

PUNJOTTAR KANJI EXCHANGE

مصرف بونو
مصرف البونو



SEND MONEY TO USA
SAME DAY CREDIT

SWIFTLY - SECURELY - SMARTLY

99101314, 99849289

customersupport@pkexchange.net

www.pkexchange.com | pkexch | @pkexchange1

DOWNLOAD OUR APP TODAY!

Google Play | App Store



P10

MICK SCHUMACHER TO TAKE ON FERRARI F1 RESERVE ROLE



P13

THUMBS-UP FOR OMANI ECONOMY FROM BIG THREE OF GLOBAL RATING AGENCIES



P20

THE LAST REMAINING: A NOSTALGIC LOOK AT THE ENTREPRENEURS OF BAHLA SOUQ



MUSCAT

HM SENDS GREETINGS TO LIBYAN LEADER

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent greetings to Dr Mohammed al Menfi, Chairman of the Presidential Council of Libya, on the occasion of his country's Independence Anniversary. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health and long life to the chairman and the friendly people of Libya more progress and prosperity. — ONA

THERMAL CHECKS FOR TRAVELLERS IN INDIA

The Indian government has released new guidelines for domestic and international passengers, including those arriving at the Delhi Airport.

As per the statement, all destination airports/states are required to carry out thermal screening of flyers upon arrival, including at the New Delhi airport.

All passengers will have to go through a thermal screening at the airport. The guidelines also revealed that random sampling will be done even for domestic passengers arriving from the states witnessing a hike in Covid-19. The ministry added, "If you are travelling on a connecting flight and not leaving the airport at a transit station, then please refer to the detailed guidelines of the respective final destination arrival state." SEE P3

INSIDE



AFGHANS PRAY FOR AN END TO DROUGHT | **P7**



OMICRON GROUNDS OVER 4,500 FLIGHTS | **P8**

HM returns home after UK visit

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik returned home on Friday after concluding his private visit to the United Kingdom (UK) which lasted several days.

During the visit, His Majesty the Sultan met with Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Head of the Commonwealth, in addition to a number of senior UK officials.

His Majesty the Sultan was accompanied by HH Sayyid

Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs; HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth; Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office; Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister; and Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Hinai, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Kingdom.

His Majesty's visit aimed to upgrade the advanced relations

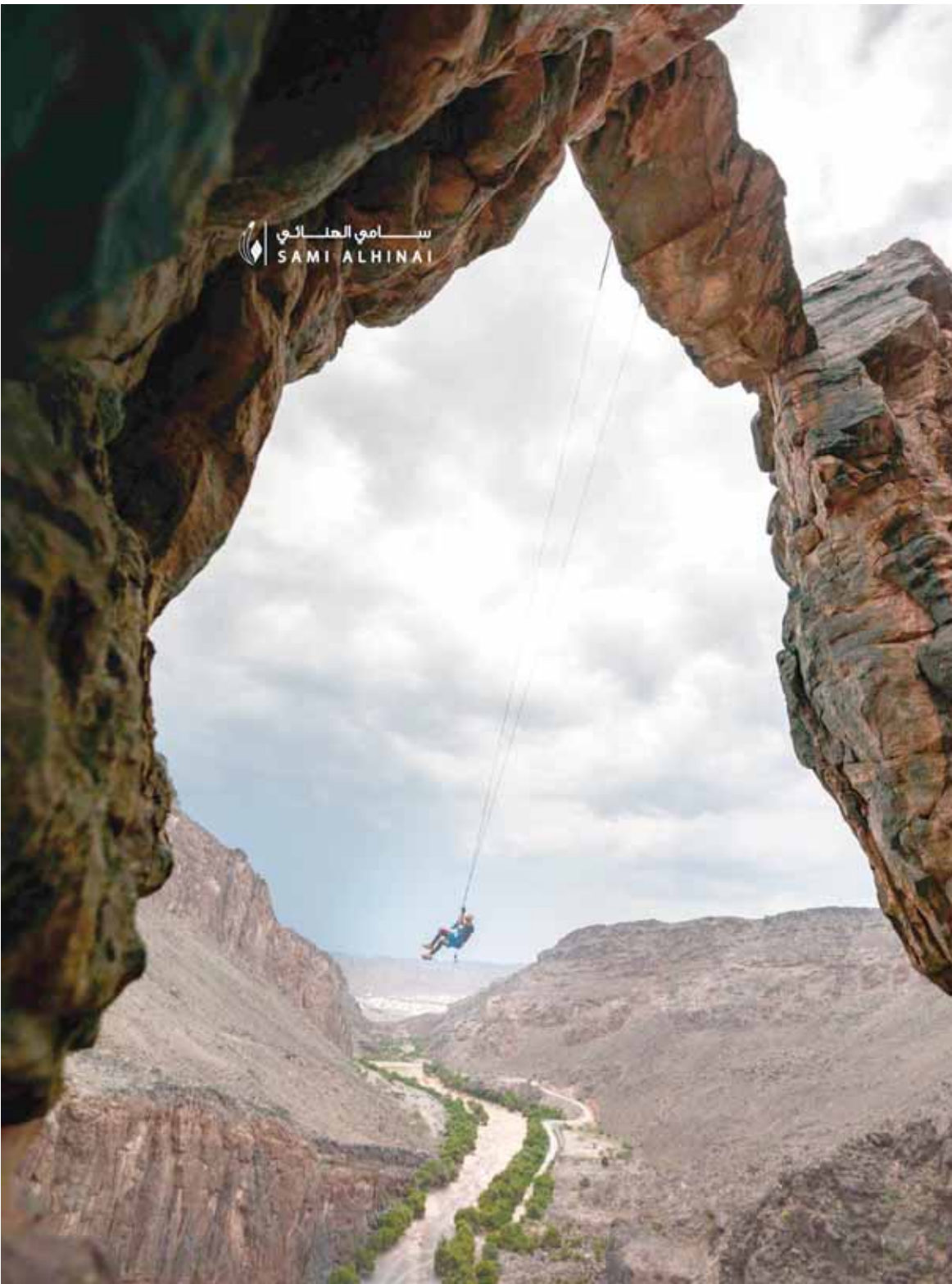
between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom, to serve the two countries' joint interests and achieve aspirations of their peoples.

The visit also touched on regional and international topics of common interest.

May the Almighty Allah protect His Majesty the Sultan wherever he might be and grant him continued good health and wellbeing to achieve further progress for the Omani people. — ONA



How about a swing up in the sky? Come to Tanuf in Nizwa



AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, DEC. 25

How about swinging on an arch of rocks high up in the mountains? Come to Tanuf in the Wilayat of Nizwa for this adrenaline pumping adventure sport like paragliding.

The idea of the swing started when Ahmed al Abri put landing ropes suspended from the Tanuf arch at a height of almost 700 metres.

"The arch is natural. We call it Tanuf arch because it is like

a window. For years we have seen this hanging rock. About 3 years ago we decided to abseil from this arch by rope. When we posted pictures of this on social media, people were awestruck. More people began to visit this area." **TURN TO P2**

Follow protocol to avoid Covid spike, mutation

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

People must follow Covid-19 protocol in coming days as new year celebrations and increasing cold offer a perfect combination for spike in coronavirus cases.

The Sultanate of Oman reported over 200 infections last week, and the number of hospitalised cases went up to 10 as Omircon cases surged across GCC and the rest of the world

Authorities have intensified checking on hotels for violations of Covid-19 protocols. The ROP has also started slapping fine on people for not wearing masks and dispersed gatherings in many places. Doctors urged the people aged 18 and above to get a third dose of coronavirus vaccine.

"All evidence point that the booster dose assumes maximum significance in combating the new mutant that has spread far

Covid-19 will continue to evolve in the months to come; simply because the virus continues to mutate. This is what viruses do: they change as they circulate

WHO

and wide in the world," said Dr Ridha al Lawati of The Royal Hospital.

The WHO said that the world remains very much in grip of the pandemic, which is now in its third year. The 22 countries/territories of the Eastern Mediterranean Region will report over 17 million cases and more than 314,000 deaths by the end of the year. **TURN TO P3**

World's most powerful space telescope lifts off

NEW YORK: The James Webb Space Telescope (JWST), the most powerful ever built, was launched into space on Saturday to explore the oldest galaxies in the universe.

The telescope was built jointly by space agencies in Europe, the US and Canada, and its launch has been planned for decades.

Designed to answer questions about the universe, the telescope will look further back in time than ever before to 400 million years after the Big Bang.

The space telescope was launched from the European spaceport Kourou in French Guiana on board an Ariane launch vehicle, for a four-week journey to its target orbit, some 1.5 million km away. — AFP

Hotels under scanner for Covid norm violations

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

MUSCAT: On the back of an unprecedented spike in the number of coronavirus cases in the Sultanate of Oman, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has intensified checking on hotels for violations of Covid-19 protocols.

“It has been observed that some hotel and tourism establishments have not been complying with the precautionary measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19,” the ministry said in an online statement.

At the weekend, a hotel in Muscat was booked by officials from the ministry for violation of social distancing norms.

The ministry, in its warnings to all hotels and tourist establishments, reiterated the need to adhere to the protocols issued by the ministry and other competent authorities with regard to the prevention of the spread of Covid-19.

“The ministry alerts all hotel and tourist establishments to the importance of adhering to the precautionary measures to prevent Covid-19 and to avoid legal measures that may amount to the closure of the hotel establishment,” the statement added.

The ministry ordered all establishments to reduce the number of visitors in restaurants, meeting and banquet halls, and the rest of the other facilities to 50 per cent of the total capacity.

Visitors and employees must stick to preventive measures such as wearing masks in all facilities, maintaining social distance, and other preventive measures to avoid any legal actions that may lead to the closure of the facility.

The decision is based on Supreme Committee guidelines that gave the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism the mandate to monitor the extent to which hotel and tourism establishments comply with its protocols.

Study proposal to regulate e-commerce discussed

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

A proposal to study “legislative and regulatory controls for electronic commerce” was discussed by the sub-committee of the Technology and Innovation Committee of the State Council recently.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Aisha bint Ahmed al Washahiyah in the presence of Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, and a number of members.

The meeting focused on a number of themes of the study aimed at proposing a draft law to regulate e-commerce in the Sultanate of Oman including: the reality of e-commerce at the global and regional levels and the extent to which it contributes as an important economic tributary to growth and expansion, and the repercussions of the Covid-19 crisis in changing the patterns of business practices especially in the e-commerce sector, the extent to which e-commerce contributes to the national economy, future expectations of its contribution to the gross domestic product, and the expected growth rates during the tenth five-year plan and future



plans within the framework of Oman 2040 vision.

The committee reviewed the efforts of the ministry in stimulating the sector, whether at the level of large, small and medium companies that practice this activity in the Sultanate of Oman, and the contribution of the Electronic Transactions Law and the National Payment Systems Law in revitalising and developing the e-commerce sector in terms of keeping pace with the current and future development and growth of the sector. It also touched upon serving e-commerce applications and their requirements, and the extent of their contribution to achieving information security, protecting the electronic contractor, and general obligations.

The meeting viewed the challenges facing the e-commerce sector at the level of the national economy in general and in the field of major investment companies, whether foreign or local, and the field of entrepreneurship in the practice of e-commerce, whether through specialised platforms and applications or through social media. In addition to discussing the ministry's plans to develop and invest in the sector, its integration with the relevant authorities, and its vision to empower the e-commerce sector from a regulatory and legislative perspective.

The Sultanate of Oman was

ranked 50th in eGov and 24th Globally in the Online Services Index of the United Nations eGovernment Survey 2020.

“There are also a number of initiatives in the Sultanate of Oman, including the formation of funds to invest in e-commerce, one of which is worth \$200 million, and another fund for electronic innovation is worth \$130 million. The Central Bank of Oman has also approved policies in line with the International Payment Systems Law that help in structuring digital currencies and clearing electronic checks,” an official from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion said.

The features of electronic transformation are evident within e-commerce initiatives, financial applications, artificial intelligence, fifth generation communications, big data analysis, electronic cloud, robotics, block-chain, and a large number of different technologies that are at the forefront of electronic transformation.

“Certainly, developing countries need protection from global electronic companies, because companies take their share of developing markets and do not pay taxes on them, but pay in their home countries” he added.

How about a swing up in the sky? Come to Tanuf



FROM P1

The ropes used for this experiment are not ordinary, said adventure enthusiast Mahmood bin Nasser al Fahdi. These are strong ropes used for climbing, which are approved globally and subjected to safety guidelines. All safety precautions were undertaken to ensure the safety of climbers

It takes about 30 minutes to climb over the arch and start swinging. Swinging on this hanging arch is a unique experience. It is a natural swing, except for the ropes they installed

Al Fahdi described the experience of swinging over the edge from this height, which he experienced several times, saying that it is a very beautiful feeling, similar to paragliding.

He pointed out that he had previously tried similar models of suspended natural swings in other countries, but they cannot match the pleasure of Tanuf arch.

Al Fahdi said friction of rocks was among the major challenges they faced during the installation of the ropes for the swing. They used clothes for smooth climbing.

When the swings were installed, people's reaction was mixed. While some supported the team, others voiced opposition on the risks of accidents.



New coronavirus infections mostly among unvaccinated, study shows

KABEER YOUSUF

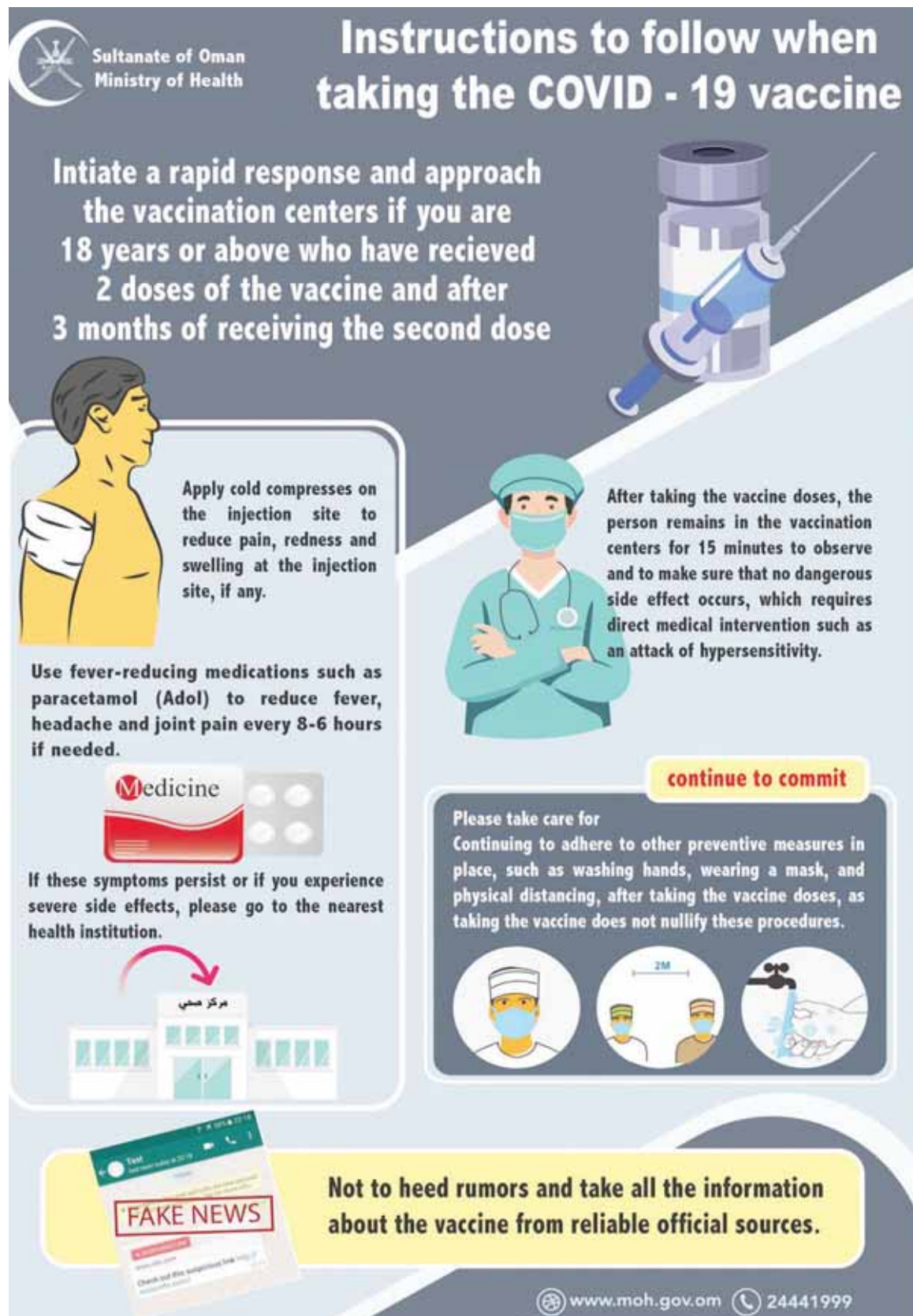
@kabeeryousef

A random study conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) has identified that the vast majority of current infections and Covid-19 cases are in unvaccinated people and vaccinated people are free from easy infection thanks to the two doses of Covid-19 vaccine and the booster dose.

In the observations made by the WHO with the support of the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) on Immunisation and its Covid-19 Vaccines Working Group, it said breakthrough infections among vaccinated persons are mostly less severe than those in unvaccinated persons.

“Booster doses are administered to a vaccinated population that has completed a primary vaccination series — currently one or two doses of EUL (WHO Emergency Use Listing) Covid-19 vaccine depending on the product — when, with time, the immunity and clinical protection has fallen below a rate deemed sufficient in that population,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of WHO at an online press briefing.

He further added that the objective of the booster dose is to restore vaccine effectiveness from that deemed no longer sufficient. “Additional doses of a vaccine may be needed as part of an extended primary series for target populations where the immune response rate following the standard primary series is deemed insufficient. The objective of the additional dose in the primary series is to enhance the immune response



to establish a sufficient level of effectiveness against disease.”

In particular, immunocompromised individuals often

fail to mount a protective immune response after a standard primary series, but also older adults may respond poorly to

a standard primary series with some vaccines.

He has further called for a moratorium on booster vac-

cination for healthy adults until the end of 2021 to counter the persisting and profound inequity in global vaccine access. While many countries are far from reaching the 40 per cent coverage target by the end of 2021, other countries have vaccinated well beyond this threshold, already reaching children and implementing extensive booster vaccination programmes. Globally about 20 per cent of Covid-19 vaccine doses, daily, are used for booster or additional dose vaccination.

A recent systematic review and meta-regression analysis on the subject conducted across the four Covid-19 vaccines, it's shown that vaccine effectiveness against severe Covid-19 decreased by about 8 per cent (95 per cent confidence interval, that is 4-15 per cent) over a period of 6 months in all age groups. In adults above 50 years, vaccine effectiveness against severe disease decreased by about 10 per cent (95 per cent) over the same period. Vaccine effectiveness against symptomatic disease decreased by 32 per cent (95 per cent 11 – 69 per cent) for those above 50 years of age.

“Omicron variant had been identified in 110 countries across all six WHO regions. Current understanding of the Omicron variant continues to evolve as more data become available.

“This technical brief provides updated early evidence on key aspects of Omicron related to transmission, severity and impact on interventions such as diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines, and outlines a set of priority actions for Member States.”

Follow Covid protocol to avoid spike

FROM PAGE 1

“Covid-19 will continue to evolve in the months to come; simply because the virus continues to mutate. This is what viruses do: they change as they circulate. Yet, the way we can protect ourselves remains unchanged and progress has been made in developing effective tools to prevent and control the pandemic, including vaccine and therapeutics,” the WHO said.

It added, “The only way we can stop the virus from spreading is by following the prevention guidelines against Covid-19 persistently, now more than ever. We have three reasons to do so. First, the winter season has been characterised by spikes of cases and deaths. Second, the holiday season with gatherings of friends and families. Third, the arrival of Omicron, which has the capacity to become a dominant variant in a matter of weeks wherever it emerges. Fourteen countries in our region have now reported this variant of concern.”

The failure to apply the established public health and social measures during the holiday season could cause alarming surges in the number of Covid-19 cases and related deaths. More cases could lead to more hospital admissions and overwhelm health systems once again.

Dr Ahmed al Mandhari, the regional director for the Eastern Mediterranean region, said, “Being vaccinated does not protect you completely from contracting the virus. That is why we urge everyone, everywhere, to continue to diligently follow all established precautions.”

Preventive measures, including physical or social distancing, quarantining, ventilation of indoor spaces, covering coughs and sneezes, and handwashing, are our only weapons to stay armed in the fight against the pandemic.

People can enjoy smaller gatherings, preferably in open or well-ventilated spaces, with attendees wearing masks and maintaining a physical distance. Always remember that indoor gatherings, even smaller ones, are breeding grounds for the virus.

India introduces thermal checks for air travellers

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, DEC 25

The Indian government has released new guidelines for domestic and international passengers, including those arriving at the Delhi Airport.

As per the statement, all destination airports/states are required to carry out thermal screening of flyers upon arrival, including at the New Delhi airport.

All passengers will have to go through a thermal screening at the airport. The guidelines also revealed that random sampling will be done even for domestic passengers arriving from the states.

The ministry added, “If you are travelling on a connecting flight and not leaving the airport at a transit station, then please refer to the detailed guidelines of the respective final destination arrival state.”

Air travellers, flying domestically or arriving from abroad, need to follow upon landing at the Indira Gandhi International Airport. Passengers testing positive will have to quarantine for 10 days at home or Covid Care Centre (CCC)/Community Health Centre (CHC)/hospital.

شركة المرافق المركزية
Centralized Utilities Company

marafiq

Tender Announcement

Introduction
Centralized Utilities Company LLC (herein the “Employer” or “Marafiq”) is inviting proposals from qualified and experienced Bidders to undertake the project based on a **Design and Build Contract for Duqm Potable Water Networks Expansions on Call-Off basis.**

Marafiq invites Bidders to submit their proposals as described below:

Tender Number	Tender Title	Tender Description	Tender Fees	Bid Closing Date	Bid Submission Date
CUC-WSP-00-000-LE-TND-005	Request for Proposal for the Design and Build Contract for Duqm Potable Water Distribution Networks Expansions Projects on Call-off basis.	The Contractor's scope of works will be Design and Build of Duqm Potable Water distribution networks extensions and expansions, on a Call-Off basis which includes: • Supply and Installation of Pipelines, • Valves and other fittings.	200 OMR	18-Jan-2022	20-Jan-2022

Request for Proposal
The RFP will be made available in electronic form only from 9:00 AM, 28 December 2021 Oman time.

Interested Contractors shall contact Marafiq via email to tender@marafiq.om with the subject heading “**Call-Off D&B Contract for Duqm Potable Water Networks Expansions Projects – Tender No. CUC-WSP-00-000-LE-TND-005**” to receive further instructions related to payment of tender fee and collection of RFP Package.

P.O. Box 80 P.C. 102
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
www.marafiq.om

EMPOWERING WOMEN AT WORK

Women in Administrative bodies of trade unions

63

33

Committees for working women in trade unions

14

Female union members participated in collective negotiations with employers

Working women have a better role in striking a perfect balance between their jobs and family

185

The number of female members in the women's committees working in the trade unions

Omani women have been conquering greater heights over the past few decades



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The number of female members in the women's committees working in the trade unions has touched 185 while the number of female members in the administrative bodies of trade unions has reached 63 members, according to the annual report published by the General Federation of Workers (GFW) of the Sultanate of Oman.

The report, released on the training programmes for female members for the year 2021 further says that there are 33 committees for working women in the trade unions and as many as 14 female union members participated in collective negotiations with employers, statistics which is attributed to the increased women empowerment programmes.

In her message on the Omani Women's Day (OWD) 2021, Her Excellency Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, has said that the nation is seeking to have a more effective role for women's associations in the country which will help them contribute better to the Renewed Renaissance march.

"Omani women have been conquering greater heights over the past few decades and they are not second to men but partners in nation building process," she said.

"Women have been given due importance and reservations in the various committees of the GFW and kudos to all women who found techniques and mechanisms for forming and empowering women's committees," said Khawla bint Ali al Haniah, Chairperson of the Working Women's Committee at the GFW.

A review of the laws and regulations

that protect women at the working place was conducted by the annual meeting.

"Despite the nature of any work she is involved, there are challenges faced by working women, which we strive to develop appropriate plans to solve and overcome them in the coming period," Khawla added.

Statistics published in the annual report of the General Federation of the Sultanate of Oman's Workers for the year 2020 indicate that the women's training was conducted to complement the efforts of the GFW and its interest in working women in general and union women in particular, and to highlight the importance of investing in women's competencies within the union's framework to enhance their capabilities.

Mona Ezzat, consultant in training on labour and gender issues, addressed the challenges facing women in occupying leadership positions and integrating them into union structures and decision-making positions, and the reasons for the limited representation of women in union structures, including their lack of knowledge of the role of the union and the importance of its existence.

Najwa Bakkar, assistant general secretary at the Basic Syndicate of Secondary Education in Sakiet El-Daer, Sfax — Tunisia, conducted a review of the experience of the Tunisian Labour Confederation in the field of working women's committees, and the role of women union leaders in integrating women into union work,

"Working women have a better role in striking a perfect balance between their jobs and family, and together, let's raise the professional and cultural level of working women and increase their awareness of their rights and duties," Khawla said.

Sultanate of Oman among top countries to visit

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyp

Lonely Planet has ranked the Sultanate of Oman as one among world's must-visit countries to visit in 2022.

In its newly released *Best In Travel 2022* book, the major Australian Travel Guide publisher places the Sultanate of Oman on the 7th position in the list of countries to visit next year.

"The Sultanate of Oman is a country on the southeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula in Western Asia. Oman offers a view of unique heritage, forts and castles. Oman is famous for its irrigation system and some fascinating tourist attractions," remarks the publisher.

The Sultanate of Oman is the only country from the Arabian Gulf to be included on that list of the book.

The 17th edition of Lonely Planet's book lists the world's hottest destinations and places particular emphasis on sustainable travel choices — ensuring a positive impact as travellers return to the road.

"After a long halt due to global coronavirus outbreak, many are ready to re-engage with the world and travel again," the publisher notes in the introduction of the book.

The other must-visit countries listed in the book are Egypt, Malawi, Nepal, Anguilla, Slovenia, Belize, Mauritius, Norway and Cook Islands. Among the top ten, six are American cities while three are from the GCC.

Lonely Planet ranked Cook Islands in the South Pacific the top destination for its adventure, cultural interaction



and culinary delights.

Egypt, which is home to the Pyramids of Giza, one of the Seven Wonders of the world, is the 10th top country to visit.

"Egypt is famous for its ancient civilisation, mesmerising beaches, coral reefs, and sea and river

The 17th edition of Lonely Planet's book lists the world's hottest destinations and places particular emphasis on sustainable travel choices — ensuring a positive impact as travellers return to the road

cruises," the report adds.

Last month, in a study by British finance site Money named Muscat as among the top ten cities in the world ideal for relocation. Among the top ten, six are American cities while three are from the GCC.

The study analysed factors that are often taken into consideration when deciding where to relocate, including house prices, living costs, average salary, weather conditions, number of restaurants and green spaces, Internet speed and life expectancy.

MoH, Oman LNG ink pacts for health projects



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health has recently signed two agreements with Oman LNG to finance health projects. This generous support comes in realisation of the objectives of Oman LNG to enhance its social responsibility and realise Oman Vision 2040 goals aimed at developing the health sector and improving health

services in the Sultanate of Oman.

The first agreement states that Oman LNG finances the purchase of three advanced medical endoscopes for early diagnosis of cancers for the Royal Hospital to improve preventive medicine in the Sultanate of Oman.

The second agreement states that Oman LNG purchases five

complete blood count (CBC) analysers for health centres in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

The agreements were signed by Dr Fatima bint Mohammed al Ajmiyah, Under-Secretary for Administrative, Financial and Planning Affairs, and Dr Amer bin Nasser al Matani, CEO of Oman LNG. — ONA

OMAN CONVENTION & EXHIBITION CENTRE
مركز عُمان للمؤتمرات والمعارض

وزارة الصحة
Ministry of Health

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

OCEC would like to invite competent and experienced companies to participate in the Tendering process for World Cup 2022 Festival:

Particulars	Description
Subject	World Cup 2022 Festival
Tender No.	OCEC/T/2021/20
Tender Fees Payment	Beneficiary: Oman Convention and Exhibition Center Bank: Sohar International Branch: Qurum - Sultanate of Oman Account No. 005020045872 Swift Code: BSHROMRU Finance Code: 609109900
Tender Fees (non-refundable)	OMR 25/-
Tender Document Sale Start Date	26-12-2021
Last Clarification Date	04-01-2022
Tender Documents Closing & Sealing End Date	09-01-2022
Tender Submission	All bidders must submit their offers with the terms and conditions of the tender by sending their bids to the e-mail: aalbalushi@ocec.om Finance Department P.O. Box 1659, P.C. 130, Al Athaiba, Sultanate of Oman Tel: + 968 24 233 930, Fax: + 968 24 233 801, 71194152 • OCEC is not bound to award the contract to the lowest bid or any other bidder. • Each Bidder must leave a business card with contact details for required tender communication (company name, contact name, telephone and email) • All tender communication will be emailed to this contact person and email address aalbalushi@ocec.om • Each Bidder must send a copy of its relevant Ministry of Commerce and Industry registration (except for International Bidders) - Notwithstanding the specific terms in the Tender Documents.
Companies Grade	G 4 and Above
Experience	International & Local experience companies in solar energy solutions
Tender Document Collection	Tender documents can be obtained by e-mail after sending the electronic payment receipt during working hours: Sunday – Thursday 8:30am – 3:00pm.

OmanConvention

www.ocec.om



Iran: War games warning to Israel

TEHRAN: War games conducted this week by Iran in the Gulf were intended to send a warning to Israel, the country's top military commanders said on Friday, amid concerns over possible Israeli plans to target Iranian nuclear sites.

The Revolutionary Guards' war games included firing ballistic and cruise missiles. State television showed missiles flattening a target which resembled Israel's Dimona nuclear reactor at the conclusion of the exercises on Friday.

"Through a simulation of the Dimona atomic facilities, the Revolutionary Guards successfully practiced attacking this critical centre of the Zionist regime in its missile exercise," the semi-official news agency Tasnim said.

"These exercises had a very clear message: a serious, real ... warning to threats by the Zionist regime's authorities to beware of their mistakes,"

Guards chief General Hossein Salami said on state TV.

"We will cut off their hands if they make a wrong move. ... The distance between actual operations and military exercises is only a change in the angles of launching the missiles," Salami added.

Armed Forces Chief of Staff Major General Mohammad Bagheri said 16 ballistic missiles of different classes had been fired simultaneously and had destroyed predetermined targets.

Britain condemned the launch of ballistic missiles during the war games.

"These actions are a threat to regional and international security, and we call on Iran to immediately cease its activities," the Foreign Office said in a statement.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Saeed Khatibzadeh, rejected the British statement as "meddling in Iran's defensive capacity," state media said.

Tear gas fired as thousands march in Sudan in anti-coup rallies

KHARTOUM: Thousands of Sudanese protesters rallied on Saturday two months on since a military coup, demanding soldiers "go back to the barracks" and calling for a transition to civilian rule.

Waving flags, beating drums, dancing and chanting, crowds marched on the streets of Khartoum despite a heavy deployment of security forces — who later fired tear gas canisters to break them up.

Officers had earlier blocked bridges connecting the capital to suburbs, cut phone lines and restricted the Internet ahead of the planned protests.

At least 48 people have died in crackdowns during weeks of protests, according to the independent Doctors' Committee, and Khartoum's state governor has warned that security forces "will deal with those who break the law and create chaos".

Demonstrators converged on the presidential palace in Khartoum, the headquarters of the military government in control since General Abdel Fattah al Burhan seized power on October 25.

Burhan held civilian leader Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok under effective house arrest for weeks, but reinstated him on November 21 under a deal promising elections for July 2023.

The move alienated many of Hamdok's pro-democracy supporters, who dismissed it as providing a cloak of legitimacy for Burhan's coup.



Protesters chant slogans during a mass demonstration demanding civilian rule, in the Sahafa neighbourhood in Khartoum on Saturday. — AFP

Protesters online had encouraged supporters with slogans, including demanding "no negotiations" with the army.

As well as rallies in Khartoum and its suburbs, protesters also marched on the streets of Madani, a town around 150 kilometres (more than 90 miles) to the south, witnesses said.

Security forces with cranes used shipping containers to block the bridges across the Nile river connecting Khartoum to the cities of Omdurman and North Khartoum, and web monitoring group NetBlocks reported mobile Internet was cut at sunrise on Saturday.

Activists reported the arrest of

several colleagues beginning on Friday night, and Volker Perthes, the UN special envoy to Sudan, urged the authorities to "protect" the protests not to stop them.

"Freedom of expression is a human right," Perthes said on Saturday, adding that it includes "full access" to the Internet. "No one should be arrested for his or her intention to protest peacefully."

"We draw the attention of the world and ask them to monitor what happens in Sudan on the issue of the revolutionary movement for freedom and democracy," said the Doctors' Committee, which is part of the pro-democracy movement.

Khartoum's governor warned that "approaching or attacking buildings of strategic sovereignty is punishable by law".

At rallies last Sunday, held on the third anniversary of mass demonstrations that led to the ouster of veteran strongman Omar al Bashir, crowds began a "sit-in" protest outside the presidential palace.

Within hours, security forces dispersed the thousands of protesters with truncheons and firing tear gas canisters.

Activists have condemned sexual attacks during those protests, in which the UN said at least 13 women and girls were raped. — AFP

Bethlehem subdued for second pandemic Christmas

BETHLEHEM: In Bethlehem's Manger Square, visitors in Santa hats and scouts beating drums marked Christmas Eve on Friday, but numbers were lower than usual as coronavirus fears overshadowed celebrations for a second straight year.

The city where Christians believe Jesus was born is usually a focal point of the holiday, with thousands packing the streets and filling hotels.

But Israel, which controls all entrances to Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank, barred its borders to foreigners in an effort to rein in infections from the Omicron strain of the coronavirus.

"It's very strange," said Kristel Elayyan, a Dutchwoman married to a Palestinian, who came to

Bethlehem from Jerusalem.

"Before (the pandemic), you had a bunch of people coming in from different countries to celebrate Christmas, and now you know that everybody who is here is probably not a tourist."

Last year, Bethlehem curtailed celebrations sharply because of the pandemic, with a virtual tree lighting and just a handful of visiting scouts.

This year, the celebrations were more vibrant — but still a fraction of their usual size.

"If it's one year, it's an interesting experience," Elayyan said of the pandemic. "But because this is the second year and we don't know what is going to come in the future, it's a huge loss for the people here."



Worshippers pray ahead of Christmas morning mass at Saint Catherine's Church, in the Church of the Nativity, in Bethlehem on Saturday. — Reuters

An upbeat Palestinian tourism minister, Rula Maayah, said it was "thanks to the vaccines" that Bethlehem was celebrating again. In his homily for midnight

mass celebrated in St Catherine's Church in Bethlehem, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Pierbattista Pizzaballa said it was encouraging that celebrations were "certainly

more joyful this year".

"Compared to last year's Christmas, the participation is much greater and this is an encouraging sign," he told the masked congregation, but regretted the absence of foreign worshippers due to the pandemic.

"We pray for them and at the same time ask for their prayers, so that all this may end soon and that the city of Bethlehem may once again be full of pilgrims."

On average, Bethlehem welcomed three million visitors a year before the pandemic, with Christmas alone drawing 10,000 people to the city's hotels, around half from abroad.

The municipality said it worked this year to appeal to local visitors

from Palestinian communities across the Holy Land.

Some hotels were busy, but about a quarter of available rooms citywide were shuttered because of the pandemic, said Elias Arja, head of the Palestinian Hotel Association.

Several businesses kept their doors shut on Friday, despite Christmas Eve being the most important day of the year for many in Bethlehem.

Inside the Church of the Nativity, visitors were even able to meditate nearly alone at the grotto where Jesus is said to have been born.

"Surreal," observed Hudson Harder, a 21-year-old American student at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

RIYADH

Coalition launches counter strikes against Yemen

The Saudi-led coalition on Saturday launched a "large-scale" assault on Yemen after missiles fired by Ansar Allah fighters killed two people in the kingdom, the first such deaths in three years. The Ansar Allah warned Yemen's oil-rich northern neighbour of a "painful" response if the coalition does not stop its "aggression" against the conflict-riven country.

Yemen has been wracked by civil war since 2014 pitting the internationally recognised government supported by the Saudi-



led military coalition against the Ansar Allah who control much of the north.

Tens of thousands of people have since been killed, in what the UN has described as the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

BEIRUT

Lebanon's top Christian cleric issues elections plea

Lebanon's top Christian cleric, Bechara Boutros Al Rai, stressed the importance of the country holding legislative elections next year as he delivered his Christmas sermon on Saturday.

Al Rai also called for the government to convene, saying that failing to do so sets a precedent that may hinder the function of future governments.

Lebanon's cabinet, which is focused on restarting talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to unlock much-



needed foreign aid, has not met since October 12, due to a dispute over a probe into Beirut port blast.

Parliament had voted for the legislative election to take place on March 27.

TEHRAN

Iran: won't enrich uranium beyond 60% if talks fail

Iran has no plans to enrich uranium beyond 60 per cent if nuclear talks in Vienna fail, the head of the country's atomic agency said on Saturday. Atomic Energy Organization of Iran director Mohammad Eslami said the enrichment levels were related to the needs of the country, in remarks published by the Russian news agency RIA Novosti.

"Our targets related to enriching uranium are meeting our industrial and production needs... and those of our people," he was



quoted as saying. Asked whether Iran plans to enrich beyond 60 per cent purity if the talks fail, he said "No". Eslami was speaking ahead of the resumption on Monday of talks in Vienna aimed at reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

In brief

■ KUALA LUMPUR



FLOODS DEATH TOLL RISES TO 46

The death toll from Malaysia's worst floods in years rose to 46 on Saturday, with five people still missing, officials said, as work crews continued a massive clean-up on Christmas Day.

Days of torrential rain caused rivers to overflow last weekend, swamping cities, cutting off major roads, and forcing tens of thousands of people to flee their homes. Selangor — Malaysia's most densely populated and wealthiest state, encircling the capital Kuala Lumpur — has been one of the worst-hit areas.

Many in its flood-hit state capital Shah Alam were left stranded in their homes with barely any food for days, before being evacuated on boats in a chaotic rescue operation.

■ JAKARTA



BOAT ACCUSED OF ILLEGAL FISHING SEIZED

Indonesian authorities have captured a Vietnamese vessel that they say was fishing illegally in Indonesian waters and had caught two tonnes of fish, an official said.

The Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla) said it had apprehended the Vietnam-flagged vessel in the North Natuna Sea near its western maritime border with Malaysia.

Bakamla spokesman Wisnu Pramandita said the authorities detected two vessels but one managed to escape after they were approached. "We managed to apprehend a vessel... manned by 20 Vietnamese crew members, while the other one was able to sail into Malaysian waters," Pramandita said.

■ HONG KONG



POLICE MAKE RECORD KETAMINE BUST

A haul of ketamine worth over \$100 million has been seized by Hong Kong officials, police said on Saturday. The record-breaking 1.3 tonnes of the drug, valued at around \$108 million, is the largest bust of its kind in the city's history.

Travel restrictions related to Covid-19 have forced smugglers to make riskier bulk shipments instead of using drug mules travelling through airports, police said.

Officers intercepted the narcotics as they were being offloaded from a speedboat in the seaside Lei Yue Mun district.

Three local men and a man of Indian nationality, aged between 32 and 47, were arrested and remain in custody.

Afghans pray for an end to drought

KABUL: Thousands of people gathered in Afghanistan's southern Kandahar province on Saturday to pray for rain as the drought in the region continues, causing mounting desperation.

Kandahar information and culture department chief Hafiz Saidullah said that tens of thousands of people from towns and villages had joined the ceremony.

The participants prayed for rain and an end to the drought, after many years marked by the absence of rain and snow.

The Taliban's supreme leader also sent a message to attendees, urging them to work harder, the official added.

Images shared in social media showed no measures were in place to prevent the spread of Covid-19, as people stood close together at the event organised by the Taliban.

During periods of drought, people traditionally pray for rain to fertilise the fields and crops.

Currently, Afghanistan is experiencing one of the worst droughts and food shortages in decades, with a humanitarian crisis looming. The landlocked



Students stand in a queue before offering special prayers for rains along with others at Eidgah in Kandahar on Saturday. — AFP

nation largely relies on rain and snow during winter but 80 per cent of the country is suffering from the long-lasting drought.

The United Nations has warned that more than half of the country's population could face acute hunger this winter due to the impact of drought, conflict, the coronavirus pandemic,

and the ongoing economic crisis.

TALKS TO RUN AIRPORT

In another development, a joint delegation from Qatar and Turkey is negotiating with the Taliban to operate Kabul international airport, Afghan officials have confirmed.

Taliban chief spokesperson

Zabihullah Mujahid said the talks were under way but the two sides have not made any progress yet.

Turkey and Qatar did not comment on the talks.

A joint technical delegation from Qatar and Turkey arrived in Kabul on Thursday following reports that the two countries have

agreed to jointly operate five airports, including Kabul airport, in Taliban-run Afghanistan.

Another high-level Taliban official said the talks will continue and if they reach an agreement, all domestic and international flights would resume.

The sides have reached an agreement and will discuss operational details over the next week, Turkish state news agency Anadolu reported, citing diplomatic sources.

Afghanistan's airspace is currently closed to all overflights. Only domestic flights and international evacuation or humanitarian aid delivery flights are taking place.

The US-led international forces caused extensive damage to Kabul airport during their chaotic withdrawal from the country in August when the Taliban seized control of the country.

The airport terminal, radar system, aircraft and vehicles were all damaged, the Taliban claimed when they took charge of the airport. A Qatari team later reopened Kabul airport.

— dpa

Over 30 killed, bodies burnt in Myanmar's Kayah state

BANGKOK: More than 30 people, including women and children, were killed and their bodies burnt in Myanmar's conflict-torn Kayah state, according to a local resident, media reports and a local human rights group.

Karen Human Rights Group said they found the burnt bodies of internally displaced people, including elders, women and children killed by the military that rules Myanmar, near Mo So village of Hpruso town on Saturday.

"We strongly denounce the inhumane and brutal killing which violates human rights," the group

said in a Facebook post.

The Myanmar military said it had shot and killed an unspecified number of "terrorists with weapons" from the opposition armed forces in the village, state media said. The people were in seven vehicles and did not stop for the military, it said. The Myanmar military could not immediately be reached for comment.

Photos shared by the human rights group and local media showed the charred remains of bodies on burnt-out trucks.

The Karen National Defence Force, one of the largest of several

civilian militias opposing the junta that led a February 1 coup, said the dead were not their members but civilians seeking refuge from the conflict.

"We were so shocked at seeing that all the dead bodies were different sizes, including children, women and old people," a commander from group said, asking not to be named.

A villager who asked not to be named for security reasons said he was aware of the fire on Friday night but could not go to the scene as there was shooting.

— Reuters



Medical workers work inside a makeshift nucleic acid testing laboratory set up in Xi'an. — Reuters

China reports highest number of Covid cases in 4 months

BEIJING: China on Saturday reported its highest number of new coronavirus cases in four months as officials rushed to contain outbreaks in several regions, including Xi'an city where millions are still under lockdown.

China, where the coronavirus was first detected in late 2019, is on high alert for new infections as it prepares to hold the Winter Olympics in February in the capital Beijing.

Of the 140 new infections, 87 were locally transmitted, according to a statement by the National Health Commission, compared to 55 a day earlier.

Most were in Xi'an, in the northwestern province of Shaanxi, where 13 million residents have been under lockdown since Thursday.

On Christmas Eve the city reported its highest daily count in a year with 75 domestic cases, according to the local health bureau on Saturday. While China has reduced cases to a minimum — thanks to a zero-Covid strategy of tight border restrictions, lengthy quarantines and targeted lockdowns — cases have been bubbling up in recent weeks.

Footage from state broad-

caster CCTV on Saturday showed long queues outside Xi'an testing centres as officials rushed to stamp out the latest flareup.

Under strict lockdown rules, since Thursday all households in Xi'an have only been permitted to send one member outside every two days to purchase necessities. Residents need special permission from their employer or local authorities to leave the city.

Xi'an has recorded 330 locally transmitted symptomatic cases since the first case was reported on December 9 2021, few compared to outbreaks elsewhere in the world.

But some 26 Xi'an government officials have been punished for lapses in virus prevention, China's disciplinary body said on Friday.

Local authorities who are deemed to have failed at controlling the virus in their region are regularly sacked or reprimanded under Beijing's strict zero-Covid approach.

Cases from Xi'an have so far spread to five other cities including Beijing, according to state media, fuelling fears about how quickly the virus can spread geographically across the vast country.

— AFP

Philippine typhoon survivors wish for roofs and food

ALEGRIA: Father Ricardo Virtudazo stands in a pool of water in his typhoon-hit church in the southern Philippines delivering Christmas Day mass to dozens of devotees whose wishes this year were for new roofs, food and fine weather.

More than a week after Typhoon Rai cut a swathe through the archipelago, killing nearly 400 people and leaving hundreds of thousands homeless, survivors clung to family and faith after their homes — and planned festivities — were wiped out.

"What's important is all of us are safe," said Joy Parera, 31, attending Christmas mass with her husband at San Isidro Labrador Parish church in the town of Alegria, on the northern tip of Mindanao island.

A light rain soaked the pews and white tiled floor of the damaged church, which has been left with a gaping hole in the roof after Rai ravaged the area.

People wore masks as they gathered inside the church festooned with Christmas



The widespread destruction caused by Rai in the southern and central regions of the Philippines has dampened celebrations. — AFP

decorations and prayed for a better year.

"We still have hope," Virtudazo said. "In spite of the calamities they experience, they still have faith in God."

Christmas is one of the most important events in the Philippines, families typically gather to share a meal.

But the widespread destruction caused by Rai in the southern and central regions of the country has dampened celebrations as many survivors plead for drinking

water and food.

Mindanao, Siargao, Dinagat and Bohol islands are among the most devastated by the storm, which knocked out electricity, tore off roofs, shredded wooden buildings, felled concrete power poles and uprooted trees.

The scale of the damage, lack of mobile phone signal or Internet in many areas, and depleted government coffers after the Covid-19 response were hampering efforts to distribute aid. — AFP

Russia completes war drills near Ukraine amid scare of invasion

MOSCOW: Russia announced on Saturday that more than 10,000 troops had finished month-long drills near Ukraine, amid Western accusations that Moscow was plotting an invasion of its ex-Soviet neighbour.

The defence ministry said in a statement that the drills for Southern Military District forces had taken place in a host of southern regions including Rostov, Krasnodar and Crimea, which Moscow seized from Ukraine in 2014.

But the drills also took place further afield, including in Stavropol, Astrakhan, North Caucasus republics and even in Russia's Caucasus ally Armenia.

The defence ministry said the troops were returning to their permanent bases and that stand-by units would be readied for the New Year's holidays.

Western countries have

accused Russia of massing upwards of 100,000 troops near Ukraine ahead of a possible winter invasion.

According to Kiev's estimates, the number of Russian troops along Ukraine's borders has increased from around 93,000 troops in October to 104,000 now.

Russia says it is free to move its forces on its territory how it sees fit and denies that it is planning a large-scale attack. It has presented the West with sweeping security demands, saying Nato must not admit new members and seeking to bar the United States from establishing new bases in former Soviet republics.

Tensions reached a boiling point on Wednesday when President Vladimir Putin said Russia would take "appropriate retaliatory" military steps in response to what he called the West's "aggressive stance". — **AFP**

MOSCOW RINGS IN WHITE CHRISTMAS



People walk past Christmas and New Year decorations in downtown Moscow on Saturday. — **AFP**



Pope Francis waves from the main balcony of St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican on Saturday. — **AFP**

Shun polarisation, try dialogue to heal divided world: Pope

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis in his Christmas message on Saturday decried increasing polarisation in personal and international relationships, saying only dialogue can resolve conflicts ranging from family feuds to threats of war.

In his "Urbi et Orbi" (to the city and the world) message, he called on individuals and world leaders to talk to each other rather than dig in their heels, a distancing he said has been worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Our capacity for social relationships is sorely tried; there is a growing tendency to withdraw, to do it all by ourselves, to stop making an effort to encounter

others and do things together," he said from the central balcony of St Peter's Basilica on a wet and windy Christmas in Rome.

"On the international level too, there is the risk of avoiding dialogue, the risk that this complex crisis will lead to taking shortcuts rather than setting out on the longer paths of dialogue. Yet only those paths can lead to the resolution of conflicts and to lasting benefits for all," he said.

Francis, who turned 85 last week, listed conflicts, tensions or crises in Syria, Yemen, Israel, The Palestinian Territories, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Ukraine, Sudan, South Sudan and elsewhere. — **Reuters**

Over 4,500 flights cancelled as Omicron hits holiday travel

NEW YORK: Over 4,500 flights were cancelled around the world by Saturday and thousands more were delayed as the highly infectious Omicron variant disrupted holiday travel, according to tracking website Flightaware.

One route, however, was thankfully not affected: Santa was on track delivering presents to children across the globe, air defence officials assured US President Joe Biden.

According to Flightaware.com, at least 2,000 flights were cancelled worldwide on Christmas Day, including roughly 700 originating from or headed to US airports, with more than 1,500 delays as of 0720 GMT.

On Friday, there were around 2,400 cancellations and almost 11,000 delays. The site also reported over 600 cancellations for Sunday.

Pilots, flight attendants and other staff have been calling in sick or having to quarantine after exposure to Covid, forcing Lufthansa, Delta, United Airlines and many other carriers to cancel flights during one of the year's peak travel periods.



Flights cancelled during the spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant on Christmas Eve in Queens, New York City. — **Reuters**

Flightaware data showed United cancelled around 200 flights on both Friday and Saturday, or 10 per cent of those that were scheduled.

"The nationwide spike in Omicron cases this week has had a direct impact on our flight crews and the people who run our operation," United said in a statement on Friday.

"As a result, we've unfortunately had to cancel some flights and are

notifying impacted customers in advance of them coming to the airport," the airline said, adding that it was working to rebook passengers.

Similarly, Delta cancelled at least 260 flights on Saturday and around 170 on Friday, saying it has "exhausted all options and resources — including rerouting and substitutions of aircraft and crews to cover scheduled flying."

"We apologise to our customers

for the delay in their holiday travel plans," the company said.

Eleven Alaska Airlines flights were axed, after employees said they were potentially exposed to Covid-19 and had to self-isolate in quarantine.

The cancellations added to the pandemic frustration for many Americans eager to reunite with their families over the holidays, after last year's Christmas was severely curtailed. — **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

MADRID

Canaries volcano eruption officially over

The eruption of a volcano on the Spanish island of La Palma that destroyed hundreds of homes and large swathes of farmland has ended, officials said on Saturday over three months after it began.

The announcement follows 10 days of low-level activity from the Cumbre Vieja volcano on the tiny isle, part of the Canary Islands which lie off Africa's north-west coast. No injuries or deaths have been directly linked to the eruption, which began on September 19, spewing rivers of mol-



ten rock and sending ash plume containing toxic gases into the air. It destroyed 1,345 homes, as well as schools, churches, health centres and farm irrigation infrastructure.

FRANKFURT

NGO ship rescues more than 270 people

A German NGO said on Saturday that one of its migrant rescue ships has picked up more than 270 people from the central Mediterranean Sea in three operations since Friday.

Sea Watch said on its Twitter account that its ship, *Sea-Watch 3*, helped two inflatables that had run into trouble in the early hours of Christmas Day. The two dinghies were carrying around 100 and 80 people respectively and were rescued around 109 km off the coast of Libya. Sea



Watch said its team was now looking after around 270 people in all, after picking up 93 people in a wooden boat in international waters south of the Italian island of Lampedusa on Friday.

TOULOUSE

Zoo shut after pack of wolves escapes

French authorities in the south of the country have temporarily shut down a zoo after a pack of nine wolves escaped from their enclosure during visiting hours, officials said on Friday.

No humans were injured in the incident last weekend at the Trois Valleys zoo in Montredon-Labessonnie in the Tarn region but four of the wolves were shot dead by park workers and five others anaesthetised by local officials on the scene. "There were not many people in the zoo at the



time and at no time was the public in immediate danger," added Chollet. However the "security problem" meant that the zoo now needed to be closed until the issues were rectified, he added.

Mustard, fries in short supply due to Canada climate woes

MICHEL COMTE

A mix of drought in Canada’s prairies and flooding on its Pacific coast have brought about crop production and shipping woes now leading to international shortages of fries and mustard.

In Japan, for example, McDonald’s has been forced to ration fries as the British Columbia floods squeezed potato imports, while mustard producers in France are forecasting steep price increases because the drought in another part of Canada — the world’s biggest producer of mustard grains — cut supplies.

“When we look back at the state of the agriculture sector in 2021, we can say this year has been marked by extreme climate change weather events,” Agriculture Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau said in a recent speech.

“That includes the worst drought in 60 years in Western Canada and the devastating atmospheric rivers in British Columbia,” she told livestock farmers and ranchers who’ve struggled to secure enough hay to feed their animals as pastures dried up.

According to government data, farmers in Canada produced more corn but less wheat, canola, barley, soybeans and oats in 2021 compared with 2020.

The lower yields — which Statistics Canada said marked the largest year-over-year decrease on record, falling to levels not seen in more than a decade — were driven largely by drought conditions in Western Canada.

Keith Currie of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture said: “There’s a lot of angst in the farming community.” Some farmers have lost everything, others are considering quitting as the future looks bleak.

The Agri-Food Analytics Labs at Dalhousie University publishes a list of the top 10 food-related stories each year. Climate calamities in Western Canada ranked second this year, after food inflation.

“Climate change has strongly impacted agricultural production and supply chains” already strained by the pandemic, its scientific director Sylvain Charlebois said, leading to rising food costs. — AFP

Climate change has strongly impacted agricultural production and supply chains

SYLVAIN CHARLEBOIS

Dalhousie University



CHRISTMAS RIDE

People and their dogs make their way in the snow on Christmas Day at the ski centre of the town of Kalavrita, Greece, on Saturday. — Reuters

We were bent, but not broken



Ray Petersen
r.j.petersen52@gmail.com

Gosh! What a year this has been, make no mistake. I usually have a lot of fun with my last column of the year, a few chuckles at the expense of my friends and colleagues, but honestly, it doesn’t feel quite so right this time around, so I’m just going to make some comments on 2021, and celebrate the extraordinary commitment of some of those around us.

First and foremost, a massive hand must go out to the Sultanate of Oman, and particularly those with responsibility for the management of the pandemic. It is clear that when the pandemic hit, many Omanis didn’t see and appreciate the dangers, and were ignorant, lackadaisical, and careless in their observance of the precaution, to the cost of many... too many. But... to give the population their due, and thanks to the persistence of the authorities, it is clear great strides have been made during the most recent months. So, well done Sultanate of Oman. This may not be over yet, but you have done so well.

Credit for the turnaround must go to Dr Ahmed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, and his team, as collectively, at times during the last 18 months, their frustration must have been intense as they appeared to be faced with an apathetic response. Their preparedness, testing, tracing, isolation policies, surveillance,

expertise, logistics, implementation and recovery planning demonstrate a healthy awareness of the challenges they have faced, and their awareness of what lies ahead as they aim for a sustained quality of life, “Living with Covid-19 on long run with minimal impact on life, and health.”

The health sector too has responded above and beyond their calling, in working extended hours, placing themselves at risk to keep their patients safe, and healthy, and those of us working elsewhere in society can only be in awe of their contributions. I believe a grateful population and government, if unable to financially reward the entire frontline health sector, should at least strike a medal of distinction to recognise their efforts.

Education has been significantly affected. However, no criticism can be levelled at teachers, who have gone above and beyond their educational remit in embracing the concepts and practices of online learning. They have been brilliant! Now let’s hope their educational administrators, who have done comparatively little, not only get learners back to the classroom, but ensure the ‘lost’ learning, is made up for.

Socially, for all of us, a new ‘normal’ has inveigled its way into our psycho-social behaviour, as whatever someone

once said, silence is not golden, and in the words of John F Kennedy, “Conformity is freedom’s jailer, and the enemy of growth.” We have all been tested and challenged, we have been restricted, locked down, locked out, masked and isolated, and we are human... none of those situations are natural to us, so some of us are either found wanting, hurting, or lonely, and often, reaching out is the hardest thing to do. Professor Brene Brown says, “Many of us are willing to lend a hand, but are reluctant to reach out when we ourselves need help.” We need to accept that we are all both needy and needed, and to be there for each other.

Vishal, Yesha, Abdullah, Asim, Khalfan, Mila, Mohamed, Sulieman, Shadha, Aisha, Serge, Chahrazed, Ali, Captain, Ghada, Vijay, GM, Andrew, May, Mathys, Nazier, Nigel, Khalfan, Juliet, Gosia, and so many others and all your families, stay safe, be well, and let’s hope that as we usher in 2022, we do so, knowing that we are much stronger than we ever knew we were.

God bless you all, friends, colleagues, readers, and strangers too... and maybe we can get back to some humour next New Year.

In the meantime, if I continue comfort eating, my shirt buttons will soon be socially distanced too!

The key to the Covid-powered challenges of 2022



NGAIRE WOODS

THE CHALLENGE FOR THE COMING YEAR IS TO MOVE FORWARD BY REDESIGNING WORK, POLITICS, PUBLIC HEALTH, AND ECONOMIC POLICY

After a year in which people longed to get back to “normal,” it is now clear that Covid-19 will not make this possible. The pandemic, now heading into its third year, has profoundly affected individuals, communities, countries, and international cooperation, creating four tough challenges for 2022. Rebuilding trust will be critical to confronting all of them.

The first challenge is that people’s relationship to work has changed. In some countries, lockdowns, the death of loved ones, and the general uncertainty of the pandemic have prompted or accelerated a rethink. In the United States, the number of workers quitting their jobs exceeded four million in each month from July

to October 2021. Many young Chinese are joining the “lie flat” movement by opting out of long working hours, doing the bare minimum to get by, and striving for only what is absolutely essential for survival.

The pandemic has deepened the divide between those who can work from home and the many who cannot.

The second challenge in 2022 is to stem the global trend towards authoritarianism. According to Freedom House, the pandemic has weakened checks and balances on government power in at least 80 countries, both rich and poor. Government surveillance, police brutality, and detention have increased, and in many countries

free media and expression have been threatened or curtailed. Vulnerable groups such as ethnic and religious minorities and migrants have suffered disproportionately.

In dozens of countries worldwide, elections have been postponed or cancelled, or certified results have been questioned. In 2022, citizens will need to find ways to hold their leaders accountable and to rebuild institutions and public trust.

In some countries, this is already happening, reflecting how well governments do five things: provide or regulate public services; anticipate change and protect citizens; use power and public resources ethically; consult their citizens and explain their deci-

sions to them; and improve living conditions for all.

The third challenge the world faces in 2022 is another pandemic. Although it is easy to think that Covid-19 eclipses all other public-health emergencies in our lifetime, our current focus must not blind us to other threats from infectious diseases.

In 2021, the world failed to distribute vaccines, treatments, and therapies for Covid-19 equitably or efficiently.

The Covid-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) facility was created to ensure immunisation for all, thereby containing mutations of the virus and its spread. But wealthy governments instead competed to secure access to the

vaccines for their citizens first.

Trust and cooperation among governments is not an impossible ideal. The key is to design rules, institutions, and policy implementation in a way that assures countries that everyone is (mostly) complying. A deep flaw at the heart of the Covid-19 response has been a lack of transparency about how much governments are paying for vaccine doses – and to whom.

Finally, Covid-19 is transforming the economic rulebook for 2022. Economic nationalism is rising, accelerated by countries’ experiences trying to procure equipment, treatments, and vaccines.

© Project Syndicate 2021



Mick Schumacher to take on Ferrari F1 reserve role

LONDON: Mick Schumacher, the son of seven-times Formula One world champion Michael, will double up as a Ferrari reserve driver next season while also having a regular race seat at US-owned Haas.

Team boss Mattia Binotto told reporters that the 22-year-old German would be available to stand in at 11 of the record 23 scheduled races should Charles Leclerc or Carlos Sainz be unavailable.

Italian Antonio Giovinazzi, who lost his place at Swiss-based Alfa Romeo this year but has secured a drive in Formula E, will be reserve for the 12 races that do not clash with the electric series.

“Whenever he (Giovinazzi) will be at the race track he will be our reserve driver. And as well he will be available to our customer teams, so both Haas and Alfa Romeo,” said Binotto.

“For the remaining 11 races... Mick Schumacher will be reserve driver for Ferrari.”

Haas have their own official reserve in Brazilian Pietro Fittipaldi, who stepped in twice in 2020 after Romain Grosjean’s fiery accident. Alfa Romeo also have Poland’s Robert Kubica in the role.

Ferrari-backed Schumacher made his Formula One debut this season, outperforming fellow-rookie Nikita Mazepin but neither

“

Whenever he (Giovinazzi) will be at the race track he will be our reserve driver. And as well he will be available to our customer teams, so both Haas and Alfa Romeo

MATTIA BINOTO
Ferrari team boss

scoring a point for a tail-end team devoting all their resources to the 2022 car.

Binotto said Mick had improved through the season, in consistency and speed, and Ferrari’s support would continue with the simulator available at Maranello and Ferrari engineers working with him.

“If I look at the last races he was a lot closer to the cars ahead while Haas didn’t really develop the car at all,” said the Ferrari boss.

Binotto said Giovinazzi would have a full programme of simulator work and suggested the Italian had a chance of returning to the starting grid full time in 2023.

“There are I think 11 seats

which will be free in 2023... 11 have contracts finishing at the end of 2022. So it is important for him as a driver to still be part of our F1 programme,” he said.

Binotto said talks would start soon on a contract extension with Spaniard Sainz, who had a strong season with Ferrari after moving from McLaren, and he expected the discussion to be uncomplicated. Leclerc has a long-term contract.

The as-yet unnamed 2022 Ferrari car was going to plan and due to be launched between February 16-18. Ferrari finished third overall in 2021, a big jump from sixth the previous season,

and Binotto said the team were stronger than before.

They are currently without a title sponsor but Binotto said talks were continuing with long-time partner Philip Morris International (PMI).

“I think there are many opportunities on which we may cooperate with them, keeping them as partners. We have various options on the table at the moment and we are still talking with them,” he said.

Binotto hoped to see Ferrari winning races again next year after a blank in 2021, and moving closer to Mercedes and Red Bull.

— Reuters

KOHLI'S INDIA SEEK TO CONQUER FINAL FRONTIER IN SOUTH AFRICA

CENTURION, South Africa: Virat Kohli bruised from being fired as India's one-day captain bids to rebound by leading his country to an historic triumph in South Africa in a three-match Test series which starts at Super-Sport Park in Centurion on Sunday.

South Africa is the only regular Test-playing nation where India have yet to win a series.

"We have worked really hard to win series away from India," said vice-captain KL Rahul at India's pre-match press conference on Friday.

"We've won series in England and Australia, which gives us a lot of confidence. We haven't won a series in South Africa, which gives us extra motivation to do our best."

South African captain Dean Elgar said he thought the teams were evenly matched.

"India are number one in the world for a reason but the fact that we are playing in our own back yard gives as an advantage."

Despite losing to New Zealand in last year's world Test championship final, India are the top-ranked Test team, five places ahead of South Africa, who have lost several key players to retirement in recent years.

Kohli leads an experienced side. Crucially, it has the fast-bowling fire power to match South Africa's in conditions which usually favour pace.

No fewer than ten of India's 18-man squad have toured South Africa before.

Kohli, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ishant Sharma, Ravichandran Ashwin, Umesh Yadav and reserve wicketkeeper Wriddhiman Saha are on their fourth tour of the country.

Ajinkya Rahane and Mohammed Shami are on their third tour, while Rahul and Jasprit Bumrah were part of the closely-contested 2017/18 series which South Africa won 2-1.

"We know what to expect and we've had great preparation," said Rahul.

"The pace and bounce is very different to other countries and it



was very important that we came here early and had preparation in the middle."

Rahul indicated India were likely to maintain their recent strategy of picking five bowlers, which he acknowledged would lead to a "very difficult discussion" about settling on five specialist batsmen.

Centurion fortress

India have the luxury of choosing between capable players in both batting and bowling, while South Africa's options seem limited, especially since fast bowler Anrich Nortje withdrew from the series because of a hip injury.

South Africa will, of necessity, field a batting line-up short of proven quality, with two players in their top six yet to score a Test century, while India may be unable to find a place for Shreyas Iyer, who scored 105 and 65 on debut

We've won series in England and Australia, which gives us a lot of confidence. We haven't won a series in South Africa, which gives us extra motivation to do our best

KL RAHUL
Indian vice-captain

against New Zealand last month.

Elgar confirmed star wicket-keeper-batsman Quinton de Kock was only available for the first Test and will then take paternity leave, which will leave the home team's batting even more vulnerable.

South Africa's fast bowling remains their strength but the loss of Nortje is a major blow.

Much will depend on former world number one Kagiso Rabada, whose form in the past two years has been moderate.

The hosts will also hope the injury-plagued Lungi Ngidi can recapture the form which enabled him to take 6-39 on debut against India at the same venue in 2017/18.

In South Africa's favour, Centurion has been a fortress for the home side, with 21 wins and only two defeats in 26 Tests at the venue. — AFP



Coach Dravid urges India to seize their moment in history

PRETORIA: India coach Rahul Dravid has urged his players to seize the chance to claim a first ever test series win in South Africa, a moment that could be career defining for many in the team as they prepare for the first test in Pretoria on Sunday.

India have enjoyed recent success in Australia and England, but South Africa remains a mighty challenge for the top ranked test side, though they will arguably never have had a better chance against a home team going through a transition period and with far less experience than in the past.

"It is a great challenge and a great opportunity for everyone," Dravid told reporters on Saturday. "It is something you look forward to as a batsman, the chance to play away from home and test yourself against some really good opposition in their home conditions."

"A lot of your career is defined by those sorts of performances, so it is a great opportunity for everyone in the group to put in the performances that are something that they can remember, and people will remember them for."

Dravid played 11

tests in South Africa and averaged under 30, well below his career mark of 52.31, so he is aware of the challenges of adjusting from lower wickets on the sub-continent to the higher bounce of the Highveld.

He said there would be much to consider when selecting a starting XI, and expects those who do not make the cut to be disappointed, something he sees as a positive.

"Most players are professional. Sometimes you have to have difficult conversations. Everyone wants to be part of the playing XI, but they understand situations. As long as you can give them the reasons for it (not being selected).

"Players will be disappointed, but that is one of the things that makes people succeed at this level, you want to be playing, competing and part of the action, not sitting out."

Virat Kohli will captain India in the first test but decisions around the middle-order batting and how many seamers to pick will be the main conundrum for the selectors.

The second test will be in Johannesburg from January 3-7, with the third in Cape Town from January 11-15.

—Reuters

Sanuth stars in easy win for Ruwi in D20 League

MUSCAT: Sanuth Ibrahim and Khalid Kail helped Ruwi Rangers to an easy 6-wicket win over Azaiba XI in an Oman Cricket-organised D20 League clash at OC Turf 1 in Al Amerat on Saturday.

Azaiba posted a disappointing 114 for 9 on the board, Arsalan Bashir topscoring with 42. Sanuth Ibrahim and Wasim Ali bowled well, taking three and two wickets respectively.

Ruwi raced to the target in just 14.2 overs, scoring 115 for 4 thanks to a superb 42 by Khalid Kail. Veteran Khalid Rasheed bagged 2 for 20.

Brief Scores (D20): Azaiba XI 114 for 9 in 20 overs (Arsalan Bashir 42 – 3x4, 1x6, Sanuth Ibrahim 3-21, Wasim Ali 2-29) lost to Ruwi Rangers 115 for 4 in 14.2 overs (Khalid Kail 42 – 6x4, 1x6, Khalid Rasheed 2-20) by 6 wickets.

GHUBRAH BEATS BOUSHER

Earlier on Friday, Ahmed Khan's 3 for 25 was the highlight of Ghubrah Giants' 5-wicket victory against Bousher Busters.

Ajay Lalcheta was the topscorer in Busters' 124 for 6. Khan's spell was the major reason Busters could not post a bigger total on the board.

Giants found the going tough but prevailed in the final over for a nail-biting 5-wicket win. Azmat Ullah (42) and Faizan Abdullah (37) led the chase with



useful knocks. Fawad Ali picked up 2 for 30.

Brief Scores (D20): Bousher Busters 124 for 6 in 20 overs (Ajay Lalcheta 45 – 3x4, 1x6, Ahmed Khan 3-25) lost to Ghubrah Giants 125 for 5 in 19.2 overs (Azmat Ullah 42 – 2x4, 2x6, Faizan Abdullah 37 – 4x4,

Fawad Ali 2-30) by 5 wickets.

SHOAIB, GANESH STAR IN QURUM VICTORY

In another D20 encounter at the same venue on Friday, Shoaib Khan's brilliant batting, Ayaan Khan's excellent all-round performance and Ganesh Chandashekar's superb spell powered Qurum Thunders to a 40-run win over Amerat Royals.

Shoaib struck a stylish 69 while Ayaan contributed a vital 34 in Qurum's total of 167 for 3.

Ganesh and Ayaan were outstanding with the ball taking four and three wickets respectively as Amerat was dismissed for 127 in 19.2 overs. Pratik Athavale was Royals' main scorer with 57.

Brief Scores (D20): Qurum Thunders 167 for 3 in 20 overs (Shoaib Khan 69 – 7x4, 1x6, Ayaan Khan 34 – 2x4) beat Amerat Royals 127 all out in 19.2 overs (Pratik Athavale 57 – 5x4, 2x6, Ganesh Chandrashekar 4-16, Ayaan Khan 3-19) by 40 runs.

MAQSOOD SHINES IN DARSAIT WIN

Zeeshan Maqsood's massive presence in the middle once again proved to be the difference as Darsait Titans defeated Khuwair Warriors in a keenly contested game at OC Turf 1 on Friday.

Maqsood's magnificent spell of 3 for 18 was

instrumental in restricting Khuwair to 154 for 8 despite brilliant batting by Sean Novak (44) and Zeeshan Siddiqui (28).

Maqsood led the chase with a solid 58, supported by Khurram Khan's fluent 49 as Darsait sealed the victory in 19.2 overs, scoring 155 for 4. Young Muzahir Raza claimed 3 for 23.

Brief Scores (D20): Khuwair Warriors 154 for 8 in 20 overs (Sean Novak 44 – 6x6, Zeeshan Siddiqui 28 – 3x4, 1x6, Zeeshan Maqsood 3-18, Yagnik Ashwin 2-44) lost to Darsait Titans 155 for 4 in 19.2 overs (Zeeshan Maqsood 58 – 5x4, 3x6, Khurram Khan 49 – 2x4, 3x6, Muzahir Raza 3-23) by 6 wickets.

RAUF BATS DARSAIT TO VICTORY

Earlier, on Thursday Abdul Rauf smashed 51 to help Bousher Busters to a 6-wicket victory against Darsait Titans.

Titans were bowled out for a paltry 104 due largely to magnificent bowling by Ajay Lalcheta and Sufyan Mahmood who claimed three wickets each.

Bousher overhauled the target in 17 overs thanks to brilliant knock of 51 by Abdul Rauf.

Brief Scores (D20): Darsait Titans 104 all out in 19.1 overs (Khurram Khan 21 – 1x4, 2x6, Ajay Lalcheta 3-13, Sufyan Mahmood 3-25, Bilal Muhammad 2-23) lost to Bousher Busters 105 for 4 in 17 overs (Abdul Rauf 51 – 2x4, 5x6, Yagnik Ashwin 2-12) by 6 wickets.

Gerrard says players deserve credit for Villa’s rise

LONDON: Steven Gerrard said on Friday his players deserved the credit for Aston Villa’s climb up the Premier League table since he took charge of the Birmingham club.

Villa had lost five straight league matches and were just two points above the relegation zone when Gerrard left Scottish champions Rangers to replace Dean Smith, sacked as manager in November.

Since Gerrard’s arrival at Villa Park, the club have climbed from 16th to 10th and will be bidding for a fifth win in seven league games when they are at home to Chelsea on Sunday.

“I had confidence and belief that we could come in and have the impact that we’ve had,” said Gerrard, who brought several of his coaching staff with him from Glasgow giants Rangers.

“The players deserve the credit for going and carrying those performances out.”

The former Liverpool and England captain added: “Once I started talking to Villa, the very first thing I did was look at the fixtures in the short-term.

“There were a lot of fixtures to be excited about, and I think the players have done extremely well in terms of the points return.”

Under Gerrard, Villa have beaten Brighton, Crystal Palace, Leicester and Norwich while losing narrowly to title contenders Manchester City and Liverpool.

“We were close to taking a point out of the City game as well,” Gerrard said. “The Liverpool game was slightly different — they dominated for large parts.

“But I think we gave a good account of ourselves and made them extremely nervous in the latter stages of that game.

“The players should be confident, they should have loads of belief heading into a really busy schedule.”

Villa will seek to make it 15 points from a possible 21 sine Gerrard’s arrival against Chelsea.

“This is a game that we’re very much looking forward to and it’s a game we want to try and take some points from as well to set us up for the Leeds clash (at Elland Road on Tuesday).

“We’re excited and looking forward to the game on Boxing Day. We’ll go in and be as aggressive and ambitious as we can.” — AFP



Steven Gerrard (left)



Novak Djokovic to skip 2022 ATP Cup in Sydney

SYDNEY: World number one Novak Djokovic will not travel to Sydney for the men’s season-opening ATP Cup next week, Serbian daily *Blic* reported on Saturday.

Djokovic was named in Serbia’s team for the ATP Cup, although the 34-year-old has yet to commit to the Australian Open following the organisers’ mandate for Covid-19 vaccinations.

Djokovic has declined to

disclose whether he is vaccinated, citing privacy.

Serbia are in Group A along with Norway, Chile and Spain at the ATP Cup, which is scheduled for January 1-9 before the Australian Open begins on January 17.

UNCERTAIN WHETHER

Australian Open chief Craig Tiley said on Wednesday that he is still uncertain whether Djokovic

will be playing at the Melbourne Park major.

Tiley has said that all players and staff at the Australian Open would be vaccinated or have a medical exemption granted by an independent panel of experts.

Those requirements have prevented Djokovic from confirming whether he will bid for a men’s record 21st Grand Slam title and a 10th Australian Open crown. — Reuters

Banking Services
Made Special
to Suit Your World

BankDhofar provides you with a host of innovative products, services that are specially designed to suit your needs and exceed your expectations

For more information:
<https://bit.ly/BankDhofarEng>

f t i s o g m

Al Rialah Priority Banking Services

Al Riala Special Banking Services

Leisure Banking Services

Youth Banking Services

Expat Banking Services

Children Banking Services

بنك ظفار
BankDhofar

the best bank for you

24/7 011 24280000 www.bankdhofar.com

Port of Salalah
breaks past
year record in
container volume



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 25

In the run-up to the year-end, Port of Salalah has managed to break its previous years’ record with a record-breaking container handling volume of 4.37 million TEUs (twenty-foot-equivalent units) with a week to go for the year-end closure. While the global supply chain continues to battle with reliability issues and port congestions, the container carriers are finding it challenging to adhere to their port schedules, which also puts pressure on port operations.

It is despite these challenges that the Port of Salalah managed to reach this record.

Mark Hardiman, CEO of Port of Salalah, said “I am happy that we have managed to reach our targets despite the challenging environment and our capacity constraints, an achievement that’s entirely attributable to the support of our customers and the outstanding work done by our team. The level of dedication that is displayed together with a continuous improvement mindset is also helping us aim higher and add value to those we serve.”

Port of Salalah also highlighted the collaboration of various government agencies like Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, ROP customs, Coast Guard and ASYAD. Above all, the ports’ long-term objective is to actively contribute to the Sultanate of Oman’s economic diversification strategy under the visionary leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq.

Thumbs-up for Omani economy from
Big Three of global rating agencies

MAJOR TURNAROUND:
The trio of the world’s most influential rating agencies cited significant improvement of key fiscal metrics, most notably the dramatic shrinkage of the budget deficit for 2021 aided by buoyant oil prices and a steady uptick in non-oil revenue

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Last week’s ratings upgrade by Fitch Ratings effectively means that all of the Big Three of international rating agencies are now broadly in agreement about the buoyant outlook of the Omani economy going into 2022.

New York-headquartered Fitch revised the Sultanate of Oman’s outlook to stable from negative while affirming the sovereign’s Long-Term Foreign and Local-Currency Issuer Default Ratings (IDR) at ‘BB-’.

It came just two months after S&P Global Ratings revised its outlook on the Omani economy to positive from stable. Also based in New York, the rating agency affirmed its ‘B+/B’ long-term and short-term foreign and local currency sovereign credit ratings.

The transfer and convertibility assessment was set at ‘BB-’. Moody’s Investors Service followed suit in October with a revision in the outlook on the Government of Oman’s issuer rating to stable from negative and affirmed its long-term issuer and senior unsecured ratings at Ba3.

Moody’s also affirmed the Government of Oman’s (P)Ba3



“
If the government fully implements its reform programme and oil prices turn more favourable than we had assumed, the pace of increase in net debt could slow significantly below our current forecast of slightly above 5 per cent of GDP on average over 2021-2024

S&P GLOBAL RATINGS

senior unsecured medium term note programme rating.

The trio of the world’s most influential rating agencies cited significant improvement of key fiscal metrics, most notably the dramatic shrinkage of the budget deficit for 2021 aided by buoyant oil prices and a steady uptick in non-oil revenue.

Also spurring the rapid evolution of the Sultanate of Oman’s credit rating — from junk status just status barely two years to stable/positive today — are the government’s fiscal reforms enshrined in its landmark Medium Term Fiscal Plan (MTFP) unveiled in late 2020.

Among the key metrics that underscore this turnaround in the Omani economy is the budget deficit which narrowed to 3.4 per cent of GDP in 2021, down from 16.1 per cent of GDP in 2020.

Oil and gas revenues also climbed by a third, driven largely by a 28-per cent rise in the Sultanate of Oman’s average fiscal oil price.

Fitch also forecast a strong rise in real GDP growth to 3.1 per cent in 2022 before steadying at 2.3 per cent in 2023, driven by stronger hydrocarbon growth next year.

However, non-oil growth is expected to moderate at just over 2 per cent on average.

Earlier, S&P Global Ratings cited the “solid path” charted by the Omani government to reduce historically high fiscal deficits, and backed by a “strong political will” to implement reform measures.

It noted that the Medium Term Fiscal Plan (2021-2025) is expected to produce a net positive outcome. “...if the government fully implements its reform

programme and oil prices turn more favourable than we had assumed, the pace of increase in net debt could slow significantly below our current forecast of slightly above 5 per cent of GDP on average over 2021-2024,” S&P stated.

Significantly, the improved outlooks by all three major ratings agencies bode well for the Omani government’s ability to access international debt markets at competitive interest rates and terms and issuance options of choice as well.

A key goal of the MTFP has been to reverse the trend of downgrades of the country’s credit ratings by all three leading ratings agencies. This was sought to be achieved by improving the country’s overall financial position, reducing its public debt and improving the overall credit environment in the Sultanate of Oman.

OCCI plans SAOC entities in key governorates

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 25

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) is exploring options to establish closed joint stock companies (SAOC) in a number of governorates of the Sultanate of Oman with a view to developing promising economic sectors in these areas.

According to Eng Ridha bin Juma al Saleh (pictured),



Chairman of the Board of Directors of OCCI, the Chamber is currently undertaking studies to establish these entities in Al Buraimi and Musandam governorates, among other areas.

These efforts are in an advanced stage, he noted. Also as part of its broader goals, the Chamber plans to establish investment and commercial partnerships with brotherly and friendly countries.

This goal is exemplified by the recent establishment of the Oman-Bahrain Investment Holding Company with a capital of RO 10 million.

Owned 50:50 by business houses from the two countries, the company will seek to promote invest food security and other sectors in line with Oman Vision 2040 objectives.

Likewise, a study is also underway for the establishment

of a trade and investment partnership with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Al Saleh said.

The Chamber, he said, is making great efforts to attract new investments to the Sultanate of Oman by organising visits by trade delegations and hosting bilateral meetings between Omani businessmen and their counterparts from brotherly and friendly countries.

(With inputs from ONA)

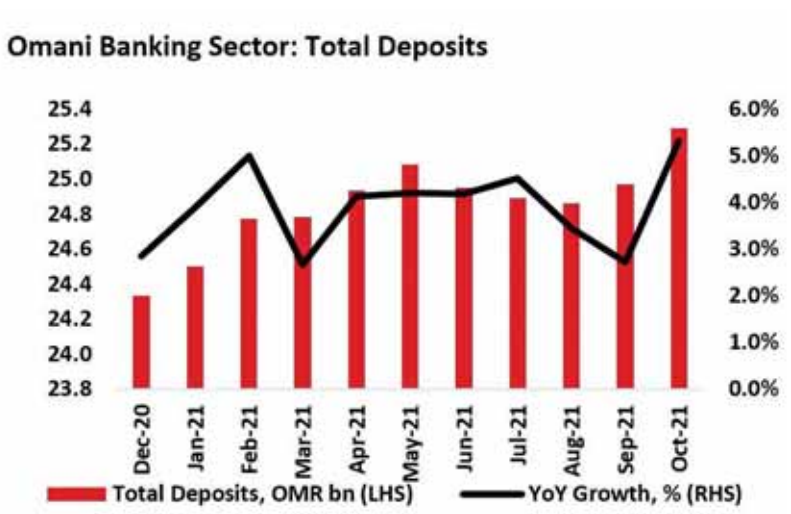
MSX ends week higher, supported by all sectors

M SX30 Index ended the week higher by 2.34 per cent. All sub-indices ended green for the week. Financial index closed up by 2.11 per cent. Industrial & service Index also closed higher by 1.70 per cent and 1.84 per cent. MSX Shariah Index closed higher by 1.68 per cent.

One of the important news developments of the week was that Fitch Ratings Revised Oman's Outlook to Stable and affirmed its Rating at 'BB-.'

The revision of the Outlook reflects actual improvements in, and the expected evolution of, key fiscal metrics including government debt/GDP and the budget deficit, driven by higher oil prices and fiscal reforms, and a lessening of external financing pressures relative to recent years even as external funding needs remain high.

Renaissance Services disclosed on the bourse that MEDC



Awards 3-Year Contract to Tawoos Industrial Services, for the installation of Smart Meters across all three zones of the Muscat Governorate. The project was awarded by Muscat Electricity Distribution Company (MEDC).

The value of the contract is RO 9.3 million. The scope includes rollout of more than 400,000 smart meters across all three zones of the Muscat Governorate.

The duration of the project is three years starting from January 2022. Earlier, Sultanate of Oman announced that it is undertaking a 1.2 million smart meter rollouts nationwide over the next five years.

Energy Development Oman (EDO) SAOC announced that it has launched its new brand identity by unveiling its corporate vision and logo.

The company was set up in Muscat in December 2020 to take over the government's 60 per cent stake in PDO's Block 6 oil and

associated gas, and 100 per cent in PDO's Block 6 non-associated gas and condensate. PDO continues to operate Block 6, and EDO, through PDO, is responsible for the bulk of the Sultanate of Oman's hydrocarbon output.

CBO's latest statistics show that conventional banking credit rose to RO 22,996 million as at the end of Oct'21, rising by 3.4 per cent YoY and 0.1 per cent MoM. On year-to-date (YTD) basis, conventional credit is up 2.9 per cent.

Conventional deposits have grown to RO 20,945 million, rising by 2.9 per cent YoY and 1.1 per cent MoM. On YTD basis, deposits have grown by 2.0 per cent. Loan to Deposit ratio stood at 109.8 per cent vs. 109.2 per cent a year ago.

Islamic credit growth remained strong on yearly basis at 15.5 per cent YoY in Oct'21, with total financing extended by Islamic banks and windows touching RO 4,771 million, rising by 0.8 per cent MoM.

Islamic deposits stood at RO 4,344 million, rising by 18.9 per cent YoY and 2.9 per cent MoM. Islamic Financing to Deposit ratio stood at 109.8 per cent vs. 115.1 per cent a year ago. Total credit & Islamic financing stood at RO 27,767 million, up by 5 per cent YoY, 0.3 per cent MoM and 4.0 per cent YTD. Private sector lending stood at 84.3 per cent of total, rising by 2.4 per cent YoY and 0.2 per cent MoM. Total deposits of conventional and Islamic institutions stood at RO 25,290 million, rising by 5.3 per cent YoY, 1.3 per cent MoM and 3.9 per cent YTD.

Total Loan to deposit ratio stood at 109.8 per cent.

During the week, the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) announced the launch of Madayn Investment Complexes which will provide an ideal opportunity for local and foreign companies to invest in Oman's industrial cities.

Under the Madayn Investment Complexes project, companies

shall develop specialised investment complexes through their real estate plans, and the designs shall be approved by Madayn, according to Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO of Madayn.

Further, it was announced that the proliferation of private individuals offering financial advisory services to investors on an informal basis is sought to be regulated by the Capital Market Authority (CMA) of the Sultanate of Oman.

Draft regulations, titled 'Rules for Independent Financial Planners (IFPs), were published by the Authority last week with the goal of eliciting feedback from market stakeholders and members of the general public.

The goal, say officials, is to create a regulatory framework to support the growth of a cadre of qualified private professionals offering financial advisory services outside of the scope of well-established and regulated corporate service providers. *[Courtesy: U-Capital]*

RO 300,000 with BankDhofar's savings account scheme year-end prize draws



MUSCAT: BankDhofar will conduct Year-End Prize Draws as part of the Savings Account Scheme 2021. Two lucky winners will get the chance to win RO 100,000 (RO 50,000 each), in addition to RO 200,000 for one Al Riadah Priority Banking Customer.

Throughout the year, BankDhofar rewarded customers who have maintained the savings habit and provided chances for various segments to win valuable cash prizes.

Commenting on the coming draws, Iman al Amri (**pictured**), Executive Manager — Retail Products & Segments at BankDhofar said: "This year's savings scheme has seen great success, with more chances and bigger prizes covering all segments. Our main aim of the savings scheme is to instill the saving habits within the community and reward our customers for that with valuable cash prizes.

I would like to congratulate all the winners of this scheme, and we look forward to congratulate the lucky winners of the Year-End prizes. With a total of RO 2.304 million, the year's scheme rewarded BankDhofar customers who save a minimum of RO 100 in their accounts in the Monthly Guaranteed Prizes for branches, Monthly Prizes for Children, Monthly Prizes for Youth, and the Monthly Prizes for Amaan Retirees Banking Services' customers.

Bank Nizwa recognised as strongest Islamic retail bank for 2021

MUSCAT: Leading the way in the Islamic banking industry, Bank Nizwa was awarded the title of the Strongest Islamic Retail Bank in the Sultanate of Oman in 2021 at the recently conducted Islamic Retail Banking Awards (IRBA).

The prestigious award honours Bank Nizwa for its contributions to the development, growth and success of Islamic retail banking in the Sultanate. The award was received by Arif al Zaabi, AGM-Retail of Bank Nizwa, on behalf of the bank.

Commenting on the win, Khaled al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa said, "We are indeed honoured to have received this coveted award as it celebrates excellence and best practices in the Islamic retail banking sector.

At Bank Nizwa, we ensure that our Sharia-compliant products and services are thoughtfully designed keeping the needs and demands of our customers in mind.

At the same time, we have remained dedicated to achieving



the objects of our digital transformation drive with a keen emphasis on providing customers with the highest level of cyber and data security.

Innovation, reliability and customer convenience are critical aspects of all our operations as we continue to enhance our digital banking ecosystem. All these factors put together have helped Bank Nizwa establish its positions as the preferred Islamic banking partner and set a new benchmark for progressive Sharia-compliant solutions."

Bank Nizwa's retail segment has secured the highest growth in

the Islamic finance industry in the Sultanate of Oman.

Its retail deposits grew from RO 445,575 million in September 2020 to RO 511,151 million in September 2021, therefore registering a significant growth of RO 64,576 million or 14%. At the same time, the bank's retail finance rose by RO 46,139 million or 11% to RO 453,137 as of September 2021 as compared to RO 406,898 million as of September 2020.

The bank's innovative digital products, Sharia-compliant financial solutions and schemes to meet the varying demands of its customers have contributed to the success of its retail segment. From the bank's robust mobile app to the option of opening additional saving accounts, Bank Nizwa has a number of solutions tailor-made to the needs of its clients.

Its recently launched education finance that helps students enhance their academic qualifications has also been well-received by the market and given a huge impetus to the popularity of the bank.

Exclusive benefits on Lexus range ending soon

MUSCAT: Lexus is offering luxury automotive enthusiasts a fantastic opportunity to own their favourite Lexus vehicle and benefit with an exclusive offer that will end soon. As part of the campaign, Lexus is offering free service 3 years / 30,000 kms (Whichever is earlier) and 1 year free registration. The campaign is valid up to December 30, 2021. (Conditions apply. Visit any Lexus showroom for details).

Customers in the Sultanate of Oman, have a wide range of vehicles to choose from with Lexus. The Lexus range includes inspiring SUVs like the NX300 with an advanced turbocharged 238hp, 2.0-litre engine which combines fuel efficiency with outstanding power output. This generates exhilarating acceleration for sporty driving, together with exceptional fuel economy.

The Lexus UX has a front-wheel drive configuration and



is powered by a high-efficiency 2.0 litre, four-cylinder engine, which is coupled with a Direct Shift Continuously Variable Transmission (DCVT).

The five-seat Lexus RX350 is equipped with a 3.5-litre V6 that is mated to an eight speed automatic transmission. The RX is also available in a 3-row 7-seater option. Also available is the Lexus RX450h, a hybrid version featuring a 3.5-litre Atkinson-cycle engine.

The Lexus GX460 is perfect for families who seek no-holds-barred adventure on their days off, yet also desire an easy-driving, comfortable and versatile luxury SUV for the work week.

The Lexus GX460 features a 4.6L engine that provides outstanding power and responsive performance. The LX570 possesses a 5.7-litre engine that delivers the punch and towing power befitting this vehicle. The 8-Speed automatic

transmission with a wide gear range contributes to achieving excellent start-off and acceleration performance and fuel efficiency during high speed driving.

The Lexus range of sedans include the IS350. This sleek and stylish powerful sedan is equipped with a 3.5-litre engine that's paired to an 8-speed automatic transmission. The turbocharged IS300 features a 2.0-litre twin-scroll turbocharged inline four-cylinder engine with intercooler that generates 241 Hp.

Complementing the Lexus ES emotional design, elevated by a new design front grille, is a thrilling drive personality imbued by two powertrain options. The ES350 is powered by a 3.5-litre 24-valve V6 engine that produces 298 hp and 36.3 kg-m of torque.

While the ES250 is powered by, high-efficiency 2.5-litre 16-valve DOHC engine that produces 204 hp and 24.8 kg-m of torque. The two powertrains on ES350 and ES250 are paired to an eight-speed direct-shift automatic transmission.

The flagship LS which is an inspiring luxury sedan, is available in 3.5-litre V6 Multi Stage Hybrid System producing 354 hp, a 3.5-litre V6 naturally aspirated Atkinson-cycle producing 311 hp and 38.7 Kg.M Torque, and a 3.5-litre twin-turbo V6 engine producing 415 hp and 61.2 Kg.M of Torque.

In the Sultanate of Oman, every Lexus vehicle comes with special benefits and privileges such as Manufacturer's Warranty of 4 years/100,000 kms (whichever is earlier) and 24 hours on-road assistance from AAA.

For more information, please visit www.lexusoman.com or subscribe to YouTube channel "Lexus Oman", or like Lexus Oman on Facebook or Follow Lexus on Instagram.



Fitch revises OQ's outlook to stable

KEY DRIVER: The rating action follows a similar action on OQ's ultimate sole shareholder, the Omani government (BB-/Stable) via the Oman Investment Authority (OIA)

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 25

International ratings agency Fitch has revised the outlook of OQ, the global integrated group of the Sultanate of Oman, to stable from negative and affirmed its 'BB-' Long-Term Issuer Default Rating (IDR).

The rating action follows a similar action on OQ's ultimate sole shareholder, the Omani government (BB-/Stable) via the Oman Investment Authority (OIA). "OQ's IDR is equalised with that of the Sultanate of Oman and reflects Fitch's view of strong links between OQ and the state.

"Under our Government-Related Entities (GRE) Rating Criteria we assess status, ownership and control, support track record and socio-political implications of default as 'Strong' while financial implications of default are 'Very Strong'.

"This assessment results in a support score of 40 out of a maximum of 60," the New York based agency said.

"We assess OQ's Standalone Credit Profile (SCP) at 'b', reflecting its complex group structure and leverage metrics that are relatively high but likely to decline over the medium term. It also reflects OQ's solid business profile with integrated operations spanning



exploration and production, refining, marketing, chemical and petrochemical segments," it further noted.

OQ is ultimately fully owned by the Omani government via Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and was established to strengthen and centralise the country's oil and gas industry.

KEY DRIVERS

Strong Ownership and Control: OQ accounts for a substantial portion of assets transferred to OIA from the Ministry of Finance in 2020. The government exerts significant influence on OQ's business and funding strategy via OIA. While OQ's privatisation is not planned, disposals of minority stakes in its subsidiaries are expected as market conditions improve.

The privatisation strategy is in line with similar steps taken in recent years or being planned in the near term by other GCC

governments with respect to national oil companies.

Strong Support Record: OQ has received significant support from the government in the form of equity injections, asset transfers, shareholder loans and debt guarantees.

Fitch believes large-scale support in the form of investment project funding or debt refinancing would be difficult to obtain due to the potential budgetary constraints on Oman's government, but support for OQ's short-term liquidity and interest payments would be provided, if needed.

Strong Socio-Political Implication of Default: OQ accounted for 4.4 per cent of the Sultanate of Oman's 2019 GDP and is one of the largest employers in the country with 6,600 employees.

OQ is the main downstream company owning all domestic

refining assets producing all transport fuels for the Omani market and is tasked with increasing the value per barrel of extracted oil by further expanding refining and petrochemical assets. It is also the exclusive operator of the domestic natural gas transportation infrastructure.

Very Strong Financial Implications of Default: With total gross debt of \$13.2 billion at end-2020 (\$4.1 billion at end-September 2021), OQ and its subsidiaries are the largest borrower after the government (debt of \$38 billion).

Fitch expects that the government's funding needs will continue to be partially met with external debt and that an OQ default would have a significant impact on the availability and cost of foreign financing options to the Sultanate of Oman.

'b' SCP: The business profile of OQ is supported by the

scale of operations, business diversification with a presence in the oil and gas upstream, downstream and midstream sectors, quality of its E&P and its newly built refining and petrochemical assets as well as its favourable location with access to high-growth markets.

Prior-Ranking Debt: OQ at the holdco level had \$4 billion of outstanding debt at end-September 2021, including a \$750 million, 5.125 per cent bond placed in 2021 under its \$2 billion GMTN programme. Consolidated gross debt \$14.1 billion) included mainly loans at OQ Refineries and Petroleum Industries LLC (OQRPI), which accounted for 53 per cent of total gross debt.

The integration process at OQ is progressing, but management reports that most debt will remain at the subsidiary level in the next five years.

Key Investments: OQ recently completed construction of a \$6.9 billion LPIC that will annually produce 880,000 tonnes polyethylene and 300,000 tonnes polypropylene.

Other key OQ downstream projects include the \$8.3 billion Duqm refinery with 230,000 barrels per day, a 50:50 JV with Kuwait Petroleum (Europe) BV that is expected to be commissioned in 2023 (86.5 per cent completed).

OQ plans to focus on investment projects already in the pipeline and has suspended some planned large investments, such as a petrochemical plant at the Duqm refinery. Still sizeable capex earmarked for 2022-2026 of \$6.2 billion is mainly for maintaining output at OQ's oil and gas exploration and production arm.

Oil prices ease, focus shifts to next Opec+ move



LONDON: Brent crude futures snapped a three-day rally on Friday in light trading before the Christmas holidays, but the benchmark ended the week higher, with the market focusing on next steps by Opec+ and the impact of the Omicron variant.

Brent crude futures settled 71 cents lower at \$76.14 a barrel at the early close of 1300 GMT, rising by about 3 per cent on the week.

Oil prices have recovered this week as fears over the impact of the highly infectious Omicron variant on the global economy receded, with early data suggesting it causes a milder level of illness.

"The omicron-is-mild rally could well continue into January now, but reality will bite in February I believe, as the end of the Fed taper moves into sight," OANDA analyst Jeffrey Halley said.

The Opec+ will meet on January 4 to decide whether to go ahead with a 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) production increase in February. Russia believes oil prices are unlikely to change significantly next year with demand recovering to pre-pandemic levels only by the end of 2022, Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said on Friday. — **Reuters**

US jobless claims steady; consumer spending up



Construction workers assemble a scaffold at a job site in New York. — **Reuters**

WASHINGTON: The number of Americans filing new claims for unemployment benefits held below pre-pandemic levels last week, while consumer spending increased solidly, putting the economy on track for a strong finish to 2021.

But price pressures continued to build up, with a measure of underlying inflation recording its largest annual increase since 1989 in November.

The reports on Thursday came as the nation was struggling with a resurgence in Covid-19 infections, driven by the Delta and highly transmissible Omicron variant, which could crimp economic growth in the first quarter.

"Rising virus cases are a near term risk but overall, we expect growth to pick up in the fourth quarter from a subdued pace in the third quarter," said Rubeela Farooqi, chief US economist at High Frequency Economics in White Plains, New York.

Initial claims for state unemployment benefits were unchanged at a seasonally adjusted 205,000 for the week ended on December 18, the Labor Department said. Early this month, claims dropped to a level last seen in 1969.

Economists had forecast 205,000 applications for the latest week. Claims have declined from a record high of 6.149 million in early April of 2020. — **Reuters**

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 25

SOHAR Port and Freezone signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) in Suhar which will see the development of an AI Lab on campus.

Signed by Dr Said bin Hamad al Rubaie, Vice-Chancellor of the University Technology and Applied Sciences, and Omar bin Hamood al Mahrizi, Deputy CEO, SOHAR Port, and CEO of the Freezone, the agreement will see SOHAR supply the necessary equipment to develop artificial intelligent technology capabilities to benefit the community as well as improve efficiency within the port and freezone. It is expected that the lab will start operations by end of Q1 2022.

SOHAR has strategically invested in new technologies to capitalise on its beneficial location and abundant resources to maintain its competitive advantage and drive growth in industrial sectors.

The use of cutting-edge technology throughout the complex will unlock new opportunities for tenants, maximise productivity and assist in the smooth running of the port



and freezone as it continues to expand.

During the signing, Dr Said al Rubaie said, "This partnership feeds directly into our goals at the University which aim to identify the right private sector partners and bridge our educational output with the technical requirements on the job.

"The upcoming lab in Suhar is a testament of our advancement, as we continue to shape the future of education. By integrating AI into our academic curricular, we will be creating a generation with the right skillsets and knowledge that will continuously innovate.

"Furthermore, we are laying

the foundation to develop new disciplines that will allow us to keep up with the rapid developments we see in technology, machine learning and robotics."

"The MoU with UTAS provides SOHAR with an outlet for talented students to develop AI applications and initiatives with a real-world purpose in mind.

"Ultimately, the adoption of technology will benefit the wider community, industries across the country and have a wide-reaching impact on the lives of people by creating a culture of innovation which will last long into the future. As we continue to expand,

we will need intelligent solutions to increase efficiency and support evolving supply chains," said Omar al Mahrizi, Deputy CEO, SOHAR Port, and CEO of the Freezone.

The collaboration between SOHAR and UTAS will build national capacities in the field of AI and technology, directly benefiting students as well as faculty, technicians and researchers.

This will also bring the educational sector together with the manufacturing and industrial sector that will contribute in building a knowledge-based society.

SOHAR Port to fund supply of AI Lab

The cult of revenue is flying in thin air

Top-line growth is the surest way to create wealth. But Wall Street has taken the idea too far lately by ignoring the importance of profit and cash flow.

Among top-performing stocks, revenue growth accounts for the majority of wealth creation over a decade, according to consultancy BCG. Take Microsoft, with a \$2.5 trillion market value. Over 20 years, revenue grew nearly sevenfold.

Net margin improved slightly, so earnings grew by a factor of eight. Investors reckon the company is worth something over 30 times estimated earnings, about what they paid two decades ago. Microsoft's stock is worth 10 times as much, as of mid-December, largely because revenue grew.

Among top-performing stocks, revenue growth accounts for the majority of wealth creation over a decade

Unlike Microsoft, Amazon.com took years to become profitable in an accounting sense.

But like Bill Gates' firm, it threw off cash early, so it didn't need additional capital to grow. Sales growth is one key ingredient, but profit and/or cash flow is another.

The median enterprise value-to-sales ratio for technology-sector IPOs in the first 10 months of 2021 was 15, according to Jay Ritter at the University of Florida.

The only time it has been higher in 40 years was prior to the dot-com crash in the early 2000s.

Already-listed e-commerce firm Shopify is valued at around 30 times estimated revenue, according to Refinitiv data for December. Five years ago, it was valued at just 6 times.

Shopify, like the growing Amazon, can bankroll its own expansion. But many firms with huge valuations are unlikely to do that for many years.

Rivian's valuation, for example, is based on the promise of uninterrupted future growth combined with a second promise that sufficient profit will eventually materialise.

In buoyant markets investors forgive such optimism. But any blows to confidence in 2022, whether economic, pandemic, political or otherwise, should sort the durable Amazon.coms from the hyped-up WeWorks. — Reuters



STREAMING WORKERS

Workers are seen through a pipe at the construction site of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, near the town of Kingisepp, Leningrad region, Russia.

Beginning exports via the Nord Stream 2 pipeline under the Baltic Sea would lead to a reduction in gas prices in Europe, Russian President Vladimir Putin was quoted as saying by local news agencies on Friday.

Nord Stream 2, completed in September, has faced resistance from the United States and several countries including Poland and Ukraine, which say it will increase Russia's leverage over Europe. — Reuters

Five factors that determine success



STEFANO VIRGILLI stefano@virgilli.com

FOR EARLY MOVERS, EDUCATING A NEW MARKET IS AN ENORMOUS CHALLENGE

In the quest to find out the secret of success for start-ups, I refer to Bill Gross' research.

His company, Idealabs, was founded in 1996 in California, and is the longest running technology incubator. They have created over 150 companies with more than 45 IPOs and acquisitions. But they have also failed a lot. And from failure, we derive precious lessons.

Mr Gross went on a mission to find out what actually mattered most for start-up success. He wanted to be systematic, avoiding his instincts and bias built over the years. So he looked across 5 factors to identify which one mattered the most:

1. Idea
2. Team
3. Business model
4. Funding
5. Timing

Let's talk about the idea. Like Gross, I also used to think that the idea was everything.

But then over time, we came to think that maybe the team, the execution, adaptability, mattered even more than the idea. So much about a team's execution is its ability to adapt to be tested by the market. The customer is the daily reality

check. That is why the team is so important for the execution of an idea.

Then comes the business model. Does the company have a clear path generating customer revenues? Could this be the most important factor?

And then comes funding. Some ideas are great, in the hands of an expert team with a sophisticated business model. Yet, what if they don't have enough money to execute? But wait, what about timing?

Even when the idea is excellent, if the market is not ready, it might be doomed to fail. For instance, the fax machine was ahead of times when it was first tested in the market. It took decades for the market to be ready.

For early movers, educating a new market is an enormous challenge. On the other hand, if the idea is too late, the market will not show interest. But then some ideas are just in time.

Blockbuster and Netflix were in the same industry, with Blockbuster having a very clear fist mover advantage. Yet, Netflix came up with a completely new business model which was head of Blockbuster, but not ahead of time. And the market loved it.

Idealabs published the data linked to the

success and failure of their companies.

Timing accounted for 42 per cent of the difference between success and failure. Team and execution came in second, and the idea, the differentiability of the idea, the uniqueness of the idea, that actually came in third.

The ranking was quite surprising to me. Although it is a quantitative assessment (i.e. it measures the number of times that it happened, and not the magnitude of the failure) the idea seems to be not as important as I thought.

According to Bill Gross, sometimes it mattered more when it was actually timed, indicating a strong link between the two factors.

The last two, business model and funding, made sense to me actually. Start-ups can get off the ground without a definitive business model.

Facebook is the clearest example.

And funding, I think as well, is not so crucial at the beginning. If your team is able to deliver an idea suited for the time, that wins enough market, then investors will indeed start knocking at the door. (The writer is a member of the International Press Association)

Does Japan vindicate modern monetary theory?



TAKATOSHI ITO

The author, a former Japanese deputy vice-minister of finance, is a professor at the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University and Senior Professor at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies in Tokyo.

Public debt has soared since the 2008 financial crisis, and especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to the International Monetary Fund, the ratio of public debt to GDP in advanced economies increased from around 70 per cent in 2007 to 124 per cent in 2020. But the fear that rising public debt will fuel future financial crises has been subdued, partly because government bond yields have been so low for so long.

Although yields started falling much earlier, in the 1990s, they were kept low by quantitative easing (QE) after the 2008 and 2020 recessions.

Few doubt that massive fiscal expenditures were warranted to alleviate suffering during those episodes. But advocates of Modern Monetary Theory take this logic a few steps further.

Advocates of MMT contend that as long as debt is denominated in a country's own currency, there is no reason to fear a fiscal crisis,

because a default cannot happen. Any withdrawal of fiscal stimulus therefore should be gradual.

And in the meantime, new issues of public debt can be used to fund infrastructure investments, income-support programmes, and other items on progressives' agenda, provided that the inflation rate remains below the central bank's target (generally around 2 per cent).

MMT's boosters cite Japan as proof of concept. Even though Japan's debt-to-GDP ratio (including both central and local government) is above 250 per cent, compared to 160 per cent in the United States, its ten-year government bond yield has remained at around zero throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, and its average inflation rate has barely exceeded zero for 20 years.

Annual new bond issues and soaring debt levels have not had any apparent impact on borrowing costs. But before other countries rush to emulate Japan, they

should bear in mind that Japanese government bonds are issued in yen, and almost all are held by Japanese residents, both directly and indirectly through financial institutions and the central bank.

This makes Japan quite different than the US, whose Treasury bonds are held by investors worldwide. Some Japanese politicians think their country should be praised as an MMT exemplar.

Just this month, the Diet approved a supplementary budget, which relies on issuance of ¥22 trillion (\$192 billion) in new bonds, on top of the ¥44 trillion in the initial budget. Total new issues this fiscal year thus come to ¥66 trillion, or about 12 per cent of GDP. One of the controversial expenditure items in the supplementary budget is to transfer ¥100,000 to all resident minors (18 years old or younger).

One thing MMT advocates get right is that the Japanese government need not, and should not, default on its debt. Even if there are no buyers for it, the Bank

of Japan can continue to purchase new and rolled-over bonds with cash injections. This may invite very high inflation. But MMT advocates would say that bond issues can be stopped if and when the inflation rate exceeds 2 per cent.

The problem is that by then, it may be too late. With the stock of debt having grown so large, it would require a massive and sudden fiscal consolidation to pay for redemption of existing maturing bonds.

A sudden stop of bond issuance at a 2-per cent inflation rate would likely result in a sharp recession. The only other option would be for the BoJ to continue to buy up the debt, which would result in still higher inflation, if not hyperinflation.

Moreover, the fact that a default can be avoided does not mean that continuing to issue bonds after the acute phase of the crisis enhances social welfare. Cash transfers, such as the one just approved, and other programmes benefit

current generations, whereas the tax burden of eventual bond redemption will be borne by future taxpayers — many of whom may not yet be alive.

And even when existing bonds are rolled over indefinitely, interest payments for debt-financed current consumption will be borne by future generations. MMT's validity partly depends on projected real (inflation-adjusted) growth per capita.

If the population is growing and future generations will be richer than current ones, the "burden" of current bond issues will indeed be small. In this sense, bond issues for consumption function like pay-as-you-go pension systems. As long as the economy is growing faster than the interest burden, PAYGO is a sensible approach, because each generation can simply shift the burden to the next generation, ad infinitum.

Like a Ponzi scheme, this works only as long as the base of the pyramid keeps expanding.

© Project Syndicate, 2021

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 Salalah 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

• Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
• Choose from a wide range of brands & models
• PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
• Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

أوربت ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease

Classifieds

Tally
POWER OF SIMPLICITY

TALLY FOR VAT

For Tally Sales, Services or Customization

Contact: TallyGuru +968 79248644, 98753781
Email: guru.prasad@rtsgroup.com
Roudh Lotas Group LLC

TallyPrime

<http://www.rltsgroup.com/tally-accounting-software/>

SUNDAY DECEMBER 26, 2021 | JUMADA AL ULA 21, 1443 AH

Observer Classified Section

Mohammed al Rashdi: 99841230
m.alrahd86@yahoo.com

Ali al Maashari: 99639264
ali.almashari@omandaily.com

Saada al Rashdi
95919344

94501166
24649593
24649595

Tally is now available on the **Cloud**

Ask for FREE Demo

Think TALLY
Call 977 TALLY
(977 82559)

TallyPrime

TSO, Tally Solutions for Oman, by Infinity Thoughts LLC : 977 TALLY (977 82559) * sales@tallysolutionsoman.com * www.TallySolutionsOman.com

VAT REGISTRATION, RETURN FILING, TAX CONSULTANCY

Contact: 9246 9602 / 9723 0025

Smile Dental Clinic
Al Ghubrah, Muscat

Dr. Murugesh MDS
Specialist Orthodontist

Available all the days of the month except Friday

Tel: 99785613 / 24499698

- Orthodontics
- Root Canal Treatment
- Ceramic Crowns & Bridges
- Treatment for Bad Breath
- Treatment for Bleeding Gums

Quality Comes First

Tower Cranes & Passenger Lifts:

- Sales and Rental Services
- Installation
- Maintenance Service
- Breakdown Service
- Spare Parts Supply
- Hoist & Lowering
- Support Fixation
- Dismantling

Steel Fabrication Works

NEW MANARA TECHNICAL SERVICES LLC
Mobile: +968 9853 1975, 9853 1970
E-mail: info@newmanara.com / newmanaratechnical@gmail.com
Website: www.newmanara.com

Driving School

Special offers for those wishing to learn driving in (Aziba - Khwair Qurum - Ruwi Al Amirat)

Contact No: 99074072

EURO CHOICE FOODS L.L.C.
(Importers of Frozen, Chilled, Fresh & Dry Food Products)

Food Service
Catering Supply
Ship Chandling
Re-export
Fresh Fruits & Vegetables
Fresh & Chilled Meat and Chicken
Dairy Product & Grocery Items

Tel: +968 24435211 / 24435177
foodservice@eurochoicefoodsllc.com
www.eurochoicefoodsllc.com

M M T CARGO
DOOR TO DOOR SERVICE

MUSCAT: 95605353, 95605454
BARKA: 95893242, 93743308
SOHAR: 96773031, 95347988
FALAJ: 94002341, 95136067
SALALAH: 94575905, 97858656
DUQUIM: 97218831, 94002341

ROAD, SEA & AIR TRANSPORT WORLD WIDE

GTC Building, Near Badr Al Sama Hospital, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman
E-mail: mmtcargo@yahoo.com
Customer Care: 96773031 / 97695454

Sea Cargo 800 Bz/Kg Express Cargo to Kerala 5 to 7 days*

SIT. WANTED

BE Electrical Engineer with over three years experience mainly in Oil & Gas field in Oman seeks suitable placement. Also have specialised training in cable testing. Currently in Muscat on visit. Contact: 00968 93873377

21 YEARS of experience in Oman as an Accountant in different industries with 14 years of continuous service in a real estate company. Oman D/L and NOC available. Contact 92583726. Email: georgetvm@live.com

SIT. VACANT

HIRING experienced **Cardiologist** for a Clinic in Muscat. Send CV to medical4cv@gmail.com

FOR SALE

USED vehicle, scrap telephone cable and steel item as-is-where-is basis. This can be inspected at NTS Camp in Ghala. Interested parties may contact on 99259157. Sealed offer should be submitted on or before December 29, 2021.

WE supply quantities of excellent mountainous soil in Bausher (suitable for compaction and filling) 99242445, 99327939.

SERVICES

AUTOCAD/ REVIT ARCH MEP, part/full-time. Contact WhatsApp: 79037728.

A LEGAL translation office needs **Marketeers**. Contact E-mail: oman4n@gmail.com

AL SUMRI AC maintenance. We are ready to repair and install all types of Air-Conditioner within Muscat Governorate. 94301888.

RENT A CAR

Buttercup

Rent A Car

AMAZING OFFERS

- Rent a car for 10 days and get an extra free day.
- Rent for one month and get 5 days free.

All the cars are 2016 brand new special prices for public departments, companies and long-term contracts. ☎972494490.

LUXURIOUS

Toyota bus 2016, air-conditioned, 30 passengers, offered for daily/monthly/annually, Muscat. Contact: 98080609, 96316269.

Need a Job

A young Omani Women looking for a job in Muscat. She holds a bachelor's degree in computer networks and has experience at Muscat International Airport.

zozoalmashari4@gmail.com

OMAN OBSERVER

Now get news on the go

To receive news updates from OMAN OBSERVER,

WhatsApp
<your name> to
96473232

www.omanobserver.com @omanobserver

AL NAMANI CARGO
DOOR TO DOOR AIR & SEA CARGO WORLD WIDE

ALL OVER INDIA EXPRESS DELIVERY

Online Tracking
TOLL FREE NUMBER
80066766

0.800 BAIZA PER KG

INDIA | BANGLADESH | INDONESIA | PHILIPPINES | SRI LANKA | ETHIOPIA | ALL GCC SERVICE AVAILABLE

95587410, 99785420, 99638698, 98523831

HO: RUWI - HAMRIYA, GHALA, AL AMRAT, SEEB, SOHAR

VIGAS CARGO
WORLD WIDE DOOR TO DOOR

Transportation, Packing & Cargo Services

- ♦ CARGO SERVICES BY AIR & SEA WORLD WIDE
- ♦ DOOR TO DOOR DELIVERY IN INDIA, INDONESIA & UK
- ♦ PROFESSIONAL PACKERS & MOVERS
- ♦ MUSCAT - DUBAI - MUSCAT REGULAR TRANSPORT

H.O. Ruwi 99851366 92495068

Ghubrah : 93571703
Falaj : 93571704
Store : 93571823
Misfa : 98119561
93260956

vigas.cargo@yahoo.com

Al Eman Dental Clinic

Flat 22, Floor 2
Abu Zaki Trading Building
Opp. Al Nahda Hospital
Sultan Qaboos Street

+968 24834113
+968 97454854
+968 96438854

Our Mission: To preserve your teeth and smile for a lifetime

FOR RENT

Substantial Villa in Hay Al Shatti near Grand Hayatt. 3 Floors with 40 Rooms, 22 Bathrooms which is suitable for Embassy / Clinic / School / Multipurpose Office / Residential Premises.

TEL : 99643760 / 24704994

AL KHOORY EQUIPMENT EST.
P.O. Box 545, P.C. 117, Al Wadi Al Kabir Area, Sultanate of Oman

Official distributor of **Schneider Electric**

Stockist & Wholesaler of Low Voltage Switchgear Products and a One Stop Solution for all Switchgear Products and Assembly

Tel: +968 24832474, +968 79474556
E-mail: alkhoory@omantel.net.om • www.alkhooryoman.com

PEST CONTROL OMAN CO. L.L.C.

Supply of Pesticides, Gel (crocroaches), Public Health chemicals, Agriculture chemicals, Snake repellent, Rodent baits and other insect repellent from UK & USA

PROFESSIONALS in Pest Control Service, Bedbug Treatment, Rodent Treatment, Snake Treatment and Termite Treatment [Pre & Post Construction]

Tel: 24787606, 24787503
Direct Line: 24786077
GSM: 99382355, 99172309

pcomctom@omantel.net.om
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman

OMAN DAILY **Observer**

For Advertisements

Please Contact with our Team:

Head Office

Mohd Al Rashdi
99841230
malrahd86@yahoo.com

Ali Al Maashari
99639264
wadialmeeh@yahoo.com

Salalah Office

Bakhit Al Shihri
92998577
bakhit.omanobserver@gmail.com

Nizwa Office

Abdullah Al Abri
99429094
nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om

Sohar Office

Musalam Al Saidi
99429192
sohardaily@outlook.com

#Living_with_COVID19

ZEN POLYNE

"TARPAULIN WAREHOUSE IN OMAN"

INDIAN BRAND BEST QUALITY LLDPE TARPAULINE CROSS LAMINATED MULTI-LAYER TARPAULIN

FEATURES OF ZEN-POLYNE

- U.V. STABILIZED
- 100% WATER PROOF
- LIGHT WEIGHT
- THERMO - WELDED JOINTS.
- FLEXIBLE & CUSTOMISED SIZES.
- STRONGEST TARPAULIN EVER
- SUPERIOR DART IMPACT STRENGTH

RAVIRA

Please Contact: OMAN : +968 9329 1473 / 7937 1865
UAE : +971 5030 58676
Mail Id: ravirainternational@gmail.com Web: www.ravirant.com

GCL GALAXY CARGO LOGISTICS

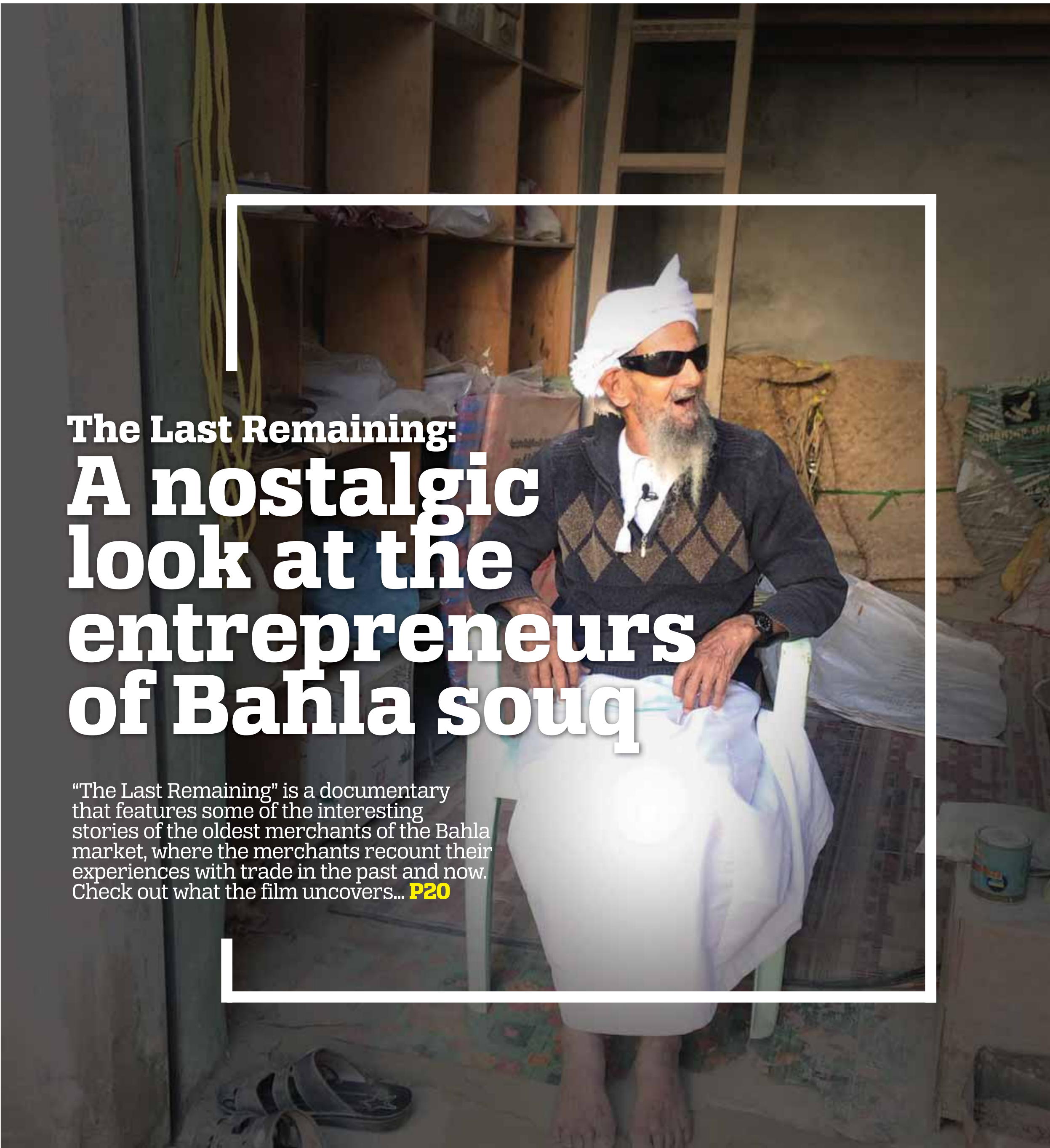
المجرة للشحن اللوجستية

WORLD WIDE AIR & SEA CARGO SERVICES

Location: Rex Road, Behind Modern Oman Bakery
GSM : +968 99635330 / 93569551
Email : gcloman@hotmail.com
Website : gcloman.com

Airport to Airport
Port to Port
Door to Door
FCL Services
LCL Services
Consolidation
GCC Road Transport
Professional Packing
Moving Local & International

features



The Last Remaining: A nostalgic look at the entrepreneurs of Bahla souq

“The Last Remaining” is a documentary that features some of the interesting stories of the oldest merchants of the Bahla market, where the merchants recount their experiences with trade in the past and now. Check out what the film uncovers... **P20**

ENTERTAINMENT

READ



YOU'LL BE THE DEATH OF ME

BY KAREN M. MCMANUS

Three friends skip school together and become involved in a murder.

'A Journal for Jordan' brings a father's life lessons for son to screen

OSCAR WINNING ACTOR Denzel Washington returns to the director's chair for drama "A Journal for Jordan", a story about love and life lessons based on a memoir by Pulitzer Prize winner Dana Canedy. Starring "Black Panther" actor Michael B Jordan and "Monsters and Men" actress

Chante Adams, the movie tells the story of how after Canedy's fiancé US Army First Sergeant Charles King was killed during the Iraq war, she turned a journal he left for their son into an essay and later a book. The film depicts the teachings King wrote to the then infant Jordan and the



couple's love story.

"I read (the script) and I went 'Whoa... Oh, we got something here, I'll direct

this'," Washington told Reuters in an interview. Jordan, also a producer on the film, said its message

was simple: "I want people to take away from this movie that... through love anything's possible." King began writing the journal in 2005. Former journalist Canedy, who was part of a *New York Times* team that won the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for a series on race relations in the United States, published her memoir in 2008. She said King would be moved by the film. "He would be humbled. He would be bashful about it and he would be incredibly proud," said Canedy, currently senior vice-president and publisher at Simon & Schuster. "A Journal for Jordan" will be released in US cinemas on December 25. — Reuters



find us on
TWITTER
Scan the QR Code or follow us on
www.twitter.com/omanobserver

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



utas_salalah_travelblog • Follow
Wadi Darbat



suboohiikhan • Follow
Salalah, Oman



drsreejith • Follow



SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.



AROUND THE WORLD

DISCOVERY

Clowns celebrate Russian master comic Nikulin



AWARD-WINNING comics on Sunday showcased the art of clowning and tomfoolery as they honoured Russia's brightest circus star Yuri Nikulin who would have turned 100 at the weekend.

During a gala in the second city Saint Petersburg, entertainers from a variety of countries including Russia,

val, said clowns all over the world knew and remembered Nikulin.

"He is a master, he is our father, he is a magnificent artist," Larible said.

Under the Soviet Union, the circus was one of the country's most cherished institutions.

Known for his signature sailor cap, cropped trousers and warmth,



Italy, Brazil and Mexico delighted the audience with skits and animal acts involving poodles and a goose.

The performance wrapped up a four-day festival dubbed "The world's best clowns" which was dedicated to Russia's beloved clown and actor Nikulin, who would have turned 100 on Saturday.

David Larible, a prominent Italian performer who took part in the festi-

Nikulin became a cultural icon entertaining Russians for decades.

He starred in iconic Soviet comedies but was also known for his dramatic talent.

When the legendary comic died in 1997, Boris Yeltsin, Russia's president at the time, addressed the nation in a televised address, saying the country was grieving.

"We've all become orphans today," Yeltsin said at the time. — **AFP**

ART

Inside 'museum' home of Greek artist Alekos Fassianos



ON A QUIET STREET lined with orange trees, sheltered from the hustle and bustle of Greece's capital Athens, lies the house of renowned contemporary artist Alekos Fassianos.

Paintings, lithographs, ceramics and tapestries line the walls, but the secrets of the three-storey building's eye-catching interior are rarely unveiled to the outside world.

A museum named after Fassianos — a man known worldwide for his works inspired by Greek mythology and folklore — will open in autumn 2022 and display some of the works adorning his home.

Iron suns decorate the windows, mosaics cover the floor and sculpted bamboo leaves grace the banisters, while gently curving walls were created without a corner to avoid a harsh coming-together.

"Welcome to the universe of Fassianos. It's an artist's house, a museum," his daughter Viktoria Fassianou said.

"Everything was designed and created by him, by hand, little by little, like a small paradise," she added, pointing to the curtain rods, door handles, lights, sofa and ochre-coloured plasterwork.

Greek inspiration Fassianos, who put down his paintbrush in 2019, rests in an adjoining room.

Viktoria said the 86-year-old's fragile health prevented an interview with him.

Despite his works appearing in Paris, Munich, Tokyo and Sao Paulo, Fassianos wanted to stay faithful to his origins and memories.

"Greekness has always been his inspiration, from mythology to contemporary

Greece," said his wife Mariza Fassianou.

"He has always believed that an artist should create with what they know."

Symbols of his attachment to his roots include depictions of fish from his favourite Greek island of Kea, round waves evoking Homer's "Odyssey" and other scenes drawn from

entirely redesigned the central Athens museum that will showcase his work.

"My father planned everything but let future historians carry it out — he never wanted to take on responsibilities," said Viktoria.

Fassianos has split his life between Greece and France, studying lithography at the National School of Fine Arts



mythology.

Fassianos — who used to invent his own colours — has painted in blue to convey Greece's blue sky, in red to give an impression of heat and in ochre to reflect the inspiration of traditional Greek handicrafts.

The veteran artist would work on the floor or even scratch the corner of a table.

"He destroyed what he didn't like. I cried, but he knew better than me what we needed to keep," his wife recalled.

Fassianos and architect friend Kyriakos Krokos

in Paris and rubbing shoulders with writers and painters as greats Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso did before him.

Although he admires the two painters, he denied being inspired by one artist over another, insisting he had drawn on 77 different influences.

"Alekos has always wanted to remain free and did what he wanted," his wife said, citing his creations taken from the worlds of mythology or Byzantine art.

— **AFP**

COLUMN



Rasha Al Raisi
rashabooks@yahoo.com

The Unknown Saint

IF YOU ARE A FAN OF THE COEN BROTHERS MOVIES, then you shouldn't miss The Unknown Saint. Set in a remote drought-ridden area in Morocco, the movie's opening scene is of a man reaching the place with a duffel bag full of stolen money.

He takes a shovel and goes uphill where he buries it and to disguise it even further, shapes it like a grave before going down and being detained by the police. After serving his time, the thief (Younes Bouab) returns to retrieve his booty and is shocked to find out that a shrine has been built on the burial place dedicated to the Unknown Saint.

Not only that, a whole village has boomed nearby where the residents are benefiting from visitors coming for the Unknown Saint, whose healing powers are witnessed throughout the movie.

The thief decides to stay for a while to figure out how he could get his money out which is an impossible mission: in the morning the place is packed with visitors and peddlers, and in the evening it's either guarded by a shepherd (Abdelghani Kitab) and his Alsatian or has occasional villagers performing curious rituals.

This catch-22 situation pushes the thief to contact his friend The Brain (Saleh ben Saleh), who comes to his aid at once. But would the two of them manage to get the booty out of the shrine? This is the main plot of the movie with other subplots that intersect at times, with all characters sharing the effect of the Unknown Saint on their lives despite their scepticism of his powers: Brahim the old angry farmer whose neighbours had left the village to the newly-founded one and is desperate for the miracle of rain for his crops, the frustrated new doctor who arrives to find the villagers depending on the Unknown Saint's healing miracles while his clinic is used as a hang out place for the old wives, the nurse who kills his time and boredom by performing misdeeds directed at the Unknown Saint, and the village barber — also the unsophisticated dentist — who rewards and punishes acts revolving around the shrine.

These eccentric characters with their deadpan humour and no background stories are the highlight of the movie especially the scenes with the old wives discussing their ailments with the new doctor, including coughs that occur on certain days. There are many themes that the movie deals with including the power of belief — reaching at times to the point of absurdity — and hope that comes in unexpected forms.

Director Alaa Eddine Aljem does a brilliant job depicting the idle life of a remote village where tiny occurrences become major events to the villagers. Moreover, he captures the scarcity of the surroundings not only by focusing on the parched terrains but even with the minimum use of score that surprise the viewer from time to time.

Also reflects the village's male dominant society by not having any main female character in the movie; the only females you get to see are the old wives and a glimpse of a few visiting the shrine.

All members of the cast portray their respective characters outstandingly, especially the nameless thief who throughout the movie ridicules the villagers' belief in the Unknown Saint yet delays his plans of excavating the shrine after hearing a thunderclap. This is Aljem's debut movie that was selected as Morocco's entry for Best International Film at the 93rd Academy Awards this year but wasn't nominated.

The Unknown Saint is a universal movie that's insightful, entertaining and easy to identify with. Available on Netflix.

Rasha al Raisi is a certified skills trainer and the author of The World According to Bahja. rashabooks@yahoo.com



The Last Remaining: A nostalgic look at the entrepreneurs of Bahla souq

By Mai Al Abri

The markets and malls that we visit today for quick shopping are very different from the souqs of the past.

The souq in the past was not only for getting the necessary commodities, but also a focal point connecting people of the same wilayat and also serve as attractions for visitors.

Generally, souqs are publicly-accessible pedestrian markets with arcades, plazas and numerous shops where people regularly gather to purchase and sell goods, socialise and walk. The souq was a place for a social gathering where everyone meets with friends. It was like a hub for entertainment.

requirements of modern life have become completely different. Markets have expanded and the city's life prospered and became more complicated. The traditional, inner market that was yesterday central became traditional now. Only a small group of people, mostly old, continued to visit this place to meet acquaintances.

The documentary casts light on the issue of familiarity which a person may develop in their old age. Almost all of the merchants interviewed were over the age of seventy, but they still go to the market every day — an activity which they have continued to do for many decades. Even though their businesses may not be profitable, these old merchants rejoice over daily meetings and conversations with their fellow merchants — an act that connects the present with



We still notice some old people clinging to their past. Some go regularly to the souq where only a few of their friends are still alive. Some decided not to let go of their small shops although they don't get sufficient return to cover the costs of running the business.

"The Last Remaining" is a documentary that features some of the interesting stories of the oldest merchants of the Bahla market, where the merchants recount their experiences with trade in the past and now. The film uncovers the secret of the survival of their business

the past!

The director of the documentary, Ali al Bimani, assures that "the visual documentation of events and people remains a historical tool that will last forever that will help the future generations in their research and study. In this 20-minutes documentary, we targeted the life of the Omani merchants in the past. The life that will disappear forever in the days to come. To the whole world, this film will document the struggle and hard work of the Omani people, their simplicity, and fight to build their country".



for many decades — up to 70 years in some cases.

Historically, this is a significant documentary as it highlights the status of Bahla's traditional market in its booming era as compared to that of now. Some archival clips of the market show the vitality of life in the market previously. However, this has changed and the market has lost its spirit. It has become a destination for meeting and sitting only.

This change reflects the transformations of social life in Omani society. While life was simple and one central market was sufficient for the whole city, the

During the film shooting, the whole team of the production realised that the documentation project that we are aiming to achieve is large, long and uninterrupted. It requires money, time and extensive knowledge. "After winning the Best Film Award in the International Short Film Festival in Moscow, we are determined to participate in a different contest, with many documentary films that tell the different stories of Omanis in the past and their methods of survival," he added.

Other members of the documentary team includes Hamad al Qasabi, Ali al Bimani and Abdulrahman al Tamimi.