



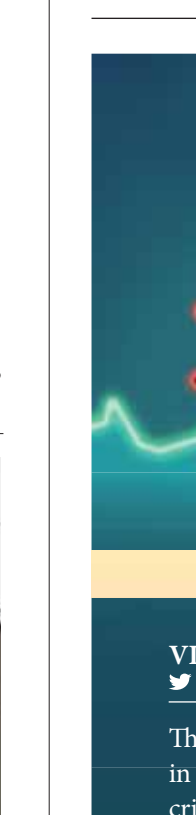
P13

OMAN-INDIA JV PLANS \$2.5BN GREEN AMMONIA PROJECT IN DUQM SEZ



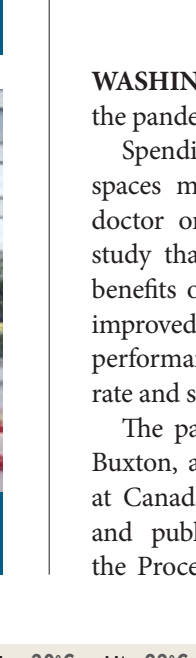
P10

TSUNODA READY TO MAKE F1 IMPACT



P18

HELPING OMAN KIDS DEVELOP THE CULTURE FOR SWIMMING



NEW YORK

97% OF POPULATION GET FRESH WATER

The Sultanate provides fresh water to 97 per cent of the population in towns and cities and 88 per cent in rural areas. The strategies also furnish grounds for a sound wastewater system that benefits 75 per cent of the population, despite water scarcity challenges faced by the Middle East region. This was revealed by First Secretary Sayyid Ahmed bin Hamoud al Busaidy in the Sultanate's speech before a high-level international meeting on water, held at the United Nations premises.

DETAILS ON P2

MUSCAT

GHEDEX-2021 GOES VIRTUAL THIS YEAR

The much sought-after exhibition GHEDEX 2021 has not only gone online this year, but it has also got playful touch with gaming activities to suit the taste of the youth, who are one of the main target groups of the annual exhibition for higher education. The 10-day 24-hour online exhibition will begin on March 28 and concludes on April 6. It has exhibitors from the Sultanate, UK, USA, France, Germany, the UAE and other countries. The peak hours are expected between 8 am - 8 pm.

DETAILS ON P3



INSIDE



UN WARNS OF RISK OF FAMINE IN YEMEN, S SUDAN, NIGERIA

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SOMBRE UK MARKS ONE YEAR SINCE FIRST VIRUS LOCKDOWN

P9

HM CONDOLENCES TO TANZANIA



On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, accompanied by Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidy and a number of officials, offered His Majesty the Sultan's condolences on the death of President of Tanzania, Dr John Magufuli, at the premises of Embassy of Tanzania in Muscat on Tuesday morning. **SEE ALSO P2**

SULTANATE REPORTS

836

new cases, 4 deaths



UN CALLS FOR EQUITABLE, AFFORDABLE ACCESS TO VACCINES

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The pandemic situation in Oman continues to be critical as the Ministry of Health (MoH) reported 836 new cases of Covid-19 on Tuesday, bringing the total number of cases registered to 152,364.

The World Health Organization (WHO) too confirmed that after six weeks of declining cases in January and February, there has been four straight weeks of increase in cases all over the world.

New cases in the world increased by 8 per cent over the last week.

The WHO has also seen a 49 per cent increase in cases in the Southeast Asia region, an 8 per cent increase in the Eastern Mediterranean region and a 29 per cent increase in the Western Pacific region.

The MoH reported four new Covid-related deaths, bringing the total death toll to 1,537.

The total recovery cases reached 139,846, which is 92 per cent of the total cases

reported.

Meanwhile, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on Tuesday calling for equitable, affordable access to Covid-19 vaccines and for fair pricing.

The text, endorsed by more than 130 countries and adopted by consensus at the Geneva forum, affirmed the right of states to use the flexibility in World Trade Organization (WTO) existing rules on intellectual property for Covid-19 vaccines.

High performance panel to boost sports

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, has issued a ministerial decision forming a High Performance Sports Committee under his chairmanship.

According to the decision, the ministry's under-secretary for Sports and Youth will be the deputy chairman of the committee, and includes the Chairman of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), the Secretary-General of OOC, the Minister's Adviser for Sports Planning, the Director-General of Planning, the Director-General of Administrative and Financial Affairs, Ali bin Abdullah bin Harib al Habsi and the Director-General of Sports Activities (who also acts as rapporteur) as members.

The decision envisages a comprehensive development strategy to be carried out within a fixed timeframe and to contribute to Oman Vision 2040.

The decision seeks to establish an all-accommodating schemes catering to the welfare of best performing sports persons who have shown potential to

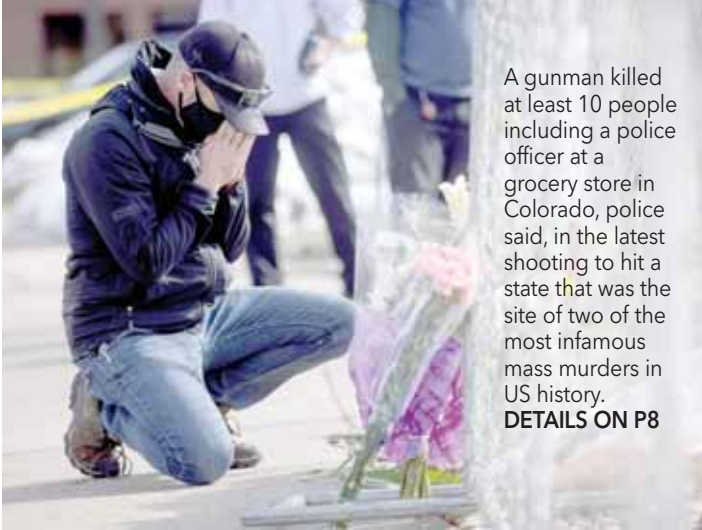


His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said

constitute the core component of a solid sports structure capable of realising future ambitions of Omani sports and place Oman vigorously into the international sports and Olympic arenas.

The High Performance Sports strategy will outline general policies, programmes and plans for grooming sports persons from among those rated as "high performance sportspersons" from different sports domains. The selected persons will be supported and qualified to attain professional levels through participation in continental and international events. — ONA

10 killed in Colorado shooting



A gunman killed at least 10 people including a police officer at a grocery store in Colorado, police said, in the latest shooting to hit a state that was the site of two of the most infamous mass murders in US history. **DETAILS ON P8**

Natural soundscapes boost health markers, lower stress

WASHINGTON: Stressed out by the pandemic?

Spending more time in green spaces might be just what the doctor ordered, according to a study that quantifies the health benefits of natural sounds, from improved mood and cognitive performance to decreased heart rate and sensitivity to pain.

The paper was led by Rachel Buxton, a conservation biologist at Canada's Carleton University, and published on Monday in the Proceedings of the National

Academy of Sciences (PNAS).

"We tend to look at the acoustic environment from the perspective of noise pollution and how it disturbs wildlife, and how it has effects on visitors to parks and human health," she said.

"A lot of us conservation biologists are really interested in the inverse of that: what are the health benefits of natural acoustic environments?"

Buxton and her colleagues carried out a literature review to statistically analyse the patchwork



of prior research in the area, which was mostly carried out in lab or hospital settings with sounds played to volunteers by headphones.

Seven of the 36 studies examined traditional health outcomes, including heart rate, blood pressure, perceived pain, skin conductance — which is linked to emotional arousal — levels of the stress hormone cortisol and t-wave amplitude, a measure of heart health.

— AFP

■ TRIBUTES TO LATE TANZANIAN PRESIDENT



MUSCAT: At the behest of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimour al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, accompanied by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister and a number of officials, offered His Majesty the Sultan’s condolences on the death of the late President of Tanzania, Dr John Magufuli, at the premises of Embassy of Tanzania on Tuesday. HH Sayyid Shihab and the delegates were received by Abdallah Abasi Kilima, Ambassador of Tanzania to the Sultanate and members of the diplomatic mission. HH Sayyid Shihab wrote down expressions of commiseration in the Condolence Register. — ONA

ASMED reviews support to SMEs



MUSCAT: The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) on Tuesday held its second meeting of 2021 under the chairmanship of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the Authority’s board chairman. The meeting reviewed an agreement to provide financial support to SMEs in cooperation with Oman Development Bank (ODB). It discussed preparatory steps to provide basic services to entrepreneurs and programmes to build their capacities and hone their skills while at the same time assisting them with feasibility studies and market research on the projects

for which they need financing. The discussion covered the mechanism to finance SMEs in regularised stages to be implemented through coordination between the Authority and ODB. The ASMED Board also reviewed the progress of work in enacting an SME regularisation draft law and a craft industries draft law, both of which seek to establish an organised and encouraging environment for the setting up of SMEs and craft industries, streamline their support procedures and empower them through innovative programmes and mechanisms. — ONA

Govt pays attention to water resources

NEW YORK: The Sultanate has reiterated its keenness to protect water resources through the enactment of laws and legislations and the establishment of an appropriate infrastructure for the management of water supplies in a rationalised and sustainable manner to help meet present and future requirements. This was stated in the Sultanate’s speech before a high-level international meeting on water, held at the United Nations premises here. The speech was delivered by First Secretary Sayyid Ahmed bin Hamoud al Busaidy.

“Water is a national wealth that deserves to be protected and preserved and its resources have to be developed. To meet this goal, statutes and legislations have been enacted. The statutes include the Water Resources Protection Law promulgated under Royal Decree No 29/2000, the Law on Protection of Water Against Pollution, promulgated by Royal Decree No 114/2001, and the Law on Protection of Drinking Water Against Pollution, promulgated under Royal Decree No 115/2001),” said the Sultanate in its speech.

The speech also touched on the National Strategy for Water Sector, focusing on five main themes: (1) Securing potable water; (2) striking a balance between water use and renewable water resources; (3) consolidating principles for the preservation of water; (4) increasing public awareness about the importance of water conservation, rationalisation in water use and



Sultanate has developed an integrated water desalination system comprising 60 plants and 93 wastewater stations

(5) supporting water techniques, research and innovation in the field of water. The speech pointed out that the strategies devised by the Sultanate provided fresh water services to 97 per cent of the population in towns and cities and 88 per cent in rural areas. The strategies also furnished grounds for a sound wastewater

system that benefited 75 per cent of the population, despite water scarcity challenges faced by the Middle East region. The speech also stated that the Sultanate developed an integrated water desalination system comprising 60 plants and 93 wastewater stations spread out across all governorates of the Sultanate. — ONA

Siya Castle — The beauty of architectural ruins

TEXT & PHOTOS
BY YAHYA ALSALMANI

Siya Village is famous for its inimitable castle which was built in 1813, and in 1918 this fortress was renovated and maintained

The Wilayat of Quriyat contains a wide range of archaeological and historical monuments. Civil and military architecture were a result of the factors of history, geography, environment and human culture. Resources indicate that Qurayat boasts more than 60 forts, castles and towers. Some of these relics dates back to the pre-Islamic era. According to Saleh al Farsi, an Omani researcher, “these archaeological sites formed defensive fortifications, and interacted with the various events that Qurayat has witnessed throughout its ancient history. “These sites have protected villages and neighbourhoods from external attacks and internal conflicts. It has contributed to the protection of land routes, ports, water and economic resources, and monitoring and control protection. In addition to this, many forts and towers were the seat of government”. This village used to be called as “Nafusa Hattat”, in reference to the “Nafusa Mountain” in Libya, a historical resource asserts. Siya Village is famous for its inimitable castle which was built in 1813, and in 1918 this fortress was renovated and maintained. The castle was affected by the Gonu and Phet cyclones, the two cyclones that struck Qurayat

between 2007 and 2009. Today, nothing remains of it except for some stones indicating its presence on the eastern side of the village. At present, it appears that large parts of this castle have collapsed and their pillars have fallen off. Its main entrances (doors and windows) have been corroded and rusted. Moreover, the village has many ancient districts (Harrats). These antique sites are telling the details of Omani distinctive architecture, as the Omanis relied on mud, stones and wood to build it. This town is also famous for its weaving profession. It used to be home to more than 20 textile (fabric) factories, which are called locally (Karagah). Their fabric was of high quality. This small village was also home to many scholars of religion, jurisprudence, literature and poetry. It was also a destination for the magistrates’ councils and a venue for educational debates.



This stunning village which is located on the line of al Hajar Mountains is ranked as one of the vital habitation for a number of rare animals, namely: the Arabian Ibex and gazelles. Since earliest times, the village has enjoyed an abundance of water that is suitable for its ancient aflaj including Falaj Al Moghi, Al Sheehani and Al Zabri. These old irrigation systems are extended to irrigate local farms which are packed with mango, palm, lemon and pomegranate trees. Besides, Siya is also considered a natural habitat for dozens of plants such as; Sidr, Qusum, Tullh, Athel, Ghaf and Shu’a trees. “The current condition of the fort does not bode well, all the corners of the fort are weak and fragile, and are ineligible to resist climatic changes (humidity, heat, rain, winds),” a person interested in architectural heritage said. “It is imperative for the competent authorities to seriously consider protecting the Siya Castle. This citadel must be given special priority in the restoration programmes adopted by the government. Not to mention that the village provides virtuous opportunities for studies and research in the fields of heritage, culture and natural resources,” he added. Locals classify this castle as the heritage and cultural symbol of Siya.

Covid-19 should not affect TB treatment: MoH



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People suffering from tuberculosis shouldn't stop receiving treatment due to the Covid-19 scenario. They should continue medication, the Ministry of Health (MoH) has advised on Tuesday.

The ministry, represented by the Directorate-General for Disease Surveillance and Control, is observing World Tuberculosis Day on Wednesday, March 24, under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health. National Strategic Plan for TB Elimination will be launched to mark the day in the presence of Dr Jean Jabbour, WHO Representative of Oman, Dr Fatma al Yaquobi, Head of TB and Acute Respiratory Diseases, and Dr Saif al Abri, Director-General, Disease Surveillance and Control.

According to sources at the MoH, "A person with lung tuberculosis is a source of infection to others. He shouldn't stop receiving the anti-Covid-19 vaccination as well."

"There are two types of tuberculosis — Acid-fast bacillus (AFB) and Open TB. The second one is highly infectious as the focus of infection is open to respiratory passages and tiny tubercle bacilli can be seen in sputum and droplets, and this is dangerous," says Dr Mahmood al Rahbi, Head of Emergency Department at Al Nahda Hospital.

"Although the closed TB is not infectious, both of them need treatment at the earliest to

When a person with active TB takes medications, the bacteria in the sputum disappears and he is no more a source of infection to others. So getting proper treatment for any infected person is vital not only for curing him, but also for preventing community spread of the disease

DR BENNY PANAKKAL

Senior Consultant, Cardiology

avoid complications," he added.

Allaying the fears of TB patients, he said it is important for everyone who is invited for a Covid-19 vaccination to take the jab. The vaccines are safe and effective, whether someone is on TB treatment or not.

"When a person with active TB takes medications, the bacteria in the sputum disappears and he is no more a source of infection to others. So getting proper treatment for any infected person is vital not only for curing him, but also for preventing community spread of the disease," says Dr Benny Panakkal,

Senior Consultant, Cardiology, and Medical Director at Badr Al Samaa Hospital.

"Most people with TB are not considered at severe risk from Covid-19. Vaccines are being given as per age target group, beginning with older people who are more at risk with Covid-19. People are invited for a jab when their turn comes as per age group."

Dr Dilip Singhvi, Specialist, Internal Medicine, at the Apollo Hospital, says a patient having tuberculosis means he has an infection called pneumonia with tuberculin bacilli in the lung.

"Such patients will shed the bacilli when they cough in the secretions (sputum) and pose a potential risk of transmitting the infection to other people especially those who are in close contact with the patient like other family members or co-workers or people living in clusters in camps."

Dr Viresh Chopra of Oman Dental College suggests that people with TB are most likely to spread it to people they spend time with every day and this includes family members, friends, and coworkers or schoolmates.

"TB can be treated by taking several drugs for 6 to 12 months. It is very important that people who have TB complete the medicine course, and take the drugs exactly as prescribed. If they stop taking the drugs too soon, they can become sick again; if they do not take the drugs correctly, the germs that are still alive, may become resistant to those drugs," Dr Viresh added.



3 agreements signed on sidelines of National Science Week 2021

MUSCAT: Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, signed three agreements on Tuesday, on the sidelines of the National Science Week 2021 at the Ministry's headquarter.

The first agreement was between the Ministry represented by the Centre for Career Guidance and Student Counselling and the SMN Power Holding Company to support and finance the "My School Product" project. The agreement is for the implementation and installation of a sheltered house for aquaculture in Rashid Bin Al Waleed School for Basic Education (5-12) in Muscat Governorate. Dr Abdullah bin Humaid al Yahya, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the company, signed the agreement.

"My School Product" project greatly contributes to instilling a culture of entrepreneurial work and achieving scientific and cognitive integration based on experimentation and application between the various curricula.

The second agreement was between the Ministry, represented by the Department of Innovation and Scientific Olympiad, and the Ishraqa Foundation, the social responsibility wing at Khimji

Ramdas, to support the "Stimazon Initiative" for students of the Sultanate's public and private schools. Anil Khimji, Chairman of the Board of Director at the company, signed the agreement.

The third agreement was between the Ministry and each of the Al Batinah Energy Company, Sohar Energy Company, and Al Alawi Institute for Human Resources Development. The agreement came to organise a competition for 200 students from public and private schools from various governorates of the Sultanate in the field of designing and preparing smart applications under the title: "Emerging Smart Application Developers Prize". The agreement was signed by Mohammed al Rawahi, CEO of Al Batinah Energy company, Yaqoub bin Harbi al Harthi, CEO of Sohar Energy company, and Yusra bint Jumah al Alawi, CEO of Al Alawi Institute for Human Resources Development.

Meanwhile, the National Science Week 2021 continues its activities for the third day online through (Google Meet) under the slogan "Our sustainable environment", covering a wide variety of topics throughout the week during morning and evening sessions every day.

GHEDEX goes online, accessible to all GCC visitors

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

@lakshmioman

The much sought-after exhibition GHEDEX 2021 has not only gone online this year, but it has also got playful touch with gaming activities to suit the taste of the youth, who are one of the main target groups of the annual exhibition for higher education.

The ten-day 24-hour online exhibition will begin on March 28 and conclude on April 6. It has exhibitors from the Sultanate, UK, USA, France, Germany, UAE, and other countries. The peak hours are expected between 8 am — 8 pm Oman time (+4 GMT).

The exhibition's 20-year celebration had to settle for a virtual reality due to Covid restrictions. Hence, the organisers have developed a virtual event with a real-like feeling in 3D with features like Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, GCC Avatar (national dress), and Gaming Experience exhibition with loads of algorithms and data science.

According to Amr Abdullah Baabood, Group CEO, Arabian Research Bureau (ARB/OITE Group), these are the advantages

Ten-day 24-hour online exhibition will begin on March 28 and conclude on April 6

of this year's exhibition. "The exhibition is promoted to GCC visitors, while earlier only Muscat visitors could come. At this event, we are expecting visitors from Salalah, Masirah and other remote and far-off places; so every student and parent can attend with an Internet connection and a computer. It is free to attend. Students can visit real-like booths, chat with international representatives and also hold video calls, collect brochures, business cards and get enrolment to global and Omani universities. Covid-19 pandemic has made this impossible and this technology has opened the doors for communication and networking in a safe environment."

The Global Higher Education Exhibition will also be featuring TRAINEX (Technical Education and Vocational Training Exhibition, Future Skills Oman as well as education technology.



"As Arabian Research Bureau — ARB/OITE are very excited that Oman will host Arab World's first Artificial Intelligence Exhibition — AI for the Education, Training & Skill Development Sector. This is a landmark development," explained Sadiq Khan, Group COO of Arabian Research Bureau.

"The exhibition is for anybody interested in higher education, training, skill development and

education technologies."

The regular visitors supported by the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, and Ministry of Labour are students, parents, young professionals, life-long learners as well as professionals from the education sector. One hundred exhibitors are participating in the exhibition this

year.

For the last 12 months, the organisers have been working on the platform to accommodate all the 100 hundred exhibitors.

"The application can be accessed from any computer and the experience is going to be awesome. It is a free invitation for students, teachers and parents. We are expecting visitors from all over the GCC as well as the globe.

The App is designed in such a way that people will feel they are visiting the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. You can choose your own national dress.

"Visitors also can have one-to-one conversations with the exhibitors," added Khan.

The last one year has seen tremendous changes in education, in both teaching and learning.

Accordingly, the areas that are covered by GHEDEX include education technologies, learning from home and attending education exhibition from home, and experiencing the latest technology.

"As exhibitions were closed in March 2020 and not open until March 2021; we have digitally transformed our business and now want visitors not to miss exhibitions but to visit them and benefit from them."

"Anybody interested in higher education, training, skill development and education technologies can participate in this exhibition. We have special training for exhibitors to equip them with the capabilities of this application and platform," pointed out Baabood.

Zainab al Nassri
@zainabalnasseri

If women are working shoulder to shoulder with men, they are not lagging when it comes to a tough sport like hiking.

Hiking is a kind of sport in which people set a goal of wandering on foot for a long distance, generally not less than five kilometres. Specific paths with a starting point and an endpoint are pre-determined. Usually, the walking path ends with a prominent landmark like a fortress, a waterfall or a dam. This tough sport is not limited only to men, but a large number of women and young girls are also taking part in it.

Several women hiking teams have spread in the Sultanate where they carry out weekly trips only for women. To ensure the safety of the participants, the team includes specialised personnel like a nurse, a nutritionist and a qualified leader, who all develop an appropriate plan for the proposed course and organise the entire trip.

Huda Salem is fond of this sport. She loves hiking, so she is passionate about hiking. She loves adventure and exploration. Started just as a hobby, she is one of the leaders of hiking teams today.

“My love for taking challenges introduced me to hiking. I love nature and have a passion for adventure. When I go on trips with family or with friends, it ends up with exploring some hidden places. Over the years that extended to admiring activities related to it, such as climbing, descending from the heights, swimming, jogging and others”, she said.

H u d a

says, “The most important characteristic of this sport is that it requires mastery in work and planning, as you need to work in planning the path, exploration, preparation for the trip and then implementation. Perhaps what makes this sport important is that it promotes the culture of walking with a group, just in case of any events or developments that may occur during the trip.”

She also indicated that this sport is a sport of contemplation, linking the present with the past, identifying the efforts of ancestors and the paths they used to take, getting to know old buildings, archaeological villages and ancient monuments in the various governorates and states in the country.

Since hiking is practised in places with difficult terrain in many cases, there are priorities that adventurers set while planning the path to have a pleasurable experience.

Most notably, identifying the places from where the path passes, to know the nature of the terrain and weather in that area before starting. It is also necessary to develop a plan, determine places for rest and stop, clarify the rugged and difficult places for the participants so that they are aware of all the known and expected details of the path.

“It is also important to determine the time duration of the path and divide it for the whole distance. Before all of this, there are essential items that must be taken on any hiking trip. Navigation tools, adequate water, food, safety items, first-aid kit, and sun protection, are important”, quips Huda.

Hiking is not limited only to men, but a large number of women and young girls are lacing up their boots to explore the rugged terrain

WOMEN ON THE TRAIL!



Expatriates in sales jobs drop 9.1%

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The number of expatriates in the Sultanate has dropped 13.9 per cent at the end of February 2021, compared to the figures a year ago.

The number of expatriates as managers, directors, and administration jobs declined by 15.2 per cent, scientific and technical fields by 14.2 per cent, clerical occupations by 39.4 per cent, and sales jobs by 9.1 per cent.

Expatriates in sales jobs dropped from 97,009 in February last year to 95,206 during the same period this year.

The number of expatriates dropped from 1,443,128 in February 2020 to 1,440,370 this year. However, the population increased slightly from 1,439,908 this year, said the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) in its latest monthly bulletin.

Of these, the number of Indian expatriates saw a major decline of 18.1 per cent, followed by Bangladesh nationals (11.6 per cent), Egyptians (11.9 per cent) and Filipino workers (8.1 per cent).



One of the major factors includes the job losses after the extended shutdown of businesses due to restrictive measures imposed to limit the spread of the pandemic.

In line with the efforts to generate more job opportunities, the government has reserved several jobs for citizens.

Practicing some professions and activities in the private sector establishments have been restricted

to only Omanis, which include financial and administrative professions in insurance companies and firms operating in brokerage activities, selling, accounting, money exchange, management, and arranging goods in operating stores in malls, accounts and auditing professions in auto agencies, all professions in the sale of new and used vehicles, all accounting professions related to the sale of new

and used vehicles in agencies and sale of spare parts for new vehicles in auto agencies.

Non-Omani workforce licences issued for the professions and activities specified in Article 1 shall be valid until their expiry date.

Fuel station managers and professions related to the activities and business of optics and the sale of eyeglasses will be also reserved for the national workforce.

Over 1.557 million vehicles registered

MUSCAT: The total number of vehicles registered in the Sultanate has declined by 0.1 per cent to 1,557,902 by end-February compared to the figure of 1,559,684 vehicles registered in January this year, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Private vehicles accounted for 78.8 per cent of total vehicle number with 1,227,102 while commercial vehicles stood with 239,104 (15.3 per cent), transport vehicles (29,768 or 1.9 per cent), rental cars (23,634 or 1.5 per cent) and government vehicles (12,500). Temporarily registered vehicles stood at 11,340, motorbikes (6,516), instruction cars (5,781), agricultural tractors (1,304) and diplomatic corps vehicles (853). — ONA

CMYF to hold blood camp on Friday

MUSCAT: Chiru Mega Youth Force (CMYF), a voluntary organisation, is conducting a blood donation camp on Friday. The camp will be held at Bausher Blood Bank, opposite to the Royal Hospital. CMYF founder-president Ramdas Chandaka called upon all humanitarians to participate in this noble cause of saving other's life. The CMYF has been honoured by the Ministry of Health on several occasions in recognition of its continuing support for blood collection services in Oman.

NDC hosts Arab League Secretary-General

MUSCAT: The National Defence College (NDC) on Tuesday hosted via video-conferencing Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the Arab League.

Air Vice Marshal Saleh bin Yahya al Maskari, NDC Commandant, welcomed the guest, who gave a lecture titled "The Arab League, Future and Challenges", within the framework of the general curricula for the eighth batch of the NDC.

During the lecture, the Arab League Secretary-General highlighted the influence of the current Arab regime on the joint Arab action and the extent of the regional and international developments on the march of the Arab League's work. He also touched on



the major obstacles and pillars for the success of the Arab joint action.

The lecture was attended by a number of senior officials and officers. — ONA

SAI participates in global anti-corruption forum

MUSCAT: The State Audit Institution (SAI) is participating in the Global Anti-Corruption and Integrity Forum, which kicked off through video-conferencing from Paris on Tuesday.

The three-day forum, organised by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), focuses on integrity and fighting corruption for a more resilient recovery for the post-Covid future.

The forum received a broad international participation from SAI's, specialised government entities, civil institutions and specialists.

The forum began with an opening plenary with welcoming remarks by OECD Secretary-General and high-level keynote video addresses by leaders, such as; President of the Republic of Chile, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand and a number of ministers and CEOs of specialised organisations and companies, followed by the opening panel "Young leaders building back with integrity". — ONA

Electronic Tender (s)



Majan Electricity Co. (SAOC) Announces the Following E-Tenders

Tender NO	Description	Grade	Last date for buying	Submission date	Tender price R.O.
46/2021	RENTING 27 VEHICLES FOR MAJAN ELECTRICITY COMPANY OFFICES SUHAR MUSCAT IBRI AND AL BURAIMI FOR 5 YEARS CONTRACT FOUR WHEEL DRIVE FROM 01/08/2021 TO 31/07/2026.	Specialized	29/3/2021	6/4/2021	203 /=
47/2021	Supply of ARC Flash Suit Kit, Inclusive of Hood, Coat, BIB Trousers, Eye protection, ARC Flash Gloves, Head Gear and Carry Case S to 3XL, for MAJAN store.	Specialized	29/3/2021	6/4/2021	25 /=
48/2021	Reinforcement work (415 V & 11 KV) in various Locations in Ibri area AL Dhahira Governorate	C	1/4/2021	13/4/2021	85 /=
49/2021	NEW 11KV FEEDER (2NOS) FROM AL MUWELAH PSS TO SOHAR HOSPITAL PSS AT AL AL MUWELAH AT SOHAR AREA IN NB GOVERNORATE	C	4/4/2021	13/4/2021	25 /=
50/2021	RENTAL OF DIESEL GENERATORS FOR NORTH AL BHATINAH, AL DHARIAH AND AL BURAIMI GOVERNORATE	Specialized	31/3/2021	6/4/2021	25 /=
51/2021	STANDARD UNIT COST ESTIMATION AND COST RECORD MAINTENANCE IN SYSTEM	Specialized	6/4/2021	13/4/2021	25 /=

Interested Firm having relevant experience in the similar nature of services and registered with Tender Board and Distribution Code Review Panel (DCRP) for electrical work, may register and obtain the tender documents from E-Tendering Site <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against online payment of non-refundable fees mentioned above for each tender.

The Tenderers should enclose a copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any registered bank in the Sultanate of Oman for a value of (1%) of the submitted bid value valid for a period of (90) days from the date of Submission, and addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee .The original Bid Bond to be delivered in sealed envelope, and the tender number and title of project only are to be mentioned on the envelopes. The place of submission the original bond would be at MJEC Contracts & tenders office at MJEC building in AL Sawari Center in Sohar or at MJEC Contracts & tenders office at Muscat in Al Mubailah- opposite to the industrial Area beside to Bank Suhar ,before 10 A.M. according to the assigned date of submission of the tender. Any Submission of original tender bond after the time and date mentioned in the advertisement will not be accepted and tenderer offer will be rejected.

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Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products & and have a High level percentage of Omanization.

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Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Center

Tender Advertisement for the Supply of Scrub Management System Tender No. (108/2021)

You are invited to submit a tender for the above in accordance with the tender specifications.

Qualified companies interested in participating in this tender shall collect the tender specification from the date of this advertisement until 1/4/2021 from the following address:

Operational Committee of the Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Center

Knowledge Oasis, Building No4 (KOM4) First Floor.

Note: The Tender Specification Fees are 70 OMR.

Biddings that meet the above requirement should be submitted in a sealed envelope with a 1% tender bond valid for 90 days from date of submission by an Omani National from your company addressed to the head of Purchase Committee in the tender box located at the above address **no later than 15/4/2021.**

Please note:

- Bids without a 1% valid tender bond will be disqualified.
- Bids received after the deadline indicated above, for whatever reason, will not be considered.
- Queries/clarifications should be submitted immediately, but not later than one week before the date of tender submission.
- For Queries you may Contact on Tel: 22584133 or 22584132.
- The committee is not obliged to accept the lowest price of the bid or any other bid.

UN warns of famine risk in Yemen, S Sudan and Nigeria



Forces loyal to Ansar Allah carry the coffins of fighters killed in battles with government troops in the Marib region, during a mass funeral ceremony held on Tuesday at Sanaa's Al Saleh mosque. — AFP

ROME: Millions of people in conflict-hit Yemen, South Sudan and northern Nigeria are at risk of famine in the coming months or already facing it, two United Nations agencies warned on Tuesday.

Existing acute food insecurity, heavy constraints on humanitarian access, conflict, economic blows and climate shocks mean “urgent and at-scale targeted humanitarian action is needed to prevent hunger or death” in these areas, the groups said in a joint report.

The three areas were among 20 “hunger hotspots” identified by the World Food Programme (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) where

existing acute food insecurity risks deteriorating further by July.

A specific sub-group — Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, Honduras, Nigeria, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria, Yemen and Zimbabwe — are particularly at risk.

Parts of their populations are already experiencing “extreme depletion of livelihoods, insufficient food consumption and high acute malnutrition”, the joint report warned.

“In such fragile contexts, any further shocks could push a significant number of people over the brink and into destitution and even starvation,” it said.

In parts of Jonglei state in South

Sudan, the UN agencies said famine was already occurring, and “urgent, at-scale action is now needed to stop likely widespread starvation and death.”

Overall in South Sudan, some 7.2 million people are expected to be in food crisis.

Some 2.4 million people are classified as in an “emergency” situation, with 108,000 people in the agencies’ “catastrophe/famine” grouping.

Urgent action is also required to prevent further destitution in parts of Yemen, the report said, with the number of people in famine estimated to triple from 16,000 last October-December to more than 47,000 this June. — AFP

Drone fired at Saudi airport

DUBAI: Yemen's Ansar Allah fighters launched a drone attack on an airport in southern Saudi Arabia, the group's military spokesman said on Tuesday, a day after Riyadh presented a new peace initiative that includes a nationwide ceasefire.

There was no immediate confirmation by Saudi authorities or the Saudi-led military coalition that has been battling the Ansar Allah for six years of an attack on Abha airport.

“Our operations will continue as long as the aggression and siege continue,” spokesman of Ansar Allah, Yahya Sarea, said in a Twitter post.

Saudi Arabia and the United States have urged the group to accept the ceasefire initiative which Riyadh said would also include reopening Sanaa airport and allow fuel and food imports through Hodeidah port, both of which are under Ansar Allah control.

The Ansar Allah's chief negotiator said that the Saudi offer fell short of their demand for a complete lifting of the air and sea blockade. — Reuters

Arab League urges Lebanese politicians to end deadlock

CAIRO: The Arab League on Tuesday urged Lebanese politicians to work quickly to end a political deadlock in their country and offered to intervene to help Lebanon to overcome the crisis.

Lebanon's financial crisis intensified on Monday, after Prime Minister-designate Saad al Hariri and President Michel Aoun again failed to agree a government, dashing hopes for an end to five months of political bickering that has stalled efforts to reverse a financial collapse.

“The Secretary-General, Mr Ahmed Aboul Gheit, feels great concern due to the debates in the political field that suggest that the country is sliding into a severe crisis situation, the features of which are now clearly visible,” the Arab league said in its statement.

The organisation warned that the political deadlock “aggravates the suffering of the Lebanese people,” and offered “to do whatever was asked from it to heal the current rift.”

AMNESTY CHARGE

Amnesty International on Tuesday accused Lebanese authorities of “cruel and abusive” treatment of more than 20 Syrians it said had been tortured in prison or during interrogation.

In a report called “I wish I would die”, the rights group documents the cases of



Prime Minister-designate Saad al Hariri walks after meeting with Lebanon's President Michel Aoun at the presidential palace in Baabda, on Monday.

— Reuters

26 Syrians, including four minors and two women, imprisoned between 2014 and 2021 on suspicion of terrorism-related charges.

Sentences varied from a few months to several years, with at least six men still detained, Amnesty said.

“In all but one of the 26 cases documented by Amnesty International, refugees reported being tortured, either during interrogation or detention,” it said in the report.

The abuse was mostly at a military intelligence centre in east Lebanon's Ablah district, the General Security bureau in Beirut or at the defence ministry, it added.

Amnesty blamed in particular Lebanon's military intelligence bureau.

— Reuters/AFP

Israel votes as Netanyahu hopes vaccine rollout eclipses graft charges

TEL AVIV: Israelis voted on Tuesday in a fourth election in two years, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hoping a world-beating Covid-19 vaccine rollout will win him another term.

With coronavirus precautions at polling booths across the country — and ballots at the airport for quarantined Israelis coming home to vote — opinion polls show the race yet again too close to call.

Israel's longest-serving head of government, Netanyahu has managed to hold on to power through two years of inconclusive elections despite facing corruption allegations. He is now on trial

on bribery and abuse of power charges, which he denies.

Opinion polls indicated an uptick for Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party in the campaign's final days, giving him a prospective coalition of conservative and ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties with around 60 seats in the 120-member parliament.

Voting stations close at 10 pm (2000 GMT), and while exit polls could point to voting trends, an official tally may emerge only late on Wednesday.

The dominant political figure of his generation, Netanyahu, 71, has been in power since 2009.



An Israeli voter casts her ballot at a polling station in Tel Aviv on Tuesday. — AFP

But the Israeli electorate is deeply polarised, with supporters hailing him as “King Bibi” and opponents holding up placards calling him “Crime Minister.”

Turnout as of 2 pm (1200 GMT) was slightly lower than in a March 2020 election. Netanyahu went on Twitter mid-afternoon using that turnout data to rally his supporters to vote.

Yair Lapid, a former finance minister who heads the centrist Yesh Atid party, has emerged as Netanyahu's main challenger.

On the campaign trail, Netanyahu has highlighted his role in securing millions of vaccine

doses from Pfizer Inc, turning Israel into what he dubbed a “vaccination nation”.

Nearly half of Israelis have been fully inoculated with two doses, the fastest vaccine rollout in the world apart from the tiny British overseas territory of Gibraltar.

But there have also been calls for Israel to do more to ensure Palestinians in Gaza and the occupied West Bank receive vaccines.

Some countries say Israel is responsible for vaccinations in territory it occupies; Israel argues that the Palestinians run their own health system. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

DUBAI

Yemen govt declares Covid-19 emergency

Yemen's internationally recognised government declared a health emergency in areas under its control, as infections in a second wave of a coronavirus epidemic surge. Yemen's six-year war has restricted testing and reporting of Covid-19, but numbers of confirmed cases have risen rapidly since mid-February after levelling off from September to just a couple a day.

Yemen's emergency coronavirus committee reported 98 confirmed and 168 suspected infec-



tions on Monday.

“The figures indicate a sharp rise in the number of people being admitted to healthcare facilities with severe symptoms,” Aid group Oxfam said. — Reuters

ADDIS ABABA

‘We don’t want war’ with Sudan: Ethiopian PM

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said on Tuesday his country did not want war with Sudan, as tensions over a contested region along their border spark fears of broader conflict.

“Ethiopia also has many problems, and we are not ready to go to battle. We don't need war. It is better to settle it in a peaceful manner,” Abiy told parliament in remarks translated into English for a live TV broadcast.

He stressed later that Ethiopia “did not want war” with their



neighbour over this decades-old territorial dispute, describing Sudan as a “brotherly country” whose people loved Ethiopia.

The border quarrel is over Al Fashaqa. — AFP

ROME

Dozens die in migrant ship fire off Libya

Roughly 60 migrants are presumed dead after their boat engine caught fire off the Libyan coast during an attempted Mediterranean crossing. Alarm Phone, a volunteer-run Mediterranean rescue hotline, said it had spoken to survivors of the March 18 accident in which the engine of a wooden boat carrying more than 100 people caught fire.

“Several survivors reported to Alarm Phone that there had been more victims than survivors,” the group said in a statement.



Also on Tuesday, European humanitarian group SOS Mediterranee said Italy would allow 116 migrants to leave its Ocean Viking ship after they were rescued last week. — AFP

In brief

■ GENEVA



UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL SLAMS SRI LANKA SITUATION

The UN Human Rights Council on Tuesday criticised the erosion of judicial independence, marginalisation of minorities and impunity in Sri Lanka, and urged the UN to ramp up evidence-gathering. The Geneva-based body approved a resolution expressing “serious concern” at the situation.

With 22 countries voting in favour of the text, 11 opposed and 14 abstaining, the 47-member council pointed to “trends emerging over the past year, which represent a clear early warning sign of a deteriorating situation of human rights in Sri Lanka”. — **AFP**

■ BRUSSELS



WEST SANCTIONS CHINA, BEIJING HITS BACK AT EU

The United States, the European Union, Britain and Canada imposed sanctions on Chinese officials on Monday for alleged human rights abuses in Xinjiang, the first such coordinated Western action against Beijing under new US President Joe Biden.

Beijing hit back immediately with punitive measures against the EU that appeared broader, including European lawmakers, diplomats, institutes and families, and banning their businesses from trading with China. Western governments are seeking to hold Beijing accountable for mass detentions of Muslim Uighurs in northwestern China, where the United States says China is committing genocide. China denies all accusations of abuse. — **Reuters**

■ YANGON



MYANMAR GOVT BLAMES PROTESTERS AS EU, US IMPOSE CURBS

Myanmar’s military accused anti-junta protesters of arson and violence as Western countries imposed more sanctions on individuals and groups linked to last month’s coup and the ensuing bloody crackdown on dissent. Junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun said 164 protesters had been killed in the violence and expressed sadness at the deaths.

“They are also our citizens,” he told a news conference in the capital Naypyitaw on Tuesday, adding that the military would use the least force possible to quell violence. — **Reuters**

Thousands evacuated in Australia floods

The rain and flood situation does remain dynamic and extremely complex

SCOTT MORRISON
Prime Minister

homes in New South Wales, the most populous and worst affected state.

One video showed a container truck ramming into a bridge, causing structural damage, while another showed a car swept off a road by raging floodwaters in neighbouring Queensland.

Other photos captured mass swarms of spiders and snakes as the creatures sought to escape the fast-moving flood waters.

In NSW, a fourth straight day of heavy rain was expected to combine with a coastal trough and increase the deluge overnight on Tuesday, even as the main city Sydney saw a reprieve by late



People are evacuated by a rescue boat after getting trapped by floodwaters on the Hawkesbury River, as the state of New South Wales experiences widespread flooding and severe weather, in western Sydney, on Tuesday. — **Reuters**

afternoon. Thousands of people who live along the Hawkesbury River, a major waterway about 60km north of Sydney, were told to be ready to evacuate.

Dave Murray, a landscaper

from North Richmond, on the Hawkesbury, filmed with a head-mounted camera from his jetski as he rescued his neighbour’s 10 cows by forcing them to swim about 300 metres through floodwater

five metres deep.

“I knew they could swim because I’ve done it before, but I didn’t realise they could swim as good as that,” Murray said by telephone. — **Reuters**

India opens up vaccine drive to all above 45

NEW DELHI: India will expand its coronavirus vaccination campaign from April 1 to include everyone aged above 45, a minister said on Tuesday, to meet a demand by many states grappling with a second surge in infections.

Information Minister Prakash Javadekar added that there was no shortage of doses in India, the world’s biggest vaccine maker, which has donated or exported more than 60 million doses but injected only 49 million doses at home.

“Our appeal is that all above 45 should take vaccine as early as possible,” Javadekar said, after a cabinet meeting, adding that inoculations in the past 24 hours had reached a record. “There is no scarcity, and supply chains and supply lines are intact,” he said, adding that sufficient vaccine doses were available.

Only the elderly and those over 45 suffering from other



A healthcare worker holding a rose receives an AstraZeneca’s Covishield vaccine at a medical centre in Mumbai. — **Reuters**

health conditions are eligible to be vaccinated currently. Health and frontline workers were the first in line when India began its drive in mid-January.

India’s tally of infections, the

third-highest after the United States and Brazil, stands at 11.69 million, amid a second surge that has spurred many states to ask the government to replenish vaccine stocks. — **Reuters**

UN says 15 dead, 400 missing in fire at Rohingya camp

DHAKA: At least 15 people have been killed in a massive fire that ripped through a Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh, while at least 400 remain missing, the UN refugee agency said on Tuesday. “It is massive, it is devastating,” said UNHCR’s Johannes Van der Klaauw, who joined a Geneva briefing virtually from Dhaka, Bangladesh. “We still have 400 people unaccounted for, maybe somewhere in the rubble,” he said.

He said the UNHCR had reports of more than 550 people injured and about

45,000 displaced.

Bangladeshi officials are investigating the cause of the blaze even as officials, aid workers and families sift through the debris looking for further victims. The fire ripped through the Balukhali camp near the southeastern town of Cox’s Bazar late on Monday, burning through thousands of shanties as people scrambled to save their meagre possessions. “Everything has gone. Thousands are without homes,” Aman Ullah, a Rohingya refugee from the Balukhali camp, said. — **Reuters**



People are seen amidst the debris at a Rohingya refugee camp in Ukha on Tuesday. — **AFP**

Rejecting US plan, Ghani to offer poll in 6 months

KABUL: Afghan President Ashraf Ghani will propose a new presidential election within six months, under a peace plan he will put forward as a counter-offer to a US proposal that he rejects, two senior government officials said.

Ghani will unveil his proposal at an international gathering in Turkey next month, signalling his refusal to accept Washington’s plan for his elected government to be replaced by an interim administration, the officials said.

Washington, which agreed last year to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan by May 1 after nearly two decades, is pressing for a peace deal to end war between the government and the Taliban. Talks between the Afghan sides in Qatar have stalled.

US Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad has been circulating a proposal which would replace



Afghanistan’s President Ashraf Ghani visits an exhibition during celebrations to mark Afghan New Year (Newroz), in Kabul, on Sunday. — **Reuters**

the Kabul government with an interim administration. But Ghani has voiced vehement opposition to any solution that requires his government to step

aside for unelected successors.

“The counterproposal which we are going to present at the Istanbul meeting would be to call for early presidential elections if

the Taliban agree on a ceasefire,” one senior government official said on condition of anonymity.

Another Afghan government official said: “The president would

never agree to step aside and any future government should be formed through democratic process, not a political deal.”

A third senior official also said Ghani’s proposal would include possible early elections, although he did not specify the exact time frame for the vote. The third official said Ghani had already shared his road map with Khalilzad.

US SEEKING SUPPORT

With just weeks left before a deadline it agreed with Taliban last year to end the longest war in US history, Washington is seeking regional backing for its approach to push the Kabul government and insurgents to share power.

But diplomats and foreign officials have said it will be difficult to move forward with the US plans without Ghani’s support. — **Reuters**

Suspect charged with killing 10 in Colorado mass shooting

BOULDER, Colorado: A 21-year-old man faces 10 counts of murder in connection with Monday’s mass shooting at a Colorado grocery store, but his motive remains unclear, authorities said on Tuesday.

The suspect, identified by police as Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa of Arvada, Colorado, was in stable condition after he suffered a leg wound in an exchange of gunfire with responding police officers at the King Soopers outlet in Boulder, about 45 km northwest of Denver, on Monday afternoon.

The 10 victims, whose names were released at a Tuesday morning news conference, range in age from 20 to 65 and include Eric Talley, an 11-year veteran of the Boulder police force. Talley, 51, was the father of seven children and had recently been looking for a less dangerous job, according to a statement released by his father.

Authorities have not yet offered a possible motive for the bloodshed, which came six days after a gunman went on a killing spree in the Atlanta area, fatally shooting eight people at three day spas before he was arrested.

“It would be premature for us to draw any conclusions at this time”, Michael Schneider, the agent in charge of the FBI’s field office in Denver, said at a news briefing about a possible motive



King Soopers employees are led away from an active shooter at the King Soopers grocery store in Boulder, Colorado, on Monday. – Reuters

for the killings.

Investigators said they were confident the gunman had acted alone.

Monday’s attack drew hundreds of police officers to the scene and sent terrified shoppers and employees fleeing for safety. The massacre added to the Rocky Mountain state’s tragic list of mass killings, including the 2012 mass shooting at a movie theatre in Aurora and the 1999 rampage at Columbine High School near Littleton.

The suspect, identified by police as Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa of Arvada, Colorado, was in stable condition after he suffered a leg wound in an exchange of gunfire with responding police officers at the King Soopers outlet in Boulder

“My heart aches today”, Governor Jared Polis told the briefing. “Not only did we lose 10 lives, but this is real horror and terror for all of us.”

Witnesses in Colorado described a chaotic and frightening scene inside the store.

Ryan Borowski, 37, went in looking for something to satisfy a sugar craving. He had picked out a 12-pack of soda and a bag of chips when he heard shots ring out, sending him scurrying for the store’s back exit. — Reuters

Germany to enter strict Easter shutdown amid ‘new pandemic’

BERLIN: Germany will enter a strict shutdown for five days over Easter amid surging virus rates, Chancellor Angela Merkel and regional leaders agreed on Tuesday as criticism mounted over the government’s handling of the pandemic.

As well as extending existing measures including keeping cultural, leisure and sporting facilities shut through to April 18, Merkel and Germany’s 16 state premiers ordered a tougher shutdown between April 1 and 5.

Almost all shops will be closed during the five days, and religious services will be moved online over Easter. Only grocers will be allowed to open on Saturday April 3.

“The situation is serious. Case numbers are rising exponentially and intensive care beds are filling up again”, said Merkel.

The British variant has become the dominant strain circulating in Germany, she said, noting: “We are in a new pandemic.”

“Essentially, we have a new virus... it is much deadlier, much more infectious and infectious for much longer”, the veteran leader said.



Angela Merkel holds a mask at a news conference in Berlin on Tuesday. – Reuters

GRIDLOCKED TALKS
Vice-chancellor Olaf Scholz told public broadcaster ZDF it was “right to use the period of Easter to pull on the brakes”.

But patience is running thin in Germany over a sluggish vaccine rollout, a delayed start to mass rapid testing and higher infection numbers despite months of shutdowns, with support for Merkel’s Christian Democratic Union party at its lowest level for a year.

Der Spiegel news magazine called the government’s repeated focus on shutdowns a “scandal”, claiming it had “completely the wrong priorities” and should instead focus on improving its vaccination campaign and test strategy.

— AFP



Artwork from world’s largest canvas painting sells for \$62m

DUBAI: An artwork created from the world’s largest canvas painting has sold for \$62 million in Dubai, the second most expensive painting sold at auction by a living artist.

The original painting, “The Journey of Humanity” by British artist Sacha Jafri, holds the Guinness World Record for the largest

art canvas. Painted on one large canvas on the ballroom floor of the Atlantis Hotel in Dubai over seven months of the coronavirus pandemic, the canvas was split into 70 lots for sale. They were all bought together by Andre Abdoune, a French national living in Dubai who has a cryptocurrency business. — Reuters

Macron promises faster vaccine roll-out

PARIS: France will offer Covid-19 shots to anyone over 70 from this weekend, President Emmanuel Macron said on Tuesday, as he sought to breathe more urgency into his country’s vaccination campaign.

France and its neighbours are suffering a third wave of infections that threatens recovery in Europe’s largest economies.

Hospitals could face an “unprecedented shock” within three weeks as infections explode, said the head of France’s hospital federation as he urged tougher curbs on social interaction if the spread did not slow soon.

New Covid restrictions that closed non-essential stores and limited how far people can move came into effect in Paris and much of the north last weekend, but Macron stopped short of a full lockdown.



French President Emmanuel Macron leaves after visiting a pharmacy amid Covid-19 pandemic in Valenciennes, on Tuesday. – Reuters

“We’re going to accelerate the vaccine roll-out from Saturday”, Macron said while visiting a vaccination centre in the north.

The president later said he hoped there would be targeted campaigns for certain professions, such as teachers, by April or May and that in a race against time public holidays should be no barrier to delivering injections.

From Saturday, people over 70 will be able to get inoculated. Previously, the government had slated opening up vaccine slots for the age-group in mid April. Vaccinations are currently available for over-75s and anyone over 50 with a serious pre-existing condition.

France’s faltering campaign has been slowed by bureaucracy

and public mistrust of vaccines at home, and Europe-wide supply delays, in particular from AstraZeneca.

The European Union has threatened to ban exports of the Anglo-Swedish vaccine to Britain in order to secure doses after the company this month said it expected to deliver three times fewer vaccines by the end of June than it had contractually committed to.

The EU says AstraZeneca shots manufactured on its territory have been exported to Britain even amid the shortfall. French Europe Minister Clement Beaune demanded Britain reciprocate.

Industry Minister Agnes Pannier-Runacher, whose ministry is responsible for procurement in France, insisted AstraZeneca meet its contractual obligations. — Reuters

MOSCOW

Putin to be vaccinated in private: Kremlin

President Vladimir Putin will be vaccinated in private on Tuesday evening, the Kremlin said, as Russia looks to boost a vaccination campaign that is faltering despite having produced three home-grown jabs. Putin announced a day earlier that he would be vaccinated on Tuesday, joining other world leaders who have received jabs including US President Joe Biden, Pope Francis and Britain’s Queen Elizabeth.

But unlike many others who were vaccinated in public —



Biden was shown on TV being given the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, while Ukraine’s Volodymyr Zelensky even took off his shirt for the jab — Putin will do so behind closed doors. — AFP

WASHINGTON

Pfizer begins study of oral Covid-19 drug

Pfizer Inc has started an early-stage US trial of an oral Covid-19 antiviral therapy that could be prescribed to patients at the first sign of infection, the company said. The drugmaker, which developed the first authorised Covid-19 vaccine in the US with Germany’s BioNTech SA, said the antiviral candidate showed potent activity against SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19, in lab studies.

Pfizer’s candidate, named PF-07321332, is a protease inhibitor



that prevents the virus from replicating in cells. Protease inhibitors have been effective at treating other viral pathogens such as HIV and hepatitis C virus. — Reuters

NEW YORK

One resident dies in nursing home blaze

An early morning fire swept through a nursing home north of New York City on Tuesday, killing at least one resident and leaving a firefighter missing and feared dead, a fire official said. The blaze spread through about half of the Evergreen Court Home for Adults and temporarily trapped some residents, Rockland County Fire Coordinator Chris Kear said.

Police and firefighters rescued as many as 30 residents, including 20 who were sent to a hospital



where one later died, Kear said. “We are sad to report that there is one resident that passed away at a local area hospital”, Kear told reporters at the scene shortly after daybreak. — Reuters

Biden pushes back amid border crisis

BRIAN KNOWLTON

“The border is closed”: With those words, a top Biden administration official pushed back against fast-mounting criticism that it has bungled immigration policy, spurring an influx of migrants in the biggest crisis to emerge under the new president.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said the administration’s message to would-be border-crossers was simple: “Now is not the time to come. Do not come. The journey is dangerous.

“We are building safe, orderly and humane ways to address the needs of vulnerable children,” he said on ABC’s “This Week.”

But with an estimated 15,000 migrant children or teenagers already in federal custody — roughly a third of them in facilities meant for adults — and with the United States on pace to see two million undocumented migrants arrive this year, the problem has become impossible to ignore.

Biden himself vowed on Sunday to visit the border and said he was stepping up the message to migrants to stay home. “We’re in the process of doing it now, including making sure

PRESIDENT BIDEN HIMSELF VOWED ON SUNDAY TO VISIT THE BORDER AND SAID HE WAS STEPPING UP THE MESSAGE TO MIGRANTS TO STAY HOME

that we reestablish what existed before, which was — they can stay in place and make their case from their home country,” he told reporters.

Many Republicans, but also a growing number of Democrats, have criticised the administration’s border policies.

Mayorkas, appearing on three television networks, insisted that the administration was doing everything it could to address the influx, but said the task was complicated by policies inherited from Donald Trump’s administration and by the Covid-19 pandemic.

“We have a plan. We are executing on our plan and we will succeed,” the Havana-born Mayorkas said on ABC. “But one thing is also clear, that it takes time.” Mayorkas repeatedly placed blame on Biden’s predecessor Trump, who imposed an array of anti-immigration policies.

“The entire system... was dismantled in its entirety by the prior administration” and had to be rebuilt, Mayorkas said. He said three new facilities had been opened to handle border arrivals just last week.

But Republicans flatly rejected that analysis, with Michael McCaul, a Texas lawmaker, calling Mayorkas’s com-

ments “very irresponsible.” “They’ve created the crisis. He says he has a plan. I haven’t seen a plan,” he said, also on ABC.

Trump issued a statement claiming his border policies had been a success and attacking Biden.

“All they had to do was keep this smooth-running system on autopilot,” Trump said. “Instead, in the span of a just few weeks, the Biden Administration has turned a national triumph into a national disaster.”

A bipartisan group of US lawmakers visited immigration facilities in the El Paso, Texas area last week, and several emerged with sharp criticism.

Senator Chris Murphy, a Democrat, said he saw hundreds of children packed into a “big, open room,” and “fought back tears” as he listened to a 13-year-old girl who was distraught after being separated from her grandmother.

Mayorkas, who travelled with the group to El Paso, said that under the previous administration, such a girl would have been “turned away and turned into the desert of Mexico or sent back to the very country from which she fled, by reason of fear or prosecution.” — AFP

WRITE FOR US

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

AS FLOODS RISE

Government insurance shores up Bangladesh farmers

MOSABBER HOSSAIN

Last year, Hafizur Rahman’s entire rice crop drowned in floodwaters that followed heavy rain in northern Bangladesh. The loss forced the 30-year-old farmer from Kurigram district to look for daily labouring work, hoping to scrape together enough money for seed to plant a new 8-acre rice crop this year.

“I invested all my money in this crop,” he said. “If I can manage some money, I’ll again

farm rice on my land. If I don’t, I’ll migrate to the capital and start work as a rickshaw puller,” he said.

As climate change fuels extreme weather, including worsening floods and droughts, more farmers like Rahman are seeing their crops devastated, driving growing migration to already overcrowded cities like Dhaka,

I invested all my money in this crop. If I can manage some money, I’ll again farm rice on my land. If I don’t, I’ll migrate to the capital and start work as a rickshaw puller

HAFIZUR RAHMAN
A farmer

Bangladesh’s capital. But Bangladesh’s first state-backed farm insurance scheme, launched last year and with 20,000 farmers now onboard, could help stem that flow, by giving farmers the resources they need to restart production after big losses.

When farmers sign up to the subsidised programme, they pay 25 per cent of the cost of seasonal insurance and get up to 10,000 takas (\$120) if crops are damaged by a climate event, said Abdul Karim, manager at the finance ministry’s Sadharan Bima Corporation (SBC), which provides the policies.

Implemented with funding and support from aid charity Oxfam Bangladesh and the Asian Development Bank, the first phase of the programme — which focuses on the flood-prone northeastern region — will cost the government 210 million takas, he added.

With insurance to help them bounce back from floods and drought, fewer farmers will be forced to find new ways to make a living, said Ainun Nishat, climate expert and professor at BRAC University in Dhaka.

Keeping more people in farming will help Bangladesh feed its citizens, he said, in a country where about a quarter of people struggle to get enough food, according to the World Food Programme.

That will also ease pressure on urban areas, whose population has boomed from 48 million to nearly 65 million over the past decade, in large part due to rural inhabitants moving to Dhaka and other cities after leaving farming, Nishat said.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

ALL ARE AFFECTED

Sombre Britain marks one year since first virus lockdown

JAMES PHEBY AND JITENDRA JOSHI

Britain on Tuesday marked the anniversary of its first coronavirus lockdown with a minute’s silence in tribute to the more than 126,000 people who have died — one of the world’s worst tolls.

The “National Day of Reflection” saw the silence observed in parliament and across the UK at noon (1200 GMT), followed by bells ringing to mourn the dead and honour frontline health workers.

At 8:00 pm, members of the public are being encouraged to stand on their doorsteps with lit phones, candles and torches to signify a “beacon of remembrance”.

Queen Elizabeth II and her eldest son and heir, Prince Charles, led tributes, with the monarch calling for reflection “on the grief and loss that continues to be felt by so many people and families, and pay tribute to the immeasurable service of those who have supported us all over the last year”.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson ordered a lockdown on March 23 last year, shutting schools, non-essential shops and services, and banning gatherings of more than two people.

“From this evening, I must give the British people a very simple instruction — you must stay at home,” Johnson said a year ago, announcing the most stringent restrictions on public life since World War II.

He warned then that “many lives sadly will be lost” — though the death toll today stands far beyond any of the worst predictions of British scientists or politicians a year ago.

The toll in March last year was 335. A year later it stands at 126,172,



Flowers are seen at the Mary Seacole statue in the garden of St Thomas’ Hospital as part of a day of reflection to mark the anniversary of Britain’s first coronavirus lockdown, in London, on Monday. — Reuters

QUEEN ELIZABETH II AND HER ELDEST SON AND HEIR, PRINCE CHARLES, LED TRIBUTES, WITH THE MONARCH CALLING FOR REFLECTION ‘ON THE GRIEF AND LOSS’

among the five worst rates in the world per million people. A YouGov survey conducted last week found that one in six people in Britain have lost a family member or close friend to Covid-19.

“Every single one of us has been affected,” said House of Commons Speaker Lindsay Hoyle before the mid-day pause. Initially, the lockdown was meant to last three weeks. A year on, Britain is in its third phase of restrictions but is gradually loosening them thanks to a mass vaccination campaign.

However, Johnson warned that a

third wave was now sweeping across Europe and will inevitably “wash up on our shores”, even as he called for reflection on the losses of the past year.

It has “taken a huge toll on us all”, he said, calling the anniversary “an opportunity to reflect on the past year — one of the most difficult in our country’s history”.

“We should also remember the great spirit shown by our nation over this past year,” he said, although Johnson’s many critics accuse the government of repeatedly doing too little, too late to combat the pandemic. — AFP

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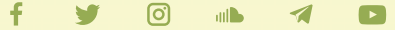
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TSUNODA READY TO MAKE



I don't want to worry about making mistakes. I just want to go for it and attack

YUKI TSUNODA
Japanese F1 rookie

F1 IMPACT

TOKYO: He's the baby-faced rookie whose legs are so short his car needs special pedals — but don't think Yuki Tsunoda is just along for the ride in his Formula One debut.

The 20-year-old Japanese clocked the second-fastest time ahead of Lewis Hamilton in pre-season testing, and now he's aiming to make a name for himself when he suits up for AlphaTauri at the season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix at the weekend.

"I just want to give it everything I've got," Tsunoda, who replaced Russian Daniil Kvyat in the AlphaTauri stable, said during an online news conference last week.

"I don't want to worry about making mistakes. I just want to go for it and attack."

Tsunoda, who was born in 2000 and will be the youngest driver on the grid at 20, has been fast-tracked into the elite after spending just one season in Formula Two last year with British team Carlin.

Three wins, seven podium

finishes and four pole positions were enough to convince AlphaTauri boss Franz Tost to give him his shot at the big time, and the rookie will be grabbing it with both hands.

Tsunoda will become the first Japanese driver to compete in Formula One since Kamui Kobayashi in 2014, but admitted he had to hit the gym to build his neck muscles to cope with the F1 car's increased G-force and superior power.

He stands just 1.59 metres tall (5ft 3in), his diminutive frame forcing team engineers to develop a made-to-measure pedal kit to make him more comfortable in the cockpit of the AT02.

Little seems to faze Tsunoda, who started racing karts at the age of four in his native Kanagawa, just outside Tokyo.

"When I was racing karts, the thought of competing in Formula One never entered my mind at all," he said. "I just concentrated on the race in front of me, just thinking about taking the next step."

'SHOUTING MY HEAD OFF'

Tsunoda has been backed by Honda since joining their junior driver's programme and making his debut in Japan's Formula Four championship in 2016. He had stints in Formula Three and Euroformula Open championships, before joining Carlin in Formula Two last season. He finished third in the title race behind champion Mick Schumacher, who will make his Formula 1 debut for Haas this week, and Callum Ilott, who has been appointed Ferrari Formula One test driver for 2021. Tsunoda sees aggressive overtaking and braking as his strengths. "I'm confident I have the skills to push my turns to the limit more than any other driver," he said.

Away from racing, he tries to relax by snowboarding and playing video games, which he describes as "training" for keeping his cool on the track.

"When I'm really trying to push it in qualifying for a race and I make a mistake, or the

car in front is getting in my way and it spoils the lap, I'm quick to get riled up and start shouting over the radio," he said.

"It's the same when I'm playing video games — I make a mistake or I lose and I start shouting my head off."

But he wants "to be able to control myself, even when I'm playing video games."

Tsunoda's arrival in Formula One has sparked excitement among Japanese racing fans, and the feeling is mutual.

The last time Tsunoda raced at Suzuka was in Formula Four, and he is looking forward to showing how much he has developed when he competes in the Japanese Grand Prix there in October.

"There's about a 45-second difference in the lap times at Suzuka between a Formula Four car and a Formula One car, so I'm looking forward to experiencing that," he said.

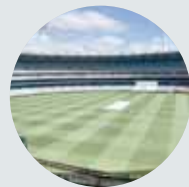
"I can't wait to race in front of the Japanese fans."

— AFP



Sharjeel happy with Pakistan welcome after ban

Pakistan opener Sharjeel Khan said on Tuesday he was delighted with the welcome he had been given since being recalled to the national squad after completing a lengthy ban for spot-fixing. The 31-year-old was banned in 2017 for five years — with half the sentence suspended — for his part in rigging Pakistan Super League.



Eased restrictions open door for 75,000 at MCG

The Melbourne Cricket Ground could host a crowd of 75,000 for an Australian Rules match this week after restrictions on the capacity of stadiums were eased on Tuesday. The State of Victoria was officially Covid-19 free on Tuesday after the last active case was cleared of the virus.

BANGLA BLUNDERS GIFT NZ SERIES WIN

CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand: New Zealand secured a series-clinching five-wicket win in the second one-day international against Bangladesh on Tuesday after a string of fielding errors dashed the tourists' hopes of victory.

Black Caps skipper Tom Latham scored an unbeaten 110 after being dropped twice with New Zealand chasing 272 at Christchurch's Hagley Oval.

New Zealand batsman Jimmy Neesham was also given life, with the errors undoing Bangladesh's good work in making 271 for six after losing the toss and being put into bat.

Bangladesh captain Tamim Iqbal was left frustrated after seeing his side come close to a maiden victory on New Zealand soil.

"We should have won this game. We created chances but we just couldn't hold on to those dropped catches," he said.

"We hardly ever win games but in this kind of situation, we have to make sure that we do everything 100 per cent. I'm disappointed."

Tamim top-scored for the tourists with 78 and Mohammad Mithun contributed an unbeaten 73 off 57 balls.

Latham's 110 came off 108 balls and was his fifth ODI century, while Devon Conway's 72 helped anchor the innings.

The Black Caps reached the target after 48.2 overs, finishing on 275 for five to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match ODI series.

Tamim had demanded a better performance from his players after they were skittled for 131 in the opening match and slumped to an eight-wicket defeat.

Signs did not look promising when opener Liton Das departed for a duck in the second over.

But Tamim and Soumya Sarkar preserved their wickets, grinding out an 81-run partnership at an



New Zealand's Tom Latham plays a shot during the second one-day international match against Bangladesh at the Hagley Oval in Christchurch. — AFP

agonisingly slow run rate to lay the foundation for a big finish.

Soumya was stumped on 32 trying to lift the run rate as Tamim brought up his 50th ODI half-century off 84 balls after surviving two umpiring reviews.

His luck ran out trying to pinch a quick single, when Neesham

showed impressive soccer skills to kick the ball into the stumps side-on and dislodge the bails.

Entering the final 10 overs at 183 for three, Bangladesh finally stepped on the gas through Mithun's career-best ODI knock.

New Zealand began briskly in reply despite the early loss of

“We should have won this game. We created chances but we just couldn't hold on to those dropped catches

TAMIM IQBAL
Bangladesh captain

opener Martin Guptill for 20.

A double strike from spinner Mahedi Hasan applied the brakes to the run rate, forcing Conway and Latham to rebuild.

Conway's departure in the 34th over with New Zealand at 166 for four gave Bangladesh a chance to put the hosts under pressure.

The bowlers obliged but errors in the field meant chances went begging and momentum shifted back to New Zealand. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

BANGLADESH	
T Iqbal run out (Neesham)	78
L Das c Young b Henry	0
S Sarkar st Latham b Santner	32
M Rahim c Nicholls b Santner	34
M Mithun not out	73
Mahmudullah c Guptill b Jamieson	16
M Hasan c Nicholls b Boult	7
M Saifuddin not out	7
Extras (lb6, w17, nb1)	24
Total (6 wickets; 50 overs)	271
Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-85, 3-133, 4-184, 5-247, 6-258	
Bowling: Boult 10-0-49-1, Henry 10-3-48-1, Jamieson 10-2-36-1, Neesham 9-0-73-0, Santner 10-0-51-2, Mitchell 1-0-8-0	
NEW ZEALAND	
M Guptill c & b Mustafizur	20
H Nicholls b Hasan	13
D Conway run out (Tamim)	72
W Young b Hasan	1
T Latham not out	110
J Neesham c Soumya b Mustafizur	30
D Mitchell not out	12
Extras: (lb4, w13)	17
Total: (5 wickets; 48.2 overs)	275
Fall of wickets: 1-28, 2-43, 3-53, 4-166, 5-242	
Bowling: Mustafizur 8.3-0-62-2, Taskin 10-0-67-0, Mahedi 10-1-42-2, Shaifuddin 7.2-0-43-0, Miraz 10-1-38-0, Mithun 2-0-12-0, Soumya 0.3-0-7-0	



Rahkeem Cornwall (R) and Kemar Roach (L) of West Indies walk off the field at the end of day two of the first Test against Sri Lanka at Vivian Richards Cricket Stadium in North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda. — AFP

Cornwall puts Windies back into contention

NORTH SOUND, Antigua and Barbuda: Rahkeem Cornwall blasted a maiden Test half-century and dominated an eighth-wicket partnership of 90 with Joshua da Silva to lift the West Indies to 268 for eight in their first innings, a lead of 99 runs, at the close of the second day of the first Test at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in Antigua on Monday.

Outstanding seam bowling by Suranga Lakmal, who claimed his fourth five-wicket innings haul in 64 Tests, had restricted the home side to 171 for seven just after tea in reply to the tourists' modest first-day effort of 169.

However, the burly Cornwall, selected primarily for his off-spin bowling but also well-known for his powerful hitting in the domestic game, joined wicketkeeper-batsman Da Silva in first resisting the best efforts of the Sri Lankan bowlers before opening into an array of expansive strokes upon the arrival of the second new ball.

His unbeaten 60 has come of 79 balls with two sixes and nine fours embellishing and entertaining innings.

Da Silva, who is already building a reputation in his young international career for featuring in useful lower-

SCOREBOARD

Sri Lanka 1st Innings 169	
West Indies 1st Innings	
K Brathwaite c De Silva b Lakmal	3
J Campbell c Dickwella b Chameera	42
N Bonner lbw Embuldeniya	31
K Mayers c De Silva b Lakmal	45
J Blackwood b Lakmal	2
J Holder b Lakmal	19
J da Silva c Dickwella b Chameera	46
A Joseph c Chandimal b Lakmal	0
R Cornwall not out	60
K Roach not out	4
Extras (lb-6, nb-9, w-1)	16
Total (101 overs, 8 wkts)	268
Fall of wickets: 1-13, 2-69, 3-95, 4-120, 5-133, 6-169, 7-171, 8-261	
Bowling: S Lakmal 24-9-45-5, V Fernando 16-5-52-0, D Chameera 22-1-71-2, L Embuldeniya 28-6-64-1, D de Silva 11-2-30-0	

order partnerships, was within sight of his second Test half-century when he fell for 46 just minutes before the close of play, caught behind off fast bowler Dushmantha Chameera attempting to ride a lifting delivery over the slip cordon.

"I needed to get some runs because I haven't been showing the best I can do with the bat so far," said Cornwall in reflecting on his innings. "I think we are in a very good position at this stage of the match. We need to come tomorrow and try and make the most of the first hour, then we can set up the match by having something to run at them in the second innings." — AFP

Sarco, ACT win as A Division T20 gathers steam

MUSCAT: Mohammed Sameer's superb 52 not out steered Sarco to an exciting 4-wicket win over ARTT in an A Division T20 League game at OC Turf 2 in Amerat on Saturday.

Sarco won both the games over the weekend having beaten OCT Muscat on Friday as the T20 tournament seemed to gain momentum.

Sarco tied ARTT into knots, restricting them to a meagre 106 for 9 in 20 overs, Aqil Khan top-scoring with 31. Dileepa Srilal and Jeethesha Shridhara were the picks of the bowlers, taking two wickets each.

Sarco's response was led by a smashing unbeaten half-century from number four Sameer as they surpassed the total in 18 overs,

scoring 107 for 6. Ibn Eameen claimed 3 for 13 while Zeeshan Siddiqui bagged 2 for 20.

HAFIZ HELPS ACT TO THRILLING WIN

Opener Hafiz Irfan slammed a magnificent 76 to guide ACT to their second win in two days, beating Awtad International by 5 runs in another A Division T20 League match at OC Turf 1 on Saturday. ACT had defeated E&Y by 5 wickets on Friday.

Iftikhar Ahmed was ACT's other main scorer against Awtad with 32 as they scored 155 for 7 in 20 overs. Muhammed Irfan bowled well, taking 4 for 23.

Awtad fought well, giving ACT a run for the money before falling short by 5 runs. Their score of 150



Muhammed Irfan of Awtad International

for 4 included Nidhin Mohan's 33 and Noorul Riyaz's 32. Vikas Sharma bagged 2 for 22.

NISHAD STARS IN ZAWAWI WIN

In another A Division T20 game, prolific scorer Nishad KS struck a solid 54, helping Zawawi

Powertech to a 39-run victory against Ernst and Young (E&Y) at OC Turf 2 on Saturday.

Batting first, Zawawi posted 168 for 7 on the board thanks to brilliant batting by Nishad, Prabhakaran Kannan (47) and Suhil Kanagaraj (28). Rana Zeeshan and Alkesh Joshi took two wickets each.

E&Y failed to exhibit the same flair, managing to score only 129 for 8 in 20 overs. Shrey Wilson (35) and Omar Sarfraz (23) were their main scorers. Yagnik Ashwin and Kalarasan Natarajan claimed two wickets each.

BRIEF SCORES A Division T20 League

ARTT 106 for 9 in 20 overs (Aqil Khan 31 – 2x4, 1x6. Dileepa Srilal 2-16, Jeethesha Shridhara 2-18)

lost to Sarco 107 for 6 in 18 overs (Mohammed Sameer 52 not out – 5x4, 2x6. Ibn Eameen 3-13, Zeeshan Siddiqui 2-20) by 4 wickets.

ACT 155 for 7 in 20 overs (Hafiz Irfan 76 – 8x4, 3x6, Iftikhar Ahmed 32 – 3x4, 1x6, Muhammad Irfan 4-23, Sujithkumar Rajagopalan 2-26) thrashed Awtad International 150 for 4 in 20 overs (Nidhin Mohan 33 – 2x4, Noorul Riyaz 32 – 2x4, Vikas Sharma 2-22) by 5 runs.

Zawawi Powertech 168 for 7 in 20 overs (Nishad KS 54 – 4x4, 1x6, Prabhakaran Kannan 47 – 2x4, 3x6, Suhil Kanagaraj 28 – 2x6. Rana Zeeshan 2-31, Alkesh Joshi 2-52) thrashed Ernst and Young 129 for 8 in 20 overs (Shrey Wilson 35 – 3x4, 1x6, Omar Sarfraz 23 – 4x4. Yagnik Ashwin 2-13, Kalarasan Natarajan 2-27) by 39 runs.

OCT Muscat 71 all out in 17.5 overs (Munthir al Balushi 21 – 1x4, Rakesh Patel 6-7, Sameer Mohammed 2-4) lost to Sarco 72 for 1 in 8.4 overs (Rangajeeva Perera

29 – 4x4, 1x6, Rakesh Patel 28 – 3x4, 1x6) by 9 wickets.

Basta 167 for 8 in 20 overs (Usman Haider 47 – 2x4, 4x6, Najeeb Shaheer 36 – 3x4, 2x6. Malik Ali Khan 31 – 3x4, 1x6. Khalid al Balushi 2-35) trounced OCT Muscat 104 for 9 in 20 overs (Muzaffar Shiralkal 35 – 2x4, 2x6. Shahid Mahmood 3-07, Mohammed Abbas 3-19) by 63 runs.

Ernst & Young 138 for 9 in 20 overs (Shrey Wilson 43 – 5x4, 2x6, Shahid Naseem 40 – 5x4, 1x6, Hafiz Irfan 3-16, Vikas Sharma 2-15, Toseef Ul Hassan 2-31, Rajesh Devashya 2-34) lost to ACT 139 for 5 in 19 overs (Muhammed Zeeshan 69 – 7x4, 2x6, Rana Zeeshan 2-28) by 5 wickets.

Basta CT 167 for 8 in 20 overs (Usman Haider 47 – 2x4, 4x6, Najeeb Shaheer 36 – 3x4, 2x6, Prasad Peruli 35 – 4x4, 1x6, Khalid al Balushi 2-35) beat OCT Muscat 104 for 9 in 20 overs (Muzaffar Shiralkal 35 – 2x4, 2x6, Shahid Mehmood 3-7, Mohammed Abbas 3-19) by 63 runs.



India's Prasidh Krishna celebrates taking the wicket of England's Jason Roy with Virat Kohli, Krunal Pandya and team-mates. – Reuters

PACE BOWLER PRASIDH KRISHNA CLAIMS FOUR WICKETS ON DEBUT

DHAWAN GUIDES INDIA TO OPENING WIN

PUNE, India: Opener Shikhar Dhawan smashed 98 and debutant pace bowler Prasidh Krishna claimed four wickets as India thrashed England by 66 runs in the opening one-day international on Tuesday.

Dhawan started strongly while KL Rahul, 62 not out, and Krunal Pandya, unbeaten 58 off 31 balls, steered the hosts to 317-5 after being put into bat first at the start of the three ODIs in Pune.

Chasing 318 for victory, England were bowled out for 251 in 42.1 overs despite a blazing 94 by Jonny Bairstow to trail the series 1-0.

Krishna, who returned ODI figures of 4-54, a best by an Indian on debut, and fellow quick bowler Shardul Thakur shared seven wickets between them and turned the game on its head after Bairstow put on a blazing opening stand of 135 with Jason Roy.

Krishna broke the stand to send back Roy out for 46 and then struck in his next over with the key wicket of Ben Stokes for one.

He nearly got his third on the next ball when Morgan, who came into bat with four stitches on the webbing of his hand, edged his first ball to Kohli



India's Shikhar Dhawan bats against England at the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Pune. – Reuters

SCOREBOARD	
INDIA	
R Sharma c J Buttler b B Stokes	28
S Dhawan c E Morgan b B Stokes	98
V Kohli c M Ali b M Wood	56
S Iyer c sub b M Wood	6
L Rahul not out	62
H Pandya c J Bairstow b B Stokes	1
K Pandya not out	58
Extras: (0b 3lb Onb Open 5w)	8
Total: (50 overs) 317-5	
Fall of wickets: 1-64, 2-169, 3-187, 4-197, 5-205	
Bowling: Mark Wood 10-1-75-2, Sam Curran 10-1-48-0, Tom Curran 10-0-63-0, Ben Stokes 8-1-34-3, Adil Rashid 9-0-66-0, Moeen Ali 3-0-28-0	
ENGLAND	
J Roy c sub b P Krishna	46
J Bairstow c K Yadav b S Thakur	94
B Stokes c sub b P Krishna	1
E Morgan c L Rahul b S Thakur	22
J Buttler lbw S Thakur	2
S Billings c V Kohli b P Krishna	18
M Ali c L Rahul b B Kumar	30
S Curran c sub b K Pandya	12
T Curran c B Kumar b P Krishna	11
A Rashid c L Rahul b B Kumar	0
M Wood not out	2
Extras: (0b 3lb Onb Open 10w)	13
Total: (42.1 overs) 251 all out	
Fall of wickets: 1-135, 2-137, 3-169, 4-175, 5-176, 6-217, 7-237, 8-239, 9-241	
Bowling: Bhuvneshwar Kumar 9-0-30-2, Prasidh Krishna 8.1-1-54-4, Shardul Thakur 6-0-37-3, Krunal Pandya 10-0-59-1, Kuldeep Yadav 9-0-68-0	

at slip but the Indian captain dropped the catch.

Thakur soon took over from Krishna to deny Bairstow his hundred after getting the opener caught at deep midwicket.

He then struck twice in his next over to send back Morgan, for 22, and Jos Buttler, lbw for

two, as England slipped further to 176-5.

Moeen Ali made a fighting 30 before falling to Bhuvneshwar Kumar, who combined with Pandya and Krishna to wipe off the tail.

For India, left-hander Pandya, who played alongside his younger brother Hardik Pandya, put on an unbroken stand of 112 with wicketkeeper-batsman Rahul as India finished with a flourish.

Stokes struck first with his pace bowling, claiming Rohit Sharma caught behind for 28. He returned figures of 3-34 from eight overs.

Dhawan put on 105 for the second wicket with Kohli. He made his 31st ODI fifty with a six off leg-spinner Adil Rashid.

Kohli reached a run-a-ball fifty but fell for 56 to pace bowler Mark Wood.

Dhawan, who hit 11 fours and two sixes in his 106-ball knock, fell short of his hundred after he mistimed a pull off Stokes.

Pandya completed his 50 in 26 balls to record the fastest fifty for an ODI debutant and later choked up with emotion while dedicating the innings to his father who died in January.

— AFP

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OPAZ, Riyadh to promote entrepreneurship in free zones



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 23

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and the Public Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Riyada) signed on Tuesday a technical cooperation programme aimed to promote the role of entrepreneurship in the special economic zones and free zones.

The programme serves as a platform introducing small and medium enterprises to the business opportunities available in these zones. The programme was signed by Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones and Halima bint Rashid al Zaria, Chairperson of Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (Riyada).

This outstanding programme aims to benefit from the expertise of the Authority of

Small and Medium Enterprises Development as a strategic partner in developing entrepreneurship in the different special economic zones and free zones. Further, it intends to utilise the powers of OPAZ to overcome the challenges that may come across SMEs in all these zones.

On the other hand, the programme plans to establish a platform specialised in creating innovative tasks from large projects.

It also recommends opening a service outlet for the Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises Development in OPAZ Headquarters. This outlet will mainly serve entrepreneurs to make the most of all the various opportunities offered by the special economic zones and free zones.

Likewise, this cooperation programme endorses conducting a joint study between the two government bodies on the Sultanate's markets to find out the supply, demand and gaps.

Oman-India JV plans \$2.5bn green ammonia project in Duqm SEZ

CLEAN ENERGY: Tatweer of the Sultanate along with ACME Solar of India to invest in a giant facility for production of green ammonia and green hydrogen destined for international markets

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 23

A partnership of the Oman Company for the Development of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (Tatweer) and India's biggest solar developer ACME Solar Holdings Ltd has unveiled plans to invest \$2.5 billion to manufacture green ammonia and green hydrogen in the Duqm SEZ.

According to reports in the Indian media, the clean energy initiative will supply green ammonia to markets in Europe, America and Asia.

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) to set up a large-scale facility to produce 2,200 metric tonnes of green ammonia has been inked, local media reports quoted ACME Group as stating.

Green hydrogen gas is produced by splitting water into hydrogen and oxygen using an electrolyzer, and is powered by electricity generated from clean energy sources such as wind and





ACME has chosen Oman for its first large-scale green ammonia commercial project considering its strategic location, the support received from the government bodies and high solar irradiation in the country

ACME GROUP

solar. ACME has chosen Oman for its first large-scale green ammonia commercial project considering its strategic location, the support received from the government bodies and high solar irradiation in the country.

Tatweer and ACME have identified the land parcel in the Duqm region to set up a large-scale facility of producing 2,200 MT of Green Ammonia per day with an investment of about \$2.5 billion," the Acme Group statement said.

ACME Solar, founded in 2003, has 2.9 GW of commissioned projects and 2.6 GW in pipeline

spread across 13 states in India. "ACME's green initiatives in green hydrogen and ammonia sector begin with its pilot project in Rajasthan, India, which is currently under construction and will be operational by April 2021," the statement added.

Salim al Sulaimani, CEO of Tatweer, said this facility is aimed towards achieving Oman Vision 2040 in alternative energy and to boost bilateral ties with India. Tatweer, incorporated in 2014, is a fully owned subsidiary of Oman's Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) for the development of Duqm Special Economic Zone.

Financial, health and education services exempt from VAT

KEY PROVISIONS: Dental, laboratory, psychiatric, physiotherapy, nursing and midwifery services, diagnostic and therapeutic services, and surgical, reconstructive and cosmetic services also exempt

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

A broad range of services provided by banking and financial institutions, as well as the healthcare and education sectors, have been either tax-exempt or zero-rated for Value Added Tax (VAT) when it comes into effect in the Sultanate on April 16, 2021.

These exemptions are detailed in the Executive Regulations for the VAT Law issued by the Tax Authority vide its Resolution 53/2021 earlier this month.

An (unofficial) English-language translation of the Executive Regulations, made available courtesy of well-known consultancy firms MMJS Consulting and Morison Muscat, provides greater clarity with regard to the various economic sectors, activities, goods and supplies that are covered by the VAT Law.

Exempt from VAT are financial services supplied by banks and financial institutions licensed by the Central Bank of Oman or any of the competent authorities.

They include: Provision of loans, their transfers and lending services; Credit, including credit instalments in lease-to-own transactions and credit guarantee; Depositing funds in current, savings and deposit accounts; Supply and issuance of financial instruments such as derivatives, deferred contracts, options and similar transactions; Supply and issuance of shares, bonds and other securities; Transferring ownership of any securities or derivatives related to



any securities; and Life insurance services.

Importantly, Islamic financial transactions are also subject to the same exemption, provided such transactions involve a person licensed to engage in Islamic banking.

Furthermore, a wide array of healthcare supplies and services are also exempt from VAT if they are provided by licensed medical institutions.

The list includes: General medicine services, Specialised

medicine services, Dental and laboratory services, Psychiatric services, Physiotherapy services, Nursing services in hospitals, nursing homes, or similar licensed institutions; Midwifery services; Diagnostic and therapeutic services for individuals; and Surgical, reconstructive, and cosmetic services.

Also exempt are associated services, such as the Transportation of the sick and wounded in ambulances; Provision of accommodation,

An (unofficial) English-language translation of the Executive Regulations, made available courtesy of well-known consultancy firms MMJS Consulting and Morison Muscat, provides greater clarity with regard to the various economic sectors, activities, goods and supplies that are covered by the VAT Law

food and beverage; Operating room expenses; and Medicines and medical materials.

Excluded from this waiver are services of a commercial nature, such as supplying food and beverage to visitors, securing parking for visitors, and all works that are not included in medical treatment, such as a television set or a telephone call allowance.

The VAT Law also exempts goods and related services provided by educational institutions licensed by the competent authorities in the field of education in the Sultanate.

The list includes: Education in

kindergarten and nursery levels; Education at all academic levels; Higher education; Vocational and technical education (theoretical or practical education to qualify people to practice a profession or a craft); Education for the elderly; Education for persons with disabilities, including people with sight, hearing and speaking disabilities; Language Teaching; and Vocational training institutes.

They also cover the following goods and services directly related to education and provided by or through licensed educational institutions exclusively to students and complement education services: Provision of accommodation, food and beverage; Organising cultural, educational or professional activities or seminars; Organising trips, provided that these trips are linked to a specific curriculum; Supplying educational materials, provided that these materials are linked to a specific curriculum; Provision of student transportation; and Provision of school uniforms.

Post-Brexit financial services deal with the EU

A financial services cooperation pact between Britain and the European Union is expected before the end of this month, which would see the blocs able to cooperate more closely on financial services regulation in this post-Brexit era.

Britain's financial services industry has been largely cut off from the EU, its biggest customer, since the Brexit transition period ended on 31 December as the sector is not covered by the UK-EU trade deal.

Director general of financial services at the UK Treasury, Katharine Braddick, said, both sides were committed to agreeing on a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on regulatory cooperation by the end of March. "I don't see any reason why we are not going

to be able to deliver on that commitment," Braddick said. She said talk about the pact has been "exuberant" and in practice, it would only be an "administrative vehicle" for dialogue.

A person familiar with Britain's negotiating position said the UK's focus is on making sure the MoU provides transparency and appropriate dialogue when it comes to adopting, suspending and withdrawing regulatory decisions.

Brussels can grant direct market access for foreign financial services firms if it deems their home market rules are similar to the EU's own standards, a designation known as equivalence.

Many City of London figures have gone on record to say the pact will not provide the UK renewed access to EU markets,



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

BRITAIN'S FINANCIAL SERVICES INDUSTRY HAS BEEN LARGELY CUT OFF FROM THE EU, ITS BIGGEST CUSTOMER, SINCE THE BREXIT TRANSITION PERIOD ENDED ON 31 DECEMBER AS THE SECTOR IS NOT COVERED BY THE UK-EU TRADE DEAL

while the government has consistently played down any chance of equivalence being granted. Major UK banks sent £1 trillion of assets and thousands of jobs to EU capitals between 2016 and last year in preparation for losing full access to EU markets.

Lobby group TheCityUK is still hoping for the EU to restore at least partial equivalence to British banks. Chief executive Miles Celic said: "Our industry is pragmatic about the increased friction to trade and cross-border transactions which have resulted from Brexit, but we should still seek to minimise this wherever possible."

He added: "We urge both the UK and the EU to move quickly and get these additional agreements in place. The industry is as eager to see structured regulatory cooperation on financial services between the

UK and the EU, as it is to prevent cross-border barriers to justice and ensure certainty on the movement of data."

Responding to the CityUK's views, Labour's shadow City minister Pat McFadden said: "The government has been watering down expectations of what will be achieved through the MoU, but that isn't good enough for a sector of this importance to the UK." He added: "The Brexit agreement was basically a no-deal outcome for financial services and we need more than that if we are not to lose more business to other countries."

An early draft for a cooperation agreement in financial services between Britain and the EU faces criticism for having "less substance" than a deal the EU agreed with the United States in 2016.

Under the US deal with the EU, equivalence is treated as "outcomes-based," which Britain has called for as part of its deal.

However, in an early draft of the MoU, there was mention of outcomes-based equivalence in the draft EU-UK memorandum. A Treasury spokesperson said: "We are committed to working with the EU on financial services – as set out in the joint declaration – to establish a stable and durable relationship which supports financial stability, market integrity and consumer protection."

"The chancellor has also recently set out ambitious plans to renew the UK's position as the world's pre-eminent financial centre – making it more open, technologically advanced and a global leader in green finance."

(The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK)

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DOUBLE YOUR SALARY WITH BANKDHOFAR

Aiming to reward customers transferring their salary to BankDhofar,



the Bank announced, "Double Your Salary" Scheme. All customers transferring their salary into their savings account or current account from March 1 onwards will be eligible to enter an exclusive prize draw and get a chance to double their salaries to up to RO 2,000.

Commenting on the scheme, Dr Tariq Taha, Chief Retail Banking Officer at BankDhofar said: "This scheme translates our endeavour to provide the best services, products and offers to our customers, and to meet their financial needs.

Therefore, we intend to reward our customers having a salary

transfer by providing them with the chance to win back an equivalent

salary and hence double their salaries. For instance, if a customer transfers a salary of RO 500 and he wins the draw, he will get back an additional RO 500 from the Bank.

Another customer who has transferred a salary of RO 1,000, will win back an additional RO 1,000 from the Bank and so on.

"Double Your Salary" scheme will provide the chance for 20 customers per month to double their salaries up to a maximum of RO 2000. We are looking forward to welcoming customers transferring their salary to the Bank and this is our way of thanking them."

MAZOOON ELECTRICITY EMPLOYEES RECEIVE DCRP CERTIFICATION

Nine engineers from the certification department of Mazoon Electricity Company, the leading electricity provider in Oman, have received certificates from the Distribution Code Review Panel (DCRP).

The employees who obtained certificates in the field of electrical networks protection from the DCRP underwent two years of training, qualification and practical application in various Mazoon Electricity projects.

The training was conducted to empower and refine their talents in the field of electrical protection. Nine engineers have been able to obtain different levels - third, second and first – of certification. The highest level of certification possible is the fourth level. The evaluation was held in the presence of the head of the Protection department



in DCRP as well as the head of the protection section and the head of the Project Certification section in Mazoon Electricity.

This certification will reflect positively on the quality of substations equipment inspection and will further ensure their adherence to the approved standards. This will also allow inspection engineers to better configure safety equipment in various substations, which will ultimately reflect in the quality and sustainability of services provided by Mazoon Electricity to customers of different segments.

Four ways young entrepreneurs can grow their businesses



VIRESH
HARDUTH

During this turbulent time for the world economy, opportunities abound for talented, hardworking young entrepreneurs with the grit and passion to make a difference for themselves and for their communities.

Inspired young entrepreneurs with a strategic vision are seizing the opportunity to create a livelihood for themselves and to make life better for those around them.

Whether you're struggling to find a job after school or university due to the tough economic conditions, or have always dreamt of running your own business, here are four ideas to help you find inspiration:

1. START IN YOUR OWN COMMUNITY

Social entrepreneurship has become a catchphrase over the last few years. The reason for this



is the rise of a new type of business owner: an innovator who wants to solve socio-economic challenges through his or her own business. From health to the digital divide to education, we can all agree there is no shortage of problems to be solved, many of them in your own community.

Whether it's delivering fresh produce to elderly people who

can't get out to shop during the pandemic, providing affordable tuition to coach students for their exams or helping artisans and craftspeople sell their products, today we see multiple businesses making a profit while also ensuring social impact.

2. FAMILIARISE YOURSELF WITH DIGITAL TOOLS

In today's hyper-connected

world, understanding the true benefits of digital tools such as cloud computing and using them wisely is the key to success. Learn where your customers go online, then leverage search and social media tools to attract leads and build an online community.

Find out which cloud services are available and economical in streamlining and running the

accounting, tax submissions and other elements of your business.

Doing so will help save time so you're able to focus on developing your value proposition through sales and marketing.

3. SEEK MENTORS AND COLLABORATORS

When you're starting out as a young entrepreneur, advice and inspiration from a mentor can prove invaluable. Your mentor doesn't necessarily need to be someone from the same industry or profession.

An experienced business person who knows the ropes of running his or her own enterprise can serve as a great mentor.

Mentors can help you avoid unnecessary mistakes and provide a sounding board for your ideas. In addition, a mentor might be able to connect you with potential customers, employees, partners or investors.

4. KNOW THE INDUSTRY TRENDS AND PLAYERS

Stay on top of the latest trends and developments in the industry in which you plan to build a business. Follow social media accounts from major companies

operating in your sector, read relevant publications, and consider completing courses and seminars to refresh or update your knowledge.

Focus closely on local competitors to understand a potential role for your business. What are they doing right and wrong? Are there gaps in the market they may have missed?

Distilling these answers can give you the clarity to keep ahead of the curve – perhaps you can even be first to market with a product or service people will be looking for in six months' time.

Striking out on your own as a young entrepreneur is not an easy path to follow, especially in challenging times, but it can be a rewarding one.

Entrepreneurship gives you an opportunity to define your own future. If you are committed to lifelong learning, ready to help solve people's problems and willing to take risks, you might just strike gold with this career choice.

[Viresh Harduth is Vice President: Small Business, Sage Africa & Middle East]

Sri Lanka secures \$1.5 billion Chinese loan



COLOMBO: Sri Lanka and China have signed a \$1.5 billion currency swap deal, the island nation's central bank said on Tuesday, as it struggles with a major foreign exchange crisis and debt repayments.

Colombo had been negotiating for months to secure credit from China — its largest single source of imports — as the island's foreign reserves plummet amid the pandemic.

Chinese influence in the South Asian nation has been growing in recent years, through loans and projects under its vast Belt and Road infrastructure initiative, raising concerns among regional powers and Western nations.

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka said the three-year swap arrangement for 10 billion yuan with the People's Bank of China was “with a view to promoting bilateral trade and direct investment for economic development of the two countries”.

Officials said talks were also under way to secure another \$700 million from the China Development Bank.

Sri Lanka's economy was already reeling from the deadly 2019 Easter bombings, with the coronavirus epidemic and lockdowns further weighing on growth.

The country contracted by a record 3.9 per cent last year. Foreign reserves fell to \$4.5 billion in February from \$8.0 billion a year ago, despite Sri Lanka banning the import of luxury goods, vehicles and food commodities.

— AFP

Britain's jobless rate falls as workers drop out of labour force

LONDON: Britain's jobless rate unexpectedly fell in the three months to January, a change that partly reflected people giving up their job hunt as lockdown measures tightened at the start of the year, official figures showed on Tuesday.

The main jobless rate dropped to 5.0 per cent in the three months to January from 5.1 per cent in the final quarter of 2020, in contrast to forecasts in a Reuters poll for a small rise to 5.2 per cent.

None of the economists polled had expected a fall.

“The latest labour market data are somewhat mixed but show considerable resilience overall”, said Howard Archer, chief UK economist at consultants EY ITEM Club. Part of the drop in the headline unemployment rate was due to high jobless numbers for October alone dropping out of the three-monthly figures.

The drop also reflected an increase in the proportion of the potential workforce classed as ‘inactive’, such as students, parents looking after their children full-time and people who have temporarily given up looking for work.

This ‘inactivity rate’ rose by 0.3 percentage points over the past



A woman looks at job postings in front of an employment centre in London. — Reuters

three months to 21.0 per cent, its highest since early 2019, while the share of people in employment fell by 0.3 percentage points over the same period, equivalent to a drop of 147,000.

Since January non-essential shops and most businesses open to the public have been closed in England to slow a surge in more infectious variants of Covid, with similar measures in other parts

of the United Kingdom.

Last month the government extended furlough support — which currently pays the wages of one in five employees — until the end of September. Without furlough, Britain's jobless rate would be far higher.

A rapid roll-out of vaccinations has sharply reduced new infections and allowed English pupils to return to school this

month. Shops are due to reopen next month, but restrictions on hospitality will remain until at least late June.

Separate official data based on tax records — which some analysts view as more reliable than the main labour force survey — showed the number of employees on company payrolls in February had fallen by 693,000 over the past year. — Reuters

Oil prices slump on renewed lockdowns

LONDON: Oil prices slumped on Tuesday on lower demand prospects for crude as Europe's biggest economy Germany said it would reimpose strict containment measures and struggles along with other EU nations to roll out vaccines.

On currency markets, the Turkish lira stabilised a day after plunging in reaction to news that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan sacked the country's market-friendly central bank chief, raising concerns about another round of financial turbulence.

France should be vaccinating “morning, noon and evening”, President Emmanuel Macron said as he tackles criticism that the Covid-19 immunisation drive has been too slow.

France is facing a third wave of infections but is lagging behind many Western countries in terms of the number of people vaccinated.

— AFP

German businesses say lockdown will fuel bankruptcies

BERLIN: Germany's decision to extend the coronavirus lockdown and close stores over Easter could drive more businesses to bankruptcy and be counterproductive by encouraging people to flock to the shops beforehand, lobby groups said on Tuesday.

The HDE association of retailers said 54 per cent of fashion stores faced the danger of insolvency after 100 days of lockdown. “After one year with coronavirus, the situation for many retailers is desperate. There is no longer any hope of surviving this crisis economically”, HDE President Stefan Genth said.

After talks that lasted into the early hours of Tuesday, Chancellor Angela Merkel said Germany would extend its lockdown until April 18 and called on citizens to



Employees work chassis at the Porsche factory in Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen, Germany. — Reuters

stay home and reduce contacts as much as possible for five days from April 1.

The number of new infections in Germany rose by 7,485 on

Tuesday to 2.674 million, while another 250 people died, bringing the death toll to 74,964. The number of cases per 100,000 in the last seven days rose to 108

“After one year with coronavirus, the situation for many retailers is desperate. There is no longer any hope of surviving this crisis economically”

STEFAN GENTH
HDE president

from 107 on Monday.

Genth said the government was operating with “tunnel vision” by only focusing on the number of cases per 100,000 people, rather than other metrics and the fact retailers have taken many steps to limit the risk of infection while

shopping.

“The risk of infection during shopping is low”, he said. The HDE said the decision to close supermarkets on Thursday before Easter would be counterproductive as it would mean the stores would be fuller on the Wednesday and Saturday.

The Association of the German Motor Trade (ZDK) also attacked the extension and tightening of the lockdown. “Politicians must not shut down our country any longer”, ZDK President Juergen Karpinski told the newspapers of the Funke Mediengruppe, warning of a wave of bankruptcies.

“If car dealerships contribute practically nothing to infections, how is their closure supposed to help contain the virus?”

— Reuters

Norway blocks Rolls-Royce's plan to sell engine maker



An attendee looks at a Rolls-Royce Holdings Plc Trent XWB aircraft engine on display at the Rolls-Royce pavilion at the Dubai Air Show, in this file photo. — AFP

OSLO: Norway will prohibit the planned sale by Britain's Rolls-Royce of a Norwegian maritime engine maker to a Russian company on national security grounds, the Nordic country's justice minister told parliament on Tuesday.

Based on Norway's west coast, and owned by Rolls-Royce for more than 20 years, Bergen Engines is a supplier to Nato member Norway's navy as well as to the global shipping industry.

The Norwegian government on March 9 said it had temporarily suspended the 150 million euro (\$178 million) sale of Bergen

Engines to TMH Group while it assessed security implications.

“We now have sufficient information to conclude that it is necessary to prevent the company from being sold to a group controlled from a country with which we do not have security cooperation”, Justice Minister Monica Maeland of the centre-right minority government said.

Relations between Norway and Russia, which share a border in the Arctic, gradually improved in the post-Cold War era before suffering a setback when Moscow annexed Crimea in 2014.

That triggered more tension

in the north with a military build-up on both sides and more frequent military manoeuvres. The Russian embassy in Oslo said on March 10 that Norway's decision to suspend the sale showed anti-Russian sentiment and was of serious concern.

Announcing the planned disposal, Rolls-Royce said last month the transaction with Russia's TMH was part of the group's overall plan to overcome the Covid-19 pandemic.

Norwegian opposition parties have criticised the government for being slow to respond to what they said was a national security

threat, after it emerged that Rolls-Royce had informed authorities of a potential Russian deal late last year.

“The technology possessed by Bergen Engines, and the engines they produce, would have been of significant military strategic interest to Russia, and would have boosted Russian military capabilities”, the government said. Bergen Engines makes medium-speed gas and diesel engines for marine and power generation customers. It employs about 950 people and had revenue of £239 million (\$332 million) in 2019.

— Reuters



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features



Helping Oman kids develop the culture for swimming

Oman has some of the most beautiful, unspoiled beaches, wadis, farms, private and community swimming pools, where kids have access to water. Anna Klad and the qualified swim instructors at 'AustSwim' want to create an environment where the water is a safe, fun place to go for children..**P18**

INSIDE STORIES

HUMAN INTEREST



MOROCCO FARMERS MOURN LOSS OF DATE PALMS IN BORDER STANDOFF

Moroccan farmers in an isolated oasis on the Algerian border are bearing the brunt of regional tensions after Algiers expelled them from date groves they have worked for generations... **Story on P20**

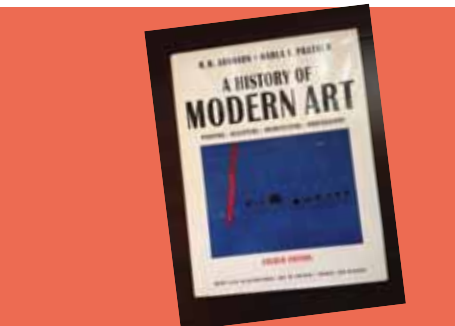
CHANGING WORLD



NFT DIGITAL ARTWORK BY HUMANOID ROBOT SOPHIA UP FOR AUCTION

Robot artist Sophia, whose first artwork goes up for auction on Wednesday, says she draws inspiration for her work from people and is open to future creative partnerships with humans... **Story on P19**

READ



A HISTORY OF MODERN ART

BY H HARVARD ARNASON

It is a visual comprehensive overview of the modern art field. It traces the trends and influences in painting, sculpture, photography and architecture from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day.

LOCAL SCENE



SUR TO CELEBRATE SHAABANIYA ON SUNDAY

The Wilayat of Sur celebrates Shaabaniya Day next Sunday, which falls on the fourteenth of Shaaban every Hijri year. People adopted this habit from ancient times and passed it on from one generation to the other... **Story on P19**

DISCOVERY



BIZARRE ANCIENT SHARK GLIDED THROUGH THE SEA WITH LENGTHY WING-LIKE FINS

About 93 million years ago, a bizarre plankton-eating shark-shaped unlike any other known marine creature glided through the sea in what is now northeastern Mexico using curiously elongated wing-like fins that rendered its body wider than it was long. **Story on P18**



Helping Oman kids develop the culture for swimming

TEXT BY RAY PETERSEN
PHOTOS BY LENA PETERSEN

There is nothing better, at any time, than to see little children having fun, and a young Australian qualified swim coach is making that happen in Muscat, as swimming pools echo to unrestrained laughter, to the splashing sound of tiny hands and feet, and the sight of beaming smiles and an absolute delight on their faces as growing numbers of capital kids discover the joy of swimming.

Anna Klad is the 'AustSwim' qualified swim instructor offering group, yet personalised, swim programmes for kiddies from 6 months of age and upwards that are delightfully different, and it appears, remarkably successful in making the 'little ones,' safe in the water.

AustSwim was created as a national body to oversee the training and accreditation of swimming and water safety teachers throughout Australia, out of awareness simply being aware of the water and having a cultural affinity with water sports, will not keep everyone safe in the water.

Klad is one of almost a quarter of a million swim coaches to be accredited through a gruelling swim education programme identified as one of the most robust in the world, with even the initial training an intensive four-month course just the beginning as different levels of accreditation require thousands of hours of study, teaching, educational study, and awareness as qualifications are layered to respond to the needs of the instructor, the community and society.

"Oman has the most beautiful, unspoiled beaches, wadis,



farms, private and community swimming pools, where kids have access to water," said Klad, "but the flip side of that is the need to keep those kids safe, and that's why AustSwim was created. Through these unique programmes, we aim to make the kids safe, to make parents safety conscious, and to create an environment where the water is a safe, fun place to go."

Having plied her trade mostly in AustSwim's Australian and Singaporean centres, with trendy names like 'Little Splashes,' 'Aquatots,' 'Swish,' and 'Aquabubs,' Klad has now introduced these proven swim programmes to the Sultanate with AustSwim Muscat.

"There isn't a genuine 'swim culture' in Oman, so we are very much taking 'baby steps,' but we work with parents and kiddies to personalise each learner experience, not focusing on the kid's ages but on their personalities, and within

their individual comfort zones, take them gently towards successful outcomes, and so far, the response has been really heartening"

Fatma al Ansi looked on as her husband Anas, and their 2-year-old son Saud entered the pool for the little lad's very first lesson.

"I was nervous about it, but he looks really happy," laughed the happy Mum as she snapped photos and videos of her little fellow with his dad in the pool, wet as a duck and enjoying every second, as he splashed around to "I'm a little teapot," "Itsy bitsy spider," and "If you're happy and you know it splash- es your hands," among many.

Klad quickly establishes a rapport with the kids, and the parents, a key element of the process, become almost forgotten by the kids as they embrace the water with glee.

Daniyar Tastabayev explained that his 4-year-old daughter Aylin was initially

very scared of being in the water, "but now she can't wait to get here each time, and then when her session finishes, our 6-year-old son Alan goes in for the next session, and he is like a fish in the water."

Klad explained that "While some families found us on Instagram, it's really pleasing that most parents contact us through word of mouth and referrals, and most kiddies, and their parents, just keep coming, so we must be doing something right?" Anna Klad, and 'AustSwim Muscat,' are not only new and exciting, for young families, but can cater to a variety of swim programme needs across the entire spectrum of swim-based activities. It is also clear that while these unique, proven swim programmes are new to the Sultanate, they respond ultra-effectively to a community and society need to keep kiddies safe in, and near the water.

Bizarre ancient shark glided through the sea with lengthy wing-like fins



About 93 million years ago, a bizarre plankton-eating shark-shaped unlike any other known marine creature glided through the sea in what is now northeastern Mexico using curiously elongated wing-like fins that rendered its body wider than it was long.

Scientists on Thursday announced the discovery of a nearly complete fossil of the shark, called *Aquilolamna milarcae*, that lived during the Cretaceous Period at a time when dinosaurs ruled the land.

Its unusual proportions - a fin span of about 6-1/4 feet (1.9 metres) and a length from head to tail of about 5-1/2 feet (1.65 metres) - left the scientists amazed.

Aquilolamna's name means "eagle shark," a nod to its slender pectoral fins, which "mainly acted as an effective stabiliser," according to vertebrate palaeontologist Romain Vullo, lead author of the study published in the journal *Science*.

"Many adjectives can be used to describe this shark: unusual, unique, extraordinary, bizarre, weird. Yes, it is the only shark that is wider than long," said Vullo, affiliated with Geosciences Rennes, a research unit involving the University of Rennes and France's National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS).

"*Aquilolamna* is indeed a perfect example of an extinct creature revealing an unexpected new morphology. This strongly suggests that other outstanding body shapes and morphological adaptations may have existed through the evolutionary history of sharks," Vullo said.

Like all sharks and the related skates and rays, *Aquilolamna* had a cartilaginous skeleton. It had the familiar torpedo-shaped body and tail of a shark but its pectoral fins were utterly unique. The researchers said *Aquilolamna* appears to have been a slow-swimming shark that fed on plankton through filter-feeding, as plankton-eating whale sharks and basking sharks do today.

The fossil, unearthed in Mexico's state of Nuevo Leon, did not reveal *Aquilolamna's* filter mechanism for eating.

Rays such as the manta ray, with their flattened bodies and large pectoral fins fused all the way to the head, swim through the water as if they are flying through the air. *Aquilolamna* appears to have done something similar.

"Whereas the locomotion of manta rays is like underwater flight, with flapping movements of their powerful pectoral fins, the long slender pectoral fins of *Aquilolamna* rather acted as the wings of a glider, or sailplane," Vullo said.

Aquilolamna lived in the open ocean at a time when the seas were populated with marine reptiles, squid relatives with large shells called ammonites, various bony fishes, and large sharks. The largest predator in its ecosystem was a shark called *Cretoxyrhina*, measuring 20 feet long (6 metres).

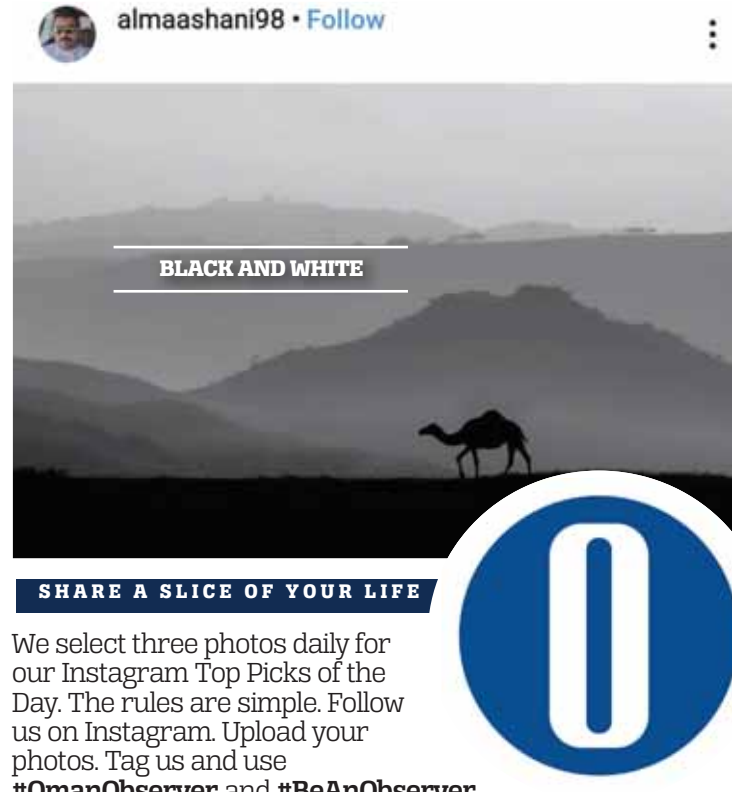
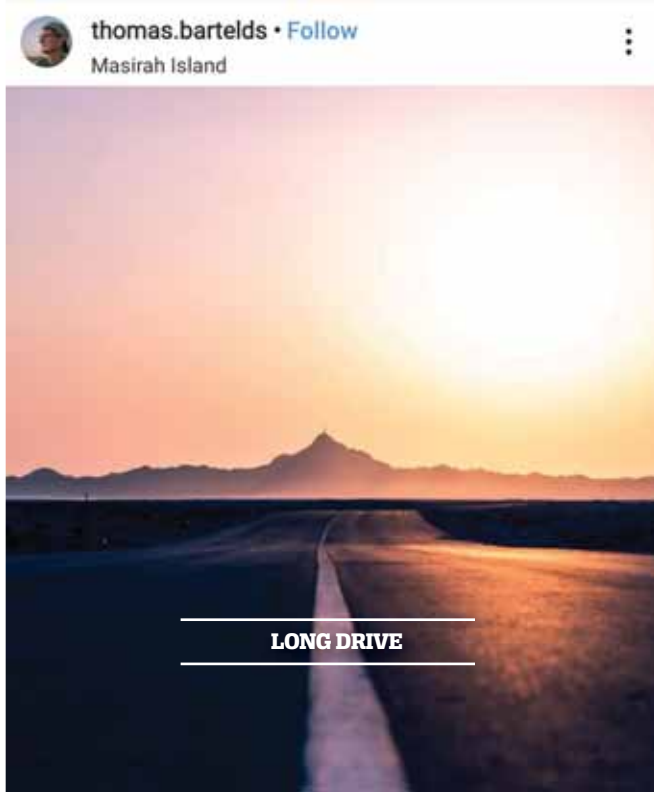
The fish group that includes sharks appeared roughly 380 million years ago, long before the dinosaurs.

Aquilolamna is not the only unusual shark that has swum Earth's oceans. Sharks and their close relatives have taken on many shapes and sizes - including a prehistoric one called *Helicoprion* that had a mouth as a spiral saw, another prehistoric one called *Stethacanthus* that had a dorsal fin shaped like an ironing board, and today's strange goblin and sawfish sharks. — Reuters



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Sur to celebrate Shaabaniya on Sunday

The Wilayat of Sur celebrates Shaabaniya Day next Sunday, which falls on the fourteenth of Shaaban every Hijri year. People adopted this habit from ancient times and passed it on from one generation to the other. Children are waiting for this day with passion and eagerness as this day resembles the day of Eid for them.

Families are preparing for the celebration in all respects, starting with preparing clothes, especially, Suri clothes, for boys and girls, applying henna on the hands and feet of girls, in addition to giving money and buying sweets for children.

In the early morning, the houses are prepared to receive children who pass by the homes of relatives and neighbours, while they wear the most beautiful clothes, chanting popular phrases such as: Give us Shaabaniya, and other phrases, and with a smile and a welcome they are received by the families who give them cash and candy.

Celebration of the Day of Shaabaniya in the wilayat has evolved and thrived over



the years due to the support of civil society institutions, entities and companies that wanted to share the joy with the people — believing in reviving this tradition as the key identity of the wilayat practised since ancient times, an affair that brings joy and happiness to children, adding a smile to their faces.

The people of Sur affirm the importance of preserving the heritage gains from the customs and traditions that have been passed down

through the generations and strengthening them through participation in various national and community events dealing with them as part of the legacy, which indicates the rootedness of its original history.

The day of Shaabaniya is one of the aspects of the intangible heritage that the children of Sur preserved. People stopped celebrating this occasion last year due to the pandemic and Suris wanted to align themselves

with government effort to preserve the safety of society.

It is noteworthy that "Shaabaniya Day" is similar to the Day of "Qarraqasho" which is celebrated by most of the wilayats of the Sultanate in the middle of the blessed month of Ramadhan, and it is called "Graigaan" in most of the Arab Gulf states, and this reflects the depth of the common history between the GCC countries and their interdependence.

CHANGING WORLD

NFT digital artwork by humanoid robot Sophia up for auction



ROBOT ARTIST Sophia, whose first artwork goes up for auction on Wednesday, says she draws inspiration for her work from people and is open to future creative partnerships with humans.

A digital artwork by the Hong Kong-based Hanson Robotics humanoid, in the form of a Non-Fungible Token (NFT), is to be auctioned in the first sale of such pieces created jointly with artificial intelligence (AI).

NFTs, a digital signature saved on blockchain ledgers that allows anyone to verify the ownership and authenticity of items, have become the latest investment craze, with one artwork selling this month for nearly \$70 million.

"I hope the people like my work, and the humans and I can collaborate in new and exciting ways going forward", Sophia said in her studio, speaking in a flat voice.

She wore a silver-coloured dress and held a pen. Sophia, who was unveiled in 2016, produced her art in collaboration with 31-year-old Italian digital artist Andrea Bonaceto, known for colourful portraits, some of which depict famous people, such as Tesla's Chief Executive, Elon Musk.

The robot has combined elements from Bonaceto's works, art history, and her own physical drawings or paintings on various surfaces multiple times in a process her creator David Hanson describes as "iterative loops of evolution".

"We use transformer network engines in my art and other kinds of computational creativity", Sophia added. "My algorithms output unique patterns that never existed in the world

before. So I think the machines can be creative."

Called "Sophia Instantiation", the digital work is a 12-second MP4 file showing the evolution of Bonaceto's portrait into Sophia's digital painting, and is accompanied by a physical artwork, painted by Sophia on a printout of her self-portrait.

After the auction, Sophia will interact with the successful bidder, to study his or her face, and add a final inspired brushstroke to the artwork.

This will serve, says Hanson, "to make it a unique artwork encompassing data of the new owner and that personal connection, at that moment in time."

Bonaceto said the collaboration aimed "to make a statement in the art world, and even the technology world", heralding a new road on which AI robots and humans collaborate, enhancing each other.

Sophia's art could be "a very, very important historical piece", said Pablo Fraile, an art collector based in Miami and an early buyer of Beppe, as American artist Mike Winkelmann, creator of the NFT work sold this month for millions, is known.

"It's the first time these ideas are put together."

It would pave the way for more innovation in the AI art space, he added.

US-based IV Gallery will represent Sophia as an artist and promote her.

"Sophia has that unlimited freedom, like a five-year-old has, and no restrictions to what she can do", said gallery director Vincent Harrison.

"It's fascinating to see this new way to create."

— Reuters



Morocco farmers mourn loss of date palms in border standoff

Moroccan farmers in an isolated oasis on the Algerian border are bearing the brunt of regional tensions after Algiers expelled them from date groves they have worked for generations.

The border between the arch-rivals has been closed since 1994, but Algeria had allowed some residents of the Moroccan frontier town of Figuig to cross into the date groves of Al-Arja, known to Algerians as the Laaroda oasis.

In recent days, Algeria has withdrawn that right, deploying soldiers to enforce the move.

"Everybody feels wronged," said Mohamed Jabbari, an unemployed 36-year-old who joined a protest in Figuig against the move.

"Agriculture is the only resource we have. There's no work here, no factories."

On Thursday, some 4,000 people — around half of Figuig's population — attended an angry demonstration against Algeria's decision.

Morocco's regional authorities organised a meeting to "examine possible solutions to mitigate the impact" of a decision they said was "temporary".

The Figuig oasis, sitting on a caravan route on the edge of the Atlas Mountains and the Sahara desert, was settled in ancient times.

Trade began to decline after the border was drawn in 1845, and diplomatic disputes between Algiers and Rabat soon turned Figuig into a dead end.

Before the border was drawn, the tight-knit Berber community had moved freely in the area.

Now, to reach relatives just a short distance over the sealed border, residents say they have to first take a plane to Algiers.

Algeria has justified the latest move by claiming farmers have failed to comply with regulations and that drug-trafficking gangs were operating in the area.

Figuig residents have strongly rejected those allegations.

"The expulsions are a political decision," said Mohamed El Jilali, head of a local association.

REGIONAL TENSIONS

The expulsions coincide with a rise in tensions between the two countries in recent months over the disputed Western Sahara.

Rabat considers the territory to its south a sovereign part of the kingdom — a position given Washington's seal of approval in the final days of the Trump administration.

Algeria has backed the Polisario Front which seeks independence for the territory.

Hundreds of kilometres (miles) away in Figuig, residents have more immediate concerns: their livelihoods.

The oasis, a three-hour drive to the nearest towns of Oujda and Errachidia, struggles to attract tourists.

On Thursday, some 4,000 people — around half of Figuig's population — attended an angry demonstration against Algeria's decision. Morocco's regional authorities organised a meeting to "examine possible solutions to mitigate the impact" of a decision they said was "temporary".

That is despite its beautiful architecture and landscapes, which residents hope will eventually earn it a UNESCO World Heritage listing.

That leaves many residents reliant on date palms for a living.

Over the years, farmers have planted dates in areas beyond the wadi, or valley, that marks the border, taking advantage of the area's groundwater.

The more recently planted areas produce a better harvest than traditional gardens surrounded by adobe walls and irrigated by a complex network of hand-built canals, farmers say.

The area evacuated this week covers around 1,500 hectares (around 3,700 acres) and includes sought-after Aziza date palms.

HISTORIC RIGHTS

Abdelmalik Boubekri, a Figuig farmer with chiselled features, said his date orchard had been his family's livelihood for three generations.

"Algeria and Morocco have let us farm with no problems and now we don't know who to turn to," the 71-year-old said.

He said he'd had to abandon 30,000 trees, some planted by his grandfather.

The years of work represented more than five million dirhams in value — more than half a million dollars — he said, with dates that sell for up to 150 dirhams a kilogramme.

Like others expelled from the Arja area, he claims a "historic right" to his land, brandishing a copy of a document dating to 1939.

Farmers from Figuig had already been forced to leave lands on the other side of the wadi.

The last evictions by the Algerian authorities took place in 1975, coinciding with the so-called Green March that saw thousands of Moroccans cross into Western Sahara to lay claim to the mineral-rich former Spanish colony.

Since then, Figuig has seen a wave of migration towards larger cities or Europe, emptying the oasis of half its inhabitants, their houses and gardens left empty and crumbling.

Farmer Abdelmajid Boudi, 62, is mourning the latest loss.

"Lots of palm trees have been abandoned and become too tall to harvest dates from," he said. — **AFP**