

BP to sell 20% stake in Oman's Block 61 to PTTEP

BP has agreed to sell a 20 per cent participating interest in Oman's Block 61 to PTT Exploration and Production Public Company Limited (PTTEP) of Thailand for a total consideration of \$2.6 billion. Following completion of the sale, BP will remain operator of the block, holding a 40 per cent interest. Subject to approval from the Sultanate of Oman and partners, the deal is expected to complete this year. **DETAILS ON P13**



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OMAN OBSERVER

www.omanobserver.om editor@omanobserver.om

P10

MESSI HITS GOAL
650 AS BARCA
GET REVENGE
ON BILBAO



P13

PANDEMIC, ECONOMIC
CRUNCH DAMPEN
POWER DEMAND
GROWTH IN OMAN



P18

REBECCA
ELFVerson:
FINDING MY
INNER MUSE



MUSCAT

HM CONDOLENCES TO SAUDI KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the death of Princess Noura bint Fahd bin Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Saud. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy to King Salman, praying to the Almighty Allah to rest the departed's soul in peace in paradise and grant her family patience. — ONA

NEW DELHI

INDIA SPENDS BIG TO REVIVE ECONOMY

India unveiled a massive spending plan focused on healthcare and infrastructure on Monday, as the government sought to boost a coronavirus-ravaged economy on course for its biggest annual contraction on record. The nation of 1.3 billion was badly hit by one of the world's strictest virus lockdowns, with growth slumping by a historic 23.9 per cent in April-June, and the economy expected to contract 7.7 per cent in 2020-21. "This budget provides every opportunity for our economy to raise and capture the pace that it needs for a sustainable growth," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman told parliament in her annual budget speech.

DETAILS ON P15



INSIDE



LIBYAN ELECTION VOW MUST
BE HONOURED 'AT ALL COSTS'

P6



EU LOOKS TO BOOST SLUGGISH
COVID VACCINATION ROLLOUT

P8

Decree on insurance protection to military personnel

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday issued a Royal Decree.

Royal Decree No 15/2021 on implementing the "Unified System of Extending Insurance Protection to GCC Military Personnel Operating in GCC Member States Other Than Their Own".

Article (1) states that the provisions of the "Unified System of Extending Insurance Protection to GCC Military

Personnel Operating in GCC Member States Other Than Their Own", shall be applied in accordance with the version attached to this Decree, bearing in mind the following: The provisions of the "Law of Post-Service Pensions and Gratuities for Personnel of the Defence Ministry and the Sultan's Armed Forces", issued under Royal Decree No 3/2002, shall apply to Defence Ministry and Sultan's Armed Forces' Omani military

personnel operating in GCC military units governed by GCC military retirement systems, from among those who do not get pension from the Sultanate.

The ceiling of a salary subject to subscription, as per the start of the salary band of a corresponding rank, shall be in line with the system enforced at the Defence Ministry in the Sultanate. The entitlement of personnel governed by the system attached shall be

restricted to the pension. The pension shall be calculated at a rate of 2.5 per cent of the monthly average of the subscribable salary received during the last five years of service, multiplied by the number of service years, to a maximum of 80 per cent of the average of the subscribable salary.

SUBSCRIPTION

The family of the deceased retiree, as per the system attached,

shall be entitled to a grant of RO 1,000. Article (2) stipulates that the Ministry of Finance shall pay the subscription difference between the contribution of the country stated in the "Law on Post-Service Pensions and Gratuities for Personnel of the Defence Ministry and the Sultan's Armed Forces" (on one hand) and the laws and military retirement systems in the country where the military person works (on the other hand).

TURN TO P2

FAREWELL TO UZBEK AMBASSADOR



On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received at his office in Muscat on Monday Anvar Abdulkhalimov, Ambassador of Uzbekistan to the Sultanate, to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty. **DETAILS ON P2**

VAT registration begins today

MUSCAT: Tax Authority announced the start of VAT Registration as of today (February 1, 2021) until March 15, 2021 for taxable persons with annual supplies exceeding or expected to exceed RO 1 million.

The voluntary registration will also be available for taxable persons with annual supplies or expenses exceeding or expected to exceed (RO 19,250).

The registration must be made through TA's online portal

<https://www.taxoman.gov.om>.

In addition, the authority advises taxable persons to register within the preset deadlines to avoid any penalties levied on late registration.

INFORMATION

Further, taxable persons may find more information regarding registration, procedures and other VAT details and the guides published on TA's website.

As many as 94 foodstuff items

have been zero-rated for VAT, which is set to be implemented in the Sultanate with effect from April 16, 2021.

The items in questions are detailed in an executive decision issued by Tax Authority.

The list includes meat, fish, poultry, dairy products, fresh eggs, vegetables, fruits, coffee, tea, cardamom, cereals, olive oil, sugar, baby foods and cereals, bread, bottled drinking water and table salt. — ONA

Not considering lockdown amid surge in cases

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

@zainabalnassri

Although there had been a decrease in Covid-19 cases since mid of October, last year, the number of patients in intensive care units has doubled to 102, within two weeks only. The number was only 51 before January 21.

This was stated by Dr Ahmed bin Mohammad al Saeedi, Minister of Health, who pointed out that the sudden increase in cases is "a very worrying and dangerous indicator."

During the press conference of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, Dr Al Saeedi said that "potential lockdown steps will be the last resort (of the pandemic situation)" and that the panel hopes not to go that far. "It is our duty to protect ourselves and society through strict adherence to precautionary measures," he added.

He said that the closure of the Sultanate's airports is "under

study and deliberation' by the Supreme Committee, which, he hoped, would not be compelled to re-lock Omani airports for international flights "because that will cause immense social and economic losses".

So far, the Sultanate has registered six cases of the new Covid-19 variant, notorious for their

swift propagation, said the minister, noting that the most globally common among the new variants is the British strain, but, he said that the Sultanate has advanced facilities to detect it, through all labs — whether at the Ministry of Health or Sultan Qaboos University or private universities.

He said that till date the Sultanate has conducted 1.550 million tests, and that the number of PfizerBionNTech vaccination doses distributed stood at 39,772 — given to 27,400 people as a first shot and to 12,272 people as a second dose.

"We all pay the price because of some irresponsible and careless group of people. Not wearing a mask is a crime.

6

CONFIRMED
CASES OF
NEW COVID
STRAIN IN
SULTANATE

Myanmar military promises new election

YANGON: The United States led governments around the world in calling for the restoration of Myanmar's democracy on Monday after the military staged a coup, arresting civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other politicians. The

United States "will take action against those responsible if these steps are not reversed", White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said in a statement.

She added that the US opposed any attempt to alter the outcome

of the November elections, which handed Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) an overwhelming landslide, but sparked allegations of vote irregularities by the routed military-backed party.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson condemned the coup and Suu Kyi's imprisonment.

"The vote of the people must be respected and civilian leaders released," he tweeted.

SEE ALSO P 7 and 9



A soldier stands guard at a blockaded road in Naypyidaw. — AFP

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 28°C Min 17°C SALALAH: Max 26°C Min 18°C NIZWA: Max 29°C Min 13°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 06:47 FAJR: 05:30 DHUHR: 12:26 ASR: 15:36 MAGHRIB: 17:59 ISHA: 19:11

Asaad bids farewell to Uzbek Ambassador

MUSCAT: On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received Anvar Abdukhalimov, Ambassador of Uzbekistan to the Sultanate

to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty, in Muscat on Monday. The ambassador thanked His Majesty the Sultan, the government and the Omani people for the support, which enabled him to carry out his assignments.

He also wished His Majesty a good health, happiness and

a long life, and the Sultanate further progress and growth under the wise leadership of His Majesty.

HH Sayyid Asaad thanked the ambassador for his efforts exerted in serving the relations between the two countries. He also wished the ambassador success.

MINISTER RECEIVES UNICEF REGIONAL DIRECTOR



Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, received Ted Chaiban, Regional Director of the UNICEF in the Middle East and North Africa Region, in Muscat on Monday. They reviewed joint cooperation between the Sultanate and the UNICEF. The UNICEF Regional Director praised the Sultanate's efforts made in international cooperation. The Minister of Health lauded the efforts of the UNICEF in the Sultanate and in the region as well. The meeting was attended by Lana al Wreikat, UNICEF Representative to the Sultanate and ministry officials. — ONA

Royal Decree on insurance

Article (3) instructs all military and security departments that apply to their respective personnel the "Law on Post-Service Pensions and Gratuities for Personnel of the Defence Ministry and the Sultan's Armed Forces" or any other military retirement law to register their GCC employees and to pay the prescribed subscriptions in accordance with the system attached to this Decree.

Article (4) states that the Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs shall issue the regulations and decisions necessary for the implementation of the system attached to this Decree.

Article (5) cancels all that contradicts this Decree or its attached system or contravenes their provisions. Article (6) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced with effect from June 1, 2011. — ONA

MoCIIP stops requests for expos

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttvvp

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has stopped receiving requests for activities like sales promotions and exhibitions.

According to a statement issued by the ministry on Sunday, promotional activities that will attract multitudes of people will not be allowed as part of the Supreme Committee's decision.

"The suspension is based on the Supreme Committee's decision to ban events and activities such as exhibitions that result in mass gatherings", said the statement.

The Ministry also said it still continued to receive requests for promotional offers and discounts. "The Ministry would like to clarify that it continues to receive requests for promotional offers and discounts, noting that the requests that have been stopped

are applications for holding exhibitions and conferences," the statement said.

Last week, the Supreme Committee tackling the developments from the Covid-19 situation prohibited all group events like conferences, exhibitions and marriages.

It also postponed students' return to universities and advised citizens and residents against foreign travel, as part of its efforts to further restrict the spread of the virus. Hamoud al Wahaibi, a retired ministry of health official in Ruwi, said, "Most people still do not know the fact that the coronavirus infection spreads through droplets generated when an infected person coughs or sneezes. I don't think people are quite fearful now. They mingle very freely at all shops without any hesitation", he said, adding, "patrols by the cops must be stepped up to prevent people from crowding".

Plan to build 141 houses this year



OHOOO AL JAILANIYAH MUSCAT, FEB 1

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning unveiled a plan to establish a cooperative housing system which is aimed at attracting and regulating housing assistance provided by charitable and public organisations and social responsibility sectors at the private sector as well as citizens willing to contribute, and bringing them under one umbrella.

The unified system is expected to enhance the role of the cooperative and charitable sector as well as reduce reliance on the government in implementing social housing programmes.

The ministry has devised a clear-cut plan which began with formulating a work team comprising specialists from the ministry and related sectors. The team is tasked with laying down the system's general principles. The ministry will endeavour to spread the concept of

cooperative housing among the charitable and public organisations and the other stakeholders. Besides, the ministry will devise the legal framework and the organisational structure of the system with the participation of specialists from various public and charitable sectors. The general frameworks of the system will be approved by the concerned authorities.

Among the government's most prominent social housing programmes is the housing assistance programme which targets to provide assistance to low-income families whose monthly income does not exceed RO 300 as well as the social security families. A non-refundable housing assistance grant not exceeding RO 25,000 is provided once to targeted families to help them build a new house as well as renovate or add facilities to an existing house.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning plans to grant 3,600 housing assistance in this year including 878

housing assistance to the tune of RO 21,950,000 currently under process form the 2020 budget. This is in addition to another 2,800 cases at a value of RO 70 million which are expected to be finalised in the current year.

This year the ministry strives to implement 141 residential units at a cost of RO 6 million from this year's budget as part of the residential units programme which aims to provide and construct residential complexes comprising all the public service facilities for low-income citizens.

In addition, in case of availability of financial allocations, the ministry plans to construct 26 residential units in Sarij township in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate as well as 9 residential units in the Niyabat of Tiwi, 51 residential units in Wadi Bani Khalid, 30 residential units in Musandam Governorate and 25 in Al Buraimi Governorate.

Woman arrested for fraud

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) arrested a woman on charges of fraud in Muscat.

The accused offered manpower recruitment services through social networking sites and

received cash transfers from her victims.

After receiving the money, she ignored her clients alleging that the transactions had not been finalised. The case is under process.

CAR THEFT

The police in North Al Batinah Governorate arrested a person in connection with stealing 3 vehicles. The accused targeted a specific type of vehicle using the same criminal method in the three cases.

ZAKAT AL-SEEB COMMITTEE
UNDER SUPERVISION OF MINISTRY
OF ENDOWMENTS & RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

ZAKAT AL-SEEB COMMITTEE
AL-SEEB ENDOWMENT 1

THE FIRST ENDOWMENT FOR THE ZAKAT AL-SEEB COMMITTEE
DEDICATED FOR THE NEEDY AND UNDERPRIVILEGED PEOPLE
THE COLLECTED FUNDS ARE ALLOCATED FOR INSOLVENT FAMILIES AND VARIOUS CHARITIES PROJECTS

ABU HURAIRAH (MAY ALLAH BE PLEASED WITH HIM) REPORTED:
THE MESSENGER OF ALLAH (ﷺ) SAID, "WHEN A MAN DIES, HIS DEEDS COME TO AN END EXCEPT FOR THREE THINGS: SADAQAH JARIYAH (CEASELESS CHARITY); A KNOWLEDGE WHICH IS BENEFICIAL, OR A VIRTUOUS DESCENDANT WHO PRAYS FOR HIM (FOR THE DECEASED)."

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In brief

■ MUSCAT

OMAN, TURKMENISTAN
REVIEW BILATERAL TIES

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister and Rashid Meredov, Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Turkmenistan discussed the existing relations between the two friendly countries. During the meeting held via video-conferencing today, the two sides affirmed their keenness to continue developing the relations in various spheres. They also exchanged views and consultations on regional and international issues of common concern.

PEOPLE URGED TO DO
ONLINE SHOPPING

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion urged individuals to make use of online shopping or through electronic applications. Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said all commercial establishments to follow the precautionary measures to avoid virus spread among customers. It has been recently noticed that some commercial malls and centres, especially restaurants and cafes, are not abiding by the precautionary measures, he said. It is very important to follow the set precautionary measures; namely wearing masks, maintaining a safe distance (2 metres) between customers at cashier counters, sanitizing shopping trolleys and regulating the entry of customers at a given time to avoid crowding.

AIR BUBBLE WITH INDIA
TO CONTINUE

India has extended the ban on international flights till February 28, but said certain scheduled flights will be allowed on air bubble agreements, including with Oman. "International scheduled flights may be allowed on selected routes by the competent authority on a case-to-case basis", the Directorate General of Civil Aviation added. Scheduled international passenger services have been suspended in India since March 23, but special flights under the Vande Bharat Mission and under bilateral air bubble arrangements. As per the agreement with the Sultanate, 6,000 seats are allowed on either side and only national carriers (Oman Air, SalamAir, Air India and Air India Express) are allowed to operate. The requirements for entering the Sultanate through Oman Airports include all travellers arriving in Oman are required to undergo a PCR test at least 72-hours before their scheduled arrival and to present a certified medical certificate of a negative Covid-19 test result.

Plan to use volunteers to curb violations

SAMUEL KUTTY

@samkutyyp

A plan is on cards to use volunteers at commercial centres and other public places to ensure that people are following precautionary measures.

According to Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, a proposal in this regard has been submitted to the Supreme Committee that deals with the developments arising out of the Covid-19 pandemic situation.

"The ministry has submitted a proposal to the committee to activate scouts and guides in commercial centres and public places to monitor violations", said the minister while speaking at the press conference on Monday.

While ruling out any move to close commercial activities, the minister said, "All businesses that are allowed to operate will remain open unless another decision is issued about them".

While warning against laxity in complying with precautionary measures, Minister of Health Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, said the Supreme Committee



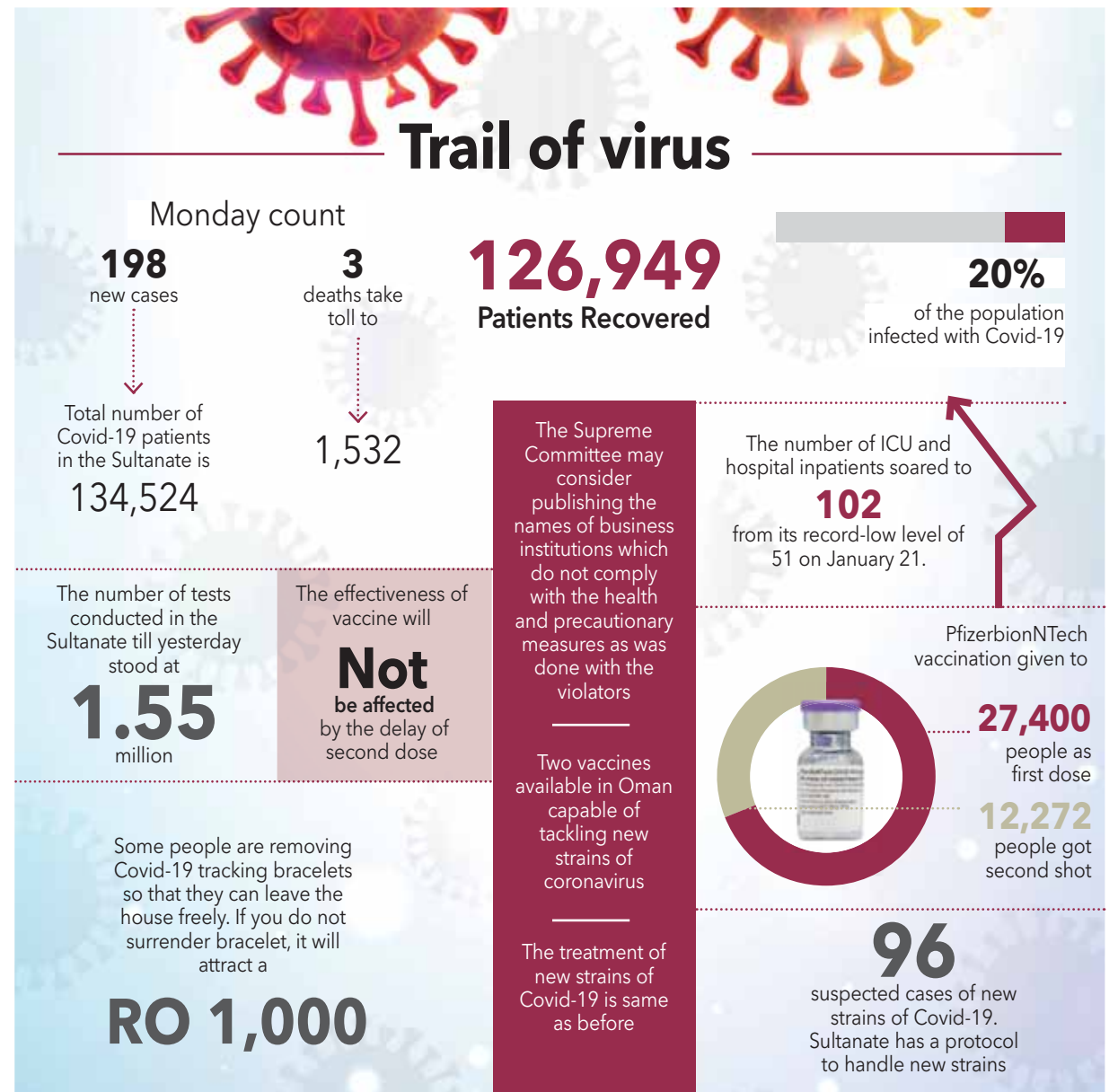
intends to publish names of shops that violate the decisions.

The Sultanate has already proved its ability to overcome the crisis. We have been able to ensure the supplies, meet the essential needs of both citizens and residents, Qais said.

The movement of freight and import continues uninterrupted at the ports and airports.

According to the minister, the reopening of most commercial activities was allowed when the situation was found to be returning to normal.

"Now the situation is again different", he said while appealing to everyone to adhere to the precautionary measures and not to crowd in commercial stores that have promotional offers or discount sales.



■ FROM PAGE 1

Not considering another lockdown, says health minister

■ VACCINES

Regarding the delay in the arrival of Pfizer vaccine, Dr Al Saeedi clarified, "The company was in the process of developing its factories, which led to a temporary interruption in the export of the vaccine. However, the manufacturer confirmed that six week delay will not affect those who took the first dose".

He indicated that 450,000 doses of the vaccine have been reserved and will arrive this month. Priority will be given to those who received the first dose. There are also 2.5 million doses which have been reserved to the Sultanate from vaccine manufacturers, the minister added, hoping that before the

middle of this year, all the first target groups should receive the vaccine.

Besides, Dr Al Saeedi clarified that a person who has received the Pfizer vaccine as a first dose cannot take the AstraZeneca vaccine as a second dose. "The efficacy of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine ranges between 86-90 per cent and Pfizer is 95 per cent. The Sultanate will not go for any vaccine without being 100 per cent sure of its safety", he confirmed.

■ BUSINESS ACTIVITIES

Addressing the press conference, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion,

member of the Supreme Committee, said that most business activities will remain open as of now. He pointed out that the Sultanate proved its ability to address such crises.

■ EDUCATION SECTOR

Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under Secretary Ministry of Education for Education said that the assessment of students depends on the medium of learning. He said that online students will be assessed in accordance with online study modes and, if proved unachievable, their respective parents may approach the school to find an alternative method of assessment.

■ PCR TESTS

Dr Amal al Ma'ani, Director of Contagion Control Department at the Ministry of Health, said that the two vaccines available in the Sultanate will cover the new variants of virus and that the PCR test will show 'positive' result within not more than three months. Any positive result afterwards, will be an indicator that the tested person is indeed infected with the virus, either in its old or new variant, she added.

She said that there are six confirmed cases and 96 suspected cases of new genetic mutations in the Sultanate. "The new strains discovered in the Sultanate are from the same strains found in Britain, Brazil and South Africa.

To reach societal immunity, we have to vaccinate at least 60 per cent of the population, and we started with 20 per cent of the high risk", Dr Al Ma'ani noted.

"Keeping the vaccine at temperatures lower than the imposed degrees may lead to a decline in the efficiency of the vaccine. The effectiveness goes through several experiments, as well as the study after applying the clinical trial. There is no specific examination for the old or new strain, but after taking the test, it is possible to know what kind of strains the person has. The person who received the vaccine does not mean that he is not a carrier of the infection", she clarified.

■ GOVERNOR REVIEWS SAHAM PROJECTS



Shaikh Saif bin Hamyar al Shehi, Governor of North Al Batinah inspected developmental projects in the Wilayat of Saham, on Monday. The governor inspected internal roads and landscaping projects and visited the groundwater dam in Wadi Bani Omar and the sea pier which was damaged by the adverse weather conditions. He also visited the new central market and the artisans market.

Ministry of Information

Postal addresses of the Information Ministry

No.	P.O. Box	Postal Code	Entity
1	100	600 - Muscat	Ministry of Information - Muscat
2	397	100 - Muscat	Radio Sultanate of Oman - Ministry of Information
3	1100	133 - Al Khuwair	Sultanate of Oman Television
4	974	100 - Muscat	Directorate General for Press, Publication and Advertising - Ministry of Information
5	855	117 - Al Wadi Al Kabir	Nizwa Magazine - Ministry of Information
6	20	211 - Salalah	Information Ministry's Bureau in Dhufar Governorate
7	161	811 - Khasab	Information Ministry's Bureau in Musandam Governorate

TO STOP THE INEVITABLE WITHOUT LOCKDOWNS

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Nearly a year after the countries across the world started imposing complete lockdowns, we are still staring at fresh ones. While it is undisputed that lockdowns do help in limiting the community spread of Covid-19, it comes at an extremely high cost and at times even life-threatening with thousands of the employed-class or left to survive or starve on their own.

NOT JUST ON OIL

Over the past decade, with the mushrooming of budget airlines and hotels, more people started travelling and, in the process, countries started depending on these sectors as a primary contributor to the national economy. As the regional economies realised in late 2014, they cannot depend entirely on the oil and gas sector, the tourism and the manufacturing sector emerged as viable alternatives.

The year-long pandemic already affected Oman's tourism sector to the extent that the recovery may take more than a couple of years.

Dr Ahmed Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, said lockdowns will be the last option and that the Supreme Committee hopes not to go that far. "We must protect ourselves and society through strict adherence to precautionary measures."

He added that the closure of the Sultanate's airports is under study and deliberation by the Supreme Committee, which, he hoped, will be not required as it will cause immense social and economic losses.

Some of the hotel operators just want the inflow of tourists to be restored to recover investment because right now we are operating at less than 10 per cent of both staff and client capacity.

"Most of my expatriate staff are yet to return from lockdown-time leave and most of my tourist-source countries are struggling to cope with the pandemic crisis", said a hotel apartment owner.

The decrease in revenues of three-stars to five-stars hotels in the Sultanate until the end of December 2020 decreased 62.9 per cent from December 2019 while occupancies dropped by 52.5 per cent during the same period.

The statistics also showed that they cannot ignore domestic travellers for their international counterparts, because Omani hotel guests 479, 336 and the large expatriate community helped the sector to survive if not thrive, though frequent restrictions halted the expected recovery.

According to economic experts, lockdowns are only preventive measures to delay the inevitable.

VACCINE BEST SHOT

While vaccines are said to be the best possible solution, their effectiveness can be proved only unless 60 per cent of the population are vaccinated.

"The vaccine may prevent you from getting a virus, but it will not stop you from spreading it to others", the Minister of Health said on Monday.

With shutdowns certainly not the answer, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) called on governments to partner with the industry to devise plans to safely re-link people, businesses, and economies when the Covid-19 epidemiological situation permits.

A priority for this critical cooperation is the acceleration of the establishment of global standards for vaccination and testing certification.

"We can see the light at the end of the tunnel as vaccination programmes rollout. Turning this vision into a safe and orderly re-start will require careful planning and coordination by governments and industry. This will be challenging as the priority for the weeks and months ahead will be containing the spread of new variants. But even as the crisis deepens, it is important to prepare the way for a resumption of flights when the epidemiological situation permits", IATA said, urging governments to come out of border closures.

62.9%

The decrease in revenues of three-stars to five-stars hotels until the end of December 2020

According to economic experts, lockdowns are only preventive measures to delay the inevitable. While vaccines are said to be the best possible solution, their effectiveness can be proved only unless 60 per cent of the population are vaccinated

In brief

NEW YORK



ANGER AFTER COPS PEPPER-SPRAY GIRL

A nine-year-old girl was handcuffed and pepper-sprayed by police in the US city of Rochester, footage released showed, sparking new outrage over excesses committed by the country's law enforcement.

Deputy Police Chief Andre Anderson said the girl — who has not been named — had been suffering from a serious mental health emergency, reportedly threatening to take her own life and that of her mother.

Officers called to the scene eventually responded by handcuffing her, before trying to force her into a car and pepper-spraying her when she resisted, body cam videos released by the city's police force showed.

— AFP

JOHANNESBURG



FIRST SHIPMENT OF COVID VACCINE RECEIVED

South Africa on Monday took delivery of its first shipment of coronavirus vaccines, paving the way to the first phase of inoculation in Africa's worst-hit country.

President Cyril Ramaphosa received one million doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, produced by the Serum Institute of India, at Johannesburg's O R Tambo airport, footage from public broadcaster SABC showed.

Another 500,000 doses of the vaccine are expected later this month. — AFP

HARARE



UK SANCTIONS FOUR ZIMBABWE LEADERS

Britain on Monday slapped sanctions on four Zimbabwean officials following the deaths of at least 23 people protesting against the President Emmerson Mnangagwa.

Applying a new sanctions regime following its exit from the European Union, Britain said the travel bans and asset freezes showed it was determined to protect human rights in its former African colony.

"These sanctions send a clear message that we will hold to account those responsible for the most egregious human rights violations, including the deaths of innocent Zimbabweans", Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said in a statement.

"These sanctions target senior individuals in the government, and not ordinary Zimbabweans." — AFP

France warns defiant restaurants

PARIS: The French government warned restaurant owners on Monday that illicit openings would jeopardise their Covid-19 aid, as several defied the pandemic shutdown to serve meals in protest of a measure they say is increasingly untenable.

Cafes and restaurants have been ordered closed since October 30 to curb the outbreak, and cash-strapped owners fear it will be several months before they can get back to business as usual.

"All I'm asking for is the right to work", said Stephane Turillon, a chef in Cusance, eastern France, who launched his campaign for a nationwide protest last month.

Around 100 people gathered in tents he set up outside "La Source Bleue", but after discussions with police and his lawyer he refrained from serving a sit-down meal, offering dishes as takeaway instead.

"We're not going to reopen because I risk having to go to jail or losing my financial aid", Turillon told journalists.

He later led a protest march of some 250 people to the local cemetery to place his apron and



Customers enjoy a lunch at restaurant 'Le Poppies' in Nice. — Reuters

a French flag to honour "French artisans" forced to close during the pandemic.

Dozens of owners emulated his call to action, saying they could not survive on takeout service or deliveries alone, even with the government offering thousands of euros a month to businesses forced to close during the health crisis.

Kathia Boucher offered a single

item, a hearty potato-and-cheese gratin known as tartiflette, at her brasserie in Ligescourt, northern France, where clients were spaced two metres apart.

"My sales from today will go towards paying my fixed costs", said Boucher, who said she had gotten work at a car part factory as well as cleaning jobs in order to make ends meet.

The protests came as Paris

police said on Saturday that agents had discovered 24 restaurants operating illicitly last Thursday and Friday alone, and warned they would step up checks following reports of dozens of similar cases in recent weeks.

One was caught serving judges who worked at the nearby appeals court on the Ile de la Cite, opposite the Paris police headquarters, *Le*

Parisien reported.

Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said owners who defied the shutdowns would see their Covid solidarity funds suspended for a month, "and if they do it again, they won't get any more at all."

"It's extremely hard for restaurants, economically and in terms of morale", he told RTL radio. "But in no way does that justify not respecting the rules."

'NOT ENOUGH'

Restaurants and other businesses that have been forced to close during the health crisis can receive up to 10,000 euros (\$12,000) a month, or compensation equal to 20 per cent of their revenues from 2019, capped at 200,000 euros per month.

But in Lyon, a bastion of French gastronomy, Yannick Moulin called the government's threats "ridiculous" as he discreetly opened the basement of his restaurant Le Francois Villon for a group of regulars on Monday.

"I have loans to pay back, my rent is 5,000 euros a month: The solidarity funds of 10,000 euros are not enough", he said. — AFP

RIVER RHINE FLOODS



A riverbank road is flooded by high water of the Rhine river near Oestrich, western Germany, as the Rhine river burst its banks after snow melting and persistent precipitation. — AFP

Kosovo establishes ties with Israel

TEL AVIV: Israel and Kosovo established diplomatic ties on Monday, with the territory recognising Jerusalem as the Jewish state's capital.

Israel has since August normalised ties with four Arab states under a series of deals brokered by former US president Donald Trump, collectively known as the Abraham Accords.

But the parties to those accords — the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan — have all said their diplomatic missions will be in Tel Aviv, in line with a global consensus against recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital until the Palestinian conflict is resolved.

In exchange for setting up its mission in Jerusalem, Kosovo gets recognition from Israel, as it seeks to further legitimise its 2008 declaration of independence from its former war foe Serbia.

Because of coronavirus restrictions, officials on Monday signed joint declarations separately in Jerusalem and Pristina.

Israel's Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi said the ceremony marked "the first time in history that diplomatic relationships are being established over Zoom".

He added he had approved Kosovo's "formal request to open an embassy in Jerusalem".

Kosovo's top diplomat, Meliza Haradinaj-Stublla, thanked Israel for becoming the 117th country to recognise its independence, joining much of the Western world.

China, Russia and five European Union members have not granted recognition to Kosovo.

"Kosovo has waited for a very long time to establish diplomatic relations with Israel", Haradinaj-Stublla said.

— AFP

Human activity threatens species survival: Study

PARIS: Human activities such as farming and construction are threatening the survival of scores of wild species by forcing them to travel more to avoid mankind's impact, research showed on Monday.

According to the United Nations' biodiversity panel, more than three quarters of land and 40 per cent of Earth's oceans have already been "severely degraded" by humans.

Its landmark biodiversity assessment in 2019 drew on a large body of research into how human activities are impacting nature.

But there have been relatively few studies looking at specific

species and how human influence is changing their behaviour.

Researchers in Australia looked at the impact of activities such as roads, tourism, recreation, hunting, shipping and fishing on 167 species, from the 0.05-gram sleepy orange butterfly to the two-tonne Great White shark.

They found that most species had increased the distance they travel due to human influence — by 70 per cent on average.

In a third of species, movement had either increased or decreased by half, according to the study published in the journal *Nature Ecology & Evolution*.

"This tells us that humans have widespread impacts on animal



Most species had increased the distance they travel due to human influence — by 70 per cent on average. — AFP

movement, but in many cases these are going undetected and unaddressed", lead author Tim Doherty, from the University of Sydney, said.

"In everyday life, we generally only see animals in the wild for short periods and don't get a proper understanding of how they move around and use space."

CASCADING IMPACTS

Doherty said that since many species, including most mammals, spend nearly all their energy on hunting for food and finding mates, the additional energy required to relocate away from humans was an unwelcome survival challenge. — AFP

Libyan election vow must be honoured ‘at all costs’: UN

GENEVA: Libyan delegates gathered in Geneva on Monday to choose new temporary leaders for the war-scarred country, with the UN stressing the importance of respecting their commitment to hold elections next December.

The 75 participants at the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum have until Friday to select a prime minister and a three-member presidency council from a list of 45 candidates.

The new leadership will then be tasked with guiding the oil-rich and conflict-ravaged North African country until elections scheduled for December 24.

By picking that date, “you have put an indelible mark on the calendar,” acting UN envoy Stephanie Williams told the delegates.

“This decision was greeted with the overwhelming approval by your compatriots, and it is a commitment that must be honoured at all costs,” she said.

“The Libyan people are behind you. They support you and they want you to succeed. They need you to succeed. Don’t let them down.”

Libya has been torn by civil war since a Nato-backed uprising led to the ouster and killing of long-time ruler Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

The country is now split between the Tripoli-based



Libyan military graduates stage an exercise at a ceremony under a military training agreement with Turkey. – AFP File Photo

The new leadership will be tasked with guiding the oil-rich North African country until elections scheduled for December 24

Government of National Accord (GNA) and its rival, the eastern-based House of Representatives backed by military strongman Khalifa Haftar.

A fragile ceasefire agreed in Geneva last October has largely held despite threats by Haftar to resume fighting.

The list of candidates unveiled on Saturday by the UN includes 21 names for the position of prime minister and 24 for the presidency council.

Williams stressed on Monday that the temporary leaders should strive towards national reconciliation and the restoration of democracy.

“This project is not about power sharing or dividing the cake,” she said.

“Rather it is to form a temporary government composed of patriots who agree to shoulder and to share the responsibility to put Libyan sovereignty and the security, prosperity and the

welfare of the Libyan people above narrow interests.”

After her introduction, the candidates began presenting themselves to the delegates via video link.

The list of candidates, including three women, was approved in political talks held in November between the 75 delegates selected by the UN to represent a broad cross section of Libyan society.

Among the names for the premiership are Fathi Bashagha, the powerful GNA interior minister, and the current deputy prime minister of the Tripoli-based presidential council, Ahmad Meitig.

Nominations for the presidency council include GNA Defence Minister Salahuddin al Namroush and the head of the Tripoli-based High Council of State, Khalid al Mishri. Council candidates include key powerbroker Aguila Saleh, the current speaker of the Tobruk-based parliament, and Mohammed al Bargathi, Libya’s Ambassador to Jordan.

The political talks kicked off in mid-November in Tunisia, where the delegates were tasked with laying out a roadmap towards elections.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on January 19 hailed the “tangible progress” made in recent months to restore stability in Libya. — AFP



Security forces force anti-government protesters away from Al Nour square in the centre of Lebanon’s northern port city of Tripoli amidst clashes. – AFP

Lebanese security forces, protesters clash in Tripoli

TRIPOLI: Clashes broke out on Sunday in the impoverished Lebanese city of Tripoli, the latest violence between security forces and protesters furious at the economic fallout of strict coronavirus lockdown measures.

Protesters took to the streets of Lebanon’s second city after an otherwise calm weekend, that followed days of angry demonstrations that left one person dead and 400 others wounded.

On Sunday afternoon, a few hundred demonstrators had gathered in central Tripoli’s Al Nour square, after calls on social media for people to rally in solidarity.

Then, later on Sunday evening, youths gathered outside government buildings — with police lobbing tear gas from the roofs to disperse the crowd, a journalist at the scene said.

Soldiers, deployed after the unrest earlier in the week, also

fired tear gas. The Lebanese Red Cross treated 10 people hit by rocks or who were struggling to breathe because of tear gas, its Secretary-General George Kettane said.

The army said on Sunday that 17 people had been arrested on charges including “rioting, destruction (and) attacking public and private property,” during the week’s protests.

Some were arrested for hurling Molotov cocktails at security forces and for trying to set fire to Tripoli’s government headquarters, the army statement said.

Protesters, who began demonstrations on January 25, say they are angry at pandemic lockdown restrictions they say are destroying their livelihoods.

But, in Lebanon’s fractious and divided politics, some politicians and media have questioned the apparently spontaneous nature of the protests. — AFP

Undaunted by pandemic, S Sudan athletes fix eyes on the Olympics

MAEBASHI, Japan: After the coronavirus forced a delay in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, athletes from South Sudan who are training in Japan seized the opportunity for more practice, which they have vowed to keep up, despite mounting uncertainty over this year’s event.

Four track athletes and a coach from South Sudan, the world’s youngest country, arrived in November 2019 in Maebashi, a city 100 km northwest of Tokyo, to exploit Japan’s better training conditions.

Forced to extend their stay after the summer games were postponed by a year, they find infections are still raging worldwide, cast a pall over the event’s new date of July 23.

“If that will be held, it’s OK, and that is all,” said Akoon Akoon, one of the athletes. Instead of weighing

Olympic participation was important for South Sudan, to foster a sense of national unity in a country ravaged by years of civil war

ABRAHAM MAJOK
1,500m S Sudan runner

the competing perspectives over the viability of the games, he preferred to get on with his training, he added.

“I don’t want to confuse my mind. I just focus on my training,” Akoon, 18, who will compete in the 400-metre race and the hurdles



Athletes from South Sudan Lucia Moris, Akoon Akoon, Michael Machiek and coach Joseph Omirok take part in their training session in preparation for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games north of Tokyo. – Reuters

event over the same distance, said.

Last week, Thomas Bach, the president of the International Olympic Committee, reaffirmed its commitment to the Tokyo Games, which Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga is determined to hold this summer.

But 86 per cent of survey respondents wanted the Games postponed again or cancelled, a poll by the *Asahi Shimbun* daily showed last week.

Japan, with a tally of 390,687 infections and 5,766 deaths, had declared a state of emergency in Tokyo and 10 prefectures that sources say the government is expected to extend on Tuesday.

Abraham Majok, a 1,500-m runner, said Olympic participation was important for South Sudan, to foster a sense of national unity in a country ravaged by years of civil war. — dpa

SHORT TAKES

TEL AVIV

Lockdown extended in Israel

Israel has extended a three-week-old lockdown in the coronavirus pandemic, the prime minister’s office and the health ministry said in a statement. The cabinet met late on Sunday and approved extending the general lockdown for an additional five days until 7 am on Friday.

The cabinet is to convene on Wednesday for an additional discussion on whether it is necessary to further extend the lockdown.

The cabinet also approved extending the ban on entry to, and



exit from, Israel until at midnight on Sunday. Existing exceptions still apply. This means that Israel’s Ben Gurion International Airport near Tel Aviv remains shuttered. — dpa

RAMALLAH

Palestinians to launch vaccinations in 2 weeks

The Palestinians are to receive a first batch of 50,000 coronavirus vaccines by mid-February, when they will launch inoculations in the West Bank and Gaza, their prime minister said.

Speaking ahead of a Palestinian Authority weekly cabinet meeting, Mohammed Shtayyeh said the procurement had been secured through various sources, including the UN-backed Covax programme, set up to provide vaccines to less wealthy states. “Vaccination will start in the middle of



this month,” Shtayyeh said. The prime minister said the vaccines would be allocated to the 2.8 million Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and the two million people in the Gaza Strip. — AFP

ALGIERS

Algeria, Russia discuss producing Sputnik vaccine

Algeria said it had discussed with Russia the possibility of producing Moscow’s Sputnik V Covid-19 vaccine.

Talks to manufacture the vaccine in Algeria took place during a meeting between Prime Minister Abdelaziz Djerad and Russian Ambassador Igor Beliaev, the prime minister’s office said.

“The two parties agreed to initiate contacts between the competent services of the two countries with the aim of establishing a bilateral cooperation...,” it said



in a statement. Algeria started its vaccination campaign on Saturday, a day after receiving 50,000 doses of Sputnik V. A shipment of the AstraZeneca vaccine arrived on Monday. — Reuters

In brief

■ KABUL



AFGHAN ARMY ABANDON 200 OUTPOSTS

Afghan forces have abandoned close to 200 checkpoints in the southern Kandahar province to the Taliban, an American watchdog said. The report by the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) comes as US troop numbers in Afghanistan fall to their lowest levels since 2001.

The province has been rocked by heavy fighting between government forces and Taliban insurgents in recent months, prompting thousands of civilians to flee their homes.

Afghanistan has approximately 6,000 checkpoints manned by 95,000 soldiers and police officers, representing one-third of the country's security forces. — dpa

■ HANOI



VIETNAM ENDS CONGRESS, VOWS TO FIGHT CORRUPTION

Vietnam's ruling Communist party concluded proceedings for its 13th National Congress with a press conference at which party chief Nguyen Phu Trong renewed vows to fight corruption within party ranks.

"We have taken back millions of US dollars," Trong told a packed conference room. "We will persevere with the fight against corruption."

During his second term in office, Trong presided over a "blazing furnace" anti-corruption campaign that saw numerous high-ranking officials arrested and two members of the politburo expelled from the party. One is now in prison. — dpa

■ WUHAN



WHO TEAM IN WUHAN VISITS PROVINCIAL CDC

A World Health Organization-led team investigating the origins of the Covid-19 pandemic visited the Center for Disease Control and Prevention in China's central region of Hubei, where the outbreak emerged in late 2019.

The group of independent experts spent about 4-1/2 hours on its longest site visit since completing two weeks of quarantine on Thursday, and did not speak to waiting journalists. The WHO, which has sought to manage expectations for the mission, has said its members would be limited to visits organised by their Chinese hosts and have no contact with community members, because of health curbs. — AFP

Myanmar military seizes power, detains elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi

NAYPYITAW: Myanmar's military seized power on Monday in a coup against the democratically elected government of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who was detained along with other leaders of her National League for Democracy (NLD) party in early morning raids.

The army said it had carried out the detentions in response to "election fraud", handing power to military chief Min Aung Hlaing and imposing a state of emergency for one year, according to a statement on a military-owned television station.

A verified Facebook page for Suu Kyi's party published comments it said had been written in anticipation of a coup and which quoted her as saying people should protest against the military takeover.

The coup derails years of Western-backed efforts to establish democracy in Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, where neighbouring China also has a powerful influence.

The generals made their move hours before parliament had been due to sit for the first time since the NLD's landslide win in a November 8 election viewed as a referendum on Suu Kyi's fledgling democratic rule.

Phone and Internet connections in the capital Naypyitaw and the main commercial centre of Yangon were disrupted and state TV went off air after the NLD leaders were detained.

Suu Kyi, Myanmar President Win Myint and other NLD leaders were "taken" in the early hours of the morning, NLD spokesman Myo Nyunt told Reuters by phone. Reuters was subsequently unable to contact him.

A video posted to Facebook by one MP appeared to show the arrest of another, regional lawmaker Pa Pa Han.

In the video, her husband pleads with men in military garb



Soldiers stand guard on a blockaded road to Myanmar's parliament in Naypyidaw after the military detained the country's de facto leader Suu Kyi and the country's president in a coup. — AFP

Military promises new election in a year

PHNOM PENH: Myanmar's military on Monday pledged the country would hold fresh elections in one year, shortly after arresting de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi and seizing power in a coup.

Speaking via the military-owned broadcaster Myawaddy, military representatives said the army would uphold "discipline-flourishing democracy" and allow the winner of the election to take power.

The army has declared a year-long state of emergency and appointed former general Myint Swe as acting president, who has handed control to commander-in-chief Min Aung Hlaing.

Suu Kyi and numerous other government officials, along with prominent activists, were detained in pre-dawn raids across the country on Monday morning. In a statement issued



From Top left: Myanmar's President Win Myint, Aung San Suu Kyi, Myint Swe, and (bottom R) Myanmar's Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. — AFP

by her National League for Democracy (NLD) party after she was detained, Suu Kyi urged the people of Myanmar to resist the military.

"The public is urged to fully oppose the military coup and

resoundingly resist against it," she said. Shortly after the dawn raids, Internet and phone lines went down as soldiers appeared on the streets in major cities. Communication channels have since been restored. — dpa

■ DEMONSTRATIONS CONTINUE IN NEPAL



Police detain a protester during a demonstration against the dissolution of the country's parliament in Kathmandu. — AFP

Critically endangered Sumatran tiger released back to wild

JAKARTA: A young Sumatran tiger was released back to the wild in a national park in Indonesia's Aceh province after recovering from an injury sustained when it was trapped by a snare, the head of Aceh's conservation agency said on Sunday.

Agus Aryanto said the male tiger, estimated to be about 1.5 years old, was released on Saturday after the veterinarian team treating the tiger said the injuries in its right front leg had healed, state news agency Antara reported.

The tiger, named Danau Putra, was released to its natural habitat near where it was found in a weak condition on January 22.

Aryanto said conservationists have surveyed the location to clear it of snares, believing it to be within the roaming area of the tiger's mother.

Apart from the threat of being caught by snares set by villagers to catch wild boar in Sumatra's forests, Indonesia's last remaining tiger subspecies also faces other threats, which include poaching



A female Sumatran tiger inside a cage before being released into the wild in the Leuser ecosystem forest in the southern Aceh province. — AFP

and conflict with humans.

Their natural habitats have been shrinking due to massive deforestation and palm oil plantations.

In 2020, two Sumatran tigers in Siak district of Riau province, also on Sumatra island, were found dead in a snare in May and September.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

standing outside the gate. A young child can be seen clinging to his chest and wailing.

Troops took up positions in Yangon where residents rushed to markets to stock up on supplies and others lined up at ATMs to withdraw cash. Banks subsequently suspended services due to poor Internet connections.

The detentions came after days of escalating tension between the civilian government and the military in the aftermath of the election.

Suu Kyi's party won 83 per cent of the vote in only the second election since a military junta agreed to share power in 2011.

The pre-written statement uploaded on a NLD Facebook page quoted Suu Kyi as saying such army actions would put Myanmar "back under a dictatorship".

"I urge people not to accept this, to respond and wholeheartedly to protest against the coup by the military," it quoted her as saying. Reuters was unable to reach any NLD officials to confirm the veracity of the statement.

Some pro-military supporters celebrated the coup, parading through Yangon in pick-up trucks and waving national flags but pro-democracy activists were horrified.

"Our country was a bird that was just learning to fly. Now the army broke our wings," student activist Si Thu Tun said.

Condemnation of the coup came from Australia, Britain, the European Union, India, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and the United States. China called on all sides to respect the constitution and uphold stability.

The White House said President Joe Biden had been briefed on the arrests, while the US Embassy in Yangon issued an alert warning US citizens there of the "potential for civil and political unrest". — Reuters

EU looks to boost sluggish Covid vaccination rollout

BRUSSELS: EU chief Ursula von der Leyen is feeling the heat over the slow Covid-19 vaccine rollout in the European Union, but Brussels is pressing to get more jabs, faster.

Von der Leyen's European Commission has invested 2.7 billion euros (\$3.3 billion) to secure 2.3 billion doses from companies making potential vaccines, mostly using European factories.

Three vaccines are so far authorised for use across the EU's 27 member countries: One by German outfit BioNTech with US giant Pfizer; one by US company Moderna; and most recently one by Anglo-Swedish group AstraZeneca.

All three firms are undershooting on delivery schedules for the January-March first-quarter period.

But von der Leyen is sticking to her goal of having 70 per cent of adults in the European Union vaccinated by the end of August.

To get there, Brussels is playing hardball with AstraZeneca — getting a pledge from the company that it will boost its EU supply over the next two months by 30 per cent — and prodding BioNTech/

Vaccines are so far authorised for use across the EU's 27 member countries

Pfizer to make up its shortfall. Here are the vaccines lined up by the Commission over this year and next, counting firm orders and options.

BioNTech/Pfizer (German/US, mRNA vaccine, 95 per cent efficacy according to the European Medicines Agency): 600 million doses. Its first-quarter deliveries to EU member states were cut by as much as half, but the company vows they will be back to normal by mid-February.

Moderna: (US, mRNA vaccine, 94 per cent efficacy): 160 million doses.

AstraZeneca (Anglo-Swedish, adenovirus, 60 per cent efficacy): 400 million doses. It was meant to have delivered between around 100 million doses in the first quarter, but on December 22 said that would be cut to 31 million. Von der Leyen announced on Sunday that would now be boosted to 40 million.

Johnson & Johnson (US, adenovirus, efficacy unknown):



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson is shown how to prepare the vaccine by advance nurse practitioner Sarah as he visits a coronavirus covid-19 vaccination centre in Batley, northern England. — AFP

400 million doses. The Commission says 100 million should be delivered by June if this single-shot vaccine is approved.

CureVac (Germany/US, mRNA, efficacy unknown): 405 million doses.

Sanofi/GSK (France/UK, recombinant spike protein, efficacy unknown): 300 million. After a disappointing Phase 2 trial, the companies are trying a different antigen formulation and

are now aiming for production late this year. The Commission is also in exploratory talks with Novavax (US, recombinant spike protein, efficacy unknown) for up to 200 million doses.

Each EU member state is responsible for its own rollout. Most are giving priority to the elderly and frontline health workers.

Almost all the vaccines require two jabs for a full vaccination.

(Johnson & Johnson is aiming for a single-shot regimen, subject to trials and EMA approval.) Collectively, the European Union as of Saturday had provided 2.4 doses per 100 people, according to official sources collated by the website Our World in Data.

Top performers are Malta (6.08 doses per 100 people), Denmark (4.47), Slovenia (3.65) and Romania (3.50).

The bigger countries are trailing: Germany has given 2.8 doses per 100 people, France 2.34, Italy 3.16 and Spain 3.1.

The countries leading the world in giving jabs are Israel (54.7 per 100 people, with most of those over 70 already having been vaccinated with their two injections), the UAE (33.7) and Britain (13.9).

Britain, which left the EU last year, is focused on giving the maximum number of people one injection and stretching out the time before they become completely vaccinated through their second injection.

France and other EU countries, in contrast, say they are maintaining stocks to give the second jab as recommended, even if that means a slowdown in their first jab programme. — AFP

Russian prosecutors back request to imprison Navalny



Yulia Navalnaya, wife of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny. — Reuters

MOSCOW: Russian prosecutors on Monday backed a request to imprison opposition leader Alexei Navalny for several years on old charges, after police detained a record number of anti-Kremlin protesters across the country.

On Sunday, demonstrators defied government warnings and rallied across the country — including in Moscow and Saint Petersburg where authorities enforced unprecedented lockdowns of the city centre — in a second weekend of mass protests over the arrest of President Vladimir Putin's most prominent opponent.

The protests — stretching from the Pacific port of Vladivostok to the northwestern city of Pskov — came ahead of a high-profile court hearing that could see Navalny imprisoned for several years.

Navalny's detention and the crackdown on protesters has sparked an outcry in the West.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell is expected to press the Kremlin to free Navalny when he heads to Moscow on Thursday.

Navalny, 44, is facing charges of violating the terms of a 2014 suspended sentence for embezzlement and could be jailed for two-and-a-half years.

The General Prosecutor's Office said in a statement on Monday that it backed a request by the prison service to change the suspended sentence to jail time. "This motion is considered lawful and justified", the statement said.

Navalny was detained at a Moscow airport in mid-January after flying back to Russia from Germany where he was recovering from an August poisoning. — AFP

Major snow storm to blanket US east coast

NEW YORK: A powerful winter storm is set to dump feet of snow along a stretch of the US east coast including New York City on Monday, after blanketing the nation's capital.

The National Weather Service issued storm warnings from Virginia to Maine — a swathe home to tens of millions of people — and forecast snowfall of 18 to 24 inches in southern New York, northeastern New Jersey and parts of southwest Connecticut.

The NWS warned New Yorkers to expect a snowfall rate of two to four inches per hour beginning on Monday, with "near blizzard" conditions closer to the coast.

Mayor Bill de Blasio issued a local state of emergency as the city of over eight million braced for the storm, restricting non-essential travel to keep roads clear for emergency vehicles.

"This winter storm will be dangerous with heavy snowfall and strong winds. If you can stay home, stay home", he said on Twitter.

New Jersey Governor Phil



A snowman is seen on the South Lawn of the White House in Washington, DC. — AFP

Murphy also issued a state of emergency ahead of the storm's expected arrival, allowing authorities to close roads,

evacuate homes and commandeer equipment needed for public safety.

Public transportation

throughout the state will be suspended as of Monday, in anticipation of the storm's impact.

"Charge your devices, and if

you experience a power outage — report it immediately", he urged New Jersey residents on Twitter.

Philadelphia also declared a snow emergency, closing city government buildings for Monday and ordering residents to move their cars off snow emergency routes so the plows can get through.

"Philly, please be safe and look out for each other", Mayor Jim Kenney tweeted.

The storm is expected to hit Maine by Tuesday, where it will drop between eight and 13 inches of snow, as well as sleet.

The storm hit mountainous parts of California with more than six feet of snow and heavy rain last week.

The extreme weather led a chunk of Highway 1 to collapse into the sea, following a landslide in an area near the mountainous Big Sur coastline in the central part of the western state. The snow later moved on to the Midwest, dumping about eight inches of snow in Chicago, according to the NWS. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

LONDON

All care home residents in UK offered vaccine

Britain's National Health Service (NHS) said it has offered a Covid-19 vaccine to every care home resident in England, despite individual reports of people still waiting for the jab. All elderly residents living at more than 10,000 care homes in England have now been offered the first dose of a Covid-19 vaccine, the NHS said.

Social Care Minister Helen Whately however told broadcaster BBC the government was "still working their way through the care home staff." She said staff who



did not want to take it were being "encouraged" to do so. During the interview, listeners emailed the BBC with reports that their relatives in care homes had not been offered the vaccine yet. — dpa

WASHINGTON

Trump hires new impeachment defence lawyers

Former US president Donald Trump announced that he had hired two lawyers to head the defence for his historic second impeachment trial.

Trump introduced the lead lawyers — David Schoen and Bruce L Castor Jr — the day after reports said several members had left his legal team just over a week shy of his trial before the US Senate.

Schoen is a trial lawyer who has said he met in 2019 with Jeffrey Epstein before his suicide in



jail about helping defend the disgraced financier against trafficking charges.

Castor previously served as a prosecutor who declined to push forward with a case. — AFP

MOGADISHU

Five killed in raid on Mogadishu hotel

At least five people were killed in an hours-long Al Shabaab attack on a Mogadishu hotel which ended around midnight on Sunday, Somali police said. The Al Qaeda-linked fighters detonated a car bomb at the entrance to the Hotel Afrik at a busy junction near the airport before gunmen stormed the hotel, exchanging fire with security personnel.

Somali police spokesman Sadik Dudashe told a press conference that four attackers had also died. "Among the dead are



five civilians and the gunmen — three of them shot and another who detonated himself. The death toll can be higher and some of the wounded people may succumb." — AFP

The trends we are going through...

The Covid-19 continues to dominate news and lives of people across the globe. Oman has identified the new strain in six people by the time we completed the first month of 2021.

As much as we could be tired about the issue it is time we became vigilant again because of the seriousness of the new strain. The quarantine life can be tough when a person is on his/her own unless one has friends. Not having the opportunity to go to work and having no one to speak to can be enduring, nevertheless gives you ample time to give yourself from learning to cook, read and catch up with thoughts.

“I didn’t know what was there in my kitchen,” said a friend who had to stay in quarantine for two weeks upon returning from holidays — obviously he is a husband who didn’t have to do much cooking until now.

And now from quarantine we have moved on to vaccines. The dilemma, the fear have come into reality of checking out on availability of the vaccine, and when and where to go to get vaccinated. No matter where you have taken the vaccination, quarantine is necessary even for those who are vaccinated and the masks stay on the face too.

Another friend travelled to a country which requires one to take injections before starting off the



Lakshmi Kothaneth
lakshmiobserver@gmail.com

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journey, gave it a miss and was down with malaria and pneumonia upon returning from holidays. Let Covid-19 not take all of us out of reality. We are still vulnerable to negative thoughts, climatic conditions and viruses and lifestyle diseases.

WALKATHON
This week, the first week of February, is observed as the GCC Cancer Awareness Week. The series of activities that are planned will all be online. The idea is to be active to stay healthy and during the annual walkathon of Oman Cancer Association, we will see ourselves walking remotely. The online life is not just for students, who probably miss their direct interaction with their teachers and classmates.

We have pretty well adapted especially on zoom press conferences and meetings. Cannot help wonder whether we would get too comfortable with the current setting. But as the wise ones say, ‘Go with the flow’. Maybe there is more for us to learn and adapt.

The travel industry is getting another blow as stepping out of the country is discouraged, but for the ones who want to go back home for good is still not having it easy. The tickets are tough on the wallets.

Lost in translation and lost in tags are the other trends. Eager to know

what is going on many went overboard in assuming too much at the same time this week also taught us the significance of tags on social media and the confusion it can create. A post on social media that was circulated had a name that was meant as a tag, it was confused as the author’s name. It came to that level of confusion because the actual author’s name was missing on the post. So should we go out and request everyone not to tag individuals? For now the scribe had to keep saying, “It wasn’t me”.

These are the days of the online world and there is much that is to be learnt from the power of social media to its drawbacks. On one side we want privacy but on the other we want to share our happy moments. We thoroughly enjoyed all the facilities of apps but are saddened now knowing that our matter on the phone could be data that could be much in demand.

In fact the ‘likes’ many want on social media now has a note saying for post insights, ‘Message related insights, such as shares and replies, maybe lower than expected due to new privacy rules in Europe.

Just as they say there is no such thing as a free lunch. Can someone see your messages that you share with family and friends? This has been a thought that has been bothering everyone.

EAGER FOR CLOUT

Facing the emboldened environmental movement

EVAN HALPER AND ANNA M PHILLIPS

When Joe Biden in December was mulling whom to name as his Interior secretary, entrusted with hundreds of millions of acres of public land, a network of nascent environmental groups eager for clout made a move that defied the usual Washington playbook.

They launched a campaign to publicly shame the person believed to beat the top of the president-elect’s shortlist — retiring New Mexico Senator Tom Udall, a longtime Biden friend and former aide whose father held the post in John F Kennedy’s Cabinet.

“It would not be right for two Udalls to lead the Interior before a single Native American,” they wrote in a public letter to Udall.

Soon after, Udall was passed over in favour of another New Mexico Democrat less familiar to Biden: Rep Deb Haaland, who, if confirmed, would be the first Native American to run a Cabinet level agency.

Similarly, California air quality regulator Mary Nichols, the perceived front-runner to

“It used to be that these mostly white, mainstream environmental groups would be in those rooms, making the decisions and then call us to say what was decided

ROBERT BULLARD
An author

lead the Environmental Protection Agency, was derailed — much to the dismay of some big, old-line environmental groups — by opposition led by local activists from California.

As Democrats have taken power in the White House and Congress, long-simmering tensions within the environmental movement are coming to the forefront, leaving established leaders pushed aside by activists who see them as too white, cautious and out of touch with the effects of industrial pollution on communities of colour.

“It used to be that these mostly white, mainstream environmental groups would be in those rooms, making the decisions and then call us to say what was decided,” said Robert Bullard, an author and co-chair of the Black Environmental Justice Network, known to some as the father of environmental justice. “We said, ‘Never again. We are not going to leave it to other folks to speak for us.”

“The tension has been there for a long time,” said Ramón Cruz, who last year was elected the first Latino president of the 128-year-old Sierra Club. “Organisations like ours have done harm in the past. We have supported policies seen by many environmental justice groups as displacing pollution into what we see now were ‘sacrifice zones. ‘That is no more.”

NEW ADMINISTRATION
The realignment creates both political opportunities and risks for the new administration. Biden benefited from the more liberal groups’ organising power and resonance with young and nonwhite voters to win election and to help Democrats retake the Senate.

And yet, though he delighted the groups with his Cabinet picks, delivering on their policy expectations could prove fraught, given Democrats’ tight majorities in the Senate and House. Biden will be beholden to centrists including West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin, an ally of fossil fuel companies. — dpa

DANGEROUS TIMES

Anger and confusion in Myanmar as coup sweeps away democratic hopes

There was panic-buying of food, military roadblocks in the capital Naypyidaw and a triumphant pro-army rally in Yangon in the hours after a coup in Myanmar. But there was also quiet anger simmering among those whose hopes for the country’s democratic future have been stolen.

“It’s extremely upsetting — I don’t want the coup,” said a 64-year-old Burmese man in Hlaing township, standing with a crowd outside a grocery stall.

“I have seen many transitions in this country and I was looking forward to a better future,” he added, declining to provide a name for fear of repercussions. A putsch had been expected for days, yet when it came it left Myanmar stunned — with roads to its main international airport blocked and communications cut — a country once more isolated from a world it only rejoined a decade ago.

The military detained de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi early on Monday — hours before a newly elected parliament dominated by her NLD party was expected to take its seats for the first time since November polls.

By 8:30 am (0200 GMT), a state of emergency was announced and former general Myint Swe appointed acting president — sinking the country back into direct military rule after barely a decade-long experiment with democracy. Fear spread as Internet and mobile services were pulled by authorities across the country.

In Yangon, Myanmar’s commercial capital, people rushed to their



A soldier stands guard in City Hall in Yangon, after Myanmar’s military seized power in a bloodless coup on Monday. – AFP

THE MILITARY
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neighbourhood grocery stores to stock up on rice, oil and instant noodles as banks were temporarily closed by the communications freeze.

But aside from police, uniformed men were few and far between in the city, and no blood was shed.

The guns, tanks and helicopters were further north around Naypyidaw, where armoured vehicles blocked off major roads leading to parliament.

Suu Kyi’s party won over 80 per cent of parliamentary seats available — a seemingly unacceptable number to a

military that still held key government posts, retained power over all defence and security decisions, and had 25 per cent of seats ring-fenced for them.

Yangon film-maker Lamin Oo said he was “shocked” but unsurprised after a week of coup rumblings.

“I take my chance to vote very seriously because this can happen in this country,” the 35-year-old said, adding that his neighbourhood is Yankin Township is trying to stay calm. “I think we need to be prepared for the worst.” — AFP

sport

Messi hits goal 650 as Barca get revenge on Bilbao

BARCELONA: Lionel Messi scored his 650th goal for Barcelona while Antoine Griezmann struck the winner in a 2-1 home success over Athletic Bilbao in La Liga on Sunday, avenging a defeat by the Basque side in the Spanish Super Cup final.

Messi curled in a stunning free kick after 20 minutes for his milestone goal on the same day the club pledged to sue Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* for publishing the full details of the Argentine's contract.

Ronald Koeman's side recorded a fifth straight Liga win and moved above Real Madrid into second on goal difference with 40 points, 10 behind Atletico Madrid who have a game in hand.

Messi had missed a guilt-edged chance at the start when he fired straight at keeper Unai Simon and Barca spurned several more opportunities to increase their lead before half-time.

Athletic, who had won their previous five matches in all competitions in a flying start under new coach Marcelino, failed to get going but levelled in the 49th thanks to an own goal.

Jordi Alba tried to prevent Athletic's Oscar de Marcos reaching a cross but instead prodded into the Barca net.

The hosts struggled to respond but finally restored their lead in the 74th when Griezmann, who

“We all know Messi's quality. When he's all fired up like he was today he scores goals like that and there's nothing you can do about it

INIGO MARTINEZ
Athletic Bilbao defender

had scored twice in the 3-2 Super Cup final defeat, arrived in the box to knock home a cross from defender Oscar Mingueza.

Griezmann paid tribute to Messi after the game when asked whether the Argentine, who tried to leave Barcelona in the close season, was being pushed further away from the club.

“We're all enjoying Messi, he's a legend and we hope he can continue to help the club to win,” said the Frenchman.

Athletic defender Inigo Martinez said his side had the misfortune to face Messi when he seemed out to prove a point.

“We all know Messi's quality. When he's all fired up like he was today he scores goals like that and there's nothing you can do about it,” he said. — **Reuters**



Barcelona's Lionel Messi in action with Athletic Bilbao's Inigo Martinez. — Reuters

**SPANISH LA LIGA
TABLE AFTER SUNDAY'S
MATCHES (PLAYED,
WON, DRAWN, LOST,
GOALS FOR, GOALS
AGAINST, POINTS):**

Atletico Madrid	19	16	2	1	40	10	50
Barcelona	20	12	4	4	41	18	40
Real Madrid	20	12	4	4	35	18	40
Sevilla	20	12	3	5	28	16	39
Villarreal	21	8	11	2	29	20	35
Real Sociedad	21	8	8	5	32	19	32
Granada	21	8	5	8	24	34	29
Real Betis	20	8	3	9	26	34	27
Levante	20	6	8	6	29	29	26
Celta Vigo	21	6	7	8	24	31	25
Athletic Bilbao	20	7	3	10	27	25	24
Getafe	20	6	6	8	17	23	24
Cadiz	21	6	6	9	19	31	24
Valencia	21	5	8	8	27	29	23
Eibar	21	4	8	9	17	23	20
Valladolid	21	4	8	9	21	32	20
Osasuna	20	4	7	9	19	29	19
Alaves	21	4	7	10	18	29	19
Elche	19	3	8	8	16	26	17
SD Huesca	21	2	10	9	17	30	16

SPANISH LA LIGA RESULTS	
On Sunday	Jordan 55)
Getafe 0 Alaves 0	Real Madrid 1 (Asensio 13)
Cadiz 2 (Negredo 35, 71) Atletico Madrid 4 (Suarez 28, 50-pen, Niguez 44, Koke 88)	Levante 2 (Morales 32, Roger 78)
Granada 0 Celta Vigo 0	Valencia 1 (Wass 22)
Barcelona 2 (Messi 20, Griezmann 74) Athletic Bilbao 1 (Alba 49-og)	Elche 0
On Saturday	Villarreal 1 (Parejo 3)
Eibar 0 Sevilla 2 (Ocampos 28-pen,	Real Sociedad 1 (Isak 90+3)
	On Friday
	Real Valladolid 1 (Villa 90+3)
	Huesca 3 (Mir 37, 50, 57)

Iraq's hosting of Arabian Gulf Cup to be decided on Feb 9

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 1

The Arab Gulf Cup Football Federation (AGCFF) will discuss and announce on coming February 9 on the outcome of the inspection team's visit to Basra city in Iraq for the possibility of hosting the forthcoming edition of the Arabian Gulf Cup.

The championship is scheduled to be held during the end of this year. The inspection team's visit to Basra city took place during January 25-28 to inspect the preparations of the Iraq Football Federation to host the 25th edition of the Gulf Cup. Iraq showed their full capability to host the prestigious event since the last edition but the security element was always behind the shifting of the tournament to another country.

Dr Jassim bin Mohammed al Shukaili, second vice-president of AGCFF, will preside over the evaluation proposals meeting of 25th Gulf Cup on February 8 to discuss the details of the technical report which was prepared by the



inspection team on the evaluation of Basra city to organise the forthcoming edition of the Gulf Cup.

The committee will raise

during the meeting the proper recommendations to the executive committee of the board which will have another scheduled meeting on February 8

to review and approve the suitable recommendation. The meeting will be chaired by the Chairman of Committee, Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al Khalifa in

presence of all the members.

In the last edition (24th) of the Gulf Cup in Qatar, Bahrain won the title for the first time in history as they had edged Saudi Arabia

1-0 in the final with a goal scored by Mohammed Saad al Rumaihi.

GULF CLUBS CHAMPIONSHIP

On the other hand, the Oman Football Association (OFA) board members, Shaikh Hamed bin Hamdan al Maamari will take part in the Football Organising Committee of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf on Tuesday through virtual communication platform. The meeting will be presided over by the chairman of the Bahrain Football Association (BFA) and the Chairman of the Committee, HE Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al Khalifa in presence of all the gulf countries representatives.

The agenda of the meeting will feature discussion on the 2021 plan and the main activities and events to be organised. Also, another important topic is the commencement of the Gulf Clubs Championship which is scheduled to begin in July. The meeting will review the other proposals and recommendations by the members.

In brief

■ PARIS



NEYMAR WANTS TO STAY AT PSG, HOPES MBAPPE WILL CONTINUE

Paris St Germain forward Neymar said he wants to remain at the Ligue 1 champions and hopes Kylian Mbappe will also pledge his future to the club. "I'm very happy today. Things have changed a lot, I can't exactly explain why — if it's just me, or something else has changed," Neymar, whose contract expires in June 2022, told French television channel TF1.

"I have adapted. I feel calmer and I'm very happy here. I want to stay at PSG and I hope Kylian will stay too. Of course, that's the wish of every PSG supporter... With Kylian, we have a relationship of brothers ... We really like to play together.

■ CHENNAI



LEACH SEES 'GREAT OPPORTUNITY' IN SPIN-FRIENDLY INDIA

England's Jack Leach said on Monday it would be a "dream" to make his mark on India's spin-friendly matches in his maiden tour of the South Asian giant.

Joe Root's England will begin their four-Test tour against India — which tops the world Test championship rankings — in Chennai on Friday.

"It's just a great opportunity. They are obviously a quality side that has come at the back of a great win in Australia," the 29-year-old said.

SERENA

'IN ZONE' WITH STRAIGHT-SET WIN

MELBOURNE: An aggressive Serena Williams stepped up preparations for another tilt at a 24th Grand Slam title with a straight-sets victory over home hope Daria Gavrilova in the Yarra Valley Classic on Monday.

The 39-year-old appeared physically strong and in control en route to a comfortable 6-1, 6-4 win in 94 minutes as she counts down to the Australian Open next week. "I felt that I was composed and in the zone. Just trying to do the things that I've been working on," she said in an on-court interview.

Williams started sluggishly, losing the first three points on serve, before quickly overpowering the Australian, who had opened the tournament impressively over Viktoria Kuzmova of Slovakia.

Gavrilova, ranked 451, was overmatched against her idol but used her speed around the court to make Williams work harder in a more competitive second set. The American, though, had all the answers and it was a sharp performance from Williams, who lifted the intensity in her second match back on the circuit after defeating world number three Naomi Osaka in an exhibition in Adelaide on Friday.

Williams, looking to get matches under her belt before embarking on another bid for a record-equalling 24th major singles title, will next play Tsvetana Pironkova of Bulgaria in the round of 16.

GAUFF FIGHTS IT OUT

Earlier, teenage sensation Coco Gauff showed only glimpses of the form that fuelled her dazzling run at last year's Australian Open during a gruelling three-set victory over Jil Teichmann at the Gippsland Trophy.

The 16-year-old overcame a mid-match stutter to win 6-3, 6-7 (6/8), 7-6 (7/5) in two hours and 45 minutes.

"All the training I did in the off-season meant I was able to go through three tough sets and not get tired," she said.

World number five Elina Svitolina also moved through with a comfortable 6-1, 6-4 victory over former top-10 player Andrea Petkovic of Germany.

The 26-year-old Ukrainian, who has never reached the final of a Grand Slam, played her first match in Melbourne since emerging from the 14-day mandatory quarantine. Svitolina plays former French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko in the round of 16.

The two WTA events are being played concurrently at Melbourne Park as players prepare for the Australian Open starting on February 8.

MOUTET UPSETS TIAFOE, GASQUET CRASHES

France's Corentin Moutet burnished his credentials with a battling come-from-behind win over American Frances Tiafoe, but his veteran compatriot Richard Gasquet crashed at the first hurdle as the ATP Tour resumed on Monday.

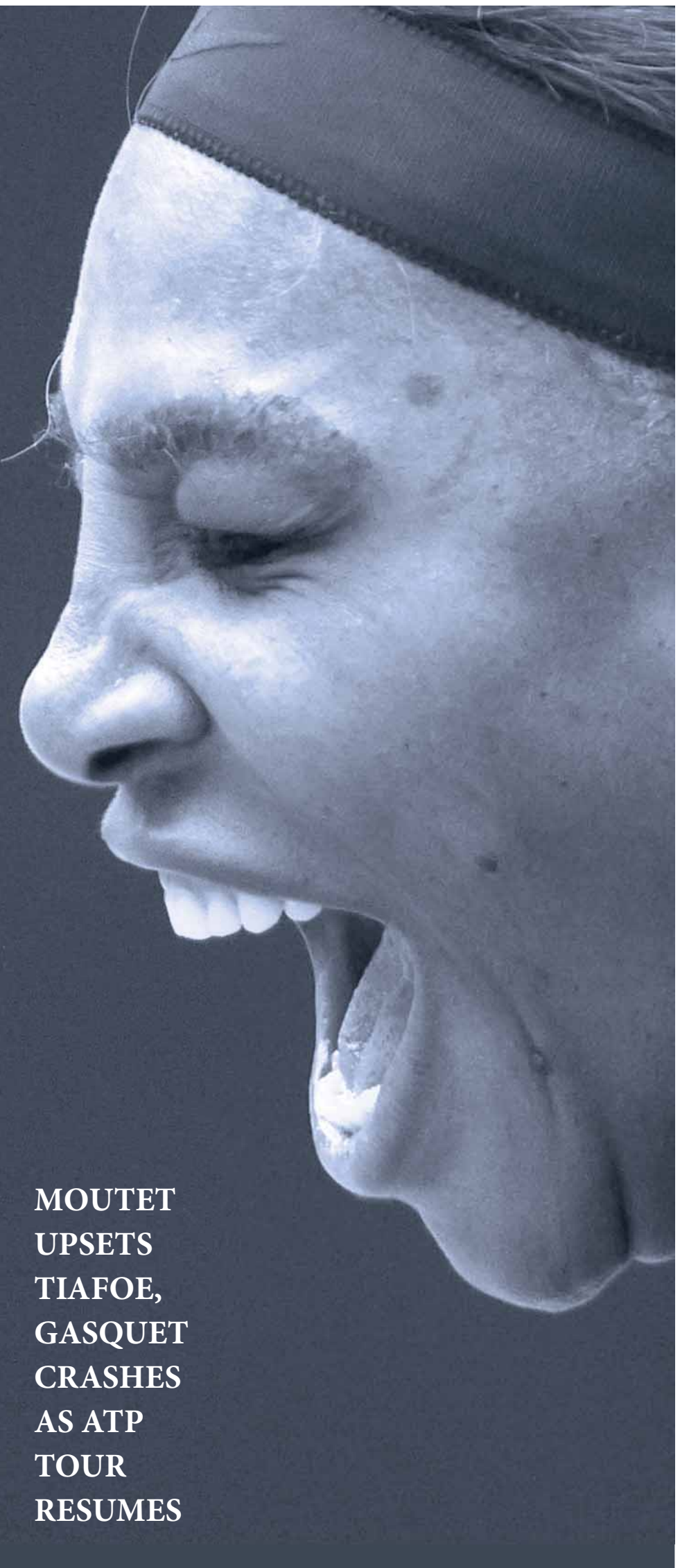
NextGen star Moutet, 21, posted a career-best result when he stormed into the final of the Qatar Open as a qualifier last year, finishing runner-up to Russian world number eight Andrey Rublev.

And he started 2021 well, ousting 2019 Australian Open quarter-finalist Tiafoe 3-6, 6-4, 6-4 in the Murray River Open, one of two ATP events being run concurrently at Melbourne Park ahead of next week's Australian Open.

"It was so nice to play a match," Moutet said.

"It was a long time since I've played, especially in front of people. It wasn't an easy one, because I had to play against a tough opponent who is a great player. A tough match, but definitely a lot of pleasure." — AFP

MOUTET UPSETS TIAFOE, GASQUET CRASHES AS ATP TOUR RESUMES



Easy victories for Al Waad, Ideal, Vanderlande and Spanio



Sebastian Ciril and Aasim Mohammed of Vanderlande.

MUSCAT: Anumodh Narayanan's superb 53 helped Al Waad Trading and Contracting Enterprises to a 62-run win over OCT Al Amerat in a C Division T20 league game at Muscat Municipality ground 2 in Amerat on Friday.

Al Waad posted 193 for 8 on the board thanks to valuable knocks by Anumodh, Pradeesh Kumar (40) and Parthipan Krishnan (40).

Facing a big target, OCT Amerat failed to keep up with the mounting run rate and could manage to score only 131 for 5 in 20 overs. Ejaz Mohamed (36) and Sulaiman Haider (35) were their main scorers.

SALMAN POWERS IDEAL

In another C Division match, Salman Khan struck a splendid 83 off 37 to power Ideal International to a comfortable 6-wicket victory against Khalsa United at Muscat Municipality ground 1.

Chasing Khalsa's 158 for 6, Ideal raced to the target in the 17th over, scoring 162 for 4 thanks to brilliant batting by Salman and Tosim Khan (93).

CIRIL, AASIM STAR IN VANDERLANDE'S WIN

Sebastian Ciril's superb 61 not out and Aasim Mohammed's excellent all-round show steered Vanderlande to a 6-wicket victory against Al Rehwan in a D Division T20 clash at Muscat Municipality ground 4.

Jibin Kunnumpurath's strokeful 70 was the highlight of Al Rehwan's 162 all in 19.3 overs as Irtaza Ahmed and Aasim claimed three wickets each.

Vanderlande recovered from 55 for 4 to reach 163 without further loss in 18 overs thanks to a 108-run fifth wicket partnership between Aasim (40 off 26) and Ciril (61 off 44).

SANTHOSH THE HERO

In another D Division game, Santhosh Varikkath's magnificent 80 off 42 steered Spanio & VDD to a 54-run victory against OCT Mabela at Muscat Municipality ground 3.

Santhosh's batting was the salient feature of Spanio's 194 all out in 19.3 overs while Warith al Balushi and Muhammed Nadim picked up four and three wickets respectively.

OCT Mabela failed to match

Spanio's flourish with the bat, scoring only 140 for 5, Warith and Nadim top-scoring with 45 and 37 respectively. Santhosh Varikkath bowled well, taking 2 for 15.

BRIEF SCORES C DIVISION

Al Waad Trad & Contracting Enterprises 193 for 8 in 20 overs (Anumodh Narayanan 53 - 8x4, Pradeesh Kumar 40 - 2x4, 1x6, Parthipan Krishnan 40 - 8x4, Khalid Pir 2-23, Said Haidar 2-32) beat OCT Al Amerat 131 for 5 in 20 overs (Ejaz Mohamed 36 - 2x4, Sulaiman Haider 35 - 3x4, 1x6, Mohamed Malick 2-14) by 62 runs.

Khalsa United CT 158 for 6 in 20 overs (Sushil Kadam 53 - 6x4, Jaspreet Singh 26 - 4x4, Sameer Sheik 2-17) lost to Ideal International 162 for 4 in 16.2 overs (Salman Khan 83 - 11x4, 3x6, Tosim Khan 39 - 3x4, 1x6) by 6 wickets.

D DIVISION

Al Rehwan 162 all out in 19.3 overs (Jibin Kunnumpurath 70 - 11x4, 1x6, Thyseer Hyderali 35 - 2x4, 1x6, Irtaza 3-19, Aasim Mohammed 3-29, Muhammed Muzaiyen 2-31) lost to Vanderlande 163 for 4 in 18 overs (Sebastian Ciril 61 - 7x4, Aasim Mohammed 40 - 5x4, Raniz Muhammed 2-29) by 6 wickets.

Spanio & VDD 194 for 9 in 19.3 overs (Santhosh Varikkath 80 - 13x4, 1x6, Warith al Balushi 4-36, Muhammed Nadim 3-33) beat OCT Al Mabela 140 for 5 in 20 overs (Warith al Balushi 45 - 4x4, Muhammed Nadim 37 - 5x4, Santhosh Varikkath 2-15) by 54 runs.



Liverpool's Mohammad Salah scores their second goal. – Reuters

Salah double puts Liverpool in title race

ANDY JALIL LONDON: Champions Liverpool are in a position to defend their Premier League title after a 3-1 win over an in-form West Ham. Playing a major role in Liverpool's performance was Mohammad Salah who ended his recent scoring drought with two goals, the second of which had a distinctly magical touch about it and took his tally of goals to 21 for the season.

He is the first player to net 20-plus goals in four successive seasons for Liverpool since Ian Rush who had six in a row from 1981 to 1987.

Liverpool Manager Jurgen Klopp spoke about Salah: "I'm

not surprised, I work on a daily basis together with him. He will never stop having a massive desire to score goals. He's a world-class player no doubt about it."

Klopp added: "We scored wonderful goals. All three were unbelievable and I'm really happy. The first goal was a proper smart goal, top-class. His second goal, what a counter-attack, his first touch was outstanding, world class."

Liverpool enjoyed more of the possession in the goalless first half but West Ham missed a chance to take the lead after 24 minutes when Pablo Fornals shot was headed away en route

PLAYING A MAJOR
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SEASON

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE RESULTS
On Sunday
Chelsea 2 (Azpilicueta 40, Alonso 84) Burnley 0
Leicester 1 (Barnes 13) Leeds 3 (Dallas 15, Bamford 70, Harrison 84)
West Ham 1 (Dawson 87)
Liverpool 3 (Salah 57, 68, Wijnaldum 84)
Brighton 1 (Trossard 17)
Tottenham 0
On Saturday
Arsenal 0 Manchester United 0
Crystal Palace 1 (Eze 60) Wolves 0
Everton 0 Newcastle 2 (Wilson 73, 90)
Manchester City 1 (Jesus 9)
Sheffield United 0
West Brom 2 (Bartley 47, Pereira 66)
Fulham 2 (Decordova-Reid 10, Cavaleiro 77)
Southampton 0 Aston Villa 1 (Barkley 41)

to goal. Liverpool opened the scoring in the 57th minute after substitute Curtis Jones supplied a pass in a flowing cross-field move to Salah who cut inside, dummied Aaron Cresswell and curled his shot sweetly into the far corner.

It took just 11 minutes for the visitors to double the lead. It started with a West Ham corner which was headed clear to Trent Alexander-Arnold whose diagonal ball found Xherdan Shaqiri.

The midfielder then sent a perfect cross-field pass to Salah. The Egyptian needed just one touch to control the ball with his right foot and then moving it to

the left with the outside of his left boot he flicked it past a helpless Lukasz Fabianski. It was simply marvellous.

Asked to comment on his goal, Salah humbly said: "It was a great ball from Shaq, credit to him. The ball was exactly at my feet, so one touch and then finish. He added: "It was a good win for us and we need to win every game now."

Six minutes before the end, Gini Wijnaldum added the third, prodding in a pass from Roberto Firmino.

The Hammers got a consolation goal three minutes later with Craig Dawson scoring from a corner.

Registration for 11th Musannah Race Week opens

MUSCAT: Registration for the annual youth sailing event Musannah Race Week is now open with young sailors from around the world welcome to train and compete in Oman. Set to take place in Al Musannah Sports City from October 26 to 31, the event has traditionally brought world and continental youth champions to the Sultanate's shores to sail against the best young sailors.

This year, for the first time in the event's history, Oman Sail will mark the 11th edition by introducing a boat class for young persons with disabilities known as 'RS Venture', alongside the Optimist and Laser 4.7 classes.

Rashid al Kindi, Oman

Sail Director of Sailing, said, "Musannah Race Week has been an exciting fixture in our sailing calendars for a decade now, bringing the best and brightest young sailing talent to Oman. We have seen the benefits of testing our home-grown sailors against the best in the world and providing the platform for young people from different cultures to learn from each other. We are proud to introduce the RS Venture class for the first time to welcome persons with disabilities to the event."

He added, "It is a great opportunity to include the RS Venture class to let young sailors join those sailing aboard the Optimist and Laser 4.7 classes. It



is our hope that the professional and competitive environment at Musannah Race Week will help to hone their skills and provide useful insight into the

possibilities a career in sailing can offer."

Following four days of racing, participating sailors and coaches will be able to take

part in three days of classroom-based training and practice races with coaching in each of the classes provided by world-class professional sailors.

Feras Asqul, Oman Sail's Musannah Race Week Project Manager, said: "Taking part in Musannah Race Week is the ideal preparation for international regattas, both now as a sailing prospect and providing valuable lessons and experience to benefit the competitors in the future. We are looking forward to welcoming sailors from around the world to Musannah once again and to continue expanding the event with the introduction of the RS Venture class in order to become one of

the most important events for local and international sailors to compete and gain experience in an ideal learning environment."

Al Musannah Sports City, located 85 km north of Muscat, was purpose-built to host Olympic-standard international sporting events with facilities to accommodate thousands of guests, global media and up to 400 boats at its onsite marina. The venue has become synonymous with sailing, successfully hosting high profile events including the 2013 Laser World Championship and 2015 Laser Radial World Championship, among others and is also home to Oman Sail's sailing school.

business

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BP to sell stake in Oman’s Block 61 to PTTEP for \$2.6bn

Expanding partnership: BP will remain operator with 40 per cent interest in Block

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 1

Energy major BP has agreed to sell a 20 per cent participating interest in Oman’s Block 61 to PTT Exploration and Production Public Company Limited (PTTEP) of Thailand for a total consideration of \$2.6 billion. Following completion of the sale, BP will remain operator of the block, holding a 40 per cent interest, the energy giant said in a press statement. Subject to approval from the Sultanate of Oman and partners, the deal is expected to complete during 2021. The agreed total

consideration of \$2.590 billion comprises \$2.450 billion payable on completion (subject to final adjustments) and \$140 million payable contingent on pre-agreed future conditions, it noted. Following completion, participating interests in Block 61 will be: BP, 40 per cent; OQ, 30 per cent; PTTEP, 20 per cent; and Petronas, 10 per cent. PTTEP is Thailand’s national petroleum exploration and production company, with interests in 15 countries, including Oman. Block 61, covering around 3,950km2 in central Oman, contains the largest tight gas development in the Middle East. The block has already had two phases of development – Khazzan, which began production in 2017, followed by Ghazeer in October 2020. These two developments,



targeted at developing a total of 10.5 trillion cubic feet of gas resources, have a combined daily production capacity of 1.5 billion cubic feet of gas and more than 65,000 barrels of condensate. Gas from Block 61 is exported for domestic consumption into

pioneering development that has applied leading techniques and technologies to maximise efficiency and minimise emissions. “We are committed to BP’s business in Oman — this agreement allows us to remain at the heart of this world-class development while also making important progress in our global divestment programme.” BP is targeting divestment proceeds of \$25 billion by 2025. Most recently, the \$5 billion sale of BP’s petrochemicals business to INEOS completed at the end of 2020. BP has had an upstream presence in Oman since 2007 when the original production sharing agreement (PSA) for Block 61 was signed. Beyond Block 61, BP and Eni signed a PSA for Block 77 in 2019. BP Trading & Shipping also purchases LNG from Oman LNG under a seven-year deal that started in 2018. BP Oman Vice-President Yousuf al Ojaili commented: “We look forward to working with PTTEP, our other partners, and the Government of Oman on the continued success of Khazzan and Ghazeer, and to explore further opportunities in Block 61. “We remain very much committed to our strategic partnership with Oman. We will continue to support critical national energy infrastructure for the Sultanate through Block 61, invest significantly in local companies and Omani talent, and deliver an ambitious social investment programme.” In 2020, Omanisation in BP Oman reached around 85 per cent and Block 61 spend with Omani registered companies exceeded \$610 million.

Pandemic, economic crunch dampen power demand growth in Oman



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 1

Power production in the Sultanate, which been growing at an annual rate of around 5 per cent, declined last year as consumption trends were impacted by the economic slowdown compounded by the coronavirus pandemic. According to figures released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), total electricity dipped 2.6 per cent to 35,540.9 gigawatt-hours (GWh) during the first 11 months of 2020, versus 36,506.5 GWh for the corresponding period of 2019. Potable water production on the other hand climbed 6.5 per cent to reach 396.83 million cubic metres during the first 10 months of the year, compared to 372.57 million cubic metres during the

same period of 2019. But some governorates of the Sultanate registered a slight uptick in power output. **Total electricity dipped 2.6 per cent to 35,540.9 gigawatt-hours (GWh) during the first 11 months of 2020, versus 36,506.5 GWh for the corresponding period of 2019** Al Batinah and Al Dhahirah Governorates produced 22,251.1 GWh of power during the January – November 2020 period, which was up 1.1 per cent over the corresponding period of 2019.

Dhofar posted a 4.6 per cent slide in output, totalling 3,506.5 GWh last year, compared to 3,674.4 GWh in 2019. The figures encompasses the power purchases of Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) and the Rural Areas Electricity Company (RAEC), as well as a number of captive power plants and diesel rental units. Muscat Governorate, which hosts one of the largest potable water production hubs, produced 171.80 million cubic metres of water during the January — October 2020 period, up 4.4 per cent from last year’s corresponding total of 164.48 million cubic metres. Output in the Governorate of Dhofar climbed 5.5 per cent to reach 52.86 million cubic metres versus 50.11 million cubic metres in 2019.

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In line with Bank Muscat’s vision to serve you better every day, and adhering to Regulatory instructions, we wish to remind you that salary/bulk payments should be provided in a secure format.

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To view approved secure formats, please visit:
<http://bit.ly/WPSbmE>

Your cooperation in this matter is highly appreciated.

Contact Us

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Bank Muscat. Better Everyday.

Second well starts production in Oman’s Masirah Block

DRILLING UPTICK: Third development well spudded on Yumna field in Block 50

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Ramping up efforts to unlock the hydrocarbon potential of Block 50 — the first producing block off Oman’s east coast, Masirah Oil Limited (MOL) brought a second development well targeting the Yumna Field into production, the latter announced on Monday.

Yumna-2 began producing on January 23, less than six weeks after it was spudded by Shelf Drilling’s Tenacious jack-up rig last December. Output from the development well averages 9,000 barrels/day of dry oil, supplementing flows from



Yumna-1 which was producing at the rate 8,000 bpd (as reported by the company last July).

The uptick in drilling activity follows a decision by Oman’s Ministry of Energy and Minerals

last July to approve MOL’s Field Development Plan for the Yumna Field. On its heels came MOL’s Declaration of Commerciality, signalling its intent to fully develop the Yumna reservoir, as

Output from the development well averages 9,000 barrels/day of dry oil, supplementing flows from Yumna-1 which was producing at the rate 8,000 bpd (as reported by the company last July)

well as explore for hydrocarbons elsewhere in the Block.

Meanwhile, MOL, which has a 100 per cent interest in Block 50 and is the operator as well, continues to make headway in the drilling of a third production well. Yumna-3 was spudded last month by the Tenacious jack-up rig.

Upon completion of the drilling of the well, the jack-up rig will be relocated to the site of a new

prospect, dubbed ‘Zakhera’, where an exploration well will be drilled targeting a structure deemed similar to the Yumna Field.

At the same time, to cater to the new crude oil volumes flowing from the Yumna reservoir, MOL has begun upgrading the production facilities of its Mobile Offshore Production Unit (MOPU) deployed at site. The processing capacity of the unit is being doubled to handle the additional volumes anticipated from all three Yumna production wells.

The upgrade, targeted for completion before the end of Q1 2021, will boost the mobile production unit’s processing capacity to 30,000 bpd, according to a top official of Rex International, which owns a majority stake in MOL.

“We are very pleased that the Yumna 2 well was developed

successfully and is now already producing 9,000 bpd”, said Dan Broström, Executive Chairman of Rex International, a Singapore-based oilfield technology services firm.

“When Yumna 1 resumes production and the new Yumna 3 is completed, we are looking forward to steady production from the three Yumna wells. We are therefore in the process of upgrading the present maximum liquid processing capacity to handle up to 30,000 bpd. We will keep the market updated as soon as we have the results from Yumna 3 and the Zakhera exploration well”, he added in a statement.

Masirah Oil Limited is majority owned by Rex’s local subsidiary Rex Oman Ltd (86.37 per cent) with minority stakes also held by Petroci, the National Oil Company of the Ivory Coast and Schroder & Co Banque SA.

CMA to support ‘Protect Your Investment’ campaign

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 1

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) of the Sultanate will join fellow securities regulators across the GCC in a joint awareness campaign on the theme, ‘Protect Your Investments by Knowing your Rights’.

The two-month-long campaign, which will commence shortly and continue till the end of March, aims to increase awareness of GCC investors of the basics of investment in stock markets, fraud-related risks, and risk mitigating strategies.

The initiative is part of the ‘Mulim’ awareness programme launched by GCC securities regulators last November and targeting the participants of stock markets in the various sectors.

Under the programme, each



GCC regulator undertakes awareness activities through conventional and social media platforms during a specific period of the programme. The campaigns started in November and December 2020 under the title “Basics of Investment”, followed by “Think before Investing” in January 2021.

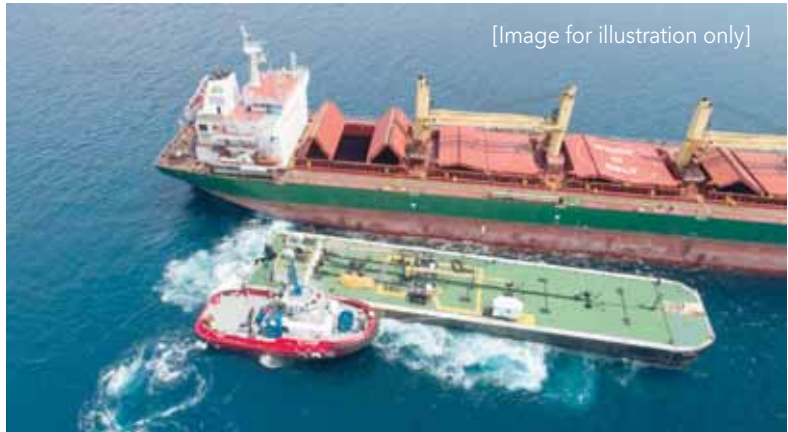
New bunker terminal set for Q2 launch at Port of Duqm

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 1

Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO), the domestic fuel marketing subsidiary of OQ Group, says it plans to commission its new bunker terminal at the Port of Duqm before the second quarter of this year.

Playing an active role in the bunker business since 1994, OOMCO is currently building a bunker terminal bunker barge to be permanently located at the port. The facility will serve as the central hub for bunkering services in other ports in Oman, offering 30,000 cubic metres of storage capacity.

The terminal will also benefit



from being next door to Duqm Refinery, which is planned to be commissioned in the first half of 2022, in addition to Oman Dry Dock, Ras Markaz Crude Oil Park, and a growing number of industries in the Special

Economic Zone (SEZ).

OOMCO recently participated in the Middle East Bunkering Convention 2021, an online event that gathered key industry players to discuss the issues and challenges facing the marine

fuels sector and wider shipping industry.

During the event, OOMCO’s General Manager of International Retail, Ali Ahmed Muqaibal, shared a video presentation on the company’s expanding marine fuels and solutions at the Port of Duqm. “As part of our strategic goals, OOMCO continues to add infrastructure to our already substantial bunker fuel services offering to customers throughout Oman.

The Port of Duqm is a preferred shipping destination and, together with our experience and customer-centric focus, will be of great benefit to our shipping customers at Duqm and further afield”, he said.

PRESS RELEASES

BANK MUSCAT TO GIVE AWAY OVER RO 1.4 MILLION TO 240 WINNERS



Bank Muscat recently announced that 20 winners would be chosen every month in the salary transfer category this year from among customers who use Bank Muscat accounts to receive their salaries. As many as 240 winners will receive a total of over RO 1.4 million in prizes throughout the year.

Abdullah Tamman al Mashani (pictured), DGM — Institutional Sales and Product Development, Bank Muscat, said: “Bank Muscat is playing a keen role in supporting the nation in achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040 and its Al Mazayana savings scheme is playing an important role in increasing the savings habit of people in the country. By continuously innovating over the past three decades based on customer feedback, the bank offers the largest number of prizes in Oman across different customer segments.

SOHAR INTERNATIONAL'S SHATTI AL QURUM BRANCH STARTS ITS OPERATION

With a key focus on furthering customer experience, Sohar International has started its operation in its new flagship branch in the heart of Muscat at Shatti Al Qurum.



Conveniently located next to the bank’s headquarter at Waterfront, the new branch recently commenced operations and offers a full range of the bank’s superior products and financial solutions for Retail, Corporate and Wealth Management clients with a 24-Hour digital lobby. The flagship branch has been designed and developed centered around customer needs and the ideal customer journey ensuring that the brand experience speaks loud from prior to entering the branch until exiting the branch.

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GET QUICK CASH THROUGH THE APP WITH NBO’S CARDLESS ATM SERVICE



Continuing to pioneer digital innovation in the Sultanate, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has made banking easier than ever with its cardless cash service.

Customers can now withdraw funds from any NBO ATM, conveniently located across the Sultanate, using only their mobile phones, by simply logging into the NBO mobile app and going to the cardless cash feature.

They will then enter the required amount and the One Time Number Passcode which will be sent via SMS into the ATM screen. This is just one of the many ways that NBO is supporting the Sultanate’s digital transformation and meeting the evolving needs of its customers.

OAB REVEALS ITS NEW EDITION OF HASAAD SAVINGS SCHEME FOR 2021

Oman Arab Bank recently announced the details of its new Hasaad Savings Scheme for 2021. The new edition has been enhanced to include even more prizes, to encourage the Bank’s customers to continue saving and enhance their financial stability.

Rashad al Shaikh, Acting Head of the Retail Banking Division at OAB, said, “Despite all the challenges that were faced by everyone last year, the Hasaad Savings Scheme has been successful in promoting a savings culture across the community, which we believe is core objective of this scheme.

Today, we are delighted to launch the latest edition of the Hasaad Savings Scheme for 2021, which has several great prizes in store for our valued customers across the Sultanate.”



SHARAKAH MOVES TO A NEW LOCATION



Sharakah moved to a more accessible and prominent new location at the Airport Heights, Al Irfan area from its earlier location in Al Khuwair 33.

The moving to the new location comes as part of Sharakah’s strategy to make its presence closer to customers, as the new office is strategically positioned, with easy access for Sharakah’s customers both from the Expressway as well as the Sultan Qaboos Highway. Sharakah welcomes all customers, inquirers from SMEs and potential SMEs at its new location as well as through social media channels, emails and phone calls.

New address details as below:

Golf Tower,
Muscat Hills,
Airport Heights,
Madinat Al Irfan, Al Seeb

**India cuts import tax on gold, silver to 7.5 per cent**

India slashed the import duties on gold and silver to 7.5 per cent from 12.5 per cent, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said, as the world's second biggest gold consumer tries to bring down smuggling of the precious metal. — Reuters

**Indonesia's largest Islamic bank starts operations**

President Joko Widodo launched operations of Indonesia's largest Islamic lender, Bank Syariah Indonesia, on Monday in a move to boost the sharia finance industry in the world's largest Muslim-majority nation. — Reuters



India spends big to revive pandemic-hit economy

NEW DELHI: India unveiled a massive spending plan focused on healthcare and infrastructure on Monday, as the government sought to boost a coronavirus-ravaged economy on course for its biggest annual contraction on record.

The planned expenditure of \$30.6 billion on health and well-being schemes was more than double the equivalent outlay in the previous budget, although it included \$4.8 billion for the country's ambitious Covid-19 immunisation drive, with plans to vaccinate 300 million by July.

The nation of 1.3 billion was badly hit by one of the world's strictest virus lockdowns, with growth slumping by a historic 23.9 per cent in April-June, and the economy expected to contract 7.7 per cent in 2020-21.

"This budget provides every opportunity for our economy to raise and capture the pace that it needs for a sustainable growth," Finance Minister Nirmala



India's Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman holds budget papers as she leaves her office to present the federal budget in the parliament in New Delhi. — Reuters

Sitharaman told parliament as she unveiled the annual budget.

The health sector has long suffered from chronic underinvestment. As of 2017, the

country had 0.8 doctors per 1,000 people, around the same level as Iraq, according to the World Bank.

Asia's third-largest economy was in the throes of a slowdown

even before the pandemic, during which it has recorded the second-highest number of coronavirus cases at 10.7 million.

Infrastructure was another big-

The planned expenditure of \$30.6 billion on health and well-being schemes was more than double the equivalent outlay in the previous budget, although it included \$4.8 billion for the country's ambitious Covid-19 immunisation drive

ticket item, with some \$76 billion — 34.5 per cent more than in the previous budget — to be sunk into major projects, including roads and railways.

Divestments — including of national carrier Air India and part of the government's stake in the country's largest insurer, Life Insurance Corporation — would help to raise \$24 billion, Sitharaman said.

But the sales of both state-run firms have been on the cards for

some time, with the mooted IPO of the insurer sparking a walk-out by nearly 100,000 staff last year.

With lenders also struggling with a mountain of bad debt, Sitharaman said \$2.74 billion would be put aside for the next financial year to recapitalise state banks.

Social security benefits, including minimum wages, will be extended to workers in the gig economy, which has flourished amid cheap mobile data and abundant labour. The raft of spending measures will blow out the fiscal deficit to 9.5 per cent of GDP for the financial year ending March, Sitharaman said, from a forecast 3.5 per cent.

The government plans to borrow an additional \$1.1 billion to fund the deficit, she added.

In its annual economic survey, the government said there would be a "V-shaped" recovery after the severe contraction, forecasting growth to hit 11 per cent in the 2021-22 financial year. — AFP

Chip sales rose 6.5 per cent in 2020 after year-end rush



A chip is on display at Huawei's headquarters in Shenzhen, China. — Reuters

NEW YORK: Global semiconductor sales rose 6.5 per cent overall in 2020, as a recovery during the last three months of the year helped offset a sharp dropoff in March and April, when pandemic stay-home orders rolled out around the world.

Global sales were \$439 billion in 2020, according to data from the Semiconductor Industry Association (SIA), a trade group that represents most US chipmakers along with many international firms.

The group said sales from US chipmakers were about \$208 billion, or about 47 per cent of the total.

Falan Yinug, SIA's director of industry statistics and economic policy, said much of the rise in US purchasing was driven by high-end memory chips used in applications.

Amazon.com Inc, Microsoft and Google all saw dramatic rises in the use of cloud computing over the course of 2020 as businesses adapted to working from home.

— Reuters

JAL projects \$2.9 billion loss

TOKYO: Japan Airlines (JAL) said it forecasts a larger-than-expected annual net loss of nearly \$2.9 billion, as the aviation industry continues to struggle from the fallout of the coronavirus pandemic.

JAL said it projected a net loss of 300 billion yen for the year ending March 2021, up from its previous forecast.

"Severe global restrictions on international travel have caused international passenger demand to virtually disappear. Many countries and areas are suffering again from the rebound of the (virus's) spread, which makes the recovery of international passenger demand hard to foresee," it said. — AFP

Pakistan inflation eases to 5.65 per cent

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's annual inflation rate eased to 5.65 per cent in January, the bureau of statistics said on Monday, from 8 per cent the previous month.

A decrease in the prices of vegetables, pulses, eggs, spices and chicken helped bring down the consumer price index (CPI), the bureau said. It said the Urban CPI recorded a decrease of 0.16 per cent while Rural CPI recorded a drop of 0.29



A trader counts Pakistani rupee notes at a currency exchange booth in Peshawar, Pakistan. — Reuters

per cent.

The average inflation rate

from July-January (2020-21) was 8.19 per cent and food inflation at 13.79 per cent over the year earlier period.

After touching as high as over 14 per cent early last year, the January reading was the first time that core inflation has come down to the level of what the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan had inherited when he took office in late 2018.

— Reuters

Asian factories suffer as pandemic impact lingers

TOKYO: Manufacturing in China and Japan suffered in January amid a resurgence in coronavirus infections, while South Korea and Taiwan saw improvements, underscoring the fragile and uneven nature of the region's economic recovery.

Factory activity quickened in major chip exporters South Korea and Taiwan, as they benefited from continued brisk demand for semiconductors crucial to work-from-home IT goods. But China's manufacturing activity expanded at the slowest pace in seven months in January, weighed down by falling export orders.

Japan also saw factory activity slip back into contraction as a new state of emergency, rolled out in January, hit operating conditions, PMI data showed on Monday.

"PMI readings for Asia suggest that manufacturing sectors improved further in most places. Buoyant global demand for electronics should continue to support the sector for at least the next few months," said Alex Holmes, emerging Asia economist at Capital Economics.

Takeshi Okuwaki, an economist at Dai-ichi Life Research Institute in Tokyo, said Japanese manufacturers may slash output



A man works inside Toyota's Kanda plant in Kanda, Fukuoka Prefecture, Japan. — AFP

as the state of emergency will unavoidably hurt the economy.

"A shortage of chip supply will take time to fix, which will also weigh on Japan's automobile production," he said. China's Caixin/Markit Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) dropped to 51.5 last month, its lowest level

since June last year and easing from December's reading of 53.0.

Although it remains above the 50 mark that separates growth from contraction, the index was below a median market forecast for a reading of 52.7.

The survey broadly aligned with Beijing's official PMI on Sunday, which showed the recovery in

factory activity slowing as local Covid-19 cases rose.

Japan's final au Jibun Bank PMI fell to 49.8 in January from the previous month's 50.0 reading, as fresh state of emergency measures in areas accounting for 55 per cent of the country's population hurt employment and output.

That was in stark contrast

to South Korea, where factory activity rose at its fastest pace in a decade thanks to soaring exports. Separate data showed South Korea's exports jumped 11.4 per cent in January from a year earlier to mark a third straight month of gains due in part to surging sales of memory chips.

South Korea experienced its third and strongest wave of infections this winter but is seeing a gradual decline in new cases. In India, factory activity expanded at its strongest pace in three months in January, fuelled by a continued recovery in demand and output.

Manufacturing activity in Indonesia increased at a faster pace in January than in December, and such activity stopped contracting in the Philippines. But activity shrank in Malaysia and rose at a slower pace in Vietnam, the PMI data showed.

China's economy expanded at a faster-than-expected rate of 6.5 per cent in the fourth quarter last year, as factories raced to fill overseas orders amid a surging pandemic. But recovery hopes are being dampened by a sharp increase in Covid-19 cases as authorities impose lockdown measures to curb the spread of the virus in the country's north. — Reuters

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Al Al Maashari
99639264
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Nizwa Office
Abdullah Al Abri
99429192
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Sohar Office
Musalam Al Saidi
99429192
sohardaily@outlook.com

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Mohammed al Rashdi: 99841230
m.alrashdi86@yahoo.com

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

Saada al Rashdi
95919344

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Ostul Liwa Almomayaz Trading Co, partnership, is a company registered with Commercial Registry Secretariat of the General Directorate of Commerce and Industry of Al Batinah Governorate under No. 1231940, hereby announces that: The company is currently changing the legal form of the commercial register from partnership company to a one-person company "OPC" and under the name: Ostul Liwa Almomayaz Trading Company OPC pursuant to Article NO (13) bis (2) of The Commercial Companies Law No 4/74 and its amendments. Anyone who rejects shall submit reasons for his objection to the Commercial Registry Secretariat of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within two months from the date of publishing this Announcement. Therefore, all parties concerned shall be informed of this amendment.

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Rebecca Elfverson: Finding My Inner Muse

‘My Inner Muse’ is a unique fashion boutique in the new Waterfront Mall in Shatti Qurum, recently opened by flamboyant Australian-born, Oman-based, fashion, costume and operatic design personality Rebecca Elfverson... **P 18**

INSIDE STORIES

WILD LIFE



DRAMATIC SHARK DECLINE LEAVES ‘GAPING HOLE’ IN OCEAN: STUDY

Overfishing has wiped out over 70 per cent of some shark and ray populations in the last half-century, leaving a “gaping, growing hole” in ocean life, according to a new study... **Story on Page 20**

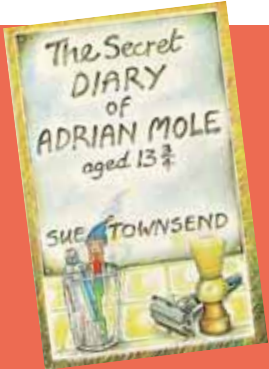
FASHION



FIRST EVER ARAB FASHION WEEK FOR MEN KICKS OFF VIRTUALLY

From animal print ensembles to lacy hoodies and flared silky slacks, Arab men on Thursday got their first ever fashion week, with the three-day event showcased virtually online... **Story on Page 19**

READ



THE SECRET DIARY OF ADRIAN MOLE, AGED 13¾

BY SUE TOWNSEND

The book is written in a diary style, and focuses on the worries and regrets of a teenager who believes himself to be an intellectual.

ART



RARE BOTTICELLI PORTRAIT SELLS FOR RECORD \$92.2 MILLION AT NY AUCTION

A rare Botticelli portrait sold for \$92.2 million at auction at Sotheby's in New York on Thursday, a world record for any work by the Italian artist... **Story on Page 19**

DISCOVERY



EGYPT SAYS THEY RETRIEVES 5,000 ARTEFACTS FROM US

Egypt announced on Wednesday that it had retrieved some 5,000 ancient items from the United States, after years of negotiations to return what it said were fraudulently acquired items.



Rebecca Elfverson: Finding My Inner Muse

Text by Ray Petersen
Photos by Lena Petersen



Moving on to Oman, for almost eight-years, Elfverson was Head of Costume and Makeup, at the Royal Opera House with a royal vision to enhance global cultural engagement, to enrich lives, and to showcase and nurture the diverse artistic creativity of Oman and the world.

Iris Apfel, is an American business-woman, designer, and fashion icon who wrote, "Dress to please yourself. Listen to your inner muse and take a chance," expressing the view that we should wear fashion that makes a statement, that says boldly, "Look at me! This is who I am today!" What wonderfully bold sentiments, and they may well be a clarion call for a new and exciting fashion boutique in Muscat.

'My Inner Muse' is a unique fashion boutique in the new Waterfront Mall in Shatti Qurum, recently opened by flamboyant Australian-born, Oman-based, fashion, costume, and operatic design personality Rebecca Elfverson. Growing up in Sydney, Australia, in the shadows of the magnificent Sydney Opera House, it would have been nigh on impossible to not be influenced by the arts, and the young Elfverson completed a Fashion Diploma, heavily influenced by home Grown designers in the 80s such as Linda Jackson, Carla Zampatti and more recently Boho stylist, 'The Kaftan Queen,' Camilla Franks, the 'fabulous' Dame Zandra Rhodes and 'The Phantom of the Palais-Royal,' French icon, Claude Montana, famous for his 'power women' designs.

The impressionable Elfverson worked in the fast-paced, high-profile Sydney Fashion Week 'catwalk scene,' and was smitten. Work experience at the Australian Opera production department saw Elfverson entranced by Dame Joan Sutherlands show costumes, and she immediately set off for the bright lights of the West End, and the English National Opera at the Coliseum, London, in the United Kingdom. Staying behind the curtain stints with Director/Designers Sue Blanes Alcina, and Phyllida Lloyd on Handmaids Tale, the Director of 'The Iron Lady,' and 'Mama Mia,' and Jonathan Wolfe Miller on

Rigoletto, the noted humor-ist and stage director.

Then followed she said, "Three full-on years with the Bill Kenwright Production Company, one of the most successful in the world, renowned for their productions of 'Saturday Night Fever,' 'Cabaret,' and the unforgettable 'Sound of Music,' where she 'dipped her toes' in the musical theatre scene working with notables on such as 'Tommy -Half a Sixpence'- Steele and Shane Ritchie, better known as Alfie Moon from the 'Eastenders,' also a star of the stage in 'Jesus Christ Superstar,' 'Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat,' and 'Blood Brothers.'

Moving on to Oman, for almost eight-years, Elfverson was Head of Costume and Makeup, at the Royal Opera House with a royal vision to enhance global cultural engagement, to enrich lives, and to showcase and nurture the diverse artistic creativity of Oman and the world.

"I think we did our part," she smiled, "and developed from modest beginnings, an Omani artistic support team in costumes and makeup, unrivalled in the region. They did themselves proud with their commitment to task, and excellence, and have certainly established an artistic legacy for others to follow."

Elfverson's boutique champions her interpretation of the warm, earthy tones of the Sultanate with her signature 'Sunset and Sand Dunes Collection,' she presents the stunningly elegant pinks and grays in her 'Rose Terraces Collection,' and is clearly inspired by her "favourite place in Oman," the geological and alluvial patterns carved by millenniums of nature's wind and rain, with her 'Jebel Rock Collection.' Further collections of naturally inspired casual, beach, and resort wear are, says the designer, "rich in style, colour, mood, expression, and are fashioned to inspire confidence,

create elegance, and to draw the beauty within, without."

Making the point that "Oman itself exudes modesty, and its beautiful women express sensitivity so elegantly," Elfverson has been inspired to create her collections based on her own experiences and passion. However, she has been deeply influenced away from her individual flamboyance, towards that classical modesty, and modernity, but, as she puts it, "Classic melding of cultures and societies, Arabic and European fusion with soft, elegant lines, fitted, not clinging, to preserve that modesty while still emphasizing the beauty. It is, I trust, Arabic with a twist!"

Not content with wearable fashion, Elfverson is teaming up with several jewellery, designers who will occupy the spotlight at MIM soon. "I have a local Omani Designer Nadia al Shamsi, who showcases modestly her impeccable 'Mazayen Collection,' unique jewellery, handmade, and inspired by the cultural heritage of the Sultanate. We also showcase Italian designer jewellery that is quiet the statement piece for your wardrobe, in gold, silver and rose gold. In addition, clothing and jewellery, designers are coming on board for short residencies, including a new contemporary Saudi designer based in Oman, in Reem Abbar, under the label Amina Atelier and I hope to also provide opportunities for budding young Omani designers to promote themselves and their wares, as Omani silverwork and embroidery is so well regarded, and so beautiful."

Rebecca Elfverson offers a bespoke commission design service for those seeking a unique, individual creation, with her personal stamp made expertly to measure. She invites all her clientele to take Apfel's 'chance,' to express it confidently, to celebrate life, the Omani experience, and to say, "Look at me! This is who I am today," as they showcase their, 'Inner Muse.'



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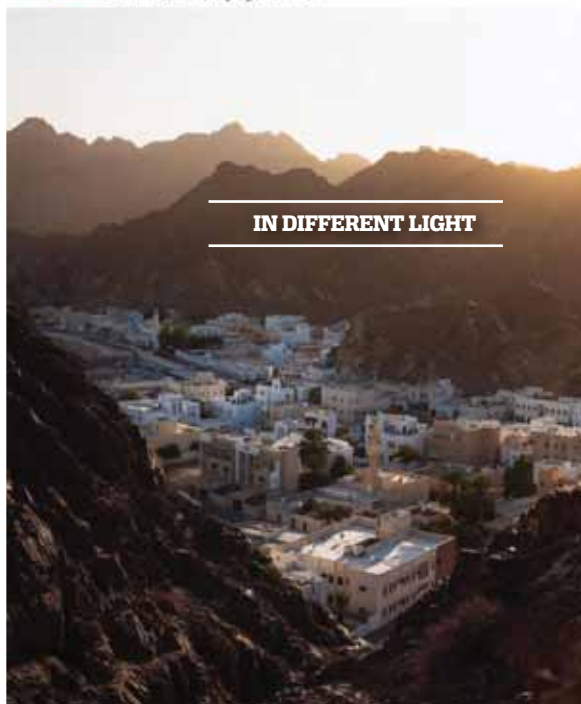
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FASHION

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First ever Arab fashion week for men kicks off virtually

From animal print ensembles to lacy hoodies and flared silky slacks, Arab men on Thursday got their first ever fashion week, with the three-day event showcased virtually online.

Designer Furne One of Amato Couture, loved in Dubai for his ethereal designs, opened the unprecedented event with a fall/winter 2021-2022 collection entitled "The First Temptation".

Set in the desert, the models all wore white, including lacy hoodies and pants. The traditional dishdasha robe worn by men across the Arab Gulf was featured, but revisited with a slit down the front.

"The world around us is changing, so too are attitudes towards fashion, and nowhere more so than in the Middle East," said Mohammed Aqra, chief strategist at the Arab Fashion Council.

"Arab Fashion Week-Men's presents the breadth of menswear beyond formal attire and street wear and paves the way for men in the Middle East to embrace a more adventurous wardrobe," he added.

The council organised the event, which will be broadcast on YouTube for the three day duration, to showcase some 15 regional and international designers, including from France, Britain, Iran and

Lebanon.

Also on show on Thursday were "Puro Teatro" (pure theatre) creations by Spanish designer Arturo Obegero, including high-rise pants, tops with crinkly waists and others with huge bow ties hanging from the back.

The first day of the Arab men's fashion week also featured designs by Zardouz, including animal print shirts and pants, as well as others by Anomalous and Boyfriend The Brand.

Based in Dubai, the Arab Fashion Council represents all 22 members of the Arab League and is already behind the twice-yearly Arab Fashion Week, now in its 14th edition.

The council aims at promoting regional designers and the industry across the globe.

According to the Dubai Chamber of Commerce, menswear dominated the UAE apparel sector in 2018, amounting to \$12.3 billion in sales. — AFP



Rare Botticelli portrait sells for record \$92.2 million at NY auction



A RARE Botticelli portrait sold for \$92.2 million at auction at Sotheby's in New York on Thursday, a world record for any work by the Italian artist.

The Renaissance artist's "Young Man Holding a Roundel" is one of only around a dozen of his portraits known to survive today. Sandro Botticelli's large-scale "Birth of Venus" and "Primavera" paintings are displayed in Florence's Uffizi Gallery.

Sotheby's said it was one of the most significant portraits of any period ever to appear at auction and fetched the second-highest price for any Old Master painting. At \$450 million, "Salvator Mundi," attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, set the world record in 2017 for an Old Master or any work of art.

Bidders on the phone and online participated in Thursday's auction. The identity of the buyer was not disclosed.

The 15th-century work, which has also been known as "Young Man Holding a Medallion," had

carried a presale estimate of \$80 million, and Sotheby's had thought it might fetch more than \$100 million.

"This is not only an exceptional painting, it is also the epitome of beauty, and of a moment when so much of our Western civilisation began. Today's result is a fitting tribute, both to the painting itself and all that it represents," said Christopher Apostle, director of Old Masters paintings at the auction house.

Sotheby's said "Young Man Holding a Roundel" was acquired for \$1.3 million by its previous, unidentified owner at an auction in 1982 in the United Kingdom.

It shows an unknown young man, likely a member of Florence's elite in the late 15th century, dressed in a simple tunic with a blue sky behind him and holding a roundel, or medallion.

The previous record for a Botticelli was set in 2013 when his "Madonna and Child with Young Saint John the Baptist" sold for \$10.4 million. — Reuters



Dramatic shark decline leaves 'gaping hole' in ocean: Study

Overfishing has wiped out over 70 per cent of some shark and ray populations in the last half-century, leaving a "gaping, growing hole" in ocean life, according to a new study.

Researchers found alarming declines in species ranging from hammerhead sharks to manta rays.

Among the worst affected is the oceanic whitetip, a powerful shark often described as particularly dangerous to man, which now hovers on the edge of extinction because of human activity.

Targeted for their fins, oceanic whitetips are caught up by indiscriminate fishing techniques. Their global population has dropped 98 per cent in the last 60 years, said Nick Dulvy, the study's senior author and a professor at Simon Fraser University (SFU).

"That's a worse decline than most large terrestrial mammal populations, and getting up there or as bad as the blue whale decline", he said.

Dulvy and a team of scientists spent years collecting and analysing information from scientific studies and fisheries data to build up a picture of the global state of 31 species of

sharks and rays.

They found three-quarters of the species examined were so depleted that they face extinction.

These are "the most wide-ranging species in the largest, most remote habitats on the earth, which are often assumed to be protected from human influence", the study's lead author Nathan Pacoureau said.

"We knew the situation was bad in a lot of places but that information came from different studies and reports, so it was difficult to have an idea of the global situation", added Pacoureau, a post-doctoral fellow at SFU's department of biological science.

The study, published on Wednesday in the journal *Nature*, points the finger at overfishing and weak protection, and emphasises that species can stage a comeback when conservation efforts are made.

The research focuses on oceanic sharks and rays, species that primarily live in open water. While it found variation in the health of different populations, the overall trend was clear.

"The data revealed a gaping, growing hole in ocean life", Pacoureau said.

STUNNED INTO SILENCE

For 18 species where more data was available, the researchers concluded global populations had fallen over 70 per cent since 1970.

Dulvy said the figure was likely to be similar, or even worse, for other oceanic sharks and rays, but gaps in data made it difficult to draw conclusions.

The results were a shock even for experts, Pacoureau said, describing specialists at a meeting on shark conservation being "stunned into silence" when confronted with the figures.

Andrea Marshall, a contributing author of the study and co-founder of the Marine Megafauna Foundation, said watching the decline of manta and devil rays in Mozambique where she works "has been a living nightmare".

"It happened quicker than we could have ever imagined and it demonstrated to us that we need to take immediate action", she said in an MMF press release.

Three sharks were found to be critically endangered, with their populations declining by more than 80 percent — the oceanic whitetip shark,

scalloped hammerhead and great hammerhead.

Sharks and rays are especially vulnerable to population collapse because they grow slowly and reproduce comparatively infrequently.

The study notes a two-fold increase over the last half-century in the use of fishing with longlines and seine nets — methods that can snare marine life indiscriminately, including endangered animals.

Regional bodies that manage international fisheries "have not prioritised shark and ray protection", Pacoureau said. He backs catch bans for endangered and critically endangered species, and limits for less threatened species.

"Proactive measures can prevent population collapses. And we know they work", he added, pointing to the recovery of great white sharks around the US after new regulations.

Dulvy said ordinary citizens had a role to play by pressing governments to meet their national and international commitments.

"Wherever you can, urge your government to care for sharks", he said. — **AFP**