

ARAB PARLIAMENT PREPARING PLAN TO COMBAT CHILD LABOUR

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by Council of Oman, on Tuesday participated in the deliberations of the Arab Parliament's preparatory committees, scheduled to be held this Thursday during the second session of the second sitting of the third legislative term in Amman, Jordan. **>A5**



HM CONGRATULATES PRESIDENT OF CHILE

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to President Gabriel Borek of Chile on being elected as his country's new president. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of success to President Borek in leading the people of Chile towards further progress and prosperity. His Majesty also wished the relations between the two countries further development and growth. **-OMA**



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DRUG DEALERS USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO TARGET TEENS



Narcotics are often marketed as performance enhancers to increase memory and physical power

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Criminals are trying to sell drugs on social media to teenagers, often relying on a lack of parental control to get through to them, the Royal Oman Police has said.

To further ensnare them, narcotics are often marketed by these peddlers as performance enhancers that increase their memory and physical power.

An increase in illegal online activities involving the promotion of drugs has been noticed recently, thanks to the latest technological developments, said Lieutenant Colonel Sulaiman bin Saif Al Tamtami, the director of enforcement administration at the Directorate General of Combating Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.

"While there has been a general increase in the number of crimes we have witnessed, owing to developments in technology, crimes around drugs and psychotropic substances are no exception," said Al Tamtami. "These

are among the most serious crimes worldwide, in terms of their impact on the health of individuals, families and the societies, and the security and sustainable development of the country."

"Drug dealers resort to illegal promotion of their products on social media, as they hope to target those teenagers who use such sites without parental control," he explained.

"Although Oman does witness some crimes of this nature to a limited extent, we have seen various social media applications used to promote such substances."

"A team of technicians and specialists at the Directorate General of Combating Drugs and Psychotropic Substances has been formed to monitor social media and to spot any violations involving the promotion and dealing of drugs and psychotropic substances," added Al Tamtami. "In case websites or programmes promoting such substances are found, then the team communicates with the

departments concerned with blocking such websites in the Sultanate."

Among the various methods used by drug touts to rope in unsuspecting people on social media are the use of fake accounts to advertise narcotics, adding photos of attractive women so that youth will be more inclined to view such pages, and also claim them to be substances that increase understanding and memorisation. This last tactic is particularly used to target school and college students ahead of their examinations.

Some websites also promote drugs and other psychotropic substances as enabling motorists to drive for long hours without feeling tired or sleepy.

"Victims who fall for such schemes normally have a lack of awareness about such things on social media," said Al Tamtami, encouraging people to not fall prey to such criminal activities. "There are opportunities for each and every one of us to get back on the right track, with the sup-

port of others.

"We always rely on the awareness of society and social media users when it comes to reporting and staying clear of such sites," he added. "The Directorate General has taken several actions, including the tracking of such social media sites to report violations found on them. Once the violators have been tracked down, we will take the necessary legal action."

The Law on Combating Drugs and Psychotropic Substances states that victims of such substances can ask for treatment to wean themselves off drugs. Such requests will be dealt with in complete confidentiality, the law adds.

Should there be individuals who require treatment for themselves, or wish to draw attention to others who are in need of assistance, the DG for Combating Drugs and Psychotropic Substances can be called toll-free on 1444. Alternatively, people can call the Royal Oman Police operations hotline on 9999.

Compensation worth OMR62 million sought post-Shaheen cyclone

MUSCAT: The weekly reports monitored by the Capital Market Authority (CMA) to follow up the insurance companies on settling the claims and paying the compensations after the cyclone "Shaheen" revealed that the volume of the claims stood at about OMR62.373 million so far through the registration of more than 9,800 claims distributed over a number of the wilayats affected by the cyclone in the governorates of Muscat, North and South Al Batinah.

The data indicated that most of the claims submitted to insurance companies were accepted for all those affected by the cyclone "Shaheen" who hold insurance policies that cover the risks of natural disasters, whether to insure vehicles, property, transportation and other various insurance coverages. The data also indicated that about OMR51.7mn are still under settlement, as reparation for these damages requires some time because they are houses, buildings and facilities. Insurance companies paid about OMR10.6mn to redress other damages, and the indicators

of the size of the compensation is expected to rise and reach approximately OMR69mn by the end of the settlement of all claims related to the cyclone "Shaheen".

As for the size of compensation for each insurance product, the data indicated that property insurance acquired the largest share, as its total compensation exceeded OMR45.3mn, which represents insurance of homes, buildings, facilities and other properties, followed by motor insurance with a total amount of OMR8.9mn. Then comes the engineering insurance with a share of about OMR7.5mn, which is the insurance that is concerned with securing industrial sites, facilities, devices and equipment. The rest is distributed to other types of insurance.

The geographical distribution of insurance claims as a result of the cyclone "Shaheen" showed the direct effects in a number of wilayats of North and South Al Batinah, as well as in the rest of the wilayats of the Sultanate in a cumulative way to determine the affected spatial dimension and its concentration in the wilayats and governorates. **-OMA**

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN Healthy demand for vaccine booster jab

1 The third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine will raise antibodies and immunity by more than 75 per cent in the body, a senior doctor has said even as a healthy demand for the booster dose was seen among people on Tuesday. **>A3**

WORLD EU COVID passports validity limited

2 The European Commission announced on Tuesday that COVID vaccine certificates in the bloc would be valid for nine months only without a booster shot. **>A6**

MARKET Ministry signs gas concession deal



3 The Ministry of Energy and Minerals on behalf of the government of the Sultanate of Oman has signed a concession pact with Shell Integrated Gas Oman BV, and its partners, OQ and Marsa Liquefied Natural Gas, to develop and produce natural gas from block 10 of the Saif Rawl gas field. **>B1**



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LONELY PLANET'S RANKING

Oman among top countries to visit in 2022



Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman has been named among Lonely Planet's top 10 countries to visit in 2022, being the only country from the Arabian Gulf to be included on that list.

Oman is ranked seventh on the list of the travel publication's best countries to visit next year, with visitors to this part of the world able to take in traditional charm and natural beauty.

"For visitors, this offers a rare chance to engage with the Arab world without the distorting lens of excessive wealth," says Lonely Planet. "Oman's low-rise towns retain their traditional charms, and

Bedouin values remain at the heart of an Omani welcome."

"With an abundance of natural beauty, from spectacular mountains, wind-blown deserts and a pristine coastline, Oman is the obvious choice for those seeking out the modern face of Arabia while wanting still to sense its ancient soul." The Cook Islands were listed first on the list of must-see countries for next year, followed by Norway, Mauritius, Belize, Slovenia, Anguilla, Oman, Nepal, Malawi, and Egypt.

The list is one of three released by Lonely Planet as part of its "Best in Travel 2022" collection, which also includes the best cities in the

world for tourists, and 10 must-see regions across the globe.

"These destinations span the globe and allow you, the traveller, to experience a wide swathe of breathtaking experiences, from trekking across fjords in Iceland to watching a fashion show from an up-and-coming designer in Nigeria," explained Lonely Planet. "Carefully selected by our editors, our list is meant to inspire and excite you, and help you make your 2022 travel dreams a reality."

Those who wish to experience all the world has to offer in terms of natural beauty and breathtaking displays would do well to check out the top 10 regions around the

world. They include Westfjords in Iceland; West Virginia in the USA; Xishuangbanna in China; Kent's Heritage Coast in the UK; Puerto Rico; Shikoku in Japan; Chile's Atacama Desert; the Scenic Rim of Australia; Canada's Vancouver Island, and the region of Burgundy in France.

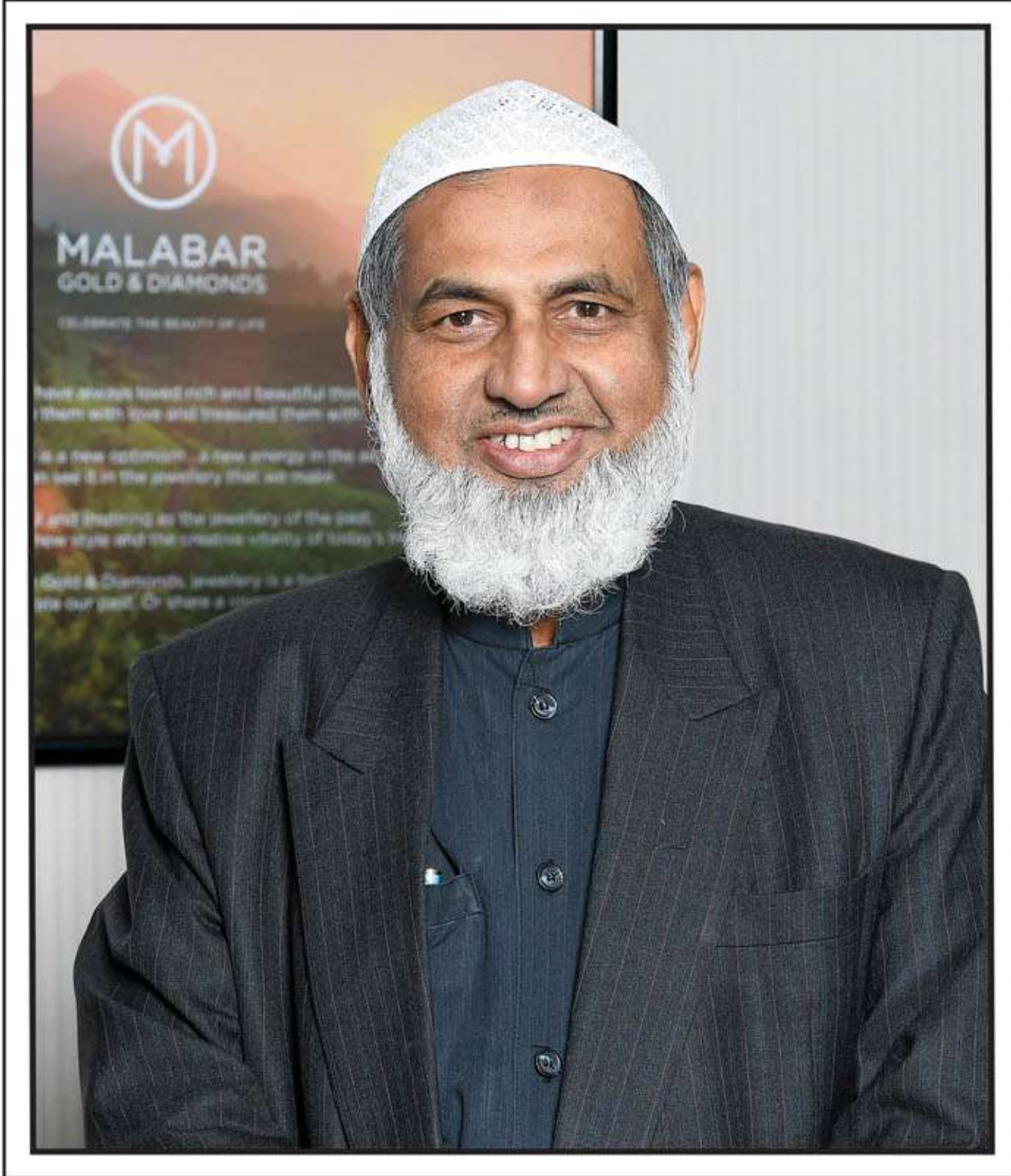
The top 10 must cities in the world, are Auckland, New Zealand; Taipei, Taiwan; Freiburg, Germany; Atlanta, USA; Lagos, Nigeria; Nicosia, Cyprus; Dublin, Ireland; Mérida, Mexico; Florence, Italy; and Gyeongju, South Korea.

"Of course, we're living in a complex travel landscape," explained Lonely Planet in its "Best in Trav-

el" entry. "As the global pandemic continues to impact an ever-shifting patchwork of places around the world, we're working hard to balance travel and safety, and a sense of caution alongside our endless sense of wanderlust. As such, our 2022 list, which is included below in its entirety, is as much a bucket list for the future as it is a to-visit list for right now."

"In the coming months, as the world continues its return to travel, we'll be unveiling a whole new series of stories, video interviews, and how-to guides for turning our Best in Travel list into your travel reality, whether in 2022 or further in the future," the publication added.

إِنَّا لِلّٰهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ



Dr. P. A. IBRAHIM HAJI

(6th September, 1943 - 21st December, 2021)

CO-CHAIRMAN, MALABAR GROUP

FOREVER IN OUR HEARTS

The Board of Directors, Shareholders and Management team members of Malabar Group express their profound grief over the passing away of Dr. P.A. Ibrahim Haji on 21st December, 2021.

As an inspirational leader and enthusiastic philanthropist, he touched the hearts of many during his lifetime and he will continue to live in them.

Our hearts go out to his family and loved ones at this difficult time.



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ANTI-COVID VACCINE

Great demand for booster shot of jab among people

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine will raise antibodies and immunity by more than 75 per cent in the body, Senior Consultant and Head of Infectious Diseases Section – Internal Medicine Department at the Royal Hospital has said.

Speaking to the *Times of Oman*, Dr Faryal bint Ali Al Lawatia, Senior Consultant and Head of Infectious Diseases Section – Internal Medicine Department at the Royal Hospital, said, “The effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines is reduced due to the Omicron variant, and there are studies that show that the third booster or supplement dose raises antibodies and immunity by more than 75 per cent.”

Dr Faryal confirmed that the need for a supplemental dose of COVID-19 vaccines for some groups of people with low immunity came because they did not reach the required level of immunity after two doses.

The Senior Consultant also said that due the spread of the Omicron variant, the time period for obtaining the booster dose of COVID-19 vaccines has been reduced. There are studies confirming the safety of obtaining it after three months.

“A large British study showed the safety of mixing vaccines and their ability to form antibodies better. There is no harm in getting the Pfizer vaccine after two doses of another vaccine,” Dr Faryal Al Lawati added

Dr Zaid Al Hina’i, an infectious disease consultant at Sultan Qa-



GO GET IT: The Supreme Committee called upon people aged 18 or more to take get the booster dose of the vaccine.

boos University Hospital also said that there will be a rapid rise in infections in the coming period due to the rapid spread of the mutant.

He pointed out that the worrying thing about the Omicron mutant is the speed of spread and the large number of infections. The reassuring thing is that the risk is lower than the previous mutant. Dr Al Hina’i confirmed that the third dose is very important and vaccinations must be expedited.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Committee charged to deal with COVID-19 has announced on Monday, December 20, 2021 that the Sultanate has recorded of 15 new cases of the Omicron mutant.

As per the data received from the Ministry of Health, fifteen new cases of the Omicron mutant have been registered in the Sultanate of Oman, all of whom are currently undergoing epidemiological investigation, the Supreme Committee said.

The Supreme Committee has

urged everyone to fully adhere to preventive measures such as wearing a mask in all closed places, maintaining physical distancing, avoiding crowded places and gatherings of all kinds, and maintaining clean hands.

The Committee also called upon all those aged 18 and over to take the initiative to receive the booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine available in primary care institutions.

In response to the Supreme Committee decisions, citizens on Tuesday went to health centres in various states in the Sultanate to take the third dose. The Directorate General of Health Services of Muscat Governorate said in a statement that there is a great demand from citizens and residents to take the third dose as part of the immunisation campaign against COVID -19 in different locations of the Sultanate as well as the Oman Airports building in the wilayat of Seeb.

CONDOLENCES

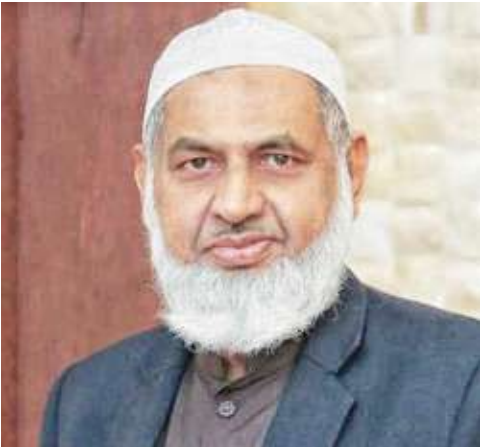
‘Ibrahim Haji’s contributions will always be remembered’

Times News Service

MUSCAT: “Dr PA Ibrahim Haji will always be remembered for his commendable contributions in the field of education”, said MP Ahammed, Chairman, Malabar Group, offering condolences on the demise of the renowned businessman and philanthropist.

“As Co-Chairman of Malabar Group, his activities always served as inspiration for us, and he contributed greatly to the devel-

opment of our company. A true believer in the power of education to empower communities, his contributions in the field of education are noteworthy. His social commitment lives through the various educational institutions and the different charitable endeavours he has initiated in India and abroad. He made charity a way of life. We are deeply saddened by his passing. My thoughts and prayers are with the bereaved family.”





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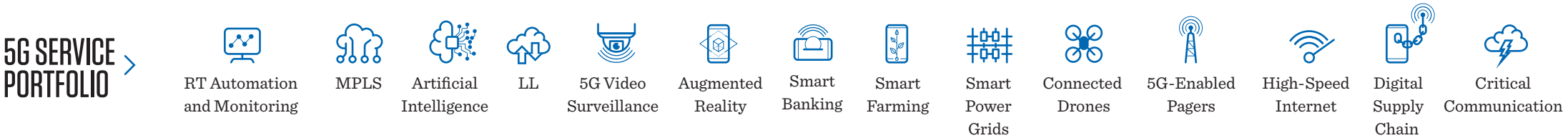
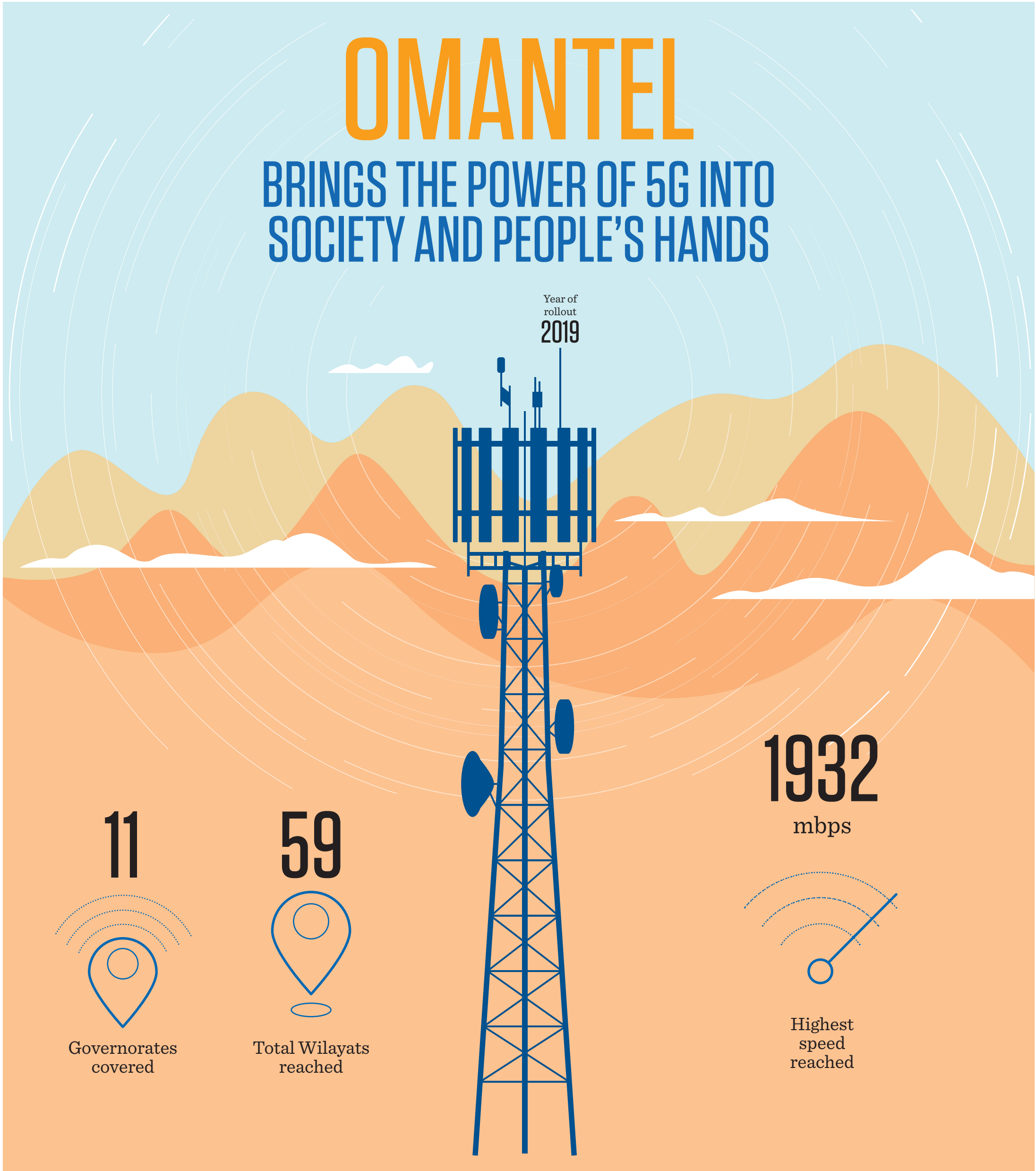
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MEETING

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Arab Parliament preparing plan to combat child labour

AMMAN: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by Council of Oman, on Tuesday participated in the deliberations of the Arab Parliament's preparatory committees, scheduled to be held this Thursday during the second session of the second sitting of the third legislative term in Amman, Jordan.

Dr. Hasan Ali Al Madhani, Member of the State Council, chaired the deliberations of the Joint Committee on Sustainable Development.

He gave a presentation on the participation of the Arab Region Parliamentary Forum on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Said Hamad Al Sa'adi, Deputy Chairman of Shura Council and member of the Legislative and Legal Affairs Committee of the Arab Parliament, also participated in the deliberations of the committee's meetings.

The meeting discussed the memorandum of the Secretariat General of the Arab Parliament on preparing a unified Arab strat-



egy to combat child exploitation and labour. Humaid Ali Al Nasri, member of Shura Council and member of the Economic and Financial Affairs Committee of the Arab Parliament, participated in the deliberations of the relevant committee meeting.

The committee's members reviewed the updates on the preparation for the Arab Forum on the requirements for enhancing economic integration among Arab countries, as well as the role of the private sector in promoting intra-trade.

Sheikh Ali Nasser Al Mahrouqi, member of the State Council and member of the Social, Educational, Cultural, Women and Youth Affairs Committee also participated in the relevant committee meeting.

The meeting discussed the draft Arab guiding law on combating violence against women, besides a study of developing a mechanism and framework to support Arab legislation on preserving environment in line with the Arab initiatives and the Middle East Green Initiative. -ONA

113 research papers to be presented at conference

MUSCAT: The 22nd International Arab Conference on Information Technology (ACIT) began yesterday at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU).

The three-day conference is organised by the Colleges of Computing and Information Society (CCIS), which stems from the Association of Arab Universities.

The opening ceremony of the event was held under the patronage of HH Sayyid Dr. Fahad Al Julanda Al Said, Vice Chancellor of SQU.

As many as 113 research papers from 33 countries will be presented during the conference, covering various information technology specialisations.

The conference aims to highlight the importance of information technology in the modern age and its role in developing society through the areas it tackles such as Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big Data,



among other fields.

The event, which is hosted for the first time by SQU, promotes joint research projects and sharing their outcomes. It aims to organize specialized and general seminars and connect research with the needs of Arab Societies.

Moreover, the conference is an opportunity for Arab researchers and scientists to meet and exchange expertise. It also attracts experts from non-Arab countries to benefit from their capabilities, in addition to highlighting the latest IT developments. -ONA

MEETING

Dr. Laila meets with Algerian counterpart

RIYADH: Dr. Laila Ahmed Al Najjar, Minister of Social Development today met with Kawthar Kriko, Minister of National Solidarity, Family and Women's Issues of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria.

The meeting came on the sidelines of the deliberations of the 41st session of the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs held in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

The two sides discussed aspects of cooperation between their ministries on fields related to the economic empowerment of women, services for persons with disabilities and services to the elderly, as well as motherhood, childhood and family in general.

The two sides also reviewed other areas of interest to the Ministry of Social Development and ways to enhance them and exchange experiences in various

social fields. During her visit to the Domestic Violence Reporting Center, Dr. Laila Al Najjar was briefed on the experience of KSA in the field of women and child protection.

She also listened to a comprehensive explanation of the work mechanism starting from receiving the call, direct intervention by the centre and the authorities concerned, and means to provide rehabilitation and reform. -ONA

Invitation to Tender

Dhofar Integrated Services Company S.A.O.C (DISC) invites specialized consultant to perform works in the Dhofar region to participate in the tender, the details of which are listed below

Tender Reference No	Title of the Tender
DISC/W/Tender/2021/005	Consultancy Services for Design and Supervision of Upgrade and improve the storage facility at Sanaya, Awqad
Tender Fee	RO. 105.000 Inclusive VAT (5%) each Note: Tenderer who wish to participate in the above tender should collect the tender document from DISC's office or send an e-mail to below mention mail id for tender document.
Experience	The Tenderer shall have executed at least two similar projects in the last 05 years.
Pre-qualification	The Tenderer should be a registered business owner with proper commercial registration certificate and Oma chamber of commerce and Industry certificate in Sultanate of Oman.
Last date for issue of tender documents	03:00 PM on 5 th January 2022
Site Visit	-
Last date for seeking pre bid clarification	03:00 PM on 9 th January 2022
Last date for response pre bid clarification	03:00 PM on 12 th January 2022
Last date for submission of bids	02:00 PM on 19 th January 2022
Any Queries Please Contact	Phone 23232554, purchase@disc.nama.om

Tenderers are requested to note that the bids accompanied with Tender Bond (1% of the quoted bid price and having 90 days validity) shall only be considered for evaluation.



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CONTACT WITH BIDEN

White House employee tests positive for COVID-19

WASHINGTON: An employee from the Biden administration who contacted him on December 17 has tested positive for COVID-19, the White House announced on Monday.

"On Monday morning, a mid-level staff member, who does not regularly have contact with the President (Joe Biden), received a positive result for a COVID-19 test.



Three days earlier, on Friday, that staff member had spent approximately 30 minutes in proximity to the President on Air Force One, on the way from Orange, South Carolina to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania," White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said in a statement.

"The President received an antigen test Sunday, and tested negative. This morning, after be-

ing notified of the staffer's positive test, the President received a PCR test and tested negative. He will be tested again on Wednesday," she said.

The White House spokesperson said the staff member is fully vaccinated and boosted, and tested negative prior to boarding Air Force One, as required for everyone traveling with the US president. **ANI**

EU COVID-19 vaccine passports valid for nine months without booster

The move comes as European countries scramble to secure more vaccine doses amid a surge in COVID cases



LONDON: The European Commission announced on Tuesday that COVID vaccine certificates in the bloc would only be valid for nine months without a booster shot.

The move comes as European countries scramble to secure more vaccine doses amid a surge in COVID cases and a spread of a likely highly transmittable new variant, omicron.

Announcing the decision, the EU Commission said that a harmonized validity period for COVID vaccine passports "is a neces-

sity for safe free movement and EU level coordination."

What are the new EU vaccine passport rules?

The new rule concerns traveling within the EU, but the Commission said in a statement that it recommends EU countries also apply it on a national level to "provide certainty for travellers and reduce disruptions."

EU residents are recommended to receive a booster shot six months, at the latest, after they're fully vaccinated. But the certifi-

cate will be valid for three additional months as a grace period to ensure access to booster doses, the Commission added.

The validity of the COVID vaccine passport after a booster shot will be extended further without a set limit, an EU official told Reuters news agency, citing a lack of scientific evidence about the duration of protection from the booster.

The Commission has also introduced a new rule for the recording of the booster shot in vaccine passports. A booster dose following a two-dose full vaccination should be

recorded as "3/3" in the certificate. A single-dose vaccination followed by a booster should read "2/1."

The rule can be blocked by a qualified majority of EU governments or a simple majority of European Parliament members. However, officials believe it has enough backing. According to the Commission, 807 million COVID vaccine certificates have been issued in the EU so far.

Europe races to curb another COVID wave

Some EU countries have already announced similar measures.

In France, adults whose jab was more than 6-months-old would no longer have access to the national COVID pass without a booster shot. The decision comes into effect on January 15. The Netherlands has also signaled plans for a similar move.

Portugal, Ireland, Cyprus, Latvia, Italy, Greece and Austria have also brought in emergency measures requiring even vaccinated EU travelers to take pre-departure coronavirus tests or quarantine on arrival. **BNW**



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OMICRON CONCERNS



Thailand reimposes quarantine as concerns grow over Omicron

BANGKOK: Thailand yesterday decided to immediately reimpose a mandatory quarantine for visitors and suspend a "test-and-go" scheme for fully vaccinated arrivals as concerns grow over the spread of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, the government said.

The decision is a blow to efforts to revive Thailand's battered tourism sector ahead of the peak holiday season.

The decision came after Thailand recorded its first case of domestic transmission of the omicron variant last week, when a returning resident tested negative on arrival, but later tested positive and infected members of his family.

The few other positive cases

were all caught after testing on arrival and quarantined.

Thailand and other countries in Southeast Asia eased entry restrictions for fully vaccinated travelers in November in an effort to kickstart tourism, a major revenue earner that collapsed with the start of the pandemic. But with the exception of Thailand, few have attracted the return of many foreign visitors due to complex entry requirements.

Thailand shut its borders to most foreign visitors in April 2020 after local transmission of the coronavirus started to climb. Foreign tourist arrivals in 2019 were almost 40 million, but plunged to 6.7 million in 2020, with most of those visitors coming in the first quarter. **ONA**

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SPORTS

Manchester United, Chelsea set to battle for Sevilla star Kounde

The 23-year-old has a 68 million-pound release clause which both clubs would have to trigger to prize him away from the Spanish club

LONDON: Manchester United are ready to fight to sign Sevilla defender Jules Kounde, with fellow Premier League rivals Chelsea also reportedly interested.

The 23-year-old has a 68 million-pound release clause which both clubs would have to trigger to prize him away from the Spanish club, where he has become an integral part of Julen Lopetegui's team.

Chelsea bid for the Frenchman last summer, but were unable to agree a fee with Sevilla, which quashed the deal back in August.

The Blues however are the most likely to try again in January as they hope the valuation of the player has decreased enough that they can come to agreeable terms.

Thomas Tuchel is very keen to make Kounde a part of his back



PREMIER LEAGUE: Chelsea bid for the Frenchman last summer, but were unable to agree a fee with Sevilla, which quashed the deal back in August.

three, with Antonio Rudiger, Andreas Christensen, Thiago Silva and Cesar Azpilicueta all out of contract next summer.

At present, there are no signs of anyone penning a new deal at Stamford Bridge, as Barcelona are monitoring Azpilicueta's situation while Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Real Madrid are keen on Rudiger.

Manchester United though are

as the club's only fit defenders at times. The situation is a little more unclear at Old Trafford though with Ralf Rangnick only in charge until the end of the season and a new permanent manager not having been announced yet, which could scupper their plans of bringing in fresh faces to the north west, the Spanish MARCA newspaper reported.



PL to continue with current fixture schedule despite COVID scare

LONDON: It was confirmed at a Premier League club meeting on Monday that the top-flight English league will continue with the current fixture schedule despite a number of clubs experiencing COVID-19 outbreaks and challenges.

A range of issues were discussed at the meeting, including the adaption of the Premier League COVID-19 postponement process in response to the impact of the Omicron variant. The League also confirmed to its clubs that 92 per cent of players and club staff have received one, two or three COVID-19 vaccination doses, with 84 per cent of players on the vaccination journey.

Players who have had one or two doses are required to wait for the appropriate time period before receiving either their second or

booster vaccinations.

"The health and well-being of all concerned remains our priority and the League will continue to monitor and reflect public health guidance, always proceeding with caution," PL in a statement said.

"The League continues to work with clubs to encourage vaccination among players and club staff, as well as promoting the Government's public-health vaccination messaging to clubs and the wider public," PL in the statement added.

Notably, outbreaks at various clubs have forced the postponement of 10 Premier League games so far.

No specific details as to clubs or individuals will be provided by the League, and player vaccination rates will now be publicly communicated at the end of each month, beginning in January. **ANI**

No better feeling than a Test win: Richardson after 2nd Ashes Test victory

ADELAIDE: Australian pacer Jhye Richardson said yesterday that there is no better feeling than registering a victory in a Test match.

Richardson's comments came after Australia registered a victory in the 2nd Ashes Test at the Adelaide Oval, gaining a 2-0 lead in the ongoing series. The pacer had taken five wickets in the second innings.

"More of a relief than anything. Especially after the first innings having a bit of a tough time of it out there, to come out again and most importantly get the win. It's nice to make a contribution as well, but there's no better feeling (than) a Test win," ESPNcricinfo quoted Richardson as saying.

"The beauty of Australian cricket at the moment is we've got fast-bowling stocks for days. I think that's a wonderful problem



for the selectors and JL [Justin Langer] to have. Whatever happens, happens. I had unfortunate first innings and then bowled a little bit better second innings. I'm happy to go either way. As long as we're winning, then that's all we can ask for," he added.

Jhye Richardson scalped five wickets in the second innings as Australia defeated England by 275 runs in the second Ashes Test. With this win, Australia has gained a 2-0 lead in the five-

match series. The Boxing Day Test will begin on December 26 at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG).

"I think getting back into the intensity of Test cricket, it's obviously a step above playing domestic cricket. You can often find yourself - if you haven't played for a while - trying too hard because you feel like you need to impress. But having said that, I don't think I bowled too badly," said Richardson. **ANI**

ATP RANKINGS

Zverev named Germany's Sportsman of the Year

BERLIN: Alexander Zverev capped the best season of his career by being named Germany's Sportsman of the Year on Monday. Zverev earned a 59-15 record this season, with his biggest victories coming at the Tokyo Olympics, where he captured the singles gold medal, and at the ATP Finals. The German became only the fourth player in event history to defeat the world's top two players in the ATP Rankings in the semi-finals and the championship match at the ATP Finals.

The 24-year-old eliminated World No. 1, Novak Djokovic, in the semi-finals and then defeated World No. 2 Daniil Medvedev for the trophy, his second at the season finale. Zverev led all players on the ATP Tour in 2021 with six titles, including his fourth and fifth ATP Masters 1,000 triumphs. **ANI**



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OMAN CRUDE PRICE RISES

Oman Crude (March Delivery 2019) rose \$1.30 to reach \$57.02 per barrel, said Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME). Average price of Oman Crude (January Delivery) has stabilised at \$66.28 per barrel, \$13.92 per barrel lower than December delivery. - ONA

MARKET BUSINESS & FINANCE



MSX INDEX ENDS HIGHER

The MSX index closed at 4,075.11 points, up 0.62 per cent from the previous close. The Sharia Index ended up by 0.12 per cent at 530.38 points. United Finance, up 5.77 per cent, was the top gainer while, SMN Power Holding down 4.44 per cent, was the top loser.

Gas concession pact signed for Block 10 in Oman's Saih Rawl field

The concession agreement establishes Shell as the operator of block 10, holding a 53.45 per cent working interest, with OQ and Marsa Liquefied Natural Gas holding 13.36 per cent and 33.19 per cent respectively

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Energy and Minerals on behalf of the government of the Sultanate of Oman has signed a concession agreement with Shell Integrated Gas Oman BV, a subsidiary of Royal Dutch Shell plc, and its partners, OQ and Marsa Liquefied Natural Gas (a joint venture between Total

Energies and OQ), to develop and produce natural gas from block 10 of the Saih Rawl gas field.

The parties also signed a separate gas sales agreement for gas produced from the block. The two agreements follow an interim upstream agreement signed in February 2019.

Shell's entry into this block signifies a further commitment to



FACT: Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals and Shell signed the pact to develop and produce natural gas from block 10 of the Saih Rawl gas field. - Supplied picture

Oman while enhancing and diversifying Shell's gas supply.

"These agreements represent a major step for Shell and our relationship with Oman. They gener-

ate value and strengthen our integrated gas business, which we need to deliver the energy Oman and the world need today. And we are looking at how Shell can help Oman

with developing low-carbon energy in the future," said Wael Sawan, Shell Integrated Gas, Renewables and Energy Solutions Director.

The concession agreement establishes Shell as the operator of block 10, holding a 53.45 per cent working interest, with OQ and Marsa Liquefied Natural Gas holding 13.36 per cent and 33.19 per cent respectively. For the initial phase, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) is building the infrastructure for the project, including the main pipeline to the Saih Rawl gas processing facility, on behalf of the Block 10 venture partners.

The venture will drill and hook up wells to maintain the production beyond the initial phase. The block is expected to reach production of 0.5 billion standard cubic feet of gas per day (bscf/d). The startup is expected within the next two years.

In addition, Shell and Energy Development Oman (EDO) signed

an agreement to process the natural gas from Block 10 in EDO's Saih Rawl facility.

Dr Mohammed bin Hamad Al Rumhi, Minister of Energy and Minerals in Oman said, "We share a long and strategic collaboration with Shell and our other partners. This project will further maximise the potential of Oman's energy industry, in line with the Sultanate's strategy to create growth opportunities across all energy streams and in line with Oman's Vision 2040 priorities."

Shell and the government have agreed that, in parallel to the development of Block 10, Shell will develop options for a separate downstream gas project in which Shell could produce and sell low-carbon products and support the development of hydrogen in Oman.

Any project would be subject to further agreements and future investment decisions.

PARTNERSHIP

Madayn, Chinese firm sign MoU to foster cooperation and promote investments

MUSCAT: The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates - Madayn has inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Shandong Shanzuo Holding Group Co. Ltd. in the People's Republic of China to develop and promote strategic cooperation in diverse areas that serve the interests of the two sides.

The MoU was signed remotely by Hilal bin Hamad Al Hasani, CEO of Madayn, and Lillian Shi, CEO of Shandong Shanzuo Holding Group Co., in the presence of Warda Al Shaqsi, Deputy Head of the Sultanate of Oman's mission in China.

The MoU focuses on mutual promotion to encourage investments in both countries and es-



tablish projects that contribute to achieving economic growth.

It also aspires to boost cooperation in import and export activities

between Oman and China, provide support in carrying out related commercial businesses, as well as ensure the provision of adminis-

trative and logistical support for the businesses.

Office space

As per the agreement, Shanzuo Group will provide Madayn with free of a charge display area in the demonstration park for advertising and promoting Madayn's investments, office space for Madayn in Hanyu Gold Valley, market consultation services for Madayn in China, and encouraging Chinese companies to invest in Oman.

Shanzuo Group will also promote Madayn and its brand to the Chinese companies and market, and recommend expert teams to handle other commercial services that Madayn requires in China. -ONA

RECORD-BREAKING

Port of Salalah breaks past year record in container volume

Times News Service

MUSCAT: In the run-up to the year-end, Port of Salalah has managed to break its previous years' record with a container handling volume of 4.37 million TEUs (twenty-foot-equivalent units) with two weeks to go for the year-end closure.

While the global supply chain continues to battle with reliability issues and port congestions, the container carriers are finding it challenging to adhere to their port schedules which also put pressure on port operations. It is despite these challenges that the

Port of Salalah managed to reach this record.

Challenging environment

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

CENTRAL BANK OF OMAN

CBO issues treasury bills worth OMR183mn

MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) raised OMR183 million by way of allotting treasury bills.

The treasury bills are for a maturity period of 28 days, from December 22 until January 19, 2022.

The average accepted price reached 99.950 for every OMR100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at 99.950 per OMR100.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 0.64644 per cent and 0.64676 per cent, respectively.

Treasury Bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds.

Issue Manager

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) acts as the Issue Manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (Repo).

It may be noted that the interest rate on the Repo operations with CBO is 0.5 per cent while the discount rate on the Treasury Bills Discounting Facility with CBO is 0.75 per cent.

Furthermore, treasury Bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates.

Additionally, the government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures. -ONA

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MARKET

MSX index ends higher

United Finance, up 5.77 per cent, was the top gainer while, SMN Power Holding down 4.44 per cent, was the top loser

MUSCAT: The MSX index closed at 4,075.11 points, up 0.62 per cent from the previous close. The Sharia Index ended up by 0.12 per cent at 530.38 points. United Finance, up 5.77 per cent, was the top gainer while, SMN Power Holding down 4.44 per cent, was the top loser. Shares of Ominvest Perpetual Sukuk were the most active in terms of the number of shares traded as well as in terms of turnover.

A total number of 390 trades were executed during the day's trading session, generating a turnover of OMR707 million, with more than 13.5 million shares changing hands. Out of 41 traded securities, 14 advanced, 10 declined and 17 remained unchanged. At the session close, Domestic investors were net sellers for OMR5 million while

GCC & Arab investors were net buyers for OMR4.87 million followed by foreign investors for OMR164,000 worth of shares.

Financial Index closed at 6,536.34 points, up 0.52 per cent. United Finance, Muscat Finance, Ahli Bank, Global Investment Holding and Bank Muscat were up 5.77 per cent, 5.66 per cent, 2.63 per cent, 1.67 per cent and 1.22 per cent respectively. Al Sharqia Investment, Al Anwar Investment and Ominvest were down 1.18 per cent, 1.08 per cent and 0.66 per cent respectively.

Industrial Index closed at 5,998.09 points, up 0.16 per cent. Oman Cement and Raysut Cement were up 2.55 per cent and 0.84 per cent respectively.

Services Index was up by 0.33 per cent before closing at 1,578.58 points. — **United Securities**

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE

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INDICES							
Index	High	Low	Value	Prev. Value	Diff	Diff%	
MSX 30 INDEX	4,079.65	4,053.95	4,075.11	4,050.01	25.10	0.62	
FINANCIAL INDEX	6,548.56	6,509.25	6,536.34	6,502.79	33.56	0.52	
Industry Index	5,998.09	5,988.26	5,998.09	5,988.26	9.83	0.16	
Services Index	1,579.90	1,572.78	1,578.59	1,573.35	5.24	0.33	
MSX Shariah Index	531.55	530.33	530.38	529.72	0.66	0.12	
MSX TR INDEX	4,909.27	4,878.34	4,903.80	4,873.60	30.20	0.62	
Trading Summary							
Volume	Turnover	Trades	Market Cap	Up	Down	Equal	Sec. Traded
13,254,108	7,078,453	390	22,095,772,897	14	10	17	41

SHARE PRICE BULLETIN FOR TUESDAY, DECEMBER 21

	SECURITY NAME	VOLUME	TURNOVER	TRADES	OPEN PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE PR.	PREV. CLOSE	DIFF (RD)	DIFF %	LAST PD	LAST BD	LAST OFFER	PDA VALUE	MARKET CAP
REGULAR MARKET																
OM00000001590	MUSCAT FINANCE	60,000	3,353	5	0.055	0.057	0.055	0.056	0.053	0.003	5.660	0.057	0.053	0.057	0.100	17,200,194
OM00000002200	AHLI BANK	101,000	11,817	2	0.117	0.117	0.117	0.117	0.114	0.003	2.632	0.117	0.110	0.117	0.100	228,109,924
OM00000001749	OMAN CEMENT	141,602	34,091	8	0.240	0.242	0.238	0.241	0.235	0.006	2.553	0.242	0.240	0.240	0.100	79,740,323
OM00000003224	RENAISSANCE SER	165,382	70,360	17	0.424	0.428	0.424	0.426	0.418	0.008	1,914	0.428	0.424	0.428	0.100	100,710,660
OM00000002796	BANK MUSCAT	1,263,577	628,129	37	0.488	0.500	0.482	0.488	0.492	0.006	1,220	0.498	0.492	0.508	0.100	1,780,088,446
OM00000003968	OOREDOO	343,899	123,118	18	0.358	0.360	0.358	0.358	0.354	0.004	1,130	0.360	0.360	0.358	0.100	233,038,034
OM00000003026	OMAN TELECOM	98,953	71,636	11	0.724	0.728	0.724	0.724	0.716	0.008	1,117	0.728	0.728	0.728	0.100	543,000,000
OM00000001418	RAYSUT CEMENT	150,000	36,000	3	0.240	0.240	0.240	0.240	0.238	0.002	0.840	0.240	0.220	0.248	0.100	48,000,000
OM00000001525	OMAN INVST& FIN.	678,217	96,790	22	0.142	0.143	0.142	0.143	0.142	0.001	0.704	0.143	0.143	0.144	0.100	33,891,000
OM00000002176	JAZEERA STEEL PROD.	11,738	4,085	3	0.348	0.348	0.348	0.348	0.348	0.000	0.000	0.348	0.348	0.352	0.100	43,464,490
OM00000003398	SOHAR INT. BANK	150,000	17,241	5	0.114	0.115	0.114	0.115	0.115	0.000	0.000	0.115	0.112	0.114	0.100	343,857,163
OM00000002168	AL ANWAR CERAMIC	6,000	2,376	2	0.396	0.396	0.396	0.396	0.398	-0.002	-0.503	0.396	0.394	0.396	0.100	87,120,000
OM00000001533	OMINVEST	226,072	67,884	9	0.302	0.302	0.300	0.300	0.302	-0.002	-0.662	0.300	0.304	0.306	0.100	242,331,699
OM00000001772	ALANWAR INVESTMENT	121,200	11,172	10	0.092	0.093	0.092	0.092	0.093	-0.001	-1.075	0.093	0.092	0.096	0.100	18,400,000
OM00000002440	AL SHARQIA INV.	15,900	1,336	2	0.084	0.084	0.084	0.084	0.085	-0.001	-1.176	0.084	0.084	0.084	0.100	7,560,000
OM00000002226	ALJAZEERA SERVICES	7,500	2,430	2	0.324	0.324	0.324	0.324	0.328	-0.004	-1.220	0.324	0.324	0.324	0.100	19,830,184
Total	16	5,941,020	1,181,816	156												
Parallel Market																
OM00000002374	UNITED FINANCE	911,254	50,136	36	0.083	0.087	0.083	0.085	0.082	0.003	5.769	0.085	0.085	0.087	0.100	19,202,943
OM00000003125	GLOBAL INV. H	585,530	34,609	36	0.060	0.062	0.060	0.061	0.060	0.001	1.667	0.062	0.061	0.064	0.100	12,200,000
OM00000004420	BANK NIZWA	1,677,697	330,106	52	0.097	0.098	0.097	0.097	0.096	0.001	1.942	0.097	0.097	0.098	0.100	216,864,444
OM00000001517	HSBC BANK OMAN	405,500	41,612	23	0.103	0.104	0.102	0.103	0.102	0.001	0.980	0.103	0.101	0.103	0.100	206,032,217
OM00000001483	NATIONAL BANK OMAN	3,150	589	1	0.187	0.187	0.187	0.187	0.187	0.000	0.000	0.187	0.188	0.192	0.100	304,051,969
OM00000001681	OMAN EMIRATES HO.	44,200	2,825	3	0.063	0.064	0.063	0.064	0.064	0.000	0.000	0.064	0.064	0.063	0.100	7,800,000
OM00000002036	Muscat Thread MILL	4,900	390	1	0.078	0.079	0.078	0.079	0.079	0.000	0.000	0.078	0.078	0.078	0.100	12,843,986
OM00000001532	OMINVEST	10	9	1	0.888	0.888	0.888	0.904	0.904	0.000	0.000	0.888	0.900	0.888	0.100	55,382,600
OM00000003281	TAGEER FINANCE	105,650	7,507	9	0.072	0.072	0.071	0.071	0.071	0.000	0.000	0.071	0.071	0.071	0.100	18,004,890
OM00000003661	VOLTAMP ENERGY	91	10	1	0.107	0.107	0.107	0.112	0.112	0.000	0.000	0.107	0.107	0.100	0.100	9,117,108
OM00000003711	SOHAR POWER	100	4	1	0.038	0.038	0.038	0.039	0.039	0.000	0.000	0.038	0.038	0.042	0.100	8,619,390
OM00000004788	MADINA TAKAFUL	27,900	2,641	4	0.094	0.095	0.094	0.095	0.095	0.000	0.000	0.095	0.093	0.097	0.100	16,625,000
OM00000004925	ALBATINAH POWER	56,696	2,703	11	0.048	0.048	0.047	0.048	0.048	0.000	0.000	0.048	0.047	0.048	0.100	32,394,597
OM00000005963	PHOENIX POWER	208,234	10,044	16	0.048	0.049	0.048	0.048	0.048	0.000	0.000	0.048	0.048	0.049	0.100	70,204,870
OM0000007043	NATIONAL LIFE INS.	1,000	338	1	0.338	0.338	0.338	0.340	0.340	0.000	0.000	0.338	0.000	0.338	0.100	9,117,108
OM00000007084	MCT DESALINATE	1,400	125	1	0.089	0.089	0.089	0.089	0.089	0.000	0.000	0.089	0.089	0.092	0.100	13,843,986
OM00000001178	MUSCAT GASES	20,000	3,260	2	0.163	0.163	0.163	0.163	0.164	-0.001	-0.610	0.163	0.163	0.163	0.100	4,890,000
OM00000003521	GALFAR ENGINEER	257,900	19,160	12	0.075	0.075	0.074	0.074	0.075	-0.001	-1.333	0.074	0.074	0.075	0.100	15,020,997
OM0000004933	AL SUWADI POWER	22,192	1,068	6	0.049	0.049	0.048	0.048	0.049	-0.001	-2.041	0.049	0.048	0.049	0.100	34,291,504
OM00000001319	ALUMINIUM PROD.	20,000	2,540	3	0.127	0.127	0.127	0.127	0.130	-0.003	-2.308	0.127	0.126	0.143	0.100	4,263,574
OM00000004248	SMN POWER HOLDING	47,674	2,050	6	0.043	0.043	0.043	0.043	0.045	-0.002	-4.444	0.043	0.043	0.043	0.100	8,584,331
Total	21	4,134,180	320,724	226												

INDIAN EQUITIES MARKET

Sensex climbs 497 points, Nifty gains 1%

MUMBAI: The Indian equities markets key indices gained smartly on Tuesday, a day after massive selloffs. The benchmark Sensex closed 497 points higher while Nifty gained around one per cent.

The relief rally was led by technology and metal stocks. Tech giants HCL Technologies and Wipro surged around 4 per cent. Tata Steel, which had slumped around 5 per cent on Monday, rebounded

smartly gaining around 3 per cent.

The 30 stock S&P Sensex of the Bombay Stock Exchange, which had lost 2,079 points in the previous two sessions, closed at 56,319.01 points, 0.89 per cent or 497 points higher than its previous day close at 55,822.01 points.

The Sensex witnessed volatile trading with positive bias. The benchmark Sensex opened on a strong positive note at 56,320.02

points and rallied to a high of 56,900.74 points in the intra-day.

The broader Nifty 50 of the National Stock Exchange also closed sharply higher after consecutive sessions of loss.

The Nifty 50 closed 0.94 per cent or 156.65 points higher at 16,770.85 points. The Nifty touched a high of 16,936.40 points and low of 16,688.25 points in the intra-day. — **ANI**

LIQUEFIED NATURAL GAS

US to be world's biggest LNG exporter in 2022

WASHINGTON: The United States is set to become the world's biggest liquefied natural gas (LNG) exporter in 2022 and may hold that title for years to come.

In a year when China and other large economies in Europe and Asia scrambled to source enough supply for heating and power generation, the United States was sitting on a bevy of supply - one that will grow in coming years.

Global LNG demand has hit record highs each year since 2015, due mostly to surging demand in China and the rest of Asia. Much of that global appetite has been met by steadily rising US LNG exports, which have reached new records every year since 2016 and is poised to continue in 2022.

The US Energy Information Administration projects US LNG exports will reach 11.5 billion cubic feet per day (bcfd) in 2022. That would account for roughly 22 per cent of expected world LNG demand of 53.3 bcfd next year, according to analysts at Goldman Sachs and would outpace Australia.

One billion cubic feet is enough gas for about 5 million US homes for a day.

The United States should remain the biggest LNG exporter by capacity until around 2025. — **BNA**

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STUDY FINDS SCHOOL UNIFORMS DON'T IMPROVE CHILD BEHAVIOUR

A new study has found that despite the belief of many parents and teachers, school uniforms don't seem to have any effect on young students' behaviour or attendance overall. The findings of the study were published in the journal 'Early Childhood Research Quarterly'. But students who attended schools requiring school uniforms did report lower levels of "school belonging" in fifth grade than did students in schools without uniforms.

The findings came from data on more than 6,000 school-age children. "A lot of the core arguments about why school uniforms are good for student behaviour don't hold up in our sample," said Arya Ansari, lead author of the study and assistant professor of human sciences at The Ohio State University.

"We didn't see much difference in our behaviour measures, regardless of whether the schools had a uniform policy or not," Ansari added.

Ansari conducted the study with Michael Shepard, a graduate student in human sciences at Ohio State, and Michael Gottfried, associate professor of education at the University of Pennsylvania. The issue is important because school uni-

forms are becoming more popular, Ansari said, and not just in private schools. About 20 per cent of public schools required uniforms in 2011-12, up from just three per cent in 1995-96. About six out of every 10 private schools required uniforms in 2011-2012.

"There hasn't been much research done on the value of school uniforms in the past 20 years or so, especially given how much their use has increased," said Ansari, who is also a faculty associate at Ohio State's Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy.

Proponents of school uniforms have argued that, among other things, they promote better attendance and a stronger sense of community, which results in less bullying and fighting.

To test that, the researchers used data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, which followed a nationally represent-

ative sample of 6,320 students from kindergarten through the end of fifth grade.

Every academic year, teachers rated each student on three dimensions: internalising behaviour problems (such as anxiety and social withdrawal), externalising behaviour problems (such as aggression or destruction of property) and social skills.

Teachers also reported how often each student was absent. Overall, school uniforms had no effect on any of the three dimensions of behaviour in any grade, even after taking into account a wide range of other factors that could potentially affect students' behaviour.

The study did find that low-income students in schools that require uniforms did have slightly better attendance, but that difference amounted to less than one day per year, Ansari said.

The researchers also evaluated self-report measures from the

same students when they were in fifth grade. Students reported on their sense of school belonging, such as how close they felt to teachers and classmates. They also reported their experiences of bullying and social anxiety.

School uniforms were not linked to any differences in bullying or social anxiety in the children. But those who had to wear uniforms reported lower levels of school belonging than did those who attended schools with no uniform requirements.

The data in this study can't explain this finding, Ansari said, but there are some plausible reasons why this might be so. "While uniforms are supposed to build a sense of community, they may have the opposite effect," he said. "Fashion is one way that students express themselves, and that may be an important part of the school experience. When students can't show their individuality, they may not feel like they belong as much," he added.

The results of this study should caution parents, teachers and administrators from assuming that school uniforms have positive effects that they may not have, Ansari said. "School uniforms may not be the most effective way to improve student behaviour and engagement," Ansari concluded. - ANI



Fashion is one way that students express themselves, and that may be an important part of the school experience. When students can't show their individuality, they may not feel like they belong as much





FEATURE

HOW RELIABLE ARE RAPID ANTIGEN TESTS?

Rapid antigen tests for detecting the coronavirus could be giving people a false sense of security. In Germany, manufacturers are allowed to certify the efficacy of their tests without independent quality control.

Coronavirus

Rapid antigen tests are playing an increasingly important role in the fight against the coronavirus, not only for people who are not vaccinated but also for those who are. Tests are being conducted at home and at work, in private and in public.

In Germany, some places have introduced the 2G+ rule, which means that as well as providing proof that they are either vaccinated or recovered from COVID-19, people also have to provide a recent negative COVID-19 test.

Therefore, many people are relying on rapid antigen tests, which were approved for private use at the beginning of 2021 because they can detect infection early on and interrupt the chain of infection. They are often used before people pay a visit to older or vulnerable relatives in care homes or before small gatherings with friends and/or family.

Experts recommend getting a PCR test if an antigen test shows positive.

However, they can give people a false sense of security. In a study conducted by researchers at Germany's Paul Ehrlich Institute, the Robert Koch Institute and Berlin's Charite Hospital, 20 percent of the antigen tests available on the market failed to detect the virus even when there was a high load.

Sensitivity

According to the preprint, 26 of the 122 examined tests did not even meet the minimum requirement, which is 75 percent sensitivity. Rapid tests should work in 75 percent of cases, if a sample contains a defined amount of the virus. This amount is determined by the cycle threshold (Ct) value, which is the number of cycles it takes to detect the genetic material of SARS-CoV-2 in a sample.

The lower the Ct value, the higher the viral load. If it is 25 or below, the viral load is very high, meaning that a person is very contagious. If it is between 25 and 30, the viral load is high. Between 30 and 36, it is moderate.

About 80 percent of the tests detected the virus when the load was very high and 60 percent detected all the cases of highly contagious samples. But 20 percent still failed to detect the virus.

Antigen tests are less reliable than PCR tests

Antigen tests and PCR tests both involve taking a sample of secretions from mucosal surfaces, through the nose and/or the back of the throat.

The antigen tests examine these secretions for certain proteins in the viral envelope. If a sample only contains a small amount of the virus, for example if a person is at the beginning or end of an infection or because they drank a lot before taking the test, then such tests are not very reliable.



If a person tests positive, they should definitely also have a Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) Test, which is more accurate and able to detect very small amounts of the virus

Polymerase Chain Reaction

If a person tests positive, they should definitely also have a Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) Test, which is more accurate and able to detect very small amounts of the virus.

Rapid antigen tests

Surprisingly, manufacturers are currently allowed to sell rapid antigen tests without external quality assessment and issue the CE mark of compliance with EU safety and quality regulations themselves.

Pursuant to the currently applicable EU Directive for in vitro diagnostic devices (IVD), tests for the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) rank among the category of high risk products and are therefore subject to the certification by a Notified Body," explains the Paul Ehrlich Institute on its website.

"COVID-19 tests are currently still categorised as "low-risk IVDs" and as such, can be certified by the manufacturers themselves. They do not require independent testing before they can be marketed."

COVID-19 tests

This unacceptable state of affairs is slated to continue until May 2022, the Paul Ehrlich Institute continues: "As of that point in time, as per the IVD Regulation an EU reference laboratory and a Notified Body will have to be consulted for their certification, as the COVID-19 tests will come under the highest risk category. In future, this will require laboratory testing of the tests as well as independent verification of the data."

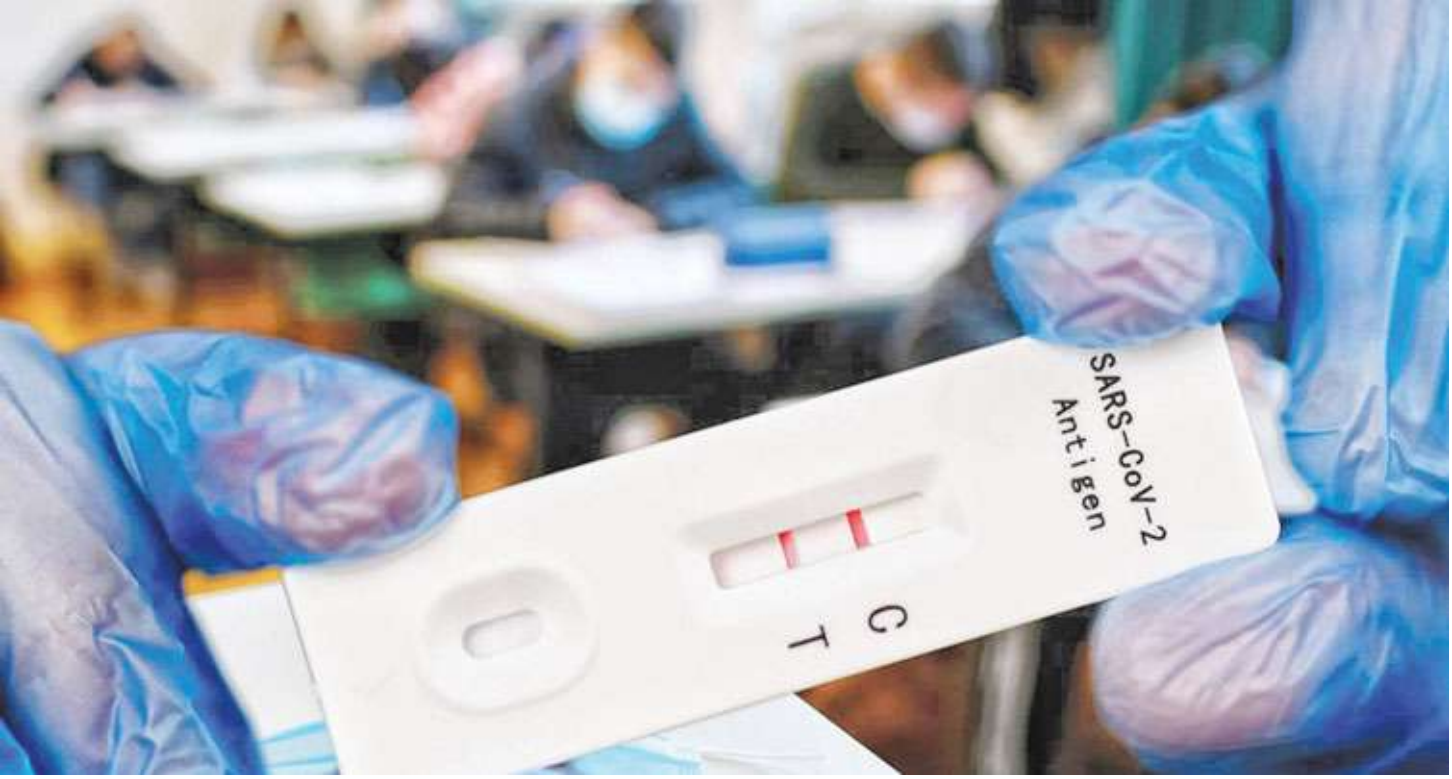
Tests are still helpful

Does that mean that rapid antigen tests are pointless? No! They can help to contain the pandemic by detecting infection fast and thus breaking the chain of infection. They raise the alarm if somebody has a high viral load and is therefore very contagious.

People have to be aware that a negative test does not necessarily mean that somebody does not have the infection and is not contagious.

People can be infected and contagious for two days before the first symptoms even manifest themselves. Some might not show any symptoms at all.

So beware that false sense of security!



ROUND-UP

Toyota plans line-up of 30 battery electric vehicle models by 2030

As part of the carbon neutrality strategy, Toyota targets the development of a full line-up of 30 BEV models by 2030, in addition to its wide-ranging electrified vehicle line-up that includes Hybrid Electric Vehicles, Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicles, and Fuel Cell Electric Vehicles

MUSCAT: Toyota is making rapid advancements in the area of battery electric vehicles. For which a lot of efforts are being taken to give these vehicles the legendary Toyota characteristics of quality, dependability

and reliability which will be trusted by its massive customer base. Reinforcing its commitment to accelerating its drive to achieve carbon neutrality and create sustainable mobility for all, Toyota re-



cently announced its strategy for Battery Electric Vehicles (BEVs) at an event held at Toyota's MEGA WEB showroom in Tokyo, Japan. As part of the carbon neutrality strategy, Toyota targets the devel-

opment of a full line-up of 30 BEV models by 2030, in addition to its wide-ranging electrified vehicle line-up that includes Hybrid Electric Vehicles (HEVs), Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicles (PHEVs),

and Fuel Cell Electric Vehicles. The full line-up will include models in both passenger and commercial segments globally. After unveiling 16 new BEV models that are part of the new line-up, President of Toyota Motor Corporation Akio Toyoda announced that the company targets to achieve annual global sales of 3.5 million Battery Electric Vehicles by 2030. Toyoda also revealed that Lexus will develop a full line-up of BEVs in all categories and achieve 1 million sales by 2030. Lexus also aims to sell 100% Battery EVs in Europe, North America and China by 2030 and globally by 2035. In addition, Toyota has announced that it will increase new battery-related investment from 1.5 trillion yen announced in September 2021 to 2 trillion yen, aiming to realize even more advanced, good-quality, affordable batteries. Akio Toyoda, President, Toyota Motor Corporation, commented, "Energy plays a critical role in achieving carbon neutrality. At present, the energy situation varies greatly from region to region. That is exactly why Toyota is committed to providing a diversified range of carbon-neutral options to meet whatever might be the needs and situations in every country and region." "We at Toyota aim to be a company that contributes to the global environment, seeks to bring happiness to people, acts, and stays close to its customers. To sum it up, we want to become a company that produces happiness for all, for both individuals and society. We want to pass on an ever-better future for the children of today and those who will come after them. We always want the future to be brighter," added Toyoda.

SAFETY CAMPAIGN

Mazoon Electricity awareness campaign focuses on unsafe and illegal connections



MUSCAT: To raise awareness on the need to practice electrical safety to prevent mishaps, Mazoon Electricity, the leading electricity provider in Oman, has launched a campaign to educate citizens and residents about the dangers of unsafe connections. The campaign also aims to educate individuals on appropriate electrical safety practices while dealing with electrical equipment such as streetlights and electricity poles. As part of the safety campaign, Mazoon Electricity is conducting awareness campaigns through so-

cial media, videos and workshops. Mazoon Electricity accords high importance to electrical safety putting strict standards and practices in place. The company sees it as their responsibility to educate people about the risks that come from neglecting electricity assets like streetlights and electricity poles. Mazoon Electricity also urges everyone to report damaged infrastructure or unsafe connections if they see one. Asking everyone to not underestimate the risk of unsafe and illegal electricity connections, Mazoon Electric-

ity has stressed the need to work together to ensure safety. The company provides help to install temporary electricity connections through its call centre 80077771. The company keeps electrical safety as a top priority to assist in continuing its goal of guaranteeing zero harm to members of the community, employees and contractors. Mazoon Electricity is committed to working towards building awareness on electrical safety and the need for implementation of safety policies in homes and public.

PARTNERSHIP

Al Maha to offer benefits to Talabat riders

MUSCAT: Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company has announced an association with Talabat, the leading online food delivery service. Under the new terms, Talabat riders will be offered a host of benefits. The signing ceremony took place recently at the Al Maha Head Office. Representing the Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company at the signing was its Division Head of Marketing & Business Development, Ahmed Al Shanfari, while Mohamed Zourab, the Managing Director, signed on behalf of Talabat. Also in attendance at the event were other members of the executive and senior management of both companies. Speaking about the association, Ahmed Al Shanfari commented, "Food and grocery delivery services such as Talabat are a lifeline in light of the current global health and



safety concerns. This is in no small part, due to the hard work of the Talabat riders. Through our association with Talabat, we will reward them for their hard work as well as make their lives a little easier." Under the new partnership, all Talabat riders will be issued an e-Rial card and will benefit from instant cashback on the fuel they purchase using the card. They will also receive

discounted prices on all Al Maha lubricants as well as car washes at the service stations. Al Maha will also be hosting raffle draws with attractive prizes for all Talabat riders making use of these benefits. That is not all, Talabat riders will also benefit from discounts from Oman International Hospital (OIH) on specific services, as well discounts on Insurance purchased

from the Bima insurance platform. "In addition to these benefits, we also plan to implement 'Rider Lounges' at our service stations and convenience stores in the near future. Talabat riders will be able to freely use these spaces to get some much-deserved rest in between their deliveries," added Ahmed Al Shanfari. Mohamed Zourab said, "We're constantly looking for ways to partner with companies to not only help us better serve our customers but also improve the quality of life of the riders. Considering the number of deliveries riders must make every day and the distances they travel, the fuel savings they can get by using Al Maha's e-Rial card, as well as the discounted prices on other services, will be of great value to them. We are therefore pleased to have entered into this association with Al Maha."

ISLAMIC BANKING SERVICES

Maisarah revamps digital channels, introduces additional ATM/CDM services



MUSCAT: To further facilitate its customers' cash transactions through a wider network of digital outlets, Maisarah Islamic Banking Services – the Islamic banking window of BankDhofar - recently launched pioneering facilities that give customers instant access to more services through a larger network of ATM/ CDM outlets nationwide. Elaborating on the revamp of Maisarah's self-service ports, Mar-

wan Mohammed Al Zadjali, Head of Digital Banking at Maisarah, stated: "In a new addition to our expansive digital banking services, we have recently enabled Maisarah customers to deposit cash to their accounts and other Maisarah accounts instantly via an expansive network of more than 70 BankDhofar and Maisarah CDMs in all major Omani cities and towns. This makes Maisarah one of the first Islamic banking services providers in the Sultanate to

offer such a cost-free instant cash deposit facility using beneficiary phone numbers instead of the bank account number. Additionally, Maisarah account holders can now change their One-Time-Activation-Code (OTAC) for newly issued debit cards and the PIN code for existing cards through the wider network of BankDhofar ATMs across Oman, 137 ATMs in total. These new services are completely free of charge and they are central to our efforts to

continuously enhance our customer experience." With an impressive record of constant introduction of new features and services through its digital channels, Maisarah has shown a solid commitment to enriching its customers' experience, focusing on high product quality and outstanding services level. "We understand our customers' requirements and we tailor our financial solutions to fulfil their

specific needs. Following popular demand, we re-engineered our processes to offer convenient self-services that are available 24/7 at the customers' fingertips. Our state-of-the-art digital platforms are already offering an unparalleled user experience, yet we constantly enhance them with the latest features and highest security standards that bring our customers the peace of mind and the convenience they deserve," noted Al Zadjali.

TALENT SUPPORT PROGRAMME



Muscat University students continue training at Zubair Corporation companies

MUSCAT: In line with the programmes and initiatives launched by the Omani Talent Support and Empowerment programme at The Zubair Corporation, the students of Muscat University participating in the Zubair Practical Training Programme continued their intensive training in 6 different companies across The Zubair Corporation. This training programme will last for 7 months. Commenting on this occasion, Hilal Omar Al Siyabi, Head of Corporate Services at The Zubair Corporation, said, "We would like to welcome the students participating in the Zubair Practical Training Programme to the companies and institutions of The Zubair Corporation. This programme is part of our efforts to support and empower Omani competencies to localise job opportunities by providing graduates with the skills and competencies required by the labour market. This step is also aligned with the government's future vision in empowering young Omanis in various companies and private sector institutions. "The Zubair Corporation will

continue to attract new batches of distinguished students from Muscat University, based on the cooperation agreement with the university. As the corporation is committed to training and qualifying these students in the various sectors in which the corporation operates. I would like to thank Muscat University for this fruitful cooperation to make the Zubair Practical Training Programme a success. Together, we will strive to enable the students to make the most of their training programme, which is the first step in their professional career," he added. From her side, Abeer Al Shami-si, Student Training Officer at Muscat University said, "We would like to thank The Zubair Corporation for their cooperation in training final year students across various companies and institutions of The Zubair Corporation. Through the Zubair Practical Training Programme, we are keen to refine their skills of training and qualification across different work environments, to highlight their competencies and prepare them to enter the labour market."



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ROUND-UP

Najahi: A preferred solution for MSMEs

Bank Muscat has been one of the biggest supporters of the MSME sector in the country with the aim of providing the widest range of products and services

MUSCAT: The Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSME) sector plays an important role in economies around the globe, considering its substantial contributions towards creating employment, improving economic diversification and driving GDP growth.

The role of MSMEs is a critical one for the economy of the Sultanate of Oman too, and the government has been continuously taking a series of steps over the past decade to strengthen the position of micro and small business, culminating in the strong emphasis given in the landmark Oman Vision 2040.

Continuous Najahi support

With the objective of developing entrepreneurship in the Sultanate as part of the overall strengthening of the economy, Bank Muscat has been one of the biggest supporters of the MSME sector in the country



with the aim of providing the widest range of products and services. It has been continuously striving to meet its unique needs, boost development and enhance the ease of MSME banking through a number of major initiatives, including the setting up of the Najahi (Retail Enterprises) unit in 2014.

Over the years, Najahi has been growing from strength to strength in its role of supporting the MSME sector with over 2,000 small businesses having benefitted from its various services and solutions. Today, the beneficiaries of Najahi's collateral-free financing include businesses operating in retail trading, services, manufacturing and processing, construction, hospitality, travel and tourism, mining and agricultural sectors.

The Najahi products suite includes the value-added Najahi Current Account; Najahi Flexi Loan to support working capital, business expansion and other business needs; the Najahi Business Credit Card; and NajahiPoS Receivables Financing for customers who use PoS machines for sales. All financing options are available to the bank's customers' collateral-free and customer relationship managers are available at all times to guide entrepreneurs in utilising the different facilities available. Customers can easily access the facilities by visiting any of the bank's branches or the 14 Najahi centres available across the Sultanate. It must be noted that small businesses can get credit up to OMR 100,000 using Najahi's financing options.

Non-financial support

The Najahi programme is contributing greatly to the success of micro and small businesses in Oman as it aids them in previously unimaginable ways through collateral-free loans and credit facilities. In addition to financial services, Najahi also provides highly supportive non-financial services to



SMEs like free digital marketing certification programmes, consultations and seminars to share entrepreneurial success stories and learning. For example, the MaharatMin Google digital marketing course is arranged free of charge for Najahi customers interested in enhancing their digital marketing skills. It has witnessed an excellent turnout and feedback from participants with over 400 Bank Muscat Najahi customers completing the certification programme, which upgrades their digital skills in a fast-changing world.

Topics covered previously include 'Digital Identity Building Tools', 'Digital Marketing Basics' and 'Steps to Building a Digital Marketing Plan'. Bank Muscat is greatly encouraged by the excellent response from Omani entrepreneurs who are looking for a wide variety of digital tools in building successful businesses. The bank will play a key role in handholding them in their entrepreneurial journey as part of its strategy of supporting the development of MSMEs.

Another initiative worth highlighting is the bank's tie-up with

Omani e-commerce site Mar-keetEx through which Najahi supports MSMEs selling their products and services online. Mar-keetEx.com currently has merchants from different parts of the country registered on its online platform, including 27 Najahi customers who are active on it. More and more MSMEs are now using the marketplace to sell and deliver products and services including groceries, household goods, mobiles and computers, fashion, beauty, and health products at highly-competitive prices. This initiative builds on the success of the bank's annual exhibitions, which used to be held regularly before the COVID-19 pandemic made social distancing norms mandatory.

Digital banking platform

Bank Muscat's Corporate Internet Banking services provide a fast, convenient and secure banking experience for MSMEs control their finances 24x7. Available in both Arabic and English language options through <https://www.bankmuscatonline.com>, the Corporate Online Banking platform can be used by Najahi customers

for real-time banking, fund transfers to local or foreign accounts, bill payments and bulk payments to vendors. It also facilitates salary payments for employees under the Wages Protection System (WPS). Najahi Current Account holders can also open FD accounts and request cheque books. They can block their Najahi Card in case it is lost or stolen. Security is ensured by a physical token and a secure mailbox. It must be noted that the bank's online banking platform features the latest technologies and world-class security features.

Enabling sustainable development

More than being just a financial services provider, Bank Muscat has always pushed itself to be an enabler of sustainable development for the community and the nation. Najahi has been praised by customers for the services and financial facilities provided since its inception, as it has enabled customers to develop and expand their projects, which is in line with the development goals of the Sultanate to contribute to economic diversification, supporting Omani youth and increasing GDP.

Bank Muscat has been continuously supporting the MSME sector through its different initiatives and programmes that view these businesses as a primary pillar of Oman's plans for economic diversification in alignment with the landmark Oman 2040 Vision. The landmark financing programme continues to promote self-employment among Omani youth, which will strengthen the National Economy in the coming years.

SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE

Life journey of Ferrari: From production to achieving legendary status

MARANELLO: Of the superior performance of the cars that he built, Enzo Ferrari was clear, simply stating, "They have more horsepower, and they don't break down." In tribute to this vision, Ferrari is committed to ensuring that every single car remains in the same pristine condition that it was delivered in, no matter whether 5,10, 15, or 20 years after its production in Maranello.

Each of the world-renowned Ferrari Aftersales programmes offers clients the utmost peace of mind, guaranteeing their much-loved Ferrari is always as good as the day it was driven off the production line. With the exception of limited-edition models, the ownership experience of a Ferrari always comes with an exclusive seven-year maintenance contract in addition to the standard three-year contractual warranty, setting an unprecedented standard throughout the industry for customer care.



Ferrari the first marque to offer warranty coverage of up to 15 years or 90,000kmafter the car is registered.

The NewPower15 programme is offered every year and can be renewed for an extra three years after the NewPower15 contract has expired. The NewPower15 warranty programmes cover the vehicle's main mechanical components, including the engine, gearbox, PTU, suspension and steering.

Ferrari cars are a manifestation of Enzo Ferrari's vision of innovation, and that innovation isn't only limited to the cars, but also extends to class-leading aftersales services. Ferrari offers an all-new extended warranty and service programme called MainPower.

MainPower is a service offered to customers who, at the end of the seven-year Genuine Maintenance programme, wish to extend their service and warranty contracts. In essence, MainPower is a combination of Ferrari's industry-leading NewPower15 and Ordinary Maintenance programmes.

The warranty coverage of the programme is identical to that of NewPower15 with the addition of the tried-and-tested seven-year Genuine Maintenance service programme. For a few selected Ferrari models like the Ferrari California, 458 Italia, 458

Spider and FF, MainPower completely replaces the NewPower15 programmes.

Ferrari Genuine also includes an accessories division, which is solely aimed at making the experience of owning a Ferrari extremely personalised and unique. Ferrari Genuine accessories offer a wide variety of Ferrari products and kits specifically designed to make each Ferrari special and unique to its owner. These products include interior carbon fibre trims and inserts, infotainment systems, battery conditioners, AFS headlights, and many more.

Last but not least is the new Ferrari Premium programme. The maintenance programme, called "Ferrari Premium", is a new programme exclusively developed to safeguard the efficiency, reliability and market value of Ferrari cars. The programme enables the customer to replace components that wear out with time. Using only original Ferrari components, highly specialised technicians from the official Ferrari Service Network service the car over the years during which the customer is a member of the programme. Members of the programme are provided with a Ferrari Premium Certificate, and the right to facilitated access to Ferrari Classiche certification.

RECOGNITION



Shaleem Petroleum receives Opal Best Practice Award 2021

MUSCAT: Shaleem Petroleum Company (Shaleem) has won the Opal Best Practice Award 2021 in the category of Health & Safety in the Class for Local Community Contractors.

The Opal Best practice Award is given annually to companies, that have made a special contribution to the Nation by executing exceptional projects. Shaleem has provided the SARS-CoV-2 Rapid Antigen Tests to all employees to quickly identify employees who have COVID-19. These tests are

used widely in Europe, especially with school kids.

These tests are self-administered, safe, easy to use and provide a result within minutes. All employees in Shaleem take a self-test before travelling to work in the oil field. In head office staff are regularly screened to limit the spread of COVID-19. By doing this Shaleem has been able to identify and isolate COVID-19 infected employees and managed to stop the virus from spreading further. This has helped the health care system

of the Sultanate of Oman. Shaleem has created a safer working space for all employees.

Mark Hobbs, the CEO of Shaleem said, "The Antigen-Rapid Tests have helped not only us and our employees in Shaleem but also the nation. We are proud to have received the Opal Best practice Award for our efforts. I would like to thank all Shaleem employees for their dedication and support in the application of the antigen rapid tests. This prestigious award is for all of our employees."

HEALTHCARE

Advanced minimally invasive care for women at KIMSHEALTH Hospital



MUSCAT: KIMSHEALTH Hospital Oman welcomes Dr Dalya Al Hamdan, Consultant – Obstetrics & Gynaecology, on a visit to Oman and offer expert care for women.

Dr Dalya is available at KIMSHEALTH Hospital Oman from December 20 to 23.

Dr Dalya has vast experience in the field of Obstetrics and Gynaecology especially in undertaking advanced laparoscopic procedures for the treatment of endometriosis,

removal of ovarian tumours myoma and hysterectomy for benign uterine conditions.

She is also well adept at operative hysteroscopic procedures for submucosal fibroid and polyps and general and high-risk pregnancy care and management. In terms of early pregnancy care, Dr Dalya is an expert in managing ectopic pregnancy, women care and screening programmes, family planning and infertility investigations.





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