

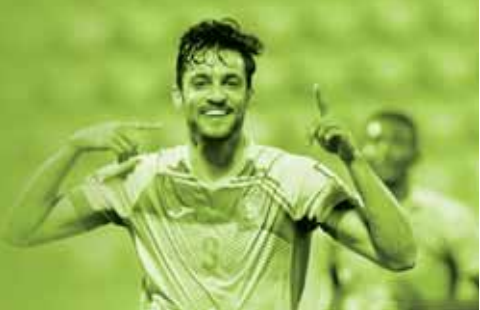
International Whaling Commission hails rescue of humpback whale

The International Whaling Commission (IWC) has commended the efforts made by the Sultanate, represented by the Environment Authority, in saving the life of a humpback whale which was caught in nets off Duqm Port. The IWC said that the humpback whale in the Arabian Sea zone is considered a rare species due to the fact that this species does not migrate, but spends its whole life in the Arabian Sea. **DETAILS ON P3**



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NIZWA BREAK
DHOFAR'S WINNING
STREAK



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BRITAIN TO APPLY TO
JOIN ASIA-PACIFIC
FREE TRADE BLOC



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THE WOMAN WHO
CAPTURED THE SPIRIT
OF AN ADVENTURE



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 Saudi Arabia, on the death of Prince Turki Nassir Abdulaziz al Saud. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the departed's soul in peace in paradise and grant his family patience. — ONA

HM THANKED BY SWISS PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from President Guy Parmelin of the Swiss Confederation, in reply to His Majesty's cable of greetings on the occasion of electing him as a president for his country. In his cable, President Parmelin expressed his utmost thanks and appreciation for His Majesty's greetings and best wishes to him and to his country's friendly people. He stressed the strong relations between the two countries and their friendly peoples. — ONA

HM confers Al Nu'man Order on outgoing Saudi Ambassador



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has conferred Al Nu'man Order (First Class) on Eid Mohammed al Thaqafi, outgoing Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Sultanate, in appreciation of his efforts in serving relations between the two brotherly countries. The order was handed over by Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, when he received the ambassador at his office on Sunday. — ONA

Sultanate gets 100,000 doses of Covid vaccines

MUSCAT: The Sultanate on Sunday received 100,000 doses of Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine from the friendly Republic of India which is manufactured by Serum Institute of India. The handover ceremony was attended by Dr Ahmed Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, represented the Sultanate, while Munu Mahawar, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate, represented the Government of India. Dr Ahmed expressed his thanks to the friendly Indian government for providing the doses of Covid-19 vaccine to the Sultanate.



Dr Ahmed Mohammed al Saeedi and Munu Mahawar.

He welcomed the Government of India's gesture to provide 100,000 doses of Covid-19 vaccine and commended the co-operation between the two countries. He lauded India's leading role in the global fight against Covid-19 and the support that India has been extending to its friends and partners in their efforts.

Land border closure extended till Feb 8

MUSCAT: The Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from corona-virus (Covid-19) pandemic has decided to keep the Sultanate's land borders closed for one more week till 6 pm of Monday (February 8). This comes as per recommendations of

the specialised technical team which is following up the spread of the new Covid-19 strain and to protect the society against the disease. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health reported 598 new cases in 3 days, bringing the total number of cases registered to 134,326. — ONA

INSIDE



MONITOR SAYS CAR BOMBS KILL 11 IN NORTH SYRIA

P6



BIDEN'S CLIMATE AGENDA AIMS TO TRIGGER JOBS BOOM

P9

Expat fee structure for new job licences issued

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Labour has specified the fee structure for new licences to recruit expatriate manpower in various sectors.

While the overall fees were announced last week, the Ministry of Labour said that in case of necessity, temporary permits can be issued to recruit expatriate workers for the specified senior or top-level posts.

It will cost RO 336 for four months, RO 502 for six months and RO 752 for nine months.

Similarly, recruiting an expatriate for middle-level posts will cost RO 169 for four months, RO 252 for six months and RO 377 for nine months. At the same time, recruiting an expatriate for

The employer pays all the fees for the use of declared vacant licences, and the fee is not refundable

MINISTRY OF LABOUR

technical and specialised posts will cost RO 101 for four months, RO 151 six months and RO 226 for nine months.

The employer pays all the fees for the use of declared vacant licences, and in all cases the fee is not refundable. The full fee may be

refunded pending the issuance of a licence for domestic workers, or in the event of the death of the owner.

The specialised professions include those in the IT sector such as computer engineers, programmers, technicians for medical devices, monitoring devices, maintenance of computers and programmed machines, security professionals for information systems.

The recruitment licence, renewal of a licence, and registration of the data for top and senior-level employee (with salaries RO 4,000 and above according to what is specified in the work contract, irrespective of the work he does) will cost RO 2,001, including RO 1 for the new licence.

Now nurseries are phone app away

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

The Ministry of Social Development launched an electronic application named 'Hthanate', meaning 'My Nursery'. This is the first app of its kind for smartphones which serves as an umbrella under which all childcare centres and nurseries in the country are covered.

The app allows parents in the Sultanate to choose the appropriate nurseries for their

children from among ten in all the governorates of the Sultanate.

Al Mukhtar Muhammad al Hashami, the founder of the application, said the idea of creating this app comes in line with technological progress, through which parents can easily choose the appropriate nursery for their children.

"It comes in both Arabic and English, it shows the locations of nurseries, their types,



their mechanism of work, services and programmes they provide, registration fees and other aspects that parents look at when searching for such centres for their children."

Al Hashami mentioned that the app, which is available on IOS and Android stores, also provides the ability to communicate with nurseries through their social media channels or phone numbers.

Subscription Period Extended

Due to the increasing demand and the delay experienced in completing the subscription procedures for many willing investors, the Capital Market Authority agreed to extend the subscription period for seven working days, so that the last day for subscription will be Tuesday, February 9, 2021. Therefore, we urge investors to complete their subscription procedures within the specified period as soon as possible, noting that a subscription application cannot be completed without having an investor number from the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company through visiting the company's head office or it's website or by visiting select Sanad offices (for Omanis) and brokerage companies (for Non-Omanis). For further inquiries, please contact the following numbers: 24763300 or 24763337

Investment Manager شركة إدارة صناديق الاستثمار ش.م.ع. Shumookh Fund Management LLC	Issue Manager البنك المركزي UNITED SECURITIES	CONTACT 24763300 24763337 ayman@usoman.com
Collecting Banks/Agents: Bank Muscat SAOG	Oman Arab Bank SAOC National Bank of Oman SAOG Bank Dhofar SAOG	Ubhar Capital United Securities Global Financial Securities

FROM P1



4 weeks gap between first and second dose of AstraZeneca vaccine

The minister indicated that the Serum Institute of India is one of the largest vaccine manufacturers in the world. He stressed that the step to obtain the vaccine promotes the global efforts aimed at overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic and to make the vaccine available for all people around the world.

Furthermore, Dr Ahmed pointed out that the vaccine will provide protection for all, and its effectiveness, safety and results have been laboratory confirmed. He added that it is important to have an interval of at least four weeks between the first and second dose when taking AstraZeneca vaccine.

The minister assured that it is not possible for those who have received the first dose of Pfizer

vaccine to receive the second dose of AstraZeneca vaccine. He clarified that the initial evidence shows that the new strain of Covid-19 responds to treatment with the various vaccines manufactured for Covid-19.

Munu Mahawar highlighted the strong cooperation between the two countries and stated, "India has always shouldered global responsibility at times of crisis and is a dependable and reliable friend of Oman".

The ambassador expressed his thanks and appreciations to the Sultanate's government under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for taking good care of Indian nationals during the pandemic.

It is worth mentioning that India's Ministry of Health and

Family Welfare and Oman's Ministry of Health has conducted a training programme, covering administrative and operational aspects, prior to the delivery of the vaccine, for Oman's Ministry of Health officials.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) reported 598 new cases of Covid-19 in three days, bringing the total number of cases registered in the Sultanate to 134,326. The ministry also reported two new coronavirus deaths in the last 24 hours, taking the total death toll to 1,529. The total cases of recovery reached 126,854, which is 94.4 per cent of the total recovery rate. Eleven patients were hospitalised during the past 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients in hospitals to 102, including 27 in Intensive Care Units (ICUs). — ONA

Expat fee structure for new job licences

The recruitment licence for expatriates with salaries between RO 2,500 and RO 3,999 will cost 1,001, while for those occupying technical and specialised posts, it will cost RO 601.

A recruitment licence for an artisanal fisherman will cost RO 361, while for those occupying unspecified posts the fee will be RO 301.

Among others, the recruitment licence for domestic workers will be RO 141 for up to three workers, RO 241 for four workers and more, and RO 301 for farmers and camels' breeders (up to three workers).

For changing the data or details of the worker, fees will be RO 5, and while transferring services of a worker to another sponsor will cost RO 5.

For small and medium enterprises, the fees of issuance and renewal of recruitment licences for non-Omani workforce will be RO 101 for up to 5 workers. It will cost RO 151 to recruit up to ten workers in an SME.

It will cost RO 1,001 to recruit a worker for some specified positions.

Specialised professions

Sales and marketing specialists, stockiest, commercial agents, commercial managers, media specialists, printing press operators, advertising agents, offset printing machine operators, paper coating machine, operator, flatbed press operator, female and male assistants in medical professions, air traffic controller, aircraft landing controller and other related professions in the sector, come under specialised professions.

Architect, survey engineer, civil engineer, electronic engineer, electrical engineer and mechanical engineer, and various types of technicians have been also included in the list.



Al Mukhtar Muhammad al Hashami

Nurseries are phone app away

It provides access to their websites, confirming that getting nurseries on this application requires the approval of the Ministry of Social Development.

Mariam Said al Obaidani, Head of the Child Raising Institutions Department, said: "Hthanate app is important because it saves effort and time for parents while searching for a suitable nursery for their child. It is compatible with their work conditions in terms of time, location, activities and programmes being offered."

"On the other hand, the application will help the specialists in the ministry, during follow-up visits, in reaching them with ease and convenience. Moreover, this application will not allow unlicensed nurseries to register as the registered nurseries will be subject to scrutiny and review by the ministry."

New Shop is NOW OPEN!

Recently, Clarks open its new shop located at Al Hail South, featuring a variety of Shoes for men and women which combines comfort and style. Come and visit our New Shop Now! and don't miss out our "SALE" up to 70% OFF from 26th January to 3rd of March 2021. Shop hours for the newly open shop is from 10:00 AM to 10:00PM all days. WhatsApp No. 93894474.

alkhamisshoes

You may also visiting Clarks store at Al Khamis Plaza, Qurum Commercial Area - Tel. No. 24565259 and at Muscat Grand Mall – Tel. No. 24399930.

OIA transfers tourism, realty assets to OMRAN

MUSCAT: Oman Investment Authority (OIA) announced the restructuring of its tourism and real-estate investments in the Sultanate by transferring them to Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN Group), now a subsidy of OIA. This included moving projects and shares in some companies to OMRAN, allowing the group to continue its focused role as the government executive arm in developing the tourism sector and adding further momentum to its contribution to the economic diversification drive.

The restructuring saw the transfer of the integrated Yeti Sustainable Tourism City project, a 1.5 million square metres waterfront tourism complex; 5-star Alila Hinu Bay Hotel in the Wilayat of Mirbat, Dhofar; and Naseem Hotel at Al Jabal Al Akhdhar with its chalets and adventure park. Moreover, OIA's shares in ASAAS Company, a joint-stock company for development and investment, were transferred to OMRAN Group in order to generate sustainable economic revenues.

As part of this, the integrated multi-purpose and free-hold tourism complex "Hay Al Sharq" is also to be under OMRAN. This step aims to channel tourist and real-estate investments under one efficient management in alignment with Oman Vision 2040 and the Tenth Five-Year Plan. Tourism has been identified in the plan as a key sector to achieve economic diversification in the Sultanate, promote growth, increase the GDP's non-oil revenues, and attract direct foreign investments.



The restructuring saw the transfer of the integrated Yeti Sustainable Tourism City project, a 1.5 million square meters waterfront tourism complex; 5-star Alila Hinu Bay Hotel in the Wilayat of Mirbat, Dhofar; and Naseem Hotel at Al Jabal Al Akhdhar with its chalets and adventure park

In addition, this initiative aligns well with the "Rawabet" Program that was launched by OIA last September to establish the general framework for

the governance of state-owned firms and establishing a common ground for the policies and systems of these companies in alignment with the overall strategic policies of the authority, which is also aligned with Oman Vision 2040 under the ultimate objective of economic diversification.

Hashil Obaid al Mahrouqi, Chief Executive Officer of OMRAN, expressed his appreciation to Oman Investment Authority for taking this step. Al Mahrouqi asserted that such a measure would drive the growth of OMRAN as it enters a new stage of business growth, strengthen its leading role in supporting economic diversification in the Sultanate as one of the strategic partners in Oman Vision 2040. — ONA

In brief

■ MUSCAT



MOH HOST VIRTUAL WORKSHOP ON DATA

The Ministry of Health (MoH), represented by the Directorate General of Quality Assurance Center (DGQAC) recently organised a virtual workshop on 'Decisions based on data and facts'.

The three-day workshop addressed several issues including data introduction and collection, methods of selecting samples, designing indicators, reading charts. Besides, the workshop touched upon the key concepts of the health systems and implementing a value-based health system that requires using data at all levels, besides using this data to develop strategic plans. Dr Qamra bint Said al Sariri, DGQAC Director-General inaugurated the workshop with a speech that explained the importance of providing the directors-general, directors of departments and health workers with the required knowledge in using data and graphs to help them in decision making. Around 500 health workers from various health institutions across the Sultanate attended the workshop.

THREE HELD FOR DRUG TRAFFICKING

The Directorate-General for Combating Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances at Royal Oman Police (ROP), has arrested three people on charges of smuggling and trafficking drugs in association with an international drug trafficking ring. The anti-drug department seized more than 150 kg of drugs and 200 tablets of psychotropic substances. The case is still under process. ROP praised efforts made by citizens and residents and their cooperation with the police to curb drug trafficking by reporting the suspicious moves of drug dealers.

OMSB EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETS

The executive board of Oman Medical Specialty Board (OMSB) held its first meeting of the year on Sunday under the chairmanship of Dr Hilal Ali al Sabti, CEO of OMSB. During the meeting, held via videoconferencing, Dr Hilal al Sabti stressed the need to stick to decisions issued by the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. He also underscored the significance of maintaining the current pace of action and the training of resident doctors through the use of modern technology and blended education to ensure that nothing will affect ongoing education or the training of resident doctors as part of OMSB specialisation programmes. The meeting touched on issues related to the international Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME-I) where it pertains to institutional accreditation of specialised training programmes.



Sultanate's whale rescue hailed

MUSCAT: The International Whaling Commission (IWC) has commended the efforts made by the Sultanate, represented by the Environment Authority, in saving the life of a humpback whale that got caught in nets off Duqm Port.

The IWC said that the humpback whale in the Arabian Sea zone is considered a rare species due to the fact that this species does not migrate, but spends its whole life in the Arabian Sea. This makes this species extremely exposed to the risk of extinction.

The IWC, which described the rescue operation as highly significant, had already listed the humpback whale in one of five groups of most endangered species of whales. It said that saving the life of a single whale would have a great impact on genetic diversity and replenishing of stocks.

The IWC's coordinator tasked with such accidents was invited by the Environment Authority to conduct training to help guide the rescue operation in which many departments took part, including the Coast Guard Police, the ports and other local departments.

The IWC pointed out that the Sultanate met with success earlier in tackling similar incidents threatening marine life. Besides the Coast Guard Police and Duqm Port, the Omani rescue team formed by the Environment Authority included experts from 5 Continents company, the Royal Navy of Oman and the Royal Air Force of Oman. — ONA

Muscat international film fest cancelled

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Muscat International Film Festival (MIFF), a biennial event, has been cancelled, the Oman Film and Theatre Society (OFTS) told the *Observer*.

"The biennial festival of both local and international films stands cancelled due to the present pandemic situation and the revised dates will be announced as and when it is decided," Qasim

bin Muhammad al Sulaimi, Chairman of OFTS, said.

Keeping pace with the changing times, conducting the film festival online was also under consideration, according to him.

"But online film fest was not exactly something which many of our well-wishers and artistes and filmmakers are looking forward to. Having said, chances of a virtual film fest cannot be ruled out," he said.

No transfer of mining licences without approval

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MoEM) has issued a circular to all companies and institutions that the ownership of mining licences cannot be transferred without its approval.

The decision is based on provisions of the Mineral Resources Law promulgated by Royal Decree No 19/2019 and the ministry called upon all companies and institutions, "not to assign the license issued to them to others, or to waive all or some of

the rights and obligations arising from the license, rent mining sites, or delegate others to extract and sell raw materials by any means."

It added, "the ministry provides a grace period until March 31, to correct the violation of the aforementioned, and in the event that a violation of this is proven in any way, the license will be permanently cancelled."

In the event that a violation of this is proven in any way, the license will be permanently cancelled and the legal actions will be taken, the ministry said.

UTAS Oman's first varsity with branch campuses

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

With a strength of 46,230 students, 13 specialisations in 13 campuses across the Sultanate, the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) has emerged as the largest university in Oman. The UTAS thus is the only university that is branch-based higher education in the Sultanate.

The youngest university in Oman has just begun its journey with the Royal Decree (76/2020) that merged Colleges of Technology (CoT), Colleges of Applied Sciences (CAS), and Rustaq College of Education, and taking the shape of a university. The formation of UTAS is part of the Oman vision 2040.

In an exclusive interview with the *Observer*, Dr Said bin Hamad al Rubaiee, Vice-Chancellor of UTAS, laid out the priorities and vision of the university. "The most challenging task is the merger of three higher education institutions (HEIs) – CAS, CoT and Rustaq College of Education, the work on which is on a fast track and that is being monitored on a day-to-day basis.

"The foundation of the UTAS's priorities will be based on the national priority of education, learning, scientific research, and national talents which were introduced in Oman Vision 2040. Thus, UTAS is going to



UTAS is going to embrace the Sultanate's education philosophy, which is based on the National Strategy for Education 2040, Scientific Research Strategy, and the Innovation Strategy

DR SAID AL RUBAIEE
V-C of UTAS

embrace the Sultanate's education philosophy, which is based on the National Strategy for Education 2040, Scientific Research Strategy, and the Innovation Strategy. We will be part of the national goals to offer comprehensive education, sustainable learning, and scientific research that leads to a knowledge society and

competitive national talents."

The vision behind setting up the UTAS is to tackle the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR4), and the Oman vision 2040 which necessitate having a dynamic and sustainable educational system.

Asked how can the university keep up with Oman Vision 2040 and future directions, the V-C said, "Oman Vision 2040 made education one of its most prominent pillars and national priorities. The vision included a strategic direction which calls for inclusive, life-long learning, and scientific research that leads to a knowledge society and competitive national talents."

Dr Said al Rubaiee called for the role of HEIs in fulfilling Oman's developmental aspirations and said, "In line with the rapid changes in technology, skills, and knowledge, the UTAS will continue to qualify future generations to positively contribute to various fields of development in fulfilment of Oman's national aspirations. This will be achieved through its various academic programmes, harnessing all human and material potentials, taking high-quality technologies and software as a path to achieve the goals of technical and applied education, and developing its academic programmes in light of the requirements of modern science."

Soccer and cricket not allowed under new regulations

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

There has been a buzz during the weekend about the new regulations that have come into effect since last week's Supreme Committee's meeting.

Weekend also sees sports enthusiasts play outdoor soccer and cricket in groups. This is now not allowed under the Covid-19 protocol.

While the rule on wearing facial masks in public areas remained in place since the beginning of the

pandemic there had been relaxation on social gatherings with fewer members and workplaces were back to full strength.

Clarifying on certain points Major Mohammed al Hashami, Royal Oman Police, said, "As per the Supreme Committee direc-

tives there is a total ban on social gatherings in public places. If there was a limit of members allowed now it is a total ban. Training courses have been stopped. What are also in place in addition to direct teaching are events as well as group activities such as

sports." Sports such as football and cricket would fall under this category. Parents have been also concerned about children playing outdoors.

"Children playing as of now is considered ok as long as they wear a mask and maintain distance,"

said Major Al Hashami. When it comes to visiting families he pointed out that while the visit is understandable gathering in large numbers would still be breaking the current protocol and all members should be cautious about the new strain of the virus.

INTERNET
TECHNOLOGY
SOPHISTICATED SERVICE
E-COMMERCE

ALL AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

Convenience at your fingertips is no longer an idiom but has become a reality. With each passing day, more spheres of life are unimaginable without new technologies, the Internet and new forms of communication channels.

The shopping habits of the people in the Sultanate are also no different. Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic that forced the Sultanate to go into lockdowns and enforce strict social distancing rules, many people did their shopping online.

With safety and uncertainty in their minds, people continue to do buying and selling of goods online from any place or any time.

ONLINE CART

Even a week's shopping can also be taken care of online. Order anything from your shopping list — whether they are essentials or any other materials like flowers or greeting card — they are confirmed for delivery any time!

Even though prices and a wide range of goods are still the priority for most shoppers, comfort and service are starting to play a significant role in the market competition.

An online vendor told *Observer*, “customers are linking their purchase decisions with the accompanying services around the particular product. Surviving in Oman’s retail market means satisfying

the most demanding customers”.

Sameer Ahmedi, partner of an online boutique apparels, said, “the increasing demand for more sophisticated service is the main reason why many shopping websites are coming out with customer loyalty programmes that offers new benefits”.

Yet experts foresee that a shift in consumption pattern including the switch to online as a result of the Covid-19 is set to stay even after things become relatively normal.

GROWTH DRIVER

According to a report, e-commerce growth is expected to continue and at least in southeast Asia, it is predicted to be the main driver of the region’s Internet economy.

“2020 has been a year of accelerated digitalisation and we believe that it is a shift to online lifestyles that is broad, deep, and irreversible,” said Terence Pang, chief operating officer for e-commerce firm Shopee.

According to the report technological awareness among customers is expected to have a significant impact on market growth.

In this regard, points out the report, the implementation of 4G and 5G technology for connectivity purpose is increasing the exposure of online shopping for customers.

There were 4.66 million Internet users in Oman in January 2020 with their number registering an increase by 727,000 or 18

per cent between 2019 and 2020. Internet penetration in Oman stood at 92 per cent in January 2020.

MORE WOMEN USERS

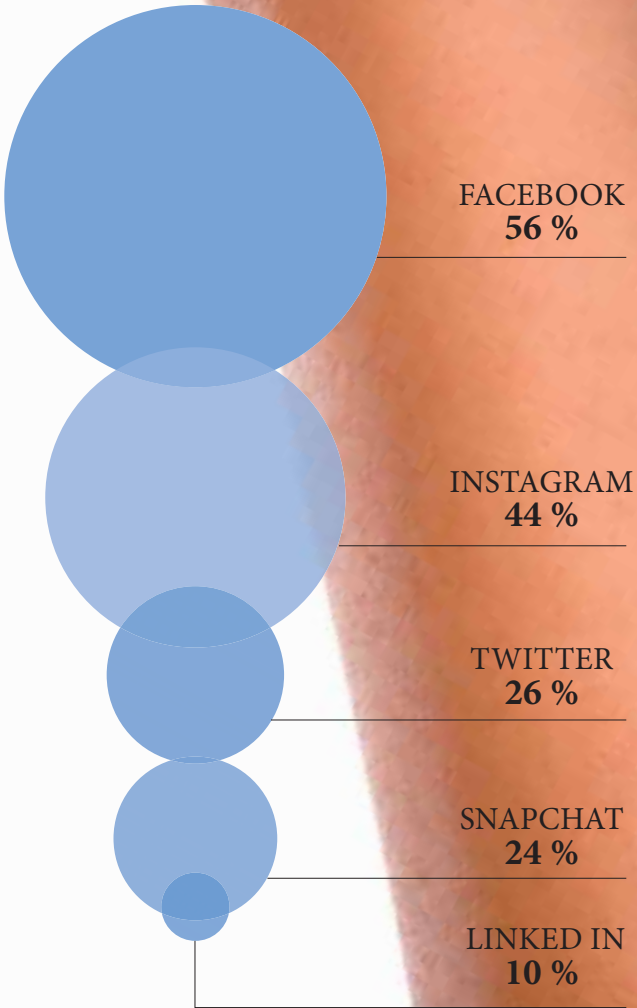
According to data from National Centre for Statistics and Information, there are more women Internet users in Oman compared to men. Facebook comes in as the third most favourite social media platform with 56 per cent, Instagram 44 per cent, twitter 26 per cent and following closely is Snapchat with 24 per cent and Linked In with 10 per cent.

E-BOOST

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, since the breakout of the coronavirus, has approved a number of laws and legislations to facilitate e-commerce, in addition to setting up a section for follow up and support the areas in this regard.

“Different government initiatives and regulations are supporting the growth of this market. The ministry is continuously influencing people to adopt e-commerce for shopping, import, and other activities,” says the report. The ministry, during the height of the pandemic, launched ‘Shop from Your Home’ initiative to prevent transmission of coronavirus. The Oman government is encouraging home business owners and small and medium enterprises to promote their products and use modern methods and technologies to market different products internationally, says the report.

FAVOURITE SOCIAL MEDIA USERS



Muscat Municipality
Advertisement No. 4/2021

Companies specialized in the field and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tenders documents for the website through the following link:

(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	E- Tender No.	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
PRE/20/113	4/2021/HQ-4	Construction of Pedestrian Walkways at Bousher (Hay Al Bydaa) (E- Tender)	Rial 25	21/02/2021	07/03/2021	This tender has been allocated for (S M E) contractors registered in second grade
PRE/21/006	(5/2021/HQ-5)	Consultancy Services for Supervision of the Construction of Drainage Structures and Remedial Measures at Sultan Qaboos Street, Al Khuwair Phase 1A2 (E- Tender)	Rial 25	21/02/2021	07/03/2021	First
PRE/21/007	6/2021/HQ-6	Cleaning works at Wellayut Muttarah (E- Tender)	Rial 25	21/02/2021	07/03/2021	First

Tender Conditions:-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied by an electronic copy of a bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat Municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Original Tender Bond envelope should be sealed with red wax and entitled to His Excellency/ Head of Internal Tender Committee and to be placed in the Tender Box at Muscat Municipality HQ, Third Floor, before 10:00 am as per the date mentioned in the above table. All envelopes are to be clearly marked with the name of the Tender being presented and no other marks.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit the e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) .
- For technical support of the e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@ita.gov.om) or call (+96824166670).

E-payment services for micro businesses

MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has issued a framework for micro business entities to enable use of electronic payment services, by the licensed banks and payment service providers (PSPs).

Inclusion of these segments under the electronic payment services will support the objective of the national e-commerce strategy that is being implemented by various government agencies and the private sector. The micro business entities (MBEs) are small business entities which employ less than ten people, and carry out the legitimate business, with a permission from the local administration like municipality licence etc.

The single taxi operation, gas delivery, water tankers, home business, street hawkers and small restaurants etc, are some of the examples of MBEs.

MBEs owned by Omani Nationals with a valid approval from competent government authorities (based on the nature of business activity) along with ID proof and bank account may approach any bank or PSP to avail the e-payment acquiring service.

The objective of this guideline by CBO is to enable e-payment acquiring for those legitimate businesses which are not required to obtain the Commercial Registration of their businesses from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP).

Since MoCIIP has permitted a list of activities that can be conducted by the MBEs with permission from the concerned authorities (and without Commercial Registration), this directive will enable licensed banks and PSPs to seamlessly enable e-payment acquiring for such MBEs. By availing the e-payment facility, the MBEs can enable e-payments to its customers for the goods purchased or the services provided, using payment cards and mobile payments via the mobile banking and wallet apps. — ONA

Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Defence
ENGINEERING SERVICES

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Tender No	Tender Name	Contractors Grade	Last date to Obtain Tender	Tender Submission Date	Tender Price (RO)
20/2020	Operation and Maintenance work- Muscat	Excellent - minimum of ten (10) years experience in Operation and Maintenance Services of the Facilities and Equipments*	11 th February 2021	30 th March 2021	1,500/-
24/2020	Electrical Works	Excellent	11 th February 2021	23 rd March 2021	350/-

*For more information about the above Tenders please visit gate number (14)

- Tender Documents (Electronic Tender Document) can be obtained from the Tender office, Gate No: 14, Muaskar Al Murtafa'a after payment of the tender fee indicated above.
- The Payment should be made electronically by using SMART CARD, VISA CARD and VISA ELECTRON. Sunday to Thursday (0900 - 1300 Hours).
- The Bid to be accompanied by Tender Bond in the value of (1%) of the bid value in the form of a Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local bank and addressed to HE the Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Bids are to be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to HE the Chairman of Tender Committee and marked with Tender Number and Name. Name of Bidder or any other marks should not be printed on the envelopes.
- Bids to be deposited in the Tender office at Gate No: 14 Muaskar Al Murtafa'a before 1300 hours on the assigned day for submission of the Tender.
- We would like to draw your attention to the importance of adherence to the submission date, request and any queries related should not be submitted to MODES fourteen days prior to submission of offer.
- You are requested to submit the following items within your tender submission, failure to submit the required information may result a disqualification of your offer without any further notification.
 - Percentage of Omanisation within the company supported by an authenticated certificate from the Ministry of Manpower (Updated Copy).
 - Detailed priced breakdown to be specified as per scope and drawings.
 - Full set of stamped drawings and documents, Tender Form and Tender Bonds to be submitted as hard copy and others documentation shall be as soft copy (USB) in two separate files:
 - Financial (bill 1&2 separated from bill3)
 - Technical files.
 - All addendums and circulars.
 - List of sub-contractors/suppliers and their acceptance letter to this project.
 - List of current and executed projects.
 - Valid Registration Certificates from Tender Board.
 - Financial Statement for the last Three years.

TO ADVERTISE
PLEASE CALL: 24649444

Electronic Tender(s)

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

Tender NO	Description	Grade	Last date for buying	Submission date	Tender price R.O.
15/2021	EXTENSION OF POWER SUPPLY TO THE VARIOUS ROP PLOTS IN HADAF, MADAM (ROWDHA) BURAIMI GOVERNORATE	C	10/2/2021	23/2/2021	102 /=
16/2021	11 KVA INTERLINK IN TWO LOCATION B/W AL WAQBAH01 PSS AL SHOYYA PSS & AL RAKI01 PSS TO AL SWADER01 PSS SHARING THE LOAD AT YANQAL AREA AL DHAHIRA GOVERNORATE	C	9/2/2021	16/2/2021	25 /=
17/2021	ELECTRICAL SYSTEM TECHNICAL LOSSES ASSESSMENT AND CONSULTING	Specialized	9/2/2021	16/2/2021	30 /=
18/2021	REINFORCEMENT OF (11/0.433 KV)2021, NON-LOAD CUSTOMER CONNECTION SERVICE PIPE REPLACEMENT AT AL BURAIMI	D	14/2/2021	23/2/2021	25 /=

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

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

The Completed signed and sealed commercial and technical offer with all tender documents should be submitted and uploaded online into the above mentioned E-Tendering website. The Hard copies of the tender document are not accepted.

For more information please contact Tel no.:24051501- 26944266

For any technical assistance please contact

Helpdesk: +968-24166670

E-mail: etenderhd@ita.gov.om

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

The Company is not bound to consent the lowest Bid or any other Tenders.
“WITH ELECTRICITY WE PROGRESS PLEASE AVOID EXTRAVAGANCE IN CONSUMPTION”



Majan Electricity Company S.A.O.C
P.O Box 286, Sohar
PC 311, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 2694 4444 | Fax: +968 2694 4222
Information@majanco.nama.om | www.majanco.co.om



Sahara Hospitality Co. (S.A.O.G.)

P.O. Box 311, Muscat, Postal Code 100, Sultanate of Oman.

DIRECTORS' REPORT

On behalf of the Board of Directors, it is my pleasure to present the Annual Report on the business and operations of Sahara Hospitality Company S.A.O.G. (hereinafter referred to as "SHC") for the financial year ended November 30, 2020.

FINANCIAL RESULTS

The financial results achieved during the financial year ended November 30, 2020, are as follows:

Key Financial Indicators	Year ended 30 Nov. 2020	Year ended 30 Nov. 2019
	(RO 000's)	(RO 000's)
Turnover	12,326	13,040
Operating Profit	3,375	3,615

The Net Profit after tax for the year was RO 2,547,744 as against RO 2,797,008 in the year 2019.

As advised earlier, the company's business depends primarily on PDO activities and presence of contractors' staff where our Permanent Accommodation for Contractors (PAC) are located. During the year under review, we are pleased to report that:

- The occupancy levels at Fahud, Nimr and Rima were 88%, 78% and 99% respectively.
- The net asset value per share has decreased from RO.3.768 in 2019 to RO 3.622 in 2020 financial year due to increase in share capital.
- The basic earnings per share in 2020 is RO 0.386 and in 2019 it was RO.0.457.

The COVID 19 pandemic situation has caused an adverse impact on our business during the year ended 30th November 2020 with reported reduced occupancy levels since March 2020.

The Board of Directors is pleased to recommend distribution of cash dividend of 12% and stock dividend of 12% on the paid up capital subject to shareholders approval at the Annual General Meeting (AGM).

Your Company has been adhering to the principles of good Corporate Governance over the years and the Board of Directors supports the broad principles of Corporate Governance as issued by CMA. In addition to the basic governance issues, the Board lays great emphasis on transparency, accountability and integrity and are pleased to state that a report on Code of Corporate Governance including the relevant auditor's certificate regarding compliance with conditions of Corporate Governance as stipulated by CMA is provided in Annexure II.

Once again, the Board of Directors and Management Team would reaffirm their commitment and enthusiasm with proper planning in carrying out the business with an objective to yield attractive returns to the shareholders.

On behalf of the Shareholders and Board of Directors, It gives us great honor to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq bin Taimour for his continued support to the private sector and I pray to the Almighty Allah to shower His everlasting blessings on His Majesty. Furthermore, we would extend our gratitude to His Majesty's government for their co-operation and assistance with special mention for the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Muscat Securities Market and Capital Market Authority.

I would like to conclude the report by thanking our company Management Team, my fellow Directors, the Service Provider, Petroleum Development of Oman, our clients and all those who participated in the successful conduct of our Company's business, for their relentless efforts and valuable contribution.

For and on behalf of the Board of Directors of
SAHARA HOSPITALITY CO. (S.A.O.G)

TALAL BIN QAIS AL ZAWAWI
CHAIRMAN

Statement of financial position (audited)

for the year ended 30th November, 2020

	2020 RO	2019 RO
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	16,686,852	17,739,190
Right-of-use assets	103,108	--
Investments at amortized cost	--	4,000,000
	16,789,960	21,739,190
Current assets		
Inventories	30,925	23,831
Amount due from related parties	5,261	33,431
Trade and other receivables	4,842,366	4,841,518
Cash and bank balances	5,924,473	1,511,436
	10,803,025	6,410,216
	27,592,985	28,149,406
Total assets		
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Share capital	6,737,500	6,125,000
Legal reserve	2,245,833	2,041,667
Retained earnings	15,420,017	14,913,939
Total Equity	24,403,350	23,080,606
LIABILITIES		
Non-current liabilities		
Non-current portion of term loan	--	982,724
Non-current portion of lease liabilities	86,629	--
Deferred taxation	133,028	114,320
Employees' end of service benefits	11,356	--
	231,013	1,097,044
Current liabilities		
Current portion of term loan	982,724	1,179,288
Current portion of lease liabilities	19,025	--
Amounts due to related parties	1,022,419	1,486,325
Trade and other payables	502,301	842,826
Income tax payable	432,153	463,317
	2,958,622	3,971,756
Total liabilities	3,189,635	5,068,800
Total Equity and liabilities	27,592,985	28,149,406
Net assets per share	3.622	3.768

Statement of comprehensive income (audited)

for the year ended 30th November, 2020

	2020 RO	2019 RO
Income from operations	12,326,457	13,039,985
Cost of operations	(8,951,083)	(9,425,072)
Gross profit	3,375,374	3,614,913
Other income	177,856	155,119
Administrative expenses	(404,403)	(362,021)
Allowances for credit losses(net)	(57,282)	(11,551)
Profit from operations	3,091,545	3,396,460
Finance charges	(92,940)	(135,343)
Profit for the year before tax	2,998,605	3,261,117
Taxation	(450,861)	(464,109)
Net profit and total comprehensive income for the year	2,547,744	2,797,008
Basic earnings per share	0.386	0.457

The complete accounts in either Arabic or English will be delivered to any shareholder within 7 days of receipt of the request. Such requests may be sent to the Board Secretary, Sahara Hospitality Co. (S.A.O.G.), P.O. Box 311, Postal Code 100, Muscat.



Rescue workers extinguish a fire caused by an explosion in the town of Azaz in the northern countryside of Syria's Aleppo province. — AFP

Two car bombs kill 11 in north Syria

AZAZ, Syria: Two car bombs killed 11 people including six civilians in two separate incidents in Turkish-held northern Syria on Sunday, a monitoring group said.

The first attack near a cultural centre in the town of Azaz killed six civilians including a young girl, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

An AFP reporter at the scene saw a mangled car ablaze, black smoke billowing into the sky.

A man rushed away from the site of the blast, carrying what appeared to be a child wrapped in a bloodied cloth.

In the second incident, a car bomb targeted a checkpoint of pro-Ankara rebels near the town of Al Bab, killing five fighters, the Observatory added.

Areas of northern Syria held by Turkish forces and their Syrian proxies are regularly rocked by such bombings.

There is usually no claim for them, although Turkey routinely blames Kurdish fighters it accuses of being “terrorists” linked to its outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).

On Saturday, explosives planted in another vehicle took the lives of eight civilians including four children in the city of Afrin, which Turkish forces and their proxies seized from Kurdish forces in 2018.

A MAN RUSHED AWAY FROM THE SITE OF THE BLAST, CARRYING WHAT APPEARED TO BE A CHILD WRAPPED IN A BLOODIED CLOTH

Syria’s war has killed more than 387,000 people and displaced millions since starting in 2011 with the brutal repression of anti-government protests.

It has since evolved into a complex conflict involving fighters and foreign powers.

Northern neighbour Turkey has seized control of several regions inside Syria in military campaigns against the IS group and Kurdish fighters since 2016. — AFP

Peace in troubled Libya brings back traditional weavers

TAWERGHA, Libya: In front of a bundle of palm fronds, Halima Mohamad squats down to weave in an abandoned school in Tawergha, a town once a flashpoint in Libya’s decade-long war.

Mohamad makes baskets from date palm leaves, using traditional skills handed down over the generations and reconnecting her to a way of life nearly destroyed by the chaos of conflict.

“We must preserve this heritage inherited from our ancestors,” said 55-year-old Mohamad. “It’s our identity.”

The mother of two spends an average of 16 hours a day in the room that serves as her workshop, plaiting the fronds into baskets, trays, floor mats and wall decorations.

The town has suffered; when Libyan ruler Muammar Gaddafi was toppled in 2011 in a NATO-

backed uprising, people took revenge on those seen as his supporters — including the entire town of Tawergha. Its 40,000 residents, many the descendants of slaves, were forced to flee, with militia forces torching homes and destroying buildings.

Residents like Mohamad ran for their lives — barely surviving for seven years in hard-scrabble dusty camps scattered across the country, and forbidden to return home.

The oil-rich North African nation has been riven by civil war ever since the fall of Gaddafi, but rival sides finally agreed on a fragile ceasefire last October. Under a separate deal struck in June 2018 with the backing of the UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA), residents of Tawergha began to slowly come back.

Around a third of the original



Haleema Mohamed makes palm wicker products at a home in Tawergha, some 200 kilometres east of Libya's capital close to the port city of Misrata. — AFP

population of the town have returned, though the scars of war remain, with houses riddled with bullet holes and craters left by artillery fire.

For some, the town’s ancient tradition of weaving offers a way to earn an income — as well as

resuming a way of life that the war had stopped.

For Mohamad, her primary motivation is money. “I work long hours because the income is decent,” she said.

As she sits knotting the long thin leaves together, the fresh

scent brings back memories of her childhood.

She follows the repetitive handwork in moves learnt from her elders, and colours the strands with three traditional dyes — blue, green and purple — to add splashes of design.

“We use special dyes,” she said. “We fill large barrels in which we boil the palm leaves until they soak up the colours.”

As her fingers twist and tie the thin stems, she explained how her relatives had taught her to select supple strands and to then “dry them in the sun for several days.”

Then the leaves are “soaked in water to soften them” before the weaving work can even begin, she added.

“My father and my sisters have been working in basketry for almost 50 years, and I started doing it 20 years ago,” she said. — AFP

Algeria launches coronavirus vaccination campaign



A medical worker holds a vial of Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine at a clinic in the capital Algiers. — AFP

BLIDA: Algeria on Saturday launched its coronavirus vaccination campaign starting in the northern city of Blida, the epicentre of the country’s Covid-19 outbreak in March 2020.

Algiers said it had received a first shipment of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine on Friday, having announced in late December it had ordered 500,000 doses from its long-time ally Moscow.

Health Minister Abderrahmane Benbouzid said the country was working to acquire sufficient vaccine doses to immunise all of Algeria’s 44 million people, the official APS news agency reported.

The vaccination campaign will be carried out in “phases” across all regions, “without exception”, he said, cited by APS.

Some 8,000 health centres have been mobilised to roll-out vaccinations, starting with medical workers, the elderly and people with chronic health conditions.

From Sunday, security and civil protection personnel, workers in the education sector, religious leaders, politicians and journalists will also start to receive the jab.

The campaign kicked off at a clinic in Blida province, which was hard hit by the virus after Algeria’s first infection was recorded there in a citizen travelling from France.

The country has since recorded 2,888 deaths from Covid-19, as well as over 107,000 infections. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

JERUSALEM

Palestinian killed amid West Bank knife attack

The Israeli army said it killed a Palestinian who carried out an attempted knife attack in the Gush Etzion area of the occupied West Bank.

“A knife attack was reported at the Gush Etzion junction, south of Bethlehem,” the army said in a statement. “The attacker was neutralised.”

The attacker “is dead”, the army said, confirming that the military had killed the assailant.

The military later said the incident took place at a bus sta-



tion, where soldiers were providing security to Israelis, with the suspect “running” at the forces while brandishing a stick with three knives fastened to it. — AFP

TRIPOLI

Candidates for Libya executive unveiled

The United Nations mission to Libya has released a list of candidates for the country’s prime minister and presidency council positions ahead of a voting process starting Monday.

Participants in the UN-sponsored Libyan Political Dialogue Forum, which kicked off in November, will meet in Switzerland from Monday through Friday for the voting process for the new temporary unified executive, the UN mission, UNSMIL. The 21 candidates for



the position of the prime minister and 24 for the three-member presidency council include political heavyweights from the country’s rival east and west, but also from the south. — AFP

TELAVIV

Israel to transfer vaccines to medical personnel

Israel will transfer 5,000 Covid-19 vaccines to the Palestinian Authority for use by medical staff who work on the pandemic’s front lines.

“The first batch is expected to be transferred at the beginning of next week,” the office of the defence minister said in a statement. No further details were immediately available. Palestinian critics have urged the Palestinian Authority (PA), which has autonomous control over parts of the occupied West Bank, not to



accept the vaccines if offered.

They say Israel is acting only after being slammed internationally for not providing vaccines to the Palestinians. — dpa

S Korea to extend Covid-19 curbs into Lunar New Year holidays

SEOUL: South Korea will extend its social distancing curbs by two weeks until the end of the Lunar New Year holidays as new Covid-19 infection clusters emerge in the country, Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun said on Sunday.

The announcement dashed earlier expectations that the government would ease the rules from the current highest levels, which include a restaurant curfew and a ban on gatherings of more than four people and have been in place since early December.

But health authorities decided to maintain the curbs after a new large outbreak emerged from missionary training schools across the country last week, reversing a recent downtrend in daily infections ahead of the Lunar New Year break, which begins on February 11.

“The government is planning to extend the current distancing levels and anti-virus standards as they are until the Lunar New Year holidays end,” Chung told an intra-agency meeting.

“The third Covid-19 wave, which had temporarily slowed, is again threatening our daily lives following the group infections from the missionary institutes.” In line with the decision, indoor cafe and restaurant dining after 9 pm



People take a walk on a cold winter day, amid the coronavirus disease pandemic, at a park in Seoul. — AFP

and any gatherings of more than four people — two key measures that have proved effective — will continue to be prohibited.

Vice Health Minister Kang Do-tae said the virus was spreading not only among the missionary schools, to which 379 cases have been linked so far, but also at churches, hospitals and sports facilities.

“There is a danger that it might lead to a broader re-spread of the virus, and potentially another major wave where thousands of patients emerge within a short time,” Kang told a briefing.

But the government will “positively consider” easing the curbs, including the dining curfew, if the situation improves this week.

Chung said the ongoing spread must be further dampened to facilitate South Korea’s vaccination campaign and the start of the spring school semester, which are respectively set for February and March.

About 117,000 doses of vaccines of Pfizer Inc, enough for about 60,000 people, will arrive as early as mid-February via the global distribution scheme

COVAX, Chung said.

AstraZeneca will also ship its products for about 300,000 people starting February, also through COVAX, as the first batch of its shipment of vaccines for at least 1.3 million people and up to 2.19 million in the first half of this year, he added.

The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) reported 355 new cases as of Saturday midnight, as the numbers fell under 400 for the first time in five days due in part to less testing during the weekend. — Reuters

Pearl’s family to challenge Pakistan murder acquittals

ISLAMABAD: The family of American journalist Daniel Pearl will challenge an order by Pakistan’s top court to release a British-born militant acquitted of masterminding his kidnapping and brutal murder in 2002.

The Supreme Court on Thursday upheld the acquittal of Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and three other men last year, triggering outrage from the United States.

Pearl was the South Asia bureau chief for The Wall Street Journal when he was abducted and beheaded by fighters in Karachi in January 2002 while researching a story about fighters.

“The Pearl family intends to file a review petition against the illegal and unjust majority decision,” parents Ruth and Judea Pearl said in a statement that was tweeted by the murdered journalist’s friend and former Wall Street Journal colleague Asra Nomani.

They join both the federal government and Sindh provincial government — of which the city of Karachi is the capital — in launching a plea for the latest verdict to be reviewed.

Lawyers for Pearl’s family have argued that Sheikh played a crucial role in organising the abduction and detention of the journalist before ordering his

The Pearl family intends to file a review petition against the illegal and unjust majority decision

RUTH AND JUDEA PEARL

Parents of Daniel Pearl

captors to kill him.

Defence lawyers, however, say he was a scapegoat and sentenced on insufficient evidence

“It is beyond belief that Ahmad Omar Sheikh — who after 18 years of lies, had finally admitted in a handwritten letter to the court his role in the kidnapping for ransom of Daniel Pearl — has been given a clean slate and let loose once again upon the world to continue his international terrorist activities,” Pearl’s family said in the statement.

The four men — who have been detained under the emergency orders of Sindh government since their acquittal last year — still have multiple court challenges linked to their case. — AFP

Vietnam re-selects party chief, shuts Hanoi schools

HANOI: Vietnam’s ruling Communist Party re-elected its 76-year-old chief Nguyen Phu Trong for a rare third five-year term on Sunday, as the Southeast Asian country battled its biggest coronavirus outbreak since the pandemic began.

Trong, who emerged on top in a power struggle at the last congress in 2016 and has spearheaded a “blazing furnace” crackdown on corruption in the last five years, was granted an exception to party rules that say people over the age of 65 should retire, cementing his position as one of the country’s strongest and longest-serving leaders for decades.

“Comrade Nguyen Phu Trong was elected to be the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, term XIII,” the official Vietnam News Agency (VNA) reported.

Trong’s re-election as party general secretary came at a five-yearly party congress in Hanoi, where 1,600 party delegates from across Vietnam are concluding eight days of meetings, mostly behind closed doors, to pick a new leadership team, aiming to bolster Vietnam’s ongoing economic success — and the legitimacy of the party’s rule.

Vietnam has no paramount ruler and is officially led by four “pillars”: the chief of its Communist Party, the most powerful post; a president; a prime minister; and the National Assembly chair.

While ascent to the highest levels of Vietnamese politics is governed by party regulations, in reality the highly secretive process revolves around building consensus and vying for control of



Nguyen Phu Trong

the decision-making Politburo.

That means exceptions to rules can be granted — especially if consensus on the top candidates cannot be reached.

Since taking office in 2011, Trong has built up a power base that saw him emerge on top in a showdown with former prime minister Nguyen Tan Dung at the last congress in 2016.

His crackdown on corruption, described by government critics as politically motivated, has seen dozens of high-level officials, including one Politburo member, sentenced to lengthy jail terms.

Trong’s re-selection by members of the ruling Communist Party came as Vietnam battles a new Covid-19 outbreak that has infected at least 221 people and spread to at least eight cities and provinces in the country, including the southern economic hub of Ho Chi Minh City and the capital, Hanoi.

After the new outbreak was detected, state media have reported the congress would end on Monday, a day earlier than planned. — Reuters

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United Finance Company SAOG

Board of Directors' Report for the year ended 31st December 2020

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, it is my pleasure to present to you the audited financial results of your company for the year ended 31st December 2020.

Overview

"Every adversity, every failure, every heartache, carries with it the seed of a similar or greater benefit" – Napoleon Hill

2020 started off on a promising note with the government unveiling the State Budget with sizable outlay for developmental projects to foster economic activity. The government adopted a balanced approach of restraining spending in line with the projected revenue streams to curtail the budget deficit. However, the onset of Covid-19 pandemic forced the governments across the world to implement strict precautionary measures which included lockdowns and movement restrictions to curtail the spread of coronavirus. These developments hampered normal economic activity as business establishments had to shut down operations and triggered a slump in demand for oil, resulting in a fall in oil prices by the end of Q1 2020. The drop in oil revenue prompted the government to curtail spending and roll back budgeted outlay on developments projects resulting in subdued market conditions which impacted normal economic activity.

The Board of your company met and decided that we should use the year of the pandemic to reset our focus and priorities and build a digitally-led, revived and rejuvenated company going forward. A three-year strategic plan was drawn up and 2020 was the first step in our new path to become a company that is relevant to the youth of Oman.

The company was faced with severe lockdown of businesses, staff and customers were affected by the pandemic and the second quarter of the year was essentially written off. However, with the support of the Central Bank and the guidance of the Supreme Committee, we have come out a better and stronger company and are ready to face the coming years with belief and confidence.

The year under review

Taking into consideration the volatile market conditions and uncertainties that prevailed through 2020, Company adopted a restrained approach in booking fresh business in the first half of the year. As a result, the loan portfolio of the company as at 31 December 2020 registered as decline and stood at RO.85.32 Million as against RO.98.46 Million as at 31st December 2019. The company recorded a net profit of RO.776,041 for the year 2020 as against RO.672,704 for the previous year - an increase of 15%. Company took rigorous efforts on the recovery front which helped in restraining NPAs at RO.27.31 Million as at 31st December 2020 as against RO.26.76 Million as at 31st December 2019.

The company holds cumulative provisions of RO 17.84 Million as at December 2020, including reserved interest and a Special Reserve of RO 2.37 Million to guard against delinquencies. The Management is pursuing stringent recovery measures to control and bring down the level of impaired loans in the coming year.

Merger

The company put in a lot of effort in the year to assess the possibility of a merger with another finance company. One of the Big 4 audit firms was appointed to do the initial valuation of both the companies. The final proposed valuation, after negotiation, could not be agreed by either companies and it was decided to drop the proposed merger. I would like to thank the Board members of both the companies for the time and effort that was put in to this exercise.

Human Resources

We have worked hard to reduce headcount where required without allowing the Omanisation requirement of 80% to be breached, and this has resulted in our staff costs going down substantially. This was one of the key strategic decisions taken by the Board and we are now a leaner and more efficient organization. We also encouraged the management to train Omanis for senior management positions and four Omanis were identified and underwent training at the College of Banking and Financial Studies. Our vision is to have 100% Omanis in our branches very soon.

"Accepted that we are Human Resources, but we are Human first and Resources later" - Rutvik Oza

In the middle of the pandemic crisis we had asked our staff to voluntarily take salary reductions and I am pleased to say that 88% of our staff chose to forego part of their salary to help the company reduce costs at a difficult time. I would like to thank them all for this gesture.

Change in Directors

One of the Directors, Mr. Ranga Gurur had resigned and as a consequence Mr. Khalid Abdullah Salim Al Eisi has been elected to the Board. Mr. Khalid Al Eisi is a Senior Manager at the Oman

Investment Authority (OIA). He joined OIA in 2009 and has 15 years of working experience in the investment sector. He is a Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) and has a Bachelor degree from the College of Commerce at the Sultan Qaboos University. We welcome him to our Board.

Corporate Governance

The company adopts the best corporate governance practices and is compliant with the prescribed code. The corporate governance philosophy and practices pursued by the company are contained in the report on corporate governance accompanied by the report of Statutory Auditors.

Corporate Social Responsibility

"Creating a strong business and building a better world are not conflicting goals- they are both essential ingredients for long term success" – Bill Ford

As part of its corporate social responsibility initiatives, UFC continues to participate in social programs by conducting regular blood donation camps and offers employment to the physically challenged. The company extends funding to SMEs and local community contractors in the interior regions which indirectly aids in providing employment opportunities and a source of livelihood to the locals in the vicinity of the projects funded.

Looking Ahead

"You've got to think about the Big Things while doing the Small Things, so that all the Small Things are going in the right direction"- Alvin Toffler

The National Program for Fiscal Balance and the State Budget for the year 2021 focus on measures to increase the efficiency of spending through various initiatives. The objective is to ensure sustainable growth over the long term. The budget also focuses on diversifying income sources to reduce dependency on the oil and gas sector. Introduction of VAT, expanding the Excise Tax base and the phased withdrawal of subsidies of water and electricity are some of the initiatives being taken by the government to improve alternate revenue sources to reduce debt. Various austerity measures are also likely to be implemented to curtail non-essential expenditure. The Development Plan aims to promote economic diversification in sector such as logistics, agriculture, fisheries, mining and manufacturing to achieve balanced growth and provide job opportunities to nationals. These initiatives are aimed at driving economic activity and aid in achieving fiscal stability and sustainable growth in the long run.

We at United Finance Company SAOG are committed to aligning our corporate philosophy and strategy for growth with the principles and goals enshrined in the 2040 Vision. We are determined to play our full part in realising all of those objectives. Taking a cue from the 2040 Vision and its precursor, the 2020 Vision, the company is proud to have already embraced many of these pillars, notably in support of youth entrepreneurship, SME development and local community advancement.

With the market environment gradually reviving from the impact of Covid-19 pandemic, UFC would cash in on the market opportunities as they unfold and grow its loan book, albeit with emphasis on asset quality.

The delays experienced by customers in realizing their contractual dues and its impact on the cash flow of borrowers is a major challenge we expect going forward. Over the years we have built an adequate cushion of provisions and are well positioned to safeguard the company's shareholders.

Our total borrowings to debt are below 1x and while we expect liquidity to remain tight, we are receiving good support from our bankers for our growth plans.

2021 is expected to be a year of uncertainties due to the second phase of the pandemic which is spreading across many countries. We expect that oil prices may remain low due to the travel restrictions and lack of mobility which are likely to continue. However, we remain cautiously optimistic that we will be able to execute the goals the company has set for itself, despite all the challenges.

Tribute to Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos

On the first anniversary of the passing away of our beloved Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said, we recall with profoundly grateful hearts his tremendous and longstanding leadership as the Architect of Oman's Blessed Renaissance and in carefully shepherding the nation's development over five decades. During his long reign, the late Sultan laid the foundations for the growth of a strong and prosperous country that today stands justifiably proud among the GCC and other developed countries. A champion of peace and goodwill, he will always be acclaimed internationally for his espousal of cooperation and reconciliation.

Acknowledgement

The Board of Directors and Management express their highest gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tark Al Said and respectfully acknowledge his able leadership to nurture and lead the country in the years to come.

On behalf of the Board, I wish to express our gratitude to the Central Bank of Oman, the Capital Market Authority, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Ministry of Manpower, the Royal Oman Police and other Regulatory Authorities and thank them for their support and guidance. We also take this opportunity to extend our sincere thanks to our bankers, shareholders and other stakeholders for their unstinting support.

On behalf of the Board I would like to place on record my appreciation and thank the Management and staff for their individual and collective contribution to achieving operational efficiency and realizing the company's goals.

May God bless all of us.

Mohamed Abdulla Al Khonji
Chairman

AUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AT 31ST DECEMBER 2020 (Subject to approval by Central Bank of Oman and Annual General Meeting)

	2020 RO	2019 RO
ASSETS		
Property and equipment	2,389,523	2,420,275
Deferred tax asset	16,923	13,898
Deposit with the Central Bank of Oman	250,000	250,000
Investment securities	554,150	554,150
Installment finance debtors	85,315,987	98,463,272
Other receivables and prepaid expenses	139,563	119,728
Cash and cash equivalents	707,594	601,423
Total assets	89,373,740	102,422,795
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Share capital	34,914,441	34,914,441
Share premium reserve	528,402	528,402
Legal reserve	4,900,439	4,822,835
Special reserve	2,368,989	2,368,989
Foreign currency reserve	294,514	294,514
Impairment reserve	1,911,736	1,036,092
Retained earnings	493,862	671,069
Total shareholders' equity	45,412,383	44,636,342
Liabilities		
Borrowings	36,675,049	45,010,255
Corporate deposits	4,000,000	7,000,000
Creditors and other payables	3,199,975	5,263,777
Taxation	86,333	512,421
Total liabilities	43,961,357	57,786,453
Total equity and liabilities	89,373,740	102,422,795

AUDITED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER 2020 (Subject to approval by Central Bank of Oman and Annual General Meeting)

	2020 RO	2019 RO
Installment finance income	7,513,942	8,463,921
Interest expense	(2,517,391)	(2,773,798)
Net installment finance income	4,996,551	5,690,123
Other Income	463,928	637,417
Other expenses	(2,951,965)	(3,514,186)
Depreciation	(100,237)	(110,795)
Impairment on installment finance debtors - net	(1,495,288)	(1,911,143)
Profit before tax	912,989	791,416
Income tax expense	(136,948)	(118,712)
Profit and total comprehensive income for the year	776,041	672,704

The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who requests them, in either Arabic or English within 7 days of the receipt of such request addressed to:

Chief Executive Officer, United Finance Co. SAOG
 P O Box 3652, PC 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman. Tel: 24577300
 Fax 24561557 E-mail: ufc@ufcoman.com, Website: www.ufcoman.com



A driver shows an identity card to checkpoint personnel and Portuguese National Republican Guards at a checkpoint crossing between Valencia and Tui. – AFP

Portugal seals itself off to contain coronavirus

BERLIN: Portugal has sealed itself off to contain the coronavirus which is rapidly spreading in the Iberian country. Since Sunday, entry and exit without a valid reason is prohibited in the popular holiday destination.

At the country's border with its neighbour and EU partner Spain, controls have been reintroduced - as they were in the spring of 2020.

Controls at ports and airports were also tightened according to a government decree. Exceptions apply for people travelling to work, returning to their main residence, for the transport of goods and for medical emergencies or humanitarian aid. The 1,214-kilometre land border between Portugal and Spain had already been closed for the first time on March 17 because of the pandemic. It was only reopened on July 1 in the wake of the sharp decline in the number of infections at the time.

The coronavirus situation in Portugal is "very bad," according to Prime Minister Antonio Costa.

On Saturday, 12,435 new infections and 293 more deaths were registered in the country of 10.3 million inhabitants.

Measured against the size of the population, these figures are among the highest in the world, according to calculations by international organisations.

According to the latest figures of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), 1,429 people per 100,000 inhabitants were infected with the virus within 14 days, putting Portugal ahead of Spain, where the number was 1,026, at the top of the list of 30 countries.

EU partners Austria and Germany have offered to help Portugal's overstretched health service as it struggles to deal with a surge in Covid-19 cases requiring treatment in hospital.

Austria has offered to take in seriously ill Covid-19 patients from Portugal. The number of people to be flown to Austria will be clarified with the Portuguese Health Ministry, Chancellor Sebastian Kurz announced on Sunday. — dpa

Over 3,000 detained as Russian police clamp down on protests

MOSCOW: Police detained more than 3,000 people across Russia and blocked off the centre of Moscow Sunday in a massive clampdown on protests demanding the release of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny.

Thousands of protesters defied government warnings to rally from Vladivostok to Saint Petersburg in a second weekend of mass demonstrations over the arrest of President Vladimir Putin's most prominent critic.

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 he blames on the Kremlin.

The 44-year-old anti-corruption campaigner is being held in a Moscow detention centre and faces years of potential jail time in several different criminal cases, despite calls from Western governments for his release.

In moves not seen in years in Moscow, authorities locked down the centre of the capital Sunday, with hundreds of police lining the streets, central Metro stations closed and the movements of pedestrians restricted.

Protesters who had hoped to gather outside the headquarters of the FSB security service were instead scattered to various parts of the city as organisers made last-minute changes in locations.

Journalists saw dozens of protesters detained and taken into police vans. It was unclear amid the chaos how many people took part in the demonstration.

Independent monitor OVD-



Police detain a man during a rally in support of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny in Moscow – AFP

Info said at least 3,062 people had been detained across the country, including 844 in Moscow, and arrests were continuing. It reported more than 4,000 detentions during similar protests last Saturday.

The Russian Union of Journalists said around 35 people working for media outlets were also detained on Sunday.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Twitter condemned "the persistent use of harsh tactics against peaceful protesters and journalists by Russian authorities for a second week straight."

The Russian foreign ministry hit back, accusing the United

ANTI-CORRUPTION
CAMPAIGNER NAVALNY
IS BEING HELD IN A
MOSCOW DETENTION
CENTRE AND FACES YEARS
IN SEVERAL DIFFERENT
CRIMINAL CASES

States of "gross interference" in its affairs and of using "online platforms controlled by Washington" to promote the protests.

Hundreds marched through the centre of Moscow chanting

"Freedom!" and "Putin is a thief!" before arriving outside Matrosskaya Tishina prison where Navalny was being held.

Several dozen were detained at the prison, with police chasing down protesters in the snow outside the complex.

"The people in power don't want to listen to anything or to anybody," 34-year-old vet Darya said at the Moscow rally.

In the second city of Saint Petersburg, police closed off the main thoroughfare Nevsky Prospekt, shut Metro stations and police cars were parked all across the centre, a journalist reported.

— AFP

Navalny, WHO and Thunberg among Nobel Peace Prize nominees

OSLO: Russian dissident Alexei Navalny, the World Health Organization and climate campaigner Greta Thunberg are among those nominated for this year's Nobel Peace Prize, all backed by Norwegian lawmakers who have a track record of picking the winner.

Thousands of people, from members of parliaments worldwide to former winners, are eligible to propose candidates. Nominations, which close on Sunday, do not imply an endorsement from the Nobel committee.

Norwegian lawmakers have nominated the eventual laureate

every year since 2014, with the exception of 2019, said Henrik Urdal, Director of the Peace Research Institute Oslo. "The pattern from recent years is quite stunning."

The Norwegian Nobel Committee, which decides who wins the award, does not comment on nominations, keeping secret for 50 years the names of nominators and unsuccessful nominees.

But nominators can choose to reveal their picks.

According to a Reuters survey of Norwegian lawmakers, nominees include Thunberg, Navalny, the WHO and its



Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya

COVAX programme to secure fair access to Covid-19 vaccines for poor countries.

Thunberg was named as one of "the foremost spokespeople in the



Greta Thunberg

fight against the climate crisis", with the campaigning group she co-founded, Fridays for Future, also receiving a nod.

Navalny, nominated by

Russian academics, was named for his "efforts for a peaceful democratisation of Russia" by Norwegian former minister Ola Elvestuen.

The battle against Covid-19 is front and centre, including a nomination for the GAVI vaccine alliance. Other names are Belarusian activists Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Maria Kolesnikova and Veronika Tsepalo for their "fight for a fair election and inspiration for peaceful resistance", one nominator, Geir Sigbjørn Toskedal, said.

Another, Jette Christensen, also named the Hungarian

Helsinki Committee, a human rights group, and Iustitia, a group of Polish judges defending civil rights.

"My nomination this year is ... for the fight to preserve democracy as a form of government in Europe," Christensen said.

Freedom of information is a recurring theme with nominees including the US-based Committee to Protect Journalists; former Charlie Hebdo journalist Zineb el Rhazoui; news website Hong Kong Free Press, the US-based International Fact-Checking Network and Paris-based Reporters without Borders (RSF). — AFP

SHORT TAKES

STOCKHOLM

Stenevi elected as co-leader of Swedish Greens

The Greens, who are part of the government in Sweden, have elected former secretary-general Marta Stenevi as their new female co-chair.

The 44-year-old was elected at a special digital congress of the party on Sunday with 142 votes out of 265, against lawmakers Annika Hirvonen and Rebecka Le Moine and local politician Elin Soderberg.

She will in future lead the Greens together with Finance Minister Per Bolund in a female-



male dual leadership typical of the party. Stenevi had entered the race as the favourite to succeed Climate and Environment Minister Isabella Lovin.

— dpa

BRUSSELS

Hundreds detained at Brussels anti-virus protest

Brussels police placed at least 200 people in administrative detention and shut down an unauthorised protest against Belgium's coronavirus containment measures. "We are shutting down the demonstration outside Central Station," Brussels police tweeted.

Those involved would be allowed to leave one by one after identification, provided they leave peacefully and there are no reasons to arrest them, police said. At least 200 people had



been placed in administrative detention so far.

Belgium braced itself for a possible spill-over of protests against coronavirus restrictions.

— dpa

WUHAN

WHO probe team visits Wuhan market

A team of WHO experts investigating the origins of Covid-19 went to a market in Wuhan where one of the first reported clusters of infections emerged over a year ago, with one member tweeting the visit was "critical" to understanding the virus.

Members of the group arrived at Huanan seafood market — which has been sealed since January last year — driving into its barricaded premises as guards quickly blocked others from



entering, according to journalists at the scene.

The mission has a remit to explore how the virus jumped from animal to human.

— AFP

A light at the end of the tunnel

The most difficult thing in life is making a living for yourself and family. In fact, it is something very essential to struggle and make sacrifices for as most people do. Though it brings headache for many, it gets even favourable when one gets the pay cheque by end of the month. Having a source of income to make a living probably comes on top of the list of necessities in life. Although cash is not everything in life, it marks the reason for having a decent lifestyle. Thus, having a job to earn money is a dream of all.

We all know that the best day is the payday for earning money allows you to buy things you need, pay your bills, have a place to live and simply do things you want to do. Money does not buy happiness! What a frustrating statements that we have, hundreds of times, heard it, seen it written on articles and posters as well as attributed to different celebrities and philosophers. However, do any of us truly believe it? What we are all sure about is that without a penny in your pocket, you can do nothing!

In other words, we all need money for everything; from satisfying basic needs necessary for survival to making our dreams come true. In



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
aljahdhami22@gmail.com

HAVING A
SOURCE OF
INCOME TO
MAKE A LIVING
PROBABLY
COMES ON TOP
OF THE LIST OF
NECESSITIES IN
LIFE

return, how could one earn money without being employed?! If truth to be told, a job means more than just a source of income. It provides people with a sense of fulfillment, productivity, and purpose of course. Having a job that depends on another person to complete a task conveys a sense of responsibility to an employee. This kind of responsibility affirms that one is needed and people are complimenting one another. In addition to the earnings, work stimulates employees to put their energy, skills and talents to use.

Likewise, work provides employees self-respect, especially when starting a conversation and you are asked, “What do you do?” Here comes the sense of pride that one gets of what he does as a profession to make his living. People very rarely ask you first about your interests, hobbies or other aspects of your personal life. Although your profession does not indicate everything about you, it is usually what people are interested to know about you first.

For that reason, all the over 65,000 job-seekers in Oman are impatiently waiting for their turn to start making their own living. What is even more important to them is the feeling of self-

value as good citizens playing a role in the nation-building march. To them making a life starts with making a living for their own and their families. As well, they are aspiring to achieve their dreams, which they over the past years. For some, it has been ages since they have graduated from high schools and waiting for the moment to make their dreams come true.

The announcements, promises and planned changes announced by the Ministry of Labour to job-seekers last week marked a flash of hope at the end of the tunnel. The number, 32,000 job opportunities which will be offered in 2021, comes a breather for the job-seekers in the Sultanate. As some are on cloud nine after hearing the announcement, others are still desperate about the impracticality to fulfill all the promises. However, it is way too early to judge the outcomes and expectations of all these announcements and promises.

To all job-seekers having a job is more of making a life rather than making a living! Hence, as it has lightened a spark of hope into the spirit of Oman’s youth, it is time for the Ministry of Labour to turn tragedies into opportunities and challenges into possibilities for job-seekers.

DIGITAL DIVIDE

How older people looking for vaccines

HOWARD COHEN & MICHELLE MARCHANTE

Win the lottery or nail an appointment for a Covid-19 vaccine dose? For thousands of seniors, their friends and family members and caregivers, getting a shot might feel like winning the lottery.

That’s how valuable — and seemingly hard to get — that appointment is given how demand far outstrips supply. And it’s also telling how technology tools are not always accessible to every member of a community.

In a world where many seniors don’t have computers or computer skills, asking an older population to constantly check websites, navigate links, monitor Twitter alerts as appointments open, close, then open again, has been a challenge.

“We are hearing more deep frustration than success stories from seniors 65-plus trying to sign up to receive the Covid-19 vaccine in Florida”, said Jeff Johnson, State Director for AARP Florida.

“The sign-up process is cumbersome and time consuming, even for younger adults helping parents or older relatives”, he said. “There is a lack of sign-up process standardisation among vaccine providers even in the same city and the state’s vaccine locator does not always offer a phone option for providers.”

Lourdes Diaz knows how it is. She said Mount Sinai Medical Center reached out to her 91-year-old mother on December 23 because her mum is a patient. Diaz said she called the Miami Beach Hospital to get an appointment for her, left messages and emails. “I even used Twitter, but no luck.”

“We are hearing more deep frustration than success stories from seniors 65-plus trying to sign up to receive the Covid-19 vaccine in Florida”
JEFF JOHNSON
State Director for AARP

Her mum, she said, does not know how to use the Internet.

“I was finally able to get my mother an appointment at Jackson Health. I got lucky”, Diaz said. “They were supposed to open the appointment portal at 11 am but it was already open when I checked in around 10 am. Registering was quick and I had no problems. The appointment itself went great. We were ushered in right away and everything was very organised. My mother has her second appointment this week.”

But Diaz said trying to secure those shots at both hospitals pulled her away from her own work responsibilities for about 10 hours as she spent time researching and reaching out.

Thankfully, I was working remotely and had the flexibility to be persistent”, Diaz said. “But this has been a very frustrating experience. I believe everyone is trying their best, but there are so many barriers. It’s like winning the lotto.”

According to Pew Research Center, Americans 60 and older are spending more time with computers — on desktops, laptops or smart phones.

In 2000, 14 per cent of those ages 65 and older were Internet users. Now, 73 per cent are, according to Pew. “And while smartphone ownership was uncommon at all ages around the turn of the 21st century, now about half (53 per cent) of people 65 and older are smartphone owners.”

At the same time, Pew’s research found that about 30 per cent of adults in low-income households below \$30,000 a year don’t own a smartphone. More than 40 per cent lack home broadband services or a traditional computer and even fewer own tablets.

— dpa

DECENT WORK?

How Biden’s climate agenda aims to trigger a ‘good-paying’ jobs boom

JACK GRAHAM

In the small Canadian city of Saint-Jérôme, Québec, electric bus and truck manufacturer Lion Electric is preparing to expand south of the border, aiming to open a plant in the United States by 2023, with the capacity to produce 20,000 vehicles a year.

After signing deals with online retailer Amazon and school districts across North America, the company expects the new factory will hire 1,500 people, from electrical engineers to assembly-line workers, and create another 9,500 jobs in its US supply chain.

“There’s a lot of people involved in building a 100 per cent electric vehicle”, said Vice-President Patrick Gervais.

The expansion by Lion Electric — which is set to go public on the New York Stock Exchange in March, through a merger with a US acquisitions firm — seems well-timed.

US President Joe Biden, who took over from climate-change sceptic Donald Trump on January 20, plans to invest \$2 trillion in green infrastructure over the next four years.

Besides combating climate change, the administration says the plan could create more than 10 million jobs.

“When I think of climate change and the answers to it, I think of jobs”, Biden said in a speech last Wednesday, on a day he signed a second round of executive actions to help curb climate warming and protect people and the economy from its impacts.

“We can put millions of Americans to work modernising our water systems, transportation (and) our



President Joe Biden walks past solar panels while touring the Plymouth Area Renewable Energy Initiative in Plymouth, New Hampshire. — Reuters

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN PLANS TO INVEST \$2 TRILLION IN GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE OVER THE NEXT FOUR YEARS

energy infrastructure to withstand the impacts of extreme climate”, Biden said.

A government-backed study out this week said reaching net-zero carbon emissions from US energy and industry by 2050 — as Biden aims to do — could be achieved by rebuilding energy infrastructure to run primarily on renewables, at a net cost of about \$1 per person per day.

The transition would involve increasing energy efficiency, switching to electric technologies, using predominantly clean electricity — especially wind and solar power — and deploying a small amount of carbon capture technology, the

researchers found.

Study co-author Margaret Torn, a senior scientist with the Department of Energy’s Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, said building clean infrastructure equates to jobs, including in the United States, “as opposed to sending money overseas to buy oil from other countries”.

“There’s no question that there will need to be a well-thought-out economic transition strategy for fossil fuel-based industries and communities”, she said in a statement.

“But there’s also no question that there are a lot of jobs in building a low-carbon economy.”

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

HEAD OFFICE

Tel: 24649444, 24649450,
24649451, 24604563,
24699437
Fax: 24699643

SALALAH OFFICE

Tel: 23292633
Fax: 23293909

NIZWA OFFICE

Tel: 25411099
P.O. Box 955, P.C. 611

ADVERTISING

AL OMANEYA ADVERTISING & PUBLIC RELATIONS, P.O. Box 3303, P.C. 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: SWITCHBOARD: 24649444, 24649430/24649437/24649401
Fax: 24649434

DISTRIBUTION AGENT

Al OMANEYA for Distribution & Marketing, P.O. Box 974, P.C. 100, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24649351/24649360
Fax: 24649379

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f t i y l p v

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NIZWA BREAK DHOFAR'S WINNING STREAK

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 31

Newly promoted Nizwa broke Dhofar's streak of consecutive victories as the Salalah giants were held to a 1-1 draw at the Nizwa Sports Complex on Sunday in the eighth week of Omantel League.

With this result, the gap between league leaders Seeb and second-placed Dhofar rose to six points.

Rasheed Jaber's men took the lead as Yaseen al Shaikh scored the opening goal in the 46th minute while the equaliser came through Abdul Hameed al Mandhari in the 62nd minute.

Despite the substitutions made by Dhofar head coach Jaber, the hosts' defence was very strong and broke all the scoring attempts by the visitors' strikers.

With the draw, Dhofar remained in second position and the new tally of the team is 16 points, while Nizwa are in the eleventh place with five points.

Bahla snatched a crucial 2-1 victory over Al Suwaiq at Al Rustaq Sports Complex in a thrilling encounter.

The visitors began the scoring as Jansaah Robert scored the first goal in the 44th minute and the first half ended with Bahla in front.

In the second half, Essam al Barhi pulled level for Al Suwaiq as he netted in the 55th minute. Younis al Riyami netted the all-



Seeb and Muscat players in action at the Seeb Stadium. – Mohammed Mahjoub

important goal for Bahla in the 86th minute as he delivered three crucial points for his team.

With the win, Bahla have 11 points and are at sixth place while Al Suwaiq remained on 13 points in the fourth position.

In the other fixtures earlier on Saturday, unbeaten team in the league, Seeb, continued their impressive run on the top of the league as they thrashed Muscat 4-0 at Seeb Stadium.

Seeb have registered seven

LEAGUE LEADERS SEEB THRASHED MUSCAT 4-0 AND EXTENDED THE GAP WITH SECOND-PLACED DHOFAR TO SIX POINTS

victories in the league and one draw against Al Ittihad. The triumph took the league holders to 22 points while the capital city team is struggling in the league bottom order with three points

from eight games. Seeb's heroes and top scorers in the league Abdulaziz al Maqbali and Salah al Yahyaii struck two goals each in the game.

Al Maqbali scored the opening

goal from a penalty in the first half.

Al Yahyaii registered a strong comeback in the second half as he netted the second and third goals while Al Maqbali ended the scoring campaign with the fourth goal.

The North Batinah team, Sohar, were still struggling in the league as they suffered the fifth loss in the league against Al Nahda. The only goal in the match, which was played at Sohar Sports Complex,

was scored by Mohammed Khaseeb in the 50th minute. The guests were the best side in the match and the strikers were seeking goals from the start.

In the second half, Al Buraimi team players managed to break the defence of the hosts as they netted the winning goal.

Sohar's team played with 10 players in the second half after 70th minute but that did not assist Al Nahda to increase the goal margin.

Al Ittihad's Abdullah Zaher spoiled Musannah's victory as he struck the equaliser in the dying minutes to end the match in a 1-1 draw at Al Rustaq Sports Complex.

With the draw, Al Ittihad snatched one crucial point.

The first half ended in a goalless draw while the exciting part in the match began in 85th minute as Majid al Saadi scored for the hosts and the match appeared to be heading in favour of Musannah.

However, Al Ittihad's Abdullah Zaher al Mughnna broke all the expectations as he netted the equaliser in the 92nd minute. With the draw, Musannah have 14 points while Al Ittihad have eight points.

The match between Al Rustaq and Al Nasr at the same venue ended in a goalless draw. Al Nasr added one point to the previous credit to reach 12 points while Al Rustaq possess 11 points.

In brief

MADRID



REAL MADRID BEATEN BY LEVANTE TO HAND ATLETICO TITLE BOOST

Real Madrid had Eder Militao sent off in a 2-1 defeat by Levante on Saturday, handing Atletico Madrid the chance to move 10 points clear at the top of La Liga.

Zinedine Zidane's defending champions sit second in the table, seven points behind Atletico, who have two games in hand and face Cadiz on Sunday.

Militao was shown a red card in the ninth minute at the Alfredo di Stefano Stadium, with his team already without their injured captain Sergio Ramos and Covid-stricken coach Zidane.

MILAN



LUKAKU DOUBLE HELPS INTER KEEP PRESSURE ON MILAN

Romelu Lukaku scored a second-half double as Inter Milan kept the pressure on Serie A leaders AC Milan with a 4-0 win over Benevento on Saturday.

Antonio Conte's Inter sit two points behind their city rivals, who beat Bologna 2-1 earlier on Saturday.

A Riccardo Improta own goal put the hosts ahead early on against 11th-placed Benevento at the San Siro.

Lautaro Martinez scored 12 minutes after the break before Lukaku added two more.

Champions Juventus moved into third, seven points off top spot with a game in hand, after a 2-0 win over Sampdoria.

Milan bounced back after losses to Atalanta in the league and to Inter in the Italian Cup on Tuesday, a game in which Zlatan Ibrahimovic was sent off.

DUBAI



CASEY WINS IN DUBAI FOR 15TH EUROPEAN TOUR TITLE

England's Paul Casey made a triumphant return after a 14-month absence to win the Dubai Desert Classic by four shots on Sunday.

The 43-year-old managed to make his way around a rock-hard Emirates golf Club in two-under par 70 to finish on 17-under par 271 for the tournament.

South African Brandon Stone (72) finished in second at 13-under par as Scotland's Robert MacIntyre paid the price of four successive bogeys around the turn for a 74 and solo third place at 12-under par 276.

AL ATTIYAH CRUISES TO RECORD-BREAKING 15TH WIN

Oman's Zakariya al Aufi finishes 8th, Al Amri 10th

Al Kuwari and Al Suwaidi make it 1-2-3 for Qatar

Kuwait's Meshari starts Merc 2 title defence in style



LOSAIL, Qatar: Nasser Saleh al Attiyah continued to rewrite his own history by securing a comfortable victory in the Qatar International Rally on Saturday.

The Qatari and French co-driver Matthieu Baumel managed the pace perfectly over the closing stages and guided their Autotek Motorsport Volkswagen Polo GTi R5 to a winning margin of 1min 48.4sec over Abdulaziz al Kuwari and his new Irish co-driver James Fulton.

Al Attiyah duly broke his own record of achieving a 15th victory in Qatar and a record breaking 77th Merc win in the 218-event history of the series. Baumel earned his 26th regional rally victory on the 41st running of the Qatar event to overhaul both Chris Patterson and Giovanni Bernacchini in the Hall of Fame. He now has his sights set on Ronan Morgan's record of 41 successes.

"Today we did a really good job," said Al Attiyah. "Leg one was a nice fight between me and

Rank

2021 Qatar International Rally – positions after SS11

	Driver/Co-driver	Car	Timing
1.	Nasser Saleh al Attiyah (QAT)/Matthieu Baumel (FRA)	Volkswagen Polo GTi R5	1hr 50min 48.5sec
2.	Abdulaziz al Kuwari (QAT)/James Fulton (IRL)	Skoda Fabia R5 Evo	1hr 52min 36.9sec
3.	Khalid al Suwaidi (QAT)/Hugo Magalhães (POR)	Škoda Fabia R5	1hr 57min 16.9sec
4.	Nasser Khalifa al Atya (QAT)/Georges Nader (LEB)	Ford Fiesta R5	2hr 09min 41.6sec
5.	Meshari al Thefiri (KWT)/Nasser al Kuwari (QAT)	Mitsubishi Evo X (MERC 2)	2hr 17min 10.9sec
6.	Saleh al Saif (SAU)/Oriol Vidal (ESP)	Can-Am Maverick X3 (T4)	2hr 19min 45.2sec
7.	Rashid al Mohannadi (QAT)/Yousef Juma (JOR)	Subaru Impreza (MERC 2)	2hr 22min 31.3sec
8.	Zakariya al Aufi (OMN)/Ammar Al-Balushi (OMN)	Mitsubishi Evo IX (MERC 2)	2hr 33min 51.9sec
9.	Ahmad Khaled (LEB)/Musa Djierian (JOR)	Mitsubishi Evo X (MERC 2)	2hr 34min 09.7sec
10.	Zakariya al Amri (OMN)/Mohamed Al-Mazroui (OMN)	Subaru Impreza (MERC 2)	3hr 01min 00.2sec
11.	Henry Kahy (LEB)/Carlos Hanna (LEB)	Skoda Fabia 1.6 (MERC 3)	3hr 01min 40.3sec

Kris Meeke. It was (becoming) a nice race but when Kris get out from the race it was an easy day for us today. It was great to have some high level in the Qatar Rally. If you look this year we had seven R5s. It was an amazing race. Thanks to the QMME. I hope to continue in this level for this championship

and this year."

Al Kuwari won three of the second's day's six special stages in his Tok Sport Skoda Fabia R5 and was pleased with the runner-up spot after infrequent rally appearances in recent seasons. Khalid al Suwaidi and his navigator Hugo Maghalaes rounded off the podium places

to make it a Qatari driver 1-2-3.

Any hope of seeing Al Attiyah and visiting WRC star Kris Meeke battling for stage wins on the final day fizzled out when the Ulsterman was unable to restart after the team discovered engine damage on his SRT Skoda Fabia R5 that was sustained on stage five.

Nasser Khalifa al Atya and Lebanese co-pilot Georges Nader gave the host nation another driver inside the top four and Kuwait's Meshari al Thefiri began the defence of his Merc 2 title in impressive fashion by winning the showroom category and finishing fifth overall in his Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution X.

OMANIS FINISH IN TOP 10

Qatar's Rashid al Mohannadi and Oman's Zakariya al Aufi reached the finish in seventh and eighth and Lebanon's Ahmad Khaled was ninth. Oman's Zakariya al Amri duly rounded off the top 10. Eleven of the original 17 starters completed the rally.

Oman's Abdullah al Rawahi confirmed before the restart that exhaust sensor issues had forced him to retire as well.

Action resumes in the FIA Middle East Rally Championship with the Oman International Rally at the end of February.

Kashyap, Aqib shine in big wins for Muscat, Alpha

MUSCAT: Kashyapkumar Prajapati struck a superb 106 not out while fellow opener Jatinder Singh scored unbeaten 65 to steer Muscat CT to yet another win over Renaissance in a Premier Division 50-over League game at OC Turf 1 in Amerat on Saturday.

Muscat bowled well again, dismissing Renaissance for 174 in the 49th over. Muscat openers overhauled the modest target, scoring 175 in 26.4 overs to seal an impressive 10-wicket victory.

AQIB POWERS ALPHA

In another Premier Division contest, Arm Alpha rode on another sizzling all-round show by Oman vice-captain Aqib Ilyas to thrash AER by 104 runs on Friday.

Aqib first batted brilliantly, scoring 66 in Alpha's 223 for 9 in 50 overs and then bowled a splendid spell, taking 4 for 16 to play a key role in dismissing AER for a paltry 119 in the 34th

BRIEF SCORES	
Premier Division Renaissance 174 all out in 48.5 overs (Shubo Pal 55 – 4x4, 1x6, Aamir Kaleem 2-09, Shoaib Khan 2-28, Wasim Ali 2-38) lost to Muscat CT 175 for 0 in 26.4 overs (Kashyapkumar Prajapati 106 – 10x4, 5x6, Jatinder Singh 65 – 8x4, 1x6) by 10 wickets. Arm Alpha 223 for 9 in 50 overs (Aqib Ilyas 66 – 8x4, 1x6, Ahmad Fayyaz 40 – 2x4, Amanpreet Singh 3-35, Ghazanfar Iqbal 2-29) beat AER 119 all out in 33.5 overs (Kuttiraja Karuthapandian 40 – 5x4, Asim Kamal 31 – 5x4, 1x6, Aqib Ilyas 4-16, Bilal Khan 3-18) by 104 runs.	58 – 1x4, 3x6, Parameswaran Shankar 3-50, Muhammed Waqas 2-35) by 2 wickets.
A Division Awtad International 258 for 5 in 50 overs (Muhammed Waqas 70 – 6x4, 2x6, Nidhin Mohan 59 – 4x4, Joel Biju 46 – 3x4) lost to Basta CT 259 for 8 in 50 overs (Chirag 101 – 6x4, Usman Haider	B Division Orient Travels/Gitacs 264 for 7 in 30 overs (Adil Khan 111 – 13x4, 3x6, Rafque 43 – 4x4, Zubair Ali 5-48) beat Oct Ruwi 173 all out in 28.1 overs (Zubair Ali 38 – 4x4, Shuaib Ismail 32 – 3x4, Rahman Umar 5-41, Adil Khan 2-6) by 91 runs.
	B Division Bank Muscat 229 for 5 in 30 overs (Abbas Al Balushi 54 – 2x4, Zeeshan Tufail 42 – 4x4, 1x6, Mohsin Nazir 41 – 8x4, Parthiban Mohan 2-35) lost to Zubair 231 for 9 in 28.4 overs (Chandana Jagath 39 – 5x4, Darwish D 38 – 6x4, Parthiban Mohan 23- 1x6. Mohsin Nazir 2-32, Zeeshan Tufail 2-36, Ashish Gupta 2-43) by 1 wicket.

over. Bilal Khan bowled well too, taking 3 for 18.

CHIRAG TON HELPS BASTA

Opener Chirag's magnificent



Jatinder Singh and Kashyap Prajapati of Muscat CT.

hundred helped Basta CT to a thrilling victory against Awtad International in an A Division 50-over league match at OC Turf 2 on Friday.

Awtad posted a robust 258 for 5 on the board thanks to valuable contributions from Muhammed Waqas (70), Nidhin Mohan (59) and Joel Biju (46).

Basta fought all the way, taking the battle to the final over before prevailing on the last ball

for a two-wicket win thanks to brilliant batting by Chirag (101) and Usman Haider (58) its total of 259 for 8.

ADIL, RAHMAN SHINE

Adil Khan's brilliant 111 and Rahman Umar's splendid 5 for 41 were the highlights of Orient Travels/Gitacs' impressive 91-run win over OCT Ruwi in a 30-over B Division League match at Muscat Municipality ground 1.

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Oman,Turkey
aim to widen
trade relations

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Oman and Turkey are looking to broaden bilateral trade vistas during meetings organised by the Turkish Exporters Association (TIM) and Omani-Turkish Business Council in coordination with the Turkish Ministry of Trade.

As part of these activities, an expert panel on bilateral relations will also avenues for enhanced economic cooperation.

The most important sectors identified include automotive, chemicals, defence, industry, home furniture, industrial kitchen, iron and steel products, engineering, machinery and other products focusing on bridging the gaps in each other's economies.

The discussions between the Omani and Turkish companies will take place from February 1 till 4, where industrialists and experts will share their ideas on various possibilities of trade and commerce.

“We are aiming at bolstering the bilateral trade and business ties with the Sultanate of Oman and a discussion session is all set to be held from February 1,” a representative from the Trade Division at the Embassy of Turkey said. The bilateral trade volume between the two stands at \$700 million and the trend has always been up, the representative said.

Oman’ exports to Turkey include aluminium and aluminium products, petroleum oils, plastic and plastic products, synthetic and artificial discontinuous fibres while it imports iron and steel, furniture, weaved carpet, motor vehicles, machinery, food items and the like from Turkey.

The 10th meeting of the Joint Economic Commission was held with the aim of enhancing the bilateral trade and commerce relations in Muscat in 2017. The Turkey-Oman Business Council was formed based on an agreement signed between the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce, the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in 2006 in Istanbul.

Executive regulations issued in support
of Competition Protection Law

NEW SAFEGUARDS: The statute aims at regulating the freedom of practicing any economic activity, stabilising the principles of the market rules and freedom of pricing

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 31

Pursuant to the Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Law issued by the Royal Decree 67/2014, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), has issued the Ministerial Decision 18/2020 promulgating the executive regulations of the Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Law.

The Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Law aims at regulating the freedom of practicing any economic activity, stabilising the principles of the market rules and freedom of pricing in such manner that the same shall not restrict the integral competition, prevent the same or be negatively affected thereby.

The Ministry emphasised that the dominance over the



relevant market can take place in two cases, namely if the person's share exceeds 35 per cent during a certain period of time, and the capability of a person to have an effective impact on the prices of products, or on the volume of supply of the products to the relevant market, along with the lack of competition during a certain period of time.

It noted that monopoly concentration can take place when any form of the control to be imposed by any person or group of people directly or indirectly over the quantity or the price for any goods or service in such manner that the freedom of the competition is restricted or the same was adversely

affected, through determining the prices, imposing resale prices, implementing less than cost pricing, or implementing a predatory pricing method, or dividing the relevant market into quotas, preventing the supplying of an alternative products to the relevant market, the absence, limitation, or weakening of competition, and the existence of economic links between the concerned products that enables the monopolists to operate independently without competition.

Those carrying out any activities that may result in economic concentration as articulated in the Competition Protection and Monopoly

Prevention Law shall submit a written request via a form prepared for this purpose, including the number of data, information and documents required to complete the request.

The Ministry shall review the application within a maximum period of 90 days, taking into account a number of factors, including the impact of the economic concentration on competition, the level of actual or potential competition in the market, the ease with which the arrival of new competitors to the relevant market, the obstacles that prevent the involve of new competitors in the market, the extent of the impact of the economic concentration on the

prices of goods and services in the relevant market, innovation, creativity and technical efficiency in the market, and the potential contribution of the economic concentration in encouraging investment, exports, building national capabilities, and interest, the potential of providing new jobs, in-country value added, and the impact of economic concentration on consumer interests.

Staff granted the status of judicious officers have the right to enter the places of work of persons subject to inspection in order to review the records, documents of the establishments, their appendices, and the offices belonging to the persons subject to inspection, and to obtain copies thereof, to take necessary measures to collect information, investigate any person suspected of committing any violation of the provisions of the Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Law and its executive regulation. In addition to the penalties prescribed in the law, an administrative fine of RO 5,000 shall be imposed on anyone who violates the provisions of executive regulation of the completion protection and monopoly law, while the fine will be doubled for repeat offences.

Oman Investment Authority lists tourism,
food projects among key successes

CENTRAL FOCUS: ‘We have embarked on our journey with accelerating momentum as a portrayal of our national duty and the mandate entrusted to us’: OIA

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

A scorecard of the Oman Investment Authority’s (OIA) performance over the six months since it was restructured as the sole integrated sovereign wealth fund of the Sultanate of Oman features an array of achievements, including key decisions in progressing major tourism, fisheries and food security related projects.

However, the past six months are more notable for the Authority’s success in driving corporate governance, waste reduction and accountability in the large slate of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) operating under its umbrella.

In a post to mark the roughly



180-day milestone since it was revamped by Royal Decree on June 4, 2020, the Authority said: “Since the issuance of Royal Decree 61/2020 to establish OIA, we have embarked on our journey with accelerating momentum as a portrayal of our national duty and the mandate entrusted to us. In the last six months, we managed to move steadily towards (better) governance of SOEs.”

Set up last June, the restructured OIA has been given the mandate to, among other things, spearhead Oman’s economic recovery amid a slowdown wrought by

low international oil prices and compounded by the coronavirus pandemic.

It owns and manages all of the government’s public assets (with the exception of Petroleum Development Oman) worth an estimated \$18 billion. In its first actions since its reorganisation, OIA announced the successful completion of the integration of three fisheries related affiliates into one flagship company.

Wholly-owned Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) is now the holding company

The past six months are more notable for the Authority’s success in driving corporate governance, waste reduction and accountability in the large slate of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) operating under its umbrella

of Blue Waters LLC, Al Wusta Fisheries Industries LLC, and Ocean Shrimp Aquaculture LLC, all three of which are positioned to play strategic roles in the development of Oman’s fisheries and aquaculture sectors.

In July, tourism and hospitality took centre-stage with the Authority announcing decisions to advance a number of prestigious government-backed hotels and resorts.

Those actions pertained to, among others, the implementation of the 5-star Alila Hino Resort in Mirbat, completion of Naseem

Hotel in Al Jabal al Akhdhar, commencement of the Yiti Sustainable Tourism City, review of the Waterfront Project in Muttrah, and development of Bassa Beach in Musandam with a public park and 4-star property.

Also in July, the Authority announced the first of a series of steps to bring the 15-plus SOEs under its remit into line with the government’s corporate governance and fiscal sustainability philosophy.

To this end, it kicked off a wholesale restructuring of the boards of the companies and brought in as many as 79 professionals to support their oversight.

This was followed by a high-level meeting between the OIA leadership and chairpersons of the subsidiary companies focusing on, among other topics, annual KPIs for every organisation, curbs on executive remunerations and incentives, a fairer geographical distribution of investments across all governorates, empowerment of SMEs, and boosting foreign investment inflows.

TURN TO PAGE 14

Oman LNG inks pact for upgrade of Distributed Control System



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 31

Oman LNG signed an agreement with leading Japanese multinational electrical engineering specialist Yokogawa for the upgrade of the Distributed Control System (DCS) at the former's LNG complex at Qalhat.

The move will ultimately buoy company's unrelenting efforts to ensure safe and reliable production, it said in a press statement.

The present DCS has been in operation since Oman LNG's inception in 2000.

This upgrade is essential to ensure uninterrupted production of liquefied natural gas. The new DCS will be of high-industry standard as it provides advanced features involving cyber security, to protect the facilities from potential threats. The project is expected to be completed by the end of 2023.

The agreement was signed by Eng Mohammed al Naseeb, Oman LNG's Chief Operating Officer, with Jean Raphael Brousseau, Yokogawa's Country Manager, at Oman LNG's Head Office in Muscat.

Commenting on

the agreement, Eng Mohammed al Naseeb said: "At Oman LNG, we strive to be the best at what we do. This agreement comes to replace the current hardware and adopt the latest technology, ensuring our efficiency in production. We are delighted to a partner with Yokogawa as they are a leading provider of Industrial Automation Test and Measurement Solutions."

Al Naseeb added: "As part of the project's deliverables, Oman LNG and Yokogawa have committed to involve Omani partners in the execution of such project which would expose the local talents to such expertise in the field.

This is aligned with our efforts towards enhancing In-Country Value, and enhance our contribution towards the local economy."

Jean Raphael Brousseau of Yokogawa stated: "Oman LNG's DCS system upgrade project will contribute towards increasing Yokogawa Oman Limited In-Country Value (ICV) in Oman. The company's current ICV is 50 per cent with commitment to achieve higher values in future and adding to the local economy."

Ras Markaz Crude Oil Park set to take delivery of offshore floating buoys

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 31

Drydocks World, the UAE based service provider to the marine, offshore, oil, gas and renewable energy sectors, has completed the production on two Calm Buoys for the Ras Markaz Crude Oil Park Project for clients, Bluewater Energy Services BV, China Petroleum Pipeline Engineering Co Ltd (Oman Branch) and Oman Tank Terminal Company LLC.

Catenary anchor leg mooring Calm Buoys act as offshore floating hulls to transfer stabilised crude and refined hydrocarbon products while tethering even the largest crude carriers to onshore terminals via up to 400 megatons hawser load.

These Calm Buoys will eventually be moored at a crude oil storage terminal off the southeast coast of Oman with maximum transfer capacity of each 2 x 8,000 m3 per



hour, joined by a pipeline end manifold (PLEM) also fabricated by DryDocks World for a design pressure of 48 Barg.

Capt Rado Antolovic, CEO of Drydocks World said, "Delivering another major project outcome for Bluewater Energy Services BV, China Petroleum Pipeline

Engineering Co Ltd (Oman Branch) and Oman Tank Terminal Company LLC, is testament to our continued partnership — I'm proud of the trust shown in the DDW team to deliver for a key partner and look forward to collaborating again on future projects."

Construction work on the Crude

Oil Park Project at Ras Markaz, not far from Duqm Special Economic Zone, is progressing at a rapid pace. Phase 1 of the project is due to be brought into operation in conjunction with a launch of a greenfield refinery, developed by the joint venture of OQ and Kuwait Petroleum International, at Duqm, in 2023.

PRESS RELEASE

AL BASHAYER MEAT LAUNCHES FIRST OMANI BRANDED RED MEAT PRODUCTS

OHI Leo Burnett partnered with Al Bashayer Meat Company, Oman's first and the region's largest integrated red meat project for the launch of their new retail brand 'Bushra' — fresh, halal and ready to cook cuts of beef, lamb and goat across Oman.

The launch was held on January



18, 2021 at the OCEC Ballroom, while following strict Covid-19 precautionary protocols. OHI Leo Burnett is the agency behind the brand's identity, packaging and communication developed a comprehensive strategy for Al Bashayer and its retail brands including Bushra.

OOREDOO BOOSTS DIGITAL EXPERIENCES WITH COMPLIMENTARY ACCESS TO OSN STREAMING APP

Keeping customers connected and entertained, Ooredoo is offering 12-months complimentary access to the OSN streaming app when signing-up or upgrading to Fibre Home Internet for new and existing customers.

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on international calls, unlimited data usage and free modem installation.

With Ooredoo's high quality network geared up for speed and reliability and combined with an awesome digital

experience, staying connected and up to date with TV and movies has never been easier.

OIA lists tourism, food projects among key successes

FROM PAGE 13

Burgeoning efforts to strengthen local food production got a further shot in the arm in July when the Authority announced the setting up of the Agricultural Production and Marketing Co (APCO).

Part of its remit is to invest

in modern agro farms and cold chain infrastructure, while also marketing the fresh produce of small farmers. Around 35 per cent of its output is earmarked for export.

In key actions taken during the third quarter of last year, the Authority restructured the entities

that form part of the Oman Information and Communication Technology (OICT) group.

The Board of Directors of OQ, the integrated energy group of the Sultanate, was reconstituted as well.

Also in September, the Authority unveiled its Rawabet programme, designed to help OIA affiliated

enterprises to align their policies with Oman Vision 2040.

Rounding off the six-month review, the Authority dissolved Oman Aviation Group earlier this year, and also announced the completion of the restructuring of wages and benefits of SOE employees.

MENA's big bet for a sustainable and inclusive future

STAKEHOLDER
CAPITALISM: 10 per cent of working hours in the region, equivalent to 24 million full-time jobs, were wiped out in Q2 2020 due to Covid-19

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 31

Governments across the MENA region have been adopting strategies to reduce their reliance on oil & gas and diversify their economies. A number of countries in the region have set clear national goals for a more sustainable future through numerous initiatives, including a focus on the digital economy, boosting SME participation, and promoting clean energy alternatives.

Badr Jafar, CEO of Crescent Enterprises and Managing Director of the Crescent Group, has emphasised the critical role that business must play in this transition, and its responsibility to generate the urgently needed opportunities for youth towards a more sustainable and inclusive future for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

Speaking in a keynote session titled "Implementing Stakeholder Capitalism in MENA" at the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Davos Agenda 2021, he said: "Businesses have no other choice but to be at the forefront of addressing our region's social and environmental challenges.

It is not just a moral imperative, it is a long-term commercial one, and the inextricable link between long-term economic success and positive societal impact is becoming increasingly clear for all to see."



The creation of new opportunities for youth is an increasingly urgent imperative, with an estimated 10 per cent of working hours in the region wiped out in 2020 due to Covid-19, equivalent of 24 million full-time jobs being lost.

The Global Risks Perception Survey published last week by the World Economic Forum clearly

highlights youth disillusionment and erosion of social cohesion as critical short-term threats to the world.

"A single-minded focus on job creation prevents us from seeing the true challenge and opportunity that lies ahead, and that is instilling a strong sense of purpose, and a feeling of belonging within our youth. Therefore, we urgently

The World Bank has estimated an annual financing gap of over \$100 billion to realise the sustainable development potential of the region.

need to deploy all the tools at our disposal to strengthen the fabric of our local communities, including through community service and volunteerism," Jafar added.

Addressing environmental sustainability, Jafar commented that the Middle East is especially vulnerable to climate shocks, and faces a host of environmental risks such as water scarcity, high levels of pollution, and biodiversity loss.

"If you argue that economic considerations trump everything else in a crisis, or you really think the economy is more important than the environment, try holding your breath while counting your

money," he remarked.

Despite transformative technologies and economic and reforms that offer unprecedented opportunities for progress in MENA, the World Bank has estimated an annual financing gap of over \$100 billion to realise the sustainable development potential of the region.

"Every sector has an important role to play in this endeavour, and we will fail if any one of us chooses not to take action. Governments, businesses, the academic sector, and even media, can all do more together than any one of us can do on our own. And we must not make the mistake of forgetting young people in this partnership model — we need to ensure feedback loops with the ultimate beneficiaries, our youth, are in place from the beginning, so the solutions that we are working towards are actually relevant to our societies," Jafar added.

Mexico's economy suffers worst slump since 1930s



Workers are seen in a building construction in Mexico City. — Reuters

MEXICO CITY: Mexico's economy last year suffered its biggest annual contraction since the 1930s, although it recovered better than expected from the ravages of the Covid-19 pandemic during the final quarter, data showed.

Gross domestic product in Latin America's second-biggest economy tumbled by 8.5 per cent last year in seasonally adjusted terms, according to the estimate issued by national statistics agency INEGI.

The fall was slightly shallower than the consensus forecast in a Reuters poll for an 8.8 per cent decline. Still, the contraction was the sharpest since 1932 during the Great Depression, data published by the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM)

show.

During the second half of 2020, the economy made up much of the ground lost to the pandemic, and an unexpectedly robust performance in the October-December period helped lift the peso against the dollar early on Friday.

But the economy remains a major challenge for President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, whose efforts to strengthen the state's hand in the energy market have led to disputes with businesses and upset Mexico's allies, chilling investment.

The second quarter bore the brunt of economic disruptions caused by the pandemic, before a sharp increase in infections towards the end of 2020 led to renewed commercial restrictions in Mexico City area. — Reuters

Britain to apply to join 11-nation Asia-Pacific free trade bloc

LONDON: Britain will apply to join a massive 11-nation free-trade bloc of Asia-Pacific countries weeks after leaving the European single market with its departure from the EU.

International Trade Secretary Liz Truss (pictured) will formally request for Britain to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), a market representing half a billion people and roughly 13.5 per cent of the global economy.

The CPTPP application will come one year after Britain left the European Union following more than forty years of membership — and after five years of complex trade discussions.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the potential new partnership would “bring enormous economic benefits for the people of Britain”.

“Applying to be the first new country to join the CPTPP demonstrates our ambition to do business on the best terms with our friends and partners all over the world and be an enthusiastic champion of global free trade”, he said.

Negotiations between the UK and the partnership — which represents 11 Pacific Rim nations including Australia, Canada, Chile, Japan, Mexico and Vietnam — are expected to start this year,



Representatives from CPTPP countries hold hands for a photo at the signing of the CPTPP, in this file photo. — Reuters



the trade department said.

But opposition Labour party shadow international trade secretary Emily Thornberry questioned the lack of transparency surrounding the pact.

After five years of debate over Brexit trade agreements, she said people would question the British government's decision “to

rush into joining another one on the other side of the world without any meaningful public consultation at all.”

“At present, Liz Truss cannot even guarantee whether we would have the right to veto China's proposed accession if we join the bloc first”, she said.

Truss said joining the CPTPP would offer “enormous opportunities”.

She has touted joining as Britain made agreements with members such as Japan and Canada in the wake of Brexit, with British media reporting that CPTPP nations accounted for around eight per cent of UK exports in 2019.

Truss said the deal will mean lower tariffs for car manufacturers

and whisky producers, as well as “delivering quality jobs and greater prosperity for people here at home”. Karan Bilimoria, President of the UK's largest business lobby group the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), said the move marked a “new chapter for our independent trade policy”.

“Membership of the bloc has the potential to deliver new opportunities for UK business across different sectors”, he said.

The CPTPP was launched in 2019 to remove trade barriers among the 11 nations representing nearly 500 million consumers in the Asia-Pacific region in a bid to counter China's growing economic influence. — AFP

DARVESH GROUP CLARIFIES ITS STAND ON THE RECENT MEDIA REPORTS

We have noted the publication of a news article currently in circulation on the net. Benchmark News, triggering the MSM and the local media to report on matters concerning our Group. This article contains a number of inaccuracies and misleading statements amongst which being the amount of the Group's exposure to financial institutions and the amount stated to be due to suppliers and others, having been vastly exaggerated.

We have met with the MSM representatives and provided them with clarifications with regard to the Group's current financial exposure to Omani banks.

Details contained in the report are false, baseless and with malicious intent made by disgruntled employees whose services have been terminated by the Group for non-performance or acts against the Group while in service, against whom a prosecution has been

ongoing in the UAE. We are taking all necessary action to bring these culprits to justice with the help of the concerned authorities.

We believe that the defamatory content of the news article to be a malicious attempt by the ex-employees of the Group to discredit the Group and its owners.

We remain fully committed to the discharge of our obligations towards all our creditors. We further take this opportu-

nity to thank our partners, suppliers and well-wishers for the trust placed in our organization over the past 40 years.

Not only has our Group been adding value to the community and business in general in Oman, but we continue to highly value our social responsibility from which we will continue to remain undeterred. With the current situation in hand, our ongoing restructuring underway, and there being an expected turnaround in the

global and local market conditions in one to two years, Darvesh Group in Oman is extremely hopeful and confident that it will continue its operations as done so for the last 40 years in Oman.

The Group has been employing at its peak in excess of 800 employees of which a significant number are Omani nationals. Not only are these employees our well-wishers but also part of our family and an asset of the Group.



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bakhit.omandaily@gmail.com

Nizwa Office
Abdullah Al Abri 99429094
nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om

Sohar Office
Musalam Al Saidi 99429192
sohardaily@outlook.com

MONDAY FEBRUARY 1, 2021 JUMADA AL THANIA 18, 1442 AH

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

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

Saada al Rashdi
95919344

94501166
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features

The woman behind the lens capturing the spirit of an adventure

Muna Khalfan volunteered with YallaGo 2020 as an adventure photographer. The trip targeted to cross Oman in a straight line from the northern-most part of Oman, Jazirat Salamah in Musandam, to the southern-most part in Mirbat. The 47-day trip was filled with unpredictable scenes and challenges and it was her job to capture those precious moments... **P18**



INSIDE STORIES

LOCAL SCENE



ARABIAN BABBLER: AN ALTRUISTIC BIRD OF THE MIDDLE EAST

My deep passion for birds recently allowed me to regale at the beauty and grace of Arabian babblers or scientifically known as Turdoides squamiceps... **Story on Page 20**

TRAVEL TALES



NILE CRUISER THAT INSPIRED AGATHA CHRISTIE SAILS ON DESPITE VIRUS

More than a century after it first cruised the glittering waters of the Nile, the Steam Ship Sudan draws tourists following the trail of legendary crime novelist Agatha Christie... **Story on Page 19**

READ



COLD COMFORT FARM

BY STELLA GIBBONS

Following the death of her parents, Flora Poste, finds she is possessed "of every art and grace save that of earning her own living". She decides to take advantage of the fact that "no limits are set, either by society or one's own conscience, to the amount one may impose on one's relatives".

ART



AN ART NOUVEAU GEM UNMASKED IN COVID-HIT BRUSSELS

An emblematic Art Nouveau mansion designed by Belgian architect Victor Horta has opened its doors to the public in Brussels, revealing a long hidden jewel of the city's Belle Epoque glory... **Story on Page 19**

FASHION



PARIS HAUTE COUTURE FASHION WEEK

British model Naomi Campbell presents a creation of British designer Kim Jones for the Fendi's Spring-Summer 2021 collection during the Paris Haute Couture fashion Week, in Paris, on January 27, 2021.



The woman behind the lens capturing the spirit of an adventure

BY TITASH CHAKRABORTY

“I captured the action so people can feel and live the experience through the photos. In this expedition, we came across different situations. Some were risky and others were fun. Through adventure photography, I can share different feelings such as excitement, fun, risk, fear, stress, power, etc.” Muna Khalfan volunteered with YallaGo 2020 as an adventure photographer. The trip targeted to cross Oman in a straight line from the northern-most part of Oman, Jazirat Salamah in Musandam, to the southern-most part in Mirbat. The trip lasted 47 days and went through a series of activities – from kayaking to long-days of walking, from hiking in valleys to conquering the intimidating Empty Quarter desert to climbing rugged mountains.

“It was a unique adventure as it combined the ocean, mountains, wadis, desert, and flat areas, an all-in-one expedition. It also included camping, every day,” Muna noted.

They moved from one camp to another with full gear.

“Every day, there was something new to the expedition. Every step of the journey, I learned from and advanced,” she shared.

The feeling one gets may differ from a person to another depending on their personality and the path of their adventure, but Muna believes that a lot of these emotions are often expressed through facial expressions and distinctive body language.

“Usually, all journeys start with a big smile, filled with happiness and excitement. As the days move on, the emotions vary. The journey takes a toll on the participants. You can feel the tiredness and at some point, factor in the mental exhaustion,” she shared.

“These emotions are reflected in photographs. For an ambitious project like this, there were unprecedented hiccups along the way. There were accidents and the trip comes with risk in varying degree and indifferent forms as one passes through unfrequented valleys, forests or mountains. Each terrain brings its own sets of challenges. The success of the trip now relied on the resilience and the eagerness of the participants,” Muna said.

“During the YallaGo 2020 saga, we faced unexpected incidents. For example, in Musandam, the girls were kayaking in a normal sea condition and suddenly raging waves started and the cloud started pouring rain,”

she shared.

She added, “even when we were in the mountains of Dhofar, we came across some cliffs and pathways that were very challenging to cross. All these challenges were also great opportunities to capture as they tell the real story behind the success,” she shared.

Muna pointed out that one of the perks though is that she was able to capture some beautiful scenes not often captured on photos. These photos allow people to appreciate what's within these places.

“Adventurers around the world are looking for new places to discover. Through these photos, the world is told of what Oman has to offer. Indirectly, it is one of the best ways to promote Oman's adventure tourism,” she said.

“In YallaGo 2020, we have explored so many new places that only a few people from Oman have visited such as some islands in Musandam, the Empty Quarter desert and some mountains in Buraimi and the south,” she said.

Muna shared that being an adventure photographer comes with its challenges and rewards. Because of the adventures, one should be fit enough to keep up with the team. The fact that an adventure photographer has to make sure that she doesn't miss a moment adds more to the pressure.

“Something can happen at any time. What I like about adventure photography is the unpredictability of the scenes. You're always on your toes,” she shared.

“A photographer should pre-plan some of the shoots. She should scout the location ahead than the team. She should keep track of the location, the type of adventure, the number of participants, the transportation and should have a set of goals listed down,” she shared.

“Some of the unforgettable memories from this trip were capturing the feeling of the support team when we lost the connection with Anisa and Natalie and they were in dangerous ophiolite mountains where the rocks were not stable. My focus at that time was to capture their feeling and show their stress level. Another moment was when we finished the first leg of the expedition which was kayaking for five days in Musandam. When we finally landed on the shores of Dibba, the amount of cheering and pride we received from the women of the area was very touching,” she said.

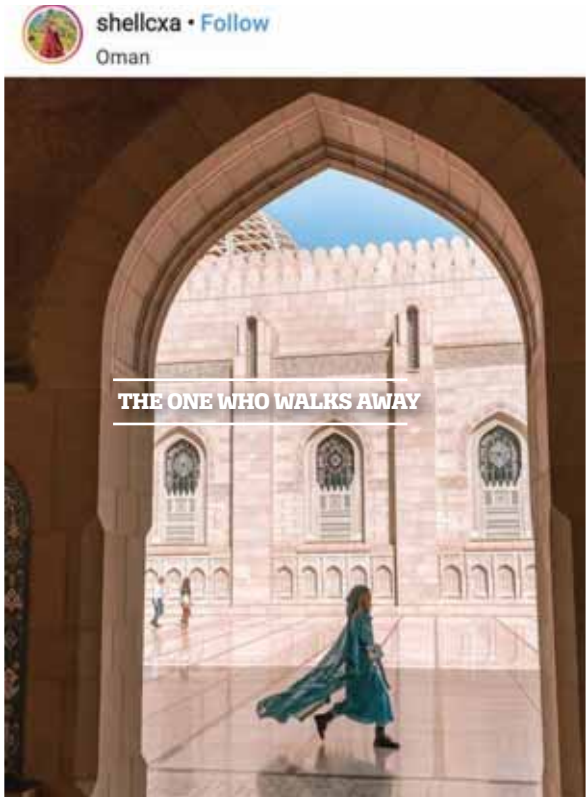
To learn more about Muna's work, you can follow her on Instagram @ **munaalshidhani** or through her Twitter @ **munashidhani**





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TRAVEL TALES

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Nile cruiser that inspired Agatha Christie sails on despite virus

More than a century after it first cruised the glittering waters of the Nile, the Steam Ship Sudan draws tourists following the trail of legendary crime novelist Agatha Christie.

The SS Sudan, which towers over the traditional wooden sailing boats in Egypt's southern city of Aswan, inspired the British author sometimes dubbed the "Queen of Crime" to pen one of her most famous works in 1937, "Death on the Nile".

The whodunnit tells the story of Christie's famous Belgian detective Hercule Poirot, investigating murder among the well-heeled travellers as they cruise the Nile.

"Agatha Christie's trip aboard the steamer, the atmosphere and its route... inspired her to begin writing the first chapters," said Amir Attia, the cruise ship's director.

Built for the Egyptian royal family in 1885 and transformed into a cruise liner in 1921, the SS Sudan hosted the novelist with her second husband, archaeologist Max Mallowan, in 1933.

TWO-YEAR WAITING LIST

Among the ship's 23 rooms



and suites, Attia says the writer's room is still "the most popular".

Passengers are whisked away on Christie's original itinerary, stopping at the same ancient archaeological sites, albeit with a difference — the liner now runs on diesel and solar power instead of coal.

A staff of 67 keeps the vessel shipshape, and a luxury eight-day trip also including stays in two historic hotels sets travellers back around \$4,000, but there is a long waiting list to stay in the Christie cabin.

"There are booking requests for up to two years in advance," he said.

While Egypt's key tourism

industry has been hit hard by Covid-19 restrictions — with revenues slashed by more than a fifth from 2019-2020 — the ship's staff are insistent the pandemic will not sink the historic vessel.

"My product is unique," Attia said. "Egypt as a tourist destination will never die down."

The SS Sudan has faced crises before.

It was left to rot for decades after World War II, but was rescued and refitted in 1991, before being abandoned and then repaired a second time in 2000.

Last year the boat was initially stuck in port — but it started operating as soon as rules allowed.

"The SS Sudan was the first cruise ship to re-open for business in October," Attia said.

"We immediately got so many reservations... that we had to knock a few back because we're overbooked."

HOLLYWOOD TREATMENT

Staff hope that Christie's story can work its magic again to draw new visitors.

A big-budget film version — directed by and starring Kenneth Branagh, along with Hollywood stars Annette Bening, Russell Brand and Gal Gadot — is due for release in late 2021, a followup to the 2017 Christie adaption, "Murder on the Orient Express".

The last stop on the cruise is the Old Cataract Hotel, which over the years has hosted guests ranging from Britain's Winston Churchill to Egyptian Nobel Prize for Literature winner, Naguib Mahfouz, said Selim Shawer, the hotel manager.

The hotel too has a small exhibition dedicated to Christie, including the rocking chair and desk where she wrote.

"It is an attraction in itself for fans of Hercule Poirot," said Shawer.

"Even people who are not staying in our hotel come to take photos with the chair."

— AFP

ART

An Art Nouveau gem unmasked in Covid-hit Brussels



AN EMBLEMATIC Art Nouveau mansion designed by Belgian architect Victor Horta has opened its doors to the public in Brussels, revealing a long hidden jewel of the city's Belle Epoque glory.

"It is perhaps even more important in the time of Covid to be able to spend a relaxing moment in the midst of this complete beauty," said Pascal Smet, Heritage Minister for the Brussels Region.

Smet acted as a guide for a handful of journalists around the Hotel Solvay, a three-storey mansion with a majestic staircase where natural light shines through a multi-coloured stained glass window.

The mansion was built between 1895 and 1903 on the

architecture with its aesthetic of curves applied to glass and steel, materials that were new at the time.

The private mansion went on to have an eventful history after the death of its first owner in 1930.

Damaged by a German bomb during World War II — the main stained glass window had to be rebuilt — it was saved from a wrecking ball at the end of the 1950s, when a couple, running a fashion house, decided to make it their workshop.

SAVED FROM DEMOLITION

At the time, real-estate developers had free rein in Brussels and the Avenue Louise was engulfed by large



once glitzy Avenue Louise for the son of Belgian industrialist Ernest Solvay, and its architecture is impressively preserved.

Horta paid attention in his work to the whole interior, from the design of the building's exposed structure, to the living room furniture, right down to the door handles.

"It gives the feeling of the perfect building, everything has been thought out, down to the smallest detail," said Smet, gazing at a decor of yellow, orange and beige, where the armchairs match the woodwork.

UNESCO included the Hotel Solvay on its World Heritage List in the early 2000s.

According to the UN agency, it is "the most ambitious and spectacular work by Horta to have come down to us from the Art Nouveau period".

At the end of the 19th century, the style revolutionised

office buildings.

Even the most awe-inspiring Art Nouveau edifices were threatened by developers, according to the current owner, Alexandre Wittamer, grandson of the fashion house couple.

"It's hard to imagine, but in the 1950s and 1960s in Brussels everything was allowed, and it happened that Art Nouveau buildings were demolished, whether they were by Horta or other architects," said the 43-year-old finance executive, who now organises visits with the help of his wife.

For the time being, the architectural gem will only be accessible on Thursdays and Saturdays, provided that a time slot has been reserved in advance online. That rule applies to all Belgian museums, which have remained open despite the pandemic unlike in Paris or London. — AFP



Arabian babbler: An altruistic bird of the Middle East

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY DR SS SURESH

BIRDS, OVER TIME, have evolved and developed their very own system so that they can survive in the wild.

My deep passion for birds recently allowed me to regale at the beauty and grace of Arabian babblers or scientifically known as *Turdoides squamiceps*.

Arabian babblers (*Turdoides squamiceps*) are unique social passerine thrush-size songbirds that are fairly common in the Sultanate of Oman, found in arid areas of Middle Eastern countries and certain parts of the Indian subcontinent.

These birds prefer to settle along dry river beds with few trees and bushes. These babblers have a fairly long curved bill, a long tail with plumage of grey-brown above and paler below. There are dark streaks on the back with a whitish throat. They are often seen as noisy social groups hopping on the ground with the tailed cocked up. They are often seen taking sand bath, offering gifts to each other, preening themselves and entering into conflict for the privilege of helping the dominant couple.

They are co-operative breeders that live in groups and known to defend their territories around the year. Each group has a size of around 10 individuals, with a reproductive pair and other non-breeding members who may or may not be direct offspring or close relatives. The non-reproductive birds are helpers, similar to the helpers in honeycombs and they participate in rearing the offspring, providing food as well as in other parenting behaviour like incubation, territory defence against predators. This act of conferring benefit on someone at a cost to the other is called altruism.

One individual, most often, the dominant alpha male, is usually seen perched on the highest branch of the tree inspecting the neighbourhood as a sentinel. This allows the rest of the group to forage in comfort. When threatened by a predator the whole group might perch on the top of the tree. A beta male often perches on the lower branch and climbs to the final guarding position at a higher level after the alpha male leaves the perch.

Very often the alpha and beta males compete to guard. Although this altruistic act reduces their reproductive success, the non-dominant birds, by competing for guarding, signals their quality and fitness over fellow birds. This might increase their social standing and gain them reproductive status. This type of facultative altruism is also documented in other birds like Florida scrub jay.

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