

P15

INDONESIA  
RAISES ECONOMIC  
RECOVERY BUDGET  
TO \$39 BN



P12

RAHANE OR  
KOHLI?...INDIA  
BENEFITS  
EITHER WAY



P19

BEYOND BUSINESS:  
GOING LOCAL  
TO ESTABLISH A  
FOODIE HAVEN



**MUSCAT**

### HM CONDOLENCES TO SAUDI KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the death of Princess Turfa bint Saud bin 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 her family patience.

— ONA

### HM GREETINGS TO PORTUGAL PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa of the Portuguese Republic, on the occasion of re-electing him as a president of his country. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of success to President De Sousa in leading the Portuguese friendly people towards further progress and welfare, and the good relations between the two countries further progress and growth.

— ONA



#### INSIDE



**TENTH SAFEST CITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST**



Out of the different urban cities in Middle East and Asia, Muscat is currently number one when it comes to the overall Quality of Life Index for 2021. Muscat has performed better than neighbouring cities Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Doha. Ranking the safest cities in the world for 2021, Muscat was on the top 10 spot with Abu Dhabi and Doha taking the first two spots respectively with Sharjah and Dubai taking 6th and 7th spots respectively.

**DETAILS ON P2**

## New app for healthcare services

**MUSCAT:** Now it is possible to access medical care remotely in the Sultanate through a mobile phone application. The application is equipped with suggesting area-wise healthcare facilities and online medical evaluation of patients.

Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, launched the app at the OCCI headquarters in Ruwi. ‘Your Doctor by Your Side’ enables people to find doctors and medical facilities at any time and place in the Sultanate.

The project founder, Khalil al Aghbary, said, “There is no doubt that health information technology sector is on the threshold of great growth, stimulated by the increase in demand for modern technologies.”

**DETAILS ON P3**

## Madayn eyes RO 15 bn investments by 2040

**MUSCAT:** The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) Vision 2040 aims at creating world-class business cities while maintaining the Omani identity to contribute to economic growth.

Madayn on Tuesday celebrated the launch of Madayn Vision 2040 at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, and Chairman of Madayn's board of directors, stated that Madayn Vision 2040 comes in implementation of the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the government bodies to develop long-term



strategies and plans in pursuance of Oman Vision 2040.

Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO of Madayn, said that through this vision, we aim at to achieve RO 15 billion of investment volume, and localising projects that shall touch 10,000 projects in various fields towards the end of the plan. Of these projects, we aim at localising 6,500 industrial projects (factories) that shall provide around 270,000 job opportunities.

**DETAILS ON P13**

## 72% of Muscat land applicants women

**ZAINAB AL NASSRI**  
[@zainabalnasseri](#)

The total applications for residential land plots in Muscat Governorate reached 123,025, around 72 per cent of which are from women, Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, revealed during a press conference.

He said total number of registered housing applications stood at 447,612. Among them, 60 per cent of them are from women.

He said the number of plots that have been distributed during the past 10 years stood at 343,692. The share of women in it was 78 per cent, indicating that the reconstruction rate in residential plots during the past 10 years amounted to less than 20 per cent.

Through a visual presentation

**The number of plots that have been distributed during the past 10 years stood at 343,692. The share of women in it was 78 pc**

**DR KHALFAN AL SHUEILI**  
*Minister of Housing and Urban Planning*

prepared by the ministry, it was revealed that the housing law will be issued in October 2021, and the urban planning law will be issued in December 2021. It said that the bid for the development of the second project for integrated

residential projects (Sorouh) will be in November 2021.

The presentation revealed that 80 per cent of the residential units in the first phase of the Al Naseem neighbourhood project is likely to be ready before October 2021.

The ministry indicated that it will complete the placement of employees according to the organisational structure of the ministry by the end of June 2021, and that it will establish and activate a comprehensive electronic services platform for 59 services, as 45 services will be ready in June.

The ministry stated that the addressing law is expected to be issued during the third quarter. This system aims to establish a general unified addressing system for all units in the Sultanate and to develop a unified form for drafting all units.

## To be on WhatsApp or move on to other platforms

**LAKSHMI KOTHANETH**  
[@lakshmioman](#)

Social media enthusiasts continue to be debating on whether to stay on WhatsApp or move on to other platforms. ‘The question is

also on what are the available options in Oman?

The crossover has been towards Signal, a secured messaging app along with Telegram. WhatsApp, meanwhile, has postponed the privacy policy ef-

fectiveness which was expected to take place in February to May 2021.

Haitham al Hajri, Cybersecurity and Electronic Crimes Researcher, said, “They have answered the frequently asked

questions where they have explained that the end-to-end encryption is still there. So when you talk with your family and friends and groups you are still protected by the privacy policy, which is encryption. They claim

that Facebook or WhatsApp cannot read your messages or hear your calls and cannot detect your location when you share it. However, the privacy policy will be effective in the business numbers or applications.”

**TURNTO P5**



## Sayyid Asaad receives ambassador of Cyprus

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received in his office here on Tuesday Andreas Nikolaides, Ambassador of the Republic of Cyprus to the Sultanate.

The meeting reviewed the good bilateral relations and aspects of the existing cooperation between the Sultanate and Cyprus in several fields to serve the common interests of the two friendly countries.

The meeting was attended by the Secretary-General and the two advisers at HH Sayyid Asaad's Office. — ONA

## Muscat top city in ME for quality of life, 10th safest city overall

YERU EBUE  
MUSCAT, JAN 26

Out of the different urban cities in the Middle East and Asia, Muscat is currently number one when it comes to the overall Quality of Life Index for 2021.

Muscat has bested neighbouring cities Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Doha.

While Adelaide, Australia, currently sits at number one in the overall global ranking against 251 urban cities followed by other Oceanian, European and American cities, only Muscat managed to break the top 40 cities comfortably nestled at rank 32 while Abu Dhabi ranks 52, Dubai at 104 and Doha at 106.

The Quality of Life Index available at crowdsourced site Numbeo "is an estimation of overall quality of life by using an empirical formula which takes into account purchasing power index (higher is better),



pollution index (lower is better), house price to income ratio (lower is better), cost of living index (lower is better), safety index (higher is better), healthcare index (higher is better), traffic commute time index (lower is better) and climate index (higher is better)." Top 10 safest city in the world

Ranking the safest cities in

the world for 2021, Muscat landed on the top 10 spot with Abu Dhabi and Doha taking the first two spots respectively and Sharjah and Dubai at 6th and 7th spots respectively.

Caracas in Venezuela, Pretoria, Durban and Johannesburg in South Africa and Rio de Janeiro in Brazil had been ranked the most unsafe cities respectively.

Top 5 with the best traffic management

Amongst the world's 251 urban cities, Muscat is in the top 5 with the best traffic systems. Ranked number 5 overall, it follows Novi Sad in Serbia, Regina in Canada, Limassol in Cyprus and Reykjavik in Iceland amongst having the best traffic commute time index.

## MoHUP reissues tenders for demolition works

OHOOD AL JAILANIYAH  
MUSCAT, JAN 26

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning announced that it will reissue a tender for the implementation of demolition and removal of buildings and facilities affected by the construction of Al Batinah Coastal Road in the wilayts of Al Suwaiq, Al Rustaq, Saham and Suhar during this year. The ministry's decision came as companies that were awarded tenders for demolition works have not fulfilled their obligations.

The ministry explained that the delay in disbursement of compensations was due to the adverse financial and economic conditions currently experienced by the Sultanate.

The ministry affirmed that



it is trying to find alternative means to complement the procedures for the financing

and implementation of the project and associated compensations by utilisation

of land plots located on the roadsides for investment purposes. The ministry envisages planning of 27 sites prior to being rolled out for investment.

Within the framework of its executive plan for this year, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning plans to disburse monetary compensations to 877 cases in all wilayats of North Al Batinah Governorate in case of availability of financial allocations. This is in addition to monetary compensations for 584 cases of compound families and in-kind compensations for 12,552 land plots.

A total of 553 buildings and facilities have been slated for demolition in 2021 following the completion of monetary compensation procedures.

## Council office discusses Notary Public Law



MUSCAT: The State Council's Office discussed a proposal submitted by the Legal Committee on studying and reviewing the "Notary Public Law" issued by the Royal Decree No 40/2003.

During the second meeting of the second annual sitting of the 7th term, chaired by Shaikh

Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, the Office hosted the head and rapporteur of the Culture, Media and Tourism Committee to discuss with them its proposal on "Omani Neighbourhoods: Tourism Investment and Architecture."

— ONA

## MoCIIP launches new online services

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, JAN 26

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) launched the first package of online services, which allows investors to submit applications for some permits through the Invest Easy self-service portal, or through government services offices Sanad.

The service has been launched in response to the requirements of the business community.

The electronic services that will be launched are the issuance of certificates of conformity certification (vehicles, motorcycles, vehicle tyres, motorcycle tyres, low-voltage electrical appliances and equipment, energy efficiency card for air conditioners and toys), in addition to a permit to use the Omani Quality mark.

INVITATION TO TENDER

SOHAR ALUMINIUM

Sohar Aluminium LLC (SA), PO Box 80, PC- 327, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman hereby invites qualified Suppliers/Contractors for the following tender:

|                |                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Tender No. :   | 2021-ENG-SOW-0001                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Tender Title : | Ingot & SOW Mould Upgraded Pre-heating System                                                                                                                                                       |
| Scope :        | Contractor shall do design, supply, install and commissioning of Ingot & SOW Mould Upgraded Pre-heating System.                                                                                     |
| Tender No. :   | 10196948                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Tender Title : | Cisco Hardware, Software support & subscription                                                                                                                                                     |
| Scope :        | The Contractor shall provide the hardware, software and technical support through Cisco SMART net and Partner shared support.                                                                       |
| Tender No. :   | RFP 21-002                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Tender Title : | Limited HVAC Maintenance Services                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Scope :        | To carry-out scheduled preventive maintenance and defect rectification activities of HVAC equipment in SA Power Plant so as to ensure uninterrupted and reliable functioning of the HVAC equipment. |

Kindly send your email and company profile to: tender@sohar-aluminium.com  
For list of active tenders visit: <https://www.sohar-aluminium.com/en/content/tender-listing>

عما نتل  
Omantel

ONLINE AUCTION NOTICE

AUCTION OF DISMANTLE & SALE OF USED MOBILE, FIXED, TRANSMISSION, SWITCHING & POWER EQUIPMENT

Oman Telecommunications Company (S.A.O.G),  
P.O. Box 789, Postal Code 112, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman hereby gives notice of the auction as follows:-

| Ref. No. | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Site visit<br>(Location per Zone)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Offers<br>Submission Date |              |            |   |              |           |   |              |           |   |                 |           |   |                  |           |   |                 |           |                 |
|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------|------------|---|--------------|-----------|---|--------------|-----------|---|-----------------|-----------|---|------------------|-----------|---|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|
| RFI # 61 | Auction of Dismantle & Sale of used Mobile, Fixed, Transmission, Switching & Power Equipment from Omantel's Salalah Warehouses/Site - Dhofar Region for different places :<br>• 8 Sites for Sale<br>• 20 Sites for Dismantle & Sale | <table><tr><td>A</td><td>Salalah City</td><td>31-01-2021</td></tr><tr><td>B</td><td>East Salalah</td><td>1-02-2021</td></tr><tr><td>C</td><td>West Salalah</td><td>2-02-2021</td></tr><tr><td>D</td><td>Al-Badiyah East</td><td>3-02-2021</td></tr><tr><td>E</td><td>Al-Badiyah North</td><td>4-02-2021</td></tr><tr><td>F</td><td>Al-Badiyah west</td><td>4-02-2021</td></tr></table> | A                         | Salalah City | 31-01-2021 | B | East Salalah | 1-02-2021 | C | West Salalah | 2-02-2021 | D | Al-Badiyah East | 3-02-2021 | E | Al-Badiyah North | 4-02-2021 | F | Al-Badiyah west | 4-02-2021 | 7 February 2021 |
| A        | Salalah City                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 31-01-2021                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                           |              |            |   |              |           |   |              |           |   |                 |           |   |                  |           |   |                 |           |                 |
| B        | East Salalah                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 1-02-2021                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                           |              |            |   |              |           |   |              |           |   |                 |           |   |                  |           |   |                 |           |                 |
| C        | West Salalah                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 2-02-2021                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                           |              |            |   |              |           |   |              |           |   |                 |           |   |                  |           |   |                 |           |                 |
| D        | Al-Badiyah East                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 3-02-2021                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                           |              |            |   |              |           |   |              |           |   |                 |           |   |                  |           |   |                 |           |                 |
| E        | Al-Badiyah North                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 4-02-2021                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                           |              |            |   |              |           |   |              |           |   |                 |           |   |                  |           |   |                 |           |                 |
| F        | Al-Badiyah west                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 4-02-2021                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                           |              |            |   |              |           |   |              |           |   |                 |           |   |                  |           |   |                 |           |                 |

The invitation to this bid is open to all international and local contractors specialized in this field.

- Bidders who are interested to participate in this auction are requested to submit their pre-qualification details online (RFI No 61) on Omantel's e-tendering system (<https://tenders.omanotel.com>). Companies that are not registered on Omantel e-tendering system are requested to register themselves in order to qualify/participate in the e-auction.
- The auction will be conducted online on Omantel's eTendering platform at <https://tenders.omanotel.com>. The date and time of e-Auction shall be informed to shortlisted bidders based on evaluation of the pre-qualification submissions.
- A maximum of 2 participants will be allowed per vendor to enter the premises during the site visit.
- Shortlisted bidders will be requested to submit a bid bond or certified cheque valid for 90 days from the date of submission addressed to GM-Procurement & Contracts Omantel, prior to the date of e-auction.
- The details of the e-auction and the required registration/training will be provided to the shortlisted bidders before the e-auction.
- For auction enquiries, requests for clarifications and site visit, please contact us on 98080350 / 99293599 .

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# APP LAUNCHED FOR HEALTHCARE SERVICES

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

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It is possible now to access medical care remotely in the Sultanate through a mobile phone application. The application is equipped with suggesting area-wise healthcare facilities and online medical evaluation of patients.

Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, launched the app at the OCCI headquarters in Ruwi. 'Your Doctor by Your Side' enables people to find doctors and medical facilities at any time and place in the Sultanate.

The opening ceremony included a welcome speech by the project founder, Khalil al Aghbary, in which he said, "There is no doubt that health information technology sector is on the threshold of great growth, stimulated by the increase in demand for modern technologies, especially those related to the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and the steady growth in the technology infrastructure. From this standpoint, it was necessary to keep pace with this digital boom, strive to achieve patient safety and improve the quality of services provided to society."

He expressed pride in being an Omani company that created this smart application.

The application shows a map of the Sultanate marking all healthcare establishments; hospitals, health complexes and centres, clinics, pharmacies, in addition to mobile health services such as consultation and emergency.

The application includes seven sections. The first section shows the basic data of healthcare facilities including pharmacies, opticians and medical laboratories. The second is for consultations which allow patients or users to conduct an online conversation with doctors with the provision of sending photos if required.

The third section is a window



for medical practitioners to register themselves for consultation. The fourth has other health professionals such as nurses and physiotherapists to provide continuous and comprehensive care and follow-up.

The fifth section is dedicated to life coaches carrying out conversations with patients based on trust and confidentiality to help them identify themselves, define their goals and eventually encourage them to make a drastic change in life. Section six is designed for emergency doctors, which will provide quick assistance by showing a list of the nearest paramedics, doctors, hospitals or ambulances.

The seventh section is more educational, which includes awareness videos and guidance intended to teach individuals how to handle medical emergencies. It

also includes some reliable health publications and announcements from the Ministry of Health or external health organisations.

The project will also teach users how to provide home healthcare to patients who underwent surgeries or those suffering from bedsores.

The project is aimed at raising general awareness among the community members, and to facilitate access to health data and services, and provide information on the health services required for tourists and visitors in the Sultanate, in addition to keeping abreast with technological development in health services. Its vision is to create a larger health platform in the Sultanate, that hosts all government and private health services. It will save time and effort for health services seekers.

## Confusion galore over PCR test

VINOD NAIR

@vinot\_nair

Confusion continues as to whether to go or not for a PCR test even after completion of 14 days of quarantine, among some recently returned travellers.

"A private hospital insisted on a fresh PCR test even after 14 days when I visited to remove the tracking bracelet. At the same time, other clinics removed the device without a test", a traveller who returned to Oman after spending over a month abroad said. Similar concerns were echoed by a few other travellers.

All passengers travelling to Oman must self-isolate for seven days and retake the PCR test on the eighth day or continue self-isolation until the 14th day, the Minister of Health had said at a press conference.

According to a recent advisory by the Ministry of Health, all travellers coming to Oman should

All passengers travelling to Oman must self-isolate for seven days and retake the PCR test on the eighth day or continue self-isolation until the 14th day

present the PCR test from the previous destination that has been done 72 hours before coming to Oman.

"Incoming travellers should stay in self-isolation for seven days, perform the test on the eighth day and continue with quarantine until the receipt of results. If you got a positive test result, you will need to quarantine for 10 more days after getting the second result."

The bracelet should not be removed without permission

from the designated authorities to avoid any legal accountability.

According to the Civil Aviation Authority guidelines, there is no longer an option for passengers travelling to Oman to stay in the Sultanate for a period of fewer than eight days.

The airlines must ensure that there are no travel reservations are made to depart Oman before the mandatory quarantine period of seven days, the CAA statement said.

Children below 15 years old are exempt from the PCR test and Tarrasud+ bracelet requirements.

In the Muttrah area, Gulf Specialised Hospital, NMC, Al Abeer, Kimz, Badr al Samma and Apollo hospitals are designated centres to return the bracelet for expatriates. In Bausher the centres are NMC, Burjeel, Al Hayat, Al Raffah and Muscat Private hospitals, while in Seeb the centres are NMC and Starcare Medical Centre.

## Embassy marks 72nd Republic Day of India

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, JAN 26

Indian Embassy celebrated 72nd Republic Day of India at the embassy premises on Tuesday. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the event was limited to embassy officials and staff. However, it was telecast live, enabling Indian community to join the celebration virtually. Before the start of the event, video highlighting the Covid-19 cooperation with India's friends and partners across the world including delivery of life saving medicines and vaccines was played.

The event started with unfurling of the Indian Flag by Munu Mahawar, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, followed by singing of National Anthem. Ambassador gave a brief speech and read out excerpts from the address of the President of India to the Nation. Ambassador greeted the Indian Community in Oman and thanked them for their outstanding support during the Covid-19 pandemic and strengthening India's friendly relations with Oman.

The Ambassador highlighted the recent initiatives taken by Government of India, including Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan and stated that Indian diaspora in



Oman would have an important role to play in it. Ambassador also thanked the Oman government for taking good care of Indian nationals during the Covid-19 pandemic and stated that India can be a strong & resilient partner in all priority areas under Oman's Vision 2040.

Videos of patriotic song by

students of Indian School Muscat (ISM) and by Neha Vishal Shah were played after the speech by Ambassador, adding to the sense of patriotism and enthusiasm in the celebration. Hundreds of Indian nationals joined the celebration online expressing their spirit and enthusiasm on the Republic Day.

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# Be nice to beaches

KABEER YOUSUF  
@kabeeryousuf

Vast, pristine, sandy beaches and fresh, frothy tides that keep chasing each other at the shores are soothing sights at the beaches of the Sultanate. However, the irresponsible behaviour of many beachgoers creates a bad situation by leaving litter, trash, broken nets etc at the beaches and thereby endangering the marine creatures.

### CLEANING CAMPAIGN

A cleaning campaign conducted by a local NGO on the Al Hail beach found several kilos of waste comprising abandoned fishing gear, items like nets, ropes, hooks, weighing machines, tyres, foam sheets and cigarette butts.

“Littering on the beaches is a very serious matter and one of the major concerns as it harms the marine environment. From one of our cleanup campaigns around the Al Hail area that leads to the beach, we collected 1,078 cigarette butts in less than 45 minutes. Added to it, this area was littered by the skewers which were very prominent, most likely due to the food trucks around the area,” Ammujam Raveendran from ‘Save Our Beaches’ said.

From this particular beach area where they carried out seven cleanups when the beaches were closed in October/November, they collected more than 400 bags, mostly containing picnic waste, and the site is majorly used

to throw construction waste. The beach-cleaners who are beach and environment-lovers, felt one of the major reasons for the huge trash in Al Hail beach is the lack of skips for fishermen and trash bins for the public.

The Ras al Ruwais beach, which is distinguished by the protective wall of the desert on the side usually has a mix of emerald and turquoise water, is a trash bin for many visitors.

A scouring task of nearly half an hour on the beach fetched around 85 bags filled with plastics from the surface covering just less than 1/4th of the beach and the next day, the task was completed by municipality staff members who were on duty at the beach along with members of beah.

“Ras al Ruwais is a beautiful picnic spot, but no garbage bins were found there. All we could find was an empty garbage bin on a beach filled with plastic, oil cans and the like. The sand on the beach was black where the waves hit during the high tide, which could be the result of emptying the engine oil cans in the sea or some remains of such engines and other machines,” volunteers said.

### WASTE COLLECTION

The sand from the main road down to the beach is filled with large black bags which people leave behind as there are no bins. Collection of waste from this location is equally posing a challenge because only a 4x4 vehicle can access the beach.



The volunteers of this NGO have conducted nearly 100 cleanups in all. They did the cleanup 79 times at Al Hail beach, one in Ras al Ruwais, three in Masirah.

“Surprisingly all the trash and litter at all the three beaches are distinctly different. The trash on Ras al Ruwais beach is very different from Al Hail beach. The stuff found at Al Aija beach, Shanzi island and Shanzi beach in Masirah Island were different too.

“As many as 103 volunteers from Muscat and elsewhere of

different nationalities gathered on January 15 and 16 at the beaches of Masirah Island from morning till evening and the result is, the collection of more than 200 green bags of trash.

“The trash was a mixed bag including plastic bottles, remains of nets and nylon ropes and tarballs. We feel that a lot of the trash could have been washed over by the waves or the nets and ropes may have been removed in earlier cleanups, leaving behind the smaller pieces.” From the Al Rasia island and the beach, a

beautiful picnic spot, around 68 volunteers collected 72 bags of trash consisting majorly of plastic bottle caps, plastics.

The area is strewn with nets buried under huge rocks which is quite impossible to remove without the use of machines and can only be removed with the help of heavy vehicles like JCB.

How to behave in the environmentally-sensitive areas?

Dr Khalfan bin Saeed al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, at the recently held Environmental

Forum 2020, titled ‘The future of the environment in light of the priorities of Oman 2040 vision’ said careful attention to environment protection is paid in formulating various developmental projects as part of the Vision 2040.

**ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS**

“Moving Oman to the level of the aspirations of its people as envisioned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik is based on the protection of all environmental factors.” Accordingly, experts and environmentalists urged all to behave responsibly in the environmentally-sensitive areas. Lack of awareness and attitude towards nature are major reasons behind the human tendency towards littering and spoiling the cleanliness of beaches and other public places.

“Yet another reason behind the trash on beaches is lack of trash bins and other facilities is a major issue behind this everywhere. While heading to the beaches, one should bring a reusable bag to carry any food, drink, or beach supplies and use them as trash bags to take back the waste,” some environmentalists said.

Be considerate and pick up any nearby trash you may be passing while leaving the beach. It will help reduce litter on the beaches. Also, avoid smoking at the beaches which would help reduce cigarette buds on the shore.



## In brief

## ■ MUSCAT

**154 NEW COVID-19 CASES, 2 DEATHS**

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Tuesday reported 154 new cases of Covid-19, bringing the total number of cases registered in the Sultanate to 133,407. MoH reported two new coronavirus deaths, keeping the total toll at 1,524. The total recovery cases reached 126,409, which is 95 per cent of the total recovery rate. Fourteen patients were hospitalised during the past 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients in hospitals to 94, including 32 in Intensive Care Units (ICUs).

## ■ MUSCAT

**REGISTER FOR POWER AND WATER SUBSIDIES**

The Authority of Public Services Regulation (APSR) urged citizens who meet the eligibility criteria to register in the National Subsidy System for electricity and water subsidies. "The Authority of Public Services Regulation urges citizens who meet the eligibility criteria to register in the National Subsidy System for electricity and water Subsidies through the National Subsidy System.

## ■ MUSCAT

**TREASURY BILLS TENDER RESULTS**

A tender of Treasury Bills, issue number 531, worth RO 76 Million was announced this week. The total value of the allotted Treasury bills amounted to RO 76 million, for a maturity period of 91 days, from 27th January 2021 until 28th April 2021. The average accepted price reached 99.803 for every RO 100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at 99.800 per RO 100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 0.79056 per cent and 0.79056 per cent. It may be noted that the interest rate on the Repo operations with CBO is 0.5 per cent while the discount rate on the Treasury Bills Discounting Facility with CBO is 1 per cent.

## ■ MUSCAT

**OCCI OFFICIALS MEET GOVERNOR**

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry's branch in Al Dhahirah recently organised an open meeting with the governor of the governorate. During the meeting with Najeeb bin Ali al Rawas, the Governor of Al Dhahirah, the business owners said that at least 10 per cent of the work of all large companies operating in the governorate should be reserved for small and medium enterprises. Saif bin Saeed al Badi, a member of the board of directors of OCCI and head of the Chamber's branch in the Al Dhahirah Governorate, said, "This meeting came as an initiative of the Governor of Al Dhahirah to discuss the challenges facing small and medium-sized enterprises in obtaining contract opportunities from the companies implementing large projects operating in the governorate."

# Help children cope with pandemic

KABEER YOUSUF  
@KABEERYOUSEF

Psychological issues among children are quite common during the pandemic and they vary from anxiety to depression prompting them to give up hope and make them feel that there's nowhere to go, nothing to do and nothing to connect with.

Albeit the life sailing back to normal might have changed their boredom of staying indoors, the scars of lockdown and total confinement within the four walls of their home might have impacted them, of course, not positively.

Dr Younis bin Ibrahim al Balushi, Consultant Paediatric Pulmonologist at the Royal Hospital, suggests one of the unique characteristics of Covid-19 among the children is that they shall develop multi-system inflammatory syndrome (MIS-C).

"MIS-C can affect the children and it is considered to be a severe infection. It can also happen a month or so later after the Covid-19 infection," Dr Younis said, adding that "children are greatly affected during the pandemic because they are given limited options to go out or mingle with friends and they are limited to only a few resources for



their leisure and entertainment. They should be given alternative avenues as much as possible."

On the other hand, some children show different symptoms like diarrhoea, skin rash, diabetes or other conditions, or even acute appendicitis. When kids show unusual symptoms, a Covid-19 test should be done.

Mental health problems such as depression and anxiety were on the rise among children aged 6

to 17 even before the coronavirus hit and social isolation caused by social distancing can make these symptoms worse, experts opine.

"Children are the most vulnerable lot during the Covid-19 pandemic and while it has completely changed the ways of living, meeting, greeting, travelling, children bear the brunt of change in schooling and staying indoors because unlike the elders, children are less likely to stay

indoors," said Dr Dilip Singhvi Internal Medicine, Specialist Apollo Hospital.

The world over, for the kids it was entirely a new world, as they were asked to remain indoors for almost a year now, not allowed to play outdoors with their friends due to lockdown although it is relaxed now. Children were asked to wear masks, a new concept for them, they have to study at home as all schools were closed for most

of the year and have to adjust to a new way of learning.

For the younger kids who are yet not used to using and sitting on computers for long hours, it was even more difficult.

Many children suffered from health issues like headaches, soreness of eyes, body aches, muscle aches due to long hours on computers for schooling or tuitions.

New norms of wearing masks, social distancing, and handwashing had to be taught to the kids.

Adults, parents, teachers and their peers have an active role in helping these children come out unscathed and lead a normal life, according to the experts.

Parents are requested to take them away from those infected people and teach them. Precautionary methods, while providing an alternative environment to them.

"Parents should also spend more time with the children these days, listen closely and set routines for them while taking care of themselves. Additionally, school and community organisations should come forward to support students through virtual events, telehealth sessions and socially distanced activities," Dr Younis al Balushi added.

## Defence ministry to receive new recruits

**MUSCAT:** The recruitment committees at the Royal Army of Oman's (RAO) military medical services, the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) and the engineering services at the ministry of defence, are completing the requirements for receiving new batches of nationals registered with the recruitment offices.

The Sultan's Armed Forces and the other departments of the ministry of defence have utilised their medical and administrative capacities as well as their means of transportation to streamline the requisite recruitment procedures and ensure rapidity and flexibility of formalities.

The process is being conducted in constant coordination between the Sultan's Armed Forces and the other departments of the ministry of defence and the ministry of labour which publishes the recruitment advertisements on local media and on the Tajneed website which publishes details about the job opportunities available at the military and security entities. The website also enables job-seekers to view appointments for personal interviews through short messages. — ONA



## No quarantine for Omanis travelling to UAE; PCR test must

**STAFF REPORTER**  
MUSCAT, JAN 26

Travellers in the Green list, including those from Oman, are permitted to visit Abu Dhabi without quarantine.

All passengers will still be required to undergo a PCR test on arrival at Abu Dhabi Airport. The green list is updated regularly and changes based on the health measures and safety in countries of origin, according to the officials. The green list features 17 countries with some nations being removed from the list and others being added based on recent developments.

The full list of green list countries are Australia, Bahrain, Brunei, China, Falkland Islands, Greenland, Hong Kong, Maldives, Mauritius, Mongolia, New Zealand, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, St Kitts and Nevis and Thailand.



## New timings for Mawaleh market

**MUSCAT:** Muscat Municipality has announced new working hours for Al Mawaleh Central Market for vegetables and fruits. "Muscat Municipality is pleased to announce the amendment of the working hours of the Central Market for vegetables and fruits for shoppers. It will be from 9 am until 5 pm starting from Wednesday." The Municipality also said: "Shoppers will continue to enter from Gate No 2 to the internal and external parking lots assigned to them, with the mechanism of work remaining as it is for wholesalers from Gate No (1) for trucks of 3 tonnes and above, from 5 am until 2 pm.

"The municipality hopes that everyone will cooperate to preserve public health. It stresses adherence to precautionary measures in physical spacing and wearing masks."



## To be on WhatsApp or move on to other platforms

**FROM PAGE 1**

Al Hajri explains that WhatsApp for business and personal usage will have its differentiation now when it comes to privacy.

"They are introducing a new line of services. They are moving towards e-commerce. Soon there will be features like having your stores on WhatsApp business. Instagram also has plans to move towards e-commerce. You can see people offering products on Instagram, now they want to facilitate more by offering another service by Facebook where the small sellers have some sort of

store on Instagram and use communication through WhatsApp," explains Al Hajri.

As an ordinary person talking to family and friends, the individual is still protected.

"However when you are talking to someone who has a business account, Facebook could obtain some data that we call metadata. This is to follow up on the fact that receipts have been exchanged, there are copies in them, and

if there is a problem they can intervene between a client and a business that is operating through their channels.

Now, they have said it is purely to enhance their services and also they would know their location which would enable them to target advertisements. "For example, if you are looking for a product they would like to know what you are looking for and bringing in the businesses in your area who are selling the merchandise

the individual is looking for," points out the expert.

In other words, the privacy policy would only be affected when speaking to a business account number while in contact with the family to friends the privacy is protected by end to end encryption.

"For security reasons, they have said no one would have access to the codes," says Al Hajri.

Meanwhile, the messages continue to come through on WhatsApp from individuals stating that they have moved on to other apps and please download them to stay in contact.



## No talks until Sudan leaves contested land, says Ethiopia



Ethiopians cross the Setit River on the Sudan-Ethiopia border in the eastern Kassala state. – Reuters

**ADDIS ABABA:** Ethiopia said on Tuesday it would not engage in border talks with Sudan until Sudanese troops withdrew from contested land, potentially complicating efforts to defuse a dispute that has fuelled deadly clashes in recent weeks.

The two Horn of Africa nations have long been at odds over the Al-Fashaqa region, where Ethiopian farmers cultivate fertile land claimed by Sudan.

Since early December Sudan has accused Ethiopian “forces and militias” of ambushing Sudanese troops along the border, while Ethiopia has accused Sudan of killing “many civilians” in attacks involving “heavy machine guns”.

The two sides held border talks last month, and Sudan

declared in late December that its army had restored control over all border territory that had been taken over by Ethiopian farmers.

Ethiopian foreign ministry spokesman Dina Mufti told a press conference on Tuesday his country was committed to a “peaceful” resolution of the standoff but wanted Sudan to pull back.

“For us to negotiate, our precondition is Sudan returns to the previous land it controlled. They should return to the status quo, and then we can return to negotiation,” he said.

In 1902, a deal to draw up the border was struck between Britain, the colonial power in Sudan at the time, and Ethiopia, but it lacked clear demarcation lines. — AFP

## Iran urges Biden to lift sanctions affecting its fight against Covid

**TEHRAN:** Iran urged US President Joe Biden on Tuesday to lift sanctions which it said were hampering Tehran’s fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

Tehran also said it had approved Russia’s Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine for domestic use, and that it was trying to buy vaccines from AstraZeneca and other companies.

Sanctions reimposed by former US President Donald Trump formally exempt food, medicine and other humanitarian supplies, but many foreign banks have been deterred from doing business with Iran.

“Since (Biden’s) administration claims not to be anti-science like the previous one ..., one expects it to free the transfer of Iran’s own foreign exchange resources to fight the coronavirus and for health and food, and lift banking sanctions quickly,” government spokesman Ali Rabiei told state television.

He also threatened that Iran would block short-notice inspections of Iran’s nuclear facilities by the United Nations atomic agency if Washington did not lift sanctions.

In 2018, Trump pulled Washington out of Iran’s 2015 nuclear pact with world powers aimed at limiting its nuclear programme, and reimposed US sanctions that had been lifted under it. During a visit to Moscow, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, said on Tuesday that Tehran planned to import and produce the Sputnik V vaccine.

Deputy Health Minister



People walk on a street after Tehran. Iran has approved Russia’s Sputnik V vaccine and plans to both import it and produce it, giving the Middle East’s worst-hit country a tool to fight the spread of Covid-19. – Reuters

“**Since (Biden’s) administration claims not to be anti-science like the previous one ..., one expects it to free the transfer of Iran’s own foreign exchange resources to fight the coronavirus and for health and food, and lift banking sanctions quickly**

**ALI RABIEI**  
Government Spokesman

vaccine candidates late last month, saying this could help it defeat the pandemic despite US sanctions that affect its ability to import vaccines.

Iran is also participating in the COVAX scheme that aims to secure fair access to Covid-19 vaccines for poorer countries.

Meanwhile, a French presidential official said on Tuesday that Iran must end its provocations and return to the terms of a 2015 nuclear deal with world powers if it expects the United States to rejoin the accord, but even then a broader negotiation would be needed.

— AFP

## Grazing cows lead to squabble on Lebanese-Israeli border

**BEIRUT:** Lebanese cattle herders from a village close to the border with Israel said several of their cows, which have grazed freely in the area for decades, were taken by Israeli soldiers, in what could become a new dispute between the two countries.

The herders from the border village of Wazzani say Israeli patrols crossed into a grey zone on Sunday between a technical fence that separates the two countries and the ‘Blue Line’ that constitutes the internationally recognised border, and started rounding up livestock, taking seven cows.

Lebanon and Israel are still in a formal state of war and have long

contested their land and maritime borders.

“For twenty years and more these cows are there, from the time of the grandparents of our grandparents and this is the first time that someone takes them,” villager Kamal al Ahmad, who lost three cows in the incident, said.

“I don’t know if they did this as a challenge or what?”

A cow is worth around \$2,000, meaning the loss of an animal is no small matter to the farmers who are already living through the tough reality of Lebanon’s ongoing financial crisis.

The area near a river where the Wazzani cows graze is only around



Herds of cattle are pictured in the village of Wazzani, near the Lebanese-Israeli border in southern Lebanon. – Reuters

200 metres away from Israel.

The two countries disagree over a border wall Israel started building in 2018.

A UN peacekeeping force monitors the boundary since Israel’s military withdrew from south Lebanon in 2000, ending a 22-year occupation.

“We are aware of the alleged incident and we are in touch with both parties in relation to this issue,” the UN Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) spokesperson Andrea Tenenti, said.

The two countries are also in a maritime dispute over an area in the sea on the edge of three Lebanese offshore energy blocks.

“God help these people, this is their livelihood,” Ahmad al Mohammed, the head of the Wazzani municipality, said of the herders.

Not far from Wazzani, in another border village called Mais al Jabal, local teenager Hussein Chartouni complained earlier of the loss of one of his chickens to Israel.

When one of his chickens wandered off behind the border barbed wire, it was snatched and never returned he said.

“I want my chicken,” he said, using the phrase that has now become a hashtag on Twitter.

— Reuters

### SHORT TAKES

#### RIYADH

##### Explosion heard days after projectile intercepted

An explosion was heard in Saudi Arabia’s capital Riyadh on Tuesday and the cause was not immediately known. Several witnesses also reported hearing two loud bangs and seeing a small plume of smoke above the capital. Al Arabiya TV cited local reports of an explosion and videos circulating on social media purporting to show a missile being intercepted over Riyadh.

Yemen’s rebels have carried out many cross-border attacks



into Saudi using drones and missiles. Missile attacks and drone strikes claimed by rebels have targeted civilian airports and oil infrastructure in Saudi Arabia, occasionally reaching Riyadh. — Reuters

#### JERUSALEM

##### Israeli troops shoot dead Palestinian

A knife-wielding Palestinian who attempted to stab Israeli soldiers near Nablus in the occupied West Bank was shot dead on Tuesday, the Israeli army and the Palestinian health ministry said.

The Palestinian health ministry confirmed that “a citizen” had been shot dead by the “occupation forces.”

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa named him as Atta Rayyan, 17, from Qarawat Bani Hassan, a town adjacent to Gitai Avisar junction, where the



attempted attack took place.

So-called lone-wolf attacks by Palestinians on the Israeli military are common in the territory. Some have involved firearms but most have been with knives. — AFP

#### RIYADH

##### Saudi seeks to provide vaccines to Yemen

Saudi Arabia is holding talks with coronavirus vaccine makers to supply low-income countries, including war-torn Yemen, with vaccines, Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed al Jadaan said on Tuesday.

“We are negotiating with a lot of the vaccination companies to provide more vaccinations to particularly low-income countries in this part of the world and Africa,” he said during a video discussion as part of the World Economic Forum (WEF).



“Yemen for example, and some of the African nations that cannot afford and will not be able to get enough, from Covax quickly,” Al Jadaan added.

In brief

KABUL



TALIBAN ACCUSED  
OF SNUBBING  
PEACE TALKS

Afghan government negotiators holding peace talks with the Taliban charged on Tuesday their opponents had been avoiding formal engagement for more than a week, an accusation the insurgents denied.

The two sides have been meeting in the Qatari capital Doha since September in a US-backed effort to contain the violence in their country, but the negotiations have already been interrupted by several long pauses.

"Peace and ending the violence are our people and government's top priority", tweeted Afghan government negotiator Nader Nadery. — AFP

NAYPYIDAW



ARMY RAISES PROSPECT  
OF COUP AFTER  
VOTER-FRAUD CLAIMS

Myanmar's powerful military on Tuesday raised the spectre of staging a coup as it ramped up demands for an investigation into alleged voter fraud during last year's election, swept by Aung San Suu Kyi's ruling party.

The National League for Democracy (NLD) won November's poll in a landslide, but has been much criticised by rights groups for its disenfranchisement of voters in conflict-wracked regions.

The military-aligned opposition disputed the results, while the army has for weeks alleged widespread voter irregularities, claiming to have found 8.6 million cases of fraud.

BANGKOK



GOVT URGES  
UNDERSTANDING  
OVER COVID VACCINE PLAN

Thailand's health minister called for understanding on Tuesday and sought to explain the country's coronavirus vaccine procurement plan, following criticism that the government has lacked transparency and been too slow in securing supplies.

Public Health Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said Thailand started negotiating in April with "every vaccine producer" but its laws prevented government agencies from making non-refundable downpayments for products not yet manufactured.

AstraZeneca presented the best option with its lower-priced vaccines and promised technology transfer to Siam Bioscience, he said. — Reuters

# Indian farmers breach historic Red Fort, clash with police

NEW DELHI: Tens of thousands of farmers drove convoys of tractors into New Delhi, clashed with the police and stormed the historic Red Fort during a protest against agricultural laws, even as the country celebrated its Republic Day on Tuesday.

Nonetheless, the city's Republic Day parade, which showcases India's military might and cultural heritage and is the main attraction of national celebrations to commemorate the country's constitution, went ahead without disruption.

The farmers, who have been camped outside the city for months, had been given a set time to start and a route to follow for their protest. However groups of protesters knocked down police barricades hours before the noon (0630 GMT) start and entered the city on foot and on tractors, some deviating from the set routes.

By the afternoon, thousands were seen marching on roads with flags while scores of tractors that deviated some 20 kilometres from their designated routes reached the Red Fort and key roads connecting to top government



Farmers put a flag on top of the historic Red Fort. — AFP

offices in the heart of the city.

They waved farm union and religious flags from the ramparts of the fort, a 16th century monument from where prime ministers annually hoist the national flag to mark the

country's independence. The police managed to remove them from the premises of the fort by early evening.

Farmers also clashed with police near the Delhi police headquarters, where police forces

appeared to be outnumbered. Dramatic visuals showed groups trying to topple a public bus parked to block farmers from progressing further. Farmers on two tractors chased down police officers in the area. — dpa

## Nepali climbers return home after K2 triumph



KATHMANDU: Nepali mountaineers who conquered one of the world's most treacherous peaks returned home to a rapturous welcome on Tuesday, with cheering supporters hailing their first-ever winter summit of K2 as a triumph for their Himalayan nation.

Their ascent in mid-January of the world's second-highest mountain — the notoriously challenging 8,611 metre "savage mountain" of Pakistan — shone a much-deserved spotlight on their own climbing prowess.

A band played patriotic songs as the team arrived in Kathmandu, while well-wishers held out flowers and waved national flags.

"This is not just our success — it is for all Nepalis, so that our future generations can look back and be proud about achievements of Nepali climbers", one of the 10 summiteers, Mingma Gyalje Sherpa (pictured), said.

— AFP

## Duterte tells children to stay home and watch television



Mothers and their children wait for free vitamins and medicine at a local health centre in Manila. — Reuters

MANILA: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has reimposed a ban on children aged 10 to 14 leaving home, telling them to watch TV instead, as the country battles an outbreak of a new coronavirus strain.

Stay-at-home orders for all children and the elderly have been kept in place across most of the country since the start of the pandemic — even as the economy reopened after crippling lockdowns and restrictions.

"Go back to your homes... and besides they're good just with the TV. They can glue their attention to the TV the whole day", said Duterte.

While many parents have flouted the rules, allowing their children to play in parks or on the street, the measure has prevented families visiting shopping malls, which are the centres of community life and consumer spending. Classrooms also have remained closed.

The prolonged restriction on movement has been blamed for hampering the country's recovery from its first recession in three decades.

Last Friday, the government's coronavirus task force announced children aged 10 to 14 would be allowed outside again from February.

But Duterte overturned the decision late on Monday, saying he did not want to risk youngsters catching the more contagious British strain of the virus that has so far infected 17 people in the country, including three children.

"I'm just afraid because this new strain strikes young children", he said.

Just hours before Duterte spoke, Trade Secretary Ramon Lopez said on Monday that allowing children outside again would help spur consumer demand and revive businesses battered by anti-virus measures.

— AFP

## Landslide early warning system for Bangladesh

DHAKA: A new system that can warn people of landslides nearly a week in advance is set to be launched in Bangladesh later this year, helping tackle increasing risks from a disaster linked to climate-change-driven extreme rainfall, experts said on Tuesday.

Developed by the United Nations and Bangladesh's environment ministry, the warning system uses satellite imagery, rainfall measurements and other meteorological data to predict landslides in vulnerable regions.

Right now, landslide alerts are provided more informally, based on rain-gauge readings, which amounts to "now-casting, not forecasting" and doesn't take into account geological data, said a UN Food and Agriculture Organization spokesman.



Women carry water jugs up a landslide-prone hill in the Balukhali camp for Rohingya refugees in southern Bangladesh. — Reuters

### Recall/Special Service Campaign

Date of Campaign : 27/01/2021  
Campaign Type : Recall/Special Service Campaign  
Product Description : Hilux & Fortuner

| Production Year | Brand  | Vehicle Model | Affected Vehicle Range* | No. of Affected Vehicles |
|-----------------|--------|---------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2018            | TOYOTA | Hilux         | MR0DB9CDXK5140188       | 1784                     |
| to              |        | &             | to                      |                          |
| 2019            |        | Fortuner      | MROHA8CD6K1058075       |                          |

\* Not all vehicles in these VIN ranges affected.

**Description:**  
In the brake booster of the subject vehicles, due to improper molding condition of the resin piston, the strength of piston could degrade. If this were to occur, the piston may break by operating the brake pedal repeatedly, and in the worst case, loss of braking assist while driving could increase the vehicle stopping distance.

**Procedure:**  
As per "Technical instruction" advised by TMC.

**For More Information:**  
Customers driving these vehicles may please contact M/s. Saud Bahwan Automotive LLC for further details / booking appointment etc. from 27/01/2021.

**Contact Details:**  
Toll free No. 80073000 on all working days between 08:30 to 17:30 hrs. after 27/01/2021.

C.R. 1703412

# EU calls on US to help rein in powerful social media giants



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on Tuesday urged the United States under President Joe Biden to work with Brussels on regulating the tech giants. — AFP

**BRUSSELS:** European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on Tuesday called on the US to help rein in the power of social media companies, creating a global rule book “based on our values.”

“The business model of online platforms has an impact not only on free and fair competition, but also on our democracies, our security and on the quality of our information,” said von der Leyen during the online World Economic Forum (WEF).

Internet companies must take responsibility for how they spread, promote and remove content, she said, using her WEF address to appeal to Washington.

For example, Twitter’s decision to shut down former US president Donald Trump’s account during the storming of the US Capitol should not have been decided by company rules alone, she stressed.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel also referred to the power of Internet giants and social media platforms, saying that she hopes to work with the administration of US President Joe Biden “on the minimum taxation of digital companies.”

“I hope that we will be better able to anchor the central role of competition law globally in order to prevent the emergence of monopolies,” Merkel said in her speech at the WEF.

“Because we have such [monopolistic] tendencies, of course, and we have to talk about them internationally, otherwise everyone will deal with such monopoly structures alone, in an inadequate manner,” she said.

French President Emmanuel Macron pointed out that new technologies like artificial intelligence and future ones like quantum computing hold the promise of finding solutions to climate change and pandemics much faster.

By using powerful computers that operate under the laws of quantum physics, “problems that would take weeks to solve will be solved in one day,” Macron said.

However, the French leader predicted that social networks, the digitalisation of the economy and these new technologies could also create further inequality and political problems.

“These will accelerate our problems from a social and democratic point of view,” Macron said, pointing to recent developments in the polarised political landscape of the United States. Some 2,000 political and business leaders are taking part in the event to debate the challenges of the year ahead.

It is being held online because of the Covid-19 pandemic, instead of the usual gathering at the Swiss mountain resort of Davos. — dpa

## Italy PM quits to seek new govt as pandemic rages

**ROME:** Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte resigned on Tuesday in the hope of forming a new government after weeks of turmoil in his ruling coalition, leaving Italy rudderless as it battles the deadly coronavirus pandemic.

He tendered his resignation to President Sergio Mattarella, the ultimate arbiter of Italian political crises, who invited him to stay on in a caretaker capacity pending discussions on what happens next.

The uneasy coalition that has led Italy since September 2019 was fatally weakened earlier this month by the withdrawal of former premier Matteo Renzi’s small but crucial Italia Viva party.

Ahead of a key vote in parliament this week that he looked set to lose, Conte informed his cabinet on Tuesday that he would quit in what supporters said was a move to form a new government.

After the meeting with Mattarella, a spokesman for the president said he “reserves the right to decide (what to do next) and invited the government to stay in office in a caretaker capacity”.

Mattarella will open discussions with party leaders on Wednesday afternoon which are likely to lead into Thursday — leaving a vacuum at the top of the eurozone’s third largest economy at a crucial time. — AFP



Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte has submitted his resignation, propelling Italy into a deeper government crisis. — Reuters

# Kremlin: Putin’s alleged palace belongs to entrepreneurs

**MOSCOW:** The Kremlin on Tuesday said a palace that President Vladimir Putin allegedly built on the Black Sea belongs to unnamed entrepreneurs.

Last week, a team around jailed dissident Alexei Navalny released a video titled “A Palace for Putin,” claiming to show that the long-standing leader has built a “tsarist empire” on the Black Sea. The video has been seen more than 90 million times.

“The Kremlin has no right to divulge the names of the owners and we do not intend to do so, it is not correct,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitri Peskov said in comments cited by news agency Interfax.

Peskov did not answer



questions by journalists on why the estate was being protected by the domestic intelligence service FSB and the security service FSO.

On Monday, Putin denied claims he or his closest allies owned the giant estate, which according to the film measures 40 times the size of Monaco and cost at least 100 billion rubles (1.3 billion dollars) to build.

Navalny’s team alleges that the owners cited in the estate’s paper do not have the money to have built it, and that it was financed by bribes.

Navalny returned to Russia earlier this month after receiving treatment in Germany following

an assassination attempt with the nerve agent Novichok. The 44-year-old was immediately detained upon his arrival and sentenced to 30 days of pre-trial detention.

Thousands of people have taken to the streets across Russia to protest for Navalny’s release, and more than 3,700 people were detained by security forces over the weekend.

Peskov accused the protesters of “unprecedented aggressiveness” against Russian security forces, but also acknowledged there had been “sad moments of unjustified roughness among representatives of security authorities” which were being investigated. — dpa

### SHORT TAKES

#### TUNIS

##### Parliament holds confidence votes on cabinet

Tunisia’s parliament began a heated session on Tuesday to approve a major cabinet reshuffle, after the president criticised the line-up and as tensions in the country run high.

Tunisia has seen a wave of night-time clashes this month, with security forces carrying out mass arrests as the novel coronavirus and lockdown measures exacerbate the North African country’s economic and political crises.

The session comes a day after



protesters clashed with police in the town of Sbeitla, in Tunisia’s marginalised centre, after a young man hit by a tear gas canister during clashes last week died in hospital. — AFP

#### WASHINGTON

##### Biden to reopen online insurance marketplace

US President Joe Biden is set to reopen the nation’s online health insurance marketplace as soon as this week, according to a planning document, offering Americans who cannot get coverage through their employers another way to obtain it.

Biden has vowed to restore full access to the healthcare.gov site, which provides a way to get to a federal exchange offering healthcare insurance. The system was created by former President Barack Obama’s sweeping 2010



Affordable Care Act.

Republicans have long sought to destroy the healthcare restructuring law, criticising the cost and quality of care as well as extensive government involvement in healthcare markets. — Reuters

#### PARIS

##### Vaccine concerns divide nations at Davos

Divisions were on display on Tuesday at the Davos virtual summit as nations called for fair distribution of Covid-19 vaccines amid fears of hoarding by rich nations.

The annual gathering of business and government leaders at the World Economic Forum in the Swiss Alps has been pushed online due to the pandemic, but organisers used the opportunity to promote global cooperation in combatting the novel coronavirus.



With more than 100 million people now infected, rich countries that funded vaccine research are now raising their voices to ensure they get doses as tensions mounted over delayed deliveries. — Reuters

# Drop plastic from our daily life...

From the beginning of this year, my memory has been under tremendous test. Although occasional forgetfulness like misplacing a key or my mobile phone is normal, I realised its gravity in the recent weeks after the ban on single-use plastic bags.

Despite knowing that most shops do not give free shopping bags anymore, not even a single time did I carry a bag while going to buy essentials! Call it mindlessness or forgetfulness, I have to shell out a few more coins at the counter.

Here I do not ignore the fact that plastic bags that were handed out till December 31, 2020, at the checkouts were not free. The only difference was that they were not directly charged. The hidden fact was that single-use plastic bags did not appear as a line item on your receipt, but you still paid for them!

Like a cupboard bulging with clothes, our kitchen shelves are often stuffed with reusable bags that I bought every time I do shopping. But when I told my colleague about my memory lapse, he just laughed it out saying, “Don’t worry, I am no exception. It happens only with tiny issues!”

So there is no cause for alarm! It is another episode like forgetting a key or a pen. It is not like the other changes



SAMUEL KUTTY  
@samkuttyp

PLASTIC BAG  
BANS TACKLE  
THE LITTER  
PROBLEM AT THE  
SOURCE AND  
PREVENT  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
HARM

that my aging body is witnessing! The normal forgetfulness that even a youngster would have!

But the landmark decision banning single-use plastic bags in Oman is the subject of importance that deserves a big applause. When I first reported about the Oman government’s plans to ban single-use plastic bags a few years ago, I did not expect it to be a resounding success.

### ALTERNATIVES

There’s no reason why single-use plastic bags need to be a part of our daily lives, especially because there are other reusable alternatives. With the ban, we are slowly adapting to a newer lifestyle by completely eliminating the use of single-use plastic.

The UN environment report suggests a ban on single-use plastics can be a step towards more comprehensive policies aiming at reducing the plastic menace and at replacing single-use plastics with more sustainable, environmentally friendly alternatives.

Elimination of single-use plastic from the earth is not only needed and feasible, it also has the potential to boost the local economy. It helps the civic authorities in the management of

littering and low-value waste.

Plastic bag bans tackle the litter problem at the source and prevent environmental harm. Plastic bags are usually lightweight and as such, they can travel very long distances by either water or wind.

Some bags may simply be discarded and tossed every nook and corner. Plastic bag litter is an eyesore that makes areas look rundown. These litters get caught up in between trees, fences and floats in water bodies thus damaging the world’s oceans. They ultimately end up in our food chain.

Discarded bags are a threat to humans and animal habitat. There are some chemicals from the plastic bags which can disrupt the normal functioning of hormones in the human body. Birds, animals and marine life such as turtles and fish often mistake the plastic bag and other plastic materials for food and eat them.

While our government is committed to bring more harmful plastic products to the list of banned items, it is the responsibility of the communities, organisations and institutions to jointly promote development of new and innovative solutions to prevent, capture and remove plastic pollution from the environment.

## FROM HOPE TO HUNGER

# Yemen’s forgotten uprising!

MOHAMED HASNI  
AND HAMMOUD MOUNASSAR

Death, destruction and starvation have obliterated the aspirations that propelled a 2011 uprising in Yemen, with the hopes of the country crushed by war and the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.

As the Arab Spring gripped the region, thousands of Yemenis took to the streets of the capital Sanaa on January 27 that year, demanding president Ali Abdullah Saleh to step down, while loyalists staged their own counter-protests. Shockwaves from the popular movements shaking in other countries were quick to reach Yemen.

“The people want the fall of the regime,” the protesters chanted, eager to shrug off Saleh’s rule. Saleh had likened governing Yemen to “dancing on the heads of snakes”, but nonetheless had remained in power since 1978, while resentments smouldered.

“For 50 years there had been political under-representation, social inequality, poverty, corruption and identity struggles,” said Maged al Madhaji, a witness to the uprising and now director of the Sanaa Centre for Strategic Studies. In the beginning, the demonstrations were peaceful and spontaneous, said activist Yasser al Raini, who at

the time was a co-ordinator of youth groups.

“The revolution brought together all sections of society to combat tyranny and injustice, and to build a new Yemen in the spirit of partnership and without excluding anyone,” he said.

In a country where there are enough guns for everyone to have their own, the

movement, Raini said, remained peaceful until Saleh’s forces opened fire on protesters in March.

A decade later, Yemen is engulfed in a bloody power struggle that erupted in 2014 between the government of President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi and the Ansar Allah fighters, who control the capital Sanaa and most of the north.

The internationally recognised government was unable to stop the insurgents, prompting the 2015 intervention of a Saudi-led military coalition. Today, millions of Yemenis are on the brink of famine with the economy destroyed and schools and hospitals in tatters, while the relentless campaign by Ansar Allah for more territory grinds on.

According to the United Nations, more than three million people have been displaced and close to 80 per cent of the population of 29 million is in need of some form of aid for survival.

While the goals of the 2011 movement were to unify Yemenis, the Red Sea state is more fractured than ever.

According to Mane al Matari, another leader of the uprising, it was Saleh’s desire to remain in power and to pass the mantle to his son Ahmed, who commanded the Republican Guard, that “unified Yemenis” in January 2011.

The following month, Saleh promised reforms and vowed he would not run for office when his term ended in 2013, but the move only emboldened his opponents.

A turning point came on March 18 when Saleh’s forces opened fire at protesters, killing at least 52 and leading to the defection of dozens of politicians and soldiers. Sanaa University, where a sit-in was staged, became the cradle of the revolt — as was Tahrir Square in Cairo and Habib Bourguiba Avenue in Tunis. — AFP

## A RAY OF HOPE

# For undocumented millions, Biden brings chance to step from shadows

JEFF GAMMAGE

After Frans and his wife came to Philadelphia from Indonesia in the mid-2000s, they lived in fear that their young son would accidentally spill the family secret and get them all deported. They were in the United States illegally.

“We always told our son, no matter how close you are, you do not share anything,” said Frans, who is in his 50s and asked that his full name not be published. “You cannot open the door to whoever rings our bell or talk to any strangers.”

The couple abandoned an upscale life in their homeland to move into the shadows here, trading a big house and a thriving lending business for a rented home and low, off-the-books wages at a beauty supply shop. Their sole motivation was to propel their son towards a top education at a competitive American college.

A decade later he’s nearing graduation. And now a dream just as big could be possible, as President Joe Biden submits groundbreaking legislation that would offer Frans and 11 million other undocumented migrants in this country a path to US citizenship.

### ATTACKING IMMIGRANTS

It’s a dramatic change of direction, opposite that set by former president Donald Trump, who based much of his presidency on attacking immigrants. It’s uncertain if Congress will approve Biden’s plan, despite slim Democratic majorities in both chambers. And the route to citizenship will not be easy or



US President Joe Biden speaks about administration plans to strengthen American manufacturing during a brief appearance in the South Court Auditorium at the White House in Washington. – Reuters

BIDEN WANTS  
TO FIRST LET  
PEOPLE APPLY FOR  
TEMPORARY LEGAL  
STATUS. FIVE YEARS  
LATER, THEY COULD  
GET GREEN CARDS

quick. Biden wants to first let people apply for temporary legal status. Five years later, they could get green cards, provided they pay their taxes and pass criminal- and national-security background checks. Then, after three more years and additional checks, those with green cards could apply to become citizens.

“It’s life-changing,” said Shoba Sivaprasad Wadhia, Director of the Center for Immigrants’ Rights Clinic at Pennsylvania State University, and not just for individuals but for

the country. The DACA programme offers a small preview, she said.

Allowing those who were brought here as children to legally stay and work has fostered thousands of productive lives that benefit the nation — including as front-line doctors and nurses during the coronavirus pandemic.

The specific language in Biden’s bill will be crucial, Wadhia said, so that people feel comfortable revealing themselves to undergo background investigations. — dpa



# OAA to kick-start season with International Drift

OIDC first round set for Feb 11 and 12 following medical protocols

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH  
MUSCAT, JAN 26

The Oman Automobile Association (OAA) will kick-start its much-shortened 2020-21 season with the Oman International Drift Championship (OIDC) on February 11 and 12, the organising committee said on Tuesday.

The fourth Oman International Drift Championship also got postponed by one week over implementing the Supreme Committee regulations on Covid-19 pandemic. The event was originally scheduled for February 4 and 5.

Top international drifters from across the world are expected to take part in the premier event to be organised by the OAA at its Muscat Arena.

The organisers are expecting 45 international drifters for the two-round championship.

The second round is scheduled

for February 18 and 19.

The Oman Automobile Association had seen great success with the Oman International Drift Championship after it was launched in 2018.

**‘FULLY READY’**

Race Director Fahmi al Busaidi of the OAA said the organising committee has worked hard to prepare well for the championship.

“We are fully ready as far as the venue and other logistical arrangement are concerned. But for the implementation of Covid-19 medical protocols, we needed another week.”

He pointed out that the working committees and the medical teams were formed, as well as the large equipment for the medical protocol in force as part of the precautions for Covid-19, according to the regulations set by the Supreme Committee.

Other arrangements include the security equipment for drivers and



Fahmi al Busaidi, Race Director

the race in addition to observers, referees, the imaging system and others, and all the equipment are in place for the start of the event.

Al Busaidi hoped that the fans would be allowed to attend and follow the tournament events.

“There is a move by the organising committee and the OAA with the Supreme Committee to allow a certain number of fans. The tournament

will be run by an international team of referees with three European referees specialised in managing such tournaments in addition to one or two young referees,” he added.

**DEANE, SEBASTIAN AND NIKNAK IN FRAY**

The organising committee said the total number of drifters registered for the event has now reached 35.

The last date of the entry has been moved to January 31 after the change of the event date.

The current list includes defending champion James Deane from Ireland, last year’s runner-up Sebastian Peter Fontijn from Netherlands and 14-year-old sensation Nikolass ‘Niknak’ Bertons of Latvia.

**SAMI LEADS OMAN CHALLENGE**

Sami al Shaibani, Oman section champion in last edition, will lead the local challenge while

star drifters Tariq al Shaihani and Haitham al Hadidi add glamour along with other prominent Omani drifters.

The local drifters have taken part in the training sessions on the championship circuit.

From the Middle East, Kuwaiti competitor Ali Mugasd and the Jordanian Ahmed Daham have confirmed their participation.

Entries were received from 17 countries — the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Lithuania, Latvia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Kuwait, Lebanon, Ukraine, Russia, Qatar, and the hosts Sultanate.

The track of the drift circuit at the OAA’s Muscat Arena was designed by Irish referee Keren Heinz, who is the chief referee of the British and Irish Drift Championships, and is judged by four world referees from the Netherlands, the United Arab Emirates and the Sultanate.



Naveed, Shaiman guilty under ICC Anti-Corruption code

United Arab Emirates players Mohammad Naveed and Shaiman Anwar Butt have been found guilty of two offences each under the ICC Anti-Corruption Code following a hearing by an independent Anti-Corruption Tribunal. Naveed and Shaiman were found guilty of corrupting matches of the T20 WC Qualifier 2019.



Inter coach Conte gets two-match ban for rant

Inter Milan coach Antonio Conte received a two-match ban and fined \$24,000 on Tuesday for verbally threatening the referee after last weekend's Serie A stalemate at Udinese. Conte saw red after 90 minutes in the goalless draw, believing referee Fabio Maresca had not added on enough stoppage time.

# Pakistan in trouble as Rabada leads South Africa fightback



**KARACHI:** Fast bowler Kagiso Rabada took two wickets for just eight runs as he led a South African fightback against Pakistan in their first Test in Karachi on Tuesday.

Pakistan were in trouble at 33 for four at the close of play, having bowled out the visitors for 220 — their second-lowest total in the country.

Fourteen wickets fell on the brownish National Stadium pitch, which had been expected to take spin from day one.

South Africa were well placed at 108-2 soon after lunch, but lost their last eight wickets for just 112 runs — barely managing to overhaul their lowest total in Pakistan, the 214 made at Faisalabad in 1997.

Spinners Yasir Shah (3-54), debutant Nauman Ali (2-38) and pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi (2-49) did the damage.

But then Rabada paid back the hosts with interest, bowling Abid Ali (four) in his third over and then getting debutant Imran Butt (nine) caught at leg-slip off a rising delivery. He now has 199 wickets from 44 Tests.

Babar Azam, leading Pakistan for the first time in a Test, fell lbw to spinner Keshav Maharaj for seven before night watchman Shaheen was bowled by Anrich Nortje without scoring. At the close, Azhar Ali and Fawad Alam were unbeaten on five each — with Pakistan trailing by 187 runs with six wickets intact.

Earlier, opener Dean Elgar top-scored for South Africa with 58, while George Linde (35) and Rabada (21 not out) were other notable contributors.

While lamenting his side's poor batting, Elgar said South Africa now had the upper hand. "I would not have said that

| SCOREBOARD                                                                                               |            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>South Africa first innings:</b>                                                                       |            |
| D Elgar c Azam b Nauman .....                                                                            | 58         |
| A Markram c Butt b Shaheen .....                                                                         | 13         |
| R van der Dussen (run out) .....                                                                         | 17         |
| F du Plessis c Rizwan b Yasir .....                                                                      | 23         |
| O de Kock c Butt b Nauman .....                                                                          | 15         |
| T Bavuma (run out) .....                                                                                 | 17         |
| G Linde c sub (Nawaz) b Hasan .....                                                                      | 35         |
| K Maharaj b Yasir .....                                                                                  | 0          |
| K Rabada (not out) .....                                                                                 | 21         |
| A Nortje b Yasir .....                                                                                   | 0          |
| L Ngidi lbw Shaheen .....                                                                                | 8          |
| <b>Extras:</b> (B-5, LB-1, NB-7) .....                                                                   | <b>13</b>  |
| <b>Total: (69.2 overs, all out) .....</b>                                                                | <b>220</b> |
| <b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-30, 2-63, 3-108, 4-133, 5-136, 6-179, 7-179, 8-194, 9-195                      |            |
| <b>Bowling:</b> Shaheen 11.2-0-49-2, Hasan 14-5-61-1, Ashraf 5-0-12-0, Nauman 17-4-38-2, Yasir 22-6-54-3 |            |
| <b>Pakistan first innings:</b>                                                                           |            |
| I Butt c Bavuma b Rabada .....                                                                           | 9          |
| A Ali b Rabada .....                                                                                     | 4          |
| A Ali (not out) .....                                                                                    | 5          |
| B Azam lbw Maharaj .....                                                                                 | 7          |
| S Shah Afridi b Nortje .....                                                                             | 0          |
| F Alam (not out) .....                                                                                   | 5          |
| <b>Extras:</b> (NB-3) .....                                                                              | <b>3</b>   |
| <b>Total: (for 4 wks, 18 overs) .....</b>                                                                | <b>33</b>  |
| <b>Fall of wicket:</b> 1-5, 2-15, 3-26, 4-27                                                             |            |
| <b>Bowling:</b> Rabada 6-3-8-2, Nortje 7-2-20-1, Ngidi 3-0-5-0, Maharaj 2-2-0-1                          |            |

after our batting, but then we fought back by taking wickets", he said. "Knowing that this pitch will get tougher, and knowing that we have good spinners, I am confident that we can get further ahead"

Elgar struck his 16th Test half-century — laced with nine boundaries — before he edged Nauman into the hands of Azam at slip. Elgar and Faf du Plessis (23) had steadied the innings during their 45-run stand for the third wicket after Aiden Markram (13) and Rassie van der Dussen (17) were dismissed in the first session. Both sides entered the Test with two spinners and three pace bowlers.

The two-match series marks the first tour by South Africa to Pakistan in 14 years, a positive step for the revival of international cricket in the host country. — AFP



## Tuchel set to accept massive Chelsea challenge

**LONDON:** Thomas Tuchel is set to be named Chelsea manager on Tuesday several years after he first spoke with the Premier League giants about the job.

The 47-year-old German replaces the sacked Frank Lampard and will be the 15th change of manager since Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich bought the club in 2003.

Tuchel follows some noteworthy predecessors in Jose Mourinho and Carlo Ancelotti, who have also fallen foul of Abramovich in the past — the Italian was fired a season after delivering the domestic double.

Lampard, Chelsea's record goalscorer, discovered that sentiment is not part of Abramovich's DNA as he dispensed with the Englishman on Monday after just 18 months in charge.

Whilst Lampard expressed his disappointment, Tuchel's task will be to get the best out of the £200 million (\$300 million) of talent that was brought in in the close season, including young German attackers Timo Werner and Kai Havertz.

Tuchel is well-versed in the school of hard knocks of being a manager having been sent

packing at the end of December despite guiding Paris Saint-Germain to the Champions League final just four months earlier.

His falling out with PSG Sporting Director Leonardo played a large part in that and his habit of fractious relations with his employers does not bode well for his prospects at a club with such a famously impatient owner.

He will need to maintain good relations with the all-powerful Director Marina Granovskaia if he too is not to suffer the same fate as his predecessors. "Tuchel will be exposed to exactly the same rules as Frank", said Lampard's former England team-mate Gary Neville.

"We'll be talking about him being let go in the next 18 months to two years, I'm pretty sure of that."

Tuchel's ambition has always been to manage a Premier League club, like fellow his German and also one of his predecessors as Borussia Dortmund coach, Liverpool's Jurgen Klopp. He did hold talks with Chelsea over replacing Antonio Conte after he left Dortmund in 2017 but while he impressed Granovskaia he ended up at PSG. — AFP

# MCCC end OC Under-19 campaign undefeated

**MUSCAT:** Muscat Cricket Coaching Centre (MCCC) ended their Junior League Under-19 League campaign undefeated after ace all-rounders Sameer Mohammed and Adeel Abbas helped their team to a 7-wicket win against Boshier Sports Centre (BSC) A at OC Turf 2 in Al Amerat on Saturday.

This was MCCC's fifth consecutive win in the tournament with a maximum 10 points, followed by ISM who have six points from four games and BSC A with four points from three games.

BSC failed to post a fighting total on the board, folding up for a disappointing 154 in 46.3 overs due largely to brilliant bowling by Prathiesh HR and Sameer Mohammed, who picked up four wickets each. Arjun Rajesh top-scored for BSC with a solid 41, while Sanin Fahad chipped in with 28.



Adeel Abbas, Aaryan Nishit Punja, Prathiesh Hema Ramesh and Sameer Mohammed of MCCC.

Knowing the game's importance, MCCC made a cautious start, reaching 77 for 1 in 24 overs before crossing the line in the 38th over at 156 for 3 thanks to vitals knocks from Adeel (42),

Aaryan Nishit Punja (40 not out) and Sameer (36 not out). **199-RUN WIN FOR ISWK** Atharva Shrikant's superb 95 and Abbas Ajay's magnificent all-round show powered Indian

School Wadi Kabir (ISWK) to a huge 199-run win over Sri Lankan School Muscat (SLSM) at Muscat Municipality ground 1 on Saturday.

ISWK batted with authority,

scoring 307 for 8 in 30 overs thanks to splendid knocks by Atharva, Abbas (74) and Vardhan Sameer (57). Puladith Omidu claimed 4 for 64.

SLSM failed to fight, managing

score only 108 for 9. Devin Wijayananda top-scored with 41. Abbas Ajay excelled with the ball too, taking 3 for 21 while Krishhang Srivastava bagged two wickets.

### BRIEF SCORES

**JUNIOR LEAGUE U-19**  
Boshier Sports Centre A 154 all out in 46.3 overs (Arjun Rajesh 41 – 4x4, Prathiesh Hr 4-23, Sameer Mohammed 4-25, Adeel Abbas 2-36) lost to MCCC 156 for 3 in 37.5 overs (Adeel Abbas 42 – 5x4, Aaryan Nishit Punja 40 – 4x4, Sameer Mohammed 36 – 4x4, 1x6) by 7 wickets.

**JUNIOR LEAGUE U-16**  
ISWK 307 for 8 in 30 overs (Atharva Shrikant 95 – 12x4, Abbas Ajay 74 – 11x4, Vardhan Sameer 57 – 6x4, Puladith Omidu 4-64, Devin Wijayananda 2-51) beat SLSM 108 for 9 in 30 overs (Devin Wijayananda 41 – 9x4,

Abbas Ajay 3-21, Krishhang Srivastava 2-8) by 199 runs.

**JUNIOR LEAGUE U-13**  
ISWK-A 177 for 6 in 20 overs (Nilaksh Vats 84 – 12x4, Patel Dhyan 2-28, Khasbage Amish 2-23) beat ISM 137 for 9 in 20 overs (Pachisia Ojjus 72 – 9x4, Kavish Rajeshkumar 2-17) by 40 runs.

**JUNIOR LEAGUE U-13**  
MCCC RED 27 all out in 14.3 overs (Shravan Sharat 10 – 2x4, Abhinav Singh 3-1) lost to Boshier Sports Centre A 28 for no loss in 5 overs (Ayman Shaikh 18 – 2x4) by 10 wickets.

# KOHLI OR RAHANE

HARIDEV PUSHPARAJ

The world's most high profile cricketing responsibility, Indian captaincy, is generating intense debate these days after India conjured up a historic Test series victory against Australia on their own turf.

The fact that the epic come-from-behind effort included a win for the ages at the fabled Gabba in Brisbane, an Australian fortress that was not breached since 1988, speaks volumes about the resilience and fortitude of this Indian team. The Indian team's Australian summer started in late November 2020, a year which has been defined by the ravage of misery and suffering unleashed by the Covid-19 pandemic, and culminated with Rishabh Pant's pyrotechnics in the last hour of the last day of the last Test on January 19th. When Ajinkya Rahane took over the leadership from regular captain and batting powerhouse Virat Kohli, who had to fly back home on paternity leave, he had inherited a team that was akin to a rubble all around him.

India had collapsed to a humiliating 36/9 in the second innings of the first Test in Adelaide after one hour of mayhem on the third day.

The team was without the services of one of its top-notch pacers Ishant Sharma and another, Mohammad Shami, was ruled out of the series with a fracture to his elbow. With arguably the world's best batsman also leaving the fold, Rahane was left with an unenviable task to resurrect the fortunes of a team that desperately needed some inspiration.

### INSPIRATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Inspiration is a very significant word. One lends inspiration to the team by setting an example and leading from the front. Come the Boxing Day Test at the intimidating cauldron of the Melbourne Cricket Ground and Rahane was up to the challenge.

The Mumbai batsman slammed a splendid hundred that came about after dealing with some furious pace and bounce that was unleashed by the fast bowling trio of Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc and the guile and turn of Nathan Lyon.

The 112 Rahane scored set the tone for the MCG Test and his astute captaincy skills including effective bowling changes and field placements put India on course for a stirring victory.

The hallmark of Rahane's captaincy stint has been the calmness he brings to the job that rubs off on his team-mates as well. The Mumbai player has shown great temperament under intense pressure from the Australian bowlers as he marshalled his resources astutely throughout the series.

Rahane's captaincy record has been highly impressive in the few opportunities that he has got. He has captained India in five Tests since 2017 with four victories and a draw.

Three out of those four victories have come against top class Australian teams and another against Afghanistan in Bangalore. The first of those victories was in Dharamsala in 2017 after injury to Kohli saw him leading in the final Test of the series.

Melbourne and Brisbane were the second and third victories for Rahane and remember he was leading a beleaguered Indian team at the Gabba.

Two debutants in T Natarajan and Washington Sundar and the pace attack completed by Mohammed Siraj and Shardul Thakur showed the level of inexperience India were going in with. But Rahane had no choice but to repose faith in his young lads to deliver. And they delivered and how!

### KOHLI'S TEAM

This Indian team that is fearless to the tee is an apt reflection of Kohli the batsman and Kohli the captain. With a captaincy win percentage of close to 60 per cent that includes 33 wins and 13 draws out of a total of 56 matches, the India No 3 has been very successful all through.

The aggressive, in-your-face style of playing and leading that Kohli has embodied over the years has its fair share of admirers and detractors. India's bowling coach Bharat Arun recently congratulated Rahane for his magnificent job during the Australia series but stood by Kohli's captaincy record.

"First thing, I would like to congratulate Ajinkya Rahane for the magnificent job he did in Australia. But to the people who are writing against Virat Kohli, I would just like to put up one stat for them. Out of the 20 series that he has captained, he has won 14 series for India. Which means the sage of win record is over 70 per cent," Arun told an Indian television network.

However, former Indian skipper Bishan Singh Bedi has a different take on the debate. "I am floored with the way Rahane conjured magic from broken bodies around him. The way he handled his meagre resources reminds me of Tiger Pataudi, who throughout his captaincy tenure was woefully short of a well-rounded unit but his leadership alone gave Indian cricket fresh legs," he added.

### CAPTAINCY RECORD (TESTS)

#### VIRAT KOHLI

|                  |
|------------------|
| Matches: 56      |
| Won: 33          |
| Drawn: 13        |
| Lost: 10         |
| Winning %: 58.92 |
| Losing%: 23.21   |

### CAPTAINCY RECORD (TESTS)

#### AJINKYA RAHANE

|               |
|---------------|
| Matches: 5    |
| Won: 4        |
| Drawn: 1      |
| Lost: 0       |
| Winning %: 80 |
| Losing%: 0    |

First thing, I would like to congratulate Ajinkya Rahane for the magnificent job he did in Australia.

But to the people who are writing against Virat Kohli, I would just like to put up one stat for them. Out of the 20 series that he has captained, he has won 14 series for India. Which means the percentage of win record is over 70 per cent

Bharat Arun,  
India bowling coach

I've observed Rahane pretty closely on this tour. The hallmark of any captain is his ability to handle the bowling resources. This is where yours truly has become an absolute 'mureed' (fan) of Rahane. Three Tests is good enough time to assess a captain's bowling changes and fielding placements. I tried hard but I couldn't find a single Rahane move which could be questioned by armchair critics like me

Bishan Singh Bedi,  
Former Indian captain

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# Madayn targets RO 15bn investment volume by 2040

**GRAND STRATEGY: New Madayn Vision 2040 envisions 10,000 localised factories, 270,000 job opportunities**

**BUSINESS REPORTER**  
MUSCAT, JAN 26

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) celebrated on Tuesday the launch of Madayn Vision 2040 at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Madayn Vision 2040 aims at creating world-class business cities while maintaining the Omani identity to contribute to economic growth.

The vision revolves around promoting comprehensive and sustainable economic and social development through strengthening Public-Private Partnership, developing and operating business cities with integrated services, and keeping pace with the variables and adopting best solutions and technologies to meet business requirements while conforming to the environmental standards.

Speaking at the ceremony, Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, and Chairman of Madayn's Board of Directors, stated that

Madayn Vision 2040 comes in implementation of the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the government bodies to develop long-term strategies and plans in pursuance of Oman Vision 2040.

Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO of Madayn, pointed out that Madayn Vision 2040 is derived from the national priorities and goals of Oman Vision 2040 for the coming period.

"Madayn Vision 2040 outlines 26 institutional goals and policies, through which we intend to implement 42 programmes and 384 scheduled projects. Through this vision, we aim at achieving RO 15 billion of investment volume, and localising projects that shall touch 10,000 projects in various fields towards the end of the plan. Of these projects, we aim at localising 6,500 industrial projects (factories) that shall provide around 270,000 job opportunities," Al Hasani elaborated.

He added that the key projects of Madayn Vision 2040 include completing the development of the industrial cities in Sur, Al Buraimi, Suhar, Raysut, Nizwa, Al Mazunah Free Zone and Knowledge Oasis Muscat.

"New industrial cities are also coming up in Ibri, Thamrait, Shinas, Al Mudhaibi and Al Rawdah, in addition to specialised industrial complexes such as the plastic industries complex in Suhar Industrial City, precision manufacturing and nanotechnology in Sur Industrial



**The key projects of Madayn Vision 2040 include completing the development of the industrial cities in Sur, Al Buraimi, Suhar, Raysut, Nizwa, Al Mazunah Free Zone and Knowledge Oasis Muscat**

**HILAL BIN HAMAD AL HASANI**  
*Madayn CEO*



City, and pharmaceutical industries complex and food industries complex in all the industrial cities, as well as metal works industries in several industrial cities," Al Hasani informed.

The vision also incorporates the establishment of specialised logistics complexes, light

industries complexes, workforce and residential townships, facility complexes, and alternative energy projects in the industrial cities.

During the event, Madayn announced its upcoming major projects, which include the Motcar Project. Motcar is an integrated city specialised in car trading, car spare parts, accessories and

services to be established in Suhar Industrial City.

Motcar aims at presenting a regional centre for the import and re-export of cars, machinery and related services to and from various countries with a focus on the Middle East and North Africa region.

Madayn also announced

Nafith Oman Project, which is an integrated system that aims at managing and facilitating the entry and exit of vehicles to/from the current and future industrial cities of Madayn.

This project represents a key pillar of the infrastructure development strategy of the industrial cities to keep pace with the technology trends and provide value-adding services. Throughout its 2011-2020 plan, Madayn was able to attract and localise investments valued at more than RO 3.3 billion, that is to say it has achieved more than 72 per cent of the target value.

This brings the accumulated investment volume in Madayn's industrial cities to more than RO 6.8 billion.

In terms of the workforce, Madayn has achieved more than 70 per cent of the target as it provided more than 40,000 job opportunities during the ten-year plan. "The total number of the workforce was 22,000 by the end of 2010 compared to more than 62,000 towards the end of 2020," Masan informed. By the end of 2020, the Omanisation rate has touched nearly 35 per cent with more than 21,000 Omani working in Madayn's various industrial cities today.

With regard to the number of projects, Madayn came close to achieving 85 per cent of the target as it was able to localise more than 1,650 projects in various sectors in its ten-year plan. Today, the number of these projects is approaching 2,400.

## Oman implements TIR system for road transport

**Major benefits: Sinyar to be guaranteeing association for registering transport companies under TIR**

**BUSINESS REPORTER**  
MUSCAT, JAN 26

The Sultanate, represented by Asyad Group, has initiated the implementation of the International Road Transport System (TIR) by registering companies through Sinyar, the guaranteeing association overseeing the registration of transport companies wishing to benefit from the TIR system.

Sinyar, a member of Asyad Group, will oversee the issuance and monitoring of TIR cards, in collaboration and coordination with Royal Oman Police – Directorate of Customs, selecting reliable TIR card holders and ensuring their continued compliance with the system.

Badr al Nadabi (pictured), Acting CEO of Sinyar, stated that the company will act as guaranteeing association for



both local and international companies, train TIR card holders, manage the implementation of precautionary measures and monitor the movement of cards. Companies operating in Oman may apply for TIR cards by visiting Sinyar's website: www.sinyar.om and selecting the TIR tab from the available options.

TIR has been facilitating and securing trade and international road transport for over 60 years and is set to align Oman's transport and transit procedures with the measures applied in more than 100 countries around the world. Moreover, it is considered an enabler for facilitating private sector trade, via direct transit to the markets of the Gulf, India and Africa and affirms the Sultanate's commitment to boosting trade across its borders.

Al Nadabi further added that the implementation of the TIR system is expected to contribute to enhancing and facilitating the movement of trade and the transit of goods at border crossings, while also simplifying customs procedures in a manner that promotes imports and exports.

**BUSINESS REPORTER**  
MUSCAT, JAN 26

The number of Omani listed banks and non-banking financing companies with exposure to the embattled Darvesh Group, a multinational business house with considerable interests in the Sultanate, has now risen to around 10.

On Tuesday, five more publicly listed banks and financial institutions disclosed that they are owed tens of millions of Omani riyals from the crisis-ridden conglomerate. Together with disclosures made by seven others lenders on Monday, the combined exposures now total RO 70.75 million to date.

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) and its subsidiary Al Izz Islamic Bank (AIB) lead the list with outstandings totalling RO 23.403 million. Rashad al Musafir, CEO, said in a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA) that Darvesh Group subsidiaries Abou Nabil LLC, Gulf Star LLC, Mega Muscat International LLC,



and Technovaa LLC have availed themselves of credit facilities from OAB.

"OAB and AIB further advise that provisions have been allocated to such exposure as per the applicable rules and regulations in the Sultanate," the CEO stated.

Muscat Finance, a listing finance and leasing company, said it has exposure to the tune of RO 3.9 million to Darvesh Group and its subsidiaries Abou Nabil and Gulf Star. "Both accounts are classified as non-performing loans as Stage 3 under IFSR 9 and

the same is appropriately provided and reported accordingly in our financials," said Pratik Punjabi, Deputy General Manager and CFO, in a similar filing.

Al Omaniya Financial Services announced that its exposure to Darvesh Group affiliates Abou Nabil, Gulf Star and Mega Muscat International totalled RO 2.74 million.

Aftab Patel, CEO, said the loans are "fully secured" while adequate provisions coverage has been made per regulatory and accounting standard requirements.

Tageer Finance Co revealed exposure of RO 1.665 million to Abou Nabil. Bank Nizwa and United Finance have said they have no exposure to the Group or its subsidiaries.

Other lenders that have exposure to Darvesh Group and its affiliates are: Sohar International Bank (RO 13.921 million), National Bank of Oman (approx. RO 6.6 million), National Finance (RO 6.342 million), Ahli Bank (RO 6.299 million), Bank Muscat (RO 3.1 million) and HSBC Bank Oman (RO 2.77 million).

Media reports emanating from the UAE, where Darvesh Group has a significant presence, indicated that the conglomerate has run up sizable debt in a number of countries where it operates.

Following the reports, the Capital Market Authority directed local lenders listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange to share details of their respective exposure to the group. Further disclosures are expected this week.

# Fund managers on ups and downs in UK deal with EU

With the trade deal with the European Union having come into effect on 1 January, investors are wondering whether it may be the turning point for UK equities, despite the UK currently being in its third lockdown. Members of the Association of Investment Companies have said what their UK-focused fund managers make of the post-Brexit trade arrangements, the impact of three lockdowns and, finally, the longer-term outlook for the UK investment community.

They focused on sectors and companies that may become the winners and losers from the deal. While portfolio companies have had a number of years to prepare for the various potential outcomes of Brexit negotiations,

the trade deal, which allows a continuation of tariff and quota-free trade in goods between the UK and EU, is welcomed by Guy Anderson, portfolio manager of The Mercantile Investment Trust.

“In particular, companies that source goods or material inputs from the EU should benefit from low-friction trade and a stronger sterling,” Anderson said. For example, convenience food producer Greencore estimates that up to one-third of its raw materials are sourced from the EU. “While the company had done extensive contingency planning, the trade deal will have been well-received,” he added.

For lead manager of SVM UK Emerging Fund, Margaret Lawson, however, it is too soon to tell if the trade deal will materially help to trade in her portfolio companies. “But it offers more certainty about the UK economy



ANDY JALIL  
andyjalil@aol.com

MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF INVESTMENT COMPANIES HAVE SAID WHAT THEIR UK-FOCUSED FUND MANAGERS MAKE OF THE POST-BREXIT TRADE ARRANGEMENTS, THE IMPACT OF THREE LOCKDOWNS AND, FINALLY, THE LONGER-TERM OUTLOOK FOR THE UK INVESTMENT COMMUNITY

and outlook.

The last four years have seen international investors reduce UK exposure and many UK wealth managers also rebalance to be more global resulting in UK equities lagging other main markets,” Lawson explained.

“There is now an opportunity to catch up,” she added. Many of Lawson’s funds targeted companies are focused on enterprise services using e-commerce, while others include companies helped by sustainability trends.

“I expect investment in supporting business resilience and strengthening supply chains to continue. UK economic recovery is likely to be led by government encouragement for sustainability and environmental improvement,” she added.

London’s financial services sector is one area where some details still need to be finalised, but for Abby Glennie, investment director of Standard Life UK Smaller Companies Trust, this is not necessarily a negative thing.

“If anything, this might bring opportunities for fund administrators such as JTC and Sanne as client funds may need to be realigned with the new regulatory environment,” Glennie said. Some companies may even benefit from the increased level of red tape and new regulations required by importers and exporters, as Glennie singled out digital specialist Kainos.

“It designs the digital processes required to help businesses cope with these new regulations.”

Anderson, however, does see negatives, particularly in the long term. Even though the trade deal ensures tariff-free trade in goods for the foreseeable future, an end to freedom of movement could

impact labour availability in some sectors that employed large numbers of EU citizens, he said.

He further added, that this could include retail and food production. Food packaging companies too rely on workers from the EU at their facilities.

**Fund manager of the Henderson High Income Trust, David Smith** said: “The majority of the companies in the portfolio have been preparing for some form of Brexit for a number of years so the impact of the trade deal is likely to be manageable.

“With greater restrictions on the movement of labour it is likely that wage costs will increase. However, companies have been investing more in automation at their plants to help drive better efficiencies and to help offset any wage pressures,” Smith added.

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

## 1.577m vehicles registered during 2020

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, JAN 26

The total number of vehicles registered in the Sultanate totalled 1.557 million in 2020, representing a 0.6 per cent over the corresponding figure for 2019, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

White was the most preferred colour for vehicles, with as many as 671,606 vehicles registered with this colour. Silver was next with 199,519 vehicles, followed by grey (121,621 vehicles).

As for engine capacity, the NCSI report indicated that the majority of vehicles (832,578) had engine capacities between 1500 and 3000 cc, while 353,489 vehicles had engine capacities between 3001 and 4500 cc. The number of vehicles with engine capacity above 4500 cc stood at 200,993.

There were 118,907 vehicles with engine capacity less than 1500 cc, while about 51,486 vehicles functioned without engines as they were designed and manufactured to be towed by another vehicle. In terms of weight, the report stated that the majority of vehicles weighed less than 3 tonnes, with their number reaching 1.1 million.



72,003 vehicles were more than 10 tonnes in weight. About 45,717 vehicles weighed from 3 to 7 tonnes and 38,357 vehicles from 7 to 10 tonnes.

The number of vehicles with temporary registration reached 15,351, an increase of 27 per cent over 2019.

Private vehicles topped the list of vehicles registered at 1,221,302, followed by 239,639 commercial vehicles and 29,931 taxis. Meanwhile, there was a drop in the number of rental, government (does not include military vehicles) and motorbikes registered by 5.3 per cent, 2.3 per cent

### PRESS RELEASE

#### BANK MUSCAT OFFERS 4,350 PRIZES TO AL MAZYONA WINNERS

In line with its vision ‘To serve you better, everyday’ and commitment to partnership in promoting a strong savings culture in Oman, Bank Muscat has announced that 4,350 prizes worth RO 3.3 million has been reserved for winners from all the governorates of the country. The 2021 edition of Bank Muscat’s landmark Al Mazyona savings scheme was recently launched by the bank and will see the country’s biggest savings scheme provide a large number of prizes to its customers across the country with a total of RO 11 million.

Saleh Mohammed Ali al Maaini (pictured), Assistant General Manager - Capital Regions, Bank Muscat, said: “Al Mazyona gives the largest segment of its customers an opportunity to win prizes and achieve their dreams and aspirations with regular draws for all governorates. With the largest network in Oman with over 140 branches, the bank provides various services and facilities to customers in all parts of the country.”



#### MUZN NAMED AMONG THE BEST ISLAMIC BANKS IN OMAN 2020

In recognition of its pioneering role in the Sultanate’s rapidly growing Islamic finance industry, Muzn has been named among the Best Islamic Banks in Oman 2020 by Islamic Finance News.

Receiving the prestigious accolade for the fourth time, National Bank of Oman’s (NBO) Islamic banking window and the first-of-its-kind in the Sultanate continues to pursue innovation and the provision of modern Sharia-compatible services, products and solutions that meet the requirements and aspirations of its customers.

Marking the publication’s biggest and broadest poll yet, the awards name the best of the Islamic finance industry, as voted by its readers.

Salima al Marzouqi (pictured), Head of Muzn Islamic Banking, said, “We are delighted to have been recognised once again as one of Oman’s top Islamic banks. Despite a uniquely challenging year, we were able to rise to the occasion, offering our customers more choice and more value than ever.”



# Shift to ‘glocalisation’ vital for business success in 2021

**KEY FEATURES: New report from the Global Manufacturing and Industrialisation Summit and PwC identifies key global trends that enable organisations to succeed at glocalisation - being able to operate globally and locally in today’s global context**

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, JAN 26

The Global Manufacturing and Industrialisation Summit (GMIS), and leading professional services firm, PwC, today launched a new report outlining the 2021 key global trends that will enable manufacturers to succeed at glocalisation.

The report, titled “The journey from globalisation to glocalisation, how COVID-19 has accelerated the shift to more local and flexible operations” highlights that companies must regionalise their footprint, increase the use of robotics for manufacturing

and logistics, and change the cost model for production and sourcing.

The report states that amid these emerging themes, COVID-19 has ensured that the case for moving from global to ‘glocal’ operations has gained significant momentum.

The opportunities and related risks of glocalisation vary in importance between regions and sectors. With a focus on the Middle East, Germany, India, the United States, Greater China, and the United Kingdom, the report reflects various global perspectives where the pandemic has accelerated efforts by industrial companies to make inflexible global footprints more agile and responsive to demand.

Anil Khurana, Global Industrial Manufacturing & Automotive Leader & Principal at PwC in the United States, said: “In a post-pandemic world where reliable, real-time data is essential for both business and health and safety reasons, we anticipate an emerging trend for greater supply chain and operational collaboration between companies – whether through sharing automation technology to devise innovative, rapid solutions to



bottlenecks, or joint sourcing of protective equipment to shield employees from the virus.

“A global economic disruption is unfolding in front of our eyes. The COVID-19 crisis hit when global supply chains were already under pressure from new tariffs and restrictions resulting from trade disputes. We now realise

**The report states that amid these emerging themes, COVID-19 has ensured that the case for moving from global to ‘glocal’ operations has gained significant momentum.**

while enhancing the customer experience, in the midst of a number of geopolitical concerns?

This “glocalisation” balancing act may mean different things for different countries, but at its core, it relies upon agile and multi-location global operations, and use of technology and digitalisation to ensure data-driven insights and decisions, greater transparency and resiliency, and improved efficiencies even at less-than-global scale.”

The report highlights how digitalisation and automation enable companies to go more local by taking labour out of the supply chain and manufacturing equation. Furthermore, traditional supply chain approaches that focus narrowly on cost efficiency need to be broadened.

Factoring in flexibility, resiliency, and customer

experience can create differentiation in the marketplace and drive improved revenue growth. The report also focuses on how COVID-19 encourages supply chain and wider operational collaboration between companies, with automation helping to solve bottlenecks with innovative, rapid solutions.

Badr al Olama, Head of the Organising Committee for the Global Manufacturing and Industrialisation Summit, said: “Digitalisation is critical to rolling out and implementing successful glocalisation strategies. Companies that have used advanced supply chain technologies have achieved greater transparency, flexibility, and local asset utilisation, in addition to seeing operational savings.

However, if manufacturers fail to recognise the power of digitalisation, they will likely see their competitive edge erode. Across the Middle East, countries are prioritising the potential of the digital revolution, constantly seeking ways to support organisations - from the manufacturing sector and beyond – to develop their digital knowledge and capabilities.”

# Indonesia raises economic recovery budget to \$39 bn

**JAKARTA:** Indonesia has raised its budget for the National Economic Recovery programme to 553.09 trillion rupiah (\$39.4 billion), increasing fiscal support for a country struggling to contain its coronavirus outbreak, a minister said on Tuesday.

"In plenary cabinet meeting and in other meetings, we've decided the size to be 553.09 trillion rupiah. It means the government sees that economic recovery in 2021 needs a similar support than in 2020", Airlangga Hartarto, Indonesia's Chief Economic Minister, told a

business forum.

The previously approved budget for the programme in 2021 was 372.3 trillion rupiah, although authorities have said this may swell after President Joko Widodo announced he wanted to run the mass vaccination campaign for free.

In 2020, the government allocated 692.5 trillion rupiah for the programme, which included the upgrading of hospitals and provision of medical equipment and services to fight the pandemic, but spent only about 579.78 trillion rupiah.



Workers leave Bank Indonesia headquarters in Jakarta, Indonesia. — Reuters

Indonesia is set to officially surpass one million coronavirus cases on Tuesday.

The country's figures for Covid-19 infections and deaths are some of the highest in Asia.

In his presentation, Airlangga unveiled plans to quadruple health spending to 104.7 trillion rupiah.

The authorities have also increased the budget for social assistance from 110.2 trillion rupiah to 150.96 trillion rupiah.

At the same forum, Febrio Kacaribu, a finance ministry official, estimated the fiscal deficit for 2021 would be 5.7 per

cent of gross domestic product, unchanged from the ministry's previous outlook.

Last year's budget deficit was estimated at 6.1 per cent of GDP, the widest in decades as Jakarta ramped up spending to help Southeast Asia's largest economy weather the impact of the pandemic.

The economy suffered its first recession since 1998 last year. The government expects the economy to grow 5 per cent this year, far better than a forecast contraction of 1.7 per cent to 2.2 per cent in 2020. — Reuters

# Investor payouts and job cuts jar with US companies' social pledge

**WASHINGTON:** When Randall Stephenson joined 180 of his peers leading many of the richest US companies in signing the Business Roundtable pledge on the "purpose of a corporation" in August 2019, the then-chief of AT&T Inc promised to look out for the interests of all the wireless carrier's stakeholders, not just shareholders.

Two months later, the Dallas-based company outlined a plan for cost reductions that also prioritised dividends and stock buybacks for shareholders, succumbing to pressure from \$41 billion hedge fund Elliott Investment Management LP.

Activist investor Elliott had said its proposals would deliver "substantial benefits" for shareholders, consumers and employees, but not everybody came out ahead.

By the end of September 2020, AT&T had eliminated 23,000 positions, or about 9 per cent of its workforce, many of them during the pandemic.

Already one of the corporate world's top dividend payers with \$14.9 billion spent in 2019, AT&T had raised its common dividend by 2 per cent and bought back \$7.5 billion of its stock.

"We are the face of AT&T and we go out of our way to help customers communicate with their families", said Darren Miller, a 35-year-old technician whose job was cut last July.

"But we are a dime a dozen to them. If they can get someone cheaper to do the job, they will do it." Miller, who worked in Reseda,



A woman looks at her mobile next to AT&T logo during the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona. — Reuters

California, said he accepted a buyout offer after managers told him he might be laid off later on less generous terms, something he said his local union representatives told him happened to dozens of other employees in the state.

AT&T spokesman Jim Kimberly said most of the workforce reductions "were from voluntary departure offers and attrition" and declined to comment on individual cases.

He added the company had for years practiced a "meaningful commitment to all stakeholders" through programmes that include worker retraining and environmental and social justice

efforts.

AT&T also ended share buybacks once the pandemic hit, and has not increased its dividend since, Kimberly said.

Some advocates of a socially-minded stakeholder capitalism say AT&T's case is representative of the hurdles they face in challenging the leverage investors have over US companies.

The voluntary governance pledge signed by the CEOs didn't spell out specific actions, but had the stated aim of moving away from "shareholder primacy".

Yet while signatories subsequently reduced payouts to shareholders as companies put

away cash to shield themselves from the financial fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic, they still give a greater share to investors than those companies that did not sign the pledge, according to a Reuters analysis of data compiled by financial information provider Refinitiv.

The analysis found that the 171 publicly traded companies that signed the pledge returned a median 60 per cent of net income to shareholders during the first three quarters of 2020 through dividends and buybacks, versus a 50 per cent return among the 355 S&P 500 firms that did not sign the statement. — Reuters



A man walks past a job centre following the outbreak of Covid-19, in Manchester, Britain. — Reuters

## UK unemployment hits 5 per cent on virus fallout

**LONDON:** Britain's unemployment rate hit 5.0 per cent at the end of last year as coronavirus lockdowns destroyed jobs, official data showed on Tuesday.

The rate for the three months to the end of November compares with 4.9 per cent in the quarter to October, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement.

At 5.0 per cent, the figure is 1.2 percentage points higher than a year earlier, the ONS added. "This crisis has gone on far longer than any of us hoped — and every job lost as a result is a tragedy", Finance Minister Rishi Sunak said.

Analysts expect the unemployment rate to surge further when the UK government's furlough

scheme paying the bulk of wages for millions of private-sector workers stops at the end of April.

Between February last year, ahead of Britain's first lockdown, and December, the number of payroll employees dived by 828,000.

The ONS data comes one day after administrators for collapsed UK department store chain Debenhams said it planned to shut all its outlets, costing around 12,000 jobs.

While Debenhams had struggled with fierce online competition long before the coronavirus pandemic, Britain's bricks-and-mortar retailers are in turmoil after a series of lockdowns. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has insisted that the current lockdown may not be lifted until around Easter. — AFP

### CAIRO

#### Egypt economy to grow 2.8 per cent

The Egyptian economy will grow 2.8 per cent in the fiscal year that ends in June, a poll of 20 economists showed on Tuesday, slower than the 3.3 per cent forecast three months earlier.

October's consensus forecast was already significantly lower than the almost 6 per cent growth projected before the coronavirus pandemic broke out. The government said in November it expected growth of 3.3 per cent this fiscal year.

The International Monetary



Fund this month predicted growth of 2.8 per cent.

"Weak tourism receipts expected over FY2020/21 are the main drag on the economy in our view", said HC analyst Monette Doss. — Reuters

### SINGAPORE

#### Gold rises on US stimulus hopes

Gold inched higher on Tuesday, as expectations that a large US stimulus package would be passed eventually boosted the metal's appeal as a hedge against inflation, although a stronger dollar capped gains.

Spot gold rose 0.1 per cent to \$1,856.33 per ounce by 0549 GMT. US gold futures gained 0.1 per cent to \$1,856.80.

"If we get the stimulus, gold can break through \$1,900", said Stephen Innes, Chief Global Market Strategist at financial

services firm Axi. "The quicker the package gets delivered, the more favourable it's for gold. Whether it's a smoother process or not, the market doesn't care."

Further supporting gold, US 10-year Treasury yields hovered near a three-week low touched in the previous session, but the dollar rose 0.1 per cent, making gold expensive for other currency holders. The US Federal Reserve's two-day policy meeting is set to begin later. — Reuters

### TOKYO

#### Oil prices down amid doubts over US stimulus

Oil prices eased on Tuesday, giving up some of the previous session's gains, as hopes for rapid approval of new US economic stimulus faded while new coronavirus infections around the world mount up.

Brent crude was down 15 cents at \$55.73 by 0135 GMT, having risen nearly 1 per cent on Monday. US crude was also lower, dropping 5 cents to \$52.72, after rising 1 per cent in the previous session.

Have recently hit 11-month



highs, oil is caught between lingering doubts over any recovery in demand as the pandemic continues to rage, offset by optimism for more stimulus from the Biden administration. — Reuters

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# features



## Omani smart irrigation device wins global award

About 90pc of the land area of the Arab world is dry which is why water is a vital resource especially in farming and producing locally grown food. Outra, a student-led company created a device that counts the actual water need of plants which helps save water often lost in the traditional method of irrigation... **P18**

### INSIDE STORIES

#### HUMAN INTEREST



##### ASPIRATIONS OF A STUDENT

Covid-19 struck the world without prior notice and forced it to adapt to a fully new manner of life in all its aspects. From the global recession to the exposure of broken health systems, the pandemic revealed the importance of needing to reimagine the education systems to meet the noble purposes of the process of learning... **Story on Page P20**

#### LOCAL SCENE



##### GOING LOCAL TO ESTABLISH A FOODIE HAVEN

It has established itself as the preferred events and business professional meeting place in Muscat in the last five years but while Hormuz Grand, A Radisson Collection Hotel, is typically clustered as a business hotel, there's actually more than meets the eye... **Story on Page 19**

#### READ



##### STAR WARS: LIGHT OF THE JEDI

BY CHARLES SOULE

In this instalment of the High Republic series, a disaster in hyperspace may cause far greater damage.

#### ENTERTAINMENT



##### 'LUPIN' MARKS RISE OF INTERNATIONAL TV CONTENT

The success of the French crime series "Lupin" on Netflix, riding on the heels of hit Spanish show "Money Heist", may hint at a waning of US dominance on the small screen as ambitious European, Latin American and South Korean players kick down the doors on streaming platforms... **Story on Page 19**

#### DIGITAL TRENDS



##### 'BUM BUM TAM TAM' SONG REWORKED TO PROMOTE VACCINATION

A remix of the Brazilian hit funk song "Bum Bum Tam Tam" that shifts the message to encouraging the public to get vaccinated was released on Saturday.



# Smart Omani irrigation device wins global award

BY RUQAYA AL KINDI

About 90% of the land area of the Arab world are located in dry areas, which means it has only about 0.7% of the total water resources in the world. This is according to The Agricultural Census Book issued by the Ministry of Agriculture in 2014. Governments and youth initiatives, around the world, seek to find solutions to solve the problem of water scarcity and improve the quality of crops. This is exactly what “Qutra” (or drop in English) – a student company was founded to achieve.

The company was established by student efforts from the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (Higher College of Technology) in 2018 to participate in the Injaz Oman competition that is held for college students.

The area of arable land, according to the Agricultural Census Book, is estimated at 200 million hectares, which is equivalent to around 14.1% of the total area of the Arab world. For this reason, Ahmed al Jabri, CEO of the company, explained: “We created a device that irrigates the plants counting their actual need of water, as studies revealed that almost 85% of the water used in the traditional method of irrigation is wasted.”

“The device provides the ability to control and follow the whole irrigation process with a single click in the “Qutra” application on farmer’s mobile phone”, he explains.

This company could help to solve many problems including water scarcity and ensures the reduction of water consumption, especially at the countries with hot and dry climates.

There are several modern irrigation devices present in the Arab world and most of them depend on the watering timer devices, but the “Qutra”

product has a high competitive advantage, confirmed by Al Jabri, as the product is sustainable and works under direct natural conditions and uses solar energy as well.

“It also works automatically without human intervention, and improves the quality of crops as it keeps pace with technological development and the fourth industrial revolution,” he added.

Other competitive advantages that make “Qutra” product distinctive from other competitors in the market, is the little amount of water consumed in the irrigation of plants.

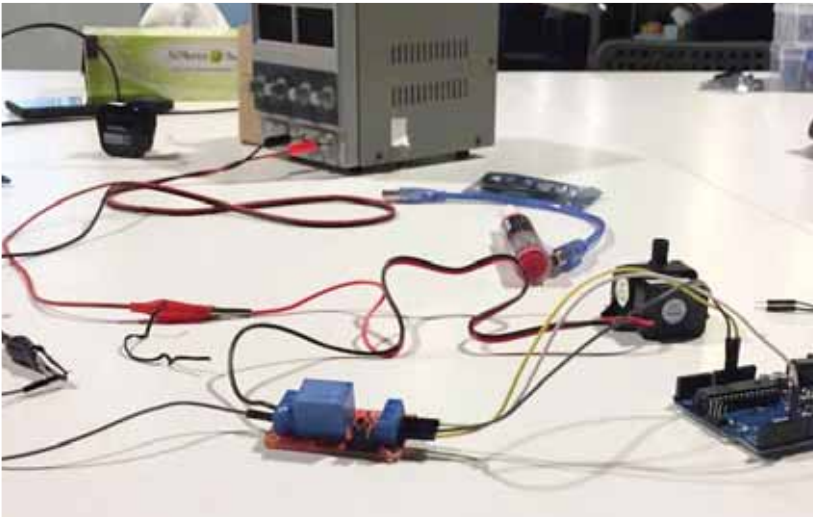
“Instead of depending on the watering timer, in this device, we used a humidity sensor as an alternative, to determine the irrigation time according to the plant’s needs by measuring the accurate soil moisture. this is suitable for all type of trees and all types of soil,” he assured.

He mentioned that the application is providing the consumer with accurate information about the amount of water consumed in irrigation of plants.

The product can measure the salinity of the soil. In case the salinity of the soil is not suitable, the device automatically will reduce the salinity by adding some chemical treatment to the soil. The product also has a sensor which tracks and kills the harmful insects,” he shared.

This product can be a reliable option for farmers, “as the effectiveness of the device has been approved by the Ministry of Agriculture. it has been tested for 8 months and the necessary improvements have been amended”, he explained. the Engineering Village Company has also carried out some tests on the device.

“Qutra” product, was award-



ed in 2020 among the top 10 innovations around the world in the global competition Shell LiveWIRE Top Ten Innovators award.

“It is expected that it will be available in the market in its final form in mid-August of 2021, and this will be announced in our account on Instagram (qutra.om) or our twitter account (@qutra5). The cost of purchasing the device and downloading the application is approximately 144

OMR,” he noted.

In the future, “We are planning to establish a reputable company, expanding the Qutra project and listing it as one of the distinct options in the local, regional and global market due to the different specifications and capabilities of this project. We also aim at working on modern and technical products that serve the environment field, and then expand in various fields,” he said.

## WILDLIFE

# Bolivian couple rescue bees in danger from coca farming, fires



**HONEY BEES** in Bolivia’s mountains threatened by deforestation are moving to a sanctuary created by a couple to rescue the insects from a staggering decline in their colonies as coca farming has encroached on their habitat.

For 10 years, zootechnical engineering vet Eric Paredes and his wife Cinthya Callisaya Yujra have scoured the humid, subtropical Yungas region for beehives to take to their “Las Orquídeas” (The Orchids) sanctuary. There, the insects thrive in wooden hives safely away from farmers who find them a nuisance.

Honey bees help to pollinate plants that produce about 70% of the food consumed by humans around



the world, Paredes said.

But many local farmers have cleared forests and other food crops in order to grow lucrative coca. Pesticides used for the coca are also harmful to the bees.

Coca is a traditional plant used for chewing, tea and medicine, but is also the key ingredient for cocaine. Although some are grown legally for the local population, most of the coca in the rainy Yungas region in western Bolivia is converted illegally to cocaine, according to United Nations estimates. Bolivia is the third-biggest cocaine producer after Colombia and Peru.

Some 60% of the nearly 20,000 hectares of Yungas forest has become vulnerable and the bee population has fallen by half, Paredes said. “We feel obliged to continue working in favour of the bees to rescue this species.”

Paredes and Callisaya Yujra are educating local farmers about bees and have helped to save 10 native species through their sanctuary.

“The objective is to convert it into a bee research institution to transmit this knowledge to different regions so that this species is valued more,” said Paredes. — Reuters



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## ENTERTAINMENT

## 'Lupin' marks rise of international TV content



**THE SUCCESS** of the French crime series "Lupin" on Netflix, riding on the heels of hit Spanish show "Money Heist," may hint at a waning of US dominance on the small screen as ambitious European, Latin American and South Korean players kick down the doors on streaming platforms. "Ten years ago, 90 per cent of creativity was in the United States," said Pascal Breton, founder and head of the Federation Entertainment production company. "There were some good little local creatives, but it didn't travel."

But the increase in Internet speed, the rise of on-demand television and the example given by American pay channels, led by HBO, have pushed their counterparts abroad to bet on TV shows, having mainly relied on cinema and sport in the past.

"Spiral," (originally "Engrenages"), "Carlos," or "Braquo," all produced for Canal+, highlighted a growing global appetite for non-anglophone TV productions and series.

They were followed by shows from public channels such as the 2010-13 Danish political phenomenon "Borgen" and, from 2010, the British "Sherlock" which, despite being made in English had a particularly non-American flavour.

Luca Barra, of the University of Bologna and co-author of a study on European television

shows, said improved standards had been driven by pay-TV stations trying to differentiate themselves from public broadcasters by coming up with the kind of premium content you used to only see on the big screen.

Channels, he said, noticed that their premium output "was not just a distinctive feature of every national market, but something that had an appeal also in other markets."

This "change in mentality" has also favoured the development of transnational production companies such as Federation Entertainment — particularly in Europe — to cope with significantly increasing budgets, he said.

At the same time, the explosion in the number of channels and platforms has generated an appetite for content never seen before, while redefining the notion of success.

"Something that 10 years ago was considered a failure now can easily be a success," said Barra.

The emergence of international platforms, mainly Netflix but also more recently Amazon and Disney+, has played a leading role in driving this appetite for content.

Bolstering its international appeal, Netflix has also set up subtitling for all its productions and dubbing for many of them, allowing a non-English series like "Lupin" to top global viewing rankings. — **Reuters**



## Beyond business: Going local to establish a foodie haven

**I**t has established itself as the preferred events and business professional meeting place in Muscat in the last five years but while Hormuz Grand, A Radisson Collection Hotel, is typically clustered as a business hotel, there's actually more than meets the eye.

Boasting 231 spacious rooms and suites located strategically in the growing Central Business District of Seeb, it is also a foodie haven just waiting to be discovered.

Beyond the 8 modern conference and events rooms or the 380-square-metre ballroom that can host more than 400 guests (pre-COVID capacity) for social and business events, its contribution to the diversity of food scene in Oman is often less appreciated.

As Executive Thierry Quintric explained, as a business hotel, they went above and beyond to offer extraordinary dishes that would cater to the different tastes of people in the Sultanate.

Hormuz Grand has several on-site dining locations. All-day dining restaurant Straits (inspired by the Strait of

Hormuz) has been envisioned to cater to an array of international dishes but also including some of the Omani favourites into the mix.

Chef Thierry also said they spend months working with talented chefs to launch Qureshi Bab-al-Hind, a local and worldwide award-winning restaurant that serves northern Indian cuisine.

"But the one people should really try is OMNY Brasserie which is a New York-style restaurant that fused modern, delicious dishes with distinct Omani flavours," Chef Thierry said.

"One of the initiatives we proudly pursue is #GoingLocal. It's where we utilised fresh Omani ingredients and make them the centre of our menu," Chef Thierry added.

He also shared that rather than importing from abroad, they curate some of the best ingredients from the Sultanate venturing into Sur and Muttrah for the freshest catch of the day to working with some of the country's best local farmers to support the local market.

The result of the Food and



Beverage department's effort can easily be seen not only on the presentation but the taste as well. The seafood, just as promised, are indeed some of the freshest in Muscat. From oysters to octopus, and from the greens used in the salad to the spices and garnishes that elevated the meat, the well-executed dishes have mouth-watering results.

Chef Thierry is also proud that the hotel's offering can be enjoyed in different beautiful settings — from the classically and nature-laden pool deck, to the modern setting of their lobby.

From the outside, Hormuz Grand may look intimidating with its business atmosphere. A closer inspection of its rooms

reveals modern amenities making it also a good option for a staycation not only for couples but even for the family.

It has a decent-sized pool that makes tracking of children easy while the parents enjoy a couple of drinks or meals in the nearby restaurant.

Thankfully, the walls are thick enough to maintain the privacy and peace and the well-maintained hallways while dimly lit by design are easy to figure out.

If you're considering a new place to explore for its food and affordability, it's the best time to consider Hormuz Grand as your place to stay. They also currently have some of the best pricing in the market for staycations.



# Post-COVID-19 education: Aspirations of a student

BY WEJDAN AL THUHLI

**C**OVID-19 struck the world without prior notice and forced it to adapt to a fully new manner of life in all its aspects. From the global recession to the exposure of broken health systems, the pandemic revealed the importance of needing to reimagine the education systems to meet the noble purposes of the process of learning.

Education all over the world jumped into an advanced overnight adaptation. Thus, contemporary teaching styles employed by virtual and augmented reality (VR, AR), student-centred learning, and knowledge accessibility are significant areas that lead to forming an engaging learning environment.

## MAKE THE UNREAL REAL WITH VR AND AR

It's astonishingly amazing to see how technology is developing at such a massive pace; to reach the possibility of creating a wholly virtual environment. Isn't it fascinating to design a virtual tour for college freshmen to wander around their college without even taking a single step? To wander around the classes,

cafeteria, the main library and the parks using a virtual environment?

Can you picture a chemistry class without experiments? Absolutely not! However, it would be wonderful if experiments are carried out without any danger of explosions. As to make an interactive textbook enhanced with augmented reality in which videos are displayed in 3D and experiments conducted as if they are real.

Imagine if medical trainees are holding surgeries without the need to touch a live human being. They can virtually make surgery and enrich themselves with all sorts of details of the human body. That should create a qualified generation of doctors.

## ENOUGH WITH THE ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL LEARNING APPROACH

Typical education is confined within four walls, with about 30 students inside and a single teacher in the middle. No wonder why students constantly look at the clock to escape back to home!

Probably, after the virus threat subsides, a whole different approach is likely to be

followed in teaching.

We should rethink the concept of one-size-fits-all. And start giving learners the freedom to customise the style they find convenient for them to acquire the level of knowledge they desire and skills they need to sharpen individually, without the need to be constrained with their peers' individual capabilities. Personalisation approach encourages learners to actively pick the style they enjoy the most when learning, whether videos, or textbooks, or pre-recorded lectures, or reading articles, or mini-quizzes. By adopting such an approach, learners would have tailored their own curriculum to meet their needs, interests, and abilities and not wasting their time on unnecessary content.

## CALL FOR ACCESSIBLE KNOWLEDGE

The spread of COVID-19

exposed the importance of knowledge sharing. To share information and date for free with every possible student has a major role in widening students' participation.

It would be also advisable if studies conducted by different educational institutions are open to the public to share the updated discoveries with the whole world, and by that students would have access to lifelong learning. In addition, educators of all the world may distribute their content, course material, ebooks and software without the need to have a license to access them.

All the rich educational content published freely shall improve the quality of education worldwide. Furthermore, more initiatives should be released to encourage education suppliers to publish their knowledge to others, including libraries with rich and valuable resources.

If only these technologies and methods are employed in all different educational fields, creative minds will be born. Learners will interact with the process of learning effectively. Many skills will be gained including communication, critical thinking and leadership. After the virus outbreak is over, a new dawn awaits the field of education, hopefully.

