



# On behalf of HM, Asaad bids farewell to B'deshi Ambassador

**MUSCAT:** On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received in his office Mohammed Golam

Sarwar, Ambassador of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty as his country's ambassador to the Sultanate. The ambassador expressed his thanks to His Majesty the Sultan for the support extended to him during his tour of duty in the Sultanate from His Majesty,

the Government and the Omani people, which had enabled him to carry out his duty. He wished His Majesty good health, happiness and a long life, and the Sultanate further progress and growth under the wise leadership of His Majesty. On his turn, HH Sayyid Asaad expressed his utmost thanks to

the ambassador for the efforts he exerted in serving the relations between the two countries, wishing him permanent success, and the friendly people of Bangladesh further progress and prosperity. The meeting was attended by the two advisers at the Office of HH Sayyid Asaad. — ONA

## Sweden, Mexico ambassadors present credentials copies



**MUSCAT:** Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received a copy of credentials of Niclas Trouvé, ambassador-designate of Sweden to the Sultanate. The foreign minister also received a copy of credentials of Anibal Toledo, ambassador-designate of Mexico to the

Sultanate. The foreign minister welcomed the two ambassadors wishing them success in performing their duties, and the Sultanate's relationships with their countries more progress and development. The meetings were attended by a number of officials from the foreign ministry. — ONA

## 140 schools to have satellite Internet in Muscat

**MUSCAT:** The Municipal Council of Muscat Governorate unveiled some challenges facing schools following their opening on November 1 including lack of Internet access at 141 schools which requires supplying them with satellite Internet with the Wadi Al Arbeien School in the Wilayat of Qurayat being the first school to have been equipped with the service. This was reviewed at a meeting of the Municipal Council held on Wednesday under the chairmanship of Sayyid Saud bin



Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat. The meeting praised the strenuous efforts made by the government to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Royal directives to support schoolchildren and university students. The Municipal Council listened to a statement from the Ministry of Education regarding its preparedness for the return of students to schools in light of the continuous impact of the pandemic.

## Quality labour housing key to attract investment

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A meeting organised by General Federation of Oman Workers (GFW) on Wednesday to discuss the quality of labour housing said the issue is more of a legal obligation as it is key to attracting investments to the Sultanate. It will also project the country as a decent place for a work environment. The meeting, attended by representatives from Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), Ministry of Labour, Muscat Municipality, Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones and Majlis Ash'shura, called for adequate monitoring mechanisms to ensure the quality standards in labour housing. It called for continuous cooperation between the regulatory and supervisory bodies concerned with labour housing with the Oman 2040 programme. The meeting called for the private sector to invest in labour housing based on social responsibility on the lines of

workers' accommodation in the Duqm Economic Zone, and as per the plans of Muscat Municipality to establish an expat workers' city. The government should develop plans in the various governorates to establish workers' cities outside the residential neighbourhoods, with various service facilities available at reasonable prices for the national and expatriate workforce. The seminar, attended by Hilal bin Hamad al Sarimi, Chairman of the Health and Environmental Committee of Majlis Ash'shura, raised concern about overcrowding of workers' housing in residential areas. Osama bin Saeed al Sibani of Muscat Municipality said that the civic body is working on legislation to close gaps, including in lease contracts, as well as carrying out inspections. He added that the legislation is not strict on violators. It may be noted that anyone who builds workers' housing without a permit or does not abide by occupational safety and health requirements can be fined no more than RO 5,000.

## Vitamins can limit lung diseases

Vitamin A, found in whole milk, carrots, green and leafy vegetables, and vitamin E, found in nuts and seeds, are believed to boost the immune system. Fish, milk, meat, egg, oats and mushrooms have vitamin D. Lead author Prof Adrian Martineau of Queen Mary University of London, said some studies suggested "people with lower vitamin D levels may be more susceptible to coronavirus." Commenting on the study, Shane McAuliffe, science communications lead for the NNEdPro Nutrition and UK's COVID-19 Task Force, which includes experts from the University of Cambridge, said: "While acknowledging the limitations of this data, it does add further to a growing body of interest and evidence for the role of vitamin D in respiratory health. Given our knowledge of the extent of vitamin D deficiency in the population, balanced with the low cost and low risk of adverse events, it seems sensible to provide supplementation of this key vitamin, particularly to those most likely to be deficient." The researchers recommended that further



study is required to assess the implications of the current study in the context of the current coronavirus pandemic. There isn't enough data to recommend use of vitamin D to prevent infection with the virus that causes COVID-19 or to treat COVID-19, according to the World Health Organization. Several recent studies have looked at the impact of vitamin D on COVID-19. One study of 489 people found that those who had a vitamin D deficiency were more likely to test positive for the virus that causes COVID-19 than people who had normal levels of vitamin D. Dr Al Moosawi is a public health nutritionist and a nutritional epidemiologist whose primary research focuses

around chrono-nutrition, the science of understanding how timing of eating influences health. She holds a PhD in Public Health Nutrition from Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh. Between 2010 and 2013, she acted as an investigator scientist at the MRC Human Nutrition Research, Cambridge. Dr Al Moosawi has won multiple awards from the British Council for promoting nutrition education in low to middle-income countries. She continues to pursue her research on the relationship between circadian rhythms of eating and dietary patterns, and metabolic diseases such as type 2 diabetes. Dr Al Moosawi is a member of the NNEdPro Global Centre for Nutrition and Health.

## ODP launches new identity for Cyber Security Centre

**MUSCAT:** Oman Data Park (ODP) launched 'Cyber Security Park' as the new business identity of the company's Cyber Security Centre under the patronage of Dr Ali bin Amer Al Shaithani, Under-Secretary for Communications and Information Technology at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology. Through this unique identity and dedicated resources for cyber security, ODP embarks on solidifying its status as the leader in cyber security services in Oman as they continue to provide pioneering and effective smart security solutions to reduce cyber attacks. Supported by a choice of preventive, detective and threat intelligent cyber security services to shield its customers, Cyber Security Park is equipped and is capable of preventing more than 8,000 cyber attacks faced by various institutions in the Sultanate of Oman on a daily basis. — ONA

## Mala'a signs MoU with Social Development Ministry

**MUSCAT:** Oman Credit and Financial Information Centre (Mala'a) on Wednesday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Social Development to provide the Ministry with Mala'a Report and Mala'a Score for individuals and corporates. The MoU aims at assisting the ministry to evaluate the creditworthiness of its consumers and beneficiaries, in order to help decision makers to take calculated decisions based on clear and

reliable data. The MoU was executed by Adil bin Khalifa al Saadi, Managing Director of Oman Credit and Financial Information Centre, and Al Mutasim bin Hilal al Hosani, Assistant Manager of Administrative and Financial Affairs in the Ministry of Social Development. The MoU states that Mala'a will provide (Mala'a Report and Mala'a Score) for individuals and corporates after receiving the required documents, with a written



consent from the authorised parties to extract the Mala'a Report. This cooperation comes as one of Mala'a's initiatives to raise credit awareness among the public, private and civil sectors, which in turn will contribute to the Sultanate's economic and financial growth and help reinforce rational decision-making culture. Oman Credit and Financial Information Centre includes members from the banking, financial, insurance and telecom sectors, as well as SMEs funds.

The centre also includes more than 17 government registries of information providers. As per the Royal Decree No 38/2020, Mala'a is to provide a database of credit and financial information on a national level, to assist its members or beneficiaries evaluate their client's solvency, and therefore reduce credit risks, improve loans quality, and reinforce financial inclusion in the Sultanate, according to state-of-art technologies and global standards. — ONA

# Majlis Ash'Shura Office receives ministerial replies



**MUSCAT:** The Office of Majlis Ash'Shura reviewed the visions of the standing committees regarding some points extracted from the Oman Vision 2040 and ways of reviewing and activating laws that support its orientations.

The Office also reviewed the reply of the Council of Ministers regarding the draft wastewater and water treatment and recycling regulatory law.

In its meeting held on Wednesday under the chairmanship of Shaikh Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, the Office of Majlis Ash'Shura, reviewed

the messages of the Youth and Human Resources Committee, the Media and Culture Committee with regard to the revision of laws and proposing suitable amendments.

The Office members reviewed a number of ministerial replies including one from the minister of higher education, research and innovation to a question relating to the educational qualification test. In addition to a reply received from the minister of labour regarding the Omanization rate in family businesses, and the reply of the

chairman of the Public Authority for Water about the project for the storage and recovery of water at underground reservoirs.

Besides, the Office looked into a number of monitoring tools and methods raised by the members including a briefing request directed to the chairman of the Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises Development on the draft Small and Medium Enterprises Law in addition to a briefing request to the minister of labour regarding the imposition of a RO 100 fine for absconding worker.

## Total confirmed COVID-19 cases stand at 119,186

**MUSCAT:** The total number of positive COVID-19 cases in the Sultanate reached 119,186, while the number of recoveries stood at 109,633, comprising 92 per cent.

Meanwhile, the total number of COVID-19 related death cases stood at 1321, the Ministry of Health said.

The Ministry also pointed out that 37 cases were hospitalised over the past 24 hours, adding that the total number of current hospitalised COVID-19-infected patients stands at 309, of them 134 are in intensive care units (ICU).

— ONA

## MSM index up 34 points

**MUSCAT:** Muscat Securities Market (MSM) general index (30) on Wednesday added 34.97 points, comprising a rise by 0.98 per cent to close at 3611.73 points, compared to the last session, which stood at 3576.76 points.

The trading value on Wednesday stood at RO 412,357, comprising a rise by 195.8 per cent, compared to the last session, which stood at RO 815,474. The report released by MSM pointed out that the market value rose by 0.247 per cent to reach about RO 20.14 billion. — ONA

## Early detection key to cervical cancer cure

**KABEER YOUSUF**

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The number of cervical cancer patients in the Sultanate is high in comparison with other countries and it is the time women take precautions against this fatal disease, according to doctors.

According to the data from the Non-Communicable Diseases Department at the Ministry of Health (MoH), cervical cancer incidence rates have been on the rise in Oman while breast cancer still remains predominant among women.

Cervical cancer comprises about 3 per cent of cancer cases. In one year the average number of cases recorded at the Royal Hospital is 32.

Dr Thuraia Rashid al Rawahi, senior consultant and gynecological oncologist at the Royal Hospital, said that women between the age brackets of 25 and 65 are prone to cervical cancer and early detection is crucial.

“A good percentage of cervical cancer cases can be avoided if early diagnosis is done and it's very easy to treat at the initial stage itself,” she said. “Routine cervical screening at least every 3 years is key to tackle the issue.”

Additionally, any woman above 32 needs must take a pap smear test and make sure she is free from this deadly disease.

“Women should opt for regular tests against HPV (Human Papilloma Virus) which is the primary prevention of cervical cancer. The secondary prevention

is through screening such as regular PAP smear tests,” said Dr Mizun Tufail al Rahman, senior Consultant and family physician at the Ministry of Health.

“Cervical cancer is a type of cancer that occurs in the cells of the cervix which is the lower part of the uterus,” said Dr Raaji Narayanankutty.

Oman has a population of 1.06 million of women aged 15 years and older who are at risk of developing cervical cancer. Cervical cancer ranks the third most frequent cancer among women in Oman and the third most frequent cancer among women between 15 and 44 years of age.

“In Western Asia, the region where Oman belongs to, about 2.5 per cent of women in the general population are estimated to harbour cervical HPV-16/18 infection at a given time, and 72.4 per cent of invasive cervical cancers are attributed to HPVs,” said Dr Dilip Singhvi, internal medicine specialist.

“Timely screening and vaccines can help prevent the development of cervical cancer,” Dr Singhvi said.

“But vaccination has its own side effects,” said Dr Thuraia. “Early diagnosis is the best way out to tackle the menace of cervical cancer,” Dr Mizun said.

To spread awareness among women against cervical cancer, the UNFPA Arab States Regional Office and other partners are organising a regional Forum on Cervical Cancer in January 2021.

## VOICES

# A chance to reflect on tradition and heritage



**LAKSHMI KOTHANETH**

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Writing is about passion. And there is one more word that fits and that is creativity. So what is required is a combination of passion and creativity

**SALEH AL SHAIBANI**

Journalist and academician

For veteran writer Saleh al Shaibani, writing is the platform where he has reflected upon life in Oman and news. He is all set to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Oman's National Day with a book titled 'Oman: Traditions, Heritage and Culture.'

“The book is dedicated to the 50th anniversary of Oman. The book is a collection of photographs, which depicts traditions and lifestyle of Oman, some of which are disappearing such as the Bedouin life. It is not there anymore, and if it is – then very remotely. The pictures display the Bedouin villages right in the middle of the desert. The tourists also are attracted to these locations,” explained Saleh, a journalist and academician who is also the author of the book, ‘Desert Classics.’

He feels the preservation of the old ways can be essential for the future.

“It is tough because the young people are moving toward the cities for jobs and businesses. But the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is encouraging SMEs to work near the national monuments so they can give a rich experience for the visitors through cafes, cultural shops as well as gift shops.”

Linking the community with the tourism sector has many advantages such as retaining traditions as well as providing jobs.

“Developing tourism businesses also keeps the young members within the community and not go out to the cities for jobs,” he pointed out.

Saleh has been working on the book for the last three years.

“I collected the photographs from a veteran television cameraman from Oman Television, late Jawad Ibrahim.

His photography is from the 70s. He wanted to preserve the old ways. He is not with us anymore but his work is back to life,” noted Saleh.

The book will also be focusing on the traditions of Oman such as the folk dances, as well as professions such as beekeeping, the old ways of fishing and farming, pottery, carving, carpentry and net making by the fishermen. The coffee table is expected to be a collector's item.

As a writer, this is what Saleh has to say to the young writers, “Most of the students do not go to college to study writing and become journalists. They want to study business and IT so it is a challenge to find young people who are interested in writing. Maybe this book will encourage young people to write about the culture and traditions of their own country.”

What is the secret to be a good writer?

“In one word it is – passion. Young people today are keener on money. If there is no money in it they will not work for it. But writing is about passion. And there is one more word that fits and that is creativity. So what is required is a combination of passion and creativity,” added the author.

Bring a new twist to the challenge is the change in the society that has been brought in by mobile texting culture.

“They write in abbreviation and when asked to put their thoughts in 500 words, the youth find it as a challenge. Another aspect about writing is research and they do not find it inspiring,” he pointed out.

He hopes the book will inspire the youth to reflect on their own traditions and heritage and write them down –not in text format on mobile form but in narrative so the tradition continues.

## Oman at GCC municipal ministers meet

**MUSCAT:** The Sultanate participated in the 23rd meeting of the GCC ministers concerned with municipal affairs.

The Sultanate was represented by Sayyid Khalifa bin Al Murdas al Busaidy, Secretary-General of Governorates Affairs at the Ministry of Interior.

The virtual meeting discussed many important topics that serve municipal work, including joint Gulf municipal work, strategic urban planning, GCC Award for Municipal Work, and the development of legislation and municipal control mechanisms.

The meeting also touched on



COVID-19 implications, the efforts of municipalities in such emergency circumstances, and

their future plans to tackle the Coronavirus crisis in the GCC countries.

## Madayn holds ‘Training of Trainers’ Programme

**MUSCAT:** The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates — Madayn, represented by Madayn Industrial Academy, organised on Wednesday ‘Training of Trainers (TOT)’ programme.

This training programme is part of a series of programmes organised by Madayn to qualify and develop the human cadres in its various industrial cities.

Moderated by Dr Khamis Al Muniri, Director-General of Madayn Industrial Academy, the TOT programme aimed at enhancing training skills of the human cadres of Madayn and develop their competencies to



deliver training programmes, workshops and awareness lectures for the employees of Madayn

and the investing companies and factories in the industrial cities.

— ONA

THE WILAYAT LIKE OTHERS IN THE SULTANATE SHOWCASES ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE PROSPEROUS ERA, NAMELY GOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTIONS AND UNITS THAT PROVIDE SERVICES TO THE CITIZENS AND RESIDENTS

Al Khabourah

HIDDEN PEARL  
AMID SEA,  
MOUNTAINS

The Wilayat of Al Khabourah is dotted with archaeological landmarks like castles, forts and watch towers between the sea, valleys and mountains.

Al Khabourah is blessed with a beautiful nature that makes it a popular destination for nature lovers.

The sea is rich in fish and the plains abound in fruitful trees and wild plants. The mountains are home to scattered villages.

A number of valleys lead the visitors to the upstream pristine beauty, where the picturesque running water and green shades of palm, lemon and various types of fruit bearing trees, make it a spot to enjoy.

Above all the mild weather of the wilayat is an added attraction for the tourists.

The Wilayat of Al Khabourah is considered a meeting point for the wilayats of the Governorate of North Al Batinah.

Land topography varies in Al Khabourah between the sea, valleys and mountains.

Al Khabourah stretches from the borders of Wilayat of Saham in the north to the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq southward for 20 km and extends to the Governorate of Al Dhahirah in the west. Al Khabourah is bounded on the east by Sea of Oman for almost 90 km, and is divided by (Muscat-Khatmat Milaha) main road.

Al Khabourah stretches over 2,700 km and comprises 198 coastal and mountainous villages on the banks of the valleys. Khanjar (Omani dagger) is the emblem of the wilayat.

The Wilayat is reputed for its archaeological landmarks, as there

are seven castles, the most famous of which is the 'Bani Said, Al Aqli Fort'. There are also 21 forts, the most famous being 'Al Khabourah Fort', and there are a number of towers, most notably are 'Al Qasuf Tower, Al Badieah Tower and Al Mathar Tower' in the village of Al Ghaizain.

The wilayat has bounteous wadis, among the most prominent being Wadi al Hawasnah, Wadi al Sarmi, Wadi Shafan, Wadi Halhal, Wadi Miha Bani Kayoum and Sanaa Bani Ghafir.

People of Al Khabourah work in agriculture, sheep herding, fishing, Khanjar making, shipbuilding (Al Shash), weaving, pottery, copper, leather industries, jewellery, engraving on timber, decorating tools for camels and some agricultural tools.

Folk arts such as Al Razha, Al Qasafi, Al Wanah, Al Maidan, Al Kousa, Al Laiwa, Al Mawlid, along with horse and camel racing and boat racing are popular in the wilayat.

The fertile valleys represent tourist attractions, in addition to villages with mild weather that attract tourists like Al Sihra, Al Qala, Khadra Al Makatim, Sanaa Bani Ghafir and Miha Bani Kayoum.

The wilayat like others in the Sultanate showcases achievements of the prosperous era, namely governmental institutions and units that provide services to the citizens and residents.

Schools dot the wilayat throughout and health institutions are scattered across the area.

The wali's office provides a leading role in providing a comprehensive development.

An agriculture and animal wealth directorate offers assistance and guidance to farmers and fishermen.







Displaced Syrians at Atmeh IDP camp, near the border with Turkey. — Reuters

## Syrian president blames West for obstructing return of refugees

**DAMASCUS:** Syria's government kicked off a two-day Russia-backed conference in Damascus on Wednesday towards facilitating the return of millions of Syrian refugees to the war-torn country, despite reservations within the international community.

Of neighbouring countries hosting the bulk of Syrian refugees, only Lebanon and Iraq sent representatives, according to organisers.

Other attendees included a Russian delegation and representatives of Syrian government allies Iran, Venezuela and China, while a United Nations representative was expected to attend as an observer.

Syrian President Bashar al Assad in a televised speech said

"millions of Syrians want to return".

But a huge amount of "infrastructure has been destroyed after being built over decades, and terrorism continues in some areas", he said. Assad said Western sanctions targeting the Damascus government were also "depriving the country of the simplest means for reconstruction".

Since Syria's conflict started in 2011, more than half of its pre-war population has been forced to flee their homes, including 5.5 million who went abroad.

Neighbouring Turkey hosts the highest number of Syrian refugees, followed by Lebanon and Jordan. Jordan did not attend the conference, while Turkey was not invited. — AFP

# Bahrain's longest-serving prime minister Prince Khalifa dies

Born on November 24, 1935, Prince Khalifa began to attend his father's royal court at the age of seven along with his elder brother

**MANAMA:** Bahrain's Prince Khalifa bin Salman al Khalifa, the world's longest-serving prime minister who had held the post since independence in 1971, died on Wednesday at the age of 84, the royal palace announced.

King Hamad bin Isa bin Salman al Khalifa mourned the late premier, who died at the Mayo Clinic Hospital in the US state of Minnesota, the court said, according to the official Bahrain News Agency.

The burial will take place after his remains have been transported home, and in line with coronavirus restrictions only a limited number of relatives will attend. The country will hold a week of official mourning, during which flags will be flown at half-mast. Government ministries and departments will be closed for three days.

Gulf leaders paid tribute, hailing the veteran leader's long

career "that has shaped Bahrain's recent history", according to Dubai ruler Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum.

Born on November 24, 1935, Prince Khalifa began to attend his father's royal court at the age of seven along with his elder brother, Prince Issa.

He was named in 1970 as the head of the state council, the executive branch of government which became the council of ministers after independence from Britain.

Prince Khalifa strove for many years to establish Bahrain as a regional financial hub.

Working closely with his brother, the late emir Shaikh Issa bin Salman al Khalifa, he favoured strong ties with Washington.

Ties have since continued to grow, with Bahrain now hosting the US Navy's Fifth Fleet as one of Washington's most trusted allies in the region. — AFP



Saudi police close a street leading to a cemetery in Jeddah. — AFP

## 4 wounded in bomb blast at World War I memorial in Jeddah

**JEDDAH:** A bomb blast struck a World War I commemoration ceremony attended by Western diplomats in the Saudi city of Jeddah on Wednesday, leaving at least four people wounded, officials said.

The attack at a cemetery was the second targeting diplomatic missions in recent weeks, after a guard at the French consulate in Jeddah was injured by a man armed with a knife. Diplomats from France, Greece, Italy, Brit-

ain and the United States were involved in the Armistice Day commemoration ceremony in the Red Sea port city, according to a joint statement from their embassies which condemned the "cowardly attack".

"The annual ceremony commemorating the end of World War I at cemetery in Jeddah, attended by several consulates was the target of an IED (improvised explosive device) attack, which injured several people", France's

foreign ministry said. A Greek policeman residing in the kingdom was among those wounded, a Greek diplomatic source said.

A Saudi policeman was also slightly wounded", state-owned Ekhbariya television added, citing the governor of Mecca region, where Jeddah is located. "(Saudi) security services will launch an investigation into an incident of aggression during a gathering of a number of consuls in Jeddah", Ekhbariya said. — AFP

# Sudan braces for thousands of fleeing Ethiopians

**ADDIS ABABA:** Ethiopia's air force said on Wednesday it had bombed arms and fuel depots in the northern region of Tigray, as an escalation in fighting led more than 8,000 to flee to neighbouring Sudan. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent troops and military jets into the federal state of Tigray last week after a months-long feud with its ruling party which he accuses of seeking to destabilise the country.

Abiy, last year's Nobel Peace Prize laureate, said the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) had crossed a "red line" and attacked two federal military bases, which the party denies.

Ethiopia's air force commander Major General Yilma Merdassa said fighter jets had "bombed arms and fuel depots as well as other areas that the TPLF junta has planned to use", the state-



Members of the Amhara militia, that combat alongside federal and regional forces against northern region of Tigray, ride on the back of a pick-up truck in the city of Gondar. — AFP

affiliated Fana Broadcast Corporation (FBC) reported. State news agency SUNA in neighbouring Sudan reported that more than 8,000 Ethiopians had crossed into the country in the past 48 hours.

It said 6,000 had taken refuge in the state of Gedaref and about 1,100 in Kassala, both in the east. Another 1,500 refugees had al-

ready arrived on Tuesday, local officials were quoted as saying.

Tigray has been under a communications blackout since the military operation was launched on November 4, making it difficult to verify the situation on the ground as both sides make conflicting claims about casualties and advances. — AFP

### SHORT TAKES

#### TEHRAN

### Virus testing ramped up amid record cases

Iran's Health Ministry plans to drastically ramp up coronavirus testing capacities, as the country marked a fresh record of new infections and fatalities related to the virus on Wednesday. In the past 24 hours, 11,780 new infections were recorded and 462 people died of complications from COVID-19, the ministry said in comments carried by state television.

The real number of cases was, however, expected to be much higher, as test facilities are lacking, according to health experts. — dpa



#### RAMALLAH

### Erekat laid to rest in home town Jericho

The casket of Saeb Erekat arrived at the Muqata, President Mahmud Abbas' headquarters, on Wednesday for an official farewell the day after the top Palestinian official's death following complications related to COVID-19.

Only officials and family were allowed to attend the ceremony, due to restrictions in place in light of the pandemic.

After Abbas and other officials paid their respects, the casket was placed into a van and



driven to Erekat's West Bank home town of Jericho for a final prayer ceremony and burial.

Erekat died on Tuesday following complications related to COVID-19, after contracting the coronavirus last month. — dpa

#### NAQOURA

### Israel, Lebanon resume border talks

Israel and Lebanon resumed US-mediated talks on Wednesday on a dispute about their Mediterranean Sea border that has held up hydrocarbon exploration in the potentially gas-rich area, the Israeli energy minister and Lebanon's state news agency said.

The longtime foes held three rounds of talks last month hosted by the United Nations at a peace-keeper base in southern Lebanon which the world body and the United States have described as "productive".



But sources had said that gaps between the sides remain large after they each presented contrasting maps outlining proposed borders that actually increased the size of the disputed area.

— Reuters

## In brief

■ PATNA

**MODI'S COALITION  
RETAINS POWER IN  
KEY STATE**

**LUCKNOW:** Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's coalition retained power in Bihar state, results showed on Wednesday, in what was a referendum on Modi's handling of COVID-19 and which may boost his chances in three more state elections next year.

Modi's coalition won a fourth straight term in Bihar, the third-most populous state and one of the poorest in India, the country which has recorded more than 8.5 million COVID-19 cases, the world's second-highest tally after the United States.

The alliance led by Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won 125 seats in the 243-member Bihar assembly, Election Commission data showed after counting started on Tuesday.

■ MANILA

**GOVT EXTENDS  
MILITARY PACT  
WITH US**

The Philippines will extend a key military pact with the United States for another six months, the foreign minister said on Wednesday. President Rodrigo Duterte had given notice to Washington in February that he planned to axe the Visiting Forces Agreement after accusing the US of interference in his internationally condemned narcotics crackdown.

The plan to break the deal — central to hundreds of joint military exercises with the US every year and a major component of their nearly 70-year-old alliance — was suspended in June.

The latest decision — announced by Foreign Minister Teodoro Locsin — came after Duterte congratulated US President-elect Joe Biden and said he was looking forward to “working closely” with the new administration.

■ TOKYO

**TSUNAMI-HIT NUCLEAR  
REACTOR GETS  
RESTART APPROVAL**

A Japanese governor on Wednesday gave a green light to the resumption of operations for a nuclear reactor in north-eastern Japan, a region hit by a deadly earthquake and tsunami in 2011. Miyagi Governor Yoshihiro Murai expressed his support for the restart of Reactor 2 at the Onagawa Nuclear Power Station, about 350 kilometres north-east of Tokyo.

It would become the 10th reactor whose resumption has been approved by a local government since the 2011 nuclear disaster at the Fukushima nuclear plant. The governor said a nuclear power plant ensures a stable supply of electricity and “contributes to the development of local economy.”

The Onagawa plant, operated by Tohoku Electric Power, is the nation's closest nuclear facility to the epicentre of the magnitude-9 quake in March 2011.

# India planning \$20 bn new stimulus

**News and current affairs content on online media such as Facebook and Twitter will also come under the new regulatory regime**

**NEW DELHI:** India is planning to announce a fresh round of stimulus totalling about \$20 billion this week to help pull the economy out of its historic contraction, government officials said on Wednesday.

The package would follow Wednesday's earlier announcement of production-linked incentives worth about \$27 billion over five years for manufacturers in 10 sectors.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and other top officials will finalise the plan on Thursday, said the sources.

The sources did not provide



India's federal government will regulate content on video streaming platforms as part of new rules announced earlier this week. — Reuters

details of the package besides saying that it would be targeted towards stressed sectors with a focus on generating employment.

Indian government's last stimulus package in May largely failed to soften the blow of the strict coronavirus lockdown as it focused on providing liquidity and collateral-free credit for small businesses but

with little actual spending.

That package also left out badly hit sectors such as tourism, hospitality and aviation.

The Indian economy, which the International Monetary Fund singled out as a global bright spot only a few years ago, contracted a hefty 23.9% in the April-June quarter and is seen contracting over 10% in the

fiscal year to March 2021.

Coronavirus cases are still surging in major Indian cities and the country has been adding over 40,000 cases a day.

Active coronavirus cases have nevertheless fallen below 500,000 for the first time in over three months although the government has eased nearly all restrictions to curb the virus' spread.

## Thousands evacuated as yet another typhoon menaces Philippines

**LEGAZPI:** Thousands of people were evacuated from their homes in storm-battered parts of the Philippines Wednesday as the third typhoon in as many weeks barrelled towards the country.

Vamco was expected to graze Catanduanes Island — which was devastated by Typhoon Goni less than two weeks ago — before making landfall on the most populous island of Luzon later Wednesday or early Thursday.

Destructive winds and torrential rain were expected in parts of central and southern Luzon, the state weather forecaster said.

About 50,000 people living in the typhoon's path would be ordered to leave their homes, said regional Civil Defense spokesman Gremil Alexis Naz.

The Bicol region, which Vamco will cross as it heads towards Manila, is still reeling from deadly typhoons Molave and Goni, which killed dozens of people and left thousands of



Philippine army officers assist residents ahead of the landfall of Typhoon Vamco in Buhai. — Reuters

families homeless.

Swathes of the region remain without power and with only limited or no telecommunication services after Goni — the most powerful typhoon this year — toppled power lines, destroyed houses and flooded roads.

Pre-emptive evacuations of around 400,000 people were credited with saving many lives.

Evacuation efforts on Catanduanes have been complicated this time, however, after Goni destroyed some of its

emergency shelters.

“It's like we are on one per cent recovery and then ... Ulysses (the Philippine name for Vamco) is coming,” Catanduanes Governor Joseph Cua told local broadcaster ABS-CBN.

“I hope that people will never get tired of helping us.”

Vamco's winds could reach a peak intensity of 130-155 kilometres per hour before it makes landfall, the weather forecaster said.

— AFP

## Peace seems impossible on Afghanistan's front lines

**MAIWAND:** The dry and dusty village of Aziz Abad sits on the frontline of Afghanistan's war and is currently under government control — but only just.

Every night, 20-year-old paramilitary policeman Zainullah and his colleagues must seek refuge in filthy trenches at their battered outpost on the edge of the village while insurgents target them at an increasingly fierce tempo.

“The Taliban do not want peace,” said Zainullah, who like

many Afghans only goes by one name.

“They are detonating landmines, roadside bombs, sticky bombs and launching rocket attacks.”

The village is located in Maiwand district — the scene of a notorious British military defeat in the 19th century — in Kandahar province, where the insurgents have kept control in some rural areas despite 19 years of war.

The insurgents are close to Zainullah's makeshift base, where



A policeman walks near a hashish plantation at Deh Qubad village in Maiwand district of Kandahar province. — AFP

barbed wire fencing and shredded sandbags offer scant protection.

A walkie-talkie crackles as a police officer listens in on Taliban transmissions — he says the militants are discussing the unrecognised vehicles AFP is travelling in. After months of US cajoling and concessions, the Taliban finally agreed to start peace talks with the Afghan government in September, but the hardliners have only stepped up attacks in the weeks since. — AFP



## Russia: Sputnik V virus vaccine 92 per cent effective

**MOSCOW:** Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine is 92 per cent effective according to initial test results, its developers said on Wednesday, as Moscow races against its competitors in the West.

The calculations were based on results from 16,000 individuals who received both doses of the vaccine, Russia's health ministry, the state-run Gamaleya research centre and the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) said in a statement.

"The Sputnik V vaccine had an efficacy rate of 92 per cent after the second dose," the statement said, after 20 of the volunteers — some of whom were given the placebo — tested positive for coronavirus.

The adenovirus vector-based vaccine uses modified viruses of the regular flu.

Some of those vaccinated

experienced "pain at the injection site, flu-like syndrome including fever, weakness, fatigue and headache," the statement said.

Russia in August became the first country to register a coronavirus vaccine but did so ahead of the large-scale clinical trials that are still underway.

Forty thousand volunteers at 29 medical centres are taking part in the third and final phase of Sputnik V trials.

In September, the vaccine was separately administered to medics and other at-risk people working in Russian hospitals, demonstrating an efficacy rate of "over 90 per cent," the statement said.

Regional authorities in Siberia's Altai region on Tuesday said that at least three medics out of the 42 that received the vaccine had contracted the virus. — **AFP**



Gintsburg, director of the Gamaleya National Research Centre for Epidemiology and Microbiology, shows bottles with Sputnik V vaccine. — **Reuters**

## Republicans add another seat in US Senate

**WASHINGTON:** President Donald Trump's Republican Party won another seat in the US Senate on Wednesday, with a victory in Alaska that puts it one vote away from a majority in the upper house of Congress.

Incumbent Dan Sullivan was easily reelected with more than 57 per cent of the vote, according to CNN and NBC television projections.

His victory confirms the strong performance of the Republican Party in the congressional elections, which were held on November 3 at the same time as the presidential election won by Democrat Joe

Biden. The Republicans now have 50 seats, compared to 48 for the Democrats in the 100-seat Senate. Two seats are still to be filled in runoffs scheduled for January 5 in the southern state of Georgia.

The Democrats would have to win both seats to catch up with the Republicans and give Biden more room to implement his policies. It would then be vice-president Kamala Harris's voice that would decide the tie in a 50-50 vote in her role as president of the Senate.

No law can be passed in the United States without the upper house. — **AFP**

## Trump makes first appearance since losing election to Biden



Demonstrators gather in front of the US Supreme Court in Washington, DC, as the high court opened arguments in the long-brewing case over the constitutionality of the 2010 Affordable Care Act, under which then-president Barack Obama's government sought to extend health insurance to people who could not afford it. — **AFP**

### With COVID-19 cases shattering records across the country and states imposing new restrictions, Trump seems to have all but shelved normal presidential duties

**WASHINGTON:** US President Donald Trump makes his first official post-election appearance on Wednesday for what should be a moment of national unity to mark Veteran's Day, now marred by his refusal to acknowledge Joe Biden's win.

The president was to visit Arlington National Cemetery,

four days after US media projected his Democratic rival would take the White House.

Since then he has not addressed the nation other than via Twitter, and has not conceded to Biden, as is traditional once a winner is projected in a US vote. And with COVID-19 cases shattering records across the country and

states imposing new restrictions in a push to contain the virus before winter arrives, Trump seems to have all but shelved normal presidential duties.

Instead he has remained shut up inside the presidential mansion, pushing an alternate reality that he is about to win and filing lawsuits alleging voter fraud that so far have been backed up by only the flimsiest evidence.

Early on Wednesday he was tweeting fresh evidence-free claims of election wins and ballot tampering, despite the consensus from international observers, world leaders, local election

officials and US media that the November 3 vote was free and fair, and that there have no credible allegations of fraud.

Claiming that a poll in Wisconsin on Election Day had resulted in "possibly illegal suppression" he said he was "now preparing to win the state," which was called for Biden one week ago.

Some Republicans were adding their voices to growing calls for the president to concede, with experts warning his refusal to do so was undermining the democratic process and holding up the transition to Biden, who takes office in January. — **AFP**

## British PM condemns 'disrespectful' protests



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson attends a service marking Armistice Day at Westminster Abbey in London. — **Reuters**

**LONDON:** British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has condemned a central London climate change protest held in front of a First World War memorial on Armistice Day as "profoundly disrespectful."

The Extinction Rebellion activist group hung a banner on the Cenotaph monument, which is Britain's official national war memorial. It was erected after the war ended in 1920.

The banner read "Honour Their Sacrifice, Climate Change Means War."

A wreath of poppies was also placed on the memorial

decorated with the words "climate change means war, act now" on Wednesday morning.

The memorial is around 130 metres from Johnson's official residence in Downing Street.

A spokesman for the prime minister said: "The Cenotaph is a memorial to those who fought and died to preserve all our freedoms. On today, of all days, when we join together to pay tribute to our war dead, this action was profoundly disrespectful." Asked whether officers should have prevented the action, the spokesman said: "These are operational matters for the police." — **dpa**

### SHORT TAKES

#### GENOA

##### 6 arrested in probe linked to bridge collapse

Italian police on Wednesday took action against six managers and former managers of the operator of a motorway bridge that collapsed in Genoa two years ago, killing 43 people.

Three people were placed under house arrest and three others were put under restrictions banning certain activities, police said, in what was described as a secondary thread to the main investigation into the collapse.

Three of the six are former top managers and the other



three are current executives of Autostrade d'Italia, the company operating the motorway across the collapsed bridge.

Investigators said they were suspected of road safety offences and fraud. Specifically, the suspected wrongdoing relates to soundproofing, they added.

#### BERLIN

##### Robbers take 6.5m euros from customs office

German investigators said on Wednesday they had launched a manhunt for suspects who made off with 6.5 million euros (\$7.6 million) in cash after breaking into a customs office.

"The break-in was professionally planned and carried out: three as yet unidentified perpetrators used a drill to get to the vault from an adjoining room in the cellar of the building," police said in a statement. "From there they stole about 6.5 million euros in cash."



The heist, which struck the customs office in the western city of Duisburg, took place on Sunday November 1.

#### ZURICH

##### Swiss to ban deducting bribes from taxes

Swiss companies will no longer be able to deduct bribes paid to private individuals from their taxes, Switzerland's government said on Wednesday, according to an update of tax laws due to take effect on January 1, 2022.

Beyond bribes, costs from financing criminal activities or money paid in return for a crime to be committed will also no longer be tax deductible once the legislation takes effect after next year, the government said.

The Alpine country, famed for

its historic practices of banking secrecy and as a haven for money from abroad, will leave some wiggle room for certain offenses to remain tax deductible, however, with foreign fines to be tax-deductible in exceptional cases from 2022 when the fines violate Swiss public policy.

"As in the past, domestic punitive financial sanctions, i.e. fines, monetary penalties and punitive administrative sanctions, are not tax-deductible," the government said.

# Health insurance for all...

It is widely said that health is the crown on a healthy man's head. Health is a quality everyone admires and appreciates in life. Today, there is an extraordinary focus on health in all indices of welfare in any country. Health is the parameter of the level of development of a country. Health for all is one of the essential parts of the system based on social justice. This is what Islam teaches. The world, despite different laws, rules and regulations, gives top importance to health.

Therefore most of the countries and governments take all efforts to provide integrated healthcare to their people as their basic priority. This service is provided by the state to citizens free of cost or through health insurance system to the rest of the segments of the society working and residing in the country. Therefore, the Capital Market Authority has made it mandatory for all those working in the private sector in Oman to have health insurance. This is to make an integrated healthcare facility available for all those living in the country.

It is important to understand the reason, feasibility and significance of health insurance as an advanced, important and fundamental focal point for a decent life of a person in this country. It is important that everyone is healthy and enjoys healthcare



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PROVIDING  
HEALTHCARE  
THROUGH  
INSURANCE IS  
IMPORTANT.  
THIS IS TO  
ENSURE THAT  
HEALTHCARE  
FACILITIES ARE  
AVAILABLE  
TO ALL

facility.

Providing healthcare through insurance is important. This is to ensure that healthcare facilities are available to all living in the Sultanate. Nobody should be deprived of this humanitarian service just because of lack of material resources or for any other reason.

Healthcare facilities such as insurance for all those working in the private sector, citizens or foreigners, are as important as air and water. It is their basic right. This approach should be appreciated by the employers in the country. This is the right of all employees.

There is a 30 per cent growth in the private health insurance sector in the Sultanate in 2017 compared with 2016. The health insurance premiums have also increased by 16 per cent to reach RO 134 million. The sector maintained its growth rate at 30 per cent until 2019. It all shows that some segments of employees and companies are aware of the importance of the health insurance.

These statistics are sufficient proof that there is a demand for integrated, quality and consist healthcare. This is a concept which needs to be strengthened. It is should not be optional any more. Instead it should be made mandatory for all companies

operating in the country. All private sector companies and establishments should focus on this and adapt their conditions to harmonise with this requirements and approach as it is in mutual interest of both the employers and employees.

If the citizen or a resident employee of the private sector is brought under the health insurance umbrella, it will make them more loyal to their companies. It will also make the private sector more attractive. This will certainly reflect in the form of increased productivity which is the ultimate goal of the private sector.

The health insurance cover will help companies themselves in reducing their financial spending on treatment for their employees. The companies can keep this aspect in mind. Sometimes the cost of treatment of an employee can be minor. It may work as a shock absorber in case of a major accident involving employees.

We are confident that rules and regulations will be formulated to support this approach. Similarly, it is the duty of the private sector organisations to support the idea and help make everyone realise that health insurance is major human and cultural requirement. Interests of all lies in it and the national economy is the ultimate beneficiary.

## UNFAIR SURVEILLANCE

# Online exam software sparks global student revolt

AVI ASHER-SCHAPIRO

When US law student Areeb Khan tried to sign into the online portal to take his practice bar exam, he was met with a strange message: “Due to poor lighting we are unable to identify your face.”

Additional lighting did not solve the issue. The 27-year-old even tried to sign in from the brightest room in his New York apartment — the bathroom. Khan began to suspect that it was his dark skin tone that rattled Exemplify, a test proctoring platform adopted by New York state's law exams board during the COVID-19 pandemic. It took days of back and forth with customer service before he could sign in.

“There are so many systematic barriers preventing people like me from obtaining these degrees — and this is just another example of that,” he said. As COVID-19 restrictions force students to take remote exams, universities around the world are relying on proctoring software like Exemplify. But many students are wary of the technology, including mass data collection and bias in facial recognition.

“Students are already under tremendous pressure because of the global pandemic,” said Hye Jung Han, a researcher at advocacy group Human Rights Watch who specialises in technology and education.

“And now we have this invasive and unfair surveillance pushing the envelope, invading their private lives.”

Industry leaders maintain their platforms are a critical part of the infrastructure that allows students to continue learning. “We believe that many lives have been positively impacted by being able to continue their education and careers,” said Nici Sandberg, spokeswoman for ExamSoft, which makes the Exemplify platform.

“ExamSoft maintains a non-biased identification and exam delivery process to ensure that individuals of color are not disproportionately affected.”

More than 90 per cent of countries have instituted some form of remote learning since the start of the pandemic, according to a report in August by Unicef. This, in turn, has created a booming business for companies dealing in educational technology — or edtech — including firms that specialise in ensuring remote exams are free from cheating.

One firm, Proctorio, reported that it was proctoring more than five times the number of exams this year, compared to last year. The remote proctoring industry offers a range of services, from basic video links that allow another human to observe students as they take exams to algorithmic tools that use artificial intelligence (AI) to detect cheating. But asking students to install software to monitor them during a test raises a host of fairness issues, experts say.

“There's a big gulf between what this technology promises, and what it actually does on the ground,” said Audrey Watters, a researcher on the edtech industry who runs the website Hack Education. “(They) assume everyone looks the same, takes tests the same way, and responds to stressful situations in the same way.”

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

## CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC

# From Asia to Africa, refugees hope Biden win could help rebuild lives

BEH LIH YI AND NITA BHALLA

Joe Biden's US presidential election win has raised hopes of resettlement for refugees from Asia to Africa, many in countries where they are denied work and education and have no formal status.

The United States has for years taken in tens of thousands of refugees who are unable to return home or make a new life in the country where they have sought asylum, under a process known as third-country resettlement. But admissions plunged under President Donald Trump from 85,000 in 2016, before he took office, to 30,000 last year, official data shows.

Biden has promised to lift the quota. That has raised the hopes of millions languishing in camps or settlements around the world, among them Joseph, a refugee from one of Myanmar's ethnic minorities who fled to Malaysia in 2007.

“I am hoping for a better future. I lost all my hopes for resettlement in the last four years,” said Joseph, who asked not to be identified in full.

“We can be arrested any time if we work. We have no legal protections, no future here,” he said. Like many countries in Asia and Africa, Malaysia, which hosts some 180,000 refugees, is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. That means people like Joseph can be viewed as illegal immigrants. Many turn to odd jobs to support themselves, putting them at risk of



US President-elect Joe Biden waves as he leaves The Queen in Wilmington, Delaware, on Tuesday. – AFP

THE US HAS FOR  
YEARS TAKEN  
IN TENS OF  
THOUSANDS OF  
REFUGEES WHO  
ARE UNABLE TO  
RETURN HOME

exploitation and abuse.

The United Nations refugee agency has said at least 1.4 million refugees like him are awaiting third-country resettlement next year, but countries have offered only a fraction of the places needed.

President-elect Biden is expected to try to reverse much of Trump's

immigration legacy including travel bans on 13 countries that are either majority-Muslim or African nations. He has also said he would raise the annual ceiling for refugee admissions to 125,000, but has not indicated how quickly that would happen.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

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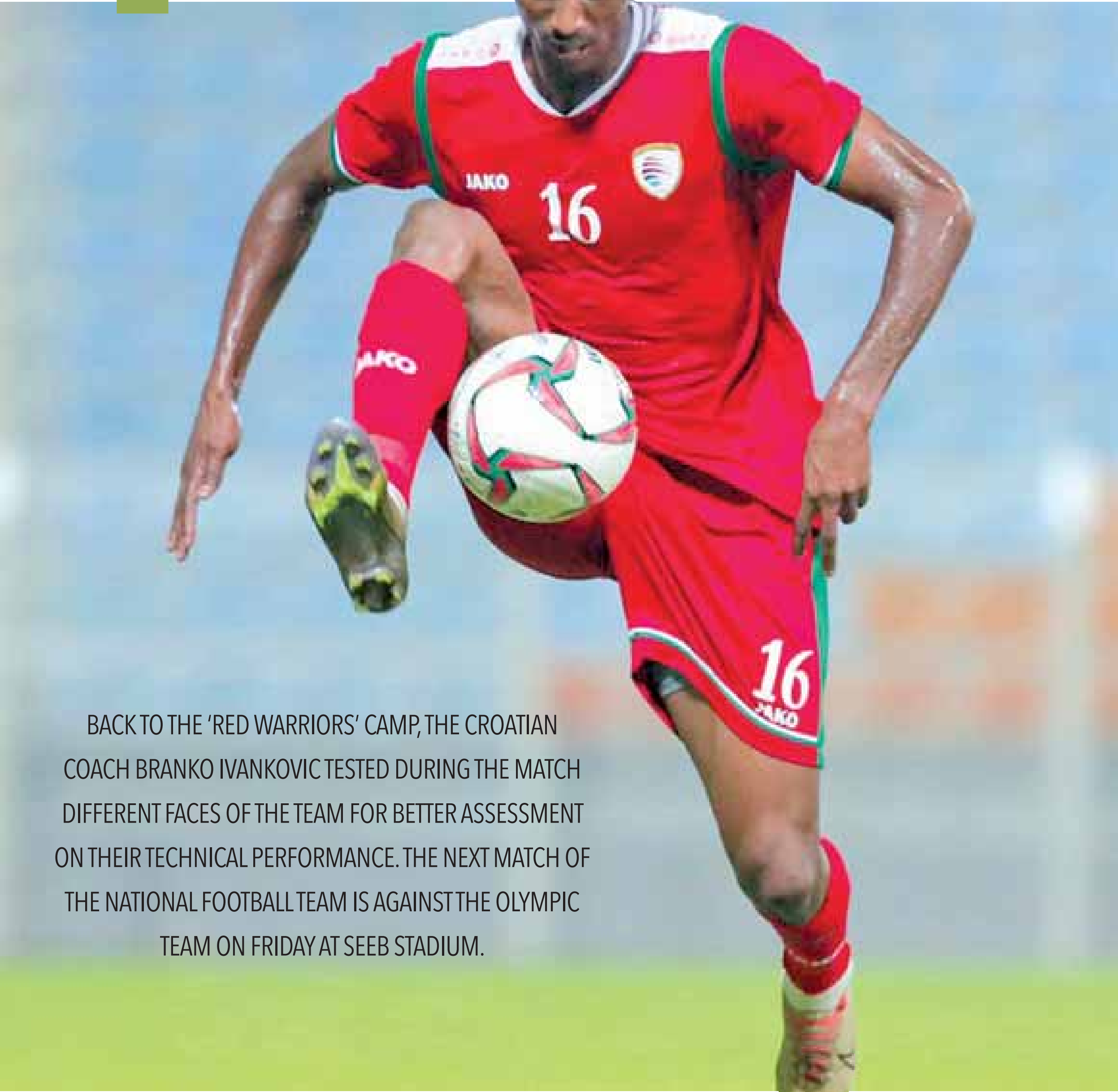
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BACK TO THE 'RED WARRIORS' CAMP, THE CROATIAN COACH BRANKO IVANKOVIC TESTED DURING THE MATCH DIFFERENT FACES OF THE TEAM FOR BETTER ASSESSMENT ON THEIR TECHNICAL PERFORMANCE. THE NEXT MATCH OF THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL TEAM IS AGAINST THE OLYMPIC TEAM ON FRIDAY AT SEEB STADIUM.

# ‘RED WARRIORS’

## BEAT MUSCAT CLUB IN PREPARATORY CAMP

ADIL AL BALUSHI  
MUSCAT, NOV 11

The national football team edged Muscat club 1-0 in a preparatory match at Seeb Stadium on Tuesday. The solitary goal in the match was scored by the striker Khalid al Hajri.

The friendly match was part of the “Red Warriors” camp for gearing up for the forthcoming matches of the 2022 World Cup Joint Qualification matches

which was shifted to 2021.

In related news, the AFC announced on Wednesday the dates of the 2022 World Cup Joint Qualification matches. According to the-AFC.com website, the Asian Qualifiers Round 2 matches should be completed by June 15, 2021 with Match Day 7 and 8 in March 2021 and Match Day 9 and 10 in June 2021 with the Final Round of the Asian Qualifiers beginning in September 2021.

The 10 match days of the Asian Qualifiers Final Round, in collaboration with Fifa, should be finished by the end of March 2022 with the Asian and Inter-Continental Play-offs proposed for the Fifa Window May/June in 2022. The Asian Play-off for the Fifa World Cup Qatar 2022 is proposed as a single match.

Back to the ‘Red Warriors’ camp, the Croatian coach Branko Ivankovic tested during the match different faces of the

team for better evaluation on their technical performance. The next match of the national football team is against the Olympic team on Friday at Seeb Stadium. It is expected that Ivankovic will continue on giving equal chances for the most called players to the internal camp and do the right technical evaluation to select the kick off list.

Coach Branko focused during the previous training sessions

on many attacking and tactical solutions. The ongoing camp featured sessions on creating the scoring chances, quick passes, receiving short passes and delivering the balls to the teammates and many other tactical sessions on converting the scoring chances into goals.

Ivankovic has called up 28 players for the domestic camp including: Fayez al Rushaidi, Mohammed al Musalami, Harib al Saadi, Abdullah Fawaz, Salah

al Yahyaee, Ahmed al Khamisi, Yazeed al Mashani, Moutaz Saleh, Ahmed Faraj, Eid al Farsi, Amjad al Harthi, Zahir al Aghbri, Khalid al Buraiki, Abdulaziz al Ghailani, Omar al Fazari, Essam al Subhi, Ahmed al Kaabi, Ali al Rushaidi, Fahmi Said, Ibrahim Saleh, Mohammed al Dheeb, Arshed al Alawi, Abbas al Hashami, Mohsin Jawher, Khalid al Hajri, Omran al Hedi, Abdulaziz al Maqbali and Ali al Busaidy.



**Babar replaces Azhar as Test skipper**

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) announced on Tuesday Babar Azam will replace the under-pressure Azhar Ali as Test captain in the two-match series in New Zealand next month.



**Sweden coach Andersson infected**

Sweden national team coach Janne Andersson has tested positive for the coronavirus, the Swedish football Association said on Wednesday.



**Hungary coach Rossi tests positive**

Hungary national team coach Marco Rossi tested positive for COVID-19 and separated from the team in quarantine a day before their crucial Euro 2020 playoff match against Iceland.

# OFA agree on postponement of the top-tier Omantel League and first division league to December 19



**ADIL AL BALUSHI**  
MUSCAT, NOV 11

The commencement of 2020/2021 season of the domestic top-tier Omantel League is shifted to December 19 instead of the previously announced date which was on December 3, according to a source.

This decision was one of the outcomes during the urgent meeting which was held at the Oman Football Association (OFA) premises in Seeb Stadium in presence of the OFA chairman Shaikh Salim al Wahaibi.

The meeting, which was attended by some of the representatives from

Omantel league and first division league clubs, discussed moving of the starting date of the first division league to 19 December as well. The previous date was on December 3 as well. Both leagues will end on May 20, 2021.

According to the source, more than 20 clubs raised a proposal to the OFA board on the postponement of the kick-off 2020-2021 season and cancellation of the junior league.

OFA discussed and reviewed the raised proposal and agreed on shifting the commencement of the domestic leagues to December 19.

The cancellation of the junior league

According to the source, more than 20 clubs raised a proposal to the OFA board on postponement of the 2020-2021 kick-off season and cancellation of the junior league

is not confirmed yet by the OFA and it will be under revision by the technical specialists and the right decision will be announced later. The decision will depend on the availability of the sports complexes as the matches cannot be held in the local clubs according to the OFA approved medical protocol.

The meeting outcomes included on permission the clubs to sign an agreement with abroad players following the implementation of the home quarantine according to the instructions of the Supreme Committee and the Ministry of Health. After completion from the quarantine period, the player

has to repeat the PCR test to ensure tested as a negative case and that will allow him to join his team.

The 2019/2020 season ended by crowning Seeb as the champion of the league for the first time while Dhofar was placed as runner up and Al Nahda ended in the third position.

Mirbat, Al Oruba and Oman Club were relegated to the first division league. Nizwa had crowned as the first division league champions while Al Shabab was positioned in the second place. Al Musannah team placed in the third position and confirmed their presence in the top flights in the next season.

## Y Horizon, Mazoon Dairy score convincing wins

**MUSCAT:** Opener Rajamani Riju's fluent 44 helped Y Horizon to a comfortable 7-wicket victory against Team Coorg Muscat (TCM) in an F Division T20 League game at OAC ground in Seeb on Friday.

TCM failed to make the most of its decision to bat first, scoring a below-par 103 for 9 in 20 overs. Milind Bhujwala top scored with a painstaking 39 off 53. Gajendran Thathapillai took 2 for 14.

Y Horizon faced no hiccups as it chased down the small target in the 12th over, scoring 104 for 3 thanks to Riju's solid knock. Arjan Halai bagged 2 for 10.

for 9 in 20 overs (Milind Bhujwala 39 – 4x4. Gajendran Thathapillai 2-14) lost to Y Horizon 104 for 3 in 11.5 overs (Rajamani Riju 44 – 6x4, Jatin Patel 21 – 2x4. Arjan Halai 2-10) by 7 wickets. MoM: Rajamani Riju (Y Horizon).

Ali leads Mazoon to easy win

In another F Division match, Syed Muhammed Ali smashed 84 off 50 to set up Mazoon Dairy Company's big 71-run win over Muscat Young Stars at the same venue later in the afternoon.

Mazoon Dairy got off to a flying start with a 97-run opening stand between Ali and Shuhaib who contributed 40 off 24. Ali was also involved in a 67-run third wicket partnership with Sakil Khan who stayed unbeaten as his side ended



its quota of 20 overs at 207 for 6. Young Stars failed to make a match of it, scoring only 136 for 8, Devansh Sampat top scoring with 31. Ameer and Sakil Khan claimed two wickets each.

**Brief scores (F Division T20 League):** Mazoon Dairy 207 for 6 in 20 overs (Syed Muhammed Ali 84 – 13x4, Sakil Khan 50 not out – 5x4, 1x6, Shuhaib 40 – 6x4, 1x6. Adharsh Srinivasan 3-16, Prathiesh Ramesh 2-32) thrashed Muscat Young Stars 136 for 8 in 20 overs (Devansh Sampat 31 – 1x4, Roshan Kumar 26 – 1x4, Adharsh Srinivasan 21 – 2x4. Ameer 2-08, Sakil Khan 2-18) by 71 runs. MoM: Syed Muhammed Ali (Mazoon Dairy).

Brief scores (F Division T20 League): Team Coorg Muscat 103



# BUBBLES AND THE BOSS:



1

‘SMILES BACK’

Delhi coach Ricky Ponting admitted he was “sceptical” about the tournament going ahead during the pandemic, but in the event he said it was “extremely well run”.  
After a nearly six-month delay as India’s coronavirus crisis grew, the 53-day tournament finally got under way in the United Arab Emirates, where it took place in strict bio-secure “bubbles” and at three empty stadiums.  
Despite the unusual conditions, Mumbai Indians paceman Jasprit Bumrah said he was happy to be part of a tournament that brought the “smiles back” to cricket fans.  
The teams, however, felt the strain of life in a bubble with Royal Challengers Bangalore captain Virat Kohli and England’s Eoin Morgan both saying it can be mentally tough on players.



3

‘UNIVERSE BOSS’ AT 41

Chris Gayle, the ultimate big-hitter, wasn’t introduced until midway through the tournament by Kings XI Punjab but he immediately injected life into their faltering campaign with some explosive batting.  
The 41-year-old amassed 288 runs in seven innings, including two match-winning fifties. The left-hander went past 1,000 T20 sixes, extending his runaway record, with a heave over mid-wicket off Rajasthan Royals fast bowler Kartik Tyagi, 19.  
The flamboyant Gayle, who modestly calls himself “Universe Boss”, said his younger team-mates had urged him: “Don’t retire.”



5

INDIAN TALENT

Bangalore batsman Devdutt Padikkal made an impact as a confident opening partner to Australia’s Aaron Finch, one of an impressive brigade of young Indian players.  
The 20-year-old left-hander was named emerging player of 2020 IPL after scoring 473 runs, with captain Virat Kohli praising his “class and efficiency”.  
Mumbai Indians batsman Ishan Kishan went better with more than 500 runs en route to lifting the trophy at 22 years of age.  
Spinners Rahul Chahar (Mumbai), Ravi Bishnoi (Kings XI Punjab) and Kolkata quicks Kamlesh Nagarkoti and Shivam Mavi also made their presence felt.  
Brett Lee, the former Australia bowler now working as a commentator, said “Indian talent stood out”. — AFP

2



TALE OF TWO SKIPPERS

Kohli and Rohit Sharma were both appointed IPL captains for their teams in 2013, but eight years down the line their leadership has met with contrasting results.  
While Sharma bagged his fifth title for Mumbai Indians, an IPL crown still eludes Kohli’s Bangalore.  
After finishing bottom of the eight-team table last year, Bangalore made the play-offs this season, an achievement that didn’t stop former Kolkata captain Gautam Gambhir calling for Kohli to step down.  
But former India opener Virender Sehwag backed Kohli, saying the “captain is only as good as his team”.

4



SPEED GUNS

Fast bowlers aren’t often the heroes in T20 games in the sub-continent. But the UAE pitches gave the pacemen a chance to shine.  
Delhi’s Anrich Nortje bowled the fastest ball in IPL history at 97 mph, and fellow South African quick Kagiso Rabada finished as the leading bowler with 30 wickets.  
Mumbai’s pace duo of Jasprit Bumrah and Trent Boult were second and third in the list of wicket-takers, with 52 scalps between them.  
“I feel the conditions in the UAE have something for everyone,” Rabada said.

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## Rebranded Cyber Security Park unveiled

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, NOV 11

Oman Data Park (ODP) launched ‘Cyber Security Park’ as the new business identity of the company’s cyber security centre. Supported by a choice of preventive, detective and threat intelligent cyber security services to shield its customers, Cyber Security Park is equipped and is capable of preventing more than 8,000 cyber-attacks faced by various institutions in the Sultanate on a daily basis.

The launching ceremony was under the auspices of Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary for Communications and Information Technology, at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology. The new identity of the centre boasts of a shield-shaped logo that embodies the five principles of cyber security (Availability, Confidentiality, Integrity, Accountability and Assurance) that the new identity will pursue in all their operations.

Eng Maqbool al Wahaibi, Chief Executive Officer of ODP, said: “The objective behind the new business identity of the cyber security centre is to strengthen its role in supporting the efforts of the government and the private sector for digital transformation. The centre will provide leading and effective smart security solutions on which institutions can rely on to reduce cyber-attacks.” “This enhanced focus on a

**Cyber Security Park is equipped to repel more than 8,000 daily cyber attacks faced by institutions in Oman**

dedicated brand will open employment opportunities for technical support professionals among internationally qualified Omanis with high level of skills and capabilities. It will also lead to more awareness among institutions regarding the importance of data storage within the Sultanate and understand the risks involved in storing them outside the country.

“This is in addition to the fact that this step would enhance the capabilities of the centre to attract new technologies using artificial intelligence in the area of security solutions,” Al Wahaibi added.

Maitham al Lawati, Vice-President, Technology and Operations, said: “The change of the business identity to Cyber Security Park is the culmination of success achieved in cyber security since its establishment in February 2012. Our cyber security solutions have become the much sought after services to combat cyber crime for leading customer-centric organisations in Oman that seek to protect their own as well as their customer data. Within a very short span of time, our services have grown up to become one of the few specialised cyber security centres in the Sultanate that provide services round the clock seven days a week.”

# OQ to invest in ‘alternative, green’ energy projects in Oman



**AMBITIOUS STRATEGY: Alternative energy initiatives are expected to contribute between \$300-450 million to OQ’s EBITDA by 2040**

CONRAD PRABHU  
@conradprabhu

OQ, the Sultanate’s global integrated energy company, has ambitions to develop a sizable portfolio of alternative energy projects envisioning investments in, among other areas, solar and wind based ventures, as well as industrial scale production of green hydrogen, green ammonia and green water.

These investments and initiatives, part of OQ’s new alternative energy business line, are expected to make a direct contribution of between \$300 million to \$450 million to the group’s EBITDA (Earnings Before

Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization) by the year 2040, according to the wholly Omani government-owned energy conglomerate. “Given that OQ’s business is fundamentally rooted in hydrocarbons, it has developed a business line, alternative energy, that is predicated on three main pillars: Green Molecules, Energy Assets and Energy Efficiency,” said the company in its newly published Sustainability Report.

In addition to making a sizable contribution to the company’s EBITDA, OQ’s Alternative Energy initiatives will also contribute to the company’s ‘social licence to operate’ by reducing its carbon footprint and bringing green markets to market.

More importantly, the alternative energy projects will enhance OQ Initial Public Offering (IPO) story, and change the perception of OQ in capital markets, which would have

a positive effect on the company’s equity value/EBITDA, it stated.

As part of its Alternative Energy development strategy, OQ aims to identify areas where the company can produce and sell green products, such as green hydrogen, green ammonia and green water, as well as various green chemicals.

To this end, the new business line plans to engage with OQ’s downstream and commercial verticals to develop and market green products, it said. Another key pillar of this strategy centres on the goal to invest in greener utilities and services (such as wind/solar power, waste to energy and water treatment) to support industrial and commercial districts in the Sultanate.

The objective is to emerge as a holistic provider of conventional and alternative energy, it said. An integral part of OQ’s alternative energy business strategy is to support

Oman’s greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction targets.

The Sultanate, says OQ, was the fifth highest producer of CO2 per capital in the world (19.87 tonnes) in 2016, with the country’s total emissions of 87.8 MT of CO2 effectively matching its 2030 Paris Agreement target of 88.7 MT.

“In this context, the alternative energy business line seeks to shift its hydrocarbon dynamics by reducing its GHG emissions and capturing new opportunities and risks.

“It further seeks to maximise the value of OQ’s existing hydrocarbon portfolio while reducing its GHG emissions and ensuring it adheres to current and future reporting requirements,” said the company.

OQ also aims to secure around 40 per cent of its total power requirements from renewable energy resources, such as solar and wind, by the year 2030, it added.

# Tethys Oil enters into farmout pact with EOG over Block 49 in Oman

JOMAR MENDOZA  
@JmObserver

Swedish energy firm Tethys Oil, through its wholly owned subsidiary Tethys Oil Montasar Ltd, has entered into an agreement with EOG Resources Oman Block 49 Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of EOG Resources, Inc, for EOG to obtain a 50-per cent interest in the Exploration and Production Sharing Agreement (EPSA) covering Block 49 onshore Oman which comprises 15,439 sq km.

Under the agreement, EOG will also have the option to assume operatorship of the Block and increase its interest to 85 per cent for any operation relating to unconventional hydrocarbon resources.

The agreement is subject to government approval. EOG will acquire access to the data from several thousand line kilometres



of 2D seismic grids, two recently acquired seismic surveys (2D and 3D), nine exploration wells plus additional geotechnical studies and reports. As consideration for both the 50-per cent interest and access to data, EOG will refund all costs incurred on the Block

and fund the Thameen-1 exploration well, up to a combined amount of \$15 million.

Tethys will continue as operator for the first exploration period including the drilling of the Thameen-1 well. After the commitments for the first

**UNCONVENTIONAL POTENTIAL: Under the agreement, EOG will also have the option to assume operatorship of the Block and increase its interest to 85 per cent for any operation relating to unconventional hydrocarbon resources.**

period have been satisfied, EOG will have the option to take over operations of the block and increase its interest to 85 per cent for any operation relating to unconventional hydrocarbon resources.

Should EOG exercise its option, Tethys would retain a 15-per cent interest. The agreement includes consideration if the option is exercised and in the case of commercial development of unconventional

hydrocarbon resources.

The parties would retain 50 per cent each of any operations relating to conventional hydrocarbon resources. “We are delighted to have reached this agreement with one of the world’s foremost experts when it comes to unconventional hydrocarbons and very happy to welcome EOG as a partner in joining us in the pursuit of hydrocarbons in Block 49,” says Tethys Oil’s Managing Director Magnus Nordin.

“We are excited to partner with Tethys to evaluate an oil-rich basin for both conventional and unconventional potential,” said William R “Bill” Thomas, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of EOG Resources, Inc.

“This agreement expands EOG’s footprint in Oman which also includes Block 36, and provides us with an

attractive opportunity to explore a basin with significant potential upside for the company.” Block 49 covers an area of 15,439 sq km onshore the South West of the Sultanate of Oman. Tethys Oil was awarded Block in 2017. After three years of seismic work, including reprocessing of older seismic data and processing and interpretation of seismic data from two new campaigns, Tethys is ready to drill the Thameen-1 well.

The well is expected to spud in mid-December 2020 and to be drilled to a depth of close to 4,000 metres to evaluate three potential reservoir targets. The initial three-year exploration phase for Block 49 has been extended with one year and runs until December 2021. The EPSA holders can elect to enter into a second exploration phase of an additional three years.



# Minimum wage reform has net positive benefits

Last month, a circular from the Ministry of Labour announced the abolition of the tiered minimum wage system based on educational qualifications applicable to Omanis working in the private sector.

The aim is to increase the number of Omanis working in the private sector, so that an Omani worker is given a minimum wage of RO 325 (\$845) per month at the start.

The circular was welcomed by the owners of companies and organisations who saw it as a correct decision to increase the number of jobs for Omanis in many of their economic sectors.

They believe that the

announcement will encourage Omanis to enter the market instead of waiting for suitably paying jobs, sometimes for many years. With the scrapping of this system, young people can take up employment and gain valuable experience in professions currently occupied by expatriate workers.

Over time, and with experience, their salaries will be raised as soon as they are able to enhance their productivity in their workplaces.

As we all know, the issue of securing employment for national workers is not only a concern of the Omani market alone.

Rather, private sector companies across the Gulf



HAIDER ALLAWATI  
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THE CIRCULAR WAS WELCOMED BY COMPANIES AND ORGANISATIONS WHO SAW IT AS A CORRECT DECISION TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF JOBS FOR OMANIS IN MANY OF THEIR ECONOMIC SECTORS

Cooperation Council countries face difficulties in employing nationals expecting high salaries, and end up taking expatriate workers to fill certain positions in their organisations.

Despite the positive benefits of this move, some experts argue that this decision will add to the disparity in wage structures and benefits enjoyed by workers in the private and public sectors.

Regardless, the decision encourages job-seekers to explore employment opportunities in the private sector because of dwindling options in the government sector.

Others believe that the minimum wage decision will likely discourage young people from pursuing their higher

studies. Employers are also likely to do away with incentives and benefits that have been in place, they warn.

Nevertheless, it will be evident in the near future whether nationals will flock to the private sector for work or wait for the appropriate time to find work in government institutions.

The latter scenario will likely put pressure on government bodies to provide job opportunities for Omanis, although this decision is designed to reform the labour market.

Oman's policies have been conducive to the growth of the private sector with a view to supporting stronger investment inflows and thereby creating more job opportunities for Omanis.

This has been reinforced by policies and legislations supporting Omanisation. The latest decision is also in line with international labour laws based on principles practiced by enterprises in free market economies.

The private sector always looks at the productivity of the individual; the higher his productivity, the more incentives and benefits he gets. Productivity stems from good performance and strong skillsets.

Today, unemployment is rife in many countries in the region, which is partly attributable to the expectation of high salaries from nationals. This has created hurdles in attracting more citizens into the private sector.

## Brent oil hits \$45 on hopes for COVID-19 vaccine

LONDON: Benchmark Brent oil rose to a more than two-month high above \$45 a barrel on Wednesday on hopes of an effective COVID-19 vaccine and an industry report showing US crude inventories fell more than expected.

Brent was up \$1.41, or 3.2 per cent, at \$45.02 at 11:18 GMT, the first time it cleared the \$45 threshold since early September. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude also added \$1.41 cents, or 3.4 per cent, to \$42.77 a barrel.

"This week's news about a coronavirus vaccine was encouraging and, alongside short-covering activity, strongly supported oil prices on Monday and Tuesday," said Giovanni Staunovo, oil analyst for UBS. The bank cautioned that European lockdowns and



A man paying in Turkish lira at a gas station in Jenderes in the countryside of Aleppo. – AFP

restored Libyan oil output could weigh on prices in the short term, but forecast oil at \$60 a barrel by the end of 2021 based on the likelihood that producers would continue to rein in supply.

US crude stockpiles fell by 5.1 million barrels last week to about 482 million barrels, industry group data showed, compared with analysts' expectations in a poll for a reduction of 913,000 barrels. — Reuters

# OQ commits to accountability with first Sustainability Report

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, NOV 11

OQ, Oman's global integrated energy company, has further committed to its Energy Transition with the publication of its first-ever Sustainability Report, examining and documenting the Group's progress towards a greener future.

This report marks the beginning of OQ's journey, embracing transparency and accountability by providing key indicators that comprise our adoption of sustainability at our core.

The Sustainability Report was undertaken voluntarily by OQ and in compliance with the highest international and industry standards, specifically Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)



Standards, in order to allow our progress to be measured at the same level at which we conduct all other aspects of our business.

"Accelerating our sustainability agenda is one of our key focus areas. We do so by having a new

OQ strategy for the 'Energy Transition'. We will implement this new strategy in close partnerships and collaborations with various organisations and foundations.

We will continuously strive to inspire each other, find better

solutions, and share best practices to increase efficiencies", said OQ Group CEO Musab al Mahrouqi.

At OQ, sustainability refers not only to our environmental policies and conduct, but to the treatment of our most important resource: our people. Delivering sustainability and business excellence at every level is at the core of OQ's values and work.

"To put sustainability at the centre of our business is a big opportunity that accelerates the speed of change. We understand that this process is not easy, and that we have a long way ahead of us. However, our commitment is firm towards driving our sustainability agenda at every level of our operations in the coming years", said Ibtisam al Riyamiyah, OQ Chief — People, Technology and Culture.

## More tech executives than tech critics on Biden's transition team

WASHINGTON: Far more executives from technology companies than outspoken tech critics were named to US President-elect Joe Biden's transition team on Tuesday, offering clues on who will decide on filling key roles and ultimately influence his administration's thinking in coming years.

Tech companies have been trying to strengthen their relationship with a future Biden administration to ensure they have a voice in an onslaught of federal and state investigations of their business practices.

The Biden transition team released a list of agency review teams on Tuesday. Amazon.com Inc's Tom Sullivan, an executive on the public policy team, will be part of Biden's review team overseeing the Department of State.

Similarly, Mark Schwartz from Amazon's cloud computing arm, who is also a former Obama administration official, will be weighing in on decisions for the Office of Management and Budget. Microsoft-owned LinkedIn's



US President-elect Joe Biden smiles at his transition office in Delaware. – Reuters

senior director for North America policy, Nicole Isaac, is part of the team overseeing the Department of Treasury.

Nicole Wong, a former deputy chief technology officer under the administration of Democratic President Barack Obama and a vice-president and general counsel for Alphabet-owned Google found a spot in the review team for the National Security Council.

By contrast, tech critics such as Gene Kimmelman, senior adviser with Washington-based Public Knowledge, which focuses

on areas such as antitrust policy, will be on the review team for the Department of Justice and Sarah Miller from the American Economic Liberties Project was chosen for the group weighing in on decisions about the Department of Treasury.

Both Kimmelman and Miller have pushed for higher antitrust scrutiny of Big Tech's business practices. Executives from relatively smaller tech companies such as AirBnB, Uber, Lyft, and Stripe were also appointed into these agency review groups. — Reuters

### PRESS RELEASES

#### MEETHAQ OFFERS 50 PER CENT DISCOUNT ON SAFE DEPOSIT LOCKER ANNUAL RENTAL FEE

In line with the bank's vision "To serve you better, everyday", Meethaq Islamic



Banking from Bank Muscat, has announced a 50 per cent discount on annual rental fees on safe deposit lockers for all existing and new customers who book a locker with Meethaq until December 31, 2020.

Customers may keep their valuables in the safety of a locker with Meethaq safe deposit locker service, ensuring the safety of their valuables. Meethaq Islamic Banking, which has been recognised as the Best Islamic Bank in Oman in 2019 by Islamic Finance News, has announced this as part of further enhancing its products and services bouquet for its customers.

The discount will be offered for the first year on a 'first come first served' basis depending on locker availability in the customer's preferred branch.

New customers can request the locker facility once they open an account with Meethaq. It is important to note that the locker facility can be requested at any of the branches where the service is available.

To avail the discount, the locker has to be requested and applicable rental paid within the promotion period. The 50 per cent discount amount will be credited back to the customer once the locker is issued and the full rental is paid by the customer.

#### BANKDHOFAR LAUNCHES 50TH NATIONAL DAY SPECIAL INITIATIVE

Coinciding with the 50th National Day, BankDhofar has launched a special initiative titled "50 years of achievement and ambitious outlook". The initiative aims marking the achievements of the 50 years of Omani renaissance and looking forward to a brighter future.



The initiative will also highlight the progress and developments seen in various fields and sectors including; education, economy (SME), as well as shedding light to the opportunities given to women and youth.

The Bank has also launched an Instagram contest, where participants will showcase the development witnessed in the 50 years through four categories; Drawings, Video, Photograph or graphic design.

The contest will be during the period November 10-16, 2020, where 4 participants will win RO 250 each (one winner from each category). BankDhofar constantly endeavours to boost positive communication with the customers and to build lasting relationship through various communication channels. As part of its strategy which aims at reaffirming its position as a leading bank in the Sultanate and the best in the Gulf, BankDhofar continues to provide the best customer experience, innovative products and creative services that are custom-made to meet the needs and requirements of our customers.

## Malaysia aviation firms need three years to recover

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Airlines in Malaysia could take three years to bounce back from the coronavirus pandemic, depending on the outbreak in the country and abroad, the transport ministry said.

The minister said earlier this week that in the Malaysian Aviation Commission's (MAVCOM) revised projections for passenger traffic this year, it expects passenger numbers to shrink as much as 75.6 per cent to 26.6 million, compared with the 109.2 million passengers recorded in 2019.

"In this regard, airlines are expected to need a period of three years to fully recover situation from the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic, subject to the of the outbreak in the country and abroad", he said in a written parliamentary reply.

Airlines globally have taken a hit from the pandemic as governments shut borders and grounded flights to contain the spread of the virus.

MAVCOM first revised lower its 2020 passenger traffic forecast in June, expecting a contraction of as much as 50.3 per cent, to 54.3 million passengers.

Malaysia's national carrier Malaysia Airlines and the long-haul unit of AirAsia Group Bhd, AirAsia X Bhd, have both cut staff and announced restructuring plans.

AirAsia Group has also lowered its market recovery expectations. — **AFP**



A screen shows the value of goods being transacted during Alibaba Group's Single's Day global shopping festival at a media centre in Hangzhou, China. — **Reuters**

## China's shoppers splash the cash in world's biggest spending spree

**SHANGHAI:** Chinese consumers snapped up everything from food to electronics and beauty products on Wednesday as retailers slashed prices for the world's largest online shopping bonanza, closely watched this year for clues on post-pandemic consumer sentiment.

The marathon spending spree has for more than a decade seen China's army of shoppers shell out colossal amounts of cash that has dwarfed the incomes of many small nations.

And this year will be no exception. While "Single's Day" — so-called for its annual 11.11 date — has long-been a 24-hour event, e-commerce giant Alibaba has expanded it to an 11-day promotion beginning November

1.

As of Tuesday night, Alibaba platforms had already processed 372.3 billion yuan (\$56.5 billion) in sales over that period, more than the GDP of Iceland, Lebanon and Georgia combined.

Leading China retailers such as Alibaba, JD.com, and Pinduoduo compete aggressively for Single's Day, which far outstrips the pre-Christmas "Black Friday" promotion in the United States.

But Chinese regulators cast a gloom over the biggest e-commerce stretch of the year by announcing draft antitrust rules that signal a looming crackdown on high-flying Internet giants.

The rules published on Tuesday outlined plans to prevent "monopolistic behaviour" among internet companies, which tend to

develop captive ecosystems.

Alibaba's Taobao platform, for example, supports payments via its own Alipay rather, but not the WeChat Pay technology of rival Tencent.

Chinese tech shares tumbled for a second day on Wednesday. Alibaba shed more than eight per cent in Hong Kong — just a week after regulators halted an enormous IPO by its Ant Group financial arm — and rival JD.com fell a similar amount.

This year's shopping is being closely followed around the world as a guide to the state of China's crucial consumer sector, which is increasingly more important to the future of the world's biggest economy.

As the country emerges from the effects of the virus and tight

lockdowns, the recovery in retail sales has lagged that seen in industrial sectors, but is gaining pace, analysts said.

"Single's Day" originally focused on sales of certain items like beauty products and electronics, said Melanie Sanders, Asia-Pacific head of retail for consultancy Bain & Company.

But e-commerce in China has expanded to include just about anything a consumer might purchase, including groceries, as digitally savvy Chinese opt for the convenience of online shopping. The pandemic, which has made many Chinese wary of crowds, is furthering this trend, she said.

"We're expecting it to be another very, very strong year, another record", Sanders said.

— **AFP**

## Asian leaders to sign China-backed trade deal

**HANOI:** Southeast Asian leaders start meetings on Thursday that are expected to lead to an ambitious China-backed trade deal at a time the still uncertain election result in the United States leaves questions over its engagement in the region.

Leaders of the 10-member Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand are scheduled to conclude talks on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

The deal will take years to complete but will progressively lower tariffs across many areas and could become the world's biggest trade agreement.

The 15 participating RCEP countries make up nearly a third of the world's people and account for 29 per cent of global gross domestic product. China is already the biggest source of imports and destination for exports for would-be RCEP members.

"The signing of RCEP will provide momentum for regional trade, particularly between signatories," said Nguyen Quoc Dung, Deputy Foreign Minister of Vietnam, which is chairing ASEAN meetings. — **AFP**



Workers help unload bags of rice from a cargo ship onto a truck at Tanjung Priok Port in Jakarta, Indonesia. — **Reuters**

## Nearly \$2 trillion traded on COVID-19 vaccine news

**LONDON:** News of a breakthrough in the race to find a COVID-19 vaccine sparked one of the heaviest trading days since the height of the pandemic crisis, according to early data analysed by Reuters, with nearly \$2 trillion changing hands on Monday.

Traders stampeded to the riskier plays in equities, foreign exchange and bond markets after Pfizer Inc released positive data on its vaccine trial, while rotating out of safe havens such as technology



Pfizer logo is seen inside the New York Stock Exchange. — **Reuters**

stocks, Japanese yen and top-rated bonds.

"Volumes (are) also surging as programmes and baskets go to work to either correct portfolio balances or address margin calls", said Mark Taylor, sales trader at Mirabaud Securities, highlighting a jump in volumes in the airlines and banking sectors.

In the United States, nearly \$500 billion worth of trades went through stock markets on Monday, one of the busiest days

since March, when coronavirus lockdown fears rattled financial markets.

Europe saw \$120 billion traded, according to Refinitiv data.

Value stocks, typically companies that are more sensitive to economic cycles, notched their best one-day performance against their growth-focused peers ever in the United States after Monday's news of an effective vaccine against the coronavirus.

A similar trend was noticed in

the bond and currency markets where volumes matched the panic trading seen during the depths of the market mayhem in March and double that of April when the coronavirus pandemic slammed into markets.

Total turnover for the 33 currency pairs on CLS, a major settler of trades in the currency markets, totalled \$627 billion on Monday. Average daily turnover was \$707 billion in March and \$380 billion in April. — **Reuters**

### TOKYO

#### Nissan's prospects brighten as China rebounds

Nissan Motor Co could trim its forecast for a full-year loss when it reports quarterly results on Thursday, analyst estimates show, as a recovery in China marks a rare bright spot for the Japanese automaker weakened by scandal and the pandemic.

Nissan's second-quarter results are likely to highlight how it is falling further behind domestic rivals Toyota Motor Corp and Honda Motor Co Ltd, both of which last week raised their profit estimates thanks partly to



an uptick in demand from China, the world's largest auto market.

While China's rebound from the pandemic is proving a boon for Japanese automakers, Nissan is still struggling in North America. — **Reuters**

### LOS ANGELES

#### TikTok files petition to stop deadline for sale

ByteDance on Tuesday sought relief from the federal appeals court in Washington to block a move by the Trump administration that would force it to sell its popular video sharing app TikTok.

The Beijing tech company had been planning to sell ownership stakes in TikTok to Silicon Valley cloud computing company Oracle and Arkansas retail giant Walmart, a plan that was initially blessed by President Donald Trump in September.

But the prospects of getting a deal done have grown murkier since Joe Biden was elected president and Trump has filed legal challenges disputing the result.

In its petition, ByteDance said it has not received clarity on whether its proposed plan would be accepted, or if it would be given a 30-day extension.

The US Committee on Foreign Investment had set a Thursday deadline for TikTok to sell its US operations. — **Reuters**

### SEATTLE

#### Boeing loses more 737 MAX orders

Boeing Co lost another 12 orders for its grounded 737 MAX jetliner in October, and delivered 13 aircraft to customers, down from the 20 jets delivered in the same month a year ago, company data showed.

For the second straight month, the closely watched monthly snapshot revealed 787 Dreamliner quality flaws and the coronavirus pandemic kept hampering Boeing's efforts to develop an alternative cash cow to the 737 MAX.



The United States Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) appeared about a week away from lifting a March 2019 safety ban, although the pandemic kept hammering demand for jets from Boeing and European rival Airbus. — **Reuters**

SHORT TAKES

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33 years, Indian, female having MBA in finance looking for position of accountant, having 8 years of experience in Muscat as accountant. NOC available. Contact No: 79161458.

MECHANICAL engineer. 21, Indian male currently in Oman looking to work at any engineering field. Contact 96511338. Email: rkdhannush11@gmail.com

I NEED a driver job, urgent, with NOC paper. My name: Masum Billah. 968 94991705.

■ FOR SALE

WE supply quantities of excellent mountainous soil in Bausher (suitable for compaction and filling) 99242445, 99327939.



To receive news updates from Oman Observer,

WhatsApp <your name> to 96473232

SINGLE room with attached bathroom and air-condition for executive bachelor, non-cooking, Wadi Kabir/ Al Falaj/ Ruwi High Street area. Contact 99657906

■ MANPOWER

MANPOWER from Philippines. Whatsapp: 91206344.



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Direct Line: 24786077  
GSM: 99382355, 99172309  
pcomctom@omantel.net.om  
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman

■ FOR SALE

INSTITUTION Licence contact 95595512.

DIESEL Tanker, 1,600 gallon Volvo, 1987. 92836774

A SHOWROOM in Al Qurum in strategic location with extravagant interior design on 280 sqm is offered for sale at RO 25,000. 92470024.

COLD store in Al Seeb for lease or sale. Contact: 94272979, 96252664.

NEW 3 storey villas for sale/rents Wadi Kabir/Al Khuwair), (Shops/offices for rent/ Al Khuwair) (Flats for rent/Wadi Kabir). 96596348.

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LUXURIOUS Toyota bus 2016, air-conditioned, 30 passengers, offered for daily/monthly/annually, Muscat. Contact: 98080609, 96316269.

**ANNOUNCEMENT**

We are a company dealing in ambulance service in the interior and in capital area of OM. We are looking for male nurse (Omani) retired from service between the age of 40 to 55 years. Having ACLS, BLS certificate and Ministry of Health License. Interested parties may please send their CV along with copies of ACLS, BLS and MoH license to: **khalfan@rawabittrading.com** or **george@rawabittrading.com**

A LEGAL translation office needs **Marketeers**. Contact E-mail: oman4n@gmail.com

1. AC maintenance and servicing.  
2. Fridge, washing machine and dish washer repairing.  
3. Painting and cleaning services.  
4. Electrical, plumbing and carpentry work 97014234, 99447257, 24290686.

ORIENT Trading llc, Shampooing, sofa, carpet, floor polishing. Old house repairing. 99834373.

AL SUMRI AC maintenance. We are ready to repair and install all types of Air-Conditioner within Muscat Governorate. 94301888.

■ SIT. WANTED

LIGHT driver, Pakistani male, 39, with good knowledge of Oman roads and areas, speaks English, Arabic, Urdu and Hindi. Looking for suitable placement. Contact 79250786.

**A reputed company in Sultanate of Oman is looking for the following personnel :**

**1. Wiring Electrician – General:**

- To read SLD, GA Drawing, Schematic drawing & BOM
- Prepare Layout & component assembly as per GA drawing
- Prepare Busbar links and busbar assembly
- Wiring of electrical components based on schematic drawing
- Testing of panels.
- Should follow his superior instructions and work closely with team

**2. Technician for Cold Storage Systems:**

- ITI holder (Mechanical), candidate should be able to install insulated cold storage panels, condensing units and evaporator units. Basic electrical knowledge will be an added advantage.

**3. AC Technician:**

- ITI holder. Adept in handling package unit/chiller installation and commissioning.

**4. Laundry Technician:**

- ITI/Diploma Holder: Capable to handle the installation of the Industrial Heavy duty Laundry Equipments namely washers, dryers, dry cleaning machines, flat work ironers and finishing presses. Basic knowledge in electronics/programming feature of the machine will be an added advantage.

**5. Kitchen Equipment Technician:**

- Preferably ITI / Diploma Holder in Electrical/Electronics.
- Min 5 years hands on experience in installation / Trouble shooting and Maintenance of Commercial kitchen equipments (Combi ovens, All gas and electrical cooking equipments, Dishwashers, Ice machines, Refrigeration system etc.)
- Must have hands on experience in reading Circuit drawings, operation manual and trouble shooting guide.
- Must be able to work independently with minimum supervision with maximum flexibility.

**Experience: 5-8 years**  
**Age Group: 25 -32 years**

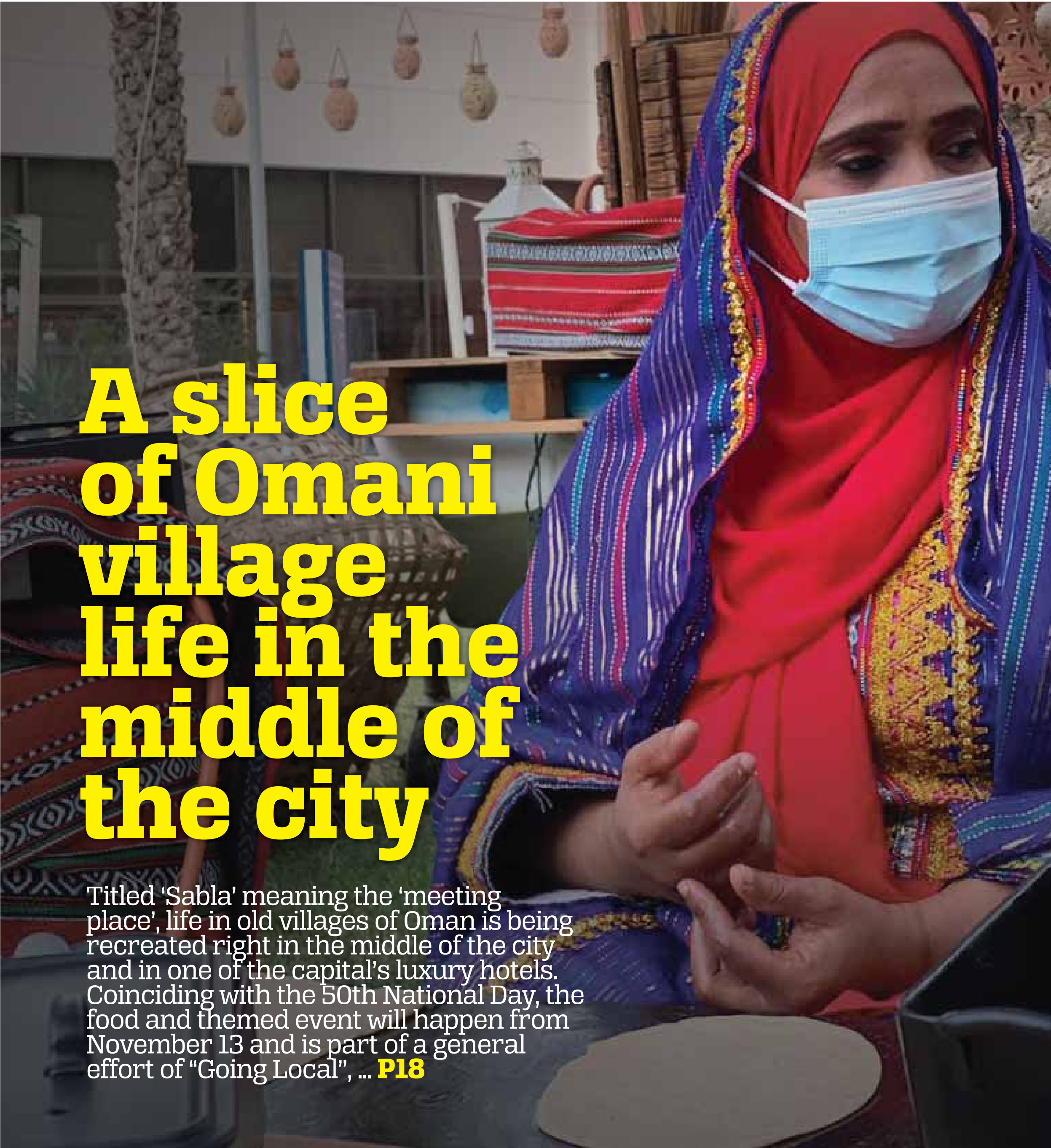
**Interested candidates may send in their resume on igcc.res@gmail.com or fax on 24816976.**

**VACANCIES**

A leading company in Oman is looking for suitable candidates for following positions.

| Trade                  | Qty | Salary (OMR) | Qualification                                                                                                                     | Contact Details                   |
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| Rotating Technicians   | 30  | 250 - 300    | Preferred Diploma in Mech/ Elect and experience of Maintenance in Oil & Gas. (VISA readily available) (Work Place: Sohar & Fahud) | <b>careers1572@gmail.com</b>      |
| Electrical Technicians | 20  |              |                                                                                                                                   | Inteshar Siddiqui: +968 93214353  |
| Instrument Technicians | 20  |              |                                                                                                                                   | Wasim Kazi: +968 93221460         |
| Planning Engineers     | 4   | 400 - 500    |                                                                                                                                   | Khalifa Al Tourshi: +968 99224602 |

# features

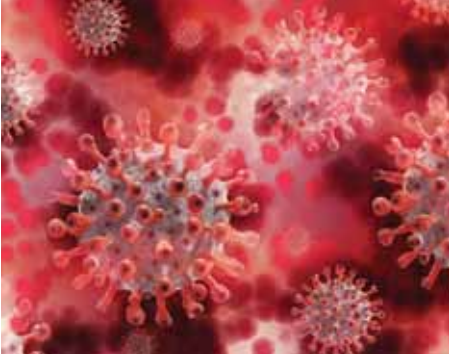


## A slice of Omani village life in the middle of the city

Titled ‘Sabla’ meaning the ‘meeting place’, life in old villages of Oman is being recreated right in the middle of the city and in one of the capital’s luxury hotels. Coinciding with the 50th National Day, the food and themed event will happen from November 13 and is part of a general effort of “Going Local”, ... **P18**

### INSIDE STORIES

#### HEALTH AND WELLNESS



##### A VIRAL STORY

Viruses are such tiny particles that tens of millions of viruses will fit on the head of a pin. Their size can range from 20 to 300 nanometres (one nanometre is equivalent to 1/1,000,000,000m)... **Story on Page P20**

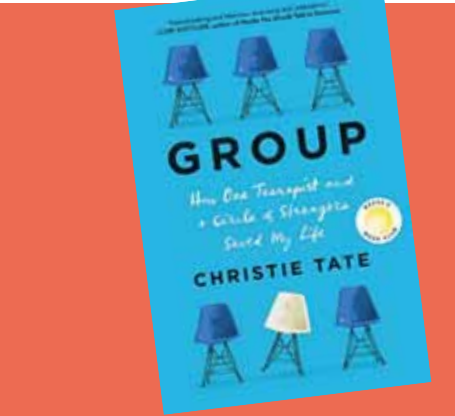
#### LOCAL SCENE



##### OMAN POST SHOWCASES ‘AL ARDAH’ TRADITIONAL ART WITH EIGHT COMMEMORATIVE STAMPS

Under the auspicious of Royal Court Affairs, Oman Post, an Asyad Group member company, launched eight stamps to showcase one of the Sultanate’s most celebrated forms of folklore, ‘Al Ardah’ traditional art of horse and camel taming.. **Story on Page 19**

#### READ



##### GROUP BY CHRISTIE TATE

A law student grappling with feelings of sadness and isolation is invited to join a psychotherapy group.

#### ENTERTAINMENT



##### IRAN CHOOSES ‘SUN CHILDREN’ TO REPRESENT IT AT THE OSCARS

Iran has chosen director Majid Majidi’s latest film “Sun Children” (“Khorshid” in Persian) to represent the country at the Oscars, the official body in charge of the selection said in a statement... **Story on Page 19**

#### CELEBRATE



##### TALK MONEY WEEK

Celebrated from November 9 to 13, Talk Money Week was designed so people will get into talking about their financial health. To celebrate today, for anyone who might be worried or stressed out about their money situation, this week is the perfect time to reach out to anyone who is close to them for some help and guidance.



# A slice of Omani village life in the middle of the city

KABEER YOUSUF

**T**he true essence of life in Oman derives from the villages which are known as the homes of tradition and culture. The lifestyle, dresses and tools used by generations, foods and cooking methods form a phase in history.

An effort to showcase local recipes, the foods and the preparation methods of a bygone era are being recreated at the lawns of Sheraton Oman, which will go live in the evenings from Friday.

Titled 'Sabla' meaning the 'meeting place', life in Oman is recreated coinciding with the 50th National Day for next two months from November 13 as part of the 'Go Local' efforts. The whole garden is currently being converted into an Omani village with an aesthetic touch to true Omani ambience.

An array of typical Omani cuisines from past to future through the present, the pots and pans in use yesteryears vis a vis most modern cooking techniques are codified in the typical village manned by men and women in traditional attire.

"The very idea behind this Omani Sabla nights, a themed night to showcase the rich tradition, culture and culinary journey that Oman has to offer, is to recreate authentic Omani lifestyle and showcase typical Omani recipes that have been handed over from generations to gener-

ations and cannot be found anywhere else," says Samir Messaoudi, General Manager.

Guests will be treated in the two majlises arranged inside the gazebos in the timeless Omani hospitality.

**An effort to showcase local recipes, the foods and the preparation methods of a bygone era are being recreated at the lawns of Sheraton Oman, which will go live in the evenings from Friday**

Besides the two 'Shua pits' which demonstrate how the auspicious food is made, different corners displaying how Majboos, Mashuai, Mushaltat, Shawarma, Mishkak, Halwa, Omani bread

and traditional Harees are made is an ode to Omani gastronomic tradition.

All frontline chefs would be Omanis who vouch by the recipes bequeathed by the past generations. They represent different wilayats of the Sultanate and will act as the food ambassadors of traditional Omani foods.

As many as 8 omani chefs specialised in traditional foods will be presenting their varieties while experimenting with the modern foods. Out of the 14 cooking stations which are earmarked for specialities and live cooking stations, 10 will be handled by Omani chefs. Adding spice to the dishes will be the ingredients which are sourced locally.

The recreation of Omani village in terms of gastronomic delights also has a 'support local charity' angle. Dar al Atta, the frontline charity initiative, will be receiving a portion of the returns on each bill while their local crafts and other products would add colour to the ambience.

Children will be given an insight into the Omani life in the past as they will be able to feel the foods through a delicious journey by the service staff with areas meant for kids.

## COVID PROTOCOL:

Sameer added that false-proof efforts are in place to adhere to the measures stipulated by the authorities in all areas, starting with welcoming to food preparation, and serving zones and only a limited number of guests would be allowed to taste the true delicacies of Omani village life.





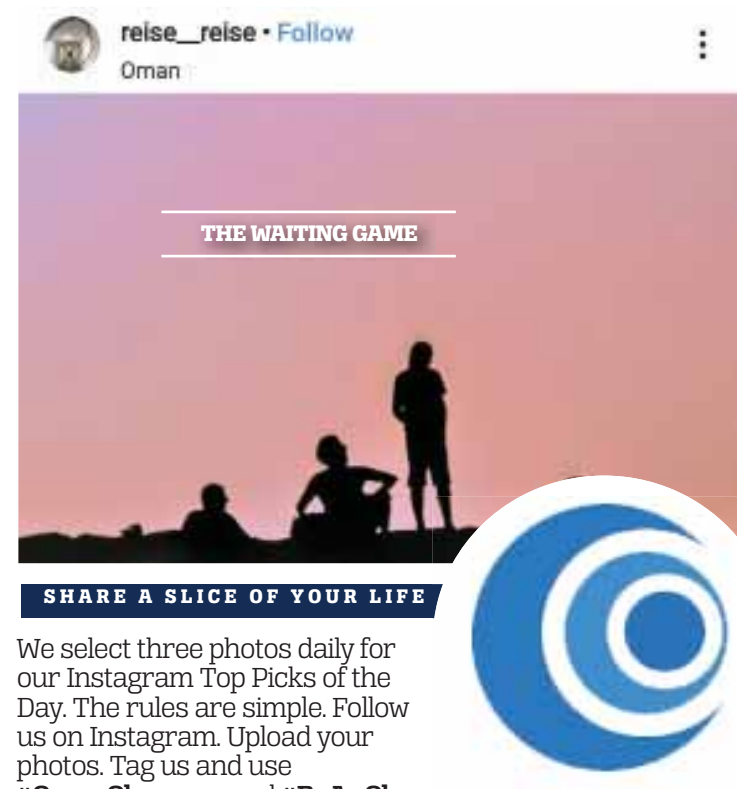
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## INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use **#OmanObserver** and **#BeAnObserver**.

## LOCAL SCENE

Get full stories online at [www.omanobserver.com](http://www.omanobserver.com)



# Oman Post showcases 'Al Ardah' traditional art with eight commemorative stamps

Under the auspices of Royal Court Affairs, Oman Post, an Asyad Group member company, launched eight stamps to showcase one of the Sultanate's most celebrated forms of folklore, 'Al Ardah' traditional art of horse and camel taming. The new stamp collection celebrates inscribing the centuries-long tradition on the Unesco's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Abdulmalik al balushi from Oman Post said, "We would like to thank the Royal Court Affairs for their sponsorship and support to bring this collection of stamps to life. We are always exploring and looking at ways to foster greater expression and presence of Omani folklore, building on traditions of the past and ensuring these forms of art are celebrated and passed along through generations to come."

The stamps feature 'Al Ardah' day, meaning the 'day of the festival' in Arabic, people gather around the race-course to watch shows by horse and camel riders that



reflect their taming skills. Traditional arts such as 'Hanbal', a singing group routine of horse and camel riders entering the 'Ardah' field, as well as reciting of poems usually accompany the festivities. This art is associated with many social occasions in Omani society and is an

integral part of Omani culture reflecting people's devotion to the care of animals.

Offering an augmented reality experience through the Oman Stamp App available on Google Play or Apple Store, the stamps pays homage to time-honoured traditions. They can now be

reserved by emailing Oman Post on [philatelic@oman-post.om](mailto:philatelic@oman-post.om).

Furthermore, by scanning the stamps on their smartphones, customers can experience true Omani folklore through a video portraying this much-cherished tradition.

## ENTERTAINMENT

## Iran chooses 'Sun Children' to represent it at the Oscars



**IRAN HAS** chosen director Majid Majidi's latest film "Sun Children" ("Khorshid" in Persian) to represent the country at the Oscars, the official body in charge of the selection said in a statement.

The film, which had its world premiere at the 77th Venice Film Festival in September, follows several street children who help support their families through odd jobs.

One day, they are told a

from street children to "show their abilities and their humanity".

It took the director four months and nearly 4,000 auditions to cast the children who starred in the film.

Majidi's "Children of Heaven" was the first Iranian film nominated by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for the Best International Feature Film Oscar, in 1999.

The only Iranian direc-



hidden treasure is buried underneath a school for street children and to dig for it, they must enrol.

The decision to nominate "Khorshid" for the 2021 Academy Awards was announced on Sunday in a statement from the Farabi Cinema Foundation.

In a September, Majidi said he chose his actors

tor to have won an Oscar is Asghar Farhadi, first in 2012 for "A Separation", and again in 2017 for "The Salesman".

Farhadi boycotted the Hollywood ceremony for "The Salesman" to protest against a controversial travel ban on immigrants imposed by US President Donald Trump.— **AFP**



# A Viral Story

DR SIVA KUMAR  
doctsh@gmail.com

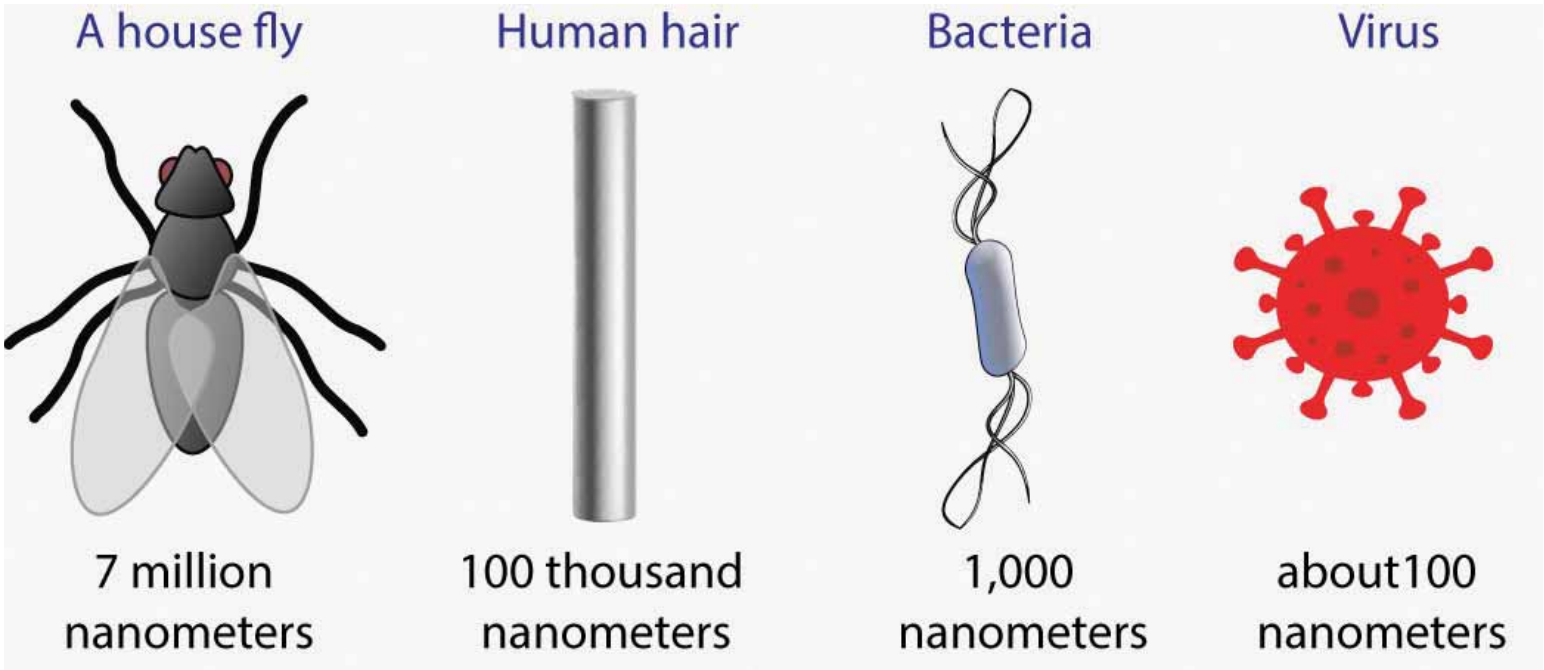
Viruses are such tiny particles that tens of millions of viruses will fit on the head of a pin. Their size can range from 20 to 300 nanometres (one nanometre is equivalent to 1/1,000,000,000m).

Viruses, which means poisonous substances in Latin, were early on

living cell, called a host, they shed their coat and behave as if they are alive. Although viruses live a kind of borrowed life, they affect cells' replication machinery to sustain, reproduce and colonise. Viruses can infect any organism; from bacteria to elephants, plants to people. The common cold, warts, diarrhoea, and encephalitis are some of the infections caused by them. Viruses are so smart they don't leave any trace of their origins because they not only copy themselves within their host cells but

An infected person, as a reservoir of viruses, can release them in bodily fluids — through coughing and sneezing — or by shedding skin or even by touching. These infections spread further and can be sporadic (less frequent), clusters, or endemic (a constant presence over a geographical area). They can become an epidemic (sudden increase), and when it affects a whole country or the world, it is called a pandemic. There are no treatments for most viral infections; we simply need to wait for our immune sys-

several types of coronavirus can affect humans. Most strains of coronavirus cause the common cold, but some rarer strains cause Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Social distancing is considered to be an effective way to contain the transition when the disease is spread by droplet, as in the case of COVID-19. Even two or three weeks of strict social distancing can prevent a sharp peak of infection. The human race has fought sev-



thought to be poisonous chemicals and therefore, in 1946 when Stanley and his colleagues successfully isolated a virus, they were given the Nobel Prize in chemistry and not in physiology or medicine. Scientists have been puzzled for the past 100 years about whether to call viruses poisons or life-forms or molecular machines produced by nature's own nanotechnology. Viruses behave as non-living things consisting of inert nucleic acids (DNA or RNA) enclosed in a coating, like seeds, but when they enter a

also stitch their genes to those of the cells they have infected. Each targeted cell may become a virus factory and release new viruses to infect other cells. During this process, they can kill, damage or modify the infected cells and make us sick. Different viruses target different cells such as the liver, respiratory system or blood. For example, the Hepatitis B virus affects the liver, and the polio virus affects the nervous system. During an infection, our body may have several million viruses in every drop of blood.

tem to act against the viruses. In fact, once infected, a war starts against the invaders as our body produces antibodies to fight them. There are around 30 million unique antibodies with different shapes in our immune system that are produced at a rate of 2000 molecules per second. Just two antibodies are enough to handle a virus. Once an antibody marks the virus, white blood cells engulf the virus and send it to the cell recycling system. Coronavirus was first isolated in 1937. Doctors now recognise that

eral pandemics over time and has become stronger in the process. During this crisis, too, there are many positive reports about recovery and rapid progress being made in the discovery of antigens and vaccines. To overcome the global pandemic affecting the planet Earth, it is very important to adhere to the guidelines issued by officials and medical authorities and to strictly practise social distancing. Someone posted the following on the social media: