

Sultanate of Oman condolences India over chopper crash

The Foreign Ministry here has expressed the condolences of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of India, the Indian people and relatives of victims of today's helicopter crash that caused the death of India's Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat in Tamil Nadu. **SEE ALSO P7**



P10

HOLDERS SIDAB TO CLASH WITH SUHAR IN HM CUP



P15

OIL PRICES EASE AS INVESTORS WAIT FOR MORE ON OMICRON'S IMPACT



P20

THE LANGUAGE OF SUNSET TELLS THE STORY OF A COUNTRY ARTIST



MUSCAT

HM GREET'S NEW GERMAN CHANCELLOR

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent greetings to Olaf Scholz on taking the constitutional oath as new chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings to the chancellor wishing him success and the friendly German people more progress and prosperity and the Omani-German friendship and cooperation relations more development. — ONA

COUNCIL CHAIRMAN HEADS TO TANZANIA

MUSCAT: Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, on Wednesday left for Tanzania to take part in celebrations of the 60th Independence Anniversary of Tanzania. Shaikh Abdulmalik is accompanied by Salim bin Mohammed al Riyami and Dr Raya bint Salim al Manthariyah, members of the State Council. **PHOTO ON P2**

MDO OPENS GABBRO QUARRY IN LIWA

MUSCAT: As part of celebrations marking the 51st National Day of the Renaissance, Minerals Development Oman (MDO), a subsidiary of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), announced on Wednesday the formal inauguration of a major gabbro quarry in Wilayat of Liwa in North Al Batinah Governorate. The inauguration was held under the auspices of the Governor of North Al Batinah. **SEE P15**

INSIDE



RUB EL KHALI HIGHWAY OPENS

RUB EL KHALI: The Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia officially opened the direct road connecting them, the Rub el Khali Highway and inaugurated its checkpoints on both sides of the borders.

The 725-km desert road starts at (the Sultanate of Oman's side) Ibri roundabout in the Governorate of Al Dhahirah and ends at the Rub el Khali checkpoint, covering a distance of 161 km. From the Saudi side, the road begins at Al Bat'ha junction and ends at the border checkpoint — a stretch of 564 km. The Rub el Khali Highway assumes significance in economic terms. It contributes to the expansion of commercial exchange and tourism activity. It enables Omani exports to reach international markets through the Red Sea gateway. It also gives direct access for Saudi exports to reach the rest of the world through Oman Sea and the Arabian Sea. Najeeb bin Ali al Rowas, Governor of Al Dhahirah, said in a press statement that the Governorate counts on the Rub el Khali in enhancing economic and tourist activity, since Al Dhahirah is the nearest governorate to the KSA.

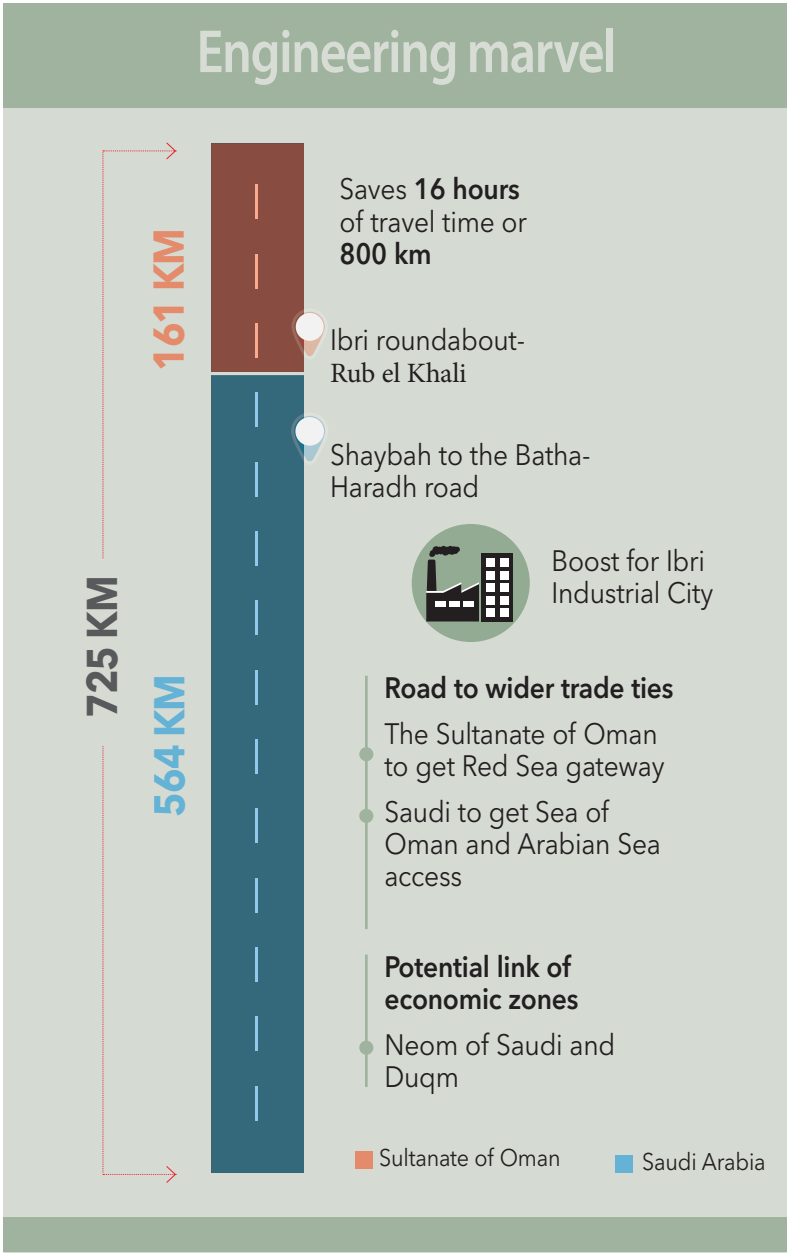


Future plans

Construction of a double lane in a 2.7-km section of the Saudi border checkpoint, a roundabout in Al Khuwair area and a roundabout directly before the checkpoint.

Dualisation of the highway is on the agenda and that raising the capacity of the road depends on the volume of traffic.

Al Rowas added that government and private sector organisations are joining hands to maximise benefits from the highway. He called upon businessmen, entrepreneurs and owners of small and medium enterprises to take the opportunity. Al Dhahirah Governorate is bracing for public investment in Al Dhahirah International Company by January 2022, which will spearhead economic activity and utilise investment opportunities associated with the Rub el Khali checkpoint's opening. **SEE ALSO P13**



Pfizer vaccine neutralises Omicron with three shots

NEW YORK: BioNTech and Pfizer said on Wednesday a three-shot course of their Covid-19 vaccine was able to neutralise the new Omicron variant in a laboratory test and they could deliver an upgraded vaccine in March 2022 if needed.

The German and US companies said two doses of their vaccine resulted in significantly lower neutralising antibodies but a third dose boosted those antibodies by a factor of 25.

“The first line of defence, with two doses of vaccination, might be compromised and three doses of vaccination are required to restore protection,” BioNTech Chief Medical Officer Ozlem Tuercu said at a press conference. The companies suggested that two doses may still protect against severe disease.

BioNTech and Pfizer are the first manufacturers of a Covid vaccine to issue an official update on the efficacy of their shot against Omicron.

In samples of blood taken



around a month after the third shot the Omicron variant was neutralised about as effectively as two doses neutralised the original virus identified in China.

BioNTech CEO Ugur Sahin suggested that countries might consider shortening the time period between second and third doses of the vaccine to combat the new variant.

He cited recent moves by countries including Britain to bring the third shot forward to three months after the second shot, from six months previously. — Reuters

55% use Internet for e-govt services, 35% for banking

MUSCAT: The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) released the results of the survey on “Measuring Access and Usage of Information and Communication Technology Among Households and Individuals”.

The survey was carried out in cooperation with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology during the period from February 14 to March 4.

The data showed an increase in the usage of laptops in the Sultanate of Oman, as it increased from 34 per cent in 2020 to 38 per cent in 2021, and the use of tablets also grew from 17 per cent to 20 per cent during the same period. The results also indicated that sending messages via e-mail, WhatsApp or SMS accounted for 97 per cent of the usage.

It also indicated that 94 per cent of household members



- CLOTHES, SHOES, SPORTSWEAR, ACCESSORIES ARE TOPPED THE LIST OF ONLINE SHOPPING, ACCOUNTING FOR 66 PER CENT
- WHILE FOR FOODSTUFFS PURCHASED ONLINE WAS 56.8 PER CENT

own a mobile phone, and 93 per cent of the surveyed individuals used the Internet. The percentage of using the Internet for the purposes of interacting with e-government services increased from 34 per cent in 2020 to 55 per cent in 2021. The use of online banking services also increased from 38 per cent in 2020 to 53 per cent in 2021, while the percentage of Internet usage for educational purposes increased from 28 per cent in 2020 to 39 per cent in 2021.

The results also show that clothes, shoes, sportswear, accessories are topped the list of online shopping, accounting for 66 per cent, while for foodstuffs purchased online was 56.8 per cent. The percentage of preference for shopping in stores was 71.8 per cent, while the percentage of disinterest in shopping online was 50.4 per cent of the surveyed sample. — ONA

Al Khalili to attend Tanzania’s 60th independence anniversary



MUSCAT: Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, will leave here to the United Republic of Tanzania to take part in its 60th independence anniversary.

The chairman of the State

Council will be accompanied by Salim bin Mohammed al Riyami, and Raya bint Salim al Manthariyah, members of the State Council.

The chairman of the State Council and his companions were seen off by Shaikh Dr Al Khatab bin Ghalib al Hinai,

Deputy Chairman of the State Council, Dr Rashid bin Salim al Badi, member of the State Council, Khalid bin Ahmed al Saadi, Secretary-General of the State Council, and the ambassador of United Republic of Oman. — ONA

RAFO pilots and air officers graduate

MUSCAT: The Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) celebrated the graduation of a new batch of pilots and air officers under the auspices of HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, at Ghala Air Base and Sultan Qaboos Air Academy, on Wednesday.

The new batch includes air officers course, officer candidates course, limited service course and college officers.

The graduating officers staged a military parade as part of the graduation ceremony.

HH Sayyid Asaad praised the high standard of the graduating officers, stressing the role played by the trainers and supervisors in the grooming of the officers and pilots.

The chief guest presented the aviation wings to the graduating pilots and presented the sword of honour to flying officer Abdullah bin Said al Maamari who achieved the first place in the officer candidates course.



SQU organises intellectual forum on genetically modified foods

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) on Wednesday organised the 10th Intellectual Forum title “Genetically Modified Foods — an Ethical and Scientific Perspective” at SQU’s Conference Hall.

The opening of the forum was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Fahd bin al Julanda al Said, SQU Vice-Chancellor, Chairman of the National Bioethics Committee.

The forum shed light on the need for genetically modified food and the international and regional laws and regulations in this respect.

Shaikh Dr Kahlan bin Nabhan al Kharousi, Assistant Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman, Deputy Chairman of the National Bioethics Committee, said in his speech at the event that the committee has been holding



intellectual forums which included specialised researchers and scholars from the Sultanate of Oman and abroad.

He added that these forums aim to identify the ethical and scientific aspects of the forums’ topics in order to come up with a clear vision, spread awareness, build research capabilities, and benefit from the recommendations and proposals of the National Bioethics Committee to be submitted to the concerned authorities. — ONA

Ministry holds meeting with diplomatic missions

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in cooperation with the Foreign Ministry, organised the fourth meeting with the ambassadors and heads of the diplomatic missions accredited to the Sultanate of Oman.

The meeting aims to introduce incentives and investment opportunities available in the Sultanate of Oman in various targeted sectors, as well as attracting foreign capital.

Shaikh Khalifa Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, said the meeting provides an opportunity to present the facilities and incentives provided by the Sultanate of Oman, besides reviewing views of foreign ambassadors in the Sultanate of Oman which help in attracting the foreign capitals.



Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion, pointed out to the vital role the diplomatic missions can play in attracting major investors to invest in the

Sultanate of Oman and promote the Omani products in the international markets.

During the meeting, a film was screened on the Omani tourism strategy presented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. In addition, several presentations

were given by various government institutions.

The meeting included a panel discussion with the ambassadors and heads of diplomatic missions on the investment environment in the Sultanate of Oman.

— ONA

MoU to generate opportunities for SMEs in tourism

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 8

Taking a collaborative approach towards boosting In-Country Value (ICV), the SMEs Development Authority signed an MoU with Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN Group). The strategic collaboration aims at enhancing the joint efforts to provide further opportunities to SMEs working in the tourism sector, through various programmes and initiatives.

The agreement was signed by Halima bint Rashid al Zari, Chairperson, SMEs Development Authority, and Eng Mohammed bin Salim al Busaidi, Chairman of OMRAN Group.

The agreement seeks to strengthen ways of cooperation between the two sides in various areas that include the enhancement of In-Country Value, empowering

The agreement also aims to provide impetus to the role of tourism incubators and areas related to operating facilities

SMEs to leverage business opportunities in OMRAN Group’s portfolio and developing the craft sector. The agreement also aims to provide impetus to the role of tourism incubators and areas related to operating facilities, as well as creating products and services, that are viable for the SME ecosystem in this sector.

Additionally, the Authority will provide OMRAN Group with a database of the companies operating in the sector to maximise their business opportunities. OMRAN Group will also raise awareness about the digital



platform of the National Travel Operator ‘VisitOman.om’ and encourage SMEs to capitalise on

the benefits it offers.

As part of the agreement, both entities will jointly cooperate

on setting a framework and a common vision to develop innovative incubators that

support the development and establishment of SMEs specialised in the tourism sector. Additionally, the Group’s senior officials will visit handicrafts centres in Bahla, Samayil and Jabal Al Akhdhar to analyse their capabilities. OMRAN Group will further explore means of support to enhance the facilities and tourism activities in the sites owned by the Authority.

The Authority, in cooperation with the Group, seeks to streamline the efforts to find effective initiatives aligned with the latest practices in the field of ICV and social investment, within the geographical scope of OMRAN’s various tourism projects and assets. This helps increase local spending, support domestic supply chains, enhance partnerships and investment opportunities with the local community, and create direct and indirect job opportunities for Omanis. — ONA



SQU awards degrees to 1,464 graduating students



MUSCAT: Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, Chairperson of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) Council, presided over the graduation ceremony of the second group of SQU 31st batch on Wednesday. The total number of graduates in this ceremony stood at 1,464 from the College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences, the College of Medicine and Health Sciences, the College of Nursing, the College of Science, the College of Education and the College of Law. — ONA

Winners of 8th National Research Award to be announced on Dec 15

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation will host the 8th edition of the Annual Research Forum on December 15, under the auspices of Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy.

Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, and a number of innovators, academics and research winners will attend the forum.

Winners of the 8th National Research Award and the 5th Upgrade programme will be announced during the forum.

For the National Research Awards (NRA), the winners are divided into two categories: best published research led by a PhD holder or equivalent (senior specialist or higher in the medical field) and best published research led by a young researcher (a non-PhD holder). As for the research fields, it consists of six areas, namely Education and Human Resources,

Information and Communication Technologies, Health and Social Services, Cultural, Social, and Basic Sciences, Energy and Industry, and Environmental and Biological Resources.

The NRA aims to encourage researchers to conduct high quality and relevant research in areas of national interest. It also encourages researchers to continue their activities and initiatives in conducting high-quality research, and increase the level of awareness about the Research and Innovation Sector and its various initiatives and programmes to support research and innovation.

The Annual Research Forum will also include the announcement of the three winning teams of the 5th edition of the Upgrade programme.

This programme transforms the best graduation projects in the 4th Industrial Revolution technologies into successful ICT start-ups to bring socio-economic benefit to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Taxpayers urged to file returns by December 20

MUSCAT: The Tax Authority has called upon taxpayers to submit their declarations on income tax for outstanding periods by December 20, 2021, at the latest, via electronic portals in accordance with the designated forms.

The Tax Authority pointed out that the entities whose operations are governed by income-tax terms and conditions have an obligation to submit their income tax reports so that they could be entitled either for paying 3 per cent or for waiving of this percentage, if they meet the conditions.

Entrepreneurship week to boost innovation

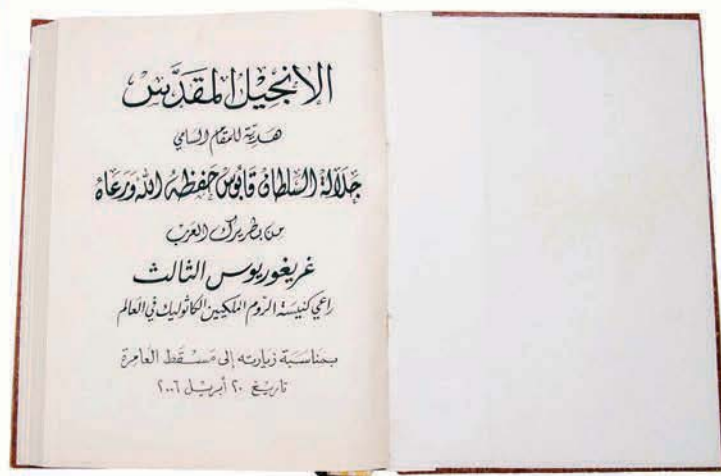
NIZWA: Makers Oman Centre at Innovation Park Muscat of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, in cooperation with the University of Nizwa, hosted workshops on student innovations and how to create prototypes for innovative ideas, as well as other activities, as part of the Global Entrepreneurship Week 2021, with the participation 40 student companies and entrepreneurs.

The event included a variety of applied workshops in the areas of innovation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies, such as smart manufacturing of innovations, product development, external

shaping through the use of modern devices and 3D printing techniques available in the centre, woodworking, metalworking and others. There were also lectures in the field of intellectual property rights preservation, innovation incubators and many more topics.

Eng Hilal bin Nasser al Shibli, Director-General of Makers Oman Centre, stated that these events are held within the framework of cooperation and partnership between the centre and the local community institutions, as the goals and roles of the centre are in line with the objectives of the Global Entrepreneurship Week celebrations organised by the University of Nizwa. — ONA

Museum displays 2nd edition of Bible presented to late Sultan Qaboos



MUSCAT: The National Museum displays the second edition of the Bible, which was printed on February 29, 1960, by the Pauline publishers, in the town of Harissa (Lebanese Republic).

It is made of mother-of-pearl, coloured foil paper, hard paper, and is printed in black and red ink.

This Bible was presented to the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said on April 20, 2006 by Gregorius

III Lahamus, Emeritus Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, of Alexandria and Jerusalem, former spiritual leader of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church (at that time) on the occasion of his visit to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Raising awareness about perils of corruption

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman is joining the international community in celebrating the International Anti-Corruption Day, which falls on December 9, the date on which the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) was endorsed in 2003.

The event seeks to raise awareness about the perils of corruption and the role of the convention in combating it and addressing its impacts on countries' economies and development plans.

Nassir bin Mohammed al Hosni, Director-General of Monitoring on Investments and Commercial and Industrial Companies, who heads the Anti-Corruption Committee at the State's Audit Institution (SAI), said that "the Sultanate of Oman is pressing ahead with

steps to consolidate the State of Institutions and Law and measures to achieve justice, integrity and transparency in accordance with the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on modernising legislations and statutes, streamlining procedures and applying performance governance and accountability."

These anti-corruption guards play a major role in the domestic development process, said Al Hosni, noting that "the Sultanate of Oman keeps reaping the fruits of His Majesty the Sultan's wise thought", examples of which are measures undertaken to restructure the State's Administrative Apparatus, the issuance of the Basic Law of the State and the 10th Five-Year Plan.

— ONA

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zinabalnasseri

THE World Health Organization named the new coronavirus mutant as ‘Omicron’, describing it as ‘alarming’ due to the high number of mutations it has undergone and also because of its higher infection rate compared to the previous mutants.

The Omicron mutant has caused a wave of panic around the world, causing economic losses in global stock exchange and pushed oil prices down, while countries took measures restricting travel to and from South Africa, where it was first discovered.

As for the Sultanate of Oman, it suspended entry to travellers from South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho and Eswatini starting from November 28 due to the spread of the new variant. Arrivals from any other country, if the travellers happened to have visited the above mentioned countries within 14 days before applying to enter the Sultanate of Oman, have also been suspended.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE already announced that they had detected the first case of Omicron in persons coming from Africa.

Dr Zaid al Hinai, a Consultant on Pediatric Infectious Diseases at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, commented that the emergence of Omicron is not entirely surprising. “It will take weeks to know how dangerous it is,” he said, adding that “this mutation reminds us of the importance of continuing caution and precaution, as well as the importance of continuing (and possibly tightening) the examination of those returning after travel to prevent the spread of the virus through the borders.”

The doctor stressed that early intervention is needed to check the entry of this new strain or others through the border crossings.

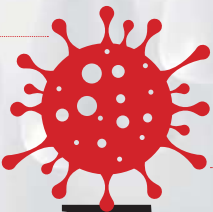
Dr Al Hinai said, “The mutant spreads rapidly in a Delta-dominant country; that is, it may be more widespread than the Delta strain. It is the first mutant to succeed this. Plus, it contains a large number of genetic mutations in the spike protein: that is, it may evade immunity more.”

He said precautions need to be taken to avoid transmitting any infection. “Do Covid test when suspected, avoid gatherings, wear mask, ensure hand hygiene, and isolate the person if any symptoms appear.”

“The fear is that mutated strains will enter through other countries. For example, the infection that was detected in Belgium was for a traveller coming from Egypt. We need to reintroduce the examination upon arrival, with reduced test charges of RO 5-10,”

New Omicron mutant may have the ability to circumvent immunity, and the SPEED of its spread may exceed which we witnessed with the Delta mutant

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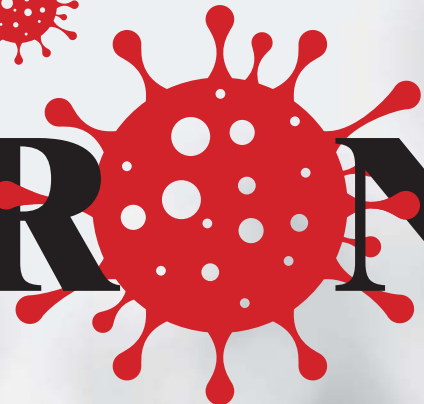
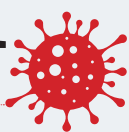
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Do COVID TEST when suspected, avoid gatherings, wear mask, ensure hand hygiene, and isolate the person if any symptoms appear

NGS-SA announced earlier that new mutant's spike protein switch tested a large number of mutations, more than 30, which is the structure the virus uses to get into the cell it attacks

The Sultanate of Oman suspended entry to travellers from South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho and Eswatini starting from NOVEMBER 28 due to the spread of the new variant



OMICRON



Precautions need to be taken to avoid transmission of any infection. Do Covid test when suspected, avoid gatherings, wear masks, ensure hand hygiene, and isolate the person if any symptoms appear

DR ZAID AL HINAI
Consultant on Pediatric Infectious Diseases at SQU Hospital

he suggested. For this reason, scientists are racing against time to unravel the Omicron mystery and ward off the threat, besides finding out the efficacy of vaccines against the variant. The World Health Organization said on Sunday that “understanding the level of severity of Omicron variable will take days to several weeks.” It also mentioned that “preliminary evidence indicates the possibility of a greater risk of re-infection with Omicron mutant for corona disease, but “it is not yet clear if the mutant is more likely to spread infection, or whether it causes more severe disease.”

It added that “preliminary data indicate that there are increasing rates of hospital admissions in South Africa, but this may be due to an increase in the overall numbers of infected people and not as a result of mutations. There is currently no information to indicate that symptoms associated with Omicron differ from symptoms that appear due to other variables.”

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control said on Friday that based on the available data about the new mutant, it “may have the ability to circumvent immunity, and the speed of its spread may exceed which we witnessed with the Delta mutant.”

However, Network for Genomic Surveillance South Africa (NGS-SA) announced earlier that new mutant's spike protein switch tested a large number of mutations, more than 30, which is the structure the virus uses to get into the cell it attacks.

Scientists are concerned that these mutations may contribute to making Omicron highly transmissible and immune. However, they found that these differences do not necessarily mean that Omicron is more dangerous than Delta, suggesting that the matter is that the virus has adapted more to humans, by generating a new mutant. They stressed that the studies currently underway will confirm if the adaptation that occurred to the virus is normal, or less or more serious.

The Management and staff of
Muscat Overseas Group, Al Tamman Group,
Qais Omani Establishment
and associated companies express their heartfelt

CONDOLENCES

to

Sheikh Mustahail bin Ahmed Al Mashani

and

Sheikh Salim bin Mustahail Al Mashani

and family

on the sad demise of

Sheikha Salma bint Mohammed Al Mashani

May Allah bless her soul and
may she rest in eternal peace.

Motorcycle bomb kills four in Iraq

BASRA: At least four civilians were killed and four more wounded in a motorcycle bombing near a hospital in southern Iraq's Basra city, security forces said. Referring to "the explosion of a motorcycle", they said in a statement that "four citizens were killed and four others injured while two vehicles near the motorcycle caught fire".

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the explosion. The blast hit at a crossroads in central Basra, near a hospital and a popular market, an AFP photographer reported.

He saw a car charred and left largely a shell, its doors gone. Shrapnel pierced a minibus whose windows were smeared with blood.

Iraq has been torn by years of war and insurgency since a US-led invasion toppled dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003. In recent years, the city of Basra has mostly been spared such attacks.

But since late November deadly attacks claimed by the IS group have targeted Kurdish fighters in northern Iraq. Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi called for a rapid investigation to identify who carried out the "cowardly terrorist attack" in Basra.

He added on Twitter that security forces "will not permit the security of the people to be threatened." Today, IS maintains a largely clandestine presence in Iraq and Syria and conducts a sustained insurgency on both sides of the border, according to a UN report published early this year. — **AFP**

SALE OF VEHICLE/EQUIPMENT

Leading Construction Co. in Oman intends to dispose off their used vehicles and equipment, in 'as is where is' condition. The items identified are presently located at their Al Khoud yard and will be offered for inspection to the public on 13/12/2021, 14/12/2021 and 15/12/2021 between 8.00am to 12.00pm and 3.00pm to 5.00pm.

Last date for submission of closed tender is 15/12/2021 at 5pm. at our Al Khoud office.

Interested parties may contact at
Tel: (+968) 24525345 / 24525314 / 24525303, Mobile: 91354151

EU: Iran nuclear talks to resume today

BRUSSELS: Talks on reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal will resume on Thursday in Vienna, a senior European Union official said.

"The 7th round talks will continue tomorrow Thursday in Vienna after consultations in and among capitals," Enrique Mora, who is chairing the talks, said on Twitter. "A Joint Commission and a number of bilateral and multilateral contacts will take place."

France's foreign minister had said on Wednesday the talks were likely to continue, although he added that he feared Iran was playing for time.

Meanwhile, British Foreign Minister Liz Truss urged Iran on Wednesday to sign up to the 2015 nuclear deal, saying it was "the last chance" to do, just a day before talks were expected to resume.

"This is really the last chance for Iran to sign up and I strongly urge them to do that because we are determined to work with our allies to prevent Iran securing nuclear weapons," she told the Chatham House think tank.

"So they do need to sign up to the JCPOA (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) agreement, it's in their interests to do so."

SANCTIONS: The United States slapped fresh sanctions on a dozen Iranian officials and entities for "serious" human rights abuses on Tuesday, ahead of the expected resumption of nuclear talks with Tehran after they halted last week without any concrete progress.

The sanctions announced by the



An Iranian flag flutters in front of the IAEA headquarters in Vienna

Treasury and State Department targeted government officials and organisations involved in the repression of protesters and political activists, and prisons where activists have been held in brutal conditions.

The Treasury also placed several Syrian officials on its sanctions blacklist for their roles in political repression and chemical gas attacks, and Uganda's military intelligence chief was hit with sanctions for extreme abuse of people arrested for their nationality or political beliefs.

The announcement came ahead of the Washington-hosted Summit for Democracy later this week, billed as a push to promote more free and open societies.

"The United States is committed to promoting democracy and accountability for those who abuse human rights around the world," said Secretary of State Antony Blinken in a statement.

"The United States will utilise its full range of tools to highlight and disrupt these abuses of human rights," he said.

The Iranian sanctions singled out officials and entities involved in brutal crackdowns on protests in 2009 and 2019, including Hassan Karami, the commander of the LEF Special Units, which are focused on crowd control and protest suppression, the Treasury said.

Also named was Gholamreza Soleimani, who commands the Basij, the country's militia also involved in the deadly 2009 and 2019 crackdowns.

The Syrians blacklisted included two air force major generals, Tawfiq Muhammad Khadour and Muhammad Youssef Al Hasouri, who the Treasury said were responsible for chemical gas attacks that killed numerous civilians in 2017 and 2018.

Security officials considered responsible for other harsh attacks on opponents of the regime of Syrian President Bashar al Assad were also named. — **AFP/Reuters**

Iraqi fishermen caught in net of water frontiers

AL FAW, Iraq: On the banks of the Shatt al Arab waterway, Iraqi fishermen live in constant fear of arrest for mistakenly straying across frontiers with former enemy countries. About 15 kilometres from where the mighty Tigris and the Euphrates rivers merge and flow out to the Gulf lies the fishing port of Al Faw.

The port town has been on the front line that have shaped Iraq's modern history. On the opposite bank of the Shatt al Arab, the green-white-red flag of Iran flutters in the wind, alongside portraits of Ayatollah Khomeini, founder of the Islamic republic, and his successor as supreme guide, Ali Khamenei.



An Iraqi youth carries freshly-caught fish in the southern Iraqi port city of Al Faw, 90 kilometres south of Basra. — **AFP**

In the past, the border along the invisible median line of the Shatt al Arab has been a casus belli. In September 1980, Saddam's forces invaded after scrapping the 1975 Algiers agreement that aimed to put an end to disputes over the borderline.

Iraqi fishermen at Al Faw, such as Tareq Ziad, complain of "being harassed" by neighbouring countries. When their boats leave the Shatt al Arab and head for the open seas of the Gulf, they often find themselves in Kuwaiti and Iranian waters because of the currents.

The Iranians "put you in prison and make you pay a fine of \$3,000. That is what happened to my brother a few days ago. He was arrested by a river patrol and he paid \$3,000," Ziad said. The head of the fishermen's union in Al Faw, Badran al Tamimi, said they have "no support from the (Iraqi) government".

Kuwait also arrests Iraqi fishermen who "inadvertently"

Fishing expeditions have become much shorter and the boundaries are closely monitored by Iraq's neighbours

venture into the territorial waters of the emirate, he said. "Yesterday evening, I went to the Kuwaiti border to bring back three fishermen who were arrested. This week, I have been there three or four times," Tamimi said.

A Kuwaiti security official, on condition of anonymity, said: "People seized in the border areas are handed over, in good health, by the ground forces, in coordination with the Iraqi side." The fishermen of Al Faw also have environmental challenges to grapple with.

"We go out to sea for eight to 10 days and when we return, we've

caught between 500 kilogrammes and one tonne, compared to three or four tonnes 20 years ago," complained fisherman Abdallah.

Fishing expeditions have become much shorter and the boundaries are closely monitored by Iraq's neighbours. In addition, the price of fuel has shot up. As Iraqi rivers dry up due to drought and the construction of dams in Iran and Turkey, so too does the amount of seasonal fish that locals relied on for food.

And while the river waters ebb to ever lower levels, the Gulf rises. "We are seeing more and more marine species in the river as the water becomes saline," said Iyad Abdelmohsen, a marine biologist at Baghdad's Al Mustansiriyah University.

And "human activities, such as sewage and waste" that end up in Iraq's waterways are causing "digestive illnesses, diarrhoea and even cholera," he said. — **AFP**

CONDOLENCES

The Management and Staff of

OCTAL SAOC FZC

express their heartfelt condolences to

H.E. Sheikh Salim Bin
Mustahail Bin Ahmed Al Mashani

and his family on the sad passing of his

Mother

May God have mercy on her.

We belong to Allah and to Him we shall return.

OCTAL

In brief

■ MANILA



NOBEL WINNER RESSA TO FLY TO OSLO

Philippine Nobel Peace Prize winner Maria Ressa will fly to Oslo to collect the award in person, after a fourth court approved her application to attend Friday's ceremony. Ressa, an outspoken critic of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, and Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov were named in October as the winners of this year's award for their efforts to "safeguard freedom of expression".

She is on bail pending an appeal against a conviction last year in a cyber libel case, and was required to apply to four courts for permission to pick up the prize in person.

■ SEOUL



S KOREA'S NEW COVID CASES TOP 7,000 FOR FIRST TIME

South Korea's new daily Covid-19 cases rose above 7,000 for the first time, Prime Minister Kim Boo-kyum said on Wednesday, putting hospital capacity under strain as deaths and severe cases rise. Infections in South Korea have skyrocketed this month after the government began to ease restrictions under a so-called "living with Covid-19" scheme in November.

The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) reported 7,175 new coronavirus cases and 63 deaths for Tuesday, and hospitals are treating a record 840 critical and serious cases.

■ COLOMBO



LANKA CHEMICAL SHIP WRECK TO BE SALVAGED

The wreck of a chemical ship that caught fire off the Sri Lankan coast and caused environmental carnage will be removed, the operators said on Wednesday.

A salvage company has been contracted to remove the sunken MV X-Press Pearl and the remains of its cargo, its Singapore-based managers said.

"The wreck removal plan will ensure a complete removal and safe, proper disposal of the wreck and any debris and pollutants around the wreck," X-Press Feeders said in a statement.

Hundreds of tonnes of chemicals and plastics leaked from the ship after it caught fire in May off Colombo and burned for two weeks before sinking.

Chopper crash kills India's defence chief, 12 others

NEW DELHI: India's Defence Chief Bipin Rawat, his wife and 11 other people were killed after a military helicopter they were travelling in crashed in southern India on Wednesday, the Indian Air Force said.

Rawat, 63, was appointed as India's first Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government in late 2019.

The accident took place around noon near the town of Coonoor, and the dead include four crew members of the Mi-17V5 helicopter, the Air Force said in a tweet.

"There are three to four dead at the crash site but we don't know the identities," a fire department official in Coonoor said.

"Some of the injured have been taken to the hospital," he said, adding around two dozen fire brigade vehicles were at the scene to douse a fire. Rawat and his wife were on board along with other officers and were headed to the Defence Services Staff College, a senior army officer said.

Videos broadcast on Indian news channels showed a fiery wreck at the crash site in a dense forested area near the college in Nilgiris district. Media reports said the chopper took off from Sulur Air Force Station on Wednesday afternoon.

Rawat comes from a military family with several generations having served in the Indian armed forces.

The general joined the army as a second lieutenant in 1978

India chopper accident

Defence chief on board helicopter that crashed on December 8

Mi-17 chopper crashed with 13 people on board



As of 11:00 GMT

► Several deaths confirmed

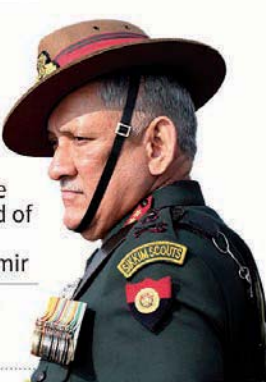
► Some injured have been taken to hospital

General Bipin Rawat

- Chief of India's 1.3 million strong army from 2017
- Elevated to defence services chief in 2019
- 4 decades of service including command of forces in Indian-administered Kashmir

Credited with reducing insurgency on India's northeastern frontier

Considered to be close to the Modi government



63 years old

AFP

Rawat was chief of the 1.3m strong army from 2017 to 2019 before his elevation to defence services chief

and has four decades of service behind him, having commanded forces in Indian-administered Kashmir and along the Line of Actual Control bordering China.

He is credited with reducing insurgency on India's northeastern frontier and supervised a cross-border counter-insurgency operation into neighbouring Myanmar.

Rawat was chief of the 1.3 million-strong army from 2017 to 2019 before his elevation to defence services chief, which analysts said was to improve integration between the army,

navy and air force.

He is considered close to the Modi government and turned heads last month when he reportedly made an approving reference to "lynching terrorists" in the contested territory of Kashmir.

The Mi-17 helicopter, which first entered service in the 1970s and is in wide use by defence services around the world, has been involved in a number of accidents over the years.

Fourteen people died in a crash last month when an Azerbaijani military Mi-17 chopper went down during a training flight.

In 2019, four Indonesian soldiers were killed and five others wounded in central Java in another training accident involving the aircraft.

India's air force said an inquiry was underway into Wednesday's accident. — AFP



The Soyuz MS-20 spacecraft carrying the crew of Russian cosmonaut Alexander Misurkin blasts off to the ISS from the Moscow-leased Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. — AFP

Japanese billionaire blasts into space

BAIKONUR: A Russian rocket lifted off on Wednesday carrying a Japanese billionaire to the International Space Station, marking the country's return to space tourism after a decade-long pause that saw the rise of competition from US companies.

Online fashion tycoon Yusaku Maezawa and his production assistant Yozo Hirano blasted off from the Russian-operated Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan at 07:38 GMT, an AFP correspondent at the scene reported.

Their journey aboard the three-person Soyuz spacecraft piloted by cosmonaut Alexander Misurkin will take just over six hours, capping a

banner year that many have seen as a turning point for private space travel.

Billionaires, Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos and Richard Branson all made breakthrough commercial tourism flights this year, bursting into a market Russia is keen to defend.

A crowd at the launch site — including Maezawa's family and friends — braved freezing temperatures and cheered as the rocket blasted off into the grey sky, leaving a trail of orange flames before disappearing in the clouds.

"This has been a long process. It's so moving. I was about to cry," said Ryo Okubo, 46, a lawyer for Maezawa's space projects. — AFP

Indonesia considers relocations for villagers

VOLCANIC TOLL 39

JAKARTA: Indonesia's volcanology agency is sending a team of researchers to the Mount Semeru volcano to identify areas too dangerous for villagers to stay after it erupted on Saturday, killing dozens of people on the slopes of Java island's highest mountain.

In the days since the disaster, questions have been raised about the effectiveness of the disaster warning system and whether some villages should be moved.

Ediar Usman, an official from the Centre for Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation (PVMBG), told a media briefing that some areas were potentially no longer safe to inhabit.

"It's not impossible that a similar disaster could happen in the future," he said. Eko Budi Lelono, who heads the geological survey centre, said the team would be sent this week and included experts from Yogyakarta who had studied the Merapi volcano near that city.

An estimated 8.6 million people in Indonesia live within 10 km of an active volcano, well within the range of deadly pyroclastic flows.

The magnitude of Saturday's eruption caught many villagers off guard, with dozens unable to escape as the volcano projected an ash cloud kilometres into the sky, and sent dangerous pyroclastic flows into villages on the fertile slopes below.

At least 39 people were killed, with another 22 still missing, while thousands have been displaced, according to the disaster mitigation



A villager evacuates her damaged home at Curah Kobokan village in Lumajang after Mount Semeru volcano eruption that killed at least 39 people. — AFP

agency.

The eruption almost entirely buried some villages under metres of molten ash, with more than 100,000 homes partially damaged or destroyed. Surveying the worst affected areas by helicopter on Tuesday, President Joko Widodo said that at least 2,000 homes would have to be rebuilt in different areas.

Semeru is one of more than 100 active volcanoes in Indonesia,

Semeru is one of more than
100
active volcanoes in Indonesia, which straddles the 'Pacific Ring of Fire'

which straddles the "Pacific Ring of Fire", an area of high seismic activity that rests atop multiple tectonic plates.

Meanwhile, death toll has climbed to 39 following the eruption of the Semeru volcano in Indonesia's East Java province at the weekend, a search official said on Wednesday. Search teams were still looking for 12 people listed as missing, said I Wayan Suyatna,

head of preparedness at the search and rescue agency in East Java.

The eruption sent villagers in Lumajang district fleeing their homes in terror as a huge column of smoke rose into the sky and searing molten rocks and gas barrelled down the slopes. Dozens were injured, mostly with severe burns, and more than 4,000 were displaced by the disaster, officials said. — Reuters

MERKEL ERA ENDS

Scholz takes over as German chancellor

BERLIN: Social Democrat Olaf Scholz was sworn in as German chancellor on Wednesday, ending Angela Merkel's 16 years of conservative rule and paving the way for his coalition government that has promised to boost green investment and strengthen European unity.

Scholz, 63, who over the past four years served as vice chancellor and finance minister in coalition with Merkel, won a majority of 395 votes from lawmakers in the lower house of parliament, Bundestag President Baerbel Bas said.

Wearing a black face mask, Scholz waved as he received a standing ovation from lawmakers and accepted bouquets of flowers and a basket of apples from leading members of parliament.

After being formally nominated by President Frank-Walter Steinmeier in the nearby Bellevue Palace, Scholz returned to the historic Reichstag building



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and his predecessor Angela Merkel pose after Scholz gave Merkel a bouquet of flowers during a handover ceremony in Berlin. – AFP

in the heart of the German capital to take the oath of office in front of lawmakers and become Germany's ninth chancellor since the end of World War Two. Scholz swore to devote his

energies to the welfare of the German people - but he did not ask for God's help, a phrase that is usually included in the oath of office and was spoken by Merkel. Back in Bellevue Palace, the

Social Democrat receives clear majority in parliament as Merkel hands over chancellery amid challenges

ministers of the new cabinet received their appointment certificates from the president.

In the afternoon, Merkel officially handed over the chancellery to Scholz and wished him a "steady hand" as the country faces a brutal fourth wave of coronavirus infections and challenges to its democratic order from authoritarian leaders.

In a short speech, Scholz hailed Merkel as a great chancellor and thanked her for a close and trustful relationship over the past years.

"I would like to build on the north-east German mentality, if I may say so, that has reigned here

so far. Not much will change in this regard," Scholz said in reference to their shared northern roots in the port city of Hamburg.

With his down-to-earth and no-nonsense manner, Scholz has positioned himself as Merkel's natural successor and a safe pair of hands to steer Germany through challenges ranging from tackling the climate crisis to dealing with a more confrontational Russia and increasingly assertive China.

Scholz will lead an unprecedented three-way ruling coalition on the federal level with the pro-spending, environmentalist Greens and the fiscally more conservative, libertarian Free Democrats (FDP) — unlikely political bedfellows in the past.

Scholz is an experienced negotiator and veteran politician who as SPD party secretary general from 2002 until 2004 defended controversial labour

market reforms and social welfare cuts under former Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder.

As labour minister from 2007-2009 in Merkel's first ruling coalition, Scholz pushed for a generous short-time work scheme that helped protect millions of workers from the fallout of the global financial crisis.

After being mayor of Hamburg from 2011-2018, Scholz returned to Berlin as Merkel's finance minister — a role in which he got rid of the goal of balanced budgets and enabled record new borrowing to shield companies and employees from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

On the European level, he worked closely with France and persuaded Merkel to support a debt-financed European Recovery Fund worth euros €800 billion (\$900 billion) to help EU member states hit hardest by Covid-19.

— Reuters

Around 1,000 British homes without power after recent storm

LONDON: Around 1,000 properties remain without power after Storm Barra sweep across Britain this week.

The latest power cuts come just days after the final homes were reconnected following Storm Arwen, which had caused "catastrophic damage" to electricity networks, mainly in the north-east of Scotland, affecting 135,000 properties. The Met Office issued yellow weather warnings as Storm Barra brought high winds, heavy rain and snow on Tuesday.

Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) said around 1,000 customers remained without power across the north of Scotland, with 700 of these in the Grampian area, at 8 am (08:00 GMT) on Wednesday.

It has restored power to more than 8,000 customers following Storm Barra and engineers are working to reconnect the rest.

More rain is forecast in some areas on Wednesday and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency has issued 11 flood alerts and three flood warnings.

There has also been some disruption to rail and ferry services in the wake of the storm, while



Waves crash over the promenade in New Brighton, north west England as Storm Barra swept over the country. – AFP

three schools in Aberdeenshire are closed.

SSEN said it hopes to reconnect all affected customers later on Wednesday. An SSEN Distribution spokesperson said: "SSEN engineers have restored power to over 8,000 customers following severe wind gusts and heavy snowfall brought by Storm Barra.

"As of 8 am, around 1,000 customers remain without power

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency has issued 11 flood alerts and three flood warnings

across the north of Scotland, with 700 of these in the Grampian area. "Our teams are working hard

to restore supplies to our impacted customers as soon as possible this morning and expect to reconnect all customers impacted by Storm Barra later today.

"We are working closely with our local resilience partners to provide support to our priority service register customers and gain access to faults blocked by heavy snow and fallen trees."

— dpa

Austria allows broad lifting of lockdown

VIENNA: Austria will let a wide range of businesses, from non-essential shops to theatres, restaurants and hairdressers reopen when its Covid-19 lockdown ends on Sunday, the government said on Wednesday, but many regions will open up more cautiously.

The move means switching from a single set of rules for the whole country to a patchwork varying between nine provinces. Adding to the confusion, those opening up the fastest included the western provinces of Vorarlberg and Tyrol, which have the highest and fourth-highest infection rates in the country.

"Some (provinces) will act gradually over time, and Burgenland, Vorarlberg and Tyrol will (immediately) adopt this federal arrangement," Tyrol's governor, Guenther Platter, told a joint news conference with Chancellor Karl Nehammer and Health Minister Wolfgang Mueckstein. Vorarlberg and Tyrol are Alpine provinces that rely heavily on winter tourism. Hotels across Austria have been closed to tourists during lockdown, though ski lifts are open.

Austria went into lockdown two weeks ago to counter a surge in daily coronavirus infections to record levels. Infections have



Austria's Chancellor Karl Nehammer during a press conference about the end of the lockdown in Vienna. – AFP

plunged but intensive-care bed occupancy is still rising. The government pledged when the lockdown was introduced that it would last no longer than 20 days, until this Sunday.

The list of businesses that can reopen from Sunday applies provided the local province is not keeping tighter restrictions. The province of Upper Austria, which long had Austria's highest infection rate and borders both Germany and the Czech Republic, plans to stay in lockdown until December 17.

Vienna will only let cafes and restaurants fully reopen a week after the national lockdown lifts, while non-essential shops and Christmas markets will reopen from Monday. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

NEW DELHI

India slashes Covid-19 jab production

The world's largest vaccine manufacturer, the India-based Serum Institute, plans to reduce production of the AstraZeneca jab against Covid-19 by at least half, its chief executive said in a television interview. Serum Institute boss Adar Poonawalla cited the failure of the Indian government to place any new orders as the reason for his plans to slash production, in comments to Indian television channel CNBC-TV18. He also said that orders from the UN vaccine initiative were coming in very slowly.



"I am going to be reducing the production by at least 50 per cent to begin with, going forward on a monthly basis, until the orders again pick up either in India and the world," Poonawalla said.

LONDON

UK warns Russia Ukraine incursion

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss warned it would be "a strategic mistake" by Moscow to invade Ukraine, amid concern at a Russian troop build-up on the border. The message, delivered during a wide-ranging speech and question-and-answer session in London, follows similar warnings from Western capitals as tensions on the Ukrainian frontier.

Moscow has deployed up to 100,000 troops there in recent weeks, sparking fears of a major



war in eastern Europe.

Truss, who met her Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba said Britain is "standing with Ukraine in the face of this aggression".

LAGOS

2 dead as truck ploughs into Lagos students

Two students were killed and 12 injured when a truck rammed into them near their school in Nigeria's commercial capital Lagos, police said.

The incident, which occurred on Tuesday in Ojodu area, sparked outrage as angry residents attacked the police station where the driver was being held and burned vehicles in the area.

The students attended a nearby secondary school, where the ages range from 10 to 17.



Officials said the students had just finished class when the truck rammed into them.

The cause of the accident could not be immediately determined.

She’s my hero
and she wears a
white coat

SYED NAMIR A

In pandemic times, our doctors and health care providers were our first and only line of defense. These brave souls are a blessing from God that we often neglect and forget. Someone who does this not for recognition, someone who does this not for any gain other than fulfilling her obligation, I know first hand all that she has endured, I know the sacrifices she has made.

The long hours, the mental stress and the physical distress.

I’ve seen her go on nights and days non-stop without a single complaint. We do not expect our doctors to fall ill or sick. She goes on fighting for us, serving her time at the Covid ward vulnerable and exposed, willingly putting her life on the line to save yours. Yet she remains steady & brave as she deals with her patients with compassion and care.

It’s not everyday you see people coming from other ends of the city just for any GP, you see lines far exceeding the waiting area as she sees well over a hundred patients in a single shift giving her time and attention to each one with the utmost professionalism, compassion, and respect.

Calling and following up on her sick patients is not a part of her job but is a part of her routine, she makes sure once they leave, they understand what they need, making sure they get the medical attention they seek. I don’t think her patients know how lucky they are, how good they have it, most of them take it for granted, but with beautiful patience, she endures and keeps going on.

Her compassion extends beyond just her patients, I’ve seen her stand up for her staff when they have been wronged. She’s the voice of the voiceless in times of difficulty. Her staff, her nurses, she values them all. No one has to ask, she’s just there for them in their time of need, She’ll fill your heart and life with laughter and light, even when her’s is exhausted, burned out and drained.

The body aches, the night shifts, doing whatever it takes.

Throughout the darkness and despair of lockdown at the break of dawn I’ve seen her get up day after day without any exception.

Never on time to work, instead always extra early, never leaves on time either, always the last to leave. Night after night risking her life to save yours, Her loved ones she’s left behind because your’s are in need.

The holidays, the celebrations and all the moments she has sacrificed.

All that she’s been through I have seen yet I cannot describe, words do not justify all that she’s done for us. The life of a doctor is one of endurance and sacrifice but in times of Covid, it’s been multiplied. At the end of the day, she’s nothing more than a human being much stronger and better than you and I.

They say not all heroes wear a cape, well she’s my hero and she wears a white coat.

I thank you Dr Sana Ali Khan on behalf of all of Sultanate of Oman.



JOY IS SPACE
HIGH

Japanese entrepreneur Yusaku Maezawa reacts as he speaks with his family after donning space suits shortly before the launch to the International Space Station (ISS) at the Baikonur Cosmodrome, Kazakhstan, on Wednesday.
– Reuters

Visit to boost mutual interests



Ali Al Matani
alimatani2@gmail.com

THESE PARLAYS
ARE EFFORTS
TO MAKE
THESE DREAMS
A TANGIBLE
REALITY
WHICH WILL
ULTIMATELY
BENEFIT THE
COMMON PEOPLE
OF THE TWO
COUNTRIES.

The recent visit of His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Crown Prince of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, to the Sultanate of Oman carries huge bilateral, regional, and international importance. It serves the interests of the two brotherly nations as well as opens up more horizons for development in the interests of the people living on both sides of the borders.

The two countries have recently shown keen interests in cooperation in economic, social and political areas to bring quality in their relations. These parlays are efforts to make these dreams a tangible reality which will ultimately benefit the common people of the two countries. There are already many bonds which cannot separate these two neighbours. They have joint interest in the present and in future and share common history. Their relations cannot be measured in mere facts, figures, and statistics. It is in the spirit on both sides.

These are the basic elements of the relations which were rightly highlighted when His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin

Tarik visited Saudi Arabia and met King Salman bin Abdulaziz in July. This was the moment when the brotherly nations started evaluation of the developments at bilateral, regional and international fronts to embark jointly on a mission which can ensure a brighter and more prosperous future for the people on the two sides.

There is no doubt that the visit of Prince Mohammed bin Salman has added a special character to the recent parleys between the Kingdom and the Sultanate of Oman. It has shown that all eyes are not set on these bilateral ties which will leave its positive impact at the regional and international levels. The leadership of the two countries have rightly evaluated the opportunities which these relations could open for both public and private sector. This will certainly show ways for optimum utilisation of the available natural and human resources in public good.

During the last few months, there were frequent visits of economic and business delegations on both sides. It

showed the enthusiasm to grab the opportunity opened by the meeting between His Majesty the Sultan and Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. The visit of the Saudi crown prince is going to give it further boost. The warm welcome extended to him by his Omani hosts shows the seriousness in the aspirations and determination to take the relationship to a higher level.

Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman coming to the Sultanate of Oman made the doors of cooperation between his country and the Sultanate of Oman open wider. His visit and the warm welcome he got were a deliberate effort to generate more mutual interests and increase the pace of joint business, bilateral trade, investments in various types of sectors. The Sultanate of Oman is strategically located on the Arabia Sea and the Indian Ocean. It is the Strait of Hormuz through which massive Saudi oil tankers move to reach the rest of the world. This also makes the Sultanate of Oman strategically important also for Saudi Arabia.

When democracy gets old, give young people a greater voice



Federico Fubini

WORSE, THERE
IS NO OBVIOUS
ANTIDOTE,
OTHER THAN
TO TRY TO GIVE
YOUNG PEOPLE A
GREATER VOICE.

This week, US President Joe Biden will hold a virtual Summit for Democracy, to be followed in roughly a year’s time by a second in-person gathering of leaders from around the world. More than 100 governments have been invited to attend.

Granted, not all invitees are democratic stalwarts. In fact, the democratic credentials of many are questionable, to say the least.

In any case, the more interesting question concerns those countries whose democratic credentials are not in doubt. Do they have common characteristics beyond the fact

that they hold free and fair elections, maintain the rule of law, and ensure freedom of expression and other individual rights?

One thing is certain: The cohort of true democracies is smaller than it was ten years ago. Among the 146 countries with more than two million residents, Freedom House considered only 39 to be “fully free” in 2020, down from 43 in 2010.

But a less noticed feature of today’s true democracies is that they tend to have aging populations. But in an age of rapid global change and multiplying

crises, these demographic trends raise urgent questions. Does a growing share of older voters affect how a country will adapt and respond to international shocks, financial crises, inflationary or deflationary threats, disruptive technologies, migration waves, and all the issues associated with climate change?

This was a central question in Germany’s recent federal election. Germany, followed closely by Italy, has the highest median age in Europe. More than half of each country’s electorate is older than 50. The number of eligible German voters fell by

1.3 million in the last general election, owing to demographic decline. In West Germany’s 1987 national election, 23 per cent of voters were under the age of 30, and 26 per cent were over 60. In 2021, 14.4 per cent were under 30 and 38.2 per cent were over 60. A similar or even sharper trend can be seen in Italy, Japan, and South Korea.

Age, of course, bears heavily on psychological traits and political preferences. Older individuals tend to be a little wiser; but they are also more cautious and slower to understand new developments. They are generally

less able or willing to adapt to the twists and turns of history. Younger people, by contrast, tend to be flexible, less risk-averse, and more resilient to shocks.

The absence of boldness, openness to novelty, and long-term vision in today’s democracies is not reassuring. Worse, there is no obvious antidote, other than to try to give young people a greater voice.

That may be a prudent reform for other democracies to discuss at this year’s Summit for Democracy.

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f t i y u t



Holder Sidab to clash with Suhar in HM Cup

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT, DEC 8

The final rounds of the 51st edition of the His Majesty's Cup Hockey Championship will begin on Thursday with three crucial matches at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

Saham will take on Salalah and the match will begin at 4:00 pm. Title holders, Ahli Sidab will face Suhar and the fixture will start at 6:00 pm. Al Seeb and Al Nasr will play in the concluding encounter which will kick off at 8:00 pm. All the finals round games will be held in Bausher.

The draw of the final rounds took place on Tuesday after the completion of Saham and Dhofar match which ended in favour of the former 6-1 in Seeb club. Six clubs including Al Nasr, Salalah, Ahli Sidab, Suhar, Al Seeb and Saham advanced to the finals round.

The chairman of Oman Hockey Association (OHA), Dr

Marwan al Juma and Dr Khamis al Rahbi, the Secretary-General attended the draw ceremony in presence of OHA officials and sponsors representatives.

The matches of final rounds will end on December 19. The matches will be played in the league system. The top four teams in the table will move to the semis. The winners in the semifinal will secure spots in the final match which will be held in January.

The initial group matches of the oldest sporting championship in the Sultanate of Oman began earlier in November. As many as 12 teams confirmed their presence in the 51st edition of His Majesty's Cup Hockey Championship. The teams have been divided into two groups. Title holders, Ahli Sidab, were in group B which featured Al Bashayer, Qurayat, Saham, Al Seeb, Suhar and Al Salam while group A comprised Dhofar Governorate clubs including Al Nasr, Dhofar, Salalah, Al Ittihad and Mirbat.



Oman Sail and Paralympic Committee announce national para sailing team

MUSCAT: In partnership with bp Oman, Oman Sail and Oman Paralympic Committee have officially announced the national para sailing team to represent the Sultanate of Oman in para sailing competitions locally and internationally in a formal celebration marking the International Day of Persons with Disability, held under the patronage of Shaikh Rashid bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development. The celebration was also attended by Dr Khamis bin Salim al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, Eng Mohammed al Najwani, Vice-President of Wells at bp Oman, Dr Mansoor bin Sultan al Tooqi, President of the Oman Paralympic Committee and various attendees

from sport related associations. The celebration highlighted the national team's journey towards success, and their future directions. The national team will represent the Sultanate of Oman in international competitions such as the Parasailing World Championship 2022 and Paralympic games. This outcome was as a result of the Sail Free programme which was first launched in December 2019 introducing persons with disabilities (specially with physical impairment) to the sport of sailing. Since the start of the programme approximately 150 men and women with disabilities aged 16 to 30 years old benefited from the programme.

The team members were



selected based on their performance in various stages of the programme at both Oman Sail's Sailing Schools in Al Mouj Muscat and Al Musannah. The members were trained under the highest standards of security and safety with supervision by a group of highly qualified Omani trainers,

using the multi-functional RS Venture Connect dinghy which can be quickly configured to suit the needs of each person with their own unique disability.

Shamsa al Rawahi, bp Oman social investment manager, commented "We believe that Paralympic sport promotes

inclusivity, diversity and empowerment. This is in line with our aims at bp to provide equal opportunities to Omanis that help develop their skills and capabilities. We look forward to the outcomes of team as they sail across local, regional and international waters." Dr Khamis al Jabri, CEO of Oman

Sail, said, "The success we have seen so far with the Sail Free programme shows the potential for the Sultanate of Oman to support people with different strengths and abilities. This programme provided the training, experience and an environment for them to succeed. I am excited to see the launch of the national para sailing team pave the way for athletes across the country to strive towards their goals." Dr Mansoor al Tooqi, President of the Oman Paralympic Committee, said, "The Sail Free programme has shown its potential to instil self-confidence and many other valuable lifelong skills in persons with disability. We are excited to see the team inspire others as they sail and compete internationally."

Atletico qualify as Liverpool complete perfect Champions League group stage



PARIS: Atletico Madrid won a bad-tempered game in Porto on Tuesday to qualify for the last 16 of the Champions League as Liverpool and Ajax both completed the group stage with 100 per cent records.

Diego Simeone's Atletico, who lost to Real Madrid in the 2014 and 2016 finals, needed to beat Porto in Portugal to advance to the knockout phase and they duly triumphed 3-1 in a game which featured three red cards.

Antoine Griezmann put the Spanish champions ahead in the 56th minute at the Estadio do Dragao but they then had Yannick Carrasco sent off for wrestling Otavio to the ground.

With tempers flaring, Porto were also reduced to 10 men as Wendell was sent off for elbowing Atletico's Matheus Cunha in the neck, before their substitute goalkeeper Agustin Marchesin also saw red. With Porto pushing forward in search of the draw they needed to qualify, Atletico got their second goal on the break in the last minute through Angel Correa before Rodrigo De Paul scored their third in injury time. Sergio Oliveira's penalty was a mere consolation for Porto.

Atletico finish second in Group B, a huge 11 points behind group winners Liverpool, who made it six wins out of six in Europe this season by beating AC Milan 2-1 at San Siro despite fielding a virtual reserve side.

Milan had to win to stand a chance of going through and they went ahead midway through the first half through Fikayo Tomori.

Mohamed Salah did start for the visitors and he equalised in the 36th minute before Divock Origi — who scored a stoppage-time winner in the Premier League at the weekend — made it 2-1 10 minutes into the second half, heading in after Sadio Mane's shot was saved.

"It's an exceptional performance," said manager Jurgen Klopp. "With that many changes, the boys have to be confident enough to show how good they are. I saw so many good things tonight, it was unbelievable."

Milan finish bottom of the group in their first Champions League campaign since 2013-14, with Porto parachuting into the Europa League.

REAL MADRID TOP GROUP
Elsewhere, Real Madrid secured top spot in Group D with a 2-0 defeat of Inter Milan at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Both sides had already qualified for the last 16 and Real just needed a draw to top the group. They went ahead through an early Toni Kroos strike, and Inter had Nicolo Barella sent off just after the hour mark before substitute Marco Asensio sealed Real's victory with a stupendous strike.

"Our objective is to go all the way, not just reach the last 16," said Real coach Carlo Ancelotti.

Moldovan debutants Sheriff Tiraspol had already secured third place before Boban Nikolov's injury-time goal earned them a 1-1 draw at bottom side Shakhtar Donetsk, for whom Fernando had opened the scoring. — AFP

Cummins shines, England crumble on rain-hit Ashes opening day

MELBOURNE: Pat Cummins took a five-wicket haul in a dream start to his Australia captaincy as England were skittled for 147 by tea at the Gabba before rain brought the opening day of the Ashes to an early close.

Australia's first fast-bowling skipper in 65 years, Cummins shone on a golden day for the home side that began with Mitchell Starc removing Rory Burns with the first ball after Joe Root sent his team in to bat on a grassy wicket.

The play ended with Cummins (5-38) leading his team off the ground to a standing ovation, holding the Kookaburra ball aloft in celebration of his first 'five-fer' against the English.

"It's been a good start to my captaincy stint," said the 28-year-old quick.

"I'm really proud of not only how everyone bowled but I thought everyone stayed really composed."

The rain capped a gloomy day for England at their traditional house of pain, but they may end up praying for more of it to avert defeat.

Their sole victory on Wednesday was when Root called the toss correctly, but his faith in England's batting was forlorn in the face of a fearsome pace on a



muggy, overcast morning.

Burns became the first player dismissed with the opening delivery of an Ashes in 85 years when Starc bowled him down the leg-side.

It was an ugly dismissal for the Surrey man, who crab-walked

across his stumps and trudged off with his sixth duck of the year, an all-time record for opening batsmen.

Within half an hour he had been joined in the dressing room by Dawid Malan (6) and Root as the metronomic Josh Hazlewood

struck twice.

Malan dangled his bat out to catch an edge and gave debut wicketkeeper Alex Carey his first test dismissal.

Root was out for a duck by a pearl of a delivery from the big quick, with David Warner leaping wide for a superb catch in the slips.

Cummins introduced himself after the morning drinks break, dismissing England's danger man Ben Stokes (5) with a brutish ball that induced a nick to a diving Marnus Labuschagne.

The captain then had opener Haseeb Hameed out for 25 in similar fashion straight after lunch, leaving England 60 for five.

An aggressive Jos Buttler (39) and Ollie Pope combined to rally England but Starc broke their 52-run stand with a sizzling delivery that caught Buttler's edge and sailed to Carey.

Young all-rounder Cameron Green celebrated his first test wicket when Pope (35) sent a panicky pull which Hazlewood pounced brilliantly in the deep.

Cummins cleaned up the tail to complete an inspirational performance, some 10 years on from his test debut as an 18-year-old, when he took a seven-wicket match haul at the Wanderers to help beat South Africa. — Reuters

ISC men's doubles crown goes to Mohan and Subhash

MUSCAT: Mohan Kannan and Subhash P lifted ISC Men's doubles title in the annual tennis tournament organised by Indian Social Club.

In the Men's Doubles final, the Mohan and Subhash capped their fine run in the tournament with a brilliant victory over the fancied team of Suhail K and Girish K K to claim the doubles crown. The final lived up to reputation as both teams played to potential until three-games-all. Suhail and Girish broke Subhash's serve in the seventh game, held their next serve and broke Mohan to win the first set. The spectators

were treated to a brilliant game of doubles with long rallies, neither side faltering under pressure. Scores were deadlocked at five-all when Subhash held his serve for the crucial lead and broke to claim a 6-2, 7-5 victory and the Men's Doubles title. The duo reached finals after defeating Shanawaz and Ganesh scoring 6-1; 6-1 in the semifinals.

In other matches of Men's doubles, Hareesh J & Junaid K beat Noushith and Dennis 8-0; Shanawaz and Ganesh beat James and Hemachandran 8-2 while Suhail and Girish beat Abbas and Mihir scoring 6-1; 6-1 in the semis



ISC Mens Doubles finalists



WTT Cup finals set new standards

SINGAPORE: After four action-packed days, the first-ever WTT Cup Finals came to a close on Tuesday and already became the new unmissable year-ending sport event. The final showdown between four of the finest table tennis players in the world crowned Sun Yingsha and Fan Zhendong. All players share a prize pool of USD 600,000 — with men and women players being awarded equal prize money.

WTT Council Chair Liu Guoliang commented, “Our goal is to turn table tennis into a truly global sports, with athletes at the core since they are the one who should benefit the most. WTT has created a fully professional platform for the athletes, from young players to champions who are vying to win the most prestigious competitions. All of them are able to get the chance to compete in WTT events.”

WTT aims to transform how table tennis is played and absorbed throughout the world while providing the fans of the sport with cutting-edge technology and new experiences which will build further the

interest and awareness of table tennis. It has developed a modern and new event structure establishing a clear journey from Day 1 to World Number 1.

Announced just two weeks ago, the inaugural WTT Cup Finals exceeded all expectations and turned out to be a complete success.

Steve Dainton, ITTF Group CEO, commented, “I am proud of World Table Tennis; they have delivered a superb Cup Finals, which will become the launching pad for future marquee events in Singapore. Furthermore, I am certain this will give other cities the confidence to collaborate with us to host spectacular events next year. We demonstrated it here: hosting WTT events brings extensive benefits to a host city, from tangible financial and economic impacts to destination marketing.”

Hosted at OCBC Arena at Singapore Sports Hub, fans did not miss the opportunity to come watch the world’s best men and women players. In just eight days of ticketing campaign, more than 75 per cent of the tickets were sold and all the



sessions for semifinals, finals and those including local hero Feng Tian Wei were sold out.

Lim Teck Yin, CEO Sport Singapore, commented, “Singapore is honoured to have been given the opportunity to host the inaugural WTT Cup Finals. We are delighted that WTT, together with the event partners, have delivered an exciting and successful event for athletes, officials, sponsors and fans. We look forward to working with WTT to bring

more exciting table tennis action to Singapore and table tennis fans around the world in future.”

The business community has also welcomed WTT Cup Finals, which gathered support quickly, with ten official partners supporting its delivery. Broadcasted by 17 rights-holders in more than 200 countries on five continents, WTT Cup Finals Singapore was the WTT event generating the most engagement across all

owned social media platforms in 2021.

Faithful to its mission to lead the digital transformation of table tennis, WTT has experimented with new engagement opportunities. A virtual mixed zone was set up and live-streamed to give global fans unprecedented behind-the-scenes access and offer them the chance to hear what their favourite players have to say after their matches.

All the ITTF Group came into play to deliver significant added value and reinforce the positive impact of the WTT Cup Finals Singapore on the local table tennis community. In cooperation with the Singapore Table Tennis Association (STTA), the ITTF held two events with Singaporeans coaches and young players. Around 100 participants from Singapore’s Youth Team and Junior development squads were treated to a ‘Meet & Greet’ session with star players. And thirty local coaches attended a lecture on development pathways and high performance.

— ITTF

Pistons, Wizards square off in battle of losing streaks



OKLAHOMA: The Detroit Pistons have the NBA’s worst record and longest losing streak. They may have hit rock bottom with their second-half performance on Monday, when they gave away an 18-point lead to the Oklahoma City Thunder.

Detroit was outscored 42-22 in the fourth quarter by an opponent that had lost by an NBA-record 73 points in its previous outing. The Pistons will carry a nine-game losing streak on Wednesday into their home game against Washington.

Washington enters on a three-game slide, which pales in comparison to the Pistons’ season-long struggle — Detroit has won an NBA-low four games and is on course to get another high lottery pick.

“It’s growing pains,” Pistons forward Saddiq Bey said. “Trying to learn how to finish all four quarters. That’s something we’re trying to go through. It’s a challenge for us.”

Detroit’s starting lineup is composed of 2021 No 1 draft pick Cade Cunningham, three second-year players, and forward Jerami Grant. The Pistons looked like they’d end their losing streak against Oklahoma City after they scored 37 points in the first quarter and led by 18 in the second.

They were unable to pull away and the Thunder rallied in the final quarter, taking the lead with a 13-0 outburst.

“We have to play 48 minutes of basketball. We didn’t do that,” Cunningham said. “Just locking in on the game plan and sticking to it for the whole game. I felt there was some spurts we kind of freestyled it and didn’t execute what we were supposed to.”

The defence completely collapsed, as the Thunder made all but two of their 19 fourth-quarter field-goal attempts in the final 12 minutes.

“Very indicative of being a young team,” coach Dwane Casey said. “Until we learn it’s a 48-minute game, play possession by possession... there was a stretch in the third quarter with like four, five turnovers in a row. We’d done a great job in the first half taking care of it. Until we string it together, we’re going to feel like this a lot.”

Cunningham posted his best statistical night of the season with 28 points, 11 rebounds and five assists but also committed six turnovers.

The fifth-place Wizards, meantime, lost 116-110 at Indiana on Monday despite 34 points from Bradley Beal. The All-Star guard had not reached the 20-point mark in his previous four games.

“Found a little rhythm tonight; hopefully I’ll keep it going,” Beal said. “But the only thing that matters is winning.”

Serena out of Australian Open, Djokovic on entry list

SYDNEY: World number one Novak Djokovic was named on the official entry list for next year’s Australian Open on Wednesday but 23-times Grand Slam singles champion Serena Williams will not play on the advice of her medical team.

Djokovic has declined to disclose his vaccination status despite all players, officials, staff and fans at the January 17-30 tournament at Melbourne Park needing to be inoculated against Covid-19.

Tennis Australia later told local media that his presence on the list was not a guarantee the Serbian would play.

Williams, who won the last of her seven Australian Open titles in 2017, had an injury-disrupted season and has not played since she limped out of her first-round match at Wimbledon in June due to the leg injury.

Tournament organiser Craig Tiley said last month that the 40-year-old American, who needs one more Grand Slam title to match Margaret Court’s record of 24, would be playing at Melbourne Park.

“Following the advice of my medical team, I have decided to withdraw from this year’s Australian Open,” Williams said in a statement.



“While this is never an easy decision to make, I am not where I need to be physically to compete. I will miss seeing the fans but am excited to return and compete at my highest level.”



Djokovic, who will be bidding for a record 21st Grand Slam men’s singles title if he plays at the tournament, said last week that he would be making a decision “very soon” about

travelling to Australia.

The 34-year-old was also named in the Serbia team for the ATP Cup, which will be held in Sydney in early January, when that was released on Tuesday.

Williams’s name was the most obvious omission from the field with 20-times Grand Slam champion Roger Federer having already confirmed that he would skip the event as he recovers from another round of knee surgeries.

Stan Wawrinka, who won the first of his three Grand Slam titles at Melbourne Park in 2014, was also absent from the men’s field. — Reuters

business

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EMPTY QUARTER ROAD

New corridor for cross-border trade and tourism

NEW MILESTONE: A fully equipped and staff checkpoint is now operational at the border between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to facilitate the speedy and smooth flow of motorists and goods

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 8

The formal inauguration of the Empty Quarter Road connecting the Sultanate of Oman and the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia opens a chapter in trade, commerce, investment, travel and tourism between the two countries.

The opening of the 725 km carriageway, which cuts through the desolate expanse of the Empty Quarter on the Sultanate of Oman's western border with Saudi Arabia, came against the backdrop of the landmark visit of HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Government dignitaries, business leaders and commentators on both sides welcomed the keenly awaited launch of this new border crossing for not only enhanced trade and economic relations, but also the movement of pilgrims, tourists and other travellers between the two friendly countries.

On Wednesday, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) announced that it has brought into operation the border crossing on the Sultanate of Oman's side of the border.

Fully equipped and staffed, the checkpoint is now geared to provide a full range of services to facilitate the movement of goods and people, while ensuring the speedy completion of travel procedures, such as passports and residence services.



The checkpoint is also equipped to provide the complete spectrum of customs services including customs clearance, inspection and scrutiny of exports and imports with the use of sophisticated scanning equipment — facilities aimed at facilitating fast and smooth flows of goods.

The Empty Quarter Road starts, on the Omani side, from the Ibri roundabout in Dhahirah Governorate and ends at the Empty Quarter checkpoint at the 161 km mark.

It extends onward on the Saudi side to Batha intersection, around 564 km away.

As the shortest overland route between the two countries, the Empty Quarter highway will

enable Omani exports to reach the rest of the world through the maritime gateways on the Red Sea, while also enabling Saudi exports to be shipped globally through Omani gateways on the Sea of Oman and the Arabian Sea.

Importantly, the new road link is expected to add to the investment appeal of a new industrial city under construction at Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn).

In a statement, Eng Nasser bin Hamoud al Mabsali, Director General of Ibri Industrial City (Madayn), said the new manufacturing hub's proximity to the Kingdom opens up promising opportunities for Saudi investors and business persons to set up operations in Ibri.

Ibri Industrial City, he further note, offers many incentives to attract investors, including an exemption from land lease rates for two years, with a further reduction for three years thereafter.

Additionally, as a full-fledged industrial city, it will be suitably equipped to provide speedy approvals and facilitate other procedures, he noted.

In statements to Oman News Agency, a number of Omani

businessmen and their Saudi counterparts hailed the opening of the Empty Quarter border crossing as giving new impetus to trade and investment exchange, as well as tourist traffic, between the two brotherly countries.

According to Eng Saeed bin Ali al Yahyai, Director of the Roads Department in Al Dhahirah Governorate, the Empty Quarter road is essentially a single carriageway with 3.65-metre wide lanes on either side and outer shoulders of 2.5 metres width.

The 2.7km approach to the border crossing is a dual carriageway featuring a roundabout. Eng Yousuf bin Abdullah al Mujaini, Director of Projects Department at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said the road has been designed according to the technical specifications approved by the Ministry.

A dualisation of the road is envisioned in the future if traffic volumes pick up along this key corridor, he noted.

A representative of Khazaen Economic

City said the new carriageway will also help channel Saudi investments into this logistics-centric destination in South Al

The Empty Quarter highway will enable Omani exports to reach the rest of the world through the maritime gateways on the Red Sea, while also enabling Saudi exports to be shipped globally through Omani gateways on the Sea of Oman and the Arabian Sea

ENG NASSER AL MABSALI
Director General of Ibri Industrial City (Madayn)

Batinah Governorate, chiefly in the logistics, manufacturing, food processing, technology and trade sectors. *(With inputs from ONA)*



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MUSCAT: GAC Motor is giving enthusiasts a chance to walk-in and win exciting prizes – 2 iPhone 13 Pro 128 GB and 8 Redmi Note 10 S 128 GB phones. Besides this, customers owning any of the GAC Motor vehicles can benefit with 5 years/150,000 kms manufacturer’s warranty, comprehensive 1 year insurance (Sultanate of Oman coverage), assured service 10 years/100,000 kms on GA8 and GN8 models, 4 years/40,000 kms on GS3, GS4 and GA4 models and 3 years/30,000 kms on GS8 model and 3M window tint for 21 and 22 YM models. The campaign is valid until February 3, 2022 (Conditions apply).

The offer is presently valid only in Muscat Governorate and Nizwa. For more details, please visit any GAC Motor showroom.

GAC Motor has some of the finest turbocharged vehicles in its range. In the Sultanate of Oman, the range includes sedans like the GA4, GA8; SUVs include the GS3, GS4 and GS8 and the MPV includes the GN8.

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GAC Motor International is devoted to the production and sales of world-class vehicles, engines, auto parts and car accessories as well as R&D of automobile engineering technology.

Since its establishment, GAC Motor International has adopted a global vision

and adhered to international standards, forming a world-class car manufacturing system with GAC Motor International’s global R&D network, world-class production model, global supply chain system and GAC Motor International’s marketing approach as its core.

GAC R&D Centre has established a rigorous and well-organised automobile development management system with the vehicle design and development control programme as its core components, major system standardisation development process as an extension, and supported by standardisation of management process in each stage of vehicle development.

It has passed the examination of ISO:9001 Quality Management System for certification review and approval.

GAC R&D Centre has worked with world famous partners many times in thorough and complete chassis performance optimisation.

Joint effort was also made in testing and tuning in different road conditions and/or under various temperatures on major proving grounds home and abroad.

GAC Motor has blazed a development path that is high-end focused, quality-first and innovation-driven with its development speed and profit level being among the best.

In the Sultanate of Oman, GAC Motor vehicles are distributed by New World Autos and backed by Saud Bahwan Group.

Al Mouj Muscat launches SQU
initiative to nurture Omani talent

MUSCAT: Al Mouj Muscat has begun a new programme of collaboration with Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) by hosting architect and engineering students at its Community Hub.

This initiative is set to inspire leaders of the future as they learn from a real-life success story of the Sultanate of Oman’s leading lifestyle destination.

Final year architecture students spent two days at the integrated tourism complex, taking part in tours of key buildings as well as workshops on urban planning, design and sustainability.

Working with the Department of Civil and Architectural Engineering, the initiative was kickstarted by a visit which, as part of Al Mouj Muscat’s corporate social responsibility strategy, seeks to support the talents of the Sultanate of Oman’s youth.

Al Mouj Muscat provides its facilities and expert staff to support students with post graduate theses and data collection, as well as assessing design and graduation projects.

Other opportunities that sit within the ethos of giving something back to the community,



will be to allow individuals to complete their training whilst gaining practical experience working within the Sultanate of Oman’s leading lifestyle and leisure destination.

Commenting on Al Mouj Muscat’s sustainable new initiative, Nasser al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj, said: “It was a great pleasure to welcome these students and to continue providing opportunities for the youth of our country who have an opportunity to learn and see first-hand, what it takes to create a world-class urban destination.

“At Al Mouj, we excel at place making and understand what it takes to put in place everything that’s needed for how people want to live, work and play. “Our community is built to grow not just in terms of scale and the number of amenities but in how people interact with one another and feel a real sense of belonging.

“We are looking forward to furthering our relationships with the university and by helping to educate and support the careers of talented individuals, we know we will be playing our part in inspiring the future architects, urban planners and leaders of our nation who will work to realise Oman Vision 2040 and in turn help our wonderful country to grow.”

EY organises seminar on tax updates

MUSCAT: Global professional services firm EY organised a seminar to provide its clients with recent updates to the Sultanate of Oman’s tax landscape. Several international tax regulations that affect the country, regional and local tax matters were highlighted.

Broadly the seminar covered the following: Economic and legal developments in the Sultanate of Oman; Base erosion and profit shifting 2.0, and the role of digital and automation in tax; Updates on administrative and direct tax matters; Compliance obligations for Automatic Exchange of Information under Country-



Ahmed al Esry



Alkesh Joshi

by-Country Reporting (CbCR) and Common Reporting Standard (CRS); Value-Added Tax (VAT) implementation in the Sultanate of Oman; and Excise updates.

The seminar was attended by over 200 participants including CFOs, Senior Finance Executives from various industries and sectors across the country.

Ahmed al Esry, MENA Tax

Leader and Market Segment Leader for EY, initiated the session by highlighting that the Sultanate of Oman has recently witnessed several regulatory tax updates, with the introduction of VAT, amendments to the Income Tax Law, and compliance to international tax standards as set out by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development relating to CbCR and CRS.

Alkesh Joshi, MENA Energy Tax Leader and Sultanate of Oman Tax Partner, emphasised the importance of tax technology transformation globally and how taxpayers can benefit in the future years by adopting and

investing in technology.

The Tax Authority is also gearing up to technological advancements and developing infrastructure for enabling digitisation. Taxpayers and their responsibilities for above transformation with respect to introduction of VAT, and compliance obligation for international standards were also highlighted during the session.

EY also highlighted the significance of Vision 2040 and Medium-Term Fiscal Plan for the country’s long-term development and fiscal consolidation.

The Ghibli Hybrid arrives, the first electrified Maserati



The Ghibli Hybrid is a Maserati destined to make an indelible mark on the Brand’s history: it is the first electrified car from the brand. The link between a past of internal combustion engines and an electric future. The spark that ignites the journey

into the future of a brand dedicated to innovation throughout its history.

The underlying aim of the Hybrid version of the Ghibli is to enhance performance while saving fuel. It represents the Maserati approach to hybrid propulsion, an approach in keeping with the constructor’s DNA.

Ghibli Hybrid takes Maserati into the future without betraying the past.

In a way, it even further highlights the keynote features of every Maserati: exceptional performance and luxury. The first hybrid engine in the history of the marque, where innovation and technology have always met with high performance automotive engineering, to drive Maserati forward towards a more sustainable future.

Faster than diesel, greener than gasoline: the Ghibli Hybrid philosophy in a nutshell. Beneath elegant looks that convey an impression of contemporary elegance, specially styled for this version with an exclusive colour scheme, a stunningly brilliant, glittering “Grigio Evoluzione” (for China, the launch version is Rosso Magma), lies this Ghibli version’s innovative high-tech secret: the hybrid powerplant that generates 330 hp, propels the car to 100 km/hour in 5.7 seconds and delivers a top speed of 255 km/h.

Developed by a team of approximately one hundred people, Ghibli Hybrid is

built around a modified version of the chassis and bodywork of the Ghibli V6, which in the Hybrid version combines a 4 cylinder, 2-litre engine with a 48 volt Hybrid system that also enables energy to be recovered when slowing and braking.

Staying true to its DNA, Maserati has chosen a hybrid solution that aims, above all, to improve performance, while also saving fuel.

The outcome achieved is almost perfect: even greater performance, with less fuel use. The same engine brilliance and performance level of every Maserati model are retained but consumption is reduced, making the Hybrid version of Ghibli even more efficient than those equipped with the gasoline or Diesel V6 engines.

In practice, Ghibli Hybrid combines the best features of the two previous powerplants, offering the driver a car that is fun to drive, with the genuine Maserati sound.

It squares the circle by delivering the

smooth response of a 6 cylinder engine with the low-rpm torque of a diesel.

The hybrid system delivers the same pickup as the diesel version together with the power and acceleration of the 350 hp V6 gasoline engine, all combined with an impressive reduction in CO2 emissions, cut by 25 per cent compared to gasoline and virtually the same as the diesel according to WLTP data.

The Maserati 48 volt hybrid system has four parts: BSG, battery, eBooster and a DC/DC converter. The BSG (Belt Starter Generator) does the job of an alternator, recovers energy during braking/deceleration and charges the battery in the boot, which in turn powers the engine’s eBooster.

The reason for installing an eBooster on the car is to back up the conventional turbocharger, working in tandem with it, to sustain the engine’s power output at low rpm. The hybrid system’s operating strategy ensures that the eBooster is always available, via battery or BSG, whenever it is needed.



Sri Lankan gloves manufacturer to set up re-export plant in Sohar Freezone



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 8

The Sri Lankan Embassy in the Sultanate of Oman has announced that it has facilitated Lalan Rubbers (Pvt) Ltd, the largest gloves manufacturing company in Sri Lanka, in setting up its re-export facility for medical disposable gloves at Sohar Freezone.

Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman Ameer Ajwad recently visited Sohar Freezone together with Lalan's Chief Executive Officer Manjula Mahadanaarachchi and officially presented the project proposal to Sohar Freezone Executive Manager Hilal al Adawi with a view to initiating the project.

Lalan's representative in the Sultanate of Oman, Damith De Alwis, made a presentation on the details of the project to the free zone authorities.

Sara al Bahrani, Senior Commercial Officer of the Freezone, also participated during the meeting. The Lalan delegation led by the Ambassador also inspected

the plot of land allocated for Lalan's gloves re-exportation plant in Sohar Freezone.

Ambassador Ameer Ajwad stated that Lalan Group's facility will be dedicated to the re-export of medical disposable gloves imported from Sri Lanka. It will capitalise on market opportunities in the Sultanate of Oman as well as in the region.

This is the first-ever Sri Lankan owned packing plant, ETO facility and laboratory unit under one roof in an Omani free zone.

The plant will also produce value added surgical gloves, as well as industrial gloves, the Ambassador added.

Lalan Group, an 80-year-old Sri Lankan family owned conglomerate of 52 companies in seven sectors, employs more than 7,500 persons and conducts business in over 105 countries.

All of its operations are centred around its vertically integrated core business of rubber. The group also manufactures mattresses, pillows, rubber bands, and other products.

MDO celebrates launch of major gabbro quarry in Liwa

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 8

As part of celebrations marking the 51st National Day of the Renaissance, Minerals Development Oman (MDO), a subsidiary of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), announced on Wednesday the formal inauguration of a major gabbro quarry in Wilayat of Liwa in North Al Batinah Governorate.

The inauguration was held under the auspices of the Governor of North Al Batinah, in the presence of a number of dignitaries, officials and representatives of the media.

The gabbro quarry, which can produce 2.4 million tonnes of gabbro per annum, is operated by Ahjaar Mining Company, which was established by MDO in partnership with local Omani firms Assarain Group and Al-Fajar Al Alamia Company.

A geological and economic feasibility study conducted by



MDO that revealed a recoverable amount of about 211 million tonnes of gabbro in a mine life of about 50 years, covering an area of 2.2 square kilometres.

The company has ambitious plans to increase the production to reach 5 million tonnes in the next phase.

Significantly, the Liwa quarry

was the first mining license obtained by MDO in January 2019.

Gabbro is witnessing an increased demand by a number of Gulf and regional markets, due to its rapid importance to the construction sector.

MDO was established with a strategic vision to invest in the

mining sector in the Sultanate of Oman and to increase its contribution to the growth of the economic and social sectors by creating job opportunities and building local capacities and competencies, in addition to supporting small businesses and developing the local added value.

Oil prices ease as investors wait for more on Omicron's impact

TOKYO: Oil prices eased on Wednesday, taking a breather after gains earlier this week, as investors waited for more information on to what extent the Omicron coronavirus variant will likely hurt the global economy and fuel demand.

Brent crude futures dropped 40 cents, or 0.5 per cent, to \$75.04 a barrel at 0748 GMT, after settling 3.2 per cent higher.

US West Texas Intermediate crude was at \$71.50 a barrel, down 55 cents or 0.8 per cent having gained 3.7 per cent in the previous session.

After a collapse last week, oil prices rebounded earlier this week on rising optimism that Omicron will not cause major



A gas station attendant pumps fuel into a car in Abuja, Nigeria. — Reuters

economic damage.

"The recovery run took a break as investors tried to confirm full impact of the Omicron variant

before buying further," said Satoru Yoshida, a commodity analyst with Rakuten Securities.

— Reuters

EU wants new trade powers to fight foreign bad actors

BRUSSELS: The European Commission on Wednesday launched a bid to equip Brussels with new powers to swiftly retaliate against efforts by foreign governments to undermine the European economy and businesses.

The EU executive has not been specific about who would be targeted with the new powers to impose regulatory controls on foreign goods and to deny government contracts and research grants to foreign firms.

The package is to be known as an "anti-coercion" tool. The plan's main backers pushed for the new weapon in the wake of Donald Trump's presidency, when European Union officials felt unfairly targeted by the whims of the US leader, especially on trade.

Potential dirty tricks by China and Russia are also thought to be on the minds of the tool's backers, which was demanded by the European Parliament, where the desire for a vigorous EU foreign policy is strong.

It is also ties in with France's ambition for Europe to exercise "strategic autonomy" against the global supremacy of the US and China, which is seen as increasingly destabilising and unpredictable.

"With this proposal we are sending a clear message that the EU will stand firm in defending its interests," European Union executive vice president Valdis Dombrovskis said.

"The main aim of the anti-coercion tool is to act as a deterrent. But we now also have more tools at our disposal when pushed to act," he said.

— AFP

Japan economy shrinks faster in third quarter

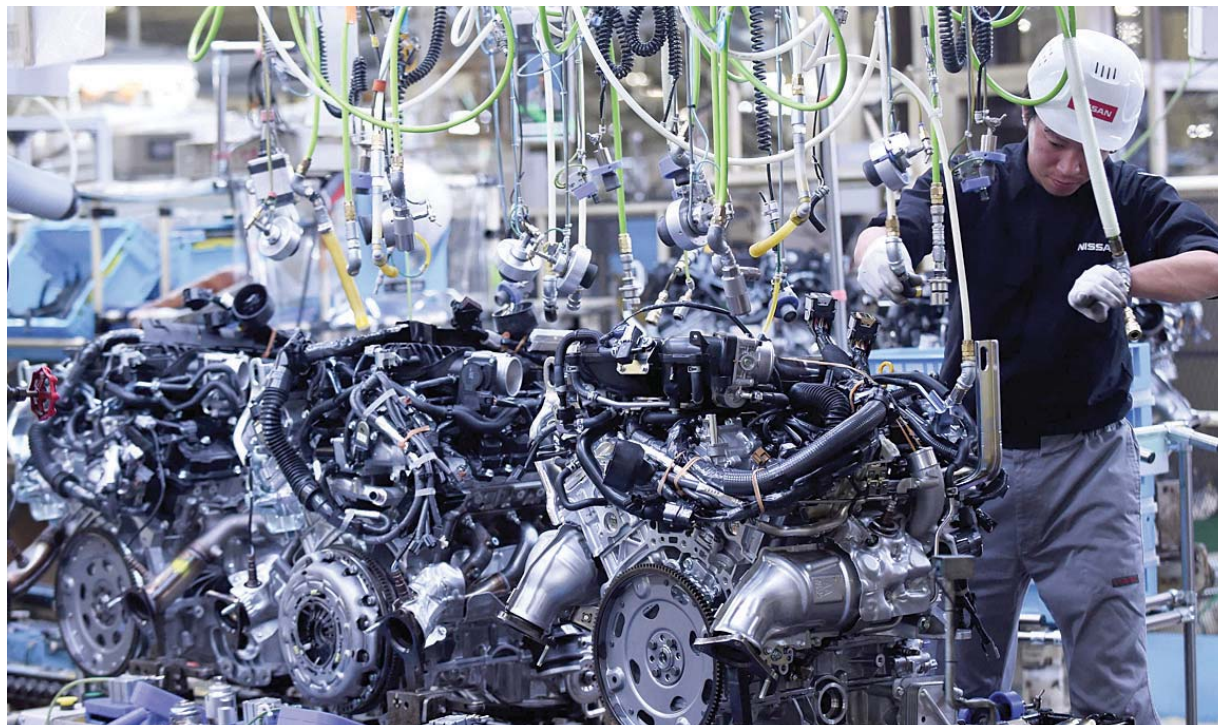
TOKYO: Japan's economy shrank slightly faster than initially reported in the third quarter, as a sharp rise in local Covid-19 cases hit private consumption and a global chip supply shortage hurt corporate sentiment.

The deeper contraction is a setback for policymakers hoping easing supply shortages and loosened pandemic curbs would support a recovery in the world's third-largest economy this quarter.

Japan's economy declined an annualised 3.6 per cent in July-September, revised Cabinet Office data showed on Wednesday, worse than the preliminary reading of a 3.0 per cent contraction.

The data, which was worse than economists' median forecast for a 3.1 per cent drop, equals a real quarter-on-quarter contraction of 0.9 per cent from the prior quarter, versus a preliminary 0.8 per cent drop.

"This confirms that economic conditions were stagnating in the July-September quarter," said



A man work on a truck assembly line at a factory in Tokyo. — AFP

Atsushi Takeda, chief economist at Itochu Economic Research Institute.

"Growth turned negative due to the resurgence of the coronavirus." The faster decline was mainly

due to a larger fall in private consumption, which makes up more than half of gross domestic product, and shrank 1.3 per cent from the previous three months, worse than the initial estimate of

a 1.1 per cent drop.

Consumption fell as bad weather kept shoppers at home and a global chip shortage hit sales of cars and electronics due to production snags, a government

official said.

"A large contraction in durable goods (spending) indicated that car production cuts had a huge impact," said Wakaba Kobayashi, an economist at Daiwa Institute of Research.

Durable goods spending posted its biggest drop since 1994 when comparable data first became available, the official said, slumping 16.3 per cent quarter-on-quarter and pulling down household consumption by 0.7 percentage points.

The data showed public investment dropped 2.0 per cent versus the initial estimate of a 1.5 per cent decline, while capital spending saw a smaller fall, shrinking 2.3 per cent from the prior quarter, compared with a 3.8 per cent preliminary drop.

The net contribution of exports to the GDP change was zero, offset by imports. Meanwhile, domestic demand pulled GDP down by 0.9 percentage point, matching a preliminary contribution.

— Reuters

Apple’s China deal mostly bought time

Apple could pay an even bigger price for its secret deal in China. Chief Executive Tim Cook signed an undisclosed agreement in 2016 promising Beijing \$275 billion of investment in the country over five years in exchange for relaxing pressure on its business. He may have had little choice, but it muddles the return calculus.

Coerced technology transfer in exchange for market access is a point of major diplomatic friction between China and its trade partners, but many executives accept it as a cost of doing business.

Everyone from Microsoft to Boeing has built research and development centres in the People’s Republic, or directly handed over intellectual property. The quid pro quo doesn’t always pay off.

Westinghouse, for example, swapped nuclear reactor knowhow for contracts and then went bankrupt anyway.

The deal came after Chinese officials had been targeting the iPhone maker for various lapses; its sales in the country tumbled 17 per cent in 2016. Sustained crackdowns could have destabilised its supply chain and global profitability.

Apart from a respite from pressure, it’s unclear what benefits Apple reaped. A \$1 billion investment in Chinese ride-sharing provider Didi Global, which was part of the package, has been a rocky one, and politically sticky in Washington: Apple’s money may have helped Didi drive US rival Uber out of China.

As a canny investor, Apple, surely put some of the money into projects that were going to be developed anyway. To placate Beijing, though, some capital may have served more like donations to state enterprises and local governments. The company generated \$249 billion of sales in Greater China over the last five years, less than the pledged amount.

Apple’s share of the Chinese smartphone market has remained roughly static since 2016, even though it benefitted somewhat from White House sanctions that pushed Huawei, its closest domestic rival, out of the smartphone business.

The decision to hide the deal from shareholders will make it even harder for Cook to justify now. The heightened geopolitical tension also augurs greater blowback at home. If nothing else, Apple at least bought itself some time. Just how much and at what cost is the question. — Reuters

Apart from a respite from pressure, it’s unclear what benefits Apple reaped



WELDING TRADE
A man works at a MAW Engineering plant in Toome, north of Belfast. Unlike the rest of the UK, Northern Irish businesses still have one foot in the European single market. The Northern Ireland Protocol, designed to govern trade in the British province and recognise its special status, has been a thorn in the side of EU-UK relations since January. — AFP

Transitioning towards e-learning



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

UNIVERSITIES ARE NOW TAKING THE ‘DISTANCE E-LEARNING’ APPROACH BY ENABLING ACCESS TO COURSE MATERIAL AND LESSONS THROUGH E-BOOKS

International pundits have long stressed the importance of e-learning to stay abreast of developments in scientific, medical and economic fields amid the lingering challenges posed by the pandemic.

The persistence of variants complicates prospects for a mass return to conventional learning methods and education in general.

Today, the world is going through a new wave of Covid infections that has affected thousands of people and caused widespread business disruption, while impacting postgraduate university education as well.

The sole exception is e-education. In this context, major international universities are now taking the ‘distance e-learning’ approach by enabling access to course material and lessons through e-books, with teachers on hand to support the needs of anyone eager for this type of education.

This approach is also being applied to primary school children to support their educational growth.

This transition to e-learning has been emphasised by Moroccan thinker Professor Idriss Ohlal in his recent book, titled *The Big Bang... The Age of Ends*, where he explore the intersection between the future of education and other issues that concern people in light of the transformations under way in the world, and the conflicts that erupt in many areas of science, culture and economic life.

These issues require people and governments to help children adapt to new learning tools and not to restrict themselves to the traditional learning model.

The writer believes that any kind of regular governmental and private university education that extends for five years and more is a flawed model. Instead, one can learn from home and obtain the certification and experience in a relatively short period of time and at a lower cost.

The writer also believes that it is important not to waste one’s life in flawed university education, at a time when one can obtain the requisite knowledge and skills within a shorter timeframe via a global digital platform, besides choosing

study materials that suit their needs and in the language they understand.

Today, employers look at the competencies and skills of a candidate and not their certificates.

This led former US president Donald Trump in June 2020 to issue a decision for the federal government to hire applicants with abilities and skills instead of academic certificates.

We in Arab and Islamic countries are in dire need of dealing with new technologies in the field of distance education or in our work with government institutions. People’s interests in the current era need to keep pace with developments in their field of work.

In the opinion of the writer, this does not mean that we abandon traditional educational values, but rather we continue efforts to keep pace with technological developments, especially in the educational field for children.

This will ensure that the current generation and owners of small and medium enterprises are better equipped with achieve their career and professional aspirations.

Hacking the tragedy of the commons



ALEX FRIEDMAN
The author is CEO and Co-Founder of Novata, Inc. and Co-Founder of Jackson Hole Economics

The word of the week, unfortunately, is Omicron. With yet another new Covid-19 variant dominating the headlines, the global spotlight on climate issues following last month’s COP26 conference is quickly fading. Humanity, after all, tends to focus on the most immediate threat.

Still, our response to the pandemic could offer a roadmap for confronting climate change. Both crises involve a classic tragedy of the commons, which occurs when individuals disregard the well-being of society in the interest of personal gain.

Yet the global reaction to Covid-19 demonstrated that some unlikely parties could come together, at risk to their individual interests, to accelerate the development, testing and distribution (at least in the rich

world) of successful vaccines. The climate crisis demands a similar approach.

Deploying capital to mitigate global warming will require an alignment of unusual bedfellows in finance, technology, social-justice activism, and beyond. Capital, along with government and religion, has been one of the three great levers of change in history.

It has the power to alter the trajectory of entire civilisations. For many decades, capital flows have followed a simple rule defined by the Nobel laureate economist Milton Friedman: all that matters is shareholder returns. But the continuing viability of this maxim has been called into question by unprecedented wildfires, more frequent and severe flooding, increasingly visible social inequities, and other worrying problems.

There is now growing support for the idea that capital should be used

for more than just financial returns, as demonstrated by the explosion of interest in ESG (environmental, social, and governance) standards for corporations.

It is good news that investors are starting to demand greater transparency into how companies manage their ESG dynamics, and that executives and boards of directors are beginning to track relevant data to report to their investors. You can’t change what you don’t measure.

But the ESG movement has largely focused on publicly traded companies. That is understandable, because such companies are where individual shareholders can influence behaviour, as the hedge fund Engine No 1 recently demonstrated with its successful campaign to install decarbonisation advocates on the board of ExxonMobil.

The problem is that there are

fewer than 50,000 publicly listed companies in the world today, compared to more than 200 million privately held companies. If the lever of capital is going to be used effectively, it must include private companies.

Not only do privately held companies represent the vast majority of employment and much of the world’s GDP, but they are also who public companies rely on for key inputs.

Most of the recent net-zero commitments made by Fortune 500 corporations will have little meaning until there is greater clarity about what is happening in their supply chains.

As matters stand, there is very little information about privately held companies’ ESG metrics. And much of the data that do exist is of poor quality, calculated by third parties using algorithms that do little more than guess at

conclusions. What has been missing is a consortium model in which unusual bedfellows come together to solve a problem that cannot be addressed by any one group.

Fortunately, there have been promising recent efforts to address this problem. For example, the ESG Data Convergence Project, a group of private-equity managers and limited partner investors, is working to standardise a set of ESG reporting metrics for private-equity managers.

Similarly, the Institutional Limited Partners Association has put together an ESG Roadmap to identify best practices for private market investors who are interested in advancing ESG efforts at their organisations.

The path is lit. Now we must follow it to address other problems of the commons before they become even more tragic.

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Ali al Maashari: 99639264
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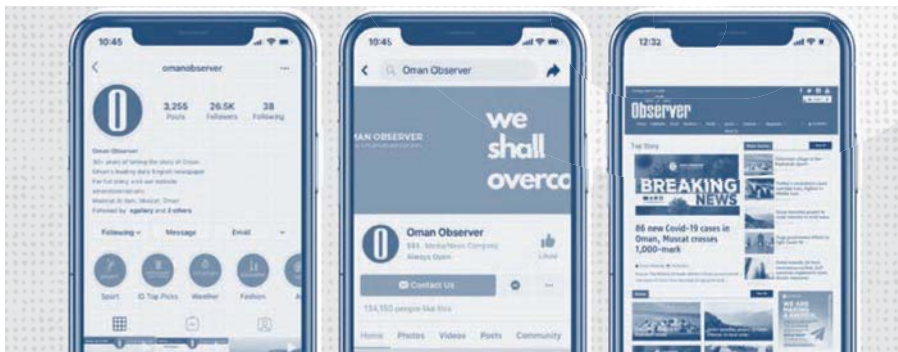
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features



The Language of Sunset tells the story of a country artist

The exhibition tells the story of sun whispering her secrets before disappearing at sunset, passing between the bodies of her loved ones and changing their language from an auditory language to a visual language full of warmth and silence.... **P20**

LOCAL SCENE

READ



HIDDEN FIGURES

BY MARGOT LEE SHETTERLY

The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Who Helped Win the Space Race is a 2016 nonfiction book. Shetterly started working on the book in 2010.

Highlights from Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque workshop

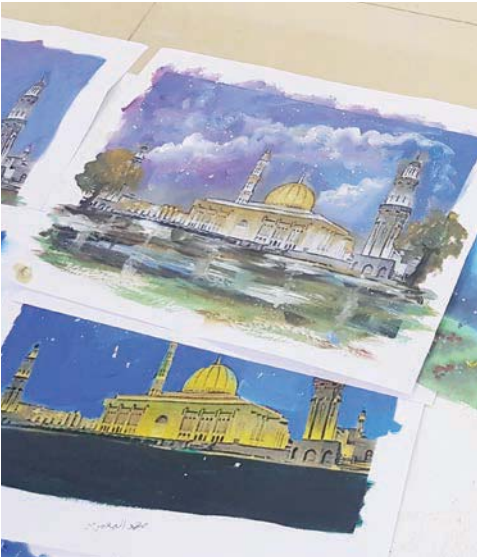
The National Museum organised a workshop titled: "Highlights from Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque" dedicated to hearing impaired group, in cooperation with the Scientific College of Design on Tuesday, December 7, 2021. The workshop was presented by Abdullah al Rugaibi, Education Specialist at the National Museum, and Dr Mohammad Tarik, Head of

Fashion Design Department at the Scientific College of Design, along with Huda al Ameriyah, sign language translator. The workshop included a number of topics, most notably a historical view of the status of mosques in Islam, the importance of the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, the parts of the mosque, and its universal message, fol-



lowed by a practical application of drawing and painting the mosque. The workshop aimed to train and rehabilitate this category and integrate it within the society, dis-

cover their creativity, provide them with skills related to art and colouring and spread this experience for a better and happier future.



The students excelled in executing artworks, emphasising their ability to deal with various materials to implement artistic paintings that require skill and accuracy.



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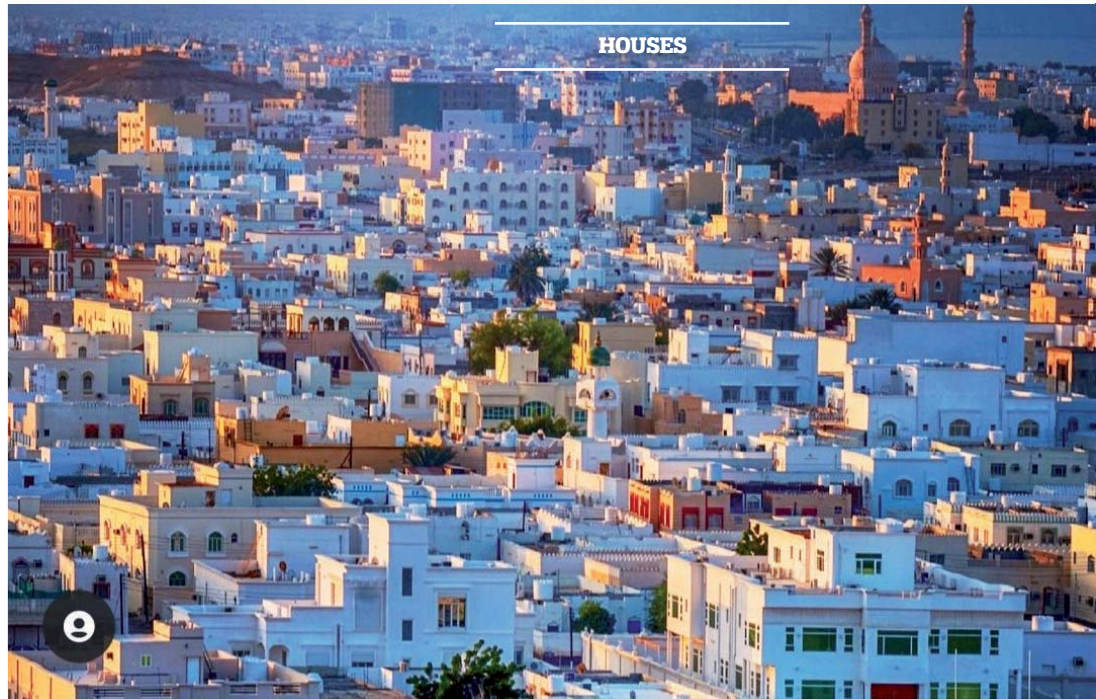
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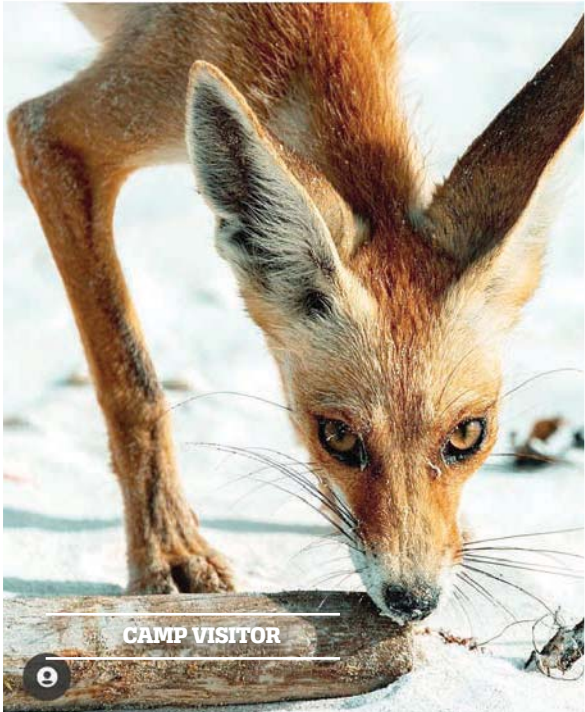


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AROUND THE WORLD

ARAB WORLD

Saudi rolls out red carpet

Less than four years after lifting a ban on cinemas, Saudi Arabia rolled out the red carpet on Monday in the Red Sea city of Jeddah for celebrities descending on the kingdom's first major film festival.

Saudi, Arab and foreign actors and actresses walked the red carpet in evening wear — a far cry from the traditional black abaya that until recently was the officially mandated dress code for women.

"It's a historical day in the kingdom," the festival's director Mohammed Al Turki said.

Movie houses were barred for decades until April 2018, but over the next 10 days, actors and directors will showcase their features at Jeddah's Red Sea International Film Festival.

The festival starts a day after Jeddah hosted its first Formula One Grand Prix, also an attempt to portray Saudi Arabia in a different light.

It will showcase 138 long and short films from 67 countries in more than 30 languages.

Among them are Jordan's critically acclaimed "The Alleys", directed by Bassel Ghandour, and non-Arabic films including Joe Wright's "Cyranos" and "83", the story of India's 1983 cricket World Cup victory.

The festival is also expected to honour Haifaa alMansour, the first female Saudi director, who shot "Wadjda" in 2012, winning her a number of international awards.

"This is a turning point, but we still aspire for more," Saudi actress Elham Ali said as she walked the carpet in a red dress.

The rise of Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, in 2017 has ushered in a number of reforms.

"The thought of organising a film festival in Saudi Arabia was unimaginable just five years ago," said Egyptian art critic Mohamed Abdel Rahman.

A social shift in the conservative Gulf state has included the lifting of a ban on women driving and allowing mixed-gender concerts and other events, even as a strict crackdown on dissent remains in place.

'SOFT POWER'

The festival also has an eye on a burgeoning market for shooting and consuming films in Saudi Arabia.

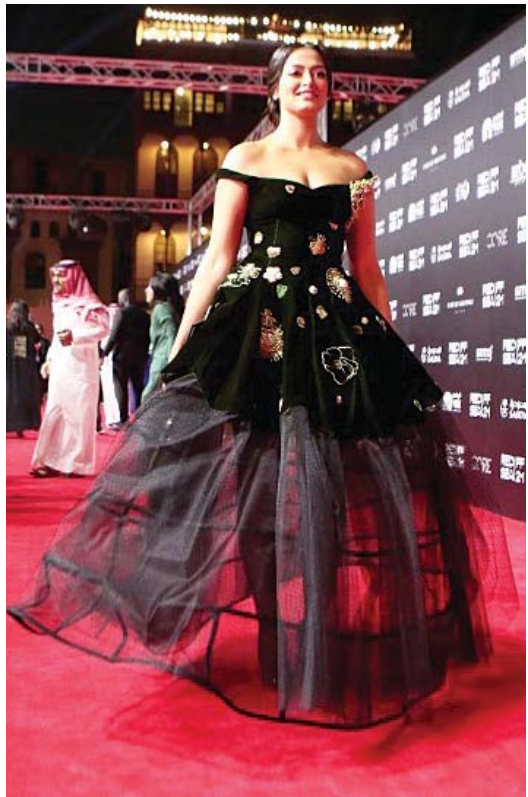
Saudi Arabia's annual box office could reach \$950 million by 2030, according to a report by multinational accountancy firm PwC.

It estimates the kingdom's forecast population of nearly 40 million could absorb up to 2,600 cinema screens. "Before cinemas reopened in 2018, the industry was working underground," said Saudi director Ahmed al Mulla, who has run an annual Saudi Film Festival in the eastern city of Dammam since 2008.

"There were no capabilities to film or get financing. It all depended on the individual's efforts."

Industry observers, however, say the Saudi film sector still lacks expertise, as well as investment.

But some big projects are now becoming reality. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT



In poor Lagos district, 'slum party' brings hope and life

To the rhythm of drums, two plastic giants whirl and kick up dust in an alleyway in Orowonshoki, one of the poorer districts of Lagos, Nigeria's megalopolis economic capital.

From shanty houses of wood and tin, inhabitants poke their heads outside, and watch wide-eyed as the strange procession bounces past.

Soon, the whole street sways and joins the dancers, whose costumes are crafted entirely from plastic bottles collected from the neighbourhood streets.

The "Slum Party" kicks off with a burst of music, dance and the flames of a fire breathing act.

For three years, a collective of 10 young Nigerian performers has sought to improve the lives of Orowonshoki's residents through dance, hoping to change the reputation of an area once blighted by gang violence.

"In 2019, Orowonshoki was facing a lot of security challenges, and no one was going out in street anymore," said Valu, one of the creators of the "Slum Party" that is held once a year.

"We started to dance in the street, so that the people won't be afraid anymore and they started to go back in the street," said Valu, a professional dancer whose real name is Sunday Ozege Obiajulu. "We started to bring life again."

Throughout the year, the collective organises dance workshops for children and fitness activities for women in the district.

"I just used to stay all day long with my kids at home, but now because of them I do something different, I feel like I exist," said Martha Eze, 37, who dances later in the party.



Wealth next to poverty
Orowonshoki is located at the foot of the Third Mainland bridge, Africa's second largest, that stretches 12 kilometres above the Lagos Lagoon.

In sub-Saharan Africa's largest city where one in two residents lives in poverty, wealthy island districts with swank fashion and restaurants are a world away from the poor mainland districts like Orowonshoki.

In the distance from Orowonshoki across a stretch of the waterways surrounding Lagos, residents can see Banana Island, an exclusive, private Lagos enclave of villas and residences.

In Orowonshoki, the only dollars visible are those printed on the shirt of a teenage boy wiggling his legs to "Peru", a song by Nigerian singer Fireboy.

"I'm in San Francisco jamming... I just arrived from Miami," the children sing along to the lyrics

dancing barefoot.

Even one of the city's daily power cuts that stopped the music dead did not spoil the party: the audience kept dancing.

"We have a lot of fun today. I love dancing," said Beke Olamileken, a 16-year-old boy who dreams of becoming an actor.

Make a difference
More than a simple performance, organisers also see "Slum party" as a tool for political awareness.

"I want to show that you can make a difference with simple actions on the ground," Valu said.

Last year, a video showing Valu dancing in a huge mud puddle in front of a police officer to denounce the disastrous state of the roads, was a hit on social media.

During the "Slum party", next to the dance floor, on the steps of a ruined house, the collective planted cardboard gravestones, inscribed with the words "People", "Wealth", "Rights", "Security" and "Peace".

Dancer Henry Bethel Wisdom ties his body with an orange rope, and improvises a performance that freezes the crowd. The artist soars into the air, trying to get out of the improvised cemetery, but is caught by his associates who drag him back with rope.

None of the dancers makes any reference to it, but the performance recalls the massive protest movement against police violence that gripped southern Nigeria in October last year.

Thousands of young people took to the streets to demand an end to human rights abuses and corruption, before being suppressed by the security forces.

— AFP

A PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE



Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla

Change your feelings..If you can't change the circumstances !

IN OUR LIVES SOMEHOW,

we notice that everyone — even the most fortunate among us has some circumstances that they want to change in their lives. For example, when you are thinking about your own life and something that may cause you stress, anxiety or sadness, especially when you have difficulty finding your interesting job or profession for instance Or maybe you don't get too many friendships and feel lonely. How can you improve the situation? Your answer might be, for example: I have to move, get a new job, meet new people. And maybe-I say-that you must change the outside world to make it better for you!

So sometimes, changing your circumstances can be difficult but absolutely necessary, as in cases of abuse or violence. Sometimes it's easy to change your circumstances: as if you experience deep lethargy every morning, you'll start falling asleep early.

However, we must also be aware that fighting against reality may be impossible or ineffective . Maybe you've been diagnosed with a chronic disease for which there are no promising treatment options, or maybe you have a job you love but don't like your manager and no one will give you a new manager! So in such situations, changing what you feel can be much easier than changing your physical reality, even if it seems unnatural.

Hence, if you consider what I mentioned earlier, you will see that it is not surprising that chronic stress often leads to inappropriate coping mechanisms in modern life, such as drug and alcohol abuse, self-harm, and self-blame. These responses not only fail to provide long term comfort; it can increase problems through addiction and depression and in-

creased anxiety.

This fact takes us to an important point, namely, the importance of risk assessment and managing your negative feelings, which is undoubtedly a better strategy than trying to change the world around you . One of the most important strategies is to notice your feelings . When you notice your feelings as if it belonged to someone else, you make yourself better advice.

On the other hand, the idea is that you need to change your circumstances if you're sad, based on the assumption that you must eliminate your negative feelings. In many cases, negative emotions can be debilitating and can require treatment, such as in cases of depression or anxiety. But in much of life, negative emotions are part of human experience full – 'if its right to say - if Erased will make life Gray! So you should share your feelings, and ask what you learn about yourself from all of these feelings, and how to grow as a result.

In between, quietly ask yourself if you are asking the world around you for something that it cannot offer you or not! If you are, let me say, you may be looking in the wrong place for your bliss.

At the end, it is true that nothing is miserable, but thinking makes it so, and on the contrary, everything is happy if it is tolerated with equanimity the man has to reduce his expectations of the world around him and even realises that serving others is one of the most effective ways to raise his happiness .When you can't change the world, change your feelings like so many people have ...And you can too!

Dr Yousuf Ali Al Mulla
is a physician, medical innovator and a writer



The Language of Sunset

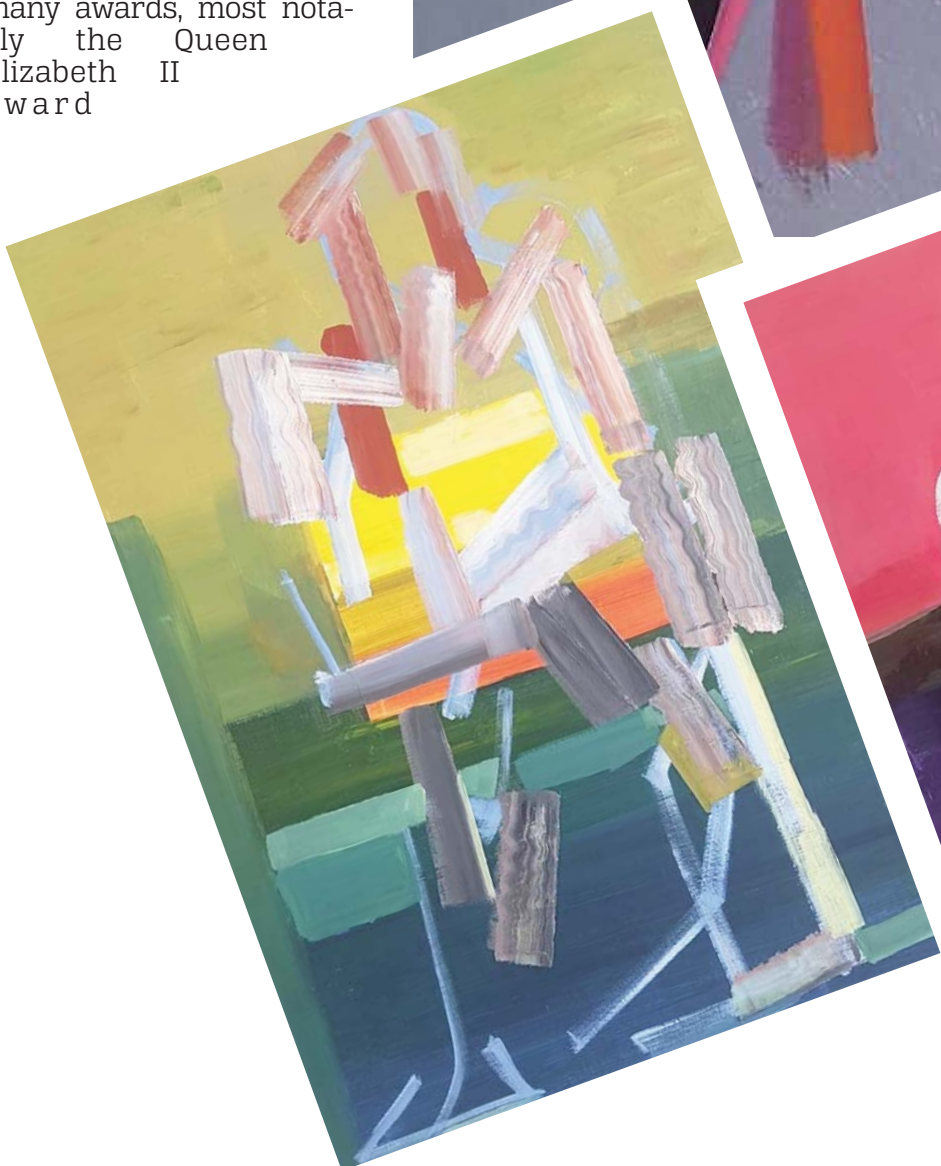
tells the story of a country artist

STAFF REPORTER

“Sunset Language” exhibition tells the story of sun whispering her secrets before disappearing at sunset, passing between the bodies of her loved ones and changing their language from an auditory language to a visual language full of warmth and silence.” The Lebanese Artist, Chucralla Fattouh documents this moment as he called it the new language of the sun that is expressed in a series of drawings.

The artist Chucralla Fattouh has a wide artistic experience, as he graduated from the College of Fine Arts of the Lebanese University in Beirut in 1983, since then he has dedicated himself to art. from 1985 to date, the artist has conducted more than 150 group and solo exhibitions in art galleries and festivals in Lebanon and abroad, like Elkan, Virginia, Tunisia, and Brazil. The artist also exhibited in Bait Muzna gallery in Muscat 2015.

He participated in many national and international exhibitions and auctions, such as the Bonhams Art Auction House and recently at Sotheby's. He received many awards, most notably the Queen Elizabeth II award



shapes in the spaces that surround the subject.

As for the current exhibition at Sarah Gallery, the artist Chucralla Fattouh presents his recently produced works from the Sunset Language series, which was the main inspiration for this collection in the coastal village of Monsef. This collection takes us on a journey to the artist's world of bright vocabulary and formations, where his works explain “the inner self or an essential personal vision of the sunset and its impact on the world”, he says.

In addition, the artist presents his series “Living with a foreign body”, where the whole world lives with foreign bodies daily. “At first, they become afraid, and then gradually they begin to adapt to the foreign bodies around them, so they become part of their world”, he expresses. Here, the artist captures the image or the first impression of this encounter, which carries many ambiguities, raises the question of the viewer, and the artist does not tell the story, but leaves it to the viewer to imagine and explain.

The artist Fattouh inspired his sons to be artists themselves. His son shares with him a short film of his production and artworks in the current exhibition. Artist Nicholas is a visual artist and film director, graduated from the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts with a master's degree in Animation. He participated in more than 30 exhibitions and auctions locally and internationally including Bonham (London) and sold 6 paintings in 2016. In 2018, his debut film “How My Grandmother Became on a Chair” was awarded the Robert Bosch Stiftung Film Award as a German-Lebanese co-production during the Berlinale. Today, this award-winning short film has been selected in more than 80 prestigious festivals around the world (10 Oscar-qualifying festivals) and has won 21 awards including the Sundance TV and Carthage Awards.

It is worth noting that “The Language of Sunset” lasts until December 11, 2021 – from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm – from Saturday to Thursday at Sarah Gallery in Bait Al Zubair Museum.

in 2007, in his participation in the live painting of the charitable horse race in the annual Gulf Polo Cup in London.

The artist belongs to the Lebanese coastal village of Monsef. In the early sixties, and since his childhood, he used to observe the waves, the sky, and the clouds that he grew up remembering all time. Inspired by the beauty of his fair coastal city, he painted those scenes and colours full of life.

The artist was able to create an artistic imprint that focuses on symbolism of the characters, and the minimisation of flat geometric