

Book on ‘Date Palm Tree’

HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, will patronize today the release ceremony of the book *Date Palm Tree* in Oman's Cultural Heritage, as part of a project for collecting Oman's oral history overseen by the ministry, at the Sayyid Faisal Bin Ali Museum at the ministry's premises in Al Khuwair. The project for collecting Oman's oral history was launched by the ministry with the aim of documenting unwritten history.



P10

ZVEREV EVEN HUNGRIER AFTER BRUSH WITH GRAND SLAM GLORY



P15

MASSIVE CONTAINER SHIP BLOCKS SUEZ CANAL



P19

TAHWA VILLAGE: A WITNESS TO OMANI PEOPLE'S STRUGGLE THROUGH AGES



MUSCAT

HM CONDOLENCES TO SAUDI KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the death of Prince Badr Fahd Saud al Kabeer al Saud. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the departed's soul in peace in paradise and grant his family patience.

HM CONDOLENCES TO DUBAI RULER

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Ruler of Dubai, on the death of his brother Shaikh Hamdan bin Rashid al Maktoum, Deputy Ruler of Dubai, Minister of Finance. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the departed's soul in peace in paradise and grant Shaikh Mohammed and his family patience.

HM GREETINGS TO GREEK PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Katerina Sakellaropoulou of the Republic of Greece, on her country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Sakellaropoulou and the friendly people of Greece further progress and prosperity.



INSIDE



More jobs for Omanis as PDO signs \$4 billion contracts

MUSCAT: Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) on Wednesday signed major service contracts worth \$4 billion covering project delivery and maintenance and integrity work in the north and south of its concession area.

The agreements with Arabian Industries Projects (AIP) LLC and Special Technical Services (STS)

LLC encompass the design and execution of more than 200 on-plot projects and will run for seven years with an optional three-year extension.

Current Omanisation levels will double over the life cycle of the contracts, resulting in several thousand additional employment opportunities for Omanis, with a

focus on skilled jobs, supervisors and engineering positions.

A Training for Employment scheme has been introduced, enabling training, re-skilling and upskilling of over 1,000 Omani personnel, and about 1,500 Omani employees from incumbent PDO contractors will be transferred and redeployed to the new contractors.

Local sub-contracting businesses and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) will also benefit from specific targets for both, and an obligation on the part of the contractors to ensure and monitor their use.

In addition, the deals include a strategy to develop a domestic firm to execute maintenance and integrity tasks in a selected cluster in

the PDO oil and gas portfolio within five years.

This further builds on the focus to introduce and mature a domestic contractor for turnarounds to carry out facility maintenance in scheduled shutdowns as recently endorsed by Oman LNG, OQ, OPAL and PDO.

DETAILS ON P13

FROM OUR STAGE TO YOUR HOME



The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) unveiled a new digital initiative codenamed "From Our Stage to Your Home", heralding a long-term programme offering world-class classical music treats online to Omani and international audiences, who will have a thrilling experience once the new season starts with three concerts titled "Pathways through Classical Music".

DETAILS ON P3

Empower children with digital access, says UN watchdog

GENEVA: Proper digital access is no game for children, it is a right that each and every country should guarantee, a UN watchdog said on Wednesday.

Images of children huddled in store parking lots to access the wifi needed for their online schoolwork have been common during the pandemic, while predators have long stalked children in online chatrooms.

In its first such analysis, the Committee on the Rights of the Child found that countries are responsible for rectifying such situations by ensuring children have "meaningful" and safe access to the digital technologies.

"Governments really need to think about giving as much access to digital environment as possible to all children," committee member Philip Jaffe said. "Not only to protect them but to empower them."

"We are in a societal transformation phase," he pointed out, insisting that "we must make sure that the human



factor doesn't get lost in these huge technological advances." The committee highlighted the obligations of governments to ensure children have equal access to digital technologies like those that over the past pandemic year have become vital to education.

GROWING INEQUALITIES

"If digital inclusion is not achieved, existing inequalities are likely to increase and new ones may arise," it warned.

Jaffe acknowledged that currently at least, "a world

standard is really impossible", since countries had different means to provide digital access to their children. "But it is important that we keep promoting this non-discrimination approach worldwide."

Tasked with monitoring implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the panel's 18 independent experts spent two years consulting with governments, intergovernmental organisations, civil society and children. — AFP

DOUBTS ON VACCINES UNFOUNDED

110,179 TOOK COVID-19 VACCINE IN SULTANATE

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH @lakshmioman

A total of 110,179 people in the Sultanate have taken the vaccination for Covid-19, with 4,458 vaccinated on Tuesday.

The vaccination drive is covered throughout the governorates starting from Musandam, Al Buraimi, North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah, Muscat, Al Dhahirah, North Al Sharqiyah, Al Dakhiliyah, South Al Sharqiyah, Al Wusta and Dhofar.

According to the weekly report of the vaccination campaign against Covid-19 published on Wednesday, Muscat Governorate topped the list with 29,688 vaccinations, followed by North Al Batinah (13,851) within the community while Al Dakhiliyah has covered 10,419. In South Al Batinah 9,294 got the vaccine, Al Dhahirah 6296, South Al Sharqiah 6174, Dhofar 4,350, Musandam 4,167, North Al Sharqiyah 4,319 and Al Buraimi 2837.

HOME VISITS

It has been a week since the Directorate General of Health Services began home visits to offer Covid-19 vaccines to people who belonged to the target groups and are enrolled under the Community Health Programme.

The home visits helped individuals who were immobile or bedridden.

The inoculation drive has been aimed at healthcare workers and the highest once again is Muscat with 7,566, Al Dakhiliyah 1,913, North Al Batinah 1,804, Dhofar 1,447, South Al Batinah 1,201, Al Dhahirah 1,141, Soth Al Sharqiyah 1,097, North Al Sharqiyah 791, Al Buraimi 563, Musandam 513, and Al Wusta 323.

TURN TO P2



Why the numbers are rising?

KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

Oman has taken one of the best strategic moves against the spread of the new wave of the pandemic, but despite the best efforts, the number of cases is rising alarmingly.

Oman reported 741 new cases bringing the total number of cases in the country to 153,105, while 11 people lost their lives to Covid-19. Now the total deaths stand at 1,644. The total recovery cases reached 140,220 which is 92 per cent of the total reported cases. Around 68 patients were hospitalised during the last 24 hours. The total number of inpatients currently in hospitals to 373. It includes 116 in the ICUs. DETAILS ON P2

11 deaths, 741 new Covid cases

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Oman reported deaths in double digits on Wednesday, the highest for a single day since Mid-November.

MoH reported 11 new Covid-19 related deaths, bringing the total death toll to 1,644, apart from 741 new cases, bringing the total number of cases registered in the Sultanate to 153,105.

While the majority of the cases 507 were reported from Muscat, Dhofar accounted for three of the 11 deaths.

The total recovery cases

HIGHEST SINGLE
DAY DEATHS
SINCE
MID-NOVEMBER

reached 140,220, which is 92 per cent of the total cases.

Sixty-eight patients were hospitalised during the past 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients in hospitals to 373, including 116 in Intensive Care Units (ICUs).

Deaths from coronavirus are on the rise worldwide after weeks of decline, warns WHO.

The World Health Organization's Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean is working with countries to safely prepare for mass gathering events.

"Especially in the context of Covid-19, mass gathering events could trigger a rise in the number of cases, and introduce opportunities for public health risks to emerging," said Dr Ahmed al Mandheri, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

Why cases are increasing again?

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Sultanate has one of the best strategic moves against the spread of the new wave of the pandemic, but despite the best efforts, the number of cases is rising alarmingly.

Oman reported 741 new Covid-19 cases and 11 deaths on Wednesday bringing the total number of cases in the country to 153,105 and fatalities to 1,644.

Questions are being raised. Have the people missed the alacrity and caution against the deadly virus that they used to have during the last year when the virus started gripping the vulnerable sectors?

All vaccinated as well as the un-vaccinated continue the safety precautions. The international border is completely closed, hotspots are identified and completely isolated from the rest of the country and inter-regional travel is also restricted.

Gatherings are a big 'no', but recurrent waves and remissions go hand in hand.

Medics, law executioners and experts opine that the present situation is due to many reasons.

Dr Wahid al Kharusi, President and Chairman of Oman Cancer Association (OCA), attributes the prime reason behind such a phenomenon to a lot of irresponsible people in our community who do not serious or have conveniently



We need more vaccination for citizens between 18 and 45 years of age who are mobile and high risk as they are carriers of the virus

DR WAHID AL KHARUSI

Oman Cancer Association

forgotten what we are going through.

"Some members of the community are behaving irresponsibly and do not observe the protocols. We have excellent legislation and we need stronger implementation," said Dr Kharusi who has always been behind various national initiatives.

"We need more vaccination for citizens between 18 and 45 years of age who are mobile

and high risk as they are carriers of the virus."

Dr Ramla al Kharusi of Royal Hospital too points at the laxity of people who take the situation very lightly.

"Although it's not certain as to how many of these positive patients are having the new variant which is known to be more infectious, people are taking the situation lightly and not following the instructions," she said.

Medics and ROP officials summarise "people's false sense of security that the worst is over" as the major reason behind an increasing number of cases. They fail to keep up with the requirements of safety and preventive protocol as and when lockdown is lifted.

"If the whole epidemic can start from one case in every country, it goes without saying that for the virus to vanish even one case should not be there in the country. This can happen only when combinations of following measures operate," says Dr KP Raman, Chairman, Al Hayat Hospitals.

■ FROM PAGE 1

Doubts on vaccines unfounded

There has been a constant appeal from the Ministry of Health to the public to take the vaccines, and not to hesitate in getting inoculated. However, there is an ongoing debate between two streams of information.

According to Dr Hamad al Sinawi, Senior Consultant Psychiatrist, Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, many psychological factors can influence whether a person will accept or refuse the Covid-19 vaccine.

"One of the factors is lack of information and being misinformed, as you know since the beginning of the

pandemic there have been a lot of conspiracy theories about the origin of the virus even to the extent that it was man-made or even a biological weapon.

So when the topic of getting vaccination comes, people are hesitant because traditionally vaccines take a longer time to be processed and approved.

Because of the impact of Covid-19, both psychological and physical as well as economic consequences of the lockdown, pharma companies and scientists worked very hard to obtain approvals for the vaccine, and different types of vaccines in a reasonable

time. This quick call of the scientists gave a section of people a feeling that maybe it was done too fast to truly understand the side effects.

There are also many groups around the world that were against the principle of vaccines for many reasons.

"They had a lot of media presence through social media as on the risks of taking vaccines with unfounded accusations," Dr Hamed said.

Another issue is people's expectations from a vaccine.

"People want complete immunity, but this is not the case unfortunately with Covid-19," he noted.

Sultanate unveils TB eradication strategy

MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Health, launched the National Tuberculosis (TB) Eradication Strategy, to be carried out in stages, with special emphasis on lowering the percentage of infection and mortality cases.

The launch of the strategy coincides with celebrations marking World TB Day, which falls on March 24 every year. TB figures as the most contagious disease in the world. The Sultanate ranks among countries with the least levels of TB infection (10:100000) at a rate of 10 patients to 100,000 people.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, who was the chief guest at the Strategy's launch ceremony, said that cases of infection with TB in the Sultanate have been in decline over the past 10 years, since 2019 when the marginal rise was registered due to the introduction of high accuracy diagnostic apparatus.

The minister pointed out that the cases registered in the Sultanate were mostly sourced from abroad and detected upon the examination of expatriates despite the tests they conduct prior to their arrival.



The Sultanate was chosen as a model country, one of very few countries in the Middle East to have gone a long way in the eradication of tuberculosis through its close cooperation with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and other parties towards the total eradication of the disease before 2035, thereby meeting the goals of its roadmap "National TB Eradication Strategy".

Dr John Jabbour, WHO Representative in the Sultanate, said in a speech on the occasion, "The Sultanate worked hard over the past five decades of its renaissance to extend health services to all parts of the country. Towards this end, the Sultanate endorsed primary health as a

gateway to different levels of healthcare."

The National TB Strategy aims, in its first stages, to lower infection to 10 per one million by 2035, with a view to attaining the pre-eradication stage by slashing infection rates by 90% and mortality rates by 95%, compared to the epidemiological situation in 2015.

The rate of TB infections in the Sultanate by 2020 stood at 7 to 100,000 when 314 cases were registered, of them 95 Omanis and 219 non-Omanis, in addition to 23 death cases.

The WHO and other prominent international institutions have hailed the Sultanate's efforts in eradicating tuberculosis. — ONA

Tender Announcement

Request for Proposals for the Design and Build a Distribution Network upgrade in the Rock Garden Area and Connection to the PDC Logistic Area

Tender No: CUC-000-00-000-LE-TND-0004

Introduction

Centralized Utilities Company LLC (herein the "Employer" or "Marafiq") inviting proposals from qualified and experienced Tenderers to undertake the project based on an Design and Build Services for Potable Water Distribution Network in Duqm.

The successful Tenderer shall be expected to Design and Build a Distribution Network upgrade in the Rock Garden Area and Connection to the PDC Logistic Area. In view of the above, Company invites Bidders to submit their Expression of Interest as described below.

Tender Fees

R.O 200 (non-refundable by bank transfer)

Contractor Minimum Qualifications

Contractor must hold valid registration with Government Tender Board for works of this nature, and have necessary experience in Oman for similar projects as a Design and Build Contractor. We particularly encourage Contractors currently operating in Duqm area (Al Wusta Region).

Interested Contractors shall contact Marafiq via email to tender@marafiq.om with the subject heading "Design and Build a Distribution Network upgrade in the Rock Garden Area and Connection to the PDC Logistic Area" to receive further instructions related to payment of tender fee and collection of RFP Package.

Scope of Work

The Contractor's scope of works will be design and build a potable water supply facility in Duqm that shall include the following:

- Distribution Network upgrade in the Rock Garden Area
- Connection to the PDC Logistic Area

Request for proposal

The RFP for the O&M Services will be made available in electronic form only from 9:00 AM, 28 March 2021 Oman time.

Bid Closing

The closing date for the receipt of proposals will be 11:00 AM, 25-Apr-2021 Oman time.

P.O. Box 80 P.C. 102
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
www.marafiq.om

SAYYID THEYAZIN RECEIVES AMBASSADOR OF JAPAN



MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, received at his office on Wednesday Toshinori Kobayashi, Ambassador of Japan to the Sultanate. The meeting reviewed the bilateral relations between the two friendly countries. It also exchanged views on aspects of the existing cooperation in the cultural and sports fields, as well as means of promoting cooperation between the two countries. — ONA

ROHM to launch digital broadcast ‘From Our Stage to Your Home’

MUSCAT: The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) on Wednesday unveiled a new digital initiative codenamed “From Our Stage to Your Home”, heralding a long-term programme offering world-class classical music treats online to Omani and international audiences, who will have a thrilling experience once the new season starts with three concerts titled “Pathways through Classical Music”.

Each concert has been pre-recorded on the stage at the opera house, adhering strictly to the rules governing such proceedings as laid out by the Covid-19 Supreme Committee guidelines.

The audiences at home are invited to view the concerts online on the dates they are streamed as the first and only



audience to each performance, the concerts will then be available to view on our channel archives.

The concerts will be available to watch at home exclusively via the ROHM website, YouTube and Facebook channels.

Performances will be premiering online on the

following dates: Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra, Sunday, April 4 at 7.30 pm; Muscat Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Opera Choir Group, Sunday, May 23, at 7.30 pm; and, the finale of the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra on Sunday, June 20 at 7.30 pm. — ONA

Benefits of Al Shu’a trees to local communities

YAHYA ALSALMANI

Al Shu’a trees are considered one of the perennial wild plants that grow in the wadis and the foothills of the mountains. They adorn the mountains and valleys of the Sultanate, especially in the northern governorate. They flower between March and April, especially in the dry season.

Al Shu’a tree has many benefits. Its flowers are aromatic and provide a nectar for honey bee flies. The remnants of the pods of its fruits are used as fodder for animal. The tree also provides shade in the desert and in the mountain heights, besides other benefits. Besides, Al Shu’a oil is used in the treatment of abdominal pain, nerve diseases, wounds and has other health



benefits. The price of Al Shu’a oil has witnessed a significant increase due to the scarcity of fruits as a result of poor harvest.

Al Shu’a tree branches are used as fodder for camels that travel long distances to gain strength, and the juice of the leaves is used to fix broken clay pots and to cast fractures. This tree descends from ‘Moringa Peregrina’ family. One of the advantages of this tree is that it is drought-resistant and can withstand the harsh weather. Therefore, locals prefer this trees, which do not require much water. “Instead of planting trees imported from outside the Sultanate, we suggest planting this local tree because of its many benefits and its suitability to various climatic changes”, one local told *Observer*.

CPA urges suppliers to ensure price stability

MUSCAT: Salim bin Ali al Hakmani, Chairman of the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) on Wednesday held a meeting with the suppliers of Muscat Governorate as part of the Authority’s preparations for the holy month of Ramadhan and prior to the enforcement of the value added tax (VAT) on April 16.

During the meeting Al Hakmani affirmed that monitoring of commodity prices has begun early to ensure proper application of VAT by suppliers in accordance with the VAT law and regulation overseen by the Tax Authority. He added: “The CPA has increased the number

of inspection teams in the governorates to ensure that the suppliers won’t hike the prices of commodities and services before and after the enforcement of VAT. During the upcoming period the CPA will tighten up inspection to ensure the stability of prices and non-exploitation of VAT for hiking the prices of commodities beyond the standard rate of VAT.”

Al Hakmani called for cooperation by suppliers and importers to maintain the prices of commodities and services and to avoid exploitation of consumers and to conduct genuine offers that cater to consumers’ needs. — ONA

Spreading scientific and technological awareness among students

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education’s National Science Week STEM 2021 continued with its activities online under the slogan “Our sustainable environment.” The Science Week aims to implant and develop the scientific capabilities and skills of students of different age groups.

It also aims to increase awareness of science and technology, enhance students’ attitudes towards science, keep pace with global trends based on the dissemination of science and technology, simplify science and spread scientific culture among all segments of society, consolidate the methodology of scientific thinking among students, and establish a link between students and specialists in science through discussion of scientific topics, in addition to changing society’s view of science, linking learning with entertainment, spreading the culture of fun education, encouraging and motivating all community members and arousing their passion for science, as well as creating positive trends to keep pace with future changes



and developments.

On the fourth day on Wednesday, the Week covered six sessions titled: “Sustainable Creative Solutions”, “Use of Augmented Reality Technology to Promote and Teach Environmental Sustainability”, “Omani Plants, Folklore and Scientific Future”, “Eco 3D Environment”, “Little Geologist” and “Air Pollution”.

The third day included eight sessions titled: “Making

and Decorating Fabric Bags”, “Peaceful Nuclear Techniques in the Fields of Environment and Agriculture”, “Oman’s Geological Ruins”, “Nanomaterials from Nature”, “IoT Applications for the Environment around You”, “How to create Your Own Environmental Project?”, “Role of Individuals in Reducing Exposure to air Pollutants and Reducing Emissions” and “Discover the IoT in Your Environment”.



“The National Science Week in its second edition comes in a different way than it was in the first time, as it is presented remotely through the employment of educational platforms, and perhaps this is an opportunity for us to expand everyone’s participation, in order to benefit from a wide variety of topics. The theme of the second edition of the National Science Week is “Our Sustainable Environment”

which comes as a translation of the government’s and the ministry’s interest in the topic of environment and sustainability, as sustainability cannot be separated from the environment if we want a happy life on this planet. The diversity of topics presented this week is an indication of the volume of work that must be done for our environment as it is the main resource for our life on this earth”, Prof Dr Abdullah

bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, said in his opening address.

The Director-General of the Directorate-General of Education in Al Buraimi Governorate, Dr Walid al Hashemi, said: “The National Science Week sheds light on the latest knowledge in the disciplines of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), by hosting a number of specialists. It also affirms the ministry’s interest in keeping pace with developments in education policies worldwide, in order to enhance the necessary knowledge and skills for students at both local and international levels. It provides a rich knowledge base for teachers, students and all those interested in the educational field. Holding events on a virtual basis during this year is positive as it provides the opportunity for participation on a larger scale, and it also enhances the experience of distance education, which has become an integral component of the concept of the education process.”

ARTIFICIALLY INTELLIGENT SMART CITIES

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

[@patkaushal](#)

Most of the scientific and technological signs of progress are moving around Artificial Intelligence (AI), which has become an in-thing for everything.

Its application has been found hugely beneficial across the sectors, including governance, business, social development, environment and even development of smart cities.

Smart cities are the best examples of the task that Artificial Intelligence is doing for city planners. New approaches and methods need to be incorporated in urban planning and development. The planning needs to embody environmental, economic, and social principles for an integrated urban system based on data, statistics, partnership, and digital and technical knowledge.

Urban planners are depending on Artificial Intelligence to make a city digitally smart based on data. The AI helps the city planners to understand a city's requirements and plan the facilities.

The AI suggests with shreds of evidence the implications of too much carbon emission into the environment. It gears up the policymakers to draw policies for green buildings or energy-neutral buildings and the right codes for smart green buildings.

There has been a call from experts to develop digitally smart cities to get the maximum out of Artificial Intelligence, which can improve people's quality of life-based on actual data.

Smart cities are not only externally smart. They are smart due to their comprehensiveness and capabilities of technology and adaptability which is derived from a strong database.

Shafiq Jiwani, an expert in city planning, called for concerted planning involving all the stakeholders to come out with a sustainable city that caters to the needs of the inhabitants.

Commenting on the reality of smart cities, Jiwani said, "This project is active in many different countries, especially in the first world countries. There is a strong drive in the GCC countries towards making the cities smart," he said.

He appreciated Oman's drive and ambition to work together for the benefit of all. He, however, called for greater cooperation between the governments and organisations to achieve the larger goals of smart cities.

He cited examples of some municipalities, transport systems, cluster creative authority, telecom and water, and electricity departments of the region which were working in tandem with the principles of the smart city.

"I see the very similar drive in Oman. The government wants to do this as it has all the foundations ready. The basic foundation is data. Organisations like the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), Oman National Survey Authority (NSA), Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, and the municipalities, have got very good GIS data and have a very good foundation to be able to implement a smart city," he said.

Commenting on a time frame for developing a city as a smart city, Jiwani said: "There is no real timeframe in the sense that there is so much that needs to be done. But things are getting a very good start here. "You can see the benefits within six to 12 months... this is a living thing that on for long, for years to come but a city becomes smart very quickly."

Muscat airport gets IATA's accreditation

MUSCAT: In recognition of the efforts undertaken by Oman Airports during the current pandemic, Muscat International Airport has achieved a new milestone by receiving both the 'CEIV Pharma' and 'CEIV Fresh' certification from the International Air Transport Association (IATA) for excellence in the handling of both pharmaceuticals and perishables. Muscat International Airport is the first airport in the world to receive both awards simultaneously working as a broad cargo community including Oman Air, Transom SATS, Transom Handling, and Swissport, alongside the Airport team.

The cargo community at Muscat International Airport has worked alongside representatives from IATA over the past eighteen months, to ensure compliance with all requirements. The successful completion of the accreditation programme is only possible with a strong partnership approach across the Airport community and is a testament to the hard work put in by all-cargo partners.

Shaikh Samer bin Ahmed al Nabhani, Commercial Chief



Officer at Oman Airports, said. "This new achievement by Muscat International Airport being awarded the IATA's CEIV Pharma and CEIV Fresh Accreditation demonstrates the commitment of the management of Oman Airports to support the development of the air cargo network and capitalising on the strategic location of Oman in particular as a cargo hub; not only for import and export to serve the Omani economy, but also as a regional transfer hub linking the Middle East region, Africa, Asia, and Europe.

He added, "I take this opportunity to congratulate our strategic partners from the public

and private sectors for their role and efforts in supporting the achievement of this new milestone. Their contribution has significantly enhanced the cargo operations at Muscat International Airport which has grown a significant size, with the new cargo building equipped to handle larger capacities as we aspire to become a key regional player in the sector. These efforts have already played a critical and vital role in strengthening global supply chains by continuously supporting cargo operations and the transportation of medical and safety equipment of various kinds during the Covid-19 pandemic."

TRA explores challenges to telecom services in Al Mazunah Free Zone

AL MAZUNAH: Eng Omar Hamdan al Ismaili, CEO of Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), visited Al Mazunah Free Zone (MFZ) to explore the challenges of telecom services facing the investors in the free zone.

During the visit, Al Ismaili was accompanied by officials from TRA and representatives of telecom service providers in the Sultanate.

The delegation was briefed on the MFZ, the ongoing and upcoming projects and the status of telecom services in the free zone, which are provided by the service providers including Omantel, Ooredoo, and Oman Broadband. — ONA



■ AMBULANCE FOR ELDERLY TRANSPORTATION



Dar Al Atta'a has donated an ambulance van to Al Ihsan foundation. The fully equipped van will serve to transport the elderly and ill members of the community to health service providers. Al Ihsan foundation is a volunteer charity organisation that focuses on elderly care in the community.

"Published as required under CBO circular BM 980 dated 18 December 2004"

Profit and loss account for the year ended 31-December-2020

	RO in 000's	
	This Year End	Last Year End
Gross interest income	70,153	76,788
Interest expense	(16,379)	(16,247)
Net interest income	53,774	60,541
Other operating income:		
1. Dividend income	11	19
2. Net fee and commission income		
a) Fee and Commission Income	11,484	14,870
Less: b) Fee and Commission Expense	(3,416)	(3,908)
3. Net foreign exchange income		
a) Income	8,918	14,498
Less: b) Expense	-	-
4. Net income from dealing in securities	-	-
5. Net income from investment in securities		
a) Income	-	-
Less: b) Expense	(441)	(38)
6. Other income	(252)	618
Gross income	70,078	86,600
General administrative expenses	(49,892)	(45,992)
Depreciation	(11,096)	(2,484)
Total operating costs	(60,988)	(48,476)
Net operating profit (Profit on ordinary activities before provisions)	9,090	38,124
Income from		
a) subsidiaries	-	-
b) Associate companies	-	-
c) Investment licensing activity	-	-
d) Profit from sale of non-banking assets	-	-
Bad debts Written off (net of recoveries from written off customers)	3,320	3,218
ECL Allowance (net) charged for Loans & Advances	(18,496)	(4,949)
ECL Allowance (net) charged for Investments (FVOCI)	(713)	(19)
ECL Allowance (net) charged for Placements	(124)	(2)
ECL Allowance charged (net) for Off-balance sheet items	(1,822)	(1,650)
ECL Allowance charged (net) for Others (if any)	(143)	(25)
Provision for diminution / gain in value of investments	-	-
Profit for the year after loan loss provisions	(8,888)	34,697
Taxation	677	(5,413)
Net Profit after Tax	(8,211)	29,284
Other comprehensive income for the year		
- Movement in fair value of available for sale / FVOCI investment for the year	1,072	807
- Effect of currency translation for the year	-	-
- Remeasurement of defined benefit liability	36	63
Total comprehensive income for the year	(7,103)	30,154

Assets and Liabilities as at 31 December, 2020

		RO in 000's				RO in 000's	
Assets (net of total ECL)		This Year	Last Year	Liabilities		Last Year	Last Year
1. Cash	34,711	28,307		1. Deposits (incl. Govt.)			
2. Balances with CBO	185,274	252,379		a) Demand	897,952	981,453	
3. Capital Deposit with CBO	500	500		b) Savings	416,286	392,825	
4. Government and other securities	-	-		c) Time	591,533	697,179	
5. Treasury bills & other bills	189,944	164,667		2. Certificate of deposits	-	-	
6. Due from HO, branches, principal shareholders and affiliates abroad	67,825	47,353		3. Due to HO, branches,			
7. Due from banks:				principal shareholders and affiliates abroad	20,832	17,032	
i) Placements *	145,036	158,242		4. Due to banks:			
ii) Loans and advances	14,587	-		i) Placements	-	-	
8. Other money market placements	-	-		ii) Borrowings	42,942	37,722	
9. Investments	293,625	323,418		5. Other money market deposits	-	-	
10. Loans and advances	1,363,582	1,502,734		6. Borrowings from CBO	-	-	
11. Tangible fixed assets	19,488	23,648		7. Capital	200,031	200,031	
12. Losses carried forward	-	-		8. Reserves	47,633	46,561	
13. Other assets	41,015	48,749		9. Retained Earnings	79,822	105,400	
				10. Capital bonds	-	-	
				11. Other liabilities	58,556	71,794	
Total Assets	2,355,587	2,549,997		Total Liabilities	2,355,587	2,549,997	

ISC Malayalam Wing gets new committee

MUSCAT: The new managing committee members of the Malayalam Wing for the year 2021/22 assumed office on March 20.

The new committee members are: Sreekumar P (Convener), Lekha Vinod (Co-convener), Ajith Kumar Menon (Treasurer), Rajesh k (Cultural-Secretary), Sunil Kumar Krishnan Nair (Literary Secretary), Prasad karnavar (Social Welfare Secretary), Shaheer T K (Entertainment & Sports Secretary), Mathew Thomas (Music & Drama Secretary), Athira Gireesh (Ladies Wing Secretary)

We are committed to liaise with the Indian embassy and also with the Kerala government to extend help to those in need, the committee said.



Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

TENDER NOTICE

The Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Tenders:-

Tender no.	Description	Tender documents price (R.O)	Class	Last date for collection of documents	Last date for Submission of documents
253/2020/MAF/HQ-22- Recall	Supplying of Spray equipment, machines and spare parts for the Desert Locust control project	25/-	Specialized	Thursday 25/3/2021	Sunday 4/4/2021
443/2020/MAF/HQ-37- Recall	Cleaning of ministry head quarters in Al-Khuwair and related buildings for 2021.	25/-	Specialized	Sunday 4/4/2021	Sunday 25/4/2021
100/2021/MAF/HQ-5	Maintenance of garden, the Ministry's Buildings Al-Khuwair & Dam Wadi Dayqah in Qurayah.	25/-	Specialized	Sunday 4/4/2021	Sunday 25/4/2021
101/2021/MAF/HQ-6	Maintenance to steel pontoons and design & construction of new boat ramp at Khasab fishery harbour	35/-	Excellent	Sunday 4/4/2021	Sunday 25/4/2021

- Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman (as required in the tender), and addressed to the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: **+968 24166670** or etenderhd@ita.gov.om.
- Note:** Bid Submission will be online only. Scan Copy of Tender Bond needs to be attached in system.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources



Melika Betley
Chief Executive Officer

Deloitte & Touche (M.E.) & Co. LLC
Auditing Firm

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Coalition clears 4 fuel ships to dock at Yemen’s Hodeidah port



An oil tanker docks at the port of Hodeidah, Yemen, on October 17, 2019. – Reuters file photo

DUBAI: The Saudi-led coalition has cleared four fuel ships to dock at Yemen’s Red Sea port of Hodeidah, two sources familiar with the matter said, after Yemen’s internationally recognised government said on Wednesday it had approved entry of some vessels.

The move came after the Ansar Allah group, which has been battling the coalition for six years and controls most large urban centres in Yemen, said it would only agree to a Saudi ceasefire proposal if an air and sea blockade were lifted.

Four vessels, including two carrying a total of 45,000 tonnes of gas oil, a ship loaded with 5,000 tonnes of liquefied petroleum gas and a fourth tanker with 22,700

Yemen’s foreign ministry said it had allowed a number of fuel vessels to enter Hodeidah to ease the humanitarian situation but provided no further details

tonnes of fuel oil have received clearance from the coalition, the sources said.

As of Wednesday morning, the four vessels had not yet begun moving towards Hodeidah port, which is controlled by Ansar Allah.

Yemen’s foreign ministry said it had allowed a number of fuel

vessels to enter Hodeidah to ease the humanitarian situation but provided no further details.

Ansar Allah chief negotiator Mohammed Abdulsalam said: “The provision of fuel, food, medical and basic goods is a humanitarian and legal right for the Yemeni people. We do not accept any military or political conditions for receiving them.”

BLOCKADE

The blockade of Yemeni ports has been one of the main causes of the world’s worst humanitarian disaster. The coalition and some aid groups have accused Ansar Allah fighters of obstructing aid efforts.

Coalition warships off Hodeidah were holding up 14

fuel tankers as of March 23 even though they had secured UN clearance, United Nations data showed. Some have been waiting six months to dock.

Four other ships left without docking after waiting months.

Saudi Arabia, which leads a coalition that has been fighting Ansar Allah since 2015, offered the group on Monday a ceasefire deal which would also include reopening Sanaa airport and allow fuel and food imports through Hodeidah port.

Ansar Allah said the Saudi offer fell short of their demand for a complete lifting of the air and sea blockade, but that the group would continue talks in pursuit of a peace deal.

— Reuters

Dubai deputy ruler Shaikh Hamdan passes away

DUBAI: Shaikh Hamdan bin Rashid al Maktoum, Dubai’s deputy ruler and for decades one of the most influential figures in international horseracing, has died, Dubai’s ruler said on Wednesday.

Shaikh Hamdan, 75, was the brother of Dubai’s current ruler, Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum. He had been unwell for months and had surgery abroad in October.

Shaikh Hamdan established his first racing stable, Shadwell Racing, in the United Kingdom in the 1980s and built it into a racing empire with his horses in blue and white silks winning major international races. He owned eight stud farms worldwide, according to local media.

Last June, jockey Jim Crowley completed a treble on the opening day of Royal Ascot with Shaikh Hamdan’s Battaash, Motakhayyel and Nazeer.

Dubai’s ruler bid farewell to “my brother, my support, my lifelong friend”.

Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, tweeted: “Today we lost one of the UAE’s faithful men after a life rich with giving and true patriotic work.”

Funeral prayers for Shaikh Hamdan, who was also the UAE’s long-serving finance minister, will be restricted to family members due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Dubai Media Office said.



Dubai announced 10 days of mourning with flags to be flown at half-mast and a closure of government institutions in the emirate for three days as of Thursday.

In 2008, Dubai’s ruler established the line of succession in the emirate by naming his son Hamdan, 38, as crown prince. His other son Maktoum is also a deputy ruler of Dubai.

Shaikh Hamdan had been the UAE’s finance minister since 1971. The UAE also has a minister of state for financial affairs, Obaid Humaid al Tayer, who has held the post since 2008.

— Reuters

Netanyahu’s future unclear as partial results project stalemate

TEL AVIV: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s prospects for retaining power looked uncertain on Wednesday after partial results in Israel’s fourth national election in two years projected no clear path to victory.

Though an official result was still hours — or days — away, with about 88 per cent of votes counted, it appeared that Netanyahu, leader of the right-wing Likud, would have to cobble together an unlikely coalition that might include Jewish ultra-Orthodox, ultranationalist and Arab parties to secure another term.

Barring any surprises from the remaining uncounted votes,

the electoral landscape raised the likelihood of yet another national ballot.

Tuesday’s vote followed three other inconclusive elections in which neither Netanyahu, 71, nor his centre-left opponents won a majority in the 120-seat parliament.

As it stands, Likud was projected to be the largest party with 30 seats, fewer than its current 36. The opposition centrist party Yesh Atid, which is headed by 57-year-old Yair Lapid, trailed with 17 seats.

Lapid had hoped there would be enough parties in the anti-Netanyahu bloc to oust the



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stands next to his wife Sara while speaking to supporters following the announcement of exit polls in Israel’s general election at his Likud party headquarters in Jerusalem on Wednesday. – Reuters

veteran leader who has been in power since 2009.

On social media, Netanyahu had claimed a “huge victory” over the groups trying to unseat him, though he did not repeat the claim in an election night speech at a Likud rally, saying only that its projected number of seats was “a great achievement” and that he hoped to form a “stable right-wing government”.

HORSE-TRADING

It usually falls on the leader of the biggest party to try to form a government, and that could take weeks of back-room dealings.

Netanyahu may have to woo Jewish religious parties who

joined his previous governments, as well as far-right parties, and possibly even a conservative Arab party that is teetering on the vote threshold and has not ruled out working with Netanyahu.

Another potential kingmaker is Naftali Bennett, 48, a former defence minister who favours annexing parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank. His hawkish Yamina party is projected to win seven seats, though Bennett, seemingly a natural partner, has yet to say he would back Netanyahu. An alliance with Netanyahu’s opponents from the centre-left seemed to be a political stretch. — Reuters

BEIRUT

Lebanon’s Hezbollah bloc urges cabinet formation

Hezbollah said on Wednesday a new cabinet was needed to pull Lebanon out of financial crisis, after a standoff over government formation between its President Michel Aoun and Prime Minister-designate Saad al Hariri worsened.

The crisis is posing the biggest threat to Lebanon’s stability since the 1975-1990 civil war, and a new cabinet could help initiate reforms to unlock foreign aid.

“Government formation is the only alternative to the



chaos that threatens everyone,” Hezbollah’s parliamentary bloc said in a statement, calling for transparency and cooperation between Lebanon’s leaders. — Reuters

BENGAZI

Power handed over to interim government

Libya’s eastern administration on Tuesday officially handed over power to a new executive that is meant to unify the war-torn country and steer it towards elections late this year. The Government of National Unity (GNU), selected through a UN-supported process, is the latest internationally backed bid to end a decade of chaos in the country and unite rival administrations.

Led by interim Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, the GNU replaces both the



Tripoli-based Government of National Accord and a parallel cabinet headquartered in the Cyrenaica region and not recognised by the international community. — AFP

KHARTOUM

Sudan’s cabinet backs UAE mediation

Sudan’s cabinet has backed an initiative for the United Arab Emirates to mediate in a dispute over Sudan’s border with Ethiopia, and over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), the Sudanese Information Minister Hamza Baloul said on Tuesday.

Tensions surrounding the control of farmland in Al Fashqa, on the border, have escalated in recent months, while talks over the operation of the GERD, which will affect water volume



downstream on the Nile in Sudan and Egypt, are deadlocked. The cabinet backed the proposal for Emirati mediation after it had been studied at ministry level, Baloul said. — Reuters

In brief

■ ISLAMABAD



PAKISTAN EXTENDS SCHOOL CLOSURES AMID CORONAVIRUS SURGE

Pakistan on Wednesday announced it would keep educational institutions closed for two more weeks in densely populated areas to bring down steadily rising coronavirus infections. "All educational institutions will remain closed until April 11 in all districts where positivity and infection rate is high", Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood announced.

"The health of students, teachers and staff is our primary consideration", Mahmood said. A two-week shutdown was announced on March 15. Virus hotspots were put under lockdown, mask was made mandatory, schools were shut and markets closed early. — dpa

■ COX'S BAZAR



BID TO REUNITE ROHINGYA KIDS SEPARATED BY FIRE

Aid workers searched on Wednesday to reunite Rohingya Muslim families separated when a huge fire swept through the world's biggest refugee settlement in Bangladesh, forcing about 45,000 people from their bamboo and plastic homes.

The blaze, the latest and biggest over the past year in the crowded camps in southeast Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar district, killed 15 people on Monday with hundreds missing, the United Nations said.

Bangladeshi authorities say they are investigating the cause.

Some 1 million Rohingya refugees live in camps in Cox's Bazar. — Reuters

■ SINGAPORE



COVID VACCINATIONS EXPANDED TO YOUNGER AGE GROUP

Singapore said on Wednesday it has opened up its Covid-19 immunisation drive to a younger age group, after more than half of its elderly population signed up for or received their vaccinations.

Residents aged 45 to 59 years can now register to receive vaccines, of which 1.1 million doses have so far been administered in Singapore, with 310,000 people having completed the full regimen, Health Minister Gan Kim Yong told a media briefing. The nation of 5.7 million people, has recorded no new locally-transmitted coronavirus cases in the past two weeks. — Reuters

India detects 'double mutant' virus variant in Maharashtra

NEW DELHI: India has detected a "double mutant variant" of the novel coronavirus in 206 samples in the worst-hit western state of Maharashtra, a senior government official said on Wednesday.

The new variant was also detected in nine samples in the capital New Delhi, the Director of the National Centre for Disease Control, Sujeet Kumar Singh, told a news conference. It adds to concern as the government struggles with the highest single-day tally of new infections and deaths this year.

Genome sequencing and analysis of samples from Maharashtra found mutations in the virus that do not match previously catalogued "variants of concern" (VOC), the Ministry of Health said in a statement.

Maharashtra is one of the worst-affected states but the ministry said it was not clear if the new variant was causing an upsurge there or in other states.

"Though VOCs and a new double mutant variant have been found in India, these have not been detected in numbers sufficient to either establish a direct relationship or explain the rapid increase in cases in some states", the ministry said.

It did not elaborate. India has already reported several cases of a variant first detected in Britain, as well as



A health worker collects a swab sample from a man for the Covid-19 Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) at the Inter-State Bus Terminus in New Delhi on Wednesday. — AFP

ones first found in South Africa and Brazil.

On Wednesday, India reported 47,262 new infections over the previous 24-hour period, the highest since early November, taking its overall tally to 11.7 million. Only the United States and Brazil have higher caseloads.

The number of deaths from Covid-19 in India in the previous 24 hours rose to 275, the most this year, taking the total to 160,441, government data showed.

Several states announced a ban on large gatherings ahead of the festival of Holi this weekend.

The health ministry said states were "strongly advised" to restrict public celebration of festivals.

"Any laxity at this point in ensuring strict adherence... to contain the spread of Covid-19, may result in losing the impetus and benefits that our country has gained so far in managing the virus", the ministry said in a statement.

Alarmed by the surge, the federal government has announced it was expanding its nationwide inoculation campaign to include everyone above the age of 45 years, and appealed to people to get vaccinated.

Total vaccinations in India, rank as world's third highest, behind the United States and China, but its ranking is lower on a per capita basis, the website Our World in Data showed.

— Reuters

North Korea fires two short-range missiles



Replicas of a North Korean Scud-B missile (C) and South Korea's Hawk missiles are displayed at the Korean War Memorial in Seoul on Wednesday. — AFP

WASHINGTON/SEOUL: North Korea fired two short-range missiles at the weekend, US and South Korean officials said, but Washington played down the first such tests under President Joe Biden and said it was still open to dialogue with Pyongyang.

The North Korean tests involved weapons systems at the low end of the spectrum that were not covered by UN Security Council testing bans, two senior officials of the Biden administration told a briefing call on Tuesday.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said two cruise missiles were fired off North Korea's west coast town of Onchon on Sunday morning.

South Korea had detected signs a test was imminent and was monitoring it in real time, a JCS official told reporters on Wednesday. The JCS reports North Korea's

testing of advanced weapons such as nuclear bombs and ballistic missiles nearly in real time but not some tests of lower grade, shorter range weapons.

The launch marks North Korea's first publicly known weapons test since Biden took office in January.

But Biden downplayed the test, saying "nothing much has changed", while one senior US official said it was "normal" testing and warned against "hyped" it.

"No, according to the Defence Department it's business as usual. There's no new wrinkle in what they did," Biden told reporters upon his return from a visit to Ohio, when asked if the test was a provocation.

The Pentagon declined to comment on the test, which was first reported by the *Washington Post*. — Reuters

Silent strike shuts Myanmar as hundreds of prisoners released

YANGON: Myanmar's junta freed hundreds of demonstrators on Wednesday arrested during its months-long crackdown on protests, while businesses in Yangon were shut and streets deserted in response to a call by anti-coup activists for a silent strike.

Several buses full of prisoners drove out of Yangon's Insein jail in the morning, said witnesses, who included lawyers for some inmates. There was no immediate word from authorities on how many prisoners were freed. A spokesman for the military did not answer calls.

"All the released are the ones arrested due to the protests, as well as night arrests or those who were out to buy something", said a member of a legal advisory group who said he saw around 15 buses leaving.

In the biggest city Yangon, a call by pro-democracy activists for a silent strike turned the streets eerily quiet.

"No going out, no shops, no working. All shut down. Just for one day", Nobel Aung, an illustrator and activist, said.

"The usual meat and vegetables vendors on the street didn't show up", said a resident of the city's Mayangone district. "No car noises, only birds."

A teacher in the Kyauktada district said the roads were deserted: "There aren't many people in the streets, only water



Associated Press photographer Thein Zaw is given drinks outside Insein prison in Yangon on Wednesday, after being released with coup detainees. — AFP

SEVERAL BUSES FULL OF PRISONERS DROVE OUT OF YANGON'S INSEIN JAIL IN THE MORNING, SAID WITNESSES, WHO INCLUDED LAWYERS FOR SOME INMATES

delivery men."

Activists have called for a "big protest", on Thursday.

"The strongest storm comes after the silence", Ei Thinzar Maung, one of the protest leaders, said in a post on Facebook.

AP JOURNALIST FREED

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) activist group says at least 2,000 people have been arrested in the military crackdown on the protests against the February 1 coup.

Australian floods kill two as more evacuated

SYDNEY: The bodies of two men were found in Australia on Wednesday in cars trapped in floodwaters, the first deaths linked to wild weather in recent days that has submerged houses, swept away livestock and cut off entire towns.

More than 40,000 people have been forced to flee their homes as torrential rain sparked dangerous flash floods, and authorities issued new evacuation orders for residents of Sydney's western regions to move to safety.

In some other areas, a massive clean-up operation began as sunny skies returned for the first time in days, and food and other emergency supplies were flown in over swamped roads.

Authorities were trying to contact the family of a Pakistani national whose body was found by emergency services in a car under six metres of water in Sydney's northwest.

Police had determined the man was driving a brand new car, on the first day of a new job and unfamiliar with the rural area, New South Wales Police Detective Inspector Chris Laird told media.

Media reported police found a second body in an upturned utility vehicle in floodwaters in Queensland state.

— Reuters

Among those freed on Wednesday, was Thein Zaw, a journalist for The Associated Press who was arrested last month, AP reported, quoting him as saying the judge had dropped the charges because he was doing his job at the time of his arrest.

Wednesday's strike came a day after staff at a funeral service in Mandalay said that a seven-year-old girl had died of bullet wounds in the city — the youngest of about 275 people killed in the bloody crackdown, according to the AAPP.

Soldiers shot at her father but hit the girl who was sitting on his lap inside their home, her sister told the Myanmar Now media outlet. Two men were also killed in the district, it said.

The military had no immediate comment on the incident.

— Reuters

After backlash, Merkel ditches stricter Easter lockdown

BERLIN: Chancellor Angela Merkel ditched a plan agreed on Tuesday for an extended Easter holiday to try to break a third wave of the coronavirus pandemic, apologising to lockdown-weary Germans after the hastily-conceived plan triggered a backlash.

At talks that ran into the early hours of Tuesday, Merkel and the leaders of Germany's 16 states had agreed to call on citizens to stay at home for five days over the Easter holidays, declaring April 1 and April 3 as extra "rest days".

The measure would have meant all stores, including essential ones, closing for an extra day. It was met by harsh criticism, with businesses lamenting more shutdowns and medical experts saying the new measures were not tough enough to prevent the exponential spread of more infectious variants of the virus.

"The idea of an Easter shutdown was drafted with the best of intentions. We urgently need to stop and reverse the third wave of the pandemic," Merkel told reporters on Wednesday.

But it was not possible to implement the measures so quickly, Merkel said. She apologised for added uncertainty that it had raised for Germans.

"This mistake is mine alone," she said.

Her comments came against a backdrop of growing public frustration with the conservative-led government over the slow rollout of Covid-19 vaccines and extended lockdown measures.

"No plan, no clue, no courage," ran a headline in the online



People with protective face masks walk in front of a drug store with the lettering "Happy Easter" in Berlin on Wednesday. — AFP

edition of the mass-selling Bild daily above a picture of Merkel and two state leaders.

SLUMPING SUPPORT

The HDE association of retailers welcomed Merkel's announcement on Wednesday, saying that closing stores for an extra day ahead of Easter would have led to logistical problems and prompted shoppers to rush to stock up earlier.

"With today's decision, a bit of reason is returning to coronavirus policy," HDE president Stefan Genth said.

Finance Minister Olaf Scholz, who is also vice-chancellor, said Merkel made the right decision to reverse plans for a stricter lockdown over Easter but he said



The idea of an Easter shutdown was drafted with the best of intentions. We urgently need to stop and reverse the third wave of the pandemic

ANGELA MERKEL
Chancellor

the government had to avoid similar mishaps in coming weeks or risk further eroding confidence.

"We have to make sure that such a mistake won't be repeated, we have to prepare such decisions well and in a better way in the future," he told reporters on Wednesday.

Christian Lindner, head of the opposition pro-business Free Democrats, called on Merkel to ask parliament for a vote of confidence, saying on Twitter: "The Chancellor can no longer be certain of her coalition's full support." A poll released on Wednesday showed public support for Merkel's conservatives slumping to its lowest in over a year ahead of a national election in September. — Reuters

Colorado shooting suspect to appear in court today

BOULDER: The 21-year-old suspect in this week's Colorado mass shooting will make his first court appearance on Thursday, three days after authorities say he opened fire at a supermarket and killed 10 people, including a policeman.

Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa faces 10 counts of murder and an attempted murder charge stemming from the rampage on Monday at King Soopers grocery store in the Table Mesa section of Boulder, some 45 km northwest of Denver. He will appear in county court in Boulder at 8:15 a.m. (1415 GMT), according to court records.

The massacre was the country's second mass shooting in a week, after another gunman shot eight people to death at three

Atlanta-area day spas on March 16.

The twin attacks prompted President Joe Biden to call on Congress to strengthen gun restrictions. Legislation to bolster background checks and ban certain semi-automatic rifles has stalled amid Republican opposition.

Police have not yet publicly identified a motive for the killings. Alissa's 34-year-old brother described him as antisocial and paranoid in an interview with the Daily Beast.

The suspect's sister-in-law told police on Monday evening that he had been "playing with" a firearm she described as resembling a "machine gun" two days earlier, upsetting family members, according to an arrest affidavit filed by police in the case. — Reuters



People gather for a candlelight vigil to honour the ten victims of a mass shooting at a King Soopers grocery store in Boulder, Colorado. — AFP

Women Covid survivors in 40s and 50s risk long-term problems

LONDON: Women in their 40s and 50s appear more at risk of long-term problems following discharge from hospital after Covid-19, with many suffering months of persistent symptoms such as fatigue, breathlessness and brain fog, two UK studies found on Wednesday.

One study found that five months after leaving the hospital, Covid-19 patients who were also middle-aged, white, female, and had other health problems such as diabetes, lung or heart disease, tended to be more likely to report long-Covid symptoms.

"Our study finds that those

who have the most severe prolonged symptoms tend to be white women aged approximately 40 to 60 who have at least two long term health conditions," said Chris Brightling, a professor of respiratory medicine at Leicester University who co-led the study known as PHOSP-Covid.

A second study led by the International Severe Acute Respiratory and emerging Infections Consortium (ISARIC) found that women under 50 had higher odds of worse long-term health outcomes than men and than older study participants, even if they had no underlying health conditions.



A member of the medical personnel attends to Covid-19 patients at the intensive care unit of the CHIREC Delta Hospital in Brussels, Belgium, on Wednesday. — Reuters

"It's becoming increasingly clear that Covid-19 has profound consequences for those who survive the disease," said Tom Drake, a clinical research fellow at Edinburgh University who co-led the ISARIC study.

"We found that younger women were most likely to have worse long-term outcomes."

The ISARIC study, which covered 327 patients, found that women under 50 were twice as likely to report fatigue, seven times more likely to have breathlessness, and also more likely to have problems relating to memory, mobility and communication.

The PHOSP study analysed 1,077 male and female patients who were discharged from hospitals in Britain between March and November 2020 after having Covid-19.

A majority of patients reported multiple persistent symptoms after 5 months, with common symptoms being muscle and joint pain, fatigue, weakness, breathlessness and brain fog.

More than a quarter had what doctors said were "clinically significant symptoms of anxiety and depression" at five months, and 12% had symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

— Reuters

VATICAN CITY

Pope orders salary cuts for cardinals, clerics

Pope Francis has ordered cardinals to take a 10 per cent pay cut and reduced the salaries of other clerics working in the Vatican in order to save jobs of staff as the coronavirus pandemic has hit the Holy See's income.

The Vatican said on Wednesday that Francis issued a decree introducing proportional cuts starting on April 1. A spokesman said lower-level lay employees would not be affected by the cuts. Francis has often insisted that he does not want



to fire people. Cardinals who work at the Vatican and live there or in Rome are believed to get salaries of about 4,000-5,000 euros a month, many in large apartments at well below market rents. — Reuters

GAROWE

Somali president under pressure to quit

The security minister of a Somali regional administration said on Wednesday he had defected along with hundreds of troops and allied himself to President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, who faces calls by rivals to quit after his term as national leader ended.

Abdirashid Janan, security minister of the semi-autonomous Jubbaland state, said he had defected together with 400 troops from Jubbaland's forces, potentially bolstering



the position of the president, known in Somalia by his nickname 'Farmajo'. Mohamed is facing pressures to resign, including from Jubbaland and another semi-autonomous state, Puntland. — Reuters

PARIS

Second French minister hospitalised with virus

France's culture minister has become the second cabinet member to be hospitalised with Covid-19 in the past week, a source close to the minister said on Wednesday.

Roselyne Bachelot, 74, tested positive on the weekend and was taken to hospital after her symptoms worsened, just days after her cabinet colleague Elisabeth Borne was hospitalised.

Labour minister Borne, 59, said on Twitter that she had been released on Wednesday and



thanked hospital staff for their help "during these difficult days". The source said her condition was stable and not worrying, adding that her doctor ordered "increased surveillance" at hospital for a few days. — AFP

Intense emotions throughout the year

One can turn left or right and will notice many changes: social, economic, political, educational, business, to mention a few. The flood of changes brought out the best and the worst in people. The opportunists, the power-grabbing, but also those who have demonstrated immense generosity.

Who has not yet noticed the chaos or the circus that is happening in all parts of the globe as consequence of the coronavirus? It is now one year since nations were shocked by the initial lockdowns. Anniversaries are to be remembered, tributes must be paid, and lessons learned.

Not just a public-health disaster we are witnessing, but a defining period with far-reaching values. In this one year since we had activities shutdown, masks have fallen — another type of mask has been introduced — with variations. Throughout this time, many people lost their sense of sensibility, became cynical — perhaps they were already. Others had their sensibility heightened.

The pandemic is still evolving. Waves of Covid-19 continue to bring social life and economy to a standstill. The up and down of the waves of the pandemic can rock nerves with anxieties. From barring events to remote working, the closure of schools, shutting down the business, restricting travel, and asking people to



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THE PANDEMIC IS STILL EVOLVING. WAVES OF COVID-19 CONTINUE TO BRING SOCIAL LIFE AND ECONOMY TO A STANDSTILL

stay at home are methods at hand, but it is hard to say how well individuals respond to the new order. Let's wait for the post-pandemic to measure the effects.

Timing has become blurred due to political interests, hidden business and trade disguises, conflicts, killings, kidnapping, and an increase of authoritarian manoeuvres — making reconstructions harder to understand.

There are different, exciting and morbid issues to reflect upon but the levels of fatigue and uncertainties are driving people nuts. Paying the bills, jobs, healthcare, mental issues, elderly issues are at the top of our concerns. These are down-to-earth worries, however, manipulations on civil liberties are going beyond comprehension.

In the meantime, as if with head-in-the-sand, there is contempt to what the weather and climate are trying to say to humanity. Perhaps, there is serious displeasure with the way the planet earth has been littered and exploited. So, let's us now litter the space — which is already reaching alarming levels.

The year 2021 seems to be an exciting period for space exploration. At least ten expeditions have been lately hovering around planets light-years away. Yet, we cannot look after ourselves, solve our bread and butter problems but we can spend millions

on missions. People suffering from hunger in Yemen, the refugees from Syria, the situation of Palestinians, the unsettling situation in Myanmar, the persecution in Hong Kong, arrests in Russia, the source of the pandemic in China, the denial of Covid-19 existence in Tanzania, the politicisation of vaccine, and the approach to the health situation in Brazil. Surely, some can make the best of the chaos and the circus; there are those who suffer because of the circus and the chaos.

Diseases that were once eradicated are making a comeback, new diseases appear, the gap in social inequality is becoming wider, the increase of poverty is distressing. Making money, fiscal policies, or spending what one doesn't have are the tenet these days. Then, there is a bomb shelling against one of the oldest monarchy systems in the world. Racism has always existed but coronavirus has amplified it. Mapping it all together can be either frightening or encouraging.

The misery the Covid-19 pandemic caused to the world has been overwhelming. It seized the focus of public attention on all levels; but under the cover of distraction, changes are being finely woven.

It is said that every crisis has a silver lining. We have walked a tough road; hope is what keeps us going.

WRITE FOR US

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ALARM BELLS

India battles sluggish vaccine rollout and new surge

GLEND KWEK & AISHWARYA KUMAR

One year after imposing the world's biggest pandemic lockdown, India is racing against time to vaccinate its 1.3 billion population against Covid-19 as a new surge threatens to derail efforts to control the disease.

The world's second-most populous country is struggling to meet a target set by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to inoculate 300 million people by the end of July. India has already suffered enough even though its case statistics are better than many feared.

When Modi announced a strict lockdown one year ago, millions of poor migrants lost their jobs overnight and fled big cities, many on foot and some dying on the way. The harsh restrictions have gradually been eased to boost the economy and case numbers started dropping from September up to last month. India has so far recorded more than 11.7 million Covid-19 cases — the third-most infected nation behind the United States and Brazil — and over 160,000 deaths, one of the lowest mortality rates among the worst-hit countries.

Authorities thought they had seen the worst of the pandemic and in January launched the huge inoculation drive on the back of being the world's biggest vaccine maker.

But a jump in infections — above 40,000 a day after falling to below 9,000 in February — and a slower-than-expected vaccination rollout is setting off alarm bells.

The western state of Maharashtra, home to financial capital Mumbai, has again become a major hotspot with authorities imposing local lockdowns and conducting on-the-spot virus tests in crowded places.

"We need to recognise that we are now facing an increasing number of cases in many parts of the country and vaccination has to be one of the key aspects of responding to that strategically," public health expert Anant Bhan said.

India kicked off its vaccination drive with healthcare and frontline workers, before expanding it to include over-60s and over-45s with serious illnesses. From April 1, everyone over 45 will also be eligible.

More than 50 million shots have been administered and about three million a day are being added, but at this rate the target will not be met. Some experts and locals AFP spoke to said they wanted even more of the populace to be eligible for jabs. — AFP



We need to recognise that we are now facing an increasing number of cases in many parts of the country and vaccination has to be one of the key aspects of responding to that strategically

ANANT BHAN
Public health expert

REMAIN INTACT

Oman-Syria relations rooted in history

At the beginning of the blessed renaissance which was led by late Sultan Qaboos and when the Sultanate of Oman tried for the membership of the Arab League, some opposed it. This is because they had certain issues with the Sultanate. This was the moment when Abdul Hakeem Khaddam, the then representative of Syria in the Arab League, stood and announced: "Oman is an Arab state, before you became Arab." It was his reprimand against those who were opposing Sultanate's membership to the Arab League. This statement still reverberates when we talk about Oman-Syria relationship. Since then, there is no looking back. Whatever has been the political situation and pressures, the relations between the two countries remained intact.

In 2011, when many countries lined up against the Syrian Republic, Oman had a view which proved correct. It saw that the crisis in Syria was an internal issue and others should not intervene in it. Only Syrian people can determine their future course and only they can decide how their internal issues are resolved in a manner which suits them.

Perhaps the recent visit of the Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad to



Ali Al Matani
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THE VISIT OF THE SYRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER WAS MEANT TO STRENGTHEN THE EXISTING RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES

the Sultanate was meant to strengthen the existing relations between the two countries which enjoy long historic and commercial connections. These bilateral ties have strong grounds which are normally missing in the international and regional relations. This link between the two Arab countries is also cemented by the cultural and civilisational bonding.

If we take an objective look at the history of the bilateral relations between Muscat and Damascus over the decades, we find only brighter sides. Despite all sorts of tussles in the Middle East, the relations between Oman and Syria remained stable. Instead, they used the opportunity for dialogue leading to further consolidation of relations and larger understanding of each other's interests and concerns. When Iran and Iraq were at war, it was also a testing time for the bilateral relations between Oman and Syria.

The Sultanate has always been supportive at all regional and international forums of the Syrian position demanding the return of the Golan Heights occupied by Israel. Oman stood with Syria and supported its demands particularly

for the establishment of peace in the Middle East. The Sultanate has played a pivotal role in many issues of concern to Syria. It has kept itself away from any conflicts in the region. For the purpose, it always preferred to hold dialogue and build parleys in the region.

There is continuation of relations between Oman and Syria, particularly during the current crisis. Oman tried for peaceful settlement of issues and to douse the fire of war by using diplomatic means. It always believed that fair means should be used to settle issues so that enemies do not get benefit from the situation. The aspirations of the people of the countries should not be ignored at any cost and at the same time international alliances should not be allowed to destroy the Syrian army and the stability of the country.

I visited Damascus several times and participated in international fairs in Syria. I have closely noticed that people of Syria feel proud of the position taken by Oman. There has been no ambiguity in policies and positions in terms of its relations with Syria. Oman extends support to Syria and is committed to unity, sovereignty and integrity of the country.

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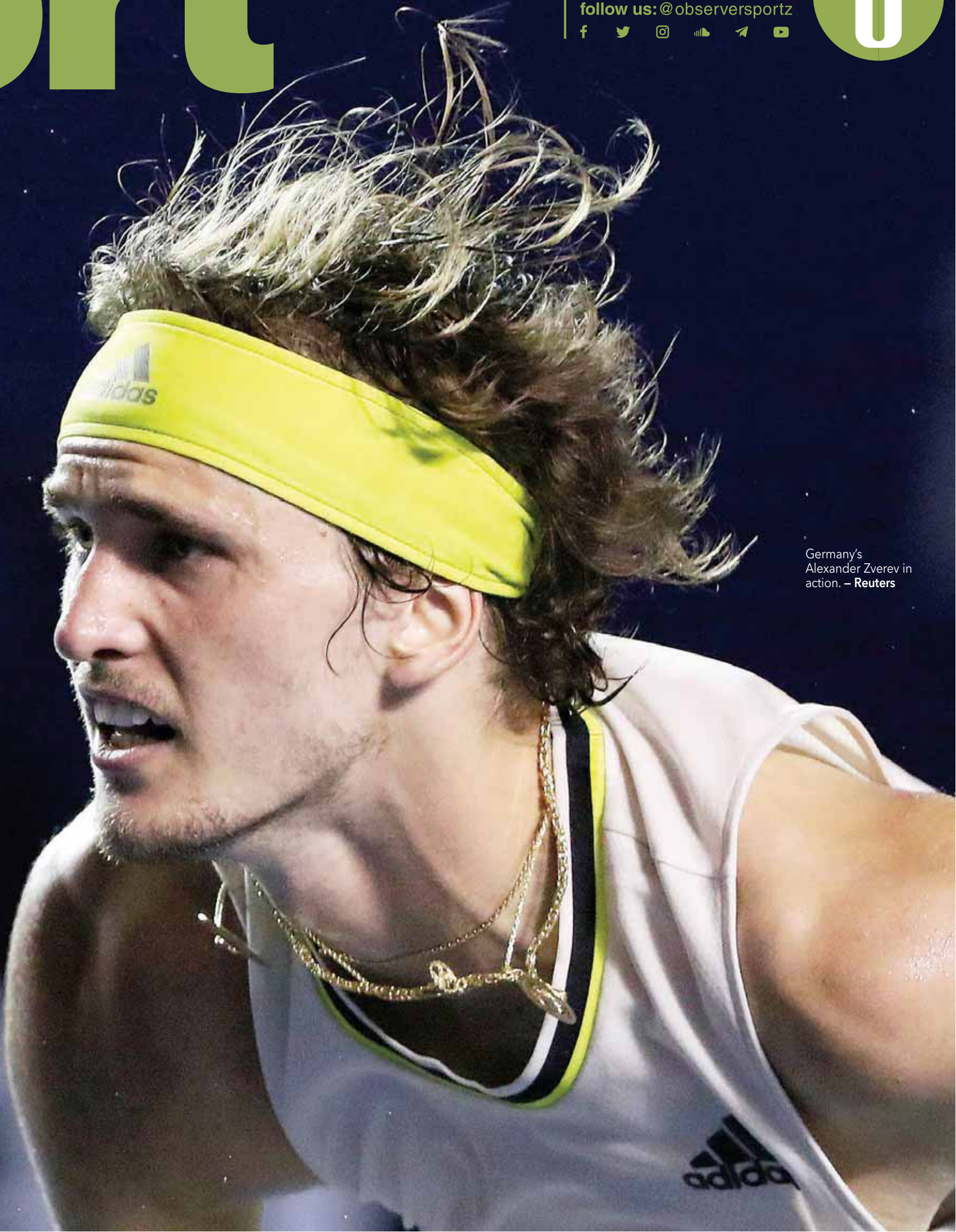
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Germany's Alexander Zverev in action. – Reuters

LONDON: Alexander Zverev said letting his best chance so far at Grand Slam glory slip through his fingers at last year's US Open has not discouraged him but instead provided extra motivation to get the job done this year.

The 23-year-old German, who for years has been touted as the future of the sport, came tantalisingly close to hoisting the championship trophy at September's final in Flushing Meadows but ultimately fell to Dominic Thiem in a five-set thriller.

"That loss made me in a way even hungrier," he told reporters ahead of the Miami Open.

"I was two points away from winning my first Grand Slam title at the US Open, but I didn't at the end of the day. You have to look at those things as well," he said.

"In a way, this year I feel like I'm more motivated than ever to

I was two points away from winning my first Grand Slam title at the US Open, but I didn't at the end of the day. You have to look at those things as well

ALEXANDER ZVEREV, Germany

do well. I'm trying to improve every single aspect of the game to give myself the best chance that I

can have. "I feel like I'm building towards that."

Zverev's improved game was

on display on Saturday when he dug deep to dispatch fellow young gun Stefanos Tsitsipas to win the Mexican Open.

The big-serving Zverev, who is ranked seventh, said he was not too picky about which Grand Slam title he would like to win first.

"I would like to win them all," he said with a smile before adding that he is most comfortable on hardcourts and clay.

But he said he was determined

not to get too far ahead of himself.

"I'm looking forward to the next weeks. I'm not trying to think of the Grand Slams right now because the Grand Slams are... still a little bit far away," he said.

"We have four Masters 1000s events before that. I have other big events before that, as well. I'm trying to focus on that, trying to compete in those events, trying to do the (best) job that I can."

— Reuters

Venus dumped out of Miami Open by Kazakh Zarina

MIAMI: Venus Williams crashed out of the Miami Open on Tuesday, losing her first round game in straight sets to Zarina Diyas of Kazakhstan.

Diyas advanced to a second round meeting with Swiss 11th seed Belinda Bencic after completing a 6-2, 7-6 (12/10) victory in 1hr 28min on the Hard Rock Stadium's Grandstand court.

The round of 128 defeat is the 40-year-old Williams' earliest exit in Miami since she made her debut in the tournament in 1997.

After Diyas raced through the first set, Williams fought back in the second, breaking her Kazakh opponent's serve in the 12th game to force a tie break.

Williams saved three match



Venus Williams of the United States waves to fans while leaving the court after her match against Zarina Diyas. – USA Today Sports

points to extend the tie break but handed Diyas a fourth match point with a double fault

which she converted to complete victory.

"I'm very happy with the win,



Zarina Diyas of Kazakhstan waves to fans after her match against Venus Williams in the first round of the Miami Open. – USA Today Sports

especially against such a legend as Venus — I looked up to her when I was little," the 27-year-old

from Almaty said.

Diyas set up the victory behind an accurate service game,

winning 61 per cent of her first serve points, and varying play cleverly to pull Williams around the court.

Tuesday marked the start of main draw action at this year's tournament, which is being held after the Covid-19 pandemic wiped out the 2020 event.

A slew of top names have withdrawn from Miami in the build-up, with Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic all pulling out of the men's draw.

Britain's Andy Murray became the latest star to withdraw earlier on Tuesday after suffering a groin injury.

Former world number one Serena Williams meanwhile pulled out of the women's tournament on Sunday. — AFP



Osaka pulls out of Stuttgart WTA

Japan's world number two Naomi Osaka has withdrawn from next month's WTA clay-court tournament in Stuttgart, organisers confirmed on Wednesday. "Naomi Osaka will now begin the European clay court season a little later in May", said the Stuttgart organisers in a statement.



Murray pulls out of Miami Open with groin injury

Former champion Andy Murray has pulled out of the Miami Open due to a groin injury, the ATP Tour confirmed on Tuesday. Murray is ranked 119th in the world after long injury lay-offs due to hip surgery but the former world number one had received a wild card for the Masters 1000 tournament after winning the title in 2009 and 2013.

Battling Fernando leads Sri Lanka fightback in first Test

NORTH SOUND, Antigua and Barbuda: Oshada Fernando and Lahiru Thirimanne led a Sri Lankan fightback as the tourists reached 255 for four in their second innings, a lead of 153, at close of play on the third day of the first Test against the West Indies in Antigua on Tuesday.

With the other Fernando in the team, fast-medium bowler Visha, doing just what was required in the taking the last two West Indies first innings wickets at the start of the day to dismiss the home side for 271, it was the fluent middle-order batsman Oshada who starred with an innings of 91 in a 162-run second wicket partnership with Thirimanne.

Fernando, in just his eighth Test, came to crease in the fifth over of the innings when his captain Dimuth Karunaratne, failed for the second time in the match, driving loosely at Kemar Roach to give John Campbell a straightforward catch at third slip.

The 28-year-old Fernando was

The 28-year-old Fernando was given a life on 17 when he was dropped at leg-slip by Jason Holder off off-spinner Rahkeem Cornwall but looked assured throughout his innings which spanned 149 deliveries and included 11 fours

given a life on 17 when he was dropped at leg-slip by Jason Holder off off-spinner Rahkeem Cornwall but looked assured throughout his innings which spanned 149 deliveries and included 11 fours.

Fernando appeared destined for a second Test hundred until West Indies skipper Kraigg Brathwaite, in what was either a moment of inspiration or desperation, brought on Kyle Mayers as his seventh bowler of the innings.

The occasional medium-



Oshada Fernando of Sri Lanka hits a boundary during day 3 of the first Test between West Indies and Sri Lanka at Vivian Richards Cricket Stadium in North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda. — AFP

pacer met with instant success as Fernando pushed at his first ball,

a full-length delivery just outside off-stump, and edged a catch to

wicketkeeper Joshua Da Silva.

Mayers then removed Dinesh Chandimal in almost identical fashion two overs later.

When Roach returned for another spell and bowled the obdurate Thirimanne for 76 to follow his first innings top score of 70, Sri Lanka were wobbling at 189 for four.

Just when the West Indies might have sensed a chance to sweep away the rest of the Sri Lankan batting, Dhananjaya de Silva and debutant Pathum Nissanka featured in an unbroken fifth-wicket partnership of 66 and will resume on the fourth morning seeking to extend their overall lead beyond 250 to give themselves a fighting chance of pulling off a come-from-behind victory.

"I think this is a good batting pitch because it has flattened out nicely", said Mayers in assessing the day's toil, even with his double-strike.

"They had the upper hand

today but the game is still evenly poised. "We just need to pick up two early wickets (on the fourth day) and things can look very differently."

Earlier, West Indian hopes of extending their 99-run overnight lead ended in the second over of the day when Vishwa Fernando bowled Cornwall for a top score of 61 and then trapped last man Shannon Gabriel leg-before without scoring.

Suranga Lakmal missed out the tail but ended with career-best Test innings figures of five for 47, an improvement on the fast-medium bowler's previous best of five for 54 against New Zealand in the Boxing Day Test in Christchurch in 2018. — AFP

Brief scores: Sri Lanka: 169 (L Thirimanne 70, N Dickwella 32; J Holder 5-27, K Roach 3-47) and 255-4 (O Fernando 91, L Thirimanne 76, D de Silva 46 n.o.; K Mayers 2-10, K Roach 2-28) vs West Indies 271 (R Cornwall 61, J da Silva 46, K Mayers 45; S. Lakmal 5-47, V Fernando 2-52, D Chameera 2-71)

Maniz Azad, Orient, OHI and Al Hail 'A' march on in Senior Knockout tourney

MUSCAT: Shoaib Ismail and Adnan Ul Haq's magnificent all-round performances powered Maniz Azad International to a 46-run victory against Bank Muscat in a Senior Division Knockout Tournament game at Muscat Municipality ground 2 in Al Amerat on Friday.

Adnan struck a vital 51 while Shoaib contributed a breezy 34 as Maniz Azad posted 161 for 7 on the board in 20 overs. Muhammed Umar picked up 3 for 29.

Shoaib was unplayable with the ball, taking 5 for 19 while Usman Asghar and Adnan claimed two wickets each as Bank Muscat was dismissed for 115 in 18.5 overs. Abbas al Balushi topscored with a fine 44.

Brief Scores (Knockout — Senior): Maniz Azad International 161 for 7 in 20 overs (Adnan Haq 51- 6x4, Shoaib Ismail 34 – 6x4, 1x6, Muhammed Umar 3-29, Vinoth Thangavel 2-35) beat Bank Muscat 115 all out in 18.5 overs (Abbas al Balushi 44 – 3x4, Shoaib Ismail 5-19, Usman Asghar 2-17, Adnan Haq 2-15) by 46 runs.

Nadeem helps Orient to victory

In another Senior Division Knockout match, Nadeem Karamat Ali excelled with the bat and ball to steer Orient Travels/Gitacs to an emphatic 6-wicket win over Khalsa United at the same venue in the afternoon.

Khalsa could not post an imposing total on the board as it was restricted to 127 for 9 due largely to Nadeem's brilliant 3 for 31. Rafique and Umar Rahman bowled well too, taking two wickets each. Sushil Kadam scored 32.



Shoaib Ismail and Adnan Ul Haq of Maniz Azad

Orient chased the total down in 16.1 overs, scoring 129 for 4 with Ibrar Hussain striking an elegant 55 not out and Nadeem Karamat contributing 39.

Brief Scores (Knockout — Senior): Khalsa United CT 127 for 9 in 20 overs (Sushil Kadam 32 – 2x4, Nadeem Karamat Ali 3-31, Rafique 2-18, Umar Rahman 2-13) lost to Orient Travels/Gitacs 129 for 4 in 16.1 overs (Ibrar Hussain 55 – 6x4, Nadeem Karamat Ali 39 – 5x4, Muhammad Parvez 2-29) by 6 wickets.

Waleed bats OHI to easy win

Waleed Rahim's splendid 65 not out was the highlight of Douglas OHI's exciting 34-run victory against Ideal International in a Senior Division Knockout Tournament match at Muscat Municipality ground 1.

Waleed topscored while Ismail al Balushi made 32 as OHI compiled 167 for 8. Salman Khan bagged 2 for 27.

Ideal failed to bat with the same flourish and was bundled out for 133 in 18.4 overs despite Salman Khan's fluent 38. Viplav Kumar claimed 3 for 37 while Rajender Kumar and Mohsin Alimamad took two wickets each.

Brief Scores (Knockout — Senior): Douglas OHI 167 for 8 in 20 overs (Waleed Rahim 65 – 5x4, Ismail al Balushi 32 – 5x4, Salman Khan 2-27) beat Ideal International 133 all out in 18.4 overs (Salman Khan 38 – 5x4, Wasim Jamadar 32 – 4x4, 1x6. Viplav Kumar 3-37, Rajender Kumar 2-22, Mohsin Alimamad 2-24) by 34 runs.

Abdul Jalil stars in Al Hail A win

In another Senior Knockout game, Abdul Jalil's superb 62 helped OCT Al Hail A to a thumping 59-run win over Zubair CT at Muscat Municipality ground 1.

Abdul's brilliant batting led Al Hail side to 165 for 8 in 20 overs. Arif Khan and Ruwan Rupa

picked up three wickets each.

Zubair's chase was over quickly as it was bowled out for a dismal 106 in 15.5 overs. Abdul Ghani was the pick of the bowlers, taking 3 for 18 whereas Suhaib Abdul and Hisham Shafi bagged two wickets each.

Brief Scores (Knockout — Senior): Oct Al Hail 'A' 165 for 8 in 20 overs (Abdul Jalil 62 – 6x4, 3x6, Arif Khan 3-17, Ruwan Rupa 3-27) beat Zubair 106 all out in 15.5 overs (Fazal Khan 24 – 2x4, Parthiban Mohan 23 – 1x4, 1x6, Abdul Ghani 3-18, Suhaib Abdul 2-15, Hisham Shafi 2-24, Ismail al Balushi 2-27) by 59 runs.

Brief Scores (Knockout — Junior): Sam Royals 149 for 8 in 20 overs (Shaji Shanu 43 – 4x4, 2x6, Mohammed Arif 2-27) lost to Aflag Group CT 153 for 4 in 18.1 overs (Haris Alam 58 – 9x4, Junaid Iqbal 51 – 11x4, Vijith Ravi 3-19) by 6 wickets.

Brief Scores (Knockout — Junior): Israr Ghala 226 for 6 in 20 overs (Sagheer Muhammad 72 – 6x4, 4x6, Wajid Mohammed 39 – 7x4, Ahmed Tahir 36 – 5x4, Sooraj A Raj 3-42, Arun Kumar 2-45) Ideal Technology 155 all out in 19.5 overs (Vijesh Vijayakumaran 38 – 54, 1x6, Yasir Jamal 4-22, Amir Munir 3-20) by 71 runs.

Brief Scores (Knockout — Junior): Pittspot 153 for 9 in 20 overs (Wajid Ali 27 – 4x4, Mushir Nazir 34 – 2x4) beat Safara International 117 all out in 19.1 overs (Hardik Toprani 22, Mohazin Moosa 2-21, Anzil Nazumudeen 2-17) by 36 runs.

Brief Scores (Knockout — Junior): Vanderlande 189 for 7 in 20 overs (Vignesh Kumar 36 – 5x4, Prasanth Reddy 30 – 3x4, 1x6, Washil 4-31, Yesupaul Martin 2-39) beat Sketch International 96 all out in 18.2 overs (Manish Bhatia 38 – 5x4, Vignesh Kumar 3-17, Aasim Mohammed 2-18) by 93 runs.

No 2 ranking no extra pressure but Medvedev still keen to prove himself



LONDON: New world number two Daniil Medvedev said he is feeling no extra pressure after rising to his career-best ranking last week but the Russian wants to prove to himself that he deserves the lofty slot by playing well in Miami.

The 25-year-old replaced Rafa Nadal as No 2 last week, becoming the first player outside the Spaniard, Roger Federer, Novak Djokovic and Andy Murray to be ranked in the top two since Lleyton Hewitt in July 2005.

Medvedev is leading the men's draw at the ongoing Masters 1000 event in Miami after world number one Djokovic pulled out to spend more time with his family.

"It's been already one week precisely. I'm enjoying the moment", Medvedev told reporters on Tuesday.

"I could maybe feel pressure, (but) no, I feel like it just gives me some energy boost. I just want to try to play better and better, to

prove even just for myself that I deserve this. Hopefully I can show some great tennis here in Miami."

Last month Medvedev reached the Australian Open final, his second title match at a major after the 2019 US Open, on the back of a 20-match winning run that saw him pick up trophies at the Paris Masters, ATP Finals and team-based ATP Cup.

His run included 12 straight wins over top-10 opponents and ended with defeat to Djokovic in the final at Melbourne Park.

Medvedev then suffered a shock loss at Rotterdam before returning to winnings ways in Marseille where he picked up his 10th Tour title — all on hardcourts.

"I don't really think about points too much because I always said that I feel ranking reflects on your results that you had", Medvedev said. "So the more big titles you win, the further you go in Grand Slam, the better your ranking will be. — Reuters

Barty on the road again in Miami after pandemic absence



MIAMI: World number one Ashleigh Barty is preparing to spend the rest of the season on the road as she prepares to defend her Miami Open title this week in her first overseas appearance since the pandemic.

The 24-year-old from Queensland elected not to travel outside Australia after the WTA Tour resumed last year, skipping both the US Open and the rescheduled French Open at Roland Garros in September.

However with Covid-19 in retreat in several parts of the

world, and authorities more adept at managing safety protocols, Barty has travelled to Florida for the first stop on what should be a gruelling year.

The Aussie got a taste of international travel in the age of coronavirus when her journey to the United States ended up taking nearly 50 hours.

"It was a long one," Barty said on Tuesday. "It was about 48 hours door-to-door. We had a flight cancellation leaving Australia, another flight cancellation when

we got to L.A. It was quite a wriggle around.

"Tough playing tennis after travelling again. Quite a while since I've done that. I'm looking forward to feeling good in another day's time."

Barty, who will face either Hailey Baptiste of the United States or Slovakia's Kristina Kucova in her opening game, said she is excited for the season ahead despite finding leaving Australia difficult.

"It was quite hard to leave and quite emotional to me," she said. "But I think we're excited to have the opportunity to

The 24-year-old from Queensland elected not to travel outside Australia after the WTA Tour resumed last year, skipping both the US Open and the rescheduled French Open at Roland Garros in September

play the whole season. We're looking at staying away the whole season."

RELAXED OSAKA

The biggest threat to Barty's hopes of defending her 2018 Miami crown is likely to come from Japan's Naomi Osaka, who is also in the field in Florida.

Osaka is brimming with

confidence after winning her second US Open title last September before backing it up with the Australian Open last month.

Barty, who exited in the quarter-finals in Melbourne, has controversially retained her number one despite Osaka's recent dominance due to the pandemic-adjusted rankings rules.

Asked to comment on Osaka's form, Barty revealed she had hardly watched the Japanese star — or any other player — during the last year.

— AFP



Russia's Daria Kasatkina. — Reuters

Depth in women's game no surprise for top players

NEW YORK: The WTA circuit has seen only one repeat winner in 13 tournaments this year and for Japan's Naomi Osaka, who is fast emerging as the next dominant force in women's tennis, the results underline the depth of talent on the Tour.

Russian Daria Kasatkina, who bagged the Phillip Island Trophy in Melbourne last month, became the first two-time winner on the Tour this year on Sunday after the 23-year-old's triumph in the St. Petersburg Ladies Trophy final.

While Roger Federer, Rafa Nadal and Novak Djokovic have dominated the men's game, women's tennis has been searching for a successor to Serena Williams since the 23-times major winner became a mother in 2017.

World number two Osaka, who has won four of the last six Grand Slams held on hardcourts, was not surprised there had been so many different winners in 2021.

"I feel like the level of women's tennis has really risen," she told reporters on Tuesday at the Miami Open.

"Everyone is really strong. Everyone has the capability of winning matches.

"Outside people might say it's really random and whatever. But I think just everyone is so strong, so everyone has a chance to win."

Two-time major winner Simona Halep said the Covid-19 pandemic had made it difficult for the top athletes to perform at their

best, contributing to a more level playing field, while world No.1 Ash Barty said the depth of talent was testament to how hard players were working.

"It makes for a really healthy competition knowing every single match you have to be near your best level to compete," Barty added. "That brings out the best in everyone. It's pushing everyone to continue to drive to be better."

Victoria Azarenka, a two-time Australian Open winner, said there were no easy matches any more, not even in the early stages of tournaments.

"It's very visible because right from the first matches on, you have to be 100 per cent ready," the Belarusian said.

"There are a lot of girls who are able to produce such a high level of tennis. I think sometimes for some young players it's a bit more difficult to have the consistency.

"But on any given day you know it can be dangerous, and the level is going to be high."

— Reuters

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Campaign Period: 11th February 2021 – 11th April 2021. Benefits are applicable for all purchases except Government Organizations & Ministries. **DO Cash Gift:** "Assured Cash Gift" is applicable on 2018 YM, 2019 YM, 2020 YM & 2021 YM Toyota models, excluding Diesel grades of Innova, Fortuner, Prado, Hilux, LC P/U, LC WGN and Hiace. The amount varies between model, model variants, model year and manufacturing year. "Cash gift in lieu of insurance" Cash Gift is given in Lieu of Insurance only as applicable for respective models. In case customer chooses Insurance (as applicable), he/she will not be eligible for "Cash gift in lieu of insurance" offer. Cash Gift can also be used as part of down payment. For exact details please contact your nearest Toyota showroom. **Comprehensive 1 Year Insurance** (Oman only, excluding diesel grades) on 19YM / 19PLT: Yaris HB, Yaris SD, Camry 3.5, Camry HEV, Avalon, Rush, Fortuner (not applicable on Diesel grades). 20YM / 19PLT: Yaris HB, Corolla 1.6, Corolla HEV, Camry 2.5 (Excluding HEV), Camry 3.5, Supra, Avanza, Rush, RAV4 (Excluding HEV), Fortuner (not applicable on Diesel grades), Hilux 4x2, 20YM / 20 PLT: Yaris HB, Yaris SD, Corolla 1.6, Corolla HEV, Camry 2.5, Camry 3.5, Camry HEV, C-HR, Avanza, Rush, Fortuner (not applicable on Diesel grades), Hilux 4x2, Hilux 4x4, Highlander HEV, 21YM / 20 PLT: Fortuner (not applicable on Diesel grades). Insurance benefit under the campaign would be given upto the extent applicable for Private vehicles only. Additional premium as per Insurance norms will have to be paid by the RAC, Taxi & Driving School Company. ****2 Years / 20,000 Kms Service** (whichever is earlier) covering 2 services at 10,000 kms service interval for Petrol models based on normal operating conditions (Excluding DSL grades) on all Toyota models excluding Corolla Cross, Supra, Highlander HEV, LC WGN, Hiace, Granvia and Coaster. ****5 Years / 50,000 Kms Service** (whichever is earlier) covering 5 services at 10,000 kms service interval for Petrol models based on normal operating conditions (Excluding DSL grades) on all Models of LC WGN 4.6L & 5.7L. ****Special Interest rate** up to 20 YM for Yaris Sedan and Yaris Hatch back models (applicable only for individual customers and not for company deals): 0% per annum for deals up to 2 years, 1.99% per annum for deals above 2 years up to 4 years, 2.99% per annum for deals above 4 years up to 5 years, for deals above 5 years normal rate will apply. For exact details please contact your nearest Toyota showroom. Vehicles may include dealer installed items. For further details & to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit your nearest Toyota showroom. Pictures and colours shown above are for illustrative purposes only.

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Bank Muscat AGM approves 25 per cent cash dividend

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

Bank Muscat held an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) and an Annual Ordinary General Meeting (AGM) of its shareholders on March 23, 2021. The meetings were presided over by Shaikh Khalid bin Mustahail al Mashani (pictured), Chairman of the Bank's Board of Directors. At the meetings, shareholders agreed to increase the authorised capital of the Bank to RO 450 million from RO 350 million previously.

The shareholders approved the amendment of the Bank's Articles of Association accordingly. The appointments of the statutory auditors for Bank Muscat and the external independent Shari'a auditors for Meethaq Islamic banking services for the year 2021 were also approved.

At the AGM, shareholders of the Bank granted their approval to distribute 25 per cent cash dividend (at the rate of 25 baisas per share) and also bonus shares at the rate of 10 per cent of the issued capital (10 bonus shares for every 100 shares owned) of the Bank for FY 2020.

Shareholders will thus receive a combined dividend of 35 per cent. Speaking on the occasion, Shaikh Khalid bin Mustahail al Mashani expressed his thanks and gratitude to the shareholders for their strong support and confidence in the Board of Directors of the Bank and the Bank's performance and progress.



He stressed that Bank Muscat would continue to further consolidate its leadership and maintain its position in the banking sector, driven by its customer-centric strategy and continuing to achieve greater success and offering products and services that meet the needs of different customer segments while also achieving added value for its shareholders.

Shaikh Khalid bin Mustahail al Mashani said that the Board of Directors of the Bank welcomed and supported the measures taken by the Central Bank of Oman and the Capital Market Authority to strengthen the financial sector in the Sultanate.

He added that the achievements of the Bank would not have been possible without the far-sighted and proactive economic policies of the Government of Oman.

In particular, he expressed his happiness with the strong financial results achieved by the Bank in the past year despite unprecedented challenges and strong competition in the banking sector. The Bank posted a net profit of RO 163.36 million for the year ended December 31, 2020 compared to RO 185.55 million reported for the year ended December 31, 2019.

Major boost for Omanisation as \$4 bn worth of contracts signed

JOB OPPORTUNITIES:
Petroleum Development Oman signs long-term service contracts with Arabian Industries Projects and Special Technical Services covering over 200 on-plot project

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) signed on Wednesday major service contracts worth \$4 billion covering project delivery and maintenance and integrity work in the North and South of its concession area.

The agreements with Arabian Industries Projects (AIP) LLC and Special Technical Services (STS) LLC encompass the design and execution of more than 200 on-plot projects and will run for seven years with an optional three-year extension.

Current Omanisation levels will double over the life cycle of the contracts, resulting in several thousand additional employment opportunities for Omanis, with a focus on skilled jobs, supervisors and engineering positions.

A Training for Employment scheme has been introduced, enabling the training, re-skilling and upskilling of over 1,000 Omani personnel, and about 1,500 Omani employees from incumbent PDO contractors will be transferred and redeployed to the new contractors.

Local sub-contracting businesses and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) will also benefit with specific targets for both, and an obligation on the part of the contractors to ensure and monitor their use.



“These strategic agreements create a win-win culture for PDO, our partner contractors and Oman, in that they maximise capital efficiency, generate multi-million-dollar savings and enhance In-Country Value (ICV) opportunities

RAOUL RESTUCCI
PDO Managing Director

In addition, the deals include a strategy to develop a domestic firm to execute maintenance and integrity tasks in a selected cluster in the PDO oil and gas portfolio within five years.

This further builds on the focus to introduce and mature a domestic contractor for turnarounds to carry out facility maintenance in scheduled shutdowns as recently endorsed by Oman LNG, OQ, OPAL and PDO. The signings took place at an official contract awards ceremony at PDO's Mina Al Fahal headquarters, which was attended

by PDO Managing Director Raul Restucci, AIP and STS Chief Executive Officers Sadiq Sulaiman and Rejeesh Mani, and the companies' Managing Directors Amer al Sulaimani and Alex Clark.

Restucci said: “These strategic agreements create a win-win culture for PDO, our partner contractors and Oman, in that they maximise capital efficiency, generate multi-million-dollar savings and enhance In-Country Value (ICV) opportunities.

“They represent a benchmark of best practice by capturing

the lessons learned over the past 17 years from engineering, maintenance and construction contracts across our concession area. “We expect to transition seamlessly from our existing on-plot deals in the coming months, working hand-in-hand with AIP and STS to deliver a large portfolio of projects safely, responsibly and efficiently. Considering the sheer size and dimensions of these contracts, embedding such improvements within 15 months of the tendering period during the Covid-19 pandemic is an outstanding achievement.”

Under the terms of the deals, AIP will carry out project delivery in the North of Block 6 and maintenance and integrity work in the South, while STS will be responsible for project delivery in the South and maintenance and integrity in the North.

Over 70 major continuous improvement ideas were generated during workshops to incentivise high performance and optimise efficiency, ICV and delivery and embedded into the contracts.

Sharakah launches new strategy to enhance SME support

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

In line with the Sultanate's Economic Stimulus Plan (ESP) endorsed by the Council of Ministers and approved by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Sharakah's Five Year Strategy (2021-2025) has been developed to meet the current market circumstances and to be more aligned with Oman's Vision 2040. Oman's Vision 2040 targets the diversification of the National Economy.

In particular, it lays emphasis on the sectors of transformative industries: Agriculture & Fisheries based projects, Mining and Mineral products, in addition to Service, Cultural, Logistics and

Educational activities and their supportive and complementary sectors.

This opens up a wider field for the economy in general and for the SMEs in particular to boost their services and enhance the quality of their products to increase the percentage of their contribution to the Sultanate's GDP, which inspired Sharakah to expand the sectors of support that were previously limited to the manufacturing, services and trading [through Bill Discounting] sectors to include the fields of Agriculture & Fisheries based projects, Tourism and Technology & Innovation.

The new strategy of Sharakah came as a support and motivation for individuals wishing to start



It lays emphasis on the sectors of transformative industries: Agriculture & Fisheries based projects, Mining and Mineral products, in addition to Service, Cultural, Logistics and their supportive and complementary sectors

their own businesses, which will help rekindle economic growth and business activity stifled by the Covid-19 pandemic as well as creating job opportunities for the local community.

With the current economic fluctuations and unexpected changes in the market, Sharakah is flexible in the payment period

which is linked to the projected financial performance.

Muath al Shehhi, Investment Analyst in Sharakah further commented: “We remain committed to the mandate given to support the SME community and thus help the economy, so we expanded the sectors of support to include the fields of Agriculture & Fisheries based projects, Tourism and Technology & Innovation. We have simplified the funding process and maintain transparency, which is evident from the details in our website.

Besides, given the significance of having a proper business plan for each project, we have formulated a business plan template to guide potential entrepreneurs to draft the same for their project.”

Private sector dilemma over 3% annual increment

Private sector organisations across the world continue to face great difficulties in operating normally amid the challenges posed by the global Covid-19 pandemic, despite vaccination campaigns initiated by governments for their citizens.

Omani businesses and organisations are in no better shape than their foreign counterparts in terms of the challenges and problems they face.

Given these testing times for the private sector as a whole, the authorities have stepped in with stimulus measures and incentives to ease the difficulties of private organisations.

Issues of concern to the private

sector and its employees are the subject of discussion during meetings involving government officials, chambers of commerce, academia and other forums.

One major dilemma weighing on the private sector is the issue of adding the mandatory 3 per cent annual increment to its workers amid the constrained economic environment.

The private sector believes that the annual increase should not be compulsory for businesses and organisations in the current circumstances, but rather, it should depend on the performance of individual employees.

This should be based on legal articles that did not clearly clarify the definition of the increase of the annual “periodic bonus”.

Ministerial Decision 541/2013



HAIDER ALLAWATI
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OMANI BUSINESSES AND ORGANISATIONS ARE IN NO BETTER SHAPE THAN THEIR FOREIGN COUNTERPARTS IN TERMS OF THE CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS THEY FACE.

issued by the Ministry of Labour indicates that the minimum periodic increment should not be less than 3 per cent of the basic wage of the worker provided the employee should have completed not be less than six months of service with the employer, and secondly, that the worker must not have received a (weak or poor) rating in his annual performance report.

This means that if there is a system within the establishment to evaluate the performance of its employees, it is obligated to provide for each worker an annual performance report, and the worker has the right to object to his report if he thinks that it does not reflect his productivity and performance.

Today, there are some large Omani organisations and

companies employing thousands of workers, especially in the contracting and construction field.

The annual increment will pose a huge burden on such companies, given especially that many small businesses do not have a system in place to evaluate the performance of their workers.

The question posed today is that while government institutions defer the implementation of annual increments, promotions, incentives and bonuses for their employees, why should private sector organisations be compelled to pay the annual increment to the workers in the current circumstances?

The Omani private sector does not demand that the annual increment or any other

bonuses be stopped entirely, but that such benefits are given only to productive and loyal workers who undertake their responsibilities sincerely.

Undeserving are those who evade work or come late, violate labour laws, and ignore work ethics.

In raising this issue, the goal is to that suitable measures are taken to ensure that workers receive their wages and annual increments without imposing a heavy financial burden on private employers.

Such measures should also aim to prevent labour disputes that are ultimately harmful to both parties.

A positive and healthy work environment not only enhances productivity of workers, but also the growth of organisations.

Omantel joins channel partnership with Huawei

MUSCAT: Omantel has taken another step to boost its valued enterprise customers’ capacities and push Oman’s digital transformation.

The leading integrated telecom & ICT services provider in the Sultanate has entered into another channel partnership with Huawei, aimed at capitalising on the enormous changes the telecom and ICT sector in Oman in particular. The world in general, is witnessing.

Under this partnership, all of Huawei’s enterprise products will be available to be sold by Omantel to provide advanced,



safer, securer, simpler, and high-value end-to-end integrated

solutions to enterprise clients, enhancing their operational

abilities, productivity, and user experience.

Several factors have created market disruptions that have made the need to adapt quickly and capitalise on the fast-paced changes.

Huawei’s next-generation solutions coupled with Omantel’s ecosystem and its digital transformation vision will bring more innovative solutions that use new-age technologies, like Artificial Intelligence (AI), Robotics, Big Data and Analytics, Internet of Things (IoT), and 5G communications for enterprises.

This step further solidifies Omantel’s position as a

provider of integrated telecommunication solutions for private and public organisations in Oman with the latest innovations and technologies. Omantel believes in the importance of offering simple yet practical solutions to enterprises for their applications.

Omantel’s robust infrastructural ecosystem will see the inclusion of high-end, technologically advanced, high-efficiency Huawei enterprise products, giving its enterprise clients across various sectors more efficiency through integration, more satisfaction and better support.

Lulu kicks off ‘Dream Drive 2021’ campaign



MUSCAT: Lulu Oman has launched its much anticipated Dream Drive campaign 2021 to reward its valued customers during the Holy Month of Ramadan and to celebrate the spirit of the season.

The campaign, which commences from March 21 and runs until the May 19, 2021, gives shoppers a chance to win 8 Nissan Patrol 4WDs and a range of marvellous gifts from Ikon. The campaign will go on in all Lulu branches in the Sultanate.

Like previous years, the group has stood firm on its policy of being environment-friendly by digitalising the raffle draw process.

As part of this year’s Dream Drive promotion, customers get a chance to win 8 Nissan Patrol 4WDs as grand prizes and 40 fabulous gifts, including smart TVs, cooking ranges, refrigerators, freezers, and washers, from Ikon.

The eight electronic draws will be held on different dates during the promotion period and will be completed by May 23, 2021.

Customers can participate in the eRaffle when they purchase goods worth RO 10 or more in a single receipt at any of the Lulu branches in Oman, followed by registering online. The raffle coupons for valid claims will be sent to the customers by email or SMS within 48 working hours. Customers who have registered once will only be required to enter their mobile numbers for subsequent registrations. Online registrations will close on May 21, 2021.

Speaking on the promotion, Ananth A V, Regional Director of Lulu Hypermarkets Oman, India & Sri Lanka, remarked, “We are happy to adapt to the new normal and break new ground in customer service excellence with our promotions and campaigns.”

Own the stylish Toyota RAV4 & save with benefits

MUSCAT: Cash gift RO 2600 up to RO 3500, insurance 1 year comprehensive or cash gift in lieu of insurance RO 250 (Not applicable on RAV4 HEV) and service 2 years / 20,000 kms (whichever is earlier). (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms & Conditions apply. Visit the showroom for exact details, please).

One of the two major additions to the RAV4 is the hybrid electric model, which combines two power sources consisting of a petrol engine and electric motor. The class-leading model, which offers the lowest fuel consumption value of 22.2 km/L (As per GSO Certification. Fuel economy may vary due to driving conditions).

The second addition to the RAV4 is the Adventure model, which was established as a symbolic model to appeal to active users through enhanced Waku Doki — the equivalent of

“heart-pumping excitement” in Japanese — and a more powerful image. It is distinguished by a more aggressive bumper, grille design and fog light surrounds, and exclusive 19-inch, split five-spoke wheels with matte-black accents.

The RAV4’s distinct personality is completed by its expansive and comfortable cabin, which displays exceptional quality and finish throughout. The instrument panel’s horizontal layout has a slimmer profile and a lower position than before to enhance forward visibility. The centre console is wider and more versatile with an expanded console storage.

For the latest press releases, test drive requests and more, please visit www.toyotaoman.com, www.youtube.com/toyotaoman or www.facebook.com/toyotaoman, [www.instagram.com/toyotaoman](http://www.instagram.com/toyotaomanofficial/), www.facebook.com/toyotaomanofficial/. For any further details & to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit your nearest Toyota Showroom.



PRESS RELEASE

MCBS HOLDS 2021 EFMD MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA CONFERENCE



Modern College of Business and Science (MCBS) is proud to have collaborated with EFMD in hosting 2021 EFMD Middle East and Africa Conference which took place March 9-11, 2021.

The conference was chaired by Dr Hesham Magd, Associate Dean of Quality Assurance and Accreditation.

The conference discussed the specificities of both the Africa and the Middle East regions in common plenary sessions and separated tracks, specifically targeting relevant issues for both regions. The conference addressed topics such as ongoing trends and new developments in management education, inside, and outside Africa and the Middle East region.

It promotes an active debate between regional actors and participants from other regions of the world. The conference was attended by top business school’s leadership from Africa and the Middle East region sharing best practices and discussing the way forward.

On the second day of the conference, March 10, 2021 from 15:30 to 16:30 the Dean of Quality Assurance and Accreditation from Modern College of Business and Science was part of a panel discussion on ‘Demystifying Online Education: Design & Implementation’ where he discussed on the way forward for e-learning in the case of MCBS and Oman at large.

SOHAR INTERNATIONAL SPONSORS ‘NOT DISCOVERED YET’ INITIATIVE

Sohar International has sponsored a documentary series that seeks to uncover the Sultanate’s diversified wildlife, thereby boosting tourism and conservation activities in the country in line with Oman Vision 2040.



The epic exploration project initiated by Oman in Focus under the title “Not Discovered Yet” will cover 12 landmark tourist destinations and encompasses a one-hour documentary ‘The Shoreline of Oman’ and a two-part documentary series called ‘Wild Oman’, that will capture the essence of Oman’s beaches, rare land and marine wildlife, carrying the audience on an extraordinary exploration of all corners of our fascinating country, from the top of the desolate escarpment to the bottom of some of world’s richest seas.

Mohammed bin Mahfoudh al Ardhi, Chairman, Sohar International, said “As a socially responsible bank, it is well within our strategic outlook to sponsor initiatives such as “Not Discovered Yet” initiative that highlights and places this beautiful nation on the international world map for wild life tourism and conservative efforts. With international expertise and a local flavour, the potential outcome of this initiative will not only highlight the diversified abundant wild life Oman has to offer, but will also provide an avenue for young Omanis to pursue their passions in exploration, film-making, conservation, and beyond providing economic impetus to the country.”

In the one-hour, high quality, documentary – The Shoreline of Oman – the InFocus team will explore the wonders of the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea, its islands and shores, and reveal the story of iconic marine life – turtles, whales, dolphins and sharks. The two-part ‘Wild Oman’ series, a first-ever showcase of the Sultanate’s natural beauty, will be packed with Oman’s impressive habitats and wildlife – unique and vitally important regions, home to hundreds of thousands of marine and terrestrial creatures.

The documentaries are expected to air on two international channels in mid of year 2022.



Massive container ship blocks Suez Canal

CAIRO: Tugs worked on Wednesday to free a giant container ship stuck in the Suez Canal after a gust of wind blew it off course, officials said, creating huge tailbacks on one of the world's busiest trade routes.

Egypt's Suez Canal Authority said it was doing all it could to refloat the Taiwan-owned but Panama-flagged MV Ever Given, a 400-metre (1,300-foot) long and 59-metre wide vessel, which was lodged sideways across the waterway.

Historic sections of the canal have been reopened in a bid to ease the bottleneck of backed up marine traffic. "The container accidentally ran aground after a suspected gust of wind hit it," ship operator Evergreen Marine Corp said.

Shipping monitors MarineTraffic recorded that the vessel had been in the same position since at least Tuesday afternoon.

SCA chairman Admiral Osama Rabie said in a statement that "rescue and tug units are continuing their efforts" to free the MV Ever Given. Bloomberg reported it had caused a build-up of more than 100 ships seeking to transit the canal.

"There was a grounding incident," Alok Roy, fleet director of BSM Hong Kong, the Ever Given ship manager, told the news agency. Photographs released by the SCA also showed excavators onshore digging soil from the canal's bank, with the earth-moving equipment dwarfed by



the giant hull towering above.

The canal, which links the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, was opened to navigation in 1869, and was expanded in 2015 to accommodate larger ships.

MarineTraffic showed a map with large clusters of vessels circling at both ends of the canal — in the Mediterranean off Port Said, and in the north of the Red Sea.

In the canal itself, the map showed at least six tug boats near the stuck Ever Given. Instagram user Julianne Cona posted a photo of the grounded ship from the Maersk Denver, which was forced to wait behind the Ever Given.



The Suez Canal is one of the world's most important trade routes, providing passage for 10 per cent of all international maritime trade. The journey between ports in the Gulf and London, for example, is roughly halved by going through the Suez — compared to the alternate route via the southern tip of Africa

"Ship in front of us ran aground while going through the canal and is now stuck sideways," she wrote. "Looks like we might be here for a little bit."

Shipping website Vessel Finder said the ship was bound for Rotterdam in the Netherlands, and it was unclear why the vessel had stopped moving. "Tug boats are currently trying to re-float the vessel," Leth Agencies, which provides crossing services to clients using the canal, said on Twitter.

The Suez Canal is one of the world's most important trade routes, providing passage for 10 per cent of all international maritime trade. The journey

between ports in the Gulf and London, for example, is roughly halved by going through the Suez — compared to the alternate route via the southern tip of Africa.

Nearly 19,000 ships passed through it last year carrying more than one billion tonnes of cargo, according to the Suez Canal Authority (SCA).

It has been a boon for Egypt's struggling economy in recent years, with the country earning \$5.61 billion in revenues from the canal in 2020.

President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi unveiled plans in 2015 for an expansion designed to reduce waiting times and double the number of ships

using the canal daily by 2023. In February, Sisi ordered his cabinet to adopt a "flexible marketing policy" for the canal in order to cope with the economic downturn caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Container ships account for more than half of the canal's total traffic, with some of them being among the largest in the world reaching a capacity of up to 23,000 TEU.

Most of the cargo travelling from the Gulf to Western Europe is oil. In the opposite direction, it is mostly manufactured goods and grain from Europe and North America headed to the Far East and Asia. — AFP

Oil rebounds as Suez Canal ship runs aground

WASHINGTON: Oil prices rose about 2 per cent on Wednesday as investors sought bargains after the previous session's slump.

The upside comes after a cargo container ship that's among the largest in the world ran aground and blocked the Suez Canal, threatening to disrupt a global shipping system already strained by the coronavirus pandemic.

Brent crude for May settlement jumped 2.1 per cent to \$62.09 per barrel, after having tumbled 5.9 per cent and hit a low of \$60.50 the previous day.

West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures for May delivery were up 2 per cent at 58.95 dollars per barrel, after having lost 6.2 per cent in the previous session.

The MV Ever Given, a Panama-flagged container ship that carries trade between Asia and Europe, became grounded on Tuesday in the narrow, man-made waterway dividing continental Africa from the Sinai Peninsula.

Despite today's rebound, underlying sentiment remains cautious due to growing concerns about demand recovery in the wake of new pandemic curbs in Europe.

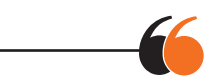
Germany, France and Italy have expanded virus-related curbs amid a third wave of infections. — AFP

IMF chief eyes proposal for \$650 bn reserve expansion

WASHINGTON: International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Tuesday she would present the IMF's executive board with a formal proposal for a possible \$650 billion expansion of the Fund's emergency reserves by June.

Georgieva said a new allocation of Special Drawing Rights, the IMF's own currency, would give member countries — many of which have been hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic — a big liquidity boost without increasing their debt burdens. It would also free up resources for member countries to help fight the coronavirus pandemic, support vaccination programmes and other urgent measures, she said in a statement.

Georgieva said IMF board



It would also be a powerful signal of the IMF membership's determination to do everything possible to overcome the worst recession since the Great Depression

KRISTALINA GEORGIEVA

IMF Managing Director

members had conveyed 'broad support' at a meeting on Tuesday for IMF staff to draw up the proposal for a \$650 billion expansion in IMF reserves to



IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva speaks at a press conference at the IMF headquarters in Washington. — AFP

address the long-term global need for reserve assets.

"A new SDR allocation would benefit all our member countries and support the global recovery

from the Covid-19 crisis," she said.

It would also be a powerful signal of the IMF membership's determination to do everything

possible to overcome the worst recession since the Great Depression."

A new SDR allocation would be the International Monetary Fund's first since a \$250 billion allocation approved in 2009, during the global financial crisis.

Georgieva said IMF staff would develop new measures to enhance transparency and accountability in the use of SDRs, and explore options for richer members to reallocate SDRs to support vulnerable and low-income countries.

If approved, the additional reserves — which can be turned into hard currencies by members or shared with needier countries — should be available later this year.

A new IMF assessment of global reserve needs, conducted

once every five years, shows a clear need for additional SDRs as countries struggle to cope with the coronavirus pandemic, sources briefed on the matter said.

No details of the assessment were immediately available.

Georgieva began pushing for a new SDR allocation a year ago, but met strong resistance from the United States, the largest shareholder in the global lender, under the Republican former Trump administration.

Both the Group of Seven advanced economies and the larger Group of 20 major economies backed the move in recent weeks after new US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen offered her qualified support while also demanding greater transparency about how the SDRs would be used and traded. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

BANGKOK

Thai central bank keeps key rate at record low

Thailand's central bank left its key interest rate unchanged at a record low on Wednesday, as widely expected, but slightly lowered its 2021 GDP growth forecast after a second wave of coronavirus infections hit economic activity.

The Bank of Thailand's (BOT) monetary policy committee voted unanimously to hold the one-day repurchase rate at 0.50 per cent for a seventh straight meeting. All 14 economists in a Reuters poll had expected the BOT to



remain on hold after three rate cuts last year.

The BOT now expects the economy to expand 3.0 per cent this year, down from a previous forecast for 3.2 per cent.

— Reuters

LONDON

UK inflation rate unexpectedly drops in February

British consumer price inflation unexpectedly fell to 0.4 per cent in February from 0.7 per cent in January, reflecting unusual patterns of clothing discounts, official figures showed on Wednesday.

The Bank of England and other economists expect inflation to rise sharply back towards the BoE's 2 per cent target in the first half of this year, reflecting a rise in oil prices, increases in regulated household energy prices and other one-off effects.



Data from the Office for National Statistics showed that producer prices — which tend to feed through into consumer prices later — were 2.6 per cent higher than the year before in February. — Reuters

MANILA

Philippine central bank vows to retain policy

The Philippine central bank has the scope to maintain monetary policy support for the country's economy, but is on guard against "second-round effects" that could push inflation higher, its governor said on Wednesday.

Governor Benjamin Diokno said the inflation environment remained manageable, and that a recent uptick is transitory.

Headline inflation in February hit a 26-month high outside the central bank's 2 per cent-4 per cent target mainly due to higher



food prices.

"The BSP remains ready to respond to second-round effects such as increased calls for wage and transport fare hikes and elevated inflation expectations," Diokno said. — Reuters

features



Disability is not a barrier to creativity

While others may judge Yahya al Mawali because of his small stature and physical limitations, this did not hinder him from pursuing his dreams. A graphic and a digital designer with a career spanning around 15 years, Yahya is conveying the message that physical disability is but another obstacle one can overcome... **P18**

INSIDE STORIES

CONSERVATION

CELEBRATING VICTORY AGAINST GHOST GEARS

The Environment Society of Oman (ESO) is happy to announce the recent completion of its Masirah Net Clean Up Campaign. Being the Sultanate's only non-profit organisation focusing on environmental conservation... **Story on P20**

LOCAL SCENE

TAHWA VILLAGE: A WITNESS OF OMANI PEOPLE'S STRUGGLE THROUGH AGES

The mountainous village of Tahwa is one of the ancient historical villages of Wilayat Al Kamil W'a al Wafi that has been a witness to many important historical events evident upon its numerous archaeological sites... **Story on P19**

READ

IT IS OK NOT TO BE OK

BY SHEILA WALSH

Walsh helps women overcome the same old rut of struggles and pain by changing the way they think about God, themselves, and their everyday lives.

INSPIRING LIVES

THIS DOCTOR LEAVES WITH MEMORIES OF A LIFETIME

A medic who served the nation for four decades is bidding adieu to the country, holding memories close to her heart, causing tears roll down from those citizens and residents who loved her unconditionally through her journey... **Story on P19**

GASTRONOMY

LOBSTER SEASON RAGES ON IN SOUTH SHARQIYAH

Fishermen in the coastal areas in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, continue to fish the lobster on the coastal strip extending to the Arabian Sea in the governorate... **Story on P18**



Disability is not a barrier to creativity

By Mazoun al Ghailani

The moment you meet Yahya al Mawali, you know that you are meeting someone special. He has no towering height or a booming loud voice but he has the kind of life that will inspire you to run after your dreams no matter the challenges that are thrown your way.

Unlike other people, Yahya is differently-abled but he does not let his physical limitations set how his life should become. His limitations have inspired him to persevere and to make something of the hands that he was dealt with.

While he usually has to work harder than other more abled individuals, Yahya takes things in stride knowing fully well that if he set his mind to it, he can make things happen.

"Nothing is impossible. Whatever it is that you dream about, it can be reached, fulfilled. You just have to unleash what is inside you and when you master yourself, you will succeed in overcoming obstacles that hinder you from achieving your dreams." This is the summary of what Yahya wanted to impart to society.

Yahya is a graphic and digital designer, a field he so willingly embraced after seeing his brother enjoying the creative process of his career. It was also a field that didn't look down on him and what he can do. Armed with computers and gadgets, Yahya can rely on his strong mind and hands to create something that not only fulfils his creative wants but that of his clients as well.

"I started in this field after seeing my brother work. My brother was the kind of guy who mixes and matches things. He was a very powerful eye for composition. He stands out well because he can create images and logos rich with meanings. I like what he was doing and it is from that spark that I realised that I love the creative process of designing. From that early beginning, it's been 15 years since I'm in this field," he shared.

Yahya uses several basic design programs such as Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator. It takes three to seven days to complete the design, depending on the idea, the size and the type of design. Yahya determines the design path based on the client's desire and the type of event.

"I like to add what is new to reflect the aesthetics of the design. When I see the completed work and the idea is clear, and when I see the relief and admiration of the clients, I truly feel very special that I didn't let any barrier stand on my way, despite my suffering and illness," he shared.

In his 15-year career in graphics design, Yahya has accomplished a lot of things just like his peers and competitors. He, however, continues his journey to push himself more and figure out what more he can do.

He has designed for many institutions, including designing the logo of the Authorized Economic Operator, the first forum for people with disabilities, the fourth edition of Arabian University Beach Volleyball Championship and Zakat Committee of the Wilayat of Barka.

Yahya aspires to have a strong footprint presence at the international level and society.

"We as individuals must take advantage of the creativity that Allah has given to us. Disability is not always a hindrance. On the contrary, it is an energy from which we derive hope that gives us the ability of giving," Yahya said.

It's hard not to notice Yahya when he is in a room. It's not only because of his stature but because every day he proves that physical limitation is not the end-all and be-all of humans. He proves that when people put their mind on it, they have the power to make things happen.

GASTRONOMY

Lobster season rages on in South Sharqiyah



FISHERMEN IN THE coastal areas in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, continue to fish the lobster on the coastal strip extending to the Arabian Sea in the governorate.

Lobsters are distinguished by their global nutritional value and their high prices in the local and international markets. They are abundant in the Sultanate's waters.

Salem al Araiimi, Director of the Department of Fisheries Development in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, explained that the lobsters live between rocks and coral reefs, as well as in sandy and muddy environments and in shallow depths, pointing out that the fishing season is one of the most important seasons on which many fishermen depend, which has a good economic return.

He said that the Department of Fisheries Development in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali is making efforts to guide and control this national wealth and to exploit it in the best ways and develop it for its sustainability for future generations.

He pointed out that last year, the number of landings in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate amounted to 238 tonnes.

During this year's season, the Fish Development Department in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali implemented a detailed plan that included highlighting the risk imposed by illegal immigrant workers on the fishery sector and the mechanism for preserving lobster fish as national wealth.

The plan also included setting up awareness programs, seminars and field visit to fishermen in the state in order to educate and guide them about adhering to the process of fishing according to the laws set by the Ministry in order to preserve this wealth.

He explained that in 2015, the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources implemented a project of landing artificial coral reefs on an area of 2500 metres in the northern area of the fishing port in Al Ashkhara, where 30 units of artificial coral reefs were lowered. With the aim of establishing a marine farm from industrial coral reefs, financed by the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund, the site was determined based on a marine comprehensive survey implemented for the sites suggested by fishermen.

He added that the project aims to enhance the fisheries of Lobster wealth, provide food and protection for them and other fish, in addition to enhancing the natural fish resources and working to form places for reproduction and feeding the lobster with modern, environmentally-friendly specifications.





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Tahwa Village: A witness to Omani people's struggle through ages

The mountainous village of Tahwa is one of the ancient historical villages of the Wilayat Al Kamil W'al Wafi that has been a witness to many important historical events evident upon its numerous archaeological sites. Its Aflaj stems from the roots of the past and its vast farms and palm trees are fed by permanent flowing aflaj.

The village of Tahwa is about 30 kilometres from the centre of the wilayat, and it enjoys the presence of several villages and residential communities such as Wadi La, Isola, Gharara, Saih Malha, Saih Muqla and Taii.

Tahwa and the surrounding villages are agricultural areas. The majority of the citizens here are occupied with agriculture crafts and their day to day living revolve around agricultural concerns and developments. It is not surprising that it is famous for the presence of several large Aflaj that feeds the village



and other villages, such as the Sulfur falaj, which is one of the most important and famous aflaj in the village which acquires its name due to the high percentage of sulfur in its waters. This falaj irrigates large areas of the village. This is in addition to the La Wadi falaj, which is considered one of the Dawoodi aflaj that increases in abundance with the fall of rain and Ain Khumra and others.

Tahwa is well-known for

its cultivation of palm trees and various citrus fruits, as well as different varieties of mangoes.

Among the palm trees that are popular in the village are Al Barni, Al Madluki, and Al Bunaringa and many other varieties of palm trees that provide wealth to the people of the village every season.

Herding activity — one of the predominant activities in the village — is no less important than agriculture.

The majority of residents of the village have a good number of livestock and since the village is located adjacent to the mountain, this made it easier to create a rich pastoral environment.

As for historical monuments, the village of Tahwa is considered one of the ancient historical villages and its importance stems from its location on the line of commercial caravans. It is the link between the commercial city of Sur and the cities located in the South and North of Al Sharqiyah governorates. Through surveys conducted by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism during the last period, it was obvious that this village was settled by humans in ancient civilisational stages, as the graves excavated in the village indicate human settlement since ancient times, and there are many defensive towers in the village such as Tahwa Tower, Wadi La Fort and many other historical monuments.

INSPIRING LIVES

This doctor leaves with memories of a lifetime



BY KABEER YOUSUF

A MEDIC WHO served the nation for four decades is bidding adieu to the country, holding memories close to her heart, causing tears roll down from those citizens and residents who loved her unconditionally through her journey.

Dr Elizabeth Kurian, MBBS, MS, DA, Anesthesiologist at the Royal Hospital began her career in 1983 following her husband Dr Kurian George who joined the Ministry of Health in 1982, having first posted in the small hospital in Sumayil then and later with Sur Hospital.

"It was a hot day in September, I still remember walking on the tarmac of the old Seeb Airport holding the hand of my 3-year-old daughter, Annie John Cherian when she first set glance on the gentlemen wearing spotless white Dishdashas", recalled Dr Elizabeth.

That little 3-year-old, who is now working as a business partner in the Human Resources department at GKN Aerospace Bristol UK, innocuously asked her mum if they were priests wearing white cassocks from the church back home because she was so used to seeing her grandfather, who was a clergyman in Kerala.

"Coming from a land known for its lush greeneries, I was a little disheartened first at seeing the parched desert sans vegetation, arid dunes and the rugged rocky mountains all around, the first sight from the aircraft."

Later she slowly started to love the changing hues of the majestic mountains, the shifting multicoloured dunes and the varied desert vegetation of different types of Acasia and Adenium

Obesum, thorny trees and bushes and most of all the beaches of Oman with the gentle rolling waves.

"Little did I imagine, that land would be my second home one day. There was not much life those days in Sur, with a small community of hospital staff on the campus. Most of the daily needs had to come from Dubai, Indian vegetables scarce, and even good bread had to come from Dubai. But the fish market was alive with an abundance of seafood."

She traces back down the memory lane and remembers the day when they first drove to Royal Hospital in 1987. There was hardly any building around except for Sultan Qaboos Stadium.

"Today, I see the Al Khuwair, Bausher and Ghala skyline teeming and jam-packed with several high rise buildings, shopping malls and multistoried residential constructions. It has just mushroomed over the last two decades."

There have been grey clouds in our life in Oman too, the devaluation of Omani Rial in 1986, the havoc and fury of nature as Gonu the cyclonic storm that hit in June 2007 and efficiently tackled Arab spring of 2011, a nation mourning the demise of its beloved leader late His Majesty, Sultan Qaboos in January 2020, the longest-serving head of state in the Middle East and Arab nations, and lately the economic crunch, social constraints and loss of lives due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"As we turn our back on Oman, in the year of the 50th National Day, the land of our cherished memories of almost 4 decades, we wish Oman the nation, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik al Said and his people, all the peace, prosperity and stability in the years to come and peace be upon you, Oh Oman! forever."



Celebrating victory against ghost gears — threat to marine biodiversity



The Environment Society of Oman (ESO) has recently completed its Masirah Net Clean-Up Campaign. Being the Sultanate's only non-profit organisation focusing on environmental conservation, the campaign saw the removal of 90 tonnes of abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG) and other pollutants from Masirah Island. Sponsored by funds from the Turtle Island Restoration Network, SEE Turtles organisation and Sprint for Oman, this campaign was completed in collaboration with the Wali of Masirah, Masirah Municipality, Environment Authority, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, Be'ah/Suma EcoVision, Sinyar Oman, Mahmood Salam Al Farsi Trad, along with the local community of Masirah.

As one of Oman's most prominent fishing hubs, the Island of Masirah has a strong tradition in fisheries and has therefore been impacted by this island-wide campaign. ALDFG or 'ghost gear' is not only a threat to marine biodiversity but also causes major ecological and socio-economic issues both locally and globally. They include serious habitat damage, quality of fish stock, lethal entanglements of whales, dolphins, nesting sea turtles, emerging hatchlings, birds and other marine species, which, when caught, are often faced with death.

Todd Steiner, Turtle Island Restoration Network's Executive Director, commented, "Making the beaches of Masirah Island safe for nesting and hatching turtles and other wildlife is key to ensuring conservation of these amazing species. ESO's advocacy efforts for proper waste disposal and sustainable fishing are a necessity, as Oman is home to five out of the seven species of turtles found in the world, all of which

are listed on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species."

ESO has dedicated five net clean-up campaigns since 2017, clearing a total of 76 km stretch of some of Masirah's densest nesting areas. The organisation has also utilised manual and customised beach-cleaning methods to remove and properly dispose of all the ghost gear present in Masirah's turtle nesting spots. On a global scale, it also estimated that ghost gear compromise one-tenth of all waste in the ocean, adding up to about six to eight hundred thousand tonnes of abandoned ghost gear getting lost in the ocean every year.

Antonia Vegh, Project Coordinator at ESO explains, "The goal of this campaign was to build awareness on regional and local levels, as well provide guidance to prevent and mitigate the impact of abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear impacting Oman's natural heritage, while paying close attention to the well-being and mortality of sea turtles and other wildlife."

ESO has been combatting such issues since 2008 as part of the organisation's long-standing Sea Turtle Research and Conservation project, based on Masirah Island. For the year 2021, ESO aims to proceed with its focus on promoting a sustainable approach in delivering conservation action, while ensuring the involvement of the local communities. For more information on how to support, donate, or to find out other ways to get involved, visit eso.org.om.

