



HM SENDS GREETINGS TO SUDAN

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to Gen. Abdel Fattah Burhan, Chairman of the Sovereignty Council of the Republic of Sudan on his country's Independence Anniversary. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere congratulations and best wishes of good health, happiness and a long life to Gen. Burhan, praying to Allah the Almighty to fulfill all aspirations of the brotherly Sudanese people towards further progress and prosperity. - **ONA**



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2021 BUDGET



HM approves Tenth Five-Year Plan, State's Budget for 2021

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik has issued two Royal decrees reading as follows:

Royal Decree No. 1/2021 approves the 10th Five Year Development Plan 2021-2025.

Article (1) endorses the 10th Five Year Development Plan (2021-2025) whose goals are indicated in Annex (1), attached to this decree.

Article (2) stipulates that the 10th Five Year Development Plan shall be implemented in accordance with its financial structure stated in the Annex (2), attached, and in line with the Fiscal Balance Plan issued by the Ministry of Finance.

Article (3) approves the national economy's strategic approaches/guidelines of the Plan as indicated in Annex 3 attached.

Article (4) approves the Five Year Plan's projects in accordance with the general guidelines/precepts indicated in Annex (4), attached.

Article (5) states that the Ministry of Economy shall publish the details of the Plan in reports to be drafted exclusively for this purpose.

Article (6) instructs all units of the State's Administrative Apparatus and other public legal entities to execute the 10th Five Year Development Plan without pre-

judice to the provisions of enforced laws and bylaws.

Article (7) states that the Ministry of Economy shall issue the Ledger of Strategic Programmes of the Plan during the first quarter of 2021 provided the Plan's first year projects be specified in coordination between the Ministry of Economy and other departments concerned.

Article (8) instructs the Ministry of Economy to conduct a regular assessment of the 10th Five Year Development Plan in light of local, regional and international developments.

Article (9) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the first day of January 2021.

Royal Decree No. 2/2021 ratifies the State's General Budget for Fiscal Year 2021.

Article (1) ratifies the State's General Budget for Fiscal Year 2021 according to the tables/schedules attached to this decree.

Article (2) instructs all units of the State's Administrative Apparatus and other public legal entities to implement the provisions of this decree, each within the scope of its prerogatives.

Article (3) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the first day of January 2021. - **ONA**

The Minister of Finance reaffirmed that the General Budget of the State 2021 has been prepared in line with the priorities of Oman Vision 2040 and within the financial framework of the 10th Five-Year Plan

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman's 2021 Budget seeks to achieve fiscal sustainability, a stable economic growth, and reduce public debt besides creating new job opportunities in the private sector.

Also, the Budget seeks to strengthen the role of private sector in the development process and has been prepared amid several challenges arising due to the COVID-19 pandemic and persistent low oil prices in the international markets. In addition to oil production cut in compliance with OPEC-plus deal and other geopolitical challenges.

The implications of these challenges were reflected in the decline in public revenue, higher deficit, and payment of balance imbalances.

Therefore, the Government took a set of measures to mitigate economic impacts and to stimulate the economic activity besides taking measures to control spending and maintain liquidity.

The Minister of Finance Sultan bin Salem Al Habsi reaffirmed that the General Budget of the State 2021 has been prepared in line with the priorities of Oman Vision 2040 and within



Minister of Finance Sultan bin Salem Al Habsi. - **ONA**

the financial framework of the 10th Five-Year Plan (2021/2025).

Financial performance

In an interview to Oman News Agency, the Minister said that a package of initiatives have been taken to improve the financial performance and its sustainability for 2021.

The steps include implementation of the medium term plan initiatives (2020-2024), a study on preparation of the framework of the Public Debt Law and initiation of the common treasury account among other initiatives.

He said that the medium term fiscal balance plan (2020/2024),

ratified by His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik, aimed to achieve financial sustainability and balance between the public revenues and spending by the end of 2024.

Financial impact

The financial impact of the actions taken in the fiscal balance plan in 2020 amounted to savings of OMR14 billion for both the revenues and spending, he said, adding that the financial impact for the actions to be taken in 2021 is expected to save OMR3.5 billion. The actions are expected to contribute to reduction of the spending in the budget by some OMR2.9 billion, he said.

The 2021 General Budget of the State has been established while setting a limit for each government entity that should not exceed the revised budget in 2020 along with implementation of the procedures aimed at rationalising the spending and control of deficit among other objectives.

The 2021 Budget outlines a ceiling for all Government units that the budget of each unit should not exceed the revised budget of FY 2020. The budget continues to rationalise public spending and enhance its efficiency. It also seeks to contain deficit and maintain its downward trend. The

2021 Budget paves the way for Programme Based Budget (PBB), and explores innovative means for funding some Government projects and services.

The deficit is estimated at about OMR2.2 billion i.e. 8 per cent of gross domestic production (GDP). A 73-percent of this deficit will be financed through external and domestic borrowing i.e. OMR1.6 billion, while the rest of the deficit, estimated to nearly OMR600 million, will be covered by drawing on reserves.

Public debt is projected to reach OMR21.7 billion by the end of 2021, and external borrowing represents 76 per cent of overall public debt.

The Government will continue building the infrastructure required to spur economic growth, and giving priority to the highly needed projects that serve economic and social objectives. In addition to expanding the participation of private sector by enhancing its role in implementing and managing some projects and services.

The First Axis is themed "Society Manned By Creative Individuals". It focuses on education, learning, research, national talents, health, citizenship, identity, heritage, national culture, welfare, social security and youth development. **>A3**

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN Distressed private firms allowed to cut salaries

1 Hard-hit private sector firms, under the current circumstances, can cut down the salaries of their employees for a period of 3 months in return for cut in their working hours. **>A3**

WORLD Dry run for COVID-19 vaccination in India

2 A dry run for COVID-19 vaccine administration is being conducted on Saturday across India. This is the second round of dry run 'drill' after the one between December 23 and 29, 2020. **>A7**

SPORTS Pogba's presence vital for us: Solskjaer

3 Manchester United boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer is impressed with midfielder Paul Pogba's performance in Friday's 2-1 win over Aston Villa at Old Trafford. **>A8**



REUSABLE BAGS

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Many shops in Oman had to order for reusable bags, following the ban on single-use plastic bags in the country.

With a ban on plastic bags starting on 1 January, many outlets had already made alternatives made from cloth and paper available to customers before it came into effect. High demand, though, means many customers needed to wait for more reusable bags to arrive on shelves, or had to go elsewhere to find them.

"All of our reusable bags were sold out in the morning of January 1 alone," said a supervisor at a multinational supermarket chain in Oman. "We have ordered for more bags and they are expected soon."

In the absence of bags in some stores, customers had resorted to other alternatives. A couple of them took home their groceries in empty cardboard boxes provided by the stores, while those who lived, or were parked near them, and had just a few things to buy carried their purchases in their hands.

Many other shops and restaurants, however, had plenty of stock to provide their customers, and were also selling them at a nominal fee to them. One shop



in Ruwi, for example, made cloth bags available for just 100 baisas each, while another had them priced at 200 baisas.

"From January 1 onwards, we will be selling no plastic bags in our stores," said a representative of a department store in Amerat. "We have made two or three types of reusable bags for our customers, but they are also welcome to bring their own bags with them."

Several outlets in Oman had also put out advisories to people reminding them that the plastic

bag ban is in effect.

"Effective from January 1, 2021, the use of single-use plastic bags are banned in Oman as per Ministerial Decision No. 23/2020," said a statement from Lulu Hypermarket. "Customers may bring their own bags or purchase reusable shopping bags in store."

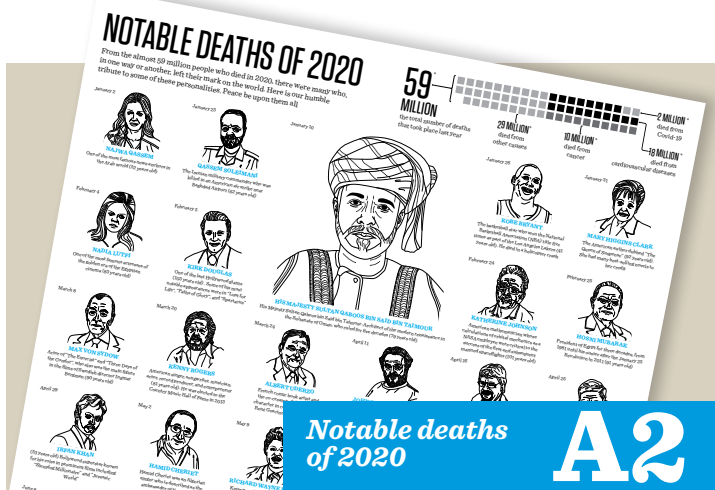
Multinational chain Spar had a similar message for customers.

Dr Abdullah bin Ali Al Omari, the chairman of Oman's Environment Authority, said it was completely understandable for some

businesses to take a few days to adapt to the new rules. The government body had been running awareness campaigns over this decision since December, to ensure everyone knew of the changes coming, and how it would affect their shopping.

"Cleaning up-single use plastic bags is very difficult, especially since Oman has a varied landscape, which includes mountains, wadis, deserts, beaches, and the sea," he said.

>A5

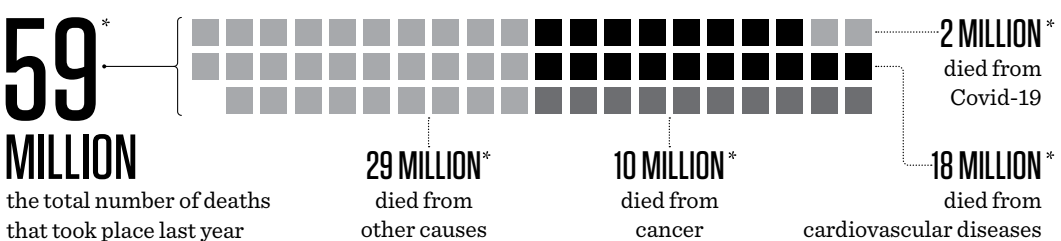


PRAYER
TIMINGS

Dhuhr.....12.16pm
Asr.....3:18pm
Maghrib.....5:38pm
Isha.....6:53pm
Fajr (Tomorrow)..... 5.29am

NOTABLE DEATHS OF 2020

From the almost 59 million people who died in 2020, there were many who, in one way or another, left their mark on the world. Here is our humble tribute to some of these personalities. Peace be upon them all



January 2

NAJWA QASSEM
One of the most famous news anchors in the Arab world (52 years old)

January 23

QASSEM SOLEIMANI
The Iranian military commander who was killed in an American air strike near Baghdad Airport (62 years old)

January 10

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN QABOOS BIN SAID BIN TAIMOUR
His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said bin Taimour: Architect of the modern renaissance in the Sultanate of Oman, who ruled for five decades (79 years old)

January 26

KOBE BRYANT
The basketball star who won the National Basketball Association (NBA) title five times as part of the Los Angeles Lakers (41 years old). He died in a helicopter crash

January 31

MARY HIGGINS CLARK
The American author dubbed "The Queen of Suspense" (92 years old). She had many best-selling novels to her credit

February 4

NADIA LUTFI
One of the most famous actresses of the golden era of the Egyptian cinema (83 years old)

February 5

KIRK DOUGLAS
One of the last Hollywood giants (103 years old). Some of his most notable appearances were in "Lust for Life", "Paths of Glory", and "Spartacus"

February 24

KATHERINE JOHNSON
American mathematician whose calculations of orbital mechanics as a NASA employee were critical to the success of the first and subsequent manned spaceflights (101 years old)

February 25

HOSNI MUBARAK
President of Egypt for three decades, from 1981 until his ouster after the January 25 Revolution in 2011 (91 years old)

March 8

MAX VON SYDOW
Actor of "The Exorcist" and "Three Days of the Condor", who also was the main figure in the films of Swedish director Ingmar Bergman (90 years old)

March 20

KENNY ROGERS
American singer, songwriter, musician, actor, record producer, and entrepreneur (81 years old). He was elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2013

March 24

ALBERT UDERZO
French comic book artist and the co-creator of the Astérix character in collaboration with René Goscinny (92 years old)

April 11

JOHN HORTON CONWAY
English mathematician active in recreational mathematics, known for the invention of the cellular automaton called the Game of Life (82 years old)

April 16

LUIS SEPÚLVEDA
Chilean writer who died in his Spanish exile due to COVID-19 complications (70 years old)

April 25

PER OLOV ENQUIST
(85 years) one of the most prominent Swedish authors

April 29

IRFAN KHAN
(53 years old) Bollywood superstar known for his roles in prominent films including "Slumdog Millionaire" and "Jurassic World"

May 2

HAMID CHERIET
Hamid Cheriet was an Algerian singer who is described as the ambassador of the Amazigh song (70 years old)

May 9

RICHARD WAYNE PENNIMAN
Known as "Little Richard", who was an American pioneer singer of rock and roll in the 1950s (87 years old)

May 12

MICHEL PICCOLI
One of the most prominent actors of French cinema in the 20th century (94 years old)

May 30

HASSAN HOSNI
One of the most prominent Egyptian comedy stars, who had a career that lasted for almost six decades (89 years old)

May 31

CHRISTO JAVACHEFF
King of large scale environmental artworks, and a unique art style involving wrapping monuments in cloth (84 years old)

June 8

PIERRE NKURUNZIZA
President of Burundi from 2005 to 2020 and the former rebel leader of the Hutu people during the civil war (1993-2006). (55 years old)

July 5

RAGAA AL-GEDDAWY
Egyptian actress who participated in nearly 400 art works. She died after suffering for weeks from COVID-19 complications(81 years old)

July 6

ENNIO MORRICONE
Italian composer who composed the soundtracks for more than 500 films, especially the works of Sergio Leone (91 years old)

July 8

AMADOU GON COULIBALY
Prime minister of Côte d'Ivoire, who died of a heart attack and whose death plunged the country into a political crisis (61 years old)

July 26

OLIVIA DE HAVILLAND
Two-time Oscar winning actress, and who is well known for her role as Melanie Hamilton in "Gone With the Wind" (104 years old)

August 24

PASCAL LISSOUBA
The first democratically-elected President of the Republic of the Congo after multi-party elections who lived in exile in France after he was overthrown in 1997 (88 years old)

August 28

CHADWICK BOSEMAN
An actor best known for his role in "Black Panther" and the first black superhero in cinema (43 years old)

September 2

KAENG GOEK IAV
Nicknamed "Dutch", he was one of the most important leaders of the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia (77 years old)

September 9

GEORGE BIZOS
South African lawyer best known for defending Nelson Mandela and a prominent human rights activist against the apartheid regime (92 years old)

September 18

RUTH BADER GINSBURG
An associate judge of the Supreme Court of the United States and an icon of the progressive left in the United States (87 years old)

September 23

JULIETTE GRÉCO
French singer and actress who played lead roles in films made by French directors such as Jean Cocteau and Jean-Pierre Melville (93 years old)

September 29

SHEIKH SABAH AL AHMAD AL JABER AL SABAH
Emir of Kuwait since 2006. A chaismatic leader who believed in mediation that made him "the dean of diplomacy" and "the wise man of the Arabs" (91 years old)

September 30

JOAQUÍN LAVADO
An Argentine cartoonist, better known by his pen name "Quino". His comic strip "Mafalda" has been praised for its use in social satire on real-life issues (88 years old)

October 4

KENZO TAKADA
The most famous Japanese designer and owner of a famous brand bearing his name (81 years old)

October 8

MOHAMMAD-REZA SHAJARIAN
The most prominent figure of traditional music in Iran (80 years old)

October 14

MAHMOUD YASSIN
Egyptian actor. He was an iconic actor in both Egyptian cinema and television, playing dramatic, psychological and romantic roles (79 years old)

October 31

SEAN CONNERY
Scottish actor who was a towering figure for the cinema world. He was the first to play the role of secret agent James Bond (90 years old)

November 10

SAEB EREKAT
Chief Palestinian negotiator and Secretary General of the Palestine Liberation Organization (65 years old)

November 11

PRINCE KHALIFA AL KHALIFA
Prime Minister of Bahrain and holder of the longest term of prime minister in the world (84 years old)

November 12

JERRY RAWLINGS
Ruler of Ghana for two decades, first as a military leader and then as an elected president (73 years old)

November 16

WALID AL-MUALLEM
Minister of Foreign Affairs and one of the most prominent figures of power in Syria (79 years old)

November 24

MAMADOU TANGA
President of Niger from 1999 to 2010 (82 years old)

November 24

KAMBUZIA PRETIWI
Iranian cinematic personality who wrote the script for the only Iranian movie that won the "Golden Bear" award at the Venice Festival (64 years old)

November 25

DIEGO MARADONA
Argentine soccer legend. He was touted among the best players in the history of the game (60 years old)

November 28

DAVE BROZ
British actor who embodied the character "Darth Vader" in the "Star Wars" series (85 years old)

December 2

VALÉRY GISCARD D'ESTAING
President of France (1974-1981). His tenure witnessed many milestones in modern French history, including the inauguration of the first express train lines (94 years old)

December 7

CHUCK YEAGER
Famous American pilot who was the first to break the sound barrier in 1947 (97 years old)

December 12

JOHN LE CARRÉ
The king of British espionage novels, known especially for his novel "The Spy Who Came in From the Cold" (89 years old)

December 28

ARMANDO MANZANERO
Mexican Mayan musician, singer, composer, actor and music producer, widely considered one of the most successful composers of Latin America (85 years old)

December 30

PIERRE CARDIN
Italy-born fashion designer. He is known for what were his avant-garde style and Space Age designs, preferring geometric shapes and motifs (98 years old)



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 Times of Oman

T Magazine: 'We will never leave anybody behind', says Oman's Minister of Health



TIMESOFOMAN.COM

'We will never leave anybody behind': Oman's Minister of Health



Oman's Health Minister talks about vaccine
A story on Oman's Health Minister on vaccines got 3,768 engagements and reached 34,344 people on Facebook.

**MOST WATCHED VIDEO ON FACEBOOK**

5,100 VIEWS





Midday Update video

The Midday Update video got 5,100 views and reached 26,800 people on Facebook.

**MOST VIEWED VIDEO ON INSTAGRAM**

1,168 VIEWS





Maghrib Minute wrapup video

The Maghrib Minute wrapup video got 1,168 views and 50 likes on Instagram

Distressed private firms allowed to cut salaries

Ministry of Labour has announced a slew of measures to lessen the economic impact of COVID-19 for companies in the Sultanate

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Hard-hit private sector firms, under the current circumstances, can cut down the salaries of their employees for a period of three months in return for reducing their working hours (after the expiration of an employee's stock of paid holidays).

This procedure shall take effect, if necessary, till 31 March 2021.

Expatriate workers leaving Oman for good will continue to have their labour-related fines waived, provided they leave the country permanently, the Ministry of Labour has announced.



CONDITIONAL CUT: Although companies are allowed to temporarily reduce their employees' salaries for up to three months, the amount of work done by them must also similarly reduce.

The decision is one of many made by the ministry to lessen the economic impact of COVID-19 on companies in the Sultanate. Companies that have been fined for the first time, between March 15, 2020 and March 31, 2021, for errors made over renewal of documents and service fees are also exempt from paying these penalties.

It is also now possible to renew expired documentation of establishments which have Omani

employees. The incentive also applies to owners of small and medium enterprises registered at the Public Authority for Social Insurance.

However, Omani nationals working in the private sector cannot be terminated until 31 March. Renewal fees for expatriate labour cards have also been cut from OMR301 to OMR201 until the aforementioned date.

Private sector firms that have

been badly affected by the coronavirus pandemic can terminate the services of their expatriate workers, provided all previous dues have been paid, and under the condition that they leave the country.

These steps were taken following discussions by the Supreme Committee to deal with COVID-19 on how to help businesses in the country that have been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Expired ID cards of expat workers stuck outside Sultanate can now be renewed

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Expatriate workers outside the country whose ID cards have expired due to the pandemic can now get them renewed, according to the Ministry of Labour.

The measure is one of many made available by the ministry, in

collaboration with the Supreme Committee to deal with COVID-19, to ease the economic strains of the pandemic on companies in the country.

The resulting fines accrued due to non-renewal of these cards will also be temporarily scrapped. Recruitment licences given to companies, which have since expired

during the pandemic, will also be extended, the ministry added.

Flexibility

Companies that require more hands to help them during this period can issue temporary work visas for non-Omani workers. Owners of multiple companies can transfer their employees be-

tween two of their organisations, if more workers are needed by one of them.

Private establishments can also temporarily hire workers from another organisation to help them during these challenging times, provided permission is secured in the form of a written agreement between the two companies.

10TH FIVE YEAR PLAN

<FROM A1 Aim is to achieve diverse economic, social priority goals

The Second Axis, themed "Economy Imbedded In A Competitive Environment", deals with issues of leadership, economic management, economic diversification, fiscal sustainability, the labour market and employment, the private sector, investment, international cooperation, the development of governorates, sustainable cities and information technology.

The Third Axis, themed "Environment Whose Resources are Sustainable", covers aspects of the environment and natural resources.

The Fourth Axis, themed "A State With Responsible Institutions", deals with issues of legislation, the judiciary, auditing/monitoring, governance of the State's administrative apparatus, resources and projects.

In its statement, the ministry said that the preparation of the 10th Five Year Development Plan has been made in adverse, exceptional conditions, including the slump in international oil prices and the coronavirus pandemic. The collapse of oil prices brought about negative impact on human development, global recession, a surge in the general debt vis-à-vis the GDP that pulled down the country's credit rating and increased the rate of borrowing and caused a decline in the contribution of the private sector to economic activity.

Still, the plan managed to re-structure the goals and come up

with clear-cut national approaches linked to timed executive programmes. It also restored economic growth, accelerated the rate of economic activities and achieved a balanced ratio of economic and social development through the execution of programmes, initiatives and proposed projects within a comprehensively regulated time frame.

The first stage of preparation of the plan focused on evaluating what was achieved earlier and tapping the outcome of strategies, plans and research made by the state's sectors, said the ministry, noting that the first stage also included expanding the base of participation and the formation of committee and specialised working teams. The drafting of the plan's estimates took into consideration the current economic circumstances and the actual fiscal performance of the previous five year plan.

Participation

The ministry indicated that, since December 2019 till today, 195 workshops and technical meetings have been held, with the participation of more than 1,900 participants. During this period, the current situation and existing challenges were reviewed. Based on Oman's 2040 vision, the 10th Five Year Development Plan determined priority goals which outline the features of development over the next five years. It also de-

vised strategic goals, programmes and instruments through which the follow-up and assessment of project results could be realised.

The statement added that the plan seeks to achieve a number of economic and social priority goals with the prime aim of activating the economy, developing macro-economy environment, upgrading the performance of general finance, realising the rationalisation of public spending (particularly recurrent one) and espousing expandable, well-disciplined financial policy that achieves sustainable growth rates.

The plan also targets the setting up necessary infrastructure for the acceleration of private investment and the execution of major strategic projects and public-private sector partnership projects, as well the attraction of direct foreign investment, while at the same time considering prospects for oil prices based on average price of \$48 per barrel during the years of the plan. This is in addition to backing the participation of governorates in the achievement of Oman 2040 vision's goals.

Sector-wise, the plan focuses on economic diversification mechanisms and programmes and raising the contribution of non-oil activities. It sets a 3.2 per cent annual average growth rate of non-oil activities in the GDP by focusing on promising economic sectors

like high-tech converting industries, agriculture, fisheries, food processing, transporting, storing and logistics.

The plan also targets increasing the contribution of the private sector to economic activities of high in-country value, the completion of value, production and import chains, the motivation of small and medium enterprises by encouraging innovation, knowledge-based economy, fourth industrial revolution (4IR) applications, artificial intelligence, specialised markets and risk capital and generating decent employment for Omani youth, notably in the entrepreneurship field.

Human capital

The plan lays great emphasis on protecting human capital and diminishing the repercussions of COVID-19, pressing ahead with the development of the health schema and the sector of medical industries, encouraging the contribution of the private sector to health sectors by providing high-quality services, developing the system of pre-university and graduate education and laying the foundation of administrative, economic and financial decentralisation.

It covers the protection of the environment, the achievement of environmental sustainability, the development of a green and blue economy, increasing the contribution of clean and renewable energy

to economic activity and achieving the most ideal utilisation of marine resources.

In its statement, the Ministry of Economy pointed out that the 10th Five Year Development Plan aims to achieve true growth in Gross Domestic Product that is not less than 3.5 per cent during its term, as well as realising 5.5 per cent growth rate by current prices during the years of the plan. It also targets increasing investment rates to 27 per cent of the GDP, with the aim of raising the efficiency of investment, increasing more direct foreign investment in oil and non-oil sectors to 10 percent of the GDP by the end of the plan, increasing the contribution of the private sector in investment by the end of the plan and augmenting the contribution of the private sector in investment to 60 per cent, in addition to achieving true growth rate in the growth of non-oil activities by an average of 3.2 per cent.

The employment of national manpower figures among the most formidable socio-economic challenges, said the ministry in its statement, noting that, despite the fact that performance rates of the national economy do provide enough employment opportunities, the labour market could not cope with the steadily increasing number of job seekers.

To address this challenge and to regulate labour market discrepancies, the 10th Five Year Develop-

ment plan endorses policies that contribute to modifying the structure of employment (which now relies on a wide base of non-skilled manpower) and introducing a new structure based on a wide base of skilled manpower through recruitment of skilled labour and offering it incentives. The plan is also to encourage new investments based on knowledge-economy, developing the education system and increasing the participation of women in the labour market.

At the conclusion of its statement, the Ministry of Economy explained that the achievement of goals, plans and programmes of the plan is closely associated with the cooperation and collaboration of all government and private establishments, civil society institutions, the media and individuals.

The Ministry of Economy will conduct regular assessment of the 10th Five Year Development Plan, prepare periodic reports and submit them to the departments concerned. The assessment will apply smart performance indicators, follow up programmes and evaluate their effects over the five years of the plan within the framework of a regulated institutional system entrusted to the Vision's Follow-up Union. An electronic platform established for this purpose will unify the performance indicators in cooperation with the departments concerned.



APART FROM THE TOWER-ING mountains, breathtaking beaches and the magnificent deserts, Oman is also known for its caves. Found in varying types and lengths, sizes and geographic formations, these caves are quite popular among tourists. There are a large number of caves in the Dhofar region, some of which have springs near them.

Al Marneef cave, about 40 km from Salalah, in Al Mughsayl area, is one of the most beautiful caves and a major attraction for tourists and residents. According to Oman's Ministry of Tourism, "Marneef cave is in close proximity to Al Mughsayl Beach, which is one of the most preferred picnic spots for Salalah locals, residents and tourists. There are many benches besides the cave, where tourists can sit and take a view of the cave or Mughsayl Beach or the blowholes by their side. It's definitely a nice area to view the surrounding landscape from."

Located at the foot of Jabal Shams, lies the famous Al Hoota Cave. It is about two hours drive from Muscat and half an hour from Nizwa. Known to be one of



the best-kept secrets in the Sultanate of Oman, it contains a rich ecosystem that includes four lakes. The cave is also well-known for housing a rare blind fish, Garra Barreimae, which is more commonly known as Bu Naseh. There are many other species that live in the caves, including bats, arthropods, mollusks, spiders, snails and water beetles.

The cave extends for 5 kilometres underground, but it may only be accessed for a distance of 860 metres, ending at Cave Lake. According to Oman's Ministry of Tourism, "This cave has two holes through which water cascading from the mountain top enters via the (Al Hoota) hole, and exits through the other (Al Falaah) hole

after passing through the connected cave passageways. Al Hoota Cave Lake is located at the end of a footpath. It is 20 metres deep, but there are many parts whose depth surpasses that. It is rumoured that it extends up to Tanuf Valley in wilayat Nizwa. The lake contains several species of blind fish: some are without eyes but have long bristles to sense their food, while others have very small eyes. Also living in the lake is a rare type of blind fish, coloured a translucent pink so that you can see the skeleton of these small fish."

Fascinating features such as stalagmites and stalactites are the main attractions of this cave.

Some of the other well-known caves are Abu Habban Cave in Wilayat Dimma in the Al Sharqiyah North and Al Kittan Cave in Ibri. Al Kittan Cave is also known as the marble cave and has beautiful geological formations and rock engravings. Jernan Cave in Izki, Majlis Al Jinn Cave at the foothills of the eastern Al Hajar Mountains and Mugal Cave in Wadi Bani Khalid are some of the other caves of Oman.





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MINISTRY OF FINANCE

Circular rationalises increments, allowances and remunerations

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Finance issued a financial circular on allowances, increments and other remunerations disbursed to some employees of the State's Administrative Apparatus.

The circular reads as follows: "In pursuance of efforts to follow up and revise some areas of spending in ministries and government units in a manner that rationalises public expenditure and optimises financial resources and, in revision of occupational systems and regulations to upgrade the efficiency of performance and regulate and unify job privilege payments with the purpose of achieving justice and equality, the Ministry of Finance informs all ministries, government units and public establishments that the following has been decided:

First (allowances, increments beyond the deserved salary):

1.A 50 percent reduction of allowances disbursed to employees in all government units beyond the Unified Payroll system cited under Royal Decree No. 78/2013, from 1 April 2021. These include management allowance, allowance for "restructuring tasks", administrative-work-nature allowance, technical-work-nature allowance, risk allowance, complementary allowance, allowance for working in Duqm, "rare practice" allowance, "user allowance", personnel services allowance, 'Majlis allowance', 'clinic allowance', 'system allowance', 'audit allowance' and any other allowances or bonuses granted to employees vide internal regulations and decisions.



DECISION: With effect from 1 April 2021, all types of privilege payments made to employees beyond the framework of the deserved salary and its standard allowances will be stopped. -ONA

In case an employee gets more than one of such allowance, the 50 percent reduction will apply to the highest-paid allowance and the rest will be stopped.

The ranks of employees listed below will be exempted from Item (1) above: the judiciary (judges and employees of similar ranking), occupants of medical jobs and paramedical jobs in government medical (civil, military) establishments, occupants of jobs of the diplomatic corps at the Foreign Ministry, academicians, teachers and air navigation jobs.

Second (Privilege payments beyond the deserved salary):

With effect from 1 April 2021, all types of privilege payments made to employees beyond the framework of the deserved salary and its standard allowances will be stopped.

Third (Senior Officials): Provisions of Items "First" and "Second" shall be applied to senior officials, occupants of the special

grade and above. In serving the public interest, the Ministry of Finance exhorts all ministries, government units, public authorities, establishments and legal entities to fully abide by the provisions stated in this circular with effect from 1 April 2021.

All are required to provide the Ministry of Finance with a detailed statement of accounts of allowances, increments and privilege payments disbursed to employees beyond the Unified Schedule of Grades and Salaries issued under Royal Decree No. 78/2013. The statement, to reach the Ministry of Finance by 31 January 2021 at the latest, should include the type and value of payments, the number of beneficiaries per financial grades and the total annual cost of payments.

Internal audit units at every department are required to fully undertake their role of following up the implementation of this edict. -ONA

SINGLE-USE PLASTIC BAGS

< FROM A1 Customers at shops hail decision on ban

"Most of the waste we monitored in these places turned out to be single-use bags, which distorted the beauty of our surroundings and harmed our environment."

"These bags are unfortunately seen everywhere: roads, parks, the coastline, and even on water surfaces, where they cause the death of fish and other animals," added

Al Omari. "We ran our campaigns in such a way that the news would reach everyone so that they could prepare for it."

Customers at shops in the country praised the state's decision to ban single-use plastic bags. Qasim Al Shehi from Wilayat Bukha in the Governorate of Musandam said, "The decision was made to protect

our environment. I advise everyone to adhere to this decision, and not use disposable plastic bags."

Adding to this, Mohammed Al Badi of Wilayat Saham in North Al Batinah, said, "I was made aware of the penalty we will face if we use disposable plastic bags through social media. The penalty was put in place to deter people from using these bags."

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DISCUSSION

Oman, Sri Lanka to cooperate in academic field



MEETING: Sri Lankan envoy Ameer Ajwad met with SQU Vice Chancellor HH Dr Fahad Al Julanda Al Said and Assistant VC for International Cooperation Her Highness Dr.Mona Fahad Al Said.

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman, Ameer Ajwad, met with the new Vice Chancellor of the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) HH Dr Fahad Al Julanda Al Said on December 29, 2020 on the university premises in Muscat.

Assistant Vice Chancellor for International Cooperation of the SQU Her Highness Dr Mona Fahad Al Said was also present during the meeting.

The envoy briefed the Vice Chancellor on areas of cooperation between the SQU and the national Universities in Sri Lanka. They also discussed exchange

programmes for faculty members and students of both undergraduate and postgraduate studies in different disciplines. Promotion of educational activities was also proposed during the discussion. They agreed to initiate virtual interactions due to the pandemic.

SQU is ranked no 1 in Oman and was among the top 10 in the QS Arab Region University Rankings 2020. Sri Lankan academic and non academic staff have been serving in the SQU since its inception and there are around 17 Sri Lankan academicians in the SQU departments. Mrs. W.D.N.M. Abeyssekara, First Secretary of the Embassy accompanied the Ambassador.



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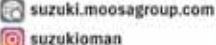


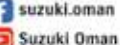
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US COVID-19 cases hit grim milestone of 20mn on New Year's Day

The country now accounts for nearly one-quarter of over 83.8 million cases, 19 percent of 1.8 million deaths

WASHINGTON: The confirmed COVID-19 cases in the United States topped 20 million on Friday as the discovery of a highly contagious new virus strain in the country increases pressure to speed up the vaccination process.

The United States reported over 20.1 million cases and more than 347,000 related deaths Friday afternoon, according to a tally from Johns Hopkins University.

The country, which makes up about 4 percent of the world's population, now accounts for nearly one-quarter of over 83.8 million cases, 19 percent of 1.8 million deaths reported worldwide, showed the university's data.

Pandemic continues to worsen

It took 292 days for the United States to reach its first 10 million cases, but only 54 more days to double it, reported CNN on Friday.

U.S. experts and media outlets have attributed the U.S. failure to contain the virus to, among others, an absence of a national strategy, politicized policies as well as misinformation and conspiracy theories.

"The actual pace of infections probably was different... A U.S.



GRIM SCENARIO: It took 292 days for the United States to reach its first 10 million cases, but only 54 more days to double it.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) modeling study suggests as many as 53 million people in the United States might have been infected from February through September alone," said the report.

The grim numbers could climb further nationwide in the coming weeks due to a surge of gatherings and travels over the holidays despite warnings against doing so amid the worsening pandemic, according to public health experts.

An ensemble forecast published Wednesday by the CDC now projects there will be 383,000 to 424,000 coronavirus deaths in the country by Jan. 23.

The current pandemic situation in the United States is "still quite

serious," especially in the state of California which accounts for about 15 percent of the country's new cases, said Zhang Zuofeng, professor of epidemiology and associate dean for research with the school of public health at University of California, Los Angeles, in an interview with Xinhua on Friday.

"Medical resources in California are nearly exhausted, and the ICU is already full. Currently, the entire City of Los Angeles only has about 300 ICU beds approximately," Zhang said.

"A significant increase in morbidity and mortality may be seen after the holidays as data-reporting were delayed during Christmas and New Year holidays," he said. "People have sort of virus fatigue

and they are easier to get infected when relaxed during gatherings and travels."

Stanley Perlman, professor of microbiology and immunology at the University of Iowa, told Xinhua on Friday that he also feared cases would increase after the holidays, "with a gradual slowdown in February and March."

Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, predicted on Thursday that normal life would not resume for most Americans until as late as next fall. "If we do it correctly, hopefully, as we get into the end of the summer, the beginning of the fall of 2021, we can start to approach some degree of normality," Fauci said in an interview on MSNBC. **Xinhua**

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US ELECTIONS

US Court dismisses govt suit to overturn certification of Joe Biden's win



WASHINGTON: A federal judge in the US state of Texas on Friday dismissed the suit filed by a group of Republican lawmakers seeking to prevent the parliament's certification of Joe Biden's victory in the presidential election at a meeting next week.

The initiative, led by Congressman Louie Gohmert and 11 electors from the Arizona state, argued that outgoing US Vice President Mike Pence should be the sole authority to determine which electoral votes should be taken into account by Congress when it meets to certify Biden's victory on January 6. According to court papers, Pence has refused to join the effort. "The problem for Plaintiffs here is that they lack standing," Judge Jer-

emy Kernodle said in the ruling, explaining that the standing is a crucial component of a court's jurisdiction and its lack in this case means that "the Court lacks subject matter jurisdiction over this case and must dismiss the action."

The lawmakers asked the court to cancel a 1887 law under which the vice president's role at the upcoming Congress meeting for the certification of president-elect's victory is merely ceremonial.

According to official results, Biden collected 306 electoral votes as opposed to 232 votes cast for incumbent US President Donald Trump. The latter has not recognized his defeat, but consented to launching the power transition. **ANI**

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Dry run for coronavirus vaccination conducted in India

This is the second round of dry run ‘drill’ after the same was conducted in Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Gujarat and Assam between December 23-29

GUWAHATI: A dry run for COVID-19 vaccine administration is being conducted on Saturday across all states and Union Territories of India.

This is the second round of dry run ‘drill’ after the same was conducted in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Gujarat and Assam between December 23-29, 2020. The dry run vaccination programme is being conducted at the Gauhati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) in Guwahati.

“We are doing a dry run where we have well-formulated every step right from the beneficiary list, bringing the vaccines in the proper way, how it is going to be stored and then how we are going to cross-



SECOND ROUND OF DRY RUN: The activity is proposed to be conducted in all state capitals in at least three session sites

check each beneficiary, how much time we are going to take in the entire process,” Dr Sthapna Sharma, Assistant professor at GMCH said.

The same process is being followed at Gandhi Shatabdi Hospital (GSH), Dehradun.

“Dry run is going on at five places in Dehradun. We have put 25 beneficiaries at one centre,” Gopal Ram Beniwal, Sub-Divisional Magistrate of Sadar Tehsil said.

The drill is being conducted at four more locations other than

GSH in the capital Dehradun - Bhaniawala, Raipur, Ranipokhari and Khurbura.

“We were kept waiting in a room after getting vaccinated. They asked us whether we feel any uneasiness. They also directed us to use masks and wash our hands properly,” said Anil Kumar Tamta who was vaccinated in the dry run process.

The beneficiaries were messaged a day before regarding the timings of the vaccination pro-

cess. Police checked their identity proofs and they were then taken for the vaccination.

Medical professionals are checking the blood pressure and sugar levels of the beneficiaries who were then given injections and put under observation.

All 30 districts of Odisha have also undergone a vaccine dry run in 31 different sites.

Dr LD Sahoo, Director of Capital Hospital in Bhubaneswar informed that 25 people, all frontline

workers, have been registered for the mock drill here.

“We will mimic the procedure of giving the vaccine shot. After that, the person will be kept in an observation room so that we can know if there is any immediate side-effect,” said Sahoo.

“The arrangement in the office is good for the dry run,” said Susmita Jena, a participant for the dry run.

Andhra Pradesh, too, conducted the mock drill in all 13 districts of the state. Officials had selected three locations in each district for the dry run. Eluru district, Asram medical college and Gopannapalem PHC of West Godavari district organised the dry run for the COVID-19 administration.

The exercise has already been carried out in the Krishna district on December 28, when the Union government selected four states for the dry run. Three centres are selected in this district for conducting the dry run.

Dry runs are being monitored by District Medical and Health Officer M Suhasini and Machilipatnam Revenue Divisional Officer (RDO) Khaja Vali here.

The vaccination drill was also carried out in Kerala as well. The state Health Minister KK Shailaja reviewed the dry run for COVID-19 at a government hospital in Thiruvananthapuram. “The mock drill is over here. Everything went smoothly. The exercise is being conducted in 4 districts,” Shailaja said.

According to Union Health Ministry, the objective of the dry run for COVID-19 vaccine introduction is to “assess operational feasibility in the use of COVID Vaccine Intelligence Network (Co-WIN) application in the field environment, to test the linkages between planning and implementation and to identify the challenges and guide the way forward prior to actual implementation”. This is also expected to give confidence to program managers at various levels, it said.

The activity is proposed to be conducted in all state capitals in at least three session sites. Some states will also include districts that are situated in difficult terrain or have poor logistical support. Maharashtra and Kerala are likely to schedule the dry run in major cities other than their capital.

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan had on Friday chaired a high-level meeting to review preparedness at session sites across the country for the COVID-19 vaccination trial run on Saturday and said just like preparations during elections, each member of medical teams should be trained responsibly.

The minister urged every official to ensure that the vaccination sites and officials in-charge abide by the detailed checklist and Standard Operating Protocols for vaccination that has been prepared by the Union Health Ministry. **ANI**

INSUFFICIENT SUPPLY

Experts slam Germany’s COVID vaccine procurement scheme

BERLIN: Experts and politicians slammed the German government on Saturday for failing to ensure a sufficient supply of vaccine doses ahead of the country’s coronavirus vaccination drive.

As a member of the EU vaccine procurement scheme, Germany is reliant on regulators at the European level granting authorization of the vaccine to prevent COVID-19 infection.

But the EU has taken longer than countries like the UK, US and Canada to give the go-ahead.

So far, only the BioNTech-Pfizer vaccine is permitted in EU member states, but the block as a whole only made an order for 300 million doses during the summer, in the belief that more vaccine alternatives would be available.

Frauke Zipp, a neurologist and member of the advisory Leopoldina Academy of Sciences, on Saturday slammed German lawmakers for their lack of foresight over vaccine procurement.

“I consider the current situation a gross failure,” she told a newspaper. “Why didn’t they order much more of the vaccine during the summer just to be safe?”

The BioNTech founders said on Friday that they were scrambling to boost production after being pressured to fill the gaps caused by the EU’s blunder.

Vaccination is a ‘race against time’

Luxembourg’s Foreign Minister, Jean Asselborn, defended the EU’s vaccine strategy on German radio broadcaster RBB, saying that the Commission had secured



COVID-19 VACCINE: So far, only the BioNTech-Pfizer vaccine is permitted in EU member states, but the block as a whole only made an order for 300 million doses during the summer.

almost two billion doses with six different manufacturers.

However, Karl Lauterbach, health expert for the socialist SPD, told the Rheinische Post newspaper that the failure by Brussels to buy more of the Moderna vaccine was “regrettable.”

“It was clear early on that the Moderna vaccine had a strong efficacy and could be used by GPs,” Lauterbach thinks it’s too late for the Moderna vaccine to play any major role in Germany’s short-term vaccination needs.

He also criticized the EU for not having ordered more BioNTech-Pfizer vaccines early on.

Bernd Riexinger, co-chair of the socialist Left Party,

called on Health Minister Jens Spahn directly to ensure the further production of BioNTech-Pfizer jabs.

He said given the spread of the new COVID-19 variant in the UK, “a successful vaccine strategy is also a race against time.”

Lockdown must not end too early

Chancellor Angela Merkel is due to meet with state premiers on Tuesday to discuss a probable extension of the current lockdown — which is set to end on January 10.

Ahead of those talks, Uwe Janssens, president of the German Interdisciplinary Association for Intensive Care and Emergency

Medicine, called for the government to rethink its plans.

He told the Rheinischer Post that tough curbs should remain in place, even if the government reaches its infection-rate goal of 50 per 100,000 people.

“We intensive care physicians strongly advise that no relaxation should be considered until the incidence value is below 25 new infections per 100,000 population per week,” Janssens said.

The current infection rate in Germany is 141.2 according to the Robert Koch Institute. However, this number varies hugely across the country, with some regions of Saxony recording rates of over 500. **DW**

NEW YEAR’S EVE



DR Congo rebels kill 25 farmers

KINSHASA: At least 25 people were killed on New Year’s Eve in a rebel attack in the Democratic Republic of Congo’s Beni territory in North Kivu province, local officials said Friday.

The killings occurred in the village of Tingwe, about 8 kilometres (5 miles) from the town of Eringeti. Local officials said farmers were working in their fields when they were attacked by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a militia that has killed hundreds of civilians over the past year.

Bravo Muhindo, a civil society representative, put the death toll at a minimum of 30, saying many were beheaded. An unknown number of others were kidnapped.

“People had gone to their fields to prepare for New Year’s Eve; the ADF picked them up one by one,” said Muhindo.

“We alerted our forces that the ADF had passed through from the east to the northeast of Eringeti.

They did not respond quickly,” he added.

Sabiti Njiamoja, the representative of the governor in the region, said, “We are in mourning.”

Fighting the ADF

The ADF began in neighboring Uganda in the 1990s. The group has been blamed for killing about 800 civilians last year in North Kivu province, which shares a border with Uganda.

The rebel group has never claimed responsibility for attacks. The local affiliate of the extremist “Islamic State” group has claimed some attacks that were carried out by the ADF, but the relationship between the groups is not clear.

The ADF is just one of many militias operating in the DRC’s eastern provinces. Many of them were formed from the remnants of groups that fought in the country’s civil wars in the late 1990s and early 2000s. **DW**

RESTRICTIONS

France tightens curfew in 15 regions as infections stay high

PARIS: Paris on Friday said an existing night time curfew would start two hours earlier in much of the country.

In 15 of France’s 101 departments from Saturday, exit restrictions will start at 6 p.m. instead of 8 p.m.

Most of the affected areas are in the east of the country. They include the Les Alpes-Maritimes department, where the Mediterranean city of Nice is situated. The capital, Paris, will not be affected.

Government spokesman Gabriel Attal told TF1 television that the earlier curfew could be extended to other departments if



NEW RESTRICTIONS: In 15 of France’s 101 departments from Saturday, exit restrictions will start at 6 p.m. instead of 8 p.m.

the situation deteriorated. He did not rule out another lockdown, of which France has already seen two nationwide. The tightened curfew comes as France’s tally of overall coronavirus cases stands at 2,620,425 — the highest in western Europe and the fifth-highest in the world. The death toll is 64,632.

The move comes as mayors in the various regions report that their local health infrastructure is being overwhelmed as new cases continue to be detected.

Slow off the mark with vaccination

Attal also defended the pace of

France’s vaccine rollout. According to TF1, France has seen just 332 people receive the jab since the campaign began last weekend. That compares with more than 130,000 in neighboring Germany.

“We are not going to judge a vaccination campaign that will last six months in just a few days,” he said, pointing out that French authorities were currently concentrating on care homes for the elderly, where the process was more time-consuming.

Despite the curfew rules, some 2,500 people attended a New Year rave in Lieuron in the Brittany region. **DW**

RBI'S SALE, PURCHASE

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will conduct simultaneous purchase and sale of government securities under open market operations (OMOs) for Rs 10,000 crore each on January 7.

MARKET

BUSINESS & FINANCE



FLYING IN 2021

Hardly any other sector was as hard-hit by the coronavirus pandemic as aviation. But COVID-19 also brought unexpected opportunities for an industry seemingly in peril.

MSM index falls despite marginal recovery towards end of the year

The trends remained largely positive for the rest of the year but the consecutive declines in September-2020 and October-2020 resulted in an 8.1 per cent decline by the end of the year with the index closing at 3,658.8 points

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The declining streak in Muscat Securities Market (MSM) continued during 2020 as the MSM 30 index declined for the fourth consecutive year despite seeing marginal recovery towards the end of the year, according to a new report.

“The index started the year on a positive note with consecutive gains during the first two months. However, the COVID-19 led decline during March-2020 pushed the index down 16.5 per cent during the month,” the Kuwait-based Kamco Invest said in its latest report.

The trends remained largely positive for the rest of the year but



LATEST REPORT: The index started the year on a positive note with consecutive gains during the first two months. However, the COVID-19 led decline during March-2020 pushed the index down 16.5 per cent during the month- **File photo**

the consecutive declines in September-2020 and October-2020 resulted in an 8.1 per cent decline by the end of the year with the index closing at 3,658.8 points, Investment, Strategy and Research firm added.

The sectoral index performance was mixed during the year. The Services index once again witnessed the steepest decline

among the three indices after falling by 16.1 per cent during the year followed by the Industrial index with a decline of 11.0 per cent. These declines were partially offset by 2.1 per cent gains for the financial index.

Total equity market cap for the exchange stood at OMR6.43 billion at the end of 2020 as compared to OMR 6.6 billion in 2019, register-

ing a decline of 2.4 per cent. Share performance for the regular market was heavily skewed towards decliners that included 11 stocks as compared to 6 gainers during the year.

Trading activity continued to decline for the fourth consecutive year and was across the markets including regular and parallel market stocks. Total value traded dur-

ing the year declined by 39.4 per cent to reach OMR400.7 million in 2020 as compared to OMR662 million in 2019. Volume traded also declined during the year but at a slightly higher rate of 40.9 per cent to reach 2.3 billion shares as compared to 3.9 billion shares during 2019. The share of Regular Market stocks in terms of total value traded increased in 2020 to 60.3 per cent as compared to 56.6 per cent in 2019.

In terms of the type of investors, Omani's were net buyers during the year and reported an even higher share of the total value of buy trades at 78.7 per cent in 2020 as compared to a share of 64.5 per cent in 2019. On the other hand, the share of GCC investors in the value of buy trades declined from 26.7 per cent in 2019 to 12.4 per cent in 2020, the Kamco Invest report said.

GCC equity markets

GCC equity markets underperformed their global peers and witnessed mixed performances across individual stock exchanges in the region. The aggregate MSCI GCC index reported a yearly decline for the first time in five years and was affected by twin dilemmas during the year, the Kamco Invest report said.

On one hand, governments had to impose COVID-19 restrictions that resulted in one of the most severe impacts on the economic front with an expected 2.7 per cent decline in gross domestic product (GDP) rates for the GCC region, as per the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

On the other hand, the decline in demand for crude oil, the biggest revenue source for the GCC gov-

ernments, resulted in the historic slide in prices to reach a three-decade low at its lowest point in the year. Volatility in the GCC equity market was the highest in four years with 49 days when the markets moved more than one per cent during the year as compared to 37 days in 2019. Almost all the markets in the GCC were in the red in terms of year-to-date (YTD) returns for the bulk of the year and recovered only during the fourth quarter of 2020.

Saudi Arabia recorded the best equity market performance during the year reporting gains for the fifth consecutive year at 3.6 per cent.

On the other hand, Kuwait, which was the best performing market in 2019, reported the biggest decline as investors booked profits after last year's gains that was led by the announcement of the MSCI EM inclusion.

The movement in oil prices during the year was especially reflected in the performance of the Saudi market, in addition to a passive impact on other markets in the region.

Decline in oil revenues

The decline in oil revenues resulted in fiscal pressure on GCC governments and the additional spending associated with COVID-19 resulted in record deficits.

Debt issuance in the region was at a record high as well. Also, the culmination of fiscal pressure and over-dependence on oil resulted in downgrades of four out of six sovereigns in the region.

In terms of sector performance, more sectors in the GCC witnessed gained during the year, however, a decline in large-cap sectors more than offset these gains.

QUALITY PRODUCTS

National Cable Factory plans to explore foreign markets soon: CEO



ANNUAL PRODUCTION: National Cable Factory annual production volume amounted to 10,000 tonnes of all types of electrical cables.

- Supplied photo

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Despite the circumstances posed by COVID-19, National Cable Factory – a factory based at Raysut Industrial City, has continued its production and promotional campaign in the local market and is manufacturing today high quality electrical and flexible cables to meet the needs of the Sultanate's market.

With high efficiency and excellent quality of products, the factory plans to explore foreign markets in the near future to promote these products overseas, informed Nayef bin Hamid Fadel, CEO of National Cable Factory.

Nayef bin Hamid Fadel stated that the company was established in 2013 and began production in 2018 to contribute to promoting the country's industrial development through its products and providing direct and indirect job opportunities for the nationals.

“The company's annual production volume has amounted to 10,000 tonnes of all types of electrical cables. Besides, the company has introduced new production lines in correspondence to the requirements of a fast-moving market,” Nayef Fadel stated.

The CEO of National Cable Factory emphasised that the company pays great attention to providing

job and training opportunities for the national cadres.

“The National Cable Factory, in cooperation with the Technical and Administrative Training Institute, which is supervised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, will train a number of diploma holders as part of training for employment,” he said, adding, “The management of National Cable Factory is committed to supporting Omanisation and employment of jobseekers.

“The Omanisation plan of the company depends on the vacant and targeted jobs, the status of the economy and the obligations arising from the situation.”



Nayef bin Hamid Fadel, CEO of National Cable Factory

NEW SURVEY

Majority of Mena region professionals will spend more time looking for remote jobs in 2021

Times News Service

MUSCAT: A new survey by Bayt.com, the Middle East's #1 job site, spotlights the career goals Mena professionals will focus on in 2021.

The 2021 New Year's Resolutions Poll reveals that a majority of Mena professionals (80 per cent) feel positive about 2021 and 74 per cent of the survey respondents have made resolutions for the new year.

Whilst looking for new jobs in 2021, prospective candidates will focus on key attributes including career growth opportunities (38 per cent), flexible work arrangements (25 per cent), competitive salaries (14 per cent), work-life balance (14 per cent) and a reputable company brand (8 per cent). A whopping 81 per cent will spend more time looking for remote jobs in 2021, using online job sites (77 per cent), company websites (10 per cent), social media (7 per cent) and virtual job fairs (2 per cent).

Most respondents are optimistic about their ability to stick to their resolutions. More than two in five of those who made New Year's resolutions for 2020 (41 per cent) said they have achieved all of them and 33 per cent achieved some of their resolutions for the year. Furthermore, 78 per cent of survey respondents complete their New Year's resolutions with careful planning and hard work while 16 per cent do it by going with the flow and trying different options. Only 7 per cent of professionals don't normally complete their New Year's resolutions.

Although 70 per cent of respondents are satisfied with their career growth during the past year, finding a new job emerges as the top career-related resolution for 75 per cent of respondents,

followed by improving skills and productivity (15 per cent) and getting a promotion or a salary raise (8 per cent).

Survey respondents also highlighted expectations they have of Mena employers – which include more training and learning resources (56 per cent), offering more rewards and benefits (19 per cent), providing more feedback and support (11 per cent) and being more flexible with timing (7 per cent).

“Career-related New Year's resolutions are popular among MENA professionals who aim to improve their career prospects in the coming year,” said Ola Haddad, Director of Human Resources at Bayt.com. “Our research shows that getting a new job is amongst professionals' top New Year's resolutions and many professionals will begin 2021 with great aspirations. To attract and retain talent, employers will need to meet workers' career expectations and provide the perks, work-life balance and career advancement opportunities they demand.”

One way to achieve professional goals at work is through an appraisal, which allows employees to discuss their performance, identify strengths and weaknesses, discover what their ambitions are and work on how to get there. A majority of respondents (63 per cent) have year-end appraisals at their company while only 21 per cent don't. Appraisals offer an opportunity to build professionals' career and perhaps lead to a pay increase.

Data for the 2021 New Year's Resolutions Poll was collected online from October 28 to December 20, 2020. Results are based on a sample of 4,062 respondents from the following countries: UAE, KSA, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Palestine, Syria and others.

MARKET

DESIGN, PROCUREMENT



TWO ORDERS: L&T has won two transmission line packages in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and an EPC order in the state of Gujarat in India. - Supplied picture

L&T Construction awarded contracts for its various businesses

DUBAI: The construction arm of L&T has secured orders from prestigious clients for two of its businesses.

Power transmission and distribution business
L&T's power transmission and distribution business has won two transmission line packages in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia involving design, procurement and construction of 380kV double circuit overhead transmission line corridors for a length of more than 650 KM. These lines are expected to strengthen the grid in the Eastern Region of Saudi Arabia and facilitate power evacuation.

Water and treatment business
The water and effluent treatment business has secured an EPC order in the state of Gujarat to execute a package in the SAUNI Yojna Link 3.

Saurashtra Narmada Avtaran Irrigation (SAUNI) is a project launched by the government to fill various reservoirs by diverting floodwaters overflowing from the Sardar Sarovar Dam across the Narmada river to drought areas in Gujarat. The project involves survey, design, procurement, laying and jointing of 2500 mm diameter MS pipeline. L&T has already completed 4 packages in the Sauni Yojana for the same client.

Larsen & Toubro is an Indian multinational engaged in engineering, procurement and construction projects, manufacturing, defence and services with over \$21 billion in revenue. It operates in over 30 countries worldwide. A strong, customer-focused approach and the constant quest for top-class quality have enabled L&T to attain and sustain leadership in its major lines of business for eight decades.

Flying in 2021: It can only get better

Hardly any other sector was as hard-hit by the coronavirus pandemic as aviation

BERLIN: There are some unexpected success stories in a year that IATA Director General Alexandre de Juniac branded an "annus horribilis" for aviation and even this characterisation might be an understatement. But one has to look for these small hints of hope amid widespread desperation.

For example, Dubai-based Emirates Airlines, one of the grand industry players, was no stranger to success and always in expansion mode. Not so in 2020: For months on end, there were no flights or just a fraction of normal operations. That's something that would have been impossible to imagine only months before. It's been a year like no other.

"In the passenger business, we are now just at 18 per cent of revenues we had last year," Emirates President Sir Tim Clark told DW.

But even that isn't a cause for desperation. Emirates has found other business opportunities, like air cargo. Traditionally, selling cargo space in the bellies of passenger airlines was a kind of add-on. This year, with far fewer flights operating, cargo capacity dried up too.

Looking on the bright side
Many other established supply chains were also disrupted due to the pandemic, prompting Emirates — and many others — to start removing economy class seats from their aircraft to transport cargo.



UNEXPECTED OPPORTUNITIES: COVID also brought unexpected opportunities for an industry seemingly in peril. - dw

"Our cargo revenues have gone through the roof," said Clark. "We exceeded revenues from last year when the entire fleet was flying."

"At some point, about 80 per cent of our revenue was cargo, although passenger numbers are starting to come back again. But cargo is really what is keeping us going," the long-serving head of Emirates explained. In addition, cargo makes up about 60 per cent of total revenues compared to just 10 per cent last year.

One example Clark gave was of a US car manufacturer whose tires were normally manufactured in Thailand. As production was shut due to the pandemic, the company chartered an Airbus A380 from Emirates to fly 40 tons of unprocessed rubber from Bangkok to Atlanta.

"We are getting some very bizarre requests for bespoke cargo operations," he told DW. "It is highly lucrative because they are paying top dollar for it, and it was worth it for us to fly an A380 all that distance."

Back to the billions
When the pandemic first struck,

the raison d'être for aviation disappeared almost overnight and came right after a record year in 2019. This year, airlines have carried barely a third of last year's 4.5 billion passengers. The industry is still reeling from €100 billion (\$122 billion) in losses, according to International Air Transport Association (IATA), an airline lobby group.

Ask any airline CEO for their predictions for 2021 and you will receive answers of cautious optimism. "2021 will be a better year," said IATA boss Alexandre de Juniac. The industry association predicts losses of just 40 per cent of 2020 figures.

"I am sure we will see a significant upturn in the course of next year," Lufthansa CEO Carsten Spohr told Germany's Wirtschaftswoche magazine. He believes his airline will achieve half of 2019's passenger levels next year and maybe up to 70 per cent in the summer.

Tourists in the driver's seat
Martin Gauss, German CEO of Latvia's flag carrier Air Baltic, is also anticipating a better year. "I believe our industry will bounce

back in March, depending on restrictions that may still remain," he told DW. "It [recovery] will begin in short-haul because there is a big pent-up demand."

Leisure travellers are expected to be the main driver of demand, while the number of business travellers will be significantly lower.

The consultancy Idea Works predicts that in the best case, 19 per cent of former business travel demand will permanently disappear. In the worst case, it could reach 36 per cent. This would pose a fundamental problem for the airline sector, which has made a comfortable living off coveted full-fare passengers, enabling it to subsidise other, cheaper fares.

Spohr has a less dramatic prediction. He estimates the permanent loss of business travellers will come out at between 10 per cent and 20 per cent, predicting a 75 per cent to 80 per cent market share for leisure travellers.

As the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to endure, even with successful vaccine programmes, industry insiders say it will be crucial to establish common rules for air travel. - dw

RESERVE BANK OF INDIA

RBI to conduct simultaneous purchase and sale of government securities on January 7

MUMBAI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will conduct simultaneous purchase and sale of government securities under open market operations (OMOs) for Rs 10,000 crore each on January 7. The decision was taken after a review of current liquidity and financial conditions, the RBI said in a statement.

Eligible participants should submit their bids in electronic format on RBI's core banking solution (E-Kuber) system between 10 and 11 am on January 7. The result will be announced on the same day and successful participants should ensure availability of the requisite amount of securities in their current

account or subsidiary general ledger (SGL) account by noon on January 8.

With the heightening of Covid-19 pandemic risks, certain financial market segments have been experiencing a tightening of financial conditions as reflected in the hardening of yields and widening of spreads. - ANI

ECONOMY

Economic uncertainty eases in Brazil in December

RIO DE JANEIRO: Uncertainty about the Brazilian economy eased in December, but still above the level in February before the COVID-19 outbreak, said a leading economic think tank.

The Getulio Vargas Foundation (FGV) said that its Economic Uncertainty Indicator fell 3.5 points to 142.3 this month from November, but is still 27.2 points above the level in February.

"After the increase of the previous month, the indicator that measures Brazilian uncertainty fell again in December, influenced by the start of vaccination in several countries and rise in expectations, although still modest, about the possibility of economic and social recovery in the coming months," the FGV said in a report.

"The year 2020 ends at a level higher than 140 points, a level that is still quite unfavourable, which reflects the uncertainty surrounding a decline in health in Brazil and the problematic vaccination scenario in the country," the think tank said.

There are no short-term signs that indicate uncertainty will return to more satisfactory levels, "due to the enormous challenges that Brazil still needs to face in a variety of issues," it said. - Xinhua

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architdesign2020@gmail.com

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Contact 92148608 /
soji_ansu@yahoo.com

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Contact 97264447

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Email: stm.crg@gmail.com

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Contact: winnerdandd@gmail.com
Mobile/WhatsApp 95150850, 79163390

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Email: muhdfahiz007@gmail.com

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Contact No. 99757759

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Contact: 99137115
Email: adimurali7@gmail.com

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Contact: 78235621/bsda@ymail.com

Smart Indian, excellent English, Research & Technical Writing Skills, Double Masters (Finance, Journalism & Mass Communication), Arabic Speaker, 17years Oman experience in Airport Project, Hospital, Media, EPC seeks role in Admin/HR/Projects/Corporate & Marketing Communications/Operations/Customer Relations/Role in Chairman/CEO Office. Immediate joining. NOC.

99283938 / rajansampath@hotmail.com

FINANCE

Indian, Group-Finance Manager, 19 years' world class experience in Strategic planning, Finance, Accounting etc. Multiple Professional qualifications in Accounting and audit. Looking for Top/Senior management position in finance/ internal audit. Available to join shortly.

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GSM: 95491377, psjanesh@gmail.com

GM / NSM / Head Of Sales

Male 49 – Proven Business Manager with exceptional sales management skills. Chartered Institute of Marketing - UK, MBA in Marketing,15+ years of FMCG sales & business management experience in GCC & OMAN. NOC/DL available.

Email: sljobseeker72@gmail.com
Contact: 96223114

I T

BCA Graduate looking for placement in suitable IT company, having Oman Driving License. Presently on family joining visa.

Contact on 93339660 for further details

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Interested please Contact 94022634

JOB WANTED

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Indian Male 43.y.o seeking a suitable opportunity in Admin/Mktg/Ops Noc & D/L available. PH. 98274545

Indian male with 21 years' experience in Oman seeks job for HR/Admin. Contact 95425764

Indian male, 13yrs Oman Experience in Stores, Purchase, Operation, Admin. D/L.Immediate joining, # 78363835

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Email: pramoda.online@gmail.com

Indian Male seeking Admin/HR Job having 23 years of experience in Oman with Valid DL and NOC available - Contact: 99578192

Indian female with 10 yrs experience in payroll, executive secretarial,general admin/HR with valid D/L,looking for suitable placement. Contact 96441865. Email reeteequ1779@gmail.com

Omani Male 35 yrs old, looking for a PRO job. Has experience 14 yrs in the same field. Contact 92049106, 95422144

Indian Female 10 years' experience in Muscat, for the post of Sales Coordinator, Secretary or Office cum Commercial Assistant. Contact 94048550, 95431427. E-mail: bmnair27@yahoo.com

Indian Male, MBA,BCOM having 6 years Gulf & 4 years India experience in HR / ADMIN & Purchase looking for suitable placement. Contact 97914340, 92369044. Email: sampathrajkv@gmail.com

Indian female 29. Experience in telemarketing/secretarial/office admin work. On family visa. Ready to join ASAP. Muscat. 93605361

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Looking for driving job. Contact 96312087

Driver with Car. Contact 94087980

Looking for driving job with Car. 6 yrs experience. Contact 96176918

Looking for job in driving, with 5 yrs experience. Contact 96189448

Driver need job with own Car. Contact 94087980

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Indian Post Graduate with 21 years experience in Oracle SQL, PL/SQL, Forms, Reports, DBA, IT Manager, Orion ERP, Sage ERP with Accounts Knowledge and NOC. Contact 95398567 / 78141598 / anas2k@gmail.com

IT sales and support. 5 years experience with IT network and hardware. BSc. Networking, Oman D/L. Contact 97060076

Web developer, 22, Indian, BSc (Hons.) IT, UK. 1yr exp in various software projects (including PHP,NodeJS,ReactJS). Seeking a suitable job. Currently in Oman. Contact: 79371798

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IT Administrator, Indian Male Looking for Job. 12years of Exp.in Oman with D/L. CCNA Certified Work Exp. in POS system, CCTV, IT Network. 95059065 / 95147348 / jaxonnj@gmail.com

MEDICAL

Indian Male 43.y.o seeking a suitable opportunity in medical centers for Admin/Mktg/Ops.Noc & D/L available. Contact 98274545

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Site and Planning Coordinator -12+ years Oman exp - Oil and Gas sector-knowledge of PDO rules and specifications, - work experience with large projects, multi-cultural teams, and MS Office. Contact - moinuddins18@yahoo.com / 0091-7032030093.

Indian Female Structural Engineer (B-Tech Civil), 18 Years Gulf Experience is seeking for suitable placement. Having valid visa and driving license. Ready to join Immediately with necessary documents. Contact: 79858363.

Indian Civil QA/QC Engineer, Inspector (BE Civil, PDO approved, QMS Auditor, Oman Driving licence, NOC) with 10 years of experience looking for new job. 96359447, +919901059827

Facility engineer. (BE) 12 years exper. in electrical or maint.engineer field, invalid Oman DL. Seeking facility or maint.engineer job. Contact 94493654 or syamsk2255@gmail.com

M/48, PM Civil Engineer, Indian 28 yrs exp (18 yrs in Oman) with consultants/client seeks placement. contact 92370274

Senior Planner for Infra projects highway and buildings (B.Tech.Civil with 17 yrs Exp) Immediate join.local transfer -NOC. Contact : 91170802. Email: vvrmtammu@gmail.com

Sri Lanka male QS Having 6 years Experience and looking for a suitable job in Oman and ready to join Immediately contact 79473123

Electrical engineer, experience 12 year in Oman. Contact 98148034

B.Tech Civil Engineer with 10+ yrs experience valid Oman DL, looking for suitable position. Available for immediate join. Noc available. Contact 79023001

Project/Civil engineer with 8 yrs experience in construction projects, gulf experience & DL available. Contact 97906770

Looking for a job for the post of Electrical Engineer with B.Tech and 15 years exp in Oman. NOC and Release available. Contact 92254336. Email ameen1667@gmail.com

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Email haleemkply@gmail.com

Indian Sales/Marketing manager selling of Constructional,building material products with 14 yrs experience in Oman with DL,looking job. Contact 95952066

Indian male, bachelor's degree seeks job in Sales, customer service,administration.12 yrs experience in Oman with Oman DL.Contact 97268429 dinojthomas@gmail.com

23 yrs old indian male experience in sales & logistics seeking for suitable job opporunities. #79964123. Email raheelrahman123@gmail.com

Indian male B.com graduate, PG Diploma in logistic (Air cargo and supply chain management) & Digital Marketing. Valid Oman DL. Looking for suitable placement.: 79748272
Email: shazil.sadique@gmail.com



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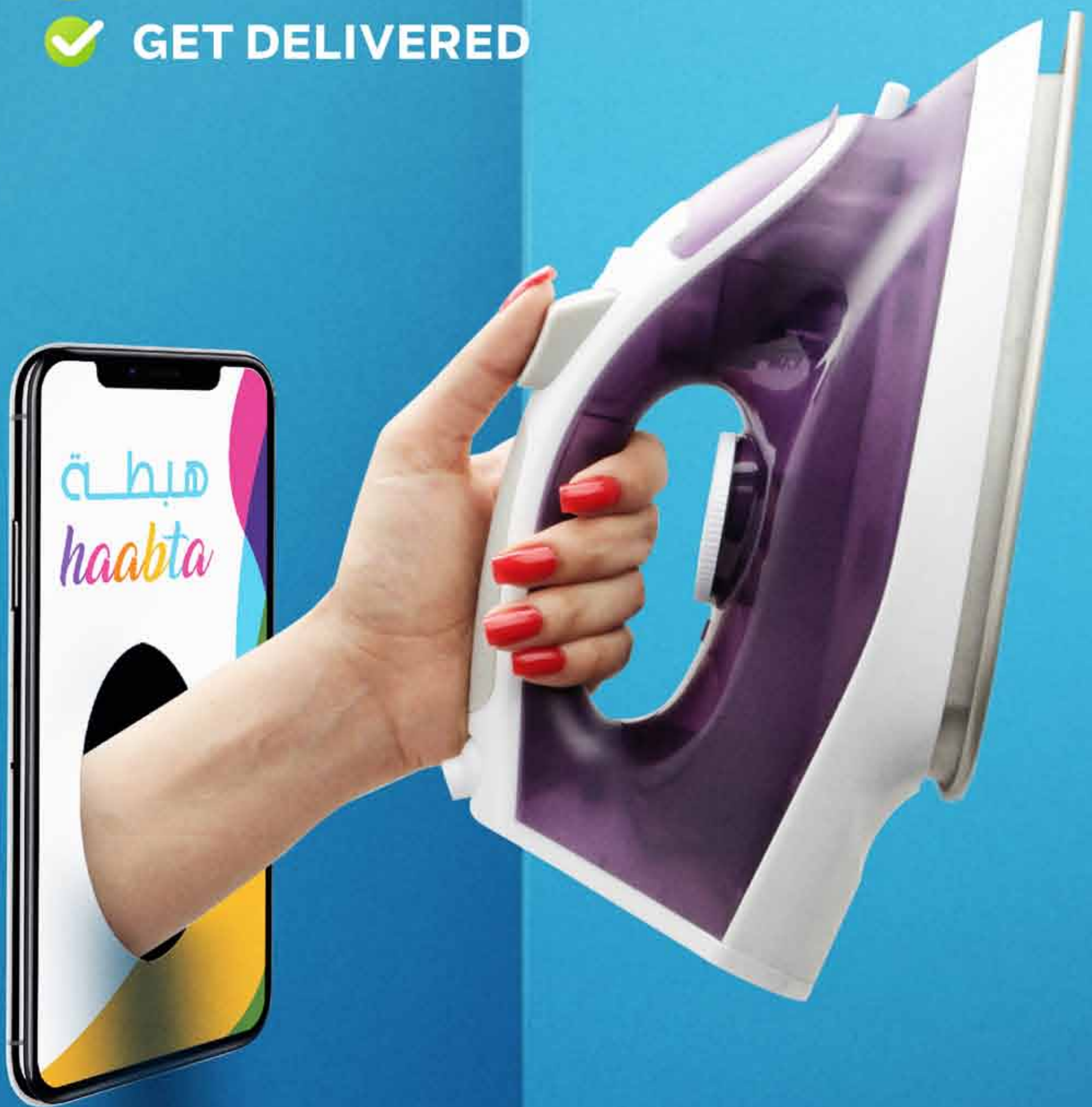
Diploma civil Indian male 26 yrs 5 yrs oman exp, NOC ready, sales/procurement/stores. E.mail vijju.asp7777@gmail.com, GSM/WA 00918712330030

Senior Procurement Engineer, M.tech-Civil, Looking for a job, NOC Available, Immediate Joining, Indian Male, 38yrs, have over 16+ years UAE& Oman experience. E. syed-kamaalsaba@yahoo.com, Watsapp +96871144578, GSM +917766019519

Indian/Male(29)/MBA/6 years' experience in procurement and sales coordination with valid Oman D/L. Available for immediate joining. Contact: 92536194

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Only four days remain before 2021 Green Sports’ registration closes

The new registration process is user-friendly and can be easily done using a computer, a tablet or even a mobile phone

MUSCAT: While Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, continues to inaugurate more new fields as part of the Green Sports programme to teams across the various governorates, only four days remain until the deadline for receiving new registration applications for the year 2021 as the opportunity is still available to all.

Eligible teams to submit their requests no later than January 6. Applications are being accepted online at <https://www.bankmuscat.com/greensports>.

The new registration process is user-friendly and can be easily done using a computer, a tablet or even a mobile phone. It is noteworthy that 15 Sports Teams will benefit from the support in 2021, thus the Green Sports programme will continue to achieve successes and achievements in the field of social responsibility and sustainability.

The criteria for availing the Green Sports support include



that sports teams should have been in existence for at least three years and have a minimum of 300 members. Teams should be able to provide documents including the Mulkiya of the land on which the sports field is situated, the team’s latest income statement and a letter from their wali. Also, the dimensions of the sports field should be as per Fifa approved standards to be considered. Teams should also showcase their positive impact and contributions to the local community along with the application. Please email GreenSports@bankmuscat.com for any further queries regarding Green Sports applications.

The Green Sports initiative launched by Bank Muscat in 2012 continues to gain momentum with a total of 100 fields inaugurated so far, and the number of sports teams benefiting from the programme until this year reached 123 teams across different governorates.

The scope of Green Sports support for sports teams include greening of football fields with natural or synthetic turf, floodlights or water desalination equipment in areas facing problems of water salinity. Ensuring wider representation, the Green Sports programme extends to develop sustainable sports infrastructure in all parts of the Sultanate.

The bank’s flagship CSR programme aims to provide avenues to Omani youth to excel in all arenas and thereby contribute to the overall development and progress of the Sultanate. The facilities developed as part of the programme can also be used as a venue for other social activities, leading to stronger community bonding and greater positive behaviour among young people.

It must be noted that the bank’s CSR and sustainability programmes have been well appreciated and received a number of accolades. The bank was recently honoured for its CSR, Sustainability and Community Service programmes at the Fourth Oman Forum for Partnership and Social Responsibility.

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Omantel, Ministry of Education conclude Olympics for Coding

The Olympics aims to increase youth awareness of the importance of technology in development and digital innovation

MUSCAT: Omantel, the leading telecommunication services provider in the Sultanate, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, has recently concluded the second version of Omantel Olympics for Coding, which was held, online this year due to COVID-19 pandemic, during December 28-29 for the qualified students from previous stages of the competition.

The Omantel Olympics for Coding awards went to Yasin Ahsan Uganeh from Hafs bin Rashid School in Muscat Governorate, Said bin Saud bin Sulaiman Al Qasabi from Balarab bin Sultan School, Dkhaliya Governorate, Mohamed bin Abdulhamid bin Hamed Al Hinai from Saleh bin AL Mutawkel School in Dhakhliya Governorate, Ghaith Mohamed Abdulwahab from Sheikh Nasser bin Rashid Al Kharusi School in Muscat Governorate, Abdulmalik bin Sulaiman bin Salim Al Lamki from Moosa bin Nasir School for basic education in Muscat Governorate, Moanis bin Hilal Al Khusaibi from Shujaa bin Wahab School in Muscat Governorate, Ghaida bint Salim bin Sulaiman Al Kindi from Hail Al Awamer School for basic education in Muscat Governorate, Mohamed bin Hasan bin Abdullah Al Ajmi from Ibn AL Nafis School in Muscat Governorate, Ahmed bin Ibrahim bin Yahya



Al Abri from Abu Said Al Kudmi School in Dakhiliyah Governorate, Elaph bint Ahmed bin Khalfan Al Shidi from Saham School for Girls in Al Batinah North Governorate.

Omantel Olympics for Coding aims at building a generation of talented students by enabling them to understand the general

foundations of software and information technology.

The Olympics also aimed at enabling students to keep pace with the rapidly developing IT systems, enhancing the educational process in the Sultanate, and creating a conducive environment for innovation and creativity.

The Omantel Olympics for Coding is based on the procedural coding which serves as an introduction to the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, cloud computing, Internet of things (IoT), big data among others. Several students have in fact

already qualified to participate in the international competitions.

Laila Mohammad Al Wahaibi, Manager of Corporate Social Responsibility at Omantel, indicated that Omantel Olympics for Coding is one of the most important CSR initiatives of Omantel saying, "The objective of the Olympics is to raise the technical capabilities of Omani youth and enable them to participate and contribute to the digital transformation process in the Sultanate during the next stage. It also aims to increase awareness of the importance of technology in the development and innovation journey in Oman, as well as encourage students to benefit from the digital world."

"Moreover, the competition is one of the means to discover talented students who will together form a national team that can participate in international coding competitions," she added.

"We are working at Omantel to harness technology with the aim to serve the community and to cultivate digital knowledge in the new generation, by developing the level of skills and knowledge they have acquired, assessing their readiness to deal with various technological advancements and the Internet of Things.

"Such initiatives enable our students to use these technologies more efficiently and prepare them to be in line with rapid technological developments," she furthered.

On her part, Maya Said Al-Azaria, Director of the Innovation and Scientific Olympics Directorate at the Ministry of Education, emphasised the role Omantel played in the success of this edition of the Olympics, at which a group of students representing various schools of the Sultanate took part.

"Due to the Corona pandemic, this year's edition was implemented virtually, which had a great impact on emphasising the importance of employing technology and programming in all

aspects of life," she added.

"Omantel is a major partner with the Ministry of Education in several programs, especially those related to technology. Omantel serves as a role model for other companies in the field of CSR programmes as it invests heavily in youth development.

"Omantel initiatives complement the role of the Ministry of Education in enhancing students' experiences by allowing them to participate in international programmes and competitions that help them share their experiences with others, in addition to refining their skills and digital knowledge at the same time. Such initiatives support the Sultanate's digital transformation efforts by creating a generation capable of embracing innovation, development and employment of technology in various aspects of life."

Hilal bin Khalfan Al-Khuzairi, Head of the Scientific Competitions Department at the Ministry of Education pointed out that coding competitions help us discover talented students who are passionate about IT and 4IR technologies. He noted that the competition electronic platform provided by the Coding Academy helped us to follow the results of the students' solutions live.

"Our participation in international competitions gave us insights on how to manage and implement such competitions electronically and provided in-depth details of all competition centres."

Omantel is the Sultanate's first and leading integrated telecommunications services provider, enabling the digital society to flourish, allowing new ways of doing business and delivering a world of information, news and entertainment.

While seeking to get optimum customer satisfaction, Omantel plays a key social role to provide the required support and subsidy to all sectors of the Omani society.

RECOGNITION

BankDhofar receives 'Banking Group Brand of Year Oman 2020' award

MUSCAT: In recognition of its position as one of the solid financial institution in the Sultanate for the past 3 decades, BankDhofar received 'Banking Group Brand of the Year Oman 2020' by Global Banking and Finance Awards.

On this achievement, Ahmed Said Al Ibrahim, Chief Operating Officer at BankDhofar said: "BankDhofar has played a crucial role, since its inception 30 years ago, in shaping the banking and financial landscape of the Sultanate, through strategic planning employing the best technologies, international processes and practices. Our contributions and efforts were recognised on locally, regionally and internationally. We are proud to be selected as the Banking Group Brand of the Year Oman, by Global Banking and Finance Awards."

Established in 1990, BankDhofar has grown to be the second-largest bank in Oman, operating as a key financial advisory and strategic investment partner to various key government and private institutions. As part of its strategic growth vision and to set an example for best banking practices in the region, BankDhofar has implemented major programmes within its organisational transformation journey, laying out a solid infrastructure to get ready for its next phase of business growth and development.

BankDhofar has set the foundation



and infrastructure for further digitisation. It has also launched a flagship drive-thru banking service for the first time in Oman, as well as a number of multifunction kiosks in selected outlets. The bank launched Cardless ATM Banking Services using the mobile app, the first service of its kind in the world, enabling customers to conduct ATM trans-

actions easily only by using their mobile numbers.

Going the extra mile, the bank offers a wide range of exclusive services that are available only through its award-winning app, including instant transfer to any bank in the Sultanate, cardless cash, a mobile top-up for all telecom providers in Oman, increasing withdrawal limit to OMR

5,000, instant international money transfer service via Western Union for customers and non-customers, among other services.

The Global Banking and Finance Review Awards were created to recognise companies of all sizes that are prominent in particular areas of expertise and excellence within the global financial community. The awards

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We are proud to be selected as the Banking Group Brand of the Year Oman, by Global Banking and Finance Awards

Ahmed Said Al Ibrahim
Chief Operating Officer at BankDhofar



are known throughout the global banking and financial community. They reflect the innovation, achievement, strategy, progressive and inspirational changes taking place within the financial sector.

This award adds to the accolades received by BankDhofar locally, regionally, and internationally. The Bank has been awarded numerous accolades, including; "Three Decades of Excellence in Banking" at Oman Banking & Finance Awards "Best Business and Corporate Banking Oman 2020", "Best Investment Banking Brand, Oman 2019", "Best Customer Experience Transformation Strategy Award" by Customer Experience Middle East Awards, "Customer Delight

Awards" by MENAA Awards, "Infosys Finacle Client Innovation Award" 2019 by the Infosys Finacle Awards, "Best Digital Transformation in Banking Award" by Smart SMB Summit and Awards, "Corporate and Investment Banking Awards" 2019, "Corporate and Investment Bank of the Year" Oman by the ABF, "Wide BPM Rollout by Newgen Software", "Best Corporate Advisory - Oman 2019" award by Global Business Awards Best Enterprise-, "Most Successful Companies in Oman Award" by Forbes Middle East, "Best Customer Service Banking Brand 2018" - Oman by Global Brands Magazine Awards, among other awards.

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