

RNO marks Armed Forces Day

The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) on Tuesday marked the Armed Forces Day, which falls on 11 December every year and the Retirees Day, which falls on 17 December every year. The ceremony was held at the military parade ground in Said Bin Sultan Naval Base under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Head of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-Up Unit. **SEE P3**



P12

SEMI-FINAL SUMMIT FOR REGIONAL RIVALS AND CONTINENTAL CHAMPIONS



P13

OMANI GOV'T TO PROCURE FIRST PROJECT UNDER PPP LAW



P20

CALLIGRAPHY SURVIVES AND BECOMES MODERN WAY OF HEARING MUSIC WITH EYES



MUSCAT

MWASALAT LAUNCHES SMART TRANSPORT

Mwasalat, the public transport company of the Sultanate of Oman, on Tuesday launched the smart transportation system, aimed at improving efficiency and providing smart services to all segments of society. Speaking at the launch event, Eng Khamis bin Mohammed bin Abdullah al Shamakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, said: “This system is the first of its kind in the region and will serve to advance mass transport in the country, as per the logistics strategy and the objectives of the Oman Vision 2040.” **SEE P3**

WASHINGTON

COVID PILL REDUCES SEVERE DISEASE: PFIZER

Pfizer said on Tuesday that clinical trials confirmed its Covid pill, a new type of antiviral treatment that should withstand the mutations seen with Omicron, drastically reduced hospitalisations and deaths among at-risk people by almost 90 per cent. The announcement came as a real-world study from South Africa showed two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was 70 per cent effective in stopping severe illness from the new variant, a result called encouraging by researchers, though it represents a drop compared to earlier strains. **SEE P8**

Now get news on the go



WhatsApp

96473232

INSIDE



TUNISIA OPPOSITION CONDEMNS EXTENSION OF PARLIAMENT

P6



BELARUS OPPN LEADER TIKHANOVSKY JAILED

P8

GCC leaders vow deeper ties



RIYADH: Gulf leaders met in Riyadh on Tuesday for the 42nd Gulf Cooperation Council summit, which explored avenues for tighter cooperation and integration in the region. On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, headed the Sultanate of Oman's delegation at the summit. In its 150th preparatory session

for the summit, held in Riyadh on Monday by the Ministerial Council, the GCC states affirmed that “The GCC summit of bounty and prosperity will continue to achieve the common goals of member states.” Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who presided over the summit on behalf of King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, received the Omani delegation, headed by HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said.

HH Sayyid Fahd was also received by Dr Nayef Falah al Hajraf, GCC Secretary-General and Saif bin Nasser al Bada'ei, deputy head of the Sultanate of Oman's mission in Saudi Arabia. HH Sayyid Fahd said; “On the convening of the GCC 42nd Summit of GCC leaders in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, I am honoured to convey the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to his brethren, GCC leaders, along with His Majesty the Sultan's

best wishes to the leadership and people of KSA. “Since its foundation, the GCC has made many accomplishments in different fields. This reflects the member states' conviction in the importance of cooperation and collaboration to meet the aspirations of the GCC peoples. “The successive developments in the regional and international arenas have had their repercussions on the region's countries. This requires the

member states to exert more efforts and coordinate their stands to address the ensuing challenges and implications, so that they could focus on domestic development in a climate of security and stability.” The summit, which comes in the wake of the crown prince's tour of the Gulf states last week, and will lead discussions on collective security, regional conflicts and the region's development. **Photos by Mohamed al Rashdi**

New performance appraisal for government staff from January

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

@zainabalnassri

The ministry has so far had 565 trainers in building job plans in government institutions to achieve the goals of this system and raising the performance of employees

MOHAMMED AL KALBANI

Assistant Director-General

Starting from January, the Ministry of Labour (MoL) will roll out the Individual Performance Measurement and Institutional Proficiency System (Ejada), covering 175,000 employees and 57 civilian units in the state's administrative apparatus. The appraisal system which is in line with the Oman 2040 Vision, aims to improve the level of quality of services provided to citizens, enhance the community's confidence in government performance, in addition to clarifying the employee's duties and responsibilities. The details of Ejada were unveiled by MoL officials at a press conference in Muscat on Tuesday. Mohammad bin Al Waleed al Hinai, Director of the Individual Performance and Institutional Proficiency Project, said that the Ejada system combines 3 projects in one to measure “individual performance, annual plans, and institutional proficiency.” It is a system for human

capital governance, improving performance evaluation systems and linking productivity with incentives.” Al Hinai said that evaluation in the new system will be quarterly, as productivity will be measured based on the objectives and key results methodology. “The evaluation will be transparent, fair and those who excel will be rewarded.” Al Hinai said the cycle of the individual performance measurement system and

institutional proficiency pass through several stages, namely: “determining the annual goals of the unit or institution, setting goals for employees, direct supervision by managers, reviewing the results of the end-of-year evaluation for all employees and determining the employee's rank, approving and publishing the results of performance evaluation.” He said the new system will not punish under performing employees, but will work to raise their efficiency, develop their capabilities, and address the challenges facing them. Mohammed al Kalbani, Assistant Director-General for Development and Quality Assurance of Individual and Institutional Performance, said that there are many steps taken by the central team at the ministry to implement Ejada. “The ministry has so far had 565 trainers in building job plans in government institutions to achieve the goals of this system and raising the performance of employees” he said, explaining that 2,312 training workshops have been organised, benefiting more than 130,000 employees.

Home loans worth RO 13.5 m waived

STAFF REPORTER

Muscat, Dec 14

The Office of Majlis Ash'shura on Tuesday discussed the Minister of Housing and Urban Planning's response to Majlis Ash'shura's report about waiving home loan instalments of borrowers. In his response, the minister said that the Ministry had waived loans amounting RO 13.5 million for a total of 731 citizens. This came during the Office's fifth regular of the third annual sitting held under Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura, in the presence of the Council's Secretary-General and its members. The Office also discussed the proposal of amending the second item of the Unified System of Extending Insurance Protection to GCC Military Personnel. The members reviewed additionally the Minister of Labour's response to the request revolving around the issue of job seekers holding educational qualification degrees.

The meeting highlighted the requests submitted by the Office's members to the Minister of Education on the partnership between the ministry and the private sector, particularly the partnership existing between the ministry and the sector, justifications of any kind of changes and alternatives. At the regular meeting, the Office also discussed the request submitted to the Chairman of the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-Up Unit regarding the priority of education, learning scientific research and national capabilities in Oman Vision 2040. The Office also highlighted the report submitted to the Chairman of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) on legalising digital transactions in the Sultanate of Oman and discussed the CBO's plan in legalising Blockchain in light of the technical advancement of digital transactions. In its meeting, the Office reviewed the report on the increasing number of resignations among the medical staff.



Fahd conveys HM’s greetings to GCC leaders

RIYADH: On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, arrived in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on Tuesday to lead the Sultanate of Oman's delegation in the 42nd Summit of GCC Leaders.

HRH Prince Mohammad bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of KSA, headed the reception team welcoming HH Sayyid Fahd upon his arrival at the King Khalid International Airport.

HH Sayyid Fahd was also received by Dr Nayef Falah al Hajraf, GCC Secretary-General and Plenipotentiary Minister Saif bin Nasser al Bada'ei, deputy head of the Sultanate of Oman's mission in Saudi Arabia.

HH Sayyid Fahd gave a press statement upon his arrival reading as follows:

“On the convening of the GCC 42nd Summit of GCC leaders in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, I am honoured



to convey the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to his brethren, GCC leaders, along with His Majesty the Sultan's best wishes to the leadership and people of KSA. Since its foundation, the GCC has achieved many accomplishments in different fields. This reflects the member states' conviction in the importance of cooperation and collaboration to meet the aspirations of the GCC peoples. The successive developments in the regional and international arenas have had their repercussions on the



region's countries. This requires the member states to exert more efforts and coordinate their stands to address the ensuing challenges and implications, so that they could



focus on domestic development in a climate of security and stability. The Sultanate of Oman reaffirms its constant support for the advancement of the GCC march. The Sultanate of Oman also expresses its appreciation for the efforts exerted by the KSA. It prays to the Almighty Allah to grant further progress and prosperity for the people of KSA and all GCC peoples.” HH Sayyid Fahd is accompanied by an official delegation comprising Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister;

Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs; Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy; HH Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the KSA and Abdullah bin Khalfan al Balushi, Head of the Private Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers.

Earlier, HH Sayyid Fahd was seen off at Muscat Airport by Shaikh Abdullah bin Mohammed al Salmi, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs; Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education; Shaikh al Fadhl bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers; Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat; Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information; Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism; and the Charge d'affaires of the Saudi Embassy in Muscat.

— ONA

■ DUQM ORGANISES BEACH CLEAN-UP ACTIVITY



DUQM: The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), represented by the Environmental Regulatory Department, recently organised a clean-up campaign at Al Antout Beach in Duqm. The Campaign “Together to Combat Beach Pollution in Duqm”, was supported by a number of companies, including OQ8 and its contractors, Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be’ah), Renaissance Services Company, Tatweer Duqm, INCO Duqm Company and the City Hotel. In addition, a number of volunteers from the local community and the companies operating in SEZAD took part in the Campaign. The activity attracted more than 130 volunteers and covered cleaning of over 3 km of the beach.

Omani delegation visits Iranian military facilities

TEHRAN: The Omani military delegation currently taking part in the 16th meeting of the Omani-Iranian Military Friendship Committee visited the exhibition of military industries of the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics (MODAFL) in Iran. The Omani military delegation is headed by Brigadier Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Manthari, Assistant Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF),

for Operations and Planning. The delegation was briefed on a number of military industrial products manufactured locally by the military factories of the Islamic Republic of Iran Armed Forces. Members of the military delegation also visited Malek-Ashtar Industrial University, during which they were briefed on the university and its research and studies in various military areas.

— ONA



RNO marks armed forces, retirees days

AL MUSSANAH: The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) on Tuesday marked the Armed Forces Day, which falls on 11 December every year and the Retirees Day, which falls on 17 December every year.

The ceremony was held at the military parade ground in Said Bin Sultan Naval Base under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Head of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-Up Unit.

At the beginning of the ceremony, the Royal Anthem was played and the military salute was given to the chief guest.

Then the chief guest inspected the front parade column. Various military and musical shows were staged by the parade column, including military formations, regular and slow march.



After that, the participants at the parade chanted the armed forces anthem and proclaimed thrice Long Live His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander.

The chief guest then pinned

long service and good conduct medals on RNO personnel in appreciation of their sincere efforts in serving the country and their dedication in performing the national duty

On his turn, Rear Admiral



Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, RNO Commander also pinned long service and good conduct medals on RNO personnel in appreciation of their sincere efforts in serving the country.

The ceremony was attended

by Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), commanders of SAF, military and security units, members of the State Council and Majlis Ash'shura, senior

officers at SAF, military and security departments, as well as retired commanders and officers, sheiks and dignitaries of the governorates of South and North Al Batinah and RNO personnel.

— ONA

Mwasalat launches smart transportation system

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 14

Mwasalat, the public transport company of the Sultanate of Oman, on Tuesday launched the smart transportation system, aimed at improving efficiency and providing smart services to all segments of society.

Speaking at the launch event, Eng Khamis bin Mohammed bin Abdullah al Shamakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, said: "This system is the first of its kind in the region and will serve to advance mass transport in the country, as per the logistics strategy and the objectives of the Oman Vision 2040."



He said Mwasalat will seek to focus on marketing, improve the existing network and provide solutions to traffic congestion, especially in the Governorate of Muscat.

He said the ministry is focusing on completing a number

of major projects, including the remaining portions of the Al Sharqiyah Expressway, Al Batinah Expressway, the coastal road linking the Al Suwaiq port system and connecting the Khazaen Economic City with Al Batinah Expressway. The tender



for the construction of the road linking the areas of Musandam Governorate Khasab Lima Dibba Road will be announced soon.

Badr bin Mohammad al Nadabi, the acting CEO of Mwasalat, said that the new

application will help commuters due to the electronic payment feature to purchase tickets using smartphones (no need for paper tickets). It will guide passengers to the nearest bus stops and help them to find suitable appropriate routes for their trips.

He said the application provides complete detail of the routes connecting the prominent tourist attractions, commercial sites and government headquarters.

The company will focus on raising the level of integration of the smart transportation system with the traffic, communications, and information technology systems of the authorities, especially the Royal Oman Police and the Muscat Municipality.

Book on maritime released



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, in cooperation with the British University of Southampton and the Western Australian Museum, on Tuesday inaugurated the book "Maritime Archaeological Survey of Oman" under the auspices of Sayyid Said Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture.

The book includes 349 pages, comprising 7 chapters and 8 appendices, besides a number of bibliographic references and geophysical survey maps of some underwater cultural heritage sites.

It also talks about the study of archives of countries with ancient trade relations with the Sultanate of Oman such as India, Portugal, China and Britain. — ONA

Third dose essential to fight Covid variants

VINOD NAIR
@vinotnair

As the effectiveness of the vaccine doses will subside over a period, it is essential to take the third or booster dose, the officials at the Ministry of Health (MoH) have said.

The officials added that studies have not yet figured out whether the symptoms of the Omicron strain are more severe than the symptoms of previous variants, including that of the Delta

variant.

The MoH officials have warned that people will be exposed to a lack of antibodies that were acquired due to contracting of the disease or from taking vaccines.

Dr Feryal bint Ali al Lawatiyah of the Royal Hospital said in an interview that it is approved to take the third dose of a different vaccine than the two doses that were taken initially.

For now, 63 countries have reported the Omicron and while the UK announced the death of a

person infected with the variant on Monday.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) announced the registration of the first two cases of the new Omicron from citizens coming from abroad.

The health conditions of the patients are said to be stable, and they are currently under epidemiological surveillance.

The Directorate General of Health Services in Muscat Governorate said that the booster or the third dose for citizens will

be available at the Old Muscat Airport building, which was also the field hospital for Covid-19 treatment in the past.

"Expatriates also can take the first or the second dose at the Old Muscat Airport building during official working hours." The other centres for vaccinations are the health centres in Al Khuwair, Al Amerat, Muscat and Qurayat. Timings are 8 am to 8 pm.

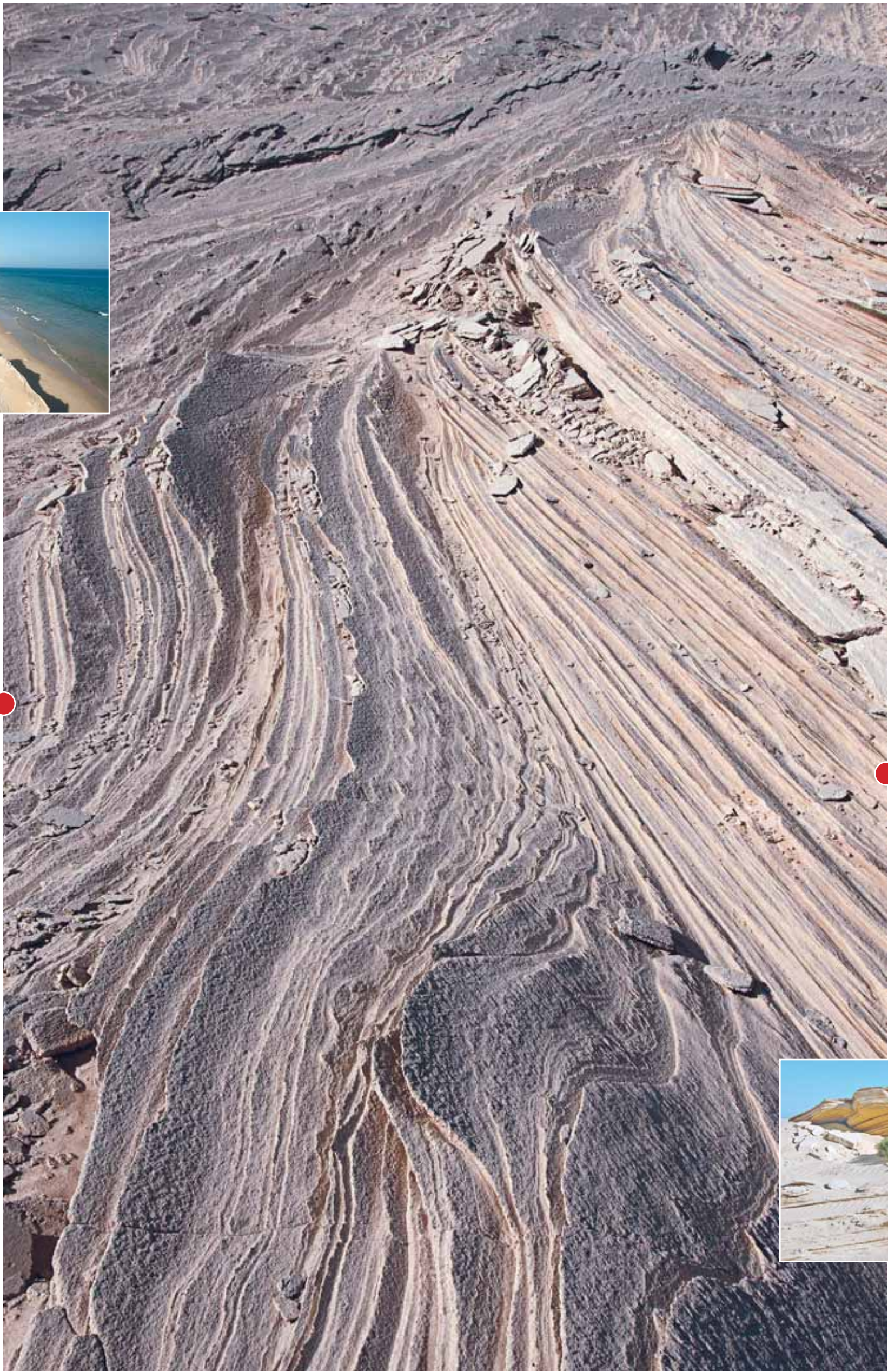
The Supreme Committee on Sunday said that there has been a significant increase in

the number of cases in various countries due to Omicron, including the number of inpatients in wards and intensive care units, in addition to deaths in some countries.

While there was a slight increase in positive cases in the Sultanate, the percentage of patients being admitted to hospital and ICUs have been low due to the high rate of immunisation, with nearly 93 per cent of the target groups taking the single dose of the vaccine.



The most important geological sites are the sands of Ras Al Ruwais beaches in Al Sharqiyah Governorate, which is one of the natural parks that attract the attention of tourists and visitors. It is characterised by high sand dunes overlooking the coast of the Arabian Sea



These sand dunes are adorned with straight and zigzag lines that extend over large areas. The expedition to Ras Al Ruwais also provides one an opportunity to enjoy the beauty of the desert nature and experience camping in the middle of the sand whose horizon extends as far as the eye can see



R A S A L R U W A I S

Enjoy the desert & the sea

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

The Sultanate of Oman's nature enjoys geological diversity that makes it a distinct tourist destination. The variety of terrain, climates and natural factors have made it a wonderful outlet for nature lovers and adventurers. The rich geology of Sultanate of Oman gives tourists multiple options, including rocky, mountainous, sandy and marine environments, in addition to the

presence of dozens of caves and geological structures dating back millions of years, to explore and marvel at the beauty of the nature. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has paid attention to activating and enriching the geological aspect by implementing the automated guide project for geological paths, including the geological paths in the Governorate of Muscat which includes 30 geological sites, aiming to raise the level of environmental and tourism education for various tourist categories. This provides tourists with an enjoyable and useful exploratory experience by tracking some of the phenomena of geological heritage, rock formations and other various natural phenomena that were formed through different periods of time. The electronic application provides scientific information of geological sites in four main languages and includes illustrative maps and guide boards, which encourages tourists and academic researchers to identify geological sites that were formed through different eras of time. Among the most important

geological sites are the sands of Ras Al Ruwais beaches in Al Sharqiyah Governorate, which is one of the natural parks that attract the attention of tourists and visitors. It is characterised by high sand dunes overlooking the coast of the Arabian Sea. A visitor to the Ras Al Ruwais area draws his attention to the geological formations that were formed by erosion factors over thousands of years. These sand dunes are adorned with straight and zigzag lines that extend over large areas. The expedition to Ras Al Ruwais also provides one an opportunity to enjoy the beauty of the desert nature and experience camping in the middle of the sand whose horizon extends as far as the eye can see. Dozens of tourists visiting this amazing site lament the inadequate facilities. Some also express displeasure over littering by visitors such behaviour not only leads to distortion of the aesthetic view of the landscape, but directly affects the elements of biodiversity, given that this site is characterised by the presence of large fish wealth and is frequented by a variety of seabirds.



National Museum organises lecture on human rights

MUSCAT: The National Museum, in cooperation with Oman Human Rights Commission, on Tuesday organised a lecture titled "The Role of Oman Human Rights Commission in Enriching and Protecting Human Rights in the Sultanate of Oman."

The workshop was presented by Salim bin Khalfan al Ruashdi, Head of the Awareness and Education Department

of the Omani Committee for Human Rights, in the presence of members of the Omani Women's Association in Muscat and students from the College of Law at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU).

The workshop aimed to introduce the tasks and functions of Oman Human Rights Commission and its role in promoting and protecting human rights in the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY
Advertisement No. (58/2021)

Specialized Companies in the field of tender shown below and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	E- Tender No.	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date	Grade
PRE/21/074 (Re-Tender)	66/2021/MM/QS-18 (Re-Call-1)	Supply of LED Street Light (Re-Tender) (E-Tender)	Rial 25	08/01/2022	23/01/2022	Excellent
PRE/21/093	2021/MM/QS-38	Reconstruction and Maintenance of Culverts in Muscat Governorate 2022 (E-Tender)	Rial 25	08/01/2022	23/01/2022	First
PRE/21/100	2021/MM/QS-39	Consultancy Services for the Study and Analysis of Embankment Slope Failure and the Design of Slope Protection Works on Al Jabal Road at Al Amirat (E-Tender)	Rial 25	30/12/2021	13/01/2022	First
PRE/21/101	2021/MM/QS-40	Consultancy Services for the Study Design and Analysis of Revestment Failure along Al Bahri Road in Mutrah Area (E-Tender)	Rial 25	30/12/2021	13/01/2022	First
PRE/21/088	2021/MM/QS-41	Construction of Box Culverts in Al Udhayba (Wadi Al Khali) (E-Tender)	Rial 25	26/12/2021	04/01/2022	First

Tender Conditions :-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of a bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond and to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).
- For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200 / 24402330).



Ministry of Social Development

Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtaining of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-refundable)
24/2021	Provision of Cleaning Services for the Building Dar Al-Aman in Al-Khoud	Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, which have the activities of cleaning, washing and pest control services, and which are registered in excellent, first or second or third or fourth degree.	Friday 24-12-2021 02:00 PM	Monday 3-1-2022 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>), On wednesday 15/12/2021

❖ Tender shall be submitted in compliance with the technical specifications and terms along with a local bank warranty at (1%) of the tender value, valid ninety (90) days from the date of e-submission.

❖ For Inquiry , please contact through the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200)

" The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry "

www.mosd.gov.om

Sultanate of Oman, US trade see growth despite pandemic

VINOD NAIR

@vinotnair

The bilateral trade between the United States and the Sultanate of Oman touched \$2.3 billion in September as both sides celebrated 12 years of signing the Free Trade Agreement.

In January 2021, the US imported over \$200m worth of Omani products, more than twice the monthly average witnessed over the past 15 years

"Sultanate of Oman's exciting 2021 US export results are testament to the hard work and resilience of Omani manufacturers despite the challenges of the pandemic," the official sources said.

"The figures indicate that despite the challenges faced by the business and industry sector during the pandemic, Omani industries were able to achieve good results and benefit from the agreement to increase Omani exports to the United States of America," the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion



Leslie M Tsou, US Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman.

(MoCIIP).

According to National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), non-oil exports from the Sultanate of Oman increased by 38.1 per cent in the first six months of 2021, compared to the same period in 2020.

The United States entered into a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the Sultanate of Oman on January 1, 2009.

The FTA allows US

SULTANATE OF OMAN'S EXCITING 2021 US EXPORT RESULTS ARE TESTAMENT TO THE HARD WORK AND RESILIENCE OF OMANI MANUFACTURERS DESPITE THE CHALLENGES OF THE PANDEMIC

per cent of all agricultural tariff lines. Both countries had agreed to phase out all tariffs on the remaining eligible goods within 10 years (January 1, 2019).

The FTA contains trade facilitation measures designed to expedite the movement of goods and the provision of services between the Sultanate of Oman and the United States; investment provisions intended to strengthen protections for US investors operating in the Sultanate of Oman, including allowing them to fully own a business without a local partner; and provisions on safeguards, intellectual property rights, government procurement, labour, environment and dispute settlement to improve the regulatory climate for bilateral trade and investment. The FTA provides fully reciprocal market access for US textile and apparel products. The United States and the Sultanate of Oman will eliminate tariffs on the same schedule on a product-by-product basis.

investors to wholly own their companies without requiring a local sponsor, although many choose to partner with Omani companies to leverage local expertise and to facilitate business. Under the market access provisions of the FTA, the United States and Sultanate of Oman provided each other immediate duty-free access for tariff lines covering almost all consumer and industrial goods, and 87

SAI participates in UN anti-corruption conference

CAIRO: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the State Audit Institution (SAI), is currently taking part in the 9th session of the Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC).

This session of the conference is hosted by the Arab Republic of Egypt represented in its Administrative Control Authority.

The Sultanate of Oman's delegation in the 5-day conference is headed by Shaikh Nasser bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of

SAI.

Shaikh Nasser in his speech at the conference affirmed that the Sultanate of Oman, through SAI and all concerned institutions, is keen to enforcing law and taking all measures to ensure protecting public money and enhance the efficiency of its utilisation. He added that Sultanate of Oman has strived to implement the terms of the convention through measures that ensure promoting integrity and combating corruption.

— ONA

PRE-QUALIFICATION

One of the leading facilities management companies in Oman intends to construct a 5000 m² workers accommodation in Misfah Industrial Area.

Construction contractors interested in bidding for this project, please contact us to submit pre-qualification documents.

Tel: 24478341, Mobile: 93215672

CPA studying restructuring

MUSCAT: The board of directors of the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) on Tuesday reviewed a proposal to amend its organisational structure and the authority's digital transformation initiative to align with Oman Vision 2040. The initiative, scheduled to be implemented during the current five-year plan (2021-2025), comprises a system to modernise correspondences and endorse partner firms.

The board also studied efforts made by its personnel in all governorates to promote consumer interests.

— ONA



SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH
NOTICE

Auction No. (1/2021)

The Ministry of Health would like to invite sealed bids for the Lease of Florist, Ornamental Plants and Miscellaneous items in Al-Nahdha Hospital. Offers should be submitted in sealed envelopes.

Specialized Companies, establishments and individuals may collect auction documents and specifications from the Al-Nahdha Hospital - Financial Affairs Section - Contracts and Purchasing Office in the Amount of (25 R.O) do not return Headquarters between 9:00 am and 12:00 pm during official working hours on or before 28/12/2021.

Every company or Institution wishing to participate in this Auction to attach with its bid a temporary a bank guarantee or a check certified by one of the bank operating in the country amounting to (200 R.O) , addressed in the name of the Ministry of Health as a security for entering the auction and refunded in the event the bid is not awarded and valid for (90) days from the date of bid submission, any bid that does not meet the required temporary security will not be considered, Offers enclosed in the sealed envelope duly signed and stamped in the original form shall be addressed to Executive Director -The chairman of the Non-Medical Tender Committee providing the title of the auction : (**Auction No. 01 / 2021 - for the Lease of Florist, Ornamental Plants and Miscellaneous items in Al-Nahdha Hospital**) is clearly mentioned on it. Envelopes shall not bear any sign that refers to bidder's name or identity.

Offers shall be deposited in the Non-Medical tender's box kept at the Al-Nahdha Hospital - Financial Affairs Section - Contracts and Purchasing Office at the latest before **12:00 am on Tuesday, 11 January 2022**. Offers submitted after the deadline will not be considered.

The Ministry is not bound to assign any reason for rejected bids.

Armed groups clash in south Libya week ahead of polls

TRIPOLI: Gunmen linked to Libyan military chief Khalifa Haftar exchanged artillery and gun fire overnight in the country's south, authorities and local media said on Tuesday, with medics reporting one person dead.

The clashes come a week before the war-torn North African country is due to hold a presidential election that observers fear could trigger a return to conflict after a year-long ceasefire.

"A militia armed with heavy weaponry and armoured vehicles... stole 11 four-wheel-drive vehicles from Sebha in an armed robbery," Sebha's police force said.

It identified the attackers as members of a group commanded by Mabruk Sahban and affiliated with Haftar, who is a candidate in the December 24 polls and whose forces control much of Libya's south.

The stolen vehicles had been sent to Sabha by the interior ministry in Tripoli to help secure the election, the police statement said.

Sahban's forces attacked a police convoy and forced officers to drive the vehicles to Brak airbase, south of Sebha, it added.

Sebha security forces and pro-Haftar gunmen later clashed in central Sabha, local media reported.



Workers walk by an electoral billboard reading in Arabic "register and vote before missing your chance" in Libya's capital Tripoli on Tuesday. — AFP

Footage online apparently showed night-time clashes with small arms in the city centre.

Sebha Medical Center said in a Facebook post that "last night due to events in the city we received two wounded people and one dead".

Local media said schools and public services were closed across the city on Tuesday.

Haftar had in 2019 seized much of southern Libya including oil infrastructure, military sites and the

southwestern city of Sebha, before launching a blistering assault on capital Tripoli, 650 kilometres to the north.

Western Libyan forces pushed him back to his eastern stronghold a year later, but he retained an armed presence in the south.

A ceasefire formally signed in October 2020 paved the way for a UN-led political process to bring in an interim unity government tasked with leading Libya until the elections — in

which Haftar is a candidate.

Libya has been attempting to extract itself from a decade of conflict since the 2011 revolt that toppled and killed dictator Muammar Gaddafi.

FEARS

With only days to go until scheduled elections, many fear a return to violence.

Standing near the port in Tripoli, Khaled al Turki said he has little optimism about the December 24 vote.

— AFP



Arabic calligraphy added UNESCO heritage list

DUBAI: UNESCO on Tuesday added Arabic calligraphy, a key tradition in the Arab and Islamic worlds, to its Intangible Cultural Heritage list.

A total of 16 countries, led by Saudi Arabia and Oman, presented the nomination to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, which announced the listing on Twitter.

"Arabic calligraphy is the artistic practice of handwriting Arabic script in a fluid manner to convey harmony, grace and beauty," UNESCO said on its website.

"The fluidity of Arabic script offers infinite possibilities, even within a single word, as letters can be stretched and transformed in numerous ways to create different motifs."

Saudi Culture Minister Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Farhan Al-Saud welcomed the decision and said it would "contribute to developing this cultural heritage", in a statement

carried by the official Saudi Press Agency.

Abdelmajid Mahboub from the Saudi Heritage Preservation Society, which was involved in the proposal, said calligraphy "has always served as a symbol of the Arab-Muslim world".

But he lamented that "many people no longer write by hand due to technological advances", adding that the number of specialised Arab calligraphic artists had dropped sharply.

The UNESCO listing "will certainly have a positive impact" on preserving the tradition, he added.

According to the UNESCO website, intangible cultural heritage "is an important factor in maintaining cultural diversity in the face of growing globalisation".

Its importance "is not the cultural manifestation itself but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next". — AFP

Tunisia opposition condemns extension of parliament freeze

TUNIS: Opponents of Tunisian President Kais Saied on Tuesday slammed his decision to extend a months-long suspension of parliament, accusing him of dealing another blow to the country's nascent democracy.

Saied had on Monday evening ruled out walking back his move in the summer to sack the government, freeze the legislature and seize wide-ranging executive powers.

Speaking on television, the former constitutional law professor announced an 11-week "popular consultation" with the Tunisian people to produce "draft constitutional and other reforms" to be put to referendum on July 25 next year.

That will mark a year since his

power grab, which came as the North African country wallowed in political and economic crises compounded by the coronavirus pandemic.

Saied had in October moved to rule by decree, escalating fears for the only democracy to have emerged from the 2011 Arab uprisings.

The president said on Monday that parliament would remain suspended until new elections on December 17 next year, the anniversary of the start of the revolution that chased dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali from power.

That effectively dissolved the current assembly dominated by his nemesis, the Ennahdha party which had played a central role



A Tunisian man checks newspapers on a stand on Habib Bourguiba Avenue in Tunis on Tuesday, one day after Tunisia's president extended his months-long suspension of parliament. — AFP

in Tunisian politics since Ben Ali's fall.

While many Tunisians, tired of a parliament and political parties seen as dysfunctional

and corrupt, welcomed Saied's moves, he has also faced growing opposition in the form of street demonstrations and pressure from abroad.

The envoys of the G7 democratic, developed economies plus the European Union had urged Tunisia on Friday to respect "fundamental freedoms" and set a timeline for a return to democratic institutions.

Political analyst Slaheddine Jouchi said Saied had "tried to pull the rug from under his rivals' feet by laying out a timeline".

But he was "determined to push through his political project to the end" despite bitter opposition from political parties and pressure from world powers, Jouchi added.

On Tuesday, opponents lashed out at Saied, accusing him of seeking to extend his one-man rule and remake the political system without involving other

actors.

Former MP Hichem Ajbouni wrote on Facebook that Saied's speech boiled down to: "I am the state, I am the president, I am the government, I am the parliament, I am the judiciary — and everyone who opposes me is either hungry for power, a liar, a traitor, a thief, an agent, or ignorant."

Saied had announced a nationwide consultation on constitutional reforms would be launched on January 1, via electronic platforms created for the purpose.

The proposals would then be examined by a committee of experts appointed by the president, before being put to referendum. — AFP

SANAA

Yemeni child killed by celebratory gunfire

A child was killed and dozens of people injured by celebratory gunfire in Yemen's capital after a youth team defeated Saudi Arabia in a football tournament, an official said on Tuesday.

Supporters across the war-torn country took to the streets on Monday night after Yemen's under-15 side secured the West Asian Football championship with victory in the Saudi city of Dammam. In Sanaa, which is under the control of the Ansar Allah fighters, heavy celebratory



gunfire killed one child, a medic at hospital said.

"A four-year-old girl was killed and 36 people were injured," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

NASIRIYAH

Iraq hangs three on 'terrorism' charges

Iraq on Tuesday hanged three men convicted of "terrorism" offences in a prison in the city of Nasiriyah, two security sources said.

One of those executed was found guilty of involvement in a summer 2013 car bombing in Nasiriyah, one of the sources said.

A second was convicted for his part in a similar attack in Karbala province further north, the source added.

Iraq executed more than



50 people in 2020, the fourth highest number in the world, according to human rights group Amnesty International. Many were convicted members of the IS group.

ISTANBUL

4 Syrian kids die in Istanbul apartment fire

Four Syrian children were killed in a fire at their Istanbul apartment on Tuesday, state news agency Anadolu reported.

The children were between the ages of 1 and 10, Anadolu said, adding that the mother and her 2-and-a-half-year-old child were rescued and brought to hospital for treatment.

According to initial findings, an electric heater caused the fire in the basement apartment in Istanbul's European district of Esenyurt. Istanbul governor's



office said it launched an investigation into the incident.

Witnesses told Anadolu that they had to break the window to save the mother and the surviving child.

In brief

■ SHANGHAI



COVID OUTBREAK PROMPTS SHUTDOWNS IN INDUSTRIAL HUB

Multiple companies have suspended operations in one of China's biggest manufacturing hubs as local authorities try to contain a Covid-19 outbreak, halting production of goods from batteries to textile dyes and plastics.

At least 20 listed companies have shut operations in virus-hit areas in Zhejiang, an eastern province with a large industrial sector.

Tens of thousands of Zhejiang residents are in quarantine and some domestic flights have been suspended as a national health official said the outbreak in three cities — Ningbo, Shaoxing and Hangzhou — was developing at a "relatively rapid" speed.

■ AHMEDABAD



POLICE PROBE MOTHER TERESA CHARITY FOR 'FORCED CONVERSION'

Indian police are probing a charity started by Mother Teresa, officials said on Tuesday. Authorities in Gujarat said they were investigating whether the Missionaries of Charity forced girls in its shelter home there to wear a cross and read the Bible.

District social officer Mayank Trivedi said that his complaint to the police was based on a report by child welfare authorities and other district officials. According to the complaint, 13 Bibles were found in the library of the institute and girls staying there were forced to read the religious text. The Missionaries of Charity was founded in 1950 by the late Mother Teresa.

■ HONIARA



POLICE CHARGE SOLOMONS OPPOSITION FIGURE OVER RIOTS

Police in the restive Solomon Islands on Tuesday charged a leading member of the opposition over deadly riots that rocked the country last month, as allies called the move politically motivated.

United Party president John Kwaita was arrested by armed police at his home late on Monday and charged with holding an unlawful public assembly, in breach of emergency Covid-19 rules.

"Police have released the suspect on bail," a police spokesperson said, adding the suspect "will appear before Honiara Central Magistrate (in) February of 2022."

No US troops to be punished over deadly Kabul drone strike

WASHINGTON: The Pentagon said on Monday that no US troops or officials would face disciplinary action for a drone strike in Kabul in August that killed 10 Afghan civilians, including seven children.

Spokesman John Kirby said Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin had received a high-level review of the strike that made no recommendation of accountability.

"There was not a strong enough case to be made for personal accountability," Kirby said.

Aimal Ahmadi, 32, who lost his three-year-old daughter, his brother and six nephews and nieces in the strike, expressed anger at the decision on Tuesday.

"God will take revenge," Ahmadi said, adding "what if the US had lost a child? What would the reaction have been?"

The Taliban urged Washington to reverse the decision, with a spokesman saying the US should punish the culprits and compensate the victims.

The August 29 drone strike took place in the final days of the US-led evacuation of Kabul after the Taliban seized control of the country.

US officials said they had intelligence of a possible IS attack on the evacuation operations at Kabul airport, and launched a missile from a drone at a target that was thought to be a car laden with munitions.

In fact, they struck a family that included an Afghan man who worked for a US aid group and seven children.

In early November, an initial report carried out by the US Air Force inspector general, Lieutenant General Sami Said,



A woman walks past the house of Aimal Ahmadi, whose daughter Mailka and his elder brother Zimarai Ahmadi were among 10 relatives killed by a wrongly directed US drone strike on August 29, in Kabul on Tuesday. — AFP

called the strike tragic, but "an honest mistake."

The review by Central Command head General Kenneth McKenzie Jr and Special Operations Command chief General Richard Clarke made use of Said's report and detailed recommendations on procedures for future drone strikes.

But it made no call for anyone to be punished for the mistake.

"What we saw here was a breakdown in process, in execution and procedural events, not the result of negligence, not the result of misconduct, not the result of poor leadership," said Kirby.

If Austin "believed... that accountability was warranted, he would certainly support those kinds of efforts," Kirby added.

— AFP

Taliban rule marked by killings: UN

GENEVA: More than 100 former Afghan national security forces and others have been killed since the Taliban takeover in August, most at the hands of the hardline group which is recruiting boy soldiers and quashing women's rights, the UN said on Tuesday.

Nada al Nashif, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, said at least 50 suspected members of a local affiliate of IS known as ISIS-Khorasan — an ideological foe of the Taliban — died by hanging and beheading.

In a speech to the Human Rights Council, she described

Taliban rule as being marked by extrajudicial killings across the country and restrictions on women's and girls' basic rights.

Families face "severe poverty and hunger" this winter amid reports of child labour, early marriages and "even the sale of children", Al Nashif said.

At least 72 of the more than 100 alleged killings have been attributed to the Taliban, she said, adding: "In several cases, the bodies were publicly displayed. This has exacerbated fear among this sizeable category of the population." — Reuters

7.3-magnitude quake strikes Indonesia

MAUMERE, Indonesia: A 7.3-magnitude earthquake struck eastern Indonesia on Tuesday, the US Geological Survey said, causing panic but no deaths or major damage were reported.

The epicentre was in the Flores Sea, north of East Nusa Tenggara province, where the quake sparked terror after hitting in the late morning (0320 GMT).

"I was in the field. People ran in panic. I am still... scared," said Nuraini, a resident of Adonara island in the East Flores regency.

No significant damage or fatalities were immediately reported, but Indonesian authorities urged caution with more than a dozen smaller aftershocks detected.

One person was injured in Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara, and a school building was damaged on Selayar island, national disaster agency spokesman Abdul Muhari said in a statement.

The impact of the quake was still being assessed, he added.

— AFP



Women are seen evacuating, as a 7.4-magnitude earthquake struck eastern Indonesia triggering a tsunami warning in Maumere, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, on Tuesday. — Reuters

Philippines' Duterte withdraws from 2022 Senate race

MANILA: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte on Tuesday withdrew his candidacy for the 2022 Senate race, the government elections monitor said, a month after he made a last-minute entry into the contest.

Duterte, 76, is constitutionally barred from seeking re-election, and his decision to run for the Senate had been seen as a way of staying in politics while facing an international probe into his deadly drug war.

"The President has filed his withdrawal from the Senatorial elections," James Jimenez, spokesman for the Commission on Elections office, said on Twitter.

Duterte decided to withdraw from the May elections to "better focus" on the government's pandemic response and ensure "orderly and peaceful elections", his spokesman Karlo Nograles said.

"After over four decades in public service, the President plans to retire from government to spend more time with his family when his term ends in June 2022," Nograles added, without



specifying if Duterte was quitting politics altogether.

The elections will see thousands of candidates

Duterte, 76, is constitutionally barred from seeking re-election, and his decision to run for the Senate had been seen as a way of staying in politics while facing an international probe

contest more than 18,000 posts from president to town councillor.

Duterte said previously he would run for the country's

second-highest office, before changing his mind and announcing plans to retire from politics — which was met with deep scepticism among analysts.

His latest withdrawal does not necessarily mean he will exit politics. Under election rules, he has until midday on election day to substitute in for another candidate sharing his surname if they are disqualified or die.

Duterte's daughter Sara is running for vice-president while his son Sebastian is contesting the mayoral race in the family's southern stronghold of Davao City.

"It's very dizzying," said Antonio Contreras, a political science professor at De La Salle University in Manila.

Contreras said Duterte may have "made a deal" to ensure the next president would protect him from criminal charges in the Philippines, or the International Criminal Court.

"They've probably already made sure that somebody is going to act on their behalf to protect their interests," he said. — AFP



Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Center

Tender Advertisement for Provide Rental Cars Service

Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Centre announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Bid Submission Closing
CCCRC/T/555/2021	Provide Rental Cars Service	30/12/2021

Qualified companies interested in participating in this tender shall collect the tender specifications from the date of this advertisement from the following address:

Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre, SQU Street Al Khoud, Sultanate of Oman, Procurement Department, Ground Floor.

Biddings that meet the above requirement should be submitted in a sealed envelope by an Omani National from your company addressed to the head of Purchase Committee in the tender box located at:

Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre, SQU Street Al Khoud, Sultanate of Oman, Procurement Department, Ground Floor.

Please note:

- Bids received after the deadline indicated above, for whatever reason, will not be considered.
- Queries/ clarifications should be submitted immediately, but not later than one week before the date of tender submission.
- For Queries you may Contact via e-mail: purchase@cccrc.gov.om
- The committee is not obliged to accept the lowest price of the bid or any other bid.

Belarus oppn leader Tikhanovsky jailed for 18 years

MOSCOW: A court in Belarus on Tuesday sentenced opposition leader Sergei Tikhanovsky to nearly two decades behind bars after he galvanised an unprecedented protest movement against strongman leader Alexander Lukashenko last year.

Tikhanovsky, a charismatic 43-year-old YouTube blogger, last spring launched a presidential campaign against Lukashenko, who has ruled the ex-Soviet country of around 9.5 million people with an iron grip since 1994.

While Belarusian authorities stopped Tikhanovsky's campaign short — arresting him on charges of violating public order ahead of the August 2020 vote and keeping him in detention since — the protest movement he triggered eventually swelled to tens of thousands of people.

On Tuesday, following a months-long trial behind closed doors, a court found Tikhanovsky guilty of organising riots, inciting social hatred and other charges and sentenced him to 18 years in prison, state newspaper *Sovetskaya Belarus* reported.

Tikhanovsky, a charismatic 43-year-old YouTube blogger, last spring launched a presidential campaign against Lukashenko, who has ruled the ex-Soviet country of around 9.5 million people with an iron grip since 1994

His wife Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, who became opposition leader in his stead, denounced the verdict from self-exile in neighbouring EU member Lithuania.

"The dictator publicly takes revenge on his strongest opponents," she wrote on Twitter after her husband was handed the sentence.

"While hiding the political prisoners in closed trials, he hopes to continue repressions in silence. But the whole world watches. We won't stop," she added in English.

Tikhanovskaya, who was a



Sergei Tikhanovsky is escorted before the verdict hearing in his trial on charges of organising riots and inciting social hatred, at a detention centre in the southeastern city of Gomel on Tuesday. — AFP

political novice and stay-at-home mother of two at the time of her husband's arrest, took his place on the ballot and is widely believed to have won the August 2020 vote, claimed by Lukashenko as a victory.

'NEVER SEE MY SON'

But she was forced to flee the country soon after, when Lukashenko launched a vicious crackdown on the post-vote protests against his rule that saw hundreds of people jailed and many more leave the country.

Tikhanovsky, who coined

the nickname "cockroach" for Lukashenko and whose supporters waved slippers — often used to kill the insects — at rallies, was handed the longest prison sentence of any opposition leader so far.

"Eighteen years. I won't live

that long," his mother Sofya Tikhanovskaya told Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFERL).

"I'll never see my son again."

He was tried alongside five co-defendants, including veteran politician Mikola Statkevich, 65, who was sentenced to 14 years.

Statkevich challenged Lukashenko in elections in 2010 but was sentenced to six years in prison.

Both Tikhanovsky and Statkevich have been in custody since May 2020. Little was known about the trial which began in June.

The four other co-defendants in the case, bloggers Igor Losik and Vladimir Tsyganovich and two activists linked to Tikhanovsky, Artyom Sakov and Russian citizen Dmitry Popov, received between 15 and 16 years in prison.

They join a growing list of people behind bars in Belarus. As of Tuesday, there were 920 political prisoners in the ex-Soviet country, according to the Viasna rights group.

Belarusian courts have been churning out guilty verdicts.

— AFP



Pfizer says Covid pill reduces severe disease

WASHINGTON: Pfizer said on Tuesday that clinical trials confirmed its Covid pill, a new type of antiviral treatment that should withstand the mutations seen with Omicron, drastically reduced hospitalisations and deaths among at-risk people by almost 90 per cent.

The announcement came as a real-world study from South Africa showed two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was 70 per cent effective in stopping severe illness from the new variant, a result called encouraging by researchers, though it represents a drop compared to earlier strains.

Data for the new pill, which hasn't yet been authorised anywhere in the world, came from more than 2,200 volunteers, and backed up findings announced last month in an interim analysis.

The American drugmaker said its treatment, called Paxlovid, withstood the Omicron variant in lab-testing.

"This news provides further corroboration that our oral antiviral candidate, if authorised or approved, could have a meaningful impact on the lives of many," Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla said in a statement, saying the new drug could "save lives."

The trial showed that the pill reduced the need for hospitalisation in high-risk adults with Covid-19 by 89 per cent if the treatment was given within three days of symptom onset and by 88 per cent if given within 5 days, according to the company.

Overall, there were 12 deaths in the placebo group who did not receive the drug and none in the drug group. — AFP

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson faced a large rebellion among his Conservative lawmakers on Tuesday in a parliamentary vote over new restrictions to try to curb the spread of the new Omicron coronavirus variant.

The measures, including ordering people to work from home, to wear masks in public places and use Covid-19 passes to enter some venues, were expected to be approved by parliament but with Johnson relying on the opposition Labour Party for votes.

It's yet another blow to a prime minister already under pressure over reported parties in his Downing Street office last year when such gatherings were banned, a pricey refurbishment of his apartment and the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Many of his lawmakers say the restrictions are draconian, with several questioning the introduction of vaccination certification, dubbed Covid passports, to enter some venues, such as night clubs.

Others are using the votes as an opportunity to vent their anger at



People queue to receive Covid-19 vaccine and booster doses, as the spread of Covid-19 continues, at a vaccination centre in Manchester, Britain, on Tuesday. — Reuters

Johnson, believing the man who helped the Conservatives win a large majority at a 2019 election is squandering the party's successes by self-inflicted missteps and gaffes.

But despite the grumblings of discontent, Conservative Party insiders say there is not enough of a groundswell against Johnson to dislodge him now, with no potential challenger commanding

enough support to replace him.

"Boris on a bad day is better than any of the other wannabes on a good day," said one veteran Conservative.

The government says the measures are necessary to stem the spread of Omicron, which accounts for more than 40 per cent of infections in London and is expected to become the dominant strain in the British capital.

One person has died after contracting the variant and 10 people have been hospitalised with Omicron across England.

Ministers are moving to try to win over the Conservative rebels, saying that people who have not been double-jabbed can instead offer proof of a negative lateral flow test to gain access to indoor venues of more than 500 people.

— Reuters

SHORT TAKES

BRUSSELS

EU, UK fail to agree post-Brexit fishing quotas

The EU and Britain failed to reach agreement on how to divvy up post-Brexit fish quotas in shared waters from next year, officials said on Tuesday, meaning provisional quotas will apply.

"Unfortunately, and despite our best efforts to conclude in a timely manner, consultations with the UK on fishing opportunities for 2022 are still ongoing," EU fishing commissioner Virginijus Sinkevicius told a news conference.



European Union fishing ministers had approved quotas from January 1, 2022 in EU waters extending into the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, the North Sea and the Black Sea, he announced.

PORT-AU-PRINCE

60 killed in Haiti gas tanker explosion

At least 60 people were killed when a gas tanker truck exploded in the Haitian city of Cap-Haitien on Tuesday morning, a local official said, with overwhelmed medics saying the toll was feared to rise. The blast is the latest disaster to hit the Caribbean nation, where violent gangs have triggered crippling fuel shortages by choking off supply, and the president's assassination five months ago has yet to be elucidated.

"We have now counted 60 deaths," Deputy Mayor Patrick



Almonor said, adding that authorities were still searching for additional victims amid the charred debris in Cap-Haitien, Haiti's second-largest city located on the northern coast.

MAYFIELD

US tornado deaths hit 88, damage being assessed

Kentucky officials voiced relief on Monday that dozens of workers at a candle factory appear to have survived tornadoes that killed at least 88 people and left a trail of devastation across six US states. Governor Andy Beshear said 74 deaths have been confirmed in the southeastern state and choked up as he told reporters the fatalities ranged in age from five months old to 86.

"Like the folks in western Kentucky, I'm not doing so well today and I'm not sure how many



of us are," Beshear said.

The governor said 109 people in Kentucky remain unaccounted for and "it may be weeks before we have final counts on both deaths and levels of destruction."

French soldiers lower flag after years in Mali

AMAURY HAUCHARD AND DAPHNE BENOIT

French troops were preparing to leave the Malian city of Timbuktu on Tuesday, in a symbolic departure more than eight years after Paris first intervened in the conflict-torn Sahel state.

It was there that then French president Francois Hollande formally declared the start of France's military intervention, in February 2013, designed to root out militants.

A few days prior, French legionnaires and Malian troops had liberated Timbuktu, a northern desert city, after an eight-month extremist occupation.

"Some people were overcome by emotion, women were crying, young people were shouting, I myself was overwhelmed," said Yehia Tandina, a Timbuktu television journalist, recalling the day. Mohamed Ibrahim, the former president of the Timbuktu regional council, also described the day as "joyful" and "beautiful".

But now French troops are leaving their base in Timbuktu, raising questions about the future of militants activity as they put down roots in the countryside.

Mathieu, a French sergeant, was part of the original contingent of French soldiers who arrived in Mali, and has returned to the Timbuktu base for the handover ceremony.

"We've come full circle," he said, smiling. Since 2013, Paris has deployed around 5,100 troops across the Sahel region — which includes Mali — helping to support local governments and their poorly equipped forces fight an ever-growing insurgency.

However, French President Emmanuel Macron announced a major drawdown of French troops in June, after a military takeover in Mali in August 2020 that ousted the elected president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita.

France's military deployment in the Sahel is due to fall to about 3,000 troops by next year.

French forces have already left bases in the northern Malian towns of Kidal and Tessalit.

The French were greeted as liberators when they entered Timbuktu in 2013.

Former president Hollande also described the day French soldiers retook the city as "the best day of his political life". — AFP

Where there is coexistence, there will certainly be fewer negative acts

YEHIA TANDINA TV journalist



COME RAIN OR SHINE

Anthony Vasquez, 42, plays with his four month-old son Michael inside a makeshift shelter which houses people who lost their homes after a devastating outbreak of tornadoes ripped through several US states in Wingo, Kentucky, US. — Reuters

Every human life is of equal value



Samuel Kutty @samkuttyvp

VACCINES ALLOW US TO COME TOGETHER. THEY ALLOW US TO MEET FACE TO FACE IN OUR WORKPLACES, HELP OUR CHILDREN TO STUDY SHOULD TO SHOULDER IN SCHOOLS, ENABLE US GET BACK TO DOING THE THINGS THAT WE ENJOY AND PRAY TOGETHER AT PLACES OF WORSHIP

There is no dearth of a policy that makes fair and effective access to Covid-19 vaccine, but its global distribution is in a mess with those who need it most left behind.

What we gather from reports around the world is that the vaccine rollouts are not serving the most vulnerable populations in the world. They continue to put low-income communities at a higher risk of getting and dying from the coronavirus and its variants.

Wealthy countries have more than enough vaccine doses to protect their people from the ravages of the virus, while the poorest countries do not!

We saw them expanding vaccinations to younger and younger people and unheeded the repeated pleas of health experts to donate their doses. Instead most of them debated on providing booster shots even as poor countries struggle to vaccinate the most vulnerable.

We also witnessed countries, which are home to giant pharmas producing the vaccine, blocked its exports as a protective gear for their people!

It has not been long since we heard lamentations from the United Nations that millions or billions of people are left susceptible to coronavirus due to the inequitable vaccine distribution and allowing even more deadly variants to

emerge and spread across the globe.

Experts familiar with the current scenario agree that an unequal distribution of vaccines will deepen inequality and increase the gap between rich and poor and will reverse decades of hard-won progress on human development.

They foresee a world without Covid-19 will not be possible until everyone has equal access to vaccines. Reports indicate that the pandemic has already claimed over 4.6 million people since its breakout in the beginning of 2020. New variants of concern mean that the risks of infection have increased in all countries for people who are not yet protected by vaccination.

The reality is that the majority of those who have been administered the vaccine are in high- and upper-middle-income countries. And the world leaders blissfully forget the fact that one of the best ways to keep people in any country is to vaccinate the world.

If I quote Strive Masiyiwa, the African Union's envoy for vaccine acquisition, "It's like a famine in which the richest guys grab the baker".

A report by science analytics company Airfinity in October last exposed the severity of vaccine inequity between high-income and low-income countries, especially in Africa. It found that G20 countries have received 15 times more

Covid-19 vaccine doses per capita than countries in sub-Saharan Africa!

Countries which have amassed extra vaccine doses must immediately redistribute them to poor countries before they expire in the coming months. There is no time to waste. A delay will bring more unnecessary and uncalled risk and injustice by nurturing new, potentially deadlier variants exposing more people to infection and death.

It is an appropriate question that Peter Singer of the World Health Organization raised, "Do we love our neighbours like we love ourselves? Do we really think that every human life is of equal value?"

Vaccines allow us to come together. They let us meet face to face in our workplaces, help our children to study shoulder to shoulder in schools, do community works together and pray together at places of worship.

They are the key steps to break the chain, end the pandemic and its variants so we can get back to doing the things that we enjoy, with the people we love.

Also we should not ignore that we live in an intimate, global world. Whatever happens in other countries, most likely, will connect to us as well. If we want to curtail the emergence of new variants, we definitely need to help with greater vaccine distribution!

US options in defusing the Russia-Ukraine crisis



Richard Haass

THE US AND ITS ALLIES ARE MORE THAN JUSTIFIED PROVIDING UKRAINE WITH ARMS TO DEFEND ITSELF, AS WELL AS THREATENING TO IMPOSE SANCTIONS

In recent months, Russia has positioned a large and capable military force along its border with Ukraine. What we do not know is why (capabilities are always easier to gauge than intentions), or even if Russian President Vladimir Putin has decided on a course of action. Thus far, he has created options, not outcomes.

What comes to mind is July 1990, when another autocrat, Saddam Hussein, positioned sizable military forces along Iraq's southern border with Kuwait. Then, as now, intentions were murky but the imbalance of forces was obvious. Arab leaders told then-US president George HW Bush not to overreact, convinced it was a ploy to compel Kuwait to take steps to increase the price of oil, which would help Iraq recover and rearm after its long war with

Iran. By early August, though, what many had looked like political theatre had become all too real. Invasion led to conquest, and it took a massive international coalition led by the United States to oust Iraqi forces from Kuwait and restore the country's sovereignty.

Could a similar dynamic be playing out today on the Russia-Ukraine border? US President Joe Biden's administration has reacted to Russia's troop buildup with a mix of honey and vinegar. The objective is to persuade Russia not to invade by making clear that the costs would outweigh any benefits and that some Russian concerns could be addressed, at least in part, if it backed off. Call it deterrence mixed with diplomacy.

Some have criticised the US response as too weak. But

geography and military balance make direct defence of Ukraine all but impossible. Biden was right to take direct US military intervention off the table: not acting on such a threat would only reinforce mounting doubts as to America's reliability.

But Biden is also right to push back against Russia. The US and the United Kingdom, along with Russia itself, provided assurances to Ukraine in 1994 that, in exchange for giving up the nuclear arsenal it had inherited from the Soviet Union, its sovereignty and borders would be respected. This did not constitute a Nato-like security commitment, but it did imply that Ukraine would not be abandoned.

And yet someone who opposes direct resistance of Russian aggression against Ukraine support it in

the case of possible Chinese aggression against Taiwan. In both instances, geography works against US military options, and in neither is the US bound by an ironclad security commitment. But in the case of Ukraine, Nato allies are not prepared to defend against a Russian attack and are not expecting the US to do so. By contrast, US allies and partners are prepared to resist Chinese aggression and expect that the US would help frustrate any Chinese bid for regional hegemony.

This does not mean Russia should have a free hand versus Ukraine. Whatever order does exist in the world is premised on the principle that no country is permitted to invade another and change borders by force. This more than justifies providing Ukraine with arms to defend itself,

as well as threatening to impose severe economic sanctions that would exact a significant cost on Russia's already fragile, energy-dependent economy. Biden is also right to offer a diplomatic path for Putin if he decides it would be wiser to walk back from the brink. Several worthy ideas have been suggested: stepped-up US participation in the Minsk process initiated in the wake of Russia's intervention in eastern Ukraine in 2014, a mutual pull-back of Russian and Ukrainian forces from their border, and a willingness to discuss with Russia the architecture of European security.

The Biden administration is also right to limit what it offers to Putin.

Copyright: Project Syndicate 2021



TOUGH COMPETITION AT YOUTH SAILING WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

MUSCAT: Day one in the Sultanate of Oman delivered stunning weather for the start of the 2021 Youth Sailing World Championships presented by Hempel. The breeze started around midday at 5 knots and as the warm of the Sultanate of Oman sun rose higher above the Barceló Mussanah Resort, the thermal sea breeze climbed to around 12 to 13 knots by late afternoon. All 11 events completed their schedule of races for the first day of world-class competition between 433 sailors from 59 nations. The beach sports are becoming a

bigger part of Olympic competition, and the same is now true at the Youth Worlds. In the boys' kite foiler division, Italy's Riccardo Pianosi (ITA) was fast out of the blocks as he powered his 21-metre kite to first place in the opening two heats, followed by a second and third place in the next. This puts the Italian two points ahead of Max Maeder (SGP) who recovered from a DNF (Did Not Finish) in the opening heat, the 15-year-old from Singapore bouncing back with a fourth and two race wins. In the other boys' beach event, the windsurfers known as Techno 293+,



Pianosi's team mate proved utterly dominant. Federico Alan Piloni (ITA) opens his Youth Worlds account with three first places, putting the Italian two points ahead of Great Britain's Boris Shaw (GBR). Perhaps it's no surprise to see Italy doing well in the beach sports considering that the team manager at the Youth Worlds is one of Italy's most highly decorated Olympians, the windsurfing legend Alessandra Sensini. Meanwhile in the boat events there was plenty of action across all the courses. The interesting challenge for the double-handed teams in the

420 and 29er fleets is that many crews share their supplied boats between the boys and girls teams from the same country. As Can Erturk and Ali Beren Adamcil (TUR) stepped ashore from winning their opening session in the Male/Mixed division of the 420 class, the young Turks immediately started to retune the rig for their female team mates, Nehir Guzeltuna and Derin Acal (TUR). "They are lighter than us," said Erturk, "so we help them to set up the mast for flatter sails. We are one boat and four sailors, but we sail for Turkey as one team."

— WORLD SAILING

Al Nasr and Suhar confirm presence in semifinal

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 13

Al Nasr and Suhar clubs confirmed their attendance in the semifinals of the 51st edition of His Majesty's Cup Hockey Championship. Dhofar representative, Al Nasr, possess ten points ahead of the concluding round against Saham on Wednesday while Suhar have nine points and they will face Seeb on Wednesday. Three fixtures will take place on Wednesday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. Al Nasr will meet Saham at 4:00 pm while defending champion Ahli Sidab, will take on

Salalah. The match will kick off at 6:00 pm. In the last encounter, Al Seeb will clash against Suhar and the match will start at 8:00 pm. The qualified teams to the final rounds including Salalah, Al Nasr, Al Seeb, Saham, Ahli Sidab and Suhar showed top performance as every team is looking to secure spot in the semifinals. Al Nasr is leading the table as they have ten points from three triumphs and one draw. Sohar is placed as runner up and they have nine points from three victories and suffered one defeat. Ahli Sidab and Seeb are positioned in third and fourth places respectively.

Both teams have 5 points with goal difference for Ahli Sidab. Saham in fifth place with two points while Salalah in last position with nil points. Title holders Sidab and Al Seeb are the closest teams to advance with Al Nasr and Suhar to the next round. Saham will need to register victory and wait for Sidab-Salalah's fixture. The topper of the group will meet third-placed team while the runner up will take on the fourth-positioned club. The semifinal matches will be played on Friday. The third and fourth place playoff will be scheduled on Sunday. The final match is to be held in the first

week of January. Oman Hockey Association (OHA) set up many umpiring courses and workshops to ensure proper referring level in the top domestic hockey event. "There is appreciation on umpires level till now in His Majesty's Cup Hockey Championship. We are having daily meetings and discussions with umpires and referees to review all the decisions and how to improve. I believe this assists the local referees to improve in their performance and learn from their minor mistakes," Eng Thani bin Saheem al Wahaibi, board member at OHA and head of umpiring committee said.



ROME: Roma put an end to their worrying recent run of form in Serie A by beating struggling Spezia 2-0 on Monday and gaining ground in the race for European football.

Goals from corners in each half from Chris Smalling and Roger Ibanez put Jose Mourinho's side back on track following defeat at Bologna and a home hammering at the hands of champions Inter Milan last weekend.

Roma are up to sixth on 28 points, two points behind Fiorentina who hold the Europa League qualification spot and level with Juventus, in seventh after drawing at Venezia on Saturday.

However, they are some way from their true objective of Champions League football as they sit eight points behind fourth-placed Napoli, and missing some key players failed to convince at the Stadio Olimpico in Rome.

"I was pleased with the goals because we spent 25 minutes working on corners yesterday," Mourinho told Sky Sport Italia.

"I'm also pleased with the result but I didn't like the way we played... even when we were two goals ahead I didn't feel like the match was over."

An 11th defeat for Spezia leaves Thiago Motta's team just two points and one place above the relegation zone, despite a spirited display which probably deserved at least a goal.

Smalling put Roma ahead with his first league goal of the season in the sixth minute when, completely unmarked at a corner, he casually met countryman Tammy Abraham's headed effort from a corner with a header of his own that Ivan Provedel had no chance of saving.

Abraham was also involved when the hosts were unlucky to not double their lead in the 25th minute, the England international cleverly flicking a pass to Matias Vina who then watched his goal-bound effort well tipped away by Provedel.

And after Rui Patricio stopped Arkadiusz Reca from drawing the away, side level Abraham was denied his fifth league goal of the season by the bar in first-half stoppage time.

The former Chelsea striker met Henrikh Mkhitaryan's fizzing cross with his chest and hit the woodwork for the seventh time this season before Jordan Veretout's rebound drive was kept out by a combination of Provedel and Martin Erlic.

However, Roma did have their second 10 minutes after the break, following a brief burst of Spezia dominance, when Ibanez met Veretout's corner with a thumping header amid more sloppy set-piece defending from Spezia.

Roma were more or less assured of the points by VAR shortly afterwards, with Rey Manaj's clearly offside goal ruled out after the on-field officials had initially allowed the Albanian's close-range strike to stand.

There was time for one more incident though, as talented teen Felix Afena-Gyan rattled home what he thought was Roma's third in added time after obviously handling in the build up and received a second booking while still celebrating with the crowd. — AFP

ROMA HALT MINI-SLUMP WITH SPEZIA WIN



Diawara to coach Guinea at Cup of Nations finals



CONAKRY: Former Arsenal, Olympique de Marseille and Paris Saint Germain striker Kaba Diawara has been named Guinea coach for next month's Africa Cup of Nations finals, the country's football association said on Monday.

Diawara, 45, was caretaker coach for Guinea's last two World Cup qualifiers last month after Didier Six was sacked in the middle of the campaign only months away from the start of the Cup of Nations, which kicks off on January 9.

Paris-born Diawara, who also played at Girondins Bordeaux and West Ham United, has no previous coaching experience apart from serving as Six's assistant.

Guinea compete in Group B at the tournament in Cameroon and begin their campaign against Malawi in Bafoussam on January 10, after which they are due to meet Senegal and Zimbabwe. Diawara played for Guinea at the 2006 Cup of Nations finals in Egypt where they reached the quarterfinals.

— Reuters

England captain Root backs Ashes flops Leach and Burns

ADELAIDE: England captain Joe Root on Tuesday backed Jack Leach and Rory Burns to bounce back from dismal Ashes performances, as star all-rounder Ben Stokes declared himself fit to carry the fight to Australia.

Root refused to rule out selecting spinner Leach in Thursday's pink-ball Test in Adelaide, even though he conceded 102-1 from 13 overs as England stumbled to a nine-wicket loss in Brisbane.

England controversially rested veteran quicks Jimmy Anderson and Stuart Broad for the first Test but Root said the pair were "fit and ready to go" in Adelaide.

Leach's meagre returns in Brisbane would normally see him dropped to make room in the attack, but England will want a specialised slow bowler for Adelaide's traditionally spin-friendly wicket.

"We've obviously got some big decisions to make," Root told reporters in Adelaide.

He said conditions did not suit Leach at the Gabba but Australia could pay the price if they continued to target him elsewhere.

"I'm sure he'll want to respond and he'll want to get back into the series and have an impact," the



England skipper said.

"Some of the grounds that we will be going to from this point onwards should offer a lot more for him and bring spin into it as well."

Root also offered support to opening batsman Burns, who fell to the first ball of the series in Brisbane and then dropped a crucial chance from David Warner.

"Rory is a very strong character, you can't doubt that side of his game," said Root, himself strongly criticised back in England after winning the toss in Brisbane and opting to bat first.

"He'll come back in and want a response and want to put some big scores on the board."

Stokes, who failed to fire in Brisbane — his first competitive match in six months after a break to deal with a finger injury and mental health issues — dismissed concerns a knee injury could keep him out of the second Test.

"People will have seen me rubbing my knee from time to time when I was in the field, but rest assured I'm fine," Stokes wrote in a column for Britain's *Daily Mirror*.

"It is an old injury that flares up every now and again, but I know how to manage it." — AFP



Paris Olympic Games organisers reveal plans for opening ceremony

PARIS: Paris plans to innovate at the Olympic Games in 2024 and, for the first time, host an opening ceremony outside a stadium.

According to ambitious plans published on Monday, the ceremony will be staged in the heart of the city along the Seine river.

The sequence of events is also to be reversed. Instead of a show and the subsequent presentation of the nations, there will be a 6-kilometre-long parade with athletes in around

160 boats across the Seine. The boats will pass by Paris's most iconic monuments, bridges and cultural institutions, including Notre Dame, the Louvre and the Eiffel Tower, where the ceremony will then take place.

"The river, its bridges and the capital's iconic monuments will serve as the backdrop for a once-in-a-lifetime spectacle, showing the world the best of Paris," organisers said in a statement.

The Summer Games in Paris are set to start on July 26, 2024.

— dpa

Semi-final summit for regional rivals and continental champions

DOHA: The quarter-finals of the Fifa Arab Cup Qatar 2021 certainly produced their share of excitement. Egypt will take on Tunisia while the hosts Qatar will face Algeria. The winners will then square off in next Saturday's final at Al Bayt Stadium and the losers contest the third-place match at Stadium 974 earlier the same day. On Friday, Qatar trashed the UAE 5-0 while Tunisia beat the Sultanate of Oman 2-1. Then the following day, Egypt came from behind to sink Jordan after extra time and Algeria prevailed against Morocco on penalties.

Asian champions face African counterparts

The Qatar-Algeria match is also a showdown between the reigning Asian and African champions, following their respective continental triumphs in 2019. The hosts, for their part, are the only last-four side to have won all four of their games so far. They were too strong for Bahrain, the Sultanate of Oman and Iraq in the group stage, before seeing off UAE in the quarter-finals. Al Annabi, who also went unbeaten during their Asian Cup triumph, have had the most potent attack at the Arab Cup, finding the net 11 times so far, compared to 10 for Egypt, nine for Algeria and eight for Tunisia. Interestingly, the most recent encounter between Qatar and Algeria was a friendly that Qatar won 1-0. The Algerian Djamel Belmadi was then the coach of Qatar, while Christian Gourcuff was at the helm of Les Fennecs.

Special match for Tunisian quartet

The meeting of the Carthage Eagles and the Pharaohs will be particularly special for



Tunisians Ali Maaloul, Seifeddine Jaziri, Ferjani Sassi and Hamza Mathlouthi. Both Jaziri and Mathlouthi currently play for Egypt's Zamalek, while Maaloul plies his trade with fellow Cairo club Al-Ahly. For his part, Sassi was one of Zamalek's most prominent players last year before his move to Al Duhail in Qatar. The game promises to see a renewed mini battle between Sassi and Egypt's Al-Ahly midfielder Amro Elsoulia.

Egyptian quartet a doubt

Egypt and Tunisia encounters have always been hard fought and frequently decided by small details. The most recent match between the pair saw Egypt win 3-1 on 16 November 2018 during the 2019 AFCN qualifiers. The Pharaohs started their campaign at this Arab Cup with a narrow



victory over Lebanon, before hitting their stride with a 5-0 defeat of Sudan and a draw with Algeria to win their group. In the last eight, they came from behind

to beat Jordan 3-1. For all that, the team have fitness concerns about Mohamed Elshenawy, Ahmed Hegazy, Ayman Ashraf and Hamdy Fathy, who all continue having treatment.

Bealili ready and Bounedjah available

Algeria's Youcef Belaili resumed training on Tuesday and has been passed fit to face Qatar despite needing hospital treatment for a head injury after the Morocco game. Baghdad Bounedjah will also be available after completing the six-day concussion protocol that followed his injury against Egypt. This match will be a special one for Belaili, Bounedjah, Mehdi Tahrat and Djamel Benlamri, four Fennec players who ply their trade in Qatar and know many of their opponents well.

— Fifa website

COROLLA CROSS

INSURANCE¹

1 Year

(IN LIEU OF INS RO 175)

SERVICE²

2 YEARS / 20,000 KMS

(whichever is earlier)

COROLLA HEV

INSURANCE¹

1 Year

(IN LIEU OF INS RO 175)

SERVICE²

8 YEARS / 80,000 KMS

(whichever is earlier)

YARIS

INSURANCE¹

1 Year

(IN LIEU OF INS RO 125)

SERVICE²

2 YEARS / 20,000 KMS

(whichever is earlier)

SUPRA

INSURANCE¹

1 Year

(IN LIEU OF INS RO 450)

CAMRY

INSURANCE¹

1 Year

(IN LIEU OF INS RO 250 UP TO RO 275)

SERVICE²

2 YEARS / 20,000 KMS

(whichever is earlier)

DRIVE THE THRILL

WALK-IN³ & WIN

4 NOS iPhone 13

Branches: Muscat - 24579050, Seeb Al Mawelah - 24550013, Mabela - 24269400, Barka - 26887504, Rustaq - 26876199, Ibra - 25571457, Sinaw - 25524203, Nizwa - 25213015, Buraimi - 25660124, Sohar - 26858500, Sur - 25541375, BB Ali - 25553692, Salalah - 23217303, Ibbri - 25687100

Campaign Period: Up to 30th December 2021. Benefits are applicable for all purchases except Government Organizations & Ministries. ¹Cash gift in lieu of insurance: Cash Gift is given in Lieu of Insurance only as applicable for respective models. In case customer chooses insurance (as applicable), he/she will not be eligible for "Cash gift in lieu of insurance" offer. Cash Gift in lieu of insurance can also be used as part of down payment. ²Comprehensive 1 Year Insurance (Oman only, excluding diesel grades) on 19YM / 19PLT: Yaris HB, Corolla HEV, Camry 2.5, Camry 3.5, Camry HEV, Supra, Avanza, Fortuner & Hilux 4x2. 20YM / 20 PLT: Yaris HB, Yaris SD, Corolla 1.8, Corolla 2.0, Corolla HEV, Camry 2.5, Camry 3.5, Camry HEV, C-HR, Avanza, Fortuner, Highlander HEV & Hilux 4x2. 21YM / 21 PLT: Corolla 2.0, C-HR, Fortuner, Hilux 4x2 & Hilux 4x4. 21YM / 21 PLT: Yaris SD, Corolla 1.8, Corolla 2.0, Corolla Cross, Camry 2.5, Camry 3.5, Camry HEV, C-HR, Fortuner, Hilux 4x2 & Hilux 4x4. 22YM / 21 PLT: Camry 2.5, Fortuner, Hilux 4x2 & Hilux 4x4. Insurance benefit under the campaign would be given upto the extent applicable for Private vehicles only. Additional premium as per insurance norms will have to be paid by the RAC, Taxi & Driving School Company. ³2 Years / 20,000 Kms Service (whichever is earlier) covering 2 services at 10,000 Kms service interval for Petrol models based on normal operating conditions (Excluding DSL grades) on all Toyota models excluding Corolla 1.8 HEV, Avalon (excluding 21YM / 20 PLT), Supra, Fortuner, Highlander HEV, LC WGN, Hiace, Granvia and Coaster. ⁴5 Years / 50,000 Kms Service (whichever is earlier) covering 5 services at 10,000 kms service interval for Petrol models based on normal operating conditions (Excluding DSL grades) on models upto 21YM (LC WGN (JLC200) 4.6L & 5.7L. ⁵8 Years / 80,000 Kms Service (whichever is earlier) covering 8 services at 10,000 Kms service interval for Petrol models based on normal operating conditions on all models of 20 YM Corolla 1.8 HEV models. ⁶Walk-in & Win Raffle: Raffle of 4 units of iPhone 13 128 GB. All individual prospects who walk-in for an enquiry of any Toyota vehicle in any Toyota Showroom in the Sultanate within the campaign period are eligible for the raffle. Raffle will be conducted at Toyota showroom Wattayah, as per the following dates 15.11.2021, 30.11.2021, 15.12.2021 and 02.01.2022. Vehicles may include dealer-installed items. For further details & to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit your nearest Toyota showroom. Pictures and colours shown above are for illustrative purposes only.

Saudi Bahwan Automotive LLC
ISO 9001:2015 CERTIFIED C.R NO:1793412

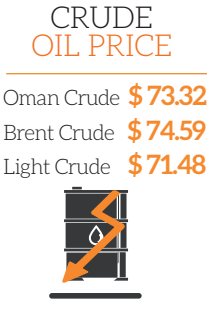
Facebook.com/toyotaoman

@toyotaomanofficial

Youtube.com/toyotaoman

www.toyotaoman.com

business



OMAN OBSERVER

www.omanobserver.om

follow us: @oman_biz



Banking Services Made Special to Suit Your World

BankDhofar provides you with a host of innovative products, services that are specially designed to suit your needs and exceed your expectations.

For more information: <https://bit.ly/BankDhofarEng>

Al Riadah Priority Banking Services | Al Riha Special Banking Services | Ladies Banking Services | Youth Banking Services | Expatriate Banking Services | Children Banking Services

بنك ظفار BankDhofar

the best bank for you

24781111 | www.bankdhofar.com

Omani govt to procure first project under PPP Law



(Image for illustration only)

PRIVATE-LED DEVELOPMENT:
Ministry of Finance initiates competitive tender for procurement of Liwa Fishery Harbour project under public-private partnership model

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

The Omani government launched on Tuesday a competitive process for its first infrastructure project for implementation via the public-private-partnership (PPP) route governed by the landmark Law of Partnership between Public and Private Sectors (The PPP Law), promulgated by Royal Decree 52/2019.

The Ministry of Finance, which has the mandate to procure projects and services via the PPP route, issued a request for Expressions of Interest (EoI) from interested investors in the development, management, operation and maintenance of the Liwa Fishery Harbour Project on the North Al Batinah coast.

The competitive procurement process is being pursued in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, it noted. The Liwa project is among a shortlist of initiatives being prepped by the Ministry of Finance for implementation on a PPP basis.

Others in the shortlist, disclosed by the Ministry earlier this year, include another multipurpose seaport development at Al Musannah in South Al Batinah Governorate, school buildings for the Ministry of Education, dialysis centres and a drug rehabilitation facility for the Ministry of Health, and a dedicated truck road from Thamrait to Salalah in Dhofar Governorate.

The selected developer will be invited to build on Liwa's relatively rudimentary harbour infrastructure to provide a range of support facilities to catalyse the growth of a thriving fisheries-centric economy around Liwa.

Current facilities include nearly 1.5 kilometres of breakwater arms, 100-metre-long fixed dock and a pair of floating berths.

In addition to an upgrade of this

infrastructure, the government envisions the potential for private investment in, among other things, a full-fledged fish market, ice-making and refrigeration facilities, boat-building and repair workshops, fish processing and value-adding plants, fish waste processing and disposal, and other commercial activities.

Opportunities for the inclusion of a marina for leisure boats, watersports, and other tourism, hospitality, dining and entertainment facilities may be explored as well.

For its part, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources will make available around 45,000 sq metres of land in the vicinity of the harbour for commercial investment and development under a long-term lease agreement signed with the developer.

While the Liwa Fishery Harbour Project is set to the first infrastructure development to be procured under the new PPP Law, there are fairly recent and successful templates to show how PPP-based seaport developments are modelled.

Under a long-term lease agreement signed with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, Falcon Tourism Investment (a subsidiary of prominent Omani developer Al Siyabi Group) is upgrading Barka Fishery Harbour at a cost of \$130 million that includes a lavish waterfront development to serve as a new landmark for shopping, entertainment, leisure and hospitality.

As part of its obligations, the developer has committed to the construction of a full-fledged, modern fish market complex. The project will also exploit its waterfront location to offer adventure watersports and boat racing activities, in addition to a 4-star luxury resort and serviced apartments.

In Taqah (Dhofar Governorate), the Ministry has signed a deal with Al Madina Taqah, a wholly owned project company of Al Madina Real Estate, to transform the Taqah fish harbour into a tourism and leisure destination as well. As the Master Developer, Al Madina will develop this site at Taqah into a mixed use destination featuring tourist elements, including a marina for leisure boats, among other tourism related facilities.

While the Liwa Fishery Harbour Project is set to the first infrastructure development to be procured under the new PPP Law, there are fairly recent and successful templates to show how PPP-based seaport developments are modelled

Stable connection. Good for business.

New Fixed Business Broadband with a reliable network you can count on.

omantel.om

Follow us:



NEW MASERSATI LEVANTE HYBRID ARRIVES IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN



MUSCAT: Alfardan Motors, the official importer of Maserati in the country, has announced the arrival of the new Maserati Levante Hybrid in the Sultanate of Oman. With the brand's first electrified SUV, Maserati takes a major step forward in its strategy for electrification, which began last year with the Ghibli Hybrid. Levante Hybrid is faster than a diesel, more sustainable than diesel or gasoline and unique in its specific characteristics.

Levante Hybrid combines the 4 cylinder, 2 litre engine with a 48 volt Hybrid system to recover energy during deceleration and braking. With a maximum power output of 330 hp and torque of 450 Nm delivered from just 2,250 rpm, the performance data of the new Levante Hybrid, only available with all-wheel drive, is impressive: a top speed of over 240 km/h and acceleration from 0 to 100 km/h in 6 seconds.

On the exterior, blue characterises the air ducts and coloured brake calipers. The blue colour was chosen by Maserati to identify hybrid cars and it already used on the Ghibli Hybrid. The Levante Hybrid is on display at the Maserati Oman Showroom, located in Athaiba, since December 7.

New central warehouse opened in Al Sawadi

MUSCAT: Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) has commenced operations at its new central warehouse in Al Sawadi, with the support of its long-term partner, Al Madina Logistics Services (ALMS).

The 2,900 sqm facility has the capacity for 4,500 pallet positions, serving to accommodate the increasing demand for OOMCO's lubricants across the Sultanate of Oman, while helping the company continue to deliver on its 'You Trust We Care' promise.

"The new centralised warehouse in Al Sawadi will ease our lubricants supply chain processes.

With direct access from the main road of Al Batinah Highway and the Expressway, the location will allow us to expand our reach beyond the populated areas



in Muscat and permit shorter delivery times," said Talib bin Omar al Maadi, Supply Chain General Manager at Oman Oil Marketing Company.

"We are always working on building valuable long-term partnerships with local

companies and our collaboration with Al Madina Logistics Services is a great addition.

Its expertise, equipment and information technology will certainly be an added value to our growing operations."

Nader Hakim, Chief Operating Officer at Al Madina Logistics Services commented, "We continue to expand our portfolio and we welcome this opportunity with Oman Oil Marketing Company as a demonstration of the trust they have placed in our services. With our versatile and cost-efficient approach to inventory and warehouse management, we place our customers' business requirements first and foremost. Our main goal is to provide the technology and resources to manage and optimise the distribution process."



MUSCAT: National Life and General Insurance Company (NLG) scripted history by retaining the #1 spot as Best Performing Company in Large Cap Segment at the Alam Al- Iktisaad

NLG wins two awards 4 times in a row at AIWA Awards 2021

(AIWA) Awards 2021 for the 4th time in a row and the first company to do so since the award was instituted in 2009.

S Venkatachalam, CEO, also won the Best CEO of the Year award maintaining his top position for the fourth time in a row at this 13th edition of AIWA awards which is a much deserved recognition of his astute business acumen and vision. Under his able leadership, the company has scaled great heights since the time he took charge of NLG in 2003.

The awards are based on the survey of financial performance of companies listed on Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) in 2020.

"I thank the organisers UMS group for recognising the Top MSX listed companies in the Sultanate of Oman across small, mid and large cap segments and I congratulate all the winners based on the performance of 2020 which was really a challenging year.

This ranking based on various financial performance parameters is all the more rewarding as it comes after overcoming many odds that the pandemic Covid-19 posed. We are really delighted and proud to retain the top spot for the 4th time in a row which makes it all the more special for us at NLG," said S Venkatachalam, CEO, NLG.



35 Omanis graduate from bp's development programmes

MUSCAT: On Sunday, bp held a graduation ceremony for 35 Omanis who have completed their development programmes. Eng Salim al Aufi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals was present.

As part of bp's aims of developing young Omani capabilities, 20 of its technicians completed the 18-month intensive programme — run by Takatuf Petrofac Oman (TPO) — to develop their technical and professional skills as they enter the labour market.

TPO welcomed its first batch of bp technicians in 2018 and has continued developing Omanis ever since.

15 Omanis also graduated from bp's three-year 'challenger' programme which is implemented in bp offices globally and offers fresh graduates in the Sultanate of Oman hands-on experience as they work on impactful projects within bp.

Yousuf al Ojaili, bp Oman President commented, "Our development programmes highlight our commitment of developing Omani capabilities as we move towards our 2040 vision and as our Omanisation approaches 90 per cent. I commend our graduates for all of their hard work and thank TPO and everyone who contributed to the success of these bright individuals."

Hormuz Marine supports local shipping firms

MUSCAT: Hormuz Marine, a leading company in bunkering solutions in the Omani Ports, has recently collaborated with Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO), an Omani bunker company, to deliver VLSFO fuel by barge through the Port of Duqm. Through this collaboration, Oman Oil Marketing was able to serve the leading shipping company, Oman Shipping Company.

On this occasion, Sulaiman Ali, the CEO of Hormuz Marine, commented, "We are proud as an Omani specialised bunker to be the first choice of local companies to begin and develop the bunkering services in the



Omani ports. Our collaboration with OOMCO will enhance its fuel delivery and we are looking for further collaborations with more local companies to enable them enhance their services."

"As the trusted physical supplier in the Omani ports, we continuously strive to make it easy for shipping companies to do business in the Sultanate of Oman," he further added.

Hormuz Marine specialises in providing round-the-clock bunker trading, with services throughout all major ports in the Sultanate of Oman (Duqm, Salalah, Muscat, Sohar, Khasab, Suwaiq, Shinas, and Sur). It handles Automotive Diesel, MGO, VLSFO, and IFO. In addition to bunker trading, it offers competitive marine lubricant trading at all the aforementioned ports.

Alizz Islamic Bank AGM values Shari'a supervisory procedures

MUSCAT: The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of Alizz Islamic Bank expressed its appreciation of the sincere efforts made by the board and executive management to strengthen the Shari'a Supervisory Procedures, which in turn contributes to promoting the bank as a leading financial institution in the Islamic banking sector.

This Annual General Meeting was held in the banks head office in Ruwi. It was chaired by Yahya Said al Jabri, Chairman of the board of directors and attended by shareholders and Sulaiman

al Harthy, the Chief Executive Officer of the bank.

The board highlighted the bank's role in promoting various packages of media and informative messages to increase awareness about the role played by Islamic banking and community initiatives. The bank, from time to time, appoints new resources with bright ideas to push Islamic banking forward.

As part of these efforts, the general assembly approved the board's proposal regarding the appointment of Shaikh Dr Ibrahim al Sawafi as a member in



the Shari'a Supervisory Board.

Sulaiman al Harthy, CEO of Alizz Islamic Bank, said: "Our approach is based on a number of key principles, primarily investment in our communities

and increasing media messages and packages to enhance awareness about the role of Islamic banking. Since I assumed my leadership position in the bank, I talked to the team about the importance of developing a prudent strategy so that Alizz Islamic Bank will be a leader of Islamic banking in the Sultanate.

We already started implementation of this strategy by launching several initiatives, the last of which was 'Manar Alizz : A will is a religious and cultural value'. Such initiatives were widely welcomed as it revives the sunna practice of writing 'wills'. We seek to implement this initiative across the governorates of the Sultanate.

In addition, we launched the Orphan's crowdfunding programme in collaboration with

the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs to support 1000 orphans in the Sultanate in aspects relating to financial management, as well as our Manar Alizz initiative that aims at increasing awareness about Islamic economy and its developmental role and the role of Islamic banks in sustainable economy, and providing researchers and scholars with necessary knowledge regarding Islamic economy, in general, and the Omani Islamic Banking experience, in particular. We have other initiatives in the pipeline to support the society."



Islamic banking sector's share climbs to 15% of banking assets

NEW ROADMAP: CBO
preparing new strategy to support growth of Islamic banking sector

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 14

Islamic banking sector in the Sultanate of Oman has accomplished a major milestone with a market share equating to over 15 per cent of the banking sector as of June 30, 2021.

International organisations International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Islamic Financial Services Board (IFSB) consider a jurisdiction with 15 per cent market share as a "systemically important Islamic banking system".

As per IFSB Stability Report 2021, the Sultanate of Oman has become the 15th country in the world that has achieved this market share. Since the issuance of the first Islamic banking licence in December 2012, the sector has grown robustly.

It presently includes two Islamic banks and five Islamic banking windows of conventional banks. Currently, Islamic banking entities operate a total of 94 branches in most geographical areas of the country.

Commenting on this growth, Tahir bin Salim al Amri (pictured), Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), said: "I am glad that Islamic banking sector in the Sultanate of Oman has continued to expand its outreach and exhibited consistent growth since its introduction eight years ago.

"Backed by robust legal,



The introduction of Islamic banking in the Sultanate of Oman has helped corporates and businesses to raise, manage and grow their capital and investment and diversify their funding sources, which has advanced entrepreneurship, competitiveness and diversification in the economy

TAHIR BIN SALIM AL AMRI
Executive President, Central Bank of Oman

regulatory and Sharia governance framework for Islamic banking sector promulgated by the CBO, this sector has offered an additional option to public for meeting their saving and financial needs, which has enhanced financial inclusion and boosted national saving and investment in the Sultanate of Oman."

He further noted: "The introduction of Islamic banking in the Sultanate of Oman has helped corporates and businesses to raise, manage and grow their capital and investment and diversify their funding sources, which has advanced entrepreneurship, competitiveness and diversification in the economy.

"Similarly, the licensing of new players has expanded the sophistication and range of products in the financial sector, leading to more efficiency through better service quality, product innovation and digitisation."

Since its inception, the Islamic

banking sector witnessed a combined average annual growth rate of 30.3 per cent between 2013 and 2020.

As of June 2021, Islamic banking sector assets in the Sultanate of Oman have reached RO 5.679 billion (equivalent to over \$14.7 billion), with a market share of 15.13 per cent.

Similarly, the market share of Islamic banking in gross financing and total deposits reached 16.9 per cent and 16.8 per cent respectively as of end-June 2021.

This robust growth has been backed by high asset-quality with a low non-performance financing ratio of 1.93 per cent as at December 2020.

Moreover, other stability indicators of Islamic banking sector all exceeded regulatory requirements with average capital adequacy ratio at 15.61 per cent against CBO requirement of 12.25 per cent as well as liquidity coverage ratio and net stable

funding ratio of 116 per cent and 119 per cent against 100 per cent requirement. Within the Islamic banking sector, two full-fledged Islamic banks contributed 41.3 per cent of assets as at June 2021 which was only 27.2 per cent as at December 2015. In order to ensure sustained growth and optimum contribution of this sector to the Omani economy as well as banking sector, CBO is preparing a new strategy for Islamic banking sector development.

Main pillars of this strategy outline initiatives that focus on improving the existing regulatory infrastructure and consumer protection frameworks, augmenting product range offered by this sector and strengthening stakeholder coordination.

Similarly, initiatives are also being envisaged to expand the outreach, nurturing Omani talent and boosting the awareness about the value proposition of Islamic finance products and services.

Omani-Korean solar-powered water desalination pilot project launched



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 14

Within the framework of Omani-Korean cooperation, Kim Chang-Kyu, Ambassador of the Republic of South Korea to the Sultanate of Oman, visited the site of the solar-powered water desalination pilot project implemented in an Omani farm in Al Nabra village in Wilayat Al Suwaiq (North Al Batinah Governorate).

The project, implemented by South Korean firm Prosave, is sponsored by the Korean Ministry of Environment, supported by global green initiative of KISA and KOTRA. The initiative aims to solve water deficiency in water-stressed countries of the Middle East.

A number of farms in North Al Batinah Governorate suffer from water salinity, including the farm where the project was launched.

The project aims to find effective solutions to the problem of salinity in farms and take advantage of modern

scientific techniques in this field.

The pilot project centres on the use of solar PV powered reverse osmosis (RO), where electricity is generated entirely from solar energy.

Photovoltaic panels are connected to the desalination system to power the reverse osmosis process (RO).

Unlike conventional processes, which are energy intensive, the technology incorporated in the pilot project enables reduced energy consumption, making the system cost-competitive.

Significantly, the pilot plant produces 36 tonnes of freshwater every day (eight hours) utilising 56 kilowatts of renewable electricity.

However, the photovoltaic component of the plant produces up to 350 kilowatts of electricity per eight hours, allowing for the surplus output to be utilised for other purposes.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by a number of farmers from Al Suwaiq and other neighbouring wilayats.

Oil prices steady on demand concerns over Omicron spread



SINGAPORE: Oil prices edged higher on Tuesday but price gains were capped due to investor worries about oil demand after renewed restrictions were imposed in Europe and Asia amid a rise in coronavirus cases.

Brent crude oil futures edged higher by 1 cent to \$74.59 a barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate crude futures gained 1 cent to \$71.48.

"Energy traders don't want to bet against Opec+ but all the short-term risks from Omicron to Fed tightening is proving to be very disruptive to the short-term outlook for oil prices," said Edward Moya, senior analyst at OANDA.

"The virus spread is delivering a bigger hit than expected and when you calculate family gatherings for the holidays, the short-term outlook could get slashed over the next month." — Reuters

GCC heads into 2022 on a firmer footing

POSITIVE TREND: Economy has likely regained pre-pandemic level

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 14

The Middle East economy looks to have recovered pandemic-related losses earlier than expected, thanks to higher oil output and almost complete lifting of health restrictions in some countries, according to the latest Economic Insight report for the Middle East, commissioned by ICAEW and compiled by Oxford Economics.

"We believe progress will continue over the coming year," said the report. "New Covid-19 outbreaks remain a risk to the outlook for the region and globally, as the emergence of the Omicron variant highlights.

"However, comparatively high vaccine coverage, especially across the Gulf, should limit the need for tight control measures.

"Provided the Omicron variant does not prove too disruptive, we expect Middle East GDP to accelerate to 4.4 per cent in 2022, after an estimated expansion of 3 per cent this year (up from 2.6 per cent three months ago)."

Activity appears to be



rebounding strongly across the GCC, driven largely by higher oil output and spending on services as health restrictions ease. With business optimism continuing to rise, the report's analysts remain upbeat about the outlook heading into 2022.

GCC GDP is expected to return to pre-crisis levels in Q1 2022, with GDP growth seen accelerating from 2.7 per cent this year (0.5 per cent higher than we projected three months ago), to 5.0 per cent in 2022.

According to the report, the recovery will continue to follow a mixed pattern given divergent growth strategies and different policy space.

The UAE's proactive approach to attracting global investment and talent, along with greater budget headroom, means it will outperform regional peers.

Meanwhile, Kuwait and the Sultanate of Oman face the prospect of a longer, more protracted recovery. The oil sector is already benefitting from higher production quotas and will be critical to boosting regional GDP growth in 2022. It should also remain an important driver of growth beyond next year as producers expand capacity, the report points out.

Meanwhile, regional PMIs show strengthening growth momentum in the non-oil sector,

with output and employment on an upward trend.

Although the pandemic is not over in the GCC, high vaccination uptake has helped regional countries avoid a Delta wave.

The remaining domestic Covid-19 restrictions are mostly related to mask wearing, PCR testing and ongoing social distancing.

"Low infection rates and less disruptive Covid measures have allowed mobility levels and domestic activity to return close to normal, helping fuel the economic recovery, with equity prices rising strongly. And while virus headwinds remain, our forecasts for the GCC show non-oil growth of 3.3 per cent in 2022, after estimated expansion of 3.8 per cent this year," the report noted.

Tourists are returning to the region after borders have reopened, aiding the recovery of the hospitality sector, with Dubai in particular witnessing a significant bounce due to the start of the delayed Expo 2020.

However, the rebound may suffer in the near-term as health situation fluctuates around the world.

The price of Brent oil has eased below \$80 per barrel as high Covid-19 numbers in Europe and

new restrictions raised concerns about demand, but it remains significantly higher than this time last year.

The Opec+ group has so far stuck to plans of steadily increasing oil output, but could adjust policy if the Omicron variant weighs on demand.

The oil market is expected to swing into oversupply soon and prices should continue to trend lower as a result.

Brent is projected to average \$72.5pb next year, slightly higher than this year, but reaching \$68pb by the end of 2022.

Higher energy prices have bolstered Gulf governments' finances as oil revenues remain dominant in the region's budget revenue structures. Recent data show Saudi Arabia's budget swung back to surplus in Q3 after more than two years in the red.

In Qatar and the UAE, data already showed surpluses in H1, while elsewhere in the region deficits are shrinking.

But uncertainty over revenue remains and the budgetary plans for 2022 and beyond unveiled by some GCC governments point to continued fiscal restraint. Consequently, the report's forecasts show an overall GCC budget surplus next year for the first time since 2014.

Asian super-apps clear regulatory road — for now

Southeast Asia’s super-apps are cruising in an express lane — for now. By helping take care of a big part of everyday mobile needs for consumers, they’re keeping governments in the region sweet. It’s a sharp contrast to the regulatory slowdowns confronting Big Tech in the United States, China and beyond.

Take GoTo and newly listed Grab. These all-in-one providers of ride-hailing, grocery delivery, payments and more are growing rapidly in a part of the world home to 650 million people coming online through their smartphones. Customers are happy to have multiple services offered seamlessly through a single app.

For states, these companies are helping drive digital adoption, ushering small- and medium-sized businesses online, and bringing finance to the masses. It’s a nation building of sorts.

During the pandemic, Grab used its digital wallet in Malaysia to help distribute support directly to users, a mechanism that avoids cash being pocketed by greedy middlemen, a common problem for benefit schemes in emerging markets.

There have been periodic obstacles. An idea to combine Singapore-based Grab and its Jakarta peer Gojek was dropped partly because of trustbuster concerns. Gojek subsequently merged with e-commerce outfit Tokopedia to form GoTo, Grab’s top regional rival.

In 2018, Singapore also fined Grab and Uber for uniting their ride-hailing units in a deal that hurt competition. GoTo’s plan to go public in Jakarta before adding a New York listing will further appease officials who want some of the benefits from their homegrown startups to accrue to domestic capital markets.

Such steps should help avoid the sort of pain being experienced by China’s Didi Global, which fell foul of Beijing and recently unveiled plans to delist just months after its US market debut.

It is also telling that Grab Chief Executive and co-founder Anthony Tan is leaving the door open to his company’s shares trading in Southeast Asia.

In the short-term, though, GoTo’s decision to soon start public life in a market unaccustomed to money-losing tech stocks could hurt its valuation. That’s a potentially pricey toll to pay, but it may help clear the regulatory road for a while longer. — Reuters

Grab used its digital wallet in Malaysia to help distribute support directly to users, a mechanism that avoids cash being pocketed by greedy middlemen



GAS TIME OUT

Environmental activists carry balloons that read ‘time’s up for gas’ as EU presents new energy plans, outside the European Commission building in Brussels. — AFP

Omicron ruins bankers’ festive season



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

BANKS HAVE HAULED IN A RECORD \$117BN IN FEES SO FAR IN 2021, BUT THE VAST MAJORITY OF DEAL MAKING HAS BEEN CONDUCTED VIRTUALLY, AS COVID-19 RESTRICTED TRAVEL AND IN-PERSON MEETINGS

The rising infection rate from the Omicron variant of Covid-19 has caused much concern in major organisation. Travel bans, cancelled parties and virtual festive gatherings — firms in the financial district of London are ripping up their Christmas plans in the wake of the new variant.

UBS is the latest bank to change course, curbing travel for its European dealmakers. The Swiss bank has told staff in Europe to avoid business trips as a precaution as various European governments impose fresh restrictions.

Switzerland now requires visitors from more than 20 countries to quarantine for 10 days upon arrival, while the UK, the US and other countries have tightened rules for arriving passengers.

The move comes as more firms are rethinking return to office, travel and Christmas plans for their staff after the discovery of the Omicron variant. The rise of infection has created a new sense of caution in the build-up to the festive period.

Among large companies, JPMorgan has cancelled its annual Christmas carols concert, which typically sees hundreds of its dealmakers and clients gather in its elaborate Great Hall at its Victoria Embankment offices.

HSBC told UK employees that they should consider scaling down their festive

celebrations, saying they should “take business continuity precautions, such as conducting them virtually or split-team attendance.

And the London Bullion Market Association has called off the sector’s annual flagship dinner due to growing concern over Omicron.

Meanwhile, asset manager Jupiter has cancelled its staff Christmas party even before Omicron was discovered and is now offering a socially distanced lunch instead.

“We were extremely sympathetic to concern that a large-scale party so close to Christmas should be avoided to minimise the risk of Covid infection as employees prepare to gather with family and friends to celebrate the holiday,” a spokesperson said.

AllianzGI has also postponed any staff festivities until at least the new year and told employees to avoid social gatherings, a spokesperson said. Beyond the financial district, restaurant and bar owners have told the BBC that Christmas parties were cancelled at an escalating rate over the weekend of 27 November, a day after the discovery of the Omicron variant was announced.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has resisted imposing restrictions on socialising, but has rolled out new requirements for travellers returning to the UK to take a PCR test and self-isolate until they receive a negative result. He said that the government was “not changing

the guidance on how you should be living your life” and that events such as Christmas parties should go ahead.

But senior dealmakers at banks, have said that travelling to client meetings have become increasingly difficult in recent weeks. One senior banker said he had to quarantine and had taken five lateral flow tests just to be “let out into the wild” to meet clients.

Banks have hauled in a record \$117bn in fees so far in 2021, according to data provider Dealogic, but the vast majority of deal making has been conducted virtually, as Covid-19 restricted travel and in-person meetings. However, since the UK government loosened guidelines in September, bankers have been travelling again to reconnect with clients and secure new business.

In September, senior bankers had said that meeting clients in person was “critical” and competitive pressures were forcing dealmakers to get back on the road. But travel also allowed a break from the relentless back-to-back Zoom calls with clients and colleagues.

A head of European M & A at a large US investment bank said bankers were desperate to make it to the festive period for a break from the frantic deal-flow. “I’ve been in this business for a long, long time and never seen it this busy,” he said. “We are all exhausted.” (The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK)

Lifting the lid on global inequality



JAYATI GHOSH

The author is Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst

The World Inequality Report 2022, produced by the Paris-based World Inequality Lab, is a remarkable document for many reasons — starting with its demonstration of the immense power of patient collective research.

The report provides the latest estimates, based on careful aggregation of national data from a multitude of sources, of income and wealth inequality at the national, regional and global level.

It gives long-run time-series data for these indicators, allowing us to consider recent patterns in a broader historical context. And it expands on different dimensions of inequality in revealing new ways.

Any research enterprise as ambitious as this one will inevitably elicit quibbles about the datasets used, the assumptions required to generate particular series, and the

ways in which some data gaps have been filled.

My own minor criticism relates to the World Inequality Lab’s use of purchasing power parity (PPP) exchange rates to determine and compare national incomes across countries.

As I have argued elsewhere, while PPP exchange rates appear to control for cross-country differences in price levels and living standards, they are ridden with conceptual, methodological, and empirical problems.

For starters, PPP exchange rates assume that the structure of each country’s economy is similar to that of the benchmark country (the United States) and changes in the same way over time. When applied to developing economies, this assumption is especially weak.

Moreover, the convoluted weighting procedure for goods can result in the inclusion of

unrepresentative, high-priced products that are rarely consumed in some countries.

For example, Angus Deaton has noted how packaged cornflakes may be available in poor countries but are bought by only a relatively small minority of rich people. Expenditure weights from national accounts do not reflect the consumption patterns of people who are poor by global standards. There is a further, and possibly even more troubling, conceptual issue.

High-PPP countries — that is, those where the actual purchasing power of the local currency is deemed to be much higher than its nominal value — are typically low-income economies with low average wages. PPP is high precisely because a significant section of the workforce receives very low remuneration, which means that goods and services are available more cheaply than in countries where the majority

of workers receive higher wages.

The widespread incidence of unpaid labour in many poor households in low-income countries further amplifies the effect.

So, it is clear that the local currency’s greater purchasing power reflects conditions of indigence and low or no remuneration for what could even be the majority of workers.

PPP-modified GDP data may therefore miss the point. By regarding greater purchasing power of a given monetary income as an advantage, rather than a reflection of the greater absolute poverty of the majority of an economy’s workers, PPP estimates effectively overstate poorer countries’ incomes compared to those of rich economies.

Predictably, the report is strong on appropriate redistributive policies, especially the potential for increased taxation of wealth and corporate profits. There is also

scope for looking more closely at “predistribution,” or the range of regulatory regimes and legal codes that have enabled today’s excessive concentration of wealth and income in the first place.

The primary cause of “predistributive” inequality is, in a word, privatisation: of finance, the natural commons, the knowledge commons (through intellectual-property rights), and public services and amenities. One could add to that states’ tendency — glaringly obvious since the 2008 global financial crisis — to protect large-scale private capital, while allowing it to wreak havoc on ordinary citizens.

The reality captured by the World Inequality Report reflects human choices, which means that it can be changed by making other choices. That is why the report is much more than a valuable compendium of useful data and analysis. It is a guide to action. © Project Syndicate, 2021

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 Salalah 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

• Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
• Choose from a wide range of brands & models
• PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
• Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

أوربت ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease

Classifieds

Tally
POWER OF SIMPLICITY

TALLY FOR VAT

For Tally Sales, Services or Customization

Contact: TallyGuru +968 79248644, 98753781
Email: guru.prasad@rtsgroup.com
Roudh Lotas Group LLC

TallyPrime

http://www.rltsgroup.com/tally-accounting-software/

WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 15, 2021 | JUMADA AL ULA 10, 1443 AH

OMAN DAILY
Observer

Classified Section

Mohammed al Rashdi: 99841230
m.alrahd186@yahoo.com

Ali al Maashari: 99639264
ali.almashari@omandaily.om

Saada al Rashdi
95919344

94501166
24649593
24649595

Tally is now available on the **Cloud**

Ask for FREE Demo

Think TALLY
Call **977 TALLY**
(977 82559)

TallyPrime GOLD

TSO, Tally Solutions for Oman, by Infinity Thoughts LLC : 977 TALLY (977 82559) * sales@tallysolutionsoman.com * www.TallySolutionsOman.com

SIT. WANTED

EXPERIENCED
Pakistani driver with
Omani light vehicle
driving licence seeks
suitable opening.
Speaks Arabic,
Hindi, English and
is familiar with
Muscat, interior
areas. Contact GSM
95856719

CUSTOMER,
logistics, freight
coordinator (Kerala)
4 years experience in
same field in Oman
looking suitable
position. I am
interested on working
partner also. NOC
available.
+968 92267276.

SIT. VACANT

A well-established
shipping and forwarding
Co in Oman is looking
for sales candidates
for their shipping &
forwarding division
candidates having
sufficient experience in
Oman market with valid
driving licence may
apply to cgs1hr2022@
gmail.com

Smile Dental Clinic
Al Ghubrah, Muscat

Dr. Murugesh MDS
Specialist Orthodontist

Available all the days of
the month except Friday

Tel: 99785613 / 24499698

- Orthodontics
- Root Canal Treatment
- Ceramic Crowns & Bridges
- Treatment for Bad Breath
- Treatment for Bleeding Gums

Quality Comes First

Tower Cranes & Passenger Lifts:

- Sales and Rental Services
- Installation
- Maintenance Service
- Breakdown Service
- Spare Parts Supply
- Hoist & Lowering
- Support Fixation
- Dismantling

Steel Fabrication Works

NEW MANARA TECHNICAL SERVICES LLC
Mobile: +968 9853 1975, 9853 1970
E-mail: info@newmanara.com / newmanaratechnical@gmail.com
Website: www.newmanara.com

Al Eman Dental Clinic

Flat 22, Floor 2
Abu Zaki Trading Building
Opp. Al Nahda Hospital
Sultan Qaboos Street

+968 24834113
+968 97454854
+968 96438854

Our Mission: To preserve your teeth and smile for a lifetime

FOR SALE

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

INVESTOR REQUIRED

INVESTOR required
to start a small cold-
pressed cooking oil ex-
traction unit in Oman.
Cold pressed oil will
be extracted by using
traditional wooden
churners. This method
helps to retain the
natural minerals and
vitamins in the oil and
is beneficial for health.
For more information
please contact: 0091-
9743234719.
edelweissbhoomi@gmail.
com

SERVICES

AUTOCAD/
REVIT ARCH
MEP, part/full-
time. Contact
WhatsApp:
79037728.

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

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

RENT A CAR

Buttercup

Rent A Car

AMAZING OFFERS

○ Rent a car for 10
days and get an
extra free day.

○ Rent for one
month and get 5
days free.

All the cars are
2016 brand new
special prices for
public departments,
companies and
long-term contracts.
☎972494490.

LUXURIOUS

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

PEST CONTROL OMAN CO. L.L.C.

Supply of Pesticides, Gel (crocoraches),
Public Health chemicals, Agriculture
chemicals, Snake repellent, Rodent baits
and other insect repellent from
UK & USA

PROFESSIONALS in
Pest Control Service,
Bedbug Treatment,
Rodent Treatment,
Snake Treatment
and Termite
Treatment [Pre
& Post Construction]

Tel: 24787606, 24787503
Direct Line: 24786077
GSM: 99382355, 99172309

pcomctom@omantel.net.om
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman

ZEN POLYNE

"TARPAULIN WAREHOUSE IN OMAN"
INDIAN BRAND BEST QUALITY LDPE TARPOLINE
CROSS LAMINATED MULTI-LAYER TARPOLINE

FEATURES OF ZEN-POLYNE

- U.V. STABILIZED
- 100% WATER PROOF
- LIGHT WEIGHT
- THERMO - WELDED JOINTS.
- FLEXIBLE & CUSTOMISED SIZES.
- STRONGEST TARPOLINE EVER
- SUPERIOR DART IMPACT STRENGTH

RAVIRA INDUSTRIES

Please Contact: OMAN : +968 9329 1473 / 7937 1865
UAE : +971 5030 88676
Mail Id: raviranr@omantel.net.om / www.zev.raviranr.com

FOR RENT

Substantial Villa in Hay Al Shatti near Grand Hayatt.
3 Floors with 40 Rooms, 22 Bathrooms
which is suitable for Embassy / Clinic / School /
Multipurpose Office / Residential Premises.

TEL : 99643760 / 24704994

GCL GALAXY CARGO LOGISTICS

WORLD WIDE
AIR & SEA
CARGO SERVICES

Location: Rex Road,
Behind Modern Oman Bakery
GSM : +968 99635330 / 93569551
Email : gcloman@hotmail.com
Website : gcloman.com

Airport to Airport
Port to Port
Door to Door
FCL Services
LCL Services
Consolidation
GCC Road Transport
Professional Packing
Moving Local & International

VIGAS CARGO
WORLD WIDE DOOR TO DOOR

Transportation,
Packing &
Cargo Services

♦ CARGO SERVICES BY
AIR & SEA WORLD WIDE

♦ DOOR TO DOOR DELIVERY
IN INDIA, INDONESIA & UK

♦ PROFESSIONAL PACKERS
& MOVERS

♦ MUSCAT - DUBAI - MUSCAT
REGULAR TRANSPORT

H.O. Ruwi
99851366
92495068

Ghubrah : 93571703
Falaj : 93571704
Store : 93571823
Misfa : 98119561
93260956

vigas.cargo@yahoo.com

M M T CARGO
DOOR TO DOOR SERVICE

MUSCAT:
95605353, 95605454
BARKA:
95893242, 93743308
SOHAR:
96773031, 95347988
FALAJ:
94002341, 95136067
SALALAH:
94575905, 97858656
DUQUM:
97218831, 94002341

ROAD, SEA & AIR TRANSPORT WORLD WIDE

GTC Building, Near Badr Al Sama Hospital,
Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman
E-mail: mmtcargo@yahoo.com
Customer Care: 96773031 / 97695454

Sea Cargo **800 Bz/Kg** Express Cargo to Kerala 5 to 7 days*

AL NAMANI CARGO
DOOR TO DOOR AIR & SEA CARGO WORLD WIDE

ALL OVER INDIA
EXPRESS DELIVERY

Online
Tracking

TOLL FREE NUMBER
80066766

24/7
FREE PICK UP

www.alnamanicargo.com

INDIA | BANGLADESH | INDONESIA | PHILIPPINES | SRI LANKA | ETHIOPIA | ALL GCC SERVICE AVAILABLE

95587410, 99785420, 99638698, 98523831

HO - RUWI - HAMRIYA, GHALA, AL AMRAT, SEEB, SOHAR

AL KHOORY EQUIPMENT EST.
P.O. Box 545, P.C. 117, Al Wadi Al Kabir Area, Sultanate of Oman

Official distributor of
Schneider Electric

Stockist & Wholesaler of Low Voltage Switchgear Products and
a One Stop Solution for all Switchgear Products and Assembly

Schneider Electric Lovato DAB WEG

Tel: +968 24832474, +968 79474556
E-mail: alkhoory@omantel.net.om • www.alkhooryoman.com

OMAN DAILY
Observer

For Advertisements

Please Contact with our Team:

Head Office

Mohd Al Rashdi
99841230
m.alrahd186@yahoo.com

Ali Al Maashari
99639264
wadiameeh@yahoo.com

Salalah Office

Bakhit Al Shihri
92998577
bakhit.omandaily@gmail.com

Nizwa Office

Abdullah Al Abri
99429094
nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om

Suham Office

Musalam Al Saidi
99429192
sohardaily@outlook.com

FRIDAY, JULY 10, 2020 DHUL, GA'DAIA 16, 1441 AH

Be Careful,
Be Responsible

HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS
OATH TO NEW MINISTER

NEW RO SO
BANKNOTE FROM
THIS MONTH

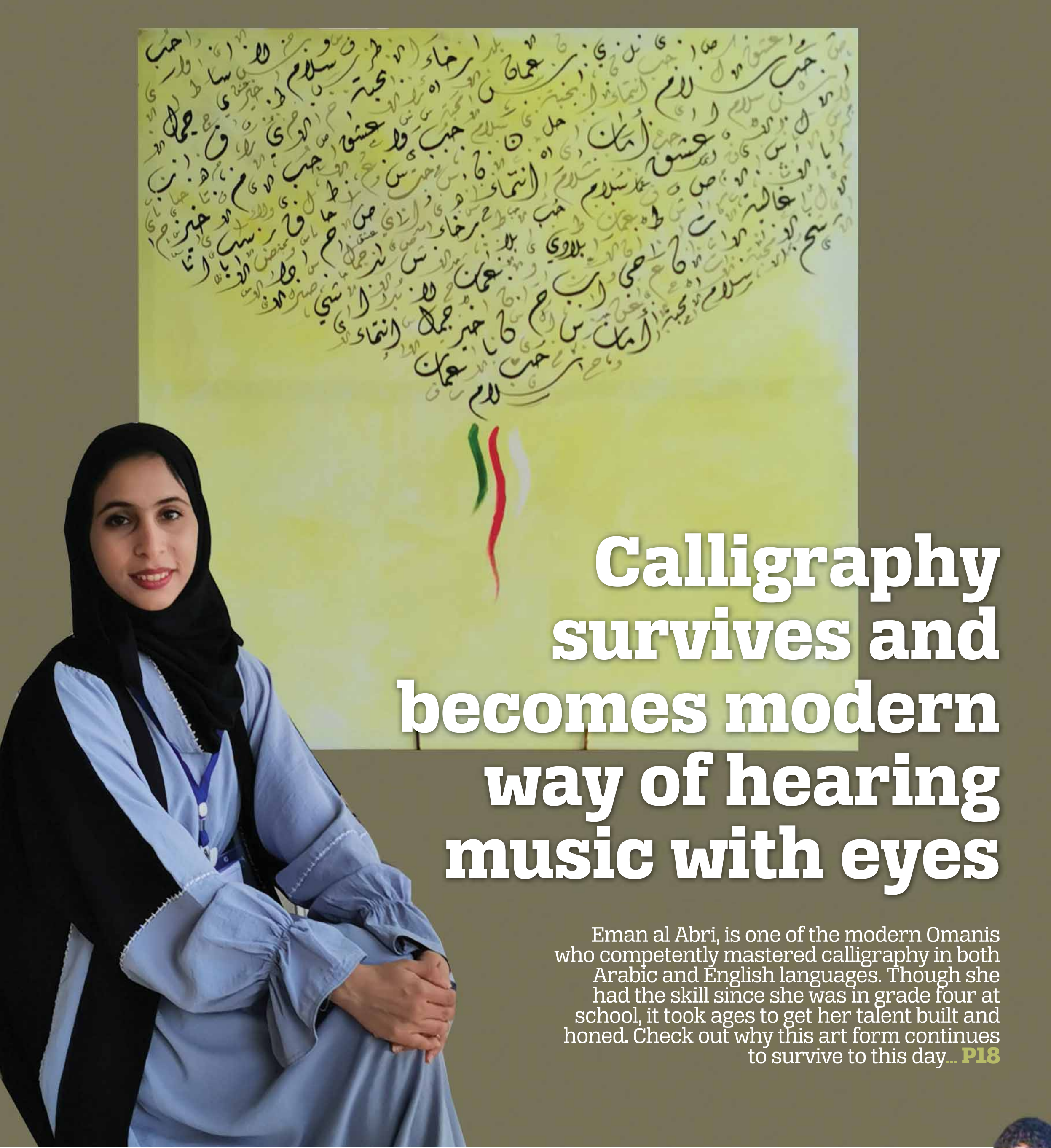
STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

Need a Job

A young Omani
Women looking for a
job in Muscat. She
holds a bachelor's
degree in computer
networks and
has experience
at Muscat
International Airport.

zozaalmashari4@gmail.com

features



Calligraphy survives and becomes modern way of hearing music with eyes

Eman al Abri, is one of the modern Omanis who competently mastered calligraphy in both Arabic and English languages. Though she had the skill since she was in grade four at school, it took ages to get her talent built and honed. Check out why this art form continues to survive to this day... **P18**

FASHION

READ

ALL ABOUT ME!

BY MEL BROOKS

The EGOT and Kennedy Center honouree shares stories about making comedy for the stage, film and television.

Disabled models breaking taboos on Ivory Coast catwalk

TWENTY MODELS WITH disabilities have taken to the catwalk in Ivory Coast in a ground-breaking assault on taboo and stigma.

Decked out in a red suit, traditional Sahelian boubou robes, multi-coloured African bogolan prints and a blue tunic with printed motifs, the models showed off the latest creations of Abidjan designers in an event dubbed “Strong and Beautiful Together.”

Grace Beho had her right forearm amputated after a road accident.

Six months ago, she created the Mougnan Foundation, an organisation set up to improve the quality of life for disabled Ivorian women. Its name

means “moving forward despite difficulties” in the Guere language of western Ivory Coast.

“I think that the women who are going to be watching us and who do not yet have confidence in themselves... are going to assert themselves and show themselves to the world as they are,” she said as she stepped off the stage.

Leslie Antsere, who suffers from neurofibromatosis, a genetic disease which can cause disfiguring tumours, said she was delighted to take part in an event that had stopped her from “feeling ashamed.”

The MC at the fashion show, Nelly Aka, was sporting high heels despite a

foot disability.

“Even in a situation of disability, we can go beyond ourselves and do many things,” she said.

“Overcoming disability is about accepting yourself – the way people look at you and criticise you will not affect who you are,” she said.

A model called Sylvia, dressed in a green-and-white dress, opened the show, coming down the catwalk on crutches by the side of a swimming pool in front of an enthusiastic audience in a hotel in the Ivorian economic capital.

The event took place on December 3 – the UN’s International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

Marginalised

Officially, Ivory Coast has 453,000 people who are disabled in some way, two per cent of the population. For them such an event is unheard of.

“Even mentioning a disabled person in the world of beauty is taboo in Ivory Coast,” said Ange Prisca Gnagbo, one of organisers for the special evening.

“They are sidelined in all the beauty shows,” she added.

But such practices are entrenched

in Ivory Coast, where disabilities are often viewed – as elsewhere in Africa – as an affliction.

“Many disabled women are very vulnerable, rejected and marginalised. So they hide away for fear of being judged,” said sociologist Yves Ouya.

For Dr Abdoudramane Coulibaly, consultant at the World Health Organization and head of a disability NGO, the issue also faces a lack of political will.

“Let’s suggest to able-bodied people that they walk with crutches for a day – (that way) we will be gain more understanding than with big speeches,” he suggested.

“My dream is that in the coming decades I will see a handicapped person making a name for himself or herself in areas where the doors have been closed,” said Beho. —AFP





find us on
TWITTER
Scan the QR Code or follow us on
www.twitter.com/omanobserver

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

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



AROUND THE WORLD

CULTURE

Nigerian heritage inspires jewellery for all time



A NIGERIAN DESIGNER is incorporating artefacts like the famous Benin Bronzes into fashion accessories, hoping to promote the country's cultural heritage as well as make a profit. Tosan Ideh said ITSK Gold, the company he co-founded with his friend Tuoyo Dudu, was motivated by Nigerian cultural symbols and artefacts to create jewellery like rings and bracelets as well as clothes. At his shop in Lagos, each piece of gold, silver and brass-coated jewellery represents Nigerian tradition and culture. "So people might really be able to speak their languages but symbols always resonate and it is something we felt people can always reso-



nate with like anywhere around the world," Ideh, who has lived in Canada, said. "I feel that we want to create products that people can have for a long time, they can pass from one generation to generation and know that this is true African heritage which is timeless." Among the jewellery are gold rings depicting the Queen Idia Mask, part of thousands of Benin Bronzes looted by British troops from the Benin palace in 1897. Idia was a 16th century queen mother from the Kingdom of Benin. Also on display is a ring topped with a Jekri sword, a symbol of the Niger Delta's Itsekiri people which is associated with courage and royalty and believed to have magical powers. "It is not just wearing pieces, it is wearing pieces that mean something," said customer Abdulmalik Obaseki after buying a lapel that represented his dual Hausa and Benin tribal roots. — Reuters

DISCOVERY

Footprints in Spain show meat-eating dinosaurs were fast and furious



IT ALMOST IS not fair. Carnivorous dinosaurs were armed with menacing teeth inside muscular jaws, wielded dangerous claws on their hands and feet, and boasted keen vision and sense of smell. And, as new research confirms, some were pretty fast, too. Two trackways of Cretaceous Period fossilised footprints from about 120 million years ago discovered in northern Spain's La Rioja region show that the medium-sized meat-eating dinosaur species that made them could run at about 28 miles per hour (45 kph), scientists said on Thursday. This roughly matches the top speed achieved by Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt, the world's fastest human being. Two trackways located about 65 feet (20 metres) apart were discovered, one with seven footprints and the other with five. Each track — an impression of a three-toed foot with claws — measures around 12 inches (30 cm) long. They were made on the muddy surface of a lake plain in a region also populated by long-necked plant-eating dinosaurs, bipedal plant-eating dinosaurs, flying reptiles called pterosaurs, crocodiles, and turtles. Speed only added to the arsenal of meat-eating dinosaurs like the species that left the footprints in Spain. "Their capacity to run very quickly and their maneuver-

ing abilities surely allowed them to chase prey very efficiently. And of course I wouldn't like to be caught by this guy on a riverbank," said Pablo Navarro-Lorbes, a paleontology doctoral student at Universidad de La Rioja in Spain and lead author of the research published in the journal Scientific Reports. The footprints bore characteristics showing they were made by a theropod, a group encompassing all the meat-eating dinosaurs, including Tyrannosaurus rex. Theropods were bipedal, with the largest perhaps 50 feet (15 metres) long. The researchers believe the trackways were made by two different individuals of the same species. They suspect it was from one of two theropod families: the spinosaurs, many of which were fish-eaters, or carcharodontosaurs, known for shark-like teeth. The individuals were about 13-16 feet (4-5 metres) long and 7 feet (2 metres) tall, weighing 440-660 pounds (200-300 kg). Running speed was calculated based on the relationship between the animal's hip height — estimated from the footprint length — and stride length. The stride length from one of the trackways was 18.3 feet (5.6 metres), while the other was 17.2 feet (5.2 metres). One of the dinosaurs ran 19.7-27.7 miles per hour (31.7-44.6 kph) — among the highest speed ever estimated for

a dinosaur — and the other at 14.5-23.1 miles per hour (23.4-37.1 kph). One trackway indicates a smooth increase in speed. The other suggests an animal maneuvering as it ran. Universidad de La Rioja paleontologist and study co-author Angelica Torices said speed helped not only in hunting but in fleeing danger including "bigger theropods that could see them as their prey." Of the innumerable dinosaur tracks found worldwide, nearly all represent walking rather than running. The fastest estimated running speed based on footprints was a Jurassic Period theropod trackway in Utah at 34 miles per hour (55 km per hour). Scientists also have calculated dinosaur speeds based on biomechanical models. The fastest using this method was the Jurassic turkey-sized theropod Compsognathus at 40 miles per hour (65 km per hour). "There are several factors that dictate the running ability of a dinosaur," Navarro-Lorbes said. "One of them is size. Some paleontologists think that theropods with sizes between 100 and 1,000 kilograms (220-2,200 pounds) could have been some of the best dinosaur runners because of the relationship between their weight and muscular performance," Navarro-Lorbes added, with elongated legs another key factor. — Reuters

A PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE



Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla

Alarming spread of the Omicron strain

MUCH IS STILL unknown about the Omicron strain (a mutated strain of Covid-19), but what is clear is that it is a troubling trend and this virus is certainly spreading rapidly. For instance, in South Africa and the United Kingdom — countries with the best variant control and high rate of vaccination — cases are increasing exponentially. Indeed, Omicron undoubtedly outperformed the highly mobile delta in South Africa and may soon do the same elsewhere. In other words, following several studies, Omicron is spreading in highly immune communities as quickly as the original virus spread in communities that have no immunity at all. Perhaps if this continues and is left unchecked, the probability that there is a big wave of it waiting for the world, greater than we expected with Delta! To be clear, this does not mean that the pandemic clock has been reset to early 2020. Previous vaccinations and infections can mitigate the worst effects of the virus. Even if protection against infection is eroded - so to speak - protection against severe illness and death must be more permanent. At the same time, this mutant doesn't look terribly malicious just yet — but if I can tell, this observation comes with even bigger caveats. When we follow the scene in South Africa where the disease is prevalent, we will notice that the doctors there have not seen as many severe cases as in the previous waves. Also, as everyone follows, other countries with small numbers of people did not find many patients who were very infected either. However, there are several reasons to believe that news

of its seriousness may turn out to be less rosy than it currently appears. Initially, it is early, and the infection can take weeks to develop into severe infections and eventually lead to death. Of course, it is difficult to predict the effect in the real world, but the effect is large enough that the protection against infection may be very low and I could be certain here that we are dealing with a variant that has no problem in infecting the vaccinated individuals! So we can say at the moment that two doses of the vaccine plus the infection or three doses get people up to a higher level of neutralising antibodies, which can hold up better with the Omicron. Certainly, we are not in the same situation as we were in early 2020 because we now have the tools to control the Omicron mutant. Vaccines are likely to continue to protect against severe infection, in addition to the third booster vaccine, which will enhance that protection, not to mention that manufacturers and pharmaceutical companies are working currently on a special Omicron booster! Finally, we must remain positive with all this as much as possible, as everyone now understands better the transmission of the virus through the air and how to stop it with masks and ventilation. There are antivirals on the horizon and there are even rapid tests, although they are easier to get, we know that physical distancing has curbed the virus before. It may also be true that the Omicron variant propagates quickly, but we know how to slow it down!

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



The sky speaks
in thousand
colours

Calligraphy survives and becomes modern way of hearing music with eyes

BY ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHAMI

If one asks what calligraphy is exactly, many would pretend to know what it is all about but is unable to provide a proper explanation. The word "calligraphy" originates from the Greek language and means the art of beautiful writing. Centuries ago, calligraphy gave people all over the world the opportunity to communicate with each other. Whether in the form of cave paintings, symbols, Asian characters or Arabic and western writ-

ing, calligraphy was and always will be seen as an art of communication. Calligraphy has existed for thousands of years and demonstrated independently in multiple cultures worldwide.

Since the dawn of civilisation, every community had its own different calligraphy, all of which were founded between a mix of necessity and creative desires, using different styles and tools. Calligraphers are very aware of such heritage and it plays a major role in contemporary calligraphy, which is shaped by a long, inspiring history. In fact, imitating historical handwriting is a wide and encouraged method of achieving calligraphic success.

However, the introduction of printing machines has slowly eroded the reputation of calligraphy as many now prefer the more effective, faster and cheaper method. This has gotten worst with the invention of home printers and computers.

Nevertheless, calligraphy survives becoming an artistic process of forming beautiful symbols by hand and arranging them in a way that inscribes words that possess integrity, harmony and rhythm.

In this basic definition, integrity represents admirable patterns and design of letters and symbols in calligraphy images. Harmony is a pleasing relationship between the words and characters. Rhythm is a deliberate repetition in calligraphic writing that creates feelings of patterns and emphasis within the eyes of the viewer. On their own, none of these factors reflects a valid calligraphic art form, but only when all gather, the entire process takes a shape of calligraphy.

Simply, calligraphy is where symbols and gestures meet, but basically, calligraphy is writing. It utilises traditional tools of the writer, a pen and ink, or brush and paint. However, as writing is a way of communicating predetermined meanings through standard forms of language, calligraphy reflects the extension of the whole body and its spirit. The spirit informs the body, which should move in a unified gesture, transferring the energy of both body and spirit into the arm, the hand, the pen and finally into the mark.

Calligraphy aims to produce a reaction, just like any quality piece of sculpture or painting, its goals are to invoke a deeper meaning and communicate with the viewer on both the linguistic and creative level. Although a bit too metaphorical to be consid-

ered a valid definition, many experts recognise that reading calligraphy is the closest way one can get to hearing music with eyes. Interestingly, this may be the most precise explanation of what calligraphic creative passion actually is.

Mastering calligraphy and writing how to write in historical styles is an excellent means of training both the hand and the eye. Only copying the ancient handwriting does not represent the creative purpose of calligraphy. However, it provides both a fine starting point for beginners and an interesting exercise for skilful calligraphers. Among those passionate calligraphers is Eman al Abri, who competently masters calligraphy in both Arabic and English languages.

Though she had the skill since she was in grade four at school, it took ages to get her talent built and honed. Marking the actual start of her journey in

professionally scripting Arabic calligraphy was recorded in 2010. Out of her serious interest in calligraphy, she started in 2014 conducting training workshops for other calligraphy enthusiasts.

"I feel calligraphy is not only understanding the skills but marks a spiritual matter. Both in writ-

ing and music, rhythm is the most outstanding element. It is rhythm, which lends calligraphy the breath of the individual," Eman al Abri explained.

Interestingly, she is competent in English calligraphy likewise, practising the round hand, copperplate and the modern English font too. She started her talent in English calligraphy in 2020 and currently she is organising training workshops and private tuitions. Over the past years, Eman participated in different art competitions and exhibitions locally and regionally. Therefore, she is planning to produce an educational document serving as a guide for calligraphy beginners and enthusiasts.

Moving her talent to the next level, Eman started doing professional calligraphy workshops and receiving business orders, via @eman.alabri, rather than just exercising a personal talent. She has conducted workshops and tuitions in English and Arabic calligraphy for Arabic and native speakers of different ages.

"Even for skilled artists and people who are good with their hands, calligraphy requires patience and practice over and over," Eman commented.

Generally, calligraphy is more about individual gestures and the meaning that can be expressed in writing beyond what is inborn in the symbols themselves. As calligraphy is nothing more than a hobby for some people, enthusiasts can certainly build a successful career in calligraphy if they are willing to put in the time and effort.

