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NEW CANNERY PROJECT TO EXPLOIT OMAN'S RICH SARDINE RESOURCES



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JUVE'S TITLE HOPES ROCKED



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AT ONE WITH THE WAVES: BODYSURFING IN CAPE TOWN



Gandhi Peace Prize for Sultan Qaboos

MUSCAT: The Foreign Ministry said that the Sultanate welcomes the declaration in New Delhi that Gandhi Peace Prize-2019 has been conferred on late Sultan Qaboos.

In a statement, the Foreign Ministry expressed thanks and appreciation for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, head of the judging panel and the members for this gesture which comes in recognition of the role played by late Sultan Qaboos in supporting peace and resolving conflicts in the region, and for his wise leadership of the modern Renaissance of the Sultanate, and his role in promoting the Sultanate's relations with the world countries and the friendly Republic of India.

The statement emphasised that this award expresses the depth of friendship between the Sultanate and India and the two wise leaderships of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Indian President Ram Nath Kovind. — ONA

INSIDE



FRESH DELUGE WORSENS AUSTRALIA FLOODS

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'SORDID' DRAMA ROCKS INDIA'S FINANCE CAPITAL

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■ HM GETS MESSAGE FROM MAURITANIAN PRESIDENT



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. The message deals with the bilateral relations and fields of cooperation between the two brotherly countries. The message was received by HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, when he received Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Mauritians Abroad, Envoy of the Mauritanian President. **DETAILS ON P2**

PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI

Oman's stand on Syrian crisis positive and precise: Mekdad

MUSCAT: Dr Faisal Mekdad, Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, has described Oman's stand on the Syrian crisis as "positive" and "precise" as it stems from the enlightened thought of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Dr Mekdad commended Oman's balance, sustained policy and its sense of responsibility which, he said, earned the Sultanate the respect and appreciation of the world. He valued the efforts exerted by Oman to end the Syrian people's suffering caused by the war.

Dr Mekdad said that his visit to the Sultanate was the first to be made to an Arab state after his appointment as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates. The visit, he added, aims to deepen ties between the two countries and peoples. He underscored the Sultanate's role backing the stabilisation of Syria to help allow the country attend to its Arab, regional and interna-



tional concerns.

Speaking about the return of Syria to the Arab League, Dr Mekdad said, "Syria is the pulsating Arab heart. Syria has not exited the Arab League through Arab consensus." In this context, he observed, "blaming the conditions in Syria will only prolong the Syrian crisis", adding that his country's absence from the Arab League is "a shortfall in joint Arab action".

Asked to comment on efforts towards "Syrian reconciliation", Dr Mekdad said that the govern-

ment of his country works for the Syrian people and for the realisation of their aspirations. The government is willing to engage in dialogue with the opposition to outline tracks for shouldering responsibility and advancing the interests of the Syrian people, "except the foreign-funded terrorist organisations", which, he said "cannot be accommodated because they carry foreign agendas".

The Syrian minister welcomed the return of more than 3 million refugees to Syria, noting that "We are for the unconditional return of Syrian refugees because they actually come back home."

Deploing the Israeli attacks on Syria, he said that the attacks cannot go on forever.

He affirmed that the Syrian Arab Army confronted the offensives by downing many missiles, of which 40 were intercepted in the recent attacks while Israel made no gains on the ground, particularly along border areas. — ONA

Saudi offers ceasefire in Yemen

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia on Monday offered Yemen's fighters a "comprehensive" UN-supervised ceasefire, as part of a series of new initiatives aimed at ending a catastrophic six-year conflict.

But the Ansar Allah fighters, who have recently stepped up attacks on the kingdom, including its oil facilities, dismissed Riyadh's initiatives as "nothing new".

The fighters have also been pushing to seize the Saudi-backed Yemeni government's

last northern stronghold, in an escalation of the country's six-year conflict.

SUPERVISION

The initiative includes "a comprehensive ceasefire across the country under the supervision of the United Nations", a Saudi government statement said.

Riyadh also proposed reopening the airport in Sanaa and restarting political negotiations between the Yemeni government and the fighters, the state-

ment added.

"We want the guns to fall completely silent", Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan told reporters in Riyadh. "The initiative will take effect as soon as Ansar Allah agrees to it."

In April last year, the Saudi-led military coalition battling the Ansar Allah began a temporary ceasefire in war-ravaged Yemen to prevent the spread of coronavirus, but the fighters dismissed the initiative as political manoeuvring. — AFP

HM greets Iran, Pakistan

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Hassan Rouhani of Iran, on the occasion of the Iranian New Year (Nowruz). His Majesty also sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Arif Alawi of Pakistan, on his country's National Day. — ONA

New Covid-19 wave fear grips the Sultanate

ASTRAZENECA US TRIAL DATA A CONFIDENCE BOOSTER

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Oman reported an exceedingly high number of cases and deaths on Monday as the health experts warned of the new wave across the world.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has reported 728 new cases of Covid-19, bringing the total number of cases registered in the Sultanate to 151,528. With seven deaths recorded on Monday, the total death toll is now 1,629.

Seventy-two were hospitalised during the past 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients in hospitals to 356, including 104 in Intensive Care Units (ICUs).

"The increase in the number of patients in ICUs is worrying and dangerous and the failure to comply with precautionary measures is one of the reasons for this", said Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health.

Dr Al Saeedi said that the Supreme Committee has taken some precautionary measures during the past two meetings and more stringent ones cannot be ruled out if the epidemiological situation continues to rise.



The increase in the number of patients in ICUs is worrying and dangerous and the failure to comply with precautionary measures is one of the reasons for this

DR AHMED BIN MOHAMMED AL SAEEDI
Minister of Health

ICU PATIENTS

He called on the target groups to take the vaccines and said there is a significant decrease in the number of ICU patients among those over 65 years after receiving the vaccine.

Meanwhile, British drug major AstraZeneca an-

nounced positive late-stage trial results of its Covid-19 vaccine AZD1222 in the US.

The company said the US trial met the primary efficacy endpoint in preventing Covid-19 at interim analysis. It demonstrated statistically significant vaccine efficacy of 79 per cent at preventing symptomatic Covid-19 and 100 per cent efficacy at preventing severe disease and hospitalisation. In participants aged 65 years and over, vaccine efficacy was 80 per cent, it added.

■ NEW LOOK SUR SOUQ



The Municipality of South Al Sharqiyah Governorate has executed a project for renovation and beautification of the old souq in the Wilayat of Sur. The project, funded by Oman India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO), is aimed at developing basic services at the old souq and providing an optimal environment for shoppers, vendors and entrepreneurs as well as promoting tourism.

SAYYID THEYAZIN RECEIVES QATARI AMBASSADOR



His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, received in his office on Monday Jassim bin Abdulrahman al Thani, Ambassador of the State of Qatar to the Sultanate. The meeting reviewed the bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries and aspects of cooperation in the areas of culture, sports and youth. – ONA

Oman, Mauritania boost bilateral ties

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. The message deals with the bilateral relations and fields of cooperation between the two brotherly countries.

The message was received by His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, when he received Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Mauritians Abroad, Envoy of the Mauritanian President, here on Monday.

The guest conveyed greetings of the President of Mauritania and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan.

The meeting comprehensively reviewed the relations binding the Sultanate and Mauritania and means of promoting cooperation in several fields, besides discussing regional developments and matters of common concern.

In his turn, the Mauritanian Foreign Minister expressed his country's appreciation for the Sultanate's balanced policy at the regional and international levels and its constructive role in promoting understanding and rapprochement among countries. He reaffirmed the desire of the Mauritanian leadership to expand cooperation with the Sultanate to serve the joint interests. — ONA

Majlis Office reviews ministerial responses, briefing requests



MUSCAT: The Office of Majlis Ash'shura held its 13th regular meeting under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Majlis Ash'shura Chairman, on Monday.

The Office discussed the activities of the standing committees of Majlis for January this year and reviewed ministerial replies to questions raised by the members of the Majlis.

Among the topics discussed at the meeting was a discussion request presented by some members of Majlis Ash'shura to the minister of housing and urban planning regarding the delay in the distribution of residential land plots. The members requested a discussion with the minister to identify the reasons behind the delay in the distribution of land plots as well as the suspension of extension and land-use change applications. It also included an explanation about the suitable procedures and mechanisms required for redressing the issue of accumulated applications especially under the continued rise in the prices of land plots.

The Office also followed up a briefing request regarding investment lands in Muscat Governorate.

During the meeting, the Office of Majlis Ash'shura approved a discussion request presented to the minister of transport, communications and information technology regarding strategic road projects.

Besides, the Office reviewed the report of the Youth and Human Resources Committee about a field visit to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The report included detailed information the committee came up with from the visit. The Office also reviewed the report of the Youth and Human Resources Committee on a request from the council's members for changing the conditions pertaining to the small and medium enterprises as per the ministerial decision 12/2021 issued by the Ministry of Labour. In its report, the committee endorsed the request due to its importance in supporting small and medium enterprises and creating a competitive environment.

The Office looked into a question presented to the minister of heritage and tourism about the efficiency of the collection of tourism fees and the establishment of a database for bank guarantees.

During the meeting, the Office reviewed a number of ministerial answers to parliamentary question including a reply from the Council of Ministers in response to the observations of the Education and Scientific Research Committee regarding the stages of implementation of some projects carried out by the ministry of education which the committee said were not included in the ministry's annual report for 2019. The Council of Ministers' reply included explanations of the stages of implementation of the projects in question. The Office referred the reply to the Education and Scientific Research Committee.

The Office of Majlis Ash'shura reviewed a reply from the minister of labour, chairman of the Civil Service Employees Pension Fund which came in response to a question about depriving the heirs of female employees from the retirement pension. In his reply, the affirmed that the post-service pensions and benefits law treats male and female employees on equal footing in terms of retirement rights affirming that the law does not involve articles that deprive the heirs of a deceased female employee from the retirement benefits.

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كلية عمان

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of management and technology

تعلن كلية عمان للتجارة الإلكترونية عن طرح مناقصاتها للعام الدراسي القادم ٢٠٢١/٢٠٢٢ م حسب الجدول المرفق:-

رقم المناقصة Tender Number	عنوان المناقصة Tender Title	قيمة المستند بالريال العماني (لا يرد) Value of Document in Omani Rials (Non-Refundable)	بدء موعد توزيع المستندات Starting date for document Distribution	آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات Deadline for submission of tender
5/2021-OCMT	نظام استئناف التشغيل في حالات الكوارث (Disaster Recovery (Qurum	٥٠ ريال عماني 50 OMR	2021/03/22	2021/4/11
6/2021-OCMT	صيانة آلات التصوير AMC for Photo Copier Machines	٥٠ ريال عماني 50 OMR	2021/03/22	2021/4/11
7/2021-OCMT	نظام مكافحة الحريق وإنذار الحرائق Fire alarm and Firefighting systems	٥٠ ريال عماني 50 OMR	2021/03/22	2021/4/11
8/2021-OCMT	تأمين الممتلكات ضد جميع الأخطار (بني الحرم) Property all risk insurance AL Haram Campus	٢٠ ريال عماني 20 OMR	2021/03/22	2021/4/11
9/2021-OCMT	التعاقد مع مجمع طبي لتوفير ممرضة لعيادة الكلية Contract with clinic/hospital to provide nurse for College clinic	٢٠ ريال عماني 20 OMR	2021/03/22	2021/4/11
10/2021-OCMT	التأمين الصحي على موظفين الكلية Medical insurance for college employees	٥٠ ريال عماني 50 OMR	2021/03/22	2021/4/11
11/2021-OCMT	تأمين إصابات العمل Work Injury Insurance	١٠ ريال عماني 10 OMR	2021/03/22	2021/4/11
12/2021-OCMT	تأمين على النقدية Money insurance	١٠ ريال عماني 10 OMR	2021/03/22	2021/4/11
13/2021-OCMT	تأمين خيانة الأمانة Fidelity Guarantee Insurance	١٠ ريال عماني 10 OMR	2021/03/22	2021/4/11

يمكن للشركات والمؤسسات المحلية المتخصصة في الأعمال المذكورة والمسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات الحصول على مستندات المناقصات من قسم الخدمات واللازم بمبنى حليان نظير الرسوم المشار إليها ابتداء من تاريخ نشر هذا الإعلان .

تقدم العطاءات مستوفاة للشروط والمواصفات الفنية مرفقا بها ضمان مصرفي يمثل (١٪) من قيمة العطاء صادر من أحد البنوك العاملة بالسلسلة ومعنون باسم كلية عمان للتجارة الإلكترونية وساري المفعول لمدة (٩٠) يوما من تاريخ تقديم العطاء .

توضع العطاءات داخل مظاريف مغلقة ومختومة بالشمع الأحمر مكتوب عليها رقم المناقصة على الا يكتب عليها اسم الشركة أو ما يشير إليها وتوضع في صندوق المناقصات الموجود في حرم الكلية في غرفة الاستعلامات .

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موقع الكلية : omancollege.edu.om

CHAIRPERSON’S REPORT 2020

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of National Bank of Oman SAOG, I am pleased to present the 2020 Annual Report for the period ended 31st December 2020.

Oman's Economy

The Sultanate's economy is anticipated to make a positive recovery with an estimated average four percent of growth over the 2021-2022 timeframe. According to the World Bank, the recovery will be fueled by the fiscal strategy unveiled by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, dubbed the 'Medium Term Fiscal Balance Plan (2020 – 2024). This provides a blueprint for achieving fiscal sustainability during this period, notably by paring debt, prioritizing spending towards strategic national objectives, conserving and boosting State reserves, and monetizing government assets, among other goals. This will also be supported by an increase in local consumption and the roll-out of Value-Added Tax (VAT).

In a step towards renewed renaissance of Oman, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, issued a series of Royal Decrees in 2020 appointing a new Council of Ministers, along with a number of undersecretaries, governors, and other senior officials. The Royal Decrees were a welcome step to decrease capital expenditure at a time of fiscal constraints, with the main aim is to streamline governmental operations by centralizing decision making, improving speed and flexibility to benefit the economy, and supporting the private sector and foreign investment. In addition to the above measures, endorsed by His Majesty, aiming at enhancing non-oil revenue and reducing spending on government units, leading to fiscal sustainability, the State's General Budget for Fiscal Year 2021 has been prepared in a way that goes in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025). One more notable achievement saw the Sultanate successfully concluding the issuance of RO 208 million local sovereign sukuk. Furthermore, the 2021 Budget endeavours to enable the private sector to play a greater role in accelerating economic growth, and to create more job opportunities.

Financial Sector

Oman's banking and financial services sector has gone through some challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic including the slowdown in business activity, the volatile price of oil and the sharp contraction in economic growth. With that said, the sector showed considerable resilience and its ability to withstand adverse shocks continued to be strong.

As an essential service, the sector was able to continue operating through the crisis and played a key role in implementing many of the government's policies to support SMEs and corporates.

It supported the economy by providing relief to the affected borrowers in the form of deferment of loans besides extending additional credit to meet the financing needs of the economy. We are expecting the sector to begin its recovery by re-accelerating across a number of metrics in 2021. Future growth in the market will stem from the increasing importance of Islamic finance, a clear opportunity to leverage for Muzn Islamic's performance and growth potential.

Operating Performance

Given this backdrop, the net profit for the year 2020, stood at OMR 18.1 million, compared to OMR 51.4 million for the same period last year, showing a decrease of 64.7 per cent - primarily due to lower income and higher loan impairment charge, mainly arising out of COVID-19 pandemic.

Net Interest for the year 2020 is OMR 90.9 million, showing a decrease of 3.3 per cent over the corresponding period last year, primarily due to margin compression. With more customers opting for deferral of the installment as allowed by regulations, the bank was holding additional deposit buffers to manage the liquidity, in addition to this, the reduction in LIBOR during the year, coupled with increase in OMR cost of funds due to tightening liquidity in the market have resulted in NII being lower year on year. The NII margin for 2020 registered 2.9 per cent and is lower compared to 3.1 per cent for the corresponding period last year because of above stated reasons. However the bank continued to support the borrowing needs of its customers in this time of need, and selectively grew the loan book during the year.

Fee income for the year 2020 is OMR 26.1 million, lower compared to last year by 24.1 per cent. The lower economic activity arising out of COVID-19 and the resultant lockdown, coupled with regulatory guidelines to waive certain fees have impacted most of our fee lines from 2019. However with the economic activity picking up after the Government eased the lockdown restrictions, the fee income has started showing gradual improvement in the fourth quarter.

Total expenses in 2020 were OMR 63.9 million, marginally higher by 0.3 per cent compared to corresponding period last year.

Net Impairment charge for 2020 is OMR 31.3 million, compared to OMR 7.7 mn for the corresponding period last year. In addition to the provisions as per IFRS 9, the bank had provided for additional management overlays because of stressed macro economic assumptions and certain collective provisions for potential restructuring, considering the instalment deferrals sought by customers.

Gross loans and advances as at 31st December 2020 are at OMR 3.04 billion, showing growth of 4.2 per cent over last year. Customer deposits correspondingly are at OMR 2.5 billion, with the bank continuing to maintain a healthy low cost mix.

The bank's core equity and total capital Adequacy Ratio stands at 12 per cent and 16.4 per cent respectively and is considered adequate, given the economic circumstances.

Organizational Updates

The year 2020 has undoubtedly proven to be full of challenges, where we have witnessed economies across the globe be impacted by adverse market conditions caused by the pandemic. It changed the way governments, businesses and people interact and saw exponential growth of online banking and e-Commerce platforms. But with every challenge, there are opportunities and hope. This is particularly true when it comes to NBO.

NBO built a strong foundation to sustain its future and to continue this path and focused on shaping an organization structure that is aligned to strategic priorities, as it is an important part of NBO's transformation and vision, People, Brand, Digital, Asset Quality, Liabilities, Optimization, and Partnerships. In order for us to achieve the goals outlined, we are undertaking very critical steps that will protect the legacy we have built in the market, while continuing to create value for our customers and harness the talent of this bank.

We are taking future-driven steps to safeguard and optimise our business and at the same time foster our people, specially our young Omani workforce to reach their full potential. We are confident in the capabilities of the Omani caliber and believe that we have a very talented pool of Omanis that could lead this organization to greater success during the next phase of our growth journey.

In July 2020, we welcomed Abdullah Al Hinal as the new Chief Executive Officer of the National Bank of Oman and are certain that he will play a critical role in the transformational journey of the bank and reinforce our nation's vision in building a system that empowers national talent.

Corporate Governance

I am honored to be elected as the Chairperson of NBO for a period of three years. The new board includes Sheikh Abdulla Al Thani as Deputy Chairperson, Mr Hamad Al Wahaibi, Ms Najat Al Lavatia, Mr Ghassan Al Hashar, Mr Mohammed Ismail Mandani, Mr Rahul Kar, Mr Fahad Badar, Mr Joseph Abraham, Mr Said Al Habsi and Dr. Ghazi Al Alawi.

Key Achievements

Rounding off a busy 2020, NBO has not only embraced the challenges emerging from this disruption but has thrived. Driven by a desire to offer the very best to our customers, by remaining agile, resilient, and continuing to focus on innovation, we have quickly adapted to a rapidly altered landscape and continue to pioneer service excellence and strengthen our reputation as the 'bank of choice'.

Thanks to our focus on digital, we were able to smoothly adapt to the challenges posed by COVID-19, seamlessly enabling our employees to work from home and continue to offer a superior customer experience. Enhancing our digital channels to enable customers to bank from home, we launched our digital remittance service, where customers can send funds in real time to seven different countries, without having to set foot outside the door. To promote financial inclusion among all sectors, we also launched our new multi-lingual mobile banking service, which is part of the bank's award-winning Mobile App. Continuing to open up more channels of communication with our customers, we added a new WhatsApp service allowing customers to chat in real time with the bank, and get answers to a wide range of queries.

Another key achievement was the expansion of our network of self-service kiosks for debit and Badeel pre-paid cards. We now have 31 kiosks where customers can replace and renew their cards, without needing to go into a branch. We intend to roll-out this self-service functionality for all payment cards in 2021, as part of our journey towards becoming a fully digitally-enabled bank.

The increased appetite for 'saving for tomorrow' was also evident in the performance of our Wealth Management advisory business. Both our Sadara (affluent) and Mazaya (mass affluent) propositions achieved significant growth in customer numbers, as well as transaction volumes. Year-on-year investment revenues grew by around 69%, with our wealth management client base growing from just around 18 in 2015 to over 975 in 2020.

Our ethos is to constantly and continuously nurture local talent, which in turn help them shine and deliver outstanding results individually and collectively for the team. In a superb individual achievement, our Head of Telebanking was named Best Contact Center Leader 2020 in Europe, Middle East and Africa by Contact Center World in its annual Top Ranking Performers Awards. During the same awards, we secured second place for Best Contact Center in a clear recognition of the team's efforts in transforming our services from traditional to digital ones, which continued to maximise customer experience. The year 2020 also another milestone for our Call Centre that achieved 90% positive feedback through our customer satisfaction surveys.

Oman Banking Outlook 2021

Oman's economy is set to start improving with 2021 unfolding, which reflects on a strengthening consumer confidence, despite the challenges posed by low oil prices. The Sultanate is looking to weather the storm through adopting balanced ideas and assertive policy steps, as well as fostering entrepreneurialism and partnerships that are helping economic recovery and growth. In the long-term, high deficits, muted economic growth and rapid increases in the working-age population mean that the well-recognised need for economic diversification continues to take centre stage for the Sultanate.

NBO Outlook 2021

Our approach has been one of prudent growth and the protection of shareholder returns. As we head into 2021, COVID-19 fatigue continues, but so does our resolve to stay strong and committed as a team to protect our health, ensure our safety and serve our customers. We remain optimistic over the upcoming growth opportunities of our organization on all levels.

We also renew our commitment to continue on the path of our strategy, prioritizing long-term stability and profitability over short-term gain. We identified opportunities for growth, re-centering our strategy to focus on Prudence, Value Creation and Sustainability for the next three years. The NBO workforce has also shown itself to be extremely adaptable and resilient in continuing to deliver leading service levels to our customers, no matter what challenges we face. This strategy has served us well before and is the right path for the future.

NBO Cares

As a major financial institution, we consider the impacts that our business has on society. We strive to contribute to sustainable economic growth, enhance our own business resiliency and longevity, and deliver positive impact for key stakeholders including customers, employees, shareholders and communities.

Throughout 2020, we continued with our NBO Cares campaign centred on taking care of our customers, while ensuring they can continue to bank uninterrupted. We set out a clearly defined Business Continuity Plan to support all of our business functions and implemented all official directives relating to health and safety. At the heart of this was our customers and the community at large. Above all, we prioritised the health and wellbeing of our people and our customers. We were one of the first banks to introduce a 'work from home' policy for employees. We pride ourselves on finding ways to support them as they deal with the impacts of the pandemic. Whether that be by offering financial aid packages to our borrowing customers, or partnerships with organizations like Dar Al Atta'a, to support families in need with donations or handing out food hampers, initiatives like these are a part and parcel of our efforts to help build the prosperity of the Sultanate and advance the living standards of its people.

Reiterating our commitment to the community, the bank had made generous contributions to the Government and continues to support wherever possible, to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. NBO also pledged to the Ministry of Health the purchase of vital medical equipment for its new field hospital, based at the old Muscat airport site, which was purpose-built for taking care of COVID-19 patients. The bank continuously supported Oman's frontline health workers and their efforts to keep our communities safe. We also joined hands with the Ministry of Education to launch an e-library platform that supports the national efforts of eLearning towards a competitive digital education society. One more key community engagement was joining the Khibrat initiative that focuses on teaching employability skills and work ethics to a total of 600 young people across Oman. Last but not least, marking the Sultanate's 50th National Day, and under the theme 'From the Nation's Bank, to the Nation', NBO pledged its support for a series of programmes focusing on empowering women in an array of sector with the main goal of championing women, while acknowledging their valuable contribution to the advancement of the nation.

As Always, NBO Is Here For Our Team

Of course, none of us can say how long the COVID-19 situation will last, but we can say this, NBO has always been there for its team of professionals, now and always to keep moving ahead with confidence. We have endured and flourished for decades by taking proactive, decisive action to help ensure our ongoing viability and growth. The actions we have been taking to see our bank safely through the pandemic represent another phase in NBO's continued commitment to following sound business practices that serve the larger interests of our organization and all of its employees and customers. In that spirit, pandemic or not, our commitment to nurturing the professional development of our people remains stronger than ever. Our Academy of Excellence has taken its e-learning offering to the next level with the launch of a mobile app. Our learning and development initiatives have been smoothly operating in the virtual world with a number of engaging training programmes, as well as videos and courses. Applying these skills to their day-to-day routines, our team's technological capabilities enable them to successfully execute our business continuity plan. The team is focused on migrating and coaching our Retail, Corporate and Muzn clients to our digital solutions to enable them to continue managing their finances remotely.

Global Recognition

NBO believes in the power of innovation as a catalyst for greater convenience and accessibility and have continued to utilize technology to create more seamless experiences for its customers, allowing them to leverage the bank's highly efficient products and services to better manage their funds with ease. This approach continues to garner critical acclaim from local, regional, and international institutions.

We were recognised among Forbes Middle East's Top 100 Companies 2020. Our performance in payments was recognised by Wells Fargo, garnering us the Straight-Through-Processing (STP) award for outstanding performance in dollar-denominated fund transfers. We also racked up another win for our Sadara wealth management account, the Highly Acclaimed: Best Private Bank, Middle East Award from Digital Banker's Global Private Banking Innovation Awards 2020. Another recognition that reaffirms our position as a digital leader in the Sultanate, was the Best Mobile Banking App Oman 2020 by International Business Magazine for the second consecutive year. In recognition of its pioneering role in the Islamic finance industry, Muzn has been named the Best Islamic Window - Oman 2020 at the Global Business Outlook Awards. We also received the award for Best Customer Loyalty Initiative and Best Life Insurance Product in the Middle East at The Asian Banker Middle East and Africa Regional Awards Virtual Ceremony 2020. Although these are unprecedented and challenging times, we are confident of our path, as with fortitude and resoluteness, we continue to drive the country's banking sector.

Appreciation

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank our customers, shareholders, directors, executive management, and all staff of NBO for their support and efforts in implementing the Bank's strategy and in achieving its goals and objectives.

We would also like to express our appreciation to our regulators, the Central Bank of Oman, the Central Bank of the UAE and the Capital Market Authority for their constant support and dedicated efforts to develop Oman's financial industry, especially the banking sector. We reaffirm our commitment to all our customers and shareholders that in 2021 we will continue to focus on areas that represent the best opportunities for NBO, to dedicate all our efforts to achieving a strong and sustainable growth rate, and to deliver on our strategic goals to enhance future returns as well as strengthening the position of Sultanate of Oman and within the region.

Above all, we pay tribute to His Majesty, Sultan Haitham bin Tarik Al Said, for his visionary leadership and under whose wise guidance Oman steadfastly continues on towards sustainable economic and social development.

Above all, stay safe and healthy.

Amal Suhail Bahwan
Chairperson

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION As at 31st December 2020

	2020 RO'000	2019 RO'000
ASSETS	38,921	43,863
Cash	156,705	287,409
Balances with CBO	500	500
Capital Deposit With CBO	281,911	251,662
Govt. & Other Securities	20,000	2,000
T. Bills & Other Bills eligible for rediscount	15,603	258
Balance due from branches, principal shareholders & affiliates Abroad		
DUE FROM BANKS		
a) Placements (Local)	8,390	20,400
b) Placements (Overseas)	55,987	63,800
c) Loans & Advances (net of provisions)	14,736	24,918
Other Money Market placements	-	-
Investments Securities	36,623	40,887
Loans & Advances (Net of loan loss provisions & reserve interest)	2,887,862	2,801,557
Tangible Fixed Assets	62,568	65,047
Other Assets	52,845	40,746
TOTAL ASSETS	3,632,651	3,643,047

LIABILITIES

Deposits (Including Government)		
a) Demand	862,055	879,011
b) Savings	636,437	599,098
c) Time	1,028,687	1,053,409
Balance due to branches, principal shareholders & affiliates Abroad	201	358
DUE FROM BANKS		
a) Placements	288,522	283,428
Capital /Assigned capital	162,595	162,595
Subordinated Funds	-	-
Reserves	90,227	87,899
Proposed cash Dividend *	-	27,316
Profits carried forward	161,911	158,893
Euro medium term notes	192,500	192,500
Tier 1 Perpetual Bond	115,500	115,500
Other Liabilities	94,016	83,040
TOTAL LIABILITIES	3,632,651	3,643,047

Note 1: LOANS & ADVANCES	RO'000	RO'000
Gross Loans	3,043,755	2,919,847
Less Loan loss Provision and Reserved Interest	(155,893)	(118,290)
Loans & Advances (Net of provision for bad and doubtful debts)	2,887,862	2,801,557
* Proposed cash dividend is subject to the approval of the shareholders at the AGM planned in March 2021.		

	2020 RO'000	2019 RO'000
PROFIT & LOSS ACCOUNT	172,126	171,381
Gross interest income	(81,222)	(77,350)
Interest expense	90,904	94,031

OTHER OPERATING INCOME		
Dividend Income	1,612	1,380
Net Fee & Commission Income	12,940	19,578
Net Foreign Exchange Income (income less expense)	6,542	6,735
Other Income	4,965	6,623
Gross Income	116,963	128,347

General Administrative expenses	(57,353)	(57,539)
Depreciation	(6,473)	(6,107)
Total Operating Costs	(63,826)	(63,646)
Net Operating Profit (profit on ordinary activities before provisions)	53,137	64,701
ECL Allowance (net) charged for Loans & Advances	(35,078)	(10,936)
ECL Allowance (net) charged for Investments	189	84
ECL Allowance (net) charged for Placements	384	(92)
ECL Allowance charged (net) for Off-balance sheet items	3,176	3,197
Profit for the year after loan loss provision	21,808	56,954
Taxation	(3,660)	(5,523)
Net Profit/ (loss) after taxation	18,148	51,431

Other Comprehensive Income for the year		
Revaluation gains/(losses) on equity instruments at fair value through other comprehensive income	(2,945)	(1,243)
Debt instruments at fair value through other comprehensive income	(43)	588
Tax effect of net movement on available for sale financial investments	277	(326)
Other comprehensive expense for the year	(2,711)	(981)
Total Comprehensive Income for the year	15,437	50,450

■ OMAN, ALGERIA REVIEW TIES



MUSCAT: General Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office on Monday Mohammed Irki, Ambassador of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria to the Sultanate. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed march of fraternal ties binding the Sultanate and Algeria. They also exchanged conversations on areas of cooperation and means of upgrading them to serve the joint interests. Furthermore, the meeting touched on several matters of common interest. – ONA

Syrian minister visits landmarks

MUSCAT: Dr Faisal Mekdad, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic, on Monday visited the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque and the Natural History Museum, within the framework of his current visit to the Sultanate.

During his visit to the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, the Syrian guest and his accompanying delegation were briefed on various Omani and Islamic architectural designs of the mosque. The guest also toured facilities of the mosque, such as the Institute of Islamic Sciences, the library and lectures hall.

During their visit to the Natural History Museum, the Syrian Foreign Minister and his accompanying delegation were briefed on different halls and rare relics in the museum.

Dr Faisal Mekdad and his delegation left Oman later in the day ending several-day visit to Oman.

He was seen off by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and officials at the Foreign Ministry. — ONA



Value water — make every drop count

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Oman observed World Water Day on May 22nd with seminars organised on line amidst the wait for rain to replenish groundwater. In Oman the focus is also on recycling water.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, Sultan Qaboos University and FAO office in Oman at a webinar discussed the various aspects of water, especially the value of water. This year's theme is the value of water.

“The value of water is not about tariff. Water is life. Valuing water is not only pricing or putting a price on water. As you know, the value of water for us in Oman is since a long time in the falaj system and it can be seen in the way it has been taken care of,” explained Zahir al Sulaimani, Chairman of Oman Water Society.

This year it is about valuing each drop of water. “We have not had rain this year during winter, which is a sign of drought. Now everyone is looking forward to summer rains. It is difficult for the farmers as they are facing salinity in water that has been used for agriculture.

Oman Water Society has been playing an important role in maintaining some of the old aflaj with the support of some of the banks. The public is the main supporter when it comes to conserving water, pointed out the chairman of Oman Water Society.

“Without the effort from the public the objective cannot be met. The public can save water in households, in irrigation and even when they go for picnics in wadis and aflaj. They can protect water from pollution



“The value of water is not about tariff. Water is life. Valuing water is not only pricing or putting a price on water

ZAHIR AL SULAIMANI
Chairman of Oman Water Society

by not leaving behind the trash. All of this is important as we celebrate World Water Day and most importantly staying committed to use water wisely,” he advised.

“Children must be educated about water especially because we are in the region as we are going through a drought. We don't know about summer. A drought is coming and we hope we will get some rain in the next few months. Otherwise we will face shortage of water,” he added.

Would recycled water become a reality?

According to Al Sulaimani, Haya Water has already successfully tried recycled water but now the discussion on how to reach the water back to consumers.

“During the Webinar today Hayya Water shared the success in reusing water. So recycled water is already a reality. They have ambitious plans as they are already treating household water in their facility. The main issue is redistributing the treated water. Maybe it is not feasible to treat the water in each house. The optimal option is to bring it back to each house so that they can use it for flushing toilets and irrigating gardens. They plan to use it in industries and in agriculture for big farm projects that can afford transporting and distributing the treated water. But there is logistics involved, however it is a very interesting development and farmers are very keen on this development of treated water as you know the delay in rain has been hard on them as the water for agriculture has become saline and deteriorating in quality. Haya is working on it,” noted Al Sulaimani.

Oman and UK partnering to power Sultanate's green goals

SIMON PENNEY

Oman and Britain are partnering to power the Sultanate's green goals by discovering common ground between UK's industrial and energy strategy priorities and the Sultanate's visionary sustainability plans.

Among the lessons that the world learnt from the Covid-19 pandemic is the need to build back better. This November, the UK will host an important climate change conference since the Paris Agreement was signed in 2015.

To achieve the climate goals, there is a need to work hand-in-hand with partners around the world. Oman is making great strides towards meeting its ambitious sustainable energy targets. The Sultanate is now ranked third among Arab countries in the 2020 UN Sustainable Development Report, ranked ninth globally in the implementation of environmental laws and 22nd for sustainable development in the travel and tourism sector.

Oman is leveraging a global network of partners to achieve its Vision 2040 sustainability goals and reduce national reliance on natural gas. Chief among these collaborators is Britain, home to a thriving renewable energy sector and Europe's largest green technology (green tech) community.

The Sultanate can take advantage of abundant sunshine, wind, and vast spaces to develop solar and wind power to supply its future energy needs. In fact, solar and wind are a big part of Oman's energy transition plans. Focusing and deploying its skills, industry and innovation in these two areas could make Oman a regional and even global leader in clean energy.

Regulation and funding are key, and plans such as powering the Oman Botanic Garden through solar can help drive awareness and appetite for clean energy.

Oman has already delivered several pilot wind projects for onshore wind in Dhofar, in the South of Oman, such as the



Plans such as powering the Oman Botanic Garden through solar can help drive awareness and appetite for clean energy in Oman.

Harweel Wind Farm project, which was completed in 2019.

The Sultanate also has plans to conduct offshore trials. Wood, Petrofac and other contractors are working with UK supply chain companies to explore these opportunities.

Given the speed at which solar and wind can be deployed, the potential exists for a major drive towards Oman's role as a pathfinder for the region to meet the target of using 30 per

cent renewable energy by 2030, from which wider economic benefits can flow.

Oman is also developing a world-class hydrogen strategy and aims to become the Middle East's first green hydrogen generation hub powered by several GW of solar.

Shell Development Oman's renewable energy arm 'Qabas' is delivering a 25MW commercial Solar PV plant in Sohar freezone, while also developing

a hydrogen strategy which is cleaner than traditional gas-to-liquid energy.

Renewables, although a relatively recent entrant to Oman's energy landscape, hold vast potential to cut fuel costs, reduce carbon emissions, conserve scarce water and create jobs.

PARTNERSHIP FOR PROGRESS

UK businesses are well placed to partner with Oman to optimise the country's vast domestic renewable resources. Several major British green tech businesses, across sectors such as waste-to-energy, desalination, wind power and solar storage, are already on the ground helping Oman to meet its sustainability goals.

UK-based GreenFuels is powering Oman's first sustainable biodiesel plant in a joint venture with local company Wakud. The facility will use old cooking oil as feedstock and is expected to be operational by Q2 2021. The innovative plant

is set produce around 20 tonnes of biofuel daily and has plans to supply the whole of Oman and surrounding Gulf nations.

The UK remains a world leader in 'green tech' — a broad term for technology that drives clean energy production, particularly the use of technology to create power that is less harmful to the environment than fossil fuels.

Underpinning the British economy, the green tech sector employs more than 750,000 people. In 2019, it invested over £14 billion in the UK and generated £95 billion in value-added economic activity.

Close collaboration between energy sectors and the UK's academic and research communities is continually bringing new technologies to market — supported by world-class education, research and technology transfer centres.

With a strong heritage of innovation and technology investment, British companies are set to play an important role in shaping and supporting Oman's carbon-free future.

National Science Week STEM begins with online events



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education's National Science Week STEM 2021 kicked off on Sunday online through (Google Meet) under the slogan "Our sustainable environment." The National Week continues for five consecutive days with various educational directorates in the governorates taking part in it.

Prof Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, delivered an opening speech in which he said: "The National Science Week in its second edition comes in a different way than it was in the first time, as it is presented remotely through the employment of educational platforms, and perhaps this is an opportunity for us to expand everyone's participation, in order to benefit from a wide variety of topics.

The theme of the second edition

of the National Science Week is "Our Sustainable Environment" which comes as a translation of the government's and the ministry's interest in the topic of environment and sustainability, as sustainability cannot be separated from the environment if we want a happy life on this planet. The diversity of topics presented this week is an indication of the volume of work that must be done for our environment as it is the main resource for our life on this earth."

The National Science Week STEM 2021 covers various topics throughout the week during morning and evening sessions everyday. The first day included 15 online sessions on: "Smart Shopping", "Farming without Soil", "Renewable Energy is the Best Choice for Environmental Sustainability", "Plastic Waste Disposal", "Methods for Using Lab



Equipment to Detect Food Safety", "Falaj Alassarani Drought Turned into Tourist Environment", "Green School Initiative", "Smart City Design", "Food Security System". "AI for Environmental Protection", "Farming Without Soil", "Marine Pollution Control", "Precision Instruments in the Oil and Gas Fields, and their Impact on Preserving the Environment", "The Green House" and "GLOBE Program's Environmental Impact".

On the second day sessions were held on: "Alternative Energy", "Palm Waste Recycling", "Weather changes", "Implementation of the Aquaculture System", "The Scientific Café", "Malpractice towards the Environment", "Using Moth to Conserve the Environment", "Satellite Environmental Application" and "Biodiversity".

The Director-General of the Directorate-General of Education

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

Nepal scraps quarantine for vaccinated tourists

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Nepal scrapped quarantine rules for vaccinated people, thus making quarantine not necessary for Omani residents visiting Nepal as tourists, who are vaccinated against Covid-19.

However, every traveller, vaccinated or not, must possess a negative report against the disease 72-hour before the travel.

Accordingly, those who travel from Oman to Nepal wouldn't have to be quarantined. They also do not require another PCR test on arrival as they carry a negative test report from the country of origin.

"Omani visitors can walk free and proceed with an itinerary if they are vaccinated or not, but carry a negative report", said Sarmila Parajuli Dhakal, Ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of Nepal to the Sultanate, told the *Observer*.

"Nepal doesn't require an inbound traveller to stay in quarantine from most of the countries including

Oman, except some WHO restricted countries due to the developments of the new variants, as a precautionary measure against the pandemic", Sarmila said.

"Both citizens and residents in the Sultanate have welcomed the move and shown interest to visit the country and we expect the decision would help to revive the tourism sector."

She further said that Nepal has also decided to issue a visa on arrival for tourists at Tribhuvan International Airport, a facility that was stopped along with the lockdown last year.

"We hope that a pleasant tourism environment would be created in Nepal with this new move just as this year's trekking and mountaineering season has slowly started to grip the enthusiasts."

There are nearly 20,000 Nepalis in Oman, most of whom are blue-collar workers and there has been a steady increase in demand for Nepali expertise in Oman as "the Sultanate provides favourable working and living conditions for expatriates."



Salalah Ports & Airports
Logistic Services S.A.O.C

INVITATION FOR ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY AGENDA

The Board of Directors of **Salalah Logistics Company** for Ports and Airports Services SAOC is pleased to invite the shareholders to attend the company's annual general assembly meeting scheduled to be held at 04:00 PM corresponding to 30/03/2021 through the electronic platform for the general assemblies, which are you can access it through the website of the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om), and if the quorum for the meeting of this assembly is not complete, the second meeting will be held at 04:00 PM corresponding to 31/03/2021 via the aforementioned electronic platform Above, to discuss the following agenda:

First item: Review and approve the report of the Board of Directors for the year ending December 31, 2020.

Second item: Review and approving the auditors' report and the annual financial statements for the year ending December 31, 2020.

Third item: Appointing auditor for the fiscal year ending on 12-31-2021 AD, and determining their fees.

Fourth item: Approval of the sitting fees for attending the sessions of the Board of Directors and sub-committees for the fiscal year 2020 and approval of the sitting fees for attending the sessions of the Board of Directors and sub-committees for the fiscal year 2021 in accordance with the attachment.

In accordance with the company's articles of association and the regulations for holding general assemblies using modern technology means issued by the authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

1. A legal person has the exclusive right to authorize a natural person to attend the General Assembly meeting and vote on his behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
2. Voting on any of the items on the agenda begins with a period not exceeding three days prior to the date of the meeting and until the end of the voting process on the day of the meeting, and in the event that the shareholder's balance is changed by an increase or decrease, the voting process will be canceled, and he must re-vote again on the day of the meeting. The day of the assembly meeting.

For any clarification in respect of the agenda of the above meeting, please contact **Mr. Sulaiman Al Hatmi 93615516 - 24616582**

Cybersecurity conference held

MUSCAT: Oman Cybersecurity Conference 2021 discussed cybersecurity within the context of Oman Vision 2040. The conference studied solutions targeting challenges posed to digitalised businesses and the

development of a methodology to protect information, formulate non-conventional thoughts that support comprehensive electronic transformation plans and achieve knowledge-based empowerment and social skills.

Conference on Omani heritage on March 29

MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Center (SQU), represented by Omani Studies Centre (OSC), will host the international conference online on Omani Heritage and its Sustainability on March 29-30.

"Due to the importance of the civilisational heritage and its significance for the current and future generations, this conference will address all aspects of Omani architecture past, present and future", OSC said in a statement.

More than 20 research papers

will be presented in the conference. Presenters from Iraq, Kenya, Egypt, Algeria, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Oman will present their findings. The papers will cover seven themes; some of these are: Omani architecture and its historical aspects, the economic aspects of Omani architecture (tourism, agriculture, etc.), the efforts in documenting and listing Omani sites and local, regional and international experiences in architectural heritage preservation."

Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Center

Auction Advertisement for Leasing Coffee Shop (Ground Floor) Auction No. (SQCCC/AUC/4/2021)

The operational committee of Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Center announces an auction for leasing Coffee Shop.

Qualified companies interested in participating in this auction shall collect the auction specification from the date of this advertisement until 21/4/2021 by sending email to purchase department (Purchase@cccrc.gov.om).

Biddings that meet the above requirement should be submitted in a sealed envelope with a 1% auction bond valid for 90 days from date of submission by an employee from your company addressed to the head of Purchase Committee in the tender box located at:

Operational Committee of Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Center

Knowledge Oasis Building No4 (KOM4), First Floor.
No later than 24/4/2021.

Please note:

- Bids without a 1% valid auction bond will be disqualified.
- 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 auction submission.
- For Queries you may Contact on Tel: 22584133 or 22584132.
- The committee is not obliged to accept the lowest price of the bid or any other bid.



Sultanate of Oman

The Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary Re-tender Announcement

The Administrative Affairs Council of the Judiciary announces its desire to re-tender the following tender:

Tender No	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Vendor Grade	Tender Document Fee
10/2020	EMS PROJECT CAAJ	29/03/2021	25/04/2021	Excellent & First	RO. 25/-

Where you can buy the tender documents electronically via the link below website:
(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Bidders should submit their offers electronically via the aforementioned site and attach to each bid an electronic copy of the provisional insurance in the form of a bank guarantee or a certified check from one of the banks operating in the country at a rate of (1%) of the bid value and is valid for a period of (90) days from the date of submission. The offers are meant in the name of the Chairman of the Internal Committee for Tenders in the Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary, And based on the Tender Board Circular No. (07/2020), we confirm that the necessity of uploading the soft copy of the bid bond when submitting the tender in a support system while preserving the original bid bond without the need to hand it over to the board until the council is asked to hand over the original one.

- 1- **For inquiries and clarifications on the tender:**
Submit inquiries related to the project electronically through the website of the electronic tender system (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- 2- **For inquiries and clarifications on the electronic bidding system:**
Submit inquiries regarding technical support for the electronic bidding system via e-mail and the phone number shown below:
Phone: +968 24166670
Email: etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Deluge worsens ‘one-in-100-year’ Australia floods

SYDNEY: Torrential rain lashed Australia’s southeast again on Monday, worsening once-in-a-century flooding that has forced 18,000 people to evacuate their homes and shuttered hundreds of schools.

The days-long deluge has inundated coastal areas of New South Wales, the country’s most populous state, including parts of Sydney.

On Monday, eight million residents were told to avoid unnecessary travel and to work from home if possible, as some hard-hit areas received 25 centimetres of rain in 24 hours.

Just over a year ago, the region was parched: suffering prolonged drought, water restrictions and unprecedented bushfires.

“I don’t know any time in a state history where we have had these extreme weather conditions in such quick succession in the middle of a pandemic,” said New South Wales Premier Gladys Berejiklian.

Scientists have warned Australia can expect more frequent and more extreme weather events as a result of climate change.

About 18,000 people have been ordered to evacuate and 38 regions have been declared disaster zones, Berejiklian added.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison, whose conservative govern-



A partially submerged car is seen abandoned in floodwaters in the suburb of Windsor as the state of New South Wales experiences widespread flooding and severe weather in Sydney. — Reuters

ment has been accused of dragging its feet on climate action, said Australia was “being tested once again” by a “terrible event.”

He told parliament that Australia’s defence force was expected to be called in to assist with the clean-up and recovery.

Emergency services have received at least 8,800 calls for help and rescued hundreds of people from floodwaters since the crisis began.

The state’s Mid North Coast has been particularly badly affected, with Berejiklian declaring the re-

gion had been struck by a “one in 100 years” disaster.

In Sydney’s vast Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley, swollen rivers were expected to peak at levels not seen since 1961, after the Warragamba Dam, the city’s main drinking water source, spilt over Saturday.

The dam was drained of 500 gigalitres of water — roughly equivalent to 200,000 Olympic size swimming pools or the total volume of water in Sydney Harbour.

Residents in some affected areas were allowed to return to their homes Monday after waters re-

Authorities have warned of a potentially ‘life-threatening’ situation though there have been no reports of deaths or serious injuries

ceded, but others were placed on high alert as floods moved toward their regions.

Authorities have warned of a potentially “life-threatening” situation though so far there have been no reports of deaths or serious injuries. “When you have been through three or four incidents that are life-changing on top of each other, it can make you feel like you are at breaking point,” Berejiklian said.

Education authorities said more than 200 schools were closed, including some that were damaged in the floods.

There were reports homes and businesses were also affected but Andrew Hall, CEO of the Insurance Council of Australia, said it was too early to understand the extent of destruction and to “estimate the insurance damage bill”.

Insurers had received more than 5,000 claims in the past few days, he added. — AFP

EU to sanction 11 people involved in Myanmar coup

YANGON: The European Union will on Monday impose sanctions on 11 individuals linked to the February 1 coup in Myanmar, the EU’s foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said as he arrived for a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels.

While the bloc has an arms embargo on Myanmar, and has targeted some senior military officials since 2018, the measures would be its most significant response so far since the coup.

“On ... Myanmar we are going to take sanctions against 11 persons involved in the coup and the repression of the demonstrators,” Borrell said, adding the situation in the country was deteriorating.

Reuters reported on March 8 that the EU was preparing the measures. The names of the individuals are expected to be made public once the sanc-



EU Minister for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell speaks to the media in Brussels. — Reuters

tions are formally decided by ministers. Stronger measures are expected soon as the bloc moves to target the businesses run by the military.

EU diplomats have said that parts of the military’s conglomerates, Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL) and Myanmar Economic Corporation, are likely to be targeted, barring EU investors and banks from doing business with them.

— Reuters

Tokyo tour bus operation restarts

TOKYO: Japan’s major tour bus firm Hato Bus Co resumed its operations on Monday following the lifting of a coronavirus state of emergency for the Tokyo area, allowing passengers to enjoy the fresh air and cherry blossoms in full bloom from an open-top bus.

The Japanese government on Sunday lifted the state of emergency for Tokyo and three surrounding prefectures, where restrictions had remained since early January, as the availability of hospital beds had improved in the region.

“I have been working from home for a long time and had no chance to go out. So, (cherry blossoms) cheered me up very much,” Masumi Ishii, a passenger, said after the tour. On Hato Bus’s open-top sightseeing bus that departed Tokyo station on Monday, all the 25 seats available on the upper deck were filled with passengers.

They enjoyed taking pictures and reached out for cherry blossom petals along the roads.



Passengers wearing protective face masks enjoy viewing blooming cherry blossoms from an open-top sightseeing bus after Japan’s government lifted the coronavirus disease state of emergency in Tokyo. — Reuters

“Frankly, I am very happy that we could resume this course,” said Satomi Yoshizuka, a tour conductor. “We are taking measures and preparations so that our customers can attend without anxiety.”

Passengers are required to put face masks on and undergo temperature checks.

Although the government, eager to jumpstart the economy, lifted the state of emergency, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga last week noted infections were creeping up and pleaded with citizens not to let down their guard.

Pedestrians walking outside Tokyo station on Monday morn-

ing welcomed the end of the state of emergency and said its effect has been fading.

Natsuki Kawakami, a 20-year-old university student visiting Tokyo from her home in Kyoto, said the prolonged state of emergency made people tired of self-restraint and less cautious. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

SINGAPORE

Singapore FM to visit Southeast Asian countries

Singapore Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan will visit Brunei Darussalam on Monday, after which he will go to Malaysia and Indonesia, the foreign affairs ministry said.

The minister’s visit reaffirmed the close and longstanding special relationship between Singapore and Brunei, the ministry said.

The statement did not specify any other reason for the visits, but last week Indonesian President Joko Widodo called for an



end to bloodshed in military-ruled Myanmar and for Southeast Asian leaders to hold a high-level meeting to try to find a way out of the country’s escalating crisis. — dpa

MANILA

Philippines reimposes domestic travel restrictions

Domestic travel restrictions are returning to the Philippines’ capital region and four nearby provinces, the government announced amid a surge in coronavirus infections. The travel ban to and from metropolitan Manila and the nearby provinces of Rizal, Bulacan, Cavite and Laguna will be in effect from Monday until April 4, presidential spokesman Harry Roque said.

“Only essential travel in and out of the areas will be allowed,” he said.



Large gatherings, including religious events, are again prohibited, while weddings, baptisms and funeral services are allowed, but with attendance limited to 10 persons. — dpa

KABUL

US defence secy holds talks in Afghanistan

The US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin made an unannounced visit to Kabul amid conversations about the full withdrawal of international troops from Afghanistan. While in Kabul, Austin met with senior Afghan officials, including President Ashraf Ghani, according to a statement from the Afghan presidential palace.

Austin’s visit to Afghanistan comes as Washington is accelerating its efforts for a political settlement in the war-torn country



before a possible withdrawal of the remaining 2,500 US forces on May 1. During the visit, both sides expressed their concerns over the increase of violence in the war-torn country, the palace said. — dpa

Palestinians say Israel took travel pass after ICC meet

RAMALLAH: The Palestinian government on Monday said Israel had stripped its foreign minister of a travel permit after he met with the International Criminal Court chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda.

The Hague-based ICC tribunal, which has faced frequent criticism by Israel, this month opened a formal investigation into alleged war crimes in the Palestinian territories.

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al Maliki met with Bensouda on Thursday.

But on his return to the occupied West Bank on Sunday he had his "VIP card" withdrawn, Palestinian officials said.

The card is identification issued to Palestinian officials to facilitate passage at border posts controlled by Israel.

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh con-

demned the "harassment" to which Maliki and his team "were subjected to on their return from a meeting with the prosecutor" of the ICC.

Israel's Shin Bet security agency declined to comment, but Israeli sources requesting anonymity said that Maliki had lost his pass because he tried to "harm" the Jewish state by meeting with the ICC prosecutor.

Ammar Hijazi, an aide to Maliki, said the group was "blocked for two hours, and for an hour and a half we were questioned about our visit to the ICC".

"They told us that it was a sensitive issue for them, and that they would not allow us to move easily."

The world's only permanent war crimes tribunal, the ICC was set up in 2002 to try humanity's worst crimes where local courts are unwilling or unable to step in. — AFP

No pact on Lebanon govt formation

BEIRUT: There was no agreement on a new Lebanese cabinet after a scheduled meeting on Monday between President Michel Aoun and Prime Minister-designate Saad al Hariri.

Hariri said after the meeting Aoun had insisted on a blocking majority in government for his political allies.

But despite widespread anger at an economic crisis that has reignited street protests against a decades-old ruling class, observers are sceptical the two will clinch a deal.

The outgoing government of premier Hassan Diab resigned in the wake of an August 4 explosion at Beirut's port, that killed more than 200 people and ravaged swathes of the capital. But leaders have failed to agree on a new cabinet lineup.

On Monday afternoon, Hariri met with Aoun for their second round of talks this month. Hariri is expected to hand over the latest draft lineup after a previous proposal failed to secure a consensus.

"The differences are still there," said a political source familiar



Prime Minister-designate Saad al Hariri arrives to meet with Lebanon's President Michel Aoun at the presidential palace in Lebanon. — Reuters

with negotiations.

"The situation is not conducive for the formation of a new government," he said, on the condition of anonymity.

The leaders have traded blame for the government delay, with Aoun calling on Hariri to step down if he is incapable of immediately forming a government suitable for all parties.

Hasan Nasrallah, the leader

of the powerful Hezbollah movement and a close ally of Aoun, has also criticised the delay.

In a speech on Thursday, Nasrallah called on Hariri to abandon his push for a 18-member cabinet comprised entirely of technocrats.

"A government of technocrats that is not backed by political groups won't save the country," Nasrallah said, calling for estab-

lished parties to also be represented.

In a report published ahead of Monday's meeting, the pro-Hizbullah *Al Akhbar* daily accused Aoun and the party he founded of obstructing progress, by pushing for a share that would give them privileged power in government.

There is "no hope for a breakthrough" it said, referring to Monday's talks. "Nothing has changed."

Lebanon is in the grips of its worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war.

More than half of the population lives below the poverty line, while the Lebanese pound has lost more than 85 per cent of its value against the dollar in the black market.

The Lebanese pound, pegged at 1,507 to the greenback since 1997, sold for 15,000 to the dollar on the black market last week at an all-time low.

The rapid currency plunge reignited street protests which started in 2019, but were temporarily snuffed last year by the coronavirus pandemic. — Reuters

Fashaqa flashpoint: Sudanese dream of reclaiming fertile land

WAD KAWLI, Sudan: Under a thatched roof, Sudanese dream of returning to farmland at the heart of a decades-old dispute with Ethiopia that has turned violent and threatened to ignite a wider conflict.

From the town of Wad Kawli, west of the Atbara river, the farmers used to cross the narrow stream with wooden ploughs to cultivate fertile fields in Fashaqa, a region claimed by Sudan and Ethiopia.

By the mid-1990s, they were no longer able to tend their fields after Ethiopia pushed into the contested borderlands, allowing thousands of its own farmers to take over.

"Our last proper harvest of sesame crops from these fields was in 1996," Mohamed Omar, a community leader in Wad Kawli said.

Farmers and traders long ignored the dividing map lines of colonial-era treaties.

But now the local dispute over fields of sesame and sorghum grown by smallholder farmers has put their thatch-hut villages on the front lines between two of Africa's most powerful nations, Sudan, third largest in terms of territory, and Ethiopia, the second biggest



A boy stands next to a donkey loaded with jerry cans by the Atbara river near the village of Dukouli within the Quraysha locality, located in the Fashaqa al Sughra agricultural region of Sudan's eastern Gedaref state. — AFP

in terms of population.

The border dispute feeds into wider tensions in the region, including over Ethiopia's controversial Blue Nile dam.

Ethiopia's push into Fashaqa came as its relations with Sudan soured following the attempted assassination of then Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in 1995 while he was visiting Addis Ababa.

At the time, Addis Ababa accused Khartoum of being behind the plot, leading to tensions that saw Sudanese forces under now-outdated president Omar al Bashir withdraw from the region.

"We were simply told that it was no longer safe for us to go to east Atbara," recalled farmer Abdelreheem Mirghani.

More than two decades after their withdrawal, the Sudanese army returned to Fashaqa last year to recapture what it considered stolen land.

The move, which came two years after Bashir's ouster, angered Ethiopia and triggered deadly clashes.

Now, villages have become military restricted areas, and Sudanese farmers have yet to re-enter.

— AFP

TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

THE MAZOOON ELECTRICITY COMPANY (MZEC) INVITES THE FOLLOWING LOCAL TENDERS:

Tender No	Description	Last Date of Purchasing	Last Date for Submission	DCRP Grade	Type of Participation	Tender Price R.O
20/MZEC/2021	REFURBISHMENT OF DISTRIBUTION SUBSTATIONS RELATED WORKS IN 11KV WADI SAAL FEEDER -3 & 4 , AL ASKHARAH 11KV FEEDER -1,2 & 3 AT JALAN BANI BU ALI IN SOUTH AL SHARQIYAH GOVERNORATE THE SITE VISIT WILL BE ON 01/04/2021 AT 10:00 AM IN JALAN BANI BU ALI OFFICE	29/03/2021	13/04/2021	C	LOCAL	85
21/MZEC/2021	REFURBISHMENT OF DISTRIBUTION SUBSTATIONS RELATED WORKS IN 11KV WADI SAAL FEEDER -3 & 4 , AL ASKHARAH 11KV FEEDER -1,2 & 3 AT JALAN BANI BU ALI IN SOUTH AL SHARQIYAH GOVERNORATE THE SITE VISIT WILL BE ON 30/03/2021 AT 10:00 AM IN MZEC H.O	29/03/2021	13/04/2021	EXCELLENT	LOCAL	2,200
22/MZEC/2021	SUPPLY, INSTALLATION AND TESTING OF OVERHEAD LINE FAULT PASSAGE INDICATORS (FPI'S) FOR MZEC ELECTRICAL NETWORK- 4TH PHASE	29/03/2021	13/04/2021	SPECIALIST	LOCAL	120

- Interested companies registered with DCRP and Tender Board and having a valid Registrations may obtain tenders documents through scm.tenders@mzec.co.om.
- Value of each tender document copy is non-refundable.
- Due to covid-19 all offers shall be submitted via the following email mzec-offerssubmission@mzec.co.om.
- The tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of tender price valid (90) days as a bid bond and addressed to the chairperson of the (Internal Tender Committee) of Mazoon Electricity Company S.A.O.C and any offer is not including the bond will be rejected immediately.
- The completed tenders should be send the offers before 10:00 am on the assigned closing date for submission of the tender.
- The priority of the awarding will be given to those bidders who assure recruitment of the maximum numbers of Omani staff and utilizing Omani products.
- The related parties only are invited to attend the tender opening meeting based on the assigned date.
- All Clarifications are to be sent to the email address: MZEC-Clarification@mzec.co.om and the Last date for receiving vendor's clarifications for tenders on 06/04/2021.
- Mazoon Electricity Company S.A.O.C. is not bound to accept the lowest tender.

(WE LIGHT...WE CARE)

TENDERS & CONTRACTS SECTION : (+968) 25371366 / 25371067 / 25371070



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Sohar Flour Mills LLC, Sohar hereby announces the following tender;

Tender No	Description of Works	Grade	Tender Fee	Date of Submission	Location for Tender Submission
DGEC/8190388/SFM/MEP/2021/RO	MEP Works for Sohar Flour Mills grain silos project at Sohar Industrial Port Area.	Excellent and Grade -1 registered in OCCI and Tender Board	RO 100/each. (Non-Refundable)	15th April 2021	Sohar Flour Mills LLC office Sohar Industrial Port, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman Contact: +968 26646817 or +968 98213510

- The electronic copy of tender documents will be available from Wednesday, 24th March 2021.
- Qualified contractors are requested to contact "Design Group Engineering Consultants, Tel: +968 22522572, Fax: +968 24819487, GSM: +968 96129006 E-Mail: amrut@dgcon.com" to request the tender documents for any further information.

India reports worst day for Covid in months



A health worker takes a swab sample from a woman for a RT-PCR Covid-19 coronavirus test at a bus terminus in Chennai. – AFP

NEW DELHI: India reported its most Covid-19 cases and deaths in months on Monday, on the first anniversary of the start of a chaotic nationwide lockdown that left many people jobless and shrank the economy.

Authorities reintroduced some curbs to slow the spread of the virus, especially in the western state of Maharashtra, which accounted for nearly two-thirds of the 46,951 new infections and the majority of the 212 deaths.

Some hospitals in the country's worst-affected districts have begun to run short of beds, and there is a rising clamour for the immunisation campaign to be widened to cover more people, instead of just the elderly and those suffering from other health

conditions.

With the biggest rise in cases since early November, India's total has surpassed 11.65 million, the highest in the world after the United States and Brazil. The increase in deaths was the largest since early January, and took the total to 159,967.

In some parts of India, most people still go out without masks and flout advice on social distancing, including politicians campaigning in four states where elections will begin later this month.

The health ministry has also warned that a huge gathering of devotees for a Hindu festival could lead to a spike in cases as people from all over the country flock to the banks of the Ganges river in the holy northern town of Haridwar. — Reuters

British premier warns of third wave of Covid-19 pandemic

LONDON: A third wave of coronavirus infections could hit Britain as countries in Europe are currently tackling a spike in cases, Prime Minister Boris Johnson has warned. During a visit to an aerospace company on Monday, Johnson told reporters that Britons "should be under no illusions" that when a third wave hits Europe, it will reach Britain as well.

"I expect that we will feel those effects in due course," he said.

It comes as the country is trialling new technology to try and establish more quickly which variants of the coronavirus are present in positive tests.

Under current testing, lab technicians can find out if a Briton with Covid-19 has a variant of concern in their system — such as the Brazil variant, the South African variant and the British variant — in four to five days using genomic sequencing.

But the new testing — called genotype assay testing — allows scientists to find out a result in two to three days, the government's health department said.

On Wednesday phase three trials of the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine were also announced to be 79 per cent effective on average at preventing Covid-19 and 100 per cent effective at preventing severe disease and hospitalisation.

The efficacy varied in different participants, with trials involving people aged 65 years and over having an 80 per cent efficacy rating.

The interim analysis involved 32,449 participants accruing 141 symptomatic cases of Covid-19.



Britain's prime minister Boris Johnson wearing a mask visits BAE Systems at Warton Aerodrome in northwest England. – AFP

Meanwhile, Britain on Monday demanded the European Union allow the delivery of Covid-19 vaccines it has ordered as tensions over a possible export ban on EU-manufactured shots mounted and Brussels pointed an accusing finger at drugmaker AstraZeneca.

"The UK is not to blame. The EU is not to blame," said an EU official. "It's about everyone finding agreement with a company that has been over-selling its production capacity."

After falling far behind post-Brexit Britain and the United States in rolling out vaccines, EU leaders are due to discuss a

Phase three trials of the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine were also announced to be 79 per cent effective on average at preventing Covid-19

possible ban on vaccine exports to Britain at a summit on Thursday.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke on Sunday to the EU's most powerful leaders, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron, to steer them

away from bans.

Johnson's spokesman declined to comment on whether Britain, which exited the 27-nation EU's orbit on December 31, was considering retaliatory measures.

"I am not going to get into hypotheticals but our position is clear is that we do not want to see countries placing export restrictions on vaccinations," he said.

AstraZeneca has told Brussels that the UK is using a clause in its supply contract that prevents exports of its vaccines until the British market is fully served, EU officials said. — AFP

Thousands flock to Iceland's erupting volcano

FAGRADALSFJALL, ISLANDE: Thousands of curious onlookers have flocked to an erupting volcano in Iceland to marvel at the hypnotic display of glowing red lava, the bravest of them grilling hot dogs and marshmallows over the smoldering embers.

The eruption of a fissure near Mount Fagradalsfjall, which began late on Friday, was the first in the same volcanic system in about 900 years.

The volcano is located only about 40 kilometres from the capital Reykjavik and can be reached after a 90-minute hike from the nearest road.

"It's absolutely breathtaking,"

says Ulvar Kari Johannsson, a 21-year-old engineer who spent his Sunday visiting the scene.

"It smells pretty bad. For me what was surprising was the colours of the orange: much, much deeper than what one would expect," he says.

The incandescent lava bubbles and spurts from a small cone in the Geldingadalur valley, piling up in the basin and slowly turning a thick black as it cools. Some 300,000 cubic metres of lava have poured out of the ground so far, according to experts, although the eruption is considered relatively small and controlled.

"For me it's the heat that



A police officer stands in front of the volcanic site on the Reykjanes Peninsula following Friday's eruption in Iceland. – Reuters

really surprised me. When we approached the lava flowing on the ground, the temperature rose by 10-15 degrees and our faces flushed," says Emilie Saint-Mleux, a French exchange student in Iceland who came with two friends.

"It reminds you a little of a barbecue in summer," jokes her friend Lucille Fernemont.

Access to the site was blocked in the first hours after the eruption. Authorities then lifted the roadblocks but discouraged visits, but by Saturday afternoon visitors were allowed — under strict guidelines.

"We are just here to look after

the people and see that everything is okay. And just watch that the people are not going too close to the lava and asking them step back," explains Atli Gunnarsson, a 45-year-old police officer.

Rescue teams also had to help dozens of freezing and exhausted people find their way back to the road on Sunday in the dark as weather conditions deteriorated.

A small recurring beep can be heard around the emergency crews. They're carrying devices that measure gas pollution, especially sulphur dioxide, which can pose a danger to health and even be fatal.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

WELLINGTON

N Zealand drafts plans for Australia travel bubble

New Zealand is finalising a long-awaited travel bubble with neighbouring Australia and will reveal next month when trans-Tasman trips can resume, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said. Speaking almost exactly a year after New Zealand closed its borders as Covid-19 swept across the globe, Ardern acknowledged many Kiwis were impatient for quarantine-free travel to and from Australia.

But she said the government would exercise the cautious



approach that has seen New Zealand largely contain the virus, with just 26 deaths in a population of five million.

"Many New Zealanders are nervous, they don't want to put everything we've fought so hard for at risk," she said during a press conference. — AFP

DAR ES SALAAM

State funeral held for Tanzania's late president

Leaders from across Africa paid their respects to the deceased president of Tanzania, John Magufuli, praising him as a true son of Africa for championing the continent's interests, at a state funeral.

The presidents and prime ministers of South Africa, Kenya, Mozambique, Congo and Zimbabwe were among those attending the ceremony held at a stadium in Dodoma. Leaders said while many thought Africa was unable to stand on its own,



Magufuli's leadership showed Africa could fend for itself.

Congolese President and chairman of African Union Felix Tshisekedi called on Tanzania's government to continue his crusade against corruption.

— dpa

DHAKA

Fire breaks out at Rohingya camp

A massive fire has broken out at a crowded refugee camp in the south-eastern Bangladeshi district of Cox's Bazar, home to hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas who fled persecution in Myanmar, an official said. The fire broke out in the afternoon at one of the camps and spread to four other adjoining camps, Mohammad Shamsud Douza, deputy chief of the government's Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission, said.

He said the firefighters spent



three hours battling the flames until the evening. An estimated 150,000 people had been living in the shanties, he added. No casualties have been reported yet, he said, adding that the extent of the damage would only be clear once the fire was extinguished.

— dpa

Living in transition...

The wind hums as it blows announcing the transition towards summer. The days are warmer and change is in the air, we say.

Not a day passes by without our thoughts going in different directions — memories and fears, things to do and hopes for the future.

At times we go overboard with our thoughts that we have to be woken up to realise why we blame everything else when we never had actual goals planned out.

It is nice to go with the flow but at times it could be just going towards the gravitational pull. The ship might sail with the wind but a plane flies against the wind.

A friend said to me, “When we are young our families are like cherry blossoms and as we get older we begin to lose them.” The comfort we found under their shade is suddenly left bare until we learn to create the shade for ourselves and for others. This is the reality in almost all spheres of life.

With so much of uncertainties going around the world, it is only natural that worry could be the dominant thought. Maybe it is time to forget and relearn. Many never gave up, instead they just adapted to a new lifestyle and career. In the process qualification did not matter but quality definitely did. When a person is creative and hardworking there is not much that can be denied when



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it comes to opportunities. Sooner or later the opportunities will arrive but we need not just wait for it. If nothing has come yet, then volunteer.

Like any machine, we also need to continuously practice our skills and keep our mind activated. Reading alone is not enough to increase our knowledge, the confidence one gets from implementing the knowledge is visible when one goes for a job interview.

Being in our own circle is in a way sticking to our comfort zone because that is a group of people who are going to accept us no matter what. It is the hardships of life that smoothen a person out. The hardship could be financial or emotional so that it touches everyone no matter whether they are rich or poor. There is a challenge for everyone and the only tool that can take them through is patience. Patience is an inner strength that has to be cultivated slowly and steadily. The advantages of having patience is of course the breaking down of stress and learning to practice detachment, which actually helps one to view a situation unbiased.

Following very closely is the communication skill that is often overlooked but is the art that requires an understanding of emotions and leads to emotional intelligence. With marketing intermingled with communication sometimes the

differentiation between the two has turned out to be vague today.

Often important information is brushed aside because of the general opinion that sets as reality in people’s minds. Maybe it is time to set aside our misconceptions and start fresh with our communication and that means it is time to reset.

Starting from readymade good morning messages to greeting people — we need to think of genuine ways to do so. Then again the question is, “Do we really need all this in the first place?” How did we communicate before social media arrived on the horizon?

In the past, a call made all the difference. Even then the elders in the family complained about how long we sat on the phones and now we are typing away even while driving threatening lives. We have the urge to communicate with the world.

All this leads to yet another important element in our lives and that is setting priorities.

When life brings in a sense of discomfort it seems that most of the time it is the imbalance in these areas that brings in problems. But the ones who understand it move on confidently as if to say a problem comes with its own solutions. To realise it one needs a calm mind. The fact is that the ones who live in the present also keep in mind the future too.

WRITE FOR US

Oman Daily Observer welcomes original contributions for publication in its opinion page. The newspaper reserves the right to publish or edit the article accordingly. The article’s length must not exceed 550 words. Please send the articles to opinion@omanobserver.om

ELECTION MEDDLING

US sanctions on Russia will send a signal, if not deter

ARSHAD MOHAMMED & PATRICIA ZENGERLE

US sanctions may not deter Russia from its alleged election meddling and cyber hacking in the short-term but will signal Washington’s renewed willingness to hold the Kremlin publicly to account for acts it views as malign.

President Joe Biden has vowed Russian President Vladimir Putin will “pay a price” and is expected to impose sanctions as soon as this week that could range from freezing the US assets of Russians to curbing Moscow’s ability to issue sovereign debt.

Russia denies meddling in US elections and orchestrating the cyber hack that used US tech company SolarWinds Corp to penetrate US government networks.

The Kremlin has also dismissed reports it offered bounties to Taliban militants to kill US troops in Afghanistan.

While the two nations’ presidents quickly extended the New START arms control treaty, Biden has taken a much tougher stance towards Putin than his predecessor, Donald Trump, and the US and Russian leaders

ANDREW WEISS
Carnegie Endowment

have made no secret of their disagreements.

In an interview last week the new Democratic president agreed with an interviewer who asked if he thought the Russian leader was a “killer”, prompting Putin to respond with a Russian playground chant that “he who said it, did it.”

Analysts said sanctions were unlikely to deter Russia and it was necessary to harden US society to resist disinformation campaigns like the one Putin likely directed to try to sway the 2020 US election in favour of Trump, a Republican, according to a US intelligence assessment released last Tuesday.

The assessment showed Russia did little to hide its hand in trying to influence the election, suggesting such efforts may now simply be a fact of life, said Andrew Weiss of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace think-tank.

“That’s a long-term problem for Western societies and we shouldn’t expect the administration is just magically going to solve it”, he said, adding Washington wanted “to send a message: We’re watching these activities, we’re going to call them out.”

A former US official said that even though sanctions may not change Moscow’s behaviour in the short-term, there can be a benefit to drawing clear lines about what is not acceptable.

“What they are trying to do with their Russia policy is to discourage risk-taking by the Russians, to carve out small areas where there are abilities to cooperate and to be very clear in specific and timely reactions that there will always be a cost to Russian behaviour”, said the former US official.

— Reuters

CAR BOMB, CORRUPTION AND COVID

‘Sordid’ drama rocks India’s finance capital

RAJENDRA JADHAV AND ADITYA KALRA

A senior Mumbai police officer filed a complaint in the Supreme Court on Monday accusing a state government minister of corruption, the latest development in a bizarre case that has transfixed the media for weeks.

“Each sordid revelation... has chipped away at public confidence in the functioning of a vital arm of government in the country’s financial capital”, said an editorial in the *Indian Express*, one of the country’s leading English-language newspapers.

Param Bir Singh, the former head of police in Mumbai, filed a petition seeking an “unbiased, uninfluenced, impartial and fair investigation” into corruption allegations against Anil Deshmukh, Home Minister of Maharashtra state that is home to the city. Deshmukh has denied impropriety.

With claims of graft, a suspicious death and a bomb threat against India’s richest man, the case has the hallmarks of a thriller made by the country’s Bollywood film industry, dominating TV networks and newspaper front pages and trending on social media for almost a month.

On February 25, a car laden with explosives was found near the Mumbai home of Mukesh Ambani, who heads Reliance Industries and is India’s richest man.

The purported owner of the vehicle was later found dead, with police treating his death as suspicious.

Sachin Vaze, a senior Mumbai police



A health worker fills a form before taking nasal swab samples for Covid-19 coronavirus Rapid Antigen Test as mandated by the civic authorities in Mumbai on Monday. — AFP

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officer, was arrested on March 13 by India’s federal National Investigation Agency (NIA) in connection with the bomb threat. He denies wrongdoing.

In a statement, Reliance said it was confident police in Mumbai “will complete their thorough investigation quickly”.

Last week, Singh was transferred from his role as Mumbai’s police commissioner for his handling of the case.

In Monday’s petition, Singh said his transfer was illegal, and that Deshmukh interfered in police investigations and worked with Vaze and other officers to extort money from local businesses.

Deshmukh denied the allegations, saying that purported meetings with Vaze last month were impossible as he was in hospital with Covid-19 and then in quarantine. The case is an additional headache for the opposition-led government in Maharashtra that is already battling a surge in Covid-19 cases.

India’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has repeatedly called for the resignation of Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, who turned against the BJP after a power-sharing agreement collapsed.

He is due to address a news briefing later in the day. — Reuters

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M I L A N K E E P P R E S S U R E O N L E A D E R S I N T E R W I T H H A R D - F O U G H T W I N

JUVE'S TITLE HOPES ROCKED

MILAN: Juventus’ hopes of winning a 10th consecutive Serie A title took another blow on Sunday with a 1-0 home loss to lowly Benevento as AC Milan closed the gap on leaders Inter Milan with a hard-fought 3-2 win at Fiorentina.

Adolfo Gaich scored the only goal in the 69th minute at Juve’s Allianz Stadium following a bad pass across his own penalty area by midfielder Arthur.

Andrea Pirlo’s side stays third, 10 points behind Inter whose match against Sassuolo was postponed because of a Covid-19 outbreak at the league leaders.

Second-placed Milan are four points ahead of the reigning champions after they recovered from their Europa League exit to Manchester United by cutting the deficit to Inter to six points with a 3-2 win over Fiorentina.

For Juve, who have 11 games left to play this season, it was another blow after being dumped out of the Champions League at the last 16-stage by Porto earlier this month.

“We performed poorly, in every aspect,” said Pirlo.
“We have to continue to believe in the title. The objective does not change, it’s the mindset which must.”

Serie A top scorer Cristiano Ronaldo, who has netted 23 times in the league this season, drew a blank in Turin a week after reaching 770 goals to beat Pele’s all-time mark of 767, with Benevento goalkeeper Lorenzo Montipo pulling off a string of fine saves.

ZLATAN HAILS ‘IMPORTANT’ WIN
Benevento broke the deadlock following Arthur’s horrendous pass across the face of goal towards Danilo, which allowed Gaich to pounce and score his second goal in five games since arriving on loan from CSKA Moscow.

Montipo denied Ronaldo twice late on as Juve pushed for a leveller, first from close range with 10 minutes to go and again in the final minute, with Danilo sending the subsequent rebound over the bar.

Benevento now sit seven points away from the drop zone in 16th.

In Florence, Zlatan Ibrahimovic returned to the starting line-up for Milan for the first time in over three weeks and scored after nine minutes following Simon Kjaer’s ball over the top.

But Milan needed Brahim Diaz’s 57th-minute strike and a Hakan Calhanoglu winner with a quarter of an hour to go to snatch victory.

A curling Erick Pulgar free-kick had pulled Fiorentina level with Franck Ribery then putting the hosts ahead six minutes after the break.

“It was very important to win like this after the defeat against Manchester United,” said Ibrahimovic, who at 39 became the oldest player to score 15 goals in a single Serie A season.

MERTENS CENTURY
Atalanta bounced back after their Champions League exit to Real Madrid with a 2-0 win at Hellas Verona to consolidate fourth place, equal on points with Juventus.

Ruslan Malinovskyi scored the first from the penalty spot after a Federico Dimarco handball in the 33rd minute in Verona. Duvan Zapata added a second before the break, after an earlier effort hit the post, the Colombian sweeping the ball past Marco Silvestri into an empty net, as Verona fell to a third successive defeat to stay ninth.

Atalanta are two points ahead of Napoli who beat Champions League rivals Roma 2-0 at the Stadio Olimpico thanks to a Dries Mertens brace.

Mertens curled in the opener from a free-kick in the 27th minute and nodded in a Matteo Politano cross seven minutes later to bring his tally to 100 Serie A goals since joining Napoli in 2013.

Roma are the only Italian side left in Europe and showed signs of fatigue after their Europa League trip to Ukrainian side Shakhtar Donetsk on Thursday.

“Perhaps we don’t have the mentality required to compete against these sort of teams,” said Roma coach Paulo Fonseca, whose side have struggled for results against Serie A’s top teams.

“In the first half the team looked to be without courage ... When we are afraid of losing, or afraid of playing, it all becomes a lot harder.” Lazio recovered from their Champions League elimination to Bayern Munich with a 1-0 win at Udinese thanks to an Adam Marusic goal.

Simone Inzaghi’s side are seventh but now just one point behind their city rivals with a game in hand. — AFP

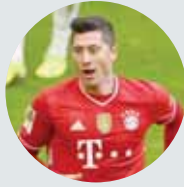
ITALIAN SERIE A TABLE AFTER SUNDAY’S LATE MATCH (PLAYED, WON, DRAWN, LOST, GOALS FOR, GOALS AGAINST, POINTS):

Inter Milan	27	20	5	2	65	26	65
AC Milan	28	18	5	5	53	33	59
Juventus	27	16	7	4	54	23	55
Atalanta	28	16	7	5	65	34	55
Napoli	27	17	2	8	58	29	53
Roma	28	15	5	8	51	42	50
Lazio	27	15	4	8	43	37	49
Sassuolo	27	10	9	8	45	44	39
Hellas Verona	28	10	8	10	36	34	38
Bologna	28	9	7	12	39	44	34
Udinese	28	8	9	11	30	36	33
Sampdoria	27	9	5	13	37	42	32
Genoa	28	7	10	11	30	40	31
Fiorentina	28	7	8	13	35	45	29
Spezia	28	7	8	13	36	51	29
Benevento	28	7	8	13	28	52	29
Torino	27	4	11	12	39	50	23
Cagliari	28	5	7	16	31	48	22
Parma	28	3	10	15	26	54	19
Crotone	28	4	3	21	32	70	15

ITALIAN SERIE A RESULTS

On Sunday:
Hellas Verona 0 Atalanta 2 (Malinovskyi 33-pen, Zapata 42)
Udinese 0 Lazio 1 (Marusic 37)
Juventus 0 Benevento 1 (Gaich 69)
Sampdoria 1 (Candрева 25) Torino 0
Fiorentina 2 (Pulgar 17, Ribery 51) AC Milan 3 (Ibrahimovic 9, Diaz 57, Calhanoglu 72)
Roma 0 Napoli 2 (Mertens 27, 34)
On Saturday
Crotone 2 (Messias 33, Simy 41-pen)
Bologna 3 (Soumaoro 62, Schouten 70, Skov Olsen 84)
Spezia 2 (Piccoli 49, Maggiore 80) Cagliari 1 (Pereiro 83)
Postponed — Inter Milan v Sassuolo
On Friday
Parma 1 (Pelle 16) Genoa 2 (Scamacca 50, 69)





Lewandowski receives honour from president

Soccer player Robert Lewandowski received an honour from the Polish president on Monday, giving the striker named Best Fifa Men's Player in 2020 another award for a trophy cabinet already containing Champions League and Bundesliga winner's medals.



'Spurs dressing room divided by 'selfish' players'

Jose Mourinho said Tottenham's dressing room is divided by "selfish" players and agents who have their own relationships with the press. Mourinho was speaking after a vital win in the chase for a top-four Premier League finish. Spurs responded to an embarrassing Europa League exit at the hands of Dinamo Zagreb.

Kohli calls for player power in cricket scheduling

PUNE, India: India skipper Virat Kohli on Monday said players should be consulted over the cricket calendar as the extended bubble life during the coronavirus pandemic has strengthened fears of burnout.

With India headed into three one-day internationals against England starting on Tuesday after winning a gruelling Test series 3-1 and Twenty20 series 3-2, Kohli said more attention must be paid to cricketers' mental health.

"The players need to be spoken to and consulted with all round," said Kohli.

"Otherwise it's going to be a case of whoever can last through difficult times like this plays, if not then move away and someone else replaces that player."

He added, "I don't think that's healthy for a cricket system and cricket culture moving forward which we definitely want to make stronger and stronger."

Responding to suggestions that the 50-over games were out of place in a year dominated by the World Test Championship final and the T20 World Cup, Kohli said tournament scheduling "is something that is not in our control."

"I think it's very important to consider how much cricket you are

The players need to be spoken to and consulted with all round. Otherwise it's going to be a case of whoever can last through difficult times like this plays, if not then move away and someone else replaces that player

VIRAT KOHLI,
Indian captain

playing. It's not just the physical side of thing but the mental side of things as well," said Kohli.

"Scheduling and workloads is something that everyone will have to be very aware," he added. "Especially in today's day and age where you just don't know where restrictions might come in."

Most players have been in secure bubbles, with only small breaks since last August.

From September until January, India's players went through the Indian Premier League and a tour of Australia.

'Umpire's call creating



India's Virat Kohli in action. — Reuters

confusion."

Kohli though stayed away from the debate of England's rest and rotate policy in the pandemic, saying it was their "internal" matter.

But the Indian superstar slammed the "umpire's call" in the game's decision review system, saying it creates "confusion".

The decision of an on-field umpire is critical when a batting or bowling side opts for a TV review during a leg before wicket call.

The batter escapes lbw even if the tracker shows the ball would have hit the stumps if a large part of the ball was not hitting the stumps and the on-field official had ruled it not out.

"The umpire's call right now is creating lot of confusion," said Kohli.

"When you get bowled as a batsman you don't expect the ball to hit 50 per cent into the stumps to consider yourself bowled, so when the ball is being shown as clipping the stumps the bails are going to fall."

Kohli, last week suggested an "I don't know" option for umpires in a catch review, said the game's complexities must be done away with.

— AFP

Muscat CT clinch T20 crown to complete dream double

IT WORKS BEAT AER TO CLAIM RUNNERS-UP TROPHY

SHAHZAD RAZA
MUSCAT, MARCH 22

Riding on Sandeep Goud's superb all-round performance, Muscat CT secured an 11-run win over spirited Al Turki NMC on Friday to clinch Premier Division's T20 League crown, completing a dream double after winning the 50-over League title last week.

Unlike the 50-over championship where they were given a run for the money by Al Turki and IT Works, Muscat dominated the T20 league with 18 points, winning nine of the 10 games they played, two more than runners-up IT Works who finished with 14 points, ahead of 12 by third-placed Renaissance.

Sandeep Goud top-scored with a hurricane 42 not out off 18 balls including 5 powerful sixes as Muscat posted a robust 179 for 5 on the board. Shoaib Khan (39) and Jatinder Singh (33) were the other notable scorers. Jay Odedara bagged 2 for 26.

Al Turki fought hard but struggled to keep pace with the mounting run rate, falling short by 14 runs as they reached 165 for 7 in 20 overs. Gustav Burger



(30), Twinkal Bhandari (25) and Prateek Athavale (25) were their main scorers. Sandeep and Wasim Ali picked up two wickets each.

NADEEM HELPS IT WORKS TO VICTORY

Muhammed Nadeem's rock solid 45 not out was the highlight of IT Works' 27-run victory against AER in the two teams' last T20 league game that helped the former to the runner-up spot in the team standings.

Studded with a bunch of talented players, including many Oman stars, IT Works

gave a good account of itself in a highly competitive tournament, promising to improve with each season it plays. Nadeem's fighting knock saved the day for IT Works as it limped to 109 for 8 in 20 overs. Waseem Akhtar's 21 was the only other notable score. Afzal Khan and Allan Gawdya bagged two wickets each.

AER failed to hold its nerves against a highly experienced IT Works' bowling attack, crawling to 82 for 7 before running out of over. Shakeel Ahmad, tournament's leading wicket-taker with young Muzahir Raza at 16 wickets each,

Was unplayable, taking 2 for 8 in 4 overs. Khawar Ali also bowled well, taking 2 for 24.

BRIEF SCORES Premier Division T20

Muscat CT 179 for 5 in 20 overs (Sandeep Goud 42 – 5x6, Shoaib Khan 39 – 4x4, Jatinder Singh 33 – 3x4, 2x6. Odedara Jay 2-26) beat Al Turki NMC 165 for 7 in 20 overs (Gustav Burger 30 – 2x4, 1x6, Wasim Ali 2-30, Sandeep Goud 2-32) by 14 runs.

IT Works 109 for 8 in 20 overs (Muhammed Nadeem 45 – 4x4, 1x6) beat AER 82 for 7 in 20 overs (Danish Mohammad 18 – 1x4, Shakeel Ahmad 2-08, Khawar Ali 2-24) by 27 runs.

Holder stars as Windies take control against Lanka

NORTH SOUND, Antigua and Barbuda: Former captain Jason Holder took five wickets to help bowl out Sri Lanka for 169 as the West Indies took control of the opening Test of their two-match series on the opening day in Antigua on Sunday.

Relieved of the captaincy after five-and-a-half taxing years in the job, any suggestions that the all-rounder would have been lacking in energy and enthusiasm swiftly evaporated on the way to impressive figures of five for 27 off 17.4 overs.

With new skipper Kraigg Brathwaite sharing opening batting duties alongside John Campbell, the pair negotiated a potentially tricky 40 minutes to the close of play and will resume on the second morning at 13 without loss. Holder's eighth five-wicket innings haul in Test



Jason Holder celebrates the dismissal of Lasith Embuldeniya of Sri Lanka during day 1 of the first Test. — AFP

cricket included the important scalp of Lahiru Thirimanne during the final session of the day as the tourists' last five wickets tumbled for just 19 runs.

Thirimanne had offered stout resistance to all the West Indies bowlers for just short of five hours before he dragged a delivery onto his stumps to depart for 70 off 180 deliveries.

— AFP

SCOREBOARD

Sri Lanka first innings:		
D Karunaratne c Campbell b Cornwall	12	
L Thirimanne b Holder	70	
O Fernando (run out)	4	
D Chandimal c Da Silva b Holder	4	
D de Silva b Roach	13	
P Nissanka c Holder b Roach	9	
N Dickwella c Cornwall b Holder	32	
S Lakmal c Brathwaite b Holder	3	
L Embuldeniya lbw Holder	3	
D Chameera b Roach	2	
V Fernando (not out)	1	
Extras (B-4, LB-6, NB-1, W-5)	16	
Total (all out, 69.4 overs)	169	
Fall of wickets: 1-17, 2-29, 3-54, 4-76, 5-92, 6-150, 7-160, 8-163, 9-164		
Bowling: K Roach 16-2-47-3, S Gabriel 9-2-22-0, R Cornwall 14-6-25-1, A Joseph 11-2-32-0, J Holder 17.4-6-27-5, K Mayers 2-0-6-0		
West Indies first innings:		
K Brathwaite (not out)	3	
J Campbell (not out)	7	
Extras (LB-1, NB-2)	3	
Total (For no wkt, 13 overs)	13	
Bowling: S Lakmal 6-1-7-0, V Fernando 4-3-2-0, D Chameera 2-1-2-0, L Embuldeniya 1-0-1-0		



Barcelona's Lionel Messi in action with Real Sociedad's Mikel Oyarzabal at Reale Arena, San Sebastian, Spain. — Reuters

MESSI

ON SONG AS BARCA THRASH SOCIEDAD

MADRID: Lionel Messi scored twice on Sunday as Barcelona trounced Real Sociedad 6-1 to keep the pressure on Atletico Madrid, who squeezed past Alaves thanks to a late penalty save from Jan Oblak.

Oblak's 86th-minute heroics ensured Luis Suarez's 500th career goal was enough for a 1-0 victory at the Wanda Metropolitano, meaning the gap at the top of La Liga remains at four points, with 10 games left to play.

But the contrast between Atletico's nervy win against 19th-placed Alaves and Barca's demolition of a Real Sociedad side with hopes of qualifying for Europe spoke volumes about where the momentum lies in the Spanish title race.

Atletico will hope Oblak's save can prove to be a turning point after a challenging few weeks, while the international break might offer Diego Simeone's side a chance to reset and refresh ahead of the run-in.

"There are games where you suffer but that's what makes football beautiful," said Oblak.

Simeone said: "Like all great teams, there is always one that scores a lot of goals and one that makes a lot of saves. They are both decisive players who make the team stronger."

Barcelona have hit their stride, their six goals against Real Sociedad no less than they deserved for a scintillating attacking display, and perhaps their best since Ronald Koeman took charge. "The team has improved a lot recently," said Koeman. "We've gone a lot of games without losing in the

SPANISH LA LIGA RESULTS

On Sunday:
Getafe 1 (Unal 60) Elche 1 (Milla 20)
Villarreal 2 (Gerard 5-pen, Bacca 67)
Cadiz 1 (Alex 69)
Valencia 2 (Wass 4, Blanco Sanchez 66)
Granada 1 (Soldado 90)
Atletico Madrid 1 (Suarez 54)
Alaves 0
Real Sociedad 1 (Barrenetxea 77)
Barcelona 6 (Griezmann 37, Dest 43, 53, Messi 56, 89, Dembele 71)
On Saturday
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Berchiche 9)
Eibar 1 (Kike 17)
Celta Vigo 1 (Mina 40) Real Madrid 3 (Benzema 20, 30, Asensio 90+4)
Huesca 0 Osasuna 0
Valladolid 1 (Orellana 44-pen)
Sevilla 1 (Bounou 90+4)
On Friday
Real Betis 2 (Fekir 70, Juanmi 75)
Levante 0

league, which was the only way to get back in the fight for the title. "But we're still behind Atletico, Real Madrid are stronger. We have to keep going to the end."

MESSI BREAKS APPEARANCE RECORD

Messi scored his 11th and 12 goals in his last 10 games, and made it 16 in 12 this year. The 33-year-old has also now passed Xavi Hernandez's record of 767 Barcelona appearances, which he had equalled against Huesca on Monday.

Messi did not plough a lone furrow at the Reale Arena, where Sergino Dest scored twice either side of half-time after Antoine Griezmann slammed in the opener. Ousmane Dembele and Real Sociedad's Ander Barrenetxea — with arguably the goal of the night — both registered between Messi's double in the second half.

For Barcelona, it is a ninth consecutive away win in the league, with a club record 10th within their grasp if they beat Real Madrid in the Clasico on April 10.

Real Sociedad next play Basque rivals Athletic Bilbao in the postponed Copa del Rey final from last year on April 3.

Dest had already hit the crossbar when Messi set Jordi Alba free down the left and while Dembele's finish was saved, Griezmann was on hand to convert the rebound.

Marc-Andre ter Stegen had to rectify his own poor clearance by getting down low to deny Alexander Isak but Real Sociedad's resistance was brief.

Messi slipped in Dest to fire in and then Alba pulled back from the other side for the American to make it three.

Messi snuck in behind early in the second half, poking in Sergio Busquets' ball over the top before Dembele was allowed to glide through unchallenged, and impressively drove into the far corner. Barrenetxea put his side on the scoreboard, and brilliantly, by nipping inside Frenkie de Jong and thundering a shot into the top corner but Messi had the last word, a crisp finish curling inside the near post.

Messi stays ahead of Suarez in the La Liga scoring charts, despite the Uruguayan's excellent finish nine minutes into the second half against Alaves. Thomas Lemar turned the ball around the corner to Marcos Llorente, who fed Kieran Trippier racing down the right, and he curled a cross in on the run to the near post, where Suarez headed in. — AFP

Arsenal hit back to draw level with West Ham in thriller

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, MARCH 22

While the first half of this 3-3 drawn match belonged emphatically to West Ham, the second went remarkably in favour of their north London opponents who clawed their way back from what seemed an insurmountable position. The Hammers will be bitterly disappointed at giving away a 3-goal advantage, yet Arsenal deserved a share of the spoils for their stunning recovery.

Gunnars manager Mikel Arteta said: "This game is going to give me a few nightmares because it is really difficult to stop some of the things we have been doing to hurt ourselves. I'm very disappointed with the way we started the game. The way we conceded three goals was completely unacceptable. But the final 60 minutes was probably the best I've seen us play under pressure in tough conditions."

He added: "Some teams would have collapsed and then started

complaining to each other but we were the complete opposite. It's a shame we didn't win because we created six or seven good chances. But it's the first part of the game that keeps me awake because I'm worried about the different levels of performance that we still show within the same game."

The Hammers began their goal rush in the 15th minute with Michail Antonio pulling a ball back to Jesse Lingard, at the edge of the box, for the forward to hit a firm shot into the top-right corner for his fifth goal in seven games. Then within two minutes the lead was doubled with Lingard taking a quick free-kick and with Arsenal slow to react, Jarrod Bowen was left free for his drive near post.

Just about half an hour came West Ham's third goal with Kieran Tierney losing possession and Antonio's downward header found the target with Tomas Soucek's foot getting a touch on the ball. Arsenal reduced the deficit seven minutes before the break when

Alex Lacazette's shot from a cross was deflected, off Soucek.

Having had some tough talking from their manager, the Gunners applied pressure and had much the better of the second half. Their second goal came on the hour when Craig Dawson turned the ball into his own net from a cross by Calum Chambers. Finally, parity was achieved with eight minutes left when Lacazette headed in a cross from Nicolas Pepe just after Antonio had hit the post.

West Ham manager David Moyes said: "We're really disappointed we didn't hang on to take all three points but that's a sign of just how far we've come when we're upset at only drawing against a team with as much quality as Arsenal. Arsenal have been in good form but we didn't allow them to show that in the first half because we were all over them. We struggled to stay in the game after the break but we still had enough chances to win and we didn't take them."



West Ham United's Declan Rice in action with Arsenal's Martin Odegaard. — Reuters

business

MUSCAT STOCK MARKET

3,731.85

CRUDE OIL PRICE

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TOTAL MID-YEAR PRIZES

OMR 16,000

TOTAL NATIONAL DAY PRIZES

OMR 55,000

TOTAL PRIZES FOR LADIES

OMR 11,000

TOTAL MEGA PRIZES

OMR 112,000

Sohar Port and Freezone inks pact for new quay wall

METALS CLUSTER: 700m quay wall in eastern area of port to support activities of Moon Iron & Steel Company

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 22

Sohar Port and Freezone has signed a land development agreement with Moon Iron & Steel Company SAOC (MISCO) centring on the construction of a 700-metre quay wall for an upcoming facility in the eastern area of the port, set to begin at the end of this year.

The signing took place between Mark Geilenkirchen, CEO of Sohar Port and Sasikumar Moorkanat, Managing Director and CEO of MISCO.

Commenting on the agreement, Geilenkirchen of Sohar Port, said, “In our journey towards becoming a key logistics hub in the region, we continue our endeavours to attract potential businesses to



SOHAR. In line with our vision, we aim to utilise the available land as an extension of the current Steel and Logistics Cluster.

We also seek to keep an eye out for industries that could further develop and strengthen the overall portfolio of services,

provided by the Port. This way, we can facilitate the growth of the existing industries and tenants, alongside accommodating new types of services, industries and products. In addition, we will see the generation of 250 local job opportunities upon completion of

the plant.”

Moon Iron & Steel Company SAOC (MISCO) is a front runner within the local iron and steel sector. It hosts an annual production capacity of 1.2 million tonnes of high-grade reinforcement bars (re-bars),

The eastern area at Sohar Port is a prime location, hosting cool water access and proximity to the Petrochemical, Logistics and Food clusters. Since plots of land with waterfront access are rare in the GCC, Sohar seeks to lease the land out to potential investors and businesses to partner up with

Sasikumar Moorkanat, MD & CEO of MISCO stated, “With the construction of the land and quay wall for the new plant, we will be able to facilitate the handling of direct reduced iron as raw material for producing steel, as well as hot-rolled coil, which can be used for engineering applications, including pipe manufacturing, cold rolling, galvanising, structural fabrication and more.”

The eastern area at Sohar Port is a prime location, hosting cool water access and proximity to the Petrochemical, Logistics and Food clusters. Since plots of land with waterfront access are rare in the GCC, Sohar seeks to lease the land out to potential investors and businesses to partner up with.

With a sizable land area of over 880,000 sqm, it is ideal for companies in the logistics and metal sectors. The integrated Port and Freezone complex, provides an easy flow of business between the two, further enhancing convenience for tenants and investors, who are looking to set up at the rapidly expanding hub.

Tanweer network to be linked up with Dhofar system



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 22

The Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) has authorized the Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer) to go ahead with the linkage of its assets with the Dhofar network covering the south of the Sultanate.

In a statement to ONA, the Authority said the decision stems from efforts to enable Tanweer to secure access to cost-competitive electricity generated through conventional or alternative means in line with government policy.

The Authority directed all licensed companies to begin supporting the implementation of the linkage plan, which is expected to be predominantly complete before the end of this year. Additionally, the regulator called on licensed companies to retain employees or

suitably redeploy those made redundant by the project.

The Authority reaffirmed its commitment to raising the efficiency of electrical networks and reducing the cost burden on the government.

In October 2020, the Authority studied the initiative to connect Tanweer’s network to the Main Electricity System (MIS) and the Dhofar network.

The study concluded that grid connection was not only feasible economically, but importantly, it would also contribute to reducing operational costs by eliminating expensive diesel power plants and replacing them with gas-generated power through current power purchase contracts. The study showed that interconnection would help increase network reliability and develop the level of service provided to participants in rural areas.

NCSI’s use of mobile phones for surveys hailed

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 22

The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) has garnered a major global accolade for its use of mobile phones to in the generation of official statistical indicators in the fields of tourism,

population, transportation and movement in the Sultanate.

This achievement has been described as a paradigm shift in the production of high-quality official statistical indicators underpinning an integrated system for data collection at the national level

necessary to support decision-making.

These indicators are key to planning social, economic, environmental and cultural development, as well as evaluating developmental performance.

By leveraging the use of mobile phones, NCSI was able to reduce

dependence on field statistical surveys, increase the speed of response to the requirements of development plans, reduce frequent visits to families and companies to conduct field surveys, and cover large geographical areas as well.

(With inputs from ONA)

New cannery project to exploit Oman’s rich sardine resources

NATURAL RESOURCES: Dhofar Fisheries to launch new facility at Duqm SEZ next year

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](#)

Dhofar Fisheries & Food Industries Co SAOG (DFFICO) says it plans to invest in a full-fledged fish processing factory at the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Duqm, anchored by a sardine cannery plant that will capitalise on the abundant sardine resources of the Sultanate.

The publicly traded firm, which is listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange, said construction work on the project had commenced last year, with plant operations slated for launch by 2022.

“This factory is being set up near the coastal area for the utilisation of the abundant supply of sardine”,



said Mahdi Mohammed Hassan Hassani, Chairman of the Board of Directors.

“Incidentally, the sardine resources of the Sultanate of Oman are the third largest in the world. Besides, as the factory is in the free zone, there are many advantages, which would significantly reduce the operating costs”, he stated in the Directors’ Report released here on Monday.

The fisheries sector — one of five thrust areas identified for aggressive development in support of Oman’s economic diversification strategies — is witnessing strong investment inflows across all aspects of the industry, encompassing fishery harbours, support infrastructure, processing and value adding plants, cold chain services and large-scale cluster developments.

These investments are being driven primarily by the government and public sector fisheries organisations, but also by increasing numbers of private players. Salalah-based DFFICO, which completes 20 years of operations this year, has also outlined plans to expand and diversify its processing and value adding capabilities.

In addition to the planned launch of dairy and juice processing activities in a 5,280 sq metre area within its Raysut premises, the company has also expanded its cold storage, can storage and packing area facilities.

Despite a 10 per cent uptick in turnover (RO 8.746 million) during 2020, DFFICO posted a net loss of RO 1.227 million for the year, compared to a loss of RO 0.939 million a year earlier.

Accumulated losses climbed to RO 8.077 million as on December 31, 2020, the company added.

How Ireland can enable Oman's green economy



MIKE
HOGAN

Celebrating St Patrick's Day this week will be different than in previous years due to the ongoing pandemic. Gone are the parades and large gatherings of people coming together to celebrate Ireland and all things Irish, instead it will be a more virtual occasion but will still be a moment to celebrate in Ireland and Oman and across the wider region.

For those Irish people residing across the Middle East much like the diaspora in Oman, it will act as a reminder of home, but also a reminder of what Ireland has achieved in the world, and a look ahead to what we will achieve next.

After a year that has challenged us all by having to navigate through a global pandemic that has impacted our lives, the way that we work, and how we socialise with friends and family, we finally have distant sight of the light at the end of the tunnel.

With the rapid vaccination programmes happening across the region, it means we can look ahead with hope that the end of the pandemic is nearing, meaning some return to more way of living our lives.



As we do, we can also begin to contemplate the future ahead of us – for many, it is a moment to reflect on building back better in the type of recovery that we want.

In Ireland, we believe that it is a time to focus on a world that is more sustainable, enabled by a greater focus on enabling a thriving green economy, and one in which we take more responsible actions towards some of the greatest environmental challenges of our lifetimes.

To coincide with St Patrick's Day, the Government of Ireland is galvanising this perspective by launching a campaign – Ready for a Green Future - across the Middle

East and around the world to both raise awareness of the need for change and to promote the many Irish businesses who are the 'green innovators' who are partnering with businesses in the Middle East to help enable both business and environmental solutions to secure the future of our planet for generations to come.

At the heart of this approach are the green innovators of Ireland, the companies brimming with innovation who are leading the way around the world in providing solutions designed to tackle the challenges of our time in our journey towards greater sustainability.

These Irish green innovators are solving complex technical challenges and delivering sustainable and low carbon solutions to make renewable energy viable; reduce energy waste in our cities with smart technology; reduce agricultural waste and are helping to make construction cleaner.

Irish companies are already working with companies in Oman and across the region to help deliver world-leading innovative solutions that lead to reduced energy bills, reduced carbon emissions, and equipping companies with the data to make energy-saving decisions in real-

time.

Our Irish companies are enabling industries to thrive and deliver greater sustainability solutions in agriculture, construction and transport, making buildings greener, cutting pollution and supporting renewable energy production.

Across the Middle East, we see more and more interest for the leading technologies operating as part of the green economy which Ireland is at the forefront of enabling as part of a greener future for the region.

A case in point is Hanley Energy, an Irish company providing customised, efficient energy solutions to the world's most powerful heavy industries. Working across the Middle East, they are supporting the burgeoning data centre industry with critical power and energy technologies that advance on operational efficiency and sustainability.

They also work across the globe with Hyperscale Data Center clients and services their

in-market operations in both the UAE and Bahrain.

Last year, they partnered with local indigenous business in both markets to provide better on-demand product support and enhanced client service on a host of operational levels.

MENA looks set for continued technology and data centre growth, with Hanley Energy unveiling new plans to further expand their export footprint into more markets across the region. With the growing level of exports to the Middle East by Irish companies increasing by 12 per cent year on year, Oman and the wider region are increasingly important markets for Irish companies forming a key strand to their growth plans.

We expect this trend to only grow further, meaning more Irish innovation entering the market. So, as we celebrate this St Patrick's Day with the green of Ireland spreading around Oman, the wider region and the rest of the world, we also celebrate the start of the opportunity to emerge from the pandemic with greater hope for a more sustainable future, one with more optimism and one to be better equipped to be more resilient for the environmental challenges before us by being ready for a green future.

[Mike Hogan is Regional Manager for the Middle East and North Africa at Enterprise Ireland - the Irish Government's trade and innovation agency]

PRESS RELEASES

OWN A KIA TELLURIDE AND SAVE WITH EXCLUSIVE BENEFITS



Kia Telluride fans can now own a Telluride and save with exclusive benefits. Owning a Telluride can now be done in 2 easy ways – Flexible Option: With cash gift as per the grade purchased, from RO 1600 Up to RO 1800. Cash Gift can be used as a part of a down payment. And Bundle Option: With service 5 Years/ 50,000 kms (whichever is earlier), 1-year comprehensive insurance, registration & cash gift as per the grade purchased from RO 2800 to RO 3000. Cash Gift can be used as a part of a down payment. (Conditions apply. Please visit the Kia showroom for details).

The Kia Telluride makes an aesthetic statement for the Kia brand as a bold, luxury SUV with impressive advanced technology, focusing particular attention on the experience and comfort of second-row occupants. At the rear, the inverted 'L' tail lamps with LED stripes are a fascinating sight.

Arming you with the advantage of having a great start to your days is the Remote Engine Start. During the summers when the heat could be discomforting, the Remote window control feature can be a much needed advantage.

MILIPOL QATAR 2021 ATTRACTS 7,924 VISITORS



Milipol Qatar 2021, the leading international event dedicated to homeland security and civil defence in the Middle East, closed a three-day run at the Doha Exhibition & Convention Centre. The number of visitors reached 7,924 and an on-site declared sales tally worth QR 390m. The event is held under the patronage of HH the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani who visited Milipol Qatar 2021 on March 16.

Milipol Qatar 2021 was a watershed in the event's history in that it was held against a background of strict health, safety and hygiene protocols implemented to combat the spread of Covid-19.

Nevertheless, the show, attracted 150 exhibitors from 17 countries and five national pavilions representing Brazil, France, Germany, the UK, and the USA. 54 per cent of the exhibitors were new to Milipol Qatar. The exhibitor line-up was a showcase of advanced technological breakthroughs in the fields of robotics, biometrics, trace and detection technologies, communication, and control systems as well as counter-drone systems, big data, smart sensors, 5G, and AI-based cybersecurity and video analytics.

Crypto-mining malware affected 69 per cent of customers in 2020

EXPONENTIAL GROWTH:
Nearly 90 per cent of organisations had at least one user attempt to connect to a phishing site, most likely by clicking a link in an email

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 22

Global technology leader published the 'DNS Security' report, which analysed malicious DNS activity and threats that occurred between January and December of last year.

The report found crypto-mining malware affected a vast majority of customers in 2020, generating substantial amounts of malicious DNS traffic while taking up precious computing resources.

During a year in which security issues have become essential for all to tackle, DNS Threat Analysis, which processes 620 billion global DNS requests daily, found that from January – December 2020 nearly 90 per cent of organisations had at least one user attempt to connect to a phishing site, most likely by clicking a link in an email.

Among the DNS activity findings: users in 70 per cent of organisations got malicious browser ads. Furthermore, 51 per cent of organisations encountered ransomware-related activity. Another 48



Overall, phishing is dramatically increasing, and more endpoints began clicking on links in phishing emails. This is due to a very large phishing campaign, where Cisco witnessed a 102 percentage-point shift between July and September

per cent found information-stealing malware activity. Besides crypto mining, DNS Security report highlights top threat trends that organisations have encountered in 2020 and will most likely encounter this year:

PHISHING: The amount of phishing-related DNS activity was fairly stable throughout the year,

with the exception of December, which saw a 52 per cent increase around the holidays.

In terms of the number of endpoints visiting phishing sites, there were significant increases during August and September.

Overall, phishing is dramatically increasing, and more endpoints began clicking on links in phishing emails. This is due to a very large phishing campaign, where Cisco witnessed a 102 percentage-point shift between July and September.

TROJANS: Trojans started the year strong. The incredibly high number of endpoints connecting to Trojan sites was largely due to Ursnif/Gozi and IcedID—two threats, known to work in tandem to deliver ransomware.

These two threats alone comprised 82 per cent of Trojans seen on endpoints in January 2020.

Emotet is another banking Trojan which alone is responsible for the large increase in DNS activity from August through September.

In all, 45 per cent of organisations encountered Emotet.

RANSOMWARE: For most of the year, two key ransomware threats dominated; Sodinokibi and Ryuk. Beginning in April, the number of computers compromised by Sodinokibi (AKA REvil) increased significantly and continued to rise into autumn.

The increase was significant enough that 46 per cent of organisations encountered the threat. In September, overall queries from this particular ransomware family shot up to five times that of August, likely indicating that the ransomware payload was being executed across many of the impacted systems.

Ryuk is largely responsible for the November-December spike inactivity. Yet the number of endpoints connecting to Ryuk-associated domains remained relatively small and consistent throughout the year, only showing modest increases before query activity skyrocketed.

There is a high contrast between the two threats when it comes to the amount of money that each threat reportedly attempts to extort from victims. Sodinokibi tends to hit a large number of endpoints, demanding a smaller ransom. Ryuk compromises far fewer systems, demanding a significantly larger payment.

**Gold prices slide 1 per cent**

Gold prices fell 1 per cent on Monday as investors opted for alternative safe-haven assets after Turkey's decision to replace its central bank head sparked financial uncertainty. — **Reuters**

**Air Arabia optimistic**

Budget carrier Air Arabia is optimistic about this year's summer travel period, expecting more borders to reopen as more people are inoculated against the coronavirus. — **Reuters**

**Dollar cements gains**

The US dollar held near a four-month high on Monday after Turkey's President Tayyip Erdogan stunned investors by replacing the hawkish central bank governor. — **Reuters**

Bank Muscat congratulates Royal Oman Police



MUSCAT: In recognition of its prominent role in anti-fraud awareness, the General Secretariat of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers announced on the sidelines of the 44th Conference of Arab Police and Security Leaders 2021 that the Sultanate represented by Royal Oman Police has won the Award for the Best Awareness Film in Combating Cybercrimes.

Bank Muscat congratulated the Royal Oman Police for the great achievement and said that the bank will continue to be a proud partner in this awareness campaign, which has been running since its launch in 2019.

The campaign, which included educational material in the form of editorials and videos in print, digital and social media has been playing a key role in enhancing awareness among the general public in Oman about cyber fraud and extortion.

Cases of electronic fraud have been increasing globally over

the past few years and often cause tremendous financial and psychological harm to both individuals and businesses alike.

The joint campaign by the Royal Oman Police and Bank Muscat advises people to always verify who they are dealing with before conducting a transaction, and also follow 'best practices' for their digital safety.

The awareness campaign is being carried out using various methods including Oman TV, radio, print, online media, and various social media channels.

The messages of the campaign provide examples of how fraudsters are perpetrating fraud and the consequences of sharing personal or banking data with others. This is especially true when making purchases through the Internet. The bank has reminded the public that they can contact the Royal Oman Police at the toll free number 800777444 for advice and queries regarding electronic fraud.

US senators press Biden to set end date for gas-powered car sales

WASHINGTON: California's two US senators are urging President Joe Biden to set a firm date to phase-out gas-powered passenger vehicles as the White House grapples with how to rewrite vehicle emissions rules slashed under president Donald Trump.

In an unreported letter going to Biden on Monday, Democratic Senators Alex Padilla and Dianne Feinstein called on Biden "to follow California's lead and set a date by which all new cars and passenger trucks sold be zero-emission vehicles."

They also urged Biden to restore California's authority to set clean car standards. In September, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed an executive order directing the state's air resources agency to require all new cars and passenger trucks sold in California to be zero-emission by 2035.

Biden's campaign in 2020 declined to endorse a specific date to end gas-powered vehicle sales, but he has vowed to dramatically boost electric vehicles and charging stations.

In January, Biden said the administration would replace the federal government's fleet of 650,000 vehicles "with clean electric vehicles made right here in America made by American workers."



A gas station attendant fills a customer's vehicle in Turnersville, New Jersey. — **Reuters**

Biden's campaign in 2020 declined to endorse a specific date to end gas-powered vehicle sales, but he has vowed to dramatically boost electric vehicles and charging stations.

The senators also say Biden should use a compromise deal that California struck with automakers including Ford Motor Co, Honda Motor, BMW AG and Volkswagen AG that falls between the Trump administration and Obama-era requirements.

"We believe the national baseline should, at an absolute minimum, be built around the technical lead set by companies

that voluntarily advanced their agreements with California," Padilla, who replaced Vice President Kamala Harris in the Senate, and Feinstein wrote in the letter seen by Reuters.

"California and other states need a strong federal partner." Shortly after taking office, Biden ordered US agencies to revisit fuel efficiency standards by July.

— **Reuters**

Fresh travel warning for Britons hits airline stocks



A man in a mask walks past London Stock Exchange in London. — **Reuters**

LONDON: Britons were warned not to book summer holidays abroad by government ministers as Covid-19 cases in parts of Europe soar, sending travel and airline stocks down by as much as 8 per cent on Monday.

Foreign holidays are currently banned in the UK. Under the government's four-stage roadmap for easing pandemic restrictions, they could be allowed to resume from May 17 at the earliest, although it could be later than that.

"My advice would be to anybody

right now is just to hold off on booking international travel," social care minister Helen Whately told the BBC on Monday.

"It just feels premature to be booking international holidays at the moment." Europe's airlines and travel sector are now bracing for a second lost summer, with rebound hopes increasingly challenged by Europe's slow and chaotic Covid-19 vaccine rollout.

Shares in British Airways-owner IAG, easyJet, TUI and Jet2 all traded down around

6-7 per cent on Monday, paring some of the strong gains since February 22 when Britain announced its ambition to restart travel.

While half of all adults in Britain have received at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine, growing infection levels in France, Italy and Germany, fuelled by variants, means the UK may choose to restrict travel beyond the May 17 date.

Whately's comments were the latest in a series of warnings from scientists, public health experts and politicians in recent days.

— **Reuters**

Oil prices slip as Europe lockdowns dim demand recovery hopes



TOKYO: Oil prices resumed their decline on Monday, falling more than 1 per cent on renewed concerns that European lockdowns may slow an anticipated recovery in demand for fuel products.

Brent crude was down 69 cents, or 1.1 per cent, at \$63.84 a barrel by 0755 GMT. US oil was off by \$1.03, or 1.7 per cent, at \$60.39 a barrel. Both contracts fell by more than 6 per cent last week.

"Germany's lockdown extension and the partial lockdown in France continues to weigh on EU consumption sentiment," said Jeffrey Halley, senior market analyst at OANDA. Germany plans to extend a lockdown to contain Covid-19 infections into a fifth month. — **Reuters**

Turkish lira sinks after Erdogan fires top banker

ANKARA: The Turkish lira and stocks plunged on Monday as officials tried to stem the carnage caused by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's abrupt dismissal of his reformist central bank chief.

The lira lost nearly 15 per cent against the dollar on the first day of trading after Erdogan replaced market-friendly economist Naci Agbal with former ruling party lawmaker Sahap Kavcioglu at the crucial post.

It clawed back some of its losses but was still down nine per cent at 7.93 to the dollar after analysts said state banks intervened to support the lira by selling foreign currencies. David Madden of the CMC Markets brokerage in London

said the rout was driven by "fears that Turkey will impose capital controls" limiting the free conversion of liras into dollars and euros.

The turmoil carried over to the Istanbul stock exchange. The Borsa Istanbul suspended trading twice when automatic circuit breakers kicked in as the broad market selloff approached 10 per cent.

Yields on Turkish bonds rose to record highs and people on the street worried about their savings being wiped out by Erdogan's decision to fire the man credited with righting the economy in his four months on the job.

"Supporting the government doesn't mean turning a blind eye



A man stands in front of a display of the new Turkish banknotes in the Central Bank's Banknote Printing House in Ankara, in this file photo. — **AFP**

to its mistakes," Sukru Kocak, 36, said on his way to work in downtown Istanbul.

The strong market reaction underscored the trust Agbal had won from investors after years of

what many Western analysts view as mismanagement by Erdogan's economic teams.

Erdogan is known for his unconventional belief that high interest rates cause inflation — instead of tamping it down — and has placed a heavy emphasis on keeping them low to support growth.

The result saw the Turkish economy expand by 1.8 per cent last year despite the pain of the coronavirus pandemic.

But the annual inflation rate also shot up to 15.6 per cent by February and the Turkish lira lost nearly a third of its value against the dollar from the start of 2020 to the day of Agbal's appointment in November. — **AFP**



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features



Traditional hand-made fishing nets under threat

As the world evolves, the handcrafted fishing nets that have been an industry in itself for generations in Dhofar can disappear. To avoid it from happening, residents like Yousef al Barakah are passing on the knowledge in the hope of saving some of its ancient techniques... **P18**

INSIDE STORIES

HUMAN INTEREST



ANTIQUITY AND HOSPITALITY IN MISFAT AL ABRIYEEN

The village of Misfat Al Abriyeen in the Wilayat of Al Hamra, Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah receives thousands of tourists every year. Nature lovers, people interested in heritage and cross-country adventure flock to Misfat from within the Sultanate and abroad... **Story on P20**

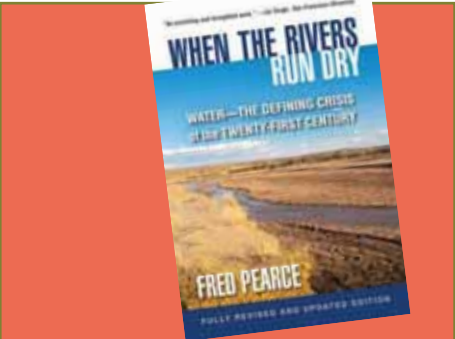
FASHION



WITH TRADITIONAL FABRICS, NIGERIAN DESIGNERS FASHION A NEW AESTHETIC

Weaving contemporary designs into a traditional West African fabric, Nigerian Tsemaye Binitie is creating fashion he hopes can also bridge the gap between luxury and the everyday... **Story on P19**

READ



WHEN THE RIVERS RUN DRY

BY FRED PEARCE

Pearce takes his readers on a global journey, explaining the impact of increasing water scarcity. He explores how this dire problem came about, and gives some possible solutions.

CHANGING WORLD



HOW FINLAND EMBRACED BEING 'WORLD'S HAPPIEST NATION'

Once notorious for its bland food and long, harsh winters, Finland's repeated success in the annual happiness rankings has helped transform the country's global reputation, boosting tourism and business... **Story on P19**

TRAVEL TALES



AT ONE WITH THE WAVES: BODYSURFING IN CAPE TOWN

At just after 6 am the light over the South African seaside town of Noordhoek near Cape Town has a pink hue as dawn emerges over the mountains and beach... **Story on P18**



Traditional hand-made fishing nets under threat

By Staff Reporter

The fishing nets industry is a traditional marine craft inherited from ancestors that is still practised by the elderly and a few young people in the coastal areas of the Wilayat of Salalah.

Yousef al Barakah, one of the residents of the al Haffa region in Salalah, who has been skilled in this craft since childhood, said that the manual manufacture of fishing nets goes through several stages that start with curling yarn. This stage is often done by women as well as men through the spinning machine, which is called a "dileep".

Al Barakah shared that after preparing the yarns, the role of the net maker comes. The stage of putting the net together is called "Washa" where a net maker goes through the different size and type as requested by his customers. For example, Al-Jarif nets are woven by approximately nine (9) individuals or more, and the process of his manufacture is called "Lakada".

Al Barakah said that there are many types of hand-made fishing nets in Salalah, and their price varies according to their use, the type of fish to be caught, and the amount of lead metal used in the nets.

He added that one of the main differences between fishing nets is the quality of the threads used in knitting in terms of strength and durability, as well as the size and length of the nets.

He indicated that the names of fishing nets may differ from one governorate to another, indicating that the most important types of nets are al Maghdafa, al Mughawir and al Jarif, as each type of these nets has specific uses and different sizes.

He explained that al Maghdafa net is small and round in size and is used to catch small quantities of small fish from the shore or on the fishing boat, where the fisherman wraps the net around his arm and then releases it into the air to fall into the water and traps the fish in a way that requires skill and experience so that the strings don't intertwine with each other.

While al Jarif nets are the largest ever, and their length ranges from 35 to 40 meters, with a width ranging from 10 to 15 meters, and is used to catch large quantities of sardines with the participation of a large number of fishermen Which is locally called "al Eid or al omah".

Saeed Al Shujibi, one of the youths who have experience in the craft of fishing nets, said that Al Mughawir nets are intended for medium fishing, and this is due to the strength and durability of their threads.

As the world is evolving, this craft is threatened and might disappear due to the frequent use of modern fishing nets made of nylon strings imported from abroad, which affected the demand for the purchase of traditional fishing nets.



TRAVEL TALES

At one with the waves: Bodysurfing in Cape Town



AT JUST AFTER 6 am the light over the South African seaside town of Noordhoek near Cape Town has a pink hue as dawn emerges over the mountains and beach.

In a car park, half-donned wetsuits dangle from the hips of sun-tanned, long-haired men.

Before heading to the sea, some grab boards — the ones who don't are bodysurfers.

"Howzit, bru?" shouts Anthony Pearse, greeting fellow surfers in local slang as he hurries to the water, keen to fit in a few waves before work.

Neels Havenga, whose day job is as a diver on offshore platforms, scans the foam for an area with ideal conditions to hit the waters — far from the crowds of surfers.

The lean 45-year-old feels he has passed the age to fight for the best spot.

"Sometimes I head for less good waves, as long as I don't end up in a heap," he says, "Maybe I am becoming old and cranky, but I definitely avoid the crowds."

Bodies as boards

Groupies watch from the rocks as board surfers pull themselves to standing, sometimes riding elegantly, sometimes falling after clumsy stunts.

A short distance away the "boardless" crowd is harder to see as they ride deep within the waves.

For these surfers the body is the board as they swim and stiffen, turning into a vessel to be carried towards the shore.

"Your ribcage becomes the bow of the boat," explains Cobus Joubert, a youthful 50-year-old former wine seller.

Some of the bodysurfers use paddles attached to their hands to improve glide and stability. Others stick to outstretched arms and fingers.

They seem to fall diagonally into the barrels of the surf, their frames arched to limit contact with the breaking water.



"It's called a curl," says Havenga.

FLYING THROUGH THE WATER

Joubert says there is something organic about bodysurfing. "You do it as a kid, intuitively, before you even know it has a name," he says.

"We've all done it. It's fun and you can't really hurt yourself," agrees Liam Kilbride, 19, who grew up just 20 minutes from the beach.

Joubert, who owns a surf shop close by, concedes he is "more relaxed" without a board that clings to the water's surface and is leashed to the ankle.

But, he notes, you have to be a good swimmer ready to kick energetically "like in your mother's womb".

"It takes you back to childhood, there's nothing serious about bodysurfing, it's just fun," he adds. "You're either thinking good thoughts or your head is empty."

Havenga says the feeling of "flying through the water" makes him joyful, even if he shyly notes that women seem to be more interested in surfers with boards. Finished with his before-work dip, Pearse dries himself vigorously on the beach. "Absolute freedom!" he beams, "Catch the waves, embrace the movement... you just position yourself and enjoy it."—AFP



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CHANGING WORLD

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How Finland embraced being 'world's happiest nation'

Once notorious for its bland food and long, harsh winters, Finland's repeated success in the annual happiness rankings has helped transform the country's global reputation, boosting tourism and business.

The UN-sponsored World Happiness Report elicited some raised eyebrows when it first placed Finland at the top of its listings in 2018: many of the Nordic country's 5.5 million people freely describe themselves as taciturn and prone to melancholy, and admit to eyeing public displays of joyfulness with suspicion.

"When I first heard — and I'm

not alone, I would say — I had a big laugh," television producer Tony Ilmoni said on the still-snowy streets of the capital Helsinki on Friday, when Finland was crowned the happiest nation on earth for the fourth year running.

But the worldwide survey in fact seeks to quantify individuals' personal freedom and satisfaction with their lives, using survey data from 149 countries alongside measures such as GDP, social support and perceptions of corruption.

Finland excels with its quietly world-class public services, low levels of crime and inequality, and high levels of trust in authority.

"The basics are really good here: we don't have anyone living

in the streets, we do have unemployment but the health service works, the big things like that," flower seller Riitta Matilainen said.

"But we could be a bit more outgoing and joyful!"

The northern country's long dark winters were once reputed to be behind high levels of alcoholism and suicide, but a decade-long public health drive has helped cut rates by more than half.

WHO WOULDN'T WANT TO LIVE HERE?

For tourism and country-branding chiefs, the "world's happiest" title has been a blessing they were quick to capitalise on.

"It's a really powerful, emotional, evocative thing to say you're the happiest country in the world. Why would anyone not want to live in the happiest country in the world?" said Joel Willans, a British digital marketer and creator of the "Very Finnish Problems" social media page, who has lived in Finland since the early 2000s.

"Awareness of Finland has grown during the past few years," Paavo Virkkunen, head of Finland Promotion Services at Business Finland, said.

After four years, the happiness trope has been used by countless Finnish businesses to market lifestyle products and to try to attract workers to relocate and join the country's tech sector.

Finland's unflashy cuisine was once derided as something to "endure" by Italian then-president Silvio Berlusconi, and slammed by his French counterpart Jacques Chirac.

But restaurateurs and product manufacturers now tout the simplicity and natural ingredients of Finnish cooking, claiming it as key to the country's no-nonsense approach to well-being.

The happiness marketing drive has been led, however, by the travel industry, with Finland's tourist office appointing Finnish

'happiness ambassadors' tasked with introducing visitors to the secrets of Finnish well-being.

"People are curious about (our happiness) and they want to learn about it," Virkkunen said.

Key to the Finnish brand of happiness is going outdoors to enjoy the country's vast forests and thousands of lakes, as well as the traditional Finnish steam bath, the sauna.

By the start of 2020, tourism to Lapland in northern Finland had reached record levels and the country was attracting more foreign direct investment projects than anywhere else in the Nordics.

While pausing international visitors, the pandemic has, if anything, increased overseas interest in Finland's clean, sparsely populated nature, leading tourist providers to offer virtual tours.

"Even though people are not able to travel now, you are able to dream about Finland and the happiness of a true connection with nature, where you can really unwind," said Virkkunen.

BUBBLE EASILY BURST

Finland's four-year dominance in the happiness stakes leaves one problem, however — where to go from here?

When this year's results were announced, "it would've been more news if Finland had been knocked off the top spot," Joel Willans joked.

The long-time Finnish resident believes that the country's well-functioning, low-stress society has in fact lowered Finns' tolerance for when things do go wrong.

"They get really aggrieved," he said. "Their happiness bubble is easily pricked when things don't go perfectly."

But the benefits of the world happiness title will be long-lasting, Virkkunen believes.

"I think we have grown as a nation, understanding the basics of happiness a bit better than we understood before," he said. — **AFP**

FASHION

With traditional fabrics, Nigerian designers fashion a new aesthetic



WEAVING CONTEMPORARY designs into a traditional West African fabric, Nigerian Tsemaye Binitie is creating fashion he hopes can also bridge the gap between luxury and the everyday.

His material of choice is Aso-oke, a hand-woven cloth indigenous to the Yoruba people and historically used on special occasions.

Binitie, who cut his teeth as a design assistant with Stella McCartney in 2005,

seven different shades.

"We are sort of preserving the culture, you know, that we've watched all our lives in front of us... and teaching the younger generation that it is something to be proud of, something to want to wear," he said.

Fellow Lagos designer Lisa Folawiyo specialises in a different traditional cloth, the West African wax prints known as Ankara, and her hybrid collection, called



began using the fabric in 2017, and he infuses the yellow dresses that are his signature creations with cottons and silks to give them a post-modern feel.

"We started to use contemporary African art and culture within the threads of the collection so you see hints of it or very... obvious (signs)," said Binitie, who divides his time between Lagos and London.

"It's sort of informed fabric, informed colour, informed styling."

Priced at between \$300 and \$4,000, his TB12 custom collection features Aso-oke — which means "top cloth" in Yoruba — in

Batkara, incorporates Batik designs embellished with needle-work beadings and sequin trimmings.

"We have merged what is indigenous to us with what is familiar in the West and we've made it ours," she said.

That same synthesis informs the aesthetic of Alara, a Lagos store dedicated to showcasing contemporary African fashion for the Nigerian and the diaspora markets.

Its Head of Partnerships, Arinola Fagbemi, says more and more people are thinking about African luxury "in terms of how we live on a day-to-day basis... not just for celebratory moments." — **Reuters**



Antiquity and hospitality in Misfat Al Abriyeen

By Staff Reporter

The village of Misfat Al Abriyeen in the Wilayat of Al Hamra, Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah receives thousands of tourists every year. Nature lovers, people interested in heritage and cross-country adventure flock to Misfat from within the Sultanate and abroad.

Over the past few years, inhabitants of Misfat Al Abriyeen engaged in restoration and maintenance of houses of the old town to serve as tourist destinations, which now stand at 6 hotels and heritage houses offering more than 70 rooms.

The abodes enshrine all that relates to the typical modes of life in Omani villages of yesteryears, as well as the habits, tradi-

tions and relics.

The number of heritage rooms is expected to reach 100 by the end of 2021.

The hotels will have modern cafeterias, a shopping outlet whose exhibits include handicrafts and products of weaving, natural oils, pottery, straw items and honey products roadshow.

Misfat Al Abriyeen village attracted many local and international media agencies that produced footings serving the tourism sector, including Discovery channel of Britain.

The Wilayat of Al Hamra is expected to see rapid growth towards the end of 2021 upon the launch of the zipline project at Misfat Al Abriyeen.

