

SAF showcases late HM's belongings

The Sultan's Armed Forces Museum on Monday launched the exhibition 'A story of a leader, a glorious era', which tells the great history and march of late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, may Allah the Almighty rest his soul in peace, coinciding with the museum's celebrations of the Armed Forces Day which falls on December 11 each year. The exhibition 'A story of a leader, a glorious era' showcases a set of gifts granted to the late Sultan from leaders of sisterly and friendly countries in addition to some personal belongings. SEE P2

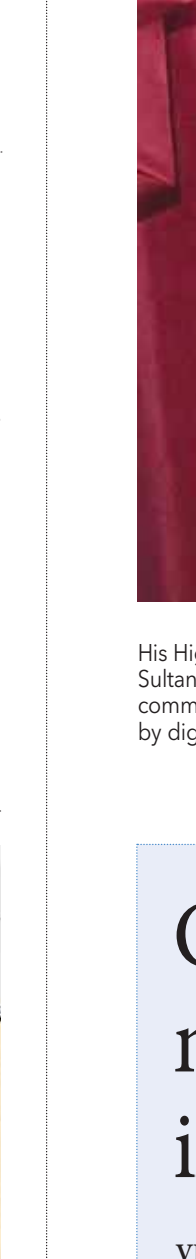
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NADAL TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID IN LATEST BLOW FOR LEGEND



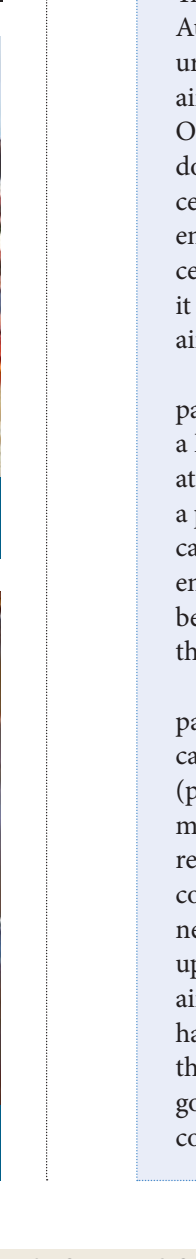
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SULTANATE OF OMAN'S TRANSITION TO GREEN FUELS



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COLLECTING ANTIQUES TO RELIVE THE BEAUTY OF THE PAST



MUSCAT

HM CONDOLENCES TO PHILIPPINES

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Rodrigo Duterte of the Republic of the Philippines, on the victims of Typhoon Rai that hit several cities in central and southern Philippines leaving several dead.

His Majesty expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy to the president, the families of the victims and the friendly people of the Philippines wishing the injured speedy recovery. — ONA

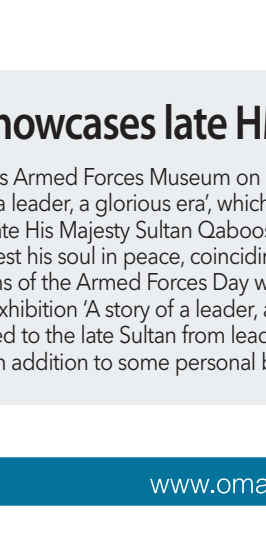
HM RECEIVES THANKS FROM KUWAITI EMIR

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received two cables of thanks from Shaikh Nawaf al Ahmed al Jabir al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, in reply to His Majesty's condolences cables to him on the death of Shaikh Duaij al Khalifa al Sabah and Shaikha Wafiq Mubarak al Hamad al Mubarak al Sabah. In the cables, Shaikh Nawaf expressed his sincere appreciation for His Majesty's heartfelt sympathies. He prayed to the Almighty Allah to rest the deceased's souls in peace in paradise and protect His Majesty against all harm.

Now get news on the go

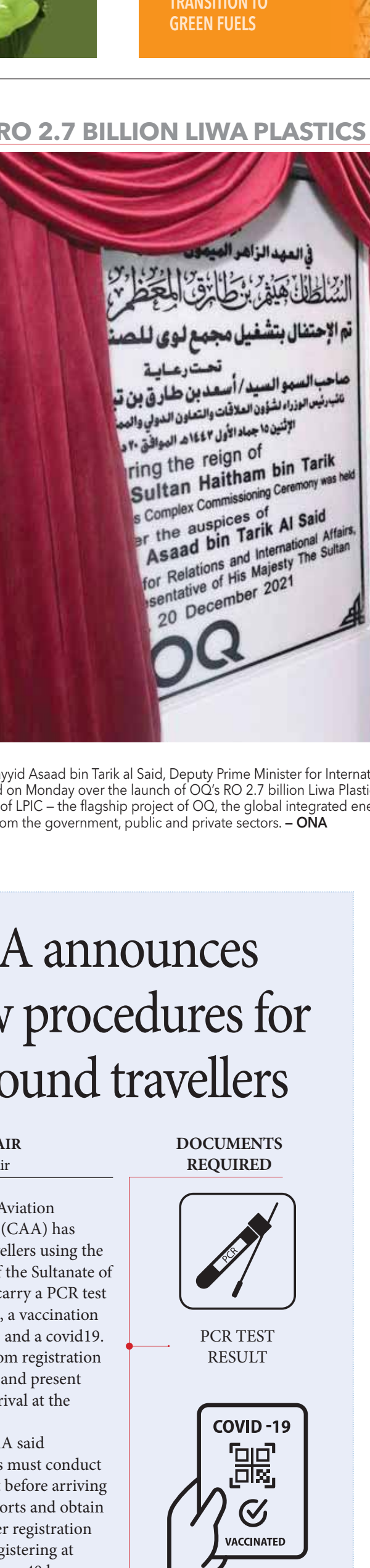

To receive news updates from Oman Observer, WhatsApp <your name> to 96473232

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JAPANESE SPACE TOURISTS RETURN TO EARTH | P8

RO 2.7 BILLION LIWA PLASTICS MEGA PROJECT BEGINS OPERATIONS



His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, presided on Monday over the launch of OQ's RO 2.7 billion Liwa Plastics Industries Complex (LPIC) located at Sohar Industrial Port. The official commissioning of LPIC – the flagship project of OQ, the global integrated energy group of the Sultanate of Oman, was celebrated with a grand ceremony attended by dignitaries from the government, public and private sectors. — ONA

Fitch revises Sultanate of Oman's outlook to stable

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, Dec 20

International ratings agency Fitch has revised the Sultanate of Oman's outlook to stable from negative while affirming the sovereign's Long-Term Foreign- and Local- Currency Issuer Default Ratings (IDR) at 'BB-'. The revision of the outlook reflects actual improvements in, and the expected evolution of, key fiscal metrics including government debt/GDP and the budget deficit, driven by higher oil prices and fiscal reforms, and a lessening of external financing pressures relative to recent years even as external funding needs remain high, the New York based credit ratings agency said on Monday. DETAILS ON P5

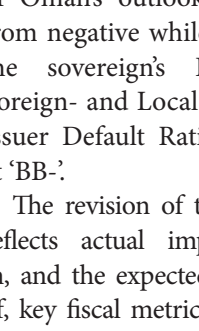
CAA announces new procedures for inbound travellers

VINOD NAIR
@vinotnair

DOCUMENTS REQUIRED


PCR TEST RESULT


VACCINATION CERTIFICATE


REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has urged travellers using the airports of the Sultanate of Oman to carry a PCR test document, a vaccination certificate, and a covid19. emushrif.om registration certificate and present it upon arrival at the airports.

The CAA said passengers must conduct a PCR test before arriving at the airports and obtain a passenger registration card by registering at emushrif.om, 48 hours before the take-off time of the flight.

Travellers holding a passenger registration card with a black stripe (procedures incompleted) must go to the passenger registration service counters to complete the necessary procedures upon arrival at the airports. Passengers who have already completed their procedures should go directly to the passport counter.

Booster shot wait time shortened to 3 months

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has reduced the time period for the booster dose vaccines from six months to three from the date of receiving the second dose, starting Tuesday December 21.

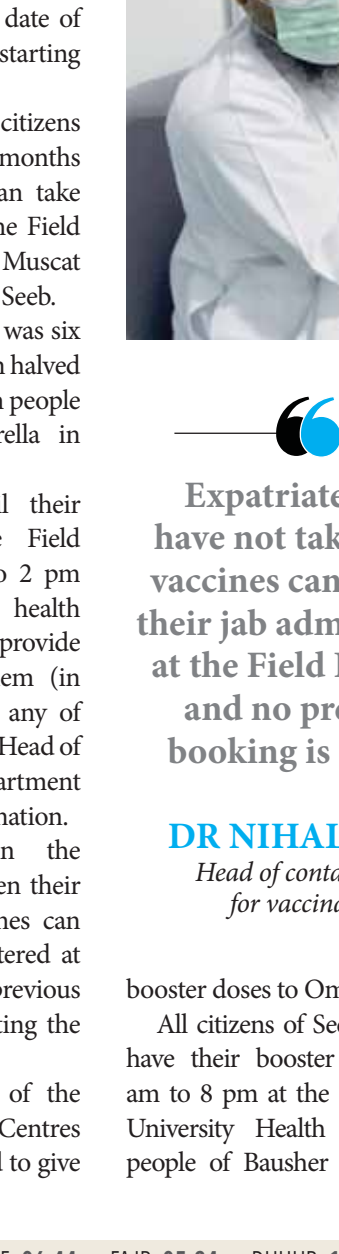
Accordingly, all Omani citizens who have completed three months after their second dose can take their booster dose from the Field Hospital, the erstwhile Muscat International Airport in Al Seeb.

This time period earlier was six months and now it has been halved in order to cover maximum people under the booster umbrella in short span of time.

"All citizens can avail their booster dose from the Field Hospital between 8 am to 2 pm from Tuesday while all health centres would continue to provide Covid-19 vaccines for them (in case they have not taken any of them)," said Dr Nihal Afifi, Head of MoH Primary Health Department and contact point for vaccination.

"Expatriates living in the country who have not taken their 1st or second dose vaccines can also get their jab administered at the Field Hospital and no previous booking is needed for getting the same," she added.

She added that some of the Primary Healthcare Centres (PHC's) are also authorised to give



Expatriates who have not taken their vaccines can also get their jab administered at the Field Hospital and no previous booking is needed

DR NIHAL AFIFI
Head of contact point for vaccination

from Al Khuwair North Health Center between 8 am to 8 pm. The citizens of Muttrah Wilayat will receive vaccination from Ruwi Health Center from 8 am to 2 pm while people of Muscat Wilayat can get their doses from Muscat Health Center between 8 am and 2 pm.

The Amerat Health Center is all set to provide vaccines for people from Wilayat of Al Amerat (8 am to 2 pm) and the Sahil Health Center will provide vaccination to Omani citizens of Wilayat of Qurayat from 8 am to 2 pm.

In a report released last week, the MoH said over 600,000 doses of Covid-19 vaccines have been administered for various target groups in the country which shows that 59.6 per cent of the country's population has received both doses of the vaccine.

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 26°C Min 19°C SALALAH: Max 28°C Min 21°C NIZWA: Max 28°C Min 13°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 06:44 FAJR: 05:24 DHUHR: 12:10 ASR: 15:10 MAGHRIB: 17:30 ISHA: 18:46



SAF museum launches late HM exhibition



MUSCAT: The Sultan's Armed Forces Museum on Monday launched the exhibition 'A story of a leader, a glorious era', which tells the great history and march of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, may Allah the Almighty rest his soul in peace, coinciding with the museum's celebrations of the Armed Forces Day which falls on December 11 each year.

The Sultan's Armed Forces Museum also opened a section dedicated to the Ministry of Defence Engineering Services under the auspices of Jamal bin Hassan al Moosawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum.

The exhibition 'A story of a leader, a glorious era' showcases a set of gifts granted to the late Sultan from leaders of sisterly and friendly countries in addition to some personal belongings.

The Ministry of Defence Engineering Services section displays samples of military equipment that were used in the support and assistance operations carried out by the engineering services throughout the Renaissance period.

THE EXHIBITION 'A STORY OF A LEADER, A GLORIOUS ERA' COINCIDES WITH THE MUSEUM'S CELEBRATIONS OF THE ARMED FORCES DAY WHICH FALLS ON DECEMBER 11 EACH YEAR

Forces Museum at Bait Al Falaj. The exhibition will be open to the public during December 20 to 23 from 8 am to 8 pm and during December 26-March 20 from 8am to 1pm. The museum will be closed on Fridays and opens on two sessions from 9 am to 1 pm and from 3 pm to 6 pm on Saturdays.

Maritime security system activated in N Batinah



A maritime security system was activated at the Command and Control Centre in North Al Batinah Governorate on Monday.

A celebration was held at Suhar Port under the auspices of Commodore Tarik bin Issa al Raisi, Acting Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO).

The launch of the maritime security system comes within the context of building an integrated radar system for detecting and tracking various maritime activities linked to the command and control centres at the Maritime Security Centres and the ports of the Sultanate of Oman. The aim is to cover the coasts of the Sultanate of Oman, boost security of international navigation lines and leverage the security level of the Sultanate of Oman's ports in global trade.

The Command and Control Centre in North Al Batinah Governorate contributes along with the other maritime centres, which will be activated sequentially, in supporting the national maritime security system of the Sultanate of Oman.

This strategic project also provides various technical requirements that enable the Maritime Security Centre to perform its national tasks and duties effectively in cooperation and coordination with the military, security and civil authorities related to the maritime security sector.

Besides, the project has a prominent role in addressing non-military risks and different maritime threats such as piracy, illegal fishing, drug trafficking to preserve security and stability in the region.

Information Ministry conducts training in news editing



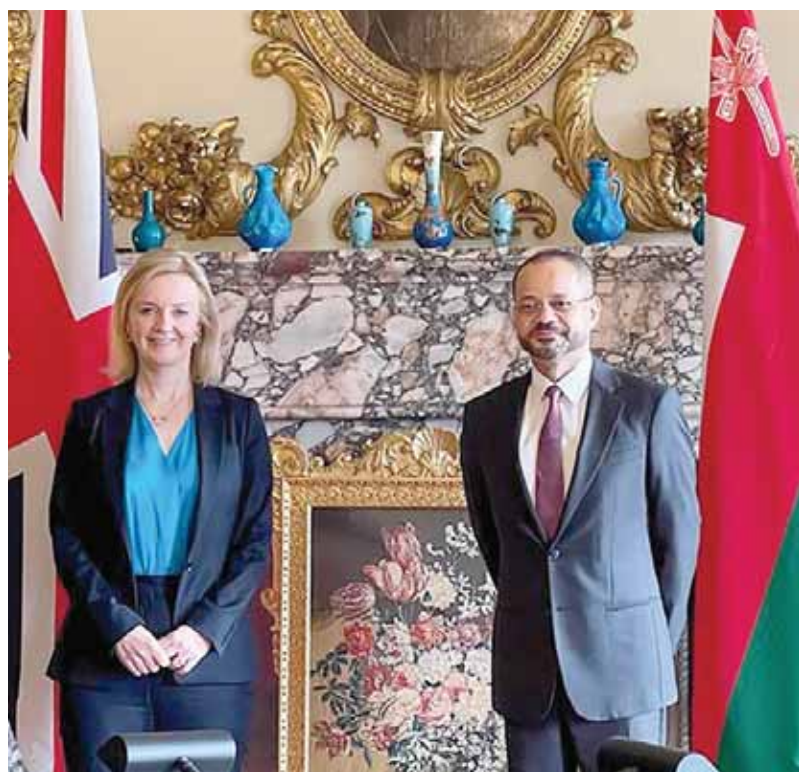
MUSCAT: The Media Training Centre at the Ministry of Information, in cooperation with Al Jazeera Media Institute, began on Monday a training programme themed 'News Editing: Techniques and Practices'.

The three-day programme seeks to sharpen the skills of the participants in writing and editing news stories.

It is worth noting that the Media Training Centre conducts several training programmes aimed at polishing the skills of employees in the communication and media sector.



■ SAYYID BADR MEETS UK MINISTER



LONDON: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, met here on Monday Liz Truss, UK Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs. The meeting touched on the historical ties binding the two countries. The two sides stressed their keenness to continue promoting the bilateral relations in various fields. They also underlined their interest to promote the joint cooperation, particularly in the economic and investment areas. The two ministers exchanged views on some regional and international issues of common concern as they stressed the importance of maintaining pillars of security and stability in all parts of the world. – **ONA**

GCC and UK discuss free trade agreement



The Sultanate of Oman, represented by Sayyid Badr, participated in the meeting of foreign ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the United Kingdom, which was held in Chevening, United Kingdom, during which several topics were discussed, including a free trade agreement between the two sides.

A big line-up of cruise ships to visit nation

Muscat will be the biggest recipient of the cruise ships, followed by Khasab in the north and Salalah in the down south

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

After a lull of nearly 20 months, the cruise industry is hoping for a quick recovery with several big ships lined up to dock at the Port Sultan Qaboos (PSQ) in Muscat.

Despite the surge in Covid-19 cases due to the Omicron variant, the travel industry feels that things won't get bad like the last time, which led to a total shutdown of the cruise operations.

In the Sultanate of Oman, Muscat will be the biggest recipient of the cruise ships, followed by Khasab in the

north and Salalah in the down south.

According to the website crew-center.com, the PSQ will receive ships such as *Queen Marry 2*, *Mein Schiff 6*, *Costa Firenze*, and *Aida Abella* among others.

In addition to some of the above-mentioned names, the Khasab Port will receive *Oceania Nautica*, *Silver Spirt* and *Seven Seas Navigator*.

Salalah Port is expected to receive ships such as *Crystal Symphony* and *Queen Victoria* apart from some of the ships listed above.

It may be noted that the Ministry of Heritage and



Tourism (MoHT) has been making efforts to revive the cruise sector in the post-Covid scenario. In the 2018/2019

season, the Sultanate of Oman saw an increase in the number of cruise visitors by more than 45 per cent, compared to the

previous season.

In Mid-November, Khasab Port received the cruise ship *Mein Schiff Six* of the TUI

Cruises with more than 2,100 tourists from different countries. It was the first ship to reach the ports of the Sultanate of Oman with the start of the cruise season.

Costa Firenze, operated by Costa Cruises, commenced Gulf operations on December 17 from Dubai and will sail to ports in the region, including the Sultanate of Oman.

The return of cruise visitors has been welcomed by the businesses on the Muttrah Waterfront that were affected by the shutdown of international borders, especially those selling antiques and restaurants.

Country's iconic aquarium bags regional award

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, DEC 20

Marking a milestone in excellence in tourism promotion, the Sultanate of Oman's largest and the only public aquarium has bagged the Silver Award in Retail Excellence at the prestigious Retail Congress MENA. The award was presented to Oman Aquarium for outstanding performance, innovation, and commercial success at a glittering ceremony held in Dubai.

Located at the sprawling Mall of Muscat over 8,000 square metres of space, Oman Aquarium and is home to a variety of marine animals. The aquarium was in the news recently for welcoming the first African baby penguin to be born in the Sultanate of Oman.

Mall of Muscat, where Oman Aquarium is located, was a close contender in the NOI Enhancement Category at the Retail Congress MENA awards. The mall was a finalist in the category that recognises unique examples of operational efficiencies or other cost-saving measures that resulted in expense reduction and/or increased



revenue for the shopping centre owner.

The Retail Congress MENA is organised by The Middle East Council of Shopping Centres and Retailers (MECS+R) in partnership with the Dubai Association Centre (DAC) and the Dubai Chamber of Commerce, bringing together retail professionals globally for a conference, exhibition, dealmaking, networking and awards celebration.

"We are proud to bring in such a recognition for tourism promotion to the Sultanate of Oman at the Retail Congress MENA Awards

which distinguishes the best in the industry," said Mahmood bin Mohammed bin Ali al Jarwani, Chairman of Tamani Trading and Entertainment LLC, the Operator of Oman Aquarium.

"It is an honour to be recognised and awarded by esteemed panelists of The Middle East Council of Shopping Centres and Retailers. We are proud of the country's first and largest public aquarium, which has gained popularity across the region," Al Jarwani added.

Oman Aquarium is the country's first indoor aquarium located on the ground and first

floor of Mall of Muscat in Al Maabala. Spanning along a whopping 8,000 square metres space, Oman Aquarium has been designed to lend a feeling of being under the ocean when passing through the underwater tunnel. The aquarium is based on the adventures of the famous 15th Century Arab explorer, Ahmed bin Majid and features aquatic creatures he encountered during his travels. Displaying over 200 species and 30,000 colourful marine animals, the collection includes popular attractions such as turtles, penguins, rays and three species of sharks.



Park Inn Hotel Duqm boosts capacity

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, DEC 20

In response to the rapid growth and development witnessed in the Wilayat of Al Duqm, Park Inn Duqm by Radisson has added 23 new rooms, bringing the total number of rooms in its property to 96 rooms.

The property, set in the Special Economic Zone in Duqm, now consists of one bedroom, chalets, and hotel rooms. In expanding the capacity of its property, the Group continues to keep pace with demand growth by offering rooms specially designed to provide a modern

and distinctive experience for the new generation of travellers.

The hotel also includes a leisure centre with a swimming pool, as well as a fitness centre. In addition, it features the RPG and Ocean restaurants that have been meticulously designed to keep pace with the new generation to give guests an unparalleled experience.

This strategically located hotel is for guests who prefer short stays or to attend meetings or events. It is also for long stay guests, making it their second home. Besides, it is for thrill seekers who come to enjoy surfing and other activities.

The future plans of the Sultanate of Oman include the development of systems for sustainable waste management and the efficient and effective use of natural resources, affordable availability and community involvement in the application of waste minimisation

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samuelkuttyvp

EVEN AS OMAN 2040

Vision attaches great importance to ensuring sustainable production and consumption patterns, waste management is a major challenge because of its negative impact on the environment and public health. The government has put in place sustainable waste management practices at par with international standards by establishing the required infrastructure, restructuring the municipal waste collection services, and improving public awareness of waste management.

The future plans of the Sultanate of Oman include the development of systems for sustainable waste management and the efficient and effective use of natural resources, affordable availability and community involvement in the application of waste minimisation.

It also includes recycling practices, and the revival of economy through improved resource productivity and damage reduction, in addition to protecting the environment for present and future generations.

By the end of 2020, there were 10 new engineered landfills in operation at key locations around the country.

An 11th engineered landfill was also reported to be under construction. Complementing this network have been 15 waste transfer stations, which are already operational, with a further five under construction. The First Voluntary National Review of the Sultanate of Oman of the Sustainable Development Goals reveals that the country aims through the National Tertiary-treated Wastewater Reuse Strategy 2040 to expand the development of wastewater treatment plants and extend sewage network lines at a cost of up to \$7 billion, averaging \$381 million per year.

Modern sewerage collection and disposal infrastructure covers more than 98 per cent of the urban population, and roughly 97% of rural communities as of 2018, the report points out.

Till 2018, there were 68 wastewater treatment plants which produce 94 million cubic metres a year of treated

wastewater. About 61 per cent of this is used in agriculture, afforestation, refrigeration, and injection of coastal aquifers.

“It is hoped that the utilisation of total treated water in 2030 raises to around 244 million cubic metres and 338 million cubic metres in 2040”, says the report.

RENEWABLE RESOURCE

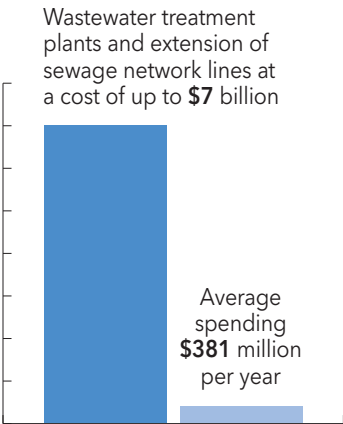
The National Strategy for the Utilisation of Wastewater also includes the mechanisms and programmes related to the utilisation of this renewable resource in the recharge of underground reservoirs and industrial and agricultural uses in order to raise the efficiency of water use in the country.

Solid waste management is among the top priorities of the government which has chalked out a robust strategy to resolve waste management problems in the country. The government is striving to establish engineered landfills, waste transfer stations, recycling and waste-to-energy projects in different parts of the country. Modern solid waste management facilities are under planning in several wilayats, especially Muscat and Salalah. The new landfills will eventually pave the way for closure of authorised and unauthorised garbage dumps around the country.

According to the state-owned Oman Environment Services Holding Company, Be’ah, the government is also ramping up on investments in waste management and reuse capacity. It manages three waste types — municipal, healthcare and hazardous.

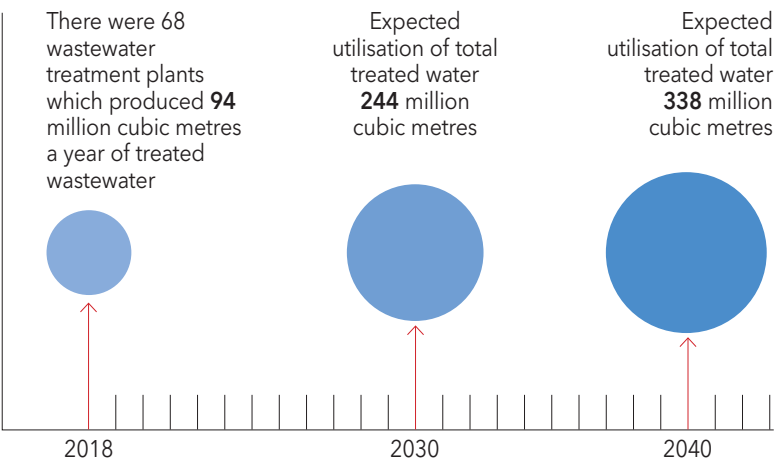
A total of six waste management firms have been licensed by be’ah to provide services. The services range from bin and fleet supply, waste collection, transfer and final disposal, to allocation, maintenance and regular sterilisation of bins.

Wastewater Reuse Strategy 2040



TACKLING THE TRASH

Modern sewerage collection and disposal infrastructure





Fitch revises nation's outlook to stable, affirms rating at 'BB-'

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, DEC 20

International ratings agency Fitch has revised the Sultanate of Oman's outlook to stable from negative while affirming the sovereign's Long-Term Foreign- and Local- Currency Issuer Default Ratings (IDR) at 'BB-'. The revision of the outlook reflects actual improvements in, and the expected evolution of, key fiscal metrics including government debt/GDP and the budget deficit, driven by higher oil prices and fiscal reforms, and a lessening of external financing pressures relative to recent years even as external funding needs remain high, the New York based credit ratings agency said on Monday.

Fitch noted that the country's budget deficit narrowed to 3.4 per cent of GDP in 2021, from 16.1 per cent of GDP in 2020. Hydrocarbon revenue grew by a third, driven largely by a 28 per cent rise in the Sultanate of Oman's average fiscal oil price



and likely accounted for more than half of the narrowing in the budget deficit, it stated.

Real GDP growth is forecast to accelerate to 3.1 per cent in 2022 and steady to 2.3 per cent in 2023, driven by stronger hydrocarbon growth next year, while non-oil growth will be moderate at just over 2 per cent on average, said Fitch. Non-oil growth will be supported by further recovery from the pandemic and the completion of large projects, but constrained by the impact of fiscal consolidation.

The report also applauded the Omani government on

the progress it had made with implementation of its medium-term fiscal plan (MTFP), which aims to balance the budget and lower government debt/GDP to 61 per cent by 2025.

"In January-October non-oil revenue grew 40 per cent y-o-y, helped by the introduction of a 5 per cent VAT in April, dividends to the budget from the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and gradual economic normalisation, as Covid-19 related-restrictions were lifted and the Sultanate of Oman's vaccination drive accelerated.

As of late November, 84 per cent of the targeted population had had two vaccination doses and a booster programme had begun," Fitch commented.

Total spending declined 6 per cent y-o-y, according to preliminary figures, helped by the 4th quarter 2021 shift of the majority of hydrocarbon spending off budget to Energy Development Oman (EDO), the state-owned enterprise (SOE) to which the government transferred its stake in Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the main oil company in the country, it added.



Social Development Minister at Riyadh meet

RIYADH: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Social Development, will take part in the 41st meeting of the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs, scheduled to be held during December 22-23 in Riyadh.

The ministry will also represent the Sultanate of Oman in the Conference on the Management of Social Transformation Programme for Social Affairs' Arab Ministers (MOST). The conference is held on the sidelines of the 41st meeting of the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs under the title "Asymmetric impact of Covid-19".

The Sultanate of Oman's delegation is headed by HE Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development.

MOST conference will discuss the containment of Covid-19 and its social repercussions. The conference will also witness the presentation of the award of HRH Sabeeka bint Ibrahim al Khalifa to Encourage

Productive Families for the Year 2022.

HE Dr Laila al Najar met with Majid al Ghanimi, Saudi Deputy Minister of Human Resources for Social Development.

The two sides discussed aspects of cooperation in various fields between the two ministries.

During the meeting, a detailed presentation was delivered on the ministries' services in the fields of family empowerment, child protection, combating beggary, welfare and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities and social protection.

Dr Laila al Najar was also briefed on the Saudi experience pertaining to aspects of family affairs. She was also briefed on role of the Family Affairs Council and the experience of the Comprehensive Rehabilitation Centre for Women on persons with disabilities and their protection.

— ONA

6th batch of 'Spring-Forward' programme passes out



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour, in cooperation with the Omani-Qatari Telecommunications Company SAOG 'Ooredoo' on Monday organised a ceremony to celebrate the passing-out of 23 employees in the 'Spring-Forward'

programme.

The programme is aimed at enhancing the trainees' professional and administrative levels.

The ceremony was held under the patronage of Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy, Human

Resources Development Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Labour.

Al Busaidy said that the programme is an example of partnership between the public and private sectors, which is a step forward in the field of grooming

leaders.

He added that the programme is based on practical projects which increase competition and teamwork, resulting in improved work performance and higher quality services.

— ONA



Theatre workshop

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Children from different parts of the Sultanate of Oman would be receiving a rare opportunity to delve into the nuances of theatre as a well-known theatrist is to conduct a two-day workshop in Muscat. Organised by Talent Space International, the sessions on December 22 and 23 will include various parts and stages of theatre art including introduction, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution. There will also be a broad session in terms of classical drama, identifying the characters and their relationship to each other, and play's conflict.

Suveeran, ace drama and film personality who has bagged several international as well as national accolades for his excellence in theatrics, will be conducting the 2-day sessions. The sessions will also make an attempt to train the children on plot, character, thought, diction, spectacle, and song.

"A mention on various roles, characters and relationships, situation, voice, movement, space and time, language and texts, symbol and metaphor, mood and atmosphere, audience and dramatic tension will also be made," according to Jayan and Bindu Parayil, the organisers of the event.

The sessions that begin at 10 am and end at 1 pm will also give the children insights on the intricacies of stage and film-making besides helping children make their own movies.

ANNOUNCEMENT

SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF INTERIOR

RE-TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender Committee at the Ministry of Interior re-tenders the following tender:

No.	Tender No.	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Documents	Last Date for Bid Submission	Document Fees OMR
1	D.Kh.M/8/2021	Cleaning works for Wall's and their Deputies' Headquarters and the Headquarters of Reconciliation Committees in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate for the year 2022	28/12/2021	30/12/2021	RO 25

Companies or establishments specialized in these works and registered with the Board of Tender may subscribe to the tender hereto and collect documents of technical requirements and specifications at the Directorate of Services and Procurement (Services Department) at the premise of Diwan General of the Ministry in Al Khuwair during official working hours against the fees mentioned above as of Tuesday 21/12/2021.

The tenderers shall enclose with their bids a temporary bond in the form of a banking guarantee or a cheque endorsed by a local bank at the sum of 1 per cent of the bid's value, addressed to the Ministry of Interior and valid for 90 days from the date of submission of bids. The bid, which does not honour the required requirements, shall not be considered.

The bids shall be submitted in closed envelopes, sealed with red wax and addressed to the Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee at the Ministry and written from outside the name and number of the tender without naming or making reference to the bidder.

The envelopes shall be deposited into the Tender Box at the Office of the Undersecretary, the Diwan General of Ministry in Al Khuwair at 10.00 am on the day of the deadline shown in the table above. The representatives of the companies/establishments submitting their bids shall be present during the session of the opening of the envelopes which will be held at 11.00 am on the last day for the submission of bids.

The Ministry shall not be obligated into accepting the lowest or any other bid.

The Internal Tender Committee of the Ministry

www.moi.gov.om

Madaris Mutrah Educational Development and Investment Company LLC

Post Box 2265, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman
Telephone: 24706119/24702815, Facsimile: 24799855.

TENDER NOTICE
Construction of International Private School in Qurum, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

Madaris Mutrah Educational Development and Investment Company LLC (owned by the Royal Oman Police Pension Fund and Oman Brunei Investment Company SAOC) invite tenders from competent contractors registered with the Tender Board, under category Grade-I and above, who are capable of executing a Construction of International Private School at Qurum, Muscat.

Those interested in participating may purchase the tender documents from the Royal Oman Police Pension Fund's office located on 1st floor, Al Barakat Building (ROP Pension Fund Building), Building No.1617, Way No.2726, Bank Al Markazi Street, Muttrah Business District, between 8:00am and 1:00pm on working days from: Tuesday 21 December 2021 onwards, against a non-refundable tender fee of RO.500/= per set.

An unconditional tender bond or certified cheque from a licensed bank in the Sultanate, drawn in favour of Madaris Mutrah Educational Development and Investment Company LLC, in the sum of 2% of the tender value, valid for a period of 60 days from the date of submission, must accompany the tender, failing which no tender will be accepted.

Sealed tenders should be addressed to Madaris Mutrah Educational Development and Investment Company LLC and the envelope must not reveal identity of the bidder.

The last date for submission of tenders shall be 12:00hrs on : 17 February 2022 (Thursday).

Madaris Mutrah Educational Development and Investment Company LLC is not bound to accept the lowest or any tender received and reserves the right to reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason whatsoever.

UN chief visits Lebanon, criticises leaders for crisis

BEIRUT: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres arrived in crisis-ridden Lebanon on Sunday, hitting out at political leaders who “paralyse” the country in the face of its people’s suffering.

“I have come with a simple message: the UN stands in solidarity with the people of Lebanon,” Guterres told a press conference with Lebanese President Michel Aoun.

“Seeing the suffering of the people of Lebanon, Lebanese political leaders do not have the right to be divided and paralyse the country,” he added.

He said the objective of his meetings would be “to discuss how we can best support the Lebanese people to overcome the current economic and financial crisis and to promote peace, stability and

sustainable development”.

Lebanon is in the throes of an economic meltdown dubbed by the World Bank as among the planet’s worst since the 1850s.

It is widely blamed on nepotism and corruption among the country’s ruling class.

Around 80 per cent of Lebanon’s population is now estimated to be living under the poverty line.

“Lebanese people also expect their political leaders to restore the economy, provide the functioning government and state institutions,” Guterres said.

Cabinet has failed to meet since mid-October because of infighting, in particular over the judge charged with investigating the catastrophic August 2020 explosion at Beirut’s port that killed at least 215 people, injured



United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres gestures as he attends a joint press conference with Lebanon’s Prime Minister Najib Mikati in Beirut, on Monday. — Reuters

thousands and devastated swathes of the capital.

The UN chief urged politicians

to work together to resolve the crisis and called on the international community “to

strengthen its support to Lebanon”.

Aoun said authorities were working on a plan to restart the economy that will be “negotiated with the International Monetary Fund”, adding that implementing economic, financial and administrative reforms was also required.

He also told Guterres that he wanted legislative elections set for March next year to be “transparent and fair, in order to reflect the real desire of the Lebanese in choosing their representatives”.

The vote, the first major electoral test since the onset in 2019 of the financial crisis, is seen by many as a chance to challenge the ruling elite’s stranglehold on the country.

Guterres said the elections would be “key” and that the

Lebanese “must be fully engaged in choosing how the country moves forward”.

Guterres is set to visit the site of Beirut’s port explosion on Monday, holding a minute’s silence for the victims.

He is scheduled to meet other high-level officials, religious leaders and representatives of civil society organisations before his departure on Wednesday.

He will also visit the impoverished northern city of Tripoli and the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in the country’s south.

The peacekeeping force, in coordination with the Lebanese army, is tasked with guaranteeing a ceasefire and Israeli withdrawal from a demilitarised zone on the southern border. — AFP

Iraq’s Mosul museum restores treasures destroyed by militants



A worker at the Mosul museum tries to reassemble from broken fragments a larger artefact bearing cuneiform inscriptions, at the museum in Iraq’s northern city on December 14. — AFP

MOSUL: Left in ruins by militants, Iraq’s once-celebrated Mosul museum and its 2,500-year-old treasures are being given a second life thanks to restoration efforts backed by French experts.

Ancient artefacts in the museum were smashed into little pieces when IS group militants seized the northern city of Mosul in 2014 and made it their seat of power for three years.

“We must separate all the fragments... It’s like a puzzle, you try to retrieve the pieces that tell the same story,” said restoration worker Daniel Ibled, commissioned by France’s famous Louvre museum, which is supporting Iraqi museum employees.

“Little by little, you manage to recreate the full set.”

When the IS militants were in control, they filmed themselves taking hammers to pre-Islamic

treasures they deemed heretical, proudly advertising their rampage in a video published in February 2015.

The largest and heaviest artefacts were destroyed for the sake of their propaganda, but smaller pieces were sold on black markets the world over.

The scars of their destruction remain today.

On the ground floor of the museum, the twisted iron bars of the foundation poke through a gaping hole.

In other rooms, stones of various sizes are scattered, some bearing etchings of animal paws or wings. Others show inscriptions in cuneiform script.

The smallest of these fragments — no bigger than a fist — are lined up on a table, and experts are hard at work sorting through them.

For now, their efforts are focused on a winged lion from

the city of Nimrud, jewel of the Assyrian empire, two “lamassu” — winged bulls with human heads — and the base of the throne of King Ashurnasirpal II.

These pieces, many dating back to the first millennium BC, are being revived with financing from the International Alliance for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH).

Alongside the Louvre, efforts are also being made by Washington’s Smithsonian Institution, which provides training for the museum’s teams, as well as the New York-headquartered World Monuments Fund, which is tasked with restoring the building.

The base of the Assyrian king’s throne, covered in cuneiform writing, appears almost fixed.

Some pieces are held together by elastic bands or small metallic rings. — AFP

Yemeni separated conjoined twins return home

SANAA: Conjoined twin boys from war-torn Yemen who were successfully separated in surgery in Jordan returned to the capital Sanaa this month, the UN children’s agency said on Monday.

Ahmed and Mohammed were born on December 16 last year, joined at the chest and abdomen, in Sanaa, the country’s Ansar Allah-held capital, Unicef said. They were transported to Jordan after urgent calls for their medical evacuation and surgery.

The twins were separated in July at Amman’s Speciality Hospital in a nearly eight-hour operation involving 25 surgeons and technical advisers. The twins were seven months old at the time.

Their father, Yasser Albukhaity, was all smiles upon returning to Sanaa on a United Nations medical flight.

“I can’t express my feelings,” he said, according to the statement, while the agency released pictures of the flight dated December 2. — AFP



The twins were separated in July at Amman’s Speciality Hospital in a nearly eight-hour operation involving 25 surgeons and technical advisers.

One killed in Sudan protests, 125 wounded



People march to the presidential palace, protesting against military rule following last month’s coup in Khartoum, on Sunday. — Reuters

KHARTOUM: A Sudanese protester was shot dead during a “savage” crackdown on mass pro-democracy rallies on Sunday, medics said, and 125 others were injured according to the health ministry.

Security forces fired tear gas canisters, and live rounds into the air, as hundreds of thousands marched, three years since the start of mass demonstrations that led to the ouster of veteran strongman Omar al Bashir.

On Monday, the independent Doctors’ Committee said 28-year-old Majzoub Mohammad Ahmad was shot and killed with “a bullet in the chest”.

Nationwide, at least 46 people have been killed and scores wounded in the past two months, according to the Committee.

The health ministry said late on Sunday that “123 people were injured in Khartoum and two in Kassala”, a city in the east of Sudan.

Many of the injuries were from inhalation of acrid tear gas,

including during clashes between the police and protesters near the presidential palace.

Demonstrators there had chanted slogans against military chief General Abdel Fattah al Burhan, who led a coup on October 25.

The generals had initially detained civilian leader Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok for weeks under effective house arrest, but reinstated him on November 21 and promised elections for July 2023.

But the move alienated many of Hamdok’s pro-democracy supporters, who dismissed it as providing a cloak of legitimacy for Burhan’s coup.

The army on Monday insisted it backed “the democratic choice for the people” and supported “free and fair elections”, a spokesman said in a statement.

Security forces on Monday maintained a barricade of bridges across the Nile river linking Khartoum with the cities of Omdurman and North Khartoum. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TRIPOLI

Libya candidates say poll delay is inevitable

A group of candidates in war-torn Libya’s presidential election said on Monday that they expect the polls to be delayed, despite the lack of an official announcement to that effect. Scheduled for Friday, the vote is meant to cap a United Nations-led peace process after a decade of conflict.

But it has been beset by deep divisions over its legal basis, who may stand and court challenges against prominent candidates.

On Monday, 17 hopefuls issued a joint statement in which



they implicitly acknowledged that a delay was inevitable.

The group urged the electoral commission to “reveal the reasons why there will be no election on the date set”.

TEL AVIV

Israel bans US travel over Omicron concerns

Israel on Monday added the United States to its “no-fly” list, citing concerns over the spread of the Covid-19 Omicron variant.

Under the edict, which goes into effect at 2200 GMT on Tuesday, Israelis would need special permission to fly to the United States, now one of more than 50 countries to which its citizens cannot travel.

In a televised address on Sunday, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said Israel had bought some



time by moving fast to limit travel when Omicron was first detected last month, but that this was now waning. He predicted a surge of sicknesses within a few weeks.

RIYADH

Over 700,000 flock to Saudi music festival

Record crowds of over 700,000 revellers flocked to Saudi Arabia’s MDLBeast Soundstorm music festival, authorities said on Monday, at the end of the four-day event in the kingdom.

International entertainers and musicians — including superstar French DJ David Guetta — performed at the event.

The festival, which ended on Sunday, comes as Saudi Arabia sees a spike in coronavirus cases amid increased fears over the spread of the new Omicron vari-



ant.

Saudi Arabia has recorded the highest number of Covid-related deaths among Arab Gulf countries, with more than 8,860 fatalities.

In brief

HONG KONG



ELECTION HAILED DESPITE RECORD LOW TURNOUT

Hong Kong's leader on Monday hailed the outcome of a "patriots only" legislature election that saw a record low voter turnout and government loyalists sweep every seat.

The financial hub selected new lawmakers on Sunday under fresh rules imposed by Beijing that dramatically cut directly elected seats and controlled who could stand for office after huge democracy protests convulsed the city two years ago.

Figures showed just 30 per cent of the electorate cast ballots, the lowest rate both of the period since the city's 1997 handover to China and the British colonial era.

YANGON



JUNTA COURT POSTPONES SUU KYI VERDICT

A Myanmar junta court on Monday postponed giving its verdict in Aung San Suu Kyi's trial for illegally importing and possessing walkie talkies, a source with knowledge of the case said.

The Nobel laureate has been detained since the generals staged a coup against her government on February 1, ending the Southeast Asian country's brief period of democracy.

Nationwide protests against the putsch have been met with a bloody crackdown, with more than 1,300 people killed and over 11,000 arrested, according to a local monitoring group.

BANGKOK



GOVT TO CONSIDER REINSTATING QUARANTINE

Thailand's public health minister said on Monday that his ministry will propose reinstating mandatory quarantine for foreign visitors due to concerns over the spread of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

The proposal would scrap the current quarantine waiver for vaccinated visitors and revert to hotel quarantine and the "sandbox" programme, which allows free movement within a specific location, Anutin Charnvirakul told the Inside Thailand television show.

He said the proposal will be made to the government's Covid-19 taskforce "soon", without elaborating further.

More than 50,000 forced from homes in Malaysian floods

KUALA LUMPUR: More than 50,000 people have been forced from their homes in Malaysia and at least seven are dead after the country faced some of its worst floods for years, officials said on Monday.

A weekend of torrential rain caused rivers to overflow, flooding towns and villages and cutting off major roads, with many motorists left trapped in their vehicles for hours.

The number of evacuees across the country rose to about 51,000 on Monday, according to official data, with the worst-hit area being the eastern state of Pahang, where some 32,000 were forced from their homes.

The country's wealthiest and most populous state Selangor, surrounding the capital Kuala Lumpur, has been badly affected — which is unusual as it typically avoids the worst of the monsoon floods.

Seven people have been confirmed dead in Selangor, according to fire and rescue officials cited in The Star newspaper. With reports of others missing, the toll is expected to climb.



Rescue officials evacuate people in a boat in Shah Alam, Selangor, as Malaysia faces some of its worst floods for years. — AFP

Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob said that a month's rainfall came down in one day in Selangor, adding that tens of thousands of emergency service and military personnel were deployed to aid rescue efforts.

Student Eyilavarasi Magesuaran recalled the moment

her house was flooded in the hard-hit city of Shah Alam in Selangor early on Sunday.

"Water rushed into our house from the rear and back, trapping us inside," the 21-year-old said, adding she was alerted to the flood by her barking dog.

"I really feared we would

drown. We have lived here since 1995, and never experienced flooding."

A relative with a truck rescued her family.

The rains had largely stopped by Monday, leaving residents to return to damaged properties and pick up the pieces. — AFP

Giant rubber whale helps Kiwi rescuers battle beachings



A group of volunteers from New Zealand whale rescue charity Project Jonah being taught how to stop a whale from coming back to the beach by a group instructor, at Scorching Bay in Wellington. — AFP

WELLINGTON: A two-tonne rubber whale can take on a life of its own in the frigid shallows of a windswept New Zealand beach, particularly when a bedraggled group of would-be rescuers is trying to wrestle it into a harness.

"Keep the blowhole clear... you're too close to the tail, one swipe can do a serious injury to yourself and the whale," an instructor yells as the Wellington rain lashes his pupils.

Despite the discomfort, enthusiasm levels remain high as the group successfully manoeuvre the five-metre long pilot whale replica onto a mat between two inflatable pontoons.

The giant black dummy, and a smaller 200 kilogramme version representing a dolphin, are eventually guided to deeper waters by volunteers trained by the New Zealand whale rescue charity Project Jonah.

Filled with water the latex marine mammals help teams prepare for real emergencies — New Zealand has one of the highest whale stranding rates in

the world.

Around 300 animals beach themselves annually, according to official figures and it is not unusual for groups of between 20 and 50 pilot whales to run aground.

But numbers can run into the hundreds when a "super pod" is involved — in 2017, there was a mass stranding of almost 700 pilot whales.

"There are always going to be strandings — there was one on Monday, there'll probably be one next week," Project Jonah's communications manager Louisa Hawkes told about 30 trainee whale medics during a course in Wellington.

The wait turns out to be considerably shorter, with a baby pilot whale found stranded Christchurch that same morning.

As the course continues in a community hall, a Project Jonah coordinator paces outside giving advice via mobile phone to wildlife rangers at the opposite end of the country desperately trying to save the animal.

Sadly, their efforts prove futile and the infant is euthanised a few hours later when its pod cannot be located.

PERFECT WHALE TRAP
"Strandings are incredibly emotional," Hawkes tells the volunteers. "If a whale isn't refloated it can really, really hurt, particularly if you've bonded with it."

"You need to ensure you have the resilience needed to cope with whatever's going to happen."

No one knows why whales strand but Hawkes said it sometimes occurred when old, sick or injured animals swam ashore and other pod members followed.

She said one orca, a male named Nobby, had been rescued on seven separate occasions from North Island beaches after beaching himself chasing stingrays for food. Most mass strandings in New Zealand involve pilot whales on gently sloping beaches, which confuse their sonar making them think they are in open waters. — AFP

Philippine military ordered to deliver typhoon aid as toll crosses 375

MANILA: The Philippines ordered its military on Monday to send airplanes and naval vessels to carry aid to areas devastated by a powerful typhoon that has displaced hundreds of thousands of people and killed more than 375.

Many central and southern regions are cut off after Typhoon Rai, the strongest to hit the archipelago this year, downed power and communication links, complicating rescue and relief efforts.

"We are still assessing the damage, but it is huge," Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana told reporters, citing early reports. "The first thing we are doing is address the food and water (supplies) and medical care of the injured."

Lorenzana told the armed forces to deliver relief goods using all available assets, and send in more troops if necessary, he added.

Police said the death toll from Rai has risen to 375, making it one of the deadliest

typhoons to have struck the Southeast Asian nation. More than 200 have been injured, and 52 people were missing.

The police figure far outstripped the 58 deaths recorded by the national disaster agency, which said it was still checking reports from affected areas.

More than half the deaths reported by police were in the central region of Visayas, home to dive spots in Bohol province, among some of the most popular tourist destinations.

Provincial governor Arthur Yap told broadcaster CNN Philippines he feared the death toll could rise further, as a lack of mobile telephone links made it hard to gather information.

Rai, which made landfall as a category 5 typhoon on Thursday, revived memories of the devastation brought in 2013 by Typhoon Haiyan, one of the most powerful tropical cyclones ever recorded, which killed 6,300 people in the Philippines. — Reuters



Residents queue up for water along a road in Tagbilaran City. — AFP



EU regulator approves Novavax Covid jab

THE HAGUE: The European Union's drug regulator on Monday approved use of the Covid-19 vaccine from US-based Novavax in people 18 years and older, paving the way for a fifth coronavirus shot in the region as the Omicron coronavirus variant spreads.

Data from two large studies showed the vaccine has an efficacy of around 90%, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) said, adding that there was currently limited data on its efficacy against some variants of concern, including Omicron.

"After a thorough evaluation, EMA's human medicines committee (CHMP) concluded by consensus that the data on the vaccine were robust and met the EU criteria for efficacy, safety and quality," the regulator said.

Novavax said it would start shipping vaccines to the EU's 27 member states in January. Its Nasdaq-listed shares were up about 10% in US pre-market trading, following the EU approval.

Covid-19 infections have broken records in parts of Europe in recent weeks, with

governments and researchers scrambling to bolster defences against the fast-spreading Omicron, prompting renewed curbs ahead of the Christmas holidays.

The endorsement for the two-dose vaccine, branded Nuvaxovid, comes well ahead of possible authorisation in the United States, where Novavax has had to resolve manufacturing issues and expects to file for approval by the end of the year.

The regulatory process in the EU has taken longer than expected too. EMA started a real-time rolling review of the data in February.

Novavax and the EU reached a preliminary deal in December 2020 for the supply of the vaccine, but due to regulatory and production issues the final contract for up to 200 million doses was only signed in August.

The shot received its first regulatory greenlight in Indonesia last month and is awaiting approval in Japan, where it would be manufactured and distributed by Takeda Pharmaceutical. — **Reuters**

UK cabinet meets to discuss Covid moves as Omicron sweeps Europe

LONDON: Britain's cabinet met on Monday as pressure grows to slow the spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant, a day after the Netherlands imposed a fourth lockdown and as other European countries consider putting a squeeze on Christmas.

Omicron infections are multiplying rapidly across Europe and the United States, doubling every two or three days in London and elsewhere and taking a heavy toll on financial markets, which fear the impact on the global economic recovery.

The variant was first detected last month in southern Africa and Hong Kong and so far been reported in at least 89 countries. The severity of illness it causes remains unclear.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte announced a shutdown on Saturday, ordering the closure of all but essential stores, as well as restaurants, hairdressers, gyms, museums and other public places from Sunday until at least January 14.

Britain has reported record levels of Covid-19 cases in recent days.

"At this point we are still monitoring the data and keeping a very close eye on it," the spokesperson for Prime Minister Boris Johnson said when asked about the possibility of further restrictions. "We will update the public if there are any further measures required, at the earliest possible opportunity."

Twelve people in Britain have died with the Omicron variant, Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab said on Monday, refusing to rule out a tightening of social



People walk past a government health campaign advertisement encouraging people to take Covid-19 vaccine booster dose in London. — **Reuters**

restrictions.

"I just can't make hard and fast guarantees," he told Times Radio. "In assessing the situation we rely very heavily on the real data coming through and it will take a little bit more time to assess this critical issue of the severity of Omicron."

Any decision to limit how people can celebrate Christmas would come at a high political cost for Johnson, whose authority has been undermined by questions over whether he and his staff broke lockdown rules last year.

The German government's scientific advisory panel said on Sunday it was necessary to further limit contact, with data so far showing that boosters alone would

not be enough to contain the spread of the virus.

The state premier of North Rhine-Westphalia, Hendrik Wuest, did not rule out contact restrictions on people who have been fully vaccinated or had a booster shot. "We should be careful about ruling anything out," he told broadcaster ARD on Monday.

Ireland on Friday ordered cafes and restaurants to close at 8 pm and reduced the capacity in all public events. Italy is also considering new measures to avoid a surge in infections, newspapers reported on Sunday.

'ENDLESS HEADWINDS'
US stock index futures tumbled more than 1% on Monday, dragged down by concerns about

the impact of tighter restrictions on the global economy.

"After battling endless headwinds in recent weeks, markets have finally been knocked over as the rapid spread of Omicron finally reaches panic mode," Russ Mould, investment director at AJ Bell, wrote in a client note.

Shopper numbers across Britain's high streets fell 2.6% over the December 18-19 weekend versus the previous weekend, researcher Springboard said.

"Omicron... remains one of the biggest issues for markets right now and has significantly clouded the outlook moving into year-end," Deutsche Bank analysts said in a note. — **Reuters**

Japanese space tourists return to Earth after 12 days on ISS

ALMATY: A Japanese billionaire returned to Earth on Monday, after 12 days on the International Space Station where he made videos about performing mundane tasks including brushing teeth and going to the bathroom.

Online fashion tycoon Yusaku Maezawa and his assistant Yoyo Hirano parachuted onto Kazakhstan's steppe at around the expected landing time of 0313 GMT on Monday, along with Russian cosmonaut Alexander Misurkin.

Footage from the landing site, around 150 kilometres southeast of the central Kazakhstan town of Zhezkazgan, showed the trio

smiling after being helped out of the Soyuz descent module and into evacuation vehicles in freezing, foggy conditions.

"The crew is feeling good," Russia's space agency Roscosmos said.

In his first tweet since returning to Earth, Maezawa posted a picture of himself eating instant noodles, saying he was on "Earth now".

The returned crew will spend two to three weeks reconditioning under the guidance of doctors as they reacclimate to Earth. They are due to hold a post-mission press conference on Wednesday.

Their journey marked Russia's return to space tourism after



Japanese Yusaku Maezawa shortly after the landing of the Soyuz MS-20 capsule in a remote area outside Zhezkazgan in Kazakhstan. — **AFP**

a decade-long pause that saw competition emerge from the United States.

They spent 12 days on the orbiting laboratory where the tourists documented their daily life aboard the ISS for Maezawa's popular YouTube channel.

Addressing his one million followers on YouTube, the 46-year-old billionaire explained how to brush teeth and go to the bathroom in space.

In one of the videos, he explained in detail the business of relieving oneself on the ISS.

In other videos, he showed his followers how to properly drink tea and sleep in zero gravity.

When the three space travellers arrived on the ISS on December 8, they joined a seven-team crew who were engaged in space biology and physics research.

Maezawa plans to take eight people with him on a 2023 mission around the moon, operated by Elon Musk's SpaceX.

He and his assistant are the first private Japanese citizens to visit space since journalist Toyohiro Akiyama travelled to the Mir station in 1990.

TURNING POINT
Their return from space caps a banner year that many have seen as a turning point for private space travel. — **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

JOHANNESBURG

Ramaphosa recovered from Covid, resumes work

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa has returned to work after spending a week in isolation following a positive Covid test, his office said on Monday.

Ramaphosa, 69, who is fully vaccinated, felt unwell after leaving a state memorial service for former president FW de Klerk in Cape Town on December 12 as his nation battles an exponential increase in cases of the Omicron coronavirus variant.

"President Cyril Ramaphosa has ended a week of self-isolation



which followed his positive test for Covid-19 on 12 December 2021," his office said in a statement.

"The President has returned to duty and will chair the final Cabinet meeting for 2021 on Wednesday, 22 December 2021."

ALGI BUENOS AIRES

Argentines remember 2001 'great crisis'

Several thousand Argentines on Sunday commemorated the 20th anniversary of the country's "great crisis," when the South American nation plunged into social unrest following economic default.

Gathered at the Plaza de Mayo in central Buenos Aires, various organisations, including unions and radical leftist parties, held a "vigil" late into the night. In some places, participants gave speeches; elsewhere, a documentary or archive images were shown, all in memory of the 39 mostly young victims of the epi-



sode's unrest.

The commemorations will culminate with a demonstration to coincide with the anniversary of then-president Fernando de la Rúa giving in to popular pressure, resigning and fleeing the palace via helicopter.

VATICAN CITY

Domestic violence 'almost satanic': Pope

Pope Francis described domestic violence as something "almost satanic" in an interview with Italian television, insisting on the dignity of the victims whose numbers have risen since the Covid pandemic.

He was referring to "the great number of women who are beaten, abused at home, even by their husbands," in comments to TG5 during a special programme broadcast on Sunday evening.

Pope Francis was filmed talk-



ing to four people described as being the "invisible ones" in society, including a victim of such abuse. They discussed issues such as violence, poverty and the fallout from the pandemic.

Bound in a love-hate relationship

EVA RODRIGUEZ LORENZO

Argentina has long had a stormy relationship with the International Monetary Fund, which many in the country see unfavourably even though it has provided a credit lifeline after decades of what experts call “very poor management of public finances.”

Twenty years after an economic, political and social crisis that shook the country — and was felt around the world — Argentina is now traversing a tense financial patch, having never fully regained the confidence of world markets.

With four in 10 Argentines still living in poverty, the country is anxious to avoid a replay of the 2001 debacle.

Argentina finds itself struggling to refinance its latest loan — contracted with the agency in 2018 — amid economic recession, with yearly inflation surpassing 50 per cent and with depleted monetary reserves.

The country has gone to the IMF 21 times since it became a member in 1956, “so the new programme supposedly being negotiated (to restructure a credit of \$44 billion) will be the 22nd in 65 years,” said Arturo Porzecanski, a researcher with the Center for Latin American and Latino Studies at American University in Washington.

“It’s like saying that a pub owner has had to call the fire department 22 times over the last 65 years,” he said.

“Rather than control its own general indebtedness, Argentina has for years borrowed excessively at home and abroad,” said Mark Sobel, US chairman of the Official Monetary and Financial Institutions Forum (OMFIF).

“The central bank is forced to finance deficits, which generates inflation and public distrust in the government and the currency.”

“Unable to pay its foreign debt, Argentina is a serial defaulter,” he added.

Experts agree that blaming the IMF for Argentina’s financial woes would be a mistake.

“The cost, the terms and the amount of any new programme the IMF approves for Argentina will be much more favourable than the government could hope to obtain from the financial markets or from other multilateral entities,” Porzecanski said.

— AFP

“
Rather than control its own general indebtedness, Argentina has for years borrowed excessively at home and abroad
MARK SOBEL
US chairman of the OMFIF



CHILE'S YOUNGEST-EVER PRESIDENT-ELECT

Chilean president-elect Gabriel Boric waves at supporters after delivering a speech, in Santiago. The streets of Santiago exploded in celebration on Sunday after leftist millennial Gabriel Boric was declared Chile's new president with an unexpectedly large victory over his far-right rival in a polarising race. — AFP

2021 saw emissions gap narrowing

BEH LIH YI

Around the world, 2021 was a year shaped by weather extremes. Germany and China saw devastating floods, while parts of Europe and the United States were ravaged by wildfires. Drought in East Africa led to crop losses and hunger, from Kenya to Madagascar.

Worsening disasters - in many cases made more likely and severe by climate change - have at last pushed governments to grasp the importance of meeting an international goal to rein in global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7F), experts say.

In 2015, when the landmark Paris Agreement was struck, about 195 nations formally committed to limit warming to “well below” 2C (3.6F) above preindustrial times, while “pursuing efforts” for a more ambitious ceiling of 1.5C.

The potentially devastating effects of letting the Earth’s climate heat up beyond that lower limit became more evident this year, according to government officials and climate scientists.

“(We) did witness a clear shift from other countries to support keeping 1.5C alive,” said UN ambassador Aubrey Webson of Antigua and Barbuda, who chairs the Alliance of Small Island States, uniting 39 nations from the Pacific to the Caribbean.

Those island states have long led the push for the 1.5C goal to prevent further catastrophic losses, with many of them at risk of being swallowed up by rising seas as the planet warms.

The problem now is that while support for the 1.5C limit won fresh political backing in 2021, it remains out of reach.

Countries are still wrangling over how to get on track to meet the goal, with pledges to cut climate-heating emissions not yet on the scale or time-frame needed.

The planet has already heated up by 1.1C since the industrial revolution unleashed widespread use of fossil fuels.

Webson said the new high-level momentum behind 1.5C - as seen among leaders this year, from the G7 and G20 summits to the COP26 UN climate talks

- must be matched by rapid action.

“Rhetoric and pledges without implementation are fool’s gold for small islands,” he said.

EMISSIONS GAP

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has said man-made carbon dioxide emissions need to fall by about 45 per cent by 2030 from 2010 levels, and reach “net-zero” by mid-century to give the world a good chance of limiting warming to 1.5C and avoiding the worst impacts of climate change.

The good news is that 90 per cent of the global economy is now covered by national net-zero emissions targets, up from 68 per cent in 2020, according to the Net-Zero Tracker compiled by a coalition of four research groups.

Frank Rijsberman, director-general of the Seoul-based Global Green Growth Institute, which works with governments to achieve a green transition, said the surge in net-zero pledges showed growing commitment to the 1.5C goal. — Reuters

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT 90% OF THE GLOBAL ECONOMY IS NOW COVERED BY NATIONAL NET-ZERO EMISSIONS TARGETS, UP FROM 68% IN 2020

Rising cases, Omicron highlight holes in Biden’s Covid strategy

JEFF MASON

Amid a new surge in Covid-19 cases and deaths ahead of the Christmas and New Year holidays, President Joe Biden is drawing criticism from health experts, who are calling for more urgency, testing, masking and global vaccine sharing.

Biden, a Democrat, took office in January pledging to get the coronavirus under control. He presided over a massive vaccine rollout and passed a \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief package, a sharp contrast with his predecessor, Republican Donald Trump, who downplayed the pandemic’s severity, dismissed many preventive measures and undermined health experts.

Eleven months into Biden’s term, however, the United States has recorded 800,000 Covid-19

deaths, over 300,000 of those on his watch, the highest total and per capita of the Group of Seven (G7) wealthiest nations. As the Omicron variant bears down and people gather for the holiday season, hospitals in some areas are seeing record high numbers of Covid-19 patients.

Biden’s vaccination push has led to 65.2 per cent of the eligible population being fully vaccinated, according to the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. Republican-led opposition means that figure is less than 50 per cent on some states. Less than 30 per cent of the population has an additional booster shot believed necessary to protect against Omicron.

The administration needs to push mask wearing, increase pressure on companies to bring

down the cost of tests, share technology on vaccines globally and secure more funding to fight the pandemic on a broad scale, health experts said. Many said the White House had let such measures slide while focusing on getting people inoculated.

“Where’s the leadership that asks for national sacrifice at a time of emergency?” said Gregg Gonsalves, an associate professor of epidemiology at Yale University. Biden should “get on TV tonight and say: ‘I want you to mask up.’” he said.

The White House has repeatedly said it has the tools to fight Omicron without shutting schools and businesses, while promising more free tests and widespread booster distribution.

The Omicron variant that is

prolonging the global crisis may not be the last, as vast majorities of people in less-developed nations remain unvaccinated, giving the virus room to mutate.

Experts said the Biden administration could have done more to get vaccines to the rest of the world, protecting other populations and Americans as well. “There’s been sort of an ongoing battle with the White House to do more,” said Gonsalves, noting the new Omicron variant came from abroad.

Biden was to speak on Tuesday about new plans, including driving home his message to unvaccinated Americans to get a shot and for those who are vaccinated to get a booster.

Broadway theatres, universities and professional sports leagues are

already cancelling or postponing events, reflecting the reality of a new Covid-19 wave.

UGLY US POLITICS ON COVID

Biden’s toughest challenge fighting the pandemic has been political.

Despite the abundance of free and safe vaccines, misinformation spread through social media platforms and pushback on health measures, driven largely by Republican politicians and conservative media, have thwarted his efforts to persuade pockets of the US population to get vaccinated.

The administration vowed early on to crack down on private companies spreading vaccine-related misinformation, but it persists. — Reuters

sport



AL NASR BAG THIRD PLACE IN HM HOCKEY CUP



MUSCAT: Al Nasr took third place and bronze medal of the 51st edition of His Majesty's Hockey Cup after beating Seeb 5-1, at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. The man of the match award went to Al Nasr player Basim Khatir whose great performance helped his team win the third place play-off. Al Nasr finished the first half 3-1 and continued their attacks in the second half consolidating their lead to 5-1.

Majees, Oman Stallions win convincingly; Yalla Shabab win

MUSCAT: Majees beat top of table Muscat CT by 121 runs in the Premier Division 50 over league match of Oman Cricket in Al Amerat Turf 1 on Friday.

Put to bat first by Muscat CT, Majees scored 198 courtesy contribution from Khurram Kham - 90 of 124 balls; losing all 10 wickets in 49.2 overs. Samay Shrivastav was Muscat CT's scalper bagging 4 wickets in his 10 overs. In return, Muscat CT tumbled down for just 77 with Ubaidullah and Khawar Ali bagging 3 wickets each.

Brief Scores: Majees 198/10 in 49.2 overs (Khurram Khan 90(124) - 3x4,8x6; Samay Shrivastav 46/4) beat Muscat CT 77 all out in 28.4 overs (Ubaidullah 17/3; Khawar Ali 8/3) by 121 runs

In another Premier Division 50 over league match played on Friday, Oman Stallions thumped AER by 7 wickets chasing the target in just 5.3 overs.

Put to bat first, AER could only muster 52 losing all their wickets courtesy of Bilal Khan and Hemal Tandel who were the wreckers in chief bagging 3 wickets each. Oman Stallions chased the target losing 3 wickets and scoring 53



Bilal Khan, Hemal Tandel of OMAN STALLIONS

in quick succession.

Brief Scores: AER 52 all out in 13.1 overs (Bilal Khan 25/3; Hemal Tandel 22/3) lost to Oman Stallions 53/3 in 5.3 overs by 7 wickets.

On Saturday, Yalla Shabab trounced IAS by 30 runs on Turf

bagging 5 wickets in his quota of 10 overs. In return, IAS could only drag themselves close to the target scoring 195 in all. Rao Waqar and Waseem Akhtar held the ship for resilient 40's to their scores.

Brief Scores: Yalla Shabab 225/10 in 47.2 overs (Gustav Burger 139(131) 14x4,4x6; Khalid Rashid 38/5) won against IAS 195/10 in 48.1 overs (Rao Waqar 49(80) 3x4; Mohd Nadeem 32/3) by 30 runs.

In another Oman Cricket Premier league match on Saturday, Renaissance thump ARTT by 66 runs.

Electing to bowl first, ARTT restricted Renaissance to 195 with Pruthvi Machhi solely contributing to the total with his 74 of 96 balls, courtesy Mohd Imran Latif picking 5 wickets. In return, Renaissance charged upto ARTT letting them just to 129 spearheaded by Ajay Lacheta's 4 wicket haul.

Brief Scores: Renaissance 195/10 in 48.3 overs (Pruthvi Machhi 74(96) 10x4,1x6; Mohd Imran Latif 34/5) beat ARTT 129/10 in 36.4 overs (Ghazanfar Iqbal 43(35) 3x4,2x6, Ajay Lacheta 21/4)



MoCSY holds workshop on updating sports strategies

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth held a workshop to update the sports strategy of the Sultanate of Oman with the aim of keeping pace with the developments in the sports fields and adapting them with Oman Vision 2040.

The workshop seeks to realise the aspirations and ambitions of Omani youth in the sports field by discussing the challenges and aspirations.

It brings together specialists from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, the Oman Olympic Committee, sports federations, sports committees,



specialised clubs, sports centres, associations and sports institutions, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman School Sports Federation and representatives from the private sector. — ONA

Australia ace Pink Test despite Buttler resistance

ADELAIDE: Jos Buttler's dogged resistance ended in a bizarre fashion as Australia thrashed England by 275 runs in the day-night second Test to go 2-0 up in the five-match Ashes series on Monday.

England resumed the final day on a precarious 82-4, needing 386 more runs for an improbable win or to at least bat out the last three sessions to force a draw.

They lost talismanic Ben Stokes in the first session and Chris Woakes fell after a fighting 44, which was the highest individual score in England's abject second innings batting display.

Buttler, who had a wretched time behind the wicket, dropping several catches, then produced a spectacular rearguard, spread over 207 deliveries, for an uncharacteristically dogged 26 that kept alive England's faint hopes of saving the match.

It was soon snuffed out when the batsman, retreating deep into the crease to work a Jhye Richardson delivery on the off-side, trod on his own stumps.

For Australia, Richardson claimed 5-42 in a magnificent display of pace bowling.

"They showed some great resilience today," Australia's stand-in captain Steve Smith said of their opponents.

"Jos played a really good innings, he faced over 200 balls.

"We were trying to stay as calm as we could out in the middle and just thought, a couple of good balls and a couple of wickets and we'll keep going."

Australia's Marnus Labuschagne was adjudged man-of-the-match for his 103, the only century hit by a player from either side in the match.

Australia were without regular captain Pat Cummins, who missed



Australia's Nathan Lyon celebrates taking the wicket of England's Jos Buttler with team-mates. — Reuters

out for being a close contact of a positive Covid-19 case, and injured paceman Josh Hazlewood.

"We made mistakes throughout the game that we made last week, whether it be no-balls, missed chances," England captain Joe

Root said.

"We just have to be better. We have to learn those lessons very quickly over the next week."

Australia began with their senior bowlers, Mitchell Starc and Nathan Lyon, who have thrived

in this test in the absence of Cummins and Hazlewood.

Ollie Pope lasted seven balls, a boundary through midwicket his sole contribution, before he nicked Starc to Smith in the slips.

Smacking his bat against his

foot as he walked off, Pope has had a poor tour to date and will be worried about his place for the third test.

Stokes was England's last major hope of salvaging a draw and his batting was restrained, a sweep to

They lost talismanic Ben Stokes in the first session and Chris Woakes fell after a fighting 44, which was the highest individual score in England's abject second innings batting display

the boundary off Lyon in the 55th over a highlight.

A few minutes later though, Lyon delivered a ball that replays showed to be hitting leg stump and Stokes was gone lbw for 12 runs in 110 minutes.

Buttler smacked Richardson through point for four runs off the quick's second delivery but England highlights were otherwise sparse.

While Buttler's obdurate batting took England's fight to the final session, the miracle they needed to save the match did not materialise.

The third Test begins in Melbourne on Sunday. — Reuters

SCOREBOARD

Australia first innings: 473/9 dec	
England first innings:	236
Australia second innings: 230/9 dec	
England second innings (O/n: 82/4):	
R Burns c Smith b Richardson.....	34
H Hameed c Carey b Richardson	0
D Malan lbw Naser	20
J Root c Carey b Starc.....	24
B Stokes lbw Lyon.....	12
O Pope c Smith b Starc.....	4
J Buttler hit wicket b Richardson	26
C Woakes b Richardson	44
O Robinson c Smith b Lyon.....	8
S Broad (not out).....	9
J Anderson c Green b Richardson.....	2
Extras (B-2, LB-3, NB-4).....	9
Total (all out, 113.1 overs)192	
Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-48, 3-70, 4-82, 5-86, 6-105, 7-166, 8-178, 9-182	
Bowling: Starc 27-10-43-2, Richardson 19-1-9-42-5 (2nb), Lyon 39-16-55-2, Naser 13-5-28-1, Green 9-5-9-0, Labuschagne 4-2-10-0, Smith 1-1-0-0, Head 1-1-0-0	

Never doubted win despite Buttler resistance, says Smith

ADELAIDE: Stand-in captain Steve Smith never doubted Australia's victory in the day-night second Ashes Test against England despite Jos Buttler's dogged resistance, the 32-year-old said after putting his team 2-0 ahead in the five-match series on Monday.

Buttler, who dropped several catches behind the wicket, tried to redeem himself with 26 off 207 balls in a spectacular rearguard spread over more than four hours even though it was not enough in the end.

"I was not getting nervous just yet," said Smith, who was put in charge of the team after regular skipper Pat Cummins was ruled out hours before the match for being a close contact of a positive Covid-19 case.

"I thought Jos early on was content to stay at one end. He'd do four balls at one end and get up to the other end. When you get to that point I thought there was enough in the wicket and I was confident.

"I thought he played really well. It's not the traditional Jos we have seen in the past. His defence was really good. He gave them a bit of a shift there for a while."

Smith said he only knew how



Australia's Steven Smith. — Reuters

as taking over the captaincy a few hours before the match began on Thursday.

"On day one, there was not a lot of nerves. I only found out about 10 or 11 am I had two missed calls from Pat and a missed message from (head

coach) Justin Langer..." Smith said.

"I found out the news that Pat was out for the game and I was going to be captain. It's been an enjoyable week, hopefully we can keep this momentum going."

Smith complimented fast

I was not getting nervous just yet. I thought Jos early on was content to stay at one end. He'd do four balls at one end and get up to the other end.

STEVE SMITH

Australia stand-in captain

bowler Mitchell Starc and Jhye Richardson, the latter returning after two years out of test cricket through injury.

Richardson added another dimension, Smith said.

"He's a bit more skiddy than the others. We did bowl a lot fuller than England did, Jhye is a thinker," he added.

Melbourne hosts the third test from Sunday and Smith ruled out the possibility of taking their foot off the pedal.

"England are a good side and we have not really let them back into the contest yet. That's how we want to keep it," said the top order batsman. — Reuters

Ekansh clinches Panorama Mall chess tourney



MUSCAT: Ekansh Goel, the talented chess player from Indian School Muscat, emerged champion in the recently concluded

Panorama Mall Open rapid chess championship held at Panorama Mall.

He scored 5.5 points out of a possible six.



NADAL TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID IN LATEST BLOW FOR LEGEND

MADRID: Spanish tennis star Rafael Nadal said on Monday he had tested positive for Covid-19, which puts in doubt his participation in the Australian Open next month where he was expected to make his big comeback after months of injury.

The Spanish former world number one said he took the test when he returned to Spain from Abu Dhabi where he took part in an exhibition tournament last week, his first since August due to a foot injury.

“I am going through some unpleasant moments but I trust that I will improve little by little. I am now confined at home and have informed the people who had been in contact with me,” he wrote on Twitter.

“As a consequence of the situation, I have to have total flexibility with my calendar and I will analyse my options depending on my evolution,” he added.

“I will keep you informed of any decisions about my future tournaments.”

The 35-year-old had been due to fly to Melbourne later this month to compete in an ATP event

“
I am going through some unpleasant moments but I trust that I will improve little by little. I am now confined at home and have informed the people who had been in contact with me

RAFAEL NADAL
Spanish player

ahead of the Australian Open which begins at Melbourne Park on January 17.

The 20-time major champion has struggled with a foot injury for the past six months — forcing him to miss both Wimbledon and the US Open. Nadal lost to another former world number one Andy Murray in an exhibition match on Friday in Abu Dhabi, his first match since August.

He then lost to Wimbledon semifinalist Denis Shapovalov of



Spain's Rafael Nadal in action in Abu Dhabi. – Reuters

Canada on Saturday.

It was his first tournament appearance since the Citi Open in Washington in early August where he lost to Lloyd Harris.

Nadal had said the championship in Abu Dhabi was a chance to test his foot and work towards the trip Down Under in healthy conditions.

“I was able to compete in both matches and even had my chances, so if we put that in perspective it’s a very positive thing,” he said after

the tournament in Abu Dhabi.

“The idea is to go there and try my best there in Australia. Being 100 per cent honest, I can’t guarantee it,” he added, saying he would have to speak to his team before making a final decision.

ROYAL CLOSE CONTACT

Nadal had been practising hard back home in Mallorca and has made a new addition to his coaching staff in the form of his good friend Marc Lopez, who won 2016 Olympic gold with him

in doubles in Rio.

Despite missing almost half the season, he finished 2021 ranked No 6 in the world after picking up two titles in Barcelona and Rome and making the semifinals at the French Open and the quarters at the Australian Open.

Nadal, Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic are tied with a record 20 Grand Slam singles titles each.

During the tournament on Friday in Abu Dhabi, Nadal was

photographed talking to Spain’s former king Juan Carlos I without wearing a face mask.

It was a rare public appearance for the 83-year-old since he went into exile in the United Arab Emirates in August 2020 following graft allegations.

Nadal said he was regularly tested in Abu Dhabi, and the results were always negative. His last test there was on Friday, and he received the results on Saturday.
— AFP



Phoenix Suns guard Devin Booker (1) dunks the ball against the Charlotte Hornets in the first half at Footprint Center. – USA Today Sports

Booker makes impact in return, Trail Blazers cool off Grizzlies

LOS ANGELES: Devin Booker scored 16 points in his return from a seven-game absence as the NBA-leading Phoenix Suns rolled over the Charlotte Hornets 137-106 on Sunday.

Booker, who had been out due to a left hamstring strain, made four three-pointers and had six rebounds and five assists in 26 minutes for the Suns, who led by as many as 29 points in the first half. The Suns own the best record in the league and have now won 23 of their last 25 games, including 14 straight at home.

JaVale McGee scored 19 points as Phoenix set season highs in points scored and three-pointers with 20.

Mikal Bridges scored 16 points and Landry Shamet had 15, while Deandre Ayton tallied 15 points and 15 rebounds.

Miles Bridges scored 26 points and Kelly Oubre had 18 to lead Charlotte. P J Washington added 13, Jalen McDaniels had 10 and LaMelo Ball recorded nine points, 10 rebounds and seven assists.

The Hornets lost for the eighth time in their last 11 games.

In Chicago, DeMar DeRozan scored 38 points after missing two weeks because of Covid-19 measures to lead the Chicago Bulls to a 115-110 victory over the Los



Charlotte Hornets guard LaMelo Ball (2) drives to the basket against Phoenix Suns' Chris Paul (3) in the first half at Footprint Center. – USA Today Sports

Angeles Lakers.

Nikola Vucevic had 19 points and 13 rebounds, and Lonzo Ball added 19 points as the Bulls snapped a two-game losing streak.

The Bulls were playing their first game since December 11 after two games were postponed because of Covid-19 measures.

LeBron James had 31 points, Carmelo Anthony added 21 and Russell Westbrook 20 as Los Angeles lost their second straight.

In Memphis, Damian Lillard scored 17 of his 32 points in the first quarter as the Portland Trail Blazers snapped Memphis

Grizzlies’ five-game winning streak with a 105-100 win.

WE HAD TO EXECUTE

The Trail Blazers won for the second consecutive game after ending a seven-game losing skid with a win over Charlotte on Friday. “It’s not like we blew them out,” Lillard said. “We had to execute. We had to get stops. We had to weather a few storms. It was a great win.”

Norman Powell finished with 28 points as Portland improved to 13-18 on the season in front of a crowd of 18,400 at the

FedExForum.

Dillon Brooks scored a career-high 37 points for Memphis. The Grizzlies lost for the second time in their last 12 games.

Portland took the lead, 94-91, on a four-point play by Lillard with just over four minutes left and regained the lead 97-95 on a three-point basket by Powell three minutes later.

“It was a big play,” Powell said. “I was just trying to find an opening. We are not going to get too excited, but it’s a great win for us. It was great to get a gritty win.”

The Grizzlies had a chance to tie it with five seconds to go, but Desmond Bane’s long shot hit the rim and bounced harmlessly away.

Elsewhere, Saddiq Bey scored 26 points and the Detroit Pistons ended their franchise record-tying 14-game losing streak with a 100-90 victory over the Miami Heat.

Hamidou Diallo finished with 15 points and seven rebounds for Detroit, who recorded their first victory since a 97-89 decision over Indiana on November 17.

Max Strus led the Heat with 24 points off the bench. Kyle Lowry tallied 19 points, 10 rebounds and five assists, while Dewayne Dedmon had 11 points for Miami, which had won four of its last five games.
— AFP

business

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Nation’s biggest petrochemical project launched

NEW LANDMARK: HH Sayyid Asaad presides over inauguration of OQ Group's RO 2.7 billion Liwa Plastic Industries Complex at Sohar Industrial Port

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 20

His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, presided over the launch of the RO 2.7 billion Liwa Plastics mega project of OQ, the global integrated energy group of the Sultanate of Oman.

The successful completion of the project, located at Sohar Industrial Port, is part of the government’s plans to diversify sources of national income and promote downstream manufacturing investment opportunities in the petrochemicals sector aimed at maximising the value of the Sultanate of Oman’s natural resources. The launch event, attended by dignitaries from the government, public and private sectors, was held against the backdrop of celebrations marking the 51st National Day of the Renaissance. Eng Talal bin Hamed al Awfi, CEO of OQ Group, said: “This project adds a new dimension to the nation’s current economic development as it is one of the most important and largest undertakings in the Sultanate of Oman’s industrial sector with the potential to stimulate investments in downstream industries and small and medium enterprises in line with OQ Group’s strategy to drive sustainable development.

The opening of this project is an illustration of OQ Group keenness to harness its industrial and investment capabilities in unlocking the full potential of the petrochemicals sector and optimising the utilisation of the Sultanate of Oman’s oil and gas resources.”

The CEO of OQ affirmed the Group’s determination to move forward in enhancing the local value addition and In-Country Value (ICV) development by supporting downstream manufacturing industries associated with this project, which incorporates modern technologies to manufacture high quality polymers.

“OQ has attached the utmost importance in building the capacity of the Omani youth, and enriching their skills in the unique technical disciplines that are introduced through this project for the first time in the Sultanate



OQ has attached the utmost importance in building the capacity of the Omani youth, and enriching their skills in the unique technical disciplines that are introduced through this project for the first time in the Sultanate

ENG TALAL BIN HAMED AL AWFI
CEO, OQ Group



this project for the first time in the Sultanate,” he noted, adding that around 337 qualified young Omanis have been trained and equipped to be part of this complex. Liwa Plastic Industries Complex consists of four key components, of which the second, third and fourth components are currently in commercial operation, with the integrated commercial operation of the first completion on track to reach full production capacity by the first quarter of 2022 in line with the project delivery schedule. The In-Country Value (ICV) generated by the project during its construction phase amounted to approximately RO 578 million, which was spent on the procurement of local goods and services, as well as training and support for SMEs. The project aims to strengthen the industrial sector by producing 880,000 tonnes annually of polyethylene (the basic raw material at the heart of about 40 per cent of all types of plastics produced worldwide) and about 300,000 tonnes per year of polypropylene, which will increase the Sultanate of Oman’s production of the two polymers to 1.4 million tonnes per year, said Eng Al Awfi, adding that output from the complex totalled 474,000 tonnes by the end of October 2021.

(With inputs from ONA)

Bank Muscat offers special life insurance coverage from AXA

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat has invited its customers to take advantage of the valuable life insurance plan offered by the bank in partnership with AXA, a global leader in insurance.

The Life Protect Plus insurance plan can protect the insured family's future and offer the financial assistance required to confront life's unexpected challenges.

Customers can use Life Protect Plus to make up for lost income, secure their children's future education, care for an elderly



family member or even settle outstanding financial obligations. Customers aged 18 to 65 can

apply for the Life Protect Plus plan, which covers death from any cause, as well as permanent total disability caused by an accident or illness. Customers can pay the premiums on a single or monthly basis, using the option that best matches their requirements.

Speaking about the special benefits available, Abdullah Tamman al Maashani (pictured), DGM — Institutional Sales and Product Development, Bank Muscat, said: "Through our strong partnership with AXA Insurance, which is recognised worldwide for

its excellent products and services, the bank offers customers the perfect solution to protect their loved ones from unexpected events that can take away their financial security and lifestyle.

We are happy to offer this great coverage at very affordable and highly competitive premiums. Customers can choose the option that provides the best coverage for their unique needs and can rest assured that their loved ones will be protected against unexpected contingencies should anything unexpected happen."

SOHAR UNIVERSITY HONOURS TOP STUDENTS OF 2020/2021 BATCH



MUSCAT: Sohar University organised a ceremony honouring its outstanding students on the Vice-Chancellor's list. Professor Barry Winn, the Vice-Chancellor, awarded the certificates for the high achievers in the academic year 2020/2021. The ceremony was attended by members of the University's executive management team, deans of faculties, and Director of Admission & Registration. There were 45 students from all the programmes. This ceremony is an annual event to celebrate the outstanding students to motivate and encourage them to study hard and learn more.

ahlibank opens new branch in Al Khabourah



MUSCAT: ahlibank has opened its newest branch in the Wilayat of Al Khabourah. The opening comes in line with the bank's strategic expansion roadmap for the year which entails bringing our services and products closer to customers.

Muneer al Balushi, AGM — Head of Retail Distribution, ahlibank, said, "We are delighted to open our new branch in Al Khabourah, where we seek to provide our comprehensive suite of services for the bank's existing and potential customers. ahlibank's growing network of branches is fundamental to and complements our ongoing efforts to bring our services closer to the people both online and offline."

"Given its strategic location, the new branch will be closer to its customers in the wilayat, ensuring fast and easy access to our innovative banking solutions. We are putting in concerted efforts in the direction of meeting excellent customer service levels throughout our branch network with the support of our well-trained staff," Al Balushi added.

Hyundai expands presence of high-performance N brand models



MUSCAT: Hyundai Motor Company unveiled its high-performance philosophy and ambition for sustainable driving

fun at an event showcasing Hyundai's N Brand for the Middle East and Africa. The company showcased N Brand's high-performance philosophy and highlighted its commitment to sustainable e-performance, giving a glimpse of the future direction for motorsport initiatives and how it will serve as a basis for upcoming N models.

N Brand was born out of Hyundai's aim to create high performance vehicles that adhere to high standards of driving excellence while

ensuring fun-to-drive as they are practical.

With technology inspired by motorsports, N Brand excels at delivering driving enthusiasm based on the three pillars of N Corner Rascal, Everyday sports car, Racetrack Capability. Hyundai had recently rolled out the Veloster N, Kona N, Elantra N and Sonata N Line in Saudi Arabia. Hyundai announced its plans to introduce N Brand models in other parts of the region and expand its line up with 3 N Brand models

through 2022.

Bang Sun Jeong, Head of Hyundai Motor Company Middle East & Africa HQs, said: "We are thrilled to share the philosophy behind N Brand and our vision to be a leader in the high-performance category."

"The expansion of N Brand to the region will allow customers to experience the exhilarating feeling of the 'fun to drive' offering delivered, something which our customers are enjoying in Saudi Arabia and other markets."

NBO gives RO 290,000 in special November Al Kanz draw

MUSCAT: Giving the gift of savings, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has wrapped up its latest Al Kanz Savings Scheme draw at its headquarters in Al Athaiba, handing out a total of RO 290,000 to 63 lucky winners across the Sultanate of Oman.

This month, the popular scheme saw three Sadara customers win RO 25,000 each and four Mazaya customers win RO 10,000 each, in addition to 50 winners receiving RO 500 each in the Salary Transfer Draw, and six winners receiving RO 25,000 each in the Quarterly Draw.

The bank is now planning for its biggest event of the year, the Mega Draw, with RO 500,000 up for grabs. Tariq Atiq, Chief Retail and Digital Banking Officer at NBO, said, "2021 has been really exciting for the Al Kanz Savings Scheme and now we're coming to the end of the year, which



is a perfect opportunity for customers to start their new year's savings plan. Plus, there is still plenty of time to make sure

they're in for the chance to win in our next draw including the RO 500,000 Mega Draw. Either way, it's the perfect opportunity to start saving."

Delighting customers across the country since 1995, the Al Kanz Savings Account rewards customers every month with prizes ranging from RO 100 to RO 250,000.

Accounts are quick and easy to open and customers are automatically eligible to win by maintaining an average minimum balance of RO 100.

Every RO 100 provides an extra chance in the draw, so the more money kept in the account, the more the chance of winning. Meanwhile, customers simply have to transfer their salary to NBO to be in for the chance of winning in the Salary Transfer draw.



Majan holds graduation ceremony

MUSCAT: Majan University College, with 26 successful years in Higher Education to its credit, today graduated its 25th batch of students. This year over 880 students of the 2019-2020 academic year were conferred their awards. The ceremony, held over a span of two days with two ceremonies each day, was conducted in strict compliance with Covid-19 measures.

The Dean & CEO of Majan University College, Dr Maha Kobeil delivered her welcome address. She felicitated the students and applauded their steadfastness and courage in facing head on the challenges of the preceding year when their studies were plagued with the Covid-19 pandemic.

She urged them to remain resilient, adaptable and open to learning and most importantly embrace change. She also appreciated the relentless efforts and sacrifices made by parents and families in supporting their wards.

A c k n o w l e d g e m e n t s

and appreciation were also rendered for the support of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and Majan's main academic partner institution, the University of Bedfordshire, UK.

Similarly, via video telecast, Professor Rebecca Bunting, Vice Chancellor and CEO of the University of Bedfordshire, UK commended the students for their zeal, hardwork and dedication in spite of all odds.

She called on them to be bold, ambitious for themselves as well as to be changemakers, making positive contributions to the Nation. She also called on them to extend gratitude to their families and to the excellent support staff at Majan.

Furthermore, to the Dean and staff of Majan, Dr Bunting expressed her great respect and trust in the Majan Team, referring to the decades old partnership as still striving with new projects for collaboration and growth.

Enjoy the finest experiences with Ford Expedition



MUSCAT: Ford is offering SUV enthusiasts an opportunity to own and enjoy the finest experiences with Ford, especially with the Ford Expedition. The Ford Expedition is available with 3 years / 60,000 kms service and 1 year registration. (Conditions apply. For details visit a Ford showroom.) The offer is valid until December 30, 2021.

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to take you places as you enjoy the advantage of confidence and capability. Eye-catching design, leading-edge features, powerful performance, impressive capability and more make the Expedition a perfect companion for every journey.

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10-speed automatic transmission, the Expedition offers best-in-class fuel economy and power, with up to 400 horsepower and 650Nm torque available. The Expedition offers more driver-assist technologies than any other full-size SUV.

In addition, an all-new high-strength, aluminium-alloy body and redesigned high-strength steel

frame form the foundation for Expedition's rugged off-road and strong towing capabilities.

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FROM FRIES TO FUEL

Sultanate of Oman's transition to green fuels

SUSTAINABILITY: Wakud, located in Khazaen Economic City, has a capacity to produce 7.2 million litres of biodiesel per year.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 20

As crude oil prices surge in the Middle East, biofuels could be a strong contender for trucks, ships, buses and cars in the region, according to the promoters of the Sultanate of Oman's first biodiesel refinery.

Wakud, located in Khazaen Economic City, is set to scale up the commercial production and sale of local biodiesel. Their plant utilises locally collected cooking oil with its circular economy turning waste into biodiesel – the nation's cleanest fuel.

"Khazaen is proud to have managed to attract Wakud as the first SME and supporting them in bringing a world class biodiesel refinery in the Sultanate of Oman. This facility represents the future of sustainable fuels in the country and Wakud's biodiesel can be used by consumers and organisations as a green and environmentally friendly products produced at Khazaen Economic City," said Salim bin Sulaiman al Thuhli, Khazaen CEO.

"We are very excited to launch commercial operations and to see our Omani biodiesel be consumed within the country," said Maher al Habsi, CEO – Wakud International LLC.

"If Wakud's biodiesel replaces



even a small proportion of the diesel consumed within the Sultanate of Oman, it will have a tremendous impact on the nation's carbon emissions while also retaining economic value within the country."

Wakud's plant, is supported by Green Fuels UK, the leading providers of biodiesel technology, has a capacity to produce 7.2 million litres of biodiesel per year.

Until recently, waste cooking oil was collected for export to the GCC or Europe. Local Omani firm Modern Arabian Gulf Projects (MAGP), which has been collecting used cooking oils in the Sultanate of Oman for over 15 years and is the largest collector in the country, had signed an offtake agreement



in August 2020 to supply all of its used cooking oil output to Wakud.

Wakud has a growing local client base with new partners Oman Truck, 44.01, and Masirah International committing to sustainable power for their operations this year.

"As a marine construction company, Masirah International operates heavy construction plant which consumes a significant quantity of diesel. In an effort to reduce our consumption as well as our carbon footprint we are excited to start using the biodiesel blend.

We hope that this is the start of seeing biodiesel commonplace in construction works around the Sultanate of Oman," said Elliot Turner, Environmental Officer – Masirah International.

Biofuels are a powerful tool which can power our vehicles sustainably, helping the nation work towards decarbonisation.

The use of biodiesel can reduce carbon emissions by up to 85 per cent without changes or modifications to standard diesel engines.

In addition, Wakud's biodiesel can be used as a blend (10 -20 per cent) which results in a significant emissions reduction. Recently, a high-level official disclosed that the Sultanate of Oman has roughly 15- 20 years to achieve a transition to a greener energy alternative before anticipated natural gas shortfalls begin posing a challenge.

Maximising the availability of biofuel will help the Sultanate of Oman reach its decarbonising goals in line with the Paris agreement and Oman's Vision 2040.

Significantly, Wakud has garnered support from local organisations be'ah, Environment Authority, Sultan Qaboos University, the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit and Oman Development Bank. With more biofuel providers coming into the picture in the Middle East, there is an increase in the market share. Biodiesel is already a significant source of alternative fuel in other parts of the world, including the USA, UK and Europe.

Oil prices drop as rapid Omicron spread dims fuel demand outlook

SINGAPORE: Oil prices slumped by about 2 per cent early on Monday as surging cases of the Omicron coronavirus variant in Europe and the United States shocked investor worries that new restrictions on businesses to combat its spread may hit fuel demand.

Brent crude futures fell \$1.36, or 1.9 per cent, to \$71.38 a barrel by 0036 GMT while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures fell \$1.51, or 2.1 per cent, to \$68.33 a barrel.

"Today's Asia ... weak sentiment in oil prices seems to go in line with a weakness seen in the S&P 500 and Nasdaq 100 e-mini futures," said Kelvin Wong, market analyst at CMC Markets. "(This is) due to fears of impending restrictions on economic activities to contain the current increasing spread of the Covid-19 Omicron variant worldwide which may increase the risk of demand slowdown."

The Netherlands went into lockdown on Sunday and the possibility of more Covid-19 restrictions being imposed ahead of the Christmas and New Year holidays loomed over several European countries.

In the United States, White House medical adviser Dr Anthony Fauci urged people travelling to visit loved ones to get booster shots and always wear masks in crowded public spaces.

Meanwhile, US energy firms this week added oil and natural gas rigs for a second week in a row.

The oil and gas rig count, an early indicator of future output, rose by three to 579 in the week to Dec 17, its highest since April 2020, energy services firm Baker Hughes Co said in its closely followed report on Friday.

Still, lower exports are expected from Russia with exports and transit of oil from the country planned at 56.05 million tonnes in the first quarter of 2022 versus 58.3 million tonnes in the fourth quarter of 2021. — **Reuters**



A pump jack operates at an oil field in Midland, Texas. — **Reuters**

Tender soon for new Central Vegetable Market in Khazaen



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 20

Khazaen Fruit and Vegetable Central Market has announced the completion of the preparation

of the detailed design for Khazaen Fruit and Vegetable Central Market, and a tender has been issued for the implementation and construction work for specialised companies in this field.

Construction work on the project is expected to commence during the first quarter of 2022.

The establishment of Khazaen Fruit and Vegetable Central Market comes as a part of the

Sultanate's efforts to support the food sector and cold storage chains, in line with the national strategy for food security and growth in the marketing sector of fruits and vegetables.

The new Fruit and Vegetable Market consists of multi- major facilities and logistics services, such as the cold storage facilities, main sales hall, truck sales area, vegetable sorting and packing workshops, local agricultural products reception building, onion and potato sheds, customs inspection and plant quarantine area, administration offices and the companies working in the market, forklift operation station, agriculture samples examination laboratory and other necessary facilities and services for the Fruit

and Vegetable Market operations.

In May 2021, Khazaen Fruit and Vegetable Central Market signed an agreement with Muscat Municipality for the transfer of the fruits and vegetables storage and wholesale activities from Al Mawaleh area to Khazaen Economic City.

The relocation of Al Mawaleh's current fruit and vegetable storage and wholesale activities is intended improve urban planning in Muscat Governorate and allow the current market's site to be developed for retail trading activities. A transitioning plan will be drawn up to reallocate all the fruit and vegetable wholesale related companies from Al Mawaleh to the new market in Khazaen Economic City.

Oman Cement invites bids for major capacity expansion

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 20

Oman Cement, a publicly listed cement manufacturer, says it has invited a number of engineering contractors to bid for its contract to expand the capacity of its Rusayl-based plant.

Oman Cement CEO Eng Salim al Hajri said in a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA) on Monday that the expansion

includes the construction of a new production line (Line 4) with a capacity of 10,000 tonnes per day of cement.

Additionally, the existing Line 3 production facility is proposed to be upgraded to a capacity of 5,000 tonnes per day of cement, up from the present 4,000 tonnes per day capacity.

Last month, the CEO explained that the capacity increase is designed to meet domestic cement



demand growth, reduce import dependence, and also add value to local resources.

Over the last 10 years, majority state-owned Oman Cement produced a total of 22 million tonnes of cement, which have contributed to the country's urban development as well as the implementation of major infrastructure projects, said the CEO.

Over this year, the company

has also maintained profits year on year, aggregating to RO 130 million over this period — a sum that translated into attractive dividends for the government and other shareholders, he said.

The government's 51 per cent stake in Oman Cement, the country's first cement manufacturer, is held by Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the integrated sovereign wealth fund of the Sultanate of Oman.

KKR sends strong buy signal on European telecom

KKR just can't stop shopping for European telecom deals. The US private equity giant's latest bauble is just under half of a 52,000-kilometre fibre-optic cable network owned by Spanish power grid operator Red Elctrica.

It has already bought Spain's Masmovil, made overtures to Dutch operator KPN and is tilting at 33 billion euro Telecom Italia. For public investors in the unloved sector, the message should be loud and clear.

Thursday's deal shines more light on the value-hunting thinking of KKR and others like Patrick Drahi, the tycoon who this week upped his stake in Britain's BT to 18 per cent. KKR already owns 37.5

per cent of FiberCop, the so-called "last-mile" of Telecom Italia's broadband network that connects exchanges to people's homes. Its Spanish acquisition, which operates cables running alongside railway and power lines, is more akin to the network's backbone.

REE's infrastructure doesn't require the painful and expensive process of digging up roads. That's reflected in the valuation. KKR is paying 971 million euros for 49 per cent of the business, implying a whopping 22 times EBITDA for an asset it will not control.

Drahi sold all of a similar asset in neighbouring Portugal in 2019 at a 20 times multiple. By contrast most "last-mile" operations still require hefty investment to replace copper wires with fibre-optic cables. BT, for example, is ploughing 15 billion pounds into upgrading its Openreach network. Even so, KKR's dealmaking suggests a valuation disconnect.

The private equity firm's investment in FiberCop was struck at a multiple of less than 9 times EBITDA. The unit's parent company, Telecom Italia, trades on less than 5 times. BT potentially faces a similar mismatch. If valued on the same EBITDA multiple as FiberCop, Openreach would be worth 26 billion pounds, equivalent to more than three-quarters of the UK company's overall enterprise value.

Apply a Spanish-style valuation to its broadband backbone, and the value of BT's parts exceeds the current total. One explanation is that public investors, which rely on regular dividend payments, are nervous about telecoms operators' massive capex requirements. The prospect of government intervention may also be weighing on valuations. But when an investor like KKR sends such a strong message, markets should be paying more attention. — Reuters

REE's infrastructure doesn't require the painful and expensive process of digging up roads



ORGANIC LOADER

A front loader transports organic waste in the Elephant Vert factory in the "Agropolis" industrial zone in Morocco's northern city of Meknes. Recycling in Morocco may be in its infancy, but the North African kingdom is making steady progress, helped by a Swiss firm that specialises in processing organic waste.

— AFP

Imagining a global digital order



JOSH ENTSMINGER

The writer is a PhD student in innovation and public policy at the UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose

THE QUESTION, OF COURSE, IS WHAT KIND OF ALTERNATIVE DIGITAL ORDER IS POSSIBLE IN TODAY'S WORLD

Although the digital revolution is now decades old, there still is no global digital economic order. Instead, there are competing visions of digital capitalism, predominantly articulated by the United States, China, and the European Union, which have been developing their models for many years and are increasingly exporting them to developing and emerging economies.

Absent more global alignment, the world could miss out on promising technological solutions to shared problems.

The question, of course, is what kind of alternative digital order is possible in today's world. How can the Internet be reclaimed to serve citizens, rather than dominant political and economic interests? Realigning the incentives that drive the digital economy will not be easy.

Still, recent policymaking efforts reflect demand for new forms of governance.

The OECD, for example, is leading an effort to tackle international tax arbitrage — a favoured practice among US Big Tech firms. At the same time, US President Joe Biden has appointed industry critics to lead key institutions such as the Federal Trade Commission, and he has directed regulators to investigate the problem of undue platform power in digital markets.

And the European Union, building on its landmark General Data Protection Regulation, has advanced a more expansive ethics-led vision for governing data, digital

markets, and artificial intelligence.

Moreover, countries such as Spain and Germany are now targeting the data-extraction business model directly.

Regulators and governing authorities around the world are considering how to redefine their AI and data agendas, foster the next generation of digital players, and shape global standards to fit their own respective visions. But if each of these jurisdictions' main goal is to rein in overpowered digital platforms, there may be common ground upon which to build a more effective global digital order.

EU and US digital authorities certainly don't agree on everything. But they do share a vision of a more open and collaborative digital order. If they are going to align effectively behind this overarching goal, they need to understand what they are up against. Divergent visions for the foundational structure of the global Internet have already put down deep roots.

In the emerging "splinternet," informational isolation is on the rise. People within different silos have fundamentally different views about facts and thus what constitutes truth. There is not even agreement on how to secure and coordinate key features of the digital architecture, such as GPS.

The digital order that has emerged in the absence of global coordination raises two critical concerns. The first is the digital side of major global challenges like climate change and pandemics, which

exist independently of liberal or illiberal governments. Just as the effects of climate change will be experienced unevenly, the technologies needed for climate adaptation and mitigation — or for epidemic surveillance — will be unequally distributed.

The second issue is the incompatibility of competing visions for future digital economies. Many developing and emerging economies are still deciding how to expand and govern their digital capabilities so that new technologies serve their broader strategies to achieve sustained economic growth.

These two concerns need to be addressed together. If measures to improve access to technology do not account for different local and national growth strategies, they may entrench an undesirable digital economic future, even if they promise progress against other issues such a climate change.

Addressing these concerns together bears directly on the pursuit of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Whether it comes to public health, education, or climate change, seeking global alignment ought to rank higher on any country's agenda than securing narrow geopolitical gains.

But, of course, realists must acknowledge that the current competition between models for data control, hardware design, and platform governance will loom large in any multilateral negotiation on these issues.

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Burying the laissez-faire zombie



LUIGI ZINGALES

The author, a Professor of Finance at the University of Chicago, is Co-Host of the podcast Capitalisn't

The return of the state is a phrase seemingly on almost everyone's lips nowadays. Given the global challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and climate change, the argument goes, it is governments, not markets, that should be responsible for allocating resources. The neoliberal revolution started by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher has apparently run its course. New Deal-style state intervention is back.

But this opposition of state and market is misleading, and it poses a major obstacle to understanding and addressing today's policy challenges.

The dichotomy emerged in the nineteenth century, when arcane

government rules, rooted in a feudal past, were the main obstacle to the creation of competitive markets.

The battle cry of this quite legitimate struggle was later raised to the principle of laissez-faire, ignoring the fact that markets are themselves institutions whose efficient functioning depends on rules.

The question is not whether there should be rules, but rather who should set them, and in whose interest.

In the twenty-first century, this state-market contrast is obsolete. State intervention can promote markets. The portability of mobile-phone numbers that most developed countries have introduced

has spurred competition among cellular providers. US Federal Aviation Administration safety regulations persuade passengers to trust new airlines, thereby encouraging new entrants and competition in the sector.

Not only did Operation Warp Speed accelerate the development of a Covid-19 vaccine, but it also promoted more competition among vaccine producers.

But while some rules foster competitive markets, many others interfere with them.

In some cases, like the restrictions on the resale of N95 face masks at the start of the pandemic, the interference is justified on the basis of higher principles. In many others, such

as limits on the number of places in medical schools, interference simply reflects the influence of vested interests trying to distort the market.

The main divide, therefore, is not between the state and markets, but between procompetitive and anticompetitive rules.

And within the universe of anticompetitive rules, the key distinction is between those that are justified by a higher principle and those that are not.

Today, however, this association no longer necessarily holds. In a world of digital monopolies, laissez-faire enables disproportionate power to be concentrated in a few hands. This fuels oppression, not individual liberty.

Is one company's ability to

edit the news for three billion people an indicator of freedom? Conversely, is state regulation that protects our privacy from constant surveillance a tool of repression?

Another crucial trade-off, therefore, is not between state oppression and market freedom, but between the oppression resulting from the existence of monopolies (whether private or state-controlled) and the freedom to choose offered by competitive markets.

In sum, we should strive to achieve a better state and better markets, and to contain each within its respective spheres. And yet the facile state-versus-market narrative lives on, because it greatly benefits vested interests

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IN accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **Tasheelat Al Khaleej Trading Co.**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No 4059492, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from RO 60,000.000 to 10,000.000. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

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features



Collecting antiques to relive the beauty of the past

His hobby for collecting old things started when he was still a child and as he grew older, that passion for antiques became an obsession. Today, photographer Saeed al Wahaibi is using his collection and photography to bring to life some of the Omanis' most celebrated moments... **P20**

ENTERTAINMENT

READ



DAUGHTER OF THE DEEP
BY RICK RIORDAN

Ana Dakkar faces the weekend trials at the Harding-Pencroft Academy.

'Avatar' director James Cameron's inspirations laid bare in art book

MOVIE DIRECTOR JAMES Cameron has created some of the most striking images on screen, from the sinking of the ocean liner in "Titanic" to Sigourney Weaver battling with an extraterrestrial creature in "Aliens."

The original concepts and characters stem from his early days as a young artist in Canada, as revealed in the book "Tech Noir: The Art of James Cameron," which shows how his early ideas evolved into films.

Researchers collected

Cameron's sketches and paintings as a young man and compiled them into thematic chapters. When Cameron first read the book, he was astounded.

"I think those strong thematic threads were the surprise or the revelation to me, because I'd just always thought it was all scatter-shot," he said.

Cameron began drawing as a child, and as a young man he focused on scenes based on his



favourite sci-fi stories and comic books.

One of his first forays into movies was creating the fantasy world of "Xenogenesis," a film that never saw the light of day but a pilot can be seen on YouTube.

The book shows pages of concept art from the unproduced film with much of the imagery foreshadowing scenes from "Terminator,"

"Aliens" and "Avatar."

"Every idea I ever had for a plant or an animal or a planet or a piece of technology or a robot or anything, I just stopped my life for a year and a half and drew it all up. It's really all the things I was playing around with, kind of in the sidelines of my life,"



Cameron said.

"The Terminator" was based on a dream in which he saw a robotic man emerging from flames; an entire sequence in "Aliens" was based on a nightmare; and the blue Na'vi humanoids from "Avatar" originated from a dream his mother told him about.

Cameron ground his fantasy designs in reality, creating anatomically correct aliens, fully operative machinery and aerodynamic spacecraft.

"There's a sense that what's happening is very real and very immediate. You can kind of project your mind into the screen and into the story because... what's happening looks like it could be real," he said.

"Tech Noir: The Art of James Cameron," published by Insight Editions, is available in bookstores now. — Reuters



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AROUND THE WORLD

FASHION

Dakar Fashion Week returns to baobab forest to promote 'inclusive' fashion



AT THE FOOT OF a towering baobab tree outside Senegal's capital Dakar on Saturday, cameras flashed in the waning dusklight as 20-year old Najeebah Samuel strode down the catwalk to zealous applause.

Born with cerebral palsy, Samuel, 20, was the first of two dozen models of all shapes and sizes to take the runway at Dakar's 19th annual Fashion Week event, held at the week-end with the dual themes of inclusiveness and sustainability.

"I want to prove to other disabled kids that you're not your disability — you're just you," Samuel said, wearing an orange and blue dress by Fashion Week founder Adama Ndiaye. "You have to come out and show people who you are."

Featuring designers from across Africa, the Dakar Fashion Week is one of the continent's longest-running fashion exhibitions.

Forced outdoors to abide by Covid-19 restrictions last year, the organisers of this edition chose to return to the baobab forest to remind attendees of the fashion world's responsibility to operate in a sustainable way. Textile production generates 1.2 billion tonnes of carbon emissions annually, and if current rates continue, the industry could account for more than a quarter of global emissions by 2050, according to a 2015 study from the Ellen MacArthur Foundation.

Known by her brand name Adama Paris, Ndiaye, who also created the first Black Fashion Week show in the French capital, routinely attaches progressive themes to Senegal's marquee fashion event.

She sets high minimum quotas for female designers and once banned models using skin depigmentation cream to promote self-acceptance. She chose inclusiveness as one of this year's themes to contrast the often rigid beauty standards of Western fashion.

"I don't want to live with fashion as the European diktat tells us to," Ndiaye said. "I want women who represent so many different things, more than just bodies." — **Reuters**

LIFESTYLE

'Cyborg' artist who 'hears' colour turns to time travel

FOR NEIL HARBISSEON, a self-described "cyborg" artist living near Barcelona, colour is quite literally music to his ears thanks to an antenna he designed to overcome colour blindness.

Well-known in Spain and with an international following that enabled him to meet the likes of Leonardo di Caprio and Tom Cruise, Harbisson is now testing out a new device designed to feel physically the passing of time.

Where once the term cyborg conjured up images of Arnold Schwarzenegger's Terminator, technology today is expanding human capacities through prostheses and implants.

Born in Northern Ireland with achromatopsia, a rare condition meaning he can only see in greyscale, Harbisson moved to Barcelona as a child and grew up obsessed with colour and things he couldn't sense.

It was an obsession that saw the now 39-year-old Briton eventually go under the surgeon's knife to transform his identity and his life.

While at music college in England, he developed the slim metal rod that arches over his head and vibrates according to colours it detects.

At first glance it looks like wearable technology, but it's as much a part of his body as his nose or his ears, giving him the ability to "hear" the colour his eyes cannot see.

"Being a cyborg means technology is part of your identity," he tells AFP.

"It allows me to sense colours from infra-red to ultra-violet through vibrations in my head that then become sound, so I can actually hear colour."

EUREKA MOMENT

In 2004, he managed to persuade a surgeon — who remains anonymous — to drill it into his skull, the technology becoming part of his body as the bone grew around it.

The sensor picks up the frequency of colours and translates them into sounds that he perceives through bone conduction.

Humans normally hear using air conduction with sound waves passing through the outer and middle ears and causing the inner eardrum to vibrate.

But with bone conduction, the vibrations are transmitted through the skull or jawbone directly to the inner ear.

The colour-sound association also means he senses colours when listening to music or even speeches, with every syllable having a frequency that relates to colour.

"At the beginning, everything was chaotic because the antenna was not telling me: blue, yellow, pink, it was giving me vibrations and I had no idea what colour I had in front of me," Harbisson said.

"But after some time, my brain got used to it and it slowly became part of my perception and became normal," he added.

Although it cannot be switched off, Harbisson's antenna falls silent in darkness. His "eureka moment" came after dreaming "in colour" and realising the colours "had been created by my brain and not by the chip".

Although he may be the first person to "hear" colour frequencies as notes, bone conduction helped Beethoven as he started

going deaf. The German composer realised he could still hear by resting a wooden stick on the piano while biting the other end as he played.

Some 200 years later, bone-anchored hearing aids work in the same way via a metal implant inserted into the skull.

STRETCH TIME

In the home where Harbisson grew up and where his mother still lives, a riot of coloured canvases line the walls, the staircase lined with curious-looking "facial scores" of celebrities like di Caprio and Cruise.

These Hollywood stars let Harbisson detect the "sound" of their skin tone and lip colour, which are rendered in enigmatic charcoal lines.

But Harbisson is now turning his attention to a new project.

He's created a device shaped like a chunky metal collar, designed to sense the passing of time, and is kicking off a year-long trial to see how it works.

"There's a point of heat that takes 24 hours to go around my neck and allows you to feel the rotation of the planet," he said.

"Once the brain gets used to it, you can use an app to make subtle changes to the speed of the point of heat which should alter your perception of time," he added.

"You could potentially stretch time or make it feel like time is going faster."

For now, it's a permanent wearable rather than an implant. A previous incarnation had to be scrapped because he was "getting burnt" at 6:00 pm.

"This is an art that does carry some kind of risk but it's an unknown risk because we don't have much history of bodies and technology being merged," he said. — **AFP**



A WINDOW INTO CONTEMPORARY OMANI LITERATURE



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0 mountains of Oman

The following are translations of poems by the Omani poet Hilal al Hajri (1968-) from his first collection titled: "Night Is Mine", (Muscat: 2006):

GLORY TO MUSIC

Glory to music!
Whenever a stranger
or drunkard cries
Glory to music
Whenever a poet or
lover groans
I often see myself in
cafes
With gloomy clouds
and poignant music.

There
In the café corner
Peeking at me a pseudo-cultured damsel
Behind her huge
glasses.
I hate arty women
As I hate critics and
marks.
Yet whenever a breast
trembles
Or a knee bends
Saliva startles me
between my lips
Like children and the
aged.

Where are these
round poems taking
me
And those old fashioned sorrows?
I'm the deposed king
The armless poet
I often see myself in
cafes
With gloomy clouds or
poignant music.

LEAVE I SHALL NOT

Burn like an inferno
O earth!
I shall but embrace
history more
And kiss the regiments of the first conquest!

O mountains of Oman
Till when will you crucify
This paleness on my
forehead?

O desert of Oman
Till when will you fill

my pockets with sand
And cast agony
In my eyes?

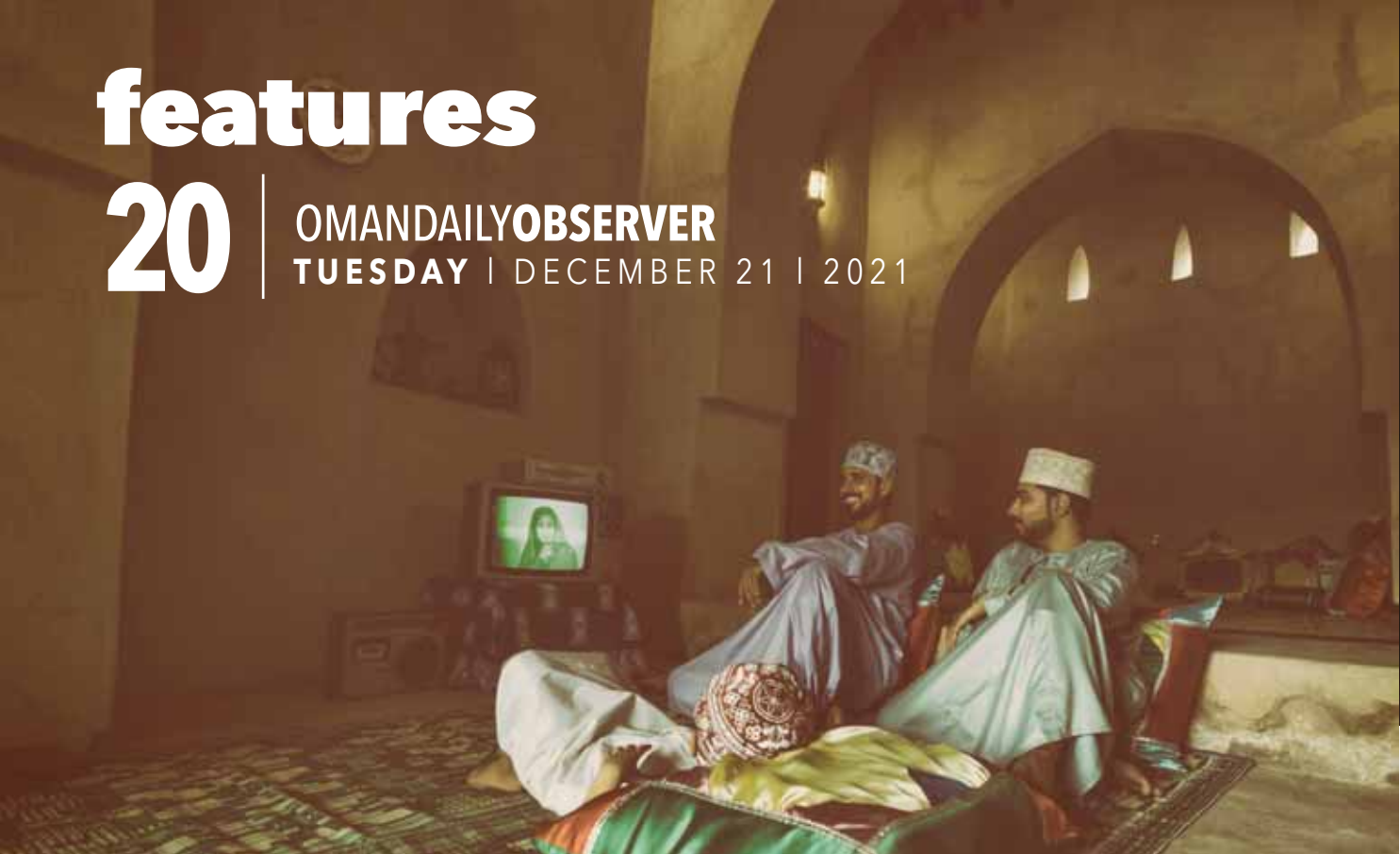
Will you force me to
leave?
No
Leave I shall not!
More melancholy, O
Mother,
I will not leave till
My bones flow upon
your mountains
One after another!

INNOCENCE

From the journey's
first moment
I used to imagine
With child-like innocence
That planes' bath-rooms
Were open to the
world!
O travelers
Is there a moment
More delicious and
delectable
Than ... upon this
chaos
From a height of 40,
000 feet?!

MUSCAT'S NIGHT

Nothing remains from
this night
Nothing.
But dogs barking and
wringing
From hunger or pain
A monk warning
about Doomsday
A drunkard vomiting
in a toilet
Beds
Creaking from lust
And the rest of it
A tiny moon in the sky
And a poet on earth
Everyone betting on
the choking of
The other.



Collecting antiques to relive the beauty of the past

BY RUQAYA AL KINDI

Collecting antiques is a global trend that doesn't show fatigue even today. In fact, the majority of antiques continue to rake in big bucks in auctions held all over the world. These timeless pieces are not only loved because of their current value but also because of their historical importance becoming a symbolic door to the past.

While some collect antique pieces as a hobby, others consider it as an investment as trends show that classical pieces become more valuable as time passes by.

For local collector Saeed al Wahaibi who started collecting unique pieces from the 1970s to early 2000s, his hobby has grown to become an 'obsession' that even in his career as a photographer, he has dedicated his style to evoke the nostalgia of the past.

"My hobby started early, back when I was just a child. I collect a variety of things from household items, to children's toys to other more historically important documents," he said.

"That collection now includes games, school books, televisions, pictures of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos (may God rest his soul), postage stamps, public telephone cards, old perfume boxes, old wall clocks, some household items such as old plates and cups, cassette tapes, electronic games, video equipment, old coins and banknotes," he added.

That passion for things of the past transcended physical objects and has split towards his photography.

Starting in 2016, he said that the way he compose his photo is reflective of his love for antiques. "This step helped me to create my own colour in photography so that the people can easily distinguish my photos," he said.

Saeed wants to convey a message through his pictures that the Sultanate of Oman's past is very beautiful and full of joyful memories, and therefore he tried as much as he could to revive many old scenes again through pictures, such as national holidays, renaissance day, students' return to schools, the joy of Eid and the daily life of Omanis.

"I heard my family tell stories of these things they use to do in the past. I am attached to these memories, longing even that I've become invested to the idea of recreating them. Omani ideas do not end, and beautiful events do not end, and the media has not always been present to extensively document things that mattered. I love reliving the good things of the past and the best way to revive the beautiful good old days is to recreate them," he said.

Saeed's lens documented the "Amber" game, and as he pointed out, it is one of the old games that young people used to play in the afternoon, and it consisted of assembling some metal cans and throwing them with a small ball.

Saeed also documented the "Qarangasho" event, which is celebrat-

ed in the middle of the Ramadhan where children especially enjoy a lot of sweets and presents.

Saeed did not forget to document "Al Habta", a popular market that takes place before Eid, where people of different ages visit it to buy some games and Eid supplies. Valuing his friends and how time is changing everyone, Saeed also includes in his documentations the memories he shared with his friends as they gather every afternoon in front of shops while showing off their beautiful cars.

The old school uniform is distinctly different from the modern one, so Saeed's lens introduces us to that style, its colours, and its beauty.

He keeps countless old tools and uses them in his photography to simulate the past.

"I've collected quite a bunch of things from the past. Some were handed down by friends, some I exchanged and some were gifted by my social media followers. My goal is to make a museum where I can house all of them and make that place accessible to filming local series and for visitors to visit," he said.

To get the vibe that he wanted for his photography, Saeed usually scouts different locations that would fit the narrative he wanted.

"I make a great effort to search for sites, organise them and prepare them for filming, and I am very lucky with my followers who always suggest suitable places. I now have two houses in Al Batinah and Muscat that I use as my studio," he shared.

The fun part about what he does is that he is always supported by friends and a team always helps him execute his vision.

"Not surprising, there is actually a community in the Sultanate of Oman that is interested in what I do. The response and positive reinforcement I get helps boost my confidence to continue what I am doing," he said.

To check on what he is working on next and for daily updates, you can follow Saeed on Twitter and Instagram: @s33d_w.