

His Majesty greets President of Bosnia and Herzegovina

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Milorad Dodik, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Dodik and the friendly people of his country. – ONA



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MUSCAT

HM THANKED BY SAUDI, CHINA, CUBA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of Saudi Arabia, in reply to His Majesty's condolences cable on the death of Princess Dana bint Abdullah bin Turki bin Abdulaziz al Saud. In the cable, King Salman expressed his thanks and appreciation for His Majesty the Sultan's sincere condolences and sympathy, praying to the Almighty Allah to protect His Majesty against all harms. His Majesty has also received a cable of thanks from President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China, in reply to His Majesty's greetings cable on the occasion of the Chinese New Year. His Majesty has received a cable of thanks from President Miguel Diaz-Canel of the Council of State and Council of Ministers in the Republic of Cuba, in reply to His Majesty's greetings cable on his country's National Day. — ONA

Sultanate seeks Mideast peace



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Minister of Foreign Affairs, on Monday made a phone call Dr Riyad al Maliki, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates in the State of Palestine, and another call with Gabi Ashkenazi, Israeli Foreign Minister. During the two calls, he affirmed the Omani positions in support of achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East through direct negotiations and a two-state solution for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. — ONA

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HM SENDS MESSAGE TO UAE VICE PRESIDENT



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Ruler of Dubai. The message deals with bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries. The message was handed over by Dr Sayyid Ahmed bin Hilal al Busaidy, Sultanate's Ambassador to the UAE, when Shaikh Mohammed received him in Dubai on Monday. During the meeting, the ambassador conveyed greetings of His Majesty the Sultan to Shaikh Mohammed along with His Majesty's best wishes of permanent health and happiness to him and the brotherly UAE people further progress and prosperity. – ONA

Ahli Sidab lift 12th HM Cup hockey title



Ahli Sidab outclassed a disjointed Bausher 3-0 in the final of the 50th edition of the HM Cup Hockey Championship at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Monday.

With the well-deserved victory, Sidab clinched their 12th His Majesty's Cup title and went one up over their 2020 performance, which saw them suffer a disappointing final defeat to Al Nasr in the 49th edition.

HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said,

Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, graced the occasion of the grand final as the chief guest. Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Abdullah bin Nassir al Harrasi, Minister of Information, presided over the post-match presentation ceremony in the presence of Rashad bin Ahmed al Hinai, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and youth, and Oman Hockey Association (OHA) Chairman Talib al Wahaibi. **DETAILS ON P10**

Meteorite 'Sayh al Uhaymir 008' returns to Mars from Oman

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 1

In a major scientific development, the meteorite 'Sayh al Uhaymir 008', which was found in the Wilayat of Haima of Al Wusta Governorate, in 1999, is now sent to its original home, Mars, through a Nasa trip to Mars.

This Omani meteorite is the

first rock sent back by humans to its motherland Mars. There was no precedence of such scientific development in the world.

This effort is aimed at learning the history of the solar system and its components during various eras since the birth of the sun and the planets around it. There are proofs that the rocks have evidence of geological



structure of Mars. The meteorite 'Sayh al Uhaymir 008' weighs more than 8 kilograms.

It was formed about 450 million years ago due to a cosmic development resulting from the collision of an asteroid or comet with the planet Mars, parts of it flying into space before it fell on the territory of Oman. **TURN TO P2**

COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES TO

CLOSE

FROM 8 PM TO 5 AM

MUSCAT: The Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic held a meeting on Monday under the chairmanship of Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, to follow up updates on the pandemic, measures for protection against the virus and ways to curb its spread and alleviate its impacts. The Supreme Committee reviewed the international Covid-19 epidemiological scenario marked by a steep surge in number of infections and deaths due to the prevalence of new, mutated variants of the virus.

On the domestic front, data analysis shows a rise in number of patients admitted to hospitals and death cases in all parts of the Sultanate. In some of the governorates, a surge beyond the red mark was registered, with an alarming swell linked to travel cases amid the global propagation of the disease and the lack of information about the situation in departure countries.

Data also indicates lab-confirmed infection cases

Vaccines for new target groups

The Ministry of Health on Monday began expanding the scope of immunisation of target segments, using approved vaccines Pfizer-BioNTech and Oxford-AstraZeneca, as part of the National Immunisation Campaign against coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. The campaign covers people aged 60 and above in all governorates of the Sultanate, irrespective of whether or not the individuals were healthy, as well as patients suffering from chronic diseases and health workers. – ONA

linked to international mutated strains (among them the South Africa variant) that caused a local spillover and the emergence of hotbeds in the Sultanate's governorates.

To protect the society and individuals from the spread of this disease — particularly due to the rapid spread of infection nowadays, the committee has decided to close all commercial activities in all the governorates between 8 pm and 5 am from Thursday (March 4) to Saturday (March 20). **TURN TO P2**

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 27°C Min 18°C SALALAH: Max 29°C Min 21°C NIZWA: Max 32°C Min 19°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 06:28 FAJR: 05:13 DHUHR: 12:24 ASR: 15:45 MAGHRIB: 18:15 ISHA: 19:25



The Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic held a meeting on Monday under the chairmanship of Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, to follow up updates on the pandemic, measures for protection against the virus and ways to curb its spread and alleviate its impacts.

COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES TO CLOSE FROM 8 PM TO 5 AM

FROM PAGE 1

The closure covers all restaurants, cafes and cafeterias inside tourism installations, in addition to home delivery services. The ban exempts fuel filling stations, health establishments and private pharmacies.

Within the context of Education Ministry's application of the Blended Learning System, the Supreme Committee approved the continuation of online learning in government schools from Sunday (March 7) to Thursday (March 11). During this period, an assessment will be made in light of epidemiological updates in the Sultanate.

The Supreme Committee lays emphasis on the seriousness of this stage at a time the disease keeps gaining new grounds at the local and international arenas.

The committee urges all members of the public to take maximum precautions and protect their families and communities, with special attention to be accorded to the elderly, children and people suffering chronic diseases.

The committee calls upon all to avoid gatherings, noting that assembling proved to be scientifically associated with infection cases in societies on large scale.

In its statement, the committee prayed to the Almighty Allah to protect all people against all harm. — ONA

Access to tourist sites gets limited

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

While the pandemic continues, measures have been taken on gathering and spots that have been popular tourist sites. However, some of these sites are also residential areas and villages as in the case of Wakan. Wakan attracts visitors in all seasons especially during this time of the year.

An old picture of the poster on the Wakan Tourism Site board has been circulating on social media. The poster states in implementation of the decisions of the Supreme Committee in charge of examining the mechanism for dealing with developments resulting from the spread of coronavirus (Covid-19), it is strictly forbidden to enter Wakan village, except for its residents.

Tourism officials, however, pointed out that as of now it is all right to visit Wakan but not stay or camp there.

"About two weeks ago there were too many visitors to Wakan and we had to control the number of people going up to Wakan



as per the Supreme Committee decisions. As of now people can still go up to Wakan but if the crowd gets over the limit we will have to restrict entry again," said Sultan Saif al Hinai, Tourism Promotion Department, Rustaq.

Wakan has always been a destination hard to resist especially during the period of apricot blossoms the season this year ended a few weeks back. The plants have already shed the flowers according to visitors who

had just been to Wakan. The main cultivation in this popular village is apricot, grapes and fig.

Abdullah Rashdi, an ardent explorer of natural sites in Oman, said, "With beaches closed the next urge was to go out to natural springs of Oman. But when we reached Nakhal, patrol officers told us that only residents are allowed in the water. It is understandable because of the overcrowding."

Meanwhile, Major Mohammed

al Hashami of Royal Oman Police clarified that camping is strictly not allowed while it is OK to visit places along with family members who live together.

"Any group consisting of more than five members who are not related will be considered a gathering," said Major al Hashami.

Masirah Island is popular with ornithologists, photographers and campers in general, but with lock down on beaches the island destination is also narrowing down the option for nature enthusiasts. While one can go to Masirah, gathering and camping are not allowed. Camping in Rimal Al Sharqiya is also not permitted according to the tourism officials.

After the Supreme Committee announcement on the closedown of commercial activities (8pm to 5am) from March 4 till March 20, heavy traffic was experienced in Muscat. When enquired about people's movement Major al Hashami said while the commercial activities will be closed there can be movement. Walking is allowed but not at the beaches. Camping is not allowed.

Sultanate participates in Arab League session

CAIRO: The Sultanate took part in the 155th session of the Council of the Arab League at the level of the permanent representatives which began on Monday in preparation for the ministerial meeting scheduled to be held on Wednesday at the Arab League headquarters under the presidency of Qatar.

The Sultanate's delegation is headed by Abdullah bin Nassir al Rahbi, Sultanate's Ambassador to Egypt and Permanent Representative to the Arab League.

The permanent representatives are discussing draft resolutions and several topics that will be presented to the Arab foreign ministers related to supporting joint Arab action as well as the Arab causes and crises the most prominent of which is the Palestinian cause and the developments in Libya, Syria, Yemen and the external interference in the internal affairs of the Arab countries.

Al Rahbi described the session as 'significant' due to its role in supporting joint Arab action



particularly amid the current regional and international developments. He affirmed that the Sultanate under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, will continue its approach in supporting joint Arab action.

In a statement of ONA, Al Rahbi confirmed the Sultanate's support to the Arab League to achieve its objectives and work towards the Arab solidarity that serves the aspirations of the Arab countries. He added: "His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has affirmed that he will continue to support the Arab League in the address he delivered upon accession on January 11 last year." — ONA

Over 320 stranded Lankan expatriates return home

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 1

A group of 320 stranded Sri Lankan migrant workers returned home from Muscat on February 25, the island nation's embassy in the Sultanate said on Monday.

The repatriation was carried out by the Sri Lanka Embassy in Oman in collaboration with the Presidential Secretariat, Foreign Ministry of Sri Lanka, and Srilankan Airline.

The returnees included 81 stranded Sri Lankan migrant workers who had overstayed their visas in Oman.

The number of Sri Lankan expatriates in Oman increased by 4.3 per cent from 19,658 at the end of December 2020 to 20,498. At the same time, the

number of Sri Lankan nationals dropped by 8.9 per cent in January on a year-to-year basis.

The Ministry of Labour in Oman announced a grace period, until March 31, 2021, during which expatriate workers who wish to leave the country on exit would be exempted from fees and fines.

The decision was aimed at regulating the labour market and facilitating the departure of expatriate workers in the implementation of the decisions of the supreme Committee formed in Oman to tackle the developments resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The ministry has urged all those wishing to leave the Sultanate to take advantage of the grace period.

Meteorite returns to Mars from Oman

FROM PAGE 1

Nasa through its Arabic language account "@Arabic_Nasa" tweeted that after a detailed chemical examination in the "Max Planck" laboratory of Germany, the researchers found evidence that the origin of the meteorite rock Sayh al Uhaymir 008 was Mars and not Earth. Therefore, the option was to carry it to Mars to be used as a calibration target. It also said that the meteorite found in the Sultanate was preserved in the Natural History Museum of London, which includes interesting and diverse meteorites from different countries around the world. The number of Martian meteorites found on our mother Earth was around 424 only. It indicates that the meteorite Sayh al Uhaymir 008 was a rare meteorite of the world. Nasa's same account further added that the evidence indicated that the rocks had the evidence of the geological com-



position of Mars.

The meteorite Sayh al Uhaymir 008 bore the symbol SaU008 as the first rock which humans returned to its motherland.

Using the same account, Nasa said that the returning of the meteorite to Mars was not planned by geologists in 1999. Instead, when the work started to develop Mars Ranger 'Perseverance', scientists suggested using a Martian meteorite found on Earth should be in the ranger. The idea was that this Omani Martian meteorite will help in processing the images captured by the ranger into their true colours and textures, without being affected by any natural con-

ditions.

It was also decided that the Martian meteorite would act directly as a calibration target instead of a piece of metal or coloured pieces with specific colours used for the purpose, as usual, it said.

The Nasa account noted that meteorites were not considered financial wealth as being propagated. Rather, it has scientific importance. It can help scientists and researchers in a deep understanding of the characteristics of the solar system and how it was created.

SOLAR SYSTEM

The study of meteorites is

aimed at learning the history of the solar system and its components during various eras, from the birth of the sun and the planets around it to the present day.

Nasa also tweeted in Arabic that these rocks could open new scientific horizons. They would have evidence of the geological and biological compositions of Mars which would inevitably provide explanations about the belief that previously there were living organisms on the Red Planet.

Malik bin Mohammad al Dohani, a member of the Board of Directors of the Oman Astronomical Society, said that meteorites were of great scientific importance.

They must be taken care of and studied in local universities by researchers and experts to contribute to international scientific efforts for understanding and learning about the origin and history of the solar system.



Oman, Tunisia discuss ties

MUSCAT: General Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office on Monday Azzedine el-Tayse, Ambassador of the Republic of Tunisia to the Sultanate and his accompanying delegation.

During the meeting, the two

sides exchanged conversation on march of the fraternal relationship between the Sultanate and Tunisia.

The meeting reviewed several areas of the joint cooperation and means of promoting them to serve the mutual interests.

— ONA

UN lauds Oman's eCensus 2020

MUSCAT: The United Nations Population Division hailed the efforts exerted by the Sultanate when conducting Electronic Census 2020 of Population, Residences and Establishments (eCensus 2020) and the publication of its results in record time amid exceptional conditions that prevailed in the country due to coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

On 14 December 2020, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik endorsed the results of eCensus 2020, which showed that the Sultanate's population stood at 4 million, 471 thousand and 148 as of 12 December 2020, the same day in which the electronic portal of the census was launched and made available to members of the public.

Dr Khalifa bin Abdullah al Barwani, CEO of National Centre for Statistics and Information, Chairman of the Census Technical Committee, said that, despite the fact that the eCensus was

accorded the least volume of human resources — compared to earlier chapters of the event — and, despite the challenges posed by Covid-19 which compelled many countries to postpone their censuses —the Sultanate managed to carry out the Electronic Census 2020 as scheduled.

Its results were approved and published within less than 48 hours from reference date set at 12 December 2020.

Al Barwani said in a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA) that the Sultanate has set a leading model at regional and international levels in the shift from traditional censuses to register-based censuses.

Al Barwani added that Census 2020 collected information directly and simultaneously by accessing national administrative records, utilising a methodology known as "Register-based Census".

— ONA

NDC hosts special representative of UN Secretary-General for Iraq



MUSCAT: The National Defence College (NDC) hosted on Monday Jeanine Hennis, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Iraq, Head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).

Air Vice Marshal (Eng) Saleh bin Yahya al Maskari, NDC Commandant, welcomed the guest, who gave a lecture within the framework of the general curricula for the eighth batch of the NDC.

During the lecture, the UN official highlighted the key regional and international



issues and reviewed some of the UN's charters and their roles in maintaining international peace and security.

She also praised the Sultanate's commitment to peaceful dialogue and diplomatic endeavours in solving regional and international issues, as well as its distinguished partnership through various roles in supporting the UN's efforts to achieve international peace and stability.

The lecture was attended by a number of senior officials and officers. — ONA

Need to educate children in behavioural economics

KABEER YOUSUF

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Children need to learn behavioural economics (BE) from a young age and recommendation is proposed to include the same as part of school curricular activities.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) has asked two of Oman's young experts in behavioural economics to educate children on BE in various aspects of their lives and the duo is working on a project on consumption of resources, including electricity and water and to inculcate the habit of being minimalist.

"We have proposed to the Min-

istry of Education (MoE) an idea to include this branch of economics which talks about how to make wiser choices in life and to be a minimalist in using the resources and influence others towards wiser life," says Maryam al Shehhi, Global Political Scientist and Behavioural Economics Researcher at the Ministry of Economy.

Simply put, BE is all about the way how people make their choices and how the others can influence their choices to help them make the right choices.

"Behavioural Economics a mix of four different branches of economics, psychology, sociology and public policy and BE helps us

analyse how people behave differently when they are given different alternatives," adds Arwa al Zaabi, Psychology/ Behavioural Economics Researcher at the Ministry of Economy.

Behavioural Economics aims to encourage people to make different choices.

"For example, when plastic bags are not available, people should be given multiple choices which are alternatives to plastic and it's all about educating them to make the best choice and be a part of the national drive," adds Maryam.

"BE decides people's choices in such a way that contrary to what

we believe that we always make the best choices, there are many factors that tend to influence our choices and decisions," Arwa said further.

This department of BE was established at the Ministry of Economy a year ago and this year the duo brought out three policy papers, one on education in Oman, another on the consumption of electricity and the third one on various facets of employment.

A number of workshops and consultancy activities have been conducted at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, and multidimensional observation and studies were carried out.

'Insan' to raise awareness about human trafficking

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The National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking (NCCHT) on Monday launched its second awareness campaign titled "Insan", the Arabic word for 'human being'.

Through the campaign, NCCHT seeks to promote and spread awareness among various segments of society about human trafficking crimes, the means to detect them and ways to support governmental efforts to deal with these cases.

The 'Insan' campaign, will run over a period of three months, starting from March 1, 2021 until May 31, 2021. It will include various messages in several languages, targeted at different segments of society, including citizens and expatriates. This is to ensure that these messages reach the target audience, specifically vulnerable groups who are most

likely to fall victim to human trafficking, which is condemned as per Omani law.

The Committee selected the slogan 'Insan' to convey a clear message to all, which focuses on human values, regardless of race, colour or religion. Being human means that everyone should be treated and respected, equally.

Nasr bin Khamis al Sawai, Attorney General and Deputy Chairman of the Committee, stated, "The Sultanate believes in the necessity of its role to support global efforts in combating human trafficking, which is a danger to society, both in the short and long term. The Sultanate is also one of the first countries to issue special legislation to eliminate this criminal act, which is the Anti-Trafficking Law."

Highlighting the achievements of the Committee, he said, "The National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking was able to achieve several successes such as



the ratification of international agreements. The most recent of which is the Royal Decree No 46/2020, which endorses the Sultanate of Oman joining the international Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. This covenant is concerned with granting individuals, including workers,

their rights and preventing them from being subjected to any violation. Another milestone is the reforming of the sponsorship system, by cancelling the No-Objection Certificate (NOC) and granting the expatriate worker the right to move from one employer to another who has a license to recruit workers.

On her turn, Leslie M Tsou, Ambassador of the United States of America (USA) to the Sultanate, lauded the Sultanate's efforts in combating the human trafficking, stressing her country's keenness to work closely with the Omani side in combating

"This is not just a problem for the Sultanate as it is a problem for

everyone in the world including the United States. We are partner with Oman in fighting one of the worst form of human rights violation," She added.

She affirmed that the campaign would achieve its goals through spreading awareness among all members of the Omani society.

'Insan' builds on the successes of the first campaign, 'Ehsan', launched by the committee in 2017. It is a reflection of the Sultanate's strategy to combat human trafficking through a wide range of measures, undertaken to eliminate these criminal practices. This campaign will also contribute towards enhancing community awareness about the mechanism for detecting and reporting these kinds of incidents, by familiarising people with its indicators, negative effects and legal consequences. The campaign looks to promote the participation of all members within the society in combatting Human Trafficking.



A girl sits outside a boutique hotel in the village of Misfat Al Abriyeen.



Haitham al Abri rappels down a mountain in the village of Misfat Al Abriyeen.



A local man fills his cup with water at a hotel in the village of Misfat Al Abriyeen.



Yacoub al Abri speaks about his village.



A general view shows traditional mud houses in the village of Misfat Al Abriyeen.

FROM MUD HOUSES TO BOUTIQUE HOTELS

KHALID ORABI

Perched on a mountain top, the village of Misfat Al Abriyeen has changed its fortunes by transforming mud-brick homes into boutique hotels, drawing tourists to a region famed for hiking trails and tales of genies.

The village of 800 residents, situated on the dramatic escarpments of Oman's "Grand Canyon", opened its narrow streets six years ago to foreigners and locals seeking adventure in the deserts and green corners of the Sultanate. Villager Yacoub al Abri said it all started in 2010 when his uncle suggested they take another look at the mud houses that had lain neglected for years in the ancient settlement about three hours' drive from the capital Muscat.

The owners had abandoned the centuries-old homes, fearing they could collapse, and moved to the opposite side of the village where they built new accommodation.

His idea was "to combine the simple and natural surroundings of an old Omani life with a modern touch that provides comfort and safety", Abri said.

The beige-walled homes, made of mud brick with palm-frond roofs, were turned into simple but elegant inns furnished with traditional wood and textiles.

Five years after the idea was dreamt up, the family's first boutique hotel was up and running, inspiring neighbours and villagers elsewhere in Oman to follow their lead.

"We started with only five rooms, then we increased the number and bought other old houses. Today we have 15 rooms and there are plans to continue expanding until we reach 50", Abri said.

MOUNTAINS AND GENIES Misfat Al Abriyeen had the right elements for success.

At an altitude of more than 1,000 metres (3,300 feet), the tiny



A local guide leads a tour in the village of Misfat Al Abriyeen.

Perched on a mountain top, the village of Misfat Al Abriyeen has changed its fortunes by transforming mud-brick homes into boutique hotels, drawing tourists to a region famed for hiking trails

village which is home to the Abri tribe is a charming collection of traditional houses situated along dozens of small alleys overlooking lands bursting with banana plants and citrus and palm trees.

It is part of a region known as the Grand Canyon of Oman where tourists can hike the rocky mountains and valleys, and explore the old ways of local people.

But the region is also famed for its centuries-old stories of genies that are still widely told in similar villages across the country, despite half a century of modernisation.

"Staying here is like a journey into a world of tranquillity and peace of mind", said Abri, in his white dishdasha and colourful traditional turban.

"Even the food that is provided here is cooked in Omani homes

by the people of the village."

According to the hotel owner, 5,500 tourists from Germany, France, the Gulf and beyond stayed at his boutique establishments in 2019, with an annual occupancy rate of 90 per cent, compared to just 800 during the first year of business in 2015.

The rates at the centuries-old former homes vary between \$90 and \$180 per night, depending on the room and the season.

ECONOMIC LIFELINE

The country of five million people has been trying to diversify its oil-reliant economy since crude prices sank seven years ago.

Tourism has long been a second source of revenue that capitalises on the nation's rich heritage, scenic coastline and stunning terrain.

Some 3.5 million tourists visited Oman in 2019, but the Sultanate plans to attract 11 million by 2040.

In Misfat Al Abriyeen, turning six mud houses into boutique hotels has led to more projects to attract visitors, such as new hiking trails and climbs, according to Abdullah al Abri, who owns one of the hotels.

While international travel has dried up, hoteliers like those in Misfat Al Abriyeen have been getting by with domestic tourism which has performed well during the long months of border closures. For Renoda, a Dutch psychologist based in Muscat who was visiting with three of her friends, the village has become a sanctuary.

"It's perhaps the 10th time that I have visited this hotel since last year. This is what we need now considering the current events", she said. "I come here for a night or two every month seeking calm, relaxation and comfort." — AFP

PICTURES BY
MOHAMMED MAHJOUB



Official inspects new hospital in Khasab



MUSCAT: Dr Fatima bint Mohammed al Ajmiyah, Under-Secretary of Ministry of Health for Administrative, Financial and Planning Affairs, visited a number of health institutions in Musandam Governorate to follow-up on the work progress in these institutions.

The visit included the under-construction Khasab Hospital, about which the under-secretary was briefed on the progress of work and the remaining stages of the project.

The under-secretary also paid visits to the referral Khasab Hospital, Khasab Health Center and Kimzar Health Center and met the administrators and health workers urging them to make every effort to overcome difficul-



ties in facilitating the provision of health services.

In addition, Dr Fatima visited the Directorate General of Health Services of Musandam Governorate (DGHS-Musandam), and discussed issues related to the health in the governorate with the

Director-General and senior officials.

The under-secretary was accompanied by Dr Ghanim bin Mohammed al Sadi, DGHS-Musandam Director-General, along with senior officials of the ministry and directorate general.

WWTW's Oman desert expedition in mid-October



FROM LEFT: Andy Phillips, Ben McComb, David Adams, Sean Gane, Ashley Winter and Brian O'Neill.

LIJU CHERIAN
@cherianmathiker

Leading military charity, Walking With The Wounded (WWTW), has announced the delay of its upcoming desert expedition, The Grenadier Walk of Oman, to autumn.

The organisers are now aiming to hold the expedition in mid-October. This is to basically ensure the safety of the team and those around them.

The team members are Andy Phillips, Ben Gallagher, Ben McComb, Sean Gane, Brian O'Neill and David Adams. The team was slightly changed in December 2020 as Ashley Winter had to step back due to an injury and Ben Gallagher joined in his place.

The expedition was originally

due to begin on February 18, 2020. The Grenadier Walk of Oman is the charity's 6th international expedition, raising awareness and funds for WWTW's employment, mental health and care coordination programmes for ex-military and their families.

Fergus Williams, CEO of WWTW, says: "While it is disappointing to announce a second delay to the Grenadier Walk of Oman expedition, we must follow government guidance both in the UK and Oman. The safety of the team and the support team is critical. The team will continue their training as we all look ahead to the new date in autumn 2021. I would like to thank the expedition partners in the UK and Oman for their ongoing support of WWTW and the Grenadier Walk of Oman."

It will follow the journey of a group of six serving and ex-military personnel as they trek across the Omani desert in the footsteps of legendary British Army explorer Wilfred Thesiger (1910-2003).

The team will walk 400km across the great sands, pulling a 100kg cart with limited provisions. Serving members of the Omani Armed Forces will also accompany the team.

Since the charity was founded in 2010, WWTW has organised and run ambitious expeditions to the North Pole, South Pole, Mount Everest, across Britain and the US to demonstrate the determination and skills of wounded ex-military. Each expedition incorporates teams of ex-servicemen and women with physical and mental injuries.

Electronic Tender (s)

Majan Electricity Co. (SAOC) Announces the Following E-Tenders

Tender NO	Description	Grade	Last date for buying	Submission date	Tender price R.O.
31/2021	Upgrade Al Feleij PSS from 2x6 MVA to 2x20 MVA with 33kV Interlinks (North Batinah Governorate)	A	3/3/2021	23/3/2021	773 /=
32/2021	Network Reinforcement (415 V& 11 KV) for the Year 2021 at Saham Area in Varies Location North Batinah Governorate Phase 1	C	4/3/2021	16/3/2021	92 /=
33/2021	Replacement of ground-mounted transformer 1000 KVA in (Sohar) at North Batinah Governorate	C	8/3/2021	16/3/2021	25 /=
34/2021	REPLACEMENT OF OIL LEAKAGE (RMU, HFU & OLU) AT SOHAR AREA IN NORTH BATINAH GOVERNORATE	C	8/3/2021	16/3/2021	25 /=
35/2021	REPLACEMENT OF GROUND MOUNTED TRANSFORMER 1000 KVA IN (SAHAM) AT NORTH BATINAH GONERNORATE	C	8/3/2021	16/3/2021	25 /=
36/2021	REPLACEMENT OF OIL LEAKAGE (RMU) AT SAHAM AREA IN NORTH BATINAH GOVERNORATE	C	8/3/2021	16/3/2021	25 /=
37/2021	REPLACEMENT OF OIL LEAKAGE (RMU, OLU, HFU) AT KHABURAH AREA IN NORTH BATINAH GOVERNORATE	C	8/3/2021	16/3/2021	25 /=
38/2021	REPLACEMENT OF GROUND MOUNTED TRANSFORMER 1000 KVA IN (SHINAS & LIWA) AT NORTH BATINAH GONERNORATE	C	8/3/2021	16/3/2021	25 /=
39/2021	REPLACEMENT OF OIL LEAKAGE (RMU, OLU, HFU) AT SHINAS, LIWA & INDUSTRIAL AREA IN NORTH BATINAH GOVERNORATE	C	8/3/2021	16/3/2021	25 /=
40/2021	Contract two years to Supply of different types of Wooden Poles medium and stout such as (9Mtrs, 11Mtrs and 13Mtrs) for Majan Electricity Co. Stores.	Specialized	9/3/2021	16/3/2021	86 /=
41/2021	Provision & Installation of SCADA Equipments for four Outdoor Primary Substations in North Al Batinah, Dhahirah & Buraimi	Specialized	9/3/2021	16/3/2021	35 /=
42/2021	REINFORCEMENT OF (11/0.433 KV)2021, NON-LOAD 11 & 0.433 KV CONVERSION FROM O/H TO U/G CABLE AND REPLACING OF DO FUSE WITH RMU AT AL BURAIMI	C	14/3/2021	23/3/2021	25 /=

Interested Firm having relevant experience in the similar nature of services and registered with Tender Board and Distribution Code Review Panel (DCRP) for electrical work, may register and obtain the tender documents from **E-Tendering Site** <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against online payment of non-refundable fees mentioned above for each tender.

The Tenderers should enclose a copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any registered bank in the Sultanate of Oman for a value of (1%) of the submitted bid value valid for a period of (90) days from the date of Submission, and addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee. The original Bid Bond to be delivered in sealed envelope, and the tender number and title of project only are to be mentioned on the envelopes. The place of submission the original bond would be at MJEC Contracts & tenders office at MJEC building in AL Sawari Center in Sohar or at MJEC Contracts & tenders office at Muscat in Al Mubailah- opposite to the industrial Area beside to Bank Suhar before 10 A.M. according to the assigned date of submission of the tender. Any Submission of original tender bond after the time and date mentioned in the advertisement will not be accepted and tenderer offer will be rejected.

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Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products & and have a High level percentage of Omanization.

The Company is not bound to consent the lowest Bid or any other Tenders.
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ONA الجمعية العمانية للتدريب
Oman Nursing Association

**Invitation to attend
General Assembly Association Meeting**

The Board of Directors of the Oman Nursing Association is pleased to invite members of the association to attend the General Assembly Meeting to discuss General Report of Oman Nursing Association for the year 2020. The meeting will be held Virtually on **27th of March 2021 from 10am to 12 noon** under this link.

meet.google.com/hkz-zime-atc
or open Meet and enter this code: hkz-zime-atc

Please note before the General Assembly meeting takes place, all members are requested to renew their membership on line together with the NEW members to register online www.oman-nursing.com

Should you have any queries, please call 99351850 from 10 am till 12 pm, Sundays and Mondays.

Oman Real Estate Fund's Units listed on MSM

MUSCAT: Units of Oman Real Estate Fund was listed in the parallel market, Muscat Securities Market (MSM) on Sunday, with a capital of RO 65.5 million, divided in 654.8 million units at an issue rate of 102 baisas (100 bz as value of unit and 2 bz at issuance fees).

Oman Real Estate Fund consists of 22 investment portfolios. It is expected to have a return of not less than 7 per cent every three months.

It will boost the real estate sector in the Sultanate by providing liquidity and unrolling a variety of sale and purchase instruments. — ONA



Ahmad Farea and his family sit for a meal at their house in Sanaa. — Reuters

Yemenis reel from poverty, hunger as UN pleads for funds

SANAA: Unable to find work, Ahmed Farea has sold everything including his wife's gold to feed and house two young daughters in one small room. Elsewhere in Yemen's capital Sanaa, widow Mona Muhammad has work but struggles to buy anything more nutritious than rice for her four children amid high prices.

And in a nearby hospital, severely malnourished children receive lifesaving nutritional drinks. Yemenis are exhausting their coping mechanisms, and children are starving, amid the world's largest humanitarian crisis. On Monday the United Nations hopes to raise \$3.85 billion at a virtual pledging event to avert what the UN aid chief has said would be a large-scale "man-made" famine, the worst the world will have seen for decades.

"I want the war to stop so we can go back to how we were ... We could buy what we wanted

The United Nations hopes to raise \$3.85 billion at a virtual pledging event on Monday

and could feed our children," said Muhammad.

Yemen was a poor country with a child malnutrition problem even before the six-year war disrupted imports, inflated the currency, displaced people, collapsed government services and destroyed incomes. Then Covid-19 hammered remittances from abroad that many families relied on.

"Since the war and the blockade started, and work stopped, I can't buy anything anymore. Where am I supposed to get it from?" said Farea, who wheels his barrow daily to collect water in cans from a neighbourhood tank provided for poor people. — Reuters

Europeans push IAEA Iran resolution despite warnings

VIENNA: Britain, France and Germany are pressing ahead with a US-backed plan for a resolution by the UN nuclear watchdog's board criticising Iran for curbing cooperation with the agency, despite Russian and Iranian warnings of serious consequences.

The International Atomic Energy Agency's 35-nation Board of Governors is holding a quarterly meeting this week against the backdrop of faltering efforts to revive Iran's nuclear deal with major powers now that US President Joe Biden is in office.

Iran has recently accelerated its violations of the 2015 deal in an apparent bid to raise pressure on Biden, as each side insists the other must move first.

Tehran's breaches are a response to the US withdrawal from the deal in 2018 and the reimposition of US sanctions that had been lifted under it.

The latest breach was to scale back cooperation with the IAEA last week, ending extra inspection and monitoring measures introduced by the deal, including the power given to the IAEA to carry out snap inspections at facilities not declared by Iran.

The three European powers, all parties to the 2015 deal, circulated a draft resolution for the Vienna meeting voicing "serious concern" at Iran's reduced cooperation and urging Iran to reverse its steps.

The draft, sent to IAEA board members and obtained by Reuters, also expresses "deep concern" at Iran's failure to explain uranium particles found at three old sites, including two that the IAEA first reported on last week.



The Iranian flag flutters in front of the International Atomic Energy Agency headquarters in Vienna, Austria, on Monday. — Reuters

Iran has bristled at the prospect of such criticism, threatening to cancel a deal struck a week ago with the IAEA to temporarily continue many of the monitoring measures it had decided to end — a black-box-type arrangement valid for up to three months and aimed at creating a window for diplomacy.

Diplomacy, however, is making limited progress. Iran said on Sunday it would not take up a European Union proposal to hold a meeting with other parties to the deal and the United States.

It is unclear how many countries would support a resolution. In a position paper obtained by Reuters before Iran's announcement, Russia warned that a resolution could hurt efforts

Iran and Russia have warned of serious consequences as Britain, France and Germany are pressing ahead with a US-backed plan for a resolution by the IAEA's board

to revive the deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and that it would oppose it.

"Adoption of the resolution will not help the political process of returning to the normal comprehensive implementation of the JCPOA," Russia's note to

member states said.

"On the contrary it will hugely complicate those efforts undermining the prospects for the restoration of the JCPOA and for normal cooperation between Iran and the Agency."

Asked about the tussle, IAEA Director-General Rafael Grossi said he did not want anything to jeopardise his inspectors' work in the Islamic Republic.

"What I hope is that the work of the agency will be preserved. This is essential," he told a news conference, before taking an apparent swipe at Iran over its threat.

"The inspection work of the IAEA should not be put in the middle of a negotiating table as a bargaining chip." — Reuters

US, Russia warships dock in strategic Sudan port

PORT SUDAN: A US warship docked in Sudan on Monday a day after a Russian frigate arrived in the same key Red Sea port where Moscow is planning to establish a naval logistics base, an AFP correspondent said. The arrival of the guided-missile destroyer USS *Winston S Churchill* to Port Sudan follows Washington's delisting of Khartoum as state sponsors of terrorism, following the April 2019 ouster of strongman Omar al Bashir.

An expeditionary fast transport ship, the USNS *Carson City*, had already docked in the port on February 24, the "first US navy ship to visit Sudan in decades," the

US embassy in Khartoum said in a statement at the time.

It "highlights the willingness" of the US military to "strengthen their renewed partnership" with Sudan's armed forces, it added.

The arrival of the USS *Churchill* was "the second (US) ship to stop in Sudan this week," said US Charge d'Affaires Brian Shukan.

Its arrival, "sheds light on US support for a democratic transition in Sudan," Shukan added, in a message on Twitter.

The USS *Churchill* docked shortly after Russia's *Admiral Grigorovich* frigate arrived in Port Sudan, where the Russian navy said "a logistical support base"



This combination of pictures created and taken on Monday shows (L) the Russian Navy frigate RFS Admiral Grigorovich (494) and (R) the US Navy guided-missile destroyer USS Winston S Churchill (DDG 81), both anchoring in Port Sudan. — AFP

would be created. The *Admiral Grigorovich* frigate would refuel and its crew rest after exercises in the Indian Ocean off Pakistan, the

navy added.

Sudan's military said the *Admiral Grigorovich's* visit was "part of advancing diplomatic

relations" between the two countries, according to a statement late on Sunday.

In December, Russia

announced signing a 25-year agreement to build a naval base in Port Sudan, part of Moscow's latest push into Africa as it seeks to renew its geopolitical clout.

The purpose of the base will be to "uphold peace and stability in the region," according to the deal.

Russia's navy will be allowed to keep up to four ships at a time at the base including nuclear-powered vessels. The base will be manned by up to 300 military and civilian personnel.

Russia will have the right to transport via Sudan's airports and ports "weapons, ammunition and equipment" needed for the naval base to function. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TEL AVIV

First UAE ambassador arrives in Israel

The first United Arab Emirates ambassador to Israel arrived there on Monday pledging to build up new bilateral relations and officials said he would scout for an embassy location in the Tel Aviv area. Mohamed Al Khaja, former chief of staff to the UAE foreign minister, was due to present his credentials to Israeli President Reuven Rivlin at the start of a three-day visit.

Meeting Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi in Jerusalem,



Al Khaja, 40, said he was "very proud and honoured to be the first Emirati ambassador" to Israel, where, he said, he and his hosts were discussing "the model of how we operate". — Reuters

DAMASCUS

Syria begins vaccinations with health workers

Syria's health ministry said on Monday it had started administering Covid-19 vaccinations to frontline healthcare workers. "For the second day in a row Covid-19 vaccinations are being given to frontline healthcare workers that are working within coronavirus isolation centres across governorates," a ministry statement said.

The statement did not make clear what type of vaccine Syria had acquired or the quantity.



Syria had said on Thursday it had received vaccinations from a "friendly country" that it did not name. Officials had said Syria was engaged with Russia and China on vaccines. — Reuters

GENEVA

Fate of Syrian detainees is 'national trauma'

Tens of thousands of people rounded up by Syrian authorities during a decade of conflict are missing, with many tortured, raped or killed, amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity, UN investigators said on Monday. Rebel groups including the Free Syrian Army, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and ISIL have also unlawfully detained, tortured and executed civilians in custody, they said.

The issue of detainees represents a "national trauma"



that would affect Syrian society for decades, they said. The government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has denied many previous UN accusations of war crimes. — Reuters

In brief

DHAKA



NEW BANGLADESH PROTESTS AS UN CALLS FOR LAW OVERHAUL

Hundreds of Bangladeshi activists staged a fourth day of protests on Monday over the death of a writer in detention as the UN rights chief called for a review of a digital security law used against opposition figures. Students tried to march to the home ministry in Dhaka demanding action over what they called the “murder” of Mushtaq Ahmed in a high-security jail, as well as the repeal of the Digital Security Act (DSA).

Riot police stopped them 100 metres from the government complex that houses all major ministries. Ahmed died last Thursday at a jail where he had been held since May. — AFP

TOKYO



JAPAN PM SUGA APOLOGISES AFTER SPOKESWOMAN RESIGNS

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga apologised on Monday following the resignation of a key spokeswoman, who along with other senior bureaucrats were reprimanded for attending expensive dinners hosted by Suga's son. Makiko Yamada, Cabinet Public Relations Secretary, tendered her resignation from hospital after being admitted for ill health, the government said.

Suga's administration and the 60-year-old spokeswoman had faced public criticism after magazine *Shukan Bunshun's* report last month. — Reuters

CANBERRA



AUSTRALIA TO BOOST SPENDING ON CARE FOR ELDERLY AFTER PROBE

Australia will increase spending on care for the elderly by A\$452 million (\$350.5 million) after an inquiry concluded that one in three people is receiving substandard care. The Royal Commission report on Australia's A\$20 billion care industry was published on Monday, after more than 100 days of hearings. Care homes in Australia are mostly privately-run, and have long been the subject of media reports alleging predatory pricing, assaults on patients, neglect and substandard care.

The Commission made nearly 150 recommendations, having found the industry was failing many residents.

— Reuters

Court files more charges against Suu Kyi

YANGON: Myanmar's ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi appeared at a court hearing via video conferencing on Monday as supporters marched in several towns and cities in defiance of a crackdown after the bloodiest day since the February 1 military coup.

Police fired tear gas and stun grenades to disperse hundreds of protesters in the main city of Yangon on Monday, witnesses said. They later combed through side streets firing rubber bullets and at least one person was hurt, media reported.

Suu Kyi, aged 75, looked in good health during her appearance before a court in the capital Naypyidaw, one of her lawyers said. Two more charges were added to those filed against her after the coup, she said.

“I saw Amyan on the video, she looks healthy”, lawyer Min Min Soe told Reuters, using an affectionate term meaning “mother” to refer to Suu Kyi.

“She asked to meet her lawyer.” The Nobel Peace laureate, who leads the National League for Democracy (NLD), has not been seen in public since her government was ousted and she was detained along with



A protester wearing basic protective gear looks on during a demonstration against the military coup in Yangon on Monday. — AFP

other party leaders. She was initially charged with illegally importing six walkie-talkie radios. Later, a charge of violating a natural disaster law by breaching coronavirus protocols was added.

On Monday, two more charges were added, one under a section of a colonial-era penal code prohibiting publication of information that may “cause fear or alarm”, and the other under a telecommunications law stipulating licences for equipment, the lawyer said. The next hearing will be on March

15. Critics of the coup say the charges were trumped up. **‘SEVERE ACTION’**

Myanmar has been in chaos since the military seized power after alleging fraud in a November election won by the NLD in a landslide, with daily protests getting increasingly violent as police and troops try to stamp them out. On Sunday, police fired on crowds in several places killing 18 people, the United Nations human rights office said. A committee representing

Charges against Aung San Suu Kyi

Myanmar's ousted civilian leader is facing several criminal charges

Feb 1	Feb 3	Feb 16	Mar 1
1 ARRESTED by military before new parliament due to convene	1 CHARGED FOR Possession of unlicensed walkie-talkies, an offence under the import and export law	2 Violation of Covid-19 restrictions by staging a campaign event	3 Violation of communications laws 4 Intent to incite public unrest



lawmakers elected last year said 26 people were killed but Reuters was unable to verify that.

The military has not commented on Sunday's violence and police and military spokesmen did not answer calls. The state-run *Global New Light of Myanmar* newspaper warned that “severe action will be inevitably taken” against “anarchic mobs”.

‘ABHORRENT’

The coup brought a halt to Myanmar's tentative steps towards democracy after nearly 50 years

of military rule and has drawn condemnation from Western countries and growing concern among its neighbours.

Foreign ministers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), of which Myanmar is a member, will hold a video meeting on Myanmar on Tuesday and “listen to the representative of the Myanmar military authorities”, Singapore's foreign minister, Vivian Balakrishnan, told parliament.

— Reuters

US envoy in Kabul as questions over troop withdrawal swirl

KABUL: The US special envoy to Afghanistan touched down in Kabul on Monday for meetings with Afghan leaders, in a bid to revive a flagging peace process as violence soars in the war-weary country and a deadline for US troop withdrawal draws closer.

Zalmay Khalilzad's arrival marks the first time he has returned to Afghanistan since US President Joe Biden took office in January and asked him to stay in his post.

Speculation is rife over America's future in Afghanistan, after the White House announced plans to review a withdrawal deal brokered by Khalilzad and the Taliban in Doha last year.

Under that agreement, the US is set to withdraw from Afghanistan in May, but a surge in fighting has sparked concerns that a speedy exit from the country may unleash greater

chaos as peace talks between the Kabul government and Taliban continue to stall.

In Kabul, Khalilzad met with both Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, who serves as chairman of Afghanistan's High Council for National Reconciliation, which is overseeing Kabul's peace talks with the insurgents in Qatar.

“Both sides discussed future steps in the Afghan peace process and underscored additional efforts to expedite the peace process”, a presidential spokeswoman said in a statement.

The envoy is also set to travel to Qatar, where he will meet with Taliban leaders.

Khalilzad, an Afghan-born political scientist, is a veteran of Republican administrations who has served as US ambassador to the United Nations, Iraq and Afghanistan. — AFP

Philippines starts vaccinations but supply and demand uncertain

MANILA: The Philippines kicked off its Covid-19 vaccination programme on Monday, with health workers the first to be inoculated in a delayed campaign as the country tries to secure supplies to address one of Asia's most stubborn coronavirus epidemics.

Healthcare workers in six government hospitals in the capital region received Sinovac Biotech vaccines donated by China on Sunday, the only doses the Philippines has received so far.

“You truly are the heroes during this time of the pandemic so it is just right that you be the first in line to receive the vaccines”, Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque told



Health Secretary Francisco Duque III (R) administers the Sinovac vaccine against Covid-19 to Eileen Aniceto, Medical Doctor of the Lung Center of the Philippines, in Quezon City on Monday. — AFP

health workers.

The Philippines has reported 576,352 Covid-19 cases overall, including infections with the more infectious British coronavirus variant. It has recorded 12,318 deaths.

It aims this year to inoculate

70 million of its 108 million people to achieve herd immunity and reopen an economy that in 2020 saw its worst contraction on record, due largely to tight restrictions on movement in place since mid-March. — Reuters

Modi takes home-grown vaccine as drive widened

BHUBANESWAR: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was inoculated with the first dose of a home-grown coronavirus vaccine on Monday, kicking off an expansion of the country's immunisation campaign as infections rise in some big states.

People above 60, and those who are 45 or more and suffering from certain medical conditions, are now eligible for the vaccinations. But some inoculation centres reported issues with the government's Co-Win portal used to coordinate the drive, which could slow its progress.

India, which has reported the highest number of Covid-19 cases after the United States, has so far vaccinated 12 million health and front-line workers since starting its immunisation programme in mid-January. It wants to cover 300 million of its 1.35 billion people by August.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi receives a dose of COVAXIN at All India Institute of Medical Sciences Hospital in New Delhi on Monday. — Reuters

“I appeal to all those who are eligible to take the vaccine”, 70-year-old Modi said on Twitter, posting a picture of him getting

the shot at a government hospital in New Delhi. “Together, let us make India Covid-19 free!”

The government said last week

it would let people choose their vaccination centres, effectively letting beneficiaries pick either the home-grown COVAXIN shot or

the AstraZeneca vaccine, unlike earlier. The inoculation campaign has run slower than expected due to a reluctance of health and front-line workers to take COVAXIN, which was approved without late-stage efficacy data. Only about 11per cent of vaccinated people have opted for the product developed by Bharat Biotech and the state-run Indian Council of Medical Research.

Bharat Biotech has said efficacy data from a late-stage trial on nearly 26,000 volunteers who took COVAXIN will be out soon. The company, along with India's drug regulator, says COVAXIN is safe and effective, based on early and intermediate studies.

“Inspired and humbled by Hon'ble PM's remarkable commitment to build an Aatmanirbhar Bharat,” Bharat Biotech said in reply to Modi's tweet. — Reuters

World’s first Covax jab injected as America eyes J&J rollout

ACCRA: Ghana’s President Nana Akufo-Addo on Monday became the first recipient of a coronavirus vaccine under the global Covax scheme, as US health workers prepared to distribute nearly four million doses of the single-shot Johnson & Johnson jab.

Covax, a scheme designed to ensure that poorer countries do not miss out on Covid-19 vaccines that have so far been largely hoovered up by rich nations, is aiming to deliver at least two billion doses by the end of the year.

Akufo-Addo received his AstraZeneca shot live on television along with his wife, a day before the rest of the first batch of 600,000 Covax doses are deployed across Ghana.

“It is important that I set the example that this vaccine is safe by being the first to have it, so that everybody in Ghana can feel comfortable about taking this vaccine,” the president said.

In the United States, 3.9 million doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine are due to be delivered after it became the latest jab to get the green light from US regulators.

The J&J rollout comes as a boost to President Joe Biden’s plan to beat back a virus that has killed more than half a million Americans, making the US the world’s worst-hit nation.

LEGAL WAR OVER JABS

Vaccines are seen as crucial to returning the world to normality and healing the economy after a pandemic that has claimed more than 2.5 million lives across the globe.



A woman puts Covax stickers as workers unload a shipment of AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine from a plane at Felix Houphouet Boigny airport of Abidjan, Ivory Coast. — AFP

More than 224 million vaccine doses have been administered worldwide, according to national data compiled by AFP, with the Philippines among the latest countries to launch a rollout on Monday.

But rich countries have bought up the vast majority of those available, prompting the World Health Organization (WHO) to warn that the crisis cannot end unless poor countries can vaccinate their populations too.

A new row is brewing over a call, led by India and South Africa, for intellectual property rights to the vaccines to be waived.

Backed by dozens of

“It is important that I set the example that this vaccine is safe by being the first to have it, so that everybody in Ghana can feel comfortable about taking this vaccine

NANA AKUFO-ADDO
President

governments from Argentina to Bangladesh, they argue that this would boost production and ultimately bring the pandemic to

a swifter end.

But the United States, the European Union and Switzerland — home to major pharmaceutical firms — oppose the idea, which is being thrashed out at a World Trade Organization meeting on Monday and Tuesday.

Some countries are now cautiously lifting strict curbs on daily life as infection rates stabilise, with Germans rushing to hairdressers on Monday as salons reopened.

“It’s such a relief. I couldn’t bear to look at myself in the mirror before!” Hans-Joachim Berthold, a 64-year-old Berliner, said after his first cut in two and a half months. — AFP

Sarkozy convicted of corruption, likely to escape jail time

PARIS: France’s former President Nicolas Sarkozy was found guilty of corruption on Monday and sentenced to three years in prison, a stunning fall from grace for a man who led his country and bestrode the world stage for five years.

Financial prosecutors convinced a Paris court that after Sarkozy left office he tried to bribe a judge and influence-peddle in exchange for confidential information relating to an investigation into his 2007 campaign finances.

However, the 66-year-old Sarkozy, who denied all wrongdoing, may not spend any time in prison. Two years of his sentence were suspended, and the presiding judge said she would accept allowing him to be tagged with an electronic bracelet outside of prison for the remaining year.

“He took advantage of his status and the relationships he had made,” presiding judge Christine Mee told the court.

Sarkozy, who served as president from 2007 to 2012, is the second head of state in modern-day France to be convicted of corruption.

Retired from politics but still influential among conservatives, Sarkozy has 10 days to appeal the ruling. He left the court without speaking.

Prosecutors said Sarkozy had offered to secure a plum job in Monaco for a judge, Gilbert Azibert, in return for inside information about an inquiry into allegations that he had accepted illegal payments from L’Oreal heiress Liliane Bettencourt for



Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy arrives at the Paris court house to hear the final verdict in a corruption trial on Monday. — AFP

his 2007 presidential campaign.

Sarkozy said he was the victim of a witch-hunt by financial prosecutors who had used excessive means to snoop on his affairs.

ANOTHER TRIAL LOOMS

Sarkozy burst onto the world stage as a reformer full of ideas who would break with France’s stagnant past on the domestic front and restore the birthplace of human rights to a place of prominence in international affairs.

Sarkozy earned himself the moniker of the Gallic Thatcher, undertaking market-driven reforms such as raising the retirement age in France, loosening the 35-hour work week and tweaking the tax system to encourage overtime. — Reuters

UK searches for mystery spreader of Brazil variant

LONDON: Britain on Monday appealed for a mystery individual infected with a highly transmissible Brazilian variant of the novel coronavirus to come forward, more than two weeks after they tested positive but failed to give proper contact details.

Britain said six cases had been detected of the “P.1” variant identified in the Brazilian city of Manaus, against which current vaccines appear to be less effective. Two were in South Gloucestershire in England and three in Scotland.

But a sixth individual in England, one of more than a million people tested on February

12-13, had yet to be identified because their test card was not filled in properly.

“If you’ve had a test on the 12th or 13th of February, (and) haven’t had your results back, please get in touch,” vaccination minister Nadhim Zahawi told Times Radio. “We are working with the postal system to try and locate them.”

The P.1 variant includes mutations similar to those found in a variant first detected in South Africa known as B.1.351, which has raised similar concerns.

Adam Finn, a member of the UK Joint Committee on



Prime Minister Boris Johnson joins Year 2 pupils in a maths lesson, during his visit to St Mary’s C E Primary School in Stoke-on-Trent, central England on Monday, to see how their preparations are going ahead of students returning on March 8, after England’s third lockdown. — AFP

Vaccination and Immunisation, told the BBC: “The evidence we have suggests that certainly the South African variant and potentially this Brazilian variant, which is somewhat similar — the vaccines we have at the moment are less effective at reducing at least mild disease and possibly transmission.

“We are optimistic that the vaccines will continue to prevent severe disease, but the evidence for that is still fairly limited.”

One of the cases in the household in South Gloucestershire had flown from Sao Paulo in Brazil via Zurich to London, arriving

on February 10. Public health officials said they were following up with all passengers.

All three of the Scottish cases were identified as people who had flown from Brazil to Aberdeen via Paris and London who self-isolated for the required period of 10 days.

By Sunday, over 20 million people in Britain had been given a first dose of Covid-19 vaccine — just over 30 per cent of the population, while around 800,000 had a second dose. Manufacturers are working on measures to adapt their vaccines to mutations of the virus. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

OSLO

Nobel Peace Prize draws hundreds of nominees

Some 329 nominations have been received for this year’s Nobel Peace Prize, likely reflecting the profusion of pressing human rights issues around the world, the secretary of the committee which awards the prize said on Monday.

“It is the third highest ever total number,” Norwegian Nobel Committee Secretary Olav Njølstad said. The record was 376 candidates, reached in 2016.

Of this year’s total, some 234 are for individuals and 95 are for



organisations. “It reflects a lot of international interest in the Nobel Peace Prize,” he said.

— Reuters

LONDON

Prince Philip moves hospital for heart tests

Britain’s Prince Philip, the 99-year-old husband of Queen Elizabeth, was transferred to a different hospital in central London on Monday to have tests for a pre-existing heart condition as well as receive treatment for an infection. Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, was admitted to London’s private King Edward VII hospital two weeks ago for treatment for an unspecified infection that is not related to Covid-19. Buckingham Palace said he was moved to St



Bartholomew’s Hospital, which is a centre of excellence for cardiac care, for further treatment and observation. — Reuters

BRUSSELS

EU to propose vaccine ‘green pass’ this month

The European Commission will propose rules for an EU vaccine “green pass” this month, commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said on Monday. “We’ll present this month a legislative proposal for a Digital Green Pass,” she tweeted, explaining it would aim to provide proof both of vaccination and of Covid test results. The pass would allow people to gradually “move safely in the European Union or abroad — for work or tourism”. Separately, Ursula said in a



meeting that her EU executive would “in coming months” seek to create a technical base for the digital certificate. — AFP

Care for the hoots and the chirps...

At least have two trees around and have a window air conditioner and one does not need to set an alarm.

You guessed it right; the birds will wake you up.

Thanks to the municipality's initiative there are trees dotting across the roads and residential areas. In addition to providing shade, these trees are home for several birds. It also gives us an opportunity to adopt a tree by giving it water because not all trees are under drip irrigation and even though grown up trees can find their own water we can still surprise them.

There is an excitement among children and adults as they see to their delight the sidr trees full of fruits. Evenings are the time when the children come out to pluck fruits, but one day an elderly farmer came to collect a few branches from the neighbourhood sidr tree and one could see the anxiety in the birds chirping. Until his work was over one could hear silence and at times a nervous chirp here and there. The minute he covered his pickup truck and sat inside the vehicle a set of birds flew over and perched right at the top most area of the tree ready to take-off if they must.

It shows us how well the birds know us. We go for bird watching, but little do we know that they are watching us too. By the time night sky falls a small



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ORNITHOLOGISTS
DO A WONDERFUL
JOB IN EDUCATING
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BIRDS AND WE
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AND LEARN FROM
THE BIRDS

colony of bats arrive sweeping across to the next tree and each time there is a sudden noise made by humans.

Ornithologists do a wonderful job in educating us about the birds and we can too begin to observe them and learn from the birds. Blessed are the ones who can wake up to the singing of the birds. And if you have a window AC then you can also become part of their family affair. We get to hear when the nestlings are fed and the landing sounds depend on which bird has settled down beneath the AC.

The mynahs can be noisy while landing on the other hand if the residents are pigeon then it is time to enjoy the coos every morning – the Mourning Doves call until a rooster pierces in the sound waves with its crowing. The pretty parakeets are always happy and chirpy and Muscat seems to have a good population of them. Considered to be pests because they are known to be invasive they don't seem to care. They happily appear in residential gardens and can be frequently spotted in the roadside gardens and landscapes.

There is a reason they move around with such enthusiasm and that is because it is illegal to use air gun at them or capture them. They seem to be balancing it out on their own but they are watching us and they are getting used to us. Now the pigeons in Oman

are pampered; they hold a very special place in people's hearts and maintain corners to feed them. The generosity is much appreciated. The ones that are nocturnal and are present but not glorified are the owls. The tough ones are mynas and even tougher are the crows they will find a way but crows learn fast to appreciate generosity and feed them for a few days and they will ensure they reach on time for the appointment.

Now the owls are the most misunderstood. Could it be because of their hoot at night? Nasser al Kindy, an environmentalist and a keen bird watcher and photographer, says myths are myths and let them be. Let's begin to accept the owl for the wonderful municipal work they do, he says. It is not their fault that they see and hunt better at night and can turn his head all the way round, this observant actually checks on rodent population in our neighbourhoods.

They observe humans too, and are probably wondering about the pandemic we are going through. Come what may man continues to explore the digital world and I have been just introduced to the latest happening App – CLUBHOUSE. While it is all good let us take time to enjoy the natural world too and make it part of our life as much as the digital world, for surely it will keep us grounded.

WRITE FOR US

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

PIVOTAL PLAYER

Can Asean diplomacy end Myanmar crisis?

TOM ALLARD

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) holds a meeting of foreign ministers on Tuesday to discuss the crisis after Myanmar's February 1 coup, which will include representation from the military government.

The United Nations, United States, European Union, China and Asian powers have all identified Asean as a potentially pivotal player in resolving the crisis in Myanmar, which is one of its 10 members. The group has the unofficial motto "One Family" and tends to stress stability and development above political

rights. Its diverse membership includes Indonesia, the world's third biggest democracy, but also communist Vietnam and Laos and Brunei, one of the world's last absolute monarchies.

Several Asean diplomats said the group's credibility was at stake over Myanmar.

Asean has advantages in its standing

as the region's premier multinational forum and its connections to junta members, but its requirement for consensus and principle of non-interference make agreement harder. As a member, Myanmar must agree with any action too. Critics, including the advocacy group Asean Parliamentarians for Human Rights, say the body has repeatedly failing to tackle human rights abuses in the region. Diplomats and analysts say the most that might happen in the short-term is the encouragement of dialogue between the junta and its opponents to avoid worse bloodshed.

Longer term, an Indonesian plan for Asean to oversee a new election to ensure it is fair and inclusive could allow the junta to step down and put Myanmar back on the course to democracy, its proponents say.

But ousted parliamentarians and protesters have rejected a new election — demanding respect for a ballot last year that was swept by Aung San Suu Kyi's party.

The United States and some Western countries have introduced targeted sanctions on junta leaders and Myanmar's ousted elected leaders and protesters would happily see more. But given its structure — and Myanmar's membership — any sanctions are unlikely from Asean. That said, regional businesses could feel the impact of Western sanctions.

While financial centre Singapore, also a close US ally, said it rejected sanctions itself, its central bank also told financial institutions to be vigilant about the risks of dealing with companies or individuals that could be under sanctions by other nations. — Reuters



The most that might happen in the short-term is the encouragement of dialogue between the junta and its opponents to avoid worse bloodshed

DIPLOMATS

MARATHON TASK

Amid scramble for Covid-19 vaccine, Latin America turns to Russia

DANIEL RAMOS & AISLINN LAING

As Bolivia struggled late last year to secure deals with large drug firms to supply Covid-19 vaccines, the incoming president, Luis Arce, turned to Russia for help.

By the end of December, Bolivia clinched its first major Covid-19 vaccine deal, with enough shots for some 20 per cent of the population. The first Sputnik V doses arrived in the country in late January, just as virus cases were spiking.

"It was a really marathon task," said Bolivian trade minister Benjamin Blanco of the procurement quest, but Russia's political will made it possible. Western vaccine makers "told us developing countries that we had to wait until June."

Bolivia's reliance on Moscow underscores how governments across the region have turned to Russia's Sputnik V drug amid fears of being left behind in the global scramble for vaccines. As many wealthier developed nations have signed big deals with large drugmakers like Pfizer Inc and AstraZeneca PLC, countries in Latin America have faced difficulties securing adequate vaccine supplies.

For Russia, acceptance in Latin America lends legitimacy to its vaccine, which faced initial scepticism. It also provides Moscow an opportunity to make in-roads in the resource rich region at a time when Covid-19 vaccines are becoming a tool



A health worker receives her first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine at the Hospital Del Nino in La Paz last Friday. — AFP

AS MANY RICH
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SUPPLIES

for soft power.

Latin America's Russian gamble looks a stronger bet after scientists said it was almost 92 per cent effective in its first peer-reviewed study, published in early February in international journal the *Lancet*.

Current and former officials from three countries in the region, including Blanco, described to Reuters challenges in negotiating with multinational drugmakers. Officials from two of the countries described the comparative ease in dealing with Sputnik V's

marketeers, ranging from eagerness to engage to less onerous contractual terms, and in some instances a more attractive price.

But it's not without risk. It's unclear how effective Sputnik is against the new coronavirus variants, including one circulating widely in Brazil. And Russia has already experienced production delays domestically and overseas, including to Argentina, which in December became the first Latin country to sign a Sputnik V supply deal. — Reuters

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Photos by ONA and Mohammed Mahjoub

Ahli Sidab clinch record 12th HM Cup title

HARIDEV PUSHPARAJ
MUSCAT, MARCH 1

Ahli Sidab cemented their status as one of the powerhouses of Oman hockey as they outclassed a disjointed Bausher 3-0 in the final of the 50th edition of the HM Cup hockey championship at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, on Monday.

With the well deserved victory, Sidab clinched their 12th His Majesty's Cup title and went one up over their 2020 performance,

which saw them suffer a disappointing final defeat to Al Nasr in the 49th edition.

Goals from Indian import Affan Yusuf and Aseel bin Ammar al Maini in the second period of the match and Ahmed al Balushi's final blow with the third goal in the last period wrapped up the game.

HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, graced the occasion of the grand final as the chief guest. Dr Abdullah

bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, presided over the post-match presentation ceremony in the presence of Rashad bin Ahmed al Hinai, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth and Oman Hockey Association (OHA) Chairman Talib al Wahaibi.

SIDAB OFF TO SLOW START
In the first period, Ahli Sidab attempted to open their account as Ashraf al Nasri made some pen-

etrative manoeuvres. However, the Bausher defence thwarted his moves on a couple of occasions.

Bausher's Sukhjeet Singh did get his way through the Sidab defenders but the final move eluded him as both teams went into the break at 0-0.

Affan Yusuf gave Sidab the much needed opening goal in the 22nd minute converting a penalty corner after a push from Ashraf al Nasri.

A minute later, Aseel bin Ammar al Maini sounded the board

with a fine goal dribbling past a packed Bausher defence to consolidate Sidab's position.

Bausher were really up against it from that point on as Sidab's attacking players assumed a menacing posture.

In the third period, Sidab had another opportunity to convert a penalty corner and go 3-0 up but Bausher goalkeeper Amjad al Hasni denied them.

In the closing minutes of the match, Ahmed al Balushi pretty much sealed the game with a

well-timed goal past Bausher custodian Amjad al Hasni through a short pass inside the D.

SEEB CLAIM THIRD PLACE
In the third place match, 11-time champions Seeb outplayed Sohar 4-1 as they settled for the third place in the prestigious event.
Seeb had lost to Ahli Sidab in the semifinal after a high-scoring 6-3 thriller that went in favour of the latter while Sohar had bowed out of contention for the final after a last four 1-0 defeat to Bausher.



Former Croatia coach Zlatko Kranjcar dies aged 64

Former Croatia coach and Dinamo Zagreb star Zlatko ‘Cico’ Kranjcar died on Monday at the age of 64, the national football federation (HNS) said. “Kranjcar, legendary Croatian footballer and coach... has died in Zagreb,” the federation said. Kranjcar was hospitalised last month due to liver problems.



Mumbai City finish top, book Asian Champions League spot

Mumbai City, majority owned by the backers of English Premier League club Manchester City, booked a spot in next year’s AFC Champions League with a win on Sunday in their final match of the Indian Super League’s regular season. The Mumbai side needed to beat leaders ATK Mohun Bagan to qualify.

MADRID: Atletico Madrid bounced back from recent poor form with a hard-fought 2-0 win at Villarreal on Sunday that allowed the La Liga pace-setters to extend their lead to five points.

An own goal from Alfonso Pedraza and Joao Felix’s powerful strike gave Atletico a precious win after a wobble which had allowed Barcelona and Real Madrid to gain ground in the title race.

Diego Simeone’s side had come into the match off the back of a Champions League last 16 defeat to Chelsea and a league run in which they picked up just five points from their previous four matches.

However despite Villarreal coming close on a number of occasions Atletico held on for a win that ensures they keep second-placed Barca at bay and crucially increase the gap between them and rivals Real Madrid to six points ahead of next weekend’s local derby.

Madrid can go back to within three points of Atletico when they host Europe-chasing Real Sociedad on Monday night.

“We suffered, and even after the second goal they had good chances. But we come home with a very important victory at this point in the season,” said Simeone.

Atletico opened the scoring thanks to Pedraza’s odd own goal mid-way through the first half, which came after long VAR check to see if Stefan Savic, who was initially credited with the goal, had strayed offside for Thomas Lemar’s cross.

Savic’s header was saved by Sergio Asenjo only for the ball to ricochet off Pedraza and into the net as the 24-year-old defender fell over.

Gerard Moreno should have pulled the hosts level when he met a Daniel Parejo cross but couldn’t muster a decisive finish and Savic recovered easily to clear the ball off the line. Suarez could have doubled Atleti’s lead eight minutes after the break when he pounced on a defensive lapse to let off a powerful shot, only for Asenjo to pull of a

Atletico hold La Liga rivals at bay with tight Villarreal win



DIEGO SIMEONE’S SIDE HAD COME INTO THE MATCH OFF THE BACK OF A CHAMPIONS LEAGUE LAST 16 DEFEAT TO CHELSEA AND A LEAGUE RUN IN WHICH THEY PICKED UP JUST FIVE POINTS FROM THEIR PREVIOUS FOUR MATCHES

Villarreal’s Gerard Moreno (right) challenges Atletico Madrid’s Felipe during the Spanish league match in Villarreal. – AFP

superb reaction save to deny the Uruguayan.

However Joao Felix gave the away side the two-goal cushion they needed in the 69th minute, quickly latching onto a poor clearance by Pau Torres to lash home the second from just outside the penalty area.

Felix appeared to direct an angry look at Simeone after scoring, reportedly prompted by a lack of game time.

“I love rebel players, those that have pride. The goal brought something out in him,” Simeone said.

“He needed it, and the team needed that goal.”

The hosts responded, with Carlos Bacca somehow shooting wide when Moreno laid on a simple finish for the Colombian with 12 minutes remaining.

And teenage substitute Alex Baena was unlucky to finish the match without his first La Liga goal, first clipping the post in the 82nd minute and then forcing a brilliant save from Jan Oblak with a stinging volley. However they couldn’t recover and sit seventh thanks to a run of seven matches without a win.

Earlier, Real Betis moved above Villarreal as they maintained their bid for European football next season thanks to Juanmi’s late strike which earned them a 1-0 victory at struggling Cadiz.

Spaniard Juanmi rammed home a close range header with six minutes remaining to squeeze Betis past the home side and put them sixth.

Betis are just two points behind Sociedad in the automatic Europa League qualification spot.

Real Valladolid climbed out of the relegation zone despite extending their winless league run to eight in a 1-1 draw at Celta Vigo. Valladolid

were denied a first league win since January 2 by Jeison Murillo’s stoppage time header.

— AFP

OWCA post first victory; easy for Khalsa, Ideal

MUSCAT: Oman star Vaishali Jesrani top-scored with a solid 32 as Oman Women’s Cricket Academy (OWCA) defeated Wadi Kabir Women by 30 runs to record their first win of the season in a Women’s League game at OC Turf 1 in Al Amerat on Sunday.

OWCA now have 2 points from two games, having lost their first match to ISC Women in February.

Invited to bat first, OWCA posted 103 for 9 on the board thanks to Vaishali’s knock. Shreya Suresh was the pick of Wadi Kabir bowlers, taking 3 for 18 while Jayavarsaa Sivakumar bagged 2 for 18.

OWCA then made sure Wadi Kabir had no room to free their arms, restricting them to 73 for 6

in 20 overs for a comfortable 30-run victory. Shreya Suresh batted well too, scoring 31 not out.

JASPREET BOWLS KHALSA TO BIG WIN

Jaspreet Singh’s magnificent 6 for 16 was instrumental in Khalsa United’s thumping 107-run win over Jumbo Electronics in a C Division T20 League at Muscat Municipality ground 1 on Friday.

Shrikant Akhil top-scored with an unbeaten 66 while Deepesh Mehta struck a fluent 39 in Khalsa’s total of 202 for 4. Jumbo’s chase lasted for less than 14 overs, getting dismissed for a meagre 95 as Jaspreet ran through the side with his outstanding spell. Saeed Mohammed top-scored with a whirlwind 40 off 20 balls.



OWCA team

VIJESH SHINES IN IDEAL WIN

Brilliant batting by Vijesh Vijayakumaran (66 off 44) was the highlight of Ideal Technology’s

exciting 4-wicket victory against Jotun CT in a D Division match at Muscat Municipality ground 3.

Chasing Jotun’s 143 for 9, Ideal surpassed the total in 18.2 overs,

scoring 145 for 6 thanks to solid knocks from Vijesh and Waseem Abbas (39 off 19). Raj Amal, who had scored 50, bowled well too, taking 2 for 25.

BRIEF SCORES

Women’s League T20

OWCA Women 103 for 9 in 20 overs (Vaishali Jesrani 32 - 2x4, Shreya Suresh 3-18, Jayavarsaa Sivakumar 2-18) beat Wadi Kabir Women 73 for 6 in 20 overs (Shreya Suresh 31 - 1x4) by 30 runs.

C DIVISION

Khalsa United 202 for 4 in 20 overs (Shrikant Akhil 66 - 6x4, Deepesh Mehta 39 - 4x4) thrashed Jumbo Electronics 95 all out in 13.4 overs (Saeed Mohammed 40 - 6x4, 2x6, Jaspreet Singh 6-16, Harminder Singh 2-14) by 107 runs.

D DIVISION

Jotun CT 143 for 9 in 20 overs (Raj Amal 50 - 1x4, Deepesh Unnikoru 2-08, Sooraj A Raj 2-20, Karakoickal Umesh 2-20) lost to Ideal Technology 145 for 6 in 18.2 overs (Vijesh Vijayakumaran 66 - 8x4, Waseem Abbas 39 - 6x4, 1x6, Raj Amal 2-25, Joby Abraham 2-31) by 4 wickets.

Quick-fire Lukaku helps Inter pull seven points clear



Inter Milan's Romelu Lukaku controls the ball during the Serie A match against Genoa in Milan. — AFP

MILAN: Romelu Lukaku scored after 33 seconds and then set up a second as Inter Milan beat Genoa 3-0 to extend their lead at the top of the Serie A table on Sunday.

Inter are seven points ahead of second-placed city rivals AC Milan who are at Roma later on Sunday, and 10 clear of champions Juventus, who were held 1-1 at Hellas Verona on Saturday and have played a game fewer.

Lukaku scored with the first chance at the San Siro, then laid on Matteo Darmian for Inter's second in the 69th minute. Alexis Sanchez came off the bench to add a third with 13 minutes to go.

"We're first in the standings and it's a good feeling," said Lukaku as Inter try to deny Juventus a 10th consecutive league title after finishing runners-up last season. Antonio Conte's side followed on from last weekend's 3-0 derby win over Milan, notching up a fifth win in a row as they push for a first league title since 2010.

"We're happy because the work is paying off. It had already paid off last year, but the team is maturing a lot," said Conte. "We know that there are 14 games left. Let's keep our antennas up until the end if we want to do something good."

Lukaku led the way, completing a give-and-go with Lautaro Martinez after good work from Nicolo Barella to fire in from an angle for his 18th Serie A goal of the season, one shy of leading scorer Cristiano Ronaldo.

Inter missed a string of chances to pull further ahead against their 13th-ranked rivals with Barella and Darmian both rattling

the crossbar and Mattia Perin denying a pair goal-bound efforts from Lukaku.

But the giant Belgian set up defender Darmian, who took the place of suspended Achraf Hakimi, for his first league goal for Inter, with Sanchez scoring minutes after coming off the bench getting his head to a rebound after Perin had denied Lukaku.

The 27-year-old has scored six goals in the last five games. "I'm in a good moment of my career but the important thing is that Inter wins," added the former Manchester United player. "These matches are opportunities for us to give signals to others, but the championship is long."

"We must not give up, last year we lost in these matches, this year we're growing."

Mid-table Genoa ended their seven-game unbeaten run under new coach Davide Ballardini before next weekend's local derby with Sampdoria.

ATALANTA BOUNCE BACK

Atalanta shook off their Champions League defeat to Real Madrid midweek with a 2-0 win at Sampdoria to move up to fourth, equal on 46 points with third-placed Juventus.

Ruslan Malinovskyi broke through five minutes before the break with Robin Gosens adding a second with 20 minutes to go in Genoa. Duvan Zapata picked up an injury against Real and was ruled out along with Hans Hateboer, with coach Gian Piero Gasperini sitting out a touchline ban.

Atalanta could thank goalkeeper Marco Sportiello and defender Jose Palomino for keeping their slate clear early before taking hold of the game. — AFP



Liverpool's Roberto Firmino celebrates scoring their second goal. — Reuters

Liverpool beat Sheffield to snap losing streak

SHEFFIELD, England: A Curtis Jones strike and a Kean Bryan own goal gave Liverpool a 2-0 win over bottom side Sheffield United on Sunday as the stuttering Reds snapped a run of four straight Premier League defeats.

Liverpool's season has imploded in recent weeks, with Juergen Klopp's side winning just two of their previous 11 games in the league, but there were green shoots of recovery in a dominant performance against their struggling opponents.

The result left Liverpool in sixth position in the table on 43 points, one behind their next opponents Chelsea. Sheffield United remain bottom on 11 points.

With Liverpool's Brazilian goalkeeper Alisson on compassionate leave following the death of his father this week, Adrian took over between the posts but it was Blades keeper Aaron Ramsdale who shone in the first half with some excellent saves.

Roberto Firmino and Trent Alexander-Arnold both had early efforts saved, and

THE RESULT LEFT LIVERPOOL IN SIXTH POSITION IN THE TABLE ON 43 POINTS, ONE BEHIND THEIR NEXT OPPONENTS CHELSEA. SHEFFIELD UNITED REMAIN BOTTOM ON 11 POINTS

Ramsdale made a superb stop with his foot to deny Mohamed Salah as the first half ended scoreless.

There was little he could do to stop Jones early in the second half, however, as he blasted home Firmino's backheel three minutes into the second half.

Firmino thought he had scored Liverpool's 7000th top-flight goal when his 64th-minute shot took a heavy deflection off Bryan before flying into the net to make it 2-0, but the effort was subsequently given as an own goal by the defender.

Striker Oliver McBurnie had a couple of decent chances for the home side but despite displaying plenty of energy, they could not manage to mount much of a fightback as Liverpool held on for their first league win since beating West Ham United 3-1 on the last day of January.

"I'm happy that we get the points and we can go again. Today was a good example of putting it all together, I am happy I scored and I'm happy for the rest of the team," Jones said after dedicating his goal to the memory of Alisson's father. — Reuters

business

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TOTAL NATIONAL DAY PRIZES OMR 55,000	TOTAL PRIZES FOR LADIES OMR 11,000	TOTAL MEGA PRIZES OMR 112,000

MAISARAH

CMA issues regulations for public joint stock companies

AL SALMI: Regulations translates economic principles of the Basic Statute of the state on encouraging investments and savings

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 1

Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Capital Market Authority (CMA), issued a decision approving the Regulation for Public Joint Stock Companies which covers all regulatory aspects related to public joint stock companies focusing on providing legislative framework for all their operations and activities.

The decision states the regulation shall have effect on the day following its publication in the Official Gazette except the provisions related to appointment of the internal auditors and legal advisers which will be effected after six months.

The issuance of the regulation was based on the provisions of the Commercial Companies Law enacted by Royal Decree 18/2019 to achieve legislative adequacy and readiness that would enhance the confidence of investors in the Omani capital market and make it sustainable engine of economic



growth and wealth creation.

On the importance of the regulations for the listed companies, Shaikh Abdullah bin Salim al Salmi, Executive President of the Capital Market Authority (CMA), said the issuance of the regulation coincides with the comprehensive structural review of the legislative framework of the Omani capital market after more than 30 years to configure it to be a key financing tool to achieve the

national priorities of 2040 Oman Vision including stimulating the private sector and activating the national economy.

Al Salmi added that CMA, to improve the investment environment and encourage the initiatives aimed at enhancing the role of the private sector in the sustainable development, prepared the regulations taking into account easing the processes and limiting its role to supervision

and follow-up and to allow the companies the freedom of implementing their plans and strategies within a clear legislative framework ensuing, at the same time, transparency and disclosure to furnish safety and protection to the company, its shareholders and investors in general.

Al Salmi said the regulations embraced a number of provisions and rules including the rules for election of directors of public

The issuance of the regulation coincides with the comprehensive structural review of the legislative framework of the Omani capital market after more than 30 years to configure it to be a key financing tool to achieve the national priorities of 2040 Oman Vision including stimulating the private sector and activating the national economy

joint stock companies and their responsibilities and the key change was that candidates will only be natural persons for the stability of the boards of directors and to limit the changes in composition of the board.

Also, the limit for annual remuneration of directors has been increased to RO 300,000 in accordance with specific rules.

The regulation comprises 12 chapters on the establishment of the public joint stock company, issuance of shares in public offering, mergers and conversion of companies, terms and conditions for transformation into public company or the public company into another form, company management and general meetings.

The regulation states in Chapter 9 that the company shall conduct internal audit either through

independent in-house unit or engage an audit firm accredited by the CMA.

Also the regulations required the companies to have a legal advisor either a whole time employee with adequate qualifications and experience or engage a licensed law firm registered with the CMA.

Chapter 10 specifies the powers of the employees who are authorised as judicial police in collaboration between the CMA and the Minister of Justice for clear authorisation guided by the provisions of the financial and administrative laws and the consumer protection law.

The regulation included chapters on administrative penalties and reconciliation in breaches of the provisions of the law and the regulation.

The last chapter is on the fees the CMA charges in consideration of the services it renders to the regulated entities.

It is noteworthy that the decision repealed Decision No 137/20002 related to election of directors and their responsibilities, the provisions related to assignment of rights issue of capital increase shares, Decision 8/2018 on the accreditation of auditors and Decision 10/2018 on the rules for constitution of audit committee and appointment of internal auditor and legal adviser of public joint stock companies.



Offset pact signed with US varsity for leadership development

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 1

The Ministry of Finance (MoF) signed on Monday a project agreement for the 'National Programme for Leadership Development and Future Foresight' with the University of Arizona (UA) and Institute of Public Administration (IPA), supervising the implementation of the programme.

The agreement was signed under the auspices of Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Baowain, Minister of Labour and Chairman of IPA Board of Directors, and in the presence of Nasser al Jashmi, Secretary-General of MoF.

The agreement was signed by Dr Dhafir al Shanfari (Ministry of Finance), Sayyid Zaki al Busaidy, CEO of IPA and Joe Carella, Dean of Eller Executive Education at the UA. This national programme is one of the projects of Partnership for Development Programme (which is known as Offset worldwide),

supervised by MoF, and will fully be funded by LENCO as part of its commitments towards the Partnership for Development Programme.

The programme will be conducted at IPA with the aim to uplift government performance through building the capacity of directors of various government units, and providing them with managerial and leadership skills needed for policy-making and efficiently achieve KPIs.

Throughout the agreement period, the UA will train 150 directors from various government units, and will conduct training courses for national trainers so as to ensure the sustainability of the program.

In addition to provide short courses for 80 persons from higher management levels and 120 employees from various government units. A number of 15 persons will be enrolled in the Advanced Government Leadership programme to be conducted at the campus of UA.

Oman finalises five projects for PPP implementation

PROCUREMENT MODEL:

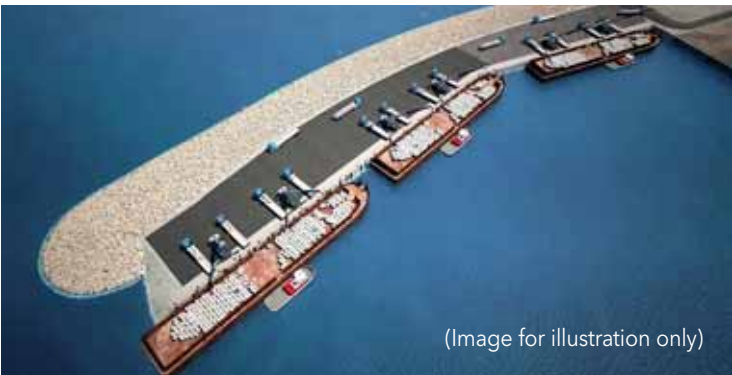
Seaports at Liwa and Musannah, as well as dedicated Salalah - Thamrait toll road under finalisation

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](#)

New seaport developments, school buildings and dialysis centres are among five sets of initiatives being studied by the Omani government for eventual procurement via the Public Private Partnership (PPP) route.

According to the Ministry of Finance, the five sets of initiatives are among a total of 50 projects planned for implementation under the PPP model.

Shortlisted for early implementation are two seaport developments — one in Musandam Governorate and the other in South Al Batinah Governorate, the ministry noted in the latest edition of its monthly bulletin, titled 'Fiscal Performance'.



In Musandam Governorate, land around Liwa Port is proposed to be offered for private investment and development on a PPP basis

In Musandam Governorate, land around Liwa Port is proposed to be offered for private investment and development on a PPP basis.

An existing port facility built by the government will also be maintained under the PPP arrangement.

In South Al Batinah, private investment has been sought in the development of land around Musannah harbour into a multipurpose seaport, the ministry said.

In the education services sector, a number of school buildings are also envisaged for

development on a PPP basis, according to the ministry.

"The first phase of the school-building project aims at developing the educational infrastructure to meet the increasing demand for schools in various governorates. The expertise of the private sector can be used advantageously in designing and building schools and multi-purpose projects", it noted.

In the healthcare services sector, the ministry has outlined plans for the procurement of a Hemodialysis Services Project supported by the private

sector. "This project aims at establishing and developing a number of dialysis centres in order to benefit a larger number of patients, in addition to reducing the costs borne by the Ministry of Health", it said.

Separately, a Drug Rehabilitation Centre is planned at Suhar to provide treatment and post-treatment services to recovering addicts. Rounding off the list of initiatives currently under finalisation is a proposal for a new expressway dedicated to trucks operating between Thamrait and Salalah Port.

While heavy vehicles will be obligated to use this toll-based road system, the option will be available to the general public as well, the ministry pointed out. All five sets of initiatives, the ministry said, meet the criteria for PPP implementation.

Besides, they are consistent with long-term development goals set out under Oman Vision 2040 and corresponding strategic plans. In procuring them via the PPP route, these projects will help alleviate the government's fiscal burden, the ministry added.

Agreement signed for setting up packaging project and hypermarket at Khazaen

INTEGRATED CITY: The RO 7 million worth of investment signed with KV Group International for the construction of a state-of-the-art polyethylene packaging plant, as well as Khazaen's first hypermarket

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 1

Khazaen Economic City, Oman's newest, integrated business destination, has signed an agreement with KV Group International to set up a polyethylene packaging factory and a commercial facility in the city.

The RO 7 million worth of investment signed with KV Group International will enable the investor to build a state-of-the-art polyethylene packaging plant in the industrial zone on a total land area of 40,000 m2 and also to



construct the first hypermarket in the city, spread over 5,500 m2 in the commercial block.

The hypermarket will cater to the Khazaen community as well as early commercial tenants.

Commenting on the agreement, Khalid al Balushi, Chief Executive Officer of Khazaen Economic City said, "Khazaen continues to grow with the arrival of more investors thus reiterating its status as the most promising economic hub, and its march towards its objectives of enhancing the growth of the national economy."

"Khazaen is gaining in position as an emerging and preferred location for the establishment of different types of businesses due to its strategic location. We have an excellent pipeline of investors who are eager to lease out different types of plots at the city. We are looking forward for a positive 2021 despite the continuous impact of Covid-19 on the global economy," Al Balushi added.

Abdul Vahid, Managing Director — KV Group, said: "Being one of its kind, Packovic targets to meet Oman's industrial

The factory will have best-in-class European plant and machinery, superior grade raw materials, sound technical knowhow of the process, products and markets, thus giving it an edge over its competition

packaging requirements as a major part which is currently being internationally sourced.

The factory will have best-in-class European plant and machinery, superior grade raw materials, sound technical knowhow of the process, products and markets, thus giving it an edge over its competition."

"Packovic — the brand name of the polyethylene packaging factory products — is part of the Group's vision 2025 to have sourcing hubs and packing houses in different countries to achieve its "Farm to Fork" philosophy, thus contributing towards Oman's food sustainability by mobilising

significant new capital to fund its expansion," Abdul Latheef, Director, KV Group, stated. KV Group International was established in 1991 with its headquarters in Oman.

The Group has business ventures spread across Dubai, Bahrain and India. Its parent company, Suhul Al Fayha Trading LLC, is a market leader in the import, distribution, wholesale and retail of fruits and vegetables for the past three decades and is the first ISO-certified company in this segment, importing from more than 50 countries.

"The Sultanate of Oman is a land of opportunities. KV Group International is continuously doing its best to contribute towards Oman's self-sustainability in the food industry under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and thanks to the father of modern Oman, the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said whose strong foundation is the reason the Sultanate's economy is growing steadily in the GCC," says Abdul Jabbar, Chairman, KV Group.

Meethaq launches 1st Shari'a compliant co-branded credit card with Lulu



MUSCAT: In line with the bank's commitment to offering an attractive value proposition for its customers, Meethaq the pioneer of Islamic banking in Oman from Bank Muscat, has announced the launch of the first Shari'a-compliant co-branded cashback credit card in Oman.

The new credit card is being launched in association with leading hypermarket chain, LuLu Hypermarket, to offer a number of exclusive benefits such as loyalty points/cashback, special discounts and flexible payment options.

Cardholders will be eligible to earn up to 2 per cent cashback on their transactions, which can then be redeemed when buying products from LuLu hypermarkets across Oman.

Meethaq has enabled various options to make secure payments worldwide and is a preferred electronic payment services provider in Oman's Islamic banking sector.

Offering the best deals and rewards, Meethaq credit cards are a big attraction with customers, providing them with the convenience and flexibility in making day-to-day transactions at shopping malls, restaurants or at international destinations.

The bank encourages the use of credit cards, which allows individuals to spend in a disciplined manner and keep track of all their transactions through electronic monthly statements.

Own a Toyota Corolla and save now

MUSCAT: Toyota is offering enthusiasts the best time to make the most of and save. The popular Corolla with its attractive looks, impressive fuel-efficiency and more, makes for a fine choice with families and customers wishing to enjoy value-for-money.

And now with an exclusive campaign like this, they have even more reasons to save. Customers looking to own a Corolla Petrol variant can look forward to cash gift from RO 1,950 up to RO 2,600, insurance 1 year comprehensive or cash gift in lieu of insurance RO 175 and service 2 years / 20,000 kms (whichever is earlier).

The Corolla's distinct personality is completed by its expansive and comfortable cabin, which displays exceptional quality and finishing throughout.



to RO 2,600, insurance 1 year comprehensive or cash gift in lieu of insurance RO 175 and service 2 years / 20,000 kms (whichever is earlier).

(Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms and conditions apply. Visit the showroom for exact details, please).

Customers looking to own a Corolla HEV can benefit with cash gift from RO 2,200 up

HSBC TOPS EUROMONEY POLL FOR TRADE FINANCE SERVICE

Businesses across the Sultanate have voted HSBC the best bank in Oman for domestic trade finance services in the 2021 Euromoney trade finance survey.

As Covid-19 swept across the world in 2020, HSBC worked closely with clients and responded quickly to minimise disruption to their supply chains by equipping them with the tools to use HSBC's digital channels and maintain the flow of essential goods around the world.

At the present around 81 per cent of HSBC's trade transactions in Oman are completed digitally. "Being recognised by our clients for having the Best Trade Finance Services in Oman demonstrates our strong position and our ability to connect Omani businesses to trading partners around the globe. We continue to invest in the digitalisation of our products and services to make banking simpler, better and faster for our customers," said Melika Betley (pictured), CEO of HSBC Bank Oman.



OVERWHELMING RESPONSE TO ALL-NEW NISSAN X-TERRA 2021

The all-new Nissan X-Terra 2021 which has been particularly designed for adventure and the outdoors has received an overwhelming response from new buyers in Oman. Ever since its launch recently, Nissan showrooms have been receiving huge footfalls to check out the all-new Nissan X-Terra 2021 which empowers owners to go anywhere, beyond boundaries. Impressed auto enthusiasts have been booking the tough yet sophisticated vehicle which promises to be an ideal partner for customers seeking exciting outdoor adventures.

Noted personality, Basma al Issa is very particular when it comes to the comfort and styling of her vehicle. Being an adventure enthusiast, she is keen on a car with its off-roading capabilities. Basma al Issa says, "I test drove the Nissan X-Terra 2021 and found it to be more than a perfect car. Most importantly, being a mother of three, I was particularly happy with the host of safety features it offers.



Rising yields a short-term threat to the commodity bull-run

OLE S HANSEN

Commodities continue to witness increased attention and demand. Following a near decade of trading sideways to lower, it has embarked on a strong rally with individual commodities reaching multi-year highs.

During the past decade we witnessed a period of strength among individual commodities but in recent months it has become noticeably more synchronised across all the three sectors: energy; metals; and agriculture.

However, following the spike in US bond yields this past week, the sectors recent success in attracting record amounts of speculative buying may in the short-term, and

despite strong fundamentals, force a correction or at best a period of consolidation. In this update we take a closer look at the reasons behind the rally and why yield moves matter.

There are plenty of reasons why commodities are on the move, but importantly there are expectations for a post-pandemic growth sprint with large amounts of stimulus driving demand for inflation hedges and green transformation themes.

This is against a backdrop of the tightening supply of several key commodities following years of under investment.

These developments increasingly drive expectations that we have entered a new dawn for commodities, raising the prospect for a new super cycle.



A super cycle is characterised by prolonged periods of mismatch between surging demand and inelastic supply.

These supply and demand imbalances take time to correct due to high start-up capex for

new projects, alongside the time needed to harness new supply.

For example, in the copper industry it can be ten years from decision to production. Such periods often cause companies to postpone investment decisions

awaiting rising prices, at which point it is often too late to avoid further price gains.

Previous demand-driven super cycles included rearmament before WW2, and the reform of the Chinese economy which accelerated following its accession to the WTO in 2001.

Then, the period prior to the 2008 global financial crisis saw the Bloomberg Commodity Total Return index surged by 215 per cent. Super cycles can also be supply driven with the most recent being the Opec oil embargo of the 1970's.

It is expected that the next commodity super cycle will not only be driven by recovering demand, but also heightened inflation risks at a time when investors will need real assets such

as commodities to hedge their portfolios following years of sub-par returns.

In addition, following a decade when investment in technology was preferred over hard assets there has been a lack of new supply lines.

Whereas the early November vaccine news coupled with Joe Biden's winning of the US presidency helped boost the sector, its current rally is almost ten months old.

Launched last April at the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the initial rally was driven by producers cutting supplies while China embarked on a massive stimulus programme to reignite their economy. [The writer is Head of Commodity Strategy at Saxo Bank]



Gold prices edge higher

Gold edged higher on Monday, recovering from an eight-month low, as a weaker dollar lifted its appeal. Spot gold rose 0.3 per cent to \$1,739.31 per ounce. — Reuters



Aramco seeks extension on loans

Saudi Aramco has asked banks to extend by a year a \$10 billion loan, suggesting that rebounding crude prices are not pushing the oil giant to reduce debt for the time being. — Reuters



Aviva sets out 2040 climate strategy

British insurer Aviva plans to become a net zero carbon emissions company by 2040, claiming this was the most demanding target set by any major insurer worldwide. — Reuters

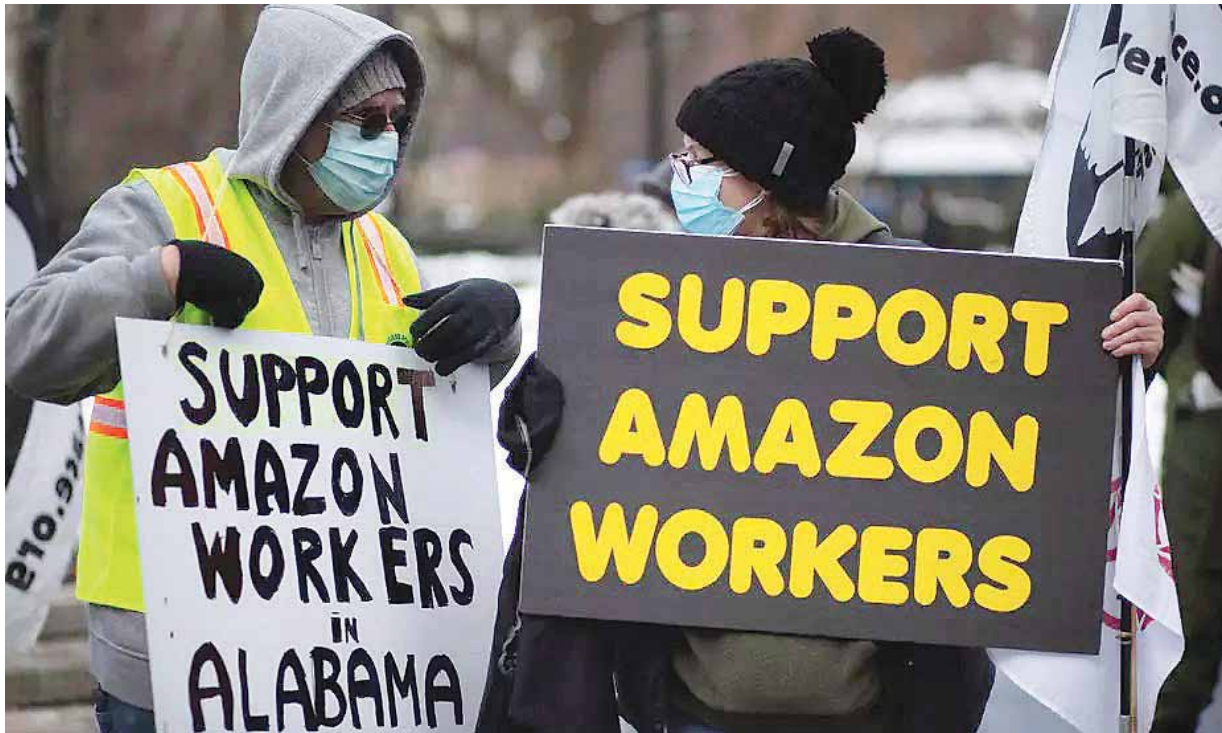
Biden urges workers to ‘make your voice heard’ as Amazon employees vote on union

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden defended workers’ rights to form unions and warned against intimidation of workers in a video posted on Twitter on Sunday night, as Amazon.com Inc employees in Alabama vote on whether to unionise.

Biden didn’t mention Amazon, but specifically referenced “workers in Alabama” in the video and a tweet introducing it. He said every worker should have a free and fair choice to join a union, and no employer could take that away. “It’s your right...So make your voice heard,” he said.

“Unions lift up workers, both union and non-union, but especially Black and Brown workers,” Biden said in the video. “There should be no intimidation, no coercion, no threats, no anti-union propaganda. No supervisor should confront employees about their union preferences.”

Amazon, America’s second-biggest private employer, has no unionised labour in the United States, and workers at its fulfilment centre in Bessemer, Alabama, would be the first if they vote in favour. Such a decision could encourage workers attempting to organise at other Amazon



People hold placards during a protest in support of Amazon workers in Union Square, New York. — AFP

facilities.

A spokeswoman from the Retail, Wholesale & Department Store Union (RWDSU) said there had been many reports of various “intimidation tactics used by Amazon on this campaign and during the voting period.”

The company has trained managers to spot organising activity. A website advocating

Amazon workers shun unions, doitwithoutdues.com, warned the Bessemer employees, “why pay almost \$500 in dues We’ve got you covered* with high wages, health care, vision, and dental benefits.”

The last attempt by Amazon workers to unionise was in 2014.

A top adviser to Biden and officials from the RWDSU discussed the union’s drive

to organise Amazon workers at the Bessemer site after the inauguration.

On Sunday, RWDSU President Stuart Appelbaum welcomed what he called Biden’s “clear message of support” for the Amazon workers seeking to bring the first union to an Amazon warehouse.

“As President Biden points out, the best way for working people

Amazon, America’s second-biggest private employer, has no unionised labour in the United States, and workers at its fulfilment centre in Bessemer, Alabama, would be the first if they vote in favour

to protect themselves and their families is by organising into unions. And that is why so many working women and men are fighting for a union at the Amazon facility in Bessemer, Alabama,” he said in a statement.

Richard Trumka, head of the AFL-CIO federation of unions, also hailed Biden’s tweet: “@POTUS is right: Every worker should have the free and fair choice to join a union.” Biden has vowed to increase union membership in the United States after years of steady declines.

The Bureau of Labour Statistics reported the union membership rate in the private sector was around 6.2 per cent in 2019, compared to around 20 per cent in 1983. — Reuters

Oil prices jump as US House passes stimulus bill



A woman fills a car with fuel at a gas station in Quito, Ecuador. — Reuters

SINGAPORE: Oil prices rebounded more than \$1 on Monday after the US House of Representatives passed a huge stimulus package.

Brent crude futures for May rose \$1.24, or 1.9 per cent, to \$65.66 per barrel.

US West Texas Intermediate crude futures jumped \$1.18, or 1.9 per cent, to \$62.68 a barrel.

Front-month prices for both contracts touched 13-month highs last week, slipping back on Friday along with wider financial markets following a bond rout amid inflation fears.

— Reuters

Turkish economy grew 1.8 per cent in 2020

ISTANBUL: Turkey’s economy grew by 1.8 per cent overall in 2020, averting a contraction despite the coronavirus pandemic, according to government data released on Monday. In the last quarter, gross domestic product (GDP) expanded year-on-year by a seasonally adjusted 5.9 per cent, the Turkish Statistical Institute said.

It put fourth quarter GDP growth at 1.7 per cent, up from the previous quarter. Last week, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecast Turkey’s GDP growth would reach 6 per cent in 2021.



People exit from the international arrivals terminal at the new Istanbul Airport in Istanbul. — Reuters

While the pandemic “inflicted economic toll on Turkey,” the IMF noted that the policy response, “which focused on monetary and credit expansion,” led to a strong rebound.

— dpa

Tech demand drives Asia’s factory revival

TOKYO: Solid demand for technology goods drove extended growth in Asia’s factories in February, but a slowdown in China underscored the challenges facing the region as it seeks a sustainable recovery from the shattering Covid-19 pandemic blow.

The vaccine rollouts globally and pick-up in demand provided optimism for a vast number of businesses that had grappled for months with a cash-flow crunch and falling profits.

In Japan, manufacturing activity expanded at the fastest pace in over two years while South Korea’s exports rose for a fourth straight month in February, suggesting the region’s export-reliant economies were benefiting



Women work at a garment factory in Thai Binh province, Vietnam. — Reuters

from robust global trade.

In South Korea, a regional exports bellwether, shipments jumped 9.5 per cent in February from a year earlier for its fourth straight month of increase on

continued growth in memory chip and car sales.

India’s factory activity expanded for the seventh straight month in February on strong demand and increased output,

The vaccine rollouts globally and pick-up in demand provided optimism for a vast number of businesses that had grappled for months with a cash-flow crunch and falling profits

though a spike in input costs could weigh on corporate profits ahead.

The Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam also saw manufacturing activity expand in February, a sign the region was gradually recovering from the initial hit of the pandemic. — Reuters

Underpricing rare earths will lead to race to bottom: China

BEIJING: China’s rare earths are underpriced due to vicious competition and face low resource utilisation, which would lead to a race to the bottom, the country’s industry minister said on Monday.

“Our rare earths did not sell at the ‘rare’ price but sold at the ‘earth’ price... because of competitive bidding, which wasted the precious resource,” Xiao Yaqing from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) said during a news briefing.

Threats from China, the world’s



Workers transport soil containing rare earth elements for export at a port in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province, China. — Reuters

top producer of rare earths — a group of 17 minerals used in military equipment, consumer electronics and electric vehicles — to curb exports of the materials to the US has left Washington scrambling for alternative supplies.

The country’s rare earths exports hit a five-year low in 2020 amid the pandemic-stricken overseas demand and rising supply in domestic industries.

The MIIT proposed in January to tighten regulation of the rare

earths industry chain, including a stipulation that importers and exporters abide by foreign trade and export control laws.

“Government should play a role in maintaining market order, to loose what can be loosen and control what should be controlled,” Xiao said.

The minister said some producers were producing excessive amounts of rare earths, causing environmental issues and leading to low resource utilisation rates.

Meanwhile, the industry is also lacking high-level rare earth products, which is against technological innovation and progress, he added.

“We should learn from Japanese enterprises in this regard, as many Japanese enterprises have done a lot of work in the high-end rare earths products,” he added.

China’s rare earths mining quota in the first half of 2021 were set at 84,000 tonnes, a 27 per cent jump from a year earlier.

— Reuters

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features

What to know about keeping a pet bird

Ibrahim al Jardani owns nearly a dozen species of pet birds converting a corner of his land property to hold the cages for his pets. Ibrahim is championing responsible pet ownership reminding everyone that there are many things one needs to consider before settling on a particular species... **P20**



INSIDE STORIES

ART



VAN GOGH PAINTING TO BE SHOWN IN PUBLIC FOR FIRST TIME

A painting of a Paris street scene by Vincent Van Gogh is to be shown to the public for the first time, after spending more than a century behind closed doors in the private collection of a French family... **Story on P19**

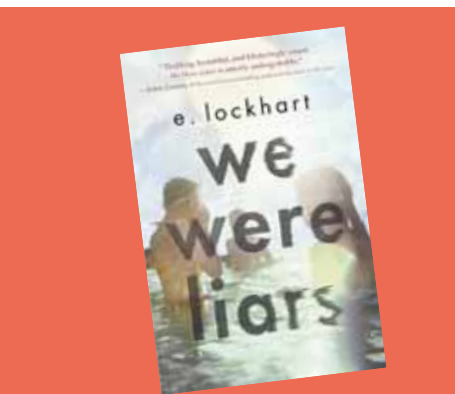
ENTERTAINMENT



FIVE TAKEAWAYS FROM THE GOLDEN GLOBES

The Golden Globes on Sunday experimented with a virtual format and cemented "Nomadland" as the film to beat this Hollywood awards season. Here are five key takeaways from the night... **Story on P19**

READ



WE WERE LIARS

BY E. LOCKHART

The book focuses on the theme of self-acceptance, family morals, and the possibly-deadly consequences of one's mistakes.

ROYAL TALES



PRINCE HARRY TELLS OPRAH HE WORRIED HISTORY WOULD REPEAT ITSELF

Prince Harry, who shocked Britain last year when he and his wife Meghan stepped back from royal duties, told US interviewer Oprah Winfrey that he had worried about history repeating itself, according to excerpts released on Sunday... **Story on P19**

MUSIC



AT 6, HE CLEARED TRINITY MUSIC LESSONS

Age is not a barrier to many things in life. Daniel, a Muscat-based resident has carved a niche in music for himself and has cleared his music lessons from one of the world's most sought-after music institutions, the Trinity College, London, at a very young age... **Story on P18**



At 6, he cleared Trinity Music lessons



BY KABEER YOUSUF

Age is not a barrier to many things in life. Daniel, a Muscat-based resident has carved a niche in music for himself and has cleared his music lessons from one of the world's most sought-after music institutions, the Trinity College, London, at a very young age.

A student of ISM, Daniel completed his Grade 1 Trinity College of London – Keyboard Exams in May 2016 when he was 6 years old and continued to learn further – a journey he began when he was just a toddler. Thereafter, he advanced his grades every six months until he completed Grade 8 Trinity College of London – Keyboard Exams in April 2019 when he was 9 years old.

His parents clearly remember that Daniel showed his first musical inclination when he was barely 7 months old. He learned some notes when he was 1 year and 3 months using an old keyboard of his father available at home. He would carefully listen to the different sounds of each note and try to play in some patterns. As a toddler, he always liked to listen to music especially English Pop and Rock songs.

His father, amid his busy schedule, put him to a couple of music teachers but they told Daniel was too young to learn keyboard since his fingers were small. Later, his father himself started to teach him slowly but steadily before Daniel gave his first public performance when he was 6 years old at the Indian School Muscat for Christmas Assembly – Silent Night and Jingle Bells.

"Thereafter, every six months he advanced his grades until he completed Grade 8 Trinity College of London-Keyboard Exams in April 2019 when he was 9 years old," says Doctor Thashli Thankachen, Internist and Diabetologist at the Badr al Samaa Hospital, Ruwi.

Daniel gave all his grade exams under the guidance of his music mentor, Savio D'souza. He was one of the youngest to have achieved this feat. Side by side, Daniel used to perform at elite platforms like at the Royal Opera House Muscat, Tunes, Indian School Muscat (Sports events, Teachers' Day Celebrations, Special assemblies etc.), St. Peter & Paul Church, private functions.

It was Daniel who scored the background for a short film, 'Alisha' which was based on a Russian fable and enacted by artistes from Oman.

Daniel has won several prizes and honours for his exemplary performances on keyboard including blind-folded feats. He was awarded bronze medal in the Global Music Awards 2019 (International Music Competition).

Today, he's known to be an expert at piano, keyboard, keytar and drums and has started getting trained in Guitar and Alto Saxophone as well. He sings and performs English and Hindi songs as a hobby and has received honours for the same as well. All his fete can be viewed on his YouTube channel under his name Daniel Thashli.

His aim? No wonder, he'd like to be groomed into a music virtuoso while pursuing Indian Civil Service as his career. One day, as Deepak Dev, acclaimed music director said after witnessing his interest in music, said "Daniel is a future musician in the making", he is a promise that both Oman and India can look forward to.

FILM

Tina Turner doc, lockdown films headline virtual Berlin fest



THE WORLD premiere of a documentary about music legend Tina Turner and an "impressive" pack of pandemic-era movies will take the spotlight at an all-virtual Berlin film festival starting on Monday. With theatres shuttered due to the coronavirus outbreak, Europe's first major cinema showcase of the year was pushed back by a month, put online and divided into two parts as the movie industry struggles to find its feet.

The Berlinale, now in its 71st year, will hold the competition for its Golden Bear top prize March 1-5 virtually for critics, reporters and rights buyers.

For the second stage, organisers hope to invite stars and screen the films for the general public in June, mainly at open-air cinemas. Last year's event, one of the last before the pandemic, sold more than 330,000 tickets.

The festival has also gone "gender neutral" with its acting awards – best actress and best actor prizes are history, replaced with best lead and supporting performance.

Industry watchers say that despite severe restrictions on making and screening movies, the Berlinale has managed to pull together an exciting lineup. "I'm pleasantly surprised that they were able to get what looks like a pretty impressive collection of solid movies together for this festival," Scott Roxborough, European bureau chief for The Hollywood Reporter, said.

UNCERTAIN TIMES

One of the hottest titles is "Tina", a star-studded HBO documentary about the queen of rock'n'roll by Oscar winners Dan Lindsay and T J Martin ("Undeclared") to be released on March 27.

The film features never-before-seen concert footage, interviews with the 81-year-old superstar and recollections from the likes of Angela Bassett and Oprah Winfrey.

Directors including Emmy winner Maria Schrader ("Unorthodox"), German-Spanish actor Daniel Bruehl ("Rush") and France's Celine Sciamma ("Portrait of a Lady on Fire") will be premiering new work in competition.

All 15 contenders for the top prizes to be awarded on Friday are films that were made or in post-production during the pandemic.

Berlinale artistic director Carlo Chatrjian said the selection captures "the uncertain times we are experiencing".

Bruehl, who starred in the bittersweet German comedy "Good Bye, Lenin" and is now part of the Captain America franchise, will make his directorial debut with "Next Door", a black comedy about gentrification. Schrader will unveil "I'm Your Man", a sci-fi comedy about a woman falling for a custom-made Mr Right, played by British actor Dan Stevens ("Beauty and the Beast") while Sciamma offers up "Petite Maman", a magical realist look at girlhood.

One of Romania's top filmmakers, Radu Jude, is back with the intriguingly titled "Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn" about a teacher whose sex tape winds up on the Internet.

Hong Sang-soo of South Korea, who won best director in Berlin last year for "The Woman Who Ran", will show "Introduction", vying against films from Japan, Mexico and Lebanon.

WATCHING UNDER HOUSE ARREST

The Berlinale comes at a complicated time for the industry. With the glamour of the red carpet and the magic of the big-screen experience sorely lacking, Roxborough said festivals were still "experimenting" with formats as the pandemic drags on.

"A danger of these virtual festivals is that even critics can't get super excited about watching films at home," he said.

"They have to have some kind of communal experience to go crazy for the movie that nobody's heard about but that now everybody just has to see."

Cannes hopes to hold its festival in July after being cancelled last year.

Venice managed to benefit from a break in high infection levels to take place last September with a range of special precautions.

But this winter, with the second wave raging, Sundance was held online.

The Berlinale jury will be made up of six previous Golden Bear winners including last year's laureate, dissident Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof, who claimed the prize for "There Is No Evil" about capital punishment.

Five of the members will all stay at the same hotel and sit, physically distanced, in a Berlin cinema made specially available under lockdown, while Rasoulof will watch from Tehran under house arrest. — **AFP**



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Van Gogh painting to be shown in public for first time

A PAINTING of a Paris street scene by Vincent Van Gogh is to be shown to the public for the first time, after spending more than a century behind closed doors in the private collection of a French family.

The work, painted by Van Gogh in 1887 while he was lodging with his brother Theo in the French capital, will be put on display by Sotheby's auction house in Amsterdam, Hong Kong, and Paris, prior to being auctioned off next month.

The auction house put an estimated value on the artwork of between 5 million euros (\$6.08 million) and 8 million euros.

Titled "A street scene in Montmartre," the painting depicts a man and woman, strolling arm in arm past a ramshackle fence with a windmill in the background.

The painting is part of a series that Van Gogh produced of scenes in Montmartre, a hilly district of Paris now dominated by the Sacre Coeur church.

When the artist was there, the church was under construction and the area was a patchwork of fields, houses and windmills on the edge of the city that was starting to attract a bohemian artist set with its cheap rents.

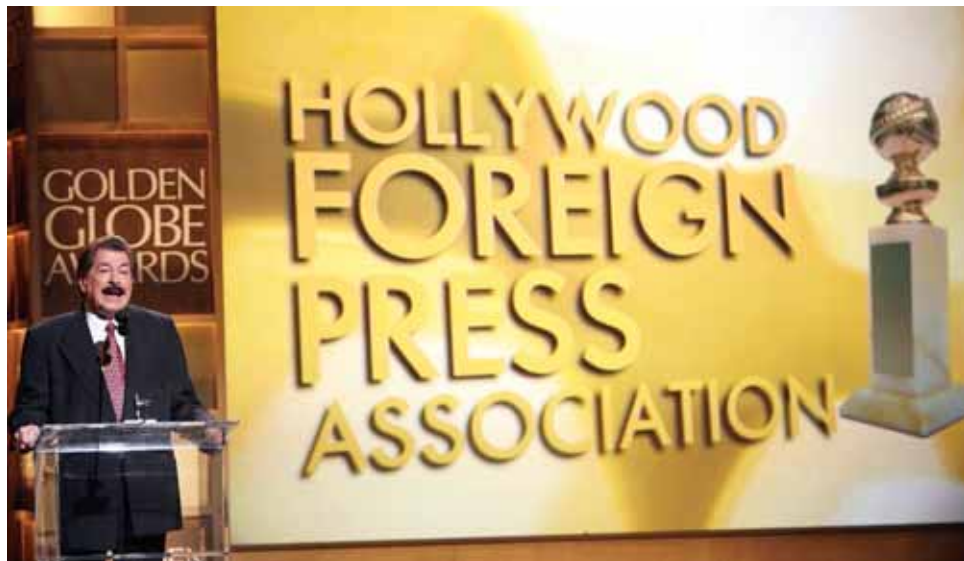
The auction house said the painting had been seen in catalogues, but has never itself been on public display. It did not identify the current owner.

Sotheby's said in a statement that very few paintings from Van Gogh's Montmartre period remain in private hands. "The appearance on the market of a work of this calibre, and from such an iconic series, is undoubtedly a major event," the statement said.

Van Gogh arrived in Paris in 1886. He left the city in 1888, saying he was tired of the hectic pace of Paris life.

He moved to the south of France, where he cut off part of his ear during an episode of mental illness. The artist later shot himself and died near Paris on July 29, 1890. — **Reuters**

Five takeaways from the Golden Globes



LOS ANGELES: The Golden Globes on Sunday experimented with a virtual format and cemented "Nomadland" as the film to beat this Hollywood awards season. Here are five key takeaways from the night:

NETFLIX ARRIVES (SORT OF...)

When it lost the first few awards, Netflix must have dreaded a repeat of last year's fiasco, when it converted just two of its 34 nods.

But the streaming giant's increased clout in Hollywood proved impossible to ignore, as it ultimately topped both the film and TV awards on Sunday.

British royals series "The Crown" proved especially popular, sweeping four prizes including various acting gongs and best drama, and Netflix earned two other TV statuettes for "The Queen's Gambit." On the film side, the late Chadwick Boseman won for "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," Rosamund Pike for "I Care a Lot" and Sophia Loren's "The Life Ahead" won best original song.

But there was ultimately disappointment for Netflix best picture hope "The Trial of the Chicago 7," which claimed only best screenplay honours for Aaron Sorkin, and nominations-leading "Mank," which missed out altogether.

NO PARTY, NO GLOBES

More than any other Hollywood award show, the Globes depend on their reputation for hosting a star-packed, champagne-drenched party of a night.

On Sunday, with all those elements absent due to Covid-19, it showed.

An initial review from *Variety* called it a "lazy, clueless ceremony," while Deadline dubbed the show "bloated and glitchy."

The night's nadir came as the first winner Daniel Kaluuya briefly lost sound for his acceptance speech, forcing in-studio presenter Laura Dern to apologise. Unsurprisingly, the winners themselves were more generous in their analysis of the event, if still rather lukewarm. Sorkin called the night "more intimate," while Sacha Baron Cohen declared it "interesting" and expressed thanks that he didn't have to set foot on a red carpet.

DIVERSITY TAKES CENTRE STAGE

The Globes-awarding Hollywood Foreign Press Association has been under fire this week after a *Los Angeles*

Times expose reported that it lacks a single Black member.

Everybody from winners and presenters to co-hosts Tina Fey and Amy Poehler poked fun at the group, which put three senior members on stage to promise change. Yet the group — known for conservative choices — ultimately chose a diverse array of winners.

Black awardees included Boseman, Kaluuya, Andra Day and "Soul" composer Jon Batiste, while Chloe Zhao became the first Asian female to win best director.

POLITICS

With the end of Donald Trump's presidency still fresh in liberal Hollywood's mind, the Globes offered a chance to ridicule the former president after his removal from the White House.

Sorkin sounded one of the night's political notes in his acceptance speech, quoting the late activist Abbie Hoffman: "If you stop doing it, democracy crumbles."

"I don't need any more evidence than what happened on January 6 to agree with this," said Sorkin, referring to the storming of the US Capitol by a Trump-supporting mob.

Mark Ruffalo, winning for TV limited series "I Know This Much Is True," urged viewers to "turn the page on the cruel past of this nation."

Baron Cohen also singled out Trump's personal lawyer for attention.

"This movie could not have been possible without my co-star, a fresh new talent, who came from nowhere, and turned out to be a comedy genius," he said.

"I'm talking about Rudy Giuliani — I mean, who can get more laughs out of one unzipping? It's just incredible."

RECORDS TUMBLE

Chloe Zhao stole the "record-breaking" headlines with her "Nomadland" the first best drama directed by a woman, and as the first Asian woman to win best director. But other records also tumbled on Sunday.

Sorkin — already the most-nominated Globes screenwriter — became the joint biggest winner in the screenplay category, alongside Robert Bolt and Quentin Tarantino. The trio now each have three wins. And Boseman became just the second posthumous winner — and first in four decades — for best drama actor.

The previous, Peter Finch, went on to win an Oscar for his star turn in 1976's "Network." — **AFP**



Prince Harry tells Oprah he worried history would repeat itself

LOS ANGELES: Prince Harry, who shocked Britain last year when he and his wife Meghan stepped back from royal duties, told US interviewer Oprah Winfrey that he had worried about history repeating itself, according to excerpts released on Sunday.

The CBS broadcast network released two brief clips from Winfrey's interview of the couple, which is scheduled to air on March 7. It is the first TV interview the couple, formally known as the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, have given since making their homes in California last year.

"My biggest concern was history repeating itself," Harry said, apparently referring to his mother Princess Diana, who was hounded by the British press and died at age 36 in a car crash in Paris after her divorce from Prince Charles.

Harry, 36, was seated next to Meghan, 39, and holding her hand. The couple announced this month that they are expecting their second child.

"I'm just really relieved and happy to be sitting here talking to you with my wife by my side," Harry said. "Because I can't imagine what it must have been like for her (Diana), going through this process by herself all those years ago."

"It's been unbelievably tough for the two of us, but at least we had each other," Harry added.

In the clips, Winfrey said that no subject was off limits and at one point tells the couple "you have said some pretty shocking things here," including that their situation had been "almost unsurvivable."

Before they moved to California, the couple had complained about the British tabloids' treatment of Meghan, whose father is white and mother is African-American, some of which they said amounted to bullying or racism.

Earlier this month, Buckingham Palace announced that the couple would not be returning to their lives as working members of the royal family. — **Reuters**



What to know about keeping a pet bird

BY TALIB AL WUHAIBI

Most Omanis like to have birds as pets in their houses. Birds come in an amazing variety of shapes, colours and personalities. It is important to find the right bird that fits your lifestyle. Some birds need a vast amount of attention and work, especially parrots, but even some smaller birds need a lot of love and handling to ensure that they are

Taking care of birds isn't as easy as many people think. Before getting birds as pets, one must have to bird-proof one's home accordingly. There are things around the home that are considered hazardous to birds

happy and friendly. Many people have allocated special corners for the nests and cages of these lovely birds. "Large cages are important to give the birds sufficient space to fly freely", shared Ibrahim al Jardani, a hobbyist who loves to raise birds and take care of them in his house. Ibrahim feels attached to these species since he was little. In the beginning, he was keen on buying only small birds but he noticed that they die fast as he wasn't able to take care of them due to the nature and atmosphere of the place. Later, he decided to buy other breeds that he thinks can adapt better to the environment. He searched across the governorates to find the breeds that he wants. He also started making cages himself. "There are many things you need to consider before you settle on a species, including the lifespan of the bird, size of the cage it needs, food it will require, the noise level of the bird, and the time and attention the species needs", he said. Al Jardani added that Omani nature is rich in a variety of good breeds of birds due to the variety of terrains in the Sultanate. The deserts, wadis, mountains, hills, vast gardens, greenery oases, the springs and Aflaj, all are

homes to different kinds of birds. "I mostly focus on the breed of the bird before looking at its colours and look. Many birds don't fit our lifestyle and weather. Having pets that are not ideal for my lifestyle or its environment would be an extra burden that I don't need", he explains. "After that initial assessment, I might get attracted to the colour and also the birds that make lovely sounds. I love to listen to their voices in the early morning. It gives the feeling that everything is innocent and it relieves you when the going gets tough", he shared. Al Jardani owns almost a dozen varieties of birds collected over the years. "I own many birds, including partridge, Chinese, Thai and Ethiopian pigeons, Mexican dove, fruit pigeon, as well as I have quail and various types of parrots such as Indian, Fisher parrots, Canary, budgies and zebra finch", he specified. He suggested that beginners who do not have a lot of time to spend with a pet bird should consider species such as canaries or finches. If you have a bit more time and have an interest in parrots, then you could consider parakeets (budgies) or cockatiels, which are smaller members of the parrot family and are friendly, relatively quiet,

and easy to tame if you get a young bird. Taking care of birds isn't as easy as many people think. Before getting birds as pets, one must have to bird-proof one's home accordingly. There are things around the home that are considered hazardous to birds. Things you probably wouldn't think of like your cookware, scented candles and deodorizers. Al Jardani shared that the respiratory systems of birds are delicate. If you are a smoker, then a bird might not be the right fit for you. Some plants are perfectly safe, while others are potentially fatal to birds. It is important to know about all the household hazards that can harm a bird. Al Jardani advised also that one should consider his own health and his family's before giving any animal as pets. He explained that some birds might be dangerous and can carry germs that make people sick. He said it is important to keep your bird healthy but at the same time, a human's health must always take precedence. He advised washing your hands every time after you handle your bird. Although these bird-borne illnesses are rare, you will still need to be vigilant about hand-washing.