

Sultanate restricts entry on short visits

Oman has now restricted the entry of visitors to the country on short visits. Close on the heels of closing the land borders for a week to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has informed all airlines operating to the Sultanate that there is no longer an option for passengers travelling to Oman to stay in the Sultanate for a period of fewer than eight days. **DETAILS ON P4**



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A COMMUNITY PLATFORM FOR FEMALE ATHLETES



MUSCAT

SULTANATE'S ROLE IN REGION HAILED

His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received at his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Wednesday Dr Nayef Falah al Hajraf, GCC Secretary-General. The meeting exchanged cordial conversations and discussed matters of common concern. Dr Al Hajraf praised the Sultanate's role in supporting peace and stability in the GCC region and the world at large. He also commended the Sultanate's endeavours and its constructive stances in extending bridges of understanding and cooperation among various world's countries. **DETAILS ON P2**

DEAL FOR ARTIFICIAL REEF PROJECT IN SUR

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources signed an agreement with Haejo Engineering and Contracting Company (HAEJO) to award the second stage of the artificial coral reef project in the Wilayat of Sur. The agreement includes designing, manufacturing and unloading artificial reef modules in the Wilayat of Sur, as well as following up the results of their deployment in the marine environment, at a total cost of RO 90,000. The project is funded by the Oman-India Fertiliser Company. **DETAILS ON P2**



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ISRAEL INVITES BIDS FOR 2,500 NEW SETTLER HOMES

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GRIM PICTURE FROM GLIMPSES OF ETHIOPIA'S TIGRAY WAR

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Sultanate took tangible steps to enhance human rights

MUSCAT: Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) has said that the Sultanate took tangible steps to foster human rights and preserve human dignity.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, the Commission pointed out that His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued a number of Royal Decrees, the most important of which amends the Basic Law of the State and introduces new clauses offering

more guarantee to human liberties, rights, human dignity and equality among citizens in terms of rights.

Other Decrees restructured the State's Administrative Apparatus to help meet the goals of Oman Vision 2040 and respond to the aspirations of citizens over the coming stage of development, said the statement.

Oman Human Rights Commission categorically

Oman took tangible and significant steps to reinforce human rights as His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued several Decrees

OHRC

refuted the report of Human Rights Watch (HRW) on specific human rights issues, by joining more international agreements of relevance.

The statement indicates that the Sultanate joined three agreements in 2020 and that these agreements have had the power after being ratified. They were enshrined in Royal Decrees, as follows: Royal Decree No 44/2020 ratifies the Sultanate's joining the

International Convention for Protection of All Persons From enforced Disappearance.

Royal Decree No 45/2020 ratifies the Sultanate's joining the International Convention Against Torture, Other Cruel, Inhuman or degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Royal Decree No 46/2020 ratifies the Sultanate's joining the International Covenant on Economic... **TURN TO P5**

72% of deaths in Oman due to lifestyle diseases

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 20

Cardiovascular diseases are the leading cause of all non-communicable disease deaths accounting for 36 per cent of these deaths in Oman. This is followed by cancer (11 per cent), diabetes (8 per cent) and chronic respiratory diseases (2 per cent).

This is revealed as the Department of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) at the Ministry of Health (MoH) launches 'Hemtak Maana' awareness campaign today to control chronic diseases.

The campaign, launched in cooperation with AstraZeneca Company, aims to raise awareness among patients living with chronic diseases and their families. It will



focus on the role of patients to control their diseases through self-monitoring and adopting healthy lifestyles.

Non-communicable diseases are diseases which are not contagious, chronic, and often progress slowly.

The four main non-

communicable diseases are cardiovascular, diabetes, cancer, and chronic respiratory problems that lead to 72 per cent of all mortality in Oman, and 18 per cent of these mortalities are prematurely occurring in the age group of 30-69 years old.

TURN TO P4

OMAN TO HOST INTERNATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS



Oman Automobile Association will host international championships during the current season namely – Oman International Drift Championship which will be held at the beginning of February, the second leg of the Middle East Rally Championship (Oman Suhar International Rally) from February 18-20.



Assuming presidency, Biden says democracy has prevailed in US

WASHINGTON: Democrat Joe Biden was sworn in as president of the United States on Wednesday, vowing to end the 'uncivil war' in a deeply divided country reeling from a battered economy and a raging coronavirus pandemic that has killed more than 400,000 Americans.

With his hand on a five-inch thick heirloom Bible that has been in his family for more than a century, Biden took the oath of office administered by US Chief Justice John Roberts that binds the president to "preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

"Through a crucible for the ages, America has been tested anew, and America has risen to the challenge," Biden said in his inaugural address. "Today we celebrate the triumph not of a candidate but of a cause: the cause of democracy... At this hour, my friends, democracy has prevailed."

Biden, 78, became the

oldest US president in history at a scaled-back ceremony in Washington that was largely stripped of its usual pomp and circumstance, due both to the coronavirus and security concerns following the January 6 assault on the US Capitol by supporters of outgoing president Donald Trump.

The norm-defying Trump flouted one last convention on his way out of the White House when he refused to meet with Biden or attend his successor's inauguration, breaking with a political tradition seen as affirming the peaceful transfer of power.

Trump, who never conceded the November 3 election, did not mention Biden by name in his final remarks as president on Wednesday morning, when he touted his administration's record and promised to be back "in some form." He boarded Air Force One for the last time and headed to his Mar-a-Lago retreat in Florida. **SEE ALSO P8**

■ SAYYID SHIHAB RECEIVES FRENCH AMBASSADOR



MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimour al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Wednesday Renaud Salins, Ambassador of the French Republic to the Sultanate. The two sides exchanged cordial conversations and reviewed the bilateral relations between the Sultanate and France. — ONA

Suwaiq-Hoqain dual carriageway opens

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) on Wednesday opened a 20 km stretch of Al Suwaiq-Al Hoqain dual carriageway project for traffic.

This came to fully utilise the strategic role of Batinah Expressway by establishing upgraded road links between it and the Al Batinah dual carriageway, and constructing new interchanges to keep up with the growing traffic between North and South Al Batinah governorates.

The project features a dual carriageway with two (3.75m wide)



lanes in each side, (2.5m wide) external asphalt road shoulders, and (1.5m wide) internal asphalt road shoulders. — ONA



Oman’s role in supporting peace in region hailed

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimour al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Wednesday Dr Nayef Falah al Hajraf, GCC Secretary General.

The meeting exchanged cordial conversations and discussed matters of common concern.

Dr Al Hajraf praised the Sultanate’s role in supporting peace and stability in the GCC region and the world at large. He also commended the Sultanate’s endeavours and its constructive stances in extending bridges of understanding and cooperation among various world’s countries.

The meeting was attended by Air Vice Marshal Saleh bin Yahya al Maskari, NDC Commandant. — ONA

GCC Secretary General highlights aspirations, challenges of group



MUSCAT: The National Defence College (NDC) on Wednesday organised a lecture titled “GCC Aspirations and Challenges”.

The lecture was delivered by GCC Secretary General Dr Nayef Falah al Hajraf as part of the curriculum of the NDC’s 8th batch.

Air Vice Marshal Saleh bin Yahya al Maskari, Commandant of the NDC, welcomed the GCC Secretary General and the rest of the gathering.

In his lecture, Al Hajraf outlined the GCC role in tackling regional and international developments, elements of power and challenges influencing the GCC’s methodology of functioning as it performs its mandate of promoting its member states. The lecture also touched on the impact of the GCC moves on regional and international security, as well as the Council’s ability to explore or anticipate future developments and address the concomitant challenges to stay as a politically and economically influential entity in the region.

The lecture was attended by Dr Ali Qasim al Lawati, Adviser of Studies and Research at the Diwan of Royal Court, Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary General of the Majlis Ashshura, Khalid bin Ahmed al Saeedi, Secretary General of the State Council, Saud Ahmed al Barwani, Head of the GCC Department at the Foreign Ministry and Dr Zainab Ali al Qasmi, Head of the Diplomatic Institute at the Foreign Ministry, as well as NDC faculty members and personnel. — ONA

■ SAYYID BADR RECEIVES AL HAJRAF

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received Dr Nayef Falah al Hajraf, GCC Secretary General on Wednesday. The meeting touched on the blessed GCC march. The two sides exchanged views and ideas to enhance the GCC joint action particularly in light of the outcomes of the 41st GCC Summit held earlier this month in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. — ONA



Artificial coral reefs in Sur

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR) on Wednesday signed an agreement with Haejoo Engineering and Construction Company (HAEJOO) to award the second stage of the artificial coral reef project in the Wilayat of Sur.

The agreement includes designing, manufacturing and unloading artificial reef modules in the Wilayat of Sur, as well as following up the results of their deployment in the marine



environment, at a total cost of RO 90,000. The project is funded by the Oman-India Fertiliser Company.

The agreement was signed by Eng Yaqoub bin Khalfan al Busaidy, MoAFWR Under-

Secretary for Fisheries and Ryan Paik, HAEJOO General Manager.

The project is part of the strategic plans to develop the fisheries sector. The ministry aims to enhance fish stocks and biological diversity in the Sultanate’s waters in a manner that ensures the sustainability and prosperity of natural fisheries.

The project will be monitored by surveying and diving operations to ensure that modules are fit and free from breakage or damage. — ONA

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‘Your Doc by Your Side’ app to ease health services

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

@zainabalnasseri

A smartphone application named ‘Your doc by your side’ will be launched on Tuesday under the auspices of Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, at the Chamber’s main headquarters in Ruwi.

The App will provide a remote and online medical evaluation of patients at their doorsteps. The App is equipped with a database

of medical and health services that provides easy and quick access to patients and will make it easy for citizens, residents, visitors and short-term tourists in the Sultanate to find their doctors anywhere in the Sultanate in a short time.

The application shows a map of the Sultanate marking all healthcare establishments; hospitals, health complexes and centres, clinics, pharmacies, in addition to mobile health services such as consultation, home healthcare, emergency.

The application includes seven sections. The first section shows the basic data of healthcare facilities including pharmacies, opticians and medical laboratories. The second is for consultations which allow patients or users to conduct an online conversation with doctors with the opportunity to send photos if required.

The third section is a window for medical practitioners to register themselves as people who are ready to take part in providing home healthcare. The fourth has other health professionals such

as nurses, physiotherapists and cupping therapists to provide continuous and comprehensive care and follow-up.

The fifth section is dedicated to life coaches carrying out conversations with patients based on trust and confidentiality to help them identify themselves, define their goals and eventually encouraging them to make a drastic change in life. Section six is designed for emergency doctors, which will provide quick assistance by showing a list of the nearest paramedics, doctors, hospitals, or

ambulances.

The seventh section is more educational, which includes awareness videos and guidance intended to teach individuals how to act correctly in emergencies. It also includes some reliable health publications and announcements from the Ministry of Health or external health organisations.

The project will also teach users how to provide home healthcare to patients who underwent surgeries or those suffering from bedsores without appealing to healthcare facilities.

The project is aimed at raising general awareness among the community members, and to facilitate access to health data and services, and provide information on the health services required for tourists and visitors in the Sultanate, in addition to keeping abreast with technological development in health services. Its vision is to create a larger health platform in the Sultanate, that hosts all government and private health services. It will save time and effort for health services seekers.

Covid-19 research findings to be out by July

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

The Covid-19 Research Programme initiated in March 2020 by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI), has been progressing successfully. Some projects are complete, while others are underway to make recommendations that may support future policies, according to the Research and Innovation wing of the ministry.

The programme was launched in collaboration with various academic and governmental research institutions. As many as 28 research projects were funded last June at a total cost of RO 280,000.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Dr Salah al Zadjali, Director of the Programme, stated that the programme has been progressing very well and several projects have been fully completed. “Examples of such projects include, assessing the effectiveness of the provision of psychological services during the pandemic online, making a smart mask, and using drones and artificial intelligence to detect possible cases of Covid-19,” Dr Salah said.

Other completed projects are about developing prediction and forecasting systems. These projects are monitored by both MoHERI and the partner research



institutes.

The programme is expected to be finalised by July. The principal investigators of these research projects will be invited to talk about these achievements on TV and radio programmes.

“Additionally, a multi-sectoral workshop to share and disseminate the results of these studies with the organisations concerned will be conducted shortly,” Dr Salah added.

As for the National Strategy for Research and Development (NSRD) 2040, its action plan is taking shape, the strategic goal of which is to strengthen and support the national knowledge-based research and development systems, and also to enhance

the integration between the various agents in this very interactive ecosystem.

Additionally, the NSRD emphasises on the importance of quality assurance and research excellence. These criteria will enable the country to achieve the targeted economic and social impacts and make research a cornerstone for sustainable development. This can be achieved by maximising the utilisation of available resources and the intellectual capital in the country.

The NSRD 2040 was approved as part of the 10th five-year plan of the Research and Innovation sector. It aims to create harmony between the National Innovation Strategy and Oman Vision 2040.

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Omani architect wins Mohamed Makiya Prize

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Omani architect, Ali Jaffer al Lawati, has won the Mohamed Makiya Prize for Architecture 2020, which is also known as the Middle Eastern Architectural Personality of the Year Award from Tamayouz Excellence Award.

There were 11 other finalists from other parts of the world.

The award is given to individuals or organisations that have made significant contributions to the advancement of architecture in a specific period. The objective of the prize is to promote the advancement of architecture, at the same time celebrate contributions for the advancement of architecture in the Middle East and North Africa.

Ali Jaffer is a UK-based architect and he has a unique trait that is celebrating traditional Omani architecture and bringing it into the spotlight through radio shows and later went on to present various aspects of architecture. His popular shows on Radio Oman are ‘Architecture



of Oman, ‘Sustainable architecture of Oman’, ‘Islamic Architecture’, ‘Building Stories’.

“It feels great to be the first Omani in the GCC to receive the Prize to win this International Award, which is growing in prominence each year. There is a lack of awards in architecture in the Middle East and what makes me proud is the title of the prize itself – the legend in Architecture Mohamed Makiya, who was deeply connected to Oman. He was here in Muscat in the early 80s and he had proposed many projects and developments for the city of Muscat, but it was not implemented. The last architectural work he executed was the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Muscat. So I am very proud to have an award under his name,” he said.

“From the early 70s, late

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos was investing in educating the citizens not only in primary and high school but also in higher education. I am now studying at Liverpool University in the United Kingdom, and this is where Mohamed Makiya also studied at the School of Architecture,” reflected Ali.

“Today Omani youth is represented at different platforms and what I am experiencing today is the result of what my government initiated. When I first began the radio it was very limited and the number of architects was few. But I was travelling personally to Bahrain, the Emirates, Jordan and Lebanon to meet architects and now I am in London and continue to meet architects. The show is expanding and we now have followers in the Middle East.

There is no other show on the same line. The opportunity of the award came because of the channel that was created between the architects and the public to share ideas as well as having a platform to exchange viewpoints on architecture between the Middle East and Europe,” he explained.

وزارة التجارة والصناعة ووزارة الاستثمار

Tender 4/2021

The Internal Tenders Committee at Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment
Promotion announces the following tenders:

Tender No.	Title of the Tender	Tender document price R.O (Non-refundable)	Company Rate	Deadline for Tender Document collection	Deadline of Offers Submission
4/2021	Maintenance work for offices in the building of the General Office of the Ministry	RO. 25/-	Specialized	Tuesday 26/1/2021	Thursday 4/2/2021 10:00 am

Companies Specialized in such fields and the **Omani Local Companies that have valid registration certificate from the Tender Board and a valid tax card issued by tax Authority** can participate and obtain requirement for proposals and tender terms from the following website :
<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.

- Offers should be submitted online to the above mentioned website, enclosed with a copy of Bank Guarantee or certified cheque issued by a local bank in the Sultanate of Oman values (1%) of the offer, valid for (90) days from the date of offer submission and addressed to H.E the Undersecretary of Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee.
- Offers shall be submitted in a wax-sealed envelopes accompanied by the original Bank Guarantee or the cheque to the Secretariat of the Internal Tender Committee located in second floor of the Ministry's main building in Muttrah AlKubraa.
- The Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest or any other submitted offer.

Note: Priority shall be given to companies and institutions whose bid has the highest Omanisation rate .

Correspondences:

- Tender inquiries; All correspondence pertaining to TENDER Inquiries shall be online through E-Tendering System . (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
- E-Tendering System inquiries : All correspondences pertaining to the technical support of E-Tendering System shall be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number .
Tel. :+968 24166670
E-mail: etenderhd@ita.gov.om

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Sultanate restricts entry on short visits

VINOD NAIR
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Oman has now restricted the entry of visitors to the country on short visits. Close on the heels of closing the land borders for a week to contain the Covid-19 pandemic, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has informed all airlines operating to the Sultanate that there is no longer an option for passengers travelling to Oman to stay in the Sultanate for a period of fewer than eight days. The airlines must ensure that there are no travel reservations made to leave Oman before the mandatory quarantine period of

seven days, the CAA statement added. The decision has created confusion as many businessmen, technicians and traders often visit Oman for a couple of days and return after their work. Only recently, Oman made the quarantine mandatory for a traveller coming to the country for less than seven days. Last week, the Minister of Health had said: "People returning from travel must self-isolate for seven days, and they may retake the test on the eighth day or continue in self-isolation for 14 days." As per the CAA circular, all travellers arriving in Oman are

AIRLINES ARE REQUIRED TO ENSURE THAT ALL PASSENGERS ARE ADHERING TO HEALTH REQUIREMENTS OF THE SULTANATE BEFORE DEPARTURE

required to undergo a PCR test at least 72 hours before their scheduled arrival and to present a certified medical certificate of a negative Covid-19 test result. Travellers are required to pre-book the PCR test through a mobile App, pay the RO 25 test fee, and download the Tarrasud+

application before arrival in the Sultanate. All travellers arriving in Oman from any country will be required to undergo another Covid PCR test on arrival, wear a Tarrasud+ bracelet and isolate for seven days. The fine for not returning the tracking bracelet is RO 1,000 as there have been reports of people throwing it away after use. At the end of seven days, travellers are required to undergo a new PCR test on the 8th day and if the test result is negative, the isolation period will end. Test results will be available within 24 hours. Airlines are required to ensure

that all passengers are adhering to health requirements of the Sultanate before departure. GCC citizens, residents with valid residency permits and travellers with a valid visa are allowed to enter the Sultanate without prior approval. All travellers arriving in Oman are required to have international health insurance covering the cost of Covid treatment valid for one month, except for citizens, GCC nationals and passengers with free treatment card. Children below 15 years old are exempted from the PCR test and Tarrasud+ bracelet requirements.

FROM PAGE 1

NCDs account for 72 per cent of mortality

The campaign will rely on the use of various tools to educate patients and their families, which include, broadcasting educational videos and instructions on social media platforms, TV channels, applications and electronic pages. This campaign also targets health workers, where numerous workshops and webinars will be conducted to discuss various topics related to the updated management of chronic diseases. The Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on those living with non-communicable diseases, given that patients with chronic diseases are more likely to develop severe symptoms and disease when infected with Covid-19.

The pandemic has also affected those living with non-communicable diseases because of the resulting disruption to health services. Therefore, it became necessary to launch this campaign to help put a focus on non-communicable diseases and to help patients, families and healthcare providers control these diseases.

GDB issue gets good response

MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) announced the auction results of the 66th Government Development Bonds (GDB) issue worth RO 100 million. The 66th GDB Issue, which received overwhelming response from investors, has received applications in excess of over RO 49.619 million at RO 149.619 million, as against the Issue value of RO 100 million. — ONA

First phase of Maysan-Square Duqm project launched

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@vinot_nair

The first phase of the Maysan-Square Duqm project, which consists of an office complex, residential apartments, a business hotel and entertainment avenues, was launched on Wednesday. Speaking to the *Observer*, Sadiq bin Jaffer Sulaiman, CEO, Maysan Properties, said there is a demand for quality office spaces in the region, which is expected to see a population of over 200,000 over the years. As the project is developed in the Economic Free Zone, properties will be available to both citizens and other nationalities. The launch event was held in the presence of Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zone.



Sulaiman said the first phase of the constructions will commence in the coming April and is expected to be completed in the last quarter of 2022, explaining that the first phase

consists of an office complex consisting of three wings and comprising 229 commercial units and retail stores available for ownership under the usufruct system. The complex

will be built on a plot of 12 thousand square metres, while the building area is 30 thousand metres. He said the growth witnessed by the Special Economic Zone

of Duqm encouraged the company to invest in the region, and it is expected that real estate activity will increase due to the expected growth of Duqm. "The Maysan-Square Duqm project is strategically located in the Centre of Duqm, 10 minutes away from the port and 15 minutes from Duqm Airport. Office prices range between RO 27,000 and RO 50 according to their space that varies between 45 metres and 75 metres. The project will be equipped with security systems, central air conditioning, and smart management of parking lots and waste, with the provision of office furnishing service upon request," he added. He pointed out that priority is given to the citizens of Al Wusta Governorate in general to own in the project and the company will also start a marketing campaign in markets such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.



Sultanate, Tajikistan hold consultations session

MUSCAT: A political consultations session was held on Wednesday via video-conferencing between the Foreign Ministries of the Sultanate and the Republic of Tajikistan. The Omani side was headed by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, whilst the Tajik side was chaired by Khusrav Noziri, First Deputy Foreign Minister of Tajikistan. The session explored ways to boost relations of the bilateral cooperation in various fields of mutual interest, in addition to

exchanging views on regional and international issues. It also reviewed the growing relations between the two countries and their future in various political, economic, commercial, scientific and cultural fields, as well as supporting joint investments and activating trade exchange between the two friendly countries. The two sides expressed keenness to develop and strengthen these relations for the interest of the two friendly countries. The consultations session was attended by officials from the foreign ministries of the two countries. — ONA

Gross Domestic Product stands at RO 18.2 billion

MUSCAT: The Sultanate's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) fell by 16.5 per cent, reaching RO 18.189 billion at current market prices by the end of September 2020, according to the data released by the (NCST). There was a fall in petroleum activities by 24.4 per cent at the end of September 2020, registering RO 5,790.9 billion, compared to RO 7,662.21 billion at the end of September 2019. The share of crude petroleum from among petroleum activities was RO 4,638.9 billion, which is a decrease of 28.3 per cent from the end of September 2019, when it was RO 6,468.5 billion. The activities of natural gas also decreased by 3.5 per cent, reaching RO 1,152 billion compared to RO 1,193.6 billion at the end of September 2019. Total non-petroleum activities fell by 12.4 per cent to RO 13,152.8 billion. Services activities were at the forefront of non-petroleum activities, which was RO 9,285.4 billion, down by 10.6 per cent over RO 10,385.2 billion at the end of September 2019. Hotels and restaurants, wholesale and



retail trade, and transport, storage and communication rose by 35.7 per cent, 31.4 per cent and 17.5 per cent, respectively. On the real estate services, financial intermediation and public administration and defence activities decreased by 14.2 per cent, 10.1 per cent and 2.1 per cent, respectively.

Industrial activities fell by 19.8 per cent to RO 3,296.4 billion at the end of September 2020. The manufacturing of basic chemicals sector fell by 28.8 per cent, manufacturing, construction, and other manufacturing industries also fell by 24.6 per cent, 21 per cent and 20.4 per cent. Electricity, and water supply

increased by 1.1 per cent, whereas other mining and quarrying fell by 0.4 per cent. The activities related to agriculture and fishery sectors showed an increase of 9.8 per cent to reach RO 571 million by end of September 2020, compared to RO 520.1 million at the end of September 2019. — ONA



■ FROM PAGE 1

Sultanate took tangible steps to enhance human rights

Social and Cultural Rights. As for the right to freedom of expression, Oman Human Rights Commission noted that it spotted no closure of any means of media during 2020.

The Oman Human Rights Commission said that it closely followed up the steps taken by the Government of the Sultanate towards guaranteeing the rights of residents and workers. It noted that expat workers were exempt from any fees or fines or any legal action pertinent to the expiry of their labour permits.

The Commission pointed out that it also followed up other procedures undertaken in favour of foreign workers and stated that it observed the amnesty granted to hundreds of foreign prisoners and their repatriation to their respective countries in special flights amid coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This is in addition to offer free medication to residents in all governorates of the Sultanate, the statement said.

The statement expressed appreciation for the US Atlantic Council network's commendation of the Sultanate's plan to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. It also noted the World Health Organization's commendation of the Sultanate's use of technology to control COVID-19 pandemic and limits its spread among citizens and residents.

Oman Human Rights Commission said in its statement that it observed the Sultanate's cancellation of the No Objection Certificate, which was a pre-requisite to any foreign worker wishing to move from one employer to another. The step secures

foreign workers' free access to any work in the market, said the statement.

About gender equality, the Commission said that it followed up the steps undertaken by the Government of the Sultanate, which joined the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Omani women are partners with men in the national building process, and this is further reaffirmed by the Basic Law of the State, said the statement of Oman Human Rights Commission.

As for foreign domestic helpers, the Commission said it has been in touch with the departments tasked with protecting the rights of this segment, including Royal Oman Police and the National Committee for Control of Human Trafficking, among other departments.

In response to the report of Human Rights Watch on gay rights, Oman Human Rights Commission reasserted what it stated in the past that the Sultanate, like many other countries around the world, is governed by principles of religion, manners and social norms which ban such practices (homosexuality). It affirmed that such a behaviour is rejected by society.

Yet, Oman Human Rights Commission reaffirmed its willingness to coordinate with Human Rights Watch and other human rights organisations to get or exchange any information and follow up international reports of relevance. It advised that information on Oman should be taken from reliable sources. — ONA

MoL calls to boost workers occupational health, safety

STAFF REPORTER
SALALAH, JAN 20

The Directorate of Labour Welfare in Dhofar Governorate organised a symposium on 'Occupational safety and health' in Salalah on Monday. The participants in the symposium included officials of the Ministry of Labour and representatives from private and public sector companies.

Naif bin Ahmed al Shanfari, Director of Labour Welfare in Dhofar Governorate, dwelt upon the necessity of awareness among all the employees of the companies, especially those involved in production activities, about the health and safety aspects of workers.

"The Ministry of Labour seeks to enforce occupational safety and health programmes in all the production units to protect



all workers in factories and other private sector establishments to ensure the workers' safety from accidents and potential hazards that may cause injuries or death to workers, in addition to the damage to the property of the facilities," Naif al Shanfari said.

A safe work environment, according to him, ensures readiness to tackle risks of all kinds including accidents and

health hazards of the workers. Raising the efficiency of health facilities in production houses will lead to reduction in occupational injuries and the protection of the workers. It will also reduce loss of working hours.

"In order to boost the culture of occupational safety among workers and employees in all sectors, the ministry has taken necessary measures in this

regard through continuous development and improvement of the occupational health and safety management system compatible with international requirements and standards through continuous review to achieve goals and performance indicators institutions and establishments in the private and public sectors and factories must abide by it," he said.

The participants came out with suggestions to improve the occupational health and safety parameters in the production houses.

"Apart from safety to workers, such measures would reduce treatment costs and compensation for occupational injuries and chronic diseases. It will lead to raising the level of productivity and pushing the economic wheel without any hindrance," said a participant.

171 new Covid cases, zero deaths reported



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Wednesday reported 171 new confirmed cases with coronavirus (COVID-19), bringing the total number of cases to 132,317, while the number of recoveries stood at 124,579, comprising 94.1 per cent.

MoH also reported zero COVID-19-related death, keeping the total death toll at 1,516.

Fifteen patients were hospitalised during the past 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients in hospitals to 84, including 24 in Intensive Care Units (ICUs). — ONA

Whispers of Serenity and Tamoghna join hands to advance mental well-being

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 20

Distinguished artist Dr Kavitha Ramakrishna established non-governmental organisation (NGO), Tamoghna, and Oman's well known mental-health clinic, Whispers of Serenity, have joined hands to work together on art, yoga for the benefit of mental well-being.

With Whispers of Serenity clinic employing a holistic approach to mental well-being, yoga and art remains a natural and readily available approaches to maintaining wellness and treating mental health issues which the NGO Tamoghna advocates.

A one-of-a-kind facility Whispers of Serenity clinic offers traditional counselling therapies, hypnotherapy, while it also promotes alternative new age treatments such as yoga, art and music therapy.

While Tamoghna's major mission is to contribute to the social and economic emancipation of rural women in India, it promotes yoga and art which founder Dr Kavitha is a great campaigner. For the last many years, Dr Kavitha has been working relentlessly to promote yoga,

art and culture and has authored a yoga book *Tamoghna*. Dr Kavitha's expertise in yoga, community work, Tanjore art, Sanskrit language dissemination, writing and dedication as an educator has won her several accolades in Oman and India.

Talking of Tamoghna's partnership with Whispers of Serenity, Dr Kavitha said, "We are privileged to collaborate with Whispers of Serenity which has been committed to improving mental well-being by empowering and providing appropriate physical, psychological and social therapies to those in need. We are happy to lend our expertise in the field of yoga and art to the facility's multitude of services. As we all know there is a growing body of research to back up yoga's mental health benefits. Yoga relieves stress, decreases muscle tension, strain and inflammation, hones attention and concentration, and calms the nervous system. We are pleased to partner with a like-minded individual and organisation on mental health issues through our work on yoga and arts."

HH Sayyida Natasha al Said of Oman's

first mental-health clinic, Whispers of Serenity, said, "It is now an established fact that yoga's positive benefits on mental health have made it an important practice tool of psychotherapy. We are delighted to

work with Tamoghna which promotes yoga and teaches deep, mindful breathing, self-awareness, meditation and connecting with our bodies, all of which are helpful tools for promoting mental and emotional well-being."

"Yoga is becoming increasingly common as an adjunct therapy to improve

quality of life for many individuals and we hope to make the best of this collaboration with Tamoghna which is founded by Dr Kavitha who holds a doctorate in yoga," HH Sayyida Natasha said.

Dr Kavitha has used every opportunity to create people-to-people and cross-cultural connections between Omani and Indian citizens. Besides being a reputed author and well renowned Tanjore style artist, Dr Kavitha is also Sanskrit language expert, yoga practitioner, dedicated educator and philanthropist.



شركة النماء للدواجن ش م ع م A' Namaa Poultry Co. S.A.O.C

Job Opportunities

A'Namaa Poultry, is an integrated poultry project, using state of the art technologies in the market for all the project components, to produce a high- quality poultry meat. A'Namaa Poultry currently seek to recruit for the following positions by national candidates to joint Anamaa Poultry team. For more details and apply, Kindly logging to <https://foodjobs.om>. Last date receiving application will be on 01 Feb 2021.

No.	Job Title	Number of Position
1	IT MANAGER	1
2	MANAGER - QUALITY ASSURANCE & CONTROL	1
3	SALES MANAGER	1
4	PROCUREMENT MANAGER	1
5	LOGISTIC MANAGER	1
6	FINANCE MANAGER	1



Muscat Municipality

Advertisement No. 2/2021

Companies specialized in the field and registered with Tender Board, may obtain tenders documents for the website through the following link:

(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	E- Tender No.	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
PRE/20/131	2020/MM/QS-57	Repair & Maintenance of Culvert at Ruwi Street Opposite to Al Nahda Hospital (E- Tender)	Rial 25	18/02/2021	28/02/2021	Excelent
PRE/21/116	2020/MM/QS-58	Maintenance of Water Falls at Hill near Qurum Natural Park (E- Tender)	Rial 25	18/02/2021	28/02/2021	Specialist

Tender Conditions:-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of a bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat Municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Original Tender Bonds are to be placed in the Tender Box at Muscat Municipality HQ, Ground Floor at the reception .
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@ita.gov.om) or call (+96824166670).

CORRIGENDUM: The tender announcement (Advertisement No. 1/2021) which was wrongly re-published yesterday (i.e. on Wednesday, 20th January 2021 on page 5.) Kindly ignore the same and we regret the inconvenience.

Israel invites bids for 2,500 new settler homes

TEL AVIV: Israel has invited tenders for 2,500 new settler homes in annexed east Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank, a watchdog said on Wednesday, hours before Joe Biden's swearing-in as US president.

On Sunday, Israel approved 780 new settler homes in the West Bank ahead of a March general election in which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to face a fierce challenge from the right from pro-settler candidate Gideon Saar.

Peace Now said the government had now invited tenders for a further 2,112 units in the West Bank and 460 in east Jerusalem, which the Palestinians hope to make the capital of a future state.

It accused the government of a "mad scramble to promote as much settlement activity as possible until the last minutes before the change of the administration in Washington".

"By doing so, Netanyahu is signalling to the incoming president that he has no intention of giving the new chapter in US-Israel relations even one day of grace, nor serious thought to how to plausibly resolve our conflict with the Palestinians", Peace Now said in a statement.

For the Palestinians, Nabil



A partial view of the Palestinian refugee camp of Shuafat in east Jerusalem where tens of thousands Palestinians live enclosed by the Israeli controversial separation. – AFP

Abu Rudeina, a spokesman for President Mahmud Abbas, said the Israeli move was equivalent to a "race to eliminate what remains of the two-state solution, while posing more and more obstacles

to the new US administration."

All Jewish settlements in the West Bank are regarded as illegal by much of the international community.

But Trump's administration,

breaking with decades of US policy, declared in late 2019 that Washington no longer considered settlements as being in breach of international law.

Biden has indicated that

Biden has indicated that he will restore Washington's pre-Trump policy of opposing settlement expansion

reverse Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

"The only way to ensure Israel's future as a Jewish, democratic state and to give the Palestinians a state to which they are entitled is through the so-called two-state solution", Antony Blinken said.

Beyond the change in Washington, experts say Netanyahu also has domestic political reasons for pushing settlement expansion.

Electioneering is intensifying ahead of Israel's March 23 vote, in which the country's longest-serving premier faces a new challenge from Saar, a prominent pro-settler voice who split with Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party late last year.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since the Six-Day War of 1967 and has increasingly expanded the size and number of its settlements there, particularly under Netanyahu's leadership since 2009. — AFP

PROTEST AGAINST FOOD AID CUTS



Palestinians gather during a protest against food aid cuts by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in the Khan Yunis refugee camp. – AFP

Libya approves executive mechanism

TRIPOLI: Libyan envoys at UN-backed talks to end nearly a decade of war voted on Tuesday to pass the mechanism to choose an interim executive to govern until polls in December, the UN said.

The UN called it a "significant step forward".

Oil-rich Libya has been torn apart by civil war since the Nato-backed uprising that ousted long-time ruler Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, with an array of militias filling the vacuum and civilian bodies struggling to impose their authority.

But talks held in the Swiss city of Geneva have brought together 75 delegates — selected by the UN to represent a broad range of constituencies — in the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF).

"Following the agreement on a proposal for the selection mechanism of a unified executive authority... the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) conducted a one-day voting process", the UN said, with the vote running from Monday to Tuesday.

A total of 73 per cent backed the proposal.



A family poses at Martyr's Square in Libya's capital Tripoli. – AFP

"Libyans have now a genuine opportunity to move past their differences and divisions, (and) select a temporary government to reunify their institutions through the long-awaited democratic national elections" on December 24, interim UN envoy Stephanie Williams said.

The UN was "finalising the nomination procedure" and an election timeline, she added.

Libya is currently dominated by a unity government in Tripoli that emerged from previous

UN-led talks in 2015, called the Government of National Accord (GNA), and its rival, the eastern-based House of Representatives elected the previous year and which never recognised the unity government.

Also on Tuesday, members of the commission drafting a future constitution met with delegations from the House of Representatives and the Tripoli-based High Council of State, which advises the GNA.

The meeting in the Egyptian

Libyans have now a genuine opportunity to move past their differences and select a temporary govt to reunify their institutions through the long-awaited democratic national elections

STEPHANIE WILLIAMS
UN envoy

Red Sea resort of Hurghada was held to "discuss the constitutional arrangements necessary for the holding of elections on December 24", the UN said.

"If you fail to reach an agreement, this will have very negative repercussions on the other tracks including the security and economic situation", Williams told the delegates.

Both camps in Libya's complex war have received extensive backing from foreign powers. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TEHRAN

Rouhani hails departure of Trump

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani has hailed the departure of 'tyrant' US counterpart Donald Trump, who left office making way for President-elect Joe Biden.

A "tyrant's era came to an end and today is the final day of his ominous reign", Rouhani said in televised remarks to his cabinet.

"Someone for whom all of his four years bore no fruit other than injustice and corruption and causing problems for his own people and the world."

During his presidency, Trump



led a campaign of "maximum pressure" against Iran, pulling Washington out of a landmark nuclear deal with Tehran in 2018 and reimposing punishing sanctions. — AFP

KHARTOUM

200 killed in ethnic clashes in Sudan

At least 200 people have been killed during ethnic clashes in Sudan, including 55 deaths following violence between farmers and livestock herders in Sudan's South Darfur region, a government official said.

Fighting between farmers of the Fallata ethnic group and pastoralists of the Rizeigat ethnic group broke out on Sunday after a shepherd was killed in the town of Gereida, South Darfur governor Musa Mahdi Ishak said. Numerous people were



wounded during the clashes, Ishak said.

At least another 159 people were killed in separate clashes over the weekend between various ethnic groups in the city of El Geneina in neighbouring West Darfur State, according to a medical group. — dpa

ISTANBUL

Turkey vaccinates one million people in first week

Turkey has vaccinated more than one million people against the novel coronavirus in the first week of a national inoculation drive, according to health ministry figures. But the drive has lost some of its momentum after more than 600,000 people were inoculated in the first two days.

Turkey began the campaign with the CoronaVac jab produced by China's Sinovac last Thursday.

On Tuesday, Health Minister Fahrettin Koca called Turkey's



progress "one of the fastest in the world". In comparison, France had vaccinated around 585,000 people by Tuesday, after starting its campaign on December 28.

Turkey has now given a first shot to more than one per cent of the population of more than 83 million people. — AFP

In brief

■ BANGKOK



THAI GOVT TO FILE DEFAMATION COMPLAINT

Thailand's ministry of digital economy and society will file a criminal complaint of defaming the country's monarchy against banned opposition politician Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, the ministry said.

The digital ministry did not specify what actions the lese majeste complaint would cite, but two ministry officials said they were related to comments Thanathorn had made about the government's vaccine strategy. The move could mark the highest-profile lese majeste case since a wave of anti-government protests emerged last year and extended to criticism of King Maha Vajiralongkorn over allegations of meddling in politics and taking too much power.

■ THULASENDRAPURAM



VILLAGERS CELEBRATE INAUGURATION OF KAMALA HARRIS

Residents of the ancestral Indian village of Kamala Harris celebrated her inauguration as US vice-president by setting off firecrackers and distributing food. Thulasendrapuram, a leafy village about 320 km south of the city of Chennai, is where Harris's maternal grandfather was born more than a century ago.

Calendars featuring the faces of Biden and Harris have been distributed throughout the village by a cooperative.

— Reuters

■ TOKYO



JAPAN PLANS MASS VIRUS JABS AHEAD OF OLYMPICS

Japan aims to start vaccinating the general public against the coronavirus in May — just two months before the postponed Olympics — after targeted jabs for the most vulnerable, reports said.

The *Yomiuri Shimbun* newspaper said the government is hoping the majority of adults will be vaccinated by July, when the Games are due to open.

The country has agreed with pharmaceutical firms to receive enough doses for all 126 million residents and is working to approve the Pfizer jab as the first to be used in Japan from next month.

Around 10,000 medical workers will be first in line for free inoculation. — AFP

Moon taps ex-adviser as FM in bid to revive N Korea talks

SEOUL: South Korea's president on Wednesday nominated a former national security adviser who was partly blamed for a failed summit between North Korea and the United States in 2019 as the country's next foreign minister.

The nomination of Chung Eui-yong, 74, to replace Kang Kyung-wha as foreign minister was seen as a bid to help revive stalled denuclearisation talks with North Korea, just hours before Joe Biden takes office as the US president.

Chung had sought to mediate between the two countries as President Moon Jae-in's top security adviser, making a surprise announcement on the White House lawn in March 2018 that US President Donald Trump would hold a summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

But Chung was accused of misleading both sides about the potential for agreement after their second summit in 2019 in Vietnam failed to produce a deal.

The reshuffle came two days after Moon called for Biden to hold dialogue with North Korea to build on progress made by Kim and Trump at their first meeting



South Korean President Moon Jae-in

in Singapore.

Chung's nomination is to "breathe new life into the lineup of diplomats and regroup their forces in time for the inauguration of the Biden administration," a presidential official told reporters.

Kim and Trump agreed in Singapore to foster new relations and work towards complete denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula.

But their Vietnam summit collapsed when Trump rejected Kim's offer to abandon North Korea's main nuclear facility in return for lifting some sanctions,

an idea that Moon had trumpeted on hopes for a restart of inter-Korean economic projects.

Former US National security adviser John Bolton, in his memoir released last June, said Moon had raised unrealistic expectations for his own "unification" agenda without reflecting on either side's position.

Bolton also cited Chung as sharing Moon's "schizophrenic" comment that Trump had rightly refused Kim's proposal but on the other hand, Kim's willingness to dismantle the Yongbyon facility was a "very meaningful

The reshuffle came two days after Moon called for Biden to hold dialogue with North Korea to build on progress made by Kim and Trump

first step" toward "irreversible" denuclearisation.

Chung has said Bolton's accounts were "inaccurate" and "distorted," without elaborating.

After the North blew up a joint liaison office in June, Kim's sister said she had rejected a previously unknown proposal from Moon to send Chung as a special envoy, calling the offer "sinister" and blaming Seoul's "incompetence and irresponsibility" for worsened ties.

South Korea's main opposition party criticised Chung's nomination, saying it reflected Moon's unwillingness to take a new approach to prevent another mediation failure.

A trade expert, Chung spent three years as Moon's security adviser until he retired last July.

— Reuters

■ REHEARSAL FOR THE BIG DAY PARADE



National Security Guards (NSG) commandos participate in a rehearsal for upcoming Republic Day parade in New Delhi. — AFP

Rescue shaft offers hope for trapped Chinese miners



Members of a rescue team work at the site of a gold mine explosion where 22 miners are trapped underground in Qixia, in eastern China's Shandong province. — AFP

BEIJING: Rescuers are widening a communications shaft in the hope of extracting a group of Chinese gold miners who have been trapped deep underground for 10 days in rising floodwaters, state media said on Wednesday, with one critically ill and far from medical help.

Twenty-two workers were stuck hundreds of metres underground at the Hushan mine near Qixia city in east China's Shandong province when an explosion on January 10 sealed the entrance and cut off communications.

Contact has been made with 11 miners at one location around 1,900 feet below the surface.

Another — apparently alone — is trapped about a further 100 metres down.

After days without any sign of life, a handwritten note was sent up on a metal wire that rescuers had dropped into the mine on Sunday.

In it, the workers pleaded for food and medicine and warned water levels were high in the damaged mine.

The whereabouts and condition of 10 of their colleagues are still unknown.

At least four of the workers are injured, according to their note.

One miner injured by the blast was "in a deep coma," Song Xicheng, deputy head of the rescue team, told reporters on Wednesday afternoon. Rescuers sent down medicine and instructed the other miners on how to treat him, but he could not be fed. — AFP

Scientists develop gene therapy to delay ageing

BEIJING: Scientists in Beijing have developed a new gene therapy which can reverse some of the effects of ageing in mice and extend their lifespans, findings which may one day contribute to similar treatment for humans.

The method, detailed in a paper in the *Science Translational Medicine* journal earlier this month, involves inactivating a gene called *kat7* which the scientists found to be a key contributor to cellular ageing.

The specific therapy they used and the results were a world first, said co-supervisor of the project Professor Qu Jing, 40, a specialist in ageing and regenerative medicine from the Institute of Zoology at the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS).

"These mice show after 6-8 months overall improved appearance and grip strength



Dr Shuhui Sun performs a step of histological staining of mouse liver for pathological analysis in the Aging and Regeneration lab in Beijing. — Reuters

and most importantly they have extended lifespan for about 25 per cent," Qu said.

The team of biologists from different CAS departments used the CRISPR/Cas9 method to screen thousands of genes for those which were particularly strong drivers of cellular senescence, the term used to describe cellular ageing.

They identified 100 genes out of around 10,000, and *kat7* was the most efficient at contributing to senescence in cells, Qu said.

Kat7 is one of tens of thousands of genes found in the cells of mammals. The researchers inactivated it in the livers of the mice using a method called a lentiviral vector.

"We just tested the function of the gene in different kinds of cell types, in the human stem cell, the mesenchymal progenitor cells,

in the human liver cell and the mouse liver cell and for all of these cells we didn't see any detectable cellular toxicity. And for the mice, we also didn't see any side effect yet."

Despite this, the method is a long way from being ready for human trials, Qu said.

"It's still definitely necessary to test the function of *kat7* in other cell types of humans and other organs of mice and in the other pre-clinical animals before we use the strategy for human ageing or other health conditions," she said.

Qu said she hopes to be able to test the method on primates next, but it would require a lot of funding and much more research first.

"In the end, we hope that we can find a way to delay ageing even by a very minor percentage... in the future." — Reuters

WORLD POWERS HOPEFUL FOR RESET WITH US AS BIDEN TAKES OFFICE

WASHINGTON: Republican President Donald Trump left the White House on Wednesday after a tumultuous four years in office, hours before Democrat Joe Biden assumed the helm of a country beset by deep political divides and battered by a raging coronavirus pandemic.

Biden, 78, becomes the oldest US president in history at a scaled-back inauguration ceremony in Washington that has been largely stripped of its usual pomp and circumstance, due both to the coronavirus as well as security concerns following the January 6 assault on the US Capitol by Trump supporters.

US President Donald Trump and his wife Melania landed in Florida on Wednesday as President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration began in Washington.

The couple descended the stairs of Air Force One and waved to the press, but did not stop to answer questions.

Trump opted to break with tradition and skip the inauguration of Biden and vice president-elect, Kamala Harris. Vice President Mike Pence and his wife Karen were in attendance at the US Capitol.

Ahead of the inauguration of US president-elect Joe Biden on Wednesday, countries around the world expressed cautious hope for a reset in relations while prioritizing their own interests.

China was hoping for "a collaboration beneficial to both sides," a spokesperson for the Foreign Ministry in Beijing said.

But China would preserve its own interests and national security and not be defamed by the United States, the spokesperson added.

The comments come after the designated incoming secretary of state, Anthony Blinken, named relations with China as a central challenge for the US on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Iran said it was generally ready to clear its differences with the US. But the ball was in Washington's court, President Hassan Rowhani said on Wednesday.



"Everything they do, we will do exactly the same ... no more, no less," Rowhani told state television. With reference to the 2015 nuclear deal, Rowhani said that if Biden was serious about fulfilling its international obligations towards Iran, Tehran would do the same.

Outgoing President Donald Trump had left the deal and imposed unilateral sanctions on Iran, after which Tehran stopped fulfilling the technical requirements of the deal. Rowhani said Iran would return to its obligations if the rest of the deal — namely scrapping the sanctions — was implemented as well. He declined a full or partial renegotiation of the agreement.

In London, British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab tweeted that Britain, one of Washington's most important allies, was



Vice President-elect Kamala Harris and her husband Doug Emhoff arrive for the inauguration of Joe Biden as the 46th President of the US in Washington. — Reuters

looking forward to working with Biden and his vice president, Kamala Harris.

"Many congratulations to @JoeBiden and @KamalaHarris on this historic day," Raab tweeted.

"From climate change to trade and security, our two countries share a close bond and special relationship. We look forward to working with you on shared priorities as a force for good in the world."

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said Germany would look for common ground with the new administration, as he expected the US to "rejoin the WHO [World Health Organization] and the climate deal," he wrote on Twitter.

"We will not always be of the same opinion as the new administration, but we will do everything to find solutions," Maas said.

European Council President Charles Michel called for the United States and European Union to create a "new founding pact" for transatlantic relations.

To do so, he invited Joe Biden — who is set to be sworn in as president of the US on Wednesday — to Brussels for a summit.

"Today is an opportunity to rejuvenate our transatlantic relationship which has greatly suffered in the last 4 years," he said.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen struck a similar tone, saying the EU was ready for a reset in transatlantic relations.

To this end, she suggested several areas of cooperation, for example creating a new trade and technology council.

Meanwhile, climate activist Greta Thunberg bid Trump farewell on Twitter, mocking a tweet he had once posted to make fun of her after an emotional speech at a UN summit on climate change in New York.

"He seems like a very happy old man looking forward to a bright and wonderful future. So nice to see!" she tweeted, posting a photo of Trump boarding the Marine One helicopter from the lawn outside the White House. — dpa/Reuters



(L-R) Doug Emhoff, US Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, incoming US First Lady Jill Biden, US President-elect Joe Biden, Missouri Senator Roy Blunt and Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar arrive for the inauguration of Joe Biden as the 46th US President at the US Capitol in Washington, DC. — AFP

Pardoned by Trump

The twice-impeached outgoing US President Donald Trump has pardoned 143 people during his time in office

Prominent pardons

1 Michael Flynn

2 Paul Manafort

3 Roger Stone

4 Alex Van Der Zwaan

5 George Papadopoulos

Convicted for various offences brought to light during Robert Mueller's inquiry into collusion and Russian interference

Charles Kushner

Father of Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, convicted of tax evasion and witness tampering

Paul Slough

Nicholas Slatten

Evan Liberty

Dustin Heard

Four Blackwater contractors convicted of killing civilians in a 2007 Baghdad massacre

Steve Bannon

Former Trump aide charged with fraud over funds raised to build the Mexico border wall

Source: justice.gov



SHORT TAKES

OSLO

Teams dig for bodies at Norway landslide site

Teams manually dug for three bodies still missing after a large landslide hit southern Norway in late December, police said. The search using shovels and other equipment centred on an area of 400 square metres where specially trained dogs have signalled for possible human remains.

Ten people were killed in the December 30 landslide that hit the small community of Ask, north of Oslo. The bodies of two women and a 13-year-old girl are



still missing.

Wintry weather, unstable ground conditions and huge amounts of debris have been a challenge for the search operation. — dpa

MADRID

2 dead as huge blast rocks Madrid building

At least two people were killed when a huge explosion ripped through a building in Madrid, in what appeared to be caused by a gas leak, officials said.

The emergency services tweeted that two people had died, while another person was seriously injured and six had suffered light injuries in the blast.

"It seems there was a gas explosion in the building," Mayor Jose Luis Martinez-Almeida told reporters at the scene, where hundreds of police and rescuers



filled the streets. The incident occurred in a building next door to an elderly care home, but no-one there was hurt, La Paloma residence said in a statement on its website. — AFP

LONDON

Newspaper group calls for full trial in Meghan case

Lawyers for a British newspaper group that Meghan Markle is suing for publishing a private letter to her estranged father called for a full trial to "shed light" on the case. The Duchess of Sussex launched legal action against Associated Newspapers, which publishes the Mail on Sunday and MailOnline website, for printing extracts of the letter to Thomas Markle.

The letter was written in August 2018, a few months after Meghan Markle married Prince



Harry, and asked her father to stop talking to tabloids and making false claims about her in interviews. Her legal team are seeking damages and argue there is no need for a full trial, as it was a clear breach of her privacy and copyright. — AFP

Pressure builds on Joe Biden to deliver

JAMES OLIPHANT

During his presidential campaign, Joe Biden vowed to fight for the soul of America. As he formally assumes office as the next US president on Wednesday, Biden now faces the steep task of repairing a nation's soul in battered and desperate shape.

Few presidents, if any, have taken power in circumstances such as these: a still-raging pandemic claiming lives and shredding livelihoods, a continuing threat of armed insurrection and a defiant former president who faces a US Senate trial charged with encouraging an attack on his country's capital.

A Democrat, Biden will preside over a deeply polarised electorate, with millions of voters still believing defeated Republican President Donald Trump's false claims of election fraud, and a divided Congress, where gridlock looms as the default and success will come only by compromise.

With that, Biden is under significant pressure to turn his pledges of unity and competence into results - and swiftly.

BIDEN IS UNDER SIGNIFICANT PRESSURE TO TURN HIS PLEDGES OF UNITY AND COMPETENCE INTO RESULTS - AND SWIFTLY

"He has to stay focused on vaccine distribution and solving the 'last mile' problem," said Joe Trippi, a veteran Democratic strategist. "Failure is not an option. Losing that focus is not an option."

Biden wants Congress to move quickly. His team believes the most effective way to lower the political temperature is through results, not rhetoric - specifically, the passage of the \$1.9 trillion virus relief package that Biden has proposed as a first step in stabilising the economy, opening schools and ramping up vaccinations nationwide.

The public wants to see a functional government deliver, a Biden adviser said, adding that plenty of Trump voters have been hurt by the pandemic.

"There is a path out of this darkness," another Biden adviser said, "but we will need support from Congress."

Unlike other newly elected presidents, Biden will have no crowds to rally him. Instead, he will be sworn in with historic Washington resembling an armed camp, the streets deserted due to the twin dangers of civil unrest

and COVID-19.

Douglas Brinkley, a presidential historian at Rice University, likened Biden's inauguration to Abraham Lincoln's in 1861, when the United States was on the brink of the Civil War and the new president faced assassination threats.

"The smell of violence was in the air," Brinkley said.

The nation is not on that kind of precipice, Brinkley added. But the Capitol siege will cloud the early days of Biden's presidency. After being impeached by the US House of Representatives on a charge of inciting the Jan. 6 assault on the Capitol, Trump faces a Senate trial that threatens to derail Biden's agenda from the very start and delay confirmation votes for his executive branch nominees.

Biden will enter the White House with more of a tailwind than Trump enjoyed. He has the approval of a little more than half the country - 53 per cent, according to Reuters/Ipsos polling, while Trump came into office four years ago at 46 per cent.

— Reuters

FRESH TROUBLE

Italy's govt survives, but for how long?

ALVISE ARMELLINI

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte survived a key parliamentary test this week, yet his coalition government remains in a perilous position as it battles the coronavirus pandemic.

The government was left on the verge of collapse after ex-premier Matteo Renzi withdrew his small Italia Viva party from the ruling coalition.

His move last week has opened up a period of political turmoil as the COVID-19 death toll mounts and Italy must come up with a credible plan to spend 220 billion euros (\$266 billion) in EU recovery funds.

"Conte is saved, but you can't govern like this," La Stampa newspaper wrote on its front page after Tuesday evening's knife-edge result in the Senate, the upper chamber.

Conte survived Renzi's challenge by securing the backing of the Senate, by 156 votes to 140, but fell short of winning the 161 needed for an overall majority

It left him leading a minority government which may struggle to push its agenda in parliament just as it is dealing with the coronavirus and a severe recession.

The ruling coalition, comprising the populist

Five Star Movement (M5S), the centre-left Democratic Party (PD) and a smaller leftist party, is now trying to beef up its numbers.

It hopes to win over some opposition lawmakers, citing the need to preserve stability and avoid snap elections in the middle of a health crisis that has claimed more than

A government is strong if it can count on 170 senators. So we must now work to strengthen it

DARIO FRANCESCHI

Culture Minister

83,000 lives.

Three senators made the leap on Tuesday night, but several more are needed to give the ruling coalition a more solid parliamentary footing. The Senate vote "is clearly not the end goal, but a starting point", Culture Minister Dario Franceschi, a key member of the PD, told La Repubblica daily. "A government is strong if it can count on 170 senators. So we must now work to strengthen it," he added, calling on centre-right "moderates" to switch sides.

The ruling parties are keen to avoid snap elections, which opinion polls suggest would hand victory to a right-wing bloc led by Matteo Salvini's eurosceptic League party.

Most opposition backbenchers are also in no hurry to face voters, as recent reform that cut by one-third the number of parliamentary seats reduces their re-election chances.

Conte can offer the incentive of a government job for new arrivals. In his speeches to parliament, he clearly said he was open to a reshuffle in the coming weeks.

If Conte fails to woo enough opposition forces, his hold on power will become increasingly tenuous, especially once the threat of fresh elections evaporates. Under Italy's constitution, parliament cannot be dissolved in the last six months of a sitting head of state's mandate, and President Sergio Mattarella's term ends in January 2022.

This means that in six months' time anyone seeking to unseat Conte could trigger a new political crisis without the risk of elections.

A possible outcome could be a grand coalition government to see Italy through the worst of the pandemic. Renzi said he would be open to this.

— AFP

STILL VOLATILE

Grim picture emerges from glimpses of Ethiopia's Tigray war

ROBBIE COREY-BOULET

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed declared victory in his military operation in the northern region of Tigray, but there are clear signs that fighting persists despite a claimed return to normalcy.

Abiy launched the offensive last November against Tigray's ruling party, which he accused of attacking federal army camps and seeking to destabilise the country. Within weeks troops entered the regional capital of Mekele and Abiy announced military operations were "completed."

But the government continues to give accounts of TPLF leaders slain in gun battles while the United Nations reports "insecurity" hampering aid access. And in recent weeks satellite images, public statements from military and civilian officials in Tigray and scattered accounts from residents have added to evidence of a conflict unfolding largely in the shadows. A communications blackout in much of Tigray means confirmable details remain scant.

When federal forces arrived in Mekele in late November, they encountered little resistance as the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) leadership appeared to have already fled.

And a triumphant Abiy claimed no civilians had been killed during the capture of Tigrayan cities.

Doctors at one Mekele hospital told a different story, though, saying at least 20 civilians died in the shelling.

They provided AFP with photos of survivors with gruesome injuries, including lost limbs and exposed internal organs. The International Crisis Group (ICG) think tank says thousands have died so far, and tens of thousands of refugees have streamed across the border into neighbouring



A drama and traditional dance group rest after a performance in a square during the preparations for the celebration of Timkat, the Ethiopian Epiphany, in the city of Gondar. — AFP

THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP THINK TANK SAYS THOUSANDS HAVE DIED SO FAR

Sudan.

Federal officials have described subsequent fighting as minor operations centred on Tigrayan leaders like former regional president Debretsion Gebremichael, who has been out of contact for more than a month.

But a UN humanitarian assessment dated January 6 said Tigray remained "volatile", with "localised fighting".

The UN is especially worried about what happened at two camps housing over 30,000 Eritrean refugees that are inaccessible. Top officials have repeatedly sounded the alarm about reported killings, abductions and

forced repatriations from the camps back to neighbouring Eritrea.

The alleged presence of soldiers from the isolated and iron-fisted Eritrean regime in Tigray has been a hotly contested aspect of the conflict. Five humanitarian workers have been confirmed killed at one of the camps, known as Hitsats.

"Reports of additional military incursions over the last 10 days are consistent with open-source satellite imagery showing new fires burning and other fresh signs of destruction at the two camps," UN refugees chief Filippo Grandi said in a statement last Thursday. — AFP

WILLCOX IS A LIVE-WIRE RIDER IN OMAN CYCLING SCENE

CONTINUING
A CYCLING TRADITION

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH



“I have been an enthusiastic cyclist since my early school years, having been born into a passionate cycling family

PAUL WILLCOX
UK CYCLIST

Coming from a family of professional cyclists, it was hard for Paul Willcox to keep his bike aside after coming to Oman five years ago.

“My first perception when arriving in Oman was that it was too hot and not suited to cycling, however I was soon inspired by the Tour of Oman in 2017 and picked up the bike again”, Willcox from United Kingdom said.

It reaped quick rewards as the British expatriate had success in the Haute Route Oman (mountain climbing), a three-stage day sportive race with an international field held in Jabal Akhdhar consisting of 240 km and 2,650m.

“I finished here in third place overall to two British cyclists, and highest placed finisher based in Oman,” Willcox, who’s working as an Engineer for Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

An active participant of the Oman Cycling Association (OCA) Championship and other cycling events, the 44-year-old is fit as ever and has just won the 40 plus category in the first Duqm championship on January 16.

“I have been an enthusiastic cyclist since my early school years, having been born into a passionate cycling family. My late grandfather Arthur Lancaster was a tireless worker for a British cycling club based in North London, called North Road Cycling Club. It is one of the oldest cycling clubs in the UK, founded in 1885.”

And there was only one choice when he named his race team in the Sultanate — North Road Oman.

HISTORIC CLUB
The club is steeped in history and tradition and



Mike Willcox, father and coach of Paul Willcox

very active in road racing and time trialling within British cycling.

“My grandfather was a member for 67 years and chairman for the club as well as holding roles as a British Cycling Federation commissaire and Road Time Trials Council.

My father, Mike Willcox, was a very accomplished time trialist for the North Road CC in the late 1970’ and early 80’s, riding at national level and held many club records that stood a couple of decades. My uncle Arthur Lancaster is now the current chairman of the club

Willcox also regularly reports his racing stories to the UK club and thereby spreads awareness on the Oman cycling races in his home country.

In Oman, Willcox met many enthusiastic cyclists.

“Having met many enthusiastic cyclists in Oman, I joined many club rides and then

came to know there was also a popular racing scene, organised by the OCA. I was desperate for competition on the bike again having not raced since my teenage years, and subsequently I joined the second race of the season 2019/20 and quickly had success with a 3rd place in the Masters (+40) in the Nizwa road race.”

“I soon followed this up winning the open Individual Time Trial (ITT), the same event which I successfully defended as part of the championship this season. With my father having been a very successful cyclist himself, I looked to him as my coach and he has been building me up with a solid training regime for past 18 months, which is now reaping the rewards.”

“My strengths and passions on the bike are time trialling and hill climbing, being the previous two winners of the ITT and also leading the team to the win in the Team Time trial this season.”

AIMING THE RED
In the OCA Championship, Willcox is second overall after the Stage 5 in Nizwa. With three more stages go, he hopes to get back to the top and win the red jersey.

“There are now many young talented cyclists competing in the championship. This can be seen with the top standings mostly occupied by under-23 riders. These guys are fit and very enthusiastic, which is fantastic to see.”

“I’m currently sitting in second with Abdullah al Ghailani deservingly taking the top spot from me last week. There is only 1 point between myself and Mundher al Hasani. The final three races of the season are going to make for an exciting finish. I still have good chance to finish with the red and will be pushing hard all the way to the final race to be held at PACA in March.”





Two more Australian Open players test COVID-19 positive

Two more Australian Open players tested positive for COVID-19, an official said on Wednesday, as the government confirmed it would send the quarantine bill for the tournament to Tennis Australia's desk. Victoria minister said two players and a non-playing Australian Open participant comprised three new infections.



Davis Cup Finals to take place in three cities

The 2021 Davis Cup Finals will be held over 11 days rather than seven and will almost certainly be staged across three cities, the International Tennis Federation (ITF) confirmed. The changes proposed by the ITF's event partner Kosmos Tennis were agreed by the ITF Board. This year's event is set for Nov 25-Dec 5.

Shakib stars in Bangladesh win over Windies

ALL-ROUNDER MARKS HIS INTERNATIONAL COMEBACK WITH 4 WICKETS

DHAKA: Shakib Al Hasan claimed four wickets for eight runs in his international comeback to set up an easy six-wicket victory for Bangladesh over West Indies in the first one-day international in Dhaka on Wednesday.

Debutant pacer Hasan Mahmud also impressed with the ball, picking up 3-28 as the hosts bowled out the weakened tourists for 122 before racing to 125-4 in 33.5 overs.

Skipper Tamim Iqbal top-scored with 44 off 69 while all-rounder Shakib played his part with the bat, hitting 19.

Left-arm spinner Akeal Hosein took 3-26 to give the home batsmen some trouble but his effort was not enough to defend the visitors' meagre total.

Mushfiquur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad were unbeaten on 19 and nine runs respectively to complete the win, helping Bangladesh take a 1-0 lead in the three-match series.

Opting to bowl first, Bangladesh earlier wrapped up the West Indies innings in 32.2 overs.

"No complaints, we bowled extremely well. Not just the



West Indies' Alzarri Joseph (L) is clean bowled off Bangladesh's Shakib Al Hasan during the first one-day international match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Dhaka. — AFP

spinners, but the pacers as well," said Tamim at the prize-giving ceremony.

West Indies captain Jason

Mohammed said he was disappointed with his side's performance.

"It wasn't easy to start on,

but we didn't have enough guys getting partnerships and those who got starts didn't carry on," he said.

SCOREBOARD

WEST INDIES	
Sunil Ambris lbw b Mustafizur	7
Joshua Da Silva c Liton b Mustafizur	9
Andre McCarthy b Shakib	12
Jason Mohammed st Mushfiquur b Shakib	17
Kyle Mayers c Liton b Mehidy	40
Nkrumah Bonner lbw b Shakib	0
Rovman Powell c Mushfiquur b Hasan	28
Raymon Reifer lbw b Hasan	0
Alzarri Joseph b Shakib	4
Akeal Hosein c Liton b Hasan	1
Chemar Holder not out	0
Extras (lb 3, w 1)	4
Total (all out; 32.2 overs)	122
Fall of wickets: 1-9, 2-24, 3-45, 4- 56, 5-6, 6-115, 7-115, 8-121, 9-122	
Bowling: Rubel 6-0-34-0, Mustafizur 6-0-20-2, Hasan 6-1-28-3, Shakib 7-2-2-8-4, Mehidy 7-1-29-1	
BANGLADESH	
Liton Das b Akeal	14
Tamim Iqbal c Da Silva b Mohammed	44
Najmul Hossain c Mohammed b Akeal	1
Shakib Al Hasan b	19
Mushfiquur Rahim not out	19
Mahmudullah Riyad not out	9
Extras (b 2, lb 10, w 4, nb 3)	19
Total (four wickets; 33.5 overs)	125
Fall of wickets: 1-47, 2-57, 3-83, 4-105	
Bowling: Joseph 8-3-17-0, Holder 3-0-26-0, Akeal 10-1-26-3, Mohammed 8-0-19-1, McCarthy 2-0-10-0, Bonner 2-5-0-15-0	

Mustafizur Rahman, who claimed 2-20, seized the early momentum for Bangladesh, trapping Sunil Ambris in front for seven in the second over.

He removed Joshua Da Silva for

nine after a rain break that halted play for nearly an hour.

Playing his first international after a one-year suspension, Shakib's left-arm spin immediately put pressure on the West Indies.

He bowled Andre McCarthy for 12 before West Indies' stand-in captain Jason Mohammed was stumped off his bowling for 17.

Nkrumah Bonner went for a duck leg before wicket in Shakib's next over to leave the West Indies struggling at 56-5.

Kyle Mayers hit 40 off 56 balls and added 59 runs with Rovman Powell (28) for the seventh wicket to bring some respectability to the visitors' score.

Hasan's pace removed Powell and Raymon Reifer with successive deliveries to end the resistance.

Off-spinner Mehidy Hasan dismissed Mayers as the West Indies lost their last five wickets for seven runs.

Shakib claimed the final wicket of Alzarri Joseph (four).

The second match of the series will be held at the same venue on Friday. — AFP

Azam stars in big victory for ISM

MUSCAT: Azam Ali's splendid all-round performance powered Indian School Muscat (ISM) to a thumping 118-run victory against Boshier Sports Centre (BSC) B in a Junior League Under-19 50-over League clash at OC Turf 2 in Al Amerat on Saturday.

ISM posted a hefty 288 for 8 on the board thanks to brilliant batting by Azam (71), Ayman Ayaz (60) and Shanmugarajan Kuttiraja (47). Pranjal Verma claimed 3 for 40.

Nobody except Yash Yogesh (53) batted with authority as BSC crawled to 170 for 7 in 50 overs. Azam Ali picked up 3 for 20 while Mithil and Arjun Rajesh took two wickets each.

Abhas helps ISWK to victory

Abhas Ajay slammed a superb 118 not out to steer Indian School Wadi Kabir (ISWK) to a huge 141-run win over Muscat Cricket Coaching Centre (MCCC) Blue in a Junior League Under-16 30-over League game at Muscat Municipality ground 1.

Abhas' magnificent century and top knocks by Chaitra Jitesh (78) and Atul Kumar (49) powered ISWK to an imposing 272 for 2.

MCCC Blue failed to rise to the occasion, managing a disappointing 131 for 6 in 30 overs. Only Prathiesh Hema played well, scoring 37 as Sidh Mehta and Abhas Ajay claimed two wickets each.

MCCC Yellow thrash SLSM

In another Under-16 match, Dhyan Deepak's whirlwind 36 off 17 steered MCCC Yellow to an emphatic 10-wicket victory against Sri Lankan School Muscat



Marc Mathews and Arjun Swamy of MCCC Blue Under-13 team

(SLSM) at Muscat Municipality ground 1.

Chasing SLSM's 66, MCCC Yellow raced to the target in only 5.1 overs, scoring 67 without loss. Openers Dhyan and Aaryan Nishit (27) remained not out.

BRIEF SCORES

Junior League U-19

ISM 288 for 8 in 50 overs (Azam Ali 71 – 6x4, Ayman Ayaz 60 – 2x4, 1x6, Shanmugarajan Kuttiraja 47 – 1x4, Pranjal Verma 3-40, Narayanapura Satish 2-50) beat Boshier Sports Centre B 170 for 7 in 50 overs (Yash Yogesh 53 – 6x4, Azam Ali 3-20, Mithil 2-19, Arjun Rajesh 2-31) by 118 runs.

Junior League U-16

ISWK 272 for 2 in 30 overs (Abhas Ajay 118 – 13x4, Chaitra Jitesh 78 – 12x4, Atul Kumar 49 – 4x4) beat MCCC Blue 131 for 6 in 30 overs (Prathiesh Hema 37 – 3x4, Siddh Mehta 2-31, Abhas Ajay 2-37) by 141 runs.

SLSM 66 all out in 28.1 overs (Puladith Omidu Medagoda 24 – 1x4, Aum Nrupen Kanani 2-1, Muhammed Hamza 2-5) lost to MCCC Yellow 67 for 0 in 5.1 overs (Dhyan Deepak 36 – 8x4, Aaryan Nishit 27 – 5x4) by 10 wickets.



Dhyan Deepak of MCCC Yellow

Junior League – U-13

ISWK-B 67 for 9 in 20 overs (Naitik Tusharkumar 12, Arjun Swamy 5-5) lost to MCCC Blue 71 for 0 in 7.4 overs (Mark Mathews 42 – 6x4, Pushkar Maheshwari 12 – 2x4) by 10 wickets.

ISM 187 for 4 in 20 overs (Pachisia Ojjus 63 – 9x4, Patel Dhyan Navin 51 – 1x4, Basharat Abyan Basharat 42 – 3x4, Hadi Mohammed 2-39) beat MCCC Red 89 for 6 in 20 overs (Shravan Sharat 41 – 2x4) by 98 runs.

PSM 125 for 8 in 20 overs (Asad Kashif 54 – 6x4, 1x6, Saumya Bhavin 2-15, Mohammad Azeel 2-18) lost to ISWK-A 126 (Nilaksh Vats 50 – 8x4, Ayush Shetty 49 – 7x4) by 9 wickets.

Royals release Steve Smith ahead of IPL auctions

NEW DELHI: Steve Smith has not been retained by his Indian Premier League side Rajasthan Royals, the team said on Wednesday, in a double blow for the Australian after his national squad's Test loss to India. The Royals have kept their England stars including Ben Stokes, Jos Buttler and Jofra Archer in their team ahead of this year's auctions next month.

Smith captained the team that finished as wooden spoons in the eight-team league in last year's edition.

India's Sanju Samson was appointed captain of the side which won the inaugural edition in 2008 under Australian spin legend Shane Warne. "The Rajasthan Royals captaincy is a post for which we are lucky to have had so many greats of the game — Warne, David, Watson, Rahane, and most recently Steve Smith," said team owner Manoj Badale.

"Steve has been a great player and great leader for the Royals, and we want to thank him for his contribution."

Australia's Marcus Stoinis will stay on for his franchise Delhi Capitals along with South African quick Kagiso Rabada. — AFP



Steve Smith

22 umpires complete 'O' Level course in Salalah



SALALAH: Oman Cricket Club (OCC) Salalah successfully completed the second Level-0 course for umpires in Salalah recently. The course was first held in 2016.

The latest course was conducted by AR Srinivasan, Level 2 accredited educator in Oman who has been involved with Oman Cricket for more than 30 years in various roles.

OCC Salalah Secretary Anil Kumar thanked Srinivasan for doing online video call sessions during the lockdown and covering the course in details which helped umpires in Salalah to learn the basics in detail during the course over the period of two and half days in the classroom.

The course commenced with Srinivasan giving his introduction to the participants and informing general requirements to the participants to follow during the course in view of COVID-19 regulations. Temperatures were scanned and recorded for all the members present at venue on all 3 days to ensure safety of all participants. All participants were instructed to use mask during the entire period except during tea and lunch breaks and requested to

abstain from venue if having fever/cold.

Twenty-two umpires successfully completed this course out of which seven were already certified in 2016 and attended the session as to refresh their knowledge. Four other umpires could not attend as they had to leave Salalah due to personal emergencies. The course was conducted at Olympic Trading hall from January 7 until Saturday, January 9, with examinations conducted on January 9 from 1545 hrs to 1745 hrs. On Friday and Saturday, the course started at 08:30 am.

All the participants were given a Certificate of Participation at the end of the course. All umpires were informed that the Certificate of Completion will be issued only after successfully passing the examinations and officiating for one complete season.

On the final day, Mayur Toprani, Treasurer, OCC Salalah, Hiten Dave and Mohammed Wasim, members, OCC Salalah, were present along with Anil Kumar.

Sudhakar and team from Olympic Trading arranged the venue with complete setup required to conduct such event.



Al Kamil W'al Wafi, Seeb and Ahli Sidab win

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 20

Al Kamil W'al Wafi, runners-up of the 2019-20 Oman volleyball first division league, emerged a 3-0 victor over Sohar in the third round of the league at Sohar Sports Complex on Tuesday.

Coach Khalid al Shizawi's men made a strong start as Al Kamil W'al Wafi won the first set 25-16. In the following set, there was a tough competition between both teams as the hosts were looking for an equaliser but Al Kamil W'al Wafi spikers clinched the winning points as they ended with two points gap at 26-24.

The guests confirmed their triumph in the last set as they won 25-20. The victory moved the team from the third position to the second place with six points while the Suhar club remained in the fourth position and possess three points.

League leaders Seeb registered their third consecutive win in the

league as they beat Masirah 3-0 at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

Coach Jamal al Maamari's battalion ended the first set smoothly with 25-20 scoreline. Seeb's spikers did not face difficulty in the second set as they ended 25-10 while the last set was thrilling as Masirah's spikers tried to bounce back but Seeb's players' experience saw them win it 25-23.

The victory of the Muscat-based team ensured their stay on the top of the league with nine points.

On the other side, the Masirah club is struggling in the danger zone as they possess one point only. Seeb, who were third in the previous edition, began the 2020-2021 league season with a 3-0 victory against Ahli Sidab. Seeb's second successive triumph was over Bahla 3-0.

AHLI SIDAB CLAIM FIRST WIN

Ahli Sidab recorded their first victory in the league as they blanked Bahla 3-0 at Sultan



Qaboos Sports Complex.

The hosts dominated the first set winning it 25-11. Asaad al Battashi, head coach of Ahli Sidab, instructed the spikers to continue the same form but saw a good comeback from Bahla in the second set. However, Ahli Sidab took the set 25-23 and in the deciding set, Bahla players failed to hang on till the end and lost it 25-17.

The 2020-2021 volleyball first division league featured the participation of seven teams including Seeb, Al Salam, Al Kamil W'al Wafi, Sohar, Masirah, Ahli Sidab and Bahla.

The 36th edition of the league began on January 8 under the restricted medical protocol. Titleholders Al Salam commenced their campaign with a comfortable 3-0 win over Bahla. The scoreline ended as 25-13, 25-14, 25-14. The second successive win for Al Salam was against neighbours Sohar as they beat them 3-2 in a thrilling encounter.

Region's first parasailing programme returns to water



MUSCAT: In partnership with bp Oman and Oman's Paralympic Committee, Oman Sail has resumed its SailFree programme in line with COVID-19 precautions.

SailFree, one of bp Oman's social investment programmes, aims to empower Omani disabled youth. Phase two of the programme, in which participants try sailing and practice leadership, resumed on January 17 after receiving the go-ahead from relevant government entities.

bp's social investment manager Shamsa al Rawahi commented: "We believe in embracing diversity and providing equal opportunities. The SailFree programme is a unique example of that. We're delighted to see it safely move forward and pave the way for Omanis to compete in future national, regional and international championships."

Candidates are trained to compete for 12 spots in the national parasailing team where they will be given the opportunity to represent Oman in international championships.

As part of taking candidates out onto the water, SailFree instructors were trained on coaching individuals with disabilities in collaboration with the Armed Forces Hospital.



business

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3,715.81



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Small Omani ports register strong increase in direct imports

MUSCAT: Marafi, the government-owned operator of Port Sultan Qaboos (Muscat), as well as the ports of Khasab, Suwaiq and Shinas, has reported a 17 per cent increase in direct imports compared to 2019, having handled 1.722 million tonnes of general cargo during the period from January to December 2020.

The uptick in volumes includes 245,000 tonnes of fruits and vegetables and 954,000 head of cattle handled by Marafi, member of Asyad Group, representing a fourfold (381 per cent) and threefold (181 per cent) growth respectively versus figures for 2019.

Vessel calls rose to 4,350, up five per cent from 2019. Cruise calls decreased by 72 per cent due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, which caused cruising lines to suspend their operations worldwide. At the outset of the pandemic, Asyad managed to maintain an efficient supply chain to sustain the delivery of critical and essential cargo to the local market; particularly the food supply.

With the opening of news markets as well as direct import and exports, goods were delivered cheaper and faster and Oman has become well connected to the major trade hubs. — ONA

OQ8 is Duqm Refinery’s new brand

STRENGTHENING BOND: The new logo represents the close relationship between the two countries and the inherent brotherhood between Oman and Kuwait

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 20

Oman’s OQ and Kuwait Petroleum International (Q8) announced on Wednesday the official unveiling of OQ8, the new brand for the Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries. Duqm Refinery, a mega-project refinery, petrochemical plant and pipeline, is a joint venture between OQ of Oman and Q8 (Kuwait International Petroleum Company), owned by Kuwait Petroleum Corporation.

The joint venture aims to build a world-class refinery using proven technology to provide high-quality products that are in line with international safety standards and efficiency levels. Duqm Refinery is located in the heart of the Special Economic Zone in the Wilayat of Duqm, Al Wusta Governorate, and overlooks the Arabian Sea.

The design of the refinery, which has a capacity 230,000 barrels per day, is based on the Hydrogen Cracking Unit (HCR) and the Delayed Coker Unit (DCU).

The Refinery has the capability to process all types of oil. Upon



operation, the Refinery will produce liquefied petroleum gas, naphtha, jet fuel, diesel, sulphur and coke.

The new logo represents the close relationship between the two countries and the inherent brotherhood between the two nations. The pair of colours tells a much greater story.

Centuries before Oman and Kuwait embarked on the OQ8 project, the duo already shared a long history of maritime trade. From small, early sailing vessels, the two enjoyed their earliest cooperation, exchanging goods and getting to know each other across the seas.



In those early days, shallower, turquoise waters would have meant safety. As trust between the two grew, both were able to venture into deeper waters, to seek larger, more diverse markets.

Today, as great ships prepare to sail forth from OQ8 in the emerging global energy hub of Duqm to carry products to markets around the world, they will begin their journey in the turquoise waters of the Arabian

Sea, eventually reach the deep blue of the Indian Ocean, as they head towards their ultimate destination.

During the construction phase of the refinery, the project involved the local community in a number of introductory meetings about the impact the project will have in particular. They were also introduced to the efforts made by the OQ8 to bring many benefits to the local community.

For this purpose, several social investment initiatives and programmes were launched to raise community members skills and enhance their competencies to take advantage of the available

Our synergy in OQ and Q8 and successful strategy can be referred to united visions of the leaderships of the two countries to achieve maximum benefits which will return back to the people of the two countries

ENG AHMED AL JAHDHAMI
CEO - Refineries and Petrochemicals in OQ and Deputy Chairman of Board of Directors of OQ8

opportunities in Duqm. “The consistency between Q8 and OQ strategies in managing the Duqm Refinery Project is a strong evidence on the collaboration of our efforts to achieve development and growth for our nations.

“Since the launch of this project, we have seen the constant growth and development of Duqm Economic Zone and being one of the key industrial hubs in the Gulf region. Such partnership will ensure us a safe channel for exporting the Kuwaiti oil besides creating considerable number of job opportunities for Omani and Kuwaiti youth.”

TURN TO PAGE 14

Haifa to lead Oman’s new energy holding company

NEW MANDATE: New all-Omani executive line-up announced at Energy Development Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Haifa al Khaifi (pictured), one of the most influential women in the region’s energy and finance sectors, has been named Chief Executive Officer of Energy Development Oman (EDO), the new holding company established late last year with the mandate to, among other things, represent the government’s stake in Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the largest oil and gas producer in the Sultanate.

Haifa, the longstanding Finance Director of PDO, moves to EDO at the helm of a new Omani executive line-up drawn primarily from PDO, but also from Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the integrated sovereign wealth fund of the Sultanate of Oman.

Other appointments include:



Haifa moves to EDO at the helm of a new Omani executive line-up drawn primarily from PDO, but also from Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the integrated sovereign wealth fund of the Sultanate of Oman

Moutaz al Riyami, currently PDO’s Gas Director who joins EDO as Chief Strategy and Commercial Officer; Ibrahim al Eisri, who moves out of Oman Investment Authority as Chief Financial Officer of EDO; Ibrahim al Waili, PDO Planning and Deal Lead, who moves to EDO as Corporate Planning

and Services Officer; and Saif al Harthy, PDO’s Finance Controller, who is appointed as Board Secretary at EDO.

Congratulating the new line-up, PDO Managing Director Raoul Restucci said: “It is a great source of pride that key appointments are from PDO, and they will no doubt steer the new company into fulfilling its mandate while at the same time supporting PDO double-hatting in their current roles for as long as possible.

“We look forward to the multiple growth opportunities that the creation of EDO will bring about, including the opportunity to broaden PDO’s remit beyond its current mandate and exploit news area of value creation for Oman.”

EDO was instituted by a Royal Decree on December 6, 2020 as an Omani joint stock company to invest in conventional as well as renewable and alternative energy resources within and outside the Sultanate.

Its most significant asset is the government’s 60 per cent shareholding in Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

Consequently, EDO also now owns an interest in the prolific Block 6 licence currently held by PDO and which contributes the bulk of the country’s hydrocarbon production.

EDO’s first task, as spelt out by the Ministry of Finance in the 2021 State Budget, is to raise RO 1.3 billion towards oil and gas related projects and initiatives for the current fiscal year.

The wholly government-owned holding company has also been tasked with overseeing the collection of oil and gas revenue, payment of all capex and opex associated with the annual production of hydrocarbons, and the overall development of the oil and gas sector.

Her appointment as the first Chief Executive Officer of Energy Development Oman caps Haifa’s stellar professional career spanning three decades during which she held senior leadership, executive management and operational roles in PDO, among other prestigious corporate organisations.

Haifa has also been featured in *Forbes’* list of most influential women in the Middle East.

REITs to drive investment into real estate

For a long time, new listings by public joint-stock companies have been limited in number in the Gulf region, thanks to the challenging economic conditions and constrained financial markets stemming from the decline in global oil prices and the closures triggered by the recent coronavirus pandemics. Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) have diminished due to the volatility of the financial markets and the departure of millions of expatriates from the region in the wake of lockdowns disrupting business and commerce. Of late, however, markets are gradually bouncing back notwithstanding precautions and risks associated with the pandemic. In the Sultanate, we

witnessed recently a new public offering by a local company in its Real Estate Investment Fund (REIT). Oman REIT Fund is backed by promoters specialising in the development and marketing of real estate products in the Sultanate. Oman REIT Fund is the latest private sector offering for subscription and is open to both citizens and expatriates alike. The portfolio of the fund consists of many and varied assets of high residential and commercial buildings located in strategic areas of the Sultanate. These assets are patronised by a good base of corporate and individual tenants. The Fund provides an opportunity for Omani investors, as well as residents inside and outside the country,



HAIDER ALLAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

THE PORTFOLIO OF THE FUND CONSISTS OF MANY AND VARIED ASSETS OF HIGH RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS LOCATED IN STRATEGIC AREAS OF THE SULTANATE

to invest in the real estate sector in the Sultanate and thereby earn regular dividend of not less than 7 per cent per annum. These dividend payments will be transferred to the accounts of shareholders every three months according to the fund management company. The new offering represents a distinct investment opportunity for those who wish to channel some of their savings into real estate through the purchase of units in the Fund. Investors are assured a sustainable income stream. The shares of the company will be subsequently traded on the Muscat Stock Exchange. The total issued capital of the fund is about RO 65 million with the option to increase the subscription from 40 per cent of

the fund to 60 per cent if demand is strong. The fund's has stated that its assets — 20 properties distributed in various parts of the country — include 196,000 square metres of vacant land, in addition to 488 lease contracts. Considering the new trends in establishing shareholding companies in the Sultanate, the government is keen that the board of directors includes people who are knowledgeable in managing such institutions. The government has also stressed the importance of corporate governance and integrity in the management of these organisations, with competent resources in place to ensure proper monitoring and audit as a safeguard against potential corruption.

Raysut Cement starts construction of 9MW waste heat recovery system

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 20

Raysut Cement Company held a ground breaking ceremony triggering the start of the construction of its new 9MW Waste Heat Recovery system in its main plant in Salalah. The development of 9MW waste heat recovery system, a strategic expansion for the RCC, will complement the company's leadership in cement manufacturing because it will support the company's commitment for the reduction of carbon footprint by generating the power via utilising the waste hot gases from the existing plant.

OQ8 is Duqm Refinery's new brand

FROM PAGE 13

The company is expected to attract talents and play a role in preparing future leaders in both countries, said Shaikh Nawaf Saud Al Nasser al Sabah, CEO of Kuwait International Petroleum and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries Company. "Despite the tough economic conditions ripping the world markets, we will spare no efforts to turn our aspirations into reality and become a model success stories for everyone", he added. Commenting on the launch of the new brand, Eng Ahmed bin Saleh al Jahdhami, CEO — Refineries and Petrochemicals in OQ and Deputy Chairman of board of Directors of OQ8, said: "Our synergy in OQ and Q8 and successful strategy can be referred to united visions of the leaderships of the two countries to achieve maximum benefits which will return back to the people of the two countries. The project has the attention and support from the leaderships of the two countries and the groundbreaking event of the project was under the patronage of His Majesty Sultan Haitham



bin Tarik in April 2018. This puts more responsibility on us to overcome all challenges to achieve the success of this strategic partnership. Due to the strategic location of Duqm and its easy access to international markets, we in OQ believe on the promising future of Duqm to attract more petrochemical projects which will create more job opportunities and businesses in the future." He further added: "The Special Economic Zone of Duqm is of high importance to us for its strategic location in the East Coast of the Sultanate that will link international maritime routes and provide quick access to international markets. In OQ we believe that

Duqm has a promising future and we look forward to enter international partnerships to focus on petrochemical projects to further enhance the development in the Sultanate." Christian van der Wouden, Acting CEO of the project, said: "The brand identities of the two companies, OQ and Q8, are in harmony to build an identity that inspires our employees to work as one team to achieve our corporate objectives. We are working to establish a strong corporate identity that inspires our employees and makes them feel proud and loyal to this world class project that will be built according to the highest quality and safety standards to achieve the aspired outcome."

DHOFAR AUTOMOTIVE CELEBRATES 10TH ANNIVERSARY



Dhofar Automotive (DA), recently celebrated its 10th anniversary, since its establishment within the Omani automotive market. The company is the official distributor for Chrysler, Jeep, Dodge, Fiat, RAM and Alfa Romeo vehicles, Mopar brands and the official provider of spare parts and after sales services for Fiat Chrysler Automobiles in the Sultanate. The anniversary marked its progress in achieving its strategic objectives at all levels, including the training and forming of the working teams, investing in human resources and achieving the target Omanisation percentage. Additionally, the investment and growth in its showrooms, service centres and customer service facilities over the last decade was also highlighted.

PRESS RELEASE

HYUNDAI MOTOR GROUP ADVANCES HYDROGEN STRATEGY

Hyundai Motor Group (the Group) announced that it signed an investment contract with the government of Guangdong Province to establish an offshore fuel cell system production facility in Guangzhou, China. The investment advances the Group's global hydrogen leadership and supports its push into China's rapidly developing hydrogen industry. Attendees at the signing ceremony included Kwang Guk Lee, President and Head of China Operations at the Group; Hyuk Joon Lee, Senior Vice President and Chief Government Affairs Officer of Hyundai Motor Group China Ltd; Lin Keqing, Executive Vice Governor of Guangdong Province; Hu Hong, Vice Mayor of Guangzhou Municipal Government and Chen Yong, District Chief of Huangpu District Guangzhou Municipal Government.



ESHRAQA REVEALS STEMAZONE CALENDAR THEME FOR 2021



With a keen eye on the future of the nation, Eshraqa, the Social Development Arm of Khimji Ramdas unveiled its 2021 calendar that showcases Stemazone, a — a new age learning programme, which will introduce and mentor kids aged 6-16 yrs, in the wonderful world of Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics & Art. Stemazone is being presented in a collaborative initiative with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and Ministry of Education. The vision of the programme is to make children enjoy and cultivate a keen interest in these new age topics. This will enable them to develop a scientific mindset and help develop creative thinking, logical reasoning & problem-solving abilities, critical factors in building a knowledge-economy.

Over 22 bn records exposed in data breaches last year

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 20

Analysis of breach data by Tenable's Security Response Team (SRT) has revealed that, from January through October 2020, there were 730 publicly disclosed events resulting in over 22 billion records exposed worldwide. Thirty-five per cent of breaches were linked to ransomware attacks, resulting in tremendous financial cost, while 14 per cent of breaches were the result of email compromises. One of the overarching themes of the threat landscape in 2020 was that threat actors relied on unpatched vulnerabilities in their attacks as well as chaining together multiple vulnerabilities as part of



their attacks. This analysis has been published in Tenable's 2020 Threat

Landscape Retrospective (TLR) report which provides an overview of the key vulnerabilities disclosed

Thirty-five per cent of breaches were linked to ransomware attacks, resulting in tremendous financial cost, while 14 per cent of breaches were the result of email compromises

or exploited in the 12 months ending December 31, 2020. As organisations around the world prepare to face the new cybersecurity challenges looming in 2021, it's crucial to pause and take a look back at the most critical vulnerabilities and risks from the past year. Understanding which

enterprise systems are affected by the year's vulnerabilities can help organisations understand which flaws represent the greatest risk. From 2015 to 2020, the number of reported common vulnerabilities and exposures (CVEs) increased at an average annual percentage growth rate of 36.6 per cent. In 2020, 18,358 CVEs were reported, representing a 6 per cent increase over the 17,305 reported in 2019, and a 183 per cent increase over the 6,487 disclosed in 2015. Prioritising which vulnerabilities warrants attention is more challenging than ever. Two notable trends from the report are: Pre-existing vulnerabilities in virtual private network (VPN)

solutions — many of which were initially disclosed in 2019 or earlier — continue to remain a favourite target for cybercriminals and nation-state groups. Web browsers like Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, Internet Explorer and Microsoft Edge are the primary target for zero-day vulnerabilities, accounting for over 35 per cent of all zero-day vulnerabilities exploited in the wild. Fixing unpatched vulnerabilities, implementing strong security controls for remote desktop protocol, ensuring endpoint security is up-to-date and regularly performing security awareness training are steps organisations can take to thwart some of these attacks.

**Banks may not survive pandemic**

Some individual banks that were weak before the coronavirus pandemic may not survive the crisis, the head of Germany's financial watchdog said on Tuesday. — **Reuters**

**Indian shares edge up on markets**

Indian shares inched higher in the run-up to a slew of corporate earnings and on positive global cues after Janet Yellen advocated for a huge fiscal relief package in the US. — **Reuters**

**Dollar slips while euro hangs on**

The US dollar nursed losses on Wednesday and the euro hung on to gains as investors' mood brightened in the wake of a better-than-expected sentiment survey in Germany. — **Reuters**



A worker watches as trucks load up raw nickel near Sorowako, Indonesia's Sulawesi island. — **Reuters**

Indonesia stays China's second-biggest nickel ore supplier despite ban

JAKARTA: Indonesia remained China's second-biggest nickel ore supplier in 2020, Chinese customs data showed on Wednesday, despite the Southeast Asian country's ban on exports of the material.

Arrivals of Indonesian nickel ore into China totalled 3.4 million tonnes last year, the General Administration of Customs reported.

That was down 85.8 per cent from 2019 but still second only to the Philippines at 31.98 million tonnes, and ahead of New Caledonia in third.

Indonesian shipments were 1.98 million tonnes in January and February combined, likely the last cargoes to depart Indonesia before the ban came into force on January 1, 2020,

although some may have been delayed by coronavirus curbs.

The data then shows a trickle of Indonesian nickel ore imports in every subsequent month of last year, including 78,245 tonnes for December.

Data from Indonesia, which enacted the ban to force more ore domestic ore processing, shows zero nickel ore exports to China for January to November.

Some analysts believe the answer may lie in material being exported as iron ore but imported into China as nickel ore.

These shipments typically consist of ore that has only around 1 per cent nickel content but over 50 per cent iron, so is iron ore as far as the Indonesia government is concerned, CRU analyst Ellie Wang said. — **Reuters**

'Act big' now to save economy, worry about debt later, Yellen says

WASHINGTON: Janet Yellen, US President-elect Joe Biden's nominee for Treasury Secretary, urged lawmakers on Tuesday to "act big" on coronavirus relief spending, arguing that the economic benefits far outweigh the risks of a higher debt burden.

In more than three hours of confirmation hearing testimony, the former Federal Reserve chair laid out a vision of a more muscular Treasury that would act aggressively to reduce economic inequality, fight climate change and counter China's unfair trade and subsidy practices.

Taxes on corporations and the wealthy will eventually need to rise to help finance Biden's ambitious plans for investing in infrastructure, research and development, and for worker training to improve the US economy's competitiveness, she told members of the Senate Finance Committee.

But that would only come after reining in the coronavirus pandemic, which has killed over 400,000 in the United States, and the economic devastation it brought.

Yellen, who spoke by video link, said her task as Treasury chief will be to help Americans endure the final months of the pandemic as the population is vaccinated, and rebuild the economy to make it more competitive and create more prosperity and more jobs.

"Without further action we risk a longer, more painful recession



Janet Yellen, US President-elect Joe Biden's nominee to be treasury secretary, speaks as Biden announces nominees and appointees to serve on his economic policy team at his transition headquarters in Wilmington, Delaware. — **Reuters**

now and longer-term scarring of the economy later," she said. Yellen said pandemic relief would take priority over tax increases, but corporations and the wealthy, which both benefited from 2017 Republican tax cuts "need to pay their fair share."

She raised eyebrows of some senators and Wall Street when she said that Treasury would consider the possibility of taxing unrealised capital gains — through a "mark-to-market" mechanism — as well as other approaches to boost revenues.

She also said the value of the dollar should be determined by markets, a break from departing President Donald Trump's desire

for a weaker US currency.

"The United States does not seek a weaker currency to gain competitive advantage and we should oppose attempts by other countries to do so," she said.

Wall Street stocks rose on Tuesday in reaction to Yellen's call for a hefty stimulus package, as well as to positive bank earnings updates.

Oil prices also rose, while Treasury yields fell slightly on her comments that parts of the 2017 tax reform should be repealed.

Biden, who will be sworn into office on Wednesday, outlined a \$1.9 trillion stimulus package proposal last week, saying bold investment was needed to jump-



The United States does not seek a weaker currency to gain competitive advantage and we should oppose attempts by other countries to do so

JANET YELLEN

Treasury Secretary nominee

start the economy and accelerate the distribution of vaccines to bring the virus under control.

Asked what outlays would provide the biggest "bang for the buck," Yellen said spending on public health and widespread vaccinations was the first step. Extended unemployment and nutrition aid, better known as food stamps, should be next, she said.

"Neither the president-elect, nor I, propose this relief package without an appreciation for the country's debt burden. But right now, with interest rates at historic lows, the smartest thing we can do is act big," Yellen said.

She said even though the amount of debt relative to the economy has risen, the interest burden — the amount the Treasury pays to service its debt — has not, due to lower interest rates. She said she will watch that metric closely as the economy recovers.

— **Reuters**

Biden admin plans to create antitrust czar

WASHINGTON: The incoming administration of US President-elect Joe Biden is considering creating a White House position focused on competition policy and issues relating to antitrust.

The idea remains under consideration and the Biden White House may not ultimately make the move, one of the sources said. "It is yet to be determined if this will be more of a coordinator kind of a role or if this person will really sit at the White House."

The role could focus on moving information back and forth between agencies and coordinating. Antitrust enforcement has emerged as an issue the Biden transition team has been watching closely, which provide free or inexpensive services to consumers while suspected of breaking the law to crush smaller rivals. — **Reuters**

France needs to plot fiscal consolidation plans now: IMF



PARIS: France needs to start working now on plans to rein in its debt once the economy has put the coronavirus crisis firmly behind it, which is not expected until 2023, the International Monetary Fund said.

In an annual in-depth review, the IMF forecast that

the eurozone's second-biggest economy would rebound 5.5 per cent this year after contracting 9 per cent in 2020. But it said the recovery would remain below the pre-crisis trend — when French growth was outpacing other eurozone economies — as corporate

balance sheets strained by the crisis and high unemployment weighed on activity.

French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire (**pictured**) has forecast a rebound of 6 per cent this year, although he has also warned that will be challenging after a slow start to a national

vaccination campaign.

With the crisis expected to leave the public sector budget deficit at 7.7 per cent of gross domestic output this year, the IMF urged the government to lose no time drawing up plans to tackle spending once the economic recovery takes hold. — **Reuters**

Oil extends gains on crude stocks drawdown

MELBOURNE: Oil prices rose in early trade on Wednesday, adding to solid gains overnight, on expectations the incoming US administration will go ahead with massive stimulus spending that would boost fuel demand and draw down crude stocks. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures climbed 23 cents, or 0.4 per cent, to \$53.21 a barrel at 01:55 GMT, building on a 1.2 per cent rise on Tuesday.

Brent crude futures rose 25 cents, or 0.5 per cent, to \$56.15 a barrel, adding to a 2.1 per cent gain on Tuesday.

US President-elect Joe Biden's Treasury Secretary nominee Janet Yellen urged lawmakers on Tuesday to "act big" on pandemic



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

relief spending, reinforcing hopes of massive spending to boost growth.

"Certainly the expectation is that will support better growth and better demand in the US,"

said National Australia Bank's head of commodity research, Lachlan Shaw.

The oil market continued to rise despite the International Energy Agency having cut its outlook for first-quarter oil demand by 580,000 barrels per day, due to tight lockdowns in Europe and border closures to stop soaring COVID-19 infections.

"That clearly vindicates the move by Saudi Arabia last week to cut 1 million barrels per day of their own production unilaterally for February and March," Shaw said.

"The risk right now is around coronavirus lockdowns. We've seen some countries extending lockdowns."

Germany on Tuesday extended a lockdown for most shops and schools for another two weeks, to February 14.

Traders will be watching out for US crude and products inventory data due from the American Petroleum Institute on Wednesday and from the Energy Information Administration on Friday.

Six analysts polled by Reuters estimated, on average, that crude stocks fell by 300,000 barrels in the week to January 15, but expect gasoline stockpiles rose by 3.0 million barrels.

Distillate inventories, which include diesel, heating oil and jet fuel, were seen up by 800,000 barrel. — **Reuters**

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HUN'na: A community platform for female athletes and adventurers in Oman

HUN'na was founded by Noorulhuda al Mandhari in September 2020 to tell the stories of Omani female adventurers and athletes and showcase their achievements on an online platform... **P18**

INSIDE STORIES

CHANGING WORLD



OLDEST CITY IN THE AMERICAS UNDER THREAT FROM SQUATTERS

Having survived for 5,000 years, the oldest archeological site in the Americas is under threat from squatters claiming the coronavirus pandemic has left them with no other option but to occupy the sacred city... **Story on Page 20**

LOCAL DISCOVERY



RARE SPECIES OF ORCHID SPOTTED IN AL DHAHIRAH

A rare stream orchid, Epipactis veratrifolia, commonly known as Eastern Marsh helleborine was spotted in one of the chalky cliffs in the moist wadis in Falaj Al Sudairieen... **Story on Page 19**

READ



PICADOR WILDING

BY ISABELLA TREE

This book is a beautiful read and affirming account of stepping back and letting nature burst back into the countryside. It makes a case for a different kind of stewardship, one where we, as humans, ought to observe first and intervene second.

ENTERTAINMENT



“PARASITE” DIRECTOR TO HEAD VENICE FILM FESTIVAL JURY

South Korean director Bong Joon-ho, whose “Parasite” movie won the Academy Award for Best Picture last year, was named on Friday as jury president of the 2021 Venice Film Festival.

CELEBRATE



WOMEN'S HEALTHY WEIGHT DAY

Originating in the US, Women's Healthy Weight Day's goal is to empower women regardless of the size they are in and as long as they are living a healthy lifestyle. Over the years, this day is spent on modest reflection and a chance to highlight the lady behind the shallow stereotypes they often suffer. To celebrate today, allow the women in your family to spend an amazing time out with their friends.



HUN'na: A community platform for female athletes and adventurers in Oman

BY TITASH CHAKRABORTY

An adventurer and athlete herself, she not only had stories of her own but knew of women in Oman who were adventurers themselves, breaking records and crossing both social and athletic boundaries! HUN'na was formed with a hope to create a platform that would not only share these stories but also help build a community of female athletes and adventurers in Oman.

HUN'na was founded by the owner Noorulhuda al Mandhari in September 2020 to tell the stories of Omani female adventurers and athletes and showcase their achievements on an online platform.

In the summer of 2020, Noorulhuda started her Instagram page, then with the help of her friends, she created HUN'na, where Mohammed al Churaibi who is a distinguished content creator designed the logo and Muna al Shidhani, an adventurer and photographer who took the launching photos for the platform. Wisal al Rashdi who is a tour guide & also promotes female guiding in Oman joined shortly as a partner in networking and collaborations.

Within a month, "We found ourselves discovering women who were on different adventures such as Suhaila al Kindi who decided to walk from Muscat to Dhofar starting from Omani Women's Day and arriving on National Day to promote awareness in preserving the environment. We joined part of her trip to experience and tell her story.

Followed directly by Anisa al Raisi and Major Natalie's for the YallaGo expedition who crossed Oman in a straight line from Musandam to Mirbat" said Noorulhuda.

She added, "We found ourselves planning visits to women and ath-

letic events almost every week. The strength we have experienced and the resilience from these women is truly remarkable."

HUN'NA AND YALLAGO

When the YallaGo expedition started on November 18, we had just finished covering Suhaila's successful journey and excited to move onto the next adventure. We attended the opening launch of YallaGo in Outwardbound and bid farewell to the ladies but that was only the start of the journey. HUN'na covered their story on our Instagram story for the duration of their expedition (46 days) and joined them at various times on their expedition.

Their first visit was during their stay in Al Buraimi. A challenging moment of their expedition, They joined the YallaGo team where they climbed a tough mountain and took more than 24 hours to get back to the camp safely. Noorulhuda said, "We were able to show our viewers what happens behind the scenes and how the support team deals with difficult situations. After our first visit, we kept in close contact with their team and covered their journey on our platform. We also decided we wanted to visit the ladies in their last leg of the expedition and experience walking the final kilometres with them in Mirbat."

DHOFAR VISIT AND LOCATING LOCAL WOMEN

Major Natalie had an injury during the empty quarter crossing and had to leave the expedition meaning Anisa was left to cross the remaining two weeks on her own. HUN'na's team was determined to keep the spirits up and decided to join Anisa at the finish line.

Noorulhuda said, "This also got us wondering about the women in Dhofar and their involvement in adventure and sports. Instantly, Wisal began her research and for two weeks she continued looking for women in the industry and was saddened when she realized that the achievements of a lot of these women were undocumented nor

filmed because of both lack of interest and cultural constraints.

Not giving up hope, the team finally got in touch with a woman called Tufool Ajzoon who manages the Female Salalah handball team, and where we got extremely excited & hopeful to know they do exist.

When the HUN'na team met up with these women, they seemed to be both excited and intrigued as they had never really had other organisations interested in them or their work.

The first met up with an adventure women team and their leader Khair Zaad who organised a beautiful short hike to Wadi Darbat, where we got to meet some of the members of the team. Although reluctant to be filmed or photographed, throughout the hike the women shared their stories, struggles, their life in Dhofar and truly understood the purpose of the group.

Noorulhuda realised that the group wasn't formed for their love of adventures and exercise only but these women felt strength with having each other and for them the outdoors was an escape from the stresses and challenges that they face in their everyday lives," she said, "It is seen as a very unusual sport as women in Dhofar don't generally spend time alone outdoors or even exercise. We were touched by their stories and told them that with their permission we wanted to share their existence for the first time online." Since women have started their adventure group on Instagram — @himam_dhofar.

After this, they met with the handball team. Although it was amazing for the team to see this team come together, but not too long after the reality of everything came forth. Noorulhuda shared with us, she said, "We were surprised to see the girls saying that they had to leave. At first, we thought the practice was over but it turns out the lights don't get turned on for them and that was just the start of what we saw. The resources given to these girls were very limited. They had very old balls and DIY cones

(water bottles with sand in them) that the team made and used. Their uniforms were given to them during a tournament on a loan basis but they decided to keep them because they don't have uniforms. But despite everything, all of the challenges faced we loved the team's persistence and their athletic enthusiasm!"

They train every week and when the outdoor space isn't given to them they train in a public park or beach. They never skip practice. The girls were strong both physically and mentally and we could see their passion for this sport.

The HUN'na team throughout their journey were also being supported by well-wishers, "We got privileged to be sponsored for our stay by Anantara Al Baleed Resort for two nights as they wanted to support our platform and our cause. We had a lovely lantern experience and a great outdoor yoga experience too! (Honestly best breakfast buffet we ever had in a hotel in Oman). We would like to thank their staff for being very supportive during our stay!", Thanked Noorulhuda.

WHAT'S NEXT TO HUN'NA?

Noorulhuda told us, she said, "We are currently working on covering more stories and expeditions. We will also be exploring different regions and looking for women who are involved in adventures and sports and sharing their existence & contributions on our platform. We found that with a little moral support we are making a huge difference in encouraging local women to compete and to experience life differently. We hope that this platform inspires females to achieve more in the field of adventure and sports. We want the world to know that they exist and that their stories will be told."





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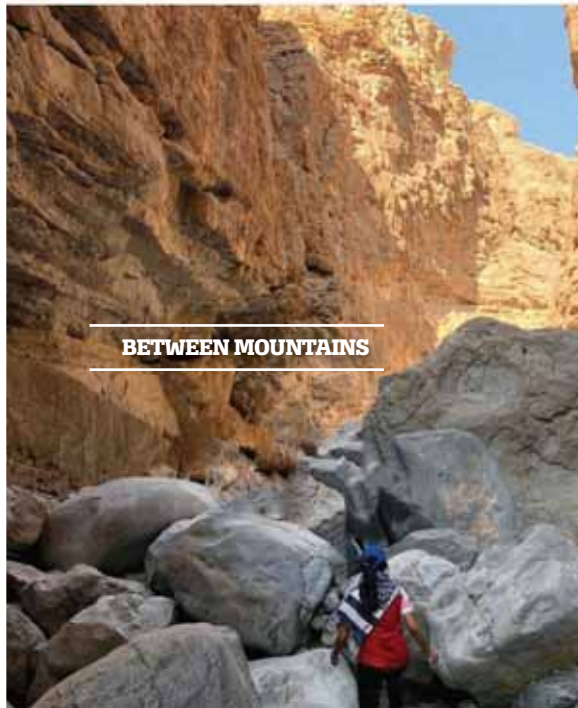
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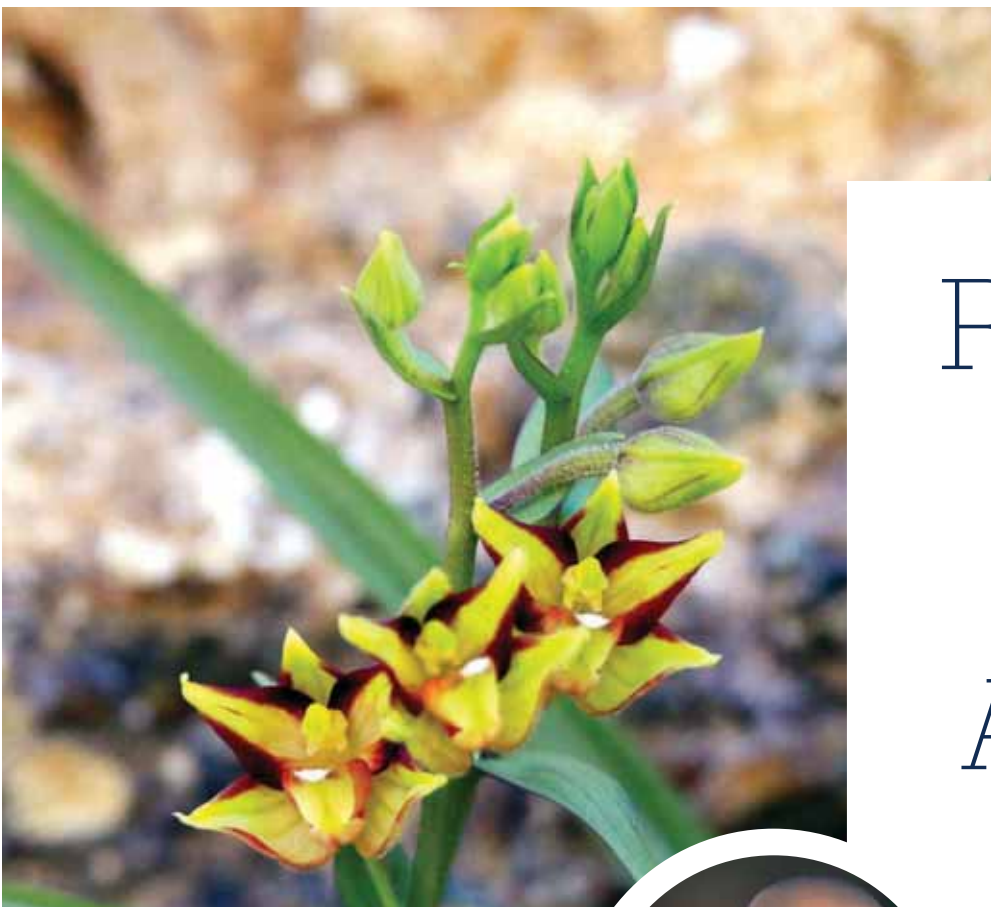
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Rare species of Orchid spotted in Al Dhahirah

PHOTOS AND TEXT BY BIJU AUGUSTINE



THE ARABIAN Peninsula is consists of an arid plateau and is mostly devoid of orchids. Most of the areas in the Sultanate of Oman has only sparse scrub of thorny trees that can tolerate its harsh summers, unlike the Dhofar Governorate which benefits due to the monsoon.

Falaj al Sudairieen village in the Governorate of Al Dhahirah is known for it's agricultural villages that are scattered over a vast area of long valleys and mountains. The village is well-known for its cultivation of various agricultural crops comprising garlic, onion, wheat in addition to date palms, and bananas.

The village derived its name from falaj, which supplies water to the farms throughout the year. The unique greeneries of the village attract tourists from far and near to have the first-hand experience of its natural beauty. A recent trip to this village recently yielded a surprise. In Oman, wadis are places of biodiversity with rocky falaj and damp walls, they become ideal conditions for plants to thrive. A rare stream orchid, *Epipactis veratrifolia*, commonly known as Eastern Marsh helleborine was spotted in one of the chalky cliffs in the moist wadis in Falaj Al Sudairieen.

Epipactis veratrifolia thrives in Europe particularly in Cyprus but can also be found in Asia.

Among Eastern Mediterranean countries, they were found in places like Anatolia, Israel, Lebanon and Sinai.

This orchid as of late was also found in various parts of Abu Dhabi. There were also some discoveries made in Sharjah. As for the Sultanate, some reports noted that it was discovered growing in Jabal al Awaid and some spotted in Northern Oman.

This moist environment of the wadi perhaps perfectly suited for the growth of this orchid. These ground orchids are also espoused to withstand the drought. They are terrestrial herbs with hairy stem that grow up to 40 cm tall. Its leaves are solely green, oval-shaped and 15 cm long. Its flowering season begins from early January to March, but the specimen found in the third week of December had bloomed. The flowers have 3 petals and 3 sepals. This orchid is special in that the pollination is done by Aphidophagous hoverflies, which describes the low abundance of this species due to its pollination strategy. The Environment and Protected Areas Authority (EPAA) of UAE has listed this plant as rare and endangered species in the Arabian Peninsula. It is named Marsh helleborine due to its presence in marshy habitat. This is the only orchid species from the six recorded in the Sultanate of Oman that grows outside the Dhofar Governorate.





Oldest city in the Americas under threat from squatters

Having survived for 5,000 years, the oldest archeological site in the Americas is under threat from squatters claiming the coronavirus pandemic has left them with no other option but to occupy the sacred city.

The situation has become so bad that archeologist Ruth Shady, who discovered the Caral site in Peru, has been threatened with death if she doesn't abandon investigating its treasures.

Archeologists team visiting Caral said that squatter invasions and destruction began in March when the pandemic forced a nationwide lockdown.

"There are people who come and invade this site, which is state property, and they use it to plant," archeologist Daniel Mayta said.

"It's hugely harmful because they're destroying 5,000-year-old cultural evidence."

Caral is situated in the valley of the Supe river some 182 kilometres (110 miles) north of the capital Lima and 20km from the Pacific Ocean to the west.

Developed between 3,000 and 1,800 BC in an arid desert, Caral is the cradle of civilisation in the Americas.

Its people were contemporaries of Pharaonic Egypt and the great Mesopotamian civilisations.

It pre-dates the far better known Inca empire by 45 centuries.

None of that mattered to the squatters, though, who took advantage of the minimal police surveillance during 107 days of lockdown to take over



10 hectares of the Chupacigarro archeological site and plant avocados, fruit trees and lima beans.

"The families don't want to leave," said Mayta, 36.

"We explained to them that this site is a (UNESCO) World Heritage site and what they're doing is serious and could see them go to jail."

DEATH THREATS

Shady is the director of the Caral archeological zone and has been managing the investigations since 1996 when excavations began.

She says that land traffickers — who occupy state or protected land illegally to sell it for private gain — are behind the invasions.

"We're receiving threats

from people who are taking advantage of the pandemic conditions to occupy archeological sites and invade them to establish huts and till the land with machinery ... they destroy everything they come across," said Shady.

"One day they called the lawyer who works with us and told him they were going to kill him with me and bury us five meters underground" if the archeological work continued at the site.

Shady, 74, has spent the last quarter of a century in Caral trying to bring back to life the social history and legacy of the civilisation, such as how the construction techniques they used resisted earthquakes.

"These structures up to five

thousand years old have remained stable up to the present and structural engineers from Peru and Japan will apply that technology," said Shady.

The Caral inhabitants understood that they lived in seismic territory.

Their structures had baskets filled with stones at the base that cushioned the movement of the ground and prevented the construction from collapsing.

The threats have forced Shady to live in Lima under protection.

She was given the Order of Merit by the government last week for services to the nation.

"We're doing what we can to ensure that neither your health nor your life are at risk due to the effects of the threats you're receiving," Peru's President Francisco Sagasti told her at the ceremony.

POLICE ARRESTS

Caral was declared a Unesco World Heritage site in 2009.

It spans 66 hectares and is dominated by seven stone pyramids that appear to light up when the sun's rays fall on them.

The civilisation is believed to have been peaceful and used neither weapons nor ramparts.

Closed due to the pandemic, Caral reopened to tourists in October and costs just \$3 to visit.

During the lockdown, several archeological pieces were looted in the area and in July police arrested two people for partially destroying a site containing mummies and ceramics. — **AFP**