

THE YEAR THAT WAS

In 2020, Oman lost its dear leader His Majesty Sultan Qaboos and the COVID-19 pandemic shut the country for nearly two quarters. It will be also remembered for landmark reforms that will have a major impact on the lives of citizens, residents and the business community in the years to come.



His Majesty Sultan Qaboos with His Majesty (then Sayyid) Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.



JANUARY 10-11



HIS MAJESTY SULTAN QABOOS PASSES AWAY

"With tears in their eyes and prayers in their hearts, the people of Oman bid adieu to His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, father of modern Oman on January 11. His Majesty Sultan Qaboos left for heavenly abode after establishing a comprehensive renaissance over the past 50 years since he assumed power on the 23rd of July 1970, and after leading a prudent and triumphant march, abundant with bounty that prevailed all over Oman, from corner to corner, and even spread over to the Arab world, Islamic nation and the rest of the world. This renaissance resulted in a balanced foreign policy that was saluted with solemn respect by the whole world," a statement from the Diwan of Royal Court read.

JANUARY 11



HIS MAJESTY HAITHAM BIN TARIK SWORN IN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik was sworn in on January 11, 2020, during a joint session of the Council of Oman and the Defence Council in implementation of the provision of Article (7) of the Basic Law of the State. Upon His Majesty's arrival, he performed the oath reading as follows: "I swear in the name of the Almighty Allah to respect the Basic Law of the State and the laws, to fully sponsor the interests of citizens and their liberties and to safeguard the independence of the nation and the safety of its territories."

JANUARY 20



FIRST TUNNELLED ROAD OPENS IN OMAN

Oman's engineering marvel the Al Sharqiyah Expressway is opened for traffic on January 20. The 191 km long expressway is located Bidbid and Al Kamil W'al Wafi. This strategic three-lane road with a design speed of 120km/h will include bridges across wadis over heights up to 90 m. The road also includes the first-of-its-kind tunnel projects built in Oman that are over 2.1 km long in total. The first tunnel is located near Nidab village in Samayil that is 650 m long while the second one is located in the mountain range of Wadi Alaq, which is 1.450 m long.

FEBRUARY 11



ROAD IN KUWAIT NAMED AFTER HIS MAJESTY SULTAN QABOOS

A statement issued online by The Kuwait Ministers Council said: "Based on the supreme order of His Highness the Emir, one of the major roads has been named in memory of the late Sultan Qaboos, in appreciation of the important role that he played and the efforts he exerted in supporting the march of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the issues of the Arab and Islamic nations."

THE YEAR THAT WAS



FEBRUARY 22

MUSCAT BOOK FAIR OPENS
The 25th edition of the Muscat Book Fair was officially opened on February 22 with the participation of 946 publishing houses from 32 countries at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC).

FEBRUARY 24



FIRST CASE OF COVID-19 REPORTED

Oman reported its first two cases of coronavirus, and halted flights to and from Iran with immediate effect, authorities and reports said.

MARCH 25



FLIGHTS GROUNDED

Oman suspended all internal and international flights from March 29, except cargo operations and flights to Musandam. The normal airport services resumed only on October 1.

APRIL 1



FIRST TUNNELLED ROADNS IN OMAN

The Ministry of Health in Oman confirmed the country's first coronavirus death on April 1, along with 18 new confirmed cases. The total number of infections recorded in the Sultanate at the time was 210.

JULY 7



PART OF EXPRESS WAY OPENED

The Ministry of Transport has opened a new 16 km from phase 2 of Al Sharqiyah Expressway on Wednesday. This bypass road avoids congested residential and commercial areas in Al Kamil W'al Wafi, connecting the wilayats of South and North Al Sharqiyah governorates while ensuring smooth flow of vehicles and goods traffic.

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AUGUST 19



SAYYID THEYAZIN BECOMES MINISTER

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq issued Royal Decree 111/2020 on the formation of the Council of Ministers. The 26 ministries have been pared down to 19. A new ministry, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth, led by His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said was set up.

OCTOBER 11-24



NIGHT LOCKDOWN IMPOSED

Oman orders two weeks of night lockdown to contain coronavirus.

OCTOBER 18



EXPATS ALLOWED TO BUY APARTMENTS

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning on Sunday announced a major decision, which will boost the real estate sector in the Sultanate. As per the decision by Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, non-Omanis can purchase units in multi-storied commercial and residential buildings under the usufruct system.

OCTOBER 22



FISCAL BALANCE PLAN APPROVED

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq approved a Medium-Term Fiscal Balance Plan (2020-2024) devised by the government, which has been developed to reduce the primary and overall fiscal deficits as a percentage of GDP in the medium term to sustainable levels in the mid-term period.

THE YEAR THAT WAS



NOVEMBER 18

Oman marks 50th National Day

DECEMBER 12



VISA -FREE ENTRY FOR 103 NATIONALITIES

In support of the tourist movement and to facilitate the travellers wishing to visit the Sultanate, the Royal Oman Police announced that the nationals of 103 countries will be exempted from entry visas for a period for ten days. The entry will be allowed as specified controls and conditions, including the presence of a prior and confirmed hotel reservation, health insurance and a return ticket.

DECEMBER 27



COVID-19 VACCINATION BEGINS

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, launches the National Campaign for Immunisation against COVID-19 under the theme (Immunisation Is a Prevention). The Health Minister was the first person to be vaccinated followed by healthcare workers and members of the community.

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Britain on Wednesday became the first country in the world to approve a coronavirus vaccine developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca, prioritising the rapid deployment of the shot as it battles a major winter surge driven by a new, highly contagious variant of the virus. The following is what we know about the race to deliver vaccines to help end the coronavirus pandemic that has killed more than 1.7 million people worldwide:

WHO IS FURTHEST ALONG?

US drugmaker Pfizer and German partner BioNTech are the COVID-19 vaccine trailblazers. On November 18, they became the first in the world to release full late-stage trial data. Britain was the first to approve the shot for emergency use on December 3, followed by Canada on December 9 and the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on December 11. Several other countries including Saudi Arabia and Mexico have also approved it. The European Medicines Agency (EMA) approved the shot on December 21 and India is accelerating its review. The World Health Organization could decide whether to give its emergency use approval for the Pfizer candidate by the end of the year as part of its COVAX programme aimed at providing shots for poor- and middle-income countries.

WHAT ABOUT MODERNA?

Moderna Inc came a close second to Pfizer in many countries after it released a full data analysis for a late-stage trial on November 30 showing a 94.1-per cent efficacy rate for its vaccine. The United States authorised Moderna's vaccine on December 19 while Canada approved the shot on December 23 and the EMA will do so on January 6.

THE UK NOD FOR ASTRAZENECA

The UK's approval for AstraZeneca's vaccine is a major win for a shot seen as crucial for mass immunisations even as questions have swirled about the robustness of its trial data. The British company announced interim late-stage trial data on November 23 showing a half-dose followed by a full dose had a 90-per cent success rate while two full doses were 62 per cent effective. The more successful outcome, however, emerged in a much smaller number of participants, and AstraZeneca is conducting more testing to see if that success rate holds up in a wider population of volunteers. The questions over the most effective dosing pattern have complicated the approval process. While India is conducting an accelerated review, it has asked for more data. AstraZeneca is also in discussions with the EMA, which is conducting a rolling review of the vaccine. India is expected to make a decision on whether to approve for the two full-dose regimen of the shot soon. Its review does not include the more effective dosage.

WHO ELSE IS IN THE RUNNING?

US drugmaker Johnson & Johnson plans to deliver trial data in January 2021, teeing it up for US authoriSation in February if its shot is effective. It reduced the enrolment target for its clinical trial to 40,000 volunteers from 60,000 on

WHERE ARE WE IN THE COVID-19 VACCINE RACE?



December 9, potentially speeding results which are tied to how quickly participants become infected. US firm Novavax is running a late-stage trial in Britain with data due in the first quarter of 2021. It expects to start a large-scale trial in the United States this month. France's Sanofi and Britain's GlaxoSmithKline , however, announced a setback on December 11 in their attempts to develop a vaccine. The drugmakers said it showed an insufficient immune response in older people in mid-stage trials and that they would start a new study in February.

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE TRIALS?

The companies typically test their vaccines against a placebo — typically saline solution — in healthy volunteers to see if the rate of COVID-19 infection among those who got the vaccine is significantly lower than in those who received the dummy shot.

HOW ARE VOLUNTEERS INFECTED?

The trials rely on subjects becoming naturally infected with COVID-19, so how long it takes to generate results largely depends on how pervasive the virus is where trials are being conducted. Each drugmaker has targeted a specific number of infections to trigger a first analysis of their data.

HOW WELL ARE THE VACCINES SUPPOSED TO WORK?

The World Health Organization ideally wants to see at least 70 per cent efficacy. The FDA wants at least 50 per cent — which means there must be at least twice as many infections among volunteers who received a placebo as among those in the vaccine group. The EMA has said it may accept a lower efficacy level.

WHAT ABOUT RUSSIA AND CHINA?

While Pfizer's shot was the first to be rolled out following the publication of full Phase III trial data, Russia and China have been inoculating their citizens for months with several different vaccines still undergoing late-stage trials. Russia said on November 24 its Sputnik V vaccine, developed by the Gamaleya Institute, was 91.4 per cent effective based on interim late-stage trial results. It started vaccinations in August and has inoculated more than 100,000 people so far. India plans to make 300 million of the shots next year and Argentina has given the greenlight for emergency use of the shot, with some 300,000 doses arriving in the country on December 24. China launched an emergency use programme in July aimed at essential workers and others at high risk of infection. It has vaccinated about one million people as of mid-November using at least three shots — two developed by the state-backed China National Biotec Group (CNBG) and one by Sinovac Biotech. Trial data on a COVID-19 vaccine developed by China's Sinovac Biotech has varied: interim data from a late-stage trial in Turkey showed its CoronaVac shot is 91.25 per cent effective, while researchers in Brazil say the shot was more than 50 per cent effective. The United Arab Emirates, meanwhile, said on December 9 that one of the CNBG vaccines was 86 per cent effective based on interim results from a late-stage trial in the Gulf Arab state. — Reuters



Governor reviews Adam projects

AMAL AL RIYAMI

@AMAL92ALRIYAMI

Shaikh Hilal bin Said bin Hamdan al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, visited the Wilayat of Adam, during which he met members of Municipal Affairs Committee in Adam on Tuesday.

The meeting was attended by Shaikh Hamad bin Rashid bin Hamdan al Muqbali, Wali of Adam and Chairman of the Municipal Affairs Committee, and the Assistant Director-General of Al Dakhiliyah Municipality, in the office of the wali of Adam.

The Governor expressed his thanks and appreciation to the members of the committee, praising their efforts to support the municipality department in the Adam in carrying out its duties. He listened to the opinions and suggestions of the members



of the committee related to the people's demands for the possibility of digging auxiliary wells for the aflaj in the Wilayat due to the scarcity of water.

The meeting also reviewed the issue of illegal holdings and land encroachment, which has become an obstacle to the implementation of development and service projects.

The meeting also discussed the importance of connecting village

households to sewage and water networks. The problem of floods in Al Bashair Tunnel during the rains, which leads to obstruction of traffic was also discussed.

The Governor also visited a number of projects in the state, including the public park project, which was recently established with the corporate support. He was also reviewed the ongoing construction of the vegetable and fruit market project in the wilayat. It being established on an area of 800 square meters and includes 20 shops equipped with air conditioning, in addition to a number of necessary services.

Al Hajri visited the municipality slaughterhouse project in Adam. The Governor also briefed on the progress of work in the municipality department in Adam. He met officials and urged them to make more efforts to address citizens requests and concerns.

Aquatic therapy unit to help boost well-being of people with disabilities

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

@zainabalnasseri

Aquatic therapy is one of the advanced therapeutic methods of great importance to improve physical condition and make the body become stronger especially for people with disabilities. It improves joint movement and strengthen muscles through water resistance as well as increase blood circulation and improve breathing. Besides, it provides immense psychological and social benefits.

A special unit for aquatic therapy was launched recently in the Sultanate at the Al Aman Rehabilitation Center, affiliated to the General Directorate of Persons with Disabilities Affairs. The centre caters to 300 people with special needs.



The unit contributes to developing and improving the mobility capabilities of people with physical disabilities, autism and Down syndrome.

The aquatic therapy unit was inaugurated by Laila bint Ahmed bin Awadh al Najar, Minister of Social Development.

An official at the centre said that this type of treatment will be available to all children with disabilities enrolled in the center,

but the greatest focus will be on cases that suffer from physical disabilities, as this type of treatment helps relieve tension in their limbs and bodies.

The inauguration of the unit is an important addition to the programmes and services provided by the centre, and reflects the ministry's interest in keeping pace with scientific and therapeutic developments through the use of the latest

rehabilitation methods.

The government under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, pays great attention to persons with disabilities, and is working in all its sectors to empower them and ensure them equality as they are an integral part of the Oman Vision 2040 which focused on providing a decent and sustainable life for all.

Al Aman Rehabilitation Centre offers services to persons with physical and mental disabilities. It provides physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, special education, behaviour modification, and life skills courses. In addition, it provides health care services in coordination with health institutions.

SAI hosts awareness seminar at Nizwa CAS

NIZWA: The State Audit Institution (SAI) conducted a seminar at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (Nizwa CAS) on Tuesday. The seminar comes in line with the SAI media and awareness plan to raise awareness on the protection of public money and preserving country's accomplishments.

The seminar, organised through video-conferencing, saw the participation of a number of academic and administrative staff as well as college students. It aimed to raise awareness on SAI's role and partnership with relevant entities to protect public properties and promote integrity in light of SAI's execution of its mandate.

Specialists from SAI presented the seminar themes in the presence of the Director of Financial and Administrative Audit Department in Nizwa. The seminar covered several themes like reviewing specific definitions relevant to audit work, audit types, objectives and importance. — **ONA**

PASI board of directors meets

MUSCAT: The Board of Directors of the Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) on Wednesday held its fourth meeting for this year under the chairmanship of Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, Chairman of PASI Board of Directors.

The Board approved the executive and operational plans for the third version of PASI's strategic plan (2021-2025). It reviewed results of PASI's general institutional performance indicators and the executive position of the second stage's projects of the strategic plan (2016-2020). The board discussed a number of insurance programmes that PASI is planning to implement in the coming period. The board reviewed memos and reports regarding PASI's financial position and some local investment opportunities that the authority intends to invest in. — **ONA**



Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Center

Auction Advertisement for Leasing Cafeteria for staff

The operational committee of Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Centre announces the following Auction:

Auction no	Auction Title	Last date for Collection of Tender Document	Bid Submission Closing	Tender Specification Fees
3/2020	Leasing Cafeteria for staff	11/01/2021	25/01/2021	No Fees

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

Operational Committee of the Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre Knowledge Oasis, Building No4 (KOM4) First Floor.

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

Operational Committee of the Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Center Knowledge Oasis Building No4 (KOM4), First Floor.

Please note:

- Bids received after the deadline indicated above, for whatever reason, will not be considered.
- Queries/ clarifications should be submitted immediately, but not later than one week before the date of tender submission.
- For Queries you may Contact on Tel: 22584133 or 22584132 or via e-mail: purchase@cccrc.gov.om
- The committee is not obliged to accept the lowest price of the bid or any other bid.



Ministry of Finance

RE-TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender Committee of Ministry of Finance hereby announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Document Fee	Purchase Document Deadline	Submission Deadline
2/2020	PROVISION OF PRINTING SOLUTIONS AND SERVICES FOR MINISTRY OF FINANCE	RO 25	Tuesday 12/01/2021	10:00 A.M Thursday 14/01/2020

All specialized companies who wish to bid must be registered in E-tendering system of the Tender Board, and have a valid registration certificate. To obtain the tender document, companies shall pay the Tender fee online through E-payment portal via the following link <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.

The bids shall be submitted online through the following E-tendering link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>. Bids received after the closing bid date, shall not be accepted in the System.

All companies shall attach a copy bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any registered bank in the Sultanate of Oman. The value of the cheque shall not be less than one percent (1%) of the bidding price, and shall be valid for Nineteen (90) days from the date of the bid closing date. The original bank guarantee and other bid relevant documents that can't be submitted via the System shall be submitted to the Secretary of The Internal Tender Committee at Financial Affairs Department in the Ministry of Finance.

For further queries or technical support, please contact us via telephone No. 24166670, or E-mail: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om

Internal Tender Committee

العمانية للاستثمارات التعليمية والتدريبية oman education & training investments

Directors Report

On behalf of the Directors of Oman Education Training and Investment S.A.O.G. it is my pleasure to present the First Quarterly Report of the company for the period from 1/9/2020 to 30/11/2020.

- According to the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation instructions, the teaching for the second semester of this academic year 2020/2021 will continue in e-learning, until the end of the academic year.

- The Ministry of Higher education, Scientific Research and Innovation has also adopted the distribution a total of 341 scholarship scholastic to Sohar University for second semester.

Consolidated Financial Statements:

The consolidated financial statements for the period from 1/9/2020 to 30/11/2020 indicated the following:

1- Net profit estimated at 535,852 OMR for the period ended November 30, 2020 compared to 359,171 OMR for the period ended November 30, 2019 due to higher tuition fees and lower expenses.

2- The government grant was registered for deferred government grants, reflecting the value of its extinguishment of the company's profits equivalent to the consumption of property and equipment funded by that grant, which was valued during the current fiscal year in the amount of 118,083 OMR

3- Purchase of fixed assets and assets of the group (computers, laboratory devices, furniture, equipment and projects under completion) during the period for 35,584 OMR.

Finally, I would extend my sincere congratulations to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al-Said, may Allah protect him, On the occasion of the 50th National Day, as well as Ministry of Higher Education. I would like also to extend my profound thanks to the Board of Directors, as well as the University and the company Executives, Academic and Administrative staff for their great effort, looking forward for a successful future in the next years.

Hassan bin Ihsan bin Naseeb Al-Naseeb
Chairman

CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME (Un Audited) Period ended 30 November 20

	Note	Group 30-Nov-20 OMR	Group 30-Nov-19 OMR	Group 31-Aug-20 OMR
Tuition fee		3,419,311	3,244,749	12,546,989
Other income	4	36,790	147,764	590,144
Total income		3,456,101	3,392,513	13,137,133
Expenses				
Salaries and related costs	5	(2,227,869)	(2,336,296)	(8,853,935)
Administrative and other operating expenses	6	(333,012)	(355,287)	(1,593,375)
Depreciation of property and equipment		(298,192)	(364,841)	(1,429,395)
Release of deferred government grant		118,083	116,751	469,704
Reversal of bad and doubtful debts Provision		-	-	113,054
Amortisation of right-of-use assets		(3,317)	-	(13,269)
Total Expenses		(2,744,307)	(2,939,673)	(11,307,216)
Profit / (loss) for the period from operations		711,794	452,840	1,829,917
Finance cost		(63,922)	(15,215)	(148,334)
Finance income		1,396	3,460	9,658
Profit for the year before tax		649,268	441,085	1,691,241
Income Tax		(113,416)	(81,914)	(559,128)
Net Income After Tax		535,852	359,171	1,132,113
Profit attributable to:				
Equity holder of the parent		535,852	359,171	1,132,113
Minority interest		-	-	-
Earnings per share		0.008	0.005	0.016

CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION (Un Audited) At 30 November 2020

	Notes	Group 30-Nov-20 OMR	Group 30-Nov-19 OMR	Group 31-Aug-20 OMR
ASSETS				
Non-current asset				
Property and equipment	9	33,426,619	34,659,461	33,689,226
Right-of-use assets		162,756	-	166,074
		33,589,375	34,659,461	33,855,300
Current assets				
Inventories	10	26,961	105,247	74,773
Trade and other receivables	11	9,441,462	5,910,574	4,936,199
Bank balances and cash	12	2,459,628	2,116,096	3,074,152
TOTAL ASSETS		11,928,051	8,131,917	8,085,124
		45,517,426	42,791,378	41,940,424
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity attributable to equity holders of the parent				
Share capital	13	7,000,000	7,000,000	7,000,000
Statutory reserve	14	3,335,200	3,059,551	3,281,615
Property revaluation reserve		5,301,623	5,301,623	5,301,623
Retained earnings / (Loss)		1,846,277	1,303,075	1,364,010
Total equity		17,483,100	16,664,249	16,947,248
Non-current liabilities				
Deferred grant related to assets	15	15,310,906	15,969,325	15,428,989
Term loan	16	-	428,341	-
Deferred tax liability	7	1,141,083	1,163,514	1,141,083
Employees' end of service benefits	17	1,288,961	1,425,459	1,372,104
Lease liabilities		154,556	-	154,556
Student Deposit-Non Current portion		248,813	211,764	211,754
		18,144,319	19,198,403	18,308,486
Current liabilities				
Bank Overdraft/short Term loan	18	3,000,000	-	3,000,000
Current portion of term loan		428,341	625,000	428,341
Lease liabilities		8,180	-	9,238
Trade and other payable	19	5,679,581	6,078,261	2,586,622
Provision for Income Tax		773,905	225,465	660,489
		9,890,007	6,928,726	6,684,690
Total liabilities		28,034,326	26,127,129	24,993,176
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		45,517,426	42,791,378	41,940,424
Net assets per share		0.250	0.238	0.242

Yemen airport blasts kill 26 as govt plane arrives



A video grab shows the moment an ordnance hit the Aden Airport on Wednesday, shortly after the arrival of a plane carrying members of a new unity government. — AFP

ADEN: At least 26 people were killed on Wednesday as explosions rocked Yemen’s Aden airport moments after a new unity government flew in, in what some officials charged was a “cowardly” attack by Ansar Allah fighters.

Although all government ministers were reported to be unharmed, more than 50 people were wounded, medical and government sources said in the southern city, with the casualty toll feared likely to rise.

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said it was preparing a “mass casualty medical response

plan”.

As smoke billowed out of the airport terminal from an initial blast, with debris strewn across the area and people rushing to tend to the wounded, a second explosion took place. Video footage shot by AFP appears to show missile-like ordnance striking the airport apron — that moments before had been packed with crowds — and exploding into a ball of intense flames.

It was not immediately clear what had caused the explosions.

Sporadic gunfire was heard soon after. Yemen’s internationally recognised government and

southern separatists formed a power-sharing cabinet on December 18, forging a joint front against the Ansar Allah fighters who have seized the capital Sanaa and much of the north.

Both Yemeni Information Minister Moammar Al-Eryani and Prime Minister Moeen Abdulmalik Saeed said that all the members of the government were safe.

We assure our great people that members of the government are fine, and we assure you that the cowardly terrorist attack by the Ansar Allah militia will not deter us from carrying out our patriotic

duty, Eryani said on Twitter.

Saeed tweeted that the “terrorist attack... was part of the war waged against Yemen and its people”, but stopped short of accusing the Ansar Allah fighters.

Yemen’s government spokesman Rajih Badi called for an international investigation into the “terrorist” attack he said targeted “all members of the cabinet”.

“It is too soon to accuse any party before an investigation reveals who executed the attack, including (accusing) the Ansar Allah,” he said, adding those injured included civilians, security



People wait to greet members a newly formed cabinet upon their arrival at Aden Airport. — Reuters

ALTHOUGH ALL GOVERNMENT MINISTERS WERE REPORTED TO BE UNHARMED, MORE THAN 50 PEOPLE WERE WOUNDED, MEDICAL AND GOVERNMENT SOURCES SAID

guards and local officials.

Meanwhile, UN envoy Martin Griffiths condemned the attack on Twitter, calling it an “unacceptable act of violence”.

“I wish the cabinet strength in facing the difficult tasks ahead,” he said. “This unacceptable act of violence is a tragic reminder of the importance of bringing Yemen urgently back on the path towards peace”.

Michael Aron, the British ambassador to Yemen, also condemned the blasts.

“A despicable attempt to cause carnage and chaos and bring suffering when Yemenis had

chosen to move forward together,” he said.

The cabinet members arrived in Aden days after being sworn in by Yemeni President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi in Saudi Arabia, which leads a military coalition against the insurgents.

Hadi fled to the Saudi-capital Riyadh after Sanaa fell to Ansar Allah in 2014.

Tens of thousands, mostly civilians, have been killed and millions displaced in Yemen’s grinding five-year war, which has triggered what the United Nations has called the world’s worst humanitarian disaster. — AFP

Iran allocates \$150,000 for families of victims of Ukraine plane crash

TEHRAN: Iran’s cabinet on Wednesday allocated \$150,000 for the families of each of the 176 victims of a Ukrainian plane shot down in Iranian airspace in January, the official IRNA news agency reported.

Describing Iran’s handling of the situation as “unacceptable”, Ukraine said the amount of compensation should be negotiated and called for those responsible to be brought to justice.

An Iranian government statement said: “The cabinet approved the provision of \$150,000 or the equivalent in euros as soon as possible to the families and survivors of each of the victims of the Ukrainian plan crash,” IRNA reported.

Iran’s Revolutionary Guards said they accidentally shot down



Soldiers carry a coffin containing the remains of one of the eleven Ukrainian victims of the Ukraine International Airlines flight 752 plane disaster during a memorial ceremony at the Boryspil International Airport, outside Kiev, Ukraine on January 19. — Reuters

the Ukraine International Airlines plane shortly after takeoff, mistaking it for a missile when tensions with the United States were high.

Five days earlier, the United

States had killed Revolutionary Guards commander Qassem Soleimani with a drone strike in Iraq. Ukraine’s foreign ministry said the compensation amount should be determined through

negotiations, taking into account international practice, and that establishing the causes of the tragedy and bringing those responsible to justice was a prerequisite.

“The Ukrainian side expects from Iran a draft technical report on the circumstances of the aircraft shooting down,” ministry spokesman Oleh Nikolenko said, adding that Iran had yet to implement earlier agreements, without giving details.

“This situation is especially unacceptable, since we are talking about the fate of innocent people,” Nikolenko said. “Ukraine, together with other affected countries, will continue to make every effort to establish justice in this case and bring those responsible to justice.” — Reuters

Israel gives hero’s welcome to American spy Pollard

TEL AVIV: Jonathan Pollard, an American jailed in the United States in 1985 for spying for Israel, landed in the Jewish state on Wednesday to a hero’s welcome led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Pollard, 66, served 30 years in prison for passing on classified documents when he served as a US Navy intelligence analyst, and had been confined to the United States under his parole terms since his 2015 release.

After years of Israeli lobbying to allow Pollard, a Jewish American, to leave, the US Justice Department removed the terms and conditions last month.

Pollard and his wife Esther arrived in Israel before dawn on Wednesday and were seen walking off a plane towards a waiting Netanyahu, who raised his hand in welcome, in a video distributed by the prime minister’s office.



Jonathan Pollard and his wife Esther pose for a picture aboard a private plane flying to Israel on Wednesday. — Reuters

Pollard, with a kippa skullcap and a long white beard, then removed his face mask, got down on his hands and knees and kissed the ground, with Esther following suit.

Netanyahu and Pollard said traditional Jewish blessings before the premier handed an Israeli identity card to the old spy, who was granted citizenship in 1995. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

DAMASCUS

Israeli strikes hit Syria air defence unit

Israeli airstrikes hit a Syrian government air defence unit in the countryside of Damascus, close to the border with Lebanon, early on Wednesday, killing one and wounding three others, Syria’s state media reported.

A military source told the official SANA news agency that Israel “carried out an aggression with rockets” from northern Galilee at 1:30 am (23:30 GMT) that targeted “one of our air defence units in the Nabi Habel area in the countryside of Da-



mascus.”

The source added that the Syrian defences confronted some of the rockets, which left one dead and three other soldiers wounded, and caused damage. — dpa

ISTANBUL

92 sentenced to life over 2016 failed coup

A court in Ankara on Wednesday sentenced 92 defendants, including former generals, to life in prison for attempting to violate constitutional order, in a trial linked to the 2016 abortive putsch by a faction in Turkish military. The trial, focusing on the incidents at land forces headquarters in Ankara, started in 2017. A total of 132 defendants were on trial. Out of the 92 life sentences given, 12 were aggravated life sentences, state news agency Anadolu reported.



Aggravated life sentences are the most severe terms possible in Turkey. Twenty-eight people were given varying jail sentences, with some facing up to over 19 years in prison. — dpa

RIYADH

Saudi King invites Qatari ruler to summit

Saudi King Salman has invited Qatar’s Emir Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani to attend an upcoming Gulf summit in Riyadh. Saudi Arabia is due to host on January 5 an annual GCC summit. The invitation was handed to Tamim on Wednesday by GCC Secretary-General Dr Nayef al Hajraf, Saudi news agency SPA reported. Qatar’s state news agency QNA confirmed the delivery of the invitation but did not say if Tamim will attend the summit.



Tamim skipped the GCC summit held in Saudi Arabia in the past two years and sent representatives instead. Earlier this month, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan said efforts aimed at ending the Gulf crisis had resulted in “significant progress.” — dpa

In brief

BANGKOK



THAILAND BANS NEW YEAR GATHERINGS TO CONTAIN VIRUS

Thailand imposed a ban on Wednesday on large gatherings and events across the country in an effort to contain its worst coronavirus epidemic yet during New Year, with active cases in over half of its provinces. Authorities have asked the public to avoid travel and have imposed tighter control measures in some areas, including entertainment businesses. Targeted lockdowns have been imposed in some provincial districts. The health ministry confirmed 250 new infections on Wednesday, among the largest number of confirmed daily cases since a big outbreak found nearly two weeks ago. — **Reuters**

HONG KONG



10 DEMOCRACY ACTIVISTS JAILED FOR UP TO THREE YEARS

A Chinese court on Wednesday jailed 10 Hong Kong democracy activists for up to three years over a bid to flee the city by speedboat to Taiwan, as a crackdown on dissent in the territory intensifies. The group were arrested by the Chinese coastguard on August 23 en route to the self-ruled island, which has quietly opened its doors to Hongkongers seeking sanctuary. The court in the southern city of Shenzhen sentenced Tang Kai-yin to three years in jail and Quinn Moon to two years for organising an illegal border crossing. The eight others were sentenced to seven months behind bars for illegally crossing the border. — **AFP**

MANILA



PHILIPPINE RESIDENT'S GUARDS USED 'SMUGGLED' VACCINES

The Philippine defence minister said on Wednesday that unapproved COVID-19 vaccines given to President Rodrigo Duterte's military security detail had been smuggled into the country, but called the move "justified". News of the special troop unit being inoculated as early as September has caused a stir among activists, with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) yet to approve any COVID-19 vaccines.

Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said members of the Presidential Security Group (PSG) obtained the vaccine without government authorisation. — **Reuters**

Sydney tightens curbs for New Year's Eve

SYDNEY: Authorities restricted movement and tightened curbs on gatherings in Australia's biggest city on Wednesday, hoping to avoid a coronavirus "super spreader" event during New Year's Eve celebrations after finding a new cluster of infections.

Household gatherings were limited to five people while the maximum number of people allowed to gather in public in Sydney was capped at 30. Residential care facilities were closed to visitors. "We don't want New Year's Eve to be the cause of a super-spreader," New South Wales state Premier Gladys Berejiklian said as she announced the restrictions would take effect from midnight on Wednesday until further notice.

Berejiklian reported 18 new coronavirus cases on Wednesday, the biggest daily increase in a week, with nine of them part of an outbreak in the city's northern beaches that has grown to more than 100 people over the past week. NSW Chief Health Officer Kerry Chant said a new cluster in the city's inner west, which includes six members of an



People visit the Opera House in Sydney on Wednesday, as authorities work to suppress a growing cluster of COVID-19 cases in Australia's most populous city. — **AFP**

extended family living in three different households, is expected to grow as members had joined Christmas gatherings.

The outbreaks in Sydney have dampened plans for the city's

New Year's Eve harbour fireworks display, an event televised around the world. In addition to the new restrictions, authorities have imposed a "green zone" in key vantage spots around the harbour

that will be restricted to residents and people with confirmed bookings who get a permit. The usual 9 pm fireworks have been cancelled and the midnight session has been cut to seven minutes.

"If I can stress again, the strongest message to everybody across New South Wales no matter where you are, is please limit your activity and your mobility," Berejiklian said. — **Reuters**

Afghan troops, police abandon nearly 200 checkpoints to Taliban

KANDAHAR: Afghan security personnel have abandoned nearly 200 checkpoints in restive Kandahar province in recent weeks, officials said on Wednesday, in some cases leaving behind their weapons to be seized by the Taliban.

Kandahar provincial governor Hayatullah Hayat and a local lawmaker separately confirmed the situation to AFP, saying commanders would be disciplined for their actions.

The defence ministry in Kabul denied the reports, insisting government forces had been making progress in the region.

Government forces and the Taliban have clashed regularly in Kandahar province since October despite peace talks between the warring sides.

"Afghan security forces have retreated from 193 checkpoints and outposts in Zharai, Maiwand, Arghandab and Panjwai districts," Kandahar provincial governor Hayatullah Hayat said.

"Most of the security chiefs



A damaged bicycle is seen after a bomb blast in Kabul. — **Reuters**

and officers who neglected their duties have been dismissed and referred to the judiciary."

Kandahar lawmaker Hashim Alkhozai and a local police officer confirmed the details to AFP.

"The security forces exited the bases leaving behind their weapons and ammunition," Alkhozai said.

Most of those who left were

soldiers, said Jan Mohammad, a policeman from Zharai district.

"They left without firing a bullet," he said.

"The Taliban now have all the weapons seized from the army and are using them against us."

Governor Hayat blamed "poor coordination" for the situation amid a shortage of police and troops. — **AFP**

Wuhan virus cases may be '10 times higher than reported'

BEIJING: The number of coronavirus cases in the Chinese city where the pathogen was first detected may have been 10 times higher than official figures suggest, according to a study by health authorities in Wuhan.

About 4.4 per cent of the city's 11 million residents had developed antibodies against the virus causing COVID-19 by April, the report by the Chinese Centre for Disease Control (CDC) said.

That correlates to around 480,000 infections in Wuhan by April, nearly 10 times the official tally to date of 50,000 cases in the city.

China has faced a barrage of criticism at home and abroad over its initial handling of the virus, including attempts to silence whistle-blowers and not reporting any cases for days in early January amid high-level political consultations.

On Monday, citizen journalist Zhang Zhan was jailed for four years for reporting on conditions inside Wuhan during the height of the outbreak.

The discrepancy revealed by

the CDC's data may "point to potential underreporting due to the chaos in late January and early February, when a large number of people were not tested or were not tested accurately for COVID-19," Huang Yanzhong, a senior fellow for global health at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), said.

Qin Ying, a serological expert from the CDC, said on Wednesday that disparities in data were not unique to China.

"Several countries have already published similar serological surveys and... in most instances the number of people with antibodies against the coronavirus was several times higher than the confirmed case count," Qin said.

"So this kind of disparity is a widespread phenomenon."

The CDC added that only 0.44 per cent of the population in central Hubei province outside of Wuhan exhibited antibodies for the virus, suggesting that the 77-day lockdown on the city may have helped prevent the spread of the disease. — **AFP**

India races to find UK arrivals to halt new virus strain

NEW DELHI: Indian authorities were trying on Wednesday to track down tens of thousands of people who entered the country from Britain in recent weeks as cases of a new and fast-spreading coronavirus strain more than doubled in 24 hours.

They have launched efforts to locate around 33,000 people who flew to India in the last month from the UK after 20 people tested positive for the new, more virulent strain — up by 14 cases since Tuesday.

India also extended on Wednesday the ban on flights to and from Britain by a week to January 7 in a bid to combat the new strain that British authorities say is no more deadly, but which

spreads more easily.

"Comprehensive contact tracing has been initiated for co-travellers, family contacts and others," the Indian health ministry said on Tuesday, referring to those who flew between November 25 and December 23, when Delhi suspended air links with Britain.

It remains unclear how many arrivals from Britain it has traced so far.

Delhi wants to learn about their movements in order to prevent a wider outbreak in a country combating the world's second highest COVID-19 tally.

Britain is home to a huge Indian community and several flights per day take hundreds of people from London to New Delhi and



A man is seen in front of a dummy representing COVID-19 outside a housing society in Mumbai, on Wednesday. — **Reuters**

Mumbai.

More than 30 countries have suspended air links with Britain

over the new strain, which British medical officials have said is "out of control".

Indian Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said any resumption of flights to and from Britain would be "strictly regulated".

Of the 33,000 passengers to enter the country in the last month, more than 130 people have tested positive for coronavirus.

The cases have been reported across India, but most are in Delhi and Bangalore.

India has the world's second highest coronavirus caseload behind the United States, with more than 10 million infections and 145,000 deaths.

The Indian government has yet to approve any vaccines but hopes to start immunisations early next year. — **AFP**

UNITED STATES



Photo: Wilmington, Nov 7
Four days after the Nov 3 presidential election, Joe Biden reached the threshold of 270 electors to win the race, along with running mate Kamala Harris. Incumbent Donald Trump claimed counting fraud and has yet to officially concede

NAGORNO-KARABAKH



Nagorno-Karabakh, Sept 28
On Sept 27, fighting broke out between Azerbaijan forces and the Armenia-backed separatist enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh. Six weeks of fighting left over 4,000 deaths and ended in a Kremlin-brokered deal in which Armenia ceded 3 key zones

RUSSIA-GERMANY



Berlin hospital, Sept 15
Opposition leader Alexei Navalny was hospitalised on Aug 20, later transferred to Germany where doctors said he was poisoned with Novichok agent. He accused President Vladimir Putin of being behind the attack

LEBANON



Beirut port, Aug 4
The port of Beirut was hit by two large explosions of a massive stockpile of ammonium nitrate on August 4, killing over 200 people and wounding thousands

UAE-BAHRAIN-SUDAN-MOROCCO-ISRAEL



White House, Sept 15
United Arab Emirates and Bahrain signed a US-brokered deal on Sept 15 to normalise ties with Israel, which Palestinians said was a "stab in the back". Sudan and Morocco have also announced normalisation of ties with Israel

UNITED STATES



California, Sept 9
California and other parts of the US West Coast hit by unprecedented wildfires in September. A record temperature of 54.4°C in Death Valley in mid-August

ARGENTINA



Buenos Aires province, Nov 25
Argentinian football legend Diego Maradona died of a heart attack on Nov 25 aged 60, and was buried the following day on the outskirts of Buenos Aires

WORLD



Photos clockwise: Wuhan (China) Jan 31; New York (US) May 17; Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) June 13
On Jan 11, China reported its first death from a disease later called Covid-19. On Mar 11, the World Health Organization declared a pandemic as the killer coronavirus spreads globally. In December, Britain became the 1st Western country to start a mass vaccination programme with the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine
Current global toll: +80 million cases, +1.7 million deaths

BIDEN WINS US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

Beirut explosions

UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, Morocco normalise ties with Israel

US West Coast wildfires

MARADONA DIES

Climate record

US-Afghanistan Peace Accord

MURDER OF GEORGE FLOYD

BREXIT

Coup in Mali

PRO-DEMOCRACY ACTIVISTS JAILED IN HONG KONG

SPACE X LAUNCHES NASA ASTRONAUTS

ETHIOPIA: CONFLICT IN TIGRAY

Belarus political crisis

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

2020

A selection of major events

ETHIOPIA



Dansha, Nov 25
In November, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed accused the TPLF* of attacking national army bases, which the TPLF denies. Addis Ababa launched a military offensive against Tigray

BELARUS



Minsk, Sept 27
Since an August election, Belarus has been gripped by massive protests that erupted after Alexander Lukashenko, 66, secured a sixth term as president

UNITED STATES



International Space Station, May 31
On 30 May, SpaceX became the first private company to launch NASA astronauts into space towards the International Space Station (ISS)

HONG KONG



Hong Kong, Nov 23
After historic pro-democracy protests, Beijing imposed a sweeping new national security law on the city. Three prominent young activists were jailed in December for their role in the protests

MALI



Bamako, Aug 21
Months of unrest led to a coup on Aug 18 toppling president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. A transitional government was installed, tasked with leading Mali back to civilian rule

AFGHANISTAN-UNITED STATES



Doha, Feb 29
US and Afghanistan signed a historic peace deal on Feb 29 in Doha, paving the way for the withdrawal of US troops after nearly two decades of war

BREXIT



London, Nov 24
UK and EU sealed a post-Brexit trade deal on Dec 24, shortly before Dec 31 deadline for Britain to leave EU single market

Sources: AFP Photos/Armenian Defence Ministry/Instagram account @navalny / handout / Queensland Fire and Emergency Services/NASA TV

*Tigray People's Liberation Front

AFP

Britain gives first approval of Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine

LONDON: Britain on Wednesday became the first country in the world to approve AstraZeneca and Oxford University's low-cost COVID vaccine, raising hopes it will help tackle surging cases and ease pressure on creaking health services.

The independent Medicines and Healthcare products and Regulatory Agency (MHRA) said the vaccine "met its strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness", and a roll-out was set for January 4.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who spent several days in intensive care with COVID earlier this year, called it "truly fantastic news" and "a triumph for British science".

Britain has already approved the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine for general use, and some 800,000 people have received a first dose in the country's biggest ever vaccination drive.

But as daily COVID infection rates hit record highs, the government is pinning its hopes on the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab,



A woman reads a copy of the Silent Patient by author Alex Michaelides as she queues at an NHS vaccination centre for the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine in London Wednesday. — AFP

which is cheaper to produce, and easier to store and transport.

Unlike the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, it does not require ultra-low freezing temperatures and can use normal refrigerated supply chains, making it a more attractive proposition globally.

The partners, who have billed it as a "vaccine for the world", have

also promised to provide it on a not-for-profit basis to developing nations, and hope to make up to three billion doses in 2021.

'WAY OUT'

Britain is struggling with another surge in the virus, with a record 53,135 daily cases reported on Tuesday, heaping fresh

pressure on health services during their busiest winter months.

More than 71,000 people testing positive for the disease have now died — one of the worst tolls in the world.

But doctors say many frontline healthcare workers have been struck down with a new, potentially more contagious variant of the virus, which is thought to be behind the surge.

More than 24 million people, or 43 per cent of England alone, are already living under strict stay-at-home measures, with bars, restaurants, pubs and other entertainment closed.

The government said three-quarters of England's 56 million people would move into the toughest level of restrictions from 00:01 on Thursday.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said the move was "absolutely necessary" because of the rising number of cases, most of which were caused by the new variant, and the pressure on health services. — AFP

Norway landslide buries homes; over 20 missing



A car has stopped where the road has been swept away by a landslide in the town of Ask, Gjerdrum county, some 40 km northeast of the Norwegian capital Oslo, on Wednesday. — AFP

OSLO: A major landslide destroyed homes during the night in a village in Norway close to the capital Oslo, leaving more than 20 people missing and 10 injured, police and local media said on Wednesday.

Video footage from the scene showed a whole hillside had collapsed in Ask in the municipality of Gjerdrum, 25 kilometres northeast of the capital, leaving homes crushed and buried in dark mud.

Snow fell throughout the morning as the emergency services evacuated the injured and attempted to secure still standing homes, some of which were teetering on the edge of the crater left behind

by the slide.

Norway's Prime Minister Erna Solberg travelled to the village of around 1,000 people on Wednesday and described the landslide as "one of the largest" the country had seen.

"It's a dramatic experience to be here," Solberg told reporters, adding she was particularly concerned with those still missing.

"The situation is still so unstable with the mud that it's not yet possible to do anything other than helicopter rescues," she said.

Norwegian media said that 700 people had been evacuated from their homes, while 21 people were unaccounted for. — AFP

Industrial Innovation Centre as driver of Oman’s development

The Industrial Innovation Centre is a testament to the achievements of the National Programme for Enhancement of Economic Diversification, “Tanfeedh.” The centre, since its establishment, has started making achievements one after another. It made pivotal role in the progress of the industrial sector of the Sultanate of Oman. The clear development programmes formulated by it has made its mark everywhere in the industrial achievements of the country. It has made innovation as the main wheel of the movement of the sector. It is imperative for the country to give the centre more attention for the development of this vital sector.

There is no doubt that the Industrial Innovation Centre, as an umbrella with many shades of success, has always made extraordinary achievements in the development of Omani industries. It came up with many programmes including training of human resources, innovation programmes for emerging industries, students’ companies and innovation programmes for the existing companies. Whatever it has achieved during the last three years has become talk of the town. Everybody is turning head towards it for what it has supported in the industrial development of the country. It has also made environment suitable for the innovations which can support industrial growth. It has opened horizons for better job opportunities and employment as well as expediting



Ali Al Matani
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THE CENTRE HAS PLAYED THE PIVOTAL ROLE IN THE PROGRESS OF THE INDUSTRIAL SECTOR IN THE SULTANATE

the process of economic development. Nearly 400 youths were trained to have skills to work as experts in industrial innovation. Their capabilities were refined in partnership with a number of international institutions such as American Institute for Innovation Management, World Packaging Organization and Global Registry of Food Safety Specialists. It is a major milestone it has achieved in a short period of time and with limited efforts.

The endeavours made by the centre are now clearly visible. The pivotal role played by it in promotion of industrial innovation is evident. It is the backbone of the development of the industrial sector of the Sultanate.

It is gratifying that the youth of the country were trained and got opportunity to sharpen their minds on 277 innovative products. This success has been further reinforced by the transfer of innovations of more than 17 youths into national industrial projects. More than 40 companies are developing innovative products made by our innovators. There were 11 intellectual properties for innovative products registered. These are some of the achievements made by the centre for the diversification of Omani industries.

It is a good omen that the approach of Industrial Innovation Centre matches with the government’s policies aimed at inculcating the idea of economic diversification and the

multiplicity of sources of income. It is focusing on four industrial sectors: fish processing, marble, mining, and the food and beverages. The centre is working for the development of these sectors with the aim of increasing their value in the GDP, opening wider horizons for manufacturing and making use of raw materials available for entry and utilisation in the industry. The industrial innovation is enriching knowledge, research and development in the Sultanate. It has opened wider horizons for the modern industries in achieving sustainability and national economic development.

The Industrial Innovation Centre and whatever it is doing will be also required in the next stage of the industrial development of the country. There would be more requirement of innovation and the centre would pull the cart in the right direction. There is need to pay more attention to what the centre is doing. It is important to highlight its activities and efforts in empowerment and support to the industrial sector of the country and for strengthening the idea of ‘Made in Oman.’

The Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion have made the Industrial Innovation Centre the major wheel of progress of the knowledge-based economy. The centre will always be required to accelerate knowledge-based economic diversification.

FROM LAB TO JAB

Vaccine: How BioNTech-Pfizer won the race

It was over breakfast on the wintry morning of January 24 that Ozlem Tureci and her husband Ugur Sahin decided, “we need to fire the starting gun on this”. Sahin “had concluded from a publication describing coronavirus cases in Wuhan... that there was a high probability that a pandemic could be imminent”, Tureci recounted.

The decision by the couple, founders of a small German company called BioNTech, gave birth to Operation Lightspeed — in which the scientists in the company diverted all their resources from cancer therapy research to finding a vaccine to stop COVID-19.

“Since that day... there has not been a day when we took a break from working on this project,” said Tureci.

Four days later, on January 28, Germany confirmed its first case of coronavirus infection — also the first known human-to-human transmission on European soil.

What was an epidemic hitting China hardest soon morphed into a global health crisis, forcing governments to close borders, schools and offices and keep their populations at home to halt the spread.

As BioNTech and other pharmaceutical companies leapt into action in search of the winning formula, Germany’s army of “Mittelstand” companies and other bigger manufacturing and logistics experts would soon prove crucial.

GENIE IN A BOTTLE

Just a few minutes’ drive away from BioNTech’s headquarters in the city of Mainz, one such company quietly ramped up production.

Little known to the rest of the world, the 130-year-old firm Schott is in fact a major player in the pharmaceutical industry because of its little glass vials designed to hold life-saving vaccines.

Three-quarters of the more than 100 coronavirus inoculation trials across the world would end up using Schott products.

The company alone aims to produce enough vials to hold two billion doses of a coronavirus vaccine by the end of 2021, head of communications Christina Rettig said.

Schott itself had an early scare with the virus at its Mitterteich plant in Bavaria.

The town became one of Germany’s first coronavirus hotspots in March after a beer festival, and Rettig said several Schott workers from the Czech Republic ended up “not seeing friends and family for weeks” as borders slammed shut. With passenger flights mostly grounded, the buzz at Frankfurt airport’s terminals all but vanished to a hush in the spring.

Its freight area however kept humming. Tens of thousands of boxes of urgently needed surgical gowns and masks were transiting through.

The head of freight infrastructure at Fraport, Max Philipp Conrady, knew that was just the beginning for his division in the pandemic battle.

No one knew then which company would find a vaccine or when it would be ready, but Frankfurt is already Europe’s largest hub for transporting pharmaceutical goods.

And so planning had to begin for the unprecedented logistical challenge of transporting millions of life-saving vaccine doses worldwide.

Fraport’s vast temperature-controlled hangar handled 120,000 tonnes of vaccines, drugs and other pharmaceutical products in 2019. — AFP

ENHANCING RELATIONS

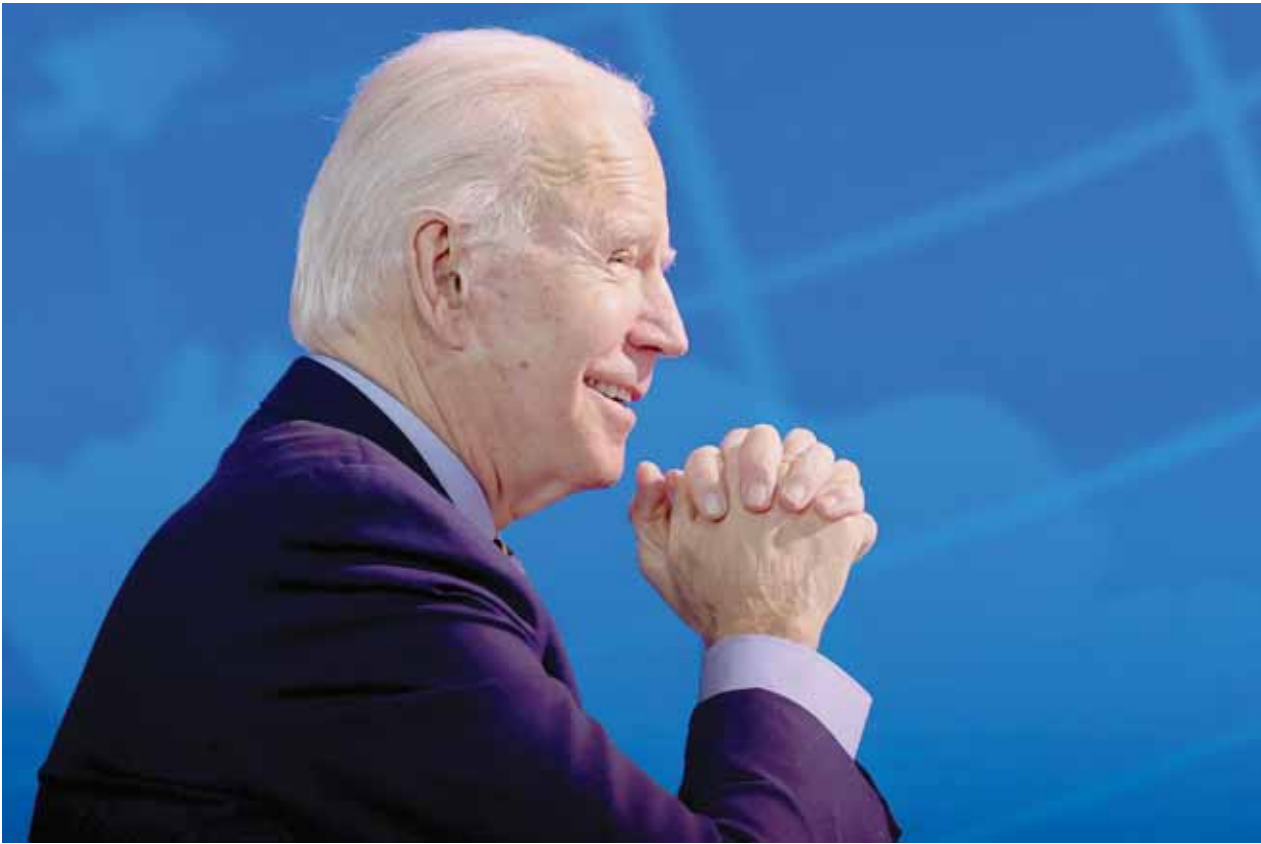
Will Biden restore ties with Cuba? Debate swirls over next steps

NORA GAMEZ TORRES & JACQUELINE CHARLES

On the campaign trail, President-elect Joe Biden promised to reverse Donald Trump’s restrictions on travel and remittances to Cuba. But he stopped short of saying just how far he’ll go in restoring ties with the communist island. To rewrite Cuba policy, Biden will have to navigate the perilous waters of Florida politics, where a large exile population has turned increasingly Republican.

The landscape in Cuba has also changed since former president Barack Obama and Raul Castro agreed to re-establish diplomatic relations in December 2014. “It’s not the same Cuba as it was four years ago,” said Eric Farnsworth, Vice-President of the Council of the Americas and a former US State Department official. “I think there’s going to be a sober reassessment about it. Did meaningful change happen?” Obama’s policies promoted the exchange of people, ideas and goods between the US and the island 90 miles away. It also bet on expanding the private sector to form a nascent middle class that would eventually advocate for more freedoms on the island.

Obama said it didn’t cost the US much to try a new approach because



To rewrite Cuba policy, Biden will have to navigate the perilous waters of Florida politics, where a large exile population has turned increasingly Republican.

OBAMA’S POLICIES PROMOTED THE EXCHANGE OF PEOPLE, IDEAS AND GOODS BETWEEN THE US AND THE ISLAND 90 MILES AWAY

the island wasa “tiny little country” posing no significant security risks to US interests. But the test lasted just over two years before Trump started reversing what he called a “terrible and misguided” deal and punishing the Cuban government with a flurry of sanctions for supporting Venezuelan

leader Nicolas Maduro. The issue divides Congress as much as the Cuban American community. The Biden transition team declined to answer questions sent by the Miami Herald about the incoming administration’s policies regarding Cuba. — dpa

sport



OMAN NEEDS MORE COMPETITIVE SWIMMERS

IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH OMAN OBSERVER, FORMER OLYMPIC COACH IVAN PROSKURA TELLS ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH ABOUT THE NUANCES OF SWIM COACHING

Former Olympic coach Ivan Proskura feels Oman swimmers have good potential with their impressive physique suitable for the sport.

Former coach of Ukraine, Proskura now works in Oman as the head coach of Nautilus Swimming Club since January 2016.

In an exclusive interview with *Oman Observer*, Proskura tells about his impressions on coaching, local swimmers and his Olympic experience.



state programme aimed to boost swimming. Such a programme has been working for 12 years.

The programme also includes compulsory swimming lessons for kids in grade 2 and 3. If we had 2-3 students able to swim before the programme started, in 4 years we had only 1-2 students not able to swim.

Competitive swimming, not recreational, means participation at the swim meets. My swimmers back in Ukraine used to join 20-30 swim meets a year. In the USA for example, swimmers enter swim meets 3-4 times a month.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF COMPETITIVE SWIMMING?

Why the parents in Europe or United States are eager and motivated to enrol their kids into competitive swimming? Competitive swimming makes children healthier, builds their body, lung capacity, weight control (especially in the era of IT development, when kids are becoming gadget addicted); it makes them active, confident and disciplined.

Many studies show that swimmers are better in studies.

HOW DO YOU RATE CONDITIONS IN OMAN?

Weather in Oman is amazing for swimming. It's a year round sports activity including competitions, which builds swimmers' character, makes them emotionally stronger and get many friends. It's a lifesaving skill! Moreover, competitive swimming is your pass to the colleges, getting into the college swim team will be an achievement.

We are witnessing how competitive swimming is becoming semi-professional and professional. Many parents motivate kids, support them, after a while you see how swimmers themselves become even more motivated, goal and result-oriented. While being in a swim team, kids



are developing their communicational skills getting together with team-mates, coaches, team administrators and of course competitors.

WHAT IS YOUR ADVICE TO BUDDING SWIMMERS?

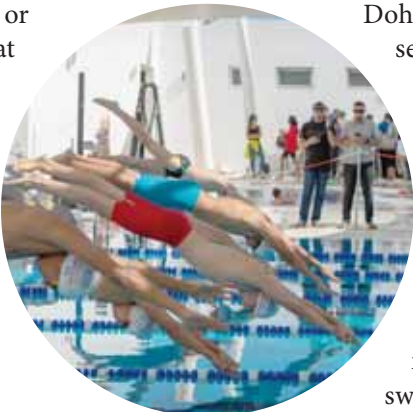
By attending swim meets locally, regionally and internationally, they are exploring the world. Experiencing the joy of victory, defeat bitterness, the young swimmers are learning a life lesson.

The dream of each motivated competitive swimmer should be an Olympic medal or at least participation at Olympic Games.

HOW DO YOU RECALL YOUR OLYMPIC EXPERIENCE?

Trust me, being part of Olympics is much more interesting than what you see on TV.

Emotions, intense competitive atmosphere is much more excitement, especially when you are participant,



not only spectator. Meeting and communicating to outstanding athletes of the world is a great satisfaction.

World-known actors, singers are regular guests of the Olympic village. Olympic Games are exhausting, but such a great and unforgettable experience.

YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH THE NAUTILUS SWIMMING CLUB?

It is not enough entering the local meets only, where the competition is limited in age groups, swimmers must enter the big meets regularly. For the time I have been working in Oman, the biggest meets in the region my swimmers from Nautilus Swimming Club entered were the Middle East Junior and Open Championships as well as the World Cup stage in Doha, Qatar. I have also seen several swimmers from Oman at that meets.

HOW CAN THE CLUB HELP THE NATIONAL TEAM?

Joint training sessions which clubs or teams host motivate a lot. If Nautilus swimmers can have joint sessions with the national team, that can be beneficial for both teams in my opinion. Last year, several Nautilus swim team members,

including Omani swimmers, joined a one-month training camp with Italian swimmers in Sardinia, Italy. It was a great experience for all of them.

THE PANDEMIC EFFECT ON TRAINING?

We have to accept the fact that COVID-19 has negatively affected the training process, but this time will pass. I believe that in few years time, swimmers from Oman will make themselves known on the world arena as Arab world representatives

Oussama Mellouli, Olympic champion from Tunisia and Farida Osman, world junior champion from Egypt.



Proskura, who also coached paralympic swimmers, has won the Ukraine President's honour.

The Ukrainian had coached legends like Ukraine sensation Svetlana Bondarenko known as 'queen of breaststroke' and Oleksii Fedina, paralympic triple gold medallist and world record breaker. Other top swimmers coached by him include former world youth champion Lyubov Korol, Ukrainian 100m World Championships (Manchester, 2008) gold winner Ihor Borysyk, LEN European Aquatics medal winner Olga Mukomol, Olympians Rostyslav Svanidze, Nataliya Zolotukhina and Illya Chuyev. With Nautilus, he has taken them to World Swim Cup in 2019.



Burns dumped as Warner, Pucovski return

Australia on Wednesday included David Warner and Will Pucovski in their squad for the third Test against India, with selectors ditching Joe Burns after an underwhelming performance. Warner will return as he continues recovering from a groin injury, while Pucovski is also expected to be fit to face India.



Barty to partner Brady for Australian Open doubles

Women's world number one Ash Barty will partner US Open semifinalist Jennifer Brady of the United States in doubles at the 2021 Australian Open in a high-profile pairing between top singles players, organisers said. Australian Barty played with now-retired German Julia Georges in this year's tournament.

New Zealand end Pakistan defiance

WIN KEEPS ALIVE NZ CHANCES TO MAKE WORLD TEST CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL

MOUNT MAUNGANUI, New Zealand: New Zealand beat Pakistan by 101 runs in a thrilling finish to the first Test in Mount Maunganui on Wednesday, where the visitors were just 27 balls from escaping with a draw.

The win tentatively put New Zealand top of the World rankings and kept alive their chances of making the World Test Championship final.

After a 165-run fifth-wicket stand by Fawad Alam and Mohammad Rizwan, the Test went into the final session with both sides in with a chance to win.

Pakistan needed 158 runs, New Zealand required six wickets and 36 overs remained.

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson put his faith in Neil Wagner, bowling on two broken toes, and the youngest of his pace quartet, Kyle Jamieson, to swing the match towards the Black Caps.

Wagner bowled a marathon 11 overs unchanged after tea and Jamieson — on his 26th birthday — bowled nine. They obliged with the wickets of Alam and Rizwan.

“We saw an incredible spell from Kyle and Wags together that did turn the match when it was looking likely to run out into a draw,” Williamson said, adding that with so much at stake he could not contemplate going defensive. “For us it was trying to win at all costs. Going into that last session we still clearly had that opportunity, as did Pakistan, but in the context of the Test championship losing while trying to win was still a better bet than anything else.”

“It was great coming away with



New Zealand's Mitchell Santner (centre R) celebrates with team-mates after taking the wicket of Pakistan's Mohammad Abbas during the fifth day of the first Test at the Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui. — AFP

the result and the excitement of finishing so late in the piece obviously adds to that.”

When Jamieson had Rizwan lbw for 60 and Wagner removed Alam for 102, New Zealand were into the tail as Pakistan folded from 240 for four to be all out for 271. Tail-enders Shaheen Afridi and Naseem Shah kept the draw option alive as long as they could, blocking for seven overs in fading light before Naseem was caught and bowled by spinner Mitchell Santner for one, ending Pakistan's resistance.

Pakistan captain Rizwan said

that despite the result, he was proud of the way his side played.

“We put in hard work, but you must give credit to the New Zealand team,” he said.

Jamieson struck first, 11 overs after the tea break, with the wicket of Rizwan, lbw for 60, before Wagner removed Alam for 102. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

New Zealand 1st innings 431

Pakistan 1st innings 239

New Zealand 2nd innings 180-5 decl

Pakistan 2nd innings

S Masood c Taylor b Southee 0
Abid Ali c Watling b Boult 0
Azhar Ali c Santner b Boult 38
H Sohail c Santner b Southee 9
F Alam c Watling b Wagner 102
M Rizwan lbw Jamieson 60
F Ashraf c Watling b Wagner 19

Yasir Shah c Southee b Jamieson 0
M Abbas lbw Santner 1
S Afridi not out 8
Naseem Shah c&b Santner 1
Extras (b16, lb7, w2 nb8) 33
Total (10 wickets; 123.3 overs) 271
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-0, 3-37, 4-75, 5-240, 6-242, 7-251, 8-259, 9-261
Bowling: Southee 23-8-33-2, Boult 25-9-72-2, Jamieson 26-13-35-2, Wagner 28-9-55-2, Santner 19-3-52-2, Williamson 2-1-1-0



New Zealand paceman Neil Wagner celebrates the wicket of Pakistan's Fawad Alam (L) during the third day of the first Test at the Bay Oval. — AFP

Wagner hailed for defying broken toes

MOUNT MAUNGANUI: Fast bowler Neil Wagner was hailed as an “inspiration” on Wednesday after he shrugged off the pain of two broken toes to help bowl New Zealand to victory in the first Test.

A Shaheen Afridi yorker fractured two toes in Wagner's right foot during New Zealand's first innings but, surviving on painkilling injections and grit, he bowled 21 overs in Pakistan's first innings and 28 in the second for a match haul of four wickets.

Wagner crucially removed Fawad Alam for 102 during a marathon 11-over spell late on the fifth day to snuff out Pakistan's hopes of a surprise victory. New Zealand eventually won by 101 runs, 27 balls from the close.

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson said it was an incredible performance, although Wagner's heart was well known within the team.

Pakistan skipper Mohammad Rizwan said: “I just told him he's mad. He's a different guy.”

“His attitude is everything, his aggression is very beautiful.”

Pakistan batsman Azhar Ali also said he had “huge respect” for Wagner.

“I said that to him — that's what it means to play for your nation,” Azhar said.

“I think he's showing that and he's an inspiration, everyone knows he's got not one, but two, broken toes and he's fighting for his team.”

“He was giving 100 per cent and maybe more than that, so I have a huge respect for him.”

Williamson said trying to get the most out of Wagner before the painkillers wore off was a unique situation.

“People talk about the size of his heart in terms of what he (normally) does on the cricket field but to have a couple of broken toes, and he's in a lot of pain and going off to get injections and numbing his foot, and we're trying to use him,” Williamson said.

“It was very, very special from ‘Wags’, one the team appreciated. We needed him out there and he delivered.” — AFP

Bucks' long-range barrage buries Heat in record game

LOS ANGELES: The Milwaukee Bucks set an NBA record for three-pointers in a game, draining 29 from beyond the arc in a 144-97 blowout win over the Miami Heat on Tuesday.

The Heat, who stunned the top-seeded Bucks in the second round of the 2020 Eastern Conference play-offs en route to the NBA Finals, never got a look in, trailing by as many as 51 in a game Milwaukee led all the way.

Sam Merrill drilled the record-breaking 28th three-pointer of the game, surpassing the 27 set by the Houston Rockets against the Phoenix Suns on April 7, 2019.

Jrue Holiday had six three-pointers on the way to 24 points. Khris Middleton, who led the Bucks with 25 points, made four of five from three-point range.

Starting guard Donte

DiVincenzo's 17 points included five three-pointers, and Brook Lopez had three treys on the way to 14 points.

Two-time reigning Most Valuable Player Giannis Antetokounmpo was the only Bucks starter not to make a three-pointer, coming up empty on two attempts in a nine-point performance.

His brother Thanasis Antetokounmpo drained one three-pointer for the family on the way to five points off the bench for the Bucks, who simply steamrolled a Heat team that was without injured forward Jimmy Butler.

“Honestly, (we) just played hard,” Holiday said. “We know the Heat way and how they're going to come out and play no matter who's playing.”

CLIPPERS BOUNCE BACK WITH WIN OVER TIMBERWOLVES



Milwaukee Bucks forward Sam Merrill (15) shoots a three pointer against the Miami Heat during the second half at American Airlines Arena.

— USA Today Sports

“So we just wanted to take that approach.”

It was a bounce-back win for the Bucks, who were blown out 130-110 by the Knicks in New York on Sunday.

“Last game in New York, we didn't show what we wanted to show,” Holiday said.

The Bucks' previous record for three-pointers in a game was 22, against the Sacramento Kings on November 4, 2018. The most the Heat had given up before was 24.

“It looked like they had been thinking about this game for 80 days,” said Heat coach Erik Spoelstra, whose team will get a chance to avenge the embarrassing defeat when they host the Bucks again on Wednesday.

The Los Angeles Clippers also rebounded from a big defeat.

Two days after a 124-73 loss to

the Dallas Mavericks, the Clippers beat the Minnesota Timberwolves 124-101. Lou Williams scored 20 points off the bench to lead seven Clippers players who scored in double figures.

“We knew coming tonight we had to do better,” said Clippers centre Serge Ibaka, who scored 16 points. “We had to be aggressive, just play team basketball.”

The Philadelphia 76ers, coming off a lopsided loss to Cleveland, beat the Raptors 100-93. — AFP

NBA RESULTS

Phoenix bt New Orleans **111-86**
Milwaukee bt Miami **144-97**
LA Clippers bt Minnesota **124-101**
Sacramento bt Denver **125-115**
Orlando bt Oklahoma City **118-107**
New York bt Cleveland **95-86**
Golden State bt Detroit **116-106**
Boston bt Indiana **116-111**
Philadelphia bt Toronto **100-93**
Chicago bt Washington **115-107**

RASHFORD

RUSHES TO MAN UTD RESCUE

LONDON: Marcus Rashford's 93rd minute strike beat Wolves 1-0 to move Manchester United into second in the Premier League as fears over the continuation of the season due to rising coronavirus infection rates grew on Tuesday.

A record 18 positive tests for COVID-19 among players and staff were detected in the weekly round of testing.

After Manchester City's trip to Everton on Monday was postponed due to a COVID outbreak in Pep Guardiola's squad, all five matches scheduled for Tuesday went ahead despite disruption for Sheffield United and Southampton.

Bottom-of-the-table United revealed they had suffered a number of positive cases but were still able to field a squad of 18 for their 1-0 defeat at Burnley.

Southampton manager Ralph Hasenhuttl coached his side from his home for a 0-0 draw against West Ham after a member of his household tested positive.

The Telegraph reported the Premier League will discuss plans for a two-week circuit breaker with infection rates soaring across England.

However, Manchester United boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer called for the competition to continue.

"I'm not sure if stopping playing football will make a difference," said Solskjaer, whose side are mounting an unexpected title challenge after a slow start to the season. "In our bubble we've proven to be quite (safe), we haven't had too many cases transmitting within the group."

On the field, United were fortunate to escape with all three points against a youthful Wolves side, who were in action just 48 hours ago against Tottenham.

In keeping with several meetings between the sides in recent years, chances were few and far between.

But United answered Solskjaer's call to win more games in the style he did as a player during Alex Ferguson's time at Old Trafford as Rashford's shot took a wicked deflection off Romain Saiss deep into stoppage time. "This is a big step forward that you don't perform, but you still win," added Solskjaer.

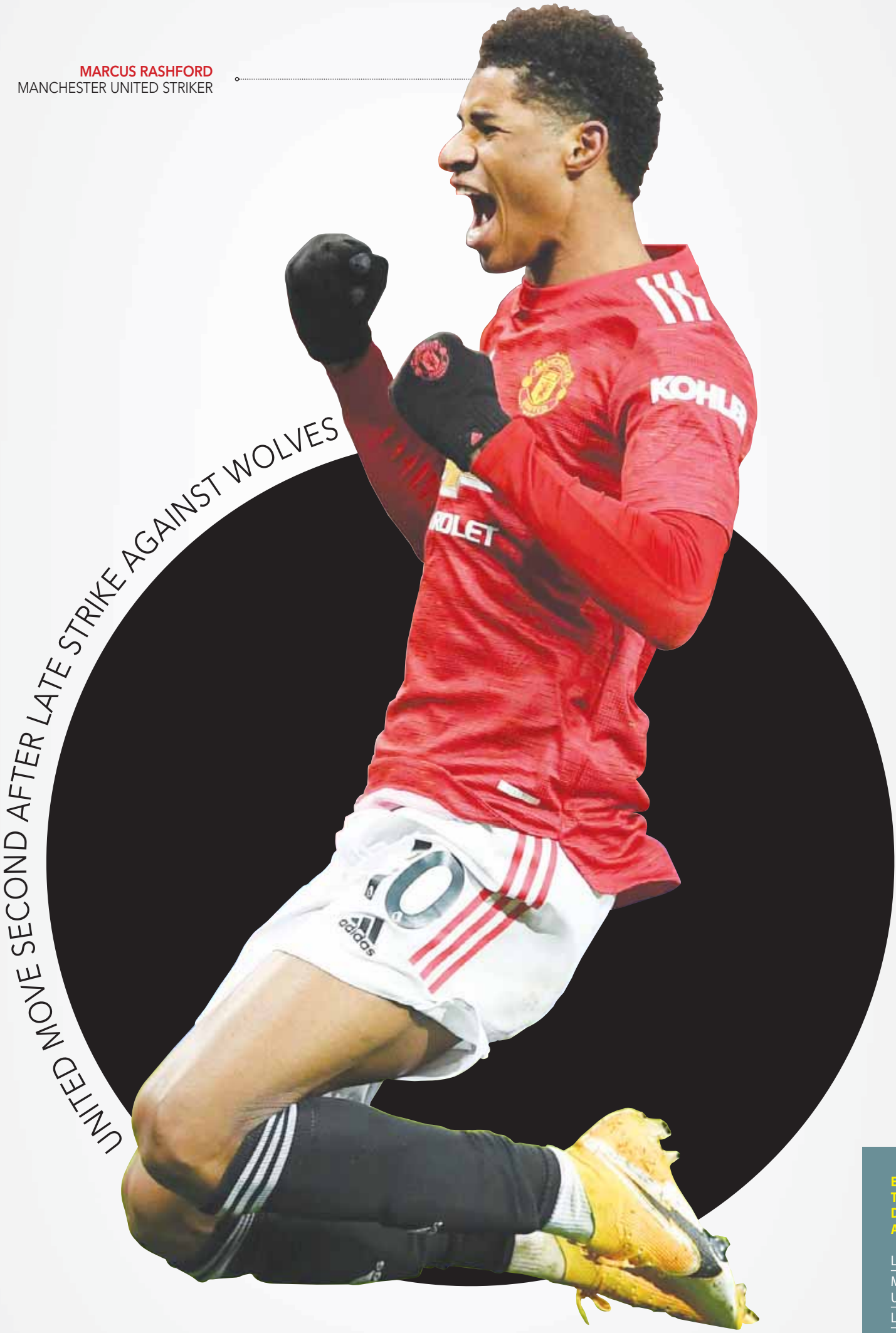
WINNING THE BEST MEDICINE FOR ARSENAL

Arsenal eased fears they could be dragged into a relegation battle with a 3-1 win over Chelsea on Saturday and can now look up the table with hope thanks to Alexandre Lacazette's winner in a 1-0 victory at Brighton.

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang returned from injury in the place of Lacazette in the only change made by Mikel Arteta.

But the French striker came

MARCUS RASHFORD
MANCHESTER UNITED STRIKER



off the bench to make an instant impact with a fine near-post finish from Bukayo Saka's pass just 21 seconds after coming on. Victory moves the Gunners up to 13th, within six points of the top six. "The best medicine is wins. When you win it's a different story and the picture looks better at the moment," said Arteta.

'BIG SAM' BATTERED BY LEEDS

West Brom are next up for Arsenal at the weekend and the Baggies confidence after a shock 1-1 draw at Liverpool on Sunday quickly evaporated in a 5-0 hammering by Leeds.

A miserable night for West Brom started with a self-inflicted wound as Romain Sawyers scored a remarkable own goal as his backpass sailed past Sam Johnstone.

Ezgian Alioski, Jack Harrison and Rodrigo made it 4-0 before half-time and Raphinha's powerful strike into the top corner inflicted Sam Allardyce's heaviest ever home defeat as a Premier League manager.

Allardyce said new recruits in the January transfer window were now a "necessity" with West Brom five points from safety.

Sheffield United are the only side below West Brom in

the table and their chances of survival are diminishing rapidly with just two points from their opening 16 games.

Blades manager Chris Wilder said "a couple of players were missing through illness" plus "four or five backroom staff have tested positive".

Ben Mee scored the only goal at Turf Moor as Burnley moved five points clear of the relegation zone and above Brighton into 16th.

Southampton missed the chance to move into the top four as they failed to score for the third consecutive game in a 0-0 draw with West Ham. — AFP



The best medicine is wins. When you win it's a different story and the picture looks better at the moment

MIKEL ARTETA,
ARSENAL
MANAGER

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE TABLE AFTER TUESDAY'S MATCHES (PLAYED, WON, DRAWN, LOST, GOALS FOR, GOALS AGAINST, POINTS):

Liverpool	15	9	5	1	37	20	32
Manchester United	15	9	3	3	31	23	30
Leicester	16	9	2	5	29	20	29
Everton	15	9	2	4	26	19	29
Aston Villa	14	8	2	4	28	14	26
Chelsea	16	7	5	4	31	18	26
Tottenham	15	7	5	3	26	15	26
Manchester City	14	7	5	2	21	12	26
Southampton	16	7	5	4	25	19	26
West Ham	16	6	5	5	23	21	23
Leeds	16	7	2	7	30	30	23
Wolves	16	6	3	7	15	21	21
Arsenal	16	6	2	8	16	19	20
Crystal Palace	16	5	4	7	20	29	19
Newcastle	14	5	3	6	17	24	18
Burnley	15	4	4	7	9	20	16
Brighton	16	2	7	7	18	25	13
Fulham	15	2	5	8	13	23	11
West Brom	16	1	5	10	11	35	8
Sheffield United	16	0	2	14	8	27	2

EPL Results on Tuesday

Brighton 0 Arsenal 1 (Lacazette 66)
Burnley 1 (Mee 32) Sheffield United 0
Southampton 0 West Ham 0
West Brom 0 Leeds 5 (Sawyers 9-og, Alioski 31, Harrison 36, Rodrigo 40, Raphinha 72)
Manchester United 1 (Rashford 90+3) Wolves 0

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Iraq signs \$2.6 bn deal with Daewoo to build first phase of Faw port

BAGHDAD: Iraq agreed a \$2.625 billion deal with South Korea's Daewoo Engineering & Construction on Wednesday to build the first phase at its planned Faw commodities port in the south of the country.

Under the contract, signed in Baghdad by representatives of Iraq's transportation ministry and the South Korean company, Daewoo E&C will handle construction work including building five berths to unload ships and a yard for containers.

Daweoo will also carry out dredging and drilling works to create an access navigation channel, Farhan al Fartousi, Iraq's director general at the General Company for Ports, said on the sidelines of a signing ceremony at the transportation ministry headquarters.

The first phase should allow the port to receive three million containers, and all the construction work should be finished in around four years, said Fartousi.

For now, to receive commodities ships, Iraq has to rely mainly on the port of Umm Qasr in the south, which sits at the top of the strategic Gulf waterway.

The port of Faw will be deeper, allowing it to receive the largest container ships.

— Reuters

Oman’s Tax Authority defers deadline for notification under CbC reporting rules

CONRAD PRABHU
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Oman’s Tax Authority has announced an extension of the deadline for multinational entities (MNEs) operating in the Sultanate to file their notifications under Country by Country Reporting (CbCR) guidelines – a global standard endorsed by Oman earlier this year in support of the fight against tax evasion.

CbCR rules came into force following their publication in the Official Gazette on September 27, 2020.

They were part of Oman’s commitment to implement four minimum standards under the Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) Inclusive Framework, which the Sultanate endorsed to secure the country’s removal from an EU blacklist of so-called non-cooperative jurisdictions for tax purposes.

On Tuesday, the Tax Authority extended the deadline to April 30 2021, for specially designated



persons (Multinational Entities) to file their notifications for the Reporting Fiscal Year ending on December 31, 2020.

The earlier deadline for the current fiscal year was December 31, 2020. In announcing a

four-month grace period, the Authority cited “the exceptional circumstances” prevailing during the year.

Tax experts have welcomed the move as providing a breather to tax resident entities in Oman who

had a relatively limited timeframe to file their notifications under the CbCR guidelines.

CbCR rules apply primarily to multinational enterprise (MNE) groups with a consolidated revenue of not less than RO 300

million (approximately \$780 million or EUR 670 million) during the year immediately preceding the Reporting Fiscal Year.

Under the rules, each MNE Group operating in the country has to clarify whether it’s a Ultimate Parent Entity (UPE) or a Surrogate Parent Entity (SPE), based on which its tax residency will be ascertained under the rules.

In case they are neither, the MNE is still required to notify the Tax Authority about the identity and tax residency of the entity undertaking the CbCR reporting in its home jurisdiction.

According to tax experts, CbCR includes aggregate financial information such as revenues, profits/losses before income tax, income tax paid, number of employees, tangible assets other than cash or cash equivalents, and so on, as well as relevant details about each entity of the MNE across the countries in which the MNE operates.

Lebanon can stretch reserves for 6 more months of subsidies: PM

BEIRUT: Lebanon can ration \$2 billion in reserves left for subsidies to last six more months, the caretaker prime minister said on Tuesday, as the country’s financial meltdown raises fears of rising hunger.

Lebanon’s worst crisis since its 1975-1990 civil war has crashed the currency and sent inflation soaring. A looming end to subsidies has triggered UN warnings of “social catastrophe”.

In an interview with Reuters, Hassan Diab also said Western officials had told him there was “an international decision” not to help Lebanon because of Hizbullah’s role in the country. Diab said he only learned there was \$2 billion in foreign reserves left for subsidies

from TV comments Central Bank Governor Salameh made last week.

“I had asked him several times. Nothing official was received.” Diab said the amount was higher than anticipated and would last “six months if we apply rationing”.

He hoped for agreement by February on a plan to cut subsidy spending while supporting the poor. A central bank spokesman did not respond to a request for comment. Diab, who took office a year ago with Hizbullah’s backing, resigned over public fury at the huge port explosion that killed 200 people and ravaged much of the capital in August. His cabinet has since served in a caretaker role.

Along with three ex-ministers,



Caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab during an interview with Reuters in Beirut. — Reuters

the premier has faced charges of negligence over the explosion but has since declined to be questioned,

accusing the investigating judge of overstepping his powers.

The US FBI said in October it

had reached no firm conclusion about what caused the explosion.

Diab’s office quoted him earlier as saying the FBI had revealed that only 500 tonnes of ammonium nitrate had detonated out of the 2,750 tonnes stored unsafely at the port. “Where did the (rest) go?” he said without answering his question.

The FBI declined to comment. An advisor from Diab’s office added on Wednesday that he was not citing first-hand knowledge and had not seen any FBI report himself. Reuters could not independently verify its contents.

One of the biggest non-nuclear blasts on record, the disaster piled hardship on Lebanese already sinking into poverty. — Reuters

Cyber-security is top strategic priority, says CBO

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 30

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) says it is set to collaborate with domestic and international partners to help strengthen the resilience of the Sultanate’s financial system and reinforce the capacity of the financial sector to mitigate and recover from cyber-attacks.

Citing the vulnerability of Oman’s financial sector to potential cyber-attacks, the apex bank affirmed that cyber-security would remain “a top strategic priority” at the Central Bank.

“Off late, the odds and incidences of cyber-attacks have increased,” the regulator noted in

Such attacks may be very disruptive as these may not only interrupt the delivery of financial services but may also undermine confidence in the financial system:

CENTRAL BANK OF OMAN

its 2020 Financial Stability Report. “Financial institutions are a prime target of cyber-attacks because



of the potential for financial gains. Such attacks may be very disruptive as these may not only

interrupt the delivery of financial services but may also undermine confidence in the financial system.

Large-scale cyber-attacks may even threaten the stability of the financial system,” it warned.

The report noted in particular the potential for some “compromises” in the usual security standards as people work from home to deliver critical services amid the pandemic. “These circumstances have made cyber risks even more relevant than normal times,” the Central Bank warned.

At the same time, it stressed its commitment to supporting the roll-out of new services based on technology and innovation, notably in the realm of fintech. It also stressed its support for the use of cutting-edge technology by the banking sector to make

the provision of financial services more efficiency, user-friendly and cost-effective.

Exceptions to the rule are crypto-currencies and speculative fintech products. The Central Bank explained: “While it facilitates the use of advancements in technology by issuing the necessary frameworks and allocating resources commensurate to the underlying cyber-risks, the CBO does not endorse cryptocurrencies or other fintech-based assets that have weak governance or are speculative. Due to this cautious approach, cryptocurrencies or unregulated fintech assets lack the volume to pose any risk to the Omani financial sector,” it added.

Observer Year-End Special

A CHRONOLOGICAL LISTING OF KEY MILESTONES, EVENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS OF SIGNIFICANCE TO OMAN'S BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE DURING AN EVENTFUL YEAR ROILED BY THE DEVASTATING EFFECTS OF A GLOBAL ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN AND MADE WORSE BY THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC
(PART 1: JAN-JUNE)

CONRAD PRABHU

[@conradprabhu](#)

JANUARY

Jan 1: Royal Decree 1/2020 ratifies the 2020 State Budget based on oil price assumption of \$58/b with a fiscal deficit projected at around RO 2.5 billion or 8 per cent of GDP.

Jan 1: The National Centre for Employment commences operation with a commitment to train 10,000 young Omanis for employment during 2020-2021

Jan 2: The Initial Public Offering (IPO) of Aman REIF, the Sultanate's maiden Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT), opens

Jan 3: The UK's International Hospitals Group secures funding to the tune of £500 million for design and construction of hospitals in Salalah, Al Suwaiq and Khasab under a PPP arrangement with Oman's Ministry of Health.

Jan 7: A renewable energy development plan unveiled recently by the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) envisions the procurement of 3,050 megawatts (MW) of renewables-based capacity by 2025, representing 16 per cent of total electricity output by this timeframe.

Jan 7: The new Foreign Capital Investment Law comes into force, enabling 100 per cent foreign ownership of Omani businesses, with the exception of a small number of predominantly low-skilled trades and services

Jan 10: Oman is plunged in national mourning following the passing of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos

Jan 11: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik is sworn in as the new Sultan of Oman during a joint session of the Council of Oman and the Defence Council

Jan 20: A key section of the Al Sharqiyah Expressway, featuring the first-ever road tunnels in the Sultanate, is opened to traffic.

Jan 21: Construction work has commenced on the Barka — Suhar water transmission system, one of Oman's biggest water transmission projects, valued at RO 82 million.

Jan 27: An agreement is signed for the establishment of a local Omani company that will support the development and commercialisation of hydrogen as a zero-emission energy source as well as feedstock for use in various industrial and petrochemical applications.

Jan 29: The Ministry of Commerce Industry (MoCI) has announced new guidelines for companies responsible for importing building materials, including cement, steel, and dyes, as part of the efforts to ensure the quality of buildings constructed in Oman. The new guidelines will come into effect from February.

FEBRUARY

Feb 2: Construction work on the National Autism Centre - Oman LNG's "Gift to the Nation" — is now complete. The project has been implemented as part of a strategic partnership with the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) and Oman Autism Society to help provide autism care to sufferers in the Sultanate.

Feb 2: Travel agencies in the Sultanate have reported a dramatic decline in outbound business travel and inbound leisure holidays stemming from the outbreak of the 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) pandemic.

Feb 9: Rakiza, an infrastructure-focused fund set up by the State General Reserve Fund (SGRF) — the largest sovereign wealth fund of the Sultanate of Oman — is keenly eyeing opportunities to invest in the country's burgeoning renewable energy space.

Feb 14: Port of Salalah says it has reached a settlement with its insurer for a sum of \$67.75 million as damages arising out the destruction and disruption caused by Cyclone Mekunu when it struck the southern part of the Sultanate during



May 2018.

Feb 16: In a move that bodes well for efforts to harness Oman's untapped offshore hydrocarbon potential, the local subsidiary of global energy major Eni has commenced drilling of what is billed as the first deep-water well in the Sultanate's history.

Feb 18: Under the leadership of the Ministry of Oil and Gas and in collaboration with prominent local and international industries, technology providers, academic institutions and investment organisations - EJAAD is coordinating the efforts to create a national strategy for hydrogen as a promising economic engine.

Feb 23: The Ministry of Technology and Communications (MTC) and Asyad Group sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to leverage ICT in developing the logistics sector in the Sultanate.

Feb 24: Oman LNG has tapped international energy technology firm Baker Hughes and Oman LNG to undertake the EPC for the turbo-machinery scope of its debottlenecking project — an initiative that will lift Oman LNG's production capacity by 10 per cent to 11.4 million metric tons per annum.

Feb 24: The Sultanate expresses solidarity with countries around the world grappling with the deadly effects of the coronavirus epidemic.

Feb 25: The Ministry of Technology and Communications (MTC), Gulf Business Machines (GBM) and The Research Council (TRC) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to implement the Artificial Intelligence projects within the Smart City Platform, which will be a consortium for AI solutions and knowledge sharing in Oman.

Feb 26: The Ministry of Transport unveils the National Aviation Strategy 2030, aimed at strengthening Oman's economy through improving the aviation industry in the Sultanate, which will significantly and directly contribute to the gross domestic product.

Feb 26: Public bidding for the first two 'pre-approved' mining blocks opens, marking the start of a new, energetic and transparent effort to open up Oman's promising minerals sector to local and international investment.

MARCH

March 1: His Majesty Sultan Haitham issues 10 Royal Decrees which, among other things, promulgate the Internal Security Service Law, and appoint a new Minister of Heritage and Culture.

March 3: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has announced that visitors from coronavirus-hit countries will not be allowed to enter the Sultanate.

March 3: A contract for the implementation of the health insurance information exchange platform — the centrepiece of the Mandatory Health Insurance System (Dhamani) due to be rolled out in the Sultanate — has been awarded to a consortium led by well-known Omani IT solutions specialist Infoline.

March 4: In a major shot in the arm for

Oman's nascent ambitions to foster the growth of a 'green hydrogen' economy in the Sultanate, a Belgium firm and its local partners have unveiled plans to set up a large-scale 'green hydrogen' project in the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Duqm.

March 7: Sandan Development celebrates the official opening of Madinat Sandan as the first fully-integrated city for light industries managed by the private sector in the Sultanate.

March 7: Sohar Port and Freezone witnessed considerable growth, seeing an average throughput of over 1 million tonnes of cargo per week over the course of 2019 and bringing in investments of RO 10.4 billion (\$27 billion) to-date.

March 11: His Majesty the Sultan orders the setting up of a Supreme Committee to prep the country for all eventualities likely to be unleashed by the pandemic as it sweeps across the globe

March 15: Units of Aman Real Estate Investment Fund — the first Real Estate Investment Fund (REIF / REIT) in the Sultanate — are listed on the MSM

March 15: In cooperation with the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) and Oman



Telecommunications Company (Omantel), the Ministry of Technology & Communications (MTC) launches the Knowledge Oasis Muscat Smart City pilot project.

March 16: ASYAD Group announces the integration of Oman Shipping Company (OSC) and Oman Drydock Company (ODC), in alignment with the Group's strategy to offer integrated and highly efficient services — cementing its competitiveness across global markets and maximising the returns of Oman's logistics sector.

March 16: The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has instructed all public joint stock companies, auditors and legal advisors to observe COVID-19 preventive measures curb the spread of the disease during their general meetings.

March 17: The State Grid Corporation of China (SGCC), one of the largest public utilities in the world, has completed the 49 per cent equity acquisition of Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) together with seller Nama Group.

March 17: The Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Centre (CPMPC) has threatened to invoke a tough new statute against local businesses found exploiting an upsurge in consumer demand for goods linked to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

March 18: The Capital Market Authority has issued circular suspending the general meetings of public joint stock companies and investment funds until further notice.

March 18: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has unveiled a raft of policy measures and financial incentives designed to unlock an estimated RO 8 billion in additional liquidity for the benefit of businesses impacted by the economic downturn and the COVID-19 threat.

March 24: A landmark endowment fund dedicated to the financing of healthcare services in the Sultanate has been formally established. The Endowment Fund for Enhancing Health Services, as it is called, will be based on Islamic sharia principles governing the regulation of endowment funds.

March 25: Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI)

April 16: The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has issued new rules vide CMA Decision E/25/2020 on convening general meetings of 'Public Joint Stock Companies and Investment Funds through Electronic Means'.

April 19: As part of the new measures to cut expenditure in the Sultanate, the Ministry of Finance has decided to reduce the 2020 budget spending by RO 500 million.

April 20: The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has announced the resumption of general meetings of joint public stock companies and investment funds via the electronic portal of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (MCDC), which were suspended in mid-March in line with the guidelines of the Supreme Committee tasked managing the COVID-19 pandemic.

April 21: Oman's Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has introduced a plan to provide telecom services to 500 rural villages at a cost of RO 15 million.

April 28: Leading oil producers in the Sultanate are preparing to slash output during May and June 2020 in line with a pledge by the Opec+ alliance, which includes Oman as a signatory, to cut

the partnership between the public and private sectors (PPP), the Public Authority for Privatisation and Partnership (PAPP) has unveiled a portfolio of 49 initiatives related to the health sector, education, environment, transportation, government services, agriculture and fisheries, for implementation under the PPP model.

May 10: OQ (formerly Oman Oil and Orpic Group) — the Sultanate's energy powerhouse — has announced the start of the commissioning phase of Liwa Plastics Industries Complex (LPIC), a mammoth petrochemicals project that seeks to optimise value generation from Oman's hydrocarbon resources.

May 20: The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) signs a memorandum of cooperation with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) to establish an industrial city within the industrial and logistics complex in Marmul.

May 28: The Sultanate has officially brought into commercial operation its first utility-scale solar photovoltaic (PV) scheme — a 105 MWac capacity Independent Power Project (IPP) located at Amin in the south of the Block 6 licence of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

May 30: Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the Sultanate's biggest oil and gas producer, achieved record production of 1.210 million barrels of oil equivalent per day (boe/d) in 2019, bolstered by a strong uptick in condensate output.

JUNE

June 4: A landmark initiative to procure Oman's first national satellite programme has formally commenced with the government inviting qualified international consultancy firms to bid for a contract to provide financial and technical advisory services linked to the implementation of this strategic project.

June 4: His Majesty the Sultan issued a Royal Decree to establish the Omani Investment Authority

June 7: Oman has agreed to slash crude output by 200,000 barrels per day (bpd) during July in line with an accord reached by global oil producers on Saturday night to extend record production cuts for another month.

June 11: The Opec Fund for International Development has reaffirmed \$130 million in funding assistance for the Al Sharqiyah Expressway Tunnels Project — a strategic carriageway that will enhance road connectivity as well as boost the Sultanate's transport infrastructure.

June 19: An array of Omani agencies spanning the aviation, shipping, logistics, customs and regulatory sectors are working in concert to achieving a trebling of the Sultanate's freight volumes to around 700,000 tons per annum by 2030.

June 29: Oman is opening up opportunities for private sector investment in as many as nine key sectors under the government's newly unveiled Public Private Partnership (PPP) regulatory framework.
(To be continued next week)



Why it pays to acquaint children with new technologies

Global technology companies take a great interest in studying how children, who represent a key segment of their market, are adapting to new technology. During the lockdowns linked to the COVID-19 epidemic, millions of children around the world have had to embrace electronic means and online programmes to access educational resources.

Indeed, all stages of education, from primary to university levels, are now adopting online study programmes.

International companies such as Huawei, Samsung, Ericsson and others publish periodic data and statistics on these

issues, regarding the necessity of qualifying human cadres in technologies in order to enhance the social and economic development of the general population.

In the region, many countries are determined to see their citizens secure the requisite qualifications in various aspects of communication and digital information technology, which is key to driving the digital transformation of their economies.

Today, the uptake of videoconferencing technologies, artificial intelligence programmes and cloud computing is on the increase as growing numbers of people use these technologies to



HAIDER ALLAWATI
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COUNTRIES ARE MAKING CONTINUOUS EFFORTS TO COMBAT THE SPREAD OF THE PANDEMIC, AND TO HASTEN THE PACE OF ECONOMIC RECOVERY

participate in conferences, seminars, exhibitions and online discussions of international economic and trade importance.

With evidence of the COVID-19 virus mutating, it is likely that lockdowns and social distancing will continue to the norm, underlining the continued importance of online platforms and technologies for communications and engagement.

It is imperative, therefore, that governments and other stakeholders focus on developing the capacities of children in the fields of digital technology as they represent the future workforce that will run industrial, business and economic growth engines.

To this end, many countries

have set up programmes to support digital transformation, innovation and creativity, which are necessary to enable individuals to harness modern technologies to drive economic growth.

At the same time, these countries are making continuous efforts to combat the spread of the pandemic, and to hasten the pace of economic recovery. This includes efforts to prepare the national population for the new normal in the post-pandemic phase, while also encourages the younger generations to develop their capabilities in the field of information technology, and other technologies necessary to enhance the output of educational, manufacturing and

other sectors.

The new generations must have the knowledge, understanding and skills to exploit technologies for the development of their families, communities and the nation as a whole.

The onus is on academic institutions in the public and private sectors to expose young children and the youth to new trends in the fields of science and technology and highlight the professional and economic potential that they offer.

Society must also instill in their young minds the concepts of innovation and enterprise and thus enable them to unlock new business and economic opportunities for the future.

Asian investors push most markets higher

HONG KONG: Asian markets mostly enjoyed gains on Wednesday following the previous day's advances, with vaccine and economic recovery optimism helping investors look past a frightening surge in virus cases around the world.

As a rollercoaster year draws to a close, two major weights on sentiment - US stimulus and the Brexit trade deal - have been navigated reasonably positively, leaving traders a little more upbeat about the next few months.

With central banks unlikely to step back anytime soon from their vast monetary easing programmes, and vaccines allowing life to get back to some semblance of normality, analysts are hopeful that equities have a



A pedestrian walks past an electronic quotation board displaying the closing numbers of shares on the Tokyo Stock Exchange in Tokyo. - AFP

long way to go higher.

"This is an economy that is recovering, the policy is going to be accommodative for years to come, it suggests a good backdrop

for risk assets — it doesn't mean there aren't going to be some challenges as we progress over the next couple of years," Brian Levitt, a strategist at Invesco, told

Bloomberg TV.

"The reality is the markets are going to be focused on a recovery."

Wall Street's three main indexes dipped from Monday's records on disappointment that Republicans had blocked a move to ramp up stimulus cash handouts, though there is a feeling US lawmakers will eventually push ahead with more support measures as Joe Biden takes over at the White House.

Hong Kong led gains in Asia, rallying 1.5 per cent, while Seoul jumped 1.9 per cent and Shanghai and Taipei also put on more than one per cent each. There were also advances in Singapore but Tokyo eased after piling on more than two per cent on Tuesday, while Wellington, Bangkok and Jakarta were also in the red. — AFP

Samsung leader Lee vows change in graft trial's final hearing



Samsung Group heir Jay Y Lee arrives at a court in Seoul. — Reuters File Photo

SEOUL: Samsung Electronics Co Ltd Vice Chairman Jay Y Lee told a Seoul court on Wednesday he would "make a new Samsung" in the final hearing of a trial that will decide whether he returns to jail for alleged bribery.

The heir of one of South Korea's most powerful families was convicted of bribing an associate of former President Park Geun-hye and jailed for five years in 2017.

That sentence was reduced and suspended on appeal and he served just one year in jail before being freed in 2018. A subsequent Supreme Court ruling sent the matter back to the Seoul High Court, which must now decide on a new sentence. The decision is scheduled for January 18.

"Samsung has been running without looking back but I missed something vital. Although it became Korea's leading company, the importance of its social role, responsibility and public trust was overlooked," Lee

said reading a statement in court, dressed in a dark suit and grey tie.

"Now Samsung will be different. I'll be the first to change... No matter what happens, I will never do anything to pursue my personal interests. I will raise the value of the company and focus on social contributions, fix what the court has pointed out as the harms of chaebol," he said.

South Korea's big family-run conglomerates, or chaebol, are credited with helping raise the country out of poverty following the Korean War but have been criticised for wielding too much power preserved in part through elaborate internal cross-shareholdings.

Lee shed tears when talking about the memory of his deceased father, saying he wanted to do his filial duty by making "a new Samsung" that is sustainable and has "a thorough compliance system that can resist undue outside pressure". — Reuters

EU LEADERS SIGN BREXIT DEAL

BRUSSELS: EU leaders signed their post-Brexit trade deal with Britain and dispatched it to London on an RAF jet on Wednesday, setting their seal on a drawn-out divorce just hours before the UK brings its half-century European experiment to an end.

EU chiefs Ursula von der Leyen and Charles Michel, the heads of the European Commission and European Council, smiled at a brief televised ceremony to put their names to the 1,246-page Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

"It has been a long road. It's time now to put Brexit behind us. Our future is made in Europe," von der Leyen said



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Charles Michel pose in Brussels, as they show the signed Brexit trade agreement due to come into force on January 1. — AFP

Britain will leave the European single market and customs union at 11 pm on Thursday, the end of a difficult year and of a post-Brexit transition period marked by intense and tortuous trade

negotiations.

But first, the hefty document, bound in blue leather, will be flown by the Royal Air Force to London for Prime Minister Boris Johnson to add his signature, and

the UK parliament will embark on a rushed debate to clear the decks before the looming deadline.

According to Downing Street, Johnson will tell MPs that the agreement heralds "a new relationship between Britain and the EU as sovereign equals, joined by friendship, commerce, history, interests and values".

In Brussels, Michel agreed, saying: "On major issues, the European Union stands ready to work shoulder to shoulder with the United Kingdom.

"This will be the case on climate change, ahead of the COP 26 in Glasgow, and on the global response to pandemics, in particular with a possible treaty on pandemics." — AFP

MIAMI

First US commercial Boeing departs Miami

Boeing's 737 MAX resumed passenger flights in the United States for the first time on Tuesday after a 20-month safety ban was lifted last month.

American Airlines Flight 718 departed Miami around 10:40 am bound for New York's LaGuardia Airport and is scheduled to land around 1:08 pm, according to several flight tracing websites.

American and planemaker Boeing has sought to reassure the public over the plane's safety after



it was cleared by US regulators in November to resume flights. The flight was observed by two media helicopters to the airport's north. It headed north into broken clouds. — Reuters

SAN DIEGO

China's Yahua agrees deal to supply lithium to Tesla

China's Sichuan Yahua Industrial Group Co Ltd said on Tuesday it had signed a deal to supply battery-grade lithium hydroxide to US electric vehicle (EV) manufacturer Tesla Inc for the next five years.

Yahua, which is based in southwest China's Sichuan province, put the total value of the contract, signed by its wholly-owned subsidiary Yaan Lithium, at \$630-\$880 million over 2021-25, a Shenzhen Stock Exchange filing showed.



Analysts at Daiwa Capital Markets said that value translated into a total lithium hydroxide procurement amount of 63,000-88,000 tonnes, or 12,600-17,600 tonnes per annum. — Reuters

SEOUL

Kia Motors' union approves tentative labour deal

South Korean workers for Kia Motors Corp have agreed to a freeze in base salary for the first time in 11 years under a preliminary deal with the automaker following 16 rounds of negotiations, a union official said on Tuesday.

Instead of a raise in base salary, each unionised worker would receive a one-time bonus of 150 per cent of their monthly base pay, as well as an incentive worth 1.20 million won (\$1,095) and a gift card worth 1.30 million won,



the official said. Kia also offered to restore a 25-minute overtime pay system which was scrapped in 2017, but it rejected proposals to raise the retirement age by five years to 65. — Reuters

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- The inspection will take a place at the company's office, at beach one building, unit 209, on 4th of January 2021 from 10 am to 2 pm.
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features



BAN THE BAG

The implementation of the Ministerial Resolution regarding the ban on the use of single-consumption plastic shopping bags will be effective from Tomorrow... **P18**

INSIDE STORIES

TOURISM

GREECE HOPING FOR TOURISM RECOVERY FROM SUMMER 2021

Greece's tourism sector is expected to recover next summer following a dramatic fall in revenues due to the coronavirus pandemic this year, a senior industry official said on Tuesday... **Story on Page P19**

FASHION

PIERRE CARDIN, FASHION'S SAVVY FUTURIST

Pierre Cardin, who died Tuesday aged 98, was a man of many paradoxes — a designer who sought flamboyant yet simple styles, an aesthete with a head for business, and a futurist now associated with retro... **Story on Page 19**

READ

THE SHADOW OF THE WIND

BY CARLOS RUIZ ZAFON

SUMMARY

The book is a multi-layered tale about a ten-year-old boy named Daniel Sempere, who picks up a copy of a book by an author who seems to have disappeared off the face of the earth.

CONCERT

NEW YEAR'S SAVING GRACE FOR VIENNA'S SILENCED MUSIC SCENE

While a virus-laden silence has descended over what is normally a busy period of concerts and balls in the Austrian capital Vienna, the city's world-famous New Year Concert is at least providing one saving grace — albeit to an empty hall... **Story on Page 20**

CELEBRITIES

'LOVE WINS'

Britain's Prince Harry and his wife Meghan on Tuesday thanked essential workers and offered encouragement to people who suffered during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic in their first podcast released on Spotify. Harry and Meghan host the episode, which features reflections and hopes for the new year.



A major indicator of our disposable consumer society, single-use plastic bags are a great danger to our oceans and environment. They create serious consequences for the ecosystem, on marine animals, and on mankind.

The implementation of the Ministerial Resolution No 23/2020 regarding the ban on the use of single-consumption plastic shopping bags will be effective from Tomorrow.

Eng Ahmed al Hinai, Director General of Environmental Affairs said that the Environment Authority is continuing to implement the decision to ban the use of single-consumption plastic shopping bags, and it comes within the plan set by

the authority to preserve the Omani environment from pollution and harmful waste to the environment and wildlife.

This decision also comes in implementation of the provisions of the Environmental Protection and Pollution Control Law No 114/2001, to achieve greater harmonization and integration between development objectives and indicators in the national action plans for the management of plastic products and their waste.

That the decision came after a set of studies and workshops carried out by the authority in cooperation with the relevant government and private agencies. an appropriate and sufficient period has been set before putting the resolution into

force in order to ensure that this decision is fully implemented and in a proper manner without affecting manufacturers or consumers. this will help to keep abreast of the developments and successive changes in the relevant global agreements.

Al Hinai also indicated that this decision will greatly contribute to reducing plastic pollution in the local environment. "The authority has studied the experiences of many countries that have implemented similar decisions in preventing single-consumption plastic bags, which greatly contributed to preserving the land and marine environment from pollution."

He also confirmed that the authority is continuing to implement this decision in

cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and that all appropriate measures will be taken in order to ensure the commitment of companies and commercial institutions in implementing it.

Many alternatives to plastic bags are emerging. Reuse your bags to limit their impact. Slip your reusable bags into your purse, car, gym bag so that you always have reusable bags with you. By doing this, you will contribute to a circular economy that respects the environment.

Wicker baskets, shopping nets, tote bags, etc., many sustainable alternatives exist and are now available to everyone. Not only ecological, but use them to make a statement about your commitment to the planet.



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TOURISM

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GREECE

HOPING FOR TOURISM

RECOVERY FROM SUMMER 2021



Greece's tourism sector is expected to recover next summer following a dramatic fall in revenues due to the coronavirus pandemic this year, a senior industry official said on Tuesday. Tourism is the main driver of Greece's economy, accounting for about 20 per cent of its output and employing one in five

workers.

How the sector fares is crucial for the country which emerged from its third international bailout in 2018 after a decade-long debt crisis. Yannis Retsos, head of the country's tourism confederation (SETE), said tourism revenues this year had reached 4 billion euros, down from 18 billion in 2019, due to global travel restrictions to contain the spread of the coronavirus.

Greece expects its economy to shrink by about 10 per cent this year and is pinning its hopes in the second half of 2021 for an economic recovery. "We need to wait for the second half of the year to see some sort of action in tourism," Retsos told a Greek radio station.

"Anything we see from May on would be a very positive surprise," he said. Based on the latest official

data from the Bank of Greece, tourism arrivals fell 76 per cent in the January-to-October period. Greece has reported 135,931 infections since it documented its first case in February and 4,672 deaths. The country has been in a nationwide lockdown since early November and allowed only hair salons and bookstores to reopen for the Christmas season.

Pierre Cardin, fashion's savvy futurist



Pierre Cardin, who died on Tuesday aged 98, was a man of many paradoxes — a designer who sought flamboyant yet simple styles, an aesthete with a head for business, and a futurist now associated with retro.

He rose to the pantheon of France's post-war fashion giants only to shake it all up by leading what was in the 1950s a revolutionary concept — designing "ready-to-wear" collections for the high street.

A savvy businessman, he expanded his empire globally, moving into once closed markets and selling hundreds of licences to make himself the undisputed king of designer merchandising — and being slammed by the fashion elite for selling out.

Cardin's 1960s "Space Age" collection is among his most legendary, and his designs such as the men's collarless "cylinder" suit inspired the early look of the Beatles.

Batwings and knitted catsuits

Cardin entered the Parisian fashion world in the aftermath of World War II, training with the likes of Christian Dior and Elsa Schiaparelli.

In the 1950s, as he began to branch out on

his own, he soon established a name as an innovator with the now legendary bubble dress in 1954.

His 1964 "Space Age" collection remains a landmark in the fashion history with its cut-out dresses, knitted catsuits, tight leather pants, close-fitting helmets and batwing jumpers.

Throughout the 1960s, as one of the most influential creative forces, he turned out collection after collection featuring an array of original ideas, and with his penchant for geometric shapes and motifs he frequently ignored the female form altogether.

It was this disregard for femininity which led him to be credited with creating the "unisex" look.

Although he was gay, he had a four-year affair with the French film star Jeanne Moreau. She wanted to have a child with him but could not after suffering from uterine cancer.

Beauty and the Beast
Cardin was born into poverty on July 2, 1922, near Venice in northern Italy. His family emigrated to France when he was a child, and he grew up in the dour French industrial town of Saint Etienne.

—AFP



New Year's saving grace

for Vienna's silenced music scene

While a virus-laden silence has descended over what is normally a busy period of concerts and balls in the Austrian capital Vienna, the city's world-famous New Year Concert is at least providing one saving grace — albeit to an empty hall.

The city's concert halls were among the first in Europe to re-open in June, in the wake of the first wave lockdown, as Vienna tried to preserve its reputation as one of the world's preeminent centres of classical music.

But as the virus took hold again in the autumn, fresh restrictions soon followed.

Music venues again had to close in November, in a city that normally boasts some 15,000 concerts and musical events annually.

But one show will go on, no doubt charged with more symbolism this year.

"If we cancel the New Year's Concert, that would be such a horrible sign to the entire

world," Vienna Philharmonic Chairman Daniel Froschauer said at the end of October when rising infection numbers were forcing Vienna's cultural world to prepare for a new phase of restrictions.

In December, even once venues had been forced to close, Froschauer said at a press conference that it would be "impossible" not to go ahead — and his view has prevailed.

Applause played in The first one of the prestigious concerts took place at a much darker moment in Austrian history, on New Year's Eve 1939.

Since then it has built up a following which sees it broadcast in more than 90 countries to more than 50 million people.

Normally the lucky few who get to go in person at Vienna's Musikverein are chosen in a draw.

This year though the musicians, conducted by Italian Riccardo Muti, will perform to an empty hall.

But to break the silence, the

ORF public broadcaster will play in applause from 7,000 music lovers watching from home.

If, as Froschauer says, the Philharmonic is to Austria as "soccer is to England", then it's only fitting that the New Year's Concert should be a rare survivor of lockdown closures.

But the wider shutdown of cultural life has been catastrophic for many artists. Since spring, Froschauer has been trying to raise their plight, even taking their case to Chancellor Sebastian Kurz.

Froschauer insists performances are safe, arguing that in the several months in which restrictions were relaxed, "we never once had a large cluster" of infection from performances.

"We do PCR tests in order to play and we wear masks" until playing, he says. "Our audience is very disciplined."

Musical message

While the New Year's Day concert may be some comfort for music lovers, those hoping to dance during Vienna's legendary ball season will be

disappointed.

This season there will be none — in a city that normally hosts around 450 of them between November and February, dedicated to groups as diverse as chimney sweeps, cafe owners, bodybuilders and florists.

The tradition goes back to the 18th century, when the tradition of Habsburg court balls being reserved to the aristocracy ended.

For Thomas Schaefer-Elmayer, the 74-year-old head of a dancing school founded by his grandfather 100 years ago, the current situation is "extremely sad".

While normally there would be around 100 students twirling on the gleaming parquet floor of his school, this year it is empty.

"It is the first time that we are totally helpless... online is not the same," says Schaefer-Elmayer, who has acted as master of ceremonies at some of Vienna's most stylish balls.

The current situation is a "disaster" for the 20 or so dancing schools in Vienna.

In addition, the ball season normally creates work for thousands of hairdressers, florists, hoteliers, tailors and taxi drivers, among others.

In 2019/2020, the season attracted 500,000 visitors, 55,000 of whom came especially from abroad, spending an average of 290 euros (\$350) per person.

In all, the city has lost 150 million euros in revenue this year, says Norbert Kettner, director of Vienna's tourist office.

But it is also a blow to the Viennese carnival season, says Kettner.

For while the balls are an expression of the city's centuries-old traditions, they have also been embraced and adapted by younger generations and Kettner assures that they can be "very wild, lively".

Kettner says the New Year's Concert will be an opportunity for the city to send out a "musical message" — in the hope of attracting more visitors when the pandemic is finally defeated. — AFP