

Oman to take part in Venice art expo

The Sultanate of Oman, through its national pavilion, will take part for the first time in the 59th Biennale Arte 2022 exhibition, due to be held in Venice, Italy, from April 22, till November 27, 2022. The participation in this event aims to introduce the Omani culture locally and internationally. The opening exhibition displays works of three generations of Omani artists, whose activities span 50 years in visual and contemporary arts.

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THE LONG DRIVE TO HASIK REVEALS AN UNTAPPED PARADISE



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO UAE PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), on his country's 50th National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to Shaikh Khalifa, praying to the Almighty Allah to grant him good health and long life to achieve further progress and prosperity for the UAE people. — ONA

HM GREETINGS TO PRESIDENT OF LAOS

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Thongloun Sisoulith of the Laos People's Democratic Republic on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Sisoulith and the friendly people of his country. — ONA

WHO advises elderly to reconsider travel plans

KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

The World Health Organization (WHO) has urged people to reconsider their travel plans or to postpone or reschedule the same in the wake of the Sars-CoV-2 Omicron variant (B.1.1.529) until further information.

“People who have not been fully vaccinated or do not have proof of previous Sars-CoV-2 infection and are at increased risk of developing severe disease and death, including people of 60 years of age or older or those with comorbidities which pose increased risk of severe Covid-19 such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes are advised to postpone travel to areas with community transmission,” the WHO has said.

This announcement comes in the wake of Japan asking airlines to stop taking new incoming flight bookings over concerns about the new variant, and as the first case was reported in Saudi Arabia.

WHO has designated the variant B.1.1.529 as a Variant Of Concern, named Omicron, on the basis of the advice from WHO's Technical Advisory Group on Virus Evolution (hereafter referred to as TAG-VE) on November 26, 2021.

Speaking to the media on the sidelines of the Covid-19 virtual press briefing on Wednesday,

Dr Ahmed al Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, said two years into the Covid-19, the pandemic continues to take a toll on people's lives and health across the world, spreading fear and frustration and that the arrival of the new variant is of concern.

“The emergence of the new variant of concern ‘Omicron’ has aggravated the situation and poses potential threat to the hard-won gains of the past two years,” Dr Ahmed said.

He said that the recent trends of Covid-19 spread in the region are mixed. While some countries have documented recent decline in cases and deaths, nine and three countries recorded increase in cases and deaths over the past week.

“As of November 29, more than 16.7 million confirmed Covid-19 cases and more than 309,500 deaths were reported across the region,” Dr Ahmed added.

WEATHER SYSTEM IMPACT ENDS



The impact of the Al Nahda depression which affected a number of wilayats ended on Wednesday. Classes resumed at two schools in the Kamzar area in Musandam Governorate after being affected by heavy downpour.

State Audit Institution submits 2020 report

MUSCAT: The State Audit Institution (SAI) submitted its 2020 report to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

Shaikh Nasser bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of SAI, submitted copies of the report to the Council of Ministers, the State Council and Majlis Ash'shura in accordance with the Basic Law of the State promulgated by Royal Decree

No 6/2021, and Article (29) of the State Audit Law promulgated by Royal Decree No 111/2011.

The report, collected from the SAI's eight branches in the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, showed its annual audit plan for 2020 which included 156 audit missions of all types that fall under the purview of SAI. The result was the issuance of 179 audit reports.

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Oman, UAE ties built on openness, cooperation

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The UAE is celebrating its 50th National Day on Thursday. Over the years, the Sultanate of Oman's relationship with the UAE has been exceptional built on trust, openness and cooperation.

The leaders of the two countries have always stressed on the strong relations of cooperation among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and both sides have always found ways to boost expand ties that bring the two countries together.

On Wednesday, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sent a congratulatory message to Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the State of the United Arab Emirates, on the 50th National Day of the United Arab Emirates.

"Leaders have always stressed the importance of exchanging visits to deepen ties between the two brotherly countries and the



need to open more avenues for cooperation in all fields, including the joint coordination", the official statements quoting both sides have said.

On the business side, the UAE has been Oman's biggest trading partner and the non-oil exports between the two countries increased 28.7 per cent to RO 389.9 million in the first six months of 2021 (January-June), compared to RO 302.1 million during the same period in 2020.

The re-exports between the two countries also increased by 32.3 per cent to RO 229.6 million in the first six months of 2021 (January-June), compared to RO 226.4 million during the same period in 2020.

The imports from the UAE to Oman also increased from RO 1,582.5 million in 2020 to RO 1,930 million in 2021.

While the capital Muscat is only 500 km away from the UAE's commercial hub of Dubai, the other cities in Northern Oman are less than three hours drive from the UAE.

Everyday, thousands of people seamlessly commute between the countries in private vehicles, trucks and even passenger buses.

Oman is popular among UAE tourists for its wadis, beaches and mountains and deserts.

The UAE and the Sultanate of Oman, through Etihad Credit Insurance (ECI) and the Export Credit Guarantee Company of Oman (Credit Oman), have signed an agreement to boost exports and further grow non-oil trade between the two countries, according to a statement released on Sunday.

Under the agreement, ECI and Credit Oman will form a task force to explore the areas of cooperation in the fields of insurance; reinsurance; collections; commercial information and credit opinion sharing on companies located in both the UAE and the Sultanate of Oman.

State Audit Institution submits report

FROM PAGE 1

The report was classified into three main parts. The first part included content related to the state's administrative apparatus, while the second part dealt with state-owned companies and public authorities and establishments. The third part of the report dealt with content related to the field of promoting integrity and detecting financial and administrative violations.

At the level of the units of the state's administrative apparatus, the auditing procedures carried out by SAI on some of these units resulted in a number of observations that need to be addressed by the authorities by developing appropriate solutions with some entities began to take the necessary measures to address and avoid such observations.

The report also included many topics of importance related to performance control for a number of authorities, including those related to rationalising spending, diversifying sources of income, maximising non-oil revenues, improving performance and quality of services, improving the business environment, and

strengthening internal control systems to achieve the desired goals efficiently and economically.

The second part of the report dealing with the state-owned companies and public authorities and establishments, the audit results unveiled some observations which can be developed and improved.

The report said that despite the exceptional conditions represented by continued decline in global oil prices and the economic impact of the pandemic, SAI was able to realise its plan and achieve many of the targeted results. — ONA

Pacts signed for projects worth RO 3.58m

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources signed five agreements with local investors on Wednesday for investment in agriculture.

The agreements worth RO 3.58 were signed by Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

1. Desert Oasis project worth RO 751,000 for non-traditional vegetables, fruits, field crops and cereals (100 fedans in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq for the annual production of 2,700 tonnes of figs and field crops). The agreement was signed with Al Ramooz National Group of Companies.

2. Greenhouse farm project worth RO 280,000 for the production of 1,200 tonnes a year of fruits and vegetables (50 fedans in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq).



3. A project worth RO 300,000 for the production of bananas in Al Suwaiq. It was signed with Al Mokhtar International Trading and Contracting Company. (50 fedans, to produce 1,500 tonnes a year).

4. A project worth RO 1.3 million for the setting up of a farm tourism on 100 fedans (to produce 3,200 tonnes of fruits and vegetables, 60 tonnes of fisheries a year).

5. A project to to raise chickens and eggs worth RO 950,000 signed with Al Fanoos Company, Barka. (50 fedans, production 40,000 a year).

— ONA

Austrian Embassy begins visa services



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 1

The Embassy of Austria in the Sultanate of Oman, has begun Visa Application Centre in Muscat in association with VFS Global, the world's largest visa outsourcing and technology services specialist for governments and diplomatic missions worldwide on Wednesday.

The Austria Visa Centre at Panorama Mall was inaugurated by

Christian Brunmayr, Ambassador, Austrian Embassy in Muscat, in the presence of various dignitaries.

This is the first time, the Embassy of Austria in Oman has outsourced its visa services in the country. Prior to this, Omani nationals needed to submit their visa applications at the Spain Visa Application Centre in the capital city.

"We are excited to extend our long-standing partnership

with Austria to the country of Oman, bringing our best-in-class visa services to the residents in Oman. We appreciate the constant support and faith the Embassy of Austria has placed in us in various countries where we offer services on their behalf, and we look forward to welcoming the enthusiastic travellers from Oman to our Visa Application Centre", said Atul Marwah, Head-Middle East & North Africa, VFS Global.



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وزارة الاقتصاد والتجارة
Ministry of Economy and Commerce

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

OCEC would like to invite competent and experienced companies to participate in the Tendering process for Solar Energy Solutions at the OCEC:

Particulars	Description
Subject	Solar Energy Solutions
Tender No.	OCEC/T/2021/18
Tender Fees Payment	Beneficiary: Oman Convention and Exhibition Center Bank: Solar International Branch: Qurum - Sultanate of Oman Account No. 005020045872 Swift Code: BSHROMRU Finance Code: 609109900
Tender Fees (non-refundable)	OMR 25/-
Tender Document Sale Start Date	2 December 2021
Site visit Date	7&8 December 2021
Last Clarification Date	14 December 2021
Tender Documents Closing & Sealing End Date	16 December 2021
Tender Submission	All bidders must submit their offers with the terms and conditions of the tender by sending their bids to the e-mail: aaibalushi@ocec.om Finance Department P.O. Box 1659, P.C. 130, Al Athaiba, Sultanate of Oman Tel: + 968 24 233 930, Fax: + 968 24 233 801, 71194152 • OCEC is not bound to award the contract to the lowest bid or any other bidder. • Each Bidder must leave a business card with contact details for required tender communication (company name, contact name, telephone and email) • All tender communication will be emailed to this contact person and email address aaibalushi@ocec.om • Each Bidder must send a copy of its relevant Ministry of Commerce and Industry registration (except for International Bidders) - Notwithstanding the specific terms in the Tender Documents.
Companies Grade	G 4 and Above
Experience	International & Local experience companies in solar energy solutions
Tender Document Collection	Tender documents can be obtained by e-mail after sending the electronic payment receipt during working hours: Sunday – Thursday 8:30am – 3:00pm.

 OmanConvention

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Oman to take part in Venice Arte Biennale

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman will take part for the first time in the 59th Biennale Arte 2022 exhibition, which will be held in Venice, Italy, from April 22 to November 27, 2022. The opening exhibition displays works of three generations of Omani artists, whose activities span 50 years in visual and contemporary arts. The exhibition provides a model for the broad global range of the Sultanate of Oman's cultural history and unique traditions in visual arts. The participating artists represent a continuous stream of influence in Omani art and they include Anwar Sonya, Hassan Meer, Budoor al Riyami, Radhika Khimji and the late Raya al Rawahi. His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth said, "It is a great pleasure for the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, to participate for the first time in the 59th Biennale Arte 2022 Exhibition, which is one of the most prestigious international art fairs. This participation reflects the importance of arts in forming cultural awareness.

It also promotes cultural and intellectual exchange between peoples and communities." Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture, Commissioner-General of the Sultanate of Oman's pavilion in the exhibition said, "The Sultanate of Oman's participation in the 59th Venice Biennale 2022 art exhibition is a testimony to the Sultanate of Oman's prominent position in the world cultural map and the role it plays in supporting artistic works, as well as boosting cultural initiatives and promoting the exchange of expertise in this field. By participating in the exhibition, we strive to achieve the ministry's vision to map of the Sultanate of Oman as a leading cultural destination on the global cultural arena. We also aim to affirm the existing balance between local culture, assimilation and cultural exposure to enable and enhance cultural production on the basis of innovation and creativity. On the sidelines of the Sultanate of Oman's participation, training programmes for the Biennale will be unveiled." — ONA

World Health Assembly's session discusses pandemic preparedness

MUSCAT: The World Health Assembly held an online special session from November 29 to December 1 to discuss an international agreement on pandemic preparedness and response.

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Health (MoH) took part in the event with a delegation headed by Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, with the presence of MoH's Under-Secretary of Health Affairs and senior officials, in addition to in-person attendance of Ambassador Idris bin Abdulrahman al Khanjari, the Oman's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and international organisations in Geneva.

Dr Ahmed stressed in his speech during the event that the special session of the World Health Assembly bears testimony to the commitment of global community to strengthening global health management. He also praised at the same time the dedication of the Working Group



on strengthening WHO response to health emergencies and for keeping the member states updated throughout the process along with its role in analysing the current situation and examining possible options for moving forward.

The health minister confirmed that the International Health Regulations require strengthening via a new international instrument or convention under Article 19 of the Constitution of WHO would complement international efforts aimed at managing pandemics more effectively. He pointed out that the process of developing the

Dr Al Saidi in his speech said that special session of the World Health Assembly bears testimony to the commitment of global community to strengthen global health management. He also praised the dedication of the Working Group on strengthening WHO response to crises

international governance of the health sector and other sectors.

The session considered the benefits of developing a WHO convention, agreement or other international instrument on pandemic preparedness and response with a view towards the establishment of an intergovernmental process to draft and negotiate such instrument, taking into account the report of the Working Group on Strengthening WHO Preparedness and Response to Health Emergencies.

The Sultanate of Oman, in cooperation with the Global Health Centre at the Graduate Institute in Geneva, hosted a regional meeting to consider the options available to member states on the international instrument and its link to the International Health Regulations, as well the difference between international regulations and agreements in the field of health, based on decision adopted by the Member States at the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly (WHA74). — ONA

QATARI COMMANDER VISITS MTC



Maj Gen Fahad Mubarak Al Khayareen, Commander of Joana bin Jassim Joint Command and Staff College of the State of Qatar, visited the Military Technological College (MTC) on Wednesday. The Qatari guest and his accompanying delegation were briefed on the college's education and service facilities, in addition to its general curriculum, technical specialisations and the various educational levels. They also toured several departments and training workshops in the college. — ONA

Global Entrepreneurship Week to focus on development of small firms

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, DEC 1

The Global Entrepreneurship Week 2021, which is organised by the Entrepreneurship Centre at the University of Nizwa, will be held under the auspices of Prof Dr Ahmed bin Khalfan al Rawahi, President of Nizwa University, on Sunday

There will be many events including the launch of the national report of the Global

Entrepreneurship Monitor and signing of the memorandum of understanding with the Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises Development

Around 40 companies will take part in an exhibition for student companies and entrepreneurs during the week. The week will also include several workshops on entrepreneurship. Fekra or (an idea) competition for small and medium enterprises is another event.

The Global Entrepreneurship Week is a worldwide movement of entrepreneurial people, with millions unleashing their enterprising talents and turning their ideas into reality and supporting the development of small and medium companies. The aim is to use entrepreneurship as a basic strategy for developing the national economy and achieving sustainable development.

The event will be held under Covid-19 protocol.

Steep rise in tourists; GCC countries, India top the list

SAMUEL KUTTY

@samuelkuttyvp

Thanks to the progress of vaccination campaigns and the lifting of a number of restrictions, inbound arrivals to the Sultanate of Oman witnessed a steep rise in October this year.

According to a report by National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), a total of 108,000 people visited the Sultanate of Oman during the month with people from the Gulf countries taking the top slot with 51.2 per cent to reach 55,230, followed by Indian, Yemeni and Egyptian visitors.

Although the figures are far from those achieved in the pre-pandemic level, the report points out that, "the number of inbound visitors is 10 times higher compared to the corresponding month in October 2020".

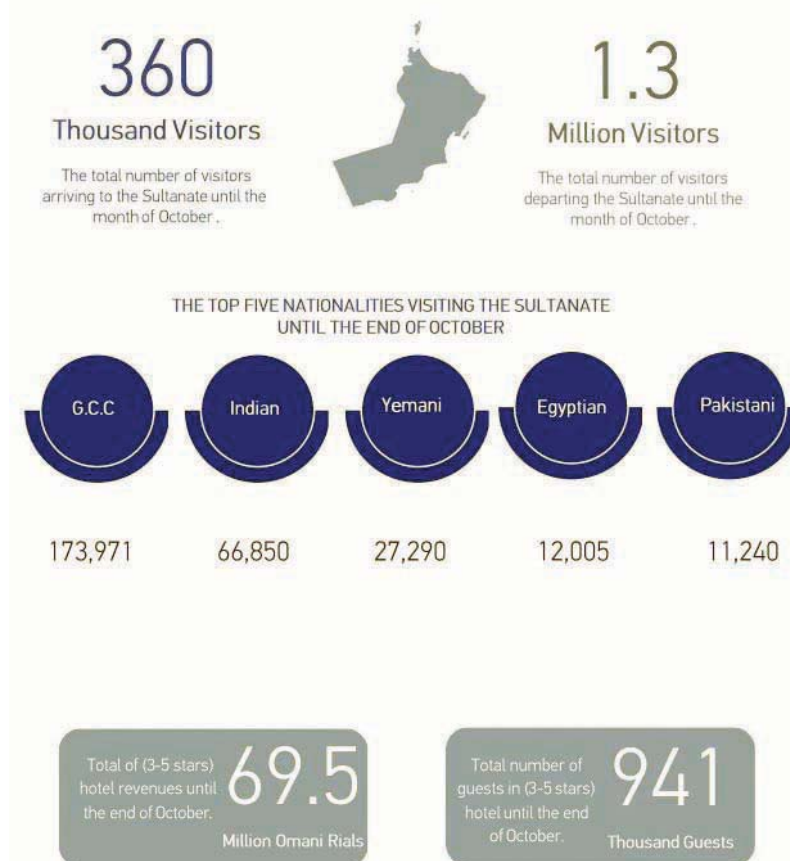
Even as the Sultanate of Oman's hotel industry is reeling with drop in revenues and mounting losses due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the NCSI report shows rise in hotel occupancy during October this year.



Revenue from the hotels in the category of 3-5 stars during the month reached RO 10.1 million, which is 105.8 per cent higher

compared to RO 4.9 million in the same month last year.

The occupancy rate in the hotels in the same category stood at 39.7



per cent with a rise of 84.5 per cent compared to 21.5 per cent in October 2020.

The total number of guests

in the hotels during the month reached 104,300 with an increase of 36.7 per cent.

At the same time, the number of

outbound visitors departing from the Sultanate during October this year reached 246,000 people.

"As many as 104,000 Omanis, forming 57 per cent of the total outbound visitors, left the Sultanate during the month. The increase is 170,000 visitors during the period between October 2021 and the same month in the previous year", the report reveals.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization expects the contribution of tourism to the world economy to be around \$1.9 trillion, which is a slight improvement over last year's \$1.6 trillion. But still far lower than the \$3.5 trillion the industry earned in 2019. Global lockdowns and severe travel restrictions caused international tourism to nosedive by 73 per cent in 2020, with about one billion fewer people travelling abroad than the year before.

But even as vaccines have become more widely available this year, the roll-out has been uneven, and the global tourism industry has struggled to bounce back amid the spread of variants and high infection rates in some parts of the world.

Shabab Oman II heads back home



Shabab Oman II, the sail ship of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), has set sail from Dubai harbour and is heading back home after concluding its participation in Expo 2020 Dubai.

Shabab Oman II took part

in the activities of the National Day dedicated to the Sultanate of Oman on November 21 by opening its doors for the visitors of Expo 2020 Dubai and also received official delegations.

The ship set out on a maritime GCC tour themed “Oman,

A Renewed Approach” that aimed to enliven the Sultanate of Oman’s maritime history and highlight the country’s modern-day achievements and signs of progress and developments being witnessed by the Sultanate of Oman under

the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. The tour incarnated the Sultanate of Oman’s timeless tradition of extending bridges of peace, amity and fraternity among nations of the world.

— ONA

WHO advises elderly to reconsider travel plans

FROM PAGE 1

The latest travel advice further suggests that it is expected that the Omicron variant would be detected in a number of countries as national authorities step up their surveillance and sequencing activities.

“WHO is closely monitoring the spread of the Omicron variant, and studies are ongoing to understand more about these mutations and their impact on transmissibility, virulence, diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines. The TAG-VE will continue to evaluate the Omicron variant, and WHO will communicate new findings with IHR States Parties and the public as needed.”

Based on the WHO observations, doctors affiliated to the Ministry of Health too have shared a word of caution.

Dr Dilip Singhvi, Specialist Internal Medicine, Apollo Hospital says, it’s advisable not to travel to such areas presently or postpone until this disparity of vaccination status is cleared.

“There is an increased risk of getting Covid-19 infection in people who are either not vaccinated or have not taken the full dose as seen in last 11 months since the start of

I agree with the concept of rescheduling travel plans and people should be advised to travel only after full vaccination

DR K P RAMAN

Chairman, Al Hayat Int’l Hospital

vaccination. Areas where the vaccination is not been achieved fully due whatever reasons are seeing the surge, same scenarios of patient overload, many having serious illness, ICU admissions.”

“I agree with the concept of rescheduling travel plans and people should be advised to travel only after full vaccination”, advises Dr K P Raman, Chairman of Al Hayat International Hospital.

Essential personnel, repatriations and cargo transport of essential supplies should continue to be prioritised at all times during the travel restrictions and beyond.

National Museum unveils Incēnsūm Exhibition



MUSCAT: The National Museum on Wednesday unveiled the Incēnsūm exhibition under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Kamil bin Fahd al Said, Assistant Secretary-General for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers.

The exhibition is organised in cooperation with the Italian Embassy in the Sultanate of Oman and the Perfumme Foundation in Turin. It was established in 2017 to promote the culture of scent by organising high-level cultural events.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by Federica Favi, the Italian Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, along with Dr Nora Ourabah Haddad, Representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in the Sultanate of Oman, and a number of people interested in the field of culture and museums.

Jamal bin Hassan al Moosawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, said, “The exhibition “Incēnsūm” embodies the historical value of the frankincense tree, as it represents a bridge to communicate with the

civilisations of the ancient world, where the trade convoys moved on different paths. Long-distance trade in frankincense was ongoing by the 3rd millennium BC and included links to Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley Civilisation and ancient Egypt. In recognition of the importance of the frankincense trade across the ages, four sites have been inscribed on the Unesco World Heritage Sites list: Al-Baleed, Khor Rori (Sumhuram), Shisr (Ubar) and Wadi Dawkah.”

The exhibition features artefacts loaned from the Italian Republic and Omani antiquities that bear witness to ancient traditions dating back thousands of years, and highlights the continuity of Omani-Italian relations through ages, embodied by trade caravans carrying precious frankincense and spices as popular consumer goods in the Western world.

Federica Favi, Italian Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, said the “Incēnsūm” coincided with the sixth Italian Kitchen Week to highlight the relationship between delicious

The exhibition features artefacts loaned from the Italian Republic and Omani antiquities that bear witness to ancient traditions dating back thousands of years, and highlights the continuity of Omani-Italian relations through ages, embodied by trade caravans carrying precious frankincense and spices as popular consumer goods in the Western world



taste and pleasant aromas, as frankincense is a major component of delicious meals.

Dr Nora Ourabah Haddad, Representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in the Sultanate of Oman, said: “We pay respect to this tree, whose species is found only in this region, and because of which trade and cultural exchange flourished throughout history which shows us the importance of preserving the biodiversity. The exhibition is in line with this year’s World Food

Day theme, which highlights how a good environment provides a better life.”

Roberta Sonzato, curator of the exhibition, said: “The exhibition was inspired by the deepest meanings of incense, as frankincense enjoyed a high status in Rome, Tsarist court and aristocratic families. It was as precious as gold, and it became a sacred religious symbol for Christianity.” It is worth noting that the National Museum participated in the

“Incēnsūm” exhibition in the Italian version, which was hosted by the Archaeology Museum in Turin during 2020. The National Museum participated with 9 artefacts related to the Omani scent culture, including the oldest incense burner discovered in the Sultanate of Oman and estimated to be about 4,500 years old, discovered in the Ras al-Jinz area, and ceremonial and ritual incense burners, and a frankincense scraping tool, in addition to an incense case. — ONA

Environment Authority, PDO hold joint annual meeting

MUSCAT: The Environment Authority and Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) held their annual joint meeting in the presence of Dr Abdullah al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority and Steve Phimister, Managing Director of PDO, on Wednesday.

The meeting comes within the framework of the memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed between the Environment Authority and PDO and related to



continued development, exchange of expertise and the participation in the environmental projects, among other fields.

The meeting reviewed what has been achieved in 2021 and 2020 between the Environment Authority and PDO. A joint

work team from the two entities presented the plan for the next year. The meeting also discussed the environmental labs with regard to nauseating smell at the Port of Mina Al Fahal.

The chairman of the Environment Authority and the managing director of PDO held a discussion session that dealt with the activation of the MoU signed between the two parties to encompass other fields of benefit to both entities.

Muscat Derm IV kicks off on Friday

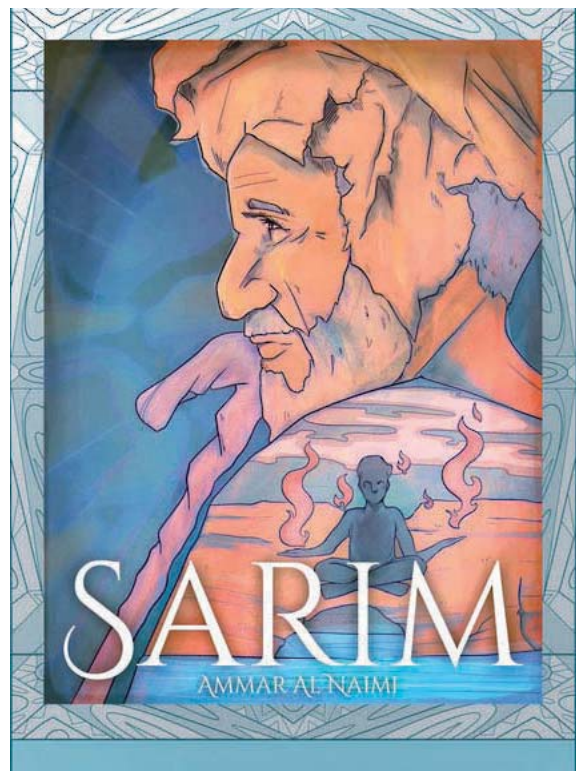
MUSCAT: The two-day Muscat Derm IV International Conference and Exhibition will kick off on Friday. The event is organised by the Ministry of Health (MoH) in cooperation with Oman Dermatology Society (ODS). The conference, to be held at the Grand Millennium Hotel Muscat, aims to enhance means of exchanging experiences in the field of dermatology and related medical specialties.

It also highlights and discusses international developments and challenges in the diagnosis and treatment of various dermatological and

cosmetic diseases. The event seeks to provide the local cadres with the opportunity to display scientific posters on some rare cases and published studies, as well as spotlighting the latest medical technologies in the field of dermatology, cosmetology and medical laser. It is expected that 400 participants from around the world will participate in the event, including heads of associations, experts, and local and international scientific associations, in addition to pharmaceutical companies for dermatology, medical laser, cosmetic and medical devices.

— ONA

Omani Novel brings action, fantasy



MUSCAT: The Omani author Ammar bin Mahfoodh al Nuaimi recently published *Sarim*, an urban action fantasy taking place in Muscat. *Sarim* is a 352-page fantasy novel exploring themes of overcoming self-loathing, exploring oneself and how empowering the youth is truly the way towards brighter horizons.

It follows the action-packed adventures of Mishal, a 15-year-old exorcist aiming to protect humans from malicious Jinn. The novel's cover art was done by Mohammed Al Attar.

Furthermore, *Sarim* is available through local distributors such as family books and local libraries like Al Rudha, Booklands, Pages Muscat and Suika Art Café. Readers and reviewers commented that *Sarim* was the first time they'd been exposed to fantasy revolving around the Sultanate of Oman. About his novel, Al Nuaimi said: "Fantasy has always been my companion, so I find this type of novel the best way to ask questions about the world around us. I want to write fantasy which acts as a refuge, provides fun and doesn't preach to the reader," he said. — ONA



كلية مزون (ش.م.ع.م)

إعلان الدعوة لحضور اجتماع الجمعية العامة العادية السنوية

يسر مجلس إدارة كلية مزون ش.م.ع.م دعوة المساهمين الكرام لحضور اجتماع الجمعية العامة العادية السنوية للشركة والمقرعهده في تمام الساعة الرابعة عصرا يوم السبت الموافق ١٨ / ديسمبر / ٢٠٢١ بمقر الكلية الكائن في مرتفعات المطار. وفي حال عدم اكتمال النصاب القانوني للجمعية سيتم عقد جمعية عامة عادية ثانية في تمام الساعة الخامسة عصرا الموافق ١٩ / ديسمبر / ٢٠٢١ بمقر الكلية الكائن بمرتفعات المطار لمناقشة جدول الأعمال التالي:

- دراسة تقرير مراقب الحسابات والموافقة على الميزانية العمومية وحساب الأرباح والخسائر عن الفترة المالية المنتهية في ٣١ / ٠٧ / ٢٠٢١ م.
- التصديق على بدل حضور جلسات مجلس الإدارة واللجان المنبثقة الذي تقاضاه أعضاء مجلس الإدارة عن الفترة المالية المنصرمة وتحديد مقدار البديل للسنة المالية القادمة.
- دراسة مقترح توزيع أنصبة الأرباح على المساهمين والموافقة عليه.
- وفي حالة وجود أي استفسارات يرجى الاتصال بالمحامي / زكريا اليحياني - المستشار القانوني على هاتف رقم ٩٩٧٨٧٨٧٩

رئيس مجلس الإدارة

المستشار القانوني



Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Defence

ENGINEERING SERVICES

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Ministry of Defence invites Contractors specialized in the under mentioned works and registered with the Govt. Tender Board and Ministry of Defence to participate in the following tender.

Tender No	Tender Name	Contractors Grade	Last Date to Obtain Tender	Tender Submission Date	Tender Price (RO)
014/2021	Construction Work - Sarfait	Excellent	16th December 2021	31th January 2022	1000/-

***For more information about the above Tenders please visit gate number (14)**

- Tender Documents (Electronic Tender Document) can be obtained from the Tender office, Gate No: 14, Muaskar Al Murtafa'a after payment of the tender fee indicated above.
- The Payment should be made electronically by using SMART CARD, VISA CARD and VISA ELECTRON. Sunday to Thursday (0900 - 1300 Hours).
- The Bid to be accompanied by Tender Bond in the value of (1%) of the bid value in the form of a Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local bank and addressed to HE the Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Bids are to be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to HE the Chairman of Tender Committee and marked with Tender Number and Name. Name of Bidder or any other marks should not be printed on the envelopes.
- Bids to be deposited in the Tender office at Gate No: 14 Muaskar Al Murtafa'a before 1300 hours on the assigned day for submission of the Tender.
- We would like to draw your attention to the importance of adherence to the submission date, request and any queries related should not be submitted to MODES fourteen days prior to submission of offer.

You are requested to submit the following items within your tender submission, failure to submit the required information may result a disqualification of your offer without any further notification.

- Percentage of Omanisation within the company supported by an authenticated certificate from the Ministry of Manpower (Updated Copy).
- Detailed priced breakdown to be specified as per scope and drawings.
- Full set of stamped drawings and documents, Tender Form and Tender Bonds to be submitted as hard copy and others documentation shall be as soft copy (USB) in two separate files:
 - Financial (bill 1&2 separated from bill3).
 - Technical files.
- Confirmation of site visit.
- All addendums and circulars.
- List of sub-contractors/suppliers and their acceptance letter to this project.
- List of current and executed projects.
- Valid Registration Certificates from Tender Board.
- Financial Statement for the last Three years.



University of Technology and Applied Sciences COLLEGE OF APPLIED SCIENCES IBRI

DECLARATION OF TENDER

University of Technology and Applied Sciences (College of Applied Sciences Ibri) invites Tenders Contractor firms for below tender:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Company than are Entitled to Participate	Tender Price	Last Date for Buying Tender	The Deadline for Submission of Tenders
03/2021	Operation and Maintenance of Electrical and Mechanical Services of Ibri College of Applied Sciences	Specialized in providing regained service and registered with the Tender Board in Excellent Grade	(25/000 R.O) Twenty Five Rial Omani	11/12/2021	21/12/2021

Tender Documents can be obtained from Administration & finance Affairs at COLLAGE OF APPLIED SCIENCES IBRI, during normal working days starting from **Thursday 02/12/2021 where copies will be distributed from 8:30 am to 2 pm.**

All companies must attach with their bid a temporary insurance in the form of bank guarantee or a certified check from a bank operating in the Sultanate of at least (1%) of the tender value addressed to the Chairman of the tender sub-committee and valid for a period of 90 days from the date of bid submission, and every bid that does not meet the required temporary insurance will not be considered.

Bids shall be submitted signed and sealed on the form prepared for this and on the table of categories accompanying him in envelopes sealed with red wax and titled in the name of the Chairman of the Tender Sub-committee of College of Applied Sciences Ibri and written on it from the outside the number and name of the tender, provided that the name of the bidder is not written on the envelope or what he refers to.

The bids must be placed in the bidding box in the department referred to above. Before ten o'clock in the morning of the day specified in the above schedule; the bids submitted after this date will not be taken into consideration, regardless of the reasons for delay.

Preference will be given to attribution to companies or small and medium enterprises registered with the General Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development whose bid includes the largest percentage of Omanisation and a possible purchase of national products.

The university is not restricted to higher acceptance or any other bid.

**Chairman of the Tenders Sub-Committee
College of Applied Sciences Ibri**



هيئة تنظيم الخدمات العامة Authority for Public Services Regulation

NOTICE

Article (51) of the law promulgated by Royal Decree 78/ 2004 requires the Authority to publish its budget for each financial year. The Authority's budget for 2022 is summarized below:

Master Budget Summary for 2022 - Rial Omani

I	Revenue Budget	2022 Budget	% of Total Budget
	Total 2022 Opex and Capex Budget	7,267,410	
	Less: Estimated Surplus in 2021	(2,167,780)	
	Net Revenue Budget	5,099,631	
	Less: Other Revenue	(40,100)	
	Expenditure recovered through licence fees	5,059,530	
II	Capital Expenditure Budget		
	Infrastructure and digital transformation	223,127	3.1%
	Furniture/Office Building	693,321	9.5%
	Motor Vehicle	60,000	0.8%
	Total Capital Expenditure Budget	976,448	13.4%
III	Operating Expenditure Budget		
	Staff related expenditure	3,995,927	55.0%
	Consultancy fees	1,481,271	20.4%
	Other Direct Costs	286,000	3.9%
	Administrative expenses	527,765	7.3%
	Total Operating Expenditure Budget	6,290,963	86.6%
	TOTAL BUDGET FOR 2022	7,267,410	100.0%

The Authority is responsible for the regulation of the electricity, water and wastewater sectors as well as natural gas transmission in the Sultanate of Oman. The Authority's costs are funded through license fees. Consultancy fees are the estimated costs of undertaking the tasks in the Authority's 2022 Forward Work Programme that is available for review on the Authority's web site: www.apsr.om

Authority for Public Services Regulation
Ominvest Business Center, First floor | Madinat Al Erfan
P.O Box 954, P.C 133, Al Khuwair, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24609700, Fax: 24609701
E- mail: enquiries@apsr.om

Court upholds presidential bid of Libyan prime minister

TRIPOLI: A Libyan appeals court on Wednesday rejected two petitions against interim prime minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah's candidacy in this month's presidential election, Libyan media reported.

The cases argued that Dbeibah was not eligible as he had not quit his post three months before the December 24 vote as required by a controversial electoral law passed in September.

The Tripoli appeals court had agreed to examine the petitions, filed by rival candidates including influential former interior minister Fathi Bashagha.

But on Wednesday, Dbeibah's "appeal was accepted, allowing (him) to take part in the election", his lawyer Abdulraouf Qanbij told journalists at the court.

He added the ruling was "final and cannot be appealed".

Dbeibah, a billionaire tycoon from the western port city of Misrata, was appointed head of a transitional administration in February with a mandate to lead the North African country into parliamentary and presidential elections, part of a United Nations-led peace process aimed at ending a decade of conflict.

The elections have been beset by disputes over their legal basis and deep divisions between prominent candidates including Dbeibah, eastern military chief Khalifa Haftar and Seif al Islam



Libya's interim Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah, seen here after registering his run for the presidency last month. — AFP File

Gaddafi, son of ruler Muammar Gaddafi, whose ouster in a 2011 revolt plunged the country into a decade of violence.

An electoral law signed in September by the speaker of the eastern-based parliament, Aguila Saleh, has sparked anger in the country's west, where many accuse him of bypassing protocol and pushing through legislation favouring a run by his ally Haftar.

Earlier this week, gunmen backing Haftar blocked roads

leading to a court in the southern city of Sebha that had been set to examine an appeal by Seif al Islam Gaddafi after opponents petitioned against his candidacy in the polls.

Judges in the case decided on Tuesday to indefinitely postpone ruling on the case.

On Tuesday, interim interior minister Khaled Mazen said ongoing security incidents could lead to the elections being postponed.

The elections have been beset by disputes over legal basis and deep divisions between prominent candidates

Western officials have lobbied hard for the polls to go ahead as scheduled.

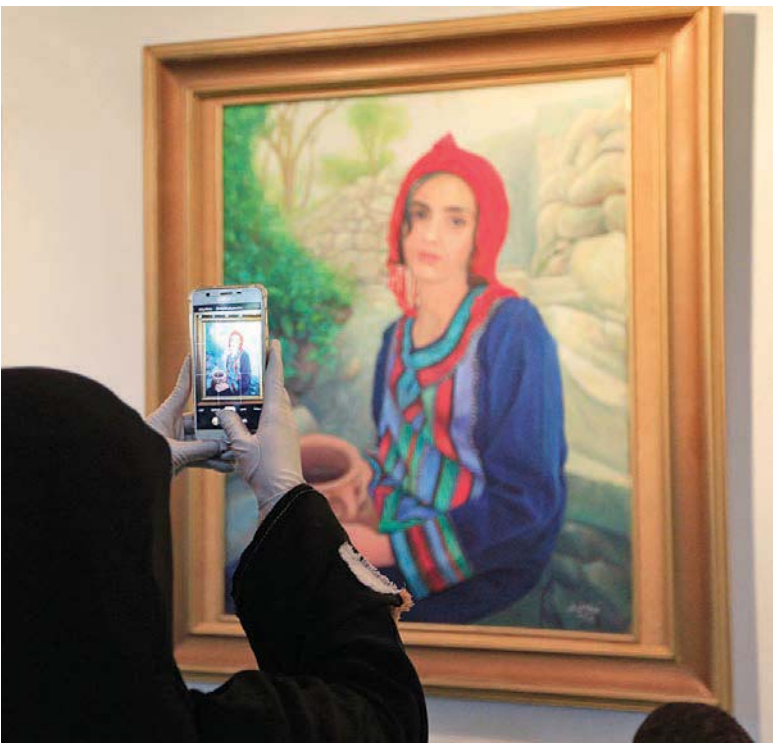
Meanwhile, Libya's electoral commission has said it is ready to organise the process and has published an initial list of candidates and handed out voting cards.

The United Nations has said that nine international organisations have sought accreditations to observe the conduct of the vote.

But despite a year of relative calm since an October 2020 ceasefire between rival eastern and western camps, Libya's deep political divisions remain. Analysts warn that violence could easily flare again.

"The electoral process imposed by the (eastern-based) parliament is so fragile, incomplete and dysfunctional and institutions in (the capital) Tripoli (in western Libya) are so eaten away by political factionalism that the dynamics of violence and polarisation are bound to come back before December 24," said Libya expert Jalel Harchaoui. "That's almost certain, even assuming that the vote somehow takes place." — AFP

■ PLASTIC AS ART MEDIUM



Yemenis visit an exhibition of Yemeni plastic artist Hala al Zuraiki in Sanaa. — AFP

Diplomats warn no time for 'niceties' in Iran N-talks

VIENNA: European negotiators on Tuesday said they will assess the "seriousness" of the Iranian position over the next few days to decide whether to continue with recently resumed talks about reviving the 2015 nuclear deal.

Without wanting to set "an artificial deadline", "we don't have the luxury to spend time on niceties", one of the European diplomats at the talks said, declining to be identified.

"If they don't show that they are serious about this work, then we'll have a problem," diplomats from the E3 nations of Britain, France and Germany said. "The next 48 hours will be very important."

After Monday's formal meeting, groups of experts began work on Tuesday on the sensitive issue of US sanctions, before tackling Tehran's nuclear commitments on Wednesday.

While the EU chair of the talks, Enrique Mora, said he was optimistic at the end of the inaugural session, the diplomats were more measured: "We neither breathed a sigh of relief" nor cried disaster, one of them said.

The diplomats said they hoped to have "a clearer picture by the end of the week", referring to a possible "breakdown" in negotiations if no progress was made. — AFP

From tents to tallest building: UAE's 'remarkable' 50-year rise

DUBAI: Ehab Fouad was a teenager when he marched in the parade marking the birth of the UAE, that has gone from desert outpost to a powerhouse in 50 years. The retired civil engineer, now 64, vividly recalls December 2, 1971, when he proudly held aloft the photo of the Gulf state's founding father, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, and saw its new flag for the first time.

Fouad, who strode directly behind the flag-bearer, tears up when he remembers the Abu Dhabi parade and reflects on the decades that followed.

"Fifty years later, I feel special," said the Egyptian father of one.

"It was a remarkable journey for me, and a remarkable journey for this country," said Fouad, who lives with his family in Dubai, one of the country's seven emirates.

Foreigners make up 90 per cent of the UAE's population, which has grown to 10 million from around 300,000 when its emirates came together to form a federation, even if its laws make most of them ineligible for citizenship.

The former British protectorate has left behind its humble beginnings of tents and simple, mud-brick houses to become one of the biggest players in the Middle East.

Dubai, a former pearling town and now a trade and financial centre, boasts a forest of skyscrapers including the world's tallest building, the 830-metre Burj Khalifa. "Some people here used to build their houses from date tree branches, then mud bricks, and today it is all villas and towers," Fouad said.

The late Sheikh Zayed "worked



A traditional band performs next to a monument at Dubai Expo 2020 celebrating the UAE's 50th anniversary on December 2. — AFP

to unite the seven emirates into a single federation", said Elham Fakhro, senior Gulf analyst at the International Crisis Group think tank. "It remains the only functional system of federalism in the Arab world."

Among the world's top producers of crude, the UAE's rapid growth since the 1970s is linked closely to its oil and gas wealth.

However, Dubai, with scant oil resources compared to the capital Abu Dhabi, has blossomed as a financial, transport, tourist and media hub.

"As a committed regional and international actor, we know we need to take on even more responsibility for the future direction of our region," presidential adviser Anwar Gargash said. — AFP

ALGIERS

Algeria's FLN narrowly wins local polls

Algeria's long-dominant National Liberation Front has narrowly won local elections, preliminary results showed in a vote seen as key in efforts to turn the page on late president Abdelaziz Bouteflika's rule. The FNL, which led the country's war of independence from France and was for decades its only party, won 5,978 seats nationwide, followed by its traditional ally the Democratic National Rally (RND) with 4,584, electoral board chief Mohamed Charfi



said. Independents came third with 4,430 seats, Charfi told journalists. Saturday's vote was an important test for President Abdelmadjid Tebboune. — AFP

MONTREAL

Canada bans travelers from Egypt

Canada on Tuesday banned travellers from Egypt, Nigeria and Malawi over fears of the spread of the new Omicron coronavirus variant, bringing to 10 the number of African countries targeted by Ottawa. "Foreign nationals who have transited or stayed in these 10 countries cannot enter Canada if they have been in those countries in the last two weeks," Health Minister Jean-Yves Duclos told a press conference.

The measure takes effect on



Wednesday, the government said. Any Canadians or permanent residents who have been in any of the 10 countries will need to quarantine on arrival and take a Covid test. — AFP

ISTANBUL

Turkey struggles to contain lira meltdown

Turkey's currency hit yet another record low of over 14 against the dollar before recouping some losses on Wednesday after a central bank move to sell reserves.

The lira traded around 14.01 against the dollar late on Tuesday following President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's remarks about further interest rate cuts before the elections planned in 2023. In an interview on state broadcaster TRT, Erdogan pledged that there would be "no return" from an



export-oriented growth model and that interest rates will drop markedly.

The lira separately fell to an all-time low of 15.7 versus the euro later on Tuesday. — dpa

In brief

■ JAKARTA



RUSSIA, ASEAN HOLD FIRST NAVAL DRILLS OFF INDONESIAN COAST

Russia and a number of Southeast Asian countries kicked off their first ever joint naval exercise along the Strait of Malacca, one of the world's most important shipping lanes, Indonesia's navy said. The drills come at a time of growing tensions in the Pacific, particularly around the South China Sea, which Beijing claims almost in its entirety. All ten members of Asean, Southeast Asia's regional bloc, participated in Wednesday's drills.

Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, Myanmar and Brunei provided warships or aircraft, with the Philippines taking part as a virtual observer. — AFP

■ MANILA



GOOGLE TO HALT POLL ADS AHEAD OF PHILIPPINES VOTE

Google will stop carrying election ads in the Philippines ahead of the May 2022 presidential vote, the Internet giant said on Wednesday, similar to action it has taken in the US. Alarm has been raised in recent years by governments and election watchdogs over the use of targeted political advertising, especially disinformation campaigns to sway voters.

"Google is focusing its efforts and resources on upcoming election-related initiatives which aim to help people access useful and accurate information via product features and media literacy programmes, encourage participation in the voting process, and help protect the integrity of the elections", it said in a statement. — AFP

■ HANOI



FLASH FLOODS KILL FOUR IN CENTRAL VIETNAM

Four people have been reported dead and more than 23,000 houses submerged after two days of heavy rains caused flash floods in Vietnam's central highlands, local authorities said. The victims include four women who were swept away by heavy floods in Kon Tum, Binh Dinh and Dal Lak provinces, located between Da Nang and Nha Trang.

More than 23,600 houses have been inundated in the region, forcing local authorities to evacuate inhabitants to higher ground, Central Committee for Natural Disaster Prevention and Control said. — dpa

Japan halts new incoming flight bookings

TOKYO: Japan suspended all new flight bookings into the country from Wednesday in response to Omicron, ignoring a World Health Organization warning against blanket travel bans as the new coronavirus strain spread further around the world.

Brazil reported the first cases in Latin America of Omicron, which has pushed dozens of countries to impose travel restrictions — mostly targeting southern African nations.

And while the likely futility of such broad curbs was underscored by Dutch authorities reporting that Omicron was present in the country before South Africa reported its first cases on November 25, governments pressed ahead with

OMICRON TRAVEL BAN WARNING



People stand in front of an arrivals board showing cancelled flights at Tokyo's Haneda international airport. — AFP

emergency travel measures.

"We have asked airlines to halt accepting all new incoming flight reservations for one month starting December 1", a Japanese transport ministry official said, adding that existing bookings would not be affected.

Japan confirmed its first Omicron case on Tuesday, and it had already tightened its tough Covid border measures.

Japanese authorities on Wednesday announced they had detected a second infection of the new strain in an arriving traveller — this time in a person arriving from Peru.

Governments elsewhere in Asia also continued to expand curbs

Wednesday, with Indonesia adding Hong Kong and Malaysia listing Malawi on their travel ban lists.

Hong Kong placed Japan, Portugal and Sweden on its highest travel restriction category after the discovery of Omicron there.

These came despite the WHO saying on Tuesday that such "blanket" moves risked doing more harm than good.

In a travel advisory, it warned the bans could ultimately dissuade countries from sharing data about the evolving virus.

But it did advise unvaccinated people vulnerable to Covid-19, including over-60s, to avoid travel to areas with community transmission of the virus. — AFP

Joy as Fiji reopens borders to tourists

NADI, Fiji: Grass-skirted traditional dancers welcomed elated holidaymakers back to Fiji on Wednesday, as the South Pacific nation opened its borders to international travellers for the first time since the pandemic began.

Fiji Airways flight FJ914 from Sydney touched down at Nadi airport at 11.40 am, ending 615 days of international isolation for the tourism-dependent economy. As the plane taxied down the runway, two fire engines lined up and aimed their hoses in the air to honour it with a water salute.

Face coverings obscured the beaming smiles as travellers, some carrying surfboards, made their way through the terminal but cries of "bula" (hello) and Indigenous songs of celebration reverberated around the building.

Australian couple Matthew Brickwood and Danielle Connelly were the first of the 200-plus passengers to clear customs, telling AFP: "Ever since we heard Fiji was opening for its first flight, we decided to just head here."

Fiji Airways Chief Executive Andre Viljoen said it was a "momentous" occasion after a tough 20 months for the tropical bucket-list destination, where tourism accounts for about 40 per cent of the economy. "The international border reopening will reignite Fiji's economy", he told reporters.

Viljoen said strict health measures were in place to contain Covid-19 and the recent emergence of the Omicron variant had not deterred passengers.

"Flights are coming in at full capacity", he said. Fiji has tightened restrictions on arrivals from southern Africa but made no changes to rules surrounding "travel partner" countries, whose citizens can now experience a tropical getaway in the Pacific idyll.

They include New Zealand, the United States and France, as well as countries where Omicron has been detected like Japan, Australia, Canada

Resorts on the two main islands of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu were gearing up for an influx of foreign travellers. We've noted around 75,000 bookings for the next couple of months, which is outstanding. We know our job has just started and we look forward to seeing more tourists coming in 2022

BRENT HILL

Tourism Fiji chief executive

and Britain. Tourism Fiji Chief Executive Brent Hill said resorts on the two main islands of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu were gearing up for an influx of foreign travellers.

"We've noted around 75,000 bookings for the next couple of months, which is outstanding", he said.

"We know our job has just started and we look forward to seeing more tourists coming in 2022."

Foreign visitors need to be fully vaccinated and test negative for Covid-19 prior to departure, as well as providing a 14-day travel history to ensure they have not visited virus hotspots.

Once in Fiji, they must stay in designated zones where all contacts, from hospitality staff to tour operators, will be double jabbed.

Fiji managed to eliminate Covid-19 for 12 months before a devastating second wave of the Delta variant earlier this year caused almost 700 deaths in the nation of one million. — AFP



Holidaymakers are greeted by traditional cultural groups in Nadi as Fiji opens its borders to international travellers for the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic. — AFP



Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

INTERNATIONAL TENDERS NOTICE

The Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following International Retenders:-

Tender No.	Description	Tender Documents Price (R.O)	Class	Last Date for Collection of Documents	Last Date for Submission of Documents
398/2021/MAFWR/HQ-45 Retenders	Supply of Red Split Lentils	25/-	Specialist	Wednesday 01/12/2021	Sunday 05/12/2021
399/2021/MAFWR/HQ-46 Retenders	Supply of Sugar Commodity	90/800	Excellent, First	Wednesday 01/12/2021	Sunday 05/12/2021
400/2021/MAFWR/HQ-47 Retenders	Supply of Thailand Rice	37/800	Excellent, First	Wednesday 01/12/2021	Sunday 05/12/2021

- International specialized and Interested Companies may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman (as required in the tender), and addressed to the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402200 or etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om.
- Note:** Bid Submission will be online only. Scan Copy of Tender Bond needs to be attached in system

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources



هيئة تنظيم الخدمات العامة
Authority for Public Services Regulation

NOTICE

The Authority for Public Services Regulation, Oman (The Authority) in exercise of the powers conferred upon it by Article(109) of the Law for the Regulation and Privatisation of the Electricity and Related Water Sector promulgated Royal Decree(No.78/2004) (the Sector Law), proposes a modifications to the Schedule Charge Restriction Conditions (the "SCRC") of the Distribution and Supply Licenses granted to Muscat Electricity Distribution Company SAOC, Majan Electricity Company SAOC, Mazoon Electricity Company SAOC and Dhofar Integrated Services Company SAOC (collectively the "Licensees").

The modification of the SCRC is required to facilitate implementation of new four-year price controls (effective from 1 January 2022) for the Licensees.

The draft Licences Modification are available for review at the Authority's office or the Authority's website at the addresses mentioned below.

Any person who has any objection to the grant of the Proposed Licence modification shall submit details of their objection to the Authority within 28 days from the date of publication of this Notice.

Any objection submitted after the period stipulated in this Notice will not be considered. Objections shall be submitted to the following address:

The Authority for Public Services Regulation
Ominvest Business Center | Muscat Hills | Airport Heights
Block No 9993 | Building No. 95 | First Floor
Sultanate of Oman, Muscat, Al Khuwair
P.O. Box 954, Postal Code 133
Website: www.apsrom
Email: enquiries@apsrom
Tel: +968 24609700, Fax: +968 24609701

Nigeria boat disaster kills 29, mostly children

KANO: An overloaded boat carrying dozens of passengers, mostly children, capsized in northwest Nigeria, killing at least 29 and leaving another dozen missing, a state rescue agency said on Wednesday.

The tragedy on Tuesday in Kano state was the latest in a string of river transport accidents this year in Nigeria, where overcrowded boats, bad weather and lack of maintenance often contribute to waterway disasters.

"We are still searching for the remaining 13 bodies. Our men and local divers are in the river, hoping to recover the remaining bodies," Saminu Abdullahi, spokesman for Kano state's fire service, said on Wednesday. "We recovered 20 last night and nine this morning. We hope to make progress." Seven others had been rescued, he said.

Abdullahi said the boat was "meant to ferry 12 adults but the skipper had packed such a number of children onboard." The children, most between the ages of eight and 15 from Badau village in Kano state, were on their way to Bagwai, a town on the other side of the river, for a religious ceremony.

Kano State Governor Abdullah Umar Gandje said the boat was carrying about 50 people and cargo when it capsized because of overloading. — AFP



EU chief mulls mandatory Covid jabs as Omicron fears deepen

BRUSSELS: Europe's top official said on Wednesday it was time to "think about mandatory vaccination" as the fast-spreading Omicron variant darkened forecasts and deepened fears of another difficult winter.

Ignoring a WHO warning against blanket travel bans, Japan suspended new flight bookings into the country as the OECD warned that Omicron threatens economic recovery and lowered the growth forecast for 2021.

Rising infection rates have already seen European governments reintroduce mandatory mask-wearing, social-distancing measures, curfews or lockdowns in a desperate attempt to limit hospitalisations, but leaving businesses fearing another grim Christmas.

In Brussels, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said it was "understandable and appropriate" to discuss how to "encourage and potentially think about mandatory vaccination" in the bloc — although only individual member states can impose vaccine mandates.

Austria has already said it will make Covid-19 jabs compulsory next February, Germany is mulling following suit and Greece on Tuesday said it will mandate vaccines for over-60s.

While it could take weeks to prove how infectious and resistant to current vaccines Omicron is, many countries have rushed to ramp up existing programmes, seeing them as the best line of defence.



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen during a press conference on the Global Gateway at the EU headquarters in Brussels. — AFP

From Wednesday, every adult in Italy became eligible for a Covid booster shot, previously only open to those aged over 40. Non-EU members Britain and Norway had already promised booster shots to all adults before the end of January and Easter respectively.

So far, more than a dozen countries and territories have detected Omicron cases, including Australia, Brazil, Britain, Canada, Israel, Italy, Nigeria and Portugal. Dozens of countries have imposed travel restrictions mostly targeting southern African nations.

Global economic body the OECD warned Omicron threatens the world's recovery and lowered growth estimates for 2021 from 5.7 per cent to 5.6 per cent.

The Paris-based organisation said the recovery had "lost momentum and is becoming increasingly imbalanced" and would remain "precarious" until vaccines were deployed worldwide.

Japanese authorities, which had already tightened its tough border measures, on Wednesday said they had detected a second infection of the new strain — this time in a person arriving from Peru.

Other governments in Asia also expanded curbs, with Indonesia adding Hong Kong and Malaysia listing Malawi on their travel ban lists.

"A lot of my neighbours and friends died of Covid-19," said Jakarta resident Jan Pieter Tobing. "Coronavirus is the real deal. So the emergence of Omicron is very terrifying. Honestly, it's scary."

France bucked the trend by announcing flights from southern Africa could land on its territory from Saturday, but only allowing French and EU residents, diplomats and flight crews to disembark.

Even as governments acted unilaterally in imposing travel restrictions, WHO member states came together to work on an international accord on handling the next pandemic. — AFP

Nearly 30 pc of UK birds endangered, report warns

LONDON: Almost 30 per cent of the UK's bird species including greenfinches and swifts are facing serious threat to survival due to factors including climate change, a report published on Wednesday warned.

The "red" list of 70 birds considered most endangered was put together by a coalition of organisations the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) based on the observations of volunteers.

The last such report was published in 2015. RSPB chief executive Beccy Speight said the report "is more evidence that the UK's wildlife is in freefall" and warned: "This really is the last chance saloon to halt and reverse the destruction of nature."

The number of bird species whose populations are in severe decline has almost doubled since the list was first compiled 25 years ago and has grown by three species

The report suggests possible factors including a loss of swifts' traditional nesting sites in wooden eaves of old buildings, as well as climate change



A cuckoo holds a grub in its beak near Horsham in southern England. — AFP File

since the last report.

The red list already contained once common birds such as house sparrows and starlings and contains 11 new species this time, including greenfinches, swifts and house-martins.

The criteria for inclusion include population decline and a reduction in the geographic area where the birds breed.

The latest fall in numbers concerns a broad range of birds with different habitats and feeding preferences, with the report citing pressures including urbanisation, changes to farmland management and invasive species.

This includes insect-eating birds that arrive in the UK in summer months and migrate to sub-Saharan Africa for winter, such as swifts and house-martins.

The report suggested possible factors including a loss of swifts' traditional nesting sites in wooden eaves of old buildings, as well as climate change and droughts in Africa.

Greenfinches, which often live in woods and farmland, went straight from the green to the red list after being hit by a parasite-induced disease.

Waterbirds that spend the winter in the UK such as Bewick's swan also joined the red list, with pressures including shifting of wintering grounds northeast due to milder temperatures. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

LONDON 30,000 UK homes still without power after storm

Tens of thousands of homes in Scotland and northern England remained without power for a fifth day, officials said, following one of the most powerful storms in decades. 'Storm Arwen' — which hit the region late on Friday, killing three people — initially knocked out power for hundreds of thousands of homes following wind gusts of almost 160 kilometres per hour.

By Wednesday morning, engineers had reconnected 97 per cent of the properties, but



around 30,000 were still without power, the Energy Networks Association (ENA) said. Some may not have their power back until the end of the week, it added. — AFP

MUNICH WW II bomb explodes injuring several people

Several people were injured in the explosion of an aerial bomb from World War II in Munich. The detonation occurred at a railway construction site near the city centre, the police said. One person was seriously injured, three others were slightly hurt. Experts from the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Service are involved in the investigation.

Bavarian Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann visited the scene and said that a 250-kg aerial bomb had been hit during



construction work. He wished the people who had suffered injuries a speedy recovery. It's unclear why the bomb was not discovered before the work began in the area. — dpa

WASHINGTON Biden lays out vision to eradicate Aids

President Joe Biden marked World Aids Day with a speech laying out his vision for ending the epidemic in the US by 2030. The White House said Biden will deliver a speech outlining the plan for "redoubling efforts to confront the HIV/Aids epidemic."

The target is for a 75 per cent reduction in new infections by 2025 and 90 per cent by 2030. In the 40 years since US researchers encountered the first cases of what later became known as



Aids, there have been 700,000 US dead and more than 36 million fatalities worldwide.

Today, there are 1.2 million people in the US living with the disease. — AFP

Libya on bumpy road to uncertain elections

HAMZA MEKOUAR

Libya is less than a month from elections seen as crucial to ending its long-running civil war, but deep political divisions could provoke a delay or even fresh violence.

In theory, the North African country is preparing to draw a line under a decade of conflict since the 2011 overthrow of longtime ruler Muammar Gaddafi in a Nato-backed uprising.

Western officials have talked up a UN-led peace process and insist on “inclusive” and “credible” elections starting on December 24, despite serious disputes over how they should be held.

Libya’s electoral commission has said it is ready to organise the process and has published an initial list of candidates and handed out voting cards.

The United Nations has said that nine international organisations have sought accreditations to observe the conduct of the vote.

But despite a year of relative calm since an October 2020 ceasefire between rival eastern and western camps, Libya’s deep political divisions remain. Analysts warn that violence could easily flare again.

“The electoral process imposed by the (eastern-based) parliament is so fragile, incomplete and dysfunctional and institutions in (the capital) Tripoli

(in western Libya) are so eaten away by political factionalism that the dynamics of violence and polarisation are bound to come back before December 24”, said Libya expert Jalel Harchaoui.

“That’s almost certain, even assuming that the vote somehow takes place.”

On Monday, gunmen backing eastern military chief Khalifa Haftar blocked roads leading to a court in the southern city of Sebha that had been set to examine an appeal by Seif al Islam Gaddafi after he was barred from running for president.

Seif al Islam is the second son of the ousted ruler, who was slain in the 2011 revolt.

— AFP

The electoral process imposed by the parliament is so fragile, incomplete and dysfunctional and institutions in Tripoli are so eaten away by political factionalism that the dynamics of violence and polarisation are bound to come back before December 24

JALEL HARCHAOU
Libya Expert



SPREADING AWARENESS

A pedestrian walks past a wall mural depicting health workers to spread awareness about the Covid-19 coronavirus in Mumbai, India.
— AFP

The connectivity war in defence of the migrants



MARK LEONARD

THE WRITER IS DIRECTOR OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS AND THE AUTHOR OF THE AGE OF UNPEACE: HOW CONNECTIVITY CAUSES CONFLICT (BANTAM PRESS, 2021)

Many observers have long assumed that the future of geopolitics will be decided in a sea battle. Yet we could probably learn more by examining the treatment of a few thousand desperate refugees in the twenty-first century’s geopolitical backwaters.

Start with the English Channel. Once the site of some of the most dramatic confrontations in history — from the Spanish Armada and the Napoleonic Wars to the Normandy Landings — it is no longer a theatre for great-power politics. Instead, the recent deaths of 27 civilians whose inflatable boat capsized after leaving the French coast has turned the channel into a site of humanitarian tragedy.

Rather than working together in solidarity with France to root out the migrant smugglers responsible for the deaths, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson immediately sought to play to a domestic political audience by blaming the French in an open letter published on Twitter. Far from just another juvenile political stunt, Johnson’s dereliction of leadership will most likely have dreadful

and far-reaching consequences.

Facing re-election next spring, in a campaign where migration will be a sensitive issue, French President Emmanuel Macron pushed back against Johnson’s boorishness and disinvented the British home secretary from a gathering of European interior ministers in Calais. Owing to a lack of trust on both sides of the channel, each government believes that the other is using the conflict as part of a bigger power play that extends to trade, defence and foreign policy.

While migration has become a political football in Western Europe, it has been fully weaponised in an obscure strip of land between Belarus and Poland. Hardly a popular destination for travellers from the Middle East, Belarus has been flying in migrants from Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria, and then funnelling them to the border with the promise of entry into the European Union.

Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko’s motive is clear: To pressure European governments to relax the sanctions imposed on his regime following last year’s fraudulent

presidential election and tightened after he forced down a commercial airliner to arrest one of its passengers.

Lukashenko is under no illusion that a few thousand migrants would be enough to overwhelm Poland, or even Lithuania. Rather, he understands that the most important battleground nowadays is people’s minds, not territory. Aiming to recreate the images from the EU’s 2015 migration crisis, his use of migrants is ultimately an act of information warfare.

Political scientist Kelly M Greenhill has shown that Lukashenko is far from the first to turn migrants into a tool of government policy. She documents more than 75 occasions when governments — including those of Morocco, Russia, Libya and Turkey — forced civilians from their homes (or encouraged them to flee) in order to achieve some political, military, or economic objective. The weaponisation of migration has become a frequent complement to other forms of pressure such as sanctions, information and cyber warfare, and trade and infrastructure policies.

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As Italy eyes a new president, can Berlusconi bewitch?

ELLA IDE

Billionaire media mogul, Italian prime minister, cruise ship crooner and convicted criminal — after a colourful career, could Silvio Berlusconi, 85, be soon adding head of state to his CV?

Just weeks before secret parliamentary elections next month to choose Italy’s new president, no clear candidate has emerged for a role crucial to keeping the country’s fractious parties in line.

There is intense speculation Prime Minister Mario Draghi might take the job, but in the meantime Berlusconi — despite recent poor health, including a bad bout of coronavirus last year — is on manoeuvres. “Berlusconi will try (to get elected), and could succeed”, Gianfranco Pasquino,

political science lecturer at Bologna’s Johns Hopkins University, said.

Italy’s president has a firefighting rather than a ceremonial role.

The incumbent, Sergio Mattarella — who is bowing out after a seven-year term — was instrumental in bringing in Draghi at the head of a national unity government last February after the previous coalition collapsed.

Draghi, a former European Central Bank chief, has refused to say publicly if he is interested in the presidency. He currently has his hands full managing a vast 200 billion euro post-pandemic recovery fund from the European Union and implementing reforms Brussels expects in exchange.

Many — including Berlusconi — have argued the 74-year-old

should stay until the next general election in 2023 to push through changes considered vital to debt-laden Italy’s economic recovery.

Others believe he could do this as president. Lorenzo Codogno, former head economist at the Italian treasury, says Draghi would “exert considerable influence... as a guarantor versus the rest of the EU on Italy’s reforms and investments”.

In that case, a senior minister would serve as prime minister temporarily before a new one could be approved by parliament.

That could spark party squabbling and risk early elections, however, in which the far-right Brothers of Italy and League parties are expected to do well. Berlusconi, who first burst onto the political scene in 1994, winning over millions of Italians with the help of his vast television

empire, has neither confirmed nor denied he will run.

Several other names circulating include Justice Minister Marta Cartabia, who if successful would be Italy’s first woman head of state, former lower house speaker Pierferdinando Casini, and European Economy Commissioner and ex-PM Paolo Gentiloni.

There are no official candidates. Lawmakers and representatives from each of Italy’s 20 regions can vote for anyone in the secret ballot, provided their choice is over 50 years old. A two-thirds majority is needed to secure victory at any of the first three rounds, after which a simple majority is enough.

“The centre-right will likely vote united for Berlusconi in the first ballot. It will be a sort of lifetime achievement award”,

Codogno said. However, he believes there is “no chance” he could drum up enough votes to secure a majority.

Pasquino said the media magnate could “get the votes by promising places in the next legislature”, pointing out that Berlusconi was convicted in 2015 of buying the vote of a senator, although he appealed and the case expired before a final resolution.

But it would be a “gigantic conflict of interest... to have the owner of three television channels and two newspapers as president”.

The tycoon, who did a year of community service for tax fraud in 2014, also has “a very complicated past” which would work against him, Pasquino said. Berlusconi is currently embroiled in two trials over allegations he paid witnesses to lie about his parties. — AFP

BERLUSCONI, WHO FIRST BURST ONTO THE POLITICAL SCENE IN 1994, WINNING OVER MILLIONS OF ITALIANS WITH THE HELP OF HIS VAST TELEVISION EMPIRE, HAS NEITHER CONFIRMED NOR DENIED HE WILL RUN

OMAN  DAILY

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f t i y u



INTERNATIONAL TENT PEGGING TRADITIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP TO BEGIN TODAY

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 1

The International Tent Pegging Federation (ITPF) is all set to begin the competitions of the inaugural edition of International Tent Pegging Traditional championship which will begin in Duqm on Thursday. HH Sayyid Loay bin Ghalib al Said will preside over the opening ceremony in presence of the ITPF chairman, Mohammed bin Issa al Fairuz and top dignitaries.

The technical meeting and official draw took place on Wednesday. The three days event will feature participation of 19 countries including: Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Malaysia, Iraq, Yemen, UK, Germany, Norway, Iran, Russia, Pakistan, Canada, USA, Sudan, Palestine, Syria and the hosts the Sultanate of Oman. The organising committee decided on withdrawal of South Africa in line with the directions of Supreme Committee entrusted with undertaking measures to

The organising committee worked hard during the last period to complete all the preparations ahead of the championships. The competitions venue is ready and the teams and riders began the training sessions. Each team is allowed to have two rounds of training to stand on the final readiness

YOUSUF BIN ALI AL HOOTI
ITPF vice-chairman

tackle developments resulting from Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic on the ban of some African countries including South Africa.

Yousuf bin Ali al Hooti, vice-chairman of ITPF, said that



all the technical and logistics preparations are completed. "The organising committee worked hard during the last period to complete all the preparations ahead of the championships. The competitions venue is

ready and the teams and riders began the training sessions. Each team is allowed to have two rounds of training to stand on the final readiness," he said. Al Hooti affirmed that during the technical meeting, all the

team managers have been informed to strictly follow the preventive measures against Covid-19 pandemic. "We hope all the teams and riders can fully adhere to the medical protocol measures to ensure the safety of

all the participants and organise a safe championships," he ended.

The championship will feature many events including Individual lance, Pairs lance and team lance (show). The technical system on total score will be based on four runs to be counted for individual and pairs.

Ride out if necessary one run team lance on 2.5 cm peg while Ride out if necessary one run individual lance on 2.5 cm peg. The winning team who will score the highest points in the team's runs (points are not counted in the overall total). The Sultanate of Oman team will be presented by the riders Hamed al Riyami and Safwan al Maamari. The head coach of the national tent pegging team said that the Sultanate of Oman riders are in full readiness to compete in the top event. "The selection of the riders was based on some technical requirements. The selected riders showed top performance during the local tournament and we hope to register top points in the championship," he concluded.

Germany knock out Britain to reach Davis Cup semifinals

Innsbruck, Austria: Kevin Krawietz and Tim Puetz beat British doubles pair Joe Salisbury and Neal Skupski in two tight sets to send Germany through to the Davis Cup semi-finals on Tuesday.

The Germans saved four set points in a tense opening tie-break in the decisive rubber in Innsbruck before edging in front. Salisbury and Skupski looked destined to force a third set after surging 5-0 ahead in another tie-break, but Krawietz and Puetz won the final seven points to book a clash with Russia or Sweden in Madrid on Saturday.

"It's great, it's an unbelievable feeling," said German captain Michael Kohlmann.

"We had super team chemistry. We had a tough loss today and on

Sunday and this team is capable of getting over these unexpected things."

Dan Evans had swatted Peter Gojowczyk aside 6-2, 6-1 in just 55 minutes to give Britain, playing without brothers Andy and Jamie Murray, the lead.

But Jan-Lennard Struff defeated British number one Cameron Norrie 7-6 (8/6), 3-6, 6-2 to pull Germany level at 1-1.

World number 51 Struff saved two set points in the opener and broke the 12th-ranked Norrie twice in the decider to set up a winner-takes-all showdown in the doubles.

"I'm very happy the way I played today, Cam Norrie is a very tough competitor, who is fighting very hard," said Struff.

"It's tough - I had the feeling I had to put the pressure on him - I made it today."

Norrie fell 4-1 behind in the first set but broke twice and was serving for it at 6-5. Struff, Germany's top singles player in the absence of Alexander Zverev, promptly hit back to take the set to a tie-break.

Indian Wells champion Norrie led 6-4 only to see Struff reel off the final four points to snatch the first set.

A single break earned Norrie the second set, but Struff kept Germany in the competition by closing out victory with four games in a row.

Earlier, world number 25 Evans won the first four games of the match against Gojowczyk



Germany's Kevin Krawietz celebrates as he and Tim Puetz (not in picture) win the men's doubles quarterfinal against Britain at the Davis Cup. — AFP

and broke five times to complete a convincing victory.

Gojowczyk, ranked 86th, was given the nod ahead of Dominik Koepfer for the opening rubber but struggled badly on serve and double-faulted four times in two games as Evans raced into a 4-0 lead.

Evans broke three more times in a one-sided second set, rebounding well from a shock loss to Czech world number 143 Tomas Machac in the group stage on Sunday.

Croatia became the first team to reach the semi-finals on Monday by defeating Italy 2-1. They await the winner of Wednesday's quarter-final between Novak Djokovic's Serbia and Kazakhstan. — AFP

Mendis strikes for Sri Lanka as WI collapse

THE WEST INDIES
FELL APART
AGAINST THE
BOUNCE OF
THE NEW BALL,
THOUGH MENDIS
WAS DENIED
A SEVENTH
WICKET WHEN
WICKETKEEPER
DINESH
CHANDIMAL
DROPPED KEMAR
ROACH ON EIGHT

GALLE, SRI LANKA: Ramesh Mendis led the Sri Lanka fightback at Galle with a six-wicket haul to bowl out the West Indies on day three of the second Test on Wednesday.

The off-spinner belatedly found his line and length, dismissing Nkrumah Bonner to end a 75-run stand with West Indies captain Kraigg Brathwaite.

It broke a two-session drought for Mendis, who then ran through the tourists' middle order to leave the West Indies all out for 253 after tea, a lead of 49.

The West Indies fell apart against the bounce of the new ball, though Mendis was denied a seventh wicket when wicketkeeper Dinesh Chandimal dropped Kemar Roach on eight.



Sri Lanka's Ramesh Mendis shows the ball as he leaves the field at the end West Indies' first innings during the third day of the second Test. — AFP

Left-arm spinner Lasith Embuldeniya dismissed Brathwaite with a ball pitched on leg-stump that turned away sharply from the right-hander to

clip the top of off-stump.

The West Indies, who are yet to win a Test match in Sri Lanka, were looking at a decent total and a considerable first-innings lead

when they finished on 145-2 at lunch.

Brathwaite's straightforward footwork and impregnable defence were a vital bulwark for

SCOREBOARD

SRI LANKA FIRST INNINGS: 204

West Indies first innings (O/n: 69/1)

K Brathwaite b Embuldeniya72
J Blackwood lbw Jayawickrama44
N Bonner lbw Mendis35
R Chase lbw Mendis22
S Hope c Asalanka b Mendis10
K Mayers (not out)36
J Holder lbw Mendis4
J Da Silva b Mendis0
K Roach c de Silva b Jayawickrama8
V Permaul b Embuldeniya15
J Warrican c sub b Mendis1

Extras (NB-6)6

Total (all out, 104.2 overs)253

Fall of wickets: 1-62, 2-137, 3-166, 4-180, 5-191, 6-197, 7-197, 8-208, 9-246

Bowling: S Lakmal 9-3-22-0, L Embuldeniya 35-13-94-2, R Mendis 34-2-80-6, P Jayawickrama 25-4-59-2, D de Silva 1-0-8-0

the West Indies after two top-order collapses in the first Test.

The skipper cashed in when loose balls were on offer and was relentless against Sri Lanka's two left-arm spinners, forcing the hosts to recalibrate to boundary protection.

But the afternoon collapse saw the visitors hand the initiative back to Sri Lanka on a fast deteriorating wicket.

The second Test has been plagued by inclement weather and bad light.

Sri Lanka are without the services of leading batsman Angelo Mathews with a hamstring tear. He is not fielding and will bat only if required.

Sri Lanka lead the two-Test series 1-0. — AFP



Annual tennis tournament at ISC court

MUSCAT: Much awaited Indian Social Club Oman annual tennis tournament took off at the ISC Tennis court on 23rd November. In addition to the club members event, men's doubles and veteran's doubles opened for all nationalities.

In the combined event of girls and boys under 12, little girl Sanabhi Ail beat Nuaim Shanawaz in the finals scoring 8-5.

Undoubtedly both are best players but Sanabhi had to muster all her resources to stave off the determined challenge of Nuaim before emerging winner with scores of 8-5. In other matches, Jaza Junaith beat Steve scoring 6-2 while Nuha beat Rahul scoring 8-5 and Devdutt beat Atif 8-1. Rohit beat Kashyap scoring 8-5 while Darsag beat Neil 8-0 and Shantanu beat Nuha scoring 8-1.

The countdown is on to this weekend's Himam Trail Run Race



MUSCAT: This Friday, 3 December, more than 420 trail runners will take their place on the start line at Birkat Al Mouz for an endurance test as the second Himam Trail Run Race gets underway. Runners from 35 countries have registered for the event, including over 40 female participants, far surpasses the previous inaugural edition.

The expanded field of runners will all begin at 6:15 am, with the first athletes taking part in the 20 km race due to finish after four hours. Runners completing the 35 km course have eight hours to finish and those taking part in the 70 km race must finish within 18 hours. Local favourites Hamdan al Khatri, Sami al Saidi, Saleh al Saidi, Adil al Subaihi and Abdelnasser al Riyami, will join notable international ultra-trail marathon runners including eight-time winner of the Marathon des Sables, Rachid El Murabity of Morocco and three-time Oman Desert Marathon



medallist Evgenii Glyva from the Ukraine on the 70 km course.

Each race has been meticulously-designed to include traditional walkways and a variety of terrains to challenge even the most experienced of runners. All three courses feature steep climbs from 350m to 2,210m through the village of Al Muaydin and nearby date plantations before turning for home and concluding with a gentle descent to the finishing

line.

The 70 km race this year is recognised by the International Trail Running Association (ITRA) and carries three points for each finisher which helps towards ranking positions and entry into the world's toughest ultra-trail marathon races.

The Himam Trail Run Race is organised by Himam Adventure, under the umbrella of Al Sahwa Team, Nizwa Club and supported by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Investment Promotion and the Authority for SME Development (Riyada) in Al Dakhiliyah. The event is sponsored by Petroleum Development Oman, gold sponsors Oman LNG, Ooredoo and bp Oman and silver sponsors the Golden Tulip Nizwa and Mazoon Dairy. For updates on the race, please follow @himam_adventure on Instagram.



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Recall Segment: Airbags

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Model Year	Division	Vehicle Model	Affected Vehicle Vin Range	No. of Affected Vehicles in Oman
2007-2014	Cadillac	Escalade	1GYFK13209R110802 to 1GYS47EFXER144560	292
2007-2014	Cadillac	Escalade ESV	1GYFC16229R145124 to 1GYS48FXDR280966	41
2007-2013	Cadillac	Escalade EXT	3GGT49EF6BG317894 to 3GYFK12289G116591	6
2007-2013	Chevrolet	Tahoe	1GNFK13J07J180333 to 1GKUKEEXAR234754	3148
2007-2014	Chevrolet	Suburban	1GNFK16308J241419 to 3GNKG26K87G317258	407
2007-2014	Chevrolet	Silverado LD	1GCNK9E00BZ226759 to 3GCRKSEA2AG260606	366
2007-2013	Chevrolet	Silverado HD	1GC1K9CG0BF128055 to 1GCHK29K98E127258	52
2007-2014	Chevrolet	Avalanche	3GCFK12358G282337 to 3GCTK7E77CG212237	25
2007-2013	GMC	Yukon	1GKFK03209J104758 to 1GKUKEEFAR246674	2333
2007-2014	GMC	Sierra LD	1GTEK14J17Z568479 to 3GTRKVE3XAG244883	787
2007-2014	GMC	Yukon XL	1GKFK06209J11818 to 1GKUKMEFXAR270516	553
2007-2014	GMC	Sierra HD	1GD329CG0BF244084 to 1GTJK99K69E126015	91

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Oman Rally Sohar

International gets underway today

MUSCAT: Oman Rally Sohar International 2021 gets under way with a ceremonial start at Al Qurum from 6 pm on Thursday (tomorrow) evening. Organised by the Oman Automobile Association, the 12-stage event is the final round of the 2021 FIA Middle East Rally Championship has attracted a dozen crews in the international section and a further 11, who will tackle the second and third rounds of the Oman Rally Championship. Slight revisions to the route

mean that competitors will now tackle 214.38 competitive kilometres in a route of 685.97 km. Repeat runs through three gravel special stages make up the route for Friday's action with the 22.04 km of the Al Khoudh stage getting the on-stage drama under way at 09.33hrs. A first run through the Misfah and Saal specials precedes a lunchtime return to service before the three tests are repeated in the afternoon.

Runs through Abyad (13.09 km), Qalqal (17.17 km) and Nakhl (19.26 km) are on the agenda for Saturday morning, before another regroup and service stop. The three specials are repeated in the afternoon before the prize giving and podium finish take place at Al Qurum from 16.52hrs onwards. While 17-time regional rally champion Nasser Saleh al Attiyah is the firm favourite for overall honours in the main FIA event, there are numerous contenders for honours in the

ORGANISED BY THE OMAN AUTOMOBILE ASSOCIATION, THE 12-STAGE EVENT IS THE FINAL ROUND OF THE 2021 FIA MIDDLE EAST RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP HAS ATTRACTED A DOZEN CREWS IN THE INTERNATIONAL SECTION AND A FURTHER 11, WHO WILL TACKLE THE SECOND AND THIRD ROUNDS OF THE OMAN RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Oman Rally Championship section that runs behind. Four Mitsubishi Lancers, a pair of Toyota Yaris, a Kia Rio, two Can-Ams and as many Yamahas grace the national entry. Seeded at 20 and topping the list is Hamid al Qasmi in his Mitsubishi. He faces competition in the N4 group from Haitham al Soomar, Hamood al Touqi and Ghaith al Qasmi. The Toyotas of Waheeb al Kharousi and Yaqdhan al

Rashdi are categorised in Group A, while Musab al Soomar's Kia is the sole entrant in the RC3 class. With the FIA T4 and T3 sections becoming increasingly popular around the world in cross-country events, it is no surprise that four vehicles are entered in Oman. Rally veteran Nizar al Shanfari wheels out his Can-Am alongside the similar car of Khalid al Shanfari and a pair of Yamaha YXZs, driven by Lebanon's Alan Nawfel and local driver Mohammed al Shanfari.

Juventus see off Salernitana, Atalanta close in on summit

MILAN: Juventus escaped Salernitana with a hard-fought 2-0 win on Tuesday which brought some positivity after a difficult week, while Atalanta are on the heels of Serie A's leaders following a Mario Pasalic-inspired 4-0 win over Venezia. Paulo Dybala and Alvaro Morata struck the goals which gave struggling Juve the points at the Stadio Arechi but they stay seventh, seven points behind Atalanta who sit fourth in the final Champions League spot. "Right now more than ever we need a sense of responsibility. We don't need to do anything out of the ordinary, we need to do the normal things but with intelligence... today we did that", said Giorgio Chiellini to DAZN. Dybala lashed home the opener in the 21st minute after a neat one-two with Dejan Kulusevski and 10 minutes later Juve thought they had doubled their lead through captain Chiellini. However after the veteran defender had celebrated pushing home the rebound following Juan Cuadrado's free-kick thwacking the post, the goal was ruled out by VAR officials who spotted Moise

Kean straying fractionally offside as the Colombian struck his shot. From there Juventus dominated proceedings but could count themselves very lucky not to enter the final half an hour level with their promoted opponents when, after a confused Juve defence allowed a cross to wriggle out to Luca Ranieri, the 22-year-old could only fire onto the post from close range. And with 20 minutes remaining Morata made sure of the points for the away side with a deft flick after Federico Bernardeschi's deflected cross fizzed into him. Dybala then skied a stoppage-time penalty and wasted an opportunity to make the scoreline more emphatic, but few in black and white will care after two embarrassing defeats to Chelsea and Atalanta and a criminal investigation into club accounts and transfer dealings. **Pasalic inspires Atalanta** Pasalic hit a hat-trick as Atalanta continued their superb recent run of form in Bergamo to move within four points of league leaders Napoli, who face Sassuolo on Wednesday. After an impressive win at Juve



Juventus' Alvaro Morata (L) controls the ball prior to shoot and score his side's second goal during the Serie A match against Salernitana. — AFP

at the weekend, Atalanta won their fourth straight league match thanks to Pasalic's treble and a Teun Koopmeiners strike which puts them level on 31 points with Inter Milan in third. Gian Piero Gasperini's Atalanta are unbeaten in eight in Italy and

cannot be discounted from the title race after swatting promoted Venezia aside despite making a raft of changes from Saturday's win over Juve in Turin. Pasalic made it an uphill battle for the away side when he collected Josip Illicic's perfect

through ball before sliding in his seventh-minute opener, and the Croat rifled home the second five minutes later. Venezia never looked like responding from their early setback and Koopmeiners made absolutely sure of the points just

before the hour mark, arrowing in his first ever Serie A goal from the edge of the box after a neat exchange of passes between Illicic, Pasalic and Giuseppe Pezzella. And Pasalic completed a perfect evening for him and his high-flying team with a simple finish 10 minutes later following dazzling dribbling from Luis Muriel. After the match Atalanta president Luca Percassi announced that Gasperini had signed a contract extension until 2024, with the option for another year. In Florence, Dusan Vlahovic extended his lead at the top of the league's scoring charts with his 12th of the season to put Fiorentina ahead in the 32nd minute against Sampdoria after Jose Callejon had levelled Manolo Gabbiadini's 15th-minute opener for the away side. Riccardo Sottill made it three just before the break to earn Vincenzo Italiano's side, who collapsed at Empoli at the weekend, a welcome 3-1 win which puts them on 24 points in sixth, above Juve on goals scored. — AFP

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Oman, EU ink Air Transport Agreement

LANDMARK PACT: Agreement establishes a set of air transport rules for greater open skies cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the European Union

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 1

Following nearly two years of negotiations, Oman's Civil Aviation Authority formally initialled on Wednesday a Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement with the European Union and its Member States, signalling the Sultanate of Oman's ambitions for a more liberalised air traffic accord with the European Union.

The agreement strengthens both parties' commitment to fair access to markets for the Sultanate of Oman and all EU Member States and is an



important first step in a planned 5-year implementation leading up to a fully formalised open skies accord.

The initialling was witnessed by Oman's Civil Aviation Authority President Eng Naif bin Ali al Abri; Najeem

Sulaiman al Abri, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Kingdom of Belgium, and Head of the Omani Mission to the European Union and Henrik Hololei, Director-General for Mobility and Transport of the European Commission.

The Sultanate of Oman holds bilateral third and fourth air freedom rights with several EU Member States, including France, Germany and Italy.

The Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement paves the way for the Sultanate of Oman

The agreement strengthens both parties' commitment to fair access to markets for the Sultanate of Oman and all EU Member States and is an important first step in a planned 5-year implementation leading up to a fully formalised open skies accord

to increase flight frequencies on existing European routes and add other European destinations for the national carrier Oman Air (WY) and Salam Air (OV).

Reciprocally, the Agreement will allow EU airlines to fly to all Omani airports from their home country or from any other EU Member State.

Currently, Air France and KLM are the only EU airlines that fly direct to Muscat International airport (MCT) — the agreement effectively aims to ease market access to the Sultanate of Oman

for more EU airlines. Besides market access, the agreement also contains provisions on a number of other important aspects of aviation including commercial opportunities, doing business, safety, security, air traffic management, environment, fair competition and social aspects.

Eng Al Abri said, "We are delighted to initial today's Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement with the European Union and its Member States which further strengthens the mutual cooperation and air connectivity between the Sultanate of Oman and European Union. Greater economic development through increased air traffic is just one of many benefits of an open skies agreement, and we are extremely confident that the inherent opportunities for tourism and an entire ecosystem of interconnected industries will flourish."

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A man works at a construction site in central Beijing, China. — Reuters

OECD cuts world growth forecast

PARIS: The OECD warned on Wednesday that the Omicron coronavirus variant threatens the global economic recovery as it lowered the growth outlook for 2021 and appealed for a swifter rollout of Covid vaccines.

The global economy is now expected to expand by 5.6 per cent this year, down from an earlier forecast of 5.7 per cent, the OECD said in its updated economic outlook which warns that low vaccination areas could create "breeding grounds" for deadlier virus mutations. Its forecast for 2022 remains unchanged at 4.5 per cent, but the report was released only days after Omicron was detected.

"We are concerned that the new variant of the virus,

the Omicron strain, is further adding to the already high levels of uncertainty and risks, and that could be a threat to the recovery," OECD chief economist Laurence Boone said at a press conference.

The report by the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development said the global recovery is continuing to progress. But it warned that it "has lost momentum and is becoming increasingly imbalanced".

While the OECD said it was "cautiously optimistic" about the recovery, it warned that health, high inflation, supply chain bottlenecks, and potential policy missteps are "all key concerns".

— Reuters

KEY FACTORS: Natural conditions, geographical location and market access position Duqm strongly in future green fuels industry

CONRAD PRABHU
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Port of Duqm, the newest maritime gateway of the Sultanate of Oman, says it is taking steps to position itself as the country's leading hub for the handling and export of green hydrogen to markets within the region and beyond.

The port's proximity to areas within Al Wusta Governorate, where large swathes have been earmarked for mega-scale solar and wind-based renewable energy projects necessary for the production of green fuels, is a key factor in its value proposition as an export hub for hydrogen.

So is its linkage with the Belgian Port of Antwerp, which is not only a potential market for green hydrogen, but also a key entry point for the import of the carbon-neutral fuel for European markets, according to Reggy Vermeulen, CEO — Port of Duqm.

Speaking during the Green Hydrogen Summit Oman (GHSO),



Port of Antwerp, as the host of the world's second largest petrochemical cluster, has quite a bit of experience in setting up clusters of any type of industry in a single location — something we are trying to replicate here within the green hydrogen space

REGGY VERMEULEN
CEO, Port of Duqm

which concluded at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) on Wednesday, Vermeulen noted that Port of Antwerp — a shareholder in the consortium that operates and manages Port of

Duqm — is well-placed to play an important role in supporting the Sultanate of Oman's green hydrogen vision.

"Port of Antwerp, as the host of the world's second largest petrochemical cluster, has quite a bit of experience in setting up clusters of any type of industry in a single location — something we are trying to replicate here within the green hydrogen space."

In addition to the abundance of solar and wind resources in the hinterland of the port, there is near limitless land available for solar and wind farms within and beyond the Special Economic Zone in Duqm, said Vermeulen.

Also within the close proximity of the port itself, "thousands of hectares" of land is available for investments linked to the downstream end of the green hydrogen value chain, including electrolyser and desalination plants, ammonia and methanol projects, and other support infrastructure.

Besides, large intake systems already in place at Duqm will allow for water to be drawn from the sea for green hydrogen production, he stated.

Further underscoring Port of Duqm's appeal is the presence of a major liquid terminal suited for the handling and storage of green fuels,

said the CEO.

"Two years ago, we took the bold step of reserving within the port's masterplan the allocation of land for green molecules production; so there is not only space onshore for green hydrogen production, but around 50 per cent of the liquid terminal's capacity is also reserved for green (fuels). That means we are not going to have any bottlenecks in our capacity to export green (fuels) to international markets."

Additionally, the location of Duqm will enable relatively convenient access to regional and international markets, said the CEO. One such market is the Port of Antwerp, which is a huge consumer of hydrogen for its petrochemical and transport industries.

The Belgian port will also be an important landing port for the import of Omani green molecules to support decarbonisation needs of Belgium and other European states, he said. Likewise, Port of Duqm is ideally located to support the shipment of locally produced green fuels to markets in the Indian subcontinent, Africa and the Middle East. Besides, industrial hubs within the Sultanate of Oman, notably at Suhar and Salalah, can be served via the maritime route in the absence of overland piped supply, he added.

Bank Muscat customers can easily apply for prepaid cards through Internet, mobile banking



MUSCAT: Bank Muscat has launched another new feature in its Mobile Banking application and Internet Banking for the benefit of its customers in line with its vision “To serve you better, everyday” and commitment to innovation reflecting the latest technological trends.

Customers can now easily apply for a Bank Muscat Prepaid card by logging into Internet Banking or the Mobile Banking application on their smartphones. The bank will receive and process the application, and customers can pick up their personalised prepaid card later from their chosen delivery branch.

Amjad bin Iqbal al Lawati (pictured), Assistant General Manager - Cards and eBanking, Bank Muscat, said: “As the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, the bank has been continuously implementing state-of-the-art technology and we are happy to launch this new service which once again enhances ease of banking and customer convenience.

The bank aims to be future-ready in order to serve its tech-savvy customers in the best possible manner and is encouraged by the rapid shift to digital and contactless payments.

The new application process continues the bank's customer-centric strategy of launching new services and products that improves financial inclusion and offers new, convenient and highly secure e-payment options for the benefit of our valued customers.”

Sohar International CEO honoured with ‘Business Leader of the Year’ Award

MUSCAT: In recognition of his exemplary business leadership and role in Sohar International's transformation journey, Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, has been honoured with the coveted ‘Business Leader of the Year Award’, at the recent Alam Al-Iktisaad Awards 2021.

Under the able leadership, Ahmed al Musalmi, Oman's premium banking institution, Sohar International has been on a strong growth trajectory setting several industry benchmarks, scaling new heights and achieving commendable milestones.

The event was held on November 30, at the Majan Ballroom in Al Bustan Palace Hotel under the auspices of Maithaa al Mahrouqiyah, Under-Secretary — of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism, along with senior leaders from Oman's corporate world.

“It is indeed a proud moment for us at Sohar International on this honour awarded to Al



Musalmi. I believe that he is truly deserving of this title and on behalf of the Board of Directors, I extend my best wishes to him.

The stellar performance recorded by Sohar International is a testament to Al Musalmi's commitment, determination and ambition to fulfil the bank's

strategic objectives while making a positive impact in the lives of the bank's customers and stakeholders.

He has played a pivotal role in Sohar International's meteoric success, spearheading change and shaping a new identity for the bank, driven by a business model

that goes beyond banking”, said Mohammed bin Mahfoudh al Ardhi, Chairman of the Board of Directors at Sohar International as he congratulated Al Musalmi on his win.

“With industry-leading initiatives geared at digitalisation, innovation and achieving

excellence in all areas of operations, Sohar International's leadership has ensured a strong financial performance in 2021.

The bank crossed RO 4 bn in total assets within a short span of three years while reflecting a phenomenal growth of over 40% despite a tough operating environment.

We are certain that Al Musalmi will continue to attain more accolades in the years to come as he leads Sohar International to greater achievements.”

Ahmed al Musalmi has been a prominent figure in the Sultanate of Oman's banking and finance industry, exemplifying his leadership acumen, by inspiring change, building a culture of innovation, and inculcating the spirit of winning in every member of the bank's team.

He was named the “CEO of the Year” within the banking sector at the Oman Banking and Finance Awards 2020 for his strategic thinking, transformational vision and futuristic outlook.

BankDhofar to provide a proactive calling service in Oman

MUSCAT: In translation of its endeavour to offer the best customer experience, BankDhofar provides proactive calling service via Interactive Voice Notification (IVN).

Being the first bank in the Sultanate to provide this innovative service, BankDhofar aims to be in touch and engaged with its customers around the clock.

The proactive calling service provided by BankDhofar's Customer Engagement Hub, through the Interactive Voice Notification (IVN) system, assists customers proactively in cases of exceeding ATM pin entry attempts, to reset their PIN, forgetting Mobile Banking App password, reset their password, attempting to withdraw or swipe more than the debit card daily



limit and increase their daily ATM and POS limit.

Commenting on the service, Abu Baker Karim al Balushi (pictured), Head of Digital Banking at BankDhofar said: “At BankDhofar, we pay great

attention to our customers' satisfaction. We understand that engaging with the customers 24/7 is crucial to guarantee their satisfaction. Thus, we have taken this concept even further, where we approach our customers before they approach us by calling them to lend them help in various scenarios. We are proud to be the first bank in the Sultanate providing this service, and our team will continue their efforts to provide further innovative services and products.”

BankDhofar constantly endeavours to promote positive communication and retain a sustainable relationship with its customers. Through the Customer Engagement Hub, the bank provides significant benefits to customers by offering services

around the clock, including Self-Services such as Interactive Voice Response (IVR), Interactive Voice Notification (IVN) Call Centre agents, among other functions to build meaningful communication with the customers.

In addition to the IVN service, BankDhofar's IVR system enables customers to handle their own simple operations over the phone. The facility provides a number of exclusive services including, mobile top-up, unblock debit card, re-issue and re-set of Debit Card pin, statement inquiry, cheque book request, bill payments and many other prompt services.

The IVR system contributed to boosting customer experience and enhancing their satisfaction level, by minimising the call

duration, as customers get a faster response to their query. Being one of the best banks in the region, BankDhofar has prioritised providing a convenient banking experience since its inception, putting technology and innovation at the core of its strategy to improve the experience of its customers.

Customers may conduct their transactions at ease and round-the-clock through highly-secured and user-friendly digital banking channels. Following best international banking practices, provision of outstanding customer experience, in addition to its commitment to community development and contribution to the growth of the national economy, has placed BankDhofar at the top of the list of best banks in the region.

Lucky Kia customer wins double cash gift on new K8

MUSCAT: Abdulrahman Abu Baker Said al Kaaf, a long-time fan and customer of Kia, recently, won instant Double Cash Prize when he purchased a K8. He is one of the many lucky customers who are turning winners in this year's most exciting offer from Kia.

As part of the campaign, customers owning their dream Kia can look forward to a Chance to Win their Kia Car Back through Scratch & Win Offer, Or Chance to Win 50% Value of Your Car Back through Scratch & Win Offer, Or Chance to Double Your Cash Gift, Or Win Periodic Services up to 100,000 kms and yes VAT is on Us which can be used as part of Down Payment. (Conditions apply.



Please visit Kia showroom for details.) The campaign is valid until December 28, 2021. Sharing his views, Abdul Rahman said, “I am very happy and excited to win double cash gift in this year's most exciting offer from Kia. I have been a fan

of Kia vehicles for a long time now. I have had the Optima, the 2020 Cadenza and now the K8. I am also particularly happy to be the first person in the Sultanate of Oman to own the all-new dazzling and stylish K8.

So if you are looking to own a Kia, then now is the time you shouldn't miss. You could also become a lucky winner. So head to your nearest Kia showroom, today”

Speaking about his experiences with Kia he said, “I like the Kia brand for various aspects. Stylish designs, advanced technology and most important of all — the smiling and every friendly staff who really go out of their way to fulfil your wishes. I am really happy with all my experiences here.”

The Kia K8 combines cutting-edge innovation and dynamic performance to establish new benchmarks for premium quality in the sedan segment.

On the occasion of the 15th anniversary of Peaceland Medical Company providing its medical services to Occidental Company, the inauguration of Peaceland Medical Center on 25/11/2021 in Mukhaizna with the opening of a nursing assistant course under the auspices of the General Manager of Occidental Mr Steve Kelly and the CEO of Peaceland Medical Company Mr. Awad Al Mahri.

The medical center includes:

Department of radiology, laboratories and dentistry, providing visa medical examination services and work examinations, in addition to other services for the local community. This center is considered the first of its kind in the oil and gas regions. The center also trains the local community nursing assistants for a period of 6 months, with the support of Occidental Oman Company to develop and rehabilitate local community cadres in the medical field.





EU seeks to forge new global trade rules with US

BRUSSELS: The European Union has experienced a “breakthrough year” with the United States even if not all trade irritants are gone and now wants to work with its transatlantic ally to start forging trade rules for the future, the EU trade chief said.

A year on from Joe Biden’s defeat of Donald Trump in the US presidential election, the two sides have suspended their disputes over aircraft subsidies and steel and aluminium tariffs and launched an alliance to cooperate on future technologies.

“One can say that this year was indeed a breakthrough year for EU-US trade relations”, European Commission Executive Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis said in an interview for the

Reuters Next conference.

On steel, the United States has replaced tariffs on all EU imports with tariff-free quotas based on historical volumes.

Dombrovskis said the end result in two years had to be a complete lifting of tariffs and quotas.

Brussels was also looking closely at the United States’ “Buy American” agenda aimed at ensuring that federal agencies buy American-produced goods as much as possible, which has already caused tensions with Canada and Mexico.

Dombrovskis said the European Union would look at the extent to which Washington respects its international commitments. Both are



European Commission Executive Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis attends a press conference in Strasbourg, France, in this file photo. — Reuters

signatories to the World Trade Organization agreement on government procurement. “There are clearly things to

watch, but what I can say is that we are now engaging constructively so I am confident we are able to address any issues or concerns that are coming”, Dombrovskis said.

The European Union, the United States and Japan on Tuesday relaunched their trilateral partnership to tackle problems of non-market economies, such as China.

The work is to include developing new trade rules. Dombrovskis said he planned to meet with his counterparts in half a year to take stock and decide on next steps.

China would feature but would not be the sole focus of this and other discussions between the EU and the United States on steel

overcapacity, aircraft subsidies and technology, he said.

Dombrovskis and the world’s top trade officials were due to meet in Geneva for the World Trade Organization’s ministerial conference this week, until Swiss coronavirus restrictions forced its postponement.

The EU had hoped to emerge from the meeting with a new group to work on reform of the WTO and global trading rules and to produce results by the following meeting due in two years’ time.

Dombrovskis said the bloc wants a reform of the rule book to take into account green and digital economic transformation, industrial subsidies and state-owned enterprises. — Reuters

Oil prices rally ahead of Opec meeting

LONDON: Oil prices rallied on Wednesday after recent sharp drops as major producers started to discuss future output against the backdrop of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus triggering fresh travel restrictions which could dampen oil demand.

Equity markets, which often move in tandem with oil prices also rebounded as investors bought the previous session’s dip in the hope that Omicron would not derail an economic recovery.

Brent crude futures rose \$2.10, or 3 per cent, to \$70.85 a barrel at 1331 GMT.



US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures rose \$1.91, or 2.9 per cent, to \$67.65 a barrel.

Both contracts retraced some of their gains after an Opec+ document showed the group forecasts a bigger oil surplus in the new year. — Reuters

Oman, EU ink Air Transport Agreement

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Henrik Hololei, Director-General for Mobility and Transport of the European Commission said: “Today’s initialling illustrates the successful collaboration of both negotiating teams and further reinforces the close aviation ties between the EU and the Sultanate of Oman. Once signed, this agreement will bring new opportunities, more choice and higher standards for passengers, industry and aviation workers. I look forward to taking our aviation partnership to the next level.”

Oman Air CEO Eng Abdulaziz al Raisi, said, “Today’s agreement signifies a tremendous achievement and defining moment for aviation and tourism in Oman as well as in the European Union. For Oman Air, it means more choice of destinations and travel options for both our business and leisure guests across an enhanced route network.

It also gives European travellers easier access to Oman’s diverse offering of beaches, mountains, wadis, deserts and Unesco world heritage sites, allowing them to fully experience one of the Middle East’s most sought-after destinations.”

SalamAir CEO, Captain Mohamed Ahmed said, “This partnership facilitates diversification of air travel in line with the Oman Vision 2040

and will very much be beneficial for SalamAir. As we have taken delivery of our new A321neo long range aircraft, it is a timely opportunity for its operation on European routes. There is great potential for growth in travel between the Sultanate and Europe. This partnership will not only provide us a platform to expand our network, it will also aid us in providing a more affordable, convenient and efficient service to passengers as well.”

Oman Airports CEO Aimen al Hosni, said, “The agreement will no doubt enhance connectivity between Oman and EU destinations-especially providing great opportunity for our home carriers — Oman Air and SalamAir — and for the European airlines to enhance their networks between Oman and EU countries resulting in increased and more efficient utilisation of airspace, more competitive fares and more choices for the travelling public.

As we are trying to mobilise and stabilise from the pandemic and as Oman’s Aviation sector is embarking on an exciting phase in its development, the agreement indeed would maximise mutual aviation benefits and extending well beyond the aviation industry and passengers, it contributes to greater trade and tourism, inward investment, productivity growth, increased employment and economic development.”

15 years of elevating trade in Oman

This year marks a very special anniversary for Hutchison Ports Sohar as we reach a decade and a half of operations in the Sultanate of Oman.

Hutchison Ports Sohar has come a long way from its humble beginnings in 2006, when we only handled a few thousand boxes. This year we celebrated the remarkable milestone of our 6 millionth TEU.

We take great pride in supporting the ambitious programme Oman Vision 2040 which was established to elevate Oman’s logistics industry and diversify the country’s economy.

It is exciting to see the vision of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos take shape, and we are grateful to have the leadership and direction of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik as Sohar increasingly becomes a maritime hub for the Middle East.

As the Sultanate of Oman adopted development policies to spur trade and economic development, Hutchison Ports Sohar continues to invest in the latest equipment and IT solutions. The aim is to progressively increase the terminal’s capacity ahead of the burgeoning demand while also expanding the range of value-added services at the port.

Reflecting on the anniversary, Andy Tsoi, Managing Director of Hutchison Ports MEA Division commented: “As a large, greenfield development, there were many unknowns and many hurdles to overcome.

We were very pleased to have support of the Hutchison Ports group, solid commitments from our valuable carrier partners and most importantly our strong workforce. Looking ahead, we are striving to continue to engage our young workforce to ensure that we build a strong pipeline of future talent for the port and the overall industry in the Sultanate of Oman.”

In addition to adopting international best practices and cultivating a strong culture



The coming years will require further innovation, dedication, efficient customer service, but above all, mutually beneficial business relationships with shipping lines and end-users alike

ANACIN KUM

CEO, Hutchison Ports Sohar

of innovation and ongoing improvement, the terminal has been outfitted with the latest container handling equipment and is ready to serve the industry’s increasingly large mega vessels.

The state-of-the-art equipment has enhanced the safety and working conditions of our team, contributed to our sustainability goals and boosted the terminal’s capacity to 2.4 million TEU.

Looking ahead, we are also laying the figurative groundwork to launch autonomous truck technology in 2022.

Another key technology

we see great promise in is 5G telecommunications for an efficient and optimised port community system.

Hutchison Ports Sohar has been working closely with Omantel and Huawei to study and formulate commercially viable 5G solutions at the terminal.

Moving ahead, efforts to attract additional direct calls continue in earnest. Hutchison Ports Sohar currently boasts a customer profile covering over 100 clients including all global shipping lines, regional feeders, NVOCCs and shipping agents. This patronage means a great deal to us.

Commenting on the occasion, Anacin Kum, CEO of Hutchison Ports Sohar said, “I am glad to be a part of Hutchison Ports Sohar’s growth for the past few years.

This place and its people have tremendous potential which is being proven by new challenges each passing day.

Now is the right moment for us all to renew the pledge to further strengthen our position in Oman and the Middle East.

The coming years will require further innovation, dedication, efficient customer service, but above all, mutually beneficial business relationships with shipping lines and end-users alike.

We have empowered our employees which allows customers and shareholders to place their faith and trust in us — and we are committed to continue strengthening this

bond.”

The future is green. We understand the importance of sustainable and the need to be fully engaged with the local community. With this in mind, we have actively identified a range of Environmental, Social & Governance initiatives.

Earlier we carefully reviewed our energy use and managed to reduce energy consumption by 28 per cent by replacing traditional lights with power-efficient LED and these efforts will continue. While it is important to protect the environment for future generations, it is also important to give them the knowledge and skillsets needed to succeed.

Through a range of programmes with local Omani schools, we open the doors of the port to the youth to show them the far-reaching benefits of international trade from Oman and the potential career paths available in the broader industry.

With regular intake of interns, some of whom successfully turn into full time employees, our Omanisation rate is at all-time high of 84 per cent. Finally, as we look into the future, we would like to thank all those who have supported the growth of Hutchison Ports Sohar over the past 15 years.

The future of the port offers great potential, so we look forward to continuing our existing partnerships and establishing new ones in the years to come.

Super-app Grab rides high into New York debut

Grab has reason to be optimistic as it speeds towards its debut this week in New York. Southeast Asia's answer to ride-hailing firm Uber, food delivery giant DoorDash and financial super-app Paytm wrapped into one has held firm against severe pandemic-induced lockdowns since announcing a \$31 billion merger read more with a blank-cheque firm.

At the time of the deal in April, acquirer Altimeter expected adjusted net revenue would grow 44 per cent to reach \$2.3 billion in 2021. Guidance was subsequently revised slightly down but if Grab increases fourth-quarter sales by just 15 per cent from the previous three-month period, it will reach the original target.

Assuming it does, the merger values its enterprise at 14 times. Grab's attraction is its reach in a mobile-first region with a population of 650 million people, half of whom are under the age of 30, and where penetration in ride-hailing, food delivery and more lags China and the United States. But Grab's sprawl makes it tricky to value and so does the way it reports its sales.

Its adjusted net revenue is a measure which adds back some incentives Grab pays out. On that basis, its heavily subsidised deliveries business accounted for 60 per cent of the company's top line during the third quarter. Using a more straightforward revenue metric values the whole of Grab at over a stunning 40 times 2021 sales.

Grab certainly deserves a multiple higher than Uber's five times sales, a valuation weighed down by its stake in China's embattled Didi. Grab's adjusted EBITDA in the third quarter is 12 per cent of its gross merchandise value. Uber's comparable margin during the period is less than half.

The Singapore-based firm's ride-hailing advantage might lie in its super-app model: Drivers can toggle between providing various services. — Reuters

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MANUFACTURING CONTRACTION

A worker welds a bicycle steel rim at a factory manufacturing sports equipment in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, China. The manufacturing sector in China slipped into contraction territory in November, the latest survey from Caixin revealed on Wednesday with a manufacturing purchasing managers' index (PMI) score of 49.9. That's down from 50.6 in October and it falls beneath the boom-or-bust line of 50 that separates expansion from contraction. — dpa

Uncertainties of digital currencies



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Will digital currencies become commonplace in financial and banking transactions in the future?

It's a question often raised by people and some governments as well at a time when some global jurisdictions and platforms are promoting these currencies in the face of concerns by regulators that cryptocurrency trades can potential involve money laundering.

The world's central banks have shunned cryptocurrencies, but modern financial technology has contributed to its rapid rise. For the global banking system, cryptocurrencies create more risks for them, notably the challenges of dealing with conventional and digital currencies alike.

Britain's *Financial Times* newspaper expects that some central banks will inevitably begin issuing digital currencies in their local jurisdictions, despite the

difficulties that may arise from trading in these currencies, making payment transfers, or placing deposits or obtaining loans from the banking sector for transfer to networks that are not regulated by them.

This could undermine the regulatory role of central banks in maintaining control of transactions.

Amid this upheaval in the cryptocurrency world, the Indian government recently announced that it is in the process of amending its income tax laws to include gains from cryptocurrency trading.

Prices of digital currencies have soared in recent years, up from its initial price per unit roughly equivalent to the cost of a small pizza.

Today, the same unit can buy the holder a full restaurant in the pizza industry. The price of the digital currency "Bitcoin" soared above \$69,000 last month, after posting some losses previously.

Former US presidential candidate Hillary Clinton recently warned in an economic forum in Singapore against

dealing with cryptocurrencies, stressing they have the potential to eventually weaken entire countries and undermine traditional currencies, including the US dollar. Indeed, there are dark forces working to destabilise some countries and central banks around the world, starting from small states to large ones.

China, for its part, announced through the Chinese Central Bank, that dealing with encrypted digital currencies is considered "illegal", and pledged to take strict measures, including bans against the activities of dealers, while its central bank will ban financial institutions, payments, Internet and trade companies that facilitate the illegal trading of cryptocurrencies.

Such steps will inevitably lead to a decline in the demand for cryptocurrencies, especially if tax evaders using these digital currencies find them monitored. At the same time, the international financial system is working to develop policies to keep pace with these digital developments too.

The high stakes of rising inflation



OTMAR ISSING

The author is President of the Centre for Financial Studies at Goethe University, Frankfurt

THE GLOBAL ECONOMY IS MORE LIKELY TO EXERT MORE SUSTAINED INFLATIONARY PRESSURE THAN IN THE PAST

Many countries are reporting their highest rates of inflation in decades: 6.2 per cent in the United States, 4.2 per cent in the United Kingdom, 5.2 per cent in Germany, and above 4 per cent in the eurozone.

Some insist that it is a temporary phenomenon; others fear that we must brace ourselves for an extended period of significant price increases driven by expansionary monetary policies and rising public debts. Still, both camps agree that at least some of the factors behind the recent inflationary surge will soon subside or disappear.

In 2020, prices rose only slightly, and even declined in some cases, setting a low baseline for the year-on-year increase in 2021. Surging prices for heating oil, gas, petrol, and diesel are also generally considered to be temporary.

A significant decline in headline inflation can thus be expected in

most countries in 2022. In the longer term, however, we must adapt to higher fossil-fuel prices in order to fight climate change. Similarly, though the across-the-board price spikes in building materials, computer chips, and raw materials are not expected to continue indefinitely, nor are we likely to find lasting relief.

After all, the problem is global. When China fully entered world markets in the 1990s, the resulting flood of cheap goods placed downward pressure not only on prices but also on wages. Trade unions, concerned about job losses, were reluctant to demand higher wages.

But now, these pressures are easing. It would be a mistake to think that globalisation has ended, but the fact is that international economic integration has slowed, owing to the Covid-19 crisis, the Trump administration's protectionism, and the decline in the Chinese labor supply as its population ages.

As a result, the global economy is more likely to exert more sustained inflationary pressure than in the past.

The argument that today's inflation is only temporary assumes that global unemployment remains substantial, and that trade unions are weak. In that case, there would be no reason to expect that wages will increase significantly, leading to a sustained rise in prices.

But that may not be the case, because the global economy is at a turning point: conditions may be shifting from deflationary to more inflationary overall. At the national level, wages are being driven up by labor shortages in many sectors.

The scarcity of truck drivers in the UK, for example, has translated into considerably higher wage offers. Of course, the economic slump caused by the pandemic was not comparable to a normal downturn, so it remains to be seen how long it will take for these sectoral wage increases to spread throughout the economy.

In any case, it is monetary policy that determines the course of inflation. In the short term, central banks can do nothing to prevent a price surge caused by factors such as rising energy costs, nor should they try to do so.

What matters is that citizens and financial markets do not lose confidence in central banks' determination to stabilise inflation (typically at around 2 per cent) over the medium term.

So far, the flooding of financial markets with liquidity — notably through massive bond purchases — has played a major role in driving up asset prices. The danger now is that this price inflation, combined with a large expansion of the money supply, will spread to consumer prices, which are also affected by the sharp rise in public debt.

The US Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank (ECB) consistently assume that today's inflationary expectations are firmly anchored at the target level of 2 per

cent, and most published inflation expectations for the US and the eurozone appear to confirm this view. But these central banks' own massive bond purchases are distorting market expectations.

Investors with higher inflation expectations tend to sell their bonds to the central bank at prices that they regard as high. As a result, these inflation pessimists are absent from financial markets, causing the thermometer of inflation expectations to read lower than the actual temperature. In fact, comments from citizens, consumers, and employees in many countries increasingly suggest doubts about the stability of inflation expectations at the level claimed or desired by central banks.

With inflation having been off the radar for many years, it is no surprise that expectations are oriented to the past, when the dominant expectation was that price stability would continue.

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The long drive to Hasik reveals an untapped paradise

A recent exploration of Ash Shuwaymiyyah and Hasik led Oman Outdoor Adventure and this author to discover remote but stunning beaches, the Grand Canyon of the South and even a green paradise in the middle of caramel, barren mountains. Check out this anecdote about the discoveries when taking a long drive to Hasik... **P20**



FASHION

READ

THE REAL ANTHONY FAUCI

BY ROBERT F. KENNEDY JR

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Prada sees second-hand fashion as opportunity, weighs partnerships

ITALIAN FASHION GROUP Prada sees opportunity in the booming second-hand fashion sector which it can develop both in-house and through partnerships, marketing chief and heir designate Lorenzo Bertelli told Reuters.

The market for pre-owned chic bags and clothes has surged over the last three years, driven by younger, more environmentally conscious shoppers looking

for affordable high-end goods. It is expected to reach 33 billion euros (\$37.2 billion) in size this year after growing by 65% between 2017 and 2021, according to consultancy Bain. This compares with 12% growth for brand new luxury goods.

Some rival luxury companies are already exploring the sector. Earlier this year, French conglomerate Kering (PRTP.PA) took a 5% stake in Vestiaire Collective,



a leading platform for second-hand clothes and handbags. Kering's star brand Gucci also formed a partnership with US-based resale platform The RealReal (REAL.O) last year.

"Second hand is a strategy we

have been investigating for more than a year", Lorenzo Bertelli, the eldest son of co-Chief Executives Patrizio Bertelli and Miuccia Prada and the future brand leader, said in an interview at the Reuters Next confer-

ence aired on Wednesday.

"I cannot disclose too much but for sure second hand is there. We will take it as an opportunity.

"It can be a partnership with a player or it can be something more in-house, or both of them, a sort of hybrid solution like for e-commerce", he said.

The heir to Prada's empire, who told Reuters he wants to keep the family-controlled group independent when he takes the reins in a few years, doesn't seem fazed by the future challenges of the ever-changing luxury sector.

For that, he thanks his experience as a rally driver.

"Rallying and sport in general taught me a lot. (It) teaches you to never give up and also a lot of humility, in the sense that you have to learn", he said.

"Sometimes sport is cruel, when you want to measure yourself."

— Reuters

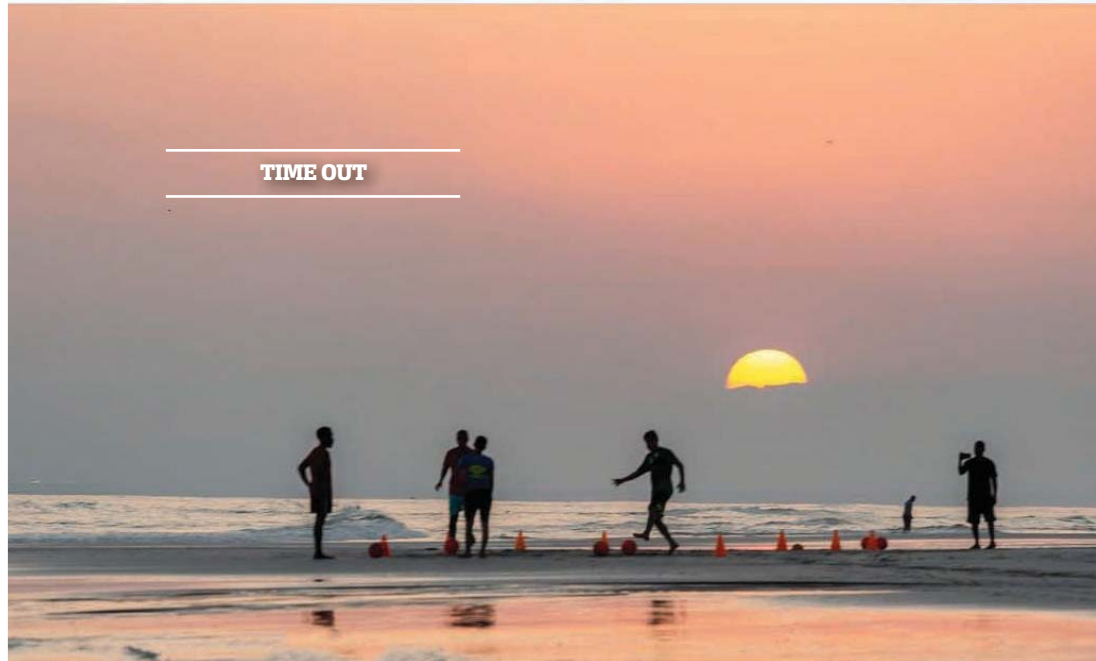


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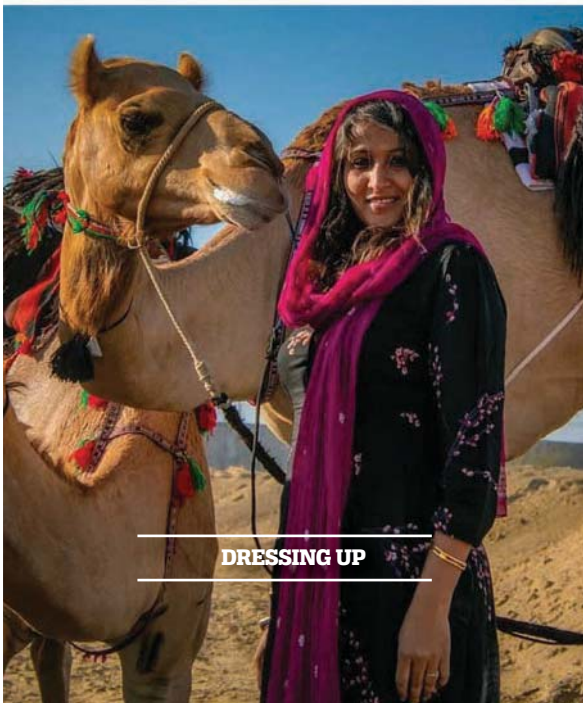
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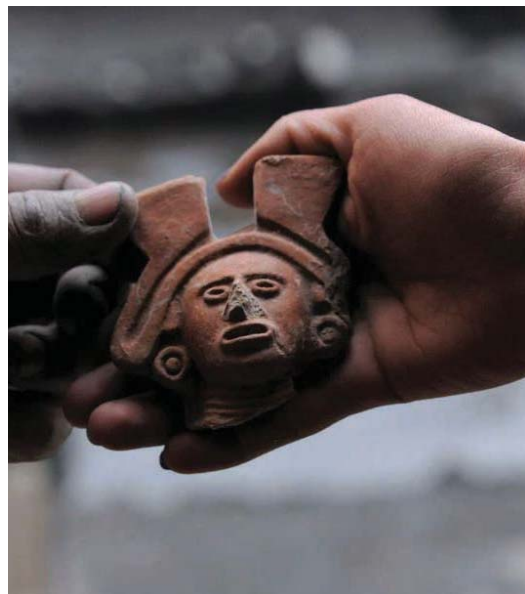
Archaeologists uncover post-conquest Aztec altar in Mexico City



SOMETIME AFTER HERNAN Cortes conquered the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan in modern-day Mexico City in 1521, an indigenous household that survived the bloody Spanish invasion arranged an altar including incense and a pot with human ashes.

The remains of that elaborate display have been unearthed by archaeologists near what is today Garibaldi Plaza, famed for its revelry and mariachi music, Mexico's Culture Ministry said on Tuesday.

In the wake of the fall of Tenochtitlan, likely within the years of 1521 and 1610, the offering from the family of the Mexica people was made "to bear witness to the ending of a cycle of their lives and of their civilisation", the Culture Ministry said in a statement.



The interior patio where rituals took place is about four metres (13 feet) below ground level, according to a team of archaeologists who spent three months analysing the site.

They found various layers of what had been a home over the centuries, the statement said, along with 13 incense burners, five bowls, a cup, a plate and a pot with cremated skeletal remains.

The finding coincides with the 500-year anniversary of the Spanish conquest, which Mexico's government commemorated by building a towering replica of the Templo Mayor, the Aztec civilisation's most sacred site, in downtown Mexico City.

A number of ancient discoveries in the Mexico City area in recent years, including some in the capital's bustling downtown, have shone light on the Aztec civilisation. They include the remains of a ceremonial ball court, a sacrificial wolf adorned with gold and a tower of human skulls.

President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador had previously sought an apology from Spain and the Vatican for human rights abuses committed during the conquest of what is modern-day Mexico.

— Reuters

ART



'In pursuit of beauty': A cross-cultural initiative by Stal Gallery

ON THE OCCASION of the 51st National Day of the Renaissance, the Embassy of the Netherlands in the Sultanate of Oman, in collaboration with Stal Gallery, Dar Al Atta'a Charity Foundation and Scientific College of Design, is presenting a cross-cultural initiative, stimulating dialogue between both countries, through the interactive art programme at Stal Gallery.

"In pursuit of beauty" is a cross-cultural programme, initiated and sponsored by the Embassy of the Netherlands in the Sultanate of Oman. The programme is focused on the educational aspect and will culminate in an open-ended public demonstration, including, which includes an artists' talk, workshop and exhibition.

The Artists' Talk offers an introduction to the three-week-long Art Residency programme in the Sultanate of Oman, with two established artists from the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The artists will share some work-in-progress and their thoughts on Dutch contemporary art, as well as on the upcoming exciting Exhibition in Stal Gallery.

The aim of the workshop is craftsmanship in oil painting, and will provide new perspectives and possibilities with realism in oil colour. This workshop intends to bring more insight into the pleasure of this genre, and how to turn everyday objects into objects of beauty.

The charity exhibition and workshop, focusing on the theme, "In Pursuit of Beauty", will feature the works of Dutch artists Ruud Verkerk and Fereshteh Salehi, and their curatorial project — an art collection created by students of the Scientific College of Design. A selection of works by artists Ruud Verkerk and Fereshteh Salehi is also for sale at Stal Gallery, with 100 per cent of the proceeds to be donated to the Dar Al Atta'a Charity Foundation.

The programme is curated by Ruud Verkerk and Fereshteh Salehi, with co-curators Dr Volodymyra Sobolevska (Stal Gallery Manager)

and Louma al Atassi (Policy Officer, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands).

Stella Kloth, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Sultanate of Oman, said: "Art is boundless and provides us with a way of building bridges in our international relations and to make friends. It presents an opportunity to connect people and cultures and

bassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Stal Gallery and it shows the commitment the gallery made to diversify the art scene in the country. We express our sincere gratitude to Stella Kloth, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Sultanate of Oman."

Ruud Verkerk added: "Art is unquestionably one of the purest and highest elements in human happi-



to share knowledge and experience between Dutch and Omani people. This will provide us with inspiration, enrichment and knowledge increase. It is our responsibility, as an embassy, to stimulate this."

Hassan Meer, Art Director, Stal Gallery, commented: "Stal Gallery & Studio continue its support to the art community by having multiple workshops and art talks. Since it was opened in 2013 it has contributed a lot to Omani art — from supporting young Omani artists to international art exchanges with different institutions and organisations. This current exhibition is a joint workshop between the Em-

ness. Through painting, you really discover what you see. It is not what you look at that matters, it is what you see."

Fereshteh Salehi remarked: "Art can offer a grand vantage point from which to survey the trials of our condition. Art can be a tool, and we need to focus more clearly on what kind of tool it is — and what good it can do for us. Art is a medium that can help guide, exhort and console its viewers, enabling them to become better versions of themselves."

The exhibition at Stal Gallery, which began on November 26, ends on December 13, 2021.

AROUND OMAN IN 3RD GEAR



Rachael MacIver
Instagram: @rachael_maciver

The adventure of a blonde and a very old car

"WATCH OUT FOR the donkey!", Mrs J shouted and slammed on her imaginary brake on the passenger side of the Pajero.

We were pulling into the roundabout on the outskirts of Mirbat and a local donkey, being a law-abiding animal, was also using the roundabout. I wasn't sure what the Highway Code said about priority in roundabouts when it came to donkeys, not in a particular hurry. So we stopped the car with screeching brakes and let him exit in his own sweet time. He took the Salalah exit.

We, on the other hand, turned right towards Mirbat. I was excited to revisit and photograph the old houses and beautifully carved windows and doors, which had fascinated me more than 15 years earlier.

Mirbat had in its heydays been one of the most important ports in the governorate. From here merchant ships would leave loaded with frankincense and return with staples like rice and grains from East Africa and the Asian subcontinent. Large fishing dhows would dock and unload their catch. With this busy trading, Mirbat became the home for many wealthy sea merchants having made a good life for themselves.

Walking into the old part of Mirbat, we soon got a taste of its former glory. The most characteristic feature of the old Mirbat houses was the fact that many of them were multi-storey. It was the high-rise of yesteryear. These merchant houses had served several purposes. Firstly, the ground floors had been used for the storage of fishing equipment and all the goods and wares brought to and from the ships. The upper floors were residential and kept light and airy with rows of beautifully screened windows allowing the breeze to cool rooms and for the successful sea merchant to lean back with his morning coffee while still being able to oversee the unloading of his ships in the harbour. But not only that. The big houses served, much like Facebook today, to show to the rest of the world just how successful and wealthy you were. The ships were built of local stones and clad in a clay mortar and the facades were then often decorated with bas-relief motifs of the

ships owned by the sea merchant. A 'look-at-me-and-what-made-me-rich' kind of thing.

A gentle stroll through the maze of old pathways took Mrs J and I passed several of these once magnificent status symbols now left to crumble. Most of them had been stripped of their impressive windows and doors, imported from as far away places like Zanzibar, and the decay, which often follows in hot pursuit of abandonment, had set in. Many of the buildings had been left to fall into ruin and I struggled to find the ones I had photographed 15 years ago. Their beautiful doors gone and probably made into dining and coffee tables so popular with us expats. Why, I wondered, why had these houses been allowed to disappear and in doing so, taken with them a piece of history?

The answer was a change in financial and social structure brought about by new roads, infrastructure and easier access to the rest of Oman. We were told that in the 80s many families left their homes and build themselves new, modern houses with the improvement of tap water, electricity, new kitchens and proper bathrooms, along the periphery of the 'Old Mirbat'. Fair enough, everybody longs for new shiny, clean showers, and an AC to keep them cool in Oman's fierce summer. But people weren't just turning their backs on an old inconvenient house, they were also leaving behind their heritage, their history and what had shaped their cultural identity.

Ali brought us two cups of hot karak. We sat outside his dusty coffee shop on homemade, very unstable benches.

"You look sad", Mrs J remarked.

"Hmmm, yes, things are changing", I replied quietly.

"Change is inevitable", she concluded. We sat for a while pondering.

"It's not that I'm against change per se", I tried to sound convincing "but it has to be changing for the better, not just change for the sake of change".

Mrs J tilted her head slightly and smiled at me "Better? ...better for who, though...?"

I hated when she caught me out.



The long drive to Hasik reveals an untapped paradise

By Yeru Ebuen

The recent long holiday meant a great opportunity to see new places. For our case, it meant going on a long drive eyeing the Ash Shuwaymiyyah-Hasik area as our places of interest for exploration.

Nothing much has been written about these places except that great rock formations can be found in the area. Located about 921 km from Muscat through the Samayil tunnel towards the Adam-Thamrait road and cutting through Al Jazer, we'd been warned that the drive will be long and unpleasant but it was an adventure that has been long overdue.

With Ahmed al Jaabri of Oman Outdoor Adventure mapping the route, we departed Muscat on Friday morning.

The first five hours of the drive was uneventful. We were pleasantly surprised by some areas we passed through experiencing fog near the desert and by the time we reached Al Jazer, the weather has become cooler cementing what we've already known that the end of November is the best time to do desert adventures and exploring some far corners of the Sultanate of Oman.

When we reached Ash Shuwaymiyyah, we found a coastal village of nearly 70 homes, some of them in bad, withered condition. There were a few hole-in-the-wall restaurants and small shops selling different home items but what was most impressive were the well-paved roads that opened into some of the most amazing beaches one would find in the Sultanate of Oman.

We decided to stop by Ash

Shuwaymiyyah to visit the famed Smurf or Star Wars houses located nearly 10 km from the town proper. These houses had seen better days. We discovered that it was a failed project and as a result, they were vandalised and neglected that in a few more years, they will be nothing more but crumbling ruins which is a complete shame as there is no decent inn or place to stay in the area.

Overall, however, seeing the Smurf houses still standing, stripped of all modern comfort, it was still a nice sight to behold and definitely, very Instagrammable.

From Ash Shuwaymiyyah, we took the road leading into the mountains. After another hour of drive, the road led deeper and deeper into the mountains and we eventually emerge at a viewpoint where from the top, the scenic view will remind you of the breathtaking beauty of Jabal Sham's Grand Canyon.

This Grand Canyon of the South can be viewed even without needing to go for a hike. From this viewpoint, the world opened up into this wild array of different peaks each demanding to be recognised and appreciated for their sheer beauty.

Another nearly an hour drive led us to Khor Nakheel and this is where I was surprisingly astonished. Before us was a garden filled with date palms in the middle of which was a khor that looks like a river flowing towards the sea. The water was not only emerald green, but it was also calm and cool that without a doubt, I would claim it as one of Oman's best spots for kayaking (if only it's easy to bring a kayak to this part of the Sultanate of Oman).

Barely four kilometres long,

the khor is hidden in the heart of barren mountains the greenery betraying the beauty of this hidden paradise. I mentioned to my companions that it reminded me greatly of some amazing rivers that flow between the karst mountains in Vietnam and this place alone was worth the nearly 9 hours drive we drove from Muscat.

For those who haven't been to Hasik yet, what you should understand is that while the coastal roads from Qurayat to Sur might already have impressed you, the one in Hasik will definitely make you mad that you haven't discovered it soon enough.

If there is one coastal road you have to take, it's definitely the one in Hasik and a stop at one of the strangest waterfalls on the side of the road will be like a cherry on top of your travel cake.

The long weekend allowed us to explore remote beaches, and while we are all celebrating the spectacular beauty of Barr Al Hikman and Al Khaluf, I would say that the beauty of the Ash Shuwaymiyyah and Hasik beaches will do magic for your beach-aching heart.

Without a doubt, the trip from Muscat to Hasik is long, painful and tiring but some hidden beauty will definitely be worth your sacrifices.

The next time you find yourself in Salalah for khareef or for a leisurely visit, Hasik is just barely two hours away. I urge you to take a detour towards this seldom visited place and thank me later when you discover the same hidden paradise we visited. You're welcome.

For details about this trip and tour guide needs, you can DM Ahmed al Jaabri on Instagram: @ahmed_aljaabri

