

### National Museum to display antiques at Muscat International Airport

The National Museum on Wednesday signed an agreement with Oman Airports company to lend antiques to set up a Museum Corner at Muscat International Airport. The agreement aims to convert passenger corridors at Muscat Airport into symbolic cultural spaces showcasing Oman's sea, oases and desert landscapes. The National Museum's Corner will narrate tales of centuries-old communication among ancient Omani civilisation and its contemporary counterparts in the global arena.

**DETAILS ON P2**



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US JOB OPENINGS RISE; SMALL BUSINESSES DESPERATE FOR WORKERS

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AL NASR HAMMER AL ITTIHAD FOR FIFTH WIN

### P20

BIRKAT AL MOUZ OFFERS MANY UNIQUE EXPERIENCES

MUSCAT

HM CONGRATULATES UAE ON HOPE PROBE

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), on the success of Hope Probe on entering orbit around Mars. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments to Shaikh Khalifa and the UAE brotherly people on this great scientific accomplishment in the field of space exploration, praying to the Almighty Allah to grant Shaikh Khalifa success to achieve the aspiration of UAE people for further progress and prosperity.

— ONA

HM GREETINGS TO IRANIAN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Hassan Rouhani of the Islamic Republic of Iran, on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and his best wishes of good health and happiness to President Rouhani and the Iranian friendly people further progress and prosperity.

— ONA

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NORTH KOREA STOLE \$300M IN CRYPTO TO FUND NUKES

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DELAY IN CURRENCY REFORM PUTS SUDAN AT RISK

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Sultanate is voice of reason and wisdom: Turkey

**MUSCAT:** Mevlut Cavusoglu, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, lauded the Sultanate's foreign policy and its efforts in coming up with solutions for regional conflicts. He described the Sultanate as a voice of reason and wisdom in the region.

During a joint press conference held at the Foreign Ministry on Wednesday with Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, the Turkish Minister said that his country supports the Sultanate's endeavours to maintain security and stability in the region.



His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, received on Wednesday Mevlut Cavusoglu, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs. PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI

He expressed his country's keenness to promote relations between the two countries in various political, economic and commercial areas.

He said that the talks between the two sides reviewed the regional developments after the recent GCC Summit. "Turkey is a strategic partner for the GCC, and is ready to work closely with the Sultanate and the rest of the Gulf countries on regional issues", Turkish Foreign Minister added.

He also added that the talks touched on the Palestinian

cause and the developments in Libya, Syria and Yemen.

On his turn, Sayyid Badr said that the session of talks held between the two countries was fruitful as it touched on bilateral relations and means of enhancing them in the economic, tourism and cultural fields.

He added that the session covered regional and international issues of common concern, affirming that there is a great rapprochement in views between the two countries on different issues.

— ONA (SEE ALSO P2)

Institutional quarantine for all travellers to Oman

SUPREME COMMITTEE ANNOUNCES STEPS TO CURB COVID-19

**MUSCAT:** The Supreme Committee tasked with tackling the developments resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic held a meeting under the Chairmanship of Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior, at the premises of the Ministry of Interior, on Wednesday, during which it followed the developments of the pandemic, the precautionary measures for combating it as well as the measures aimed at handling the impact of the pandemic.

The Supreme Committee followed with great concern the continuation of the outbreak of Covid-19 and the consecutive waves and new virus strains witnessed by many countries around the world. Within the framework of the efforts exerted to limit the impact of the rapid spread and the sharp spike in cases, the committee studied the

Citizens and residents should avoid travel outside the Sultanate during the upcoming period unless it's necessary

SUPREME COMMITTEE

results of the epidemiological investigation regarding the various sources of the virus coupled with non-compliance to the precautionary measures on the part of many people such as avoiding social gatherings, abidance by quarantine instructions and wearing face masks. Cases of non-compliance with precautionary measures at

some establishments were also reported to the committee.

Based on that, the Supreme Committee has decided the following:

To continue the closure of the Sultanate's land ports until further notice with the exception of trucks.

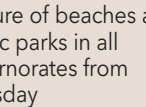
Omani citizens will be allowed to return to the Sultanate through land ports effective for 10 days starting from the time of publication of the decision until 12 am on Sunday (February 21) after which individuals won't be permitted to pass through the land ports until the land ports are reopened.

All citizens entering the Sultanate through land ports should undergo institutional quarantine at their own expenses as well as the other procedures imposed on arrivals to the Sultanate.

TURN TO P5



Closure of all commercial activities in North Al Sharqiyah from 7 pm to 6 am



Closure of beaches and public parks in all governorates from Thursday

Ban on all forms of gatherings at rest houses, farms, winter camps and others



Reducing entry to service halls at public and private places



Citizens and residents told to avoid travelling abroad



No family gatherings inside houses and other places

OETC issues 10-year bond

**MUSCAT:** Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), a subsidiary of Nama Group, says its \$600 million bond offering has been well-received by international investors. The Senior Unsecured Notes, due in February 2031, were offered with an interest rate of 5.8 per cent.

The offering is the first by a government-linked entity outside Oman since 2018 and marks the return of OETC to the capital markets after a four-year hiatus, benefiting from improved investors' desire to invest in Oman, which reinforces the strategic importance of Nama Holding Group, it said in a statement.

"Oman Electricity Transmission Company succeeded in attracting investor interest in its offering, and investor confidence was further boosted by the strategic diversification of Nama Group for Oman Electricity Transmission Company."

**DETAILS ON P13**

Bolder climate action could save millions each year

**TORONTO:** Countries could save millions of lives annually by 2040 if they commit to bolder plans to cut planet-heating emissions and curb global warming in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement on climate change, researchers said.

A study published in *The Lancet Planetary Health* journal found policies to that end could, each year, save 5.86 million lives

due to better diets, 1.18 million lives from cleaner air and 1.15 million lives through more walking and cycling by 2040.

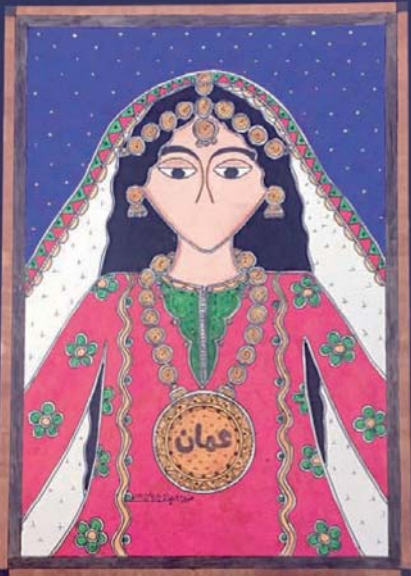
In 2015, governments set a global goal of limiting average temperature rise to "well below" 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial times and set emissions reduction targets as a first step to getting there.

— Reuters

Turning Arab experiences to Madhubani art

People, since ancient times, draw on walls and stones to document their history. These drawings also served as a way to pass knowledge to future generations and to this day had helped modern scientists and sociologists to understand how ancient civilisations functioned. While most of these drawings are considered primitive, they become essential tools in understanding how society grew overtime. It is for this intriguing reason that young Omani artist Marwa al Hinaei has gravitated towards stone-age painting. While she has gone through different phases and genre of art since her childhood, she currently has developed her passion for Madhubani or Mithila Art.

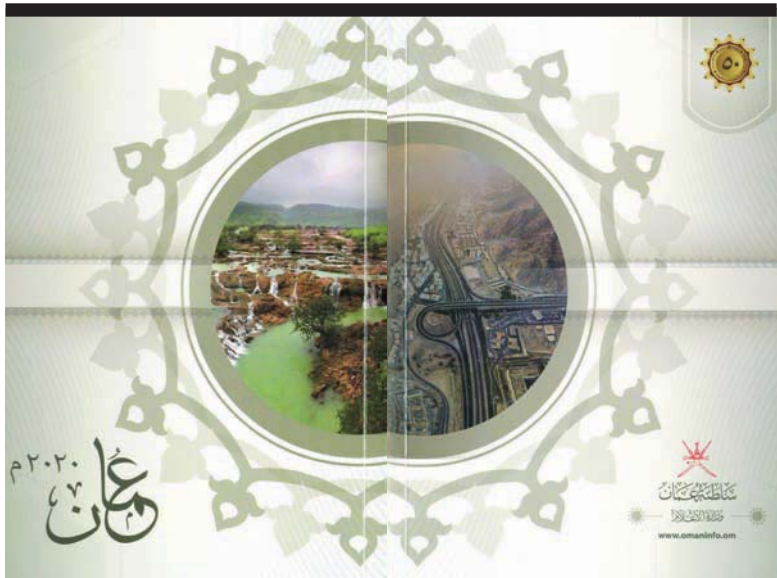
**DETAILS ON P18**





## Sayyid Theyazin receives Chinese ambassador

**MUSCAT:** His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, received in his office on Wednesday Li Lingbing, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the Sultanate. The meeting reviewed the relations binding the two friendly countries. They also touched on several matters of common concern. The meeting also discussed aspects of the existing cooperation in the cultural, sports and youth fields and means of developing them to serve the two countries. — ONA



## Ministry of Information releases *Oman 2020*

**MUSCAT:** The Ministry of Information on Wednesday released a book titled *Oman 2020*. The book documents the achievements that took place during the 50 years of the blessed Renaissance. It also talks about the continuation of the blessed Renaissance by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik who shows his keenness to follow the same wise political approach of late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos.

## GCC Council board chooses new chairperson

**MUSCAT:** The Advisory Board of the GCC Supreme Council on Wednesday chose Shaikha Dr Maryam bint Hussein al Khalifa as Chairperson of the Board in succession of Hamad bin Abdulrahman al Madfa.

Held via video conference in Muscat, the first meeting of the 24th session discussed decisions of tasking the Advisory Board of the GCC Supreme Council to study three topics pertaining to maximising the benefit of GCC states from the Silk Road (Belt and Road Initiative), matters related to the GCC human capital and enhancing economic sustainability, in addition to combining efforts of the GCC states to upgrade their rankings within global competitiveness reports.

The Board also reviewed appropriate visions so as to be raised to the GCC leaders to be approved and referred to the respective committees for implementation.

Dr Nayef Falah al Hajraf, GCC Secretary-General, took part in the meeting. — ONA



### SALE OF USUFRUCT

Abu Timam Chartered Accountants in their capacity as liquidator of one company announce the availability of an Investment Site (Sale of Usufruct) at 18 November Street (Commercial & Residential) of 1700 square meters.

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# Sultanate and Turkey seek to enhance economic cooperation

TURKISH MINISTER AFFIRMS HIS COUNTRY'S APPRECIATION OF THE BALANCED POLICY PURSUED BY OMAN IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

**MUSCAT:** His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, received here on Wednesday Mevlut Cavusoglu, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs.

After HH Sayyid Fahd welcomed the guest and his accompanying delegation, the growing relations between the two friendly countries and means of promoting cooperation between them were reviewed in all economic and trade fields, in addition to encouraging joint ventures. Current regional and international issues and developments were also reviewed.

The Turkish Minister conveyed greetings of the leadership of Turkey to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. He expressed the importance of visiting the Sultanate due to its positive outcomes at the level of exchanging visions on several matters of concern to the two countries.

The Turkish Minister also affirmed his country's appreciation of the balanced policy pursued by Oman in its international relations, as well as the Sultanate's support to paths of understanding among nations. He also commended the talks he conducted with the Omani Foreign Minister and officials.

The meeting was attended by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and Ayse Sozen Usluer, Turkish Ambassador to the Sultanate.

### TALKS SESSION

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy held a session of consultations with Mevlut Cavusoglu.

They reviewed aspects of cooperation between the two friendly countries and means of enhancing them, particularly in



HH Sayyid Fahd with Mevlut Cavusoglu, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs.



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy held a session of consultations with Mevlut Cavusoglu.

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy held a session of consultations with Mevlut Cavusoglu. They reviewed aspects of cooperation between the two friendly countries and means of enhancing them

the economic and cultural fields. The two sides also exchanged views on current regional and international issues of common concern, besides stressing the importance of supporting all peaceful endeavours to consolidate pillars of peace and stability.

The session was attended by the Turkish Ambassador to the Sultanate and officials from both sides. — ONA

# National Museum collections to be displayed at Muscat Airport

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, FEB 10

The National Museum of Oman and Oman Airports have announced signing of an agreement to display museum collections at a designated corner at the Muscat International Airport.

The agreement was signed on Wednesday at the National Museum of Oman in Muscat by Jamal bin Hassan al Mousawi, Secretary-General at the National Museum of Oman, and Shaikh Aimen bin Ahmed al Hosni, CEO of Oman Airports, as part of the collaboration between the National Museum and Oman Airports.

Al Mousawi said, "This agreement is aimed at strengthening joint cooperation in the cultural field in accordance with the goals set by the National Museum which include



reaffirming noble Omani values, raising public awareness and promoting a sense of belonging for citizens, residents and tourists alike towards Oman — its history, heritage and culture. This agreement entails lending of museum collections for a museum set up at Muscat International Airport, through which we strive to

infuse Muscat International Airport's passages with a unique cultural experience from the country's National Museum."

Al Hosni, CEO of Oman Airports, said, "We are pleased to have concluded this agreement with the National Museum, which is in line with our mission to uncover the magnificence of Oman

— its cultural potential and its time-honoured heritage to all visitors and travellers through Muscat International Airport owing to its touristic and cultural significance in the Sultanate."

He added: "This agreement will add more value to the airport's terminal, as this museum corner will convey live models and reflect Oman's

historical and sociological realities discovered through an outstanding travel experience that we aspire to offer through the Sultanate's airports."

By collaborating with Oman Airports, the National Museum seeks to enrich travellers' experience by offering cultural spaces that highlight the three expanses of Muscat International Airport, which represent the sea, oases and desert. The set-up will display some of the museum's finest collections in proportion to these elements either as graphic works, as well as open displays in a corner dedicated to the National Museum at Muscat International Airport.

The selected collections tell a story about the prominence of Muscat International Airport marking a new era in the history of Oman's connection with the world.



# Souq Al Madina set to open to the public in Madinat Sultan Qaboos



**7,500**

Leasable Area (sqm)

**60+**

Shopping Outlets

**400+**

Parking Spaces

**10AM-10PM**

Centre Timing

Souq Al Madina, the retail and commercial centre in the heart of Madinat Sultan Qaboos, will open its doors to the public next week. The development, promoted by the WJ Towell Group, promises a unique and traditional shopping experience that captures the magic of traditional Omani souqs, offered along with modern conveniences.

*"Souq al Madina is a unique lifestyle destination that has been developed to recreate the charm of the old souqs that have been part of Omani culture for centuries. It's a matter of great pride that Souq Al Madina stands testimony to our roots right at the heart of Madinat Sultan Qaboos."*

- Ivor Braganza, CEO of Towell Property

**Souq Al Madina is a key part of the redevelopment of Madinat Sultan Qaboos' popular commercial precinct which has been home to a number of premium brands over the years. The Souq is spread over 3 levels and can house more than 60 brands spread over 7,500 sq.m of leasable area.**

Speaking on the state of the industry and the way forward, Ivor said, "Online retail has grown significantly over the past few years and has received a boost during this pandemic. While some might consider this a challenge for the retail industry, these times represent an opportunity for the industry to adapt to a new hybrid model and not just survive – but thrive. The ones who will do so are those that will reimagine and redefine their stores and business model for the digital age. Brick and mortar stores still have an enormous opportunity to leverage the in-person shopping experience that digital stores will find hard to replicate online."

On the occasion of the opening of the Souq and Spinney's, Sabah Hassan, said, "Spinney's is a key part of our tenant mix for the retail centre that will focus on Convenience, Cuisine, Community and Culture. This opening is yet another milestone in our long and trusted 40+ year relationship with Fine Fare Foods."



The Souq will bring together both international brands as well as home grown concepts to serve the needs of residents in the Madinat Qaboos, Madinat Ilam, Shatti al Qurum, Qurum 29 and surrounding areas. The tenant mix is designed to focus on catering the convenience needs of the community, areas for souq, handicrafts and luxury items, health and wellness, apparel and food and beverage – including full and quick service restaurants, cafés, delis, and confectioners.

The Souq precinct is already home to several brands, banking institutions and premium retailers that have enjoyed success with a majority having traded for over 10 years.

*"Souq al Madina offers a lucrative opportunity for both global brands to increase their reach as well as local home-grown concepts to break out in a competitive market; whether you're looking at expanding or relocating an underperforming store, Souq al Madina is an opportunity that you won't want to miss out on."*

- Sabah Hassan, General Manager



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# DRINK ENOUGH WATER TO BOOST CONCENTRATION

IS THERE ANY CONNECTION BETWEEN SCHOOL AND DEHYDRATION AMONG CHILDREN? THE ANSWER IS YES, TO SOME EXTENT, BECAUSE IT HAS BEEN NOTICED IN MANY CASES THAT CHILDREN’S WATER INTAKE DURING THEIR STAY IN SCHOOLS IS LESS THAN NORMAL

DR NISMA HARIS

Keep the Covid-19 outbreak aside for a while when the children are not going to school on a daily basis. But is there any connection between school and dehydration among children? The answer is yes, to some extent, because it has been noticed in many cases that children’s water intake during their stay in schools is less than normal.

They should have been drinking more water during their stay in schools because it is during the day when people consume more water than night hours. Children spend a major part of their day in schools, in fact, the most active hours of the day. They tend to ignore water during study hours and do not want to waste any single moment of their break time on anything other than playing with their peers.

We can easily excuse them for being children, at the same time we have to be very careful to ensure

that their water intake is proper. We should ensure that they carry water in a moderate size bottle and on their coming back home from school we should ask whether they have finished the water or not. This is the time we can inculcate a habit of proper water intake.

Water plays important role in the proper functioning of our body. From maintaining the body’s equilibrium to carrying out the vital functions, flushing out the toxins from the body, it has many roles.

For the school kids, drinking water during school hours is even more essential. As guardians, we are more concerned about their dietary habits than the habit of drinking water frequently during the day. We leave no stone unturned to pack healthy meals for our children to school. But somewhere we miss cultivating in our children about the importance of drinking water at regular intervals, especially at school. Children control their thirst

unknowingly as sometimes drinking water is not allowed during the classes or at other times.

According to Elizabeth Sherwin, MD (Children’s National Hospital, USA), less water consumption leads to dehydration which in turn causes health issues like headache, fatigue, dizziness, urinary tract infections, muscle cramps, etc. Their body’s water requirements are more compared to adults because of the higher body surface area to mass ratio and are hence more vulnerable to dehydration.

Climatic conditions also play a determining role in the body’s water requirements. In hot, dry and humid conditions, kids must be encouraged to consume water at frequent intervals.

Active participation in sports or other physical activities also increases the water needs of the body, particularly in children. Many scientific pieces of evidence throw light on the role of drinking

water and its benefits on improving cognitive performance among children.

**Drinking less water leads to dehydration and as a result, it causes unclear thinking and confusion in children.**

Water also helps to limit excess weight gain in children and adolescents. Moreover, water is the chief constituent of the body cells. Hence, it is imperative to keep the cells hydrated so that physical health can be sustained.

Water is also the prime component of blood which transports various nutrients within the body tissues, thus aiding in absorption as well as removing the harmful substances from the body. Drinking less than adequate water predisposes kids to constipation and other digestive issues. Thus, in this way, water plays a key role in preserving gut health in children. Water protects the organs and tissues as well as provides

cushioning to the joints.

Children are dependent on adults to remind them to drinking water regularly. It is incumbent upon us as parents, teachers, or guardians to educate them regarding the benefits of drinking water. School rules must be compliant enough to allow children to drink water during classes if they feel thirsty. They should never be encouraged to hold their thirst. Various schools have taken the initiative of water bell; that is, a bell is rung on the premises several times to remind them to consume water. Schools must provide access and provision to safe drinking water for children so that their water requirements are not compromised during school hours.

In short, water is that unmatched element of nature that has infinite beneficial effects, and as adults, we should join hands and ensure our kids drink enough water to keep their intrinsic and extrinsic health in equilibrium.



■ MINISTER OF ECONOMY RECEIVES  
IRANIAN AMBASSADOR

**MUSCAT:** Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, received in his office on Wednesday Ali Najafi, the Iranian Ambassador to the Sultanate. They discussed the friendly relations between the two countries and aspects of existing economic cooperation to serve the common interests of both nations.

■ FROM PAGE 1

No more home  
quarantine for passengers  
arriving in Sultanate

The Supreme Committee also decided on a mandatory institutional quarantine for all arrivals through land, sea and air ports on their own expenses as many did not comply with home quarantine and others violated the measures approved by the Supreme Committee.

Closure of all commercial activities in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate from 7 pm to 6 am starting from Friday (February 12) for 14 days with the exception of fuel stations, health institutions and private pharmacies.

Closure of beaches and public parks in all governorates of the Sultanate starting from Thursday (February 11) for two weeks.

Ban on all forms of gatherings at rest houses, farms, winter camps and other places.

Avoidance of family gatherings inside houses and other places.

Reducing entry to service halls at public and private establishments as well as shopping centres, restaurants, coffees and indoor sports activities, by 50 per cent, starting from Friday (February 12), until further notice.

## ECONOMIC IMPACT

Stemming from the Supreme Committee's role to reduce the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and mitigating the financial burden on entrepreneurs and owners of small and medium enterprises, the committee decided to delay

the payment of due instalments for these enterprises to the Rafid Fund (formerly) from January 1 to the end of June, 2021.

The Supreme Committee decided to offer facilitations for the beneficiaries from the Sanad Programme and Mawarid Al Rizq (formerly). The facilitations will be announced by the relevant authorities later on.

The Supreme Committee reiterated that its importance that citizens and residents should avoid travel outside the Sultanate during the upcoming period unless it's necessary particularly that many countries have toughened restrictions on travel and movement.

The committee also recommended reducing travel of citizens and residents outside the Sultanate for official missions and participation.

The Supreme Committee affirms that it is constantly following the pandemic on both the local and global levels and that the relevant authorities continue to impose penalties on the violators of the Supreme Committee's decisions which aimed at protecting the members of the society for the pandemic. This includes publishing the photos and names of the violators in various types of media.

The Supreme Committee confirmed that it will close any establishment that comply with the precautionary measures.

— ONA

Royal Hospital warns of  
rise in Covid-19 cases

VINOD NAIR

@vinot\_nair

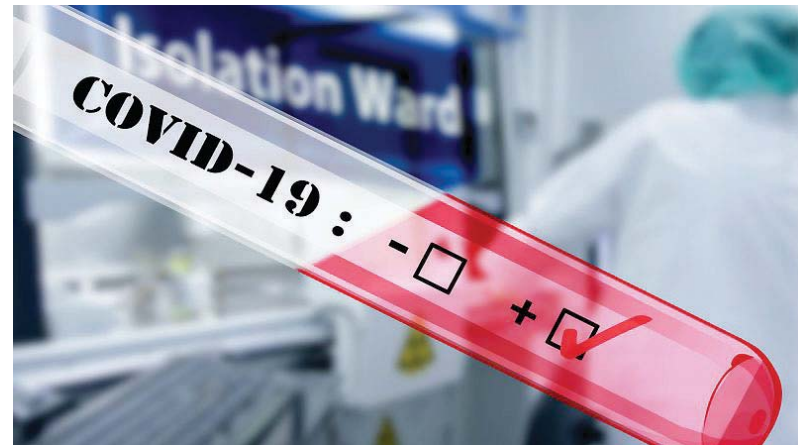
The Royal Hospital has warned of an increase in cases of Covid-19 infection and admission of patients in wards and intensive care units (ICUs) in the health institutions in the Sultanate.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Wednesday reported 190 new cases of Covid-19, bringing the total number of cases registered in the Sultanate to 136,377.

Twenty-five patients were hospitalised during the past 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients in hospitals to 154, including 50 in intensive care units (ICUs).

"This increase calls for all of us to resume preparations to deal with any increments or other waves to come, and to activate the steps specified in the standard work document to resume our services," said Qasim bin Ahmed al Salmi, director-general of the Royal Hospital.

The infection control team and



all the supportive teams in the hospital will work diligently in the national centres, departments, and hospital departments, and we will use our experience and strength to support the Sultanate's health system, to overcome any upcoming challenges related to Covid-19, he said.

Royal Hospital said it has started a campaign to vaccinate the health cadres and more than 600 of its staff have been vaccinated. "We expect to vaccinate more, consecutively, soon."

Al Salmi said that pandemic had led to the collapse of the health and economic systems of developed countries, with enormous resources.

"I thank you for your sincere efforts and your noble sacrifices to support the hospital, support the health system of the Sultanate, and enable it to deal with the requirements of a pandemic that the world has not seen for more than a hundred years," he said in a statement.

Al Salmi added, "With your dedication and sacrifices, we

witnessed a significant decline in the previous wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the numbers of patients in intensive care departments and wards decreased, and we were able to start resuming some of our services to excellent rates, in accordance with the standard document for the safe resumption of health services, which you drafted."

He said, "We must stress on examining patients coming to the hospital to obtain our various services and make sure that they do not have symptoms of infection."

The national campaign to immunise health personnel and the population will continue and will help to witness the end of this pandemic and this challenge soon, he said.

The MoH also reported one Covid-19-related death, bringing the total death toll to 1,537.

The total recovery cases reached 128, 255, which is 94 per cent of the total cases reported.

Envoy to Guinea-Bissau  
presents credentials

**BISSAU:** President Umaru Sissoko Embalo of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau received at the Republican Palace on Wednesday Abdullah bin Mohammed al Aamri, who presented his credentials as the Sultanate's non-resident ambassador to Guinea-Bissau.

During the meeting, Ambassador Al Aamri conveyed greetings and best wishes of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin

Tarik to President Embalo, and the friendly people of Guinea-Bissau further progress and prosperity.

The President of Guinea-Bissau asked the ambassador to convey his greetings and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan, and the Omani people further progress. The meeting reviewed bilateral relations and means of promoting them in various fields. — ONA

Prepaid electricity meters  
gaining acceptance

VINOD NAIR

@vinot\_nair

More and more apartment owners in Muscat are installing prepaid meters in their flats, which have been also welcomed by the tenants.

With the electricity bills expected to increase during the summer months after the introduction of a new tariff, prepaid meters will help customers rationalise their usage.

"Conventional electricity meters, however smart, have their drawbacks. While tenants are generally not convinced of the amount mentioned in the bills, they also ignore wastage of electricity by taking precautionary measures," said an apartment owner who has started installing bills in all his flats in Muscat.

We also have another issue here: "Some people vacate flats without clearing their bills, leaving a heavy burden on us

under these circumstances. With prepaid meters, it is a win-win for both sides. Tenants do have to worry about clearing pending dues while shifting or vacating homes."

According to sources, buying credit for your prepaid meter at utility company outlets and also at retail shops and petrol stations.

"With prepaid meters, users will pay for electricity as per the usage, instead of paying monthly bills. It will be easier for customers to budget for their electricity needs alongside other household bills," said Ramez, whose landlord installed a prepaid meter recently.

When the credit reduces to RO 2, a low volume warning sound for two minutes alerting the customer of low balance.

Customers will have to access an emergency credit facility in case they cannot get to the shops to buy credit.

But not all customers are convinced of the prepaid meters.

## MoCIIP reviews investment opportunities in Asia

**MUSCAT:** The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) in cooperation with the Foreign Ministry held a virtual meeting with the ambassadors of the Sultanate in Asian countries, under the auspices of Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, on Wednesday.

The meeting was attended by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthi, Under-Secretary for Diplomatic Affairs at the Foreign Ministry, along with representatives from the Ministry of Transport, Communications

and Information Technology, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones and Oman Investment Authority with the participation of 15 representatives of the Sultanate's embassies in Asia.

The meeting was aimed at acquainting the participants with the investment opportunities available in various sectors in the Sultanate and ways of attracting foreign investments during the upcoming period as well as the economic developments in the Sultanate. Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthi valued the efforts being exerted by the MoCIIP to pull more foreign investments to



the Sultanate underscoring the importance of activating the role of the diplomatic missions and

enhancing cooperation between the ministries.

Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah,

Under-Secretary for Investment Promotion at the MoCIIP, said that this meeting stems from the

ministry's belief in interactive and integrative action between the state entities with a view to promoting Omani products in the global markets. She added that over the past period the MoCIIP embraced a set of policies aimed at creating an attractive climate for foreign investors including removing all setbacks and challenges facing investors, simplifying the procedures through an initiative aimed at restructuring the sector in line with the investment requirements, reinstating the investment portfolio project that encompasses investment opportunities in various government sectors, among other things.

# 12-year-old teaches neighbours during school closure

**ATMIDAH:** Everyday up to 30 children gather for school lessons in a narrow village street in Egypt's northern Dakahlia province.

Their teacher is 12-year-old Reem El Khouly, who started offering instruction to her younger neighbours in Atmidah, about 80 km (50 miles) northeast of Cairo, when schools across Egypt were shut due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"I thought that instead of having them play in the street, I can teach them," said Khouly.

"I wake up in the morning, pray and I call them to start the classes. I teach them Arabic, mathematics, religion and English."

Khouly started using just a notebook before being given a blackboard and some chalk. Now she has a whiteboard and marker pens donated by a local company.

"Once the schools were closed, Reem started teaching us so that we don't forget what we learned at school," said Mohamed Abdel Moneim, a nine-year-old who attends the classes.

"I love Miss Reem because I really understand Arabic, maths and English due to her teaching."

Khouly hopes to work as a maths teacher when she is older.

"My mum didn't encourage me in the beginning because my voice was loud, but she encouraged me when she saw how the students were interacting with me and benefiting, and told me I can do this as long as I like it," she said. — **Reuters**



Reem El Khouly teaches children in her neighbourhood as schools remain closed during the coronavirus disease pandemic, at Atmidah village in Dakahlia province, Egypt on Sunday. — **Reuters**

# Plane ablaze in drone attack on Saudi airport

**DUBAI:** Yemen's Ansar Allah group said it carried out a drone attack on Saudi Arabia's Abha airport on Wednesday which the Saudi-led coalition said caused a fire in a civilian aircraft.

Ansar Allah military spokesman Yahya Sarea said four drones were used in an attack that he said struck Abha airport, in southern Saudi Arabia, on Wednesday.

Ansar Allah regularly launches drones and missiles into Saudi Arabia, many of which Riyadh says it intercepts. Some have previously hit Abha International Airport which is about 120 km from the border with Yemen.

"The attempt to target Abha airport is a war crime and put civilian travellers' lives in danger," the coalition statement said, adding that the aircraft was on the ground at the time and that the fire was brought under control. — **Agencies**

## ■ COLOURS OF REVOLUTION



An Iranian parachuter performs during a ceremony marking the 42nd anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, at the Freedom square in Tehran, on Wednesday. — **AFP**

# Use AstraZeneca's vaccine even against S African variant: WHO

**GENEVA:** AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine is safe and effective and should be deployed widely, including in countries where the South African variant of the coronavirus may reduce its efficacy, a World Health Organization panel said on Wednesday.

In interim recommendations on the shot, the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunisation (SAGE) panel said the vaccine should be given in two doses with an interval of 8 to 12 weeks, and should also be used in people aged 65 and older.

Even in countries such as South Africa, where questions have been raised about the AstraZeneca vaccine's efficacy against a newly-emerged variant of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, "there is no reason not to recommend its use", SAGE's chair, Alejandro Cravioto, told a briefing.

"We have made a recommendation that even if there is a reduction in the possibility of this vaccine having a full impact in its protection capacity, especially against severe disease, there is no reason not to recommend its use even in



Municipal health workers and environmental military police officers leave Tupe after administering the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine in the Negro river banks in Manaus, Brazil, on Tuesday. — **Reuters**

countries that have circulation of the variant," he said.

South Africa this week paused part of its rollout of the AstraZeneca vaccine after data from a small trial showed it did not protect against mild to

moderate illness from the 501Y.V2 variant of the coronavirus now dominant in the country.

The WHO said those preliminary findings "highlight the urgent need for a coordinated approach for surveillance and

evaluation of variants" and their impact on vaccine efficacy.

"The WHO will continue to monitor the situation (and) as new data become available, recommendations will be updated accordingly," it said. — **Reuters**

## SHORT TAKES

### DUBLIN

#### Ireland may fine residents 2,000 euros for travel

Ireland's government is considering increasing fines for residents who break current Covid-19 restrictions to travel aboard on holiday to 2,000 euros from 500 euros, Prime Minister Micheál Martin said on Wednesday.

Non-essential travel overseas is a breach the top level of Covid-19 regulations that limit people to exercising within 5 kilometres of their homes, except for travelling for work, education or other essential purposes.

While passenger numbers are



down 97 per cent year-on-year, the government said two-thirds of Irish arrivals at airports are returning holiday-makers, which an official described as "a very concerning statistic".

### ADDIS ABABA

#### 80 per cent of Tigray cut off from aid

The head of the Ethiopian Red Cross Society said on Wednesday that 80 per cent of the country's conflict-hit Tigray region was cut off from humanitarian assistance and warned that tens of thousands could starve to death.

The dire assessment underscores widespread fears of a humanitarian catastrophe three months after Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize winner, announced military operations intended to topple Tigray's former ruling



party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

"Eighty per cent of the Tigray is unreachable at this particular time," Ethiopian Red Cross president Abera Tola said.

### NEW DELHI

#### Modi invites protesting farmers for talks

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday invited protesting farmers for talks to address growers' concerns about three new agricultural laws that seek to deregulate the country's vast farm sector.

Tens of thousands of farmers have been camping near New Delhi for more than two months in a bid to force the government to withdraw the laws they say benefit private buyers at their expense. Protesting farmers accuse the government of introducing



the laws to help large private retailers. Growers say the laws will gradually make traditional wholesale markets irrelevant and farmers will be left at the mercy of private buyers.

## In brief

■ NEW YORK



### FACEBOOK TO TEMPORARILY CUT POLITICAL CONTENT

Facebook said on Wednesday it would temporarily reduce political content appearing on New Feeds for some users in Canada, Brazil and Indonesia this week and in the United States within the coming weeks.

Chief Executive Officer Mark Zuckerberg said in January that he wanted to “turn down the temperature” of political conversations on the social networking site because “people don’t want politics and fighting to take over their experience on our services.”

The world’s largest social network last month said it would stop recommending civic and political groups to users.

■ BERLIN



### GERMANY TO EXTEND LOCKDOWN UNTIL MARCH 14

Germany plans to extend restrictions to curb the spread of the coronavirus until March 14, according to a draft agreement for talks between Chancellor Angela Merkel and leaders of the 16 federal states on Wednesday.

The number of new daily infections in Germany has been falling, prompting some regional leaders to push for a timetable to ease the lockdown, but concerns are growing about the impact of more infectious variants of the virus on case numbers.

“We have a highly fragile situation”, Winfried Kretschmann, Greens premier of the southern state of Baden-Wuerttemberg, told *Spiegel* Online.

■ MADRID



### SPAIN TOPS 3 MILLION CORONAVIRUS CASES; REAL FIGURE HIGHER

The total number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Spain, one of Europe’s hardest-hit nations, has topped three million since the start of the pandemic, the health ministry said on Tuesday.

Spain recorded another 16,402 cases in the last 24 hours, taking its overall figure to 3,005,487. Seroprevalence studies, which test for antibodies using a blood serum sample, suggest the real figure is far higher.

Over the same 24-hour period, Spain also saw another 766 deaths, bringing the overall toll to 63,061 in the nation of some 47 million people.

— Agencies

# Scientists claim step closer to figuring out Parkinson’s disease

DUBLIN: A “crucial new piece of information” discovered by University of Cambridge-led researchers could mark a “vital step” towards understanding Parkinson’s disease, a debilitating neurological disorder, according to new research.

A paper published on Wednesday in the journal *Nature Communications* outlined what the university says is “compelling new evidence” about a “key protein” that affects neurons in the human brain.

Giuliana Fusco, research fellow at the university’s St John’s College, said that “if we want to cure Parkinson’s, first we need to understand the function of alpha-synuclein, a protein present in everyone’s brains.”

“This research is a vital step towards that goal”, said Fusco, lead author of the paper.

“Until the function of this mystery protein is confirmed with more research”, said co-author Alfonso de Simone of Imperial College London, “drug therapies cannot begin to be developed to tackle the origins of Parkinson’s disease.”

The disease is thought to be derived from a mix of genetic and environmental factors leading to the death of nerve cells that make dopamine, which plays a role in bodily movement.

The disease can develop slowly over a period of time and appear in impaired speech and movement, as well as impacting



“Until the function of this mystery protein is confirmed with more research drug therapies cannot begin to be developed to tackle the origins of Parkinson’s disease

ALFONSO DE SIMONE  
Imperial College London

cognitive abilities or even causing the onset of dementia.

There is no cure for Parkinson’s, which affects more than 10 million people and was first described in 1817 by British

doctor James Parkinson in a paper about “the shaking palsy.”

Boxer Muhammad Ali, comedian Billy Connolly and singer Ozzy Osborne are among those who have contracted the disease.

Symptoms include limb tremors and stiffness as well as gait and balance problems. Most of those affected are over 60, but a “young onset” variant can afflict people in their prime, such as actor Michael J Fox, who was diagnosed when 29.

David Dexter, Associate Research director at Parkinson’s UK said: “It’s important that we keep funding this fundamental research into really getting down to the nitty-gritty about what causes Parkinson’s, so we can then design effective treatments to actually slow Parkinson’s for the first time.” — dpa

# N Korea stole \$300m in crypto to fund nukes: UN

SEOUL: North Korea has stolen more than \$300 million worth of cryptocurrencies through cyberattacks in recent months to support its banned nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, a confidential UN report said.

Compiled by a panel of experts monitoring sanctions on Pyongyang, the report said the country’s “total theft of virtual assets from 2019 to November 2020 is valued at approximately \$316.4 million”, citing a UN member state. Financial institutions and exchanges were hacked to generate revenue for Pyongyang’s nuclear and missile development, said the report.

The vast majority of the proceeds came from two thefts late last year. The North is known to operate an army of thousands of well-trained hackers who have attacked firms, institutions and researchers in South Korea and elsewhere.

It has also been accused of exploiting its cyber capabilities for financial gain.

The North is under multiple sets of international sanctions over its banned nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes, which have made rapid progress under leader Kim Jong Un.

A summit between Kim and then-US president Donald



A Bitcoin Trading Machine is seen in a store in Brooklyn, New York. — Reuters

Trump in Hanoi in February 2019 broke down over sanctions relief and what Pyongyang would be willing to give up in return.

Nuclear talks have been stalled ever since, while the North showed off several new missiles at military parades in October and last month, when Kim pledged to strengthen his nuclear arsenal.

The UN panel said it was investigating a September 2020 hack against a cryptocurrency exchange that resulted in \$281 million worth of cryptocurrencies being stolen. A second cyberattack siphoned off \$23 million a month later.

“Preliminary analysis, based on the attack vectors and subsequent efforts to launder the

illicit proceeds strongly suggests links to the DPRK”, the report said, using the initials for the North’s official name.

Pyongyang’s cyberwarfare abilities first came to global prominence in 2014 when it was accused of hacking into Sony Pictures Entertainment as revenge for “The Interview”, a satirical film that mocked leader Kim. The attack resulted in the posting of several unreleased movies as well as a vast trove of confidential documents online.

The North is also blamed for a huge, \$81 million cyber-heist from the Bangladesh Central Bank, as well as the theft of \$60 million from Taiwan’s Far Eastern International Bank.

— AFP

# China asks Washington to invite WHO to probe US Covid-19 outbreak

BEIJING: China called on the United States on Wednesday to invite the World Health Organization to investigate origins of the Covid-19 outbreak there, as sparring over the pandemic continued after the WHO wrapped up its field work in the Chinese city of Wuhan.

Hours after the WHO team revealed preliminary findings at a Wuhan news conference on Tuesday, Washington said it wants to scrutinise data used by the team, which concluded that the virus causing Covid-19 did not originate in a laboratory in Wuhan, and that bats remain a likely source.

“We wish that the US side can, like China, uphold an open and transparent attitude, and be able to invite WHO experts to the US to conduct origin tracing research and inspection”, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a regular daily briefing, repeating a call it has been making recently.

The origins of the coronavirus

pandemic, which first emerged in Wuhan in late 2019, are highly politicised, with China pushing the idea that the virus has roots outside its borders.

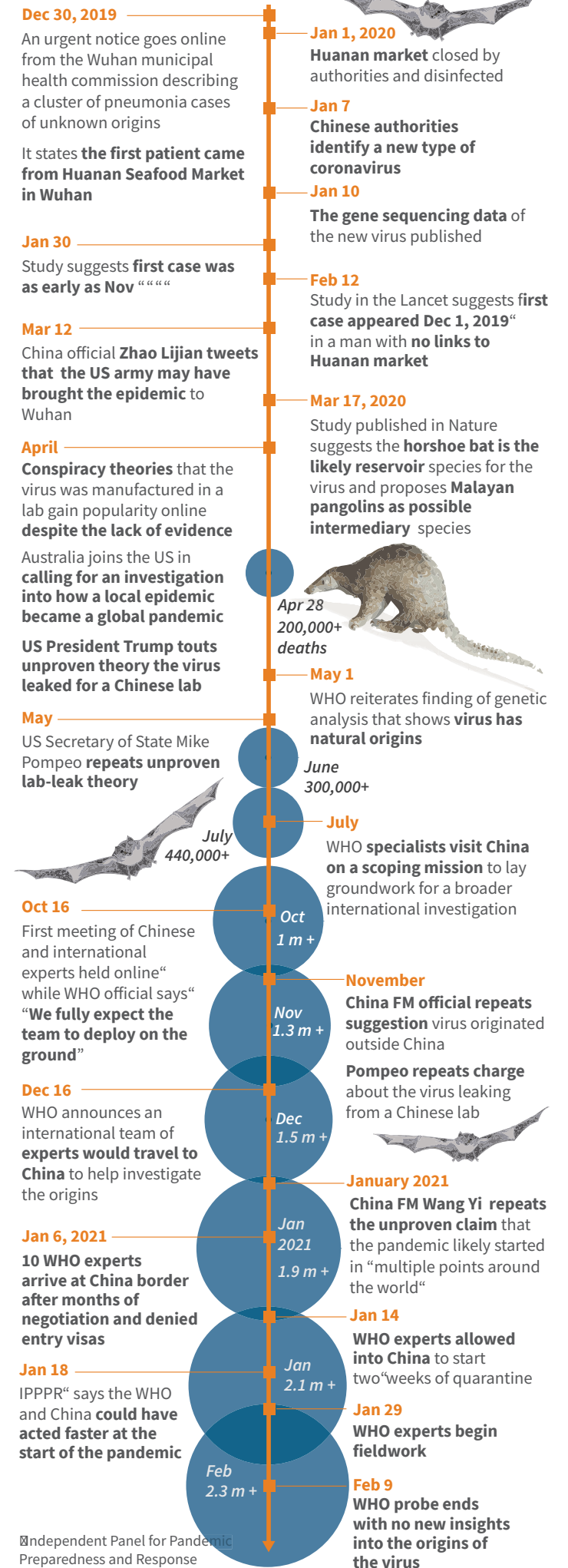
White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Tuesday that the Biden administration had not been involved in the “planning and implementation” of the WHO investigation and wants to take an independent review of its findings and underlying data.

“The US independently examining the WHO’s data? It’s the WHO who should examine the US data”, said Hu Xijin, editor-in-chief of the *Global Times*, a tabloid run by the ruling Communist Party’s official *People’s Daily*, on Weibo.

Peter Ben Embarek, who heads the WHO-led team that spent four weeks in China — two of them in quarantine — said that the investigation had not changed its picture of the outbreak, although the virus could have crossed borders before arriving in Wuhan. — AFP

## Covid-19 origins: a timeline of dispute

A fundamental scientific question of vital importance has been turned into a political controversy “as scientists seek proof” and government officials repeat unproven theories



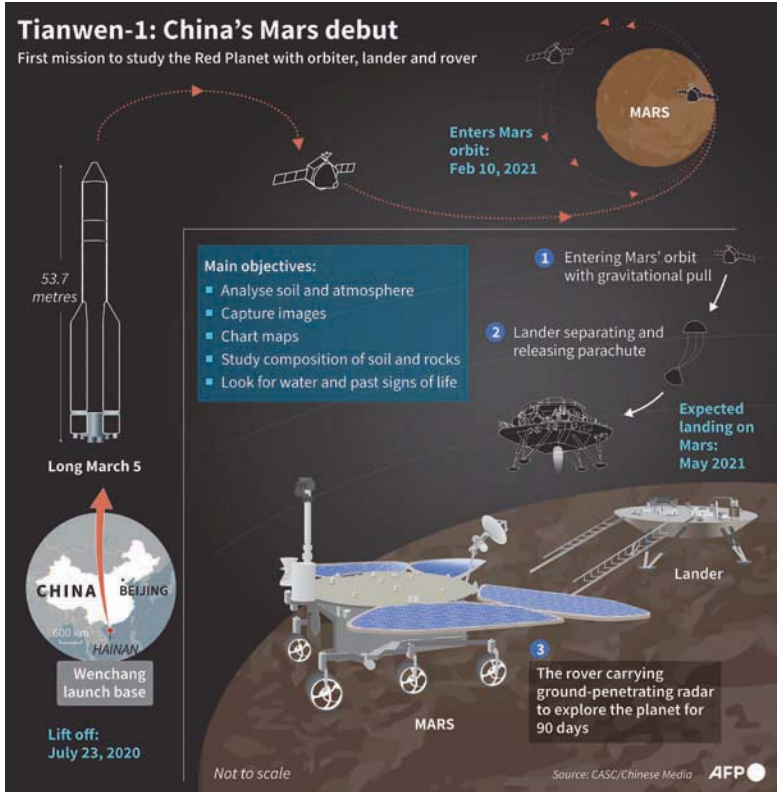
AFP

■ WARMING UP TO BEAT COLD



People use self-made exercise equipment while training in a forest on a frosty day in Moscow, Russia, on Wednesday. — Reuters

## Chinese spacecraft enters Mars orbit



**BEIJING:** An uncrewed Chinese spacecraft on Wednesday successfully entered orbit around Mars after a 6-1/2-month journey from Earth, China's space agency said, in the country's first independent mission to the red planet.

The robotic probe initiated and completed a 15-minute burn of its thrusters, the China National Space Administration said in a statement, slowing the spacecraft to a speed at which it could be captured by the pull of Mars' gravity.

In about three months, the Tianwen-1 will attempt to send a landing capsule carrying a 240-kilogramme rover in a rapid seven-minute descent onto a massive plain in the northern hemisphere of Mars known as Utopia Planitia.

If the landing is successful, the solar-powered rover will explore the Martian surface for 90 days, studying its soil and seeking signs of ancient life, including any sub-surface water and ice using a ground-penetrating radar.

Tianwen-1, or "Questions to Heaven", the name of a Chinese poem written two millennia ago, is China's first independent mission to the planet after a probe co-launched with Russia failed to leave the Earth's orbit in 2011.

The probe is one of three reaching Mars this month. The Hope spacecraft launched by the United Arab Emirates successfully entered the planet's orbit on Tuesday. Hope will not make a landing but will orbit Mars gathering data on its weather and atmosphere. — AFP

## EU admits errors in bloc's Covid vaccine strategy

**BRUSSELS:** After weeks of criticism and delivery setbacks, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen acknowledged mistakes in the bloc's Covid-19 vaccination strategy in the European Parliament on Wednesday.

"We were too late on the approvals," the top EU official told lawmakers. "And perhaps we were too sure that what we ordered would actually arrive on time."

The EU focussed too much on development and underestimated how difficult it would be to scale up production of the vital shots, the German politician conceded. "In a way, science surpassed industry."

With EU states lagging behind the front-runners in the race to inoculate their populations against Covid-19, the bloc's executive arm has fended off accusations about the strategy it devised and grappled with pharmaceutical firms over delivery problems.

However, von der Leyen defended the bloc's choice to opt for conditional market authorisation rather than emergency approval for vaccines,



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen puts on her mask during a debate on the state of play of the EU's coronavirus disease vaccination strategy, at the European Parliament in Brussels on Wednesday. — Reuters

**The EU focussed too much on development and underestimated how difficult it would be to scale up production of the vital shots, the German politician conceded. "In a way, science surpassed industry."**

as neighbouring Britain did. The latter, though speedier, confers liability for drugs

from producing companies to governments.

The three to four weeks of extra time needed for the process was an essential investment to instil public confidence, according to the EU executive chief, even if it has now slowed Europe's vaccine campaign down.

"There can be no compromise when it comes to injecting a biologically active substance into a healthy person," she said.

It was also the right for the European Commission to buy jabs on behalf of the member states, she added.

The members of the EU legislature largely backed the shared approach, which saw the 27 states order vaccines collectively, in Wednesday's debate, but many were vocal about the secrecy shrouding contracts with producers of the shots.

"These vaccines were developed thanks to billions of euros of public money," French socialist lawmaker Manon Aubry said, calling for greater transparency and accusing von der Leyen of allowing pharmaceutical firms to dictate the terms of sales. — dpa

All the virus in the world would fit in a coke can

**LONDON:** All the Covid-causing virus circulating in the world right now could easily fit inside a single cola can, according to a calculation by a British mathematician whose sum exposes just how much devastation is caused by minuscule viral particles.

Using global rates of new infections with the pandemic disease, coupled with estimations of viral load, Bath University maths expert Kit Yates worked out there are around two quintillion — or two billion billion — SARS-CoV-2 virus particles in the world at any one time.

Detailing the steps in his calculations, Yates said he used the diameter of SARS-CoV-2 — at an average of about 100 nanometers, or 100 billionths of a meter — and then figured out the volume of the spherical virus.

Even accounting for the coronavirus' projecting spike proteins and the fact that the spherical particles will leave gaps when stacked together, the total is still less than in a single 330 millilitre cola can, he said. — Reuters

## Thailand bans Valentine's Day marriages

**BANGKOK:** Lovers across Bangkok will be heartbroken come Valentine's Day, with city officials declaring on Wednesday that all of the Thai capital's 50 districts will be banned from issuing marriage licences.

The holiday, immensely popular across the kingdom, is also typically considered an auspicious day for couples to tie the knot resulting in large queues at marriage registration offices across the city.

The most popular district is Bang Rak which translates as "district of love" in Thai.

But the hopes of eager-to-wed couples have been dashed.

"Bangkok's 50 district offices will refrain from providing marriage licence registration service on this Valentine's Day," Thailand's Public Relations Department said on Twitter.

"The cancellation aims to prevent the spread of #Covid19."

The announcement also said Chinese New Year festival, which usually involves a raucous parade in Bangkok's Chinatown, will not go on. Last year, Bang Rak district



A couple shows their newly-issued marriage licence on Valentine's Day in Bang Rak. — AFP file photo

had scores of couples dressed in matching outfits or formal wear lining up before dawn to register for licences, helped by pink-shirted civil servants wearing "love" headbands.

Little fanfare has been made among the city's malls and businesses compared to previous

years, though that hasn't stopped some restaurants for punting out Valentine's Day-themed meal offerings. Burger King Thailand has debuted "Black and Pink burgers" for Valentine's Day, featuring a pink salmon patty with rose-colour buns.

Last year, Thailand was faring

well in handling the pandemic but infections have climbed to more than 23,000 cases after a new wave hit in December.

This has led to a partial lockdown in Bangkok, with authorities banning bars and alcohol sales in restaurants. — AFP

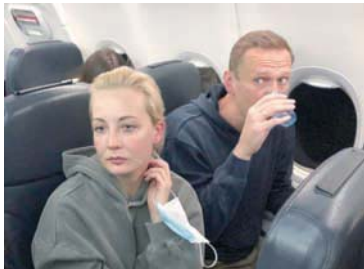
SHORT TAKES

MOSCOW

### Wife of Navalny flies to Germany from Russia

Yulia Navalnaya, the wife of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, has flown to Germany from Russia, the Interfax news agency reported on Wednesday.

Navalny was flown to Germany last summer after being poisoned in Siberia with what many Western countries said was a military-grade nerve agent. Tens of thousands have taken to the streets in recent weeks to protest against the jailing of Navalny, a prominent critic of President Vladimir Putin, who says he is



being persecuted for political reasons. Police have detained more than 11,000 people at what they say were unsanctioned protests that the Kremlin has condemned as illegal and dangerous.

NEW DELHI

### Twitter suspends 500 accounts after India request

Twitter on Wednesday suspended more than 500 accounts linked to the ongoing farmers' protests following a request to do so by the Indian government. The accounts were in clear violation of Twitter's policies, the social media giant said in a statement. The platform also said it had reduced the visibility of certain hashtags with "harmful content," making it impossible for them to trend.

Twitter also briefly suspended the profile of a well-known Indian magazine that has been cov-



ering the farmers' protests. The move was reversed several hours later, following public criticism. Later, the platform received a warning from the Ministry of Electronics and IT Technology.

JERUSALEM

### Israel plans green pass for Covid immune

Israel plans to open up some hotels, gyms and other leisure facilities in two weeks to those documented as being immune to Covid-19, Health Minister Yuli Edelstein said on Wednesday.

Having administered Pfizer vaccines to almost 40 per cent of its 9 million population, Israel saw first signs of managing to outpace highly contagious virus variants, he added.

Israel has said it would issue an official app allowing users to link up to their Health Ministry



files and show if they have been vaccinated against or recovered from Covid-19, with presumed immunity, in order to gain entry to leisure facilities. — Agencies

# Liquidation normal in an economy...

Companies go for liquidation and declare bankrupt in all countries around the world. It is a normal thing which takes place everywhere. It is due to the changes in the global economy. But it is unfortunate that some cases are being misinterpreted in the Sultanate of Oman, due to lack of understanding of economic cycle and developments. Without any insight into the causes and factors of such things, some people are improperly talking about it.

There is no justification for such conclusions. Those who are coming up with such assumptions do not have any argument to support their stand. By such talks what they are contributing is just frustration in the local circles adversely affecting the investment environment in the country.

Perhaps raising the issue of liquidation of some of the companies and linking them to economic developments taking place in the country is nothing more than baseless rumour. There is no evidence or justification of what they have come up with.

Such irresponsible conclusions are being made despite clarifications coming from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion on such issues. After contacting the business group, the ministry has made it clear that the companies which are being liquidated



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LINKING THE  
LIQUIDATION OF  
SOME COMPANIES  
TO ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENTS  
IN THE  
COUNTRY IS  
LIKE SPREADING  
RUMOURS

were set up in 2019 and have never started their economic or commercial activities, and this the reason why they are being liquidated as per the rules and regulations. The announcement in this regard was also made in the official Gazette.

One thing which has surprised all of us is that some are spreading fictitious stories about the economy of the country. Such things are being spread on social media also. This is nothing but spreading falsehood, slander and lies.

This is not the first time a company or companies are liquidated in Oman or anywhere in the world. This is not because of the conditions of the place. There are several reasons for such decisions as mentioned in Article 40 of the Companies Act. Among the reasons which are mentioned include internal differences, mergers, lack of any activity since its establishment or no activity for more than two years, or completion of the achievement of the purpose for which a company has been set up, or decision of the partners to end their partnership after completion of the agreement. There can also be management or financial issues behind the decision.

The liquidation is not always due to economic developments. It is important that before spreading any such statements, facts should be verified.

In the recent past, the government has announced incentives for merger and unification of registrations. This was to avoid duplicity of registration of companies. This required announcement of liquidation of companies and registrations and completion of the procedures. We notice that there are many companies which are involved in just one activity. It is natural that some of them need to withdraw from the market and go for liquidation.

At the same time, there are new companies being set up. They are being registered and working in dynamic economic environment in the country. Therefore, it is a must that if we speak anything, we must have full understanding of the issue, and do not exaggerate it.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has explained the matter so that there is no misunderstanding. It did so on behalf of the business group so that there is no misrepresentation of the business and economic conditions of the country. Therefore, it is also a kind of notice that those who spread such rumours may face legal consequences.

There is adequate freedom of expression in Oman. But there is a difference between spreading rumours and misunderstandings causing adverse effects to economic activities and airing views on a subject.

## CORNERED

### Italy's Salvini shifts his party out of far-right camp

CRISPIAN BALMER AND  
GISELDA VAGNONI

In February 2017, populist firebrand Matteo Salvini accused the-then European Central Bank Chief Mario Draghi of being an “accomplice” in what he termed the economic “massacre” of Italy.

Fast forward four years and Salvini has unexpectedly pledged the support of his League party for a government that Draghi is trying to put together to tackle the twin scourges of the coronavirus pandemic and the economic crisis ravaging the country.

For a man who once campaigned for Italy to quit the European single currency, Salvini's endorsement of Draghi marks a potential sea change for the League, shunting it out of the far-right, eurosceptic camp and into the moderate, centre right. League politicians say it is a calculated move, aimed at improving Salvini's image, thereby enhancing his prospects of one day becoming prime minister, while boosting the appeal of their group, whose poll ratings have been in decline.

“We want to become like the Republican Party in the United States. An inclusive party that reconciles all the positions of the Italian centre right, no one excluded”, Giulio Centemero, a League parliamentarian, said.

President Sergio Mattarella gave Draghi a mandate to form a government last week after the previous coalition collapsed, urging him to seek cross-party backing for his administration.

Salvini's immediate response was to keep Draghi at arm's length and push instead for early elections.

But members of his inner circle, including moderate stalwart Giancarlo Giorgetti, who is a friend of Draghi, saw it as a golden opportunity to hit the reboot button and shake off the “far-right” label that has spooked investors in the past.

“The League wants to join Draghi in order to clear its name in Europe, to get rid of its reputation as a eurosceptic party”, said a senior League source, who had helped shape the policy.

Salvini's plain-talking, anti-migrant message has resonated with millions of Italians and helped transform the League from a troubled regional party into Italy's most popular group, which won 34 per cent of the vote in European parliament elections in 2019.

At the time, the League was in government with the anti-establishment 5-Star Movement. Carried away by his success, Salvini quit the coalition, expecting to trigger a national election. It proved a terrible miscalculation.

The centre-left Democratic Party unexpectedly replaced the League in government and dumped Salvini into opposition where his approval ratings have dropped behind that of another League politician — Luca Zaia, the Governor of Veneto.

Zaia is widely perceived to have done a good job tackling the coronavirus in his region and represents the old, established League, close to the industrialists and small business leaders who make up the backbone of the economy.

“The pandemic has shown that polarising policies are not accepted by citizens in the face of suffering. Voters want solutions for their problems”, said Nicola Pasini, professor of Political Sciences at the Milan University.

— Reuters

## ECONOMIC CRISIS

# Delay in currency reform puts donor support for Sudan at risk

AIDAN LEWIS AND  
NAFISA ELTAHIR

Sudan's new cabinet faces pressure to push through rapid currency reform or risk endangering its path to debt relief and to international financial support for its shaky political transition, diplomats and analysts say.

Failure to devalue the currency has already delayed hundreds of millions of dollars in aid for a flagship, donor-funded welfare programme intended to ease the pain of a long-running economic crisis and the removal of fuel subsidies. A ministerial overhaul was completed on Monday to include representatives of rebel groups that signed a peace deal with the government last year, an important step in the political transition after the overthrow of Omar al Bashir in 2019.

But a weak civilian administration is locked in an uneasy power-sharing arrangement with the military and has faced an array of challenges including record floods, instability on the border with Ethiopia, coronavirus and violence in the western region of Darfur where international peacekeepers are pulling out.

An economic crisis that contributed to Bashir's downfall has deepened. Inflation stood at 254 per cent in December, one of the world's highest rates, and the Sudanese pound has slid rapidly on the parallel market.

Informal currency traders were asking more than 400 pounds for a dollar on Monday, up from about 260



A demonstrator makes a victory sign during a demonstration in Khartoum. — Reuters file photo

AN ECONOMIC  
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DECEMBER

pounds on January 1 and against an official exchange rate of 55 pounds to the dollar.

Protests over living conditions broke out in Khartoum last month, and spread to other cities this week. There are frequent shortages of fuel, electricity, bread and medicine.

“The economy remains the number one political risk to the country's transition”, said Jonas Horner, Sudan analyst at the International Crisis Group. Failure to respond adequately “is likely to undermine the prospects for civilian rule”.

Sudan has removed fuel subsidies that cost the state several billion

dollars per year, a key requirement of a 12-month Staff Monitoring Programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) endorsed last September.

### DEBT RELIEF

But a delay in moving to a “unified market-clearing exchange rate”, another structural benchmark set by the IMF with a target date of September 2020, risks jeopardizing the programme, which Sudan must complete to get relief on \$60 billion in foreign debt under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative and to unlock funding from international lenders.

— Reuters

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Ahli Sidab and Nizwa players fight for the ball.  
– Saleh al Sharji

AL NASR HAMMER AL ITTIHAD FOR FIFTH WIN

BAUSHER REPEAT 6-0 THRASHING OF QURAYAT | AHLI SIDAB HIT 10 PAST HAPLESS NIZWA

ANUROOP  
ATHIPARAMBATH  
MUSCAT, FEB 10

Al Nasr hammered Al Ittihad 6-0 to register their fifth straight win in the His Majesty's Cup hockey championship preliminary round in Salalah on Wednesday.

At the Al Saada Sports Complex, star player Basim Khater put the defending champions ahead in the fourth minute from a penalty corner. Fuad Ali made it 2-0 with a field goal in the 12th minute.

In the second quarter, Anwar Saad struck with a field goal in the 23rd minute. Two minutes later, Mahmoud Ashroor made it 4-0 with a brilliant strike.

Two minutes before the break, Huwaid Jamal found the target as Al Nasr led 5-0.

Al Ittihad strengthened their defence in the third and fourth quarters but could not stop Qasim Moosa net the sixth goal for the Group 2 toppers in the 39th minute. Al Nasr have 15 points and had ensured the final round with the unassailable points lead.

**BRILLIANT BAUSHER**

In Group 4, Bausher repeated their 6-0 win against Qurayat in the second-round match to top the table late on Tuesday.

For Bausher, Muhanna al Hasani hit a brace, which earned him the best player award in the match.

Khaled al Battashi, Adnan al Hasani, Nawaf al Hasani and Saleh al Wahaibi scored one each.

At the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, Al Bashayer posted a



Al Nasr's Basim Khater receives the best player award.

thrilling 4-3 win over Muscat on Tuesday night.

In an exciting match, Muscat advanced with the goals of Azad al Fazari and Adel Mubarak in the first and second quarters, before Al Bashayer turned the tables

and scored four consecutive goals through Islam Mustafa, Laith al Maashari, Bassam al Owaisi and Faris al Amiri, before Adel Mubarak reduced deficit for Muscat.

Mohamed Salem al Zadjali

from Muscat club won the best player award in the match.

In Group 1, Majees thrashed Al Salam 4-1 at Sohar Sports Complex.

Al Salam struck the first goal in the 26th minute. Majees equalised in the 36th minute through Muhammad Adel, who added the second and third goals in 52nd and 57th minutes. Osama Khamis completed the scoring for Majees in the 58th minute.

**DHOFAR DOMINATE**

On Monday, Dhofar blanked Al Ittihad 3-0 in Group 2, while Ahli Sadab pummelled Nizwa 10-0 in Group 3.

At Al Saada Sports Complex, Shafi Taleb put Dhofar ahead in the 15th minute from a penalty corner. The second goal was scored by Ahmed Akaak in the 21st minute. Munir

Awad found the target in the 39th minute to make it 3-0 for Dhofar.

At the end of the match, Tariq al Kathiri, General Supervisor of the Salalah Tourism Festival, presented the best player award to Talal Mohammed of Dhofar.

**AHLI SIDAB SUPREME**

At the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, Ahli Sidab were way ahead in comparison to Nizwa in terms of scoring skills.

Ashraf al Nasiri's led the scoring with four goals. Ahmed Nabil scored twice, while Ahmed Salem, Sanad Salem, Khaled Juma and Mohan found target once each.

After the match, Fada Muhammad Ali handed over the best player award to Ahli Sidab's Ashraf al Nassiri.

## In brief

### ■ BURNLEY



#### BOURNEMOUTH KNOCK BURNLEY OUT OF FA CUP

Premier League Burnley were knocked out of the FA Cup by Championship side Bournemouth after suffering a 2-0 defeat to the second-tier team at Turf Moor on Tuesday. Sam Surridge's 21st-minute goal and a late penalty by Junior Stanislas sent the Cherries, relegated from the top flight last season, into the quarterfinals. Burnley manager Sean Dyche fielded a largely second-string lineup, making eight changes from the team which drew with Brighton & Hove Albion in the Premier League on Saturday. Bournemouth looked hungrier from the outset and caused Burnley plenty of problems before Surridge put them in front, slotting home from close range after a low ball across from Jack Stacey.

### ■ LAHORE



#### PAKISTAN SEEK RETURN TO T20 GLORY DAYS

Pakistan are hoping to turn their Twenty20 fortunes around when they take on a depleted South Africa in a three-match series starting in Lahore on Thursday. The hosts have won just one of their last eight Twenty20 series, with victory coming against lowly Zimbabwe. But they are seeking a return to the form that saw them win 11 series in a row from September 2016 to November 2018, lifting them to the top of the world rankings. Pakistan's spirits are riding high after beating South Africa by 95 runs in Rawalpindi on Monday to take the two-match Test series 2-0 — their first win over South Africa since 2003.

### ■ DHAKA



#### BANGLADESH RECALL SOUMYA FOR INJURED SHAKIB

Bangladesh on Tuesday recalled batsman Soumya Sarkar as a replacement for injured all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan for the second and the final Test against the West Indies. The second Test will start at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Dhaka on Thursday. Soumya, who has a hundred and four half centuries in 15 Tests, will join the squad's training on Wednesday, the Bangladesh cricket Board said in a statement. Shakib was ruled out of the upcoming match after picking up an injury during the first Test, which Bangladesh lost in Chittagong.

# JUVENTUS HOLD INTER TO MAKE ITALIAN CUP FINAL

**TURIN, Italy:** Juventus are in the final of the Italian Cup after a goalless draw with rivals Inter Milan on Tuesday put them through 2-1 on aggregate.

Andrea Pirlo's side will face one of Napoli or Atalanta, who are locked at 0-0 ahead of Wednesday's second leg in Bergamo, in May's final in Rome after comfortably holding Inter in a disciplined display at the Allianz Stadium.

Inter barely troubled veteran Juve goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon despite the return of Romelu Lukaku and Achraf Hakimi, while Cristiano Ronaldo was twice denied by fine Samir Handanovic saves at the other end. Juve are unbeaten since losing 2-0 to Inter in Serie A last month as novice coach Pirlo drags his team into contention in league and cup after an uncertain start coaching the Italian champions.

They have conceded just once since that defeat, in the first leg win at the San Siro last week, and look in ominous form as they return to the title chase at the weekend. Juve sit seven points behind leaders AC Milan with a game in hand and a trip

Inter barely troubled Juve goalkeeper Buffon despite the return of Romelu Lukaku and Achraf Hakimi, while Cristiano Ronaldo was twice denied by fine Samir Handanovic saves

to troubled Napoli awaiting them on Saturday. "It's a completely different feeling as a coach, we're really happy but we haven't done anything yet," said Pirlo to state broadcaster Rai. "We were really good today, they basically didn't have a shot on goal. Handanovic was the best player on the pitch," added the 41-year-old, who won four league titles with Juve.

Antonio Conte, who led Pirlo to three of those Serie A crowns, will now have to concentrate entirely on overhauling Milan if he wants to win Inter their first trophy since 2011.

Second-placed Inter are two points behind their city rivals ahead of their league clash with in-form Lazio

on Sunday, while Milan travel to lowly Spezia.

#### INTER HELD AT BAY

Inter came into the match with a dismal recent record at Juventus, without a win since November 2012 when Conte was still managing the then-resurgent 'Old Lady' of Italian football. That win, 3-1 thanks to a brace from 2010 treble hero Diego Milito, ended a 49-match winning streak for Juve but no such heroics were on display on Tuesday night.

The return of Lukaku and Hakimi, who both missed the first leg through suspension, did nothing to improve Inter's fortunes in a blunt display from the away side, who had plenty of the ball but did very little with it.

A first half of few chances featured a Juve team much-changed from the XI which beat Roma 2-0 at the weekend but equally comfortable holding their opponents at bay.

Juve were content to sit on their first-leg lead, knowing that even a 1-0 defeat would have been enough for them to go through. — AFP



## Under-pressure Kohli vows 'tough fight'

**CHENNAI:** After losing four Tests in a row as captain, Virat Kohli desperately needs his side to bounce back quickly from their crushing defeat by England in the opening match of the Test series.

Team changes are certain for the second match that starts in Chennai on Saturday after the 227-run mauling by Joe Root's England that the media called "a shock" and a "rude jolt".

While no one has criticised the captain, who got the top score of 72 in the Indian second innings of 192, there will be intense scrutiny of the way he and coach Ravi Shastri lift the team before the next of the four-match series.

Known for his aggression and demand for discipline within his side, Kohli has already vowed to come back fighting.

"We are a side that accepts our failures and faults and learns from them," the captain said after the loss.

"One thing is for sure that in the next three matches we are going to give a tough fight and not let things slip away like it did in this Test."

Kohli found fault with India's batting and bowling in his post-match comments when he praised England for being "far more professional".

The top order batting "left a lot to be desired", he said. The bowlers gave away too many runs when England hit 578 in the first innings after Root won a crucial toss.

Off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin claimed six wickets to dismiss England for 178 in the second innings but received little help from left-arm orthodox Shahbaz Nadeem.

Kohli singled out slow bowlers Washington Sundar and Shahbaz for criticism.

"You need your bowling unit to step up and create pressure on the opposition," he said. — AFP

# OHI, Ideal, Vanderlande notch victories

**MUSCAT:** Abhishek Rai struck a superb 69 off 39 to help Douglas OHI to a thrilling 4-wicket victory against Design Group Engineering Consultants in a C Division T20 League game at Muscat Municipality ground 2 in Amerat on Friday.

Design Group posted a robust 167 for 4 on the board thanks to brilliant batting by Parvez Beg who slammed unbeaten 98 off 59.

OHI's chase was led by Abhishek's to knock that included 4 sixes and Waman Jagannath's solid 28-ball 39 as it scored 168 for 6 in 19.5 overs for a sensational win.

#### DEEPAK SHINES IN IDEAL WIN

In another C Division match, Deepak Bhandari's excellent all-round show steered Ideal International to a comfortable 7-wicket win over Jumbo Electronics at Muscat Municipality ground 1.

Ideal did well to restrict Jumbo Electronics to 115 for 7 thanks to Deepak's splendid 2 for 10 in four overs and then chased it down in only 8.1 overs, scoring 117 for 3 thanks to major contributions from Salman Khan (43) and Deepak Bhandari (37).



Syed Arfan and Younus Murad of Al Jaddidi Engineering.



Rahul Chadha of Vanderlande



Wajid Ali of Pitspot

#### RAHUL LEADS VANDERLANDE TO VICTORY

Rahul Chadha's top class 83 and 3 for 23 were the highlights of Vanderlande's exciting 19-run victory against Ideal Technology in a D Division T20 League game at Muscat Municipality ground 3.

Vanderlande's impressive 205 for 5 was led by Rahul's 52-ball 83 and Barathwaj Vinayagam's 54 off 41.

Ideal Tech fought well but fell short by 19 runs, getting dismissed for 186 in 19.4 overs due largely to Rahul's 3 for 23. Harish Mohan and Amir topscored with 44 each.

#### BRIEF SCORES

##### C Division

Design Group Engineering Consultants 167 for 4 in 20 overs (Parvez Beg 98 - 8x4, 3x6, Hemendrasinh Chatrapal 37 - 3x4) lost to Douglas OHI 168 for 6 in 19.5 overs (Abhishek Rai 69 - 6x4, 4x6, Waman Jagannath 39 - 4x4, 1x6, Muhammed Althaf 3-30, Nishan Padma 2-31) by 4 wickets.

Jumbo Electronics 115 for 7 in 20 overs (Gireesh Nair 29 - 2x4, Deepak Bhandari 2-10) lost to Ideal International 117 for 3 in 8.1 overs (Salman Khan 43 - 5x4, 2x6, Deepak Bhandari 37 - 6x4, Chandra Mouli 2-30) by 7 wickets.

##### D Division

Vanderlande 205 for 5 in 20 overs (Rahul Chadha 83 - 10x4, 1x6, Barathwaj Vinayagam 54 - 4x4, Deepesh Unnikoru 2-44) beat Ideal Technology 186 all out in 19.4 overs (Harish Mohan 44 - 6x4, Amir 44 - 7x4, Rahul Chadha 3-23, Aasim Mohammed 2-21, Irtaza 2-30) by 19 runs.

Spanio & Vdd 159 for 7 in 20 overs (Jeason Jacob 56 - 9x4, Ranjith Kumar 45 - 4x4, Younis Murad 4-26, Gokul Gopinath 2-36) lost to Al Jaddidi Engineering and Contracting 160 for 4 in 19.2 overs (Syed Arfan 55 - 7x4, Sadhik Mohammad 33 - 5x4, Jeason Jacob 3-19) by 6 wickets.

Jotun Cricket Team 128 for 7 in 20 overs (Renju Radhakrishna 44 - 6x4, Fahad T Hamsa 2-25, Aneesh Chaziyottil 2-28) lost to Pitspot 132 for 3 in 17.4 overs (Wajid Ali 65 - 9x4, Rajesh Periyannan 30 - 5x4) by 7 wickets.

##### E Division

Ghantoot Group 166 all out in 19.5 overs (Vishal Parshottambhai 48 - 4xx4, 1x6, Huzefa Sodawala 2-20, Muhamamad Ghafoor 2-25, Yusuf Patanwala 2-28, Issam Othman 2-37) beat Sketch International 155 for 8 in 20 overs (Yusuf Patanwala 43 - 2x4, 1x6, Saravanan Manickam 3-27, Kirit Tandel 2-24) by 11 runs.

Mazoon Up 190 for 8 in 20 overs (Faisal Babu 73 - 5x4, 1x6, Muhammed Ali 32 - 5x4, Samir Faizu 2-11, Khalid Rahim 2-28) routed Oct Al Hail 'B' 114 all out in 18 overs (Ahmed Ghulam 30 - 3x4, Fahad Mohamed 4-12, Ashfakh Chaikinakath 3-17, Sherif Muhammed 2-16) by 76 runs.

##### F Division

KCA Deutag 121 for 6 in 20 overs (Khalid Balushi 31 - 2x4, Sifiyan Muhammed 3-16, Yasir Jamal 2-19) lost to Israr Ghala 122 for 3 in 13.4 overs (Ahmed Tahir 44 - 5x4, Haneef Mohammed 2-22) by 7 wickets.

BSI CT 136 for 7 in 20 overs (Usman Siddique 32 - 5x4, Mohammed Ali 2-21) lost to ACT Cricworld 137 for 9 in 19.5 overs (Mohammed Ali 86 - 11x4, 2x6, Saud Haroon 4-13, Druvin Shetty 3-15) by 1 wicket.

# DJOKOVIC PASSES TIAFOE TEST, SERENA SUBLIME



Serbia's Novak Djokovic in action during his second round match against France's Tiafoe of the US. — Reuters

**MELBOURNE:** Eight-time champion Novak Djokovic was made to sweat at the Australian Open on Wednesday as Serena Williams made serene progress in her bid for a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title.

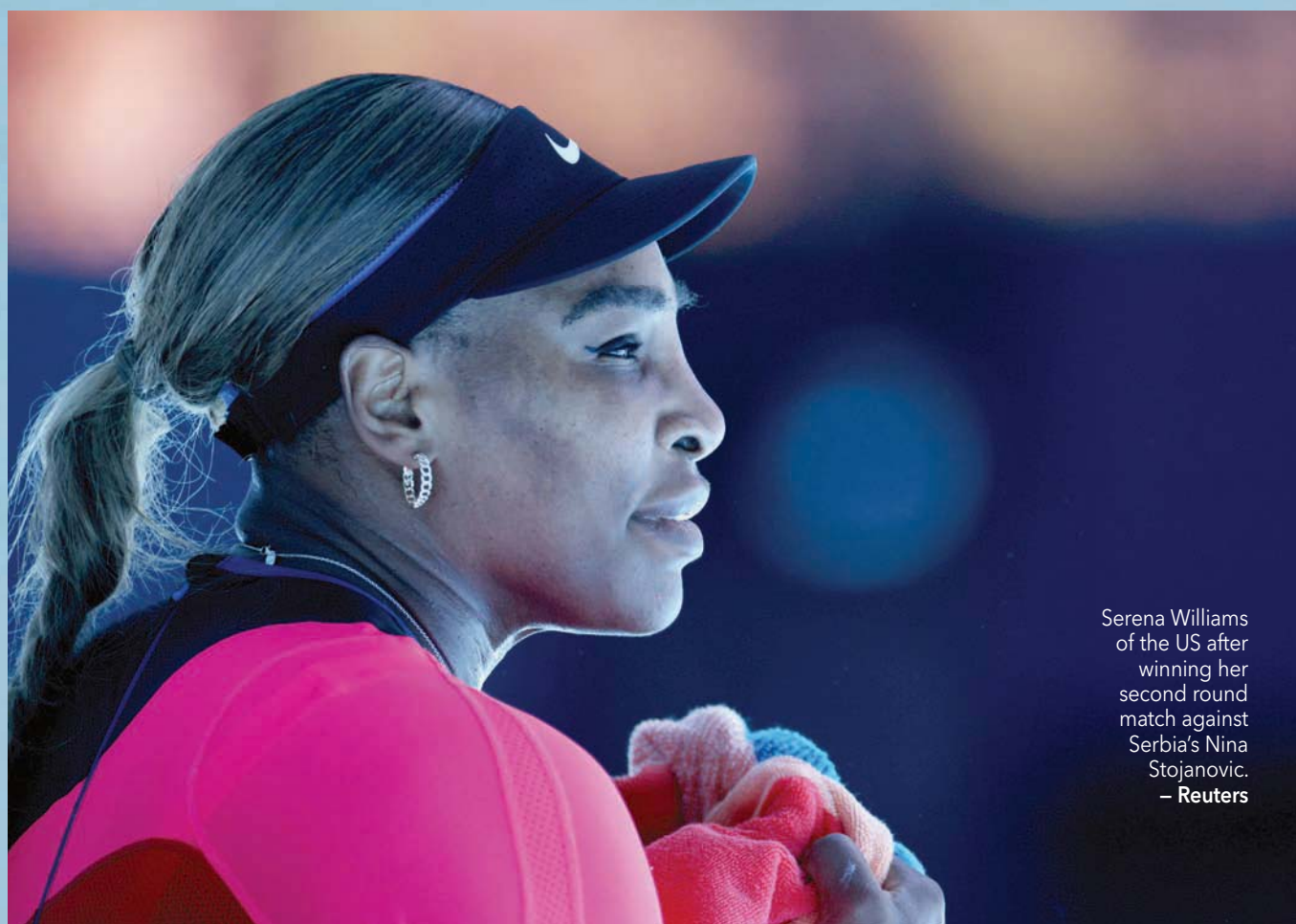
Women's favourite Naomi Osaka also charged through but fellow major winners Stan Wawrinka, Bianca Andreescu and Petra Kvitova were all second-round casualties.

Among the late matches, Aussie crowd-pleaser Nick Kyrgios served underarm, smashed a racquet and rowed with the chair umpire before coming from behind to beat France's Ugo Humbert in five gripping sets.

Earlier, Djokovic was given a stern examination by American Frances Tiafoe and dropped his first set of the tournament before recovering to win 6-3, 6-7 (3/7), 7-6 (7/2), 6-3. "I was fortunate to get through the third set today, it was anybody's game," said the defending champion, after his win in hot conditions in Rod Laver Arena.

The top seed looked in control after taking the first set, but lightning-quick Tiafoe, who reached the quarterfinals two years ago, refused to go away.

The American bounced back to take a close second set but imploded as tensions rose in the fourth, receiving a code violation for an audible obscenity as Djokovic took charge.



Serena Williams of the US after winning her second round match against Serbia's Nina Stojanovic. — Reuters

The Serb is targeting a record-extending ninth title and his 18th Grand Slam trophy overall as he snaps at the heels of Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer, who top the all-time list with 20 each.

## DREAM RESULT

Djokovic avoided the fate of 2014 winner Wawrinka, who blew three

match points in the fifth-set tie-breaker of his four-hour epic with Marton Fucsovics, who won 7-5, 6-1, 4-6, 2-6, 7-6 (11/9).

"I hesitated a little bit when I had the match point and I lost it," said the 35-year-old Swiss, a three-time Grand Slam winner.

Osaka, whose three Grand Slam titles include the 2019 Australian

crown, had no such trouble in her evening match against France's Caroline Garcia — despite fearing defeat after a bad dream. "Last night I had a dream that I lost this match, and I really didn't feel good about it," she said after the 6-2, 6-3 win.

Second seed Simona Halep survived a scare when she reeled off five third-set games in a row

to avoid defeat by Australia's Ajla Tomljanovic.

"I fought till the end. I never gave up during the match, and that's why maybe I could win in the end," said the two-time Grand Slam winner.

Williams, 39, continued her quest to equal Margaret Court's all-time mark of 24 Grand Slams with a 6-3, 6-0 romp past 99th-ranked Serbian Nina Stojanovic. Williams hit 27 winners in her 101st Australian Open match while again sporting her unique, one-legged catsuit inspired by track legend Florence 'Flo-Jo' Griffith Joyner.

## 'LOST FOR WORDS'

A socially distanced John Cain Arena was rocking for the Kyrgios match, where the unseeded home favourite denied Humbert what seemed like a certain win to set up a clash with US Open champion Dominic Thiem.

"Honestly, I don't know how I did that," said Kyrgios after the unlikely 5-7, 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-4 victory.

German sixth seed Alexander Zverev went through in less compelling fashion, grinding past America's Maxime Cressy 7-5, 6-4, 6-3.

Williams' elder sister Venus, 40, was among the casualties on day three when she painfully rolled her ankle in the first set against Sara Errani before hobbling through a 6-1, 6-0 defeat. — AFP

## AO TOP QUOTES



Australia and the Australian government did such a good job with containing the virus. So there is hope. If Australia can do it, then the whole world can.

**Bianca Andreescu** on the prospect of having fans in attendance for the rest of the tournaments in 2021.

I haven't met Robert Downey Jr and I love Marvel and Iron Man. I went shallow there, but it's fine.

**Serena Williams**, when asked to name a celebrity she would like to meet.



Right now, I feel like I'm dying.

**Marton Fucsovics** on having to play a second consecutive five-setter to reach the third round.



Canadians never want to play Canadians, but in the end it happens so often that we kind of just treat it the same way.

**Denis Shapovalov** on facing Felix Auger-Aliassime in the third round.

When I stepped on the court and we had crowd, even if it's against me, just to have crowd, I was already excited.

**Garbine Muguruza** on playing with fans back in the stadium for the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic last year.

It's tough to hang with this guy, running left and right, just wasting energy.

**Dominik Koepfer** on struggling to keep up with Dominic Thiem.



Of course it is (harsh). But, you know, he's probably the worst commentator I've ever seen in my life, as well.

**Bernard Tomic** on pundit John Fitzgerald, who questioned whether the former would return to next year's Australian Open.

It usually happens when I'm in the airplane — I have this dream where I'm hitting a backhand rally with someone and I hit the backhand into the net. And I wake up. So then I wake up hitting the backhand and the person next to me on the airplane is so scared.

**Naomi Osaka**, when asked about her worst tennis-related nightmare.

In the first 10 years I was staying mostly in the hotel room and tennis court, like a quarantine. So after I (started) working with (coach) Paul McNamee, we enjoy a lot off the court as well. We go to shopping together and we find a nice restaurant and the result has been very good.

**Hsieh Su-wei** on enjoying the latter half of her career.

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# Strong interest in OETC’s \$600 million bond offering

INVESTOR CONFIDENCE:  
Successful investment marks return of OETC to capital markets

MUSCAT: Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), a subsidiary of Nama Group, says its \$600 million bond offering has been well-received by international investors. The Senior Unsecured Notes, due in February 2031, were offered with an interest rate of 5.8 per cent.

The offering is the first by a government-linked entity outside Oman since 2018 and marks the return of OETC to the capital markets after a four-year hiatus, benefiting from improved investors’ desire to invest in Oman, which reinforces the strategic importance of Nama Holding Group, Oman’s subsidiaries, international capital



markets and investors alike, it said in a statement.

“Oman Electricity Transmission Company succeeded in attracting investor interest in its offering, and investor confidence was further boosted by the strategic diversification of Nama Group for Oman Electricity Transmission Company, which paved the way for the company to become a 49 per cent partner in the company,” it said.

Investors from Asia, Europe and America have shown a clear willingness to participate in OETC’s offering of more than 83 per cent of the record of purchase orders received.

The diverse allocation of orders from the region demonstrates the strength of OETC’s credit position and also demonstrates the hard work of the team in the Loan Department of the Ministry of Finance and the team of State

Grid International Development, it further stated.

The \$600 million international offering will be used to finance some existing loans, including a shareholder loan to OETC from Nama Group, State Grid International Development and capital expenditure financing at OETC, thereby allowing the company to implement infrastructure development plans in Oman.

Among the main spending programmes undertaken by OETC, the implementation of the first phase of the 400 kV electricity grid interconnection project, and the extension and integration of the grid will be of great benefit to the Sultanate due to the significant fuel savings, coordination and the expected improvement in loads between different energy systems with access to new areas

Investors from Asia, Europe and America have shown a clear willingness to participate in OETC’s offering of more than 83 per cent of the record of purchase orders received

with renewable energy projects and the participation of available reserves.

This in turn will reduce the operating cost of the company. The returns are also expected to support the efforts of OETC to implement the 400 kV backbone, which aims to connect a 1,000 MW solar power planned by 2024 and 2025.

“OETC’s offering has attracted the attention of international bond investors, particularly those looking for high-quality assets to invest in, and demonstrates the company’s ability to attract \$4.5 billion in investment demands, at a time when the financial markets are struggling with the strength of Nama Group and State Grid International Development and the good credit position of OETC and also demonstrates strong demand for sovereign issues in Oman and its subsidiaries,” it added. — ONA

## Banking credit rises 3.3pc to RO 26.7bn in 2020



BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, FEB 10

Data issued by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) indicates that the total deposits held with conventional and Islamic banks (also known as Other Depository Corporations or ODCs) reached RO 24.3 billion at the end of December 2020, increasing by 2.9 per cent from the previous years.

Total private sector deposits increased by 10.5 per cent to RO 16.8 billion, the apex bank said in its monthly review for December 2020.

The total outstanding credit extended by ODCs grew by 3.3 per cent to RO 26.7 billion at the end of December 2020, while credit to the private sector showed a relatively moderate growth of 1.1 per cent (Y-o-Y) to reach RO 22.9 billion.

The shares of non-financial corporate sector and the household sector (mainly under personal loans) in the total private sector credit stood at 46.5 per cent and 45.0 per cent, respectively, at end-December 2020.

The share of financial corporations was 5.1 per cent

and other sectors received the remaining 3.4 per cent of the total private sector credit as at end-December 2020.

In terms of sector-wise composition of private sector deposits, the households deposits represented the share at 51.0 per cent, followed by non-financial corporations at 32.3 per cent, financial corporations at 14.3 per cent and the other sectors at 2.4 per cent.

The combined balance sheet of conventional banks showed a Y-o-Y growth of 2.2 per cent in total outstanding credit as of end-December 2020. On assets side, conventional banks’ credit to the private sector decreased marginally by 0.6 per cent Y-o-Y to RO 18.8 billion while their overall investments in securities increased by 20.2 per cent to RO 4.3 billion at end-December 2020.

Investment in Government Development Bonds increased by 10.6 per cent over the year to RO 1.8 billion while their investments in foreign securities stood at RO 1.1 billion at the end of December 2020, higher by 1.9 per cent over the position a year ago.

TURN TO PAGE 14

## 11.4 per cent decline in real estate deals last year

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, FEB 10

The total value of property transactions in the Sultanate until the end of December 2020 decreased by 11.4 per cent to reach RO 2.45 billion, down from RO 2.77 billion for the same period of 2019, as indicated by the preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and information (NCSI).

The number of plots issued until the end of December 2020 was 204,484, down 3.2 per cent

from the previous tally of 211,191 plots. Of the total traded value until the end of December 2020, RO 925.7 million worth transactions were sales contracts, while RO 1.46 billion transactions were mortgage deals. As many as 66,835 sales contracts were executed until the end of December 2020 against 56,887 contracts during the same period of 2019.

However, the total number of mortgage contracts fell by 7.2 per cent to reach 14,864 contracts against 16,017 contracts in 2019. The Omani government collected RO 71.1

million as real estate transaction fees until the end of December 2020, which is a drop by 13.6 per cent compared to the same period of 2019.

NCSI data reveal a significant rise in the traded value of exchange (barter) contracts by 196.1 per cent at the end of December 2020 period to RO 69.0 million, as against RO 23.3 million posted in the comparable period of 2019.

The number of barter contracts witnessed a rise of 28.3 per cent to 2,106, compared to 1,641 contracts in 2019.

## Companies set up to build, operate two new water projects in Oman

STRONG DEMAND:  
Ground-breaking on \$405m Al Ghubrah-3 and Barka-5 IWPs in Q2

CONRAD PRABHU  
@conradprabhu

Two new companies have formally been established to design, finance, construct, own and operate a pair of Independent Water Projects (IWPs) in the Sultanate. Capital Desalination Co SAOC has been set up to build a 300,000 cubic metres per day capacity (equivalent to 66 million imperial gallons per day MIGD) desalination plant at Al Ghubrah in Muscat Governorate. Total investment in the project is around \$275 million.

Separately, GS Inima Barka 5 Desalination Co SAOC has been established to construct and operate a 100,000 cubic metres per day (22 MIGD) capacity



desalination plant at Barka in South al Batinah Governorate at a cost of \$129 million.

Both companies are majority-controlled by Spanish-based international water and environment services specialist GS Inima Environment, which is wholly owned by South Korean conglomerate GS Engineering & Construction (GS E&C).

It follows the award of a mandate to GS Inima Environment from Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP),

the sole procurer of power and related water capacity in the Sultanate, for the implementation of the two water schemes on a Build, Own and Operate (BOO) basis for a 20-year period.

On Wednesday, Oman’s Capital Market Authority (CMA) announced the listing of the two new companies on the Third Market of the Omani bourse.

GS Inima says it hopes to break ground on the Al Ghubrah IWP in the second quarter of this year.

Also dubbed Al Ghubrah-3,

because it represents the third phase of the expansion of an existing water desalination hub in the capital region, the project will be the largest green-field water desalination plant in the Sultanate when it is fully operational in the second quarter of 2024.

Barka-5, representing the fifth phase of an equally large potable water production hub at Barka, is set to come into production in the second quarter of 2023.

Both Al Ghubrah-3 and Barka-5 IWPs will be developed on the basis of reverse osmosis (RO) technology.

Last November, Italian water desalination infrastructure services giant Fisia Italmimpianti announced that it is participating in the Engineering - Procurement - Construction (EPC) of the two IWPs as a joint venture partner alongside GS Inima.

Milan-headquartered Fisia Italmimpianti, a unit of the Webuild Group, has a 50 per cent stake in the EPC contracts totalling \$350 million in value.

# Pros and cons of investing in shares of electric carmakers

Of late, there has been an upsurge in international share in the shares of electric vehicle companies, with a number of investors, whether from the region or beyond, having begun to set aside some of their funds or personal savings in invest in the stocks of prominent carmakers.

Global demand for electric vehicles is rising in response to a growing campaign to reduce the carbon footprint on the environment and thereby combat global warming which is linked to a number of natural

disasters.

Fossil fuel emissions are also linked to a variety of human diseases and ailments. But switching to green or low-carbon fuels, we can improve air quality for all humans, as well as improve their quality of life.

A switch to electric cars also means reducing the gasoline and diesel consumption bills. These cars have many other advantages and features over regular, combustion-engine cars.

Fuel cells used in electric vehicles typically do not require large quantities of chemicals that can potentially pollute



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THERE ARE GREAT EXPECTATIONS FROM CAR OWNERS THAT THE PRICES OF ELECTRIC CARS WILL RISE SIGNIFICANTLY OVER THE NEXT FIFTEEN YEARS

the environment, unlike conventional cars that need engine oils, coolant and other lubricants and liquids for their operation.

Moreover, the fuel cell fitted out in electric vehicles can be recharged using the electrical network at homes or at charging stations that are proliferating along highways in several capitals around the world.

Today, there are great expectations from car owners that the prices of electric cars will rise significantly over the next fifteen years as a result of investors rushing to buy the shares of Tesla other brands.

Tesla, for example, has seen its market value soar. Last year, the company reported a 250-fold jump in profits and is currently the leading car brand in the world.

Several other carmakers are moving into the production of electric vehicles, while some have also ventured into the manufacture of electric buses and trucks, notably in China, UK and other parts of Europe.

While investor interest in such car brands is at record levels, investors must exercise cautions in these pandemic times to avoid putting all of their “eggs in one basket”, so to speak.

Seeking to capitalise on the intense competition in this space, some companies with little experience in electric vehicles can look to get rich by jumping on to EV manufacturing bandwagon.

Backed by massive advertising and promotional campaign, and with the support of speculators, they can drive up demand in their stocks.

After all, there is no guarantee that the new players will not face challenges, such as in the form of fuel cell efficacy or supply, or availability of quality manpower, to achieve the success that conventional cars have long enjoyed.

## Galfar secures RO 68m worth of contracts

MUSCAT: Publicly-listed Omani contractor Galfar Engineering & Contracting SAOG has announced that it has secured contracts totalling RO 68 million for the operation and maintenance of the water networks and facilities of the Public Authority for Water (Diam).

Hamoud bin Rashid al Tobi, CEO, said in a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA) that the contracts, valid for five years, will contribute to the company’s revenue and business growth.

## Banking credit rises 3.3pc to RO 26.7bn

FROM PAGE 13

Aggregate deposits held with conventional banks increased by 2.4 per cent Y-o-Y to RO 20.5 billion at the end of December 2020. Government deposits with conventional banks decreased by 18.7 per cent to RO 4.4 billion, while deposits of public enterprises decreased by 14.9 per cent to RO 1.1 billion.

Private sector deposits, which accounted for 70.3 per cent of total deposits with conventional banks, increased by 10.8 per cent during January-December 2020 to reach RO 14.4 billion.

Islamic banking entities provided financing of RO 4.3 billion at the end of December 2020, recording a growth of 9.5 per cent a year ago. Total

deposits held with Islamic Banks and Windows increased by 5.4 per cent to RO 3.8 billion. The total assets of Islamic Banks and Windows increased by 6.3 per cent on a Y-o-Y basis to RO 5.2 billion and constituted about 14.5 per cent of the banking system’s assets as at end-December 2020.

Among the indicators of monetary aggregates, narrow money (M1) at the end of December 2020 increased by 4.1 per cent Y-o-Y to RO 5.6 billion. Likewise, quasi-money (Rial Omani saving and time deposits, certificates of deposit issued by banks, margin deposits and foreign currency denominated deposits) registered a significant increase of 10.9 per cent during this period. Broad money supply M2 (M1 plus quasi-money) grew

by 8.9 per cent to reach RO 19.3 billion at the end December 2020.

The weighted average interest rate on RO deposits increased marginally from 2.006 per cent at the end of December 2019 to 2.013 per cent at the end of December 2020, while the weighted average RO lending rate increased from 5.461 per cent to 5.510 per cent over the same period.

Meanwhile, the overnight Rial Omani domestic inter-bank lending rate fell significantly to 0.700 per cent in December 2020 from 2.139 per cent a year ago, reflecting transmission of policy rate cuts by the Federal Reserve and by the CBO. The average Repo rate for liquidity injection by the CBO at end-December 2020 stood lower at 0.5 per cent compared with 2.236 per cent a year ago.

## Bank Muscat inks Facility Agreement with PDO

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, FEB 10

Bank Muscat has signed a Sub-Participation Facility Agreement with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) to refinance or monetise the existing and future portfolio of home loans that PDO provides to its employees under a housing loan scheme.

The unique financing structure provides an efficient option for PDO to monetise the receivables of this portfolio to generate cash flow for operations and investments. Speaking on the occasion, Shaikh Waleed K al Hashar, Chief Executive Officer, Bank Muscat, said: “We are happy to strengthen the cooperation between the Bank and Petroleum Development Oman, the leading Oil and Gas Producer in the Sultanate. Under this agreement, while PDO continues to provide its employees housing loans as part of its employee value proposition, it will monetise or refinance the portfolio through the sub-participation facility provided by Bank Muscat.

“While PDO will continue to operationally administer the loans and cater to the needs of its employees under its relevant staff policies, the participation facility will enable it to release working capital tied up in staff loans.”

# New initiative for airlines to share health information during the pandemic

SAFE TRAVEL: SITA's ‘Health Project’ seamlessly integrates with multiple travel pass or health passport schemes

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, FEB 10

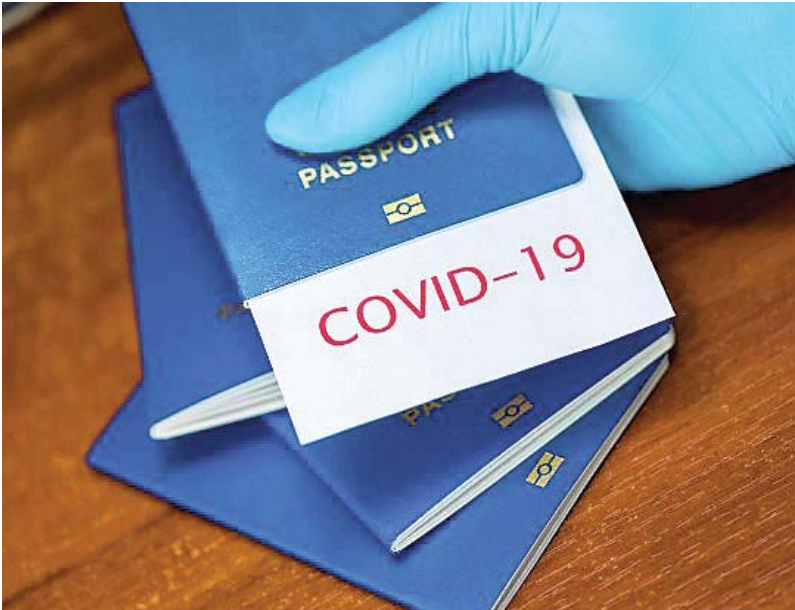
SITA, the IT provider for the global air transport industry, announced on Tuesday the launch of Health Protect — an industry solution, to help airlines, airports, governments and passengers safely and securely share information on health tests or vaccinations needed during travel.

For many countries, economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic relies heavily on travel and tourism.

As governments globally seek a way to resume safe and secure travel in the wake of Covid-19, the ability for passengers to share vital health information such as PCR test results or vaccination history with authorities is increasingly important.

SITA’s Health Protect allows airlines and passengers to submit these required documents safely and securely in line with specific government requirements.

A key benefit is a unique ability to seamlessly integrate with multiple travel pass or ‘health



passport’ schemes, bridging the gap between these schemes and aviation and border processes.

Critically, by incorporating Advance Passenger Processing (APP), it enables authorities to make an informed decision whether a passenger can travel at the point of check-in, improving the safety of all passengers and avoiding costly return flights.

Passengers without the required documentation, or considered high risk, will be unable to check in for their flight, ensuring they do not travel to the airport. By facilitating the inclusion of health pass schemes into existing, proven and trusted passenger processing systems, Health Protect minimises the operational and technical

impact on carriers and ports.

Combining the functionality of passenger locator forms, health attestations and travel declarations, as well as Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA), Health Protect will deliver confidence for all stakeholders to travel again, safely and securely, supporting a seamless and contactless passenger journey.

It will also provide passenger certainty that they have the right documents before departure, vitally at a time when borders regulations change regularly.

At the airport, Health Protect also integrates with the existing airport passenger processing systems to verify the health status of the passenger at each

As governments globally seek a way to resume safe and secure travel in the wake of Covid-19, the ability for passengers to share vital health information such as PCR test results or vaccination history with authorities is increasingly important

point in the process using SITA Flex touchless passenger flow monitoring technology.

David Lavorel, CEO of Airports & Borders at SITA, said: “We’re excited for the potential of SITA Health Protect to bridge the gap between airlines resuming normal operations and governments’ strong focus on keeping control of Covid-19. Recovery from Covid-19 will take time and is complex but we believe that SITA can play a key role in enabling a safer, simpler travel experience for passengers.”

This week for the first time, a small group of air travellers flying from Germany and Estonia to the United Arab Emirates has tested the health data platform and app SimplyGo in a live environment.

As part of the trial project, SimplyGo partnered with SITA to make use of SITA Health Protect.

During the trial, travellers obtained a negative Covid-19 result via their SimplyGo app before travelling. The data was then securely stored on the SimplyGo platform to be accessed by airlines and border officials authorising boarding of the plane and eventually arrival at the destination country, the United Arab Emirates.

Integration with the UAE government systems was made possible through the Advance Passenger Processing platform delivered by SITA. Integrating SimplyGo with APP forms part of SITA’s Health Protect ecosystem, simplifying and automating the inclusion of health data into existing airline, airport and government processes.

By adapting APP to meet the current health demands of Covid-19, passengers can be processed faster and experience a more enjoyable journey while the airport benefits from improved efficiency and security.

Similarly, SEA Milan Airports, Italy’s second busiest airport, is collaborating with SITA to pilot an innovative platform that digitalises declarations on Covid-19 tested flights and manages the testing process at Milan Malpensa (MXP) airport.



“This gesture complements previous initiatives executed by Eshraqa for our wilayat in the field of education. This sector is one of the key pillars for creating the next generation, who can build the future of the Sultanate.

“We look forward to seeing such initiatives from other entities which will positively impact the community, ultimately improving the welfare of people.”

PRESS RELEASE

### KR ESHRAQA PRESENTS SCHOOL BAGS TO 70 GOVERNMENT SCHOOL STUDENTS

Eshraqa, Khimji Ramdas’ Social Development Arm, recently presented 10,000 school bags for 70 government school students in the wilayats of Samayil, Bidbid, Izki and Ibra.

This initiative comes as part of Eshraqa’s endeavours to support the education sector in the Sultanate as well as developing the local communities.

Expressing his appreciation for the initiative, Shaikh Dr Hamood bin Ali al Marshoodi, Wali of Bidbid, said: “We would like to express our appreciation to KR Eshraqa for their social initiatives that are aimed at enhancing the education sector, social activities and health centres.



## Egypt's inflation eases in January

Egypt's urban consumer price inflation eased to 4.3 per cent in January from 5.4 per cent in December. The indicator fell 0.4 per cent, the same pace of deflation as in December. — **Reuters**



## Saudi economy shrank in Q4

Saudi Arabia's economy shrank by 3.8 per cent in the fourth quarter from the same period a year earlier, data showed but it grew 2.8 per cent on a quarterly basis. — **Reuters**



## Dollar wallows at two-week low

The dollar hit two-week lows on Wednesday as demand for safer assets ebbed, with traders looking ahead to an expected recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic this year. — **Reuters**

## China factory prices see first rise in a year



A man restocks boxes of masks inside a supermarket in Beijing, China. — **Reuters**

**BEIJING:** Factory prices rose in China for the first time in a year last month as the country's vast industrial sector leads a recovery from the virus pandemic, with analysts hailing the data as a turning point for the world's number two economy.

But the lingering effects of the disease weighed on the country's vast army of shoppers as consumer prices slipped, hit by new outbreaks that led to the reimposition of containment measures.

Official data showed the producer price index (PPI), a key measure of input costs, came in at 0.3 per cent in January, having fallen every month but January in 2020 owing to a collapse in demand as the virus broke out around the country and then the world.

The figure was in line with forecasts and a big improvement in the 0.4 per cent fall seen in December.

"We believe that the turn of PPI is very solid, from a deflation trend to an inflation trend", said ING Chief Economist for Greater China Iris Pang.

"Although this is mild, it is a turn, a very important turn, and it will last for the rest of 2021."

The reading comes as China leads a recovery in the world economy, with the rollout of vaccines and slowing infection rates fuelling hopes that lockdowns and other containment measures can be eased, setting up a huge bounce this year.

However, the consumer price index edged down a 0.3 per cent as a spike in infections that led to new tough restrictions in the north of the country combined with a high base from January last year.

"With the Spring Festival taking place, and the impact of a partial epidemic spread, there were decreases in both residents' travel and some contact-based services in January", said National Bureau of Statistics official Dong Lijuan.

— **AFP**

# US job openings rise; small businesses desperate for workers

**WASHINGTON:** US layoffs eased in December and job openings increased modestly, suggesting the decline in employment that month was largely due to companies cutting back on hiring amid uncertainty caused by a raging Covid-19 pandemic.

Though the Labour Department's monthly Job Openings and Labour Turnover Survey, or JOLTS report, offered cautious optimism that job growth could regain speed as coronavirus vaccines become accessible to large swaths of the population, unemployment remains pervasive.

The economy shed jobs in December for the first time in eight months following renewed outbreaks of the virus. "The decline in employment in December was more a product of reduced hiring than a pick-up in layoffs", said Nick Bunker, Director of Research at Indeed Hiring Lab.

"Employers were hesitant about adding new workers. This trend is easier to reverse than the destruction of employer-employee relationships that happens when workers are laid off."

Job openings, a measure of labour demand, rose 74,000 to 6.65 million on the last day of December from 6.572 million. There were an additional 296,000 job openings in the professional and business services industry.

But vacancies decreased for state and local government, excluding education.



A man wearing a mask walks past a job advertisement in central New York. — **Reuters**

There also were fewer unfilled jobs in the arts, entertainment and recreation industries as well as at factories producing goods that are not intended to last longer than three years, such as clothing. The job openings rate ticked up to 4.5 per cent from 4.4 per cent in November. Layoffs decreased by 243,000 to 1.81 million, lowering the layoffs rate to 1.3 per cent from 1.4 per cent in November.

Layoffs declined in the federal government, transportation, warehousing and utilities industries as well as the healthcare and social assistance sector. But 50,000 people were laid off in the arts, entertainment, and recreation industry.

Hiring dropped by 396,000 to 5.54 million. It was led by

a decrease of 221,000 in the accommodation and food services industry. Hiring in the transportation, warehousing, and utilities sector fell by 133,000 and decreased by 82,000 in the arts, entertainment and recreation industry.

But retailers hired 94,000 workers. The hiring rate declined to 3.9 per cent from 4.2 per cent in November. The government reported on Friday that the economy created only 49,000 jobs in January after shedding 227,000 jobs in December. Employment is 9.9 million jobs below its peak in February 2020.

The labour market has largely stalled amid a resurgence in Covid-19 infections, which now

appears to be ebbing. In December, there were 16 unemployed people for every 10 job openings.

"The January jobs report was a stark reminder that near-term risks remain tilted to the downside amid a third Covid-19 wave," said Lydia Boussour, lead US economist at Oxford Economics in New York.

"But the labour market outlook is slowly brightening. We foresee increased vaccinations, elevated savings and robust business activity contributing to a 6.6 million jobs rebound in 2021."

Many economists do not expect the labor market to return to its pre-pandemic peak until 2023. Amid the labour market slack, signs of a skills mismatch are emerging. — **Reuters**

## Toyota net profit soars in Q3, hikes full-year outlook

**TOKYO:** Toyota said on Wednesday that net profit soared 50 per cent in the third quarter and upgraded its full-year forecasts as the global auto industry gradually recovers from the pandemic.

The world's top carmaker made 838.7 billion yen (\$8.0 billion) in the three months to December, compared with 559.3 billion yen a year earlier, it said as it revised up full-year forecasts for the second straight quarter.

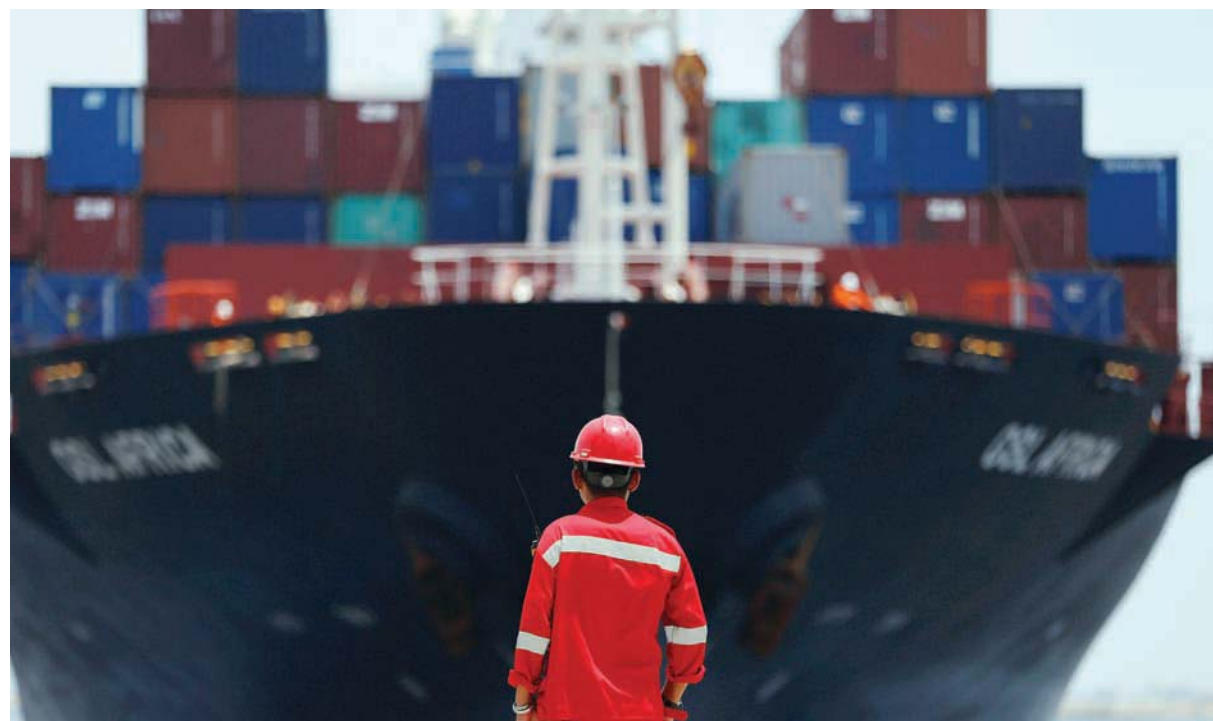
Toyota said it saw net profit at 1.90 trillion yen for the fiscal year to March, compared with its earlier estimate of 1.42 trillion yen. Sales are now seen at 26.5 trillion yen, compared with the 26.0 trillion yen previously forecast.

The firm last year overtook Volkswagen as the world's top carmaker for the first time in five years. — **AFP**



A Toyota logo is seen in central Tokyo. — **Reuters**

## Recovery in global trade to stall again in Q1



A ship leaves a port in Jakarta, Indonesia. — **Reuters**

**GENEVA:** A recovery in global trade is expected to slow again in the first quarter of 2021 as the coronavirus pandemic keeps disrupting the travel industry after world trade contracted 9 per cent in 2020, a UN report said on Wednesday.

After lockdowns caused trade to shrink 15 per cent in the first half of 2020, it rebounded in the

second half, with global trade in goods up about 8 per cent in the fourth quarter compared with the third, the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) said.

That was largely due to developing countries, particularly those in East Asia, with trade in goods originating from the region up 12 per cent in the fourth

quarter year-on-year.

"East Asian economies have been leading the recovery process with strong export growth and gains in global market share", UNCTAD said, adding that most manufacturing sectors rebounded in the fourth quarter, apart from energy and transport.

However, trade in services stagnated at levels seen in the

**East Asian economies have been leading the recovery process with strong export growth and gains in global market share, most manufacturing sectors rebounded in the fourth quarter, apart from energy and transport**

**UNCTAD**

third quarter, the report said, adding that exports of services from China, and to a lesser degree India, had fared relatively better than other countries.

For the first quarter of 2021, UNCTAD projects a 1.5 per cent fall in trade in goods versus the previous quarter, and a 7 per cent drop in trade in services, although it said its forecasts were uncertain due to the pandemic and uncertainty about stimulus packages.

The fourth quarter saw goods exports in China, where the novel

coronavirus pandemic originated, up 17 per cent, with Japan registering 3 per cent and South Korea 4 per cent gains.

China's economy grew by 2.3 per cent last year, with a 6.5 percent final quarter expansion helping to offset losses incurred during the early stages of the pandemic.

UNCTAD said that while goods trade grew throughout the second half of 2020, services trade continued "to lag substantially" due to "continued disruptions" in travel.

Global goods trade fell by 6 per cent overall in 2020, a sharp decline that was nonetheless 10.5 percentage points better than the services collapse.

During the final quarter, as winter waves of coronavirus infection swept Europe and North America, prompting further restrictions, US services exports fell by 26 per cent and the European Union's by 14, while China's grew by 2 per cent.

Goods exports from the US fell by 5 per cent, though the EU registered 3 per cent growth, in part due to increased demand for pharmaceuticals. — **Reuters**

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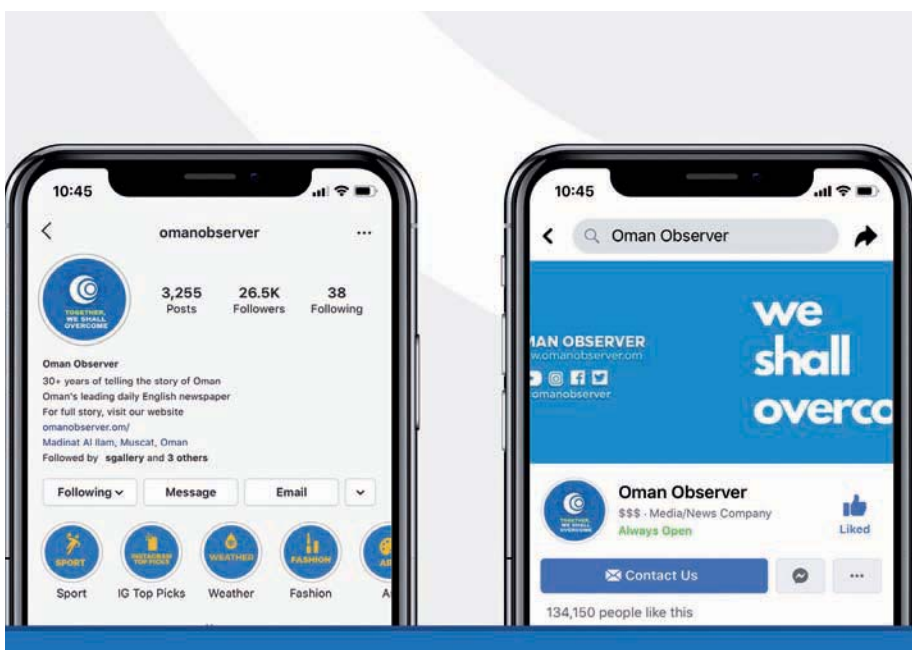
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# features

## Turning Arabic experiences to Mādhubani art



Young Omani artist Marwa al Hinaei has gravitated towards stone-age painting and having discovered her love for Mādhubani or Mithila art, now converts Arabic experiences into this popular Indian folk art... **P18**

### INSIDE STORIES

CHANGING WORLD

**MAKEUP TUTORIALS AIM TO GIVE CANCER PATIENTS A BOOST IN PANDEMIC**

Surrounded by lipstick and eye-shadow, Aisha Quashie brushes her cheek with foundation as she mirrors makeup artist Laura Hunt thousands of miles away in London... **Story on Page 19**

MUSIC

**CHANGING THE TUNE: SERBIAN ARTIST TURNS WEAPONS INTO INSTRUMENTS**

Every week, Serbian sculptor Nikola Macura picks through discarded rifles, helmets and missiles, he taps, blows and raps his knuckles on the decommissioned weapons to find pieces he can bring back to his studio and turn into musical instruments... **Story on Page 19**

READ

**IT ENDS WITH US**

BY COLLEEN HOOVER

New to Boston, small-town girl Lily manages to get gorgeous neurosurgeon Ryle Kincaid to break his "no dating" rule. But his stubborn ways make her wonder where that aversion came from.

FASHION

**UZBEKISTAN FASHION IN THE TIME OF PANDEMIC**

Models present creations by Uzbek designer Dilnoza Oshurova during the Burana Fashion Week in Bishkek on February 6, 2021.

ENTERTAINMENT

**OSCAR-WINNING ACTOR CHRISTOPHER PLUMMER DEAD AT 91**

Veteran Canadian actor Christopher Plummer, whose decades-long career featured an indelible star turn in "The Sound of Music" and an Oscar win late in life, died on Friday, his manager announced. He was 91.



# Turning Arab experiences to Madhubani art

BY RUQAYA AL KINDI

People, since ancient times, draw on walls and stones to document their history. These drawings also served as a way to pass knowledge to future generations and to this day had helped modern scientists and sociologists to understand how ancient civilisations functioned.

While most of these drawings are considered primitive, they become essential tools in understanding how society grew overtime. It is for this intriguing reason that young Omani artist Marwa al Hinai has gravitated towards stone-age painting.

"I've been very interested to read about history, Arabic poetry, and Omani novels and stories. After studying these materials, I'm always inspired to translate this knowledge into fine art," Marwa shared.

"Sometimes, however, I find it challenging to tell these stories, especially on social media. What I did is turn to the primitive method of painting, one that has been used back in the Stone Age to execute my ideas," she explained.

While she has gone through different phases and genre of art since her childhood, she currently has developed her passion for Madhubani or Mithila Art.

"I focus, currently, in Indian folk arts and they are Madhubani art or Mithila art (practised in the Mithila region of the Indian subcontinent and done with a variety of tools, including fingers, twigs, brushes, nib-pens, and matchsticks while using natural dyes and pigments) and Warli art," she shared.

"By turning to this style, I was able to convey the story, translate them into an artistic style that everyone can understand," she said.

Marwa said that she was intrigued by the symbolism and elements of this art and once her curiosity was piqued, she went to fully study everything that makes it beautiful.

"The Indian arts", she explained, "they love colours and motifs and they add them densely to their artworks. Madhubani art, Mandala art, rangoli art, Warli art and Saura art are examples of Indian arts that mirror each other in some sense."

In Madhubani art, "each artwork is decorated with motifs in the border. Each object has a border. The spaces should be covered by motifs and colours. It is 2D art without details of objects as in the real world. For the face, it is an important

feature to have a sharp, pointed nose and big bulging eyes, rich with colours," she said.

"I attempt to define Arab culture and biography of their heroes. I painted stories of Arabic literature, stories from Palestine and I painted about the Omani culture. I love to use fashion to express who we are and what is our identity; I want to tell others this is our culture," she explained.

Her favourite artwork, as she shared, are those which tell stories about Palestine because she painted them out of her feeling and beliefs.

"As I have a message for every art piece, I find the Madhubani art as a good way to translate stories and poetry about that land."

"Omani table and family gathering" painting is another colourful drawing with Madhubani art style.

"It shows the Omani table and Omani cuisine. This table is considered sacred among the Omanis because it gives a meaning of family bonding amongst the members of the family. It is a small table with affection, tenderness and warmth."

Marwa, also, reflects a scene from Omani folk games, "Hobboah Moh Tdoory (Grandma, what are you looking for?", using Madhubani art. Omani folk games are a pastime for boys and girls. They use some materials available in nature, such as small stones, wood and shells.

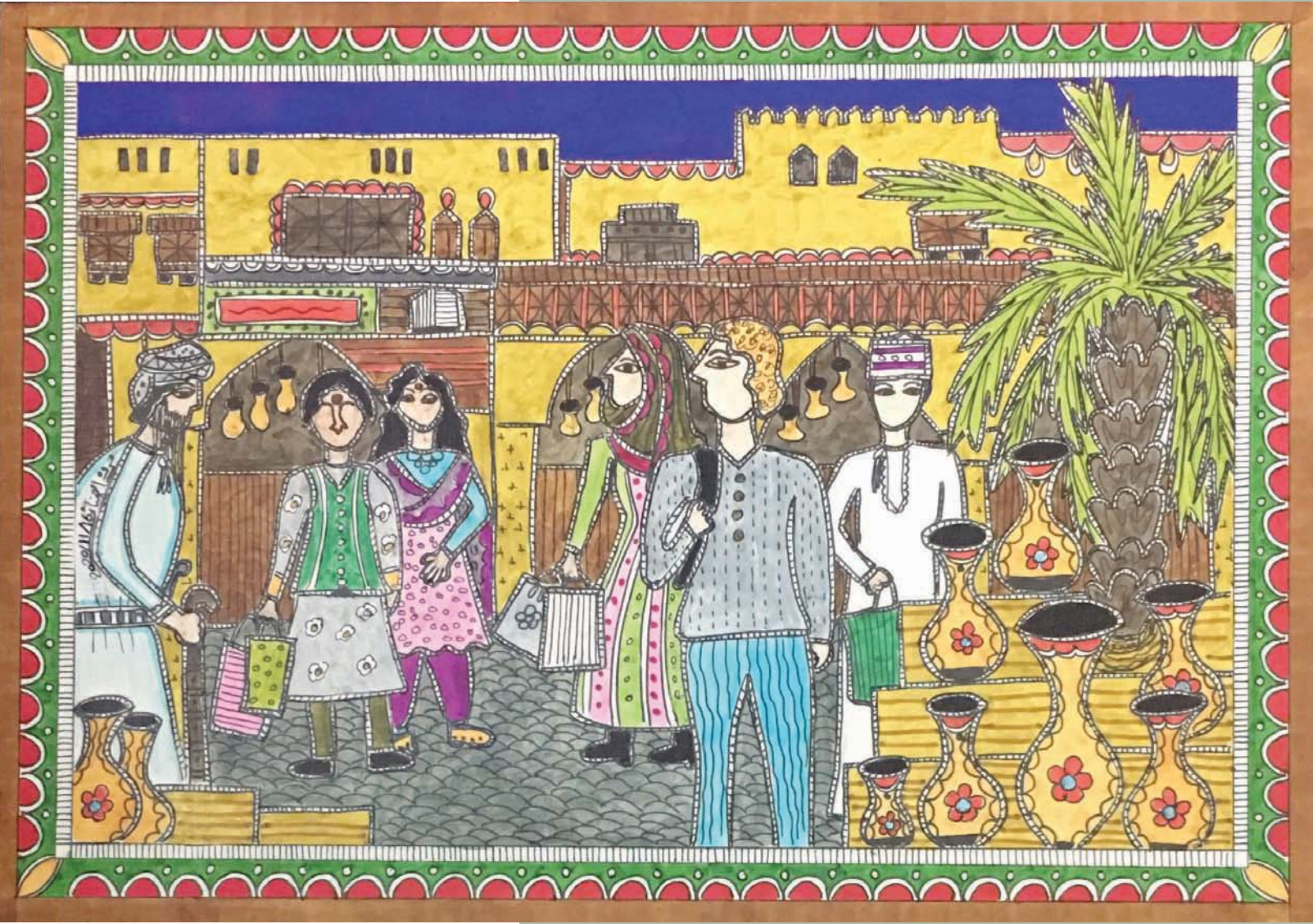
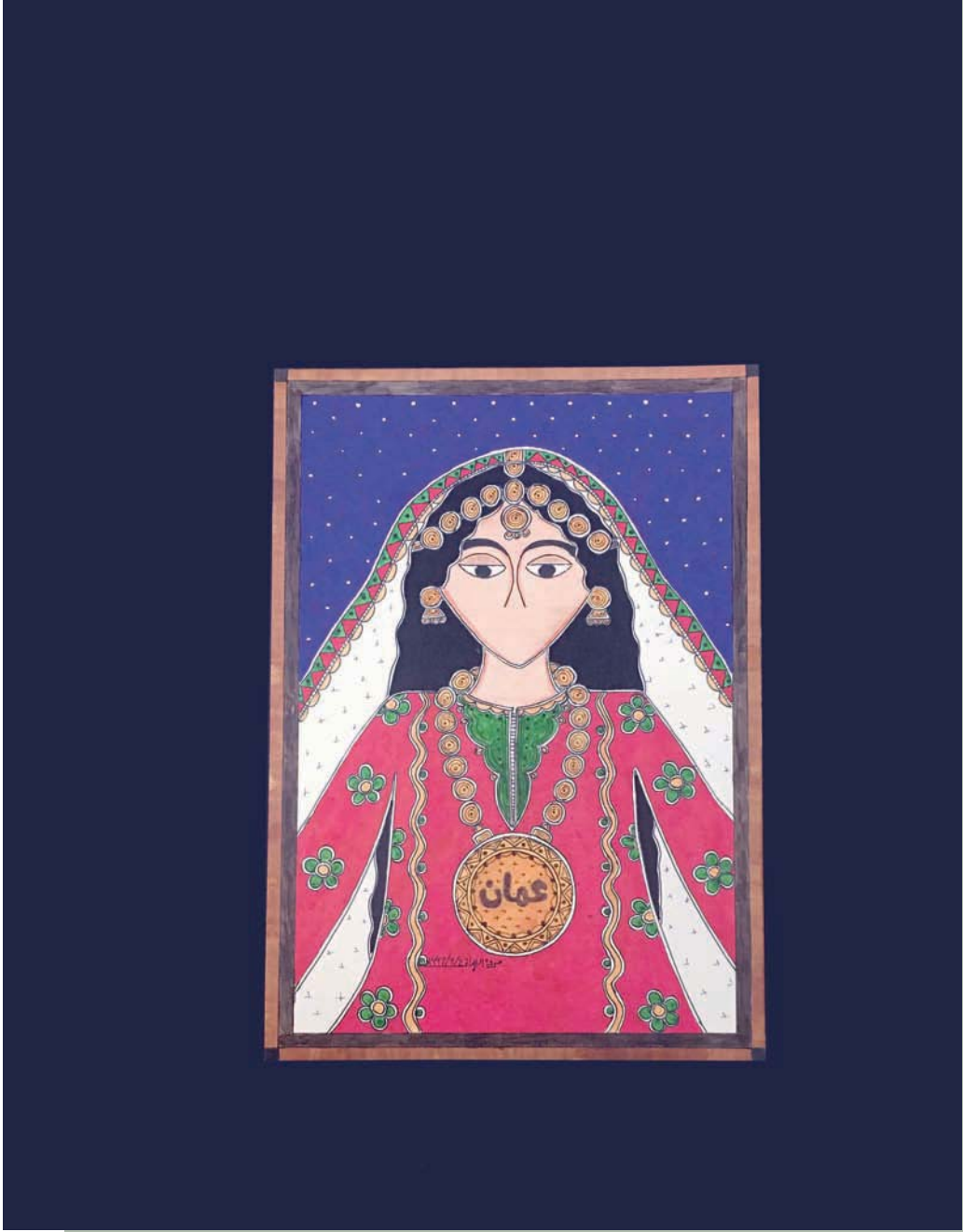
"Hobboah Moh Tdoory" is one of these games, it is intended for girls. They select one of them to be the grandmother "Hobboah" who is searching for something around her and the girls start to sing a song.

"Omani Sword" painting is another favourite artwork for Marwa. A sword is a weapon, it is a sign of strength and it's not just used by men but women too. Women take care of it and decorate it with motifs, gold, silver and precious stones. They, also, used the sword as a piece of home decoration.

"By using Madhubani art style, I try to reflect that strength, care and love by drawing Omani woman holding a sword," she said.

Artists in all fields face challenges. For Marwa, the "Difference of cultures between us (I mean Muslims and non-Muslims) will make difficulties to understand because Madhubani art began as religious art. When I asked some Madhubani artists if I made mistakes when I draw, the answer they give me was that I have my own style."

In Madhubani art, "each artwork is decorated with motifs in the border. Each object has a border. The spaces should be covered by motifs and colours. It is 2D art without details of objects as in the real world. For the face, it is an important feature to have a sharp, pointed nose and big bulging eyes, rich with colours," she said.





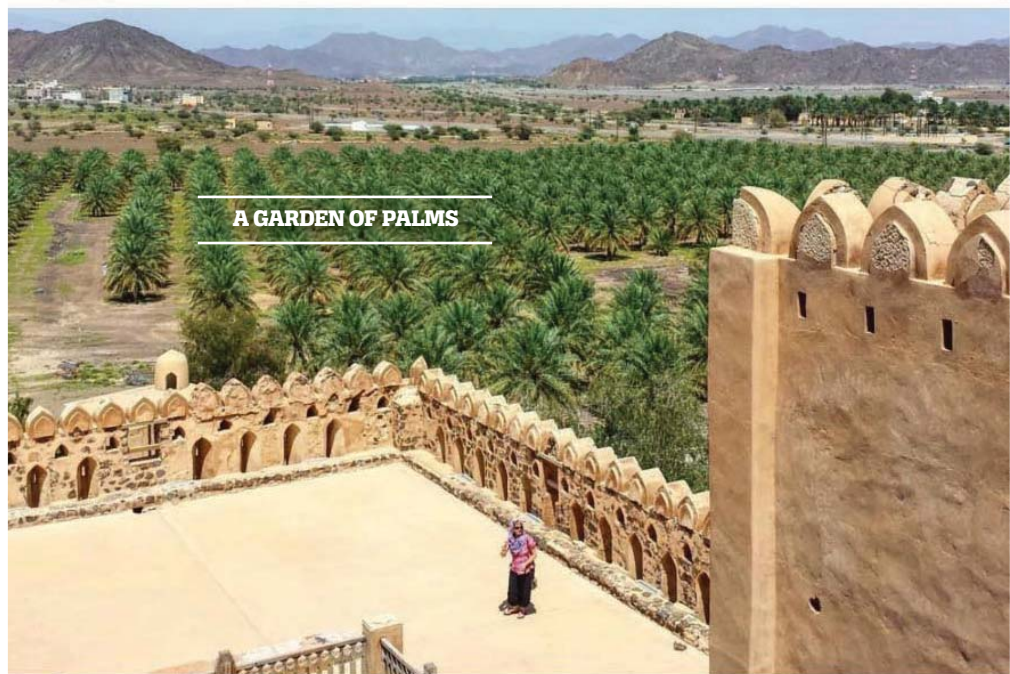
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## CHANGING WORLD

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# Make-up tutorials aim to give cancer patients a boost in pandemic

Surrounded by lipstick and eye-shadow, Aisha Quashie brushes her cheek with foundation as she mirrors makeup artist Laura Hunt thousands of miles away in London.

The 39-year-old, who finished treatment for lymphoma in March, is doing a

private online make-up tutorial while shielding at her Mississauga, Ontario home during the Covid-19 pandemic.

"When you're going through something like cancer, you tend to stay away regardless, because sometimes you're not feeling well," Quashie said.

"But that additional isola-

tion, just it makes it even that much harder not being able to see family (and) friends. It's definitely tough mentally."

For some 30 years, international charity Look Good Feel Better has organised workshops for people living with cancer, giving advice on how to deal with treatment side-effects like dry skin and hair loss.

While group sessions took place at hospitals and cancer support centres around the world, these moved online last year. People living with cancer are considered at higher risk of becoming seriously ill from Covid-19.

Dee Diaz, president and CEO of Look Good Feel Better Canada, said it now offered two one-hour skin and haircare workshops with groups of six to 12 women.

"What's hard is sometimes that connectivity and now women, when they join, have the option of not turning on their camera," she said.

"Although ... within the first 10 minutes, the cameras start coming on because they start to feel comfortable, less vulnerable because they are amongst others who are facing the same challenges."

For her tutorial, Quashie

received the same kit as Hunt, who talked her through techniques.

Cancer charities say the pandemic has made it more difficult for patients to reach out to support organisations, themselves facing funding cuts in the past year, according to the Union for International Cancer Control, which leads the World Cancer Day initiative held annually on February 4. Look Good Feel Better UK, which also offers male grooming workshops, says it reached 4,500 people last year through mostly online sessions and will continue to do so for those living in remote areas.

Briton Bev Francis-Green, who was diagnosed with chronic myeloid leukaemia in 2004, takes oral chemotherapy daily. She and her husband, a delivery driver, use different bathrooms and eat their meals separately to protect her from Covid-19 risks.

"I wouldn't ask my consultant about my skin going dry because he might view it as vanity," said Francis-Green, who did a workshop in May before her birthday.

"I'm 57 and I've never had a makeup lesson ... It was just something that was a little bit of nicety out of the whole of the doom and gloom." — **Reuters**

## Changing the tune: Serbian artist turns weapons into instruments



**EVERY WEEK**, Serbian sculptor Nikola Macura wanders through a messy military junkyard in search of sounds.

Picking through discarded rifles, helmets and missiles, he taps, blows and raps his knuckles on the decommissioned weapons to find pieces he can bring back to his studio and turn into musical instruments.

The 42-year-old is trying to transform these former tools of destruction into

become a common sight around the country.

These graveyards overflow with deactivated guns, bombs and gas masks, as well as combat vehicles, radars and even huge chunks of warplanes.

The sculptor's goal is to create a full orchestra that would travel and play throughout the region, with war veterans serving as some of the musicians.

"I aim to offer those people who participated in the



vessels of creation, in a region that still bears scars from the 1990s wars that unravelled Yugoslavia.

He has already successfully converted a bazooka and an army gas bucket into a cello, created a guitar out of a Zastava M70 rifle and a Yugoslav army helmet, and assembled a violin from an assault rifle magazine and a first aid kit, among others.

"Guns are all around us. We are so surrounded with destruction that we no longer notice it", said Macura, an assistant professor at Novi Sad Academy of Arts in Serbia's north.

There is a vast supply of material to work with: since the wars, depots selling decommissioned army equipment for pennies have

war a chance to utilise the weapons they used to wage war to create music instead", he said.

He has already recruited veteran and visual artist Srdjan Sarovic, who likes to jam on the guitar made from a rifle and helmet.

"It disappears as a rifle and becomes exclusively a musical instrument. When I hold it in my hands and play it, all I worry about is how to align with the instrument," he said.

Macura's next project is turning an army tank into a percussion instrument for five musicians, which he plans to paint pink.

"To make an instrument out of a tank? It's the same as making an instrument out of a rifle. Impossible," he laughed. — **AFP**



# Birkat Al Mouz offers many unique experiences

BY LAKSHMI KOTHANETH



**THEY ARE FROM** two different countries who met in Nizwa because of their teaching profession, but what they found in Birkat Al Mouz made their stay in Oman something to remember forever.

Olga Chernyshova is from Ukraine and Magdelina Formicka-Starzec is from Poland, and today date palms and Jabal Al Akhdhar roses are features of Olga's garden and for Magdelina it is the mountains of Birkat Al Mouz that defines the special memories. They have built bonds of friendship with people and the land of Oman has inspired them to explore the various locations.

"Let us take a walk through the oasis and then you will get to see the big wall", said Olga. "Have you seen the wall before?" asked Magdalena.

The wall has steps that can take you to its top and underneath there are arches that let you walk through the oasis.

What they are excited about is also the ruins of Birkat Al Mouz and the various heritage projects that are coming about.

"While sitting here looking at the ruins, we are looking at Oman's history, architecture through these remains of the previous centuries. This was not made for tourists instead it is part of the natural setting", Magdalena said looking at Harat Al Siybani.

"Mountain biking is amazing here — challenging and exciting", she added.

The Bait Ar Rudaydah, Al Yaaribah Mosque, Al Walja walled plantation, Al Bait Al Jazeera walled plantation, Al Bait Al Hadeeth and Falaj Al Khatmain are all in the itinerary list of the visitors to Birkat Al Mouz.

According to Magdalena, there is one feature that amazes her each time she sees it, "I am amazed at the mountains — Jabal Akhdhar and the mountains here are wonderful. Everyday they are different especially in the morning with different lighting and in the afternoon they have a different look. They are great for hiking and you can also cycle if you have good mountain bikes and this is what we do each day when we have free time.

For Olga, it is the falaj that is fascinating. "While cycling with my friend we came across the falaj and we realised there is another Falaj for women. We were the only visitors and we made it a cosy place and went there everyday. In my country, we would have to pay a lot of money to experience this facility — fresh water coming from the mountains for free. I would recommend it for everyone as it is great for the body, mind and soul."

