

Maljis Ash'shura refers draft amendments to State Council

Majlis Ash'shura has referred the draft amendments of the Insurance Companies Law and the Takaful Insurance Law, referred to it by the Council of Ministers, to the State Council. The referral of the two draft amendments followed the council's approval of two reports submitted by the Economic and Financial Committee, at a regular session of Majlis Ash'shura held on Sunday. **DETAILS ON P2**



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CHINESE FOOTBALL IN DISARRAY AS CHAMPIONS JIANGSU FC CEASE OPERATIONS IN CSL



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OMAN FISCAL REFORMS TO BOOST IPO ACTIVITY GOING FORWARD



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GOLDEN GLOBES TO LAUNCH PANDEMIC-ERA AWARDS SEASON



MUSCAT

E-CONNECTION WITH COURTS LAUNCHED

The Public Prosecution Department inaugurated the first stage of a project for electronic connection with the Council of Administrative Affairs for the judiciary, so that lawsuits are transferred electronically to the designated courts with effect from this month. The first phase of the project will achieve the transfer of lawsuits electronically from the Public Prosecution Department to penal departments in all courts of the Sultanate with effect from today. The project will stop the processing of lawsuits through paperwork and pave the way for the use of computers and other electronic devices. **DETAILS ON P5**

OMANI TEAM TOPS IN GOOGLE CONTEST

A team of students (Rakeezh) from the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Muscat, took first place at Arab level and the 22nd global position in the 2021 Google HashCode Contest, which saw a turnout of 9,000 teams from around the world. The Omani team consisted of four students majoring in engineering. They were Ahmed bin Salim al Alawi, Ammar bin Ali al Hudaifi, Khalfan bin Sulaiman al Busaidy and Lo'ay bin Hudaib al Habsi. The competition, in which international programmers participate, judges the participants' potential and capability to come up with innovative solutions to complex programmatic problems in Google within a limited timeframe.



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BIDEN BRINGS EMPATHY TO STORM-BATTERED TEXAS

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HM RECEIVES MESSAGE FROM KUWAIT EMIR



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmed Al Jabir al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait. The message is related to the bilateral relations and supporting areas of joint cooperation between the two brotherly countries, as well as countries of the region. The message was received by HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, when he received in Muscat on Sunday Shaikh Dr Ahmed Nasser Al Mohammed al Sabah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kuwait.

PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI

60,000 expatriate workers availed 'exit scheme' till January

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 28

With less than a month to go, several embassies are urging their nationalities to take advantage of the grace period given for them to exit the country without paying any fines and fees.

In November last year, the Ministry of Labour announced a grace period during which employers and expatriate workers would be exempted from fees and fines charged against employment discrepancies provided the expatriate manpower leave the Sultanate permanently.

The initiative was aimed at regulating the labour market and facilitating the departure of expatriate workers.

As of January first week, nearly 60,000 expatriate work-

The decision will contribute in adopting new policies to protect the market from illegal employment and reduce the financial burden on companies

RIDHA AL SALEH
OCCI Chairman

ers responded to the offer by the ministry.

"Registration can be done at the embassies, on the ministry's website and Sanad offices. Seven days after registration, the expatriate worker can visit the Ministry of Labour office at Muscat

International Airport seven hours before the departure of the flight. They should carry a valid ticket and the PCR test valid for 72 hours."

The decision to exempt the expatriates who wish to leave the country for good and their employers from any fines and fees will help in regulating the labour market, said the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in a statement.

Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman, OCCI, said: "The decision will contribute significantly in adopting new policies to protect the market from illegal employment and reduce the financial burden on private sector companies and establishments as they can reduce the number of workers in the light of the current economic conditions."

Omani physician wins Michael Davidson Award for thoracic surgeons

TEXAS: Dr Qassim bin Saleh al Abri, Cardiac and Thoracic Surgery Specialist, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), has won the Michael Davidson Structural Heart Surgery of the United States Society of Thoracic Surgeons (STS).

STS, a reference in surgical operations, seeks to promote cardiac and thoracic surgeries and scientific development worldwide. The award eternal-

ises Dr Michael Davidson who was killed in 2015 performing his duty in this type of profession in which he scaled new heights. The award advances the mission initiated by Dr Michael to improve the specialty of heart surgery.

Dr Qassim said in comments: "The annual award is granted to physicians nominated by their respective hospitals, along with their biodata and samples



Dr Qassim bin Saleh al Abri

of professional practice. Once short-listed, each candidate provides a plan clearly envisioning the accomplishment of their objectives and ways to benefit from the expected outcome. A specialised committee picks up the best of the plans. This year, the arbitrators decided to grant the award to me and to a physician from the State of Boston."

Dr Qassim graduated from the College of Medicine and

Health Sciences, SQU, in 2011. He was one of the best performers in his batch. He was selected to join the SQU Hospital's department of cardiovascular surgery in 2011. In 2014, he was sent to study specialisation of heart surgery at Miguel University, Canada. In July 2020, he completed the study and obtained Fellowship of Canadian Surgeons College in October 2020. — ONA

As Covid cases, deaths go up, people urged to take vaccine

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

With Oman reporting eight Covid-19-related deaths on Sunday, warnings from authorities concerned should be taken seriously.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) reported 908 new cases of Covid-19, bringing the total number of cases registered in the Sultanate to 141,496.

While the death toll has now reached 1,570, the number of recovered patients stood at 132,459. Nineteen patients were hospitalised during the past 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients in hospitals to 197, including 67 in intensive care units (ICUs). Meanwhile, the Health and Environmental Committee of Majlis Ash'shura discussed the increasing number of Covid cases in various governorates of the Sultanate.

Stressing that vaccine is the only weapon to fight the virus, the committee said it is following the vaccination campaign carried out by the Ministry of Health, and called on the members of the community, especially



the groups most vulnerable and those with chronic diseases, and the elderly to take the vaccine, which will reduce the number of infections.

The committee also discussed the pandemic situation in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate, and told the authorities concerned to reconsider the decision to close commercial activities in the governorate and discuss its negative effects on the owners of small and medium enterprises. It urged people not to be led by rumours on vaccines.

RAISING A GARDEN!



Born in a family which loves gardening and agriculture, 24-year-old Omani Hiba al Husaini didn't automatically inherit her elder's passion for crops and plants. **SEE P18**

Sultanate, Kuwait review fraternal relations



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq has received a written message from Shaikh Nawaf al Ahmed al Jabir al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait. The message is related to the bilateral relations and supporting areas of joint cooperation between the two brotherly countries, as well as countries of the region.

The message was received by His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, when he received here on Sunday Shaikh Dr Ahmed Nasser

Al Mohammed al Sabah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kuwait, who conveyed greetings and best wishes of Shaikh Nawaf to His Majesty the Sultan.

The meeting reviewed the growing relationship between the Sultanate and Kuwait, stemming from the strong bonds binding the two brotherly countries' peoples. The meeting also touched on a range of current issues pertaining to means of supporting the GCC march, in addition to the latest regional and international developments and matters

of common concern.

The Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs underlined the fraternal and historic relationship, as well as the constructive cooperation between the two countries. He underscored the importance of expanding fields of joint cooperation in different spheres to support the existing ties and enhance the exerted efforts in this regard.

The meeting was attended by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and Dr Suleiman Abdullah

al Harbi, Ambassador of Kuwait to the Sultanate.

SESSION OF CONSULTATIONS

Separately, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, held a session of consultations on Sunday with Shaikh Dr Ahmed Nasser Al Mohammed al Sabah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kuwait.

The session reviewed the strong fraternal relations binding the two brotherly countries. The two sides stressed their keenness on boosting the constructive cooperation between the two

countries to serve joint interest.

They reviewed some regional and international issues, besides exchanging views to enhance the GCC joint action in the light of outcomes of Al-Ula Summit, which was held in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The session was attended by a number of officials from both sides.

Shaikh Dr Ahmed Nasser Al Sabah and his accompanying delegation later left the Sultanate after a two-day visit. They were seen off by Sayyid Badr. — ONA

Shura refers insurance law draft amendments to State Council



MUSCAT: Majlis Ash'shura has referred the draft amendments of the Insurance Companies Law and the Takaful Insurance Law, referred to it by the Council of Ministers, to the State Council.

The referral of the two draft amendments followed the council's approval of two reports submitted by the Economic and Financial Committee, at a regular session of Majlis Ash'shura held on Sunday.

Ahmed bin Said al Sharqi, Chairman of the Economic and Financial Committee reviewed the draft amendments of the Insurance Companies Law and the Takaful Insurance Law. The amendments included clear-cut regulations of the medical insurance whereby Takaful insurance companies will be able to issue medical insurance.

The committee had studied the justifications for the amendments with the relevant authorities and their impact on various parties including the private sector and the health institutions. The council has approved the committee's decision to maintain the draft amendments of the two laws as received from the Council of Ministers in preparation of a mandatory medical insurance for the private sector employees.



The Shura council also approved amendments of Articles (20,21) of the Advocacy Law. Yaqoub bin Mohammed al Harthy, Deputy Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura, presented justifications for the amendments pointing to the ministerial decision No 261/2016 issued by the Ministry of Justice which gave non-Omani lawyers until December 31, 2020 to appear before the Supreme Court and appellate courts due to lack of national lawyers who have completed the required period for

appearance before these courts.

During the session, the Shura council reviewed a number of ministerial replies formerly presented by council's members including a question presented to the minister of agriculture, fisheries and water resources on the national strategy for developing date palm trees. They also included a question to the minister of transport, communications and information technology, related to finding a special identity for vehicles

using electronic platforms for delivering transportation services. The ministerial reply said that the electronic requesting of transportation services is an additional activity given to taxi owners but it does not cancel the original taxi license.

The Shura council also listened to a ministerial reply from the minister of education to an inquiry about the delay in remunerations on the transportation contracts signed with the owners of school buses. The ministerial reply said that the delay in payment is attributed to several reasons which included the suspension of schools due to the Covid-19 pandemic which triggered activation of online classes.

The Shura council also listened to a ministerial reply from the minister of housing and urban planning to a question about the suspension of the housing loans. The minister said the housing loans programme for the limited-income segment was suspended since 2015 because the relevant authorities have prepared a comprehensive conception which recommended transfer of the housing programme from the ministry to Oman Housing Bank, however the transfer procedures have yet to be completed.

Around RO 3 bn spent on medical treatment abroad

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
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The move to allocate government hospitals to private health institutions to operate after official working hours for a fee, is aimed at reducing the number of Omanis going abroad for treatment.

This was stated by Dr Deena al Asfour, Public Health Expert.

She said: "Citizens who go abroad for treatment are divided into two categories - one who goes voluntarily for periodic examination and as medical tourism, while the other section is forced to go abroad for treatment. Yet, there are no studies which show the percentage of patients who go abroad for treatment on emergency basis, but it seems that there are many who do it".

Dr Deena said "From my point of view as an expert, there are many examples of financing health services without charging citizens. The problem is when you ask a sick person to pay money for the service when he needs treatment. This may put the patient in financial difficulty. We know of many cases of expatriates remaining in the hospitals due to their inability to pay medical expenses, so I do not agree with making the ill pay."

The best solution is to provide social health insurance for all individuals by deducting an amount commensurate with the income of each individual, excluding the lowest income groups.

She also recommended that private or government health institutions to operate

in harmony by providing services to each person, either a citizen or an expat, holding an insurance card. This also applies to primary healthcare centres.

"We do not need new buildings, but rather we need to improve the quality of services and make all services reach the citizen near his home," she asserted, confirming that in the case of a partnership between the public and private sectors, contracts should be made with private companies to provide a specific service to a specific region for long periods, so that a fixed and reduced price is negotiated for a period of 20 or 30 years.

This comes after Ali al Lawati, CEO of Company Affairs at Towell Group, proposed to transfer public health providers to private ones in exchange of money, after officials working hours, during a radio interview.

Al Lawati mentioned that statistics show that thousands of citizens travel abroad for medical purposes spending around RO 3 billion. According to Al Lawati, the reason for travelling abroad for treatment is delay in appointments which extend to months even for critical cases.

"As a solution, we proposed in 2017 that health institutions operate from 3 noon to midnight for a fee, so that they are activated as a private institution after the official working hours. Medical devices are qualified to work 18 hours instead of only 7 hours, and thus we saved the costs of treatment abroad by spending on treatment in our local institutions."



First Oman Geriatric Association formed

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Marking a milestone in the care for the elderly, the first Omani Association for the Elderly Health, has officially come into existence under the umbrella of the Omani Medical Association.

The association brings together a group of doctors interested in the health of the elderly, medical groups and assistance interested in providing healthcare to the elderly patients.

"The Association for the Elderly Health is envisioned to provide for improving the health status of the elderly and integrating them into the society as an effective and fruitful component to lead a secure old age and a stable life," Dr Saleha al Jadidiyah, Consultant Psychiatrist for elderly health at Al Masara Hospital, and President of the Association told the *Observer*.

Oman has 145,450 elderly people comprising 75,265 females and 70,194 males. Their population is expected to grow at a rate of 9 per cent by 2040, thanks to the advanced medical care and better living standards.

According to geriatric experts, the needs of the elders vary from the need for proper communication, to healthy relationships and presence of family. Their requirements include healthcare, food and nutrition, physical activity, community and social events, financial security, independence so that they don't feel like a burden to their family, retain their self-esteem, comfort and respect, and dignity and compassion. Having a platform for expressing their needs and concerns is highly lauded by the elderly as well as the people concerned about the topic.

At the first BoD meeting of the Association, Dr Hilal al Azri has been selected as the Vice-President, Dr Maryam al Harrasi as Treasurer, Dr Nihal al Afifi as Secretary, and Dr Ahmed Samir as a member. A

The Association for the Elderly Health is envisioned to provide for improving the health status of the elderly and integrating them into the society as an effective and fruitful component to lead a secure old age and a stable life

DR SALEHA AL JADIDIYAH
Consultant Psychiatrist

logo that details the vision and mission of the first of its kind association was also launched.

Other major aims include establishing a Center for education and training in the field of aging in the Sultanate; To improve the health, social and psychological well-being of the elderly; and to enable them to overcome life's challenges and lead a normal life, among others.

Additionally, ideas are under way for launching a specialised magazine that deals with the concerns and issues of the elderly.

The objectives of the association are based on raising the level of awareness of the community and health workers about the concerns and challenges facing the elderly, as well as directing the level of community members and health workers for the right methods of caring for the elderly. The association also aims to work on finding a common formula with various institutions to develop a unified framework for caring for the elderly.

Preserving the rights of the elderly and securing a decent living for them, giving emphasis on the work and research in improving care for the elderly are other objectives of the Association.

With public places closed, malls see surge in footfall



File image for illustration purpose only.

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

All major hypermarkets, restaurants, commercial complexes and malls in the capital are witnessing a surge in footfalls over the past two weeks.

"With parks, beaches, and all outdoor tourist places closed, people are moving towards malls for night and weekend outings. There is a nearly 20 to 30 per cent increase in the number of visitors but it is difficult to say whether they translated into actual businesses for retailers. The trend is however positive," said a manager of a mall in the capital.

He added, "We are strictly following guidelines of the Ministry of Health that permit only 50 per cent of the total

There is a nearly 20 to 30 per cent increase in the number of visitors but it is difficult to say whether they translated into actual businesses for retailers. The trend is however positive

MALL MANAGER

capacity at a time. We are also committed to temperature checks of all visitors apart from ensuring that they wear masks."

"Malls are not a welcome option because for health safety reasons most of them have

removed or reduced their seating and dining capacities. I hope these commercial establishments will make most of the available opportunities," said Laila, a homemaker.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) too called on commercial centres and shops to adhere to the precautionary measures issued in coordination with the Ministry of Health.

The shopping process suggested for consumers is aimed at limiting the spread of the coronavirus.

The ministry stated that these procedures include organising safe entry for consumers, wearing masks, adhering to social distancing norms (two metres) between one consumer and another at the payment counter, sterilising shopping carts, and

providing sanitiser to consumers.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, said that the Supreme Committee is meeting continuously and added that the economic impact due to the closure of beaches and parks is small, compared to the impact resulting from the closure of commercial centres and vital sectors. "The health situation is the highest priority, but it is not the only criterion for decision-making."

"Keeping in mind the increasing number of visitors, apart from introducing special promotional offers, our employees and contracting companies have intensified sanitising procedures to ensure that we do not contribute to the spread of the virus in the country," said a supervisor at a hypermarket.

Lobster fishing season in Sultanate begins today

MUSCAT: Lobster fishing season in the Sultanate will begin today and continues for three months, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources announced, on Sunday.

During the three-month long lobster fishing season, fishermen begin fishing and collecting lobster in Dhofar, Al Wusta and South Al

Sharqiyah governorates.

In preparation for the fishing season, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has introduced a system for issuing permits for the fishing of lobster which is mandatory for individual fishermen as well as companies involved in lobster fishing and export.



PACDA marks World Civil Defence Day today

MUSCAT: The Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance (PACDA) will join the member states of the International Civil Defence Organisation (ICDO) to mark the World Civil Defence Day, which is observed on March 1 every year, under the theme "Strong Civil Protection To Preserve The National Economy".

This year PACDA marks the World Civil Defence Day under the theme 'Civil Defence for the Protection of the National Economy'.

The rapid economic growth witnessed by the Sultanate required development at PACDA which became one of the region's most advanced civil defence bodies in terms of equipment and training.

PACDA constantly improved its systems to facilitate the issuance of safety licences for



investors and entrepreneurs. The coordination between the civil defence sector and the economic sector is aimed at protecting the economic development witnessed by the Sultanate in various fields

to achieve the objectives of Oman Future Vision 2040.

PACDA handled 3,409 fire incidents in 2020 compared to 3,864 fire incidents in the previous year, a 12 per cent decrease.



LET THE CAMERA ROLL!

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

One year of higher studies online and this is what lecturers have been experiencing — wait for students to join class, do the best to engage them and now exams are a challenge for teachers too. There are a few tricks practiced by students and teachers are catching on.

To begin with there was a challenge with WiFi networks, having the right technology and adapting to the new environment.

Today the scenario is different; there are WhatsApp groups within the classrooms and one which could include the teacher as well. They might be out of sight in the classroom but definitely on the mind of the teachers.

Sonia Ambrosio, a lecturer in journalism at Sultan Qaboos University, has been teaching in Oman for the last 12 years and then came March of 2020, throwing everyone's lives into the new norm affecting students and teachers too.

ONLINE CLASSES

With lockdown and remote working came online classes with students from different parts of the country joining classrooms conducted on digital platforms.

"When the lockdown came in the first semester it was a shock for everyone and it was not just about technology but emotional shock for students who are just 19 and 20 years of age. By the time it was second semester it was like, 'we can do it Miss,' but now I feel students are missing out and they do not have a prospect of the future and are probably in a confused zone."

"The contact with their classmates and lecturers are important and they are missing that. As for the boys, sometimes they are the oldest child in the family and staying at home, unlike before when they were staying on campus, they could be distracted with

responsibilities, even chores and happenings at home," explained Ambrosio.

Another issue is the numbers of courses students take per semester, she pointed out, "Some of them take six courses online and it is difficult. Mentally and emotionally it is not fair as it is a heavy load for students to digest. While online it can be challenging to engage the students in case the idea of independent studying is not strong. One could study for three hours but it may not be effective. I also feel exams online are also not very effective. So I have been giving assignments."

Dr Saad al Jabri, Asst Professor, University of Technology and Applied Science, Sohar, feels that distance education as a mode of teaching can apply for certain courses.

"There is an advantage of this mode of teaching by enriching the experience of academic staff with a new experience. Also this is applied for students. The teaching in engineering needs more visualisation,

imagination and critical thinking to solve complex problems. At in-class learning mode, more interactive lectures and tutorials are delivered to force all the students to participate and prompt feedback is given to the students. In addition, group discussion is arranged for a student project which is one of the main assessments of most of the courses.

Unfortunately, this could not be applied in some of these exercises during the online learning mode," explained Dr Al Jabri.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE

Another factor is that most of the engineering courses have the practical part of the course.

"This is the biggest challenge we face. The students have to touch and feel about the results they get in the experimentation part. My observation is that the majority of the students are not studying well and are waiting for the assessments given by the lecturer to search on the Internet for a solution or get help from other sources. Also for the group projects the students find it difficult to arrange meetings in person and rely on online discussion. This is not useful for low skill and dependent students. The students who are living in close proximity regionally, and arranged meetings with lecturers have better submissions than the others," he noted.

Another major which needs practical classes in addition to theory classes is the medical field.

According to Dr Manal al Zedjali, Dean of the Higher Institute of Health Specialities, changing the culture of teaching was a challenge.

"It was a challenge indeed, but with persistence and team decision things worked out. However, to teach medical personnel online, you need much more than just a meeting platform and this is what we were not ready for. Our main challenges were lack of STS preparedness, lack of teachers' preparedness for the sudden change as well as lack of appropriate resources," said Dr Al Zedjali.

To retain media students' engagement in class, journalism professor Sonia has a technique to ensure the students are in complete focus - all of a sudden she might ask the student to show what's outside their room window.

"As journalists I want them to observe their backdrop when they are on camera and observe around them. It has been creating a rich experience because we get to see from Saham in North Al Batinah to Sadah in Dhofar," concluded the professor.

Whatever the class is and the subject the camera must be switched on as it is the right of the teacher to see the students they are teaching.

WHATEVER THE CLASS IS AND THE SUBJECT

THE CAMERA MUST BE

SWITCHED ON AS IT IS THE RIGHT OF THE TEACHER TO

SEE THE STUDENTS THEY ARE TEACHING



Health minister chairs ABHS meeting

MUSCAT: The Executive Office of the Arab Board of Health Specializations (ABHS) held a meeting under the chairmanship of Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, President of ABHS Supreme Council.

Held via video-conferencing, the meeting was attended by members of the Executive Office, Representative of the Technical Secretariat of Arab Health Ministers Council and officials from the Ministry of Health.

Dr Al Saeedi expressed his thanks to all workers in the ABHS Secretariat General and to all medical cadres for their efforts and sacrifices during the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

Prof Omar bin Awadh al Rowas, ABHS Secretary-General, reviewed Secretariat General's report on implementing decisions of the Supreme Council and Executive Office, and the ABHS activities for



2020.

Al Rowas has also highlighted the development programmes being carried out by the Secretariat General, most importantly e-exams according

to the international standards.

The Executive Office approved a number of decisions that included appointing the ABHS Assistant Secretary-General, approving the

strategic plan for the years 2021-2025, the operational plan of 2021, regulations of academic affairs, the final budget of 2020 and the 2021 budget.

Pact to build showroom for craft-training unit



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education signed an agreement with the Petroleum Development Oman to finance the construction of a hall and a showroom for products of the craft-training unit at the Omar bin Al Khattab Institute for the Blind.

Dr Abdullah Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, signed the agreement with Mohammed al Gharibi, Director of Foreign Affairs and Communications at PDO.

The agreement comes within the framework of the fruitful partnership between the Ministry of

Education and private sector institutions to develop and improve the services provided to children with disabilities.

It also supports the principle of "inclusive education and equal opportunities" for persons with disabilities, and to enhance efforts aimed at supporting the skills and competencies of students with disabilities and qualifying them for the labour market in proportion to their abilities and capabilities and providing them with the opportunity to participate and support their desires for future life.

GCC anti-corruption agencies meet

MUSCAT: The State Audit Institution (SAI) took part in the 19th meeting of the GCC Committee of Integrity and Anti-Corruption Agencies.

The meeting was held through video-conferencing at the GCC Secretariat General in Riyadh with the participation of member SAs at the committee.

The agenda highlighted views of member states relevant to activating mechanisms to implement guiding principles of exchanging expertise among agencies.

The meeting discussed academic programmes proposed in the field of integrity promotion and fighting corruption.

Further, the meeting discussed its recommendations. — ONA



Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos Private School

Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos PVT School is currently seeking teachers to fill the following vacancies for the academic year 2021/2022:

1. Female English Teacher (Primary).
2. Female Science Teacher (Primary).
3. Female Math Teacher (Primary) & (5-10).
4. Female Chemistry Teacher.
5. Female IT Teacher (knowledge in programming languages).

Requirements: candidates must have

- B.A. in the subject /B.Ed.
- Minimum 3 Years experience.
- Must be resident in Oman.
- Minimum score 6 in IELTS.

Please submit your CVs in via E-mail

info@msqps.edu.om or **schoolhr@gmail.com**

No hand-resumes will be received due to the precautionary measures.

Note:- CV from outside Oman will not be considered

MOORE STEPHENS LLC

NOTICE ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF LIQUIDATION OF OMAN INTERNATIONAL TRADE & EXHIBITIONS LLC (AS APPEARED IN OFFICIAL GAZETTE NO 1381)

Moore Stephens LLC, announces the liquidation process of Oman International Trade & Exhibitions LLC, bearing commercial registration number 1245147, in accordance with the decision taken by the Company's Members on 15 February 2021. The liquidators alone have the right to represent the Company under liquidation before third parties, and all parties are to confirm with the liquidator for all matters concerning the company's business at the following address:

**Office No. 41, 4th Floor, Building No.1022, Way No.1013;
Al Walaj Street, Al Qurum
P O Box 933, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24061000, Fax: 24061099**

By this announcement, the liquidator calls the company's creditors to submit their claims against the company, together with the supporting documents, to the above address within six months from the date of publishing this announcement for the first time, and any debtors should settle the company's rights with the liquidator on the address above.

Moore Stephens LLC

**Official Liquidators of Oman International Trade & Exhibitions LLC
(Under voluntary liquidation)**

Public Prosecution e-connected with courts

MUSCAT: The Public Prosecution Department on Sunday inaugurated the first stage of a project for electronic connection with the Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary, so that lawsuits are transferred electronically to the designated courts with effect from March 2021.

The first phase of the project will achieve the transfer of lawsuits electronically from the Public Prosecution Department to penal departments in all courts of the Sultanate with effect from Monday. The project will terminally terminate the processing of lawsuits through paperwork and pave the way for the use of computers and other electronic devices (laptops).

The program was launched by Sayid Khalifa bin Said al Busaidy, Chairman of the Supreme Court, Chairman of the Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary and Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Judiciary Council. The first phase of the project will provide statistically accurate data to study the course of action, distribute work and propagate indicators. — ONA

Invitation and Notice to attend the Ordinary General Meeting

The Board of Directors of the National Bank of Oman S.A.O.G. (the Bank) has the pleasure to invite all Shareholders to attend the Ordinary General Meeting (OGM) of the Bank, scheduled to be held at 3pm on Monday the 15th of March 2021 through the electronic platform for holding General Meetings, which you access through the website of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om); in the event the legal quorum required under the Commercial Companies Law (Royal Decree 18/19) to hold the OGM is not met, the second OGM shall be held at 3pm on Tuesday 16th of March 2021 at the same electronic platform above, to discuss the following agenda items:

The agenda of the Ordinary General Meeting:

1. To consider and approve the Shareholders Commitment Agreement to be concluded with certain related parties (and/or their nominees) and a proposed fee payable to a related party being appointed as a joint lead manager in connection with the proposed issuance of capital securities by the Bank.
2. To consider and approve any shareholders attending the meeting who wish to enter into the Shareholders Commitment Agreement (either directly or through a nominee) on the same terms and conditions of the Shareholders Commitment Agreement.

As per the Bank's Articles of Association, and the regulations for convening general meetings through the electronic platforms issued by the Capital Market Authority (CMA), we would like to draw your kind attention to the following:

1. Only juristic persons may authorise a natural person to attend the OGM and vote on their behalf through the electronic systems, provided that the authorised natural person has an investor number at Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
2. Voting on the subject items offered for voting in the agenda starts before a period of not more than three (3) days and until the end of the voting process on the day of the OGM. If your balance of shares increased or decreased during the period of voting, your submitted votes will be cancelled and you would have to submit your votes again on the OGM's date.

For any queries please contact Jawaher Al Tamami, Company Secretary on +968 2477 8218 or +968 9510 8251 or e-mail Jawaher at: jawaheraltamami@nbo.co.om

Amal Suhail Bahwan
Chairperson

KPMG
External Auditors

Mohamed A.H Mohamed
Legal Advisor

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البنك الوطني العماني
NBO

nbo.om

ELECTRONIC TENDER

The Internal Tenders Committee of Ministry of Higher Education Research & Innovation (MOHERI) announces the tendering of the tender shown in the following table:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Company that are entitled to participate	Tender Price	Last Date for purchasing Tender	The deadline for submission of Tenders
16/2020 (Recall 1)	Annual Maintenance Contract for Non-Comprehensive of CCTV, Access Contract & Intrusion Alarm system for Ministry of Higher Education, Research & Innovation	Specialized in providing Same service and registered with the Tender Board with Grade: Excellent and First	(25/=R.O) Twenty Five Omani Rial Only	10/03/2021	19/3/2021

The purchasing of the tender documents by E-Tendering system will start on Sunday 28/02/2021; at 07:30 am. To purchasing, please visit the following link:

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

All companies that are bidding must provide a bank guarantee or a certified cheque from a bank operating in the Sultanate for at least (1%) of the tender value on behalf of His Excellency Dr. / Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee.

Preference will be given to companies' or small and medium enterprises registered with the General Authority for the development of Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) that includes the largest proportion of its tender Organisation.

Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender.

Chairman of tender committee
Ministry of Higher Education Research & Innovation (MOHERI)



Yemen fighters claim Saudi strikes, threaten new attacks

SANAA: Yemen's Ansar Allah fighters on Sunday claimed the attempted strikes that targeted neighbouring Saudi Arabia overnight and threatened more attacks, as fighting in the grinding civil war escalates.

The fighters have intensified operations against the kingdom as air strikes by the Saudi-led military coalition pound fighter positions in the north of Yemen, in a bid to stop their offensive to seize the government's last northern stronghold of Marib.

Years of war have already pushed Yemen to the brink of famine.

Saudi Arabia said on Saturday it thwarted an Ansar Allah missile that targeted Riyadh.

"The operation was carried out with a ballistic missile and 15 drones... targeting sensitive areas in the enemy's capital of Riyadh," said Ansar Allah spokesman Yahya al Saree, according to the fighters' Al-Masirah TV channel.

"Our operations will continue and will expand as long as the aggression and seige on our country continues."

Fragments of the missile scattered over several Riyadh neighbourhoods, damaging at least one home but no casualties



Fighters loyal to Ansar Allah surround the coffins of fellow combatants killed in battles with coalition-backed government troops, during a mass funeral ceremony at Sanaa's Al Saleh mosque, on Sunday. — AFP

were reported, Saudi's state-run Al-Ekhbariya television said.

AFP correspondents in the Saudi capital reported hearing multiple loud explosions, with state television footage showing the night sky light up with a bright flash.

Separately, the coalition said it had intercepted six Ansar Allah drones targeting the kingdom, including the southern cities of Khamis Mushait and Jizan.

Saree on Sunday claimed those attacks as well, warning residents in the region to "stay clear from all military airports and sites."

'CATASTROPHE'

The Ansar Allah fighters have escalated cross-border attacks on the kingdom even after the United States delisted them as terrorists, reversing a decision by the administration of former president Donald Trump.

The designation had been widely criticised by aid organisations, who warned it would hamper their efforts to alleviate a humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

On Sunday, in the latest violence in Yemen, five civilians including a child were killed when their home was destroyed in a bombardment near the strategic fighter-held Red Sea port of Hodeida. — AFP

Palestinians shut West Bank schools to contain virus

RAMALLAH: Schools in the occupied West Bank will shut down for 12 days in an effort to stop a sharp rise in coronavirus variant infections, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh has said.

High schools have been exempted from the closure which began on Sunday. Shtayyeh said in a televised address on Saturday that the new restrictions were prompted by a large number of cases of the British and South African variants in the territory.

Intensive care units for Covid-19 patients have reached 95 per cent occupancy in the West Bank and schools have been identified as a major cause for the fast spread of infections, the Ministry of Health said.

On Thursday, it reported that a randomised sample of coronavirus patients showed that more than three-quarters were

infected with the British variant.

The World Bank said in a report this week that the Palestinian territories have one of the lowest testing rates in the Middle East and North Africa and that the positivity rate in the West Bank is over 21 per cent, and in Gaza 29 per cent, indicating an uncontrolled spread of the pandemic.

The West Bank, where 3.1 million Palestinians live, has reported a total of 118,519 coronavirus cases and 1,406 deaths.

Meanwhile, Israel said it will administer Covid-19 vaccines to Palestinians who work in Israel or in its settlements in the occupied West Bank, the Israeli liaison office COGAT said on Sunday. The vaccination campaign, which could apply to an estimated 130,000 Palestinians, will begin within days. — Reuters



Mask-clad Palestinian pupils attend a class amid the coronavirus pandemic at a school run by the United Nations in the Nuseirat refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, on Saturday. — AFP

Iran health ministry says virus deaths cross 60,000 mark

TEHRAN: Iran's health ministry said the country's coronavirus fatalities broke the 60,000 mark on Sunday, as the Islamic republic battles the Middle East's worst outbreak of the illness.

The grim milestone comes after several Iranian officials, including President Hassan Rouhani, warned of a Covid-19 "fourth wave" with cases rising in certain areas of the country.

"Sadly in the past 24 hours, 93 people lost their lives to Covid-19, and total deaths from this disease reached 60,073," health ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said in a televised address.

Iran has registered a total of 1,631,169 infections, according to the ministry.

But some officials — including Health Minister Saeed Namaki — have admitted in the past that the actual numbers are likely higher than the official figures.

The coronavirus taskforce spokesman Alireza Raisi on Friday said that Iran is "very concerned" about the more contagious British variant of the virus, which has already "circulated in the country."

"We have identified 112 people infected with the British variant in the country, eight of whom have died," he said, according to the health ministry. He noted that the variant was seen in many provinces including the capital Tehran, and the virus' new focal point in the southwest, Khuzestan. — AFP

Dubai cat cafe hopes rescues will find purr-fect new homes

DUBAI: A haven for humans craving furry feline company, a cat cafe in Dubai also doubles as an adoption centre for some of the United Arab Emirates' many strays.

The Ailuromania Cat Cafe, which was the Middle East's first cat cafe when it opened in 2015, hopes the relaxing properties of its 25 rescue and shelter cats will help find them their forever homes.

"Anyone who is stressed just has to find a cat. All your stress will go away," said Omnia Fareed, whose two cat-loving sisters Allaa and Iman started the cafe after university, taking inspiration from similar establishments in Korea and London.

The cafe's original residents



The owner plays with the cats at the Ailuromania Cat Cafe. — Reuters

were strays taken in by the family over the years. Now Ailuromania hosts cats from a government-run animal shelter in the neighbouring emirate of Ras al Khaimah, hoping

to increase adoptions. The cafe's name Ailuromania is a play on the Greek-derived English word for a lover of cats: ailurophile.

The cafe has regular customers

who come seeking relaxation from the stresses of life, or because they cannot keep a cat at home.

"They are so cute, they love playing," said visitor Shaasthra. She said she appreciates how the cafe looks after the cats' welfare by advising people not to hold them or wake them up.

Another regular visitor, a street cat who would stare in through the window, was also invited and eventually adopted.

Since Dubai began lifting coronavirus lockdown measures last summer, the cafe re-opened with capacity and sanitisation restrictions. Dubai has a large number of stray cats, with many abandoned on the streets by their owners. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

TRIPOLI

Almost 100 migrants rescued, 20 missing

Almost 100 migrants were rescued off Libya's west coast on Sunday as they made failed attempts to reach Europe, while around 20 were missing. People traffickers have thrived amid the lawlessness that followed the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi's regime in 2011, making the country an important conduit for migrants seeking safety and a better life in Europe.

The Libyan coastguard rescued the mostly African migrants as they attempted



perilous sea crossings to Italy and brought them to a naval base in the capital Tripoli, where they were met by a team from the International Organization for Migration. — AFP

AMMAN

Jordan ministers sacked for virus rules breach

Jordan's interior and justice ministers were sacked on Sunday for breaching health regulations to stem the spread of coronavirus, with their replacements named by royal decree. The pair were asked to step down by Prime Minister Bisher al Khasawneh, a move immediately endorsed by King Abdullah II, according to a statement from the royal palace. They are accused of "having violated the emergency law".

The Jordanian news website Ammon claimed Interior Minis-



ter Samir Mobaideen and Justice Minister Bassam Talhuni had attended a dinner in a restaurant in Amman with a total of nine people, when the law allowed a maximum of six. — AFP

BAGHDAD

Vatican envoy to Iraq tested Covid-positive

The Vatican's Ambassador to Iraq Mitja Leskovar has tested positive for Covid-19, two officials said on Sunday, just days before Pope Francis' historic visit. "Yes, he tested positive, but it will have no impact on the visit," an Iraqi official involved in the papal plans said. An Italian diplomat also confirmed the infection.

As apostolic nuncio to Baghdad, Leskovar had been travelling across the country in recent weeks to prepare for the pope's ambitious visit, including



visits to Mosul in the north, the shrine city of Najaf and the southern site of Ur.

During foreign trips, popes typically stay at the nuncio's residence. — AFP

18 dead on bloodiest day of Myanmar protests

YANGON: Myanmar police fired on protesters on Sunday in the bloodiest day of weeks of demonstrations against a military coup and at least 18 people were killed and several wounded, political and medical sources, residents and media said. Police were out in force early and opened fire in different parts of the biggest city of Yangon after stun grenades, tear gas and shots in the air failed to break up crowds. Soldiers also reinforced police.

Several wounded people were hauled away by fellow protesters, leaving bloody smears on pavements, media images showed. One man died after being brought to a hospital with a bullet in the chest, said a doctor who asked not

to be identified.

“Myanmar is like a battlefield,” the Buddhist-majority nation’s first Catholic cardinal, Charles Maung Bo, said on Twitter.

Myanmar has been in chaos since the army seized power and detained elected government leader Aung San Suu Kyi and much of her party leadership on February 1, alleging fraud in a November election her party won in a landslide.

The coup, which brought a halt to tentative steps towards democracy after nearly 50 years of military rule, has drawn hundreds of thousands onto the streets and the condemnation of Western countries.

A UN official who spoke on



Protesters take cover as they clash with riot police officers during a protest in Yangon on Sunday. – Reuters

condition of anonymity said the office had confirmed at least five people dead in Yangon. Police also opened fire in Dawei in the south, killing three and wounding several, politician Kyaw Min Htike said from the town.

The Myanmar Now media outlet reported two people had been killed in a protest in the second city of Mandalay. Security forces fired again later in the day and one woman was killed, Mandalay resident Sai Tun said.

“The medical team checked her and confirmed she didn’t make it. She was shot in the head,” Sai Tun said. Police and the spokesman for the ruling military council did not respond to phone calls seeking comment. — Reuters

Philippines receives first Covid-19 vaccines from China



President Rodrigo Duterte holds a vial of Sinovac’s Covid-19 vaccine at Villamor Air Base, Pasay City, Metro Manila, on Sunday. – Reuters

MANILA: The Philippines received 600,000 vaccine doses from China on Sunday, kick-starting the country’s inoculation drive despite concerns over the Sinovac jab’s effectiveness. Top government officials and health workers will be the first on Monday to receive the Chinese-made vaccine — called CoronaVac — just days after the drug regulator approved it for emergency use.

President Rodrigo Duterte, whose government has been under fire over delays in procuring vaccines, oversaw the delivery of the doses at a military air base.

Around 525,000 doses of the AstraZeneca jab were also due to arrive on Monday as part of the COVAX global inoculation programme and will also be offered to healthcare workers.

The regulator did not recommend CoronaVac for healthcare workers due to its comparatively low efficacy.

An advisory group to the Philippine government allowed it to be offered to those willing to take it, but many nurses and doctors are reluctant and have opted to wait for other vaccines.

In the Philippine General Hospital, one of the country’s main facilities treating Covid-19 patients, only 10 per cent of staff were willing to be inoculated with the Chinese-made vaccine, spokesman Jonas Del Rosario said.

It was far from the 94 per cent who registered to take the Pfizer-BioNTech jab, said Del Rosario, who himself opted not to take the CoronaVac shot.

The hesitancy is not new in the Southeast Asian nation, which has struggled with vaccine programmes in recent years.

The Philippines was the first country in 2016 to deploy the dengue vaccine Dengvaxia, but a botched rollout led to unfounded claims that several dozen children had died from the jab. — AFP



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Audited Financial Statement for the year ended 31 December 2020

BOARD OF DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Sohar Power Company SAOG ("Sohar Power" or the "Company"), I am pleased to present you with the sixteenth Annual Report of the Company for the year ended 31 December 2020, corresponding to the fourteenth year of operations of the Company.

On 2nd June 2020, Sohar Power Company shareholders held their Annual Ordinary General Meeting ("AGM") and an Extraordinary General Meeting ("OGM") to approve the amended Company's Article of Association. The AGM and OGM were held online using the platform provided by MCDG pursuant to the CMA instructions. Sohar Power was incorporated in 2004 after the award of the Sohar IWPP project resulting from a competitive bidding process and started its operations in 2007. The Company owns and operates the 585MW electricity generation and 33MIGD seawater desalination plant in Sohar Port and Freezone industrial area. It sells electricity and water to Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC ("OPWP") under a 15-year Power and Water Purchase Agreement ("PWPA"), in a regulated but not competitive environment. The Company has been listed on the Muscat Securities Market since 2008.

Health & Safety

The year 2020 has seen excellent Health and Safety performance for Sohar Power. There were no Lost Time Accidents (LTA), accumulating to 2,894 days without LTA at the end of the year. The Health and Safety of our employees, contractors, and visitors remains the utmost priority for the Company and its operator Sohar Operations & Maintenance Company LLC ("SOMC").

The year also saw a unique global challenge in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic that required Sohar Power, its contractors and stakeholders to activate their Business Continuity and aspects of Disaster Recovery plans. At the Muscat office, all employees were instructed to work from home, minimise exposure to others and follow all government laid down rulings. At the Plant, the Operator SOMC instituted a lock down at the Plant, preventing unessential movement to and from the Plant and stationing two shifts for a period of 14 days, which continued for a period of 3 months commencing March 22, 2020. While these measures have now been relaxed, the Company and its Operator remain vigilant, promoting social distancing, and ensuring that all protection measures are in place going forward. The Company has donated OMR 10,000 and OMR 15,000 to support the COVID-19 initiatives of MoH fund and Sohar Industrial Port respectively.

Operations

The demand for power and water significantly decreased in 2020 compared to 2019 due to the entrance of new water plant in the port area. The plant was in standby mode most of the time in this year; thus the demand for power has also decreased. Accordingly, the load factors of the plant reached 2% for power (39.1% in 2019) and 1% for water (47.6% in 2019).

An aggregate of 96 GWh net power and 0.5 Million m3 potable water was delivered to the electricity and water grids during the year.

The plant achieved 99.59% reliability for power and 99.06% for water in 2020. Forced outages amounted to 0.41% for the power plant and 0.94% for the water plant.

The Contract Year 14 started on 01 April 2020. The annual performance test was successfully undertaken, demonstrating to OPWP the guaranteed capacity of the plant on fuel gas only.

Following the plant being operated for annual performance test, the plant went through preservation process on April and May 2020 for the entire water plant and water/steam cycle.

The Company was able to undertake the required annual maintenance activities of its key equipment during the 2019-2020 winter period.

Maintenance activities were performed by SOMC and its sub-contractors, in accordance with Original Equipment Manufacturers' recommendations, while applying the best standards and practices for health & safety and maintenance of the industry. All gas turbines underwent regular annual maintenance during the Winter Period; there were no Major Inspections undertaken during the Winter Period.

Financial Performance

The Board of Directors would like to announce that the Company has ended the year with a net profit of RO 2.256 million compared to a net profit of RO 1.155 million in 2019.

The increase in net profit in 2020 is mainly due to the lower direct cost (fuel oil and import power) and indirect cost compared to 2019. The revenues for the year 2020 amount to RO 27.3 million against RO 50.6 million for the year 2019. This mainly due to lower load factor of the plant (low power and water demand). As per the PWPA agreement with the off-taker, the variation of the Load Factor has no impact on the company profitability as the mainstream of the profit is generated from the available capacity and reliability of the plant, (load factor is a pass-through item under the PWPA (and financially neutral to the Company)).

The direct costs, have decreased from RO 31.1 million in 2019 to RO 7.2 million in 2020, due to mainly the decrease in gas consumption as a result of lower load factor.

Long term loans were repaid, and swaps were settled on their due dates. The hedging deficit on the Company's swap agreements at the close of business on 31 December 2020, was RO 3.3 million, in comparison with valuations as of 31 December 2019 of RO 4.2 million. As per IAS 39, hedging deficit is calculated on each balance sheet date, and it represents a notional loss, which the Company may incur if it opts to terminate the swap agreements on this date. However, under the terms of Financing Agreements, the Company is not permitted to terminate its swap agreements and, as such, the loss is notional.

The reduction in finance costs by RO 0.6 million in 2020 in comparison to 2019 is associated with debt repayments during the year.

Under its Financing Agreements entered into with its lenders, Sohar Power is subject to a cash sweep mechanism which started on 30 September 2015 and will last until the full repayment of the long-term loans. The cash sweep mechanism prevents the distribution of dividends to shareholders since all the available cash is devoted to the repayment of the loans. This mechanism is common in financing agreements throughout the region and helps to provide a competitive tariff for an off-taker such as OPWP at the time of the bid. As previously disclosed, the payout of dividends ended in 2016, and there will be no more dividend distributions to shareholders unless the debt of the Company is refinanced and the cash sweep is successfully removed. The Company has explored and continues to explore opportunities to refinance its project finance debt.

As a consequence of the cash sweep, the inability of the Company to distribute dividends, and the decrease of the global and Omani Capital Market indices in 2020, the share price dropped from RO 0.061 to RO 0.045 during the year.

There are no legal proceedings against the Company as of 31 December 2020.

Corporate Governance

In line with efforts deployed in previous years, the Company ensured that its organization, systems, policies, and procedures follow the highest standards of governance to comply at all times with the Code of Corporate Governance promulgated by CMA, including the new Code requirements effective since July 2016.

After the issuance of the new Company Commercial laws in Feb 2019 pursuant to the Royal Decree 18/2019, the company has amended its Article of Association ("AoA") to ensure full compliance. The new AoA has been approved by the board of directors and then by the shareholder in an online EGM held on 2nd June 2020.

Audit Committee and the Board have pursued the action plan arose from third-party consultant audit to review the internal audit system and process of the company was set to address the recommended action for further improvements.

After resignation of the internal auditor of the Company, the Audit Committee and the Board has appointed, after CMA approval, an external firm to perform the IA activities of the company for Q3 and Q4 of 2020.

Employment

Pursuing their continued efforts to develop, train, and employ Omanis, the Company and its operator have maintained the Omanisation level at 84.5% at the end of 2020.

Corporate Social Responsibility

In 2020, the Company further extended its support to the local community and municipality projects, mainly in North Batinah Governorate, while focusing on education, health and safety, social development and environment protection. Sohar Power was able to contribute to local projects intended for the local communities and the people of the Sultanate of Oman. The world faced unprecedented challenge of COVID-19 in 2020, the company has contributed and support the Ministry of Health with 10,000 OMR to alleviate the spread of COVID-19. In addition to 10,000 OMR; The Company has contributed 15,000 OMR to the SIPC initiative to setup a dedicated testing laboratory under the auspices of the Ministry of Health for COVID-19 and other type of viruses. The laboratory should speed up the testing cycles to ensure the smooth operation in the port area in which the plant is located.

The Company has co-supported an initiative of The Ministry of education to train around 200 students on mobile app development and then launch a competition for them. The top 2 will participate in international MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) competitions. The donation amount is around 8,000 OMR.

Outlook for 2021

Looking ahead, the Company expects to maintain high reliability even though the delivered power and water level is expected to be at a same level seen in 2020, while undertaking periodic maintenance activities, in a safe working environment for its employees, contractors and visitors.

During the year 2018, the Company engaged in the '2022 Power Procurement process' launched by OPWP. As part of the process, OPWP has notified the Company on 7 February 2019 that it has pre-qualified its Power only offer but did not pre-qualify its Power and Water offer. The Company has submitted a Binding Bid for its Power only offer on February 28, 2019, after seeking approval during the Ordinary General Meeting held on February 26, 2019.

As a consequence, the Company will not be able to extend the operations of its water desalination plant beyond the term of the current PWPA ending in March 2022. This situation triggered an impairment review of the Desalination plant, which resulted in an impairment loss of RO 18.554 million that is recorded in the financial year 2018. The useful life of the Desalination plant has also been revised to 15 years from the earlier estimate of 30 years. The Desalination plant will have a remaining useful life of around three years starting January 2019, and the residual book value will be amortized over the coming 3 years.

The Company engaged as well in the second phase of '2022 Power Procurement process' launched by OPWP RFP on 16th October 2019. The Company has submitted its offers on 29th April 2020 as per the processes of the RFP. OPWP feedback is still awaited which got delayed due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors. As per the recent communication from the Authority of Public Services Regulation (APSR), the response is expected by the end of Q1 2021. APSR is assessing the market readiness for direct sale of power by allowing bilateral contracts which may provide generators with expiring PPA an additional avenue to contract their

power capacity.

The Company's main objective for 2021 is to secure a new PPA with effect from 2022. The Company will also engage with different stakeholders to assess the feasibility of the potential bilateral contracts for its plant. In case SPC is unsuccessful in the Power 2022 Procurement process, the Company may operate in the Spot Market currently being developed in Oman, for which the rules are not yet fully finalised. Revenues will not be contracted in the Omani Spot Market, it will be subject to the overall supply and demand in the Market. In view of the uncertainties surrounding the Spot Market, it is very difficult to predict the future of the Company in its current technical configuration, should it operate in the Spot Market, but it will be very challenging. In such case, restructuring the outstanding debt after the current term of PWPA will be very challenging as well.

The energy transition is accelerating in Oman, caused

by the continuous drop in prices for renewable energy such as photovoltaics and wind. This is likely to impact the competitiveness of existing conventional thermal plants and might substantially reduce their value beyond the term of their current PWPA.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I wish to thank our valued shareholders for their continued support, trust, and confidence. I would also like to thank all the personnel associated with the operation and maintenance of the plant in Sohar and the staff of the Company for their loyalty, dedication and commitment.

I would also like to express our gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and His Government for their continued guidance, support and encouragement to the private sector.

Luciano Guffanti
Chairman of the Board

Statement of financial position as at 31 December 2020

	Dec 31 2020 (RO '000)	Dec 31 2019 (RO '000)	Dec 31 2020 (USD '000)	Dec 31 2019 (USD '000)
ASSETS				
Non-current assets:				
Property, plant and equipment	81,821	93,630	212,523	243,196
Right-of-use assets	226	376	586	976
Total non-current assets	82,047	94,006	213,109	244,172
Current assets:				
Inventories	793	705	2,060	1,831
Trade and other receivables	2,655	14,650	6,897	38,052
Cash at bank and on hand	6,270	4,998	16,286	12,982
Total current assets	9,718	20,353	25,243	52,865
Total assets	91,765	114,359	238,352	297,037
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Shareholders' equity:				
Share capital	22,101	22,101	57,405	57,405
Legal reserve	4,373	4,148	11,358	10,774
Accumulated losses	(7,146)	(9,177)	(18,559)	(23,830)
Total shareholders' equity	19,328	17,072	50,204	44,349
Hedging reserve - net of tax	(2,296)	(3,140)	(5,964)	(8,157)
Total capital and reserves	17,032	13,932	44,240	36,192
Non-current liabilities:				
Hedging deficit	3,290	4,152	8,545	10,785
Non-current portion of long-term loans	46,628	57,777	121,112	150,070
Non-current portion of lease liability	75	236	195	613
Provision for decommissioning costs	1,800	1,676	4,675	4,353
Non-current portion of deferred revenue	-	1,881	-	4,886
Deferred tax liability	8,048	9,261	20,905	24,056
Total non-current liabilities	59,841	74,983	155,432	194,763
Current liabilities:				
Current portion of long-term loans	9,232	8,649	23,979	22,465
Current portion of lease liability	162	150	421	390
Current portion of deferred revenue	1,881	1,533	4,886	3,982
Trade and other payables	2,016	13,795	5,236	35,825
Amount due to a related party	288	235	748	610
Provision for taxation	1,313	1,082	3,410	2,810
Total current liabilities	14,892	25,444	38,680	66,082
Total liabilities	74,733	100,427	194,112	260,845
Total equity and liabilities	91,765	114,359	238,352	297,037
Net assets per share	0.087	0.077	0.226	0.201

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 31 December 2020

	Dec 31 2020 (RO '000)	Dec 31 2019 (RO '000)	Dec 31 2020 (USD '000)	Dec 31 2019 (USD '000)
Revenue	27,264	50,586	70,816	131,392
Cost of revenue	(19,138)	(43,069)	(49,709)	(111,868)
Gross profit	8,126	7,517	21,107	19,524
Other income	343	287	891	745
	8,469	7,804	21,998	20,269
EXPENSES				
General and administrative expenses	(1,147)	(828)	(2,980)	(2,151)
Finance costs	(4,803)	(5,369)	(12,475)	(13,945)
Total expenses	(5,950)	(6,197)	(15,455)	(16,096)
Profit before tax	2,519	1,607	6,543	4,173
Income tax expense	(263)	(452)	(682)	(1,174)
Net profit for the year	2,256	1,155	5,861	2,999
Other comprehensive income:				
Fair value gain on effective interest rate	862	213	2,239	553
Related deferred tax	(126)	(33)	(327)	(86)
Other comprehensive income for the	736	180	1,912	467
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR	2,992	1,335	7,773	3,466
Earnings per share - basic and diluted	0.0096	0.0052	0.0249	0.0136

Note: The complete accounts either in English or Arabic will be sent to any shareholder by mail within 7 days of receipt.

In brief

■ MOSCOW



NAVALNY BEGINS
SERVING TIME FOR
PAROLE VIOLATION

Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny has been transferred to a penal colony east of Moscow to serve a term for violating parole, a public commission that monitors detainees' rights said on Sunday.

President Vladimir Putin's most prominent opponent was sentenced this month to two-and-a-half years at a facility in the Vladimir region about 200km east of the capital.

He was convicted of violating parole terms while in Germany recovering from a poisoning attack. For several days, Navalny's allies were unaware of his whereabouts. — AFP

■ BERLIN



GERMANY TO TIGHTEN
COVID CONTROLS AT
FRENCH BORDER

Germany on Sunday declared France's Covid-battered Moselle region a high-risk area for virus variants, prompting tougher entry rules for visitors at the border. France's eastern Moselle region is now classed as an area "at particularly high risk of infection due to widespread occurrence of SARS-CoV-2 virus variants", Germany's Robert Koch Institute for disease control announced.

From Tuesday, travellers from Moselle will need to be able to show a fresh negative coronavirus test. Germany has already introduced tough checks at its land borders with the Czech Republic and Austria's Tyrol region — AFP

■ HONG KONG



DOZENS OF DISSIDENTS
CHARGED WITH
SUBVERSION

Dozens of Hong Kong dissidents were charged with subversion on Sunday in the largest use yet of Beijing's sweeping new national security law. Police arrested 55 of the city's best-known pro-democracy campaigners in a series of dawn raids last month.

On Sunday, 47 were charged with one count each of "conspiracy to commit subversion" — one of the new national security crimes — with police saying the group would appear in court on Monday morning.

The activists charged on Sunday represent a broad cross-section of Hong Kong's opposition. — AFP

Biden in no rush to lift Venezuela curbs, seeks 'steps' by Maduro

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden's administration is in "no rush" to lift US sanctions on Venezuela but would consider easing them if President Nicolas Maduro takes confidence-building steps showing he is ready to negotiate seriously with the opposition, a White House official said.

Signalling that the new US president may be unlikely to loosen the screws on Venezuela anytime soon, the official emphasised that existing sanctions have enough special provisions to allow for humanitarian aid shipments to help Venezuelans cope with economic hardships and the Covid-19 pandemic.

But the official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Maduro's Socialist government has been "actively preventing the delivery of humanitarian assistance."

This suggests that for now Biden is prepared to stick with the specific sanctions, including crippling oil-sector penalties, imposed by former President Donald Trump on the OPEC nation, despite the failure to force Maduro from power.

But Biden, by contrast, intends to move away from the mostly unilateral approach of Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign and enlist more countries to help seek a diplomatic solution, the official said in an interview.

Biden's administration has made clear it will continue to



Migrants from Central America and other nationalities, hoping to cross and request asylum in the US, hold banners and shout slogans to US President Joe Biden at their campsite outside El Chaparral border crossing, in Tijuana, Mexico. — Reuters

recognise opposition leader Juan Guaido as Venezuela's interim president. Dozens of countries have backed Guaido's claim following Maduro's re-election in 2018 in a vote Western governments called a sham, though cracks recently have appeared in Guaido's international support.

"We're in no rush to lift sanctions," the official said. "If the regime undertakes confidence-building measures that show that they're ready and willing to engage in real conversations with the opposition ... if they're ready to take serious steps, then

Biden's administration has made clear it will continue to recognise opposition leader Juan Guaido as Venezuela's interim president

we will consider the alleviation of sanctions."

The official did not specify what steps Maduro would need to make but said he could not be allowed to use negotiations as a "delaying tactic" to consolidate power and divide the opposition,

as he has been accused of doing in the past.

Maduro, who calls Guaido a US puppet, has shown no signs of giving ground. Having retained support of the military as well as Russia, China, Cuba and Iran, he has rejected or ignored previous demands for such concessions.

The Biden administration also appears to have little sense of urgency for major gestures toward Cuba despite hopes for a softer approach after Trump, often citing its support for Maduro, rolled back historic Obama-era détente with Havana.

— Reuters

Two killed during bid to detain Chad oppn figure

N'DJAMENA: Two people were killed and five wounded in a gun battle on Sunday after security forces tried to detain a Chadian opposition figure who wants to run for president in April, the government said.

Three of those wounded were members of the security forces who came under fire from the home of Yaya Dillo Djerou, before firing back, said government spokesman Cherif Mahamat Zene.

"They had no other choice than to return fire in self defence," he said.

In the small hours of Saturday morning, Yaya Dillo, a former rebel chief named minister after joining forces with Deby, posted on Facebook that troops and police had surrounded his home in N'Djamena.

"They have just killed my mother and several relatives," he added a few minutes later.

"An armoured vehicle has broken down my front door. The fight for justice must go on to save our country.

"My dear compatriots, rise up!" he said in the last message that was posted at dawn.

In his statement later on Saturday, government spokesman Mahamat Zene condemned what he described as an "armed rebellion in the heart of the capital".

— AFP

Tears, anxiety as kidnapped schoolgirls remain captive

JANGEBE, Nigeria: Humaira Mustapha made no effort to wipe away the tears rolling down her cheeks, as she spoke about her two kidnapped daughters.

"Whenever I think about my daughters I'm filled with indescribable grief," Mustapha said.

Seated against the plastered mud wall of her bare sitting room, her tears left damp spots on her navy blue hijab.

Hafsa and Aisha, 14 and 13 respectively, were among the 317 schoolgirls abducted by gunmen from their hostels in an all-girls boarding school in the Zamfara state's remote village of Jangebe.

"Whenever I serve food to their younger sister, tears keep flowing from my eyes because I keep thinking about the hunger and thirst they are going through," said the 30-year-old mother of three.

But she only serves her daughter.

"I can't eat since the abduction," she said.

"I'm appealing to the governor to do everything to rescue our daughters who are facing real danger to their lives," Mustapha added.

"As a mother, my anguish is crushing me."

'I HID UNDER THE BED'

Villagers say more than 100 gunmen in military uniforms invaded the village early on Friday morning.



They fired their weapons incessantly, challenging male residents to come out for a fight. No one dared.

Mukhtar Rabiou, another parent, said the gunmen then headed to the school's hostel for the sleeping students, forcing them to trek into the bush.

Rabiou's daughter Shamsiyya was one of around 50 schoolgirls who managed to escape.

"They came into the school around 1:00 am and went into dormitories hurling insults at us, calling on us to come out while firing into the air," she said from her home in the village.

"They wore military uniforms," the 13-year-old added.

"I hid under the bed until they were gone after mustering the

students they could get hold of.

"Some of us hid inside toilets", she added, from behind a milk-coloured veil.

"Every time I think about my colleagues I feel depressed. I'm lonely and have been praying for their safe return" she added.

On the streets of the quiet village, residents carried on with their lives, suppressing their anxiety.

The school, located on the edge of the village, lies virtually deserted. The only sounds are the birds in the trees scattered around the school compound, and the odd bleat from goats there.

The school's vice principal and a security guard manning the entrance are the only people still present. — AFP

EU to clear J&J vaccine in March: France

PARIS: A single-shot Covid-19 vaccine by US drugmaker Johnson and Johnson is likely to be approved for use in the European Union in early March, a French minister said on Sunday.

The vaccine was cleared for emergency use in the United States on Saturday, becoming the third available vaccine there.

The single-shot vaccine is highly effective in preventing severe Covid-19, including against newer variants, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said before giving it the green light.

French Industry Minister Agnes Pannier-Runacher told France 3 television that the European Medicines Agency (EMA) was also evaluating information transmitted by the US pharmaceuticals company.

An EU approval in early March would allow the vaccine to be rolled out in late March or early April, she said, adding

this was "good news" because it offers protection with a single shot in contrast to other vaccines requiring two.

She said it was possible that a booster shot was needed later "but we can't be sure yet".

The EU hoped to receive 600 million doses of the vaccine by the end of June, she said.

France has so far vaccinated 1.5 million people.

BRITAIN VACCINATES OVER 20 MILLION

Britain announced on Sunday that it has given more than 20 million people at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine, with the rapid rollout providing hope in a country with Europe's highest death toll.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock made the announcement in a video on Twitter, saying: "I'm absolutely delighted that over 20 million people have now been vaccinated." — AFP



A man wearing a protective face mask walks his dog on an empty Promenade des Anglais during the first local weekend lockdown imposed to slow the rate of the Covid-19 contagion, in Nice. — Reuters

Groom and value in-house workforce

Human beings are generally granted different skills and abilities of thinking and doing things. For that reason, their level of understanding and competency are not the same of course. Some are competent in executing ideas while others are good at planning and imagination. Therefore, people's talents and needs in different walks of life complement one another. The Chinese-born Singaporean film actor and producer, Jet Li, said: "I believe the world is one big family and we need to help each other".

In view of that, one should never undervalue others no matter who they are. Whether people are skilled and educated or not; that should not be the standard to judge them. Likewise, people's appearance and personality do not always reflect what they are capable of doing. Instead, their performance and deliverables are what matters most to value people, especially at a workplace. Therefore, bosses, for instance, do not have the right to underestimate colleagues or others at work.

Usually, bosses or employees with higher ranks are given command on others not to look at their employees or colleagues as inferiors, but to be more responsible for the business and people alike. In fact, a leader's key responsibility is to get things managed



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WHAT IS REALLY
HURTING IS TO
SEE EMPLOYEES
BEING
HUMILIATED
AND
UNDERVALUED
IN MANY
WORKPLACES

properly and employees are adequately supervised and fairly rewarded. Speaking on this subject, the Almighty Allah, said in the Holy Quran: "We raise some of them above others in ranks, so that some may command work from others. But the Mercy of the Lord is better than the (wealth) which they amass".

It is Allah, who distributed fortunes and fates to people, regardless of their origins, religions, languages and cultures. It's just everyone's fate in life, so some people are just a means behind making others' dreams and fortunes come true. Hence, people are paving each other's paths to live their fates, make a living and fulfil ambitions. Hence, no one has the power to control others or manage their way of living; we are all minding what Allah has created us to deliver.

What is really hurting is to see employees being humiliated and undervalued in many workplaces. With respect to all, sometimes you see expats undervaluing the competency of their local counterparts, while there are locals devaluing the expertise of expat colleagues. Such scenarios usually happen with some managers who look superior over their employees and other colleagues. Sometimes, such attitudes are observed in some organisations, where expat bosses are supervising locals! In contrary,

employees experience the same with their local bosses too.

Actually, such culture should not be promoted at a workplace, which marks a second home for employees. However, in some corporates some expat bosses undervalue their Omani counterparts for being unqualified. As well, it happens with non-graduated Omani employees, who are regarded less experienced compared to other colleagues. It is shameful to know that expat counterparts, colleagues and managers are undervaluing or stereotyping their Omani co-workers and employers too.

This is unfortunately unfair and unprofessional of course. Omanis are always known as hardworking and outstanding people; they could prove it right when they are given an opportunity. Many of them have been competing with non-Omani experts in taking leading positions in different key companies in the country. For those unskilled ones, all what they need is proper training and guidance to groom their skills and bring out the best in them.

As a good advice for employers, Jim Collins, an American researcher, author, speaker and consultant, said, "First get the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats, and then they can figure out where to drive it."

WRITE FOR US

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

SKIN THERAPY

Salt spa seeks to soothe cradle of Libya's revolution

Libya's principal eastern city may be best known as the cradle of a revolution, but it has lately scored an improbable first for the conflict-riven country — a salt spa.

The Opal centre in Benghazi, where citizens rose up against Muammar Gaddafi's rule a decade ago, opened Libya's first-ever artificial salt caves to clients last October.

Established by two women entrepreneurs, the centre offers soothing treatments in a zen-like atmosphere accompanied by soft music and subdued lighting.

"The inhalation of salt particles purifies the respiratory tract and brings benefits for the skin", says joint founder Iman Bugaighis, sporting a white blouse and a pink veil around her head. A r m e d with a shovel, the specialist in alternative medicine covers the body of a client in his 30s with salt, from his

legs to his neck. Eyes closed and hands clasped around a ball of salt, the man relaxes, breathing slowly in a windowless but uncramped room.

In another room, with crystal covered walls and resembling a cave, a machine propels iodine-laden salt particles through the air. An immersive session inhaling the concoction lasts 45 minutes and costs between 80 and 120 dinars (\$18 to \$27). Several sessions are required to yield results, says Bugaighis.

The Opal centre, slap-bang in the chic district of Dagadosta in downtown Benghazi, promises treatment of respiratory issues like asthma and skin conditions including eczema and psoriasis.

Pockmarked walls and disfigured buildings are reminders of past conflict in the city, which in recent years has been the bastion of eastern Libyan strongman Khalifa Haftar.

Mustafa Ahmed Akhlif, a banker in his 50s, has suffered from acute sinusitis for a decade.

"I've taken lots of painkillers and tried traditional medicine without it dulling my pain", he said.

But in just four sessions of inhaling the salty substances he says he feels "80 per cent" better.

Bugaighis herself discovered the therapy when travelling in Arab countries that offer the same treatments. She then studied alternative medicine in neighbouring Tunisia.

Convinced of the treatments' efficacy in tackling chronic illnesses, she returned to her home city and launched her business, alongside her friend Zainab al Werfalli.

The Opal "centre has met its public", enthused Werfalli, even if the years of instability makes business success difficult to predict. The centre's opening coincided with a ceasefire agreed in October by the main players in Libya's conflict — Haftar's eastern-based forces and rival authorities in the capital Tripoli. — AFP

MESSAGE OF UNITY

Biden brings empathy to Texas

JARRETT RENSHAW

US President Joe Biden met with volunteers at a food bank, toured a health centre and visited an emergency operations facility on Friday to assess recovery efforts from a severe Texas winter storm while an aide blamed state government for being unprepared.

Biden and his wife Jill Biden landed in Houston where he met Republican Governor Greg Abbott and Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner to discuss the recovery from last week's storm, which caused serious damage to homes and businesses, left millions without power or clean water for days, and killed at least two dozen.

At the Houston Food Bank, the largest in the country serving more than 1.1 million people, Biden saw rows of packaged food, from pasta to apple sauce, stacked in a large warehouse and watched conveyors move slowly as volunteers pulled food out of boxes and put them in containers for delivery.

He visited an emergency operations centre in Harris County, where roughly 50 per cent of the county's 4.9 million residents were without power. "As my mother would say to you, you're doing God's work", he told workers there.

Biden, a Democrat, has sought to bring consolation and empathy to the hard-hit state, which leans heavily Republican. When he visited a vaccination centre, he repeated his message of unity. "We're not here as Democrats or Republicans. We're here today as Americans."

Biden also said his administration has given out 50 million shots of the vaccine out of the 100 million the White House promised will be



US President Joe Biden walks to Marine One as they depart from the South Lawn of the White House in Washington, DC on Thursday. — AFP

THE STATE'S
REPUBLICAN
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COME UNDER FIRE
FOR NOT HEEDING
WARNINGS THAT
THE TEXAS POWER
GRID NEEDED
SIGNIFICANT
UPGRADES

delivered in the first 100 days. He said the effort is "weeks ahead of schedule."

"America will be the first... in the world to get that done", he said. In five weeks, the United States has administered the most shots of any country, Biden said.

The United States has the highest Covid-19 death toll at more than 500,000 people and is still recording the most infections and deaths per day, according to Reuters tracking.

Biden also delivered a warning with his message of hope and progress. "Cases and hospitalisations could go back up as new variants emerge and it's not the time to relax", he said.

Earlier in the day, Biden's Deputy National Security Adviser, Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, laid responsibility

on the Texas government for foregoing energy regulation that could have left it better prepared.

"Texas has chosen not to make the kinds of decisions that would provide for the supplies that you would keep for an emergency, that is, to invest in a kind of resilience that other states which are regulated are required to invest in", she said. "They don't have the backup in terms of supply or generation capability that they needed to have in this crisis", she said.

For 10 days this month, Texas was hit by an unusually prolonged period of very low temperatures. Electricity consumption surged, while many generating units failed to start up owing to frozen instrumentation.

— Reuters

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AHLI SIDAB, BAUSHER TO LOCK HORNS FOR HM CUP HONOURS

HARIDEV PUSHPARAJ
MUSCAT, FEB 28

Indian import Sukhjeet Singh's 40th minute goal helped Bausher edge past Sohar 1-0 in the second semifinal of the 50th edition of the HM Cup hockey championship and book a mouth-watering summit clash with Ahli Sidab on Monday.

It was a close ball play inside the D that saw Ameer al Mashari passing the ball to Sukhjeet, who slotted the ball home to give Bausher what turned out to be the match-winning goal.

Sohar squandered a golden opportunity to level scores and keep the match competitive after their captain Sameer al Shibli failed to convert a penalty stroke, which was parried by Bausher goalkeeper Amjad al Hasni couple of minutes later.

The Bausher custodian was later presented the player of the match award for his match-turning save.

AHLI SIDAB WIN BIG
Earlier, Ahli Sidab produced a scintillating effort to thump Seeb 6-3 riding on a treble from Aseel Ammar al Muaini and a brace from Yusuf Afan.

Afan got Sidab off to a cracker of a start slamming two goals in a space of three minutes as the Seeb defence was in complete disarray.

Sohar squandered a golden opportunity to level scores and keep the match competitive after their captain failed to convert a penalty stroke, which was parried by Bausher goalkeeper Amjad al Hasni

Thereafter, Seeb worked their way to challenge the Sidab defence to restore parity over the next ten minutes or so.

The efforts bore fruit as Mohammad Atiq (13th) and Fahad Hasan al Lawati (15th) drew level for the 11-time champions.

However, Aseel Ammar al Muaini took the star turn for the rest of the match for Sidab with match-winning goals that changed the course of the game.

Aseel's first goal came in the 18th minute while his second came in the 33rd which gave Sidab a two goal cushion at 4-2.

When Ali Salim al Zadjali converted Ahli Sidab's penalty corner in the 38th minute, Sidab took a decisive 5-2 lead.

Although, Mubasher Ali converted a penalty stroke for Seeb to reduce the deficit, Aseel's 51st minute goal wrapped up a convincing 6-3 win for Sidab.



Seeb and Sohar players in action. – Mohammed Mahjoub



Australia's Popyrin wins first ATP title in Singapore

Australia's Alexei Popyrin came back from a set down to beat Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik at the Singapore Open on Sunday and win his first ATP Tour title. Popyrin started off badly, losing the first set 4-6 but charged back and snatched the second 6-0. Popyrin fired 11 aces to take the third set 6-2 and clinch the title.



Sri Lanka gets Moody to revive cricket

Sri Lanka's cricket board on Sunday announced it had appointed former coach Tom Moody as a consultant tasked with reviving the game and rebuilding the lowly-ranked national team. The 55-year-old Australian will have a three-year contract with Sri Lanka Cricket starting Monday as its "Director of Cricket."

26 players named for Dubai camp

OMAN TO MEET JORDAN ON MARCH 20, INDIA ON MARCH 25



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 28

Oman national football team head coach has announced the list of the 26 players for the camp in Dubai during March.

Branko Ivankovic, unveiled the players list during a press conference on Sunday at the Oman Football Association (OFA) headquarters in Seeb Stadium in presence of Maqbool al Balushi, team manager and media representatives.

Ivankovic, who celebrated his 67th birthday on Saturday, affirmed that he is fully confident with the selected players.

"The professional players abroad are stuck with their clubs and we have to depend on the Fifa days only to call them. The national team doors are always open for any top player and we are closely following up with the injured players also", he said.

The Croatian coach said he had planned five preparatory camps and training schedule last year but none of

it worked due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

"During the previous year, we had cancelled Dubai camp because of the late start of 2020-21 season and other restrictions due to coronavirus outbreak. The team had a domestic camp only in November. The pandemic had impacted the team's preparation plans", he said.

Ivankovic pointed out that he preferred to have the remaining matches of the joint 2022 Fifa World Cup and 2023 AFC Asian Cup qualifiers as per the previous system. "Anyhow the decision is made and I was looking forward to Oman hosting the group matches but we are all aware with existing circumstances and restrictions of the pandemic", he said.

Responding to a query on why Oman are not facing any top teams instead of Jordan and India, the Croatian said that everyone will opt to meet top and professional teams for better preparation.

"The existing situation will not allow you to comfortably choose any teams



The Sultanate team had faced India previously and they are a much-improved team while Jordan will have a camp in Dubai in the same period and these matches give us a golden chance to evaluate our technical preparation prior to qualifying matches

BRANKO IVANKOVIC

Oman head coach

which you would like to play. However, we managed to secure two preparatory matches. The Sultanate team had faced India previously and they are a much-improved team while Jordan will have a camp in Dubai in the same period and these matches give us a golden chance to evaluate our technical preparation prior to qualifying matches", he clarified.

The 67-year-old's first international match with Red Warriors will be with Jordan on March 20 as part of Dubai camp, while the next preparatory fixture is scheduled against India on March 25.

OMAN PROBABLES

Goalkeepers: Fayed al Rushaidi, Ahmed al Rawahi, Ibrahim al Mukhaini; **Defenders:** Mohammed al Musallami, Ahmad al Khamisi, Ali al Nahar, Fahmi Durbin, Khalid al Buraiki, Abdulaziz al Ghilani, Ali al Busaidy, Ahmad al Kaabi and Abbas al Hashimi; **Midfielders:** Abdullah Fawaz, Harib al Saadi, Yazid al Mashani, Amjad al Harthi, Zahir al Aghbari, Salah al Yahyai, Omar al Fazari, Mohsin Jawhar and Yaseen al Shiyadi; **Forwards:** Abdulaziz al Maqbali, Mohammad al Ghafri, Khalid al Hajri, Mohsin al Ghassani and Omar al Malki.

Indian hockey umpires appreciate Naqvi museum

MUSCAT: Top Indian international hockey umpires Javed Sheikh and Raghu Prasad, who are in town to officiate the His Majesty's Cup hockey semifinals and final matches visited SAS Naqvi's sports museum on Friday.

The museum has good coverage of Indian hockey's golden era along with Oman's sports history.

Both umpires have officiated in the World Cup and Olympics and are regular international umpires invited by the Oman Hockey Association (OHA) for HM Cup hockey championship since 2008.

The top umpires appreciated the hockey history being depicted in the museum as Naqvi himself was associated with the golden era hockey period of India.

Special mementos were presented to both of them in memory of their visit.

The top umpires were accompanied by Abdulrahman al Raisi, former international umpire and Oman national hockey coach and Khaleel al Balushi, international umpire from Oman.

The Omani international umpires were also honoured on the occasion.

Javed and Raghu also presented a souvenir to Golaf Rehman, curator of the museum, for his contribution in setting up the hockey and sports gallery.



Exciting wins for Muscat CT, Renaissance and ACT

MUSCAT: Sandeep Goud's superb all-round performance helped Muscat CT to an exciting 4-wicket victory against Arm Alpha in a Premier Division 50-over League game at OC Turf 1 in Al Amerat on Saturday.

Alpha was shot out for 187 in 46.3 overs due to brilliant bowling by Ayaan Khan (3 for 17 and Sandeep (2 for 26). Sanuth Ebrahim (50 and Aqib Ilyas (36) were the main scorers for Alpha.

Finding them in deep trouble at 86 for 5, Muscat rode on a vital 73-run sixth wicket partnership between Sandeep (47 not out) and Siddharth Bukkapatnam (41) to seal the win in the 45th over, scoring 192 for 6. Muscat now have 16 points from 9 games with 8 wins and 1 loss with Al Turki NMC and IT Works both having 12 points each from 8 matches.

Bilal bowls Renaissance to win

Muhammed Bilal's magnificent 4 for 26 was the highlight of Renaissance's nail-biting 10-run win over Al Turki NMC in



Sandeep Goud, Siddharth Bukkapatnam and Ayaan Khan of Muscat CT.

a Premier Division T20 League match at OC Turf 1 on Saturday.

Sufyan Mahmood top-scored with a fluent 49 off 40 as Renaissance posted 150 for 6 on the board. Mehran Khan took 2 for 13.

Al Turki's chase was derailed by Muhammed Bilal's superb spell, restricting them to 140 for 8 in 20 overs. Prateek Athavale (51) and Jitenkumar Ramanandi (35) were their leading scorers.

Zeeshan stars in ACT victory

Muhammed Zeeshan's sterling show by bat and ball powered



LC Tech team

ACT to a thrilling two-wicket victory against Arabian Region Travel and Tourism (ARTT) in an A Division 50-over League game at OC Turf 2 on Saturday.

Batting first, ARTT's 236 for 9 included 61 by Zeeshan Siddiqui, 58 by Pranav Mehta and 49 by young Adeel Abbas. Rajesh Devashya and Muhammed Zeeshan bowled well, taking three wickets each.

ACT's successful chase was

led by solid knocks from Iftikhar Ahmed (65) and Muhammed Zeeshan (47) as they surpassed the total in 48 overs, scoring 237 for 8. Zeeshan Siddiqui was the pick of ARTT bowlers, taking 3 for 33 while Muhammed Mohsin bagged 2 for 57.

Rahul takes LC Tech to victory

Rahul Rajeev's solid 57 guided LC Tech to a comfortable 5-wicket win over Bank Muscat in a B

Division 30-over League match at Muscat Municipality ground 1 on Friday.

Bank Muscat were dismissed for 188 in 29.5 overs, Asghar Khan top-scoring with a run-a-ball 49. Shameer Kariadan and Noushad Haneefa claimed three wickets each.

LC Tech raced to the target in 26 overs, scoring 192 for 5 thanks to brilliant batting by Rahul and Jayaprakash Narayan (40).

BRIEF SCORES

Premier Division

Arm Alpha 187 all out in 46.3 overs (Sanuth Ebrahim 50 – 7x4, Aqib Ilyas 36 – 3x4, 2x6, Ayaan Khan 3-17, Sandeep Goud 2-26) lost to Muscat CT 192 for 6 in 44.2 overs (Sandeep Goud 47 – 2x4, 1x6, Siddharth Bukkapatnam 41 – 3x4) by 4 wickets.

Premier Division T20

Renaissance 150-6 in 20 overs (Sufyan Mahmood 49 – 3x4, 3x6, Pruthvikumar Damubhai 33 – 4x4, Mehran Khan 2-13) bt Al Turki NMC 140-8 in 20 overs (Prateek Athavale 51 – 3x4, 2x6, Jitenkumar Ramanandi 35 – 2x6, Muhammad Bilal 4-26) by 10 runs.

A Division

ARTT 236-9 in 50 overs (Zeeshan Siddiqui 61 – 6x4, 1x6, Pranav Mehta 58 – 5x4, 1x6, Adeel Abbas 49 – 4x4, Rajesh Devashya 3-33, Muhammed Zeeshan 3-41, Toseef Ul-Hassan 2-43) lost to ACT 237-8 in 48 overs (Iftikhar Ahmed 65 – 7x4, 1x6, Muhammed Zeeshan 47 – 4x4, Zeeshan Siddiqui 3-33, Muhammed Moshin 2-57) by 2 wickets.

B Division

Bank Muscat 188 all out in 29.5 overs (Asghar Khan 49 – 6x4, Shameer Kariadan 3-30, Noushad Haneefa 3-43) lost to LC Tech 192-5 in 26 overs (Rahul Rajeev 57 – 8x4, Jayaprakash Narayan 40 – 5x4) by 5 wickets.

Mbappe on target twice in PSG cruise

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe scored twice to take his tally to 18 goals in Ligue 1 this season as Paris Saint-Germain eased to a 4-0 victory at bottom club Dijon on Saturday to keep the pressure on leaders Lille in the title race.

Moise Kean and Danilo Pereira also scored for Mauricio Pochettino's team, who bounced back from a 2-0 home defeat by Monaco last weekend and moved back up to second place in the table, a point behind by Lille.

The leaders play on Sunday at home to Strasbourg, while Lyon are two points behind the capital club but can leapfrog them again with a win at Marseille, also on Sunday. Fourth-placed Monaco are six points off top spot but can extend their unbeaten run to 12 games when they face Brest in the principality. Former Monaco striker Mbappe had been kept quiet by his old club last weekend but he got back among the goals against the division's bottom side, who have now lost their last seven games.

Mbappe had scored twice when PSG beat Dijon 4-0 at home in October and repeated the feat here to move onto 23 goals for the season in all competitions.

The victory was achieved in the ongoing absence of Neymar, with the world's most expensive player missing a fourth consecutive game with a groin injury.

He has returned to individual training but, having already missed the first leg, he remains a doubt for the Champions League last-16 return match at home to Barcelona on March 10. Angel Di Maria, Marco Verratti, Mauro Icardi, Leandro Paredes and Alessandro Florenzi were also missing at the Stade Gaston-Gerard along with long-term injury victim Juan Bernat.

KEAN MAKES MARK AGAIN
On-loan Everton striker Kean kept his place and he opened the



Paris Saint-Germain's Kylian Mbappe (right) runs with the ball during the French L1 match at the Gaston Gerard stadium in Dijon. – AFP

Mbappe had scored twice when PSG beat Dijon 4-0 at home in October and repeated the feat here to move onto 23 goals for the season in all competitions

scoring inside six minutes, taking a touch and poking the ball home from close range after being set up by Abdou Diallo.

Kean, who was also on target twice in the last meeting of the sides, has now scored 15 times for PSG, who could well be convinced to make his loan move into a permanent transfer come the season's end.

Mbappe made it 2-0 in the 32nd minute, converting a penalty awarded for a handball

by Bersant Celina.

Julian Draxler then had another goal disallowed for offside but Mbappe scored again six minutes into the second half, sweeping a low, first-time shot

into the corner from a Rafinha pass to finish off a flowing move.

Danilo, who is on loan from Porto, wrapped up the win late on as he headed in Draxler's corner for his first goal in French football,

before being replaced by 17-year-old midfielder Edouard Michut who was making his senior debut. Dijon are eight points adrift at the bottom and nine points away from outright safety.

Saturday's other game saw Metz win 2-1 at Bordeaux thanks to a stoppage-time goal by Cape Verde international Vagner Dias Goncalves.

Metz are now fifth, a position which brings with it qualification for the inaugural UEFA Europa

Conference League next season.

Elsewhere in France, Marseille on Friday announced the appointment of Argentine Jorge Sampaoli, 60, as their new coach on a deal to 2023. He is the permanent successor to the sacked Andre Villas-Boas and arrives after a year in charge of Brazilian side Atletico Mineiro. Sampaoli, who coached Argentina at the 2018 World Cup, will not however be on the bench for Sunday's game against Lyon. — AFP



This file photo taken on November 12, 2020 shows Jiangsu Suning's Alex Teixeira (left) who scored a goal, celebrating after his team won the Chinese Super League (CSL) final against Guangzhou Evergrande. – AFP

Chinese football in disarray as champions Jiangsu FC cease operations in CSL

BEIJING: Chinese football was thrown into disarray on Sunday as the owners of reigning Chinese Super League champions Jiangsu FC announced the club would cease operations with immediate effect.

A post on Jiangsu's official WeChat account expressed hope of new backers or that a "company of insight" would be willing to consult on the team's future.

The announcement stated all of owners Suning Group's football clubs, including the hugely successful Jiangsu Suning Women, would "cease operations from today".

The Nanjing-based retailer, one of China's biggest and which also owns Italian Serie A club Inter Milan, earlier in February said it intended to focus on core businesses, leaving non-retail assets at risk.

These assets include Jiangsu FC, which won the Chinese Super League title in November for the first time with a playoff win over eight-time champions Guangzhou Evergrande. That victory was the

These assets include Jiangsu FC, which won the Chinese Super League title in November for the first time with a playoff win over eight-time champions Guangzhou Evergrande

pinnacle of a run by a once cashed-up club previously coached by ex-England manager Fabio Capello, and which in the summer of 2019 attempted to sign Gareth Bale, formerly the world's most expensive player, from Real Madrid.

The squad that clinched the title and a place in this year's Asian Champions League featured Brazilian winger Alex Teixeira, who chose to make a 50 million euro (\$60.37 million) switch to Jiangsu in 2016 over interest from Premier League side Liverpool.

When Teixeira refused to sign a new contract at the end of last season and with coach Cosmin Olaru reported to be unlikely to return to the club, questions started to be asked of Jiangsu's financial future and the knock-on impact on football in China.

The Jiangsu announcement comes days after Chinese FA Cup winners Shandong Luneng had their expulsion from the Asian Champions League confirmed by the Asian Football Confederation due to "overdue payables".

Should Jiangsu fail to find new owners soon, their absence could cause further upheaval in the Asian Champions League ahead of the start of the continental competition in April. Retailer Suning.com, also part of the Suning Group, said on Thursday shareholders plan to sell 20 per cent to 25 per cent of the company to unnamed buyers, which might lead to a change in control as its parent seeks to raise cash. — Reuters

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Oman fiscal reforms to boost IPO activity going forward

Promising trend: The MENA region saw a total of nine IPOs in 2020, raising proceeds of \$1.86 billion

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 28

Oman’s reforms aimed at privatisation of government assets are expected to lead to an increase in IPO activity over the coming years, according to a report by global professional services firm EY.

The MENA region saw nine IPOs raise proceeds of \$1.86 billion, a fall of 40 per cent in total issuances and 94 per cent in total proceeds when compared with 2019, said EY in its MENA IPO Eye Q4 2020 report.

Out of the nine issuances, six were in the real estate sector, of which two were real estate investment trusts (REITs), with the remaining in the healthcare, consumer staples and insurance sectors.

The Aman REIF IPO on the Muscat Securities Market (MSM), which raised \$52.5 million, was the first MENA IPO of 2020. The



second IPO for the REIT sector — Oman REIT Fund — was floated recently and is due to be listed on the Omani bourse shortly.

One of the most anticipated listings from Oman is of OQ (formerly known as Oman Oil and Orpic Group), the government-owned global integrated energy company. They had announced in late 2019 that they were planning to IPO 20 per cent to 25 per cent of their shares in 2020; however, the listing did not materialise during 2020 due to the volatility

in oil prices and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In Q4 2020, they announced plans to invest in alternative energy projects in Oman to further enhance their IPO story. Oman announced several measures aimed at reducing their spending and raising revenues primarily through taxes.

A VAT of 5 per cent will be implemented in April 2021, and Oman is also expected to start implementing an income tax on high earners by 2022, an

unprecedented move in the GCC countries.

Reforms are expected to continue in Oman coupled with an increase in privatisation efforts, which could see an increase in IPOs in the coming years. Despite a subdued annual picture, Q4 2020 rebounded after a quiet Q2 and one IPO in Q3, with four IPOs in the MENA region raising \$925 million in total.

Although the number of IPOs decreased by 33 per cent and proceeds were down 97 per cent

The Aman REIF IPO on the Muscat Securities Market (MSM), which raised \$52.5 million, was the first MENA IPO of 2020. The second IPO for the REIT sector — Oman REIT Fund — was floated recently and is due to be listed on the Omani bourse shortly.

a global level. Market volatility in the first half of the year was higher than at any time since the global financial crisis, although it quickly subsided, and the latter half of the year presented some strong IPO market performances.

As 2021 begins, we believe that continued fiscal stimulus measures, an abundance of liquidity and growing confidence in Covid-19 vaccination programmes will sustain positive IPO momentum.”

Despite a drop of nearly 30 per cent earlier in 2020, the Tadawul recovered to end 2020 with a positive index return of 3.6 per cent, which was aided by the recovery in crude oil prices.

The Egyptian Exchange (EGX) saw the biggest decline among the observed indices, having lost 22.3 per cent. The Qatar Stock Exchange (QSE) and Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange (ADX) both ended the year relatively flat, while the Dubai Financial Market (DFM) and Boursa Kuwait indices both fell by 10 per cent and 13 per cent respectively during the same period. Equity markets in the MENA region experienced high volatility and average daily trading values increased significantly across the main exchanges.

Geneva Act protects Omani products

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 28

Oman’s accession to the Geneva Act of the Lisbon Agreement on Appellations of Origin and Geographical Indications, as ratified by Royal Decree 19/2021 on February 15, 2021, provides legal protection of Sultanate’s local products which bear geographical indications, according to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP).

Covered in the scope of the protections conferred by the Geneva Act are, among others, the Omani dagger, Omani frankincense, Omani sweets, Omani ships, pomegranates of Al Jabal al Akhdhar, Omani Jabalian goats, Southern cows, Omani lemons and Omani thyme, as the concern Act allows international registration of geographical indications in addition to appellations of origin.

The ministry pointed out that the adoption of the Geneva Act of the Lisbon Agreement on Appellations of Origin and Geographical Indications will also support the generation of financial revenues for the Sultanate as member states of the agreement protect the appellations of origin and their geographical indications within the Sultanate.

MoCIIP has also called on all competent entities and authorities to carry out the international registration of local products which have geographical indications, in order to ensure



its protection against any an external infringement.

Ali bin Hamad al Maamari (pictured), Director of the Intellectual Property Department at MoCIIP, said: “The Geneva Act of the Lisbon Agreement on Appellations of Origin and Geographical Indications has been signed in Geneva on May 20, 2015, while it entered into force on February 26, 2020.

The Act strengthens the existing international registration system to protect names that are identifying the geographical origin of products, while the Lisbon Agreement applies to appellations of origin, which are a special type of geographical indications being placed on products that are closely related to their origin.”

The Act also provides



maximum flexibility in implementing the legal protection standard (through a special system of appellations of origin or geographical indications, or through the trademark system).

The Act also allows the accession of some intergovernmental organisations to it in a way that enhances the comprehensive character of the international protection system, while Lisbon Agreement and the Geneva Act of the Lisbon Agreement together provide effective and more comprehensive international protection for product names whose quality is related to a certain origin.

Al Maamari explained that the International Bureau of the Act maintains an international registry that records the international registrations that

are made under this Act or under the Lisbon Agreement and the 1967 Document or both, as well as maintains the data of these international registrations.

He explained that the application for the protection of geographical indications in the Sultanate is being filed at the International Bureau of the Act via the Intellectual Property Department at MoCIIP, where the application can be filed in the name of the beneficiaries or a legal person who enjoys legal bases under specific laws.

In case the product is located between a cross-border geographical area, the Act enables the filing of a joint application to register it, while the neighbouring contracting parties may share in the filing of one application through a competent administration that agrees to appoint in accordance with their joint agreement.

Arabian Car Marketing Company LLC

CORRIGENDUM

A Ford Explorer with Offer Press Release printed in this newspaper on 28th February, 2021 were misprints. We regret the inconvenience caused due to the misinformation and offer our sincere apologies. For the on-going offer campaign we request you to please visit <https://en.fordoman.com/Promotions/Ford-Oman-offers>

Oman’s deficit climbs 7.7% to RO 370.8 million in Jan 2021

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 28

Buoyed by lower earnings from oil exports, Oman’s budget deficit climbed 7.7 per cent to reach RO 370.8 million for January 2021 versus RO 344.4 million for the corresponding period of 2020, the Ministry of Finance revealed here on Sunday.

Total revenues plummeted 33.1 per cent to RO 384.8 million for January 2021, down from RO 575.3 million for the corresponding period of 2020.

A 17.8 per cent decline in expenditure to RO 755.6 million

this year, down from RO 919.7 million for January 2020, helped partly offset the deficit.

Crude production declined slightly to 946K barrels per day (bpd) this year, down from 970K bpd for January 2020 — in line with Oman’s commitment to a joint accord by Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and non-Opec producers to reduce their output as part of an effort to shore up international oil prices.

Average earnings per barrel were significantly lower at \$41.11 this year versus \$60.26/barrel for January 2020.

INVITATION TO TENDER


Sohar Aluminium LLC (SA), PO Box 80, PC- 327, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman hereby invites qualified Suppliers/Contractors for the following tender:

Tender No. :	MM21-001
Tender Title :	Sale of used Mobile Equipment, Display Screens and FTC Duct Sections
Scope :	Sohar Aluminium invites vendors who are interested in purchasing the used /scrap Forklifts, Sweeper, Under Pot, Trailer, Display Screens and FTC Duct Section.

Tender No. :	RFP 21/007
Tender Title :	Provision of Pot Relining Material Transportation and Pot De-lining Services
Scope :	Sohar Aluminium Invites Vendors who can supply equipment’s and consumables to carry out the Pot lining material transportation, Loading and unloading of materials including waste bins inside SA premises and De-lining Services. Detailed scope will be issued to the interested bidders.

Kindly send your email and company profile to: tender@sohar-aluminium.com
For list of active tenders visit: <https://www.sohar-aluminium.com/en/content/tender-listing>

Trust is good but controls are better



MUBEEN KHAN

The most trusted man at a Japanese automobile giant, who was their Executive Chairman credited with turning their business around, suddenly fell from grace and fled from Japan on board a private jet. This was the ugliest face of greed and breach of trust that the business world had witnessed.

A Chief Operating Officer (COO) who served at a European fin-tech giant for almost twenty years went untraceable after it was discovered that more than 1.9 billion euro that was shown to be in their overseas bank accounts, simply did not exist.

However, their CEO was not lucky enough to board a private jet to a safe haven and rather landed in jail. The most worrying part of this fin-tech company story is that this massive fraud was not discovered by anyone else but by an investigative journalist.

Another gem, this one discovered by a thankless market analyst and short-seller, was a multi-billion dollars thriller unveiled last year at a well-known health and financial services company in a neighbouring country where the Board suddenly woke up to an ultra-spicy sizzler of \$6.6 billion in loan liabilities whereas their audited financials were showing some sweet \$ 2.1 billion pie only.

It is alleged that this unaccounted bank borrowings of more than \$4.4 billion were secured and potentially diverted



by their most trusted Chairman and his cronies. Bankers have reported severe heartburn if not critical heart attacks whereas shareholders of this LSE listed company were in shock after losing more than \$5 billion when the share prices crashed.

How did it happen?
The common phenomenon in all three stories was a dominant blindly trusted individual who boasted to have built the business from scratch. This trusted individual was turned into a revered holy unquestionable cow, allowed to run his 'One Man Show'.

Anybody who dares question this holy cow is kicked out. I also had run into a few such holy cows during my career and pulled the carpet from beneath their feet to discover a lot of dirt. Even when the person pulling the carpet is often swallowed by the hovering 'dust storm' emanating therefrom, I do believe, such proverbial carpets are still worth being pulled.

"Trust Vs Controls"
The traditional approach has always been "trust" over "controls" which might prove to be fatal.

There was an interesting fraud at a local entity where right from the tissue paper boxes to big plant and equipment were being purchased from one single supplier.

The same supplier was also the marketing agent, wholesale buyer and supplied everything under the sun to this company.

The magic behind this miraculous supplier was that the CEO of the buyer company was also the proud partner of the supplying company but the CEO of the buyer company never bothered to disclose this fact to his board that blindly trusted him. What happened next is history.

The Role of Auditors
The only way to prevent corporate fraud is the implementation of robust corporate governance mechanism. The basic pillar of Corporate Governance is the fearless auditor. Omani Law empowers the regulator to object to the unjustified removal of auditors. At the same time, Capital Market Authority (CMA) regulations mandate that auditors are rotated at least once in four years to protect their independence. Oman's Corporate Governance

framework and regulations are regarded as one of the best not only in the region but globally.

The CMA brought a new Code of Corporate Governance in the year 2016 that had taken corporate governance to an entirely new level. Recently, CMA also issued another code applicable to Government Companies that will bring in unprecedented transparency, objectivity and discipline to these companies and help protect public money.

Rotation of Auditors of LLCs
Although this might be debatable, we need to carefully read Article 280 of the new Commercial Companies Law, which states that the regulations for the appointment of auditors of joint stock companies shall also be applicable to the appointment of auditors of Limited Liability Companies (LLC).

One may interpret that even the LLC companies are required to follow the rotation of auditors every four years as per Article 280.

This does not seem to be the industry practice as of now. I believe that compulsory rotation of auditors brings in more confidence of investors, bankers

and other users of Financial Statements and strengthens corporate governance. Lenders might think of insisting Auditor rotation even for LLC borrowers.

Regulatory Protection to Internal Auditors

CMA Regulation 10/2018 prescribes that the Internal Auditors shall be appointed for a minimum period of four years and if the Internal Auditor is removed before the expiry of four years from the date of appointment, detailed reasons shall have to be provided. If the basis for removal is not found satisfactory, the Internal Auditor can be reinstated by CMA. This strengthens the most important pillar of Corporate Governance and the Internal Auditors can now discharge their statutory obligations without fear of reprisal.

Conclusion

An independent Internal Audit must be established even in family owned businesses that are not regulated by CMA as external audit scope is limited to the financial statements. Regulators and owners should protect external and internal auditors from unjustified removal. Only then quality audits can be expected.

The trust based Delegation of Authorities by shareholders and owners should not be without effective segregation of duties, controls and monitoring. Controls are always better than trust.

[Mubeen Khan (FCA, CIA, CISA and DISA) is a well-known fraud investigation and controls designing expert with more than 25 years of experience in this area. He is past Chairman of the Muscat Chapter of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) and Ex-Vice President of the Oman Chapter of The Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA)]

Bank Muscat rewards 630 lucky customers



MUSCAT: Bank Muscat conducted a number of draws recently at its head office at Airport Heights in Muscat.

The monthly draw for different governorates for January 2021 saw 420 winners win RO 500 each. All customers maintaining a minimum balance of RO 100 were entered into the monthly draws for different governorates.

The draws also saw 10 lucky women customers win RO 1,000 each in the Zeinah monthly draw while 100 youths won RO 100 each in the Shababi monthly draw. All Zeinah customers who maintained a minimum balance of RO 100 and Shababi customers with a minimum balance of RO 10 were entered into the monthly draws for their respective categories. Prize draws were also held for Children's account holders having a minimum balance of RO 50, and 100 lucky winners won RO 100 each.

Abdullah bin Tamman al Mashani (pictured), DGM — Institutional Sales and Product Development, Bank Muscat, said: "Bank Muscat is very happy to share joy and happiness amongst its customers with its first set of prize draws for the year. As a result of continuous innovation every year, the Al Mazyona savings scheme has witnessed massive growth and is the largest prize draw scheme in Oman."

PRESS RELEASE

SOHAR INTERNATIONAL'S VIEWPOINTS TO HIGHLIGHT 'CONQUERING HUMAN LIMITATIONS'



Continuing to bring global experiences to the local market, the latest virtual edition of Viewpoints — Sohar International Chairman's forum, is back with yet another compelling session on Tuesday, March 9, 2021 starting at 7:00 pm on Zoom platform.

Chaired by Mohammed bin Mahfoudh al Ardhi, Chairman of the Board of Directors at Sohar International, the 11th edition of Viewpoints will host Sir Ranulph Fiennes and delve into an interesting and currently relevant subject of 'Conquering Human Limitations', explaining the human capabilities and boundaries, offering new dimensions to the subject.

Mohammed bin Mahfoudh al Ardhi said, "Our world today has changed significantly. Everywhere, individuals and businesses have adapted to the new normal continuing to carry forward daily life, demonstrating utmost agility and resilience."

AHLI ISLAMIC TIES UP WITH AL MADINA INSURANCE



Ahli Islamic has signed a strategic agreement with Al Madina Takaful to offer a range of Takaful insurance products — travel, home, motor and domestic helper — that will ensure protection and cover for customers under the bank's portfolio.

Yousuf al Rawahi, Deputy General Manager and Head of Ahli Islamic says, "Ahli Islamic is delighted to partner with Al Madina Takaful to offer innovative Takaful solutions to its customers across Oman. We are committed to provide the most beneficial proposition for our customers based on their diverse requirements and it is with these customised plans that we are ensuring that their needs and expectations are met and fulfilled."

The partnership with Al Madina Takaful is expected to widen the bank's portfolio of products, thereby addressing the full range of its customers' safety and welfare needs. Ahli Islamic's insurance portfolio provides a variety of Takaful insurance products that can be tailored to safeguard policyholder's assets and property from financial risks."

Webinar to focus on EXIM Bank's trade financing solutions

March 3 session will cover loan guarantees, long-term financing and other opportunities for companies in Oman

BUSINESS REPORTER MUSCAT, FEB 28

In line with its mission to foster the development of trade and commercial activity between Oman and the United States, the Oman American Business Center (OABC) will host an informational webinar on March 3, entitled 'Introduction to the Export-Import Bank of the United States (EXIM)', in partnership with the US Embassy Muscat.

The session will feature opening remarks by Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion and US Ambassador to Oman Leslie Tsou and a presentation by Rick Anguioni, Business Development Specialist and Regional Director



Omani companies can access incredible financing opportunities through EXIM, allowing them to grow their businesses and increase their competitiveness in the region

ALI DAUD

Chairman, Oman American Business Centre

of Africa, EXIM.

Anguioni will discuss the International Buyers Programme, with loan guarantees and direct loans for international companies, long-term financing of up to 14 years, and details on specific opportunities: For example,

EXIM can support up to 85 per cent of the contract amount (depending upon US content) after a cash payment of at least 15 per cent.

As the event is free of charge and open to all individuals and organisations within Oman's

public and private sector, the OABC is encouraging those with interest in trade financing or importing US goods and services to please register and attend. The event will be hosted online from 5 - 6 pm (Oman Time), Wednesday, March 3.

"The OABC is bringing a unique opportunity to Omani companies by introducing them to the US EXIM Bank", says Ali Daud, Chairman of the OABC.

"As the official affiliate of the US Chamber of Commerce in Oman, OABC's mission is to support the strong commercial relationship between Oman and the US and to regularly highlight the unique ways in which Omani businesses can take advantage of the US-Oman Free Trade Agreement.

Twenty countries in the world today have an FTA with the US, including just 4 in the MENA region. In addition to importing and exporting products from the US duty-free, Omani companies can access incredible financing opportunities through EXIM, allowing them to grow their businesses and increase their competitiveness in the region.



China's factory activity expands at a slower pace

BEIJING: China's factory activity expanded in February at a slower pace than a month earlier, hitting the lowest level since last May and missing market expectations after brief Covid-19-related disruptions earlier in the year.

The official manufacturing Purchasing Manager's Index (PMI) fell to 50.6 from 51.3 in January, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed on Sunday, remaining above the 50-point mark that separates growth from contraction.

Analysts had expected it to decline to 51.1. Chinese factory activity normally goes dormant during the Lunar New Year break as workers return to their home towns. This year, the government appealed to workers



A worker welds a bicycle steel rim at a factory manufacturing sports equipment in Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China. — Reuters

to remain local to curb the spread of Covid-19.

Generally, China's economic recovery has been gathering pace due to robust exports, pent-up demand and government stimulus.

The official PMI, which largely focuses on big and state-owned firms, showed the sub-index for new export orders was 48.8 in February compared with 50.2 in January, slipping back into contraction after months boosted by overseas demand.

A sub-index for activity among small firms stood at 48.3 in February versus 49.4 a month earlier. A sub-index for employment in the official PMI stood at 48.1 in February, down from January's 48.4 as firms laid off more

workers and at a faster pace. China's factory gate prices rose on year in January for the first time in a year, as months of strong manufacturing growth pushed raw material costs higher.

China eked out 2.3 per cent economic growth last year. This year, the government may avoid setting a growth target for fear of provincial economies feeling pressured to take on more debt, policy sources previously said.

China will reinforce policy support for foreign trade and ensure the smooth operation of supply chains, its new commerce minister said earlier this week. In the services sector, activity expanded for the 11th consecutive month but at a slower pace.

— Reuters

Australia's aviation authority lifts Boeing 737 MAX suspension

SYDNEY: Australia's Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) said it lifted the temporary suspension on Boeing 737 MAX aircraft operating to and from the country issued following two deadly accidents involving the model.

A total of 346 people perished in two accidents involving Boeing 737 Max jets, one in Indonesia in October 2018 and another in Ethiopia in March 2019.

The planes were grounded worldwide and only certified to fly again last November. In both crashes, a sensor provided incorrect data to the software, prompting the nose to dive. Pilots were unable to override the automatic settings.

The new version of the software is to be fed data from two sensors. The 737 MAX has already received approval in Boeing's home country, the United States, by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and in the European Union by the EASA, among others.

"We have accepted the comprehensive return-to-service requirements specified by the FAA as State of Design for the 737 MAX and are confident that the aircraft are safe", CASA's acting head and director of aviation safety, Graeme Crawford, said in a statement.

"Our airworthiness and engineering team has assessed there are no additional return to service requirements for operation in Australia."

No Australian airlines currently operate the Boeing 737 MAX. Pre-coronavirus pandemic only Singapore-based Silk Air, now Singapore Airlines and Fiji Airways did.

— Reuters



A Boeing 737 Max during a test flight near the Boeing Field in Seattle, Washington, in this file photo. — Reuters

'Never bet against America,' Buffett advises investors

WASHINGTON: Ninety-year-old billionaire Warren Buffett reaffirmed his fervent belief in the American Dream in a letter to investors published on Saturday — advising them never to bet against the country despite its many problems.

"In its brief 232 years of existence, there has been no incubator for unleashing human potential like America", he said in the message to investors in his Berkshire Hathaway conglomerate.

Even after a particularly difficult 2020 — when the Covid-19 pandemic plunged the world's largest economy into recession and pushed millions into poverty — "our country's economic progress has been breathtaking", he said.

The man known as the Oracle of Omaha added: "Our unwavering conclusion: Never bet



against America." Buffett's annual letter is always highly anticipated by the business world because of his reputation as a prudent investor with a canny view to long-term trends.

But in his latest letter, Buffett did acknowledge a mistake made in 2016 that became evident last year: Berkshire's purchase of Precision Castparts (PCC), which led to an "ugly \$11 billion write-down." "I paid too much for the company", Buffett wrote.

In its brief 232 years of existence, there has been no incubator for unleashing human potential like America. Our country's economic progress has been breathtaking

WARREN BUFFETT
American billionaire

"No one misled me in any way — I was simply too optimistic about PCC's normalized profit potential", an error laid bare when the company's aerospace customers fell on hard times last year.

Buffett also announced that Berkshire's annual meeting, which

in normal years draws thousands of shareholders to Omaha, Nebraska will take place in a virtual format on May 1, as it was last year because of the pandemic.

He said he and partner Charlie Munger would answer shareholders' questions.

Last year, Buffett wrote, the conglomerate they led met neither of two goals: "Berkshire made no sizable acquisitions and operating earnings fell nine per cent. "We did, though, increase Berkshire's per-share intrinsic value by both retaining earnings and repurchasing about five per cent of our shares."

He voiced confidence that Berkshire's capital gains from its investment holdings would be "substantial" over time. Looking ahead, Buffett said Berkshire would remain "a collection of controlled and non-controlled businesses." — AFP



UK's Sunak to provide £5 bn of grants to pandemic hit businesses

LONDON: British Finance Minister Rishi Sunak will announce £5 billion (\$7 billion) of additional grants to help businesses hit hard by pandemic lockdowns in his budget statement next week. Shops, bars, clubs, hotels, restaurants, gyms and hair salons would be among nearly 700,000 companies eligible for new direct cash grants of up to £18,000.

The funding takes the total spent on direct grants to businesses during the crisis to £25 billion.

Encouraged by the rapid roll-out of vaccines, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has unveiled a route out of lockdown for England. However, some businesses will need to remain shuttered until the summer.

"There's now light at the end of the tunnel and this £5 billion of extra cash grants will ensure our high streets can open their doors with optimism", said Sunak.

Local authorities in England will also get an extra £425 million to distribute grants to businesses not eligible for the restart grants, while the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will receive £794 million of extra funding.

The government has already racked up more than £280 billion in coronavirus spending and tax cuts, pushing Britain's borrowing to its highest level since World War Two. — Reuters

European officials urge World Bank to exclude fossil-fuel investments

WASHINGTON: Senior officials from Europe have urged the World Bank's management to expand its climate change strategy to exclude investments in oil- and coal-related projects around the world, and gradually phase out investment in natural gas projects, according to three sources familiar with the matter.

In the six-page letter dated on Wednesday, World Bank executive directors representing major European shareholder countries and Canada, welcomed moves by the Bank to ensure its lending supports efforts to reduce carbon emissions.

But they urged the Bank — the biggest provider of climate finance to the developing world — to go even further.

"We... think the Bank should now go further and also exclude all coal- and oil-related investments, and further outline a policy on gradually phasing out gas power generation to only invest in gas in exceptional circumstances", the European officials wrote in the letter, excerpts of which were seen by Reuters.

The officials took note of



Activists protest in front of the coal-fired Jaenschwalde power station in the Lausitz region, Germany, in this file photo. Their banner reads: 'Love for the Lausitz. Not for the coal.' — Reuters

the World Bank's \$620 million investment in a multi-billion dollar liquefied natural gas project in Mozambique approved by the Bank's board in January, but did not call for its cancellation, one of the sources said. The World Bank confirmed receipt of the letter but did not disclose all its contents.

It noted that the World Bank

and its sister organisations had provided \$83 billion for climate action over the past five years.

"Many of the initiatives called for in the letter from our shareholders are already planned or in discussion for our draft Climate Change Action Plan for 2021-2025, which management is working to finalise in the coming month", the Bank said in an

emailed statement.

The Bank's first climate action plan began in fiscal year 2016. The United States, the largest shareholder in the World Bank, this month rejoined the 2015 Paris climate accord, and has vowed to move multilateral institutions and US public lending institutions toward "climate-aligned investments and away from high-carbon investments."

World Bank President David Malpass told finance officials from the Group of 20 economies on Friday that the Bank would make record investments in climate change mitigation and adaptation for a second consecutive year in 2021.

"Inequality, poverty, and climate change will be the defining issues of our age", Malpass told the officials.

"It is time to think big and act big in finding solutions", He said it was also launching new reviews to integrate climate into all its country diagnostics and strategies, a step initiated before the letter from the European officials, said one of the sources.

— Reuters

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SIT. WANTED

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features



Young Omani gardener shares some secrets to effectively raise garden plants

Hiba al Husaini followed her family's footsteps and has grown passionate about agriculture and gardening. In turn, she turned her social media account as an opportunity to educate others about raising plants and crops. In this feature, she shares some secrets on how to make sure that you are raising healthy plants... **P18**

INSIDE STORIES

FASHION



BLACK LIVES MATTER DESIGNERS MAKE HISTORY IN MILAN

Last minute touches on a frilly white dress, a final coat of powder and it's showtime for the Black Lives Matter-inspired collective making history at Milan Fashion Week... **Story on Page 20**

ART



HOLLYWOOD, HISTORY COMBINE IN CHURCHILL ART AUCTION

Hollywood's Angelina Jolie and Britain's iconic wartime prime minister Sir Winston Churchill, a keen artist who took inspiration from the Moroccan city of Marrakesh, are combining for a March 1 date at Christie's auction house in London... **Story on Page 20**

READ



BROKEN GLASS

BY ALAIN MABANCKOU

It centres on the patrons of a run-down bar in the Congo. In a country that appears to have forgotten the importance of remembering, a former schoolteacher and bar regular nicknamed Broken Glass has been elected to record their stories for posterity.

DISCOVERY



ROMAN CHARIOT UNEARTHED 'ALMOST INTACT' NEAR POMPEII

Roman chariot unearthed 'almost intact' near Pompeii. An ornate Roman chariot has been discovered "almost intact" near Italy's buried city of Pompeii, the archaeological park announced on Saturday, calling it a discovery with "no parallel" in the country... **Story on Page 19**

ENTERTAINMENT



GOLDEN GLOBES TO LAUNCH PANDEMIC-ERA HOLLYWOOD AWARDS SEASON

Hollywood's award season kicks off on Sunday at a very different Golden Globes, with a mainly virtual ceremony set to boost or dash the Oscars' hopes of early frontrunners like "Nomadland" and "The Trial of the Chicago 7" **Story on Page 19**



Young Omani gardener shares some secrets to effectively raise garden plants

BY RUQAYA AL KINDI

Born in a family who loves gardening and agriculture, 24-year-old Omani Hiba al Husaini didn't automatically inherit her elder's passion for crops and plants.

"The love for gardening developed in 2018 when I started watching gardening shows and reading books on agriculture. It is when my mind opened up to the idea," she said.

So far, Hiba learned that gardening in Oman takes resilience and adaptation as some variety can only grow in a specific season. It is important to know the condition of the country in order to be a successful gardener. Whatever knowledge she acquired, she usually shares on her Instagram [@hiba.garden](#).

"Agriculture in Oman is divided into two periods. The first period starts in September while the second period begins in February," she said.

In the first period, she shared, "We start to plant crops that grow in the warm temperature. Crops include tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, pumpkins, cucumbers, corn, herbs and seasonal flowers. During winter, usually in October, we start planting cabbage, cauliflower, peas and other crops that prefer cold weather."

They also plant watermelon, melon, peanuts, okra and many others depending on the best season. For those just starting in home gardening, she recommends planting lettuce, radish, potatoes, sunflowers, tomatoes, cilantro, watercress and beetroot as they are usually easy to care for.

Hiba pointed out that there are plants however that can grow regardless of the season.

Other crops that farmers usually plant during warmer temperature includes parsley, kale, cummer spinach, and molokhia while on colder periods, they plant garlic, onions, cauliflowers, Brussel sprouts among others.

To start growing crops, you need to choose a suitable soil mixture, because the success of the plants is due to the soil mixture.

"You need, basically, 1/3 of the peat moss or potting oil + 1/3 of perlite + 1/3 of compost and mix them well," she said.

Often, "The mentioned mixture is fixed for pots, while for agricultural land, we only need to fertilise it from time to time, whether with organic fertilisers or nutrients," she added.

People who prefer to grow crops using seeds need seedlings or small pots, soil (peat moss or potting oil), seeds, and water.

"You start by filling the seedlings with soil about 1/3 of it, then put the seed in the middle and follow that by covering it again with soil then finally irrigating it," she said.

She noted that this is the well-known method when seeding but farmer needs a larger pot for seedlings or planting large seeds. She added that some seeds, also, spread their roots very quickly and need to be transferred to the open soil faster because they cannot tolerate the small pots, these seeds include pumpkin, zucchini, cucumber, sunflowers, peas, etc.

Plants that can be planted on pots include tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, strawberries, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli and herbs as they grow slower and don't need large space.

There are types that should not be planted as seeds example, coriander, parsley, and dill. These plants preferably need to be scattered on wider gardens without transplanting. As for carrots and beets, it is also preferable to scatter them because transplantation in pots distorts the shape of the formed head.

For those without big gardens, Hiba said there are alternatives such as using smart and wooden pots.

"These alternatives are very excellent for transplantation because they are

characterised by rapid drainage of excess water and also allow the roots to expand inside them comfortably," she explained.

She advises the farmers to know the appropriate sizes for each type of plant (seasonal vegetables). She explained that the farmer needs 5 gallons (for only one vegetable, herbs, or flowers), 7 gallons (for growing leaves or for one plant), 10 gallons (for one pepper, tomato, or eggplant).

"15 gallons (for potatoes, pumpkin, zucchini, or cucumber), 20 Gallons (for watermelon, pumpkin, cantaloupe, and more than one plant of tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant)," she added. She noted that larger pots are more suitable and excellent for healthy plant growth.

Irrigation is one of the main tasks that the farmer must also perform. "Watering the plant is done moderately, meaning not to drown the plant with water and not let it dry for long days because the result is the death of the plant, slow growth, or lack of good production. When the humidity is high (too much water) the roots rot and the plant dies," she said.

"Therefore, you must pay attention to the pots and make sure that they have drainage holes at the bottom. When the soil is left dry for long days, this affects the size of the plant and its fruits," she warned.

Choosing the right place for planting is also crucial and it always due to the sunrise and the location of the chosen land.

Hiba said that location is also important. If you are leaving in a complex, it is important to look at the structure of the building.

"If you have neighbours on two sides of your property, this is good as the buildings will act as a barrier to block the winds and the changing weather of the seasons," she said.

Hiba noted that it is important to know which plants need longer hours in the sun and which needed cooler temperature or shade.

"There is a rule that says that any plant from which we harvest the fruits like pumpkin, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and others need about 6 to 8 hours "long sun hours". In contrast, any plant from which we harvest leaves needs fewer sun hours, such as lettuce, cabbage, radish, and herbs, and these hours are about 3 to 4 hours," she shared.

Even before beginning to plant, Hiba said it is also ideal to know the different kind of seeds which include heirloom, hybrid or genetically modified seeds.

"Heirloom seeds are seeds inherited from one generation to another. After every harvest, some of these seeds are stored for replanting the next season. These seeds are distinguished by excellent production and very wonderful taste," she explained.

Hybrids seeds, on the other hand, are the result of the hybridisation of two pure strains of the plant to obtain certain features, for example, disease resistance, high yield, or high-temperature resistance. But on the other hand, the seeds cannot be collected as they will not grow like the original.

Genetically modified seeds, Hiba said, have had their genetics added or modified. And sometimes the source of these seeds is another organism such as bacteria. This requires the presence of special laboratories and scientists specialising in this field.

"Hybrids and heirloom are the popular varieties being used. Hybrids are always distinguished by the presence of a coloured layer on them, while the heirloom ones are without colours," she noted.

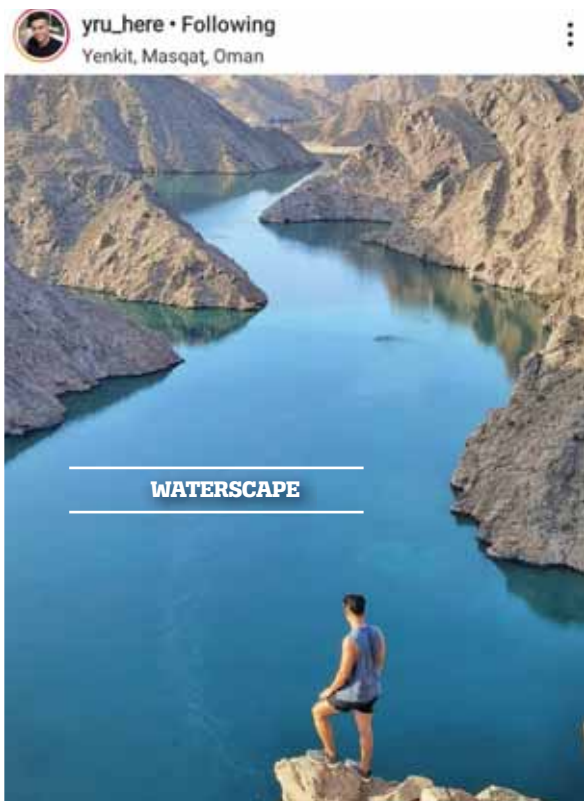
Hiba added that they are always available in the nurseries and stores that sell seeds and agricultural tools, but recently it has started to be available in electronic stores such as [organic_crops.om](#).





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DISCOVERY

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Roman chariot unearthed 'almost intact' near Pompeii

An ornate Roman chariot has been discovered "almost intact" near Italy's buried city of Pompeii, the archaeological park announced on Saturday, calling it a discovery with "no parallel" in the country. The four-wheeled processional carriage was found in the portico to stables where the remains of three horses were unearthed in 2018, including one still in its harness.

Pompeii was buried in boiling lava when Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 AD, killing between 2,000 and 15,000 people. "A large ceremonial chariot with four wheels, along with its iron components, beautiful bronze and tin decorations, mineralised wood remains and imprints of organic materials (from the ropes to the remains of floral decoration), has been discovered almost intact," a statement issued by the archaeological park said.

"This is an exceptional discovery... which has no parallel in Italy thus far - in an excellent state of preservation." The excavation site is known as the Civita Giuliana, a suburban villa that lies just a few hundred metres from the ancient city of Pompeii. The excavation is part of a programme aimed at fighting illegal activity in the area, including tunnel digging to reach artefacts that can be sold on illicit markets. Looters missed the room where the chariot had lain for almost 2,000 years, tunnelling by on both sides, the park's statement said. Specialists took great care to unearth the vehicle, for example by pouring plaster into voids "to preserve the imprint of any organic material" that had decomposed, it added. The park said this had allowed it to emerge well preserved down to the imprints of ropes, "thus

revealing the chariot in all of its complexity". "Pompeii continues to amaze with all of its discoveries, and it will continue to do so for many years yet, with 20 hectares (50 acres) still to be excavated," Culture Minister Dario Franceschini was quoted as saying.

'PARADES AND PROCESSIONS' - "It is an extraordinary discovery for the advancement of our knowledge of the ancient world," added Massimo Osanna, outgoing director of the park. "What we have is a ceremonial chariot, probably the Pileum referred to by some sources, which was employed not for everyday use or for agricultural transport, but to accompany community festivities, parades and processions." Pompeii's remarkably well-preserved remains have slowly been uncovered by teams of archaeological specialists. It is Italy's third most visited tourist site, drawing more than 3.9 million visitors in 2019. The ancient city was closed after the coronavirus struck, and only reopened on January 18. — **AFP**

ENTERTAINMENT

Golden Globes to launch pandemic-era Hollywood awards season



HOLLYWOOD'S AWARD season kicks-off on Sunday at a very different Golden Globes, with a mainly virtual ceremony set to boost or dash the Oscars hopes of early frontrunners like "Nomadland" and "The Trial of the Chicago 7." Usually a star-packed, laid-back party that draws Tinseltown's biggest names to a Beverly Hills hotel ballroom, this pandemic edition will be broadcast from two scaled-down venues, with frontline and essential workers among the few in attendance. Deprived of its usual glamour, the Globes — which also honour the best in television — remain a coveted prize, and a high-profile source of momentum in the run-up to the season-crowning Oscars, which were pushed back this year to April. "Nomadland," Chloe Zhao's paean to a marginalised, older generation of Americans roaming the West in rundown vans, has long been viewed as a frontrunner for the Globes' top prize. But it will face stiff competition from Aaron Sorkin's "Chicago 7," a courtroom drama about the city's anti-war riots in 1968 with a mouth-watering ensemble cast including Mark Rylance, Eddie Redmayne and Sacha Baron Cohen. Both films are fuelled by their timely themes of protest and joblessness. "I think that it's likeliest between them," said The Hollywood Reporter's awards columnist Scott Feinberg. "And then the spoiler, if something were to come out of left field, would probably be 'Promising Young Woman,' which is just unlike anything else in recent memory." Its star Carey Mulligan — playing a revenge-seeker who lurks at bars, feigning drunkenness to lure men into revealing their own misogyny — is tipped

by many to win best actress. She will have to fend off Frances McDormand's grounded and nuanced turn alongside a cast of non-actors in "Nomadland," and Viola Davis' portrayal of a legendary 1920s crooner in "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom." **'HARD TO RESIST'** The other films vying for best drama, the night's final and most prestigious prize, are "Mank" — David Fincher's ode to "Citizen Kane," which topped the overall nominations with six — and "The Father" starring Anthony Hopkins. Hopkins, who has never won a competitive Globe despite seven previous nominations, has been showered with praise for his harrowing portrayal of the onset of dementia. But he is up against sentimental favourite Chadwick Boseman, the "Black Panther" star who died last August from cancer at age 43. Boseman is nominated for his kinetic performance as a tragic young trumpet player opposite Davis in "Ma Rainey." "This is his best part, and the backstory is that he knew this might be his last performance — so that's kind of hard to resist," said Variety awards editor Tim Gray. The race will be closely watched by groups including Time's Up, who this week slammed the Globes-awarding Hollywood Foreign Press Association for failing to admit a single Black member. "I support and congratulate all the nominees, but the HFPA needs to change in meaningful ways," tweeted actress Olivia Wilde. "Cosmetic fixes are not enough. #TimesUpGlobes." The HFPA released a statement recognising that "we need to bring in Black members, as well as members from other underrepresented backgrounds." — **AFP**



Black Lives Matter designers make history in Milan

Hollywood, history combine in Churchill art auction

HOLLYWOOD'S ANGELINA Jolie and Britain's iconic wartime prime minister Sir Winston Churchill, a keen artist who took inspiration from the Moroccan city of Marrakesh, are combining for a March 1 date at Christie's auction house in London.

"The Tower of the Koutoubia Mosque", an oil painting Churchill produced during a World War II visit, is tipped to fetch between £1.5 million and £2.5 million (\$2 million and \$3.5 million), according to a Christie's estimate.

Put up for auction by Angelina Jolie, it is vaunted in Christie's catalogue as "Churchill's most important work. Aside from its distinguished provenance, it is the only landscape he made" during the war.

A career army officer before entering politics, Churchill started to paint relatively late, at the age of 40.

His passion for the translucent light of Marrakesh, far from the political storms and drab skies of London, dates back to the 1930s when most of Morocco was a French protectorate, and he went on to make six visits to the North African country over the course of 23 years.

"Here in these spacious palm groves rising from the desert the traveller can be sure of perennial sunshine... and can contemplate with ceaseless satisfaction the stately and snow-clad panorama of the Atlas Mountains," he wrote in 1936 in Britain's *Daily Mail* newspaper.

He would set up his easel on the balconies of the grandiose La Mamounia hotel or the city's Villa Taylor, beloved by the European jet set of the 1970s.

It was from the villa, after a historic January 1943 conference in Casablanca with US president Franklin Roosevelt and France's Charles de Gaulle, that he painted what came to be regarded as his finest work, of the minaret behind the ramparts of the Old City, with mountains behind and tiny colourful figures in front.

"You cannot come all this way to North Africa without seeing Marrakesh," he is reputed to have told Roosevelt. "I must be with you when you see the sun set on the Atlas Mountains."

A newspaper photograph taken at the time shows the two wartime Allied leaders admiring the sunset.

Truly remarkable panorama After the US delegation had left, Churchill stayed on an extra day and painted the view of the Koutoubia Mosque framed by the mountains.

He sent it to Roosevelt for his birthday. "This is Churchill's diplomacy at its most personal and intense," said Christie's head of modern British and Irish art, Nick Orchard. "It is not an ordinary gift between leaders. This is soft power, and it is what the special relationship is all about."

Sold by the Roosevelt family in the 1950s, it changed hands several times before passing on to Hollywood dream couple Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt in 2011, well before their high-profile separation.

A second Churchill landscape, "Scene in Marrakesh", painted on his first visit to Morocco in 1935, is also going under the hammer at Christie's on Monday.

That was painted while on a stay at Mamounia, where he marvelled at the "truly remarkable panorama over the tops of orange trees and olives", in a letter to his wife Clementine.

The hotel today has a suite and a bar named after its illustrious guest. —**AFP**



Last minute touches on a frilly white dress, a final coat of powder and it's showtime for the Black Lives Matter-inspired collective making history at Milan Fashion Week.

After a years-long battle to improve diversity on the Italian catwalks, a group of five black designers made their on-schedule debut on Wednesday by opening the women's Fall/Winter fashion shows.

Is opening fashion week a victory? "I'd say it's a first step," said Michelle Ngonmo, who chose those to include in the debut show.

She is a co-founder of the collective dubbed Black Lives Matter in Italian Fashion, named after the anti-racism movement that swept the United States last year and reached Europe.

Longer term, "we have to make the society we live in understand that the 'Made in Italy' label is not a question of skin colour but of know-how", she told.

On an individual level, opening Milan Fashion Week is a dream come true for the designers, all Italian but born in various African countries.

Claudia Gisele Ntsama, a 29-year-old from Cameroon, admitted being "a little nervous" as she fussed with the eco-friendly looks in pastel tones made entirely from hemp.

Nearby, fellow designer Fabiola Manirakiza played with silk in floral prints for her brand, Frida Kiza.

"In general, we are ignored, we are invisible. But this is a rebirth," exclaimed Manirakiza, whose parents were killed in 1972 in ethnic violence in Burundi.

WALL OF SILENCE

Ngonmo co-founded the collective last year alongside designers Edward Buchanan and Stella Jean, who has been the only black member of the National Chamber for Italian Fashion since 2016.

It participated in Milan's Fashion Week in September, with a video featuring the same five designers, but that "was just a teaser," explained Mokudu Fall, 45, from Senegal.

"Now we're on the official calendar, I've been dreaming about it since I've been in fashion," Fall said. In a nod to his African origins, his collection — "works of art that I

transpose on clothes" — featured satin lions and zebras in gold and red, his favourite colours.

Previously, the presentation of the collections of black designers was confined to Afro Fashion Week, which launched in Milan with a show in 2016.

"For years we came up against a wall of silence when knocking on the door" of the fashion chamber, said Ngonmo, the founder of Afro Fashion Week.

The catalyst for change was the death last year in US police custody of an African-American man, George Floyd, an event that triggered anti-racism protests across the US and the world.

Carlo Capasa, head of the fashion chamber, acknowledged that the death of Floyd was "an important moment of awareness for the whole world".

Thanks to the collective, "we have become more aware of this theme" of racism, he said, adding: "In fact, we could have done more."

The chamber now supports the collective through tutoring on design and business skills, and finances the five designers' fashions show and the collections of three of them.

WORK TWICE AS HARD

"As a woman and an immigrant in Italy, I had to work twice as hard to prove that I have the same skills as the others," said Joy Meribe, a 43-year-old born in Nigeria.

Her collection — dresses and skirts in 100 per cent organic silk, yellow, Atlantic blue and dark red — was made entirely in Italy, like all the others.

Buchanan, an African-American who has been in Italy for 25 years and co-founded the collection, said he has experienced racism on a daily basis.

He said people often assume that he makes T-shirts, or other garments for hip-hop fashion.

"They find it hard to imagine that I work in the luxury sector," he said.

But this first official show of the association gives hope to some.

"It's a dream come true," says Karim Daoudi, 27, a designer born in Morocco.

Of his shoes featured in the show, he said: "I hope they will go around the world." — **AFP**



Sour grapes: Italy and Slovenia battle over balsamic vinegar

ITALY'S VINEGAR producers are engaged in a battle with their competitors in Slovenia over balsamic vinegar.

The consortium for the protection of Aceto Balsamico di Modena - the traditional balsamic vinegar made in the Emilia-Romagna region of northern Italy — feels attacked by its small eastern neighbour.

The Ljubljana government has applied to the EU for a "national technical standard" to produce balsamic vinegar, which the association rejects out of hand.

If the Slovenians are successful there would be a stipulation that "all wine vinegars mixed with grape must" could call themselves "aceto balsamico," or balsamic vinegar, explains Federico Desimoni, director of the association.

Aceto Balsamico di Modena is produced from grape must that is fermented and/or cooked and/or concentrated, the consortium explains. Must is crushed fruit juice that still contains stems, skins and seeds.

The grapes traditionally come only from Lambrusco, Sangiovese, Trebbiano, Albana, Ancellotta, Fortana and Montuni vines. A minimum 10 per cent wine vinegar and an amount of at least 10-year-old aged vinegar is added to the grape must.

In Italy, Agriculture Minister Stefano Patuanelli intervened. For Rome, the "protection of the cultural heritage" of its own producers was a high priority, he was quoted by the Ansa news agency as saying.

The government will do everything to defend balsamic vinegar against attacks, he said.

An important deadline in the dispute with the EU expires on March 3. The consortium of producers has already fought over the use of the term balsamic vinegar before several German courts and the European Court of Justice (ECJ). — **dpa**