

Plan for green ammonia project in Salalah

An international consortium comprised of the alternative energy business unit of OQ, Marubeni Corporation, Linde and Dutco has signed a Joint Development Agreement (JDA) for the development of a green hydrogen and green ammonia project at Salalah Free Zone in Oman. The Salalah region enjoys rich solar and wind resources supported by a world-class shipping infrastructure at the Port of Salalah; all of which position the region to be a global hub for the production and export of green hydrogen and green ammonia. **DETAILS ON P13**



P10

HALF-TIME TALK INSPIRED PLAYERS: IVANKOVIC



P15

AMAZON COPIED PRODUCTS AND RIGGED SEARCH RESULTS



P20

SIX REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD PLAN A TRIP TO MUSANDAM



MUSCAT

EFFORTS CONTINUE TO RESTORE NORMALCY

The government, civil and military authorities ratcheted up operations to restore normalcy in the cyclone-hit areas in North Al Batinah Governorate. The North Al Batinah Municipality is making great efforts to reopen roads and remove rocks and debris and drain water from roads and public areas. Sulaiman bin Hamad al Sunaidy, Director-General of Municipalities of North Al Batinah Governorate, said that the municipality continues its efforts to repair the damage caused by the tropical condition Shaheen in cooperation with government authorities and private companies and volunteering teams. He added that these efforts have been successful as 1,598 roads have so far been reopened. **DETAILS ON P3**

HM SENDS MESSAGE TO BAHRAIN KING



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq has sent a written message to King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa of Bahrain, dealing with bilateral relations and matters of mutual interest. The message was handed over by HH Sayyid Fatik bin Fahr al Said, Special Envoy of His Majesty the Sultan, when he was received by the Bahraini King at Al Sakhir Palace in Manama on Wednesday. **DETAILS ON P2**

ON ROYAL DIRECTIVES



Majlis Ash'shura to reconvene on Nov 7

PACT FOR VOCATIONAL COLLEGES SIGNED

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and OQ signed an agreement for funding the development of vocational colleges to enable students of colleges and schools, as well as members of civil society to use the labs as modelling centres. The agreement comes within the context of the National Innovation System, Oman Vision 2040 and the National Research and Development Strategy. As per the agreement, OQ will allocate a sum of RO 200,000 for equipping and developing a number of laboratories in vocational colleges affiliated to the Ministry, by introducing the latest apparatus. **DETAILS ON P5**

Spatial modelling remote sensing identifies hotspots

INNOVATIVE RESEARCH BY OMANI ON PANDEMIC



Our aim was to develop real-time Geographical Information Systems data model for the spatio-temporal prediction of Covid-19 hotspots in Oman

DR AL KINDI

Author of the study

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Spatiotemporal patterns using geographical analysis and cartography can help identify the hotspot and cold spots of any pandemic including the Covid-19 in the country, according to a major study conducted by an Omani scientist. The breakthrough study revealed that the technique could also facilitate the spread and effects of the pandemic using spatial modelling remote sensing techniques in Oman and 21 cities in the Middle East. The innovative research projects of the Covid-19 Research Programme of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation carried out by Dr Khalifa al Kindi, Assistant Professor of the Unesco Chair on Aflaj Studies at the University of Nizwa, along with a group of researchers from Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) Nizwa, explored the development of the Geographical Information Systems (GIS) model and its relation to the Covid-19 pandemic with his research project 'Spatiotemporal patterns of the spread and effects of the emerging Covid-19. Speaking to the *Observer*, Dr Al Kindi, Principal Investigator (PI), said his team aimed to develop a real-time Geographical Information Systems (GIS) data model for the Spatio-temporal prediction of Covid-19 hotspots in the Sultanate of Oman through this research project. "Our study aimed at developing a GIS real-time dashboard for the cartography of hotspots and cold spots of Covid-19, managing data of Covid-19 using GIS real-time dashboard based on Omani health sentinel observations," said the principal researcher. For him, the study should also help predict Covid-19 hotspots, monitor the disease origins and its contagion movements, and develop multi-factors correlations with Covid-19 based on environmental, demographic and socioeconomic data. **TURN TO P5**

MUSCAT:

In response to the Royal Directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Majlis Ash'shura will begin its third annual session (2021-2022) of the ninth term, on November 7. This was stated by Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis Ash'shura. Shaikh Al Nadabi said that Majlis Ash'shura will begin its third annual session on November 7 in accordance to Article (38) of the Council of Oman Law which states that the Council of Oman should convene its regular session for no less than eight months a year which begins during the month of November on an invitation from His Majesty the Sultan. The Secretary-General of Majlis Ash'shura added that the first regular meeting will see the reelection of six members to complement the council's membership and the nomination of the chairmen and vice-chairmen of the standing committees as per the council's regulations. He said that the session will also look into the State Budget for the fiscal year 2022, which was transferred to the Majlis Ash'shura as is the norm. The Economic and Financial committee will study the budget draft in accordance in a fixed timeframe, he added. — ONA

READ IN

OPINION P9

The call of the conscience is supreme!

Ali al Matani

Changing the Africa population narrative

Hippolyte Fofack

Climate change could sink small states

ROME: Some of the world's smallest countries could "disappear" without action at an upcoming UN summit to contain climate change, the secretary-general of the Commonwealth warned in a Wednesday interview. "The threat to the 42 small states in existential," Baroness Patricia Scotland said. "People say that as if it does not mean what it says — namely these small states will disappear."

The Dominica-born lawyer and former British government minister, who leads the Commonwealth association of former countries of the British



A demonstrator holds up a sign as he attends a Fridays for Future climate strike in Milan, Italy. — Reuters

empire, was speaking during a visit to Rome. She said some of the Commonwealth's smallest members, like the low-lying Pacific islands of Tuvalu and Nauru, were "looking for new places to go" because "the sea level rises are so dangerous now". She also decried the devastating impact of more frequent hurricanes, including in her native country. "Dominica usually looks like a Garden of Eden," she said. But after 2017's Hurricane Maria "even the bark of trees had been stripped, there was not one green leaf left. It was like Armageddon". — AFP



INJURED STRIPED EAGLE SAVED IN AL KHABOURAH

An injured striped eagle was found in Hajar Bani Rabee'ah area in the Wilayat of Al Khabourah area in the Wilayat of Al Khabourah following the tropical condition Shaheen. Experts from the Department of Environmental Control in North Al Batinah Governorate provided medical treatment to the eagle after which it could fly. Four days later it was again seen by the veterinarian who affirmed that the bird could be returned to the wild after it recovered fully.



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In brief

MUSCAT



FOREIGN MINISTER RECEIVES DCO SECRETARY-GENERAL

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received at the ministry's premises Deemah al Yahya, Secretary-General of the Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO).

The meeting reviewed means of promoting cooperation between the Sultanate and the DCO in the fields of digital economy.

OMAN TAKES PART IN GCC RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS MINISTERIAL MEET



The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, took part in the 7th session of the GCC Endowments and Religious Affairs Ministers on Wednesday.

The Sultanate was represented in the virtual meeting by Shaikh Abdullah bin Mohammed al Salmy, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. The meeting discussed several topics listed on the agenda, mainly areas related to the exchange of experiences and the use of modern technologies in managing the endowments. The meeting further discussed different issues related to endowments and religious affairs.

GCC LEGISLATION UNDER-SECRETARIES ONLINE MEETING



The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, took part in the 20th meeting of the GCC officials of legislation departments.

During the meeting, held via video-conferencing, the Sultanate was represented by Dr Yahya bin Nasser al Khusaibi, the ministry's Under-Secretary.

The meeting discussed report of the Secretariat-General on the internal law draft of the under-secretaries committee, technical committees and working teams. It also covered the report of the Secretariat-General on unifying legislative terminologies in the GCC countries.

The meeting further reviewed proposal of the Secretariat-General on introducing an electronic blog for the GCC legislations.

HM sends message to Bahrain king



His Highness Sayyid Fatik bin Fahr al Said, Special Envoy of His Majesty the Sultan, handed over a written message from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq to King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain, in Manama on Wednesday. – ONA

‘Turtle Commandos’ to protect sea turtles in Ras Al Hadd Reserve



ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnassri

The Environment Authority launched the ‘Turtle Commandos’ programme on Tuesday to protect, control and monitor sea turtles, with broad participation of Omani youth. The programme will continue for three months in Ras Al Hadd Reserve in the Wilayat of Sur.

The programme aims to encourage the youth to volunteer for the environmental protection, educate the local community inside the reserve, protect, control and monitor sea turtles that nest on the Omani beaches and clean the beaches of waste, especially after Cyclone Shaheen, which hit the Sultanate recently.

The participants are expected to learn the importance of turtles and then pass this knowledge to society.

The Authority said the idea of the Turtle Commandos programme emerged from several reasons. “Because of the global situation of the Corona epidemic, the difficulty of foreign tourism boosted domestic tourism. So, a large number of visitors visited the turtle reserve to watch turtle nests and hatch of baby turtles without being aware

The programme aims to encourage the youth to volunteer for the environmental protection, educate the local community inside the reserve, protect, control and monitor sea turtles that nest on the Omani beaches and clean the beaches of waste, especially after Cyclone Shaheen

of the guidelines and laws of the reserve,” it said.

Besides, there is a lack of guides inside the reserve to educate people about turtle habitats and other features.

“This led to the loss of control and protection of turtles in the reserve, in the past two years, and the programme seeks to find effective solutions to meet this challenge,” said the Authority.

The programme looks into engaging 40 participants per week from all governorates of the Sultanate and working in various activities and workshops that achieve the programme’s objectives.

Usufruct deals worth over RO 3 million signed



MUSCAT: As part of the outcomes of the recent Food Security Lab forum, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning on Wednesday signed five land development (usufruct) contracts with private sector companies and establishments to the tune of RO 3 million.

The Food Lab forum was organised by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, with support from Oman Vision 2040 Follow-up Unit and “Invest-in-Oman Programme (for Programme for Attracting Investments and Supporting Exports in External Markets), which aligns with economic stimulus plans and meets the Sultanate’s agricultural needs in an innovative manner that is compatible with its foods security policies.

Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said that the agreements are specialised projects and constitute an added value to food security and



employment of job-seekers.

The land development (usufruct) projects include a contract with Qais Al Batran Company to set up a 9.5-fedan chicken farm in Khasab, Governorate of Musandam, (RO 600,000); a contract with Al An’am Business Company to establish a 95-fedan livestock breeding farm in Dhank, Governorate of Al Dhahirah (RO 1.5 million); a contract with Integrated Services for Business and Development Company for the setting up of a 200-fedan mango cultivation farm in Barka, Governorate of South Al

Batinah (RO 1.25m); a contract with Gulf Mashroom Products for establishing a 10-fedan wheat cultivation project in Thamrait, Dhofar Governorate (RO 26,000) and a contract with Al Rasbi Agricultural Development Company to set up a farm for fig trees on an area of 101 fedans in Al Kamil W’al Wafi, South Al Sharqiyah Governorate (RO 282,000).

The agreements were signed by Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, and the CEOs of the companies. — ONA



Work to restore normalcy in full swing

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 13

The government civil and military authorities ratcheted up operations to restore normalcy in the cyclone-hit areas in North Al Batinah Governorate.

The North Al Batinah Municipality is making great efforts to reopen roads and remove rocks and debris and drain water from roads and public areas.

Engineer Sulaiman bin Hamad al Sunaidy, Director-General of the Municipalities of North Al Batinah Governorate, said that the municipality continues its efforts to repair the damage caused by the tropical condition Shaheen in cooperation with government authorities and private companies and volunteering teams. He added that these efforts have been successful as 1,598 roads have so far been reopened. In addition, 1,635 valley crossings have been cleaned up and rainwater drained off from 699 locations.

The municipality has removed 7,083 carcasses from different wilayats of North Al Batinah Governorate, the official said.

The North Al Batinah Municipality received 1,128 reports since the beginning of the tropical condition. Acting in response to these reports, the municipality in cooperation with



Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, with cyclone affected families in Saham on Wednesday

volunteers cleaned up 3,974 houses and 317 shops, Al Sunaidy said.

Her Excellency Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, on Wednesday visited the Wilayat of Saham and met with a number of the affected families in the presence of Shaikh Saif bin Hamyar al Shihi, Governor of North Al Batinah and Shaikh Awadh bin Abdullah al Mantheri,

Wali of Saham.

In exclusive comments to Oman Arabic, sister publication of the *Observer*, the minister of social development said that her visit to the Wilayat of Saham is part of a series of visits conducted by the members of the committee tasked with following-up the impact of the tropical condition.

The minister of social

development listened to a number of citizens who have been affected by the tropical condition. More than 600 affected houses have been registered in the Wilayat of Saham.

The minister of social development also visited the Wilayats of Al Khabourah and Al Suwaiq where she inspected affected houses, affirming that the committees are currently assessing

the scale of the damage in the affected wilayats.

Shaikh Saif bin Hamyar al Shihi, Governor of North Al Batinah, told Oman Arabic that the visit aimed to ensure that the working is going on to restore normal life in the affected places, confirming that most of the affected roads have been reopened and water supply has been fully restored.



1,598

roads have so far been reopened. 1,6235 valley crossings have been cleaned up and rainwater drained off from 699 locations. Volunteers cleaned up 3,974 houses and 317 shops

OMAN PAVILION TOP DRAW AT EXPO 2020

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

The Frankincense tree inspired Pavilion of the Sultanate at the Expo 2020 has been pulling a steady stream of people from across the world as the ambitious Expo 2020 completed two weeks since it opened on September 30.

According to available statistics, the Sultanate's pavilion receives an average of 11,500 visitors a day. In the first week, the number of visitors crossed 81,071, and it is steadily increasing.

For those prospective visitors sitting miles away and thumping through what's awaiting them at the Omani pavilion for the next six months, the Ministry of a Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has said, "It's a simple walk through the many facets of the beautiful country as an investor or a tourist."

"Over the next six months, what an avid visitor to our pavilion can look forward to is simply an experience of the true Omani culture as well as various dimensions of scientific, artistic, cultural, economic and other fields", Mohsin al Balushi, Commissioner-General of the Sultanate at Expo 2020 Dubai, said.

Several hundreds of Small and Medium Enterprises (SME's) from Oman are currently taking part at the Expo. Young Omani men and women representing a gamut of sectors.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), there are 52,524 SMEs in Oman compared to 47,802 the previous year, an increase of 19 per cent, as quoted by the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Riyada) till the end of April 2021.

They represent a diverse range of sectors, from local halwa making to manufacturers of

drones and battery makers to makeshift wall constructors.

A great effort is put in to highlight the youth power in innovating and designing contemporary solutions for life with the Innovation Factory Company, which carries out the designing, manufacturing and implementation of devices, equipment and technologies used in telling and reviewing the content of the pavilion's story.

There are small manufacturing facilities, small processing units, trading companies, export-import companies, distribution, retailing, rental, service companies and so on, and will be an attraction at an event where 191 countries, as well as regional and international organisations will participate under the theme, "Connecting Minds, Creating the Future".

Participation is also a step towards maximising Oman's desired gains at all levels, most important of which is the economic, social and cultural goals in line with the Oman Vision 2040.

There are efforts to highlight Oman's tourism potential, an abundance of natural sightseeing opportunities, and air connectivity thanks to Oman Air, which will introduce the Sultanate as a distinct tourism and business destination.

Oman's true identity and the rich ancient Omani heritage will be in the limelight at the event that expects millions to visit over the next six months. The Omani pavilion will also host a series of Omani events and participation, including scientific, artistic, cultural and economic seminars on various topics.

The frankincense tree-shaped edifice is divided into five sections that simulate in their content the life cycle of frankincense, syncing with the three sub-themes of Expo 2020 Dubai, which are Mobility, Sustainability and Opportunity.

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■ PACT TO DEVELOP VOCATIONAL COLLEGES



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and OQ signed an agreement for funding the development of vocational colleges to enable students of colleges and schools, as well as members of civil society to use the labs as modeling centres. The agreement comes within the context of the National Innovation System, Oman Vision 2040 and the National Research and Development Strategy.

As per the agreement, OQ will allocate a sum of RO 200,000 for equipping and developing a number of laboratories in vocational colleges affiliated to the Ministry, by introducing the latest apparatus.

The agreement was signed by Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and Ashraf bin Hamad al Maamari, CEO of Human Resources and Technology at OQ. — ONA

Spatial modelling remote sensing identifies hotspots

FROM PAGE 1

Dr Al Kindi (pictured) has earlier authored three major studies. “Demographic and socioeconomic determinants of Covid-19 across Oman, A Geospatial Modeling Approach”, “Spatiotemporal assessment of Covid-19 spread over Oman using GIS techniques”, and “The impacts of Covid-19 lockdowns on surface urban heat island changes and air quality improvements across 21 major cities in the Middle East” invited global attention and debates were conducted on the same.

With this present study, the team has been able to obtain a valuable detailed assessment of Oman’s primary spatial Covid-19 hotspots by modelling a wide range of physical and socioeconomic variables with the help of advancements in GIS, spatial modelling and data mining techniques.

Dr Al Kindi further said that although their approach was mainly based on spatial data, it goes beyond employing state-of-the-art Geospatial, mathematical, and deep learning models to assess the current situation and validate and predict the spatial evolution of the pandemic in the short run.

“Our research showed various geospatial implications in planning a healthy human nation that can be used



to enhance surveillance systems. The project’s spatial techniques allowed makers to consider changes in the demographic and socioeconomic statuses, which are the critical determinants of Covid-19 rates.”

The findings of this research suggested that determinates of Covid-19 rates differed in time and space in Oman. Therefore, the control programmers should focus on wilayats or areas with high population density. In addition, the vector control programming should concentrate on communities in districts and sub-districts with high density during the infection arrival month or season.

By developing computer prototypes based on the research project’s findings, it will be possible to predict potential epidemiological activities under different conditions, thus predicting future consequences of changes in these conditions.

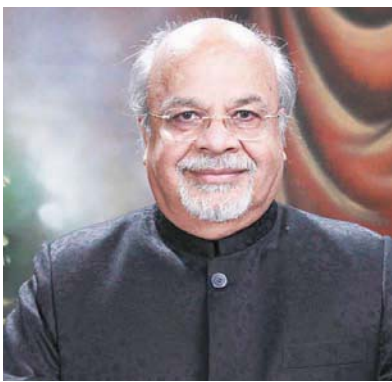
Long-term residency scheme augurs well with businessmen



Yusuf Nalwala, MD, Al Ansari group



Stephen Thomas, CEO, Renaissance



Kiran Asher, Group Managing Director, Al Ansari group



Sasikumar Moorkanat, MD & CEO of Moon Iron & Steel Company

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

@patkaushal

The recent announcement of a long-term residency scheme for expatriates in the Sultanate has evoked a positive response from business people in the country. Those who received the permits on the launch day called it a move that can reinforce an entrepreneur’s confidence to do business in the country and have a more extended plan of action to build, establish and grow.

They appreciated the government’s move to inject positivity into the system and at the same time called for some major steps to ensure that Oman’s economy bounces back with a thumping speed.

Renaissance CEO Stephen Thomas, who is in Oman for more than three decades, found it an honour and recognition of the work done by everyone at Renaissance Services and not just him.

“I am both humbled and honoured by this, but I believe this is a recognition of the work done by everyone at Renaissance Services and not just me... the long-term residency scheme allows the holder to set up a business that employs at least ten Omanis and to invest in industrial, commercial, or residential property in Oman. The investor residency card is another tool in the government’s suite of measures to attract investment into Oman. Initiatives like this contribute to the goal of diversifying the economy as part of the Oman Vision 2040 plan,” he said.

Yusuf Nalwala, Managing Director, Al Ansari group, remembers coming to Oman in February 1977. Long term residency programme, according to him, is a positive step towards reinforcing an entrepreneur’s confidence in the country.

“Any business needs time to settle and flourish. Two-year visas did not give that encouragement. Now, this system is going to change people’s perception. In fact, it clearly shows that the government cares and encourages people to trust and prosper along with the country,” he said.

Commenting on the possibility of the revival of the economy, Yusuf Nalwala said, “Sustainable recovery for the economy normally comes from the GDP. Oman is witnessing increased oil prices, positive steps by the government to reinforce

confidence in the investor. If both these factors continue, Oman’s economy is bound to bounce back with a thumping speed.”

“The business community has suffered a lot due to Covid restrictions and lower cash flow in the market for the last two years. A positive outlook will replace this pessimistic approach. That certainly will give impetus to the economy. Most importantly, the government must continue to promote business. Make all bureaucratic procedures simplified and take bold, inclusive steps that do not differentiate from locals and expats,” he said.

Kiran Asher, Group Managing Director, Al Ansari group, said, “The scheme coupled with other initiatives like the 100-per cent business ownership are a boon for the investing community and will help build the confidence. The long term residency scheme is a definite

“**The investor residency card is another tool in the government’s suite of measures to attract investment into Oman. Initiatives like this contribute to the goal of diversifying the economy as part of the Oman Vision 2040 plan**

STEPHEN THOMAS

Renaissance CEO

attraction for foreign investors, as it lends stability and longevity to businesses in Oman.”

“In the Middle East region, Oman is considered a home away from home for many. Its beauty, peace, cleanliness, tolerance towards all religions, varied education institutes and hospitality are key reasons people want to stay in the country.

“This scheme will now formally allow investors to make this their home. For long term residents like myself — this is a comforting move as Oman is my only home and this scheme allows me to comfortably make it my official home,” he said.

Sasikumar Moorkanat, Managing Director & CEO of Moon Iron & Steel Company, called it a confidence-building measure among the business community.

“Personally, it is quite an honour to be among the first recipients of

the long term residency in Oman. I fully understand the depth of responsibility and the confidence the country has reposed on me. I would like to give back to the Sultanate only the best. MISCO has been able to generate jobs in hundreds with our manufacturing plant in Sohar Industrial Estate and we aim to do so much more at different

levels with more projects in the pipeline.”

“Oman has immense potential to emerge as a production hub in the non-oil sector. With the abundant resources available in this country, a lot of diversification is possible, and it is great to see the government supporting investors to realise that potential,” he said.



الواجهة البحرية وخدمات المراسي
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PAKISTAN SOCIAL CLUB OMAN

Notice for Extra Ordinary Meeting 2021

With reference of Ministry of social development Oman letter no **MW-212450974** Members are hereby notified that the extra ordinary Meeting of Pakistan Social Club Oman will be held on Saturday 16th October 2021 at 4:00 pm at Crown Plaza al Qurum The following will be the agenda for the meeting:

Agenda:

1. Recitation of verses from the Holy Quran.
2. Address by the Secretary General.
3. General Assembly Meeting will start for the period 2021-2022 (Board of Directors).

Note:

1. Members with 6 month’s older valid memberships & life members are eligible to attend the AGM & members exceeding 1 year membership status can contest in election.
2. Fully vaccinated Persons can participate only.

All are requested to keep their Membership and Residence Cards with them to attend the meeting.

Pakistan Social Club-Oman
GSM: 93955004



الواجهة البحرية وخدمات المراسي
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(JOB VACANCY FOR OMANI NATIONALS ONLY)

For detailed job description visit
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كلية مزون Mazoon College



إعلان الدعوة لحضور اجتماع الجمعية العامة العادية السنوية

يسر مجلس إدارة كلية مزون ش.م.ع. دعوة المساهمين الكرام لحضور اجتماع الجمعية العامة العادية السنوية للشركة والمقرعده في تمام الساعة العاشرة صباحاً يوم السبت الموافق ٣٠/ أكتوبر/ ٢٠٢١م بمقر الكلية الكائن في مرتفعات المطار وفي حال عدم اكتمال النصاب القانوني للجمعية سيتم عقد جمعية عامة عادية ثانية في تمام الحادية عشرة صباحاً من يوم الاحد الموافق ٣١/ أكتوبر/ ٢٠٢١م بمقر الكلية الكائن بمرتفعات المطار لمناقشة جدول الأعمال التالي:

١. دراسة تقرير مجلس الإدارة عن الفترة المالية المنتهية في ٣١/ ١٠/ ٢٠٢١م والموافقة عليه.

٢. دراسة تقرير مراقب الحسابات والموافقة على الميزانية العمومية وحساب الأرباح والخسائر عن الفترة المالية المنتهية في ٣١/ ١٠/ ٢٠٢١م.

٣. التصديق على بدل حضور جلسات مجلس الإدارة واللجان المنبثقة الذي تقاضاه أعضاء مجلس الإدارة عن الفترة المالية المنتهية وتحديد مقدار البدل للسنة المالية القادمة.

٤. إحاطة الجمعية بالتعاملات التي أجرتها الشركة مع الأطراف ذات العلاقة خلال الفترة المالية المنتهية في ٣١/ ١٠/ ٢٠٢١م.

٥. انتخاب وتعيين أعضاء مجلس الإدارة للمقعدين اللذين لم يتم ملؤهما فعلى من يرغب في الترشح لعضوية مجلس الإدارة تعبئة استمارة الترشيح المعدة لذلك من قبل وزارة التجارة والصناعة وترويج الاستثمار وتسليمها الفاضلة /

عاشقة بنت سيف الكعبية وللاستفسار الرجاء الاتصال على هاتفي رقم ٩٦٦٥٦٥٨ / ٢٤٥١٣٣٢١ قبل انعقاد الجمعية بيومي عمل.

٦. دراسة مقترح توزيع أنصبة الأرباح على المساهمين والموافقة عليه، بنسبة ٦٠٪ من صافي الأرباح أي ما يعادل ٣٩٢,٠٠٠ بيسة للسهم الواحد.

٧. تعيين مراقبي الحسابات للسنة المالية الجديدة ٢٠٢٢ وتحديد أتعابهم.

ووفقاً للنظام الأساسي للشركة يحق لأي مساهم أن يفوض خطياً أي شخص آخر لحضور الاجتماع والتصويت على القرارات على أن يكون التفويض على بطاقة التفويض المرفقة بالدعوة، ويجب بالنسبة للشخص الطبيعي أن يرفق مع بطاقة

التفويض نسخة من البطاقة الشخصية للبالغين، وجواز السفر للنساء والقصر الذين لا يحملون بطاقة شخصية، وبطاقة مقيم أو جواز السفر لغير العمانيين. كما يجب بالنسبة للشخص الاعتباري أن تكون بطاقة التفويض موقعة من أحد

الأشخاص المفوضين بالتوقيع ومختومة بختم الشركة ومرفقا بها نسخة من شهادة التسجيل في السجل التجاري ونموذج المفوضين بالتوقيع، ويرجو مجلس الإدارة من جميع المساهمين الكرام الحضور على الحضور قبل الموعد بنصف ساعة

على الأقل، (وبما يتفق مع نص المادتين ١٦٨، ١٦٩ من قانون الشركات التجارية رقم ١٨/ ٢٠١٩).

وفي حالة وجود أي استفسارات يرجى الاتصال بالمحامي / زكريا الجياني - المستشار القانوني على هاتف رقم ٩٩٧٨٧٨٧٩

المستشار القانوني

رئيس مجلس الإدارة

TWO ARREST WARRANTS FOR EX-MINISTERS DIFFICULT TO SERVE Beirut blast probe stand-off roils Lebanese cabinet

BEIRUT: A standoff between the judge investigating the disastrous Beirut port blast and top politicians he seeks to question roiled Lebanon's cabinet after the inquiry was suspended on Tuesday for the second time in less than three weeks.

The investigation has faced obstacles since judge Tarek Bitar sought to query some of Lebanon's most powerful people on suspicion they were aware of the stored chemicals involved in the August 4, 2020 explosion but did nothing to avert it.

Bitar has been under enormous pressure from groups that accuse his investigation of political bias and have mounted a smear campaign against him. The leader of the Hezbollah said on Monday it wanted Bitar removed from the case.

On Tuesday the inquiry was again shelved on the basis of another complaint accusing Bitar of bias.

The impasse spilled into a cabinet meeting on Tuesday where ministers, mostly from Hezbollah

and the Amal movement, pushed for Bitar's ouster in a heated discussion that ended inconclusively, two sources with direct knowledge of the matter said.

The cabinet is due to meet again to discuss the inquiry, a former finance minister against whom Bitar issued an arrest warrant said in an interview with Lebanon's Al Mayadeen TV.

The warrant for Ali Hassan Khalil, a senior member of Amal and a Hezbollah ally, was the second to be issued for an ex-minister and was the main cause of Tuesday's escalating tension.

Khalil said he deemed the warrant to be illegal and he would not heed it. He said Bitar was being influenced by politics and added: "The legal path that is being followed in this investigation is pushing the country towards civil strife."

Asked by Al Mayadeen whether some ministers would resign if Bitar was not removed, Khalil said: "All options for political escalation are open."



A file photo of demonstrators waving Lebanese flags during protests near the site of a blast at Beirut's port area, Lebanon. - Reuters

The port explosion, one of the biggest non-nuclear blasts on record, killed more than 200 people and devastated swathes of

the capital Beirut. Senior officials from across the political spectrum have refused to show up for questioning and arrest warrants

appeared unlikely to be enforced.

US State Department spokesperson Ned Price accused Hezbollah of threatening and

intimidating Lebanon's judiciary, and of "illicit activities (that) threaten Lebanon's security, stability, and sovereignty".

He added that US Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland would visit Beirut on Wednesday for further "important" bilateral talks with Lebanese authorities.

Bitar had wanted to interrogate senior politicians on suspicion of criminal negligence as they had served in posts where they would have been in a position to know about the ammonium nitrate stored unsafely at the port for years.

A session of Lebanon's supreme defence council, chaired by President Michel Aoun, on Tuesday refused the permission sought by the judge to pursue Tony Saliba, director general of state security, an official source said.

The investigation was first suspended in late September on the basis of a complaint questioning Bitar's impartiality. A court rejected the complaint on procedural grounds, allowing Bitar to resume the inquiry. — Reuters

Tunisia, Morocco hoteliers eye an end to Covid downturn

HAMMAMET, Tunisia: The October sun warms the sands of Hammamet beach on Tunisia's east coast, but the coronavirus pandemic still casts a shadow and visitor numbers are yet to bounce back.

After two ruined seasons in a row, operators in Tunisia and Morocco are licking their wounds and hoping the lifting of travel restrictions will spell better days.

This year was better than the last, "which was really a terrible season. But (2021) was still only half as good as 2019," said Haykel Akrouf of the Bel Azur hotel.

The luxury facility, with swimming pools overlooking rows of deckchairs along the shore, had to halve its capacity of 1,000 beds in July as a spike in coronavirus cases battered Tunisia.

The country found itself on European nations' red lists, making it virtually impossible for holidaymakers from major markets including France, Germany and Italy to visit. But as restrictions have begun to ease, some have managed to reach the North African country.

Elena Bakurova flew in from Vladivostok in the east of Russia



This picture shows a view of empty sunbeds and shades along a beach in Tunisia's resort town of Hammamet, about 66 km south of the capital Tunis. - AFP

to celebrate her 44th birthday and "discover Africa".

Yanis Merabti, from France's Lyon, said he had chosen a holiday in Tunisia for the price and the weather. "France isn't like this in October. You can't get to the beach or enjoy the sun, it's cold," he said. "It's so nice here."

Akrouf said the hotel was at around 30 per cent capacity, with Russians making up roughly half that number.

"We are talking about survival — it's nowhere near profitable," he

said.

Dora Milad, head of the FTH hoteliers' association, said the "catastrophic" 2020 season had battered the sector, with hotel stays down by 80 per cent. This year saw an 11 per cent uptick, she said. "That's very slightly better... but it's still far from normal."

In a good year like 2019, Tunisia registers about nine million hotel stays, and the tourism sector accounts for up to 14 per cent of gross domestic product — providing livelihoods to around

two million Tunisians.

Nearby Morocco also depends heavily on visitors to its coastal resorts and historic inland cities.

This season saw a modest influx of tourists when the country reopened its borders in June following months of closure.

Roughly 3.5 million visitors had entered the country by the end of August — up from 2.2 million the year before.

But that is still far short of the 13 million registered in the same period of 2019.

Facing its own spiking Covid-19 caseload, Morocco was forced to impose new restrictions, such as limiting travel to the tourist hot spots of Marrakech and Agadir.

"The recovery has been focused on the coastal cities, but it has been slowed down by the restrictions imposed in August," said Hamid Bentahar, the president of the country's tourism federation.

In neighbouring Algeria, the sector depends largely on domestic tourism, also hit hard by the pandemic. National Hoteliers' Federation chief Ahmed Oulbachir said facilities were operating at just a quarter of their normal rate. — AFP

Turkey lashes out at US, Russia after Syria attacks

ISTANBUL: Turkey on Wednesday said the United States and Russia bore responsibility for a spate of deadly attacks on its border with Syria, stressing that Ankara reserved the right to self-defence.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned that Turkey had "no patience left" with Syrian-based Kurdish militias it blames for cross-border rocket strikes and attacks against its personnel.

Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on Wednesday accused the US and Russia of failing to adequately police a buffer zone in northern Syria, set up under two agreements in 2019, and aimed at pushing the Kurdish forces away from Turkey.

"Unfortunately, Russia and the United States also bear responsibility for the latest attacks aimed at civilians and the police," Cavusoglu told a televised news conference.

"We will do whatever is needed to cleanse the terrorists from those regions."

Turkey has blamed the reported attacks on Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which Ankara views as the Syrian branch of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Washington relied heavily on



Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu

the YPG to defeat IS group who overran large swathes of Syria and neighbouring Iraq in 2014.

The PKK is proscribed as a terrorist organisation by the US and EU. Ankara wants Washington to cut its ties with the YPG and fully back Turkey's campaigns in Syria.

Turkey's official Anadolu news agency said two special forces officers were killed and two wounded when their armoured personnel carrier was hit by a guided missile fired by the YPG in northern Syria on Sunday.

The US embassy on Tuesday expressed condolences to the officers' families and condemned reported mortar attacks fired from Syria at Turkey's south-eastern border district of Karkamis. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BAGHDAD

Majority groups denounce Iraq election as 'scam'

Two days after Iraq's legislative election, some parties and armed groups denounced early poll results as "manipulation" and a "scam".

Sunday's election — the fifth in the war-scarred country since the 2003 US-led invasion toppled Saddam Hussein — was marked by record low turnout of 41 per cent.

According to preliminary results from the electoral commission, the biggest winner was the movement of Moqtada



Sadr, which increased its lead to 73 of the assembly's 329 seats.

This boosts Sadr's leverage when it comes to choosing Iraq's next prime minister and cabinet.

TEHRAN

EU envoy to visit Iran Thursday amid N-talks push

The EU envoy charged with coordinating talks on reviving a troubled nuclear deal between Iran and major powers is to visit Tehran on Thursday, the Iranian foreign ministry said.

Enrique Mora's visit "is a follow-up to consultations between the two sides on matters of shared interest, particularly Iran-EU relations, Afghanistan and the nuclear agreement," a ministry statement said.

The deal, which gave Iran sanctions relief in return for



curbs on its nuclear programme, has been on life support since 2018, when then US president Donald Trump unilaterally pulled out and reimposed crippling sanctions.

CAIRO

Blaze hits Egypt film festival site day before opening

A fire erupted on Wednesday at the site of a film festival on Egypt's Red Sea coast, briefly threatening its cancellation before being brought under control, officials said.

The blaze "damaged a small part of the main pavilion" of El Gouna Film Festival just a day before its scheduled opening.

Fifteen people who suffered smoke inhalation were rushed to hospital for treatment, a civil defence force official said.

The brainchild of property



mogul Samih Sawiris, one of Africa's richest men, the festival has attracted Hollywood stars including Forest Whitaker and Owen Wilson in previous editions.

In brief

■ TOKYO



JAPAN'S OPPOSITION PARTY FOCUSES ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Japan's largest opposition group unveiled a campaign platform on Wednesday that said it would stand for rights like different surnames for couples.

The Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDPJ), led by Yukio Edano, is facing a critical test in the October 31 general election, the first it is contesting since its formation last year, hoping to make a dent in the ruling party coalition. But it is struggling in opinion polls, and with the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) also emphasising social safety nets and similar policies long espoused by the Democratic Party from which the CDPJ was formed.

■ MANILA



DEATH TOLL FROM STORM HITS 13 IN PHILIPPINES

The death toll from landslides and flash floods caused by storm Kompasu in the Philippines has risen to 13, with eight still missing, the national disaster agency said on Wednesday.

The latest fatalities were a 35-year-old woman killed in a landslide and a 52-year-old man who drowned in floods in the northern province of Ilocos Sur, the agency said.

Landslides and floods earlier killed six people in the nearby province of Benguet, one in Cagayan province and four in the western province of Palawan. Kompasu has left the Philippines and is moving towards China, the weather bureau said.

■ JAKARTA



DOUBTS OVER DEMAND ON EVE OF BALI REOPENING

Hours before Indonesia's top holiday destination Bali reopens to foreign tourists after 18 months of pandemic hiatus, the island is lacking one crucial ingredient: international flights.

Tourism-reliant Bali is scheduled to reopen on Thursday and though its Ngurah Rai international airport has carried out simulations preparing for the tourists to return. "So far there is no schedule," said Taufan Yudhistira, a spokesman for the airport. Indonesia's tight immigration measures during the pandemic have devastated the island, with widespread closures of hotels.

NORTH KOREAN ARMY GIVES BRUTAL SHOW OF 'STRENGTH'

UN RIGHTS REPORT WARNS OF NORTH KOREA 'STARVATION RISK'



Fireworks are set off to commemorate the 76th founding anniversary of the Workers' Party of Korea in Pyongyang, North Korea. — Reuters

SEOUL: A shirtless soldier smashes two glass bottles together, adding to a pile of shards on the ground as North Korean leader Kim Jong Un looks on, grinning. The man lies down on the debris and a comrade puts a thick concrete block on his chest, before smashing it with a sledgehammer.

The scene was part of a pain-defying display put on by the North Korean army for the opening of a defence exhibition this week that showcased the nuclear-armed country's weapons. The soldiers — some in uniform, others topless — punched their way through layers of concrete bricks, or broke them with their heads.

Others were hammered on their arm or hand, and one lay on a bed of nails to have a block broken on his chest.

Leader Kim looked on clapping and smiling, surrounded by officers and with his sister and close adviser Kim Yo Jong at his side, footage on state broadcaster KCTV showed on Tuesday.

Korea has a long tradition of martial arts, and breaking is part of its indigenous sport of taekwondo — developed by a South Korean general who later fell out with the South's military-

North Korea's most vulnerable are "at risk of starvation" with the economy worsening due to a self-imposed coronavirus blockade, and UN sanctions

UN HUMAN RIGHTS EXPERT

backed dictator Park Chung-hee and became a frequent visitor to Pyongyang, where he died in 2002. It is now often used by the North to symbolise its military prowess. "These soldiers, embraced and raised by our party, have demonstrated to the whole world the strength, bravery and morale of the Korean People's Army," newsreader Ri Chun-hee — the North's most famous presenter — said over the images.

The arms exhibition — at which Kim blamed the United States for tensions on the peninsula and accused the South of hypocrisy — is part of the commemorations for

the anniversary of the foundation of the ruling Workers' Party.

Kim has overseen rapid progress in Pyongyang's banned nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes, which have earned it multiple international sanctions. And Ri did not forget to declare the source of the participants' strength. It was "bestowed upon them by our dear leader Kim Jong Un", she said.

UN REPORT

North Korea's most vulnerable are "at risk of starvation" with the economy worsening due to a self-imposed coronavirus blockade, and UN sanctions imposed over the country's nuclear programmes should be eased, a UN human rights expert said on Wednesday.

The nation has been behind a rigid blockade since early last year to protect itself from the pandemic, with the economy suffering and trade with key partner China dwindling to a trickle. In June, state-run KCTV admitted North Korea was facing a "food crisis", sounding the alarm in a country with a moribund agricultural sector that has long struggled to feed the population.

— Agencies



Men play a game of Janggi, also known as Korean chess, on a street in Seoul on Wednesday. — AFP

South Korea launches panel to debate 'living with Covid-19'

SEOUL: South Korea established a panel on Wednesday to debate a strategy on how to "live with Covid-19" in the long-term, as the country seeks to phase out coronavirus restrictions and reopen the economy amid rising vaccination levels.

Under the strategy, the government aims to relax coronavirus restrictions for citizens who can prove they have been fully vaccinated, while encouraging asymptomatic and mild Covid-19

patients aged below 70 to recover at home, the health ministry said last week.

The government will also focus on the number of hospitalisations and deaths rather than new daily infections, and will consider not publishing the latter on a daily basis, Yonhap news agency has reported.

"We will turn Covid-19 into a controlled infectious disease and no longer a fear of the unknown, and return a complete routine to the citizens," Prime Minister Kim Boo-kyum told the panel's first committee meeting

on Wednesday, adding that mandatory mask-wearing would not be immediately scrapped under the new policy.

South Korea never imposed a full lockdown but has been under its tightest social distancing curbs since July.

These include limited operating hours for restaurants, cafes, saunas and indoor gyms - which have hit the self-employed and small businesses particularly hard - and a cap on gatherings of more than two people after 6 pm (09:00 GMT) in and around Seoul.

The new strategy comes as vaccination, initially bogged down by a supply shortage, has picked up pace. The country has given at least one Covid-19 vaccine dose to 78.1 per cent of its population, while 60.7 per cent are fully vaccinated.

In September, the government announced plans to expedite a phased return to normalcy starting November when 70 per cent of its 52 million people are expected to have been fully inoculated. — Reuters

We will turn Covid-19 into a controlled infectious disease and no longer a fear of the unknown

Afghan women nurses work alongside men



This picture shows a midwife (L) and a nutrition counsellor weighing a baby at the Tangi Saidan clinic in Daymirdad district of Wardak province. — AFP

Shah, a man and the only surgeon, who carries out procedures on women. It takes hours to reach the clinic from some surrounding villages, and in the winter, when

snow blocks the roads, patients are often carried on foot.

Reaching better health facilities in the capital Kabul, a day trip away on rocky, winding roads, is

out of the question for people in this impoverished mountain area. There are seven women among the clinic's 28 staff members: one nurse, a vaccine specialist, two midwives, a nutritionist and two cleaners, often working side by side with men.

"When it is necessary, law permits it," Mohammad, the Taliban official in charge of health care in Daymirdad district, said.

The Taliban, who seized power in August as US-led forces withdrew from Afghanistan, have yet to issue clear guidelines on how they will govern in line with law. They initially ordered women to refrain from returning to work until systems were in place.

The group later called women health workers back to clinics and hospitals, but many were too afraid

to resume their duties.

Others in Kabul, the most progressive Afghan city, said rules on segregation made their work too difficult.

But Jamila, the sole female nurse at the Tangi Saidan clinic, said she had never had to worry about working in Daymirdad, although she is chaperoned by a male "mahran", or guardian, when she does the night shift.

"People don't have a problem with men doctors, because a doctor is like a mahram," she said. Clear rules govern this coexistence — one of few exceptions granted by the Taliban.

When there are no male nurses, a female nurse can care for male patients. And when there are no female doctors, a male physician can treat women. — AFP

Italy divided as mandatory workplace Covid pass looms

ROME: Covid-19 health passes will be mandatory for all workers in Italy from Friday, a measure that some politicians, unions and businesses fear will cause shortages and disruptions rather than boost inoculations and output as the government hopes.

Prime Minister Mario Draghi's cabinet approved the rule — one of the world's strictest anti-Covid measures — in mid-September, making it obligatory from October 15 for all workers either to show proof of vaccination, a negative test or recent recovery from infection.

The government hoped the move would convince unvaccinated Italians to change their minds, but with over 80 per cent of residents over the age of 12 already fully inoculated and infection rates low, that surge has not materialised.

The rightist League and Brothers of Italy parties and some unions say that, to address the risk of staff shortages, the validity of Covid tests should be extended from 48 to 72 hours, and they should be free for unvaccinated workers.

"We will not be able to grant a swab every 48 hours to all the unvaccinated. The business people I am in contact with are extremely worried," said the League's Luca Zaia, governor of the wealthy north-eastern region of Veneto.

Some 15 per cent of private and 8 per cent of public sector workers have no Green Pass, an internal government document seen by



A man shows his Covid-19 'Green Pass' before entering the Colosseum as Italy prepares to become the first European country to make the Green Pass mandatory for all workers in Rome. — Reuters

Reuters estimates. Under the new rules, effective until year-end, they will be suspended without pay and face a fine of up to €1,500 (\$1,730) if they try to work on regardless.

The Green Pass policy has the backing of a majority of Italians, polls show, but it has also triggered angry demonstrations, and workers who have declined to get vaccinated have threatened to block the major port of Trieste if it is not rescinded.

Draghi has support from industrial lobby Confindustria, whose vice-president denied businesses risked being disruption and said it would favour of making the vaccine mandatory.

Public Administration Minister

Polls show the Green Pass policy has the backing of a majority of Italians, but has also triggered angry demonstrations

Renato Brunetta said the certificate would help to end remote working for civil servants by allowing fuller offices, a boost for small businesses in city centres.

But unions say the pass is not enough to ensure workplace safety from Covid and have criticised the decision to suspend the salaries of "no-vax" workers. "This is a very restrictive measure that could

have a serious impact on social stability and exacerbate an already complicated situation," the UIL union said in a statement.

But the government has stopped short of that, partly because one of the members of Draghi's left-right coalition government, the nationalist League party of Matteo Salvini, opposed compulsory vaccines.

Once the government ignored the union's advice, they successfully requested that unvaccinated workers should get fired, but only suspended. But they did not manage to also obtain free Covid tests for workers, paid by the state or employees.

— AFP

Austrian opposition seeks graft inquiry for Kurz

VIENNA: Austrian opposition parties agreed on Wednesday to set up a parliamentary commission of inquiry into alleged corruption by officials from the ruling conservative party after its leader Sebastian Kurz stepped down as chancellor.

Kurz denies wrongdoing but has been placed under investigation along with nine others including senior aides on suspicion of corruption offences to do with using public funds to manipulate public opinion in favour of Kurz when he was seeking to take over as party leader and later chancellor.

He stepped down on Saturday at the behest of his junior coalition partner, the Greens, to save their coalition. He has been succeeded as chancellor by close ally Alexander Schallenberg, a diplomat and relative newcomer to politics who says he will work closely with Kurz who remains party leader.

"We believe that what we have seen until now is just the tip of the iceberg," lawmaker Kai Jan

Krainer of the Social Democrats told a joint news conference with colleagues from the two other opposition parties in parliament.

Parliamentary commissions of inquiry in Austria have the power to seize documents and question witnesses under oath.

An earlier commission on possible corruption under Kurz's previous coalition with the far right obtained troves of text-message exchanges that became part of prosecutors' corruption case against Kurz and others.

Kurz is separately under investigation on suspicion of perjury over testimony he gave to that commission. Kurz, who is now also taking over as his party's top lawmaker in parliament, says all allegations against him are false.

While the opposition parties can set up such a commission without the two ruling parties' support, Krainer said Kurz's conservatives can delay its approval and it might not be able to hold its first session until next year. — Reuters



Austrian Foreign Minister Michael Linhart arrives for a meeting of the ministerial council at the Federal Chancellery in Vienna. — AFP

Flying taxis to take to the sky in mid-2020s: Vertical Aerospace

LONDON: Fed up with traffic jams? Imagine a world where your taxi takes to the skies and lands on top of your office building, recharges and sets off afresh. That's the vision of Stephen Fitzpatrick, founder and CEO of Britain's Vertical Aerospace, which is set to raise \$394 million in a merger with a blank-cheque New York-listed company, and who says his aircraft will be flying by the mid-2020s.

And he's not alone. Some of the world's most high-profile engineers and airlines believe Vertical is onto something with its plan for zero-emission mini-aircraft to almost silently take four passengers through the skies for up to 193 km.

American Airlines, aircraft



Heathrow to Canary Wharf flights to take 15 minutes

STEPHEN FITZPATRICK
CEO of Britain's Vertical Aerospace

lessor Avolon, engineers Honeywell and Rolls-Royce, as well as Microsoft's M12 unit are investing in the merger, which is



A general view of carrots as a customer buys items at 'Fritz Fruit Stall' owned by Eamonn Fritz Fitzpatrick, who has been selling fruits and vegetables on Northampton market for 58 years, in Northampton, Britain. — Reuters

expected to complete by the end of the year.

Fitzpatrick, who also set up OVO Energy, Britain's no.3 energy retailer, said Vertical flights

between London's Heathrow airport and its Canary Wharf financial district will take 15 minutes and cost £50 (\$68) per passenger.

That potential is attracting airlines' attention. More than 1,000 VA-X4 aircraft have been pre-ordered by customers. Interest in the zero-emission aircraft comes at a time when aviation companies are under mounting pressure from investors to help decarbonise the sector and boost their environmental, social and governance scores.

"We are going to sign deals. We're finding the appetite and the demand from airlines to be really strong," Fitzpatrick said. The biggest challenge for Vertical is certifying its aircraft, which Fitzpatrick said it is on track to do by the end of 2024, funded by new money from the merger.

Fitzpatrick first had the idea

back in 2015 when he sat for hours in 10 lanes of gridlocked traffic in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Back then, there weren't many competitors, he said, but today analysts estimate there are more than 100 companies working on rival electric Vertical Take-Off and Landing (eVTOL) aircraft.

The VA-X4 is still in construction and will start test flights early next year. Fitzpatrick believes Vertical's partnerships will help it emerge as a winner.

Using battery technology from the car industry, and tried and tested electrical propulsion units and motors, and backed by Honeywell's electronics, Fitzpatrick has "no doubt" that the VA-X4 will fly. — Reuters

WASHINGTON

US calls ransomware summit without Russia

Washington has called about 30 nations together on Wednesday and Thursday to boost the international fight against ransomware, a senior White House official said, noting that Russia was not invited. The United States has been hit, especially in the first half of 2021, by a series of ransomware attacks that have seen cyber-extortionists seize data or networks in exchange for cryptocurrency payments.

Ransomware attacks have been often blamed on Russian-



speaking hacker groups or those operating from Russian territory. The United Kingdom, Australia, India, Japan, France, Germany, South Korea, the European Union, Israel, Kenya and Mexico are among those due to join the virtual summit. — AFP

WARSAW

Poland to spend over \$400m on Belarus border

Poland plans to spend over \$404 million on building a wall on its border with Belarus, according to a draft bill lawmakers are due to discuss, in a bid to stem the flow of migrants trying to cross. In August, Poland began building a barbed wire fence along its border with Belarus to curb the illegal border crossings despite criticism that some migrants were being treated inhumanely. The wall, which would come with a system of motion sensors and cameras, would further bolster



border security.

Poland and fellow EU countries Lithuania and Latvia have reported sharp increases in migrants from countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq crossing their borders from Belarus.

— Reuters

VATICAN CITY

Pope John Paul I put on path to sainthood

Pope John Paul I, who reigned for only 33 days in 1978, will be beatified, putting him on the path to eventual sainthood in the Roman Catholic Church, the Vatican said. A statement said Pope Francis had approved a decree recognising a miracle attributed to the intercession of the late Italian pope, whose birth name was Albino Luciani.

John Paul I was elected on August 26, 1978 to succeed Paul VI and died unexpectedly on September 28. He was succeeded



by John Paul II, making 1978 go down in Church history as the year of the three popes. His sudden death gave rise to several books that alleged conspiracy theories but they were generally debunked and he is believed to have died of heart attack.

Climate change
may already
impacted
majority

The effects of climate change could already be impacting 85 per cent of the world's population, an analysis of tens of thousands of scientific studies said.

A team of researchers used machine learning to comb through vast troves of research published between 1951 and 2018 and found some 100,000 papers that potentially documented evidence of climate change's effects on the Earth's systems.

"We have overwhelming evidence that climate change is affecting all continents, all systems," study author Max Callaghan said in an interview. He added there was a "huge amount of evidence" showing the ways in which these impacts are being felt.

The researchers taught a computer to identify climate-relevant studies, generating a list of papers on topics from disrupted butterfly migration to heat-related human deaths to forestry cover changes.

The studies only rarely established a direct link to global warming — so Callaghan and teams from the Mercator Research Institute and Climate Analytics, both in Berlin, took on the task themselves.

Using location data from the studies, they divided the globe into a grid and mapped where documented climate impacts matched climate-driven trends in temperature and precipitation.

For each grid cell they asked "is it getting hotter or colder or wetter or dryer outside of the bounds of natural variability?" said Callaghan. Then, he said, they checked if this kind of heating matched expectations from climate models.

They found 80 per cent of the globe — home to 85 per cent of the world's population, had generated impact studies that matched predictions for temperature and precipitation changes due to global warming. Crucially, he said, research has disproportionately documented climate impacts in richer nations, with fewer studies in highly-vulnerable regions. For example he said that trends in temperatures and rainfall in Africa could be linked to climate change. — AFP

We have overwhelming evidence that climate change is affecting all continents, all systems. There was a huge amount of evidence showing the ways in which these impacts are being felt
MAX CALLAGHAN
Study author



A SEA EXERCISE
Two Canadair planes from the French Civil Protection, drop water the sea during an exercise at the entrance of the Vieux Port in Marseille on the first day of the Firemen congress, southern France, on Wednesday.
— AFP

The call of the conscience is supreme!



Ali Al Matani
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The people of Oman wrote a great epic recently by helping each other and curing the wounds and woes caused by the cyclone Shaheen. People started a national campaign responding to the call of their own conscience to do their duty in South and North Al Batinah. This will be recorded in the history in golden letters. Those who reached out to the people of these two governorates will be remembered as role models for the coming generations as well as to others who live elsewhere. This is for their volunteer work and quick response to the needs of their co-countrymen. These people reached there with whatever was in their possession to share and bring back the life of those who have suffered during the cyclone to normal.

It is a matter of satisfaction that the people of the country have left no doubt that if there is any trouble, they will be available with whatever they have. The call of the conscience is supreme for them.

More than 15,000 volunteers demonstrated their ability to scan entire areas affected by the cyclone in Al Suwaiq and Al Khabourah. Not only this, what they did and offered was mind boggling. They were there to share their pain and sorrow at this difficult moment. They set the finest example of sacrifice in the history of modern Oman.

When the people of Al Suwaiq and

Al Khabourah saw this warm national response to their hardships caused by the cyclone, they felt relieved. All sorts of help was available for them at their doorsteps to the level they the people of these two wilayats forgot what they suffered during the cyclone when they saw that common people from far-flung areas cleaning their streets, passages and doorsteps of the dirt and debris caused by the cyclone.

These volunteers reached the affected areas with material help also. They went there with every relief items from foodstuff to anything they can manage to get. One after other, trucks lined-up in Al Khabourah and Al Suwaiq with these gifts which have come to them from their brethren who lived in other parts of Oman. All this was to make their lives easy after so much of difficulties created by the natural disaster. This was so much that the people of these two wilayats forgot their sufferings. Whatever has reached there was more than what they needed.

What we saw was an example of the qualities and capabilities of the people of Oman. They make history of their cooperation, compassion, and cohesion with each other during any difficult moment.

The epic which the people of Oman wrote was inspired by the vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

who believed in providing all possible facilities, safety and security to them. Soon after the cyclone, he ordered a quick assessment of the damages caused by this natural disaster so that citizens and residents who suffered get adequate support and their life bounces back to normal. This is the spirit which inspired these people who reached there with whatever was available with them.

Cyclones are difficult natural circumstances. Many countries such as Germany, the United States, and Japan face them regularly. There is no infrastructure which can prevent them from creating havoc and damage. They face all this, call for international support and carry on their life. Al Suwaiq registered the highest level of rain in the world. This shows that the cyclone which hit the area was most violent. Nobody can be held responsible for this natural disaster.

It is neither possible to assess the entire disaster overnight, nor possible to bring everything back to normal with the press of a button. The concerned ministerial committee concerned has asked Galfar to repair the roads as soon as possible.

There is no doubt that the country has suffered heavily due to the cyclones and other natural disasters. But the most satisfying thing is the fact that the entire country stood together and felt each other's pain.

Changing the Africa population narrative



Hippolyte Fofack
The author is Chief Economist and Director of Research at the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank)

Economic policy debates about Africa are too often clouded by calls for population control and lower fertility rates. And the United Nations is fuelling the problem by projecting that Africa's population will double by 2050. In fact, Africa's overall fertility rate has fallen by more than 36 per cent since 1970 to 4.2 births per woman, and is projected to decline to 2.1 births per woman later this century.

Moreover, it is disturbing that so many commentators advocate population control for a region whose population was decimated by centuries of slavery and colonisation. Partly as a result of that legacy, Africa has the lowest population density of any region, at 46 people per square kilometre, compared to 150 people per square kilometre in Asia and 112

in Europe.

A far more salient statistic is that Africa is the world's youngest continent, with more than 70 per cent of its population aged under 30. Harnessing the potential of this youth cohort is both a key challenge and an enormous opportunity.

To that end, the Africa Progress Group, chaired by former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, released a report earlier this year entitled Making Africa's Population an Asset. The study is a welcome contribution to discussions about the relationship between the continent's demography and its development.

Africa's past inability to invest sustainably in its young people and deploy them effectively to meet key development challenges has been very costly. For example, despite the

fact that unemployment rates have been at Great-Depression levels for decades, governments habitually rely on international partners to build infrastructure, instead of using public-works programmes to expand job opportunities for young people. This has impeded learning by doing, marginalised young Africans, and exacerbated the debt-trap risks associated with the highly externally dependent growth model.

Human capital constraints can also have implications for Africans' health, as the Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated. Countries that invested in their people and developed homegrown research and economic infrastructure were able to produce safe, effective vaccines in record time. African countries, which did not even

enter the global race to develop Covid-19 vaccines, have thus remained on the sidelines in the worldwide scramble for doses. Africa has the slowest vaccination rate of any continent, with just 7.2 per cent of its population having received at least one vaccine dose, far below the world average of 48.8 per cent.

The consequences of failing to capitalise on Africa's population are just as glaring in the security domain. A continent of nearly 1.4 billion people that is confronted with transnational terrorist networks has opted to outsource its security imperatives, mostly to former colonial powers. Rather than fostering peace and security, this approach has contributed to the entrenchment of terrorist groups across Africa and rising

casualties over the last decade.

But Africa's emerging youth bulge presents more opportunities than risks. True, if today's large cohort of young Africans cannot find gainful employment and earn satisfactory incomes, a demographic time bomb may materialise. Disenfranchised workers will become economic migrants, leading to a long-term brain drain, and targets for recruitment by transnational terrorist networks.

But if Africa trains its young people well and creates sufficient opportunities for them to drive endogenous growth, then the region will reap a huge demographic dividend.

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Sport

HALF-TIME TALK INSPIRED PLAYERS: IVANKOVIC



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ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 13

Oman kept alive their hopes after a 3-1 triumph against Vietnam on Tuesday in the fourth round of group B at Asian qualifiers – Road to Qatar 2022. The victory will equip the players with more encouragement and excitement ahead of their crunch fixture against China on November 11 in an away game before hosting Japan on November 15.

Oman head coach Branko Ivankovic expressed satisfaction over the result. “I am very proud with the final result of the fixture. The players showed a perfect performance. They delivered high efforts and deserved the win. I am happy that we made the community happy with the triumph,” he added.

During the break, the Croatian coach had some good session with the players and feels Oman’s good plan inspired the players to register



the winning goals. “We focused on ways to make a comeback in the game during the half-time. Many scoring attempts were created but

with no luck. However, the team managed to win the match,” he said.

The 67-year-old commented

on the league commencement soon and he said: “With start of domestic league, the players will get good match exposure and this will



We focused on ways to make a comeback in the game during the half-time. Many scoring attempts were created but with no luck. However, the team managed to win the match

BRANKO IVANKOVIC
Oman head coach

help them to focus and maintain the technical performance. The chances to join in the squad of the national team is open for any player who will deliver top show during the league,” he concluded.

The ‘Red Warriors’ began the campaign with a stunning 1-0 win over Asian heavyweights Japan. Then, the team suffered two defeats against Saudi Arabia and Australia in the second and third rounds respectively.

After the win against Vietnam, Oman moved up to third with six points and behind leaders Saudi Arabia who displaced Australia after the beat China 3-2.

Australia went down to Japan 2-1 to slip to the second spot. Japan are fourth with six points and China stand fifth with three points.

Vietnam, who made their debut appearance at the deciding round of AFC Asian Qualifiers, suffered their fourth consecutive defeat and are placed at the bottom of Group B.

Denmark book World Cup ticket, England held

PARIS: Denmark became the second team to qualify for the 2022 World Cup finals when they beat Austria by a single goal on Tuesday as England were frustrated by Hungary at Wembley.

Joakim Maehle scored in the 53rd minute to send the Danes to Qatar as they build on their surprise run at Euro 2020 this summer when they reached the semifinals. “You can only dream about things like this,” said Denmark midfielder Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg. “It’s crazy. This is huge for me, it’s huge for the team, for Danish football and for Denmark. With the age and quality we have, we will only keep growing.”

The Danes join Germany, who qualified on Monday, in the finals. Host nation Qatar qualify automatically. England sputtered as a combative Hungarian side held them to a 1-1 draw. The match was marred by ugly scenes at Wembley as Hungarian supporters clashed with stewards and police.

Gareth Southgate’s side fell behind to Roland Sallai’s disputed first-half penalty before John Stones stuck out a boot to score the



Denmark's Joakim Maehle (R) celebrates scoring with his teammates during the Group F match against Austria in Copenhagen. – AFP

equaliser in the 37th minute from Phil Foden’s cross.

Harry Kane failed to score in a qualifier for the first time in 16 games and was substituted as Hungary’s resolute defence kept a disjointed England side at bay. “We did not play at the level we need to, simple as that,” said Southgate.

England defender Tyrone Mings called for harsher punishments for

racism in football after it emerged the trouble at Wembley had flared after police had moved in to arrest a Hungarian supporter for what police called a “racially aggravated public order offence.”

England will be sure of reaching next year’s finals if they take four points from their final qualifiers against Albania and San Marino in November.



Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo (L) vies with Luxembourg's goalkeeper Anthony Moris during the World Cup Qatar 2022 qualification Group A match. – AFP

RONALDO HAT-TRICK

Poland are second behind England in Group I after a stormy win in Albania.

Play was halted and the teams left the pitch as fans threw bottles after Karol Swiderski scored the winning goal in the 77th minute. The teams later returned to complete the game.

Cristiano Ronaldo scored

two penalties in six minutes and completed the 10th international hat-trick of his career in the 87th minute as Portugal thrashed Luxembourg 5-0.

Bruno Fernandes and Joao Palhinha were the other scorers in the romp, but Portugal remain a point behind Serbia in Group A after the Serbs beat Azerbaijan 3-1 at home. — AFP

EUROPEAN WORLD CUP QUALIFYING RESULTS ON TUESDAY:

GROUP A

In Faro

Portugal 5 (Ronaldo 8-pen, 13-pen, 87, Fernandes 18, Joao Palhinha 69)

Luxembourg 0

In Belgrade

Serbia 3 (Vlahovic 30-pen, 53, Tadic 83-pen)

Azerbaijan 1 (Makhmudov 45+2)

GROUP B

In Tirana

Kosovo 1 (Muriqi 45-pen) Georgia 2 (Okriashvili 11, Davitashvili 82)

In Solna, Sweden

Sweden 2 (Forsberg 59-pen, Isak 69)

Greece 0

GROUP C

In Sofia

Bulgaria 2 (Nedevlev 53, 63) Northern Ireland 1 (Washington 35)

In Vilnius

Lithuania 0 Switzerland 4 (Embolio 31, 45, Steffen 42, Gavranovic 90+4)

GROUP D

In Nur-Sultan

Kazakhstan 0 Finland 2 (Pukki 45, 48)

In Lviv

Ukraine 1 (Yarmolenko 15) Bosnia and Herzegovina 1 (Ahmedhodzic 77)

GROUP E

In Copenhagen

Denmark 1 (Maehle 53) Austria 0

In Torshavn

Faroe Islands 0 Scotland 1 (Dykes 86)

In Be'er Sheva

Israel 2 (Zahavi 28, Dabbur 49) Moldova 1 (Nicolaiescu 90+5)

GROUP I

In Tirana

Albania 0 Poland 1 (Swiderski 77)

In London

England 1 (Stones 37) Hungary 1 (Sallai 24-pen)

In Serravalle

San Marino 0 Andorra 3 (Pujol 10, Moreno 53, Fernandez 89)

COMPOSED ZVEREV SLIPS PAST MURRAY

WOMEN'S TOP SEEDS FALL IN INDIAN WELLS

INDIAN WELLS, United States:

Alexander Zverev won the clash of the two most recent Olympic gold medalists at the ATP Indian Wells on Tuesday, holding off a fierce challenge from Andy Murray despite an equipment malfunction.

The 24-year-old German advanced to the fourth round, coming from behind in both sets to beat two time Olympic gold medal winner Murray 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) in the combined women's and men's tennis tournament in the California desert.

"I'm happy about the match, how everything went," said Zverev. "I think it was a very entertaining match. It was pretty high level."

Zverev won the Olympic gold medal at the recent Tokyo Games and former world No 1 Murray won gold at both the 2012 London Olympics and in 2016 in Rio.

Third-seeded Zverev moves on to play Gael Monfils of France who rolled over hard-hitting South African Kevin Anderson 7-5, 6-2.

"You got to enjoy what you're doing. You got to enjoy being out on the court. You got to enjoy playing tennis," Zverev said. "After Wimbledon I really enjoyed every second that I was on court."

Murray tossed his racquet several times Tuesday after missing easy shots. The outbursts were in contrast to Zverev, who maintained his concentration in the seventh game of the second set when the laces on his left shoe snapped.

He continued to play with the wobbly shoe but then had to take an extra long break between games



Alexander Zverev of Germany hits a backhand return against Andy Murray of Great Britain during their Round of 16 match at ATP-WTA Indian Wells tournament. — AFP

so he could swap out the laces. Murray seized the opportunity for a bathroom break.

Zverev then won three of the next five games which set up the tiebreaker.

Zverev went up 3-0 in the second set tiebreaker, but Murray fought back to get to 4-5 before Zverev finished him off at the net.

"I'm disappointed because I obviously want to be winning these matches," Murray said. "I haven't in the last few months. Something needs to change."

In the night match, second seed Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece came from behind to defeat Italian veteran Fabio Fognini 2-6, 6-3, 6-4 to reach the fourth round.



Shelby Rogers of the US hits a return to Leylah Fernandez of Canada. — AFP

Tsitsipas will next face Australia's Alex De Minaur, who defeated Chile's Cristian Garin in straight sets 6-4, 6-2.

The 23-year-old Tsitsipas was runner-up in the French Open this year becoming the first Greek Grand Slam finalist ever.

SHELBY UPSETS LEYLAH

In the WTA side of the draw, unseeded Shelby Rogers upset US Open runner-up Leylah Fernandez in a marathon three-setter on a day when more top seeds tumbled out.

Rogers outlasted Canadian teenager Fernandez 2-6, 6-1, 7-6 (7/4) in two hours and 34 minutes to reach the quarterfinals.

"It was a matter of who was able to dictate the points," Rogers said. "Who could get control of the points first."

"She has a bright future. Luck was on my side today, and I look forward to the quarterfinals."

Rogers moves on to play 24th-seeded Jelena Ostapenko, who upset second seed Iga Swiatek of Poland in straight sets.

After they split the first two sets, Rogers hit a backhand winner to break a 4-4 deadlock in the tiebreaker then won the next two points to clinch the match.

The 23rd-seeded Fernandez held serve in a lengthy 12th game of the third set to set up the tiebreaker. She saw off one match point and then got a lucky bounce off the net cord to get the advantage. Fernandez went on to win the game on the next point when Rogers hit a backhand into the net.

Swiatek became another top seed casualty, losing in straight sets 6-4, 6-3 to Latvia's Ostapenko in a fourth round match.

Swiatek's ouster comes one day after No. 1 seed Karolina Pliskova and defending champion Bianca Andreescu were bundled out of the

tournament in their third round matches.

Canadian Andreescu's elimination means there will be no repeat champion in Indian Wells.

Swiatek's exit, combined with fourth-seeded Elina Svitolina's crushing 6-1, 6-1 defeat to American Jessica Pegula, and No. 3 Barbora Krejickova's 6-1, 7-5 loss to Paula Badosa, leaves 10th seeded Angelique Kerber of Germany as the top seed left in the draw.

Reigning US Open champion Emma Raducanu was eliminated earlier in her first match of the tournament. — AFP

ATP and WTA Indian Wells results Men (third round)

Taylor Fritz (USA x31) bt Matteo Berrettini (ITA x5) 6-4, 6-3; Jannik Sinner (ITA x10) bt John Isner (USA x20) retired; Nikoloz Basilashvili (GEO x29) bt Albert Ramos (ESP) 4-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-2; Karen Khachanov (RUS x24) bt Pablo Carreno-Busta (ESP x12) 6-0, 6-4; Alexander Zverev (GER x3) bt Andy Murray (SCO) 6-4, 7-6 (7/4); Gael Monfils (FRA x14) bt Kevin Anderson (RSA) 7-5, 6-2; Alex De Minaur (AUS x22) bt Christian Garin (CHI x13) 6-4, 6-2; Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE x2) bt Fabio Fognini (ITA x25) 2-6, 6-3, 6-4

Women (fourth round)

Jessica Pegula (USA x19) bt Elina Svitolina (UKR x4) 6-1, 6-1; Jelena Ostapenko (LAT x24) bt Iga Swiatek (POL x2) 6-4, 6-3; Shelby Rogers (USA) bt Leylah Fernandez (CAN x23) 2-6, 6-1, 7-6 (7/4); Anett Kontaveit (EST x18) bt Beatriz Haddad Maia (BRA) 6-0, 6-2; Paula Badosa (ESP x21) bt Barbora Krejickova (CZE x3) 6-1, 7-5; Angelique Kerber (GER x10) bt Ajla Tomljanovic (AUS) 6-4, 6-1; Victoria Azarenka (BLR x27) bt Aliaksandra Sasnovich (BLR) 6-3, 6-4; Ons Jabeur (TUN x12) bt Anna Kalinskaya (RUS) 6-2, 6-2

Payas, Alan, Abdulrahman champs

GIRLS' COMPETITION OF WTT YOUTH CONTENDER MUSCAT BEGINS TODAY

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT, OCT 13

As many as 29 girls paddlers will take part at the 2021 WTT Youth Contender Muscat Championships here on Thursday. The participants from nine countries — Egypt, India, Iran, Lebanon, Maldives, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Syria and hosts Oman — will compete in the championship.

Oman's girls team will be represented by Al Hoor al Jassasi, Noor al Farsi and Retaj al Abri.

The Sultanate's girls paddlers took part in an intensive ITTF High performance training camp, which concluded on Tuesday at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex under supervision of ITTF coach Mohammed Atoum. Coaches from India, Uzbekistan, Syria, Maldives and Oman also attended the camp.

The camp lasted for 10 days with morning and evening training sessions. The girls competition will commence on Thursday with under-15 and under-19 sections.

On Friday, the under-13 and under-17 matches will take place at the indoor hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

PAYAS CLINCH TITLE

Indian paddler Payas Jain stole the limelight in Muscat by winning the under-17 and under-19 boys singles titles. Payas beat compatriot Yashansh Malik 3-0 in the U-19 final. In the semifinal, Payas edged another Indian player Shanker Varun 3-2.



Girls contingents for the championships.



India's Payas Jain in action with Uzbekistan's Alan Kurmangaliyev.



Saudi's Abdulrahman al Thaher plays a shot.



Oman's Mashaal al Shehi during a match.

In the U-17 final, Payas edged Uzbekistan's Alan Kurmangaliyev 3-2 to emerge champion.

Oman's Mashaal al Shehi ended his campaign in the event after he lost to Bangladesh's Ahmed Mohutaisn 3-0 on Tuesday. Al Shehi secured a spot in the last 16 after he beat Qatar's Ahmed Sadawi 3-1 on Monday.

Kurmangaliyev claimed the under-15 boys crown. The

Uzbekistan paddler beat India's Ankur Bhattacharjee 3-2 in a tough final on Tuesday. Alan beat Yemen's Ibrahim Abdulhakim 3-0 to reach the final.

Oman's Luqman al Farsi suffered a 3-0 loss against Saudi's Hadi Abdulrahi in the last 32 of the U-15 boy's singles. Luqman reached the last 32 after he beat Sri Lanka's Lithuim Singappulige 3-0 but lost to Qatar's Khalid al Yafei

3-0. He was second in Group 7 standings.

On the opening day, Luqman secured spot in last 32 of U-17 boy's singles.

Saudi's Abdulrahman al Thaher claimed the under-11 boy's singles title after edging Qatar's Mohammed al Sulaiti 3-2 in the concluding match. The Saudi paddler entered final after beating Lebanon's Ahmed Fahis 3-1.

Offside calls could be 'automated' by next year

PARIS: Offside calls could be "automated by 2022", when the World Cup will be held in Qatar, Arsene Wenger, director of the development of the world soccer at the Fifa, said on Tuesday.

The former Arsenal manager also said he understood the opposition of many in football to his recommendation, which Fifa has embraced, to stage the World Cup every two years.

Speaking to the press in Paris on Tuesday, Wenger said he could not give details of how the technology would work.

"There is a strong chance that the offside will be automated in 2022," Wenger said. "I'm bound to secrecy, but it will be the next big development in refereeing."

Close offside calls are currently decided by video-assisted refereeing (VAR), but Fifa has been working to develop "advanced offside technology".

The governing body of world football said in August that "the goal is to develop a supportive tool similar to goal-line technology: Not designed to make the decision, but to provide evidence instantly to the referees".

Wenger, talking ahead of the French multi-sport Refereeing Days, of which he is the figurehead, suggested that the timetable could be accelerated in the run-up to the World Cup in Qatar, which starts on November 21 2022.

Wenger has already suggested changing the offside rule so that players are onside if any part of their body that can score a goal is



Arsene Wenger

behind or level with the relevant defender.

His proposal last month that the World Cup should be staged twice as often was met with a storm of opposition from leading football figures.

He said that he understood the reluctance to change "because there is an emotional aspect" but, he added, the plan was part of a wider reform.

"The reform I am proposing is part of a reform of the calendar. I want to reduce the number of qualifying matches," Wenger said. "We could have a big competition every year," he said, with the World Cup alternating with continental tournaments like the Euro or the Copa America, "with 25 days of rest guaranteed afterwards" for players.

"If prestige is linked to the gap between the competitions, it would be necessary to organise the World Cup every eight years," he added.

Fifa plans to publish a report in November, before a "global summit" by the end of the year.

— AFP

In brief

NEW DELHI



INDIA ADD THAKUR
IN PLACE OF AXAR IN
WORLD CUP SQUAD

India added pace bowler Shardul Thakur to their Twenty20 World Cup squad while all-rounder Axar Patel dropped out of the 15-man side and into a list of stand-by players, the country's cricket board (BCCI) said in a statement on Wednesday. Inaugural T20 World Cup champions India begin their bid for a second title in a Super 12 match in Dubai against Pakistan on October 24.

THE SQUAD: Virat Kohli (captain), Rohit Sharma, KL Rahul, Suryakumar Yadav, Rishabh Pant, Ishan Kishan, Hardik Pandya, Ravindra Jadeja, Rahul Chahar, R Ashwin, Shardul Thakur, Varun Chakravathy, Jasprit Bumrah, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Mohammad Shami.

Reserves: Shreyas Iyer, Deepak Chahar, Axar Patel.

MELBOURNE



HEAD SMASHES
RECORD DOUBLE TON
IN ONE-DAY CUP

Middle-order batter Travis Head became the first Australian man to hit two double centuries in one-day cricket after scoring 230 runs for South Australia against Queensland in the Marsh Cup on Wednesday. Head struck 28 fours and eight sixes off 127 balls on the way to the second-highest score in the history of the Australian one-day cup, behind D'Arcy Short's 257, also against Queensland, in 2018. Left-hander Head, who played the last of his 42 ODIs for Australia in 2018, scored 202 against Western Australia six years ago. Head was dropped from Australia's Test team last year.

MELBOURNE



EDDINGS QUILTS AS
AUSTRALIA CHIEF AFTER
LOSING SUPPORT

Cricket Australia chairman Earl Eddings resigned on Wednesday, a day before he was due to stand for re-election at the board's annual general meeting. Eddings, whose three-year chairmanship was marked by near-constant division between member states, was under pressure after fellow board directors nominated by New South Wales and Queensland withdrew their support for him this week. Western Australia also pulled its support after a meeting late on Tuesday, dealing a terminal blow to his re-election hopes, Australian media reported. "It has been an honour and a privilege to be able to serve the sport I love as a Cricket Australia director," Eddings said.

OMAN EASE PAST NAMIBIA BY 32 RUNS

DUBAI: Tournament co-hosts Oman enjoyed a comfortable victory over Namibia, impressing with both bat and ball.

Batting first, Oman managed a total of 152/8, with Aqib Ilyas' 30 off 20 providing the innings plenty of thrust. Ruben Trumpelmann was the best of Namibia's bowlers, taking 2/30.

Despite a steady 32 from captain Gerhard Erasmus and an unbeaten quickfire 20 off nine from Trumpelmann, Namibia were held to 120/9 as Kaleemullah took 4/23.

SRI LANKA EDGE
BANGLADESH

Drawn in opposite groups in Round 1, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh played out a topsy-turvy warm-up match in Abu Dhabi that Dasun Shanaka's side won by four wickets with an over to spare.

Batting first, Bangladesh posted a total of 147/7 from their 20 overs. Soumya Sarkar was the Tigers' top-



scorer with 34, while Dushmantha Chameera was Sri Lanka's most dangerous bowler, taking 3/27 from his full allotment.

In the chase, Avishka Fernando led the way for the Sri Lankans, making an unbeaten 62 off 42, finishing things off in the company of Chamika Karunaratne (29*

off 25). As was the case with the bat, Sarkar was Bangladesh's best performer with the ball, taking 2/12.

IRELAND BEAT PNG

Ireland enjoyed a confidence-boosting victory over PNG in Abu Dhabi, pulling off an eight-wicket

win.

The most encouraging thing to come from the match for Ireland was the participation and performance of captain Andrew Balbirnie, who had suffered a foot injury over the weekend. Balbirnie made an unbeaten 42 in a chase of 97, with No.4 Curtis Campher

(42* off 35) providing him reliable company.

It was a torrid time with the bat for PNG as Craig Young (3/15) and Ben White (3/10) picked up three wickets each to hold Assad Vala's side to 96/8. Vala top-scored for his team with 32.

SCOTS WIN

Scotland's bowlers stepped up in a big way to help their side defeat Netherlands in Abu Dhabi.

Electing to bat first, Scotland managed a total of 122/6 with Calum MacLeod (32 not out off 34) and Michael Leask (30) the best of the batters. MacLeod proved the backbone of the innings at No.4, while Leask brought impetus to the innings at the end. Fred Klaassen shone with the ball for the Dutch, taking 2/21.

Scotland's total proved more than enough as Mark Watt (4/10) and Chris Greaves (4/19) took four wickets each to bowl the Netherlands out for 90. — ICC

Morgan, Kohli target T20
World Cup title legacy

DUBAI: Five years after losing a heart-stopping T20 World Cup final to the West Indies, Eoin Morgan's England start as narrow favourites in their bid to become double world champions despite the absence of Ben Stokes.

Not far behind though are Virat Kohli's India, an ever-lethal West Indies and World Test champions New Zealand — not to mention South Africa, Australia, former winners Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and fairytale outsiders Afghanistan.

Postponed and moved twice because of the pandemic, the tournament's seventh edition kicks off on October 17 with Oman — joint hosts with the United Arab Emirates — taking on Papua New Guinea in a first qualifying round.

The top nations will join the event — played in stadiums 70-per cent full — on October 23 with Australia and South Africa playing the opener of the Super 12 stage and England up against holders West Indies.

England, ranked as the world number one nation in T20 cricket, beat New Zealand to win the 50-over title at Lord's in 2019 and victory in the shortest format's showpiece event will further cement their white-ball dominance.

Morgan's team will, however, be without Stokes and Jofra Archer, who played a key part in their one-day World Cup triumph, but vice-captain Jos Buttler insists the team is "certainly one of the favourite teams."

"I know we are missing Ben and Jofra, who are two superstars of the game, but I still look down that list and see some real match-winners in our side."

WAR HORSES

England had to defend 19 runs in the last over of the 2016 final at Kolkata's Eden Gardens but Carlos Brathwaite hit Stokes for four straight



Kohli will look to repeat India's triumph in the inaugural tournament in 2007 with the then skipper MS Dhoni joining the team as mentor

sixes, giving the Caribbean their second world T20 title.

Many of that winning team will be back, led by Kieron Pollard and old war horses Dwayne Bravo, 38, and 42-year-old Chris Gayle.

Asian giants India will begin their campaign against arch rivals Pakistan on October 24 with Kohli looking to go out with a bang before stepping down as captain of the T20 side after the tournament.

Kohli will look to repeat India's triumph in the inaugural tournament in 2007 with the then skipper MS Dhoni joining the team as mentor.

Swashbuckling opener Rohit Sharma is widely tipped to be Kohli's successor and will be key to the team's chances along with yorker king Jasprit Bumrah.

KL Rahul, meanwhile, hit the most sixes — 30 — in the

Indian Premier League, which wraps up just before the T20 World Cup and which has allowed many stars the chance to get used to the UAE pitches.

Glenn Maxwell, for example, scored 513 runs including six half-centuries in the world's most popular cricket league, a performance that will boost Australia's hopes of a maiden T20 title.

Australia's white-ball captain Aaron Finch said he and David Warner will open the batting despite his left-handed partner twice being dropped by Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL.

'SIX, SEVEN
CONTENTENDERS'

Trans-Tasman neighbours New Zealand, led by Kane Williamson, will also be eyeing two successive world crowns after they won the inaugural Test championship, beating India in the final in June.

"We're in a tough pool, I genuinely think there are six, seven teams that could win this tournament and I guess that's good for world cricket as well," said Kiwi coach Gary Stead.

New Zealand are clubbed with India, Pakistan and Afghanistan in Group 1. England, Australia, South Africa and West Indies make up Group 2.

South Africa and former champions Pakistan remain underdogs while Sri Lanka and Bangladesh need to fight it out with associate nations to join the heavyweights in the Super 12s.

A few weeks after the country's takeover by the Taliban, the dream winners would be outsiders Afghanistan, all of whose players are based abroad.

Their South African coach Lance Klusener recently boasted of his team's "best spin attack in the world" comprising Rashid Khan, Mujeeb Ur Rahman and Mohammad Nabi. — AFP



Oman Cricket
unveils World
Cup anthem

MUSCAT: Oman has marked its spot in the world of cricket as the country is co-hosting one of the biggest events in the region – The ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2021. To welcome the cricketing world to Oman and showcase the pride that is reverberating through the nation, Oman Cricket has released #HayyaCricket, an exhilaration anthem that spans the length and breadth of the nation.

Commemorating the multicultural milieu, the anthem is an echo of the emerging passion Omanis hold for the sport and the pride they feel at cementing their position in the cricketing world. It reflects the joyful welcome of a nation that is poised and ready to make their mark by hosting an event that unites countries and transcends beliefs, borders and boundaries.

The #HayyaCricket anthem holds bundled emotions in a visually evocative 90 seconds that whips up an unrivalled frenzy across borders, generations, and languages. It showcases the length and breadth of the nation and portrays an unaltered vision for Oman in the world of Cricket.

A true homage to the Sultanate of Oman, #HayyaCricket has been released in English, Hindi and Arabic; the language of its people, an incantation that rouses hearts and the very spirit of the game. "With the entire Cricket-frenzy world watching, the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2021 is the ideal moment to unveil a spanking new anthem. #HayyaCricket isn't just any other anthem; it bridges social, cultural, and geographical divides – bringing together the multicultural community in the country for the love of Cricket. We unite to chant #HayyaCricket for the biggest event happening in the history of Oman" said Pankaj Khimji, Chairman of Oman Cricket.

Developed by Gozoop Group, the anthem translates the crux of moment and the belief that 'Cricket not just a sport; it is a reason to celebrate and bring people together'. Keeping with the vision and spirit of the anthem, Gozoop is fueled with a multi-lingual global team, working in tandem to imbue the anthem with that distinctly Omani flavour. Composed in India, the music is from London and Middle East. The Instruments of Tajikistan and Syria with mesmerising vocals from Iran and Pakistan blend together, accompanied by heartwarming moments shot entirely in Oman.

business

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EXCHANGE

3,964.080



CRUDE
OIL PRICE

Oman Crude	\$81.45
Brent Crude	\$82.93
Light Crude	\$80.23



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OQ-led consortium plans major green ammonia project in Oman

AMBITIOUS VENTURE: OQ, Marubeni Corporation, Linde and Dutco sign a Joint Development Agreement to explore green ammonia production in Salalah

BUSINESS REPORTER
An international consortium comprised of the alternative energy business unit of OQ, Oman's global integrated energy company, one of Oman Investment Authority government's companies, Marubeni Corporation, Linde and Dutco has signed a Joint Development Agreement (JDA) for the development of a green hydrogen and green ammonia project at Salalah Free Zone in Oman.

The Salalah region enjoys rich solar and wind resources supported by a world-class shipping infrastructure at the Port of Salalah; all of which position the region to be a global hub for the production and export of green hydrogen and green ammonia. The project, named 'SalalaH2', targets the production of up to 1000 tonnes per day of green ammonia, utilising OQ's existing ammonia plant in Salalah. An electrolysis facility with a capacity of up to 400 MW will be constructed to produce green hydrogen. Approximately 1 GW of solar and wind energy, produced either by existing or new facilities, will be used to power the electrolyzer.



The consortium is currently conducting studies that will provide the basis for an investment decision. Various offtake streams will be explored and coordinated with the OQ ammonia plant's current offtaker including the co-firing needs of coal fired power plants in Asia, the renewable feedstock needs of fertiliser plants in Europe and the decarbonisation needs of the global shipping industry. The project is set to create a positive impact on Oman's national economy through the diversification of its energy infrastructure, the transformation of its skills base and the transfer of new technologies into the region.

Dr Salim al Huthaili, CEO Alternative Energy at OQ, said: "OQ is excited to enter into this unique opportunity as the integration of the Salalah cluster between LPG, methanol and ammonia is already bringing great synergies. Integrating green molecules and green hydrogen into the system is a true transition story to pave the path towards decarbonisation. The potential of low carbon hydrogen production is promising in Oman and this partnership reflects OQ's, and our shareholder OIA's deep commitment towards maximising value and diversifying Oman's economy in line with Vision 2040. Yuji Sato, General Manager

of the Middle East and Africa Department, Power Division in Tokyo, stated: "Marubeni is keen on leading the development of this project to support the hydrogen economy in Oman utilising our abundant experience in acting as a lead developer of renewable projects in the Middle East and the world. We are committed to the energy transition and an active participant in the decarbonisation of the world economy. We are delighted to be part of this project in Oman, one of our most important markets in the region." Philippe Peccard, Linde's Vice-President Clean Energy, added: "At Linde we believe that hydrogen and its derivatives will play a key role in reshaping the global energy landscape, and as a leader in the production, processing, storage and distribution of hydrogen, we are proud to be a partner in the SalalaH2 project which we expect to be transformational for the local society." Tariq Baker, Vice-Chairman, Dutco group of companies, said: "Dutco has strategically positioned itself to be part of the hydrogen economy through driving new investments in the value chain of production of green hydrogen and green ammonia. The diversified and unique set of global capabilities of the members of this consortium will greatly contribute to making the SalalaH2 project a showcase project that will allow Oman to position itself as a global player in the production and export of green hydrogen/green ammonia."

Drone trials in delivery of postal and food parcels

BUSINESS REPORTER
The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) hosted the second phase of experiments involving the use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (drones) to help deliver postal and food parcels as part of tech-driven service delivery solutions to be offered in the SEZ at Duqm. The US-based company, UVL Robotics, which is specialised in advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and drones, carried out two experiments in cooperation with Azim Technology Company, one of the local companies providing artificial intelligence services and autonomous systems. In the first experiment, a number of parcels and postal mails were delivered from the Oman Post office in Duqm to the headquarters of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm. The experiment succeeded in delivering the goods within only a few minutes, during which the drone travelled an estimated distance of around 11 kilometres. In the second experiment, a basket of food and beverages was delivered from an outlet in Say commercial district to Renaissance Village, flying for about 6 kilometres. The experiment marked a success in delivering food parcels in a record time. During the two experiments, the team employed an electric drone that can fly 25



kilometres and carry a payload of up to 5 kg. UVL Robotics provides infrastructure solutions for delivery services by offering drone landing station, which comes as a smart box that can accommodate over thirty parcels. Thus, the drones land on the box to drop and save the postal parcels inside this box. Being built with the latest technologies in this field, the box includes an electronic screen that makes it easier for the user to make payments and get the postal parcel post putting his interactive code. Commenting on the experiments, Issa al Sumri of OPAZ said the demos, which began in SEZAD last month, reflects the Authority's efforts to encourage the use of artificial intelligence technologies. OPAZ has designated a dedicated zone for AI and drone experiments in SEZAD, covering 18 square kilometres of area. Sultan al Hatali from Azim Technology Company noted that the Zone has many advantages that contribute to the success of these experiments.

Oman's industrial cities target RO 8bn of new investments

ROBUST GROWTH: Six new industrial cities under development; Goal to develop 50m sq metres of new acreage for industrial investment

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conrad prabhu](#)
A long-term strategy drawn up by Oman's Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) envisions over RO 8 billion of new investment inflows into its expanding network of existing and new industrial cities by the year 2040. According to a senior official of the state-owned enterprise (SOE) — part of Oman Investment Authority — as many as six new industrial cities are currently being prepped for

new investment, supplementing the existing seven cities, as well as a technology park and free zone, presently in operation under Madayn's auspices around the Sultanate. "Madayn's 2040 Vision is to create world-class business cities that will help Oman's long-term socioeconomic development through investments in manufacturing and industry," said Ibtisam al Farouji (**pictured**), Director General of Investment Services at Madayn. "We aim to be among the top 5 economic institutions in the Middle East and North African region with investments totalling around RO 15 billion in these industrial cities by 2040." Speaking at the OER Manufacturing Summit 2021, which was held at Sheraton Oman Hotel on Wednesday,



the official said Madayn's 2040 Vision provides a roadmap for positioning the manufacturing and industrial sector as a strong pillar of the Sultanate's long-term socioeconomic growth. It seeks to more than double investments in Madayn's industries from RO 6.8 billion presently, increase the total area

under industrial development to 170 million sq metres, up from around 120 million sq metres presently, and lift the total number of projects operating in these cities to 10,000 by 2040, up from around 2,300 presently. As a major driver of job growth, the industrial cities will



seek to ramp up the total size of their aggregate workforce to around 279,000 employees by 2040, up from around 59,000 presently. Around half of the targeted number will comprise of Omanis, she said. Significantly, as many as six new industrial cities are planned for development in the coming

years, adding to a network of strategically located zones that leverage Oman's geographical advantages and infrastructural strengths, Al Farouji said. These new clusters are coming up at Mahas (Musandam), Ibri (Al Dhahirah), Shinas (North Al Batinah), Marmul and Thamrait (Dhofar) and Al Mudhaibi (North Al Sharqiyah). As part of its long-term vision, Madayn is looking to invite the private sector to operate and manage existing and future industrial cities, while its role will be limited to that of policymaker and regulator, she said. Additionally, private sector investment is also sought in soft infrastructure, such as hospitals, schools, residential blocks, transportation and shopping centres, to enhance the overall investment appeal of these cities, she added.

NBO signs partnership with ONEIC to enhance digital capabilities

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) has signed a strategic Memorandum of Understanding with Oman National Engineering & Investment Co (ONEIC) in order to jointly explore technical and financial opportunities. Under the agreement, the bank will cooperate with ONEIC on a range of shared digital solutions, distribution channels, infrastructure and training courses, with the aim to generate additional revenue streams, create sustainable and scalable partnership models, and reach untapped markets.

Abdullah bin Zahran al Hinai, Chief Executive Officer of NBO, said, “As part of our efforts to enrich the Sultanate’s banking industry with the latest technologies and know-how, we are pleased to have joined with ONEIC. The partnership is a major step in helping us to maximise our digital and technical capabilities, develop our products and services, provide added value to our customers, while adding overall economic value according



to Oman’s 2040 Vision.”

Dr Rashid bin Mohamed al Ghailani, CEO of ONEIC, added, “Our agreement with NBO is a welcome addition to our growing portfolio of partnerships and a testament to how such partnerships between government institutions and

private sector companies can promote innovative thinking and growth within the economy. Through it, we look forward to delivering added value to people across the Sultanate.”

Through a number of partnerships with both public and private entities, NBO is providing

integrated banking services with an innovative approach. With a range of compelling solutions, products and world-class customer service, the bank is helping to support the Sultanate’s development, while cementing its position as a preferred financial institution.

Meethaq to celebrate quarterly draw, Omani Women’s Day Draw

MUSCAT: Meethaq, the pioneer of Islamic banking in Oman from Bank Muscat, is all set to celebrate the upcoming Hibati savings account quarterly draw in a special event, which will be broadcasted on the bank’s social media channels.

Ten high-value cash prizes of RO 10,000 each and RO 5,000 each will be given away to 20 lucky winners during the quarterly draw. In addition, 30 cash prizes of RO 1,000 each will be given away to our lucky female customers in celebration of the Omani Women’s Day draw.

Amor bin Said al Amri, Senior Regional Manager, Meethaq Branches, said: “We are delighted to carry out the upcoming Quarterly Draw and the Omani Women’s Day Draw under Meethaq Islamic Banking’s flagship Hibati Savings Account.

“The bank has been constantly updating the prize scheme taking into account customer feedback from across the Sultanate and has increased the total cash prize substantially this year. The 2021 Hibati prize scheme gives more chances for customers to win valuable prizes.” He thanked all customers for their confidence in the scheme and in the various products and services of Meethaq.

Hibati Savings account is based on the unrestricted Mudarabah contract. The cash prizes offered under Hibati’s 2021 prize draw scheme are ‘Hiba’ (gift) from Meethaq to its customers and are paid out of the Mudarib’s/ shareholders’ own sources. The cash prizes are over and above the profit share of Investment Account Holders (IAHs) in the General Mudarabah Pool as



Amor bin Said al Amri

per the declared profit sharing weightages.

The 2021 Hibati Saving account has two Grand draws including the upcoming End-of-Year draw. For every RO 30,000 in quarterly average balance maintained in the preceding quarter, the customer shall be entitled to one entry to the Grand draw. Four grand prizes

of RO 50,000 each and one grand prize of RO 100,000 will be given away during the End-of-Year draw. Prizes totalling over RO 1.5 million will be given away to a record number of 5,331 winners in 2021.

The Hibati account benefits include attractive Mudarabah profit rates, cash prizes through draws, visa debit card, no minimum balance charges and eBanking facilities. Initially launched in 2018, Hibati has been instrumental in improving awareness for Islamic Banking in Oman and has seen excellent response from customers. Very importantly, every Meethaq product goes through the process of Sharia compliance certification by the Sharia Supervisory Board and is created in line with the guidelines of the Central Bank of Oman.

Bank Nizwa’s HR Head, elevated to Asst GM, Human Resources

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa has announced the elevation of Haifa al Lawati to take on new responsibilities as the Assistant General Manager, Chief Human Resources Officer. Haifa is presently Bank Nizwa’s Head of Human Resources, and will pursue her new role from January 2022.

With over 17 years of experience in the field of HR management, Haifa has been with Bank Nizwa since its inception and has held the position of Head of the Salaries, Wages, Compensation and Benefits Department earlier.

“The bank will continue its march towards excellence and innovation by hiring, retaining and developing a highly-qualified and well-versed national workforce. We believe that our people are our greatest assets. Such assets will contribute to the bank’s development, strengthen its leadership in the Islamic banking industry and enhance its growth, ultimately achieving the bank’s desired objectives locally and internationally. We believe that by recognising outstanding employee performance and providing them with newer opportunities and higher responsibilities, we are able to move forward with a team which is highly motivated and passionate of their association with Bank Nizwa,” said Khalid al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa.

“Haifa is a valuable resource for us. Her numerous skills, including leadership, team building, project management, strategic thinking, problem-solving and creativity, negotiation and decision-making have brought in great ideas, mentorship and a structured roadmap to the Bank’s personnel management department,” he added.

Haifa has started her career in PDO, then



Haifa al Lawati

Occidental Oman. She is holding several important positions including Secretary to the Board of Directors at HRC, and member of the Human Resources Committee at Oman Banks Association. Her contribution to Oman’s HR industry has brought her several coveted awards, such as GCC Best Employer Brand Award 2020, GCC HR Leadership Award 2020 and Wowani Most Influential Women Award in Islamic Finance 2020 amongst others.

Haifa holds a Bachelor’s degree in Computer Science from Sultan Qaboos University and an MBA from the University of Bedfordshire in the United Kingdom. In order to enhance her skills, Haifa attended several courses and workshops on human resource, leadership and Islamic Finance, from the University of Houston in the United States of America.

To raise the skill levels and empower Omanis for middle and senior management positions in the private sector, Bank Nizwa had enrolled its select employees in programmes like the National Leadership Programme called ‘Etimad’ while supporting others to pursue academic and professional qualifications that have helped them add to their educational degrees and enhance their competency and overall professional development.

Avail exclusive benefits to own your dream Lexus

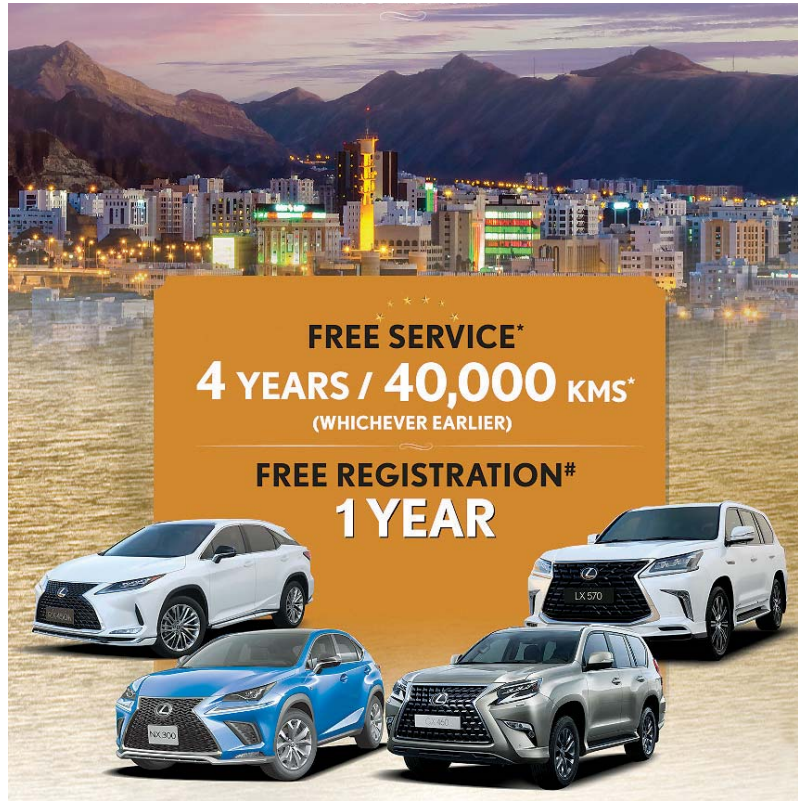
MUSCAT: Lexus enthusiasts looking forward to owning their dream Lexus can make the most of the offer from Lexus. 4 years/ 40,000 km or whichever is earlier, and 1 year free registration. The campaign is valid up to October 21. Conditions apply. Visit any Lexus showroom for details.

Customers looking to own a Lexus can choose from the range that includes luxury sedans, SUVs and coupes too. In sedans, the range includes the IS350. This sleek and stylish powerful sedan is equipped with a 3.5-litre engine that’s paired to an 8-speed automatic transmission. The turbocharged IS300 features a 2.0-litre twin-scroll turbocharged inline four-cylinder engine with intercooler that generates 241 Hp.

One of the most popular

luxury sedans in the segment, the ES is available in options of 2.5L, 16 Valve, engine with a fuel efficiency of 17.2 km/L and a classy 3.5 litre, engine paired to a 8-speed automatic transmission with a fuel efficiency of 13.6 km/L. The ES is also available in Hybrid version with a 2.5-litre DOHC direct injection Atkinson cycle 4-cylinder with intake VVT-i E and exhaust VVT-i with a total system output of 215 hp, offering 24.1 km/L mileage.

The flagship LS, which is an inspiring luxury sedan, is available in 3.5-litre V6 Multi Stage Hybrid System producing 354 hp, a 3.5-litre V6 naturally aspirated Atkinson-cycle producing 311 hp and 38.7 Kg.M Torque, and a 3.5-litre twin-turbo V6 engine producing 415 hp and



61.2 Kg.M of Torque.

The powerful and luxurious SUV range has exciting models that include the NX300 with an advanced turbocharged 238hp, 2.0-litre engine which combines fuel efficiency with outstanding power output. This generates exhilarating acceleration for sporty driving, together with exceptional fuel economy.

The Lexus UX has a front-wheel drive configuration and is powered by a high-efficiency 2.0 litre, four-cylinder engine, which is coupled with a Direct Shift Continuously Variable Transmission (DCVT).

The five-seat Lexus RX350 is equipped with a 3.5-litre V6 that is mated to an eight speed automatic transmission. The RX is also available in a 3-row

7-seater option. Also available is the Lexus RX450h, a hybrid version featuring a 3.5-litre Atkinson-cycle engine.

The Lexus GX460 is perfect for families who seek no-holds-barred adventure on their days off, yet also desire an easy-driving, comfortable and versatile luxury SUV for the work week. The Lexus GX460 features a 4.6L engine that provides outstanding power and responsive performance.

The LX570 possesses a 5.7-litre engine that delivers the punch and towing power befitting this vehicle. The 8-speed automatic transmission with a wide gear range contributes to achieving excellent start-off and acceleration performance and fuel efficiency during high speed driving.

OMAN CELEBRATES WORLD STANDARDS DAY TODAY

PROMOTING SUSTAINABILITY: The Sultanate has adopted nearly 26,000 standard specifications covering all kinds of goods, products and materials

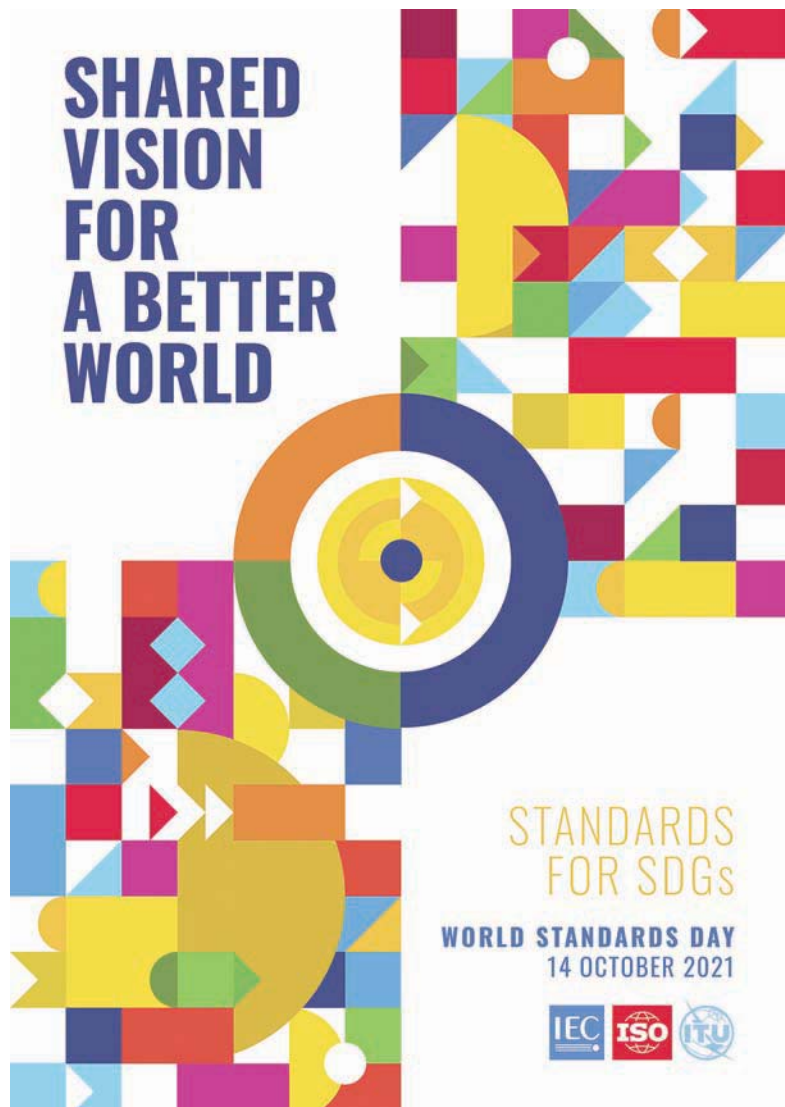
BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 13

Oman, represented by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), is celebrating the World Standards Day on October 14, 2021 under the slogan: 'Our shared vision for a better world.'

This year's slogan highlights the role of standards in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which seek to address challenges facing the world, notably poverty, inequality, climate change and environmental degradation, while ensuring that all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

Nadia bint Mohammed al Siyabiyah (**pictured**), Head of the Chemical and Petroleum Products Specifications Department and the Acting Director of the Standards Department at the Directorate-General for Standardisation and Metrology at MoCIIP, said the sustainable development goals are comprehensive and interdependent, as the key to achieving any one of its goals is closely linked to the other goals. To reach the sustainability goals will require solidarity and cooperation between the global countries.

"The Sultanate has adopted the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the United Nations Summit in September 2015, where it has become one of the member states to work actively to achieve these goals, while it has integrated the Sustainable Development Goals



Nadia bint Mohammed al Siyabiyah

(SDGs) into the main pillars of the country's ninth five-year plan, and these goals were also taken into account when the country set the Oman's Vision 2040," she stated.

The official explained that the sustainable development goals contribute to addressing social imbalances, developing

a sustainable economy and slowing the rate of climate change, while the achieving of these goals requires the cooperation of many public and private partners, and the use of all available tools, including international standards and conformity assessment, where standard specifications are a way to achieve quality standards for products, to ensure energy efficiency for electrical and electronic products, to reduce waste and rationalise consumption, and to preserve the environment and consumer health and safety.

The Ministry, she said, has adopted nearly 26,000 standard specifications in the fields of food products, agricultural, chemical, petroleum, mechanical, metallurgical, building and construction materials,

renewable energy, green buildings, electrical, electronic appliances and medical supplies.

There are also approved standard specifications for unleaded gasoline fuel, reusable shopping bags made of polyethylene, and systems used for gas-powered cars, in addition to the standard specifications for food products that achieve food safety and protect consumer health from harmful substances.

Nadia al Siyabiyah also pointed out that efforts made against the Covid-19 have revealed the absolute necessity of addressing the SDGs in an inclusive way, to strengthen our societies, making them more resilient and more equitable, as the standard specifications became more important than ever.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the Ministry issued Decision 57/2020, which temporarily allowed the import of food products, goods and health materials without writing the explanatory data in the Arabic language.

The Ministry also coordinated with the GCC Standardisation Organization in adopting the standard specifications for sterilisers, face masks and personal protection tools in an urgent manner, while these standard specifications were made available on the authority's website standardisation for free direct use by the beneficiaries, in addition to all standard specifications for medical protection tools and health requirements for food, while the Sultanate seeks, with accelerated steps, to build an integrated system of specifications and standards.

Al Siyabiyah emphasised that the Directorate-General of Standards and Metrology at MoCIIP is the national standardisation body in the Sultanate, and thus it is the only body entrusted with all standardisation activities.



Workshop highlights challenges of VAT implementation

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 13

Eng Redha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), inaugurated a daylong VAT Practical Masterclass organised by leading accounting and advisory firm Crowe Oman at the Crowne Plaza Hotel on Tuesday.

Speaking on the occasion, Al Saleh said: "Many businesses are yet to comply with the registration requirements of the Oman VAT Law. The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry is interacting with the business community to mitigate the problems faced by them by coordinating with various ministries to bring these to the attention of the government."

Earlier, welcoming the participants, Davis Kallukaran, Managing Partner of Crowe Oman, said that Oman has one of the lowest rates of VAT with just 5 per cent for goods and services with limited number of zero ratings and highest number of exemptions compared to other countries in the region. This is significantly lower than the OECD average rate of 19 per cent.

Presenting a technical session on the mechanics of Oman VAT, Antony Kallukaran, Associate Partner for Tax Advisory Services, said the VAT regime is aligned with the GCC VAT framework.

"The UAE and Saudi governments had gone ahead with the implementation of VAT in 2018, followed by Bahrain in 2019. This gave great advantage to Oman to learn the issues, challenges and the solutions to problems faced by those countries in the implementation of VAT. Right from the registration to the administration of the VAT regime, strict fines and penalties have been enacted in the law for non-compliance. This is because businesses are merely tax collectors on behalf of the government and they are expected to remit the money collected from the public to the government on a timely basis. Businesses and corporates need to be aware of the provisions of the VAT Law that can invite administrative fines and penalties for non-compliance and may also attract imprisonment for breaching the provisions of the VAT Law," he added.

Amazon copied products and rigged search results

NEW DELHI/LONDON: Amazon.com Inc has been repeatedly accused of knocking off products it sells on its website and of exploiting its vast trove of internal data to promote its own merchandise at the expense of other sellers. The company has denied the accusations.

But thousands of pages of internal Amazon documents examined by Reuters — including e-mails, strategy papers and business plans — show the company ran a systematic campaign of creating knockoffs and manipulating search results to boost its own product lines in India, one of the company's largest growth markets.

The documents reveal how Amazon's private-brands team in India secretly exploited internal data from Amazon.in to copy products sold by other companies, and then offered them on its platform. The employees also stoked sales of Amazon private-brand products



by rigging Amazon's search results so that the company's products would appear, as one 2016 strategy report for India put it, "in the first 2 or three... search results" when customers were shopping on Amazon.in.

Among the victims of the strategy: a popular shirt brand

in India, John Miller, which is owned by a company whose chief executive is Kishore Biyani, known as the country's "retail king." Amazon decided to "follow the measurements of" John Miller shirts down to the neck circumference and sleeve length, the document states.

The internal documents also show that Amazon employees studied proprietary data about other brands on Amazon.in, including detailed information about customer returns. The aim: to identify and target goods — described as "reference" or "benchmark" products — and

"replicate" them. As part of that effort, the 2016 internal report laid out Amazon's strategy for a brand the company originally created for the Indian market called "Solimo." The Solimo strategy, it said, was simple: "use information from Amazon.in to develop products and then leverage the Amazon.in platform to market these products to our customers."

The Solimo project in India has had international impact: Scores of Solimo-branded health and household products are now offered for sale on Amazon's US website, Amazon.com.

The 2016 document further shows that Amazon employees working on the company's own products, known as private brands or private labels, planned to partner with the manufacturers of the products targeted for copying. That's because they learned that these manufacturers employ "unique processes which impact the end quality of the

product."

The document, entitled "India Private Brands Program," states: "It is difficult to develop this expertise across products and hence, to ensure that we are able to fully match quality with our reference product, we decided to only partner with the manufacturers of our reference product." It termed such manufacturer expertise "Tribal Knowledge."

This is the second in a series of stories based on internal Amazon documents that provide a rare, unvarnished look, in the company's own words, into business practices that it has denied for years.

Amazon has been accused before by employees who worked on private-brand products of exploiting proprietary data from individual sellers to launch competing products and manipulating search results to increase sales of the company's own goods. — **Reuters**

IMF warns supply snarls slowing global recovery

Worldwide supply chain disruptions are driving price increases and draining momentum out of economies recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic, the IMF has warned. The ongoing hit from the pandemic and the failure to distribute vaccines worldwide is worsening the economic divide and darkening prospects for developing nations, the IMF said in its latest World Economic Outlook.

The global economy is expected to grow 5.9 per cent this year, only slightly lower than projected in July, before slowing to 4.9 per cent in 2022, the report said.

But the overall figures mask large downgrades and ongoing struggles for some countries, including the United States, Germany and Japan that are feeling the impact of supply bottlenecks, IMF chief economist Gita Gopinath said.

“This recovery is really quite unique,” she said on the sidelines of the annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

Despite a strong return in demand, “the supply side has not been able to come back as quickly,” hampered in part by the spread of the Delta variant of Covid-19, which has made workers reluctant to return to their jobs.

Those labour shortages are “feeding into price pressures” in major economies, she said, slowing growth expectations this year.

Energy prices have hit multi-year highs in recent days, with oil above \$80 a barrel, weighing on households.

But Gopinath said she expects energy prices to begin to retreat by the end of the first quarter of 2022.

In low-income developing countries, the outlook “has darkened considerably due to worsening pandemic dynamics,” she said in a blog post on the new forecasts.

The setbacks, which she blamed on the “great vaccine divide,” will impact the restoration of living standards, and a prolonged pandemic downturn “could reduce global GDP by a cumulative \$5.3 trillion over the next five years,” she warned.

“The dangerous divergence in economic prospects across countries remains a major concern,” Gopinath said.

Advanced economies are expected to regain “pre-pandemic trend path in 2022 and exceed it by 0.9 per cent in 2024,” she said.

However, in emerging market and developing economies, excluding China, output “is expected to remain 5.5 per cent below the pre-pandemic forecast in 2024.” — AFP

This recovery is really quite unique. The supply side has not been able to come back as quickly

GITA GOPINATH
IMF chief economist



JOY AFTER THE DEAL

Jean-Christophe Gallagher, (L) executive vice-president of services and support and corporate strategy at Bombardier and Tony Lefebvre, president and COO of Signature Aviation, pose after announcing a partnership at the Las Vegas Convention Centre during the NBAA Business Aviation Convention & Exhibition in Las Vegas, Nevada, US. — Reuters

An enabling environment is key to the goal of attracting foreign investment



Haider al Lawati
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

THE INCENTIVES OFFERED BY QATAR INCLUDE EXEMPTING FOREIGN INVESTORS FROM INCOME TAX FOR A PERIOD NOT EXCEEDING TEN YEARS FROM THE DATE OF THE INVESTMENT PROJECT

Recently, the sisterly State of Qatar announced the provision of a number of facilities and incentives for those wishing to invest in various economic and commercial projects in that country. This policy prompted many investors, including a group of Omani businessmen, to establish their institutions and commercial projects and link them with similar businesses in the Omani capital, Muscat. These initiatives are in line with the economic integration policies of the GCC region, and will open up job opportunities and support economic diversification.

According to official Qatari sources, Doha has provided many opportunities, whether for Gulf nationals or foreign investors, including ownership rights and other benefits opportunities, in a bid to drive investment in a number of areas. In the field of real estate, for example, investors have been invited to explore opportunities related to tourism, banking, insurance, industry and commercial agencies, subject to certain conditions, and in accordance with local regulations.

Today, the State of Qatar has enjoyed a stable economic and political climate, enabling it to come out with

legislation that seeks to attract foreign investment into the country. Qataris are also encouraged to invest in the economic and commercial sectors. To this end, Qatar had signed a number of economic, commercial and technical cooperation agreements to protect investments and prevent double taxation between Doha and other countries.

At the same time, Qatar has enacted laws that safeguard the interests of its citizens even as it seeks to attract foreign investment. Consequently, foreign investors can be assured of their rights with regard to their shareholdings in a project even if they have local Qataris as partners.

In order to speed up attracting foreign investments, Qatar has offered many incentives, including by creating investment opportunities, preparing preliminary studies for projects, assisting investors obtain loans for licensed projects, and enabling access to power, water, oil and natural gas for their feedstock and energy requirements. Additionally, foreign investors are exempted from income tax for a period not exceeding ten years, liberalised import criteria, and

customs exemptions on raw and semi-manufactured material imports.

Qatar's issuance of new investment laws means that it has effectively eliminated some of the impediments and shortcomings that existed in its statutes in the past. The country has a strong economic structure underpinned by dedicated industrial areas for industrial investment, and modern logistical infrastructure supported by airports and seaports. Supplementing this modern industrial and economic infrastructure are well-established educational, training and sports facilities that have attracted foreign guest workers and their families, foreign students, and athletes to come to Qatar and make the most of what the country has to offer.

This comprehensive development, spanning key sectors of the economy, have continued to attract local and foreign investment into Qatar over the past years, thereby providing numerous job opportunities for Qataris. This lends credence to the country's claim that their investment climate is an enabler for everyone – Qatari and foreign investor alike – to achieve its business goals in Qatar.

A facelift for Facebook



STEVEN HILL
A former policy director at the Centre for Humane Technology, he is the author of seven books

THE SCANDAL WILL FINALLY PROVIDE THE IMPETUS GOVERNMENTS NEED TO TAKE EFFECTIVE ACTION – BEGINNING WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DIGITAL OPERATING PERMITS

If the testimony of whistleblower Frances Haugen, a former Facebook data scientist, before a US Senate subcommittee told us anything, it was that tech companies cannot be relied upon to regulate themselves. And why should they be?

It is a basic principle of modern economics that governments mandate the terms of operation for business. The real question is how governments can best exercise this authority when it comes to the tech sector.

Facebook, Google, Amazon, and other tech companies have been allowed to develop unprecedented surveillance-based business models that include relentless capture of personal data, including geographic locations, and the manipulation of users with hyper-targeted content. And yet, as Haugen testified, “Almost no one outside of Facebook knows

what happens inside Facebook.” The KGB would have been envious.

But tech companies also serve a useful purpose.

They have built much of the public infrastructure of the digital age, including search engines, global portals for news and social networking, GPS-based navigation apps, online commercial and job marketplaces, and movie, music, and livestreaming platforms.

To enable digital platforms to continue performing a beneficent role, while minimising their harm, governments should require them to secure “digital operating licenses.” There is plenty of precedent for this: from grocery stores to nuclear power plants to pharmaceutical manufacturing facilities, traditional businesses must be granted various licenses and permits before they can begin operations, not least to ensure

the safety of workers, customers, the environment, and the local community.

Likewise, to be granted a digital operating license, tech companies would have to meet certain conditions. The first would be to obtain users’ explicit permission before collecting any personal data, using an “opt-in” consent system instead of an “opt-out” system that must be periodically renewed.

Since tech companies first developed their business models, users’ private data have become their real cash cow.

Companies sell psychographic profiles of users to advertisers and political operatives, who then target them with manipulative content. There have also been leaks. In 2014, for example, the political consultancy Cambridge Analytica harvested information from the Facebook profiles of more than 87 million users —

information that it used to try to sway voters.

Five years later, Facebook leaked 530 million users’ private data.

Tech executives argue that their data grabs benefit users by giving them personalised ads that cater to their individual desires. But how many times do you need to see ads for hiking boots, especially after you have purchased them? The risks of the surveillance-capitalism business model far outweigh the benefits.

The digital operating permit could also require companies to ensure compatibility with “middleware,” third-party software that helps users to manage their online experience. Software that blocks online advertisements is one example. Another is a smartphone app that allows users to turn data-collection and location-tracking on and off as needed, with the

touch of a button. Want to call a taxi?

Turn on location tracking so the driver knows where to find you, and then turn it off — no more tracking, and no transaction data retained. If this functionality — a limited version of which is now included in Apple’s iPhone iOS — becomes widespread, it could upend Facebook’s “data-grab-for-profit” model.

Other middleware could target “dark patterns” in platform design: engagement tricks like infinite scroll, autoplay, pop-ups, and automated recommendations, which keep users clicking and viewing. Platforms like Facebook deploy such “behavioural nudges” to ensure that users continue to see ads — the single biggest source of Facebook’s \$86 billion in annual revenue.

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features



Six reasons why you should plan a trip to Musandam

With winter almost here and with ease of travel already put in place, we think you should begin looking at Musandam as your next travel destination. Aptly nicknamed the “Norway of the Middle East” because of its beautiful fjord, there's so much more to discover about this governorate. We listed down six of the top reasons why you should visit soon... **P20**

ENTERTAINMENT

READ

TALKING TO STRANGERS

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

Famous examples of miscommunication serve as the backdrop to explain potential conflicts and misunderstandings.

French film festival back with a bang in Hollywood

HOLLYWOOD'S FRENCH film festival unveiled its line-up on Monday, with organisers hoping to capitalise on a pandemic-sparked shift towards non-English language programming in the United States.

The 25th edition of COLCOA — the world's largest festival dedicated to French film — will open with “Between Two Worlds,” in which Oscar-winner Juliette Binoche goes undercover to expose the insecurity of the gig economy.

The film, which has a largely non-professional cast, leads a field of 55 movies and series, as well as 19 shorts designed to showcase the best in Gallic cinema.

“Contrary to what could have been expected after all these months of lockdown, this very eclectic and high-profile programme reflects the amazing number of films actually produced in France during the last two years,” Francois Truffart, the festival's execu-

tive producer and artistic director, said.

The raging Covid-19 pandemic forced the cancellation of last year's event, as audiences retreated inside.

But, says deputy director Anouchka van Riel, the boom in non-English language films and television during lockdown is proof that there is a sizable market — and appetite — for things other than Hollywood's usual fare.

“In a world that had to shelter in place for a year due to the pandemic, French stories went global while individuals were isolated at home,” she said, citing French-language series “Lupin” and “Call My Agent.”

Continuing hits such as Netflix's smash Korean-language “Squid Game” under-



line the point that audiences do not find subtitles off-putting, says van Riel.

Other titles on offer this year include “Lost Illusions,” writer-director Xavier Giannoli's adaptation of Honore de Balzac's novel of the same name, and “Onoda: 10,000 Nights in the Jungle,” the story of a Japanese soldier who refuses to believe World War II has ended and fights on for decades.

COLCOA, which stands for “City of Lights, City of Angels” — the nicknames of Paris and Los Angeles, respectively — runs from November 1-7.

— AFP



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AROUND THE WORLD

TRAVEL TALES

Sculpture of Indigenous woman to replace Columbus statue in Mexico



A FIGURE OF A young Indigenous woman is to be erected on the former site of a statue of Christopher Columbus in the centre of Mexico City.

It is an approximately 6-metre-high copy of a recently discovered sculpture from around the time of Columbus' arrival in what was referred to as the New World, the mayor of the Mexican capital, Claudia Sheinbaum, announced on Tuesday.

She said it was a tribute to Indigenous women who have repeatedly been the victims of racism and discrimination.

A few weeks earlier, Sheinbaum had presented another replacement for the Columbus statue. However, the sculpture of a head by a contemporary artist, which was also supposed to represent Indigenous women, was ridiculed.



The new solution is a copy of the 2-metre-high stone sculpture "Young Woman of Amajac," which is said to have been created between the years 1450 and 1521 and was found by chance by farmers in January in the eastern state of Veracruz. According to archaeologists, it probably represents a female ruler.

The Columbus statue had stood on the boulevard Paseo de la Reforma since 1877. It was already removed in October last year — at the time authorities said it was being restored.

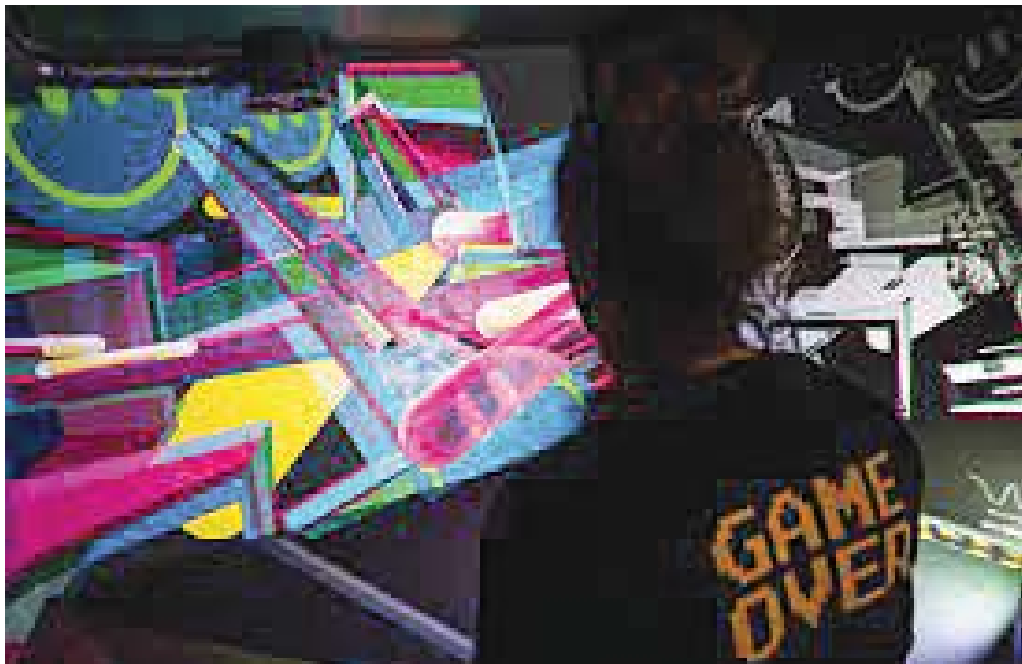
Before that, left-wing groups had threatened to push it off its pedestal on October 12, the day the arrival of Columbus in the New World in 1492 is commemorated in numerous countries in America.

The statue will be reinstalled in a less prominent location, a small park.

The Italian Columbus (1451-1506) is often referred to as the discoverer of America. However, he is also much criticised for his violence against Indigenous peoples and for his significant contribution to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. — **dpa**

CHANGING WORLD

In Berlin, a street art show before it's 'game over' for site



FROM AN IMAGE of Hulk who suddenly leaps over your head to a painting that changes its colours, one Berlin street art exhibition offers visitors a chance to experience paintings in 3D.

fully also in the lives of the visitors and admirers," said Joern Reinert, a member of art group The Dixons and one of the curators of the exhibition.

"We try to bring together the right artists who

their phones at the images to discover what lies beyond the analogue painting.

For painter Gita Kurdpoor, the show "which we have created here, together, is like a bit



Called "Game Over", the exhibition inspired by videogames is housed in a former casino stretching over 2,000 square metres (21,500 square feet) which is due to be torn down.

Eighty artists are showcasing their work here, with a dedicated app enhancing the experience.

"After all these dry months with the coronavirus and this, yes, dark world, we have finally created a bit of colour, not only in our lives, but hope-

will continue to develop and evolve creatively and ultimately create completely new layers and processes here."

The Dixons organised a similar pop-up exhibition in 2017, with artists plastering the walls of an old bank with their paintings before the demolition crew moved in.

This time the works stand out against a minimalist background.

But the special app allows visitors to point

of a school trip feeling."

Berlin is a hub for urban culture and its particularly vibrant street art scene has left its mark on many of the capital's facades.

Tours are organised regularly for visitors to check out the most iconic images.

Most famously, the longest remaining stretch of the Berlin Wall is covered with murals, first painted in 1990 and later restored. — **AFP**

ENTERTAINMENT

Blue Origin poised to transport 'Star Trek' actor Shatner into space



BILLIONAIRE US businessman Jeff Bezos's company Blue Origin is set for its second suborbital tourism flight on Wednesday, with actor William Shatner — who embodied the promise of space travel on the "Star Trek" TV series and films — among the four-person all-civilian crew poised to blast off in Texas.

Shatner, at age 90, is due to become the oldest person ever in space. He and his crew-mates are scheduled for a 9:30 am (10:30 EDT/14:30 GMT) takeoff aboard the white 60-foot-tall (18.3 metres-tall) fully autonomous New Shepard spacecraft at Blue Origin's launch site about 20 miles (32 km) outside the rural west Texas town of Van Horn.

The four astronauts, all wearing blue flight suits with the company's name in white letters on one sleeve, climbed into the crew capsule atop the spacecraft and strapped in after ascending a set of stairs accompanied by Bezos. Each rang a bell before entering the capsule. Before that, they rode a vehicle with Bezos at the wheel to the launch pad after about a half hour delay.

Winds were light and skies were clear ahead of launch time.

Joining Shatner for what the company said is expected to be a roughly 11-minute journey are former Nasa engineer Chris Boshuizen, clinical research entrepreneur Glen de Vries and Blue Origin vice-president and engineer Audrey Powers.

Blue Origin said the astronauts will experience about three to four minutes of weightlessness and travel above the internationally recognised boundary of space known as the Karman Line, about 62 miles (100 km) above Earth. The crew capsule is due to return to the Texas desert under parachutes.

The flight, previously scheduled for Tuesday, was pushed back a day for wind-related reasons.

The four crew members went through training on Tuesday and the mission team completed a flight-readiness evaluation to ensure "all systems are go for launch," Blue Origin said on Twitter.

Blue Origin had a successful debut space tourism flight on July 20, with Bezos and three others aboard, flying to the edge of space and back on a trip lasting 10 minutes and 10 seconds.

Shatner, who turned 90 in March, has been acting since the 1950s and remains busy with entertainment projects and fan conventions. He is best known for starring as Captain James T Kirk of the starship Enterprise on the classic 1960s TV series "Star Trek" and seven subsequent films about fictional adventures in outer space.

As an actor, Shatner was synonymous with space voyages. During the opening credits of each episode of the series, he called space "the final frontier" and promised "to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilisations, to boldly go where no man has gone before." — **Reuters**

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Six reasons why you should plan a trip to Musandam

When people call Musandam the 'Norway of the Middle East', it is a compliment that is well-grounded on reality. The governorate not only boasts some of the best fjords in the region, but it is also home to some of the most fascinating sunsets, the most captivating of history and so rich in culture you can spend a week on the island and would barely scratch the surface of what makes it a unique destination.

Now that travelling all over the country has become easier and with winter finally coming in a few weeks, there could be no better time to visit.

If it's your first time to visit this remote but equally gifted treasure of Oman, here are seven reasons why you should finally check it out this year.

LEARN CULTURE AND HISTORY IN KHASAB

The capital of Musandam, Khasab has the perfect access to the strait of Hormuz wedged between scenic, steep cliffs and a playful blue sea. Covering about 136 coastal and mountainous hamlets, it's one of the most scenic drives you can take in Oman.

Other than its natural beauty, Khasab is also home to Khasab Castle which was built by the Portuguese in the 17th century. This alone will give history buffs so much material to work with. Within the castle walls, you'll find a model of Bait al Qafel, an ancient traditional lock house that demonstrates how homes used to be made and secured on the island. Many of the villages also preserved many of their traditions so a walk down ancient paths will definitely lead to new discoveries of how

things are done in the past.

ISLAND HOPPING AND EXPLORING THE FJORDS

Anyone who visited Musandam always recommends not missing a dhow cruise. Being the Norway of the Middle East, one of its prized possessions is the way fjords rise from the blue sea. Other than Khasab, you can also visit Telegraph Islands, Seebi Island, Jazirat al Ghanam, al Khil and Kun Island and even the intriguing Kumzar Island where the inhabitants have created their own language totally unique from anywhere in the region. Just off the peninsula, you can also explore Um Al Ghanam Island (Mother of Goats) and learning the origin of the names of these islands will already provide you with all-day hunting activity.

BEST PLACE FOR DOLPHIN WATCHING

Whenever doing water adventures, one of the best attractions while cruising through the waters of Musandam are the playful dolphins that swim along with the sea vessels. The rich and diverse waters of Musandam are also perfect for diving, swimming and snorkelling in fact, in Khasab alone, the waters are overflowing with fish, turtles and even whale sharks in some seasons. As of late, different travel companies within Musandam have already provided diverse activities including deep-sea fishing and jetski.

CAMPING AND HIKING HAVEN

Outside Khasab you will find villages such as Qadah and Ghubb Ali where you will find prehistoric drawings on rocks said to be more than 2000 years old. The highest peak of Musandam, Jabal Harem which is under 2,100 metres above

sea level is also an amazing hiking destination. Going to Musandam means also exploring the mountains on foot to get a better idea of the lay of the land. With a long stretch of coastline, you will find pockets of beautiful beaches in between. It is a common thing to see a group of campers dominating some of the best beaches, especially before Covid-19. A week-long stay will not be enough to explore all the amazing beaches and hidden trails that overlook not only the city of Khasab but even the village of Kumzar and other islands.

CHECK OUT MADHA

A settlement of about 2,000 people, Madha is surrounded by Sharjah, Fujairah and Ras al Khaimah and while its location may be hard to access, exploring its 16 villages is filled with new knowledge and learning about the traditions of Oman. Madha is also home to 24 aflaj and hot springs including Ain A'smai, Lashma and Hajer Bani Hamid and these places are seldom visited because of their remote location. If you're looking for a place only very few people have visited, this is one of the wilayats to visit when in Musandam.

A ROMANTIC GETAWAY

Musandam, over the years, has established itself as a remote romantic getaway thanks to some hotel properties within the governorate that offer an incomparable experience. Prior to Covid-19, several Hollywood and Bollywood celebrities visited the governorate to experience not only the unique Omani hospitality but the world-renown beauty of Six Senses Zinghy Bay which is hidden between chocolate mountain and beautiful white-sand beaches. Can you imagine having your own private villa and pool overlooking a beautiful mountain and sea view?

