

P10

GRIEZMANN
RESCUES DRAW
FOR FRANCE
VS HUNGARY



P13

OQ GROUP EYES
GREEN STEEL,
GREEN CEMENT
PROJECTS



P20

CONTINUING
OMAN'S
ANCIENT LEGACY
OF ROCK ART



45 years and above to get jabs from today

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

The vaccination for those aged 45 years and above will start on Sunday at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre and at Al Sahil Health Centre in the Wilayat of Qurayat. All precautionary measures announced by the General Directorate of Health Services in Muscat Governorate will be followed during the vaccination drive.

Immunisation teams will start receiving the eligible groups from Sunday to Thursday between 8 am and 2 pm, and from 9 am and 4 pm during the weekend (Friday and Saturday) at the OCEC. The vaccination timing at Al Sahil Centre during weekdays will be from 8 am to 2 pm.

The MoH had called upon people falling under the new target group i.e. 45 years and above, to book appointments in advance online via website (<http://covid19.moh.gov.om>) or Tarrasud + application, before heading to the approved government centres for immunisation in the various



governorates of the Sultanate. The idea behind online appointment is a safe and accessible vaccination process for all.

On Thursday, the MoH registered a new record of daily deaths since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. It announced 35 deaths for the first time in a single day, bringing the total deaths to 2,626.

The latest statement said that the number of inpatients in hospitals and public and private health centres amounted to 182, the number of currently hospitalised cases increased to

1,306. The number of critical cases in intensive care stood at 382. However, the MoH will release the new figures of infections and deaths registered during the weekend that passed.

A few days ago, the authorities announced the registration of confirmed cases of the 'black fungus' among those infected with the coronavirus.

The MoH said more than half a million residents in the Sultanate received the anti-Covid-19 vaccine since the start of the vaccination campaign late last year.

TURN TO P3

BAN ON MOVEMENT FROM 8 PM TO 4 AM

ALL PUBLIC PLACES AND COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES TO REMAIN CLOSED DURING NIGHT.

DECISION EXEMPTS HOME DELIVERY SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES EXCLUDED FROM SIMILAR BANS ANNOUNCED EARLIER.

IMMUNISATION PROGRAMME TO CONTINUE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PRESET STAGES AND SEGMENTS.

COMMITTEE WARNS OF FIRM ACTION AGAINST NON-COMPLIANCE AND GATHERINGS.

REPORT ON P2

HM GREETES IRAN'S PRESIDENT-ELECT

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President-elect Ebrahim Raisi (pictured) of Iran for winning the presidential elections.

His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to the new president wishing him success in leading the friendly Iranian people towards more progress and prosperity.

His Majesty affirmed the Sultanate's keenness to bolster the existing relationship between the two countries and enhance cooperation in various fields to serve the interests of the friendly Omani and Iranian peoples.

Ebrahim Raisi was declared the winner on Saturday of Iran's presidential election.

Raisi won just shy of 62 per cent of the vote in Friday's election, according

to official figures, on a turnout of 48.8 per cent.

"I congratulate the people on their choice", said outgoing moderate President Hassan Rouhani, who has served the maximum of two consecutive four-year terms and leaves office in August.

Raisi, 60, is set to take over at a critical time, as Iran seeks to salvage its tattered nuclear deal with major powers and free itself from US sanctions that have driven a sharp economic downturn.

"God willing, we will do our best so that the hope for the future now alive in people's hearts grows further", said Raisi, adding that he wants to strengthen public trust in the government for a "bright and pleasant life together".

— ONA/AFP



GED examinations begin today

MUSCAT: The final examinations, first term, of the general education diploma (GED) will begin on Sunday.

A total of 56,759 students are taking the exams at 360 examination centres distributed in the directorates

of education in the governorates.

The correction of exam papers will begin on Monday and end on July 14. A total of 3,200 teachers will correct the exam papers at four centres in Muscat, Suhar, Nizwa and Musannah.



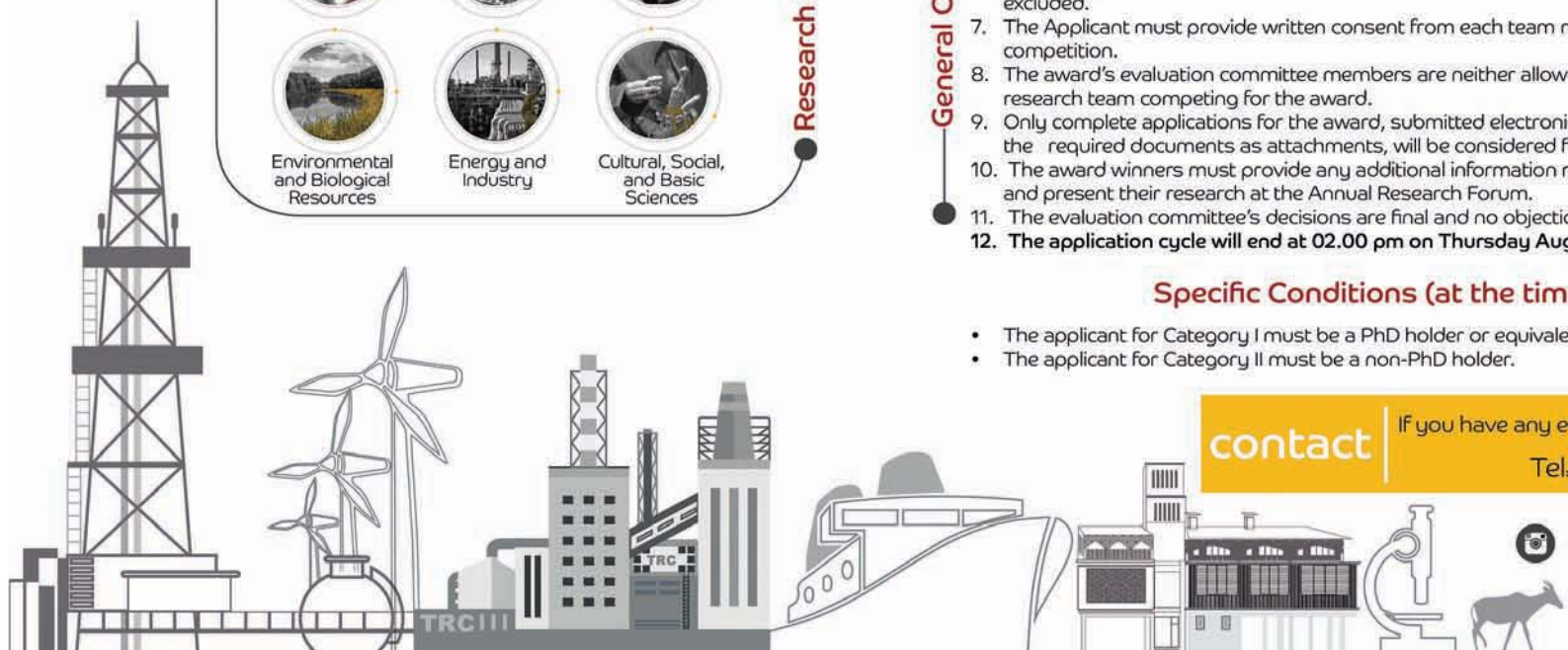
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The CDAA said that the flames spread over a wide area due to active winds, dry trees and high temperatures. — **ONA**



Ministry of Labour continues employment efforts

MUSCAT: In response to the Royal directives issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to expedite the implementation of employment initiatives, the Ministry of Labour continues to provide job opportunities to nationals in coordination with the military security authorities, the Diwan of Royal Court and the Royal Court Affairs.

Since the beginning of the implementation of the Royal directives, the ministry published 7 employment advertisements for various specialisations and educational levels at the military and security authorities. Over the past two weeks, the interviews, tests and evaluation of the applicants, got under way in various military authorities. Besides, the preparations have been completed to summon the job-seekers who met the conditions to undergo interviews and tests. The active job-seekers at the labour registers are vying for the announced job vacancies.

Yahya bin Mohammed al Battashi, Director of the Department of Other Units Affairs at the Ministry of Labour, said that the ministry is currently preparing the necessary procedures for the upcoming period in coordination with the relevant authorities as well the provision of job-related training for the replacement and employment in the other departments for the technical and professional specialisations for the general education diploma and



below. This is in addition to the continued coordination to find different jobs needed by these departments.

Al Battashi explained that the Ministry of Labour has coordinated with the military and security authorities, the Diwan of Royal Court and the Royal Court Affairs, to notify the ministry of their job vacancies.

The job-seekers are permitted to apply for more than one job in different entities but they cannot apply for more than one job with the same entity, Al Battashi said, adding that the e-system allows to identify the jobs that match each job-seeker in terms of the education level and experience. They are also able to know the number of applicants for each job and they can enquire about



their educational and personal information without the need to approach the ministry's offices.

The e-system enables the employers to conduct the appointment procedures by simplifying the advertising procedures and reducing time, effort and cost. He noted that the Tajneed (recruitment) website taj.nce.gov.om is a new addition to

the centralisation of advertising of job vacancies available at the military and security authorities. The website provides the service of applying for job vacancies in different entities and for all jobs and educational levels. The system provides the service of viewing the dates and timing of interviews through SMS associated with the website, the official said. — ONA

Vaccination for 45+ opens

FROM PAGE 1

It indicated that the total of those who received vaccinations until Tuesday amounted to 535,578 people, representing 15 per cent of the total targeted. In contrast, the total doses that have been provided since the start of the campaign amounted to 720,199.

The total vaccinated with the first dose amounted to 350,957 people, representing 66 per cent who received the vaccine, while the total of those who received two doses of the vaccine reached 184,621 people, representing 38 per cent of the total vaccinated.

The Sultanate allows the use of the 'Pfizer-Biontech' and 'AstraZeneca' vaccines against coronavirus, and it also plans to use the Russian 'Sputnik V' and 'Johnson & Johnson' vaccines as part of its efforts to immunise its population.

Hotel closed for rule violation

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 19

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism took stern action against a hotel establishment in Muscat for Covid-19 violations.

"The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) has penalised the InterContinental Muscat Hotel for organising an event without committing to the authorised capacity of the celebration halls," an official statement said. MoHT has called on all tourist and hotel facilities and travel and tourism offices to fully comply with the decisions issued by the Supreme Committee and the Ministry of Health.

The Supreme Committee allowed the reopening of exhibitions, wedding halls and other commercial activities which require people to gather together, provided not to exceed 30 per cent of their capacity, and not to exceed 300 people in whatever case for halls with large capacities, while adhering to all preventive measures and requirements. Last week MoHT announced the closure of The Chedi Muscat Hotel for the approved time period, in addition to applying the penalties, after cases were confirmed as a result of non-compliance with implementing the preventive measures to be applied.

Construction begins on Muscat Pavilion project



STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 19

Asawer Real Estate and Muscat Hills Joint Development celebrated the start of construction of 'Muscat Pavilion' for smart offices located in Muscat Hills, under the patronage of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat.

Eng Siham bint Ahmad al Harthy, co-founder of Asawer Real Estate, said: "This project represents the values added to the efforts to develop the real estate sector and enable it to attract investments, especially since foreigners are allowed to freehold

in it, in addition to entertaining specifications, whether in terms of its strategic location or the features it contains, as well as high-quality finishes, adding that such projects contribute to attracting foreign investments into the Sultanate, and it convinces foreign investors in them, which is in line with Oman's Vision 2040."

To be completed in 24 months, the building consists of nine floors along with 3 floors for smart parking underground, which can accommodate up to 550 cars. Smart office prices start from RO 39,000 and shops start from RO21,000.

Taxi operators find the going tough

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The past 15 months have been difficult for small-scale businesses in the country, especially taxi operators worldwide.

There have been series of full and partial lockdowns over this period, which restricted the movement of vehicles and period during night peak hours.

"We generally do our business during evenings, weekends, Eid and National Day holidays. But all these occasions have been a major washout and we have little hope for the upcoming Eid al Adha holidays as the Covid-19 cases continue to rise in the country," said Mohammed, a taxi operator at one of the leading supermarkets in the city.



Harith al Maqbali

On Saturday, the Supreme Committee reimposed the night lockdown between 8 pm and 4 am until further notice.

Harith al Maqbali, the CEO of the on-demand app-based Otaxi, said, "It has been difficult for the taxi operators, who tried to survive these months by focusing on

cutting costs wherever possible."

He said that vaccines have been given to taxi drivers on a priority basis.

With the vaccination drive gaining steam, Otaxi said it is trying to take advantage of this lean period to prepare for the future.

The company that had a humble start now has 1,500 taxis in its fleet and hopes to equip all vehicles with facilities such as Wi-Fi and premium or VIP services.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Sulaiman, a retired government employee and a taxi driver said, "The past year has been difficult, and we have to still spend on maintenance and insurance business or no business. Apart from lockdowns, there are other factors hurting us. People now

avoid public transport to avoid sharing commute with others. Also, many expatriates, especially those who avail of taxis, have left the country due to job losses. The tourist inflow has been also zero due to the travel ban, which also affected our lucrative airport trips."

Several taxi operators echoed the hope that things to get better before the winter, which will not only bring tourists but offer unrestricted movement for domestic travellers.

"We struggle to make even RO5 to R10 a day despite waiting in the sun for customers for a long period. It has been really bad and there is no point in repeating our problems," said Salem, whose private-sector job has been facing uncertainties too.

An initiative to promote Sri Lankan products in Oman



MUSCAT: Sri Lankan goods that were exported recently under the initiative by the country's embassy in Oman have received a good response, according to a statement from Spar Oman.

An invitation to participate in a business conference hosted by Omar Lebbe Ameer Ajwad, the Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Oman, presented an opportunity to interact with Sri Lankan companies. This event fostered closer collaboration between SPAR Oman and the SPAR operator in Sri Lanka, Ceylon Biscuits Limited, resulting in Spar Oman placing a product order worth \$10,000.

The launch was celebrated at an event at Spar Madinat Qaboos, hosted by the Honourable Ambassador and SPAR Oman CEO Sridhar Moosapeta on May 11.



إعلان

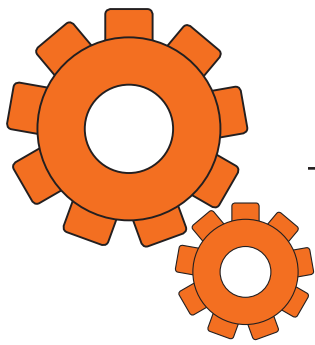
وزارة التجارة والصناعة
وترويج الاستثمار

دائرة الملكية الفكرية

تعلن دائرة الملكية الفكرية عن طلب تسجيل العلامة التجارية المقبولة وفقاً لأحكام قانون حقوق الملكية الصناعية الصادر بالمرسوم السلطاني رقم ٢٠٠٨/٦٧.

طلب تسجيل العلامة التجارية رقم: ١٤٤٣١١
في الفئة ٣٠ من أجل السلع والخدمات:
أرز.

باسم: شركة دبليو جي تاوول
الجنسية: عمانية
العنوان: سلطنة عمان
تاريخ تقديم الطلب: ٢٠٢١/٣/١٥



THE NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME
ROLLED OUT RECENTLY SEEKS TO FILL THE
GAP BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS
NEEDED BY THE LABOUR MARKET SO THAT
THE UNEMPLOYED GET JOBS DEPENDING
ON THEIR AVAILABILITY

FOR A

KNOWLEDGE-BASED

LABOUR
MARKET

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

The recent roll-out of the National Employment Programme (NEP) is all set to create a labour market filled with nationals who are qualified and skilled in their respective fields.

The programme, which stems from Oman Vision 2040, seeks to fill the gap between knowledge and skills needed by the labour market so that the unemployed get jobs depending on their availability.

Education and training have long been fundamental to the Sultanate's long-term development plans and central to Oman Vision 2040. The government has always stressed on upgrading education that suits the labour market needs with focus on technical and vocational education.

One of the goals in Vision 2040 is developing a favourable environment to attract talent in the labour market. For this purpose, it outlines, "a national system that empowers human capabilities in the educational sector and nurtures scientific research, innovation and creativity to build a knowledge-based economy and society".

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik approved the launch of the Programme this week with a target of finding sustainable solutions to provide jobs to nationals in both public and private sectors, in addition to keeping track of their data till they enter the job market.

While stressing on the need to upgrade the quality of school education and adapt its outcomes in accordance with labour market needs as outlined in Oman Vision 2040, His

Majesty underscored the importance of accelerating procedures necessary for

analysing the requirements of technical and vocational education for the post-basic education stage.

In a recent interview to Oman TV, Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, the Minister of Labour, said that NEP will focus on creating plans related to different sectors and studying the smoothness of business in terms of identifying job opportunities and the types of qualification and training required.

With regard to Omanisation, he told the national channel, "we look at the sectors in which appropriate nationalisation can take place in accordance with the programmes that are planned, studied and shared with production parties to reach the best practices".

According to the minister, the number of beneficiaries of the training programme associated with employment and on-the-job training in the private sector has reached 4,400 people.

Vision 2040 stresses on improving educational outcomes that have become necessary to build Omanis' confidence in their identity and commitment to their social values.

"This is attainable through increasing the quality of basic and higher education and developing scientific and educational curricula, so that graduates are acquainted with competitive qualifications and employability skills to enter the local and international labour market", it envisions.

Such graduates, according to the programme, will have an adequate level of productivity

and competitiveness to build a knowledge-based economy, enhance job security in the private sector and foster a participatory relation between the private and the public sectors.

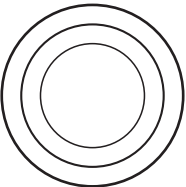
In addition to this, a developed educational system also entails the development of educational institutions, faculty and staff, the application of international standards for accreditation, the use of modern teaching and learning techniques, and the dissemination thereof as national culture.

It emphasises that a leap is required in quality and quantity in the domain of scientific research and development, through the provision of diverse and sustainable sources of funding to support applied scientific researches to promote innovation in various fields.

"This will strengthen partnership between the academic and research institutions on the one hand and the private sector on the other", the vision suggests.

Another aspect of joining forces also entails maximising national capabilities through a national system established to nurture talent, creativity and entrepreneurial potential.

Vision 2040 defines the national priorities to be achieved through parallel work streams, with the aim of promoting Oman's position in the different fields over the next two decades. The vision equally outlined the strategic directions, goals and key policies to translate ambitions into action plans underpinned by clear milestones and timelines and progressing against a set of local and international indicators to measure and evaluate the performance in a transparent manner.



‘We need to work together to fight Covid-19 as daily cases spike’

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@LAKSHMI OMAN

Social media influencers are not necessarily journalists or media personalities, but when Abdullah al Rubai, one of the senior news anchors at the 7 pm news bulletin in English on the Sultanate of Oman Television, shared his thoughts on Covid-19 precautions recently it went viral on the social media.

One who likes to end news bulletins on a positive note, Abdullah, reminded the viewers about the current situation.

“Don’t forget to follow precautions. The cases are increasing daily; hospitals are full of patients and ICU — let us not even talk about it. So please follow the preventive measures. And if you are targeted for the vaccine, please go ahead and have it. Do not forget to wear your mask,” he said, pulling out his mask explaining that now he is going to step out of the studio with his mask on.

The cases are increasing daily; hospitals are full of patients and ICU — let us not even talk about it. So please follow the preventive measures. And if you are targeted for the vaccine, please go ahead and have it

ABDULLAH AL RUBAI
Senior news anchor

The Instagram post of @omannews continued to rise ahead, almost touching 46,000 views with thousands of likes and 30.6 K views on Twitter soon after, and the clip was shared by numerous other accounts and WhatsApp groups.

When asked about the response,

Abdullah said, “I said what came to my mind because fighting this virus is a joint responsibility. We have to take precautions, and that is not to do so just because there is a rule to wear a mask in public, but we must wear it because we are responsible for ourselves and others.”

“I trust people do understand the seriousness of the situation and the pressure it creates on hospital staff. Suppose the public takes the responsibility to spread awareness. In that case, it will be the best solution to cut down the number of cases and prevent the transmission of this deadly virus,” he added.

“At times when I go on field trips, I have noticed sometimes in the industrial areas such as Mabela where people take it easy — both Omanis and non-Omanis. We have to remember we are not at home and people are coming from different places. We need to be conscious,” he pointed out.

Abdullah al Rubai, who is also

from the medical profession and a veteran broadcast journalist, has also been reporting on the pandemic since the beginning on Sultanate of Oman Television and Radio Oman and has had experts as guests during the bulletins. The viral message reached out to other parts of the world too.

He said, “If people realised they could also be in a spot like others who need oxygen support to breathe or understand the fact that they could be a potential cause for their family members, relatives or colleagues, to fall sick, then they will take the precautions seriously.”

The comments on social media appreciated the fact that the message came directly from the heart. As the number of Covid-19 cases and deaths continue to increase, the only solutions are precautions such as avoiding social gatherings, maintaining distances, frequently washing hands, wearing masks and taking the vaccination.

Oman, Indonesia mark 43 years of diplomatic ties



MUSCAT: The Sultanate and Indonesia on Thursday celebrated 43 years of their diplomatic relations by holding a virtual forum titled “Oman-Indonesia Partnership A Bridge To The World”.

Mohammed Irzan Djohan, Ambassador of Indonesia to the Sultanate, commended the pace of development of bilateral relations and the constant contact between the two countries.

Meanwhile, His Highness Sayyid Nazar bin al Julanda al Said, the Sultanate’s Ambassador to Indonesia, valued the efforts undertaken by the Republic of Indonesia to foster ties of joint cooperation.

In his turn, Agus H K, Director of Middle East Department at the Indonesian Foreign Ministry, said the two countries enjoy robust relations and will shortly sign agreements in

Mohammed Irzan Djohan, Ambassador of Indonesia to the Sultanate, commended the pace of development of bilateral relations and the constant contact between the two countries

the field of air transport.

During the videoconferencing event, specialised officials from Oman and Indonesia presented reports in areas of investment, tourism and energy.

The event also saw a display on investment opportunities and incentives offered by the Sultanate to foreign investors in the above-mentioned sectors.

— ONA

Japanese envoy fetes winners of essay competition

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 19

The Embassy of Japan in the Sultanate recently received the two Omani winners of the Oman-Japan Essay Contest organised by the Embassy.

During the meeting held in accordance with Covid-19 precautions, Kobayashi Toshinori, Ambassador of Japan to the Sultanate, listened to the inspirations behind the winning essays and appreciated the affection of the winners towards



Japan.

The Arabic language essay

competition, on the theme, ‘Oman-Japan relations’, received

a large number of entries in the categories for children and adults. Lubaba al Salami and Mariya al Hooti were announced as winners. Ambassador Kobayashi, impressed by the level of vivid writings of Omanis, said that the first-ever Oman-Japan Essay Contest was a huge success. He thanked all the participants for their enthusiasm and willingness to learn more about Japan and showed his confidence that Japan-Oman bilateral relations would further enhance in the future.

Muscat University becomes IELTS test registration centre



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 19

Muscat University hosted the British Council for the signing of an agreement for the university to become an IELTS Test Registration Centre. Vice-Chancellor Prof Khamis al Yahyaee signed the agreement along with the British Council Country Director Helen Mehta.

Professor Khamis said, “We are delighted to sign this agreement with the British Council to become an IELTS Test Registration Centre. This agreement further exemplifies the flourishing partnership we have with the British Council to provide examinations to Omanis and residents at the university.”

The signing of the contract signals the next step in a very successful partnership

with the British Council which delivers most of its Muscat-based English language examinations such as IELTS at the University. Test candidates are now able to register for the IELTS exam and then take the exam at Muscat University. As well as hosting English language exams in partnership with the British Council, Muscat University recently provided its high-quality IT suites for students sitting the ACCA examinations. The university was happy to support the British Council hosting ACCA exams as this aligns well with the university’s own programmes in Accounting and Finance.

He added, “The university always looks forward to increasing partnership opportunities with the leading institutions operating in the Sultanate and meeting their needs in accordance with the principle

of exchanging common interests and in line with the aspirations of both sides in providing global education.”

On behalf of the British Council, Helen Mehta, Country Director, stated that, “The accreditation of Muscat University as a British Council IELTS registration centre is an exceptional addition to the list of licensed centres in Oman. The partnership is an important step that reflects the British Council’s commitment to continue supporting the country’s higher education institutions.” The IELTS test is the most popular test in the world to assess English language proficiency for non-native speakers, and it is internationally recognised by more than 10,000 institutions and universities around the world. The exam is also recognised by the leading universities inside and outside of Oman.

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. 24/2021

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Tender No.	E- Tender No	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date	Grade
PRE/21/031	(31/2021/QS-1)	Annual maintenance contract for UPS System at Muscat Municipality – various location (E- Tender)	Rial 25	12/07/2021	29/07/2021	Specialized
PRE/21/030	(32/2021/QS-2)	Connecting irrigation water to Hayy Al Muna Park at Bousher (E- Tender)	Rial 25	12/07/2021	29/07/2021	First

Tender Conditions :-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Tender Bonds shall be placed in the Tender Bond Box for E-Tendering in the Ground floor at Muscat Municipality Building, Ruwi, before 10:00 am as per the date Mentioned in the above table. All envelopes are to be clearly marked with the name of the Tender being presented and no other marks.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@ita.gov.om) or call (+968 24166670).

Palestinians cancel deal to trade vaccine doses with Israel



A Palestinian woman paints a national flag on the face of a child amidst the rubble of buildings destroyed by last month's Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip in the northern part of the Palestinian enclave. — AFP

RAMALLAH/TEL AVIV: The Palestinian Authority (PA) cancelled a deal on Friday to receive soon-to-expire Covid-19 vaccines from Israel after an initial Israeli shipment showed an expiration date sooner than had been agreed, the PA health minister said.

Israel and the PA announced a vaccine swap deal earlier on Friday that would have seen Israel send up to 1.4 million Pfizer-BioNTech doses to the PA, in exchange for receiving a reciprocal number of doses from the PA later this year.

The doses were due to "expire soon", Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's office said in a statement announcing the deal. The PA said they had been "approved in order to speed up the vaccination process" in the occupied West Bank and Gaza.

"They told us the expiration date was in July or August, which would allow lots of time for use," PA Health Minister Mai Alkaila told reporters later on Friday.

"But (the expiration) turned out to be in June. That's not enough time to use them, so we rejected them," she said.

The PA cancelled the deal over the date issue, a PA spokesman said, and sent the initial shipment of around 90,000 doses back to Israel.

Bennett's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Rights groups have criticised Israel, which led one of the world's swiftest vaccination campaigns, for not doing more to ensure Palestinian access to doses in the West Bank and Gaza, territory it captured in a 1967 war. — Reuters

Raisi wins Iran presidential vote

TEHRAN: Ebrahim Raisi was declared the winner on Saturday of Iran's presidential election, a widely anticipated result after many political heavyweights were barred from running. Raisi won 62 per cent of the vote with about 90 per cent of ballots counted from Friday's election, poll officials said, without releasing turnout figures, after the three other candidates had conceded defeat.

"I congratulate the people on their choice," said outgoing moderate President Hassan Rouhani, who has served the maximum of two consecutive four-year terms and leaves office in August.

Raisi, 60, is set to take over at a critical time, as Iran seeks to salvage its nuclear deal with major powers and free itself from punishing US sanctions that have driven a sharp economic downturn.

The head of the Iranian judiciary, Raisi is seen as close to the 81-year-old supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has ultimate political power in Iran. Friday's voting was extended by two hours past the original midnight deadline amid fears of a low turnout of 50 per cent or less.

Many voters chose to stay away after the field of some 600 hopefuls including 40 women had been winnowed down to seven candidates, all men, excluding an ex-president and a former parliament speaker. Three of the vetted candidates dropped out of the race two days before Friday's vote.

Former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, one of those barred



Iran's outgoing President Hassan Rouhani and Iran's President-elect Ebrahim Raisi speak to the media after their meeting in Tehran. — Reuters



An electoral staff empties full ballot boxes after voting ended in the presidential election in Tehran. — Reuters

from running by the Guardian Council of clerics and jurists, said he would not vote, declaring in a

video message: "I do not want to have a part in this sin." Raisi's victory was confirmed

Raisi is set to take over at a critical time, as Iran seeks to salvage its nuclear deal with major powers and free itself from US sanctions

on Saturday when he received the congratulations of the incumbent and the three other candidates — Mohsen Rezai, Amirhossein Qazizadeh Hashemi and Abdolnasser Hemmati.

Khamenei hailed the election saying that "the great winner... is the Iranian nation because it has risen up once again in the face of the propaganda of the enemy's mercenary media".

On election day, pictures of often flag-waving voters dominated state TV coverage, but away from the polling stations some voiced anger at what they saw as a stage-managed election. "Whether I vote or not, someone has already been elected," scoffed Tehran shopkeeper Saeed Zareie. "They organise the elections for the media."

Enthusiasm was dampened further by spiralling inflation and job losses, and the Covid pandemic that proved more deadly in Iran than anywhere else in the region, killing more than 80,000 people by the official count.

Among those who queued to vote at schools, mosques and community centres, many said they supported Raisi, who has promised to fight corruption, help the poor and build millions of flats for low-income families. — AFP

Jordan racing against time to save rare Dead Sea carp

FIFANATURERESERVE: Jordan is racing against time to save a tiny rare fish from extinction as falling water levels partly triggered by global warming threaten to dry up its last habitat.

The Dead Sea toothcarp (*Aphanius dispar richardsoni*) has been on the red list of the International Union for Conservation of Nature since 2014.

The IUCN warns that the "exploitation of spring waters and climate change" are major threats facing the four-centimetre-long, silver-coloured fish. "This fish is threatened with extinction at the global level. It is endemic here and does not exist elsewhere," said Ibrahim Mahasneh, the manager of the fish's last home, the Fifa Nature Reserve.

Lying some 140 kilometres

Researchers are now preparing to open an artificial pond just for the toothcarp so they can grow safely and their eggs are not devoured by predators

southwest of Amman in the Jordan Rift Valley and 60 kilometres south of the Dead Sea, the area is the lowest wet reserve on Earth. Established in 2011, the reserve consists of some 20 square kilometres. It is located some 426 metres below sea level and is managed by an independent body, the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN).

Even though the Hashemite kingdom is primarily desert, this



Abdullah Oshoush holds specimens of the endangered Dead Sea toothcarp in a glass jar at the reserve in the Jordan Rift Valley. — AFP

area of wetlands is criss-crossed by streams and is home to a variety of plant and wildlife species including birds.

"We have a plan to save and breed this fish... to create a natural

habitat for it to breed and at the same time to mitigate the existing threat," added Mahasneh. "The reserve is the last home for this endangered species of fish," said environmental researcher



Specimens of the endangered Dead Sea toothcarp. — AFP

Abdullah Oshoush who works in the reserve.

The male fish also has a streak of blue along its sides, while the female has incomplete black stripes. It is not known how many

still remain, but "monitoring programmes have warned of a clear decline in the presence of this fish in recent years," Oshoush said.

Among the environmental threats causing numbers to drop is the "lowering water level due to low rainfall and the change in its environment, as well as the presence of other fish that feed on it and its eggs."

Researchers are now preparing to open an artificial pond just for the toothcarp so they can grow safely and their eggs are not devoured by predators. Each season, a female produces around 1,000 eggs. The aim is then to release the young fish back into the natural environment. "In Jordan live two unique species of fish that do not exist anywhere else in the world. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BEIRUT

Drought may exacerbate Syria hunger crisis

A month-long drought is threatening to exacerbate a hunger crisis in Syria, as wheat might be scarce this year due to poor harvests, according to UN estimates. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) expects wheat harvest to be "way down" this season compared to last year, FAO representative in Syria Michael Robson said. The Welthungerhilfe, a German charity whose name loosely translates as World Food Aid, warned that the number of people dependent on humanitar-



ian aid would increase drastically. "The hunger situation of the people in Syria is already absolutely catastrophic today," said Syria coordinator Konstantin Witschel.

WASHINGTON

Guantanamo detainees, both Yemenis, released

Two Yemenis who have been held at the US military prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba for 17 years as alleged Al Qaeda supporters have won their release, according to newly published Defence Department filings on their cases. Ali al Hajj al Sharqawi and Abd al Salam al Hilal were both detained in 2002 as US authorities, citing a "war on terror," combed the world for members of Al Qaeda after the September 11, 2001 attacks.

They were transferred to Guantanamo in 2004, with subse-



quent records showing Sharqawi had undergone torture while being interrogated by the CIA after he was detained in Pakistan. Documents released by the Pentagon's Periodic Review Board showed both had been approved for release on June 8.

KHARTOUM

New joint force to 'crack down on Sudan insecurity'

Sudan's military has announced plans to create a joint force to "crack down on insecurity" and assert the state's authority in the capital and nationwide as an economic crisis and regional tensions plague a fragile transition period.

The announcement was made in an order from General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (pictured), deputy head of Sudan's ruling sovereign council. Dagalo, also known as Hemedti, is head of the Rapid Support



Forces which will be part of the new force with the police, armed forces, General Intelligence Service and "representatives" of rebel groups and the public prosecutor, the order said.

In brief

■ ISLAMABAD



BORDER CROSSING WITH AFGHANISTAN SHUT AFTER COVID SURGE

Pakistan closed a border crossing with Afghanistan after health authorities in Kabul reported a record surge in coronavirus infections, leaving thousands of travellers stranded on both sides. Border guards at the crossing called Friendship Gate in the south-western Pakistani town of Chamman barred Afghans from entering the country, local administration chief Tariq Mengal said.

The closure was ordered by a national body that oversees Pakistan's response to the coronavirus, Mengal said.

The sudden closure has left thousands of people who travel across the porous border between the neighbouring countries stranded on both sides without any help or information.

■ HANOI



VIETNAM INTRODUCES NATIONWIDE CODE OF CONDUCT

Vietnam introduced national guidelines on social media behaviour which encourage people to post positive content about the Southeast Asian country and require state employees to report 'conflicting information' to their superiors. The code prohibits posts which violate the law and 'affect the interests of the state' and applies to state organisations, social media companies, and all their users in Vietnam.

"Social media users are encouraged to promote the beauty of Vietnam's scenery, people and culture, and spread good stories about good people", reads the code, which was contained in a decision from the information ministry and dated June 17.

■ MANILA



PHILIPPINES RAISES CAP ON HEALTH PROFESSIONALS GOING ABROAD

The Philippines has increased the number of nurses and healthcare workers allowed to go overseas to 6,500 annually, a senior official said, amid high demand for its health professionals. The Philippines, one of the world's biggest sources of nurses, reached its annual cap of 5,000 health worker deployments late last month.

Those with contracts as of May 31 can take up overseas employment, presidential spokesperson Harry Roque said. That means another 1,500 nurses and healthcare staff can work abroad, according to the labour ministry.

Flower protests mark Suu Kyi's 76th birthday

YANGON: Anti-coup protesters in Myanmar donned flowers in their hair on Saturday to mark the birthday of ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who remains under house arrest and is due to face court again next week.

Suu Kyi's elected government was overthrown in a February 1 coup that sparked mass protests and renewed clashes between the military and ethnic rebel armies in border regions.

Flowers tucked into a bun have long been a signature look of Suu Kyi, who turned 76 on Saturday.

Many replicated the floral hairstyle and uploaded pictures onto social media across Myanmar for the occasion.

Among them was Myanmar Miss Universe beauty queen Thuzar Wint Lwin, who wore red flowers in her hair and wrote: "May our leader be healthy."

In Yangon's north, protesters put up posters on power lines wishing Suu Kyi a happy birthday and expressing solidarity.

"Happy Birthday Mother Suu. We are right behind you", the signs read. Some marched with black umbrellas and banners that read "freedom from fear" alongside pictures of Suu Kyi.

In the border region of Karen state, some rebel soldiers were photographed holding their guns and yellow, white and purple posies, as well as single flowers tucked behind their ears.

Demonstrators in the south-eastern city of Dawei made a giant



Protesters make the three-finger salute and hold posters of Myanmar's detained civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi to mark her birthday in Yangon. — AFP

pink birthday cake and brought it to their street protest.

The Noble Peace Prize Laureate's international reputation was damaged after she defended Myanmar's military over allegations of genocide against the ethnic minority Rohingya population in troubled Rakhine state in 2017.

Not all Myanmar flower protest participants were full of praise for Suu Kyi. "I am involved in this campaign because now she is unfairly detained by the military and her civilian rights... and

freedom is denied," a 35-year-old activist said, adding it wasn't personal support.

"After she is free from her detention, she will have to take full responsibility over her silence concerning the suffering of Rohingya and other ethnic groups."

Czech Republic Prime Minister Andrej Babis sent birthday wishes to Suu Kyi from afar.

"I wish you all the best for your health and strength... We stand with the people of Burma", he said.

The civilian death toll since the

coup is estimated to be at least 870 people and close to 5,000 protesters are in detention after being arrested, according to a local monitoring group.

The UN General Assembly on Friday took the rare step of calling on member states to "prevent the flow of arms" into Myanmar, part of a non-binding resolution condemning the military coup in the violence-wracked country.

The resolution — which did not go so far as to call for a global arms embargo — also demands that the military "immediately

stop all violence against peaceful demonstrators".

It was approved by 119 countries, with 36 abstaining including China, Myanmar's main ally. Only one country, Belarus, voted against it.

Suu Kyi is due back in court next week and has been hit with an eclectic raft of criminal charges, including accepting illegal payments of gold and violating a colonial-era secrecy law. She went on trial for sedition on Tuesday, but journalists were barred from observing proceedings. — AFP



Aung San Suu Kyi

THE CIVILIAN DEATH TOLL SINCE THE COUP IS ESTIMATED TO BE AT LEAST 870 PEOPLE AND CLOSE TO 5,000 PROTESTERS ARE IN DETENTION

Singapore sees early rush for Sinovac vaccine

SINGAPORE: Offering Sinovac Biotech Covid-19 vaccines to the public in Singapore for the first time since Friday, several private clinics reported overwhelming demand for the Chinese-made shot, despite already available rival vaccines having far higher efficacy.

Singapore has vaccinated almost half its 5.7 million population with at least one dose of the vaccines from Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna. Both have shown efficacy rates of well over 90 per cent against symptomatic disease in clinical trials, compared with Sinovac's 51 per cent.

Evidence from other countries showed people who had taken the Sinovac vaccine were still getting infected, Kenneth Mak, Singapore's Director of Medical Services, said on Friday. "There is a significant risk of vaccine breakthrough", he said, referring to the report on Indonesian healthcare workers.

A number of the people rushing for the Sinovac shot on the first day of its availability in Singapore were Chinese nationals, who felt it would make it easier to travel home without going through quarantine.

Singapore allowed the usage of the Sinovac vaccine by private healthcare institutions under a special access route, following an emergency use approval by the World Health Organization (WHO) earlier this month. Singapore said it is awaiting critical data from Sinovac before including it in the national vaccination programme.

Meantime, authorities have



Swab tests are conducted at a public housing estate after a nearby food centre in Singapore. — Reuters

selected 24 private clinics to administer its current stock of 200,000 doses. The clinics are charging between S\$10-25 per dose.

Authorities have selected 24 private clinics to administer its current stock of 200,000 doses which are charging between S\$10-25 per dose

"We have about 2,400 bookings, so that stretches from right now until end of July", Louis Tan, CEO at StarMed Specialist Centre, said on Saturday. He said many of those who made the Sinovac bookings tend to be in their 40s and above.

Wee Healthfirst, another approved clinic, put a notice at its entrance, saying it had

stopped reservations for the vaccine until next Thursday, citing "overwhelming demand". A receptionist said about 1,000 people had registered there.

Leong Hoe Nam, an infectious diseases doctor at Rophi Clinic, also said he had been "overwhelmed" by people wanting the Sinovac shot.

Tang Guang Yu, a 49-year-old engineer, was among the Chinese nationals resident in Singapore who waited for the Sinovac shot rather than take a foreign-made vaccine that he thought might not be recognised by authorities back home.

"No one wants to be quarantined for a month, I don't have so many days of leave", Tang told Reuters as he queued outside a clinic.

Travellers to China may have to be quarantined at a facility and at home for up to a month depending on their destination city, regardless of vaccination status, according to the Chinese government website. — Reuters



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un attends the Plenary Meeting of 8th Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea in Pyongyang. — Reuters

North Korea's Kim appoints new politburo members

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has reinforced the ruling Workers' Party discipline and appointed new members of its powerful politburo, state media KCNA reported on Saturday.

The party's central committee held a plenary meeting for a fourth and last day where it reviewed organisational and ideological issues for its central leadership organ.

Some members of the leadership expressed "remorse for failing to live up to the expectations", after Kim pointed out "serious problems" with their lifestyle, KCNA said, without elaborating.

The central committee's powerful politburo also elected Thae Hyong Chol, Vice-President of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, as a new member, and U Sang Chol, an official at the party's Central Auditing Commission, as an alternate member, KCNA said.

The party gathering kicked off on Tuesday.

During earlier sessions, Kim called for measures to tackle the "tense" food situation, blaming the coronavirus pandemic and last year's typhoons, and urged preparation for both dialogue and confrontation with the United States in his first direct comment on US President Joe Biden's administration.

Meanwhile, Kim laid out "appropriate strategic and tactical counteraction" to deal with Washington in a detailed analysis of its North Korea policy at Thursday's plenary meeting of his ruling Workers' Party's central committee, KCNA said.

"The general secretary stressed the need to get prepared for both dialogue and confrontation, especially to get fully prepared for confrontation, in order to protect the dignity of our state and its interests for independent development."

— Reuters

Moscow records pandemic high for Covid cases for 2nd day running

MOSCOW: Russia's capital Moscow on Saturday reported a pandemic high for new coronavirus cases for the second straight day, as the city's hospitals were flooded with new patients due to the Delta variant.

The city registered 9,120 new coronavirus infections in 24 hours, according to government figures, a second consecutive high topping the previous day's total of 9,056 cases.

Those figures have ballooned from just 3,000 daily just two weeks ago, with Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin saying the highly infectious Delta variant first identified in India represented nearly 90 per cent of new cases.

The new wave of infections came as Russia's second city of Saint Petersburg, the country's worst Covid hotspot after Moscow, is slated to host seven Euro 2020 matches — including a quarter-final on July 2 — expected to draw thousands of European football fans.

Officials are now scurrying to reintroduce pandemic restrictions and roll out new beds dedicated to coronavirus patients.

On Monday, Saint Petersburg announced a tightening of restrictions including no food sales in its Euro 2020 fan zones.

Measures have been more drastic in Moscow, where Sobyanin on Friday shuttered the city's fan zone, banned gatherings of more than 1,000, suspended



Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin accompanied by chief doctor of the Kommunarka infectious diseases hospital and Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin (R), visits the hospital for Covid-19 patients outside Moscow. — AFP

all mass entertainment events and closed dance halls.

The Russian moves come just over a month before the Tokyo Olympics. The Japanese capital's governor said on Saturday the city will cancel all public viewing events. Rather than set up six planned viewing sites, "we will make greater use of the web to create exciting atmospheres for the Games," Yuriko Koike said.

MOSCOW MAYOR SOBYANIN SAID THE LATEST MEASURES ARE NECESSARY BECAUSE THE CAPITAL'S HOSPITALS WERE INUNDATED WITH COVID PATIENTS WITHIN DAYS

Moscow mayor Sobyanin has said the latest measures are necessary because the capital's hospitals were inundated with Covid patients within days. On Thursday, he said that in just five days 13,000 free hospital beds had been "eaten up" and that the city has since expanded to 17,000 beds.

One of his deputies, Anastasia Rakova, said in a statement on

Saturday that Moscow would add another 7,000 beds over the next two weeks, bringing the total to 24,000.

In Russia, Moscow mayor Sobyanin extended closures announced last weekend of food halls in public spaces like malls, as well as overnight shuttering of bars and restaurants. The city has also ordered mandatory vaccination for residents working in the service industry, saying some 60 per cent would have to be fully inoculated by August 15.

Although free jabs have been available to Russians since December, just 19.5 million out of a population of some 146 million have received at least one dose of a vaccine, according to the Gogov website which tallies Covid figures from the regions and the media.

In Moscow, only 1.5 million of the capital's roughly 12 million people have been fully vaccinated.

A recent independent survey found that 60 per cent of Russians do not intend to be vaccinated.

Russia is among the countries hardest hit by the pandemic, with the sixth-highest number of cases in the world, according to an AFP tally based on official figures.

It overtook Britain on Thursday as the European country to suffer the most Covid deaths, reaching 128,911 by Saturday — although Kremlin critics argue the real figure is far higher due to undercounting by authorities. — AFP

Liberian rebel sentenced for war crimes

GENEVA: A Liberian rebel commander was sentenced in Switzerland to 20 years in jail on Friday for abuse, killings and an act of cannibalism, in one of the first ever convictions over the West African country's civil war.

The case was also Switzerland's first war crimes trial in a civilian court. It involved 46-year-old Alieu Kosiah who went by the nom de guerre "bluff boy" in the rebel faction ULIMO that fought former president Charles Taylor's army in the 1990s.

Kosiah faced 25 charges including one where he was accused of eating slices of a man's heart. He was convicted of that and all but four of the other counts, documents from the Swiss Federal Court showed.

He was arrested in 2014 in Switzerland, where he had been living as a permanent resident. A 2011 Swiss law allows prosecution for serious crimes committed anywhere, under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

A plaintiff in the case who testified that Kosiah ordered his brother's murder urged other Liberians to come forward as witnesses and secure more convictions.

"If you set an example, the other guys will be afraid," he said in a statement via the NGO Civitas Maxima that represented him. He asked not to be named in media reports for fear of reprisals. — Reuters

WHO declares an end to second Ebola outbreak in Guinea

NZEREKORE, Guinea: The World Health Organization on Saturday officially announced the end of Guinea's second Ebola outbreak which was declared in February and claimed 12 lives.

At 16 confirmed cases and seven probable infections according to WHO figures, the limited size of the latest flare-up has been credited to experience from the 2013-16 epidemic, which killed more than 11,300 people mostly in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Just 12 people died this time around.

"I have the honour of declaring the end of Ebola" in Guinea, WHO official Alfred Ki-Zerbo said at a ceremony in the southeastern Nzerekore region where the disease surfaced at the

end of January.

International rules meant that Guinea had to wait 42 days — twice the virus' incubation period — without a new case before declaring the epidemic over.

That wait was over on Friday, weeks after the last person was declared cured on May 8, a senior health ministry official said.

Health Minister Remy Laham also declared the outbreak finished "in the name of the head of state" President Alpha Conde.

Saturday's event in a health ministry building was attended by around 200 people including local religious and community leaders.

"We must also thank the communities who pitched in to overcome the disease," the WHO's Ki-Zerbo said.



A member of Doctors Without Borders (MSF) putting on protective gear at the isolation ward of the Donka Hospital in Conakry, where people infected with the Ebola virus are being treated. — AFP File Photo

During last decade's outbreak, reluctance and outright hostility towards anti-Ebola infection control measures led some people

in Guinea's forested southeast to attack and even kill government employees.

"Community engagement,

International rules meant that Guinea had to wait 42 days, twice the virus' incubation period, a new case before declaring the epidemic over

effective public health measures and the equitable use of vaccines" had this time been key to overcoming Ebola, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a statement.

The UN body said it had delivered around 24,000 vaccine doses to Guinea and that 11,000 people at high risk had received shots, including more than 2,800 frontline workers.

"We've beaten Ebola but let's remain vigilant" read a banner unfurled at Saturday's ceremony.

"We must stay alert for a possible resurgence and ensure the expertise in Ebola expands to other health threats such as Covid-19," WHO Africa director Matshidiso Moeti said.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said in a statement that genetic sequencing showed links between the previous outbreak and the latest epidemic.

This year's outbreak could have been caused by "persistent infection in a survivor from the West Africa outbreak" back then, the CDC said, emphasising "the necessity for strong and ongoing survivor programmes" as well as more research. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BERLIN

Germany on alert for wildfires as heatwave descends

There was growing concern about the danger posed by wildfires in the region surrounding Berlin, which was sweltering in hot summer temperatures at the weekend. In the largest fire so far this season, 43 firefighting units were battling flames covering an area of 10 hectares near Boetzow, north-west of Berlin, on Saturday.

Further forces were being called in to help, including a water-bombing helicopter, a regional command centre said.



Authorities were taking into account the potential for another danger: buried World War II munitions that could ignite and hamper efforts to contain the blaze.

BRUSSELS

3 dead, 2 missing under Belgium school collapse

Three construction workers were confirmed dead and two still missing on Saturday, a day after a school construction site partially collapsed in the Belgian city of Antwerp. The city's fire department tweeted that three bodies had been found under the rubble.

"Despite this terrible toll, the rescue work continues unabated until we are also able to free the two remaining missing persons," it said. Two of the dead were from Portugal and Romania, police told local media.



The nationality of the third dead worker was not clear. Rescuers had said when three people were still missing that they were looking for two more Portuguese and one Russian.

AMSTERDAM

The Netherlands to ditch most facemasks rules

Face masks will mostly no longer be required across the Netherlands and other restrictions will ease from next week, after a drop in Covid-19 cases, Prime Minister Mark Rutte said. Most limits on group sizes will also be lifted from June 26, as long as people can keep at least 1.5 metres apart, he told a news conference.

"This is a special moment", Rutte said. "Many times I have stood here to tell you what you can't do. But now we can focus on what is possible." No new lim-



its will be set on the number of guests allowed in stores, bars and restaurants, Rutte said, as long as they keep their distance, or show that they have been vaccinated or have a negative test.

What tangled webs we weave, as we flatter to deceive

The wonderful Jonathan Swift wrote, “Falsehood flies, and the truth comes limping after it, so that when men come to be undeceived it is too late, the jest is over and the tale has had its effect,” meaning the damage has been done!

That recalls Ashley Lutz’ recent comment that “Incompetent bosses often hide behind their more skilled employees.” Even though it has become the norm for teams to review their supervisors, employees are often afraid to speak up because they fear the consequences. You should have more respect for yourself! Supervisors who would take credit for your achievements, while blaming you for their failings are schemers, recidivist, and habitual. Each new intrigue a plot, a new ploy, to maintain control. Such machinations are not solitary reactions, but wily conspiracies, seeking to take, or keep, something that they may even entitled to, yet are so insecure in their own knowledge and understanding.

Let us be clear... there is nothing wrong with wanting things, we all want things from the time we are kids when we want to be fed, then toys, then clothes, money, cars, jewellery, children, homes, grandchildren, companionship, comfort, and ultimately... rest! But, in real life, at every step, someone wants that which is yours. Babies pinch toys from each



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KNOWING THE
LIE MEANS YOU
KNOW THE TRUTH,
AND WITH SO
MUCH MORE
CERTAINTY THAN
BEFORE, SO YOU
GAIN STRENGTH,
OR CONVICTION,
THROUGH THAT
KNOWLEDGE

other, kids pinch cookies and friends, teens steal friends, adults become well... covetous, and that is where the worst deceptions occur... as having achieved a position of dominance, that is not enough, the covetous conceal their own failings, inabilities, and insecurities, by using your talents to fulfil their own obligations.

You see... they cannot possess your intellect, your knowledge, your understanding, even your thoughts, and that must really irritate them! So, they do the next best thing, manipulating who you can effectively interact with, so they have ownership of the results of that intellect, knowledge, understanding, and thought processes, and take credit for positive results whilst wielding any negatives are used as a further control mechanism. They become masters of a chess like game, where they know the rules and you do not even know you are playing! not. Only with maturity will you understand that really, in truth... there are no rules. However certainly, to divide first to conquer, then divide and rule, is the old maxim that rings true in far too many organisations and institutions. If we learned one thing from that enormously successful ‘Game of Thrones’ series, it is that manipulation and deception can keep even the strongest blind to their potential, and oblivious to opportunity.

Most of us do not see or recognise

all deception though, as it is human nature to see others in the light of our own standards and morality. While we may recognise undeserved discipline or reprimand for what it is, we will rarely see it as part of that greater scheme because in our youth and naivety, the only great scheme we see, is that we are allowed to see, and we are parties not to concepts and ideas, but are compartmentalised, and task driven. The deceiver knows too, from ‘Loves Labors Lost,’ “A jest’s prosperity lies in the ear that hears it, never in the tongue that makes it.” Yet knowing a deception is empowering, hurtful, disturbing at first, but then with maturity and understanding, knowing the lie means you know the truth, and with so much more certainty than before, so you gain strength, or conviction, through that knowledge.

Deceptive employers and supervisors don’t think about you while they are plotting, and may appear much differently than their true character, as in Shakespeare’s ‘McBeth,’ “Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent beneath it...” They are narcissistic and conceited, remarkably self-absorbed, and while their high position gives them prominence, their actions ensure that they remain uneasy... So, again to quote Shakespeare, the master of the intrigue, “They whose guilt within their bosom lies, imagine every eye beholds their lies.”

COP26 Uniting the world to tackle climate change

ALOK SHARMA

This November, the UK will welcome the countries of the world to Glasgow for the 26th UN Climate Change Conference, COP26. This is our moment to get the world on track to address the enormous threat of climate change and build a cleaner, brighter future for us all.

We know what we need to do, because we’ve already agreed what we’re aiming for. In 2015, the world signed the Paris Agreement, an international deal to tackle the climate crisis. That Agreement commits us to limit global temperature rises to well below two degrees, aiming for 1.5 degrees, because the science tells us that would avoid the worst effects of climate change.

Every fraction of a degree makes a difference. An average global temperature rise of two degrees, compared to 1.5, would see hundreds of millions more people affected, and twice as many plant and three times as many insect species losing vast swathes of their habitat.

However, since the 1.5 degree target was set, the world has not done nearly enough and our planet is heating up. In my role as COP26 President Designate, I have witnessed the impact first hand: melting glaciers, crop degradation, villagers forced from their homes. If we continue as we are, these effects will get worse, and fast.

The Climate Action Tracker estimates that if countries keep to their emissions reduction targets, we are now on course for average temperature rises of 2.4 degrees. This is progress on their estimates this time last year. But there is much further to go; to limit warming to 1.5 degrees, we must halve global emissions by 2030. So this is the decisive decade.

We must act now, to launch a consistent and concerted effort to reduce emissions throughout the next ten years. And use the Covid-19 recovery to reimagine our economies, building a better future, one with green jobs and cleaner air, increasing prosperity without harming the planet.

This is what makes the next United Nations climate conference in Glasgow, COP26, so critical. It must be the moment where every country, and every part of society, embraces their responsibility, to protect our precious planet, and keep the 1.5 degree target alive. And we have a clear plan to get there.

As COP26 President Designate, alongside the Prime Minister, fellow ministers and the whole of the UK’s diplomatic network, I am pressing for action around four key goals.

We must put the world on a path to driving down emissions, until they reach net zero by the middle of this century. This is imperative to keeping 1.5 degrees within reach. So we need countries to come forward with clear targets to reduce emissions. This means near term 2030 emissions reductions targets consistent with net zero by the middle of the century. And these targets must be based on the science, so that net zero is not just a vague aspiration, but a concrete plan.

We also need to see action on the most polluting sectors. If we are serious about 1.5 degrees, Glasgow must be the COP that consigns coal power to history, calls time on deforestation and signals the end of polluting vehicles. So we are working with governments and through international organisations to end international coal financing, a personal priority of mine. We are urging countries to abandon coal power, and we are working with developing countries to support their transition to clean energy.

We are seeing real progress. The G7 Climate and Environment Ministers’ meeting I recently co-chaired, committed G7 nations to end all new direct government support for international coal power by the end of 2021. And ministers agreed to transition away from dirty coal domestically to an overwhelmingly decarbonised power system in the 2030s.

(The author is a member of British parliament. He is currently serving as President for COP26, based in the Cabinet Office, and is a full member of the Cabinet.)



ABNORMAL TEMPERATURES

Enduring the hottest weather on record

DAN WHITCOMB AND
PETER SZEKELY

An extreme heat wave that has already shattered temperature records across the US Southwest threatened on Friday to push power systems to the brink of failure as residents cranked up air conditioners.

California power grid operators, who have so far been able to keep the lights on, issued their latest “flex alert” for Friday, asking homeowners across the state to conserve energy in the late afternoon and evening when demand surges.

The heat, which comes amid years of drought across the Southwest, has strained power grids in California and Texas and fuelled the spread of wildfires.

“It feels somewhat apocalyptic with the record high heat, the smoke from wildfires tearing through the Sonoran desert and the news on the drought,” said Emily Kirkland, a communications organiser for a Phoenix nonprofit group. “Just the 10-minute walk from my house to the light rail made me queasy.”

The National Weather Service has issued excessive heat warnings for five states — California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona and parts of Colorado — warning that temperatures soaring well above 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius) can be dangerous.

Temperature records have already been tied or broken in Salt Lake City, Palm Springs and elsewhere and



An aerial view shows Elizabeth Lake in Los Angeles County that has been dried up for several years, as the region experiences extreme heat and drought conditions. — Reuters

POWER SYSTEMS
IN TEXAS AND
CALIFORNIA HAVE
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SYSTEM RUNNING

record highs were forecast for Phoenix.

“It’s miserable, you literally just don’t leave your house unless you have to,” said Hannah Knight, 20, a waitress at The Coronado coffee shop in Phoenix.

The diner has an outdoor dining area but “when it reaches over 110 (degrees Fahrenheit), there’s no way to make it comfortable,” she said.

Many other cities were expected to come close to tying or breaking their daily records, including Las Vegas where a high temperature of 114 degrees was forecast.

A high-pressure ridge, or dome, over the Southwest has been blamed

for the heat wave.

“Every year it’s hot in the Southwest,” National Weather Service meteorologist Bob Oravec said from the Weather Prediction Center in College Park, Maryland. “It just seems to be more newsworthy when you have temperatures of 115 or so day after day. It’s pretty hot.”

Power systems in Texas and California have so far withstood the strain but operators said that if residents did not conserve energy in the late afternoon, rolling blackouts could be required to keep the system running. — Reuters

SPORT

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France's Antoine Griezmann celebrates scoring their first goal. - Reuters

GRIEZMANN RESCUES DRAW FOR FRANCE AGAINST HUNGARY

BUDAPEST: Antoine Griezmann salvaged a 1-1 draw for France against Hungary in Budapest as the world champions missed the chance to clinch a place in the Euro 2020 last 16 on Saturday.

Hungary threatened to blow Group F wide open when Attila Fiola gave the hosts a shock lead in first-half stoppage time after catching out the France defence.

But Griezmann, the Golden Boot winner at Euro 2016, equalised on 66 minutes as an unconvincing France avoided a first competitive defeat since June 2019.

Didier Deschamps' side top the section with four points, one above reigning champions Portugal who play Germany in Munich later.

Hungary earned their first point and the Germans are bottom after losing to France in their opener.

France stay in Budapest for their final game against Portugal, while Hungary travel to Munich to take on Germany, still hoping to qualify for the knockout phase for a second straight tournament.

Contending with stifling temperatures in excess of 30 degrees Celsius (86 degrees Fahrenheit) and a crowd approaching 60,000 at the Puskas Arena, the only Euro 2020 venue without capacity restrictions due to Covid-19, France controlled much of the first half.

Having lived up to their billing as tournament favourites in a 1-0 win over Germany, France

Didier Deschamps' side top the section with four points, one above reigning champions Portugal who play Germany in Munich later. Hungary earned their first point and the Germans are bottom after losing to France in their opener

dominated Hungary early on, creating numerous chances against a side that held out for 84 minutes before losing 3-0 to Portugal.

Peter Gulacsi clawed away Karim Benzema's low drive, reacting sharply to keep out Griezmann's follow-up, despite the Barcelona star being flagged for offside.

Lucas Digne, brought into the side for Lucas Hernandez as the only change made by France coach Deschamps, then picked out an unmarked Kylian Mbappe whose glancing header flashed narrowly wide. Hungary lost captain Adam Szalai to injury midway through the first half, and the hosts were living dangerously as Benzema

sliced badly from a superb flick by Mbappe before the Paris Saint-Germain forward dragged wide himself.

France captain Hugo Lloris had warned of over confidence against a team expected to finish bottom of the group, and Les Bleus were punished for a brief lapse just before half-time.

Fiola collected Adam Nagy's crossfield ball and played a one-two with Roland Sallai, outpacing Benjamin Pavard and holding off Raphael Varane to side-foot beyond Lloris at his near post.

Deschamps had waited until the 89th minute before making a substitute in the opener against Germany, but the introduction of Ousmane Dembele for Adrien

Rabiot on the hour nearly brought an immediate equaliser as the Barcelona forward rattled the post.

France pulled level when a long kick upfield by Lloris sailed over the head of Nagy, with Mbappe latching onto it ahead of Hungary's Paris-born Loic Nego.

His ball across goal was deflected into Griezmann's path by Willi Orban, allowing the forward to slam in his seventh European Championship goal.

Gulacsi produced a fine save to turn away a fierce shot from Mbappe as France pressed for a victory that would have sent them through to the knockout phase. Instead, they must wait until Wednesday's clash with Portugal.

— AFP

Barakat bags bronze in Arab Athletics meet in Tunisia

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 19

Oman's star athlete, Barakat al Harthi, claimed bronze medal at the 22nd Arab Senior Athletics Championship (men and women) which will conclude on Sunday in Rades Stadium in Tunisia.

Barakat finished the 100 metres with a timing of 10.43 seconds and bagged the bronze medal. Qatar's Femi Seion clinched gold medal after clocking 10.19 seconds while the silver medal went to his team-mate Toseen Joseph with a time of 10.41 seconds.

Oman's ace long-distance runner Mohammed al Suliemani disappointed in the 1500 metre running competition as he was positioned in tenth and last place with a timing of 4'04'96. The 22nd Arab Senior Athletics Championship is a certified athletics event by the International



Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF). The Arabian event acts as the last chance for the Arab's athletes to confirm their presence in the forthcoming 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo which will take place during July 23 until August 8

through registering the minimum desired record which is required for the Olympic Games.

Barakat was supposed to register a timing of 10.05 in 100 metres running competition to seal spot in the Olympic Games. However, he

will attend in the top Olympic event through the only wild card entry in athletics and Mazoon al Alawi may not get the chance to participate in the upcoming 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games.

Morocco is topping the table



order of the Arab Senior Athletics Championship as their athletes captured twelve medals including five gold, two silver and five bronze.

The hosts, Tunisia, placed as runner up with eight medals while Egypt in third position and

possess twelve medals. As many as 400 athletes are taking part in the ongoing edition of championship representing 19 countries including: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iraq, Oman, Bahrain, Syria, Somalia, Djibouti, Yemen, Palestine, Jordan, Sudan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Egypt, Algeria, Lebanon, Comoros and the hosts Tunisia.

The only competition which is pending for Oman athletes is the relay race. The team will comprise from Barakat al Harthi, Sameer al Riyami, Rashid al Asmi and Mohammed al Saadi in the 400*100 meter distance running.

On the other hand, Oman's delegation head Eng Yaqoob al Siyabi, Chairman of Oman Athletics Association (OAA) attended the reception and dinner in honor of a delegation from the Arabian Athletics Federation and Organising Committee of Tunisia Athletics Federation.

Impressive Scotland hold England to draw



England's midfielder Jack Grealish (L) and Scotland's defender Kieran Tierney vie for the ball. — AFP



Scotland fans react after the UEFA Euro 2020 Group D match between England and Scotland. — AFP

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, JUNE 19

The much-anticipated match between the oldest rivals in football ended in a stalemate with neither side able to find a way to score. But with a point from this game and another group match to come, England should have enough to qualify for the last 16.

England manager Gareth Southgate said: "I think it was a fair score-line. We didn't do enough to win the game. We didn't do enough to create clear cut chances but we didn't deserve to lose the game either. We give huge credit to Scotland, they defended extremely well and they used the ball well."

He added: "We had moments down

the sides where the spaces were but we couldn't exploit those spaces. Scotland defended those areas well and we couldn't find the answers. We have to look at the whole performance and use of the ball and review where we can be better."

Scotland were impressive, well drilled and made it difficult for England to get beyond their midfield. They certainly had the better of the first half. For Scotland, 19-year-old Billy Gilmour was outstanding and Andrew Robertson, on the left, was a threat to the opposition.

England looked anxious, panicky at times and ragged, almost as if they lacked self-belief. Much was expected of striker Harry Kane who hardly touched the ball in the first half. He did have a chance from a superb cross from Reece James but the ball

I think it was a fair score-line. We didn't do enough to win the game. We didn't do enough to create clear cut chances but we didn't deserve to lose the game either. We give huge credit to Scotland, they defended extremely well and they used the ball well

GARETH SOUTHGATE
England coach

skidded in front of him as he attempted a diving header.

England had their best chance in the first half when John Stone rose unchallenged to a corner but headed against the post. That was followed by near misses with Phil Foden's left-footed shot going just wide of the far post and Mason Mount missing a near post opportunity when his shot was deflected wide. Mount had also forced an excellent save from David Marshall.

Scotland were unlucky not to score when a shot by Lyndon Dykes was headed off the line by James in the 62nd minute and Che Adams missed a good chance in the 78th minute, putting his shot wide. Prior to that, in the first half, Jordan Pickford made a fine diving save from Stephen O'Donnell's

shot. At the final whistle, there were boos from England fans who felt let down while the underdog Scots roared.

Scotland manager, Steve Clarke said: "I was pleased with the performance. We defended well, we played well. Obviously, we had to be solid defensively, we had to work hard to stop England creating chances that they always create." He praised his players. "Steve O'Donnell was exceptional and Billy Gilmour was just behind him. He is a big player on big stage and big part in future for Scotland."

He added: "I'm pleased for all my players and staff. The objective was to get something out of the game so that we can go into the next game with chance to qualify for next round and that's what we've done, so we're pleased with that."

Forsberg fires Sweden to top of group



Sweden's Emil Forsberg in action with Slovakia's Juraj Kucka after sustaining an injury. — Reuters

ST PETERSBURG: Sweden moved to the top of Group E with a 1-0 win over Slovakia on Friday after Emil Forsberg scored their first goal of the European Championship from the penalty spot to put the Scandinavian side on track for the knockouts.

In a game short of clear-cut chances, Slovakia goalkeeper Martin Dubravka tripped Robin Quaison in the second half and Forsberg beat him from the resulting penalty to end a 365-minute run without a goal for Sweden at the Euros.

The winger told SVT broadcaster that the first half was only "half-okay". "In the second we played the ball up, we created a little more pressure. A great action by Robin Quaison to win the penalty, fantastic to score it," he added.

Sweden, who last reached the knockout stage in 2004, lead the group with four points from two games, one ahead of Slovakia in their second successive Euros as an independent nation.

Spain, who have one point, play bottom side Poland on Saturday. The final round of Group E fixtures — Sweden v Poland and Slovakia v Spain — will be played on Wednesday. Both teams threatened from set pieces early in the first half but Slovakia's Juraj Kucka and Sweden's Mikael Lustig saw headers sail over the bar. Sweden were compact at the back, as they were against Spain in their goalless opener, and it was centre back Victor Lindelof initiating attacks with his distribution from a high defensive line, at times camped in Slovakia's half.

Slovakia switched to a five-man defence when they were out of possession, frustrating the Swedes who were unable to string passes in the final third while Slovakia's defence easily won the aerial duels.

Slovakia eventually made inroads towards the end of the first half as Sweden retreated but they lacked the creativity to make the final pass count and the first 45 minutes ended with neither goalkeeper tested.

SCHICK PUTS CZECHS CLOSER TO KNOCKOUTS

The Czech Republic closed in on the Euro 2020 knockouts on Friday as a bloodied and battered Patrik Schick netted a first-half penalty to help them secure a 1-1 draw with Croatia, whose own qualification hopes will go down

to the wire.

Schick, who took his tally for the tournament to three, picked himself off the turf and wiped the blood from his nose and mouth before burying a 37th minute spot kick, awarded after Dejan Lovren's flailing elbow clattered into the striker's face.

That was not enough to secure victory, however, as Ivan Perisic's superb leveller shortly after the break gave Croatia renewed hope of making it through.

The result left the Czechs with four points from their two games and a giant step closer to booking their spot in the last 16. They face England in their final game at Wembley on Tuesday knowing victory would see them top the group while defeat would probably not be fatal. — Reuters

Al Mashaykhi gears up for 2020 Tokyo Paralympic Games

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 19

Dr Mansour bin Sultan al Touqi, Chairman of Oman Paralympic Committee (OPC), said that the committee is under continuation of its plans to enhance the capabilities of the talented players through external camps, with an aim of raising their technical levels.

"OPC has sought to provide the appropriate environment for the preparation of players including Mohammed al Mashaykhi, who is currently preparing for the 2020 Tokyo Paralympic Games, which will be held next August, for which he qualified among six players in the world for the first qualification of the Sultanate without a white card," he added.

The chief of OPC appreciated the support of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and supporters from the private sector.

"OPC set up a preparation camp for the player, which began with an external camp two months ago in Morocco, during which Muhammad al

Mashaykhi went for an intensive training programme under direct supervision of the head coach of the national team, Sonia Mustafa. Taha al Harrasi was also in the overseas camp in Morocco under the supervision of his coach Al Sakri. The purpose of the camps was continuation of the intensive training programmes and giving them greater training doses and preparing them perfectly for the upcoming events. Then, the players of the national team and the technical staff moved to a second external preparatory camp in Tunisia which is underway until today,"

The chairman of OPC affirmed that the national Paralympics team will take part in "Fazza" International Powerlifting Championship for disability people in Dubai from June 18 to 25.

"The national team will be represented by Fadel bin Nasser al Hadi, who is ranked internationally and he is currently in the championship under the supervision of Adnan al Owaiddi, member of the Oman Paralympic Committee," he ended.



KOHLI HELPS INDIA REBUILD IN WTC FINAL



India's Virat Kohli in action. – Reuters



New Zealand players celebrate the wicket of India's Rohit Sharma. – Reuters

SOUTHAMPTON, England: India captain Virat Kohli took on a rebuilding job for his team on Saturday, taking them to 120-3 by tea on the first day of play in the World Test Championship (WTC) final against New Zealand.

Trent Boult dismissed the dour Cheteshwar Pujara after lunch before Kohli, on 35 at tea, combined with deputy Ajinkya Rahane to try to shore up the innings.

Rahane did not look entirely convincing against the moving ball and was batting on 13 when fading light forced an early break for tea.

After persistent rain washed out the entire opening day on Friday, New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson unsurprisingly elected to field after winning the toss.

Under an overcast sky, India scored 69 runs but lost both their

Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill raised 62 runs for the opening partnership, negating the moving ball by standing outside the crease.

set openers in an evenly balanced morning session.

Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill raised 62 runs for the opening partnership, negating the moving ball by standing outside the crease.

But Kyle Jamieson brought the flourishing stand to an end with a delivery that swung late. Rohit, having made a fluent 34, left his bat hanging and Tim Southee dived to his right to pouch the outside edge at third slip.



India fans hold up flags in the stands before play. – Reuters

Neil Wagner was introduced late in the session, and the left-arm quick struck with his third delivery dismissing Gill caught behind for 28.

Pujara took 36 balls to get off the mark and, like Gill earlier in the match, was smacked on the helmet grille by a rising delivery which sent his neck guard flying.

Pujara made eight before Boult swung one back in to trap him lbw.

Both teams stuck to their strength with India picking both their spinners — Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja — and New Zealand opting for an all-seam attack.

Organisers have allocated a reserve day to make up for lost time.

The one-off match marks the culmination of a two-year cycle of the inaugural WTC, launched in 2019 to create a pinnacle event for test cricket. — Reuters

Oman chase a win against Somalia to enter Arab Cup final

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 19

Oman national football team will aim for victory against Somalia on Sunday in the qualifying match to cruise into the finals of inaugural edition of Fifa Arab Cup 2021. The match will kick off at 9:00 pm at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium in Doha.

The Red Warriors entered this match few days after confirmation of their attendance in the deciding round of the 2022 Fifa World Cup Asian Qualifiers and a spot in the AFC 2023 Asian Cup finals. Oman ended their campaign in the Group E at the joint qualification as runner up with 18 points behind Qatar who led the group.

Coach Branko Ivankovic's men are in best shape to face Somalia team after they played three top matches in the second round of joint qualifier against Qatar, Afghanistan and India. Today's evening encounter will be played at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium which is the venue that hosted all of the Red Warriors'



matches in group E of 2022 Fifa World Cup and 2023 Asian Cup joint qualification matches. This will give better advantage to Red Warriors' members as they are familiarised with the green field.

Registering triumph against African opponent in today's fixture will secure a slot for the Sultanate team in the finals of Fifa Arab Cup 2021 in group A along with hosts Qatar, Iraq and the winner of

Bahrain vs Kuwait match which will be played on Sunday as well.

The finals of the Fifa Arab Cup 2021 will take place during November 30 until December 18 and this event act as rehearsal for the hosts Qatar ahead from the Fifa World Cup 2022. As many as 16 teams will take part in the finals. The confirmed teams in the tournament till now due to their Fifa world ranking including:

Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Iraq, UAE and hosts Qatar.

In the other qualifying games, Bahrain will take on Kuwait in a top Gulf clash while Jordan will meet South Sudan. Lebanon will clash with Djibouti while Palestine will take on Comoros and Libya will face Sudan. The winners of the play-off will qualify for the finals of the showpiece event.



BRANKO CONFIDENT

The Croatian coach, Branko Ivankovic, voiced confidently that the team is in best shape to move into the finals. "We are respecting the Somalia team and there are no weak teams. I am fully optimistic that we can achieve the required from this fixture after a solid show in the previous round of qualifier," he added.

The 67-year-old pointed out

Coach Branko Ivankovic's men are in best shape to face Somalia team after they played three top matches in the second round of joint qualifier against Qatar, Afghanistan and India

that all the players are right shape to perform well in the encounter. "I am confident on my squad and they can accomplish the required result in this match. We are having weak technical brief about the opponent. However, we have set our players for this match," he ended.

Oman's striker Abdulaziz al Maqbali said that this is a new tournament and as players we will do our best to register a triumphant result. "We are working as one team in the field and we will deliver our best to make our fans happy," he concluded.

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OQ Group eyes green steel, green cement projects

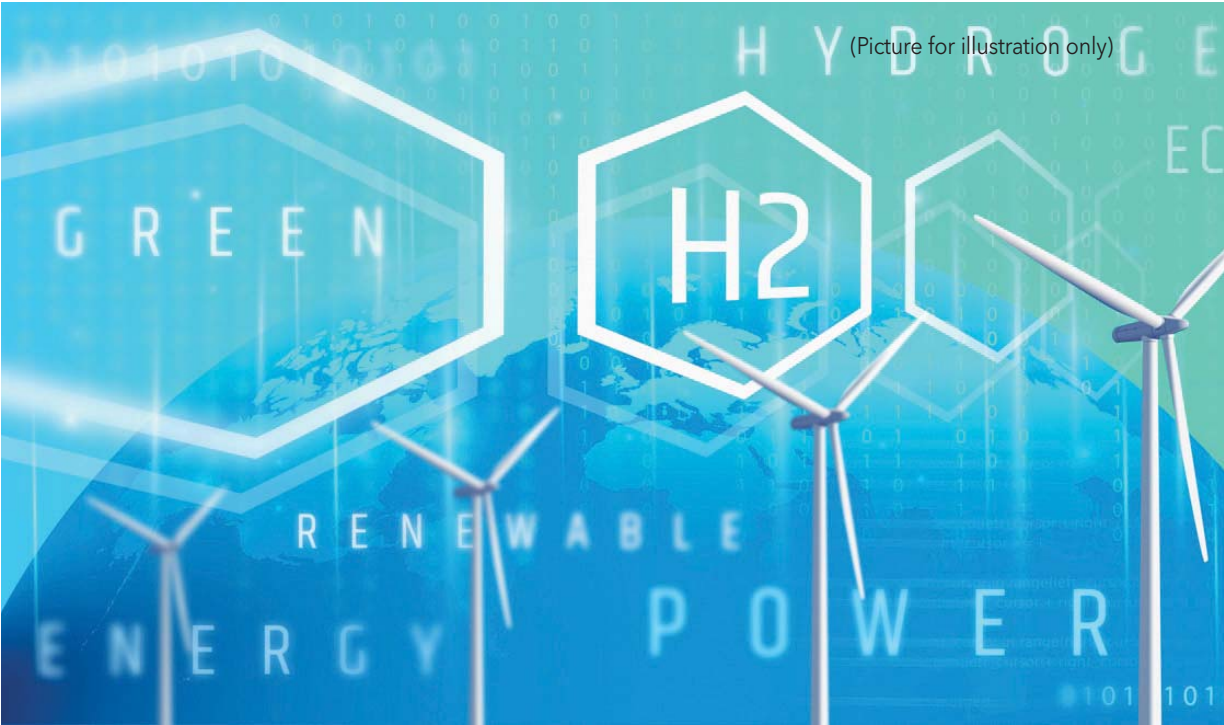
ENERGY TRANSITION:
Wholly state-owned energy conglomerate is partner of choice for international investors

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

OQ — Oman’s global integrated energy group — says it sees the potential for investments in decarbonised steel, cement and other low-carbon industries once green hydrogen production from renewable energy resources becomes a reality in the Sultanate.

Over the past year, wholly state-owned OQ has unveiled plans for a pair of large-scale green hydrogen projects — part of a slate of alternative energy initiatives that it aims to implement in partnership with international players to help drive Oman’s economic diversification, as well as support global energy transition goals.

Overseeing this ambitious vision at OQ is Dr Salim al Huthaili, CEO — Alternative Energy, who in a recent interview, said the Group is set to play a leading role in the pursuit of green hydrogen and other alternative energy projects.



“OQ remains a key player and partner of choice for the Omani government and international investors, building on our history and experience in partnering with local and international investors, in developing and financing projects”, said Dr Al Huthaili.

“This has given us unique skillsets that gear us in enabling this change. We now want to scale up and transfer these skillsets into the renewable energy space.”

The official made the comments during an online interview with The Anglo Omani Society (AOS), a London-registered charitable organisation working to promote and sustain friendly relations between Oman and the UK.

As a result of the strong interest shown by international investors in exploring partnership opportunities with OQ, the latter has signed a number of projects in the hydrogen space, said the CEO. Notable is the

Hypot Duqm project — a 500 MW solar-based green hydrogen initiative in partnership with DEME Group of Belgium, and a mega-scale 25 GW scheme also planned in Wusta Governorate in consortium with InterContinental Energy of Hong Kong and Enertech of Kuwait.

Significantly, while a key part of these investments is to cater to an emerging global demand for green hydrogen, the locally produced zero-carbon fuel will also support



OQ remains a key player and partner of choice for the Omani government and international investors, building on our history and experience in partnering with local and international investors, in developing and financing projects

DR SALIM AL HUTHAILI
CEO – Alternative Energy

Oman’s energy transition objectives, as well as drive local investment in decarbonised industrial projects, according to the official.

“We are trying to create new industry in Oman — we are thinking about green steel and green cement projects downstream from our (investments) in green hydrogen, for example,” Dr Al Huthaili stated.

In pursuing alternative energy projects, OQ is also guided by the objectives set out in the Vision 2040 blueprint for supporting sustainable long-term development in the Sultanate, said the official. Vision 2040 targets, among other things, a 20 per cent share of Oman’s electricity requirements coming from renewable energy resources by 2030, rising to 40 per cent by 2040, he noted.

“OQ is well positioned to play that role because of its size and experience”, Dr Al Huthaili said. “We believe we can exceed those numbers with the ambitions we have and the projects we are currently exploring. We can contribute to the achievement of these targets, but also the diversification of the economy.”

With operations across 17 countries, OQ’s portfolio covers the entire value chain from exploration and production to marketing and distribution of end-user products. The Group’s fuels and chemicals are sold in over 60 countries worldwide.

Invest Easy portal handles 566,000 transactions

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 19

The number of transactions handled by the ‘Invest Easy’ portal of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) during 2020 totalled 566,020, representing a 5.6 per cent increase over the 2019 tally of 537,759 transactions.

Applications were routed through the ministry’s front offices (27,395 transactions), its departments in various directorates (213,562), self-service facilities (122,522), the free zones at Sohar, Duqm and Al Mazayona (4858), legal offices (1,292) and Sanad offices (196,391) across the Sultanate.

Mala’a receives 740,000 credit report applications in 2020

STRONG APPEAL: Oman Credit and Financial Information Centre (Mala’a) plays a major role in improving the financial climate in the Sultanate and ease of doing business

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 19

Oman Credit and Financial Information Centre (Mala’a) has so far received 740,000 credit report applications in 2020 from individuals and corporates.

The facility was established in 2019 by Royal Decree 38/2019 as the first pillar of the Central Bank of Oman’s 2019-2021 strategy to enhance the business environment towards implementing Oman Vision 2040. The centre offers credit and financial reports and scores for individuals and corporates and aims to be Oman’s national databank.

Mala’a plays a major role in improving the financial environment of the Sultanate by enhancing financial inclusion, creating fertile environment for ease of doing business, and reducing credit risks by supporting various institutions in making informed financial decisions

Mala’a also contributes to Oman’s



Mala’a also contributes to Oman’s economic growth by improving the quality of loans without interfering with the financing decision-making process, and supports individuals and corporates to improve their creditworthiness which leads to a financially literate society that is capable of informed financial planning



Mala’a, said: “Oman Credit and Financial Information Centre known as Mala’a, has so far signed 37 Membership Agreements with credit providers from the Banking and Finance sector, Telecommunications sector, Small and Medium Enterprises Funds, and the Insurance Sector, in addition to Data Providers such as Royal Oman Police and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Investment Promotion. It has also signed several Memorandums of Understanding with government entities and non-profit organisations.”

Al Saadi said the agreements were a cornerstone of the infrastructure of the National Databank on which Mala’a continues to work

on. The centre provides credit information services such as credit reports, credit classification, and credit score for individuals and institutions, in addition to financial technology solutions such as the Instant Decisions Module, the IFRS9 Module and Advisor Module. The beneficiaries of these services are banking, financial and telecommunications sectors, as well as funds supporting small and medium enterprises, and insurance companies. This is in addition to all sectors that require creditworthiness information.

With reference to the importance of Mala’a in credit reporting system, Aadil al Saadi said: “The Credit Bureau System is not new to the Sultanate of Oman. It has been here for more than ten years, which was previously represented by the Central Bank of Oman. The establishment of the Oman Credit and Financial Information Centre, Mala’a, in 2019 comes as a development of the credit bureau system in Oman to stay in line with the world’s information technology advancement. The Mala’a credit reports encourage responsible financing to give creditors the ability to make informed financial decisions and reduce credit and default risks, by compiling financial information in individual and institutional reports.”

Opec told to expect limited US oil output growth, for now: Sources

LONDON: Opec officials heard from industry experts that US oil output growth will likely remain limited in 2021 despite rising prices, Opec sources said, giving it more power to manage the market in the short-term before a potentially strong rise in shale output in 2022.

Officials from Opec’s Economic Commission Board (ECB) and external presenters attended a meeting on Tuesday focused on US output, the sources said. Opec heard from more forecasters on the outlook for 2021 and 2022 at a separate meeting on Thursday.

While there was general agreement on limited US supply growth this year, an industry source said for 2022 forecasts ranged from growth of 500,000 bpd to 1.3 million bpd.

“The general sentiment regarding shale was it will come back as prices go up but not super fast”, said a source at one of the companies that provided forecasts to Opec.

US shale oil output usually responds rapidly to price signals and US crude has this week hit its highest since October 2018 at nearly \$73 a barrel. But US producers are still focusing on capital discipline and investor returns, rather than expanding supply, the ECB heard.

“Investment discipline and free cash flow for the investor”, said one Opec+ source. — Reuters

IS INFLATION COMING TO STAY?

Inflation is growing in most parts of the world. In the US inflation jumped from around 1.5 per cent early this year to nearly 5 per cent recently. One of the key reasons seems to be the stimulus plan that brought too much liquidity to the market.

There is however, a multitude of other reasons behind growing inflation around the world. One of the lowest hanging fruits to identify as a key reason — in my opinion — is a price rebound. In 2020, the price of many products and services collapsed.

Naturally, as the pandemic restrictions are being lifted in many parts of the world, people are going out finally shopping and spending the money that did not spend last year. By doing so, a surge in demand could be one of the reasons for prices to climb up.

In the euro zone in particular, the consumer confidence

dropped by half in 2020, and rebounded solidly — back to pre-Covid levels — in 2021.

Similarly, in the USA, the consumer confidence dropped by a third, to then spike back to “normality”. A different picture is painted by consumer confidence charts for India, where the decline has yet to recover. Rather, the confidence level is projected to continue to decline throughout 2021, probably due to the scarcity of cash and savings.

If this was a key cause for inflation thought, it would not last long. In fact, the International Monetary Fund — World Economic Forum’s most recent forecast for Real GDP growth (year on year) showed a significantly less optimistic picture then before.

While 2021 was seen as a booming year for the reasons shared above, 2022 is shown in decline for all countries taken in consideration.



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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ONE OF THE LOWEST HANGING FRUITS TO IDENTIFY AS A KEY REASON — IN MY OPINION — IS A PRICE REBOUND. IN 2020, THE PRICE OF MANY PRODUCTS AND SERVICES COLLAPSED

India’s GDP is projected stabilise at 6 to 7 per cent from 2022 onwards, down from the peak of over 12 per cent in 2021.

The United States projection is also a downtrend, but less sharp: from 8 per cent in 2021, to 4 per cent in 2022, to less than 2 per cent in 2023, and finally a small rebound between 2 to 3 per cent in 2024.

The euro zone is projected in slow decline from the current 4 per cent, but only from 2023, down to 3 per cent and then stable from then onwards. China is shown as one of the most solid economies after pandemic, from the current 8 per cent down to 6 per cent next year and stable at 5 per cent from 2023 onwards.

Another cause could be identified in supply bottlenecks. The 2020 lockdown caused several interruptions to manufacturing of goods all around the world. As demand grows strong again in 2021,

manufacturers are still catching up with orders, thus affecting the natural price point between demand and supply. Microchips and semiconductors are some of the most affected products.

Commodity prices are also one of the main causes of inflation. As many forms of transportation were halted during the pandemic, raw materials and commodities became more scarce.

Global unemployment is still quite high, yet jobs vacancies in the US for example at still high.

This could be due to the cash support provided during the pandemic, where unemployment cheques offered a safety net to many who lost their jobs in 2020, but have continued to receive economic support until now. In the US, this is likely to change from July, when the unemployment cheques will be cut in most states. *[The columnist is a member of the International Press Association]*

Sohar International introduces escrow accounts for real estate sector



MUSCAT: Further enhancing investor confidence whilst facilitating financial services for developers, Sohar International introduces Escrow Accounts. This financial solution comes in line with Royal Decree No 30/2018 promulgating the law on escrow account for real estate development and Ministerial Decision No 72/2019 issued by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

As the country witnesses key legislative reforms with new laws and regulations, as well as the introduction of strict measures to ensure implementation of good governance, Sohar International is keen to contribute and support the government’s efforts in providing impetus to the real estate sector. The introduction of escrow account is key to this objective, as it protects deposits of investors following the purchase of real estate developments within the country.

Khalil al Hedaifi, Chief Retail Banking Officer at Sohar International, said, “Keeping pace with recent intricate and sophisticated development of Omani real estate sector and supporting the government’s efforts in regulating the sector, our new financial product aims at enhancing confidence of real estate developers, investors, as well as vendors, whilst protecting their interests.”

Opening up an Escrow Account with Sohar International requires a few easy steps. Once the account is active, it can then be communicated to the potential investors by the developers which will not only increase the investors’ confidence, but will also regulate and ensure the developers are paid on time which will enhance the overall experience.

It is important that the developer interested in opening the Escrow Account submits all the necessary documents in any of the bank branches.

Fully redesigned Hyundai Elantra all set to impress

MUSCAT: The 2021 Elantra — the seventh generation of Hyundai’s much-loved compact sedan — has been given a complete makeover.

Modern exteriors and impressive interior styling complement a generous array of standard and optional features that accentuate the brand’s longstanding reputation for performance and value.

Available in four trim options — two each in 2.0L and 1.6L capacities — each variant delivers power and

performance characteristic of the award-winning Elantra.

The royal and luxury trims come equipped with the smart stream power train 2.0L engine, coupled with 6 speed automatic transmission producing 159 PS power and 19.5 Nm torque which gives faster acceleration.

The Elantra comfort and premier trims, on the other hand, are available with a 1.6L engine coupled with 6 speed automatic transmission producing 127 PS power and 15.7 Nm of torque.



Kia launches its new identity in MEA markets



MUSCAT: Kia launched its new global brand identity, strategy, and purpose across the Middle East and Africa (MEA) as a signal of Kia Corporation’s future direction and vision. The regional launch, which involved a striking multimedia show at Dubai’s Burj Khalifa, follows the global announcement of Kia’s brand transformation at the beginning of 2021.

Defined by the new brand slogan ‘Movement That Inspires’ and a modernised logo, the shift will see Kia expand its influence beyond vehicle manufacturing to provide sustainable mobility solutions for customers. In support of this ambition, the new purpose will see Kia work to create spaces that inspire customers and free up time for the activities they enjoy the most, through bold product design, innovative in-car experiences, and meaningful and convenient services at every touchpoint.

The regional brand transformation will see the manufacturer put its mid to long-term ‘Plan S’ strategy into action across MEA. The Plan S strategy outlines Kia’s pre-emptive and enterprising ‘shift’ from a business system focused on internal combustion engine vehicles toward one centered on electric vehicles and customized mobility solutions.

Top OQ official elected to GPCA board

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 19

A top executive of OQ — the Sultanate’s global integrated energy group — has been elected to the Board of Directors of the Gulf Petrochemicals & Chemicals Association (GPCA), the voice of the chemical industry in the Arabian Gulf region.

Ahmed al Jahdhami, CEO Downstream, OQ, joined the new Board in elections held during the 2021 Annual General Assembly Meeting held in Dubai. Yousef al Benyan, Vice-Chairman and CEO, SABIC, was re-elected for a new three-year term as Chairman of the GPCA Board of Director. Dr Mohamed al Mulla was elected to the position of GPCA Vice-Chairman.

GPCA was established in 2006 to represent the downstream hydrocarbon industry in the Arabian Gulf. Today, the association voices the common



interests of more than 250 member companies from the chemical and allied industries, accounting for over 95 per cent of chemical output in the GCC. The industry makes up the second largest manufacturing sector in the region, producing over \$108 billion worth of products every year.

Other new members of the Board of Directors are: Ali Mohammed al Asiri, CEO, Chemanol; Abdel Hadi al Suhaimi, Executive President, S-Chem; Othman A al Ghamdi,

President and CEO, PetroRabigh; Abdulrahman M al Suwaidi, Managing Director and CEO, QAFCO; Mohammed Y al Qahtani, SVP Downstream, Saudi Aramco; and Abdullah Saif al Saadoon, CEO, Sipchem.

GPCA founding members who retain their seats on the GPCA Board include: Yousef al Benyan, Vice-Chairman and CEO, SABIC, Saudi Arabia; Dr Abdulrahman Jawahery, President, GPIC, Bahrain; Dr Mohamed al Mulla, Managing Director and CEO, QAPCO,

Qatar; Hazeem al Suwaidi, CEO, Borouge, UAE; Naser al Dousari, CEO, EQUATE, Kuwait; Mutlaq al Azmi, CEO, PIC, Kuwait; Mutlaq al Morished, CEO, Tasnee, Saudi Arabia; and Abdullah al Hussaini, Executive VP – Marketing, Qatar Petroleum.

Dr Abdulwahab al Sadoun, Secretary-General, GPCA, commented, “I am pleased to welcome the newly elected Members of the Board who bring decades of leadership experience acquired at the helm of some of the largest chemical and petrochemical companies in the GCC.

“Their wealth of knowledge, expertise and commitment to advancing the industry’s contribution to socio-economic development in the region make them an exceptional addition to the GPCA Board and I look forward to working closely with them in the coming years to take the Association to new heights.”

Ahlibank all set to conduct quarterly Wafra prize draws



MUSCAT: Promoting financial freedom and wise spending habits among the people of Oman, ahlibank continues to hold its popular Wafra prize draws rewarding more winners, with more prizes. The bank is all set to conduct this year’s second quarterly draw at the beginning of July. Winners from the bank-wide customer base will walk away with a total cash prize of more than RO 300,000, including one winner who will receive a whopping RO 250,000 in ‘Salary for Life’ draw. The Bank will announce the names in a live broadcast on its official social media pages.

Speaking about the importance of banking initiatives and programmes that help customers realise their dreams, through prudent financial choices, Muneer al Balushi – AGM, Head of Retail Distribution, ahlibank, said, “Ahlibank is taking a firm approach focused on meeting the evolving customer requirements. Under the current circumstances in the world, programmes that help our customers move forward and plan their future accurately to avoid any potential crisis had to continue.”

The 2021 Wafra prize scheme aims to reward more than 1,600 customers across ahlibank’s branches in the Sultanate, with a total cash prizes of more than RO 2 million.

OTC meets with industry partners for academic programme review



MUSCAT: As part of its continuous commitment to enhance the quality of its academic programmes, Oman Tourism College (OTC), represented by the Department of Tourism and Management Studies, recently held a meeting via Microsoft Teams. This was set up to review and update the academic programmes offered by the college to prepare a well-trained and qualified national workforce. The meeting saw the presence of 45 participants from across the tourism, hospitality, events and aviation sectors.

Commenting on the importance of holding the meeting, Dr Abdulkarim al Mughairi, Dean of OTC, said, “Such meetings are integral in bridging the gap between the offered academic programmes and the requirements of the labour market.

“This is because it represents the link between the academic institution and hotel and tourism establishments to come together and discuss various aspects related to the academic programmes that are offered and the skills, expertise and knowledge that is required by the labour market.”

Fitch raises UK outlook on economic resilience

LONDON: Rating agency Fitch raised Britain's outlook to 'stable' from 'negative' on Friday, saying macroeconomic, labour market and fiscal outturns since the start of 2021 showed the economy was more resilient to the impact of the pandemic shock.

"The roll-out of the UK's coronavirus vaccination programme has been rapid... which could dampen the impact of infection cases on healthcare capacity and support economic resilience to ongoing developments in the pandemic," Fitch said.

Last year, the economy shrank by 9.8 per cent, its sharpest slump in more than 300 years and the biggest fall in output of any large advanced economy. — **Reuters**

Fed shift causes rally in value stocks to wobble

NEW YORK: The Federal Reserve's hawkish shift is forcing investors to reevaluate the rally in so-called value stocks, which have taken a hit in recent days after ripping higher for most of the year.

Shares of banks, energy firms and other companies that tend to be sensitive to the economy's fluctuations have tumbled following the Federal Reserve's meeting on Wednesday, when the central bank surprised investors by anticipating two quarter-percentage-point rate increases in 2023 amid a recent surge in inflation.

The Russell 1000 Value stock index is down 4 per cent from its June peak, though still up 13.2 per cent this year. Its growth counterpart is up 9.1 per cent year-to-date.

One factor driving the move is the idea that a Fed more strongly focused on preventing the economy from overheating may begin unwinding easy-money policies sooner than previously expected. St Louis Federal Reserve President James Bullard said the central bank's



The New York Stock Exchange is pictured in the Manhattan borough of New York City, New York. — **Reuters**

shift was a "natural" response to economic growth and inflation moving quicker than expected, bolstering that view.

"Value stocks had gotten ahead of themselves, particularly in energy and financials, and the

folks that are caught offside are starting to unwind those trades," said Jamie Cox, managing partner at Harris Financial Group.

The post-Fed meeting slide in value has been accompanied

by a retreat in some commodity prices, a surge in the dollar and a rally in US government bonds that dragged down yields on the benchmark US Treasury to around 1.44 per cent on Friday.

Investors will be keeping a

close eye on next week's economic data for clues on whether the recent surge in inflation — which saw consumer prices accelerate at their fastest pace in 12 years last month — will persist.

New home sales and mortgage applications are due out on June 23, while May consumer spending numbers are expected on June 25.

Investors piled into value stocks in the latter half of 2020, as signs of breakthroughs in vaccines against Covid-19 bolstered the case for a powerful economic rebound in 2021. Value stocks have outperformed growth stocks by nearly 7 percentage points since the start of November 2020, bucking a trend that saw technology and other growth sectors regularly outshine value over the last decade.

An unwinding of the heavy positioning in value shares could exacerbate the recent slide. Mutual funds are overweight value names to a larger degree than any time in the last eight years, according to a Goldman Sachs report. — **Reuters**

MSX WEEKLY REVIEW

MSX rises for third consecutive week

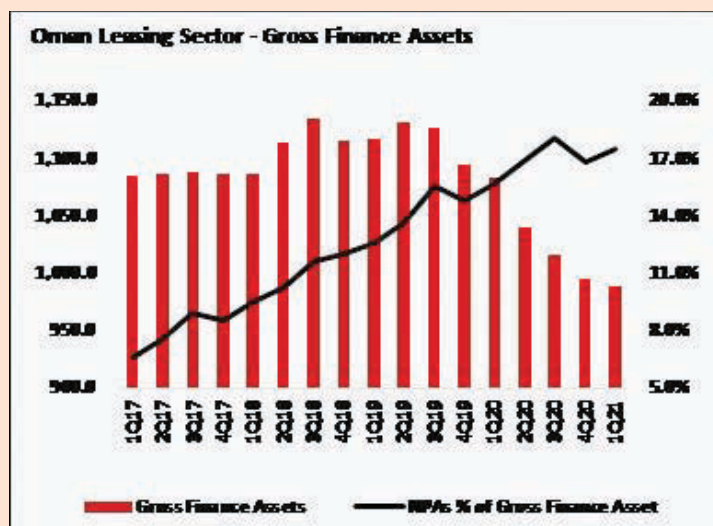
M S X 3 0 Index ended the week higher by 1.19 per cent. All sub-indices ended in green. The industrial sector led gaining 3.43 per cent. Financial sector and service sector closed up by 1.62 per cent and 1.03 per cent respectively. MSX Shariah Index was higher by 3.05 per cent.

United Power's board of directors met on June 15 and approved to convert the Company from a public joint stock company (SAOG) to closed joint stock company (SAOC). The board of directors is authorised to take all the necessary procedures to convert the company from a SAOG to SAOC.

Bank ABC and First Abu Dhabi Bank acted as joint coordinators, underwriters, initial mandated lead arrangers and bookrunners on the two-year syndicated term loan facility. The syndication was launched in May and was over 2x oversubscribed.

Total of 9 banks (excluding the joint coordinators) from the GCC, Europe and Asia participated in the facility. Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank, Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait, Bank of Baroda, Doha Bank, State Bank of India joined as mandated lead arrangers. Commercial Bank of Dubai joined as lead arranger. Banque Du Caire, HSBC Bank Middle East and Mashreqbank joined as arranger. The facility will be utilised to refinance its \$250m facility dated June 13, 2018.

HSBC Bank Oman and the SME Development Fund signed a collaborative agreement recently to provide



The industrial sector led gaining 3.43 per cent. Financial sector and service sector closed up by 1.62 per cent and 1.03 per cent respectively.

small and medium sized enterprises in Oman with RO 5 million in financing.

The agreement was signed by Nasr Al Asfoor, Head of Business Banking in HSBC Bank Oman and Salah al Mawali, CEO of SMEF. This collaboration provides additional support to the SME development initiatives endorsed by the Omani government and will help accelerate the growth of SMEs throughout the Sultanate by giving them access to financing at an attractive rate.

Moody's rating agency placed on review for upgrade National Bank of Oman SAOG (NBO)'s ba3 Adjusted BCA, Ba3 long-term deposit ratings, Ba3 senior unsecured ratings, Ba2 long-term local currency CRR and Ba2(cr) long-term CR Assessment. The rating action follows CBQ's recent offer to the shareholders of

NBO to acquire an additional 15.2 per cent stake in NBO, which if successful would increase its shareholding in the bank to 50.1 per cent. Following the potential increase in shareholding CBQ would consolidate NBO as a subsidiary.

The ratings affirmation and stable outlook reflect Moody's expectation that following a successful acquisition of a controlling stake in NBO, the credit profile of CBQ would remain commensurate with its existing ba1 BCA despite increased exposure to Oman's more challenging operating environment and the slightly weaker financial profile of NBO.

Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the Sultanate's integrated sovereign wealth fund, has reaffirmed that State-of-Enterprises (SOEs) operating under its auspices will not compete with the private sector.

OIA President emphasised the primacy of the private sector in driving the local economy, noting that state-owned businesses will ally with, rather than challenge, privately owned firms in the

marketplace.

Gross finance assets of the leasing sector dropped in 1Q21 by 0.7 per cent QoQ and 8.8 per cent YoY to RO 0.98 billion. Gross NPAs rose to RO 173.2 million by 1Q21 compared to RO 167.1 million at the end of 4Q20 i.e. growth of 3.7 per cent QoQ and 2.1 per cent YoY.

NPAs as per cent of Gross Finance Assets rose to 17.5 per cent in 1Q21 from 16.8 per cent at the end of 2020. Cash and bank balances with the finance companies dropped to RO 86.3 million in 1Q21 from RO 129.2 million in 1Q20. Borrowings from banks and financial institutions dropped to RO 587.9 million in 1Q21 from RO 744.7 million in 1Q20. Sector reported net income of RO 3.4 million in 1Q21 compared to RO 3.0 million in 4Q20 and RO 4.0 million in 1Q20.

Opec-13 crude oil production averaged 25.46 mb/d in May 2021, up by 0.39 mb/d m-o-m. Crude oil output increased mainly in Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and IR Iran, while production decreased primarily in Nigeria and Angola. The share of Opec crude oil in total global production was up by 0.2 per cent in May to 27.2 per cent compared with the previous month.

Global liquids production in May increased by 0.63 mb/d to average 93.67 mb/d compared with the previous month, and was higher y-o-y by 5.63 mb/d. Non-Opec liquids production (including Opec NGLs) in May was up by 0.24 mb/d m-o-m to average 68.21 mb/d, an increase of 4.30 mb/d y-o-y.

(Courtesy: U-Capital)

Largest Boeing 737 MAX model takes off on maiden flight



The Boeing 737 MAX 10 takes off from Renton Airport in Washington on its first flight on Friday. — **Reuters**

SEATTLE: Boeing Co's 737 MAX 10, the largest member of its best-selling single-aisle airplane family, took off on its maiden flight on Friday, in a further step towards recovering from the safety grounding of a smaller model.

The plane completed a roughly 2-1/2-hour flight over Washington State, returning to Renton Municipal Airport near Seattle at 12:38 pm.

The first flight heralds months of testing and safety certification work before the jet is expected to enter service in 2023.

In an unusual departure from the PR buzz surrounding first flights, the event was kept low-key as Boeing tries to navigate overlapping crises caused by a 20-month grounding in the wake of two crashes and the Covid-19 pandemic. Boeing's 230-seat 737-10 is designed to close the gap between its 178-to-220-seat 737-9, and Airbus's 185-to-240-seat A321neo, which dominates the top end of the narrowbody jet market, worth some \$3.5 trillion over 20 years.

However, the market opportunity for the 737 MAX 10 is constrained by the jet's range of about 3,300 nautical miles (6,100 km), which falls short of the A321neo's roughly 4,000 nm.

Boeing must also complete safety certification of the plane under a tougher regulatory climate following two fatal crashes of a smaller 737 MAX version grounded the model for nearly two years — with a safety ban still in place in China.

Boeing has carried out design and training changes on the MAX family, which returned to US operations in December.

Boeing Commercial Airplanes CEO Stan Deal said the company is producing about 16 737 MAX jets a month at its Renton factory.

Boeing is working on safety enhancements for the 737 MAX 10, including for its air data indication system and adding a third cockpit indication requested by European regulators of the "angle of attack," a parameter needed to avoid stalling or losing lift. — **Reuters**

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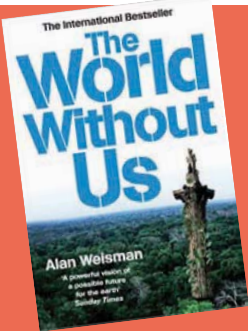
DR AMMAR ABDULRAHMAN AL BALUSHI:

A ‘MAN ON A MISSION’

Muscat born, the athletic (football, badminton, swimming) son of a local businessman, and one of seven siblings, all academically and professionally active, Dr Ammar bin Abdulrahman al Balushi represents the best of up-and-coming Omani professionals... **P18**

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Ole! Spanish chef gives thumbs up to a robot-made paella

CAN a robot cook a paella as tasty as that made by a Spanish chef? Yes it can, according to a master chef who tried it. Spanish company BRS has developed a robot that can cook one of the national cuisine's most world-renowned dishes. The product has already provoked the interest of some hotel chains and resorts outside Spain.

"Of course a home-made rice dish on a Sunday will always taste different... We are not aiming at reaching that, our goal is to travel around the world and be able to eat the same rice that we eat in our country, in a different country," founder of BRS, Enrique Lillo, said. Some amusement parks and resorts in Japan already

have their own paella robot, Lillo added. But it can also please the locals. "In my opinion it's a wonderful tool, and 'Ole!' for the developers because I loved it," said Maria Munoz, paella chef and director of "Cocinea" gastronomy school, after trying the robot-made paella. The robot consists of an electronically controlled stove and a mechanical arm which puts the sauteed ingredients over the paella pan, adds the rice and then stirs it with a slotted spoon before pouring in the fish stock. All ingredients have to be prepared in advance and are already measured for one paella. Once all the ingredients are in the pan, the robot stirs and shakes it constantly until



it is done. Munoz said it would be very useful for restaurants because it helps making more paellas at a time. "If you only have one pael-

la cook, you can only make 20 at most because it's crazy, specially finding the sweet spot for the paella," she added.

— Reuters



Dr Ammar Abdulrahman al Balushi:
A ‘Man on a Mission’

BY RAY PETERSEN

Recently appointed as Head of the Faculty of Business Management at Majan University College, the youthful and impressive Dr Ammar bin Abdulrahman al Balushi, as one academic put it, “represents the best of up-and-coming Omani professionals.” That is certainly a big wrap, but after a couple of hours with the ebullient educationalist I am not sure I could disagree.

Muscat born, the athletic (football, badminton, swimming) son of a local businessman, and one of seven siblings, all academically and professionally active, Al Balushi’s early education was in Oman, but his higher education objectives took him to the United Kingdom, the University of Essex, and the Glasgow Caledonian University in London. There he studied under Professor John Lennon, prominent in the travel and tourism sector.

A valuable PhD in Marketing and Tourism Development safely ‘tucked under his arm’, Al Balushi then took the opportunity to gain “immeasurable experience in the wider tourist sector, prior to returning home to the Sultanate.” Being employed in the tourism industry in Europe holds quite a positive perception in Western societies, but this is not so here in Oman according to Al Balushi.

He expanded saying, “This is no better reflected than in the minimal number of Omanis joining the Hospitality and Tourism colleges within the country. I think tourism’s image as a future employer needs a major revamp, particu-



larly with reference to young Omanis who feel that the sector holds sociocultural challenges that they cannot respond to or integrate with.” Hence, marketing the employability concept, for Omanis to participate positively within the international four- and five-star sectors of the international tourism industry takes on significant importance.

Al Balushi was, he smiled, “astutely recruited two years ago by Majan University College (MUC),” which was established as the Sultanate’s very first private college in 1995 and became the first higher education institution

in the Sultanate to receive the prestigious OAAA Institutional Accreditation in 2017. MUC is an accredited college of the University of Bedfordshire, in the United Kingdom.

MUC offers courses in undergraduate programmes in Business Administration with diverse specialisations across Bachelors and Masters Programmes in Accounting, Applied Linguistics, Business Administration, Computing, Computer Sciences, Computer and Internet Applications, English Language, Finance, International Human Resources Management,

Islamic Banking and Finance, Marketing and Networking, Banking information systems, Computing in oil and gas, software engineering and Networking, at its campus in Darsait.

“Originally as the Faculty Director of Quality Assurance, it is fair to say that I was challenged to prove myself, as an Omani Assistant Professor, institutionally, and to my peers, and at times that wasn’t easy.” However, he explained that “Subsequently, they have proven extremely supportive and encouraging as I have met their standards, and this has culminated in my recent promotion to Head of Faculty of Business Management, the largest faculty in the College.”

He sees key elements of his new role, apart from being privileged to lead a very progressive faculty team, as “capitalising on being an Omani in a position to enable change, in aligning MUC’s educational objectives to HM Sultan’s Vision 2040 in terms of employability, shaping their courses specifically to graduate student cohorts with the skills, knowledge and understanding required to fill job-market vacancies.”

Omani graduates, in Al Balushi’s opinion, need more than ever to market themselves and their skills. “In my opinion”, he said, “Self-marketing has been neglected due to the graduates’ reliance on their earned college degree for job vacancies rather than the skills they present. The current reality indicates that there is an oversupply of job-seekers who are competing for the same jobs in the current depressed labor market.”

He is certain that by effectively aligning their knowledge and skills to the job market, tailoring their attributes more appropriately for the workplace, their capabilities and talents will surely attract greater opportunities. It is certainly more productive and positive for graduates, to change to meet the needs of the market, than to expect the job market to change to accommodate them. It follows too that institutions have a responsibility to remain aligned to positive job market vacancies and trends.

Dr Ammar al Balushi then, is one of that ‘new generation’ of young Omanis we keep hearing about, with the Omani sensitivity to add to Western pragmatism. Maybe the forerunner of thousands who can influence change, not for the sake of change, but for his institution, community and society.

LOCAL TRENDS

Manufacturing charcoal from coffee residues



JADHWA STUDENT COMPANY at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Muscat has succeeded in producing experimental quantities of charcoal made from coffee residues as part of its projects to participate in the Injaz Oman 2021 competition.

The project qualified for the second phase among 40 products of different student companies, and the research and production team in the company is working on its experiments to reach a high quality product through which it can achieve an added market value.

Ahmed al Barwani, a member of production and development at Jadhwa Student Company, said: The company was established at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Muscat at the end of 2019. With the first meeting of the Board of Directors, a number of manufacturing ideas were



put forward, and four production ideas were chosen at a start, which were the closest and most acceptable. we then analysed the ideas and knew the strengths and weaknesses of each idea and what it could constitute of an added market value for each of these products. Finally, we settled on the idea of producing charcoal from coffee residues, as it represents an attractive element from the company’s point of view and the data of the study.

He added that the idea of the product is based on recycling coffee residues in making charcoal, the team started research operations and reviewed a number of research and studies looking to benefit from coffee residues, and worked to reach a product that contributes to reducing environmental disturbances, which includes cutting trees. The team worked to achieve a number of other health benefits in this product, thus reaching a product that represents a high health and environmental value that satisfies all consumers.

He explained that the search and investigation of ingredients that can be added with the coffee residue is continuous, along with investigation and experimentation processes in order to reach a product that achieves the specified goals. “Indeed, we have carried out a number of home experiments through which we produced, tested and evaluated charcoal in order to address some of the negatives that appeared in the product by searching for additional substances and modifying some mixtures. All the additions and amendments done to the product aimed at meeting the environmental and health specifications that were specified in the framework of the company. we aspire to add a competitive advantage for the consumer and the market.

He pointed out that experiments and tests to modify product mixtures are still ongoing, with the aim of reaching a high-quality product in a way that satisfies us and the consumer in the market.



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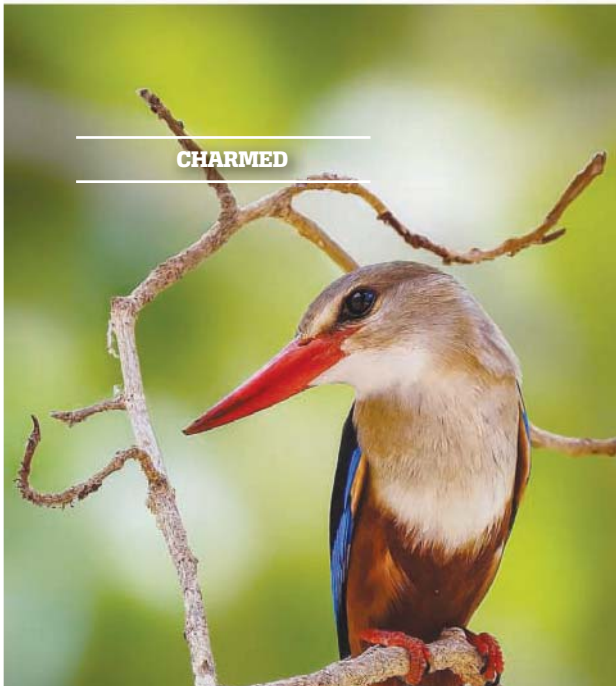
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TRAVEL TALES



Entrepreneurs turn rusting Soviet plant into green urban space in western Ukraine

ENTREPRENEURS in western Ukraine are turning a huge Soviet-era manufacturing plant into a hub for education, business and art which they hope will drive development in a country struggling with corruption, political instability and a recession.

The disused factory in the city of Ivano-Frankivsk once produced gas meters and other appliances, but is now a growing urban space with a green micro farm, a contemporary art gallery, offices and a children's education club.

The founders of the 'Promprylad.Renovation' project — named after the factory — bought the 36,000-square-metre (390,000 sq ft) site in 2019 and have raised more than \$8.5 million from local investors for the revamp.

"We are creating an innovation centre which will include four main fields — education, art, new economy and urbanism. Why these fields? Because they drive development of any area, any society," project co-founder and CEO Yuriy Fylyuk, 38, said.

In 2020, the local edition of Forbes magazine named Ivano-Frankivsk, in the foothills of the Carpathian mountains, the best city for doing business in Ukraine, ahead of the capital of Kyiv and Lviv.

Corruption is endemic in Ukraine and its economy has been hit hard by the pandemic, shrinking 4 per cent last year.

In its 2020 Corruption Perception Index, Transparency International ranked Ukraine 117th out of 180 countries globally, giving it 33 out of a maximum of 100 points where zero indicates that "corruption effectively replaces the government".

So far the project takes up only a sixth of the 36,000-square-metre (390,000 sq ft) site, which also houses the municipal department for investment policy.

"The atmosphere is different here. A place shapes a person's thoughts. And this particular place has had an impact on our thoughts and our ideas," the department's head Igor Popadyuk said. "Everything feels different here."

Fylyuk said almost 900 private investors put money into the project and that the only criteria for accepting their funding is that it must come from legal sources, not oligarchs.

Its founders expect the project to be complete by the end of 2023 and plan to add an event hall for 4,000 people, a library, a bookstore and a mindfulness centre on the rooftop. — Reuters

CONSERVATION

'Reef stars' promote new growth in Bali's dying coral ecosystem



USING A SNORKEL and protective gloves, Pariama Hutasoit dives down into the clear waters off the Indonesian island of Bali to pull away plastic from a "reef star" installed by her conservation group to encourage new coral growth.

The Nusa Dua Foundation has installed almost 6,000 of the stars, hexagonal-shaped steel structures around a metre in diameter, in coral reefs across Bali. The stars bridge gaps in the reefs where coral has died, supporting regrowth. "We're aiming to install

according to a 2018 report by Bali's Marine and Fisheries Department. The damage has been attributed to human activity, including destructive fishing, global warming, and heavy waves.

Part of the Nusa Dua Foundation's remit is holding community outreach programs, attempting to educate local residents about the importance of protecting Bali's coral reefs. I Nyoman Sadnya, a local fisherman, said his parents had mined coral from the island's reefs for decades, unaware of the



about 5,000 reef stars over the next five years," Hutasoit, 52, a former World Wildlife Fund employee, said. "And in the future, we also if possible want to expand outside Bali for the restoration of coral reefs."

The Indonesian archipelago harbours more than 75 per cent of the world's coral species, many of which are facing erosion and bleaching every year, according to the Coral Triangle Initiative, a transnational coral restoration project.

Only just over half of Bali's coral reefs are considered to be in "good" condition with 30 per cent in "poor" condition and the remaining 15 per cent in "very poor" condition,

destructive long-term impact.

"My parents did not have a job and the area here used to be an arid area, and sometimes it was difficult to find food," he said. "So my parents resorted to coral mining for building materials, because they didn't know (it was bad)."

Coral, popularly used for house foundations and decorative pieces, was a source of income for his parents.

"By looking at the condition of coral reefs today, we realise that what we did in the past to them was totally wrong," he said. Hutasoit is using World Oceans Day on June 8 to plea for more support for coral reef regeneration. — Reuters

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Woman trains men in boxing in Egyptian agricultural heartland



TWICE A WEEK in a small gym room in the Egyptian city of Beni Suef, 36-year-old Sabah Saqr coaches young men and boys to box.

A woman coaching men may not be that unusual in the capital, but in Beni Suef, which lies 100 kilometres (60 miles) south of Cairo in an agricultural area, tradition often limits women's roles.

"I started boxing by accident," said Sabah, who was spotted by a coach impressed by her strength and energy. "I didn't like it because I was worried about my face, about being hit."



Yet Sabah began to do well, winning several championships and more than 10 medals before starting to coach two years ago.

Now a working mother with one son, she trains around 20 men between the ages of 18 and 30.

"At first this situation wasn't accepted. As you know, in Upper (southern) Egypt, it was hard (to coach) in sports like boxing," said Sabah. "In addition the fact that it is a girl doing the training made it a bit harder."

She says her serious approach helped her gain respect and trust.

"For a woman to train a man isn't a very good thing in Upper Egypt," said Amr Salah Eldin, who trains with Sabah after overcoming his initial reluctance.

But her "experience and excellence" amid a lack of boxing coaches in Beni Suef made him give it a try and he now enjoys training with her, he said. — Reuters



Continuing Oman's ancient legacy of rock carving

By Staff Reporter

Long before there was Sultanate of Oman, rock carving is already a craft practised by people who used to live within the territory. Modern Omanis especially the artists are just building on the art already mastered by their ancestors.

Artist Ahmed al Alawi discovered his love for rock carving 10 years ago attracted by how artists were able to make three-dimensional sculptures out of very hard material. The rock artists' ability to make this material into flawless work of art has fascinated him then continues to intrigue him even today.

"Oman has been gifted with different kinds of rocks. This richness can be seen even on a quick stroll whether on beaches or mountains. These rocks come in different shapes, colours, and sizes and this diversity has inspired me to create art out of them challenging me to become innovative and a better craftsman," Al Alawi said.

For Al Alawi, however, he just doesn't want to make any art, he wanted to take inspiration within his own heritage and build upon the knowledge of his ancestors thankful that he is allowed to help preserve the Omani heritage and culture.

He explained that he prefers sculpturing, which is based on the formation of three-dimensional models that carry ancient craft forms such as pottery, silver jewellery, or some ancient stone shapes. Artisanal sculpture differs from other types of sculpture as it depends on the speed of production, and in most cases, the sculpture is small and easy to carry. It takes an hour to a week to produce one piece.

He pointed out that the success of any work must have clear lines and landmarks. In the

field of stone sculpture, it is necessary to first determine the shape to be carved or drawn, and then choose the appropriate rocks in size and colour so that those rocks are free from defects, and high-quality equipment must be used for carving. It is necessary to provide protection tools for the eyes and face in general, such as wearing gloves for the hands and providing suction tools.

Regarding the types of rocks through which the sculptor works, he said that he has certain criteria. He wants them to be found in the environment of Oman, should be in locations where they are far from salt, and should be free from cracks or defects. Finding the proper rock is in itself a discovery and a process and once he finds the right shapes and sizes, he usually turns them into familiar shapes like pots, pieces of jewellery, ships or khanjars.

Al Alawi said that inspiration can be found anywhere and that while ancient stone carvings are rare and difficult to find, Omani museums are famous for these stone collectables.

"Sculpture is widespread in the Sultanate and in all fields such as carving on rocks, wood, metal and other various materials, as most sculptors in the Sultanate tend to prefer abstract art. It is one of the modern arts through which the artist expresses his ideas or works in innovative works," Al Alawi said.

He added, for his work, he wants them to "shed light on some social or economic aspect."

Al Alawi has won the Sultan Qaboos Award for Craftsmanship in the Field of Modern Industries in 2018, and the Vision Award in 2019 in the craft field and has participated in numerous forums, art fairs and events.

