

Iran’s President Raisi presents cabinet

Iran’s President Ebrahim Raisi on Wednesday presented his cabinet to parliament, state media said, nominating a top diplomat amid talks with world powers to salvage a nuclear deal. A list published by the government on Twitter showed the cabinet of ministers that is set to be officially announced by parliament on Saturday.

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MUSCAT

NEW BOARD FOR OMAN HISTORY ASSOCIATION

Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, has issued a ministerial decision forming the board of directors of Oman History Association. The association has Hon Sayyid Nooh bin Mohammed al Busaidy as its Chairman and the members include Dr Ibrahim bin Yahya al Busaidy, Contemporary History Professor at Sultan Qaboos University (Deputy Chairman).

DETAILS ON P5

OMAN SAIL MARKS 13TH ANNIVERSARY

Oman Sail marked 13 years of excellence since its inception. Tasked with rekindling the Sultanate’s maritime eminence, Oman Sail has continued to contribute to the sustainable prosperity of the nation and provide long-term learning opportunities for the youth of Oman. Oman Sail marked the occasion by unveiling the team representing the Sultanate in the Star Sailors League.

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SAVE 9 LIVES WITH ORGAN DONATION

There are approximately 2,500 kidney patients in the Sultanate who depend on dialysis

ZAINAB AL NASSRI @zainabalnasseri

Organ donation saves many lives and the lack of donors is a challenge, say surgeons and transplant specialists. Community awareness is key to popularising organ donation.

For instance, there are approximately 2,500 kidney patients in the Sultanate who depend on dialysis. If matching donors are willing to give a part of their body, it will alleviate the suffering of these patients.

Dr Nevin al Kalbaniyah, Head of the Organ Transplant Department at the Royal Hospital, said that organ donation is a humanitarian act and not many come forward to pledge their organs.

Dr Ahmed al Busaidy, Supervisor of the National Programme for Organ Transplantation, said: “For the living donor, there are legal conditions as well as strict medical conditions that guarantee the safety of the donor. Many medical

tests are conducted for the donor to ensure that the organ is matching and that he does not suffer from any diseases. As for organ donation after death, a person who has reached the legal age can submit his willingness to donate organs after death. When death is confirmed, these organs are evaluated and they are given, if suitable, to the patient on the waiting list according to the protocol.”

TURN TO P2



50% road accidents due to overspeed

KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

Driving a vehicle over and above the permissible speed limits has been the main reason behind many of the road accidents in Oman, according to the Traffic Department at the Royal Oman Police (ROP).

Although other reasons like multitasking, use of mobile phones, reckless driving and others are some of the reasons behind the number of accidents, a passion for speed has been found to be the main culprit behind road accidents and casualties.

“Speed has been the reason for nearly 198 of the 371 deaths from road accidents reported in 2020, followed by multitasking, reckless driving and others,” a source from the department told the *Observer*.

Other reasons like reckless driving which has led to 226 accidents, while negligence resulted

in 206 cases. Failure to wear seat belt increased the risk of accidents, while as many as 40 accidents were due to vehicle defects. Wrong overtaking resulted in 30 accidents, while other reasons contributed to 49 accidents.

Over the past four years, the number of road accidents in Oman has reduced substantially, thanks to the efforts of the government as well as the NGOs. From 4,721 accidents in 2016 (1 accident every 2 hours on an average), accidents fell to 1,341 in 2020 (1 accident every 6 hours on an average), according to the data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NC SI).

Nonetheless, the number of accidents is showing a proportionate increase with the surge in traffic on Muscat-Salalah road during the khareef season as the case was, until some years ago.

Sudan says to handover Bashir to world court

KHARTOUM: Sudan will hand Omar al Bashir to the International Criminal Court (ICC) along with other officials wanted over the Darfur conflict, Foreign Minister Mariam al Mahdi said on Wednesday.

Bashir, 77, has been wanted by the ICC for more than a decade over charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Sudanese region.

The “cabinet decided to hand over wanted officials to the ICC,” Mahdi was quoted as saying by state media, without giving a time frame.

The United Nations says 300,000 people were killed and 2.5 million displaced in the Darfur conflict, which erupted in the vast western

region in 2003.

The cabinet’s decision to hand him over came during a visit to Sudan by ICC chief prosecutor Karim Khan, who met with Mahdi on Tuesday.

Mahdi noted the handover of wanted officials will be discussed between the cabinet and the ruling sovereign council comprised of military and civilian figures for final approval, according to state news agency Suna. The transitional authorities have previously said they would hand Bashir over, but one stumbling block was that Sudan was not a party to the court’s founding Rome Statute.



— Reuters

Musandam Sea Adventure sees success with global awards

KHASAB: The Omani youth proved their competence and excellence through a tourism project ‘Musandam Sea Adventure.’

The project secured several international awards and it was classified among the best five companies in the world in 2016. It also won the silver prize in 2017 among the top five companies in the Middle East.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Abdul Fattah bin

Ahmed al Shehhi said that this story of success began as a tourism office in 2001, operating only a single vessel. That office came to be the second tourism-specialised office in the Governorate of Musandam.

Al Shehhi pointed out that in 2002, he received an invitation from a German company, which previously visited him in the governorate, to participate in an exhibition specialised in promoting tourism. In the exhibition, he



highlighted tourism and related products offered by his office to tourists wishing to visit islands, bays and creeks in Musandam.

He added that in 2006, he utilised German expertise in tourism to help him attract tourists and to promote his project. Al Shehhi also hired Omanis, but only 8 of them remained while the others found other jobs in the public and private sectors.

— ONA

Covid-19 field hospital receives 2,529 coronavirus patients

MUSCAT: The Covid-19 Field Hospital for coronavirus patients received 2,529 coronavirus patients since its opening on October 6, 2020, till end-July 2021, said Dr Nabil bin Mohammed al Lawati, Senior Consultant, Respiratory and Sleep Disorders and director of the field hospital.

The rate of coronavirus patients entering the field hospital a day varied depending on the epidemiological situation reaching 30 patients a day on peak periods, however, with the decrease in Covid-19 wave, the number dropped ranged between 2 and 5 people a day. Likewise, coronavirus patients being admitted to the field hospital goes up and down depending on



the daily caseload, Al Lawati said.

The Covid-19 Field Hospital for coronavirus patients, situated in the now-defunct Muscat international airport, plays a pivotal role in combating Covid-19. The hospital was established by joint efforts of several public and private entities including the Ministry of Health, Royal Court Affairs, Royal Oman Police, Civil Aviation Authority, Oman Airports, Petroleum Development Oman and other relevant bodies.

The idea behind the establishment of the field hospital is to reduce the load on the public and the private hospitals and allow them to perform their routine work in treating non-coronavirus patients.

WATER NETWORK IN SUR TO GET A BOOST



MUSCAT: Construction work on water networks in the Wilayat of Sur worth RO 1 million will begin on September 1, Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (OWWSC) said in a statement. Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company will commence the preliminary work of the project and amounting to RO 1,857,860, a statement said. Engineer Badr bin Salem al Rabaani said the construction work will take 18 months and it will support the water distribution networks in various regions in Sur as part of the company's plans to provide improve water supply. He said high-density polyethylene pipes will be used that conform with the latest local and international specifications in the field of water network construction.

Expansion of Masirah fishing harbour in South Al Sharqiyah underway



MASIRAH: The expansion of the fishing harbour in the Wilayat of Masirah in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate continues with local funding and participation of the private sector under the supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture,

Fisheries and Water Resources.

Aimed at developing fisheries wealth, boosting food security and upgrading the port's infrastructure, the project involves the construction of a marina berth for the mooring of artisanal and coastal fishing

vessels, and other fishing boats. The total length of the two berths is approximately 180 metres.

Youssef bin Hamad al Nahdi, head of the Fisheries Development Center at the Ministry of Agricultural and Fisheries Wealth

and Water Resources, said that the project aims to expand the fishing port as a result of the increase in the number of fishermen and the increase in the number of boats and fishing vessels.

The project also includes the

expansion and development of the refuelling and provisioning area, as well as the construction of a slide for advanced and large boats. It is expected to be completed by the end of August.

It is worth noting that the fish

production from artisanal fishing in the Wilayat of Masirah for 2020, amounted to 24,239 tonnes, with a total value of RO 19,833,000 compared to 15,359 tonnes with a value of RO 1,3756,000 in 2019.

— ONA

Save 9 lives with organ donation

FROM PAGE 1

Most organs are gifted to recipients from deceased donors, but there are occasions where living donors can save lives in a safe way.

Organs like heart, liver, kidneys, intestines, lungs, and pancreas, can be donated after one dies, for the purpose of transplanting them into another person who is in need of an organ. When alive one can give one kidney, a lobe of liver or bone marrow. One organ donor can save nine lives through multiple organ and tissue donations, if they are suitable for transplant.

In March this year, Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saidi, Minister of Health, issued a decision to establish the national programme to regulate the transplantation of human organs

and tissues.

The aims of the programme are to propose priority criteria on organ donation and control and inspection of medical practices in this field, and setting a plan to enhance community awareness on the importance of donation and instilling the concept of a medical will for donation.

Organ failure poses great suffering to the patients and their families. The only solution to alleviate the pain is transplantation. But the great scarcity of living donors prevents the terminally ill from leading a decent life.

The ministry supports all efforts to spread the culture of organ donation during life and after death. The ministry hopes that it will alleviate the suffering of patients with organ failure.

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Sultanate had its coolest summer in 2020 and the same year also had the warmest winter since 2011. At the same time, 2020 was one of the wettest years since 2011.

The mean maximum temperature in the Sultanate saw an increase between the years 2017 and 2019, only to drop substantially in 2020.

The mean maximum temperatures were 32.3 °C in 2011, which dropped to 31 °C between 2012 and 2016.

The temperatures, however, raised substantially to 33.6 °C in 2017, 37.8 °C in 2018, 35.8 °C in 2019.

Last year, 2020, the mean temperatures were only 28.7 °C, a significant drop from previous years.

Oman experiences warmest winter since 2011



However, with minimum temperatures, 2017 was the coolest at 17 °C and 2020 was the warmest weather at 27.5 °C.

In terms of rainfall, 2013 was the wettest with 139.2 mm of rainfall, followed by 103 °C in 2020. The year 2015 was the driest year since 2011 as it received only 69 °C mm of rainfall.

The mean humidity in 2020

was also low at 71.3 compared to 87 in 2019 and 86 in 2018.

In 2020, the average temperatures were 34.6 °C in June, 33.3 in July, 33.1 in August, and 31.8 in September.

January 2020 was the wettest month in 2020 with 33.6 mm of rainfall, followed by 29.5 mm in May and 25 mm in March.

Similarly, Muscat received 60.3

mm of rainfall and Al Buriami 85.9 mm in January 2020.

Countries of the Arabian Peninsula, which includes the Sultanate on its southeastern edge will unlikely be spared any of the dire weather-related predictions made by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in its report published earlier this week.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has been to enhance understanding of the financing opportunities available from the Green Climate Fund and the requirements for obtaining it at the national level, in a way that enables the Sultanate to benefit from the financing opportunities available to a shift towards a low-carbon economy and face challenges from climate change and its negative effects on the various sectors in the Sultanate.

NGC introduces advance medical equipment

MUSCAT: The National Genetic Centre (NGC) at the Royal Hospital has introduced a set of advanced diagnostic and analytic equipment to meet the needs of medical diagnosis of various blood diseases and to match an increase in inherited blood disorders in the Sultanate. The move is aimed at keeping pace with genetic mutations responsible for hereditary diseases.

In comments to Oman News Agency (ONA), Dr Musallam bin Said al Araiimi, Clinical Geneticist and Head of Education and Genetic Counselling Services at the National Genetic Centre, said that the centre has recently witnessed a qualitative expansion in the development of laboratory

equipment and modern diagnostic devices in alignment with the Oman Vision 2040, and inline the steady increase in the rates of genetic diseases in the Sultanate.

The number of patients served by the NGC has surged dramatically from 1,732 in 2016 to 4,119 in 2020, the official said adding that the Sultanate is among countries with a high rate of inherited blood disorders as the probability of a child being born with a birth defect or any genetic disease in the Sultanate ranges between 5.4 per cent and 7 per cent while the global rate does not exceed 4.4 per cent.

Al Araiimi added that the Sultanate has recorded 140 cases of Down syndrome in 2014, and



150 cases in 2015, while metabolic disorders with hereditary endocrine diseases and genetic nutritional disorders account for about 20.7 per cent of all genetic diseases.

The statistics showed that 37 per cent of neonatal deaths and



stillbirths are caused by severe genetic congenital disorders, while genetic congenital disorders make up 10 per cent of the registered causes of infant mortalities, and 52 per cent of the causes of death in older children in the Sultanate, he said.

He pointed out that genetic diseases are, by large, responsible for hearing, visual and mobility impairment and other disabilities, he noted that the latest statistics indicate that about 10 per cent of Omani families have a child with a genetic disease that leads to

disability.

Al Araiimi said that the NGC has 59 health professionals including doctors specialising in various branches of genetics, lab specialists, technicians, administrators and assistant medical cadres all of whom are Omanis. — ONA

GLOBAL AWARDS FOR MUSANDAM SEA ADVENTURE



Abdul Fattah bin
Ahmed al Shehhi

The success story of 'Musandam Sea Adventure' Project says Abdul Fattah bin Ahmed al Shehhi came when the Omani youth proved their competence and excellence through a tourism project and crowned its success with international awards. The project scooped several international awards and was classified among the best 5 companies in the world in 2016. It also won the silver prize in 2017 among the top 5 companies in the Middle East.

GCC, Jordan discuss health cooperation

MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Health (MoH) on Wednesday took part in the third coordination meeting between the GCC countries and Jordan in the field of public health.

The virtual meeting aimed at promoting relations of cooperation and partnership among the GCC, and the active countries, regional and international organisations.

It also aimed to complete the implementation of joint action plans and what has been agreed upon at the working groups and joint committees formed for this purpose, as well as to update the detailed plans of the working group.

The meeting touched on several topics, including human resources, research, studies, training and development, in addition to the exchange of expertise and information in the field of primary healthcare including scientific



evidence and operational plans, along with sharing best practices in the field of communicable diseases surveillance.

It also covered the efforts exerted in confronting Covid-19 pandemic and the implementation of vaccination programmes, polio, measles, tuberculosis and AIDS.

Exchange of expertise and information in the field of prevention of non-communicable diseases was also discussed.

Moreover, the meeting discussed means of strengthening health systems such as regulations and laws of health profession licensing, exchange information in the field of health legislation, universal health insurance and best practices in the areas of promoting healthcare.

The meeting also highlighted ways of exchanging expertise in the field of information and electronic health applications, exchange of

information in policies, procedures and standards for patient safety and risk assessment, as well as the exchange of experiences with regard to environmental health and food safety.

Dr Hamad al Balushi, Health Systems Development Advisor and Dr Jumana al Abdwani, Director of Foreign Relations and Organisations from MoH participated in the meeting.

— ONA

Oman Sail marks 13th anniversary, unveils team for Star League



MUSCAT: Oman Sail marked 13 years of excellence since its inception. Tasked with rekindling the Sultanate's maritime eminence, Oman Sail has continued to contribute to the sustainable prosperity of the nation and provide long-term learning opportunities for the youth of Oman.

As part of the celebration, and in the presence of Deputy Swiss Ambassador to Oman, Sabina Läderach, Oman Sail marked the occasion by unveiling the team representing the Sultanate in the Star Sailors League, a leading inshore competition scheduled to take place in Switzerland from September 19 to October 4.

Oman has been selected thanks to the sailors' impressive track record and the country's high standing in global sailing. The 12-man team will compete against professional teams from around

We are also looking forward to an incredibly busy period of sailing events that will open the eyes of the international sailing community to Oman

DR KHAMIS AL JABRI
CEO of Oman Sail

the world for the Sir Roland Symonette Trophy in what will be the first strong competition for Oman's elite sailors post-pandemic.

Dr Khamis al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, said, "We are incredibly proud of what Oman



Sail has accomplished over 13 years. Having a team compete in the Star Sailors League will provide a great opportunity for us to promote the Sultanate and will give the team a platform to perform and compete against the best. As we celebrate the occasion, we are also looking forward to an incredibly busy period of sailing events that will open the eyes of the international sailing

community to Oman."

The winter season will see Oman Sail host three major world championships with the 2021 World Youth Sailing Championships, 2021 49er, 49er FX & Nacra 17 World Championships, and the 2021 ICLA Radial World Championships headed to these shores. Oman Sail will also organise the 2021 49er, 49er FX &

Nacra 17 Asian Championships, 2021 Asian Windsurfing Championships, along with regular fixtures in the calendar the Mussanah Race Week and Sailing Arabia – The Tour 2021 to close out the year as competitive sailing returns to the Sultanate.

Dr Al Jabri added, "I would like to pass my sincerest gratitude to all Oman Sail team for their efforts over the last 13 years. This

has always been a team effort and all of achievements still to come are a result of the hard work put in every day since we began."

Oman Sail is also extending its expertise to bring additional high-profile sporting events to the country with the recent announcement that the World Race Walking Team Championships is headed to Muscat in March 2022.



STEELY RESOLVE TO SHIELD PLANET

Oman has embarked on serious structural reforms and transformative policies to lay the groundwork for a low carbon economy and shift to low-emission sustainable development pathways over the last five years

SAMUEL KUTTY[@samkuttyvp](#)

The coronavirus pandemic has introduced a significant factor of uncertainty into policymaking worldwide. For climate change policy, it is a major potential accelerator disruptor!

Globally, the pandemic also pushed climate change down on the international agenda. The health response and efforts to bring economies back to their pre-pandemic state have dominated the discourse on many national agendas.

According to a landmark UN assessment published on Monday, global warming has arrived with a vengeance and will see Earth's average temperature reach 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre industrial levels around 2030, a decade earlier than projected only three years ago.

However, the Sultanate has embarked on serious structural reforms and transformative policies to lay the groundwork for a low carbon economy and shift to low-emission sustainable development pathways over the last five years.

The country has developed a comprehensive Oman Vision 2040 policy to further liberalise and

diversify the economy by increasing investments in tourism, financial services and port logistics.

The Government Carbon Control Target Plan is rooted in the Oman Vision 2040 and the National Energy Strategy to support a gradual transition to a low carbon economy and an energy matrix significantly lower in carbon emission by 2030.

According to Oman's Second Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), which was submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), at the end of July last, climate change is at the forefront of public and government consciousness due to the accelerated pace of Changing climatic patterns being experienced in the Sultanate.

"Despite the still considerable uncertainty around the ultimate course of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Sultanate continues to move ahead with the same determination to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development since its announcement in 2015", affirms the report.

Detailed climate simulation reveals that the Arabian Gulf and the Sultanate form a particular regional hotspot where climate change is likely to cross the

survivability threshold in the absence of drastic carbon cuts.

Moreover, much of Oman's population, infrastructure and economic activity are located in coastal zones and are vulnerable to sea-level rise, salt-water intrusion and more frequent extreme tropical cyclones.

The NDC report reveals that the energy sector emitted the most greenhouse gases in 2015, making up 64 per cent of total emissions, primarily due to the emissions from the oil and gas, transportation and electricity generation using natural gas and diesel.

The second-largest greenhouse gas (GHG) emitter with 30 per cent of the total nationwide emission is the industry. Over the period 2000-2015, Oman's economic carbon intensity increased slightly from 1.1 to 1.4 Kg CO₂ per US dollar of output, and the emission of the CO₂ equivalent per capita reached 22.9 tonnes in 2015.

According to the report, the massive deployment of renewable energy and the deepening of energy efficiency actions are the pillars of the 2030 carbon control plan in the Sultanate.

The National Energy Strategy has set an ambitious target to derive

20 per cent of electricity from renewables by 2027. Over the period 2021-2027, the renewable energy plan aimed to secure at least 2,660 MW.

The National Energy strategy further enhances the gas-fired plant's overall energy efficiency in conjunction with the clean energy plans. The energy efficiency of the gas fired plants' has improved by 13 per cent between 2004 and 2015 (from 26 per cent in 2005 to 39 per cent in 2015). Between 2015 and 2020, the improvement was even more significant at 15.63 per cent (from 39 per cent in 2015 to 55 per cent in 2020).

From 2017 to 2019, the Sultanate has established a strategic framework for engagement with the Green Climate Fund (GCF) through the country's Programme on Climate Change initiatives and priorities.

Six thematic areas including water resources, agriculture, marine and fisheries, urban areas, health and energy efficiency) have been identified in the country engagement programme for the GCF to finance over the medium-term. It has prepared the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) proposal with GCF from 2018-2020.

IIC provides support to start-up companies

HAMAD AL HASHMI

MUSCAT, AUG 11

The Industrial Innovation Centre (IIC) strives, through the innovation programme for emerging companies, to convert innovative ideas into commercial products and to sharpen the innovative skills of Omanis and help them to start-up lucrative businesses.

The IIC also supports entrepreneurs and enables them to promote their products and enables start-up businesses to penetrate the local and international markets.

The centre helps small and medium enterprises to achieve good economic returns and works towards building a network of successful industrial entrepreneurs.

The IIC contributes to converting innovative ideas to actual businesses which, in turn, generate job opportunities and contribute to the strengthening of the national economy.

A number of start-up companies have succeeded in providing unique products inspired by the national heritage by upgrading local traditional crafts using wood, marble and metal to produce a wide range of products such as furniture and souvenirs, among others.

Another company works on developing fisheries products and provides training for



women in an effort to upgrade this sector and take its products to international markets.

A third company is working on robotic products and artificial intelligence.

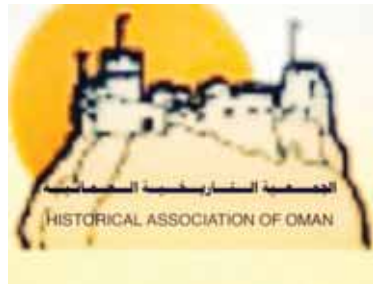
The IIC helps SMEs to achieve excellent economic returns and works towards building a network of successful industrial entrepreneurs

The IIC's programme for establishing innovative companies provides support to start-up companies involved in the field of technology, artificial intelligence (AI), robotic products and innovative solutions by offering financial consultancies in order to contribute to the sustainability of innovative start-up companies.

Oman History Association's Board formed

MUSCAT: Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, has issued a ministerial decision forming the board of directors of Oman History Association.

The association has Hon Sayyid Nooh bin Mohammed al Baisaidy as its Chairman and the following as members: Dr Ibrahim bin Yahya al Baisaidy, Contemporary History Professor at Sultan Qaboos University (Deputy Chairman), Dr Badria bint Mohammed al Nabhaniyah, History Subject Supervisor at the Ministry of Education, Dr Ahlam bint Hamoud al Jahwariyah, Assistant Director of the Research and Studies Department, National Records and Archives



Authority, and Ali bin Hamoud al Mahrouqi, Managing Editor, *Omani Studies* magazine.

The decision identifies the specialisations of the board of directors, stating that the association specialises in disseminating knowledge about Omani heritage, history and civilisation, besides contributing to the protection and documentation of Omani

heritage.

The association will organise lectures and related activities and participates in conferences, specialised forums and other events, according to the decision, which also states that the association will communicate with local and international scholarly and intellectual institutions.

It is worth noting that Oman History Association, established way back in 1975, enjoys the patronage of His Majesty the Sultan.

Since its inception, the association laid down the pillars of specialised studies in the field of history and heritage, which gave a strong impetus to a variety of initiatives in the field. — ONA

Interdisciplinary collaboration expands knowledge horizons

DR SMITHA SUNIL KUMARAN NAIR

It is a fact that interdisciplinary collaborative efforts find solutions to several complex real-world problems in the Fourth Industrial Revolution era. Not every Higher Education Institution (HEI) in the Sultanate offers programmes in all disciplines within their institution. This however must not be a barrier to leveraging cross-disciplinary research in such HEIs.

Studies confirm that enabling collaborative learning environments boosts the involvement of students to be responsible and accountable for the success of their own learning, while collaboratively working towards finding a solution to a problem that equips them to be successful in the workplace in future.

Here is a success story narrating

an inter-institutional collaborative set-up established to work on an interdisciplinary research problem: a case study that aimed at bringing together students of diverse disciplines (Computer Science and Biotechnology) from two different HEIs in Oman to collaboratively work towards finding a computational solution to a biological problem, mentored by teachers at both HEIs. The project was successfully completed and resulted in a joint publication.

Moreover, such inter-institutional collaborative ventures give advantages to students to collaborate with external student communities. The whole exercise aimed to provide students with a new perspective of student interaction, student experience, student learning



Mohamed bin Yousuf bin Said al Rawahi

in higher education and the importance of interdisciplinary research and inter-professional respect in a collaborative environment. It also helps students improve the collaborative skills that would help them succeed in their careers.

"It was an amazing and distinctive learning experience collaborating with students at another college studying in a different discipline. It was a great learning experience while exchanging our knowledge and ideas over the slack platform. I am now confident to work in an interprofessional environment," said Mohamed bin Yousuf bin Said al Rawahi of Middle East College.

The author is Head, Centre for Postgraduate Studies, Middle East College. smitha@mec.edu.om



Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Center

Tender Advertisement for the Supply & Installation of Car Parking Shades

The Operational Committee of Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Centre announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Last date for Collection of Tender Document	Bid Submission Closing	Tender Specification Fees
CCCRC/T/273/2021	Supply and Installation of Car Parking Shades	19/08/2021	26/08/2021	OMR 50.000

Qualified companies interested in participating in this tender shall collect the tender specifications from the date of this advertisement from the following address:

Operational Committee of the Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre, SQU Street Al Khoud, Sultanate of Oman, Procurement Department, Ground Floor.

Biddings that meet the above requirement should be submitted in a sealed envelope by an Omani National from your company addressed to the head of Purchase Committee in the tender box located at:

Operational Committee of the Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre, SQU Street Al Khoud, Sultanate of Oman, Procurement Department, Ground Floor.

Please note:

- Bids received after the deadline indicated above, for whatever reason, will not be considered.
- Queries/ clarifications should be submitted immediately, but not later than one week before the date of tender submission.
- For Queries you may Contact via e-mail: purchase@ccrc.gov.om.
- The committee is not obliged to accept the lowest price of the bid or any other bid.

TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

THE MAZOOON ELECTRICITY COMPANY (MZEC) INVITES THE FOLLOWING LOCAL TENDERS:

Tender No	Description	Last Date of Purchasing	Last Date for Submission	Tender Board Grade	Type of Participation	Tender Price R.O
30/MZEC/2021 (RETENDER)	UNITE RATE CONTRACT TO TOP-UP SMS CREDIT TO MZEC SMS GATEWAY	16/8/2021	14/09/2021	SPECIALIST	LOCAL	90
Tender No	Description	Last Date of Purchasing	Last Date for Submission	DCRP Grade	Type of Participation	Tender Price R.O
MZEC/28/2021 (RETENDER)	SURVEY AND DESIGN WORKS OF 11KV & LT ELECTRICAL NETWORKS NEW EXTENSIONS AND REINFORCEMENTS AT SOUTH BATINAH GOVERNORATE & AL SUWAIQ DISTRICT & AL MANUMA AREA	16/08/2021	31/8/2021	GRADE 1 TYPE 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	LOCAL	724
MZEC/33/2021	CONSTRUCTION OF 2x6 MVA PSS (ROP) WITH 33KV FEEDERS IN WADI AL MAAWIL AT AL BATINAH SOUTH GOVERNORATE SITE VISIT ON (23/08/2021) AT (09:00 AM) IN BARKA MZEC OFFICE	16/8/2021	14/09/2021	B	LOCAL	400

- Specialized companies registered with the DCRP and the Tender Board and their valid registration can subscribe and obtain technical specifications and tender conditions by submitting an application with all company documents attached via e-mail: scm.tenders@mzec.co.om during working hours. The official time is from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm. In return for paying the amount specified above for one copy (non-refundable) via bank deposit to the company's account.
- The tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of tender price valid (90) days as a bid bond and addressed to the chairperson of the (Internal Tender Committee) of Mazoon Electricity Company S.A.O.C and **any offer is not including the bond will be rejected immediately.**
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic conditions, offers will be submitted by sending offers to the e-mail: mzec-offerssubmission@mzec.co.om and that the offers are valid for a period of not less than (90) days from the date of bid submission.
- Bids must be sent before (10:00 am) from the date specified as the last day for bid submission.
- The priority of the awarding will be given to those bidders who assure recruitment of the maximum numbers of Omani staff and utilizing Omani products
- **All Clarifications are to be sent to the email address: MZEC-Clarification@mzec.co.om and the Last date for receiving vendor's clarifications will be for tender no. 28/2021 on 25/08/2021 and for tenders no. 30,33/2021 on 01/09/2021.**
- Mazoon Electricity Company S.A.O.C. is not bound to accept the lowest tender.
- We would like to inform you that above documents prices do not include VAT 5% and it will be charged if purchase invoice issued.

(WE LIGHT...WE CARE)

Tenders & Contracts Section : (+968) 72722787 / 97292777 / 92858543



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At least 65 killed in Algerian wildfires

ALGIERS: Wildfires tearing through forested areas of northern Algeria have killed at least 65 people, state television reported on Wednesday, as some of the most destructive blazes in the country's history continued to rage.

The government has deployed the army to help fight the fires, which have burnt most fiercely in the mountainous Kabylie region, and 28 of the dead are soldiers, with another 12 critically injured with burns.

President Abdelmadjid Tebboune declared three days of national mourning for the dead and froze state activities not related to the fires.

Forest fires have set large parts of Algeria, Turkey and Greece aflame over the past week and a European Union atmosphere monitor said the Mediterranean had become a wildfire hotspot aided by increasingly hot weather.

Dozens of separate fires have raged through forest areas across northern Algeria since Monday and on Tuesday Interior Minister Kamel Beldjoud accused arsonists



Smoke rises from a wildfire in the forested hills of the Kabylie region, east of the capital Algiers, on Wednesday. — AFP

of igniting the flames, without providing any evidence.

The worst-hit area has been Tizi Ouzou, the largest district of the Kabylie region, where houses have burned and residents fled to shelter in hotels, hostels and university accommodation in nearby towns.

The government has said it will

compensate those affected.

Images of trapped villagers, terrified livestock and forested hillsides reduced to blackened stumps were shared on social media, many of them accompanied by pleas for help.

AFP journalists saw villagers desperately trying to put out the spreading fires with makeshift

brooms in an effort to save their homes.

High winds fuelled the rapid spread of the fires in the tinder-dry conditions created by a heatwave across North Africa and the wider Mediterranean, fire official Youcef Ould Mohamed told the state-run APS news agency.

— Agencies

Iran president appoints new foreign minister

TEHRAN: New President Ebrahim Raisi named an anti-Western diplomat as foreign minister on Wednesday as Iran and six world powers seek to restore their 2015 nuclear deal.

Raisi was sworn into office on August 5 with the Islamic Republic's clerical rulers facing growing crises at home and abroad.

The mid-ranking cleric replaced pragmatist Hassan Rouhani as president after an election in June when most prominent rivals — including moderates and reformists — were barred from standing.

Presenting his cabinet to parliament for an expected vote of confidence, Raisi chose Hossein Amirabdollahian as foreign minister and Javad Owji, an ex-deputy oil minister and managing director of the state-run gas company, as oil minister.

“Amirabdollahian is a hardline diplomat...If the foreign ministry remains in charge of Iran's



Hossein Amirabdollahian

nuclear dossier, then obviously Tehran will adopt a very tough line in the talks,” said an Iranian nuclear negotiator who asked not to be named.

Reports in semi-official Iranian media suggested that the Supreme National Security Council, which reports directly to hardline Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei would take over the nuclear talks in Vienna from the foreign ministry, which had been led by relative moderates during Rouhani's administration. — Reuters

Yemen forests next casualty of war

KHAMIS BANISAAD: Yemeni lumberjack Ali al Emadi spends hours chopping down an acacia tree with an axe as his 12-year-old nephew helps out splitting logs.

In a country blighted by war, Emadi had to turn to log in his northern Al Mahweet region to eke out a living. An economic collapse has wiped out the farming and building work he used to travel around the country for.

But with demand for firewood soaring due to fuel shortages, there are now concerns that the country's humanitarian crisis, with millions facing starvation, has compounded the risk of deforestation — threatening both the environment of Yemen and any hope of a long-term livelihood for men like Emadi.

“The owners of bakeries ... use wood and stone to heat their ovens. In the past, they used to use gas, but now there is only wood,” Emadi said. “Should there be a good quantity of wood available, we make a living, thank God. But nowadays trees are scarce, “



A lumberjack cuts a tree with an axe in Bajil district of Hodeida province. — Reuters

the father of seven said. “If I get something, we eat. At least we live or die together.”

More than six years of war between the recognised government backed by a Saudi-led coalition and the Ansar Allah has killed tens of thousands of people and left 80 per cent of Yemen's population reliant on aid.

The fuel shortages due to a coalition blockade on Ansar

Allah-held areas, including limiting access to the main port of Hodeidah, have led businesses and families to swap diesel and gas for firewood. The alliance says the blockade is needed to foil arms smuggling. Around 886,000 trees are felled annually to feed bakeries and restaurants in the capital Sanaa alone, said Abdullah Abul-Futuh, head of the biodiversity and natural reserves at

Yemen's Environment Protection Authority in the city, which is run by Ansar Allah authorities along with most of northern Yemen.

Some 5 million trees have been cut down over the past three years across the north, he said.

“That is the equivalent of 213 square km (82 sq miles) of forests, knowing that only 3.3 per cent of Yemen's total area is classified as forests,” Abul-Futuh said.

The authority could not provide comparative figures, saying this was a recent phenomenon.

After gas was discovered in the Marib region in the 1980s, wood cutting became limited to remote areas but the war has choked Yemen's energy output, forcing a reliance first on imports and now on wood from trees more usually used to build homes.

Yemen has few woodlands but a relatively rich variety of flora in the oil-producing Arabian Peninsula desert region. In Al Mahweet, known for its thick canopies, several types of acacia, cedar and spruce are vanishing. — Reuters

Traders bid for sweetest dates at Saudi festival



A worker collects dates from a palm tree during Unaizah Season for Dates, at Unaizah city in the Al Qassim province. — Reuters

UNAIZA: At dawn in Unaiza, the golden-brown dates — the stars of the festival — arrive at the marketplace to the sound of a town crier announcing trading open.

Farmers, traders and consumers wend their way through piles of the fruit stacked on metal carts at the annual seasonal market, where 280,000 kg of dates are sold each day.

The festival, which organisers say is one of the largest in the world, is held at the town in the central Qassim region, one of the most conservative parts of the country.

Besides being the world's top oil exporter Saudi Arabia is also a leading producer of dates. The Qassim region is famed for its Sukkari dates, which auctioneer Abdulaziz al-Falwa says can vary in price from 5 riyals (\$1.33) for 3 kg to up to 700 riyals (\$186.66), depending on the quality.

Falwa is one of dozens of auctioneers selling the prized dates that are later exported worldwide. — Reuters

ISTANBUL

After wildfires, heavy floods hit Turkey

Floods caused by unusually heavy rainfall struck Turkey's northern coast on Wednesday, tearing down a bridge and leaving villages without power, after some of the biggest wildfires in the country's history ravaged its southwest. State broadcaster TRT Haber said one person died from a heart attack in the northern province of Bartin, and emergency workers were looking for another person who was missing.

Thirteen people were also injured after a bridge collapsed



in Bartin and there were power outages in 12 villages, the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) said.

TRIPOLI

Libyans launch new round of talks

Delegates from war-torn Libya launched a new round of UN-led talks via video conference on Wednesday aiming to reach a compromise ahead of planned elections.

The meeting comes six weeks after the failure of negotiations held in Switzerland between the 75 participants from all sides gathered for the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum.

The United Nations Support Mission in Libya was forced to



acknowledge the failure of that session after four days, due to a lack of consensus among the delegates.

RABAT

Israel foriegn minister in Morocco

Israel's top diplomat landed in Morocco on Wednesday for the first visit by a senior official from the Jewish state since the two sides agreed to normalise ties last year.

Foreign Minister Yair Lapid is expected to meet his Moroccan counterpart, Nasser Bourita, on Wednesday and open a diplomatic representation on Thursday in the capital Rabat.

“We have landed in Morocco. Proud to represent Israel during



this historic visit,” Lapid wrote on Twitter as his flight operated by Israeli national airline El Al arrived.

In brief

BANGKOK



THAILAND TO TRIAL SHOTS VIA NASAL SPRAY

Two coronavirus vaccines administered using a nasal spray being developed in Thailand are due to start human trials by the end of this year, after promising results in trials involving mice, a government official said on Wednesday.

Developed by the National Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, the vaccines are based on the adenovirus and influenza, deputy government spokeswoman Ratchada Thanadirek said.

After conducting trials in mice, the first phase of human trials should start by the end of this year, pending approval from the food and drug regulator, she said.

SYDNEY



28 DAYS QUARANTINE FOR AUSSIE OLYMPIANS

A group of Australian Olympic athletes were on Wednesday facing 28 days in quarantine on return from Tokyo in a move slammed as “cruel” and “uncaring” as concerns mount over their mental wellbeing.

All overseas travellers, including the nearly 500-strong Australian team, are required to spend 14 days’ isolation in a hotel or special outback camp on arrival in the country, under strict coronavirus rules.

But some will have to endure double that after the South Australian government ruled those who could not get direct flights to Adelaide from Tokyo must serve another two weeks of home quarantine when they arrive in the state.

DHAKA



MYANMAR VACCINATION LEAVES OUT ROHINGYA

Authorities in Myanmar currently have no plan to include minority Rohingya Muslims living in densely-packed camps as they begin vaccinating priority groups against COVID-19 in western Rakhine State, the junta-appointed local administrator said. Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya fled to Bangladesh during military operations in 2017 and those who remain complain of discrimination and mistreatment in a country that does not recognise them as citizens.

Local administrator Kyaw Lwin said from Sittwe township that the rollout had begun there with 10,000 vaccinations for priority groups such as the elderly, healthcare workers, government staff and Buddhist monks.



Taliban fighter (C) is seen surrounded by locals at Pul-e-Khumri on Wednesday after Taliban captured the capital of Baghlan province about 200 km north of Kabul. — AFP

‘Taliban could take Kabul in 90 days’

KABUL: Taliban fighters could isolate Afghanistan’s capital in 30 days and possibly take it over in 90, a US defence official said on Wednesday citing US intelligence, as militants took control of an eighth provincial Afghan capital.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that the new assessment of how long Kabul could stand was a result of the rapid gains the Taliban had been making around the country as US-led foreign forces leave.

“But this is not a foregone conclusion,” the official added, saying that the Afghan security forces could reverse the momentum by putting up more resistance.

The fighters now control 65 per cent of Afghanistan and have taken or threaten to take 11 provincial capitals, a senior EU official said on Tuesday.

All entry points to Kabul, which lies in a valley surrounded by mountains, are choked with civilians fleeing violence elsewhere, a Western security source in the city said, making it hard to tell whether Taliban fighters were also entering.

“The fear is of suicide bombers

Biden urged Afghan leaders to fight for their homeland, saying on Tuesday he did not regret his decision to withdraw. He noted that the United States had spent more than \$1 trillion over 20 years and lost thousands of troops

entering the diplomatic quarters to scare, attack and ensure everyone leaves at the earliest opportunity,” he said.

Wednesday’s loss of Faizabad, capital of the northeastern province of Badakhshan, was the latest setback for the Afghan government, which has been struggling to stem the momentum of Taliban assaults.

It came as President Ashraf Ghani flew to Mazar-i-Sharif to rally old warlords to the defence of the biggest city in the north as Taliban forces closed in.

Jawad Mujadidi, a provincial council member from Badakhshan, said the Taliban

had laid siege to Faizabad before launching an offensive on Tuesday.

“Unfortunately, after hours of heavy fighting the ANDSF retreated,” Mujadidi said, referring to national security forces. “With the fall of Faizabad the whole of the northeast has come under Taliban control.”

Badakhshan borders Tajikistan, Pakistan and China.

The Taliban are battling to defeat the U.S-backed government and reimpose strict Islamic law. The speed of their advance has shocked the government and its allies.

US President Joe Biden urged Afghan leaders to fight for their homeland, saying on Tuesday he did not regret his decision to withdraw. He noted that the United States had spent more than \$1 trillion over 20 years and lost thousands of troops.

The United States was providing significant air support, food, equipment and salaries to Afghan forces, he said.

The United States will complete the withdrawal of its forces this month in exchange for Taliban promises to prevent Afghanistan being used for international terrorism. — Reuters

China approves first mixed-vaccine trial as Delta variant spreads

BEIJING: China’s drug regulator has approved the country’s first mixed-vaccine trial, a company involved in the study said, as the rapid spread of the Delta variant raises concern about the efficacy of domestically produced jabs.

The trial will test the efficacy of combining an “inactivated” vaccine made by China’s Sinovac with a DNA-based one developed by US pharmaceutical company Inovio, a statement issued on Tuesday said.

The statement was put out by Advaccine Biopharmaceuticals Suzhou, Inovio’s trial partner in China.

Preclinical work has found that “two different vaccine applications... produce an even stronger and more balanced immune response”, Advaccine chairman Wang Bin said in the statement.

There are several types of Covid vaccines, including those using an inactivated or weakened virus to generate an immune response, and more cutting-edge RNA- or DNA-based jabs that use engineered versions of the coronavirus’ genetic code to create a protein that safely prompts an immune response.

Five out of the seven vaccines approved in China are two-shot inactivated vaccines.

Their published efficacy lags RNA jabs by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, which have pre-Delta success rates above 90 per cent.

The World Health Organization has said there is still not enough data to say whether using two different vaccines together is safe or can boost immunity.

Inovio has not published any efficacy data from its global clinical trials. It is the first DNA-based vaccine to be trialled in China.

China is battling its worst coronavirus outbreak in months, with officials saying many of those infected had already been vaccinated.

This has added to calls for China’s two biggest vaccine producers — state-run Sinopharm and privately owned Sinovac — to provide data proving their jabs work against the Delta variant. — AFP



Travellers at the check-in area at Beijing Capital international airport on Tuesday. — AFP

Two dead, dozens trapped after landslide in India

NEW DELHI: Two people have died and at least 12 were injured after a landslide in the mountainous Indian state of Himachal Pradesh on Wednesday saw boulders tumbling onto a highway, hitting several vehicles, Indian officials said.

At least 25 people are still trapped, Abid Hussain Sadiq, a government official in the Kinnaur district where the incident happened, said.

“We are in the middle of rescue operations,” he said. “We expect the rescue operations to continue through the night, if not longer.”

Around 200 troops have been dispatched to aid in the rescue attempt, said Vivek Pandey, a spokesman for the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), an Indian paramilitary unit responsible for border security in the region. — Agencies

Indonesian village turns unwanted trash into Covid helper



Aseyanto, 53, a resident of the Tembok Gede neighbourhood, operates the “Delta Robot”, made from household items like pots, pans and an old television monitor, in Surabaya. — Reuters

battery life. It is one of several robots made in the village of Tembok Gede, which has won a reputation for its creative use of

technology.

After trundling down the street to the home of an isolating resident, its speaker emits the

message “assalamu’alaikum” (Peace be with you), followed by “A delivery is here. Get well soon.”

The village lies within Surabaya,

capital of East Java province and Indonesia’s second-biggest city, where a devastating second wave of coronavirus infections has swept in over in the past month.

Indonesia has become the epicentre of Asia’s Covid-19 outbreak and recorded more than 3.68 million infections and more than 108,000 deaths from the virus among a population in excess of 270 million spread across the vast archipelago.

“This Delta robot is very simple.... When we created this, we purely used materials in our neighbourhood,” said Aseyanto, who goes by one name.

It is a far cry from the robots deployed in hospitality and for care in Japan and elsewhere, some of which have been adapted to help tackle the pandemic.

“For the base, we used a used toy car chassis,” said another team member, engineering lecturer Benazir Imam Arif Muttaqin.

— Reuters

US tries again to extradite Assange from Britain

LONDON: A London judge on Wednesday widened the scope of a US appeal against a block on the extradition of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange from Britain and will hear the renewed bid in late October.

A judge ruled in January that Assange should not be extradited to the United States to face criminal charges including breaking a spying law, saying his mental health problems meant he would be at risk of suicide.

Assange faces 18 criminal charges in the United States of breaking an espionage law and conspiring to hack government computers.

WikiLeaks published a US military video in 2010 showing a 2007 attack by Apache helicopters in Baghdad that killed a dozen people, including two Reuters news staff. It then released thousands of secret classified files and diplomatic cables.

The legal saga began soon afterwards when Sweden sought Assange's extradition from Britain over allegations of sex crimes. When he lost that case in 2012, he fled to the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he spent seven years.

When he was finally dragged out in April 2019, he was jailed for breaching British bail conditions although the Swedish case against him had been dropped.

The United States had already been given permission to appeal the January ruling on three grounds, but on Wednesday asked that the scope of it be expanded to include a reassessment of the expert evidence used to evaluate Assange's risk of suicide.

Judge Timothy Holroyde said that it was unusual for an appellate court to reconsider evidence from an expert witness when it has been accepted by a lower court. — **Reuters**



Supporters of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange display a banner outside the Royal Courts of Justice in London on Wednesday. — **Reuters**

AIR WARRIORS TAKE ON FIRE



Fire-fighting helicopters are filled with water off the beach of the village of Pefki, on the island of Evia, Greece, on Wednesday. — **Reuters**

Germany, Netherlands halt migrant expulsions

BERLIN: Germany and the Netherlands said on Wednesday they have stopped forced repatriations of Afghan migrants because of deteriorating security in Afghanistan, as the Taliban pressed on with its rapid advance in the country's north.

"Due to current developments in the security situation, the interior minister has decided to suspend deportations to Afghanistan for the time being," Germany's interior ministry spokesman Steve Alter wrote on Twitter.

Separately in The Hague, Dutch State Secretary for Justice and Security Ankie Broekers-Knol announced a "moratorium on (deportation) decisions and departures."

The halt "will apply for six months and will apply to foreign nationals of Afghan nationality," she wrote in a letter to the Dutch parliament.

Wednesday's move by the Germans and Dutch marked a sharp U-turn from their previous position.

Officials had said as late as on Tuesday that both governments had joined their counterparts in Austria, Belgium, Denmark and Greece to write to the EU's executive arm saying they should be allowed to press on with expulsions of Afghan migrants if their asylum bids fail.

Afghanistan urged the EU in July to cease forced deportations of Afghan migrants for three months as security

forces battle the Taliban offensive ahead of the full US military pullout from Afghanistan on August 31.

"We are now complying with this request, which I consider to be the right thing to do," Germany's foreign minister Heiko Maas said of Kabul's call.

As a deportation flight had to be stopped in recent days because of fighting in Kabul close to the airport, Maas said a decision had to be quickly made on whether to resume the flight.

Neighbouring Austria however said it would press on with expulsions to Afghanistan.

"Austria is keeping to its plans for deportations. A de facto suspension of deportations is currently not up for discussion,"

a spokesman for the interior ministry said.

The Taliban have in recent days made huge advances in the north, capturing territory including provincial capital Kunduz — where German soldiers had been deployed for a decade until the end of June.

German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer had voiced disappointment at the developments.

"The reports from Kunduz and from all over Afghanistan are bitter and hurt a lot," she wrote on Twitter on Monday.

Northern Afghanistan has long been considered an anti-Taliban stronghold that saw some of the stiffest resistance to militant rule in the 1990s. — **AFP**

US-bound migrants fill Colombia town after curbs lifted

NECOCLI: After travelling for more than a year by ship, bus and car from Africa in hope of reaching the United States, Simon Gyamfi found himself stuck in a remote tourist resort on the coast of Colombia with thousands of other migrants.

The 42-year-old carpenter, a Christian, fled his home in Ghana because of a dispute with his late wife's Muslim family, he said, and took a month-long ocean voyage to Brazil. The closure of borders

due to the coronavirus pandemic left him stranded there for months.

Now, after the frontiers finally reopened, he has made his way by road to the northern Colombian town of Necocli, a gateway for migrants heading northward into Central America.

Every year, thousands of migrants pass through the small town, looking to catch a boat across the Gulf of Uraba toward the jungles of the Darien Gap on the isthmus of Panama.



A migrant and his daughter check a photo on his phone as they wait to cross into Panama to continue their journey toward the US, in Necocli, Colombia. — **Reuters**

There, people smugglers guide groups across the wild, road-less region, one of the most treacherous barriers on the clandestine route to the United States.

Now borders closures have lifted, the number of migrants arriving in Necocli is soaring.

In a typical year, an estimated 30,000 migrants pass through Necocli. But by August of this year, 25,000 have already been through, according to Colombian government figures.

Panama's Foreign Affairs ministry said it expects to receive over 70,000 migrants crossing the country en route to the US by the end of 2021, an unprecedented number in the country's history.

The town has been struggling to accommodate migrants from Latin America and beyond — many of them driven by the economic hardship worsened by the pandemic — clamouring for scarce places on boats across the Gulf. — **Reuters**

SHORT TAKES

WASHINGTON

Biden to host virtual global summit

US President Joe Biden will gather world leaders in December for a virtual "Summit for Democracy" that is being seen as a Challenge to authoritarian China and an alternative to the traditional G20 meeting. Biden is seeking to bring together heads of state with major figures in philanthropy, civil society and the private sector "from a diverse group of the world's democracies," the White House said on Wednesday.

The gathering from December 9-10 will "galvanise commitments



and initiatives across three principal themes: defending against authoritarianism, fighting Corruption, and promoting respect for human rights," it said.

MOSCOW

Navalny risks more jail time

Russian investigators on Wednesday charged jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny with a new crime that could prolong his time behind bars by up to three years.

President Vladimir Putin's most vocal domestic critic is in prison serving two and a half years on old fraud Charges after returning from Germany once he recovered from a near-fatal poisoning attack.

The Russian Investigative Committee — which probes



major offences — charged him with the additional crime of "creating a non-profit organisation that infringes on the identities and rights of citizens."

LUSAKA

Zambia gears up for tense vote

Campaigning was winding up on Wednesday on the eve of Zambia's tightly fought presidential and legislative elections dominated by economic hardships.

President Edgar Lungu, 64, who is seeking re-election after six years in office, was out and about in Lusaka distributing face masks ahead of a final rally slated for late afternoon at a sprawling government complex.

All together, 16 candidates are vying for the top job, but the vote is forecast to be a two-horse race



between the incumbent and his nemesis, Hakainde Hichilema, who is running for a sixth time backed by an alliance of 10 parties.

Wheels on the bus bring school to students

ANUSHREE FADNAVIS

Every weekday four buses head into the New Delhi slums to give the children of migrants, labourers, ragpickers and scavengers a chance at an education they might not get otherwise.

Each bus goes to two locations a day, setting up an on board classroom to give about 50 children at a time basic lessons in math, body parts, English and Hindi, along with daily meals. Ages range from 3-13, and some activity-based lessons are held outside.

These “Hope Buses” of non-profit group TejasAsia are one of several grassroots initiatives in India helping to fill the education gap caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Another such initiative delivers lessons by loudspeaker to children in rural areas.

TejasAsia has been operating the mobile schools a few years now, said Ebna Edwin, a project co-ordinator for the group, but they have become more critical since the pandemic struck.

Schools across the country have shut and moved classes online amid repeated lockdowns to curb the spread of Covid-19 over the past year, impacting nearly 247 million Indian children from 1.5 million schools, according to Unicef.

Even for children in the slums who went to regular schools pre-pandemic, their families are often too poor to afford the phones or other devices needed to study online.

For others, the two hours on the bus are time away from manual labour or scavenging the landfills with their families.

Data from India’s latest Annual Status of Education Report show that the national dropout rate has risen to 5.5 per cent from 4 per cent over the last year.

“It is very hard to get the kids to understand the value of education so we have got to work with the families first, create a lot of awareness in all these places,” said Marlo Philip, the founder of TejasAsia.

“It takes about six months to establish our programme in one location”, he said.

The NGO wants to expand its reach to ten more locations in different states but has put these plans on hold as funds and resources have been redirected during the pandemic.

— Reuters



It is very hard to get the kids to understand the value of education so we have got to work with the families first, create a lot of awareness in all these places. It takes about six months to establish our programme in one location

MARLO PHILIP
Founder of TejasAsia



DATES SEASON

A Saudi farmer displays dates to customers during Unaizah Season for Dates, at Unaizah city in Al Qassim province, Saudi Arabia, on Wednesday.
— Reuters

Reforms to ward off threat to national economy



Ali Al Matani
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The Government of Oman is making extraordinary efforts to bring certain reforms and changes to address economic and financial requirements. The objectives of these initiatives are to make sure that the common people of the country do not suffer economically in a major way, the life should continue without any hassle and more avenues are opened for economic growth and development. This clearly shows the wisdom and time-tested earnestness of the government to serve the people.

There are some who feel that these changes and reforms, being brought to ward off any threat to the national economy and development of the country, are not implemented in a proper manner. It is easy to find fault with the initiatives, changes and reforms which are being carried out at all levels. But it is difficult to realise their own responsibilities. Before government implements any of its decisions and takes a new approach on anything, it carries out studies, analysis, assessments and debates them extensively. All these are honest efforts to serve the country. Some may not agree with some of these initiatives. They can wait and watch for the outcomes. Making quick conclusion about any economic reform is not wise.

Our society has changed. It is not like as

it was in seventies and eighties. Therefore, the strategy of dealing with it should also change. For example, recently people had issues with the rising electricity bills, when efforts are made to resolve the issue for good. They could have approached the right authorities to get explanation on issues. If they had taken initiatives at their own level to learn about the disparity in bills (before and after lifting of subsidies), the government could come forward with its own plan to create awareness about it. But instead of addressing real issues in the right manner, people started holding each other responsible for the hardships.

Everybody should realise that if there are certain responsibilities of the government, there are equal duties of the people. Any changes or reforms will succeed only if they are implemented by the government in a proper manner and shouldered by the people. This is how any radical changes and reforms in the method of dealing with any crisis are introduced and made effective and successful. All these problems show that a radical change in the methodology of dealing with the crisis is required.

There is no denying that along with reforms, the government should also launch awareness drive to educate people about these efforts. This is how

changes can be managed in a society and a right perspective about them is developed in the minds of the people. Sometime, such awareness campaigns avoid many issues. The awareness drive also works as a communication channel to get feedback from the people. Such initiatives also help in making changes and corrections in any decisions. Any country, government and people, cannot live in isolation from the world. If any government is taking any step, it should always be well thought about and implemented in a proper manner. But it does not mean that people have no responsibilities. It is the sincerity which should be shown from both sides to make reforms a success.

Any changes in fees, duties and taxes should not create concern among people. They will never create any apprehension if they are taken after proper assessment of the situation and people are educated about them in a comprehensive manner.

Wisdom is required for any reform. It is also part of the wisdom that people are made to learn about the details of a decision and their feedback is taken. People should also give their response in a positive and objective manner so that the initiatives taken by the government in their interests become successful.

Global production and future demand for gold



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THE WORLD GOLD COUNCIL EXPECTS THAT THE DEMAND FOR JEWELLERY WILL INCREASE IN THE SECOND HALF OF THIS YEAR

Savings vary in a number of valuable products such as real estate, bonds and stocks, as well as trading in gold, diamonds, cash currencies and other commodities which give attractive returns in the future. Gold is accepted by all groups as it has its material and moral value in societies, and it is also one of the products that cannot be polluted over the years, and its value and luster remain constant, while the desire of people and demand for it remains sustainable at all times and circumstances according to supply and demand.

On their part, people follow the movement of gold, whether

from traders, banks, financial institutions and workers in global stock exchanges. The World Gold Council constantly monitors gold deals and sales, and from time to time publishes data and forecasts. The council expects that the demand for jewellery will increase in the second half of this year, reaching between 1,600 and 1,800 tonnes, at a level much higher than the levels of 2020, at a time when the world is recovering a little from the effects of the pandemic, which leads to a recovery in demand for gold in a way. In general, there are increasing opportunities for investment and purchase of this product, whether by central

banks or gold dealers in the world markets.

During the past months, the global market was distinguished by the demand for buying gold from bullion and currencies, which led to price fluctuation, except for its price in the stock markets.

It has witnessed a demand from funds for bullion and gold coins at a good level that achieved its best quarter since 2013. The average price of gold in dollars reached \$1,817.4 per ounce in the second quarter of this year, an increase of 6 per cent compared to the same period in 2020, which led to some gains from the metal, with central banks increasing demand for its

purchase, although the demand is less than what has characterised gold in the past 10 years.

Gold market analysts believe that with the continuation of the global economic recovery after the pandemic, consumer demand for gold and jewellery will grow again, whether by individuals or institutions, at a time when experts note financial flows by some funds to buy this metal, which is expected to see a good improvement by investors who intend to increase their investments and allocations to own this precious element in the future. This happens with the improvement of markets and the

return of life and daily commercial traffic to global cities. Despite all this, people in these circumstances are keen to take precautions from any risks which may be exposed to the gold markets in the future.

As it is known, people’s desire for gold differs from one category to another, as the World Gold Council explains that the term “bullion and gold coins”, for example, refers to the investment of individuals in small gold bars of one kilogram or less, while others are invested in bullion coins Gold, and various quantities are sold according to caliber, whether they are pure gold or combined with other materials.



Messi sets sights on Champions League ‘dream’

Argentine superstar to team up with Neymar and Mbappe

PARIS: Lionel Messi has set his sights on more Champions League glory after being unveiled as a Paris Saint-Germain player on Wednesday as hundreds of fans gathered outside the club's stadium hoping to see their new idol.

The 34-year-old Argentinian superstar was presented to media from all over the world at a news conference at the Parc des Princes after arriving in the French capital the previous day and penning a two-year contract with the option of a third season.

PSG quickly emerged as the favourites to sign Messi following the shock of his departure last week from Barcelona and he arrives eyeing a fifth Champions League, with the most recent of his four victories with his old club coming in 2015.

"I have said many times that my dream is to win another Champions League and I think I am in the ideal place to have that chance and to do it," Messi told reporters inside a packed auditorium, with the audience including his wife Antonella, their children and his father and agent, Jorge.

Messi and Barcelona were knocked out of the Champions League last season by PSG, who went on to reach the semifinals following their run to the final in 2020.

"Sometimes you can have the best team in the world and not win. That's football," Messi, who won 35 trophies in total with Barca, added as he prepares to team up with Neymar and Kylian Mbappe in Paris.

"We know how difficult the Champions League is but Paris know that too — they have come very close in recent years but it is a competition in which the best teams take part and the best team doesn't always win."

MESSI-MANIA

PSG are reportedly paying 35 million euros (\$41 million) a year to Messi, who will wear the number 30 jersey — fans were already queueing up outside the club's different shops in the capital on Wednesday morning to buy the shirt with his name and number on the back.

Messi was given a hero's welcome when he arrived in Paris on Tuesday, greeting supporters at Le Bourget airport to the north of the city and waving from the balcony of the plush hotel where he is staying near the Champs Elysees.

On Wednesday, he appeared unfazed as he emerged, immaculately turned out, to talk to media, although he did seem slightly uneasy at times, not least when one member of the audience started chanting his name.

Unlike when Zlatan Ibrahimovic signed for PSG in 2012 there was no glitzy unveiling in front of the Eiffel Tower, but Messi was photographed on the pitch before greeting the supporters who had waited at the stadium entrance, watching his press conference on a big screen.

"I'm very proud to present Leo Messi as a PSG player," said Nasser al Khelaifi, the president of the Qatar-owned outfit. "It is an amazing and historic day for the club, for the football world."

Messi made no secret of his sadness at leaving Barca, the only club he has so far represented in his 17-year professional career, as he gave a tearful news conference at the Camp Nou last weekend.

'CAN'T WAIT TO START'

However, on Wednesday he said he was looking forward to getting started in his new home.

"Everyone knows that my departure from Barca was very hard because I spent so many years there, but as soon as I arrived here, I felt enormously happy," said the player who scored 672 goals in 778 games for the Catalans.

"Now I can't wait to.. start training."

Messi has had no pre-season having been on holiday since winning the Copa America with Argentina a month ago.

He is therefore unlikely to make his debut for PSG any time soon, and certainly not this weekend when Mauricio Pochettino's team play Strasbourg at home in Ligue 1.

PSG are now even more obvious favourites to run away with the French title, a trophy they missed out on last season to Lille.

However, despite concerns about a lack of competitive balance, French League president Vincent Labrune hailed the arrival of the six-time Ballon d'Or winner as "extraordinary news for the exposure of Ligue 1 internationally."

"The arrival of Lionel Messi will increase the attractiveness and visibility of our league on all continents," he said.

— AFP

“I have said many times that my dream is to win another Champions League and I think I am in the ideal place to have that chance and to do it

LIONEL MESSI
PSG player

In brief

■ LONDON



FODEN RULED OUT FOR THREE TO FOUR WEEKS

Manchester City midfielder Phil Foden will be out of action for three to four weeks more, ruling him out of the start of the Premier League season, he said on Wednesday.

The 21-year-old England international missed last month's European Championship final defeat by Italy on penalties and has been absent from City's pre-season training.

"It (the foot) is still a little bit sore, it's such a shame to do it just before the Euro final, it was really unfortunate but I'm working hard in the gym," Foden told Sky Sports. "Hopefully, I can get back as soon as possible."

■ WELLINGTON



CAIRNS STILL IN 'SERIOUS' CONDITION

New Zealand cricket legend Chris Cairns was fighting for his life in a Sydney hospital on Wednesday, with his wife speaking out for the first time about their "upsetting" ordeal. Cairns, 51, one of the world's top all-rounders in the early 2000s, is being treated at a specialist unit after a serious cardiac problem emerged last week.

"He's in a serious but stable condition in intensive care," a spokesman for St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney said.

Cairns was reported to be on life support following an aortic dissection, which is a tear in the inner layer of the body's main artery.

■ MADRID



PEREZ DENIES HE INFLUENCED MESSI EXIT

Real Madrid president Florentino Perez has denied that he had any influence on Barcelona's decision to allow Lionel Messi to leave the club. Messi had been set to stay at Barca after agreeing a 50 per cent reduction in salary, only for a dramatic U-turn to occur last Thursday, resulting in the Argentine forward joining French side Paris St Germain on a free transfer on Tuesday.

Barcelona president Joan Laporta blamed the decision on La Liga's stringent Financial Fair Play (FFP) controls.

However, Jaume Llopis, a former board member of the Espai Barca project — which is the project for the renovation of the Camp Nou — resigned his position in the wake of Messi's departure before accusing Laporta of bending to Perez's will.

Kohli looks for 'perfect balance'

INDIA FORCED TO REPLACE INJURED THAKUR



India's Shardul Thakur during nets session. — Reuters

LONDON: India captain Virat Kohli said how best to take 20 wickets rather than extra runs would be the main consideration when it came to replacing Shardul Thakur for the second Test against England at Lord's.

Pace-bowling all-rounder Thakur was ruled out on Wednesday, the day before the match at the 'home of cricket', with a hamstring strain.

Paceman Ishant Sharma or off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, neither of whom played in last week's rain-affected drawn first Test in Nottingham, could replace Thakur, who took four wickets - two in each innings — at Trent Bridge.

Ashwin has five Test hundreds to his credit but with left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja making a fifty at Nottingham in a match where India's tailenders added valuable runs, Kohli told reporters: "That already makes our batting a bit deeper and the lower order contributed with the bat as well."

Star batsman Kohli, out for a golden duck at Trent Bridge, added: "We are very comfortable as a batting unit and we don't feel we might be a batsman short if Shardul doesn't play."

With high temperatures forecast, the pitch may favour spin bowling, but Lord's is also where Ishant Sharma took a Test-best 7-74 during India's 95-run win in 2014.

"For us it's about finding that perfect balance but if someone like Shardul is not available, we will definitely think first about how we pick up 20 wickets not plug-in another guy who can give us some runs with the bat," said Kohli.

'MUTUAL RESPECT' WITH MOEEN

England, outplayed for much of the first of a five-match series, could recall all-rounder Moeen Ali in one of several changes.

Against India at home, off-spinner Moeen has taken 31 wickets in seven Tests during 2014 and 2018 series wins for England.

The 34-year-old has played only white-ball cricket, however, since

Calf injury rules Broad out of series

LONDON: England fast bowler Stuart Broad will miss the remainder of the five-Test series against India with a torn right calf, the England and Wales Cricket Board announced on Wednesday.

Broad, who played in last week's drawn first Test at Trent Bridge, underwent a scan that revealed a tear.

He suffered the injury warming-up on Tuesday ahead of a training session at Lord's, where the second match of the series starts on Thursday, ahead of what would have been his 150th Test.

Broad's 524 wickets make him England's most successful Test bowler behind longtime new-ball partner James Anderson, who is himself struggling to be fit for the second Test following a thigh problem.

"England seamer Stuart Broad has sustained a tear to his right calf and has been ruled out of the Test series



England's Stuart Broad celebrates taking the wicket of India's KL Rahul. — Reuters

against India," said an ECB statement.

Earlier on Wednesday, the ECB announced that Saqib Mahmood, uncapped at Test level but who has played seven one-day internationals and nine Twenty20s, had been called up as cover for Broad.

Mahmood now joins Ollie Robinson, Mark Wood, Craig Overton and all-rounder Sam Curran in vying for a place in England's pace attack. — AFP

Team to blame for over-rate points penalty: Kohli

LONDON: India captain Virat Kohli said his team had no one to blame but themselves after both they and England were docked two World Test Championship points each for maintaining a slow over-rate in their rain-marred drawn series opener at Nottingham last week.

Both teams were also fined 40 per cent of their match fee by match referee Chris Broad.

England and India now take two points each out of the Test, the first of a five-match series, instead of the four they would normally receive for a draw under the new points system for the 2021-23 WTC cycle.

Kohli, as captain a key figure in maintaining the over-rate, said on Wednesday ahead of the second Test at Lord's: "As a team we are not pleased we lost two points because of factors that are definitely in our control."

"We have to keep up to speed with the pace of the game — small little things where we can save 10 to 15 seconds is something that really matters. We practised that in the second innings and we were able to cover up three or four overs."

The points deductions could yet have a bearing on whether England or India qualify for the second World Test Championship final, with Australia having missed out



India's Virat Kohli reacts during the first Test against England. — Reuters

on this year's inaugural showpiece match — where India were beaten by New Zealand at Southampton in June — partly as a result of over-rate penalties.

"You don't want to be that far behind in the game you are not able to cover your overs in time," said Kohli.

"The points are very, very crucial."

One key factor in the slow over-rates at Trent Bridge was that both

INDIA AND ENGLAND WERE DOCKED TWO WORLD TEST CHAMPIONSHIP POINTS EACH FOR MAINTAINING A SLOW OVER-RATE IN FIRST TEST

attacks were dominated by fast bowlers, with India left-arm Ravindra Jadeja the lone spinner on either side.

Frequent rain interruptions delayed the game, while batsmen on both sides took their time to face-up.

Australia saw their hopes of playing in the WTC final harmed when they were docked four points for a slow over-rate during the 2020 Boxing Day Test.

Together with a 2-1 series loss to India, that pushed New Zealand into second place in the table.

"It wasn't until after the game that we realised our over rate was down," said Australia coach Justin Langer in March. "Now that's really slack on our behalf."

"At the time, we probably thought it's not that big a deal — the players get fined — but that cost us the World Test Championship (final)." — AFP

Top seed Medvedev through

FOOT INJURY FELLS NADAL IN TORONTO

TORONTO, Canada: A nagging left foot injury forced Rafael Nadal out of the ATP Toronto Masters on Tuesday as top seed Daniil Medvedev rallied to reach the third round.

Nadal, a five-time champion in Canada, pulled the plug on his participation before his scheduled second-round opener with plans to return to Spain for treatment of the injury which kept him from Wimbledon and the Tokyo Olympics.

“I’ve had this issue for a couple of months”, he said. “It is not a happy situation after all the success that I had here in Canada.

“I need to go back (to Mallorca) and try to find a way to be better again. With this pain, I’m not able to enjoy (playing).

“I believe that I am not able to compete at the level that I need because the foot doesn’t allow me to move the way that I need”, added Nadal, who was the second seed in the hardcourt tournament.

Top-seeded Russian Medvedev opened his week in the second round after a bye and staged a

fightback to overhaul Kazakh Alexander Bublik 4-6, 6-3, 6-4.

The Russian came back a changed man after a second-set rain delay.

“I was not playing well before the rain”, he said. “I was not feeling the ball and was missing on returns. “I just wanted to play better — I knew I had to if I was going to win. “When we got back on court, I felt much better from the first game.” Medvedev advanced with 27 winners and 28 unforced errors in the two-hour victory.

New world number three Stefanos Tsitsipas cured an extended case of the jitters with a runaway third set to finally overcome Ugo Humbert 6-3, 6-7 (13/15), 6-1.

With the win he avenged a pair of previous losses to Humbert, including in the third round of the Olympics.

The Greek wasted five match points in the second set while his French opponent held on in a 23-minute tie-breaker.

But after a speedy deciding set, Tsitsipas finally prevailed on his



Daniil Medvedev of Russia serves against Alexander Bublik of Kazakhstan in Toronto. – USA Today Sports

seventh match point, finishing with 37 winners including 16 aces.

“It’s all about the fighting spirit”, Tsitsipas said. “I don’t like to give up. “It was not easy out there, I had to put in a lot of effort and give my best. “It didn’t work out for me in the second set but nothing could stop me in the third.”

Sixth seed Casper Ruud made a smooth transition to hardcourt after winning three consecutive claycourt titles, knocking out Marin Cilic 6-3, 3-6, 6-3.

The Norwegian, who has moved to 10th in the rankings, won his 36th match of the season.

Kei Nishikori, runner up in 2016, carried his Tokyo Olympic

and Washington momentum into a 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-2 first-round win over Miomir Kecmanovic.

Asia’s leading player, who reached the quarterfinals at the Games and followed up by reaching the semifinals in Washington, broke the 59th-ranked Serb five times in their match lasting for just over two hours.

“My level is good, I’m playing some of my best tennis so far this year over the last couple of tournaments”, Nishikori said. “I’m back on track now.”

Olympic silver medallist Karen Khachanov defeated Britain’s Cameron Norrie 6-4, 5-7, 6-4 with 10 aces, lining up a date with



Rafael Nadal of Spain during practice in Toronto.

15th-seeded fellow Russian Aslan Karatsev.

ISNER WITH EASE

American John Isner, winner of a sixth Atlanta trophy earlier this month, pounded 19 aces in his 6-4, 6-1 thrashing of Spaniard Alejandro Davidovich Fokina.

Serb Dusan Lajovic put out Finnish qualifier Emil Ruusuvuori 3-6, 6-3, 6-3 while Georgia’s Nikoloz Basilashvili beat Washington semifinalist Jenson Brooksby 2-6, 6-0, 6-4.

Brooksby erupted as he was aced on match point, firing his racquet angrily into advertising hoardings at the side of the court.

— AFP

ATP TORONTO RESULTS

FIRST ROUND

Nikoloz Basilashvili (GEO) bt Jenson Brooksby (USA) 2-6, 6-0, 6-4; Kei Nishikori (JPN) bt Miomir Kecmanovic (SRB) 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-2; John Isner (USA) bt Alejandro Davidovich (ESP) 6-4, 6-1; Frances Tiafoe (USA) bt Yoshihito Nishioka (JPN) 6-4, 6-3; Dusan Lajovic (SRB) bt Emil Ruusuvuori (FIN) 3-6, 6-3, 6-3; Karen Khachanov (RUS) bt Cameron Norrie (GBR) 6-4, 5-7, 6-4; Benoit Paire (FRA) bt Mackenzie McDonald (USA) 6-3, 6-4

SECOND ROUND

Daniil Medvedev (RUS x1) bt Alexander Bublik (KAZ) 4-6, 6-3, 6-4; Casper Ruud (NOR x6) bt Marin Cilic (CRO) 6-3, 3-6, 6-3; Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE x3) bt Ugo Humbert (FRA) 6-3, 6-7 (13/15), 6-1; Reilly Opelka (USA) bt Grigor Dimitrov (BUL x14) 6-3, 6-4

Andreescu overcomes Dart challenge in Montreal opener

MONTREAL: Defending champion Bianca Andreescu overcame a surprise showing from Harriet Dart, recovering to post a 6-1, 3-6, 6-3 victory to reach the third round of her home WTA tournament on Tuesday.

The 2019 US Open champion, who missed the entire 2020 season with injury, has played little in 2021 and hadn’t won a match since reaching the second round at Eastbourne in June.

Here she enjoyed a first-round bye before taking more than two hours to get past 172nd-ranked Briton Dart and take a step towards retaining the title she won in 2019 when Serena Williams retired after just four games of their final.

“It was an awesome atmosphere out there”, Andreescu said. “I was super emotional and got goosebumps walking out with the crowd cheering. “There may have only been 5,000, but it seemed like a lot more.”

The winner said her proudest moment was coming back after dropping the second set.

“Bouncing back was the most satisfying thing”, she said. “The small rain delay also helped me to refocus, so thanks you, God.”

KVITOVA THROUGH

In other second-round matches, two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova, seeded seventh, advanced with a 6-4, 6-4 victory over France’s Fiona Ferro.

Kvitova won the Canadian title in 2012, but hasn’t made it past the third round since.

Kvitova’s Czech compatriot Katerina Siniakova toppled fifth-seeded Garbine Muguruza of



Bianca Andreescu of Canada reacts after winning her match against Harriet Dart of Great Britain. – USA Today Sports

Spain 6-2, 0-6, 6-3.

In first-round action, Olympic absentee Coco Gauff played her first match since Wimbledon and came away with a 6-1, 6-4 victory over Anastasija Sevastova.

The US teenager had to abort her planned trip to Tokyo when she tested positive for Covid-19 on the eve of her departure for Japan.

“The timing of it was terrible, but the actual experience wasn’t too bad”, Gauff said. “I didn’t have symptoms other than loss of

WTA MONTREAL RESULTS

FIRST ROUND

Sloane Stephens (USA) bt Dayana Yastremska (UKR) 6-4, 1-6, 6-4; Veronika Kudermetova (RUS) bt Yulia Putintseva (KAZ) 1-6, 6-2, 6-4; Donna Vekic (CRO) bt Alison Van Uytvanck (BEL) 6-1, 6-2; Liudmila Samsonova (RUS) a Elena Rybakina (KAZ/N.12) 6-4, 5-7, 6-4; Sara Sorribes (ESP) bt Carol Zhao (CAN) 6-2, 6-3; Camila Giorgi (ITA) bt Elise Mertens (BEL x9) 6-3, 7-5; Coco Gauff (USA x15) bt Anastasija Sevastova (LAT) 6-1, 6-4; Johanna Konta (GBR) bt Zhang Shuai (CHN) 4-6, 5-2 retired; Danielle Collins (USA) bt

Jil Teichmann (SUI) 4-6, 6-1, 6-3; Jessica Pegula (USA) bt Anett Kontaveit (EST) 5-7, 6-3, 6-3; Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (RUS x10) bt Caroline Garcia (FRA) 6-4, 6-4; Daria Kasatkina (RUS) bt Petra Martic (CRO) 7-5, 6-3

SECOND ROUND

Victoria Azarenka (BLR x8) bt Sorana Cirstea (ROM) 6-2, 6-2; Katerina Siniakova (CZE) bt Garbine Muguruza (ESP x5) 6-2, 0-6, 6-3; Petra Kvitova (CZE x7) bt Fiona Ferro (FRA) 6-4, 6-4; Bianca Andreescu (CAN x2) bt Harriet Dart (GBR) 6-1, 3-6, 6-3

smell. My dad and my brother had it at the same time as me so I didn’t have to quarantine alone. They also didn’t have many symptoms.”

The 17-year-old eighth seed shrugged off the bitter career disappointment once on court in Canada with victory in 67 minutes.

The win was a first for Gauff in the series after losing her first three against Latvia’s Sevastova.

“I can’t sit here and lie and say I didn’t think about it”, Gauff said of her losing record against Sevastova.



I was super emotional and got goosebumps walking out with the crowd cheering

BIANCA ANDREESCU

Canada player

“I for sure thought about it.

“Our last couple matches we split sets almost every time. I just focused more on this match and didn’t worry about previous ones.”

Gauff came back in the second set from an early break down and advanced on her second match point.

Sloane Stephens, a finalist in 2018, also recovered from 2-4 down to advance past Dayana Yastremska 6-4, 1-6, 6-4.

Stephens was badly outpaced by Yastremska’s 27 winners to her own seven but managed to grind out a win in nearly two hours.

She sprinted to the finish, winning 15 of the last 19 points to book a clash with top-seeded Aryna Sabalenka.

American Jessica Pegula, an Australian open quarterfinalist, eliminated another Baltic player, beating Estonian Anett Kontaveit 5-7, 6-3, 6-3.

British No 1 Johanna Konta, another who missed Tokyo due to Covid, reached the second round in her first match since mid-June as China’s Zhang Shuai retired with a leg injury. — AFP

business

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OQ sells stake in Portuguese utility



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 11

OQ, Oman’s leading global integrated energy company, has announced that Mazoon BV, a wholly owned subsidiary of OQ, has sold its 12 per cent stake in Portuguese utility Energeticas Nacionais (REN), through an over-the-counter transaction at the end of last month.

The investment was made in 2012, as OQ aimed to expand and diversify its growing investment portfolio locally and internationally.

REN is a high-voltage transmission grid operator and natural gas transportation company with operations in several countries.

On this occasion, Tala al Awfi, Group Chief Executive Officer of OQ, said: “OQ is privileged to have been a significant shareholder in REN since 2012. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Board and management of REN for working with us throughout this successful partnership. I would also like to take this opportunity to wish REN and the new investors the best of luck in the future.”

REN was formed in 1994 as the electrical transmission company for Portugal. Its main role is to manage the energy transmission systems in Portugal and is one of the few European operators active in both electricity and natural gas transmission.

Bidding opens for three Omani oil blocks

PROMISING ACREAGE: Offered as part of the 2021 Licensing Round are onshore blocks 38 and 66, and offshore Block 23

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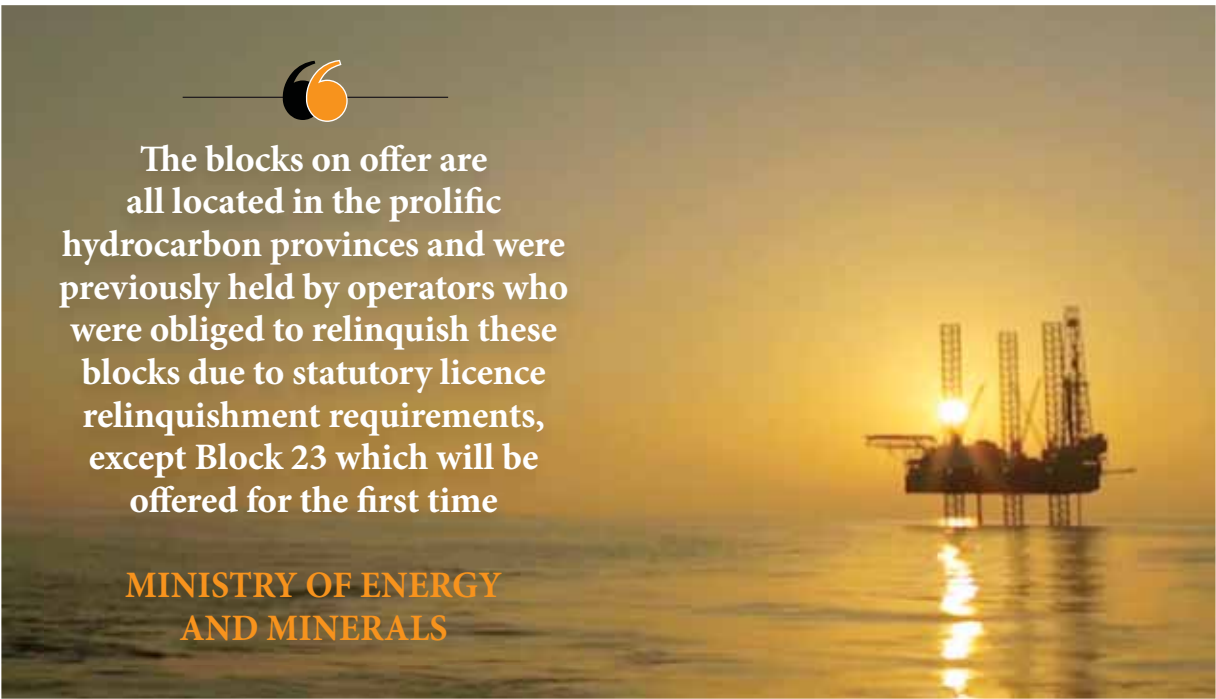
International bidding has commenced for three hydrocarbon blocks offered by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals as part of the Oman Licensing Round 2021. The roughly four-month-long competitive process kicked off on August 8, 2021, for two onshore blocks – 38 and 66 – as well as a newly created offshore swathe, dubbed Block 23, located just east of Masirah Island off the Sultanate’s east coast.

“The blocks on offer are all located in the prolific hydrocarbon provinces and were previously held by operators who were obliged to relinquish these blocks due to statutory licence relinquishment requirements, except Block 23 which will be offered for the first time,” said the Ministry in introductory remarks.

Of the three blocks on offer, the newly crafted Block 23 is

The blocks on offer are all located in the prolific hydrocarbon provinces and were previously held by operators who were obliged to relinquish these blocks due to statutory licence relinquishment requirements, except Block 23 which will be offered for the first time

MINISTRY OF ENERGY AND MINERALS



expected to garner significant interest. Covering an area of 4,898 sq km, this offshore block is located just beyond Block 50 where in 2014 Masirah Oil Limited made the first oil discovery off Oman’s east coast.

Once part of the enormous Dhofar Concession that incorporated the massive Block 52, Block 23 is essentially unexplored, but has been partly covered by 2D seismic. Further, no wells have been drilled to date on the block.

Commenting on the

prospectivity of the block, the Ministry noted: “This is an oil block. The prospective interval is the shallow Permo-Triassic section, although deeper and older objectives can’t be excluded. Proven commercial hydrocarbons are encountered in the Block 50 with the discovery of the Yumna Field. Expectations are that the prospective geological trends continue further offshore.”

The largest of the three blocks on offer is Block 38, located in southern Oman. Described as a

“pure exploration block”, Block 38 covers 17,425 sq km – an area that has been under-explored.

Also once part of the sprawling Dhofar Concession, Block 38 has been created with portions of Block 6 – the largest producer of hydrocarbons and currently licensed to majority government-owned Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

Block 38 has had a number of owners, individually or in partnership, over the past years. The list includes: Dhofar Cities Service Petroleum Corp

comprised of Cities Service and Richfield Oil Corp; John W Mecom; Petroleum Development Oman; Phillips; Sinopec and Frontier Resources.

According to the Ministry, a total of three wells have been drilled to date in the block. It includes the Alboot-1 drilled by Dhofar Cities Service Petroleum Corp in 1959. It ranks among one of the oldest exploration wells drilled in the Sultanate. None of the three wells discovered commercial hydrocarbons, although shows where present in the drilled sections, it said.

Rounding off the trio of blocks on offer is Block 66, straddling Oman’s border with Saudi Arabia in the central-southern part of the Sultanate. Covering an area of 4,898 sq km, the block is essentially under-explored with only five wells drilled to date, according to the Ministry.

Also once part of the mammoth Dhofar Concession, Block 66 was previously owned, either individually or in partnership, by D’Arcy Exploration; Dhofar Cities Service Petroleum Corp; John W Mecom; Petroleum Development Oman; and MOL Oman.

The deadline for submission of offers is November 30, 2021.

Swedish energy firm Tethys Oil outlines strategy for new upstream exploration in Oman

PROMISING POTENTIAL: Swedish firm operates three oil and gas blocks in the Sultanate

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 11

Swedish-based international energy firm Tethys Oil has lined up a substantial slate of activities to unlock the hydrocarbon potential of its expanding portfolio of oil and gas assets in the Sultanate.

The Stockholm-headquartered company operates three of the five blocks in its portfolio, with the remaining two represented by the combination of blocks 3 and 4 are operated by CC Energy Development Oman Branch (CCED).

Block 56, located in the southeast of Oman, is planned to be the subject of a three-well drilling campaign during 2021 aimed at further evaluating the Al Jumud area in the north western part of the Block. Work on maturing leads to prospects in



the Al Jumud area (which includes the Al Jumud discovery) has been completed, Tethys Oil said in his half-yearly report released here on Tuesday. Procurement of equipment and services for drilling campaign is on-going. Drilling will aim to establish the commerciality of the Al Jumud discovery as well as confirm the overall prospectivity of the area. The first well is planned to be drilled in the fourth quarter 2021, it said.

In addition, planning and tendering of a 3D seismic survey in the central area of the

Block is also well underway. Final negotiation with a seismic contractor is ongoing. The central area holds a number of attractive leads identified on legacy 2D seismic that warrant further investigation and require more detailed data, it stated.

In Block 49, in the southwest of the Sultanate, the company drilled the Thameen-1 exploration earlier this year. While no flows were recorded at the surface, logs indicated a gross hydrocarbon column of close to forty metres in the primary target, the Hasirah Sandstone.

“The results confirm a decent porosity but a low permeability. Stimulation will most probably be needed in order to try and flow the well, and an unconventional approach could be considered,” the company said.

In Block 58, the company’s most recent acquisition, a new seismic survey is planned in the second half of 2021. In addition, 3D image quality enhancement is planned to be performed on legacy 3D seismic.

Non-operated blocks 3 and 4, in which Tethys Oil has a 30 per cent working interest, the exploration well Safi-1 was spudded and reached its final depth in the second quarter 2021. The exploration well Suhail-1, located between the Erfan and Anan discovery, will be spudded in August 2021. Suhail-1 is targeting the producing Khufai and Buah layers, but will also investigate a new possible stratigraphic trap in the Buah layer.

Significantly, Tethys Oil expects total investments in oil and gas properties of \$47 million for 2021, of which investments

in blocks 3 and 4 are expected to amount to \$32 million. The focus of the work programme on blocks 3 and 4 is continued development drilling, upgrading infrastructure with focus on asset integrity and debottlenecking, continue the gas utilisation project and the drilling of exploration wells.

The work programme on Block 49 is expected to amount to less than \$5 million (following the closing of the EOG farmout) with the main target to complete drilling, testing and evaluation of Thameen-1 exploration well. The work programme on Block 56 is expected to amount to \$5 million (on 65 per cent basis including carried interest following completion of the farmin) and is centred on evaluating the Al Jumud area by drilling up to three wells and planning of a 3D seismic acquisition in the central area of the block.

The work programme on Block 58 is expected to amount to \$5 million with focus on reprocessing of legacy 3D seismic data and acquiring new 3D seismic, it added.

Alizz Islamic Bank launches new update for mobile banking application



MUSCAT: Alizz Islamic Bank recently launched a new update for its mobile banking application, making bill payments even easier. The Alizz Islamic Bank mobile application now has more utility service providers added to its list of bill payment facilities.

The service providers added to the app include Awasr, Mazoon Electricity Company, Dhofar Power Company, Majan Electricity Company and others. With the new update, customers of these companies can now pay their bills conveniently through the app and also be aware of their upcoming payments.

Additionally, users can now make international mobile top ups easily when they are abroad through the updated Alizz Islamic Bank mobile banking application.

Speaking about the update to the application, Mohammed bin Juma al Ghassani, AGM, – Chief Consumer Banking Officer of Alizz Islamic Bank, said: “At Alizz Islamic Bank one of our key focuses is to provide the very best digital banking experience for our customers, whenever and wherever our customers need.

“Throughout the bank’s history we have been at the forefront of digital banking in Oman and we are delighted to further reinforce this with the latest release of our bi-lingual application. With an increasingly young population in Oman who prefer more technologically advanced banking solutions, our wide range of cutting edge digital banking solutions enable our customers to benefit from more convenient and secure self-service channels, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.”

Robust system to counter money laundering, terrorist funding (Part 3)



JOSE CHACKO

The Sultanate’s Anti-Money Laundering Law (AML) together with Penal Code and other laws mandate extensive requirements and enable wide-ranging actions with National Committee for Combating Money Laundering, constituted with high-level representatives from relevant Ministries, Regulators and Law Enforcement Authorities.

The AML and combating the financing of terrorism (CFT) law of 2016, in line with the international standards, was enacted with wider powers to combat money laundering and terrorism financing in various sectors of the economy. The National Committee for Countering Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing is the apex body to regulate AML/CFT in Oman.

The National Centre for Financial Information (NCFI) is the legal entity established under the law to receive suspicious activity reports. As per the law, various supervisory

authorities are Central Bank of Oman, Capital Market Authority, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, Ministry of Social Development and Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs. The National Committee can designate any other party as a supervisory authority for AML/CFT.

These authorities give constant guidelines and regulations to control money laundering and terrorism financing. The Central Bank of Oman is the supervisory authority for licensed financial institutions covering banks, finance and leasing companies, and money exchange business, while the Capital Market Authority supervises the regulated entities like securities and insurance sector. All the supervisory authorities have the power to conduct onsite inspections and are generally thorough in covering the prudential health of the entities.

According to Article 4 of the Act, all non-financial institutions and professions are covered under Designated Non-Financial Business and Professions (DNFBPs) group and covers all the so called gatekeepers.

Gatekeepers are deemed to have a particular role in identifying, preventing and reporting money laundering and terrorism financing.

Another category of entities covered under the law are Nonprofit Associations and Entities (NPOs) Any organised group established in accordance with the provisions of the law on non-governmental organisations for the purpose of raising or spending funds for charitable, religious cultural social educational cooperative or any other purpose including foreign branches of international nonprofit association and entities are covered under this group.

All obligations applicable to financial institutions under the AML/CFT Law are also applicable to DNFBPs and other not for profit organisations.

Besides being subject to obligations under the AML/CFT Law, real estate brokers, dealers in precious metals and stones and accountants are subject to a decision by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion which partially covers the requirements of identification of clients, record keeping, reporting suspicious transactions, the use of modern technologies, training and other requirements.

Whereas the CMA is supervising the companies operating in the field of securities and insurance companies, it issued instructions for the implementation of the Anti-Money Laundering and Combating

Financing Terrorism Law for insurance companies vide Decision E/3/2020, and instructions to the companies operating in the field of securities vide Decision E/4/2020.

CMA also established Anti-Money Laundering and Combating Financing Terrorism Department (AML/CFT) to oversee, audit and ensure compliance of all the companies regulated by the CMA with the laws, regulations and directives related to anti-money laundering and combating financing terrorism.

Existing regulations for the DNFBP sector do not address the requirement to provide a designated staff responsible for AML/CFT compliance. The requirement of establishing policies and procedures shall be emphasised along with the training and awareness requirement to regulated entities.

The mutual evaluation for Oman by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is expected in 2021/22 which aims to assess the status of the country in combatting money laundering and terrorism financing threats.

The international community has recognised the role of FATF in protecting the integrity of the financial system. *(The writer is Partner-Forensic Technology Services, Crowe Oman. Email: jose.chacko@crowe.om)*

Bank Nizwa provides seamless services through enhanced CIB



MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa SAOG, the first and leading Islamic bank in Oman, announced its enhanced Corporate Internet Banking (CIB) solution availing new products, features and security enhancements to support its Wholesale Banking customers comprising of SMEs, mid-sized corporations, large corporations, project finance and government institutions.

These enhancements, in line with its customer centric-vision and values, will offer customers best-in-class services and help them to better deal with recent challenges and constraints related to Covid-19.

The upgraded CIB solution incorporates well-tailored and value-added features including enhanced transaction limits, customer self-administration options such as user creation and user management, Online Utility Payments, PASI Payments, foreign currency payments, various RO payments, salary payments, chequebook requests, multi-level approval workflow and much more.

R Narasimhan, GM, Wholesale Banking, is quoted saying, “Bank Nizwa has been showcasing an unparalleled growth story in Oman’s banking sector for a couple of years with the support of our valued customers. The upgraded Corporate Internet Banking solution is expected to bring in a valuable experience to customers as an efficient business tool particularly during this trying pandemic situation.”

He added that many more exciting Sharia-compliant products and services are in the pipeline under its Transaction Banking suit and solutions as the Bank continues with its digitisation initiatives.

Bank Muscat offers Green Finance for solar installations

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat has announced that its customers can continue to make use of its Green Finance to purchase and install residential solar panels. Launched earlier in association with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the bank’s Green Finance facility aims to promote sustainable practices and renewable energy in the Sultanate in the place of fossil fuels.

Green Finance, which is Oman’s first environmentally-friendly finance product, encourages customers to install solar panels on their rooftops and use solar energy for a large part of their household



energy requirements. Under the scheme, loans ranging from RO 1,000 to RO 25,000 are being given to eligible individuals at highly competitive interest rates subject to a maximum debt burden ratio (DBR) of 50 per cent. Loans under the scheme

are available for a maximum of 5 years. This unique initiative reflects the bank’s commitment to responsible banking and its continuous contributions to the country’s overall progress and development.

Abdullah Tamman al

Mashani, Deputy General Manager – Institutional Sales and Product Development, Bank Muscat, said: “The bank’s Green Finance scheme has been witnessing a steady rise in interest from its customers and we are delighted with the response so far.

Going ahead, we hope to reach out to even more customers. As a pioneer in offering products that meet the different needs of customers and a strong supporter of Public-Private Partnership in promoting national goals, the bank has been participating in many environment-friendly initiatives.

Sohar International provides wholesome range of banking services

MUSCAT: Constantly innovating to cater to the changing needs and demands of its elite clientele, Sohar International has remained a preferred choice in the Sultanate.

With an increasing base of entrepreneurs in the Sultanate, Sohar International has introduced an enhanced proposition, ‘Sohar Business Account’, to cater to such business-owner customers. The Bank has launched the account with a new direction, fresh strategies and a unique outlook to ensure an efficient, quick and seamless approach to servicing these customers, in order to address their varying banking requirements.

The Sohar Business Account option will be available for companies that fall under the



sole ownership category or the partnership category, and will have a number of special privileges for the account holders.

“With a deep understanding of the various businesses day-to-day banking requirements,

the Sohar Business Account will undertake a more efficient approach to servicing customers in this category and assist them with their requirements. At Sohar International, we constantly refine and realign our account types to suit our long-term strategies. This has ultimately always proved beneficial to our customers, and serves as a testament to the bank’s efforts towards premium client servicing,” said Khalil al Hedaifi, Chief Retail Banking Officer at Sohar International.

“Meeting the specific needs of customers who own a business, Sohar Business Account supports their enterprises with services including the ease of availing credit and access to a variety of fund management options.”

More than RO 300,000 cash prizes to be won in ahlibank’s Prize Scheme 2021 third quarter draws

MUSCAT: Committed to its promise of helping people achieve their dreams with more prize draws for more customer segments, ahlibank will celebrate the winners of its third quarterly draws in the beginning of October 2021. Stirring excitement amongst its customers, the bank is all geared up to reward prizes totalling more than RO 300,000, wherein one winner will walk away with the grand ‘Salary for Life’ prize of RO 250,000 (RO 1,000 monthly for 250 months). The event will be streamed live on the bank’s official social media pages.

Expressing his joy on the success of the Wafra scheme and its role in changing the winners’ lives, Muneer



al Balushi, AGM, Head of Retail Distribution, ahlibank, said, “The Wafra prize scheme has witnessed huge popularity since its launch and this has encouraged the bank to continue its efforts to create new products that encompass a wider customer base. The draws help the winning customers in ensuring financial stability and secure their future and that of their families.

ahlibank will continue to look for new opportunities that add value to customers and stakeholders through prize schemes, innovative banking products and superior customer service.”

“We always encourage a savings culture among our customers, and this has been reflected in the increased winning opportunities and prizes offered under Wafra 2021 scheme. The prize programme is part of our long-term strategy that aims to promote financial inclusion among citizens, and an opportunity to further contribute to the Sultanate’s economic and social development objectives,” he further explained.



India and US seeing fund inflows after China crackdown



Brokers trade at their computer terminals at a stock brokerage firm in Mumbai, India. — Reuters

MUMBAI: India, the United States and parts of other emerging markets have seen fund inflows redirected from China as recent regulatory crackdowns in the world's second-biggest economy have spooked markets, according to veteran investor Mark Mobius.

"I would say half the money has just left ... But I think that is temporary, it will not last," Mobius, emerging markets fund manager and founder of Mobius Capital Partners, told the Reuters Global Markets Forum (GMF) on Tuesday.

Mobius said his firm was "heavily concentrated in India", with about a 20 per cent allocation, adding that he was bullish on sectors ranging from medical testing to industrial equipment.

"It's a pretty wide scope that we have in India. Lots of opportunities."

Mobius earlier made his name as an emerging markets guru with US money manager Franklin Templeton, where he managed over \$50 billion in EM portfolios.

The effects of China's crackdown will be temporary, and over the long-term, curb monopolistic trends enabling small- and medium-sized enterprises (SME) to thrive, said Mobius, whose firm manages over \$414 million in assets.

The unpredictability

The unpredictability of China's regulatory measures make the country unappealing to foreign investors in the short term but could make it attractive in the long run, global fund managers told GMF last week

of China's regulatory measures make the country unappealing to foreign investors in the short term but could make it attractive in the long run, global fund managers told GMF last week.

In China, Mobius was upbeat on medical equipment makers, healthcare, higher-level education companies that haven't been impacted by the recent crackdowns, consumer products and fast food.

"We feel that it's good where we are," he said, adding that he would consider buying some stocks, especially in the SME segment, given the recent price corrections.

"There are opportunities now in China as a result of this panic following the government intervention," Mobius said. Along with India, Mobius said his fund was bullish on Taiwan and Brazil. — Reuters

US Senate narrowly approves \$3.5 trillion spending plan

WASHINGTON: The US Senate approved a \$3.5 trillion spending blueprint for President Joe Biden's top priorities on Wednesday morning in a 50-49 vote along party lines, after lawmakers sparred over the need for huge spending to fight climate change and poverty.

After months of haggling, the Senate on Tuesday passed a \$1 trillion infrastructure bill in a bipartisan 69-30 vote, proposing to make the nation's biggest investment in decades in roads, bridges, airports and waterways. The measure faces an uncertain future in the House.

Democrats in the Senate then turned to a budget resolution containing spending instructions for the multi-trillion-dollar follow-up package, which includes provisions to create universal preschool, affordable housing and climate-friendly technologies.

The bills have been a top priority for Biden, who has sought to enact sweeping changes during a time when Democrats hold slim majorities in both congressional chambers and where they fear loss of legislative control in the looming 2022 elections.

The Democrats plan to push the package through over the next few months, using a process called "budget reconciliation,"



Vehicles are parked outside the US Capitol building in Washington, DC. — Reuters

which allows them to pass legislation with a simple majority vote.

On Tuesday, the Senate began a "vote-a-rama," a procedure that gave senators the opportunity to propose amendments to the non-binding budget resolution. It continued early on Wednesday. Debate can run for days unless party leaders agree to a shorter period.

In the freewheeling process, senators cast votes on nearly 50 amendments, including ones

that would have prevented tax increases on people making less than \$400,000 a year and barred taxpayer funding of abortions. Both of those votes were approved by the chamber.

Republicans have rallied against the \$3.5 trillion spending plan. Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, who voted for the \$1 trillion infrastructure bill, called the larger proposal "radical."

Dozens of Republican senators also signed a pledge not to vote to raise the nation's borrowing

capability when it is exhausted in the autumn in a bid to curtail Democrats' spending plans.

"They (Democrats) shouldn't be expecting Republicans to raise the debt ceiling to accommodate their deficit spending," Senator Ron Johnson, a Republican who circulated the pledge, told the *Wall Street Journal*.

Failure to increase or suspend the statutory debt limit — now at \$28.5 trillion — could trigger a federal government shutdown or a debt default. — Reuters

Singapore upgrades GDP outlook

SINGAPORE: Singapore's bellwether economy expanded more than initially estimated in the second quarter and the government raised its forecast for 2021 as Covid-19 vaccinations progressed at home and in other key markets.

Gross domestic product (GDP) is forecast to grow 6 per cent to 7 per cent in 2021, versus a prior estimate for an expansion of 4 to 6 per cent, the Ministry of Trade and Industry said.

GDP grew 14.7 per cent year-on-year in the second quarter, higher than the 14.3 per cent growth seen in the government's advance estimate. Analysts had expected a 14.2 per cent increase.



The Marina Bay Sands integrated resort lights up in Singapore. — Reuters

In absolute terms, GDP remained 0.6 per cent below its pre-pandemic level in the second quarter of 2019.

On a quarter-on-quarter

seasonally-adjusted basis, the economy contracted 1.8 per cent in the second quarter, a reversal from the 3.3 per cent expansion in the prior quarter. — Reuters

China auto sales tumble for a third straight month

BEIJING: China's vehicle sales slid in July for a third consecutive month, hit hard by flooding, Covid-19 outbreaks in other areas and the global shortage of semiconductors.

The world's biggest auto market saw sales drop 11.9 per cent from the same month a year earlier to 1.86 million vehicles.

For the first seven months of the year, China's vehicle sales have jumped 19 per cent as the market recovered from pandemic lows. China Association of Automobile Manufacturers (CAAM) said that rebound is set to peter out with sales for the rest of 2021 expected to be below relatively high year-ago levels, although the market is still expected to log growth overall on an annual basis.

Chen Shihua, a senior CAAM executive, cautioned that the global chip shortage, which has led to automakers curtailing production, was unlikely to resolve itself soon as the pandemic rages on in the world. — Reuters



Cars for export wait to be loaded onto cargo vessels at a port in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province, China. — Reuters

Oil crawls higher on solid US demand outlook

MELBOURNE: Oil prices on Wednesday consolidated strong overnight gains as a bullish outlook for US fuel demand outweighed concerns about mobility curbs in Asia with the spread of the highly infectious Covid-19 Delta variant.

Industry data showed US crude oil and gasoline inventories fell last week, while the US Energy Information Administration raised its forecast for fuel demand in 2021 and said consumption in May through July was higher than expected.

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures rose 6 cents, or 0.1 per cent, to \$68.35 a barrel at 01:36 GMT, adding to a 2.7 per cent jump on Tuesday.

Brent crude futures inched up 3 cents to \$70.66 a barrel, following



The chimneys of the Total Grandpuits oil refinery are seen just after sunset in southeast of Paris, France. — Reuters

a 2.3 per cent gain from Tuesday.

"Oil prices rose on hopes that oil demand growth will outpace

supply growth despite the spread of the highly transmissible Delta variant of Covid-19,"

Commonwealth Bank commodity analyst Vivek Dhar said in a note.

Data from the American

Petroleum Institute showed US crude stocks fell by 816,00 barrels and gasoline stocks fell by 1.1 million barrels in the week ended August 6, according to two market sources. Both drawdowns were a bit smaller than analysts polled by Reuters had expected.

The EIA's monthly report showed that the need for supply from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) will exceed Opec supply by 1 million barrels per day in the third quarter and by 300,000 bpd in the fourth quarter of 2021, CBA's Dhar said.

"With OECD commercial crude oil stockpiles having dropped back to pre-Covid levels already, a tightening oil market outlook will likely amplify oil price gains," he said. — Reuters

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features



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LOCAL SCENE

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AMARI AND THE NIGHT BROTHERS
BY BB ALSTON

Amari Peters competes for a spot at the Bureau of Supernatural Affairs.

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SEVERAL STUDIES have shown the benefits of Omani frankincense (luban), whose trees are spread in different areas of Dhofar Governorate, in terms of the amount of effective natural biological materials it contains, compared to other types of frankincense trees in the world. Entrepreneur Mohammed al Shanfari, a resident of the Wilayat of Salalah, works through his own company, the Natural Frankincense Products Company, to manufacture natural extracts such as frankincense oil and distilled frankincense water. He uses the finest types of

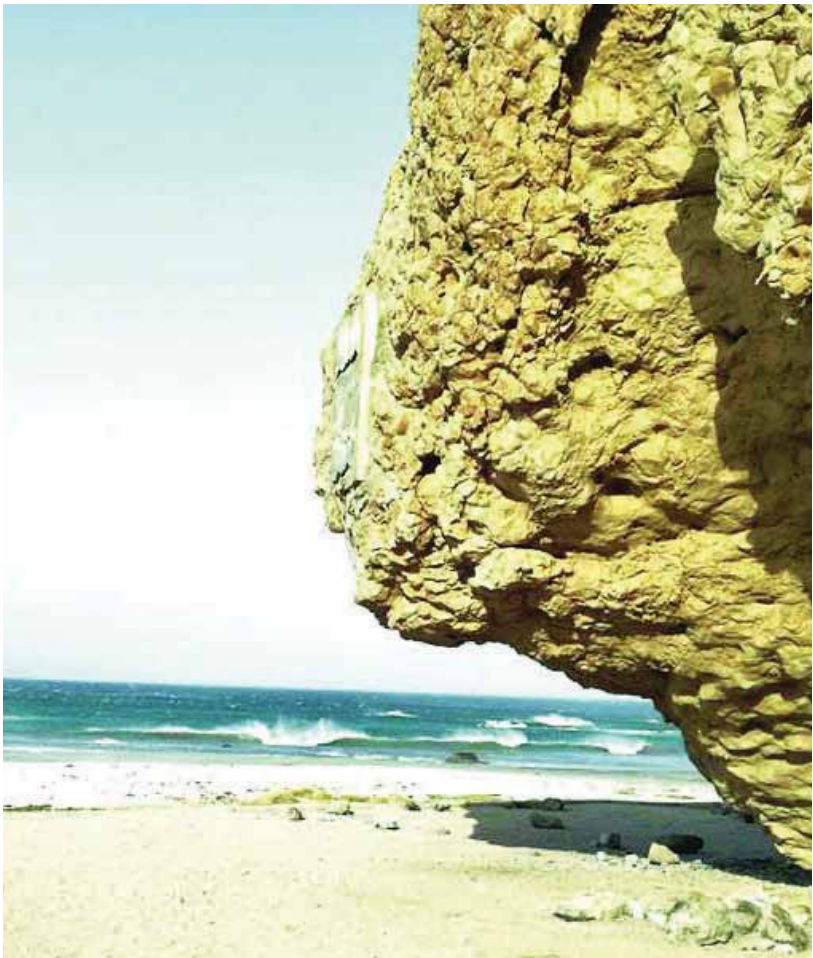
Omani frankincense due to its economic and commercial returns and the effectiveness of its natural elements on human health and personal care. Al Shanfari established his project in 2019, supported by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, Riyada, represented by the Salalah Business Incubator and Business Centres. He participated in several programmes to develop his project, such as the "Digitisation" programme and the "Sustainability" programme for the Youth Enterprise Development Fund/Sharakah/ and other programmes. The company

developed products that are approved medically and manufactured some cosmetics and natural perfumes. He said that his project is currently based on the production of frankincense oil, which is one of the products of great medical value, noting that the results of examinations for the detection of elements and organic compounds conducted in cooperation with Sultan Qaboos University showed a high percentage of pinene, which reaches more than 73 per cent of the extract. As an added value to the development of the project, Al Shanfari manufactured five natural types of frankincense soap in cooperation with specialised international production centres, which were produced according to the unified Gulf standard specifications. He added that he produced hand sanitiser with frankincense at the beginning of the Corona pandemic, according to the specifications and standards approved by the Ministry of



Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. He indicated that the production of frankincense oil and distilled frankincense water is carried out by the method of distillation followed globally by methods of extracting essential oils.

Al Shanfari stated that the company has been seeking, two years ago, to start investing in model farms of frankincense trees, using sustainable agricultural methods for promising varieties, harvesting and processing frankincense using modern methods.



Tranquillity and pristine nature at Ras Nous



RAS NOUS IS one of the most important tourist places in the Wilayat of Sadah, which attracts tourists throughout the year due to its diverse aesthetic components, between soft sandy beaches and unique mountain formations.

It has one of the most beautiful beaches that are characterised by small bays and distinctive places for fishing and hiking in different seasons of the year, in addition to some archaeological sites.

Ras Nous is located on the coastal line between Hadbeen and Hasik in the Wilayat of Sadah, about 150 kilometres from the city of Salalah, where there are large limestone rocks, water springs and natural caves along the coast, which is about 7 kilometres long, making the place an integrated natural tourist resort for visitors, wildlife seekers and natural bays.

The beach is known for its blue waters, the presence of various marine creatures and plants, the fertile environment of the charming coral reefs, the pristine nature and the biological diversity that constitutes a picturesque palette of the inte-

gration of environmental elements.

Visitors can also enjoy watching dolphins in the sea, practicing all kinds of different sports, fishing, camping on the sands of the beach, or watching the sunrise or sunset in tranquillity. There are sufficient areas of fine sand, in addition to fishing, collecting mussels in its specific seasons, as well as practicing sports of swimming due to the calm waves and clarity of the water, especially in the winter.

Ras Nous beach witnesses crowds of visitors, especially at noon to watch the dolphins presenting their acrobatic performances as if they had been familiar with the people and the place and waiting for their arrival time to arrive.

To reach Ras Nous, there are two roads, the first for those coming from the governorates of Al Sharqiyah, Al Wusta and East Dhofar, taking the Shaleem-Shuwaymiyah road, then to Hasik. Continue the road towards Hasik, passing through Hadbeen Centre, then cross 7 kilometres from Hadbeen Centre to reach Ras Nous.



ENTERTAINMENT

COVID worries send Emmy Awards show outdoors



LAST YEAR'S Emmy Awards took place in an empty studio with Jimmy Kimmel as the host and nominees from around the world joining on video screens from their homes and gardens.

Concerns over the Delta variant of the virus on Tuesday prompted singer Stevie Nicks, 73, to cancel five concerts she had scheduled for 2021.

"While I'm vaccinated, at my age I am still being extremely cautious and for that reason have decided to skip the five performances I had planned for 2021," the former Fleetwood Mac musician wrote on Twitter.

The New Orleans Jazz Festival, due to take place in early October, was cancelled on Monday because of rising cases of coronavirus in Louisiana.

The 73rd Emmy Awards announced this year's nominees via live streaming last month from ShowPro Live Studios in Los Angeles, with Disney's "Star Wars" series "The Mandalorian" and Netflix royal drama "The Crown" tying for the most Emmy nominations at 24.

Disney's new streaming service, in only its second year, also topped the prestigious limited series category, where Marvel superhero spin-off "WandaVision" earned 23 nominations.

The gala, hosted by US actor-comedian Cedric the Entertainer, will honour the best in television from a unique, pandemic-plagued year in which producers struggled to film under tight Covid-19 restrictions. — Reuters

Comedy, action, romance, gaming — 'Free Guy' movie has it all



RYAN REYNOLDS' new movie "Free Guy" defies classification.

"It's an action, comedy, adventure kind of film. Its inspiration is 'Back to the Future' and movies like that," said Reynolds.

The film is set in a video game world, but Reynolds says that doesn't make it a video game movie. "We're kind of smuggling a lot of other themes into that premise," he said.

Opening in movie theatres on Friday, "Free Guy" is the story of bank teller (Reynolds) who discovers he is a nameless background player in a hyper-realistic video game. He decides to break out and forge his own path in a story that moves between the real world and the virtual world.

In a business dominated by sequels, spinoffs and franchises, Reynolds says "Free Guy" stands out.

"It's become an increasingly rare unicorn in this industry where you get to make a movie that is based on nothing other than an original idea," said the actor, who is also a producer on the film.

The movie, which also features "Killing Eve" star Jodie Comer, dinosaurs, a gun-toting rabbit, crashing helicopters and cameos by Channing Tatum, late "Jeopardy" host Alex Trebek and famous gaming YouTubers.

Professional gamer Ninja, who has some 24 million subscribers to his live streams, was uncomfortable seeing himself on the big screen.

"I don't want to see myself on camera, which is funny because I'm always on camera, so it's a little weird," said Ninja, whose real name is Richard Tyler Blevins.

— Reuters



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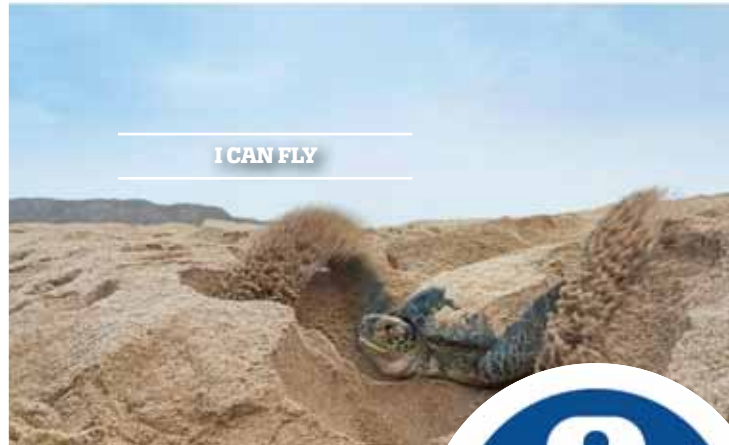
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ART

Dutch masterpiece set for display in Belfast community space



AN 18TH-CENTURY masterpiece by an internationally renowned Dutch artist will be displayed at a community space in east Belfast.

Jan van Huysum's "Flowers In A Terracotta Vase" will be shown at the port view Trade Centre for almost a week on loan from the national gallery in London as part of a touring exhibition.

The Jan van Huysum "Visits" touring programme is designed to reach a wider audience beyond the gallery's wall across the UK.

It was shown in "unexpected" settings in Scotland, the East Midlands, Cornwall, Norfolk and Barnsley before crossing the Irish Sea.

National Gallery director, Dr Gabriele Finaldi, said he hopes the painting will inspire people.

"This astounding, large flower painting has made unexpected appearances in unexpected venues across the country," he said.

"I hope it will make people think about art and the beauty of nature, encourage their own creativity and inspire them to visit their own local museum or art collection."

In Northern Ireland, the curation of this exhibition has been entrusted to a group of young programmers from Reimagine, Remake, Replay (RRR) — a project that engages 16 to 25-year-olds in museums across Northern Ireland, using digital technology and creative media to interpret collections.

RRR is led by a consortium of partners including Nerve Centre, National Museums NI, Northern Ireland Museums Council and Northern Ireland Screen, and is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Kick the Dust programme.

In collaboration with Urban Scale Interventions, the RRR group is the first to take over a new community gallery space in Portview Trade Centre, called "What's the Story?" which aims to celebrate stories of east Belfast, both old and new.

RRR used its digital and creative skills to encourage the public to slow down, explore, enjoy and take notice of this exhibition which included a range of interactive activities aimed at enabling visitors to fully appreciate and immerse themselves in the gallery, including a custom-made Virtual Reality experience of the artwork, created by artist Estella Tse, a commissioned mural inspired by the piece and created by a local artist Wee Nuls, as well as vinyl tote bag making and mindful Slow Art sessions for young people. — **PA Media/dpa**

ART

Picasso's leaving Las Vegas for auction block



SOME 11 PICASSO paintings and works by the Spanish artist are going up for auction in October as casino and hotel group MGM Resorts seeks to further diversify its vast art collection. The auction will take place on October 23 in the Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas, where the works were on display, MGM Resorts and Sotheby's said on Wednesday.

The sale could fetch some \$100 million and is thought to be the most valuable auction dedicated to Picasso that has ever been held. "We are committed to creating an even more inclusive collection that maintains the breadth of our existing portfolio while giving a greater voice to artists from under-represented communities," Ari Kastrati, chief hospitality officer at MGM Resorts, said in a statement.

The MGM Resorts Fine Arts Collection boasts about 900 works by 200 artists, including modern pieces by the likes of Bob Dylan and David Hockney displayed in its hotels around the world. The collection was started more than 20 years ago by real estate developer Steve Wynn, former owner of the Bellagio and former chief executive of Wynn Resorts.

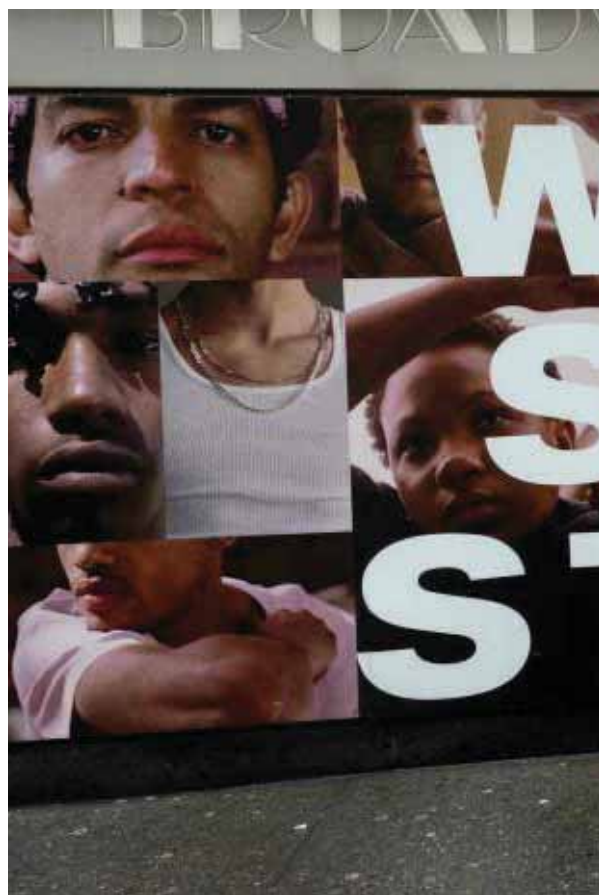
The Picasso works up for auction include five paintings, some of which were displayed for years in the Bellagio's fine dining restaurant, Picasso. The restaurant will continue to show an additional 12 Picasso works. The artist's 1938 painting "Femme au beret rouge-orange" of his lover and muse Marie-Therese Walter is expected to sell for \$20 million to \$30 million.

The large-scale portraits "Homme et Enfant" and "Buste d'homme" have a pre-sale estimate of up to \$30 million and \$15 million respectively. In the wake of a widespread cultural reckoning in 2020 over racism at all levels of American society, museums and art galleries are working to diversify their collections and appoint more women and people of colour to their staff.

A 2019 study published by the Public Library of Science of 18 of the leading US museums found that 85 per cent of the artists on display are white and 87 per cent are men. MGM Resorts said its collection was already diverse but that it wanted to showcase even more works by women, LGBTQ artists, people of colour and those with disabilities. — **Reuters**

ENTERTAINMENT

Final curtain for musical 'West Side Story' on Broadway



THE RE-IMAGINED VERSION of the popular musical "West Side Story" will not reopen on Broadway, its producer said on Monday, an indirect victim of the Covid-19 pandemic's effect on New York's theatre industry.

The revived production opened in February last year but was forced to shutter just one month later as the coronavirus pandemic took hold in the city.

"It is with great regret that we are announcing today that the 2020 Broadway revival of West Side Story will not reopen," producer Kate Horton said in a statement.

"For a variety of reasons, reopening is not a practical proposition," she added, thanking the "brilliant, creative artists" in the production who brought the story "to life at the Broadway Theatre, even for so brief a time."

The 1957 musical is directed by Belgian Ivo van Hove, who gave the production an unprecedented makeover, with a more diverse cast and dealing with current themes such as police violence and rape.

The pandemic was not the show's only obstacle: its original producer, Scott Rudin, stepped aside for Horton to take the job following allegations of workplace harassment.

And one of the main actors, Amar Ramasar, was embroiled in allegations of inappropriate behaviour dating back to his years in the New York Ballet Troupe.

Theatres on Broadway, which are set to reopen in September, have announced that they will require the audience and all production members to be vaccinated.

The public will still have a chance to see a new version of "West Side Story" in the cinema in December, directed by Steven Spielberg. — **AFP**



Getting lost in a world made of books and coffee

By Safiya al Munji

COFFEE AND A BOOK are a good combination every time and everywhere. Many people would say, "Give me a cup of coffee and a book that I love and I will be happy". They are dear friends to human beings in lonely times. Loving reading and coffee, two young Omanis decided to launch their own café "Chapter One", for the lovers of coffee and books.

Located in Al Khoudh, Muscat, the idea behind the café is so that someone will have a space to relax, read a book and have his favourite coffee.

"We are two partners who decided to start a business in 2015, after working in various companies and getting great experience and knowledge in our separate fields. We've decided that we want to share our passions with the community and try to fill the gaps as much as we can, and it turned out as "Chapter One Book Café", said Fahad al Alawi.

Chef Fahad al Alawi, a culinary graduate from Oman Tourism

College, is experienced mostly in pastries and desserts and he is behind the famous Classic Tiramisu that they sell at the café. Chef Fahad always had a passion for cooking, creating new dishes and adding his own twists to them. He is also a coffee addict which helps a lot in concocting the items served at the café.

Bookworm Sara al Habsi, a computer science graduate from the German University of Technology in Oman who has a background in management and marketing, is passionate about reading books from all genres. She loves meeting other bookworms at the café and encouraging people to read more.

"Chapter One" resembles a new beginning for the book community in Muscat. Following two of the owners' passions, they would like to encourage people to go back to reading.

"We would like to show how reading with a cup of coffee can be life-changing and beneficial. We also wanted this space to help elevate the culture of living within the community", the partners shared.

The café houses more than 1,000 titles to read both in English and Arabic making it perhaps the only coffeeshop in Muscat that is also a library-of-sort.

The partners have taken into consideration a lot of things that affect their customers. For instance, not only did they look only at what type of food would connect well with their client base, they also look into pricing making sure that prices are within the range that students can also afford.

"We are very keen on having kids around and doing book-related activities such as story-time events. We would like it to be a venue of learning and we are aiming for the culture of reading to be passed on to the next generation", the partners shared.

The idea of the café started in 2015 with the opening happening

The partners have taken into consideration a lot of things that affect their customers. For instance, not only did they look only at what type of food would connect well with their client base, they also look into pricing making sure that prices are within the range that students can also afford

ness was only possible because of sheer determination and persistence.

"There are a lot of challenges in starting any business. For us,

only in 2020.

"We looked into the interior designs and decorations. We were meticulous as to the sort of products and services we wanted to provide. We were also looking into funding. By the time that we opened last year, we had taken into account all the things we want it to", they shared.

Both Sara and Fahad are united in saying that the business was only possible because of sheer determination and persistence.

we have looked into making sure that we were creating something unique and fresh in the market so that our café stands out and create a new experience for the customer. Adding a library gave us that needed edge. Choosing a great location with affordable rent was a big challenge as well while keeping in mind that there are a lot of competitors in the area", they shared.

Formally opening the café on September 15, 2020, the business partners were amazed by the great turnout and love they got from their customers.

All of it, they admitted would have not been possible without the help and support of both their families.

"One's army is his family. We were thankful that they showered us with great ideas and material support", they chorused.

