

HM condolences to Kazakhstan

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev of the Republic of Kazakhstan on victims of the explosion at an ammunition depot in Jambyl Province. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sympathies to President Tokayev, families of the victims and the friendly people of Kazakhstan. His Majesty prayed to Allah the Almighty to rest the departed souls in peace in paradise and grant their families patience, wishing the injured a speedy recovery. — ONA



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OMAN LOCK HORNS WITH JAPAN TODAY



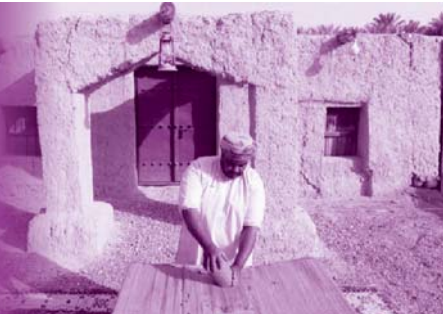
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SRI LANKA ORGANIC REVOLUTION THREATENS TEA DISASTER



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POTTERY IS A CRAFT CONNECTING MANY OMAN VILLAGES



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO VIETNAM PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Nguyen Xuan Phuc of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Phuc and the friendly people of his country further progress and prosperity. — ONA

OMAN AND INDIA REVIEW RELATIONS

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, received a phone call from Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Minister of External Affairs in the Republic of India. During the phone call, the two sides exchanged views on matters of joint interest. They also reviewed the cooperation between the two friendly countries. — ONA

Now get news on the go



Airlines given nod to operate flights

STRANDED EXPATS START RETURNING AS FLIGHTS RESUME

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 1

All major international airlines have been given green light to operate domestic and international flights through Oman Airports after the restrictions imposed after the outbreak of the pandemic were lifted. The restrictions lasted for nearly a year and a half due to Covid-19 precautionary measures.

Several major airlines operating out of the Sultanate, including Oman Air, SalamAir, and Air India will increase frequencies to several destinations in the coming weeks, especially from October.

Oman Airports welcome travellers coming to the Sultanate from all around the world, coinciding with the decision to lift the quarantine requirements for those who have received the two doses of approved vaccines for Covid 19 in the Sultanate.

PCR examinations have been limited to either before departure or upon arrival in the Sultanate for fully vaccinated travellers.



Easing of restrictions marks the return of domestic and international flights by airlines through Oman Airports.

Muscat International Airport has implemented measures and preventive requirements in line with the national efforts to prevent the spread of Covid-19 and to ensure the safety and health of all passengers and airport's workers.

Saud bin Nasser al Hubaishi, Oman Airports Vice President of

Muscat International Airport, said, "Implementation of a set of strict precautionary protocols at Muscat International Airports and Salalah enabled us at Muscat International Airport to obtain international recognition as the first airport in the Middle East in application of health standards related to Covid-19, and we are constantly updating these protocols in line with the international standards adopted in this regard and aligning

it with the national precautionary requirements approved by the concerned authorities in the Sultanate. In this context, we would like to thank wholeheartedly the competent authorities for their continuous efforts in assessing the epidemiological situation worldwide and updating protocols aimed at ensuring the safety and health of travellers to and through the Sultanate's airports."

SEE ALSO P3

Quarantine mandatory for unvaccinated travellers

Expatriates working in the public and private sector units and holding a valid residency can return to the Sultanate even if they were not able to get one or two doses of vaccine in their countries.

According to an official statement, non-Omanis holding a valid residency visa who have not received the vaccine are allowed to return to the Sultanate, but subject to applicable procedures, including institutional quarantine for seven days.

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Sultanate sees 25% rise in fish output

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
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The total value of fish farming production in the Sultanate stood at RO 2.5 million in 2019, an increase of 25 per cent, according to the National Centre of Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Fisheries sector is one of the main sectors of economic diversification, and contributes to the national income and is at the fore of non-oil productive sectors.

The number of fish farming projects until the end of 2020 stood at 18, including 7 approved commercial licenses, 11 initial commercial licenses at an investment cost of RO 987 million, and are projected to produce 435,397 tonnes.

Shrimp farming was the highest among the projects with four approved commercial projects and four initial commercial projects, as announced by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources at beginning of 2020.

The ministry, in cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), has completed preparation of a national strategy for aquaculture to promote fish farming in a sustainable manner. DETAILS ON P2



HAMDAN AL KHATRI COMPLETES 170-KM UTMB RACE

Hamdan al Khatri, Oman's top trail runner, has completed the arduous 170 km UTMB race in Chamonix, France. He crossed the line in a time of 41 hours, 14 minutes and 41 seconds after recording an average speed of 4.17 km per hour throughout the race. Team-mate Hamed al Harthi had to withdraw after 127 km and 32 hours of racing, just 45 km from the finish. Exhausted, but proud as he reached the end, Hamdan unfurled the Omani flag in celebration. DETAILS ON P11

Weather disasters killed 2 million in last 50 years: UN

GENEVA: The number of disasters, such as floods and heatwaves, driven by climate change have increased fivefold over the past 50 years, killing more than 2 million people and costing \$3.64 trillion in total losses, a UN agency said on Wednesday.

The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) says its "Atlas" is the most comprehensive review of mortality and economic losses from weather, water and climate extremes ever produced.

It surveys some 11,000 disasters occurring between 1970-2019, including major catastrophes such as Ethiopia's 1983 drought, which was the single most fatal event with 300,000 deaths, and Hurricane Katrina in 2005 that was the most costly, with losses of \$163.61 billion.

The report showed an accelerating trend, with the number of disasters increasing nearly fivefold from the 1970s to the most recent decade, adding to signs that extreme weather events are becoming more frequent due to global warming.

The WMO attributed the



WMO Secretary-General
Petteri Taalas

growing frequency to both climate change and improved disaster reporting.

Costs from the events also surged from \$175.4 billion in the 1970s to \$1.38 trillion in the 2010s when storms such as Harvey, Maria and Irma ripped through the United States.

"Economic losses are mounting as exposure increases," said WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas in a foreword.

But while hazards became more costly and frequent, the annual death toll has fallen from more than 50,000 in the 1970s to around 18,000 in the 2010s, suggesting that better planning was paying off.

— Reuters

Oman, South Korea discuss defence cooperation

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office Suh Wook, Minister of National Defence of the Republic of Korea, and his accompanying delegation. The guest is on an official several-day visit to the Sultanate.

The meeting discussed areas of existing cooperation between the defence ministries of the two countries and ways to enhance them. The two sides exchanged views on a number of matters of common interest for the benefit of the two friendly countries.

The meeting was attended by Dr Mohammed bin Nasser bin Ali al Za'abi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence, Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis bin Abdullah al Raeesi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), the Korean Ambassador to the Sultanate, the Military



Attaché at the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Muscat, and SAF senior officers.

The Korean Minister of National Defence and his accompanying delegation arrived here on Wednesday. They were received upon their arrival at Muscat International Airport by Air Commodore Khalid bin Mohammed al Abri, Director General of Operations at the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), the Ambassador of Korea to the Sultanate, and the Military Attaché at the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Muscat. — ONA

Sultanate, Italy review bilateral relations

MUSCAT: Dr Mohammed bin Nasser bin Ali al Za'abi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Wednesday General Enzo Vecciarelli, Chief of the Defence of the Italian Republic and his delegation.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations and a number of matters of common concern.

The meeting was attended by Vice Admiral Abdullah Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), Italian Ambassador to the Sultanate and the military attaché at the Italian Embassy in Muscat. — ONA



Empowering people with disabilities: 9 winning research projects announced

MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), represented by the Humanitarian Research Center, on Wednesday announced nine winning research projects, within the Research Programme, to empower people with disabilities for the current year.

Funded by the Development Institution of Oman LNG, the programme aims to achieve sustainable and solid development that ensures the future of the society's individuals, especially the disabled category, and safeguard their active contributions to scientific research and innovation.

In the field of computer



programmes and technological applications, Dr Ali bin Mahdi bin Kadhim won for his research "The Effectiveness of an Electronic Application in Developing Language Skills for Autistic People



in the Sultanate", and Dr Mun Fai Chan for his research project "The Effects of Virtual Reality Training on Upper Limb Motor Recovery for Stroke Patients".

The first version of the programme witnessed a fair competition. The winning projects were distinguished for the quality and authenticity of research ideas from various humanitarian fields.

The winning projects were consistent with the research programme, which supports software innovation, computer applications, training curricula to rehabilitate the people with disabilities.

It also supports research studies related to the rehabilitation and training of human cadres working with people with disabilities, which help reduce genetic disabilities. — ONA



SOHAR Port and Freezone invites Tenderers in the following Tender

NO	Tender Ref	Tender Title	Tender Fee OMR
1	SIPC 2021/0195	Relocation of the Current Sector Light from OOTO Tank	RO 26.250

The above-mentioned tender fees including the VAT 5%. Tenderers can request to receive the electronic tender documents from 9:00 am on Thursday, 2 September 2021 until 4:00 pm on Thursday, 16 September 2021. Tenderers to follow the below procedures and steps to obtain the electronic tender documents:

Step 1: Interested Tenderers should remit the stated tender fees as per the below bank details:

Account Name	Sohar Industrial Port Co
Account Number	3101-007970-500
Bank Name	Oman Arab bank SAOC – Main Br
SWIT	OMABOMRXXXX
Note: Bank transfers is the only mode of payment accepted	

Step 2: Tenderers to send the following documents:
A request for the electronic tender documents
Scanned bank transfer
The firm's commercial registration documents
All shall be communicated to the following e-mail address:
sipc.procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

Step 3: Tenderers will receive the electronic Tender Document by email. The Technical and Commercial Proposals must be in separate, marked " Technical and Commercial" addressed to:
SOHAR Port and Freezone.
Bid Opining Committee
Tender Reference No: 2021/
Tender Title

- SOHAR reserves the right to accept or reject any tender without assigning any reasons
- All SMEs are requested to provide their Green Card along with the required documents
- For any clarification regarding the tenders please send an e-mail to: sipc.procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

25% rise in fish farming production

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
[@zainabalnasseri](https://twitter.com/zainabalnasseri)

The total value of fish farming production in the Sultanate amounted to RO 2.5 million in 2019, an increase of 25%, according to the National Center of Statistics and Information.

Fisheries sector is one of the main sectors of economic diversification at the fore of non-oil producing sectors. The number of fish farming projects until the end of 2020 reached 18 projects, including: Seven approved commercial licences, 11 initial commercial licences at an investment cost of RO 987 million, projected to produce 435,397 tonnes of fish. Shrimp farming was the highest among the projects with four approved commercial projects and four initial commercial projects announced by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources at beginning of 2020.

The Sultanate is distinguished by its 3,165 km long coastline overlooking three seas: the Arabian Gulf, the Sea of Oman and the Arabian Sea. Each coastal area has its own characteristics that make it suitable for one

OVER 18
AQUACULTURE
PROJECTS
PROJECTED TO
PRODUCE
435,397 TONNES
OF FISH

method of cultivation without the other.

Musandam Governorate, for example, is suitable for floating marine cages projects due to the presence of protected and deep lagoons. As for the coast of the Al Batinah governorates, it is suitable for establishing marine cage projects, due to the high population density and the lack of many large land sites. It is also convenient for integrative farming projects in freshwater due to the presence of many vegetable farms. Muscat has marine sites suitable for marine cage projects as well. As for the coastal strip facing the Arabian Sea from Sharqiyah South to Dhofar, it has many coastal sites with vast areas that are good for establishing shrimp farming projects. In Dhofar, however, there are



coastal sites with small areas in some protected lagoons, fit for the establishment of closed aquaculture projects for abalone, or other marine organisms.

The ministry, in cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), has completed the preparation of the national strategy for aquaculture, in order to promote fish farming in a sustainable manner.

The plan took into account the creation of a kind of integrated farms through which owners of small and medium enterprises can be encouraged to expand aquaculture operations so that the area allocated for farming does not exceed 10% of the cultivated land area in order to preserve agricultural land.

Through Aquaculture

Center, the ministry provides data and technical information by conducting applied research; a complement to the database and research that encourage and develop fish farming projects in the Sultanate. The ministry also works to support the sector by backing small fish farmers through preparing and equipping facilities, providing seed and fodder, providing technical services to fish farms and marketing the product in the final stages.

It also supports production requirements through the development of industries associated with aquaculture, including fish feed industry, manufacture of medicines and treatments, development of disease-resistant seed, and introduction of advanced technologies and equipment in fish farming.

Stranded expatriates start arriving as Sultanate lifts travel restrictions

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Hundreds of expatriates who were stranded back home, after Oman suspended international flights from several countries in an attempt to contain the spread of coronavirus, arrived at the Muscat International Airport on Wednesday.

With Oman's decision to lift the ban on entry from abroad, residents and visitors from as many as 21 countries, including India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, started arriving through the land, air and sea gateways.

"I have been stuck back home for nearly 121 days and had sort of lost all hopes of returning in time to join my work in Muscat. For me, it's nothing but a dream come true after my family's prayers," Ahmed Adil, an employee at a supermarket told the *Observer* at the airport after arriving with Oman Air from India.

"I had no plans of staying back home for more than a month



when I went on vacation in April but it is nearly the fifth month since I reached back home. Thanks to the Oman authorities for helping us come back and

join our work," Sarath, another expatriate adds.

Arrivals from these countries are further accentuated as the Passports and Residency

Department of the Royal Oman Police (ROP) started issuing visit and residency visas from September 1.

"We have secured nearly 20

visas for new employees from some Asian countries without which we have been unable to open our supermarkets in a couple of wilayats," said Unni Krishna

Pillai, GM of an upcoming retail chain. Residents who reached Oman told the *Observer* that the arrival procedures were easy at the airport and were quite simplified.

79% OF TARGET POPULATION VACCINATED IN SOUTH AL SHARQIYAH



The number of students vaccinated against Covid-19 in South Al Sharqiyah is 25,756, representing 79 per cent of the targeted category aged 12 years and above. The vaccination drive in the governorate is going according to a planned schedule, and the committees are making best efforts to raise the percentage of the vaccinated students. Meanwhile, there is a positive sign as there is a good turnout of parents with their children to the main vaccination centres in the various wilayats of the governorate. – ONA

UAE issues guidelines for travellers from Oman via road

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, SEPT 1

The UAE said it welcomes travellers coming from Oman through the land borders, the official statement said.

The General Authority of Ports, Borders and Free Zones Security and the National Emergency Crisis and Disasters Management Authority (NCEMA) said, those coming from Oman via land crossings from September 1 shall be required to present a negative PCR test result, conducted no more than 48 hours before the date of arrival, in addition to undertaking a rapid PCR test while on the vehicle upon arrival.

They also have to undertake a PCR on day four of entry should they stay four consecutive days or more, in addition to another PCR test on day eight of entry should



they stay eight consecutive days or more.

The two authorities underlined the importance of complying with

all precautionary measures in place, including wearing masks, maintaining physical distance and sanitising luggage.

"Those suffering from chronic diseases and individuals with Covid-19 symptoms are advised to avoid travel," the statement said.

Unvaccinated expats can return, but institutional quarantine must

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, SEPT 1

Expatriates working in the public or private sector units and holding a valid residency can return to the Sultanate even if they were not able to get one or two doses in their countries.

According to an official statement, non-Omanis working holding a valid residency who have not had the vaccine yet are allowed to return to the Sultanate but are subject to the applicable procedures, such as taking the PCR test before arrival, taking the PCR test upon arrival at Oman's Airports, wearing the electronic

tracking bracelet and the home-based quarantine (for Omanis) and institutional quarantine (for non-Omanis) for seven days. The PCR test has to be repeated on the eighth day.

Generally, all travellers are required to be fully vaccinated prior to entry to the Sultanate using one of the following approved vaccines: Pfizer BioNTech, AstraZeneca, Oxford, Sputnik, Sinovac, Moderna, Sinopharm, Covishield AstraZeneca, or a single-dose vaccine-like Johnson & Johnson, provided that the last dose is received 14 days before the date of arrival in the Sultanate.

KABEER YOUSUF

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People with the disease of forgetting things, places and familiar people on a daily basis, known as 'people with Alzheimer's Disease', need our support and understanding, says medics.

Those who make futile attempts to connect their past with the present, to travel to the future, indeed, need a nudge to live a life with the minimum satisfaction, consciously and emotionally.

"The number of people with Alzheimer's disease is on the rise and in our clinic alone, as many as 3,000 cases are reported from different governorates", says Dr Saleha al Jadidiyah, Chairperson of the Oman Geriatric Society.

Dementia is a term used to describe different brain disorders that affect memory, thinking, behaviour and emotion. It includes brain syndromes which affect memory, thinking, behaviour and emotion.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia and affects people around the age of 60. Other causes include vascular disease, dementia with Lewy bodies and frontotemporal dementia, according to her.

"Early symptoms of dementia can include memory loss, difficulty performing familiar tasks, problems with language and changes in personality", adds Dr Saleha, who is also the Head of Consultant Psychiatry at Al Masarra Hospital.

There is currently no cure for dementia, but a range of support is available for people with dementia and their carers.

Dementia knows no social, economic or ethnic boundaries.

According to a WHO data published in 2018 Alzheimer's and Dementia deaths in Oman reached 397 or 3.86 per cent of the total deaths. The age adjusted death rate is 32.04 per 100,000 of population which ranks Oman 49 in the world.

"Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia that affects people around the age of 60. In some cases, however, the symptoms can manifest at the early age of forty, causing significant challenges for the patient and their family

WHAT A PERSON WITH
ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE OR
DEMENTIA NEED IS LOVE,
AFFECTION, CARE AND
UNDERSTANDING

DON'T FORGET PEOPLE WITH ALZHEIMER'S



members", says Dr Hamed al Sinawi, Senior Consultant — Psychiatrist at the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU)

"Sometimes, the symptoms would affect how they make decisions related to the job and deal with colleagues around them. Some patients exhibit inappropriate behaviour causing embarrassment to their family", adds Dr Al Sinawi.

Aiming at giving better care and spreading awareness about the lifelong medical condition, the Oman Alzheimer's Society was founded by Dr Hamed al Sinawi in 2013 and has been a member of the Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI) since 2018. Based in the US, the Association is has recently launched a 'Dementia Friends programme' to support those who tend to keep forgetting.

Some of the services provided by the Association include various educational events for the patients and their families, helpline, resources such as fact sheets, reading materials, etc and conducting seminars, webinars and workshops all aimed at creating awareness about the disease.

"Around 5 per cent of people aged 65 and above have dementia particularly Alzheimer's disease, although it is caused by increasing age due to biological brain changes along with other risk factors such environmental and genetics", said Dr Al Jadidiyah.

And what they need is love, affection, care and understanding. It's all about treating them as people among us and extend our helping hand to them.

She further said that the Oman Geriatric Society is taking lead to educate healthcare providers and caregivers about Dementia.

In the virtual Alzheimer's symposium which will be held on September 21, from 5 pm to 9 pm, the speakers from Oman Geriatric Society will discuss about overall dementia, treatment, nursing care and caregivers' support as well as ethical considerations with dementia. The symposium is expected to come up with recommendations to the authorities.



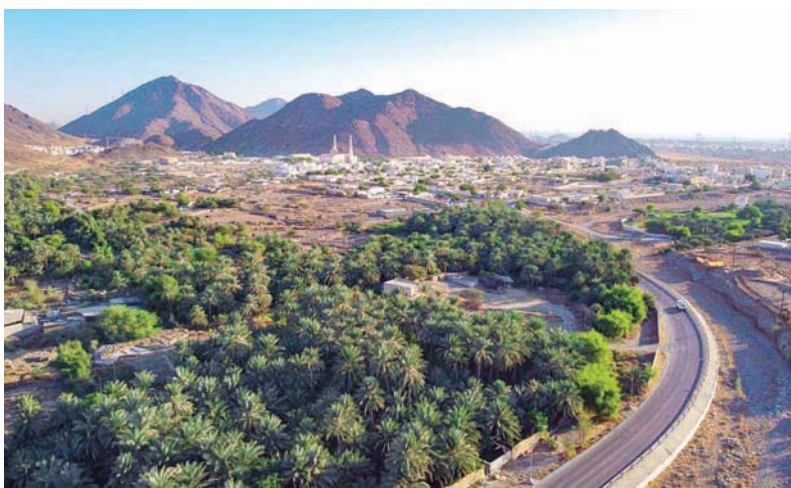
Madha stands witness to development process



MUSCAT: With constant improvement carried out by the government, the Wilayat of Madha in the Governorate of Musandam enjoys the best quality of services.

The projects that were implemented and are being implemented in the wilayat stand as a witness to the ongoing process of improvement.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Mohammed bin Ahmed al Madhani, representative of the wilayat in Majlis Ash'shura, said that many government departments were opened in the wilayat to facilitate and provide services to citizens with an aim to create an ideal environment for development.



There are a number of ventures being executed in Madha; a step that is expected to make the best use of its components and consolidate its economic and technical structure, in general.

In this regard, Al Madhani indicated that work is currently under way to finalise Madha hospital, which is expected to be completed by the end of the next year. The hospital will include

more than 30 beds and 14 clinics, including internal medicine and children and women clinics.

Raising the efficiency of the health system and reducing the movement of citizens over long distances to get health care services are among key goals of setting up Madha hospital.

Al Madhani touched on the importance of communications and the Internet in all aspects of life. The wilayat enjoys a fibre optic network that is currently being delivered to all houses and commercial establishments.

A wells water desalination plant was opened during the month of July with a production capacity of 2,000 cubic meters per day. — ONA

RAIN IN NIZWA



A number of villages in the Wilayat of Nizwa in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate experienced moderate to heavy rains, causing wadis of Al Rahba and Tanuf to overflow.



Forum on enhancing human capital



MUSCAT: The Zubair Corporation recently organised a human resources forum aimed at exchanging innovative ideas focused on enhancing human capital, as well as introducing future projects and programmes in support of the corporation's human resources. The forum was attended by all the heads of human resources of the Zubair Group companies, alongside several members of the corporation's senior management.

The forum also witnessed the launch of the 'Himma' programme, which seeks to

empower Omani competencies within The Zubair Corporation and its subsidiaries. This programme is considered as one of the main pillars of the corporation's strategy in managing and developing human resources in all group companies.

Commenting on the forum, Hilal bin Omar al Siyabi, Head of Corporate Services at The Zubair Corporation, said, "The organisation of this forum stems from the recommendations approved by the Omani talent empowerment team within the corporation. It is also aimed

at enhancing cooperation between the human resources departments within the various group companies to implement a unified strategy.

The forum was an opportunity to learn about the current situation across different sectors in the group, discuss development opportunities and encourage collaboration.

The cooperation and sharing of ideas will contribute towards jointly facing the existing challenges and enrich a system of joint work among all parties involved."

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT



Nama Shared Services Company LLC (NSS), invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR)
NSS/2021/9	IT GRC & Cyber Security Call-Off Outsource Agreement	20-SEP-2021	11-OCT-2021	500 /- Plus VAT Value (25 OMR)

- Bids shall be submitted in a single envelope and sealed with red wax, addressed to the "Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee", and must write on the envelope the tender name & number.
 - 3 separate envelopes shall be included inside the single sealed envelope, and each of these 3 envelopes must be marked with a tenderer name & tender no. as per the below:
 - Commercial Proposal
 - Technical Proposal
 - Bid Bond
 - Bids should be dropped in the tender box at Nama Holding reception before 1.00 pm, time of the Sultanate, on Monday, 11 Oct 2021.
 - Each bid should be accompanied with a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) of the total bid value and valid for a period of (90) days from the last date for submission of offers, addressed to the "Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee". Tenders that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered.
 - NSS is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
 - Registration of the bidders to be done through the company Tender website (www.nama.om).
 - Interested party to deposit Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) on: Account Name: Nama Shared Services, Bank Muscat: 0423-048027270-017 Corporate Branch (Bidder name and Tender Number to be clearly mentioned). Tender Documents will be received by email.
 - The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 1.00 pm.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.


نماء للخدمات المشتركة
Nama Shared Services

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Syrian army steps up offensive on rebel enclave

AMMAN: Syrian elite forces aided by militias stepped up an offensive against a rebel enclave in a southwestern pocket bordering Jordan and Israel, according to residents, military and opposition sources.

Fighting escalated earlier this week after the collapse of a Russian peace plan meant to avert an all-out offensive against Deraa al Balaad, the core of the city of Deraa that has defied state authority since surrounding Deraa province was recaptured by President Bashar al Assad's forces in 2018.

Witnesses and military sources said dozens of improvised missiles were fired into Deraa al Balaad by the Syrian military's pro-Iranian Fourth Division, which is backed by local militias.

A halt to fighting was announced after Russian generals offered a new plan that appeared to meet some of

the rebel demands to involve the Russian military police in patrolling the enclave while allowing for the first time a Syrian army security presence in the stronghold.

Rebels said they accepted the plan while the army said it would give its response by Wednesday to the deal that also allows the Syrian and Russian flags to be raised in the opposition bastion but gives Moscow's guarantees that Iranian-backed army units cannot act with impunity.

Army sources said troops that have encircled the urban rebel enclave for the last two months and which brought forward reinforcements on Monday would be withdrawn under the deal.

Deraa al Balaad was the birthplace of peaceful protests against Assad family rule that broke out a decade ago — part of the pro-democracy Arab Spring



A Russian soldier uses a binocular during a patrol in the Syrian district of Deraa al Balaad in Syria's southern province of Deraa, on Wednesday. — AFP

uprisings — before spreading in response to deadly crackdowns by security forces and morphing into a devastating civil war.

The latest army campaign came amid a spate of attacks over the past 24 hours by remnants of rebel groups on army checkpoints and outposts in Dael, Jasem and other towns across Deraa province, opposition sources and residents said.

A Western intelligence source said several thousand families in towns caught in the crossfire had fled to safer areas near the Jordanian border where the Jordanian army was on alert for a possible new wave of refugees.

The Syrian army said at least four soldiers were killed in ambushes on troops in the towns of Sanameen and Nawa, and that rebel shelling had caused several casualties in residential areas.

Government forces, aided by Russian air power and militias, retook Deraa province in 2018, and Moscow assured Israel and the United States at the time that it would prevent militias from encroaching on the border zone.

That deal forced thousands of Western-backed rebels to hand over heavy weapons but kept Assad's forces from entering Deraa al Balaad, whose administration remained in opposition hands.

Pro-Assad forces have prevented food, medical and fuel supplies from reaching Deraa al Balaad but have opened a corridor for civilians to leave, according to local officials and residents.

The US and its allies have voiced concern about Syrian military campaign in Deraa, which they say is challenging Russia's pledge to maintain stability and rein in militias hostile to Israel. — Reuters

Lebanon's 'new poor' pull children out of private school

BEIRUT: Roula Mrad wanted to give her children a head start in life with a private education, but Lebanon's economic crisis is forcing her to move them to the substandard state system.

"My children have always been educated privately," said Mrad, who works at the finance ministry.

But "now we can no longer afford that privilege."

She is just one of thousands of newly impoverished parents in the Mediterranean country pulling their children out of private classrooms because they can no longer pay the fees.

More than 90,000 Lebanese students have already been moved since the crisis broke out in 2019, says the education ministry, which is bracing itself for many more when schools start re-opening from September 27.

Since 2019, Lebanon's financial meltdown, one on the planet's worst since the 1850s, has decimated the country's middle class. Entire families have seen their savings all but vanish and salaries dwindle to barely a tenth of their previous dollar values.

The UN says poverty now affects more than three quarters of the population.

Unable to keep up with ever-rising private school fees, last year Mrad moved her eldest son to a state facility to finish his last year of high school.

The move slashed 18-year-old



Lebanese pupil Rayan Mrad, 14, plays a video game at home in Beirut. — AFP

Rawad's fees from around \$3,000 a year to just \$170 — and suddenly the books were free.

This year his 14-year-old brother Rayan will follow suit. But the family will try desperately to keep their youngest daughter in the private system a little longer.

Sami Makhoulf, a 55-year-old plumber, says he used to spend the equivalent of \$13,000 a year on private education for his four children. But as his earnings plummeted last year, he was forced to uproot the whole family from a Beirut suburb back to his home village in Lebanon's east. He says

life is cheaper in the village of Qaa, where he has planted a vegetable garden and enrolled his children at a government school.

"This crisis has decimated the middle class," Makhoulf said.

"We've become the new poor."

The coronavirus pandemic has compounded the problem.

More than a million children in Lebanon have been out of school since Covid-19 arrived in Lebanon in February 2020, according to aid group Save the Children.

Now the country is set to return to nationwide in-classroom learning, after months of battling

to implement distance learning despite petrol shortages and never-ending power cuts. The education ministry says it is doing its best to adapt.

With international assistance, it has provided solar panels to 122 schools and hopes to equip 80 more soon, caretaker education minister Tarek Majzoub said last week.

Hilda Khoury, who heads the ministry's counselling and guidance department, said the influx of new students from the private sector was a "huge challenge". — AFP

Covid vaccine mandates boost uptake among Palestinians

GAZA: After mandating vaccinations for workers and many students — and offering prize money — to nudge a sceptical public to get the jab, Palestinian officials report a big boost in vaccine uptake they hope will stem a surge in Covid-19 infections.

Officials in Gaza and the Israeli-occupied West Bank announced the new rules last week after many shunned the vaccine due to misinformation online — even as authorities accumulated enough doses to cover most Palestinians over 12.

In addition to mandating jabs for public sector workers and those in jobs dealing with the public, as well as teachers and students above 15, Gaza now offers a chance at \$200 — a hefty sum for Palestinians in the impoverished territory — to anyone over 50 who gets inoculated. Ten winners are chosen daily.

More Palestinians in Gaza have taken the vaccine in the past week — some 133,000 — than in the entire six-month period prior, health ministry spokesman Ashraf al Qidra said. The West Bank has registered a similar jump in vaccinations.

Samer al Asad, a Palestinian Authority (PA) health ministry

Gaza now offers a chance at \$200 to anyone over 50 who gets inoculated

official in the West Bank, attributed the increased uptake to "people's desire to go back to normal life... The vaccine is the only and shortest way to curb the spread of the virus."

Despite the recent boost, however, just 19.5 per cent of Palestinians in Gaza and 41 per cent in the West Bank are vaccinated, according to PA health ministry data. Officials privately worry the current increases will eventually taper off.

New infections in the West Bank and Gaza have surged since the global emergence of the highly infectious Delta variant of the coronavirus.

PA health officials began administering vaccines in West Bank schools this week to keep up the momentum.

At one school in the village of Dura, near Hebron, 11th-grader Youssef Sharif said he trusted the science behind the jab. "Scientists won't do anything unless they are sure of it. In my opinion, everyone should get vaccinated," he said.

— Reuters

SHORT TAKES

NICOSIA

Syrian oil spill moves away from northern Cyprus

An oil slick spreading from a Syrian power plant pulled away from the breakaway north of the Mediterranean island of Cyprus on Wednesday thanks to shifting winds.

The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) has been watching for days as an estimated 20,000 tonnes of fuel oil drifts towards the region's northeastern tip. Emergency workers tried to contain the spillage by roping it off with booms tossed from ships some 28



km off the shore. Top ministers had warned that at least some of the oil could reach the scenic Karpaz peninsula on Friday. But they sounded more positive after noticing that winds had begun pushing the oil back up north and away from the coast.

SANAA

3 explosive drones destroyed over Yemen

The Saudi-led coalition fighting Yemen's Ansar Allah group said it had intercepted three explosive-laden drones over Yemen on Wednesday, a day after shrapnel from a drone destroyed over Saudi Arabia wounded eight and damaged a civilian plane.

The three drones, intercepted and destroyed in Yemeni airspace, had been fired by Ansar Allah and were aimed at civilian targets, according to coalition statements reported by Saudi television channels Al Arabiya



and Ekhbariya.

The Saudi-led coalition said on Tuesday it intercepted a drone targeting Abha International Airport, scattering shrapnel in the vicinity of the airport in southern Saudi Arabia which wounded people and damaged a plane.

CAIRO

Egypt ramps up local vaccine production

Egypt is ramping up production of the Sinovac coronavirus vaccine as it aims to become a hub for vaccine exports to Africa and protect its own population of more than 100 million from a fourth wave of infections.

The government is preparing new facilities that it says could produce several million vaccine doses daily, and is also in talks with an unspecified European vaccine producer.

"We are currently in discussions with other companies because it is important to us that we diversify our sources, and hopefully soon we will announce our partnership with a European company," said Dr Heba Wali, president of the state-run Holding Company for Biological Products and Vaccines (VACSERA).



In brief

■ SINGAPORE



SINGAPORE PM AWARDED \$275,000 IN DEFAMATION DAMAGES

Singapore's prime minister was awarded more than a quarter of a million dollars in damages on Wednesday after winning defamation suits against a news website editor and writer, the latest libel cases brought by the leader.

Critics say such lawsuits are among a range of tactics employed by the tightly regulated city-state to silence dissent.

Terry Xu, chief editor of the Online Citizen Asia, and a writer for the site were accused of defaming Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in two separate lawsuits.

■ MOSCOW



PUTIN SAYS US PRESENCE IN AFGHANISTAN ENDED IN 'TRAGEDIES'

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday that the United States' 20-year campaign in Afghanistan ended in "only tragedies, only losses."

The Russian leader has a track record of criticising Western countries for trying to impose their values on non-Western nations.

Moscow has regularly slammed the US policy in Afghanistan, which is now controlled by the Taliban after their takeover this month ahead of the American pullout on August 31. Putin said that the US army tried to "engrain their norms" in war-ravaged Afghanistan for two decades, which he characterised as a futile exercise.

■ TOKYO



JAPAN FINDS ANOTHER MODERNA VIAL CONTAMINATED

Japan reported a fresh contamination case involving Moderna's Covid-19 vaccine, the fourth such incident in less than a week, threatening to slow the country's sputtering inoculation campaign.

Kanagawa prefecture said several black particles in one Moderna vaccine vial were found upon checking for foreign substances before its use, and it has put the rest of the lot on hold. Japan suspended the use of 1.63 million doses of Moderna shots last week after being notified of contamination in some of the supply. Moderna and Spanish pharma company Rovi, which bottles Moderna vaccines, have said the cause could be a manufacturing issue, and European safety regulators have launched an investigation.

Taliban parade as Biden defends US pullout

KABUL: The Taliban prepared on Wednesday to stage a parade showcasing some of the military hardware they captured during their takeover of Afghanistan, after President Joe Biden defended his decision to end the two-decade war.

The group celebrated the US withdrawal, which was completed on Monday, as a major victory after taking control of Afghanistan last month following a bloody insurgency. A long line of green Humvees idled in single file on a highway outside Kandahar, the spiritual birthplace of the militant movement, many with white-and-black Taliban flags attached to aerials, an AFP journalist saw.

In footage posted on a pro-Taliban account of the build-up of the parade, a helicopter flew overhead, trailing the Taliban's standard beneath it as fighters wrapped in headscarves waved beneath. At least one Black Hawk helicopter has been seen flying over Kandahar in recent days, suggesting someone from the former Afghan army was at the controls as the Taliban lack qualified pilots.

The United Nations warned, meanwhile, of a looming "humanitarian catastrophe", underscoring the daunting challenges that the Taliban face as they transform from insurgent group to governing power. US President Joe Biden was nonetheless defiant.

"This is the right decision. A wise decision. And the best decision for America," Biden said in an address to the nation.

For America, Biden argued, the only choice was "leaving or escalating."



Taliban walk in front of a military airplane a day after the US troops withdrawal from Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Tuesday. — Reuters

The president, who has been savaged by critics for his handling of the withdrawal which saw the US and its allies evacuate more than 122,000 in just over two weeks, as an "extraordinary success."

"No nation has ever done anything like it in all of history; only the United States had the capacity and the will and ability to do it," he said.

All eyes will now turn to how the Taliban handle their first few days with sole authority over the country, with a sharp focus on whether they will allow free departure for those wanting to leave — including some foreigners.

The US has said that "under

For America, Biden said the only choice was 'leaving or escalating'

200" of its citizens remain in the country, and Britain said the number of UK nationals inside was in the "low hundreds."

Thousands of Afghans who worked with the US-backed government over the years and fear retribution still want to get out.

Talks are ongoing as to who will now run Kabul airport,

which German Chancellor Angela Merkel warned was of "existential importance" as a lifeline for aid.

Qatar meanwhile urged the Taliban to ensure "safe passage" for people still desperate to flee. Many Afghans are terrified of a repeat of the Taliban's initial rule from 1996-2001, which was infamous for their treatment of women and girls, as well as a brutal justice system.

The group has repeatedly promised a more tolerant brand of governance compared with their first stint in power.

But UN chief Antonio Guterres expressed his "grave concern at the deepening humanitarian and economic crisis in the country,"

adding that basic services threatened to collapse "completely." He pleaded for financial support from the international community for the war-ravaged country, which is dependent on foreign aid.

Authorities from several countries have already begun meeting with Taliban leadership, the latest being India.

Qatar's Foreign Minister, Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani, urged the Taliban to combat terrorism after the US withdrawal, and called for an inclusive government. The US-led airlift began as the Taliban completed an astonishing rout of government forces around the country and took over the capital on August 15.

The withdrawal came just before the August 31 deadline set by Biden to end the war, which began with a US-led invasion that ousted the Taliban in the wake of 9/11, but later reached a stalemate on the battlefield with the resurgent militants.

The conflict has claimed the lives of tens of thousands of Afghans and more than 2,400 American service members.

The evacuation was complicated by a threat from the regional offshoot of the Islamic State group, rivals of the Taliban.

Thirteen US troops were among more than 100 people killed when an IS suicide bomber attacked the perimeter of the airport, where desperate Afghans had massed in the hope of boarding an evacuation flight. Biden said on Tuesday that the United States would continue the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan and other countries, and warned IS: "We are not done with you yet." — AFP

Warnings as Southeast Asia's biggest economies ease Covid-19 curbs

JAKARTA: As Indonesia and Thailand start to ease Covid-19 curbs after seeing case numbers fall, health experts say cases of new infections could rise again with vaccination rates still low. After containing the coronavirus better than much of the world last year, Southeast Asia has turned into a global epicentre in recent months with the arrival of the virulent Delta variant.

Although case numbers are still rising fast in most of the region, Indonesia and Thailand, which have its largest economies, have started to lift curbs on dine-in restaurants and shopping malls to ease the economic pain of their lockdowns.

Indonesia reported 10,534 new cases on Tuesday, five times fewer than its peak in mid-July, while Thailand reported 14,802 new cases on Wednesday, down 37 per cent from its mid-August peak.

However, experts said relaxations carried dangers with a low level of vaccination and a shortage of testing, with rates of positive tests often above the 5 per cent recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

"We are definitely concerned around the reopening without meeting all the criteria proposed by the WHO," Abhishek Rimal, Asia Pacific Emergency Health Coordinator at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, said.

"Now with the Delta variant, which is highly transmissible, and



A teacher gestures in a classroom at a school after some schools reopened following restrictions due to Covid-19 in Jakarta on Wednesday. — AFP

the low vaccination rate, we could very well see a surge of Covid-19 in days to come."

Indonesia has recently had a positive test rate of 12 per cent and Thailand 34 per cent.

"Surveillance is not that great, we still need to be careful," said Tri Yunis Miko Wahyono, a University of Indonesia epidemiologist.

Indonesia has recorded more than 4 million coronavirus cases in total and more than 133,000 deaths from Covid-19 since the start of the pandemic. Thailand has reported 11,841 deaths and 1.2 million cases.

The two countries both have first vaccination rates at around 30 per cent with Indonesia having fully vaccinated 17 per cent and Thailand 11 per cent. Their capitals, Jakarta and Bangkok,

have much higher levels of vaccination.

In Jakarta and some areas on the populous Java island, restaurants inside shopping malls could have a 50 per cent dine-in capacity, and shopping malls could stay open until 9 pm, while factories are permitted to operate at 100 per cent capacity.

Bangkok and 28 other provinces listed as having the most severe outbreaks can similarly reopen dine-in restaurants at a capacity between 50-75 per cent, with opening hours capped at 8 pm, the same as shopping malls.

"The situation is getting better because many people are getting vaccinated and they are being more cautious," said restaurant customer Orrapin Peenane, queuing in Bangkok. — Reuters

Australia aims to 'live with virus' instead of eliminating it

SYDNEY: Australian authorities on Wednesday extended the Covid-19 lockdown in Melbourne for another three weeks, as they shift their focus to rapid vaccination drives and move away from a suppression strategy to bring cases down to zero.

Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews flagged a staggered easing of the tough restrictions once 70 per cent of the state's adult residents receive at least one dose, a milestone he hopes to reach at least by September 23, based on current vaccination rates.

"We have thrown everything at this, but it is now clear to us that we are not going to drive these numbers down, they are instead going to increase," Andrews told reporters in Melbourne, the state capital, after a lockdown for nearly a month failed to quell the outbreak. The lockdown was due to end on Thursday.

"We got to buy time to allow vaccinations to be undertaken all the while doing this very hard work, this very painful and difficult work, to keep a lid as much as we can on cases."

New local cases jumped

We got to buy time to allow vaccinations to be undertaken all the while doing this very hard work, this very painful and difficult work, to keep a lid as much as we can on cases

DANIEL ANDREWS
Victorian Premier

to 120 in Victoria from 76 a day earlier. Of the new cases, 100 have spent time in the community while infectious.

Neighbouring New South Wales state, home to Sydney, on Wednesday brought forward its target date to fully vaccinate 70 per cent of people above 16 to the middle of next month from the initial target of the end of October, as outbreaks spurred a surge in inoculation.

"No matter where you live, life will be much, much better, much freer, as long as you're vaccinated at 70 per cent," Berejiklian told reporters. — Reuters

Hurricane Ida could become costliest weather disaster: UN



A sign for the 17th Street Canal Floodwall, the largest and most important drainage canal is seen in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Ida. — AFP

GENEVA: Hurricane Ida, which slammed into the US Gulf Coast at the weekend, could become the costliest weather disaster on record, the UN said Wednesday, hailing though that prevention measures had dramatically limited casualties.

Louisiana and Mississippi are still taking stock of the disaster inflicted by the powerful Category 4 storm that hit exactly 16 years after Hurricane Katrina made landfall and devastated the area.

Ida is known to have killed four people, although the death toll is expected to rise, and knocked out power for more than a million properties across Louisiana.

“There is a chance that the economic cost will be higher than Katrina,” Petteri Taalas, who heads the UN’s World Meteorological Organization (WMO), told reporters in Geneva. He pointed as an illustration to the “major damage to the electric system in Louisiana.”

Until now, Katrina, which killed more than 1,800 people and destroyed large parts of New Orleans, had been considered by far the costliest weather-related disaster.

A fresh WMO report that examined mortality and economic losses from weather, climate and water extremes between 1970 and 2019, found that Katrina had raked in nearly \$164 billion in economic losses. — AFP

Jury selection starts in Theranos founder’s fraud trial

SAN JOSE: Fallen biotech star Elizabeth Holmes was in court Tuesday as jury selection began for her fraud trial in a case that rocked Silicon Valley.

Dressed in her trademark black clothing and wearing a blue mask due to the pandemic, the founder of the former high-flying startup Theranos took in the proceedings from a seat at the defence table in the federal courtroom in San Jose, California.

Holmes, 37, was a tech world celebrity whose multibillion-dollar start-up looked set to revolutionise medical testing before it crashed and burned in a blaze of fraud claims.

She and former Theranos chief operating officer Ramesh “Sunny” Balwani, whom she dated for a time, are charged with conspiring to swindle Theranos investors and customers.

Holmes and Balwani are having separate trials, and recently disclosed documents indicate she plans to contend that she was abused and controlled by her former business partner.

Holmes’s attorney Kevin Downey asked whether anyone in the jury pool had experience with “abuse by an intimate partner,” signalling the possibility the defence plans to raise the issue.

Meanwhile, prosecutor Jeffrey Schenk of the US Attorney’s Office asked whether anyone had experiences with medical professionals that might skew



Elizabeth Holmes, the founder and former CEO of Theranos, arrives for the first day of jury selection in her fraud trial, in San Jose, California. — AFP

their testimony in court.

Holmes faces charges of wire fraud and conspiracy to commit wire fraud that, if found guilty, could see her jailed for up to 20 years.

US district court judge Edward Davila expected to whittle down potential jurors before seating a panel of 12 who will be entrusted to decide Holmes’s fate in a trial likely to last at least 13 weeks.

Through the morning, juror after a juror told of seeing either a news article, documentary, book, or headline about the Theranos

Holmes was a tech world celebrity whose multibillion dollar start-up looked set to revolutionise medical testing before it crashed and burned in a blaze of fraud claims

saga. Davila pressed each person regarding whether they could still weigh the evidence without bias, getting assurances that would be

the case.

When she launched the diagnostics company Theranos in 2003, at the age of just 19, the charismatic Holmes promised results that were faster and cheaper than traditional laboratories, running an analytical gamut on just a few drops of blood.

Political figures like Henry Kissinger and former defence secretary James Mattis were drawn to the company’s board and media mogul Rupert Murdoch invested cash in what seemed to be a sure-fire winner. — AFP

Johnson says UK owes ‘huge debt’ to Afghan refugees

LONDON: Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Wednesday said Britain owed “an immense debt” to Afghans who worked with Nato forces as he announced “vital support” for those resettling in the UK.

But his government is coming under fire after thousands of Afghans who helped Nato and are eligible to move to Britain under the “Relocations and Assistance Policy (Arap)” were believed to be have been left stranded in Afghanistan, where they are at the mercy of the Taliban.

More than 8,000 did make it out, and the government announced on Wednesday that they will be given immediate indefinite leave to remain and that £15 million would be provided for additional school places and to support access to the health service.

“We owe an immense debt

Britain has opened talks with the Taliban over the ‘safe passage’ of its remaining nationals and allies out of Afghanistan

to those who worked with the Armed Forces in Afghanistan and I am determined that we give them and their families the support they need to rebuild their lives here in the UK,” Johnson said of the so-called “Operation Warm Welcome” measures.

“I know this will be an incredibly daunting time, but I hope they will take heart from the wave of support and generosity already expressed by the British public.”

The government said the measures “will give Afghans the certainty and stability to rebuild their lives with unrestricted rights



Britain’s Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab visit The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Crisis Centre in London. — Reuters

to work and the option to apply for British citizenship in the future.”

But current and former officials have condemned the government, suggesting many more could have been rescued.

The Observer on Sunday cited a whistleblower as saying thousands of emails from MPs and charities to the foreign ministry highlighting specific Afghans at risk from the Taliban takeover went unopened.

Foreign minister Dominic Raab has already been strongly criticised for not immediately leaving a beach holiday when the Taliban took control. An unnamed minister also told the Sunday Times that “I suspect we could have taken out 800-1,000 more people.”

Alongside Arap, Britain also has a resettlement scheme for Afghans fleeing from their home country, with around 5,000 expected this year alone and 20,000 in total.

Resettlement minister Victoria Atkins on Wednesday told Sky News that it was not yet decided whether those arriving under this scheme would get indefinite leave to remain. Raab faces a tough hearing before the Foreign Affairs Committee on Wednesday, when he will be grilled by MPs over the chaotic withdrawal.

Announcing the evidence session, Chair of the Foreign Affairs

Committee Tom Tugendhat said that “the last two weeks have been tough for so many of us: anger, shame, even incredulity”.

“We never thought we would see the day Nato forces, led by the US, would turn their backs on the people of Afghanistan.

“How will we deal with the Taliban? How will Afghanistan shape our regional strategy? How will the government hold the Taliban to account for reverses in human rights?”

“These questions, and so many others, will be put to the Foreign Secretary.”

Britain has opened talks with the Taliban over the “safe passage” of its remaining nationals and allies out of Afghanistan. The government confirmed to AFP it has dispatched senior civil servant Simon Gass to meet with Taliban representatives in Doha. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

MOSCOW

Putin says fulfilled dream to serve Russia

President Vladimir Putin said he has fulfilled his childhood dream of serving Russia as he spoke to teenagers to mark the start of the new school year. “Everything was aimed at — and I have to speak pompously in this case — devoting myself to serving the Fatherland,” Putin said during the televised meeting in the Russian far eastern city of Vladivostok.

“And today I am doing just that and I believe that in this sense I managed to achieve what



I dreamed of,” Putin, 68, added.

Putin, a former KGB agent, has been president since 2000, apart from briefly serving as prime minister between 2008 and 2012. — AFP

PARIS

French train robbed; haul heavy on decorations

A gang forced a train to halt in central France this week so they could steal cargo from the wagons, but might have been four months ahead of themselves, as their haul consisted mainly of Christmas decorations.

Police said on Wednesday they have opened a probe after thieves interfered with the signals to stop the train on Tuesday, according to La Montagne newspaper. When the train restarted, the brakes jammed, prompting the driver



to run the length of the train. In the end, he heard sounds and saw several people opening four containers with a handheld power tool. They fled before the police arrived. — dpa

VATICAN CITY

Pope says never considered resigning after surgery

Pope Francis said the idea of resigning following his surgery earlier this year “didn’t even cross my mind”, in an interview broadcast. Rumours that the 84-year-old pontiff was considering stepping down were recently reported in Italian media, seemingly sparked by his hospitalisation following an operation on his colon in July.

“I don’t know where they got it from last week that I was going to resign!” he told Spanish radio Cope in an interview, saying that



“it didn’t even cross my mind”. “Whenever a pope is ill, there is always a breeze or a hurricane of the conclave,” he added, referring to the meeting of cardinals called to elect a new pope. — AFP

Drying Euphrates threatens disaster in Syria

DELIL SOULEIMAN AND ALICE HACKMAN

Syria's longest river used to flow by his olive grove, but today Khaled al Khamees says it has receded into the distance, parching his trees and leaving his family with hardly a drop to drink.

"It's as if we were in the desert," said the 50-year-old farmer, standing on what last year was the Euphrates riverbed.

"We're thinking of leaving because there's no water left to drink or irrigate the trees."

Aid groups and engineers are warning of a looming humanitarian disaster in northeast Syria, where waning river flow is compounding woes after a decade of war.

They say plummeting water levels at hydroelectric dams since January are threatening water and power cutoffs for up to five million Syrians, in the middle of a coronavirus pandemic and economic crisis.

As drought grips the Mediterranean region, many in the Kurdish-held area are accusing neighbour Turkey of weaponising water by tightening the tap upstream, though a Turkish source denied this.

Outside the village of Rumayleh where Khamees lives, black irrigation hoses lay in dusty coils after the river receded so far it became too expensive to operate the water pumps. Instead, much closer to the water's edge, Khamees and neighbours were busy planting corn and beans in soil just last year submerged under the current.

The father of 12 said he had not seen the river so far away from the village in decades.

"The women have to walk seven km just to get a bucket of water for their children to drink", he said.

Reputed to have once flown through the biblical Garden of Eden, the Euphrates runs for almost 2,800 km across Turkey, Syria and Iraq.

In times of rain, it gushes into northern Syria through the Turkish border, and flows diagonally across the war-torn country towards Iraq.

Along its way, it irrigates swathes of land in Syria's breadbasket, and runs through three hydroelectric dams that provide power and drinking water to millions. But over the past eight months the river has contracted to a sliver, sucking precious water out of reservoirs and increasing the risk of dam turbines grinding to a halt.

At the Tishrin Dam, the first into which the river falls inside Syria, Director Hammoud al Hadiyyeen described an "alarming" drop in water levels not seen since the dam's completion in 1999. "It's a humanitarian catastrophe", he said. — AFP



It's as if we were in the desert. We're thinking of leaving because there's no water left to drink or irrigate the trees

KHALED AL KHAMEES

A Syrian farmer



A PLASTIC RAIN COAT!

A cyclist covers himself with a plastic sheet during a downpour in Faridabad, India, on Wednesday. — AFP

Economic cooperation between Oman and Saudi to benefit region



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THE VISIT OF THE SAUDI DELEGATION IS BEING CONSIDERED A POSITIVE STEP TOWARDS ECONOMIC COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES

The recent visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Saudi Arabia, and the agreements signed during this visit, are very important in terms of bilateral cooperation and dependence on each other in economic development. The visit of the Saudi Minister of Investment Khalid bin Abdulaziz al Falih to Oman is an embodiment of what has been agreed upon between the two leaderships to push the wheel of economic, industrial and tourism cooperation ahead. What has been decided by the two leading countries needs concerted efforts by the people to meet their aspirations in shortest possible time. It is the vision of His Majesty the Sultan and the Saudi King which has charted the course to achieve prosperity in the region in near future.

This visit is considered an advanced step to harness the potentials of the two countries for more cooperation and joint efforts to achieve mutual objectives. This is expected to open more horizons for both the brotherly countries. Now it is the turn of the private sector in Oman and Saudi Arabia to use the opportunity for investments in the areas of mutual interests so that it can address the aspirations of the two governments. This is how the vision of diversification of the economy can become a reality.

The business delegation from the neighbouring country led by the Saudi minister was in Muscat in less than two months after the visit of His Majesty the

Sultan to Saudi Arabia. This swift action shows the extent of attention being paid by the authorities concerned of the two countries to follow the path set by their leaders.

There are all signals that the approach decided by the leadership is being brought to action. This will certainly open more horizons of expansion and strengthening of the relations between the two economic giants of the region. Soon, we would see that they would open more opportunities for each other in all areas to expand their ambit of investments.

The visit of the Saudi delegation is being seen with interest at all levels. This is being considered a positive step towards economic cooperation between the two countries. There are lot of virtues stored in these actions and activities which are patronised by the top leadership of the two brotherly countries. Wider horizons of cooperation and joint efforts are opening for the private sectors of the two countries. It is their turn to show how they grab these opportunities. The ball is now in their court.

During the visit, the Saudi delegation visited Rusayl and Duqm industrial and special economic zones. This is an indication of their intention to invest in various industrial sectors. As part of this activity, 150 projects worth RO 1.5 billion were offered for investors from Saudi. These meetings and visits have generated hope for more cooperation. Under encouraging rules and regulations, the

two countries would take the advantage of the investment opportunities in manufacturing, production and services sectors.

The geostrategic location of Oman in the Arabian Sea, the Strait of Hormuz and the Indian Ocean is expected to help cooperation in the areas of oil, gas, petrochemicals and minerals. There are many such areas in the country which require investments.

Food security is one of the most important areas of cooperation. It is expected to get more attention because there is a mutual interest in this area. The diversity of agriculture, fisheries and livestock in the two countries can be jointly harnessed to ensure food security.

The road linking the two countries will support cooperation in logistics making import and export easy. Naturally, Saudi Arabia and Oman would move ahead with plans to further cooperation in electricity and power. Saudi companies already have some investments in the area. The entire Gulf region can benefit from Saudi-Oman cooperation in this sector.

The cooperation between the two countries will obviously make way for small and medium enterprises. It will encourage entrepreneurship and innovations as well as create more opportunities for mutual investments in such projects. Going hand in hand and making joint efforts in the areas of mutual interests is always beneficial.

Banking obligations of individuals and small companies



Haider al Lawati
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THE PANDEMIC HAS RESULTED IN THE CLOSURE OF MANY BUSINESSES AND THIS HAS RESULTED IN LOSS OF JOBS

Nobody denies that the pandemic caused the closure of many commercial establishments around the world, in addition to layoff of workers who were working in many local and foreign companies. As a result of these, workers in those institutions were unable to fulfil their monthly banking obligations, while some merchants and entrepreneurs, especially small ones, failed to pay monthly instalments towards loans they received from banking institutions due to the closure of businesses for a long period.

This has affected the citizens of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries to varying degree too, according to the decisions of the epidemic control committees

and their understanding of this matter. These matters are not taken into account that people depend on their livelihood by operating their small enterprises. Also, it was not to mention the inability of laid-off companies to pay their monthly instalments to banks on time, which has led to an increase in court cases.

This does not mean that only these people have been harmed, but also the banks have seen fall in profits since 2020. But many young entrepreneurs suffered losses due to the decisions they took regarding bad debts as a result of the bankruptcy of some institutions, while there are cases which are being discussed in the courts against individuals and

institutions because of failure to pay monthly instalments for loans.

The pandemic which is still affecting the world and the closures resulted from it have led to the loss of many people's businesses and jobs, and this has led to high cost of risk in the world, with the decline in profitability of banks during the past two years.

As the countries in the region continue to improve their financial and economic conditions and work to speed up vaccination of their citizens, along with the improvement in oil prices, this will lead to an improvement in state institutions and banks as well.

Consequently, cases of bad debts and indebtedness will decline as well, which will reflect positively on the results of banks during the next stage.

Most of the banks in the region have previously stopped asking their customers to pay monthly instalments for a period of six months, but many of them are still suffering from debts, and this requires another decision from the central banks to extend this facility for some more time.

The accumulated debts by people happened due to the promotion and marketing operations carried out by the banks in the region during the pre-pandemic stage. The banks were calling people and urging

them strongly to achieve their dreams by taking loans for any good, product or service, without appreciating the negative consequences in the event of non-payment of these loans. There has also been a confusion between personal loans and loans granted to commercial projects, so that some have exaggerated in obtaining them for private and recreational matters at the expense of commercial loans. This led to the accumulation of debts on some people and institutions in the region, not to mention the interest rates charged by banking institutions on these debts to increase the burdens of borrowers year after year.

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Oman lock horns with Japan today

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 1

Oman will take on heavyweights Japan in their opening match of group B at the deciding round qualifier to 2022 Fifa World Cup and 2023 AFC Asian Cup on Thursday. The match will be played at the Panasonic Suita Stadium at 14:10 (Muscat time).

The Red Warriors will look to end the tough encounter with a positive result that will encourage the team members to show their top performance in the remaining fixtures. Branko Ivankovic's heroes are all set for the crucial game as the team arrived to Osaka city on Saturday and had few training sessions after the long overseas preparatory camp in Serbia.

Head coach Ivankovic voiced confident to deliver top performance that will make Oman fans proud. "I can assure that the team players will do their level best to spread joy for Oman's community. We are pleased to be in this final round of qualifier. We are in a tough group that feature heavyweight teams who attended the Fifa World Cup many times," he said in a pre-match press conference on Wednesday.



TOUGH ASSIGNMENT

The 67-year-old affirmed that the fixture against Japan will be a tough assignment. "Japan is one of the top teams in Asia. I will not elaborate more about Japan's players. They have good experience," he added.

The Croatian coach said the team is fully ready for the match. "We had some injuries but all have recovered including Mohammed al Musallami, Mohsin al Ghassani and Ahmed al Kaabi. Serbia camp

was good and the team prepared well during the overseas gathering," he concluded.

The Sultanate goalkeeper Faye al Rushaidi said the match against Japan will not be an easy task but said the players will deliver their top performance. "In all the 90 minutes, we will fight for good show and implement all the technical outcomes of the Serbia camp," he said.

During the last warm-up sessions in Osaka, the technical

staff headed by the Croatian coach focused on the technical and tactical sides. Also, the players trained well for building proper harmony among all the lines, moving flexibly towards forward lines of the opponents and creating scoring attempts and converting into goals. All the sessions were done under full supervision of Ivankovic.

The head coach finalised the starting line-up for Japan match after the training sessions at

“
We had some injuries but all have recovered including Mohammed al Musallami, Mohsin al Ghassani and Ahmed al Kaabi. Serbia camp was good and the team prepared well during the overseas gathering

BRANKO IVANKOVIC
Oman head coach

FK Kolubara 4-0 in the opening preparatory encounter while in the second fixture, the Sultanate team edged Qatar club 1-0. In the third match, Oman romped to an easy 3-0 win against Spartak Subotica club. In the concluding fixture, Oman posted a 2-0 victory over Serbia's FK Vozdovac club.

OMAN'S CAMPAIGN

Oman's campaign in the final round of qualifier will feature a home game against GCC rivals Saudi Arabia on Tuesday at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. The Sultanate's delegation will return to Muscat on Friday and gear up for the Saudi match. Then, Branko's men will have an away game against Australia on October 7 and it will be followed with a home game against Vietnam on October 12. In November, the Red Warriors will travel to China for their match on November 11. Five days later, the national team will host Japan on November 16. Oman will meet Saudi Arabia in Riyadh on January 27 and then host Australia in Muscat on February 1. The penultimate fixture is an away tie against Vietnam on March 24 and then the concluding game against China at home on March 29.

In brief

KABUL



TALIBAN APPROVE AFGHANISTAN'S FIRST TEST SINCE TAKEOVER

The Taliban have approved Afghanistan's first cricket Test since their takeover, raising hopes that international matches will continue as usual under the new rule. "We have got approval to send the team to Australia," chief executive of the Afghanistan Cricket Board Hamid Shinwari said.

During their first stint in power, before they were ousted in 2001, the Taliban banned most forms of entertainment — including many sports — and stadiums were used as public execution venues.

The Test match, to be played in Hobart from November 27-December 1, was earlier scheduled for last year.

LONDON



INDIA VOW TO DENY ROOT FAST START AT OVAL

India have learnt their lessons against England's in-form captain Joe Root and are determined not to give him freebies early in his knock, bowling coach Bharat Arun said on the eve of the fourth Test at Oval from Thursday.

Root smashed three centuries in as many Tests and is comfortably the leading scorer in the five-Test series which remains level at 1-1.

Arun agreed to the suggestion that the otherwise tidy Indian bowlers might have fed an in-form batsman too many loose deliveries early in his knock to make things easy for him.

DHAKA



TAMIM OPTS OUT OF T20 WORLD CUP

Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal opted out of this year's Twenty20 World Cup in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Wednesday citing lack of game time as he continues to recover from a knee injury.

Tamim hurt his knee during the April-May tour of Sri Lanka but chief selector Minhajul Abedin was optimistic Bangladesh's one-day captain would regain his fitness ahead of the World Cup in October-November. "Game time is the biggest reason. I haven't been playing this format for a long time," Tamim, who played the last of his 78 T20 Internationals in March 2020, said. Bangladesh will play Scotland in their first opening round match on October 17 in Muscat.

TEAMMATE HAMED AL HARTHI REACHES 135KM CHECKPOINT

HAMDAN COMPLETES UTMB RACE IN FRANCE



Hamdan al Khatri during the UTMB 170 km race in France.

MUSCAT: Hamdan al Khatri, Oman's top trail runner, has completed the arduous 170 km UTMB race in Chamonix, France. He crossed the line in a time of 41 hours, 14 minutes and 41 seconds after recording an average speed of 4.17 km per hour throughout the race. Teammate Hamed al Harthi had to withdraw after 127 km and 32 hours of racing, just 45 km from the finish.

Exhausted but proud as he reached the end, Hamdan unfurled the Omani flag in celebration. He said, "It is not easy, a very technical race. The terrain is very different to training in Oman, with a different climate to contend with but I finished and I'm delighted."

The Omani pair, 31-year-old Hamdan and 62-year-old Hamed, were due to compete in last year's race but were forced to postpone the attempt due to Covid-19 and travel restrictions. Both had committed to training to prepare for the race despite the lack of competition.

Focused around the foothills of Mont-Blanc, this year's 170 km race course challenged the athletes with undulating terrain leading to sharp uphill portions taking the athletes up to 2,500 metres with a total of 10,000 of elevation gain. The event, described as 'a mythical race, a unique experience', featured nearly 10,000 runners and is considered the showpiece meet for trail-runners around the world. The race distance that both Hamdan and Hamed took part in saw around 2,300 participants.

WEALTH OF EXPERIENCE

Both athletes have accumulated a wealth of experience in trail running marathons, competing in the inaugural Oman by UTMB in 2018 and at a variety of races



Hamed al Harthi during the UTMB 170 km distance race.

around the world. Hamdan has raced at UTMB Mont Blanc in 2019, when he was the first and only Omani in the 100 km race. Hamed reached the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro earlier this year and has also competed in Oman by UTMB, in 2019, as well as Ushuaia by UTMB in Argentina in 2019.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Sultanate had gained a solid reputation as one of the world's newest and most exciting emerging sports and adventure destinations, with Oman by UTMB attracting athletes from around the world and an impressive local contingent to test themselves on a brand-new course. The rugged landscape and well-designed routes, which follow traditional trails between villages in the mountains, were popular with marathon runners in 2018 and 2019 with the and remained open for locals to use for training and tourism after the race as more Omani athletes look to discover their potential and explore the country by foot.

HAMDAN AL KHATRI OMAN TRAIL RUNNER

AT 170 KM UTMB RACE IN CHAMONIX
41 HOURS, 14 MINS, 41 SECS

AVERAGE SPEED
4.17 KMPH

Shakib shines in Bangladesh's first T20 win over NZ



Bangladesh's Shakib Al Hasan (L) plays a shot during the first T20 against New Zealand in Dhaka. — AFP

DHAKA: Shakib Al Hasan said Bangladesh's first Twenty20 international victory over New Zealand will boost their confidence after they skittled out the Kiwis for 60 in the opener on Wednesday.

Shakib returned figures of 2-10 and then made 25 as Bangladesh chased down their target in 15 overs to win by seven wickets and lead the five-match series 1-0 in Dhaka.

But it was the bowlers who set up victory with Mustafizur Rahman taking three to dismiss New Zealand for their joint-lowest T20 total — the same score against Sri Lanka in 2014 at Chattogram — in 16.5 overs.

Skipper Tom Latham and Henry Nicholls scored 18 each while the rest of the batters failed to get into double digits.

Spinners Nasum Ahmed, Shakib and pace bowler Mohammad Saifuddin took two wickets each. "Very good feeling to win the first match of the series, given the fact we've never won against New Zealand," said man of the match Shakib. "This win will boost our confidence. We've been bowling really well through the

Australia series and against New Zealand. Our batting is not up to the mark yet, but, having said that, the conditions are not easy for batting."

Bangladesh, who bowled out Australia for 62 last month to seal the T20 series 4-1 in Dhaka, took

down New Zealand for the lowest-ever total against them. Mahedi Hasan struck in the first over with debutant Rachin Ravindra out for a golden duck after being caught and bowled by the off-spinner.

Shakib bowled Will Young for five and left-arm spinner Nasum

then got two wickets in one over including Colin de Grandhomme, for one, to reduce New Zealand to 9-4. Latham, who is leading a second-string side without regular stars including Kane Williamson, and Nicholls put on 34 runs for the fifth wicket but Saifuddin broke

the stand with the captain's wicket to rattle New Zealand further.

"We knew it was going to be tough but we kept losing wickets at crucial times," said Latham. "For us, it's about finding a way in these conditions and try to assess what a good score is." — AFP

SCOREBOARD

NEW ZEALAND	
T Blundell b Nasum Ahmed	2
R Ravindra c and b Mahedi Hasan	0
W Young b Shakib Al Hasan	5
C de Grandhomme c M Naim b N Ahmed	1
T Latham c N Ahmed b M Saifuddin	18
H Nicholls c M Rahim b M Saifuddin	18
C McConchie b M Rahim b Shakib	0
D Bracewell c Mahedi b Mustafizur	5
A Patel b Mustafizur	3
B Tickner not out	3
J Duffy c M Saifuddin b Mustafizur	3
Extras (b2)	2
Total (all out, 16.5 overs) 60	
Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-7, 3-8, 4-9, 5-44, 6-45, 7-49, 8-52, 9-55	
Bowling: Mahedi 4-0-15-1, Nasum 2-0-5-2, Shakib 4-0-10-2, Mustafizur 2-5-0-13-3, Mahmudullah 2-0-8-0, Saifuddin 2-0-7-2	
BANGLADESH (TARGET 61)	
M Naim c Nicholls b McConchie	1
Liton Das st Latham b Patel	1
Shakib c Latham b Ravindra	25
Mushfigur not out	16
Mahmudullah not out	14
Extras (w5)	5
Total (3 wickets, 15 overs) 62	
Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-7, 3-37	
Bowling: Patel 4-0-7-1, McConchie 4-0-19-1, Ravindra 4-0-21-1, Duffy 1-0-3-0, Bracewell 1-0-3-0, Tickner 1-0-9-0	



Novak Djokovic of Serbia hits a forehand against Holger Vitus Nodskov Rune of Denmark. – USA Today Sports

DJOKOVIC

LAUNCHES SLAM QUEST WITH US OPEN WIN

NEW YORK: World number one Novak Djokovic won without playing his best to reach the second round of the US Open on Tuesday in his quest for a calendar-year Grand Slam and record 21st major title.

The 34-year-old Serbian star dominated much of the way in beating 18-year-old Danish qualifier Holger Rune 6-1, 6-7 (5/7), 6-2, 6-1 after two hours and 15 minutes in the night feature at Arthur Ashe Stadium.

“It wasn’t the best of my performances”, Djokovic said. “At the same time, he played well in the second set when it mattered and I didn’t serve well in the second set.”

History-chasing Djokovic, who has won eight of the past 12 Grand Slam events, will next face 121st-ranked Dutchman Tallon Griekspoor, a rival the top seed admitted he didn’t know much about.

“I know this court well”, Djokovic said. “Hopefully that’s going to help.”

Djokovic would complete the first men’s singles calendar-year Slam since Rod Laver in 1969 by winning the crown on the New York hardcourts.

He would also break the deadlock for all-time men’s Slam titles at 20 which he shares with Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, both absent due to injuries, as is

defending champion Dominic Thiem. Rune, ranked 145th, began cramping in the third set and struggled to finish.

“From the third or fourth game in the third set, he couldn’t move much”, Djokovic said. “You could see he struggled a lot. I feel for him.”

Djokovic won the first set in 26 minutes without facing a break point, fell behind 3-0 to start the second before battling into the tie-breaker, where Rune grabbed leads of 4-0 and 6-3. After two Djokovic service winners, he sent a backhand service return long to drop the set.

In the third set, Djokovic broke to lead 3-1 and Rune began getting treatments between games, grimacing at times and struggling to run for shots to the end.

ZVEREV STRETCHES STREAK

Earlier on Tuesday, Tokyo Olympic champion Alexander Zverev stretched his win streak to 12 matches and warned he has his eyes on denying Djokovic the Slam. Fourth seed Zverev, who beat Djokovic in an Olympic semi-final, dispatched American Sam Querrey 6-4, 7-5, 6-2.

“I hope in two weeks’ time I’ll be on an 18-match winning streak”, said Zverev, who would claim his first Grand Slam title if he creates such a run.

It wasn’t the best of my performance. At the same time, he played well in the second set when it mattered and I didn’t serve well in the second set

NOVAK DJOKOVIC
World No 1

The 24-year-old German, last year’s US Open runner-up, hit 18 aces and 40 winners while never facing a break point in advancing after an hour and 40 minutes.

“Novak is chasing history”, Zverev said. “But the young guys are going to try and get in the way of that. I’m going to try to give him a challenge as well.”

Zverev, who next faces Spain’s Albert Ramos-Vinolas, could face Djokovic in the semifinals.

“I hope I can keep the level up”, Zverev said. “To beat Novak here is going to be an extremely difficult task.”

QUALIFIER PULLS SHOCKER

French-born US qualifier Maxime Cressy fired 44 aces and saved four match points to upset Spanish ninth seed Pablo Carreno

Busta 5-7, 4-6, 6-1, 6-4, 7-6 (9/7).

After beating Djokovic for a Tokyo Olympic bronze medal, the Spaniard’s US Open ended slamming down his racquet in frustration.

“I’m really happy things are starting to pay off”, Cressy said.

World number one Ashleigh Barty, coming off wins at Wimbledon and Cincinnati, began her chase for back-to-back Slam titles by defeating Russian Vera Zvonareva 6-1, 7-6 (9/7).

“When my back was against the wall late in that buster, I came up with some really good stuff”, Barty said. The 25-year-old Australian next faces Denmark’s Clara Tauson as she goes for her sixth title of the year.

Japan’s Kei Nishikori, the 2014 US Open runner-up, eliminated Italy’s 113th-ranked Salvatore Caruso 6-1, 6-1, 5-7, 6-3. He next plays American Mackenzie McDonald with Djokovic a possible third-round opponent.

Italian sixth seed and Wimbledon runner-up Matteo Berrettini, a 2019 US Open semi-finalist, defeated France’s Jeremy Chardy 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (9/7), 6-3.

Canadian sixth seed Bianca Andreescu, the 2019 US Open winner who skipped last year’s event, struggled but outlasted Swiss Viktorija Golubic 7-5, 4-6, 7-5. — **AFP**

US OPEN FIRST ROUND RESULTS	
MEN: 1-Novak Djokovic (Srb) bt Holger Rune (DEN) 6-1, 6-7 (5/7), 6-2, 6-1; Tallon Griekspoor (Ned) bt Jan-Lennard Struff (Ger) 2-6, 7-6 (7/3), 4-6, 6-4, 7-5; Kei Nishikori (Jpn) bt Salvatore Caruso (Ita) 6-1, 6-1, 5-7, 6-3; Mackenzie McDonald (US) bt 27-David Goffin (Bel) 6-2, 7-5, 6-3; 21-Aslan Karatsev (Rus) bt Jaume Munar (Esp) 7-5, 1-6, 6-3, 6-2; Jordan Thompson (Aus) bt Gianluca Mager (Ita) 4-6, 6-3, 7-5, 2-6, 7-6 (7/3); Jenson Brooksby (US) bt Mikael Ymer (Swe) 7-5, 6-2, 5-7, 6-3; Taylor Fritz (US) bt 14-Alex de Minaur (AUS) 7-6 (7/4), 6-2, 1-6, 6-4; 10-Hubert Hurkacz (Pol) bt Egor Gerasimov (Blr) 6-3, 6-4, 6-3; Andreas Seppi (Ita) bt Márton Fucsovics (Hun) 2-6, 7-5, 6-4, 2-6, 7-6 (15/13); Denis Kudla (US) bt Laslo Djere (Srb) 4-6, 6-3, 7-5, 7-6 (7/4); Oscar Otte (Ger) bt 20-Lorenzo Sonego (Ita) 6-7 (8/10), 7-5, 6-4; Jack Sock (US) bt Yoshihito Nishioka (Jpn) 6-7 (5/7), 6-2, 6-4, 6-2; 31-Alexander Bublik (Kaz) bt Yannick Hanfmann (Ger) 6-0, 4-6, 6-2, 6-1; 17-Gael Monfils (Fra) bt Federico Coria (Arg) 6-3, 6-2, 6-2; Steve Johnson (US) bt Maximilian Marterer (Ger) 5-7, 7-6 (10/8), 7-6 (10/8), 6-3; Zachary Svajda (US) bt Marco Cecchinato (Ita) 7-6 (8/6), 5-7, 6-4, 6-4; 13-Jannik Sinner (Ita) bt Max Purcell (Aus) 6-4, 6-2, 4-6, 6-2; Maxime Cressy (US) bt 9-Pablo Carreño-Busta (Esp) 5-7, 4-6, 6-1, 6-4, 7-6 (9/7); Nikoloz Basilashvili (Geo) bt Sebastian Korda (US) 6-2, 2-1, retired; Lorenzo Musetti (Ita) bt Emilio Nava (US) 6-7 (5/7), 6-4, 6-1, 6-3; 22-Reilly Opelka (US) bt Kwon Soon-woo (Kor) 7-6 (7/3), 6-4, 6-4; Lloyd Harris (RSA) bt 25-Karen Khachanov (Rus) 6-4, 1-6, 4-6, 6-3, 6-2; Ernesto Escobedo (US) bt Pablo Cuevas (URU) 6-1, 6-3, 6-1; Roberto Carballés (Esp)	bt Tommy Paul (US) 7-6 (7/5), 6-2, 1-6, 6-3; 7-Denis Shapovalov (Can) bt Federico Del Bonis (Arg) 6-2, 6-2, 6-3
WOMEN 1-Ashleigh Barty (Aus) bt Vera Zvonareva (Rus) 6-1, 7-6 (9/7); Clara Tauson (Den) bt Clara Burel (Fra) 7-5, 6-0; Shelby Rogers (US) bt Madison Brengle (US) 6-4, 6-0; Sorana Cirstea (Rom) bt 29-Veronika Kudermetova (Rus) 7-6 (7/5), 3-6, 6-0; Sara Sorribes (Esp) bt 22-Karolína Muchová (Cze) 6-2, 7-6 (7/3); Hsieh Su-wei (Tpe) bt Claire Liu (USA) 6-1, 6-4; Zhang Shuai (Chn) bt Hailey Baptiste (US) 6-3, 6-4; Emma Raducanu (Gbr) bt Stefanie Vögele (Sui) 6-2, 6-3; 11-Belinda Bencic (Sui) bt Arantxa Rus (Ned) 6-4, 6-4; Martina Trevisan (Ita) bt Coco Vandeweghe (USA) 6-1, 7-5; Misaki Doi (Jpn) bt Storm Sanders (Aus) 7-6 (7/3), 6-3; 23-Jessica Pegula (US) bt Anastasia Potapova (Rus) 6-2, 6-2; 28-Anett Kontaveit (Est) bt Samantha Stosur (Aus) 6-3, 6-0; Jil Teichmann (Sui) bt Cristina Bucsa (ESP) 6-3, 6-4; Fiona Ferro (FRA) bt Nao Hibino (JPN) 6-1, 6-4; 7-Iga Swiatek (Pol) bt Jamie Loeb (US) 6-3, 6-4; 4-Karolína Plíšková (Cze) bt Caty McNally (US) 6-3, 6-4; Amanda Anisimova (US) bt Zarina Diyas (Kaz) 7-5, 6-2; Ajla Tomljanovic (Aus) bt Katie Volynets (US) 6-3, 6-1; 30-Petra Martić (Cro) bt Dalma Gálfi (Hun) 6-3, 6-2; 24-Paula Badosa (Esp) bt Alison Van Uytvanck (Bel) 6-4, 6-3; Varvara Gracheva (Rus) bt Nuria Parrizas (Esp) 5-7, 6-0, 6-2; Anna Karolína Schmiedlová (Svk) bt Ashlyn Krueger (US) 7-5, 6-7 (3/7), 6-3; 14-Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (Rus) bt Alison Riske (US) 6-4, 6-2; 10-Petra Kvitová (Cze) bt Polona Herczeg (Slo) 6-1, 6-2; Kristýna Plíšková (Cze) bt Danka Kovinić (MNE) 6-4, 6-3; Katerina Siniaková (Cze) bt Anastasiya Sevastova (Lat) 7-6 (8/6), 6-3; 17-Maria Sakkari (Gre) bt Marta Kostyuk (Ukr) 6-4, 6-3; Greet Minnen (Bel) bt Nadia Podoroska (Arg) 6-4, 1-6, 6-3; Liudmila Samsonova (Rus) bt Katie Boulter (Gbr) 6-3, 6-2; Lauren Davis (US) bt Viktoriya Tomova (Bul) 6-2, 2-6, 6-3; 6-Bianca Andreescu (Can) bt Viktorija Golubic (Sui) 7-5, 4-6, 7-5	

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Green hydrogen is potentially a new economic engine for Oman: OPAL CEO

NEW PLATFORM: OPAL is working closely with EJAAD and OQ in facilitating a number of R&D initiatives related to green hydrogen development, says Al Yahyaiei

CONRAD PRABHU

@conradprabhu



Abdulrahman al Yahyaiei

‘Green hydrogen’ — a carbon-neutral energy resource seen as imperative to driving the global energy transition as well as achieving climate change goals — also has the potential to ignite the growth of a new, carbon-free economy in Oman.

According to Abdulrahman al Yahyaiei (pictured), CEO of the Oman Society for Petroleum Services (OPAL) — the umbrella organisation of energy companies and service providers in the Sultanate — the climate-friendly energy resource will be a game-changer for the Omani economy and the wider global community.

“The need for an energy transition is widely understood and shared,” said Al Yahyaiei. “I

believe green hydrogen has the potential to be a powerful enabler of this energy transition, as it offers a clean, sustainable and flexible option for overcoming multiple obstacles that stand in the way of a resilient, low carbon economy.”

Speaking at the opening of the 2nd MENA Energy Meet, which was held earlier this week, the CEO underscored the green fuel’s potential ability to power the growth of a new economy in the Sultanate.

“The Omani government has taken actions, such as by conducting feasibility studies, aimed at unlocking the potential of green hydrogen as a new economic engine for the country,



knowing that hydrogen and fuel cell technologies have significant potential to enable this transition to a clean, low carbon energy system.”

Al Yahyaiei recalled in this regard the recent establishment of the National Hydrogen Alliance – branded as Hy-Fly – under the auspices of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals. Hy-Fly, a grouping

of 13 public and private sector organisations representing energy services, academia and R&D, will work collectively to facilitate the production, transportation and utilisation of green hydrogen for domestic consumption and export, he said.

“One of their ultimate goals is to promote green hydrogen

through investment in technology, and setting in place policies and expertise across the whole hydrogen supply chain,” he further stated.

OPAL, for its part, is keenly supporting the Hy-Fly project, Al Yahyaiei said. “At OPAL, we are supporting a number of initiatives related to green hydrogen, by

working closely with EJAAD (the country’s main platform connecting academia with industry) and OQ (the Sultanate’s global integrated energy group) in facilitating a number of R&D initiatives related to green hydrogen.”

The CEO however acknowledged that the pace of green hydrogen’s adoption as the agent driving the energy transition would depend largely on two factors: global dynamics, and society’s responses to climate change.

The 2nd MENA Energy Meet, a two-day virtual expo and summit, held under the auspices of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, concluded on Tuesday. Organised by Muscat Expo in association with White Paper Summits, the forum featured an international cast of speakers who presented on a broad array of topics centring around green hydrogen.

A number of local and international energy developers have outlined plans for green hydrogen schemes potentially involving several billion dollars of investment in the Sultanate over the coming years.

Omanisation in oil and gas sector rises to 85 per cent

BUSINESS REPORTER

The rate of Omanisation among companies operating in the upstream and downstream of Oman’s Oil and Gas sector reached around 85 per cent in 2020, representing a 5.7-per cent increase over the corresponding figure for 2020, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals stated in its 2020 Annual Report.

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the country’s largest producer of hydrocarbons, reported a record Omanisation of 86 per cent last year, up from 84 per cent a year earlier. At the end of 2020, PDO employed 8,943 staff, of which 7,687 were Omanis. There were 1,173 women on staff, including 1,061 Omanis, the highest number in PDO’s history. A total of 443 nationals were hired in the year and the total number of Omani graduates was 111, the company said.

Occidental Oman said it has developed and implemented a long-term sustainable hiring strategy for Omanis. This strategy has contributed to generating more than 3,400 employment



opportunities, and resulted in 93 per cent Omanisation of Occidental Oman’s workforce as of 2020.

Approximately 45 per cent of Omani hiring in 2020 represented job-seekers, according to the company. More than 1,541 job-seekers were hired, including fresh graduate degree holders and diploma holders.

As many as 401 locals, hailing from Oxy concession areas, were hired and trained to become competent operators and technicians. In 2020, Occidental Oman hired around 46 job-seekers, and efforts are ongoing to define more opportunities to support its long-term Omanisation plans.

At Oman LNG, job creation

continues to be a priority despite the challenges of 2020. A total of 69 job-seekers were selected through the Eidat and Internship programmes.

Thirty-one Omanis have been deployed in permanent roles after successfully completing their development plans.

Daleel Petroleum employed Omanis in operational and support departments during 2020. The company managed to achieve and maintain a 96-per cent Omanisation rate across the organisation.

CCED, with a workforce of over 90 per cent Omanisation, is building a cadre of capable professional staff with industry know-how to lead the sector in the future.



Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Invitation to attend the Chamber's Annual General Assembly Meeting

Based on Article (19), according to the Chamber's Regulations, issued by Royal Decree (45/2017), regarding the obligation to call upon the assembly, to an annual general meeting, which is to be held once a year.

The Chairman of the Chamber's Board of Directors is pleased to invite the members of the Assembly, who have paid the annual fee prescribed for their membership, to attend the General Assembly meeting, which will be held at 5:00 pm, on 26/9/2021 at the Chamber's headquarters in Ruwi, to discuss the following points in the agenda:

1. Discussing and approving the annual report of the Chamber's business and analyzing auditor's annual financial report for the year ending on 31/12/2020.
2. Considering the suggestions of the members of the General Assembly, which were submitted to the Council at least (15) fifteen days before the meeting date.
3. Appointment of the auditor.
4. According to the Chamber's system, the registered member is represented in the general assembly meeting, in his term as the owner, the solo authorized partner, or the solo managing director, according to the data of the commercial register, and each member has the right of one vote, and it is not permissible to delegate or authorization to attend or vote in the assembly meeting. The Chamber membership certificate should be a valid certificate.

Points to Note:

1. We inform the honorable members that the second meeting of the Assembly, in the event, that the quorum for the first meeting is not met, will be on Tuesday, 28/9/2021, at 5:00 pm in the Chamber building in Ruwi.
2. OCCI's annual report on its activities is available at the OCCI head office and its branches.
3. The auditor's end of financial, year report shall be provided prior to the Regular General Association meeting.
4. The deadline for receiving members' suggestions is 2:30 pm, Thursday, (9/9/2021).
5. Please register to attend the meeting via Chamber's website: www.chamberoman.om
6. Registration is available at all OCCI branches.

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Majid Al Futtaim opens Mall of Oman

MUSCAT: Majid Al Futtaim, the leading shopping mall, communities, retail and leisure pioneer across the Middle East, Africa and Central Asia has opened the doors of Mall of Oman in Muscat. The opening of the mall marks an important milestone for Majid Al Futtaim as it continues to play a significant role in supporting local communities by enhancing the Sultanate’s retail and entertainment offerings for both residents and tourists.

A recipient of the LEED Platinum certificate for its commitment to sustainability, resource efficiency, health and well-being, the new super-regional mall combines a selection of curated stores that bring the very best in retail, leisure, entertainment and dining, as well as experiential offerings for all ages. Those visiting the mall can now experience Oman’s largest VOX Cinemas — complete with 15 screens — as well as the only IMAX experience in Oman, the first GOLD experience in Oman, and the largest Magic Planet in the country, which features award-winning rides, games and attractions. Plus, those looking for dining options can indulge at Kitchen 35, the VIP Lounge (Gold) and Nutella.

Alongside this offering, customers can also enjoy a host of brands including a 9,000-square metre Carrefour Hypermarket as part of Majid Al Futtaim and



several brands from the Landmark and Apparel groups. In addition, Mall of Oman offers famous outlets such as DKNY, Nespresso, G-SHOCK, Homes R Us, Tavola and Al Khalili Buildex, ensuring there is something for everyone.

Husam al Mandhari, Director of shopping malls in Oman at Majid Al Futtaim Properties, said: “We are pleased to welcome residents and tourists to the brand-new Mall of Oman — Sultanate’s flagship destination for retail, leisure and entertainment. This is another achievement for us as we continue to position ourselves as a retail pioneer that offers unique experiences and unmatched



value, whilst contributing to the local economy. Providing 3,500 new jobs in the region, Mall of Oman offers multiple first-of-its-kind experiences in the Sultanate, which allows us to continue to create memorable moments

for our customers that they can cherish with their family. At Majid Al Futtaim, we are committed to place the people and communities we serve at the heart of everything we do, and this new opening demonstrates this.”



This September, families at Mall of Oman can also embark on the ultimate adventure with Dino World, an interactive dinosaur experience. In collaboration with EventBox, the new family offering will have visitors travelling back in time for an exciting and educational journey showcasing the history and evolution of dinosaurs, life size dinosaur installations, a “roaming dino” interactive experience and augmented reality.

Plus, with 80 per cent of Mall of Oman’s gross leasable area leased, the mall is set to welcome over 300 additional retail outlets in the coming months. And for those looking to go on a culinary

journey, Mall of Oman has unveiled a 1,000-plus seater food court which will offer a selection of global chains.

Those looking for more indulgent cuisine options from across the globe, will soon be able to visit various cafes and restaurants at the mall including over 50 dining options. Mall of Oman is also pleased to announce that it will launch the largest indoor snow park in the Sultanate next year, spanning over 14,000 square metres.

Mall of Oman complements Majid Al Futtaim’s strong regional presence that includes 29 existing malls across the GCC.

Sohar International to host 12th session of Viewpoints on Sept 15

MUSCAT: A much-anticipated event that has witnessed participation of key industry leaders in the past years, Sohar International is all set to conduct the 12th session of Viewpoints — Sohar International Chairman’s Forum, on September 15.

Slated to be live-streamed via Zoom app, the event will start at 7:30 pm encompassing an insightful knowledge sharing session with a speaker of international acclaim. The upcoming event will host George de Lama, who is a prominent international journalist and the President of Eisenhower Fellowships, and will deliver inspirational messages using his vast experience and extensive subject know-how.

“Viewpoints is an industry first and one-of-its-kind initiative, seeking to provide a unique opportunity for the youth to gain insights and engage in dialogue with inspirational personalities in key sectors. This is an event which



George de Lama and Mohammed bin Mahfoudh al Ardhi

I take pride to host as it aims at bringing the best global learning to the local population of Oman and build leaders of tomorrow,” said Mohammed bin Mahfoudh al Ardhi, Chairman of Sohar International.

Viewpoints — Sohar International Chairman’s Forum, is a dedicated platform where inspirational global leaders from different industries and sectors share their experiences, knowledge and ideas with a cross-section of Omani society.

With a special focus on youth, the platform aims to connect global leaders to inspire and motivate collaboration. Anyone interested can register for the upcoming virtual session free of cost simply by visiting Sohar International’s website (www.soharinternational.com) or the bank’s official social media pages and follow the registration post/link. The session will provide opportunity for participants to engage with the guest speaker with their valuable inputs and questions.

“We are indeed delighted to have George De Lama as our distinguished speaker in the upcoming session of viewpoints.”

Ever since the event took a virtual form, a few of its recent distinguished guests included public figures such as Mina al Oraibi, Editor-in-Chief of *The National* newspaper, Dr Reinhard Christian Zinkann, a fourth-generation Executive Director and Co-proprietor at the 121-years old Miele Group, and Sir Ranulph Fiennes, explorer and motivational speaker.

Through various leadership initiatives like these, Sohar International has not only been encouraging the community to enhance their professional skills but has instilled a positive mindset that revolves around sustainable growth and pioneering change while encouraging them to become key representatives of the country on international platforms.

Bank Muscat’s Personal Finance helps meet your special needs

MUSCAT: In line with its vision ‘To serve you better, everyday’ and aligned to the goal of supporting national development goals, Bank Muscat continues to innovate to offer new products and services.

The bank is steadfastly working towards improving the quality of life and financial inclusion of various segments of society in Oman. Having expanded its range of products and services over the years, the bank currently offers a number of financing facilities including Personal Finance, Sayyarti Auto Finance, Green Finance, Education Finance and the Woqar banking package for pensioners.

The bank’s Personal Financing options are very popular among Omani nationals and residents for its highly competitive rates, fast processing and prompt disbursements. Omani customers with salaries more than RO 250 and expatriates with salaries more than RO 500 can apply for personal finance at any branch of the bank across the Sultanate by providing their salary assignment letter and the ID card. Financing up to RO 200,000 is available based on the eligibility of the customer.

Speaking about the bank’s wide range of financing options, Abdullah bin Tamman al Mashani, Deputy General Manager — Institutional Sales and Product Development, Bank Muscat, said: “Bank Muscat endeavours to provide the best banking and financing products and services in Oman in line with the needs of different customer



Abdullah bin Tamman al Mashani

segments. The bank’s financing is offered at highly competitive interest rates in keeping with the needs of its customers and aligned to its role of facilitating a high standard of living for the people of Oman. We thank all our customers for their strong confidence in the bank’s products and services as well their excellent feedback which helps Bank Muscat to continue innovating and offering new products.”

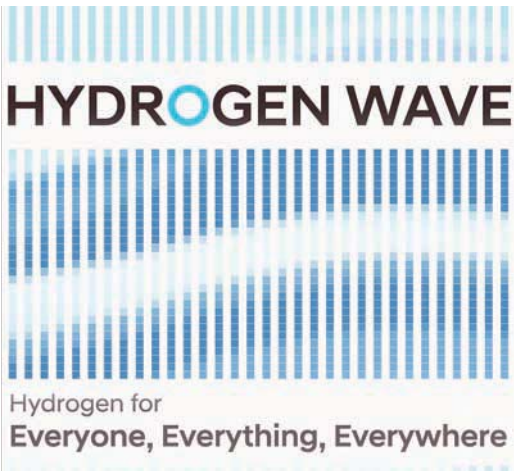
Bank Muscat’s wide range of products include Baituna home finance, which makes the dream of owning one’s home come true, Zaffa marriage financing and Sayyarti Auto Finance, which enables customers to own the vehicle of their choice.

The Terhal travel finance helps customers to realise their holiday plans while the health and beauty finance will enable you to access the best healthcare options for your well-being. Bank Muscat’s Green Finance aims to promote environment-friendly homes in the Sultanate and was the first financing scheme that facilitates environmental-friendly initiatives.

Hyundai to unveil future vision for hydrogen society

MUSCAT: Hyundai Motor Group (the Group) announced to host ‘Hydrogen Wave’, a global virtual forum which represents the Group’s plans for a new ‘wave’ of hydrogen-based products and technologies.

The forum will also provide a revealing insight into the Group’s future vision of a sustainable hydrogen society. The forward-thinking forum, which is exclusively online, starts on September 7, 15:00 KST, and will be live-streamed via the Group’s YouTube channel. Investigating and exploring the concept of a future sustainable hydrogen society, Hydrogen Wave is open for participation to industry,



media and the wider public.

Ahead of the online forum, the Group has released three short teaser videos on its YouTube channel (Hydrogen Wave 1 LINK, Hydrogen Wave 2 LINK, Hydrogen Wave 3 LINK).

It has also launched a microsite (<https://www.hydrogen-wave.com/>) that provides a glimpse of future hydrogen products and technologies that will be unveiled at Hydrogen Wave.

Following the online forum, the programme jumps from the virtual world of Hydrogen Wave into the real-world of a physical exhibition taking place in the city of Goyang, South Korea, from September 8 to 11.



In brief

■ PARIS

**LUXURY BILLIONAIRE ARNAULT SELLS OUT OF RETAILER CARREFOUR**

French luxury goods billionaire Bernard Arnault has sold the 5.7 per cent he owned in supermarket group Carrefour (CARR.PA) through his Financiere Agache holding company, raising 724 million euros (\$854 million) with the disposal.

Arnault, who had bought into Carrefour in 2007 and is known for running Louis Vuitton owner LVMH, was one of its three big shareholders, along with the Moulin family and Brazilian businessman Abilio dos Santos Diniz.

The Agache stake was sold in an accelerated book building process at 16 euros per share, bookrunner Societe Generale said in a statement on Wednesday.

■ COLORADO

**WALMART TO HIRE 20,000 SUPPLY CHAIN WORKERS**

Walmart Inc said it planned to hire 20,000 workers at its supply chain division and raise wages ahead of the busy holiday season anticipating higher demand. The roles, which will be a mix of part-time and full-time jobs, would be hired at across more than 250 Walmart and Sam's Club distribution centers, fulfillment centres and transportation offices, the retailer said.

The world's biggest retailer also hired around 20,000 seasonal workers last year in its e-commerce fulfillment centres to meet the holiday demand. The average wage for supply chain workers would be \$20.37 per hour, the statement added, which compares with the company's announcement of \$15.25 an hour average wage pay in February.

■ AMSTERDAM

**PHILIPS TO START REPLACING MILLIONS OF RESPIRATORY DEVICES**

Dutch health technology company Philips said it would start repairing and replacing millions of respiratory devices in the US and most of its other markets this month, to address potential health risks caused by the machines.

The company in June recalled up to four million of its respiratory devices and ventilators, as it said a foam part might degrade and become toxic, potentially causing cancer.

Philips said it had received authorisation from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the rework of the affected DreamStation device, allowing it to replace the sound abatement foam with a new material. More than half of the affected machines have been sold in the US and the full replacement effort will take about a year, Philips said.

Opec+ seen sticking to policy despite higher oil demand

LONDON/DUBAI: Opec and its allies will likely stick to their existing policy of gradual oil output increases despite revising up the 2022 demand outlook and facing US pressure to raise production more quickly, four sources said on Wednesday.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies led by Russia, a group known as Opec+, meet at 1500 GMT.

They agreed in July to phase out record output cuts by adding 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) a month to the market.

“(Opec+) will most likely keep the agreement as it was agreed”, one of the sources said ahead of Wednesday's talks.

On Tuesday, Opec+ experts revised the 2022 oil demand growth forecast to 4.2 million bpd, up from a previous 3.28 million bpd, potentially building the case for higher output in future.

The outlook for 2022 looks optimistic based on data for 2021. Opec+ expects demand to grow by 5.95 million bpd this year after a record drop of about 9 million bpd in 2020 because of the Covid-19 pandemic, but demand only grew by about 3



The Opec logo pictured ahead of an informal meeting between members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) in Algiers. — Reuters File

million bpd in the first half of 2021.

“Demand has disappointed relative to lofty expectations and there are still headwinds, particularly in Asia. We only expect demand to rise back to 2019 levels in the second half of 2022”, said Amrita Sen, co-founder of Energy Aspects think-tank.

The United States has called for speedier output increases by Opec+ as benchmark Brent crude traded above \$72 per barrel, close to multi-year highs.

The demand forecast revision came during the Opec+ joint

Opec faces US pressure to raise production as demand forecast for 2022 revised up to 4.2 million bpd

technical committee (JTC), which on Tuesday presented an updated report on the state of the oil market in 2021-2022.

On Tuesday, Opec+ sources said the report, which has not

been made public, forecast a 0.9 million bpd deficit this year as global demand recovers.

The report had initially forecast a surplus of 2.5 million bpd in 2022 but this was later revised to a smaller surplus of 1.6 million bpd due to stronger demand, the sources said.

As a result, commercial oil inventories in the OECD, a group of mostly developed countries, would remain below the 2015-2019 average until May 2022 rather than the initial forecast for January 2022, the JTC presentation showed, according to the sources. — Reuters

Sri Lanka organic revolution threatens tea disaster

AHANGAMA: Sri Lanka's drive to become the world's first 100 per cent organic food producer threatens its prized tea industry and has triggered fears of a wider crop disaster that could deal a further blow to the beleaguered economy.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa banned chemical fertilisers this year to set off his organic race but tea plantation owners are predicting crops could fail as soon as October, with cinnamon, pepper and staples such as rice also facing trouble.

Master tea maker Herman Gunaratne, one of 46 experts picked by Rajapaksa to guide the organic revolution, fears the worst.

“The ban has drawn the tea

industry into complete disarray”, Gunaratne said at his plantation in Ahangama, in rolling hills 160 kilometres south of Colombo. “The consequences for the country are unimaginable.”

The 76-year-old, who grows one of the world's most expensive teas, fears that Sri Lanka's average annual crop of 300 million kilograms will be slashed by half unless the government changes course.

Sri Lanka is in the grip of a pandemic-induced economic crisis, with gross domestic product contracting more than three per cent last year, and the government's hopes of a return to growth have been hit by a new coronavirus wave. Fertiliser and pesticides are among a host of key imports — including



Sri Lankan master tea maker Herman Gunaratne at the Virgin White tea plantation in Ahangama. — AFP

vehicles and spare parts — the government has halted as it battles foreign currency shortages.

But tea is Sri Lanka's biggest single export, bringing in more than \$1.25 billion a year —

accounting for about 10 per cent of the country's export income. Rajapaksa came to power in 2019 promising subsidised foreign fertiliser but did a U-turn arguing that agro chemicals were poisoning people. Gunaratne, whose Virgin White tea sells for \$2,000 a kilo, was removed last month from Rajapaksa's Task Force for a Green Socio-Economy after disagreeing with the president. He says the country's Ceylon tea has some of the lowest chemical content of any tea and poses no threat.

The tea crop hit a record 160 million kilos in the first half of 2021 thanks to good weather and old fertiliser stocks but the harvest started falling in July.

— AFP

Huge increase in USB-linked cybersecurity threats

CYBER SECURITY: Report finds that 79 per cent of cyber threats originating from removable media could critically impact operational technology (OT) environments

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 1

USB-based threats that can severely impact business operations increased significantly during a disruptive year when the usage of removable media and network connectivity also grew, according to a report released by Honeywell, a Fortune 500 technology company.

Data from the 2021 Honeywell Industrial USB Threat Report indicates that 37 per cent of threats



were specifically designed to utilise removable media, which almost doubled from 19 per cent in the 2020 report.

The research also highlights that 79 per cent of cyber threats originating from USB devices or removable media could lead to

a critical business disruption in the operational technology (OT) environment.

At the same time, there was a 30 per cent increase in the use of USB devices in production facilities last year, highlighting the growing dependence on removable media.

The report was based on aggregated cybersecurity threat data from hundreds of industrial facilities globally during a 12-month period. Along with USB attacks, research shows a growing number of cyber threats including remote access, Trojans and content-based malware have the potential to cause severe disruption to industrial infrastructure.

“USB-borne malware was a serious and expanding business risk in 2020, with clear indications that removable media has become part of the playbook used by attackers, including those that employ ransomware”, said Eric Knapp, Engineering Fellow and Director of Cybersecurity research for Honeywell Connected Enterprise.

“Because USB-borne cyber

intrusions have become so effective, organisations must adopt a formal program that addresses removable media and protects against intrusions to avoid potentially costly downtime.”

Many industrial and OT systems are air-gapped or cut off from the Internet to protect them from attacks. Intruders are using removable media and USB devices as an initial attack vector to penetrate networks and open them up to major attacks.

Knapp says hackers are loading more advanced malware on plug-in devices to directly harm their intended targets through sophisticated coding that can create backdoors to establish remote access.

Hackers with remote access can then command and control the targeted systems.

Madayn inks pact to develop e-Learning Platform

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 1

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) signed an agreement with Reem Al Bawadi Company (RAB HR) to develop an e-Learning Platform with the objective of providing education and training programmes to Madayn's employees as well as the employees of companies and factories based in the various industrial cities.

Zuhair al Zadjali, Director General of Admin and HR at Madayn, emphasised on the significance of the e-Learning Platform to equip and empower the employees with various relevant skills in line with the emerging training and development trends, and to keep pace with latest training curriculum and methods.

Al Zadjali added that the platform shall present an advanced educational environment, which will digitise all procedures associated with training, save and archive data electronically, reduce training related expenses, provide training opportunities to a large number of trainees, and ensure the continuity of Madayn's training efforts in light of the disruption caused by Covid-19.

Madayn's e-Learning Platform reflects the continuity of the efforts made to achieve sustainable and comprehensive economic and social development based on the capabilities and talents of the national cadres.

By organising a series of training programmes in various fields, Madayn aims at enhancing the productivity of the national cadres and equipping them with essential competences as per the needs and requirements of factories and companies based in the industrial cities.

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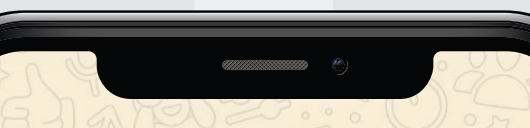
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features



A café turned memorial to a young Omani artist

A brother's love for his younger artist-sibling inspires a trendy café that serves as a creative space for artists in Al Mawaleh. As a magnet for young artists, the café is evolving into a hub for creativity, in a sense. Not only adults, but young children too, are gravitating to the café to share their creative works of art... **P20**

ENTERTAINMENT

READ

REALM BREAKER
BY VICTORIA AVEYARD

A small band of misfits attempt to save Allward.

Russia's Hermitage to sell digital art as NFT tokens

RUSSIA'S HERMITAGE Museum, the largest art collection in the world, announced on Tuesday it will sell several masterpieces, including a work of Leonardo da Vinci, in the form of non-fungible tokens (NFT).

The Saint Petersburg-based museum in partnership with the Binance NFT marketplace will run the auction starting on Tuesday and until September 7, the Hermitage said in a statement.

An NFT is a digital object

with a certificate of authenticity created by blockchain technology that underlies cryptocurrency. It cannot be forged or otherwise manipulated.

In recent years, NFTs have been sought after by art collectors, with some selling for millions of dollars.

The Hermitage will bring out a limited series of NFTs, including a digital copy of Leonardo da Vinci's "Madonna Litta", as well as works by Vincent Van Gogh, Claude

Monet and Wassily Kandinsky.

The starting price for each lot has been set at 10,000 BUSD, a cryptocurrency that tracks the US dollar. All proceeds will go to the museum.

Each NFT will be issued in two copies, one held by the museum and one going to the buyer. The NFT's metadata will include the signature of Hermitage director Mikhail Piotrovsky.

"The Hermitage is a conservative innovator, a conservative museum that uses the latest technologies," Piotrovsky said in the statement.

Founded in 1764 and housed inside the former winter residence of Russia's imperial family, the Hermitage is home to over three million works of art. — **AFP**





Pottery is a craft connecting many Oman villages

The pottery industry has been connected to wilayat Bahla in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate for ages. However, it is not the only place in Oman where people are famous for this industry. Wilayat Wadi al Maawil in al Batinah South is also known for its connection to many traditional crafts, pottery included, specifically in Musilmat village where people still practice the craft.

"We inherited this craft from our forefathers. It grew to become a source of income for us", says Khamis al Khusaibi, a craftsman.

After producing their goods, the craftsmen market and sell them at the wilayat level and the neighbouring villages using traditional methods and making use of modern means of communication such as social networking sites or in cooperation with the competent authorities.

"The process begins with obtaining the appropriate and special soil for this industry, which is known as the madar soil and the sabkha soil, and we find it in some places in the village or outside it", says Khamis.

He added that the madar is extracted from the ground at a depth of two meters, unlike the sabkha that we get from the surface of the earth. then we purify the soil well, the madar is brewed in water for a period of one day.

The sabkha soil is put on a surface made of palm tree leaves, ready to be mixed with the madar soil. The same amount of the two kinds of soil should be mixed carefully until it becomes a flexible clay that the craftsmen can cut and shape as they like.

Then it is dried. After making more than 200 pieces, the products are collected to be



put in the oven for the burning process, where they are placed very carefully and between them are gaps so that the fire reaches all sides. They are left there for some hours. Khamis explained that

in the old days the palm trunks were used to light the fire. Recently, the electric furnace and others were used. Then the pots are examined well to check that none is affected by the severe heat.



the good ones are displayed, marketed and sold.

He added, "in the moulding process, we use a special machine to rotate the clay on, called (the moulding machine), which is moved by the foot, and we do the clay shaping process manually with high skill and accuracy, using a little water to produce the desired shape. Some products may be engraved and some are coloured according to the request of customers.

TRAVEL TALES

Al Seer, a vivid example of an Omani historical village



AL SEER VILLAGE in Wadi Al Sahtan in the Wilayat of Rustaq in the Governorate of South Al Batinah is an ancient archaeological village, 30 kilometres from the centre of the wilayat. It is known for its beautiful scenery and moderate climate in summer and cold in winter, in addition to the contrast of terrain and geological composition of the surrounding mountains.

Dr Hamad al Dhuli, a researcher in history, says that the village of "Al Seer" is located at the bottom of the summit of Jabal Shams on the side of Wadi Al Sahtan, and it is bordered to the east by the village of "Al Bushouq", from the northwest by the village of "Al Houb", and from the south by the village of "Ula". You can have access to this village through the road Mountain, walking for a distance of four kilometres from the last stop the car reaches in "Al Houb".



He added that in the village, there are ancient ruins of houses and a mosque that needs some restorations. There is also a special basin for bathing in the wintertime made of plaster, with two openings, the first for putting firewood and making a fire to heat the water, and the second for the water faucet on one side basin.

There are agricultural terraces covered by palm trees, pomegranates, boot, Sidr, lemons, quince, and bananas, and these crops are watered by a falaj flowing from the slopes of the mountains surrounding the village. the water of the falaj gathers in a pond called "Al Lajel" around which a number of inscriptions and drawings were found, including the image of a knight riding a horse was apparently painted with the Omani sarooj type of clay.

He explained that there are some traces that indicate that Sayyid Faisal bin Hamoud bin Azzan al Busaidy lived in this village for periods of his life, and among these monuments is his solid house that is standing still to this day despite the various erosion factors.

an ancient inscription carved on one of the rocks that was used for the construction of this house was found. Those words were written on the rock: "When we reached the village, Faisal bin Hammoud built his palace in Rabee Al Thani of 308 AH. And another one: Sayyid Faisal coming to Wadi Al Sahtan in 1290 AH, and this is the oldest date we found in a place called "Al Madhiq".

As for the documents, there are two documents, the first of which is with a family in Wadi Al Sahtan, which is a correspondence between his grandparents and Sayyid Faisal, dated 1302 AH, and the second is a letter from Sayyid Faisal, who was in the village of "Al Seer" to Sheikh Zahran bin Mohammed bin Zahran al Abri in the Wilayat of Al Hamra on Shawwal, 3, 1305 AH.

The researcher indicated that there is printed poems that mention the village of Al Seer and the settlement of Sayyid Faisal bin Hamoud al Busaidy there in some periods of his life.

Apart from its historical importance, the village is the perfect place for recreation in the lap of calm nature away from the hustle and bustle of the city.



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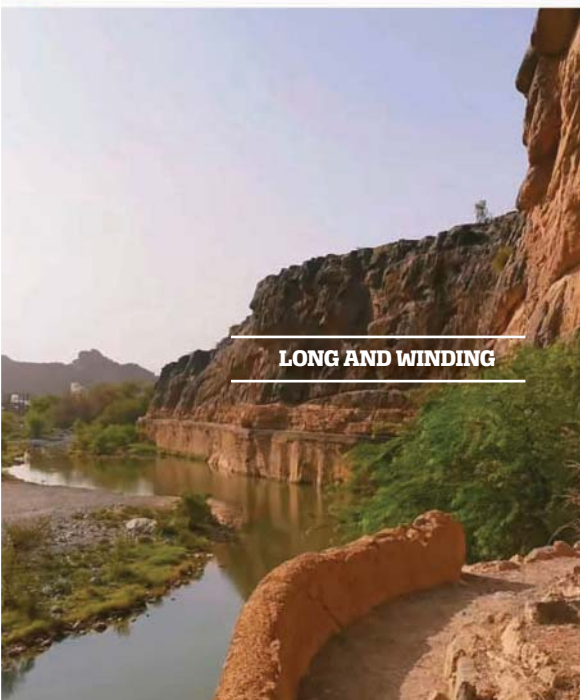
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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

With masks and tests, stars return to Venice for 'sold out' film fest



THE VENICE FILM festival opens on Wednesday with a rich line-up and the return of Hollywood stars who had largely deserted it last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, as cinema looks forward to shaking off the crisis triggered by the health emergency.

Organisers hope a strict coronavirus protocol will help keep the 11-day movie marathon trouble free. Theatres are operating at half capacity and a wall is blocking the view to the red carpet to stop crowds from gathering outside the main venue, Palazzo del Cinema, to get an autograph. Face masks and a health passport — or a negative Covid test — are required to attend screenings.

"Everybody everywhere is eager to come back, to reopen, to restart, to release the films that stayed on the shelf for a year and a half or maybe two years," festival director Alberto Barbera said ahead of the opening ceremony.

He said that most of the world premieres to be screened at the festival were already sold out, and promised that there would be no shortage of celebrities — even though fans will not be able to get anywhere near them.

"The red carpet will be one of the most crowded in years because everybody is here ...from Timothee Chalamet to Zendaya, from Jessica Chastain to Matt Damon, Ben Affleck. The list is so long I can't remember everybody."

Spanish director Pedro Almodovar kicks off the festival, the world's oldest and a showcase for Oscar contenders as awards season approaches, with "Parallel Mothers," starring Penelope Cruz as one of two single women about to give birth in the same hospital.

Other titles vying for the Golden Lion award for best film include Jane Campion's "The Power of the Dog," with Benedict Cumberbatch as a ranch owner who torments a young widow (Kirsten Dunst), and Kristen Stewart's turn as Princess Diana in "Spencer."

Paolo Sorrentino, who will offer a highly personal film about the loss of his parents when he was 17, is one of five Italian directors in the main line-up.

Meanwhile Maggie Gyllenhaal presents her debut feature movie "The Lost Daughter," based on an Elena Ferrante novel and starring Olivia Colman and Dakota Johnson.

Ridley Scott's medieval epic "The Last Duel" starring Damon and Affleck, and Denis Villeneuve's hotly anticipated science-fiction tale "Dune," with Chalamet and Zendaya, will both screen out of competition.

Chloe Zhao, the director of last year's Golden Lion winner, "Nomadland" — which went on to scoop up Oscars for best picture, director and actress — is part of this year's jury, led by another Oscar winner, South Korean "Parasite" director Bong Joon-ho. — **Reuters**

COOK LIKE A CHEF

Lamb Chop with Muhamara to surprise your family this weekend



THE RECENT announcements about Oman finally opening is amazing news for people who had been looking forward to visiting Oman. As the khareef season still rages on, many are still hoping to be able to pay a visit and see the magical transformation of Oman's Garden City.

In today's Cook Like a Chef, Chef Mahmoud of Fanar Hotel and Residence in Salalah is sharing one of his speciality dishes, one that has impressed thousands of guests that have visited the shores of Dhofar and were fortunate to make a stop over at the property

where he currently serves as Sous Chef.

If you're looking for a different way to cook your lamb, you most definitely would love to give this Lamb Chop with Muhamara a try — something to surprise your family with over the weekend.

INGREDIENTS

LAMB CHOP RECIPE MARINATION
1/4 tsp Coriander
Juice of 1 lemon
1/2 tsp White Vinegar
Grated Onion, 1 clove of
Garlic and Tomato
1 tbs Olive Oil
Salt and Pepper to taste

MUHAMARA RECIPE

1 pc Carrot
2 pcs Red Capsicum
1 clove garlic
1 pc Tomato
1 tsp Cumin Powder
Salt to taste
1 tsp Tahina
2 tsp Pomegranate Sauce
1/4 tsp Oil Sunflower
1/2 tsp Red Chili

TO PREPARE THE LAMBCHOP

Mix salt, pepper, coriander,

lemon juice, white vinegar, olive oil and grated onion, garlic and a little bit of tomato. Marinate the Lambchop with all the spices, leave it for a few minutes and grill.

TO PREPARE THE MUHAMARA

Roast red capsicum, blend it along with carrot, Onion, Tomato, Cumin Powder, Salt, Tahina, Pomegranate Sauce, Sunflower Oil, and Red Chili.

ABOUT THE CHEF

Chef Mahmoud Mohamed
Sou Chef, Fanar Hotel and Residence

Chef Mahmoud Mohamed, is Sous Chef in charge of Al Souk Restaurant at Fanar Hotel and Residence, Salalah, Oman. Chef Mahmoud started his career 20 years ago in Egypt as a commis chef. He grew in his career from working in different properties in Egypt, until in 2012 he got an opportunity to work at Fanar Hotel and Residence. That was his first time working abroad, and his position back then was as Chef de Partie. With more than nine years of experience with the company and his deep passion for cooking and guest satisfaction, he got promoted to Sous Chef. His speciality is Arabic and French Cuisine. For him, to see people happy with his food is everything. When not cooking he likes to ride a horse.



TRAVEL TALES

Big John', the largest known triceratops, to go under the hammer



THE FOSSILISED REMAINS of 'Big John', the largest triceratops dinosaur ever discovered by palaeontologists, will be sold by a Paris auction house in late October, and could fetch up to 1.5 million euros (\$1.77 million). Big John roamed the lands of modern-day South Dakota more than 66 million years ago. Palaeontologists unearthed the first piece of bone in 2014 and eventually found 60 per cent of his skeleton, including a near-complete skull.



The Drouot auction house estimated Big John's skeleton would fetch between 1.2-1.5 million euros. Once primarily sold to museums, dinosaur remains have increasingly attracted private buyers, though their numbers remain few.

"I imagine there are about 10 buyers worldwide for this kind of piece," said Alexandre Giquello, who is leading the sale.

The skull of Big John, named after the owner of the land where more than 200 of the dinosaur's bones were found, is 2.62 metres in length — nearly a third of his overall body length — and two metres wide.

The name triceratops means 'three-horned face'. In the fossilised remains of his bony frill is a gaping hole, a battle scar inflicted by a smaller rival according to palaeontologist Iacopo Briano. — **Reuters**



A café turned memorial to a young Omani artist

By Mai al Abri

NASAQ CAFÉ, tucked away in a quiet Al Mawaleh neighbourhood in Muscat's suburbs, is no ordinary coffee shop à la Starbucks, Costa Coffee or Second Cup. An upscale coffee bar in its own right, it also doubles as a creative space for artists, but perhaps most importantly, a celebration of a brother's love for his artist-sister, Sahar, whose untimely passing in a tragic road accident enshrines the very idea behind Nasaq. During a recent visit to this delightful outlet, I found that my dear cousin Sahar's vivacious energy and artsy spirit resonating in the cosy settings of the café. Adorning the four walls of the café were her paintings – a tribute to the prodigious talent of a young Omani girl snatched away from us at barely 20 years of age.

I fondly remember dropping off my dear cousin at her college in the morning. She had this outsize canvas frame that she could barely carry. "Painting is one thing that I'm really good at, I think!" expressing her all-consuming passion for art that dominated her life and dreams, tragically cut short in a road mishap just over seven years ago. Out of that family heartbreak was born Nasaq Café – the brainchild of her older brother Mohammed as an enduring tribute to his artist-sister.

"The idea behind Nasaq took off late in 2016, soon after Sahar's passing", says Mohammed al Oufi.

"I was in constant turmoil

ever since I lost my sister two years ago. It was during this time that a wonderful teacher inspired me to turn this grief into something positive to honour the memory of Sahar. One thing that stands out about Sahar – and most people who were close to her will concur – is about her incredible love for colours and art. Although resources were limited, she created fascinating pieces of art. Nasaq Café is a celebration of her relatively short but creative life."

An engineer by training,

he adds.

But it's not this exciting menu alone that draws all manner of customers to this chic café. "There are people who come simply to immerse themselves in the atmosphere offered by the café, amidst the profusion of paintings and other works of art displayed all around. It's an opportunity for them to banish any negative energies, simply by surrounding themselves with the positive colours exuded by these artworks."

Managed by Angham, a talented Omani artist herself, Nasaq

staff of the café. They were more like family members than co-workers. The atmosphere was celebratory, jolly and positive – a setting into which patrons felt part of.

"When choosing my team, I care about their values, people skills and their capacity to work as a team. I think that great energy and positive customer experience are what appeals to our patrons the most, no matter the gender of the service provider. However, having female baristas in the cafe adds a sense of inclusivity to customers", Mohammed



Mohammed began the task of educating him – literally from scratch – about the business of coffee-making. His deep dive into all things coffee covered the numerous types of beans, the specialised art of processing the beans, and other exotic aspects of the craft.

Seeking to position Nasaq Café as a niche outlet, Mohammed and his baristas are now adding speciality coffees to their offerings, which have grown in scope from the traditional espresso variations and cold-blended drinks to include new trends like CBD infusions, cold brew, ready-to-drink and with all manner of non-dairy additions. Indeed, serving quality coffee and snacks in a trendy, relaxing atmosphere can be a hugely successful endeavour,

Café also serves to underscore the importance of art in Omani culture and the local community. Many young artists – professionals and amateurs alike – are beginning to take an interest in Sahar's craft. As a magnet for young artists, the café is evolving into a hub for creativity, in a sense. Not only adults, but young children too, are gravitating to the café to share their creative works of art.

"Painting is a way for children to do many important things", adds Angham. "It helps them convey ideas, express emotion, use their senses, explore colour, experiment with new processes and outcomes, and create aesthetically pleasing works and experiences."

During my visit, I also observed that Mohammed shared a warm and lively relationship with the

points out.

The young entrepreneur hastens to add, however: "Nothing comes easy for sure, especially in today's difficult times amid the pandemic and the economic downturn. But I think with knowledge, experience and determination, we can overcome these challenges. When you are conversant with your craft and show determination to follow through on your knowledge, then success is bound to follow."

Nasaq encapsulates many things. In Arabic, Nasaq translates as 'consistency' and 'repetition'. But it also has connotations of beauty and art. "We chose it because it is related to speciality coffee in the sense of consistency in grind size, bean ripeness and roast level. It also relates to art in the sense of beauty", Mohammed explained.