

New Hijri Year holiday announced

On the occasion of the Holy Prophet's Hijra Anniversary (PBUH) and the advent of new Hijri year 1443 AH, it was decided that the first day of Muharram 1443 AH will be an official holiday for the employees of the ministries, public authorities other departments of the state administrative apparatus, as well as employees at the private sector. **DETAILS ON P2**



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HASSAN LAUNCHES TREBLE BID WITH GOLD



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ASIAN FACTORY ACTIVITY HIT BY RISING COSTS, DELTA VARIANT



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PLASTIC CREATES 'EVOLUTIONARY TRAP' FOR YOUNG SEA TURTLES - STUDY



MUSCAT

RAO, US INFANTRY BRIGADE HOLD DRILL

The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) and the United States Army's infantry units began a joint drill codenamed "Valley of Fire 2021". During the 11-day exercise, the RAO is represented by 11th Infantry Brigade. The exercise is being conducted with the participation of the Sultan of Oman's Parachutes, the Sultan of Oman's Armoured Division, the Sultan of Oman's Artillery, the Royal Air Force of Oman and the SAF Signals and Engineering divisions. **DETAILS ON P3**

DEAL TO ENDORSE SMART CITIES, IOT

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology on Monday signed a cooperation agreement with the National Energy Centre (NEC) to introduce the experience of smart cities and Internet of Things (IoT) in the Sultanate. The agreement also includes cooperation to promote knowledge transfer between the government and the business and academic sectors. **DETAILS ON P13**

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READ IN OPINION

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Lakshmi Kothaneth

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Dr Khalid Mohammed al Balushi

INSIDE

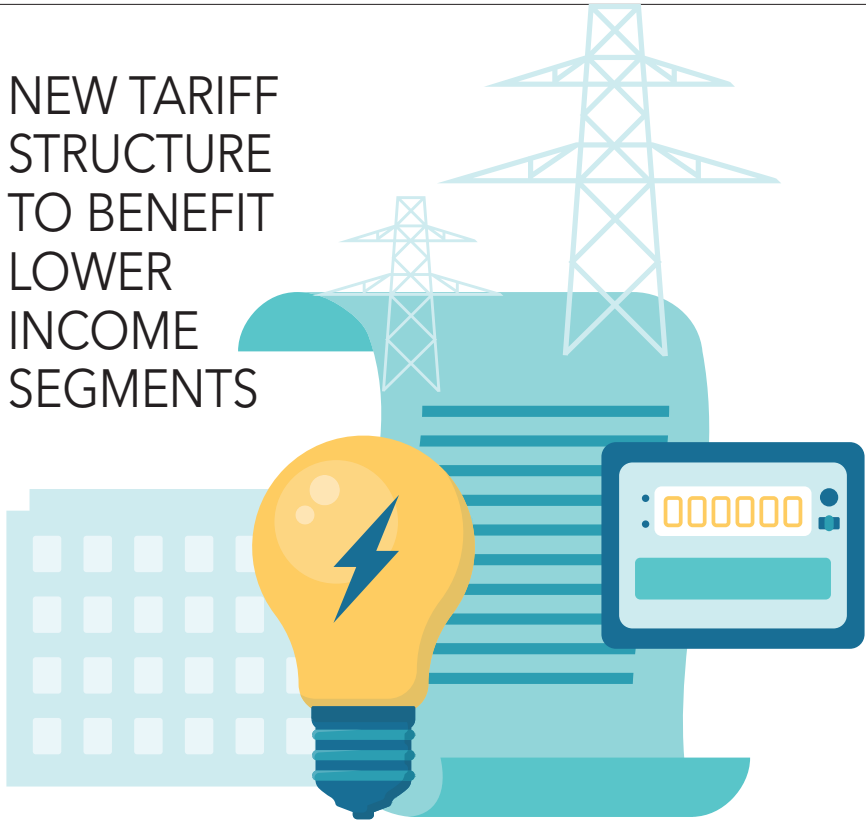


EU SENDS HELP TO TURKEY AS WILDFIRE TOLL RISES | P6



FAMILIES AND FRIENDS REUNITE AT UK'S HEATHROW | P8

NEW TARIFF STRUCTURE TO BENEFIT LOWER INCOME SEGMENTS



HIGH ELECTRICITY BILLS DUE TO SUBSIDY REDIRECTION

NO DISCONNECTION DURING THE SUMMER MONTHS

EVALUATION FOR REDIRECTING THE SUBSIDY SCHEME

CITIZENS CAN PAY ELECTRICITY BILL IN INSTALMENTS

TARIFF WILL BE 12 BAISAS DURING SUMMER MONTHS

POWER BILLS FOR MAY AND JUNE TO BE RECALCULATED

KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

In a major relief to the people, the electricity bills for May and June will be recalculated, and in case there is an increase in the bill, the excess amount will be credited to the following month's bill, said Authority of Public Services Regulation (APSR) after it received 5,000-7,000 complaints of inflated bills.

It also assured that distribution companies won't disconnect power to subscribers whose bills are pending. Subscribers can now pay bills in instalments instead of one go. Many people were shocked by their electricity bills having doubled, or even tripled, in recent months.

In a press conference on Monday, the Authority of Public Services Regulation Chairman Dr Mansoor al Hinai also unveiled a new tariff structure, which will significantly benefit lower income segments.

He said high electricity bills are caused by the subsidy redirection

USERS WILL HAVE A CHOICE BETWEEN REMOTE READING METERS OR PREPAID METERS TO RESOLVE COMPLAINTS ON READINGS

programme and the authority has appealed to the government to reconsider the electricity subsidy directive.

For Omanis, the first slab of 0-4,000 units will be at a rate of 12 baisas per unit; the second from 4001-6,000 at 16 baisas; and above 6,000 units at 27 baisas. For expats, it is 20 baisa per unit up to 500 units, 25 baisas from 500 to 1,500 units and 30 baisas above 1,500 units

This is part of the government's vision and its keenness to ensure the water and power subsidy for eligible

groups, which was announced in December 2020 within the financial balance plan Medium-term (2020-2024). Generally, the assessment seeks to alleviate burdens on the whole society in light of Covid-19 pandemic.

STANDS BY STAKEHOLDERS

Speaking to the *Observer*, Dr Al Hinai, said that the authority has directed the distribution companies to suspend service cuts in the summer months and to bring relief to customers reeling under inflated bills.

"APSR stands by its stakeholders and we are here to protect the interests of the individuals, industry and agriculture sectors. We would like assure all citizens that we, from time to time, review the mechanisms and performance of the electricity sector to ensure its efficiency and that the subsidy redirection programme achieves its set objectives", Dr Al Hinai said.

TURN TO P2

Unvaccinated at risk of Covid infection

VINOD NAIR @vinot_nair

The Ministry of Health on Monday reported only 287 new cases, though the daily toll continues to be high at 18 deaths. At the same time, health experts have warned that the unvaccinated segment of the population is still vulnerable to the virus.

"Most of the new cases and hospitalised patients are unvaccinated people. We are now in the fourth wave of Covid-19 across the region. By applying effective use of all public and social health measures we will make sure that this is the last wave", said Dr Ahmed al Mandheri, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

As per the statistics available, the daily cases reported on Sunday are the lowest since February 18.

Also, only 38 patients were admitted to hospitals across the country, taking the total number of inpatients to 505 including 215 in intensive care units.

The total number of cases registered in the Sultanate has now reached

No hotel quarantine for teaching staff, families

The Supreme Committee has excluded all teaching staff in government, private and international institutions, and their families coming to the Sultanate from institutional quarantine, provided that they adhere to home quarantine and wear the electronic bracelet, a statement from the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said in a statement to all airlines operating in Oman.

297,122, including 3,868 deaths. The total number of recoveries is 280,423 while the recovery rate is 94.4 per cent.



CATCHING THE GIANT TREVALLY

The Giant Trevally is a fish widely found throughout the tropical waters of the Indian Ocean and Pacific ocean, Arabian Sea and the Red Sea among others. According to Naveed Ahmed Bakhtiar, a fishing enthusiast, people from around the world travel to the Sultanate only just to catch this fish. That is offshore fishing, but catching a Giant Trevally from the shores is very rare and it happened to us recently. **DETAILS ON P3**

Oman aims to cut emissions by 7 per cent in 9 years

SAMUEL KUTTY @samkuttyvp

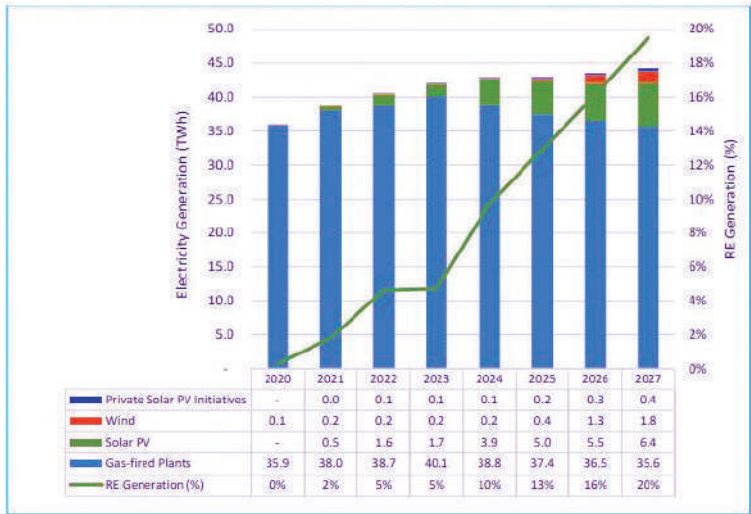
On the back of measures to support transition to a low carbon economy, Oman intends to slow greenhouse gases (GHG) emission growth. According to the Sultanate's Second Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), 4 per cent of the GHG reduction commitment will be based on national efforts.

The remaining 3 per cent would necessitate grants and other forms of concessional financing and assistance with capacity building and institutional strengthening, and access

to appropriate technologies.

"The proposed renewable energy projects, energy efficiency plans and energy conservation initiatives would enable the Sultanate to slow GHG emission growth and reduce them by 7 per cent in 2030", says the report which was submitted to United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), last week.

This, according to the report, is compared to the business-as-usual scenario, which is predicted at about 125.254 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent or MTCO2e



assuming a sustained moderate GDP growth rate at 3 per cent per year, a total population of 6.3 million by the year 2030.

International climate finance is a crucial element for the Sultanate of Oman to further bend the GHG emission growth curve over the next decade. Article 6 of the Paris Agreement is an additional mechanism for the Sultanate to achieve cost-efficient emission reductions, facilitate the transfer of carbon mitigation technology and deliver significant sustainable development co-benefits.

TURN TO P2

Electricity bills to be recalculated



FROM PAGE 1

AGRICULTURE

“The Authority is currently evaluating some other tariffs related to economic and agricultural activities to ensure their compatibility with the current economic and societal conditions,” the chairman said

Last year, the losses in the main connected network were up to 24 per cent, and with the efforts of companies and those in charge of the sector, it was reduced to 9.8 per cent. Companies that violate the authority’s decisions will be fined, and this will reduce electricity costs, according to the APSR. Various companies have been fined for violating

the decisions. There are companies that were fined RO 10 million.

“The focus of the authority’s attention is the citizen, and the authority’s doors are open to receive your suggestions and complaints and this is part of our work in providing service to the citizen and easing the burdens,” Al Hinai said.

The Sultanate has a surplus in electricity output and through the common GCC grid, it has been exporting power to countries because they have a deficit. The authority has sold 100 megawatts to the Gulf Cooperation Council Interconnection Authority (GCCIA).

SMART METERS

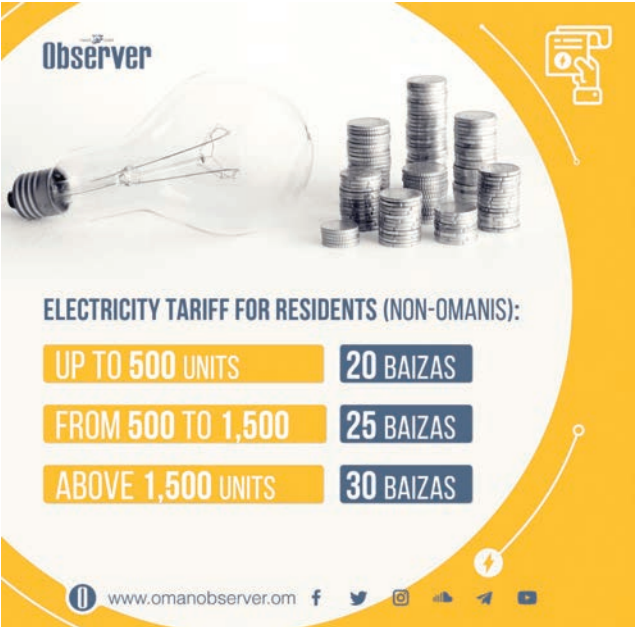
Smart digital meters will help to

solve complaints in meter readings, according to the APSR chairman. “The companies are currently working on implementing smart digital meters.”

Users will have a choice between remote reading meters or prepaid meters, considering that this is a radical solution to resolve complaints on readings,” Dr Al Hinai said.

The current tariff does not reflect the real cost of electricity, because it is subsidised and does not include generation costs and others.

The total costs of the electricity sector consist of energy production costs of 57 per cent, capital costs of 27 per cent, and operating costs of 16 per cent.



First day of Muharram will be public holiday

MUSCAT: On the occasion of the Holy Prophet’s Hijra Anniversary (PBUH) and the advent of new Hijri year 1443 AH, it was decided that the first day of Muharram 1443 AH will be an official holiday for the employees of the ministries, public authorities, other departments of the State’s Administrative Apparatus, as well as employees at the private sector. Muharram moon sighting will be declared by the concerned authorities.

The Ministry of Labour explained that the decision allows employers and employees to agree on compensating this holiday if necessity arises.

On this blessed occasion, the Ministry of Labour extended its greetings to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, praying to Allah the Almighty to protect His Majesty, grant him good health, happiness and a long life and for the return of this and similar occasions on His Majesty for many years to come while the Omani people our dear country enjoy further progress and welfare under His Majesty’s wise leadership, and all Muslims blessings and welfare. — ONA

Sultanate aims to cut emissions by 7 per cent in nine years

FROM PAGE 1

“Such co-benefits would reduce air pollutants, generate jobs, and lay the ground for the just transition to a climate-resilient economy and society,” points out the report.

The NDC is rooted in the Oman vision 2040 and the National Energy Strategy to support a gradual transition to a low carbon economy and an

energy matrix significantly lower in carbon emissions.

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

The massive deployment of renewable energy and the deepening of energy efficiency

actions are the pillars of the 2030 carbon control plan in the Sultanate. The National Energy Strategy has set an ambitious target to derive 20 per cent of electricity from renewables by 2027.

Over the period 2021-2027, the renewable energy plan aimed to secure at least 2,660 MW. The plan relies mainly on solar PV with 79 per cent and wind of about 21 per

cent.

The power generation decarbonisation plan has already started since the third quarter of 2019 with the first wind farm of 49 MW in Oman and the Gulf region. Commercial operations for the Sultanate’s first large-scale solar PV project of 500 MW are due to begin at the end of 2021.

The National Energy Strategy further enhances the gas-fired

plant’s overall energy efficiency in conjunction with the clean energy plans.

The energy efficiency of the gas fired plants’ has improved by 13 per cent between 2004 and 2015 (from 26 per cent in 2005 to 39 per cent in 2015). Between 2015 and 2020, the improvement was even more significant at 15.63 per cent (from 39 per cent in 2015 to 55 per cent in 2020).



WADI HAWER TOUGH AND HARD, BUT TREK IS WORTH IT



TEXT & PHOTOS BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

Wadi Hawer casts a magic spell on you with a combination of huge boulders, crystal clear blue pools and beautiful waterfalls. It is a fantastic wadi for swimming, diving and climbing.

The gorgeous Wadi is located in Wadi Bani Khalid, which is approximately 200 km from Muscat.

After parking in Wadi Bani Khalid, visitors need to walk about 15 minutes until the main pool equipped with basic services to receive tourists appears in front of you. Those who are looking for an adventure, must make sure to continue your journey uphill to discover more of the valley’s hidden and amazing vistas.

The farther you go, the narrower the valley and the stream will become. One will have the opportunity to enjoy the peace and quiet of the site due to the lack of crowds. After walking about 20 minutes from the main pool, there is a small pool surrounded by a distinctive landscape, which is suitable for diving.

“Wadi Hawar is one of the most beautiful spots in the Sultanate. The way to the wadi is full of adventure so we have to prepare not only for long walks but also to crawl into small narrow spaces and jump into some heights,” a visitor told *Observer*.

“The mountains in different shades of brown and pastel contrasting with the dense green of the streams and pools, and

cool gushing waterfalls, is worth the adventure. After overcoming the hard part, the rest of the visit is fun, excitement and discovery. Especially as there are many pools that allow you to swim calmly away from the crowds,” he added.

To see the waterfall hidden behind the rocks, tourists have to scramble from one giant boulder to another. Emerald water pools and lush palm trees are surrounded by rocky valleys, as well as steep slopes suitable for rock climbing enthusiasts.

“Visitors to this valley should be aware that they are in a remote location. There are no facilities on site and the nearest village is about half an hour away, so you should be very careful and go with someone familiar with the terrain and location” residents advised.



New Omani publications corner opens in Brunei Darussalam



BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN: "Al Khalil bin Ahmed al Farahidi" Corner for Omani Publications was inaugurated at the Library of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports in Brunei Darussalam.

The inauguration ceremony was held in cooperation with the Sultanate's Embassy in Brunei Darussalam under the auspices of Dato Aminuddin Ehsan, Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports.

The corner aims to strengthen the distinguished cultural cooperation relations between the two countries.

Shaikh Ahmed bin Hashel al Maskari, the Sultanate's ambassador to Brunei Darussalam, said in his speech during the ceremony that the move is part of the embassy's

endeavour to continue strengthening the outstanding relations of cooperation and friendship between the Sultanate and Brunei Darussalam in cultural cooperation and related fields.

It also aims to support the initiatives launched by the Bruneian government to encourage young people to adopt a culture of reading and knowledge, by enriching public libraries in Brunei with different types of books covering various fields of knowledge, Al Maskari added.

The ceremony also included a cultural exhibition that displayed pictures of the most important heritage, cultural and tourist sites in the Sultanate, as well as the most prominent landmarks of the Omani Renaissance.



The corner aims to strengthen the distinguished cultural cooperation relations between the two countries

This event is a result of the embassy's efforts exerted throughout the past few years, as six corners of Omani publications were launched in public libraries affiliated to higher education institutions and other official bodies in Brunei Darussalam.

Some of these corners were named after prominent Omani figures known for their status and contributions. These include Ibn Al Dhahabi Corner for

Omani Publications, which was inaugurated at the Brunei University of Technology Library in October 2019, and Al Muhallab Ibn Abi Saifra Corner for Omani Publications, which was inaugurated at the Brunei Defense Academy Library in October of last year.

There are also other corners for Omani publications in the Seri Begawan Religious Teachers University College, Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University and Brunei Darussalam University.

The six corners include over 2000 publications that highlight the contributions of Omani scholars, thinkers and researchers in enriching intellectual and scientific fields in different types of knowledge. — ONA

Fishing enthusiasts catch Giant Trevally from shore

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The Giant Trevally is a fish widely distributed throughout the tropical waters of the Indian and Pacific oceans, Arabian Sea, and the Red Sea among others. According to Naveed Ahmed Bakhtiar, a fishing enthusiast, people from around the world travel to the Sultanate just to catch this fish. "That is offshore fishing, but catching a Giant Trevally from the shores is very rare and it happened to us recently."

Naveed is a Pakistani expatriate based in the Sultanate who has been managing a team of fishing enthusiasts called 'No Limits' since 2012.

Recently, while driving

towards the Sur, near Qalhat for fishing from the rocks, the team, which included Bino, Sanish, Ismael and Prashant, came across the Giant Trevally during one of their explorations on July 19. "But it took some time to get hold and bring it to the shores."

He added, "We normally always attempt to release bigger fish back in the water but this time could not manage to do so on time as the fish was completely exhausted and injured. I was very happy with my catch but equally sad that I could not return it back to the water."

He said that for a week his phone was flooded with congratulatory messages from anglers all over Oman.



RAO, US infantry brigade hold joint drill



MUSCAT: The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) and the United States Army's infantry units began a joint drill codenamed "Valley of Fire 2021".

During the 11-day exercise, the RAO is represented by the 11th Infantry Brigade.

The exercise is being conducted with the participation of the Sultan of Oman's Parachutes, the Sultan of Oman's

Armoured Division, the Sultan of Oman's Artillery, the Royal Air Force of Oman and the SAF Signals and Engineering divisions.

The joint drill kicked off at Thamrait Air Base in Dhofar Governorate amid precautions to avoid the spread of Covid-19. Simulation and role-playing tasks of the exercise are aimed to provide training in accordance

with a macro plan set by the RAO to achieve the desired national objectives.

Such plans seek to maintain preparedness and high combat ability.

They come within the context of annual training programmes carried out in cooperation with friendly countries to exchange expertise in military fields.

— ONA

2ND VIRTUAL SCIENTIFIC WEEK BEGINS AT MTC



The second virtual scientific week began at the Military Technological College (MTC) under the auspices of Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO). The chief guest launched the virtual platform of the second scientific week and honoured a number of the MTC affiliates who excelled in scientific and research activities.



Muscat Finance (SAOG)

DIRECTORS' REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Muscat Finance (SAOG), I am pleased to present the report for the period ended June 2021.

Economic Environment

Similar to last year, the economic challenges caused by the pandemic have continued to effect the business sentiment in the Sultanate throughout 2021 and muted economic growth. The 2nd wave of COVID19 has required the Supreme Committee to impose movement restrictions. Due to this uncertainty, many businesses are facing difficulty in managing cash flows and consumer spending recovery has been slower than expected. On the retail side, consumer spending habits are transforming rapidly in favour of digital and social media based commerce.

To address the challenges, the Government has already facilitated a vaccination of over 35% population in the Sultanate. On the economic front, a recovery in oil prices combined with VAT implementation promises to narrow down the fiscal deficit for the Government. We expect the outlook to improve over the remaining half of the year due to these developments.

Business Results

Your Company has recorded a net profit after tax of RO 782K for the period ended June 2021 against RO 1,608K net loss for the corresponding period in the previous year. The Net Operating Income for the year has increased by 11% over last year to RO 3.45M. The financial results are summarized below:

PARTICULARS	Amount in RO '000		
	YTD 30 June 2021	YTD 30 June 2020	% change
Net Investment in Finance Debtors	110,583	130,852	(15%)
Net Operating Income	3,453	3,116	11%
Operating Expenses	1,727	1,566	(10%)
Operating Profit	1,726	1,550	11%
Provisions	944	1,262	26%
Net Profit/(Loss) after tax	782	(1,608)	149%

*In 30th June 2020 loss includes onetime litigation loss of RO 2,021K.

The company delivered an increase in operating income by improving the yield, managing down interest costs and enhancing recoveries from write off accounts. The operating costs for your company are under review for efficiency improvements through process and technology.

Accelerated remedial and legal recourse on non-performing loans has resulted in stemming the flow of new provisions. Impairment provisions were controlled at budgeted levels. While Muscat Finance has been accommodating deferment requests in line with CBO guidance for its customers, we carry a COVID19 related management overlay provision of RO 1.15M to cover any unexpected increase in NPAs.

During the year, your company advanced credit to select segments with prudent risk management diligence. Net loans and advances have reduced to RO 110M, a 15% reduction over the preceding year. Our focus remained on underwriting new credit at reasonable margins. The company aligned its business resources towards working with corporate clients to manage their cash flows effectively during this time, either through deferments or rescheduling payment terms. On the retail business front, opportunities for new advances were capitalized both through our dealership referral network as well as through digital sourcing channels.

The company initiated a transformation mandate focusing on improving customer experience through better use of technology. Muscat Finance is upgrading its core and ancillary systems to a modern architecture. This technology improvement will help us build automation for our aspiration towards digital lending solutions.

Human Capital

At Muscat Finance, we believe people are the driving force behind any company's success. Our priority was to ensure staff health and safety in these testing times. I am pleased to report that majority of our staff and their families have received their first jab of vaccine, and the second is scheduled for July 2021 under a company sponsored program.

Earlier in the year, the company brought new leadership under Mr. Fahd Amjad as Deputy CEO. A new organization structure was implemented with a cohesive management team.

Un-Audited Financials for the Period Ended June 2021

Statement of Financial Position at 30 June 2021

	Jun 21 RO ' 000	Jun 20 RO ' 000
Assets		
Debtors arising from financing activities	110,583	130,853
Cash & Bank balances	508	2,542
Other assets	1,302	8,073
	<u>112,393</u>	<u>141,468</u>
Liabilities		
Bank borrowings, Bonds & Corp. Deposit	68,557	94,012
Creditors & other liabilities	6,472	8,771
	<u>75,029</u>	<u>102,783</u>
Net Assets	<u>37,364</u>	<u>38,685</u>
Shareholders' funds		
Share capital	30,715	30,715
Legal reserve	6,960	6,960
Special reserve	-	801
Impairment reserve	3,955	6,418
Cumulative changes in fair value	42	140
Retained Earnings	(4,308)	(6,349)
	<u>37,364</u>	<u>38,685</u>

Statement of Comprehensive Income for the Period ended 30 June 2021

	Jun 21 RO ' 000	Jun 20 RO ' 000
Lease and interest income	5,076	5,430
Interest expense	(2,073)	(2,521)
Net interest income	<u>3,003</u>	<u>2,909</u>
Other Income	450	206
Operating Expenses	(1,727)	(1,565)
Loss on litigation	-	(2,021)
Provision for Impairment	(944)	(1,262)
Profit / (Loss) before taxation	<u>782</u>	<u>(1,733)</u>
Provision for taxation	-	125
Profit / (Loss) for the period	<u>782</u>	<u>(1,608)</u>

The company continues to invest in building local talent with Omanisation ratio standing at 87.3% for the period ended June 30, 2021. This is well above the 80% requirement of the Central Bank of Oman.

Future outlook

With the vaccination drive in full force and recovery in oil prices, we expect the credit markets to start easing and better liquidity in the market. However the recovery in business activity is expected to be slow over the next six months of the year. We are optimistic though about the economic stimulus measures taken in line with the Sultanate's Oman Vision 2040 supporting business community. Your company is fully aware of all the challenges over the coming six months, and remains committed to high standards of operations and profitability.

Acknowledgement

On behalf of the Board and the company, I would like to express our sincere gratitude and best wishes to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik to lead the Sultanate of Oman with his wisdom and vision, towards a path of prosperity.

I would like to thank His Majesty's Government, the Central Bank of Oman, the Capital Market Authority and other Authorities for their continued support and guidance. We are also grateful to all our customers for their continued patronage and support, to our local and overseas bankers for their active co-operation, and to all the shareholders for the confidence reposed in its Board.

On Behalf of the Board of Directors

Faisal Mohamed Al Youssef
Chairman

NOTE :- The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder or other interested party who requests them, in either Arabic or English, within 7 days of such request addressed to: Chief Executive Officer, Muscat Finance (SAOG) P.O.Box 108, PC 112 Sultanate of Oman

Expats hopeful of rollback of air travel curbs

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

The recent announcement that the Supreme Committee was studying air travel curbs has brightened speculations that the Sultanate may lift the entry ban of expats in the coming days.

Adding to the hope of hundreds of stranded employees in different South Asian countries is the latest decision excluding academics and their families from institutional quarantine.

The Committee that is monitoring the situation arising out of the Covid-19 pandemic, last week said, “it was studying suitable measures including procedures related to entry to public places and means of availing services of the public and private sectors, as well as travel measures governing entry to the Sultanate.”

The Committee later excluded institutional quarantine for “academics in government, private and international educational institutions and their families

coming to the Sultanate, provided they adhere to home quarantine guidelines and wear the electronic bracelet”.

According to observers in the travel industry, all these measures point to the fact that the Sultanate will open its skies for the return of expatriates who are stranded in different countries following travel restrictions imposed in April last.

“Indications are that travellers will likely be able to book flight tickets to Oman in the coming weeks. Bookings are likely to

reopen in the coming days”, said a travel agent.

Yet, he warned the potential travellers not to fall prey to “rumour-mongers” and rely on official channels for clarity.

However, a senior officer of an airline said the chances are low for lifting the air travel restrictions, so soon. “Although, Covid cases have been decreasing, there is still ambiguity. The authorities will look at all the pros and cons”, he said.

Like other countries in the Gulf, Oman has extended a travel ban on

passengers including those in the Asian countries and announced a suspension of flights. The restrictions do not apply to Omani nationals, diplomats and their medical and domestic staff.

However, the Qatari government, a few weeks back, reopened its borders to fully vaccinated travellers and resumed issuing family and visitor visas. Foreign nationals who are fully vaccinated with a Qatari-approved vaccine may enter Qatar and undergo institutional quarantine

for 14 days.

At the same time, many of the stranded expats have taken circuitous routes using third countries like Qatar, Armenia, Maldives, Serbia and Uzbekistan to quarantine there and return to their jobs in Oman.

But, one of the biggest issues facing expatriates is the expiry of residency visas and work permits. During the first wave of the pandemic, the Sultanate extended the validity of all visas, including visit, residency and entry permits.

MoH, Oman LNG ink pacts to finance projects



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Monday signed four agreements with Oman Liquefied Natural Gas (Oman LNG) Development Foundation to finance health projects, with a total cost of more than RO 167,000.

The agreements stipulated on supplying medical devices for three hospitals; Sur, Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan and Ibra, in addition to funding the purchase of computers for Khawla Hospital to strengthen the process of Al Shifa health system.

Dr Fatima bint Mohammed al Ajmiyah, MoH Under-Secretary for Administrative, Financial, and Planning Affairs, signed the agreements on behalf of the Ministry and Mohammed bin Juma al Mukhaini, Senior Manager of Communication and Community Affairs at Oman LNG signed on behalf of the Company.

Dr Al Ajmiyah stressed the importance of partnership between the public and private sectors to serve the public interests, praising the initiative provided by the Oman LNG Development Foundation to finance a number of health projects.

The Senior Manager of Communication and Community Affairs at Oman LNG reiterated the institution's ongoing commitment to partnerships and cooperation with government institutions to serve the development aspects of the country, including health aspects and services offered to citizens, along with contributing to the enhancing health services quality and relieving patients by providing more healthcare.

The signing of the agreements stems from the company's objective to strengthen strategic partnership to enhance community services and development projects of public benefit. — ONA

7 RESCUED FROM HOUSE FIRE



MUSCAT: The firefighting teams of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) controlled a fire that erupted at a house in Al Sharadi area in the Wilayat of Al Seeb and rescued seven people who were inside the house at the time of the incident using a hydraulic crane.

تکافل عمان للتأمين ش.م.ع.ع TAKAFUL OMAN INSURANCE SAOG			
DIRECTORS REPORT			
Dear Shareholders, On Behalf of the Board of Directors and myself, I hereby present the board's report for the half year ended 30 June 2021.			
Performance in Brief The company reported Gross contributions of RO 15,224,817 for H1 2021, growth by RO 12,880,600 or 18% from H1 2020.			
The following are the company's key financial highlights:			
	Amounts in RO		
	Jan – Jun 2021	Jan – Jun 2020	
Profit as per Shareholders Income Statement	742,579	883,106	
Surplus/ (Deficit) to Policyholders	(2,621,003)	(114,870)	
Combined Result Profit/ (Loss)	(1,878,424)	768,236	
During the period, the company has incurred management expenses of RO 2,372,258 compared to RO 1,673,628 in H1 2020. The increase in expenses is due to the change in regulation to account for acquisition costs in the shareholders account. The company charged Wakala Fees of RO 2,740,467 to its policyholders in H1 2021 as compared to RO 2,318,508 in H1 2020.			
The investment portfolio of the company comprises of 83% in Wakala deposits, 8.6% in Sharia compliant Sukuk, 5.5% in Real Estate and 2.9% in Sharia compliant Fund.			
The company has raised perpetual sukuk in Jan 2021 to meet the solvency requirements resulting due to significant increase in business during last five years.			
Business Update Takaful Oman Insurance Company is the First Full Fledged Islamic Insurance and true to its beliefs on which it is founded; highest level of transparency and governance is practiced.			
The Business mix of the Policyholders is in line with our Strategy. The company is concentrating on diversified portfolio of insurance risks and focusing on Life and Medical business.			
Market Outlook The oil prices have further improved globally and this will benefit the economy of Oman. Infections due to Covid 19 saw a resurgence with the new Delta Variant which continues to cause disruption of life and business. The vaccinations have increased and with increased supplies, Oman will be able to vaccinate 70% of its eligible population by end of 2021. This should have a further positive impact on the economy.			
On the local front, the company continued its growth in business in Medical and Life and has further strengthened claims control and is focussing on profitable growth across all lines of business.			
Acknowledgements On Behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for his wise and extra ordinary leadership and to his majesty's wise government for their efforts in creating a dynamic, successful and conducive business environment in Oman.			
I would like to thank the CMA, MSM and other Business partners. Finally, I would like to thank Directors, Management and Staff of the company for their continuous efforts.			
Sheikh Rashid Al Saadi Chairman			
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 JUNE 2021 (Unaudited)			
	2021		
	Shareholders RO	Participants General takaful RO Family takaful RO Total RO	
ASSETS			
Cash and bank balances	54,369	42,311	17,255
Financial asset at fair value through equity	496,432	-	-
Investment in subsidiary	1,000	-	-
Receivable from participants' fund	11,576,486	-	-
Takaful balance receivables	-	5,723,760	953,937
Retakaful balance receivables	-	630,008	2,521,246
Other receivables and prepayments	1,518,222	246,012	246,012
Retakaful contract assets	-	6,495,302	2,384,837
Deferred policy acquisition costs	610,307	264,676	114,155
Wakalah bank deposits	14,519,000	-	-
Investment carried at amortised cost	1,503,000	-	-
Investment in a real estate	967,497	-	-
Property and equipment	307,211	-	-
Intangible assets	345,578	-	-
Deferred tax asset	826,355	-	-
Total assets	32,725,457	13,402,069	5,991,430
LIABILITIES, PARTICIPANTS' FUND AND EQUITY			
LIABILITIES			
Takaful contract liabilities	-	16,164,716	3,275,133
Payable to shareholders' fund	-	9,869,068	1,707,418
Payable to Retakaful	-	2,388,248	3,725,758
Accounts and other payables	1,013,206	2,170,384	458,694
Short term borrowings	1,750,000	-	-
Deferred income from retakaful contracts	-	140,532	14,687
Employees' end of service benefits	75,917	-	-
Total liabilities	2,839,123	30,732,948	9,181,690
Participant's fund	-	-	39,914,638
Deficit in participant's fund	-	(17,330,879)	(3,190,260)
Equity			
Capital and reserves			
Share capital	10,000,000	-	-
Legal reserve	1,360,635	-	-
Investment fair value reserve	55,042	-	-
Property fair value reserve	250,284	-	-
Retained earnings	12,220,373	-	-
Equity attributable to shareholder's	23,886,334	-	-
Perpetual Sukuk	6,000,000	-	-
Net Equity	29,886,334	-	-
Total liabilities, participants' fund and equity	32,725,457	13,402,069	5,991,430
Net assets per share attributable to shareholders	0.239	-	-
Note: The complete accounts either in English or Arabic will be sent to any shareholder by mail within 7 days of receipt.			
STATEMENT OF SHAREHOLDERS' COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2021 (Unaudited)			
	1 January 2021 to 30 June 2021 (Unaudited) RO	1 January 2020 to 30 June 2020 (Unaudited) RO	
Wakalah fees income	2,740,467	2,318,508	
Investment income – net	309,470	273,675	
	3,049,937	2,592,183	
General and administrative expenses	(1,886,313)	(1,638,153)	
Acquisition cost	(451,669)	-	
Rental cost	(34,276)	(35,475)	
Profit before taxation	677,679	918,555	
Profit for the year	677,679	918,555	
Other comprehensive income			
Items that may be reclassified to profit or loss			
Changes in fair value of financial asset at fair value through equity	64,900	(35,449)	
Total other comprehensive income	64,900	(35,449)	
Total comprehensive income for the year	742,579	883,106	
Earnings per share attributable to shareholders – basic and diluted	0.007	0.009	
STATEMENT OF PARTICIPANTS' REVENUES AND EXPENSES FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2021			
	1 January to 30 June 2021 (Unaudited) RO	1 January to 30 June 2020 (Unaudited) RO	Total RO
General takaful RO	Family takaful RO		
Takaful revenue			
Gross contributions	10,814,571	4,410,247	15,224,818
Contributions ceded to retakaful	(5,184,476)	(3,484,701)	(8,669,177)
Net retained contributions	5,630,095	925,546	6,555,641
Movement in unearned contribution reserve - net	(572,945)	(57,598)	(630,543)
Income from retakaful contracts	160,242	51,572	211,814
Total takaful revenue	5,217,392	919,520	6,136,912
Takaful expenses			
Gross claims settled	(5,281,921)	(2,779,717)	(8,061,638)
Retakaful share in claim settled	1,716,116	2,429,961	4,146,077
Net claims settled	(3,565,805)	(349,756)	(3,915,561)
Movement in outstanding claims reserve – net	(836,085)	(161,371)	(997,456)
Movement in other reserves	-	-	-
Net claims incurred	(4,401,890)	(511,127)	(4,913,017)
Acquisition costs	(936,130)	(232,296)	(1,168,426)
Other takaful expenses	(3,810)	(861)	(4,671)
Wakalah fees expense	(1,946,623)	(793,844)	(2,740,467)
Total takaful expenses	(7,288,453)	(1,538,128)	(8,826,581)
Other income	68,666	-	68,666
Deficit from takaful operations	(2,002,395)	(618,608)	(2,621,003)
1 January to 30 June 2020 (Unaudited)			
Takaful revenue			
Gross contributions	9,550,078	3,330,522	12,880,600
Contributions ceded to retakaful	(3,930,444)	(2,569,090)	(6,499,534)
Net retained contributions	5,619,634	761,432	6,381,066
Movement in unearned contribution reserve - net	(260,889)	52,723	(208,166)
Income from retakaful contracts	246,833	79,901	326,734
Total takaful revenue	5,605,578	894,056	6,499,634
Takaful expenses			
Gross claims settled	(5,789,417)	(1,442,568)	(7,231,985)
Retakaful share in claim settled	1,781,881	1,247,558	3,029,439
Net claims settled	(4,007,536)	(195,010)	(4,202,546)
Movement in outstanding claims reserve – net	1,383,535	52,086	1,435,621
Net claims incurred	(2,624,001)	(142,924)	(2,766,925)
Acquisition costs	(1,406,912)	(217,112)	(1,624,024)
Other takaful expenses	(139,866)	-	(139,866)
Wakalah fees expense	(1,719,014)	(599,494)	(2,318,508)
Total takaful expenses	(5,869,793)	(959,530)	(6,849,323)
Other income	206,765	28,054	234,819
Deficit from takaful operations	(77,450)	(37,420)	(114,870)
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2020 (AUDITED)			
	2020		
Shareholders	General takaful	Participants	Total
RO	RO	RO	RO
ASSETS			
Cash and bank balances	98,669	76,436	46,285
Financial asset at fair value through equity	431,532	-	-
Receivable from participants' fund	11,252,141	-	-
Takaful balance receivables	-	3,452,589	1,698,524
Retakaful balance receivables	-	1,152,170	978,398
Other receivables and prepayments	1,251,358	301,246	301,246
Retakaful contract assets	-	5,067,009	1,190,090
Deferred policy acquisition costs	-	1,200,806	346,451
Wakalah bank deposits	8,519,000	-	-
Investment carried at amortised cost	1,503,000	-	-
Investment in a real estate	909,111	-	-
Property and equipment	303,245	-	-
Intangible assets	227,806	-	-
Deferred tax asset	826,355	-	-
Total assets	25,322,217	11,250,256	4,259,748
LIABILITIES, PARTICIPANTS' FUND AND EQUITY			
LIABILITIES			
Takaful contract liabilities	-	13,327,392	1,861,416
Payable to shareholders' fund	-	8,316,810	2,935,331
Payable to Retakaful	-	2,528,825	1,336,915
Accounts and other payables	243,419	2,266,083	697,381
Short term borrowings	1,850,000	-	-
Deferred income from retakaful contracts	-	139,630	357
Employees' end of service benefits	48,004	-	-
Total liabilities	2,141,423	26,578,740	6,831,400
Participant's fund	-	-	33,410,140
Deficit in participant's fund	-	(15,328,484)	(2,571,652)
Equity			
Capital and reserves			
Share capital	10,000,000	-	-
Legal reserve	1,360,635	-	-
Investment fair value reserve	(9,858)	-	-
Property fair value reserve	250,284	-	-
Retained earnings	11,579,733	-	-
Equity attributable to shareholder's	23,180,794	-	-
Perpetual Sukuk	-	-	-
Net Equity	23,180,794	-	-
Total liabilities, participants' fund and equity	25,322,217	11,250,256	4,259,748
Net assets per share attributable to shareholders	0.232	-	-



Call for development of research, ed networks in Arab countries

MUSCAT: Oman Research and Education Network (OMREN) of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) in collaboration with the Arab States Research and Education Network (ASREN), have announced a call for action to recognise and foster the role of National Research and Education Networks (NRENs) across the Arab regions during their annual conference. The call of action focused on addressing the official authorities in the Arab countries, including ministries concerned and stakeholders, in addition to joint Arab action institutions led by the Arab League to work on developing and improving the infrastructure for research and education at the national and regional



levels in the Arab region. Asserting on the importance of this call of action, Dr Saif al Haddabi, Under-Secretary for Research and Innovation at MoHERI, said, "We are proud of OMREN's achievements and what it has provided for

the development of research and education in the Sultanate and beyond. This confirms how the Sultanate recognises the importance of supporting and developing the infrastructure for research and education, enhancing its capabilities and providing it with the necessary resources. We call on all the Arab countries to work on developing their infrastructure. We are pleased to share the experience of Oman with those who wish to benefit from." During the conference, the Ministry and ASREN recalled the role of the late Dr Abdulmonem al Kharusi, Director of OMREN (2014-2021), with his significant contribution to OMREN and to the Arab NRENs as well. — ONA

187,897 Omanis registered with public sector pension funds

MUSCAT: The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) data shows that the number of Omanis registered in pension/retirement funds of the public sector (Civil Service, Diwan of Royal Court and Central Bank of Oman) till May 2021 declined by 0.1 per cent (compared to April 2021) to 187,897, of them 55.8 per cent males and 44.2 per cent females.

Preliminary statistics show that there are three subscription-based segments registered in different wage bands.

- The first segment, a total of 52,542 Omanis registered in public sector funds, receives salaries ranging

from RO 1,000 to less than RO 2,000.

- The second segment (36,681 Omanis) receives RO 700 to less than RO 800.

- The third segment (25,630) receives between RO 900 and less than RO 1,000.

Age-wise, statistics show that Omanis registered in the above-mentioned public sector funds fall in 3 segments, as indicated below:

- 39,883 beneficiaries aged 30-34 years.

- 42,159 beneficiaries aged 40-44 years.

- 53,913 beneficiaries aged 35-39 years. — ONA

CPA seizes electronic cigarettes in Muscat

MUSCAT: The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) in Muscat Governorate busted expats selling electronic cigarettes.

The CPA said that the seizure comes within the framework of its continuous efforts to monitor and control the markets, stave off violations committed by some suppliers and curb dealing in illicit commodities that harm individuals' health.

As per the details, the CPA received a tip-off about expats selling electronic cigarettes in a tobacco products shop in violation to the decision 698/2015 which bans dealing in electronic cigarettes and hookah. Based on the information received, the CPA conducted an investigation and obtained a warrant to search the store after coordinating with the Public Prosecution. The CPA inspectors ascertained that the store was really selling electronic cigarettes and promoting them online. The CPA inspectors seized 4,303 electronic cigarettes along with their accessories hidden in a secret store. In light of that, the CPA inspectors issued a seizure report and took legal procedures.



Work begins on infra projects at KOM

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 2

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates — Madayn — has started implementing the project to construct the ring road at Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM) and other facilities.

Eng Jaafar bin Mohammed al Ajmi, Director-General of Knowledge Oasis Muscat, said that this project will provide investors and business owners with a dual carriageway that allows

quick access and connection to facilities throughout the oasis.

The projects include modernisation of the on-site rainwater drainage and security systems, construction of 3,662 km of dual road 4,022 km of single carriageway road, to be delivered by January 30, 2023.

In addition to the Ring Road project, Madayn is working on the implementation of several projects at KOM, including the multi-storey car parking project, spread over 14,863 square metres

with a capacity to accommodate 1,000 vehicles at the same time. The construction will start in the fourth quarter of this year 2021.

The projects to be completed in the first quarter of next 2022 include shaded walkways, exhibition spaces, outdoor cafes, bus stops, and a cycling track. Work is under way for the construction of Building 6, which will add 40,000 sqm of rentable office space according to the latest specifications upon completion.



الشركة المتحدة للطاقة (ش.م.ع.م.)
UNITED POWER COMPANY (SAOC)

P.O. Box 147, PC 134, Jawharat A'Shatti, Sultanate of Oman,
Tel: 24400600, Fax: 24698496, Website: www.upcmanah.com

INVITATION TO THE EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING OF UNITED POWER COMPANY S.A.O.C.

The Board of Directors of United Power Company SAOC (the "Company") is pleased to invite all shareholders to the Extraordinary General Meeting ("EGM") to be held at 3:30 pm on Wednesday, 18 August 2021 at the e-portal for convening general meetings which you may access through Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om). Failing quorum of the Extraordinary General Meeting, a second Extraordinary General Meeting shall be convened at 3:00 pm on Thursday, 19 August 2021 at the e-portal for convening general meetings which you may access through Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om) to discuss and consider the following agenda:

1. To consider and approve the amendment of Article 5 of the Articles of Association of the Company concerning the share capital of the Company to be read as follows:

Reduction in the authorised share capital of the Company from RO 39,914,400 to RO 1,500,000 and reduction in the issued share capital from RO 2,000,000 to RO 500,000 (Annexure 1).

The share capital shall be divided into classes of shares namely:

- a. 300,000 Preference Shares having a value of RO 1 each.
- b. 200,000 Ordinary Shares having a value of RO 1 each.

According to the Commercial Companies Law RD 18/2019 and the Rules for Convening General Meetings via Electronic Means issued by MOCIIP, we would like to call your attention to the following:

- a. only a corporate person may authorize a natural person to attend and vote on its behalf on decisions/resolutions of the general meeting, through electronic means, provided such natural person must have an investor number at MCD.
- b. voting on any item of the agenda shall commence prior to the convention of the general meeting at a maximum of three (3) days and ends on the date of the meeting. If a shareholder's balance is changed either by increase or decrease the voting process shall stand cancelled and must revoke on the date of the meeting.

Please log on to the e-portal at least 30 minutes prior to the EGM.

For further information please contact Mr. Salah Issa Al Farsi on phone number: 99219419.

Chairman

Auditor

Legal Advisor

EU sends help to Turkey as wildfire toll reaches 8

MARMARIS, Turkey: The European Union sent help to Turkey on Monday and volunteers joined firefighters in battling a week of violent blazes that have killed eight people and put pressure on President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The wildfires tearing through the resort regions of Turkey's Mediterranean and Aegean coasts have destroyed huge swathes of pristine forest and forced the evacuation of panicked tourists from their hotels.

But they have also exposed Erdogan — facing an election in two years that could extend his rule into a third decade — to a new round of criticism over his seemingly sluggish and out-of-touch response.

The Turkish leader came under especially strong criticism over the weekend for tossing bags of tea to locals while touring one of the most badly affected regions under heavy police escort.

The government has also disclosed that it had no firefighting planes in its inventory and had to rely on foreign help to battle the flames.



A firefighting helicopter drops water to a wildfire near Marmaris. — Reuters

Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu thanked Brussels on Monday for sending a plane from Croatia and two from Spain.

The European Union said it “stands in full solidarity with Turkey at this very difficult time” — a

message designed to show goodwill after more than a year of heated disputes.

Firefighters on Monday also battled local blazes on the Greek island of Rhodes in the Aegean as well as parts of Italy and Spain.

Fanned by soaring temperatures and strong winds — with experts saying that climate change increases both the frequency and intensity of such blazes — EU data show this year's fire season has been significantly more destruc-

Turkey's forestry directorate said 105 fires had been recorded in 35 towns and cities across the country since Wednesday

tive than most.

Erdogan's office at first blamed the worst fires in Turkey in at least a decade on arsonists that pro-government media linked to outlawed Kurdish militants waging a deadly insurgency against the state. But that theory appeared to vanish as the number of fires grew, the toll mounted and the days wore on.

Turkey's forestry directorate said 105 fires had been recorded in 35 towns and cities across the country since Wednesday.

It said seven — most of them not far from the southern resort cities of Antalya and Marmaris — continued to burn on Monday.

An AFP team in Marmaris on the Aegean Sea saw flames simmer across the crests of forest-covered hills.

The night sky glowed amber and the smoke-filled air was heavy and hard to breathe in stifling heat of around 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit).

Weather services warned locals of poor air quality and volunteers spent sleepless nights helping fatigued firefighters save lush forests from the devastation that experts say may take generations to restore.

“This is a disaster,” resident Evran Ozkan said at a makeshift assistance centre set up by the sides of a road leading to the burning hills.

“Like me, many inhabitants of Marmaris cannot put their heads on their pillow to sleep peacefully while these fires burn.”

Firefighters with flashlights wrapped around their foreheads sat eating simple meals from containers and drinking bottled water that locals gathered from neighbouring towns.

Emergency rescue boats stood on standby by the Marmaris shoreline to evacuate anyone should the fires spread and the town be cut off. — AFP

Tunisia's parliament speaker leaves hospital

TUNIS: Tunisia's parliament speaker Rached Ghannouchi (pictured), head of Ennahda party that has had an influential national role for a decade, left the hospital hours after he was admitted on Sunday, two advisers said, in the midst of a major political crisis.

Ghannouchi, 80, has led opposition to last week's move by President Kais Saied to seize governing powers, dismiss the prime minister and freeze parliament, steps that the Ennahda leader quickly branded a coup.

His advisers did not say what was wrong with Ghannouchi, who



was hospitalised for a week last month with Covid-19.

“After a few hours in the military hospital, Ghannouchi returned home and he is fine now”, an advisor said. Suppressed before the 2011 revolution that introduced democracy, Ennahda has since then been the most con-

sistently powerful political party, backing successive coalition governments and helping to agree with the 2014 constitution.

However, economic stagnation, declining services and public perception of increased corruption have dented its support and Saied's sudden declaration on Sunday appears to have widespread backing.

Ghannouchi, who was also taken to hospital briefly on Saturday and later discharged, faces internal dissent within Ennahda over both his handling of the immediate crisis and his strategic choices since the 2019 election. — Reuters

For Beirut blast survivor leaving Lebanon, every day is August 4

BEIRUT: For Beirut blast survivor Shady Rizk, the time has stopped since August 4 last year when a huge stockpile of ammonium nitrate exploded in the Lebanese capital's port opposite his office.

“Every day is August 4, every day,” the 36-year-old said.

“Every day, I remember the blast or remember what happened that dreadful day.”

The gigantic explosion killed more than 200 people, injured thousands, and destroyed large parts of the city.

Rizk was in the office where he works for an internet provider and was filming the smoke rising from an initial explosion at the port when the second blast hit.

It left him with 350 stitches all over his body and face, and partially impaired his vision.

Having survived the near-death experience, Rizk considers August 4 his re-birth and he now wants to continue this new chapter of his life away from Lebanon.

“I don't feel safe in my country, this is why I want to leave... This is the hardest decision I



Shady Rizk, a survivor wounded during last year's Beirut port blast, in Sin el-Fil, Lebanon. — Reuters

took in my life,” Rizk said.

He has now applied for immigration to Canada and plans to be there by October this year.

Meanwhile, he still lives at his family house in a Beirut suburb with a view of the port, a daily reminder of his traumatic experience.

As Wednesday's anniversary of the blast nears, Rizk says his “internal anger” grows, fuelled by the stalling of an investigation into the blast. He is one of many Lebanese angry at the lack of accountability one year later.

“No one has yet been arrested, no one resigned, no one is in jail...The truth is not yet known,” Rizk said.

Rizk's doctor is still extracting glass from his body.

And even though many of his scars have now been treated, he is “still healing” both physically and mentally.

“The internal scars are even worse, I may physically heal eventually but psychologically, I don't know when I will heal,” he said, speaking as he stood in the street of his damaged office facing the port's wrecked silos.

— Reuters

VACCINES ARRIVE IN LIBYA



Libyan workers prepare to unload a shipment of the Chinese Sinopharm vaccine against Covid-19 at Mitiga International Airport in Tripoli. On July 11, Libya imposed sweeping restrictions to stem the spread of coronavirus as recorded cases hit a new high. These included a ban on weddings and organised funerals with mourners. — AFP

CAIRO Egyptian soldiers killed in anti-terror operations

Eight Egyptian army soldiers have been killed in anti-terrorism operations, the armed forces said. According to an armed forces statement, most of the fighting took place in the northern Sinai, where militants loyal to the IS group operate, “during the last period”. It was not clear whether all the soldiers were killed there or in various other regions.

Eighty-nine “very dangerous Takfiris” were killed during the fighting in northern Sinai, the statement said, using a term it



normally employs to refer to suspected militants. The army confiscated different types of arms and ammunition during the operations and destroyed hundreds of explosive devices and some explosive belts. — Reuters

KHARTOUM USAID chief in Sudan for talks on economy

US aid chief Samantha Power has hailed Sudan's transition during a visit to Khartoum where she discussed with officials the country's urgent economic and humanitarian needs. Sudan has been going through a rocky transition since the ouster in April 2019 of strongman president Omar al Bashir.

USAID said ahead of her visit that Western nations sought to support the civilian-backed transitional government after decades of authoritarian rule.



“My emphasis in this trip ... is squarely on Sudan's economic development needs and the ongoing humanitarian needs,” she told a news conference in the Sudanese capital. — AFP

BEIRUT Lebanese army detains man after deadly attack

The Lebanese army said it had detained a man wanted over an attack on mourners at a funeral where three people were killed, after the Hezbollah demanded the perpetrators be detained. The shooting in Khaldeh, a town south of Beirut where tensions between two groups have long simmered, has prompted leaders to warn against an escalation as Lebanon grapples with political and financial crises.

The attack targeted the funeral of Hezbollah member Ali Shibli



who was shot dead during a wedding.

Army intelligence stormed the homes of a number of wanted people and detained a man who was involved in the funeral attack, the army said. — Reuters

In brief

■ BEIJING



DEATH TOLL IN CENTRAL CHINA FLOODS RISES TO 302

The death toll from floods in central China last month is at least 302 with dozens of people still missing, officials said after record downpours dumped a year's worth of rain on a city in just three days. Zhengzhou, the capital of Henan province and the epicentre of the record flooding, was hardest-hit with 292 people dead and 47 missing, according to a provincial government press briefing, as residents were trapped in subway trains, underground car parks, and tunnels.

Images of passengers inundated by shoulder-height water went viral on Chinese social media on Line 5 of the city subway where 14 people died, while dozens of cars in a tunnel were tossed aside by the deluge, many with passengers still inside. — AFP

■ MANILA



PHILIPPINES TO EXTEND NIGHT CURFEW IN MANILA

The Philippines will extend a night curfew in the capital, Manila, amid a tightening of curbs in the Southeast Asian country to combat a potential surge in cases of the Delta variant of Covid-19, a government official said.

Metropolitan Manila, already subject to an six hour curfew from 10 pm, will bring forward that curfew by two hours to 8 pm, said Benjamin Abalos, chair of the region's governing body:

"We are only asking for two weeks. This will stop the virus for the meantime. What's important is our hospitals don't get full," Abalos told a briefing. — Reuters

■ BANGKOK



THAILAND TIGHTENS CURBS IN 16 MORE PROVINCES

Thailand has extended a night-time curfew and other virus restrictions to 16 more provinces beginning on Tuesday as the kingdom's Covid-19 death toll soared to a new record. The Southeast Asian country is struggling to contain its latest outbreak fuelled by the Delta variant, with infections and deaths skyrocketing and the healthcare system stretched thin.

Severe curbs on daily life including a seven-hour night-time curfew have already hit residents in a dozen provinces and the capital Bangkok, where an estimated 10 million live. — AFP

Afghan President blames 'abrupt' US withdrawal for worsening security

KABUL: President Ashraf Ghani on Monday blamed Afghanistan's fast-deteriorating security situation on a "sudden" decision by the United States to withdraw its troops, but said his government had a plan to bring conditions under control within six months.

Taliban insurgents have moved in on three provincial capitals in the last few days, amid rapid advances nationwide since Washington said it planned a complete withdrawal of troops by September.

"The current situation is due to a sudden decision on the withdrawal of the international troops," Ghani told the Afghan parliament in a speech. "We have had an unexpected situation in the last three months."

However, the Afghan government had a security plan to bring the situation under control within six months, he added, and the United States supported the plan.

The Taliban would not move towards peace unless the worsening security situation was curbed, Ghani said.

Peace talks between the Afghan government and Taliban negotiators started last year in the Qatari capital of Doha, but have not made any substantive progress despite a few rounds.

The two sides committed to speeding up the talks, however, at a recent meeting in Doha between a high-level Afghan political delegation and the Taliban.



Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani arrives for a meeting at the Afghan Parliament house in Kabul. — AFP

Ghani said the militants had not severed ties with terrorist groups, and had stepped up attacks on women and civil society activists.

It was time the Taliban and the Afghan government accepted each other and moved towards a peaceful solution, he added.

The Taliban rejected Ghani's accusations.

"Declarations of war, accusations and lies cannot prolong Ghani's government's life; his time has run out, God willing," the movement's spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, said on Twitter.

DOMESTIC FLIGHTS CANCELLED:

In Afghanistan, domestic flights have been cancelled to at least five Afghan provinces for weeks now as fighting intensifies between the pro-government forces and the Taliban militants, officials confirmed.

Badakhshan, Faryab, Helmand, Kunduz and Uruzgan are the affected provinces under a fierce siege by the Taliban.

"It is impossible for the aeroplanes to land because the Taliban will hit them with mortars," Helmand provincial

council chief Ataullah Afghan said from the volatile province.

Civilian government employees cannot travel in and out of Maimana city, the capital of Faryab province in the north, because the insurgents control all the surrounding districts to the city, a councillor from the province, Fazel Haq Mohammadi, explained. In addition to the five provinces, flights had been temporarily suspended to Kandahar and Herat, according to the officials. The flights from Herat airport resumed on Sunday after a three-day pause while

The Taliban would not move towards peace unless the worsening security situation was curbed. We have had an unexpected situation in the last three months

ASHRAF GHANI

Afghan President

heavy clashes were under way between the warring sides in the western part of the city.

Suliman Omar, the commercial director of Kam Air, the largest private airline in the country, said that the airline conducted two flights on Sunday carrying hundreds of stranded people from the capital Kabul to Herat province and vice versa. On Sunday, flights from Kandahar airport were cancelled after a Taliban rocket hit the airport runway, provincial councillor Nematullah Wafa said.

In a statement, the Civil Aviation Authority said that all civilian flights will resume after the technical problems are resolved. Afghanistan is in a state of uncertainty since the withdrawal of international troops began in early May. Many countries have asked their citizens to leave the country via the earliest available commercial flights.

— Reuters/dpa

Millions under virus lockdown as China battles Delta outbreak

BEIJING: Millions of people were confined to their homes in China on Monday as the country tried to contain its largest coronavirus outbreak in months including seven positive tests found in Wuhan, where the virus first emerged in late 2019.

China reported 55 new locally transmitted cases on Monday as an outbreak of the fast-spreading Delta variant reached over 20 cities in more than a dozen provinces.

The Wuhan cluster came after the official daily tally was released, but it was confirmed by state media which said the infections had been traced to a train station. "The seven were identified as migrant workers," Xinhua reported, citing Covid-19 prevention and control officials.

Major cities including Beijing have now tested millions of residents while cordoning off residential compounds and placing close contacts under quarantine.

Over 1.2 million residents were placed under strict lockdown for the next three days in the central city of Zhuzhou in Hunan province on Monday, as authorities roll out a citywide testing and vaccination campaign, according to an official statement.

"The situation is still grim and complicated," the Zhuzhou government said.

Beijing had previously boasted of its success in bringing domestic cases down to virtually zero af-



A swab sample is taken from a woman to be tested for the coronavirus at a hospital in Beijing. — AFP

ter the coronavirus first emerged in Wuhan, allowing the economy to rebound.

But the latest outbreak, linked to a cluster in the city of Nanjing where nine cleaners at an international airport tested positive on July 20, is threatening that success with more than 360 domestic cases reported in the past two weeks.

In the tourist destination of Zhangjiajie, famed for its national forest park, an outbreak spread last month among theatre patrons who then brought the virus back to their homes around the country.

Zhangjiajie locked down all 1.5 million residents on Friday.

Officials are urgently seeking people who have recently trav-

elled from Nanjing or Zhangjiajie, and have urged tourists not to travel to areas where cases have been found.

Meanwhile, Beijing has blocked tourists from entering the capital during the peak summer holiday travel season.

Only "essential travellers" with negative nucleic acid tests will be allowed to enter after the discovery of a handful of cases among residents who had returned from Zhangjiajie.

Top city officials on Sunday called for residents "not to leave Beijing unless necessary".

The capital's Changping district locked down 41,000 people in nine housing communities last week. — AFP



A woman casts her vote during a referendum to decide whether to investigate five of former Mexican leaders at a polling station in Mexico City. – Reuters

Mexico vote on ex-leaders falls short of turnout target

MEXICO CITY: A referendum backed by President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador on whether to investigate Mexico's former political leaders has fallen short of the required turnout though it had overwhelming backing from those who voted, initial results showed on Monday.

Mexico's National Electoral Institute said that, according to a preliminary count of nearly 99 per cent of ballots, 97.7 per cent of participants supported the proposal of putting the decisions of previous political leaders under investigation. Still, turnout for the referendum was just over 7 per cent, far below the 40 per cent threshold set to make it binding.

Speaking at his regular news conference, Lopez Obrador said he was pleased with the outcome, arguing it marked the start of a practice that would become a "habit" for Mexican voters.

He added that he would

press ahead with plans to hold a referendum in March on whether he should stay in office until the end of his term, which is due to conclude on September 30, 2024.

Lopez Obrador has used plebiscites to overturn decisions by past governments, including major infrastructure investments such as a partly built new Mexico City airport. The leftist leader has blamed former presidents Carlos Salinas, Ernesto Zedillo, Vicente Fox, Felipe Calderon and Enrique Peña Nieto, whose administrations extended from 1988 to 2018, for fuelling corruption, inequality and violence in Mexico.

Sunday's referendum asked voters to reject or back "a process of investigation of political decisions taken in past years by political actors" that would be aimed at "guaranteeing justice and the rights of possible victims."

— Reuters

US Democrats seek eviction moratorium extension

WASHINGTON: Democratic leaders in the US House of Representatives on Sunday called on the Biden administration to immediately extend a moratorium on housing Evictions through October 18.

The moratorium, related to the coronavirus pandemic, expired at midnight on Saturday. The request was made through a statement by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other top leaders.

"House leadership is calling on the administration to immediately extend the moratorium," the Democratic leaders said.

President Joe Biden on Thursday asked Congress to extend the deadline, citing the Covid-19 Delta variant that is taking hold in the United States.

But Congress, possibly lacking the votes to approve such an extension, failed to act after a Republican lawmaker blocked a move in the House to immediately bring up a bill under the unanimous consent of the chamber.

It was unclear whether the administration has the authority to extend the moratorium using its executive powers and without Congress acting.

More than 15 million people in 6.5 million households are currently behind on their rental payments.

But lawmakers have failed to extend those expiring protections and only \$3 billion in aid has reached households out of the



People gather on the House steps during a multi-day protest supporting an extension of the pandemic-related federal moratorium on residential evictions outside the US Capitol in Washington. – Reuters

\$25 billion allotted to states and localities in early February.

"We should be compassionate. We should help. And if that money is there, we should use it for its intended purpose," Democratic Senator Joe Manchin told CNN.

Over a quarter of renters are behind in some states, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities think-tank.

Southern states are some of the worst affected, though some 16 per cent of US households owed rent — about double the amount before the pandemic.

The protections lapsed at midnight on Saturday, two days

It was unclear whether the administration has the authority to extend the moratorium using its executive powers and without Congress acting

after the White House announced it would not be legally able to renew the moratorium.

Republicans balked at Democratic efforts to extend the freeze through mid-October, and the House of Representatives

adjourned for its summer vacation on Friday without renewing it.

But Democratic Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez laid blame on President Joe Biden's administration for waiting until the last minute to ask Congress to act — saying it could have done so weeks earlier.

She added it would be unfair to turf people out when billions in aid have not been spent — a total of 46 billion has been approved by Congress — and called for an immediate vote to extend the moratorium.

— AFP/Reuters

Families and friends reunite at London's Heathrow airport

LONDON: Families and friends were overjoyed at London's Heathrow Airport on Monday after a travel rule change meant they could reunite after 18 months of pandemic separation.

"Very, very excited. It means the world," said Sue Blake, as she waited to greet her son, daughter-in-law and grandson who had flown in from New York and who she last saw two years ago.

"It's a big chunk of his life and I'm so thrilled for him that he can come here," she said of the eight-year-old.

Watching the hugs and tears in the arrivals hall, Heathrow's boss urged Britain to remove barriers to travel, not add to them, amid speculation that the government

was poised to impose more rules.

"Let's just make it easier now for people to travel," Heathrow's chief executive John Holland-Kaye said.

Britain, where the death toll from the coronavirus pandemic has nearly reached 130,000, reopened its borders to large parts of the world on Monday, scrapping quarantine for fully vaccinated arrivals from the European Union, excluding France, and the United States.

The move was welcomed by families divided by the pandemic and airlines strained by it.

"It is really awesome," said 31-year-old medical writer Colleen Castro after collecting her luggage.



Karen Tyler embraces her son Jonathan who arrived from the US, at the International arrivals area of Terminal 5 in London's Heathrow Airport. – Reuters

She and her husband had come to London to deliver some happy news to his parents.

"It's been a really long time and, actually, I'm pregnant with my in-law's first grandchild, so it's really exciting to finally be able to be here and share that news with them."

But just as families, friends and business travellers arrived at British airports like London Heathrow, the travel industry faced a new headache over potential Covid-19 warnings against holidays to Spain.

"We just need to keep things simple. We need to build confidence in travel," Holland-Kaye said when asked about the reports of another rule change.

Britain has one of the fastest vaccination programmes in the world but the government has prevented the travel industry from bouncing back because of its maze of rules and track record for making last-minute changes.

In the latest twist, *The Times* reported on Monday the government planned to warn holidaymakers against visiting Spain, Britain's most popular holiday destination, because of concerns about Covid-19 there.

Spain could go on a new category of risk — the "amber watchlist" — meaning it could be upgraded to "red" at short notice, with arrivals having to quarantine in hotels.

— Reuters

SHORT TAKES

COPENHAGEN

Europe hits 60 million coronavirus cases: WHO

More than 60 million coronavirus infections have been registered in Europe since the start of the pandemic, compromising about 30 per cent of all known cases in the world, World Health Organization (WHO) data showed. The WHO's European regional office called for greater efforts to make faster and more equitable progress in vaccinating people against Covid-19, noting the wide disparity between some countries.

While vaccination rates in Eu-



rope are among the highest in the world, WHO regional emergency director Dorit Nitzan noted that many people who are in priority groups — such as the elderly and healthcare workers — have yet to receive jabs. — dpa

BERLIN

Scuffles in Berlin as Covid sceptics defy protest ban

Thousands of anti-lockdown demonstrators defied a court-ordered protest ban and gathered in the streets of Berlin, resulting in scuffles with police. Police said some protesters had "harassed and attacked" officers and ignored roadblocks, disrupting traffic in parts of the German capital.

"They tried to break through the police chain and pull out our colleagues. This led to the use of irritants, batons and physical violence," Berlin police tweeted.



Several people were arrested, they added. The protest was called by the 'Querdenker' (Lateral Thinkers) movement, which has emerged as the loudest voice against Germany's coronavirus restrictions. — AFP

ABUJA

Nigerian doctors begin strike over salary

Resident doctors in Nigerian public hospitals began an indefinite strike over grievances that include the delayed payment of salaries and allowances, the doctors' union said, as the country faces rising Covid-19 infections. Nigerian doctors frequently strike over what they say are poor conditions of service. Last year they walked out from their jobs three times, including over demands for an allowance for treating coronavirus patients.

Okhuhiesuyi Uyilawa, presi-



dent of the National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD), said the strike had started on Monday and that the government had not reached out to the union since it gave notice of the job action. — Reuters

No ‘eureka moment’ in climate science

KELLY MACNAMARA

What if Earth’s atmosphere was infused with extra carbon dioxide, mused amateur scientist Eunice Foote in an 1856 research paper that concluded the gas was very good at absorbing heat. “An atmosphere of that gas would give to our earth a high temperature”, she wrote in the study, published in the *American Journal of Science and Arts* and then swiftly forgotten. The American scientist and women’s rights activist, who only wrote one more paper, could not have known the full significance of her extraordinary statement, said Alice Bell, author of a recent book on the climate crisis — “Our Biggest Experiment” — that features Foote. This was the decade that the United States first

began to drill for oil. It is also the baseline period of global temperatures we now use to chart the fossil fuel driven warming of the planet.

Foote, whose work was rediscovered in recent years, is now seen as part of a multi-generational exploration, spanning some 200 years, unravelling the mysteries of how the climate works — and more recently how human activities have tipped it out of balance.

“There is no eureka moment with one great genius in climate change science”, Bell said.

“Climate science is a story of people over centuries and different disciplines, different countries working together, incrementally learning more and more.”

People have believed human activities like deforestation could alter the local climate since at least the ancient Greeks. But in terms of the global climate, the story of our understanding of what we now call the greenhouse effect, arguably began in the 1820s with French scientist Joseph Fourier.

Fourier calculated that Earth would be much colder if it was not enveloped in an insulating blanket of gases. — AFP

There is no eureka moment with one great genius in climate change science. Climate science is a story of people over centuries and different disciplines, different countries working together, incrementally learning more and more

Alice Bell
Author



THE DAY’S CATCH

Fishermen and their families bring in their haul of fish caught in their nets by the shore in Lhokseumawe, Aceh, Indonesia, on Monday. — AFP

An enigma called luck



Lakshmi Kothaneth
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WITH COVID-19 MANY PEOPLE HAVE BEEN EXPERIENCING MOUNTING EXPENSES AND BILLS FORCING INDIVIDUALS TO LIVE VERY MUCH IN THE PRESENT

In quiet moments thoughts wander from electricity bills to future to present to planning of vacations to lifting of bans to destinations to fly to and fly back from.

The pandemic period taught us that reality can change instantly and accordingly our concerns too. We have always heard and referred to the phrase, ‘Health is Wealth’, but now we now what it can indicate.

With Covid-19 many people have been experiencing mounting expenses and bills forcing individuals to live very much in the present.

No matter what, people still hold onto hope and some kept pursuing their career path as seen at Tokyo Olympics 2020 being conducted in summer of 2021.

There were competitiveness and celebration of friendships and giving into pressure at the same time overcoming of stress and looking forward to a bright future.

Now is a good time to ask ourselves the question — what is your dream in life?

It is important to ask this question because now you realise it must have

become slightly different from your earlier concepts. The priorities could have changed seeing the harsh reality of the pandemic. The question of life’s dream is important for the youngsters because they have missed out so much in life at their age compared to previous generations. The online world is giving them everything from knowledge to entertainment. But they are missing out on class room energy, finding their voice and friends.

I am sure you remember our shy moments and then discovering friends whom you can relate to and suddenly you are a bit more confident. This is the age the personality traits appear.

This period on the other hand has been essentially teaching us to be self reliant, which is a good thing.

On the other hand, many children have been impacted because their parents have been effected by the Covid or due to the job security. In many incidents children have been taking up responsibility. So on the other hand they have been gaining on life so kills.

Our lifestyle definitely changed and we can almost live online by shopping and ordering food to groceries. Many families have been opting to these services to avoid crowded places. Less stressful they said. Accordingly yours truly also tried out getting an gift for someone via online. As luck would have that ‘within five days’ merged into the four days of complete lockdown followed with the last day of the weekend and first day of the week.

Now you might ask, ‘Why didn’t you call?’

Did that too, but the answer was too many orders before the lockdown. And when it finally arrived after 10 days there was a defect. So a friend in need is a friend indeed and went down there to prove it arrived with problem and promptly got a replacement.

So there are at times disadvantages when it comes to online shopping, however advantages are far more especially during the pandemic period.

Then again as they say we need a bit of luck in whatever we do. Luck is an enigma.

Motifs of absence, death and exile... | A WINDOW INTO CONTEMPORARY OMANI LITERATURE



Dr Khalid Mohammed al Balushi
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SAMA ESSA HAS BEEN PARTICULARLY INFLUENTIAL IN BOTH INTRODUCING AND SOLIDIFYING VERSE-FREE PROSE POETRY IN OMAN

Essa al Tai, famously known for his pen name Sama Essa, is a pioneering contemporary Omani poet. Along with Saif al Rahbi (1956) and Zahir al Ghafri (1956), Al Tai has been particularly influential in both introducing and solidifying verse-free prose poetry in Oman. His diction is characterised by a preponderance of motifs such as death, absence and exile.=

As these words suggest, there’s a prevalent atmosphere of alienation in his poetry from the predominant discourses. The following are translations of poems from his elegiac collection: A Love Song for Laila Fakhru (Beirut 2012):

(1) Scattered around you
Are small corpses.
You weep
But the earth is earth:

Prophets it expels
Martyrs it stones.
(2) As if her blood
Had risen from the East,
Like a butterfly whose nectar
death’s fields suck.
(3) Even if the wind
Carried the silent whispers of
the dead
To their first abodes,
Even if solitude left us standing
before a tree
On whose boughs the clothes
of the dead
Hung
I still remember you
As I remember my mother...
(4) Like a child that
Touches the river and cries:
My mother who’s gone away
Will you be back again?
(5) Who will open the door
For my mother when she
returns?

The angels, my love.
But she’s travelled
Left us
She’ll never return.
(6) Will I knock your tomb’s
door and cry?
Who will be there to hear East’s
call
After all its lovers turn to dust?
(7) Martyr
The passersby gathered
The ashes of his body
And left.
From the love that glowed in
his eyes
There remained a warm blink
Like the drowsiness of a babe.
(8) The small, white love tree
Bent its boughs
Like an old dry river
Turns into a wasteland
After its lovers travelled to
death.
(9) Turn to me

As you start your cry
Your bitter cry.
Say to me: I love you,
For you will travel later
To a warm, tender, deep death.
Every path leads to love
Every path leads to death.
(10) How sweet you are!
Like a stream descending
From some remote mountain.
But...
Wait a little while,
Let me finish my song
And follow you...
(11) Like a tree
Dropping its fruits at last
After they ripen, you leave.
Sweet as you are
The river takes you
From its source to its mouth.
(12) We grew old
We died
Before your death
Your sweet death.

(13) Mothers of absence lull us
to sleep
With songs of exodus
In a mountain the traveler can’t
leave
Till after love shuts it eyes
And becomes but ruins.
(14) But
Who can stop you travelling to
death?
The earth has already drawn
you
To its roots
Embraced you
Like a mother hugging her
babes
Before the rendezvous
With eternity’s night
The deep night.
(15) A tranquil, serene beauty
Passed by our village at dawn,
It woke us up
It woke up our dead
And then left...



Hassan launches treble bid with gold

World record holder McLaughlin made light of the wet track to win her semi in a brisk 53.03sec while Muhammad was fractionally slower in her qualifier to take victory in 53.30sec. — **AFP**

In brief

■ TOKYO



CUBA'S LOPEZ WINS FOURTH OLYMPIC WRESTLING GOLD

Cuban Greco-Roman wrestler Mijain Lopez won his fourth Olympic gold medal in the heavyweight category on Monday. The 38-year-old beat Georgia's Iakobi Kajaia 5-0 in the final and joins a list of athletes including Carl Lewis (long jump), Al Oerter (discus) and swimming legend Michael Phelps (200m medley) to win golds in the same event in four straight Games. "I feel happy, proud to be the best in the world and make history," said Lopez.

He will be 41 by the time of the Paris 2024 Olympics, but did not rule out a bid for a fifth gold. "I don't want to say yes or no, but to everyone, Mijain is alive," Lopez added.



JACOBS SAYS FATHER PUSHED HIM TO GOLD

Lamont Marcell Jacobs believes reconnecting with his estranged American father helped him make history by becoming the first Italian to claim Olympic men's 100 metres gold on Sunday.

It was a stunning run from the 26-year-old underdog, who was born in the United States to an American father and Italian mother. "I was born in Texas, but I stayed there for six months before my parents separated and I came to Italy. Italy is my country," Jacobs said.

"The reconciliation gave me something more, which has helped me in the last few days. But I have never met him in person, we write to each other and talk."



DEFENDING CHAMPION VAN NIEKERK OUT

Wayde van Niekerk's reign as Olympic 400m champion came to a disappointing end on Monday as the South African world record holder was eliminated in the semifinals at the Tokyo Games.

Van Niekerk, who produced one of the highlights of the 2016 Rio Olympics with an electrifying world record run of 43.03sec in the final, was dumped out of contention after a fifth place finish in his semifinal.

The 29-year-old from Cape Town, who has struggled to regain full fitness after injuring his knee during a celebrity rugby game in 2017, could only manage a time of 45.14sec.

That left him only 12th fastest overall and out of the running for a place in Wednesday's final.

SHOOTER KHATRI FINISHES IN 35TH PLACE WITH 1,148 POINTS

Oman conclude campaign in Tokyo

ADIL AL BALUSHI

TOKYO, AUGUST 2

Oman's Hamed al Khatri registered a total of 1,148 points (382- kneeling, 392-prone, 374-standing) to finish 35th among the 39 world ranking shooters in the men's 50m rifle 3 positions qualifications event on Monday at Asaka Shooting Range.

The top eight shooters got highest score in the qualification round and advanced to the finals late on Monday. The first place went to Sergey Kamenskiy (ROC) with 1,183 points with preference than Changhong Zhang (CHN), who finished as runner-up with same points, while Jon Herman (NOR) ended in third place with a total of 1,181 points.

Sebic Milenko (SRB) advanced to the finals after ranking fourth with 1,180 points. Miran Marcic (CRO) earned direct ticket to finals with a fifth spot with 1,178 points, while Seriy Kulish (UKR) finished in sixth place with 1,178 points. The seventh qualifier was Petar Gorsa (CRO) with 1,176 points and Yury (BLR) took the last ticket to the finals with 1,176 points as well.

In his previous attendance at Rio 2016 Olympics, Al Khatri had recorded a total of 1,138 and finished in 43rd place.

GREAT EXPERIENCE

Hamed al Khatri said that it was an accumulative experience for him to attend the Olympic Games. "The lesson I learned is confidence and having more ability to do best in the forthcoming events. Striving for the top positions is the target and I will continue my hard training to reach to the top levels."

"I aimed to qualify into the finals but it was pretty difficult as many of the world ranking shooters took part and registered highest scores. Also, it was too windy. I will work



Hamad al Khatri (27) during the shooting event.



Oman delegation

to enhance and address my weak areas and focus on having quality shots with highest scores," he added.

CAMPAIGN ENDS

With completion of Al Khatri's participation, the Sultanate's ended their campaign at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. Five athletes represented

the Sultanate and competed in four different disciplines. Swimmer Issa Al al Adawi began the campaign as he was placed sixth with a timing of 51:81 seconds in the 100 metres freestyle. Sprinter Mazoon al Alawi finished sixth in the 100m race event with a timing of 12:35 seconds. Oman's top sprinter Barakat al Harthy advanced to



Kazem al Balushi, Chef De Mission

round one of the men's 100 m race event. He topped preliminary heat two group and clocked 10:27 seconds as his seasonal best record. In the round one qualification heat five, Barkat clocked 10:31 seconds in seventh place.

COMMITMENT

Kazem al Balushi, Oman's

chef De Mission, appreciated the cooperation of all representatives of the national teams which took part in the Tokyo 2020 for their commitment and adherence to all precautionary measures and preventive instructions issued by the organising committee to have a safe Olympic Games. "A special thanks to all the players, coaches and administrators who followed all the rules and regulations to ensure their safety and the safety of all Olympic participants," he added.

Kazem pointed out that everyone were looking for the top results from our athletes. "I believe all the sporting associations and committee have to learn from the mistakes and weakness of this participation. Also, they have to set long term plans and proper strategies to ensure registering top results in the forthcoming international events," he ended.

Barshim, Tamberi 'love-in' takes another leap

TOKYO: The camaraderie between Qatar's Mutaz Essa Barshim and Italy's Gianmarco Tamberi continued during the Olympic men's high jump victory ceremony on Monday, a day after the pair opted to share the gold medal.

Both Barshim, 30, and the 29-year-old Tamberi cleared 2.37 metres on Sunday evening. Facing the prospect of a jump-off to decide the winner, they persuaded organisers to let them share the triumph.

Videos and pictures of the good friends clasp hands, whooping for joy and embracing each other have gone viral on social media.

After climbing on to the podium together, Barshim and Tamberi presented the gold medals to each other amid more hugs and switched places to face their flags when each national anthem was played.

"He is one of my best friends, not only on the track, but outside the track," Barshim said on Sunday.

"We work together. This is a dream come true. It is the true



Gold medalists, Gianmarco Tamberi of Italy and Mutaz Essa Barshim of Qatar celebrate on the podium. — Reuters

spirit, the sportsman spirit, and we are here delivering this message."

It was the first time since the 1912 Olympics that a gold medal was shared in athletics - in both

pentathlon and decathlon at the Stockholm Games.

Earlier, Both Barshim, 30, and the 29-year-old Tamberi ended with jumps of 2.37 metres and had no failed attempts until they

We work together. This is a dream come true. It is the true spirit, the sportsman spirit, and we are here delivering this message

**MUTAZ ESSA
BARSHIM**

Qatar high jumper

attempted to clear 2.39.

After three failures each at that height, an Olympic official first offered them a jump-off to decide the winner.

"Can we have two golds?," Barshim asked him.

The official nodded, and the two athletes clasped hands and whooped for joy.

"I look at him, he looks at me, and we know it. We just look at each other and we know, that is it, it is done. There is no need," Barshim said.

It was also a win-win situation

for the Italian, who broke his ankle days before the Rio Games in 2016.

"After my injuries I just wanted to come back, but now I have this gold, it's incredible," he said. "I dreamed of this so many times.

"I was told in 2016 just before Rio there was a risk I wouldn't be able to compete any more. It's been a long journey."

Maksim Nedasekau of Belarus, who also cleared 2.37, took the bronze on countback.

Barshim won bronze, later upgraded to silver, at the London 2012 Games He picked up another silver in Rio four years later and then won two successive world titles in 2017 and 2019.

His personal best of 2.43m is the second-highest jump of all time, behind Cuban Javier Sotomayor's world record mark of 2.45 set in 1993.

In a high-level competition, South Korean Woo Sang-hyeok and Australian Brandon Starc, the younger brother of cricketer Mitchell, both cleared 2.35 to finish fourth and fifth. — Reuters

INDIA SHOCK AUSTRALIA TO REACH HOCKEY SEMIFINALS

TOKYO: India pulled off a stunning 1-0 victory over Australia in the Tokyo Olympics women's hockey tournament, and will face Argentina in the semifinals on Wednesday after the South Americans got past the quarterfinals for the first time since 2012 with a 3-0 win over Germany.

Gurjit Kaur scored India's winning goal from a first-half penalty corner, beating Australia goalie Rachael Lynch who had kept a clean sheet in the previous four matches.

Australia were unable to equalise in the second half despite ramping up the pressure and winning a number of penalty corners.

"It's a dream come true," India goalkeeper Savita said, struggling for words. Savita, who goes by one name, pulled the team through some of the hardest moments of the match with nine saves.

DUTCH IN SEMIS

The Netherlands beat New Zealand 3-0 on Monday to qualify for the semifinals, joining India and Argentina in the last four.

Lidewij Welten, Frederique Matla and Lauren Stam scored for the Dutch, the 2016 silver medalists who are now set for a showdown against the winners of the match between Spain and Britain.

Argentina's women team have never won an Olympic hockey gold medal, but clinched silver at the 2012 London Games and the 2000 Sydney Games, the latter being where they earned the nickname Las Leonas, or lionesses.

Las Leonas were elated after beating Germany, with some players crying as they celebrated around goalie Belen Succi, who was on the team that was knocked out of the quarterfinals in 2016 by the Netherlands.

"We have to keep fighting," Ar-



Players of India celebrate after defeating Australia 1-0 as Australia's Renee Taylor squats (R) at the end of their women's quarterfinal match in Tokyo. — AFP

gentina's Maria Victoria Granatto said. "We are going to play one of the most important games of our lives."

Argentina stepped up the pace against their opponents from the start, with their skilful and fast attackers posing a threat to the Germans who won bronze at the

Gurjit Kaur scored India's winning goal from a first-half penalty corner, beating Australia goalie Rachael Lynch who had kept a clean sheet in the previous four matches

2016 Olympics. Their effort paid dividends shortly before half-time when a hard pass from Rocio Sanchez Moccia crossed in front of the goal to reach Agustina Albertarrio, who deflected the ball with her stick behind the German goalie. The game had barely restarted when Maria Victoria Gran-



Berta Bonastre of Spain celebrates with Begona Garcia after scoring. — Reuters



Lily Owsley of Britain celebrates a goal by team-mate Fiona Crackles. — Reuters

atto doubled the lead off a penalty corner just before half-time.

After the break, the Germans were unable to break down their opponent's defence. Argentina sealed the win in the 52th minute when Valentina Raposo Ruiz scored the third goal through another penalty corner.

"The first goal was the knock-out for us because then they get their chests up and they get better and better," said veteran Franzisca Hauke, who was playing her last match for Germany.

"I'm really disappointed and sad that it's the end of my journey," a tearful Hauke added. — Reuters

Canada stun US to set up title-clash with Sweden

TOKYO: Canada stunned world champions the United States on Monday, handing them a shock 1-0 defeat in the semifinals of the women's Olympic football tournament to set up a clash with Sweden in Friday's showpiece match.

The Swedes beat Australia 1-0 thanks to a 46th minute goal from Fridolina Rolfo to return to the final after their silver medal in Rio five years ago.

Canada celebrated their first win over the US in over 20 years after Jessie Fleming's 75th minute penalty settled the contest.

The crucial moment, in a game which had produced little incident, came when US defender Tierna Davidson challenged Deanne Rose on the edge of the penalty area. After a video review, a spot kick was awarded.

Canada's veteran striker Christian Sinclair initially had the ball in her hands, but Fleming took the responsibility and kept her cool to slot home.



Jessie Fleming of Canada celebrates scoring their first goal from the penalty spot with team-mates. — Reuters

The US, pre-Games favourites for the gold medal, went close to an equaliser when Carli Lloyd struck the bar with a header but Canada held on for a famous victory — and their first appearance in an Olympic final.

The Americans have won the

gold medal four times and have not lost to Canada for over 20 years. It is only the fourth time the Canadians have beaten their neighbours in 62 meetings.

"It has been a long time coming to beat those guys," said Fleming. "We want to come away with gold

now but it is really special for us to put our flag on the map," she said.

TRIPLE SUBSTITUTION

The game was a dull affair until a triple substitution saw Megan Rapinoe, Lloyd and Christen Press brought on — a change which



USA's Crystal Dunn (R) in action with Canada's Janine Beckie. — AFP

brought new life to the American attack.

The first effort on goal finally arrived in the 65th minute with a curling shot from Lloyd which was tipped over by Stephanie Labbe, and moments later the Canada keeper did well to keep

out a glancing header from Julie Ertz.

But just as the Americans were piling on the pressure, a Canada break led to the penalty award and the end of the road for Vlatko Andonovski's side.

Sweden, who lost to Germany in the Rio final, fired an early warning with a Rolfo shot rattling the crossbar.

Australia, seeking a first Olympic final, thought they had gone ahead just before the break with a Sam Kerr effort but the goal was ruled out.

It was the Swedes though who took the lead when Matilda's keeper Teagan Micah could only push a looping, deflected shot from Filippa Angeldal against the bar and Rolfo hooked in the loose ball.

Australia were reduced to 10 players in stoppage time when Ellie Carpenter was sent off for pulling down Sweden substitute Lina Hurtig as she ran goalwards.

— Reuters



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First phase of Oman’s mega crude storage park set for Q1 2022 launch



STRATEGIC PROJECT: Plan to link Raz Markaz terminal with Main Oil Line under study

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Phase 1 of a world-scale Crude Oil Storage Terminal, currently nearing completion at Ras Markaz on the Sultanate’s southeastern coast, is slated to come into operation in the first quarter of 2022.

Developed by Oman Tank Terminal Company (OTTCO), a wholly-owned subsidiary of OQ — the Sultanate’s integrated energy group — the facility will position the Sultanate as a global hub — for the first time — for all kinds of local, regional and international crudes.

According to a high-level executive of OTTCO, marine works at the Raz Markaz Crude Oil Park were completed in the first quarter of this year, with landside infrastructure reaching the 70 per cent completion mark as of June-end this year.

“The infrastructure required to store crude oil during the first phase is almost ready, and operations are expected to start in Q1 of 2022,” Eng Salim bin Marhoon al Hashmi, Project General Manager, said in an interview published in the latest edition of ‘Duqm Economist’, the quarterly newsletter of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ).

An array of huge tanks has been constructed at site, offering up to 25 million barrels of storage capacity in the first phase of the project. When fully built, in increment stages over several years, the facility will offer a world-leading 200 million barrels of storage capacity.

A total of 40 sq kilometres has

We aspire to become the largest crude oil storage project in the Middle East to serve as an important global crude oil storage centre due to the strategic location of Ras Markaz on the Arabian Sea, overlooking the Indian Ocean

ARD VAN HOOFF
CEO, OTTCO

been earmarked for the entire park, up from the present area of about 10 kilometres under development for the first phase.

OTTCO’s CEO Ard Van Hoof was quoted as stating that the storage terminal, located just 80 km south of the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) at Duqm, adds another strategic element to Duqm’s importance as an integrated energy and economic hub.

Overlooking the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean beyond, the storage park’s geographically advantageous location — far removed from the contentious Strait of Hormuz — will open up opportunities for regional and international oil traders to store their volumes on a short-term and long-term basis, he said.

“We aspire to become the largest crude oil storage project in the Middle East to serve as an important global crude oil storage centre due to the strategic location of Ras Markaz on the Arabian Sea, overlooking the Indian Ocean. The Park will meet the markets’ needs, connecting the markets in South

Asia, Far East and Africa.

The project will contribute in the long-term to place the Sultanate as a major centre for storing bulk and liquid products in the region,” he told the newsletter.

In addition to serving as a storage hub, imported crude as feedstock for the greenfield refinery of OQ8 (formerly known as Duqm Refinery) – a partnership of OQ and Kuwait Petroleum International – will be channelled to the refinery via an 80-km pipeline already in place.

Giant tanks, built at a height of 110-metres above sea level, will allow for its crude oil contents to flow by gravity for loading into ships anchored a few kilometres offshore.

But when tankers arrive at Raz Markaz to unload their cargoes, a series of four heavy-duty pumps will be activated to pump the crude to the tanks on the hilltop.

Going forward, however, OTTCO plans to build a new pipeline connecting the Main Oil Line (the country’s principal crude export pipeline) with Ras Markaz, thus opening up another export terminal for Omani crude.

“We have started, in cooperation with international consulting companies, preparing pre-feasibility studies to assess the possibility of connecting Ras Markaz Park to the (interior) oilfields in the future. This comes with aim to supply the refinery with its crude oil needs and establish an alternative site for the export of crude oil,” CEO noted.

Currently, the Sultanate exports the bulk of its crude via the Mina Al Fahal terminal in Muscat. Some small volumes are also shipped from a single-buoy mooring built off Tibat in Musandam Governorate for liquids produced in offshore fields in Khasab.

Pact signed to support deployment of smart solutions, IoT

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 2

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology yesterday signed an agreement with the National Energy Centre to support the rollout of smart infrastructure solutions, based on the deployment of Internet of Things (IoT) and other such advanced technologies.

Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaidhani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communication and Information Technology, signed the agreement on behalf of the Ministry. National Energy Centre was represented by Eng Abdullah bin Rashid al Badi, CEO. As part of the pact, the two sides will encourage the sharing of knowledge and experiences between the government, corporate and academic



sectors. The agreement encompasses smart public services, smart infrastructure solutions, smart environment solutions, such as waste water management and smart road lighting system, as well as electricity and water meter reading solutions.

National Energy Centre (NEC), a semi-government

company, was established to serve the utility sector through innovative and integrated smart solutions, smart services and smart technologies in the field of renewable energies and utility metering. NEC is a key player in the design, development and deployment of metering devices for the electricity sector.

Synergy BioFuels announces commissioning of first Biodiesel Plant in Oman

Oman’s first biodiesel plant is now open in Samail Industrial Estate. Announcing the commissioning of the plant, Synergy BioFuels informed that the company has successfully produced its first batch of 30 Tons of Biodiesel from Used Cooking Oil (UCO) that complies with EN14214 international standards.

“This is a significant milestone in our journey to support Oman’s green economy and Oman Vision 2040. Being able to establish a state-of-the-art Biofuels plant and produce the first batch of Biodiesel in Oman is an incredible achievement and we would like to thank Be’ah for its support in our journey” indicated Anthony Helou, CEO of Synergy.

The Biodiesel plant is only one part of Oman Biofuels Hub that has been established by Synergy. The Biofuel hub includes in addition to the Biodiesel manufacturing plant, a research center that is focusing on Biofuels and renewable fuels in collaboration with local researchers and universities. “Our team has a grand vision for the biofuels project. The



Biodiesel plant is only the beginning, we have established the first and only Biofuels hub in Oman and the region. We are working with a great team to innovate in this whole space. Expect great announcements on the hub’s various projects very soon,” added Anthony Helou.

Furthermore, in collaboration with Sarooj Construction, the biodiesel from the plant will be used to power the construction of the first Oil & Gas well head for PDO. Within three weeks, Sarooj Construction would complete the construction of

an Oil & Gas well-head in Saih Rawl in Oman using Biodiesel fuel for the heavy equipment. This will be the first Oil & Gas well-head in Oman and the Middle East where Biodiesel was used as a fuel to power the construction equipment. “Construction equipment has a huge carbon footprint, by using Omani-produced Biodiesel we are helping in de-carbonizing the construction business and assisting Oman’s Oil & Gas sector in its mission towards net zero emission oil,” indicated Simon Karam, Chairman of Sarooj Construction.

Tanweer
upgrades
Masirah's
power grid



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 2

The Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer) — a member of Nama Group — continues its efforts to raise the electricity grid's reliability in the Wilayat of Masirah in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate with a RO 186,340 project. The new project upgrades Al Nahdha area network — in Masirah — by adding a 6MVA transformer to the existing Dowa primary sub-station, and the related works, including the laying an 11-kilovolt underground cable to the current ring main unit (RMU) to ensure the sustainability of the electricity infrastructure.

The new enhancement was designed to reinforce the existing feeders to meet the growing demand in the area and enhance the reliability of the power supply in the Wilayat of Masirah, which enjoys distinctive tourist and economic features.

Tanweer's project consists of two main components. The first is laying a new 11kv underground cable from Dowa primary substation to the distribution substation (Al Nahdha area) with a total length of 15 km. And the second component is the supply and installation of a 6MVA transformer, 11KV PMR- 1 Nos and 33kv and 11kv gantry. Upgrading Masirah electricity grid is among the numerous projects undertaken by Tanweer to raise the efficiency and reliability of the electricity networks in its areas of operation in the Sultanate to meet the increasing demand for electricity for residential, commercial and investment purposes in different governorates.

Oman's top luxury fragrance
brand sets up US presence

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 2

Amouage, the independent Oman-based global luxury fragrance house, has set its sights on the lucrative US market by establishing Amouage Americas, the House's newly opened direct subsidiary, with its head office located on New York's prestigious Broadway.

The latter will soon launch its new e-commerce fulfilment platform to serve the US's growing niche luxury fragrance market, which makes up the largest share of the company's 6-fold increase in online demand.

Headed by newly-appointed Senior Vice-President of Amouage Americas, Robert Sorce, Amouage will also be establishing a physical presence in key retailers across the country.

"For the past two years, we have been working on a new strategy to strengthen our digital presence, to build scale, and to establish new connections with the next generation of fragrance enthusiasts. This year we have



turbo-charged this strategy, having recently moved into China and now the US, while installing several structural changes to create the right capabilities to fulfil global demand for our products, including a vertically integrated product creation in Muscat, Oman, that guarantees no compromise on quality," said Marco Parsiegla, Chief Executive Officer of Amouage.

"The US is considered an important market for ultra-luxury and our projections are that it will eventually make up a third of our overall business. We look forward to installing a diverse team of exceptional industry professionals that will carry our quest to create true masterpieces and share them

with our discerning clientele."

Amouage has enjoyed impressive growth since unveiling its new strategy in 2020. Its results for the first half of 2021 more than doubled (+106 per cent) over the same period in 2020, and are up +20 per cent vs 2019.

As the number one most searched and yet unlisted fragrance at Nordstrom, Amouage's timely expansion means it is poised to cater to the country's growing appetite for rare, qualitative and long-lasting fragrances.

In the coming months the brand will begin rolling out across the US, with a permanent presence at top retailers of ultra-niche perfumes such as

Amouage Americas will soon launch its new e-commerce fulfilment platform to serve the US's growing niche luxury fragrance market, which makes up the largest share of the company's 6-fold increase in online demand.

Nordstrom, Bergdorf Goodman, Neiman Marcus, Bloomingdale's and Saks Fifth Avenue.

As well as being available on a wide range of eminent e-commerce platforms, Amouage is setting up permanent shop installations in Nordstrom stores in New York and Houston.

In addition, a temporary shop concept will be created with Neiman Marcus in Houston, Atlanta, Bal Harbour and via the eCommerce channel. Further openings will follow suit with key retailers in key US cities in the future.

EU extends
tariffs on US
biodiesel for
five years



A fuel nozzle from a bio diesel fuel pump is seen in this photo illustration taken at a filling station in San Diego, California. — Reuters

BRUSSELS: The European Union will retain its tariffs on US biodiesel for a further five years after concluding that removing them would likely lead to a surge of imports at artificially low prices.

The tariffs, dating back to 2009, will be extended until 2026, the EU official journal said on Monday.

The European Commission, which reviewed the case, concluded that US producers could increase to full capacity and also divert sales from some of their exports from less profitable markets to the European Union, the world's largest market.

It said US producers were already selling to third countries at prices below those in the United States, meaning they were being dumped.

It also said US producers were benefiting from subsidies, including tax credits, grants and loan guarantees. The anti-dumping duties range from zero to 198.0 euros (\$235.36) per tonne, and duties related to subsidies from 211.2 to 237.0 euros per tonne.

The duties are not cumulative, so whichever is the higher rate of the two forms of duties applies.

They will continue to be imposed on a range of companies, including Archer Daniels Midlands Co and Cargill.

The initial case was brought by the European Biodiesel Board on behalf of EU producers such as France's Saipol and Germany's Verbio.

— Reuters

Consumer confidence in
Japan hits 17-month high

TOKYO: Japan's consumer confidence hit a 17-month high in July, a government survey showed on Monday, returning to pre-coronavirus pandemic levels despite a resurgence in infections that forced Tokyo to impose fresh state of emergency curbs.

Households were more upbeat in July about their livelihoods, job and income conditions than the previous month, the survey showed, suggesting that huge government spending and robust exports were offsetting the pain from weak domestic demand.

Japan's seasonally-adjusted consumer confidence index stood at 37.5 in July, up from 37.4 in June to mark the second straight month of increase, the survey showed. The index hit the highest level since February last year, when Japan had yet to experience an outbreak of Covid-19.

"While still in a severe state, consumer confidence continues to recover," the government said in the survey. Japan decided on Friday to expand state of emergency curbs to three prefectures near Olympic host Tokyo and the western prefecture of Osaka, as Covid-19 cases spike.

While the move has dashed policymakers' hopes for a strong rebound in July-September growth, some analysts say the hit to consumption could be smaller than previous curbs.

Restrictions on activity have been looser in Japan than lockdowns imposed in other nations with most shops open.

Restaurants are asked to close early and not serve alcohol, though traffic has stayed dense around major train stations and business hubs.

— Reuters



Shoppers choose clothes at a shopping mall in Chiba, Japan. — Reuters



A technician moves the body of a car on the production line of the Rolls-Royce Goodwood factory, near Chichester, Great Britain. — Reuters

UK manufacturing grows
despite increase in costs

LONDON: UK manufacturing businesses are still growing, but are having to fend off some of the fastest increases to their costs in decades. The manufacturing sector outstripped expectations in the monthly IHSMarkit/CIPS purchasing managers' index survey released on Monday.

It showed a reading of 60.4 last month, down from a 63.9 score in June. The decrease comes on the back of record highs earlier this year, as the economy pushed to leave the impact of the pandemic behind.

Despite the fall, the July score is still evidence of high growth, and significantly ahead of the

57.1 reading that economists had expected for the month. Any score above 50 is considered to show growth in the sector.

Partly because of this continuing growth, the cost of materials has been soaring as demand increases to match the necessary output.

Problems in supply chains around the world has also put pressure on the price of many items. "Supply gridlock resulted in a moderate deceleration in the rates of expansion of production, new orders and job creation," Duncan Brock, group director at the Chartered Institute of Procurement & Supply, said.

— Reuters

Discover new experiences anywhere in the Lexus LX

MUSCAT: The Lexus LX is built to take your places and reward you with some of the finest luxury experiences while you are at it. The flagship SUV features a stylish exterior that leaves an enduring image of beauty and strength. The LX is designed and engineered to make a mark wherever it goes.

Powering the LX 570 is a 5.7-litre V8 engine with 362 horsepower

and 54.04 kg.M of torque available at 3,200 rpm. Equipped with an 8-speed automatic transmission, the LX 570 is capable of towing up to 2,500 Kgs.

When entering the cabin of the LX, you are greeted with quality and style. The leather-trimmed interior features the Lexus Memory System for the driver's seat, outside mirrors and steering wheel. Included for comfort is a



10-way power adjustable driver's seat and a 8-way adjustable front passenger seat.

The LX 570 Sport Plus includes ventilated front and second-row seats. The Climate Concierge feature monitors the temperature of four separate climate zones and adjusts not only speed of the fans, but also the temperature.

Whether getting away from it all or staying connected, the

LX 570 is the ultimate vehicle. A 12.3-inch navigation display with Remote Touch Interface (RTI) heads a list of multimedia and connectivity features that keep the LX on the cutting edge of user tech.

The dashboard screen is split into three sections to show different functions, such as navigation, audio and climate control information.

Asian factory activity hit by rising costs, Delta variant

Supply bottlenecks remain a constraint. But the PMIs suggest demand is cooling too, taking the heat out of price gains and weighing on activity in industry and construction

TOKYO: Asia's factories hit a rough patch in July as rising input costs and a new wave of coronavirus infections overshadowed solid global demand, highlighting the fragile nature of the region's recovery.

Manufacturing activity rose in export powerhouses Japan and South Korea, though firms suffered from supply chain disruptions and raw material shortages that pushed up costs. China's factory activity growth slipped sharply in July as demand contracted for the first time in over a year, a private survey showed, broadly aligning with an official survey released on Saturday showing a slowdown in activity.

"Supply bottlenecks remain a constraint. But the PMIs suggest demand is cooling too, taking the heat out of price gains and weighing on activity in industry and construction," said Julian Evans-Pritchard, senior China economist at Capital Economics.

Indonesia, Vietnam and Malaysia saw factory activity shrink in July due to a resurgence in infections and stricter Covid-19 restrictions.

The surveys highlight the divergence emerging across the global economy on the pace of recovery from pandemic-induced strains, which led the International Monetary Fund to downgrade this year's growth forecast for emerging Asia.

"The risk is that growth scars linger for longer even if activity recovers in the coming months," said Frederic Neumann, co-head of Asian Economics Research at HSBC. Plus, cooling export momentum, far from a temporary blip, provides a hint of what to expect in quarters to come," he said, adding that such uncertainty over the outlook would prod Asian central banks



A worker welds wheels at a factory in Hangzhou in China's eastern Zhejiang province. — Reuters

to maintain the loose monetary policy.

China's Caixin/Markit Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell to 50.3 in July from 51.3 in June, marking

the lowest level in 15 months, as rising costs clouded the outlook for the world's manufacturing hub.

The final au Jibun Bank Japan PMI rose to 53.0 in July from 52.4 in the previous month, though

manufacturers saw input prices rise at the fastest pace since 2008.

Japan also faces a surge in Delta variant cases that has forced the government to expand state of emergency curbs to wider areas

through August 31, casting a shadow over the Olympic Games and dashing hopes for a sharp rebound in July-September growth.

South Korea's PMI stood at 53.0 in July, holding above the 50 mark indicating an expansion in activity for the 10th straight month. But a sub-index on input prices rose at the second-highest on record in a sign of the strain firms are feeling from rising raw material costs.

Underscoring the pandemic's strain on emerging Asia, Indonesia's PMI plunged to 40.1 in July from 53.5 in June. Manufacturing activity also shrank in Vietnam and Malaysia, the PMI July surveys showed.

While still grappling with infections, easing restrictions helped India's factory activity bounced back in July as demand surged both at home and abroad.

Once seen as a driver of global growth, Asian's emerging economies are lagging their advanced peers in recovering from the pandemic's pain as delays in vaccine rollouts hurt domestic demand and countries reliant on tourism. — Reuters

Keep travel simple to reopen economy, Heathrow CEO tells UK



Let's just make it easier now for people to travel. I think we just need to keep things simple. We need to build confidence in travel

JOHN HOLLAND-KAYE
CEO, Heathrow Airport

LONDON: The boss of London's Heathrow Airport told Britain on Monday to rebuild confidence in travel by making it easier to go abroad, as speculation grew that the government was poised to slap yet more new rules on arrivals.

Britain reopened its borders to large parts of the world on Monday, scrapping quarantine for fully vaccinated arrivals from the European Union and the United States, in a boost for airlines and travel companies brought to their knees by the pandemic.

But just as families and business travellers arrived at airports like London Heathrow, the industry faced a new headache

over potential Covid-19 warnings against holidays to Spain.

Heathrow Airport CEO John Holland-Kaye called on the government not to throw new barriers in the way of travel just as it finds its feet again. "Let's just make it easier now for people to travel," he said in the arrivals hall. "I think we just need to keep things simple. We need to build confidence in travel."

Heathrow, like many airports and airlines across the world, is forecasting that it will be two to three years before travel returns to pre-pandemic levels.

Britain has one of the fastest

vaccination programmes in the world but the government has prevented the travel industry from bouncing back because of its maze of different rules and last-minute changes blocking trips to certain countries.

In the latest twist, the government plans to warn holidaymakers against visiting Spain, Britain's most popular holiday destination because of concerns about Covid-19 there.

Spain could go on a new category of risk for travel, the "amber watchlist", meaning it could be upgraded to "red" at short notice, with arrivals having to quarantine in hotels. — Reuters

Indonesian inflation rise higher than expected



A vendor takes money from the customer at a traditional market in Jakarta. — Reuters

JAKARTA: Indonesia's consumer prices increased more than expected in July. Consumer prices rose 1.52 per cent year-on-year in July. Economists had expected a 1.45 per cent rise. Core inflation was 1.40 per cent in July, which was above the 1.38 per cent economists had forecast.

On a monthly basis, consumer prices rose 0.08 per cent in July, after a 0.16 per cent fall in June. Economists had expected a 0.01 per cent increase.

Prices for food, beverages and tobacco increased 0.15 per cent yearly in July and prices of clothing and footwear rose 0.08 per cent. — dpa

HSBC first-half profits more than double, resumes dividends

HONG KONG: HSBC on Monday said it would resume paying dividends to shareholders after first-half profits more than doubled as an ongoing restructuring and pivot to Asia continues to pay off.

The results beat analyst estimates and are a shot in the arm for the Asia-reliant lender after a tumultuous 2020 saw its fortunes take a hammering from the coronavirus and simmering geopolitical tensions.

Reported profit before tax rose \$6.5 billion to \$10.8 billion while reported profit after tax increased \$5.3 billion to \$8.4 billion.

The bank also announced an interim dividend of seven cents per ordinary share for the first half of the year.

British regulators last year ordered banks to suspend payouts as the coronavirus tore through the global economy to shore up liquidity. But last month they relaxed those "temporary guardrail" measures.

HSBC is one of the biggest dividend payers in European



A woman touches a lion sculpture outside HSBC office in Hong Kong. — AFP

banking, and after a year of restrictions is expected to set aside more than any of its rivals this year and next.

"We definitely feel more confident," CFO Ewen Stevenson told Bloomberg. "We will keep buybacks under review" together with dividends, he added.

HSBC shares were trading up 2.3 per cent in Hong Kong shortly after the results were released.

Like all banking giants, HSBC was battered by the coronavirus

last year, with a 30 per cent plunge in 2020 profit.

Under CEO Noel Quinn, it has embarked on a dramatic restructuring, rolling out plans to cut its workforce by about 35,000 to drive down costs and to refocus on its most profitable areas — Asia and the Middle East.

HSBC makes 90 per cent of its profit in Asia, with China and Hong Kong the major drivers of growth.

In February it published a

HSBC is one of the biggest dividend payers in European banking, and after a year of restrictions is expected to set aside more than any of its rivals this year and next

new strategy laying out plans to redouble its attempt to seize more of the Asian market. Weighed down by low-interest rates, it is planning to seek out more fee-based income, especially wealth management for Asia's increasingly affluent.

Earlier this year the bank sold its 90 branches in the United States and completed long-running disposal of its unprofitable French retail business.

"We are focused on executing the growth and transformation plans we announced in February," Quinn said, noting all geographical regions of the global bank were currently returning a profit.

— AFP

Oil prices fall on worries over China economy and higher crude output



A pump attendant refuels a car at a gas station in Beijing, China. — Reuters

SINGAPORE: Oil prices fell on Monday on worries over China's economy after a survey showed growth in factory activity slipped sharply in the world's second-largest oil consumer, with concerns compounded by a rise in oil output from Opec producers.

Brent crude oil futures slid by 74 cents, or 1 per cent, to \$74.67 a barrel, after dropping to a low of \$74.10 earlier in the day.

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures dropped 70 cents, or 1 per cent, to \$73.25 a barrel after slipping to a session low of \$72.77.

"China's been leading economic recovery in Asia and if the pullback deepens, concerns will grow that the global outlook will see a significant decline," said Edward Moya, senior analyst at OANDA.

"The crude demand outlook is on shaky ground and that probably will not improve until global vaccinations improve." China's factory activity growth slipped sharply in July as demand contracted for the first time in more than a year.

— Reuters

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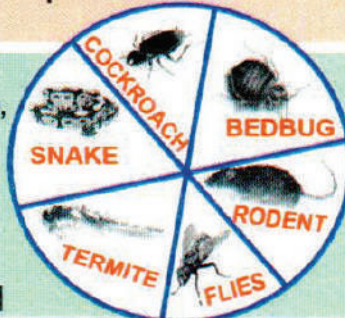


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features

OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | editor@omanobserver.om



Omani artists go global through GCC's first digital museum

Founded in May 2020 by sisters Manar and Sharifah al Hinai, the Khaleeji Art Museum is the first digital museum that showcases and promotes the work of artists and photographers of the Arab Gulf states. During the pandemic, several of Oman's prolific artists had been featured to showcase their work at the museum opening more doors for international recognition... **P20**

ANIMAL PLANET

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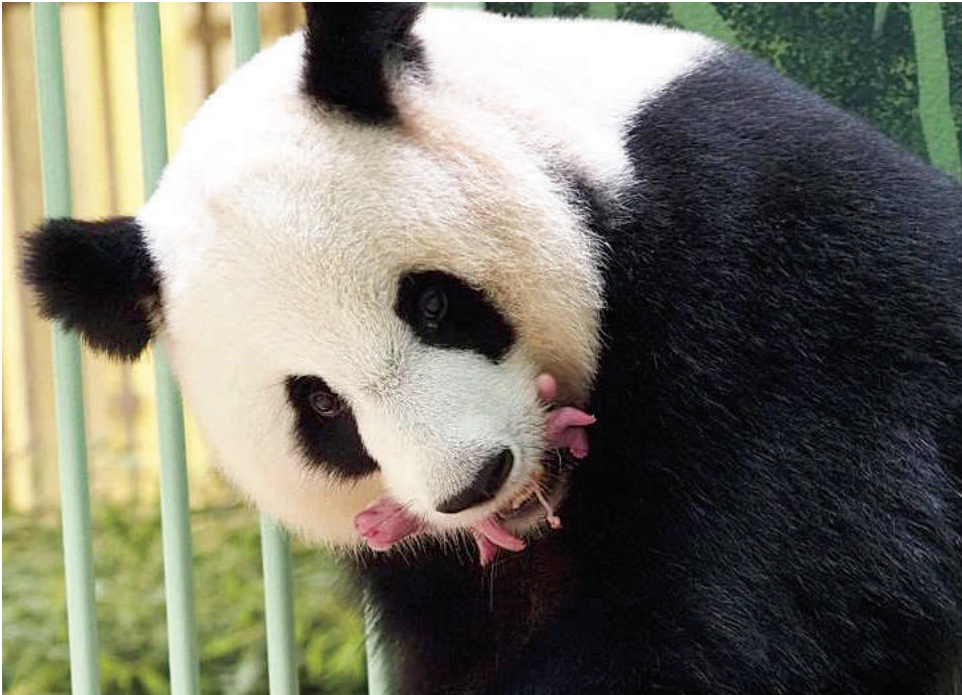
IT ENDS WITH US
BY COLLEEN HOOVER

A battered wife raised in a violent home attempts to halt the cycle of abuse.

Two baby pandas born at France's Beauval zoo

TWO BABY PANDAS have been born at the Beauval zoo in France, said the zoo on Monday, adding that the newly born animals were in good health. The zoo said its female panda — Huan Huan — had given birth to the two babies in the early hours of Monday. Huan Huan and her partner

Yuan Zi came to France on loan from China in 2012, and their arrival was hailed at the time as a sign of warming diplomatic ties between Paris and Beijing. While an adult female panda can weigh up to 125 kilograms (275 pounds), a baby panda weighs barely 120 grams (4 ounces) at birth. — **Reuters**





A journey into the land of the rising sun

Nippon - A nation where the sun rises and sets first, a nation with technological advancements par excellence and a nation whose food has a cult-like following. Welcome to our epicurean journey of Japan. The world of Japanese cuisine has a long history, which has evolved over the centuries. Rich in unique traditions and customs, Japanese cuisine is an example of originality, diversity, and usefulness. Different food traditions of other

nations have influenced Japanese cuisine; the Chinese introduced rice, the Buddhists introduced the usage of raw fish. The influx of the Dutch and Portuguese brought with them the frying technique of 'Tempura' and earth vegetables. The usage of fresh and raw products gives the Japanese an upper hand, food is often consumed in its original form, in small portions with the highest aesthetic. Ever heard of a restaurant where everything on the menu leaves you

wanting more? Where the umami flavours combine with the sweet, salty, and tangy that curate a riot for your senses. That is what you get when you visit Takara. Nestled in the heart of the city in Qurum within the Intercontinental Hotel, Takara is arguably the best Japanese restaurant in town. They serve delectable a la carte options along with a weekend brunch. We picked the weekend brunch and here is a showcase of some of their best dishes.

HE SAID: While every scrumptious dish in the array of food was a treat, my tastebuds were wowed by the delicate umami flavours of the Shiromi Jalapeno Sashimi. Thin slices of raw whitefish seasoned with coriander, garlic puree, Yuzu soy, and topped with a paper-thin Jalapeno. The delicate fish almost disintegrates on your tongue and the seasoning makes this dish an absolute winner.



SHE SAID: A standard at almost every sushi restaurant, the Ebi Tempura Maki is a non-traditional concoction of deep-fried tempura prawn rolls stuffed with spicy mayonnaise and cucumber. This simple dish delights your senses, while whetting your palate for more to come. I must add a special mention to the various other appetisers that were fit for a king's feast.

HE SAID: The Banana Tempura Maki served with a side of ice cream and fresh fruits made the perfect finish. You'd think the combination of banana, strawberries and mint wouldn't work but it does. This dessert is the epitome of Japanese cooking, light, flavourful and a miscellany of textures and tastes.



SHE SAID: Eating at Takara is so close to turning into gourmands. Following a delightfully loaded brunch where we ate till we couldn't breathe, the simple combination of cold, fresh fruits and ice cream was so perfect. Our brunch ended on a sweet note that left us wanting more.



HE SAID: The Gyudon or Japanese rice bowl with beef was a clear winner. A dish so simple yet elegant, it strikes you as a class apart almost immediately. Thin slices of soft, silky beef, white onions and scallions cooked in a sweet, yet salty Teriyaki sauce served on a bed of white rice.

SHE SAID: A good bowl of Yakisoba is the ultimate soul-stirrer - this one was close. Soft yet al dente Ramen tossed with a medley of veggies and chicken in a tonkatsu sauce. This rich sauce coats every bite of the Yakisoba giving it a world of flavours. Light yet perfect as a main.



WE SAID: Takara has never managed to get it wrong. Service is efficient and heartwarming. The team takes immense pleasure in serving you and you don't end up feeling rushed. Their unlimited weekend brunch currently is served on the table with an exhaustive array of dishes on the menu to choose from. We are yet again delighted to be returning and would go back again. Whether you try the a la carte or the weekend brunch, if you are a Japanese food aficionado, this is the place to be.

OVERALL RATING
Ambience: 5/5
Taste of food: 5/5
Presentation: 5/5
Service: 5/5
Value for money: 4/5

To fly or not to fly, that is everyone's question



OUT OF THE BOX
By Yeru Ebu
whereisyeru@gmail.com

It's nearly two years since I was last on a plane. The threat of Covid-19 made me postpone a lot of my scheduled travels including visiting home in the farthest corner of South East Asia.

That streak was finally put to rest when I decided to visit Salalah four weeks back. I wanted to see what the Garden City was like during khareef at the time of the pandemic.

Since it was only a weekend getaway, the fastest way to go was via plane. I was thankful that both Oman Air and Salam Air were operational.

While the airline we took will remain unnamed, something bothered me about the procedures on the plane. After passing the final check at the airport, we headed to the gate. In a room that was about 400 square metres in size, there were nearly 200 people all cramped up together. All seats were taken and because it was overfilled, some were standing in nearly every corner while others were sitting in the middle of the aisles. While everyone was wearing facemasks, something was not right.

I tried to still my panicking heart. My brain was filled with thousand and one questions including: Is this allowed? Was the airline given special permission to not adhere to 50 per cent capacity which was imposed in different companies, hotels, and restaurants on the ground? Whose responsibility is it to ensure that people adhere to social distancing at the gates?

Working in the media, I heard countless stories of people having negative PCR test results when they departed from one location but became Covid positive after taking the test in their final destination. This recent flight to Salalah was an eye-opener.

Hotels and restaurants on the ground had to adhere to the strictest measures. They can only operate 50 per cent of their available rooms. This also means that after the last guest left, the room has to be fully cleaned and sanitised. It must be vacant for the next 24 hours. That's the protocol and not following this has already resulted in some institutions being penalised.

When I got to the plane, I suddenly have the strong urge to run away. It's the khareef season and it's the weekend, of course, planes will be fully booked. I stared at the long line before me, people of different ages and backgrounds all rearing to go and catch their flight.

As the bus drop us off to board the plane, my stress level was to the roof. Except for perhaps two empty seats at the very back, all 200-plus people we saw at the gate cramped up were on that flight.

Aeroplanes actually have smaller spaces. The seats too are less than two metres apart. Each row has three opposing seats. Inside the plane, there was no social distancing. Inside, the 50 per cent capacity on the ground didn't apply. My mind justified that they need to fill the plane to save on fuel costs. I wondered whether that very policy to save on cost was the very reason why the Delta variant and all the different variants travelled fast.

Nobody can stop people from travelling. We all travel for different reasons, some more justified than others. Whether it's death in the family, someone's health is failing or the fear of losing a job, or just because we miss home, we all think our reasons are valid. But, the lax security and protocol on the plane -- was it one of the root causes of the problem?

On our flight, a kid was crying his heart out five rows away from our seat in the front. His

parents can't keep him from wearing the mask. Are children not capable of spreading the virus? I really didn't think of that.

About six rows behind us, an old gentleman was coughing his lungs out. Was he wearing his mask? I didn't dare to look.

Then the flight attendants wheeled in the food. For an hour flight, they could just have avoided it altogether. But they have to make their sale. Nearly 30 people ordered -- from coffee to tea, from sandwiches to chips. They talked as they munched. They laughed as their friends beside them joked. Small space, not two metres apart, talking, laughing without a mask, the child behind us cry in chorus with two more in the front, the elderly gentleman coughing behind us, someone sneezed by the toilet -- it was a powder keg and a tragedy just waiting to happen. But I sat in silence praying that all of us were vaccinated.

By the time that we landed and I got the phone signal back on, I send messages to the airlines about their protocol. I asked them three questions. Was the 50 per cent capacity not applicable to airlines? Why was one seat apart not a safety protocol? Why were they not giving packets that included face masks and sanitisers?

The social media managers of the airlines gave me long, corporate, non-answer answers. When I insisted that they were not answering the questions, they want me to reach out to corporate. Apparently, it's not in their pay grade to answer such questions.

We didn't get the virus on that trip. I think of it as just us getting lucky. By the time we came back, we rushed to get our vaccine.

Oman just came from a near 5-day lockdown. Before it, hospitals were getting inundated with all ICU beds filled. Medical organisations were turning away patients because they can no longer cater even to those who badly needed oxygen. Thankfully, after the new series of curfews and the full lockdown, cases are going down according to experts. The country is moving forward with its vaccination procedures. Now more than ever, thousands are clamouring to fully open the airports for international flights.

As the Khareef season rages on, thousands will also fly to Salalah not just on weekends but even on weekdays. At the rate that the demand is going, many will definitely have the same experience as we did.

Should people fly at the time of the pandemic? To say no will be selfish. We travel for different reasons. I can understand the urge. I can understand the demand. I can understand the different purpose we think is more valid than the reasons of others. But if you haven't been fully vaccinated yet, I urge you not to. It's a powder keg and you might be not as lucky as we were.

And I urge the airlines to review their safety protocols. I urge the people responsible to check on these protocols. If we can't even properly regulate domestic flights, how can we remain safe if we finally open up the airports for international flights? Somewhere in the process, there is something wrong -- something that contributes to the cases getting worst. With the threat of the new variants, we can't rest on our early wins. As the virus mutates or changes, so do we and so do our practices and protocols. Someone has to be responsible for our safety and it needs to be a collective effort not just by the authority but the airlines and the people travelling. Let's not make 2022 another year of fighting another variant and we can't keep losing just because money has to come first.



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INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



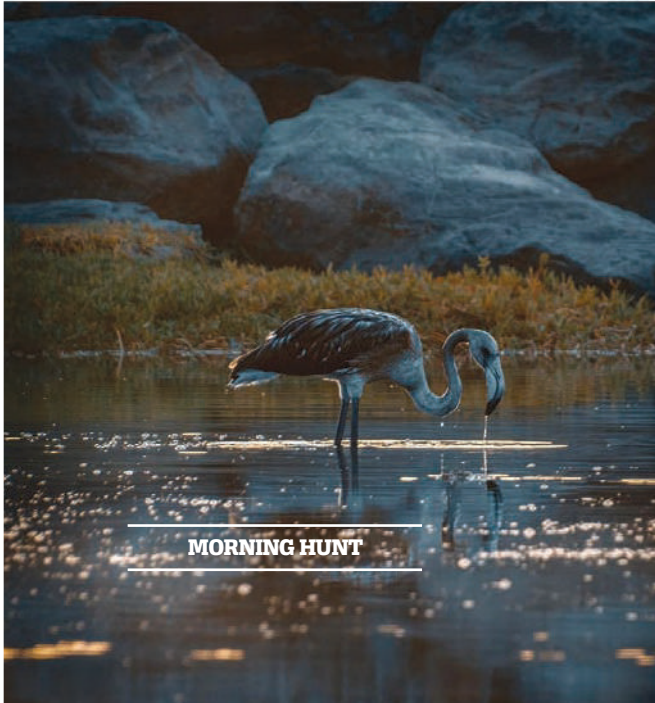
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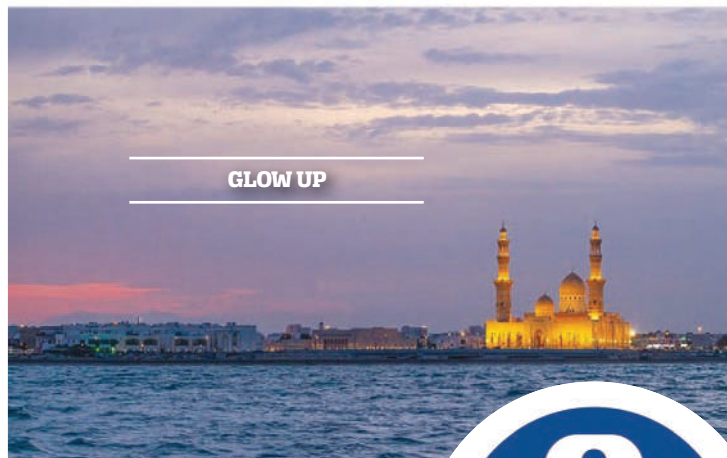
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FILM



Disney's 'Jungle Cruise' a hit in debut weekend

"JUNGLE CRUISE" — Disney's nostalgia-soaked adventure film — sailed to the top of the North American box office as it debuted this weekend, taking in \$34.2 million, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations said on Sunday.

A modern twist on a 1950s theme park ride, the film stars Emily Blunt and Dwayne Johnson along with British actor Jack Whitehall.

Another new flick, A24's "The Green Knight," a medieval fantasy, coming-of-age tale based on a



14th-century poem about a nephew to King Arthur, came in second as it raked in \$6.78 million.

Hot on its heels was last weekend's top box office draw, "Old", at \$6.76 million. The Universal movie is about a family that becomes trapped on a beach where they begin to age precipitously, and it stars Gael Garcia Bernal and Vicky Krieps.

In fourth place was Disney's latest Marvel superhero flick "Black Widow" starring Scarlett Johansson, which took in \$6.4 million.

Another movie making its debut came in fifth: "Stillwater," from Focus Features, starring Matt Damon as a burly American oil worker who travels to France to help his estranged daughter when she is jailed for a killing she says she did not commit. It took in \$5.1 million.

ROUNDING OUT THE TOP 10 WERE:

"Space Jam: A New Legacy" (\$4.3 million)

"Snake Eyes" (\$4 million)

"F9: The Fast Saga" (\$2.7 million)

"Escape Room: Tournament of Champions" (\$2.2 million)

"Boss Baby: Family Business" (\$1.3 million) — **AFP**

TRAVEL TALES

Plastic creates 'evolutionary trap' for young sea turtles — study



PLASTIC POLLUTION creates an "evolutionary trap" for young sea turtles, according to a new study.

The research found plastic inside small juvenile turtles along both the east (Pacific) and west (Indian Ocean) coasts of Australia.

After hatching on beaches, the animals travel on currents and spend their early years in the open ocean.

However, these currents accumulate vast quantities of plastic and because they feed near the surface, many young turtles swallow it.

The research team led by the University of Exeter, included Murdoch University, the Department of Environment and Science (Queensland) and the Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions (Western Australia).

Dr Emily Duncan, of the Centre for Ecology and Conservation on Exeter's Penryn Campus in Cornwall, said: "Juvenile turtles have evolved to develop in the open ocean, where predators are relatively scarce.

"However, our results suggest that this evolved behaviour now leads them into a trap — bringing them into highly polluted areas such as the Great Pacific

Garbage Patch.

"Juvenile sea turtles generally have no specialised diet — they eat anything, and our study suggests this includes plastic.

"We don't yet know what impact ingesting plastic has on juvenile turtles, but any losses at these early stages of life could have a significant impact on population levels."

Researchers examined juvenile sea turtles — from hatchlings to a shell measurement of up to 50 centimetres — that either washed up or were accidentally caught by fishermen on the Australian coasts.

The study included a total of 121 sea turtles from five of the world's seven species: green, loggerhead, hawksbill, olive ridley and flatback.

According to the data, the proportion of turtles containing plastic was far higher on the Pacific coast with 86 per cent of loggerheads, 83 per cent of greens, 80 per cent of flatbacks and 29 per cent of olive ridleys.

On the Indian Ocean coast, 28 per cent of flatbacks, 21 per cent of loggerheads and 9 per cent of green turtles contained plastic.

While no plastic was found in hawksbill turtles

on either coast, only seven hawksbills were found so this sample size was small.

The researchers found that plastic in the Pacific turtles was mostly hard fragments, which could come from a vast range of products used by humans, while Indian Ocean plastics were mostly fibres — possibly from fishing ropes or nets.

The polymers most commonly ingested by turtles in both oceans were polyethylene and polypropylene.

Duncan said: "These polymers are so widely used in plastic products that it's impossible to pin down the likely sources of the fragments we found.

"Hatchlings generally contained fragments up to about 5mm to 10mm in length, and particle sizes went up along with the size of the turtles.

"The next stage of our research is to find out if and how plastic ingestion affects the health and survival of these turtles.

"This will require close collaboration with researchers and veterinarians around the world."

The study was funded by the Sea Life Trust and the National Geographic Society and published in the journal *Frontiers in Marine Science*.

— **PA Media/dpa**

CONSERVATION

Protecting 'The Patriarch,' Italy's ancient tree threatened by fire



SCIENTISTS IN SARDINIA are hoping a thousand-year-old olive tree nearly destroyed by recent fires can be saved, mobilising volunteers to stand guard around the remains of the ancient tree.

"The Patriarch", as it is known in the west of the Italian island region, was a massive wild olive tree with a trunk about 10 metres (33 feet) around and 16.5 metres (54 feet) high.

But it was nearly completely devoured by flames that ripped through the area last weekend when over 20,000 hectares (50,000 acres) burned in the worst fires seen on the island in decades.

The blaze destroyed homes and killed livestock as it ravaged thousands of Sardinia's olive trees, along with juniper groves, cork trees, oaks and pines.

After an examination of the tree earlier this week, experts said they hoped there might be signs of life in the root system and the side of the trunk that was spared the worst burns.

The community of Cuglieri has organised volunteers to stand guard to prevent people from walking on its fragile root systems on the advice of experts, including botanist Gianluigi Bacchetta of Cagliari University.

"Keeping this tree alive means keeping everyone's hope alive," he said of the specimen, which registered on Italy's list of monumental trees.

Bacchetta said after an examination of the area on Wednesday that water added to the soil around the tree had helped lower its temperature.

Another scientist who surveyed the damage, University of Sassari botany professor Ignazio Camarda, wrote on Facebook that all that was left of the mighty tree were "miserable remains that lie on the ground and a few blackened stumps, as well as a section of the base".

But he also noted "a glimmer of life from which a new sapling could emerge".

Firefighters were still on the ground in western Sardinia on Friday, extinguishing new outbreaks and clearing areas, even as scorching temperatures of over 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) and winds mean that the risk of fire remains high. — **AFP**



OMANI ARTISTS

GO GLOBAL THROUGH GCC'S FIRST DIGITAL MUSEUM



By Ruqaya al Kindi

Founded in May 2020 by sisters Manar and Sharifah al Hinai, the Khaleeji Art Museum is the first digital museum that showcases and promotes the work of artists and photographers of the Arab Gulf states by hosting regular online exhibitions.

"We celebrate creativity, diverse forms of arts, established as well as emerging artists, and hope to connect art collectors and enthusiasts with diverse talents from our region. The digital museum is a record and documentation of the art movement as it is happening in the region, presented on a global scale", Manar shared.

Since its inception, "we've organised over seven virtual solo and group art exhibitions as well as exhibited the works of over 40 established and emerging artists from the GCC. The themes of the show revolved around Khaleeji identity, Summer in the Gulf, Ride Culture in the GCC, Ramadan amid Covid-19 and more timely themes", Manar explained.

The latest virtual group art exhibition is Transcendence where 12 artists from the GCC portray what spirituality means to them. The virtual exhibition is organised in the form of a maze to simulate the common perception of life as a labyrinth "where every road is a dead end."

Examining the various artworks on display, it is clear that the participating artists differ not only when it comes to defining a concept as complex as spirituality, but also in the ways through which they transcend and establish a spiritual connection and with whom.

Transcendence is the act of release, change of state and transformation beyond the physical. Transcendence is sublime. Its nature may not be seen, but it is strongly felt. To experience the sublime is to transport oneself into a boundless atmosphere. The chemical process of sublimation is what initially inspired this theme.

Sublimation is defined as the transition of a substance from the solid to the vapour state. This is what both Majeda al Hinai (Omani artist) and William Virgil imagine transcendence to be: A change from something material to immaterial, and in some sense metaphysical. With it being a very personal experience, the artists wanted the piece to loosely depict self-transcendence through the simulation of a human figure.

The series of photos "More Precious Than Gold" by rising Omani talent Mahmood al Zadjali was on display in the virtual art exhibition "Ramadan in Quarantine". He raised a question which is, "What is the most thing you will miss in Ramadhan?"

He describes his photos saying that "During Ramadhan, food turns into an obsession. Refraining from it during the hours of the day turns it into a desire. The concept behind this project was to bring that all to light; our mothers have been creating these meals that are rarely ever cooked over the year and we hold them on to the highest regard; Luqaimat,

Samboosas, pastries. They all fall into that same category: "More Precious Than Gold."

"Swim Good", by Mujahid al Malki was included in the virtual art exhibition "Art For Change". The photographer describes his work by saying: "A lot of us feel like their job in the corporate world has become a large part of their identity and sense of self-worth. Most of the time you'd feel locked and marginalised which follows up with physical exhaustion and spiritual drain. This photograph describes a place where every corporate person would like to be in, a temporary escape to a perfect world where you swim in an ocean, and where the sun always shines".

Since the beginning of 2021, "we've collaborated with Dubai Festival City Mall, to organise monthly digital art shows that are projected on the world's permanent, outdoor projection thus shedding a light on our GCC talents on a wider scale", Sharifah said.

The ravaging of Covid-19 over the last two years has also drastically changed summers in the Gulf. For the second year in a row, the world is experiencing summer under exceptional circumstances. The preoccupation with the pandemic is clearly present in the works of Oman's renowned artist Alia al Farsi who also take part in the "Summer in The Gulf" show that is projected on the world's permanent outdoor projection.

Alia's painting, Corona Quarantine, depicts a group of women donning traditional Omani clothes and medical masks, isolated at home together and engaged in different activities such as painting or using their phones.

"As the numbers of Covid-19 patients are soaring in Oman, this summer will be no different from last year's summer. People will continue to spend time on their phones and following up with their close friends and families to ensure their safety and health", said the artist who drew inspiration from Oman's people, nature and architecture.

Everything from the identity to the online museum is developed and curated by women of the Arab Gulf States.

"In an art world where females are under-represented in museums, galleries and amongst management of art institutions, we are proud that our museum is run by an all-female team, and was developed by a team of GCC females. The identity of the museum was developed by Omani graphic designer Marwa al Kalbani", Sharifah said.

The digital exhibitions and galleries are free to experience stemming from the founder's firm belief that knowledge and arts should be accessible to all. You can enjoy the art displayed by the Gulf Art Museum through the Instagram account "khaleejiartmuseum" or their website www.khaleejiartmuseum.com

