

GED exam results tomorrow

Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, has endorsed the results of General Education Diploma (GED) exams for the school year 2020-2021. The results will be available via Omantel or Ooreedo text messages (SMS to be sent to 90200) from 4 pm on August 3. The same results will also be available later at the portal of the Ministry of Education. **DETAILS ON P3**



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OMAN OBSERVER

www.omanobserver.om editor@omanobserver.om

P11
SINDHU HOPES
BRONZE CAN INSPIRE
NEW GENERATION



P15
SOHAR INTERNATIONAL
POSTS 15.3% RISE
IN NET PROFIT



P20
AN ARTIST'S
FASCINATION
WITH COLOURS



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO
SWISS PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Guy Parmelin of the Swiss Confederation on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Parmelin and the friendly Swiss people.

— ONA

BAN ON PYRAMID
MARKETING

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has issued a Decision No 105/2021 prohibiting sale, publicity and promotion of goods or commodities or products or services via network or pyramid marketing. The decision bans the use of any electronic or non-electronic network/pyramid marketing methodology to purchase, sell, exchange, publicise or promote any goods or services.

DETAILS ON P13



READ IN

OPINION

Yes, it's holiday time!
**ABDULAZIZ AL
JAHDHAMI**

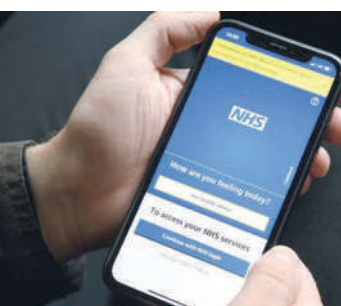
The adventures of
a blonde and
a very old car
Rachael MacIver

INSIDE



TURKEY EVACUATES TOURISTS
AT RISK FROM FIRES

P6



PRESSURE TO RECALL
BRITISH MPS GROWS

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HM issues Royal Decree on appointment of officials

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Sunday issued a Royal Decree No 52/2021 on appointment to some posts. Article (1) appoints the following officials to the posts

indicated along their names.
Eng Khamis bin Mohammed bin Abdullah al Shamakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for

Transport.
Basil bin Ahmed bin Amir al Rowas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth.
Eng Nayef bin Ali bin Hamad

al Abri, Chairman of Civil Aviation Authority.
Dr Jokha bint Abdullah bin Humood al Shukailiyah, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Authority for Academic

Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education.
Article (2) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA

NATIONAL IMMUNISATION DRIVE FOR SECOND DOSE BEGINS

COVID-19 CASES FALL

NEVER LET THE GUARD DOWN

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

@zainabalnsseri

Lockdown measures have blunted the Covid-19 graph in the Sultanate as the country on Sunday reported 978 new cases and 36 deaths over the past 72 hours, with an average of about 300 new cases and 12 deaths per day.

The administration of a second dose of vaccines, which started on Sunday, is also expected to flatten the curve further later this month. Doctors urged people to take vaccines and follow coronavirus protocol to beat the pandemic.

"We expect a continued decline in new infections and inpatients," said Dr Zaid al Hiani, Assistant Professor,

College of Medicine and a Consultant of Infectious Diseases at SQU Hospital. He said that the numbers this week will reflect the impact of the total lockdown during Eid al Adha.

Dr Zakariya al Balushi, Infectious Disease Consultant at Royal Hospital, said that the vaccination drive must be accelerated after the Supreme Committee changed lockdown

timings. He suggested that immunisation centres must work until at least 9 pm to enable people to take the shots as the vaccination is the most powerful weapon to stop new waves.

TURN TO P2

EVALUATION FOR NEW RECRUITS



In response to the Royal directives issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, to speed up the implementation of the employment initiatives, the Royal Court Affairs conducted evaluation tests for new recruits in Salalah which was advertised on June 9 in coordination with the Ministry of Labour. The first phase of the sort-out and evaluation processes began on Sunday amid precautionary measures against coronavirus in cooperation with the Medical Services Department of the Sultan's Armed Forces. **DETAILS ON P2**

Made-in-Oman phone to be launched this year

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

A mobile phone made and designed by young Omanis is set to hit markets later this year. 'Mersal' is the result of years of extensive efforts", Rashid al Nasri, CEO of Mersal Company, told the *Observer*. Mersal made headlines last year with the first tablet made in Oman.

The project aims to employ nearly 1,000 Omanis and make mobile phones affordable for students who are in online classes due to the pandemic.

Al Nasri said the device is inspired by the Oman Vision 2040, which envisages a significantly increased role for the private sector,



both in helping to diversify the economy and providing employment for Omanis.

The Android device features a 10-inch HD screen and weighs 215 gram. It has 128 GB memory while it's RAM is 6 GB.

TURN TO P3

Parked vehicle with running engine easy mark for a thief

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, AUG 1

A parked vehicle with the engine running may be an easy mark for a thief, especially if it is unattended or unlocked, warned a top official of the Royal Oman police (ROP).

The driver leaves the vehicle in the running position as he goes for a quick errand, thinking, "There is no need to stop it, I will return quickly.

But within seconds, the vehicle is gone."

Col Ahmed bin Ali al Rawas, Assistant Director-General of Criminal Investigations of ROP, said that most thefts take place when vehicles are left behind in a running state. Many people tend to leave keys in the ignition before going to ATMs or shops. If your key is in the car, a thief can simply break a window and



drive off.

Col Al Rawas said that the negligence of the driver is the most important reason that leads to the theft as the owners leave the vehicle unlocked in front of ATMs, shops, filling stations and even near their homes. He pointed out that the General Department of Criminal Investigations monitored several cases of citizens and residents who

imported vehicles from outside the Sultanate with forged import certificates. Vehicle importers should protect themselves from falling victim to fraud, by verifying the validity of documents online.

Some gangs from outside the Sultanate also offer vehicles for sale online at a price lower than the market price to entice those wishing to buy.

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 39°C Min 33°C SALALAH: Max 28°C Min 25°C NIZWA: Max 42°C Min 29°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 05:37 FAJR: 04:15 DHUHR: 12:18 ASR: 15:42 MAGHRIB: 18:54 ISHA: 20:12



Royal Court Affairs conducts evaluation for new recruits

MUSCAT: In response to the Royal directives issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, to speed up the implementation of the employment initiatives, the Royal Court Affairs (RCA) conducted evaluation tests for new recruits in Salalah which was advertised on June 9 in coordination with the

Ministry of Labour. The first phase of the sort-out and evaluation processes began on Sunday amid precautionary measures against coronavirus in cooperation with the Medical Services Department of the Sultan's Armed Forces. The process will last for four days following which

successful applicants will undergo physical fitness tests after passing the medical examination phase. Those who pass all the stages will move to personal interviews which will be conducted on the last two days of the evaluation process. Successful candidates will then undergo military training at the

soldiers training and qualifying centre at the Royal Court Affairs security unit as part of an integrated military training. They will also study military sciences and acquire other knowledge to enable them to perform their duties at various units of the Royal Court Affairs. — ONA

Covid-19 vaccination campaign continues

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) continues vaccinating target segments of people aged 18 and above against Covid-19. The drive comes within the National Immunisation Strategy. The ministry on Sunday began administering the second dose of Covid-19 vaccines for people who completed 10 weeks since getting their first dose. In the Governorate of Muscat, Oman Convention and

Exhibition Centre and the Sahil Health Centre in the Wilayat of Qurayat saw a great turnout of people targeted for vaccination. The ministry emphasised the importance of booking appointments in advance before heading to vaccination centres in various governorates of the Sultanate. This comes in order to ensure a safe and smooth process for all, with full adherence to preventive measures. — ONA



Covid-19 cases fall, never let the guard down



FROM PAGE 1
“People must wear face masks, follow physical distance, wash hands, and avoid gatherings, because we are still recording cases and it is still too early to remove the precautionary measures,” he said. To avoid any more waves of Covid-19, Dr Al Balushi stressed on avoiding travel to countries where the virus is strong. One must also take a second dose. Attendance in weddings and funerals must be limited to

immediate family circles, he advised. The total number of cases registered in the Sultanate has now reached 296,835, including 3,850 deaths. Thirty nine patients were admitted to hospitals across the country in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients to 550 including 232 in intensive care units. The total number of recoveries stood at 279,892 while the recovery rate was up to 94.3 per cent.

Ministry slashes fee to recruit expats in SMEs

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 1
The Ministry of Labour (MoL) has issued a new decision regarding the fees for issuing and renewing licenses for the recruitment and practice of non-Omani manpower in small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The decision states that the institution must be owned by full-time employers to manage it — which holds an entrepreneurship card — and is registered with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, and insured with the Public Authority for Social Insurance. Retirees who have an entrepreneurship card are excluded from registration with

the Public Authority for Social Insurance. The facility shall be for one institution only and not for other institutions owned by the owners of the institution. There should be at least one Omani employee if the licence application is for a number of six to 10 workers. The fees are RO 301 to licence to recruit expatriates, RO 141 to recruit one to three domestic or similarly-skilled workers, RO 241 to recruit four or more domestic or similarly skilled workers, RO 201 to recruit two to three farmers and breeders, and RO 301 to recruit four or more. RO 5 will be charged to change worker data and RO 5 to change the employer.



الوطنية للتمويل
National Finance

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Directors' Report

On behalf of the Board of Directors, we are pleased to present to you the financial results of the Company for the six month period ended June 30, 2021.

Over the last year, we have continuously engaged with our customers and partners to overcome COVID-19 related challenges. Driven by a customer-centric strategy, we continued providing our services while ensuring that all necessary health and safety measures are in place for our employees, customers and partners. We continue to improve our technological capabilities to be aligned with the digital transformation happening across the world and provide solutions that deliver best in class customer experience. To support the economy and our customers, we provided payment deferrals to our eligible clients and an option to reschedule their finances.

Your Company has a well-diversified geographical presence across Oman (20 branches), coupled with a broad product profile and we are well positioned to meet the financing requirements of both the Retail and SME segments. As testimony to the Company's endeavors towards supporting SMEs and encouraging Omanis to enter the field of entrepreneurship, the company was recently awarded the 'Best SME Finance Solution -Oman 2021' by Capital Finance International. The accolade recognizes your Company's sterling efforts in supporting the development of the local SME ecosystem and its tailor-made financial solutions for this category.

Your Company continues to adopt a conservative approach to credit approvals keeping in view the overall macroeconomic scenario and perceived increase in credit risk. Within this policy, our approach has been to target customers who satisfy our credit risk appetite. We anticipate a cautious outlook to our credit risk in the medium term and overall, our reading is that the economic climate will continue to remain challenging.

Our total regulatory capital of RO 108.4 million is the highest among FLCs and gives us a strong base on which to build our business. Our Company remains the largest finance and leasing Company in the Sultanate in terms of asset size, branch network, revenues and profit.

The operating profit (profit before provision and tax) was at RO 6.9 million (RO 7.8 million in June 2020) while total earning assets was at RO 404.7 million (RO 402.3 million in December 2020). Profit after tax was RO 3.6 million as compared to RO 3.9 million in June 2020.

The Company is in full compliance with the provisioning norms prescribed by the Central Bank of Oman and the International Financial Reporting Standards. We have added to our credit reserves through additional overlay over the IFRS9 requirement in order to be prepared for future challenges given the incremental risk in the portfolio due to COVID-19 pandemic.

The Company remains committed to Omanisation and as of June 30, 2021, the number of Omani employees was 268 out of the total workforce of 302. The Omanisation percentage works out to 88.74%, which is higher than the given target of 80%. Your Company continues to remain committed to providing career growth and development of Omani nationals through ongoing training in line with their job requirement. We will continue to maintain momentum on employee engagement initiatives, development of future skills, managerial and leadership capabilities for their professional development.

We wish to place on record our deep gratitude and thanks to Mr. Robert Pancras, Chief Executive Officer of your Company who after guiding the Company past several milestones in his illustrious career with us has decided to retire from services. We wish him the very best in his post-retirement endeavors.

We also extend our sincere gratitude to the Central Bank of Oman, Capital Market Authority, Muscat Stock Exchange, our bankers, depositors, vehicle and equipment dealers, customers and shareholders for the support extended for the growth of the Company. On behalf of the Board of Directors, we also thank the management and staff for their dedication and hard work which has enabled us to establish ourselves as the most trusted company in the sector.

Taya Jandal Ali
Chairman

UNAUDITED CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE

	Six months ended 30 June 2021 RO '000	Six months ended 30 June 2020 RO '000
Income		
Income from financing activities	20,372	20,965
Finance costs	(8,452)	(9,181)
Net finance income	11,920	11,784
Other operating income	1,171	1,217
	13,091	13,001
Expenses		
Operating expenses	(5,634)	(4,787)
Depreciation	(360)	(300)
Amortization	(155)	(128)
Net impairment loss on lease receivables	(2,591)	(3,214)
Bad debts written back	115	23
Total expenses	(8,625)	(8,406)
Profit before tax	4,466	4,595
Income tax expense	(837)	(689)
Profit after tax	3,629	3,906
Other comprehensive income		
Items that will be classified to profit or loss		
Movement in revaluation reserve – net of tax	5	13
Total comprehensive income	3,634	3,919
Basic and diluted earnings per share (RO)	0.005	0.006

UNAUDITED CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

	30 June 2021 RO '000	30 June 2020 RO '000	31 December 2020 RO '000
ASSETS			
Cash and cash equivalents	3,531	7,415	5,407
Net investment in finance leases	348,090	366,533	348,954
Working capital and factoring receivables	56,617	46,583	53,390
Advances, prepayments and other receivables	2,947	5,425	2,452
Assets held for sale	1,500	1,500	1,500
Goodwill	5,950	5,950	5,950
Intangible assets	993	1,152	1,134
Property and equipment	6,937	6,617	7,095
Statutory deposit	250	250	250
Total assets	426,815	441,425	426,132
LIABILITIES AND EQUITY			
LIABILITIES			
Creditors and accruals	8,529	3,316	8,303
Tax liabilities	1,405	1,243	1,687
Bank borrowings	276,993	311,670	281,793
Fixed deposits	30,591	18,910	24,834
Deferred tax liabilities	298	283	190
End of service benefits	602	708	666
Total liabilities	318,418	336,130	317,473
EQUITY			
Capital and reserves			
Share capital	54,123	54,123	54,123
Share premium	5,786	5,786	5,786
Revaluation reserve	1,035	770	1,040
Foreign currency reserve	4,321	4,321	4,321
Voluntary reserve	3,000	3,000	3,000
Cash flow hedge reserve	(221)	-	(298)
Legal reserve	8,501	7,699	8,501
Retained earnings	13,783	11,527	14,117
Total shareholders' equity attributable to the equity holders of the company	90,328	87,226	90,590
Perpetual bonds	18,069	18,069	18,069
Total equity	108,397	105,295	108,659
Total liabilities and equity	426,815	441,425	426,132
Net assets per share (RO)	0.167	0.161	0.167

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who requests the company in either Arabic or English with 7 days of receipt of the request. The full set of financials are available in the website of Muscat Stock Exchange.

GED exam results on Tuesday

MUSCAT: Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed bin Nasser al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, has endorsed the results of General Education Diploma (GED) exams for the school year 2020-2021.

The GED results will be available via Omantel or Ooredoo text messages (SMS to be sent to 90200) from 4 pm on Tuesday, August 3, 2021. The same results will also be available later at the portal of the Ministry of Education.

As many as 433 Grade 12



students could not sit for the exams due to the fact that some of them were infected with coronavirus (Covid-19) while

433
Grade 12 students
could not sit for the
exams due to Covid-19
infections

others happened to have mingled with infected persons, said Dr Zuweina bint Saleh al Maskariyah, Director General of Education

Assessment, Supervisor General of the GED Exams.

Those who missed the exams because of Covid-19 circumstances will sit for alternative exams later this year, Dr Zuweina added.

The exams were conducted in 361 centres covering all governorates of the Sultanate. Requests for re-marking of exam papers will be received by the Ministry at its website between 4 and 12 August 2021, after which no requests will be entertained.

— ONA

Oman Girl Guides participate in e-Camp Korea 2021



MUSCAT: The Sultanate's Girl Guides participated on Sunday in the inaugural ceremony of the 18th Girl Scout International e-Camp,

organised by South Korea.

The virtual event, themed "Apart and Together", is held from August 1 to 20, with the participation of



3,000 girl guides from around the world.

The camp aims to enhance values of global citizenship in

girl guides, as well as availing a safe environment for them to communicate virtually through the Internet. — ONA

MoTCIT rolls out tenders for reconstruction of roads, bridge



SALALAH: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said that it is finalising procedures to roll out tenders for the reconstruction of viaducts on Wadi Adonab and the construction of Al Mughsayl bridge on the Raysut-

Al Mughsayl road in Dhofar Governorate.

The ministry will shortly complete the procedures to roll out a tender for the construction of Wadi Afoul bridge and rehabilitation of Arjout-Sarfait road to avoid disruptions during heavy rains. The aforementioned



roads are among the most important main roads that link the western wilayats of the governorate to the Wilayat of Salalah while the Arjout-Sarfait road links Dhofar Governorate to the brotherly Republic of Yemen through the Sarfait border outlet.

At the beginning of this year, the ministry completed the rehabilitation of the water drainage system in Wadi Ghadun, Wadi Aidam and other valleys. The rehabilitation of these valleys was executed with high quality to ensure permanent solutions to the problem of road disruption.

Made-in-Oman phone to be launched this year

FROM PAGE 1

"The beauty of the product is that it involves a multi-layered In Country Value drive. The supply chain, the process of sourcing the components, detailed logistics, procurement, production, distribution and retail marketing are all taken care of by different Omani companies which will ensure a complete Omani product in the market," he said.

The manufacturing unit is based in Samail Industrial Area and will create 800 to 1,000 jobs. A factory exclusively for manufacturing semiconductors is currently under process. Other components, accessories and the like will also be made from the local factories.

"The selling point too is also well thought about. There are 500 to 600 shops run by the locals that sell gadgets and other mobile accessories.



The project aims to employ nearly 1,000 Omanis and make mobile phones affordable for students who are in online classes due to the pandemic

We have identified them and products will be sold through them. This will create plenty of jobs too."

	GENERAL FEATURE
Platform	MTK6771, T606
Screen Size	6.95" HD+, IPS, 720*1640
MCP	6GB RAM + 128GB ROM
OS	Android 11
Dim & Weight	174*79.8*8.9mm, 215g
Camera(front)	16M/25M
Camera(back)	48.0M+16M Wide angle+5M Macro+VGA, quad flash
TP	INCELL full lamination multi-touch
Band A (Suitable for Europe, Asia and Africa)	2G-B2/B3/B5/B8 3G-B1/B2/B5/B8 4G-B1/B3/B5/B7/B8/B20/B38/B39/B40/B41
Band B (Suitable for America)	2G-B2/B3/B5/B8 3G-B1/B2/B5/B8 4G-B2/B4/B5/B7/B12/B28A
IO	Type C, 3.5mm audio jack
WIFI	802.11 b/g/n 2.4G&5.0G
Bluetooth	Bluetooth 5.0
SENSOR	G-3D/P/L/fingerprint
GPS	GPS
SIM card	SIM1: NANO + SIM2: NANO+ T-FLASH
T-flash card	Up to 256G
Battery	5000mAh (Non-removable)
Sell point	6.95" punch hole screen with big battery, 3D curve glass, Sic

Campaign to save Dhofar's ageing baobab trees



MIRBAT: The Directorate-General of Environment in Dhofar Governorate in cooperation with volunteer teams has conducted an environmental campaign to save and preserve rare and ageing baobab trees and protect them from pest and wood-boring insects gnawing on their trunks and branches. Some of the Baobab trees of Dhofar Governorate are 300 years old.



HAPPY FRIENDSHIP DAY

ANCHOR, FIRM

AND SECURE

VINOD NAIR

[@vinot_nair](#)

We depend on families and partners in times of crisis, but close friends are the ones with whom we share our true self.

They know all our flaws and yet they love us. Be it spending time with them or discussing the highs and lows of our lives, true friends are always there for us.

Friendship Day is observed on the first Sunday of August each year to celebrate the beautiful bond we share with our close friends.

For more than one year, the coronavirus pandemic has shut us indoors or forced us to maintain social distance but it doesn't mean that we should stay emotionally distant with our friends and well-wishers.

Social media was abuzz with lovely wishes, emojis, messages, popular quotes and images which beautifully describe the different shades of this special relationship.

"We have a strong group of some 15-20 school friends in different parts of the world, we used to meet every year around mid-December in India since 2010. We missed it last year and this year too looks unlikely under given situations because our mates are spread across Australia, the GCC, the US and Europe", said Nilesh Bharghav, who is based in the Sultanate.

"The sad part is not about missing the meeting but the fact that things will never be the same

when we meet again. We lost two due to Covid and one due to another illness. We have been in regular touch through WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram. Still, to meet everyone in person annually has been big for us."

Such feelings have been echoed by several friends especially those who have been separated due to lockdowns and travel restrictions.

"A friend of mine in Pakistan needed big money for treatment a few months back and it was immediately raised and transferred to him. While money did make an impact, the fact is that none of the friends have been not able to meet and spend valuable moments with him till date."

International Friendship Day was proclaimed with a large goal by the United Nations with the aim of involving young people, as future leaders, in community activities that include different cultures and promote international understanding and respect for diversity.

But the meaning of Friendship is more expressed by individuals and commoners by exchanging greetings.

With schools going online, the fun part is missed by students who used to make new friends by sharing friendship bands that offer memories for life.

"While schools in Oman are generally on vacation around this time, children always found ways to celebrate them later", said an Indian schoolteacher.



Breastfeeding must for infant’s well-being

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 1

Breastfeeding a baby is one of the most overwhelming experiences a mother can have. It’s very essential for an infant as well as a mother and hence, the world celebrates World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) from August 1 to August 7 every year, to spread awareness about its importance and need.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recognises breast milk as the best nutritional source for infants.

WHO and Unicef recommend that an infant must be breastfed within an hour of birth and should continue at least for the first six months of the child’s life.

However, ideally, breastfeeding should continue till the age of two to ensure the healthy growth and development of the child. World Breastfeeding Week is celebrated to encourage women to breastfeed for the all-around development of a child.

Breastfeeding provides the optimal nutrition for babies and it has a lot of benefits for infants’ physical and mental health lasting right into adulthood, as well for the mothers’ physical health. It has the right amount of nutrients, is easily digested, and is readily

WHO and Unicef recommend that an infant must be breastfed within an hour of birth and should continue at least for the first six months of the child’s life

available.

WBW started in 1992, with annual themes including healthcare systems, women and work, the International Code of Marketing of Breast milk Substitutes, community support, ecology, economy, science, education and human rights. Since 2016, WBW is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In 2018, a World Health Assembly resolution endorsed WBW as an important breastfeeding promotion strategy.

The theme of World Breastfeeding Week 2021 is “Protect breastfeeding: a shared responsibility” which will focus on how breastfeeding contributes

to the survival, health and well-being of all, and the imperative to protect breastfeeding worldwide.

Although support at the individual level is very important, breastfeeding must be considered a public health issue that requires investment at all levels. The concept of ‘building back better’ which means that we can return in a better way after the Covid-19 pandemic will provide an opportunity to create a warm chain of support for breastfeeding that includes health systems, workplaces and communities at all levels of society.

It should be noted that in Oman, the Omani Code for Marketing Breast Milk Substitutes was issued in 1998 to protect breastfeeding. Then the Nutrition Department updated the code, and it was issued by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion in May and was named “Omani Standard Specification for Regulating Classified Products for Infants and Young Children” to stop inappropriate marketing of breast milk substitutes.

The provisions of the specification were based on what was included in the International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes, which was approved by the WHO and Unicef.



SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH
ANNOUNCEMENT



The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders :-

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of Tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/ Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/HQ-102/2021	Provision of External Laboratory Referral Services for The Royal Hospital	05/August/2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 25/August/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-103/2021	Supply and Installation of Medical Equipment for Madha Hospital in Musandam Governorate	12/August/2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 08/September/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 91.500 Per set
MOH/HQ-104/2021	Supply of Surgical Instruments	12/August/2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 01/September/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-105/2021	Supply & Installation of Fluorescence Insitu Hybridization System & Reagents for National Genetic Centre at The Royal Hospital	12/August/2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 01/September/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-106/2021	Upgrading of BMS at Al Nahdha Hospital in Muscat Governorate	12/August/2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 01/September/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-108/2021	Supply of Consumable Items (Cyclotron) for The Royal Hospital	12/August/2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 01/September/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 29.400 Per set

- All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board on the above mentioned Grade may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- Tenders should be submitted on line on the given website signed and sealed. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee or a certified Cheque issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee before one day of date submission.
- The Original Bank Guarantee should be submitted to the office of Director of Purchase and Tenders one day before the submission date for all Tenders.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Any Clarification, you may contact via
Telephone: 24166670
Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om



OMAN UNITED INSURANCE CO. SAOG
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COMPANY REPORT

Dear Shareholders,
On behalf of the Board of Directors of Oman United Insurance Company SAOG, I have the pleasure to present to you the Un-Audited Financial Statements of the company for the Six months' period ended on 30 June 2021.

Insurance operations and underwriting results:
The gross premium income of all insurance branches amounted to OMR 18.60 million compared to OMR 17.30 million in the same corresponding period of the year 2020 registering a growth rate of 7.5%.

The gross underwriting profits of all insurance business (before administrative expenses) amounted to OMR 3.37 million compared to Underwriting profits of OMR 4.24 million in the corresponding period of last year registering a decrease rate of (20.5%).

Reinsurance Markets:
The increase in claims resulting from catastrophe insurance in the world, and the increase in the total loss ratios of international reinsurance companies has restricted the capacity of reinsurance treaties, therefore we expect a rise in the reinsurance cost in general, with reinsurers imposing more stringent terms and conditions in the treaties for the underwriting year 2021-2022.

Investment Results:
The MSX30 index ended the 2nd quarter 2021, at positive note of 11.06% year to date and closed at 4,063.40 points.

Our investment strategy to reduce the exposure of the stock portfolio and investing in fixed income instruments enabled us to avoid the volatility of stock markets. Therefore, we expect the stability of streamlining investment income in the coming years. Because of the foregoing, the company achieved net investment income of OMR 2.01 million compared to OMR 880K for the same period last year, with a growth rate of 128.9%

Net profits:
The company's net profit after tax amounted

to OMR 2.42 million as against a net profit after tax of OMR. 2.14 million in the corresponding period of last year, registering a growth rate of 13.0%, accordingly the earnings per share amounted to 24 Bzs as against 21 Bzs in the corresponding period of last year. It is worth noting that the net asset value per share amounted to 293 Bzs compared to 282 Bzs in the same period of last year with a growth rate of 3.9%, this is despite dividends distribution of OMR 3.5 million during this year.

Business risks:
Honorable shareholders: As you know, insurance business is exposed to natural and other risks that are governed by fate and destiny, (Such as the pandemic of Coronavirus, Covid19) and on the other hand, the performance of the investment portfolio is very much influenced by the prevailing economic and political conditions.

However, the management has been exerting its utmost efforts by adopting a conservative risk management mechanism that mitigates the effects of the risks related to the activity.

Acknowledgement:
On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank the shareholders, our loyal customers, reinsurers and employees. Our sincere thanks and appreciation also extended to Capital Market Authority for their tremendous support in regulating and developing the local insurance sector and for their assistance, which has led to the smooth functioning of operations.

Finally, our sincere thanks and gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq. We all pray to Almighty Allah to shower His Majesty with blessings, keep him in good health and give him long life. Our sincere thanks and appreciation also extended to His Majesty's rational government and we wish to the Omani people always Progress and prosperity.

Thank You and Kindest Regards

Salim Bin Nassir Al Busaidi
Chairman
July / 2021

UNAUDITED BALANCE SHEET
AS AT 30th JUNE 2021

	(Amounts in Rial Omani)	30th June 2021	30th June 2020	31st Dec. 2020
DESCRIPTION				
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property,furniture and equipments	1,527,171	1,432,347	1,603,240	
Investment Property - Land & Buildings	2,109,629	2,179,367	2,142,352	
Available-for-sale investments	834,073	1,199,707	976,624	
Deposits	42,600,000	37,150,000	41,400,000	
Insurance Contracts (Actuarial Reserve)	5,896,172	7,056,828	6,861,000	
Total Non-Current assets	52,967,045	49,018,249	52,983,216	
Current assets				
Financial assets at fair value through income	4,603,054	5,573,278	4,304,329	
Insurance & other receivables	11,556,395	10,939,571	7,212,165	
Deposits	11,841,497	14,623,088	17,146,400	
Cash & Cash equivalents	622,674	74,658	1,936,502	
Reinsurance Contracts	25,404,575	28,972,448	23,726,982	
Total current assets	54,028,195	60,183,043	54,326,378	
Total assets	106,995,240	109,201,292	107,309,594	
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Capital and reserves				
Share capital	10,000,000	10,000,000	10,000,000	
Share Premium	871,519	871,519	871,519	
Retained earnings	4,822,193	3,788,300	5,899,195	
Legal reserve	3,333,334	3,333,334	3,333,334	
Contingency reserve	10,000,000	10,000,000	10,000,000	
General reserve	100,000	100,000	100,000	
Fair value reserve	199,369	75,838	255,240	
Total capital and reserves	29,326,415	28,168,991	30,459,288	
Non-current liabilities				
Insurance Contracts (Actuarial Reserve)	6,996,172	8,531,828	8,141,000	
Employees' end of service benefits	881,137	899,542	846,912	
Lease liability	248,571	100,080	294,082	
Deferred tax liability	122,910	40,886	125,481	
Total Non-current liabilities	8,248,790	9,572,336	9,407,475	
Current liabilities				
Bank Overdraft	598,828	-	2,405,907	
Insurance Contracts	50,749,910	54,825,767	48,522,345	
Trade and other payables	17,575,741	16,009,644	15,470,715	
Lease liability	57,300	70,530	68,206	
Provision for Income Tax	438,256	554,024	975,658	
Total current liabilities	69,420,035	71,459,965	67,442,831	
Total liabilities	77,668,825	81,032,301	76,850,306	
Total equity and liabilities	106,995,240	109,201,292	107,309,594	
Net asset per share	0.293	0.282	0.305	

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who request them, in either Arabic or English as requested, within 7 days of receipt of the request.

UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME
FOR THE PERIOD 01-01-2021 TO 30-06-2021

	(Amounts in Rial Omani)	2021	2020
PARTICULARS			
Income			
Gross Written Premiums	18,597,509	17,298,458	
Net underwriting result	3,371,042	4,239,730	
Investment income - net	1,772,622	644,607	
Other operating income	242,139	235,402	
Total Income	5,385,803	5,119,739	
General and administration expenses	(2,572,488)	(2,515,307)	
Operating Profit before taxation	2,813,315	2,604,432	
Taxation	(390,317)	(461,000)	
Net profit for the period	2,422,998	2,143,432	
Other comprehensive income:			
Available for sale investments fair value gain/(loss)	(55,871)	(228,901)	
Total comprehensive income for the period	2,367,127	1,914,531	
Earnings Per Share	0.024	0.021	

SALIM BIN NASSIR AL BUSAIDI
CHAIRMAN

NASSIR BIN SALIM AL BUSAIDI
CHIEF MANAGEMENT EXECUTIVE

B

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S

Location	Telephone	Fax
Head Office	2447 7300	2447 7323
Darsait	2470 3991	2479 6327
Al Qurum	2456 2105	2456 2074
Barka	2688 6687	2688 6698
Buraimi	2565 0105	2565 0096
Ibra	2557 2386	2557 2387
Ibri	2569 2386	2569 1840
Nizwa	2541 0330	2541 2392
Salalah	2329 5040	2329 8405
Seeb	2442 1771	2442 1770
Sohar	2684 1533	2684 0016
Sur	2554 3229	2554 2454
Bidaya	2670 9545	2670 9548

Turkey evacuates tourists at risk from fires as villages clear out

ISTANBUL: Thousands of emergency forces were battling severe forest fires in Turkey for a fifth day running on Sunday.

On Saturday night, several villages in the Aegean region of Bodrum, a popular holiday destination, were evacuated, according to Mayor Ahmet Aras.

People were brought to safety, sometimes using boats to cross, he said. One hundred Russian tourists were also brought to safety from an eastern suburb of Bodrum, the Russian Consulate General said. They have been relocated to new hotels and were out of danger.

Another village in the province of Antalya also had to be evacuated on Sunday, as the broadcaster NTV reported.

Turkey has since Wednesday been battling the worst forest fires in years.

Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Bekir Pakdemirli said on Sunday that five of the original 100 fires were still active. Strong winds kept fuelling the flames and hampering the fire-fighting efforts.

According to official figures, the fires have claimed at least six lives so far and injured hundreds.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited the affected regions on Saturday and assured the victims of quick help. The number of fire-fighting aircraft has been increased to 16 with the support of Russia, Iran



The town of Manavgat shows burnt car in front of a burnt house as a massive forest fire which engulfed a Mediterranean resort region on Turkey's southern coast. — AFP

and Ukraine, he said.

One fire in the coastal town Marmaris was caused by children, Erdogan said.

Turkish authorities have begun an investigation into the cause of the other fires and have not ruled out arson.

The country is currently suffering from a heat wave and temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius are expected for the coming days.



An injured person sits in front of a burnt house near the town of Manavgat, Turkey. — AFP

Meanwhile, wildfires in southern Turkey forced more people to flee their homes on Sunday as pressure on the government grew over its response to the deadly forest fires.

Turkey has suffered the worst fires in at least a decade, official data show, with nearly 95,000 hectares burned so far this year, compared with an average of 13,516 at this point in the year between 2008 and 2020. — AFP

Anger over Tunisia's pandemic failures

JENDOUBA: Waiting in line to receive a Covid-19 jab from the Tunisian army, Zubeir Bin Ammar was in little doubt that the military and President Kais Saied were succeeding where the government he removed from power had failed.

“May God bless the army and the president. I hope they let him rule because we live in a country that was run by mafia,” said Bin Ammar, a teacher.

He showed scant concern as to whether Saied's actions on July 25 constituted a coup and a threat to Tunisia's young democracy, as his political adversaries claim.

“He followed the people on the streets, not political parties,” said Bin Ammar, who is married with children and lives in Jendouba, 150 km west of the capital Tunis.

Failures in dealing with spiralling Covid-19 cases in Tunisia stoked anger at the government in the weeks leading up to Saied's decisions to sack Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi and suspend parliament, with support from the army.

Coupled with a deep economic malaise, the Covid-19 crisis brought many Tunisians into the streets in protest at the government and the main parties in parliament, including the main-



A woman receives the Covid vaccine at a vaccination centre in Tunis. — Reuters

stream Ennahda, before Saied's decision.

So far, around 940,000 people have been fully vaccinated among a population of 11.6 million. Tunisia has reported around 18,000 deaths and more than half a million infections. At one point last month it had the worst infection rate in Africa.

During a recent religious holiday, the government opened walk-in vaccination centres, but was unprepared for the large numbers who showed up to get a shot and, as people crowded into dense queues without social distancing, the supplies ran out.

That debacle was the final straw for many people in the government's handling of the pandemic — and prompted Saied to announce soon afterwards that the military would take it over.

— AFP

Gaddafi's son hints at Libya presidential bid

TRIPOLI: Seif al Islam, the son of slain ruler Muammar Gaddafi, wants to “restore the lost unity” of Libya after a decade of chaos and does not exclude standing for the presidency.

He spoke in a rare interview, given to the *New York Times* at an opulent two-storey villa inside a gated compound at Zintan in the west of the North African country.

For years, mystery had surrounded the precise whereabouts of a man wanted for war crimes by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The 49-year-old, who before 2011 had been seen as his father's presumed successor, said politicians in the decade since have brought Libyans “nothing but misery”.

“It is time for a return to the

past. The country — it's on its knees... There's no money, no security. There's no life here,” Seif al Islam said in his first appearance in years. After four decades in power, Muammar Gaddafi and his relatives were the target of a popular uprising in 2011.

Three of the dictator's seven sons were killed, but the fate of Seif al Islam, whose name means “sword of Islam” was unknown.

He was captured by a Libyan militia in November 2011, days after his father was killed.

Four years later, a Tripoli court sentenced him in absentia to death for crimes committed during the revolt.

The ICC has repeatedly asked for him to be handed over for trial.

Until the interview, Seif al Islam had not been seen or heard from

I've been away from the Libyan people for 10 years. You need to come back slowly, slowly like a striptease. You need to play with their minds a little

SEIF AL ISLAM

Son of Muammar Gaddafi



since June 2014, when he appeared via video link from Zintan during his trial by the Tripoli court.

Seif al Islam said in the interview that he was a free man organising a political return, and that his former captors “are now my friends”.

He told the paper the militiamen eventually realised he could be a powerful ally.

In recent years Libya has been split between two rival administrations backed by foreign forces and countless militias.

In October, after Turkey-

backed forces of the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) routed those of eastern military strongman Khalifa Haftar, the two camps agreed a ceasefire in Geneva.

The security situation has been slowly improving since. A provisional government was agreed in March, and general elections are expected to take place on December 24.

Any possible return by Seif al Islam to Libyan politics would face hurdles, including his conviction by the Tripoli court and the ICC warrant for his arrest.

But the Britain-educated son of Muammar Gaddafi seems undeterred, according to the *New York Times*.

Seif al Islam said “he was confident that these legal issues

could be negotiated away if a majority of the Libyan people choose him as their leader”.

The paper quoted him as saying: “I've been away from the Libyan people for 10 years. You need to come back slowly, slowly. Like a striptease. You need to play with their minds a little.”

Asked if it felt strange to seek shelter in Libyan homes when he was on the run in 2011, he was as enigmatic as some of the opinions expressed in his late father's ‘Green Book’.

“We're like fish, and the Libyan people are like a sea for us,” Seif al Islam replied.

“Without them, we die. That's where we get support. We hide here. We fight here. We get support from there. The Libyan people are our ocean.” — AFP

SHORT TAKES

DUBAI

Yemen fighters make gains in central province

Yemen's Ansar Allah fighters confirmed they had seized two districts in central Al Bayda province, amid an ongoing battle for control of the government stronghold of Marib further north. Operations have led to ‘the liberation of the Naman and Nateh districts’ in Al Bayda, Ansar Allah spokesman Yahya Saree said in a statement carried by the rebels’ Al Masirah television.

The Ansar Allah are in the ‘process of clearing out



the remaining pockets in Al Bayda province after liberating most areas’, he added. The announcement comes after the country's warring sides deployed reinforcements to the nearby district of Bayhan. — AFP

ABOARD SEA-WATCH 3

Rescuers pull migrants from overcrowded boat

Two humanitarian rescue ships pulled 394 migrants from a dangerously overcrowded wooden boat in the Mediterranean overnight in an operation lasting about six hours, a Reuters witness said. The German and French NGO ships *Sea-Watch 3* and *Ocean Viking* rescued the migrants in Tunisian waters 68 km from the North African coast, near oil facilities and other ships.

Sea-Watch 3 took 141 of the survivors while *Ocean Viking* took the rest. The yacht *Nadir*, from the



German NGO ResQ Ship, later gave support. It was not clear if there were any deaths or injuries among the migrants who were in the wooden boat, which was crammed with migrants on deck and inside the hull. — Reuters

GAZA

Haniyeh re-elected as chief of Hamas

Ismail Haniyeh has been re-elected as leader of the Palestinian group Hamas, officials said, cementing his control of the organisation which rules the Gaza Strip and has fought multiple violent conflicts with Israel.

Haniyeh, Hamas chief since 2017, has controlled the group's political activities in Gaza, the Israeli-occupied West Bank and the diaspora largely from outside Gaza, splitting his time between Turkey and Qatar for the past two years.



He directed Hamas in an 11-day conflict with Israel in May that left over 250 in Gaza and 13 in Israel dead. An Egyptian-mediated ceasefire has mostly held since. — Reuters

In brief

KABUL



AFGHANISTAN'S FLASH FLOODS DEATH TOLL RISES

The death toll from last week's flooding in Afghanistan's eastern province of Nuristan has risen to 113 as rescue operations continue, a disaster agency official said. Another 34 villagers were wounded when heavy rains hit Kamdesh district mid-week, a spokesman for the country's National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA), Abdul Samai Zarbi, said.

He said that 173 houses have been damaged either 'partially or completely', affecting 300 families. Zarbi added that the rescue teams were still working and the figures were preliminary and subject to change. Initially, officials estimated at least 100 dead and wounded. — dpa

JAKARTA



2 SUMATRAN TIGERS TEST POSITIVE FOR COVID

Two critically endangered male Sumatran tigers at a zoo in Jakarta tested positive for the coronavirus but are expected to recover, city officials said.

Nine-year-old Tino and 12-year-old Hari were receiving medication and under close observation by veterinarians at Ragunan Zoo, the head of Jakarta Parks and Urban Forest Agency, Suzi Marsitawati, said.

Tino began to show symptoms including sneezing, breathing difficulties, and a decrease in appetite on July 9. Two days later, Hari started exhibiting the same issues. Marsitawati said samples taken from the cats on July 14 tested positive for the virus. — dpa

ISLAMABAD



PAKISTAN BANS UNVACCINATED FROM DOMESTIC AIR TRAVEL

Pakistan banned air travel for unvaccinated people as the country recorded its highest daily coronavirus infections in more than three months amid a fourth wave of the pandemic.

The travel restrictions have been imposed to encourage people to get vaccinated, a Health Ministry official said. He said vaccine hesitancy was still an issue the authorities were struggling to deal with.

A surge of new coronavirus infections that is dominated by the Delta variant is once again putting pressure on the country's weak healthcare system. — dpa

Afghan forces battle to thwart Taliban assaults on key cities

KANDAHAR: Afghan government forces struggled against Taliban assaults on several major cities on Sunday as the insurgents stepped up a nationwide offensive that saw a key airport in the south come under rocket fire overnight.

Hundreds of commandos were deployed to the western city of Herat while authorities in the southern city of Lashkar Gah called for more troops to rein in the assaults.

Fighting has surged across the country since early May when US-led foreign forces began a final withdrawal from Afghanistan that is now almost complete.

After seizing large tracts of rural territory and capturing key border crossings, the Taliban have started assaulting provincial capitals with gruelling onslaughts.

Flights out of Kandahar, Afghanistan's second-largest city and the former stronghold for the insurgents, were halted after rockets struck the airport before dawn.

Airport chief Massoud Pashtun said two rockets had hit the runway and repairs were underway with planes likely to resume service later on Sunday.

The facility is vital to maintaining the logistics and air support needed to keep the Taliban from overrunning the city, while also providing aerial cover for large tracts of southern Afghanistan.

The attack came as the Taliban inched closer to overwhelming at least two other provincial capitals, including nearby Lashkar Gah in Helmand province.

"Fighting is going on inside the city and we have asked for special



An Afghan National Army commando stands guard along the road in Enjil district of Herat province. — AFP

forces to be deployed," Ataulah Afghan, head of Helmand provincial council, said.

Afghan security forces have increasingly relied on airstrikes to push the militants back from cities even as they run the risk of hitting civilians in heavily populated areas.

"The city is in the worst condition. I do not know what will happen," said Halim Karimi, a resident of Lashkar Gah, a city of 200,000 residents.

"Neither the Taliban will have mercy on us, nor will the government stop bombing."

Further west in Herat, fighting

The city is in the worst condition. I do not know what will happen

HALIM KARIMI

Resident of Lashkar Gah

continued on the city's outskirts overnight with airstrikes targeting Taliban positions, following another day of dramatic clashes between the insurgents and Afghan security forces bolstered

by local fighters.

Herat provincial governor's spokesman Jailani Farhad said around 100 militant fighters had been killed in the attacks.

Both the Taliban and government forces tend to exaggerate their claims of casualties inflicted on the other's forces and true counts are difficult to independently verify.

On Sunday, the Ministry of Defence said that hundreds of commandos had been sent to Herat to help beat back the insurgent assault.

"These forces will increase offensive operations and suppress

the Taliban in Herat," the ministry tweeted.

As fighting raged, President Ashraf Ghani again slammed the Taliban for failing to marshal their negotiating power to reach a peace deal.

"We want peace but they want us to surrender," Ghani said at a cabinet meeting.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) also took issue with the Taliban, demanding the insurgents "provide answers" for the rocket attack on its office in Herat Friday that killed an Afghan guard. — AFP

Thai monks don protective gear as Covid cases surge

BANGKOK: As Covid cases surge in Thailand, some Buddhist monks are donning PPE over their distinctive robes, delivering oxygen cylinders, taking nasal samples to help with testing, and even helping carry the dead to the crematoriums.

Thailand is struggling to contain its latest outbreak fuelled by the highly contagious Delta variant, leaving healthcare services stretched and further damaging a battered economy.

"There are a lot of Thais who are still ignored by the public health system," Mahapromphong, 33, the deputy abbot of Suthi Wararam Temple in the Thai capital, said. "We take care of everyone we come across."

Since July 21 he has been working in Bangkok's poorer neighbourhoods, distributing oxygen tanks, food and medical supplies to the needy as well as taking samples for testing.

Monks are highly respected in the Buddhist kingdom, and they were inundated with donations once word got out, he adds.

He learned how to do nasal swabs from the doctors and



Monks in personal protective equipment carry a coffin to the crematorium at Wat Chin Wararam Worawihan in Bangkok. — AFP

Thailand has reported over 597,000 coronavirus cases and more than 4,800 deaths

nurses working in his temple, which doubles as an isolation centre for those infected with the virus.

One man winced as Mahapromphong removed the swab and deposited the sample in

a plastic pot.

"It's better to be safe than sorry," the man said, his eyes watering.

"Monks are able to live because we rely on people's donations," Mahapromphong said.

"So it's time for us to give back to the people. At the very least, we could encourage them to keep fighting."

Supornchaithammo, a monk at Chin Wararam Worawihan Temple, helps with the grim task of taking the bodies to the crematorium. — AFP

Millions of Americans risk eviction as virus cases spike

WASHINGTON: Millions of Americans could find themselves homeless starting from Sunday as a nationwide ban on evictions expires, against a backdrop of surging coronavirus cases and political fingerpointing.

With billions in government funds meant to help renters still untapped, President Joe Biden this week urged Congress to extend the 11-month-old moratorium after a recent Supreme Court ruling meant the White House could not do so.

But Republicans balked at Democratic efforts to extend the eviction ban through mid-October, and the House of Representatives adjourned for its summer vacation Friday without renewing it.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said blocking the measure was “an act of pure cruelty... leaving children and families out on the streets,” in a tweet late Saturday.

Several left-wing Democrats had spent the night outside the Capitol in protest — calling out their colleagues over the failure to act.

“We slept at the Capitol last night to ask them to come back and do their jobs. Today’s their last chance,” tweeted Congresswoman Cori Bush, who has herself experienced homelessness and was joined by fellow progressives Ilhan



US Representative Cori Bush speaks to reporters about the upcoming expiration of the pandemic-related federal moratorium on residential evictions from the steps of the US Capitol in Washington. — Reuters

Omar and Ayanna Pressley.

With the clock ticking down to Sunday, the country was braced for a heartbreaking spectacle — families with their belongings at the curbside wondering where to go.

One of those at risk is Terriana Clark, who was living out of a car with her husband and two step-

children for much of last year, before finding a teaching job and an apartment in Harvey, Louisiana.

Jobless again and struggling to pay rent after a bout of illness, the 27-year-old told The New Orleans Advocate she applied to a local assistance programme four months ago, but is still waiting for help.

“If it comes, it comes. If it don’t,

it don’t,” she told the paper. “It’s going to be too late for a lot of people. A lot of people are going to be outside.”

Up north in Michigan, Mary Hunt, who makes minimum wage driving a medical taxi, likewise fell behind on her rent on a mobile home because she got sick with Covid-19.

Several left-wing Democrats spent the night outside the Capitol in protest calling out their colleagues over the failure to act

She was served with eviction papers, and frets over what she will do with her stuff and her five cats and one dog.

“How do I choose which cats to keep? It’s not going to happen. I’m not going to leave any of them behind,” Hunt told National Public Radio this week. “If I lose this house, then they go in the car with me. And people can think I’m a crackpot, but I’m not giving up my family,” Hunt said.

Unlike other pandemic-related aid that was distributed from Washington, such as stimulus checks, it was states, counties, and cities that were responsible for building programmes from the ground up to dole out assistance earmarked for renters.

The Treasury Department said that as of June, only \$3 billion in aid had reached households out of the \$25 billion sent to states and localities in early February, less than three weeks after Biden took office.

Pelosi in another tweet Saturday urged “state and local governments to immediately disburse the \$46.5 billion in emergency rental assistance approved by the Democratic Congress so that many families can avoid eviction.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) ordered the eviction moratorium in September 2020, as the world’s largest economy lost over 20 million jobs amid the pandemic shut-downs. The CDC feared homelessness would boost coronavirus infections.

Although more than half of those jobs were since recovered, many families still have not caught up on missed rent payments.

The Census Bureau’s latest Household Pulse survey showed that of 51 million renters surveyed, 7.4 million were behind on rent and nearly half of those said they risked being evicted in the next two months. Nearly 80 per cent of households that are behind on their rent as of early July lived in Covid hot spots, according to a study by the Jain Family Institute.

“Putting people out on the street is probably not going to have good effects on community transmission rates,” the institute’s housing policy researcher Paul Williams told CBS MoneyWatch. — AFP

Pressure to recall British MPs over vaccine passports grows

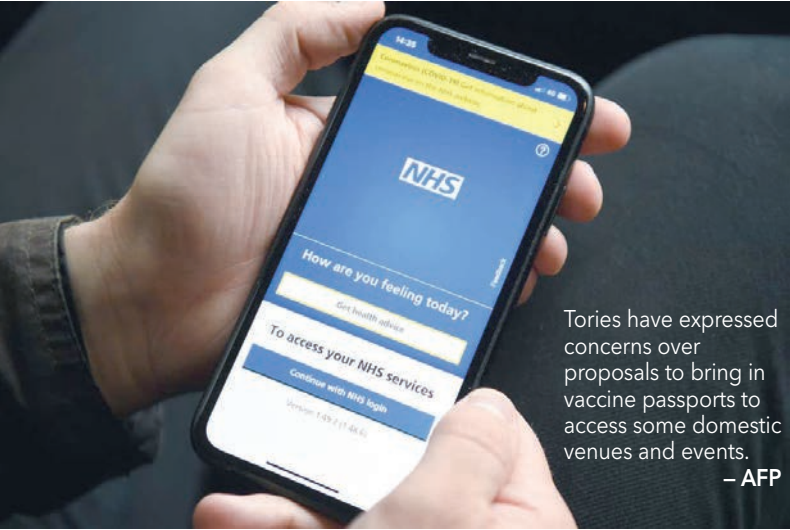
LONDON: Boris Johnson is facing a renewed backlash within his party over the “threat” of domestic vaccine passports, with demands for MPs to be recalled from their holidays to debate the proposal.

Andrew Bridgen, one of 43 Conservative MPs to sign a declaration opposing vaccine passports, said parliament should be recalled from its summer recess if ministers are “serious” about asking people to show proof of their vaccine status to gain entry to domestic venues and events.

The call means cross-party backing is emerging for the Commons to return before September.

Last week, the Liberal Democrats, said a change rolled out to the NHS app, allowing users to prove they had been double-jabbed to access domestic settings - as well as for international travel - warranted a recall.

Conservative grandee Sir



Tories have expressed concerns over proposals to bring in vaccine passports to access some domestic venues and events. — AFP

David Lidington, who was de facto deputy prime minister under Theresa May, added his voice to growing numbers in the Tory Party who are concerned about the prospect of vaccine passports, which are being used in some European countries, including Denmark and France.

The former cabinet minister told Times Radio that introducing a “government certificate of

approval” to access certain events would set a “dangerous precedent”.

The prime minister has announced that he intends to change the rules in September so that only those who are fully vaccinated can attend nightclubs, in a move designed to increase the take-up of vaccination among young people.

According to the Department of Health and Social Care

(DHSC), about two-thirds of people aged 18 to 29 in England have received the first dose.

The nightclub stipulations would be stricter than the coronavirus status certificates used at some mass events in recent months, with clubbers not allowed to use proof of a negative Covid-19 test or evidence of having had the virus to gain entry.

But Johnson was warned by one of his backbenchers that he faced an “embarrassing defeat” if he put the “authoritarian” proposal to a vote in the Commons.

North West Leicestershire MP, Bridgen, told LBC: “I think if the Government is serious about the threat of bringing in domestic vaccine passports then, of course, parliament should be recalled.

“This is a very serious infringement on people’s liberties, it is basically unprecedented in this country, and I and a number of colleagues would oppose it.”

— dpa

Hackers shut down system for booking Covid-19 shots

MILAN: Hackers have attacked and shut down the IT systems of the company that manages Covid-19 vaccination appointments for the Lazio region surrounding Rome, the regional government said on Sunday.

“A powerful hacker attack on the region’s CED (database) is underway,” the region said in a Facebook posting.

It said all systems had been deactivated, including those of the region’s health portal and vaccination network, and warned the inoculation programme could suffer a delay.

“It is a very powerful hacker attack, very serious... everything is out. The whole regional CED is under attack,” Lazio region’s health manager Alessio D’Amato said. According to ANSA, Italy’s postal police and Rome prosecutors are looking into the matter and could open an investigation to find out who

is behind the attack. Italy recently followed France in announcing that proof of vaccination or immunity from Covid-19 would become mandatory for an array of activities.

The move triggered a series of protests across the country against the introduction of the so-called Green Pass which shows people have been vaccinated, tested negative or recovered from Covid-19.

Agencies report that the region’s website, www.regione.lazio.it, was still down on Sunday morning. The site for booking vaccinations was also unavailable.

The highly contagious Delta variant represents about 80 per cent of new Covid-19 cases in Lazio, where 66 per cent of the adult population has been vaccinated, the regional health commissioner D’Amato said earlier this week. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

ABUJA

Nigeria receives 4m vaccine doses from US

Nigeria received four million doses of the Moderna Covid-19 vaccine from the United States on Sunday as the West African nation steps up efforts to battle the third wave of infections. The doses, which came on two planes, were received by officials from the UN children agency Unicef on behalf of Nigeria at the airport in the capital Abuja, a video reporter at the scene said.

It was the second batch of vaccines to arrive in Africa’s most populous nation after four



million doses were delivered in March under the Covax scheme. Covax was set up to ensure the equitable distribution of vaccines, particularly to low-income countries, and has already delivered more than 80 million doses to 129 territories. — AFP

BERLIN

Covid sceptics defy protest ban in Berlin

Hundreds of anti-lockdown demonstrators defied a court-ordered protest ban on Sunday and gathered illegally in the streets of Berlin, resulting in scuffles with police. Police said some protesters had “harassed and attacked” officers in the capital’s western Charlottenburg district and ignored roadblocks.

“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

LONDON

Former UK envoy hands himself in to serve jail term

Former British ambassador Craig Murray handed himself in to UK police on Sunday to serve an eight-month prison term for contempt of court after his appeal was rejected.

Murray, formerly ambassador to Uzbekistan, was convicted in May over blogs and tweets about the assault trial of Scotland’s former first minister Alex Salmond.

The 62-year-old hugged his family members and supporters, who sang ‘Auld Lang Syne’



outside a police station in Edinburgh as he arrived to begin his sentence. In a statement released by supporters, he said that “I go to jail with a clean conscience.” — AFP

Iran’s Raisi to focus on economy

AHMAD PARHIZI AND KARIM ABOU MERHI

Iran’s Ebrahim Raisi will be inaugurated on Tuesday as the new president of the Islamic republic, a country mired in deep economic crisis and hit by crippling US sanctions.

He replaces President Hassan Rouhani, whose landmark achievement was the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and six world powers.

Raisi, 60, will have to tackle the nuclear talks aimed at reviving the deal from which the US unilaterally withdrew.

Two days after Tuesday’s inauguration by the Islamic republic’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Raisi will take the oath before parliament. He won June’s election when more than half the voters stayed away after many political heavyweights were barred from standing.

Iran’s economic problems, exacerbated by the American sanctions, will be the new president’s greatest challenge, according to Clement Therme, a researcher at the European University Institute in Italy.

“His main objective will be to improve the economic situation by reinforcing the Islamic republic’s economic relations with neighbouring countries. The goal would be to build a business model that would protect Iran’s economic growth from American policies and decisions.”

Therme believes Raisi’s main priority will be to “remove US sanctions” so Iran can bolster trade with its neighbours and non-Western countries such as China and Russia.

The 2015 deal saw Iran accept curbs on its nuclear capabilities in return for an easing of sanctions.

But former US president Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the accord three years later and ramped up sanctions again, prompting Tehran to pull back from most of its nuclear commitments.

— AFP

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CLEMENT THERME
A Researcher



WADING THROUGH WATERS

Commuters make their way through a flooded street after heavy monsoon rains in Lahore, Pakistan, on Saturday.
— AFP

Yes, it’s holiday time!



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
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HOLIDAY MARKS THE BEST TIME TO HAVE A REFRESHING AND ENERGISING BREAK FOR FAMILIES, EMPLOYEES AND SCHOOL STUDENTS ALIKE

Most likely, every human being is in need of a break every now and then during his lifespan; no matter how busy he or she is. Everyone needs to be away from the life’s hustle and bustle and breaks the daily routine, which sometimes makes one just like a controlled machine! As machines undergo a regular maintenance schedule, so do humans. A short break will always be good for one to refresh the memory, recharge body’s power and stimulate the spirit.

As people are different in the way they think and behave; they are also different in the way they see and enjoy life. Each one has a different perception and attitude towards life and its experiences. What matters is that one should live the moment, enjoy life and take the learnings. One has to accept the moment with all its lessons and challenges. As Mahatma Gandhi said: “Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.”

For the sake of enjoying life, people should balance between the life’s necessities and having a break, which is a significant one of course. Having a rest is as important for people as maintenance for machines. Likewise, health breakdown might happen to people due to excessive hard work, life stress and work pressure. Everyone has to get a

break and experience the difference in feelings, spirit and memory.

In view of that, as summer has kicked off, it is time for holiday and have a rest. Summer is the much-awaited season of the year, though it is the time of hot weather! However, it is the time coinciding with holiday, commonly for families as it corresponds with the school break too. Hence, the whole family can enjoy their time together. In fact, this season marks the perfect refreshing holiday time for all. It is a good time to relax after the long hectic and busy first half of the year.

As a matter of fact, this holiday marks the best time to have a refreshing and energising break for families, employees and school students alike. Thus, people get themselves programmed for the long summer break. The time has come to have fun and recharge! For this reason, there would be no excuse for people, but to enjoy summer in a way or another that could refreshes them and brings them memorable moments. This time of the year always offers a wide range of enjoyment options for people to fulfil their desires and amuse themselves.

During this holiday time, most people try their best to beat the heat and escape the burning weather at this time

of the year. Accordingly, people’s plans to enjoy the season differ depending on their interests and budgets, being the two key factors to sufficiently plan for a holiday. Some have already packed their luggage and travelled overseas to enjoy their summer holidays.

On the other hand, some have preferred to enjoy their time in the town especially as the overall condition worldwide is not conducive to travel due to the spread of Covid-19. Despite the precautionary measures put in place everywhere, it is not very safe to enjoy flying to other parts of the world. Thus, domestic tourism works as an alternative safe option to enjoy the holiday. Either flying overseas or staying in town, both are different ways intended to enjoy the summer holiday.

All what one has to do is just to make his mind, pack the luggage and either fly or drive away. More or less each one needs a break to get refreshed; if not crossing the borders, then perhaps touring around local tourist destinations. All what one needs is just to indulge in the beauty of homeland, discover the unrivalled beauty, unique culture and genuine heritage of Oman. I think there is no excuse, but to enjoy summer holiday in a way or another and get yourself refreshed.

The adventures of a blonde and a very old car



Rachael MacIver
Instagram: @rachael_maciver

WE HAD DRIVEN, WITHOUT EVEN A TEA BREAK, FROM NIZWA TO HAIMA AND THE PAJERO STUCK IN 3RD GEAR, HAD LITERALLY ROLLED IN TO THE FORECOURT ON THE FUMES

“Sorry, the card machine is not working”

I looked at the petrol station attendant in horror. We had driven, without even a tea break, from Nizwa to Haima and Ol’ Martha, the Pajero stuck in 3rd gear, had literally rolled in to the forecourt on the fumes, which was all that was left in its very, very empty tank.

“So..? What do we do?” I asked the sleepy guy, who had just filled the Pajero to the brim. He handed me back my useless credit card with a shrug. “Cash only.”

“It would have been extremely helpful if you had told me this before you filled up my car”, I mumbled under my breath while going through every glove compartment, ash tray and coin holder the car had. RO 1.400. Hmm....

Mrs J had been fast asleep with her mouth open since Nizwa, and I noticed a small damp spot on her white linen shirt, where she had dribbled slightly. I shook her awake.

“We need cash”, I informed her. “I know”, she replied still half asleep. “No, not in general, well yes that too, but now. We need cash to pay the man for our petrol, I pointed out.

Ten minutes later, having turned every pocket inside out, checked under the seats and had everything out of our bags, we had... RO 6.300. Nowhere near enough to pay our debt. It was a Mexican standoff. We didn’t have cash, the petrol station didn’t have wifi; who would blink first?

In the end the petrol station attendant must have remembered the old saying about not being

able to pick the hair of a bald man, and the sooner we got on our way, the sooner he could go back to snoozing.

“Leave your friend here and go get cash. There is an ATM in town”, he pointed down the dark road. Mrs J looked at me, eyes big with fear. “Leave me here?? she whispered “are you out of your mind? Anything could happen”

“Calm down, this is Haima not downtown Detroit. Nothing is going to happen here”. Mrs J looked around nervously; sand gently sweeping across the forecourt, a couple of tired donkeys snorting nearby and a hungry stray cat rummaging through the bin. “Alright”, she sighed “go!”

Cash in hand I raced back to the petrol station to pay the ransom money for my best friend. I knew she would be feeling terrified

and alone, and forced the Pajero as fast as it would go in 3rd gear. But the forecourt was empty. No friend and no attendant to be seen. I started panic sweating and worrying how I would ever be able to explain to Mrs J’s children that I had somehow lost their mother in Haima. A faint light fanned out from underneath the door to the office. I knocked and was met with a cheerful “Come in”. Mrs J was sitting with the petrol station attendant on a floor mat drinking tea and scrolling through their phones.

“...and this is my son and his wife in the snow”, she would point to her phone screen. The attendant nodded and smiled, and in turn showed several family photos from recent gatherings in India. Mrs J clucked and admired the selection of beautifully dressed babies with

heavily kholed eyes.

“Perhaps we could..?” I tried gingerly holding out my cash and nodding towards the car.

Only after a second cup of tea and an exchange of Facebook details did we finally get back on the road. We slalomed between small sand dunes, which had collected by the side and spilled over on to the tarmac. I looked at the fuel gauge promising a full tank and miles to go. I sent a silent prayer to the sky, hoping that it would at least take us to the next available petrol station.

“Isn’t it an amazing country?” Mrs J smiled, “friends everywhere”. I smiled back at her and being a good friend myself, I decided not to point out that she had spilled tea on her white shirt. It was going to be a long drive to Salalah. A long drive indeed.

Confident Khatri looks for top display

ADIL AL BALUSHI
TOKYO, AUGUST 1

Oman's experienced marksman Hamed al Khatri will conclude the Sultanate's participation in Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games as he will take part in the 50m rifle three position men's qualification round on Monday at Asaka Shooting Range. This is the second successive Games participation for Oman's top shooter.

Arab Shooting Championship titleholder had the official training session at Asaka Range on Sunday under the watchful eyes of national coach Sultan al Rushaidi.

Registering a new national record is the top target for the Sultanate's shooter. "I am pleased to be in Olympic Games for the second consecutive time after being in Rio Olympics 2016. Representing the nation in this showpiece event is a historic moment for any athlete. I am proud of myself to be here and I am looking for a different show this time. My goal in this Olympics is to break my best record and make my country proud," the 36-year-old added.

Hamad will target to register better records in his second Olympic presence in Tokyo after taking part in Rio Games in 2016.

The flag bearer in Rio 2016 will surely strive to improve his points tally during his competition on Monday against the world's top-ranking shooters at 50m Rifle 3 positions competition.



Hamad al Khatri with his coaching staff.

TOUGH CHALLENGE

The Sultanate shooting team in recent years had impressed in various regional, continental and other international participation. The team's shooters had accomplished many achievements in team and individual levels during Islamic Solidarity Games in Azerbaijan in 2017, GCC meets, Arabian shooting championships and the military sports events organised by CISM Council.

Oman Shooting Association (OSA), which was established in January 1984, is very keen on preparing and shaping all the national shooting team members for the top shooting events by implementing competitive preparatory programmes.

The OSA is working closely with the sports-related entities to register the national shooters in the civil and military shooting events.

Al Khatri rose to form last year when he became the champion of the Arab Shooting Championship in Egypt in January 2020.

In Tokyo, he will compete with 38 top shooters. The qualification will start at 6:30 am (Oman time) and eight shooters will advance to the finals which will begin at 11:50 am (Oman time). All the shooters will get 120 shots and distributed into 40 shots each for kneeling, prone and standing within a duration of one hour and 45 minutes. The existing record of Al Khatri is 1,176 points and he is the holder of the Arab record.

Sindhu hopes bronze can inspire new generation

TOKYO: Indian badminton star PV Sindhu hopes she can inspire a new generation after adding Tokyo Olympic bronze to her 2016 silver medal on Sunday.

The world champion beat China's He Bingjiao 21-13, 21-15 to add another prize to her collection, five years after finishing second at the Rio Games. Now she hopes the world's second-most populous country can use her achievement as a springboard for more badminton success.

"I'm sure a lot of youngsters and others will get motivated to work hard and come up," she said.

"I'm sure we can do this. If I can do it, everybody can do it."

Sindhu was aiming to become only the second Indian to win an individual Olympic gold medal, but lost to Taiwan's Tai Tzu-Ying in the semifinals.

She said she was "sad" at not being able to go one better than her 2016 silver.

But she was able

to put the disappointment behind her to claim bronze.

"I had to close all my emotions for this one match and just give my all," she said.

"I'm very happy and I think I've done really well. Getting a medal for the country is definitely a proud moment for me and also the people out there."

Sindhu followed up her 2016 Olympic silver by winning the world title in 2019.

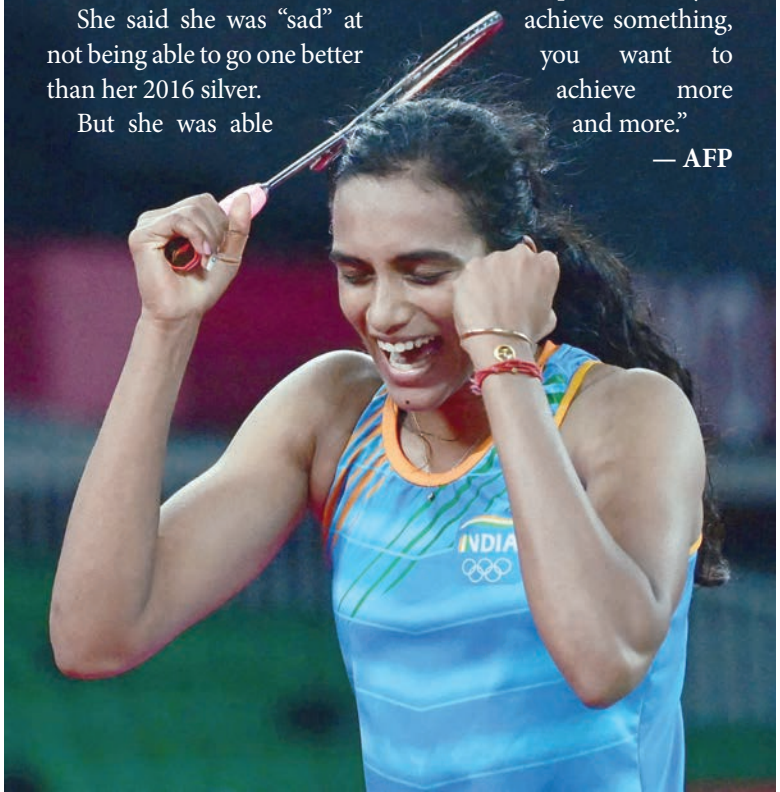
She said she would "definitely" look to challenge for Olympic gold again at the 2024 Paris Games, and backed herself to continue improving.

"Every time I win, it's a stepping stone," said the 26-year-old.

"It builds up my motivation. I can do much better and I can work harder."

"I think that's my passion towards the sport -- once you achieve something, you want to achieve more and more."

— AFP



Zverev powers to men's gold in first for Germany

TOKYO: Alexander Zverev became the first German man to win the Olympic singles gold medal on Sunday, powering to a 6-3, 6-1 victory over the Russian Olympic Committee's (ROC) Karen Khachanov that he called the greatest of his career.

The world number five, who upset number one Novak Djokovic in a stunning comeback on Friday, put on a near-flawless performance against big-hitting Khachanov, who had no answers to the German's serve and laser-like returns.

"There is nothing better than this," said Zverev, who matched compatriot Steffi Graf's 1988 success in the women's singles, while Boris Becker and Michael Stich won men's doubles gold for Germany in 1992.

"I think, because you're not just playing for yourself, you're playing for everybody involved, everybody in Germany supporting me back at home, supporting all the athletes here."

"The Olympics is the biggest sporting event in the world," added Zverev, who came agonisingly close to breaking his Grand Slam duck in 2020 when he lost the US Open final from two sets up against Austria's Dominic Thiem.

"So, for me, the feelings that I have, and the feelings that I probably will have in these next few days, can't compare to anything else."

Zverev broke 25-year-old Khachanov's serve twice to take the first set, before steamrolling through the second, winning five games in a row.

Khachanov managed just one game in the final set before sending a forehand into the net on championship point, securing the gold for the German.

Spain's Pablo Carreno Busta claimed the bronze on Saturday after beating Djokovic.

DOUBLES GOLD FOR CZECHS, ROC

In the women's doubles,



Gold medallist Alexander Zverev of Germany celebrates on the podium. — Reuters

the Czech Republic's Barbora Krejckikova and Katerina Siniakova beat Belinda Bencic and Viktorija Golubic of Switzerland 7-5 6-1 to clinch their country's first Olympic gold in the sport.

The victory for the top-seeded Czech team and three-time Grand Slam champions put an end to

Bencic's dream of making it a Swiss double golden success, after she triumphed in the women's singles final a day earlier over Krejckikova and Siniakova's compatriot Marketa Vondrousova.

But it helped continue a dream summer for Krejckikova, who took home both the women's singles

TENNIS RESULTS

MEN'S SINGLES

Final: Alexander Zverev (GER) bt Karen Khachanov (ROC) 6-3, 6-1

WOMEN'S DOUBLES

Final: Barbora Krejckikova/ Katerina Siniakova (CZE) bt Belinda Bencic/Viktorija Golubic (SUI) 7-5, 6-1

MIXED DOUBLES

Final: Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova/Andrey Rublev (ROC) bt Elena Vesnina/Aslan Karatsev (ROC) 6-3, 6-7 (5/7), 13-11

and doubles trophies at this year's French Open. She and Siniakova also won the 2018 French Open and Wimbledon.

Krejckikova thanked previous Czech medalists, who include 2016 women's bronze winner Petra Kvitova, for inspiring the pair.

"It's very special... We just need to thank them because without them, we wouldn't have the motivation or inspiration, it's really big," Krejckikova said. "Now we have this beautiful gold medal, it's pretty much a dream come true."

Brazilians Laura Pigossi and Luisa Stefani won the bronze on Saturday, claiming their country's first tennis medal with a win over Veronika Kudermetova and Elena Vesnina of the ROC.

In the mixed doubles' final, the ROC added two more medals to Khachanov's silver, with Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova and Andrey Rublev edging compatriots Vesnina and Aslan Karatsev 6-3 6-7(5) (13-11) to clinch the gold.

Australian pair Ash Barty and John Peers took the bronze, winning by walkover after Djokovic, playing with Nina Stojanovic, withdrew from Saturday's contest citing a shoulder injury. — Reuters



Alpine's Esteban Ocon competes during the Hungarian GP at the Hungaroring race track in Mogyorod near Budapest. — AFP

Ocon wins wacky Hungarian GP

HAMILTON TAKES LEAD FROM VERSTAPPEN

BUDAPEST: Alpine's Esteban Ocon won his first ever Formula One race in a dramatic Hungarian Grand Prix on Sunday, with Lewis Hamilton taking over at the top of the standings after more bad luck for Max Verstappen.

Aston Martin's Sebastian Vettel was second after most of the contenders were caught in a first corner crash. Pole-sitter Hamilton finished third after a hit-and-miss tyre strategy call from Mercedes with Verstappen only 10th in a damaged Red Bull.

"What a moment. It feels so good," said Frenchman Ocon as the rebranded Renault team took their first victory as Alpine. He missed the pit lane after the excitement of winning.

"It's fantastic, what can I say?" For the second race in a row, Verstappen was hit early on because of a Mercedes fault.

A massive first corner pile up in the rain came when Mercedes driver Valtteri Bottas shunted Lando Norris and the McLaren then crashed into Verstappen with other cars affected.

Bottas was ruled out along with Norris, Red Bull's Sergio Perez, Ferrari's Charles Leclerc and Aston Martin's Lance Stroll, but Verstappen was able to continue with the race being red flagged and starting again.

At the British Grand Prix last



time out, seven-time champion Hamilton collided with Verstappen on the first lap and ended the Dutchman's race en route to winning his home race.

Red Bull mechanics worked hard on Verstappen's car before the Budapest restart, after he lost his barge board on the right.

As cars were in the pits, the rain cleared and the sun came out, meaning all cars except Hamilton then came into the pits for dry tyres after the second formation lap. Mercedes opted for Hamilton to stay out for a lap to try to build a cushion, meaning he was bizarrely the only car on the grid

for the restart.

Hamilton queried the strategy via radio when he boxed a lap later and then found himself last as he emerged from the pits.

He struggled to make his way through the field so pitted again for fresh rubber after 20 laps, triggering Verstappen to box too.

The British defending champion then ended up in front of the Dutchman as the tactics battle took another twist, with Verstappen's car still clearly damaged from the early crash and struggling for full pace.

Hamilton could afford to pit again after 48 laps. In the end the

strategy decision to stay out at the restart meant Hamilton took over again at the top of the standings by six points but arguably it may have cost him race victory as he sought a 100th career F1 win. He had a great battle with old rival Fernando Alonso, who finished fifth and helped protect team-mate Ocon, before Hamilton got past and then claimed third.

"It was a tough race and I had nothing left at the end. Considering how things went overall, we have to be happy with P3," said Hamilton, who was again booed by some of the crowd.

Bottas, whose future at Mercedes is under scrutiny, got away badly behind Hamilton on pole and Norris quickly came up his outside. The Finn struggled to brake in the wet and ploughed into the back of Norris, who could do nothing but crash into Verstappen and send him into the run off area.

Vettel's second place followed the same result in Azerbaijan this year as the four-time champion desperately tried to hunt Ocon down for his first win since Singapore in September 2019.

"Man I tried, I tried the whole race. Following is so difficult," the German said over the radio.

The Budapest race was the last before a four-week mid-season break. — dpa

Pakistan defy rampant Pooran to edge Windies

PROVIDENCE, Guyana: Pakistan's versatile bowling attack did just enough to restrain a rampant Nicholas Pooran and come away with a seven-run victory over the West Indies in the second T20 International of the four-match series at the National Stadium in Guyana on Saturday.

Following a rain-ruined opening encounter in Barbados three days earlier, Babar Azam's team will go into the third match of the series on Sunday, also at Providence, with 1-0 lead.

Pooran's explosive unbeaten 62 off 33 balls with six sixes and four fours kept the West Indies in with a chance of overcoming the lethargy of much of their innings, even to the final over when 20 runs were required to overhaul Pakistan's total of 157 for eight.

However Shaheen Shah Afridi claimed the wicket of captain Kieron Pollard and then denied the rampant Pooran the opportunity to swing freely and lustily at the next three deliveries to ensure the visitors came away with the win with the hosts kept to 150 for four.

West Indies were again undone in their run chase by the number of scoreless deliveries, 47, in their innings, although nothing could take away from the outstanding bowling effort of Mohammad Hafeez.

Bowling the first over of the innings, the veteran off-spinning all-rounder bowled Andre Fletcher

with his second ball and conceded just six runs across his four overs. "Knowing these conditions and having played cricket here before in the Caribbean Premier League certainly helped as I knew it would be difficult for the batsmen," said Hafeez at the end of the match.

"They are very powerful players so the challenge is always to keep a tight line every time."

Pollard, who played the supporting role in a 70-run fourth-wicket partnership with Pooran to revive the West Indies chances, gave credit to his bowlers for limiting their opponents after he chose to put them in to bat. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

PAKISTAN	
S Khan c Hosein b Holder	20
M Rizwan run out	46
B Azam c Pooran b Holder	51
F Zaman c Walsh b Bravo	15
M Hafeez c Walsh b Bravo	6
H Ali c Bravo b Holder	0
S Magsood c Shepherd b Holder	5
Shadab Khan run out	5
M Wasim not out	1
Extras (b1, lb2, w4, nb1)	8
Total (20 overs, 8 wks)	157
Fall of wickets: 1-46, 2-113, 3-134, 4-145, 5-145, 6-150, 7-150, 8-157	
Bowling: A Hosein 4-0-3-0, J Holder 4-0-26-4, C Gayle 1-0-11-0, D Bravo 4-0-24-2, R Shepherd 3-0-38-0, H Walsh 4-0-25-0	
WEST INDIES	
A Fletcher b M Hafeez	0
E Lewis retired hurt	35
C Gayle b Hasan Ali	16
S Hetmyer b M Wasim	17
N Pooran not out	62
K Pollard c M Wasim b SS Afridi	13
J Holder not out	0
Extras (lb3, w4)	7
Total (20 overs, 4 wks)	150
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-31, 3-70, 4-140	
Bowling: Mohammad Hafeez 4-1-6-1, Shaheen Shah Afridi 4-0-44-1, Hasan Ali 4-0-32-1, Shadab Khan 4-0-22-0, Usman Qadir 1-0-11-0, Mohammad Wasim 3-0-32-1	



Jason Holder (R) of the West Indies congratulate Shaheen Shah Afridi of Pakistan for winning the second T20I match. — AFP

Al Harthy confirms continued partnership with Omantel

MUSCAT: Omantel, the first homegrown telecommunications services provider in Oman, will continue its long-standing support of multiple motor racing champion Ahmad al Harthy throughout the second half of 2021 as the Aston Martin Vantage GT3 driver makes his eagerly awaited track return.

Almost five months since he was last in action, during the Middle East-based Asian Le Mans Series, the Sultanate's most successful racer is absolutely delighted to make his first partner announcement ahead of his just announced return to the Intelligent Money British GT Championship next month.

In its position as the leading telecommunications provider in Oman, Omantel is focused on fulfilling the needs of its many

customers — both business and personal — with first class services and the highest standards of professionalism.

Sustainability is at the core of the business model with a vision focusing on three key areas, namely digital inclusion, responsibility and innovation. With regard to the latter, Omantel is forging forward with its rollout of 5G across the Sultanate — bringing immense benefits to the people of Oman.

Omantel has a very strong and successful history of supporting the best Omani talent in many fields, not least in sporting endeavours, and the company has been an integral part of Al Harthy and Oman Racing's winning partnership portfolio since the beginning of his motorsport career.

"I really am so delighted to be able to confirm the continued sup-



port of Omantel this year for our upcoming race programme, our partnership is a long-standing and very successful one and it's an honour for me to continue represent-

ing Omantel on and off track", said Al Harthy.

"We've just announced our return to British GT next month, and have more exciting announce-

ments to come with regard to additional races this year. It's been a very long five months since the Asian Le Mans Series, so I can't wait to be back on track. Of

course, it's been a very challenging time since the Covid-19 pandemic began last year so I am incredibly grateful for the amazing support of Omantel."

On behalf of Omantel, Saba al Busaidi, Senior Manager Corporate Affairs, commented: "Ahmad Al Harthy has been Oman's pride on the racing circuit. Omantel is always keen to associate itself with, and stand behind, outstanding Omani talent with its support. The Company has been partnering with Ahmad since 2016 and welcomes his return to the track.

"This partnership also embodies leadership position, speed, talent and the ability to conquer all challenges — qualities that both Oman's favourite racer and Oman's favourite telecom company share. Omantel is sure that Ahmad will keep making Oman proud."

Shaza Hotels to add new property to Oman portfolio

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, AUG 1

Shaza Hotels maintains ambitious growth plans in the Middle East with various properties to open in the coming years in Salalah, Jeddah, Dubai and Doha.

The expansion plans include Mysk Jeddah, Mysk Kuwait, Shaza Salalah, Shaza Doha and Mysk The Palm, on Palm Jumeirah in Dubai that is to open its doors in time for EXPO 2020 Dubai.

Shaza also operates Mysk by Shaza Al Mouj Muscat, overlooking

the vibrant marina of Al Mouj in Muscat, and the four retreats of Sharjah Collection by Mysk including Mysk Al Faya Retreat, Mysk Kingfisher Retreat, Mysk Al Badayer Retreat, and the soon to be opened Mysk Moon Retreat at Sharjah.

Another dazzling destination in the pipeline is The Mysk Moon Retreat, settled amidst the sandy desserts of Mleiha region in Sharjah, it is set to open in 2021, offering luxury glamping tents with private pools and unique service standards unheard to the region



In KSA, Shaza is already a household name in the hospitality sector as it operates three luxury hotels in three prime locations: Shaza Makkah, one of the first

in line hotels in Jabal Al Ka'abah overlooking Al Masjid Al Haram, Shaza Madinah, right next to Al Masjid Al Nabawi, and Shaza Riyadh, in the buzzing heart of

the capital next to Al Rajhi grand mosque.

Each of these retreats offer a unique perspective of glamping atmospheres, service rituals, and guest experience that are unheard of in the region, making them serene, luxury, contemporary, and bespoke retreats.

Shaji Abu Salih, Corporate Director of Business Development at Shaza Hotels, said, "The Middle East and GCC in particular make the key feeder markets for Shaza Hotels. We aim to become a true embodiment of

the authentic Arabian hospitality that is synonymous to this region, focusing on delivering the highest hospitality standards that our guests truly deserve."

"Travelling and the love of travel have always been a core value of everything that we do at Shaza, and our expansion plans are no different. You can see that in our interiors, in our hospitality, and our business as well. Like those true explorers of the past, we love travelling and we seek the adventure of a new place," he added.

Outward Bound Oman names new Omani COO



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 1

After 12 years of outstanding service, during which he has worked in almost every role within the organisation, Outward Bound Oman has announced the appointment of Mohamed al Zadjali (pictured) as Chief Operating Officer.

Initially appointed as Outward Bound Oman's first instructor in 2009, Al Zadjali, originally from Musannah, has progressively worked his way up the ladder, becoming senior instructor, and then Head of Operations and Deputy General Manager over the past 12 years.

Outward Bound Oman is part of an international network of 35 not-for-profit centres, and Al Zadjali has represented Oman at conferences and events in South Africa, Singapore, North Carolina in USA, as well as the UK. At the 2014 Outward Bound International Conference

in Germany, Al Zadjali received the Outward Bound International Award for Innovation.

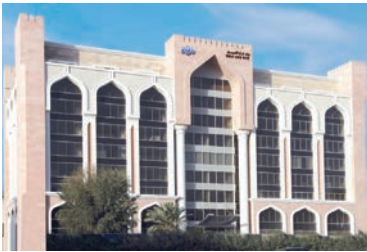
In 2016, along with Amor al Wahaibi from Bidiyah, he became the first Omani for 85 years to cross the largest sand desert on earth, travelling on foot and by camel from Salalah to Doha in 49 days, retracing the first ever crossing of The Rub Al Khali (Empty Quarter) that took place in 1931.

Outward Bound Oman Executive Director Mark Evans stated: "A priority at Outward Bound Oman is to develop the national talent of Oman to help make Vision 2040 a reality, so the deserved appointment of Mohamed to COO is justified reward for 12 years of outstanding performance. He is exactly the right man to play a key role in the sustainable evolution of Outward Bound in Oman to ensure as many people as possible benefit from the Outward Bound experience in the years to come."

OAB announces winners of the Hasaad Savings Scheme for June

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) recently announced the names of the winners of its Hasaad Savings Scheme for June 2021. The draw saw 101 customers winning prizes of RO 500 each and two winners of RO 10,000 as part of the Big Prize Draw. As for the Elite account holders, one customer was the winner of the Elite Grand Prize of RO 25,000 from the Al Khoud branch.

Rashad al Shaikh, Head of the Retail Banking Division at OAB, said, "We are proud to see an increase in the number of overall savings, especially since we have reached the first half of the year. OAB continues to promote the culture of saving



across all its customer segments while ensuring that they are well rewarded for their efforts. We strive to encourage our customers to save as well as generate awareness regarding sound financial management practices, especially during the current unprecedented situation."

The Hasaad Savings Scheme 2021 will see 101 lucky winners from 53 branches win RO 500

each per month, as well as five winners of RO 1,000 each. This is in addition to a Big Prize draw, which will see two winners of RO 10,000 each every quarter.

The Elite Draws will see two winners every month of RO 10,000 each. This is replaced by an Elite grand prize draw conducted every three months with one lucky winner of RO 25,000.

"I congratulate all the winners of this month's draw and extend my gratitude for their trust and loyalty to OAB. I encourage all our customers to continue to save so that they can increase their chances of winning for the remainder of the draws of this year," Rashad added.

SBA holds Covid-19 vaccination drive

MUSCAT: To safeguard the health and safety of its employees and customers against the spread of Covid-19, Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) has initiated a vaccination drive for its employees across the organisation. The vaccination drive was initiated as per the Oman government's guidelines and protocols.

So far, nearly 500 employees have been immunised with the Covid-19 vaccine and 95 per cent of these employees have received both the doses as per norms set by Ministry of Health.

A spokesperson for Suhail Bahwan Automobiles said, "Vaccination is a proven way to successfully reduce the risk of spreading the virus, safeguard health and help provide a safe purchase environment across our workshops and showrooms. Through this initiative, we aim to protect our employees from



Covid-19 as well as contribute towards the nationwide immunisation efforts. We are confident that with adequate safety measures and vaccination drives, we shall overcome this challenging situation."

Nissan recently received the coveted 'Nissan Safe & Clean' certification from Nissan Middle East FZE (NMEF) for complying

with the sales and service Covid-19 protocols established as per the programme.

Designed to maintain high levels of health and safety measures across authorised Nissan dealers in the region, Nissan Middle East FZE 'Safe & Clean' certification programme requires partners to abide by set preventive and safety measures.

Muzn offers wide range of consumer financing facilities



MUSCAT: Providing personalised banking solutions that keep its customers' values in mind, Muzn, National Bank of Oman's (NBO) Islamic banking window offers a range of consumer financing facilities that tick all the boxes. From Home, Auto, Education, Travel and Goods financing, each comes with an easy application process, fast processing and competitive monthly instalments, while the bank's distinguished Shari'a Supervisory Board ensures complete Shari'a compliance.

Salima al Marzouqi (pictured), Chief Islamic Banking Officer (CIBO), said, "At Muzn, we believe that banking should be made simple for everyone. That's why we offer innovative, competitive and quality Islamic banking products and services that meet the distinctive needs of our customers. Backed by our dedicated customer service, they can fulfil their life goals without compromising their values."

Open to Omani nationals and residents, Muzn Education Finance is based on the concept of Services Ijarah which offers financing to get educational facilities from institutions inside and outside Oman.

Meanwhile, Home Financing is available to Omani nationals and is based on the concept of Ijarah and Diminishing Musharakah. Customers have the option to buy a new home, get their dream home constructed or convert their existing financing to a Shari'a-compliant facility.

Toyota Camry: Stylish, fuel-efficient & powerful

MUSCAT: The new Camry sports a sleek and stylish look that doesn't just attract attention. But raises the bar on design expectations. This coupled with a range of advanced features, power that impresses and interior that make every experience in it amazing, the Camry makes a fine choice for those seeking the best of everything.

The new Camry introduces a level of refinement that exceeds expectations. It provides a comfortable and stable ride with superior handling characteristics thanks to the Toyota New Global



Architecture (TNGA). A new front fascia incorporates a more

defined lower-intake area, with grille bars extending dynamically

to the sides creating a refined look that is enhanced by chrome-plated ornamentation for a premium feel. The sportier grades wear a noticeably different body style than the premium grades, with a bold redesigned lower fascia shape featuring a powerfully expressive gloss black mesh grille and larger side vents. This athletic look is further emphasised with new 18-inch bright machined-finish alloy wheels. A subtle rear spoiler lip is paired with a unique rear bumper with distinctive corner lines, as well as new-look combination lamps.

The new Camry's interior melds functionality, elegant styling, and impeccable craftsmanship. The dash design has a sporty, cockpit-like feel, while treating both the driver and the front passenger to wider visibility.

The exciting interior's distinctive design offers comfort and convenience with a layer of luxury and hosts a range of advanced features. These include a panoramic moonroof, a floating 7-inch or 9-inch multimedia touch screen that comes integrated with Apple CarPlay and Android AutoTM, among others.



Liwa Plastics set for commercial launch by end-Q3

ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION:
Polyethylene production to spur growth of downstream plastics-based manufacturing

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 1

Liwa Plastics Industrial Complex (LPIC), the centrepiece of OQ's integrated refinery and petrochemicals scheme at Sohar Port, will formally commence commercial operations at the end of the third quarter of this year.

According to Kamel bin Bakhit al Shanfari, Head of Operations (Refining and Petrochemicals) at OQ Group, construction work on the multi-billion dollar plant has continued despite challenges posed by the coronavirus



pandemic.

When fully operational, it will start manufacturing polyethylene

— a key raw material in the production of an array of plastics products, he said.

In a statement to ONA, Al Shanfari said Liwa Plastics represents the flagship of OQ

Group's investment of RO 4.884 billion (\$12.7 billion) in an integrating complex comprising LPIC, Sohar Refinery Improvement Project (SRIP), Aromatics Plant and Polypropylene Plant, in addition to other support infrastructure at Sohar Port.

Also included in the integrated complex is a Natural Gas Liquids (NGL) extraction plant upstream at Fahud connected with the Sohar scheme with a 300 km pipeline. Integrated with the adjoining refinery, Liwa Plastics produces around 300,000 tonnes per year of polypropylene along with 880,000 tonnes per year of high-density and low-density polyethylene.

During the construction phase, OQ Group spent around \$ 1.5 billion on local goods and services

in line with its In-Country Value (ICV) programme.

It also supported Omani SMEs and entrepreneurs, while contributing to a number of CSR projects as a partner in the Jusoor foundation. In 2020 alone, Jusoor supported social and community initiatives in North Al Batinah Governorate amounting to \$1.5 million.

Liwa Plastics, Al Shanfari said, represents a pillar of the government's strategy to diversify the economy through the development of a thriving petrochemicals sector, which in turn will spur investment in downstream plastics projects.

Plant operations are subject to stringent environment standards and specifications set by the Omani government as well as international agencies, he added.

New Plastic Industries Complex planned in Sohar

FROM PAGE 13

The product portfolio will include linear Low-Density Polyethylene (LLDPE), High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE) and Polypropylene (PP) — the principal raw material for a wide range of plastics products and related applications.

"Madayn is working in coordination with OQ and Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit on the final stages of the project preparation. An area exceeding one million sq metres has been allocated for this project in Sohar Industrial City", said Madayn in a statement.

Also, according to Al Qasabi, plans are being firmed up for the Motkar project — an integrated complex for everything related to the car trade, including markets, exhibitions, sales yards, workshops, spare parts and services.

A tender for the construction

of basic support infrastructure for the Motkar project has garnered significant interest from interested contractors, said Madayn. The facility — the first of its kind in the Sultanate — is being developed on a 1 million sq metre site in Sohar Industrial City.

NBC holds workshop on digital marketing fundamentals



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 1

The National Business Centre (NBC), which is part of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), organised a workshop on the fundamentals of digital marketing for companies. Organised in cooperation with Rumoz Company at the Knowledge Oasis Muscat, the workshop highlighted the elements of an effective marketing plan, key marketing platforms, digital marketing methods, in addition to an implementation of practical exercises to enrich knowledge and expertise of the participants.

NBC holds a series of events and discussion sessions for the entrepreneurs to exchange

knowledge, views and expertise in several major topics to contribute in developing and advancing their projects. The National Business Centre was launched by Madayn to offer promising Omani entrepreneurs a platform to develop their business ideas and advance them into growing ventures.

NBC aims at facilitating, supporting and contributing to the growth of investable ideas into successful businesses; building entrepreneurial skills through dedicated and focused training, coaching and mentoring; and providing business support facilities from office space, administrative support, financial support and consultancy services that are crucial in ensuring the success and survival of new ventures.

Alizz Islamic Bank surprises winner of RO 100,000



MUSCAT: Alizz Islamic Bank recently held a joyful reception at its branch in CBD to congratulate Abdullah al Wahaibi, the winner of RO 100,000 in the Bushra Prize Savings account's half yearly draw.

Abdullah al Wahaibi was in for a surprise when he visited Alizz Islamic Bank on receiving a call from Mohammed al Ghassani, the AGM — Acting Chief Consumer Banking Officer of Alizz Islamic Bank, to visit the branch as he had not yet revealed the happy news to the customer until he arrived.

Upon his arrival, Khalid al Zaabi, the bank's CBD branch manager, received him and conveyed the joyful news to him. Upon receiving the news, Abdullah al Wahaibi expressed his astonishment and kept repeating the words, "This is not real, right?"

When it finally set in that he had really won RO 100,000, Abdullah al Wahaibi said the good news had changed the course of his life.

Speaking on winning the Bushra Half yearly draw he said: "This is the first time that I have won a cash amount and for it to be such a significant amount is truly a dream come true. What gives me assurance and comfort is that the money of these prizes are Shari'a compliant and a gift from the shareholders' funds. I am overjoyed that my Bushra account has brought good tidings."

GS3: Go places with confidence

MUSCAT: Compact, powerful and built to take you places, the GS3 raises the bar on on-road experiences with its attractive design, turbocharged performance, advanced features and more. It is the perfect choice for those who want to make the most of weekdays in the city as well as the countryside on the weekends.

The GS3's stylish profile is complemented by a choice of 16", 17" and 18" alloy wheels. Adding to its bold design are the sleek daytime running lights (available on 1.3L Turbo AT), front and rear fog lamps, LED taillights and halogen projector headlights with follow-me-home function. These headlights are equipped with alarm feature for headlights on warning.



The GS3's powerful performance gives you more reasons to enjoy the thrill. Powering up the experiences are a choice of 113 HP, 1.5L engine with 150 Nm torque and a 135 HP, 1.3L turbo-charged engine with 202 Nm torque. Both are paired to a 6-speed automatic transmission. An available ECO

drive mode offers the advantage of better fuel-efficiency.

The interior of the GS3 is impressive, spacious and comfortable. Passengers in the GS3 can revel in a cool and comforting environment with automatic air conditioning with air filter and negative ion air purifier.

Sohar International posts 15.3% rise in net profit

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 1

Sohar International posted healthy growth in the six-month period ended June 30, 2021 recording a net profit of RO 15.20 million compared to RO 13.18 million during the same period in 2020, representing a growth of 15.3 per cent.

Commenting on the financial results, Mohammed bin Mahfoudh al Ardhi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Sohar International, said: "The half-yearly financial results are a great reflection of Sohar International's vision and strategy in full gear. The Sultanate has made commendable progress to counter the effects of the pandemic by adopting learning, implementation of agendas, thoughtful investments

in key areas and an aggressive vaccination campaign. This, coupled with a rise in global oil prices, has in turn, helped us to continue operations in an improving economic environment that is more conducive to business growth."

Sohar International's total assets increased by 12.5 per cent in the first six months of 2021 recording RO 4,031 million compared to RO 3,584 million during the same period last year. Net loans and advances increased by 3.4 per cent to RO 2,526 million (June 30, 2020: RO 2,442 million) reflecting the bank's prudence in managing growth given current economic conditions. Customer deposits increased by 2.8 per cent to RO 2,304 million (June 30, 2020: RO 2,241 million), reflecting the bank's strengthening funding and



liquidity position.

Operating income increased by 13.9 per cent to RO 54.22 million, (June 30, 2020: RO 47.62 million), driven by increases in other operating income streams including gain on sale of

investment securities. Operating profit increased by 17.0 per cent to RO 30.64 million compared to RO 26.18 million for the same period last year. Operating expenses increased by 10 per cent to RO 23.58 million (June 30, 2020: RO

21.44 million).

Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, stated: "Our latest financial results reflect our strong position in the market and our ability to absorb and overcome challenges.

Our focus for the year remains geared towards rewarding customers by creating opportunities to win while helping them achieve their goals. Aligning ourselves to the national agenda and playing an active role as a key contributor to the Sultanate's economy, Sohar International continues to seek and promote in-country values (ICV), identify key projects that will contribute to the short-term and long-term goals of the country, and create opportunities for individuals and businesses alike."

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OMAN DAILY

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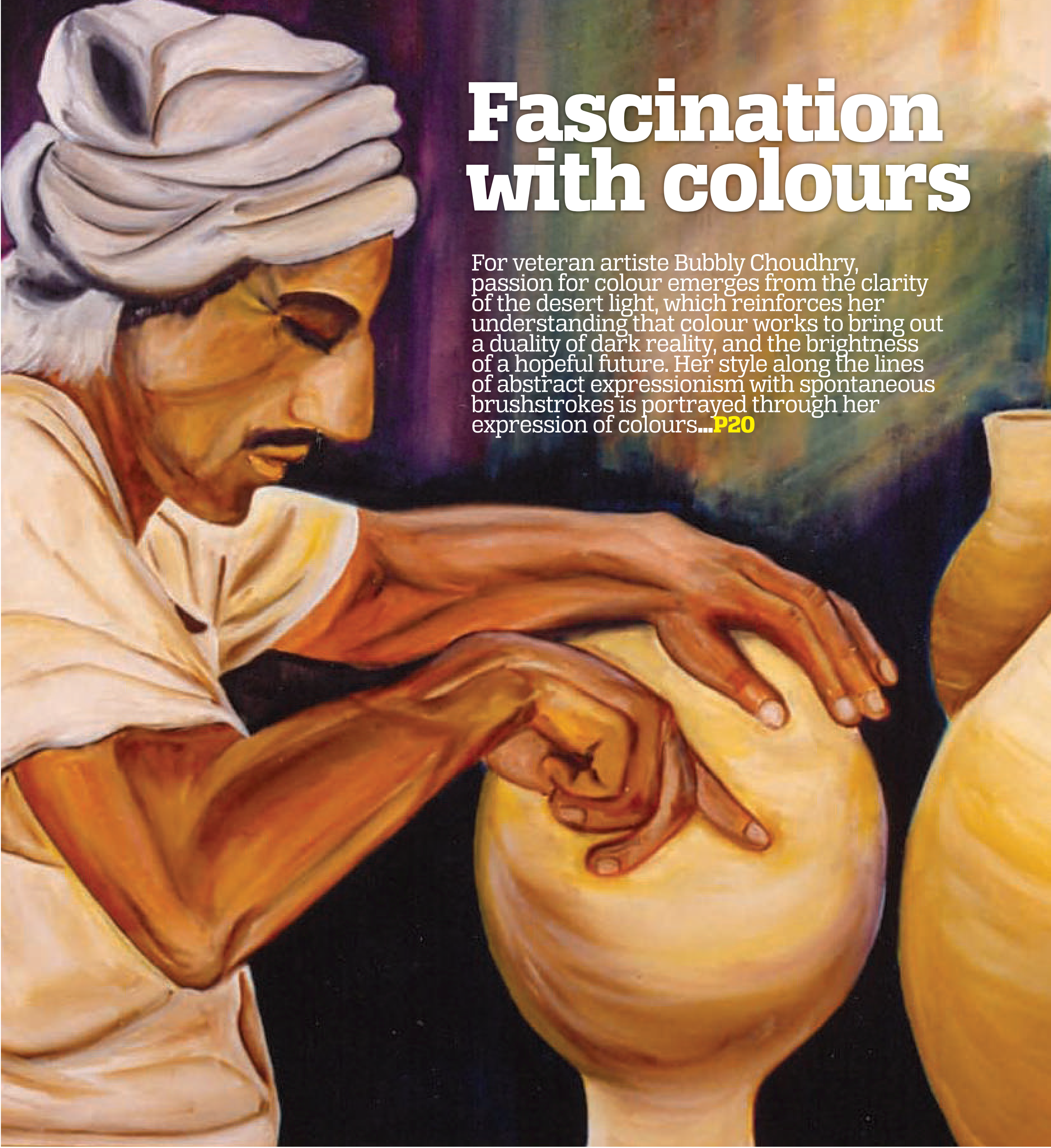
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features



Fascination with colours

For veteran artiste Bubbly Choudhry, passion for colour emerges from the clarity of the desert light, which reinforces her understanding that colour works to bring out a duality of dark reality, and the brightness of a hopeful future. Her style along the lines of abstract expressionism with spontaneous brushstrokes is portrayed through her expression of colours...**P20**

ONLINE TRENDS

READ

MALIBU RISING
BY TAYLOR JENKINS REID

An epic party has serious outcomes for four famous siblings.

Bubble man' roams' San Francisco streets, bringing joy

The massive bubble Kurth Reis conjured last month, rising like a genie from a bucket of soap, startled a small girl visiting San Francisco's Embarcadero, almost enveloping her as she scampered away.

The bubble popped. She then jumped and clapped, and turned to Reis, eager for another show. This city's hard-working bubble man had succeeded once again in bringing a little joy.

The 48-year-old Californian travelled a rocky path to his novel métier. Reis was in the military and later did jail time, burning

bridges before a motorcycle crash hospitalised him in 2018, he recounted. Waking up, surgery after surgery, "it was like being reborn."

He walked out 88 days later with a titanium rod in his leg and resolved to change his ways. In 2020, when Covid-19 emptied the city's streets, he found his calling as a bubble performance artist.

His girlfriend, Kelly Sullivan, deserves much of the credit, or blame, for what she calls his soapy "addiction". She gave him a bubble-making gun for Easter, and after the batteries died, he rewired the

toy to turbocharge it and crank out 1,000 bubbles a minute, he said.

Dipping a string that hangs like a "V" from two rods into solution, Reis learned to fashion spheres "the size of a Prius".

Reis bid farewell to his food delivery gigs and committed to full-time bubbling. "I went out to dinner yesterday. In my mind I thought, should I bring my bubbles?" he said.

He rides a tricycle across San Francisco to perform his craft in parks and on street corners for hours, making up to \$150 in tips a day from tourists who visit Alcatraz. Money is not what moves him. A woman approached Reis not long ago, on Bush Street, to say his bubbles uplifted her when her dad died. Eyes squint and cheekbones flex when people smile behind their masks. Reis felt like an essential worker who spread joy in the pandemic.

He has his bubble-making down



to a science. For his solution, he squirts a bottle of Dawn dish soap into a bucket - never Palmolive - then pours in half a cup of guar gum and stirs with an eggbeater. He adds a third of a cup of baking powder. Then he fills the bucket with water from a hose he holds at the bottom to minimise foam.

For his stage, the higher, the better. A rear wind propels his

bubbles and prolongs them. Under the sun, they evaporate, so he prefers nightfall. And humidity - 50, 60, 70 per cent - is key. "Bubbles wouldn't work so well at Burning Man, you know what I mean?" he said. Reis finally conducts a ballet with his rods, like batons, widening his arms to form the bubbles and narrowing to release them. — **Reuters**

DISCOVERY

Morocco team announces major Stone Age find



ARCHAEOLOGISTS IN MOROCCO

have announced the discovery of North Africa's oldest Stone Age hand-axe manufacturing site, dating back 1.3 million years, an international team reported on Wednesday. The find pushes back by hundreds of thousands of years the start date in North Africa of the Acheulian stone tool industry associated with a key human ancestor, Homo erectus, researchers on the team told journalists in Rabat. It was made during excavations at a quarry on the outskirts of the country's economic capital Casablanca. This "major discovery... contributes to enriching the debate on the emergence of the Acheulian in Africa," said Abderrahim Mohib, co-director of the

Earlier humans had made do with more primitive pebble tools, known as Oldowan after their East African type site. Research at the Casablanca site has been carried out for decades, and has "delivered one of the richest Acheulian assemblages in Africa", Mohib said. "It is very important because we are talking about prehistoric time, a complex period for which little data exists." Mohib said the study also made it possible to attest to "the oldest presence in Morocco of humans" who were "variants of Homo erectus". Prehistoric man's ability to "design the shape of the tool he wants", such as the latest find, was a "very important technological advance," he added. In 2017, the discovery of



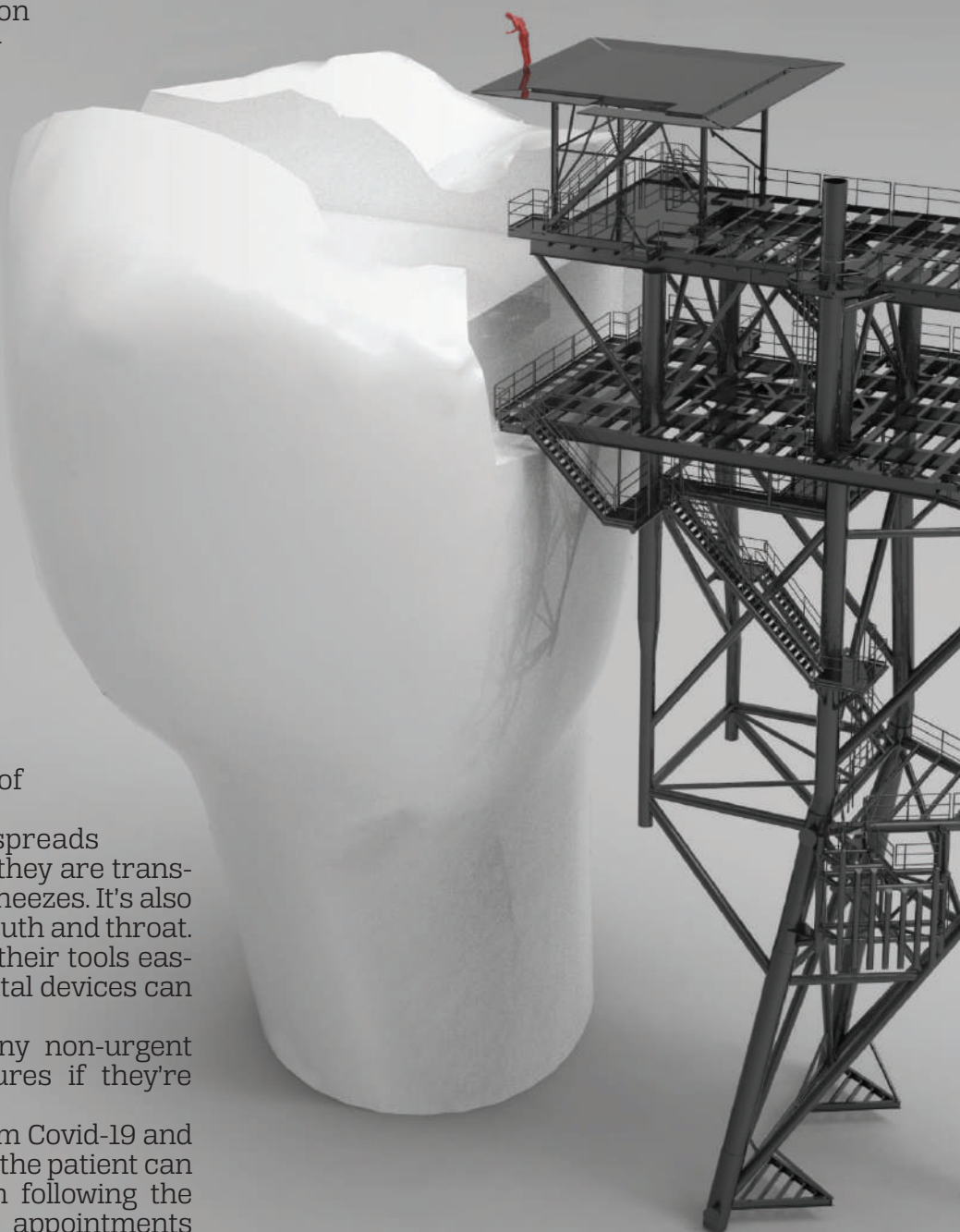
Franco-Moroccan "Prehistory of Casablanca" programme. Before the find, the presence in Morocco of the Acheulian stone tool industry was thought to date back 700,000 years. New finds at the Thomas Quarry I site, first made famous in 1969 when a human half mandible was discovered in a cave, mean the Acheulian there is almost twice as old. The 17-strong team behind the discovery comprised Moroccan, French and Italian researchers, and their finding is based on the study of stone tools extracted from the site. Moroccan archaeologist Abdelouahed Ben Ncer called the news a "chronological rebound". He said the beginning of the Acheulian in Morocco is now close to the South and East African start dates of 1.6 million and 1.8 million years ago respectively.

five fossils at Jebel Irhoud in Morocco, estimated at 300,000 years old, overturned evolutionary science when they were designated Homo sapiens. The Moroccan fossils were much older than some with similar facial characteristics excavated from Omo Kibish in Ethiopia, dating back around 195,000 years. The "Prehistory of Casablanca" programme is the result of collaboration between the Moroccan Institute of Archaeology (INSAP), Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3 University in Montpellier, France, and the French foreign ministry. French and Italian laboratories also took part in the project. The Paleolithic age is the first and longest period of prehistory which began more than three million years ago and ended 12,000 years ago. — AFP

Busy times take toll on dental health

By Kabeer Yousuf
@kabeeryousef

PERHAPS ONE of the least attended parts of our body is the teeth and all our attention turns towards them is only when one gets a toothache. While we are so lost in our daily chores and face several challenges both physically and mentally and humanity is learning to face one after the other, it's the time we attend to even the smallest need of our health. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, worldwide healthcare systems have been severely challenged. According to Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), dental healthcare personnel (DHCP) are placed in a very high exposure risk category as dentists work in close proximity to the patient's oral cavity. Therefore, with a greater understanding of the modes of transmission, clinical features, and testing methods of Covid-19 new protocols for dental practices have been made to identify cases and prevent further spread of infection to the patients. "Tele-dentistry has proved to be of great assistance in the current pandemic situation. Patients with active Covid-19 infection should not be seen in dental settings and should be referred for emergency care where appropriate transmission-based precautions are available," says Dr Viresh Chopra of Oman Dental College. Basically, the coronavirus spreads through respiratory droplets and they are transmitted when someone coughs or sneezes. It's also in the mucus and saliva in your mouth and throat. Those are fluids your dentist and their tools easily come in contact with. Some dental devices can spray these droplets around. Medics advise all to put off any non-urgent treatments and elective procedures if they're worried about Covid-19. If the patient is not suffering from Covid-19 and needs to be seen in an emergency, the patient can be treated by the dental surgeon following the recommended protocols such as appointments scheduled within social distancing and in adherence with strict covid protocols. He advocates that dental healthcare personnel need to understand the implications of potential transmission of the (SARS)-CoV-2 virus in a clinical setup. Hence, we should keep ourselves updated with any new information regarding this disease. New approaches such as Teledentistry will help dentists assist patients without adding the risk of cross-infection. Non-emergency cases such as teeth cleaning or exams, X-rays, treatment for things that don't hurt cavities, tooth removal, teeth whitening, fixing cosmetic problems, and checkup for braces can be put on hold for some time in order not to expose yourself to the virus.





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TRAVEL

China tourists take a leap in world's highest bungee jump



STRADDLED BETWEEN two cliffs in China's Hunan province, a 430-metre glass-bottomed suspension bridge offers the world's highest bungee jump from a footbridge.

Visitors to the Zhangjiajie Grand Canyon Glass Bridge can take a leap from a height of 260 meters, a stomach-churning way to take in the views of the surrounding Wulingyuan wilderness, a Unesco World Heritage site.

The area, a popular international tourist attraction, is famous for its quartzite sandstone pillars and peaks extending into the clouds, along with deep ravines and gorges.

The bungee jumping operation opened at the end of 2020, delayed by restrictions imposed by the Chinese government because of the coronavirus pandemic, which included some of the world's toughest border restrictions.

Operator Jonni Deaker said business had been building slowly as domestic tourists began to return to the region.

"We are probably averaging twenty jumps a day at the moment, which is pretty good for a jump this size," Deaker said, adding he was confident of a solid July-August holiday season.

To compensate for the lack of foreign tourists, the cost of a jump has been cut by around 40 per cent to RMB 1998 (roughly \$306).

The pedestrian bridge, designed by Israeli architect Haim Dotan and opened in August 2016, was once the longest glass-bottomed suspension bridge in the world.

Jumping into the abyss below might be terrifying for some, but Deaker believes the sheer height makes it less intimidating than smaller jumps.

"Because it's so high, it actually makes it easier", Deaker said. "When you're this high, it's kind of like skydiving." — **Reuters**

FASHION

Luxury looks homeward as Covid curtails travel



THE LUXURY SECTOR has flashed back from the Covid-19 pandemic but the crisis is still putting a crimp in travel, a key part of the market.

Industry giants have reported results that show the world's well-heeled are splurging on luxury goods as sales surpass even pre-pandemic levels.

LVMH — home to Louis Vuitton, Moët, Fendi, and Kenzo brands among others — saw first-half sales climb by 11 per cent above their pre-pandemic level to 28.7 billion euros (\$41.1 billion) as it reported a profit of 5.3 billion euros, a whopping 64 per cent increase from 2019.

Rival Kering — which owns the Gucci and Balenciaga brands — bested its pre-pandemic level by 8.4 per cent with a record 8 billion euros in sales. Hermes reported a 29 per cent jump to 4.0 billion in sales.

Both recorded profits of more than a billion euros, beating expectations.

The Swiss luxury group Richemont — Cartier, Piaget, and Montblanc — beat its pre-pandemic level in the second quarter by 18 per cent, while Italy's Prada bested 2019 first-half sales by eight per cent.

It is the "upper middle class, the rich and ultra-rich untouched by the crisis" who could not travel or eat out and instead bought lux-

ury goods, said Arnaud Cadart at asset manager Flornoy.

The Chinese, "who represent 35 to 40 per cent" of luxury customers, are still crucial, he added.

But while Chinese buyers previously made a lot of their purchases while visiting Europe, they are now making them at home.

- 'VIOLENT REBOUND IN THE UNITED STATES' -

In fact, "what was surprising was not so much the recovery in China but the violent rebound in the United States," remarked Erwan Rambourg a sector analyst and author of "Future Luxe: What's Ahead for the Business of Luxury".

Compared with previous crisis recoveries, after the September 11 terror attacks or the 2008 economic crisis for example, "the feeling of guilt, the idea that it is inappropriate to buy luxury goods, disappeared," Rambourg said.

"There is a young generation in the United States that feels comfortable with luxury purchases," in particular among the African-American, Hispanic and Asian populations, he explained.

Hermes chief executive Axel Dumas told a telephone news briefing: "We've seen a very strong rebound in

activity in the United States from our loyal clients as well as a new clientele that came to us thanks to digital" marketing by the company.

Hermes's sales in the US jumped by a quarter from their pre-pandemic level.

Citigroup analyst Thomas Chauvet noted that the fact that a roaring US stock market had made many Americans more wealthy, on paper at least, had also provided an important psychological boost to consumption.

In Europe, the sector's performance was better than might be expected given the absence of tourists who normally generate half of sales, because local clients turned out.

"Europeans had to a considerable extent deserted this market" but this year the trend was reversed, said Flornoy's Cadart.

Rambourg added: "To everyone's surprise, the brands discovered that by stimulating the local clientele" via social networks "the French, Italians, Spanish turned out more than hoped".

Chauvet cautioned that "the rebound in local demand doesn't compensate for the loss of tourists."

The luxury market will nonetheless "remain dominated by local buyers for at least another year," Rambourg forecast. — **AFP**

ENTERTAINMENT

Amanda Knox criticizes 'Stillwater' film for profiting off her story



AMANDA KNOX, the American woman who was tried and acquitted of murder in Italy more than a decade ago, has hit out at a Hollywood movie that she said seeks to profit off her name without her consent.

Knox, who spent four years in jail in Perugia, Italy, before being acquitted of the 2007 murder of her roommate, expressed her frustration as "Stillwater" opened in US movie theatres this week.

Director Tom McCarthy has said the Amanda Knox case inspired the film about an American oil rig worker who travels to France to help his daughter who is in prison for a murder she says she didn't commit.

The movie, starring Matt Damon, is seen as a potential Oscar contender.

"Does my name belong to me? My face? What about my life? My story? Why does my name refer to events I had no hand in? I return to these questions because others continue to profit off my name, face, & story without my consent. Most recently, the film #STILLWATER," Knox wrote in a lengthy post on her Twitter account on Thursday.

The Stillwater filmmakers did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Knox, now 34 and working as a criminal justice activist, said that the movie "reinforces an image of me as a guilty and untrustworthy person."

"I have not been allowed to return to the relative anonymity I had before Perugia," Knox said. "My only option is to sit idly by while others continue to distort my character, or fight to restore my good reputation that was wrongfully destroyed."

She invited McCarthy and Damon to hear her point of view by appearing on her "Labyrinths" podcast, which deals with issues ranging from justice to her personal life.

Rudy Guede, a local man, was found guilty of the murder in Perugia and was sentenced to 16 years in prison. — **Reuters**



FASCINATION WITH COLOURS

By Liju Cherian
Instagram: @lijucherianoman



THE PLANTS at Al Jabal Al Akhdhar fascinate her. She looks forward to painting a series of flora focusing on sustainability and inspirational art and also a series on Omani silverware.

For a long time, Oman resident artist Bubbly Choudhry, her artistic journey has been a busy run working at her art each day. For her, the landscape in Oman appears to be a blank canvas, inviting every artist to splash ideas, emotions, colour and communication.

An Indian artist with a rich history of art, Bubbly (officially called Sudipta Choudhry) communicates at an emotional and elemental level.

Famous Indian artist, the late M F Husain and renowned Paris-based curator Pascal Odille had hailed her presentation of the Sultanate 'as a country she loved.'

"The wealth of colours feed my soul very strongly and I am thankful for this enduring quality. This chromatic search has influenced the gradual change from representational to abstract paintings that I make", she says.

Bubbly admits aspects of movement

and thought helped her evolve with commitment and discipline. "Creative pursuits take time to reach their apex. The above attributes helped me to move on with my pursuits since good work is never created by indecision", she explains.

For her, creating a painting she truly loved helped immensely to evolve. Working at a constant pace also contributed to progress. She also realised that inventing, experimenting and making mistakes made her grow just as identifying personal goals and defining what success means to her in the evolutionary path.

For Bubbly, the creative response to the Coronavirus pandemic has been extraordinary.

In her surroundings, the stark and jagged mountains display brilliant shades of blue and purple at daybreak. Doorways beckon to a threshold which is a step to culminating peace among the people. The entrances offer a symbolic depiction of the warmth and hospitality of Omani citizens.

Different hues and their manner of interacting with each other become a

language she uses to communicate to the viewer.

"It is a spontaneous pursuit which surges before it is comprehended rationally and the image develops naturally fusing the experiences of the inner self", she adds.

The ever-increasing intensity of the colour is a constant towards her journey as an artist.

"The primary inspiration began with the unpolluted clarity of the desert light in Oman. This light plays beautifully on the mountains, sea, settlements and flora of this blessed country. Changing from a realistic portrayal to the intensity of my mind's eye and the colour is depicted powerfully in most of my paintings", she mentions.

The colours of the Omani sunsets were always inspiring as she continued to create paintings that echoed the brilliant hues. The wealth of colours feeds her soul strongly and she is yet again thankful to Oman for this enduring quality.

Her home studio in Qurum 18 is on the bright and sunny lower ground floor. The

big work table has a collection of different types of paints, pastels, pencils and other essentials namely paintbrushes, palette knives and easels. The studio has ample space and sunlight and also stores her unused canvases. She works on 2-3 paintings at the same time.

Being a resident in the Sultanate for over three decades has provided her opportunities to share her art with Omani citizens. She has donated several of her paintings which were auctioned at many prestigious venues in Muscat.

It was a rare honour for Bubbly to have the famed Guggenheim Museum in New York accept five of her drawings in 2013. The artist has held over 25 exhibitions in the Sultanate and also many major international and solo shows. An award of honour also came her way at Basel Art Week, Switzerland in 2018. International awards in competitions at Venice, Milan, and Florence and Berlin also followed.

Bubbly has all along presented the importance of the Sultanate at prestigious art venues in London, Paris, New York and Dubai.

