

Sultanate and Saudi Arabia
discuss economic challenges

The Ministry of Finance held a meeting with its Saudi counterpart via video conferencing. The meeting reviewed the initiatives and policies undertaken by the Sultanate to deal with the financial challenges caused by the fall in international oil prices, the National Programme for Fiscal Balance (Tawazun) and Oman's Vision 2040 programmes aimed to achieve financial sustainability.

DETAILS ON P2



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READY TO GET
ON A ROLL AT
WIMBLEDON



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SPURRING
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PARADIGM SHIFT



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KHAMIS:
THE JEWEL OF
JABAL SHAMS



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO
DJIBOUTI PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti on the occasion of his country's Independence Anniversary. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health and long life to the president and friendly Djiboutian people more progress and prosperity. — ONA

36 PROPOSALS QUALIFY
FOR RESEARCH AWARD

Thirty-six research proposals have qualified for the conduction of research studies phase of the Business Research Award. Of these, 24 research proposals are from master's and doctoral degree holders and 12 from bachelor's degree holders and undergraduates, the Oman Economic Association (OEA) has announced. Dr Khalid bin Said al Amri, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Economic Association (OEA), said that the first edition of the Business Research Award is stepping to the second phase after 36 researches qualified out of 58 research proposals presented in the evaluation phase. The qualifying researchers have begun conducting integrated research studies which will be submitted on November 29, Al Amri said, adding that research studies serve as a tributary for finding suitable solutions for the current economic challenges. — ONA

IN-HOME IMMUNISATION FOR SPECIAL TARGET GROUPS

DRIVE-THROUGH VACCINATION IN MUSCAT RESTARTS TODAY

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Expanding the vaccination drive to more categories, the Directorate General of Health Services for the Governorate of Muscat will provide home immunisation service against Covid-19 for a group of clinically handicapped and those with special needs whose condition prevents them from attending the immunisation centres.

“Those responsible for the caring of this category are kindly requested to go directly to the health centre to register during workdays, Sunday to Thursday (8 am-1 pm).

The registered person will be contacted to schedule a visit for home immunisation.

The Directorate-General of Health Services in Governorate of Muscat said the vaccination service will resume today for people aged 45 years and older and pregnant women in their fourth month of pregnancy, at the Oman Automobile



Association.

The drive-through vaccination service will be available from 3 pm to 7 pm and there will be a weekly update regarding the service.

Due to the safety, the ministry urged all pregnant women to approach the vaccination centres to get the vaccine, starting from the fourth month of pregnancy.

The Ministry of Health continued

its vaccination campaign on Saturday for the targeted groups at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Meanwhile, the service for requesting promotional offers, discounts, and advertising publications has been suspended until further notice, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) said on Saturday.

70% will be
fully vaccinated
by year-end

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Sultanate will be able to cover more than 70 per cent of its population with both doses of anti-Covid-19 vaccine by December 2021, according to the Ministry of Health (MoH).

Till last weekend, as many as 1,051, 549 vaccines were administered to both citizens and residents at a rate of about 1 person per 4 seconds (approx) and 33,763 people each day.

TURN TO P2

Bids invited for Oman's maiden satellite project

CONRAD PRABHU
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Firming up its ambitious plans to procure and launch Oman's maiden satellite, wholly government-owned Space Communications Technology LLC (SCT) has invited international companies to compete for its contract to support the delivery of its OmanSat-1 satellite programme.

Muscat-based SCT has been tasked with spearheading the development of the country's National Satellite Programme centring on the construction of national satellite communications infrastructure to meet the requirements of public and private sector telecommunications.

SCT says its primary goal is to oversee the procurement of a “High Throughput Satellite that meets all the requirements of the Sultanate with high technical features through a coverage of the Sultanate's entire territory, its economic waters, and associated external markets, with high-speed/throughput data”.

REPORT ON P13



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MUSCAT: Max 43°C Min 33°C SALALAH: Max 29°C Min 25°C NIZWA: Max 41°C Min 28°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 05:22 FAJR: 03:55 DHUHR: 12:15 ASR: 15:33 MAGHRIB: 19:02 ISHA: 20:25



The Ministry of Health continued its vaccination campaign for the targeted groups at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Vaccine for blue-collar workers, undocumented residents

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Just as the vaccination at both government and private levels for target groups is progressing with nearly 20 per cent of the target groups being covered, the Ministry of Health (MoH) has said that the campaign will be extended to blue-collar workers as well as undocumented residents who wish to get themselves vaccinated.

“Our vaccination programme is going in full vigour, and everyone irrespective of nationality or community is being given the privilege to be vaccinated. In a short span, we covered a huge population,” a ministerial

representative said.

Various labour camps and other group accommodations are scheduled to be visited by the dedicated teams from the MoH and from the private sector hospitals to ensure that all are covered under the mass vaccination campaign.

“We understand the role, including the blue-collar workers in society and everyone’s life is of great importance. We make sure to vaccinate several camps in many parts of the country including Suhar, Nizwa, Salalah with the support of the private sector,” Dr Mazin al Khabouri, Director-General of Private Health Establishments at Ministry of Health, told the *Observer*.

He added that the ministry talks with the various private hospitals to vaccinate more labourers free of charge and the discussions are currently on, and all will be covered in due course of time.

Private healthcare has taken more than 90 per cent of the vaccination load. They have been to various places that are not quite accessible.

They are part of the expansion of the vaccination programme, and it has a crucial role in vaccinating people along various phases.

We will have more areas, more opportunities and outlets for private organisations to vaccinate the people.

EXTENDING TO MORE AREAS

Speaking to the *Observer* on the sidelines of the opening of the 13th branch of Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals in Mabela, he said they have already started to vaccinate the blue-collar workers with the hospital. They have gone to Duqm, Muscat, Suhar, Salalah, and Al Mazyouna, which is the border city free of charges.

“Also, we provide vaccine to all healthcare workers free of charges and a ministerial announcement of the programme for undocumented workers of Dhofar as Khareef season is beginning and in Souq Mawaleh those who don’t have documents,” he added.

Oman, Saudi Arabia discuss economic challenges and tie-ups

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Finance held a meeting with its Saudi counterpart via video conferencing.

The meeting was aimed to exchange expertise and enhance cooperation between the two ministries in the field of comprehensive financial policies.

The Sultanate was represented at the meeting by Abdullah bin Salim al Harthi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Finance.

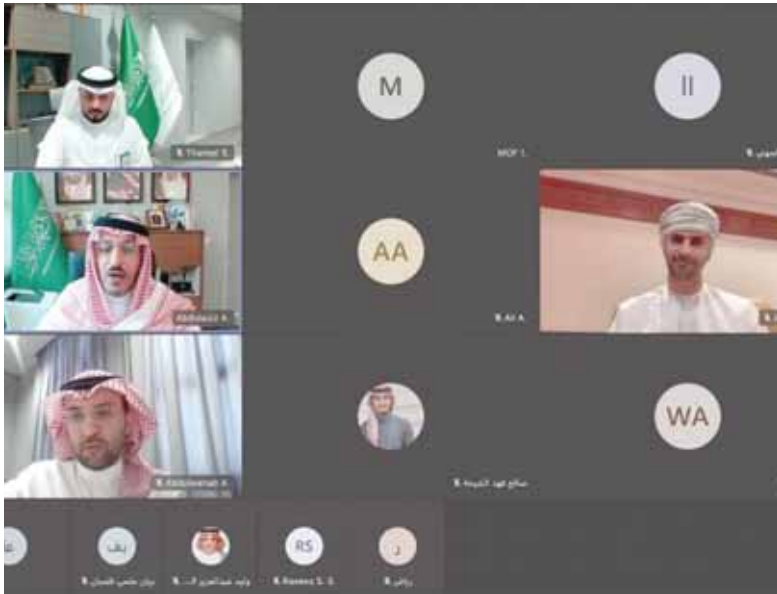
The meeting reviewed the initiatives and policies undertaken by the Sultanate to deal with the financial challenges caused by the fall in international

oil prices, the National Programme for Fiscal Balance (Tawazun) and Oman’s Vision 2040 programmes aimed to achieve financial sustainability.

The meeting touched on a number of changes and structural reforms made by the brotherly Saudi Arabia to lay down effective financial policies and manage its financial resources efficiently to achieve sustainable economic growth.

These include the launch of the financial sustainability and the financial sector development programmes.

— ONA



70 per cent will be fully vaccinated by year-end

FROM PAGE 1

“This is about 20.6 doses per hundred people (-5.11 million). At this rate, Oman will be able to cover 70 per cent of the people vaccinated (2 doses) in 181 days which is on December 23, 2021,” a statement from Dr Faryal bint Ali al Lawati, Senior Consultant and Head of Infection Diseases

Section — Internal Medicine Department at the Royal Hospital, said.

Around 841,706 people were vaccinated till last weekend, and this comprises 16.48 per cent of the population while 209,838 vaccinations were completed. The completed number comprises 4.11 per cent of the population.

Children vulnerable to latest Covid-19 variants

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Health experts in Oman have warned that children are also getting infected by the latest Covid-19 variants, unlike last year.

One of the primary reasons for the recent big surge in cases is the virus tightening its grip on young adults, including children.

“We are witnessing an increase in the percentage of infections in all age groups, especially from 30 to 50 years with some infections also reported among children aged 12 years and below,” said Saif al Abri, Director-General of Disease Surveillance and Control, Ministry of Health, on Thursday.

Mona bint Zaher al Shaqsiya of the pediatric intensive care unit at the Royal Hospital said that the number of children in intensive care is increasing and may exceed 50 per cent than before, adding that “one of the children died a few days ago, without us being able to do anything for him and save him.”

“Last year, we had situations where one or two members of

One of the primary reasons for the recent big surge in cases is the virus tightening its grip on young adults, including children

the family were getting infected, but this time the virus attacks the entire family, including children, in a short time,” said a doctor of a leading private hospital.

He added, “While most children manage to get away with symptoms like fever, cold and body pain, they can be still a spreader, passing on the adults with other chronic diseases and health complications.”

The doctor said, “We do not suggest PCR tests for children, but if they show symptoms, it has to be seen as a positive case that requires isolation.”

Health experts have said that the only way to bring the situation control will be stepping up the pace of vaccination to include adults above 18 and even children,



by advancing the earlier schedules for them.

Meanwhile, the MoH has issued a circular to private hospitals saying that Pfizer vaccines can be given to children above 12

years by following the requisite procedures.

Dr Zakaria al Balushi, the infectious disease consultant at Royal Hospital, said that hospitals are hosting young patients whose

conditions are deteriorating very quickly despite the absence of chronic diseases.

He said, “In the past, we did not worry much about young patients, but the current mutant does not

differentiate between a young and the elderly.”

He advised people should not leave the house except in emergency cases and should make purchases enough to sustain themselves for an extended period. He urged the people in target groups to take the vaccine as soon as possible.

Al Balushi said, “If you are infected or in contact, do not contribute to spreading the virus by contact with others, do not allow its transmission between families.”

According to Dr Maher bin Jaafar al Bahrani, Assistant Director-General for Medical Affairs at the Royal Hospital, more than 80 cases depend on artificial respirators and that these numbers are unprecedented and dangerous.

Royal Hospital, which has over 150 Covid-19 inpatients, including 76 in intensive care units, has said that the situation is severe and unprecedented.

Currently, there are 29,617 patients of sick of Covid-19 in the country, of which 7,202 are women.

Minister of Housing and Urban Planning visits Qatar, Saudi



MUSCAT: Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, concluded his visits to Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

During his visit to Saudi Arabia, the minister met with officials from the Ministry of Municipal

and Rural Affairs, Ministry of Housing, General Authority for Real Estate, Royal Commission for Riyadh City and the Saudi Authority for Industrial Cities and Technology Zones (MODON).

In Qatar, Dr Khalfan bin Said

al Shueili met with the prime minister, the minister of interior and a number of ministers. He also met with heads of public and private establishments, Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry

of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Municipalities and Environment, Ministry of Transport, Communications, the Public Works Authority (Ashghal) and Qatar Investment Authority. Officials and experts from

the two brotherly countries commended the Sultanate's experience in housing and urban planning and its achievements in terms of housing schemes, regulatory programmes and city planning.

The visits reflect the mutual attention to the exchange of expertise in the housing and real estate and urban planning sectors and development that took place in these sectors.

— ONA



THREE MUTANTS OF COVID-19 DETECTED IN SULTANATE

NO PLAN FOR TOTAL LOCKDOWN, ONLY IF IT IS NECESSARY: AL SAEEDI

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

@zainabalnassri

The number of patients in the hospital intensive care units (ICUs) in the Sultanate has multiplied since the beginning of the pandemic. The number of such beds for Covid-19 patients has reached 460 so far, said Dr Ahmed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, during the Supreme Committee on Covid-19 press conference held on Thursday.

He also pointed out that 567 doctors and 2,046 nurses were taken to provide the necessary care for the Covid patients within the last 18 months.

The minister confirmed that 1,144 respirators were available in the Sultanate. "There is no truth to what is being circulated about the existence of a shortage of these devices. There are 85 oxygen concentrators, and the oxygen factories have the capacity to meet our needs and more."

He expressed concern over other health services being affected, as many non-emergency

operations have been postponed due to the current situation.

Regarding the feasibility of the lockdown, he said that during the Holy Month of Ramadhan, the number of patients in Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah reached 55, but when the decision was taken to partially close, the numbers decreased.

He stressed, "There is currently no plan to close the airport or complete lockdown, but if the Supreme Committee was forced to take such a decision, it would be to preserve the safety and health of individuals first."

Al Saeedi mentioned that most of the deaths in April were of the people over 60 who refused to take the vaccination, stressing that more than three million doses will reach the Sultanate at the end of September.

Badr bin Saif al Rawahi, Ministry of Health, said that entry to government institutions and commercial establishments might become conditional on obtaining the Corona vaccine.

"The national vaccination plan



includes immunising the entire population for those over 12 years old, and this plan is divided into two phases; The first targets the groups most vulnerable to infection with coronavirus. The second phase of vaccination, yet, will start next July," he confirmed.

Al Rawahi revealed that more than 40,000 people are vaccinated daily with the anti-Covid-19 vaccine in all governorates,

including 16,000 in Muscat. He explained that the number of people receiving the vaccine in the government sector reached 82,000, and in the private sector reached 112,000, calling on everyone to take the vaccination, citing that Musandam Governorate reports the least in the number of infections. The reason, he said, is due to the immunisation of most of the people of the governorate

against Covid-19.

Dr Saif al Abri, Director-General of Disease Surveillance and Control, clarified that the biggest challenge we are facing is Delta's ability to spread into the community. Besides, the patients' need to enter hospitals and intensive care is much more than the rest of the mutants.

"The spread of the virus is now much more than last year, and this is noted from the infections recorded in all age groups. The results of the epidemiological investigation showed that most of the infections were not caused by workplaces or schools but rather by non-compliance with precautionary measures. We monitored three of the mutants in the Sultanate after genetic sequencing of the virus," he explained.

Al Abri added, "All viruses change and mutate. Most changes have a slight effect and sometimes no effect at all. However, the coronavirus is completely different. The epidemiological situation is complicated, as the percentage of positive tests reached 30 per cent."

Sale offers, promotions suspended

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 26

The service for requesting promotional offers, discounts, and advertising publications has been suspended until further notice, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIPI) said on Saturday.

The ministry stresses the need for all commercial centres, shops, and industrial establishments to abide by the decisions to limit the spread of the coronavirus.

Meanwhile, several supermarkets and shops have been closed for violations and not complying with the precautionary requirements.

It may be not that people were crowding hypermarkets, shops and gift markets that were offering heavy discounts to lure customers.

"There was an instance of the crowd gathering at a supermarket offering discounts even before they opened doors for customers in the morning," sources told the Observer.

Salalah in mind to go for a Covid shot in GCC?

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

@patkaushal

Pandemic or no pandemic, people in the region have reason to remember Salalah, particularly during the Khareef season. The contrast in the temperature between most places and Salalah substantiates their reason. Salalah has temperatures between 26-28 degrees for the last two weeks or so. In comparison, most other places in the GCC range between 40 and 50 degrees Celsius this time around.

Not authentic, but this thought is prevalent among many in the GCC that by taking both the doses

of the anti-Covid-19 vaccine, they may be allowed to enter Salalah to beat the heat.

Rashid from Abu Dhabi dropped a message to his friend Awad asking about Salalah weather. On hearing from Awad that the situation for Khareef is building up, Rashid announced, "I have also taken both the doses of Coronavirus vaccine, so that does not make any hindrance for me to come to Salalah."

And he confided to Awad that many of his friends were taking vaccines keeping Salalah in mind.

"They were very regular to Salalah during Khareef, pre-pandemic. But, unfortunately, last



year they could not come because the situation was alarming. For them, this year; there is hope due to the availability of vaccines. And

they are going for it, exclusively for Salalah. They don't want to miss staying in Salalah during the monsoon season, which is a rare

phenomenon in the GCC," Awad said.

However, the gentleman from Taqah (Awad) is surprised and more proud about Salalah, which till now was known only for greenery, vegetation, and tourism. "But it will become a reason to motivate people for a bigger cause like a vaccination against the pandemic, I never thought of," he said.

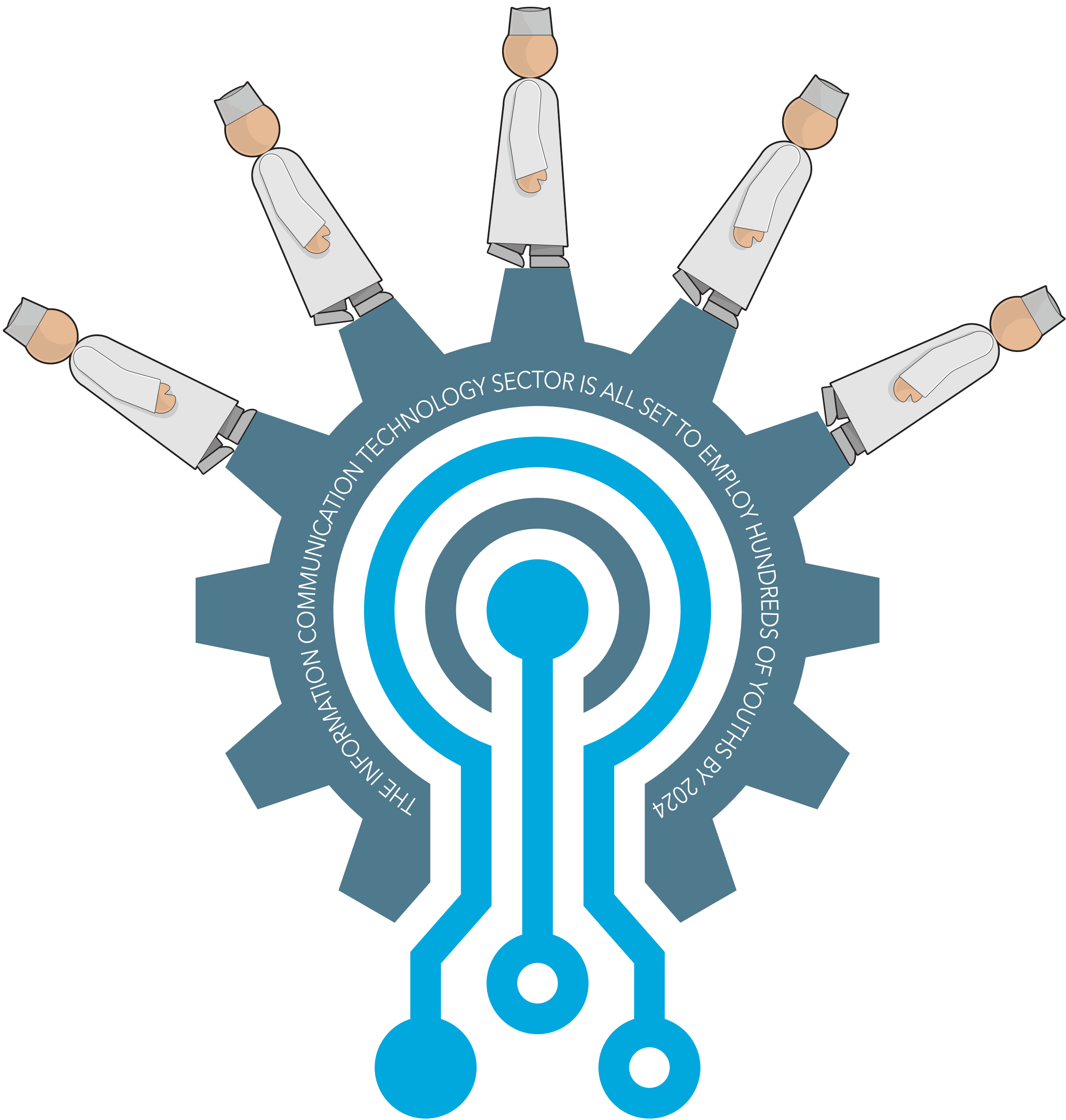
The hoteliers in Salalah are also thinking on the same lines. They have hope on vaccination that can assure the authorities to open tourism doors in a restricted manner.

"If the situation allows people

to come to Salalah, it would be a deal for them because good accommodations would be available at far cheaper rates. Still, we are keeping our fingers crossed due to the pandemic situation," said a hotel duty manager in Salalah.

Salalah hotels are assuring all possible care for the visitors and keeping their properties ready for bulk arrivals even at short notices.

They also have hopes for vaccination. They expect that the immunisation would work as a catalyst for them, as a possible solution to any relaxation in movements shortly would depend on vaccination.



ICT HOLDS PROMISE FOR THE YOUTH

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](#)

The Sultanate has been keen on investing in IT infrastructure, moulding an IT-savvy young generation and converting the nation into a digital society by encouraging digital day-to-day transactions.

Efforts that began during the earlier five-year plans are seeing fruition and according to reports, Oman's Vision 2040's digital transformation is expected to boost the national Information Communication Technology (ICT) market to RO 2.2 billion by 2024, and create employment opportunities

and drive new levels of citizen engagement.

According to a new whitepaper titled 'Navigating Oman's Vision 2040 through SAP's Lens' by market research firm GlobalData, Oman's ICT market will nearly double to RO 2.2 billion (\$5.6 billion) by 2024, up from RO 1.2 billion (\$3.2 billion) in 2019, thanks to nationwide digital transformation.

As many as five areas for the growth trajectory are identified by the whitepaper, highlighting the digital transformation opportunity for the Sultanate. Accordingly, a society of creative individuals,

a competitive economy, a sustainable environment, responsible state agencies and building smart cities will drive Oman's ICT march.

"Oman's government agencies can achieve Oman Vision 2040 goals by digitally transforming into Intelligent Enterprises that can integrate back-end operations and centre the citizen experience", says Waheed al Hamaid, Managing Director, SAP Oman.

"Citizen engagement platforms can enhance happiness and trust, reduce costs and security risks, and rapidly deploy and future-proof e-services."

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) represented by the Governance and Compliance division, provides advice to the government entities on the best procedures in the IT sector. Intending to create awareness among the local populace, the division develops and publishes a number of instruments, including policies, standards, frameworks, and guidelines to be followed by government entities. In this area, the focal areas of the ministry are:

- 1) Information Security Management Policy
- 2) Information Security

Management Framework

- 3) Project Management Framework
- 4) IT Service Continuity Management Framework
- 5) G-Cloud Standards
- 6) IT Services Standards

ENABLING THE OMANI WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE:

Going forward, more and more Omanis are being trained to carve a niche in ICT sector and in alignment with the Omanisation goals, as many as 60 per cent of SAP Oman workforce has become Omani nationals while scores of other young Omani men

and women are being trained to take the helm of the ICT drive in the country. Recently, 125 university graduates were trained to become certified SAP associate consultants by the Training and Development Institute's Young Professionals Programme.

The Dual Study programme integrates technology into the curricula programme at the Modern College of Business and Sciences (MCBS) and the GUtech (German University of Technology). Side by side, many Omani university graduates are trained to gain hands-on skills and knowledge on digital business solutions.



SULTANATE MARKS DAY OF THE SEAFARER



MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, along with the member states of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) marked the Day of the Seafarer which falls on June 25 each year.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) designated the 25th of June as the Day of the Seafarer in recognition of the efforts they make in boosting international trade and the challenges they face during their daily voyages in addition to the security threats and the long stay

in the sea away from their families to transport the world's needs of energy, foodstuff and the other commodities we need for our daily life.

The ministry organised a celebration to mark the occasion on the premises of Oman LNG in the Wilayat of Sur under the auspices of Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA).

The celebration shed light on the legislations and regulations issued by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for



maritime activities.

A number of excelling seafarers were honoured during the

celebration in recognition of the efforts they exerted during their career.

Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said that seafaring is essential to the sea transport industry which is a principal tributary to countries' economies. The seafarers are affected by the sea conditions and the changing climate and now they are among the most affected category by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the international community has taken all the necessary measures to protect the seafarers from the coronavirus infection.

The Sultanate's celebration along with the other member

states of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), is a testament to the attention accorded to the Omani and expat seafarers working in the Omani and foreign ships in recognition of the efforts they exert, he said.

The minister pointed to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the health and safety of seafarers which directly affected the work system on ships.

The Sultanate and the international organisations have taken suitable health measures to ensure a safe and healthy environment for the seafarers.

— ONA



New fish market in Barka opens

BARKA: The new fish market has been opened at the fishing port in the Wilayat of Barka. An area was allocated for the market in the port project 'Barka Marina'.

The opening ceremony was held on Thursday amid full adherence to the healthy procedures set by the departments concerned.

The opening included operating all facilities related to the fish market, regulating the entry of fish transport vehicles and transporting fish from boats to the auctioning area, as well as operating the auctioning system at the designated site.

The authorised vendors received the outlets designated for fish selling and cutting according to the regulations of fish markets issued by the Ministry of Agriculture,



Fisheries and Water Resources.

The outlets include 72 shops for sellers, 21 others for fish cutting, and selling sites for fishermen and fish transporters; in addition

to distributing tools and equipment necessary for sellers and fish cutters that come as a support from the ministry during the initial operating phase. — ONA

36 research qualify for Business Research Award second phase

MUSCAT: Thirty-six research proposals have qualified for phase 2 (conducting research studies) of the Business Research Award. Of these, 24 research proposals are from master's and doctoral degree holders and 12 from bachelor's degree holders and undergraduates, the Oman Economic Association (OEA) has announced.

Dr Khalid bin Said al Amri, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Economic Association (OEA), said that the first edition of the Business Research Award is stepping to the second phase after 36 researches qualified out of 58 research proposals presented in the evaluation phase. He noted that the qualifying researches include 14 researches dealing with the current economic challenges facing the Sultanate, 7 research proposals on business structure, 6 research proposals on foreign investment, 5 research proposals on fiscal policies, 3 research proposals on labour market solutions and 1 research proposal



on monetary policies.

The qualifying researchers have begun conducting integrated research studies which will be submitted on November 29, Al Amri said, adding that research studies serve as a tributary for finding suitable solutions for the current economic challenges.

The first edition of its Business Research Award was launched by the Oman Economic Association on March 16, this year.

The award encourages research and studies analysing the current economic condition and charting out an economic track that responds to the era of Renewed Renaissance across different

sectors.

The award will help decision makers find appropriate solutions to prevailing economic challenges and it will furnish an interactive research platform through which researchers could focus on the pressing concerns of the national economy.

The award will also encourage researchers to direct their activities towards fostering sciences and expertise of relevance to local and international economic developments, with emphasis on disseminating economic knowledge among segments of society.

The prize covers a broad range of business domains, including monetary policies, financial policies, the business environment, the legislations, foreign investment and current local economic challenges in the Sultanate and labour market solutions. It targets research to be conducted by holders of Master's, PhD and Bachelor's degrees, as well as university and college students. — ONA



Tender Number T-15-2021

Tender Announcement

"Mwasalat" invites professional firms for the following tender:

Tender Name Framework Agreement for the Supply and Delivery of Pantry & Cleaning Items for MWASALAT

Project Summary Within the framework of this tender, MWASALAT would like to have a qualified supplier for the supply & delivery of pantry and cleaning items for MWASALAT.

Tender Fee 50 OMR Grade & Speciality Qualified & Specialized Companies in the Field.

Start date for tender document distribution SUN, 27th June 2021 Last date for tender document distribution SUN, 11th July 2021 Last date for submission WED, 28th July 2021

Interested specialized companies may obtain the Tender Documents from the E-Tendering website <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents. Tenders should be submitted online on the given website; no documents can be accepted as manual submission except original Tender Bond. The Tenderer shall register in E-tendering portal to enable purchase and collection of the Tender Documents. All correspondences pertaining to the Tender Inquiry must be online at the e-tendering system. Any clarification pertaining to the E-tendering system technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email etender@ita.gov.om and phone number: +968 24166670, 24166429.

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IAEA demands Iran answer on nuclear monitoring

VIENNA/PARIS: The UN nuclear watchdog on Friday demanded an immediate reply from Iran on whether it would extend a monitoring agreement that expired overnight, prompting an Iranian envoy to respond that Tehran was under no obligation to provide an answer.

The agreement continued the International Atomic Energy Agency's collection of data on some of Tehran's activities, cushioning the blow of Iran's decision in February to reduce cooperation with the agency.

"An immediate response from Iran is needed in this regard," the IAEA said in a statement summarising a report by its chief Rafael Grossi to its 35-nation Board of Governors that was also seen by Reuters.

Grossi wrote to Iran last week "to understand Iran's position regarding the possible continued collection, recording and retention of data", the report said. As of Friday, Iran had not indicated if it intended to maintain the arrangement, it said.

Lack of accord could scupper nuclear deal talks as Iran should engage watchdog without further delay, says US

Iran's Ambassador to the IAEA, Kazem Gharibabadi, "said that Iran was not required to comply" with the IAEA head's request, Iran's semi-official news agency Tasnim reported.

Washington believes Tehran should engage the IAEA without further delay and a failure to do so would contradict Iran's stated desire for both to resume compliance with the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action nuclear deal as soon as possible, said a US State Department official.

"Iran should engage the IAEA without further delay to ensure appropriate measures remain in place so the IAEA's continuity of knowledge on JCPOA monitoring can be readily re-established," the



IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi. – Reuters

US official said on condition of anonymity.

Iran and the United States have been holding indirect talks on reviving the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and major powers that imposed restrictions on Tehran's nuclear activities in

exchange for lifting international sanctions.

The Vienna talks, which began in April, are now in a pause that had been expected to last until early July, but failure to extend the monitoring accord could throw those negotiations into disarray.

"Regarding the IAEA, this remains a serious concern," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, speaking before Grossi updated the board, told a news conference in Paris alongside his French counterpart, Jean-Yves Le Drian. "The concern has been

communicated to Iran and needs to be resolved."

The United States abandoned the deal under then-President Donald Trump in 2018 and reimposed harsh US sanctions, prompting Iran to respond by violating many of its restrictions.

One of Iran's moves to reduce compliance was its February decision to end the deal's extra IAEA monitoring of some nuclear activities. The temporary agreement continued that monitoring and a one-month extension ended overnight.

Officials on all sides have said there are major issues to resolve before the nuclear deal can be revived.

"We still have significant differences with Iran," Blinken said, adding that he hoped a resumption of talks in the coming days could settle them. "We are just not there yet," Le Drian echoed that.

"We're waiting for Iranian authorities to take the final difficult decisions to allow for the revival of the 2015 nuclear deal," he said.

— AFP

Three MSF aid workers killed in Tigray

NAIROBI: One Spanish and two Ethiopian employees of the medical charity Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) have been "brutally murdered" in Ethiopia's war-torn northern Tigray region, the organisation said on Friday.

The trio "were travelling yesterday afternoon when we lost contact with them. This morning, their vehicle was found empty and a few metres away, their lifeless bodies," the international aid group said in a statement.

"No words can truly convey all our sadness, shock and outrage against this horrific attack."

The conflict in Tigray began in



Doctors Without Borders (MSF) emergency co-ordinator Maria Hernandez, killed by unknown assailants in Tigray region. – Reuters

November, when Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent troops in to oust the dissident regional leadership, promising a swift victory. But the fighting continues nearly eight months later, and has triggered a humanitarian crisis which the United Nations warns has left 350,000 people on the brink of famine.

MSF, or Doctors Without Borders, named the Spanish victim as 35-year-old aid coordinator Maria Hernandez from Madrid. She started working with MSF in 2015 in the Central African Republic and had since worked in Yemen, Mexico and Nigeria. — AFP

■ MESSAGES IN BOTTLE FOR PEACE



Palestinian students who received letters from US children, send messages in bottles as a response, during a field trip organised on a beach in Gaza City. Last month, 11 days of hostilities between Israel and the Palestinian Hamas movement, killed and wounded dozens of people, including children. — AFP

For poor Jordanians, debt trap is often a prison cell

AMMAN: Cash-strapped and struggling to care for his two disabled children, Mohammad Sabha took out a loan. Now he fears ending up in a Jordanian prison because he can't repay it. He would join thousands already behind bars for similar infractions in the kingdom, where debt law is draconian and disproportionately punishes the poor.

"This is one of the most serious social problems in the kingdom," said Jordanian economist Musa al Saket of the Phenix Center for Economics and Informatics Studies in Amman.

Jordanians in financial trouble can't resort to declaring personal bankruptcy. Non-payment of even small debts carries up to 90 days' jail time and a bounced cheque can lead to a year in prison

Jordanians in financial trouble can't resort to declaring personal bankruptcy. Non-payment of even small debts carries up to 90 days' jail time and a bounced cheque can



Mohammad Sabha, a Jordanian factory worker, sorts out paperwork with his two children, Fathia, and Khader at the family home in Amman. — AFP

lead to a year in prison.

Sabha's daughter, Fathia, 17, suffers from a paralysed right arm and leg, and his son Khader, 18, lost an eye in a fall as a child and has to change his ocular prosthesis regularly. The 43-year-old father has a job in a factory making aluminium products and his wife works in a cleaning service. Together they make about 650 dinars (\$930) a month, which barely covers their expenses.

In a country where only civil servants and pensioners have health insurance, Mohammad is burdened with grinding debt.

"My wife and I both work, but we are forced to borrow to treat our two children because the care costs 5,000 dinars (\$7,000) a year and we just don't have that," Sabha said.

"To take care of our children, we have borrowed 12,000 dinars over the past five years from five credit institutions," he said.

"We are harassed by creditors who have gone to court. Today, we are desperate." Sabha has already been in prison over unpaid debt, and he says the only reason he is free right now is the Covid-19 pandemic. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BEIRUT

Economic crisis in Lebanon worsens

The Lebanese were struggling to fill up their cars on Saturday, a day after the country's caretaker government reduced fuel subsidies amid deepening economic woes. Long lines of cars stretched outside fuel stations in Beirut where motorists waited for more than two hours to get half a litre of fuel, witnesses said.

Some motorists said they had to bribe petrol station employees to fill up their cars. Others expressed anger. "I



have been waiting for three hours. I've brought my children along with me so that they would do their homework in the car in the meantime," a housewife named Mona said. — dpa

CAIRO

Egypt arrests ex-MP for smuggling antiquities

Egyptian police arrested last week a former lawmaker and others on charges of illegal excavation and smuggling of 201 Pharaonic, Greek and Roman artefacts, an interior ministry statement said. Security agencies "arrested a criminal gang headed by a person, who was previously charged in four cases, for illegally excavating sites nationwide... with the aim of smuggling and selling antiquities," it said.

A 5-minute video accompanying the statement



listed the looted relics found in the men's possession including "two wooden tablets engraved with hieroglyphics, 36 different statues of various lengths... 52 copper coins believed to be from the Greek and Roman periods... three black basalt plates". — AFP

HEBRON

Palestinian mourners call for change

Palestinian mourners called for a change of government as they marched through Hebron for the funeral of one of President Mahmoud Abbas's most prominent critics, who died after being arrested by security forces. Thousands of people accompanied Nizar Banat's coffin through the streets of the occupied West Bank city, many of them chanting "The people want the fall of the regime" and "Leave, leave Abbas".

Some waved Palestinian



flags and others the flag of Hamas in Gaza. Protesters also gathered in Ramallah and outside East Jerusalem's Al Aqsa Mosque.

— Reuters

In brief

■ WELLINGTON



N ZEALAND SUSPENDS TRAVEL BUBBLE WITH AUSTRALIA

New Zealand announced a three-day suspension of its quarantine-free travel arrangement with Australia on Saturday, with Wellington citing “multiple” outbreaks of Covid-19 in the neighbouring country. The announcement comes as a two-week lockdown begins in Sydney to contain a rapidly spreading outbreak of the Delta coronavirus variant.

More than 80 cases have been reported so far in Australia’s largest city, while a handful of community cases have also been recorded in the Northern Territory, Victoria and Queensland in recent days.

— AFP

■ YANGON



MYANMAR TORCHES OVER HALF-BILLION DOLLAR DRUGS STASH

Myanmar authorities torched over half a billion dollars worth of narcotics across the country, sending opium, heroin and methamphetamine up in smoke as experts warn smugglers have adapted to Covid-19 travel restrictions and are back in business.

Sacks of green-brown cannabis were stacked high at a compound in the commercial capital Yangon, alongside bin-liner-sized bags of red-pink pills, marking one of Myanmar’s offerings for the annual World Drug Day burning.

Slabs of heroin, bags of ketamine and tramadol and ice were also laid out on the pyre. Stashes were also burned at ceremonies held in Mandalay and Taunggyi in Shan State, Myanmar’s anti-drugs police department said. — AFP

■ DHAKA



‘ALARMING’ VIRUS SURGE PROMPTS NEW B'DESH LOCKDOWN

Bangladesh has announced it will impose a tough new lockdown starting Monday, after a “dangerous and alarming” surge in Delta variant cases of coronavirus. All government and private offices will be shut for a week and only medical-related transport will be allowed, the government said.

“No one can step out of their homes except in emergency cases”, a statement added. Health department spokesman Robed Amin said police and border guards would be deployed to enforce the lockdown and the army may be involved if needed.

— AFP

Biden calls on Afghans to ‘decide their future’ as troop withdrawal nears end

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden met Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and his former political foe, Abdullah Abdullah, on Friday at the White House where he called on Afghans to decide the future of their country as the last US troops pack up after 20 years of war and government forces struggle to repel Taliban advances.

Biden, seated beside Ghani and Abdullah in The Oval Office, called them “two old friends” and said US support for Afghanistan was not ending but would be sustained despite the US pullout.

“Afghans are going to have to decide their future, what they want”, said Biden, saying the “senseless violence has to stop.”

Ghani said Afghan security forces had retaken six districts on Friday. He said he respected Biden’s decision and that the partnership between the United States and Afghanistan is entering a new phase.

“We are determined to have unity, coherence”, he said.

Speaking with reporters after the meeting, Ghani said the United



President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani meets with US President Joe Biden in Washington, DC. — AFP

States’ decision to withdraw troops was a sovereign one and it was Kabul’s job to “manage consequences.”

He added that Biden had clearly articulated that the US Embassy

would continue to operate and security aid would continue and in some cases move on an accelerated schedule. Abdullah said in an interview after the Biden meeting that stalled intra-Afghan talks on

a political settlement to decades of strife should not be abandoned unless the insurgents themselves pull out.

“I think we shouldn’t shut the door unless it’s completely shut by

Ghani says the United States’ decision to withdraw troops was a sovereign one and it was Kabul’s job to ‘manage consequences’

the Taliban”, Abdullah said. “We can’t say no to talks despite a lack of progress or in spite of what’s happening on the ground.”

The Oval Office meeting could be as valuable to Ghani for its symbolism as for any new US help because it will be seen as affirming Biden’s support for the beleaguered Afghan leader as he confronts Taliban gains, bombings and assassinations, a surge in Covid-19 cases and political infighting in Kabul.

“At a time when morale is incredibly shaky and things are going downhill, anything one can do to help shore up morale and shore up the government is worth doing”, said Ronald Neumann, a former US ambassador to Kabul. “Inviting Ghani here is a pretty strong sign that we’re backing him.” — Reuters

Sri Lanka’s marine disaster worsens

COLOMBO: Damage to Sri Lanka’s marine environment from a sinking chemical ship is worse than feared, officials said, as more dead turtles, dolphins and whales washed up on the island’s beaches. 130 marine animals have been found dead on the Indian Ocean’s beaches since the MV X-Press caught fire last month before partially sinking off the coast after two weeks ablaze.

Sri Lanka’s government believes they were killed by the hundreds of tonnes of chemicals and plastics leaking from the ship.



“At least six turtle carcasses washed up along the western coast on Thursday alone”, a wildlife official said. He said they had also received the first report of a shoal of reef fish dying at Hikkaduwa, a southern tourist resort area known for its rich coral reefs.

Sydney in 2-week hard Covid-19 lockdown

MELBOURNE: Sydney and some surrounding areas will enter a hard two-week Covid-19 lockdown on Saturday as authorities struggle to control a fast-spreading outbreak of the highly infectious Delta variant that has grown to 80 cases.

Parts of Sydney, Australia’s biggest city, were already under lockdown due to the outbreak, but health authorities said cases and exposure sites were increasing too rapidly.

“Even though we don’t want to impose burdens unless we absolutely have to, unfortunately this is a situation where we have to”, said, New South Wales state Premier Gladys Berejiklian.

Australia has been more successful in managing the



A worker cleans public seating outside the Opera House in Sydney after authorities locked down several central areas of Australia’s largest city to contain an outbreak of the highly contagious Delta variant. — AFP

pandemic than many other advanced economies through swift border closures, social distancing rules and high

compliance, reporting just over 30,400 cases and 910 Covid-19 deaths.

— AFP

Ex-president Aquino buried, amid calls for dignity

MANILA: Former Philippine president Benigno Aquino was buried on Saturday amid calls for Filipinos to honour his legacy by remembering to choose leaders who are decent and to never again compromise the people’s dignity.

The 61-year-old Aquino, popularly known as Noynoy, died on Thursday due to renal disease, secondary to diabetes, at the age of 61.

He was president from 2010 to 2016, and was credited for cementing a Philippine economic revival, passing a controversial reproductive health law and filing a successful arbitration case against China over the disputed South China Sea.

“The best eulogy tribute we can pay to our dear president Noynoy is to bring back, recover, preserve, safeguard and never again to compromise our dignity as a people and the decency of our leaders as servants, not bosses”, Archbishop Socrates Villegas said in his homily at the funeral Mass for the bachelor president.

“The flags at half mast are not only for the dead president but for



Honour guards transport the urn of former Philippine president Benigno Aquino III, at the Manila Memorial Park, Metro Manila, Philippines. — Reuters

the dying decent governance”, he added.

The rule of Aquino’s successor, President Rodrigo Duterte, has

been characterised by a violent illegal drug war that has left thousands dead, vulgar and misogynistic statements, and

constant threats of arrests or being killed for opposing his policies.

“Maybe, and I do hope, his death will spark another fire within us to

resurrect his example of decency and integrity”, Villegas said.

“The sincerest form of tribute to President Noynoy is to relive his life lessons of decency and ethical leadership, recover honour and dignity in our private and public lives, among us private citizens and among our leaders”, Villegas said

As president, the younger Aquino led the Philippines in shedding its perennial “sick man of Asia” image through better governance and robust economic growth. He challenged Beijing’s sweeping claims of the South China Sea before the arbitration court in The Hague in 2013.

Aquino, who led a private life after stepping down, is survived by four sisters.

The best tribute for the late president is “to bring back, recover, preserve, safeguard and never again to compromise our dignity as a people and the decency of our leaders as servants, not bosses”, Archbishop Socrates Villegas, former president of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, said in his homily.

— Reuters

US ex-cop sentenced to over 22 years for George Floyd murder

MINNEAPOLIS: Former policeman Derek Chauvin was sentenced to 22 and a half years in prison on Friday for the murder of African American George Floyd, the killing that sparked America's biggest demonstrations for racial justice in decades.

The white, 45-year-old Chauvin gave his "condolences" to the Floyd family in a Minneapolis court, without apologising, before Judge Peter Cahill handed down a lesser sentence than the 30 years the prosecution had sought.

"This (jail term) is based on your abuse of a position of trust and authority and also the particular cruelty shown to George Floyd," Cahill told Chauvin, who listened impassively.

The decision was read out at the end of a tense hearing in which the court watched a recorded message by Floyd's seven-year-old daughter and heard from Chauvin's mother.

The Floyd family's lawyer called the sentencing a "historic" step towards racial reconciliation in the United States.

"(It) brings the Floyd family and our nation one step closer to healing by delivering closure and accountability," Ben Crump tweeted.

President Joe Biden said: "I don't know all the circumstances that were considered but it seems



Protesters march during a rally after the sentencing of Derek Chauvin, the former Minneapolis policeman found guilty of killing George Floyd, in Minnesota. — Reuters

to me, under the guidelines, that seems to be appropriate."

After the sentence was announced, chanting marchers with megaphones and motorcycle escorts took over some of the city's busiest blocks during rush hour. No serious incidents were

The Floyd family's lawyer called the sentencing a 'historic' step towards racial reconciliation in the United States

reported as they wound their way through stopped traffic.

The sentencing was long awaited in Minnesota, with hundreds of people gathering near the courthouse into the evening. Many said Chauvin should have gotten 30 or 40 years. — AFP

Pressure builds on UK premier to fire health secretary

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was under mounting pressure on Saturday to fire his health secretary after the admission that he broke Covid-19 guidelines by kissing an employee sparked accusations of blatant hypocrisy.

Matt Hancock, 42, has been at the centre of the government's fight against the pandemic, routinely telling people to follow strict rules and even welcoming the resignation last year of a senior scientist who broke restrictions in a similar manner.

Hancock apologised on Friday after *The Sun* newspaper showed him kissing and embracing a senior aide in his office last month, at a time when it was against the rules for people to have intimate contact with a person outside their household.

The opposition Labour Party also questioned whether he had broken the ministerial code: the woman, a long-time friend of Hancock's, was appointed as a non-executive director, on a taxpayer-funded salary, to oversee and scrutinise the running of his department.

"I accept that I breached the social distancing guidance in these circumstances," Hancock said. "I have let people down and



Britain's Health Secretary Matt Hancock

am very sorry." Johnson said on Friday he considered the matter closed.

But Britain's leading newspapers, which all splashed the story on their front pages, said Hancock had lost any moral authority and must go. One lawmaker in his party, Duncan Baker, called on him to resign.

"Mr Hancock cannot now hope to put on a straight face and tell us how to behave and seriously expect us to listen," *The Sun* said in its leader column. "There is the rank stench of hypocrisy."

With 128,000 deaths, Britain has one of the highest official death tolls from Covid-19 in the world. — Reuters

German investigators seek motive in deadly knife attack

WURZBURG: Investigators were racing on Saturday to pinpoint the motive of a man who went on a knife rampage in the German city of Wuerzburg, killing three people and leaving five seriously injured.

The suspect, a 24-year-old Somali who arrived in Wuerzburg in 2015, staged the attack in the city centre on Friday evening, striking at a household goods store before advancing to a bank. He was later overpowered by police after they shot him in the thigh, Bavaria's Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann said.

Investigators found records showing that the man had been treated at a psychiatric institution, and police said he was not a known fighter. "The police investigation will determine if this was an act or if it was due to the psychiatric state" of the man, said Herrmann.

But the case was immediately seized on by the far-right AfD, with the party's co-chair Joerg



Bavarian Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann addresses a press conference in Wuerzburg. — AFP

Meuthen noting that a witness had reportedly heard the suspect shouting.

Meuthen lamented the latest "knife murders in the middle of Germany," adding that it was a "tragedy for the victims, who have my sympathy and another manifestation of Merkel's failed migration policy".

The AfD has railed that



People place flowers and candles at a makeshift memorial in tribute to the victims of a deadly attack in the city centre of Wuerzburg, southern Germany. — AFP

Investigators found records showing that the man had been treated at a psychiatric institution and police said he was not a known fighter

Chancellor Angela Merkel's decision to allow in more than one million asylum-seekers — many fleeing Iraq and Syria — since 2015 has contributed to a heightened security risk.

Residents of the Bavarian city woke up in shock at the news, some bringing flowers and candles in the morning to the scene of the stabbing. "It's terrible. I'm extremely sad and shocked and that's why I'm here. I find that's the least one can do — show sympathy," said Wuerzburg resident Franziska, who together with a friend, brought candles.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

AMSTERDAM

Netherlands relaxes most virus rules

The Netherlands took a step back towards normal public life without coronavirus restrictions on Saturday, as almost all measures introduced in the wake of the pandemic were lifted. The last remaining key rule is a requirement for a safe social distance of 1.5 metres. If this distance cannot be maintained — as in a dance club, for example — entry is only possible with a negative test or vaccination certificate.

However, the government



continued to urge citizens to be cautious — also in view of the fast-spreading Delta variant of the virus, which is considered particularly contagious.

The obligation to wear masks has also been almost completely lifted. — dpa

JOHANNESBURG

Delta variant driving Covid surge in S Africa

The highly contagious Delta variant is driving a surge in South African Covid-19 infections that is testing the capacity of hospitals and forcing authorities to mull tighter restrictions, the government and scientists said.

The hardest-hit country in Africa recorded 18,762 new infections on Saturday — its highest daily figure since January — taking the total number of laboratory-confirmed cases to 1,895,905, of which 59,621 have been fatal. The country is in the



thick of its third wave. "We are in the exponential phase of the pandemic with the numbers just growing very, very, extremely fast and (they) will keep growing in the next weeks," Tulio de Oliveira, a top virologist in the country said. — AFP

BELFAST

N Ireland's unionist taps Jeffrey as new leader

Members of Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) endorsed Jeffrey Donaldson as their new leader, giving him 32 of the party's 36 electoral college votes. The move was a rubber stamp. It will become official next week, when the DUP's ruling executive meets to ratify his appointment.

The decision came after a chaotic two months for Northern Ireland's largest party. Internal divisions have been laid bare after successive revolts deposed



former leader Arlene Foster and her successor, Edwin Poots. Donaldson, the party's 58-year-old Westminster leader, was the only candidate to put his name forward for the DUP leadership after the dramatic resignation of Poots last week. — dpa

We can learn so much from the greatest genius of our time

Albert Einstein was a genius. A theoretical physicist whose contributions towards mankind’s intellectual understanding of relativity, and quantum theory, led to him being awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1921. He was also incredibly humble, saying “I have no special talent, but I am passionately curious.”

His name is synonymous with the term ‘genius,’ and via google search his name appears as a suggestion, simply upon typing the letter ‘a.’ However I have always seen him as the doyen of all philosophers, because his philosophies have the hard edge of truth, appear relevant to all cultures, races, and societies. He advocated too that without science, there can be no philosophy, because “science discovers, and philosophy interprets,” which offers tangible value to his thoughts.

Take for example that which is applicable to most of us, in most walks of life: “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” The simplicity, and the reality, of this statement is evident to us all, particularly now in respect of pandemic non-compliance, which is still at unbelievable levels, as mask wearing, social-distancing, family and social gathering regulations are ignored by far too many. “If people are good only because they fear punishment, they really are a sorry lot



Ray Petersen
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AS A HUMAN BEING, ONE HAS BEEN ENDOWED WITH JUST ENOUGH INTELLIGENCE TO BE ABLE TO SEE HOW UTTERLY INADEQUATE THAT INTELLIGENCE IS, WHEN CONFRONTED WITH THAT WHICH EXISTS

indeed,” and that appears to be the way many feel, that unless the police are on every corner to stop and apprehend them, they will still have their gatherings... they really are a sorry, sorry lot, for their callow, insensitive, naïve, even childish regard for their fellow man, their arrogance knowing no bounds.

“Imagination is more important than knowledge, for knowledge is limited to what we know and understand. While imagination embraces the entire world, and all there will ever be to know and understand.” Where would we be without imagination? It takes us past the sentences, tenses, grammar, structure, punctuation and spelling, past numbers, fractions, percentages, angles, and tangents, and develops what we have seen, heard learned and understood, beyond that to where we can produce literature, art, science, and ask endless questions that create a cycle that continues to reach out to the unknown. “Wisdom is not a product of schooling,” he said, “but of the lifelong attempt to acquire it.”

None of us, two years ago, could have foreseen exactly where we are at this time. The oil price crash had a significant effect on the country, but it appeared that fiscal measures being implemented were part of a cohesive and responsible response to the situation. Then we were blindsided by the impact of the pandemic, most of us

having lived through SARS and MERS were only mildly concerned, but Einstein foresaw such frailty saying, “As a human being, one has been endowed with just enough intelligence to be able to see how utterly inadequate that intelligence is, when confronted with that which exists.” And the truth is that we are horribly inadequate, because we are forced to rely upon the good sense of those who refuse to comply, to keep us all safe during the pandemic. Talk about ‘utterly inadequate!’

“Everybody is a genius,” said the great man, with the great mind, “but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its entire life thinking it is stupid!” We are all different, physically, emotionally, physiologically, cognitively, and we all have different genes, traditions, cultures, and influences that make us different, or perhaps better said, define us. It is important that we give our youth the opportunity to be all that they aspire to be. Don’t force them into silence, or away from their passions. Tree-climbing fish, swimming birds, and flying snails will not achieve much!

This amazing man of thought and deed said that we are all imprisoned by our own ideas and must test ourselves on reality while we are young. Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow, and never stop asking questions!

SPACE IS FOR EVERYONE

Europe’s Space Agency to hire first disabled astronaut

THOMAS ESCRITT

The European Space Agency hopes to hire and launch the world’s first physically disabled astronaut and several hundred would-be para-astronauts have already applied for the role, ESA head Josef Aschbacher said on Friday.

The 22-member space programme has just closed its latest decennial recruitment call for astronauts and received 22,000 applicants, Aschbacher said.

“We would like to launch an astronaut with a disability, which would be the first time ever,” the Austrian added. “But I’m also happy for ESA because it shows that space is for everyone, and that’s something I’d like to convey.”

The ESA, whose Ariane rocket once dominated the market for commercial satellite launches, faces ever stiffer competition from tech-funded upstarts like Jeff Bezos’s Blue Origin and Elon Musk’s SpaceX.

Amazon founder Bezos hopes next month to become the first man to go into space on his own rocket, highlighting the growing role tech billionaires are playing in a field that was once dominated by public agencies.

“Space is developing extremely fast and if we don’t catch up with this train we are left behind,” he added, outlining plans to refashion the agency

as a more entrepreneurial player ready to work with venture capitalists to help grow European start-ups that could one day rival the Silicon Valley players.

The challenges are immense: the ESA’s 7 billion euro budget is a third of Nasa’s, while its seven or eight launches a year are dwarfed by the 40 carried out by the United States.

Aschbacher, who grew up staring at the stars above his parents’ mountain farm in Austria, himself once applied to become an ESA astronaut when he was a student. But what was once a geeky, niche enthusiasm has now become mainstream, he said.

This year’s job ad attracted almost three times the 8,000 applications received a decade ago, and a quarter of them were women, up from just 15 per cent before. The ESA has promised to develop technologies to ensure those with disabilities, like shortened legs, play a full part.

And those astronauts will go beyond the International Space Station: some will deploy to the United States’s planned Gateway station on the moon, while the ESA’s member states are considering an invitation from Chinese and Russian space agencies to participate in their similar moonbase project.

Could European astronauts one day be serving simultaneously on two different moonbases at once?

“The invitation is on the table and it’s a very nice idea,” he said. — Reuters

CHANGING WEATHER

Data overhaul to improve forecasts

EMMA FARGE

The UN weather agency on Friday endorsed a policy to fill “severe gaps” in global data-sharing, which have diminished the accuracy of forecasts at a time when they are needed to track extreme weather events linked to climate change.

Since its establishment in 1951, the World Meteorological Organization’s (WMO) primary aim has been to coordinate the acquisition and exchange of data that provide the basis for weather forecasts. These rely on round-the-clock weather observations from all around the globe but some gaps have emerged in data coverage, the WMO said.

“Severe gaps in data and weather observations, especially in Africa and island states, have a major negative impact on the accuracy of early warnings both locally and globally,” WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas said.

While the number of satellite data used for weather forecasts has increased in recent years, readings from some more old-fashioned instruments have waned.

Lars Peter Riishojgaard, who drafted the new policy and is director of the Earth System Branch at the UN agency, cited the example of radiosondes — an instrument that is carried into the atmosphere by a balloon. Data from these instruments coming from Africa has halved over five years, he said.



A boy plays in a fountain on a hot summer day in central Kyiv. — Reuters

THE POLICY WOULD “HELP ITS MEMBERS MEET THE EXPLOSIVE GROWTH IN DEMAND FOR WEATHER, CLIMATE AND WATER SERVICES AS THE WORLD GRAPPLES WITH THE DUAL CHALLENGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE INCREASING FREQUENCY OF EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS”

The new resolution, known formally as the WMO Unified Data Policy, also envisages data sharing beyond the traditional areas of weather, climate and water data to also incorporate the atmospheric composition, oceans, cryosphere and space weather.

The WMO said the policy would “help its members meet the explosive growth in demand for weather, climate and water services as the world grapples with the dual challenges of climate change and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events.”

Riishojgaard cited the importance of sharing heat readings from deep ocean

layers to improve climate models.

The new policy still to be approved by all 193 WMO members at another meeting in October.

Developing countries are expected to receive financial assistance to comply with the new policy and will benefit through improved access to key data themselves, the WMO said.

In another development, the European Parliament has approved a landmark law to make the European Union’s greenhouse gas emissions targets legally binding, paving the way for a policy overhaul to cut planet-warming pollution faster. — Reuters

sport

Ronaldo makes Portugal believe again before Belgium



Belgium national football team's players (L to R) Eden Hazard, Kevin De Bruyne, Michy Batshuayi, Jeremy Doku and Hans Vanaken attend a training session. — AFP

MADRID: Portugal felt the full range of emotions during the Euro 2020 group stage and with Cristiano Ronaldo in the groove again, they can really begin to believe.

After scoring three late goals to beat Hungary, Portugal were shaken by a 4-2 loss to Germany, only for a 2-2 draw against France to restore morale and ensure they snuck out of Group F in third place.

The result is a last-16 clash with Belgium in Seville on Sunday, when one of the tournament favourites will bow out in what is surely the blockbuster tie of the round.

One of the frontrunners for the Golden Boot will fall too, with

Ronaldo and Belgium's Romelu Lukaku both in contention. Ronaldo leads the scoring charts on five goals with Lukaku not far behind on three.

Portugal may have taken only a point from a sweaty contest with France at the Puskas Arena in Budapest but the belief and confidence gained from going toe-to-toe with the world champions could be pivotal for the rest of their tournament.

After chaos against Germany came concentration against the French, a committed, organised and aggressive performance which was a reminder of what carried Portugal to success at Euro 2016 and in the Nations League three years later.

One of the frontrunners for the Golden Boot will fall too, with Ronaldo and Belgium's Romelu Lukaku both in contention. Ronaldo leads the scoring charts on five goals with Lukaku not far behind on three

"We were strong and consistent. The players helped each other, we had possession, we attacked well. We improved a lot from the game against Germany," said Portugal's coach Fernando Santos afterwards.

Santos had responded too, reacting to criticism by reverting to his traditional 4-3-3 system of the past two years and making some bold changes to his starting line-up.

'WE CAN BEAT ANYONE'
William Carvalho and Bruno



BELGIUM
Romelu LUKAKU
Aged 28
FORWARD
1st FIFA world rankings



EURO 2020
LAST 16
SPAIN Seville
Sunday, June 27
1900 GMT
La Cartuja Stadium

COACH
Roberto Martinez (ESP) | Fernando Santos

REFEREE
Felix Brych (GER)
18 HEAD-TO-HEADS
5 Wins | 7 Draws | 6 Wins

1st IN GROUP B
3 BELGIUM | 0 RUSSIA
1 DENMARK | 2 BELGIUM

GROUP PHASE
0 FINLAND | 2 BELGIUM
0 HUNGARY | 3 PORTUGAL
2 PORTUGAL | 2 FRANCE

3rd IN GROUP F
2 PORTUGAL | 4 GERMANY
2 PORTUGAL | 2 FRANCE

Finalist 1980

BEST EURO PERFORMANCE

Winner 2016

Source: UEFA

AFP

beat anyone and I'll keep saying it — no team thinks they will have an easy time against Portugal."

The principal threat against Belgium will be Ronaldo who, at 36, is sparkling again on the biggest stage, delivering goals and breaking records from the outset.

Ronaldo had never previously scored in six meetings with France but his two penalties means he has already achieved his best Euro tally, after scoring twice in 2004, once in 2008 and three times in both 2012 and 2016.

He has pulled five clear of Michel Platini's previous record of nine goals in total at European Championships and became the first ever to score in five different editions of the competition.

Against France, Ronaldo also equalled the world record for international goals held since 2006 by Ali Daei, who has 109 for Iran.

There may be an added personal incentive for Ronaldo to outshine Lukaku, who pipped the Juventus striker to Serie A's player of the season award last season despite scoring five fewer goals.

Lukaku's 24 goals were fundamental to Inter Milan's Scudetto success but the 28-year-old's work rate, pressing and link-up play meant he was more of an overall contributor than Ronaldo.

In contrast, Ronaldo is all about the end-game — the goals, the victories and the trophies, with Portugal hoping to follow his lead.

— AFP

Czechs face Netherlands with history on their side

PRAGUE: The Czech Republic will enter Sunday's last-16 game against the Netherlands at Euro 2020 as the odds-on favourites, at least when it comes to the history of their head-to-head encounters.

Since the Czech Republic emerged as an independent state in 1993, its national team has won five games and lost three against the Dutch, on top of three draws.

Before that, Czechoslovakia memorably beat the Netherlands on the way to their only European Championship title in Belgrade in 1976, having edged Johan Cruyff and company 3-1 after extra time in the semifinal.

Czechoslovakia were not there to stop the Dutch when they won the 1988 title in West Germany.

But Czech fans cherish above all the memory of an epic battle at Euro 2004 in Portugal, won by the Czechs who came back from 2-0 down to win 3-2.

"People still remember that one best," says Vladimir Smicer, the former Lens and Liverpool winger, who scored the decider after a selfless pass from Karel Poborsky.

Aside from those two, the star-studded Czech team



Czech Republic's players take part in a training session in Prague. — AFP

comprised Petr Cech, Pavel Nedved, Tomas Rosicky, Jan Koller, Milan Baros and Tomas Galasek, who spent a decade playing in the Netherlands.

Galasek is now an assistant to Czech coach Jaroslav Silhavy, who was in turn an assistant to coach Karel Bruckner in Portugal.

"The team was really fantastic. We all played in top clubs. It was the most total football we ever played," said Smicer, who now works as a Euro studio pundit for Czech Television.

Since the Czech Republic emerged as an independent state in 1993, its national team has won five games and lost three against the Dutch, on top of three draws

'A PRETTY CRAZY GAME'
"Everyone at home went crazy after the comeback. People started to believe we could win the whole Euro," Smicer added.

Both teams went on to reach the last four at the 2004 tournament, with the trophy



NETHERLANDS
Memphis DEPAY
Aged 27
FORWARD
16th FIFA world rankings



EURO 2020
LAST 16
HUNGARY Budapest
Sunday, June 27
1600 GMT
Ferenc Puskas Stadium

COACH
Frank de Boer | Jaroslav Silhavy

REFEREE
Sergei Karasev (RUS)
11 HEAD-TO-HEADS
3 Wins | 3 Draws | 5 Wins

1st IN GROUP A
3 NETHERLANDS | 0 UKRAINE
0 NETHERLANDS | 0 AUSTRIA
0 N. MACEDONIA | 2 NETHERLANDS

GROUP PHASE
0 SCOTLAND | 2 CZECH REP.
1 CROATIA | 3 CZECH REP.
1 CZECH REP. | 1 ENGLAND

3rd IN GROUP D
1 CROATIA | 3 CZECH REP.
1 CZECH REP. | 1 ENGLAND

Winner 1988

BEST EURO PERFORMANCE

Finalist (1996) Winner (1976) Czechoslovakia

Source: UEFA

AFP

The latest sweet memories are as recent as the Euro 2016 qualifying campaign.

The Czech Republic beat the Netherlands twice, 2-1 at home and 3-2 in Amsterdam, the latter when Robin van Persie scored a bizarre own goal to help the 10-man Czechs advance to the finals while the Dutch stayed at home.

In that game, the first goal was scored by Pavel Kaderabek, who may appear in the Czech line-up on Sunday as a replacement for Jan Boril, ruled out by suspension.

"Every player remembers his national team goals, so I can still recall that game," said the Hoffenheim defender.

"It was a pretty crazy game. But if people ask me to pick one special game against the Netherlands, I won't say 2004 but 2015," Kaderabek added.

'Meeting Memphis'

Boril's place may also be taken by Brescia defender Ales Mateju, who spent half a season at PSV Eindhoven as a youth player in 2014.

"I remember meeting Memphis Depay on the pitch, but it's been a really long time," Mateju said, refusing to view the history as an advantage.

"I guess we have a better head-to-head record, but time has passed and we are now facing a really strong team. They won the group so easily."

Assistant coach Jiri Chytrý said the Czechs would go into the game as the underdogs, as so often in the past against the Dutch.

"We consider the Netherlands one of the top teams, one of the favourites of the tournament," he said.

"But if we give our best, we are able to face anyone."

— AFP

BOTTAS PENALISED FOR PITLANE SPIN, VERSTAPPEN FASTEST

SPIELBERG, Austria: Formula One championship leader Max Verstappen was fastest in Styrian Grand Prix practice at Red Bull's home Austrian track on Friday while Mercedes' Valtteri Bottas collected a three place grid drop for spinning in the pitlane.

Red Bull's 23-year-old Dutchman led both sessions, setting a best lap of one minute 05.910 seconds in the morning and then 1:05.412 in the afternoon on the soft tyres.

McLaren's Daniel Ricciardo was second fastest, on a cloudy but mostly dry afternoon at Spielberg's scenic Red Bull Ring, and Alpine's Esteban Ocon third.

Mercedes' seven times world champion Lewis Hamilton, 12 points behind Verstappen after seven races in a tough title battle, ended up fourth on the timesheets and said it was "a work in progress."

"Generally over the day the car felt relatively solid. We're losing on the straight a considerable amount (of time) so we've got to keep working to try to rectify that," added the 36-year-old.

"I think the Red Bulls definitely will be really hard to beat, I think they've just got the edge — maybe more. We don't know what they're going to do when they turn that engine up."

The Briton went faster than Verstappen in the second stint but his lap time was wiped for exceeding the track limits at the last corner when he went wide.

"Lewis was faster but his lap time got deleted so it looks a bit different than what is shown at the moment," said Verstappen, a two times winner in Austria.

"But overall it has been quite good for us. Of course a few things to look into but I'm quite happy where the car is at the moment."

Bottas, fourth and 12th, was



Generally over the day the car felt relatively solid. We're losing on the straight a considerable amount (of time) so we've got to keep working to try to rectify that

LEWIS HAMILTON
Mercedes driver

summoned to stewards after losing rear grip and skidding sideways as he left the Mercedes pits, coming to a halt blocking the pit lane but without hitting anybody.

"That's absolutely ridiculous,"

said McLaren in a radio message to race director Michael Masi. "He could have taken our guys out there."

Bottas, who said he had tried "something different" in getting out of the box, was also given two penalty points for potentially dangerous driving.

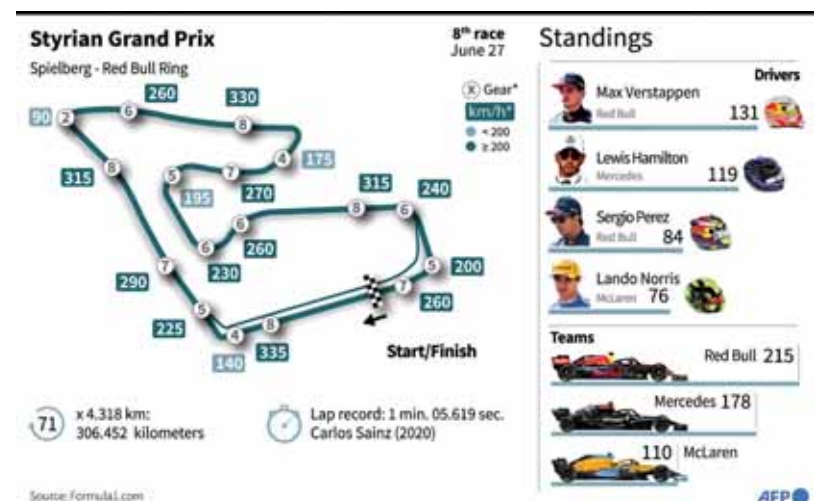
Alpine's Fernando Alonso was fifth in the afternoon, with Aston Martin's Sebastian Vettel sixth and McLaren's Lando Norris seventh.

Frenchman Pierre Gasly had been second for AlphaTauri in the first session but sat out the afternoon due to power unit problems.

Sunday's race will be the first of two at Spielberg's scenic Red Bull Ring, with fans in attendance after racing behind closed doors last year.



Mercedes' driver Valtteri Bottas during the third practice session at the Red Bull Ring race track in Spielberg, Austria. — AFP



Red Bull are chasing their fourth successive victory after winning in Monaco, Azerbaijan and France. The team last won four in a row in 2013, before the V6 turbo hybrid era ushered in seven years of Mercedes domination from 2014.

Ferrari's Carlos Sainz was one of several spinners in the morning. Red Bull's Sergio Perez, the winner in Baku, ended up ninth after a morning spin but can be expected to be fighting for the podium on Sunday. — Reuters

St Petersburg to host Russian GP from 2023



MOSCOW: The Russian Grand Prix will move from Sochi's Olympic Park to a new purpose-built circuit outside St Petersburg from 2023, Formula One announced on Saturday.

The race, first held in 2014 after the Black Sea resort hosted the Winter Olympics, will switch to the Igora Drive circuit located 54km from the Baltic Sea port city of St Petersburg.

"We are looking forward to racing in a hugely exciting location that includes 10 professional tracks for racing and testing over approximately 100 hectares," Formula One said in a statement.

Igora Drive is some 150km from the Finnish border, and should be more accessible than Sochi for Russian and international fans alike. Finland has produced three F1 champions but never hosted a championship race.

The new circuit was designed by German architect Hermann Tilke and received a Grade One licence in 2020.

The circuit would have hosted

a round of the German Touring Car championship (DTM), as well as the all-female W Series, last year but those races were cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"I am impressed by St Petersburg and believe that the Russian Grand Prix at Igora Drive will be an incredible event," said Formula One chief executive Stefano Domenicali.

This year's race in Sochi, which had a contract until 2025, is scheduled for September 26.

Champions Mercedes have won all seven Russian Grands Prix to date, with seven times world champion Lewis Hamilton triumphant four times.

St Petersburg is the birthplace of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has regularly attended the race in Sochi to hand out the winner's trophy.

Formula One, whose commercial rights are owned by US-based Liberty Media, has been open about wanting to host more races in or near 'destination cities'. — Reuters

Federer ready to get on a roll at Wimbledon

LONDON: Roger Federer may be closing in on his 40th birthday, but he said he still believes he can challenge for a ninth Wimbledon title if he gets on a roll when the grasscourt Slam starts next week.

The All England Club is as familiar to Federer as his own backyard, but he has played only a handful of tournaments in the past 18 months because of knee surgery.

His loss to Canadian youngster Felix Auger-Aliassime at Halle last week, a venue where he has won 10 titles, raised valid questions about his form.

Federer expressed his own disappointment with that match and his attitude on court, but he said on Saturday that there will be no repeat of that at Wimbledon.

“There’s ways to lose and a standard I set for myself how I go about things,” Federer told reporters in a pre-tournament media conference conducted via Zoom — one of the many changes as the tournament returns following last year’s cancellation because of the coronavirus pandemic.

“The good thing now looking back is I know it will not happen here because I’m ready, I’m excited, I’m pumped up. I know I can do so much better.”

“I don’t know what it was, to be honest,” Federer added of his Halle setback. “But I think I’ve got to take the positives out of these last few weeks, that I’m actually here at Wimbledon right now and I have a chance.

“I know if I get rolling, I get into the second week, which is the goal here right now, that I get stronger and stronger as every match goes by, I believe it’s very much possible.”

Despite being the king of Wimbledon, Federer has found himself in the same strict bubble as every other player in the draw this year, rather than in his usual plush rented house with his family a stroll away from the grounds.

Like all the players he will be staying in the Park Plaza hotel in central London and will have to abide by the strict Covid-19 protocols which limit their entourage to three people, including coaches and physios.

“It’s the bubble. It doesn’t matter what the (hotel) room size is, whatever, it’s just living the bubble life is different,” the 20-time Grand Slam champion said.

“Took me some getting used to the first day or two, understanding where we’re allowed to go, what we’re allowed to do. Same thing with the on-site protocols. How



Switzerland’s Roger Federer and Britain’s Andy Murray during a practice session. — Reuters

does it work? By now I’ve gotten used to it. I’m embracing it. I’m OK with it.

“It does feel totally different than the last 20 years here since I’ve been coming here. We would arrive with the family, kids would be running everywhere. We organised the grocery shopping, get the house set up and all that stuff.

“But look, I still feel a big privilege that I’m actually able to play Wimbledon. I’m not going to be complaining. Wimbledon tries to put on the best bubble possible.”

Federer’s last match at Wimbledon was a heart-breaking defeat by Novak Djokovic in an epic final in 2019.

The sixth seed will open his record-extending 22nd Wimbledon campaign against Frenchman Adrian Mannarino on Tuesday. — Reuters



Switzerland’s Roger Federer during a press conference. — Reuters

“The good thing now looking back is I know it will not happen here because I’m ready, I’m excited, I’m pumped up. I know I can do so much better

ROGER FEDERER

Former Wimbledon champion

‘India set to shift World T20 to UAE due to pandemic’

MUMBAI: This year’s Twenty20 World Cup is set to be shifted to the United Arab Emirates due to the Covid-19 situation in India, Indian cricket board sources said on Saturday.

The pandemic swept the world’s second-most populous nation last year, resulting in a lengthy shutdown.

Infections have rocketed again in another wave this year as the country scrambles to curb a more transmissible variant of the virus, hitting plans to ease lockdown measures.

India’s official total for infections has risen to more than 30.18 million, with 394,493 deaths.

The Board of Control for

Cricket in India (BCCI), the local organisers for the 16-team tournament, was forced to suspend the Indian Premier League in May as cases surged in the country.

The remaining matches of the world’s richest T20 league were moved to the UAE, where it was also held last year, and will be completed ahead of the World Cup, which is scheduled to start from mid-October.

“Even if we go ahead and host the World Cup in the safest possible manner, some countries might ban travel to India in view of the third wave (of coronavirus infections). That makes the whole thing untenable,” a board source, who did not want to be identified,



said. “A decision will be taken in the next couple of days and will be conveyed to the International Cricket Council.”

Sourav Ganguly, the BCCI chief and former India captain, said in a text message that a final decision had yet to be made. The ICC did not want to comment.

UAE, which has international standard cricket grounds in Dubai, Sharjah and Abu Dhabi, has been the preferred venue for both India and Pakistan to stage the final leg of their domestic T20 leagues this year.

Abu Dhabi hosted the remaining 20 matches of the Pakistan Super League, including Thursday’s final, after the Pakistan Cricket Board

was forced to suspend the league in March.

World governing body ICC had set a June 28 deadline for the BCCI to take a decision on hosting the tournament. The Indian board will retain hosting rights for the event regardless of where the tournament is played.

Cricket website ESPNcricinfo.com reported that the World Cup will kick off from October 17 in UAE.

The first round of the T20 World Cup is expected to be played in the UAE and Oman and will be contested between eight lower-ranked teams, four of whom will join the top eight sides for the Super 12 stage. — Reuters



**For the first time in the Sultanate,
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Firms invited to bid for Oman’s maiden satellite project

SPACE MISSION: OmanSat-1 is targeted for launch in 2024

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Firming up its ambitious plans to procure and launch Oman's maiden satellite, wholly government-owned Space Communications Technology LLC (SCT) has invited international companies to compete for its contract to support the delivery of its OmanSat-1 satellite programme.

Muscat-based SCT, part of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — the Sultanate’s integrated sovereign wealth fund — has been tasked with spearheading the development of the country’s National Satellite Programme centring on the construction of national satellite communications infrastructure to meet the requirements of public and private sector telecommunications.

SCT says its primary goal is to oversee the procurement of a “High Throughput Satellite (HTS) that meets all the requirements of the Sultanate with high technical features through a coverage of the Sultanate’s entire territory, its economic waters, and associated external markets, with high-speed/throughput data”.

A tender floated by the company late last week invites suitably qualified international companies to submit technical and commercial proposals covering all of the hardware, software, technical expertise, training support and other wherewithal necessary to procure, launch, operate and maintain the country’s maiden satellite programme. The contract covers both



the space-based and ground-control aspects of the programme.

Structured into three segments, the first focuses on the space component, and includes the procurement of the satellite itself, launch services, orbit raising support, in-orbit testing, provision of satellite simulators, insurance support and technical training services.

A sizable part of the contract deals with hardware and software capabilities to be provided in support of ground control services. It includes the installation of primary and back-up satellite control centres, payload control, capacity management, RF and other antennas, and training support.

Envisaged in the third segment is the provision of in-country services

that includes installation and commissioning of ground control infrastructure, and training and support services.

SCT has specified that interested bidders must have proven experience in the delivery of at least three Ka band high-throughput satellites, as well as expertise in ‘flexible satellite technologies’ in order to ensure the in-orbit installation of the OmanSat-1 satellite.

Interested bidders have until September 21, 2021 to submit firm technical and commercial offers in support of their bids.

Separately, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology is preparing to appoint an

Muscat-based SCT, part of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — the Sultanate’s integrated sovereign wealth fund — has been tasked with spearheading the development of the country’s National Satellite Programme centring on the construction of national satellite communications infrastructure to meet the requirements of public and private sector telecommunications

international consultant to craft a National Space Policy for the Omani government.

The proposed policy will enable the government to, among other things, shape the strategic focus and contours of a future industry around space. In addition to attracting investment into the sector, it will also help in the development of national technical and industrial capabilities in various areas across the industry. Additionally, it will support international cooperation in the field of space.

A robust national satellite programme, the government says, is necessary to help strengthen, among other things, telecommunications, earth observations, environmental monitoring and protection, border monitoring and national security and meteorological services. OmanSat-1 is targeted for launch in 2024.

Over 24,500 licence approvals granted electronically

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 26

As many as 24,664 licences were issued electronically in response to applications submitted via the Invest Easy portal and Sanad network since the launch of the automatic approvals service on April 4, 2021 through to June 22, 2021, according to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP).

The top 10 countries utilising the new automatic service include India, Iran, Pakistan, Yemen, Syria, Bangladesh, UAE, Egypt and Iraq, besides the Sultanate.

The facility has attracted praise from investors and business persons who have welcomed the ease with which licences are automatically approved speedily and electronically — boding well for an appealing investment environment in the Sultanate.

Said bin Nasser al Maini said: “The automatic licence approval service provided by the Invest Easy portal saves both time and



effort, making it one of the easiest government services launched by the ministry in cooperation with other government entities concerned. Applicants can obtain licence approvals in less than 24 hours — a move that will encourage local and foreign investors to invest in the Sultanate.”

Sulaiman bin Nasser al Siyabi said the service serves as a one-stop shop for obtaining all-in-one licences covering all permits and approvals required to set up businesses and operations in the Sultanate. He welcomed investments made in the digitalisation of government services.

Azhar bin Salem al Saadi said the launch of an efficient electronic

system would help enhance Oman’s image as an attractive destination for investment and commercial.

Amer bin Sulaiman al Saadi added that investors can now obtain approvals for more than 1,500 types of economic activities covering about 88 per cent of the total, encompassing agriculture, animal production, fishing, manufacturing industries, repair and installation of machinery, equipment, devices, electrical supplies, water, construction and building, in addition to the sectors of maintenance and repair of vehicles and wholesale retail, commercial activities, transportation and warehousing activities.



THE COMMERCIAL BANK OF QATAR OFFERS TO BUY 15.2% OF NATIONAL BANK OF OMAN

The Commercial Bank P.S.Q.C. (“CB”) is extending an offer to acquire an additional 15.2 percent. of the issued share capital (the “Issued Capital”) of National Bank of Oman SAOG (“NBO”) pursuant to the takeover and acquisition regulation (E/2/2019), to shareholders who are registered as of the Offer Closing Date set out below (the “NBO Shareholders”).

Key Dates:

Record Date: 9th June 2021
Offer Opening Date: 10th June 2021
Offer Closing Date: 11th July 2021

Offer Price:

A cash only offer of OMR 0.200 per NBO Share, which represents a (1) 36% premium versus the Volume Weighted Average Price (“VWAP”) since 1 January 2021; (2) 28% premium versus the last three months’ VWAP; and (3) 18% premium versus the closing price of 2nd June 2021

Important:

This offer by CB is open to all NBO Shareholders as of the Offer Closing Date and is still open as at the date of this announcement. CB intends to acquire an additional 15.2 percent. of the Issued Capital (being 247,146,240 NBO shares), which would increase CB’s shareholding in NBO to 50.1 percent. of the Issued Capital. NBO Shareholders are under no obligation to accept the offer. However, if an NBO Shareholder wishes to accept the offer, such NBO Shareholder must indicate her/his/its intention by duly filing and signing the acceptance form. In the event that NBO Shareholders who hold in aggregate less than 15.2 per cent. of the Issued Capital accept the offer, CB may choose to either withdraw the offer or acquire the relevant number of NBO shares from the accepting NBO Shareholders.

Offer Manager:

Ubhar Capital SAOC

For any queries related to the offer, kindly contact following in Ubhar Capital SAOC:

Talal Al Balushi Vice President - Brokerage Tel: +968 24 949 051 / 99267286 Email: talal@u-capital.net	Hunaina Banatwala Asst Vice President – Brokerage Tel: +968 24 949 053 / 99378351 Email: hunaina@u-capital.net
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The offer document and acceptance forms are available on Muscat Stock Exchange (www.msx.om) & Ubhar Capital SAOC website (www.u-capital.net)

All-new Creta sets benchmark for compact crossovers



MUSCAT: The all new Creta 2021 is an impressive sub-compact SUV crafted with a beautiful edgy design and updated interior that sets it apart from others. It offers all that a customer would look for in an SUV and more — spacious interior, comfort, a long list of remarkable features and powerful performance.

Under the hood, it has a 1.5-litre 4-cylinder unit and comes in Comfort and Premier Variants. The spacious five-seater has 115/6300 power (ps/rpm) and 14.7/4500 torque (kg.m/rpm) with CVT transmission providing better fuel economy that can take on any terrain with ease.

Modern and sporty in design, it has an aero-sculpted front end with cascading grille that lends it a dynamic look. The integrated front skid plate boosts a sporty, masculine appeal.

The quality of the exterior is reflected inside as well with an increase in size providing more space, comfort and convenience. The plush interior reiterates

comfort in all ways possible — look and feel as well as utility. Equipped with state-of-the-art technology, it meets the requirements and expectations of working professionals, young drivers and families. The TFT LCD cluster and optional fully digital 7-inch supervision cluster delivers information in detail with speed and precision.

“Carefully crafted inside out, the all-new Creta offers a lot of versatility with a wide range of improved features for a comfortable and enjoyable drive. We anticipate considerable local interest in this new offering, given its reputation as a game-changer in the sub-compact SUV segment,” said Sudhir M, CEO, OTE Group, exclusive distributors of Hyundai cars in the Sultanate of Oman.

Available in four eye catching colours — Titan Grey, Typhoon Silver, Polar White and Red Mulberry — Creta is on display at OTE’s extensive network of 12 Hyundai showrooms across the Sultanate.

The impressive growth of Turkey

Readers that follow my weekly column, might have noticed that over the past month I have temporarily moved from talking about SME to a more global scale of economy and finance.

The reason for this shift is that what is happening in the world is quite extraordinary. The Western world is opening up after Covid-19, while Asia seems to close down once again.

Moreover, from the economy perspective, incentives that were generously distributed during the hardest part of the pandemic lockdown, are running dry and from July most markets would run free from cash injections.

In the last column I have talked about the long and short terms repercussions of inflation on our day to day life. Today I would like to talk about a specific case, that is representing a middle ground between the West and the East: Turkey.

Treasury and Finance Minister Lutfi Elvan recently announced that the country is expected to have grown around 20 per cent in the second quarter of 2021. This number is not only spectacularly high, but also unexpected as the previous forecast placed growth at 5.8 per cent.

“We expect double-digit



STEFANO VIRGILLI
stefano@virgilli.com

DESPITE THE 10 PER CENT CONTRACTION OF Q2, 2020, TURKEY WAS ONE OF THE FEW COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD THAT MANAGED TO SHOW AN OVERALL GROWTH LAST YEAR, 1.8 PER CENT, MAINLY DUE TO A STATE-LENDER-LED CREDIT BOOM MID-YEAR.

growth in the second quarter of the year due to a strong base effect,” he said.

“It is probable that we see a growth rate for the full year higher than the medium-term economic programme due to investments, industrial production and foreign demand,” the minister noted.

The reasons behind such a stunning performance are many and diverse. The first data to point out is that during the same period last year, Turkey’s economy contracted 10 per cent, therefore a certain degree of organic bounce-back was expected. But this accounts for only part of the growth shown in 2021.

In fact, despite the 10 per cent contraction of Q2, 2020, Turkey was one of the few countries in the world that managed to show an overall growth last year, 1.8 per cent, mainly due to a state-lender-led credit boom mid-year.

2021 started well for Turkey with a 7 per cent growth in the first quarter.

The Government credits such an impressive performance to the ability of tackling the pandemic. The country is currently delivery and inoculating 1 million vaccination doses every day, while the number of daily positive tests fell to around 5,000 from 60,000 at the peak.

Elvan is confident that such achievement in controlling the pandemic would manifest in further growth through tourism, which remains a key sector for Turkey.

However, not all that glitters is gold. The country must ensure a reduction in inflation, which last year plagued the pockets of consumers. Over the past 4 years, the inflation was stable in the double digits and the exchange rate had high volatility.

“We have to get rid of high inflation,” Elvan noted.

“Disciplined and predictable policies will bring success in fighting inflation. This country needs low inflation and exchange rate stability. Without price stability, we cannot talk about sustainable growth and prosperity growth.”

The unexpected 17 per cent inflation reported in May was seen as a sign of relief, marking a low point compared to the recent highest one.

This could have been caused by the full lockdown early this year, so now Turkey faces the challenge of keeping prices and currency within control to avoid wasting the economic growth achieved. The aim is to bring it down to 5 per cent by 2023.

[The columnist is a member of the International Press Association]

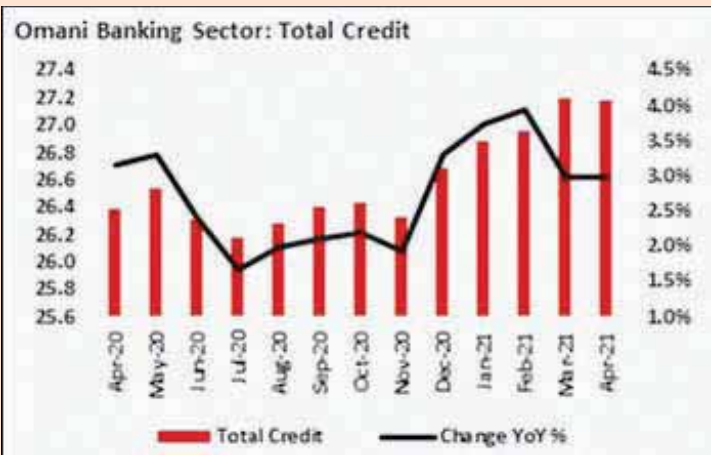
MSX WEEKLY REVIEW

MSX ends the week lower by 0.76 per cent

MSX 30 Index ended the week lower by 0.76 per cent. Industrial sector was the only sector to end green for the week gaining 1.33 per cent. Financial sector and Service sector closed lower by 0.91 per cent and 0.24 per cent respectively. MSX Shariah Index increased by 1.09 per cent. Net foreign inflows has increased for the second week recording at RO 22.26 million, totalling an inflow of RO 30.07 million for two weeks.

Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has announced an incentive to stimulate the business and investment environment, which includes the long-term residency for foreign investors. The residency will be granted to investors wishing to invest in the Sultanate, with a period of 5 or 10 years, subject to extension, with adherence to the procedures and regulations stipulated for this policy. The activation of the Investor Residence programme will start in September.

An official Omani delegation currently visiting Saudi Arabia rolled out around 150 investment opportunities worth an estimated RO 1.5 billion now available in the Sultanate in real estate development, industry, tourism, fisheries, petrochemical and renewable energy. Under-Secretary for



Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has announced an incentive to stimulate the business and investment environment, which includes the long-term residency for foreign investors

Investment Promotion at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, stressed the importance of integrated efforts between the Saudi Vision 2030 and Oman’s Vision 2040, pointing out to the many intersections between them including the economic diversification and the Sultanate’s efforts to support the economy by forming strong corporations and economic entities.

Conventional credit growth dropped to +1.5 per cent YoY from +2.2 per cent YoY in Dec’20. Total conventional

credit reached RO 22.65 billion (-RO 28 million on MoM basis or -0.1 per cent MoM). Conventional credit contracted on MoM basis largely on account of -0.2 per cent MoM, or RO 35.5 million worth of decline in Private Sector credit. Government and Public Enterprises credit registered growth of +2.1 per cent MoM and +0.8 per cent MoM, while credit to non-residents dropped by 14.6 per cent MoM. Conventional deposits grew by +2.3 per cent YoY as compared to +0.8 per cent in Mar’21.

Total conventional deposits stood at RO 20.88 billion (+RO 128 million on MoM basis or +0.6 per cent MoM). Conventional deposits increased on MoM basis on account of Public Enterprises and Non-Resident deposits while government deposits dropped marginally MoM basis.

The share of Government & Public Enterprises deposits, which had dropped to the lowest value in our records

at 26.6 per cent in Dec’20, now stand at 27.1 per cent in Apr’21 but below 27.8 per cent recorded in February 2021. Loan-to-deposit (LTD) ratio marginally dropped and stood at 108.5 per cent.

Islamic banking financing (Banks & Islamic Windows) reached RO 4.52 billion (+0.3 per cent MoM and +12.2 per cent YoY). Islamic deposits reached RO 4.04 billion (+1.4 per cent MoM and +14.7 per cent YoY). Islamic financing stands at 16.7 per cent of total Omani banking credit, and Islamic deposits form 16.2 per cent of total bank deposits. Islamic financing-to-deposit ratio dropped to 111.9 per cent as of April 2021 compared to 114.7 per cent in Dec’20 and 113 per cent in Mar’21.

The inflation rate in the Sultanate, measured by movement in the average Consumer Price Index (CPI), turned positive after remaining negative for a while and rose by 1.65 per cent in May 2021 compared to the same month of 2020, according to the latest data released by the (NCSI) on consumer prices’ index. According to the report, the inflation rate in May increased by 0.24 per cent compared to April 2021. However, Consumer prices of food and non-alcoholic beverages group remained in negative territory at 0.11 per cent in May compared to the same month last year.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

Infiniti Express Service designed to deliver expert service in 60 minutes

MUSCAT: Guaranteeing quick, convenient, and reliable service, Infiniti Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles, offers Infiniti Express Service assuring high quality service at breath-taking speed.

Designed to deliver the expert service while demonstrating the art of efficiency, Infiniti Express Service is completed in one hour or less. Every Infiniti Express Service includes a complimentary multi-point inspection performed by factory-trained technicians and car wash.

Finished within 60 minutes, Infiniti Express Service is available for cars which are due for their Periodic Maintenance Service every 10,000 kms (except the major service). The one-hour time



calculation is from the time the customer hands over the key for service to the time the customer gets back the key after service.

A senior spokesperson at Infiniti Oman said, “Infiniti Express Service is intended to deliver expert service, efficiently and quickly. Highly trained two-men team deliver the utmost standards of Periodic Maintenance Service (except major services) in record time.”

Own fuel-efficient Nissan Altima on low EMI



MUSCAT: Nissan Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA), is offering a low EMI on Nissan Altima. The model is known for its outstanding drive, enhanced handling, fuel efficiency and thoughtful technology solutions. Customers can now avail an exceptionally low EMI rate of RO 168 on Nissan Altima. EMIs are calculated based on 2.99 per cent rate of Interest, 20 per cent down payment, six-year loan tenure. Subject to credit approvals.

A senior official of Nissan Oman said, “We are pleased to offer Nissan Altima on a low EMI. Its state-of-the-art engineering offers those who drive it an effortless power while furthering remarkable fuel economy.

Nissan Altima is also cherished by owners in Oman for its classy design, fuel economy, driving performance, technology, and comfortability. Its good looks, striking exterior, colour range, spaciousness, and fashionable interior has brought the car a lifetime of fans. Its powerful high-performance engine and a range of other options add to its appeal.”



Vision 2040: Spurring a business paradigm shift

Oman's development story is an exciting one. Oman has achieved significant development leaps at various levels, which are evident from different local and international indicators. However, there are a number of great challenges facing its development. We need to enhance business owner understanding of the wide-ranging impact of the pandemic and help them design suitable recovery policies and actions to build resilient and more inclusive and sustainable growth.

Oman is at a critical stage in terms of its development, and Oman Vision 2040 provides an opportunity for change that calls for a paradigm shift in all aspects of our country's development including on the level of individual and society, government and business.

The rapid developments in the business environment and various other fields pose great challenges to governments and companies on both the local and global levels, while simultaneously providing them with great opportunities. In order to keep pace with these agile developments and seize opportunities, we must highlight the importance of changing the current frameworks and methods of work for companies in accordance with the best global practices, new data and Oman Vision 2040.

The private sector (business) in Oman is still at the receiving end. Relying heavily on outdated business strategies, high oil prices, government contracts, material imports and low-cost labour will no longer be sustainable or profitable.

In fact, local business must build on their strengths and previous accomplishments, moving their strategy towards international investment, local production, exported goods and services. It is the time to see big business houses acting as anchors for the new path of development.



With Vision 2040, businesses step up to play a leading role in the Renewed Renaissance, and contribute to the company's growth and Oman's sustainable future through the successful implementation of this vision

**DR YOUSUF HAMED
AL BALUSHI**

This is demonstrated by Korea's experience with LG, Samsung and Hyundai.

For business, Vision 2040 provides an incentive for change that calls for a paradigm shift in all aspects of doing business. With Vision 2040, businesses step up to play a leading role in the Renewed Renaissance, and contribute to the company's growth and Oman's sustainable future through the successful implementation of this vision.

The vision calls for a change in key elements and factors that determine business future growth in Oman including the following: Capital, which can be obtained from FDI and local private sources; human capital, labour and talent; productivity and efficiency; and best utilisation of good infrastructure.

It is clear that Oman invests wisely in upgrading its infrastructures such as roads,



ports, airports, networks and other infrastructures needed for development. It is now an issue of effectively utilising all these investments for the purpose of sustainable development.

To build on the degree of readiness in infrastructure and availability of natural and human resources, it is essential for business in Oman to move towards a more integrated and international cooperation to attract sizable FDI and enhance trade in order to enable the country to move towards a new path of development based on investment, production and exports. A lot of our resources are not fully utilised and many segments can flourish towards a better performance.

The non-oil sectors have significant room for improvement too: Business needs to support government to scaling a lot of existing programmes and

initiatives such as local content, SMEs funding and others.

Moreover, fixing Oman's economic cycle is among top priorities in the vision that can be achieved through intensifying the use of different financial, monetary, social, trade and other forms of policies as different engines to work towards desired goals, state business and the society relationship.

Also, Oman's business cycle requires attention: To fix the business cycle, businesses need to focus on enhancing, supporting, and strengthening production of goods and services, export-oriented policies and FDI, while targeting increasing backward and forwards linkages within the economy. Moreover, business must also focus on improving the labour market which is heavily reliant on low-skilled labour.

Among the alternatives proposed will be improvements

with regards to attracting global talent and providing them with an incentive to work, stay and invest in Oman.

Human resources are key to the Vision's success and it is essential to mobilising and energising Omani the individual and business to be inspired and entrepreneurial in order to unlock their true potential. The involvement of youth in business is essential and policies should be tweaked to ensure that they are integrated and taken into account in the decision-making process, and that all policies look to diversify and ensure job creation for local youth.

One of the key directions of Oman Vision 2040 looks at a development paradigm shift based on integration and international cooperation and attracting more investment.

Oman has abundant natural resources, as well as ambitious strategies to develop several sectors including: Tourism, fisheries, logistics, mining, manufacturing and technology. However, the development of these sectors will not be possible without effective local and foreign investment. Due to high barriers of entry to non-resource sectors, such as high costs due to the lack of development as well as a lack of experience in such industries, the

domestic private sector is unable to pursue opportunities in the market alone.

Moving forward and building on the degree of preparedness in infrastructure and the availability of natural and mining resources, it is essential for Oman to support local business and attract sizable FDI to enable the country to move in a new path of development based on investment, production and exports that will help the country in dealing with its two great challenges — Economic Diversification and Job Creation — in the post-pandemic era.

Today, Oman is at an important stage of development as globalisation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution revolutionises the globe and integrates its economies. Therefore, Oman Vision 2040 sets ambitious strategic targets that will require a high degree of determination by the local business and government to leap forward the development process.

We are confident that by capitalising on Oman's competitive advantages — including its strategic location, rich heritage, unique natural beauty, cheap energy resources and the abundance of various raw material particularly in the mining sector — the Sultanate has all that it takes to achieve these targets. Oman Vision 2040 provides a catalyst for change that calls for a dramatic and paradigm shift in all aspects of development. We totally envision that individual, society and business will need to leave their comfort zones and be uncomfortable for a short to medium term, as it will be a period of adjustment and action-taking.

This is essential for long-term prosperity and sustainability. Business should align its priorities and goals with Vision 2040 priorities and goals through understanding the vision pillar aspiration.

[Dr Yousuf Hamed al Balushi is the Founder of Smart Investment Gateway; www.omaninvestgateway.com]

Alshawamikh Oil Services inks strategic pact with Highwood Global

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 26

To maintain the high-level of service qualities for different operating companies in the oil concession areas, Alshawamikh Oil Services, one of the Super Local Community Contractor companies (SLCC), recently signed a strategic cooperation agreement with Highwood Global, a technological Canadian leader company in the design and metal fabrication industry.

The agreement will enable Alshawamikh Oil Services to include high quality equipment and modern technologies that will serve their clients and meet their high-level standards and expectations for upcoming projects in different concession areas.

The partnership will also upscale the level of quality, speed and automation of services using the latest technologies in the energy sector meeting



international standards keeping pace with the mission, vision and core values of Alshawamikh Oil Services.

Dr Aflah bin Saeed al Hadhrami, CEO of Alshawamikh Oil Services, said, "The strategic partnership with Highwood Global will develop the local expertise and enhance the

performance of Alshawamikh in the energy sector. By using the latest technology, we will be able to undergo projects that enhance the local added value in the energy sector and enable local companies to enhance their role in this vital sector.

Alshawamikh Oil Services is one of the Super Local Community

Contractor companies (SLCC)—a private national shareholding company with 100 per cent Omani ownership.

It was established in 2011 through a Royal Decree in order to create investment opportunities for citizens residing in the oil concession areas in the wilayats of Bahla and Adam.

Win RO 200 everyday with Oman Avenues Mall's Eid Bonanza 'shop and win'

MUSCAT: Oman Avenues Mall, the Sultanate's iconic destination for shopping, dining and luxury experience has announced a fully integrated QR code based digital 'Eid Bonanza' with an everyday spend and win RO 200 offer from June 12 to July 11.

To participate in the draw, visitors must spend RO 5 from the participating outlets at Oman Avenues Mall. For enabling a seamless registration process, QR codes have been placed at strategic locations of the mall. The shoppers on their visit to the mall, after shopping, need to scan the QR code using QR code scanners on their smartphones and register themselves by filling in the required details and uploading their shopping receipts on <https://www.omanavenuesmall.om/eidbonanza> to become eligible for the draw that will be held to choose the winner for each day.

Two lucky winners will be entitled to an RO 100 each worth Mall cash voucher during the promotion period. Winners of



the draw will be announced on a weekly basis on the mall's social media platforms.

Suad al Wahibi, Deputy Mall General Manager, Oman Avenues Mall said, "It is all about shopping and winning at Oman Avenues Mall. With Eid al Adha fast approaching, we are pleased to announce this special Eid Bonanza. It gives customers a chance to shop and win before Eid. This is an ideal time to reward our valuable customers and we are happy to create meaningful experience around a festival that is close to people's heart. We are happy to make customer rewards and incentives a key part of our strategy."

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcement of Capital Reduction

IN accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company NAFAS International (SPC), which is registered with the Commercial Registration No 1225678, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from RO 150,000.000 to 50,000.000. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

Oman Chemical Industries Co. SAOG (Under Liquidation)

SALE OF COMPANY ASSETS

BDO LLC, the Official Liquidators, hereby makes the final announcement for the sale of the fixed assets (comprising of leased building, plant and machinery and furniture and fixtures) of Oman Chemical Industries Co. SAOG (Under Liquidation) on "as is where is" basis along with the usufruct rights of the land owned by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates admeasuring 34,367 sq. mtrs located at Plot no. 119 and 120, Block No. Phase-1A, Sohar Industrial Area. All interested parties should contact Mr. Mudather Al Hooti either on his direct office no. 24955121 or GSM no. 92990093 for further details within 30 days of this notification. Arrangements will be made for the interested parties to visit the premises at Sohar for inspection of the fixed assets, after which the parties would be required to submit their offer in a sealed envelope either to the Liquidator's office located in Suites 601 & 602, Pent House, Beach One Building, Way No. 2601, Shatti Al Qurum or PO Box 1176, Ruwi, PC 112, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman. The last date for receiving offers is 26 July 2021.

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features

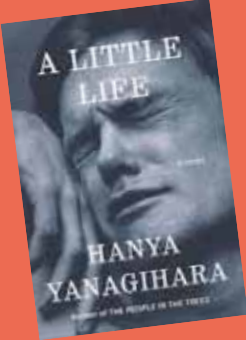


Giving back to Wadi Shab by ridding it off from trash

Oman has some of the best wadis in the Middle East but this beauty usually is put at risk as more and more tourists, whether local or international, come to visit them as the problem of trash is not managed well. A group of like-minded individuals recently went on a clean-up drive in one of Oman's best wadis. Here's why initiatives like this are important... **P20**

LOCAL SCENE

READ



A LITTLE LIFE
BY HANYA YANAGIHARA

The book tells the story of Jude St. Francis and the people in his life. Jude, left partially disabled by a terrifying injury as a teenager, is distraught about his past and hides most of that past and himself from others, even those closest to him.

Falaj Belt: An inexhaustible source of water

THE FALAJ of the village of Belt is located in the far north of the Wilayat of Dhank, and it is the main falaj of the village among several other aflaj. The length of Belt Falaj from the source Al Qabil to its end Al Lijil is about 800 metres. It is one of the Gaelic aflaj that depends on the running surface water and therefore it depends entirely on rain.

At the source, there is what is known as Al Qabil, which is built by the people to collect the water of the wadi running to rise to the level of the falaj and then it flows into the channel of the falaj to water the palm trees, lemon, figs, pomegranate, mango and quince. The falaj ends in Al Lijil, which is a large basin in which water is collected so that the rest of the agricul-

tural crops are irrigated, such as an animal feed from grass, alfalfa and corn, in addition to seasonal crops such as barley, wheat, onions, garlic and cowpeas. The water of the falaj is divided for five days among the people so that for each day there is a person responsible for distributing the water between farmers to irrigate their crops.





Sab Bani Khamis: The Jewel of Jabal Shams

The Wilayat of Al Hamra abounds with many tourist sites and is unique in mountainous areas of pristine nature, its moderate temperatures in the summer, and freezing cold in winter. Jabal Shams still holds many surprises for its visitors, lovers of tourism, travellers and adventure enthusiasts. Its towns or villages are hardly devoid of beautiful scenery and tourist areas. However, accessing these sites most of the time is not an easy thing, as it requires patience, endurance, will and strong determination. Among those areas is the “Sab Bani Khamis” area, which is located in Jabal Shams, below the Hail Al Raq area. visitors to the “Sab Bani Khamis” area have to take the road leading to Wilayat Al Hamra, and when they reach the roundabout near the gas station, they should head towards the west and continue driving until they reach the village of Al Minthar in Wadi Gul. After that they should begin to climb to Jabal Shams until they reach the roundabout of the village of Al Khatim close to the Jabal Shams tourist resort. from the Al Khatim area, they should head to the bank that leads to the steep gully, and then start walking on a path along Wadi Al Nakhr for one hour until they reach the Sab Bani Khamis area. The ruins of the old houses still exist even now, despite the fact that the people left them decades ago, and most of these houses have been destroyed,



and they are built of stones and mud, and their roofs are made of trees. The site of Sab Bani Khamis is unique in the abundance of water throughout the year as a result of the continuous rainfall, in addition to the waterfalls descending from the top of Jabal Shams. The rains create a number of waterfalls that finally flow into Wadi Al Nakhr, which is one of the deepest wadis in the Sultanate. The area is also the home for swimming lovers because of the large water pool, as well as for hikers and skydivers. There is also a large cave, from which water falls in the form of drops. Stalagmites and

stalactites were formed as a result of the flow of this water from the top of the mountain. The people benefited from this water in the past, so they built canals and made agricultural terraces under this lake. The remains of agricultural meadows remain to this day. Hamad al Khateri, Director of one of the tourist rest houses in Jabal Shams says “shurfat al Nakhr (balcony) is close to the high summit of Jabal Shams, and it serves as a collection and drainage hole for rainwater coming from the wadis of the mountain. It has become a magnet for tourists and those coming to visit Al Hamra. “The height of the balcony is

more than 2,400 metres and in some places, it reaches 3,009 metres above sea level. Al Nakhr village is located in the middle of the Canyon and surrounded by wadis. There are also several land roads linking the balcony to the bottom of the wadi”. Jabal Shams is the highest peak in the Sultanate of Oman, with a peak of over 3,000m and 20 degrees cooler than in Muscat city. Wadi Ghul is often named Oman’s ‘Grand Canyon’, a majestic semi-circular canyon, mid-way around the rim of which is the ‘Balcony Walk’ — featuring amazing views through the valley, village ruins and centuries-old Pomegranate trees.

LOCAL SCENE

Omani youth builds a suspension bridge in Dhank



MUHANNA AL ZAIDI from Wadi Fida, Wilayat of Dhank was able to construct a suspension bridge with a length of 40 metres and a height of 13 metres. The lengths of wires used reached one kilometre to ensure the rigidity and cohesion of the bridge to ensure safety measures.



Muhanna explained that the bridge was built by self-efforts and by high engineering standards, based on a three-year research on the Internet and visits to a large number of suspension bridges. “In cooperation with my brothers and under my supervision, the aim of establishing this bridge is to facilitate access to our farm on the other side. It was established in our own property to gain the necessary experience in building bridges”, he shared. He also highlighted some of the challenges faced him like the search for suitable materials, which took a long time, as rust-resistant steel was used in the gratings. the bridge can hold up to 35 tonnes. The young man supervising the project confirmed that his ambition to build this bridge was only to gain the experience necessary to build a bridge stronger than this in a public place to be considered a tourist attraction. the total cost amounted to more than RO 2,000.



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ART



Possible Durer work discovery draws art lovers to German church

A POSSIBLY NEWLY discovered work by Albrecht Durer (1471-1528) has attracted many visitors to the town of Crailsheim in the south-western German state of Baden-Wuerttemberg. The town's Lutheran Johanneskirche (St John's Church) had the late Gothic winged altar folded closed on Monday so that the work could be better seen, as it is painted on the back of the altar panels.

Experts suspect that the German Renaissance master may have painted parts of a panel on the outside of the altar, but as the altar is open most of the time, the painting in question has remained hidden, on the back.

Durer experts from his home state of Bavaria also want to examine the high altar, which was created around 1490, more closely in the near future.

After media nationwide had reported on the possible Durer work, the number of visitors to the Protestant church had risen sharply.

"Of course, that went steeply up," said Dean Friederike Wagner. The altar will now remain closed up for the next two to three months until the initial excitement has died down.

Experts are convinced that the altar itself comes from the workshop of Durer's teacher, Michael Wolgemut.

One of the panel paintings shows an executioner with the head of John the Baptist.

According to the experts, this is very similar to other works by Durer, a native of the Bavarian city of Nuremberg. — **dpa**

ENTERTAINMENT

'Godfather' of Tibetan rap spits karmic rhymes



In his tracksuit, silver chain and sparkling trainers, MC Tenzin would look like any other rapper if not for the backdrop of towering Himalayan peaks in his videos and rhyme-dropping about karma.

The self-described "Godfather" of Tibetan rap is a leading light of the region's hip-hop scene, where tight social constraints are at odds with the in-your-face art form.

Tibetan rappers walk a tightrope unfamiliar to their peers overseas, with some cautiously exploring local pride and Buddhist identity in coded lyrics to avoid the unwanted attention of Chinese authorities.

Most, however — MC Tenzin included — give politics a wide berth to be able to continue creating their music.

"I am a little bit different (from Western rappers). I do my best to create a positive experience," says the 36-year-old, whose real name is Tenzin Dhondup.

He discovered hip-hop listening to American giants like Eminem and 50 Cent in his home village of Pasum near the foot of Mount Everest, connecting so much with the music that it felt like "home".

"I listened to them so much sometimes my ears hurt," he said during an interview at a bar in the Tibetan capital Lhasa's nightlife district.

TIBETAN IDENTITY

In the decade since, a home-grown Tibetan scene has emerged, with Tenzin among the early pioneers.

Chinese hip-hop got a huge boost with the 2017 launch of the wildly popular TV talent contest "The Rap of China," which helped bring the genre into the mainstream, and Tibetan fans say the lyrical flow of Buddhist chants fits rap's rhythms.

Some younger rappers with Tibetan roots are nudging boundaries by expressing cultural pride, "challenging the stereotype of underdeveloped Tibetans (and) advocating for inter-ethnic equality", according to one researcher's 2019 study at Georgetown University, based on interviews with dozens of Tibetan musicians.

Tibet has alternated over the centuries between independence and control by China, which says it "peacefully liberated" the rugged plateau in 1951.

In 2008, the region exploded in deadly rioting after rising anger over the perceived dilution of their ancient culture by rapid Chinese-fuelled development, and controls have been ultra-tight ever since.

In his videos, stylish rapper Uncle Buddhist flashes between trendy neon-lit parties and grasslands on horseback, singing about the "unified single root" of Tibetan tradition.

His song "Tsampa" references Tibet's grain-based staple food, a symbol of Tibetan cultural pride and unity.

Religious overtones and singing in Tibetan can also express subtle opposition to Chinese pressure for secularisation and assimilation.

"Because the artists can't be explicit, I see important messages in the way that they choose to express themselves, dress, the topics they choose to rap about and who they collaborate with," said Dechen Pemba, founder of the High Peaks Pure Earth website, who has translated Tibetan raps into English.

KARMA AND KINDNESS

Most Tibetan rappers, however, stick to positive messages and cultural imagery like temples, colourful prayer flags and maroon-robed monks.

Popular hip-hop duo ANU scored a hit with the catchy karma-focused anthem "Fly" that told listeners to "search for the highest soul".

In another, they rap about kindness as the "essence of Buddhism" and rail against material greed.

Against the wishes of his parents, budding rhyme-slinger MC Tenzin eventually relocated to the big city, Lhasa.

"I worked in a travel agency, slept there at night. In the beginning, it was very difficult," he said.

"One night me and my friend sat drinking Lhasa Beer and we started to make music."

Rapping in Tibetan, Mandarin, English, and Nepalese, he mostly uses Douyin — the Chinese version of social media platform TikTok — along with live shows to share his music and interact with fans.

The Tibetan scene is so embryonic, however, that MC Tenzin also works as a tour guide since he still hasn't earned enough to make a living — or the support of his parents, who "don't understand rap music".

His parents had planned for him to make a life in their village with his family and follow the social practice of fraternal polyandry — a once-common custom where several brothers marry the same wife.

Ultimately, MC Tenzin feels his mission is to bestow a musical blessing on his fans.

"I want to make music so that positive energies go to everyone," he said. — **AFP**



Giving back to Wadi Shab by ridding it off from trash

By Rumpa Mitra
Instagram: rumpa_mitra

We enjoy being in the lap of nature, take pictures and edit them for the perfect frame. Have you ever by chance upon editing one of your photos where you have to edit out the litters scattered around?

Weekends are meant for outings with family and friends, many a time relaxing in the beaches, mountains or even parks and often having our meals and refreshments there. But while we are all free to enjoy the beauty of nature's gift, a lot of us seemed to be callously leaving behind our garbage.

Not that we are not aware of our actions. In fact, while we know what's right from wrong, we tend to ignore our humanitarian instinct to leave nothing but footprints. That despite having enjoyed nature for free, we also give back what shouldn't be left behind — things that destroy the natural beauty of the world.

Wadi Shab is one of the most popular tourist places in Oman and most photographed for its beautiful picturesque presence. Tourists take a small boat ride to cross the small wadi and then walk through the small farms of the locals. After crossing the farms, the trail starts with the path crossing mountains before finally reaching the main wadi. The wadi itself is huge peppered with small pools where one can swim in between. At the very far end, one can swim the length of the last pool before reaching the opening of the cave that opens into this beautiful waterfall. This wadi is very easy to access and can be crossed with family and friends (of course life jackets are a must).

On the second week of June, I had the opportunity to do a very special hike in Wadi Shab organised by @Tiwikayak. Collaborating with move_green owned by Fahad Murshid Bilal al Abri, it was special because its aim was along the environmental clean-up initiative started by Fahad in 2019. Joined by a small team of like-minded followers, the goal for the day is to collect trash just thrown wantonly all over this spot.

Muhannad Juma Said al Salti the

founder of Tiwikayak is a young Omani adventure enthusiast who during one of his hikes at Wadi Shab noticed that the place is flooded with plastics and all unnecessary dirt and garbage.

After hearing of the plan from Instagram, a few friends and I decided to volunteer, drove all the way to Wadi Shab at six in the morning and joined the group. The twenty-member team had our morning briefing and still adhering to Supreme Committee protocols, other than our cleaning gears, we also had our masks on.

Tiwi.kayak was generous enough to provide us with all the supplies which were required for the clean-up which included waste bags, gloves and life jackets, etc. Once we started the trail, it was surprising to see that even during summer when people are mostly indoors, the amount of garbage piled up in every corner imaginable. We were all determined to clean up the place and by the end of the day, we ended up collecting more than 40-45 bags of garbage.

It was one of the well-organised clean-up drives I've attended. While the temperature was over 45 degrees, we didn't mind. Constantly reminded to look after ourselves, hydrate and stay protected, a lot of us, gave our best to complete the goal of the day.

We all sang the jingle — "Matloob lil Adala" which is the signature song of move_green team ever since it started.

It has become a habit of mind to go into nature almost every weekend to appreciate it. But this time around, it became more meaningful being able to give back. The clean-up hike ended with an amazing lunch organised by Muhannad.

Wendell Berry has said once that the "Earth is what we all have in common." If there's one takeaway I'd love to share during this particular adventure, it's that we all have a responsibility to keep nature clean. I also think we should all begin the habit of bringing trash bags with us whenever we venture out. Whatever small effort we give back will back a tremendous effect on the overall effort of saving this Earth for the future generation.

