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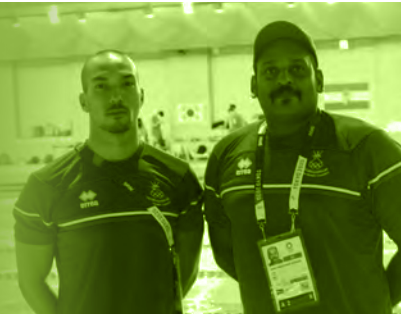
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P10

WORKING HARD TO
DEVELOP NATIONAL
SWIMMERS' PERFORMANCE:
COACH AYMAN



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BIG TECH
COMPANIES RETAKE
MARKET REINS WITH
EARNINGS ON TAP



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ALIA GALLERY: A
DESTINATION TO
INSPIRE OMAN'S
ART LOVERS



MUSCAT

HM RECEIVES PHONE CALL FROM IRAN'S PRESIDENT-ELECT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a phone call on Saturday evening from Ebrahim Raisi, president-elect of the Islamic Republic of Iran. During the telephone conversation, they exchange greetings on the occasion of Eid Al Adha, praying to Allah the Almighty for the return of the occasion while the two friendly peoples enjoy blessings and bounties. They also reviewed the existing bilateral relations between the two countries and ways to promote them to serve the interests of the two friendly peoples. — ONA

HM GREETINGS TO TUNISIA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Kais Saied of the Republic of Tunisia, on the anniversary of the Republic Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health, happiness and long life to the President, wishing the friendly Tunisian people more progress and prosperity. — ONA

READ IN

OPINION

You get what you work for... not what you want

Ray Petersen

Portraying a tragic biography in the movie

Rasha al Raisi

INSIDE



JEMMA NUNU KUMBA, SOUTH SUDAN'S FIRST FEMALE SPEAKER

P6



NASA SELECTS SPACEX FOR MISSION TO JUPITER MOON

P8

Sultanate earns international praise for human rights record

MUSCAT: Oman's Vision 2040 sets off from the ground of achievements which were realised over the past decades in various fields representing an integrated framework of the economic and social policies that should be implemented and adopting them as a work methodology in order to actualise the desired goals by the year 2040.

This was stated by Her Excellency Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, in an interview with Oman News Agency (ONA).

She said that reinforcing social protection and social responsibility requires organising the efforts of the institutions concerned and the social responsibility projects and its governance, identifying their principles, managing them effectively, and measuring the outcomes so as to provide advanced social services in a manner that contributes to achieving the sustainable development goals.

The minister said that the Sultanate's

Sultanate's interest in human rights was gradually embodied over the past five decades as the economic, social and cultural rights became a priority after the blessed Renaissance

DR LAILA BINT AHMED AL NAJAR
Minister of Social Development

attention to human rights is not only an international obligation, but also a religious commitment and a national duty which is deeply rooted in our

values and our Omani identity. Besides, the Sultanate's interest in human rights was gradually embodied over the past five decades as the economic, social and cultural rights became a priority after the blessed Renaissance and the attention to human rights, children and women acquired a special importance in the development programmes through building schools, hospitals, roads and qualifying women to work in different fields.

DETAILS ON P2

National Immunisation Drive to pick up pace

SULTANATE TO GET 3 MILLION DOSES BY AUGUST

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

Covid vaccination resumes on Sunday after Eid al Adha holidays and four days of total lockdown. The immunisation drive will get a boost as the Sultanate is expected to get 3 million doses of vaccines by August and September, according to a top Ministry of Health official.

Vaccination for people aged above 18 years will restart at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Sunday, and those who are eligible to receive the jabs under this target group can register online, according to the ministry.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, said recently that no one will be left without vaccination. "Many companies have reserved doses for their expatriate employees. If expats who are not covered by any scheme, the Sultanate will vaccinate them for free."

The Sultanate has vaccinated 35 per cent of the population till date, with expectation to reach 55 per cent of the target categories or 2 million people, after Eid al Adha, according to Saif al Rawahi, Director of Infectious



Disease in the ministry. "We also expect to receive 3 million doses of vaccines by August and September", he added.

"We will resume the vaccination drive, which was stopped due to total lockdown, on Sunday. All eligible under this category can complete

their registration procedure starting on Saturday morning", a statement from the ministry has noted. Registration can be done by logging on to <http://covid19.moh.gov.om> and getting their name enrolled in the vaccination registry at the OCEC.

TURN TO P3

Efforts on to restore normalcy in rain-affected areas

MUSCAT: The public and private establishments continue their efforts to follow up the effects caused by heavy rains witnessed by some wilayats of the Sultanate. Work teams have been formed to identify certain issues and report them to the relevant authorities to find suitable solutions for them.

In the Wilayat of Sur, the government and private bodies continue their efforts to repair the damage resulting from the severe weather conditions which hit the wilayat recently.

Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of South Al Sharqiyah,



conducted a field visit to the affected areas to follow up the workflow and to take suitable decisions in coordination with the relevant authorities.

Shaikh Saqr bin Sultan al Shukaili, Wali of Sur and Abdullah al Hajri, Director-General at the Municipality of South Al Sharqiyah, conducted

a series of visits to the affected areas during which they held several meetings with local officials to ensure seamless rehabilitation work.

The Sur Municipality began early to repair the damage resulting from heavy rains by targeting the areas worst hit by the flow of wadis. All efforts were made to remove rainwater from the electricity generation plants to restore power supply after being disrupted at health institutions and government offices. Efforts were also made to remove blocks in rainwater drainage systems on the main roads to open them to traffic.

It's noteworthy that the Wilayat of Sur recorded 200 mm of rain on a single day thus taking fifth place worldwide for highest amount of rainfall in 24 hours. SEE ALSO P3

■ FOREIGN MINISTER BIDS FAREWELL TO OUTGOING AMBASSADORS



MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Saturday received Mohammed Ahmed Fahmi Ghoneim, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the Sultanate, to bid him farewell at the end of his tenure as his country's ambassador to the Sultanate. Sayyid Badr also received Laetitia van Asch, Ambassador of the Netherlands to the Sultanate, to bid her farewell at the end of her tenure as her country's ambassador to the Sultanate. The foreign minister expressed his appreciation to the ambassadors for their efforts in fostering the relations between their friendly countries and the Sultanate, wishing them success.

Sultanate earns international praise for clean human rights record

Sultanate pays great attention to the disabled and is keen to provide them with appropriate services and advanced technologies that help them lead a better life

MUSCAT: Her Excellency Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, affirmed that the Oman Vision 2040 sets off from the ground of achievements that were realised over the past decades in various fields representing an integrated framework of the economic and social policies that should be implemented and adopting them as a work methodology in order to actualise the desired goals by the year 2040.

In an interview with Oman News Agency (ONA), the minister explained that reinforcing social protection and social responsibility requires organising the efforts of the concerned institutions and the social responsibility projects and its governance, identifying their principles, managing them effectively, and measuring the outcomes so as to provide advanced social services in a manner that contributes to achieving the sustainable development goals.

Her Excellency, the Minister of Social Development, indicated that the Sultanate pays great attention to the disabled and is keen to provide them with appropriate services and advanced technologies that help them lead a better life.

The Disabled Care and Rehabilitation Law promulgated by Royal Decree No 63/2008 and the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) form the legal basis that supports the activities of



the governmental and non-governmental agencies concerned with the provision of free services for the disabled including rehabilitation services, prosthetic devices and aids, vocational training and other prosthetic devices services.

Speaking about the most notable challenges facing the ministry in the disabled field, the minister said that there are a number of challenges such as the lack of specialised national cadres in the field of disabled care and rehabilitation, the high cost of operating the rehabilitation centres and the reluctance of some parents to register their children at rehabilitation centres as well as the need to develop diagnostic programmes and early intervention services in all governorates of the Sultanate except for Muscat Governorate.

The minister said that the civil society organisations are one of the pillars of development in the Sultanate being an important sector that contributes to all forms of development and that the integration of the three sectors of the state, the government, the

The Ministry of Social Development is keen to realise the goals of Oman Vision 2040 that are related to humans and society, and seeks to achieve the concepts of welfare and social protection in several fields

private sector and the civil sector increases the effectiveness of the development process.

The minister explained that the Sultanate's attention to human rights is not only an international obligation, but also a religious commitment and a national duty that is deeply rooted in our values and our Omani identity. Besides, the Sultanate's interest in human rights was gradually embodied over the past five decades as the economic, social and cultural rights became a priority after the blessed Renaissance and the attention to human rights, children and women acquired a special importance in the development

programmes through building schools, hospitals and roads, and qualifying women to work in different fields. She added that this attention developed with the Sultanate's joining many international conventions and treaties, including Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (1969) ratified by Royal Decree 63/90, and years later came the ratification to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1996, and later the Sultanate joined a number of relevant international conventions pertaining to human rights.

The minister noted that the Ministry of Social Development is keen to realise the goals of Oman Vision 2040 that are related to humans and society, and seeks to achieve the concepts of welfare and social protection in several fields under the ministry's purview including juvenile care.

For this aim, the ministry has set up a specialised department and provided it with specialised staff to provide care to the juveniles, and also seeks to create integrated buildings in one dedicated place for the provision



of juvenile care from the stage of collecting evidence until they are sentenced by juvenile courts.

The minister affirmed that the Sultanate has earned international appreciation for its efforts in following up various human rights agreements, including those related to the efforts of the Ministry of Social Development in submitting timely reports on the rights of children, women and

the disabled, affirming that there is no international pressure in the field of human rights in general or on the rights of children and women, in particular.

She noted that the United Nations has mechanisms to follow up on the implementation of the provisions of the international conventions, agreements and treaties concerned with human rights. — ONA



High electricity bills test nerves of some users

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

High electricity bills are drawing the ire of some citizens and residents amid scorching summer and the extended spell of evening lockdowns that have confined people to their homes.

Some consumers who spoke to the *Observer* feel that the latest surge in bills is not in tune with the new tariffs that came into effect in January this year.

Responding to a flurry of messages, the Authority for Public Services Regulation (ASPR) said that the consumers can submit complaints through Hasel or they can leave a direct message (including name, account number, and Civil ID) on its Twitter handle.

The Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer) has been also telling consumers that complaints regarding electricity bills will be responded to within one working day.

Individual consumers have been citing various discrepancies in their electricity bills, especially those related to meter reading intervals between two bills.

According to sources in the sector, the meter reading intervals should be not less than 28 days and not more than 33 days. But the consumers have shared bills that showed consumption days such as 35 and even 85 and 95 in some cases.

"With temperatures touching 40 degrees Celsius even at night, we are forced to use an additional AC this summer and my electricity bill skyrocketed to over RO 100 from my earlier average that used to be between RO 30 and RO 35," said an expatriate.

Expatriates are still coming to terms with new tariffs that were introduced this year. "I expected the bills to go up with these new tariffs, but



what I need to know is that will it really go by 50 to 70 per cent as informed by some of my friends. Also what about the Value-Added Tax," said a British school teacher, who did not want to be named.

Some consumers took to social media and said that the issue is not about some individuals having exorbitant bills, but that of a common situation witnessed and reported from across the country, both rural and urban.

People have been urging that electricity companies should be more transparent and explain to their subscribers the exact reason for this in big surge in monthly charges.

"I am not in a position to pay these electricity bills that amount to more than RO 60 per month. I don't know whom to approach and whether there will be any immediate solution. It is really a difficult situation because expenses have gone up and the company is irregular in paying salaries."

ASPR said it has been following what is being circulated on social media about the inflated electricity bills for some subscribers, it would spare no efforts to ensure that electricity distribution companies follow the applicable standards while issuing bills to all its subscribers.

It affirmed that if the licensed

ASPR said that the consumers can submit complaints through the Hasel or they can leave a direct message (including name, account number, and Civil ID) on its Twitter handle

companies do not comply with the regulatory framework for billing, the authority will intervene in favour of the subscriber to amend the calculation based on the bases it has approved, in accordance with the legal powers granted to it.

All licensed companies are required to take actual readings for all subscribers per month for a period of no less than 28 and not exceeding 33 days.

If it is not possible to take the actual reading, an estimated reading is calculated by the following method — use the actual consumption for the same month of the previous year. If this is not possible, use the actual consumption for the closest previous month available.



EFFORTS UNDER WAY TO RESTORE NORMALCY IN RAIN-HIT AREAS



The public and private establishments continue their efforts to deal with the effects caused by heavy rains and floods witnessed by various wilayats.

Vaccination drive to pick up pace



FROM PAGE 1

As for the Sultanate, the initial results of the evening lockdown showed a substantial fall in the number of new Covid-19 cases.

According to Ibrahim al Maimani, an analyst, the cases admitted into hospitals declined by 23 per cent, from 1,214 cases to 933.

Patients in ICUs declined by 18.5 per cent, from 444 to

362.

Al Maimani stressed that if the vaccine campaign went on with a rate of 80,000 per day till August 15, we will reach 72 per cent of the target population sooner.

This comes as the World Health Organization (WHO) said that it is expecting that the mutated Delta variant of the coronavirus will become the dominant strain in the world in the coming months.

IN THE MATTER OF THE EXEMPTED PARTNERSHIP ACT 1992 OF BERMUDA

and

IN THE MATTER OF PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS (the "Partnership")

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN pursuant to Section 13B(2)(f) of the Exempted Partnership Act 1992 of Bermuda that the Partnership intends to de-register under the laws of Bermuda and continue in the Dubai International Financial Centre as if the Partnership had been incorporated under the laws of the Dubai International Financial Centre.

Dated: 27 June 2021 at the Sultanate of Oman

For and on behalf of PricewaterhouseCoopers LLC



E-commerce set to soar

SAMUEL KUTTY

@samkuttyvp

On the back of strong online shopping, the e-commerce market in Oman is set for further growth in the coming years.

According to a report, Oman's online market, which was valued at \$2.19 billion in 2020, is expected to reach \$6.52 billion by 2026, registering a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 20.1 per cent during the period between 2021 and 2026.

Major drivers of e-commerce growth in the Sultanate are high spending potential, developed transport logistics networks, rising Internet penetration levels and a growing tech-savvy youth population.

"The overall economic growth of this country is expected to drive the e-commerce market. The different initiatives of the Oman government are fuelling the growth of this market", says the report based on a study by ResearchAnd Markets.com.

The main objective of these initiatives, says the report, are to unravel the future change of governance, transportation, logistics, commerce, which can infuse digital transformation into the economy.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the total fixed Internet subscriptions in Oman rose 6.9 per cent to touch 506,091 at the end of November 2020 compared to the same period of 2019.

Oman's online market, which was valued at \$2.19 billion in 2020, is expected to reach \$6.52 billion by 2026, registering a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 20.1 per cent during the period between 2021 and 2026

The number of active mobile broadband subscribers rose 12.1 per cent to 5.31 million at the end of November 2020 compared to the same period of 2019.

According to the report by the global market researcher, the major restraint of this market is the changing mindset of the consumers.

"Most of the consumers preferred to buy directly from the retail shops due to the high security of payments in offline payments", it points out.

The Sultanate is coming

very close to 100 per cent smartphone use penetration; the country has high mobile broadband penetration, and its 4G coverage also reaches a high level, the report says.

According to a survey conducted by the NCSI, the most important indicator of access to information and communication technologies in Oman is possession of smartphones, which reached 95 per cent.

This is in addition to household access to the Internet, which reached 94

per cent, while household possession to computers including smartphones reached 96 per cent

In recent years, Oman has made great efforts to build up its IT infrastructure both at governmental and private levels.

The growing adoption of 4G and 5G technology is also driving the growth of this market.

For instance, points out the report, the Oman Telecommunication company planned to set up 2,226 5G sites by 2024, which will increase the Internet consumption rate for this country.

However, spending on telecom services and devices is decreasing due to the large-scale job losses due to the

ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. This decreasing trend of consumer spending can create a considerable barrier for this market. Major vendors in this market are also innovating their services to cater to this untapped market.

In terms of market share, affirms the report, some of the major players currently dominate the market.

However, with technological advancements, data analytics, web design, creative programming, digital marketing, cataloging and app development and product innovations, major companies are gaining a competitive advantage and increasing their market presence by securing new contracts and tapping into new markets.



Return to daytime movement after lifting complete closure

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

People expressed relief after the four-days long total lockdown ended on Saturday. A few ventured out to the beaches to get fresh air while others went to shops to restock supplies after total ban on movement and closure of shops.

Citizens and expats are set to resume duty on Sunday after a week of being cooped at home. The dusk-dawn lockdown will continue till July 31 as part of the Supreme Committee's measures to tackle the spread of coronavirus infections in the Sultanate.

"We are happy to be back to the beach after so many days because we were all stuck inside the flat for many days and glad that the pan-



demic would be over soon," Rasha, an expatriate who was seen on Qurum Beach with her family, told the *Observer*.

Dr Zakaria al Muharrami, Senior Consultant, Department of Microbiology and Immunology at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), said that all efforts of the Sultanate

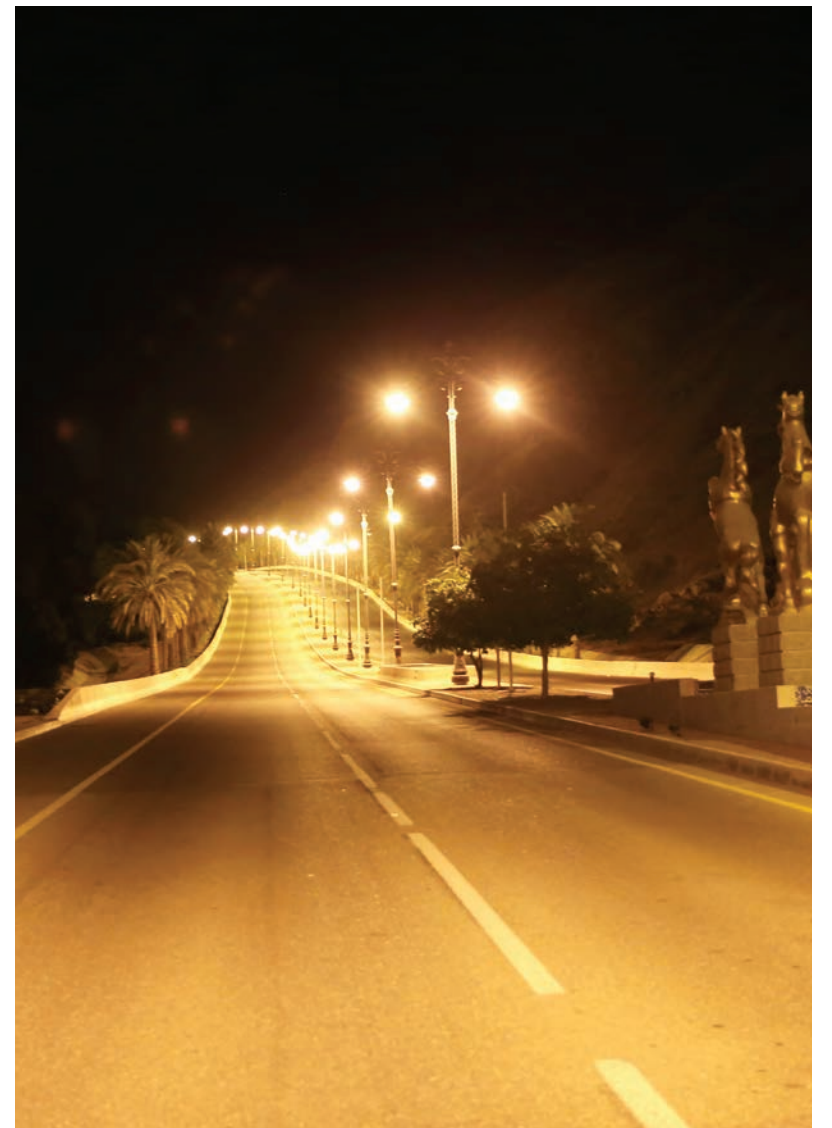
since February 24, 2020 when the first Corona case was reported in the country, are seeing fruition as the number of cases registered at the SQU Hospital has been showing a decline.

"The number of daily cases has been reduced as a result of the months-long efforts and due to last

week's lockdown. There's a general trend of reduction in the cases, admissions, and the like after the closure."

He further clarified that the data gathered by the team shows a trend of improvement after lockdowns and restrictions in the country.

"This trend shall continue in future as well and with God's grace, we hope that most of the occupancy in all hospitals would come down to less than 80 per cent. Earlier, some of the hospitals have exceeded more than 200 per cent of their ICU capacity and admissions as well," Dr Zakaria said, adding that, "This is a need to enlighten the people to follow Covid protocols and to make them more aware of the importance of following the precautions thoroughly."



Stranded expats tap vaccines, third countries for re-entry

SAMUEL KUTTY

@samkuttvyp

With expectations high that Oman will lift the entry ban soon, expatriates are making beelines at vaccination centres in their home countries in anticipation that a certificate will be made mandatory for travel clearance.

At the same time, many of the stranded expatriate workers of different South Asian nations are opting to travel to a third country that is not in the list of travel ban to quarantine there and return to their jobs in Oman.

Some of the travel agencies confirmed to *Observer* that scores of resident card holders are ready to spend 14 days of quarantine in other countries including Qatar which are not in the entry ban list before flying into Oman.

"Those who do not want to wait till the lifting of the entry ban, this is a feasible option. We are getting

good response to our packages because there are a lot of people who want to return as their jobs are at risk either because their work permits are expiring or are being warned by their companies to resume work at the earliest," said Aneeh Ahmed, an executive with a travel agency in the South Indian state of Kerala.

Based on the decision made by the Supreme Committee, institutional quarantine applies to all non-Omani arrivals into the Sultanate.

For those who travel via Qatar, there are packages that start from around RO 600. This includes flight charges, three-star hotel stay, travel insurance and three-time meals.

"Passengers who are aged 12 years and those who have received two doses of vaccines that are approved by WHO and Qatar Ministry of Public Health will be allowed to travel," says a note from



a travel agency.

Tippu Bowmik, a Bangladeshi national, said in a Whatsapp message that he has not yet received the vaccine as his country was giving priorities to those expatriate workers who are returning to countries which have

lifted the travel ban.

"We have already registered for the vaccination. Since Oman has not yet lifted the entry ban, we have been placed in the waiting list. Moreover, we have to confirm that we get vaccines that are approved by the Sultanate," said

Scores of resident card holders are ready to spend 14 days of quarantine in other countries including Qatar which are not in the entry ban list before flying into Oman

Bowmik, who is associated with a transport industry in Oman.

Some of the vaccines like Covaxin are not approved by the World Health Organization and GCC and some other countries have denied entry to expatriates who got these jabs.

In India, stranded expatriates are thronging primary health centres, in some cases with air tickets, to get vaccinated despite the fact that advance online

registration is mandatory for vaccination.

Most of them are apprehensive about losing their jobs if they do not return anytime soon.

Joseph Mathew, a chef at a hotel in Oman, said he was trying to get vaccinated as early as possible to avoid any kind of a delay in his travel back to Oman.

"Like some other countries, if Oman too makes vaccination mandatory for entry, it should not come as a hindrance in our return," he said.

In India, a new order issued by the government said those going abroad would now get vaccination certificates issued by the Health and Family Welfare Department, wherein the passport number would be recorded.

Students and others going abroad for higher studies or jobs have already been given priority in the categories selected for vaccination by the government.

Lebanon can't handle next Covid wave: Hospital chief



A patient rests on a bed in a hallway of the Rafic Hariri University Hospital in Beirut. — AFP

BEIRUT: Lebanon's deepening economic crisis has piled pressure on hospitals, leaving them ill-equipped to face any new wave of the coronavirus, a top hospital director has warned.

Already struggling with shortages of medicine and an exodus of staff abroad, the country's health facilities are now also having to contend with almost round-the-clock power cuts.

"All hospitals... are now less prepared than they were during the wave at the start of the year," said Firass Abiad, the manager of the largest public hospital in the country battling Covid.

"Medical and nursing staff have left, medicine that was once available has run out," and ever lengthening cuts to the mains power supply have left hospitals under constant threat.

Even the Rafik Hariri University Hospital he runs has been struggling to cope.

"We only get two to three hours of mains electricity, and for the rest of the time it's up to the generators," Abiad said.

On top of worrying they could burn out, "we have the huge burden of having to constantly be on the hunt for fuel oil."

Huge demand for the increasingly scarce commodity has driven up prices by more than 80 per cent since June 17.

Even at the prestigious RHUH, some medicines are routinely running out.

"Some days it's antibiotics, others it's anaesthetics," the hospital chief said.

Sometimes "we're forced to ask the patients' relatives to go and try to find the medicine from another hospital or a pharmacy."

After dropping over the spring, Covid cases are on the rise again as Lebanese expats flood home for the summer, and many gather with family and friends. — AFP

Palestinian shot by Israeli troops dies: Ministry

TEL AVIV: A Palestinian teenager has died after being shot during clashes with Israeli soldiers at a protest over illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank, Palestinian authorities said on Saturday.

Seventeen-year-old Mohammed Munir al Tamimi, who suffered gunshot wounds, died later in hospital, the Palestinian Health Ministry said, a day after the violence in the flashpoint Palestinian village of Beita.

The Red Crescent said 320 Palestinians were injured in the clashes, including 21 by live fire, 68 by rubber-tipped bullets and many others by tear gas.

Hundreds of Palestinians had gathered in the afternoon in the village of Beita, a hot spot in recent months, to protest against the wildcat settlement of Eviatar, located nearby, an AFP photographer said.

The Israeli army said its soldiers had responded "with riot dispersal means" after Palestinians hurled rocks at them.

Israel said two of its soldiers were "lightly injured" in the violence.

Beita has been the scene of frequent unrest since May, when dozens of Israeli families arrived and began building the settlement on a hilltop near Nablus in defiance of Israeli and international law.

After weeks of clashes and tensions, the government of nationalist Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett struck a deal with the settlers that saw them leave the



Relatives comfort Ruba al Tamimi as she mourns her son Muhammad during his funeral procession in Deir Nizam, west of Ramallah city in the occupied West Bank, on Saturday. — AFP

Seventeen-year-old Mohammed Munir al Tamimi, who suffered gunshot wounds, died later in hospital, the Palestinian Health Ministry said, a day after the violence in the flashpoint Palestinian village of Beita

Eviatar outpost.

The settlers left behind the rudimentary homes they built until the Israeli defence ministry

determines whether the land can be considered state territory.

The Israeli military is maintaining a presence in Eviatar

until the decision is made.

The agreement was rejected by the mayor of Beita, who said on Thursday that "clashes and protests will continue" as long as any Israeli "remains on our land".

All Jewish settlements in the West Bank are regarded as illegal by most of the international community. — AFP

Jemma to become S Sudan's first female parliament speaker

JUBA: Jemma Nunu Kumba will become the first woman to preside over the parliament of South Sudan, the world's youngest nation that only recently marked 10 troubled years of independence.

The secretary-general of the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) "will be the next speaker" of the newly reconstituted assembly, President Salva Kiir said on Friday afternoon.

Born in 1966, Kumba joined SPLM rebels at the start of the 1990s in a civil war that pitted them against Khartoum.

She was active in the party and eventually took part in peace negotiations between the SPLM

and the Sudanese government, then led by Omar al Bashir.

After independence in 2011, she held several official posts, including governor of the Western Equatoria state in the country's southwest.

But then in 2013, just two years after independence, South Sudan plunged into a civil war that pitted Kiir against his nemesis Riek Machar.

Close to 400,000 people died and four million were displaced before a ceasefire was declared in 2018.

Kiir and Machar are now both part of a coalition government.

As part of the 2018 peace deal,



parliament was dissolved and then reconstituted in May, with 550 lawmakers instead of the previous 400.

Of these, 332 deputies were chosen by Kiir, 128 by Machar, and 90 others by other signatory parties.

As such, Kumba will preside over an assembly that includes nearly 40 per cent of members of Machar's party.

The deputy speaker, who has yet to be nominated, will also be from that party.

"It is not going to be business as usual. The current political dispensation calls for diligence from all of us, it calls for unity of

purpose," Kumba said after her nomination.

Kiir called on Kumba and SPLM members to focus on the truce, of which few provisions have been honoured.

"You must be the ambassadors of peace," he said.

The oil-rich country remains severely underdeveloped and poorly managed.

Despite the peace deal, brutal communal conflicts — often over cattle raiding — continue, with more than 1,000 killed in violence between rival communities in the last six months of 2020. The country also faces its worst hunger crisis since independence. — AFP

TELAVIV

Israel plans to slash carbon emissions by 2050

Israel will seek to drastically reduce its carbon emissions by 2050 to help combat the global climate crisis, the foreign ministry announced in a statement on Friday.

The "revolutionary and historic decision" agreed by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and several cabinet members will be put to a vote before Israel's parliament on Sunday, it said.

"The Israeli government set to approve an unprecedented decision mandating that by the



year 2050 Israel will move to a low carbon emissions economy, while dealing with the climate crisis that threatens all of humanity," the statement added.

BAGHDAD

Drone attacks Iraq base hosting US troops

A drone attack has been carried out on a military base in Iraqi Kurdistan that hosts American troops, without causing any casualties, the US-led coalition said on Saturday.

The attack comes with Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi expected to meet US President Joe Biden in Washington on Monday to discuss a possible full US troop withdrawal from his country.

"An unmanned aerial system



impacted a coalition base in Kurdistan" in the early hours of Friday, coalition spokesman US Colonel Wayne Marotto said in a statement.

TUNIS

Tunisia reports a daily record of 317 Covid deaths

Tunisia recorded 317 coronavirus-related deaths in the last 24 hours, a daily record since the start of the pandemic, the health ministry said on Saturday.

The ministry also reported 5,624 new cases, increasing concerns about the country's ability to fight the pandemic, with intensive care units in hospitals completely full and a lack of oxygen supplies. The vaccination campaign is moving slowly.

The World Health



Organization (WHO) says the daily Covid-19 death tally in Tunisia is now the highest in Africa and in the Arab world.

In brief

■ WASHINGTON



BIDEN OKAYS \$100M IN EMERGENCY FUNDS FOR AFGHAN REFUGEES

US President Joe Biden on Friday authorised up to \$100 million from an emergency fund to meet “unexpected urgent” refugee needs stemming from the situation in Afghanistan, including for Afghan special immigration visa applicants, the White House said.

Biden also authorised the release of \$200 million in services and articles from the inventories of US government agencies to meet the same needs, the White House said.

The United States is preparing to begin evacuating thousands of Afghan applicants for special immigration visas (SIVs) who risk retaliation from Taliban insurgents because they worked for the US government.

■ KABUL



AFGHAN GOVT IMPOSES NIGHT CURFEW TO STEM TALIBAN ADVANCE

Afghan authorities on Saturday imposed a night-time curfew across 31 of the country’s 34 provinces to curb surging violence unleashed by a sweeping Taliban offensive in recent months, the interior ministry said.

The widespread Taliban offensive has seen the insurgents capture key border crossings, dozens of districts and encircle several provincial capitals since early May.

“To curb violence and limit the Taliban movements a night curfew has been imposed in 31 provinces across the country”, except in Kabul, Panjshir and Nangarhar, the interior ministry said in a statement.

■ JAKARTA



INDONESIA'S BALI RUNNING OUT OF OXYGEN

The Indonesian island of Bali is running out of oxygen for its Covid-19 patients as infections surge, the chief of its health agency said, as Southeast Asia’s biggest country struggles with the region’s worst Covid epidemic.

Bali, famous for its tourist beaches and temples, along with the main island of Java and 15 other regions are under tight coronavirus restrictions, due to expire on Sunday. The government is debating whether to extend them or not.

“We’ve had an oxygen shortage since July 14 and it’s getting critical by the day because of a surge in new cases”, Ketut Suarjaya said.

China braces for Typhoon In-Fa as it cleans up flood damage



An aerial view shows flooded industrial buildings by a highway following heavy rainfall in Xinxiang, Henan province, on Saturday. – Reuters

BEIJING: China shut down ports and railways on Saturday as it braced for Typhoon In-Fa as parts of the country struggled to recover from devastating floods earlier this week.

In-Fa is forecast to make landfall late on Sunday in the eastern coastal province of Zhejiang near Shanghai, according to the official Xinhua news agency.

Chinese authorities have issued a level III alert — the third-highest — for the storm, while more than 100 trains travelling through the region have been cancelled, according to China Railway.

Shanghai authorities closed some public parks and museums and warned residents on Saturday to “stop large-scale outdoor gatherings” and to stay indoors.

Meanwhile, all container ship docks were shut down from Yangshan Port south of Shanghai

Authorities have issued a level III alert — the third-highest — for the storm, while more than 100 trains travelling through the eastern coastal province of Zhejiang have been cancelled

and 150 vessels including passenger ships and cargo vessels were evacuated from the area.

In central China’s Henan province, where historic floods this week have now killed at least 58 people, authorities are gradually clearing and reopening roads blocked with vehicles and debris.

Millions have been affected by the floods, with some trapped without fresh food or water for days and others lifted to safety in excavator buckets.

More than 495,000 people have been evacuated, according to the Henan government, with the

flooding causing billions of dollars in losses.

Henan emergency response official Li Changxun warned on Saturday that the province would need to undertake large-scale cleaning and disinfecting to “ensure the disaster is not followed by an epidemic.”

Photos published by state media and government social media accounts Saturday showed rescue workers continuing to shovel mud and remove uprooted trees across the province.

Torrential downpours dumped a year’s rain in just three days this week on the hardest-hit city of

Zhengzhou, where at least a dozen people died inside a subway train during Tuesday’s rush hour after floodwaters trapped passengers in their carriages.

State media warned that In-Fa could bring more torrential downpours to parts of the province in the coming days.

China has suffered an annual flood season for millennia, but the record rainfall in Henan has prompted questions about how China’s cities could be better prepared for freak weather events, which experts say are happening with increased frequency and intensity due to climate change.

Henan province is striated by rivers, dams and reservoirs, many constructed decades ago to manage the flow of floodwater and irrigate the agricultural region, but rapid urban sprawl has strained existing drainage systems. — AFP

Philippines evacuates thousands from Manila, provinces

MANILA: Philippine authorities moved thousands of residents in the capital, Manila, out of low-lying communities on Saturday as heavy monsoon rains, compounded by a tropical storm, flooded the city and nearby provinces.

The national disaster agency said about 15,000 people, most of them from a flood-prone Manila suburb, had moved into evacuation centres.

“We decided to evacuate early”, said Luzviminda Tayson, 61.

“We don’t want the waters to rise and be caught”, said Tayson, one of about 2,900 evacuees who were reminded to practice physical distancing as they took refuge in a primary school in Marikina city.

The Philippines, a Southeast Asian archipelago of more than 7,600 islands, is hit by about 20 tropical storms a year but a warmer Pacific Ocean will make storms more powerful and bring heavier rain, meteorologists say.

In some parts of the Philippine capital region, an urban sprawl of more than 13 million people, flood waters rose waist-high in places and cut off roads to light vehicles. The Philippines is also grappling with one of the worst outbreaks of Covid-19 in Asia and has tightened curbs to prevent the spread of the more infectious Delta variant.

— Reuters

India rescuers hunt for survivors as monsoon toll hits 76



Members of National Disaster Response Force evacuate people from a flooded area to safer places in Kolhapur in Maharashtra, on Saturday. – Reuters

MUMBAI: Rescuers in India combed through mud and debris on Saturday in a desperate search for survivors as the death toll from heavy monsoon rains climbed to 76, with nearly 90,000 others evacuated.

Torrential downpours have lashed India’s western coast in recent days, leaving dozens missing near the financial capital Mumbai and causing the worst floods in decades in the resort state of Goa.

“People have lost virtually everything”, said Goa’s Health Minister Vishwajit Rane, pointing out that the state had not seen such heavy rains in half a century.

He said more than 1,000 houses had suffered serious damage in the area as rising waters flooded homes.

Goa’s floods were its worst in decades, according to its Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, who said the monsoons had caused “widespread damage” but no casualties, unlike in neighbouring Maharashtra state, where 76 people died.

More than half of the deaths occurred in hard-hit Raigad, south of Mumbai, where landslides buried dozens of houses, killing 47 and with another 53 feared trapped under layers of mud.

The downpour caused the Savitri river to burst its banks, leaving the town of Mahad completely inaccessible by road, and prompting terrified residents to climb onto rooftops and upper floors to escape swelling waters.

National Disaster Response Force teams could not land their choppers in the area due to bad weather on Friday but were eventually able to rescue locals as waters began to recede. The hillside resort of Mahabaleshwar recorded nearly 60 centimetres of rain in a 24-hour period ending on Friday morning, the India Meteorological Department said. — AFP

Sydney to get extra vaccines as cases spike

MELBOURNE: Sydney will get 50,000 more doses of the Pfizer vaccine this week to battle its worsening Covid outbreak, Canberra said on Saturday, reversing a rebuff by the Australian government and other states the previous day of a plea for more supplies.

Australia reported 176 new locally acquired Covid cases on Saturday, a third consecutive daily record with nearly all cases in the state of New South Wales, centred in the country’s largest city, Sydney. Officials fear the outbreak could jeopardise the rest of the country.

Defying a statewide stay-

at-home order, however, 3,500 mostly maskless protesters clashed with police in downtown Sydney, decrying a month-long lockdown in what the state police minister said was the best case study of a superspreader event since the start of the pandemic.

“You don’t have to be an epidemiologist to work out that if this is a superspreader event, we can forget about lifting restrictions next week”, New South Wales Police Minister David Elliott told reporters.

Police arrested 57 people with more under investigation, facing hefty fines and penalties.

— Reuters



Protesters march through the city centre during an anti-lockdown rally as an outbreak of Covid-19 affects Sydney, on Saturday. – Reuters

Search for bodies in Florida ends

SURFSIDE: The Miami-Dade County fire and rescue department on Friday declared an end to its search for more human remains in the rubble of a Florida condominium complex that collapsed on June 24, killing at least 97 people.

Authorities said one victim was still believed to be unaccounted for. The Miami-Dade Police Department will continue to sift through what is left of the debris pile for additional remains and personal effects, officials said in a statement.

The round-the-clock fire department operation at the beachfront site of the Champlain Towers South condo was demobilised four weeks and a day after the 40-year-old, 12-storey structure gave way at about 1:30 am as residents slept.

“At this step in the recovery process it has become increasingly challenging to identify victims, and we are relying heavily on the work of the medical examiner’s office and the scientific, technical process of identifying human remains,” Miami-Dade Mayor Daniella Levine Cava said in a statement.

She hailed members of the



General view of the land where the partially collapsed Champlain Towers South building was located in Surfside Florida. — AFP

search and recovery teams as “true superheroes.”

Nobody has been pulled alive from the ruins since the early hours after the collapse, and authorities formally gave up hope of finding any survivors on July 7.

County officials said in a statement that the confirmed death toll stands at 97 — consisting

of 96 victims whose remains were recovered from the wreckage and one victim who died while hospitalised.

“We believe there is one victim still unaccounted for,” the statement said.

Investigators have yet to determine what caused the 136-unit building to crumble. A

2018 engineering report found structural deficiencies that are now the focus of several inquiries, including a grand jury investigation.

The disaster has prompted officials across South Florida to study residential buildings for signs of poor construction or structural weaknesses. — Reuters

SpaceX selected for Jupiter moon mission

WASHINGTON: Nasa on Friday said it had selected SpaceX to launch a planned voyage to Jupiter’s icy moon Europa, a huge win for Elon Musk’s company as it sets its sights deeper into the solar system.

The Europa Clipper mission will launch in October 2024 on a Falcon Heavy rocket from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, with the total contract worth \$178 million.

The mission was previously supposed to take off on Nasa’s own Space Launch System (SLS) rocket, which has been plagued by delays and cost overruns, with critics calling it a “jobs programme” for the state of Alabama where much of the development work is taking place.

While SLS isn’t yet operational, Falcon Heavy has deployed on both commercial and government missions since its maiden flight in 2018 when it carried Musk’s own Tesla Roadster into space.

It generates more than five million pounds of thrust (22 million Newtons) at liftoff, equal to approximately eighteen 747 aircraft.

The Europa clipper orbiter will make about 40 to 50 close passes over Europa to determine whether the icy moon could harbour



The Europa Clipper mission will launch in October 2024 on a Falcon Heavy rocket from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, with the total contract worth \$178 million

conditions suitable for life.

Its payload will include cameras and spectrometers to produce high-resolution images and compositional maps of the surface and atmosphere, as well as radar to penetrate the ice layer to search for liquid water below.

The contract marked Nasa’s latest vote of confidence in the Hawthorne, California-based company, which has carried several cargo payloads and astronauts to the International Space Station for Nasa in recent years.

In April, SpaceX was awarded

a \$2.9-billion contract to build the lunar lander spacecraft for the planned Artemis programme that would carry Nasa astronauts back to the moon for the first time since 1972.

But that contract was suspended after two rival space companies, Jeff Bezos’s Blue Origin and defence contractor Dynetics Inc, protested against the SpaceX selection.

The company’s partly reusable 23-storey Falcon Heavy, currently the most powerful operational space launch vehicle in the world, flew its first commercial payload into orbit in 2019.

Nasa did not say what other companies may have bid on the Europa Clipper launch contract.

The probe is to conduct a detailed survey of the ice-covered Jovian satellite, which is a bit smaller than Earth’s moon and is a leading candidate in the search for life elsewhere in the solar system.

A bend in Europa’s magnetic field observed by Nasa’s Galileo spacecraft in 1997 appeared to have been caused by a geyser gushing through the moon’s frozen crust from a vast subsurface ocean, researchers concluded in 2018. Those findings supported other evidence of Europa plumes.

— Agencies

Germany to allow broadcast of flood alerts

BERLIN: Germany will enable mobile operators to broadcast emergency warnings by text message to specific geographic regions, a technology that has existed for decades but which Germany has always resisted over privacy concerns.

The government has faced growing calls to switch on the technology since last week’s catastrophic floods, which killed at least 180 people. Some argued that text alerts would have given people a better chance of reaching safety in time.

Interior Minister Horst Seehofer told ARD public television that he had now given the order for the introduction of a system allowing emergency warnings to be broadcast to all mobile phones connected to a particular local network antenna.

“Warnings to the population have to get through, on all channels,” he said, adding that short text messages could only complement Germany’s existing emergency warning systems, which include sirens, a smartphone app called NINA



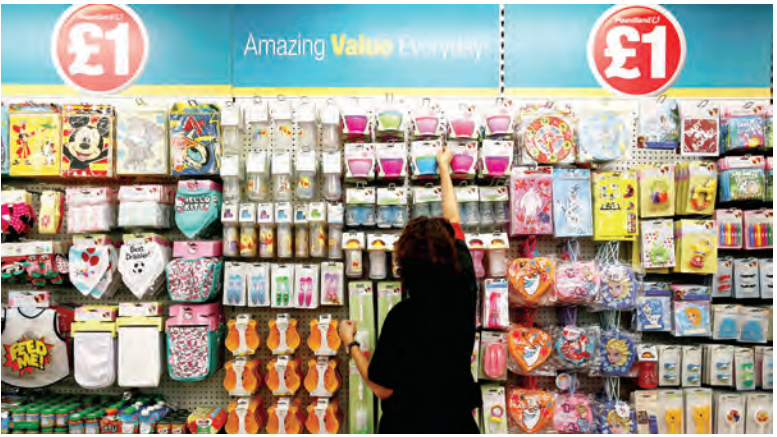
A worker is seen during clearing work in front of the destroyed building of the country guesthouse 'Jaegerstuebchen' in Laach, part of the municipality of Mayschoss, district of Ahrweiler, western Germany, on Friday, about a week after heavy rain and floods caused major damage in the Ahr region. — AFP

and radio.

“If you are woken up at night, you have to know immediately what has happened and what you have to do,” he said.

Germany has some of the strictest privacy laws in the world, reflecting sensitivity around any kind of surveillance in a country that endured 20th century totalitarianism under Hitler’s Nazis and the East German Communists. — Reuters

Britain to expand Covid tests for emergency staff



An employee checks products in a store in London. — Reuters

LONDON: The British government has expanded its workplace testing programme to an initial 200 testing sites for frontline emergency services personnel amid criticism of its self-isolation policy.

Some police, firefighters, Border Force staff and transport workers were already eligible for a self-isolation exemption, but only if their employers specified their names and they were double-jabbed against Covid-19.

The government on Saturday said in a statement that an expected initial extra 200 testing sites would be opened so that daily contact testing could be “rolled out to further critical workplaces in England.”

Home Secretary Priti Patel

said: “Daily testing will keep our front-line teams safe while they continue to serve the public and communities across our country.”

The expansion came after the government on Thursday announced its programme would allow thousands of workers at up to 500 sites in the food sector to avoid the need to self-isolate if identified as a contact of a coronavirus case, and instead take daily Covid tests.

Discontent with the government’s self-isolation policy was growing at the weekend as food industry bosses condemned changes to ease the “pingdemic” as “worse than useless”, hospitality leaders warned of a summer of closures and train operators were forced to cut services. — dpa

SHORT TAKES

AMSTERDAM

EU clears Moderna vaccine for kids

The Covid-19 Vaccine from the US manufacturer Moderna can also be injected into children and adolescents aged 12 and older, according to a recommendation by the European Medicines Agency (EMA).

On Friday in Amsterdam, the experts of the EU medicines authority positively assessed the corresponding data from studies and cleared the way for the approval of the Vaccine for 12-to-17-year-olds.



The European Commission still has to give the green light, but that is considered a formality.

Moderna’s preparation Spikevax would thus be the second Covid-19 vaccine that may also be administered to young people in the bloc.

PARIS

Amnesty urges moratorium on spy tech

Allegations that governments used phone malware supplied by an Israeli firm to spy on journalists, activists and heads of state have “exposed a global human rights crisis,” Amnesty International said, asking for a moratorium on the sale and use of surveillance technology.

In a Friday statement, the NGO warned of “the devastating impact of the poorly regulated spyware industry on human rights worldwide.”



The NSO Group’s Pegasus software — able to switch on a phone’s camera or microphone and harvest its data — is at the centre of a storm after a list of about 50,000 potential surveillance targets was leaked to rights groups.

BERLIN

Berlin’s airport sees 50,000 daily passengers

For the first time, more than 50,000 passengers have passed through the German capital’s new BER airport in one day.

“The positive trend of the past few weeks is clearly continuing during the holidays,” airport CEO Engelbert Luetke Daldrup said on Saturday. “There is a holiday mood at our airport.”

More than 51,000 passengers travelled through BER on Friday, according to the airport. Last year, there were around 30,000 on normal travel days.



The numbers are nevertheless a far cry from those seen before the coronavirus pandemic. During the summer travel season in 2019, the airport company saw up to 120,000 passengers transit Berlin’s Tegel and Schoenefeld airports on their busiest days.

Mozambique’s gas ambitions rest on distant hope of peace

EMMA RUMNEY AND DAVID LEWIS

The future of Mozambique’s gas ambitions hinges on its ability to end a deadly insurgency linked to IS, but if peace is the answer the southern African country and French energy giant TotalEnergies may have a problem.

Four months after gunmen overran Palma, a town housing TotalEnergies contractors near its Afungi site in Cabo Delgado province, the insurgents still control swathes of territory and a key port while the army is in tatters, security experts, military personnel, company officials and insiders said.

TotalEnergies has said its \$20 billion gas project will remain on hold until security is restored in the province in a “verifiable and sustainable manner”. At the end of April, it estimated the delays would last at least a year.

The Mozambican government says Palma itself is now pacified and it is working to ensure peace in Cabo Delgado.

But as recently as June, the United Nations refugee agency said people fleeing areas adjacent to the TotalEnergies site reported ongoing insecurity and gunfire.

“A year strikes me as very optimistic,” said Sam Ratner, an analyst with Cabo Ligado, a media and civil society project tracking the violence in northern Mozambique.

An even bigger project led by Exxon Mobil is now also on hold with minority partner Galp telling Reuters that re-establishing security was essential and that it would not move forward until TotalEnergies returns. TotalEnergies declined to comment for this article. An Exxon spokesperson said the company continues to evaluate the security situation. Government officials did not respond to questions.

Mozambique’s gas reserves are estimated at some 100 trillion cubic feet, putting the country 11th in world rankings, and the two liquefied natural gas (LNG) projects are at the heart of the transformation plan of one of the world’s poorest countries. — Reuters



WATCHING THE DESTRUCTION!

Cal Fire firefighter Jesse Forbes (C) watches a tree ignite in flames as his crew lights a backfire to help stop the spread of the Dixie fire in the Prattville community of unincorporated Plumas County, California, US. The Dixie fire, which started only a few miles from the origin of the deadly Camp fire, has churned through more 150,000 acres and continues to burn towards rural communities. Several villages were evacuated in the face of the advancing “Dixie Fire”, which is suspected to have been caused by a tree falling on power cables. – AFP

You get what you work for... not what you want



Ray Petersen
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DREAMS WE
HAVE BECOME
HOPES, AND
HOPES BECOME
EXPECTATIONS,
IF THOSE
EXPECTATIONS
ARE NOT REALISED,
THEY BECOME
DISAPPOINTMENTS

Singer/songwriter Jason Mraz has written that in his experience, “anger and frustration are the result of not being authentic in your life, or with someone in your life,” contending further that life will not work the way you want it to if you are not true to yourself in all things.

Those who get frustrated with themselves in sport, for example in football, if you are not quite making tackles, not quite getting on the end of long balls, hitting the post, or seeing every shot saved, it is probably not ‘bad luck’ that is getting you frustrated, but if you are honest, you are probably not working as hard on your fitness as you should, and ‘cheating’ yourself by taking shortcuts in the gym. As Thomas Jefferson, since paraphrased by Sam Goldwyn and Gary Player, once wrote: “I am a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work, the more I have of it.”

Life has that effect of ‘biting you on the backside’ if you do not give of yourself completely to anything, whether it is relationships, friendships, jobs, or what. When you get frustrated, and it is almost always with yourself not being able to do something properly, perhaps you should ask a different question? Rather than, “What is going on?” Perhaps you should

ask, “What am I not doing?” Or... do something different, and accept Rick Warren’s advice that, “A sense of humour is God’s antidote for anger and frustration.”

I do like that option... it is more relaxing, and I don’t really want to analyse my faults, because that list may just be too long! “Expectation,” said Latino actor Antonio Banderas, “is the mother of all frustration.”

And it is not difficult to see where this thought comes from. If we expect life to be simple, and easy, and it is not... we will be frustrated to some extent. We will have to do more, maybe to work harder, for longer than we thought, to achieve that which we thought was, to some extent, a fair expectation. The sorry truth is that life is rarely easier than you thought, and it will constantly challenge you, because your expectations get confused with your dreams.

The dreams we have become hopes, and hopes become expectations, if those expectations are not realised, they become disappointments. A contemporary issue is that our generation has gone so far past the need for survival, beyond need, beyond even comfort, so much so that want has become today’s doctrine, and expectation our material, consumerist

theology. We have become slaves to want and even worse... the expectation of that want being satisfied, and usually by the government. Yet those days are clearly gone, consigned to the past, and nothing but fancy in the future.

If you have read this far, you are probably upset with me, but we are all different, and we all see things differently. Certainly, I don’t see myself as exempt from what I have written, except in my maturity. I have lived, loved, lost, found, made, broken, come, gone, taught, and learned... yet I still cannot see myself as anything other than vulnerable to my own failings. I should have all my ‘ducks in a row’, have a solution for every problem, but I don’t, and that’s what makes us human. What I have learned is that life is merciless, and there is no substitute for work. Hard work, or smart work, but your intensity of work, your achievements, successes, and opportunities arise out of working... not wishing or wanting.

There are those... who would prefer your bad days, your frustrations, to theirs. Don’t sulk in that pit of despondency, that well of despair, that swamp of chagrin, or that morass of regret... get living! Get better at being better... and stop wishing and hoping... grow up!

Portraying a tragic biography in the movie...



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THE DEVIL’S
MISTRESS
FOCUSES ON LÍDA
BAAROVÁ’S RISE TO
STARDOM THAT
WAS FOLLOWED
BY A HARD FALL
WHICH AFFECTED
BOTH HER AND
HER FAMILY

Lída Baarová (1914-2000) is a well-known Czech actress who starred in many German movies during the 1930’s and 40’s. She was the mistress of Joseph Gobles — the minister of Nazi propaganda at the time — which meant that a promising career and a life-time chance of becoming a Hollywood legend like Marlene Dietrich had to be ditched.

Her tragic biography is portrayed in the movie: *The Devil’s Mistress* (2016) by Czech director Filip Renč. The movie focuses on her rise to stardom that was followed by a hard fall which affected both her and her family between the end of the Nazi occupation in Czechoslovakia and the start of Communism in 1946.

The movie starts in 1935 with the young Lída Baarová (played by

Czech actress Tatiana Pauhofová) winning her first role in a German movie called *Baracarole* in front of Gustav Fröhlich (depicted by his compatriot Gedeon Burkhard).

But it wasn’t easy for the Slavonic brunet as according to the director her German was flawed and had to be improved through accent coaching — even though she was playing the role of an Italian in the movie.

Later, She and Fröhlich became the golden couple and starred together in other movies. Around that time, she met Joseph Gobbles (played by Austrian actor Karl Markovics) and had a two years affair that doomed her career forever as Hitler had to intervene to end the affair after Gobble’s wife Magda sought his help.

To German media, Gobles, his wife and three children were

the model Arian family and the presence of Baarová threatened that perfect image, being a mistress from an inferior race whose country would be invaded by Germany.

The scene where Hitler asks Gobles to leave Baarová is emotionally intense, you can’t help but feel sorry for love-struck Gobles who almost begs and suggest different ways out that are all rejected by the Führer.

The Führer even takes a step further by banning Baarová’s recent movie *A Prussian Love Story* from all theatres and prohibiting her from performing in German movies. Against her better judgement, she manages to escape the Gestapo’s watch and flees to Prague, where things get too complicated due to her former link with the Nazis. The director

uses flashback technique to move between the older Baarová — stuck in her estate in Salzburg and being interviewed by a young reporter — and the younger one being pushed by her ambitious mother to become a superstar.

Her close relationship with her family and later with Fröhlich and Gobles is well presented in the movie besides her encounter with Hitler and Magda — Gobles’ wife — which sees the start of her fall from stardom.

The movie is a war-time piece that’s very well paced and executed, yet the older Baarová scenes were at times a bit overdramatic. All in all, Tatiana Pauhofová does a good job impersonating Lída Baarová and is only surpassed by Karl Markovics’s performance as Gobles. The costume and set designs are remarkable and create

the right historical atmosphere for the movie.

The struggle that Baarová goes through from the time of her ban in Germany to her return to the Communist Prague is tragic, although not fully depicted in the movie. Interestingly, the real Baarová made a comeback in the 90’s by publishing her autobiography and later starring in a short Czech movie called: *Lída Baarová’s Bittersweet Memories* (1996) that won an award in Slovakia’s Film Festival. She suffered from Parkinson disease and died alone in 2000. *The Devil’s Mistress* is the first Czech movie streaming on Netflix and is worth watching. Recommended for European Cinema fans.

(The writer is a certified skills trainer and an author)

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f t i y l

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Oman flag bearer over the moon after Olympics opening ceremony march past

WORKING HARD TO DEVELOP NATIONAL SWIMMERS' PERFORMANCE TO COMPETE INTERNATIONALLY: **COACH AYMAN**

ADIL AL BALUSHI
TOKYO, JULY 24

Oman's promising swimmer Issa al Adawi expressed his happiness as he was the flag bearer of Oman during the march past at the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 on Friday at the Olympic Stadium.

"It is a historic moment for any athlete to carry the flag of the nation. These moments will remain in my sporting memory for ever. I am proud of myself in this debut presence in Tokyo 2020 and will do the level best to deliver top technical performance," he said.

Oman's delegation participated in the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 on Friday at the National Olympic Stadium in Tokyo. The Sultanate's promising swimmer Issa al Adawi was the flag bearer.

Japanese Emperor Naruhito announced the declaration of the opening ceremony of Tokyo 2020 Olympics besides presence of top delegates including top dignitaries, officials from Japan government and International Olympic Committee (IOC) and representative from National Olympic Committees (NOC). The opening ceremony, which lasted for four hours, highlighted the Japanese history and culture. Japan's tennis athlete Naomi Osaka lit the Olympic cauldron to mark the start of Tokyo 2020.

ISSA IN THIRD HEAT 3

The national swimmer Issa al Adawi will compete in third heat during Men's 100m freestyle competitions. He will be in the seventh line in the Olympic swimming pool at the Tokyo Aquatics Center. The 22 years old will kick off the Sultanate's campaign in Tokyo 2020 as the first athlete on Tuesday.

Beside Issa's, the heat 3 will feature swimmers: Miguel MENA



Issa al Adawi with coach Ayman al Kulaibi

(NCA), Jean-Luc Zephir (LCA), Yousuf al Matrooshi (UAE), Stefano Mitchell (ANT), Andrew Chetcuti (MNT), Kledi Kadiu (ALB) and Danilo Rosafo (KEN).

The number of heats in the preliminary qualifiers is nine where 16 swimmers who will advance to semis in the following days. The finals will take place on Thursday where the medals will be delivered to the top three winners. The domestic swimming star will seek to confirm his top show in competing with other opponents from different parts of the world.

COACH AYMAN ARRIVED

The national swimming head coach, Ayman al Kulaibi, arrived on Friday. He joined with the swimming team and began supervision of Issa's training in the training pool at Tokyo International Aquatics Center. The local coach and Japanese coach Kenta will direct Issa during the daily training sessions until commencement of the competitions.

The national coach Ayman al Kulaibi said that attendance in the Olympic Games is a great

opportunity for everyone. "As a coach I will try to gain the required experience from this globe sporting event. From this participation at Olympic Games, we are working to enhance the technical performance and shape the swimmer to compete in the regional and international levels," he added.

Commenting on Issa's performance during the last few years, the former Sultanate's swimmer champion responded, "Issa has technical points which will assist him easily to reach the standard and international level. Moreover, reaching to the top technical level needs sustainability and continuity in the training and having the right exposure at regional and international championships. I hope we can use all these facilities which will help us to develop our swimmers' performance."

GLOBAL ATTENDANCE

Dr Mohammed bin Said al Busaidy, the Sultanate's Ambassador to Japan, affirmed that the Sultanate's participation in this significant sporting forum, represented in the Summer

Olympics "Tokyo 2020", confirms the Sultanate's commitment and presence in various international forums, as the Sultanate is an important member of the international community.

The ambassador pointed out that Omani sports has witnessed great developments during the modern Omani renaissance under the leadership of the late Sultan Qaboos and that sports and youth sectors in the Sultanate continue to develop and receive the highest attention and care under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

The ambassador indicated that the future is looking bright for Omani youths and sports, especially with the diversity of plans and strategies that have been developed in this framework and in line with the directions of Oman Vision 2040.

The Sultanate's ambassador to Japan conveyed his greetings to all Sultanate's delegation and athletes at the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, adding that he and all members of the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Tokyo are very proud to see

representatives of Omani sports competing in the most important international sporting events, wishing them all a successful participation and hoping that they succeed in achieving advanced and honourable results for the Sultanate. Oman has many enthusiastic friends in Japan including the Japan-Oman Society, the Japan-Oman Club in Tokyo, the Japan-Oman Friendship Association in Hiroshima and the Japan-Oman Friendship Association in Nara who were all looking forward to cheering Team-Oman and were actually ready to receive them and support them during this great sporting event, but couldn't due to Covid-19 restrictions and the countermeasures to prevent the spread of the virus. The ambassador concluded that we fully understand and respect the strict countermeasures in place adding that all our Japanese friends will continue to support Team-Oman even if they cannot attend in person.

The ambassador explained that Japan is a unique country in all fields, including sports, as Japanese are considered among

“It is a historic moment for any athlete to carry the flag of the nation. These moments will remain in my sporting memory for ever. I am proud of myself in this debut presence in Tokyo 2020 and will do the level best to deliver top technical performance

ISSA AL ADAWI

Oman swimmer and flag bearer

the top most competitive people in various individual and team sports, adding that they are never defeated as they have the aspiration and determination to achieve their goals, noting that, the Japanese public always stands united by their teams whatever the outcome. The Japanese people will unconditionally continue to support and believe in their teams until they achieve victory in the end. The ambassador added, likewise all of Oman will continue to support our teams and the Omani athletes participating in this important sporting event.

The ambassador concluded his statement that next year will be an important year for Oman-Japan relations, as it will mark 50 years of modern diplomatic relations between both nations. He explained that the historical relations between the two countries actually extend to over 400 years, demonstrating the strength and commitment of our relations, and that we continue to seek to grow and expand it even further.

India's Mirabai clinches historic silver medal

TOKYO: India's Mirabai Chanu created history by winning the country's first medal of the Tokyo Olympic Games by bagging silver in the women's 49kg category.

China's Hou Zhihui grabbed the gold after opening up an early 7kg advantage over Mirabai that she never relinquished at the Tokyo International Forum.

Chanu's silver medal effort was also India's first weightlifting medal since the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

Mirabai, the 2017 world champion at 48kg, was unable to make inroads on Hou's 210kg aggregate but was ecstatic at becoming India's first weightlifting silver medallist, after Karanam Malleswari's bronze in the women's 69kg at Sydney 2000.

Mirabai hoped her success could inspire more Indian young women to take up weightlifting.

IT'S A REALLY BIG THING

"It's a really big thing, the first silver for India. Whatever happens in the future I hope this is just the beginning," said Mirabai.

Back in India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi led the celebrations as the country celebrated only its fifth individual Olympic silver medal in the history of the Games.

"Could not have asked for a happier start to @Tokyo2020!", Modi tweeted.

"India is elated by @mirabai_chanu's stupendous performance. Congratulations to her for winning the Silver medal in weightlifting. Her success motivates every Indian."

Had she won gold, Mirabai would have been just the second athlete — and first female — from the country of 1.3 billion people to win an individual Olympic title, after Abhinav Bindra in the 10m air rifle at Beijing 2008.

Teenager Windy Cantika Aisah took the bronze for Indonesia after smashing her personal best twice in the clean and jerk. The 19-year-old from Bandung hoisted 110kg with her third attempt and screamed with delight as she secured a medal.

She put her success down to her mum



It's a really big thing, the first silver for India. Whatever happens in the future I hope this is just the beginning

MIRABAI CHANU (INDIA)

Silver medallist, women's 49kg

Siti, who was also a weightlifter.

"Yes my mum inspired me and though I cannot say what will happen in the future, right now I am just so happy," Aisah said.

Hou's victory could herald a gold rush for China in the weightlifting, especially with arch-rivals North Korea absent.

China have sent a full quota of four men and four women to Tokyo, and all are capable of finishing on the top step of the podium.

PAPUAN HISTORY-MAKER

Earlier in Group B of the 49kg competition, Papua New Guinea's Loa Dika Toua made history as the first female to compete in five Olympic weightlifting competitions, just a few hours after carrying her nation's flag at the Tokyo 2020 opening ceremony.

It was a remarkable achievement by the 37-year-old, coming 21 years after she became the first female ever to lift at an Olympic Games, when women's weightlifting was first introduced at Sydney 2000.

"It's an amazing feeling," she said. "Your dream is to go to one Olympics, and maybe a second one. But I never imagined in a million years that I would make it to five."

Her five-Games feat was later matched by double Olympic medallist Hiromi Miyake from Japan, who won a silver medal at London 2012 and bronze at Rio five years ago but finished out of the medals. — AFP



Silver medallist India's Chanu Saikhom Mirabai stands on the podium for the victory ceremony of the women's 49kg weightlifting competition during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Tokyo International Forum in Tokyo. — AFP



This picture taken with a robotic camera shows India's Chanu Saikhom Mirabai competing in the women's 49kg weightlifting competition during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Tokyo International Forum in Tokyo. — AFP

Belgium beat Dutch as Germany, Britain also win

TOKYO: World champions Belgium beat the Netherlands 3-1 in the men's hockey tournament at the Tokyo Olympics on Saturday thanks to a stunning hat-trick from Alexander Hendrickx, while Germany and Britain also won their first group matches.

Earlier on Saturday, Australia beat hosts Japan 5-3 in a thrilling opening match set against blue skies and under the scorching sun in a spectator-less Oi Hockey Stadium.

Hendrickx scored three goals in five minutes as the Belgians came back from a goal down to take revenge on the side that beat them in the EuroHockey semifinals last month.

"There, our product was not finished yet. Now, we're already one step closer to that finished product," said Hendrickx, who scored a penalty stroke and from two penalty corners.

"We played calm and kept the ball in the team. We killed the game."

Germany thrashed Canada 7-1, with two goals each from explosive



Canada's James Alexander Paget Kirkpatrick (L) and Germany's Timm Alexander Herzbruch vie for the ball. — AFP

forward Jan Ruhr and defender Lukas Windfeder.

Britain, who have won Olympic gold in the men's tournament three times, defeated South Africa 3-1 helped by a second minute goal from Sam Ward and two more in the second half.

India recovered from a goal down to defeat New Zealand 3-2.

AUSTRALIA COMEBACK

Australia's 'Kookaburras' trailed 3-2 at half-time against Japan after conceding three goals in quick succession but kept fighting to turn the tables in the final two quarters.

"Japan are a tough opponent. We wanted to get the result today," said midfielder Daniel Beale, who scored the final goal.

"Luckily, we got the three points and we're just looking to build each and every game. This is definitely a good place to start with a win."

The Australians pulled level in the 34th minute after Blake Govers scored a penalty corner and went ahead on the sun-drenched pitch of the main stadium with a back-hand shot from captain Aran Zal-

ewski that flew high in the net.

Beale took an assist from forward Tim Brand to put the game away.

Australia's players were taking on plenty of ice water and using fans and cold towels to cool themselves during breaks but Beale said they would adapt to the humid conditions.

"It's hot, but we're just going to deal with it and get on with it," he said.

"Luckily coming from Australia we're used to a high heat so I think everyone has to deal with it. The team that copes the best is going to go the furthest in this tournament."

Rio gold medallists Argentina drew 1-1 with Spain after conceding in the 52nd minute while playing with a man down following a yellow card minutes earlier.

India, who have won gold medals at eight Olympics, conceded early against New Zealand but equalised quickly through a penalty stroke and roared on to win, with two goals from Harmanpreet Singh and one from Rupinder Pal Singh. — Reuters

SWEDEN TOO STRONG FOR MATILDAS, BANDA NETS TREBLE IN ZAMBIA DRAW



Jonna Andersson of Sweden and Amanda Ilestedt of Sweden celebrate after the match. – Reuters

TOKYO: Sweden recovered to continue their dominant run in the women's Olympic soccer tournament with a 4-2 comeback win over Australia, while Zambia striker Barbra Banda netted her second hat-trick in as many games to lead the scoring charts.

Three days after stunning world champions the United States, Sweden were on the front foot once again with a first-half Fridolina Rolfo strike before Australia captain Sam Kerr equalised just before halftime.

In a goal-laden second half, Kerr handed the Matildas a 2-1 lead, only for Sweden to score three quickfire goals courtesy of

Lina Hurtig, Stina Blackstenius and Rolfo's second.

There was still room for more drama at Saitama Stadium as Australia earned a late penalty but Kerr was denied a hat-trick as goalkeeper Hedvig Lindahl saved her spot kick and Sweden held on to claim all three points and top Group G.

After scoring a treble in Zambia's 10-3 drubbing by the Netherlands, Banda cemented her status as the breakout player of the competition with another hat-trick in a 4-4 draw with China in Group F.

China had a goal machine of their own in Wang Shuang,



Stina Blackstenius of Sweden celebrates scoring their fourth goal with Fridolina Rolfo of Sweden. – Reuters

who scored four times including a late penalty to earn her side a deserved point at Rifu's Miyagi Stadium.

Wang became only the third player to score four goals in a match at the Games and the second in the tournament after Dutchwoman Vivianne Miedema.

In Group E, Manchester City forward Ellen White nodded in her third goal of the tournament to give England a 1-0 victory over hosts Japan, who stay winless after two games.

Earlier, Canada's forward Janine Beckie scored in each half as they beat Chile 2-1 at the Sapporo Dome. — Reuters

Canada's Hadwin cruises to 65 to take share of lead at 3M Open



Charl Schwartzel hits off at the 4th tee during the second round of the 3M Open. – USA Today Sports



Rickie Fowler tees off from the 4th tee box during the second round of the 3M Open. – USA Today Sports



Jonattan Vegas shoots on the 12th hole during the second round of the 3M Open. – USA Today Sports

LOS ANGELES: Adam Hadwin fired a bogey-free 65 at the PGA Tour's 3M Open on Friday, to grab a share of the second round lead with Ryan Armour.

The 33-year-old Canadian has only one bogey through the first two rounds to reach a 10-under 132 total at the Twin Cities course in Blaine, Minnesota.

"I drove it really well today," Hadwin said. "Wasn't in any trouble, hit a lot of good quality iron shots. Again, fat sides of the hole, I gave myself opportunities. My speed control's been really good. It's been as stress-free a 65 as you're going to have."

Hadwin, who played his final three holes in even par, has been

relying on his precision putting and solid iron play.

Bo Hoag (66), Chez Reavie (67), Jhonattan Vegas (69) and Roger Sloan (69) were all a shot back.

Eleven players finished their first rounds on Friday morning after a weather delay on Thursday halted the action early.

With more poor weather expected this weekend, organisers decided to go with threesomes off split tees on Saturday.

Hadwin has dropped to 120th in FedEx Cup standings after missing the cut in his last three tournaments.

"The biggest thing this week

is I've just been a little bit more committed to the process and less on the outcome," Hadwin said.

Armour, who birdied five of his final eight holes in the second round, is coming off a fifth-place finish at last week's Barbasol Championship.

"I'm trying," said Armour,

whose only win was at the 2018 Sanderson Farms Championship.

"You've got to go out and get it done and we're just trying our hardest right now."

Second-ranked Dustin Johnson made bogey on 18th and missed the cut. He shot 72 to finish at even par. The cut was two-under. — AFP



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32 per cent jump in patent, copyright registrations

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 24

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has reported a 32-per cent jump in applications for the registration of national and international trademarks, patents, copyrights and other intellectual property rights during the first half of this year.

According to figures released by the National Intellectual Property Office at the Ministry, applications totalled 5,779 during the January-June 2021 period versus 4,370 applications registered during the same period in 2020. National and international trademarks accounted for the vast majority of applications at 5,445 requests, followed by national and international applications for patents (260) and copyright (78).

Following Ministerial Resolution 206/2018, registration fees for students and researchers were slashed by 90 per cent, while those from small and medium enterprises were halved — a move designed to encourage people to register their innovations, discoveries and creative works.

In addition, patent examiners in the National Patent Office assist applicants in the drafting of their

Following Ministerial Resolution 206/2018, registration fees for students and researchers were slashed by 90 per cent, while those from small and medium enterprises were halved

patent requests and advising them on the importance of registration and protection. Copyright, on the other hand, is a legal term describing the rights granted to creators in relation to their literary and artistic works.

It covers a wide range of works from books, music, oil paintings, sculptures and films to computer programmes, databases, advertisements, geographical maps and technical drawings.

The importance of protecting intellectual property lies in allowing rights holders, whether the creator or the owner of the patent, trademark or copyright, to benefit from their work and investment and the establishment of local industries based on these rights, encouraging and attracting foreign investments, providing the necessary protection, and limiting the spread of counterfeit works. — ONA

Oman Food Investment targets \$1.2 billion worth projects

FOOD SECURITY: Food equity fund, coconut farm, camel milk project, and animal and aqua feed development among portfolio of eight projects planned for implementation over 2021-2026 timeframe

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Oman Food Investment Holding Company SAOC (OFIC), the government’s food sector investment and development arm, has unveiled plans to invest in an array of strategically significant food-related projects involving an investment of around \$1.2 billion (RO 433 million) over the next six years.

According to a high-level official of wholly government-owned OFIC, an affiliate of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) – the Sultanate’s integrated sovereign wealth fund – as many as eight different projects are envisioned for implementation over the 2021-2026 timeframe.

These span investments in Oman’s first food-centric private equity fund, a new camel milk farm project, a countrywide fruits and vegetable retail distribution network, a dedicated coconut farm development, a food logistics scheme, and a novel vertical farming initiative. Also on the anvil for development during this phase is a new animal and aqua feed production facility, and a substantial expansion and integration of the Nakheel Oman date palm processing scheme.

“There are about eight initiatives that form the strategic direction of the OFIC Group going forward,” said Ali al Shihhi (pictured), Vice-President – Finance, OFIC. “OFIC is planning to invest around \$1.2 billion in food security over the coming 5-6 years.” The official made the announcement during a recent webinar on the

theme, ‘Connecting Denmark to Oman’s Business Opportunities,’ organised by Business Gateways International with the support of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

“OFIC is working with Oman Investment Authority and our subsidiaries to consolidate a number of projects that will form the new direction of OFIC going forward,” Al Shihhi stated. “Some of these initiatives have been defined and already approved, while some of them are under study.” Having launched a flurry of key projects, while kickstarting the development of several others, OFIC is now focused on phases 5, 6, 7 and 8 of its future strategy spanning the next two decades, said the official.

Key projects that have been

launched under OFIC’s umbrella include Mazoon Dairy, which is the largest integrated dairy farm and processing project in the Sultanate, and Al Bashayer Meat, a Dhofar-based supplier of high-quality red meat products for the domestic market. Gearing up to launch is A’Namma Poultry, which is set to be one of the largest producers of white meat in the Sultanate.

Earlier, Al Shihhi underlined the advantages of OFIC’s strategy to partner with the private sector in the delivery of the company’s food security objectives. “OFIC is a government-owned company with a built-in vision to seek partnerships with the private sector. OFIC has managed to do so through proven partnerships in its existing assets that are currently selling its products in the local and international markets.” Securing the Sultanate’s food requirements is a key pillar of the company’s growth strategy, according to the official. “Our strategic vision is to aggressively close the gap in the trade balance between imports and exports of food products. There’s presently a huge gap in the imports and exports of vegetables,

fruits, and white and red meat products. By closing that gap, OFIC will be able to contribute automatically to the diversification of the Omani economy. We will also be contributing to the GDP of Oman, while also marketing Omani products to local and international markets,” he said, adding these objectives ultimately lead to the goal of achieving 100 per cent food security for Oman and its people by 2040.

Set up in 2012 as a government entity, OFIC is nevertheless fully commercial in its business outlook, said Al Shihhi. “OFIC has a number of competitive advantages; it currently has a well-defined strategy that is project-based. We are a leading government entity in the production, processing, import and export of food products. We also have a diverse portfolio of food projects — we believe in public-private partnerships (PPP), which is built into our investment philosophy. We also have a very good global outreach — our products are currently being exported to markets as far afield as Singapore, Pakistan and Morocco.”

Over 2,000 tonnes of Omani busur dates exported

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 24

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has announced the successful export of around 2,065 tonnes of the busur crop of Omani dates harvested during the course of 2020.

The busur crop refers to certain types of dates that are harvested before they ripen, cooked in

vats and then sun-dried. The entire process forms part of the tabseel season, which is marked throughout the date growing parts of the Sultanate.

This year’s busur haul was made up of dates of the Al Mebselli, Al Madlouki and Abu Narengah types. During a roughly six-week period extending from April 11 to May 20 this year, farmers and traders dealing in the busur crop deposited their harvests at the warehouses of the Ministry in the

Al Wadi al Kabir area of Muscat. As many as 66 farmers and traders contributed to this year’s haul, according to the Ministry. Each received RO 62,500 per tonne of busur dates.

The busur crop forms a longstanding tradition supported by the Ministry to ensure that date growers in the Sultanate secure a market for their annual produce. While the collection process is overseen by the Ministry to ensure that the crop meets with certain

standards and specifications, the export process is tendered out to companies as part of a competitive process.

India is traditionally an important destination for Omani busur dates where they are either retailed out as dried dates or chopped and mixed with other dried fruits. Alternatively, they can be processed into numerous types of date-based snacks and food products.

— With inputs from ONA

The largest companies in the world

When we hear others talking about billions and trillions, we at times struggle to put figures in context. So this is the first column of a short series that I would like to introduce exclusively to the readers of the *Oman Daily Observer* to appreciate proportions when it comes to business magnitude.

The numbers presented relate to the top 100 companies in the world, ranked by industry and country in the yearly report of PwC.

So when I mention “all” I mean to point to all those listed within the top 100.

However, to set the context, it could be useful to begin with a first more general fact: the US is the largest economy in the world at nearly \$22.7 trillion. In fact, 59 out of the 100 largest companies

in the world are in the US.

You can sense this vast amount of business when you look at job openings.

Take any metropolis in the US and count how many LinkedIn jobs are available compared to entire countries.

For example, the job title “software engineer”: in San Francisco Bay Area alone, there are nearly 19 thousand job openings at the moment. That is more than UK, France, Italy and Spain all together.

In fact, all of the top US technology companies together are valued at \$7.79 trillion. An incredible \$2 trillion of which is taken by Apple alone.

Apple alone has a larger capitalisation than all of China’s tech giants put together. And as a sector, the US stands tall twice as higher as all of the top companies in Europe, including



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THE US IS THE LARGEST ECONOMY IN THE WORLD AT NEARLY \$22.7 TRILLION. IN FACT, 59 OUT OF THE 100 LARGEST COMPANIES IN THE WORLD ARE IN THE US

all countries and all industries.

China comes up second in the world for technology, at \$1.5 trillion with Tencent and Alibaba ranking among the top 10 in the world.

Although it has been growing steadily, it is hard to say if China’s top tech companies will be able to catch up with the American ones within this generation.

Overall, all of the top China businesses put together are valued at \$4.2 trillion. Given the population of China, it is somehow expected that as a tech savvy and financially strong country, is able to place a pool of enormous companies within the top 100 in the world.

And for such a pool to combine their valuation above an entire continent can be seen as not so surprising. This is however a performance that did not work out with the same

outcome in India.

In fact, among the Indian companies ranked among the top 100 in the world, the total valuation stands at only \$340 billion. The overall GDP of the country, however, is the 6th in the world, with over \$3 trillion in 2019.

As a first analysis we could therefore highlight that only 10 per cent of India’s economy is made by giants, while in the US, with a GDP close to \$23 trillion in 2019, about 90 per cent is made by 59 companies alone.

Food for thoughts for sure. Which one do the readers see as a stronger economy? One in the hand of a few huge businesses or one where the giants are a tiny minority? Let us spark the conversation.

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

US Treasury Secretary Yellen warns Congress on debt limit



WASHINGTON: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen (**pictured**) urged lawmakers to increase or suspend the nation’s debt limit as soon as possible and warned that if Congress does not act by August 2 the Treasury Department would need to take “extraordinary measures” to prevent a US default.

In a letter to House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Yellen said that October 1, the first day of the next fiscal year, could be a critical date for the US ability to pay its obligations without debt limit legislation due to large federal outlays scheduled for then.

In the letter, also sent to other congressional leaders from both parties, Yellen said US debt would be at the statutory limit on August 1, when a two-year suspension is set to expire.

A partisan fight over raising the debt ceiling erupted in Congress this week.

Republicans have seized upon the debt limit issue to attack Democrats for pushing legislation that they say has led to inflation and escalating public debt.

“Today, Treasury is announcing that it will suspend the sale of State and Local Government Series (SLGS) securities at 12:00 pm on July 30, 2021,” Yellen wrote.

The suspension of such sales to state and local municipal bond issuers will continue until the debt ceiling is suspended or raised, Yellen said.

“If Congress has not acted to suspend or increase the debt limit by Monday, August 2, 2021, Treasury will need to start taking certain additional extraordinary measures in order to prevent the United States from defaulting on its obligations,” Yellen added. — **Reuters**

Europe’s biggest real estate takeover fails



The logo of German real estate company Vonovia SE is seen at a Vonovia building in Essen, western Germany. — **Reuters**

DUESSELDORF: Europe’s biggest real estate takeover could fall through, at least for now, after Germany’s Vonovia warned on Friday that it likely had not secured the backing of enough shareholders in its target Deutsche Wohnen.

The deadline for Deutsche Wohnen shareholders to tender stock passed at midnight on Wednesday and Vonovia needs to collect at least 50 per cent of its rival’s shares for the deal to proceed.

Vonovia said the latest tally indicated it had only received commitments for 47.6 per cent. A final result is due on Monday.

The deal would create a \$22

billion property giant with 550,000 apartments.

“A combination of the two companies makes a lot of sense,” Vonovia Chief Executive Rolf Buch said in a statement.

“Unfortunately, an insufficient proportion of the current shareholders of Deutsche Wohnen have turned in their shares.” The deal has been controversial in Germany amid tensions over soaring rents ahead of general elections in September.

Executives have promised the merged company would work with politicians on providing affordable housing.

— **Reuters**

Mexico disputes US application of USMCA rules on autos

WASHINGTON: Mexico is at odds with the United States over how it is applying content rules for the regional auto trade, Mexican economy Minister Tatiana Clouthier said.

The dispute centres on content requirements known as rules of origin that allow cars manufactured in North America to receive duty free treatment under the regional trade pact that took effect just over a year ago. “We believe that the rules of origin have not been interpreted the way it was agreed at the moment we signed the agreement,” Clouthier said.

The US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) signed by former US president Donald Trump raised the regional content requirement for vehicles to 75 per cent from the 62.5 per cent threshold under the North American Free Trade Agreement (Nafta), which it replaced.

Clouthier met on Thursday with US Trade Representative (USTR) Katherine Tai to discuss the issue just after the anniversary of the deal’s implementation, but indicated the sides had not resolved their disagreement.

“We need more dialogue,” she said at a press conference.

She also released a statement



Employees work at Ford’s Dearborn Truck Plant in Dearborn, Michigan. — **Reuters**

USMCA raised the regional content requirement for vehicles to 75 per cent from the 62.5 per cent threshold under the North American Free Trade Agreement (Nafta), which it replaced

warning that “not abiding by US-MCA rules may potentially disrupt the operations of the North America automotive industry and will result in unnecessary bur-

dens” for the manufacturers and “reduced competitiveness.” The USTR did not respond to a request for comment, but in a statement after the meeting with the Mexican officials said the “United States remains committed to the full implementation of the US-MCA, including the strong auto rules of origin.”

Trump and his trade representative Robert Lighthizer touted the new pact as a boon for the American auto industry, which under Nafta became tightly integrated with suppliers and assembly plants in Mexico and Canada. — **AFP**

Tesla lobbies India for sharply lower import taxes on EVs

NEW DELHI: Tesla Inc is likely to set up a factory in India if successful with imported vehicles, Chief Executive Elon Musk said on Twitter, after the company wrote to Indian ministries seeking a big reduction in import duties on electric vehicles, according to two sources with knowledge of the matter.

The electric-car maker’s pitch to lower duties, however, is likely to face resistance from Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s administration which has championed high import taxes for many industries in a bid to boost local manufacturing.

“We want to do so, but import duties are the highest in the world by far of any large country,” Musk said in reply to a tweet about

launching the company’s cars in India.

“But we are hopeful that there will be at least a temporary tariff relief for electric vehicles,” Musk added.

Other luxury automakers in India have also lobbied the government in the past to lower taxes on imported cars but have had little success due to opposition from rivals with domestic operations.

Tesla, which aims to begin sales in India this year, said in a letter to ministries and the country’s leading think-tank Niti Aayog that slashing federal taxes on imports of fully assembled electric cars to 40 per cent would be more appropriate, according to the sources.

That compares with current rates of 60 per cent for cars priced



Tesla Model X electric cars recharge their batteries in Berlin, Germany. — **Reuters**

below \$40,000 and 100 per cent for those above \$40,000.

“The argument is that at 40 per cent import duty, electric cars can become more affordable but the

Other luxury automakers in India have also lobbied the government in the past to lower taxes on imported cars but have had little success due to opposition from rivals with domestic operations

only one model — the Model 3 Standard Range Plus — is priced below \$40,000.

The Indian market for premium EVs, indeed for electric cars in general, is still very much in its infancy with vehicles far too costly for the average consumer and very

little charging infrastructure in place. Just 5,000 of the 2.4 million cars sold in India last year were electric and most were priced below \$28,000.

Daimler’s Mercedes Benz began selling its EQC luxury EV in India last year for \$136,000, and Audi launched three electric SUVs this week with sticker tags that begin at around \$133,000.

While lower duties would give Tesla a better chance to test the market, its plan to begin sales in India does not hinge on a change in government policy, both sources said.

Tesla registered a local company in India in January and has ramped up local hiring while also scouting for showroom space.

— **Reuters**



US business activity cools further



A closed barber shop is seen in California. — Reuters

WASHINGTON: US business activity grew at a moderate pace for a second straight month in July amid supply constraints, suggesting a cooling in economic activity after what was expected to have been a robust second quarter.

Data firm IHS Markit said on Friday its flash US Composite PMI Output Index, which tracks the manufacturing and services sectors, fell to a four-month low of 59.7 from 63.7 in June. A reading above 50 indicates growth in the private sector.

Businesses are battling shortages of raw materials and labour, which are fanning inflation, in the aftermath of the economy's reopening after severe disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The survey's findings fit in with economists' views that growth will slow after accelerating in the second quarter, thanks to massive fiscal stimulus.

Even with the boost from government money fading, the economy remains supported by strong demand, with households having accumulated at least \$2.5 trillion in excess savings during the pandemic. — **Reuters**

Big tech companies retake market reins with earnings on tap

NEW YORK: The rally on Wall Street faces a fresh test next week with a flood of earnings reports from major US companies, including the tech and Internet behemoths that have recently retaken leadership of the market.

More than one third of the S&P 500 is set to report quarterly results next week, headlined by Apple, Microsoft, Amazon and Google-parent Alphabet, the four largest US companies by market value.

Those stocks have gained between 5-7 per cent so far this month, as of Thursday's close, while the S&P 500 had climbed just 1.6 per cent. The S&P 500 equal-weight index, a barometer of the average stock, had fallen 0.2 per cent.

"The expectation level for these names is quite a bit higher than it was a month ago given the stock performance, so I think they are going to have to deliver", said Walter Todd, Chief Investment Officer with Greenwood Capital in South Carolina.

"It's a question of looking forward: Can they live up to the expectations that the stock prices reflect?" The strength in those large stocks has come amid concerns about a slowing US economic recovery that have helped pushed down benchmark Treasury yields this week to their lowest levels since February, before rebounding some.

As the Delta variant of Covid-19 sweeps through the United States, the economic outlook will be in sharp focus at the Federal Reserve's meeting on Tuesday and Wednesday, another pivotal event for investors seeking clues for when the central bank



Customers walk around the new Apple Store on Broadway in downtown Los Angeles. — Reuters

The strength in those large stocks has come amid concerns about a slowing US economic recovery that have helped pushed down benchmark Treasury yields this week to their lowest levels since February

might rein in its easy money policies.

Though the S&P 500 stands at record levels after rallying more than 95 per cent from its March 2020 lows, stocks have endured more volatility in recent days as investors seek to reconcile bond-market signals about the economic outlook.

Indeed, below the surface, stock performance indicates some doubts about economic strength. Growth stocks, which led the market for years as the economy grew sluggishly, have outperformed economically-sensitive value stocks in July, while smaller stocks, which tend

to have more exposure to the US economy, have also lagged, with the small-cap Russell 2000 down over 4 per cent so far this month.

"Investors have... sought safety in those megacaps, particularly the megacap tech companies, which are expected to continue to deliver very strong growth", said Tim Skindzielewski, Investment Director at Aberdeen Standard Investments in Philadelphia.

The dominance of the megacap stocks also raises concerns that the broader index may be more dependent on the fortunes of a few giant technology-related companies.

The market cap of five

companies — Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, Alphabet and Facebook — recently stood at 24.6 per cent of the S&P 500's market cap, nearly the highest proportion it has been in 2021.

Fewer than half of the stocks in the S&P 500 recently traded above their 50-day moving averages even as the index has been at or near new highs, compared to over 90 per cent in April, a sign that "what is happening beneath the surface is at odds with the picture of strength that is portrayed if one just looks at the popular averages", according to Willie Delwiche, an investment strategist with market research firm All Star Charts.

At the same time, bullish investors can point to a strong start for an earnings season that has been expected to show a powerful rebound from the pandemic. — **Reuters**

GLOBAL INSURANCE RECOVERY FASTER, STRONGER THAN IN 2008

NEW YORK: The global insurance industry is poised to recover more quickly and forcefully from the pandemic than it did after the 2008 financial crisis, despite such obstacles as low interest rates and inflation risk, insurer Swiss Re AG's chief Americas economist said on Friday.

Unlike the prior crisis, the pandemic did not weaken insurers' overall capitalisation or financial strength, which allows companies to write new coverage and increase revenue, economist Thomas Holzhau said.

Writing new policies was more difficult in 2009 and 2010 when insurers were reeling from capital losses, slow economic growth and depleted incomes of companies and individuals.

In contrast, businesses and individuals now have more money from government stimulus and support programs, and are more conscious of the need to buy protection against risks, he added.

"We see a much stronger, more resilient demand for insurance — last year, this year, and we expect for the next few years."

— **Reuters**

US trade agency drops tariff threat against Vietnam

WASHINGTON: The US Trade Representative's office on Friday said it had determined that no tariff action against Vietnam was warranted after its central bank agreed with the US Treasury not to manipulate its currency for an export advantage.

In a statement, USTR said it found that the US Treasury-State Bank of Vietnam agreement earlier this week "provides a satisfactory resolution of the matter subject to investigation and accordingly that no trade action is warranted at this time." The State Bank of Vietnam on Monday pledged in an agreement with Treasury

Secretary Janet Yellen to refrain from "competitive devaluation" of its dong currency and make its monetary and exchange rate policies more transparent.

The deal follows months of US pressure on Vietnam over its currency practices and ballooning US trade surplus. The Trump administration in its final weeks had declared Vietnam a currency manipulator and had threatened to impose punitive tariffs on imports from Vietnam over its currency practices.

The USTR determination, outlined in a federal register here notice, only pertains to its Section



A clerk counts Vietnamese dong banknotes at a bank in Hanoi. — Reuters

301 investigation into Vietnam's currency practices. It does not affect a separate Section 301 investigation into Vietnam's use of illegally harvested or traded timber that could lead to tariffs on furniture and other wood products imported from Vietnam.

"American workers and businesses are stronger when our partners value their currency fairly and compete on a level playing field", US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said in a statement.

"Going forward, in coordination with Treasury, we will work together with Vietnam to ensure implementation, and

we will continue to examine the currency practices of other major trading partners", Tai added.

Vietnam welcomed the USTR's decision to take no action, its foreign minister, Bui Thanh Son, said.

"Constructive efforts and goodwill help resolve outstanding issues and contribute to the building of a better and stronger partnership", Son said on Twitter.

The Vietnamese dong closed at 23,005 to the dollar on Friday, compared with 23,191 on October 2, 2020, the day that USTR launched its currency probe.

— **Reuters**

SHORT TAKES

GENEVA

Vitol hands record \$2.9 bn payout to its traders

Vitol Group has paid a record \$2.9 billion to its executives and staff through share buybacks so far this year after the global energy trader posted its best-ever results in 2020, Bloomberg News reported on Friday.

Vitol's 2020 net profit of \$3.2 billion exceeded its previous record of \$2.3 billion, which it last achieved in 2019, the report said, citing the company's audited annual accounts.

Vitol made a significant chunk of its profits during the Q2, when



oil demand collapsed, allowing traders to buy cheap crude and store it, while locking in a profit by selling forward the oil on the futures market at higher prices, according to the report.

— **Reuters**

MUMBAI

Profits at India's Reliance fall on Covid impact

Profits at Indian conglomerate Reliance Industries dropped sharply between April and June this year, the company said on Friday, as Asia's third-largest economy battled a vicious second wave of Covid-19.

The oil-to-telecoms giant, which is owned by Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani, reported a consolidated net profit of 122.73 billion rupees (\$1.65 billion) in the quarter ending June 30, a 7.25 per cent fall compared to the same period last year.



Even though its quarterly revenues jumped by 58 per cent year-on-year to 1.44 trillion rupees, aided by its flagship oil and gas businesses, its retail arm took a hit as a spike in infections prompted shop closures. — **AFP**

NEW YORK

GM announces 2nd Bolt recall to address fire risk

General Motors announced on Friday a second recall of the all-electric Chevrolet Bolt to address a battery defect blamed for recent car fires. GM cited "two rare manufacturing defects" in the high-voltage batteries, which are produced by LG Chem in South Korea.

The automaker said it will notify 2017-2019 Bolt owners when replacement parts are available. The recall affects about 69,000 cars globally, including around 51,000 in the US.



"Out of an abundance of caution, customers should continue to park their vehicles outside immediately after charging and not leave their vehicles charging overnight", GM warned. — **AFP**

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features

Alia Gallery: A destination to inspire Oman’s art lovers

Alia al Farsi is an accomplished and unconventional artist who owns the 860 sqm warehouse holding the treasures of Alia Gallery in Muttrah. Completely designed by the artist herself, the gallery includes a café (Alia lounge), a library and a gift shop and houses art pieces that were a product of her different phases and life experiences... **P20**



CONSERVATION

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The 21st book in the Gabriel Allon series. A private intelligence service plans an act of violence that will aid Russia and divide America.

Over 10,000 species risk extinction in Amazon, says landmark report

MORE THAN 10,000 species of plants and animals are at high risk of extinction due to the destruction of the Amazon rainforest — 35 per cent of which has already been deforested or degraded, according to the draft of a landmark scientific report published on Wednesday.

Produced by the Science Panel for the Amazon (SPA), the 33-chapter report brings together research on the world's largest rainforest from 200 scientists from across the globe. It is

the most detailed assessment of the state of the forest to date and both makes clear the vital role the Amazon plays in global climate and the profound risks it is facing.

Cutting deforestation and forest degradation to zero in less than a decade "is critical," the report said, also calling for massive restoration of already destroyed areas. The rainforest is a vital bulwark against climate change both for the carbon it absorbs and what it stores. — **Reuters**





Tips from an exemplary hospitality marketing expert

Building an outstanding career in hospitality and tourism



HERE IS AN INDUSTRY classified amongst the top female-led industries in the world. In Oman, the tourism and hospitality sector is expected to contribute to the country's GDP by RO 3 billion by 2028. Dramatically changing in the past decades, women have become more apt for the hospitality sector as female hoteliers "portray a leadership style that is highly recognised and appreciated by the employees."

Sarah Khaled's inclusion as one of the 50 best hotel marketing talents in the Middle East released by Hotelier Middle East wasn't an accident. The only one who is based in Oman, part of the accolade was because of her show-stopping ideas and campaign which not only provided proof of her effectiveness as a communicator but is also a testament to how proper marketing brings money to a business.

With insight into the inner workings of hospitality in the Sultanate, Sarah has been exemplary in nearly all aspects. She's not only a trendsetter but a commodity in the hotel industry. One of her most needed skillsets is her fluency and mastery of both Arabic and English, her luxury background that trace back to almost 15 years, and the powerful network she's created for herself which not only boost her credibility but also provides her with the support she needs to navigate the

politics and challenges of being a hotelier and a marketer.

Oman Daily Observer reached out to Sarah for her to share some insights as to how Omani hoteliers and marketers can also break barriers and become global talents that will help the hospitality and tourism industry in the country grow.

IN THE MIDDLE EAST, PARTICULARLY IN OMAN, THERE IS STILL A BIT OF RESERVATION IN GETTING INTO HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM. HAVING MANAGED THE MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS OF DIFFERENT LUXURY AND FIVE-STAR PROPERTIES ACROSS THE REGION, CAN YOU SHARE THE CURRENT TREND YOU'RE NOTICING? IS THE INDUSTRY STILL SOLELY FOR WOMEN?

Despite the dynamic nature of hotel life, hotel marketing roles have been predominantly occupied by females for a long time now. I personally believe that it started organically, then it evolved into a trend which then turned into a misconception by both, employers and applicants. However, throughout the past couple of years, this has been slowly shifting to welcoming good talents regardless of their gender, and in Oman, there are a couple of gentlemen working in this field who are pulling off a great job indeed.

YOU WERE THE ONLY MARKETING EXPERT ON THE LIST THAT IS BASED IN OMAN. FROM YOUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, HOW DO YOU THINK CAN OTHERS IMPROVE AND BECOME BETTER SUITED FOR THE HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM SECTOR?

The warm Omani hospitality is synonymous with the ethos of the hotel industry. Passionate Omani Hoteliers To-Be can thrive in this field. So, to every Omani talent out there, if you are new to this field and you do not know from where to start, research about different hotel companies and brands in Oman and identify the ones that are closest to your heart.

The next step is reaching out to the HR departments of these hotels by email or even to the hotel professionals via LinkedIn for training and internship opportunities. This will provide you with practical experience and on-the-job training to unlock your potential. Usually, when you prove to be a solid performer by the end of your internship, you can end up with a permanent contract; so that you can embark on your hospitality journey from there.

If you are an existing Omani Hotelier and looking for career progression, be proactive and chase opportunities that make you stand out. Volunteer to support other departments within your hotel through a wider scope

of work, even if it was during your free time. Remember that every minute you spend now, is a self-investment in the future.

To sum it up, the ingredients are simple for your hotel-career discovery: Be passionate, dedicated, consistent, keep your smile on, always go the extra mile and do not lose the eagerness to learn.

Key Tip: No matter how senior we are, we are in a consistent learning curve. Pick one key person whom you wish to be in his or her place in the future and ask them for coaching, guidance and mentorship or even job shadowing for a day!

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT HOTEL MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS?

Marketing and Communications play a fundamental role in the ecosystem of the hotel industry, and the importance of this role gets amplified, when you operate in a luxury hotel brand such as The Shangri-La.

MarCom (Marketing and Communications) is a complex position that includes several functionalities, and it involves a lot of planning ahead. The main functions of this role include but are not limited to brand positioning, 360 campaign ideation and execution, content creation, brand compliance, all printed materials, online/offline advertising, direct marketing, social media management, online presence, sales presentations, B2B marketing, reputation management, crisis communications, media relations, PR activities and partnerships in addition to analytics and reporting.

On the other end of the spectrum, there is a wide belief that working in hotel Marketing and PR is a "glamorous" role that involves only mixing with celebrities, and the rich and famous. While this does occasionally happen, 90pc of the time it involves plain hard work, long working hours and resilience; so that you can really stand out.

FOR ANYONE PLANNING A JOB ALONG THIS LINE OF WORK AND INDUSTRY, WHAT SHOULD BE THE REQUIRED SKILL SET OR CHARACTERS ONE MUST POSSESS TO DO IT SUCCESSFULLY?

At Shangri-La, we hire for attitude and passion, then the experience requirements come into play depending on the position and the seniority of the job role. From a hotel MarCom perspective, this expands to creativity, innovation, market intelligence and deep knowledge of consumer insights which are essential criteria for a successful marketer. Omanis are also beginning to fully understand the importance of hospitality and tourism as a career.

IN DOING YOUR JOB, WHAT IS YOUR MANTRA OR THE WORDS YOU LIVE BY AND WHY?

Success starts by believing in an idea, having what it takes to make it happen, going out there to achieve it and doing what you love every day! You just need to discover the entrepreneur in you and learn to own your ideas.

I also subscribe to the quote of Brian Herbert which says: "The capacity to learn is a gift; the ability to learn is a skill; the willingness to learn is a choice".

SKIN CARE

From faux-fur to organic skin care products



AFTER RECEIVING several backlash with her faux-fur clothing line, Dubai-based Ollia Tzarina decided to turn her business 360 degrees with the launch of her new organic skin care line — Bio Lab Exotique, but how did this realisation really happened while she's at the peak of her fashion career gaining momentum and attention from big celebrity clients such as Beyonce, Cardi B, Ariana Grande, and the Kardashian Clan?

Here, Ollia answers some of the Frequently Asked Questions to her:

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO MOVE YOUR BUSINESS FROM FAUX-FUR TO ORGANIC SKIN CARE PRODUCTS?

I think over time our morals do evolve and we get to have a better perspective of the world. I have reached a point where I want to live my life 'clean' and 'sustainable'. Launching the skin care brand was totally not planned and just happened out of coincidence when we met a couple who lives in Agadir and introduced us with Argan, we fell in love instantly with the process of getting a product that is free from all free radicals as I myself is having a difficult time to access these kind of products over the counter as most of the skin care products currently out in the market are just pure of chemical (even though they claim they do not have on it!) and the rest is history.

CLEAN BEAUTY IS AMONGST THE BIGGEST TRENDS IN THE BEAUTY INDUSTRY TODAY. WOULD YOU SAY 'BIO LAB EXOTIQUE' IS A 'CLEAN BEAUTY' BRAND?

It's so clean you could cook with it if you ever happen to be stuck on some desert island with no way out! The product has zero added chemicals and it is cold pressed, put it in the bottle and send immediately to the local stores, that's how fresh it is.

WHAT CHANGES DO YOU THINK NEED TO TAKE PLACE WITHIN THE BEAUTY INDUSTRY IN THE NEXT COUPLE OF YEARS?

The beauty industry, in my opinion, is an industry where everybody can find exactly what they need. Be it highly acidic products that resurface the whole skin or 100pc organic products that are great for maintenance, the beauty industry stands to improve anyone, and everyone's lives once they've found the products right for them but generally I think the trend will be sustainable, people would like to get products that will 100pc help them feel better and look better, without all the nasties.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LIVE SUSTAINABLY?

Living sustainably means making choices that have less of an impact on the environment and human livelihoods. Sustainable skin care is essentially choosing products that will meet our skin and beauty needs, without harshly impacting the environment or safety of humans.

We all want to make good product choices, for the environment and for ourselves. It can definitely be overwhelming to think of all the potential impacts, the certifications you should follow, the ingredients and the list goes on and on... But it doesn't have to be difficult to build a sustainable skin care routine.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF SKIN CARE PRODUCTS TO THE ENVIRONMENT?

The beauty industry contributes to pollution and drains natural resources in multiple ways — with our everyday actions as consumers exasperating the problem.

There are reports that more than 120 billion units of packaging are produced every year by the global cosmetics industry, much of which is not recyclable. The majority of beauty products come packaged in plastic, which — when talking about your average moisturiser pot — can take nearly 1,000 years to decompose. Then there's the plastic wrappings, paper inserts, cardboard sleeves, foam, mirrored glass and more, sometimes all present in one purchase.

HOW BIO LAB EXOTIQUE ADDRESSES THE CHALLENGES FACED BY THE SATURATED SKIN CARE INDUSTRY?

With a new push towards clean beauty, the biggest obstacle isn't consumer demand; it's that beauty brands need to figure out how to source, manufacture and scale clean products.

Producing a truly clean product is especially challenging under traditional manufacturing methods because it requires visibility into the entire development process to make sure every ingredient is safe and sustainably sourced. In addition, producing a clean product from nature may deplete natural resources or require purification processes to compensate for variability in quality.

Bio Lab Exotique addresses these challenges and is enabling a clean beauty transformation that benefits consumers and the planet.



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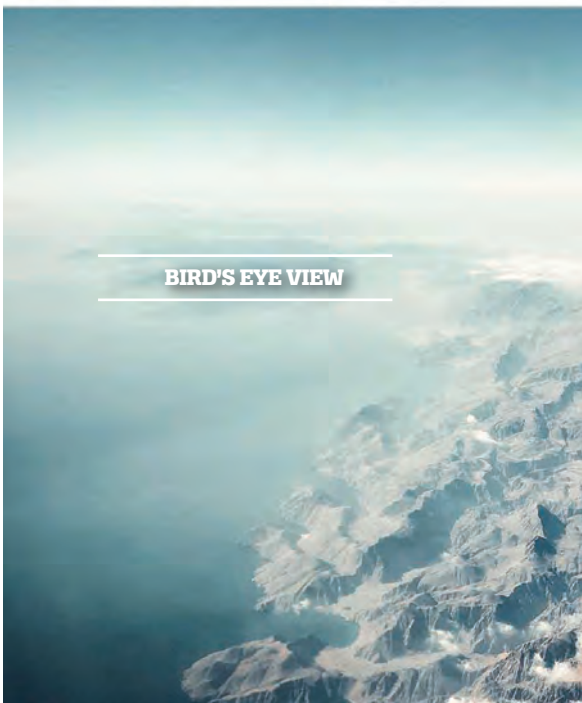
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DISCOVERY

Modern crocodile's 'grandfather,' 150 million years old, discovered in Chile fossil



A 150-MILLION-year-old fossilised skeleton discovered in the mountains of southern Chile was determined to be the ancestor of the modern crocodile, the Argentine Museum of Natural Sciences announced on Friday.

The species, named *Burkesuchus mallingrandensis*, was found in 2014 in an Andean fossil deposit near the Patagonian town of Mallin Grande by Argentine and Chilean researchers. Since then it has been analysed at the Argentine Museum of Natural Sciences (MACN) in Buenos Aires.

The specimen is a "grandfather" of current crocodiles and should allow scientists to understand how they evolved, the museum said.

Scientists believe the fossil will help them understand how these reptiles went from being terrestrial to aquatic. Along with other fossils, the discovery supports the idea that South America was the cradle of evolution for crocodiles.

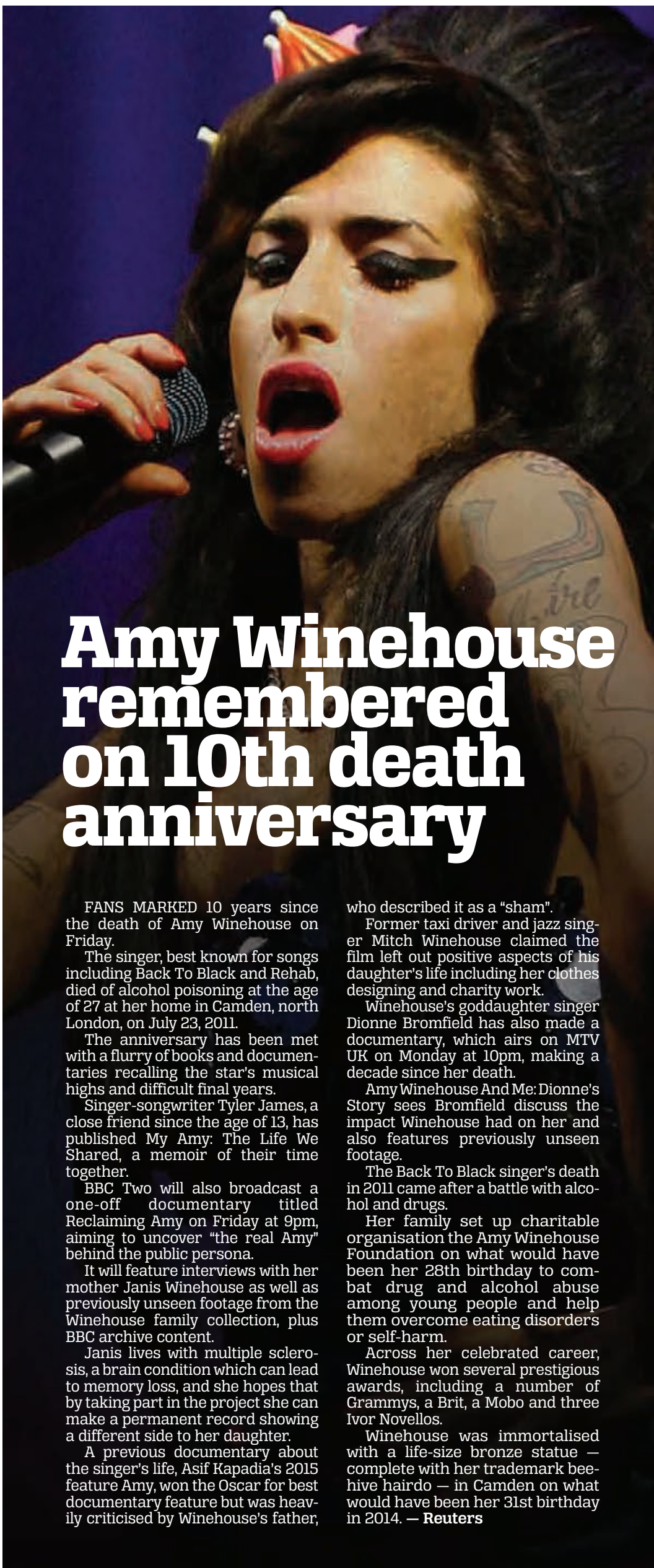
About 200 million years ago "crocodiles were smaller, and did not live in water. Paleontologists always wanted to know what that transition was like," Federico Agnolin, who found the specimen, said.

"What *Burkesuchus* shows is a series of unique traits, which no other crocodile has because they were the first that began to get into the water, into fresh water," Agnolin said.

According to the MACN, crocodiles appeared at the beginning of the Jurassic period, around the time of the first dinosaurs.

In a few million years they got into the water, thanks to the existence of warm and shallow seas. South America is known for its richness in marine crocodile fossils. — **Reuters**

ENTERTAINMENT



Amy Winehouse remembered on 10th death anniversary

FANS MARKED 10 years since the death of Amy Winehouse on Friday.

The singer, best known for songs including *Back To Black* and *Rehab*, died of alcohol poisoning at the age of 27 at her home in Camden, north London, on July 23, 2011.

The anniversary has been met with a flurry of books and documentaries recalling the star's musical highs and difficult final years.

Singer-songwriter Tyler James, a close friend since the age of 13, has published *My Amy: The Life We Shared*, a memoir of their time together.

BBC Two will also broadcast a one-off documentary titled *Reclaiming Amy* on Friday at 9pm, aiming to uncover "the real Amy" behind the public persona.

It will feature interviews with her mother Janis Winehouse as well as previously unseen footage from the Winehouse family collection, plus BBC archive content.

Janis lives with multiple sclerosis, a brain condition which can lead to memory loss, and she hopes that by taking part in the project she can make a permanent record showing a different side to her daughter.

A previous documentary about the singer's life, Asif Kapadia's 2015 feature *Amy*, won the Oscar for best documentary feature but was heavily criticised by Winehouse's father,

who described it as a "sham".

Former taxi driver and jazz singer Mitch Winehouse claimed the film left out positive aspects of his daughter's life including her clothes designing and charity work.

Winehouse's goddaughter singer Dionne Bromfield has also made a documentary, which airs on MTV UK on Monday at 10pm, making a decade since her death.

Amy Winehouse And Me: Dionne's Story sees Bromfield discuss the impact Winehouse had on her and also features previously unseen footage.

The *Back To Black* singer's death in 2011 came after a battle with alcohol and drugs.

Her family set up charitable organisation the Amy Winehouse Foundation on what would have been her 28th birthday to combat drug and alcohol abuse among young people and help them overcome eating disorders or self-harm.

Across her celebrated career, Winehouse won several prestigious awards, including a number of Grammys, a Brit, a Mobo and three Ivor Novellos.

Winehouse was immortalised with a life-size bronze statue — complete with her trademark beehive hairdo — in Camden on what would have been her 31st birthday in 2014. — **Reuters**

TRAVEL TALES

As Spain swelters and Covid cases grow, pool renting app thrives



A COOLING DIP in the mid-July swelter of central Spain no longer requires owning a private pool, or risking Covid-19 contagion at crowded public swimming facilities, Aura Cenet discovered.

The 21-year-old waitress from Madrid and her three friends hired a private pool in the garden of a house in Arroyomolinos, a town 28 km (18 miles) southwest of the capital city, using the Swimmy app.

"You are better protected here, without anyone to bother you. It's a good idea, I don't think I will go back to a municipal pool," Cenet said as she relaxed in the pool.

The pandemic has buoyed businesses such as pool manufacturing and maintenance across the world, as more people choose to avoid community pools and beaches.

Spain's Fluidra (FLUIMC), the world's largest swimming pool equipment maker, in May posted a 40-fold jump in profit and said demand for residential pools was likely to remain strong.

Owners using the Swimmy app can earn up to 1,200 euros (\$1,413) per month by renting out their pools, said Estefania Leiva, communications director at the Spanish arm of Swimmy, which was founded in 2017 in France.

Prices in the Madrid area typically range from 12 to 30 euros per person for a half day.

"Even though (Covid-19) restrictions have been relaxed this year, in May and June we have doubled the number of reservations compared with last year," Leiva said.

A new surge in infections this month has forced several regions to reimpose some restrictions in the past couple of weeks.

She said there were 150,000 app users who take their pick between some 3,500 private pools in Spain and France. Swimmy is also operating in Italy, Germany and the United States.

The owner of the pool rented out by Cenet and her friends started using the app last year.

"I rarely enjoy the swimming pool...so if I only use it a couple of hours I prefer others to enjoy it and the money comes in very handy because this kind of swimming pool is expensive to maintain," said Vanessa Ghirardato. — **Reuters**



Alia Gallery: A destination to inspire Oman's art lovers

By Ruqaya al Kindi

ALIA GALLERY stands in the heart of an industrial town in Muscat serving as an oasis of colour and haven for those who seek inspiration. The 860 metres squared warehouse is home to more than 120 art pieces, all crafted by the Omani artist Alia al Farsi.

Upon entering the high-vaulted and deceptively plain-looking gallery, the lights lead your eyes towards the huge paintings that welcome visitors with a burst of colours.

"Omani" is what comes to your mind the moment your eyes meet the abstract paintings. From the dresses to the facial features, the artist stays loyal to her background and heritage and reflects the good, the bad and the ugly of human relations.

To your right sits the Mona Lisa of the gallery named "But Mostly Me" — a 3-metre-wide painting that embodies the sense of pride that overwhelmed the artist upon opening the gallery.

Her looks and gesture resemble the artist as she presides over her works. The painting bursts with symbolic texts in three languages: Arabic,

French and English.

As you pass by the spacious alleys, the paintings get darker and more sophisticated.

Paintings start addressing more troubling aspects of conservative cultures, broken promises, unbalanced relationships and immigration.

I was humbled by a piece that was hiding in the corner. I scanned the QR code next to it to read its description. It read: "When you walk for miles filled with sorrow, you eventually walk away. Some walk away with their bodies, others depart with their souls. In this piece entitled "Voyagers", the stretched bodies resemble the length and hardship of their journeys in which few left home in peace, while most bear the brunt of their bitter memories."

While abstract art raises more questions than giving answers, this piece touched a nerve. It displays how seasoned artists can convey a message with few colours and minimalist shapes.

Each painting in the gallery is a result of different phases and experi-

ences that Alia went through. Some display her connection with nature, others showcase her love of Sufism, while she tries to empower women through breaking taboos, especially the ones related to romance.

The gallery is completely designed by the artist herself and it also includes a café (Alia lounge), a library and a gift shop.

"It is a dream coming true. This place was built so people can appreciate art and be inspired emerging artists to create unique pieces", Alia said.

Muttrah, the culturally rich town, is the place where she was born and was imbued to become an avid explorer and culturist with an affinity for historic towns. She says that she is a non-believer in self-imposition of stylistic boundaries, she takes her inspiration from patterns and vernacular architecture.

Alia is an accomplished and unconventional artist. She holds an ineffable belief in the need to explore inner beauty and to help project it to discerning viewers. Not hindered by stereotypical definitions of art and

the means of expressing it, she imbues a sense of style in all that she creates. A firm believer that art needs strong roots but these should not act as barriers to creativity and hence her interpretations of Arabic art take on cerebral forms and textures.

The scale of what she can create spans from intricate palm-sized boxes to large wall paintings and even air-force jet fighters. Her recent foray into furniture, sculptures, installations and object painting allows her to showcase and express her talent beyond the two-dimensional settings of the canvas. Complex pieces with multi-faceted subjects sit next to paintings that use old coins and textiles from the Far East.

Her strong spiritual grounding and interest in the philosophies of Sufism is captured in the movements, facial expressions and reflective looks of her paintings.

Her art is celebrated and appreciated in many parts of the world. "I held major solo exhibitions in Tokyo, Dubai, Paris, Seoul, Brussels and has exhibited at Venice Biennale in addi-

tion to over 20 countries", she said.

"My works include large-scale paintings, objects, furniture and installations. My work has been auctioned at Christie's and is displayed at Museums including the Arab World Institute in Paris. I was chosen to be the first Omani artist to exhibit officially at Venice Biennale 2015 and won the prestigious Dr Saud Al Sabah Creativity Award in 2010", she added.

The gallery entry is free since it was designed to attract art lovers. She pointed out that it is planned to make the gallery a hub for emerging artists. It is more of a gift to the community and a display of a lifetime career of one of the most popular art figures in the GCC.

Having a tour in Alia gallery is a wonderful and exceptional experience for art lovers. If it is difficult for you to reach the gallery, however, you can enjoy an online tour through the Instagram account of the gallery: @aliagallery_art or even the Instagram account of its owner, Alia, @alia_farsi.