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■ MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO FRENCH PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Emmanuel Macron of the French Republic on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Macron. His Majesty also wished the friendly people of France further progress and prosperity. — ONA

HM CONDOLENCES TO IRAQI PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Dr Barham Salih of the Republic of Iraq on the victims of the fire that broke out in the Al Hussein Teaching Hospital in the city of Nasiriya. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed heartfelt sympathies to President Dr Barham, families of the victims, and the Iraqi brotherly people. His Majesty also prayed to Allah the Almighty to rest departed souls in peace in paradise and grant their families patience, wishing the injured speedy recovery. — ONA

READ IN

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Samuel Kutty

Share happiness, make life less miserable...
Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla

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PRESERVING UNDERWATER CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism completed the scanning and excavation phase at the site of the sunken ship *Kiva* in Mirbat coasts in the Governorate Dhofar. These efforts are part of the ministry's endeavour to preserve and document the underwater cultural heritage. The underwater archaeology team dived and photographed *Kiva* shipwreck, to register the site as an archaeological underwater cultural heritage site in the local and regional waters. **DETAILS ON P2**

Sultanate exerts efforts to achieve food security

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
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Arable agricultural land in the Sultanate amounts to approximately 5.3 million acres or only 7 per cent of the total area, of which 2 million acres are classified as arable while the remaining is classified as marginal land characterised by low productivity, and low economic returns, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources stated.

According to the ministry, the increase in salinity leads to a decrease in the productivity of field crops and losses due to the

THE FARM SECTOR CONSUMES ABOUT 16 PER CENT MORE THAN THE AVAILABLE RENEWABLE WATER RESOURCES ANNUALLY

increased costs of extracting larger quantities of irrigation water to ensure that salts do not remain in the soil.

It indicated that the availability

of water resources, besides suitable soil, is the most important factor in the agriculture sector as the agricultural sector consumes about 90 per cent of renewable water resources in the Sultanate. The National Water Resources Plan estimated that the farm sector consumes about 16 per cent more than the available renewable water resources annually.

In light of the political, economic and social developments that the world witnesses, the provision of food have become one of the chronic problems globally.

TURN TO P2

Handful of cities driving greenhouse gas emissions

LONDON: Just 25 big cities accounted for more than half of the climate-warming gases pumped out by a sample of 167 urban hubs around the world, an analysis of emissions trends showed.

In per capita terms, however, emissions from cities in the richest parts of the world are still generally higher than those from urban centres in developing countries, researchers found in the study published in the *Frontiers* journal.

The study compared greenhouse gas emissions reported by 167 cities in 53 countries and found that



23 Chinese cities — among them Shanghai, Beijing and Handan — along with Moscow and Tokyo accounted for 52 per cent of the total.

It included more cities from China, India, the United States and the European Union because of their larger contribution to global emissions and significance to the climate debate. The findings highlighted the significant role cities play in reducing emissions, said study co-author Shaoqing Chen, an environmental scientist at Sun Yat-sen University in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou.

“It is simple, logical,” he said. “If you don’t act, eventually you will suffer from (climate change),” he said.

Average global temperatures have already risen by more than 1 degrees Celsius compared to the pre-industrial baseline and are still on track to exceed the 1.5-2 degrees limit set by the Paris Agreement. Chen and other scientists cautioned, however, that some of the data available for use in their study were patchy, with some cities reporting numbers from as far back as 2005. A lack of consistency in how cities report emissions also makes comparisons tricky, they added. — Reuters

Cases below 1,000 for first time in 47 days

SULTANATE VACCINATES 38% OF TOTAL TARGET GROUPS

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](#)

The Sultanate has reported less than 1,000 daily cases of infection for the first time since May 27 (after 47 days), but the daily deaths shot up after a week of lull.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Tuesday reported 982 new cases and 37 deaths over the past 24 hours, compared to 12 fatalities reported a day before.

Around 122 patients were admitted to hospitals across the country in the last 24 hours, bringing the total number of inpatients to 1,290, including 458 in intensive care units (ICUs).

The number of sick patients or active cases dropped to 22,756 (7.7 per cent) from 23,807 (8.7 per cent) on Monday and over 30,000 and 10 per cent on July 4.



The total number of cases registered in the Sultanate has now reached 287,054, including 3,482 deaths. The total number of recoveries is 260,826, while the recovery rate is 90.9 per cent.

With the vaccination drive getting momentum and new regulations announced last week by the Supreme Committee to be implemented ahead of the Eid holidays, a substantial drop in the Covid related mortality figures and cases since July 4 has been a sign of relief.

According to experts, the 37 new deaths reported on Tuesday is a matter of concern as the country still has over 450 patients in ICUs.

“The fact that the overall recovery rate has improved, and the number of active cases has dropped is a positive sign. We need to be careful during upcoming holidays.”

The ministry on Monday reported 1,167 new cases and 12 deaths.

The total number of people vaccinated in the Sultanate since the beginning of the national campaign has reached 1,359,65, which is 38 per cent of the total target groups.

The ministry said it is continuing a campaign to vaccinate the target group with vaccines in all governorates of the Sultanate between 5 pm and 4 am. It will continue until July 31. There will be a total lockdown during three days of Eid.

To tackle the further spread of the Covid-19 virus, the Supreme Committee has extended lockdown by three hours from July 16 to prevent people from gathering in large numbers. The Supreme Committee said the lockdown, which will be between 5 pm and 4 am, will continue until July 31.



Shura economic panel debates draft securities law

MUSCAT: The Economic and Financial Committee of Majlis Ash'shura held its 16th ordinary meeting under the chairmanship of Ahmed bin Said al Sharqi, head of the committee, on Tuesday.

The committee hosted a number of experts from the Capital Market Authority (CMA) to seek their opinions about the draft securities law referred to Majlis Ash'shura from the government.

The committee discussed a number of articles governing penalties and administrative and penal violations in accordance with the size and environment of the local market. The amendments of the

Capital Market Authority are aimed at upgrading the financial management sector and opening new markets for investment to push forward the development process in the Sultanate.

Easterly disturbance to bring rain

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Oman will continue to experience overcast skies due to easterly disturbance, partly cloudy to cloudy, with chances of rain in some parts of the country in the coming days.

Al Hajar Mountain and its adjoining areas are expected to receive rains, but the chances of isolated rains and occasional thundershowers are higher in Dhofar Governorate, said the weather forecaster at Oman Met Office, Civil Aviation Authority.

"The weather pattern will continue up to next week," said the weather forecaster.

"But mainly it seems to be high and medium cloud advection not too much rain. The main rain is expected in Dhofar, with chances of rain in Al Hajar and very little chance of rain for the rest of the country," he explained.

According to the weather expert, the wind is normal and southeasterly for the time for Al Wusta, Al Dhahirah and Dhofar, but for Muscat, it will be northeasterly sometimes southeasterly.

The upper air trough low-pressure area from the Arabian Sea is to bring weather changes in the upcoming days.

The weather bulletin Reports partly cloudy to cloudy skies



Mughsayl blowholes are best during the influence of the monsoon.

along with coastal areas of Dhofar governorate and adjoining mountains with chances of intermittent drizzle. Clouds advection is expected over most of the sultanate with chance of isolated rain occasionally thundershower over Dhofar, South Al Sharqiyah and Al Wusta governorates. Chances of clouds development and rain occasionally

thundershowers over Al Hajar Mountains and adjoining areas towards the evening.

While Mughsayl blowholes are best during the influence of monsoon, it also indicates that the Arabian Sea is rough during the season.

It is rough along Arabian Sea coasts with a maximum wave height of 4.0 metres and moderate

along the rest of the coasts with maximum wave height of 2.0 metres.

Weather officials have requested to be cautious about rough sea conditions along the coastal areas of the Arabian Sea, the chance of wadis flowing in Dhofar and Al Hajar mountains. They have also warned about poor horizontal visibility during thundershowers.

Payments to subcontractors: Ministry issues circular

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Finance on Tuesday issued Financial Circular No 5/2021 about assessing subcontractor dues.

In the circular, the Ministry directed all ministries, government units and state firms to ask contractors to furnish proof that the designated subcontractors have received all their dues in accordance with past payment certificates and prior to the finalisation of settlement of their (the contractors') payments scheduled to be received in return for executed tasks.

The circular states that, due to the importance of adhering to laws and legislations regulating business dealings,

the Ministry of Finance requests all departments concerned to fully abide by the content of this circular as a measure to serve the public interest.

Internal audit departments in ministries and government units have to monitor the units' commitment compliance with the circular.

The Finance Ministry stresses that the circular is aimed at limiting the non-abidance of firms and establishments to the contracts awarded them when making due payments to subcontractors as per the contracts.

This, the Ministry said, impacts the business sector in the Sultanate and the economy in general. — ONA

Sultanate exerts efforts to achieve food security

FROM PAGE 1

The crisis does not stop at food shortage only, but it also includes pollution, environmental and climatic changes, shrinking forest areas, desertification, lack of arable water and others.

The Sultanate was not far from the changes taking place globally, primarily as it is located in the dry areas, which prompted the government to implement investment projects for its food needs. Some years ago, it also signed an investment agreement for four decades of usufruct on 47 million square meters area to establish poultry farms within the food security project.

In 2019, the Sultanate planted various crops on more than 262,000 acres, producing more than 3 million tonnes of vegetables, fodder and fruits.

Further, fish production also witnessed continuous growth. The total fish production in the first three months of 2019 amounted to 202 thousand tonnes, while the average per capita share of fish production in

the same year amounted to 55.2 kg per person per year, which is greater than the global average estimated at 18 kg, according to a report published in ONA.

Despite the challenges represented by the lack of arable land and water scarcity, Oman seeks to increase its production of crops such as dates, lemons, guavas, grapes, pomegranates, and others.

The Sultanate also seeks to maximise its production of tomatoes, cucumbers, carrots, watermelons, garlic and onions.

Wheat and barley top the well-known field crops in Oman. Governorates of Al Dakhiliyah and Al Dhahirah are characterised by abundant production of these two crops, yet the Sultanate is expanding in agriculture outside its borders.

The idea of foreign agricultural investment in the Sultanate is based on short, medium and long periods of time, with the aim of strengthening the food security system, and working on the optimal use of water resources in the Sultanate.

Underwater heritage: *Kiva* documentation completed



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism completed the scanning and excavation phase at the site of the sunken ship "*Kiva*" in Mirbat coasts in the Governorate Dhofar.

These efforts are part of the Ministry's endeavour to preserve and document the underwater cultural heritage.

The underwater archaeology team dived and photographed "*Kiva*" shipwreck, to register the site as an archaeological underwater cultural heritage site in the local and regional waters.

The move comes as part of the Ministry's efforts to document marine-related and underwater cultural heritage. This documentation is among the first and most important projects executed this year in the underwater antiquities sector.

The Sultanate is a member state of the Unesco Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage, known as the 2001 Convention, which is considered as the international charter for heritage protection that enables member states to protect and conserve underwater cultural heritage effectively and efficiently.

It is noteworthy that the Ministry works in accordance with the scientific standards and ethical instructions approved by the charter. — ONA





Now juveniles can work part-time

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

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Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Baowain, Minister of Labour, issued a Ministerial Resolution 115/2021 regarding part-time employment for juveniles. The decision said an employer might hire general diploma or higher education students under the partial work system, on par with job seekers and retirees.

"It is required when employing general diploma students in the part-time work system that the candidate is an Omani, enrolled in public or private schools, and not less than 15 years of age," said the decision.

The employment can take place only during breaks after semester exams with approval from parents. The decision states that both parties will determine the wages and the working hours of the employees through a contract.



The ministry also stipulated that work should be in the jobs specified by the Ministerial Resolution 217/2016, which are: Salesperson of books, clothes, foodstuff, shoes, bags, tailoring materials, household utensils, electrical appliances, gifts and antiques, jewellery, watches, sports clothing, scientific

equipment, carpentry tools, industrial machines, bicycles, and others.

The decision is based on the Labour Law issued by Royal Decree 35/2003, and Royal Decree 89/2020, establishing the Ministry of Labor and determining its terms of reference and the adoption of

its organizational structure, and to Ministerial Resolution 217/2016 regarding the system of employment of juveniles and the businesses and professions in which they may be employed, and to Ministerial Resolution 40/2017 regarding the organization of part-time work, and based on what is required by the public interest.

Article 2 states that the decision 40/2017 is repealed, and everything that contradicts this decision or contravenes its provisions.

Decision 40/2017 stated that a part-time Omani worker may be employed where his daily working hours should not exceed four hours and should not exceed 25 hours a week. The part-time work is limited for Omanis and at a minimum hourly wage of RO 3. It allows those aged 15 to 18 to work part-time. The work hours should be from 6 am to 6 pm.

Omani engineer's research paper wins first place at MENA level

MUSCAT: Young Omani engineer Abdullah bin Ahmed al Ma'ashani won first place at Middle East and North Africa (MENA) level for presenting the best research paper investigating the use of ash flying from broken-glass-based concrete debris as a substitute for natural sand.

A contest organised by the UK's Institution of Civil Engineers awarded Al Ma'ashani's paper the topmost rating for the segment of young engineers, thus qualifying Abdullah to go for the final round of the contest at a global level.

Abdullah al Ma'ashani told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the study he conducted was aimed at achieving sustainability in environment conservation.

The Young Engineers Award celebrates the work of students and alumni from around the world and inspires them to be innovative, said Al Ma'ashani.



The regional round of the contest for the MENA region was open for engineering graduates, civil engineers and members from the Sultanate, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, he added.

Al Ma'ashani pointed out that the London-based British institution was founded in 1818 and has more than 95,000 members, three quarters of them from the UK and the rest from 150 countries from around the world. — ONA

Dhofar, Musandam visitors have to stick to the lockdown rules



VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

With the Musandam and Dhofar governorates open for vaccinated domestic and international tourists this season, the authorities have urged travellers to stick to the lockdown rules.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has said all health requirements to enter the Sultanate will be applied to the international travellers arriving at Salalah and Khasab airports.

For international travellers, those who have received two approved vaccine doses have an obligation to wear a Tarrasud+ bracelet and adherence to the institutional isolation for non-Omanis and home quarantine for the Omani citizens for seven

days.

These rules are effective from 5 pm on Friday, July 9, 2021, until further notice.

All Covid-19 vaccines used in the GCC countries are approved for entering the Sultanate.

Omani citizens and residents of the Sultanate who have received at least one dose of the approved vaccine in the Sultanate (aged 18 and over) can travel on domestic flights to Salalah and Khasab.

Travellers from abroad who have received the two doses of the approved vaccine are also allowed to travel to the two mentioned airports on direct international flights and the international passengers transferred on domestic flights.

The Omani residents of Dhofar and Musandam

GCC citizens can also travel to Salalah and Khasab airports if they have received two doses of approved vaccines

governorates are excluded from these rules.

GCC citizens may also travel to Salalah and Khasab airports if they have received two approved vaccines.

"There is no change so far regarding the protocols and decisions for those coming to the Sultanate," the Ministry of Health (MoH) said.

Hotels and furnished apartment facilities in the Dhofar Governorate shall not exceed 50 per cent of

their capacity, in addition to the necessity of their strict adherence to all precautionary controls, the authorities said.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has issued fresh guidelines for hotel and tourism establishments as per new SC decisions.

The use of hotel facilities are limited to in-house guests during the ban period.

Hotel establishments must adhere to preventive measures and not exceed 50 per cent of their capacity.

Hotel and tourist establishments located in Musandam Governorate have been excluded from the closure decision.

Employees working in hotel establishments are allowed to obtain permits from their workplace to pass during the closure period.

OCCI team to study issues of automotive sector

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has formed a team to study the major issues facing the automotive sector in the country in the wake of the pandemic and in carrying out business in future.

Speaking to the *Observer*, engineer Redha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of the Board of Directors of OCCI, said that the committee shall be assigned to study the issues of both new and used car agencies and vendors and retailers of spare parts.

"We are in the process of establishing a team comprising a group of business owners affiliated with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, specialised in the automotive and spare parts sector, to study the issues facing the sector in general and each segment in particular," Al Saleh said.

Speaking on the sidelines of a meeting with various business owners in the sector at the OCCI, he said automotive agencies and spare parts vendors were considered one of the important commercial sectors in the Sultanate.

"Automotive sector is linked to the activities of a number of vital sectors such as the logistics, service and retail sectors and we consider the sector as a



We are in the process of establishing a team comprising a group of business owners affiliated with the OCCI

REDHA AL SALEH

Chairman of the Board of Directors of OCCI

vital feeder to the economy."

The critical challenges being faced by the sector are high-cost fees and procedure processes. The business owners discussed these issues during the meeting and came out with suggestions to streamline the sector.

The participants also discussed Omanisation of the profession of sales promoters and challenges associated with the decision affecting the companies' activities.

The team will study broad-based challenges that directly affect local companies' activities, especially with the price control policies followed in the Sultanate with a narrow profit margin and the reasons that lead to high car prices, and submit reports in a time-bound manner.

■ TEMPORARY TRAFFIC DIVERSION



As part of the plans to implement the construction of drainage structures and remedial measures at Sultan Qaboos Street in Al Khuwair, the Muscat Municipality has announced a temporary road diversion from July 13. The diversion will continue until the completion of the project-related works, motorists have been urged to be cautious and follow the instructive signboards for their safety.

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



HABTA MARKETS

LOST IN PANDEMIC AGAIN

The coronavirus pandemic has taken away all the pleasures of life. Look at the market now against what it was two years back when it used to resonate with the sounds of both people and animals during this season of the year. Many of the Eid traditions are being squeezed out

A RUWI RESIDENT

SAMUEL KUTTY
MUSCAT, JULY 13

For the second time in a row, marred by Covid-19 pandemic, Eid al Adha celebrations will be minimal in the Sultanate under the shadow of dusk-to-dawn lockdown and other controls. Although people have started thronging markets including traditional souqs, what they miss mainly is the decades old practice of ‘buy and sell’ at the pre-Eid souqs called Habta market. “Without a Habta market, Eid celebrations are not complete. It is not that we get all what we require at these markets. It is a tradition in Oman that we assemble at these places not only for buying and selling, but also we go there as a social obligation”, said Ahmed Yakooob, a retired health official. Mohsin al Balushi, a resident



of Ruwi, while lamenting the closure of the Wadi Kabir Habta market, said that Eid celebrations are becoming a story of the past. “The coronavirus pandemic has taken away all the pleasures of life. Look at the market now against what it was two years back when it used to resonate with the sounds of both people and animals during this season of the year. Many of the Eid traditions are being squeezed

out”, he said. Oman’s Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs announced that the first day of the Eid al Adha will be on July 20. The Supreme Committee monitoring the Covid-19 situation, last week, banned Habta in all governorates. It also barred family gatherings, Eid greeting assemblies and collective celebrations of Eid. It also declared a complete

lockdown in the country across three days of Eid al Adha. During that time, a total ban will be imposed on all commercial activities and the movement of individuals and vehicles as well. Eid ‘Habta’, which is an ancient legacy in the Sultanate, are held during the occasions of Eid in open spaces or under the shade of palm trees or near castles and forts. These unique seasonal markets host locally-

produced goods including fruits and vegetables, as well as clothes, toys and spices, in addition to various livestock attracting scores of people to attend. Still people are trying to recreate the tradition of Habta using different social media platforms with videos and photos to buy and sell live animals. “Online sales of sacrificial animals are rapidly increasing

as e-commerce platforms are luring customers into digital cattle markets amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Many of them are taking orders online through social media like WhatsApp, Instagram, etc”, said Faizal al Lawati, who is associated with an online marketing firm. This marks a departure from the times when people shopped till late night in crowded malls and shops, he added.



Central fruits and vegetable market to be closed for Eid

MUSCAT: Muscat

Municipality announced the opening hours of the Central Fruits and Vegetable Market, in line with the decisions issued by the Supreme Committee for tackling the developments resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The municipality said the market will be open between 5 am and 3 pm from Saturday, July 17 to Thursday, July 29. The market will close on the first three days of Eid al Adha and also on Fridays.

The traders should enter the market through gate No 1 which is dedicated to trucks and vehicles weighing 3 tonnes or more. Internal and external car parks will be available for the shoppers.

Muscat Municipality urged traders and shoppers to comply with the precautionary measures approved by the Supreme Committee.



CAA issues statement on flight ticket prices

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

MUSCAT: The Civil Aviation Authority(CAA) has said that it has no role in the pricing of ticket fares, even with regards to airlines operating in the country

The CAA, in response to queries on ticket fares charged by airlines operating in the country, said: "In accordance with the mechanisms adopted to regulate air transport markets subject to supply, demand and competition between airlines, there is no interference from the CAA in determining or approving ticket prices, especially with the air carriers in Oman."

STATEMENT ON SRI LANKAN FLIGHT

The CAA has also issued a statement following reports that the concerned authorities in the Sultanate

rejected a request for emergency landing of a Sri Lankan flight due to a shortage of fuel.

CAA said as per the records it did not receive any request for an emergency landing. The records showed that the first contact with the Muscat Air Traffic Control Center by the pilot of the Sri Lankan plane (flight 6504 on July 6, 2021) was before the aircraft entered the airspace of the Sultanate.

The request for a direct route due to a shortage of fuel on the plane and the request was fulfilled. The matter was coordinated with Sri Lankan Airlines on this subject, which confirmed that the news published was untrue.

CAA assured that it will spare no effort when it comes to responding to any emergency in line with its commitment to international agreements and conventions.

Oman attends ministerial conference of Non-Aligned Movement



MUSCAT: The Sultanate on Tuesday took part in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Ministerial Conference held under the theme: "Non-aligned Movement at the Centre of Multilateral Efforts in Responding to Global Challenges".

The virtual conference is held during the period from July 13-14 in Baku, Azerbaijan.

The Sultanate was represented by Shaikh Khalifa Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs.

The conference kicked off with a recorded statement of Dr Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The participants reviewed the progress made in implementing outcomes of the NAM 18th Summit, which was held in Baku during October, 25-26 2019.

— ONA

Articles invited from creative writers

MUSCAT: Pachyderm Tales, a literary consultancy is inviting articles from creative writers based in Oman.

The contest is open to both expatriates in the GCC and also Omanis.

Pachyderm Tales welcomes all writers to contribute poems or short stories which will go towards

creating an anthology.

This will provide an opportunity for the writers to get their works published under a Canadian publishing house giving international standards.

Writers can write on all the five elements namely air, water, fire, earth and space.

The work will be available on

Amazon with ISBN numbers both in paperback and e-book.

Certificates will also be provided to all the participating writers.

The last date for submission is August 15, 2021, and will be published as an anthology.

For details contact GSM 9560 8801 or email divkasaad@gmail.com

Smuggler arrested

The Directorate of Combating Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances at North Al Batinah Police Command foiled an attempt to smuggle a large quantity of drugs by an international drug cartel. The anti-drug police seized a smuggling boat while attempting to enter Oman's regional waters and arrested a drug smuggler.

MAJIS INDUSTRIAL SERVICES SAOC (Majis)
P.O. Box No. 553, Falaj Al Qabail, Postal Code 322, Sultanate of Oman
Tel No. 26852421 Email: Tender@miscoman.com
(Office Location: Administration Building, Opposite Sohar Aluminium and Sohar Power Co. at Sohar Industrial Port Area)

TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT
Majis Industrial Services SAOC (Majis) is a closely held joint stock company fully owned by the Government of Oman. Majis is engaged in providing various water utility services at the Sohar Industrial Port Area.
Tenders are invited from local and international qualified firms for the following (Note: small description of TOR will be shared upon the request from bidder's side).

Sl. No.	Tender No.	Tender Description	Bids fees in R.O.	Last date for paying bid fee	Last date for tender submission
1.	Majis/22/2021	Langelier Saturation Index (LSI) Control System and other associated works for Majis RO Desalination Plant at Sohar Industrial Port Area	250/-	Tuesday 13th July 2021	Tuesday 10th August 2021
2.	Majis/23/2021	Disposal and dump Generated Sludge from Majis ETP at Sohar Port	40/-	Tuesday 13th July 2021	2nd August 2021

The companies participating must be registered with Majis' in e-tendering system (<http://tendering.majis.om/endorlogin.aspx>) on or before 13th July 2021. Bidders who have made electronic transfer of bid fee will be provided the soft copy of the tender documents on Tuesday 13th July 2021 through our e tendering system. The payment of bid fee should be made by direct transfer to the following bank account of Majis. (Account Name: Majis Industrial Services SAOC, Bank : Bank Muscat SAOG, Account Number: 0423010783830018). While making payment by direct bank transfer name of the firm should be clearly mentioned and an email sent to tender@miscoman.com with a copy of the money transmittal advice as well upload the tender fees receipt in our e tendering system. Tender documents will be published to such firms only.

The Tender should be submitted into our e-tendering system under the respective tender Nos., addressed to the Management Committee, Majis Industrial Service SAOC, P.O. Box No. 553, Falaj Al Qabail, Postal Code 322, Sultanate of Oman (at Majis's reception). Tenderers must not display their identities on envelopes. Majis is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender. Questions regarding this procurement process shall be directed to Majis e tendering system under "pre tender clarification section". For any technical issues facing in the e tendering system, the bidders are requested to send the screen shot of error page and send it to tender@miscoman.com.

SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH
ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of Tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/HQ-87/2021	Supply of Surgical items (Adult Cath lab Items) for The Royal Hospital	22/July/2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 04/August/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 125.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-88/2021	Supply of Electrophysiology Items at The Royal Hospital	22/July/2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 04/August/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-90/2021	Provision of Clinical Coordination Services for Treatment Abroad	22/July/2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 11/August/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-92/2021	Supply of Surgical Items (Vacuum Assisted Closure Therapy)	22/July/2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 11/August/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-93/2021	Supply of Surgical Items for The Royal Hospital	22/July/2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 04/August/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-94/2021	Supply of Consumable Surgical Items (Respiratory care)	22/July/2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 11/August/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-95/2021	Provision of Cleaning and Pest Control Services for Various Health Establishments in AL-Wusta Governorate	22/July/2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 18/August/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set

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

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

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

92 killed in Iraq Covid hospital fire

CORONAVIRUS WARD GUTTED AFTER OXYGEN TANK EXPLODES

NASSIRIYA: The death toll from a fire that tore through a coronavirus hospital in southern Iraq rose to 92, health officials said on Tuesday, as authorities faced accusations of negligence from grieving relatives and a doctor who works there.

More than 100 people — patients and visitors — were injured in the blaze on Monday night in Nassiriya, officials said.

An investigation showed the fire began when sparks from faulty wiring spread to an oxygen tank that then exploded, police and civil defence authorities said.

It was Iraq's second such tragedy in three months, and the country's president on Tuesday blamed corruption for both. A statement from the prime minister's office called for national mourning.

Rescue teams were on Tuesday using a heavy crane to remove the charred and melted remains of the part of the city's Al Hussain hospital where Covid-19 patients were being treated, as relatives gathered nearby.

A medic at the hospital, who declined to give his name and whose Monday shift ended a few hours before the fire broke out, said the absence of basic of safety measures meant it was an accident in the making.

"The hospital lacks a fire sprinkler system or even a simple



People gather as they inspect the damage at Al Hussain coronavirus hospital. — Reuters

fire alarm," he said.

"We complained many times over the past three months that a tragedy could happen any moment from a cigarette stub but every time we get the same answer from health officials: 'we don't have enough money.'"

In April, a similar explosion

at Baghdad Covid-19 hospital killed at least 82 and injured 110. The head of Iraq's semi-official Human Rights Commission said on Monday's blast showed how ineffective safety measures still were in a health system crippled by war and sanctions.

"To have such a tragic incident

repeated few months later means that still no (sufficient) measures have been taken to prevent them," Ali Bayati said.

The fact that the hospital had been built with lightweight sandwich panels separating the wards had made the fire spread faster, local civil defence authority

head Salah Jabbar said.

Health and civil defence managers in the city and the hospital's manager had been suspended and arrested on Monday on the orders of Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhimi, his office said.

Government investigators

- Anger mounts over the blaze in which over 100 injured
- A tragedy waiting to happen, says medic at hospital
- Similar fire in Baghdad in April killed 82

arrived in Nassiriya on Tuesday morning, according to a statement.

At the city's morgue, anger spread among people gathered as they waited to receive their relatives' bodies.

"No quick response to the fire, not enough firefighters. Sick people burned to death. It's a disaster," said Mohammed Fadhil, who was waiting there to receive his brother's body.

Two health officials said the dead from Monday's fire included 21 charred bodies that were still unidentified.

The blaze trapped many patients inside the coronavirus ward who rescue teams struggled to reach, a health worker said on Monday before entering the burning building. — Reuters

Living with Covid: Israel changes strategy as Delta variant hits

TEL AVIV: Four weeks ago, Israel was celebrating a return to normal life in its battle with Covid-19.

After a rapid vaccination drive that had driven down coronavirus infections and deaths, Israelis had stopped wearing face masks and abandoned all social-distancing rules.

Then came the more infectious Delta variant, and a surge in cases that has forced Prime Minister Naftali Bennett to reimpose some Covid-19 restrictions and rethink strategy.

Under what he calls a policy of "soft suppression", the government wants Israelis to learn to live with the virus — involving the fewest possible restrictions and avoiding a fourth national lockdown that could do further harm to the economy.

As most Israelis in risk groups have now been vaccinated against Covid-19, Bennett is counting on



A youth receives a vaccination against Covid-19 after Israel approved the usage of the vaccine for youngsters aged 12-15, at a Clalit healthcare maintenance organisation in Ashkelon. — Reuters

fewer people than before falling seriously ill when infections rise.

"Implementing the strategy will entail taking certain risks but in the overall consideration, including economic factors, this

is the necessary balance," Bennett said last week.

The main indicator guiding the move is the number of severe Covid-19 cases in hospital, currently around

45. Implementation will entail monitoring infections, encouraging vaccinations, rapid testing and information campaigns about face masks.

The strategy has drawn comparisons with the British government's plans to reopen England's economy from lockdown, though Israel is in the process of reinstating some curbs while London is lifting restrictions.

The curbs that have been reinstated include the mandatory wearing of face masks indoors and quarantine for all people arriving in Israel.

Bennett's strategy, like that of the British government, has been questioned by some scientists.

Israel's Health Ministry advocates more of a push for stemming infections, Sharon Alroy-Preis, head of public health at Israel's Health Ministry, told Kan Radio on Sunday. — Reuters

Iran confirms prisoner exchange 'negotiations'

TEHRAN: Iran confirmed on Tuesday ongoing "negotiations" with the United States over a potential prisoner swap, after a US official said Washington is working to release its detained citizens.

The US envoy for Iran, Robert Malley, said on Saturday that President Joe Biden insists on the release of all Americans and will not accept a "partial deal".

Malley called the release of Americans detained in the Islamic republic a "priority" and said that negotiations with Iran have "made some progress," NBC News reported.

Asked about Malley's remarks, Iran's government spokesman Ali Rabiee confirmed the talks and said Tehran calls for the release of all Iranian prisoners, not just those held in the US.

Iran "is ready to swap all political prisoners in exchange for freeing all Iranian prisoners across the world," he told reporters at a televised press



conference.

They include those "who have been detained upon US orders" or at Washington's request, he added, saying that "the negotiations on this issue are ongoing".

Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said on Monday that Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif had "put forth a plan to swap all Iranian and American prisoners", state news agency IRNA reported.

"Biden's administration also considered this issue from the first day" in office, he added.

The remarks came as Iran has engaged in talks with world powers in Vienna on reviving its 2015 nuclear deal. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

ISMAILIA

Ever Given container ship leaves Egyptian waters

The *Ever Given* container ship that had blocked the Suez Canal in March left Egyptian waters at 4 am local time following inspections at Port Said, a canal source said on Tuesday.

Ship tracker MarineTraffic showed the *Ever Given* to be underway in the Mediterranean Sea north of the Egyptian coast.

The container ship, one of the world's largest, resumes its voyage to Rotterdam 112 days after becoming wedged across a southern section of the Egyptian



waterway for nearly a week and disrupting global trade.

The ship was released on July 7 after protracted negotiations and an undisclosed settlement was reached between the Suez Canal Authority (SCA) and the *Ever Given's* owners and insurers.

TUNIS

Saudi to send 1m doses of vaccine to Tunisia

Saudi Arabia will send a medical aid package to Tunisia that includes one million doses of vaccine to help the North Africa country control the rapid spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Saudi Arabia joins other Arab countries in helping Tunisia, which is facing the collapse of its healthcare system, including Egypt, Algeria, UAE, Kuwait, Turkey and Qatar.

The Saudi Press Agency said on Monday the aid also includes 190 respirators and other



equipment.

"We are in a catastrophic situation... the health system has collapsed, we can only find a bed in hospitals with great difficulty," said health ministry spokesperson Nisaf Ben Alaya.

TELAVIV

Khalida Jarrar denied access to daughter's funeral

Israel is refusing to let a Palestinian political prisoner attend her daughter's funeral, according to the prisoners' association Addameer.

Khalida Jarrar, a prominent Palestinian lawmaker and member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), was arrested in 2019 for belonging to a hardline network.

The Israeli Prison Service had rejected a request for her to attend the funeral, Adameer said. The prison authority confirmed



on Tuesday that Jarrar would not be present at the event.

Jarrar's daughter Suha worked for the human rights organisation Al Haq. It announced her death on Monday. Media reported that the 31-year-old had died of sudden cardiac arrest.

In brief

■ DHAKA



BANGLADESH TO LIFT LOCKDOWN FOR FESTIVAL DESPITE SPIKE

Bangladesh will lift its nationwide coronavirus lockdown for the country's second-biggest religious festival, the government said on Tuesday, even as new infections soared to record levels. The cabinet said all restrictions would be eased in the country from Thursday ahead of the Eid al Adha festival which will be celebrated from July 20 to 22 this year.

The removal of the curbs would "normalise economic activities" ahead of the celebrations, it added.

Tens of millions of people usually head back to their villages to mark Eid al Adha with their families.

Under the lockdown, people were only allowed to leave home for emergencies and to buy essentials, with public transport, shops and offices shut.

■ SYDNEY



COVID CASES EASE BUT LOCKDOWN EXTENSION STILL LOOMS

Australian authorities reported a slight slowdown in new Covid-19 cases in Sydney on Tuesday, but may still extend a lockdown in the country's largest city to douse an outbreak of the highly contagious Delta variant.

New South Wales state Premier Gladys Berejiklian warned the harbour city's more than 5 million residents not to become complacent as she reported 89 new locally transmitted cases, down from Monday's record high for the year of 112 infections.

"One day is not a trend, the numbers will keep bouncing around", Berejiklian said in a televised news conference.

■ ISLAMABAD



DISTRESS IN PAKISTAN AS DELTA VARIANT HITS CITIES

The highly transmittable Delta variant of Covid-19 has hit Pakistani cities, triggering fears and forcing authorities to put virus hotspots under a strict lockdown. New infections in Pakistan have risen sharply in July after a decline last month, due to the spread of the variant.

"Thousands of frightened people queue up in the institute for Covid-19 testing every morning since the outbreak of the Delta variant. They all look distressed", said Afzal Khan, a spokesman of the National Institute of Health.

Taliban say do not want to fight inside Afghan cities



An Afghan policeman keeps watch at the check post on the outskirts of Kabul on Tuesday. — Reuters

KABUL: The Taliban do not want to battle government forces inside Afghanistan's cities and would rather see them surrender, a senior insurgent leader said on Tuesday, as the militants also warned Turkey against extending its troop presence.

The hardline group has swept through much of the north as foreign troops complete their withdrawal, and the government now holds little more than a constellation of provincial capitals that must largely be resupplied by air.

On Tuesday, the head of a Taliban commission that oversees government forces who surrender urged residents of Afghanistan's cities to reach out to them.

"Now that the fighting from mountains and deserts has reached the doors of the cities, Mujahiddin (Taliban) don't want fighting inside the city", Amir Khan Muttaqi said in a message tweeted by a Taliban spokesman.

"It is better... to use any possible channel to get in touch with our invitation and guidance commission", he said, adding this

would "prevent their cities from getting damaged".

The strategy is one well-worn by the Taliban — particularly during their first rise to power in the 1990s — cutting off towns and district centres and getting elders to negotiate a surrender.

Muttaqi's comments came as the defence ministry said Afghan forces had cleared Qala-i-Naw city after days of fighting.

TURKEY WARNING

In a separate statement on Tuesday, the Taliban said Turkey's decision to provide security to Kabul airport when US-led forces leave was "reprehensible".

"We consider stay of foreign forces in our homeland by any country under whatever pretext as occupation", the group said, days after Ankara agreed with Washington to provide security for Kabul airport.

As foreign forces wind up their withdrawal — due to be completed by August 31 — the situation on the ground is changing rapidly.

The top US general in Afghanistan relinquished his

command on Monday at a ceremony in the capital, the latest symbolic gesture bringing America's longest war nearer to an end. The pace of the pullout — and multiple offensives launched by the Taliban — have raised fears that Afghanistan's security forces could be swiftly overwhelmed, particularly without vital US air support.

Around 650 American service members are expected to remain in Kabul, guarding Washington's sprawling diplomatic compound.

But Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Friday he had agreed with the United States on the "scope" of how to secure Kabul airport.

Peace talks between the insurgents and the government supposedly taking place in Doha have largely fizzled out, and the Taliban now appear set on a complete military victory.

But claims by the hardline group to control 85 per cent of the country are impossible to verify independently — and strongly disputed by the government.

— AFP

Deuba becomes PM as Nepal struggles with Covid

KATHMANDU: Nepal's president appointed veteran liberal Sher Bahadur Deuba as prime minister on Tuesday, the president's office said, a day after the Supreme Court reinstated the parliament that was dissolved in May.

The new leader's immediate task is to procure Covid-19 vaccines and control the spread of the coronavirus that has infected more than 658,000 people and killed nearly 10,000 of them — figures experts say fail to reflect the true toll.

"The biggest challenge of the new leader is to free every citizen from suffering from Covid-19 by inoculating them", said Prakash Sharan Mahat, a senior leader of Deuba's party.

More than 1.3 million people have had a first dose of Covid-19 vaccine and are awaiting a second shot as the government scrambles to protect its people.

Deuba, 75, head of the centrist Nepali Congress party, will head a coalition with former Maoist rebels and a party representing a minority community dominant on Nepal's southern plains, the latest development in a months-



Sher Bahadur Deuba

long political crisis that left the country without a parliament.

Deuba, who has served as prime minister four times in the past, must win a vote of confidence in parliament in the next month.

The Supreme Court on Monday ordered Deuba be appointed in place of KP Sharma Oli, who had failed to win a vote of confidence and dissolved parliament twice in recent months, which the court ruled was unconstitutional.

Deuba, a staunch democrat, will aim to end corruption and create conditions for free and fair elections due next year following the latest bout of political instability, Mahat said. — Reuters

At least 2 dead after heavy rains swamp Indian state

NEW DELHI: At least two people were dead and 10 missing after heavy rains in a hilly northern Indian state triggered landslides and flash floods that destroyed homes, damaged roads and swept away cars, a senior government official said on Tuesday.

About 50 workers from the National Disaster Response Force and local responders have been deployed to look for survivors in the hard-hit Boh valley in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh, said Nipun Jindal, the district's Deputy Commissioner. "Rescue work

there is ongoing", Jindal told Reuters via telephone. "They are clearing the muck and the debris."

The fast-moving flood waters ripped away buildings' foundations and threatened to wash away roads. Residents gathered outside in the rain, hauling their belongings away from the flooding.

With further rains expected, Jindal said that district authorities were on high alert, and that tourists had been told to either postpone visits or to remain where they are if already in Kangra. — Reuters

Modi warns against overcrowding at tourist spots

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi warned on Tuesday against overcrowding at tourist sites and called for faster vaccinations against the coronavirus even as official figures indicated a slower spread of new infections.

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) said on Monday it feared gathering of tourists and pilgrims could become super spreader events that fuel a deadly third wave of infections and it warned against complacency.

"I will say very emphatically that it is not OK to have huge crowds in hill stations, markets, without wearing masks", Modi said in comments posted on Twitter while acknowledging the tourism industry has been badly hit by lockdowns.

India's coronavirus caseload of 30.91 million infections is the world's second-highest behind the United States.

Its official tally of deaths is 410,784, many of them coming in a brutal second wave of infections in April and May when people died outside hospitals as they waited for



A youth looks at a healthcare worker as she inoculates his mother sitting inside a taxi with a dose of the Covishield vaccine at a drive-in vaccination facility in Mumbai on Tuesday. — AFP

beds and bodies were washing up on the banks of the holy Ganges river.

On Tuesday, authorities reported 32,906 new cases — the lowest daily tally since mid-March — compared with some 400,000 a day at the height of the second wave.

The government last month launched a campaign to inoculate all adults, with a target of 950 million people by the end of the year, but the pace of the drive has faltered because of shortages of vaccines and various logistical hurdles, and only 8pc of the target is fully vaccinated.



I will say very emphatically that it is not OK to have huge crowds in hill stations, markets, without wearing masks

NARENDRA MODI
Prime Minister

Modi called for vigilance against new variants of the virus and a faster campaign to get the population protected.

The Delta variant that is spreading in many countries was first detected in India where experts have recently identified what they believe is a new variant

they have called Delta plus.

"To combat the third wave, we have to keep speeding up the process of vaccination", Modi said.

Last week, the government administered fewer than 4 million vaccine doses a day compared with a record 9.17 million on the day Modi launched the campaign.

UNREPORTED DEATHS

While new daily cases are at a three-month low, deaths have not fallen at the same pace, leading to concern that state governments, which have authority over their own restrictions are lifting lockdown too quickly.

India reported 2,020 new Covid-19 deaths on Tuesday but that tally included a backlog of hundreds of previously unreported fatalities in the central state Madhya Pradesh, according to health ministry data.

The state's revision of its death toll comes less than a month after Maharashtra and Bihar, India's two most populous states, revised their death tolls up sharply, leading to concern about under-reporting and calls for a wide review. — Reuters



A shop owner weeps inside her looted store at the Diepkloof Square area in Soweto, Johannesburg on Tuesday. – AFP

Looting and violence spreads in South Africa

JOHANNESBURG: Rioters looted shops and threw stones at police on Tuesday as violent protests triggered by the jailing of former president Jacob Zuma spread across South Africa.

The military prepared to send in 2,500 troops as outnumbered police seemed helpless to prevent attacks on businesses in Zuma's home province KwaZulu-Natal and in Gauteng province, where the country's biggest city, Johannesburg, is located.

At least 30 people have been killed in days of unrest that broke out last week when Zuma handed himself over to authorities. The protests have been fuelled further by frustration over poverty, inequality and the economic impact of Covid-19 restrictions.

Nearly 500 people have been arrested, while shops, petrol stations and government buildings have been forced to close.

"What we are witnessing now are opportunistic acts

of criminality, with groups of people instigating chaos merely as a cover for looting and theft," President Cyril Ramaphosa said in an address on Monday night.

Zuma, 79, was sentenced last month for defying a constitutional court order to give evidence at an inquiry investigating high-level corruption during his nine years in office until 2018.

The decision to jail him resulted from legal proceedings seen as a test of post-apartheid South Africa's ability to enforce the rule of law, including against powerful politicians.

But any confrontation with soldiers risks fuelling charges by Zuma and his supporters that they are victims of a politically motivated crackdown by Ramaphosa, his successor.

The violence worsened as Zuma challenged his 15-month jail term in South Africa's top court on Monday. Judgement was reserved until an unspecified date. — Reuters

WHO warns people against mixing and matching Covid jabs

GENEVA: The World Health Organization's chief scientist on Monday advised against people mixing and matching Covid-19 vaccines from different manufacturers, calling it a "dangerous trend" since more data is needed about the health impact.

"It's a little bit of a dangerous trend here," Soumya Swaminathan told an online briefing. "It will be a chaotic situation in countries if citizens start deciding when and who will be taking a second, a third and a fourth dose."

Swaminathan called mixing a "data-free zone" on Monday but the WHO clarified on Tuesday that some data was available and more was expected.

Its Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on vaccines in June said the Pfizer vaccine could be used as a second dose after an initial dose of AstraZeneca, if the latter is not available.

The results of a further clinical trial led by the University of Oxford that will look at mixing AstraZeneca and Pfizer as well as Moderna and Novavax vaccines is underway.

"Data from mix and match studies of different vaccines are awaited — immunogenicity and safety both need to be evaluated," the WHO said in e-mailed comments.

It should be public health agencies who make decisions, based on available data, and not individuals, the WHO added.

Thailand on Tuesday defended mixing two different Covid-19 vaccines to battle a surge in



A health worker fills a syringe with a dose of the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine against Covid-19 at the Mbagathi hospital vaccination centre in Nairobi on Tuesday. – AFP

infections, after the WHO's top scientist warned it was a "dangerous trend" not backed by evidence.

Thailand's chief virologist Yong Poovorawan said this would be possible by combining an inactivated virus vaccine — Sinovac — with a viral vector vaccine such as AstraZeneca.

"We can't wait 12 weeks (for a booster effect) in this outbreak where the disease is spreading fast," he said.

"But in the future, if there are better, improved vaccines... we will find a better way to manage the situation."

Thailand has reported more than 353,700 coronavirus cases and 2,847 deaths — the bulk of them detected since the latest wave kicked off in April from an

It will be a chaotic situation in countries if citizens start deciding when and who will be taking a second, a third and a fourth dose
Soumya Swaminathan
Chief Scientist, WHO

upscale Bangkok nightlife district.

Healthcare workers were the first in line to receive Sinovac, but authorities said on Sunday nearly 900 medical staff — most of them vaccinated with that shot — got Covid-19.

They will now also get an AstraZeneca or Pfizer-BioNTech

booster shot, authorities said.

Virus hotspot Bangkok and nine other hard-hit provinces are now under tougher restrictions that include a night-time curfew and a ban of gatherings over five people.

The administration of Premier Prayut Chan-O-cha has come under vociferous criticism for its handling of the pandemic, from accusations of vaccine mismanagement to the lack of government compensation for affected sectors.

On Tuesday, his cabinet approved a 30 billion baht (\$920 million) rehabilitation scheme to aid businesses — including retail, entertainment and construction — affected by the severe restrictions in Bangkok and nine other provinces. — Agencies

‘TikTok Sounds used to spread vaccine misinformation’

LONDON: A TikTok feature that allows users to add another person's audio to their videos is being used to promote misleading and harmful content about Covid-19 vaccines, a think tank said in a new report.

The London-based Institute for Strategic Dialogue analysed 124 videos that used speech from four original TikTok videos, including two that were removed by the company for breaking its Covid misinformation rules, to push misinformation and stoke fears about vaccine side-effects. The 124 videos had more than 20 million views.

"There's a part of the content which is still able to travel," said Ciaran O'Connor, an analyst at the counter-extremism think

tank. He likened the spread of misinformation though TikTok's "Sounds" feature to WhatsApp audio messages that proliferated during the pandemic.

Viral trends where users create their own videos by riffing off the same music or speech clip are a central part of TikTok. The popular social video platform, which saw explosive growth during the pandemic, said it reviews the audio of rule-breaking videos and may prevent these being used as Sounds by other users. It said these cases were caused by human content moderation errors. It also said Sounds can be reported on the app.

Audio from one video of a user implying the Covid vaccine's fast development made it unsafe and



Viral lies though TikTok's "Sounds" feature likened to WhatsApp audio messages that proliferated during the pandemic. The platform said these cases were caused by human content moderation errors

making misleading comparisons to other illnesses has been used in more than 4,500 videos, ISD found.

TikTok said it had previously limited the distribution of videos using this Sound, rather than remove it completely, as it was only deemed to be potentially misleading. Even so, the top 25 videos on the TikTok page for this Sound have been viewed a total of 16.7 million times.

ISD found many of the videos used the Sound to signal support for the statement. TikTok said it took down some of the videos using the Sound and made the Sound more difficult to find in searches after reviewing the report's findings. It removed the three other Sounds identified in

the report.

"We strive to promote an authentic TikTok experience by limiting the spread of misleading content, including audio, and promoting authoritative information about Covid-19 and vaccines across our app," a TikTok spokesperson said. ISD found the app had added labels directing to authoritative Covid information on only two of the 124 videos. The company said this was because labels were only added on videos with specific hashtags.

TikTok last week announced changes to its content-moderation systems for certain content, moving to fully automated reviewing systems for categories like nudity and violent or graphic material. — Reuters

PARIS

Presidential vote on April 10, 24

Next year's presidential elections in France will take place in April, with the first round on the 10th and the runoff on the 24th, a government spokesman said on Tuesday.

French presidents are elected to five-year terms in a two-round election. The two candidates who get the most votes in the first round face off in the runoff.

During the last poll in 2017, centrist Emmanuel Macron beat the far-right leader Marine Le



Pen. Macron has yet to declare that he will stand for a second mandate but is widely expected to do so, and Le Pen is widely expected to again be his main rival.

VATICAN CITY

Pope Francis to leave hospital soon

Pope Francis is continuing his planned treatment and rehabilitation after intestinal surgery 10 days ago and will leave hospital as soon as possible, the Vatican said on Tuesday.

The Vatican's daily medical bulletin on the 84-year-old Pope, who had part of his colon removed on July 4, also said he had met many patients during his stay at the Gemelli hospital but felt particularly close to "those who are bedridden and cannot return home".



The Vatican had said on Monday that he would stay in hospital a few days longer than the seven originally expected to "optimise his medical and rehabilitative therapy".

SEOUL

S Korea vaccine rollout grinds to halt

South Korea's rollout of Covid-19 vaccinations to people aged 55-59 has stuttered to a week-long halt after a spike in new cases sparked a rush for shots, booking up available supplies and crashing the official government reservation website.

The halt in vaccination appointments for people in the upper 50s age bracket came late on Monday, the first day that inoculation bookings were opened to under-60s. It came as daily



infections, featuring the highly contagious Delta variant, came in at 1,150, a seventh straight day of more than 1,000 cases — the country's worst coronavirus outbreak so far.

Delta variant spurs countries to speed up shots

MATTHIAS BLAMONT AND
MAAYAN LUBELL

The daily pace of Covid vaccinations has increased in about a dozen countries due to the arrival of the more contagious Delta variant and governments expanding their vaccination drives, a data analysis found.

Israel's rate of vaccinations has seen a sharp pickup. The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and Spain are all vaccinating at their fastest speed to date. Belgium, Denmark, Finland and Sweden are not far behind.

But it is a different story in the United States. At its current, declining pace, 70 per cent of the US population will not receive a first dose of vaccine until December 1, according to the Reuters analysis of Our World in Data vaccination figures. At the current pace, Canada, Chile, the United Kingdom, and eight others will reach that benchmark before the end of the month.

And if the current pace is maintained, five more countries will hit 70 per cent by the end of August. Those dates could change depending on many factors, including approvals to vaccinate younger children. In Israel the vaccination rate had plateaued in April as new Covid infections were on a months-long steady decline.

But when the arrival of Delta brought a spike of cases in June, the government jumped in quickly with a new campaign urging teenagers to get the shot and parents to vaccinate their children aged 12 to 15.

In many countries, vaccination drives slowed before reaching 70 per cent or more of the population — a threshold some experts say could help largely curb Covid-19 transmission through so-called herd immunity, when combined with people who developed immunity following an infection.

Heidi Larson, Director of the international Vaccine Confidence Project and a professor at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, said a rise in vaccinations due to Delta variant concerns may have been held back by changes seen as signalling an end to the pandemic, such as lifting mask mandates and travel bans. — Reuters


A rise in vaccinations due to Delta variant concerns may have been held back by changes seen as signalling an end to the pandemic, such as lifting mask mandates and travel bans

HEIDI LARSON
Director of international Vaccine Confidence Project



DOUSING THE FIRES!

A Canadair aircraft drops water on a forest fire at the Thessaloniki Seih Sou Park, which overlooks the city of Thessaloniki, on Tuesday. The risk of new fires was considered high, after several days of hot temperatures across most of Greece. — AFP

Count the positives during this pandemic...



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyvp

PEOPLE ARE
FIGHTING
COVID-19 STRESS
INGENUITY AND
CREATIVITY.
MANY HAVE
ADOPTED
LIFESTYLE
CHANGES TO
STAY SOUND
AND HEALTHY

Covid-19 has made our lives more difficult and challenging due to social isolation leading to mental stress, disrupted routines in work and family life and economic insecurity.

But there have also been remarkable stories of resilience, ingenuity and creativity. Doctors, researchers and public health officials say the pandemic has led to unexpectedly positive lifestyle changes.

According to them, this trying time has provided an opportunity for everyone to break out of the normal routines and try new things like starting a new project, trying a new recipe, learning a new skill.

When it comes to social life, this period has enabled us to spend more time with our family and share domestic chores. There is probably a different pace at our homes. Many parents have prioritised their child's well-being above educational attainment during this time.

The pandemic also acted as a catalyst for digital innovation with the relevant authorities and others rolling out new technology solutions, which otherwise, would have taken years to get going. We have seen the rapid adoption of technology as the main means of communication, and the emergence of

a growing number of online mutual aid and social support groups.

We are all growing in our knowledge. Due to the lockdowns, we all started using technology in our day-today activities. We are now familiar with many websites that provide use with information on many of our requirements and acquainted with virtual meetings using different applications. We watch our children crating videos, and even see them reading a book online.

In communities, we also saw the rapid adoption of technology as the main means of communication, and the emergence of a growing number of online mutual aid and social support groups.

We have found that some families are doing well and many are having positive experiences, particularly in terms of strengthening family bonds.

It is not that we all need more screen time, but all these 'remote' technology experiences have a positive outcome with a new learning element in them.

Yet the other side of the coin is that many people, despite stringent laws and appeals by the authorities, are not adhering to the protocols that are in place to control the spread of the novel

coronavirus.

This is the second year in a row that the faithful are going to celebrate Eid al Adha in the Sultanate under pandemic amid lockdown in their homes. Both citizens and residents will be offering prayers indoors and celebrating it with close family members while connecting with others virtually.

The Supreme Committee on Covid-19 has already banned all sorts of events or gatherings and holding of any get together at public places and imposed strict punishment for violators.

But what we should not ignore and forget during the coming days is the fervent appeal by our Health Minister Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, to avoid gatherings in any form as part of the Eid celebrations.

"How can some celebrate Eid while others grapple with rising numbers of deaths? Somehow, all are affected by the lockdown, but festive seasons can be compensated for after the eradication of the pandemic," he asks.

Do not forget that the Covid-19 pandemic is not metaphor, symbol or allegory, it is something that kills you without consideration, if not followed the precautions!

Share happiness, make life less miserable...



Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla
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You might be browsing social media or scrolling through the list of videos, while overwhelmed with worries and anger about issues big and small here and there. And perhaps there is much suffering that you have experienced or witnessed.

This suffering is not uniform. Especially for those who are better off, it can provoke a little guilt. They may even conclude that showing joy and contentment with life means being irresponsible and insensitive to people's problems. However, the fact that you say you're unhappy and you talk about yourself out of joy and sadness won't do anything to ease the suffering of others.

Rather, we should all be

aware that what will help us is the pursuit and presentation of happiness, even while showing your concerns about the mistakes that must be corrected among people. In fact, your happiness will make you more effective in making your community a better place.

Some of us may be laughing on the outside, but crying on the inside. When an individual forces himself to act happily, it has dire consequences, from depression to heart diseases. So the implications are fairly straightforward. Act the way you want to feel, but don't ask others to act the way you want them to feel!

Whereas if we pull a long face to show our unhappiness, people

IF YOU FIND YOURSELF
PERENNIALY ANGRY
OR CONSTANTLY
COMPLAINING ABOUT
THOSE AROUND YOU, IT
WILL MAKE YOUR LIFE
MORE MISERABLE

usually do not like it. Displaying negative emotions like sadness and boredom can help us gain more empathy from others, but it almost certainly won't make us happier.

Some individuals suffer from a fear of happiness or cherophobia. Those suffering from it are under the illusion that happiness will lead to misfortune and that

expressing or pursuing happiness is bad.

Let me point out two downsides for this state of mind. The first is that sad behaviour leads to unhappiness. For instance, describing oneself as depressed can lead people — especially young people — to think negatively about themselves and suffer from depression. Likewise, acting angry can make you angrier.

Being dissatisfied, angry or depressed about the problems of the world or those around you won't make the world better. Conversely, our facial expressions and emotions, including negative ones, can be highly contagious.

If you find yourself perennially

angry or constantly complaining about those around you, it will make your life more miserable. Understand your feelings by analysing them. Ask whether you are focusing more on the negative aspects of life and forgetting the positives.

There is no need to keep your happiness a secret or bury it under sadness. Showing the joy in your hearts and sharing it with others will improve our lives. If the world around you has really pushed you down in the dumps, don't worry. Spreading joy in an imperfect world will slowly make life better for you. Share your buried treasure with those around you.

(The author is a physician, a medical innovator and writer)

OOC sets plan to achieve Olympic medal

WOMAN SPRINTER MAZOOON AL ALAWI JOINS SQUAD FOR TOKYO



Mazoon al Alawi



Weightlifter Amer al Khanjri



Barakat al Harthy



Shooter Hamad al Khatri

ADIL AL BALUSHI MUSCAT, JULY 13

Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad al Busaidy, Chairman of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), affirmed that the long-term plans for OOC are set to accomplish the first Omani Olympic medal in 2028 Los Angeles Olympic Games.

This was announced during the OOC chief’s meeting with the Sultanate’s delegation which will take part in the 32nd Summer Olympic Games – Tokyo 2020 and that is scheduled to be held from July 23 until August 8. The meeting at the OOC headquarters in Muscat was attended by Taha bin Sulaiman al Kishry, OOC Secretary-General, and the representatives of the national teams who will participate in 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

FIVE ATHLETES TO COMPETE

The OOC confirmed the participation of sprinter Mazoon al Alawi in 2020 Tokyo Olympics after she completed the requirements to get the Olympic invitation card.

With joining of Mazoon, the number of athletes who will represent the Sultanate increased to five. The squad includes Barakat bin Mubarak al Harthy and Mazoon al Alawi, both

will participate in the 100-metre men’s and women’s sprint. Barakat’s coach Mohammed bin Abdullah al Hooti will accompany the team.

The national swimming team will feature coach Ayman bin Hamad al Kulaibi and the talented swimmer Issa bin Sameer al Adawi, who will participate in the 100-metre freestyle swimming competition. The national shooting will be represented by shooter Hamad bin Saeed al Khatri, who will participate in the 50m rifle competitions in 3 positions, along with his coach Sultan bin Salim al Rashidi and the administrator Sulaiman bin Hamad al Hinai. Weightlifter Amer bin Salem al Khanjri will participate in the 81kg weight category alongside with his coach, Mazin al Rashid and Yousef al Hasani as administrator of the team.

OOC CHIEF CONGRATULATES ATHLETES

The OCC chairman appreciated the athletes for achieving the invitation for the Games.

“Congratulations to all the athletes who met the requirements of obtaining the Olympic invitation card. We depend on our athletes to accomplish advanced records and top technical performances. Also, we would like to urge the national team members to represent the Sultanate in an honourable and

SHOOTER HAMAD AL KHATRI pointed out that taking part at Olympic Games is not an easy assignment. “I will do my best to register top results in the tough competition.”

WEIGHTLIFTER AMER AL KHANJRI said he is proud to participate in his first Olympics and promised his top performance for the country.

appropriate manner in this glorious sporting event.”

“We are looking forward to see you as top ambassadors for Oman in this top sporting event. Also, this event is a suitable environment for our sporting representatives to have the right exposure from world ranking champions at the top Olympic venues. A special thanks to the positive efforts that have been taken during last period for technical preparations of the athletes by the coaching staff of the national teams although the negative impact of Covid continues in sports,”

Sayyid Khalid said. Highlighting on the rapid raise on the positive cases and death numbers due to ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the chairman of OOC requested all the delegation members including players, coaches and administrators to fully adhere to all precautionary health guidelines and procedures issued by the Organising Committee and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to ensure the safety of all participants from the Sultanate and the representatives of other countries in the Olympics.

Also, he affirmed that everyone’s commitment to all preventive measures will lead to have a safe version of Olympic Games.

Speaking during the meeting with members of the Sultanate’s delegation participating in the Olympics, OOC chief said: “A special thanks to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for his continuous support to the sports and the national athletes. A dedicated thanks to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, led by HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, for the support to ensure the OOC’s presence in Olympic Games.”

BARAKAT PROMISES BEST EFFORT

The national athletes expressed their keenness to ensure good participation

in the Tokyo Games.

Top sprinter Barakat al Harthy promised his best efforts in the competition which features the world’s top athletes. “I will try my best to make an impact at the Tokyo Games,” he said.

Shooter Hamad al Khatri pointed out that taking part at Olympic Games is not an easy assignment. “I will do my best to register top results in the tough competition.”

Weightlifter Amer al Khanjri said he is proud to participate in his first Olympics and promised his top performance for the country.

Sprinter Mazoon al Alawi thanked OOC for their efforts to join her in the final list of Olympics athletes. She promised to deliver best technical performance in Tokyo.

The Sultanate’s delegation to the 2020 Olympics will be headed by Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad al Busaidy, Chairman of OOC. The administrative delegation includes Taha bin Sulaiman al Kishry, Secretary-General of OOC, Kazem al Balushi, Chief De mission, Ali al Ajmi from OOC and Adil al Balushi, OOC media officer.

Kazem gave a presentation on the procedures and Covid protocols required for the athletes and the delegation members ahead of travel to Tokyo and during the participation at the Games.

In brief

■ LOS ANGELES



JAMAICA, COSTA RICA WIN GOLD CUP OPENERS

Shamar Nicholson and Bobby Reid powered Jamaica past Suriname and Costa Rica downed Guadeloupe in the opening Gold Cup Group C games in Orlando on Monday.

Nicholson scored in the sixth minute to put Jamaica ahead with his third career Gold Cup goal and first international strike in two years.

Fulham forward Reid doubled the lead in the 26th minute. In the late game, Joel Campbell and Ariel Lassiter put Costa Rica 2-0 ahead early in the first half.

Raphael Mirval pulled one back for Guadeloupe just before half-time, but Celso Borges scored Costa Rica's third in the second half to seal the win.

■ NEW DELHI



INDIAN WC WINNER YASHPAL DIES AT 66

Yashpal Sharma, part of the India team that won the 1983 World Cup, has died of a heart attack at the age of 66, cricket authorities said on Tuesday.

Sharma played a key part in India's first World Cup win that triggered cricket's rise in South Asia. He played 37 Tests and 42 one-day internationals as a middle-order batsman between 1979 and 1985. Sharma was the second-highest run-getter for India at the 1983 tournament after captain Kapil Dev. He scored 89 against the West Indies in a first-round game and 61 in the semi-final against England.

India beat two-time champions the West Indies in the final at Lord's.

■ BRUSSELS



GOFFIN PULLS OUT OF TOKYO OLYMPICS

David Goffin, the Belgian number one who is 20th in the ATP rankings, announced on Tuesday that he would not play at the Olympics because he has not recovered from an ankle injury. "The tournament starts on 24 (July), I still haven't picked up the racket," he told French-language broadcaster RTBF. "The Olympics will be too soon for me this time."

"It's not good news because I was determined to take part in these Games, even in these very special conditions, at a venue that suits me well," he told *Le Soir* newspaper.

Goffin joins several high-profile players who have already withdrawn from the Olympics.

Canadian world number five Bianca Andreescu said Monday she will skip the Tokyo Olympics, citing concerns over the Covid-19 pandemic.

GAYLE'S HALF-CENTURY POWERS WEST INDIES PAST AUSTRALIA

GROS-ISLET, Saint Lucia: A Chris Gayle half-century blasted the West Indies to victory over Australia in St Lucia on Monday, clinching the five-match T20 series between the sides.

Chasing a modest target of 142, Gayle recaptured his most destructive form in racing to 67 off only 38 balls to take his team to the target with five overs to spare at the Daren Sammy Stadium.

By spearheading the West Indies to an insurmountable 3-0 lead in the series, the 41-year-old also sent an ominous warning that he could yet be a factor in the Caribbean side's defence of the World T20 title later this year.

Gayle's pyrotechnics followed another efficient West Indies performance in the field as wrist-spinner Hayden Walsh again presented the most effective challenge to the Australians with figures of two for 18 in limiting the visitors to 141 for six.

All-rounder Moises Henriques topscored with 33 and struck the only two sixes of his team's innings.

Henriques' contribution followed his side's best opening partnership of the series — 41 — between captain Aaron Finch and Matthew Wade.

However, the tempo of the innings dropped considerably when they were separated by Obed McCoy in what proved to be the seamer's only over of the innings.

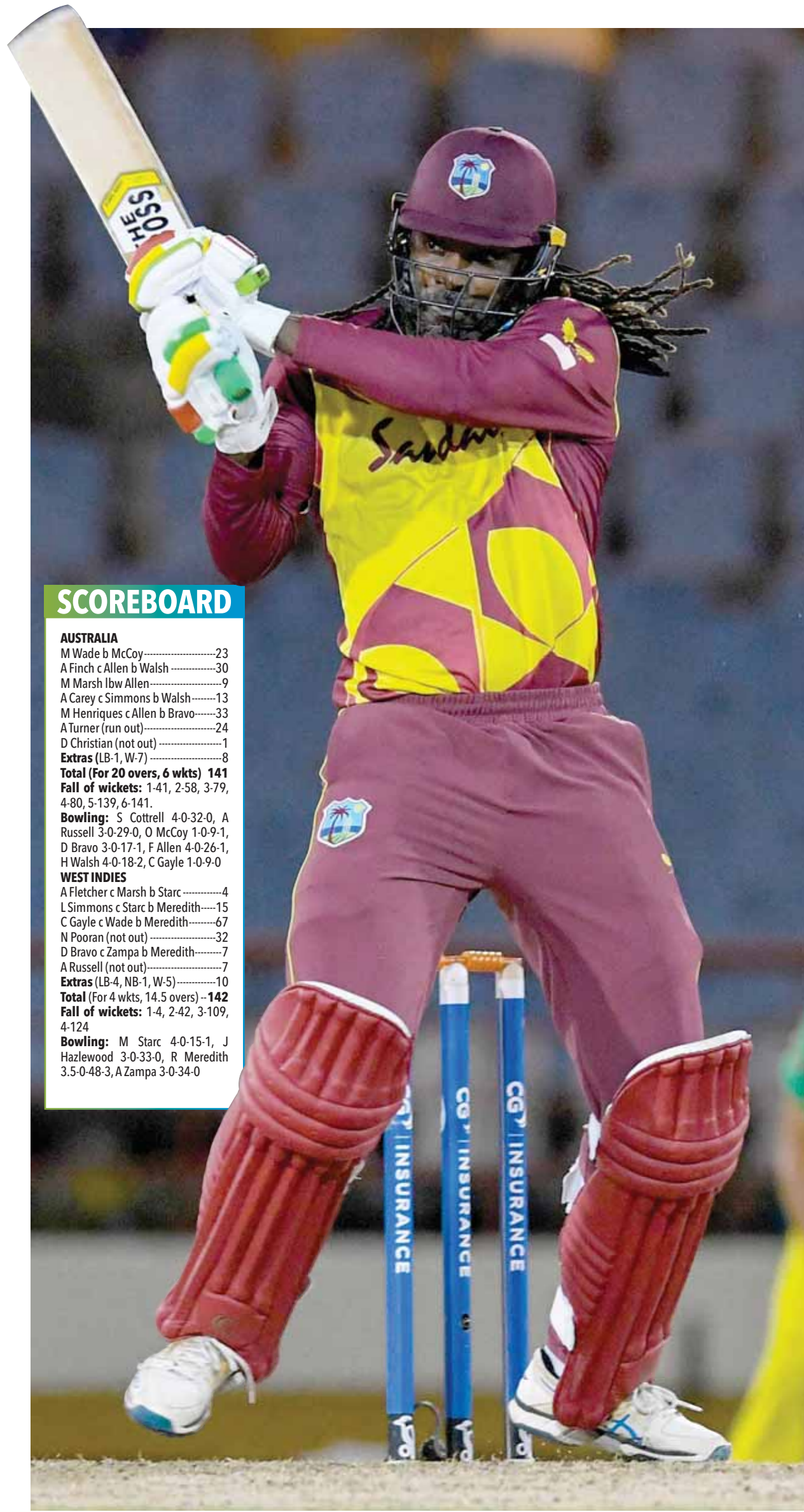
'I STILL HAVE IT'

Mitchell Marsh fell cheaply for the first time in the series and when Walsh accounted for Alex Carey and Finch in the same over, their hopes of a first formidable total of this campaign effectively came to an end given the relative inexperience of their batting line-up.

Walsh should have claimed the third wicket but stand-in captain Nicholas Pooran missed a straightforward stumping offered by Henriques who managed to make some use of the reprieve.

Yet all of that effort was put into proper context by Gayle's muscular performance — his first T20 international half-century in six years, with seven sixes and four fours.

Fully aware of all the speculation off the field as to his value to the team, he went after



SCOREBOARD

AUSTRALIA	
M Wade b McCoy.....	23
A Finch c Allen b Walsh.....	30
M Marsh lbw Allen.....	9
A Carey c Simmons b Walsh.....	13
M Henriques c Allen b Bravo.....	33
A Turner (run out).....	24
D Christian (not out).....	1
Extras (LB-1, W-7).....	8
Total (For 20 overs, 6 wkts) 141	
Fall of wickets: 1-41, 2-58, 3-79, 4-80, 5-139, 6-141.	
Bowling: S Cottrell 4-0-32-0, A Russell 3-0-29-0, O McCoy 1-0-9-1, D Bravo 3-0-17-1, F Allen 4-0-26-1, H Walsh 4-0-18-2, C Gayle 1-0-9-0	
WEST INDIES	
A Fletcher c Marsh b Starc.....	4
L Simmons c Starc b Meredith.....	15
C Gayle c Wade b Meredith.....	67
N Pooran (not out).....	32
D Bravo c Zampa b Meredith.....	7
A Russell (not out).....	7
Extras (LB-4, NB-1, W-5).....	10
Total (For 4 wks, 14.5 overs) 142	
Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-42, 3-109, 4-124	
Bowling: M Starc 4-0-15-1, J Hazlewood 3-0-33-0, R Meredith 3.5-0-48-3, A Zampa 3-0-34-0	

I have to thank my entire team for the faith they have shown in me because everyone knows the struggles I have had with the bat in the last few matches

CHRIS GAYLE

West Indies batsman

the Australian bowlers not long after arriving at the crease in the opening over when Mitchell Starc dismissed Andre Fletcher.

Starc would actually emerge relatively unscathed from the celebrated power-hitter's assault, returning his most economical T20I figures ever of one for 15 from four overs.

However, all the other bowlers felt the weight of Gayle's bat although paceman Riley Meredith had the consolation of picking up three wickets, including the rampaging Jamaican, for the first time in his brief T20I career.

"I have to thank my entire team for the faith they have shown in me because everyone knows the struggles I have had with the bat in the last few matches," said Gayle on receiving the Man of the Match award.

"They have all stood up for me and I am happy that I was able to stand up today and deliver to remind everyone that I still have it in me to do something special at the World T20."

Gayle passed 14,000 runs in all T20 matches during the innings, the only player so far to reach that milestone.

For Finch, it was another case of his team failing to meet the expected standards.

"We really should have built on that start but I didn't help the situation when I got out and when you're playing a team like this with so much experience and so many world-class players it is always going to be tough," he explained.

"Yes, we are missing a number of key players here but that is no excuse. We expect better of ourselves and haven't managed that yet so far in this series."

— AFP

South Korea draw with Argentina in Olympics tune-up



Argentina's Francisco Ortega (C) competes for the ball with South Korea's Um Won-sang (R) and Lee Dong-Gyeong (L). — AFP

YONGIN, South Korea: The South Korean Olympic football squad drew 2-2 against Argentina on Tuesday after they netted an injury-time equaliser in a friendly match in front of empty seats.

The match held in Yongin, south of Seoul, was one of two tune-up matches this week ahead of the Tokyo Olympics set to begin next week.

It was played without spectators under tightened coronavirus restrictions as a recent surge in infections grips the greater Seoul area.

Argentina went ahead early

when Alexis Mac Allister scored from just outside the box in the 12th minute to give his side a 1-0 lead.

But South Korea caught up in the 35th minute with midfielder Lee Dong-Gyeong's long-range strike hitting the back of the Argentine net.

The visiting team took the lead again 12 minutes into the second half when Carlos Valenzuela made a curling shot into the far corner after receiving a cross.

The home team then generated a last-minute turnaround when winger Um Won-Sang delivered

an equaliser in the 92nd minute.

South Korea will play France on Friday in the last preparation match before heading to Japan, where they will start their quest for a second Olympic medal against New Zealand on July 22.

The South Korean team won bronze at London 2012.

Romania and Honduras are also in Group B while Argentina will face Egypt, Spain and Australia in Group C.

The top two teams from each of the four groups will advance to the quarter-finals. — AFP



Oman to hold camp in Serbia

COMMITTEE FORMED TO ARRANGE HOME MATCHES OF WC FINAL QUALIFYING

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 13

The Oman Football Association (OFA) unveiled the upcoming events and activities in a press conference on Tuesday at the premises of OFA in presence of Fahad al Raisi, Executive Director of OFA, Shaikh Shabib al Hosni and Khalifa al Hasani from Professional league union and Maqbool al Balushi, admin manager of the national team.

Al Raisi announced that the Sultanate senior football team players will be totally free for the team training sessions from July until March 2022. “ During this period, the national team will play in the deciding round of 2022 Fifa World Cup qualifier, 2021 Fifa Arab World Cup and GCC Gulf Cup,” he added.

The Executive Director of OFA pointed out that a committee was formed for hosting Oman’s matches



during the final round of 2022 Fifa World Cup Asian Qualifications.

The panel comprise members from Ministry of Culture, Sport, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Information, ROP, Oman Airports and Mwasalat Company. The main task of

Al Raisi announced that the Sultanate senior football team players will be totally free for the team training sessions from July until March 2022

the committee is to secure all the necessary technical and logistics arrangements. The Asian Football Confederations (AFC) ensured to provide the VAR (Video Assistant Referee) system. There is full cooperation from all the government entities to provide full support

to success the matches of the qualifier which will be hosted in Muscat,” he added.

On the other hand, the Croatian coach Branko Ivankovic, announced the probable’s for the overseas camp in Serbia from July 25 until August 23. The camp will comprise four friendly matches. The list of probable’s included the following players:

Mohsin al Ghassani, Jameel al Yahmadi, Zaher al Aghbari, Amjad al Harthi, Abdulaziz al Ghailani, Mohammed al Musalami, Fayeze al Rushaidi, Omar al Fazari, Abdulaziz al Maqbali, Salah al Yahyei, Abdullah Fawaz, Ali al Busaidy, Juma al Habsi, Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Al Mundher al Alawi, Mohammed al Ghafri, Harib al Saadi, Arshadal Alawi, Fahmi Dorbeen, Khalid al Buraiki, Essam al Subhi, Khalid al Hajri, Mohsin Jawher, Yazeed al Mashani, Ahmed al Kaabi,

Saud al Habsi and Ahmed al Khamisi.

Oman Olympic team will have an overseas camp in Turkey and that will be scheduled from August 11 to 16 while Oman beach soccer team will attend Ukraine International friendly event and Fifa World Beach Soccer championship in August.

Fahad al Raisi said the 2021/2022 season will begin from October while the HM Cup qualification matches will start October 29.

“The OFA Cup will kick off on November 19. All Omantel league clubs confirmed their participation in the league while 21 clubs will join in the first division league.

We will have 32 courses this year and there will be dedicated programmes for women sports. More than five camps in Salalah and Nizwa to shape local referees for the new season,” he ended.

IOC chief praises ‘best-prepared Tokyo’ as Olympic Village opens



International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach gestures. – AFP

TOKYO: Olympics chief Thomas Bach praised Tokyo on Tuesday as the “best-ever prepared” host city, as athletes began entering the Olympic Village 10 days before the opening ceremony.

The final countdown to the Games comes with Tokyo under a coronavirus state of emergency and spectators banned from attending all Olympic events in the city and surrounding regions.

International Olympic Committee President Bach, who arrived in Japan last week and spent three days in quarantine, told Tokyo 2020 chief Seiko Hashimoto that organisers were “doing a fantastic job”.

“You have managed to make Tokyo the best-ever prepared city for an Olympic Games,” he said.

“This is even more remarkable under the difficult circumstances we all have to face.”

The pair met as the first athletes began entering the Olympic Village, which opened on Tuesday without any of the welcome ceremonies or media opportunities often seen at the Games.

Organisers declined to even specify which teams were entering or how many athletes were now in the Village.

Strict coronavirus rules mean athletes can only enter the Village five days before their events and

must leave within 48 hours of winning or being eliminated.

Despite the low-key opening, Bach said organisers could “be confident that the stage is set”.

Aside from the spectator ban in Tokyo and surrounding regions, the public will also be kept out of almost all venues elsewhere in Japan.

Athletes, media and officials are subject to regular virus testing and limits on their movement.

Polls have regularly found most Japanese would prefer the Olympics to be postponed further or cancelled outright, though opposition has softened in recent weeks. — AFP

business

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Oman weighs legislation to enable issuance of green, blue and social bonds

CATALYSING INVESTMENT:
CMA invites public feedback on draft Regulation for Bonds and Sukuk with the new Sustainable and Responsible Investment (SRI) Bonds and Sukuk Framework

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 13

As part of its continuous development efforts to enhance and diversify the capital market in Oman with various types of fundraising instruments to meet the issuers' and investors' needs, the Capital Market Authority (CMA) has come up with a new draft Regulation for Bonds and Sukuk which includes the new requirements for Sustainable



and Responsible Investment (SRI) bonds and Sukuk meant for the issuance of sustainable, green, blue and social bonds and Sukuk, including waqf Sukuk.

The new draft Regulation for Bonds and Sukuk aims to consolidate and enhance the earlier bonds and Sukuk regulations that were issued

separately, said the Authority in a statement.

The move comes as Oman prepares to open up the country to potentially billions of dollars in investment in, among other areas, renewable and alternative energy based projects.

They include mega developments centring on green hydrogen schemes that

would ideally be funded by sustainable-type green finance. This broader vision is also in line with Oman's Vision 2040 objectives.

In addition, the new requirements for SRI bonds and Sukuk aims to encourage capital market fundraising for sustainable development and provide clarity for those who

wish to issue such SRI bonds and Sukuk from Oman and attract a wider participation and investor base subscribing to such issuances including foreign investors.

The proposed requirements have been benchmarked against international best practices (including the World Bank) and in line with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals.

"As part of the CMA's continuous market consultations with the public, we are extending these draft requirements for comments which is available on the CMA's website. We would greatly appreciate any comments within three weeks from July 7, 2021. The existing draft regulation is not final and any feedback received could be used to enhance these requirements further", the Authority added.

Ratings agencies maintain status quo on Oman's creditworthiness

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 13

International ratings agency Moody's has affirmed Oman's credit rating at 'Ba3' — a score that attests to the Sultanate's success in withstanding the severe challenges posed by volatile international oil prices on the domestic economy amid its sizable fiscal needs. In a report, Moody's cited projections of 2.6 per cent growth in the Sultanate's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2021, rising to 3.5 per cent in 2022.

The budget deficit is also anticipated to improve from -18.1 per cent in 2020 to -3.6 per cent in 2021, it noted. Improvements in the public debt to GDP ratio, and current account deficit to GDP are anticipated as well.

Ratings agencies have affirmed Oman's creditworthiness since mid-2020 despite adverse external factors impacting the Sultanate's economy. This proves the significance of financial measures and economic initiatives undertaken by the Sultanate, including the medium-term fiscal plan (2020-2024), which targets financial stability and the realisation of fiscal surplus by 2025, besides cutting down public debt.

SOHAR eyes new investment inflows from India

INVESTMENT DESTINATION:
Businesses keen to set up at SOHAR can benefit from a myriad of incentives, easy set-up facilities and take advantage of the company's global outreach

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 13

Sohar Port and Freezone, in collaboration with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI), has launched a series of five online webinars to explore opportunities between SOHAR and the Indian market. In the following months, four more webinars will be conducted targeting the various key industries such as Food, Automotive, Plastics and Metals.

The first, 'Accessing Industrial and Logistic Solutions to Maximise Your Market Reach' included presentations from Sohar Port and Freezone's Deputy Chief Executive Officer (DCEO) and Sohar Port and Freezone CEO, Omar al Mahrizi, on SOHAR's strategic advantages, and its Free Trade Agreement (FTA) Advisor, Emmee Haun, on how to utilise SOHAR to access the US market.

Guest speakers from established investors Jindal Shadeed, Sameer Gupta and Khimji Ramdas, Malvika Khimji



highlighted their own success stories.

Omar al Mahrizi (pictured) said, "Oman and India have enjoyed decades of bilateral trading, linked by history, culture, warm and cordial relations. As a well-connected integrated hub with established clusters, our close geographical location, coupled with prime waterfront access, leasable land options and excellent infrastructure are all key ingredients to provide Indian investors with unique business opportunities.

This webinar series provides the ideal platform for us to highlight these prospects to FICCI's vast

network, paving the way for future business development and closer relations."

Around 70 Indian businesses took part in the first session, which focused on promoting access to Sohar Port and Freezone's strategic advantages and location to maximise market reach between India, the GCC, Africa and the US. The agenda for forthcoming webinars will be released prior to each event.

The series of webinars will provide unrivalled insight into the opportunities available to participating companies for producing or adding value to their products by partnering with

SOHAR.

Through the competitive utility prices, attractive incentive packages, and rich source of raw materials offered by the Port and Freezone, in addition to the benefit of the Oman-US Free Trade Agreement for duty free access on qualifying products.

There is huge potential for expanding mutually-beneficial commercial partnerships between Indian and Omani enterprises. Sohar Port and Freezone is already home to a number of prominent Indian investors including Jindal, Larsen and Toubro (L&T), and Moon Iron and Steel Company (MISCO) and with several new

infrastructure projects and investments under way, there is ample room for growth.

Meanwhile, it is also heavily invested in innovative sustainability practices and projects, with an emphasis on renewable energy, one of India's fastest growing sectors.

Businesses keen to set up at SOHAR can benefit from a myriad of incentives, easy set-up facilities and take advantage of the company's global outreach across Africa, Asia and the Middle East markets. Sohar Port & Freezone recently released its Q1 2021 results noting growth in all categories of cargo



Oman and India have enjoyed decades of bilateral trading, linked by history, culture, warm and cordial relations

OMAR AL MAHRIZI
CEO, Sohar Port and Freezone

compared to the same period the previous year.

Throughput increased by 21 per cent over the same period in 2020, dry bulk volume grew by 23.6 per cent to almost 9 million tons, breakbulk handling grew by 6.8 per cent to 426,783 and liquid bulk increased by 7 per cent to just over 4 million tonnes.

In addition, the number of containers handled rose by 1.9 per cent to 1.9 million and the total vessels visiting the port rose by 13.7 per cent to 843 vessels as the Port continues to expand operations.

Singapore and Britain in digital trade talks

The UK has held trade talks for a digital trade agreement that could remove barriers to trade and enable UK exporters to expand into high-tech markets around the world. Britain's International trade secretary, Liz Truss, has been in virtual negotiations with Singapore for a Digital Economy Agreement (DEA).

The UK is the second largest services exporter in the world, with remotely delivered services exports worth £207bn in 2019.

That year, Britain delivered £3.2bn of digitally delivered services to Singapore. But there is significant cross-border red tape standing in the way of digital trade.

The aim of the DEA is to make it easier for companies to trade through the use of digital technology. It is also part of the government's wider plan to establish the UK as a global leader in industries like fintech and cybersecurity.

Negotiations will focus on opening digital markets for exporters; ensuring cross-border data sharing; promoting digital

trading systems like e-signatures and e-contracts that will streamline the export process; protecting consumer rights and IPS (Intrusion Prevention System) and cybersecurity.

Truss said: "The UK will be the first European country to ever negotiate a Digital Economy Agreement, which shows what we can do as a sovereign trading nation."

She added: "Our ambition is to make the UK a global hub for services and digital trade, by striking a series of advanced, high-standards agreements with leading nations across the world that drive productivity, jobs, and growth across the UK."

Chief executive officer, Miles Celic, at TheCityUK, underlined the need for new trade agreements that enable the flow of data across borders, and said that digital restrictions are one of the fastest-growing barriers to trade.

"Over 50pc of trade in services is facilitated by digital exchange, but restrictions on digital trade doubled in the decade leading up to 2019," Celic said.

"The UK should strive to set



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THE UK SHOULD STRIVE TO SET CLEAR GROUND RULES FOR DIGITAL TRADE AND BUILD AN OPEN AND ROBUST FRAMEWORK FOR FUTURE DIGITAL TRADE AND TECHNOLOGICAL COOPERATION

clear ground rules for digital trade and build an open and robust framework for future digital trade and technological cooperation. Such a framework can then become a template for other key markets, aiding the free flow of data and preventing unnecessary market fragmentation," he added.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister, Dominic Raab had been in Hanoi, Vietnam, for trade talks about joining a free trade area in the Asia-Pacific region – The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) — which would grant the UK access to some of the biggest economies in the world.

CPTPP consists of 11 nations including Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam.

The trade area covers a market of around 500 million people and would see reduced tariffs on exports like cars and whiskey, while helping British farmers sell beef and lamb to CPTPP countries, the government said.

According to reports, trade

secretary Liz Truss said a CPTPP membership would be a "glittering post-Brexit prize" for the UK.

"This part of the world is where Britain's greatest opportunities lie. We left the EU with the promise of deepening links with old allies and fast-growing consumer markets beyond Europe, and joining the high-standards trans-Pacific Partnership is an important part of that vision."

City of London Corporation policy chair Catherine McGuinness said: "Membership of the CPTPP brings potentially greater access for UK firms to fast-growing markets. We welcome the opportunity to focus on the services, data and digital, and investment elements specifically."

McGuinness added: "Removing barriers to trade in these areas would not only be good news for firms and consumers, but could help support wider global goals including a swift recovery from Covid and the race to net zero." *(The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK)*

Alizz Islamic Bank extends IFIN services in Danube Home



MUSCAT: Alizz Islamic Bank has extended 'IFIN' services for instant financing to all Danube Home branches spread in the Sultanate. Alizz Islamic Bank and IFIN had earlier partnered to launch 'IFIN' services in Danube Home's Al Khuwair branch and now extends this service to all of the Danube Home branches in Oman.

The IFIN service is the first instant finance service launched by Alizz Islamic Bank in the Islamic banking sector, where it has become possible for customers to obtain financing for goods within ten minutes only. This service allows customers to instantly take home their desired goods such as furniture, luxuries, accessories, health and household appliances from the store having them financed for up to 120 months without the need of visiting any bank branch.

Customers whose salaries are deposited with Alizz Islamic bank, whether Omanis with salary of RO 350 or expatriate residents with a salary of RO 800, are eligible for the financing service.

In addition to this, with no down payment requirement, customers can finance 100 per cent of the value of the goods.

The extension of the IFIN service to other branches comes as part of the bank's plans to provide a wide range of banking solutions designed with great care. The process of availing of finance has been simplified into a simple 10-minute process at the store's checkout counter, where the customer will go through an online verification process and sign the finance contract following an immediate approval.

Sohar International accelerates digitalisation

MUSCAT: Setting a new benchmark in mobile banking, Sohar International has achieved yet another milestone with the recent launch of its enhanced mobile banking app that reflects the bank's global identity and values, offering customers a premium, seamless, secure and convenient medium of banking.

Equipped with a full suite of digital banking services, the app leverages the bank's proven technological expertise and is aimed at giving customers more control over their accounts while reducing the need to visit the branch or stand in queues.

While investing in technology, innovation and digitalisation have long remained one of Sohar International's top priorities, the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted its importance even



more. With thousands of people now turning to digital channels to carry out their daily banking transactions, being prepared to cater to this radical shift has earned Sohar International the loyalty of its customers.

By giving customers more freedom to manage their finances on the go, Sohar International has further enhanced the banking experience for them.

Nama Group concludes Strategic Development Programme

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 13

As part of its annual activities and to further align the Group's strategy with Oman Vision 2040 and Oman Investment Authority's (OIA) guidelines, Nama Group held its Strategy Review Workshop recently over a period of three days. Led by the Group CEO, Eng Omar al Wahaibi, the event was attended by the subsidiary CEOs and Nama's Executive leadership team.

Suhaila al Farsi, Executive Manager — Strategic Planning and Risk Management said: "The main objective of the workshop is the inclusion of the water and wastewater sector and identify synergies and efficiencies, in addition to approving the strategic focus areas to achieve customer satisfaction, drive towards



sustainability and renewables, and promote alternative non-conventional plans to confront general socio-economic conditions and obstacles." The workshop concluded a series of engagement sessions that commenced in April 2021 covering five key strategic focus areas: HSE, Customer Experience, Service Reliability,

Human Resources, and Digitisation. The sessions were supported with meetings with a wider audience to leverage Nama's talent pool, in addition to meetings with other key stakeholders: OIA, Authority for Public Services Regulation, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources, the water sector's policy maker.

SABCO Group launches Covid-19 vaccine awareness campaign

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 13

SABCO Group has announced the launch of a Covid-19 vaccine awareness campaign to increase awareness of and confidence in Covid-19 vaccinations.

The leading business group is utilising all of the SABCO Media platforms at their disposal to get the message across including: Al Wisal, Merge 104.8 and Virgin Radio Oman with coverage spanning across Muscat, Al Batinah North and South, Al Sharqiyah North and South, Dhofar, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Buraimi, Musandam and Al Dhahirah governorates. They are also utilising their Outdoor Media company with a national footprint



covering the entire governorates of the Sultanate as well as their social media platforms.

Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad al Busaidy (pictured), Chairman of SABCO group, said: "One of

the most important factors that will help preserve the country and its citizen's health is to get vaccinated as soon as possible. We are trying our best to convince those who are hesitant and raise awareness in the community. We are trying, through this campaign, to contribute in showing the right image of the vaccines and their benefits to the community."

Launched with the support of National Mineral Water Company, the Covid-19 vaccine campaign features a large number of community figures including doctors, influencers and media personalities, encouraging all members of society to get their vaccine. The campaign launched in July and will continue for 10 weeks.

GAC Motor opens new showroom in Al Mawaleh



MUSCAT: Adding another showroom to its growing network, GAC Motor Oman recently inaugurated a showroom at Seeb Al Mawaleh. The location of the showroom was planned to cater to the growing interest in GAC Motor's high quality, durable and reliable range of turbo charged vehicles, among the residents of Seeb Al Mawaleh and the neighbouring areas.

The low key affair had select few invitees and was held maintaining

all health and safety guidelines. Speaking on the occasion, a representative from GAC Motor Oman said, "It gives us great pleasure to inaugurate one more showroom for GAC Motor here in Oman. We thank our customers for making this possible. GAC Motor's award-winning quality, use of materials from the world-leading manufacturers, firm focus on aspects like durability and reliability have made them popular in Oman."



In brief

■ WASHINGTON



US OUTPUT SURGES DUE TO DIGITISATION

The Covid-19 pandemic has prompted businesses to rapidly digitise their operations, leading to a surge in productivity in the United States, Goldman Sachs analysts said.

Since the health crisis began, annualised growth in output per hour has risen 3.1 per cent, a big jump from the 1.4 per cent growth recorded in the previous business cycle, the analysts said. “Stronger productivity growth has been one of the silver linings of the pandemic,” economist Jan Hatzius wrote in a note dated on Monday.

“Higher-frequency measures indicate further gains in the middle of the year.” — **Reuters**

■ NEW YORK



JPMORGAN PROFIT SURGES ON INVESTMENT BANKING BOOST

JPMorgan Chase & Co reported a 155 per cent jump in quarterly profit on Tuesday that trounced estimates as the largest US bank gained from a surge in dealmaking and released more reserves it had set aside last year for potential pandemic-related loan defaults.

The Wall Street behemoth, whose fortunes tend to reflect the health of the US economy, said robust capital markets and a jump in M&A activity offset a slowdown in trading and weakness in consumer lending as the economy starts to reopen after the Covid-19 pandemic.

The bank's net income rose to \$11.9 billion, or \$3.78 per share, in the quarter ended June 30, from \$4.7 billion, or \$1.38 per share, a year earlier. Revenue fell 7 per cent to \$31.4 billion.

— **Reuters**

■ LONDON



BANK OF ENGLAND MATCHES FED ON LIFTING DIVIDEND CURBS

The Bank of England (BoE) on Tuesday axed pandemic curbs on shareholder dividend payouts in the commercial banking sector, mirroring a move by the US Federal Reserve.

British-based lenders had axed billions of pounds in dividends and share buybacks after the Bank of England requested the move to boost liquidity at the height of the coronavirus crisis.

“Extraordinary guardrails on shareholder distributions are no longer necessary,” the BoE said in its latest financial stability report after declaring the resilience of the sector. — **AFP**

China's export growth quickens as easing lockdowns lift demand

BEIJING: China's exports grew much faster than expected in June, as solid global demand led by easing lockdown measures and vaccination drives worldwide eclipsed virus outbreaks and port delays.

But overall trade growth in the world's second-biggest economy may slow in the second half of 2021, a customs official warned on Tuesday, partly reflecting the Covid-19 pandemic uncertainties as the Delta virus variant wreaks havoc in some countries.

Overall imports also beat expectations, though the pace of gains eased from May, with the values boosted by high raw material prices, customs data showed. Thanks to Beijing's efforts in largely containing the pandemic earlier than its trading partners, the world's biggest exporter has managed a solid economic revival from the coronavirus-induced slump in the first few months of 2020.

Exports in dollar terms rose 32.2 per cent in June from a year earlier, compared with 27.9 per cent growth in May. The analysts polled by Reuters had forecasted a 23.1 per cent increase.

“Exports surprised on the upside in June, shrugging off the impact of the temporary Shenzhen port closure and other supply chain bottlenecks,”



Gantry cranes move containers onto transporters at a port in Qingdao in eastern China's Shandong province. — **AFP**

said Louis Kuijs, head of Asia economics at Oxford Economics.

“The headline US\$ numbers suggest that in real, sequential terms shipments held up in June, after having moderated earlier on from the record levels of end-2020.”

China's trade performance has seen some pressure in recent months, mainly due to a global semiconductor shortage, logistics bottlenecks, and higher raw

material and freight costs.

All the same, the global easings in Covid-19 lockdown measures and vaccination drives appeared to underpin a strong uptick in worldwide demand for Chinese goods.

Germany, for example, which was at first sluggish in its vaccination drive, said this month it had caught up with the United States in terms of the proportion of the population having had one

shot of Covid-19 vaccine. Close to half of Americans are now fully vaccinated, while elsewhere in Europe the rate has also increased recently.

China's strong shipment numbers last month underlined some solid factory surveys overseas. A measure of US factory activity climbed to a record high in June, while Euro zone business growth accelerated at its fastest pace in 15 years. — **Reuters**

BOJ to offer cautiously upbeat view on economy

TOKYO: The Bank of Japan will offer a cautiously optimistic view of the economy in fresh quarterly projections due on Friday, as renewed state of emergency curbs to combat the Covid-19 pandemic hurt consumption and keep growth heavily reliant on overseas demand.

The central bank will also unveil details of a new scheme to boost funding for activities aimed at battling climate change, putting it in line with its global counterparts stepping up efforts to deal with the economic fallout from climate risks.

At the two-day policy meeting ending on Friday, the BOJ is set to maintain its yield curve control (YCC) targets at -0.1 per cent for short-term interest rates and 0



The Japanese flag flutters in front of the Bank of Japan in Tokyo. — **Reuters**

per cent for 10-year bond yields.

In new quarterly projections also due on Friday, the board is seen slashing its economic growth forecast for the fiscal year ending in March 2022 from the current 4.0 per cent estimate made three months ago, some sources have previously said. — **Reuters**

ECB starts to taper asset purchases

BRUSSELS: The ECB will start tapering its pandemic-related asset purchases after its September meeting and stop buying them by the end of March, according to a Reuters poll which showed the top economic risk was new Covid-19 variants.

After announcing a new strategy last week that allows the central bank to tolerate inflation higher than its new 2 per cent symmetric target, ECB President Christine Lagarde said on Monday the bank would change its policy guidance at its July 22 meeting.

While those announcements came against a backdrop of slightly more optimistic growth and inflation forecasts for this year and next, high unemployment rates in most euro zone countries are underscoring the need for caution.



European Central Bank President Lagarde attends a plenary session at the European Parliament in Brussels. — **Reuters**

Just over 70 per cent of economists, or 36 of 51, who responded to an additional question in the July 5-12 poll said the ECB would start tapering its

Pandemic Emergency Purchase Programme (PEPP) after the September meeting, up from nearly 63 per cent last month.

— **Reuters**

Opec+ impasse risks price war as demand surges

VIENNA: Stalled talks by top oil producers over releasing more supply could deteriorate into a price war just as Covid-19 vaccines are sending demand for oil surging, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said on Tuesday.

The Paris-based agency's concern over scarce oil supply comes less than two months after it issued a landmark report warning that investors should not fund new oil, gas or coal projects if the world wants to reach net zero emissions by mid-century.

“The possibility of a market share battle, even if remote, is hanging over markets, as is the potential for high fuel prices to stoke inflation and damage a



A man fixes the Opec logo at the group's headquarters in Vienna. — **Reuters**

fragile economic recovery,” the IEA said. “The Opec+ stalemate means that until a compromise can be reached, production quotas will remain at July's levels.

In that case, oil markets will

tighten significantly as demand rebounds from last year's Covid-induced plunge,” it added in its monthly oil market report.

A spat between Saudi Arabia and the UAE forced Opec+,

The Opec+ stalemate means that until a compromise can be reached, production quotas will remain at July's levels

which groups producers from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, Russia and others, to abandon talks last week on boosting production after days of negotiations.

Though rising virus cases in some countries remain a key downside risk, the IEA said, oil storage levels in most developed countries have fallen well below

historical averages and draws on oil stocks this autumn are set to be the largest in at least a decade.

“Oil markets are likely to remain volatile until there is clarity on Opec+ production policy. And volatility does not help ensure orderly and secure energy transitions – nor is it in the interest of either producers or consumers,” the IEA added.

The IEA said market volatility stoked by the impasse served neither producers nor consumers and that while higher fuel prices could provide an impetus to developing more renewable energy, “volatility does not help ensure orderly and secure energy transitions.” — **Reuters**

Oil climbs on further draw in crude inventories



Pumpjacks are seen during sunset at the Daqing oil field in Heilongjiang, China. — **Reuters**

TOKYO: Oil prices climbed on Tuesday, reversing most of the previous day's losses, as tight supply and expectations of a further draw in US crude inventories provided support, although fears over the spreading Covid-19 variant capped gains.

Brent crude for September rose 36 cents, or 0.5 per cent, to \$75.52 a barrel, after losing 0.5 per cent on Monday. US West Texas Intermediate crude for August was at \$74.45 a barrel, up 35 cents, or 0.5 per cent, having fallen 0.6 per cent the previous day.

“Optimism about tight supply and declining US crude stockpiles lent support,” said Toshitaka Tazawa, an analyst at Fujitomi Co. “Still, growing concerns over a spike in Covid-19 infection cases and uncertainty over production plans by Opec+ will likely limit gains,” he added. — **Reuters**



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features



Bidiya teen scents opportunity in handmade perfumes

A young Omani entrepreneur from the Wilayat of Bidiya is preparing to take on luxury international perfume brands with an artisanal line-up of her own infused with distinctively Omani essences and fragrances... **P20**

TOURISM

LIFE 3.0
BY MAX TEGMARK

Life 3.0 discusses Artificial Intelligence and its impact on the future of life on Earth and beyond.

Jordan sees hopes of tourism revival after 2020 collapse

HOPING FOR CUSTOMERS, Ahmad Nassar is dusting and polishing the trinkets and souvenirs in his tourist shop in Madaba, an ancient town in central Jordan known for its early Christian mosaics.

The coronavirus pandemic has been a disaster for Jordan's tourism industry and for its

economy as a whole, which suffered its worst contraction in decades last year.

"I felt despair, there was no income, no work, there was no support for shop owners," Nassar said.

Now foreign tourists are starting to trickle back, and the situation is looking more hope-

ful, he said. The European Union last week included Jordan among a dozen new epidemiologically safe countries as of July 1, and government efforts to revive the tourism sector appear to be paying off.

Officials this month announced special measures for Jordan's 'golden triangle', which includes famous sites such as the ancient city of Petra, Wadi Rum and crusader castles, closing the area off to all but the fully vaccinated.

At the start of July the government also lifted most lockdown measures after a sharp drop in infections, reopening gyms, pools and night clubs in hotel facilities.

"At the height of the crisis, hotel occupancy did not exceed 2 per cent or 3 per cent," Abdul Hakeem al Hindi, the head of Jordan Hotels Association, said.



Now occupancy rates in some of Jordan's main tourist centres are back up to 40-50 per cent in the Dead Sea and the Red Sea port city of Aqaba and around 30 per cent in Amman, the latter driven by returning tourists from the Gulf, latest hotel industry figures show.

The government is also taking other steps to get the number of foreign tourists back to the record 3 million visitors Jordan received in 2019, many of whom arrived on low cost European carriers led by Ryanair which resumed flights last month.

— Reuters



Perhaps the fate of the small villages is to remain small to contain the legacy, the fabulous meaning of unity, the traditions and all the small things that matter. They are not meant to develop into greater cities so that they don't lose their social position.

Musilmat village in Wadi al Maawil is one of these small, yet superior with its distinguished location, old history and attractive nature. For many eras, it remained a link between the villages within the wilayat and the neighbouring wilayats. Scholars, jurists, writers and poets settled there for years, either seeking knowledge or work.

The village is known for its pottery industry and it has three lines of defence. Al Khandaq house is one of the most famous heritage landmarks that was built by Shaikh Mohammed bin Salim bin Saif al Rawahi in 1851. It used to have only one floor but the second floor and the rest of the house were completed in 1870 during the reign of Sultan Faisal bin Turki. Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Salim al Rawahi renovated the house.

The ground floor also contains several rooms that were used as a storage. There were historical writings that confirm the visits of shaikhs in that time. On the other hand, during the reign of Shaikh Saif bin Abdulaziz al Rawahi, the front of the house collapsed but Mohammad bin Masood al Hilali rebuilt the house.

The age of the house is estimated at three hundred years.

The house also contains of the famous Sablat al Roshan,

Bait al Khandaq: A testament to Omani architecture



where shaikhs and visitors gather in the past.

The house reflects the skills of the Omani architecture. It is surrounded by houses and



farms as it is also close to the souq.

Musilmat has recently witnessed several remarkable changes through urban expan-

sion and economic activity. It received a large share of sustainable development services, such as education, health, electricity, water and paved roads.

LOCAL SCENE

Treating the salinity of water and soil in the arable lands



FARMING IS FOUND to be a source of relaxation and stress relief. Given the fast pace of modern life, it's perhaps unsurprising that people often discover that slowing down and getting back in touch with nature is a great way to keep stress under control. However, people complain that some lands are no suitable for agriculture and they cost them a fortune to treat. The following article indicates the efforts of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in solving the problem.

The ministry stated that the arable lands in the Sultanate are limited, estimated at 5.29 million acres only, representing only 7 per cent. 1.88 million acres are classified as arable lands, and 3.41 million acres are marginal lands characterised by low productivity or they require production stimulus in larger quantities and therefore its economic returns are low.

The ministry indicated that the increase in salinity leads to a decrease in the productivity of field crops and to an increase in losses as a result of the increased costs of extracting larger quantities of irrigation water to ensure that the soil is free of salt. It also indicated that the availability of water resources is the most important factor in the agricultural sector as the agricultural sector consumes about 90 per cent of the renewable water resources in the Sultanate. The National Water Resources Plan has estimated that the agricultural sector consumes about 16 per cent more than the available renewable water resources annually.

The ministry stated that the increased use of groundwater has adversely affected its quality in areas near the sea, and this directly requires reducing the use of fresh groundwater in areas affected by salinity. Salinity treatment is one of the difficult operations, and therefore work must be done to control and coexist with the salts in the soil so that it does not exceed the permissible limits by integrating agricultural operations such as plowing, fertilising, irrigation and drainage.

The salinity of irrigation water affects soil fertility through the accumulation of dissolved salts on the surface of the soil and in the root area, according to the type of soil. The use of saline water for irrigation, especially in clay lands, leads to the demolition of soil construction and makes it less permeable and unventilated. The salinity of irrigation water affects the productivity of plants; as agricultural crops differ in their sensitivity to dissolved salts in irrigation water.

The salinity of soil water should remain at the level of salinity of irrigation water when applying the best irrigation management systems in the coastal areas of the Sultanate. There are two different types of salinity problems in the Sultanate. The first is soil salinity in the governorates that have an irrigation source of fresh water. This problem can be overcome by improving irrigation and drainage management systems using good water quality.

The second type is the problem of salinity arising from the extraction of a large amount in excess of the natural limit of groundwater in coastal areas and it occurs as a result of the flow of sea water to the coastal aquifers, which in turn leads to the salinisation of irrigation water sources.





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ENVIRONMENT

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Kenya concern over UK elephant 'rewilding' project

Kenya voiced concern on Wednesday over plans by an animal charity to fly a herd of elephants from a British zoo to Kenya for "rewilding".

The Aspinall Foundation said it plans to take the elephants on a Boeing 747, dubbed the Dumbo jet, from southern England to their new home 7,000 kilometres (4,500 miles) away.

The charity said it would work with anti-poaching teams to help ensure the long-term survival of the 13 animals — including three babies — once they reach one of two sites under consideration in southern Kenya.

But Kenya's Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife said it "noted with concern" the reports in the British media about what the charity has described as the first rewilding project of its kind.



"The ministry wants to state that neither them nor the Kenya Wildlife Service have been contacted or consulted on this matter," the ministry said.

"Relocation and rehabilitation of an animal from a zoo is not easy and is an expensive affair."

A ministry official said that the Kenyan authorities would be guided by specific regulations drawn up by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) on the movement of animals.

The IUCN warned in March that poaching and habitat destruction, particularly due to land conversion for agriculture, was devastating elephant numbers across Africa.

The population of African savanna elephants shrank by at least 60 per cent in

the last half century, prompting their reclassification as "endangered" in the latest update to the IUCN's "Red List" of threatened species.

The Aspinall Foundation said the operation was planned for next year and that it would be the first time a breeding herd of elephants will have been rewilded.

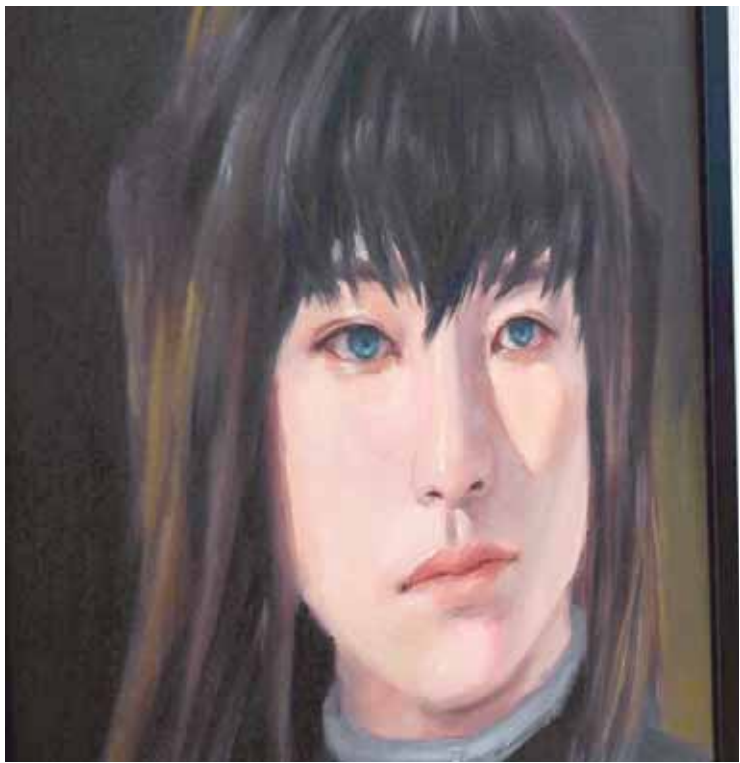
Aspinall's head of communications Carrie Johnson, wife of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, said the plan would support Kenya's economy after the coronavirus pandemic.

"Life in Kent is pretty good for these elephants, all things considered. But Africa is where they belong," she said in an article published in the British media.

— AFP

ART

Imaginary deaths, real grief: Thai artist honours fallen anime heroes



PORTRAITS OF DOZENS of anime characters, each with a small altar for fans to leave flowers, adorn the wall of a Bangkok gallery — a tribute to fictional heroes who met an untimely death.

The 2D Afterlife exhibit is made up of 50 of these creations from artist Jinnipha Nivasabut, who wanted to mourn the deaths of her favourite characters in popular shows and manga series.

The core concept "is to explore the idea of why the deaths of these fic-

popularity in the kingdom, with frequent conventions held in pre-pandemic Bangkok that would draw massive crowds of cosplayers.

Jinnipha said she wanted her work to not just serve as fan art, but as a participation experience for both her and the massive fan base supporting each series.

Below each portrait, a small shelf acting as an altar allows the public to place flowers and Fanta soda drinks — typical Thai offerings to the dead.



tional characters could have such an impact on real people," the 22-year-old anime lover said.

Eschewing anime's cartoon style, she instead painted the fallen heroes with the realism of state-

ly oil portraits. "In my memories, I see these characters as real persons. They're like members of my family so I decided to draw these characters to resemble real persons as much as possible," she said.

Japanese anime and manga enjoy mainstream

Sasha Braus, a beloved character from the ultra-popular Attack on Titan series, had a potato left on her shelf — a reference to her love for food on the show that earned her the nickname "Potato Girl".

"They know that she loved potatoes so one of them came here and put it on the shelf for her," said gallery visitor Kullanit Assawawongkasem, 19, who added that she was "devastated" when the character was killed.

— AFP



Bidiya teen scents opportunity in handmade perfumes

CONRAD PRABHU

Bidiya, with its wind-swept desert expanses peppered with lush oases, is a far cry from the exotic world of luxury perfumes and exotic fragrances. Yet, in an urban corner of this wilayat — best known for its camel rearing traditions and natural attractions — a high school student is already charting for herself a successful future around artisanal perfumery.

Demure and soft-spoken, Medhawi bint Fahad al Hajriyah, hardly looks suited to the world of haute couture. Yet, the 15-year-old budding entrepreneur already has a small, but promising, product portfolio to her name, complete with stylish, international-class brand, logo and packaging.

It all began two years ago when Medhawi joined hands with her classmate to compete in the annual Injaz Oman programme — a competition that recognises and rewards young Omanis with a business or entrepreneurial mindset. Medhawi's entry — handmade Omani perfumes and soaps — did not make the cut, but it ignited in her an unrelenting fascination for all things perfumed and fragrant.

"I was barely 13 then! But the realisation that you could mix and match essences to create out-of-this-world fragrances opened my eyes to the potential for a full-scale business opportunity centred around perfumery", said Medhawi.

Thus, what started out as a mundane curricular activity has since burgeoned into a full-blown entrepreneurial pursuit for the young girl. Weekends and holidays are now spent in what passes as a rudimentary home lab featuring neat rows of bottles of raw ingredients — fragrant essential oils, aroma compounds, fixatives, solvents and other exotica.

An exciting two-year journey of creativity, experimentation and discovery has since given birth to 'Medhawi' — a handmade Omani perfume brand named after its young creator. Available in nine different fragrances, the product is marketed in 50, 75 and 100ml sizes. The median price is around RO 7 per 50ml size. High quality bottles and elegant packaging have helped position the brand in the premium category just below the luxury range.

A signature ingredient in all of her perfume products is frankincense oil, distilled from the finest incense sourced from Salalah. Oils from choice agar wood (oudh) also help in the concoction of heady scents that are distinctive in fragrance and uniquely Omani in character, says the young artisanal perfumer.

"Medhawi' is positioned as an



upmarket product that makes for an excellent gift to friends, family members or office colleagues", said the perfumer. "I get inquiries and orders primarily via my social media accounts, but some local outlets in Bidiya have shown interest in displaying my products as well."

Recently, a surprise order from Kuwait underscored 'Medhawi's potential to become a bestseller. "I was over the moon when a Kuwaiti trader got in touch asking for an initial supply of 100 bottles", said Medhawi.

As a family-centric endeavour without any paid hand to support her, Medhawi can count on her parents and siblings to pitch in with help when there's a flurry of orders. "Usually, there's increased interest in my products during Eid holidays. Thus, while I focus on the mixing and blending of the perfumes, my family members help with the packaging and sorting. Often, the entire family is involved in this enterprise."

While her focus is currently on her studies, she is in no doubt that her future lies in the world of fragrances. To this end, the young girl plans to major either in Chemistry or Business Management in college, aimed at garnering the skillsets necessary to take her business to the next level. The longer-term goal, she says, is to invest in a modern factory suitably equipped to churn out a wide range of perfumes and fragrances, supplemented with body and hair care products as well.

Indeed, in tradition-bound Bidiya, young girls like Medhawi are breaking new ground in exploring career choices once deemed taboo by women. Entrepreneurship is increasingly appealing to young women, as it does to menfolk, potentially paving the way for the growth of a thriving SME sector — a key objective of Vision 2040 as well.

To Medhawi's good fortune, entrepreneurship has long been a family trait. Her father, Fahad al Hajri, is one of Bidiya's better known entrepreneurs, having built a reputation for himself as an 'agripreneur' specialising in the agriculture and farming business. Fahad, who owns three-acre farm in Bidiya, is often in the local news for his successful exploits in cultivating fruits and vegetables farmed for the first time in these parts. Using modern farming practices and soil nutrients, he has managed to grow strawberries, eggplants, capsicums and other such crops in commercial quantities — an activity that keeps him busy all through the year.

As for his daughter's ambitions to become a perfumer, the proud father adds: "We parents have a duty to encourage our children to explore business, entrepreneurial or self-employment opportunities, so we don't add to the burden on the government in creating jobs for Omanis. Hopefully, Medhawi's example will be an inspiration to her peers!"