

Khazaen city to boost investments

Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, visited Khazaen Economic City (KEC) on Tuesday to check the readiness of the City's infrastructure and to review the most notable strategic projects coming up within the KEC such as the Khazaen Central Fruits and Vegetables Market and the Land Port. The minister's visit was also aimed at reviewing the investment opportunities offered by KEC in the industrial, logistics and housing sectors to the local and international investors. **DETAILS ON P5**



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ENGLAND FANS DARE TO DREAM AS DENMARK SEMI LOOMS



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REVISED ELECTRICITY TARIFFS BEGIN TO PARE SUBSIDY: APSR



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REDISCOVERING THE WARM WELCOME OF HOSPITALITY OF WADI HALHAL



MUSCAT

YEMEN SITUATION REVIEWED WITH ICRC

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, met Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). During the meeting, they reviewed the current humanitarian situation in Yemen and the efforts made by all parties to end the conflict and stop the suffering of the brotherly Yemeni people. They also exchanged views on various regional and international developments of common interest. The guest expressed his thanks for the Sultanate's support to the humanitarian operations carried out by the National Committee of the Red Cross. **SEE ALSO P2**

SALALAH

MAJOR POWER OUTAGE IN SALALAH

Salalah witnessed a major power outage on Tuesday afternoon. The Dhofar Integrated Services Company reported the interruption in the main network that feeds the Dhofar Governorate. The emergency teams of engineers and technicians were working to sort out the issue, as the outage started at around 1 pm and could not be resumed till the time of writing of this report 4 pm. In its statement the DISC said, "The emergency teams of engineers and technicians are taking the necessary action." Power was restored in some areas. **DETAILS ON P2**

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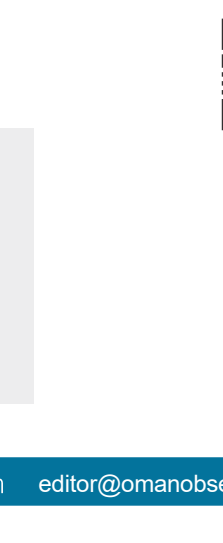
OPINION

Diversions necessary to survive Covid trauma...
Samuel Kutty

Our actions determine the potency of coronavirus
Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla

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**TOP BELARUS OPPOSITION LEADER JAILED FOR 14 YEARS** **P8**

Decree shifts Al Saiidiya School Museum to National Museum

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday issued a Royal Decree No 49/2021, shifting the Education Museum of Al Saiidiya School from the Ministry of Education to the National Museum.

Article 1 transfers Al Saiidiya School's Education Museum, with its existing organisational level, from the Ministry of Education to the National Museum.

Article 2 of the Royal Decree stipulates that all allocations, origins, rights, obligations and assets of Al Saiidiya School's Education Museum shall be transferred from the Ministry of Education to the National Museum.

Article 3 transfers to the National Museum all employees of Al Saiidiya School's Education Museum, along with the employees' existing job status and financial allocations.

Article 4 cancels all that contradicts this Decree or contravenes its provisions.

Article 5 says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced on its date of issue.

— ONA



JOB-SEEKERS APPEAR FOR WRITTEN TEST

A new batch of job-seekers took written test at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Muscat on Tuesday. The candidates took the test for employment opportunities in the public sector. The Ministry of Labour has sent call letters to 17,525 job-seekers to appear for the tests and compete for 1,003 opportunities in nine government departments, including the Ministry of Health, Education, the Directorate General of the Council of Ministers, Ministry of Information, Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and the State Audit Institution. **DETAILS ON P2**

OIA initiative on 4,800 job and training opportunities

MUSCAT: Oman Investment Authority (OIA) in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, launched an initiative which involves more than 4,800 job and training opportunities at a number of OAI-owned firms.

The initiatives, to be implemented in three phases during the current year, include direct job opportunities, work-related training, on-the-job training as well as training opportunities designed to hone the skills of the participants and equip them with the experience required for joining the labour market.

The initiatives target the holders of diploma, Bachelor's and Master's degrees in various specialisations in addition to laid-offs and holders of the General Education Diploma and below. The initiative stems from the keenness of the OIA and its owned companies to continue to adhere to the responsibility towards society by seeking to provide job and training opportunities, and to contribute to the employment of national job-seekers. — ONA

➡ EVENING CLOSURE FROM 5 PM TILL 4 AM FROM JULY 16

➡ MUSANDAM GOVERNORATE EXEMPTED FROM CLOSURE

➡ ONLY VACCINATED PEOPLE ALLOWED TO VISIT DHOFAR DURING KHAREEF

➡ NO EID AL ADHA PRAYERS, PRE-EID SOUQS (HABTA) AND GATHERINGS

➡ BAN ON TRAVELLERS ARRIVING FROM EGYPT LIFTED

➡ SINGAPORE, INDONESIA, IRAQ, IRAN AND OTHERS ADDED TO BAN LIST

COMPLETE LOCKDOWN DURING EID ALADHA

MUSCAT: The Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic held a meeting on Tuesday under the chairmanship of Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior.

The meeting, held at the Interior Ministry, followed updates on the pandemic, measures of protection against Covid-19, ways of tackling its impacts and means of curbing the spread of the virus.

The Supreme Committee studied the epidemiological scenario of Covid-19 worldwide as indicated by the latest data about the virus and its different variants. It also reviewed the situation in different countries that experienced rapid spread due mutated strains

of the virus that eventually caused a huge surge in infections in the Sultanate, with the number of inpatients multiplying in hospital wards and intensive care units, in addition to a spate in death cases.

To protect all individuals of society against this pandemic and, to safeguard the capability of the health system in the Sultanate to handle this disease and other services, the following has been decided.

The evening closure of commercial activities and the ban on movement of individuals and vehicles shall continue to take effect from 5 pm everyday till 4 am the next day, starting from Friday (July 16) till the morning of Saturday (July 31),

TURN TO P3



A rare pasture tree found in Dhofar Governorate

MUSCAT: Specialists from the Environment Authority (EA) discovered and documented a rare species of trees in Oman and in the Arab world. It was found in several areas in the Wilayat of Al Mazyouna, Dhofar Governorate.

This tree was spotted earlier in 2020. A specialised team from the Authority conducted a research on the tree. It is a flowering tree that attracts bees. It is a pasture tree which plays a major role in the ecosystem in the region.

Ali bin Salim Akaak,



Wildlife Specialist at the Authority, affirmed that flora and fauna in the Sultanate always dazzles us with new, unique, unregistered and unclassified plants in the region. EA, in cooperation with the departments concerned, is exerting efforts to preserve, define, document and protect this unique eco-diversity. He added that steps are under way to enhance cooperation between the EA team and the team of the Oman Botanic Garden of the Diwan of Royal Court. Samples

of the newly-discovered tree were taken for the purpose of research and study and as an attempt to cultivate them, which showed a great success.

He further said that the team, in cooperation with the Oman Botanic Garden's team, contacted botanists in the region from Saudi Arabia and Yemen who confirmed that the tree was not previously registered in the GCC states.

Akaak also added that communication was established with Professor Tony Miller, an expert on

plants in the Royal Edinburgh Gardens in the United Kingdom who is interested in documenting wild plants in the Arab countries. He affirmed that it is a new species of trees in the Arab world. It was earlier registered in Pakistan and Sri Lanka. He pointed out that EA specialists are in contact with international organisations to register this tree. A research is being conducted to study the tree to be classified officially as the first tree of its type in the Arab world. — ONA

SAYYID THEYAZIN RECEIVES SAUDI AMBASSADOR



MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, received in his office on Tuesday Abdullah Saud al Anzi, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Sultanate. The meeting reviewed the relations between the two brotherly countries. It also exchanged views on means of developing them for the interest of the two sides. The meeting also discussed aspects of the existing cooperation in areas related to culture, sports and youth. — ONA

ICRC president hails Sultanate’s support to humanitarian operations

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, met with Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), here on Tuesday.

During the meeting, they reviewed the current humanitarian situation in Yemen and the efforts made by all parties to end the conflict and stop the suffering of the brotherly Yemeni people.

They also exchanged views on various regional and international developments of common interest.

The guest expressed his thanks for the Sultanate’s support to the humanitarian operations carried



out by the National Committee of the Red Cross.

On his turn, Sayyid Badr stressed the Sultanate’s keenness to continue cooperation with the ICRC. He also affirmed that the Sultanate attaches great interest to humanitarian issues as part

of the political and diplomatic efforts to come up with peaceful solutions to issues and conflicts.

The meeting was attended by Jamila Hammami, Head of ICRC Mission in the Sultanate and a number of officials at the Foreign Ministry. — ONA

Labour Ministry conducts tests for new batch of job-seekers



MUSCAT: A new set of job-seekers has started taking the written test at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) here on Tuesday for the employment opportunities in the public sector.

Saif bin Sulaiman al Shaqsi, Head of the Department of Job Vacancies and Announcements Section at the Ministry of Labour, said that the ministry sent invitations to 17,525 job-seekers to sit for the tests and compete for 1003 employment opportunities available in nine government departments, which are the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Directorate General of

the Council of Ministers, the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and the State Audit Institution.

Al Shaqsi pointed out that today’s tests were run in a smooth manner, thanks to the presence of a large number of supervisory human resources having enough experience in this field. UTAS facilities were ideal for organising such tests, said Al Shaqsi, adding that precautionary measures were undertaken for protection against Covid-19.

Al Shaqsi said “The job-



More than
17,500
applicants to take
test for over 1000
job opportunities
in nine government
departments

seekers, who come from all governorates of the Sultanate, have been distributed in accordance with the capacity of each college so that all candidates could be accommodated. The job-seekers are received in sets

of 600 each day over a period of three days from Tuesday to Thursday from 8.30 am to 2 pm. The test for each set takes 30 minutes, followed by 40 minutes for sorting and announcement of results, after which a new group enters the exam halls.”

Al Shaqsi explained that each test consists of 30 questions, of which 20 pertain to the specialisation, 5 are dedicated to mental abilities and 5 for general knowledge.

As many as 83,038 applied after the jobs were announced, said Al Shaqsi, adding that precedence in sorting of results was accorded to those who applied first.

— ONA

Power outage in Salalah

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Salalah witnessed a major power outage on Tuesday afternoon. The Dhofar Integrated Services Company (DISC) reported the interruption in the main network that feeds the Dhofar Governorate. The emergency teams of engineers and technicians were working to sort out the issue, as the outage started at around 1pm and was partially resorted in some areas at around 5 pm.

In its statement the DISC said, “The emergency teams of engineers and technicians are taking the necessary action.”

The sudden outage caused chaos at traffic signals at all the traffic junctions till the time the personnel from the Royal Oman Police (ROP) swung into action and regulated the traffic at

important junctions.

Most of the officials and senior technicians in the power generation and distribution were busy to rectify the issue and were not available for comments. One source, however, dropped a hint of ‘gas issue’ as the reason behind the interruption.

The Authority for Public Services Regulation also hinted at interruption in the gas supply to power generation station that led to the sudden outage.

The DISC said it is necessary to contact the toll-free number 80077700 in the event of cases of illness in homes that depend on devices that require the operation of electric current to provide them with immediate assistance.

Salalah Airport, however, reported no direct impact of the outage on flight movements due to proper back up.



Ample supply brings down fish prices in June



MUSCAT: The prices of fish in the local markets in the Sultanate saw a significant drop last June. The prices hovered between RO 0.500 and RO 3.00 per kilogramme and the markets saw medium purchasing activities and an abundance of fish quantities.

It is noteworthy that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is implementing a plan for the marketing of fish during the summer months. The plan which began in May and continues till the end of August, is carried out in cooperation with fish selling and marketing companies and aims to supply fish markets, outlets and fish shops in the governorates with adequate quantities of fish in order to achieve balance in the local market in terms of quantities, types and prices.





Supreme Committee members follow up vaccination process of target segments

MUSCAT: Headed by Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, several members of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, followed-up the process of vaccinating target segments within the National Strategy for Immunisation against Coronavirus (Covid-19) at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) on Tuesday.

Sayyid Hamoud and the panel

members were briefed on the procedures of the vaccination process, from the registration phase all the way to taking the vaccine.

They commended the great turnout of target segments, which reflects the societal awareness of immunisation against Covid-19.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA) and to Oman Television, Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, member

of the Supreme Committee, praised the vaccination process, its easiness, and the organisation at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. He underscored the pivotal role of the centre in the vaccination process. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health, within the National Strategy for Immunisation against Coronavirus (Covid-19) continues vaccinating target segments in all governorates of the Sultanate, which sees a great turnout of people.



30% vaccinated against Covid-19



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@zainabalnasseri

The number of people vaccinated against Covid-19 has increased to 1,096,838, representing 30 per cent of the targeted figure which is 3.7 million, according to latest statistics by the Ministry of Health.

It showed that 78 per cent of the vaccinated people received one dose, while 22 per cent received two doses of various vaccines.

The ministry seeks to cover the target group (above 12 years), who represent 70 per cent of the population, according to the quantities of the available vaccine.

On Sunday, the mass immunisation drive entered a new phase as it included youngsters (18 and above). This comes as the new variants of Covid-19 proved to be affecting



younger people, including children.

The ministry called on the target group to book vaccine appointments in advance through Tarassud+ mobile application or through covid19.moh.gov.om before heading to the approved government centres for immunisation in order to ensure a safe national vaccination drive.

Meanwhile, casualties

continued to reduce in the Sultanate while active cases showed an increase. On Tuesday, 23 people died due to Covid-19 related cases taking the total toll to 3,339.

The Ministry of Health reported 1,824 new cases in the last 24 hours adding the total number of active cases to 28,755. In the past 24 hours, 1,684 people recovered while the total recovery rose to 246,466.

Total lockdown during Eid al Adha

FROM PAGE 1

except on the three days of Eid al Adha (10 to 12 Dhul Hijjah 1442 AH), during which the lockdown of commercial activities and ban on movement of individuals and vehicles shall continue all day long (throughout the three days of Eid).

The Governorate of Musandam is exempted from the decision of closure of commercial activities and ban on movement of individuals and vehicles due to low number of infections and hospitalised Covid-19 patients there. This decision starts to take effect from Tuesday, with emphasis on the population in Musandam Governorate taking full precautions as indicated earlier, like wearing face masks and refraining from gatherings.

Also, it is not allowed to visit the Governorate of Musandam, except for people who have taken at least one dose of the approved vaccine in the Sultanate (from among citizens and residents aged 18 years and above), as well as travellers from abroad who took two doses of the vaccines. This decision takes effect from 5 pm from Friday (July 9), till further notice.

Lifting ban on travellers arriving from Egypt to the Sultanate. Yet, a new list of travel-ban countries has been added, and these are Singapore, Indonesia, Iraq, Iran, Tunisia, Libya, Argentina, Columbia, Brunei Darussalam. Travellers from the above-mentioned



countries are not allowed to enter the Sultanate with effect from 5 pm of Friday (July 9), till further notice. The same ban applies to travellers who happened to have visited the above-mentioned countries within 14 days from applying to enter the Sultanate.

Upon the advent of the monsoon season in the Governorate of Dhofar (khareef), it has been decided that citizens and residents in the Sultanate who have taken at least one dose of approved vaccines (from among those aged 18 years and above) are allowed to visit the Governorate of Dhofar. Also, those who took two doses of the vaccines from among travellers from abroad will be allowed to enter Dhofar Governorate. The decision takes effect from 5 pm on Friday (July 9) till further notice. It is a condition that occupancy in hotels and furnished apartments shall not exceed 50 per cent in the Governorate of Dhofar.

All approved precautionary measures have to be undertaken as stated by the authorities concerned earlier.

The Supreme Committee stresses that no Eid al Adha prayers, no traditional pre-Eid souqs (habta) and no gatherings are allowed in all sites and governorates of the Sultanate. This ban includes family gatherings, Eid greeting assemblies and collective celebrations of the Eid.

The Supreme Committee stresses that the decisions of closure of all land border checkpoints of the Sultanate continue to take effect and that international activities and conferences be suspended in the Sultanate till further notice. All celebration halls have to be closed, and so shall related activities like the leasing of tents. All local activities of public nature shall be suspended, and this includes sports activities and exhibitions of all types. — ONA

SALUTE

THE WARRIORS IN WHITE



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

For them, days and nights have shrunk into work. And a work that deals with life and death. They know no days and nights, leisure, family time, or even shifts don't bother them. They took up the challenge of humanity since the Covid-19 stuck humanity.

They are the warriors in white.

If they are cautious for their own health, they are cautious because the virus does not spread among the patients, as they have to mingle closely with those 'positive' patients from among us. They are on a 'Save the People' mission

Just as the Covid-19 pandemic has exhausted the global health system and testing humanity, doctors across the world are working round the clock with no significant break as they show an unrelenting commitment and courage to care for the infected people and communicate with their families as well providing support.

They are parents of small children,

husbands, newlyweds, sons and daughters.

"These men and women are the backbone of addressing a wide range of health challenges facing the world as they serve the healthcare system and at the front lines to address the pandemic issues", a note from the Ministry of Health (MoH) said.

"We are just doing our duty at the clinics and hospitals and we are in the mission to save life and alleviate their pains", says Dr Mizun Tufail al Rahman, Senior Consultant — Family physician at the Ministry of Health.

"Being positive is the most negative word of the season, a lesson taught by the pandemic Coronavirus during this period of uncertainty. Health workers are in the frontline of Covid-19 team, and this exposes them to hazards including exposure to a pathogen (Covid-19), fatigue, burnout, psychological stress and the like", Dr Saleha al Jadidi, Head of Consultant Psychiatry and Geriatrics at Al Masarra Hospital.

Dr Rohil Raghavan, CEO of Burjeel

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ISSUES

Hospitals admits that from the time they became doctors, they have never faced such a crisis.

"There is a lot of risks involved; yes, we all feel exhausted, we are under severe tension but in between all this, there is a huge sense of satisfaction that we can save lives. The harder we try, the more people we can save. On this day for doctors, all that I can say is keep up the great work", he said.

"This July 1, we actually celebrated the second doctors day after the outbreak of the pandemic. Still, it's raging worldwide, and governments and healthcare workers are struggling to curb and contain the spread and get the maximum number of people to get vaccinated. We are struggling a lot to contain the virus, but no matter what, we'll continue to do our best as this is our job and life, let me ask one thing in return from the general public: please follow the directives of the authorities and take all precautions to prevent further spread of the disease", pleads Dr Benny Panakkan, Medical Director at

Badr Al Samaa Hospitals Group.

"It gives a great feeling that a day has been designated for us, the doctors, that people recognise and appreciate our hard work", says Dr Dilip Singhvi, Specialist Internal Medicine, Apollo Hospital.

"We, doctors by virtue of our training, our commitment to our profession of helping patients in reliving their life's healthy and safe, forget ourselves and for the past one-and-a-half-year this pandemic has increased not only our workload but also our responsibility to treat patients and also made the society realise and recognise the importance of doctors and healthcare system, how important they are to the community."

When the world is passing through the disastrous Covid-19 pandemic, these frontline warriors in the battle include, predominantly, the doctors, nurses, paramedics, administration and support staff who sacrifice their lives to save other lives need a big salute.

It is a salute of gratitude, a salute of solidarity and a salute of love.



Minister inspects progress on Khazaen Economic City

SAID AL SALMANI

AL RUSTAQ: Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, visited Khazaen Economic City (KEC) on Tuesday to check the readiness of the City's infrastructure and to review the most notable strategic projects coming up within the KEC such as the Khazaen Central Fruits and Vegetables Market and the Land Port.

The minister's visit was also aimed at reviewing the investment opportunities offered by KEC in the industrial, logistics and housing sectors to the local and international investors.

The minister of economy was accompanied during the visit by Issa bin Hamad al Azri, Governor of South Al Batinah, Engineer Salim bin Mohammed al Nuaimi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, and Shaikh Abdullah



bin Mohammed al Braiki, Wali of Barka.

The minister of economy and the officials made an inspection tour to get acquainted with the completed stages of the first phase of the infrastructure project at KEC, which was completed before the end of last year. They also inspected a number of facilities in the city.

Administrative officials of KEC gave a presentation about the KEC and its principal components and the incentives

and facilitations offered to local and international investors.

The executive management of Khazaen Economic City reviewed the city's plans and programmes and the importance of this ambitious national project and its contribution to supporting the government's economic diversification strategy.

Also reviewed during the visit were the most important achievements and the development that took place

at KEC, especially after the completion of the first phase of the infrastructure project. The visit shed light on the main government projects which are hoped to be executed during the next stage according to the plans approved by the government.

Salem bin Suleiman, CEO of Khazaen Economic City, gave a visual presentation on the components of the city, the most important projects it contains, as well as the expected investments for the city. He explained that the KEC has many advantages, the most important of which are the advanced infrastructure and ease of procedures, in addition to a set of incentives and facilitations designed to attract local and international investors, in addition to the city's strategic location, which ensures easy connectivity and quick access to the various land, sea and air ports of the Sultanate.



Air France to launch Muscat-Paris service

MUSCAT: Air France has announced its long-haul flight schedule for the 2021-2022 winter season, which includes services to Muscat, Zanzibar and Colombo from Paris.

Paris-Muscat will be launched on October 31 with a thrice weekly service, and Air France will also increase the frequency of its flights to Dubai (up to 14 services per week) from October 23.

With this, Air France intends to resume a flight from Paris to Muscat from October 31.

The route was last operated in 1994 using the Airbus A310. The flight will utilise a Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner three times a week on Sundays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

Services to Colombo will operate as a continuation of the carrier's route to Male in the Maldives, with three flights per week from November 1, 2021.

Meanwhile, the carrier's brand new route to Zanzibar will operate as a continuation of its flight to Nairobi, with a twice weekly service starting on October 18.

The airline said that it was "continuing to adapt its network and increase services to leisure destinations", but stressed that the flight schedule is subject to change and "will be implemented taking into account the health measures currently in force in the various countries served".

DATE HARVESTING SEASON



The Tabseel and harvest season of the Mabsali variant of date palm begins in the Sultanate from June-end and continues till July-end. The Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate boasts the best types of Tabseel which earned not only local but also international recognition and is exported to India and China.

Forum boosts skills of students and employees

AMAL AL RIYAMI

@amal92alriyami

Over 610 students participated in 12 different specialised training programmes during the first Virtual Summer Meeting of Ithraa at University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Nizwa.

The Industry and Community Linkage Committee (ICLC) of UTAS-Nizwa organised the virtual meeting for the public and private sector employees, school students, university students, job-seekers and parents.

Dr Ahmed bin Ali al Shahri, Dean of UTAS-Nizwa, said the administration has set up a special committee on behalf of the ICLC to work and strengthen the university's link with the government, industry, community and academic institutions. The



Dr Ahmed bin Ali al Shahri

committee promotes the skills of the University's society through academic, technical or administrative staff.

The forum is designed to groom abilities and talents of students, as well as employees of state and provincial institutions.

The programme is designed to boost the curiosity of participants by encouraging them to ask questions, inspiring them to develop their passion for the topic at hand and reflecting



Suleiman bin Ali al Harthi

on their future careers through several workshops and activities in Arabic and English.

The programme will help to enhance their knowledge and research and thinking skills to contribute to the overall growth of these participants and prepare them optimally to play positive roles for the advancement of society in all areas.

Suleiman bin Ali al Harthi, Chairman of the ICLC, said: "I expect that the participants

would improve multiple skills and thinking strategies in a more in-depth and visualised manner, in addition to dealing with deep and specialised aspects of knowledge and culture through the forum".

Al Harthi also explained that the forum was aimed at school students, job-seekers, graduates and students' guardians. "We focus specifically on the cognitive aspect by offering intensive scientific material in multiple areas. The most important of which are motivation and handling of failures."

The first workshop was entitled 'What Kinds of Expenses in Self-Employment and How to Manage a Project' by Engineer Saleh, CEO of a manufacturing company. The second workshop was entitled 'Enhancing the Status of the Arabic Language' by Dr Hafedh Ambusaidi.

Huge turnout for Zubair U-16 chess championship

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, JULY 6

The second edition of the Zubair International U-16 Classic Chess Championship witnessed a great turnout from participants across all nationalities. This was after the opening of registration that took place recently for this tournament, which will run from July 11 to 14. The number of participants has reached more than 50 participants so far. The registration is still open until July 10.

This tournament stems from the framework of The Zubair Corporation's adoption of the activities of the Oman Chess Committee. This is to encourage talented youths, develop them and enhance their chess abilities, through their interaction and participation in various local and external competitions. In addition, it motivates and supports them to do more

through participation in such competitions.

The tournament has been approved and implemented virtually via the lichess.org website, taking into account the prevailing health conditions. Players wishing to participate in the tournament must have an account on the lichess.org website, provided that all final stage players are monitored via 'Zoom'. Those wishing to participate must register via the link: <https://forms.gle/McGTAc5zcS7AqEL8>.

The tournament's system follows the regulations and laws of the International Chess Federation for remote Internet tournaments. Each players' pairing will be merged through the Swiss Manager Programme. Nine rounds will be played according to the Swiss system, giving each player five minutes with the addition of two seconds after each move in the qualifying



stage. The top 40 players will qualify for the finals.

Commenting on the launch of the second edition of this tournament next week, Hilal al Siyabi, Chief Corporate Services Officer at the Zubair Corporation, said, "We are extremely pleased with the high turnout of participants in the second

edition of the tournament, which is a positive indication of the wide popularity of chess among young members of the society. At The Zubair Corporation, we aim to support young talents in chess, especially the outputs of the Zubair Chess Centres. This way we can contribute to raising the spirit of competition and

enthusiasm and raising youth awareness of the importance of these activities in enhancing commitment and raising their IQ. This support is aligned within the framework of The Zubair Corporation's strategy to adopt several sports, cultural and community initiatives in order to serve the local community through its partnerships with many government and private entities."

Ahmed al Balushi, Chairman of the Oman Chess Committee, said, "The tournament is a continuation of the cooperative efforts with The Zubair Corporation, in order to discover young Omani talents in chess, who are capable of achieving advanced positions in local and external competitions. We would like to highlight that participation is open to all players of all nationalities and we look forward to benefiting Omani players from

this competition and achieving advanced results."

The first edition of this tournament witnessed the participation of nearly 60 male and female players from 6 countries (Sultanate of Oman, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Yemen, India and Pakistan), including 23 internationally ranked players. The first three are the Indian international player Arberry Armstrong with a rating of 1551, our national junior team player, Hamoud al Busaidi, with a rating of 1453 and the Qatar national team player Irfan Mohammed, with a rating of 1255.

The Zubair Chess Centres are spread in various governorates of the Sultanate. There are 10 centres located in the governorates of Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, North and South Al Batinah, Muscat, Musandam, South Al Sharqiyah, Dhofar, Al Buraimi and Al Wusta.

Ethiopia resumes filling Nile dam reservoir, angering Egypt

CAIRO: Ethiopia has started the second phase of filling a mega-dam's reservoir on the upper Blue Nile, Egypt and Sudan said, raising tensions on Tuesday ahead of an upcoming UN Security Council meeting on the issue.

Both Cairo and Khartoum said they had been notified by Addis Ababa that the second phase of filling had begun at the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

Egypt's irrigation ministry late on Monday expressed its "firm rejection of this unilateral measure" and Sudan's foreign ministry on Tuesday followed suit, labelling the move a "risk and imminent threat".

In Addis Ababa, the offices of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Irrigation Minister Seleshi Bekele did not immediately respond to AFP's requests for comment.

The huge dam, set to be Africa's largest hydroelectric project when completed, has sparked an almost decade-long diplomatic stand-off between Addis Ababa and downstream nations Egypt and Sudan.

Ethiopia says the project is essential to its development, but Cairo and Khartoum fear it could restrict their citizens' water access.

Both governments have been pushing Addis Ababa to ink a binding deal over the filling and operation of the dam, and have been urging the UN Security Council to take the matter up in recent weeks.

Thursday's UNSC meeting was requested by Tunisia on behalf of Egypt and Sudan, a diplomatic source said.

But France's ambassador to the UN said last week that the council itself can do little apart from



This photo taken on December 26, 2019, shows a general view of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) under construction, near Guba in Ethiopia. — AFP

bringing all the sides together.

"We can open the door, invite the three countries at the table, bring them to express their concerns, encourage them to get back to the negotiations and find a solution," he told reporters.

'EXISTENTIAL THREAT'

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said in a note to the UN that negotiations are at an impasse, and accused Ethiopia of adopting "a policy of intransigence that undermined our collective endeavours to reach an agreement".

Relations between Cairo and Addis Ababa have been icy over

Egypt's irrigation ministry expressed its "firm rejection of this unilateral measure" and Sudan's foreign ministry on Tuesday followed suit, labelling the move a "risk and imminent threat"

the past decade. Tensions have also risen between Ethiopia and Sudan as the Tigray conflict has sent refugees fleeing across the border into Sudan.

Shoukry and his Sudanese

counterpart Mariam al Mahdi met in New York ahead of the Security Council talks and reiterated their "firm rejection" of Ethiopia's move, Cairo said.

Addis Ababa had previously announced it would proceed to the second stage of filling in July, with or without a deal.

Ethiopia argues that adding water to the reservoir, especially during the heavy rainfalls of July and August, is a natural part of the construction process.

"Filling goes in tandem with the construction," said a senior official at the water ministry. "If the rainfall is as you see it now in July, it must have begun." — AFP

Lebanon's Diab urges donors to 'save' crisis-hit country

BEIRUT: Lebanon's caretaker premier Hassan Diab on Tuesday urged donors to "save" the country, despite the fact it has no formal government, as it struggles through a dire economic crisis.

Warning that Lebanon is "just days away from a social explosion," Diab urged the international community to "help save Lebanese from death and prevent Lebanon's demise".

He urged foreign donors to release financial aid even though the multi-confessional country has failed to form a new government in almost 11 months.

"Linking aid to Lebanon with government formation has started to threaten the lives of Lebanese," Diab told a Beirut meeting with foreign envoys.

Withholding funds, he argued, does "not affect the corrupt. Instead it is the Lebanese people who pay a heavy price," he said. "Save Lebanon before it's too late."

Lebanese are grappling with spiralling devaluation and painful shortages as the country plunges deeper into what the World Bank has called one of the world's worst economic crises since the 1850s.

The international community has pledged humanitarian aid but conditioned any financial assistance to the cash-strapped interim government on the formation of a new cabinet to launch reforms.

But despite international pressure, led by former colonial power France, the deeply divided political elite has been unable to agree on a cabinet line-up for almost 11 months.

Diab stepped down and has served as caretaker premier since



Linking aid to Lebanon with government formation has started to threaten the lives of Lebanese
HASSAN DIAB
Caretaker premier

the deadly Beirut port explosion of last August 4, when hundreds of tonnes of ammonium nitrate fertiliser exploded, killing more than 200 people and ravaging swathes of the capital.

The disaster overwhelmed Beirut hospitals in the middle of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

In the months since, the economic crisis that started in the autumn of 2019, sparking mass street protests, has only deepened.

The Lebanese pound has lost more than 90 per cent of its value to the dollar on the black market. Plunging foreign currency reserves have translated into long queues outside petrol stations and imported medicines running out.

"Lebanon is passing through a very dark tunnel, and the suffering has reached the point of tragedy," Diab said. — AFP

Israel PM suffers defeat over Arab family unification ban

TEL AVIV: Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett suffered defeat on Tuesday as lawmakers failed to extend a law that denies Israeli citizenship and residency rights to Palestinian spouses from the West Bank and Gaza.

The ban first enacted in 2003 during the second Palestinian intifada, or uprising, has been justified by supporters on security grounds but critics derided it as a discriminatory measure targeting Israel's Arab minority.

Bennett, a hardline religious-nationalist, supports the measure that has highlighted cracks in his

Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked tweeted that the ban's expiry could bring 15,000 Palestinian applications for Israeli citizenship

ideologically disparate eight-party coalition, which has a wafer-thin majority in Israel's 120-seat parliament, the Knesset.

In talks that ran through the night, the coalition sought a deal that would see nearly all of its members vote for the measure,



Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett speaks during a press conference on Tuesday. — AFP

including Jewish left-wingers and two Arab lawmakers from the conservative Islamic Raam party.

In exchange, the government would grant residency or citizenship rights to more than 1,500 Palestinians with pending requests who have been living in Israel for many years.

But that compromise failed when a member of Bennett's hawkish Yamina party, Amichai Chikli, voted with the opposition, tweeting on Tuesday that the fracas over the bill exposed "the problematics of a government" that relies on the nominally anti-

Zionist Raam party and the Jewish left. "Israel needs a functioning Zionist government, and not a mismatched patchwork," said Chikli, a vocal sceptic of the coalition crafted by his party leader Bennett last month.

His defection left parliament tied at 59 votes to 59, meaning the measure would lapse later on Tuesday.

Bennett had called for members of the right-wing opposition led by former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu to support the measure in a plea for unity on national security grounds. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TEL AVIV

Israel, S Korea agree Covid vaccine swap

Israel agreed on a Covid vaccine swap with South Korea on Tuesday, sending 700,000 doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech jab to Seoul "immediately" in return for the same number in coming months. A statement from Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's office said the deal, the first of its kind for Israel, would allow more effective use of the vaccine stocks of both countries.

The statement added that Bennett had spoken to Pfizer chief executive Albert Bourla



about the arrangement.

Israel received a huge supply of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine shortly after its approval last year following an arrangement with the producers to share data about its impact.

BEIRUT

Eight murders in a month in Syria camp: Kurds

A camp in northeast Syria housing IS group relatives saw at least eight murders last month, Kurdish forces said on Tuesday, the latest of dozens of such killings since January. Kurdish forces have struggled to maintain security inside the sprawling tent city of Al Hol, which is home to some 62,000 people, mostly women and children. The United Nations has warned of radicalisation inside the camp, which houses Syrians, Iraqis and some 10,000 foreign women and children linked to IS



in a separate annexe.

In June, IS cells inside Al Hol "carried out more killings of residents distancing themselves from the extremist ideas of the group", the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces said.

RABAT

Morocco to produce Sinopharm Covid vaccine

Morocco announced plans on Monday to produce locally the Chinese Covid-19 vaccine Sinopharm, the official MAP news agency reported, adding that five million doses could soon be produced per month.

The agency said Morocco and Sinopharm signed a memorandum of cooperation for that purpose, at a ceremony attended by King Mohammed VI. The project will involve an investment of around \$500 million, MAP reported, but it



did not say when production will begin.

Around 9.1 million of Morocco's 36 million population have received two doses of Covid vaccines since the inoculation drive started in January.

In brief

■ GENEVA



UN 'DISTURBED' BY DEATH IN JAIL OF INDIAN PRIEST

The United Nations said on Tuesday it was deeply disturbed by the death in pre-trial detention of Father Stan Swamy, an 84-year-old Indian rights activist and Jesuit priest. Swamy, who was detained for nine months without trial under Indian anti-terror laws, died on Monday ahead of a bail hearing.

The priest, who campaigned for marginalised tribal communities, was arrested last year for allegedly inciting violence between different Indian castes in 2018.

"We are deeply saddened and disturbed by the death of 84-year-old Father Stan Swamy", Liz Throssell, a spokeswoman for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, told reporters in Geneva.

■ NAYPYIDAW



SUU KYI VACCINATED AGAINST COVID-19 IN MILITARY CUSTODY

Ousted Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi and her personal staff have been fully vaccinated against Covid-19 since being taken into military custody, her lawyer said on Tuesday, as the country battles a spike in cases.

Suu Kyi has been all but invisible since being detained by the military in February, with a handful of court appearances in a special court in Naypyidaw her only link to the outside world.

Coronavirus infections are rising sharply in Myanmar, with authorities reporting almost 3,000 cases on Monday, up from around 100 per day in early June.

■ TOKYO



SURVIVOR WINDOW CLOSING IN JAPAN LANDSLIDE, 29 MISSING

The desperate search for survivors in a Japanese resort town devastated by a landslide was becoming less hopeful three days after the disaster that killed at least four people, local officials warned on Tuesday.

The fate or whereabouts of nearly 30 residents of Atami in central Japan is unknown, a regional spokesman said, after dozens of homes were swept away on Saturday by several violent waves of mud.

"The number of those who remain unaccounted for stands at 29, up from 24 announced earlier, after police newly added five others to the list", Shizuoka prefecture spokesman Takamichi Sugiyama told AFP.

Afghan forces vow to retake districts lost to Taliban

OVER 1,000 GOVERNMENT TROOPS FLEE INTO NEIGHBOURING TAJIKISTAN

KABUL: Afghan authorities on Tuesday vowed to retake all the districts lost to the Taliban as hundreds of commandos deployed to counter the insurgents' blistering offensive in the north after more than 1,000 government troops fled into neighbouring Tajikistan.

Fighting has raged across several provinces, but the insurgents have primarily focused on a devastating campaign across the northern countryside, seizing dozens of districts in the past two months.

Last week, all US and Nato forces left Bagram Air Base near Kabul — the command centre for anti-Taliban operations — effectively wrapping up their exit after 20 years of military involvement that began in the wake of the September 11 attacks.

"We are planning to launch a big offensive to retake the lost territories from the enemy", Fawad Aman, a spokesman for the Ministry of Defence said.

"Our forces are being organised on the ground for this operation."

Troops and pro-government militiamen were deployed in the northern provinces of Takhar and Badakhshan where the Taliban have captured swathes of territory at lighting speed, often without any fighting.

Afghan defence officials have said they intend to focus on securing major cities, roads and border towns in the face of the Taliban onslaught, launched as US and Nato troops pressed ahead with their final withdrawal in early May.

The militants' successes have spurred fears that Afghan forces are in crisis, particularly now vital US air support has been massively curtailed by the handover of Bagram Air Base.



An Afghan policeman stands guard inside the Bagram US air base after all US and Nato troops left, some 70 km north of Kabul. — AFP

AFGHAN FORCES FLEE

On Monday, more than 1,000 Afghan troops fled into Tajikistan, forcing the neighbouring country to bolster the frontier with its own soldiers.

Several hundred had already crossed into the country in recent weeks, in the face of a Taliban offensive.

Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon has ordered "the mobilisation of 20,000 reserve troops to further strengthen the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan", a statement from the presidency said late on Monday.

"We had to abandon our base because there was no coordination or interest among our commanders to counter the attack", said Mohammad Musa, a soldier who had fled to Tajikistan after his base in Kunduz province fell to the Taliban last week.

The fighting in the north has also forced Moscow to close its

We are planning to launch a big offensive to retake the lost territories from the enemy
FAWAD AMAN

Spokesman for the Ministry of Defence

consulate in the city of Mazar-i-Sharif, the capital of Balkh province and one of Afghanistan's largest urban centres near the border with Uzbekistan.

"The situation is changing rapidly. The Afghan forces, as they say, have abandoned too many districts. This logically creates nervousness", Moscow's envoy to Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov told the state-run TASS news agency on Monday.

The insurgents on Tuesday claimed to have captured a district in Nimroz province in the southwest.

The speed and ease of the Taliban's effective takeover of swathes of areas in Takhar, Badakhshan and Kunduz represent a massive psychological blow to the Afghan government.

The area once served as the stronghold for the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance during the gruesome civil war in the 1990s and was never routed by the militants.

A psychological war has also been taking shape online.

The Taliban has marshalled its forces on social media, with insurgent-affiliated accounts providing live updates of the fall of districts and posting numerous videos of Afghan soldiers surrendering and handing over huge weapons caches and equipment to the group. — AFP

Philippines retrieves crashed military plane's black boxes

MANILA: Philippine security forces have retrieved the cockpit voice and flight data recorders of a military aircraft that crashed in a coconut grove and killed 53 people, a top commander said on Tuesday.

The C-130 Hercules transport plane was carrying 96 people, mostly fresh army graduates, when it overshot the runway on Sunday while trying to land on Jolo island in the southern Sulu province.

Witnesses and survivors told investigators the plane landed "hard" and then bounced twice before taking off again, said Lieutenant General Corleto Vinluan, chief of the Western Mindanao Command.

"Then at the right side of the airport it hit a tree — that's the account of the injured", Vinluan said.

Most of the dead were soldiers being deployed to the island — a haven for militants — as part of a counter-insurgency effort.

The death toll among those on board rose to 50 after a soldier suffering "chemical burns" to his face and smoke inhalation died overnight, said armed forces chief General Cirilito Sobejana. — AFP



Soldiers stand near wreckage of a Philippine Air Force C-130 transport aircraft, which crashed and killed 50 people after it overshot the runway, in Jolo town, Sulu province. — AFP

Indonesia imports oxygen as hospitals battered by Covid-19

JAKARTA: Indonesia is sourcing emergency oxygen for virus patients from neighbouring Singapore, the government said on Tuesday, as the 24-hour toll soared to a record 728 deaths and hospitals crumble under the weight of its deadliest Covid-19 wave yet.

Jakarta warned that it was bracing for a spike driven by the highly infectious Delta variant that could send cases skyrocketing to more than 50,000 a day.

Hospitals in the hard-hit capital were topping 90 per cent occupancy while more than a dozen facilities in Indonesia's second-biggest city Surabaya are now full and not taking any more patients, authorities said.

A Surabaya hospital spokeswoman described jammed ICUs and exhausted doctors, some infected with Covid-19.

"The hospital no longer has rooms for patients who need ventilators. The ICU rooms are also full", said the woman who asked not to be identified.

"We're overwhelmed. Many of



Workers for an oxygen supplies company prepare cylinders for distribution in Semarang, Central Java on Tuesday amid a surging demand for oxygen. — AFP

our health workers have collapsed from exhaustion and some are also infected. We trying to get volunteers to help out because many of the staff are down."

Nearly 1,000 Indonesian medical workers have died of Covid-19, including more than a dozen who were already fully inoculated.

Desperate families are hunting for oxygen tanks to treat the sick and dying at home, as authorities

scramble to enforce new virus curbs to bring down record daily cases, which soared on Tuesday to 31,189 new infections and 728 deaths — as much as seven times the daily mortality rate less than a month ago.

On Tuesday, Jakarta said about 10,000 concentrators — devices that generate oxygen — were to be shipped from nearby Singapore with some arriving by a Hercules cargo plane earlier. — AFP



A health worker administers a dose of the Covishield vaccine during a vaccination drive at Tagore Hall in Ahmedabad on Tuesday. — AFP

Top Belarus opposition leader jailed for 14 years

MOSCOW: One of Belarus's leading opposition figures was sentenced to 14 years in prison on Tuesday, the latest move in a months-long crackdown on critics of strongman leader Alexander Lukashenko.

Former banker Viktor Babaryko — considered one of Lukashenko's strongest opponents — was handed the sentence by the Supreme Court in Minsk.

His Twitter account, which is run by supporters, said he would serve the 14 years "in a maximum-security colony."

The 57-year-old was arrested in June last year on fraud charges ahead of a disputed presidential election that sparked demonstrations that gripped the ex-Soviet country for months.

Babaryko was accused of receiving bribes and of money laundering when he was head of Belgazprombank, the Belarusian branch of a bank belonging to Russian energy giant Gazprom.

He was also ordered to pay 46 million Belarusian rubles (\$18 million, 15 million euros) in damages, according to local independent rights group Viasna.

Exiled opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya called the verdict "insane" and said it was aimed at silencing Babaryko.

"14 years for faith in an idea," Tikhanovskaya, who fled abroad after claiming to win the vote against Lukashenko, wrote on the



Opposition politician and banker Viktor Babaryko, charged with corruption and money laundering, stands inside a defendants' cage during his sentencing in Minsk on Tuesday. — AFP

Telegram messaging app.

"The regime is doing everything to kill ideas in us that are even remotely similar to hope."

The US embassy in Minsk called the sentence a "sham" and said it showed that "the Lukashenko regime will stop at nothing to keep power."

Western diplomats were present at the hearing, according to Viasna, which said two people were detained outside the court after "dozens" of Babaryko supporters arrived at the building but were not permitted inside the courtroom.

Prosecutors had requested a 15-year sentence, the maximum possible punishment. Babaryko denied any wrongdoing throughout his trial.

The sentence is not subject to appeal.

Babaryko was also fined the equivalent of about 45,000 euros (\$53,000) and barred from holding senior official positions.

Seven other defendants in the case, including several Belgazprombank executives, were prosecuted on the charges.

They all pleaded guilty and on Tuesday were sentenced to terms

of between three and six years.

Several key opposition figures were arrested in Belarus last year ahead of the presidential vote, clearing the way for Lukashenko, 66, to secure a sixth term.

Lukashenko's only rival was Tikhanovskaya, a political novice who took the place of her jailed husband in the vote and quickly gained popularity.

Her husband Sergei Tikhanovsky was arrested after announcing his presidential bid and spent over a year in detention awaiting his trial, which started in late June. — AFP

Wreckage of passenger plane found in Russia

MOSCOW: Search teams on Tuesday found the wreckage of a passenger plane carrying 28 people that had disappeared in Russia's remote far eastern Kamchatka peninsula.

The search for survivors would be paused due to the onset of darkness, emergency ministry sources said. Initial reports by Russian news agencies suggested no survivors would be found.

The governor of Kamchatka, a vast peninsula popular with adventure tourists for its abundant wildlife and live volcanoes, said search teams had found parts of the fuselage along the coast and in the Okhotsk Sea.

"There was a catastrophe during the go-around approach for landing," Vladimir Solodov said in a video released on the government website.

In comments to the Interfax news agency, he said there were still no signs of the aircraft's passengers or their luggage.

Russia's aviation agency said in a statement that the plane's debris had been found at 9:06 pm local time (0906 GMT).

Earlier Tuesday, Valentina Glazova, a spokeswoman for the local transport prosecutor's office, said that the An-26 plane was flying from Kamchatka's main city of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky to the coastal town of Palana when it disappeared at 2:40 pm (0240 GMT).

Officials said that communication with the plane had been lost nine kilometres (5.5 miles) from Palana's airport and 10 minutes before its scheduled landing time. — AFP

UK elephants head to the wild in Kenya in dumbo jet

LONDON: Touting a world-first for "rewilding", an animal charity said on Tuesday it was set to fly a herd of elephants from a British zoo to a new home in Kenya.

The Aspinall Foundation said it would use specially built crates aboard a Boeing 747, dubbed the Dumbo jet, to take the 13 pachyderms from their current home near Canterbury in Kent, southeast England.

The charity said it would work with anti-poaching teams to help ensure the long-term survival of the herd — which includes three babies — once it reaches one of two sites under consideration in southern Kenya. The charity's head of communications is Carrie Johnson, wife of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who said the plan would also support Kenya's economy after the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

Excitement as Cannes Festival reopens after pandemic hiatus

CANNES: The famed Cannes Film Festival opens Tuesday, and despite social distancing subduing some of its signature glamour, excitement is rife for the first fully-fledged film festival since the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

Last year's edition was cancelled over the health crisis, and although stars will be allowed to go maskless on the red carpet this year, a health pass is required for entrance and many of the glitzy after-parties that are the festival's calling card have been postponed because of distance measures.)

"Covid is still there, but being here for the return of the festival, in the opening film... it's a huge sense of relief and excitement," US actor Adam Driver said.

Driver co-stars with French

actor Marion Cotillard in the opening night film, "Annette", a musical directed by cult favourite Leos Carax.

Members of the jury — headed for the first time by a black man, US director Spike Lee — arrived Monday night and will give their traditional press conference on Tuesday afternoon, before embarking on their 24-film marathon.

The festival palace — a squat, concrete construction dubbed "the bunker" — is draped in a poster featuring Lee, in oversize spectacles, peering between two palm trees.

His jury this year has a female majority, including US actor Maggie Gyllenhaal, Canadian-French singer Mylene Farmer



Staff roll the red carpet as the 74th edition of the Cannes Film Festival kicks off in Cannes on Tuesday. — AFP

and French-Senegalese actor Mati Diop.

Other members include Tahar Rahim, the star of the 2009 film "A Prophet", and South Korean actor Song Kang-ho, who dazzled in the festival's last winner two years ago, "Parasite".

As evening falls, stars will strut down the recycled red carpet, which has been chopped in size as part of a green makeover.

American actor and director Jodie Foster is guest of honour at the opening ceremony, and will be awarded an honorary Palme d'Or before the screening of "Annette" gets underway.

The film is Carax's first since "Holy Motors" nine years ago, which also competed at Cannes.

It tells the story of a celebrity

couple and their mysterious child, the titular Annette.

Cotillard told AFP that after months of pandemic-induced confinement, the tragic love story "invites the spectators to come and be transported, to be present at a great spectacle".

Her co-star Driver famously hates watching himself on screen, and said this film will be no exception.

When the lights go out, he said he will flee to an office until it is finished.

"I sit there playing with a stapler or some scotch tape and come back when the lights are back on," he smiled.

"And I act as if I'd been there the whole time!"

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

JOHANNESBURG

Zuma back in court to avoid jail

South Africa's ex-president Jacob Zuma, who has been handed a 15-month jail term for contempt, made another legal attempt on Tuesday to dodge incarceration going to court to seek the suspension of an arrest order.

His latest bid in the Pietermaritzburg High Court came as police said they will not make any move to arrest him until he has fully exhausted his legal battle against the sentence.

Zuma has mounted a two-pronged last-ditch attempt to



avoid jail after the Constitutional Court, the country's top judicial authority, slapped him with the sentence last week. He was told to turn himself in by midnight on Sunday, failing which police would be instructed to arrest him within the following three days.

AMSTERDAM

Wilders guilty of insulting Moroccans

The Netherlands' supreme court on Tuesday found Dutch far-right populist Geert Wilders guilty of insulting Moroccans during a 2014 campaign rally.

The High Council, the country's highest court, confirmed an earlier ruling.

Like the previous court, the High Council also found Wilders was not guilty of discrimination and inciting hatred.

The court did not impose a penalty. The finding cannot be appealed.



The case concerns a speech the anti-Islam politician made in 2014, when he asked a crowd if they wanted more or fewer Moroccans in the Netherlands. He then led the chant for "fewer, fewer" Moroccans. In response, Wilders said,

VIENNA

Ex vice-chancellor pleads not guilty

Austria's former vice-chancellor and longtime leader of the far-right Freedom Party pleaded not guilty in his trial for alleged corruption on Tuesday, in a case stemming from a scandal that brought down the government.

Heinz-Christian Strache, one of Europe's most high-profile far-right leaders, was forced to resign as vice-chancellor in 2019 after a video was published showing him offering public contracts in return for electoral campaign support from a woman posing as



a Russian investor. The scandal, dubbed "Ibiza-gate" because the video was secretly filmed on the Spanish party island, spawned a sweeping corruption investigation that uncovered several different accusations of wrongdoing.

What next for Afghanistan as foreign troops leave

JAY DESHMAKH

With the United States military presence in Afghanistan effectively over, the country faces an uncertain future with Taliban attacks rampant and the threat of civil war looming. Fears are growing that the loss of vital American air cover — massively curtailed by the closure of Bagram air base — will knock the Afghan government's ability to hold power, as multiple players circle to take advantage of the power vacuum.

While Washington's withdrawal ends America's longest war, the conflict in Afghanistan continues, with no obvious signs of a ceasefire.

The insurgents appear focused instead on a total military victory and the overthrow of President Ashraf Ghani.

They have recently made huge advances across the country, claiming control of dozens of new districts, but Afghan security forces remain in firm control of major cities.

"For now, the fighting will intensify and Afghan forces will have a hard time sustaining militarily on their own", Afghan Security Analyst Bari Arez said.

A leaked internal US intelligence assessment reportedly said the Taliban could take Kabul within six months of the US departure.

Government forces and the Taliban regularly claim to have inflicted enormous casualties on each other, but independent verification is impossible.

However, the number of targeted assassinations of educated Afghans, and sticky bomb attacks against civilians, has dropped in recent weeks.

That remains to be seen, with an all-out civil war looming. US air power had been a key factor in the ongoing fight, offering vital support to Afghan security forces when they risked being overwhelmed.

In a sign of possible growing desperation, the Afghan government has made calls for civilians to form militias to fight the Taliban — a move some analysts say could only add fuel to the fire.

"This strategy has to be well-led, well-orchestrated and well-controlled or else it might backfire", said a foreign security analyst who did not want to be named. — AFP

For now, the fighting will intensify and Afghan forces will have a hard time sustaining militarily on their own

BARI AREZ

Afghan Security Analyst



STAR FESTIVAL IN JAPAN

Around 2,000 candles are lit in front of Zojoji temple to mark the Tanabata or Japanese star festival in Tokyo on Tuesday. — AFP

Diversions necessary to survive Covid trauma...



Samuel Kutty @samkuttyvp

Doing things that provide a sense of accomplishment or help you meet your goals can all feel rewarding. I am grateful to everyone about what I choose to do with this gift of a reboot

After living in the fear of Covid-19 infection for so long, the virus has transformed our lives significantly with most of us adopting new routines and making changes in our priorities in daily life. This has happened mainly with those who are suffering from the devastating effects of the pandemic, especially in post-Covid panic.

There is no surprise that we are in the midst of many problems including anxiety, depression, stress, fatigue, frustration, anger, grief and other psychological issues created by this deadly invisible virus. Some people may find themselves in survival mode, gathering information and resources necessary in their journey to the normal.

For many others, learning to re-live with family members, colleagues and friends is not that easy. The most common emotion faced by all is fear. It makes us anxious, panicky and can even possibly make us think, talk or do things that we might not consider appropriate

under normal circumstances.

As I mentioned in this space in the recent weeks, I survived the 'pandemic' trauma that I have undergone during my admission in the hospital. I realise that transitioning to a new way of life is not a simple process and it can take time to adjust to the idea of seeing people and going to public places again.

Being around people again, managing relationships or looking into each other's eyes or engaging in a conversation will never be the same as it used to be.

What I have learned, in fact, trying to overcome the emotional impact is engaging myself in activities that keep me busy.

As I adjust to yet another big change, I know it's more important than taking note of how I am feeling.

Even as full recovery takes a long time, we should not exert ourselves too much. For most people, some balance of fun, productive, social, active and relaxing activities in life is key to feeling like your

different needs are being met. While the return to the normal life becomes more of a reality, don't idealise post-pandemic life.

As we are aware art and literature are frequent keystones for overcoming trauma. So, I turned to books that give me comfort and solace in addition to writing reports to keep my profession alive. I know it will take some trial and error to find the balance of activities that provides that sense of reward. Yet I am happy that slowly, I am coming back on the track.

Doing things that are pleasurable, that provide a sense of accomplishment or help you meet your goals can all feel rewarding. I am grateful to everyone about what I choose to do with this gift of a reboot.

My wish for you is that all of you who are struggling with the monster virus find some peace in the chaos, and learn something about yourself and the world around you.

Our actions determine the potency of coronavirus



Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla dryusufalmulla@gmail.com

The coronavirus is mutating faster, spreading quicker and claiming many lives across the world. Researchers are still grappling with the virus and the healthcare networks are struggling with galloping infections and deaths.

Specialists keep trying to classify specific mutants as more dangerous or more lethal, but viral evolution is a random mess: a complex story that we have to watch in real time and most importantly we can't be complacent and say oh God this is the end of mutations!

Moreover, as I mentioned in previous articles, as long as the virus has a host for infection

which is us, it will continue to change shape in ways we cannot fully predict. We should consider our role as humans in this relationship. Perhaps what the virus can achieve also depends a lot on us, which means that its evolution is linked to our actions.

Perhaps most importantly, our relationship with the virus will not depend only on its genetic properties but also on the immunity defences, which will shape its evolution. Let us hope universal vaccination across age groups will slow down the spread of the virus.

Multiple vaccines will also stop the virus mutations. The reality is

APART FROM VACCINES, WE MUST FOCUS ON OTHER MEASURES THAT CAN CONTROL COVID-19 SUCH AS BETTER VENTILATION, RAPID, LARGE-SCALE TESTING AND BETTER FACE MASKS

that eventually, as our collective defences increase, the coronavirus may no longer be a nuisance than the common cold, causing only transient and insignificant symptoms in most people, who will acquire antibodies.

However, we must also be realistic. The number of infections and deaths due to the coronavirus in 2021 is more than in 2020. If newer strains appear we may need to administer booster shots for people who are fully vaccinated.

It is necessary for us to prepare for the future and procure additional quantities of the vaccines to cover booster dose inoculation.

Apart from vaccines, we must focus on other measures that can control Covid-19 such as better ventilation, rapid, large-scale testing and better face masks. We have seen the great and wonderful role of Oman's Ministry of Health when it launched a mobile app and smart device to track Covid-19 cases.

We must also be prepared to face new and improved variants that get harder and harder to contain.

Our actions will determine whether the new mutants will be ferocious or mild.

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

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England's goalkeeper Jordan Pickford kicks a ball during England's MD-1 training session. – AFP

ENGLAND FANS DARE TO DREAM AS DENMARK SEMI LOOMS

LONDON: England is gripped by Euro 2020 fervour as Gareth Southgate's men prepare to take on Denmark for a place in the final of a major tournament for the time in 55 years.

England will walk out to a wall of noise at Wembley on Wednesday with the bulk of a crowd of 60,000 willing them on, backed by millions of passionate supporters at home.

Southgate's side started the tournament slowly but have rapidly picked up momentum, beating old foes Germany in the last 16 and hammering Ukraine 4-0 in the quarter-final in Rome.

Nearly 21 million people tuned into the Ukraine game, making it the most-watched live TV event of the year, but that record is likely to be obliterated against Denmark.

Southgate's men are back at home on Wednesday, and would play at Wembley again if they reach the final against either Spain or Italy, as the pan-European event turns into a "home" tournament for the Three Lions.

Belief is growing in a nation weary of the coronavirus pandemic and hungry for success that Southgate's young team can deliver glory for the first time since the 1966 World Cup.

Cars and homes are decked out with St George's Cross flags and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has reportedly given the green light for pubs to remain open later on Sunday to prepare for a potential England final.

Johnson, who unveiled a huge England flag on Downing Street before the Ukraine game, tweeted: "We're all behind you for the semi-finals, bring it home."



England's forwards Harry Kane (R) and Raheem Sterling take part in England's MD-1 training session at St George's Park in Burton-on-Trent, central England. – AFP



England's defender Tyrone Mings laughs during England's MD-1 training session. – AFP

Southgate's men are back at home on Wednesday and would play at Wembley again if they reach the final against either Spain or Italy, as the pan-European event turns into a "home" tournament for the Three Lions

'POSITIVE VIBES'

Defender Harry Maguire said the players were aware of the mounting excitement around the country as they seek to reach a first European Championship final in England's history.

"We see all the positive vibes and the videos going around. It's a great atmosphere to be involved in and winning football matches enables that," he said.

"We're on this journey together. Us, players, staff, fans, we're all in this together. We all want the same thing, we all want to win football matches and go as far as we can."

Maguire admitted that home advantage would benefit England in the last four, with bigger crowds allowed back into Wembley as coronavirus limits are eased despite a surge in infections.

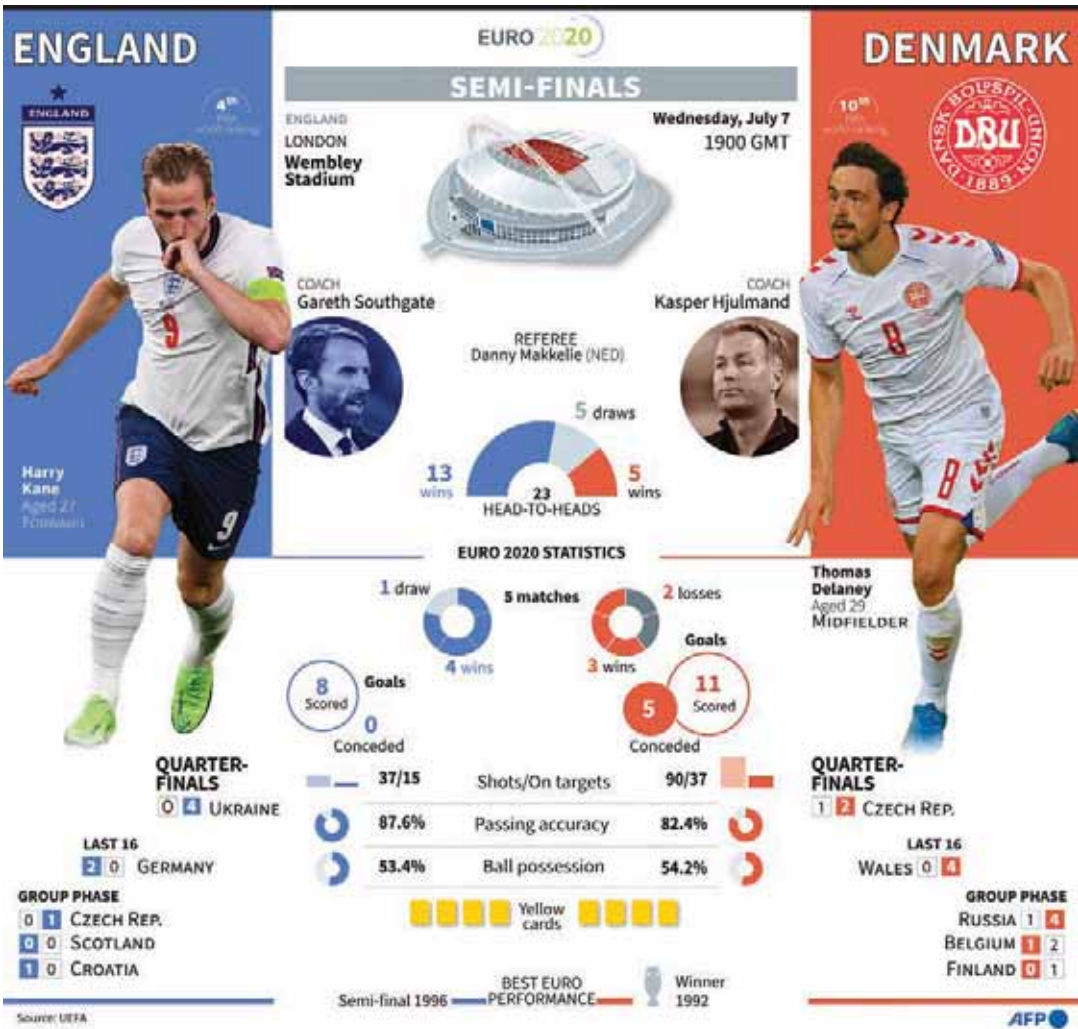
The Manchester United player said the atmosphere in the Germany game was one of the best he had experienced, with Neil Diamond's "Sweet Caroline" belted out by 40,000 delirious fans.

"We've got even more fans in the stadium for the semi-final," he said. "It's going to be electric, it's going to be a great atmosphere."

– AFP



Denmark's defender Mathias Jorgensen leaves the team hotel in Helsingor. – AFP





In brief

■ PARIS



CAS UPHOLDS DOPING BAN ON LYSENKO

The Court of Arbitration for Sport on Monday upheld a ban on high jumper Danil Lysenko, whose missed doping tests briefly halted the international reinstatement of Russian athletes in 2019. CAS had upheld charges laid by the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) against the 2017 world championship silver medalist “for multiple breaches of the Anti-Doping rules including whereabouts failures and tampering with the results management process,” said an AIU statement.

In July 2020, World Athletics suspended the process of allowing Russian athletes to return to competition after the country’s athletics federation (RusAF) had failed to pay a \$5-million fine and \$1.31 million in costs for helping cover up Lysenko’s missed tests.

■ LONDON



ENGLAND CHANGE FULL SQUAD AFTER COVID OUTBREAK

England named an entirely new squad featuring nine uncapped players on Tuesday for their one-day international series against Pakistan, after a coronavirus outbreak in the English camp.

The England and Wales Cricket Board said three players and four support staff, all unnamed, had tested positive for Covid-19, with the rest of the group who completed an ODI series win over Sri Lanka on Sunday forced to self-isolate.

But the three-match series against Pakistan, starting in Cardiff on Thursday, will go ahead, with Ben Stokes taking over the England captaincy from Eoin Morgan.

■ NEW DELHI



INDIA DISMISS B TEAM CLAIMS FOR LANKA TOUR

India batsman Suryakumar Yadav on Wednesday shrugged off complaints that only a weakened side had been sent to Sri Lanka for a limited overs tour.

Former Sri Lanka captain Arjuna Ranatunga slammed the island’s sports leaders for agreeing to the tour by a ‘B Team’ Indian side without top stars Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Mohammed Shami, Jasprit Bumrah and Rishabh Pant.

The team led by opening batsman Shikhar Dhawan will play three one-day internationals and three Twenty20 matches starting on July 13.

Paqueta sends Brazil past Peru

NEYMAR SHINES AS HOSTS MOVE INTO COPA FINAL

RIO DE JANEIRO: Star forward Neymar set up Lucas Paqueta to score the only goal as hosts Brazil beat Peru 1-0 on Monday to qualify for the Copa America final.

The semifinal was a repeat of the last final, two years ago, when a Brazil team shorn of the injured Neymar also triumphed on home soil.

The Seleccion will play either Lionel Messi’s Argentina or Colombia, who meet in Brasilia on Wednesday, in Saturday’s final at Rio de Janeiro’s iconic Maracana stadium.

“I want Argentina. I’m supporting Argentina because I have friends there and Brazil will win the final,” said Neymar.

“Paqueta is a great player, he’s getting better in every game and in every game with the national team,” he said about the 23-year-old match winner, who plays his club football for Lyon in France.

“He’s just had a great season with his club and is showing that he can be a very important player for the Brazilian national team.”

GALLESE THWARTS BRAZIL

Brazil totally dominated the first half at the empty Nilton Santos stadium in Rio but had to survive some nervous moments after the break before securing a spot in the final.

They opened up Peru on eight minutes as Paqueta’s pass sent Richarlison in behind the defence, but after beating goalkeeper Pedro Gallese to the ball, the forward tried to pull it back to Neymar who blazed high and wide under pressure.

Gallese spilled a fierce Casemiro free-kick from distance but gathered the loose ball before winger Everton could turn in the rebound.

Brazil were turning the screw and Everton cut in off the right flank but shot straight at Gallese.

The Peruvian shot-stopper was the busiest player on the pitch in the first quarter and after saving another Casemiro piledriver from



Brazil’s Lucas Paqueta (L) and Peru’s Yoshimar Yotun vie for the ball. — AFP

distance he made an incredible double point blank save from Neymar and then Richarlison.

And when Gallese suffered a rush of blood to the head and charged out of his area only to be beaten to the ball by Richarlison, Brazil couldn’t capitalise as Peru’s

defenders threw themselves in front of Everton’s shot.

Peru were non-existent as an attacking force and when they did manage to win a corner just after the half hour, they ended up playing the ball all the way back to Gallese.

Brazil deservedly took the lead 10 minutes before halftime after Peru gave the ball away in midfield for the umpteenth time.

Neymar’s twinkling toes got him free of three defenders in the box and he teed up Paqueta to fire home from 12 yards.



I want Argentina. I’m supporting Argentina because I have friends there and Brazil will win the final

NEYMAR

Brazil forward

SELF-PRESERVATION

Peru finally had their first attempt at goal on the counter attack four minutes after halftime, but goalkeeper Ederson comfortably parried Gianluca Lapadula’s powerful drive.

Soon after, Raziell Garcia shot wide twice in quick succession as Peru showed far greater ambition than during the first period.

Peru were now on top with Garcia at the heart of their attack and his shot on the hour mark was parried by Ederson.

Brazil started to wrestle back control and Everton shot straight at Gallese before Neymar blazed well over the bar.

Peru should have been level nine minutes from time when Yoshimar Yotun fired a free-kick into the box and Alexander Callens beat Ederson to the ball but headed wide from just six yards out.

It would prove their last chance and coach Ricardo Gareca rued their slow start.

“We paid for being slow to settle into the game,” he said.

“The team reacted well in the second half and it was even.”

But he admitted the 4-0 group stage thumping Brazil handed Peru earlier in the tournament, and a 4-2 home defeat in World Cup qualifying in October, had affected their approach.

“We have to admit that we wanted to protect ourselves a bit given we’ve conceded a lot of goals against Brazil.” — AFP

Oman Olympic delegation gets vaccinated

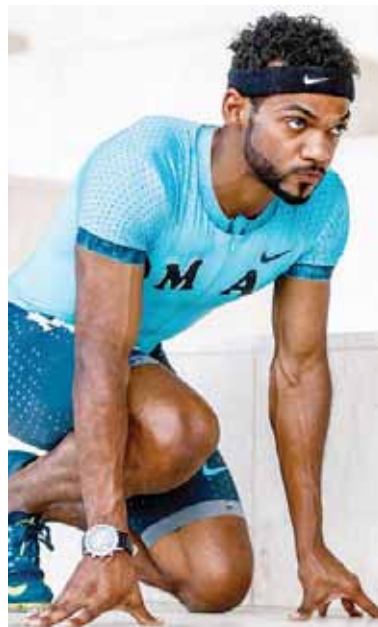
ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT, JULY 6

The Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) in coordination with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and the government health entities are carrying out the vaccination of Oman’s delegation members including the athletes, and officials for the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games.

The OOC said it is keen to ensure the well-being and health of all the Omani participants in the top Olympic event. Moreover, OOC officials followed all the preventive precautions suggested by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the organising committee of 2020 Tokyo Games including completion of the vaccination of all the athletes’ prior arrival to Japan.

Many members of the Sultanate’s delegation received their first dose in first week of June while the second doses were administered three to four weeks



Barakat al Harthy

later. The rest of Olympic team members got the first dose of immunisation against Covid-19 in beginning of July and will have the second dose ahead of travel to Tokyo by few days. Minimising the health risks of infectious diseases in the Olympics was another aim to get all the team vaccinated.



The vaccination drive of athletes is in line to the top efforts taken by the government to control and slow the spread of the Covid-19 virus. Also, it is in accordance to the National Vaccination Campaign against Covid-19, which is being run by the Ministry of Health and government medical related

entities.

Four athletes will represent the Sultanate in 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. Issa bin Samir al Adawi will take part in the 100 metres freestyle swimming. Barakat bin Mubarak al Harthy will compete in 100 metres sprint, shooter Hamad bin Saeed al Khateri will feature in the 50m rifle

competitions in three positions and Amer bin Salem al Khanjari will try his luck in the 81 kg weightlifting category.

The delegation will be headed by OOC Chairman Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad al Busaidy and will feature Taha al Kishry, OOC Secretary-General and Oman’s chef-de-mission Kazim al Balushi.



This was my first appearance on Court One this year and I had to work really hard to get to this court. I feel like I am improving with every match

KAROLINA
PLISKOVA

Czech Republic player



Pliskova storms into first Wimbledon semifinal

LONDON: Karolina Pliskova reached her first Wimbledon semi-final on Tuesday with a 6-2, 6-2 win over Switzerland's Viktorija Golubic.

Former world number one Pliskova, now ranked 13, will face either Belarus second seed Aryna Sabalenka or Ons Jabeur of Tunisia for a place in Saturday's final.

Pliskova has yet to win a Grand Slam title with her best performance at the majors a runners-up spot at the 2016 US Open.

"I'm super-happy to be through to my first semi-final at Wimbledon," said the 29-year-old Czech who will be playing in her fourth Slam semi-final.

Her last appearance in a major semi-final was at the 2019 Australian Open.

"This was my first appearance on Court One this year and I had to work really hard to get to this court.

"I feel like I am improving with every match."

Pliskova has yet to drop a set at Wimbledon this year and has been broken just three times in five rounds.

Her eight aces on Tuesday, meanwhile, took her tournament tally to 40.

"I have had good preparation and hopefully this will continue."

MEDVEDEV KNOCKED OUT BY HURKACZ

Hubert Hurkacz became just the fourth Polish man to reach the



Hurkacz

Wimbledon quarter-finals on Tuesday with a five-set win over Russian second seed Daniil Medvedev.

World number 18 Hurkacz triumphed 2-6, 7-6 (7/2), 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 in a match held over from Monday due to rain and will now face Roger Federer for a place in the semi-finals.

The 24-year-old follows in the footsteps of fellow Poles who made the last-eight — Wojtek Fibak (1980) and Jerzy Janowicz and Lukasz Kubot (2013). — AFP

Al Faisal, Soucek aim to defend GT Open lead in Hungary



On a personal level, the Hungaroring is a track that I am strong at. Hopefully we come out with a good points' haul at the end.

AL FAISAL AL
ZUBAIR,

Omani race driver

podium with the Stuttgart brand in Barcelona at the end of the 2016 season.

"Very excited for the Hungaroring now that we have the championship lead by one point," said Al Zubair. "I think going by the championship and our philosophy, this will not change anything from our side to be honest.

"I think the team is prepared now. We are working better together. On a personal level, the Hungaroring is a track that I am strong at. It's a track that Andy likes as well and one where the Porsche will be strong. Hopefully we come out with a good points' haul at the end."



Al Zubair and Soucek have joined forces with Lechner Racing after achieving their own successes in circuit racing. Two of the highlights of the young Omani's career so far were his two Porsche GT3 Cup Challenge Middle East titles, while Soucek was the 2009 FIA Formula Two champion and has achieved more recent success in the Blancpain GT and GTWC America series.

Two free GT Open practice sessions are scheduled for Friday (July 9) and then teams will take part in a 30-minute qualifying session from 10.15hrs (CET) on Saturday.

The 70-minute opening race takes centre stage from 15.10hrs.

Qualifying for race two is scheduled from 09.00hrs on Sunday and precedes the one-hour second race, starting at 13.00hrs.

2021 INTERNATIONAL GT OPEN — OVERALL STANDINGS AFTER ROUND 2:

1. Andy Soucek (ESP)/Al Faisal al Zubair (OMN) 43 pts
2. Frederick Schandorff (SUI)/Michele Beretta (ITA) 42 pts
3. Baptiste Moulin (BEL)/Yuki Nemoto (JPN) 36 pts
4. Ollie Millroy (GBR)/Brendan Iribe (USA) 29 pts
5. Jordan Pepper (ZAF)/Ivan Peklin (UKR) 21 pts

HUNGARORING, Hungary: Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair and Spanish team-mate Andy Soucek head to the Hungaroring this weekend determined to defend a one-point lead in the 2021 International GT Open Championship after two rounds.

After securing a win and a third place at the most recent round in Belgium, the Lechner Racing Team Porsche 911 GT3

R crew have amassed 43 points and take a single-point advantage over the Vincenzo Sospiri Racing Lamborghini crew of Frederick Schandorff/Michele Beretta into the weekend's action in Hungary.

The Spa success in Belgium marked the first outright win for a Porsche in the GT Open series in almost five years. Kevin Estre and Peter Terting were the last crew to grace the top step of the

business

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Brent Crude	\$77.78
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Revised electricity tariffs begin to pare subsidy: APSR

DOWNWARD TREND: SUBSIDY PROJECTED TO EASE IN 2021 FROM PEAK OF RO 582.9 MILLION IN 2020

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

The Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), whose broad remit includes the electricity sector, has projected a tangible easing of government subsidy during 2021 following the phased introduction of revised tariffs for key segments of the sector's diverse customer base starting from January 1, 2021.

Total subsidy for the electricity sector this year is projected at RO 511 million, down from a peak of RO 582.9 million disbursed to the sector in 2020.

The roughly 13 per cent decline in subsidy projections for 2021 has been attributed to a significant uptick in revenue earned from customers subject to the revised tariffs, coupled with the application of new cost reflective tariffs (CRT) guidelines for major customers effective from this year.

Under measures adopted last year to help reduce the annual budgetary deficit and public debt

in the face of a steep decline in state revenues from low oil prices, the Omani government announced a phased lifting of subsidy for residential and other consumers over the 2021-2025 timeframe.

At the same time, it issued directions for part of the revenue increase to be channelled to economically vulnerable citizens to help mitigate the impact of the tariff hike.

It is expected that, by the end of the five-year timeframe for the complete rollback of subsidy — which at its peak averaged RO 600 million annually — tariffs levied will be at par with the economic cost of producing and supplying electricity to consumers.

The Main Interconnected System (MIS) — the country's largest grid serving much of the northern half of the Sultanate — received the lion's share of the subsidy of RO 443.8 million in 2020.

This is projected to slump to RO 384.1 million in 2021, the Authority said in its newly published 2020



Annual Report.

Likewise, Dhofar Power System, covering parts of Dhofar Governorate, earned RO 47.4 million in subsidy last year, while the Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer), serving vast swathes of the country unserved by the two main grids, received RO 91.6 million in subsidy last year.

Subsidy estimated to be paid to the latter two systems in 2021 is projected to decline to RO 40.4 million and RO 86.6 million respectively for 2021.

Significantly, the Authority anticipates a sizable increase in customer revenue within the Main Interconnected System during 2021, stemming from the revised tariffs.

"The Authority's estimate of 2021 MIS subsidy requirement is 13.5 per cent lower than the 2020 outturn subsidy, reflecting the increase of 52.5 per cent in customer revenue of RO 757.9 million due to the new electricity tariffs approve for the year 2021.

Units supplied in 2021 are

expected to witness a growth from 2020 by 18 per cent", it noted in its 2020 Annual Report.

Improvements in revenue recovered from customers are also expected in the Dhofar Power and Tanweer systems during 2021, helping contribute to modest subsidy reductions.

Dr Mansoor bin Talib al Hinaï, Chairman of the Authority for Public Services Regulation, noted in the Foreword that electricity supply declined 2.3 per cent to 33.0 terawatt-hours (TWh) last year, which experts have attributed to the subdued economic conditions prevailing in the Sultanate amid a raging pandemic.

"The Authority's measure of electricity intensity (MWh per account) reached 25.1 in 2020, lower than 2019 by 5.1 per cent and 40.3 per cent higher than in 2005 (when the sector was restructured). Increasing intensity is an important driver of electricity demand and has implications for costs and subsidies", he said.

Embezzled funds:
OAB receives
assurance of claim
settlement



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 6

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has announced that it has received assurance of full compensation from its insurers of funds embezzled from the bank last year. Rashad al Musafir, CEO, stated in a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA) that a claim for the estimated RO 6 million stolen from the bank would be settled by the insurers.

"With reference to the bank's disclosure on the Muscat Stock Exchange on December 22, 2020, on the criminal complaint related to the existence of a suspicion of forgery and embezzlement of approximately RO 6 million, the bank is pleased to disclose that it has received communication from the loss adjuster that the reinsurers have confirmed that the policy liability in principle for the amount claimed, as mentioned above", he stated. He added that the bank is continuing to follow up the case with the Public Prosecution.

Omran Group unveils new luxury resort in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar

NEW LANDMARK: Soft opening of dusitD2 Naseem Resort Jabal Akhdar announced

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 6

Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group), the executive arm of the Sultanate for tourism development, announced the soft opening of dusitD2 Naseem Resort Jabal Akhdar, marking the commencement of its operational activities.

The four-star dusitD2 Naseem Resort Jabal Akhdar is the newest addition to Omran Group's diverse hotel portfolio in the Sultanate. The resort draws inspiration from the natural and cultural characteristics of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, one of the most prominent tourist spots in the region.

The resort will offer its visitors unmatched experiences and tourism products that combine both leisure and entertainment aspects in a distinctive way, thereby playing an important role in meeting the market needs and growing demand for new and innovative hotel facilities and tourist experiences in the country.

On this occasion, Hashil bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, CEO of



Omram Group, said: "The soft opening of dusitD2 Naseem Resort Jabal Akhdar is an important step that solidifies Omran Group's steadfast tourism development journey across the country, while reflecting our continued determination towards building a sustainable future for the sector, and stimulating investments in the most prominent tourist spots of the Sultanate. These efforts align with the objectives of the National Tourism Strategy 2040 to strengthen the Sultanate's position as one of the premier tourism destinations for regional and international travellers."

He added: "dusitD2 Naseem Resort, Jabal Akhdar will provide tourism experiences that go beyond

hotel accommodation and focus on a whole new tourism offering that combines the elements of adventure tourism and entertainment, therefore diversifying into wider market segments and opening up new horizons for similar projects in the Sultanate."

"We are delighted to make our Oman debut with this vibrant resort which showcases the heritage, culture and visual splendour of the destination in truly distinctive fashion", said Suphaje Suthumpun, Group CEO, Dusit International.

"From enriching wellness experiences and exciting dining journeys to adventurous excursions and a wide range of exhilarating activities, dusitD2 Naseem Resort, Jabal Akhdar has all the elements

in place to provide a highly memorable vacation for visitors of all ages. Bright days are on the horizon for international travel, and we look forward to making the property a resounding success."

Comprising of 250 beautifully decorated contemporary rooms and suites, and located on the Saiq Plateau, an area of natural beauty in Oman's Al Jabal Al Akhdhar area at an altitude of 2,000 metres, the resort is only 2 hours by car from Muscat International Airport and features panoramic views of the surrounding Al Hajar mountain range, along with several facilities, to be opened at a later stage, including an 8,000 sqm Adventure Park, and other experiences inspired from the local heritage and

The soft opening of dusitD2 Naseem Resort Jabal Akhdar is an important step that solidifies Omran Group's steadfast tourism development journey across the country

HASHIL BIN OBAID AL MAHROUQI
CEO, Omran Group

culture, such as traditional olive oil and rose water distilleries and other amenities that offer the perfect environment for an exciting, yet relaxing stay.

dusitD2 Naseem Resort Jabal Akhdar is the second hotel property owned and developed by Omran Group in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. In 2014, Omran launched its iconic Alila Jabal Akhdar Resort, which underpinned the Group's pioneering role in catalysing growth in various governorates and represented a significant milestone that contributed to attracting local and global visitors to Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and the Sultanate.

London pushes out Amsterdam to reclaim trading top spot

The financial district of London reclaimed its place at the top of Europe's largest share trading centre rankings in June for the first time since Brexit, muscling out Amsterdam from top spot.

€8.9bn (£7.6bn) of shares a day were traded on average at London venues in June, compared to €8.8bn for various Dutch venues, new data published by Cboe Europe has revealed. The robust trading figures are a symbolic shift of power from Amsterdam to London and show the UK capital has defied concerns that it could recede from being a major player on the global stage after the end of the Brexit transition period.

London's rise back to the top spot comes despite the EU blocking investors from trading

shares in several companies listed in the capital.

Brussels has still not recognised rules governing UK financial markets as equivalent to its own even though London formerly left the EU over six months ago. Analysts have highlighted that the lack of a post-Brexit financial services deal could give the UK greater freedom to follow a path of its own over how it governs its financial services industry.

This freedom may enable London to think "more pragmatically about their future and what they can do to support their trading ecosystems that they couldn't before" said Sylvain Thieullent, CEO of Horizon, a provider of electronic trading systems.

The new figures come as Finance Minister (Chancellor)



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

THE ROBUST TRADING FIGURES ARE A SYMBOLIC SHIFT OF POWER FROM AMSTERDAM TO LONDON AND SHOW THE UK CAPITAL HAS DEFIED CONCERNS THAT IT COULD RECEDE FROM BEING A MAJOR PLAYER ON THE GLOBAL STAGE AFTER THE END OF THE BREXIT TRANSITION PERIOD.

Rishi Sunak laid out plans to boost the competitiveness of UK's financial services industry. "We're consulting on reforms to the regulation of wholesale capital markets" Sunak told a conference at Mansion House.

He highlighted that Brexit presents an opportunity for the UK to craft policy that is more tailored to the specific nuances of Britain's financial markets. He said the government is considering new measures intended to "boost our competitiveness across both regulation and tax."

Meanwhile, on another issue, there is a tussle between the UK and the EU – the import of mineral water. The UK has confirmed that major European mineral water brands like Evian, Perrier, San Pellegrino and Volvic will lose their automatic right to export to

Great Britain from January next year.

It was suggested in February that mineral water accreditation could be withheld by the UK government as a tit-for-tat response to the EU banning British shellfish.

Environment secretary George Eustice wrote to the EU's food safety chief Sandra Gallina to say "all natural mineral waters which obtained their recognition as a member state will no longer be authorised for import into England" unless they are given accreditation by UK regulators.

It comes after the UK and EU brokered a truce over the so-called sausage wars just days ago, meaning chilled meats can still be sent from Great Britain to Northern Ireland until September.

The water brands will still be able to export to Northern Ireland

without fresh accreditation as it still follows the EU's customs union and single market rules.

A senior Whitehall source said earlier this year that "there is thought being given to where we can leverage in other areas" as a response to the EU shellfish ban, including mineral water access.

"Mineral water both in the EU and the UK is an extremely regulated business that guarantees high product standards, so there is no need to further complicate its sale with more red tape," he said.

"If mineral water is to be used as a bargaining tool to pressure the EU about other issues, the government can come up with a further set of rules that may make it difficult - or even impossible - to import EU water." *(The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK)*

Ford Expedition: Always unstoppable



MUSCAT: The Ford Expedition's sheer size, build quality and powerful performance, offers a unique advantage of taking people places without a worry. Coming from the Ford stable, this family-size large SUV empowers you to make a lasting mark on every journey.

Powered by a 3.5-litre EcoBoost engine with standard Auto Start-Stop plus a class exclusive new 10-speed automatic transmission, the Expedition offers best-in-class fuel economy and power, with up to 400 horsepower and 650Nm torque available. An available electronic limited-slip differential on models with Intelligent 4WD enables improved off-road capability by sending power where it's needed.

The Expedition offers more driver-assist technologies than any other full-size SUV.

In addition, an all-new high-strength, aluminium-alloy body and redesigned high-strength steel frame form the foundation for Expedition's rugged off-road and strong towing capabilities.

More than 40 features and driver-assist technologies in the Expedition help make the journey as enjoyable as the destination. These include class-exclusive enhanced active park assist to easily pull in and out of parking spots, as well as available 360-degree camera technology to help customers see more around their Expedition for easier parking.

The Adaptive Cruise Control keeps a constant speed without having to work the brake or accelerator pedals – plus it automatically maintains a comfortable distance from vehicles ahead, once a pre-set distance has been set.

All-new 2022 Hyundai Tucson set to turn heads in Oman

MUSCAT: OTE Group, exclusive distributor of Hyundai vehicles in the Sultanate, has announced the Oman debut of the all-new Tucson NX4 2022 model, which sets a new benchmark for bold styling, technology and performance.

The fourth generation of the compact SUV (C-SUV) — Hyundai Motor's best-selling model in many parts of the



world — is the culmination of a complete makeover complete with cutting-edge design, roominess, class-leading digital

capabilities, dynamic ride and handling, and excellent fuel efficiency. A key hallmark of the new model is its sporty look, which places the Tucson NX4 in a class of its own. From its signature parametric radiator grille that sleekly incorporates the new front lighting, to the sharp angular creases on the door panels, the 2022 model is every bit a head-turner.

OAB announces Hasaad Savings Scheme winners for May



MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank recently announced the names of the winners of its Hasaad Savings Scheme for May. The draw saw 101 customers winning prizes of RO 500 each. As for Elite account

holders, two customers won RO 10,000 each from the Basher and corporate branches.

Commenting on the results of the draw, Rashad al Shaikh, Head of the Retail Banking Division at OAB, said, "The Hasaad Savings Scheme not only enables our customers to be financially secure but also encourages prudent saving habits and rewards them for the efforts. We look forward to seeing a growth in the number of customers who continue to save and have several exciting prizes in

store for them until the end of the year."

The Hasaad Savings Scheme 2021 will see 101 lucky winners each month from the 53 branches winning RO 500 each. This is in addition to a Big Prize draw which will see two winners of RO 10,000 each, every quarter.

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

Alizz Islamic Bank's Shari'a Supervisory Board holds third meeting



MUSCAT: The Shari'a Supervisory Board (SSB) of Alizz Islamic Bank recently held its third meeting for the year. The meeting was led by Shaikh Dr Essam Khalaf al Enezi (**pictured**), Chairman of the Shari'a Supervisory Board. Members of the Board including Shaikh Dr Ahmed Subhi Ahmed Ayadi and Shaikh Nasser bin Yousef al Azri and the internal Shari'a auditor Issa al Riyami were present.

The meeting was also attended by Sulaiman al Harthi, CEO of Alizz Islamic Bank and a number of senior executive management members.

The meeting discussed matters related to the services and products provided by the bank to various clients. Sulaiman al Harthy gave a presentation on the bank's ongoing activities during the second quarter of this year, and Muhammad Nadeem Aslam — DGM — Chief of Wholesale Business & Key Initiatives gave a visual presentation through which he showcased the performance of the wholesale banking portfolio.

The Shari'a Supervisory Board reviewed the Shari'a audit report submitted to them and discussed the observations and took the appropriate decisions. They also reviewed the Shari'a audit and compliance report, which included periodic reviews of transactions, training and awareness activities for Shari'a management. The Shari'a Supervisory Board also reviewed several new products that will be launch during the second half of the year.

Omanisation in insurance sector climbs to 79%

LOCALISATION: TAMKEEN 2021 FOCUSES ON SPECIALISED TRAINING PROGRAMMES

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 6

The Capital Market Authority continued its policy to enhance Omanisation ratios in the insurance sector according to Tamkeen initiative which was announced in 2018 in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour to achieve qualitative Omanisation ratios focusing on enhancing the national cadres in the medium and senior managerial positions rather than focusing on the operational roles in the insurance sector in line

with the Oman 2040 Vision which aims to encourage the private to take the lead in the development process, actively contribute to the national economy and to create employment opportunities for the citizens.

Omanisation in the sector has climbed to 79 per cent, as of 2020-end, with 51.7 per cent in senior roles, 72.4 per cent in mid managerial and technical roles and 85.7 per cent in operational positions.

The CMA adopted replacement approach by creating integrated database for the national cadres in the sector showing their details and qualifications. The policy faced challenges but achieved positive results with remarkable presence for the national cadres at the various levels of the industry.



The Authority has adopted this approach in the Omanisation policy for more than five years in a national initiative coupled with technical training and qualification to furnish national cadres able to fill the various managerial and

technical positions and contribute to building specialised national capacities in the industry as well as creating attractive work environment in view of the competition in the labour market.

Annual plans continued since

2015 focusing on the quality of the training programmes offered to the trainees to provide qualified Omanis for specific specialised roles through long term and short term programmes with the participants being selected according to academic qualifications and work experience beside Omanisation ratio in the sector.

The plan included four stages starting with comprehensive analysis of the data in the CMA portal which shows clear readings of Omanisation ratios in the managerial and technical roles, analysis of the qualification and experiences available in the sector to identify the fields of training programmes and their quality and content as well as setting training standards to achieve the objects of Tamkeen.

Key insurer warns about financial impact of ransomware attacks

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 6

Leading insurance broker and risk advisor Marsh is warning clients that ransomware attacks across the region are intensifying in both frequency and severity and advising them to take additional measures to protect their businesses.

With more people now working from home, cybercriminals are capitalising on the opportunities presented by less secure online environments and targeting remote workers, particularly with Covid-19 related phishing emails.

The pandemic has seen the cost and frequency of ransomware attacks explode, with the average amount now demanded by cybercriminals rising significantly – ransom demands attributed to Maze, a particularly sophisticated strain of Windows ransomware, have risen by a factor of six since the start of the coronavirus.

Worryingly, cybercriminals are increasingly targeting governments and healthcare organisations and as the downtime from ransomware now averages 16 days the

impact and financial costs associated with remediation are growing exponentially.

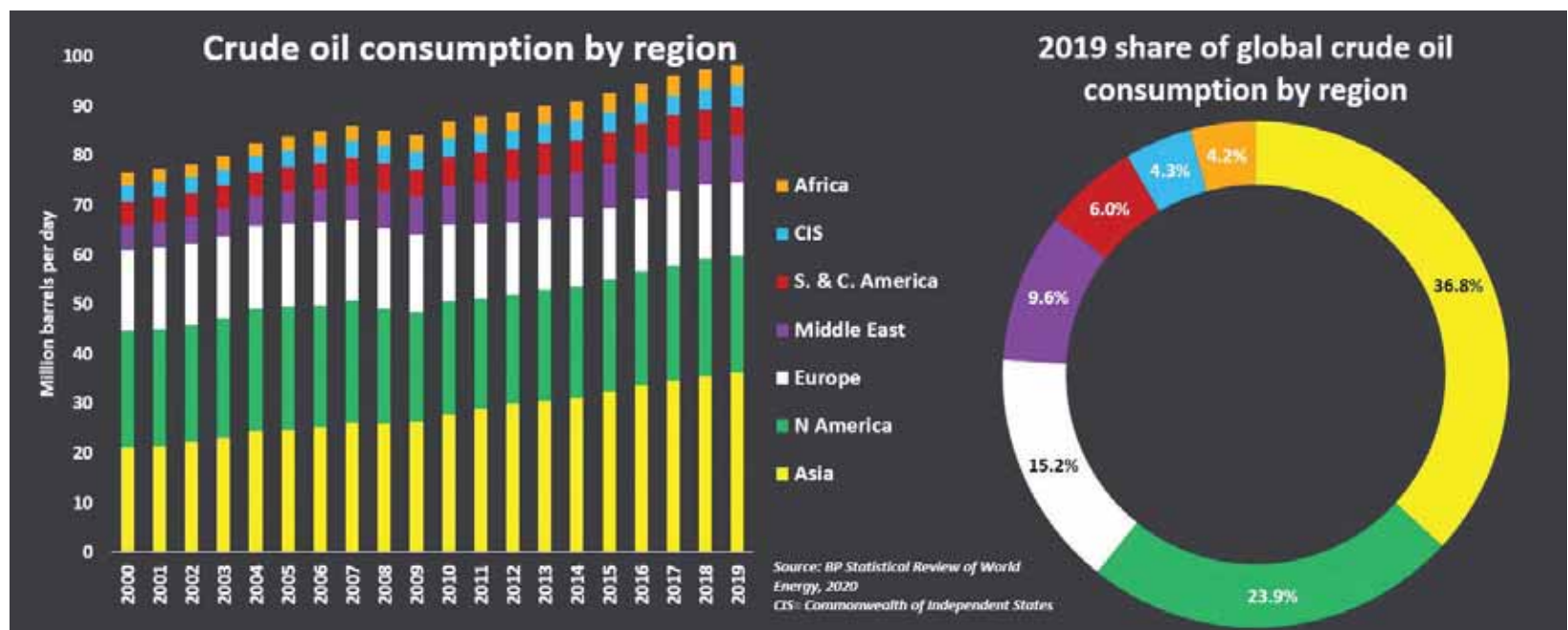
Christos Adamantiadis, CEO at Marsh MENA, commented; “Cybercriminals view ransomware as a lucrative business and are shifting the focus of their attacks from privacy breach to ransomware, which offers the potential for securing larger payments.

“The Covid-19 environment has cultivated the perfect conditions for more successful ransomware attacks: phishing emails that leverage pandemic-related topics, and less secure remote cybersecurity environments. From a business perspective, the financial and operational severity of ransomware is also increasing: the size of ransom demands are growing, operational downtime is becoming longer, and remediation is now more complex.”

Marsh is advising that firms take a comprehensive approach to cyber risk management– one that combines appropriate cyber defences with broad insurance coverage and well-rehearsed resiliency plans.



Asian oil buyers fret over margin impact of cancelled Opec+ meeting



SINGAPORE: Crude oil buyers in Asia are concerned that an unexpected cancellation of an Opec+ meeting to discuss a rise in output could drive oil prices even higher and hurt their margins.

They are now awaiting Saudi Arabia's official selling prices (OSPs), which were delayed until after the Opec+ meeting and set the tone for prices of a majority of Middle East crude sales to Asia, to assess the oil market's direction.

Brent crude oil prices rallied to above \$77 a barrel, the highest since 2018, on Monday, after ministers of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, a group known as Opec+, called off oil output talks and set no new date to resume them.

“The Opec no decision and resulting high price will have a short-term negative impact on Chinese refiners, as they will see margins pinched due to often lagging domestic fuel prices,” a Singapore-based crude oil trading executive said.

“That could force them to cut

Oil soars to multi-year highs

LONDON: Oil prices surged to multi-year highs on Tuesday including US crude hitting its highest since 2014 after Opec+ producers

fell out over plans to raise supply in the face of rising global demand.

Brent crude climbed 62 cents, or 0.8 per cent, to \$77.78 a barrel by 0748 GMT, a level not seen since October 2018.

US West Texas Intermediate crude futures traded up \$1.75,



or 2.3 per cent, at \$76.91, their highest since November 2014.

Talks collapsed on Monday among ministers from Opec+, which groups producers from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) with Russia and others. No date for resuming negotiations was agreed upon after the talks were carried over for a third day after disagreements last week.— **Reuters**

runs, which should lift margins again and bolster their crude oil buying,” the source added.

China is the world's second-largest oil consumer and top overall importer.

The talks were cancelled following a clash between top

producer Saudi Arabia, which wants to maintain output curbs, and the United Arab Emirates, which has pushed for increased output.

No date has been set for the next Opec+ meeting, which has left some sources speculating

there would be no output increase in August while others expect the group to convene a new meeting within days in order to secure an agreement.

Still, buyers in Asia are optimistic the row will be temporary. “Buyers would like prices to be reasonable and early release of additional barrels will help us ... this is more of a temporary phenomenon and would settle eventually,” a source with an Indian refiner said.

For now, Asia's physical crude market remains adequately supplied even as global fuel demand gradually recovers from the coronavirus pandemic, refining sources said.

Asia is the top oil-consuming region, accounting for roughly 37 per cent of world use. The near-term impact on Asia's physical market would only be marginal even if Opec+ had agreed to increase volume, because the proposed output rise appeared to be only 400,000 barrels a day, said a source with a Japanese refiner.— **Reuters**

What to expect when you've been hit with REvil ransomware

REvil, also known as Sodinokibi, is a widely used, conventional ransomware-as-a-service (RaaS) offering that has been around since 2019.

Criminal customers can lease the REvil ransomware from its developers, adding their own tools and resources for targeting and implementation.

As a result, the approach and impact of an attack involving REvil ransomware are highly variable.

This can make it hard for defenders to know what to expect and look out for. The following information may help IT admins facing or proactively concerned with the impact of a REvil ransomware attack.

The findings are based on insights from the Sophos Rapid Response team, which has investigated multiple cyberattacks involving REvil.

What to do immediately: contain and neutralise

The first thing you need to do is determine whether the attack is still underway.

If you suspect it is, and you don't have the tools in place to stop it, determine which devices have been impacted and isolate



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HARISH CHIB
VP Middle East & Africa
Sophos

them immediately.

The easiest option is to simply disconnect from all networks. If the damage is more widespread than a few devices, consider doing



this at the switch level and taking entire network segments offline instead of individual devices. Only shut down devices if you can't disconnect the network.

Second, you need to assess the damage. Which endpoints, servers and operating systems were affected, what has been lost? Are your backups still intact or has the attacker deleted them? If they are intact, make an offline copy immediately. Also, which machines were protected? They'll be critical in getting you back on your feet.

Third, do you have a comprehensive incident response plan in place? If not, you need to identify who should be involved

in dealing with this incident. IT admins and senior management will be required, but you may also need to bring in outside security experts and consult with cyber insurance and legal counsel.

Should you report the incident to law enforcement and/or inform data protection authorities? There is also the question of what information you should give to employees, many of whom are likely to find a similar ransom note on their desktop.

Last, but definitely not least: you'll need to contact these and other key people, such as customers, to let them know what's happening, but the attackers may be eavesdropping so

don't use your normal channels of communication. If the intruders have been in your network for a while, they'll probably have access to email, for instance.

What defenders can do

There are some proactive steps you can take to enhance your IT security for the future, including:

- Monitor your network security 24/7 and be aware of the five early indicators an attacker is present to stop ransomware attacks before they launch
 - Shut down Internet-facing remote desktop protocol (RDP) to deny cybercriminals access to networks. If you need access to RDP, put it behind a VPN or zero-trust network access connection and enforce the use of Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA)
 - Educate employees on what to look out for in terms of phishing and malicious spam and introduce robust security policies
 - Keep regular backups of your most important and current data on an offline storage device.
- The standard recommendation for backups is to follow the 3-2-1 method: 3 copies of the data, using 2 different systems, 1 of which is offline. Also, test your ability to perform a restore
- Prevent attackers from getting access to and disabling

your security: choose a solution with a cloud-hosted management console with multi-factor authentication enabled and Role-Based Administration to limit access rights

- Remember, there is no single silver bullet for protection, and a layered, defence-in-depth security model is essential – extend it to all endpoints and servers and ensure they can share security-related data
- Have an effective incident response plan in place and update it as needed. If you don't feel confident you have the skills or resources in place to do this, to monitor threats or to respond to emergency incidents, consider turning to external experts for help.

Conclusion

Dealing with a cyberattack is a stressful experience. It can be tempting to clear the immediate threat and close the book on the incident, but the truth is that in doing so you are unlikely to have eliminated all traces of the attack.

It is important that you take time to identify how the attackers got in, learn from any mistakes and make improvements to your security. If you don't, you run the risk that the same adversary or another one might attack again in the future.

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features



Bringing sophistication and luxury with provincial twist to Mirbat

From his home country of Sweden, Martin Dennis Persson has travelled the world managing and opening luxury hotels in some of the world's most remote yet astoundingly beautiful locations including Fiji. When he landed in Oman more six months ago, he faces a new challenge — how to sell Mirbat and Dhofar as a destination and how to convince the rest of the world that it is worth coming to the remote shores of Oman... **P18**

DISCOVERY

READ

KILLING THE MOB

BY BILL O'REILLY
AND MARTIN DUGARD

The 10th book in the conservative commentator's Killing series looks at organised crime in the United States during the 20th century.

Dinosaur faeces yields 230-million-year-old bugs, say scientists

ALMOST COMPLETELY preserved specimens of an ancient beetle species have survived an estimated 230 million years in petrified dinosaur excrement, an international research team has found.

The researchers were able to make the insect, called *triamyx-acoprolithica*, visible using synchrotron microtomography, according to a paper published in the *Current Biology* journal.

The fossil excrement contains numerous bug parts, most of them belonging to the same small species, the research team wrote.

They noted that some insects were almost completely preserved, with many of the sensitive legs and antennae still intact.

Based on their recordings, the researchers created a 3D model of the bug. Co-author Martin Qvarnstrom said in a

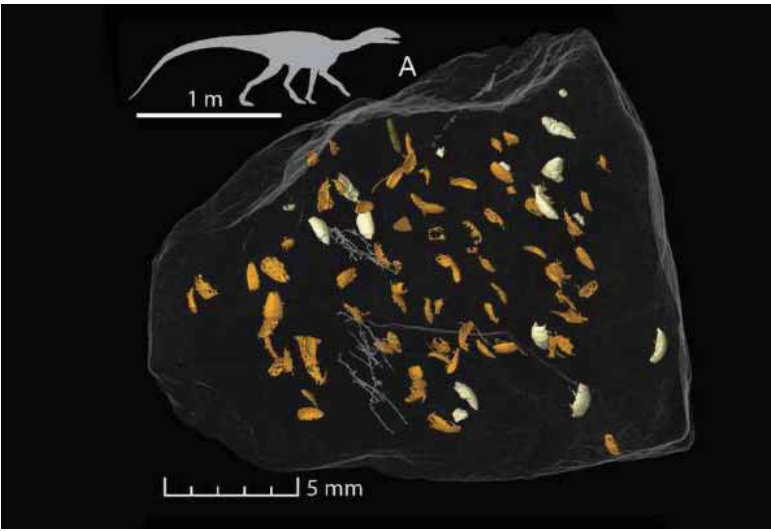
statement from Uppsala University he was surprised how well the insects had been preserved. "When you recreated them on the screen, it was as if they were looking right at you."

Besides the Swedish researchers, scientists from Taiwan, Mexico, France and Germany were also involved.

The team suspects that the bugs might have been eaten by a relatively small dinosaur, a silesaurus, a species which is estimated to have had a body weight of 15 kilograms, living about 230 million years ago on the territory of present-day Poland.

The discovery that ancient insect species can be preserved in petrified excrement, or coprolites, is opening the gate into a new field of research. So far, most preserved insect fossils had been found in amber.

The oldest, however, are about



140 million years old, which is considered young, geologically speaking. With coprolites, researchers hope to be able to look back even further into the past and learn more about the evolution of insects in still unexplored time intervals. — dpa



Bringing sophistication, luxury with a provincial twist to Mirbat



Jabal Samhan is a powerful, dominating site in the sprawling simplicity of Mirbat. With the start of the khareef, the usually caramel mountain has started to shed its earthy tone transforming to the lush green of the monsoon.

It has rained sporadically in the last few days and while the strong, foggy breeze from the Indian Ocean continues to hammer the coasts of Dhofar, the now 112 rooms, 96 of which are guestrooms while the other 16 are pool villas, sprawling complex of Alila Hinu Bay has started to add luxury and sophistication to the Mirbat landscape.

There was an air of refined confidence when Martin Dennis Persson met the media on a playful — sometimes cool, sometimes humid — Thursday afternoon in July. From his home country of Sweden, Martin has travelled the world managing and opening luxury hotels in some of the world's most remote yet astoundingly beautiful locations including Fiji. When he landed in Oman nearly six months ago as the general manager of the property, he has before him another set of challenges but nothing he has not done successfully before — how to sell Mirbat and Dhofar as a destination and how to convince the rest of the world that it is worth coming to the remote shores of Oman.

With the final details of the property being set into place, Martin has spent many weeks looking at Mirbat and Oman with the critical eye of an entrepreneur and “experience concierge.” Alila, after all, is all about integrating and building upon the local culture and making sure that these cultures are not changed or curated but are presented in their most authentic form.

As an action-loving executive who also enjoys exploring new countries, discovering food trends and working on his personal fitness, it didn't take long for Martin to realise that Mirbat and Dhofar have something truly unique and special to sell — one that makes the venture of hospitality in Dhofar a potentially profitable one and truly enjoyable for the guests.

THE OMANI'S DNA FOR HOSPITALITY

Martin and his team are busy curating different experiences unique to Mirbat and Dhofar. They are looking into tapping the beauty of the ocean, the spectacle of the mountains, the stealthiness of the diverse lifeforms in this side of Oman, the superbly interesting history of the place, the colourful day to day living of the villagers around the property and the richness of the food not only on land but also in the sea.

“What we wanted to do is to set the tone of the experience. We wanted our guests to see the nuances of this location, from the time that our Omani colleagues pick them up from the airport and upon their arrival to the property and their selection of unique experiences,” he said.

“What a lot of Omanis don't realise is that some of their daily chores are really spectacular to see from a guest's point of view. The nearby fish market, for example, offers a glimpse of how dynamic their relationship is with the ocean,” he shared.

“Our colleagues, whether it's Ali or Khalid, invited us once to join them as they visited their farms in the mountains. They don't realise how potentially mind-blowing it was to see and experience how they drew honey from their apiary,” he gushed.

From visiting one of the deepest sinkholes in Oman, to the frankincense farms, to historical sites, Martin believed that the collective experience Mirbat as a location offers make the trip down Dhofar worth it.

“What Alila Hinu Bay offers is this opportunity to integrate with the landscape, to get the authentic experience — something that you usually will not have the opportunity to do when you're in the city,” he said.

“Also, for the Omanis, this humble form of hospitality is already ingrained in their DNA. We are trying to also offer the people of Dhofar an opportunity to see their culture and heritage in a unique light — one that celebrates their uniqueness and authenticity,” he said.

Located around 87 km from Salalah Airport, Alila Hinu Bay is a contemporary fusion of local architectural traditions with modern aesthetic sensibility rising between the Jabal Samhan mountain and the Indian Ocean. It is a stone's throw away from a town of Mirbat known as one of the richest historical and cultural spots and fishing destinations in Oman. Some of the property's current offerings include ‘Journey for two to a thousand stars’ where guests can “indulge in a romantic dining experience under the starlit sky with tasty, mouthwatering dishes. They also have a plethora of activities including Yoga by the beach and visits to local attractions including a journey to Wadi Darbat.

LOCAL SCENE

20 volumes of manuscripts restored



THE NATIONAL RECORDS and Archives Authority (NRAA) has cataloged, restored and documented electronically hundreds of manuscripts and documents in 20 volumes for Shaikh Abdulrahman bin Saif bin Muhammad al Kaabi from the village of Masah in the Wilayat of Mahdha in Al Buraimi Governorate (1870-1950 AD).



Most of these manuscripts and documents were written by the Shaikh himself, while others were in his possession. Among the documents he wrote a hundred years ago is a volume containing surahs from the Holy Quran and manuscripts that included many topics such as the hadiths, fatwas, the honourable prophetic biography, poetry, literature, interpretation and jurisprudence issues. NRAA has restored, indexed, photographed, sterilised, restored and preserved the documents in a professional manner, in order to ensure that these documents remain a memory of history and a bright aspect of the Omani civilisation.



Khalid al Kaabi, one of the Shaikh's grandsons, said that Shaikh Abdulrahman excelled in various aspects of knowledge and fields like science and literature, as he specialised in the field of jurisprudence, biographies, fatwas and poetry, and devoted himself to science, reading, writing and blogging. He added that the Shaikh used to teach his students Quran and Sharia sciences in a mosque in the village of Masah, which is about 11 kilometres from the centre of the wilayat.

He indicated that the village of Masah, in which the Shaikh grew up, means remedy and was called by this name because people used to come to the village for treatment with folk medicine, cupping and legal Islamic ruqyah.



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INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



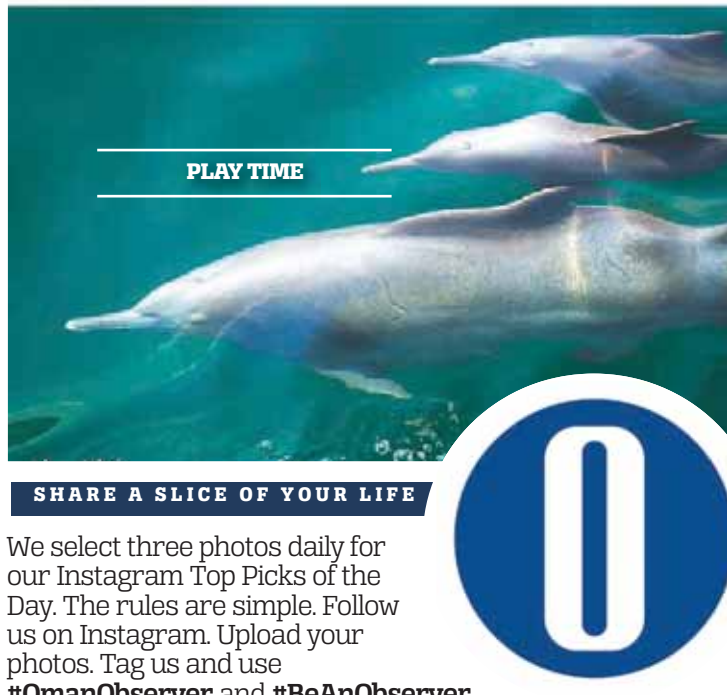
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FILM



Assassin-turned-Avenger 'Black Widow' finally takes movie spotlight

AFTER NUMEROUS delays because of the global pandemic, Marvel's Black Widow takes centre stage in a new movie that debuts Friday and delves into the past of the Avengers character played by Scarlett Johansson.

The actress reprises the role for the ninth time in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, even though Black Widow died in 2019 blockbuster "Avengers: Endgame."

The new "Black Widow" film will be available in theatres and for a \$30 fee through Walt Disney Co's (DIS.N) Disney+ streaming service. It previously had been scheduled to debut exclusively in cinemas in May 2020.

The film is a prequel set after the events of the 2016's "Captain America: Civil War." It catches up with former assassin Natasha Romanoff as she is on the run from government agents.

Johansson said it is likely this will be the last time she portrays the character.

"I think it's always great to leave on a high note," the actress said in an interview. "You've got to set it free. It's part of the journey when you know it's come to an end."

The movie begins when Romanoff is handed a box of mail left at a previous apartment. Because of the contents, she unwittingly becomes the target of the mysterious Taskmaster as well as an army of women known as Widows.

"Stranger Things" actor David Harbour plays Romanoff's father and Rachel Weisz co-stars as her mother. Florence Pugh portrays her sister, Yelena, who often pokes fun at the Black Widow and her fellow Avengers.

"I hope I made people laugh," Pugh said. "The bluntness of me being just outrageously harsh to Natasha may have been funny, but I definitely smirked when the whole family got involved. They all shared the same sense of humour and timing. That was just perfect."

Harbour plays an atypical superhero who is out of shape and struggles to fit in his superhero outfit.

"When (director) Cate (Shortland) pitched the character to me, it was him at the end of his life with all this regret and remorse and just this past his prime thing," Harbour said. "I was like that's fun and I'll be able to sit around and eat doughnuts all day. It'll be fantastic." — **Reuters**

CONSERVATION

Saving the pangolin: One conservationist's lifetime mission



Vietnamese conservationist Nguyen Van Thai recalls in detail the moment when, as a boy, he watched his neighbour's dig up and kill a female pangolin that had curled up into a scaly ball.

It was an experience that changed a life he now devotes to protecting the critically endangered mammal.

"With this defence mechanism, she would have been able to defend against all of her natural predators, but not from a killing by human hands," said Thai.

Raised near the lush forests of the Cuc Phuong National Park, the 39-year-old founded animal charity Save Vietnam's Wildlife in 2014. Since then it has rescued close to 1,600 pangolins.

A lucrative illegal trade in Asia in body parts alleged to be able to cure everything from cancer to male impotence makes pangolins one of the world's most trafficked mammals.

Pangolin parts can fetch up to \$300 per kg, said Thai,



whose group has set up task forces with rangers to patrol and find traps set by poachers.

"When we look at them, we think they are scary because they look like a dinosaur," said Thai.

"But in fact they are really nice and shy, incapable of attacking or posing a threat to humans. We are the reason for their declining numbers that could lead to

extinction."

Vietnam is home to two pangolin species, both considered critically endangered. Hong Kong conservationist group WildAid estimates 100,000 pangolins are poached each year, and says all eight species worldwide are under threat.

Thai's manual on rescuing and caring for pangolins has been published in international academic journals



and he was awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize this year.

But that pales into insignificance beside the work he and his team do on the ground.

"The most wonderful moment is (when)... we witness the rescued pangolins... slowly walk into the forest because the forest is their true home," said Thai. — **Reuters**



Rediscovering the warm welcome of hospitality of Wadi Halhal

By Khalid Abdulmalik



It was back in October 2010 when I visited Wadi Halhal for the first time. Since then, I returned here several times on hiking trips in the mountain to reach three abandoned villages perched above the wadi — Al Widd, Al Ghogha, Qabrut and Raas Al Hosn.

On one of the weekends, I set off on a hiking trip to Al Ghogha with Mona, a photographer friend, but the weather was very hot, and we could not reach the village.

On our way back to our car, we met Saud bin Mohd al Ghalabi coming down from Qabrut. He was visiting his parents, who some six years ago decided to go back and live in their village despite it being a deserted place now. Saud insisted, we have to come back one day to visit the mountain.

Two weeks later, I asked Saud if he was free to come with me to Qabrut.

I left Muscat at around 6 am and headed to Wadi Bani Kharous and then to Halhal where the hike starts.

Saud headed earlier to avoid the heat and told me that he will wait for me on the trail, mid-way to Qabrut.

It was around 8.30 am when I joined Saud waiting for me in the shade of a rock. From there, it took us about 40 minutes to reach Qabrut.

"This is the house where I was born in 1987", he told me. It is a small house consisting of one bedroom, a small majlis and a kitchen.

Saud's mother, Aisha, welcomed us with fruits, dates, qahwah, yoghurt mixed with Zaatar (Omani thyme) and fresh Omani bred.

"Tfaddhalu", she greeted us. "Mohammed went to the gardens, but he will be back soon", she said, explaining her husband's absence.

After we finished eating and having coffee Saud took me to the gardens to join his father.

"We grow many kinds of fruits here; date palms, pomegranate, lime, fig and peach. On the other terraces, we grow onions and garlic, and in the past, we used to grow wheat as well", he said.

"I think my father went back home taking the other way following the falaj", he added as we could not find him in the garden.

"Assalamuualaykum" greeted us Mohammed as we reached the house.

Mohammed, in his 70's and Aisha in her mid 50's decided to go back to Qabrut to settle permanently six years ago, visiting Halhal only for Eid and other special occasions.

"Here we have everything", Mohammed said, "water and grass for our goats, and Saud comes every weekend to deliver the provisions that we need from the city. It is difficult to hike all the way from Halhal to tend to the gardens at our age."

"Saud was born here. He was two years old when we moved to Halhal after the government had brought electricity to the city. Eight families were living in Qabrut at the time. We are the only ones who came back", said Aisha.

"There were three other hamlets in the vicinity, but they all died out as their source of water dried 40 years ago; water is life", said Mohammed.

But in Qabrut, Saud's parents are lucky. "Two springs have kept the hamlet alive, alhamdillillah", he said. As I was preparing to head back to Muscat shortly before noon, my hosts would not let me leave without having lunch first.

"Aisha will bring Biryani and chicken, and you will eat before leaving!" Mohammed insisted.

I could not refuse and had one of the most delicious meals ever.

After 25 years of living in Oman, I was happy to experience once again Omani hospitality and see for myself that it is still as warm and welcoming as it was when I first set foot in the Sultanate a quarter of a century ago.