

HM thanked by Chinese President

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China in reply to His Majesty's greetings cable to him on the centennial anniversary of founding the Chinese Communist Party. In his cable, President Xi Jinping expressed his utmost thanks for His Majesty's greetings. – ONA



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ZVEREV ADDS CINCY MASTERS TO OLYMPIC GOLD



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SKIING IN AFRICA? TOURISTS HIT LESOTHO SLOPES



MUSCAT

HM CONDOLENCES TO EMIR OF KUWAIT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmed Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, on the death of Shaikha Badriya Al Ahmed Al Jaber al Sabah. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sympathies, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the deceased's soul in peace in paradise and grant her family patience. — ONA

HM GREETINGS TO UKRAINE PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Zelensky and the friendly people of Ukraine further progress and prosperity. — ONA

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ROYAL DECREE ESTABLISHES KHOR KHARFOUT ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESERVE

NEW ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESERVE IN DHOFAR

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday issued Royal Decree No 58/2021 establishing Khor Kharfout Archaeological Reserve in Dhofar Governorate.

Article (1) of the Royal Decree states that a sanctuary under the name “Khor Kharfout Archaeological Reserve” shall be established in the Governorate of Dhofar and that it shall be accorded the zone whose demarcations are indicated in the annex and diagram attached to this Decree.

Article (2) stipulates that the Chairman of the Environment Authority, acting in coordination with ministries and departments concerned, shall issue the regulations and decisions necessary for the implementation of this decree. The regulations and decisions shall include the method of management of this archaeological reserve, formalities for entry to the sanctuary, the prescribed fees, the duration of stay therein, the activities allowed to be practiced or prohibited there and the appropriate administrative penalties against each case of violation.

Article (3) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced on the day following its date of publication. — ONA



A sanctuary under the name Khor Kharfout Archaeological Reserve shall be established in the Governorate of Dhofar.

OMAN BAGS 13 MEDALS IN GCC SWIMMING



Oman's promising swimmer Issa al Adawi claimed two gold medals for the Sultanate at the 28th GCC Aquatic Championships in 200 metres and 400 metres freestyle events while his teammate Mohammed al Wahaibi bagged the third gold medal in backstroke 50 metres event. At Hamad Aquatics Centre in Doha on Sunday, the Sultanate's swimming team ended their participation with a tally of 13 medals. **DETAILS ON P10**

Mosque in Al Seeb first to run on solar power

KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

Hassan bin Thabit Mosque in the Wilayat of Al Seeb is all set to be the first mosque in the Sultanate to run on solar power.

The project is part of the “Green Mosque” renewable energy programme launched by Amana Waqf Funds Management Company, in cooperation with the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), energy companies and Islamic financial institutions.

The project, which reduces electricity consumption and operational costs, comes in line with the directives of Oman Vision 2040 to achieve around 30

This programme will contribute in supporting the Sultanate's plans towards promoting renewable energy and is highly practical

DR MANSOUR BIN TALIB AL HINAI

Chairman, APSR

per cent of the Sultanate's energy needs from renewable sources. **TURN TO P2**

Travel ban lifted from Sept 1

VINOD NAIR @vinot_nair

The Sultanate on Monday lifted ban on arrivals from several countries, which include India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The decision will come into effect from September 1. Only fully vaccinated passengers will be allowed, and there will be no quarantine for passengers with negative PCR tests.

Expatriates who had gone on vacations and short trips in March were among those stranded as the ban was imposed in mid-April following a surge in Covid-19 cases across the country.

The decision will also benefit travellers from Sudan, Brazil, Nigeria, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Tunisia, Libya, Argentina and Colombia.

The stranded expatriates were worried about the validity of their visa if the duration of the stay is extended over 180 days. However, the owner of a Sanad centre in Ruwi told the *Observer* that expatriates who are stranded abroad due to a travel ban were able to renew visas which have expired during this period. “The sponsor or the PRO from the company can visit the Sanad office with company details, passport, resident card copies, and two photographs of the employees for renewal of the visas.” **TURN TO P2**

ROP to take a call on visas

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) on Monday said it will take a decision on visa issuance on Wednesday.

The announcement came after authorities removed a ban on air travel from September 1, which was in place to control the spread of Covid-19 pandemic.

“We will announce a decision on issuance of visas on Wednesday after a high-level meeting,” a source at ROP said. **SEE P2**

VAT | جهاز الضرائب | TAX AUTHORITY

Virtual sessions

Second Session

The mechanism of calculating VAT

24 August 2021 pm 5:00 – 6:30

Third Session

Invoices and tax records

31 August 2021 pm 5:00 – 6:30

Broadcast platform:

taxoman taxoman Tax Authority of the Sultanate of Oman

ROP to take call on visa tomorrow

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Royal Oman Police on Monday said it will take a decision on visa issuance on Wednesday. The announcement came after authorities removed a ban on air travel from September 1, which was in place to control the spread of Covid-19 pandemic. “We will announce the decision on issuance of visas on Wednesday after a high-level meeting. This decision will be applicable to both visit and residence visas,” a top official at the Directorate General of Passports and Residency at the Royal Oman Police said. The Sultanate stopped issuing visas of all types in April 2020 in the wake of the pandemic. However, Omani citizens and residents were allowed to enter the country while transit passengers were allowed to pass through the airports.

In September 2020, Oman allowed entry for residents into the country with some restrictions and began to issue residence permits for those applications filed through its e-visa platform. The decision to lift the travel ban as well as the announcement on visas have brightened the hopes of many stranded expats as well as companies who have been waiting for their employees to resume duties. “We are happy that the country has decided to open up due to reducing the number of cases and this move will boost tourism,” said Renny Johnson, CEO of Royal King Tours and Travel. “We are waiting for the decision by the ROP as many of our new recruits are waiting to join duties at our new hypermarket, the opening of which has been postponed many times,” Santhosh Pillai, representative of a hypermarket chain, said.

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Travel ban lifted from September 1

FROM PAGE 1

Now, all visa holders of Oman and those who can obtain a visa upon arrival are allowed to enter the Sultanate.

All passengers arriving in the Sultanate are required to present a vaccine certificate with a QR Code stating that they have received two doses of a vaccine approved in Oman. The last dose received should be not less than 14 days.

All arriving passengers who present a negative result of PCR test before arrival are exempted from quarantine. “The test report should have a valid QR code and the test shall be conducted 96 hours prior to the scheduled time of arrival in the Sultanate for international flights of more than 8-hour duration, including transit, and 72 hours for shorter flights.”

All passengers arriving in the Sultanate without holding a negative PCR test will be subject to a PCR test upon arrival.

In cases of a positive PCR test result, the passenger shall be required to undergo mandatory health isolation for 10 days

Only fully vaccinated passengers will be allowed and there will be no quarantine for passengers with negative PCR tests

starting from the test date. Passengers who have recovered from Covid-19 but tested positive on arrival are exempted from health isolation provided they are able to submit proof that they have completed the prescribed isolation period in the country where they were infected before travelling to the Sultanate.

Heavy traffic was reported by airlines websites immediately after they were opened for bookings. Within minutes, tickets were sold out.

“Fares did matter, but were not a big concern at this stage as I just wanted to go to Oman and resume work at the earliest,” said Vinod Prakash, who went home after quitting his old job in March to join a new company in the Sultanate.

Mosque in Al Seeb first to run on solar power

FROM PAGE 1

The Sultanate has 16,464 mosques of various sizes, according to a statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) in 2019. “This programme will contribute in supporting the Sultanate’s plans towards promoting renewable energy,” said Dr Mansour bin Talib al Hinai, Chairman of the Public Services Regulatory Authority (APSR). “Green Mosque initiative is highly practical as well as economically viable as the cost



of these technologies continues to decrease while increasing their effectiveness,” he said. The pilot phase of the Green Mosque programme was launched in November 2020.

Later, it has been decided to expand to cover 100 more mosques through three packages over 3 years with an investment of RO 5 million, part of which is also allocated to projects

of technologies to rationalise consumption, in addition to generating electricity from renewable sources. “This project represents the first investment of the endowment trust based on the approach of partnership and cooperation with the private sector to serve the endowment organisation and its investments,” said Yousuf bin Ali al Harthy, CEO of Amana. It is expected that mosques will achieve immediate savings in bills, provided that the solar energy systems will be owned by the mosques at the end of the agreed investment period.

73 jobs up for grabs in private sector

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour has unveiled 73 jobs (up for grabs by job-seekers) in private sector establishments. The opportunities are distributed as follows: 8 for holders of Master’s degree, 25 for university (Bachelor’s) degree holders, 4 for ‘higher diploma’ holders, 11 for holders of qualifications above General Education Diploma (postgraduate certificates), 4 for holders of vocational diplomas and 15 for General Education Diploma (GED) holders and 5 jobs for holders of qualifications below GED and other standings. A statement to this effect was made by Budoor bint Issa al Harthiyah, Director of Employment Opportunities Department at the Ministry of Labour, who affirmed that the jobs were announced by the Ministry as part of ongoing coordination with private sector establishments aimed to fill vacancies in specialised areas. Budoor added that the website of the Ministry of Labour provides more than 2,970 vacancies, of which 546 were slated for holders of qualifications below the GED, 1395 for GED holders, 590 for qualifications above GED, 401 for Bachelor’s degree holders, 36 for Master’s degree holders and 5 for PhD holders. — ONA



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North Al Sharqiyah Municipality finalises project for paving Al Shuwaie road

MUSCAT: In order to keep pace with the demographic and urban evolution and to meet the demands of the community, North Al Sharqiyah Municipality has finalised the project of paving Al Shuwaie road in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi. With a length of more than 10 km, the road will serve the inhabitants of the wilayat to smoothly move around. Eng Nasser bin Khamis al Hasni said to Oman News Agency (ONA) that the project comes as part of the Municipality’s keenness to provide essential services and touch the needs of the people. The road paving project includes speed bumps that are placed before interchanges. It is worth noting that the project of designing and paving the roads and its neighbouring villages in the wilayat is one of the projects that the municipality is keen to implement within its annual plan for the design and implementation of a number of



roads in the various wilayats of the governorate. This will also provide the necessary services to the citizens

ensuring easy and smooth movement between remote villages. — ONA



SOHAR Port and Freezone invites Tenderers in the following Tender

NO	Tender Ref	Tender Title	Tender Fee OMR
1	SIPC 2021/176	SWC Cleaning & SWRC Embankment Repair at Port of Sohar	RO 1RO 26.250
2	SIPC 2021/180	Building Waterproofing Works at Port of Sohar	RO 105.000

The above motioned tenders' fees including the VAT 5%. Tenderers can request to receive the electronic tender documents from 9:00 am on Monday, 23/08/2021 until 4:00 pm on Tuesday 09/09/2021. Tenderers to follow the below procedures and steps to obtain the electronic tender documents:

Step 1: Interested Tenderers should remit the stated tender fees as per the below bank details:

Account Name	Sohar Industrial Port Co
Account Number	3101-007970-500
Bank Name	Oman Arab bank SAOC – Main Br
SWIT	OMABOMRUXXX
Note: Bank transfers is the only mode of payment accepted	

Step 2: Tenderers to send the following documents:
A request for the electronic tender documents
Scanned bank transfer
The firm’s commercial registration documents
All shall be communicated to the following e-mail address: sipc.procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

Step 3: Tenderers will receive the electronic tender documents. The Technical and Commercial proposals must be in separate, marked “Technical and Commercial” addressed to: SOHAR Port and Freezone Bid Opening Committee Tender Reference No. 2021/ Tender Title:
• SOHAR reserves the right to accept or reject any tender without assigning any reasons
• All SMES are requested to provide their Green Card along with the required documents
• For any clarification regarding the tenders please send an e-mail to : sipc.procurement@soharportandfreezone.com



Khor Kharfout Archaeological Reserve famed for grazing trees, water resources

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday issued Royal Decree (No. 58/2021) establishing Khor Kharfout Archaeological Reserve in Dhofar Governorate.

Established by the Royal Decree No. 58/2021, the Khor Kharfout Archaeological Reserve is located

between the Wilayats of Rakhyout and Dhalkout in the Governorate of Dhofar on the coast of the Arabian Sea. The reserve stretches over an area of 143.4 square kilometres.

Situated within the mountainous geographical range of the governorate makes it among the areas

affected by the annual monsoon rains (Khareef).

The site is characterised for its mild summer with a maximum temperature ranging between 34 to 14°C and a relatively short winter.

It receives irregular cyclonic rain that may increase due to cli-

mate change and weather conditions.

The dissimilarity seen in the reserve's topography has created diversity in the sanctuary's environments from its mountains, woods, valleys, coastal areas to its semi-desert environment.

With its pristine beach, the re-

serve is counted as an exceptional habitat for migratory birds, and best-sought destination for hiking, fishing and watching turtles and dolphins.

The Khor Kharfout Archaeological Reserve is famous for being home to the finest grazing trees and the availability of water sources.

It was believed that the Khor was used as an ancient port for exporting frankincense. The towering mountains and deep wadis are areas of inspiration for many enthusiasts and adventurers. The unique biodiversity of the reserve is one of the cultural and aesthetic features of the place. — ONA

Snaking falaj of Wadi Qurai a delight for hikers

TEXT & PHOTOS
BY YAHYA AL SALMANI

The falaj of Wadi Qurai snakes around the mountain slopes. It is a fine example of ancient Oman's prowess in harnessing water for drinking and farming in difficult terrains. The falaj is the favourite spot of hikers from across the Sultanate. It is scenic with minor challenges to help amateur hikers get acquainted with the beauty of trekking.

Located about two hours from Muscat hidden in one of the corners of Samayil, Wadi Qurai has maintained its old-world charm and here, the locals are insistent that the impeccable state of nature is preserved.

Based on the source, there are three types of falaj: the Ghaily falaj, which is a simple diversion and canalisation of surface wadi flow; it uses normally open channels to collect and transfer the water. It dries out after long periods of drought with low rainfall since it depends on a shallow underground water table.

The second is the Iddi or Dawoodi falaj, also called qanat, which is a very ancient system for extracting water from the water table by gravity, through a nearly horizontal gallery," the organisation explained.

"This type of falaj has a system of deep and long channels, the lengths of which sometimes extend to 16 km, while the whole falaj network may reach 45 km, while the third is the Aini falaj, which is a simple canalisation of



springs."

The falaj of Wadi Qurai belongs to the Aini falaj.

In ancient times, people used the hollow trunks of the date palm to transport water from the slopes of the mountains for domestic and agricultural purposes.

The canal assumed its modern form with the advent of concrete and cement when the people were able to easily deliver water flowing along the mountains and giant rocks.

The falaj derives its water from five natural springs and the most important of these springs is Ain al Najmiya. It is also called Falaj Sana'a.

Despite the small size of this falaj, its width does not exceed 20 cm, it is an important source of freshwater for the people as it is able to transport water for a distance of more than three kilometres.

The wadi is also home to birds and wild animals including the Arabian Tahr. It also has dozens of species of wild plants such as Sidr Qusum, Simr, Tulh, Boot and wild figs.

As the falaj is a source of fresh water, swimming is banned. Visitors must also take care of the surroundings and not leave trash at the picnic site.

"We are completely dependent on the water of this falaj for irrigation and household uses, but there are those who do not care. Many visitors swim in the wadi and do not care about the cleanliness of the place," some locals complained.

Over
2.33 m
vaccinated
against
Covid-19
in Oman



MUSCAT: As many as 2,336,980 people have been vaccinated against Covid-19 in the Sultanate since launching of the National Immunisation Campaign till yesterday (Sunday) August 22, reaching 66 per cent of the targeted population.

The number of those who took the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine stood at 1,294,098 comprising 37 per cent while the number of those who are fully vaccinated (two doses) stood at 1,042,882 comprising 29 per cent.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health continues vaccinating target segments against Covid-19 in all governorates of the Sultanate as vaccination centres witness a good daily turnout. — ONA



POLLUTION-FREE, ENVIRONMENT-FRIENDLY

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Sultanate is one of the few countries in the Middle East to have round-the-year sunlight while a majority of the energy is either untapped or wasted.

Tapping sunlight before it is wasted would mean a great addition to its national revenues where the cost on electricity from the grid can be substantially reduced and environment pollution kept at a bay to a greater extent.

Solar power generation holds great possibility in the Sultanate and the country has been paying substantial attention to alternative energy also known as green energy.

WHAT IS HOLDING US BACK?

According to solar panel installers and operators in the country, it is the ignorance of the people about solar energy and its advantages of the same that is keeping them away.

“Not only that, the initial lackadaisical attitude of many people has pulled them back from installing solar panels on their roofs which is slowly changing”, according to Manu S

Nair, who undertakes many industrial alternative energy needs of the country.

COST VS BENEFITS:

On an average, a normal household tends to spend around RO 30 to RO 100 on electricity per month and this can go up to RO 50 to 200 if they have many additional electrical gadgets in operation. Many villas which are equipped with swimming pools, tennis court and various other amenities where the HVAC system is on 24x7 mode are paying even more than the prescribed rates owing to their consumption.

At the outset, although initial investment on solar project is slightly high, the user can derive the Return-On-Investment in the next three years after the installation.

However, just like any electric or electronic gadget that needs to be maintained, a fixed amount of money needs to be paid for maintenance costs.

“A normal solar panel, say Chinese panel, which is widely in use, has a life span of 25 years and the initial cost would be equivalent to some two or three years’ electricity bills. Nonetheless, it’s worth in the long run and pays to be in use as the surplus

THE FOCUS SHOULD BE ON MAKING OMAN SOLAR FRIENDLY. THE COUNTRY CAN BECOME A SOLAR POWER IF THERE IS ENOUGH AWARENESS AMONG THE PEOPLE ABOUT ITS ADVANTAGES AS AN ALTERNATIVE ENERGY

power can be shared with the grid operator”, adds another supplier.

“Simply put, solar energy which is a truly renewable energy source can also reduce one’s electricity bills and provides one with a plethora of applications. Their maintenance costs is less and comes with inexpensive storage. Additionally, solar system could immediately save up to 40 per cent of their monthly bills and they can take back the capital in less than 5 years”, says a representative of Technical Project Sales & Design team of a leading business conglomerate’s Renewable Energy division.

Houses, buildings and villas wishing to adopt and implement this programme will be able to contract with the authorities and solar panel suppliers who will install, operate and maintain the solar panels for a specified period of time upon an investment which one will be able to retrieve in three years time.

REDUCING CARBON EMISSION:

One of the best advantages often coined with the reduced electricity bill is that ‘clean energy’ or ‘natural energy’ is highly environment-friendly and

leaves no residues on earth.

Carbon emission can also be reduced by covering abundant sunlight into reusable energy contributing to a cleaner and much better world, according to solar technologists.

In the Sultanate, reports indicate that many residential people have started registering for solar under the ‘Sahim’ scheme and some have approached the solar panel installation companies for their households as well as industries.

GO SOLAR

Summarising the main advantages that renewable energy like solar power can fetch for both households and industries, a host of benefits us await for those who turn themselves into this unstoppable power reservoir.

#Solar power is pollution-free and environment-friendly

#Available round-the-year

#More employment opportunities

#Less or no maintenance as solar panels last over 30 years

#Safer than traditional electric current

#Possible to sell back the excess power to the power company

#Less dependence on oil and fossil fuels

UTAS Suhar concludes 'Imdha' programme

MUSCAT: The University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) in Suhar concluded on Monday, the 'Imdha' programme, which was organised by the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Club of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Shinas.

The closing ceremony included announcing the results of the best student company, in addition to an exhibition that showcased innovative products made by those students.

The programme also included a speech by the competition jury, delivered by Issa bin Salim al



Balushi, a businessman, in which he explained the importance of student companies in the labour market.

Five companies took part in

the contest, in which the student company 'Dajaji' won first place. The other participating companies and the jury's members were honoured. — ONA



Oman likely to move to UK's amber list

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 23

The Sultanate is expected to be one of the countries that will be moved from the United Kingdom's Red list to the amber list in the latest review, which is expected this week.

According to local media reports quoting the UK data analyst, the reviewed list will be announced either on August 25 or 26, which will see more countries moving to the green and amber lists. Some green list countries might return to the amber list.

The UK Travel secretary is expected to make the announcement this week.

According to rules, if a traveller has been in a country or territory on the red list in the last 10 days, then he or she will be allowed to enter the UK if they are a British or Irish National, or you have residence rights in the UK.

Travellers from the amber list must take a Covid test three days before one travels to England, book and pay for Covid-19 tests — to be taken after arrival in England and complete a passenger locator form.



If fully vaccinated, they must take a Covid-19 test on or before day two.

Several Oman students enrolled in UK universities have been urging the government to move Oman from the red list as the Sultanate has a good vaccination rate and a relatively low number of cases.

The Civil Aviation Authority(CAA) on Monday

said the travel ban on 18 countries, including India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh that were red-listed has been lifted. The decision will be effective from 12 pm on September 1, 2021.

The Supreme Committee had earlier extended the suspension of entry to the Sultanate until further notice for arrivals from the United Kingdom, Sudan,

Brazil, Nigeria, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Iraq, Iran, Tunisia, Libya, Argentina, Colombia and arrivals from any other country if they have passed through any of the aforementioned countries during the previous 14 days preceding their request to enter the Sultanate.

Private schools may reopen in September

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Most students in Oman, including those in private and international schools, are expected to return to classrooms in September.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) on Monday issued a circular on the operation of private schools, international and international community schools for the academic year 2020-2021.

Oman's public schools will reopen for students from September 19 and for teaching and administrative staff from September 12.

The International community schools with a student population of 3,000 or more, will adhere to blended education (70 to 30 per cent of the total students) depending on the capacity of the school.

Speaking to the *Observer*, a top official at the Board of Directors of Indian Schools in Oman, said, "We are

waiting for a final communique from the Ministry of Education, following which the details will be shared with parents. We are also talking with school management to find out their preparedness for restarting the conventional school."

He added that students aged 12 years and above are given free vaccination by the Ministry of Health in coordination with the Ministry of Education.

The MoE said classroom education will be allowed for grades 1 to 6 in smaller private and international schools.

As for schools with a high student density, it will be a mix of online and direct education.

Class 12 students will be taught classrooms in private and international schools.

For special education students in international and private schools, classes will be held in schools with precautionary health controls and reduced student density.

Al Dhahirah water transmission system to be operational by year-end

MUSCAT: A major water transmission project that will supply desalinated water from Suhar to towns in Al Dhahirah Governorate will be operational before the end of this year, according to an official of Oman Water and Wastewater Services (OWWS).

Eng Ibrahim bin Hamad al Hasani, Project Manager, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the transmission project, currently 81 per cent complete, will ease the Al Dhahirah's dependence on groundwater for its requirements of potable water. Groundwater supplies are currently sourced from the Al Massarat Basin.

Traversing rugged terrain, characterised by mountains on the one hand, and wadis on the other, the 230-km long pipeline project presented huge challenges during the construction phase, Al Hasani said.

Additionally, intersecting



oil and gas pipelines along the route of the transmission project complicated construction work.

Further difficulties were encountered during the coronavirus pandemic with lockdowns impeding the delivery of construction equipment and materials to the project site, he stated.

Once operational, the Suhar water transmission project

will ensure reliable supplies of desalinated water to consumers in Dhahirah Governorate, thereby helping conserve groundwater supplies which will be tapped only during contingencies.

In addition to the main transmission line, OWWS is also constructing as many as 15 reservoirs of a combined capacity of 451,000 cubic metres in Suhar, Ibri and Dank.



Four pumping stations with a capacity of 144,000 cubic metres per day will be installed as well along the route of the transmission system.

Also as part of the project, a water pipeline is being laid parallel to the existing transmission line running from Suhar to Al Buraimi Governorate.

This new line will meet the future water needs of the governorate and is part of a system of pipelines that will supply desalination water to the northern regions of Oman.

— ONA



Ministry of
Higher Education,
Research &
Innovation

ELECTRONIC TENDERS

**The Internal Tenders Committee of the
Ministry of Higher Education Research & Innovation
announced the following tenders:**

Tender No.	Tender Name	Company that are entitled to participate	Tender Price	Last Date for purchasing Tender	The deadline for submission of Tenders
01/2021 Recall (2)	Providing Cleaning Services to the Ibri Vocational College	Specialized in providing Same service and registered with the Tender Board with Grade: Excellent, First, Second, Third, Fourth	25/= RO	01/09/2021	11/09/2021
03/2021 Recall (2)	Providing Cleaning Services to Saham Vocational College	Specialized in providing Same service and registered with the Tender Board with Grade: Excellent, First, Second, Third, Fourth	25/= RO	01/09/2021	11/09/2021
04/2021 Recall (1)	Rectification works at MOHERI Headquarters and Carpark Structure	Specialized in providing Same service and registered with the Tender Board with Grade: First	26/200 RO	01/09/2021	11/09/2021
05/2021 Recall (1)	Providing Cleaning Services for the buildings of Seeb Vocational College	Specialized in providing Same service and registered with the Tender Board with Grade: First, Second, Third	25/= RO	01/09/2021	11/09/2021

The purchasing of the tender documents by E-Tendering system will starting on Monday 23/08/2021 at 07:30 am. To purchasing, please visit the following link:
<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om/>

All companies that are bidding must provide a bank guarantee or a certified cheque from a bank operating in the Sultanate for at least (1%) of the tender value on behalf of His Excellency Dr. / Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee.

Preference will be given to companies' or small and medium enterprises registered with the General Authority for the development of Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) that includes the largest proportion of its tender Omanization.

Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender.

**Chairman of tender committee
Ministry of Higher Education Research & Innovation**



www.moh.gov.om

Iran ready to ship more fuel to Lebanon

TEHRAN: Iran said on Monday it is ready to ship more fuel to Lebanon if needed, a day after the leader of Lebanon's Iran-aligned Hezbollah group said more vessels carrying Iranian fuel would sail soon to help ease the country's fuel shortage.

"We sell our oil and its products at the request of our friends and clients. Iran is ready to send fuel again to Lebanon if needed," Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Saeed Khatibzadeh said in an online weekly news conference.

On Sunday Hezbollah's Hassan Nasrallah said the first vessel shipping Iranian fuel to Lebanon, which last Thursday the group announced was about to leave Iran, had already sailed.

Iranian fuel shipments to Lebanon to help ease a crippling fuel shortage were all purchased by a group of Lebanese Shi'ite

businessmen, Iran's semi-official Nournews said on Thursday.

Hezbollah's foes in Lebanon have warned of dire consequences from the move, saying it risked sanctions being imposed on a country whose economy has been in meltdown for nearly two years.

US sanctions on Iran's oil exports, reimposed in 2018 when then-President Donald Trump exited Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with six powers, aim to cut its crude sales to zero.

Hezbollah, founded by Iran's Revolutionary Guards in 1982, has also been targeted by US sanctions.

Nasrallah insisted that the group was not trying to step in and replace the state by purchasing the fuel.

"We are not taking the place of the state, nor are we an alternative to companies that



Lebanese wait in a queue outside a closed petrol station in Beirut's Hamra district. — AFP

import fuel," he said in a speech to supporters without elaborating on how the shipments would enter the country.

The arrival of the Iranian fuel would mark a new phase in the financial crisis, which the Lebanese state and its ruling factions — including Hezbollah — have failed to tackle even as fuel has run dry and shortages have prompted deadly violence.

The US ambassador to Lebanon, Dorothy Shea, said on Thursday that Lebanon didn't need Iranian tankers, citing "a whole bunch" of fuel ships off the coast waiting to unload.

The United States was in talks with Egypt and Jordan to help find solutions to Lebanon's fuel and energy needs, she said, speaking hours after Hezbollah said it was arranging the shipments.

— Reuters

Egypt closes Rafah crossing with Gaza

CAIRO: Egypt is to close the Rafah crossing on its border with the Gaza Strip until further notice on Monday, Egyptian security sources said. Hamas, the Palestinian faction that controls Gaza, said it had been informed by Egypt of the decision to shut the crossing in both directions, without giving details.

According to two Egyptian security sources, the closure was made for security reasons following an escalation on Saturday between Israel and Hamas, with Israeli aircraft striking sites in Gaza after gunfire



Members of Palestinian security forces stand guard at the closed-off Rafah border crossing to Egypt in the southern Gaza Strip, on Monday. — AFP

across Gaza's border with Israel earlier in the day.

Rafah is the sole crossing between Egypt and Gaza, where

an Israeli-led blockade has placed severe restrictions on the movement of goods and people for years. — Agencies

Yemen to get \$665 million of IMF reserves

ADEN: Yemen will receive about \$665 million worth of reserves from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Monday which will help ease an acute economic and humanitarian crisis in the war-torn country, the fund's regional representative for Yemen said.

The distribution is part of a \$650 billion IMF allocation of Special Drawing Rights — the fund's unit of exchange backed by dollars, euros, yen, sterling and yuan — which states receive in proportion with their existing quota shareholding.

"The SDR allocation will boost Yemen's foreign exchange reserves by over 70 per cent, providing

much-needed support to help address the crisis, including with the many urgent food and medical needs of the population," IMF regional representative Gazi Shbaikhat said in a statement to Reuters.

The war, in which a Saudi-led coalition has been battling the Iran-aligned Houthis for over six years, has depleted foreign exchange reserves in Yemen, which imports the bulk of its goods. Around 80% of the population is reliant on aid.

To spend their SDRs, states would first have to exchange them for underlying hard currencies, requiring them to find a willing exchange partner country. — Reuters

Iraq seeks role as mediator with regional summit

BAGHDAD: After decades of conflict, Iraq will pitch itself as a regional mediator as it hosts a leaders' summit this week — despite foreign influence on its territory and a grinding financial crisis.

The meeting in Baghdad on Saturday seeks to give Iraq a "unifying role" to tackle the crises shaking the region, according to sources close to Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Jordan's King Abdullah II have said they plan to attend, as has French President Emmanuel Macron, the only official expected from outside the region.

Leaders from Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey have also been invited.

Kadhemi came to power in May last year after months of unprecedented mass protests

against a ruling class seen as corrupt, inept and subordinate to Tehran.

The new premier had served as the head of Iraq's National Intelligence Service for nearly four years, forming close ties to Tehran, Washington and Riyadh.

His appointment prompted speculation he could serve as a rare mediator among the capitals.

"In the past, under Saddam Hussein, Iraq was a state that was feared and despised in the region and everyone saw it as a threat," said Iraqi political expert Marsin Alshamary.

After the 2003 US-led invasion, it became "a weak state", prone to external influences and meddling.

But Saturday's summit, she said, could be "a positive thing for Iraq".

Renad Mansour of Chatham House said the aim was to



Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi.

President Sisi and King Abdullah II plan to attend, as has President Macron. Leaders from Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey have also been invited

transform Iraq from "a country of messengers to a country that is leading negotiations".

Organisers have been tight-lipped on the meeting's agenda.

But Baghdad has already hosted closed-door encounters in recent months between Tehran and US

ally Riyadh.

The powerful regional arch-rivals had broken off ties in 2016.

If confirmed, the presence of Iranian and Saudi officials this weekend would be notable in itself.

Iraq, for its part, has been caught for years in a delicate balancing act between its two main allies Iran and the United States.

"The ambition is for Iraq to not just be a playground but actually have a role potentially as a mediating force," Mansour said.

Iran exerts major clout in Iraq through allied armed groups within the Hashed al-Shaabi, a powerful state-sponsored paramilitary network.

Since the 2019 anti-government protests, dozens of activists have been killed or abducted.

Some say the killers are known to the security services and despite

government promises of arrests, remain at large — due to their ties to Iran.

Shiite factions operating under the Hashed are also accused of dozens of attacks this year against US interests in Iraq.

Kadhemi is under pressure from pro-Tehran armed factions, who demand the withdrawal of 2,500 US troops still deployed in Iraq.

Turkey is another regional power with an outsized presence in Iraq.

Ankara regularly targets Iraq's northwest in operations against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which Turkey considers a terrorist organisation. The Kurdish separatists, who have waged a decades-long insurgency against Ankara, have bases in the rugged mountains on the Iraqi side of the border. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

CAIRO

Egypt to intensify Covid-19 vaccination

Egypt will vaccinate all 4.5 million of its state employees against Covid-19 in August and September as it seeks to accelerate vaccinations ahead of a likely fourth wave of infections, the health minister said on Monday.

The country's infection rate is still low but started to increase last week and the upward curve is expected to continue for a while, Hala Zayed told a briefing, adding that a significant increase is expected in late September.



"It is important for the Egyptian government and the political leadership that we work to intensify vaccinations in the coming period," Zayed said.

TUNIS

Saudi pledges to provide support for Tunisia

Saudi Arabia pledged on Sunday to provide assistance to Tunisia, which is suffering a political, economic and health crisis, the Tunisian presidency said on Sunday, the latest sign of support for President Kais Saied against his opponents. Saudi State Minister for African Affairs Ahmed Abdul Aziz Kattan met Saied in Tunis and senior officials held talks afterwards to discuss cooperation, the presidency said in a statement.

Saied last month dismissed his



prime minister, froze parliament and assumed executive authority in a sudden intervention that his Islamist opponents have labelled a coup but that he said was necessary to save the country from collapse.

NICOSIA

Cyprus to strip passports from Turk Cypriot officials

The government of Cyprus said on Monday it would revoke the passports from Turkish Cypriot officials in the breakaway state in the northern part of the island.

A number of Turkish Cypriot officials, including incumbent leader Ersin Tatar, are known to hold or held passports of the Republic of Cyprus, even though they administer the Turkish Cypriot state.

The east Mediterranean island was split in a Turkish invasion in 1974 after a brief Greek-



inspired coup. North Cyprus is recognised only by Turkey, while the Republic of Cyprus, run by Greek Cypriots, is internationally recognised.

In brief

■ BEIJING



NO NEW LOCAL COVID-19 CASES SINCE JULY

China reported no new locally transmitted cases of Covid-19 on Monday for the first time since July, a sign the current outbreak may be waning amid Beijing's 'zero-tolerance' stance and tough anti-virus measures across the country.

More than 1,200 people have been confirmed infected in an outbreak that officials said has been mainly driven by the highly transmissible Delta variant, which was brought in from abroad and caused a cluster in late July in the eastern city of Nanjing.

No deaths have been reported in the outbreak.

■ SEOUL



US: NO HOSTILE INTENT TOWARDS NORTH KOREA

The United States has no hostile intent towards Pyongyang and is open to meeting any time and any place, Washington's special envoy for North Korea said on Monday during a visit to South Korea.

Sung Kim arrived in Seoul on Saturday for a four-day visit.

The visit comes as a brief thaw in inter-Korean relations in July gave way to a new standoff over US-South Korean military exercises that North Korea has warned could trigger a security crisis. "The United States does not have hostile intent toward (North Korea)", Kim told reporters after meeting with his South Korean counterpart, Noh Kyu-Duk.

■ BALI



'SUITCASE KILLER' SET FOR EARLY RELEASE

An American woman convicted with her boyfriend of killing her mother and stuffing the body in a suitcase at a luxury Bali hotel is to be freed from prison early, her lawyer said on Monday.

In 2015, teenager Heather Mack was handed a 10-year jail term while her boyfriend Tommy Schaefer got 18 years for the murder of Chicago socialite Sheila von Wiese Mack on the Indonesian holiday island.

Schaefer beat the 62-year-old victim to death with a fruit bowl during a heated argument at the five-star St Regis resort, before the couple abandoned the suitcase containing the battered body in a taxi and fled.

Taliban reject extended evacuation as chaos reigns



The crowds of people near the airport in Kabul on Monday. — Reuters

KABUL: The Taliban warned on Monday there would be "consequences" if the United States and its allies extend their presence in Afghanistan beyond next week, as chaos continued to overwhelm Kabul airport.

The hardline group's takeover of the country last weekend shocked Western nations, coming just two weeks before an August 31 deadline for all troops to fully withdraw from the country.

To manage the chaotic airlifting of foreigners and Afghans — many of whom fear reprisals for working with Western nations — thousands of soldiers have poured back into Afghanistan, with pressure growing on Washington to extend the deadline.

But the Taliban, who have so far sought to strike a more moderate tone, showed no willingness to compromise on the US pullout.

"If the US or UK were to seek additional time to continue evacuations — the answer is no. Or there would be consequences", Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen told Sky News on

Monday.

Staying beyond the agreed deadline would be "extending occupation", he added.

Two Taliban sources said the group would not announce the makeup of its government or cabinet until the last US soldier has left the country.

The rush to leave Kabul has sparked harrowing scenes and killed at least eight people, some crushed to death while at least one person died after falling from a moving plane.

One Afghan was killed and three others were injured in a dawn firefight on Monday that according to the German military erupted between Afghan guards and unknown assailants.

German and American troops "participated in further exchange of fire", the German army said in a statement.

The Taliban, infamous for an ultra-strict interpretation of sharia law during their initial 1996-2001 rule, have repeatedly vowed a softer version this time.

President Biden has insisted

he wants to end the US military presence and the airlifts by August 31.

But with the European Union and Britain saying it would be impossible to get everyone out by then, Biden is under pressure to extend the deadline.

Speaking at the White House on Sunday, Biden said talks were under way to explore the possibility of extending the deadline.

He also acknowledged the tragic scenes at the airport, which have included babies and children being passed to soldiers over razor-wire fences and men clinging to the outside of departing planes.

But he said they were part of the cost of departure.

"There is no way to evacuate this many people without pain and loss and heartbreaking images you see," he said.

In the streets of the capital, the Taliban have enforced a calm of a kind, with their armed forces patrolling the streets and manning checkpoints.

— Agencies

Risks of party revolt grow for Japan's PM after local poll loss

TOKYO: Unpopular Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga (pictured) looks increasingly vulnerable to a challenge from within his party for the nation's top job after an ally's defeat in a local election on Sunday seen as a referendum on Suga's Covid-19 response.

If Suga loses, he would join a long list of short-term premiers. He took over in September after Shinzo Abe quit, citing ill health and ending a rare lengthy term of nearly eight years.

Suga, whose term as ruling Liberal Democratic Party leader ends next month, has seen his support slide from highs of about 70 per cent to below 30 per cent, with a weekend poll by ANN News putting support at 25.8 per cent as Japan battles an explosive surge of Covid-19 infections.

On Monday, domestic media reported that former Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida is likely to run in the LDP's leadership race.

The defeat of Hachiro Okonogi, son of Suga's political mentor and a former cabinet minister, in Sunday's election for Yokohama city mayor, will most likely amplify calls to replace Suga ahead of a Lower House election that must be held by November.

Opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan candidate Takeharu Yamanaka, a former professor of public health, won by a landslide in Suga's constituency near Tokyo.

"The LDP is being severely criticised in my constituency, so it's very hard to fight under Suga", said a junior LDP lawmaker from a conservative rural district, who declined to be named because of the sensitivity of the situation.

Such views are expected to spread.

"For certain, voices saying they can't fight the general election under Suga will grow louder", said



Scenarios include Suga losing the LDP race to a rival, bowing out early, or winning the party vote and keeping his job if LDP losses in the Lower House poll are limited

political analyst Atsuo Ito. "The chances of multiple candidates (in the LDP race) will increase."

Still, uncertainty remains. Suga told reporters on Monday there was no change in his plan to run in the LDP poll. No party bosses who backed Suga last year have publicly withdrawn support.

"We should not change the ship's captain in the midst of a storm", one senior LDP lawmaker said ahead of the mayoral vote.

Scenarios include Suga losing the LDP race to a rival, bowing out early, or winning the party vote and keeping his job if LDP losses in the lower house poll are limited.

Suga's election track record isn't good. Abe led his coalition to victory in six national elections, but Suga has seen defeats in by-elections and a lacklustre showing in a Tokyo local poll.

Lower House members' four-year terms end on October 21. An election for the chamber must be held by November 28 but is expected sooner. — Reuters

Indian capital opens first 'smog tower'

NEW DELHI: India's capital New Delhi opened its first "smog tower" on Monday aimed at reducing the air pollution blamed for thousands of premature deaths every year, but experts were sceptical.

Concentrations of tiny deadly particles in Delhi's air regularly exceed safe limits by up to 20 times, particularly in winter when its 20 million people are enveloped in a noxious grey blanket of smog.

Forty giant fans on the 25-metre (82-foot) tower will pump 1,000 cubic metres of air per second through filters that halve the amount of harmful particulates in a radius of one square kilometre (0.4 square miles), according to engineers.

"Today is a big day for Delhi in its fight for clean air against pollution", Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said after the inauguration near the busy shopping area of Connaught Place.

The installation "is being looked at in an experimental way. We will analyse the data and if it's effective, more towers will be built across Delhi", Kejriwal added.

The tower cost \$2 million and critics say erecting a sufficient number to clean the



Workers climb a ladder at the 25-metre (82-foot) high smog tower, built to purify the air during pollution season, in New Delhi on Monday. — AFP

air substantially across the city would cost huge amounts of public money, and that efforts would be better directed at the sources of the smog. These include vehicle exhaust, heavy and small-scale industry, construction activity, the combustion of waste and fuel and in winter the burning of crops in neighbouring regions.

"Let's just be clear that this is futile, an absolute waste", Karthik Ganesan from the Council on Energy, Environment and Water told AFP.

"Now that taxpayers' money has been spent, let Delhi be the test case for all other Indian cities... to ensure no other city spends on such ideas which we can't afford", he added.

India has 14 of the world's 15 most polluted cities, according to the World Health Organization.

A 2020 study in the *Lancet* found there were 1.67 million deaths in the country attributable to air pollution in 2019 including almost 17,500 in Delhi.

In 2018 China built a much larger 60-metre smog tower in the polluted city of Xian, but the experiment has not spread to other cities so far. — AFP

US grants Pfizer vaccine full approval

WASHINGTON: The US Food and Drug Administration on Monday fully approved the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid vaccine, a move expected to trigger a new wave of vaccine mandates as the Delta variant batters the country.

Around 52 per cent of the country is fully vaccinated, but health authorities have hit a wall of vaccine hesitant people, impeding the national campaign.

“The FDA’s approval of this vaccine is a milestone as we continue to battle the Covid-19 pandemic,” acting FDA Commissioner Janet Woodcock said in a statement.

“While all three Covid vaccines have met FDA’s strict standards for emergency use, this FDA approval should give added confidence that this vaccine is safe and effective. If you’re not vaccinated yet, now is the time,” tweeted President Joe Biden.

The vaccine, which will now be marketed under its brand name Comirnaty, is the first to receive full approval. More than 200 million shots have already been administered under an emergency use authorisation (EUA) that was granted on December 11, 2020.

The decision to approve it among people aged 16 and up was based on updated data from the drug’s clinical trial, which found the vaccine more than 90 per cent effective in preventing Covid.

“Overall, approximately 12,000

“
While all three Covid vaccines have met FDA’s strict standards for emergency use, this FDA approval should give added confidence that this vaccine is safe and effective. If you’re not vaccinated yet, now is the time

JOE BIDEN
US President

recipients have been followed for at least six months,” the FDA said in its statement.

Most commonly reported side effects included pain, redness and swelling at the injection site, fatigue, headache, muscle or joint pain, chills and fever.

The FDA is continuing to investigate safety data regarding myocarditis (heart inflammation), particularly within seven days after the second dose. The data so far shows an increased risk among males under 40 compared to females and older males.

The highest risk has been detected in boys aged 12 through 17, with available data suggesting most individuals recover but some re-



quire intensive care.

The US military said shortly after the announcement that it would mandate the vaccine, and a slew of private businesses and universities are expected to follow.

Immediately after the announcement, New York City said it would require all its department of education employees to receive at least one dose of vaccine by September 27, without the option for regular testing instead.

The vaccine remains available under emergency use authorisation to children aged 12 to 15, but

because it has now been fully approved, physicians may prescribe it to children under 12 if they believe it will be beneficial.

“One of the talking points of the anti-vaccine movement which has falsely claimed that this was an ‘experimental vaccine’ has been removed,” Amesh Adalja of the Johns Hopkins University Center for Health Security said.

“Hopefully now you’ll see people who said that they were waiting for full approval line up to get vaccinated, hopefully more organisations, more businesses will require

the vaccine as a condition of employment as a condition of participation.”

A recent survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation found 30 per cent of adults said full approval would make them more likely to get vaccinated.

It comes as the ultra-contagious Delta variant pummels the country, with new cases and hospitalisations approaching levels last seen during the winter wave.

The hardest hit regions include southern states Florida, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. — AFP

Delegates hash out UN biodiversity goals online

PARIS: Country delegates met online on Monday to start tackling a draft agreement for the pandemic-delayed COP15 global summit on biodiversity, days after the new summit date of April 2022 was set.

The virtual discussions between delegations from 195 countries are the first to be held since the UN unveiled the text in July and are slated to run until September 3.

The fruit of months of online talks, the draft calls for the preservation of at least 30 per cent of land and oceans, along with other biodiversity targets.

It maps out the route for humanity to be “living in harmony with nature” by 2050, outlining dozens of targets and milestones to be hit by 2030 to preserve biodiversity.

But environmental and conservation groups are lobbying for stronger language in the draft agreement around several key issues, including the measures needed to stave off further outbreaks of deadly viruses such as SARS-CoV-2. “It’s not ambitious enough at all,” Wildlife Conservation society vice president Susan Lieberman said. — AFP

Changing of the Guard back on at Buckingham Palace

LONDON: Soldiers in bearskin hats and red tunics marched outside Buckingham Palace in London on Monday for the first Changing of the Guard ceremony since the pandemic began.

The elite 1st Battalion Coldstream Guard soldiers performed the colourful tradition in the palace courtyard for the first time since March 2020, when it was halted to avoid spreading infection.

Forces News reported that this was the longest pause in holding the ceremony since World War II.

The Changing of the Guard is a ceremonial handover between guards on duty and those taking over.

Monday’s event included a musical tribute to the UK’s Olympic athletes with the military brass band playing tunes including “Gold” by Spandau Ballet and the Olympics theme music, as spectators watched through the fence.



Members of the Nijmegen Company Grenadier Guards take part in the Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace on Monday. — AFP

Queen Elizabeth II is not in residence at the palace as she is on her annual holiday at Balmoral, Scotland.

Garrison Sergeant Major Andrew Stokes, of the Coldstream Guards, who was in charge of the ceremony’s return, said: “It’s been a long time coming.”

Many of the young soldiers had not taken part in the ceremony

before, having joined the Guards since it was postponed, he said.

For those taking part, “it instils an awful lot of pride knowing that all these people have come to watch these very young guardsmen and musicians.”

During the pandemic, the Grenadier Guards have helped run virus testing and vaccination centres. — AFP

Palau loses virus-free status with first Covid cases

KOROR: The tiny Pacific nation of Palau reported its first cases of coronavirus on Saturday, losing its prized status as one of the world’s few Covid-free countries as authorities appealed for calm.

Two travellers, who tested positive after arriving from Guam, have been placed in quarantine along with their known contacts.

“We urge everyone to remain calm,” the Ministry of Health said in a statement after deciding against imposing lockdown measures.

With more than 80 per cent of the 18,000 population fully vaccinated, President Surangel Whipps insisted the remote island state “has been Covid-free but is now Covid-safe”.

Until Saturday Palau was just one of fourteen countries in the world that had recorded no virus cases at all, according to the World Health Organization.

The Health Ministry would not say how many contacts were



Two travellers, who tested positive after arriving from Guam, have been placed in quarantine along with their known contacts.

in isolation but a spokesman said they did not believe there had been any community transmission.

Whipps added if anyone who has been fully vaccinated does become infected “it will be just like a flu or they won’t show symptoms at all”.

The infected travellers tested negative 72 hours before departure but were positive when they had

a compulsory test five days after arrival.

Palau protocols demand that in the first five days after arriving, people wear masks and avoid crowds. The country is not able to determine which strain of the coronavirus the new cases are and a sample has been sent to the United States for analysis.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

WASHINGTON

US blacklists Eritrean official over rights abuse

The United States on Monday imposed sanctions on an Eritrean official it accused of being engaged in serious human rights abuse in the conflict in Ethiopia’s Tigray region, where thousands have been killed and over 2 million displaced.

The US Treasury Department in a statement said it blacklisted Filipos Woldeyohannes, the chief of staff of the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF). The Treasury said he commands EDF forces that have been operating in Tigray.



The Treasury accused the forces of being responsible for massacres, sexual assaults and purposely shooting civilians in the streets, among other human rights abuses.

KIEV

Summit seeks to end ‘occupation’ of Crimea

Ukraine and its Western allies on Monday agreed to work towards “peacefully” ending Russia’s “occupation” of Crimea in a summit that sparked anger in Moscow.

The support for Ukraine — which has little chance of changing Russia’s position — follows complaints from Kiev in recent months about its allies being reluctant to allow it to join Nato, refusing to deliver arms and Maintaining gas agreements with Moscow to the detriment of Ukraine.



The inaugural summit comes seven years after Moscow annexed the Crimean peninsula and a pro-Russian insurgency broke out in eastern Ukraine that has claimed more than 13,000 lives.

BRASÍLIA

Brazil indigenous protesters slam Bolsonaro

With feather headdresses, grass skirts and body paint, hundreds of indigenous demonstrators camped out in Brasilia on Monday to protest President Jair Bolsonaro’s policies and an initiative that could take away their ancestral lands.

Pounding wooden tent poles into the ground, the protesters set up the “Fight for Life” camp outside the seat of power in the Brazilian capital, near the trio of modernist buildings housing the presidency, Congress and the



Supreme Court.

Convened by the Association of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (APIB), the protest camp, which opened on Sunday, will hold a week of demos and other activities.

Security crisis drives up Nigeria’s food worries

EMMANUEL ANULE

Rice farmer Donald Amokaha spends his days weeding a temporary plot outside the city of Makurdi, on the fringes of the Benue river in Nigeria’s agricultural heartland. Two hours drive away into the countryside, Amokaha has a swathe of prime farmland, but it lies abandoned. Fear of attacks forced him to leave earlier this year.

“I usually cultivate rice, millet and sesame seeds on 100 hectares of land in Guma... but this year, I ran,” Amokaha said. “I ploughed 40 hectares but was unable to plant.”

Amokaha is only one of a growing number of farmers who are fleeing violence in Nigeria’s crop-growing Middle Belt.

The agricultural heartland, like Nigeria’s northwestern states, is in the grip of years-long tit-for-tat violence between nomadic herders and farmers — a feud that has sharpened as climate change intensifies competition for water and land.

While insecurity is rooted in that herder-farmer conflict, the crisis in northwest Nigeria has spiralled into broader criminality with mass abductions for ransom, cattle theft and banditry. The rural exodus is a key factor in driving up the cost of food in Africa’s most populous country, hitting its tens of millions of poor.

The government’s statistics bureau says inflation in June was around 17 per cent compared with a year earlier.

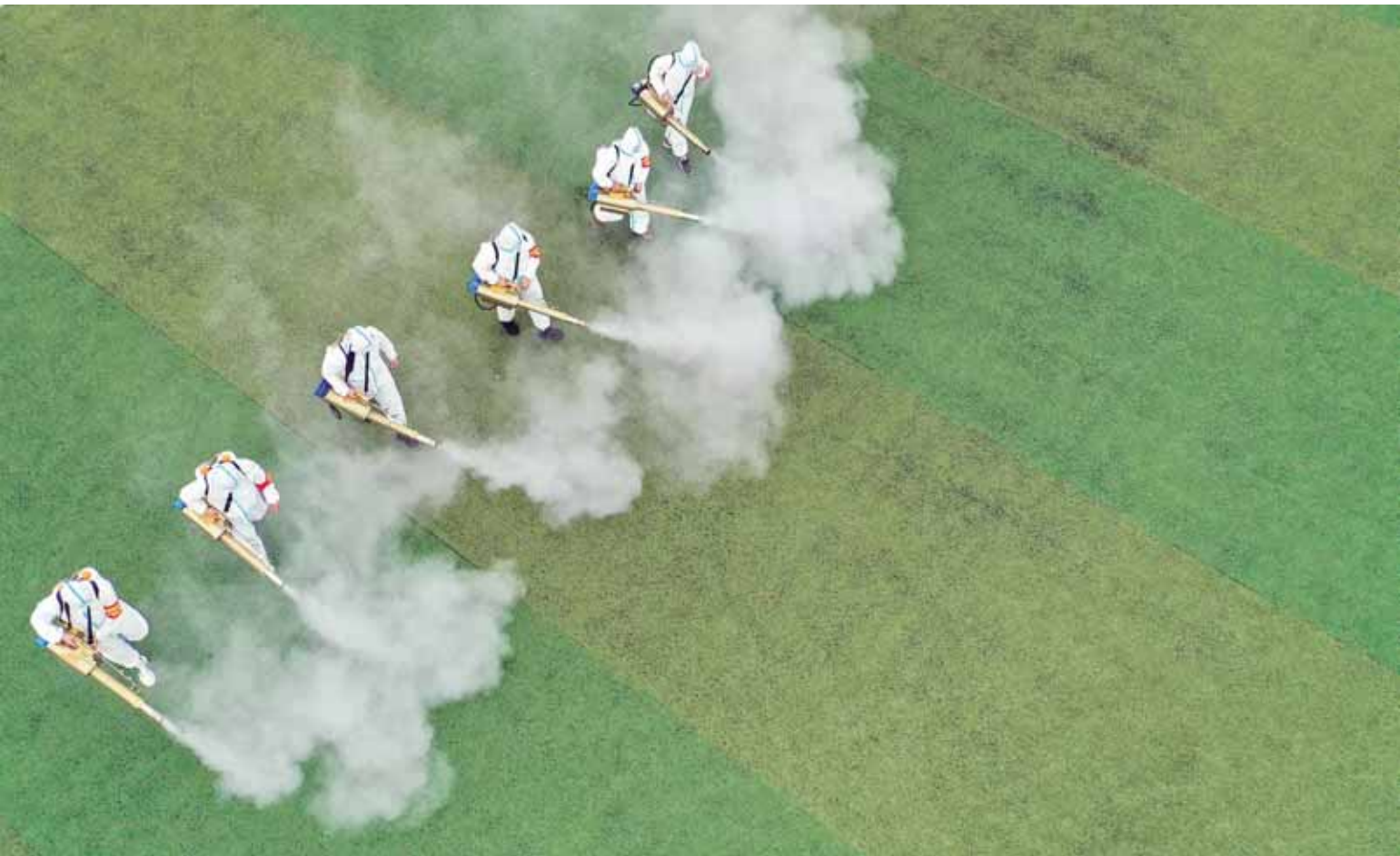
The rise has been fuelled by the fallout from the global pandemic, which has triggered a slump in petroleum demand, badly hitting revenues in oil-producing Nigeria. But within the index lies even worse news: food inflation of 22 per cent.

In Nasawara state, on the outskirts of Nigeria’s capital Abuja, vegetable seller Badamasi Bello is anxious.

He said he loses customers daily because of the spiralling price of commodities. The high cost of transportation is also contributing to rising prices.

“I used to sell tomatoes and peppers, but things are now costly. I sold 10 bags of these items daily, but customers are no longer coming like before. I now sell only two bags in a day.”

— AFP



READY FOR NEW SEMESTER

This aerial photo shows staff members spraying disinfectant on Monday at a school ahead of the new semester in Bozhou in China’s eastern Anhui province. — AFP

“I usually cultivate rice, millet and sesame seeds on 100 hectares of land in Guma... but this year, I ran. I ploughed 40 hectares but was unable to plant”
AMOKAHA
A Farmer

With no funds coming in, Afghans face an economic cataclysm

NABIH BULOS

With the Taliban cementing its grip on Afghanistan, the country faces an economic cataclysm, as world powers and international financial institutions move to withhold or freeze billions of dollars in assets and aid from a government-run by the movement.

The group’s blitz into the Afghan capital, Kabul, leaves it in charge of a war-stressed state heavily reliant on outside dollars that, during the last two decades, have covered three-quarters of government spending. Some of that may be in jeopardy as the Taliban is subject to a bevy of sanctions from the US, the European Union and the United Nations.

Without that money — Kabul received \$4.2 billion in development assistance in 2019 — the government is all but bankrupt. The Taliban is facing enormous pressure to show Afghans and the world that it can pay civil servants, buy fuel, pick up garbage, run hospitals and develop a country more modernised and transformed from when the group first ruled between 1996 and 2001.

The Taliban’s return to power — its sneaker-wearing, camouflage-fitted fighters roam the capital — has plunged the group into the realities of governance. Sporadic protests against it have broken out across the country by a population that has grown accustomed to smartphones, civil liberties, education and other freedoms that came with years of American occupation.

The group is suppressing resistance while attempting to show the international community, including China and other regional investors, that, despite its militant roots and fundamentalism, it can lead a nation.

Image has become increasingly important: Taliban spokespeople have been reaching out to foreign journalists in Kabul, suggesting the group is not what it was 20 years ago, when women were forbidden from working.

Not far from where those spokespeople congregate is another image, that of thousands of Afghans running a chaotic gauntlet of dangers, including truncheon-wielding Taliban fighters, to make their

way to the airport and escape the country.

But the more immediate problem is that Afghanistan, one of the world’s poorest countries, is a cash economy, with only 10 per cent of the adult population keeping a bank account, according to a 2018 World Bank report.

The local currency, the afghani, is propped up by regular bulk shipments of dollars from abroad every few weeks to Afghanistan’s central bank.

Those funds are drawn from some \$9-10 billion in foreign currency and gold reserves as well as liquid assets such as US Treasury bonds, according to Ajmal Ahmady, former head of the country’s central bank, who escaped from the country on August 15.

The last shipment of those funds was due to arrive that day, which is when the Taliban seized the capital, meaning that the country is in effect starved of dollars. Even before the Taliban breached Kabul, the central bank had placed limits on withdrawals. Since then, financial institutions and money exchange shops have remained shuttered. — dpa

The adventures of a blonde and a very old car



Rachael MacIver
Instagram: @rachael_maciver

IT WAS GETTING LATE AND WE DECIDED TO SET UP CAMP FOR THE NIGHT JUST OUTSIDE THAMRAIT

“Checkmate!” Mrs J shouted out, completely out of the blue and completely unrelated to anything.

“What??” I looked at her next to me in the passenger’s seat.

We had left the Ubar museum behind us and were back on the main road to Salalah, in our quest to one day safely reach the City of Coconuts. Which, if I had to be honest, was taking somewhat longer than I had planned with Mrs J by my side. Not only because the Pajero was still firmly stuck in third gear, but also because Mrs J insisted on stopping to visit every tourist sight which carried more than 3 stars in her tourist guide book. I was still working on a plan to accidentally ‘lose’ that book somewhere along the way. I hadn’t succeeded so far.

“You know, checkmate, as in chess” she repeated and gave me

one of those looks you give 35-year-olds who still haven’t learned to tie their shoelaces.

“Did you know, that the chess piece archaeologists found when excavating the ruins of the fortress in Ubar, and which we just saw photos of in the museum, is part of the earliest medieval chess sets found in the Middle East?” Mrs J continued her lecture straight from the dreaded guidebook.

“And did you know, that when the game of chess was introduced from Persia to the Middle East, the players still used the Persian word for king – ‘shah’ - and would call it out when attacking their opponent? ‘Shah mat’ (Persian for ‘the king is helpless’) which would be used when the king could not escape the attack, became today’s ‘checkmate’. Wow, this is so fascinating.” Mrs J was all fired up

and eager to share her newfound knowledge. What she forgot was that she was talking to someone who still lost every single game of ‘Snakes and Ladders’, even when playing against kids. Chess was too advanced for me.

It was getting late and we decided to set up camp for the night just outside Thamrait. We had already reached the roundabouts which gave us a few choices: the airforce base, Salalah, town centre – and somewhere else. We chose the exit to somewhere else and soon came across an area perfect for our needs. No houses, sandy ground, big rocks to shield out tents, and yet still close enough to town and dinner options. There were quite a few wheel tracks in the sand so we just followed one of them at random. Half buried plastic sheets and what looked like

blown-away camouflage nets were strewn around but it was getting dark fast and we decided to close our eyes to the mess and quickly get the tents up.

It was a freezing cold night. Both Mrs J and I slept poorly and got up before sunrise, shivering with cold.

“Listen to the thunder in the distance,” I told Mrs J who was grumpily waiting for the campfire to warm her up a bit. It sounded like heavy thunder, deep rumblings and loud booms, just behind the rocky hills. “It’s getting closer”, she agreed. Lightening.

Then all hell broke loose. Let’s just say that we didn’t bother packing the camping gear neatly but rather threw it in the back of the car and did a frantic tap-dance on the campfire to put it out, as the military vehicles came over the hill. We sped as fast as the old

Pajero could manage across sand, rocks and camouflage netting to reach the tarmac. In fact, we went so fast that we hardly noticed the large sign, which we had obviously missed in the dark the night before, saying: ‘Ministry of Defence range. Keep out when the red flag or red lamps are displayed’. We had also missed the red flag.

The silence in the car was deafening. Mrs J once more referred to her guidebook.

“The poet Al-Katib once said about chess that the skilled player places his pieces in such a way as to discover consequences that the ignorant man (or woman) never sees...”

I admit it, we hadn’t been skillfully placed. It hadn’t been a great move. We had been ignorant.

“Oh, put a sock in it!” was all I could think of saying.



ISSA CLAIMS TWO GOLD, MOHAMMED TRIUMPHS IN DOHA

OMAN BAG 13 MEDALS IN GCC SWIMMING

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 23

Oman’s promising swimmer Issa al Adawi claimed two gold medals for the Sultanate at the 28th GCC Aquatic Championships in 200 metres and 400 metres freestyle events while his teammate Mohammed al Wahaibi bagged the third gold medal in backstroke 50 metres event.

At Hamad Aquatics Centre in Doha on Sunday, the Sultanate’s swimming team ended their participation with a tally of 13 medals as an outcome from the GCC championship including three gold, five silver and five bronze medals. Oman swimming team was placed in the third position in senior category while Kuwait topped the order and hosts Qatar finished runners-up.

All the GCC countries participated in the championships which last for four days from August 19 to 22.

The five silver medals for the Sultanate came through Abdulrahman al Kulaibi who managed to earn two silver medals in 400 metres and 200 metres medley events.

Talented swimmer Muath al Sihbani claimed two silver as well in 50 metres freestyle and 50

Oman finished overall third in Doha with three gold, five silver and five bronze medals



metres breaststroke events. The freestyle relay team won a silver medal in the 4x200 freestyle relay event for the senior category.

Young swimmer Hussain Tariq Taha managed to earn two bronze medals in 200 metres and 100 metres breaststroke events. His teammate Mashal al Kulaibi won the bronze in 50 metres freestyle, while Issa al Adawi added another bronze in 800 metres freestyle. The freestyle relay team won a bronze medal in the 4x100 freestyle relay event.

On the other hand, Taha al Kishry, Oman Swimming Association (OSA) chairman and Fina Bureau member attended the meeting of Fina president Hussain al Musallam with the Qatar Swimming Association (QSA) president and FINA Bureau member Khaleel al Jaber.

The Fina chief appreciated the positive efforts made by the QSA to organise the championship successfully. “Doha has all the facilities and good infrastructure to host the 2023 Fina World Championships and World Masters as the best-ever in history. Doha has the experience to host this mega event,” he said.

The Oman delegation arrived in Muscat on Monday after the successful participation at 28th GCC Aquatic Championships.

Zverev adds Cincy Masters to Olympic gold

BARTY CRUISES PAST TEICHMANN TO GRAB WOMEN'S TITLE

CINCINNATI: Alexander Zverev backed up his Olympic triumph with a fifth ATP Masters 1000 title as he crushed Andrey Rublev 6-2, 6-3 in Cincinnati on Sunday.

The German needed less than an hour against his longtime childhood friend and rival to lift the trophy and put himself into a solid position with the US Open starting a week from Monday.

"The US Open starts in a week's time, so obviously I want to keep it up and I want to maybe play even better there", Zverev said.

Women's world number one Ashleigh Barty was similarly impressive in winning her fifth title of the season at the combined ATP and WTA event, cruising past Swiss wild card Jil Teichmann 6-3, 6-1.

The Australian, who will keep a firm grip on the number one ranking as the final Grand Slam of the year approaches, took control mid-way through the opening set and was never truly threatened.

"It's been an awesome week, with each match it was getting progressively better", Barty said.

"Today I was able to trust myself and play with confidence, which was important in a big final.

"I'm excited to get matches in tough conditions here in Cincy going into New York."

Zverev showed no effects from the stomach discomfort which forced him to take a medical



Alexander Zverev (GER) holds the Rookwood Cup after defeating Andrey Rublev (RUS) in the final. – USA Today Sports

timeout during his draining semifinal victory over Stefanos Tsitsipas on Saturday.

Zverev won his 11th match in a row and his fifth against Rublev, a player he's been playing since their junior days.

The German came into the week with six defeats in prior Cincinnati appearances, but turned that negative on its head.

"My first win here was on Wednesday and now I'm holding

the title four days later", he said.

"It's been an incredible week, I had a lot of great matches. It's a great feeling going into the Open."

Zverev kept his unforced error count to just six, though he was out-aced by Rublev 11 to six.

The third seed produced 16 winners and broke Rublev five times.

Zverev's only minor hiccup came as he was broken while serving for victory leading 5-2 in



Ashleigh Barty (AUS) with the trophy after winning the final. – USA Today Sports

the second set. But he closed out the convincing win a game later with a timely break back as Rublev found the net with a return.

"Until the end I was playing pretty good tennis", Zverev said. "I didn't do a big celebration at the net since Andrey and I have been best friends since we were 11 or 12.

"With my Olympic gold and this fifth Masters I'm really looking forward to New York."

BARTY DOMINATES

Although she doesn't leave Cincinnati with a trophy, women's runner-up Teichmann departs after a stellar week.

The world No 76 beat three top 12 players, including four-time Grand Slam winner Naomi Osaka, fourth seed Karolina Pliskova and Olympic gold medallist Belinda Bencic of Switzerland.

But she had no answers as

Wimbledon champion Barty stretched her WTA Tour-leading match win tally this season to 40.

"I'm very happy with my week, today I wanted to win, but Ash was just too good", she said.

"I felt like I was there in the first set, but suddenly the first set was gone. She stepped up her level in the second — she was too good."

Barty played a near-impeccable match against a first-time Masters-level finalist, losing serve only once as she served for victory.

The top seed quickly corrected course, breaking Teichmann back in the final game to clinch the title in 71 minutes.

Barty, who didn't drop a set all week, said she hadn't expected her run to the title to be so seamless after she had played only the Olympics since Wimbledon.

The double Grand Slam champion will on Monday start her 83rd consecutive week in the number one spot. The win in her 19th career singles final gave Barty a 13th trophy, including seven from her last eight finals appearances. —AFP

ATP/WTA Cincinnati results	
Men (final)	
Alexander Zverev (GER x3)	bt Andrey Rublev (RUS x4) 6-2, 6-3
Women (final)	
Ashleigh Barty (AUS x1)	bt Jil Teichmann (SUI) 6-3, 6-1

Juve stumble at Udinese, winning start for Mourinho

MILAN: Cristiano Ronaldo was denied a last-gasp winner to save Juventus after his stoppage-time header was ruled out for offside in a dramatic 2-2 draw at Udinese, while Jose Mourinho got off to a winning start at Roma with a 3-1 victory over Fiorentina.

Ronaldo started on the bench at the Dacia Arena in Udine amid rumours he is looking for a way out of the Italian giants, but he almost snatched the three points deep into stoppage time after Juve insisted he was going nowhere this term.

After the match returning coach Massimiliano Allegri played down the controversy, saying that he was always planning to bring on Ronaldo.

"Cristiano is OK... It's the start of the season and seeing the condition everyone is in and thinking about the game, especially at the beginning, I put him on the bench knowing that there would be a need for him to come on", he told broadcaster DAZN. "He made himself available, like everyone. He played well, even scored a goal but unfortunately it didn't stand."

Allegri's Juve looked to be cruising to victory when Paulo Dybala, wearing the captain's armband, and Juan Cuadrado put them two ahead midway through the first half. But two second-half blunders from Juve 'keeper Wojciech Szczesny allowed Udinese to take a point through Roberto Pereyra's penalty and a Gerard Deulofeu strike.

Ronaldo entered the field to loud applause from the Juve fans on the hour mark with Juve leading 2-1 and he was unlucky not to restore their two-goal advantage when his header from a



Juventus' Cristiano Ronaldo heads the ball against Udinese. – AFP

Dybala cross flashed wide.

And with just seconds left he wheeled away after meeting Federico Chiesa's pinpoint cross with a trademark header, celebrating with his jubilant teammates who thought he had saved their skins.

However he could only watch on in desperation as his winner was chalked off by VAR.

ABRAHAM REPAYS MOURINHO

It was the most dramatic moment in an eventful night in the Italian top flight, with six red cards in four matches and three big-name managers returning to the touchline.



AS Roma's Tammy Abraham in action. – Reuters

The one with the biggest reputation — Mourinho — was made happy by two assists from new signing Tammy Abraham who shone on his Roma debut at the Stadio Olimpico.

With Fiorentina already down to 10 men, in the 26th minute Abraham slipped through Henrikh Mkhitaryan whose neat finish was given as a goal after a long VAR check.

Nicolo Zaniolo's second yellow card gave a brave Fiorentina side hope and Nikola Milenkovic levelled the scores on the hour mark. However great work again from Abraham — who also hit the bar — led to Roma retaking the lead through Jordan Veretout

four minutes later, the 23-year-old just about staying onside before rolling a perfect low cross which allowed the French midfielder to slot home.

Veretout made sure Mourinho got three points from his first match in Serie A since winning the league with Inter Milan in 2010 when he rolled home the third in the 79th minute after collecting a brilliant Eldor Shomurodov pass.

"We were good 11 against 11, good 10 against 10, but with 11 against 10 we weren't that good", Mourinho told DAZN.

"I liked the spirit, the sacrifice the work we put in after the super difficult match on Thursday. But we had difficult moments that I wasn't expecting."

Luciano Spalletti also triumphed on his return to football with Napoli, his team running out 2-0 winners over promoted Venezia. — AFP

ITALIAN SERIE A RESULTS ON SUNDAY:	
Bologna 3 (De Silvestri 59, Arnautovic 75, De Silvestri 77)	Salernitana 2 (Bonazzoli 52, Coulibaly 70)
Udinese 2 (Pereyra 51-pen, Deulofeu 83)	Juventus 2 (Dybala 3, Cuadrado 23)
Roma 3 (Mkhitaryan 26, Veretout 64, 79)	Fiorentina 1 (Milenkovic 60)
Napoli 2 (Insigne 62-pen, Elmas 73)	Venezia 0
On Saturday	
Inter Milan 4 (Skriniar 6, Calhanoglu 16, Vidal 74, Dzeko 87)	Genoa 0
Verona 2 (Zaccagni 71-pen, 90)	Sassuolo 3 (Raspadori 32, Djuricic 51, Traore 77)
Empoli 1 (Bandinelli 4)	Lazio 3 (Milenkovic-Savic 6, Lazzari 31, Immobile 41-pen)
Torino 1 (Belotti 79)	Atalanta 2 (Muriel 6, Piccoli 93)

Chelsea show strength early in season

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, AUG 23

An imperious Romelu Lukaku led Chelsea to an overwhelming 2-0 win over Arsenal in a London derby which showed that Chelsea may well be regarded as favourites to challenge for the league title. Their £97.5 million signing from Inter Milan, Lukaku, was voted man-of-the-match, with his side in dominant form throughout the match.

Chelsea manager, Thomas Tuchel, praised Lukaku: “Nobody likes to play against him. Everybody is aware of his physicality, but there is also his link-up play. I’m very happy with the way he’s integrated already, he’s a smart guy. He likes to be in the group, he’s a democratic leader, he talks to everybody, very friendly, very humble and competitive.”

Tuchel added: “He gives something to our game we didn’t have so much last season. To protect balls, to play direct into the last line and you can’t start better than with a goal. I didn’t expect too much, I wanted to see his strengths and capability to adapt and to link up between Kai Havertz and Mason Mount and he did very good.”

Arsenal were totally outplayed in the first half. They were too easy to pass through and around with incredible ease. Within 15 minutes they conceded the first goal. Mateo Kovacic played a fine pass to Reece James on the right whose cross was tapped in by the lurking Lukaku with Pablo Mari beaten and Bernd Leno missing the ball. It was his first goal for Chelsea in his ‘second coming’ having made his debut for the club nearly a decade ago and

“Nobody likes to play against him. Everybody is aware of his physicality, but there is also his link-up play. I’m very happy with the way he’s integrated already, he’s a smart guy. He likes to be in the group, he’s a democratic leader, he talks to everybody, very friendly, very humble and competitive”

THOMAS TUCHEL
Chelsea manager

leaving without a goal to his name.

After a further 20 minutes of Chelsea’s domination, came the second goal. Marcos Alonso combined with Havertz on the left to start the move before Mount put the ball to James who seemed to play with freedom on the right and the wing-back brilliantly slammed the ball into the roof of the net.

Lukaku could have had a third goal for his side but was unlucky to see his powerful header tipped against the bar in an excellent save by Leno in the 78th minute. Earlier in the second half, with Arsenal showing improvement, Edouard Mendy tipped over the bar a fine shot by Bukayo Saka. The Arsenal man also had a penalty claim turned down by the referee and VAR in the first half after he was tackled by James.

Mikel Arteta, the Arsenal



Arsenal's Granit Xhaka in action with Chelsea's N'Golo Kante. – Reuters

manager, who faced criticism from unhappy fans after defeats in the opening two matches, with several players missing with injuries and Covid, said: “We cannot control (the criticism), we try to

explain what we are facing but the expectation for this club to win every single match and when that doesn’t happen, we have to accept the criticism.”

He added: “The worst thing you

can do is throw in the towel, we are not going to do that. Hopefully things will get better the moment the players are back. We’ll see a different squad and level and different results.”

Oman to play three T20 and 4 50-over ties against Mumbai

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 23

MUSCAT: Oman will play three T20 and 4 50-over matches against the visiting Mumbai team in Muscat, according to Oman Cricket on Monday. The first T20 will be played on August 24, the second on August 26 and third on August 27.

The one-day 50 over matches will be held on August 29, 31, September 2 and 3 respectively.

All the games will be played at Oman Cricket Ground One in Al Amerat

Coached by renowned cricketer Amol Muzumdar, one of the best batsmen not to have played for India, Mumbai team comprises many star players who have represented India including Shivam Dube, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Armaan Jaffer.

All-rounder Dube, who bats left-handed and bowls right-arm medium pace, has played 13 T20 Internationals and one ODI for India. He played for Royal Challengers Bangalore in the IPL last year and will be representing Rajasthan Royal this season.

Mumbai tour schedule

First T20: August 24
Second T20: August 26
Third T20: August 27
First one-day: August 29
2nd one-day: August 31
3rd one-day: September 2
4th one-day: September 3.

MCCC sweep Junior Division honours with rare title treble



U16 Champions – MCCC Yellow

BY SHAHZAD RAZA
MUSCAT, AUG 23

Completing a rare title treble in a remarkably successful 2020-21 season, Muscat Cricket Coaching Centre (MCCC) swept the Junior Division honours at the prize-giving ceremony held by Oman Cricket (OC) at its sprawling Ground One in Al Amerat on Sunday.

MCCC sides won all the Junior Division tournaments, receiving champions trophies from Oman Cricket Board Directors including Madhu Jesrani, OC Secretary, Kiran Asher, Treasurer, and Syed Anwar Ahsan in the presence of Duleep Mendis, Chief Development Officer, Oman Cricket.

Indian School Muscat (ISM) claimed the runners-up trophies in



Best Bowler U-13 Ayush Karthyic

Under-19 and Under-16 categories while Indian School Wadi Kabir (ISWK) emerged runner-up in Under-13 competition.

Top Under-19 prizes went to Syed Muzahir Raza of BOC (Best Batsman), Amanpreet Singh Sirah of ISWK and Adeel Abbas of MCCC (Best Bowler).



U-19 Champions MCCC



Group Photo of Junior Division toppers after receiving their prizes

Junior toppers season 2020-21

U13
Champions: MCCC Yellow
Runners-up: Indian School Wadi Kabir
Best batsman: Pachisia Ojjus (Indian School Muscat)
Consolation batting: Nilaksh Vats (Indian School Wadi Kabir)
Best bowler: Ayush Karthyic MCCC Yellow
Consolation bowling: Arjun Swamy (MCCC Blue)

U16
Champions: MCCC Yellow
Runners-up: Indian School Muscat
Best batsman: Aaryan Nishit Punja (MCCC Yellow)
Consolation batting: Shanmugarajan Kuttiraja (Indian School Muscat)
Best bowler: Abhas Ajay Jaltare (Indian School Wadi Kabir)
All-rounder: Abhas Ajay Jaltare (Indian School Wadi Kabir)

U19
Champions: MCCC
Runners-up: Indian School Muscat
Best batsman: Muhammad Muzahir Raza (BOC)
Consolation batting: Azam Ali (Indian School Muscat)
Best bowler: Amanpreet Singh Sirah (Indian School Wadi Kabir)
Consolation bowling: Tanuj Sivakumar Shridevi (Indian School Muscat)
All-rounder: Adeel Abbas (MCCC)

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Agreement signed for major green hydrogen and ammonia project in Duqm



DECARBONISATION: India's ACME Group is lead developer in clean energy venture planned at SEZ

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 23

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) signed on Monday a land lease agreement with Acme Group, India's largest solar power developer, for the establishment of a major Green Hydrogen & Ammonia Project in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

The agreement was signed by Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, with Manoj Upadhyay,



Chairperson of ACME, and Gursharan Jassal – GM Business Development of ACME.

Eng Yahya bin Khamis al Zadjali, who head operations at the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, said ACME Group will initially conducted field studies at the project site, install devices

for measuring wind speed and direction, a weather station, and other equipment for weather data collection.

The agreement is in line with OPAZ's efforts to promote investment in clean energy, notably in the production of green hydrogen and ammonia

from renewable energy resources. It also sees the potential for investment in clean energy storage and transportation systems, as well as the growth of a manufacturing sector that utilises these new energy resources at Duqm.

According to Jalal bin Abdulkarim al Lawati of OPAZ, the

Authority is currently negotiating with a number of international companies that have expressed an interest in establishing projects for the production of green hydrogen and ammonia in Duqm, Salalah and Suhar.

Duqm, in particular, is ideal for green hydrogen and ammonia projects considering the presence of high solar irradiation, wind resources all year long, and easy export and import access through Duqm Port. Adding to these factors is the large amount of land allocated for renewable energy covering an area of about 200 sq km.

ACME, the largest solar energy operator in India, has around 3 GW of solar power capacity in its portfolio, in addition to around 3 GW of capacity under construction.

Tanweer signs power purchase pact with Marafiq

MUSCAT: A Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) was signed by the Central Utilities Company (Marafiq), a member of OQ Group, and the Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer) a member of Nama Group.

The agreement was signed by Hamad bin Ali al Wahaibi, General Manager of Business Development at Marafiq and Ahmed bin Said al Harthy, Acting CEO of Tanweer.

As part of the agreement, Marafiq will build and operate a gas-fired power plant with a capacity of 80MW to meet the energy requirements of Tanweer in Duqm. Output will become available from November 2021.

Marafiq began receiving natural gas in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm in April 2021 and started the commissioning activities of the integrated power and water plant, which has reached a completion rate of 92 per cent. Work on the 132 kV high voltage transmission line has been completed.

Last month, leading international energy services specialist GE Gas Power signed an agreement to build, own and operate a power plant equipped with mobile TM2500 aeroderivative gas turbines for Marafiq.

Crowdfunding only for commercial entities, not individuals

FUNDRAISING: Once legalised, crowdfunding can only be practiced by those with a valid license from the CMA

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu



Crowdfunding platforms in the Sultanate will be barred from raising funds for individuals under draft legislation proposed by the Capital Market Authority (CMA). Beneficiaries can only be commercial organisations and enterprises, according to the regulator.

The Authority describes crowdfunding as a "method enabling those who seek funding to obtain amounts

from donors or investors for the purpose of supporting their projects via the platform for donation or in consideration of reward or equity or investment note"

Globally, crowdfunding is projected to burgeon into a \$200 billion market by 2025, underscoring the enormous potential of this sector to tap funds outside of conventional

banking, financial and stock market channels.

Legal experts, as well as market specialists, have about three weeks to provide their feedback to the CMA on its draft regulation on Crowdfunding Platform Activity, published here on Monday.

Once legalised, crowdfunding can only be

practiced by those with a valid license from the CMA. Licensed operators can offer crowdfunding services via any of the following four prescribed channels: (i) Donation Crowdfunding (raising funds without expectation of any return), (ii) Reward Crowdfunding (funding in return for products in the early version of a product or special version or service on commencement of operation or production, (iii) Equity Crowdfunding (providing funding in return of getting shares in the capital; such shares may be convertible or tradable), and (iv) Peer to Peer Crowdfunding (Providing funding in consideration of issuing conventional investment notes or Islamic investment notes

TURN TO P15

BURAIMI GOVERNORATE BRANCH

Tender announcement

Tender No.	Tender name	Corporate activity	Tender document value (non-refundable)	Deadline to purchasing the Tender	Deadline of bids submittals
7/2021	Maintenance of the Chamber of Commerce branch building at Al Buraimi Governorate	Companies specialized in contracting, construction, decoration and building maintenance	OMR - / 25	Tuesday 07/09/2021	Thursday 30/09/2021

Companies specialized in the field of contracting, construction and decoration may obtain the Tender requirements and specifications Book from the branch of the Chamber at Al Buraimi Governorate, during business hours and upon payment of the Tender fees.

Documents required to purchase the tender (all required documents are to be recent/ updated and valid):

- 1- Commercial Register .
- 2- Municipal License .
- 3- Certificate of Membership with Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry .
- 4- Tax Certificate .

Tender Terms:

- Companies desirous to apply for this tender shall provide/ attach to the bids thereof a temporary insurance in the form of a bank guarantee or certified cheque of (1 %) of the value of the bid, certified by a bank operating in the Sultanate of Oman. The guarantee/ cheque shall be valid for a period of 90 days from the deadline of bids submittal, noting that no bidding/ offer, which is not complying with the temporary insurance term shall be accepted.
- Bids/ offers shall be submitted in envelopes sealed with red wax and addressed to: The Chairman of the Main Tenders Committee - Al Buraimi Governorate Branch, containing the number and subject of the Tender. The envelope shall not mention or refer to the name of the bidder.
- Noting/ confirming that the branch of the Chamber at Al Buraimi Governorate is not bound to accept the lowest bid/ offer, and that it is entitled to accept or reject bids/ offers without justification.

The bidding companies are to submit their bids before 12:00 PM, 30/09/2021.

For inquiries, please contact us on the following numbers: 25641774 / 25641612

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Maisarah continues to offer premium Takaful insurance plans

MUSCAT: Catering to the diverse requirements of its customers, Maisarah Islamic Banking Services, the Sharia-compliant window of BankDhofar, continues to offer diverse bundles of Takaful insurance that provide the needed coverage against personal accidents and critical illnesses.

The schemes are powered by Al Madina Takaful and are accessible to all Maisarah customers through its branch network across Oman and they provide adequate insurance coverage in time of need where Maisarah acts as an agent providing Takaful services on behalf of Al Madina Takaful. All Takaful policies are provided by Al Madina Takaful, and the contract is between the customer and the Takaful insurance firm. Terms & conditions apply.

These Takaful insurance packages are Sharia-compliant



products that can be easily obtained with simple approval process and a very affordable premium compared to other schemes (terms & conditions

apply). Personal Accident Takaful Insurance covers accidental death and permanent total disability due to accidents, as

well as repatriation costs of up to RO 500 per person for the eligible age group between 18 – 60 years (could be extended to 65 years maximum). The sum insured is RO 10,000 per person. Passive war cover is included.

Meanwhile, the Critical Illness Takaful Insurance is designed thoroughly to cover the cost of treatment and hospitalisation costs that could cause severe financial burden on individuals and their respective families. The plan provides basic monetary support in case of critical illnesses including cardio vascular, nervous system, organ failure and cancer. Moreover, optional additional insurance cover of death by any cause is also available as per the discretion of the customer. The sum insured is RO 10,000/ RO 15,000/ RO 25,000 per person, and the eligible age group is 18 – 65 years.

178 customers win in NBO’s latest Al Kanz Draw



MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) has concluded its Al Kanz Draw for July, giving away a total of RO 175,500 in cash prizes. The event, held at the bank’s headquarters in Athaiba, included the popular monthly Salary Transfer draw, which saw 50 customers win RO 500 each.

The Sadara draw also gave RO 25,000 to three account holders, while the Mazaya Exclusive draw gave RO 10,000 to four account holders. This month also saw the return of the quarterly Women’s and Youth draws, which gave RO 1,000 to six customers, and RO 100 to 115 customers, respectively.

With a total of RO 3.251

million to be handed out by the end of the year, the bank continues to delight its customers with exciting rewards, simply for banking.

“We have been successfully running Al Kanz for numerous years, and with more customers benefiting year-on-year, it’s one of the Sultanate’s largest schemes of its kind. We believe that banks have an important, and active, role to play in supporting and guiding customers throughout their financial lives. Al Kanz is just one way we fulfil this role, as we continue to promote the value of savings,” said Tariq Atiq, Chief Retail and Digital Banking Officer at NBO.

Tanweer initiates second dose campaign against Covid-19

MUSCAT: In line with the national vaccination drive, organised by the Ministry of Health, the Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer) — Member of Nama Group — announced the commencement of the vaccination campaign for the second dose of the ‘Covid-19’ vaccine for all employees.

The company, in cooperation with Nama Holding, is completing the vaccination plan to ensure preserving the health and safety of its employees, to create a



safe working environment for them and to stop the spread of this epidemic. Abdullah bin Hamoud al Maskari — Head of the Quality, Health, Safety and Environment Department — said: “The vaccination process went smoothly in Tanweer while

ensuring the abidance by the precautionary measures. Hence, we managed to cover 80 per cent of our employees for the first dose of Covid-19 and expect to complete the rest of the employees by the end of August 2021. On this occasion, Tanweer is pleased to express its appreciation to the Ministry of Health and the health sector workers, for their dedication and continuous efforts in providing the necessary health care across the governorates of the Sultanate.”

Kia K5 sedan: More features, more fun

MUSCAT: Kia’s K5 is more than just a style icon. Its inspiring design and aggressive profile make it a hard-to-miss sedan. The K5 is also available as a 2.5L Rear View Camera (RVC) grade. Making it an ideal vehicle to make the most of on every journey.

Kia’s K5 is designed to make an impressive mark with its sleek style and aggressive design language. The K5’s powerful and angular design language represents another chapter of boldness and passion for the brand. From the side, the K5’s low-slung and fastback silhouette confirms



the impression it was made to excite, highlighted by a chrome garnish that spans the roofline and wraps around the rear glass.

A number of other exterior design traits give the K5 an

unexpected level of visual impact. Giving the K5 its stunning looks are features that include LED headlamps, LED daytime running lights, LED front fog lamps, LED rear fog lamps and 17” alloy wheels.

Al Jenaibi International Automobiles LLC launches Motorrad for the first time in Oman

MUSCAT: Al Jenaibi International Automobiles LLC (AJIA), the official importer of BMW Group vehicles in Oman, is excited to announce the launch of its brand-new BMW Motorrad showroom.

Opening to the public on Monday 16th August, the new landmark covers 128 square metres and is located next to the renowned BMW showroom in Al-Qurum. With a dedicated brand manager on site, each customer’s journey is guaranteed to be as seamless and enjoyable as possible.

Introduced in 1923, BMW Motorrad, BMW’s exclusive motorbike brand, has contributed to BMW’s long legacy in motorsport worldwide - taking home victories at the Dakar Rally six times.

Today, BMW Motorrad continues to enjoy intense brand affinity among motorbike enthusiasts in the Middle East as it continues to grow across the GCC. Each year, the brand pushes the boundaries and dares to be different, with persistent innovation driving



the introduction of new machines.

Sabah Al Zadjali, Brand Manager of Al Jenaibi International Automobiles LLC added, “We are delighted to announce the opening of BMW Motorrad in Oman. With six new Motorrad models launching in line with the showroom opening, we are looking forward to showcasing these awesome machines to existing and new customers in the market.”

“The launch contributes to the ever-growing motorbike community in Oman, providing residents with the opportunity to connect with the renowned brand for the very first time. Our customers are fans, not just of BMW Motorrad, but also of the motorbike lifestyle: fast-paced and on the go.”

“Through our selection of motorbike accessories and services at our brand-new showroom, we are ensuring

a one-stop-shop for all our customer’s needs.”

In line with the easing of government restrictions, the dealership is ready to welcome customers every day from 8.30 AM till 7.30 PM, and will continue to apply the highest level of care and hygiene measures following guidance received from official Omani authorities.

For more information, please call 80050008 or visit www.bmw-oman.com.

Bank Muscat launches speed transfer service and Awasr bill payments

MUSCAT: In line with its vision “To serve you better, everyday” and commitment to innovation reflecting the latest technological trends in banking, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, has launched several new features including Speed Transfer service to Egypt, bill payments to Awasr and instant Debit Card linkage to one’s account through Internet banking and mBanking app. Also, linked Floosi and children’s accounts will now be visible in their parent’s accounts improving transparency and oversight.

The latest features add to a number of other useful features like the instant opening of additional savings account for existing customers, generation of PIN for Debit Cards, Credit Cards and Pre Paid Cards, download of SWIFT advice for international transactions, blocking of prepaid card as well as charity contributions and donations to the Ministry of Health (Covid-19).

Speaking about the addition of new features in Internet Banking and the mBanking app, Amjad al



Lawati (pictured), AGM – Cards & eBanking, said: “In line with our customer-centric vision, Bank Muscat is delighted to introduce new features to enhance banking convenience.

The addition of Speed Transfer service to Egypt, Awasr bill payment and instant Debit Card linkage to one’s account will further enhance ease of banking for all our customers. Bank Muscat is committed to continuing its investments in state-of-the-art technology to further increase efficiency and improve customer service so as to maintain its clear leadership in hi-tech products and services, including electronic payment and web-based services, in tune with the banking requirements of a tech-savvy generation.”



Banking sector credit climbs 3.8% during H1 2021

KEY FIGURE: Total deposits held with ODCs registered a Y-o-Y growth of 4.2 per cent to reach RO 24.9 billion at the end of June 2021

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 23

Total outstanding credit extended by conventional and Islamic banks in the Sultanate (also known as Other Depository Corporations — ODCs) grew by 3.8 per cent to RO 27.3 billion at the end of June 2021, while credit to the private sector demonstrated moderate increase of 0.8 per cent (Y-o-Y) to reach RO 23.2 billion, according to the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

The non-financial corporate sector received the highest share of the total private sector credit (46.5 per cent), followed by the household sector (45.3 per cent). The share of financial corporations was 4.8 per cent and other sectors received the remaining 3.4 per cent of the total private sector credit as at end-June 2021.

Total deposits held with ODCs



registered a Y-o-Y growth of 4.2 per cent to reach RO 24.9 billion at the end of June 2021.

Total private sector deposits increased by 6.5 per cent to reach RO 17.4 billion. In terms of sector-wise composition of private sector deposits, the biggest share was from household deposits at 51.4

per cent, followed by non-financial corporations (32.1 per cent), financial corporations (14.1 per cent) and other sectors (2.4 per cent).

The combined balance sheet of conventional banks showed a Y-o-Y growth of 2.1 per cent in total outstanding credit as of end-

June 2021. Credit to the private sector declined by 0.6 to reach RO 19.0 billion while their overall investments in securities went up by 23.5 per cent to RO 4.8 billion. Investment in Government Development Bonds increased by 18.7 per cent compared to the same period last year to RO 2.2

The non-financial corporate sector received the highest share of the total private sector credit (46.5 per cent), followed by the household sector (45.3 per cent)

billion while their investments in foreign securities declined by 24.0 per cent to RO 0.85 billion at the end of June 2021.

Aggregate deposits held with the conventional banks increased by 1.8 per cent Y-o-Y to RO 20.8 billion at end-June 2021.

Government deposits with conventional banks witnessed a decrease of 11.2 per cent at RO 4.3 billion, while deposits of public enterprises went up by 13.3 per cent to RO 1.2 billion. Private sector deposits, which accounted for 71 per cent of total deposits with conventional banks, increased by 4.9 per cent as of June 2021 to reach RO 14.7 billion.

Islamic banking entities

provided financing of RO 4.6 billion at the end of June 2021, recording a growth of 12.7 per cent over that a year ago.

Total deposits held with Islamic banks and windows increased by 18 per cent to RO 4.2 billion. The total assets of Islamic Banks and Windows increased by 16 per cent on a Y-o-Y basis to RO 5.7 billion and constituted about 15.1 per cent of the banking system's assets as of end-June 2021.

Among the indicators of monetary aggregates, broad money supply M2 at end-June 2021 grew by 6.7 per cent to reach RO 20.1 billion.

This increase was the outcome of 4.7 per cent expansion in narrow money (M1) and 7.6 per cent increase in quasi-money (Rial Omani saving and time deposits, certificates of deposit issued by banks, margin deposits and foreign currency denominated deposits).

Despite the decline in currency with public by 4.5 per cent, the M1 witnessed a marginal increase, resulted from the growth of demand deposits by 8.1 per cent, during the same period under discussion.

Crowdfunding only for commercial entities, not individuals

FROM PAGE 13

including invoice financing which are convertible or tradable; such funding instruments may be convertible to equity).

Article 4 of the proposed legislation states: "The crowdfunding platform shall grant funding for commercial companies and enterprises, not to individuals." Also prohibited from raising funds through crowdfunding platforms are a number of entities, including public joint stock companies, investment funds, companies and enterprises with no specific business plans, and not-for-profit societies or organisations.

Applicants for crowdfunding support that are less than a year old since they were constituted can seek funding of RO 100,000 or less, provided they submit their latest audited financial statements when seeking approval. Those that are more than one year of age can seek more than RO 100,000 of funding.

Applicants for crowdfunding are required to submit all relevant information to the platform

Applicants for crowdfunding are required to submit all relevant information to the platform operator, including details about the key characteristics of the business and company, purpose of the fundraising and targeted amount

operator, including details about the key characteristics of the business and company, purpose of the fundraising and targeted amount.

The draft law also proposes a strict set of criteria for applicants seeking licences to operate a crowdfunding platform. Applicants must demonstrate that they have the relevant experience and track record in managing a crowdfunding platform. Those found charged or convicted of civil or criminal action related to the capital market, or in any fraudulent or dubious activity, are barred from obtaining a licence.

Global dividends to near pre-pandemic levels in 2021

MILAN: Global dividends are forecast to rise to \$1.39 trillion this year, up slightly from a previous estimate to reflect a stronger than expected recovery in the company payouts, Janus Henderson said in a report published on Monday.

Its latest estimate, up 2.2 percentage points from an earlier one, is just 3 per cent below the pre-pandemic peak.

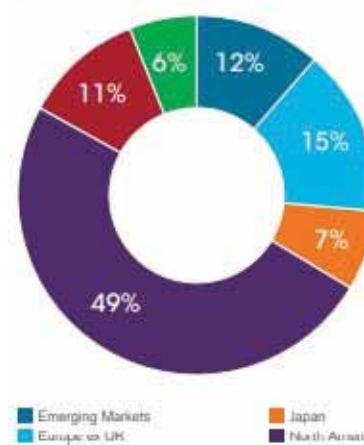
Dividends, a company payout to shareholders, slumped last year against the backdrop of the Covid-crisis as regulatory constraints and government pressures to restrict payments weighed.

But a strong recovery is currently under way, with headline growth at 26.3 per cent in the second quarter, data from the investment manager's Global Dividend Index showed.

Underlying growth — adjusted for special dividends, changes in currency, timing effects and index changes — was 11.2 per cent. On a year-on-year basis, 2021 growth is expected at 10.7 per cent, equivalent to an underlying rebound of 8.5 per cent.

Dividends from companies restarting payments totalled \$33.3

2020 FULL YEAR DIVIDENDS BY REGION

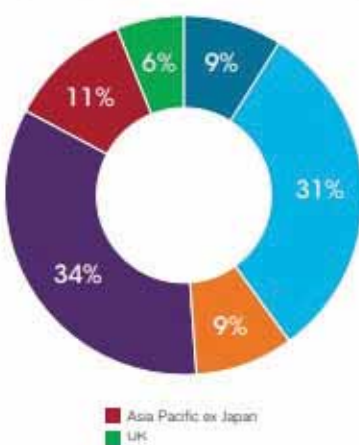


billion and accounted for three-quarters of the underlying growth in the second quarter, the report said.

"Global dividends in aggregate will likely regain their pre-pandemic levels within the next 12 months", Jane Shoemake, client portfolio manager on the global equity income team at Janus Henderson, said in a statement.

The current "recovery will not be hampered by a weak banking system as it was after the global financial crisis a decade ago", as policymakers continue to provide

2021 Q2 DIVIDENDS BY REGION



fiscal and monetary support to the economy, she added.

Limits on bank dividends had a significant impact in 2020 as lenders accounted for half of the fall in global payouts, but constraints have since been lifting.

In early August, European banks announced billions of euros in payments to shareholders. These included ING Groep NV and Intesa Sanpaolo, whose interim dividend will be subject to discussions with regulators.

— Reuters

Bitcoin jumps above \$50,000 for first time since May

LONDON: Bitcoin rose back above \$50,000 on Monday for the first time in three months after supportive news from payments giant PayPal and cryptocurrency platform Coinbase.

The world's most popular virtual unit jumped to \$50,440 during Asian trade, before easing to \$50,350 in early morning London deals.

"Bitcoin continues its recent recovery, moving above the \$50,000 mark it last attained in May though still some way short of its \$65,000 record as PayPal announces plans to launch its cryptocurrency trading platform in the UK", said AJ Bell analyst Danni Hewson.

PayPal has announced that it will this week begin to allow users in Britain to buy, hold and sell cryptocurrency through the online payment platform for the first time.

The expansion into the hot digital money trend follows similar moves by the payments giant in the United States earlier this year. — AFP

LONDON

British private sector growth logs six-month low

British private sector growth eased sharply in August, largely due to staff shortages and supply chain issues, flash survey results from IHS Markit showed.

The flash composite output index decreased to a six-month low of 55.3 in August, from 59.2 in July. The score had been forecast to drop to 58.4.

Weaker recoveries were seen in both the manufacturing and service sectors. The services purchasing managers' index (PMI) fell to 55.5, from 59.6 in



July. The expected level had been 59.0.

The manufacturing PMI came in at a five-month low of 60.1, versus 60.4 in the previous month. The reading had been forecast to drop to 59.5. — dpa

BANGKOK

Thailand exports beat forecast, but virus looms

Thailand's exports rose more than expected in July but the Southeast Asian country's biggest Covid-19 outbreak to date and movement restrictions are likely to impact shipments in August and September, the commerce minister said on Monday.

Exports, a key driver of Thailand's growth, increased 20.27 per cent in July from year earlier as global demand improved, beating a forecast for a 19.7 per cent in a Reuters poll, and against June's 43.8 per cent



year-on-year rise.

Exports are a rare bright spot in Thailand as it struggles with a surge in infections, prompting movement curbs in areas which account for about 80 per cent of GDP. — Reuters

LONDON

Oil jumps on weaker dollar after a week of losses

Oil prices jumped 3 per cent on Monday, recovering from a seven-day losing streak, with gains driven by a weaker dollar despite demand concerns stoked by rising cases of the Delta coronavirus variant.

Brent crude climbed \$2.15, or 3.2 per cent, to \$67.33 a barrel by 1052 GMT after touching its lowest since May 21 of this year at \$64.60.

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude for October delivery rose \$2.01, or 3.1 per



cent, to \$64.15.

Both benchmarks marked their biggest week of losses in more than nine months last week, with Brent sliding about 8 per cent and WTI about 9 per cent. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

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Mohammed al Rashdi: 99841230
m.alrahd186@yahoo.com

Ali al Maashari: 99639264
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features

Khareef season attracts reptiles in plenty

The famous khareef season contributes to a variety and diversity of lizards in Dhofar Governorate. Shutterbugs, Suganthan Pathmanathan and Amardeep Singh, have left no stone unturned in their determined quest towards spotting various lizards in Salalah. Find out more about their amazing discovery of the colourful world of reptiles and how they captured them on their lenses...**P20**



READ



THE SPY NEXT DOOR
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Ursula Burton, who resided in the English Cotswolds in 1942 with her family, turned out to have been a high-ranking Soviet intelligence officer seeking scientific secrets to build the bomb.

ENTERTAINMENT

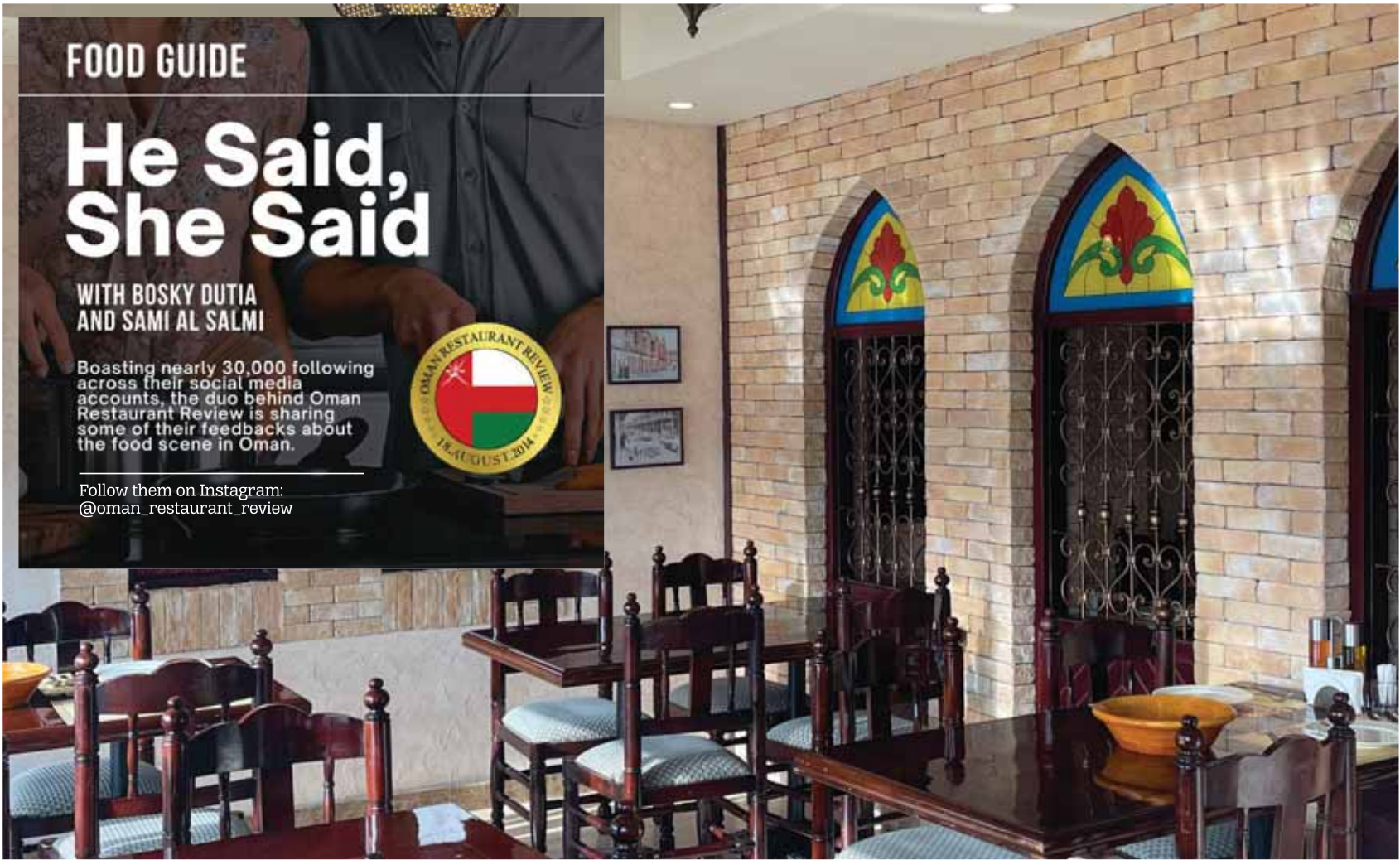
Rock band Aerosmith and Universal Music Group sign alliance deal

HARD ROCK BAND Aerosmith and Universal Music Group (UMG) said they had signed a strategic, global alliance deal, whereby the entire Aerosmith recorded music catalogue is moving to UMG ahead of the band's 50th anniversary and UMG's IPO next month. UMG will also be the home of Aerosmith's future music projects and merchandise, and will work with the band on new film, television and other audio-visual content.

"Aerosmith's global success places them in rarefied air among the all-time greatest rock icons," said UMG chairman and chief executive Sir Lucian Grainge. "On a personal note, I couldn't be prouder that they have chosen UMG as their global partner," he added. Since the band was founded in Boston in 1970, it has gone on to sell more than 150 million albums around the world.

It was the first rock band with a commercially successful hip-hop collaboration with Run DMC on "Walk This Way". "It's a win for Aerosmith, UMG and ultimately our fans. Needless to say we are very excited. It's an incredible way to celebrate 50 years and the many more years to come," said Aerosmith's co-founder and lead guitarist Joe Perry. UMG is the world's largest music company, with artists such as Billie Eilish, Post Malone, Lady Gaga and the Rolling Stones. French media giant Vivendi is planning an initial public offering (IPO) for UMG in September, and earlier this month billionaire hedge fund manager William Ackman bought 7.1 per cent of UMG from Vivendi. — **Reuters**





Gourmandism down the streets of Mesopotamia

FOOD TELLS THE real stories, the ones that alter people, places and cultures. Food tells us about the cradle of civilisation, where this tumultuous epicurean journey begins. Recipes can be as old as the tales of Gilgamesh or as stimulating as the sojourns of Sindbad.

This week our gourmandism took us down the streets of Mesopotamia or what we call it today, Iraq. A cuisine that dates back more than 10,000 years, where the Babylonians took great pride in their food and documented it on cuneiform tablets from 1700BC to 1900BC.

From types of bread and cheese to soups, the old dishes have survived and been modernised over the ages. Today, the foods of Iraq reflect this rich inheritance as well as strong influences from the culinary traditions of surrounding nations. Because of all these tra-

ditions and complex influences, Iraqi cuisine is enormously rich and varied. With these thoughts in mind, we tried Samad Al Iraqi in the heart of Qurum. This restaurant gives off an old-world vibe. As is our course, we ordered a couple of appetisers, mains, and a dessert to round it off.

HE SAID: We started with Iraqi Hummus and Dolma. The hummus was creamy and rich and it went so well with the fresh-baked Iraqi bread and kebabs from the main course. On the other hand, the Dolma which was made out of different types of vegetables stuffed with a tomato-based rice and meat concoction cooked to perfection. It's was delicious and it can be considered a meal on its own.



SHE SAID: Iraqi flavours are new to my palate so the excitement was overwhelming. That being said I am no novice when it comes to Dolma. These stuffed veggies are the highlight of any Arab meal. Cooked to juiciness, each vegetable was stuffed to the brim with rice and meat oozing out.



HE SAID: For our mains, we picked Qoozi and Iraqi kebab. Qoozi is a rack of meat cooked for hours and served on a bed of different types of rice with okra in a tomato gravy. The meat was so tender that if you lifted the bone off the plate, the meat slides off. It's a supreme feast in one dish. The Iraqi kebabs are minced, skewered and then grilled meat. The flavour of the meat was not overpowered by any spices.



SHE SAID: The Qoozi turned out to be a slow-cooked rack of meat served on a bed of 3 types of fragrant rice. One cooked with tomato, the other was a Biryani rice and the last being steamed. Each morsel of meat just melted in the mouth and left you want-



ing more. The dish was peppered with dry fruits and nuts. If you're looking for a hearty rice dish that wows your senses, this is the place to be.

HE SAID: We decided on the Um Ali for dessert. I must say I liked this very much as it wasn't sweet. There was a hint of the chopped nuts and the buttery pastry inside. A good dessert to end a good meal.

SHE SAID: After such a huge meal, desserts were not an option but a review we had to write so we went ahead and ordered the Um Ali. I must say I was disappointed, hoping for a rich, flaky crust and sweet pudding beneath. The dessert was absolutely bland for my taste.

WE SAID: Service was unobtrusive and pleasant. We didn't want for anything. We would say the pricing on this is a bit on the higher side but well worth the quality and quantity of the food served. We are definitely going back for another round of that Qoozi!

OVERALL RATING

Ambience: 5/5
Taste of food: 4.5/5
Presentation: 4/5
Service: 4/5
Value for money: 4/5

DISCLAIMER: The ORR team reviews anonymously and pays for their own meals.

LOCAL SCENE

Dhalkout Port pushes the wilayat towards growth and development



THE FISHING PORT in the Wilayat of Dhalkout is one of the achievements of the blessed Renaissance and is part of a series of sea fishing ports along the Omani coasts extending from Khasab to Dhalkout. The port contributes to the development of the fisheries sector in the wilayat and is the only seaport in the western region of Dhofar Governorate. It provides its services to fishermen and sea surfers, and greatly serves the people of Dhalkout and Rakhyout.

Omar al Amri, Director of the Fisheries Development Department in Dhalkout, said that the port of Dhalkout, which was opened in 1998, is one of the vital and important projects in the wilayat. The port was provided with a plant for the production of ice, cooling and freezing of fish and a fuel station for fishermen's boats.



He added that there is a fish market in the port, which is equipped with the necessary supplies to help fishermen sell the fish. There are also other public services and a large shade for seating. Among the services that were planned and still need investing parties are the workshops for the maintenance and repair of boats and marine machines.

Al Amri added that the number of fishermen who benefited from the port in the wilayat is approximately 400 fishermen, other than the fishermen who come from other wilayat, especially from Rakhyout.

He explained that the seasons of fishing continue throughout the year, but in different quantities, while there are specific seasons for fishing lobster or shrimp, as well as squid, which sometimes comes in abundance in the autumn season and the beginning of Al Serb Season (July-October).



Al Wathiq Baowain, a fisherman, said, "The port provided us with many facilities and services, and fishing became continuous throughout the year when sometimes we used to stop fishing due to the roughness of the sea. It provides a well-designed gateway for easy entry and exit of fishing as well as a place for drying sharks, which is our most important perennial marine crop. These fishing ports and communities have played important roles in spatial use of the sea, in effective use, maintenance and control of living resources and in a succession of sea culture.

The sea fishing port in Dhalkout is one of the most important promising achievements as it can receive large wooden fishing vessels to stimulate the purchasing movement of various marine products.



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AROUND THE WORLD

HEALTH

Expert shares how collagen can help achieve healthy hair



COLLAGEN IS AN ESSENTIAL nutrient for our bodies, but one that begins decreasing from around the age of 25, with production slowing down by about 1.5% each year. When it comes to our hair, this protein is made up of some of the same amino acids that the body produces to build keratin – of which hair is primarily made. As such, this natural antioxidant is important because it helps strengthen the hair and its elasticity, resulting in better growth and overall health, helping your mane look its best.

Supporting the hair follicles on the scalp, collagen is crucial because during the hair's growth stage, collagen levels increase. Once the hair follicle is mature, however, collagen is lost, thus weakening the follicle and the hair that grows from it. Additionally, hair loss has also been attributed to damage from free radicals – pollution, stress, poor diet – which can destroy proteins and lipids in hair cells, something that collagen has been suggested to be able to replenish. Collagen is also known to be able to improve skin hydration and elasticity, which in turn is believed to play a part in maintaining good health in hair follicles.

The good news is we can help encourage healthy hair growth by adding an extra dose of collagen to our daily regimen. Collagen Shot Premium by Gaia Naturelle has been created to help boost the body in a number of ways – from anti-aging to stronger bones – in which your hair will also see the benefits. The super-concentrated drops, free of gluten, sugar, dairy and soy, are quickly absorbed by the body and will show results after 30 days of daily use.

When it comes to hair, it's not only the collagen in Collagen Shot Premium that is so beneficial. Collagen, when consumed on its own, simply breaks down in the digestive tract. However, additional active ingredients are included that act as a pre-potent stimulator to collagen, boosting the body's ability to start processing collagen production, rather than simply breaking it down. These extras are working double duty, helping with collagen production as well as adding their own individual benefits to making your hair healthier. MSM (methylsulfonylmethane) is one of the most important ingredients working alongside collagen to help your hair. With the same amino acids as collagen, this sulfur-rich compound has anti-inflammatory properties. Research has shown this protein can form bonds to strengthen hair and encourage its growth.

TRAVEL TALES

Skiing in Africa? Tourists hit Lesotho slopes



SUGGEST A HOLIDAY in Africa and most people picture baking hot sun, palm-fringed beaches or herds of wildebeest galloping across the savannah. Few think of skiing.

Yet the continent contains five mountain ranges with enough seasonal snow to make potential slopes, of which two host rudimentary ski resorts.

Tucked into South Africa's stunning Drakensburg range, one such resort in the mountain kingdom of Lesotho attracts tourists seeking a more adventurous skiing destination – despite visitor numbers being drastically slashed by Covid-19.

"Africa is, you know, you wouldn't even actually think of it. I think that's what actually amazes most people," snowboard instructor Hope Ramokotjo told Reuters TV, after sliding through a sec-

tion of perfect powder snow on his board.

"Yes, it isn't much," he said, glancing over his shoulder at bare brown hills beyond a lone white slope. "But people come here and have a whole lot of fun. For me, as a local, I don't have to fly out. I've got a vacation right here."

As with other tourist spots, the Covid-19 pandemic – and severe travel restrictions enforced worldwide to try to curb it – has drastically slashed visitor numbers.

They fell to virtually nothing last year and are still

only half the usual 17,000 this year, owner of the nearly two-decade-old Afriski Resort, Pieter Peyper, said. Regional hub South Africa has been badly hit by the pandemic, with 2.64 million recorded coronavirus cases, and is on most country's red lists.

"It was something very different. My knees and feet are in pain ... but it was mad fun," said Kevin Kava, a Ghanaian first-time skier who lives in Cape Town, shortly after wiping out. — Reuters

ENTERTAINMENT

Adelaide to Hollywood via Edinburgh in a day: Fringe theatre goes global



A NEW DIGITAL THEATRE platform developed to keep audiences engaged during lockdown is being used by performers to take their shows to festivals far from home, and even to two events at once.

Black Box Live, set up by Adelaide-based performer Joanne Hartstone and her partner, won accolades when it live-streamed shows around the world from the Adelaide Fringe earlier this year, which went ahead despite the pandemic, though with Covid measures in place.

Now Hartstone is using the platform to take her show to not one, but two major fringe festivals abroad that this year are happening at the same time, without ever leaving Australia.

The Edinburgh festival is held throughout August. After technical delays to adapt to pandemic times, the Hollywood Fringe, is taking place in the same month, from August 12-29, rather than its usual time of June.

Hartstone stars in "The Girl Who Jumped Off The Hollywood Sign," which live-streamed to Hollywood, from a performance at 1 pm (0330 GMT) Adelaide time and a separate show at 7.30 pm to the Edinburgh Fringe.

Much as she misses the in-person appearances she made in Edinburgh and Hollywood in the past, Hartstone says streaming is becoming an art form in its own right that demands new skills.

"I'm both acting for camera and I'm also acting for stage," Hartstone said. "I'm not just hitting a spotlight, I'm also hitting a camera angle. I'm also having to make eye contact with the camera at a certain point."

Edinburgh has chosen to mix live, live-streamed – meaning the audience watches as the performance is staged – and on-demand performances, which can be viewed at any time, although they are still based on a single-take recording of a show.

Mindful of the huge Hollywood film industry, Hollywood Fringe decided to include only live and live-streaming, despite the higher technical and cost barriers to live-streaming, especially for small theatre companies.

"The live 'anything can happen' aspect of theatre is how our community differentiates itself from the film industry," Lois Neville, operations director at Hollywood Fringe Festival, told Reuters.

She said the festival planned to move back to June in future, but the extra time this year allowed "the pivot to hybrid".

Now the infrastructure has been set up in venues and on the festival's website, it is likely to stay.

"We've seen the accessibility that livestream can provide to audiences that might not otherwise participate in fringe and will likely keep that element around for years to come," Neville said. — Reuters

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Khareef season attracts reptiles in plenty

By Liju Cherian
@lijucherianoman

REPTILES ARE A SIGNIFICANT element of global biodiversity in Dhofar Governorate. The mountainous area offers many natural ecosystems comprising lagoons, wadis, water springs, grasslands, wetlands, and mangroves, which support a high diversity of reptiles and lizards.

The famous khareef season contributes to a variety and diversity of lizards within Dhofar Governorate. All these unique aspects in the governorate typically inspired a photographer duo to go on an adventure of taking pictures of various birds and lizards.

During summer, many lizards will be on estivation (a state of being temporarily inactive, similar to hibernation), which usually takes place during summer rather than the winter season. Therefore, it is an excellent opportunity to watch and observe many lizards and reptiles during the khareef season when they are active among the lush greenery.

Wildlife shutterbugs Suganthan Pathmanathan, a Sri Lankan Quantity Surveyor, and Amardeep Singh, an Indian Marketing Manager working in Salalah, spent a great deal of time capturing the lizards with their lens.

Two years back Suganthan who relocated to Salalah from Muscat, was impressed by a remarkable photo that Amardeep posted on his

Instagram handle @amar_clicks.

It was a spiny-tailed Agama, one of the giant lizards living in Oman, which can change its colour to bright yellow when body temperature is high and dark grey when the body is cold. A perplexed Suganthan wanted to photograph the same lizard. He then contacted Amardeep, the author of the photograph.

This was the starting point of many of their dual adventures the two photographers had in Salalah.

Amardeep recollects how he captured the spiny-tailed Agama by sheer coincidence while driving back from Mirbat after photographing a Little Owl. Noticing the vibrant colours on a rock, made him stop his vehicle allowing him to take a few shots of the beauty.

Their outdoor professions enabled them with opportunities to excel as bird photographers. They could spend their free time and were delighted in photographing the colours, textures and behaviour of various lizards and reptiles in Salalah.

The Arabian chameleon is a sub-species of the chameleon family, endemic to the southern Arabian Peninsula, and they exist in Dhofar.

Chameleons live in various habitats that range from wooded areas to wilderness conditions. Consequently, Salalah and adjacent areas are suitable places for chameleon's habitats. Chameleons have the ability to change their body colours to suit their habitats and their moods.

Chameleons are Suganthan

and Amardeep's first choice of lizards to take photograph of. Both of them agree they managed to find this distinctive and highly specialised lizard in Wadi Nahiz, Salalah, at the same spot, especially during the khareef season, as the food supply is abundant.

Amardeep found Pseudotrapelus dhofarensis or Pallid Agama or Trapelus pallidus or desert agama in Ayn Razat area. By repeatedly visiting the place, he managed to spot both the male and female species of Agamas together. He said it is always better to maintain a safe distance from the lizards, as they do not get disturbed or else they change their location.

Another species captured by Amardeep is Pristurus carteri, commonly known as Carter's rock gecko, a species of gecko. Native to Oman, Pristurus carteri is often found basking on rocks or in urban areas. The males develop little fleshy spikes on their tails upon reaching maturity. When they feel threatened, they curl their tails in a scorpion-like fashion and even mimic the movements of a scorpion.

The texture and details on the body of Oriental Garden Lizards and common house lizards motivated Suganthan and Amardeep to photograph them week after week.

Narrating another moment of spotting the Sinai Agama Lizard, Amardeep mentioned that he witnessed it crossing the Ayn Hamran road and slowed the vehicle to let it cross. Later, he slowly parked his sedan and had to get down to the eye level to take a few shots. While

taking shots, Agama's head started turning blue in colour. Getting down to the eye level, gives all together a different perspective to the image. These are some of the tips he learnt from his mentors at Salalah Photography Club.

Suganthan found his first Sinai Agama/Dhofar Agama in Mirbat while searching for Little Owls. On another day, Suganthan found a Trachylepis lizard closer to Ayn Khor during a family outing.

Both say "Dhofar Governorate is the most reliable and ideal area for reptile watchers due to its variety and diversity."

Accordingly, the duo has indulged in photographing the colourful reptile world by constantly visiting Wadi Nahiz, Ayn Razat, Ayn Sahnawt, Ayn Hamran, Ayn Khor, Ayn Aththum, Wadi Darbat, and Taqah.

Suganthan and Amardeep avoid getting too close to the subjects and subsequently take utmost care to prevent their habitats from being disturbed.

ADVENTURE FACTS

Suganthan is a Sony Alpha shooter . His major shoot is Sinai Agama or Dhofar Agama.

Amar uses Canon. His major find is Carter's rock gecko.Both use 600mm telephoto lenses

Follow them on Instagram:
@sugan_path
@amar_clicks

