

PURSHOTTAM KANJI EXCHANGE

شركة بروكس
كانجي للتداول



SEND MONEY TO USA
SAME DAY CREDIT
SWIFTLY - SECURELY - SMARTLY

99101314, 99849289 customersupport@pkexchange.net
www.pkexchange.com pkexch @pkexchange1

DOWNLOAD OUR APP TODAY!
Google Play App Store



P11

SPRINTER BARAKAT
SETS HIS SEASON
BEST, AMUR BREAKS
PERSONAL RECORD



P13

HOMEOWNERS
WEIGH SOLAR
PV TO OFFSET
RISING BILLS



P19

PLANTED ART:
JAPAN RICE FIELD
WORK MARKS
TOKYO OLYMPICS



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO BENIN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Patrice Talon of Benin on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health and long life to the President, and the friendly Beninese people more progress and prosperity.

— ONA

CONDOLENCES TO TURKEY ON FOREST FIRES

The Sultanate, in a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, expressed its condolences and sympathy to the government and people of the friendly Republic of Turkey, on the victims of the forest fires which raged across many areas of Turkey leaving several dead and many wounded, wishing the injured speedy recovery.

— ONA

Now get news on the go



To receive news updates from omanobserver, WhatsApp -your name- to 96473232

READ IN

OPINION

Fridge magnet philosophy works for me!
Ray Petersen

Kiki's fight to gain the whole territory in the house...
Rasha al Raisi

INSIDE



EU READY TO IMPOSE SANCTIONS OVER LEBANON CRISIS

P6



CALL FOR NEW RESPONSE TO DELTA VARIANT

P8



RAFO RECEIVES NEW BATCH OF RECRUITS

In response to the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, to speed up the process of recruitment of nationals, and in continuation to the national efforts exerted by the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) to open the door for citizens to join the military service and obtain the honour of serving the dear country, the Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo), in coordination with the Ministry of Labour, received a new batch of citizens. **DETAILS ON P2**

National drive for ‘second dose’ vaccination begins

DAILY CASES OF COVID-19 EXPECTED TO DROP IN AUGUST

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Sultanate will administer the second dose of Covid-19 vaccine from Sunday for people who have completed 10 weeks of first dose amid a fall in the number of cases.

“The Ministry of Health will start a vaccination campaign for the second dose from Sunday, for those who have completed 10 weeks from the date of the first dose as per the national campaign for immunisation,” an official statement said.

Meanwhile, Ibrahim al Maimani, an analyst, has indicated that daily cases of Covid-19 are expected to drop to 150 and 250 during August, and the number of ICU patients



may drop to less than 150 during this period. The daily inpatients admitted to the hospital will come down to around 40 this month.

As of July 29, Oman had 618 inpatients, including 260 in intensive care units (ICUs).

With 13,848 active cases, only 4.68 per cent of the total

infected people in the country are currently sick.

The estimates are based on the impact of full and partial lockdowns in the past, and the fact that vaccination rate will reach around 52 per cent during this period, including around 95 per cent for those vaccinated with one dose and 15 per cent for those who have received both doses.

The ministry has urged citizens to book ‘in advance’ for appointments before heading to the immunisation centres in the various governorates of the Sultanate, which will ensure a safe and smooth process for all in line with the precautionary measures.

TURN TO P2

Sultanate identifies 3 areas to power food security

SUHAR TO BE DEVELOPED AS NATIONAL GATEWAY CITY TO EXPAND THE SULTANATE'S ACCESS TO FOREIGN MARKETS

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkutyvp

In line with Vision 2040 and as part of its efforts to promote food security and self-sufficiency in the country, Oman seeks to intensify agriculture production and establish land suitable for agricultural development.

“New agricultural areas and food processing hubs will be established to contribute to food security”, according to proposals in Oman Urban Strategy.

Najd in Dhofar, Al Masarat in Al Dhahirah and North Al Batinah have been identified as major arable areas in this regard.

According to the plans, these areas have been identified taking into account the importance of sustainable management of limited water resources, the exploitation of non-traditional water resources, and the use of modern production techniques.

New agricultural production techniques and intense water resource management will be employed in addition to reinstating traditional agricultural areas to derive maximum results.

Plans are also afoot for modernisation of coastal fisheries facilities and methods; creation of a commercial fleet, development of aquaculture projects and improved management of rangeland areas.

TURN TO P2

Biodiesel plant in final stages of completion in Barka

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

A biodiesel plant which converts used cooking oil (UCO) into automotive fuel is in the final stage of construction in Barka Industrial Area. Once completed it will process 800,000 gallons per year.

Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (Be'ah), which is responsible for all waste management in Oman, has given endorsement for the project to be implemented by Erigo Bio-fuel, the Qatar-based

biodiesel pioneer and Dubai-based Neutral Fuels Holdings Ltd.

“Oman produces nearly 600,000 litres of used cooking oil in a year, which goes down the drain causing pollution and other environmental issues,” said Asim Khamis Salman al Sabri, owner of the initiative, which is built with support from Be'ah.

“This initiative to convert UCO into useful bio-diesel stems from the need for a sustainable and environment-friendly source of energy,” said Mohammed Ashraf,



Oman produces nearly 600,000 litres of used cooking oil in a year, which goes down the drain causing pollution

ASIM KHAMIS AL SABRI

Owner of the initiative

Country Manager, Erigo Bio-fuel. He said many European countries, including the Netherlands have agreed to import biodiesel from Oman. These importers are equipped with appropriate distribution channels, according to the promoters of the project.

“Oman's export of bio-diesel can assure around 30 to 40 per cent price advantage over the traditional diesel oil and it's ‘zero-pollution’ fuel which doesn't harm our environment,” said Noushad Rahuman, MD, Premium

Global Group, the local representative of the project.

Erigo runs biofuel operations in Malaysia, Qatar, Tunisia, the Philippines and India. Erigo has tie-ups with thousands of restaurants across the region to source used cooking oil.

Neutral Fuels is funded by London-based Neutral Capital Finance PLC through the region's first certified green bond. It now has operations in the UAE, Bahrain and India.



State Council’s second annual session sees increased activities

MUSCAT: The second ordinary annual session of the seventh term of the State Council witnessed increased activities in line with the Royal attention paid by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, to reinforce the pillars of Shura (consultation) and activate the council’s role.

This was stated by Khalid bin Ahmed al Saadi, Secretary-General of the State Council. He added that the ordinary annual session of the seventh term of the State Council acquired a special importance as it coincided with the issuance of the Basic Law of the State by Royal Decree 6/2021 and the Council of Oman Law by Royal Decree 7/2021.

The secretary-general of the State Council said that the two Royal Decrees constitute a quantum leap in the course of national action and highlight the Royal keenness to consolidate the pillars of the state of institutions and law. They also enhance the Shura practice in line with the aspirations of the wise leadership



Khalid bin Ahmed al Saadi, Secretary-General of the State Council

that meets the aspirations of the Omani people. He added that the issuance of the two Royal Decrees comes within the framework of the renewed Renaissance led by His Majesty the Sultan who pays great attention to the permanence of the Renaissance in a way that enhances the progress and prosperity of the Sultanate and achieves more prosperity for the Omani people.

Al Saadi noted that the State Council discussed a number of topics during the second ordinary annual session of the seventh term including draft laws

referred to the Council by the government. The Council also debated a set of proposals and studies and discussed the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) and the state general budget for fiscal year 2021.

The secretary-general of the State Council explained that the most prominent works and activities undertaken by the State Council were the discussion of six draft laws referred by the government, namely: amendments of the Insurance Companies Law, amendments of some provisions of the Takaful Insurance Law, amendment of some provisions of the Civil Status Law, draft unified GCC Anti-Commercial Fraud Law, amendments of some provisions of the Foreigners Residence Law, and amending some provisions of the Motor Vehicle Insurance Law.

The secretary-general of the State Council pointed out that despite the current crisis facing the Sultanate and the world at

large due to the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, the State Council held three general sessions amid precautionary and preventive measures to help limit the spread of the virus and preserve the lives of its affiliates in implementation to the Royal directives to defer the general sessions and to hold meetings of the enhanced specialised committees. The enhanced specialised committees held seven meetings during which it discussed a number of topics.

The State Council made an active presence in regional and international forums held through video conferencing including the meetings of the GCC legislative councils, the Arab Parliament, the Union of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Member States (PUIC), the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the United Nations World Youth Forum and the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments (ASGP), the secretary-general of the State Council added. — ONA

Necessary action taken on vessel incident beyond regional waters: MSC

MUSCAT: An official at the Maritime Security Centre (MSC) has said that thanks to an existing system of joint maritime action and, acting in coordination with maritime security centres in the region, the MSC was prompt in responding to a mayday signal from MV Mercer Street, a by-products carrier flying the Liberian flag, stating that it met with an incident outside Omani regional waters.

The MSC official told Oman News Agency (ONA) that as soon as the centre received the call, it immediately took necessary action in coordination with military, security and civil authorities to handle the situation. As part of the action, the Royal Air Force of Oman

(RAFO) sent sorties over the incident site while the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) operated a vessel en route. Field data shows that the incident indeed took place beyond Omani regional waters. Once the vessel owners and crew were contacted, they stated that the vessel would proceed to its destination without the need for further assistance.

The Sultanate affirms its constant keenness on providing all resources to maintain safe passage for all in Omani regional waters.

The Sultanate also reiterates the preparedness of its departments to undertake any action deemed necessary for safe navigation along Omani regional waters. — ONA

■ HEAVY RAIN IN RUSTAQ



A number of villages in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq in South Al Batinah Governorate on Saturday received moderate to heavy rains causing wadis to overflow.

FROM PAGE 1

RAFO receives new recruits



MUSCAT: In response to the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, to speed up the process of recruitment of nationals, and in continuation to the national efforts exerted by the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF) to open the door for citizens to join the military service and obtain the honour of serving the dear country, the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), in coordination with the Ministry of Labour, received a new batch of citizens.

RAFO took all the precautionary measurements against Covid-19 to start the basic military training for new air soldiers who have passed evaluation, physical fitness testing and personal interviews.

RAFO employed its expertise and administrative capacities as



well as its means of transportation in order to provide a suitable environment for conducting the necessary procedures for the new recruits in a speedy and seamless manner.

These vigorous efforts made by the SAF to recruit citizens

are in line with the plans and programmes for the employment of nationals at SAF and the other departments of the Ministry of Defence to enable them to serve the country, its leader and the Omani people.

— ONA

Sultanate identifies 3 areas to power food security

The Oman National Spatial Strategy is the national framework for guiding Oman’s spatial development sustainably for the next 20 years and seeks to balance socio-economic development while preserving the Sultanate’s valuable natural and cultural resources for the next generations, in alignment with the national goals and priorities of Oman Vision 2040.

According to key targets envisioned in the strategy, 40 per cent land for expansion of agriculture be brought into water-efficient, commercial production and make additional land available for food production within existing agricultural properties and increase the level of food self-sufficiency.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, had last week warned that some people listen to rumours and refuse to take the vaccines. “Most deaths reported at the local and international levels are from people who are not vaccinated.”

He said that there are many

In 2040, North Al Batinah will be the premier centre for international trade, with value-added activities building upon the industrial, mineral and agricultural resources of the governorate. Its key settlement, Suhar, will use its port and airport facilities to expand access to foreign markets to develop as a National Gateway city.

As a city it will continue to grow, formalising the urban areas of the existing settlements of Suhar and Liwa to form the Greater Suhar urban area.

It will be supported by the growth of Al Suwaiq which will prosper as a major agricultural processing centre in the south of the governorate.

reasons which have led to the decline in the number of infections, which include adherence to precautionary measures and vaccination. The minister said the first dose of vaccination for the age group 12-18 years will start before the end of August first week.

Vaccinations are currently

Al Najd area in Dhofar Governorate enjoys natural potential. It is an environment with fertile lands and is one of the most promising agricultural regions in the Sultanate to cover the local demand of various agricultural crops.

Al Dhahirah will progressively enhance its strength in high value production in major engineering industries, logistics, food processing and national scale advanced agriculture, accelerating diversification from oil and gas and capitalising on improved access to international and regional centres through its connections to Suhar and Al Buraimi to the north and Nizwa/Duqm to the east and south.

available for the category of 18 years and above.

There is a cooperation between the ministries of health and education to vaccinate the age group between 12 to 18 years with the first dose of 320,000 male and female students before the start of the new academic semester.

GORGEOUS GETAWAY

DR PRITI SWARUP

Bandar Al Khayran is one of the most stunning lagoons tucked in Oman's 3,000 miles coastline. A scintillating place in the heart of Muscat where one would love to catch the early morning sunrays overlooking a spectacular landscape.

Bandar Al Khayran is an ideal hotspot in Oman and a great combo if one is looking for a beachside picnic, get hand of an adventurous activity, explore the trek line, spend a day by the magnificent blue waters, or a night-camp amidst the mountains, or just relax by yourself alone.

HOW TO REACH

Considering the driving time from Al Ghubra region, Bandar Al Khayran beach is a drive of about 45-50 minutes. To reach the viewpoint which is the most visited spot there, a normal car and a 4WD is not really necessary, though is still advisable to take one (considering the possibility of getting carried away and exploring more nearby areas like Yiti beach too!).

WHAT TO DO

Bandar Al Khayran viewpoint is 'the most unmissable place' of the Sultanate. The drive up to this point is curvaceous and serpentine, passing through the mountains and culminating into a spectacular view as you stop



the car at the viewpoint which is a combination of mountains, coastline, and pristine sea of various hues of blue and green! The coastline is one of the most captivating and stunning ones along the Western side of Muscat.

The small islands give enough options for boating, kayaking, snorkeling, camping, or hiking. Do not miss taking the creative 'slow-mo' or 'jump-in-the-air' videos against the dazzling vast

BANDAR AL KHAYRAN IS AN IDEAL HOTSPOT IN OMAN AND A GREAT COMBO IF ONE IS LOOKING FOR A BEACHSIDE PICNIC, GET HAND OF AN ADVENTUROUS ACTIVITY, EXPLORE THE TREK LINE, SPEND A DAY BY THE MAGNIFICENT BLUE WATERS, OR A NIGHT-CAMP AMIDST THE MOUNTAINS, OR JUST RELAX BY YOURSELF ALONE

sea of various tones.

THINGS TO CARRY

With breathtaking views and shots to be captured, carrying a great camera is ideal to get memories of lifetime. If night camp is the plan, travellers may consider carrying campfire stuff, marinated food and experience a breezy night by the fire.

Stargazing may require carrying sufficient mats as per choice. Packing considerations

include good footwear for hiking and climbing, floaters or casual slippers for the water side, plenty of drinking water, good quality sunscreen, hats/caps, swimming clothes, towels etc.

TREK CONSIDERATIONS

A lesser-known aspect of this place is that it also provides ample opportunity for trekking and is a somewhat easier trek. The pathways are relatively straighter, with gentle slopes which are easier to climb. Carrying a light backpack with basic stuff for swimming after reaching the beach area may be considered.

THINGS TO AVOID

The travellers at all times should avoid disturbing the animals moving around the area. Avoid going too close to the cliff to take that 'one-shot' as it may be risky at certain points. Since it is a popular weekend destination, group visits may be avoided during the present health scenario.

SIGNING OFF TIP

The soil here is a bit loose, and one may need to be extra cautious while trekking. And let us not forget to collect back the litter inadvertently strewn while having a gala time there. This helps preserve the natural charm the place offers, and mother earth feels happy too!

(The author is a HR expert, speaker and columnist. drpritiswarup@gmail.com)

Don't cut electricity over arrears: Authority



VINOD NAIR

vinot_nair

Electricity has been restored to users whose service was cut off due to late bill payments. Some of them delayed payments citing inflated bills while others, mostly businesses, due to loss of revenue.

The Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) told the electricity distribution and supply companies that they should not cut the service provided to any subscriber, even if there are arrears pending.

"It is unfortunate that the electricity was cut off in the height of summer. Some citizens were unable to pay the required amount due to the difficult situation," said a citizen.

Some citizens argued the matter is not about users being unwilling to pay the bill charges. "The problem is that the bills are inflated and there is no proper explanation from the concerned

The Authority for Public Services Regulation told the electricity distribution and supply companies that they should not cut the service provided to any subscriber, even if there are arrears pending

parties," said a subscriber.

Some customers argued that the fuse was removed despite them agreeing to pay the bill immediately online at the spot.

Some small businessmen told the *Observer* that they are unable to pay bills (both for home and the shop) due to the long period of lockdown that has hit their livelihood.

The authority urged subscribers to submit their complaints if the service is cut off or any other matter to the offices of licensed companies in the different governorates or their affiliated

call centres and the authority's accounts in various social media or through Hasel platform.

Meanwhile, the Nama Group on Thursday said that it had extended the period for updating subscriber data until the end of August.

"All subscribers should update their data through the websites of the electricity companies, which will ensure that the users will get the right tariff," the Nama Group said.

Muscat Electricity Distribution Company (MEDC) in a statement said that the company has restored electricity to subscribers who were previously disconnected from the service.

"All subscribers can contact through the toll-free number 80070008 if the service is not restored until the issuance of this statement or to inquire about the facilities available in the process of repaying arrears.

"Several other companies also restored the power supply to subscribers that were previously disconnected," the statement said.




AL ZAHRA COLLEGE FOR WOMEN

Tender Announcement

إعلان طرق مناقصات

تعلن كلية الزهراء للبنات عن طرق المناقصات التالية :

م	رقم المناقصة Tender number	عنوان المناقصة Tender title	قيمة المستندات بالريال العماني (لا ترد) Document cost in OMR (non- refundable)	آخر موعد لتسليم العطاءات Deadline of Tender submission	آخر موعد لاستلام العطاءات Deadline of Tender receipt
1	ZCW-27/2021	توريد وتركيب أجهزة مركزية ومعدات تقنية المعلومات Supply and installation of Servers Network Switches. Backup System and VDI System	٢٠ ريال عماني 20 R.O.	08/08/2021 pm 1:00	26/08/2021 pm 1:00
2	ZCW-28/2021	توريد أجهزة الحاسب الآلي Supply of Desktop Computers	٢٠ ريال عماني 20 R.O.	08/08/2021 pm 1:00	26/08/2021 pm 1:00
3	ZCW-29/2021	تجديد تراخيص برنامج مايكروسوفت التطبيقية والتشغيلية للكلية Renewal of MS office 365, windows and windows server's subscription	٢٠ ريال عماني 20 R.O.	08/08/2021 pm 1:00	26/08/2021 pm 1:00
4	ZCW-30/2021	تجديد ترخيص برنامج مكافحة الفيروسات والجدار الناري (سوفس) Renewal of Sophos firewall and user Antivirus subscription	٢٠ ريال عماني 20 R.O.	08/08/2021 pm 1:00	26/08/2021 pm 1:00
5	ZCW-31/2021	توريد أجهزة الحاسب الآلي نوع إي ماك Supply of iMac Desktop Computers	٢٠ ريال عماني 20 R.O.	08/08/2021 pm 1:00	26/08/2021 pm 1:00
6	ZCW-18/2021	خدمات النظافة (مبنى الكلية) Cleaning service for all building (college)	٢٠ ريال عماني 20 R.O.	08/08/2021 pm 1:00	26/08/2021 pm 1:00
7	ZCW-26/2021	تأمين الممتلكات • تأمين مبنى الكلية • تأمين مبانئ الاستثمار • تأمين ضد الخيانة و السرقة • تأمين الاموال المنقولة Assets Insurance • College Building • Investment building insurance • Fidelity guarantee • Money Insurance	٢٠ ريال عماني 20 R.O.	08/08/2021 pm 1:00	26/08/2021 pm 1:00
8	ZCW-32/2021	صيانة المصاعد (مبنى الغبرة) Maintenance of Al - Ghubrah building lifts	٢٠ ريال عماني 20 R.O.	08/08/2021 pm 1:00	26/08/2021 pm 1:00
9	ZCW-33/2021	صيانة التكييف المركزي (مبنى الغبرة) Maintenance of central A / C (Al - Ghubrah building)	٢٠ ريال عماني 20 R.O.	08/08/2021 pm 1:00	26/08/2021 pm 1:00
10	ZCW-34/2021	صيانة نظام مكافحة الحرائق وأجهزة الإنذار (مبنى الغبرة) Maintenance of firefighting system and alarm (Al - Ghubrah building)	٢٠ ريال عماني 20 R.O.	08/08/2021 pm 1:00	26/08/2021 pm 1:00

- يمكن للشركات والمؤسسات المختصة الحصول على الشروط والمواصفات من قسم الخدمات واللوازم بمبنى الكلية في مدينة العرفان اعتباراً من تاريخ نشر الإعلان (ساعات العمل : ٨:٠٠ ص إلى ١:٠٠ م من الأحد إلى الخميس)
- يتم تقديم العروض في مظاريث مغلقة ومختومة بالشمع الأحمر معنونة باسم رئيس قسم الخدمات واللوازم والأمن وتوضع العروض في صندوق العطاءات ويكتب عليه رقم المناقصة فقط . على أن تكون العروض سارية لمدة ٦ شهور على الأقل .
- الكلية غير مقيدة بقبول أقل عطاء أو أي عطاء آخر
- آخر موعد لتسليم العطاءات حسب ماهو موضح بالإعلان .

- Companies and institutions can obtain the conditions and specifications from the Department of Services and Supplies College building in the city of Alarf as of the date of publication of the announcement (working hours: 8:00 am to 1:00 pm Sunday to Thursday)
- Offers will be presented in envelopes sealed and stamped with red wax, named in the name of the head of services and supplies and security. Bids shall be placed in the tender box and the tender number shall be written on it only. The offers must be valid for at least 6 months.
- The College is not bound to accepting the lowest tender or any other one.
- The deadline for submitting tenders is as indicated in the announcement.

Tel: helpdesk department (0968)24512536, 24512850 Service department (0968) 24512823

NO SOIL OR SEASONS

OMAN FOOD INVESTMENT COMPANY IS SETTING UP THE FIRST VERTICAL FARMING PROJECT OF THE SULTANATE IN AL KHOUD, MUSCAT



P.O. Box: 147, Jawharat A' Shatti, PC 134, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: 24400600, Fax: 24698496, Website: www.soharpower.com

Unaudited condensed financial statements 30 June 2021

BOARD OF DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Sohar Power Company SAOG ("Sohar Power" or the "Company"), I am pleased to present you with the Quarterly Directors' Report of the Company for the period ended 30 June 2021, corresponding to the fifteenth year of operations of the Company.

Health & Safety

The Second Quarter of year 2021 has seen excellent Health and Safety performance for Sohar Power. There were no Lost Time Accidents (LTA), accumulating to 3,075 days without LTA at the end of June 2021. The Health and Safety of our employees, contractors, and visitors remains the utmost priority for the Company and its operator Sohar Operations & Maintenance Company LLC ("SOMC").

In addition, the global challenge continued in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic that required Sohar Power, its contractors and stakeholders to activate their Business Continuity and aspects of Disaster Recovery plans. The Company and its Operator remain vigilant, promoting social distancing, and ensuring that all protection measures are in place going forward.

Operations & Maintenance

The plant achieved 99.76% reliability for power and 99.0% for water. Forced outages amounted to 0.24% for the power plant and 0.99% for the water plant in the reporting period.

The demand for power and water continued to be in the lower side due to the entrance of new water plant in the port area and over capacity in the Oman electricity grid. The plant was in standby mode and under preservation most of the time ; accordingly, the load factors of the plant in the reporting period reached 2.1% for power (3.7% in 2020) and 1.9% for water (1.9% in 2020) mainly due to performing the Annual Performance Test which was conducted in Feb'21.

An aggregate of 55 GWh net power and 0.5 Million m3 potable water was delivered to the electricity and water grids respectively during the period.

Maintenance activities were performed by SOMC and its sub-contractors, in accordance with Original Equipment Manufacturers' recommendations, while applying the best standards and practices for health & safety and maintenance of the industry. All gas turbines underwent regular annual maintenance during the Winter Period; there were no Major Inspections undertaken during the Winter Period.

Financial Performance

The Board of Directors would like to announce that the Company has ended the period with a net profit of RO 1,303 million compared to a net profit of RO 0.873 million in the same period 2020.

The increase in net profit in 2021 is mainly due to the lower finance cost and better fuel margin compared to 2020.

The revenues for the period 2021 amount to RO 13.9 million against RO 14.3 million for the same period 2020. This mainly due to lower load factor of the plant (low power and water demand). As per the PWPA agreement with the off-taker, the variation of the Load Factor has no impact on the company profitability as the mainstream of the profit is generated from the available capacity and reliability of the plant. (load factor is a pass-through item under the PWPA (and financially neutral to the Company)).

The direct costs, have decreased from RO 4.4 million in 2020 to RO 4.1 million in 2021, due to mainly the decrease in gas consumption as a result of lower load factor.

The reduction in finance costs by RO 0.5 million in 2021 in comparison to 2020 is associated with debt repayments during the year.

Long term loans were repaid, and swaps were settled on their due dates. The hedging deficit on the Company's swap agreements at the close of business on 30 June 2021, was RO 1.9 million, in comparison with valuations as of 31 December 2020 of RO 3.3 million. As per IAS 39, hedging deficit is calculated on each balance sheet date, and it

represents a notional loss, which the Company may incur if it opts to terminate the swap agreements on this date. However, under the terms of Financing Agreements, the Company is not permitted to terminate its swap agreements and, as such, the loss is notional.

Under its Financing Agreements entered into with its lenders, Sohar Power is subject to a cash sweep mechanism which started on 30 September 2015 and will last until the full repayment of the long-term loans.

The cash sweep mechanism prevents the distribution of dividends to shareholders since all the available cash is devoted to the repayment of the loans. This mechanism is common in financing agreements throughout the region and helps to provide a competitive tariff for an off-taker such as OPWP at the time of the bid. As previously disclosed, the payout of dividends ended in 2016, and there will be no more dividend distributions to shareholders unless the debt of the Company is refinanced and the cash sweep is successfully removed. The Company has explored and continues to explore opportunities to refinance its project finance debt.

As a consequence of the cash sweep, the inability of the Company to distribute dividends, and the decrease of the global and Omani Capital Market indices in 2020, the share price increased slightly to 0.047 during the year compared to RO 0.045 at the end of 31 December 2020.

Outlook for 2021

Looking ahead, the Company expects to maintain high reliability even though the delivered power and water level is expected to be at a same level seen in 2020, while undertaking periodic maintenance activities, in a safe working environment for its employees, contractors and visitors.

The Company engaged as well in the second phase of '2022 Power Procurement process' launched by OPWP RFP on 16th October 2019. The Company has submitted its offers on 29th April 2020 as per the processes of the RFP. OPWP feedback is still awaited which got delayed due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors. As per the recent communication from the Authority of Public Services Regulation (APSR), the response is still awaited.

The Company's main objective for 2021 is to secure a new PPA with effect from 2022. The Company will also engage with different stakeholders to assess the feasibility of the potential bilateral contracts for its plant. In case SPC is unsuccessful in the Power 2022 Procurement process, the Company may operate in the Spot Market currently under trial run and expected to go live early 2022. Revenues will not be contracted in the Omani Spot Market, it will be subject to the overall supply and demand in the Market. In view of the uncertainties surrounding the Spot Market, it is very difficult to predict the future of the Company in its current technical configuration, should it operate in the Spot Market, but it will be very challenging. In such case, restructuring the outstanding debt after the current term of PWPA will be very challenging as well.

The energy transition is accelerating in Oman, caused by the continuous drop in prices for renewable energy such as photovoltaics and wind. This is likely to impact the competitiveness of existing conventional thermal plants and might substantially reduce their value beyond the term of their current P(W)PA.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I wish to thank our valued shareholders for their continued support, trust, and confidence. I would also like to thank all the personnel associated with the operation and maintenance of the plant in Sohar and the staff of the Company for their loyalty, dedication and commitment.

I would also like to express our gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and His Government for their continued guidance, support and encouragement to the private sector.

Luciano Guffanti
Chairman of the Board

Unaudited condensed statement of financial position as at 30 June 2021

	30 June 2021 RO'000	31 Dec 2020 RO'000	30 June 2021 USD'000	31 Dec 2020 USD'000
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	75,925	81,821	197,209	212,523
Right-of-use assets	151	226	392	586
Total non-current assets	76,076	82,047	197,601	213,109
Current assets				
Inventories	869	793	2,257	2,060
Trade and other receivables	4,004	2,655	10,398	6,897
Bank balances	6,581	6,270	17,094	16,286
Total current assets	11,454	9,718	29,749	25,243
Total assets	87,530	91,765	227,350	238,352
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Capital and reserves				
Share capital	22,101	22,101	57,405	57,405
Legal reserve	4,503	4,473	11,696	11,358
Accumulated Losses	(5,973)	(7,146)	(15,514)	(18,559)
Shareholders' equity	20,631	19,328	53,587	50,204
Hedging deficit - net of tax	(1,039)	(2,296)	(2,699)	(5,964)
Total capital and reserves	19,592	17,032	50,888	44,240
Non-current liabilities				
Hedging deficit	1,910	3,290	4,961	8,545
Non-current portion of long-term loans	41,785	46,628	108,532	121,112
Provision for decommissioning costs	1,866	1,800	4,846	4,675
Non-current Portion of Lease Liability	250	75	649	195
Deferred tax liability	7,595	8,048	19,727	20,905
Total non-current liabilities	53,406	59,841	138,715	155,432
Current liabilities				
Current portion of long-term loans	9,450	9,232	24,545	23,979
Current Portion of Lease Liability	-	162	-	421
Current Portion of deferred revenue	945	1,881	2,455	4,886
Trade and other payables	3,057	2,016	7,941	5,236
Amount due to a related party	505	288	1,312	748
Provision for taxation	575	1,313	1,494	3,410
Total current liabilities	14,532	14,892	37,747	38,680
Total equity and liabilities	87,530	91,765	227,350	238,352
Net assets per share	0.093	0.087	0.242	0.226

Unaudited condensed statement of profit or loss for the period ended 30 June 2021

	30 June 2021 RO'000	30 June 2020 RO'000	30 June 2021 USD'000	30 June 2020 USD'000
Revenue	13,871	14,280	36,029	37,091
Cost of revenue	(10,039)	(10,134)	(26,076)	(26,324)
Gross profit	3,832	4,146	9,953	10,767
Other income	173	134	449	348
	4,005	4,280	10,402	11,115
Expenses				
General and administrative expenses	(411)	(653)	(1,068)	(1,694)
Finance costs	(2,088)	(2,624)	(5,423)	(6,816)
	(2,499)	(3,277)	(6,491)	(8,510)
Profit/(loss) before tax for the period	1,506	1,003	3,911	2,605
Income tax expense	(203)	(130)	(527)	(338)
Net profit/(loss) after tax for the period	1,303	873	3,384	2,267
Basic and diluted earnings per share	0.006	0.004	0.015	0.010

Unaudited condensed statement of profit or loss for the period ended 30 June 2021

	30 June 2021 RO'000	30 June 2020 RO'000	30 June 2021 USD'000	30 June 2020 USD'000
Net profit/(loss) after tax for the period	1,303	873	3,384	2,267
Other comprehensive income:				
Items that may be reclassified into profit and loss				
Fair value gains on interest rate swaps	1,274	(463)	3,312	(1,205)
Related taxation	(100)	73	(260)	190
Total other comprehensive income for the period	1,174	(390)	3,052	(1,015)
Total comprehensive income for the period	2,477	483	6,436	1,252

Note: The complete accounts either in English or Arabic will be sent to any shareholder by mail within 7 days of receipt.

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

@zainabalnsseri

Modern technologies have transformed vertical farming into a tangible reality, moving cheap and environmentally-friendly cultivation from rural areas to the heart of cities.

Oman Food Investment Company, affiliated to the Oman Investment Authority, is setting up the first vertical farming project of the Sultanate in Al Khoud, Muscat.

Vertical farming grows crops and vegetables on vertically stacked layers rather than in fields.

It often incorporates controlled-environment agriculture, which aims to optimise plant growth, and soilless farming techniques such as hydroponics, aquaponics, and aeroponics.

Vertical farming can be done in shipping containers or warehouses or even on premises of one's home.

This modern idea uses indoor farming techniques using controlled environment farming technology, artificial control of temperature, light, humidity and gases makes indoor cultivation possible.

In many ways, vertical farming like greenhouses uses metal reflectors and artificial lighting to increase natural sunlight. The main objective of vertical farming is to increase crop production in limited spaces.

Increasing production from a small cultivation area is not the only advantage of vertical farming. Some of the main benefits of vertical farming are to produce crops all the year around, use less water, escape unexpected weather conditions and increase production of organic crops.

The vertical farming market continues to advance in the United States. Japan has probably seen the greatest success in this field more than any other country. Japan already has 200 large-scale "agricultural factories", and China has about 80. However, we must note that even in Japan, about 60 per cent of vertical agricultural projects are unprofitable. Currently, vertical farming represents a very small portion of the market, but it is growing rapidly and is expected to reach \$5.8 billion by 2022, with the largest gains in the Asia Pacific region.

The development of better technologies can always increase efficiency and reduce costs. But the entire vertical farming is highly dependent on different technologies for lighting, maintaining temperature and humidity, and a single day's energy loss can be very costly for a vertical farm. Many believe that techniques used today in vertical farming are not ready for widespread adoption.

Finally, vertical farming techniques are still relatively new. Companies still have to successfully produce crops on a large scale and make them economically viable to meet the growing demand for food.



Video meetings to raise cancer awareness and early diagnosis

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 31

The Oman Cancer Association will organise video meetings every month with experts to address the community as part of its efforts to spread awareness about the importance of early diagnosis for better treatment of cancer.

Globally, each month of a year is dedicated to support the awareness and advocacy programmes.

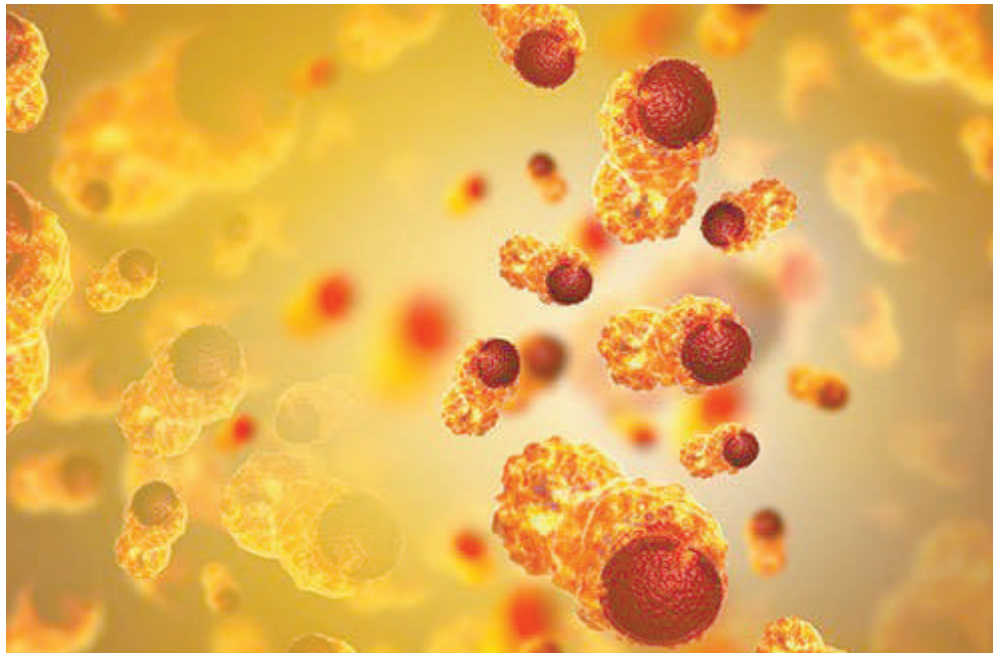
“We will explain about different cancers and their causes; early signs and symptoms; screening programmes for early diagnosis; and different modalities of treatment. The treatment protocols and patient management are the responsibility of the treating oncologist and the patients should discuss with their physician and understand the recommended treatment and modality they prefer,” explained OCA officials.

July is the month for bone tumours and sarcoma. “A tumour is a lump or mass of abnormal tissues formed by uncontrollable division of cells in the bone. Most bone tumours are benign (not cancerous). Benign tumours are usually not life threatening and in most cases will not spread to other parts of the body,” explained the health expert at OCA.

Tumours can either be benign or malignant. Benign tumours aren't cancerous or fatal. But they're still abnormal cells and may require treatment. They can grow and could compress surrounding healthy tissue.

Malignant bone tumours are of two types. Primary bone cancer contributes to less than 1 per cent of cancers. Secondary bone cancers usually in adults start in other organs and spread to the bones. It originates from the kidney, breast, prostate, lungs and thyroid.

Osteochondroma constitutes up to 40 per cent of all bone tumours.



Tumours can either be benign or malignant. Benign tumours aren't cancerous or fatal. But they're still abnormal cells and may require treatment.

We will explain about different cancers and their causes; early signs and symptoms; screening programmes for early diagnosis; and different modalities of treatment

OMAN CANCER ASSOCIATION

Others are Non-Ossifying Fibroma, which is a single simple cyst found in the leg bones in children and adolescents; Giant Cell Tumour, rare aggressive growing tumours in adults in the round areas of the bones; enchondroma, a cartilage cyst that grows in the bone marrow; and Fibrous Dysplasia, a gene mutation making bone fibrous and end up in fractures.

Multiple Myeloma, the most common secondary bone cancer, affects the bone marrow. Suspected causes are genetic, radiation treatment or injuries.

Soft tissue Sarcomas are hard to spot as they grow anywhere in the body. It starts with a painless lump, which later becomes uncomfortable and painful. It may cause difficulty in breathing if it is in the chest.

Symptoms of osteosarcoma are recurrent pain of and on in the affected bone, which worsens at night. Swelling appears weeks after the pain accompanied by limp if it is in the legs.

It occurs more in children and young adults and as healthy, active children and teens often have pain and swelling in their arms and legs, osteosarcoma might be mistaken for growing pains or a sports injury.

If pain persists especially at night in one of the limbs consult your doctor. Adults with this pain should see the doctor immediately. The treatment is surgery or radiation.



Announcing a Public Auction

The Tenders committee of the **Ministry of Social Development** announces the following auction:-

Auction No.	Auction Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment	Last date for proposal submissions	Tender fee (OMR) (non-refundable)
(1/2021)	Managing and operating of the Autism Center in Sohar	Premium or first and second grade	Tuesday 10/08/2021 01.00 PM	Thursday 19/08/2021 10.00 AM	OMR 25.000

- ❖ Specialized registered companies can obtain the bidding documents from the Treasury Department at the Ministry of Social Development Head Office, located in Airport Heights.
- ❖ Bids shall be submitted in closed envelopes, sealed with red wax addressed to the “Chairman of the Internal Tenders Committee, His Excellency the Shike of the Ministry of Social Development” attached with an original bank guarantee covering (2%) of the total bid value, and valid for a period of 90 days from the last date of submission of offers.
- ❖ For inquiries about the auction, please contact **(24962754)** or email **(yahyass@mosd.gov.om)**.

(The Ministry is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other tender)

www.mosd.gov.om

Looking for job, car, flat and furniture? Check out the Observer classified page. It's where buyers meet sellers.

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Holding invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR)
EHC/2021/17	Directors and Officers Liability Insurance	08-AUG-2021	09-SEP-2021	25
EHC/2021/18	Comprehensive General Liability Insurance	08-AUG-2021	09-SEP-2021	25

- Bids shall be submitted in a single envelope and sealed with red wax addressed to the “Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee” and must write on the envelope the tender name & number.
- 3 separate envelopes shall be included inside the single sealed envelope, and each of these 3 envelopes must be marked with a tenderer name & tender no. as per the below:
 - Commercial Proposal
 - Technical Proposal
 - Bid Bond
- Bids should be dropped in the tender box at Nama Holding reception before 12.00 pm, time of the Sultanate, on 09-SEP-2021.
- Each bid should be accompanied with a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) of the total bid value and valid for a period of (90) days from the last date for submission of offers, addressed to the “Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee”. Tenders that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered.
- NH is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- Interested party to deposit Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) on: Account Name: Electricity Holding Company, Bank Muscat: 0423-010776440-018 Corporate Branch (Bidder name and Tender Number to be clearly mentioned). Tender Documents will be received by email.
- Bidders to send the deposit slip to: Yasmeen.allawati@holding.nama.om.
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 12.00 pm.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.



Nama Holding

In Beach One Building, 3rd Floor (Units 305 & 307), Shatti Al Qurum
P.O Box 850, Post Code 116, Sultanate of Oman.
Phone Number: +968 24559287 / 277
E-Mail: Yasmeen.allawati@holding.nama.om

Electronic Tender (s)



Majan Electricity Co. (SAOC) Announces the Following E-Tender

Tender NO	Description	Grade	Last date for buying	Submission date	Tender price R.O.
51/2021 Re-Tender	STANDARD UNIT COST ESTIMATION AND COST RECORD MAINTENANCE IN SYSTEM	Specialized	10/8/2021	24/8/2021	25 /=
70/2021 Re Tender	SURVEY AND AUDIT OF METER CONNECTION AT AL DAHIRAH GOVERNORATE	C	8/8/2021	17/8/2021	114 /=
81/2021	EXTENSION OF POWER SUPPLY TO THE AGRICULTURE POLT'S AT THE VARIOUS LOCATION IN AL-KHABOURAH, SAHAM, SOHAR, LIWA & SHINAS (NORTH AL-BATINAH GOVERNORATE)	C	8/8/2021	24/8/2021	40 /=
82/2021	EXTENSION OF POWER SUPPLY TO THE AGRICULTURE POLT'S AT THE VARIOUS LOCATION (AL-BURAIMI GOVERNORATE)	C	8/8/2021	24/8/2021	25 /=
83/2021	PROVIDING SERVICES FOR GREEN BUILDING HVAC MAINTENANCE IN MJEC.	Specialized	16/8/2021	7/9/2021	25 /=
84/2021	EXTENSION OF POWER SUPPLY TO THE AGRICULTURE POLT'S AT THE VARIOUS LOCATION (DHAKIRAH GOVERNORATE)	C	10/8/2021	24/8/2021	67 /=

Interested Firm having relevant experience in the similar nature of services and registered with Tender Board and Distribution Code Review Panel (DCRP) for electrical work, may register and obtain the tender documents from E-Tendering Site <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against online payment of non-refundable fees mentioned above for each tender.

The Tenderers should enclose a copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any registered bank in the Sultanate of Oman for a value of (1%) of the submitted bid value valid for a period of (90) days from the date of Submission, and addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee. The original Bid Bond to be delivered in sealed envelope, and the tender number and title of project only are to be mentioned on the envelopes. The place of submission the original bond would be at MJEC Contracts & tenders office at MJEC building in AL Sawari Center in Sohar or at MJEC Contracts & tenders office at Muscat in Al Mubailah- opposite to the industrial Area beside to Bank Suhar ,before 10 A.M. according to the assigned date of submission of the tender. Any Submission of original tender bond after the time and date mentioned in the advertisement will not be accepted and tenderer offer will be rejected.

The Completed signed and sealed commercial and technical offer with all tender documents should be submitted and uploaded online into the above mentioned E-Tendering website. The Hard copies of the tender document are not accepted. For more information please contact Tel no.:24051501- 26944266

For any technical assistance please contact
Helpdesk: +968-24166670
E-mail: etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products & and have a High level percentage of Omanization.

The Company is not bound to consent the lowest Bid or any other Tenders.
“EXTRAVAGANCE IN CONSUMPTION WITH ELECTRICITY WE PROGRESS PLEASE AVOID”



Majan Electricity Company S.A.O.C

P.O Box 286, Sohar
PC 311, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 2694 4444 | Fax: +968 2694 4222
Information@majanco.nama.om | www.majanco.co.om

EU ready to impose sanctions over Lebanon crisis

BRUSSELS: The European Union said on Friday it was ready to impose sanctions on Lebanon's ruling elite over the political crisis wracking the country, after adopting a legal framework for such measures.

The crisis has left Lebanon without a functioning government since the last one resigned after a massive explosion killed dozens and destroyed swathes of Beirut in August 2020.

The country has plunged into what the World Bank described as one of the worst economic crises since the 1850s, and political players continue to squabble.

"This framework provides for the possibility of imposing sanctions against persons and entities who are responsible for undermining democracy or the rule of law in Lebanon," the EU said in a statement.

The bloc's 27 member states must still vote unanimously for the list of people and entities to be sanctioned.

The United States welcomed the EU's steps to use a "powerful tool to promote accountability on a global scale," Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in a statement.

"Sanctions are intended, among other things, to compel changes in behaviour, and promote



A combination picture shows the damage near the site of the August 4, 2020 explosion at Beirut's port and the same area after almost a year since the explosion. — Reuters

accountability for corrupt actors and leaders," they added, saying they were ready to cooperate with the EU on Lebanon.

On Monday, Lebanese lawmakers tasked ex-premier and billionaire Najib Mikati with forming a government, days after fellow veteran politician Saad Hariri threw in the towel.

EU sanctions would target people obstructing this process, the statement read. They "consist of a travel ban to the EU and an asset freeze for persons, and an asset freeze for entities," it said.

"In addition, EU persons and

entities are forbidden from making funds available to those listed."

The EU could also sanction people "obstructing or undermining the implementation of plans approved by Lebanese authorities and supported by relevant international actors, including the EU, to improve accountability and good governance in the public sector or the implementation of critical economic reforms."

Meanwhile, Reuters said the EU is seeking to ramp up pressure on Lebanon's squabbling politicians, part of broader international

Lebanon has plunged into what the World Bank described as one of the worst economic crises since the 1850s, and political players continue to squabble

efforts to force a stable government capable of carrying out reforms to emerge from political chaos and economic collapse following a blast that ravaged Beirut port.

"It is, however, of the utmost importance that the Lebanese leadership put aside their differences and work together to form a government and enact the measures required to steer the country towards a sustainable recovery," the EU statement said.

The EU said earlier in July that the sanctions measures would not be immediately implemented.

Under the sanctions regime, some people could face travel bans and asset freezes. Diplomats have said targets are not likely to be decided before the end of the summer. EU persons and entities

are also forbidden from making funds available to those listed, the statement said.

Criteria for EU sanctions would include corruption, obstructing efforts to form a government, financial misdeeds and human rights abuses.

The United States welcomes the EU's move, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in a statement, adding that Washington "looks forward to future cooperation with the EU in our shared efforts."

— AFP/Reuters

Turkish wildfire leaves charred home as blazes continue

MANAVGAT: Days after a raging wildfire in southern Turkey drove his family from the home they lived in for four decades, Mehmet Demir returned on Saturday to discover a burnt-out building, charred belongings and ashes.

Bedsprings, a ladder, metal chairs and some kitchenware were the only things left identifiable after some of the worst fires in years tore through the region, with several still burning four days after they erupted on Wednesday.

Demir's home, near the coastal Mediterranean town of Manavgat, not far from the popular tourist resort Antalya, was hit by one of almost 100 fires which officials say erupted this week across southern and western Turkey, where sweltering heat and strong winds fanned the flames.

"The blaze spread through the highlands and raged suddenly," Demir said as he looked around the wreckage of his home, built in 1982. "We had to flee to the centre of Manavgat. Then we came back to find the house like this."

"This was our (only) saving



Fire trucks on a road as a wildfire engulfed a Mediterranean resort region on Turkey's southern coast near the town of Manavgat. — AFP

for the past 39-40 years. We are now left with the clothes we are wearing, me and my wife. There is nothing to do. This is when words fail."

The death toll from the fires rose to six on Saturday, as two firefighting personnel died during efforts to control the fire in Manavgat, broadcaster CNN Turk said.

Satellite imagery showed smoke from the fires in Antalya

and Mersin was extending to the island of Cyprus, around 150 km away. Wildfires are common in southern Turkey in the hot summer months but local authorities say the latest fires have covered a much bigger area.

With deadly heatwaves, flooding and wildfires occurring around the world, calls are growing for urgent action to cut the CO2 emissions heating the planet. — AFP

Talks under way to end fighting in Syria's Daraa

BEIRUT: Ceasefire negotiations have started in Syria's southern province of Daraa after the deadliest flare-up in three years killed 28 people, including 11 civilians, a war monitor said last week.

The clashes on Thursday between government forces and rebel fighters marked one of the deadliest days of fighting in Syria in recent months.

They posed a fresh challenge to a Moscow-brokered truce that allowed rebels to stay in Daraa province after it was taken by the government in 2018.

On Friday, the two sides exchanged tit-for-tat machine gunfire but refrained from escalating attacks following talks to stop the fighting, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The negotiations between the Syrian army, security officials and a committee of Daraa residents formed in the wake of the clashes,



Smoke rises above rebel-held areas of the city of Daraa during reported air strikes by Syrian regime forces. — AFP File Photo

came under pressure from Russia and it remains to be seen whether a ceasefire deal was reached, the monitor said.

Thursday's exchange started when the army launched a ground assault backed by artillery on Daraa al Balad, a southern district of the provincial capital that is considered a hub for former rebel groups, the Observatory said.

In response, rebel fighters launched a broad counterattack, seizing several government positions across the province and capturing more than 40 troops and militiamen, it added.

The violence killed 28 people, including eight government fighters and nine gunmen affiliated with opposition groups.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

TRIPOLI

Libya fully reopens east-west highway

Libya fully reopened the coastal highway linking the country's east and west, after unblocking parts in areas controlled by forces loyal to military strongman Khalifa Haftar. 'Everything will be done to ensure the safety of travellers,' a joint military commission from rival camps said.

The highway was mostly reopened last month in a move interim Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah at the time said would help to "turn a page" after a decade of conflict. The



highway connects the war-torn North African country's border with Tunisia to its frontier with Egypt. — AFP

RIYADH

Doctors in Saudi separate Yemeni baby from twin

A team of doctors in Saudi Arabia has separated a Yemeni baby from her parasitic twin, authorities said, marking their 50th successful operation on conjoined twins. Aisha Ahmed Saeed was born fully developed but with an extended pelvis area and an extra pair of lower extremities, the Saudi English-language *Arab News* daily reported.

The procedure to separate her took seven hours and 45 minutes and involved a team of 25 medical staff including



doctors, technicians and nurses, said the state-run King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center. — AFP

KHARTOUM

Tribal clashes in Sudan's Kordofan kill 20

Tribal clashes in Sudan's West Kordofan state have killed at least 20 people and wounded dozens more, witnesses said. The violence broke out late on Thursday between members of the Arab Hamar and Misseriya tribes near the town of Al Nahoud, some 560 kilometres southwest of Khartoum.

"I saw 20 bodies and other wounded people taken to the hospital and tensions continued into Friday morning," witness Hamdan Mohamed said.



Another witness, Ahmed Adam, said the violence was triggered by "a dispute over a plot of agricultural land". — AFP

In brief

■ KOLKATA



11 KILLED AS INDIA'S MONSOON DEATH TOLL SWELLS

Eleven people were killed in eastern India after torrential rains swept away homes and triggered landslides, officials said on Saturday, taking the country's monsoon death toll above 230. Rainstorms that have swept across the nation lashed the eastern state of West Bengal causing widespread destruction.

Four people were electrocuted after rain gushed into their homes in Howrah and North 24 Parganas district, state disaster management minister Javed Khan said. Seven people died when their houses were washed away by downpours, he said, with several still missing. — AFP

■ BANGKOK



PROTESTS AGAINST MYANMAR MILITARY AHEAD OF ANNIVERSARY

Small groups of students protested against Myanmar's military junta on Saturday in Mandalay and a human rights group accused the armed forces of crimes against humanity ahead of the six-month anniversary of the army's takeover.

Bands of university students rode motorbikes around Mandalay waving red and green flags, saying they rejected any possibility of talks with the military to negotiate a return to civilian rule. "There's no negotiating in a blood feud," read one sign.

Myanmar's army seized power on February 1 from the civilian government led by Aung San Suu Kyi after her ruling party won elections that the military argued were tainted by fraud. — AFP

■ COLOMBO



SRI LANKA ENDS WORK-FROM-HOME OPTION

Sri Lanka announced it was ending its work-from-home option for civil servants, ordering all 1.2 million back to the office from Monday despite a surge in coronavirus infections. The island's top bureaucrat, P B Jayasundera, said there was no need for officials to work from home since "the majority... have been vaccinated".

The move came even as Sri Lanka recorded a doubling in daily Covid-19 cases to around 2,000 compared to early July, with hospitals struggling to cope. Government figures show that 9.17 million people, or 43 per cent of the population, have had one vaccine dose, and more than two million people have received two shots. — AFP

Delta variant rampant in Asia

TOKYO, THAILAND, MALAYSIA POST RECORD COVID INFECTIONS



A man reacts as he receives a dose of a vaccine against the coronavirus disease during a mass vaccination programme in Jakarta. — Reuters

TOKYO: The Olympics host city Tokyo, as well as Thailand and Malaysia, announced a record number of Covid-19 infections on Saturday, mostly driven by the highly transmissible Delta variant of the disease.

Cases surged in Sydney as well, where police cordoned off the central business district to prevent a protest against a strict lockdown that will last until the end of August.

Police closed train stations, banned taxis from dropping passengers off downtown and deployed 1,000 officers to set up checkpoints and to disperse groups. The government of New South Wales reported 210 new infections in Sydney and surrounding areas from the Delta variant outbreak.

Tokyo's metropolitan government announced a record number of 4,058 infections in the past 24 hours, topping 4,000 for the first time. Olympics organisers reported 21 new Covid-19 cases related to the Games, bringing the total to 241 since July 1.

Covid-19 infections have increased by 80 pc over the past four weeks in most regions of the world

TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS

WHO Director-General

The record comes a day after Japan extended its state of emergency for Tokyo to the end of August, expanding it to three prefectures near Tokyo and the western prefecture of Osaka in light of the recent spike in infections.

Olympics organisers said on Saturday they had revoked accreditation of a Games-related person or people for leaving the athletes' village for sightseeing, a violation of measures imposed to hold the Olympics safely amid the pandemic.

The organisers did not disclose how many people had their accreditation revoked, if the person or people involved were athletes, or when the violation took place.

Malaysia, one of the hotspots of the disease, reported 17,786 coronavirus cases on Saturday, a record number of infections.

More than 100 people gathered in the centre of the capital Kuala Lumpur, expressing dissatisfaction with the government's handling of the pandemic and calling on Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin to quit.

Protesters carried black flags and held up placards that read "Kerajaan Gagal" (failed government) — a hashtag that has been popular on social media for months.

Thailand reported a daily record of 18,912 new coronavirus infections, bringing the country's total accumulated cases to 597,287. The country also reported 178 new deaths, also a daily record, taking total fatalities to 4,857.

— Reuters

Covid-19 cases surge in Sydney as police cordon deterrents protest

MELBOURNE: Sydney's coronavirus cases continued to surge on Saturday as police cordoned off the city's central district, preventing a planned anti-lockdown protest from taking place.

There were 210 locally acquired cases of Covid-19 reported in Sydney and vicinities that are under a weeks-long strict lockdown while battling an outbreak of the highly infectious Delta variant. Saturday's numbers bring the outbreak to 3,190 cases.

The lockdown, to last at least until the end of August, spurred violent demonstrations last weekend, with protesters vowing to return to the streets on Saturday.

But the police closed train stations, banned taxis from dropping passengers off downtown and deployed 1,000 officers to set up check points and to disperse any groups.

Australian media reported that the rally's organisers urged their followers on Saturday to avoid gathering and regroup on a later date.

A late-July poll by the NSW-



Police conduct a law enforcement operation to prevent anti-lockdown protesters from gathering during a lockdown in Sydney suburb. — Reuters

based market research firm Utting Research showed that only 7 per cent of the people support the demonstrations. Compliance with public health rules has been one of the key cited reasons behind Australia's success in managing the pandemic.

Despite its struggle with spikes of infections, mostly of the Delta variant, Australia has managed to keep its epidemic largely under control with a total of just over 34,000 cases and 924 deaths.

The country has struggled significantly with its vaccination rollout, with the government indicating on

Friday it will be months before Australia's borders reopen.

In Sydney, there are 198 people in the hospital, 53 of them in intensive care and 27 requiring ventilation, NSW Health Minister Brad Hazzard said. There was also one death reported, bringing the total number of deaths in the outbreak to 14.

Parts of the neighbouring state Queensland entered into a three-day snap lockdown on Saturday after the state recorded six new coronavirus cases of the Delta strain, putting a number of football, rugby and other sporting events into a limbo. — AFP

China reports new Covid cases

BEIJING: China on Saturday reported 55 new coronavirus cases on the mainland for July 30, compared with 64 cases a day earlier, as the Delta variant spreads across the country during the summer holiday.



He Qinghua, inspector for China's National Health Commission's disease control and prevention bureau, at a press conference in Beijing.

— AFP

Thirty of the new infections were local cases, compared with 21 the previous day, the National Health Commission said in a statement. There were no new deaths. The other 25 cases originated overseas.

A majority of the local cases were reported in Jiangsu province where Nanjing, its provincial capital, is facing an outbreak of the Covid-19 Delta variant this month traced to airport workers who cleaned a plane which arrived from Russia.

Nanjing has reported 190 locally transmitted cases since July 20, while there has been a total of 262 cases across the country, figures released on Saturday showed. The Nanjing outbreak has spread to other cities in Jiangsu, to the country's capital Beijing, and to other provinces including Anhui, Sichuan, Liaoning, Guangdong and Hunan.

Suzhou, a major city in Jiangsu, announced on Saturday it is shutting all games parlours for chess, cards and mahjong, after several people in another Jiangsu city caught the virus while playing in one such parlour. To curb the outbreak in Beijing, some schools in the city have asked students on summer vacation to return to Beijing at least 14 days before the autumn semester starts on August 15, the *Beijing Youth Daily* reported.

Zhengzhou, a provincial city in Henan province hit by heavy floods this month, announced on Saturday that people must test negative for Covid-19 before leaving the city. — Reuters

جامعة صحر
SOHAR UNIVERSITY

TENDER NOTICE No. 002/2021

Sohar University invites sealed tenders from specialized, experience and authorized suppliers for Supply of Personal Computers, Laptop and Data Show Projectors who have sufficient experience in providing similar service to Government/Private Organizations.

The tender details are as follows:

Tender	Description	Fee OR	Submission Date
002/2021	Supply of Personal Computers, Laptop and Data Show Projectors	150/-	26/08/2021

The tender document can be obtained from Procurement and Contracts Department from **03/08/2021 to 12/08/2021 08:00 to 15:00 hrs** at Sohar University Main campus in Sohar after payment of RO. 150.000/- in cash (Non-refundable) at the cash counter located in the Al Khauboor Building. The receipt of payment has to be taken to the Procurement and Contracts Department to collect the Tender Document.

Tenders offers must be submitted in closed envelopes sealed, delivered at the Sohar University premises, tender number shall be written only on the envelope, no indication shall be made, and deadline for submission of offers is **26/08/2021 12:00 hours**.

Tender should be addressed to Deputy-Vice Chancellor - Resources and deposited in the tender Box at DVC-R Office as given below during office hours 08:00 to 15:00 Sunday to Thursday.

**Deputy Vice-Chancellor – Resources Office
Sohar University
P.O Box 44, P.C. 311, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman.
Telephone: 26850100 Ext.: 421 & 289
(Procurement and Contracts Department)**

Sohar University reserves the right to accept or reject any offer without assigning any reason.

‘War has changed’, CDC says, calling for new response to Delta variant

WASHINGTON: The war against Covid-19 has changed because of the highly contagious Delta variant, the US Centers for Disease Control said, proposing a clearer message, mandatory vaccines for health workers and a return to universal masking.

An internal CDC document said the variant, first detected in India and now dominant across the globe, is as contagious as chickenpox and far more contagious than the common cold or flu. It can be passed on even by vaccinated people, and may cause more serious disease than earlier coronavirus strains.

The document, entitled “Improving communications around vaccine breakthrough and vaccine effectiveness”, said the variant required a new approach to help the public understand the danger — including making clear that unvaccinated people were more than 10 times more likely than those who are vaccinated to become seriously ill or die.

“Acknowledge the war has changed,” it said. “Improve communications around individual risk among vaccinated.”

Recommended preventative measures included making vaccines mandatory for healthcare professionals to protect the vulnerable and a return to universal wearing of face masks.

The CDC confirmed the



A woman costumed as Minnie Mouse wears a mask to prevent against the spread of coronavirus disease as the highly transmissible Delta variant has led to a surge in infections in New York City. — Reuters

‘War has changed’, says CDC, as Delta variant is as contagious as chickenpox. Even those vaccinated should wear masks

authenticity of the document, which was first reported by the *Washington Post*.

While vaccinated people were less likely to become infected, once they contracted such



Dr Rochelle Walensky, Director, Center for Disease Control and Prevention

“breakthrough infections” from Delta — unlike the case with earlier variants — they might now be just as likely as the unvaccinated to pass the disease on to others.

“High viral loads suggest an

increased risk of transmission and raised concern that, unlike with other variants, vaccinated people infected with Delta can transmit the virus,” CDC head Rochelle Walensky said in a statement.

On Friday, the CDC released data from a study of an outbreak in Massachusetts in which it said three quarters of those infected had been fully vaccinated. That study played a pivotal roll in a CDC decision this week to again recommend that vaccinated people wear masks in some situations, Walensky said. — Reuters

Jab makers urged to help poor nations

GENEVA: Four of the world’s most prominent health, trade and financial organisations on Saturday implored Covid-19 vaccine manufacturers to prioritise doses for poorer countries to combat the “acute and alarming shortage”.

A joint statement by the heads of the World Health Organization, World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund and World Bank said countries which have progressed far in vaccinating against the disease should release doses rapidly in favour of less fortunate nations.

“We reiterate the urgency of providing access to Covid-19 vaccines, tests and treatments to people throughout the developing world,” they said.

“In the area of vaccines, a key constraint is the acute and alarming shortage in the supply of doses to low and low-middle income countries, especially for the rest of 2021.

“We call on countries with advanced Covid-19 vaccination programmes to release as soon as possible as much of their contracted vaccine doses and options as possible to Covax, AVAT (the African Vaccine Acquisition Trust), and low and low-middle income countries.”

Covax aims to get donor-funded jabs to poorer countries.

The leaders said vaccine delivery contracts for poorer nations were being delayed, with less than five per cent of purchased vaccine doses having been delivered.

“We urge Covid-19 vaccine manufacturers to redouble their efforts to scale up production of vaccines specifically for these countries, and to ensure that the supply of doses to Covax and low and low-middle income countries takes precedence over the promotion of boosters and other activities,” they said.

They called on governments to reduce or eliminate barriers to the export of vaccines and all materials involved in producing them, and said there was an urgent need to tackle supply chain bottlenecks. The four international agencies have set up a combined task force on Covid-19 vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics for developing countries in order to identify and resolve impediments to production. The task force held its first meeting on June 30. — AFP

Countries need to be more ambitious in climate goals: UN

PARIS: Countries that have signed up to the Paris accord to tame climate change need to be more ambitious in their own national efforts, the UN’s climate chief said on Saturday.

Only just over half of countries that are party to the accord have submitted updated proposals for limiting their carbon emissions, Patricia Espinosa said in a statement.

And “the level of ambition reflected in those national climate action plans also needs to be enhanced,” she said.

The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change that was adopted by 196 countries in December 2015 with the aim of limiting global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius and preferably to 1.5C, compared to pre-industrial levels.

Under the accord, every participating country originally had until the end of 2020 to

“Extreme heatwaves, droughts and floods across the globe are a dire warning that much more needs to be done, and much more quickly, to change our current pathway

PATRICIA ESPINOSA
UN climate chief

submit new or updated “nationally determined contributions” or “NDCs”.

But because of the global coronavirus pandemic and the postponement of the COP26 climate conference in Glasgow to November 2021, a number of governments said they would be unable to meet the deadline.

By the new cut-off date on



A temporary bridge is seen in the village of Rech near Dernau on the river Ahr, western Germany, weeks after heavy rain and floods caused major damage in the Ahr region. — AFP

Friday, “the secretariat (had) received new or updated NDCs from 110 parties,” Espinosa said, including the United States, which came back into the Paris Agreement after former president Donald Trump pulled out.

“This compares favourably with new or updated NDCs from 75 parties received up to the end of December 2020... but it is still far from satisfactory, since only a little over half the Parties (54 per cent) have met the cut-off deadline.”

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has indicated that by the end of this decade, emissions must have been reduced by at least 45 per cent compared to 2010 levels.

“Recent extreme heatwaves, droughts and floods across the globe are a dire warning that much more needs to be done, and much more quickly, to change our current pathway. This can only be achieved through more ambitious NDCs,” Espinosa said. — AFP

PARIS

Protests against virus measures expected in France

Large-scale demonstrations against stricter coronavirus rules are expected in France for the third consecutive weekend. The authorities expect some 160,000 people to join protests across the country, French media reported, citing the police.

Last Saturday, more than 160,000 people protested against compulsory vaccinations for health workers and an extension of the so-called health passport, which shows holders have tested negative, recovered or have been



fully vaccinated. The French government introduced stricter regulations in mid-July as case numbers soared. After a lengthy debate, the French parliament approved the controversial changes earlier this week. — dpa

ATHENS

Greece suffering from record high temperatures

A powerful and long-lasting heatwave means high temperatures are set to continue in Greece, with thermometers recording 43 degrees Celsius in some places over the past three days. During the weekend and in the week ahead, forecasters say temperatures could rise to 46 degrees Celsius during the day. On Tuesday, the temperature in Rhodes is also expected to rise to around 44 degrees Celsius. Nights too remain hot, particularly in urban areas with the temperature



above 30 degrees Celsius. The heat has prompted some meteorologists to describe the situation as a “historic heatwave.” The Greek Civil Defence was put on alert following an emergency meeting. — dpa

HELSINKI

Finland battles worst forest fire in 50 years

Finland is battling its worst forest fire in half a century with some 300 hectares ravaged in five days in a northwestern valley during an exceptionally hot summer. The fire began on Monday about 25 kilometres south of the small port town of Kalajoki in the Gulf of Bothnia. “It’s still burning, but it hasn’t got bigger, it’s limited to 300 hectares,” Jarmo Haapanen, in charge of firefighting operations near Kalajoki, said. He said it would take a “minimum



of one week, perhaps two or three weeks” for it to be put out completely. “If climate change warms our summers like that, I’m sure it will happen more often,” he warned. — AFP

Climate pledges pile pressure on major emitters

KATE ABNETT

A group of mostly smaller countries submitted new, more ambitious climate pledges to the United Nations last week, raising pressure on big emitters to do the same ahead of a major UN climate summit in November.

UN climate chief Patricia Espinosa said that as of Saturday the United Nations had received new pledges from 110 countries, out of the nearly 200 that signed the 2015 Paris climate accord. “It is still far from satisfactory, since only a little over half the parties (58 per cent) have met the cut-off deadline,” Espinosa said in a statement, urging laggards to “redouble their efforts” and make more ambitious commitments to protect the planet.

A total of 15 countries — most of them small and with relatively low CO2 emissions — submitted new pledges this week, ahead of a July 30 deadline for them to be counted in a UN report. They included Sri Lanka, Israel, Malawi and Barbados. Malaysia, Nigeria and Namibia were among the larger countries to submit tougher climate targets this week. With deadly heatwaves, flooding and wildfires occurring around the world, calls are growing for urgent action to cut the CO2 emissions heating the planet.

“The United Nations had received new pledges from 110 countries, out of the nearly 200 that signed the 2015 Paris climate accord. It is still far from satisfactory, since only a little over half the parties have met the cut-off deadline

PATRICIA ESPINOSA
UN Climate Chief

But the United Nations’ latest analysis of countries’ climate pledges said that taken together, they would still lead to global warming far beyond the 1.5 degree limit that would avoid the worst impacts of climate change. “I truly hope that the revised estimate of collective efforts will reveal a more positive picture,” Espinosa said.

China — the world’s biggest emitter of CO2 — and countries including India and South Korea have not yet submitted new climate pledges. They are facing considerable international pressure to do so ahead of the UN climate summit.

The United States and European Union, the world’s second and third biggest emitters, hiked their targets in recent months, promising to slash emissions faster this decade. Tina Stege, climate envoy for the Marshall Islands, an island country near the Equator in the Pacific Ocean which is highly vulnerable to rising sea levels, urged rich nations who have not yet hiked their pledges to step up. — Reuters



FIGHTING FOR THEIR LANDS

A demonstrator raises her hand, painted with the colours of the Palestinian flag, during a demonstration by activists against Israeli occupation and settlement activity in the Palestinian Territories and East Jerusalem, in Jerusalem's Palestinian Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood on Saturday. — AFP

Fridge magnet philosophy works for me!



Ray Petersen
r.j.petersen52@gmail.com

MANY FRIDGE
MAGNETS
FOCUS ON FOOD
AND DIETS,
AND ANOTHER
GOOD ONE
THAT PROBABLY
REFLECTS MY
ATTITUDE TO
DIETING

I love... no, I like fridge magnets! No... not the ones with Dutch windmills, the UK’s Big Ben, the Statue of Liberty from the States, or the Egyptian pyramids, but those that have homespun philosophies.

A mother and wife perhaps underlined the frustrations of cooking for a family of fussy eaters, in rehashing what was probably her Grandma’s mealtime mantra that, “Every day my family has two choices at dinner... take it or leave it!” In today’s environment of vegan, vegetarian, and everything in-between food fads, I think it’s a great statement of intent to ‘take back’ the kitchen!

Which also begs the random question... why do vegetarians like going to barbeques so much? I love doing a ‘bbq!’ They are a fun social occasion, with good food, good company, and usually lots of laughter... but there is always a vegetarian or a vegan who pushes and prods at the chicken, steaks, sausages, and burgers with a fork, lifting them half off the plate with a fascinated/ horrified glance at the underside, expecting it to look different maybe, and stridently exclaiming something like, “Oh it’s disgusting! I don’t eat meat, and I don’t know how you can. You’re all disgusting, yuck!” I mean really, what’s that all about? Desperate for attention maybe? I don’t inspect the salad, cheese

and yoghurts going, “OMG! When you think about where that’s come from...” Do I? it’s weird!

Much of the world too, is made of tea or coffee devotees, and obviously, someone who doesn’t drink coffee, and is sick of hearing about its revitalising, recharging, rejuvenating qualities wrote... “Drink coffee! It doesn’t make you any better, but you will do the silly things faster!” People who don’t drink coffee, according to my good friend Asim al Saqri, and his wife Hajar, the owners of the ‘Kawa Kava Café’ in Birkat al Mouz, “have never lived!” Well, I took him at his word and tried one of his signature coffees one day... and never slept for 48 hours! On the other hand, we all know people who are so frustratingly slow they could do with an espresso drip.

Many fridge magnets focus on food and diets, and another good one that probably reflects my attitude to dieting, and my inability to stick to them, resonates with considerable empathy, being... “I just finished my 28 day diet... it took me only 36 hours and 17 minutes!” While the result of being unable to discipline my nutritional intake are consequentially clear, as a bygone insistence that “My body is a temple,” has today’s addenda of... “that was once worshipped, but is now an ancient,

crumbling, abandoned, facile, remnant of yesteryear’s glories.” Fortunately, “I’m still good in bed... I can sleep for days.”

Our interactions with others are challenged, or enhanced, depending upon your perspective, by pearls of wisdom like this, clearly from someone with a thick skin, “I do not have an attitude problem. You have a problem with my attitude, and that’s your problem, not mine.” My Mum would explain that she “rarely argued, but often explained why she was right!” A warning was issued by another mother taken past their ‘tipping point,’ by a lazy teenage son saying, “You better run... the chains on my mood swing just snapped.” While the best of that genre must be, “I’m sorry. Did I roll my eyes out loud?”

I do like inspirational philosophies too, and though laughter may well be the best medicine, we take eloquence, meaning, and poignancy from the man with the greatest name ever given. Minor Myers Jnr was a noted liberal, political historian, political theorist, and philosopher, who once exhorted an Illinois Wesleyan University graduate cohort to “Go out into the world and do well,” then he thought for a moment and said, “but more importantly, go out into the world and do good!” How could you fail to be galvanised by such clarity?

Kiki’s fight to gain the whole territory in the house...



Rasha al Raisi
rashabooks@yahoo.com

KIKI’S DAILY
ROUTINE STARTS
AT 7.30 AM AS SHE
STANDS AT MY
DOOR WAITING
TO LEAVE THE
ROOM

Our house is divided into two cat territories. The first is mom’s room that is solely controlled by cross-eyed Poppy. And the second is my room (of course!) that is shared between three cats: Fat Mansoor, Duja the Siren and Little-Miss-Terror Kiki.

For years, Kiki had been fighting to gain the whole of the territory to no avail. The main spot (the bed) is shared between the two male cats, who due to their seniority had reached a long-time agreement on which spot to sleep on.

Kiki tried more than once to invade the bed and get her own spot, to be either howled at by Duja or slapped back to the floor by Fat Mansoor. Sulking at her defeat, she’d climb the ironing

board and wait for the right time to strike back but soon forgets about it and doze off instead.

Although she has no luck in gaining her own territory (yet), Kiki managed to control the whole house during the pandemic.

Kiki’s daily routine starts at 7.30 am as she stands at my door waiting to leave the room. Pushing her aside, I close the door tightly behind me and seek one-eyed Sinan — her favourite victim — to throw outside before unleashing the blind Minotaur.

When it’s too hot, Sinan stupidly opts to get back inside to be chased around the house by Kiki who’d easily sniff out his hiding spot. While running around the house like Theseus in the labyrinth, we try saving

Sinan by running after both and shouting instructions like Ariadne: “Here Sinan! I’ll open the door for you!”

When Sinan is outside in safety, Kiki starts her morning rounds by visiting each room in the house, meowing back at anyone wishing her a good morning. Then she’ll head to the enemy’s territory — mom’s room — to check on Poppy.

Poppy would be nesting on the shelves outside the room as she rarely spends the night in her territory, preferring the living room where she could pick fights with Sinan (Poor Sinan Indeed!).

Like a trained wolf, Kiki would sniff the air to locate Poppy and manage to find her whether she’s hiding in Mom’s room or sitting

dead silent on the shelves. This would be the auspicious time to mark her territory by spraying nearby the door, communicating to Poppy not to get too comfy in her own territory as there are future invasion plans cooking.

The funny thing is although Poppy is twice Kiki’s size and can see, she’s so terrified of her that she refuses to leave mom’s room without an escort. Whenever Poppy wants to use the toilet outside or go to the balcony, she’ll pat Mom’s hand and follow her outside, turning her head right and left to make sure that Kiki is not around.

Kiki spends the rest of the morning loitering around the house, rolling over sunny spots on the balcony’s floor, listening

carefully to words exchanged across the neighbourhood, sniffing the air by mid-day to guess today’s special (Sunday’s fried beef liver is her favourite. She sticks to dad while he has his lunch in order to be fed). When I go out, Kiki would sit on the stairs waiting for me (not out of love of course but to be fed the minute I walk in. We’re talking about pragmatic cats here not sentimental dogs!).

Once the clock strikes 1.30 pm, it’s time to lock her back in my room and let Sinan inside. Now the indoor cats could sigh in relief as peace and quiet reigns home again. Happy 3rd birthday to my Little Blind Bully!

(The writer is a certified skills trainer and author)

Sprinter Barakat sets his season best, Amur breaks personal record



Mohamed al Hammadi of United Arab Emirates, Barakat al Harthy of Oman, Badamassi Saguirou of Niger, Didier Kiki of Benin and Ratu Banuve Tabakaucoro of Fiji in action in Heat 2. — Reuters

ADIL AL BALUSHI
TOKYO, JULY 31

Oman's top sprinter Barakat al Harthy advanced to first round of the men's 100 metres at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games.

Barakat topped the preliminary heat two group and clocked 10.27 seconds on Saturday at the Olympic Stadium. With the new timing, he registered his seasonal best record. The previous best season record of Barakat is 10.37 seconds.

Weightlifter Amur al Khanjari finished as runner up in weightlifting competition at men's 81kg – group B event and in tenth place in the overall order of the category.

The 20-year-old managed to register his personal best record in his debut in Tokyo 2020 Olympics as he lifted a total 317 kg with four kg extra than his previous record in Egypt on Saturday at Tokyo International Forum in Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games

In the first round qualification heat five of Men's 100 metres



Oman's Barakat al Harthy wins the men's 100m heat during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. — AFP

race event, Barakat clocked 10.31 seconds in seventh place.

With this result, Barakat ended his journey at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. De Grasse Andre (CAN) took the first place and qualified for the semis in a time

I claimed the new timing after hard work under watchful eyes of the national coach Mohammed al Hooti through series of training and long overseas camp in Turkey. Thanks to everyone who supported me during the past years and highly appreciated the support from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Oman Olympic Committee, Oman Athletics Association, my spectators and I am assuring you to deliver my best in the forthcoming events

BARAKAT AL HARTHY
Omani sprinter

of 9.91 seconds while Kerley Fred (USA) was the runner up in a time of 9.97seconds.

Omurwa Ferdinand (KEN) finished third in a time of 10.01s.

The Ibra-born athlete commented post the race that he is

happy with registering the seasonal best.

"I claimed the new timing after a hard work under watchful eyes of the national coach Mohammed al Hooti through series of training and long overseas camp in Turkey.

Thanks to everyone who supported me during the past years and highly appreciated the support from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Oman Olympic Committee, Oman Athletics Association, my spectators and I am assuring you to deliver my best in the forthcoming events," he said.

"The competition was very strong and tough among all the participating opponents runners who were in good shape to compete. The 100-metre sprint event is considered one of the most difficult athletics races as the small technical details may differ from you to another athlete with a fragment of a second," he added.

"Taking part in the Olympics is significant for any athlete to register the desired development. I am proud of the three consecutive Olympic Games and differently I will translate this experience on my sporting career whether as an athlete or in different position in the future," he concluded.

Perfect show for Amur on his Olympic debut

Oman's weightlifter Amur al Khanjari delivered solid performance in his debut in the weightlifting competition on Saturday at Tokyo International Forum in Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games.

He showed perfect form at men's 81kg – group B and in tenth place in the overall order of the category. He lifted a total of 317 kg with four kg extra than his previous record in Egypt in Arabian Weightlifting championship.

Omani athlete began in snatch competition and he registered 140 kg as his best attempt. In his initial attempt, he lifted 130 kg and in the following attempt he could not manage to lift 137 kg. In the last attempt, he lifted successfully 140 and it was the best attempt.

In an exciting clean and jerk session, Oman's Amur recorded 177 kg. In the first attempt he managed to lift 170 kg while in the later attempt he failed to lift 176 kg but he bounced back strongly in the final attempt as he lifted 177 kg. He finished with a total of 317 kg, which is also a new best personal record for Amur.

NEW EXPERIENCE

Commenting after his debut in Tokyo 2020 Olympics, weightlifter Amur expressed his joy on setting a new best personal record for him in Tokyo 2020 Olympics. "I am proud of my first presence in Olympics event. It is really a new experience for me to see and contact with top weightlifters. Competing against the world ranking weightlifter is a wonderful exposure prior to any forthcoming regional, continental and globe events," he added.

Oman's talented weightlifter highlighted his future goals. "My aim is to focus now in the upcoming Paris 2024 Olympic Games. I will work hard under the technical instructions of my coach to develop the weakness areas and enhance the positive technical sides. I hope to get the right support from the related government and private sectors which will assist me to prepare and shape my readiness ahead of taking in top events," he ended.

Mir hits hat-trick to send Spain into Olympic semi with Japan

MIYAGI, Japan: Substitute Rafa Mir hit a hat-trick as Spain finally saw off Ivory Coast 5-2 in extra time in the Tokyo Olympics men's football on Saturday to set up a semifinal with hosts Japan.

Brazil defeated Egypt 1-0 thanks to a first-half strike by Matheus Cunha and will play either South Korea or Mexico in the other last-four clash.

The Spaniards are one of the gold medal favourites after naming a strong squad featuring six members of the team that reached the Euro 2020 semi-

finals.

But they suffered a major fright before reaching the last four, even if the scoreline suggested otherwise.

Spain were just minutes from going out when forward Max Gradel's deflected strike made it 2-1 to the Ivorians in the 91st minute of normal time.

But the Spaniards responded almost immediately, Wolves forward Mir lashing in from close range to force extra time, just a minute after coming on.

Manchester United defender Eric Bailly then conceded a

penalty for handball after the intervention of VAR, with Mikel Oyarzabal stroking the ball in for a 3-2 Spain lead in the 98th minute.

Mir struck twice in the dying minutes to put extra gloss on the scoreline.

Japan's quarterfinal with New Zealand was a far tighter affair with the score deadlocked at 0-0 after 120 minutes.

The hosts kept their nerve in the penalty shootout and the Kiwis missed twice from the spot, sending Japan through 4-2 on penalties. — AFP



Spain's defender Juan Miranda (L) vies for the ball with Ivory Coast's defender Eric Bailly during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games men's quarterfinal match. — AFP

ABDULLAH ROMPS TO JORDAN TRIUMPH

OMANI-JORDANIAN DUO CLAIMS JORDAN RALLY THIRD ROUND TITLE

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JULY 31

Oman rally star Abdullah al Rawahi returned to winning ways after claiming the top spot in the third round of Jordan Rally Championship 2021 held near Dead Sea in Amman on Saturday.

The triumph in Jordan was also bitter-sweet for the Omani youngster after he was forced out of Jordan International Rally due to an overheating engine two months back.

Al Rawahi and his Jordanian co-driver Ata al Hmoud finished on top in their Subaru Impreza STi N14 after covering the total distance of 167 km in 40 minutes 39 seconds.

The Omani-Jordanian duo claimed the first spot in all the four Super Special stages to take the lead in the Jordan Rally Championship also after the three rounds.

“I’m very happy to return to Jordan after a long break and to claim the title in the third round on Subaru N14. Feels great to win outside Oman despite facing some difficulties during the races. Less power of engine, terrain was different in Dead Sea area, especially on Nebo and Main categories. So, happy to be on the podium with my co-driver Ata al Hmoud,” Abdullah said after winning the title.

Abdullah said they had to manage the engine issues and adjust to the terrain before finishing top.

“This win is a satisfying one especially when conditions were not perfect. This experience will definitely help me and our team in the upcoming events,” Al Rawahi added.

Jordanian drivers Youseff al Asmal and Kayyal Nabil in Subaru Impreza STi N11 finished second with a timing of 43:05 in the third round.

Local drivers Ameer Nassif and Musa Djiyerian in Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X claimed third position with a timing of 43:42.

GRAVEL STAGES

The event, organised by the Jordan Motorsport Association, included gravel stage for 53.34 km and the rest road sections in 166.59 km total distance.

Stage timings for Al Rawahi were 7:11 minutes, 13:03, 7:14 and 13:11 in the four stages respectively.

The first leg consisted of Super Stage 1 (Nebo 1) for 9.7 km and Super Stage 2 (Main 1) for 16.97 km.

The second leg repeated the two special gravel stages for the same distance.

Al Rawahi didn’t participate in the first and second round in 2021 edition due to Covid-19 imposed travel restrictions.

Two more rounds are remaining in the 2021 Jordan Rally Championship with Abdullah and Ata in the lead after the first three rounds.

Abdullah and Al Hmoud had claimed the overall championship in the Jordan Rally 2019.

In 2020, Abdullah won the first round but was unable to attend further rounds due to the pandemic situation.

“This win is a satisfying one especially when conditions were not perfect. This experience will definitely help me and our team in the upcoming events

ABDULLAH AL RAWAHI
Omani rally driver



Stokes to take ‘indefinite break’ for mental well-being

LONDON: England all-rounder Ben Stokes has taken an indefinite break from all cricket with immediate effect to prioritise his mental well-being and continue his recovery from an injury to his left index finger, the country’s cricket board (ECB) said on Friday.

Stokes, 30, has withdrawn from England’s test squad for next week’s series against India and will be replaced by Craig Overton.

The ECB said it fully supported his decision and it would “continue to help him during this

period away from the game”. “Ben has shown tremendous courage to open up about his feelings and well-being,” Ashley Giles, England’s director of men’s cricket, said in a statement. “Our primary focus has always been and will continue to be the mental health and welfare of all of our people. “Spending significant amounts of time away from family, with minimal freedoms, is extremely challenging. The cumulative effect of operating almost continuously in these environments over the last 16



England’s Ben Stokes reacts. – Reuters file photo

months has had a major impact on everyone’s well-being.” Stokes missed two of England’s test against Pakistan last summer after taking a five-week break from cricket to visit his family in Christchurch and help care for his father, who died in December after a year-long battle with brain cancer. Stokes has struggled with a finger injury throughout the summer and missed England’s home test series against New Zealand in June after suffering a fracture while playing for the Rajasthan Royals in the Indian

Premier League in April. He returned to competitive action ahead of schedule earlier this month for Durham in the Vitality Blast after a Covid-19 outbreak in their second team led to an availability crisis. In similar circumstances, Stokes then captained a second-string England team to a 3-0 one-day series win against Pakistan. Stokes most recently played for the Northern Superchargers in The Hundred. The five-test series between England and India stars on August 4 at Trent Bridge.

— Reuters

Homeowners weigh solar PV to offset rising bills

Homeowners covered by the scheme will be required to pay a modest payment upfront, which is calculated on the basis of their expected savings. Any surplus output from the solar systems will be injected back into the grid, with the resulting benefit shared in some fashion between the developer/investor and the homeowner.

شركة
تأجير التمويل
Taageer Finance
Co. S.A.O.G

BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2021

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Taageer Finance Company SAOG, I am pleased to present the unaudited financial statements for the period ended 30 June 2021.

Market Outlook

Challenges and the pressures of Market are expected to remain during rest of the year. The Global fights against the ongoing pandemic has remained. Oman witnessed an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases reported resulting in lockdowns, and this led to lower business volumes including the holy month of Ramadan where

the business levels are usually higher. The CBO has recently issued a circular extending the loan deferrals upto September-2021 to support the struggling businesses. An aggressive vaccination campaign initiated by the Government has given confidence to the market to sense a feeling of return to normal business life by the end of the year 2021. The Central Bank of Oman continues its forward looking assessment of the asset quality and ensuring that the financial institutions have adequate liquidity buffers in place to counter credit risks if any. Policy measures aimed at infusing liquidity to the sector is required to support the borrowing needs of the SME.

Performance Summary

Financial results for the period ended 30 June 2021 indicate that the company has made efforts to maintain its portfolio size. Company's Gross portfolio stood at RO 243.55 Million as on 30 June 2021 as compared to RO 230.76 million as on 30 June 2020 thereby registering an increase of 5.54% during these challenging times. Total Income for the period ended June 30, 2021 were RO 9.484 million as compared to RO 8.835 million for the same period last year thereby registering an increase of 7.35%. The Interest Expenses for the period ended 30 June 2021 stood at RO 4.22 Million as compared to RO 4.24 million for the same period last year.

Despite the pressures on the business volumes, the Company registered Profit of RO 2.92 Million before Expected Credit Losses (ECL) charge and taxation for the period ended 30 June 2021 as against RO 2.09 Million for the same period last year. The ECL charge for the six months period ended 30 June 2021 stood at RO 1,714K as against RO 978K for the same period of previous year. The company has pro-actively increased provisioning levels by 75.26% in view of prevailing market conditions. The Net Profit after ECL charge and Taxation stood at RO 1,026K for H1-2021 vis-à-vis RO 942K for H1-2020 thereby reflecting a growth of 8.92%.

Acknowledgement

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I wish to express sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik bin Taimour for his vision and wise leadership.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation and acknowledgement for the guidance and support from the Central Bank of Oman, Capital Market Authority and Muscat Securities Market. We are also grateful to our shareholders, bankers, dealers and customers for their continued trust, confidence and support. Finally, the Board would like to appreciate and thank the management and the staff for all their hard work and efforts.

On Behalf of the Board of Directors

Rashid bin Saif Al Saadi
Chairman

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who requests them in Arabic or English as requested, within 7 days of receipt of the request.

UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AT 30 JUNE 2021

	June-21 RO'000	June-20 RO'000	Dec-2020 RO'000
ASSETS			
Cash and bank balances	6,483	5,234	2,412
Net investment in finance leases, working capital finance and factoring receivables	168,503	174,154	170,154
Other receivables and prepayments	369	622	441
Financial assets at fair value through other comprehensive income	-	-	-
Deferred tax asset – net	88	1,016	88
Vehicles, equipment and right-of-use assets	555	800	771
Statutory deposit	250	250	250
Total assets	176,248	182,076	174,116
LIABILITIES AND EQUITY			
LIABILITIES			
Creditors, accruals and other liabilities	2,843	3,629	2,480
Bank overdrafts and short-term loans	60,293	64,021	65,496
Tax payable	206	1,075	377
Corporate and security deposits	11,015	10,110	8,645
Long-term loans	59,211	62,565	55,314
Total liabilities	133,568	141,400	132,312
EQUITY			
Share capital	25,359	25,359	25,359
Legal reserve	5,141	4,934	5,141
IFRS 9 impairment reserve	2,222	2,850	2,222
Fair value reserve	(441)	(441)	(441)
Retained earnings	10,399	7,974	9,523
Total equity	42,580	40,676	41,804
Total equity and liabilities	176,248	182,076	174,116
Customers liabilities under guarantees	-	-	-
Net assets per share (baizas)	169	160	165

UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2021

	June-21 RO'000	June-20 RO'000
Income		
Finance income	9,033	8,443
Interest expense	(4,216)	(4,238)
Net finance income	4,817	4,205
Other operating income	451	392
	5,268	4,597
Expenses		
Operating expenses	(2,114)	(2,300)
Depreciation	(230)	(211)
Impairment in net investment in finance leases, working capital finance and factoring receivables	(1,714)	(978)
	(4,058)	(3,489)
Profit before taxation	1,210	1,108
Taxation	(184)	(166)
Profit for the period	1,026	942
Other comprehensive income:		
Items that will not be reclassified to profit or loss		
Changes in fair value of financial assets at fair value through other comprehensive income – net of tax	-	-
Total comprehensive income for the period	1,026	942
Basic and diluted earnings per share (baizas)	8.09	7.43

The largest companies in the world at a glance

This week I want to conclude my analysis — started last week — on the economic and financial dynamics linked to the ranking of the top 100 companies in the world by capitalisation.

Every year, big-4 auditing firm PwC compiles a list of the 100 biggest companies and in 2021, Apple was still the top one with \$1.9 trillion. Such astronomical capitalisation is bigger than all of the top tech Chinese companies put together.

It is important to highlight that of the top 100 globally, 59 are from the USA, while 14 are from China. The rest of the world

counts 18 companies in Europe, 7 in Asia Pacific, 1 in Saudi Arabia and 1 in Canada. In terms of capitalisation volumes, the USA accounts for 65 per cent of the pie. China claims 13 per cent of the total.

Despite having only 1 company in the top 100, Saudi Arabia Aramco at \$1.9 trillion takes up a larger chunk for the pie than the entire Asia Pacific (excluding China).

Aramco is the second largest company in the world for market value. Followed by Microsoft at \$1.7 trillion, Amazon at \$1.5 trillion, Google's parent company Alphabet at \$1.3 trillion, and Facebook at over \$800 billion.



STEFANO VIRGILLI
stefano@virgilli.com

IT IS IMPORTANT TO HIGHLIGHT THAT OF THE TOP 100 GLOBALLY, 59 ARE FROM THE USA, WHILE 14 ARE FROM CHINA

Just to put numbers in context, the GDP of Germany is close to \$4 trillion, the same amount of Apple and Aramco's market capitalisation put together.

In Europe, the largest sector is Health Care, with a capitalisation close to \$1 trillion. That falls slightly short of a third of all sectors across all of the 18 companies in Europe, with total value at \$3.46 trillion.

Europe has lost a few companies in the top 100 compared to 2020. There are 3 fewer in the UK and 2 from France have dropped off the list.

However, Germany has added 2 more, for a net balance of negative 3 for Europe in the

top 100. In terms of company capitalisation by country, Switzerland contributes over \$800 billion, with Nestle on top at \$332 billion and Roche Holdings shortly after at \$283 billion.

Europe brings to the world twice as much market value than the entire block of companies — 7 all together — from the Asia Pacific region, namely Japan, South Korea, India and Australia.

The capitalisation of the top companies in this region accounts for approximately \$1.5 trillion. The first company from this region listed in the top 100 is Samsung Electronics, the 15th largest company in the world.

Toyota come in 32nd at \$245

billion. India appears at #58 in the list with Reliance Industries, in the energy sector.

Canada is listed in the top 100 only with #98, the Royal Bank of Canada with a market value of \$131 billion. Finance as an industry in USA summed up to China represent a market cap of \$2.3 trillion.

The first company in the industry is Berkshire Hathway at #10 with \$588 billion in market capitalisation. JPMorgan Chase following at #13 with \$465 billion. The two largest financial institutions in the USA exceed \$1 trillion in market value. *[The columnist is a member of the International Press Association]*



MSX WEEKLY REVIEW

MSX ends the week 1.10 per cent lower, dragged by all sub-indices

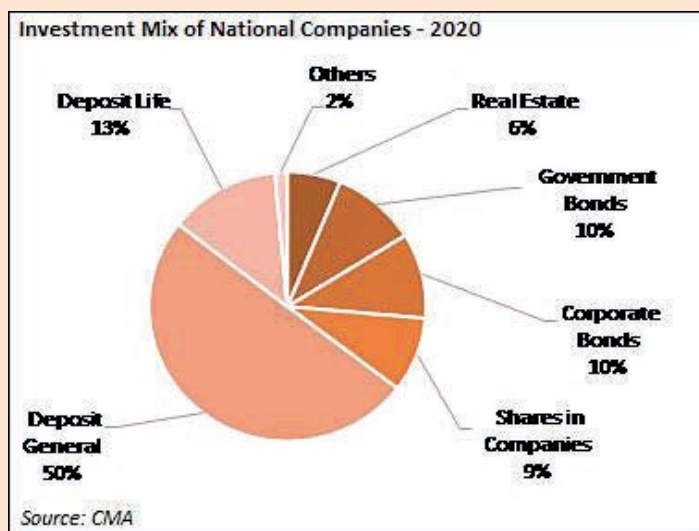
MSX 30 Index ended the week lower by 1.10 per cent. All sub-indices ended in red. Financial sector fell by 1.00 per cent while Services went down by 1.71 per cent. Industrial sector closed down by 0.54 per cent. MSX Shariah Index closed down by 0.86 per cent.

National Life and General Insurance has tied up with Omantel to provide motor insurance through Omantel self-service machines at various locations across Oman. Omantel is the topmost telecom company and NLG, the market leader and largest insurance company in Oman is also the number 1 in motor insurance based on total premium in 2020.

Ahlibank has announced the signing of an agreement with Dhofar Insurance Company. Under the agreement, ahlibank will strengthen its portfolio of insurance solutions offering its customers comprehensive home and family insurance protections with long term plans, to address their evolved and aware choices.

The total investments of Oman insurance companies at the end of 2020 were RO 669 million including RO 414.4 million investments of national insurance companies and RO 254.6 million investments of the foreign insurance companies compared to RO 634.8 million at the end of 2019 which were RO 399.2 million for the national insurance companies and RO 235.6 million for the foreign insurance companies.

The investments of national insurance companies were concentrated in 2019 and 2020 in banking deposits (General and Life) which represents 63 per cent in 2020 and 66 per cent in 2019. On the other hand, the investment of national



The inflation rate in the Sultanate increased in June by 1.25 per cent compared to the same month of 2020

insurance companies in other investment instruments collectivity were not more than 37 per cent in 2020 and 34 per cent in 2019.

National insurance companies investment composition has changed over the last four years towards less risky form of investments.

Investment in companies (listed/unlisted) has reduced to 9 per cent of the total in 2020 from 15 per cent in 2017 while investment in fixed income (government & corporate bonds) has increased to 20 per cent compared to 9 per cent earlier.

Conventional credit growth dropped to +0.4 per cent YoY from +2.2 per cent YoY in Dec 2020. Total conventional credit reached RO 22.55 billion (-RO 104.2 million on MoM basis or -0.5 per cent MoM).

Conventional credit contracted on MoM basis largely on account of -0.9 per cent MoM, or RO 177.8 million worth of decline in Private Sector credit. Government and Public Enterprises credit registered growth of +9.4 per cent MoM and +0.5 per cent MoM. Credit to non-residents also

increased by 4.0 per cent MoM.

Conventional deposits grew by +2.3 per cent YoY as compared to almost similar rate YoY in April 2021. Total conventional deposits stood at RO 20.98 billion (+RO 97.4 million on MoM basis or +0.5 per cent MoM).

Conventional deposits increased on MoM basis on account of Public Enterprises and Non-Resident deposits while government deposits dropped marginally on MoM basis.

The share of Government & Public Enterprises deposits, which had dropped to the lowest value in our records at 26.6 per cent in Dec 2020, now stand at 27.2 per cent in May 2021 but below 27.8 per cent recorded in February 2021.

Loan-to-deposit (LTD) ratio marginally dropped and stood at 107.5 per cent.

The inflation rate in the Sultanate increased in June by 1.25 per cent compared to the same month of 2020, according to the latest data issued by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The rise in the price index in June 2021 is attributed to the increase of prices in main groups such as transportation, various goods and services, furniture, household equipment, clothing, footwear, education, health, housing, water, electricity, gas and other types of fuel.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

A'Saffa launches '1-by-1' range of frozen chicken products



MUSCAT: Renowned for providing the Sultanate with fresh, tasty, and healthy food products for over a decade – A'Saffa Foods has now announced the launch of a tasty and versatile range of frozen chicken products called '1-by-1'. Specifically designed to be convenient, economical, and quick, this new range gets rid of the practice of defrosting an entire chicken every single time before cooking. Simply pick out however many pieces you need, cook and enjoy!

Comprising chicken thighs, drumsticks, wings, and breast tenderloins, the 1-by-1 range by A'Saffa is hygienically processed from quality chicken from the company's farms and then quickly frozen using Individual Quick Freezing (IQF) to ensure that they maintain their freshness. IQF is a freezing method used whereby each piece is individually frozen in a matter of minutes. This short freezing time helps the product keep its shape, colour, smell and taste even after defrosting; thereby ensuring you enjoy a fresh, tasty, and healthy chicken dish.

Students' effort to inculcate habit of microfinancing

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JULY 31

An innovative microfinance platform concept for women has been developed by a student in Oman after being inspired by Bangladesh's Grameen Bank, known to be the world's largest microfinance Bank which helped make banking for the poor more accessible.

SWIFT — Sustaining Women in Financial Turmoil — as it is named, was formed in September 2020, when the young founder, Ghobanu Korisepati, a student of ABA Oman International School, began to establish a microfinance social business platform.

He spent over three months in an internship with Grameen Bank to learn how and why the the Bank helped the people by making banking more accessible and wanted to replicate the same by educating his peers in the school.

"I was so much attracted by the concept of microfinancing and wanted to replicate the same here and conducted studies for several months and did an internship with the world's first microfinance bank, the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh," an excited

Ghobanu told the *Observer*.

After doing some further research on the socio-economic situation within Oman, he came across a set of statistics, that he believes, would help him in launching the same here.

"I found that in 2020, the female unemployment rate was over 12 per cent in Oman, whereas the global average was just a mere 8 per cent unemployed women whereas the adult literacy rate was over 95.7 per cent.

After a rather awe-struck moment, he realised that micro-entrepreneurship would be a great step in the right direction for the prosperity of the women in Oman."

Fixed on founding the microfinance institution, he was encouraged by the school which supported the SWIFT initiative.

According to him, the school has been extremely encouraging of all social work, as they believe serving the local community is an essential part of any successful education.

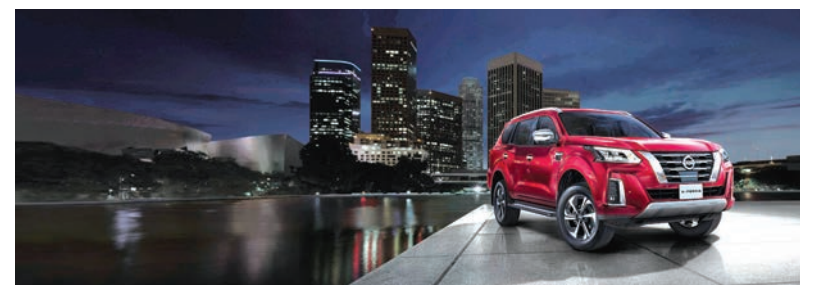
"It is an attempt to educate my fellow schoolmates to understand the concept of microfinance and if possible, give it wings to spread across the schools," he added.

Nissan X-Terra amazes customers with its 'Go Anywhere' capabilities

MUSCAT: Nissan X-Terra, the vehicle especially designed for adventure and the outdoors has received a terrific response from customers in Oman.

The model, which empowers owners to go anywhere has impressed customers with its robust yet sophisticated look. They have defined the vehicle as an ideal partner for customers seeking exciting outdoor adventures.

Powering the all-new X-Terra is a 2.5-litre four-cylinder petrol engine with a seven-speed automatic transmission. The petrol engines deliver 124kW /165 hp and 241Nm of torque that ensures an exciting drive of speed and acceleration.



Created for adventures, with a roomy interior and advanced technologies Nissan X-Terra ensures safety and comfort. Nissan Intelligent Mobility features add to its attraction.

A spokesperson for Nissan Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) said, "The seven-seater, spacious, comfortable X-Terra is a catalyst for new experiences, allowing

owners to connect with the people in their lives, and to confidently 'Go Anywhere' together.

It addresses a variety of needs and all types of terrains as it is both, good for city use and great for an adventure with family and friends. Developed in line with the "unbreakable" frame vehicles design philosophy, it combines masculine solidity with sleek and modern execution."



Bangladeshis rush back to work as factories reopen



A woman works in a garment factory in Dhaka. — Reuters

DHAKA: Hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshi garment workers rushed back to major cities on Saturday, besieging train and bus stations, after the government said export factories could reopen despite a deadly coronavirus wave.

With the economy badly hit by the pandemic, the government excluded the factories that supply top brands in Europe and North America from a nationwide lockdown order.

Authorities had ordered factories, offices, transport and shops to close from July 23 to August 5 as daily coronavirus infections and deaths hit record levels.

Officially, Bangladesh has reported 1.2 million cases and more than 20,000 deaths. Experts say the real figures are at least four times higher.

The government said however that the country's 4,500 garment factories, which employ more than four million people, can reopen from Sunday, sparking a rush back to industrial cities. — **Reuters**

China's factory activity grows at slowest pace since February 2020

BEIJING: China's factory activity expanded in July at the slowest pace in 17 months as higher raw material costs, equipment maintenance and extreme weather weighed on business activity, adding to concerns about a slowdown in the world's second-biggest economy.

The official manufacturing Purchasing Manager's Index (PMI) eased to 50.4 in July from 50.9 in June, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed on Saturday, but remained above the 50-point mark that separates growth from contraction.

Analysts had expected it to slip to 50.8. It was the lowest figure since the index slumped to 35.7 in February 2020, after China began lockdowns to control the coronavirus pandemic.

An NBS official said in a statement the PMI's sub-index for production slipped to 51.0 from 51.9 in June, pointing to equipment maintenance and extreme weather. The new order sub-index fell to 50.9, from 51.5, reflecting a slowdown in demand.

"The most alarming signal is the new export order index, which is at lowest level since July last year," said Zhiwei Zhang, chief economist of Pinpoint Asset Management.

The sub-index for new export orders has dropped for three straight months starting in May. It stood at 47.7 in July.

A sub-index for raw material costs stood at 62.9 in July, compared with June's 61.2, pointing to an increase in costs. High raw material prices have eaten into the profitability of industrial firms and deterred some



A man works on the production line of electric vehicle (EV) battery manufacturer Ocellion in Hefei, Anhui, China. — Reuters

Chinese exporters from taking on orders.

Authorities are eager to prevent high factory-gate prices being passed on to consumers, which would only add to current economic headaches as underlying demand remains weak.

Hit by extreme weather, the construction index dropped to 57.5, from June's 60.1, and analysts expect the sector to face headwinds amid Beijing's clampdown on the property market.

To bolster a slowing economy, the People's Bank of China (PBOC) in mid-July surprised the market by lowering the reserve requirement ratio (RRR) for banks, releasing around 1 trillion yuan (\$154 billion) in long-term liquidity.

China's economy has largely

Authorities are eager to prevent high factory-gate prices being passed on to consumers, which would only add to current economic headaches as underlying demand remains weak

recovered from disruptions caused by the pandemic, with the consumption and service sectors gradually catching up to the improvements in exports and manufacturing.

However, manufacturers are grappling with new challenges including higher raw material prices, surging logistics costs and

global supply chain bottlenecks, and the pace of gross domestic product growth is expected to moderate.

The country is also racing to contain a fresh Covid-19 outbreak of the more infectious Delta variant in the eastern city of Nanjing. China's zero-tolerance approach could present significant downside risks to the current economic recovery, analysts say.

Record flooding in central China may have also weighed on business activity in July, along with government moves to curb steel production in line with a drive to reduce emissions.

The official non-manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) eased to 53.3 in July, from 53.5 in June, a separate survey from the NBS showed. — **Reuters**

UK 'closing in' on free trade pact with New Zealand

LONDON: Britain is nearing an agreement in principle on a free trade deal with New Zealand, its trade ministry said on Saturday, as London looks to bolster its post-Brexit trade ties with non-EU partners.

The European Union is Britain's single largest trade partner and the two sides have signed a post-Brexit trade pact, but business groups say they still face extra red tape dealing with European customers and suppliers as a result of Brexit.

Trade minister Liz Truss said that "great progress" had been made in a sixth round of discussions which ran from July 19-30.

A trade agreement with New Zealand could see the removal of tariffs on British and New Zealand goods making products available at lower prices, the ministry said.

A deal would also enable small and medium enterprises to export more goods and services to New Zealand, it added. "We're closing in on an agreement in principle, with 6 more chapters now complete," Truss said.

— **Reuters**

Super cruise ship sets sail from Saudi Arabia for first time

RIYADH: A super cruise ship has departed Saudi Arabia for the first time, setting sail for regional waters as the kingdom seeks to expand its tourism industry and diversify its oil-dependent economy.

The MSC Bellissima, a vessel longer than three football fields, departed for the first in a series of voyages from Jeddah Islamic Port to Aqaba in Jordan and Safaga in Egypt.

The launch of the service on Friday comes two days after Saudi Arabia opened its first cruise ship terminal at the port in Jeddah, on the kingdom's west coast.

"The inauguration of the first cruise ship port represents an important step... to support the growth of the tourism sector in the kingdom," Cruise Saudi managing director Fawaz Farooqi said, quoted by Saudi Press Agency.

Developing the tourism and leisure sector is one of the foundations of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's "Vision 2030" plan to prepare the Arab world's largest economy for the post-oil era.

The Gulf country enacted a landmark decision in 2019 to offer tourist visas, relaxing rules that had largely restricted visits



MSC Bellissima arrives in Jeddah Islamic Port in Saudi Arabia. — AFP

to business travellers and Muslim pilgrims.

Citizens from 49 countries —

mostly European — had become eligible to apply to visit the kingdom, which has a population

of around 35 million.

Constructed in France, the MSC Bellissima is 315 metres (345 yards) long and has a capacity of 4,500 passengers, making it one of the world's largest cruise ships.

First launched in 2019 and operated by Swiss-based MSC Cruises, it will embark on 21 trips up until October 30.

The mammoth vessel has an array of amenities, including swimming pools, gyms, restaurants, cafes and ballrooms.

The price of journeys start at 2,195 Saudi riyals (about \$585), according to travel agencies, with some itineraries including Luxor

in Egypt and Petra in Jordan.

Cruise Saudi, owned by the kingdom's Public Investment Fund, also struck a deal in April with MSC Cruises to launch winter voyages between November 2021 and March 2022.

These cruises will start out from Jeddah and Dammam on the eastern Gulf coast of Saudi Arabia in the hope of attracting 170,000 guests.

The global cruise industry has taken a severe hit as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, which has so far resulted in the death of more than four million people worldwide. — **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

BERLIN

Chip shortage to slow new car sales in Germany

In Germany, the market for new cars remains sluggish due to the shortage of semiconductors. That means car dealers and carmakers have little reason to offer incentives, said Ferdinand Dudenhofer from Germany's Centre for Automotive Research.

"The German car market is suffering from the semiconductor crisis and new car buyers are stuck with long delivery times and higher net prices."

Discounts offered on Internet platforms for personalised new



cars fell in July compared to the previous month.

Car subscriptions offered also fell, a relatively new distribution model where customers rent their car for a few months, including insurance. — **dpa**

DENVER

Exxon posts biggest quarterly profit in a year

Exxon Mobil on Friday posted its biggest quarterly profit in more than a year that also sailed past analysts' estimates, boosted by higher oil prices and record earnings at its chemicals business.

The upbeat results following a contested board fight over the company's direction highlighted how oil producers are taking advantage of a recovery in oil prices to cut debt and boost shareholder payouts rather than spend more to raise production.



"Positive momentum continued during the second quarter across all of our businesses as the global economic recovery increased demand for our products," Chief Executive Darren Woods said. — **Reuters**

WASHINGTON

Amazon needs to spend billions on warehouses

Amazon.com Inc needs to spend billions of dollars to expand its warehouse and delivery system, adding pressure to its shares which dropped 7 per cent on Friday after it forecast lower sales growth.

The company is racing to meet demand even though shoppers are venturing more outside the home and it is returning to a pre-lockdown sales trajectory.

Last year, Amazon turned goods away from warehouses for weeks because it lacked the



people and space to fulfil them safely.

It still is playing catch-up, said Andrea Leigh, vice president at e-commerce optimisation firm Ideoclick, who formerly worked at Amazon. — **Reuters**

features



Five activities to break the monotony of your summer

The high temperature is nothing new for Oman's nationals and residents. While many opt to stay indoors especially with the looming threat of Covid-19, some are becoming creative with their activities making use of the cover of darkness to pursue their passion and interest. With strict adherence to Supreme Committee protocols, here are some activities you can do both during your weekdays and weekends without needing to be under direct sunlight...**P20**

TRAVEL TALES

READ

BLACK ICE
BY BRAD THOR

The 20th book in the Scot Harvath series. The American spy faces dangers in the Arctic Circle.

Dutch unearth Roman canal, road near Unesco heritage sites

DUTCH ARCHAEOLOGISTS reported last week that they have unearthed a Roman canal and road near ancient military camps that were this week listed on Unesco's list of World Heritage sites.

The canal — more than 10

metres (33 feet) wide — and road were uncovered last week near the eastern city of Nijmegen, a major Roman-era settlement with permanent military bases that were awarded the Unesco status.

They are believed to have

been built and used by the Roman military, according to RAAP, the country's largest consultancy for archeology and cultural history.

Nijmegen is on the Rhine, the border of the Roman Empire at the time, it said in a statement, adding that the discovery was "unique" for that region of the country.

Many Roman soldiers were stationed along the river and the canal probably linked Nijmegen and the Rhine and was used to transport troops, supplies and building materials.

The Roman highway, with its original gravel pavement preserved, provides new insight into the road network of around 2,000 years ago, Eric Noord, who is leading the project, said. — **AFP**





From farm to face, Gaza women create cosmetics from local herbs

FOR YEARS, Palestinian farmers have exported herbs to Europe where they have been turned into high-end cosmetics and beauty products.

Now a team of Gaza women have brought the process home, extracting the essential oils themselves and creating products such as shampoo and moisturiser which are sold in 50 stores, including 30 pharmacies, across the enclave.

From a factory in Gaza City, the internationally funded project's four staffers, all women, use steam distillation to draw out the ingredients from plants including rosemary, basil, mint, thyme and chamomile.

"When you hold the product, you feel like you are taking something from the earth — with no additives," Refqa Al Hamalawi said of the project, which sources herbs exclusively from farms run by women.

Their range already runs to 17 products, including cleansers and body wash, under the brand GG — standing for green gold, as the farmers of northern Gaza call mint.

"As women, we're proud of the idea and the production, an idea like in European countries," Al Hamalawi said.

The project, aimed at empowering women and boosting the economy, is supported by Australia and the global charity Oxfam.

While small scale so far, the women involved say it has already begun to have an impact in Gaza, where unemployment hovers around 50 per cent. Female unemployment is even higher at 62 per cent, according to the Palestinian Central



Bureau of Statistics.

Dawlat Marouf said before the project, she struggled to make a living selling mint and thyme she farms in local markets.

Now, she "wakes up everyday at 5 am to come to the field and prepare 40-50 kg ordered by the factory",

the 55-year-old mother of 12 said.

Marouf's daughter-in-law, Ekhlas, said she did not know herbs had uses outside of cooking.

The project will "develop us, make a source of income for our children and our families", Ekhlas said.

Pharmacist Narmin Al Banna stocks the products at her store. "I like these products because they are natural and have no chemicals in them. I tried them on many people, and many customers, and they gave me great feedback," she said. — **Reuters**

GASTRONOMY

Kitchen robot in Riga cooks up new future for fast food



A PASTA ORDER comes in and the robotic arm springs into action at the Roboeatz eatery in Riga. After five minutes of gyrations, a piping hot plate is ready.

The Riga cafe, located under a crumbling concrete bridge, is designed in such a way that customers can observe the robotic arm at work.

It also has a seating area, although most customers prefer take away since vaccination certificates are required to be able to eat indoors in Latvia.

A Roboeatz app allows customers to order and pay for their dish before picking it up at the cafe.

"The food tasted better than I expected!" said customer Iveta Ratnika, a teacher and a member of the Latvian capital's education board.

Ratnika said she would encourage schoolchildren to come and observe the robotic arm in action and mused that there could be robots working at the school cafeteria within "a few years".

- KITCHEN DESIGN IS 'REAL CHALLENGE' -

Roboeatz was set up in January 2018 by Konstantins Korcjomkins and Janis Poruks, who have been running the Woki Toki fast food chain in Latvia since 2009.

Their aim? To revolutionise the fast food industry.

"This robot replaces four to six human employees, reducing labour costs significantly," said Poruks, who has a background in engineering.

But he stressed that the introduction of such robots would not push up unemployment rates since "people are not lining up to flip burgers".

"The robot will not replace people who are willing to have a career in restaurants and catering, becoming chefs or other food celebrities. The robot will take those low-paid jobs which most people already do not want," he said.

Automated kitchen technology has been gaining interest in recent years, and that has been accelerated by the pandemic.

At a newly opened eatery in Paris, customers can watch robots build, bake and box up pizzas at a rate of up to 80 an hour.

In the US, a robot named "Sally" belonging to the start-up Chowbotics can whip up salads sold through a vending machine.

And, for the ultimate household luxury, a UK-based company last year unveiled a fully robotic kitchen that will set customers back a minimum of £248,000 (291,000 euros, \$347,000).

The designers of Roboeatz say it is designed to take over some of the food prep tasks while improving food safety and eliminating the infection risks of crowded kitchens.

During a visit by AFP this week, the robotic arm was programmed to make three different pasta dishes.

Its creators say it can be programmed to make hundreds of recipes, taking into account the owner's favourites and food allergies.

"The robotic arm actually makes the least trouble of all, we just programme it to do what we need," said Korcjomkins.

"The real challenge is to design and invent an entire kitchen around the robot, which should contain all the food ingredients, spices, sauces, rotating pots for boiling and frying," he said.

- 'AS POPULAR AS ELECTRIC CARS' -

The co-founders said the robotic arm would pay for itself within two years at most.

"On average in the European Union, one employee in the kitchen costs the company around 16 euros (\$19) an hour, which includes salary, taxes, insurance, training and everything else," said Poruks.

"The robot does not need health insurance, its kids cannot get sick, it does not go on vacation or maternity leave, it does not complain and it cannot bring Covid from home to work," he said.

The company has big expansion plans with sales offices in Canada and the United States and a technical team in Riga to programme the robots.

The technology was shown off earlier this year at the Consumer Electronics Show in the US.

The co-founders said they were unconcerned about competition from similar robots, such as the pizza-making one in France.

"Our robot is designed to do more tasks and jobs than just make pizza. Our goal is to create a robot that can be useful for many kinds of foods, cuisines and dishes," said Korcjomkins.

"Hopefully a robot in kitchen will become as popular as electric cars!" — **AFP**

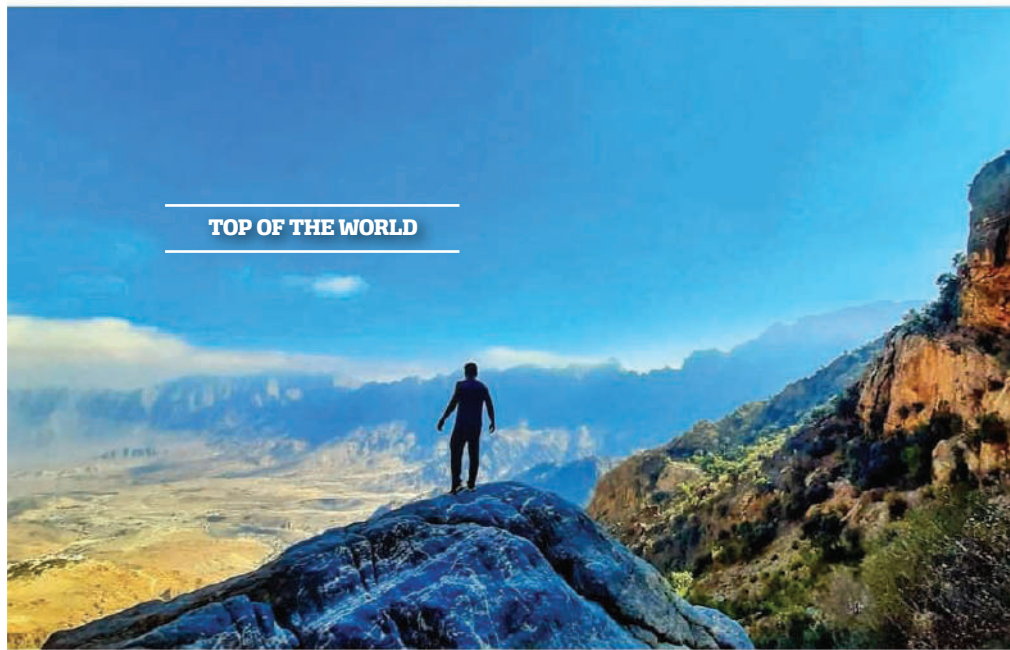


find us on
TWITTER
Scan the QR Code or follow us on
www.twitter.com/omanobserver

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



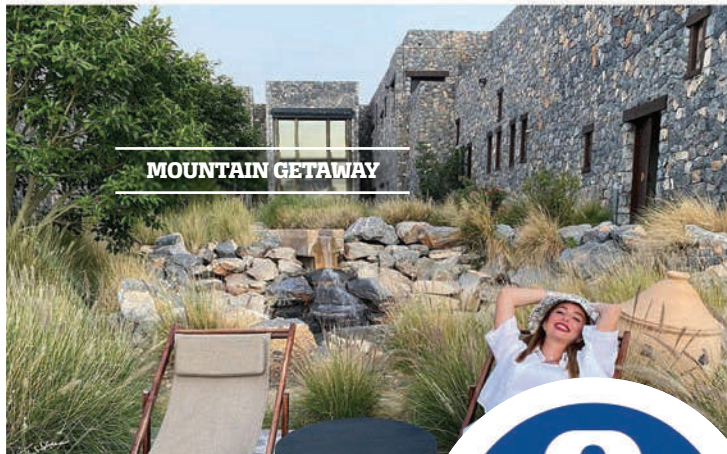
yru_here



asofiahenriques • Follow
Wave Summit



rihamaisamad • Follow
Alila Jabal Akhdar



SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use **#OmanObserver** and **#BeAnObserver**.



AROUND THE WORLD

Get full stories online at www.omanobserver.om

ENTERTAINMENT

Hollywood agency slams Disney in heated dispute over Johansson's "Black Widow"



ONE OF HOLLYWOOD'S biggest talent agencies on Friday hit out at the Disney (DIS.N) movie studio in an escalating public dispute over claims by Scarlett Johansson that she had lost money over the release of her "Black Widow" movie.

Bryan Lourd, co-chairman of the Creative Arts Agency (CAA), accused Disney in a statement of attacking the actress's character and of revealing her \$20 million salary for the superhero movie "in an attempt to weaponise her success as an artist and a businesswoman."

Lourd, who also represents Johansson, released his statement a day after the "Black Widow" star filed a lawsuit accusing Disney of breaching its contract with her by releasing the July 9 movie on its streaming platform at the same time it played in theatres, thereby reducing her expected share of box office receipts.

The lawsuit sent shockwaves through Hollywood as media companies move to boost their streaming services by offering premium content at or near the same time as movies are released in theatres, many of which have been shuttered during the coronavirus epidemic.

Johansson, 36, one of the most popular actors in Hollywood and among its highest earners, has made nine Marvel films with Disney.

Disney shot back saying on Thursday that there was "no merit" to the lawsuit. It also revealed that Johansson had received \$20 million for the film and said the lawsuit showed a "callous disregard" for the effects of the pandemic.

Details of Hollywood movie contracts and any disputes are usually worked out behind closed doors.

Lourd said Disney had "shamelessly and falsely accused Ms Johansson of being insensitive to the global Covid pandemic."

"Disney's direct attack on her character and all else they implied is beneath the company that many of us in the creative community have worked with successfully for decades," Lourd added.

Disney on Friday did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Lourd's statement.

"Black Widow," the story of the Russian assassin turned Avenger, pulled in \$80 million at US and Canadian box offices over its debut weekend. The movie also generated \$60 million through Disney+ purchases, Disney said. — **Reuters**

ART

Planted art: Japan rice field work marks Tokyo Olympics



FROM THE GROUND, there's not much to distinguish the rice stalks in a field in Japan's Gyoda. It's only seen from above that a massive artwork marking the Olympics emerges.

The huge, living installation features iconic Japanese images: the famous wave and Mount Fuji of Katsushika Hokusai's woodblock print and a Kabuki actor in striking facepaint, similar to one that featured at the Olympic opening ceremony.

The images are part of a yearly tradition started by the town of Gyoda in Saitama, north of Tokyo, in 2008 in a bid to bring in tourists.

In 2015, they even scooped a Guinness World Record for creating the world's largest rice field artwork: 28,000 square metres.

Each year, a committee comes up with a new design and hundreds of volunteers plant differently coloured varieties of rice to produce spectacular images that can be viewed from a nearby observatory.

A design is selected early in the year, with planting happening around May. In 2019, the theme honoured the Rugby World Cup, hosted

by Japan.

This year's image was intended to highlight Japan's cultural heritage, on the assumption that crowds of foreign visitors would be in the country for the Games.

"We wanted to show the Japanese arts of Ukiyoe (woodblock prints) and Kabuki (theatre) in a rice paddy field, which itself is also an important part of Japan's culture," Gyoda city official Shuhei Tagashira said.

"We wanted to present Japan to the world."

It hasn't worked out that way, with foreign spectators barred and most Games events happening without even domestic fans allowed in the stands.

But on Friday, there were still people taking in the view from an observatory 50 metres up that offers a bird's eye view of the piece.

"It's much more dynamic than I had expected," 23-year-old visitor Kiyo Hoshino said.

"I expected something more simple. But it's more complicated in its design and on a really large scale. I was impressed that the art is so panoramic."

Maintaining the piece takes work, and on Friday nearly a dozen officials from the city's agricultur-

al department were weeding the field, pacing across the vast area in rubber boots and armed with sickles.

The work is important to stop the different colours from bleeding into each other or being mud-died by other plants.

"Can you see the green, tall plants? Those are not rice, weed them," city official Shuhei Tagashira called out as his fellow workers struggled in the muddy field.

The project is also designed to bring the community together and promote interest in farming.

In an ordinary year, about 1,000 people get involved in the complex task of planting the right varieties of rice in the right place to produce the artwork.

They include volunteers with some farming experience and those with no background in agriculture, including local children.

But the pandemic forced organisers to slash the numbers in half, though people will still have another chance to get involved when the rice is harvested in October.

And everyone gets a thank you gift at the end: two kilogrammes of rice in late November. — **AFP**

DISCOVERY

Sponge structures may be Earth's oldest animal life



FOSSILISED STRUCTURES discovered in north-western Canada may be from sponges that lived in oceans as long as 890 million years ago, making them the earliest known animal life on Earth, research showed on Wednesday.

The findings also challenge the long-held idea that animals did not arise on Earth until after a major infusion of oxygen into the atmosphere and oceans.

Sponges are simple animals with an ancient history. Genetic evidence gathered from modern sponges has shown they likely emerged between 1 billion and 500 million years ago.

But until now there has been no evidence of fossilised sponge bodies from this period, known as the early Neoproterozoic era.

Elizabeth Turner, a professor at Canada's Laurentian University's Harquail School of Earth Sciences, looked for evidence of sponges in 890-million-year-old reefs that were constructed by a type of bacteria that deposited calcium carbonate.

She found networks of tiny tube-shaped structures containing crystals of the mineral calcite — suggesting they were contemporaneous to the reef — that closely resemble the fibrous skeleton found within some modern sponges.

If her structures Turner identified end up being verified as sponge samples, they will outdate the current oldest known sponge fossils by 350 million years.

Although the implications of her possible discovery, published in the journal *Nature*, Turner said she was not getting carried away.

"The earliest animals to emerge evolutionarily were probably sponge-like. This too is not surprising, given that sponges are the most basic animal in the tree of animal life," she said.

"The nature of the material is familiar from the bodies of much younger body fossils of sponges," Turner said.

She said the possible sponges were around one centimetre across, and "would have been tiny and inconspicuous, living in shadowy nooks and crannies below the upper surfaces of the reefs".

If the structures do turn out to be confirmed as sponge specimens, that means they would have lived roughly 90 million years before Earth's oxygen levels reached levels thought to be necessary to support animal life.

Turner said that if confirmed to be sponges, she believed that they lived before the Neoproterozoic oxygenation event, during which oxygen levels increased, subsequently leading to the emergence of animal life.

"If I am correct in my interpretation of the material, the earliest animals appeared before that event and may have been tolerant of comparatively low oxygen levels, relative to modern conditions," she said.

"It is possible that the earliest animals were tolerant of low oxygen — some modern sponges are — but that more complex animal types that require a higher oxygen level did not appear until after the Neoproterozoic oxygenation event," Turner added. — **AFP**



Photo: hikingff

Five activities to break the monotony of your summer

By Yeru Ebuén
Instagram: yru_here

THE SWELTERING HEAT of summer in Oman can be a real challenge for people to enjoy their usual outdoor activities. With some areas registering up to 47 degrees Celsius (Muscat included), the country has some cities listed amongst the world's hottest places on earth. We've recently tried one of those experiments of frying eggs

under direct sunlight and suffice to say, while we got soggy sunny side up, it did the deed in less than an hour. This gives an insight into how easy Oman's hot temperature can burn your skin. But the high mercury temperature is nothing new for Oman's nationals and residents. While many opt to stay indoors especially with the looming threat

of Covid-19, some are becoming creative with their activities making use of the cover of darkness to pursue their passion and interest. With strict adherence to Supreme Committee protocols, here are some activities you can do both during your weekdays and weekends without needing to be under direct sunlight.

GO MUSEUM HOPPING

As the night curfew hours had been extended up to 10 pm, museums in the country had also started operating. There are a lot of both private and public museums in Oman that are accessible to the public. Well air-conditioned and the traffic regulated to abide by the required capacity of visitors as imposed by the Supreme Committee, it's a wholesome activity that will be a great learning opportunity and a teachable moment for your kids. Don't know where to start? The National Museum is Oman's flagship cultural institution, "showcasing the Sultanate's cultural heritage from the earliest evidence of human settlement in the Oman Peninsula through to the present day." It's open on weekdays from 10 am to 5 pm. There are more than a dozen museums in Muscat that you can choose from including the Omani and French Museum, Bait Al Zubair Museum, and the smaller, private ones but allow public access. Do your research beforehand and make sure to make phone inquiries for timing hours as to not waste your time.

Photo: @2gorotravel

EXPLORE SHADED CANYONS OF THE WADIS

Wadi adventures can also be perfect as summer outdoor adventures. Some of Oman's wadis involve passing through canyons which are totally protected from the sun with mountains and cliffs serving as canopies protecting you from direct heat. As of late, Wadi Hoqain has grown tremendously in popularity not only because of its picturesque canyon walls but also because of its warm water. There are many others to choose from. The wadi near Bat Village in Liwa, the Snake Canyon (both big and small), the beautiful Umq Baer, and even Wadi Mibam in Tiwi are great alternatives because they involve hiking without direct sunlight. Remember to take precautions however when you do this sort of adventure. Always know your capacity and go with someone who has prior experience.

Photo: 1001teacher:tales

EXPLORE OMAN'S UNDERGROUND SCENE BY SPELUNKING

Spelunking is yet to pick up among the public as an adventure but numerous tour groups and agencies already include this package in their adventure list. Since you are going underground, you won't definitely feel the scorching heat of the summer sun so it makes perfect logic as a summer adventure. Oman offers some of the best caves in the world. From the easier Jirnan Cave to the mid-level Al Hoota Cave to the challenging Majlis Al Jinn, you can choose the caves according to your level of confidence. Inside these caves are pools unlike you've seen before. There are also very interesting stalactite and stalagmites formations. Did you know that there is a rock formation in Al Hoota cave they called "the guardian of the lake"? Did you also know that the long, echoing chambers of Tahiri include what they call Cheryl's Drop? Exploring Oman's caves is also a great learning experience as to how Oman's lands were formed. You can get a reference a few more information about some cave adventures from our friends at Change Your Routine Adventure (Instagram: @cyr_adventure).

Photo: ones_path

VISIT HISTORICAL VILLAGES, FORTS AND CASTLES

Last week, one of our writers talked about Jabreen Castle and the ruins of Al Hamra. There are many more to choose from as great alternatives. The Harat in Manah and Al Yemen House some of the best ruins that give a glimpse of Oman's ancient, beautiful past. In Muscat alone, there are two forts in Muttrah that you can check out — something you can visit in the late afternoon when the sun is not too harsh. From Al Rustaq to Suhar, from Nizwa to Sur, there are places that you can visit but still enjoy the comfort of air-conditioned rooms. You can also do cultural activities by visiting the rose water makers of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar or the dhow makers of Sur. Make sure to check out timing hours by calling or checking online for whatever destination you'd like to visit.

Photo: tegan.book

TAKE EVENING HIKES BY THE CITY

While avid hikers go for the usually challenging routes, you and your family's hikes need not be overly complicated. A beginner will no doubt be able to do the Muttrah Trail at 6 pm and finish it with still the sun on the horizon at 7 pm but if even that is too complicated for you, then you can do either do the Muttrah Sea Road or Love Street Sea Road hike. It's a good 30-minute hike which is just enough to give you a bit of cardio exercise. The Qurum Rose Garden Park and the Athaiba Beach are also great alternatives for a late afternoon stroll.

Photo: s.sool