

Registration for National Research Award

The deadline for registration for the eighth cycle of the National Research Award 2021, organised annually by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation closes on August 19 at 2.00 pm. The award is divided into two categories. **DETAILS ON P3**



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FOCUS SWITCHES TO PSG AS MESSI TO EXIT BARCA



P15

SAUDI ARAMCO Q2 PROFIT SOARS ON HIGHER PRICES



P18

THE HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE OF AL AYJAH



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO SINGAPORE PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Halimah Yacob of the Republic of Singapore on her country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Halimah and the friendly people of Singapore. — ONA

HM THANKED BY MONGOLIA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from President Ukhnaa Khurelsukh of Mongolia in reply to His Majesty's greetings cable on his country's National Day. In his cable, President Khurelsukh expressed his utmost appreciation for His Majesty the Sultan's greetings. He wished His Majesty good health and the Omani people further progress and prosperity. — ONA



READ IN

OPINION

A recall of the historical migration
Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami

The adventures of a blonde and a very old car
Rachael MacIver

INSIDE



SAUDI TO REOPEN BORDERS FOR VACCINATED PILGRIMS | P6



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HIS MAJESTY, LEADERS EXCHANGE NEW HIJRI YEAR GREETINGS

MUSCAT: On the advent of the New Hijri Year and the anniversary of the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) Hijra, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has exchanged greetings cables with leaders of the sisterly and friendly Arab and Muslim countries.

In his cables, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health, happiness and long life for the leaders, praying to Allah the Almighty for the return of this blessed occasion on them and make the New Year, a year of peace and security for all peoples and achieve for the Islamic nation further progress, welfare and prosperity.

In their cables, the leaders of the sisterly and friendly countries expressed their sincere greetings and best wishes of good health, happiness and long life to His Majesty the Sultan, praying to Allah the Almighty for the



return of this blessed occasion on His Majesty for many years to come to achieve all aspirations of further progress, welfare and prosperity for his faithful people and all Muslims further welfare and blessings.

His Majesty the Sultan exchanged greetings on this occasion with Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain, Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmed Al Jabir al Sabah, Emir of State of Kuwait, King Abdallah II of Jordan, King Mohammed VI of Morocco, President Kais Saied of the Republic of Tunisia, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune of Algeria, President Ismail Omar

Guelleh of the Republic of Djibouti, General Abdel Fattah al Burhan, Head of the Transitional Sovereign Council of Sudan, President Dr Bashar al Assad of the Syrian Arab Republic, President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo of the Federal Republic of Somalia and President Dr Barham Ahmed Salih of the Republic of Iraq.

His Majesty also exchanged greetings with President Mahmud Abbas of the State of Palestine, Chairman of the Executive Committee of Palestine Liberation Organisation, President Othman Ghazali of the Union of the Comoros, Dr Mohamed al Menfi, Chairman of the Presidential Council of the Government of National Accord of Libya, President Abdel Fattah el Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt, President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani of Mauritania, **TURN TO P2**

New Hijri Year holiday on Tuesday

MUSCAT: The moon of Muharram 1443 AH has not been sighted on Sunday evening. Consequently, Monday, August 9 will be the 30th and last day of Dhul Hijjah 1442 AH and Tuesday (August 10) will be the first day of Muharram 1443 AH, according to a statement issued by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs on Sunday.

On the occasion of the Holy Prophet's Hijra Anniversary and the New Hijri Year 1443 AH, the first day of Muharram (Tuesday, August 10) will be an official holiday for employees of public and private sector companies, institutions and establishments.

On the advent of the New Hijri Year and the anniversary of the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) Hijra, the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs extended its sincere greetings and best wishes to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, praying for many returns of this auspicious occasion on His Majesty with good health, well-being and long life and wishing the Islamic world blessing and bounties and praying for flourishing and the lifting of pandemics from the whole world. — ONA



Tokyo Olympics of 'hope' closes

The Olympic torch and cauldron are seen with Paris 2024 displayed on the big screen during the closing ceremony at Olympic Stadium, Tokyo, Japan, on Sunday. **DETAILS ON P10**

Fall in Covid-19 patients as vaccination picks up pace

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The number of active Covid-19 cases (currently sick), which touched nearly 33,000 in the last days of July, dropped below 10,000 on Sunday. With the recovery rate improving to 95.4 per cent, the number of patients currently sick of the virus dropped to 9,713 from 11,351 reported on Thursday.

The Ministry of Health on Sunday reported 686 new cases and 30 deaths over the past 72 hours.

The total number of cases registered in the Sultanate has now



Vaccination against Covid-19 is progressing well in most of the governorates. — ONA

reached 298,706, including 3,936 deaths.

Thirty patients were admitted to hospitals across the country in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients to 359, including 163 in intensive care units. The number of recoveries stands at 285,057 while the recovery rate is 95.4 per cent.

Meanwhile, an official concerned with the national campaign for immunisation told the *Observer* that vaccination is the national goal of the government as it seeks to return to normalcy and revive economic and social life.

The Directorate General of Health Services in Dhofar Governorate started the first dose vaccination for school students, both citizens and residents.

The immunisation centres in North Al Batinah Governorate witnessed a good turnout from citizens and residents at the six centres in the governorate.

The number of people who received vaccination in North Al Batinah until last week stood at 342,322, including 288,517 Omanis, with coverage of at least one dose reaching 77 per cent. **SEE ALSO P5**

HM, leaders exchange New Hijri Year greetings

FROM PAGE 1

Field Marshal Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, President of the Republic of Yemen, Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei Darussalam and Sultan Abdullah Ahmad Shah, King of Malaysia. His Majesty also exchanged greetings with President Dr Ilham Heydar Aliyev of the Republic of Azerbaijan, President Dr

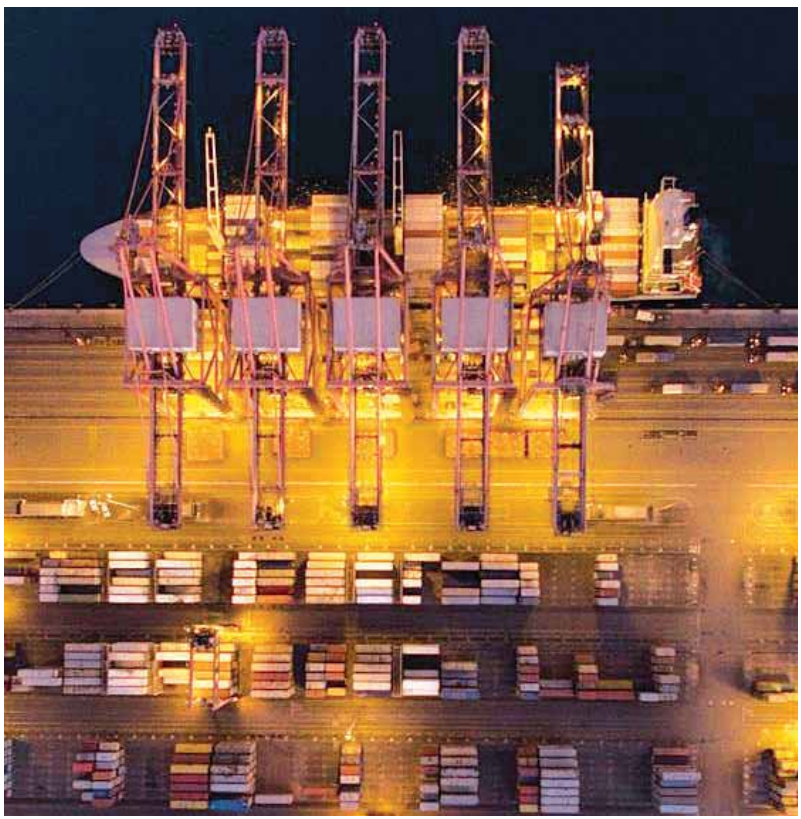
Mohammed Ashraf Ghani of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, President Joko Widodo of the Republic of Indonesia, President Dr Shavkat Mirziyoyev of the Republic of Uzbekistan, President Dr Ebrahim Raisi of the Islamic Republic of Iran, President Dr Arif Alvi of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, President Mohammad Abdul Hamid of the People's Republic of Bangladesh,

President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov of the Republic of Turkmenistan, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of the Republic of Turkey, President Samia Hassan of the United Republic of Tanzania, President Ali Bongo Ondimba of the Gabonese Republic, President Adama Barrow of the Republic of Gambia, President Macky Sall of the Republic of Senegal, President

Emomali Rahmon of the Republic of Tajikistan, President Sadyr Japarov of the Kyrgyz Republic, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev of the Republic of Kazakhstan, President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih of the Republic of the Maldives, President Mohamed Bazoum of the Republic of Niger and President Muhammadu Buhari of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. — ONA

Salalah port handles 2.1 million containers despite pandemic

MUSCAT: In the first half of this year, 2.1 million containers were loaded and unloaded at the Port of Salalah, which is considered a key economic site for commercial containers. Besides steady growth in operations and logistic services, the Port of Salalah also handled 8.8 million general cargo goods in the first six months of 2021. Mohammed bin Oufait al Shanfari, Executive Manager of Salalah Port Company, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that "Despite challenges posed by Covid-19 pandemic, the port had achieved a positive growth in 2020. In fact, it made the largest volume of container handling ever—a record hit of 4.3 million containers, compared to 4.1 million in 2019." Al Shanfari pointed out that Salalah Port achieved global records in the volume of container handling and operational efficiency. The two records were quoted by the World Bank in its Container Ports Performance Index issued by



the World Bank's international transport organisation. Salalah Port came sixth among 351 ports worldwide. The index measures the operational efficiency shown

by a port when receiving container vessels and handling them. Al Shanfari added that Salalah Port Company is embarked on developing two products: Flexible

Storage (Flex Hub) and the development of simultaneous sea and air transport via Salalah. Flex Hub has been developed in cooperation with Maersk and support from Asyad and the Royal Oman Police (ROP) Directorate General of Customs. The aim is to cut down cargo handling time by 60 per cent to 80 per cent. The second product (development of simultaneous sea and air transport via Salalah) minimises logistics cost, the period of handling goods (that have added value or are perishable or brittle) when transporting them to markets in Europe, the United States or African states. Both products have been developed after passing the trial periods, now over. Speaking about employment in higher and medium posts, Al Shanfari said that more than 80 per cent of the company's staff are Omanis with advanced expertise in managing operations. — ONA



AI RUSTAQ: A number of villages in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq in South Al Batinah Governorate experienced moderate to heavy rains, on Sunday. The rain fell in the villages of Al Sahtan, Wadi Bani Ghafir, Hatt and Balad Sait, causing overflow of wadis. — ONA



Harbours contribute to sustainability of fisheries sector

SUHAR: The six fishing ports spread across North Al Batinah Governorate constitute an integrated system for fishermen as they involve spots for fish landing along with other service facilities that provide a suitable environment for all fishing-related activities and generate job opportunities for nationals. The fishing harbours in the North Al Batinah Governorate have ice factories and shops for grilling fish, selling fishing equipment, boat and engine maintenance workshops and factories for the packaging of fish, refrigerated stores and other facilities related to the fisheries sector. By the end of April 2021, the fish output in North Al Batinah Governorate amounted to 21,147 tonnes, while the total number of licenses issued for practicing the fishing profession in the governorate was 12,296 licenses. There are 5,002 artisanal fishing boats and 21 fishing vessels in North Al Batinah Governorate. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources carried out several projects the fisheries sector in North Al Batinah Governorate with the aim



to promote and develop this sector and provide job opportunities for nationals and encourage the private sector to invest in development projects and raise the added value of fish products, thus raising income of fishermen and encourage them to continue practicing the fishing profession. These projects include placing artificial reefs in the wilayats of

There are 5,002 artisanal fishing boats and 21 fishing vessels in North Al Batinah Governorate Suhar and Liwa with the support of the Jusoor Foundation to provide a suitable environment for coral growth and fish reproduction thereby increasing fish stocks

and the diversity of marine life especially the benthic species. This is in addition to the marine farm of artificial reefs in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq which aims to sustain and enhance fish production in the Sea of Oman. The marine farm is about 20 kilometres long and 7 kilometres wide with depths ranging between 15 and 30 metres. — ONA





Pomegranate harvest under way in Jabal Akhdhar



Farmers in the Al Jabal Al Akhdhar began marketing their crop of pomegranate, the harvest of which has got under way of late. Pomegranate comes on top of the other fruits in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar due to its high quality and good taste and is planted in gardens and houses. The pomegranate of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is highly demanded by consumers and achieves excellent returns for farmers.

August 19 deadline to register for National Research Award

MUSCAT: The registration deadline for the eighth cycle of the National Research Award 2021, organised annually by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI), will be closing on Thursday, August 19 at 2 pm.

The National Research Award is divided into two categories; Best published research led by a PhD holder or equivalent (Senior Specialist or higher in the medical field) and Best published research led by a young researcher (a non-PhD holder).

As for the research fields, they cover Education and Human Resources, Information and Communication Technologies, Health and Social Services, Cultural,



Social, and Basic Sciences, Energy and Industry, and Environmental and Biological Resources.

Statistics in the registration system indicate that the number of applications submitted has reached

143 applications so far for the PhD holder or equivalent category up until Saturday.

Interested applicants can apply through (home.trc.gov.om/NRA/SubmissionForm.aspx). Applicants can find additional information and updates regarding the conditions through the NRA's official website (www.trc.gov.om).

The National Research Award aims to encourage researchers to conduct high quality and relevant research in areas of national interest, encourage researchers to continue their activities and initiatives in conducting high-quality research, and increase the level of awareness about MoHERI and its initiatives and programmes to support research and innovation. — ONA

■ WHALE DIES AFTER GETTING TRAPPED IN NET



SUR: A humpback whale has died after becoming entangled in a fishing net near the coast of Sur on Sunday. The humpback whale has been listed as an endangered animal since 1972. A recent report indicated that the humpback whale population faces various types of threat including entanglement in fishing nets near the coasts of Oman, Pakistan, India and the Arabian Gulf. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, banned the fishing and hunting of whales, turtles, mammals and marine birds as per article 11 of the Water Wealth Protection Law.

TIME TO TACKLE MYNA MENACE

INVASIVE BIRD SPECIES THREATENS ECOLOGY, BIODIVERSITY AND FOOD SECURITY OF THE SULTANATE

TEXT & PHOTOS
BY YAHYA AL SALMANI

An explosion in myna bird population may cause extinction of other bird species, and destroy fruits and vegetable crops, cautioned biodiversity experts in the Sultanate. They pointed out that the bird is the reason why the Dhofar governorate recently saw a surge of locust swarms. The myna eliminated or displaced many predator birds that had kept these insects in control.

Biodiversity specialists term it as an ecological imbalance. "Some living organisms may not be important in the event of their extinction as they may not be among the main species whose absence affects the ecosystem, but there are other types that may be major and their absence leads to the collapse of the ecosystem, and this is what worries us...The numbers of myna birds multiply in several places in the world. We have to protect biodiversity by taking appropriate measures to limit the spread of these birds to restore balance. It is time to prepare a plan to combat exotic and invasive birds in the Sultanate," an Omani environmentalist said.

In the Sultanate, the Myna has eliminated the local crow whose numbers decreased significantly after it attacked its nests and devoured the eggs.

Myna is classified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as one of the 100 worst invasive species in the world and it is common across many governorates of the Sultanate.

These birds also contribute to increasing noise levels because of their annoying and loud sound because they live in groups, and they are disease-carrying birds. Researchers indicate that



"the myna threatens biodiversity due to its rapid reproduction, where its numbers may reach 160,000 birds, to then compete with endemic birds for habitat and food. Its habitat, nests and places of residence lead to its gradual disappearance to its extinction".

"These birds also attack mammals such as goats, lambs and calves to transmit

diseases classified as contagious to humans. The Myna bird travels daily at a distance of 20 km from its nesting place to the availability and availability of food, and in some cases, it attacks the pigeon and the human being in some countries," researchers found.

Recent studies have revealed that the introduction of one species of predator

into a habitat other than its original habitat, can lead to a series of cascading ecological changes, including affecting the numbers of other organisms, their reproductive system, and the biomass of the original species.

Moreover, environmental studies indicate that there are many ways in which non-native bird species can invade

We have to protect biodiversity by taking appropriate measures to limit the spread of these birds to restore the balance. It is time to prepare a plan to combat exotic and invasive birds in the Sultanate

ENVIRONMENTALIST

different areas, either naturally or by human transmission by deliberate import. Also, there are some birds that are forced to escape or are released from retailers and then breed in small groups, and their numbers increase over time.

These birds love to feed on grain, bread and potatoes, and they drink a lot of water. The chocolate brown bird has a black head and distinctive yellow beak, eye patch and legs.

The age of this bird is more than 25 years, and when breeding, the female lays 2-3 eggs of pale turquoise colour with brown spots, and the incubation period of eggs is from 16-17 days, the young leave the nest after 20 days from hatching.

Specialists in biodiversity in the Sultanate said that competition for habitats will have a very big impact in the future when the numbers of these invasive species of birds increase, as they carry a number of diseases that can be transmitted to humans. These birds can replace local endemic birds with time, based on the law of "natural selection and survival of the fittest".

ENJOY WATER SAFELY

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Swimming, a life skill, can be taught from a young age and parents ought to take the initiative even before installing a swimming pool at home, say experts.

As cases of drowning increase, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority are urging the public to pay special attention to avoid water related accidents while enjoying the outdoors.

The victims tend to be people who do not know how to swim. The places that record frequent drowning are beaches, valleys and irrigation canals, dams and water ponds, wells and open water tanks as well as the valleys during flash floods, according to CDAA.

The CDAA lists the reasons for drowning as not knowing to swim, disregarding warning signs, risking and crossing overflowing valleys and random attempts to save people from drowning resulting in more victims. Other causes of drowning incidents are lack of adult supervision over children while visiting the beaches and valleys. Other reasons are individuals choosing to swim in locations not intended for swimming such as agricultural ponds, dams and irrigation canals.

Last month, the World Health Organization said drowning is

Do not have a pool at home unless you know how to swim. I have noticed that here, having a pool is more for decoration and most parents don't even use their pool or even know how to swim. Also, parents should invest in swimming classes for their kids if they have a pool at home

MADEEHA BINT
MADNI AL BAKRI
swimming instructor

now a leading cause of death for children aged under five in many countries.

Around 2.5 million people died by drowning in the decade to 2019, the WHO said, as it set out a series of simple measures to help reduce the "entirely preventable" toll to mark the first World Drowning Prevention Day on July 23. The WHO said that around 60 per cent of all drowning deaths were among those under the age of 30, with

the highest rates among children aged under five.

According to Madeeha bint Madni al Bakri who has been a swimming instructor for the last 15 years and has trained more than 350 children, the ideal age to learn to swim is two and a half years of age. "This is the best age to start, as the children that age don't have much fear and are fast learners", said Madeeha.

"You should always have eyes in the back of your head, accidents

happen and the moment you turn away, things escalate very quickly so parents should always be watching", she noted.

"Do not have a pool at home unless you know how to swim. I have noticed that here, having a pool is more for decoration and most parents don't even use their pool or even know how to swim. Also, parents should invest in swimming classes for their kids if they have a pool at home", Madeeha pointed out.

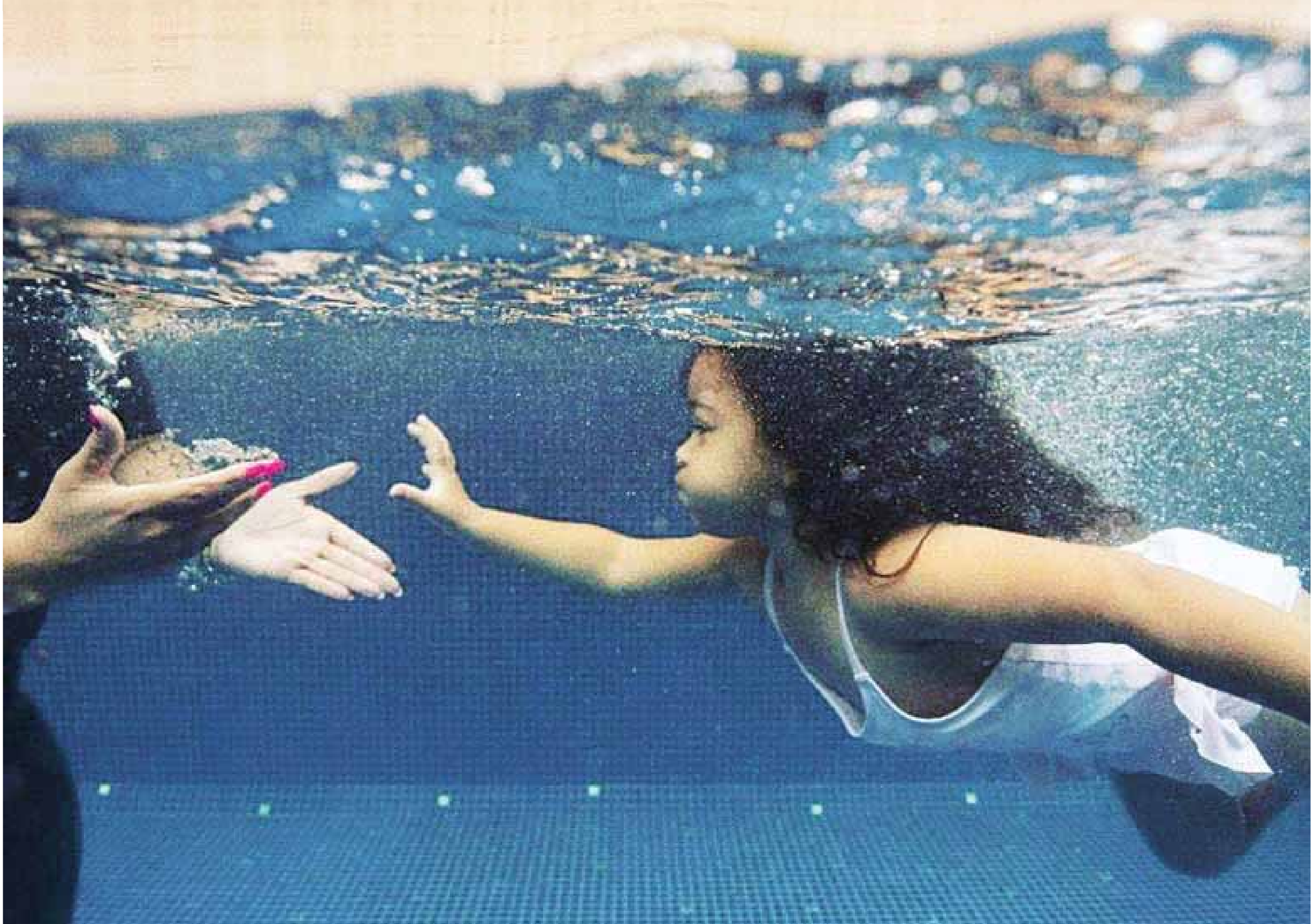
Swimming is a lifelong skill and once taught it stays with the individual forever. There is a growing trend in vacationing in farmhouses and the danger is that many of the youngsters do not know swimming.

"The cases of drowning here are so high and it's sad as we have access to the sea and pools unlike other people who live in areas away from water. Start the kids early with swimming, don't wait until an accident happens in order for parents to realise", urged the swimming instructor at Mady's Swim School.

The CDAA has listed out safety measures for the public to keep in mind. In addition to sticking to allocated locations, CDAA has stated that it is important to have provision of safety rings and jackets at the swimming sites. They have also warned against filling the pool in full. Adults should also ensure that the children are out of the pool before they leave.

It has stated that swimming pools should be fitted with fixed metal ladders and have handles distributed around the pool.

The CDAA also stressed on the importance of having a swimmer to watch over the children while they are in water. "When necessary, call the emergency hotline: 9999 or 24343666", CDAA has urged.



All students to be vaccinated before new school year

KABEER YOUSUF

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The Ministry of Health represented by the General Directorate of Health Services continued to add more target groups, as well as included more regions to the list of national vaccination campaign as the latest drive covered almost 30 per cent of the children of 12 and above.

The campaign which began with the school students of over 12 years old has been spread to North and South Al Sharqiyah on Sunday where an overwhelming response was experienced since morning.

It's part of the national drive of getting all students from both public and private sectors vaccinated before the beginning of the new academic year.

The first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine for school students aged 12 years and over in the governorate are being given at ten immunisation centres in the governorate in cooperation with the General Directorate of Education in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

These centres are: one in Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi, two centres in the Wilayat of Dima W'attayeen, and one in the wilayats of Ibra, Al Qabil, Bidiya and Wadi Bani Khalid.

"The new phase launched on Sunday is to complete the previous stages of the national campaign against Covid-19, with the students of age group 12 years and above in 86 schools at the governorate level has evoked a strong response from both parents and teachers and will run until August 16," said



Mohammed bin Khalifa al Abri, Director-General of the General Directorate of Health Services in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

The ongoing immunisation campaign for children from 12 years of age targets 320,000 students from public and private schools from all governorates, where 90,000 students targeted are from Muscat alone.

"We aim to vaccinate 320,000 students from various educational institutions in both public and private sectors. All students who have attained 12 can get their jabs from the centres," Dr Lamia al Balushi, head of the epidemiological investigation team at the Directorate General of Health Services in Muscat Governorate said.

"The campaign will run for

3 weeks from August 3 until all students are vaccinated before the start of the new school year," she added.

Similarly, parents of all those children who have been in contact with Covid-19 patients or complain from respiratory disease symptoms must get their children's vaccination dates rescheduled until the symptoms are no more existing.



شركة تنمية الطاقة ش.م.م.
POWER DEVELOPMENT COMPANY L.L.C.

Announcement of Capital Reduction

In accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company Power Development Company LLC, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No. 1452193, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from Omani Rials 150,000.000 to 25,000.000.

Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry within 30 days from the date hereof.

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Check out the Observer classified page.
It's where buyers meet sellers.



Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Center

CCCRC/T/267/2021-
Rent a Pickup for 6 months

The operational committee of Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Center announces for renting a Pickup for six months with 1 cabins (2doors) - 4-cylinder engine

Biddings that meet the above requirement should be submitted in a sealed envelope on 15/8/2021 by an employee from your company addressed to the head of Purchase Committee in the tender box located at:

**Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and research centre,
Procurement department ground floor**

No later than 15/8/2021.

Please note:

- Bids received after the deadline indicated above, for whatever reason, will not be considered.
- Queries/ clarifications should be submitted immediately, but not later than one week before the date of tender submission.
- For queries you may Contact via email (purchase@cccrc.gov.om).
- The committee is not obliged to accept the lowest price of the bid or any other bid.



MINISTRY OF HEALTH ROYAL HOSPITAL ANNOUNCEMENT FOR TENDER



THE DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF ROYAL HOSPITAL INVITE SPECIALIZED COMPANIES TO SUBMIT TENDER

TENDER NO.	DESCRIPTION	LAST DATE FOR COLLECTION OF TENDER DOCUMENT	CLOSING TIME/DAY/ DATE	ELIGIBILITY	TENDER FEE (NON-REFUNDABLE)
319/2021/ MOH/ DGRHP-14	SUPPLY OF PHARMACEUTICALS	18/8/2021	BEFORE 10 AM ON TUESDAY 31/8/2021	SPECIALIZED COMPANIES REGISTERED WITH TENDER BOARD	25 RIALS
320/2021/ MOH/ DGRHP-15	ELECTRICAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN WARDS FOR AL-SHIFA WIFI COVERAGE	19/8/2021	BEFORE 10 AM ON TUESDAY 7/9/2021	SPECIALIZED COMPANIES REGISTERED WITH TENDER BOARD	25 RIALS
65/2021/ MOH/ DGRHP-5 RECALL 1	REPLACEMENT OF SOFT WATER PIPES - WATER TOWER TO PR	18/8/2021	BEFORE 10 AM ON TUESDAY 31/8/2021	SPECIALIZED COMPANIES REGISTERED WITH TENDER BOARD IN EXCELLENT GRADE	25 RIALS
321/2021/ MOH/ DGRHP-16	SUPPLY & INSTALLATION OF OPERATION THEATRE TABLE	19/08/2021	BEFORE 10 AM ON TUESDAY 7/09/2021	SPECIALIZED COMPANIES REGISTERED WITH TENDER BOARD	25 RIALS

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

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

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

ENTRIES INVITED FOR CREATIVE WRITING CONTEST

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 7

A creative writing contest for children aged 15 is being organised by Bhavalaya Art and Culture Foundation on the topic 'Life During Covid-19 Pandemic Days.'

The submission may be an essay or short story in not more than 3,500 words. Those interested may mail entries bhavalayacreation@gmail.com before August 17 along with the full biodata.

"It is very crucial to involve our children in some creative activities during the pandemic and help them utilise their time in a more productive way," said Dr J Retnakumar, founder and Chairman of Bhavalaya

The best three entries will get prizes of INR 10,000, INR 7,500 and INR 5,000 and every participant will receive an appreciation certificate. "We are very excited to have this event to encourage creative writing and this is done to bring out the imagination of people.



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY Advertisement No. 33/2021

Companies specialized in the field and registered with Tender Board, may obtain tender documents for the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	E- Tender No.	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date	Grade
PRE/21/039	(43/2021/ MM/HQ-31)	Design and Construction of the Widening of Al Qurm Street (E- Tender)	Rial 50	07/09/2021	07/10/2021	First
PRE/21/055	(44/2021/ MM/QS-4)	Supply and Installation of Ceramic Road Studs at Various Locations in Muscat Governorate (E- Tender)	Rial 25	02/09/2021	19/09/2021	Specialized
PRE/21/057	(45/2021/ MM/QS-5)	RFP for Renewing IBM FILENET & CMS Licenses for Record and Document Management System (E- Tender)	Rial 25	02/09/2021	19/09/2021	Specialized
PRE/21/058	(46/2021/ MM/QS-6)	Renewal of Hardware Maintenance Service & Accessories (E- Tender)	Rial 25	02/09/2021	19/09/2021	Specialized

Tender Conditions :-

1. Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
2. Original Tender Bond envelope should be sealed with red wax and entitled to His Excellency/ Head of Internal Tender Committee and to be placed in the Tender Box at Muscat Municipality HQ, Third Floor, before 10:00 am as per the date Mentioned in the above table. All envelopes are to be clearly marked with the name of the Tender being presented and no other marks.
3. For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
4. For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@ita.gov.om) or call (+968 24166670).

Saudi allows vaccinated pilgrims

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia will begin accepting vaccinated foreigners wanting to make the Umrah pilgrimage, authorities said on Sunday, a move that will boost an economy hit by the Covid pandemic.

Nearly 18 months after it closed its borders to battle coronavirus, Saudi Arabia will from Monday begin “gradually receiving umrah requests from various countries”, the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported.

The umrah can be undertaken at any time and usually draws millions from around the globe, unlike the annual haj, which abled-bodied Muslims who have the means must perform at least once in their lifetime.

The Covid-19 pandemic hugely disrupted both pilgrimages, which are usually key revenue earners for the kingdom that rake in a combined \$12 billion annually.

Before Sunday’s announcement, only immunised pilgrims residing in Saudi Arabia were eligible for umrah permits.

And last month only around 60,000 inoculated residents were allowed to take part in a scaled down form of the annual haj.

But the kingdom is slowly



Worshippers perform the evening prayer during the fasting month of Ramadhan around the Kaaba in the Grand Mosque complex in the holy city of Mecca. — AFP file photo

opening up, and has started welcoming vaccinated foreign tourists since August 1.

Foreign pilgrims must be immunised with a Saudi-recognised vaccine — Pfizer-BioNTech, AstraZeneca, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson — and agree to undergo quarantine if necessary, the

SPA said quoting deputy haj minister Abdulfattah bin Sulaiman Mashat.

He added that the kingdom was working on determining the destinations from which pilgrims can come and their numbers on a “periodic basis according to the classification of preventive meas-

ures” in those countries.

Barring overseas pilgrims has caused deep disappointment among Muslims worldwide, who typically save for years to take part.

“I feel relieved about the resumption of the umrah pilgrimage,” Ahmed Hamadna, 33, a sales

Foreign pilgrims must be immunised with Pfizer-BioNTech, AstraZeneca, Moderna or Johnson & Johnson vaccines and agree to undergo quarantine

manager in Egypt, said.

But he added that he was “concerned about the complex procedures and measures during the pandemic”.

Engineer Mohamad Ragab, an Australian resident, said he too was still “hesitant” to perform the umrah pilgrimage.

“There will likely be crowds in Mecca and the chances of infection are high,” he said.

According to the SPA report, Saudi Arabia will allow 60,000 pilgrims to perform umrah each month, and gradually increase that to reach two million worshippers per month.

Hosting the pilgrimages is a matter of prestige for Saudi rulers, for whom the custodianship of Islam’s holiest sites is their most powerful source of political legitimacy. —AFP

Ansar Allah: No point in meeting new UN envoy now

DUBAI: The chief negotiator for Yemen’s Ansar Allah said on Sunday it would be futile to hold talks with the United Nations new special envoy for Yemen without movement on the group’s key conditions under stalled peace efforts.

The appointment of Swedish diplomat Hans Grundberg on Friday as the new UN envoy comes as the United Nations and United States struggle to secure a breakthrough to end more than six years of war.

A UN-led initiative for a ceasefire and the lifting of sea and air restrictions imposed by the coalition on Ansar Allah-held areas has stalled, with the coalition seeking a simultaneous deal and the the fighters insisting on an end to the blockade first.

“There is no use in having any dialogue before airports and ports are opened as a humanitarian necessity and priority,” negotiator Mohammed Abdulsalam tweeted in response to Grundberg’s appointment. — Reuters

Sudan recalls ambassdor from Ethiopia as tensions rise

KHARTOUM: Sudan has recalled its ambassador to neighbouring Ethiopia, the foreign ministry said on Sunday, reporting Addis Ababa had spurned its efforts at trying to broker a ceasefire in war-torn Tigray.

Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, chair of the regional body IGAD, wanted “to encourage all Ethiopian sides to reach a ceasefire agreement, and engage in comprehensive political talks”, the ministry said in a statement.

But last week Ethiopia said their trust in some of Sudan’s leaders had been “eroded”, and accused the Sudanese army of launching an “incursion” into their territory.

Northern Ethiopia has been wracked by fighting since last November, when Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent troops to topple the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), the region’s then ruling party.

Tens of thousands of Ethiopians have fled to refugee camps in Sudan, to escape a conflict that the UN says has pushed 400,000 people into famine-like conditions.



A protester rides a horse, waving Ethiopian flags, during a rally against pro-TPLF forces (Tigray People’s Liberation Front) and to support for Ethiopia’s armed forces in Addis Ababa on Sunday. — AFP

Relations between Khartoum and Addis Ababa have also soured over the contested border region of Fashaga, a fertile strip long cultivated by Ethiopian farmers, but claimed by Sudan.

Billene Seyoum, spokeswoman for Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, said the issue “needs to be thoroughly addressed, before Sudan could be entertained as a credible party in terms of facilitating such kind of negotiations”.

Sudan’s foreign ministry on Sunday said it had “followed statements made by senior Ethiopian officials refusing Sudan’s help to end the bloody conflict in Tigray, citing a lack of neutrality and (Sudan’s) occupation of Ethiopian territories,” the ministry statement read.

It dismissed the statements as “allegations with no basis”, adding that “Sudan has recalled its ambassador to Ethiopia for consultations”. — AFP

Syrian children hold ‘Tent Olympics’ of the displaced

Idlib: Hurling a javelin, leaping over hurdles and sprinting beyond rows of tents to win gold, displaced children in the north-west of war-torn Syria staged their very own Olympics. As the Tokyo Olympics wrapped up at the weekend, 120 boys from 12 different camps excitedly gathered late on Saturday for their own version of the Games in Syria’s last major rebel bastion of Idlib.

Each wearing the colour of their camp, it was their turn to be the star athletes on a running track and soccer pitch etched in the red earth besides the tent settlement of Yaman near Idlib city.

Among the participants at the “Tent Olympics 2020”, Walid Mohammed al Hassan, 12, was delighted to have represented his camp in the long jump.

“We had such fun,” he said, three fellow team mates huddled around him with their arms draped over his shoulders.

“I won second place in the long jump,” he said, grinning from ear to ear in his team’s uniform of white head band and blue vest.



Displaced Syrian boys stand on the podium after winning medals in the so-called “Camp Olympics 2020” in the town of Fuua. — AFP

The eight to 14-year-olds competed in a host of disciplines.

Also on the programme were javelin, discus, high jump, hurdles, gymnastics, martial arts, volleyball, badminton, football, running and even “horse racing”.

Surrounded by a small crowd, two boys in white karate outfits squared off against each other, while another — much shorter — appeared to act as referee.

On the race track, a boy ran as fast as he could clutching a cutout of a horse’s head to his chest in a

“horse race”.

As the sun set, participants and organisers cheered wildly as the winners stepped up onto the podium to receive their medals under a shower of confetti.

A boy named Abdallah, who did not give his age, said his team had won gold in badminton.

The Idlib region is home to nearly three million people, two-thirds of them displaced from other parts of Syria over the course of its 10-year-old conflict. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BEIRUT

Hezbollah warns ‘proportionate’ response

The head of Lebanon’s powerful Hezbollah movement, Hassan Nasrallah, on Saturday vowed a “suitable and proportionate” response to any Israeli air strikes on Lebanon after a flare-up at the border this week.

Israel carried out its first air raids on Lebanese soil in years on Thursday, prompting Hezbollah to fire rockets back at the Jewish state the following day.

“Our response was linked to the Israeli strikes that occurred in south Lebanon for the first time



in 15 years,” he said in a televised speech ahead of the anniversary of the end of the last war with Israel in 2006.

Nasrallah described the air strikes this week as a “very dangerous development”, but said Hezbollah did not want war.

ISTANBUL

Six wildfires in Turkey still out of control

Turkey is battling the worst forest fires in more than a decade for the 12th consecutive day, with at least six fires still not under control on Sunday, according to official figures.

Emergency forces are mainly concentrated on the western Turkish province of Mugla, where winds hampered the fire-fighting efforts.

A fire in the province of Aydin, which was thought to have been under control, was reignited by the wind, as the broadcast-



er NTV reported.

Meanwhile, the situation in Antalya in southern Turkey has eased. According to local authorities, emergency forces have been withdrawn and sent to western Turkey for reinforcement.

TEHRAN

Iran records over 500 Covid deaths

Iran reported over 500 daily Covid deaths for the first time on Sunday, its health ministry announced, as new infections also hit a record high.

Iran registered 39,619 new infections in the 24 hours to Sunday, taking the total since the pandemic started to 4,158,729, the ministry said

During that same period it recorded 542 deaths, taking the total number of fatalities to 94,015, it added.

Iranian health officials



have acknowledged that the Islamic republic’s Covid figures underestimate the real toll.

But Iran remains the Middle East country worst hit by the pandemic.

In brief

■ MANILA



PHILIPPINES REPORTS RECORD COVID DEATH TOLL

The Philippines' health ministry recorded on Sunday 9,671 new coronavirus cases and 287 additional deaths, the biggest single-day spike in the country's death toll since April 9.

In a bulletin, the ministry said total confirmed infections in the Southeast Asian country had risen to 1.66 million, while the death toll had climbed to 29,122.

Checkpoints were put up around Metro Manila to stop people who are not authorised from leaving their residences to travel in and out of the area. Long queues of vehicles formed at the checkpoints as police scrutinised commuters' documents.

■ BRISBANE



BRISBANE TO LIFT VIRUS LOCKDOWN

Australia's third-largest city of Brisbane will lift a lockdown on Sunday after containing a virus cluster, while an outbreak that has kept Sydney paralysed for weeks continues to grow.

Millions of people in Brisbane and surrounding areas have spent just eight days under stay-at-home orders after an outbreak of more than 100 cases spread among several school communities.

Deputy Queensland premier Steven Miles said the region had achieved "something quite incredible" by seemingly bringing the outbreak under control.

"It looks like we may have been able to contain a Delta outbreak in just eight days of lockdown, just 10 days from when the first case was notified," he told reporters.

■ TUNIS



TUNISIA AIMS FOR 1 MILLION COVID JABS

Up to 1 million Tunisians were to receive their first coronavirus vaccine dose on Sunday as the country hit hard by the pandemic began a massive inoculation campaign for those over age 40.

Thousands of people were already queueing in front of vaccination centres in the North African country's capital early on Sunday.

As part of the effort, hundreds of institutions, such as schools, have been turned into vaccination centres.

According to an adviser to President Kais Saied, a preparation from AstraZeneca will be used.

TALIBAN CAPTURE MORE TOWNS



Internally displaced families sit inside a school after they left their house following fighting between Afghan security forces and Taliban, in Ghaziabad District in the northern part of Kunar province on Saturday. — AFP

Sar-e-Pul city, the government buildings and all the installations there."

Parwina Azimi, a women's rights activist in Sar-e-Pul, told AFP by phone that government officials and the remaining forces had retreated to an army barracks

about three kilometres (two miles) from the city.

The Taliban had the compound "surrounded", said Mohammad Hussein Mujahidzada, a member of the provincial council.

Kunduz is the most significant Taliban gain since the insurgents

launched an offensive in May as foreign forces began the final stages of their withdrawal.

It has been a perennial target for the Taliban, who briefly overran the city in 2015 and again in 2016 but never managed to hold it for long. The ministry of defence said

government forces were fighting to retake key installations.

"The commando forces have launched a clearing operation. Some areas, including the national radio and TV buildings, have been cleared of the terrorist Taliban," it said.

Kabul's ability to hold the north may prove crucial to the government's long-term survival.

Northern Afghanistan has long been considered an anti-Taliban stronghold that saw some of the stiffest resistance to militant rule in the 1990s. The region remains home to several militias and is also a fertile recruiting ground for the country's armed forces.

"The capture of Kunduz is quite significant because it will free up a large number of Taliban forces who might then be mobilised in other parts of the north," said Ibraheem Thural, a consultant for International Crisis Group.

Vivid footage of the fighting was posted on social media over the weekend, including what appeared to be large numbers of prisoners being freed from jails in captured cities. — Agencies

Myanmar protesters mark uprising anniversary

YANGON: Myanmar protesters on Sunday marked the anniversary of a 1988 pro-democracy uprising that brought Aung San Suu Kyi to prominence, with flash mobs and marches of defiance against the ruling junta.

The country has been in turmoil since the military coup in February — more than 900 people have been killed and thousands arrested in the subsequent crackdown on dissent, according to a local monitoring group.

But protesters remain undeterred, taking to the streets daily in lightning-quick rallies to demand the end to the State Administration Council — as the junta's so-called "caretaker" government has dubbed itself.

On Sunday, flash mobs popped up across Yangon and second city Mandalay to commemorate the 1988 uprising — a massive pro-democracy movement that the military violently quelled by opening fire on protesters and jailing thousands. Following the calls of an online campaign, red-clad protesters on Sunday flashed an eight-finger salute and carried banners that read: "Let's return the old blood



Protesters wear wet weather gear to protect against police water cannon as they take part in a demonstration against the military coup in Yangon. — AFP file photo

debt of 1988 in 2021."

"In 1988, our country sacrificed a lot — many people lost their lives. But the dictatorship is still alive," said Ko Sai Win, who joined a morning protest in Mandalay.

"It is like a black shadow on our country."

The 1988 uprising heralded the rise of Suu Kyi, who had returned to Myanmar just before protests kicked off to care for her ailing mother. — AFP

Malaysia to ease Covid curbs for fully vaccinated

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia will ease coronavirus curbs for fully vaccinated people in states comprising about half the country, its premier said on Sunday.

The move, which takes effect from Tuesday, will allow millions to cross district borders, play individual outdoor sports and eat in restaurants in eight states where cases have fallen and vaccination rates are promising.

A lockdown since June has shut down thousands of businesses and limited most peoples' travel to the districts where they lived, though sectors of the economy have gradually been allowed to open.

"More people are receiving complete vaccinations... the



The curbs will not be lifted in states such as the capital Kuala Lumpur, which is recording thousands of new infections every day, and the commercial heartland of Selangor.

burden on the public health system will reduce," Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin said in a televised speech.

"More economic and social sectors can be opened up in stages, and we can get out of this pandemic (in a) more

orderly and safely (manner)."

The curbs will not be lifted in states such as the capital Kuala Lumpur, which is recording thousands of new infections every day, and the commercial heartland of Selangor. — AFP

Thousands evacuated as floods hit N Korea

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has mobilised the military to carry out relief work in areas recently hit by heavy rains, state media said on Sunday, amid concerns over an economic crisis and food shortage.

The ruling Worker's Party's Central Military Commission held a meeting of its chapter in the eastern province of South Hamgyong to discuss damage and recovery from the downpour, the official KCNA news agency said.

An early monsoon season arrived on the Korean peninsula last month, with torrential rains also inflicting damage in some southern regions.

North Korean state TV released footage this week showing submerged houses and destroyed bridges and railroads in Hamgyong, saying some 1,170 homes were devastated and 5,000 people

evacuated.

Kim did not attend the meeting but party officials conveyed his message that the military should kick off a relief campaign and provide necessary supplies in the region, KCNA said.

"It was also emphasised that he called for awakening and arousing the (party) officials... into waging the recovery campaign skilfully and unyieldingly," KCNA said.

KCNA said the military commission explored emergency measures to rebuild the disaster-stricken areas, stabilise people's living, prevent the coronavirus and minimise crop injuries.

The meeting came amid concerns over a crisis in a reclusive economy that has already been dogged by international sanctions, aimed at curbing its nuclear and weapons programmes. — Agencies

MOORE STEPHENS LLC

NOTICE ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF LIQUIDATION OF EVOLVENCE KNOWLEDGE AL KHONJI LLC (AS APPEARED IN OFFICIAL GAZETTE NO 1402)

Moore Stephens LLC, announces the liquidation process of Evolvence Knowledge Al Khonji LLC, bearing commercial registration number 1230070, in accordance with the decision taken by the Company's Members on 4 July 2021. The liquidators alone have the right to represent the Company under liquidation before third parties, and all parties are to confirm with the liquidator for all matters concerning the company's business at the following address:

Office No.41, 4th Floor, Building No.1022, Way No.1013;
Al Walaj Street, Al Qurum
P O Box 933, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24061000, Fax: 24061099

By this announcement, the liquidator calls the company's creditors to submit their claims against the company, together with the supporting documents, to the above address within 180 days from the date of publishing this announcement for the first time, and any debtors should settle the company's rights with the liquidator on the address above.

Moore Stephens LLC
Official Liquidators of Evolvence Knowledge Al Khonji LLC
(Under voluntary liquidation)

MOORE STEPHENS LLC

NOTICE ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF LIQUIDATION OF EVOLVENCE KNOWLEDGE AL KHONJI SCHOOL LLC (AS APPEARED IN OFFICIAL GAZETTE NO 1402)

Moore Stephens LLC, announces the liquidation process of Evolvence Knowledge Al Khonji School LLC, bearing commercial registration number 1236906, in accordance with the decision taken by the Company's Members on 4 July 2021. The liquidators alone have the right to represent the Company under liquidation before third parties, and all parties are to confirm with the liquidator for all matters concerning the company's business at the following address:

Office No.41, 4th Floor, Building No.1022, Way No.1013;
Al Walaj Street, Al Qurum
P O Box 933, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24061000, Fax: 24061099

By this announcement, the liquidator calls the company's creditors to submit their claims against the company, together with the supporting documents, to the above address within 180 days from the date of publishing this announcement for the first time, and any debtors should settle the company's rights with the liquidator on the address above.

Moore Stephens LLC
Official Liquidators of Evolvence Knowledge Al Khonji School LLC
(Under voluntary liquidation)

Italy reels under floods and wildfires

ROME: Italy was facing the twin threat of rainfall leading to landslides and scorching weather contributing to fire on Sunday.

A car and a vehicle were smashed by the landslide in South Tyrol, but no injuries were reported.

But rising water levels were flooding garages and paths. The weather service had warned of heavy rains: The northern part of the province reported downpours of 87 litres within a day.

That was a marked contrast to southern parts of the country, where wildfires are increasingly threatening agriculture and nature reserves in southern Italy.

The Coldiretti agricultural association on Sunday warned about the damage to agriculture caused by the ongoing drought, especially in the southern part of the Mediterranean country.

Wheat yields could fall by 10 per cent, while experts expect fruit varieties such as cherries, peaches and nectarines to drop by up to 50 per cent in some cases, compared to an ordinary year.

Coldiretti suspects the effects of climate change are behind the weather events. — dpa

Blaze ravages Evia island on sixth day of Greek wildfires

PSAROPOULI: Thousands of people have fled their homes on the Greek island of Evia as wildfires burned uncontrolled for a sixth day on Sunday, and ferries were on standby for more evacuations after taking many to safety by sea.

Fires that had threatened northern suburbs of Athens in recent days died back. But the blaze on Evia, a large island east of the capital, quickly burgeoned into several fronts, ripping through thousands of hectares (acres) of pristine forest across its northern part, and forcing the evacuation of dozens of villages.

“I feel angry. I lost my home ... nothing will be the same the next day,” said one resident who gave her name as Vasilikia after boarding a rescue ferry at the village of Psaropouli.

“It’s a disaster. It’s huge. Our villages are destroyed, there is nothing left from our homes, our properties, nothing, nothing,” she said.

Wildfires have erupted in many parts of the country during a week-long heatwave, Greece’s worst in three decades,



Local residents look at the wildfire approaching the village of Gouves on Evia (Euboea) island, the second largest Greek island, on Sunday. — AFP

with searing temperatures and hot winds creating tinder-box conditions. Across the country, forest land has burned and dozens of homes and businesses have been destroyed.

“Fiery destruction,” newspaper *To Vima* said on its front page on Sunday.

The coastguard has evacuated more than 2,000 people, including many elderly residents, from different parts of the island since Tuesday, in dramatic sea rescues as the night sky turned an apocalyptic red.

Others fled their villages on foot overnight, walking along

roads dotted with trees in flames.

“A house is burning over here,” one woman told emergency crews on the ground in the settlement of Vasilika, pointing to a searing fire in the distance.

“Everywhere, everywhere, everywhere, everywhere,” one of the firefighters replied. — Reuters

Spain cave paintings show Neanderthals were artists

ARDALES: Neanderthals may have been closer to our species of prehistoric modern human than previously believed after cave paintings found in Spain proved they had a fondness for creating art, one of the authors of a new scientific report said on Sunday.



Pigments were made in the caves at different times up to 15,000 and 20,000 years apart, the study found, and dispel an earlier suggestion that they were the result of a natural oxide flow rather than being man-made.

Red ochre pigment discovered on stalagmites in Caves of Ardales, near Malaga in southern Spain, were created by Neanderthals about 65,000 years ago, making them possibly the first artists on earth, according to the study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS) journal.

Modern humans were not inhabiting the world at the time the cave images were made.

The new findings add to increasing evidence that Neanderthals, whose lineage became extinct about 40,000 years ago, were not the unsophisticated relatives of Homo sapiens they been long been portrayed as. Pigments were made in the caves at different times up to 15,000 and 20,000 years apart, the study found, and dispel an earlier suggestion that they were the result of a natural oxide flow rather than being man-made.

Joao Zilhao, one of the authors of the PNAS study, said dating techniques showed that ochre had been spat by Neanderthals onto the stalagmites, possibly as part of a ritual. — AFP

A drought-hit California town finds itself sinking into the ground

CORCORAN: “You’ve got too many farmers pumping all around,” complained Raul Atilano. This octogenarian resident of Corcoran, the self-proclaimed farming capital of California, was struggling to make sense of the strangest of phenomena: his already suffering town is sinking, ever so gradually, into the ground.

A constant stream of trucks carrying tomatoes, alfalfa or cotton outside this town of 20,000 shows just how inextricably Corcoran’s fate is tied to the intensive farming practised here.

To irrigate its vast fields and help feed America, farm operators began in the last century to pump water from underground sources, so much so that the ground has begun to sink — imagine a series of giant straws sucking up groundwater faster than rain can replenish it, as hydrologist Anne Senter said.

Strangely, signs of this subsid-



Irrigation tubing is seen piled up beside a young nut tree in the drought-stricken Central Valley near Corcoran, California. — AFP

ence are nearly invisible to the human eye. There are no cracks in the walls of the typical American shops in the town’s centre, nor crevices opening up in the streets or fields: to measure subsidence, Californian authorities had to turn to NASA, which used satellites to analyze the geological change.

And yet, over the past 100 years, Corcoran has sunken “the equivalent of a two-story house,” Jeanine Jones, a manager with the California Department of Water Resources, said.

The phenomenon “can be a threat to infrastructure, groundwater wells, levees, aqueducts,” she said.

To irrigate its vast fields and help feed America, farm operators began in the last century to pump water from underground sources, so much so that the ground has begun to sink

The one recognisable sign of this dangerous change is a levee on the edge of the city, in an area where wisps of cotton blowing in the air.

In 2017, the authorities launched a major project to raise the levee, for fear that the city, which sits in a basin, could be flooded ... whenever the rains finally return.

This year, however, the problem has been not floods but an alarming drought aggravated by climate change. — AFP

WASHINGTON

Biden’s infra bill passes key hurdle

A huge infrastructure bill deemed historic by US President Joe Biden passed a key procedural hurdle on Saturday, with enough Republican senators joining Democrats to make its final passage in the upper chamber appear nearly certain.

The \$1.2-trillion-bill, designed to fund much-needed upgrades to US roads, highways, bridges and high-speed Internet, drew the support of 18 Republican senators and 49 Democrats, a rare instance of bipartisanship in



deeply divided Washington. That Republican support — with the party’s Senate leader Mitch McConnell among the 18 in favour — will end floor debate on the bill, a procedural step that required 60 votes.

BRASILIA

Bolsonaro told not to undermine polls

When US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan visited Brazil’s far-right President Jair Bolsonaro on Thursday, he brought a message from Washington: Don’t mess around with elections.

A source familiar with the matter confirmed to Reuters that the Biden administration raised concerns over Bolsonaro’s unfounded claims of fraud in Brazil’s all-electronic voting system and his threat not to accept the results of next year’s



election if the system is not changed.

The nature of the message delivered by Sullivan was first reported in the *Folha de S.Paulo* newspaper on Saturday.

BERLIN

Greens defends chancellor candidate

The co-leader of Germany’s Greens on Sunday defended the party’s candidate for chancellor at next month’s federal election, and brushed off suggestions that he should replace her after she made a string of costly mistakes.

The ecologists briefly surged in the polls to overtake Chancellor Angela Merkel’s conservative bloc after they named Annalena Baerbock as their chancellor candidate in April, but have since waned.

Baerbock’s error-strewn



campaign has included mistakes in her resume and a scandal over a Christmas bonus payment that she failed to declare to parliament. Baerbock has also said that sexist scrutiny is holding her back.

Economic woes to weigh on Zambia vote

SOFIA CHRISTENSEN

Soaring food prices and economic hardship could sway this week's tightly-contested Zambian presidential vote in favour of the opposition, as citizens grapple with the fallout from rampant financial mismanagement.

President Edgar Lungu, who is vying for re-election in the August 12 poll, stands accused of borrowing unsustainably, to splurge on infrastructure projects. The copper-rich southern African nation last year became the first country on the continent to default on its debt in the coronavirus era.

The value of the kwacha currency plummeted to record lows and inflation surged past 20 per cent during Lungu's presidency, which also saw investor confidence decline as external debt ballooned to around \$12 billion last year.

"Mismanagement at the macro level is affecting common people", said Zambian economist Trevor Simumba.

"The poor don't have mechanisms to adjust their living costs".

With tensions rising ahead of the elections next week, Lungu ordered an unprecedented deployment of the military to clamp down on violence.

Economic troubles in a country where more than half the population lived below the poverty line before the pandemic do not bode well for a president who only eked out slim victories in previous polls, analysts warn.

Results of an Afrobarometer study published last month showed that poverty, hunger and economic inequalities had worsened compared to five years ago. According to a survey at the end of May, 80 per cent of Zambians considered the economic conditions "bad".

The upcoming election is expected to be the tightest contest yet between Lungu, 64, and his longstanding rival, main opposition candidate and sixth-time-runner Hakainde Hichilema, 59.

Lungu's "popularity has gone precisely because of how the economy has performed", economist Grieve Chelwa said speaking from the capital Lusaka. For the typical Zambian voter, who has a low paid job or is informally employed, the election is "all about the economy", said Chelwa.

— AFP

Mismanagement at the macro level is affecting common people. The poor don't have mechanisms to adjust their living costs

TREVOR SIMUMBA

An economist



CAMP OLYMPICS IN SYRIA

Displaced Syrian boys in karate outfits square off against each other, during the so-called "Camp Olympics 2020" in the town of Fuua, in the northwestern Syrian last major rebel bastion of Idlib, on Saturday, as 120 boys from 12 different camps gather for their own version of the Olympic games. — AFP

A recall of the historical migration



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
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THE PROPHET'S JOURNEY BETWEEN THE CITIES MARKED A TURNING POINT IN THE ISLAMIC HISTORY

As the anniversary of New Hijri Year is round the corner, Muslims all over the world are gearing up to commemorate this valued occasion. With all its values and lessons, one recalls the historical incidents of the scared journey of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Observing the occasion attracts the attention of many to realise its significance to Muslims and how different is the Islamic Calendar?

The New Year marks the migration journey of the Prophet from the city of Mecca to Madina. This was the central historical occasion in the early days of Islam and it declared the start of the Islamic Calendar, announcing the foundation of the first Muslim state at that time. The Prophet's journey between the cities marked a turning point in the Islamic history.

As another year is bidding farewell, a new one is approaching to remind humanity of the glorious memories of the Prophet's migration journey. The blessed migration reflected an honourable challenge for human excellence and presented several lessons of patience, control, knowledge and wisdom. It stands as an improvement for the future generations to take advantage of, so they will be able to clear up all the difficulties and overcome the hardships they come

across during lifetime.

The Almighty Allah assigned the Prophet as a Messenger for entire humanity and bestowed him with guidance to renew the call for Islam; the religion of other Prophets and Messengers who came before him. All of them in succession conveyed the religion, which Allah accepts to their respective audiences until the religion was fully completed by revealing the Holy Quran to the last of the Prophets, Muhammad.

As the verse confirms: "Say you we believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes of Al Asbat, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another of them: And we submit to Allah in Islam."

In reference to the difference between the Gregorian and Islamic calendars, they are totally different in terms of the names of months and dates. In the Islamic Calendar, months consist of 29 or 30 days based on the moon sight while in the Gregorian calendar consist of either 30 or 31 days and they are fixed in rotation. However, both are similarly consisting of 12 months, but the ones in the Islamic Calendar are different than the Gregorian ones.

There was a highlight to the Islamic Calendar and its months in the Holy Quran as clarified in the verse: "They ask thee the New Moons. Say: They are but signs to mark fixed periods of time in the affairs of men and for Pilgrimage." The number of months is also stated in the verse: "The number of months in the sight of Allah is twelve in a year. So ordained by Him the day He created the heavens and the earth; Of them four are sacred; that is the straight usage so wrong not yourselves. Therein, and fight the Pagans".

As a matter of fact, the Prophets' journey came post his advice to his companions to migrate to a city called Habasha where there was a just Christian king who welcomed Muslims and believed in them. When the number of believers increased in Madina, Allah revealed to the Prophet to migrate to it. After that, all Muslims started migrating one after another in compliance to the order of Allah and in obedience to the order of the Prophet.

Generally, the Prophet's migration to Madina started a new era, so he could unite all believers as if they all had a heart of a single man. It was a dawn that enticed millions of people from every corner of the universe to believe in the Prophet Muhammad and convert to Islam.

The adventures of a blonde and a very old car



Rachael MacIver
Instagram: @rachael_maciver

I TRIED TO OPEN MY EYES, SWOLLEN WITH LACK OF SLEEP AND HAVING HAD TO STRAIN TO LOOK AT THE ROAD IN THE DARK

"Gooood morning", Mrs J chirped outside my tent.

Chirped, twitter, chipper... all related to little birds deliriously happy to greet a new day. Well, not this old bird.

I tried to open my eyes, swollen with lack of sleep and having had to strain to look at the road in the dark, with sand twirling in front of us like snowflakes in a snowstorm. They felt bruised. I felt absolutely no desire to greet a new day with birdlike enthusiasm.

"Hmmp", I groaned and held my watch close enough to the little slits which were my eyes, and had to blink several times to focus. 5:30 am. In my book this was still in the middle of the night. Why, oh why, was Mrs J already up and chipper like a crow outside a bedroom window on a Saturday sleep-in morning? I knew she had been up

for a while, because I had heard her struggle with the zipper to her tent for what felt like a thousand times in my sleep. Seriously, the guy who one day invents 'the silent zipper' for tents and sleeping bags will become an overnight millionaire. There is no louder noise than the noise coming from the person in the tent next to you, be it 2 m or 2 km away, getting up in the night to 'go behind the bushes'. The procedure always follows the same pattern. Loud un-zipping of the sleeping bag, a struggle with the zipper on the tent flap, which is loudly zipped closed again when the person too late realizes that it is the wrong zipper and only opens the fly net. Loud fumbling and mutterings in the dark and more un-zipping of the right tent flap. By then, you are fully awake. The person in the tent next to you squeezes halfway through the too small hole and has

to un-zip a bit more, before finally tip-toeing to the nearest bush. Needless to say, the entire procedure is repeated in reverse when the fellow camper returns two minutes later. With a final loud zip, which sounds like a jet breaking through the sound barrier, your neighbour settles in with a sigh of pleasure, completely convinced nobody noticed they were up. By this time you yourself are not only fully awake, but you also realise that you now desperately need to pee. Silent zippers — I tell you, there is a huge market.

I poked my head out of the tent. We had been happy to find a small patch of flat ground close to the road late in the night when I finally got too tired to drive any further. Here in the daylight it looked very different. Our spot was flat alright, but so was everything else around us. Flat nothingness, apart from the road

towards Salalah and electricity poles one after another in a seemingly endless row.

I looked at Mrs J and grunted. "Breakfast?" she asked.

In a sweeping 360 degree motion I pointed at the barren landscape. "Where? Have I missed the restaurant???"

Mrs J pursed her lips "Boy, are we grumpy today". She pointed towards a bowl with dates and a thermos, which I knew we definitely hadn't packed from home.

"Abdullah dropped this off an hour ago and said we could just leave the empty thermos when we set off, and he would pick it up later". I stood in awe with my mouth open. Only slightly, but still.

"Abdullah who???" I wanted to know.

"Ah, just a kind man who stopped earlier to check if we needed help. We

had a nice long chat and he gave me loads of insider tips of what to see on the way to Salalah. It's quite a way, you know".

Oh did I know.

The hot sweat tea, a handful of dates and the kindness of strangers did miracles for my mood. We sat in comfortable silence and listened to the emptiness around us, only interrupted by an annoying, lone, desperate fly which must have smelled the sugary tea from miles away and set off on its life's journey across the barren land for this promise of plenty. Mrs J looked down at her once white, now slept in, linen shirt. "Do you think I need to get changed?" she asked. True, the Pajero was still stuck in 3rd gear and we were still a long way from Salalah, but just like the stubborn fly, we had a goal. We were going to get there... just very, very slowly.

sport



USA TOP MEDAL TABLE AS TOKYO 2020 CONCLUDE

TOKYO: Eliud Kipchoge produced a marathon masterclass and the USA edged China at the top of the Tokyo Olympics medals table as the curtain fell on the biggest sports event since the pandemic on Sunday.

After Kipchoge's marathon win for Kenya, the United States scored victories in volleyball, track cycling and basketball to top the tally with 39 gold medals, just one ahead of China.

The 339th and final gold medal went to Serbia's men's water polo team, capping a Games that were in serious danger of cancellation after they became the first postponed Olympics last year.

Thirty-three sports have been contested across 16 days in largely empty stadiums, with fans barred over coronavirus risks and athletes living in strict biosecure conditions.

"Some were already speaking of 'Ghost Games,'" Olympics chief Thomas Bach told an International Olympic Committee session ahead of the closing ceremony on Sunday.

"What we have seen here is that on the contrary the athletes have brought soul to the Olympic Games."

The Olympics were plagued by low Japanese support over fears they would become a super-spreader event but



IOC President Thomas Bach hands over the Olympic flag to Paris' mayor Anne Hidalgo. – AFP

officials maintained that a record haul of 27 gold medals, putting Japan third on the table, has won hearts.

"We believe our athletes' earnest spirit and all-out performance moved people," said Tsuyoshi Fukui, chef de mission for the Japanese team.

Britain finished fourth with 22 golds and the Russian Olympic Committee, the team for Russian athletes after Russia were banned for systematic doping, were fifth with 20.

'ONCE IN A LIFETIME'

A succession of big names have failed to perform in Japan, where new sports skateboarding, surfing, sport climbing and karate have brought young new stars to the fore.

But marathon world record holder Kipchoge showed his class, kicking



General view of the Olympic flame and cauldron at the closing ceremony of Tokyo 2020 Olympics. – Reuters

in the closing stages and clocking 2hr 08min 38sec to retain the title he won in 2016.

"I know there were a lot of people against holding this Olympics due to the coronavirus," said a flag-waving, 47-year-old fan on the marathon route who gave his name as Tsujita.

"But I am glad it took place. This was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for everyone."

The marathon, moved north to Sapporo to avoid Tokyo's summer heat, was one of the few events to allow spectators.

Sunday's closing ceremony got underway at an Olympic Stadium empty of spectators, rounding off an extraordinary Games conducted mostly for a worldwide TV audience of billions.

Fears of a major outbreak among the mostly vaccinated Olympic athletes

and officials proved unfounded and 430 cases were picked up during the Games, including 32 in the Olympic Village.

Among the final events on Sunday, Canadian cyclist Kelsey Mitchell took gold in the women's sprint while Jason Kenny won the men's keirin to become the first Briton to win seven Olympic titles.

The Americans started the day two golds behind China but the women's basketball and volleyball titles and US track cyclist Jennifer Valente's omnium victory put them top of the final table.

The Olympic flag will now pass to 2024 hosts Paris. But the Olympic circus will reconvene in just six months when Beijing, faced with boycott threats and a renewed coronavirus emergency, holds the Winter Games in February. — AFP

Medals		TOKYO 2020			
By delegation		Short version			
Ranking					TOTAL
1	United States	39	41	33	113
2	China	38	32	18	88
3	Japan	27	14	17	58
4	Britain	22	21	22	65
5	ROC*	20	28	23	71
6	Australia	17	7	22	46
7	Netherlands	10	12	14	36
8	France	10	12	11	33
9	Germany	10	11	16	37
10	Italy	10	10	20	40
11	Canada	7	6	11	24
12	Brazil	7	6	8	21
13	New Zealand	7	6	7	20
14	Cuba	7	3	5	15
15	Hungary	6	7	7	20
16	South Korea	6	4	10	20
17	Poland	4	5	5	14
18	Czech Rep.	4	4	3	11
19	Kenya	4	4	2	10
20	Norway	4	2	2	8
21	Jamaica	4	1	4	9
22	Spain	3	8	6	17
23	Sweden	3	6	0	9
24	Switzerland	3	4	6	13
25	Denmark	3	4	4	11
26	Croatia	3	3	2	8
27	Iran	3	2	2	7
28	Serbia	3	1	5	9
29	Belgium	3	1	3	7
30	Bulgaria	3	1	2	6
31	Slovenia	3	1	1	5
32	Uzbekistan	3	0	2	5

*Athletes from Russia

AFP

FOCUS SWITCHES TO PSG AS MESSI CONFIRMS BARCA EXIT

BARCELONA: An emotional Lionel Messi confirmed on Sunday he is leaving Barcelona after 17 trophy-laden years, with Paris Saint Germain his likely next port of call for a career swansong.

"I have still not come to terms with the reality of leaving this club now — I love this club," said a suited Messi, who several times wiped away tears before a squadron of reporters at the club's Camp Nou ground who gave him a standing ovation.

Messi, widely considered the most gifted player in the history of the game, has won 35 trophies at the club which he joined as a 13-year-old — including four Champions Leagues and 10 league titles while his 672 goals are a record for any of the top five European leagues.

Despite offering to cut his salary by half to seal a new five-year deal which a club carrying debts of 1.2 billion euros (\$1.5 billion) and the player had agreed on, the agreement foundered on strict Spanish League salary restrictions.

Barca president Joan Laporta said he could not "mortgage" the club's future on any player — not even Messi.

Previously Messi had been earning over 70 million euros (\$82.3m) a year net — but financial observers of the Spanish game estimate he pulled in around twice as much in commercial revenue, accounting for almost one-third of total incomings and eight in ten shirt sales.

Messi tried to engineer his departure last year, fed up with some underwhelming recent Champions League showings.

But he stayed and stressed on Sunday that he and his family had wanted to continue in Catalonia rather than embark on a likely reunion with former clubmate Neymar at PSG — ostensibly the only club that can afford him with Manchester City having already said they will not make a move for his services.

"I would've liked to have won another Champions League," said Messi.

"I don't regret anything, I tried to give my best and I'm ending my career here with a good number of titles".

He also said he had been completely transparent throughout the saga regarding his intentions.

"I gave everything for this club from the first day that I arrived right to the last. I never imagined having to say goodbye.

"I'm not ready for this," he said, again choking back tears as thousands of fans waited outside to salute their icon, whose first contract 21 years ago was signed on the back of a restaurant napkin for want of anything else to seal the deal on.

PSG 'POSSIBILITY'

Stressing no deals had been done, Messi did concede that joining PSG was a "possibility" as the Qatar-owned club consider a move.

"There have been lots of rumours. Lots of things are being said," said PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino on Friday. — AFP



Lionel Messi's records at Barcelona

Ballons d'Or : 6



*Records not verified by FIFA, due to lack of reliable historical records
Photo AFP/Franck Fife

Top all-time goal scorer in Spanish Championship (with only one club)

⚽ 474

Top all-time scorer for one club

⚽ 672

Top all-time scorer in clasicos matches Barcelona - Real Madrid

⚽ 26

Top goal scorer in one season in a major championship (2011-2012)

⚽ 50

Top goal scorer in a calendar year including all competitions (2012)

⚽ 91*

Top goal scorer in a season including all competitions (2011-2012)

⚽ 73*

Played most games for Barcelona : 778



Perfect return for Al Harthy at British GP with pole position

MUSCAT: Oman's number one racing driver Ahmad al Harthy delivered an absolutely remarkable qualifying performance on his Intelligent Money British GT Championship return at Snetterton 300 Circuit on Saturday, August 7, to take an utterly dominant pole position for race one of the weekend.

In control throughout the first of the day's two qualifying sessions, the Oman Racing star was at one stage almost 1.5 seconds ahead of the competition before ultimately ending the run 0.8 seconds clear with a time of 1m49.237 seconds (97.84mph).

During the race two session, 'Pro' team-mate Charlie Eastwood posted the sixth quickest time of 1m48.159 seconds (98.81mph) to ensure the TF Sport-engineered entry has a fantastic chance of two very strong results in the pair of one-hour races at the Norfolk track later today.

"It's great to be back in the car and obviously great to start the race weekend with P1", said an elated Al Harthy, "Qualifying went very well for me, the team did an amazing job over the week to make sure we were comfortable in the car and able to perform at a high level.

"The car felt absolutely amazing and I'm really happy to be back at this level straight away, after being away from the car for such a long time — more than five months. I think that's what's really driving me and motivating me. I'm really looking forward to having a clean



and solid first race, the weather has been fluctuating over the last few days but, either wet or dry, I'll do the best I can."

From the outset in testing on Friday, August 6, the exquisite Omantel and OQ liveried No.97 Aston Martin Vantage GT3 was quick with Eastwood lapping second quickest in session one, Al Harthy fifth fastest in the second run and Eastwood ninth in the final outing. The day's running was, remember, Al Harthy's first competitive track time since the end of the Asian Le Mans Series in February.

Continuing their strong preparation, both free practice sessions on Saturday also went very well for the Oman Racing duo. Al Harthy lapped sixth quickest in the opening one-hour period with a time of 1m50.152 seconds (97.03mph). Heavy rain arrived before session two, giving teams a great chance to gather wet-weather data, and Eastwood was fifth with a time of 2m09.882 seconds (82.29mph).

Al Harthy took part in the race one qualifying session, which got under way at around 17.00 local time on a dry track, and on his

first flying lap he rocketed to the top of the times — an excellent effort of 1m50.044 seconds.

Instantly setting the fastest first sector of all on his next lap, and then the outright quickest second sector, the Omani extended his advantage with a stunning lap of 1m49.237 seconds which put him an incredible 1.4 seconds clear at the head of the timesheets.

Satisfied he had more than done enough to secure pole position for the first race of the weekend, which he undoubtedly had, Al Harthy backed off and ultimately sealed the top spot on



It's great to be back in the car and obviously great to start the race weekend with P1. Qualifying went very well for me, the team did an amazing job over the week to make sure we were comfortable in the car and able to perform at a high level

AHMAD AL HARTHY

Omani race driver

the grid by just under a second.

In the race two session for the 'Pro' drivers, which followed immediately afterwards, Eastwood went fifth fastest with a time of 1m48.335 seconds on his first flying lap and then produced a better time of 1m48.159 seconds to move within just three tenths of a second of pole position. In the end he was edged back to sixth in

the session, 0.5 seconds shy of the top of the times.

Race one of the weekend at Snetterton 300 Circuit will get under way at 10.40 local time this morning, with race two expected to follow at around 15.45 local time. Live streaming of both one hour encounters will be available online here: <https://www.britishtg.com/live>

Rossi happy as tributes pour in

SPIELBERG, Austria: Valentino Rossi said he had become "very emotional" as messages poured in from sports stars round the world after he announced he would retire from MotoGP at the end of 2021.

"From my close friends but also from other sports, soccer players, Formula One drivers and especially from old rivals and those are the best," said the 42-year-old, who won nine world titles, seven in the elite category between 1997 and 2009.

"It was great. I was very happy."

He also told a virtual press conference on Friday how much he had enjoyed springing the news of his decision on his mother Stefania and girlfriend Francesca less than 24 hours before the announcement.

He said the three eat together on Wednesday evenings before a race weekend.

"I didn't say anything to my mother," he said of the meal, giggling throughout the anecdote.

"Before leaving I said 'Stefi, tomorrow I have a press conference that I stop' and she was 'Ooooh. Yes!' She didn't have the power to say nothing. And I left. It was quite funny."

After the announcement on Thursday that Rossi was ending his 26-year-career as a rider, farewells poured in on social media.

"I received a lot, a lot, a lot, a



Yamaha-SRT Italian rider Valentino Rossi puts in his ear-plugs during the third free practice session ahead of the Styrian MotoGP in Spielberg. — AFP

lot of messages from all around the world," he said. "Yesterday was incredible."

Rossi is a fan of Inter Milan and one of his many famous victory celebrations came in Germany in 2006, shortly after Italy had won the World Cup in Berlin, when he donned the azzurri shirt of his friend Marco Materazzi, the Inter player who had been involved in the sending off of Zinedine Zidane in the final.

"For me, you will always be on the top step of the podium," wrote Materazzi.

Another Italian World Cup winner joined in.

"Dear Vale, it's not easy for a

Juventus fan to cheer for an Inter fan... but it was easy for you!" said Alessandro Del Piero in a video message. "Thank you for everything, idol."

Italian-born Australian F1 driver Daniel Ricciardo, meanwhile, noted "the joy, happiness, excitement you brought to so many"

Others in Formula One, including drivers George Russell, Antonio Giovinazzi, Alex Albon and Carlos Sainz, the Mercedes, Ferrari and McLaren teams and F1 CEO Stefano Domenicali also praised Rossi. Rossi said he was most touched by messages from his MotoGP rivals.

"You've been without a doubt one of my greatest rivals, my achievements have been all the more validated having raced against you," tweeted double MotoGP champion Casey Stoner.

Jorge Lorenzo tweeted photos of himself, Rossi, Stoner and Dani Pedrosa, who has come out of retirement to ride in this weekend's race, but compared Rossi to some of the greats in other sports.

"End of an era," wrote Lorenzo. "On the track the 4 of us were just as fast, but in terms of charisma and transcendence @valeyel-low46 is at the level of Jordan, Woods, Ali or Senna."

Marc Marquez also praised his former rival in his press conference at Spielberg on Friday.

During the years when the rising Spaniard deposed Rossi as the top dog in MotoGP, the two were involved in a series of incidents culminating in what the Italian saw as a deliberate crash in Argentina in 2018.

"Everyone knows that our personal relationship is not the best one but I can recognise we are losing something big," Marquez said.

"Maybe the biggest part of MotoGP. Valentino always brings a lot of people. He did many good things inside the track but also outside the track."

"If you evaluate his career, it's something special, unique and a legend." — AFP



Dr Said al Shari re-elected as OHA chairman

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT, AUGUST 8

Dr Said bin Ahmed al Shari re-elected as chairman of Oman Handball Association (OHA) on Sunday for another term (2021-2024). The majority members of OHA general assembly voted for Salalah representative who had 17 votes while the other nominee was Captain Said al Busaidy.

A total of 26 clubs attended the general assembly meeting which was held in the main indoor hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. Moosa al Balushi remained the Secretary-General of OHA for another term as he had obtained the confidence from OHA general assembly with 16 votes. Al Musannah man will continue his duties alongside the existing chairman with the new faces in the board members.

Jameel al Hasani (15 votes) was elected as the new vice Chairman while Ali al Alawi (14 votes) is the board treasurer. The handball referee Abeer al Zadjali won the woman board member post. Her opponent was Rudaina



Dr Said al Shari

al Hajri. Mohammed al Alawi (23 votes), Nasr al Hasani (19 votes), Tawfeeq Bait Mustahel (18 votes), and Omar al Balushi (13 votes) won the board members post.

On Monday, Oman Swimming Association's election will take place in the main indoor hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex and it will start at 11:00. In the following day, the general assembly of Oman Hockey Association (OHA) will vote for the new board while Oman Basketball Association's election scheduled on Saturday.

The conclusion of the sports bodies' election will be through Oman Football Association (OFA) on August 28.





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BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 8

Qais bin Mohammad al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), issued Ministerial Decision (11/2021) to form a committee to oversee the processing or registering accountants and auditors in the Sultanate.

The committee will included the Vice-President of the Capital Market Sector in the Capital Market Authority as Chairman, with the membership of the Director General of the Directorate General of Trade in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, a representative of the Ministry of Finance, a representative of the Tax Authority, a representative of the Central Bank of Oman, a representative of the Omani Accountants Association, and an expert member.

The panel will study applications for obtaining licenses to practice the profession of accounting and auditing. This is subject to applicants being enrolled in the register for accountants and auditors for a period of at least three years. In addition, the committee will set up accounting standards that must be applied when preparing financial statements, budgets, and the final financial results.

The terms and conditions for registering in the register of accountants and auditors in the Sultanate include: the applicant must be an Omani nationality, dedicated to practicing the profession, holder of a university academic qualification specialising in accounting, or holder of a certificate of an internationally recognised chartered accountant or its equivalent, fully qualified, of good reputation, and has not been convicted of a judicial or disciplinary judgment in a crime against honour or trust, unless has been rehabilitated.

Ban on pyramid marketing to fight commercial fraud, hidden trade practices

STRONG MEASURE: Officials, experts applaud Ministerial Decision prohibiting hierarchical / network marketing activities in Oman

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 8

The Omani government's recent decision to ban all forms of pyramid or network marketing schemes in the Sultanate has been welcomed by a number of experts who have cited the measure's importance in combating potential fraud in the retail activities and thwarting those involved in hidden trade.

Earlier this month, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) issued a Ministerial Decision outlawing selling, advertising or promoting goods, products, and services via network marketing or hierarchical schemes as a safeguard against commercial



fraud and unfair competition. It also seeks to protect those engaged in legitimate trade activities.

Dr Mohammed bin Rashid al Badi, Acting Director of the Legal Department at the Ministry, explained that pyramid marketing typically involves an individual or company sitting atop the pyramid

that usually siphons off the lion's share of all revenues generated by the scheme. Those at the lower rungs of the pyramid, while contributing the most to revenue generation, are left with little or nothing at all.

Pyramid or network schemes are similar to 'get-rich-quick'

Pyramid or network schemes are similar to 'get-rich-quick' scams that channel huge profits to a small handful of individuals sitting at the top at the cost of the gullible

DR MOHAMMED BIN RASHID AL BADI
Acting Director of the Legal Department, MoCIIP

scams that channel huge profits to a small handful of individuals sitting at the top at the cost of the gullible.

Dr Maha bint Khamis al Balushiyyah, Assistant Professor of Marketing and Identity at Sultan Qaboos University, noted that the new measure will strengthen

regulation of direct marketing activities patronised by young entrepreneurs.

Direct marketing also contributes to the country's gross domestic product as it's a legitimate commercial activity. In developing economies like India, for example, direct marketing is linked with major initiatives launched by the Government of India such as Made in India, Skill India, Startup India and so on, she said.

Sameh bin Salim al Adawi, another market expert, said: "The ministerial decision to ban pyramid marketing activities is a timely one, particularly as we embark on the journey to Oman's long-term growth guided by Vision 2040. The ban will help combat the illegal outflow of funds earned through hidden activities, regulate the marketing of products lacking approval in the Sultanate and help control pricing and quality of goods in the local market."

35 per cent stake available for investment in Oman's biggest poultry project

WHITE MEAT: Ahead of commercial launch in January 2022, A'Namaa Poultry invites local / international investors to be part of government-backed strategic food security venture

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Oman Food Investment Holding Company (OFIC) — the government's food sector investment and development arm — has revealed that it is offering an equity stake of up to 35 per cent in its flagship poultry venture, A'Namaa Poultry, slated to commence commercial operation in January 2022.

According to a high-level official of wholly-state-owned OFIC, an affiliate of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — the country's integrated sovereign wealth fund — the available stake is primarily targeted at local and international private investors.

"We have a stake of around



35 per cent that we are currently promoting to the private sector," said Ali al Shihhi, Vice-President — Finance, OFIC. "We welcome any discussions and initiatives from (investors) if they are interested in the poultry market in Oman."

Speaking during an online investment forum organised recently with the support of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the official said the poultry project — currently nearing completion at

Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate — forms part of a portfolio of OFIC-backed investments aimed at securing the country's long-term food requirements.

The project, set up at a total cost of around RO 110 million, covers all aspects of the poultry business, extending from the operation of hatcheries to distribution of white meat products. Output of white meat from the venture is targeted at around 60,000 tonnes per annum.

This volume, together with the outputs of other poultry ventures in operation or under development elsewhere around the Sultanate, will account for 70 per cent of Oman's domestic requirement of white meat by the year 2030.

Besides OFIC, equity stakes acquired by local Omani-based firms include the Civil Service Employees Fund (CSEF), A'Saffa Poultry, and Oman National Investments Development Company (Tanmia).

The project, set up at a total cost of around RO 110 million, covers all aspects of the poultry business, extending from the operation of hatcheries to distribution of white meat products. Output of white meat from the venture is targeted at around 60,000 tonnes per annum

At full capacity, A'Namaa Poultry is projected to generate Earnings before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation and Amortisation (EBITDA) of RO 13.7 million, while the Internal Rate of Return (IRR) is estimated at 17.5 per cent, according to the official.

Besides serving as a local source of fresh white meat for domestic consumption, A'Namaa Poultry will also support the creation of around 1,500 direct and indirect jobs at full production, he added.

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The two powertrains on ES350 and ES250 are paired

to an eight-speed direct-shift automatic transmission.

The class-leading hybrid electric model's batteries come with 8 years /160,000 Kms warranty and are automatically charged either by a petrol engine or during braking or decelerating, eliminating the need to plug in a power cord.

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PDO's Ras Al Hamra development wins LEED certification

GREEN BUILDING: LEED-certified homes have significant environmental benefits with lower carbon emissions and higher water savings compared to baseline conventional villas

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, AUG 8

Petroleum Development Oman's (PDO) Ras Al Hamra (RAH) Development Project has been awarded an international green building certification recognised as an international symbol of sustainability achievement and leadership.

The project achieved the LEED accreditation for implementing practical and measurable strategies and solutions in areas including sustainable site development, energy efficiency, water savings, minimising greenhouse gas emissions, materials selection and indoor environmental quality.

Several types of townhouses and villas in the project were awarded the LEED Platinum rating, an achievement which is the first of its kind in Oman and the region. LEED (Leadership



in Energy and Environmental Design), which was developed by the US Green Building Council (USGBC), is the most widely used green building rating system in the world.

Through design, construction and operations practices that improve environmental and human health, LEED-certified buildings are preventing pollution impacts during construction and waste diversion from landfill to contribute to the circular economy.

RAH Development Project Manager Eng Jaber al Siyadi said: "The project is a prime

example of how the innovative work of project teams can create local solutions that contribute to making a global difference. It is also a key contributor to the transformation of the way our buildings are built, designed and operated to the highest levels of sustainability.

"We are delighted to contribute to the sustainability of the country, in line with Oman Vision 2040, and to the green design standards in our modern development of RAH.

The LEED accreditation means the project is moving towards meeting international

sustainability standards by achieving efficiency and creating healthy indoor environments. It also drives project excellence and best practice for all initiatives to build sustainable and modern cities in Oman."

RAH LEED-certified homes have significant environmental benefits with lower carbon emissions and higher water savings compared to baseline conventional villas. This in turn reduces operational and maintenance costs, conserves resources while prioritising sustainable practices and human health.

Omantel supports national campaign against Covid-19

MUSCAT: Omantel has sustained its efforts against the Covid-19 pandemic through community initiatives that support various organisations in the Sultanate to limit the spread of the virus.

Continuing its work towards the nation's health, Omantel is lending its resources to the national vaccination campaign being held in cooperation between the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC). More than 20 Omantel employees are volunteering for the MoH vaccination campaign. Apart from this, to ensure the health



and safety of its employees against Covid-19, Omantel has been running a vaccination

campaign for staff and their families, in a smooth and orderly manner, using its own developed

internal system "Hassin"

Laila bint Mohammed al Wahaibiyah, CSR Manager at Omantel said: "As part of its CSR initiatives the Company is extending its support to the national vaccination campaign, which is of high importance for Oman's overall health and safety in these challenging times. Twenty members from Omantel's "Together" volunteer team have participated in the national campaign, which was launched in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and OCEC. This contribution complements the Company's efforts to support different initiatives to fight

Covid-19 in Oman."

Thamir Al Kathiri, General Manager of Personnel Services at Omantel's Human Resources Unit said: "We have joined hands with Ministry of Health to run an internal campaign for vaccinating the Company's employees and their families.

This campaign complements the national efforts made by the Ministry and other concerned authorities to limit the spread of the virus. Omantel's widespread campaign has already covered all outlets across various governorates. Our employees are also participating as volunteers at the national vaccination drive."

Customers praise the 'You Choose' finance campaign from Alizz Islamic Bank



MUSCAT: The 'You Choose' campaign, launched by Alizz Islamic Bank last month, has received a wide response from various segments of society.

The 'You Choose' campaign gives the customers the flexibility to choose from a range of specially designed offers, once they transfer their current finances or avail new financing from Alizz Islamic Bank or transfer their salaries to the bank.

The #YouChoose campaign gives the customers the freedom of picking one of the many benefits that fit their requirements and needs, such as, a combo offer for customers to enjoy a new credit card free for the lifetime of the financing tenors upon availing new financing from the bank.

One can also enjoy special rates on new financing at a rate of 4.75% for home finance and 4.99% for auto & personal finance or they can avail a 3 months' moratorium period for their new finance. Customer can also transfer their salaries to the bank and enjoy 10% cashback on the first salary credited during the campaign period.

NBO Innovation Incubator begins

MUSCAT: Concluding a highly successful selection process, National Bank of Oman's (NBO) Innovation Incubator has officially begun. 30 young graduates, who were chosen from over 1,500 applicants, have now started their journey through the three-month long programme, which is part of the bank's corporate social responsibility (CSR) programme, in collaboration with the SME Development Authority, Oman Academy for SMEs, and Paradigm Consulting.

Coached by 15 of the bank's specially-trained employees, the young men and women will go head-to-head to design their own FinTech start-up. Only three will emerge as winners, and have the opportunity to pitch their ideas to potential investors.

NBC incubated firms explore business opportunities in Daleel Petroleum

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, AUG 8

The National Business Centre (NBC), which operates under the auspices of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), organised a meeting between officials representing Daleel Petroleum and the SMEs incubated at NBC.

Daleel Petroleum officials were introduced to the services offered by these SMEs in the local and foreign markets. On their part, Daleel Petroleum officials elaborated on the supply chain management at Daleel, online tendering and supplier registration, and discussions



took place on collaboration opportunities between Daleel Petroleum and the SMEs.

The meetings were an opportunity for both sides to exchange views and explore

business options available for Omani entrepreneurs in various fields in the energy company. NBC serves as a platform for Omani entrepreneurs to get access to business development

support and guidance, training and mentoring, access to markets and industry experts, and state-of-the-art and fully equipped office space, meeting rooms and presentation facilities.

NBC plays a key role in facilitating and supporting the growth of investable ideas into successful businesses; building entrepreneurial skills through dedicated and focused training, coaching and mentoring; and providing business support facilities such as office space, administrative support, financial support and consultancy services to contribute in ensuring the success and survival of new ventures.

ECB must tighten policy if needed to counter inflation



BERLIN: The European Central Bank must tighten monetary policy if it needs to counter inflationary pressures and cannot be put off from doing so by the financing costs of euro zone states, ECB policymaker Jens Weidmann (pictured) told the *Welt am Sonntag* newspaper.

Euro zone countries have ramped up their borrowing to cope with the coronavirus pandemic, potentially leaving them exposed to increased debt servicing costs if the central bank tightens policy to counter upward pressure on prices.

“The ECB is not there to take care of the solvency protection of the states”, said Weidmann, whose role as president of Germany’s Bundesbank gives him a seat on the ECB’s policymaking Governing Council.

Should the inflation outlook rise sustainably, the ECB would have to act in line with its price stability objective, Weidmann said. “We have to make it clear again and again that we will tighten monetary policy if the price outlook calls for it.

“We cannot then take into account the financing costs of the states”, he added.

After its July 22 policy meeting, the ECB pledged to keep interest rates at record lows for even longer to boost sluggish inflation, and warned that the rapidly spreading Delta variant of the coronavirus posed a risk to the euro zone’s recovery. — Reuters

Saudi Aramco Q2 profit soars on higher prices, demand recovery

DUBAI: Saudi Arabia state oil producer Aramco reported a near four-fold rise in second-quarter net profit on Sunday, beating expectations and boosted by higher oil prices and a recovery in oil demand.

Aramco said its results were supported by the global easing of Covid-19 restrictions, vaccination campaigns, stimulus measures and accelerating economic activity in key markets.

Aramco joins other oil majors who have reported strong results in recent weeks.

Exxon Mobil last month said its net income for the second quarter came in at \$4.69 billion, or \$1.10 per share, compared with a loss of \$1.08 billion, or 26 cents per share, a year ago.

Royal Dutch Shell reported its highest quarterly profit in more than two years, with adjusted earnings at \$5.53 billion, compared with earnings of \$638 million a year earlier.

Oil prices, boosted by output cuts made by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and their allies, a group known as Opec+, closed at \$70.70 a barrel on Friday and has gained over 35 per cent since the start of the year.

“Our second quarter results reflect a strong rebound in worldwide energy demand and we are heading into the second half of 2021 more resilient and more flexible, as the global recovery gains momentum”, Aramco Chief



Engineers work at a Saudi Aramco facility in Saudi Arabia. — AFP

Executive Officer Amin Nasser said in a statement.

Aramco’s net profit rose to 95.47 billion riyals (\$25.46 billion) for the quarter to June 30 from 24.62 billion riyals a year earlier.

Analysts had expected a net profit of \$23.2 billion, according to the mean estimate from five analysts.

Aramco’s CEO told an earnings call that global oil demand was expected to hit 99 million barrels a day by the end of the year and 100 million barrels next year, Aramco is still working to increase its own capacity to 13 million barrels day,

Nasser said, reiterating a plan announced last year.

It declared a dividend of \$18.8 billion in the second quarter, in line with its own target, which will be paid in the third quarter.

Credit Suisse analysts said late last month they expected Aramco to declare a special dividend because of higher oil prices that had helped boost its free cash flow.

Yousef Hussein, equity research analyst at EFG Hermes, said Aramco may be keeping the extra cash for taking part in the new state-backed shareek (Partner) initiative, to partner

with private sector investments.

“I think the reason they maintained [the dividend] and our rationale was that they are retaining money to invest in future projects and particularly the “shareek” programme”, he said.

Aramco’s capital expenditure was \$7.5 billion in the second quarter, an increase of 20 per cent from a year earlier.

A consortium including Washington DC-based EIG Global Energy Partners in June closed a deal to buy 49 per cent of Aramco’s pipelines business for \$12.4 billion. — Reuters

TikTok owner ByteDance aims for Hong Kong IPO by early 2022

BEIJING: ByteDance, the Chinese owner of short video platform TikTok, has revived its plan to go public with a listing in Hong Kong by early 2022 after addressing Chinese regulators’ concerns, the *Financial Times* reported on Sunday.

ByteDance is planning to list in either the fourth quarter of this year or in early 2022, the FT reported.

“We are expecting final guidance from ByteDance in September. They are submitting all the filings with Chinese authorities right now and are going through the review process”, the newspaper quoted a source as saying.

Beijing-based ByteDance said in April that it had no imminent plans for an initial public offering (IPO). Chinese regulators have stepped up their scrutiny of the tech sector in recent months. — Reuters



A man walks past Tiktok logo in Beijing, in this file photo. — Reuters

US consumer credit grows at record rate

WASHINGTON: US consumer credit grew at the fastest rate ever in June, as Americans increased their credit card usage to drive consumer spending in the second quarter, data from the Federal Reserve showed on Friday.

Total consumer credit expanded at a pace of \$37.69 billion, which was the quickest rate ever and followed a \$36.69 billion increase in May, the US central bank said. Economists polled by Reuters

had expected consumer credit to increase at a rate of \$23.00 billion in June.

An alternate measure tracking the monthly change in the total amount of credit outstanding increased by the most since December 2010, the data showed. That measure showed that revolving credit, which mostly measures credit-card use, rose by \$17.858 billion, the largest gain since 2006, after climbing by \$9.089 billion in May.

— Reuters

Chinese regulators meet with delivery firms, call for stronger labour rights

BEIJING: China’s delivery platform companies including Meituan and Alibaba’s Ele.me recently joined a meeting with government regulators on improving safety and labour rights for delivery workers.

Food delivery platforms, in the spotlight due to China’s regulatory reforms, have attracted severe criticism on social media for their treatment of delivery workers, most of whom are not covered by basic social and medical insurance. The meeting included officials from the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of Human Resources and Social



Delivery workers wait for online orders at a shopping area in Beijing. — Reuters

Security, according to a Saturday notice on WeChat by the Ministry of Emergency Management, which also attended.

Firms should strengthen safety

and labour rights protections, and not set performance indicators which harm the health of workers, according to the meeting. — Reuters

US labour market powers ahead with strong job gains



People line up outside a newly reopened career centre for in-person appointments in Louisville, Kentucky. — Reuters

WASHINGTON: US employers hired the most workers in nearly a year in July and continued to

raise wages, giving the economy a powerful boost as it started the second half of what many

More than 4 million jobs created since we took office. It’s historic — and proof our economic plan is working

JOE BIDEN
US President

economists believe will be the best year for growth in almost four decades.

The Labour Department’s closely watched employment

report on Friday also showed the unemployment rate dropped to a 16-month low of 5.4 per cent and more people waded back into the labour force.

The report followed on the heels of news last week that the economy fully recovered in the second quarter the sharp loss in output suffered during the very brief pandemic recession.

“We are charting new economic expansion territory in the third quarter”, said Brian Bethune, professor of practice at Boston College in Boston. “The overall momentum of the recovery continues to build.”

Nonfarm payrolls increased by 943,000 jobs last month, the

largest gain since August 2020, the survey of establishments showed. Data for May and June were revised to show 119,000 more jobs created than previously reported. Economists had forecast payrolls would increase by 870,000 jobs.

The economy has created 4.3 million jobs this year, leaving employment 5.7 million jobs below its peak in February 2020.

President Joe Biden cheered the strong employment report. “More than 4 million jobs created since we took office”, Biden wrote on Twitter. “It’s historic — and proof our economic plan is working.”

Hiring is being fueled by pent-up demand for workers in the labour-intensive services sector.

Nearly \$6 trillion in pandemic relief money from the government and Covid-19 vaccinations are driving domestic demand.

But a resurgence in infections, driven by the Delta variant of the coronavirus, could discourage some unemployed people from returning to the labour force.

July’s employment report could bring the Federal Reserve a step closer to announcing plans to start scaling back its monthly bond-buying programme.

The US central bank last year slashed its benchmark overnight interest rate to near zero and is pumping money into the economy through the bond purchases.

— Reuters

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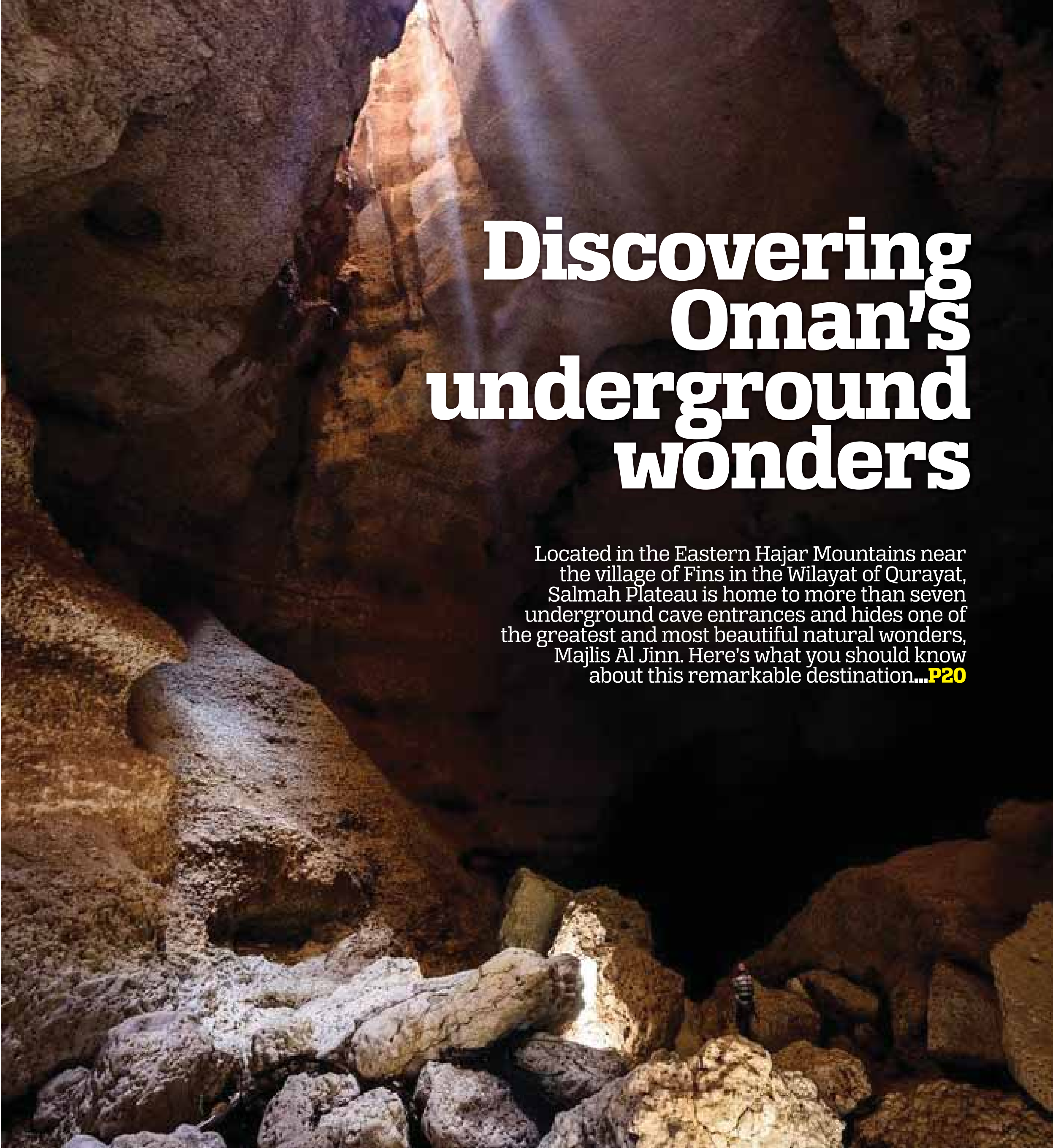
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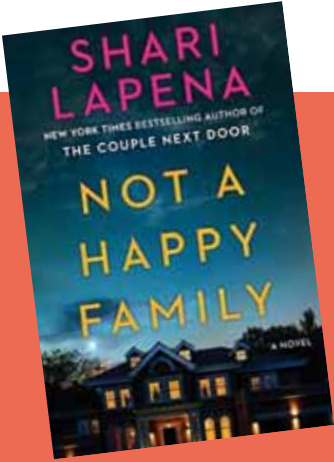


Discovering Oman's underground wonders

Located in the Eastern Hajar Mountains near the village of Fins in the Wilayat of Qurayat, Salmah Plateau is home to more than seven underground cave entrances and hides one of the greatest and most beautiful natural wonders, Majlis Al Jinn. Here's what you should know about this remarkable destination...**P20**

ANIMAL PLANET

READ



NOT A HAPPY FAMILY

BY SHARI LAPENA

Questions arise when a rich couple are murdered after an Easter dinner with their three adult children.

Study finds giraffe behaviour is far more complex than once believed

ELEPHANTS HAVE always been well-known for their extremely pronounced social behaviours and a strong sense of family, but British researchers have demonstrated that giraffes are in fact equally as complex in their habits.

A recently published study by the University of Bristol demonstrates that the social structure of these giant herbivores is actually far more

complex than previously believed.

According to the study, the giraffe social network is characterised by strong bonds between the females and their offspring even after the reproductive phase, with 'grand-mother giraffes' helping to look after giraffes two generations younger.

The discovery of complex, multi-layered association structures con-

trasts with the long-standing belief that giraffes have no social structure, the authors say.

"It's amazing that such an iconic, large and charismatic African species has been misunderstood for so long," says Zoe Miller, co-author of the study published in the British journal *Mammal Review*.

Miller hopes that her work will help reshape the image of the giraffe as an intelligent and social creature and, in so doing, contribute to their long-term survival.

According to the World Conservation Union (IUCN), giraffe populations have declined by up to 40 per cent in the past 30 years. In total, there are fewer than 70,000 giraffes of all species left in the wild and the trend is downward. The organisation therefore upgraded the mighty ruminants' threat level from "endangered" to "threatened" in 2016. — **dpa**





The historical importance of Al Ayjah

SUR COULD be a good choice now to escape the high temperature in many parts of the Sultanate. Besides the mild weather in the summer, it is also rich in some touristic and historical places so that one enjoys the stay and also get introduced to the place.

One of the extraordinary areas is "Al Ayjah", in the eastern part of Sur. Tariq al Alawi, a researcher in Omani history, said that Al Ayjah in the local language means the coast. It is a peninsula surrounded by the sea from three sides. Inhabitants of the area practice commercial and marine activities.

By virtue of this distinguished marine location between the Sea of Oman and the Arabian Sea, its people worked in the sea and in ship-building and were associated with different regions and civilisations. This communication facilitated the prosperity and development of trade, which made it an important commercial broker in the region.

Al Alawi pointed out that Al Ayjah is surrounded by a wall that connects with the surrounding mountains. It contains two doors that indicate the historical importance of

the place. The first is a gate from the eastern side and is called Bab Al Seddah and the second gate from the southern side called Bab (Khubat Al Naqa) and its traces still remain to this day.

The mountains surrounding Al Ayjah include a group of military fortifications and towers to defend the area in the event of an attack. The defences include a fort called Al Ayjah Fort and called by the residents as Bait Al Sheikh and is located in the centre of the region. It is an architectural building in the form of a square and has many rooms designated for managing the affairs of the region previously. There is the wall that still exists and the tower on the western side, and a series of small towers in the south, perhaps these towers were built in the eighteenth century AD.

Al Alawi said that Al Ayjah was connected with Sur Al Sahel in the past by ferries that transported people between the two banks of Khor Al Batah. This method has now ended with the advancement of means of transportation and the establishment of the land road linking Sur with Al Ayjah, as well as the construc-

tion of the Khor Al Batah bridge, which is a suspension bridge between the two banks of the Khor and connects the two areas.

Al Ayjah overlooks Khor Al Butah, where the ships and the suspension bridge can be seen from the top of the mountain overlooking the creek. It also has the Al Ayjah lighthouse, which is a lighthouse overlooking the entrance to the creek and gives an aesthetic character around the place.

There are many ancient white coloured houses in Al Ayjah that create a unique charm and beauty with their reflection on the blue sea. They still preserve their archaeological character and highlight the historical importance of the city and the economic situation of its residents.

Al Ayjah was famous for many traditional crafts and industries, most notably the manufacture of wooden ships. There is a factory for the manufacture of ships overlooking the marine creek, which has been abandoned because fishermen are heading towards modern vessels made of fibreglass, in addition to the textile industry and fishing.



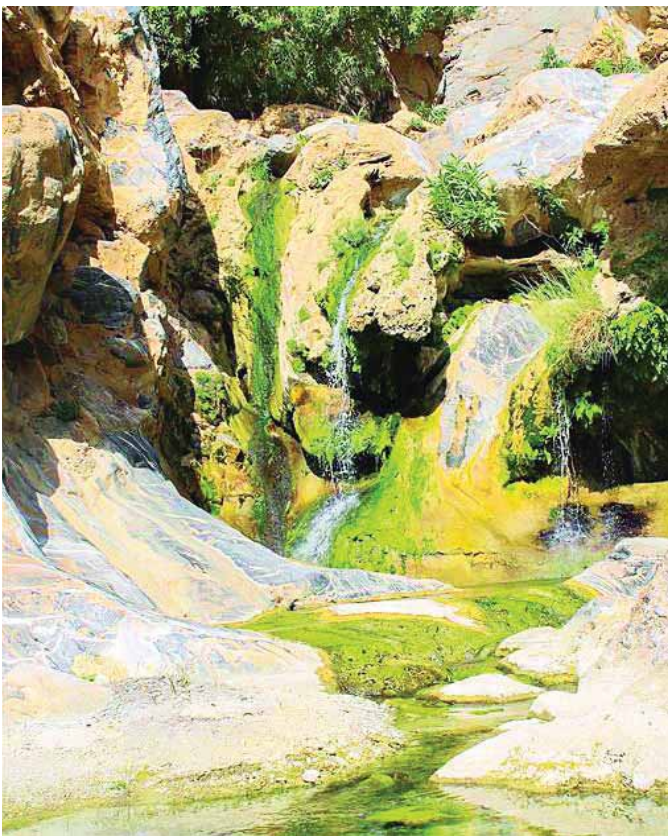
LOCAL TRENDS

Ajma village, a destination for relaxation



THE MOUNTAINOUS village of Ajma in the Wilayat of Dima Wa Al Ta'in in North Sharqiyah Governorate is one that shouldn't be missed when a tourist plans for a holiday for the purpose of relaxation. It is located at an altitude of 200 m above sea level and 150 km away from Muscat Governorate.

acterised by the presence of a falaj that never dries and extends from the highest edge of the village to the lowest edges. The spring of the falaj is in the middle of the mountains, passing along the wadis for a distance of about 9 km and splitting the village into two sides. The village has acquired several



Sheikh Hamad al Battashi said the name of the village means the sand in the middle of the mountains. The temperature is high in summer and moderate in winter. There are many trees in the village, and several wadis pass through it in

names, such as Al Alayah, Al Balad, and Al Rajee, and the old Al Balad. The village of Ajma is one of the old villages that people targeted for living because of its richness in water.

There are also several ancient monuments in the country, in addition to a



one stream, including Wadi Maas and Wadi Khab Hana. It is one of the main wadis feeding the Wadi Al Kabir, which flows into the Wadi Dhayqah Dam.

Batashi indicated that the village of Ajma is char-

beautiful village at the top of the mountains called Al Zarqa. the tourist can see the creativity of the Omani man in the past when viewing the agricultural terraces that are watered from a spring in the middle of the mountain.



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DISCOVERY

Ancient snack bar in Pompeii to open to visitors



AN ANCIENT SNACK bar will soon be open to visitors at the Archaeological Park of the buried Italian city of Pompeii.

From Thursday, August 12, visitors will be able to see the site in the Gulf of Naples south of the volcano Vesuvius, the Pompeii Archaeological Park has announced.

At the end of December, experts said that they had uncovered the counter of a kind of snack bar. The find had caused great interest at the time because it is very well preserved.

A yellow painting and images of a rooster, for example, were still clearly visible on the counter. At



that time, people had carved holes into the stone table. Researchers assume that food was displayed there for sale.

During the excavations, the workers also found food remains as well as human and animal bones.

In Pompeii, archaeologists keep discovering spectacular things from antiquity.

Ash, mud and lava buried the city during the eruptions of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD.

In the 18th century, the historic city was rediscovered. In Italy, the excavation site is one of the most popular tourist destinations. — **dpa**

COOK LIKE A CHEF

Singapore Chili Lobster inspired by Oman's bountiful seas



THE FOOD SCENE in Salalah continues to evolve. But one thing that Oman's Garden City will always take pride in is the bounty of its seas. As the khareef season continues to flourish, all eyes are in Dhofar for its most awaited monsoon season. Inspired by the bountiful harvest in Oman's water, here is a recipe that's guaranteed your family will enjoy. If you wanna check out how the professionals prepare it, drop by Seasalt Restaurant in Alila Hinu Bay.

INGREDIENTS:
800gm lobster
140ml oil
2pcs egg beaten(optional)

5gm black bean sauce
lee kum kee
500ml stock
60gm spring onion chopped
50gm tomato puree
40gm tomato ketchup
10gm corn flour

CHILLI PASTE (REMPAH)
15gm long red chillies
90gm shallots
40gm garlic chop
25gm ginger chop
20gm lemongrass
60gm tomato paste
30gm chilli sambal(sub recipe)
10ml soy sauce dark
20ml fish sauce
20gm coriander stalk chopped
10ml vinegar

GARNISH
10gm chilli red julienne
10gm coriander sprig
10gm spring onion

METHOD OF PREPARATION:
Add oil to a wok and stir in the frying paste, cooking out for a couple of minutes. Stir in the lobster pieces and cook through for 5 minutes, tossing the lobster to coat evenly in the paste. Stir in the sauce and the light fish stock to finish, then cookout until the sauce is slightly reduced. To serve, place the headshells on top to decorate. Sprinkle over the Thai basil, chilli, spring onion and coriander, and serve immediately.

ABOUT THE CHEF

ALESSANDRO SANDROLINI
Head Chef, Alila Hinu Bay



Born and raised in Bologna, Italy, Alessandro started his passion for hospitality at the Istituto Alberghiero Statale Riolo Terme, where he studied Hotel Management. He then began his first job as a Commis to Sous Chef at Ristorante Silverio in Italy. The restaurant was a new big entry in Bologna and was awarded 1 Michelin star in 1989. In 1991, five years later, Alessandro moved on to a bigger dream, by following a family legacy. He became the Chef-Owner at the Ristorante da Angelo, an old Italian restaurant opened by his father in 1968. When the restaurant closed, he became the Chef de Cuisine at the Ristorante Al Ghisello in 1995 managing the kitchen operation for 10 years. In 2005, he moved to Belgrade to become the Italian Chef at Hyatt Regency. Alessandro's entry to the Middle East started in 2009 when he moved with his family to Oman. This would be followed by different movements from Delhi to Jeddah and back to Italy. Now with almost three decades of experience, specialising in fine Italian cuisine, Alessandro contributes his humble and extensive knowledge as Head Chef at Alila Hinu Bay. His passion for food and innovation keeps him motivated, and his dream to work in a casual Italian restaurant by the sea has become a perfect reality.

TRAVEL TALES

Egypt's ancient King Khufu's Boat is moved from Giza pyramids to a new home



KING KHUFU'S Boat, an ancient vessel that is the oldest and largest wooden boat discovered in Egypt, has been painstakingly moved from its longstanding home next to the Giza pyramids to a nearby giant museum, officials said on Saturday.

The 4,600-year-old vessel, also known as the Solar Boat, was moved to the nearby Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM), due to be inaugurated later this year.

"The aim of the transportation project is to protect and preserve the biggest and oldest organic artefact made of wood in the history of humanity for the future generations," the tourism and antiquities ministry said in a statement.

It took 48 hours to transport the cedarwood boat, which is 42 metres (138 feet) long and weighs 20 tonnes, to its new home. It arrived at the GEM in the early hours of Saturday, the ministry said.

The boat was transported as a single piece inside a metal cage carried on a remote-controlled vehicle imported especially for the operation, said Atef Mofteh, supervisor general of the GEM project.

The vessel, discovered in 1954 at the southern corner of the Great Pyramid, has been exhibited for decades at a museum bearing its name at Giza Plateau.

Egypt says the Grand Egyptian Museum, which has been under construction intermittently for 17 years, will contain more than 100,000 artefacts when it opens. — **Reuters**



Discovering Oman's underground wonders

by Muzna Al Riyami

THE SULTANATE is home to a unique blend of geological wonders that have become geological museums, starting from mountains, deserts, to canyons and caves. Salmah Plateau is one of the incredible places that adventurers from around the world head to for an eye-opening experience.

The plateau is located in the Eastern Hajar Mountains near the village of Fins in the Wilayat Qurayat and around 160 kilometres from Muscat, the capital. The place is an impressively splendid destination to be visited and explored. It is considered a repository of natural life treasures offering great sceneries of large caves, old tombs, and traditional villages. Exploring the plateau involves loads of opportunities for land, sea and nature activities including climbing, abseiling, hiking, windsurfing, swimming, fishing and more. Unmatched views of the shore and the turquoise waters of Sea of Oman meet the sprawling rugged mountain chain beyond.

The drive up towards the plateau is a remarkable adventure in itself. The routes are unpaved steady steep slopes and zigzag up the mountainside that some consider thrilling to drive as the adrenaline rush when going uphill. It is accessible only by 4WD so that it grunts on the

way up the mountain and safely back down as off-road travel requires finesse and caution. At first glance, the landscape there gives the plateau a desolate feel because it is devoid of vegetation and trees; however, visualising the geological formations of the plateau and stalactites, stalagmites and crystal chambers that have been formed over millions of years is definitely worth a visit.

Salmah Plateau has a fantastical etymology to its name as researched by Authors Anne Dale and Jerry Hadwin in their book *Adventure Trekking in Oman*.

"Long ago, Selma, a local shepherdess tending her flock on the plateau, needed to go and fetch water. Leaving her flock in a cave, she set off, returning hours later to find a leopard eating one of her goats. Her first thought was to defend her flock so she picked up an axe, advancing towards the leopard. She was attacked but managed to bring the axe down on the leopard's head, splitting it wide open. Both were mortally wounded. Later they were found lying together, the axe by their side. God was so impressed that he sent down seven stars from the heavens to make the seven khoshilat (cave shelters) as a memorial to Selma's bravery."

The plateau is home to more than seven underground cave entrances. It hides one of the greatest and most beautiful natural wonders, Majlis Al Jinn, "the gathering place of the genies." It is the second-largest known cave chamber in the world, the base of which measures 58,000 square metres, the size of nearly eleven football fields. What makes it unique is the vertical entrance which is unlike other prevalent caves, with a dome-shaped ceiling that tops the cave at a height of 120 metres.

The cave was discovered by the American couple W Don Davison, Jr and Cheryl S Jones in 1983, while they were carrying out Karst Research Programme, missioned to them by the Public Authority for Water Resources at that time.

The cave eventually was known

after they completed the mapping survey of the cave in 1985 and gave its name which reflects the mythological belief of locals that the genies live in caves.

"It all began with two tiny dots on a photograph!", Don said. The cave has three vertical openings in the ceiling through which abseilers can access only by descending using about 200m specialised rope and gears to guarantee a safe adventure.

The cave has locally and internationally gained popularity and has become a hot spot for caving activities from individuals and companies alike.

Felix Baumgartner, an Austrian skydiver, daredevil and BASE jumper, have BASE jumped into the cave in 2007. Therefore, the cave has been off-limits, and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in Oman recently has placed activities restrictions in order to conserve the site, so now it requires permits from the Ministry for any visits to the interior of the cave.

Will it stop here? No, of course. The 7th Hole Cave is another great alternative to explore in Salmah Plateau. It provides multiple access points to the largest caving network in the plateau. Its entrance looks like a large crack created by mother nature through which one can realize the vastness of what lies underneath feeling humble that we are so tiny creatures comparing to this mysterious underworld. The hole is connected to 'Tahiri Cave' one of the horizontal exits and probably the only chamber that is walkable in the plateau. The trip starts by abseiling down the hole, traversing and passing by deep-water basins inside, observing the limestone that formed the cave, and finally coming out through Tahiri Cave carrying an unforgettable lifetime experience. This kind of adventure entails training sessions offered by tour companies for many skills that are prerequisites for this caving adventure to master some techniques and acquire knowledge in using the equipment.

