

**NEW OXYGEN TANK TO HELP
SERVE PATIENTS IN DHOFAR**

The Ministry of Health (MoH) signed on Tuesday a funding agreement with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and Gulf Energy for the construction of a new oxygen tank with the capacity of 10,000 litres for the Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah. **>A5**



**HIS MAJESTY THE SULTAN
GREETES ITALIAN PRESIDENT**

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Sergio Mattarella of the Italian Republic on his country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Mattarella. His Majesty also wished the friendly people of Italy further progress and prosperity. **-ONA**



Founded 1975 · Volume 46 No. 70 | 16 Pages · Baisas 200 · Subscription OMR63 | ISO 9001:2008 Certified Company | Chairman/Editor-in-Chief: Mohamed Issa Al Zadjali | Printed & Published by Muscat Media Group



1.25 million

OMAN IS EXPECTED TO RECEIVE
200,000 DOSES OF THE 1.25M
VACCINE PER WEEK

32,000

STUDENTS PURSUING
THEIR GENERAL EDUCATION DIPLOMA
EXAMINATIONS HAVE BEEN VACCINATED

MASS VACCINATION DRIVE

With the arrival of more vaccines in June, the inoculation drive will gain momentum

Times News Service

MUSCAT: A mass vaccination drive against COVID-19 is set to begin in full swing, thanks to the scheduled arrival of 1.25 million doses of the vaccine in June, with the first shipment having already arrived in Oman.

The drive, which began on 25 May with the vaccination of students preparing to give their general education diploma exams, will see government employees, military personnel, and people above the age of 45 included in the vaccination groups.

In June, Oman is expected to

receive about 200,000 doses of the vaccine every week. About 205,000 doses arrived last Saturday, and the next shipment is expected to arrive on the fifth.

"This also includes health workers in the private sector who have not previously received their vaccine doses," said Badr bin Saif Al Rowahi, Director of Contagious Disease Department at the Directorate General of Disease Surveillance at the Ministry of Health. "Basic service providers, and employees in military and civil agencies will have their vaccination process begin next week."

process begin next week."

"From the third week of June, the vaccine groups will be expanded to include adults above the age of 45," he added. "Also, those who were administered their first doses more than 10 weeks ago will now be offered second dose." Among the target groups are staff and students under the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, and Innovation, who will be considered for vaccinations in July. Plans to include other target groups have also been drafted. **>A5**

Oman's COVID cases show rising trend

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman has recorded a single day increase of more than 1,000 cases for two consecutive days, pointing to an increase in infection numbers compared to last week.

The total number of COVID-19 infections on June 1 stood at 218,271, which is 1,047 more infections than on 31 May, where infection numbers were at 217,224, an increase of another 1,041 cases, according to data from the Ministry of Health. **>A3**



Palestinian Prime Minister arrives in Oman

A5

TRAVEL & TOURISM

Pack your bags! Your cruise trip starts soon!

Times News Service

MUSCAT: People in Oman who wish to take cruises in Europe and America are now once again able to do so, after the countries in both regions lifted some travel restrictions.

Travel companies in Oman are advertising cruises to popular tourist destinations such as Greece, Italy, Spain and the United States for both Omanis and expatriates

and are also offering to take care of other arrangements travellers will have, such as visas and flights.

"We only made this announcement public on Sunday, and on the very first day, we received about 25 inquiries," said Faiyaz Khan, general manager for Travel Point. "This is a good opportunity for people who intend to travel, as it has not been available to them for more than a year." Although travellers who wish to take part in these

cruises need to make their own arrangements to get to their port of departure, tour agencies in Oman are willing to take care of these for them as well, at an extra cost.

"We can organise flights to these locations, as well as arrange for transfers from the airport to the cruise ship and back," said Khan. "If you want, we can also organise a one or two-day city tour in your port of disembarking, and your port of arrival. **>A3**

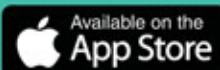
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Teachers' initiatives in blended and distance learning in Oman analysed

The virtual forum, seeks to motivate teachers to develop their teaching methods, as well as to spread the culture of digital transformation in learning by employing ICT in the educational process

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The first virtual educational forum 'Toward A Sustainable Blended Education: Reality, Empowerment, and Ambition' kicked off under the patronage of Majid Said Al Bahri, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education for Administrative and Financial Affairs on Tuesday.

Prof Dr Abdullah Khamis Ambosaidi, Undersecretary for Education attended the opening session of the forum with a number of Directors-General at the Ministry and with wide participation from different groups in the educational field.

The forum includes six discussion sessions (morning and evening) for two consecutive days covering four different topics, which are: 'Effective implementation of simultaneous lessons,' 'Effective implementation of the integration between simultaneous and asynchronous classes,' 'Effective application of electronic evaluation methods,' and 'Production and ap-



plication of interactive lessons in educational platforms.'

This virtual educational forum comes with the aim of highlighting the efforts and the distinguished teachers' initiatives from various government schools in the educational directorates in the governorates, which have had a positive impact on the continuation of distance learning.

The forum aims at defining the requirements for the implementation of these initiatives and their results to enable teachers to benefit from these initiatives in various educational levels.

The forum also seeks to motivate teachers to develop their teaching methods in line with the distance learning and blended learning, as well as to spread the culture of digital transformation in learning by employing information and communication technology (ICT) in the educational process.

The first day of the forum in-



cluded an opening speech delivered by Prof. Dr. Ambosaidi, in which he said: "This virtual educational forum seeks, in its first round, to highlight teachers' initiatives in blended learning and distance learning that is imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and requires special skills and attributes that teachers must possess in order to provide distance learning that is sustainable, interactive and attractive to students."

"The great efforts that we have found from workers in the educational field, especially teachers who had the greatest merit in implementing this type of education and contributed to overcoming many of the challenges that faced them at the beginning of the implementation of this type of education; resulted in this forum," he added.

"This forum came to highlight and honour these efforts and initiatives, and to strengthen teachers to provide the best, in addition



to motivating other teachers to take the initiative, and make use of these experiences, which will be presented throughout the two days of this virtual forum in addressing learning loss," he said

He also explained, "This forum is a basis for future forums to strengthen the ministry's approach with regard to e-learning. In this version, the focus is on teachers. In the coming years, there will be a tendency to attract other educational groups, such as supervisors and laboratory technicians, to present aspects of benefit of technology in other areas, with the involvement of parents on how to deal with technology and contribute to providing initiatives that contribute to enhancing the educational process, as e-learning will be one of the basic pillars on which education is built."

Dr Maymouna bint Hamid Al Abriya, Director of Education Technologies Department at the Directorate-General for Curricu-



lum Development, and Head of the Technical Committee of the Forum, gave a presentation.

She said that the most important tasks of the technical team of the forum, which was forming a team in cooperation with the relevant educational directorates (educational supervision, information technology, curriculum development, and the Centre for Educational Measurement and Evaluation).

The team will define the objectives of the forum, its most important topics and target groups, setting procedures, defining the topics of initiatives and the evaluation mechanism, and preparing electronic registration forms.

She also shed light on total number of participating initiatives. This amounted to 386 initiatives, in four different topics that were evaluated by 12 evaluators, according to 40 items for evaluation.

A total of 22 initiatives were qualified for blended and distance

education, which are the initiatives participating in this virtual forum.

The first day also included a speech from the sponsoring company of the forum delivered by Tariq Medhat, Director of Products and Technology Solutions Department in the Education Sector of Bahwan Projects and Communications Company.

In his speech, he thanked the Ministry of Education for organising the first virtual educational forum, then confirmed the commitment of Bahwan Projects and Communications Company to provide full and continuous support.

He praised the efforts of the Ministry of Education in developing the educational process by using the latest technological means to achieve the fourth goal of the Sustainable Development Goals, which emphasises the importance of ensuring education, in accordance with the pillars of Oman 2040 vision on education strategy and capacity building.

The programme of the first day included two sessions in the morning and one in the evening, where the two morning sessions focused on the topic: Effective implementation of simultaneous lessons.

The first session included three educational initiatives, the first was entitled 'Distance Learning Tools in Mathematics,' the second was titled 'Initiator's fingerprint,' and the third was 'Interactive Online Class - Online Sports.'

The Second session also included the presentation of three initiatives. The first one was titled 'Learning for Oman,' the second was titled 'Saw my picture and increased my fortune,' and the third initiative came under the title 'Sigma Tech Balloon in Blended Learning.'

The evening session included the presentation of four initiatives under the topic 'Effective application of electronic calendar methods.'





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Circumstances of Omani patient’s death in hospital under probe

Munira Said Khalfan Al Maqbali died after a liposuction session supposedly went wrong

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The family of a woman who died because of the alleged mistakes reportedly made during a routine procedure at a hospital in the country has called for more to be done to hold doctors accountable for such errors.

Munira Said Khalfan Al Maqbali, an Omani national from Sohar in North Al Batinah, died on Saturday after a liposuction session sup-

posedly went wrong. The doctor performing the liposuction apparently perforated her liver several times during the procedure. The doctor has since been suspended by the Ministry of Health.

She leaves behind two children, a seven-year-old and a four-year-old, who are currently in the care of her husband, Ghaith Al Shibli.

“On Saturday, Munira decided to go to a private hospital for a liposuction procedure,” said Al Shibli.

“Later that evening, I received a call from her sister, saying she was bleeding internally, and that I needed to go to the hospital at the earliest.” 15 minutes later, Ghaith was at the hospital, but his wife had already passed away. He points to the evidence shown in the autopsy as proof of medical malpractice.

“I do not know whether the doctor who performed the procedure for Munira is a specialist, because the autopsy showed that her liv-

er had been penetrated several times,” he said.

“But the liver is far from the area in which the liposuction was to take place. This is evidence that the doctor does not know what they are doing. “We must stop such medical errors from occurring, and I ask for action to be taken in this regard,” added Al Shibli.

On the doctor’s suspension, a Ministry of Health statement said it was “following with great interest

the cases of the deceased, Munira Al Maqbali, and the ministry continues to undertake the necessary investigations to identify her circumstances. “As a precaution, the doctor has been suspended from practicing any medical duties until the investigation by the concerned authorities has been completed.”

The doctor in question had rented the operation theatre and in-patient services of the clinic, a common practice in the country.

RESOURCES

Mafrag field to yield 25mn barrels oil

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Between 20 and 25 million barrels of oil can be recovered from the Mafrag Block 70 oil field in Oman, says the company tasked with its extraction.

Swedish oil and gas company Maha Energy plans on investing \$20 million (about OMR 8 million) into the field, with its initial efforts involving precise mapping of the area, before embarking on an aggressive drilling strategy.

Although this might be Maha’s first foray into Oman, its top management are no strangers to Oman’s oil and gas setup. CEO Jonas Lindvall has been involved in oil and gas in Oman since 1986, and the company’s Vice President of Exploration and Production, Jamie McKeown, has overseen the drilling of and production from many offshore and onshore wells since the mid-80s.

“Maha’s philosophy is to acquire existing hydrocarbon assets and increase value by applying modern hydrocarbon recovery technologies,” said Lindvall. “As such, Maha is more of an engineering-based production and exploration company, rather than the traditional ex-

ploration and production company.

“The initial plan is to further define and appraise the field so that it can be brought on production in due course,” he added. “Secondly the company plans on drilling further exploration wells in the area. To that extent, the company is embarking on defining the existing seismic data to generate prospects to drill.”

“According to initial estimates from previous work done in the area, Maha estimates there is about 20 to 25 million barrels recoverable from the Mafrag field alone,” explained Lindvall.

Oman aside, Maha Energy –

whose origins are in Canada – also has assets in two other countries: in the US, it oversees the Illinois basin that straddles the states of Illinois and Indiana, and the LAK Ranch in Wyoming. It operates two other fields in Brazil: Tie field in Bahia, and Tartaruga in Aracaju. Located in the interior of Oman, Block 70 in Mafrag represents their latest acquisition.

Founded in 2013 by Lindvall and former colleague Ron Panchuk, the upstream oil company has increased its output from 900 barrels of oil equivalent per day (BOEPD) to 4,100 BOEPD, since it was first listed on Sweden’s Nasdaq Stock-

holm First North Growth Market in 2016. In December 2020, Maha’s listing moved to the Nasdaq Stockholm main market.

The company has plans to quadruple its energy production once again, over the coming four years, with Oman a key part of its expansion plans.

“Initially there will be limited job opportunities generated through the exploration work that the company will undertake in Oman,” Lindvall revealed. “However, during the early stages, the company will contribute to the Oman economy by purchasing local goods and services. “In the event the field generates commercial amounts of oil, we hope to expand its operations in the country to such an extent it can become a significant employer,” he added.

Block 70 is an onshore block that includes the shallow undeveloped Mafrag heavy oil field. The block is in the middle of the prolific oil producing Ghaba Salt Basin in the central part of Oman. The Mafrag oil field was discovered by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) in 1988 and was further delineated by four wells and 3D seismic activity in stages until 2010.

COVID-19

Recovery rate now 92%

Compared to the weekend, where a total of 2,399 cases were reported between Thursday, May 27 and Saturday, May 29, or an average of nearly 800 cases a day, the numbers of new infections seen since then are significantly higher.

The recovery rate as of June 1, 2021, stood at 91.8 per cent, accounting for 200,421 people being cured from the virus. 2,356 people have sadly died from the disease. About 257 patients in total have been admitted to intensive care, and some 802 patients are currently in hospital for the coronavirus. Of these, 97 people were admitted in the 24 hours leading up to June 1.

As part of its efforts to provide quality health services to people in the country, and make future plans for healthcare, a workshop was held on Sunday by the Ministry of Health’s Directorate General of Planning and Studies. “The workshop was held to review the planning criteria of health services, which is one of the strategic programmes for healthcare under Oman Vision 2040,” said the ministry in a statement. “The goals of planning criteria include

achieving balanced health services with specific criteria throughout the country, to achieve overall health coverage.”

Also discussed at the workshop were the steps needed to be taken by the relevant authorities to plan and develop future healthcare facilities. These also include coming up with planning standards, and making sure these can be met, so that adequate and efficient services are available to all.

Among the issues discussed were the possibility of “adding virtual services, and expanding services so that they meet the standards issued, as well as making sure future services that are part of the ministry’s plans also serve to meet the needs of people,” added the ministry.

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The Maghrib Minute news wrap had 4,500 views and reached 18,400 people on Facebook.

 MOST VIEWED VIDEO ON INSTAGRAM

3,343 VIEWS



max video

The Morning Minute video had 3,343 views and 169 likes on Instagram.

TOURISM

FROM A1

Who can travel on cruise ships?

“A lot of Omanis love football, and we sometimes do get requests, particularly when we organise tours to Spain, to arrange tours of the Camp Nou, the home stadium of FC Barcelona, because it is such an iconic location,” he went on to explain.

“Similarly, if you want to visit Athens, because of its rich history, we can do that as well.”

Seeking clarification

Tour companies, however, are still seeking clarification on who can travel, with a number of European countries only allowing in people who have been vaccinated against the coronavirus.

“Another location we’ve found to be very popular in the US is Disneyworld,” said Khan. “Our New York cruise stops at Miami, so once you go there, we can arrange a transfer to Orlando and organise a tour for you.”

Prices

Among the cruises offered are one from Greece, priced at OMR399 and operated by Norwegian Cruise Lines, a seven-night cruise from Royal Caribbean which departs from New York (OMR790), a week-long cruise along the Eastern Mediterranean, which also begins in Greece, and operated by Azamara (OMR700), and MSC Cruises’ five-day voyage from Italy to Spain (OMR 450).

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A TRADITIONAL INN WITH A TOUCH OF MODERNISATION



Times News Service

In the narrow roads of Al Agur in Nizwa lies a hidden gem for tourists. The Bustan Inn, which is near the Nizwa Fort, was opened in November 2020. What makes it special is its historical background, its location and the fact that the inn is actually a set of old traditional houses that were renovated to become what they are today. It's a traditional inn with a touch of modernisation.

Visitors can experience several aspects of the Omani traditions during their stay here. It is decorated with old and traditional Omani items. Tourists staying at Bustan Inn can enjoy rides in the tourist cars around the neighbourhood like the Nizwa Souq and the Nizwa Fort. For those who want to experience the place on their own they can take a walk as most of the main attractions in the area are at walking distance.

"Bustan in Arabic means farm and that is exactly what the inn is, as it is surrounded by palm trees and nature. In addition, it has a 'Jil' which was earlier used to gather water for the farm, although today

it's a beautiful swimming pool. One of the most magnificent aspects of Omani agriculture is the falaj system and a falaj runs through the inn.

Sulaiman Mohamed Al Sulaiemani, one of the founders of Bustan Inn said that the inn is a part of the traditional inns being established by Bawareq Nizwa International for Investment, which aims to preserve culture.

He said, "the inn is surrounded by nature in traditional Arab style. We have four types of rooms — small, regular, bigger rooms with a living area, and rooms that have jacuzzis. The inn is a family-friendly place".

Al Sulaiemani added: "We did not start these inns with the aim to bring in revenue, but instead to preserve our culture out of respect for our ancestors, and for the next generations to experience how we lived as young kids ourselves. We hope that the inns will become a hotspot of culture and a place where universities, colleges, government institutions and companies would send their students and guests to learn about the culture. We have plans to make this place more enjoyable for kids and families."



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OMAN



THREE-DAY VISIT

Palestinian Prime Minister arrives in Oman

MUSCAT: Mohammad Shtayyeh, Prime Minister of the State of Palestine and his accompanying delegation arrived here on a three-day visit to the Sultanate on Tuesday.

The Palestinian Prime Minister and his accompanying delegation were received upon their arrival by Sayyid Badr Hamad Al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, Sayyid Saud Hilal Al Busaidi, Minister of the State and Governor of Muscat, Dr Said Mohammed Al Saqri, Minister of Economy, Sheikh Khalifa Ali Al Harthy, Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, Dr Khalid Said Al Jaradi, Head of the Protocols Department at the Foreign Ministry and Dr Tayseer Ali Farhat, Palestinian Ambassador to Oman.

The Palestinian Official is accompanied by Riyad Najeeb Al Maliki, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates and other officials. — OMA



SULTAN QABOOS HOSPITAL IN SALALAH

New oxygen tank to help serve patients in Dhofar

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MOH) on Tuesday signed a funding agreement with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and Gulf Energy for the construction of a new oxygen tank with the capacity of 10,000 litres for the Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah.

The agreement was signed by Dr Fatma Mohammed Al Ajmi, MOH Undersecretary for Administrative, Financial & Planning Affairs on behalf of the Ministry, Abul-Amir Abdul-Hussein Al Ajmi, PDO External Affairs & Value Creation Director on behalf of PDO and Yasser Al



Baraami, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Mubbadarah on behalf of Gulf Energy Company.

— OMA

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

‘Vaccines are safe and effective’

Since the start of efforts to vaccinate grade 12 students, about 32,000 people, or 43 percent in this target group have been administered their doses. However, Al Rowahi said that there were some areas where the number of students who'd been vaccinated was lower, compared to others.

"Rumours against vaccinations, and concerns about them in the elderly and parents, have led to disparity in coverage ratios between regions," he said. "I would like to once again emphasise that the vaccines that come to the Sultanate are safe and effective. They were chosen on scientific grounds, after licensing was provided by the approved regulatory

bodies, both in their country of origin, and by international organisations," he explained. "I call on all general diploma students to take the vaccine, because it will be a prerequisite for them to enter colleges and universities in Oman and overseas."

The Ministry of Health aims to vaccinate 70 percent of the country's target population, which also includes children aged 12 and over. This drive will be rolled out in phases, depending on vaccine supplies, and in accordance with the national immunisation strategy against COVID-19. As part of these efforts, another target group is to be vaccinated next month.

IN AL WUSTA

Pact to fund several key projects signed

HAIMA: A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the Office of the Governor of Al Wusta and PDO to fund several projects as a part of its social responsibility. As per the pact the PDO will fund building a public park, installing solar system lights in main street intersections, repairing damaged lights, and funding two portable units for the rehabilitation of people with disabilities. The pact was signed by Sheikh Me'athad Mohammed Al Ya'qoubi, Governor of Al Wusta and Eng. Abdul-Amir Abdul-Hussein Al Ajmi, CEO for external affairs and added value in PDO. — OMA



VIA VIDEOCONFERENCING



Oman-EU review bilateral relations

MUSCAT: The second session of political consultations between the Foreign Ministry and the European External Action Service (EEAS) was held on Tuesday via videoconferencing.

Sheikh Khalifa bin Ali Al Harthy, Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs at the Foreign Ministry chaired the Omani side to the session, while from the European side it was chaired by Enrique Mora, Deputy Secretary General of the European External Action Service.

The session reviewed the bilateral relations between the

Sultanate and the EU and ways of their enhancement and development for the joint interest of both sides. The session also exchanged views on the regional and international issues of common concern and the latest developments in the region.

The session saw the participation of Najim bin Sulaiman Al Abri, the Sultanate's ambassador to Belgium and the European Union; Patrick Simonnet, the European Union's Ambassador to the Sultanate and a number of officials from the two sides.

— OMA

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WORLD

Canada vows action after discovery of Indigenous student mass grave

The PM’s comments came after First Nations leaders urged the government to excavate school burial sites

ONTARIO: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Monday said it was not an isolated incident that more than 200 Indigenous children were found buried at a former boarding school.

The prime minister’s comments came after First Nations leaders urged to government to excavate school burial sites across the country, which he agreed would be “an important part of discovering the truth.”

Remains of 215 Indigenous students, some as young as 3-years-old, who were registered at the Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Colombia were found by the Tk’emlups te Secwepemc First Nation last week using ground-penetrating radar.

The British Columbia coroner is helping the tribe establish the causes and timings of the student deaths at the Kamloops site.

What did Trudeau say?

“As a dad, I can’t imagine what it would feel like to have my kids taken away from me,” Trudeau said at a news conference. “And as prime minister, I am appalled by the shameful policy that stole



SCHOOL BURIAL SITES: Remains of 215 Indigenous students, some as young as 3-year-old were found by the Tk’emlups te Secwepemc First Nation last week.

Indigenous children from their communities.”

“Sadly, this is not an exception or an isolated incident,” he said.

“We’re not going to hide from that. We have to acknowledge the truth. Residential schools were a reality — a tragedy that existed — here, in our country, and we have to own up to it. Kids were taken from their families, returned damaged or not returned at all.”

The prime minister also said he’ll be talking to his ministers about further steps his government needs to do to support survivors and the community.

“Canada will be there to support Indigenous communities as we discover the extent of this trauma and trying to give opportunities for families and communities to heal,” he said.

Canada in mourning

Flags atop government buildings

were lowered to half-staff over the weekend, while empty pairs of children’s shoes were placed in front of the parliament in Ottawa and on steps outside government offices and churches in several cities. About 100 people in the Mohawk community of Kahnawake, near Montreal, marched on Sunday, many of them wearing ceremonial attire.

Plans are underway to bring in forensics experts to identify and repatriate the remains of the children found buried on the site.

What did Indigenous leaders say?

Perry Bellegarde, the national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, called on the government to launch an inquiry at the former residential schools.

“A thorough investigation into all former residential school sites could lead to more truths of the

genocide against our people,” he said, according to the Globe and Mail newspaper.

The Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations and the Saskatchewan government said they want the federal government to help research undocumented deaths and burials at residential schools in the province.

Federation Chief Bobby Cameron said finding the children’s remains and giving them proper burials is important to help First Nations communities and families find closure.

They have compiled a list of initial sites where they hope to complete radar ground searches.

On Monday, opposition New Democratic Party (NDP) leader Jagmeet Singh called for an emergency debate in Parliament on the “heart-breaking” discovery — to which Trudeau agreed.

- DW

Printed and published by:
Muscat Media Group
Post Box: 770,
Postal Code: 112

Founder: Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali
Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Mohamed Issa Al Zadjali
Deputy Editor-in-Chief: Anees bin Essa Al Zedjali
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ADVERTISING: Telephone: 24726666, Fax: 24812624, E-mail: advertising@timesofoman.com
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AVOID ACCIDENT

Suez Canal authority plans to widen canal to avoid event like ‘The Ever Green’



CAIRO: In an effort to avoid a repeat of the event like The Ever Given, a cargo ship which was struck in Egypt, the Suez Canal Authority (SCA) has announced that it had started dredging work to widen and deepen the southern part of the canal.

In March, world trade was thrown into chaos after The Ever Given, a container ship, ran aground in the Suez Canal in Egypt. It was stuck for over six days, disrupting global supply chains. The 30-kilometer-long area will be widened by 40 meters (131 feet) to the east and deepened to 72 feet, up from 66 feet, according to the SCA, reported the CNN.

Plans also include extending the second lane near the Great Bitter Lake, which opened in 2015, by 10 kilometers (6 miles) -- allowing two-way traffic along an 82 kilometer (51 mile) stretch.

The work is intended for “maximizing the canal’s efficiency and shortening the vessels’ transit time, as well as raising the navigation safety,” said a press release from the SCA.

The blockage of the Suez Canal led to paralyzing the crucial waterway. The damage to global trade can run into one billion US dollars, according to the canal authority. The ship was refloated on March 29 by a fleet of 15 tugboats. **ANI**

إنا لله وإنا إليه راجعون

CONDOLENCES

Management and staff of
Gulf Neon Signs
offer their condolences
on the sad demise of

Mr. Mohammed Perwez

Chairman
of Abu Haroon LLC

We pray to the Almighty to bless
his soul with everlasting peace
and to grant strength to his family
to bear this irreparable loss

الخليج للوحات المضيئة

GULF NEON SIGNS

MEMORIAL

Democracy itself is in peril, says Biden as he commemorates the war dead of America



REMEMBERING THE FALLEN: Biden commemorated America's war dead in Memorial Day remarks at Arlington National Cemetery.

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden on Monday (local time) said that Democracy itself is in peril in the US and around the world. Biden commemorated America's war dead in Memorial Day remarks at Arlington National Cemetery. He urged the people of his country to honor memory of the fallen by strengthening and protecting the nation's democracy. “Democracy itself is in peril, here at home and around the world. What we do now -- what we do now, how we honor the memory of the fallen will determine whether or not democracy will long endure,” CNN quoted Biden as saying.

The President said, “We owe the honored dead a debt we can never fully repay. We owe them our whole souls. We owe them our full best efforts to perfect the union for which they died.”

He further stated that the nation must honor the sacrifices of generations of service members “by sustaining the best of America while honestly confronting all that we must do to make our nation fuller, freer and more just.”

Biden said, “Empathy is the fuel of democracy,” and added, “Our willingness to see each other not as enemies, neighbors, even when we disagree, to understand what the other is going through.”

According to CNN, Biden spoke of the rising wave of autocratic rule across the world and argued, as he often does, that “liberation, opportunity, justice are far more likely to come to pass in an democracy than an autocracy.”

“This nation was built on an idea, the only nation in the world built on an idea. Every other nation is built on ethnicity, geography, religion, etcetera. We were built on an idea, the idea of liberty, an opportunity for all,” Biden said.

“We’ve never fully realized that aspiration of our founding, but every generation has opened the door a little wider and every generation has opened it wider and wider to be more inclusive,” he added. Biden said the diversity of the nation and its armed forces has been “an incredible

strength,” and noted Americans of all backgrounds, races, identities and sexual orientations have sacrificed their lives to defend the nation's democracy.

The President also spoke about the death of his own son, Beau Biden, who was an Iraq War veteran. On Sunday, it was marked the sixth anniversary of Beau Biden's death.

“To those who mourn a loved one today, Jill and I have some idea how you're feeling. Our losses are not the same, but that black hole you feel in your chest, as if it's going to suck you into it, we get,” Biden said.

He said the anniversary of his son's death is a difficult time of year for him and his family and that he always feels close to his son on Memorial Day, CNN reported.

“It can hurt to remember, but the hurt is how we feel and how we heal,” Biden said.

Beau Biden was the attorney general of Delaware and a member of the Delaware National Guard, and died in 2015 at the age of 46 from brain cancer. **ANI**



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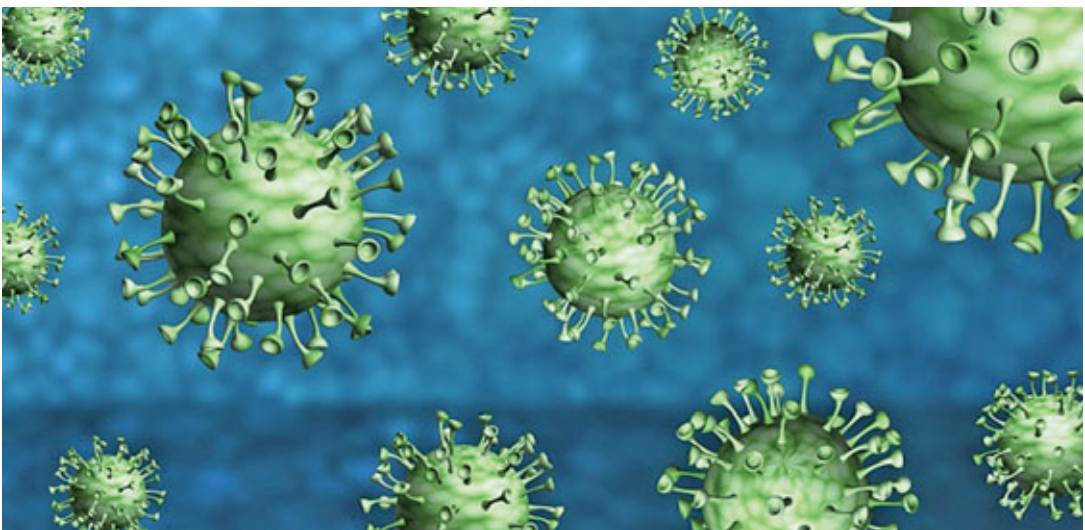
WORLD

COVID STRAIN

WHO renames Indian COVID B.1.617.2 strain as ‘Delta variant’

GENEVA: The World Health Organization (WHO) on Monday renamed the B.1.617.2 variant of the coronavirus, first identified in India, as the ‘Delta variant’.

In a statement, the WHO said that it convened an expert group that recommended using easy-to-pronounce and non-stigmatising labels for Variants of Interest (VOIs) and Variants of Concern (VOC). The group recommended using letters of the Greek Alphabet - Alpha, Beta, Gamma, which will be easier and more practical to be discussed by non-scientific audiences. Apart from the B.1.617.2 variant, the B.1.1.7 strain first identified in the United Kingdom has been identified as ‘Alpha variant’. The VOCs that were identified in South Africa and Brazil have been



EXPERT GROUP RECOMMENDATION: The WHO said that it convened an expert group that recommended using easy-to-pronounce and non-stigmatising labels for Variants of Interest.

named ‘Beta’ and ‘Gamma’ respectively. As for VOIs identified in the United States, Brazil, Philippines and other countries, the WHO has used nomenclature like ‘Epsilon’, ‘Zeta’, ‘Tota’, ‘Theta’ and more. The B.1.617.1 strain, also first identified in India, has been named as ‘Kappa variant’.

The B.1.617.2 variant of COVID-19 is believed to have led to a devastating second wave of the pandemic in India, crippling healthcare infrastructure in the country and resulting in thousands of deaths every day. On May 15, England’s Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty said that the B.1.617.2 variant of COVID-19, first identified in India, is likely to take over and dominate in the UK. The WHO earlier this month informed

that the B.1.617 variant of COVID-19, first found in India in October last year, had been detected in sequences uploaded “from more than 40 countries in all six WHO regions”.

The coronavirus variant, first identified in India last year, has been classified as a “variant of global concern”, with some preliminary studies showing that it spreads more easily, a senior WHO official informed.

The WHO also revealed that the variant has three sub-lineages. “Our team has been discussing with our virus evolution group. Everything we know about it in terms of transferability, studies that are being done,” Dr Maria Van Kerkhove, Technical lead COVID-19 at WHO. **ANI**

NATO SUMMIT

NATO ministers meet to lay groundwork for summit

BRUSSELS: The NATO allies’ defense and foreign ministers are meeting on Tuesday to prepare for the June 14 summit, which US President Joe Biden will attend.

On the ministers’ agenda are the latest developments in Ukraine and Belarus as well as NATO’s future ties with Russia.

The ministers are also expected to discuss the alliance’s role in Afghanistan as it withdraws NATO troops.



The way forward in Afghanistan

As NATO withdraws troops from Afghanistan after two decades, allies have been considering the future of their ties with Kabul.

The UK announced that it would accelerate the relocation of its Afghan staff who worked with the military, often as interpreters, ahead of the planned withdrawal. Germany had also made a similar announcement. Biden had said that the US would pull out its troops from Afghanistan by September 11. NATO troops are expected to leave by that date if they have not already.

Critics have raised concerns over the decision, fearing it could lead to the Taliban taking over the more urban parts of the country which it does not control.

Tensions with Belarus

Stoltenberg announced on Monday that the alliance would restrict access to its headquarters in Brussels for Belarusian officials.

Stoltenberg’s announcement came in the wake of the forced Ryanair flight diversion that sparked international outrage.

In a joint statement last week, NATO’s 30 member states con-

demned Belarus’ move and called for the immediate release of Roman Protasevich and Sofia Sapega, who were arrested aboard the Ryanair flight. “We have also clearly stated that we welcome the decision by many NATO allies to impose sanctions, including restricting the access of the Belarusian airliner to their airspace,” Stoltenberg said.

NATO mulls response to Russia

Russia is high on the June summit agenda as relations between NATO allies and Moscow have hit a new low. The Kremlin announced Monday that Russia would deploy an additional 20 military units in the country’s western border areas by the end of the year. “What we see is a pattern of Russian behavior where Russia over the last years has invested heavily in new modern military capabilities from conventional to nuclear weapon systems,” Stoltenberg told reporters on Monday.

“Not only that but that Russia has been willing to use military force against neighbors in Georgia and Ukraine, continuing to desta-

bilize Donbas and eastern Ukraine and illegally annexing Crimea.”

NATO allies repeatedly raised concerns over tensions between Russia and Ukraine. The Kremlin had recently ordered troops back from the border with Ukraine, after a military buildup.

“Our message remains clear: We are prepared for dialogue, and we have made proposals, but the key to a better relationship lies clearly with Moscow,” German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas told reporters ahead of Tuesday’s meeting.

Ukraine keen on German military gear

Meanwhile, Ukraine’s president enthusiastically picked up on a suggestion from a leading German Green politician made recently during a visit to Kyiv. Green party co-chair Robert Habeck had suggested that Germany could sell military equipment to Ukraine.

“Germany has not given us any military aid, but it could do that,” Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung newspaper’s Tuesday edition. “Habeck understood that.” **DW**

Tender Announcement

MUSCAT ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION COMPANY S.A.O.C WOULD LIKE TO AMEND THE BELOW TENDER AND INVITES INTERESTED COMPANIES TO PARTICIPATE IN THE FOLLOWING Auction:

Auction No.	Description	Last Date of Participate	Available for Inspection	Date of Submission	Tender Price (R.O)
Auction No 1/2021	AUCTION TO SALE RETIRED PSSS AT MUSCAT ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION COMPANY	10/06/2021	Mobella store 13/06/2021 to 14/06/2021 Rusail Store 15/06/2021	29/06/2021	36.750

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -

Purchase timing	The amount specified above is including 5 % VAT. The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply) Auction documents can be purchased at online, time between 08:00 – 13:00 hours You are kindly requested to communicate through email to Contract@medcoman.com
Fees	Against the amount specified above. Non-Refundable payment
Tender Submission	Auction offer should be submitted in a sealed and stamped envelope addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE, MUSCAT ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION CO. marked only with Auction number and the subject
Guarantee	- Auction offer should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted for the value of (3%) of the tender value valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE, MUSCAT ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION COMPANY S.A.O.C. - Any bid that does not meet the bank guarantee condition will not be considered
Terms and Conditions	- The bidder must adhere with MEDC QHSE safety rules. - The bidder must have No Objection Letter (Waste Management Activity) From Be'ah if the Scrap Lot consist of Hazardous waste materials (Transformer oil , Batteries) - The name of the bidder, other marks or any reference must not be specified on the envelope - Bids received after the deadline stated in the Invitation , including any extension thereof, for any reason whatsoever will not be considered - Inspection Days from 13/06/2021 to 14/06/2021, at Mobella store from the 8:30 am to 12:30 pm , for Rusail Industry Area inspection day 15/06/2021 from the 9:00 am to 12:30 pm
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EASED

The Netherlands lifts ban on flights from India

AMSTERDAM: The Netherlands on Tuesday lifted the ban on passenger flights from India.

The ban was imposed on April 26 in view of rising COVID-19 cases in India.

“As per the Government ban on passenger flights from India that had come into force on April 26, 2021, has been lifted w.e.f 01 June 2021,” the India embassy here tweeted. However, there is still a European Union ban on non-EU travelers from countries where the coronavirus situation is considered very high risk.

The Netherlands had on April 26 decided to suspend India flights as “the epidemiological situation on the ground (in India)



is very serious...”

The Netherlands Embassy in India tweeted in April 2021 that the “ban on passenger flights from India has been extended until June 1, 2021. **ANI**

COVID-19

CBSE cancels 12th exams

NEW DELHI: The government on Tuesday decided that class XII board exams of CBSE would not be held this year in view of the uncertain conditions due to COVID-19 and the feedback obtained from various stakeholders.

The government said that CBSE will take steps to compile the results of class XII students as per a well-defined objective criteria in a time-bound manner. It was also decided that like

last year, in case some students desire to take the exams, such an option would be provided to them by CBSE, as and when the situation becomes conducive. The decisions were taken at a review meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi regarding the class XII board exams of CBSE.

The Prime Minister said that the decision on class XII CBSE exams has been taken in the interest of students. **ANI**



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Naomi Osaka withdraws from French Open after media boycott fallout

World number two Osaka was fined 15,000 dollars on Sunday for skipping the press conference following her victory

PARIS: Amidst the ongoing controversy regarding her decision to boycott press conferences at the ongoing French Open, Japanese tennis player Naomi Osaka on Monday announced that she is withdrawing herself from the tournament.

In a statement released on Twitter, Osaka said: "Hey everyone, this isn't a situation I ever imagined or intended when I posted a few days ago. I think now the best thing for the tournament, the other players and my well-being is that I withdraw so that everyone can get back to focusing on the tennis going on in Paris."

"I never wanted to be a distraction and I accept that my timing was not ideal and my message could have been clearer. More importantly I would never trivialize mental health or use the term lightly," she said.



WITHDRAWS: Osaka defeated Patricia Maria Tig 6-4, 7-6(4) on the opening day of the tournament on Sunday.

"The truth is that I have suffered long bouts of depression since the US Open in 2018 and I have had a really hard time coping with that. Anyone that knows me knows I'm introverted, and anyone that has seen me at the tournaments will notice that I'm often wearing headphones as that helps dull my social anxiety. Though the tennis press has always been kind to me (and I wanna apologize especially to all the cool journal-

ists who I may have hurt), I am not a natural public speaker and get huge waves of anxiety before I speak to the world's media. I get really nervous and find it stressful to always try to engage and give you the best answers I can," she added.

World number two Osaka was on Sunday was fined 15,000 dollars for skipping the press conference following her win in the first round in the ongoing French

Open. The tournament organisers also said that the Japanese tennis star could be subjected to additional sanctions if she continues to "ignore her media obligations".

"So here in Paris I was already feeling vulnerable and anxious so I thought it was better to exercise self-care and skip the press conferences. I announced it preemptively because I do feel like the rules are quite outdated in parts and I wanted to highlight that. I wrote privately to the tournament apologizing and saying that I would be more than happy to speak with them after the tournament as the Slams are intense," said Osaka further in her statement.

"I'm gonna take some time away from the court now, but when the time is right I really want to work with the Tour to discuss ways we can make things better for the players, press and fans. Anyways hope you are all doing well and staying safe, love you guys I'll see you when I see you," she added.

Last week, Osaka had said that she would not be taking part in press conferences during the French Open in order to ensure better mental health.

Osaka defeated Patricia Maria Tig 6-4, 7-6(4) on the opening day of the tournament on Sunday. With the victory, the Japanese tennis star also extended her winning streak at the Grand Slams to 15 matches in a row. **ANI**

FRENCH OPEN



Serena Williams, Roger Federer enter second round of French Open

PARIS: American tennis star Serena Williams defeated Irina-Camelia Begu in the first round of the ongoing French Open on Monday.

The 23-time Grand Slam singles winner won her opening match of the tournament after beating Romanian tennis player 7-6 (6), 6-2. Serena, the three-time champion in Paris, had come to the French Open after all with a less than perfect build-up, losing early in Rome and Parma but the star player managed to win her first game after surviving a scare.

She had to convert five of her eight break points to walk out with flying colors.

"I'm happy that I was able to

save those moments. Did not want to lose that first set. I wasn't thinking at that moment," Serena said in a virtual press conference after the match.

"I was just thinking to get that ball out the air because I've been hitting some good swing volleys in practice," she added.

Swiss tennis maestro Roger Federer also stormed into the second round of the ongoing French Open on Monday. Federer defeated Uzbekistan's Denis Istomin 6-2, 6-4, 6-3 in the first-round match played at Court Philippe-Chatrier.

The 39-year-old was seen at his best in the first set and he managed to easily win it 6-2, not giving his opponent any chance. **ANI**

TOKYO OLYMPICS

Carolina Marin to undergo knee surgery, to miss Tokyo Olympics

NEW DELHI: Rio 2016 Olympic badminton champion Carolina Marin on Tuesday announced that she has torn the ACL on her left knee, and as a result, she would be undergoing surgery later this week.

The 27-year-old also announced that she would not be in the best shape for the upcoming Tokyo Olympics and as a result, she would not be participating in the Games.

In a statement released on Twitter, Marin said: "After the examinations during the weekend and the medical consultation, I confirm that I have torn the ACL and both meniscus on my left knee. I will undergo surgery this week and start my recovery. I want to thank everyone for your support and messages during these days. This is another blow that I have to deal with, but I will certainly be back." "The preparation during the last two months had become very diffi-



WITHDRAWAL: The 27-year-old announced that she would not be in the best shape for the upcoming Tokyo Olympics and as a result, she would not be participating in the Games.

cult for reasons beyond the team's control, but we were excited and knew that I would be in the best shape for the Olympics. It won't be possible. I know that I am in safe hands and that I have a lot of people by my side," she added.

Earlier, Marin had suffered an injury on her left knee during training on Friday. Marin, the Spanish badminton player, informed that she suffered discomfort during the training and subsequent tests have confirmed the injury.

"Today I have suffered some discomfort during training that forced me to stop training," Marin said in a statement on Twitter.

"After the first tests carried out, the doctors have verified that the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) of the left knee has been affected. Soon I will be able to give you more information. I am in the best hands, always," she added.

Meanwhile, Badminton World Federation (BWF) on Friday con-

firmed that no further tournaments will be played inside the qualifying window.

As a result, India shuttlers Saina Nehwal and Kidambi Srikanth's slim chances of qualifying for the upcoming Tokyo Olympics ended after the announcement.

According to BWF, while the qualification period officially closes on June 15, as per the Revised Tokyo 2020 qualification system, the current Race To Tokyo rankings list will not change.

BWF Secretary General Thomas Lund said: "The Olympic qualification process is in effect closed as there are no additional opportunities for players to earn points."

"However, we still need to receive confirmations from National Olympic Committees and Member Associations, followed by any possible reallocations, and this will take a number of weeks to complete," he added. **ANI**

CLEARING THE AIR

Never claimed to be vegan: Kohli clears air on his diet

MUMBAI: After keeping fans engrossed about his diet, India skipper Virat Kohli on Tuesday clarified that he has never claimed to be vegan.

In the 'Ask Me Anything' session last week on Instagram, the Indian skipper had answered a question from a fan which sparked a debate on various social media platforms. When a fan asked him about his diet, Kohli said: "Lots of vegetables, some eggs, 2 cups of Coffee, quinoa, lots of spinach, love dosas too. But all in controlled quantities."

After this, the fans were surprised to know that Kohli has had eggs in his diet as they thought he was vegan. And the Indian skipper on Tuesday said he is vegetarian and he never claimed to be vegan.

"I never claimed to be vegan. Always maintained I'm vegetarian. Take a deep breath and eat your Veggie (if you want)," Kohli tweeted.

Kohli will next be seen in action in the World Test Championship final against New Zealand in Southampton from June 18.

The Indian men's team will arrive in the UK on June 3 via a charter flight with negative PCR Test. Prior to travelling, the party will have spent 14 days in a bio-secure environment in India dur-



ing which regular testing will have taken place.

Upon landing, they will proceed directly to the on-site hotel at the Hampshire Bowl where they will be tested again before commencing a period of managed isolation. Regular tests will be conducted during the period of isolation.

Players' activity will be allowed in a gradually increasing manner after each round of negative testing, moving from exercise in

isolation to small group and then larger squad activity, whilst always remaining within the bio-secure venue. The New Zealand team is already in the UK ahead of their bilateral series against England and the team will see transition from the ECB bio-secure environment into the World Test Championship Final bubble on June 15 and will be subject to regular testing prior to and post-arrival in Southampton. **ANI**

FOOTBALL

Euro 2020, Copa America set to capture Indian football fans' imagination

MUMBAI: Football fans in India are in for a treat in the month of June as UEFA Euro 2020 and Copa America 2021 are set to be played and this will see the return of international football.

The 16th edition of UEFA EURO 2020 will have 51 games for fans to enjoy over a period of 30 days. Rome's Stadio Olimpico will host the opening match on June 12 while the finals on July 12 will be held inside the iconic Wembley Stadium in London.

The opening round of matches from June 12 to June 23 will feature some thrilling encounters such as England vs Croatia, France vs Germany, Portugal vs Germany, Portugal vs France, and many more.

Both Euro 2020 and Copa America 2021 will be broadcasted on Sony Pictures Sports Network (SPSN). UEFA Euro 2020 will also bring back the much-loved LIVE Studio Show "Football Extraa" hosted by familiar faces, Manas Singh and Arpit Sharma. The distinguished line-up of panelists to provide 'extraa' opinions, insights and analyses will include international former

footballers like Louis Saha, Luis Garcia, Don Hutchison, David James, Terry Phelan, Mark Seagraves, Ashley Westwood, and Jo-fre Mateu along with some of the best Indian talent to have graced the football pitch like Indian legend, Bhaichung Bhutia and current superstars such as Indian Captain Sunil Chhetri, Gurpreet Singh Sandhu, Sandesh Jhingani and Robin Singh.

And to give the viewers back home something 'extraa', SPSN will also have Andy Mitten, Adriano Del Monte, and Eisha Megan Acton, reporting live from the ground across match venues and taking the viewers closer to the action.

SPSN will telecast UEFA EURO 2020 in six languages to reach out to a wider audience across India: English, Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam. UEFA EURO 2020 will be held in 11 cities across Europe featuring 24 of the best teams starting June 11, 2021, and fans can watch all the thrilling action unfold LIVE on SONY TEN 2, SONY TEN 3, SONY SIX, and SONY TEN 4 channels as well as

live stream it on SonyLIV.

Sports fans can also look forward to Copa America 2021 which will feature some of the biggest names from the 10 participating nations with top footballers like Lionel Messi, Neymar Jr, Dani Alves, Gabriel Jesus, Alisson Becker, James Rodriguez, Roberto Firmino, Paolo Dybala, Sergio Aguero and more. Copa America will be telecast live in five languages: English, Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam on SONY TEN 1, SONY TEN 2, SONY SIX, and SONY TEN 4 channels starting June 14, 2021, and fans can also live stream it on SonyLIV.

Rajesh Kaul, Chief Revenue Officer, Distribution and Head -- Sports Business, Sony Pictures Networks India said: "Sony Pictures Sports Network is committed to presenting our viewers with the best sporting action in the world and UEFA EURO 2020 is at the forefront of it. UEFA EURO 2020 is considered one of the toughest tournaments in the world because of the high quality of the participating teams and players." **ANI**

OMAN CRUDE PRICE RISES

The price of Oman oil has increased, with prices for delivery by August 2021 reaching \$69.15, said Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME). The DME statement said that the price of Oman oil rose by \$1.25 from the price of Monday, which was \$68.03. - **ONA**

MARKET

BUSINESS & FINANCE



MSX INDEX ENDS HIGHER

The MSX index closed at 3,893.91 points, up 1.07 per cent from the previous close. The Sharia Index ended up 0.89 per cent at 562.45 points. Sharqiyah Desalination, up 8.70 per cent, was the top gainer while National Detergent, down 5.95 per cent, was the top loser.

Treasury bills worth OMR90mn issued

The treasury bills are for a maturity period of 28 days, from June 2 until June 30, 2021

MUSCAT: Oman's central bank raised OMR90 million by way of allotting treasury bills on Tuesday. The treasury bills are for a maturity period of 28 days, from June 2 until June 30, 2021.

The average accepted price reached 99.950 for every OMR100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at 99.950 per OMR100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 0.65179 per cent and 0.65211 per cent, respectively.

Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds.

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) acts as the Issue Manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (Repo).



ISSUE MANAGER: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) acts as the issue manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (Repo). - **ONA**

It may be noted that the interest rate on the Repo operations with CBO is 0.5 per cent while the discount rate on the Treasury Bills Discounting Facility with CBO is

0.75 per cent.

Furthermore, treasury bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates.

Additionally, the government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures.

- **ONA**

VIRTUAL EVENT

Madayn participates in Comex 2021



SPONSOR: Madayn, a diamond sponsor of Comex 2021, is featuring and highlighting the services, incentives and objectives of its technology arm - the Knowledge Oasis Muscat. - **Supplied picture**

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates - Madayn, represented by the Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM), is taking part in the 30th edition of the Technology, Communications, Innovation and Digital Transformation - Comex 2021, which kicked off on Sunday and will continue till June 8.

Held virtually for the first time this year under the theme of 'Digital Transformation and Accelerated Utilisation of Artificial Intelligence Future', Comex 2021 presents a specialised platform for online industry-leading discussions, knowledge-sharing, and B2B meetings.

Through a dedicated app and portal where visitors can log in and virtually communicate with rep-

resentatives of various local and international bodies, Madayn - a diamond sponsor of Comex 2021 - is featuring and highlighting the services, incentives and objectives of its technology arm - the Knowledge Oasis Muscat.

Established by Madayn in 2003 as Oman's first tech park, KOM plays a pivotal role in transforming business in the country by creating an outstanding collaborative environment in which knowledge-driven enterprises can pursue their local and international ambitions.

It is worthwhile mentioning that Comex this year aims at highlighting the major trends and developments witnessed by the field of information and communication technology worldwide, and underscoring the Sultanate's e-government initiatives and services.

NCSI DATA



SMEs REGISTERED: The number of SMEs registered in the Governorate of Muscat stood at 17,692 at the end of April 2021, followed by the Governorate of North Al Batinah with 8,310, the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah with 6,554 comprising an increase of 17.6 per cent, the Governorate of Dhofar with 4,388, the Governorate of South Al-Batinah with 3,981, the Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah with 3,488 comprising an increase by 16.3 per cent, and the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah with 3,123.

Over 52,000 SMEs registered with Riyada till April in Oman

MUSCAT: The total number of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) registered in the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Riyada) till the end of April 2021 stood at 52,524, compared to 44,139 in April 2020, an increase of 19 per cent, according to the data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The number of SMEs registered in the Governorate of Muscat

stood at 17,692 at the end of April 2021, followed by the Governorate of North Al Batinah with 8,310, the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah with 6,554 comprising an increase of 17.6 per cent, the Governorate of Dhofar with 4,388, the Governorate of South Al-Batinah with 3,981, the Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah with 3,488 comprising an increase by 16.3 per cent, and the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah with 3,123.

The number of SMEs registered in the Governorate of Al Dahirah stood at 2,988, marking a rise of 13.9 per cent while 1,123 SMEs were registered in the Governorate of Al-Buraimi.

In the Governorate of Al-Wusta, 684 SMEs were registered, a rise of 38.2 per cent.

The number of SMEs in the Governorate of Musandam also rose by 14.9 per cent to stand at 193. - **ONA**

INDIAN REAL ESTATE SECTOR

85% first-time buyers pave way for India's realty growth in 2021

NEW DELHI: The Indian real estate sector has always remained an investor's favourite which has shown immense resilience against the pandemic. Continuing its uphill climb against all odds, the sector continues to attract potential buyers.

These positive sentiments were reflected in a recent ANAROCK report which said that in the nine months between July 2020 and March 2021, 85 per cent of homebuyers in the NCR market were first-timers.

Volatile times

"During volatile times, buyers pursue comfort and steadiness, and the prevalent demand for real estate has established that there is an appeal for stable assets in an otherwise unstable economy. The industry has shown indomitable resilience against the pandemic and has transformed it into a buyer's market," said Aakash Ohri, Sr Executive Director, DLF Home Developers Ltd.

Sharp rise

"2020 brought the fence-sitters to the market. The pandemic directed the demand for residential real estate moving beyond the metros, to mini-metros, and tier II and III cities. Catering to the demand beyond the Delhi NCR region, we witnessed a sharp rise in sales of

residential projects in key cities like Lucknow, Indore, Shimla, Kasauli and Tri-city in Punjab, with diverse offerings - from plots to ready-to-move-in units. Between November 2020 and January 2021 alone, we did three back-to-back successful launches in Gurgaon.

"These were all plotted developments - close to 150 independent floors sold for over 500 crores, followed by similar launches in DLF City Phase 1 to 4 in Gurgaon and New Gurgaon region," Akash Ohri further added.

Total housing sales

As per the total housing sales of 21,750 units in NCR during these nine months, around 90 per cent of buyers were end-users and 10 per cent, investors. With these promising numbers, leading real estate developers are confident that the demand in the resilient real estate sector will get stronger once lockdown restrictions are lifted.

"At present, affordability and financing cost is at the lowest point in this century, acting as a catalyst, reducing inventory overhang in not only ready inventory but also under development stage projects; while new launches have considerably reduced thereby bringing supply down. Not to mention, the lockdown caused by COVID has made people realise the importance of a home includ-

ing its size and amenities. Therefore, the experience of this pandemic (COVID) may make people invest heavily in real estate in the given time, increasing demand for housing, and coming years may witness the revival of the affordable luxury segment in real estate," Rajan Gupta, Vice President - Business Development and Corporate Strategy, Omase Limited.

As per the ANAROCK report, there has also been a sharp increase in demand for an additional 1/2 room for creating a mini office, study room, yoga, gym etc. As movement is now restricted due to COVID-19 there is a rise in demand for 2.5 BHK and 3.5 BHK homes where the homebuyers are looking to convert the additional space as per their need and requirements.

With new infrastructure upgrades, improved liveability index, and excellent connectivity, peripheral areas have also become attractive choices. Many homebuyers are now upgrading to larger homes in non-central locations.

Amid the extended-work-from-culture, a rise in tech-savvy millennial customers has changed the perceptions and has enabled developers to come up with offerings with modern amenities matching global standards, setting new benchmarks in the housing segment. - **ANI**

Association of Asia

Pacific Airlines said

the ongoing COVID-19

pandemic and surges

in transmission

across many Asian

economies have

resulted in renewed

border control

restrictions as well as

domestic lockdowns,

quelling hopes of

any meaningful

resumption in

international travel

markets

MARKET

MSX index ends higher

Sharqiyah Desalination, up 8.70 per cent, was the top gainer while National Detergent, down 5.95 per cent, was the top loser

MUSCAT: The MSX index closed at 3,893.91 points, up 1.07 per cent from the previous close. The Sharia Index ended up 0.89 per cent at 562.45 points. Sharqiyah Desalination, up 8.70 per cent, was the top gainer while National Detergent, down 5.95 per cent, was the top loser. Shares of Al Omaniya Financial Service were the most active in terms of the number of shares traded as well as in terms of turnover.

A total number of 1,220 trades were executed during the day's trading session, generating a turnover of OMR7 million, with more than 37 million shares changing hands. Out of 46 traded stocks, 26 advanced, 3 declined and 17 remained unchanged. At the session close, local investors were net buyers for OMR646,000 while GCC & Arab investors were net sellers for OMR479,000 followed by foreign investors for OMR167,000 worth of shares.

Financial Index closed at 6,066.55 points, up 1.45 per cent. Muscat Finance, Al Omaniya Financial Services, Al Anwar Investment, United Finance and Sohar International Bank were up 6.67 per cent, 4.31 per cent, 6.25 per cent, 2.33 per cent and 2.27 per cent respectively.

Industrial Index closed at 5,580.79 points, up 0.58 per cent. Galfar Engineering, Al Maha Ceramic, Raysut Cement, National Aluminium Product and Jazeera Steel Product were up 6.25 per cent, 3.03 per cent, 1.37 per cent, 0.71 per cent and 0.53 per cent respectively. Services Index was up by 0.77 per cent closing at 1,636.22 points. Sharqiyah Desalination, Al Jazeera Services, Phoenix Power, Oman Investment & Financials and Al Suwadi Power were up 8.70 per cent, 4.64 per cent, 2.13 per cent, 2.00 per cent and 1.75 per cent respectively. — **United Securities**

OMAN STOCKS

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE

INDICES

Index	High	Low	Value	Prev. Value	Diff.	Diff%
MSX 30 INDEX	3,894.27	3,854.10	3,893.92	3,852.61	41.30	1.07
FINANCIAL INDEX	6,066.56	5,990.24	6,066.56	5,979.85	86.71	1.45
Industry Index	5,580.80	5,541.56	5,580.80	5,548.54	32.26	0.58
Services Index	1,637.88	1,623.03	1,636.22	1,623.79	12.43	0.77
MSX Shariah Index	562.46	557.09	562.46	557.51	4.95	0.89
MSX TR INDEX	4,674.09	4,625.88	4,673.66	4,624.09	49.57	1.07

Trading Summary

Volume	Turnover	Trades	Market Cap	Up	Down	Equal	Sec. Traded
37,391,598	6,746,571	1,220	21,199,265,888	26	3	17	46

SHARE PRICE BULLETIN FOR TUESDAY, JUNE 1

SECURITY NAME	VOLUME	TURNOVER	TRADES	OPEN PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE PR.	PREV. CLOSE	DIFF (RD)	DIFF %	LAST PR	LAST RD	LAST OFFER	P/B VALUE	MARKET CAP
REGULAR MARKET															
OM0000001590..... MUSCAT FINANCE	1,286,109	62,131	63	0.046	0.049	0.046	0.048	0.045	0.003	6.667	0.048	0.049	0.049	0.100	14,743,024
OM0000002226..... ALJAZEERA SERVICES	344,700	139,828	50	0.400	0.412	0.400	0.406	0.388	0.018	4.639	0.410	0.410	0.412	0.100	24,848,935
OM0000002077..... AL OMANIYA FIN.	5,292,241	638,533	223	0.120	0.124	0.118	0.121	0.116	0.005	4.310	0.122	0.122	0.123	0.100	35,354,156
OM0000001772..... ALANWAR INVESTMENT	2,304,024	213,217	74	0.091	0.093	0.091	0.093	0.090	0.003	3.333	0.093	0.093	0.093	0.100	18,600,000
OM0000006005..... ALMAHA CERAMICS	774,300	262,553	63	0.330	0.346	0.330	0.340	0.330	0.010	3.030	0.344	0.344	0.344	0.100	17,700,000
OM0000003398..... SOHAR INT BANK	2,283,089	205,483	13	0.090	0.091	0.090	0.090	0.088	0.002	2.273	0.090	0.090	0.091	0.100	219,105,608
OM0000001525..... OMAN INVEST FIN.	1,459,839	148,992	37	0.101	0.103	0.101	0.102	0.100	0.002	2.000	0.102	0.102	0.104	0.100	24,174,000
OM0000001418..... RAYSUT CEMENT	104,594	30,820	22	0.284	0.297	0.282	0.295	0.291	0.004	1.375	0.292	0.292	0.300	0.100	59,000,000
OM0000002440..... AL SHARQIA INV	438,980	40,461	36	0.092	0.093	0.092	0.092	0.091	0.001	1.099	0.093	0.092	0.093	0.100	8,280,000
OM0000002796..... BANK MUSCAT	1,803,649	631,342	38	0.394	0.394	0.390	0.394	0.390	0.004	1.026	0.392	0.390	0.392	0.100	1,408,343,068
OM0000001533..... OMINVEST	571,200	181,684	5	0.320	0.320	0.318	0.318	0.316	0.002	0.693	0.318	0.316	0.322	0.100	256,871,601
OM0000002176..... JAZEERA STEEL PROD.	1,167,927	443,207	55	0.374	0.386	0.374	0.380	0.378	0.002	0.529	0.384	0.384	0.388	0.100	47,461,225
OM0000003026..... OMAN TELECOM	545,204	431,843	10	0.796	0.796	0.792	0.792	0.788	0.004	0.508	0.792	0.792	0.832	0.100	594,000,000
OM0000001087..... OMAN UNITED INSUR.	1,221,852	474,927	18	0.388	0.388	0.384	0.388	0.388	0.000	0.000	0.388	0.388	0.388	0.100	38,800,000
OM0000001400..... OMAN FLOUR MILLS	760	535	2	0.704	0.704	0.704	0.704	0.704	0.000	0.000	0.704	0.640	0.000	0.100	110,880,000
OM0000001707..... OMAN CABLES INDSTR	294,315	264,546	24	0.896	0.904	0.896	0.900	0.900	0.000	0.000	0.900	0.900	0.912	0.100	80,730,000
OM0000002188..... AL ANWAR CERAMIC	914,805	439,100	29	0.480	0.484	0.480	0.480	0.480	0.000	0.000	0.480	0.476	0.480	0.100	105,600,000
OM0000002200..... AHLI BANK	2,000,000	222,000	1	0.111	0.111	0.111	0.111	0.111	0.000	0.000	0.111	0.106	0.113	0.100	216,411,879
OM0000003000..... AI MAHA MARKTING	2,850	1,573	1	0.552	0.552	0.552	0.550	0.550	0.000	0.000	0.552	0.552	0.580	0.100	37,950,000
OM0000003234..... RENAISSANCE SER.	512,500	215,550	19	0.420	0.422	0.420	0.420	0.420	0.000	0.000	0.422	0.422	0.430	0.100	99,292,200
OM0000003968..... GOREDDO	227,223	91,273	22	0.400	0.404	0.400	0.400	0.400	0.000	0.000	0.404	0.404	0.404	0.100	260,377,292
OM0000001160..... NATIONAL GAS	60,000	8,780	6	0.146	0.148	0.146	0.146	0.147	-0.001	-0.680	0.146	0.145	0.147	0.100	12,410,000
Total	22	23,410,761	5,148,488	811											

Parallel Market

OM0000004669..... SHARQIYAH DESALIN.	15,500	1,944	3	0.123	0.126	0.123	0.125	0.115	0.010	8.696	0.126	0.122	0.126	0.100	12,225,270
OM0000003521..... GALFAR ENGINEER	1,122,857	56,892	50	0.049	0.052	0.049	0.051	0.048	0.003	6.250	0.051	0.051	0.052	0.100	14,789,012
OM0000002374..... UNITED FINANCE	220,082	9,684	11	0.044	0.044	0.044	0.044	0.043	0.001	2.328	0.044	0.044	0.045	0.100	15,362,354
OM0000004768..... MADINA TAKAFUL	3,638,072	350,336	108	0.094	0.096	0.094	0.096	0.094	0.002	2.128	0.097	0.097	0.099	0.100	16,800,000
OM0000005963..... PHOENIX POWER	62,434	2,997	7	0.048	0.049	0.048	0.048	0.047	0.001	1.128	0.048	0.046	0.051	0.100	70,204,870
OM0000001483..... NATIONAL BANK OMAN	2,640,000	447,394	19	0.168	0.170	0.168	0.169	0.166	0.003	1.807	0.170	0.165	0.170	0.100	274,784,934
OM0000002549..... BANK DHOFAR	3,011,149	349,293	3	0.116	0.116	0.116	0.116	0.114	0.002	1.754	0.116	0.116	0.120	0.100	347,576,767
OM0000004933..... AL SUWADI POWER	11,350	658	3	0.058	0.058	0.058	0.058	0.057	0.001	1.754	0.058	0.057	0.058	0.100	41,435,568
OM0000004248..... SMN POWER HOLDING	17,000	1,105	1	0.065	0.065	0.065	0.064	0.061	0.003	1.563	0.065	0.062	0.067	0.100	12,976,314
OM0000003281..... TAJEGER FINANCE	591,206	41,384	14	0.070	0.070	0.070	0.070	0.069	0.001	1.449	0.070	0.070	0.074	0.100	17,751,300
OM0000004420..... BANK NIZWA	71,649	6,802	6	0.094	0.096	0.094	0.096	0.094	0.002	1.994	0.095	0.095	0.097	0.100	142,500,000
OM0000001517..... HSBC BANK OMAN	146,689	14,816	6	0.101	0.101	0.101	0.101	0.100	0.001	1.000	0.101	0.101	0.101	0.100	202,031,592
OM0000001319..... ALUMINIUM PROD.	1,813,000	251,564	127	0.140	0.141	0.136	0.139	0.138	0.001	0.725	0.136	0.136	0.137	0.100	4,696,432
OM0000001178..... MUSCAT GASES	4,000	748	1	0.187	0.187	0.187	0.187	0.187	0.000	0.000	0.187	0.187	0.190	0.100	5,610,000
OM0000001681..... OMAN EMIRATES HO.	404,393	20,624	25	0.051	0.051	0.051	0.051	0.051	0.000	0.000	0.051	0.051	0.054	0.100	6,215,625
OM0000001962..... AL MADINA INV.	45,000	990	2	0.022	0.022	0.022	0.022	0.022	0.000	0.000	0.022	0.022	0.023	0.100	4,557,330
OM0000002275..... SHELL OMAN MKK.	4,339	3,523	6	0.812	0.812	0.812	0.808	0.808	0.000	0.000	0.812	0.784	0.812	0.100	78,760,000
OM0000003861..... VOLTAM ENERGY	147	22	1	0.149	0.149	0.149	0.150	0.150	0.000	0.000	0.149	0.149	0.149	0.100	12,210,413
OM0000003711..... SOHAR POWER	420	20	1	0.047	0.047	0.047	0.048	0.048	0.000	0.000	0.047	0.046	0.047	0.100	10,608,480
OM0000004925..... ALBATTINAH POWER	100,550	5,571	10	0.055	0.056	0.055	0.055	0.055	0.000	0.000	0.055	0.055	0.057	0.100	37,118,809
OM0000005280..... OMAN ARAB BANK	6,000	760	1	0.126	0.126	0.126	0.126	0.126	0.000	0.000	0.126	0.126	0.126	0.100	253,752,292
OM0000008447..... OMAN REIT FUND	1,000	90	1	0.090	0.090	0.090	0.090	0.090	0.000	0.000	0.090	0.090	0.094	0.100	58,928,305
OM0000001897..... MAJAN COLLEGE	8,000	1,162	2	0.142	0.155	0.142	0.145	0.150	-0.005	-3.333	0.155	0.142	0.155	0.100	13,050,000
OM0000003265..... NAT. DETERGENT	47,000	29,704	1	0.632	0.632	0.632	0.632	0.672	-0.040	-5.952	0.632	0.632	0.732	0.100	10,751,900
Total	24	13,980,837	1,588,063	409											

FOUR-YEAR CONTRACT

Majid Al Futtaim awards consultancy contract for its Mall project in Saudi

RIYADH: Majid Al Futtaim, the leading shopping mall, communities, retail and leisure pioneer across the Middle East, Africa and Asia announced that it has awarded a four-year contract to global infrastructure consulting firm AE-

COM to provide lead consultancy services for its flagship Mall of Saudi development.

With the project set to break ground in Q4 this year, the announcement marks an important step in further delivering Majid Al

Futtaim's master-planned landmark mixed-use development, Riyadh North. AECOM's contract will see the firm deliver Lead Design Consultancy for pre-contract and post-contract construction supervision for Mall of Saudi.

Credit losses set to decline for most Asia Pacific banks

MELBOURNE: Credit losses are set to fall across most Asia Pacific banking systems over the next two years, S&P Global Ratings said on Tuesday.

This is partly because targeted assistance to stretched borrowers will likely continue in many places until pandemic-related challenges substantially abate.

"Asia Pacific banks should safely avoid a 'cliff effect' even as extensive relief measures are progressively removed," said S&P Global Ratings credit analyst Sharad Jain.

Moratoriums on loan repayments - together with fiscal, monetary and policy support - have helped cushion the blow to borrowers in the Asia Pacific from the COVID-19 outbreak and containment measures.

Repayment moratoriums have fallen to less than 5 per cent of system loans for a number of Asia

Pacific countries compared with between 6 and 80 per cent at the height of the pandemic.

S&P forecast credit losses for the 12 larger banking systems in Asia-Pacific: Australia, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand. "We forecast that credit losses will remain well below our expected long-term average in most countries despite last year's economic hardship," said S&P.

Bad loans

Credit losses encompass provisioning for expected bad loans and generally precede charge-offs, the actual write-down of loans that detract from the balance sheet allowances for credit losses. S&P said most banking systems will see problem loans elevated over the next few years as delayed hits from the pandemic take time to normal-

ise. However, sturdy provisioning thus far combined with economic rebounds and strong government support will contain credit losses.

In addition, the stress on the region's banking asset was at historical low levels just before the pandemic struck.

In India and Indonesia where banks have suffered higher asset distress in recent years, credit losses are set to trend closer to expected long-term average in the coming years, said S&P.

While China's banks have taken much of its pandemic-related pain up front, with large credit losses reported in 2020, the fallout is not quite over. Given the vast size of the country's banking system, this translates into big numbers.

In absolute terms, credit losses for Asia Pacific could reach 585 billion dollars by 2022, or nearly double the pre-COVID level, and this is driven by China. — **ANI**



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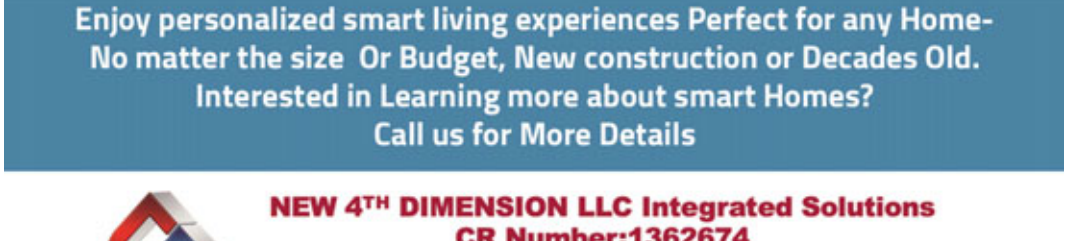
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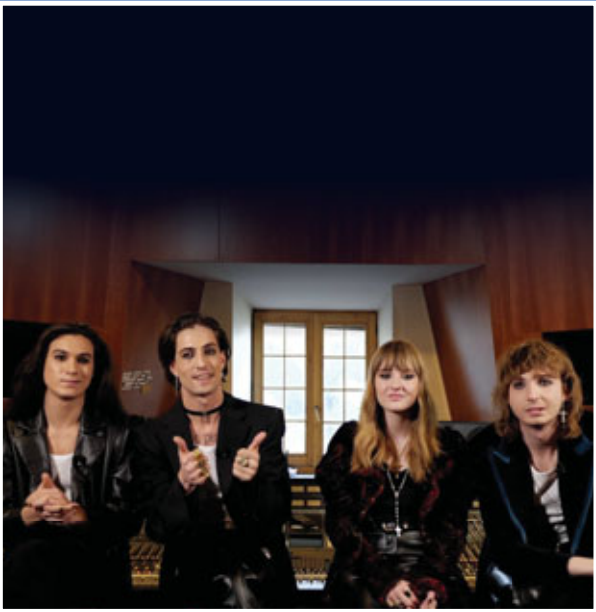
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FEATURES

ITALY WINS 2021 EUROVISION SONG CONTEST FOLLOWING TIGHT RACE



“We just want to say, to the whole of Europe, to the whole world, rock ‘n’ roll never dies,” Maneskin’s frontman Damiano David has said after winning.

Lots of sequins, pyrotechnics and super-personic belting: Some aspects of the Eurovision Song Contest are reliably predictable each year, perhaps even formulaic. After all, the event is the world’s largest non-sporting TV event, drawing millions of TV viewers annually, and requires a certain amount of pomp and circumstance to succeed in keeping people from Reykjavik to Sydney tied to their screens each year. But all bets were off in 2021, as people in the Netherlands cautiously dared to return to attending the live event in Rotterdam while the COVID-19 pandemic continued to rage on across the world. The 3,500 viewers watching the event live at the Ahoy arena, however, made enough noise to fill the arena and transport the unifying and transcendental power of music beyond the Netherlands, which hosted the event after winning the last Eurovision. In 2020, at the height of the pandemic, organizers in Rotterdam had been forced to cancel the Eurovision Song Contest for the first time in the 65-year history of the event, making sure this year that this edition would make up for the time lost since the last Eurovision held in Tel Aviv in 2019

And the winner is... It came as somewhat of a surprise when Italy shot to the top of the 2021 Eurovision chart after a long night of music and even longer rounds of complicated voting. Represented by singer Maneskin and his band with the mostly spoken glam-rock track “Zitti E Buoni,” Italy got a landslide public vote in the last few minutes of the show. Maneskin could hardly believe the victory, as the band had looked earlier like they had resigned themselves to defeat. “We just want to say, to the whole of Europe, to the whole world, rock ‘n’ roll never dies,” Maneskin’s frontman Damiano David said after the win. Maneskin’s win was Italy’s third-ever victory in the immensely popular contest and the first since 1990 when Toto Cutugno took the top spot — which came at a time when the competition took place in a country that no longer exists: Yugoslavia. Italy was the bookmakers’ favorite to win but trailed Switzerland, France and Malta after the national juries delivered their votes. It was a tight race between Switzerland and France for much of the voting period, in particular during the jury voting stage. By the time the national juries’ votes had all been cast, it looked like the evening was going to be won by Francophone power ballads, with France and Switzerland leading the competition with their more dulcet tones.

Public vote that makes or breaks the winner While ballads like the ones sung by France’s Barbara Pravi this year have indeed occasionally scored well in the competition in the past — most recently in 2017 when Portuguese singer Salvador Sobral won the competition with his ballad “Amar Pelos Dois” — this kind of music is rather the exception and not the norm in the top positions of the popular music competition.

Rock tracks like Italy’s “Zitti E Buoni” also typically feature less frequently as winners, with most Eurovision trophies going to pop music interpreters; however, there is also a history of bands like Finland’s Lordi winning the competition in 2006 with a decidedly harder sound that even goes beyond heavy metal. Ultimately, it’s always the public vote that brings in a surprise result, which is also true for the element of disappointment: The UK, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands all received zero points from the public vote this year — much to the amazement of the audience at the Ahoy Arena, which expressed its support for these low-scoring candidates with applause and cheers.

An opportunity to ‘Open Up’ Inclusion was meanwhile a big theme at the 2021 Eurovision Song Contest this year. While the motto of this edition of the competition “Open Up” was primarily a reference to the world beginning to return to a sense of normal by gradually reopening events and businesses, there was a lot of opening up to new ideas in general — not just in the music. Hosting nation the Netherlands was represented by singer Jeangu Macrooy from Suriname with a soulful rendition of his song “Birth Of A New Age,” which was performed in multiple languages — including Sranan Tongo, the English-based Creole language spoken in his native country. Norway sent singer TIX to deliver his song “Fallen Angel.” TIX has Tourette’s Syndrome and is also a recognised mental health advocate in his home country. San Marino, meanwhile, was represented by singer Senhit — and American rapper Flo Rida. Though this was not the first time in Eurovision history that a performance received a bit of celebrity support like this — for example, Germany had been propped up by model Dita von Teese in 2009 — the small enclave of San Marino did surprise bookies and spectators alike with this unique entry.

Beyond binary ideas Much of the fashion seen on stage this year also reflected that sense of opening up to progress, featuring bold gender-nonconforming elements that brought home the message of inclusion and diversity that Eurovision has always stood for. Maneskin’s frontman rocked not only with his performance on stage but also showed off a lot of skin with an outfit that represents the kind of gender fluidity that is associated with burlesque and cabaret. Sweden sent singer Tusse with his song “Voices” into the race, whose bright red outfit was complemented by his elegant elbow-length finger gloves. Germany’s Jendrik stuck it to all the haters by singing “I don’t feel hate” while featuring a lot of rainbow references in his branding and staging, while 22-year-old performer Gjon’s Tears from Switzerland donned a dark chiffon shirt with silver patterns throughout, bedazzling audiences as much with his outfit as he did with his outstanding falsetto voice in his mesmerizing ballad “Tout l’Univers.”



ROUND-UP

NBO inks pact to provide digital banking services for ministry

Ministry of Defence Pension Fund will be provided with the latest services and solutions while meeting its banking requirements easily and conveniently

MUSCAT: Marking another milestone in its digital leadership, the National Bank of Oman (NBO) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Defence Pension Fund for the provision of digital banking services, including its Corporate Online Banking (CIB) and B2B Banking Portal.

Signed by Ahmed bin Salem Al Busaidi, Director General of the Ministry of Defence Pension Fund, and Hassan Abdul Amir Shaban, General Manager – Chief Government Banking Officer at NBO, the agreement is the latest in a number of long-term strategic partnerships the bank has formed as it seeks to build bridges between the private and public sectors.

With its state-of-the-art, simple and secure online corporate banking services, it continues to support Oman’s 2040 Vision and its digital transformation.

Hassan Abdul Amir Shaban said, “We are pleased to sign this strategic agreement with the Ministry of Defence Pension Fund. As the first local bank to conclude such fruitful cooperation with the ministry, it is a welcome confirmation of our leadership in digital and electronic banking services in the Sultanate. We will work hard to ensure that the ministry is provided with the latest services and solutions while meeting its banking requirements easily and conveniently, now and



into the future.”

NBO has been providing full digital financial services to the Ministry of Defence since 2019. Using cutting-edge technology

and leading security features, its online banking services empower companies and government entities to make instant transactions, payments and transfers,

access account balances, make on-the-spot enquiries, access non-financial services and complete transaction histories on all of their accounts.

Available free and accessible 24/7, the frequently updated digital service is enhanced by the bank’s best-in-class expertise and superior customer experience.

APPOINTMENT

Zubair Corporation appoints Hilal Al Siyabi as Chief Corporate Services Officer

MUSCAT: In line with its continuous strategy and vision to hire nationals to high management positions, The Zubair Corporation has appointed Hilal Al Siyabi as Chief Corporate Services Officer.

Hilal Al Siyabi’s corporate communications expertise is a valuable addition to The Zubair Corporation’s executive team. In this new role, he will be responsible for corporate communications and CSR; HR; IT; government relations in addition to the facility and services management for The Zubair Corporation.

The appointment of Hilal Al Siyabi strongly underlines Z-Corp’s strategic objective to empower and encourage a highly talented workforce in leadership positions in the private sector. It also emphasises the group’s commitment to advancing and increasing the Omani workforce in top management positions. The elevation is aligned with the organisation’s human resources policy to appoint Omani talents and build a sustain-



able work environment that attracts a national workforce.

Regarding this appointment, Rashad Mohammad Al Zubair, chairman, The Zubair Corporation said, “We are keen to build young Omani competencies that assume higher administrative and operational roles in the corporation and its subsidiaries. Within

the framework of that strategy, Z-CORP seeks to attract young Omani cadres in various disciplines. Those who were appointed by the group within its corridors, today occupy the first rows in managing the group’s business.”

He added, “Today I welcome Hilal Al Siyabi, a new young Omani talent to join the Z-Corp. He has the experience that qualifies him to be part of the corporation’s administrative work. We hope he will contribute to the institution’s present and future roles in the national economy, and contribute to achieving the institution’s vision, mission and goals through the administrative duties entrusted to him. We wish him success.”

Over the last 23 years, Hilal Al Siyabi has had extensive exposure across numerous areas of communications and stakeholder engagement right from external and internal communications, brand PR, corporate communications, consumer affairs, international relations and sustainability in both

the private and public sector.

Hilal Al Siyabi’s career has included a top corporate communications position at Oman Arab Bank, as well as a media affairs role at Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA). In his previous stint at The Zubair Corporation, he served as head of corporate communications. He has also held important positions in diplomatic and international institutions.

An exceptional communications executive and strategist, Hilal has a master’s degree in public policy from Carnegie Mellon University in the USA and a bachelor of science in environmental science degree from Ohio State University in the USA.

Hilal said, “It is an honour and a privilege to be appointed to the position of Chief Corporate Services Officer in this prestigious organisation. I look forward to working with our talented team as we will continue to drive positive change and transformation across the Z-Corp group.”

FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP



Toyota Gazoo Racing wins Croatia Rally

MUSCAT: Toyota Gazoo Racing team has once again stood out and made a mark with the thrilling performance at the first-ever Croatia Rally held as part of the FIA World Rally Championship. With this win, Toyota extends its lead in the FIA WRC Manufacturers’ Championship to 138 points

In a final-stage decider that went right down to the final meters, Sébastien Ogier and Julien Ingrassia raced to victory in the No. 1 Toyota Yaris WRC. They ended the race just 0.6 seconds ahead of their teammates Elfyn Evans and Scott Martin in the No. 33 Toyota Yaris WRC, making it one of the WRC’s closest-ever finishes.

every rally with all team members working together. To our fans, please continue cheering for the GR World Rally Team. We always appreciate your support and encouragement. Thank you very much!”

Sébastien Ogier, Driver of the No. 1 Toyota Yaris WRC, said, “It has been a real rollercoaster of emotions. I think everybody knows that I never give up and I tried to keep fighting until the end. I feel for Elfyn who did a good job during this race and was especially strong on the final day. But we had a good pace and it’s nice to share the podium in another one-two for the team.”

Only 10.4 seconds separated the top three vehicles going into the final day of the rally, with Ogier 6.9 seconds in front of Evans. In the opening two stages of the fourth and final day, Evans was the fastest driver in No. 33 Toyota Yaris WRC and took the lead from Ogier in the No. 1 Toyota Yaris WRC.

The pair began the deciding Power Stage separated by just 3.9 seconds, and needed to push to secure the one-two result with only a narrow margin back to third place. In the end, Ogier was fastest through the stage and claimed the victory in the No. 1 Toyota Yaris WRC, with Evans finishing 4.5 seconds slower in the No. 33 Toyota Yaris WRC – the third closest winning margin in WRC history.

The result saw Ogier move back to the top of the drivers’ standings with a maximum points haul, while the team extended its lead in the manufacturers’ championship to 27 points.

Akio Toyoda, President, Toyota Motor Corporation, commented: “I’m very proud that our crews delivered victory to the team in this new Croatia Rally. To Seb, Julien, and the team, congratulations! Elfyn and Scott also did great by finishing so close behind. It’s wonderful that we achieved a one-two finish. Led by Jari-Matti, the team shows its strength in

Over the years, Toyota has been participating in many different forms of motorsports, including Formula One, the World Endurance Championship (WEC), and the Nürburgring 24 Hours endurance race. Toyota’s participation in these events was overseen by separate entities within the company until April 2015, when Toyota established GR, to consolidate all of its motorsports activities under one in-house brand. Representing Toyota’s belief that ‘the roads build the people, and the people build the cars,’ GR highlights the role of motorsports as a fundamental pillar of Toyota’s commitment to making ‘ever-better’ cars. Harnessing years of experience gained under the extreme conditions of various motorsports events, GR aims to forge new technologies and solutions that bring the freedom, adventure, and joy of driving to everyone.

The FIA World Rally Championship heads to Portugal for the first gravel event of the year. Based in Matosinhos near Porto in the north of the country, Rally de Portugal features classic stages on sandy and rocky roads. The grip can be difficult to find on the soft roads during the first pass through the stages, while rocks can be exposed and deep ruts can form during the second pass, creating a challenging weekend for the teams and an exciting event for motorsports fans.

RECOGNITION

Omantel receives cfi.co’s 2021 Best Digital Transformation Leadership GCC award

MUSCAT: At Omantel, strategy and service go hand in hand, leading to success for the company and convenience for its customers. Recognising the company’s service to the nation during the COVID-19 pandemic by way of accelerating digital technology’s reach to businesses in the region, the *Capital Finance International* magazine (cfi.co) has conferred Omantel with the Best Digital Transformation Leadership (GCC) Award, 2021. The award further emphasises Omantel’s position as the market leader that puts the country first.

Acknowledging the award, Talal bin Said Al Mamari, CEO of Omantel said, “We at Omantel are ecstatic as our efforts for society continue to show results in the form of convenience, continuity of business, healthcare, education etc and most importantly safety, during the pandemic. This recognition humbles as well as encourages us. Omantel is a people’s company and it continues to leverage its strengths to make the lives of people better and the function of organisations more efficient. The award is a boost for us to fast track our plans that will continue to revolutionise the way Omani society functions. Our timely network upgrades coupled with the 5G rollout in late 2019 formed the base on which solutions to face COVID-19 were built. We are confident that Omantel will continue to offer better solutions to every sector of Oman’s growing economy.”

Omantel, the Sultanate’s leading



integrated telecommunications services provider and its trusted digital enabler, has driven Oman to be among a host of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states at the vanguard of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and is fast turning its digital transformation goals into reality. Omantel is embedding futuristic communications and network technology into every aspect of the nation’s functioning through smart solutions, the Internet of Things “IoT”, Artificial Intelligence and other frontier technologies.

The award categorically recognises the efforts of Omantel as it rose from just being a telecom com-

pany to be an ally in the Omani government’s fight against COVID-19, with multi-pronged measures.

In 2020, when the pandemic threatened to disrupt economies, Oman remained on the growth track, powered by Omantel’s investments in frontier technologies infrastructure and its 2019 rollout of 5G network service. Omantel provided its solutions to the healthcare, education, public service delivery, as well as business sectors and helped them brace the impact. Its services for health workers, setting up of virtual clinics, e-learning platforms, digital public service delivery solutions, remote working and online solutions ensured uninterrupted service and business continuity.

As strict health protocols like lockdowns came into force, Omantel App continued making customers access to its services easier, quicker and safer from the comfort of their homes.

Omantel app users grew from around 300K in early 2020 to 1 million by the end of the year, attracted by its ease of use and excellent service delivery through improved user experience, intuitive design and Artificial Intelligence.

During the pandemic, the app became Omantel’s virtual outlet bringing instant access to services like top-ups, bill payments, other than the purchase of e-sim and instant activation without the need of any human intervention, devices and mobile and home internet plans. With the addition of Noor, the AI-powered chatbot to the app,

customer engagement levels grew manifold. This AI, bilingual chatbot continues to provide quick and accurate responses to Omantel’s products and services, by upselling promotions, answering Frequently Asked Questions and capturing leads. The ever-increasing number of users and growing demand for more services at customer’s fingertip have encouraged bringing even more innovative solutions to the app and take the service to the next level.

Understanding well the potential of digital transformation to build sustainable, affordable and efficient solutions that touch every aspect of work, life, and play, and lead to the creation of an innovation and knowledge-based society, Omantel has been keeping itself ahead of the curve. Founded five decades back, Omantel has grown to become the leading provider of integrated telecommunications in GCC and remains committed to enabling a digital society to flourish.

In 2019, Omantel introduced the 5G fixed wireless access to the people of Oman.

Omantel is the Sultanate’s first and leading integrated telecommunications services provider, enabling the digital society to flourish, allowing new ways of doing business and delivering a world of information, news and entertainment. While striving to ensure optimum customer satisfaction, Omantel plays a key social role to provide the required support and subsidy to all sectors of the Omani society.



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