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SALALAH MILLS PLANS PROJECT AT KHAZAEN
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1.25mn doses expected in June

1.1mn doses of Pfizer and more made by AstraZeneca to arrive this month

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) announced 1.25mn doses of vaccines will arrive in Oman in June and an immunisation plan for COVID-19 for the month on Tuesday.

Elaborating on the vaccination drive, Badr bin Saif al Rawahi, Director of Infectious Diseases Control in MoH, said, "The ministry has developed a national campaign for immunisation against COVID-19 to cover all target groups in the population who are 12 years and older. These groups represent 70 per cent of the population. The drive will be implemented in several phases according to the supply of vaccines."

He explained that based on the agreements of vaccine procurement, Oman will receive 1.25mn doses in June with over 200,000 doses expected every week. "Around 205,000 doses arrived last Saturday. About



GED students and teaching staff await their turn to be vaccinated at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher (Supplied photo)

VACCINATION PLAN FOR JUNE

- **General Education Diploma students and supervisory staff of GED examinations, which already started on May 26**
- **Workers in private health institutions who didn't take the vaccine, service providers, and military and security personnel, will be vaccinated next week**
- **Among other community members, target groups will include adults who are 45 years and older starting in the third week of June**
- **Those who have completed ten weeks since the first dose will start getting the second dose**

1.1mn doses of the Pfizer jab and more made by AstraZeneca are expected to arrive in June," he said.

Rawahi added that staff and students of Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Edu-

cation, Research and Innovation will be vaccinated in July.

"In order to accelerate the vaccination drive, immunisation centres will be opened across all governorates. Mobile teams will be formed if necessary."

Rawahi informed that vaccine coverage rate varies among governorates due to concerns of some elders and parents. "As for vaccine safety, the ministry confirms that the selection process of vaccines in the sultanate is

based on scientific criterion."

Following the accelerated immunisation drive, around 35 per cent of citizens and residents are expected to be vaccinated by August end.

See also **Page 03**

MoL to begin interviewing fuel station managers soon

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) has announced that it will start job interviews for Omanis to appoint them as managers of 655 fuel stations across governorates soon.

The ministry confirmed that the first screening of applicants has ended and will start interviewing applicants in Dakhliyah on June 14. The interview phase will end in Muscat on July 19.

The ministry confirmed that the highest number of applicants (1,540) have registered in Muscat, followed by 1,220 in North Batinah, 790 in Dakhliyah, 790 also in Dhofar, 490 in South Batinah, 480 in North Sharqiyah, 400 in South Sharqiyah, 330 in Dhahirah, 270 in Al Wusta, 180 in Buraimi, and 40 in Musandam.

In January 2021, the MoL and Oman Society for Oil Services (OPAL) launched an initiative to Omanise the position of fuel station managers for holders of



higher diplomas and Bachelor's degrees in business administration and related fields.

"The initiative was within the framework of the ministry and OPAL's vision of Omanising, enabling and developing this sector with capable national cadres who would be able to manage work in these stations. Six hundred and fifty-five fuel stations in the sultanate will benefit from this," an MoL statement said.

Indian students' test for Grade 12 scrapped

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The uncertainty hanging over the future of 1,718 Grade 12 students of Indian schools in Oman has come to rest with the Indian government on Tuesday announcing the cancellation of Class 12 exams this year.

The Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired a review meeting regarding the exams of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on Tuesday. Officials gave a detailed presentation on the wide and extensive consultation held so far and views received from all stakeholders, including state governments.

"In view of the uncertain conditions due to COVID-19 and the feedback obtained from various stakeholders, it was decided that Grade 12 Board Exams will not be held this year. It was also decided that CBSE will take steps to compile the results of Grade 12 students as per a well-defined objective criteria in a time-bound manner," a press statement from the Indian government said.

Prime Minister Modi said that the decision on the Grade 12 CBSE Board Exams has been taken in the interest of students. He stated that COVID-19 has affected the academic calendar and the issue of Board Exams has been causing immense anxiety among students, parents and teachers, which must be put to an end.

Prime Minister Modi said that the COVID-19 situation is a dynamic one across the country. "While the numbers are coming down in the country and some states are managing the situation through effective micro-containment, some states have still opted for a lockdown. Students, parents and teachers are naturally worried about the health of students in such a situation."

He directed officials to ensure that the results are prepared in accordance to well-defined criteria, in a fair and time-bound manner. It was also decided that like last year, in case some students desire to take the exam, such an option would be provided to them by CBSE, as and when the situation becomes conducive.

SAYYID BADR RECEIVES PALESTINIAN PM



H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, received Dr Muhammad Ibrahim Shtayyeh, Palestinian Prime Minister, and his accompanying delegation, on Tuesday. The delegation is in the sultanate on a three-day official visit (ONA)

National policy to phase out inefficient lights expected

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) is in the process of formulating a national policy on phasing out inefficient light bulbs in Oman.

The authority has recognised the need to consider a comprehensive approach to raising energy efficiency and sustainability in the Omani market and reached an agreement with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals to conduct a comprehensive

study on phasing out energy inefficient lamps in the sultanate in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

The authority has commissioned Three Pillars Consulting to conduct a study on phasing out inefficient lights in Oman in partnership with Econoler. The study will put forward a recommended national policy and programme to be submitted to the Ministry of Energy and Minerals for approval.

APSR recently organised a



workshop for companies engaged in manufacturing, distribution and sale of lamps and lights in the sultanate on the efficient use of energy and the ap-

plication of new technologies in the lighting sector. It will hold another virtual workshop on lighting technologies on Wednesday. The workshop will include a

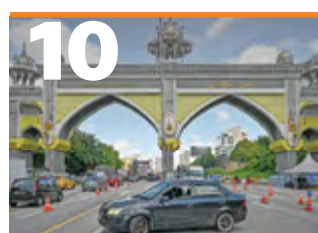
presentation on the current lighting market and an interactive session on the policies that are being considered to phase out inefficient lights and improve energy efficiency.

APSR appointed Three Pillars Consulting in February this year to study international best practices and the readiness of the Omani market to formulate a national policy to phase out inefficient lights, laying down the necessary regulations that would fully or partially restrict the manufacture, import or sale

of such inefficient lamps in Oman and adopt an optimal programme to implement the policy.

The consultant is expected to provide options of phasing-out programmes in line with international and regional best practices as well as the findings on market readiness and Oman's legal framework.

The overall programme is likely to include a comprehensive design consisting of a detailed timeline to phase out inefficient lights.



Southeast Asia battles COVID-19 pandemic



Vaishali Jesrani picked for ICC programme

ASMED calls on Omanis for incubation programme



(Supplied photo)

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Authority for SME Development (ASMED) has started receiving applications for an incubation programme in its efforts to support innovative projects and prepare a generation of entrepreneurs to promote the small and medium enterprises (SME) sector.

The authority will receive applications from entrepreneurs wishing to benefit from the incubation programme in the governorates of Muscat (at the authority's building in Ghala), Al Wusta (Duqm), and Dhofar (the authority's branch in Salalah).

The incubation programme will provide resources and serv-

ices needed to establish and develop project, build programmes designed to support creative ideas and emerging projects, and innovate and diversify activities to support the national economy.

The authority's conditions to benefit from the incubation programme include the applicant clearing an interview with ASMED's selection committee, and the owner of the enterprise or one of the partners being an Omani managing the project full-time.

The authority also stated that the number of employees in the enterprise must not exceed four, including the applicant who should not be an owner of an establishment or a partner in another company. Additionally, the

applicant should not be a beneficiary or have previously obtained benefit from any incubator of any other government agency.

'The employer must adhere to the incubator's training and orientation programme, if accepted,' an ASMED statement said.

The deadline for submission of applications is June 30. For more information, e-mail incubators@sme.gov.om

Credit report for emergency loan not a prerequisite

ASMED also confirmed that it has discontinued submission of credit report - Mala'a - as a prerequisite for emergency loan applications.

Applicants for emergency loans can attach the Mala'a if it is available and it may be requested at a later stage from the beneficiary according to the requirements and mechanisms of evaluation. Owners of SMEs holding an entrepreneurial card can also apply for an emergency loan.

The total number of SMEs registered with ASMED till the end of April 2021 stood at 52,524, compared to 44,139 in April last year, an increase of 19 per cent.

The Governorate of Muscat topped the list with 17,692 of the total registered SMEs, followed by North Batinah (8,310), Dakhliyah (6,554), and Dhofar (4,388).



(Supplied photo)

Pact signed to boost SQH Salalah's oxygen capacity

Our Correspondent Muscat

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

The agreement was signed by H E Dr Fatma bint Mohammed al Ajmi, MoH's Undersecretary for Administrative, Financial and Planning Affairs, Abul-Amir Abdul-Hussein al Ajmi, PDO's

We are delighted to sign this joint agreement to fund several projects of MoH in Salalah

ABUL-AMIR AL AJMI

external affairs and value creation director, and Yasser al Baraami, CEO of Mubbadarah on behalf of Gulf Energy Company.

At the signing ceremony, H E Dr Fatma stressed the impor-

ance of partnerships between government and private sectors in the sultanate in the interest of the public, and praised the initiative of the two companies that will contribute to enhancing health services.

"We are delighted to sign this joint agreement to fund several projects of MoH in SQH Salalah," Ajmi said. "PDO would like to thank Gulf Energy Company for its contribution to such health projects."

Baraami stressed that Gulf Energy's contribution is part of its social responsibility.

MoH suspends doctor for death of a patient

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has suspended a doctor following an enquiry into the death of a citizen named Munira al Maqbaliya.

The ministry stated that it continues to conduct necessary investigation to identify circumstances under which the patient died. It noted that the doctor in this particular case has been suspended from practising until investigation is completed by the

concerned authorities.

'We stress extreme commitment to safety in medical practice in both government and private sectors. Any compromise on professional standards will not be tolerated,' MoH stated.

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32,172 Grade 12 students and teaching staff vaccinated: MoH

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As many as 32,172 Grade 12 students and teaching staff, from both private as well as government schools, have been vaccinated against COVID-19 so far, according to the Ministry of Health (MoH). This has resulted in coverage of 43 per cent of the target group.

The MoH and the Ministry of Education (MoE) are running a two-week campaign to vaccinate General Education Diploma students and teaching staff in all the governorates that began on May 26.

According to MoH statistics, the largest number of doses has been administered in the Governorate of Muscat, with 7,915 people vaccinated that covers 47 per cent of the target group. This is followed by North Batinah with 5,418 doses covering 39 per cent, and 4,613 people in Dakhliyah or 44 per cent of the target group.

Earlier, the MoH had said that in all 75,730 people will be vaccinated in this drive. The target group includes students of General Education Diploma of public and private schools, students of Islamic science institutes, special education schools, and other public education institutions.

This immunisation drive also includes the teaching staff supervising the General Education



It is indicated that no student will be denied entry to the exams, whether or not he/she takes the vaccine

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Diploma exams, members of examination committees, observers, correctors, and workers in examination centres.

The MoE confirmed that the vaccination of students is optional. 'It is indicated that no student will be denied entry to these exams, whether or not he/she takes the vaccine.'

However, MoE stressed the importance of taking the vaccine

in order to preserve the health and safety of students, and confirmed that all countries may require immunisation against coronavirus for students aiming to study abroad.

Daily case count crosses 1,000 again

MoH reported 1,047 new cases of COVID-19 and 11 related deaths on Tuesday. With this, the

total number of cases registered in the sultanate is 218,271 and deaths 2,356.

The total number of COVID-19 patients who recovered is 200,421, accounting for a recovery rate of 91.8 per cent.

Ninety-seven people were admitted to hospitals on Tuesday in a 24-hour period taking the total number of inpatients to 802, including 257 in intensive care.



Philippines extends ban on entry from Oman to June 15

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Philippines has extended the entry ban on both their nationals and non-Filipino passengers travelling from several countries including Oman till June 15. The other countries are India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and the United Arab Emirates.

Speaking about the issue, a senior official from the Embassy of Philippines in Oman said, "This decision has been taken by the government as part of the measures to stop the spread of the virus in the Philippines."

"However, the rule states that passengers who have transited through these countries within 14-days before the arrival in the Philippines (those who have not left the respective airports) will be allowed to enter the country.

Such passengers will also not undergo mandatory 14-day facility based quarantine," the official said.

The restriction was to end on May 31, but the further extension of it has effected several Filipinos in Oman.

Many have not been home for several months and anxiety has risen up among the community.

Hamad Wahabi, whose company has several Filipino staff, said that many of his staff have not been home for several months. He was planning to issue their tickets from June onwards but he needs to wait.

"Many of my staff are definitely sad. They have not been home to their loved ones for over two years now; and I too am saddened. However they understand the situation and are being patient. Hopefully, the restriction will not extend beyond June 15," he added.

BUS DRIVERS HONOURED FOR SUPPORTING MOH



Mwasalat honoured a group of bus drivers on Tuesday who volunteered to transport people to support the Ministry of Health's (MoH) operations during the pandemic. Around 7,500 passengers were transported on more than 500 buses, from Muscat International Airport to institutional isolation facilities and finally to their homes across Oman (Supplied photo)

Pact signed to boost investment in entrepreneurial development

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Oman Technology Fund (OTF) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with AWJ Innovation - Sustainable Technologies and Innovation Development, on Tuesday with the aim of investing in the outcomes of the entrepreneurial development in frontier technology programme (.nxt), by providing potential training and employment opportunities.

The OTF is also aiming at creating potential investment opportunities to support feasible projects and entrepreneurial ideas within the fund's investments in the fields of technology and innovation.

The MoU signed by Ismail bin Ibrahim al Harthy, acting CEO of OTF, and Eng Humoud bin Sloum al Shukeiry, vice president of projects and operations at AWJ Innovation, is an agreement for two years to begin with that can be extended in future.

Eng Shukeiry explained that the third phase of the .nxt programme comes as an intensive virtual practical training bootcamp for a period of five weeks, which is dedicated to developing 100 young Omani entrepreneurs and startups.



At the end of this stage, he said participants were expected to develop the skills necessary for entrepreneurship through learning experience based on training workshops, interaction with mentors and successful pioneers in startups and entrepreneurship, forming teams, as well as innovating in their companies' ideas and working to turn ideas into reality.

The entrepreneurial development in frontier technology programme has been divided into three progressive phases spread over a period of nine months. It began in October last year and is scheduled to end in July this year.

The first phase which was held from October to December had 1,200 participants, who received training in emerging technologies.

The second phase held from January to May included 700 participants, during which they chose one specialised path and went deep into it to obtain a specialised certificate in those selected skills and techniques.

They also attended ten different virtual live courses in entrepreneurial and soft skills conducted by local and international experts in addition to the constant mentoring by the company and global partners.

The third phase, which is beginning in June, will run until July and have 100 participants for a project application bootcamp. During this phase, the participants will be divided into teams and made to work on entrepreneurial ideas and apply them on the ground with the guidance of the local and global mentors.

OCCI announces exemption of renewal fees for members

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has announced the extension of the period to exempt members from paying the membership renewal

fees, considering the challenges faced by business owners.

The OCCI Board of Directors held its third meeting on Tuesday at the OCCI headquarters. The meeting was chaired by Eng Redha bin Juma al Saleh, chairman of the Board of Directors, in

the presence of the members of the board, and a number of representatives of the executive body of the chamber.

The OCCI said that as per the procedures and systems of the chamber, the members will be exempted from renewal fees for

one year only in the third and fourth categories by 50 per cent and other categories by 25 per cent, starting from July 1.

It confirmed that the exemptions reached RO7mn in 2020 and will be around RO6.5mn until the end of 2021.

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MoE's virtual forum on blended education begins

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The first virtual educational forum titled 'Toward A Sustainable Blended Education: Reality, Empowerment, and Ambition' kicked off on Tuesday morning on the Microsoft Teams platform under the patronage of H E Majid bin Said al Bahri, Undersecretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs in the Ministry of Education (MoE).

H E Prof Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambosaidi, Undersecretary for Education, attended the opening session of the forum with a number of directors general at the ministry and with large participation from different groups in the educational field.

The forum includes six discussion sessions on the course of two consecutive days covering four different topics - 'Effective implementation of simultaneous lessons', 'Effective implementation of the integration between simultaneous and asynchronous classes', 'Effective application of electronic evaluation methods', and 'Production and application of interactive lessons in educational platforms'.

This virtual forum comes with the aim of highlighting the efforts and the 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.



H E Prof Dr Ambosaidi



Dr Maymouna al Abriya

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 in the educational process.

H E Prof Dr Ambosaidi 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. This forum came to highlight and honour the special efforts and initiatives of the teachers, and to



H E Majid al Bahri



Tariq Medhat

strengthen teachers to provide the best, in addition to motivating other teachers to take the initiative, and make use of these experiences."

Dr Maymouna bint Hamid al Abriya, director of Education Technologies Department at the Directorate General for Curriculum Development, and head of the Technical Committee of the forum, gave a presentation in which she explained 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), to define the objectives of the forum.

A total of 22 initiatives were

qualified for blended and distance education, which are the initiatives participating in the 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.

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 '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'. The first one was titled 'Interactive activities for the musical skills curriculum', the second was titled 'Smart assessment form for the musical skills course for grades 11-12 in blended education'; the third was 'Question and answer in plastic arts for grades 11 and 12', and the fourth was titled 'With my ideas I make change'.

British Council launches global climate campaign

Muscat - The British Council on Tuesday announced the launch of a new global campaign to address the climate emergency in the lead up to the COP26 summit in November.

The Climate Connection campaign will bring together people from around the world to share their ideas and perspectives on climate change, and to look for solutions using education, art and culture, and science.

It will offer global conversations, art and science showcases, university scholarships, funding, research, and training opportunities.

The UK will host the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow, Scotland from November 1 to 12. The British Council is supporting the UK government's ambition for COP26 to be the most inclusive ever by using its global networks to inspire millions of people around the world to take action against climate change.

A British Council survey of almost 40,000 young people aged 18-34 across 36 countries, including the G20 countries, found that climate change is perceived by them to be the most important issue facing the world today.

The Climate Connection, which launches in the week lead-



ing to World Environment Day on June 5 and runs until the COP26 summit in November, includes the following initiatives:

► 17 Creative Commissions bringing together people from the UK and 28 countries to explore climate change through art, science and digital technology. These creative projects address issues such as climate migration, plastic pollution, coastal erosion, deforestation, biodiversity, landscape, air pollution, wildfire and melting glaciers.

► Green Careers, supporting young people to build successful careers that help the planet, through advice on education opportunities and routes into green jobs.

► On June 3 the British Council will host The Climate Connection: Conversation for Change, a free online event exploring the climate emergency. Speakers include COP26 president, Alok Sharma, and author and activist, Neil Gaiman.

Helen Mehta, British Council country director for Oman, said, "Oman has a long history and track record of environmental conservation and pollution control measures to protect biodiversity, land, air quality, and water resources. As the country has consciously ensured that economic development does not happen at the expense of the environment, we hope to bring awareness through the Climate Connection campaign."

Dhofar Municipality shuts down eight restaurants

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dhofar Municipality has closed eight restaurants for violating health standards in the wilayat of Salalah.

In a statement, Dhofar Municipality said, 'The municipality

runs several campaigns to inspect restaurants and food stores in order to ensure the safety of consumers. The inspection team, in coordination with the Department of Health Affairs, monitored a number of vi-

olations in some restaurants.'

The team warned 23 restaurants, fined 13 of them, and closed eight. The municipality urges the owners of restaurants and shops to adhere to health requirements and cooperate with inspection teams.

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Salalah Mills plans major food industries project at Khazaen

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its strategy to expand into various food and related industries and diversify the sources of income, Salalah Mills Company has announced that it will set up a major food industries project at Khazaen Economic City in Barka.

"In the implementation of company's strategy to expand the establishment of flour-based food industries, Salalah Mills is pleased to disclose the new project for food industries center at Khazaen Economic City, on an area of 20,000 sqm," Ahmed Alawi al Dhahab, chief executive officer of Salalah Mills, said in a disclosure submitted to the Muscat Stock Exchange on Tuesday.

Salalah Mills' project at Khazaen Economic City, Dhahab said, will include an industrial bakery and production lines for frozen and semi-cooked pastries in the first phase. The production lines for frozen cakes, snacks, noodles and biscuits will be added during the second phase of the project, he said.

The initial cost of this project is estimated to be in the range of RO10-12mn, according to the company's disclosure.

Dhahab said Salalah Mills will sign an agreement with Khazaen Economic City in the coming weeks for the allotment of a land.

Being developed in Barka, Khazaen is the new integrated economic city which will be the home to Oman's first dry port.



Providing more details about the proposed project for food industries center at Khazaen, Salalah Mills Company's CEO said, "It is expected that the production will start at the end of 2022. The project will be financed by commercial loans. As per the study, the project is expected to make profit from the second year of its operations. The projected internal rate of return is 18 per cent." According to the disclosure, Salalah Mills has plans to expand in the fields of grains trading and storage during the years between 2022-2025.

The company also plans manufacturing of flour blends and improvers, vitamins and minerals for bakeries, flour mills and fodder factories. The company's future plans also include producing starch, fish and pet feed and manufacturing of flexible packaging films, bags, and producing grass capsules.

Moreover, Salalah Mills said its management is studying to enter into partnerships for the production of plastic medical supplies.

Capacity expansion

Salalah Mills owns a flour factory with a production capacity of 1,500 tonnes per day and a macaroni factory with a capacity of 432 tonnes per day in Salalah.

Its subsidiary Salalah International Plastic Industries Factory has a capacity to produce 250,000 bags per day. The production capacity will rise to 350,000 bags per day after adding the second new expansion by the end of next year, Salalah Mills said in its disclosure.

The company said that the trail production at its new Salalah factory for concentrated animal feed will start at the end of this month with a production capacity of 240 tonnes per day.

In the context of diversifying sources of revenues, Salalah Laboratories Company SPC was also established to provide physical and chemical analysis services for grains and foodstuffs products, and it will start functioning this year, Salalah Mills Company added.

OPEC+ agrees to continue planned oil output increases

London, UK - The OPEC group of oil-producing countries and its allies agreed on Tuesday to maintain their planned production increases, as pandemic-hit demand for crude recovers.

The 23-nation OPEC+ alliance implemented sharp output cuts to support prices after the coronavirus pandemic crushed the global economy last year.

But since early May the cartel has started implementing more generous production increases as oil prices have recovered and the health situation improves in developed economies.

At the end of a short meeting on Tuesday which lasted barely half an hour, the group agreed to continue rises up until July adding up to 1.2mn barrels per day (bpd).

However, the alliance took no decision on what policy to follow from August onwards, and did not discuss the possibility of Iranian oil returning to the market in the coming months.

OPEC secretary general Mohammad Barkindo said Monday that the alliance's policy contin-



ues to be a reliable and crucial tool for oil market stability.

Among OPEC's allies, Russia has been pushing for faster rises in output but traditional OPEC kingpin Saudi Arabia supports a much more cautious approach, pointing to the surge of coronavirus infections in parts of Asia. Riyadh's caution comes after markets have been shaken by a vicious third wave of the virus that has swept through India, the world's third-biggest consumer of crude after the US and China. Several other Asian countries have also had to adopt virus-related restrictions, representing a brake on demand.

OPEC has remained optimistic in its predictions for 2021,

expecting demand to reach 96.5mn bpd, an increase of 6mn bpd on 2020 levels.

This, combined with OPEC's previous policy of production restraints, means analysts expect the market to tighten sufficiently by August for demand to start outstripping supply.

This has been reflected in recent movements in crude prices. World oil prices rose sharply as OPEC+ met, with the US WTI crude trading above US\$68 a barrel - levels unseen since October 2018. After facilities in war-torn Libya began producing again from the end of 2020, eventually adding 1mn bpd to the market, all eyes will be on Iran.

If negotiations in Vienna on the full revival of the 2015 nuclear deal are successful, it could lead to many economic sanctions on the Islamic republic being lifted, including the US embargo on Iranian oil exports.

If Iran were able to get back to its level of exports three years ago it could mean an extra 1.5mn bpd coming to the market.

AFP

CBO issues RO90mn treasury bills

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A tender of the government treasury bills (issue number 119) was announced this week by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

Total value of allotted treasury bills amounted to RO90mn, for a maturity period of 28 days, from June 2 until June 30.

Average accepted price reached RO99.950 for every

RO100 bill, and minimum accepted price also arrived at RO99.950.

Average discount rate and average yield reached 0.6517 per cent and 0.6521 per cent, respectively.

Interest rate on the repo operations with CBO is 0.5 per cent, while discount rate on the treasury bills discounting facility with the central bank is 0.75 per cent. Treasury bills are short-term

highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance.

This instrument provides licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds.

The Central Bank of Oman acts as the issue manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (repo).

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

China Petroleum Pipeline Engineering Company Limited Oman Branch (CPP), as an EPC Contractor, invites companies to participate in the following tender:

Estimated Scope Description	Tender Documents Fee
CIVIL WORK-FIRST BATCH, the main works including: 1. Platform foundations; 2. Skid/Pump foundations; 3. Pipe Sleepers in Area 711,712,713,740; 4. Pipe Supports in Area 711,712,713,740; 5. Traffic sign foundations; 6. Road guard rail foundations; 7. Street light foundation (not including the cliff road); 8. Instrument/telecom support foundations; And etc.	Free

Legal entities, domestic Omani and foreign companies who meet the following minimum qualification criteria are eligible to quote in Tender:

- Priority to Oman local companies, or local agent appointed by foreign companies,
- Capability to submit a performance bond of ten percent of total value.
- Complying with the CPP's project execution schedule.
- ISO 14001 and OHSAS18001 in valid period are mandatory.
- Having direct experience of similar jobs in the last five years.
- Agree to complete the further prequalification undertaken by CPP.

All interested bidders shall submit a written application letter printed on Bidder's letter head signed by the Bidder's authorized Person to cppomanecd@cppmde.com over a period before **8th June, 2021** stating the following details: Full name of Bidder, phone number, e-mail address, contact person, tender name and tender title. Any application received after **8th June, 2021** shall not be entertained.

The ITB documents will be issued via email by CPP later. The bidders shall bear all cost arising from or incidental to the preparation, clarification, finalization and delivery of their bid proposal.

CPP is not obliged to accept the bid with least prices or any other bids. CPP reserves the right to accept or reject any bid, and to annul the bidding process and reject all bids, at any time prior to award of contract, without thereby incurring any liability to the affected bidder or bidders or; any obligations to inform the affected bidder or bidders of the ground for the CPP's action.

Send your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

China Petroleum Pipeline Engineering Company Limited Oman Branch (CPP), as an EPC Contractor, invites companies to participate in the following tender:

Estimated Scope Description	Tender Documents Fee
CIVIL WORK-SECOND BATCH, the main works including: 1. Pond (210-SU-001); 2. Sumps; 3. Retention pond (Administration Area); 4. Pull pits and neutralization pits; 5. OWS/PCSW buried pipe excavation & filling; 6. Sanitary sewer buried pipe excavation & filling; 7. Storm water manhole works; 8. Manhole-OWS & PCSW; 9. Manhole-sanitary sewage; And etc.	Free

Legal entities, domestic Omani and foreign companies who meet the following minimum qualification criteria are eligible to quote in Tender:

- Priority to Oman local companies, or local agent appointed by foreign companies,
- Capability to submit a performance bond of ten percent of total value.
- Complying with the CPP's project execution schedule.
- ISO 14001 and OHSAS18001 in valid period are mandatory.
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MSX jumps 1% as oil prices rise

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) jumped by 1.07 per cent on Tuesday and closed at 3,893.92 points. The upward trend at the MSX continued for third consecutive day as oil prices recorded sharp gains on Tuesday.

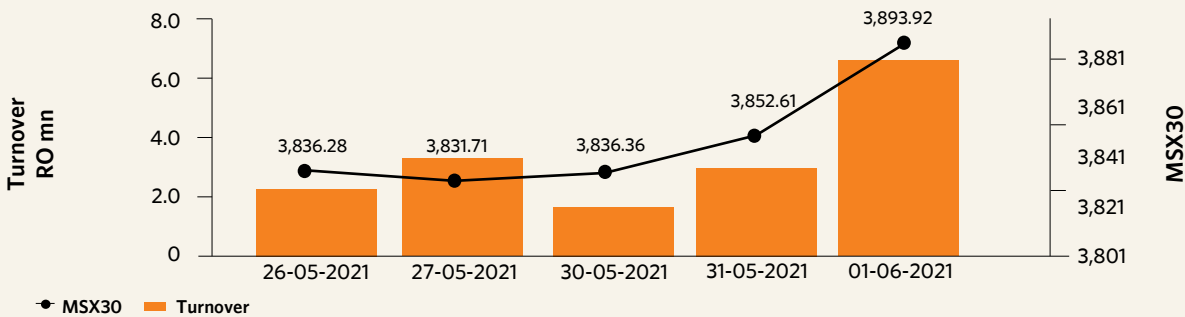
All the sectoral indices closed in green territory on Tuesday led by Financial Index which surged by 1.45 per cent. Industrial Index rose 0.58 per cent while Services Index jumped 0.77 per cent. The MSX Sharia Index increased 0.89 per cent to close at 562.46 points for the day.

Trading activity sharply increased on Tuesday as volumes nearly tripled to 37.4mn shares compared with 12.8mn shares traded on Monday. Market turnover also jumped by more than 115 per cent to RO6.74mn compared with RO3.13mn recorded in the previous trading session.



Market breadth at the MSX remained highly positive with 26 advancing stocks to just three decliners. As many as 17 traded stocks remained flat for the day. Top gainers for the day were Sharqiah Desalination (8.7 per cent), Muscat Finance (6.67 per cent), Galfar Engineering and Contracting (6.25 per cent) and Al Jazeera Steel (4.64 per cent). The three losers were National Detergent (-5.95 per cent), Majan College (-3.33 per cent) and National Gas (-0.68 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Nestle eyes new strategy as leaked file show many products unhealthy

Zurich, Switzerland – Global food giant Nestle said Monday it was developing a new nutrition strategy after the *Financial Times* reported on an internal document showing that most of its food and drinks were unhealthy.

An internal presentation circulated among top executives earlier this year had revealed that more than 60 per cent of Nestle's mainstream food and drinks portfolio did not meet 'recognised definition of health', the British business daily reported.

The presentation, seen by the *FT*, revealed that only 37 per cent of Nestle's food and beverages by revenues (not including products like pet food, baby food and specialised medical nutrition) achieved a rating of over 3.5 under Australia's five-star health rating system.

Nestle, owner of everything from chocolate to coffee and



baby food brands, has for several years been reorganising its activities to focus more on health and wellness as consumers increasingly snub frozen pizzas and sugary drinks.

The Swiss company has among other things been making a major push in vegetarian and vegan products.

'We have made significant

improvements to our products,' the Nestle presentation said, according to the *FT*.

But, it added, 'our portfolio still underperforms against external definitions of health in a landscape where regulatory pressure and consumer demands are skyrocketing.'

A Nestle spokeswoman told AFP the company was currently

"working on a company-wide project to update its pioneering nutrition and health strategy."

"We are looking at our entire portfolio across the different phases of people's lives to ensure our products are helping meet their nutritional needs and supporting a balanced diet," she said

The initial focus, she added, would be on "assessing the part (of) our food and beverage portfolio that can be measured against external nutrition profiling systems, like the Australian system".

According to the *FT*, Nestle is aiming to unveil its new strategy this year.

Quoting an unnamed person familiar with the situation, the paper suggested the company might drop products pushing down its health ratings such as confectionery items.

AFP

Omantel wins award for best digital leadership in GCC

Muscat – Recognizing 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, *Capital Finance International* magazine has conferred Omantel with the Best Digital Transformation Leadership (GCC) Award, 2021.

Omantel said this award further emphasises its position as the market leader that puts the country first.

Omantel has driven Oman to be among a host of GCC states at the vanguard of 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, Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other frontier technologies, the company said in a press release.

The award categorically recognises the efforts of Omantel as it rose from just being a telecom company 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 roll out 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 300,000 in early 2020 to 1mn by the end of the year, attracted by its ease of use and excellent service delivery through improved user experience, intuitive design and AI.

Talal bin Said al Mamari, CEO of Omantel said, "The award is a boost for us to fast track our future plans that will continue to revolutionise the way Omani society functions. Our timely network upgrades coupled with the 5G roll out 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."

EU to launch virus recovery plan

Brussels, Belgium – EU countries will be able to launch the bloc's coronavirus recovery plan in June after all 27 members approved the scheme, the European Council announced Monday.

"The European Union is now able to obtain the necessary funding for the European social and economic recovery," said Antonio Costa, the prime minister of Portugal, which currently chairs the Council.

The Commission will now be able to go to the capital markets and borrow the money to finance the plan in the name of the EU members.

The EU's landmark 750bn-euro (US\$910bn) recovery plan, known as Next Generation EU, was drawn up in July 2020.

But it needed the green light

from all 27 member states before the Commission could borrow in the name of the bloc.

The landmark fund for the first time creates a pool of common debt – shared between EU members, to lower borrowing costs for weaker members – a move that was long opposed by 'frugal' northern states.

"The governments and national parliaments of the EU 27 have shown a strong sense of solidarity and responsibility," Costa said.

"We cannot afford to waste more time," he added. "We must ensure the swift approval of the first recovery and resilience plans by the end of June."

Clement Beaune, France's minister for European affairs, told Les Echos newspaper that the EU

would start approaching major international and European banks from Tuesday.

The parliaments of Austria and Poland were the last to approve the common debt mechanism on Thursday.

Spain and Italy, both hit hard by the coronavirus, will be the main beneficiaries of the fund, each receiving nearly 70bn euros.

The money is due to go towards major infrastructure work and environmental projects such as developing the network of recharging stations for electric vehicles.

Money has also been set aside to improve high-speed telecommunications and data storage facilities.

AFP

'Lebanon's economic crisis among world's worst since 1850s'

Beirut, Lebanon – Lebanon's economic collapse is likely to rank among the world's worst financial crises since the mid-19th century, the World Bank said in a damning report released Tuesday.

The report predicts that Lebanon's economy will shrink by close to 10 per cent in 2021 and stresses there is 'no clear turning point in the horizon'.

Lebanon defaulted on its debt last year, the currency lost around 85 per cent of its value and poverty is devastating a country once seen as a beacon of prosperity in the region.

'The economic and financial crisis is likely to rank in the top ten, possibly top three, most severe crisis episodes globally since the mid-nineteenth century,' the report said.

The latest World Bank Lebanon Economic Monitor report, entitled 'Lebanon Sinking: To the Top 3', said such brutal economic collapses are usually the result of war.

The complete meltdown of Lebanon's economy during the past 18 months is widely blamed



An aerial view shows Beirut port on May 27, 2021, with the grain silos in the foreground, damaged in a massive explosion on August 4 last year, which killed more than 200 people and injured scores of others (AFP)

on corruption and mismanagement by the country's hereditary political elite.

'Policy responses by Lebanon's leadership to these

challenges have been highly inadequate,' the report said.

Lebanon's ruling class has failed to act on the country's worst emergency in a genera-

tion, which was compounded by the coronavirus pandemic and a devastating explosion at Beirut port last August.

'The increasingly dire socio-

economic conditions risk systemic national failings with regional and potentially global effects,' the World Bank said.

The International Monetary

Fund has offered assistance but the country's political barons have failed to even form a government that could deliver the reforms on which foreign aid is conditioned.

'Social unrest'

'Subject to extraordinarily high uncertainty, real GDP is projected to contract by a further 9.5 per cent in 2021,' said the World Bank, dashing any hopes of a quick recovery.

According to the monetary institution, the economy contracted by 6.7 per cent in 2019 and 20.3 per cent in 2020.

The solutions the Lebanese authorities have so far opted for to ease the financial crisis have placed much of the burden on small depositors.

The report warned of 'potential triggers to social unrest' in a country with a history of conflict and instability.

'The increasingly dire socio-economic conditions risk systemic national failings with regional and potentially global effects,' it said.

The bankrupt state is unable

to settle many of its bills and Lebanon's own energy minister, Raymond Ghajar, has warned that electricity supply was becoming critical and that the country could be plunged into total darkness by June's end.

'The sharp deterioration in basic services would have long-term implications: mass migration, loss of learning, poor health outcomes, lack of adequate safety nets, among others,' the report said.

'Permanent damage to human capital would be very hard to recover,' said the World Bank Lebanon Economic Monitor, whose previous report was entitled 'The Deliberate Depression'.

'Perhaps this dimension of the Lebanese crisis makes the Lebanon episode unique compared to other global crises,' it said.

Some teachers in Lebanon are now earning the equivalent of less than US\$200 monthly, doctors are increasingly looking for work abroad and many students can no longer afford university tuition.

AFP



NBO's digital services to enrich MoD's fund

Marking another milestone in its digital leadership, National Bank of Oman (NBO) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) 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 Vision 2040 and its digital transformation.

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 co-

operation 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 in an easy and convenient manner, 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 fea-

tures, 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 the 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.

Bank Muscat extends strong support to COMEX



In line with its role in strengthening national development and digitalisation of the economy, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider is strongly supporting and participating in the currently ongoing COMEX 2021 Expo, which will run till June 8.

COMEX is the largest Technology, Communications, Innovation and Digital Transformation show in the sultanate and offers exhibitors and visitors a comprehensive and highly specialised platform for industry leading discussions, knowledge-sharing and B2B meetings. In 2021, COMEX is celebrating its 30th anniversary with a Virtual Expo, which showcases a number of digital innovations across Fintech and Banking, Augmented and Virtual Reality, Robotics, Drones, Smart Homes and Cybersecurity.

There will be a series of events taking place during the exhibition. This year's digital forums include e-Oman; an International Conference on Artificial Intelligence (AI); Consumer Tech & Smart Shoppers;

COMEX Experiential; Business Arena; the COMEX Awards for Excellence in Technology; COMEX ICT SME & App Show; and the COMEX Tech Club.

Bank Muscat has a strong presence in the Banking & Fintech Zone highlighting its strong digitalisation and its "best in class" financial products, services and solutions. Visitors to the exhibition have the opportunity to easily view the bank's stall and interact with its representatives through video calls or live chat.

Amjad al Lawati, assistant general manager - Cards and eBanking, Bank Muscat, made a presentation during the Expo on "Reimagining Banking" and the rapid technological changes happening in the banking and financial services sector.

Bank Muscat's continuously upgraded Internet and mobile banking services, which are in line with the government's e-payment goals and the Oman Vision 2040, give its customers a fast, comfortable and secure banking experience.

Today, many retail banking

customers are using features like real-time bill payments for utilities in Oman, fund transfers within the bank and in Oman, fund transfers across the world via the SWIFT network; speed transfers to a number of countries including India, the Philippines, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh; Zakat calculator and charity payments.

Bill payment facility is available for a variety of utility services such as electricity, water, telecom, mobile top ups, instant credit card bill payments, school payments, etc. Internet banking and the mBanking app also allow customers to disable or enable their debit card for international usage adding an extra layer of security for the benefit of customers.

A large number of the bank's corporate customers are also using digital banking options like bulk payments to make salary and vendor payments through Corporate Internet Banking or the state-of-the-art B2B Connect Solution without the need to visit a branch.



Vivo debuts 'To Beautiful Moments' campaign for Euro '20

As the official smartphone of UEFA Euro 2020, vivo wants football fans everywhere to enjoy every beautiful moment during the tournament. With a passion for providing incredible experiences to its users, the brand is channeling its sponsorship platform to help enrich the joys around the game, whether they take place on or off the phone.

In its "To Beautiful Moments" campaign debuting on Tuesday, vivo encourages people to be in the moment, whether that means connecting virtually with friends, family and fellow fans or giving their full attention to the beautiful game, even if it means putting the phone down.

"People around the world have been eagerly awaiting this tournament. Now more than ever, we want to celebrate the spirit and sportsmanship of the game and help fans get the most out of the experience," said Spark Ni, senior vice president and CMO of vivo.

"We strive not only to help people capture and share life's magical moments, but to make every moment in life more magical."

The new advertising campaign will roll out, airing on television in Europe, the Middle East, Southeast Asia and China, and around the world on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. The

creative shows fans enjoying, capturing and sharing beautiful moments before, after and in-between matches, while sending the message, "give your phone a break, and be there for life's beautiful moments".

Through its partnership with UEFA, vivo looks to connect with and expand its widening user-base of over 400mn people worldwide.

"As we rapidly expand our global business, it is incredibly important for us to connect with people through the beautiful moments in life that they care about most," said Spark Ni. "vivo is incredibly proud to partner with UEFA to engage with football fans across the world as we're a brand deeply connected to and invested in the like-minded passions and interests of our users."

Vivo is the first-ever presenting partner of the opening and closing ceremonies taking place on June 11 and July 11 respectively, where the brand has worked with UEFA to create a memorable experience for the millions of viewers around the world who will watch the tournament unfold.

While spectators will return to stadiums across Europe, capacity restrictions will limit onsite fan experiences and will be varied based on the quarantine policies in respective countries.

Joyalukkas Exchange relocates head office to MBD

Joyalukkas Exchange, one of the leading money exchange houses in the sultanate, has relocated its head office to Fahad Plaza, MBD, next to Muscat Security Market.

The ceremony was inaugurated by the Joyalukkas Group local partner Sheikh Salim Said Hamed al Rawahi.

The event took place in the presence of dignitaries like Joyalukkas Exchange general manager Nixon Baby, Joyalukkas Jewellery general manager Anto Ingnotious, manager operations Ansar Shentharr, other department heads of Joyalukkas Ex-



change and invited officials.

Joyalukkas Group chairman, Joy Alukkas addressed the official delegates over video conferencing and became a part of the inauguration.

He shared the business expansion plans of Oman from 26 to 35 branches in 2021. He was accompanied by Antony Jos, managing director, Joyalukkas Exchange in the video conferencing. He congratulated the Oman Division as well for the overall performance. The event was conducted following all the protocols of COVID-19.

Challenges faced at Nizwa Industrial City explored

A team representing Madayn Research Chair at Sultan Qaboos University and Madayn Industrial Academy organised field visits to a number of factories in Nizwa Industrial City to explore the challenges and obstacles facing the companies and factories, and identify a range of possible solutions.

Headed by Prof Abdullah al Badi, chairman of Madayn Research Chair, the team visited three major companies representing different industries to

identify the obstacles related to water and wastewater treatment as well as the challenges related to energy and its sources.

Mohammed al Ajmi, team member and representative of Madayn Industrial Academy, stated that the visits focused mainly on the sewage plant in Nizwa Industrial City, and the quality of the chemical and organic materials emerging from wastewater of each company that may contradict the specifications of the plant.

During the visits to Nizwa Food Industries, Pragati Glass Gulf and Schlumberger, possible solutions were highlighted to support Madayn in accommodating the additional quantities of wastewater, wastewater treatment methods were underscored, as well as water samples were collected.

The team will also organise visits to Raysut, Sur and Sohar Industrial Cities as part of the visits planned for this year.

The Madayn Research Chair

at Sultan Qaboos University aims at building local research capacity in areas related to industrial cities and free zones through providing quality research and studies in the field of industrial cities and free zones by conducting applied research, academic events, and outreach research activities that directly contribute to the sultanate's social and economic development.

Established in 2019, Madayn Industrial Academy aims at providing training opportunities for

the national cadres to enhance administrative, financial and technical skills and raise their productivity to contribute in providing value adding services to the investors in the industrial cities.

The academy organises a series of programmes that address trending topics and challenges that are observed locally and globally, and thus provides scientific and practical training opportunities to the cadres in order to meet the needs of the industrial sector.



Enjoy Mercedes-Benz GLC 200 Coupé, GLC 300 4Matic



Mercedes-Benz Oman is giving customers a chance to own two of the most coveted models at competitive prices. Choose from the dynamic and elegant Mercedes-Benz GLC 200 Coupé starting at just RO26,995 including VAT or the powerful and striking Mercedes-Benz GLC 300 4Matic, starting at just RO29,995 including VAT valid until June 30.

With outstanding technology, dynamic design, and great off-road capabilities, these spacious

and versatile SUVs fit perfectly in the city, country and everywhere in between.

“As one of our most popular ranges in the sultanate, the Mercedes-Benz GLC takes the lead in terms of technology, comfort, and performance. These particular two models include added exclusivity and function that customers love. So much more than just a family car, they boast all the technological features and hallmarks of comfort that Mercedes-Benz cars are renowned

for,” said Shaun Michael, CEO at Mercedes-Benz Oman. “Additionally, every vehicle is backed up with our Mercedes-Benz aftersales care, ensuring the car can be enjoyed at its very best, now and far into the future.”

Setting benchmarks in the segment in terms of high-class appeal, the Mercedes-Benz GLC 200 Coupé and the Mercedes-Benz GLC 300 4Matic both feature 50.8 cm (20-inch) AMG 5-twin-spoke light-alloy wheels, 9G-Tronic, and state-of-the-art

Active Break Assist for the ultimate comfort and safety.

On the exterior, the vehicles are defined by their SUV capability and bold Mercedes-Benz style. Offering the best of both worlds, the Mercedes-Benz GLC 200 Coupé combines SUV performance and coupé agility, with the latest model sportier and more cutting-edge than ever.

Meanwhile, with outstanding ride comfort, the Mercedes-Benz GLC 300 4Matic boasts turbo power, confident all-wheel drive,

innovative luxuries, advanced safety, and a spacious, sensuous cabin, all wrapped in elegantly athletic style.

The Mercedes-Benz GLC 200 Coupé and Mercedes-Benz GLC 300 4Matic are available for test drives at Mercedes-Benz Oman showrooms now.

To find out more or to book a test drive visit www.shop.mercedes-benz-mena.com/oman/en/ or contact the expert sales team on 80077333.



Sohar International prize scheme makes winning closer

Delivering on its promise and excitement of a winning journey, Sohar International continues to make winning closer to everyone with more than 600 winners till date under its Prize Scheme 2021. With a total of more than RO2,250,000 in cash prizes, a bank-wide approach includes weekly, monthly, half-year, and year-end draws, salary transfer, dedicated branch draws, and special draws on National Day and Omani Women's Day, the saving scheme is designed to maximise the number of winners and promote a healthy savings culture in Oman.

Khalil al Hedaifi, chief retail banking officer said, “Sohar International is proud to widen the scope of the 2021 savings prize scheme to benefit a large number of customers across the sultanate.

We therefore encourage all our customers to continue saving to be rewarded as well through the upcoming Prize Scheme draws including weekly, monthly, half-yearly, and year end prize draws as well as salary transfer, branch draws and special occasions draws.”

Catering to all segment types, the 2021 Prize Scheme offers customers more draws, more chances, and more winners with the introduction of the newly added Salary Transfer Account Draws and beefing up the previous categories with more overall value in cash prizes.

The weekly draws under the scheme provide 10 customers bank-wide chances to win RO500 each and 10 minor accounts to win RO100 each. Under the monthly draws, two winners from the general segment bank wide will receive RO25,000 each; and two winners from the wealth management segment will also receive RO25,000 each.

With the purpose of encouraging a monthly savings habit to secure a better financial future, Sohar | Prize Scheme 2021 consists of Monthly Salary Draws.

CONDOLENCES

Saleh Zakwani
and members of
Apex Media
express their deepest
condolences to
Ayesha Patel
and her family members
on the sad demise of
her father
Shabir Bashir Patel

MAY HIS SOUL REST IN
ETERNAL PEACE

Zubair Corporation appoints new chief corporate services officer

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.

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 Siyabi strongly underlines Z-Corp's strategic objective to empower and encourage highly talented workforce in leadership positions in the private sector. It also emphasises group's commitment to advancing and increasing Omani workforce in top management



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.”

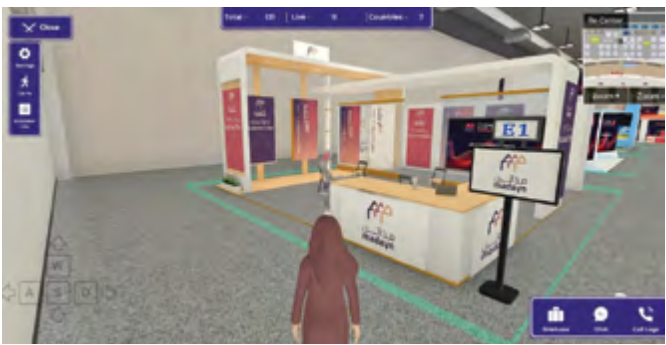
Siyabi said, “It is an honour and a privilege to be appointed to the position of chief corporate services officer in this prestigious organisation. I look forward to working with our talented team as we will continue to drive positive change and transformation across the Z-Corp group.”

Madayn takes part in COMEX

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates – Madayn, represented by the Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM), is taking part at 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 login and virtually communicate with representatives of various local and international bodies, Madayn – a diamond sponsor of COMEX 2021 – is featuring and highlighting the services, incentives and objectives of its tech-

nology 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.

War in Syria killed nearly 500,000

Previous tally, issued by the Observatory in March this year, stood at over 388,000 dead

Beirut, Lebanon - A decade of war in Syria has left nearly half a million people dead, a war monitor said on Tuesday, in a new toll that includes 100,000 recently confirmed deaths.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the conflict has claimed 494,438 lives since it erupted in 2011 with the brutal repression of anti-government protests.

The previous tally, issued by the Observatory in March this year, stood at more than 388,000 dead.

The war monitor has since confirmed an additional 105,015 deaths following months of documentation efforts supported by its network of sources on the ground.

"The overwhelming majority of these deaths occurred between the end of 2012 and November 2015," Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman told AFP, referring to the latest additions.

Of the recently confirmed fatalities, more than 42,000 are civilians, most of them killed under torture in Syrian regime prisons, according to the monitor.

Abdel Rahman said that a lull in the fighting allowed his organisation to investigate reports of deaths that had not been included in the overall tally for lack of documentation.

"It provided us with a window



This file photo shows a villager talking with an Arabic speaking US Army soldier on patrol near the Turkish border in northeastern Syria on May 26 (AFP)

to document tens of thousands of cases for which we lacked evidence," he said.

With government forces having reconquered large swathes of Syria and a ceasefire still holding along the main front line in Idlib region in the northwest, violence

levels are at their lowest since the start of the conflict.

Prison deaths

The new figures published by the Observatory bring the total civilian death toll to 159,774, with attacks by Syrian government

forces and allied militia accounting for the majority of deaths.

The Observatory also documented a total of at least 57,567 deaths in government prisons and detention centres since 2011, up from the 16,000 confirmed deaths it reported in March.

It also reported 168,326 deaths among Syrian soldiers and allied militia, with troops accounting for more than half of the tally.

The conflict has killed 68,393 extremists, most members of the Islamic State group or of organi-

The overwhelming majority of these deaths occurred between the end of 2012 and November 2015

RAMI ABDEL RAHMAN

sations linked to Al Qaeda, as well as 79,844 other rebels.

A deal brokered by Turkey and Russia in March 2020 froze a government offensive on the rebel-controlled Idlib enclave which many feared would have caused human suffering on a scale yet unseen in the conflict.

The attention on both sides has since turned to battling the COVID-19 pandemic and 2020 saw the lowest number of conflict-related deaths since the start of the war with 10,000, according to the Observatory.

Today the Damascus government controls more than two thirds of the country after a string of Russia-backed victories since 2015.

President Bashar Assad, in power since 2000, was re-elected in May for a fourth seven-year term.

The war has forced more than half the country's pre-war population to flee their homes.

AFP

China confirms 1st human case of bird flu

Beijing, China - China reported the world's first human infection of the H10N3 bird flu strain on Tuesday but said the risk of it spreading widely among people was low.

A 41 year old man was admitted to hospital with fever symptoms in the eastern city of Zhenjiang on April 28 and was diagnosed with H10N3 a month later, China's National Health Commission (NHC) said in an online statement. "The risk of large-scale spread is extremely low," the NHC said, adding that the man was in a stable condition and his close contacts had reported no 'abnormalities'.

It described H10N3 as low pathogenic - less likely to cause death or severe illness - in birds.

The NHC said there had been no human cases of H10N3 previously reported in the world.

Several strains of bird flu have been found among animals in China but mass outbreaks in humans are rare. The last human epidemic of bird flu in China occurred in late 2016 to 2017, with the H7N9 virus.

The H7N9 has infected 1,668 people and claimed 616 lives since 2013, according to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization.

AFP



Libya's Foreign Minister Najla al Mangoush at a press meet, joined by her French, German and Italian counterparts, in Tripoli on March 24 (AFP)

Germany to host new round of Libya peace talks on June 23

Berlin, Germany - Germany will host a new set of Libyan peace talks on June 23 in Berlin, with Libya's transitional government due to attend, the Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Tuesday.

"The next steps needed for a sustainable stabilisation of the country will be discussed [at the conference]," said the ministry.

Talks will mainly focus on preparations for national elections planned for December 24 as well as the withdrawal of foreign troops and mercenaries from Libya.

They will also look at the creation of unified security forces for the North African country.

"The conference is an expression of the continued international support for the stabilisation of Libya," said a German ministry spokeswoman. "The international community remains ready to continue its close and constructive support of the UN-led peace process in Libya."

Libya was thrown into a decade of violence following the 2011 overthrow of dictator Moammar Gadhafi.

Berlin hosted the first round of the UN-sponsored talks on January 19, 2020, gathering leaders of warring Libyan sides as well as

the presidents of Russia, Turkey, France and Egypt to bid for peace in the conflict-torn country. At that conference, world leaders committed to ending all foreign meddling in the conflict and to uphold a weapons embargo.

Since then, a formal truce last October has led to the creation of an interim government tasked with unifying Libya's divided institutions, launching reconstruction efforts and preparing for December polls.

But the UN envoy for Libya, Jan Kubis, last month assessed that progress on issues such as the withdrawal of foreign mercenaries and reopening of the road connecting the country's east and west had stalled.

According to the UN, more than 20,000 foreign mercenaries and military personnel are still in Libya. They include Turkish, Russian, Sudanese and Chadian mercenaries.

Unlike the Russian mercenaries who supported the authorities in the east of the country, Turkey says its troops sent to Tripoli were sent under a bilateral agreement with the government, implying that they are not affected by a request for foreign troops to leave.

AFP

Netanyahu opponents grapple to form Cabinet

Jerusalem - Israeli politicians worked against the clock on Tuesday to overcome final hurdles to building a coalition that would end the record rule of right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid, a secular centrist, and religious nationalist Naftali Bennett were locked in talks late into the night on Monday on the terms of a 'change alliance' to unseat the premier ahead of a Wednesday midnight deadline.

'The coalition negotiation team sat all night and made progress toward creating a unity government,' a Bennett spokesman said in a statement.

He said Bennett, who heads the Yamina party, would meet Lapid - leader of the Yesh Atid party - again in the afternoon.

The discussions come as Israel's longest serving premier is on trial on criminal charges of fraud, bribery and breach of trust while in office, accusations he denies.

Former TV anchor Lapid inched closer to success on Sunday when he and tech millionaire Bennett overcame their sharp political differences and publicly agreed to join a 'national unity government' in which both would serve as premier, with Bennett going first.



Protesters take part in a rally in support of the opposition for government formation, in Tel Aviv on Monday (AFP)

Lapid was tasked with forming a government after Netanyahu failed to do so following Israel's fourth inconclusive election in less than two years.

'Compromises'

Efforts to form a new government without Netanyahu have picked up speed after an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire on May 21 halted 11 days of hostilities with Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip.

They have left the 71 year old Prime Minister, who heads the rightwing Likud party, scrambling

to scupper the new alliance against him.

Lawyers for the Likud on Tuesday tried to hobble the emerging coalition by challenging Bennett's right to serve first as prime minister when Lapid was charged with forming the government. But the legal advisor to Israel's president knocked down the challenge.

Netanyahu, in power for 12 straight years after an earlier three-year term, had warned on Sunday of 'a leftwing government dangerous to the state of Israel'.

Lapid said on Monday that obstacles remained to build the diverse coalition necessary to unseat the premier, but encouraged his party to be upbeat.

"That's our first test - to see if we can find smart compromises in the coming days to achieve the greater goal."

Arab Israeli parties?

Lapid (57) is seeking to cobble together an unlikely alliance including Bennett, a supporter of Jewish settlements in the Israel-occupied West Bank, as well as Arab-Israeli lawmakers.

In order to build such an anti-Netanyahu bloc, he must sign individual agreements with seven parties, whose members would then vote in parliament to confirm their coalition.

They include the hawkish New Hope party of Netanyahu's former ally Gideon Saar and rightwing secular nationalist Avigdor Lieberman's pro-settlement Yisrael Beiteinu party.

The centrist Blue and White party of Defence Minister Benny Gantz, the historically powerful centre-left Labour party, and the dovish Meretz party would also join.

But to achieve the required 61 seats in the 120-seat parliament, the emerging alliance still needs the backing of four more lawmakers.

Lapid is counting on parties representing Palestinian citizens of Israel, which have not yet announced their intentions.

Despite the votes stacking up against him, it is too early to count out the wily Netanyahu, political scientist Jonathan Rynhold of Bar Ilan University has said. "It's never done until it's done, particularly because, even if they (the opposition) got by far the best hand, Bibi is the best card player by miles, you can't count him out."

AFP

90% in Ethiopia's Tigray need immediate food aid: UN

Geneva, Switzerland - More than 90 per cent of people in Ethiopia's troubled northern Tigray region need emergency food aid, the United Nations said Tuesday, as it appealed for US\$203mn to scale up its response.

The UN's World Food Programme said it was alarmed at how the conflict had increased already-high levels of hunger in Tigray.

"A total of 5.2mn people, equivalent to 91 per cent of Tigray's population, need emer-



This file photo shows refugee children from Tigray gather to receive food at Sudan's Um Raquba refugee camp on December 12, 2020 (AFP)

gency food assistance due to the conflict," WFP spokesman Tomson Phiri told reporters in Geneva.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, winner of the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize, sent troops into Tigray in November to detain and disarm leaders of the Tigray People's Liberation Front, the region's former ruling party.

He said the move came in response to TPLF attacks on federal army camps.

Though he vowed the con-

flict would be brief, more than six months later fighting continues, reports of atrocities are proliferating, and many leaders are warning of a potential humanitarian catastrophe.

The WFP said it had provided emergency aid to more than a million people since it started distributions in northwestern and southern areas of Tigray in March.

"WFP is alarmed at the impact of conflict on already high levels of hunger," said Phiri.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Malaysia imposes lockdown as Southeast Asia battles surge

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - Malaysia imposed a tough nationwide lockdown on Tuesday to battle a worsening coronavirus outbreak, as countries across Southeast Asia struggled with a resurgence in cases driven by infectious variants.

Much of the region escaped the pandemic's first wave last year relatively unscathed by rapidly closing borders and introducing curbs.

But countries from Thailand to Vietnam are being hampered by fresh surges, with efforts to quell outbreaks hampered by slow vaccine roll-outs and populations weary of restrictions.

Malaysia is among the worst hit. Of almost 2,800 deaths from COVID-19 recorded in the country of 32mn since the start of the pandemic, over 40 per cent were in May alone.

More than 570,000 infections have been reported, with a string of new daily records last week. As well as variants, the outbreak has been fanned by gatherings during the holy month of Ramadan and the Eid al Fitr holiday, often in defiance of coronavirus rules.

Under what authorities have termed a 'total lockdown' in



A driver makes a U-turn to head back after being discovered by the police of travelling without documents at a roadblock during the nationwide lockdown, in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday (AFP)

force from Tuesday, only essential businesses - such as supermarkets and medical clinics - can operate, people can only go outside for necessities, and most schools are closed.

Travel between most parts of the country had already been banned for months.

While there had been growing calls for tougher action, the

two-week lockdown will deal a fresh blow to many businesses that have struggled to stay afloat over the past year.

"The impact of the coronavirus on small businesses like mine is devastating," said Lilian Chua, whose hair salon outside the capital Kuala Lumpur will have to close.

"The government imposes a

lockdown but the virus is in the air - they need to speed up vaccinations," the 42 year old said. About six per cent of Malaysia's population have so far received at least one vaccine dose.

Slow vaccine rollouts

Vietnam was praised for keeping infections low last year, but its cases have more than dou-

bled in the past month, prompting officials to suspend foreign arrivals at some airports and implement social distancing in Ho Chi Minh City. State media also reported that authorities are appealing to private companies to procure jobs for their own workers.

The Health Minister has reportedly had meetings with South Korea's Samsung and LG, as well as various embassies and chambers of commerce, to discuss vaccine supply. Overcrowded prisons have been at the centre of an escalating outbreak in Thailand, which is recording more than 4,000 infections a day.

Affluent Singapore - which had barely seen any local transmission for months - tightened curbs in May following an uptick in cases, with authorities citing concerns about variants.

And the Philippines imposed a fresh lockdown in and around Manila in March as hospitals struggled to cope, although the restrictions have been eased as infections fall. Infection rates have been relatively stable recently in Indonesia, however, which was hit hard last year at the start of the pandemic.

AFP



Students wait at the entrance of a school in Sittwe, the capital of western Rakhine State as Myanmar orders opening of schools on Tuesday (AFP)

Myanmar orders opening of schools; students defy junta

Yangon, Myanmar - Schools in Myanmar will open on Tuesday for the first time since the military seized power, but teachers and students are set to defy the junta's calls for full classrooms in a show of resistance.

Four months of national turmoil have followed the February ouster of civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, with more than 800 people killed by security forces and a nationwide strike crippling the economy.

Public school teachers - dressed in the green and white uniforms mandated by the education ministry - were prominent in the early mass protests, joining railway workers, doctors and civil servants on the streets.

The junta has insisted schools open on Tuesday after a year's absence due to COVID-19, but many educators had already decided they could not return to a job they love.

"I'm not afraid of their arrest and torture," Shwe Nadi, a teacher from the commercial capital Yangon said. Her name has been changed for her safety.

"I'm afraid of becoming a teacher who teaches the students propaganda."

The 28 year old was fired for supporting the civil disobedience movement - one of the thousands of teachers and academics the junta has sacked.

"Of course, I feel bad losing my job because I loved being a teacher. Although it is not well paid, we have our pride for being teachers as others respect us," she said.

Nu May - not her real name - in southern Mon state will also stay away, she told AFP.

The primary school teacher lost months of her salary after joining the nationwide boycott, but said 'my soul is pure' because she participated in the strike.

"When I see how they have killed a lot of people, I feel I don't want to be their teacher any more," she added.

Some of those killed in the junta's crackdown were of primary school age, and charity group Save the Children said the dead include 15 children under the age of 16.

Junta-run media has in recent days carried pictures of functionaries watching school registrations and promising that parents will be 'satisfied' with the return of classes.

Students at a school near the capital Naypyidaw opened a setpiece ceremony to mark the new term by performing a 'National Enrolment Week' song in front of the regime's education minister, according to the *Global New Light of Myanmar* state newspaper.

AFP

Human Rights Watch says Yemen rebels blocking jabs



This file photo shows a health worker receiving a dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine in Yemen's third city of Taiz on 21 April (AFP)

Dubai, UAE - Yemen's Huthi rebels, who control most of the country's north including the capital Sanaa, have been blocking international efforts to supply COVID vaccines, Human Rights Watch said on Tuesday.

The New York-based group accused Huthi leaders of suppressing information about both the dangers of COVID and the prevalence of the disease in territory under their control.

"The deliberate decision of the Huthi authorities to keep the real number of cases of COVID-

19 under wraps and their opposition to vaccines are putting Yemeni lives at risk," said HRW's deputy Middle East director Michael Page. "Pretending COVID-19 does not exist is not a mitigation strategy and will only lead to mass suffering."

"Given the weakened health-care system in Yemen, Huthi authorities should at least ensure transparency so that civilians living in their areas can understand the scale of the pandemic and facilitate an international vaccination plan that

meets the needs on the ground."

Yemen received 360,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine on March 31, the first of 1.9mn doses to be delivered this year through the Covax programme for poorer countries.

However, the rebels' failure to cooperate with the World Health Organization and the Yemeni government has prevented any vaccines from reaching the north, HRW said citing a medical source with 'direct knowledge of the circumstances'. As a result, vaccinations have only been occurring in the government-held south.

HRW quoted Huthi officials as dismissing COVID-19 as a 'conspiracy'. 'America bears the primary responsibility for the COVID-19 epidemic,' it quoted rebel leader Abdul Malik al Huthi, as saying in a televised speech last year.

Since March 2015, the rebels have been fighting a Saudi-led coalition which intervened in support of the government as it teetered on the brink of defeat.

AFP



A file photo of 'Talisman Sabre' joint exercise on June 14, 2005 (AFP)

US, Australia scale back war games

Brisbane, Australia - A major US-Australia joint military exercise will go ahead this year despite pandemic concerns but will be significantly scaled-back, a senior Australian military officer said on Tuesday.

The biannual 'Talisman Sabre' war games - seen as a key symbol of the countries' alliance - will take place in July, but will be roughly half the usual size, as the number of foreign troops entering Australia will be limited. Vice Admiral David Johnston said about 17,000 personnel will take part in the exercise, with 2,000 foreign forces entering Australia and undergoing a 14-day quarantine.

"This year... there will be less foreign forces operating on Australian territory," he told a Senate hearing. "But all of those who will come in onto Australian territory will have had to have gone through quarantine practices."

Australia has largely contained local transmission of the coronavirus and the number of overseas visitors allowed to enter the country has been tightly restricted in the last 18 months. Both Australian and American military officials had been keen to see the exercise go ahead, not least as Australia comes under sustained diplomatic pressure from China.

AFP

China rejects torture allegations by Australian academic

Beijing, China - China on Tuesday denied an Australian academic's claims that he had been tortured in custody during his two-year detention on espionage charges.

The trial of Chinese-born Australian Yang Jun began behind closed doors on Thursday, but the court decided to delay a verdict and a sentence.

The 56 year old, who also goes by his pen name Yang Hengjun, has told supporters he was tortured while at a secret detention site and fears forced confessions may be used against him.

"The first six months... was a

really bad period. They tortured me," Yang said in a message.

But China denied the claim, saying his trial was handled in accordance with Chinese laws and that Yang's legal rights were protected.

"Yang Jun was not arbitrarily detained or tortured to extract a confession," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said at a regular briefing on Tuesday.

"Such practices are expressly prohibited by Chinese law."

Canberra has voiced deep concerns over a lack of transparency after its ambassador was denied access to the hear-



A Chinese police returns an ID card to Australian Ambassador to China Graham Fletcher (left) as he arrives at the Beijing Second Intermediate People's Court before the trial of Yang Jun, in Beijing on May 27 (AFP)

ing.

Yang, who has been held since 2019, is one of two high-profile Australians detained in China on spying allegations as tensions escalate between Canberra and Beijing.

Another Australian, TV anchor Cheng Lei, has been held since August accused of 'supplying state secrets overseas'.

Relations between Canberra and Beijing have deteriorated sharply in recent years, with disputes over everything from telecoms giant Huawei to the origins of COVID-19.

Australia and New Zealand on Monday also expressed

grave concerns over human rights abuses in Hong Kong and the Xinjiang region, as well as China's island-building spree in the South China Sea that affects freedom of navigation.

China's Foreign Ministry said it 'firmly opposes' the joint statement issued by Scott Morrison and Jacinda Ardern, chiding the leaders for 'irresponsible remarks on China's internal affairs'.

China has also imposed tariffs on Australian exports worth billions of dollars and cut off diplomatic channels between the two nations.

AFP

IN-CAR DINING comes to Oman

THE FOOD STUDIO



A family enjoys their meal in their own car outside The Food Studio Restaurant, in Sohar, last weekend

A new trend of 'in-car dining' is now picking up in Oman. You can enjoy good food as well as service right on your lap in your own car

Hubert Vaz

If you have been missing your weekend trips to your favourite restaurants in Oman, or been literally fed up of eating restaurant food delivered at home, take heart! A new trend of 'in-car dining' is now picking up in Oman.

You don't have to anymore go through the ordeal of emptying out restaurant food from soggy paperbags and plastic containers into plates on your dining table, or playing steward as well as cleaner during and after the meal. You can enjoy good food as well as service right on your lap in your own car.

Though people in Muscat as well as other towns have been in the habit of enjoying 'shawarmas' and juices served out to them in their cars, The Food Studio Restaurant chain has become a pioneer of 'in-car dining' in Oman by introducing this much sought-after service at their outlet along the service road of Falaj al Qabail, in Sohar.

So, to enjoy a good restaurant meal, you simply have to drive up to the restaurant and luxurious service will unfold on your lap right away. The restaurant staff greet you and convert your car into a personal dining cabin by placing slim tray tables (only as broad as ironing boards) through the windows on the front and back row of seats. These boards rest on the edges of the doors on both sides, with the windows rolled down.

The stewards, who maintain high standards of hygiene and sanitation, then begin their service by first providing the necessary paraphernalia - plates, cutlery, glasses, mineral water and boxes of paper napkins. Based on the order from an elaborate menu, they then serve out the dishes and wait on you, without infringing on your comfort level, until you are meal is complete.

"We started this service of in-car dining on May 28. We figured out this idea from our sister concern advertising company (Al Aseel).

This plan has been executed and implemented by our managing director Rasheed Kuzhilaragattil," Tobin Thomas, manager of the restaurant, said, adding, "We also have the same service (in car dining) and facilities at our Food Studio branch in Buraimi."

Thomas further disclosed that they have floated the in-car dining service to enable diners to enjoy the experience of dining out at their favourite restaurant without any hesita-

tion. Since some diners are wary about visiting restaurants, in view of the risks surrounding the pandemic, the in-car dining service provides them th safe haven of their own car and at the same time gives them the feel of dining out, he asserted.

No extra charges are imposed on diners who opt for this service. The tariff on the menu card is just the same for those who dine in the restaurant as well as for those who choose in-

car dining.

"We are concerned about our customers safety and comfort, so we don't mind spending an extra amount to provide this service for our customers," he said, adding, "The response from our customers has been very positive on the first day it self. All diners who took this service said they could enjoy their meal in good comfort."

In car dining service at The Food Studio Restaurant is designed for any type of cars. Over the past week customers have been arriving in different models of cars, sedans as well as SUVs and the staff were able to provide the same service to all with ease, Thomas confirmed. The in-car dining is provided in the car parking area itself without posing any inconvenience to other motorists or people in the area, he added.

Happy to be the pioneers of in-car dining in Oman, Thomas further said, "We have implemented this idea, so that other restaurants also could take this as an example. We need to respect the needs and comfort level of our customers. So, this idea of in-car dining gives them utmost satisfaction, instead of sending them back disappointed."

Food studio restaurant offers a wide range of cuisines - Indian, Chinese, Arabic and Continental, all of which has been extremely popular because of the expertise of the chefs as well as the service staff. A few more new service ideas are in the pipeline, Thomas said, calling on diners as well as prospective diners to visit their facebook or instagram pages for updates as well as to offer suggestions for improvement.



Lap-top dining

The in-car dining experience is new to Oman but has been prevalent in some parts of the GCC, especially UAE, Kuwait and Qatar as well as in the UK wherein restaurants chose to offer the service during movement restrictions and lockdowns when only food stores and restaurants were functional.

Most diners flash their hazard lights when they

arrive, to signal to the waiters to present the menu card, as well as when they need assistance or are done. Some read menus online to avoid touching menu cards as well as place their orders by phone.

While most restaurants provide a sleek tray table that can be placed in front of the steering wheel, just over the laps of those

seated, some people prefer to have their own portable turn-tables which can be fitted within the car for dining.

The experience has been welcomed during the current pandemic, as long as restaurants do not charge extra for the service. Of course, the joy of satisfied diners is always reflected in the tip they leave behind.

SCAN ME to see video



Kahn to be new Bayern chief

Karl-Heinz Rummenigge to step down as club chairman after 30 years



Karl-Heinz Rummenigge (left) will step down as Bayern Munich chairman at the end of the month and will be replaced by former Germany captain Oliver Kahn

GERMAN LEAGUE

Berlin, Germany - After 30 years in charge of Bayern Munich, Karl-Heinz Rummenigge will step down as chairman at the end of the month and be replaced by former Germany captain Oliver Kahn, the Bundesliga giants confirmed on Tuesday.

Rummenigge had been due to see out his contract which expires at the end of 2021, but is leaving six months early to meet the end of the financial year on June 30. Rummenigge's departure represents the start of a new era at Bayern with Julian Nagelsmann, 33, also replacing

Hansi Flick as head coach going into next season.

"It is strategically the most sensible and logical point in time," said Rummenigge, 65, with Kahn, 51, to be Bayern's chairman when the new season starts in August.

"We are reaching the end of the financial year, and at the same time a new phase with a new coaching team is beginning.

"It is a farewell with satisfaction and pride. That was important to me," he added.

Rummenigge joined the club's management in 1991 as vice-president and then became chairman in 2002, overseeing an

incredible period of success.

With Rummenigge on board, Bayern won the Bundesliga 19 times and lifted the Champions League trophy in 2001, 2013 and 2020. Bayern president Herbert Hainer praised Rummenigge for his work alongside former club supremo Uli Hoeness which 'shaped FC Bayern into one of the top names international football - both in sporting and economic terms'.

Since Rummenigge became chairman, Bayern Munich's annual turnover has increased from US\$215mn to US\$829mn, according to club figures.

A former striker who made 95

appearances for West Germany, Rummenigge played for Bayern from 1974 to 1984. He was part of the team which won the European Cup twice and was voted the *Ballon d'Or* winner in both 1980 and 1981.

However, Kahn has a pedigree to match having won the Bundesliga title eight times in 14 years at Bayern before retiring in 2008.

The former goalkeeper played 86 times for Germany, captaining them to defeat against Brazil in the 2002 World Cup final, and made 632 appearances for Bayern.

"As chairman, Karl-Heinz

Rummenigge has done great work for Bayern for over 20 years," said Kahn, who had been tipped as their next chairman since joining the club's board in January 2020.

"During this time, the club has won everything there was to win - you can't rate his services to Bayern highly enough.

"The time has now come for me to take on responsibility at the top of Bayern Munich.

"In the past 18 months, I have got to know all facets of the club.

AFF

'King Kahn' rise heralds new era

Berlin, Germany - On the pitch, legendary Germany goalkeeper Oliver Kahn had a reputation for a fiery temper, but he has since mellowed enough to become the next chairman of Bundesliga giants Bayern Munich.

As a player, Kahn earned nicknames 'King Kahn' and 'Vol-Kahn-o' for his fierce competitive nature.

Since hanging up his gloves, Kahn has been steadily integrated into Bayern's management, joining the club's board in January 2020 and groomed to replace Rummenigge, 65.

Kahn has toned down his temper since once famously demanding 'balls, we need balls!' during a post-match interview as Bayern captain.

He is remembered in Germany not only for his stunning s a v e s

which helped Bayern win the 2001 Champions League final on penalties, but also for a biting incident in 1999. During a Bundesliga match, he nuzzled his teeth into the neck of bemused Dortmund forward Heiko Herrlich.

Three-times voted the world's best goalkeeper during his career, Kahn has kept busy since retiring. He earned his coaching licence in 2010, worked as a TV pundit and completed an MBA in 2012, writing his thesis on 'Strategic management in Germany's professional football'.

Bayern are expecting a seamless transition of power from Rummenigge to Kahn.

"After his extremely successful professional career and his time as an entrepreneur, he has now been intensively involved in the board of directors of FC Bayern Munich," said club president Herbert Hainer in a statement on Tuesday.

"We are all convinced that Oliver Kahn is the right man to successfully shape the future of FC Bayern Munchen AG."

However, he will have to develop his diplomatic skills in the spotlight at Bayern Munich.

AFF



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FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

QUICK RUN

Olympic badminton champion Marin to miss Tokyo Games

Spain's Carolina Marin, the women's Olympic badminton singles champion, will miss the Tokyo Games after tearing the anterior cruciate ligament and meniscus in her left knee. The 27 year old will undergo surgery in the coming days after suffering the injury during a training session last week. "This is another blow that I have to deal with, but I will certainly be back," she wrote on social media. The three-time world champion also ruptured the ACL in her right knee in 2019 and missed that year's world championships. Marin was crowned European champion for the fifth consecutive time last month and had beat India's PV Sindhu in the 2016 Olympic final in Rio.

Inter Milan's Vidal in hospital after testing positive

Inter Milan's Chilean midfielder Arturo Vidal is receiving hospital treatment after testing positive for coronavirus, his national team said on its official website on Monday. The diagnosis means the 34 year old will miss Thursday's World Cup qualifier between Chile and Argentina. It said no other players in the squad had tested positive for the virus. The former Barcelona, Bayern Munich and Juventus star, who was vaccinated against the virus on Friday, will now miss the Qatar 2022 World Cup qualifier with Argentina and another qualifier against Bolivia next week in Santiago.

AFP

Alexander-Arnold named in England's Euro 2020 squad

London, UK - Liverpool defender Trent Alexander-Arnold was named in the England squad for Euro 2020 on Tuesday, while in-form Jesse Lingard missed out on a place in Gareth Southgate's 26-man group.

Alexander-Arnold had to endure a nervous wait before learning he had made the cut after spending much of the season out of favour with Southgate.

The 22 year old was left out of Southgate's England squad for their World Cup qualifiers in March. But Alexander-Arnold's strong end to the season with Liverpool convinced the England manager to restore the rightback to his squad for Euro 2020, which starts on June 11.

Manchester United forward Lingard, who had a superb loan spell with West Ham, was the highest profile casualty as Southgate axed six players from his provisional squad.

The 28 year old was recalled to the England squad in March after a long exile. His brilliant form, including nine goals in 16 games, earned the Hammers a place in the Europa League, but it wasn't enough to convince Southgate of his worth.

The others to miss out were Sheffield United keeper Aaron Ramsdale, Southampton midfielder James Ward-Prowse, Aston Villa striker Ollie Watkins and uncapped centrebacks Ben Godfrey and Ben White.

'A lot of talent'

One selection decision was taken for Southgate on Tuesday morning when Manchester United for-



A file photo of England manager Gareth Southgate (left) and Liverpool's Trent Alexander-Arnold during a training camp

ward Mason Greenwood pulled out with what his club said was an 'underlying injury'. "I think every squad is difficult because we have a lot of talented players in this country," Southgate said.

"The most difficult thing is to not be able to take players who've been with us in previous matches and who are such good professionals."

Alexander-Arnold faces intense competition, with Kyle Walker, Kieran Trippier and



Reece James among four rightbacks included in the squad. Trippier helped Atletico Madrid win the Spanish title this

term, while Walker was instrumental in Manchester City's Premier League triumph.

Walker was on the losing side as Chelsea's James gave a dynamic display in the Blues' 1-0 win against City in the Champions League final on Saturday.

Southgate had originally been due to officially announce his squad last week.

But instead he named a 33-man provisional group, delay-

ing his final decision until the June 1 deadline.

That gave Harry Maguire, Jordan Henderson and Calvin Phillips time to prove their fitness.

Manchester United defender Maguire had been struggling with ankle ligament damage suffered at Aston Villa earlier in May.

The injury forced him to miss the Europa League final defeat against Villarreal last week.

I think every squad is difficult because we have a lot of talented players in this country

GARETH SOUTHGATE



Liverpool midfielder Henderson has not played since having surgery on a groin injury in February.

Phillips sustained a shoulder problem in Leeds' final game of the Premier League season against West Brom.

"The most complex part this time has been those injuries and whether we should take the chance on people," Southgate said.

"We've clearly with Jordan and with Harry Maguire, we've got a couple of players who are not where we'd be ideally in terms of their physical prep.

"But we think that the experience they have, the fact that we think we can get them to a point where they can have an involvement in the tournament, it's worth taking them, especially as we've got an extended squad of 26."

England face Austria on June 2 and Romania four days later in pre-tournament friendlies in Middlesbrough.

The Three Lions begin their Euro 2020 campaign against Croatia on June 13 before facing Scotland and the Czech Republic in Group D.

AFP



Ancelotti quits Everton to succeed Zidane at Real

Madrid, Spain - Everton manager Carlo Ancelotti will return to Real Madrid as manager for the next three seasons, the Spanish club said on Tuesday following the resignation of Zinedine Zidane last week.

Italian Ancelotti, who managed Real Madrid for two years between 2013 and 2015, will sign his new deal on Wednesday, the club said in a statement.

The 61 year old leaves English Premier League club Everton after 18 months in charge at Goodison Park. His departure leaves Everton searching for a sixth permanent manager in five years. Ancelotti has signed a three-year deal at Real and said the move represented 'an unexpected opportunity'.

"I have complete respect for everyone associated with Everton and hope they can achieve the exciting opportunities they have in front of them," he added. "While I have enjoyed being at Everton I have been presented



Carlo Ancelotti will take over as Real Madrid manager for second time

with an unexpected opportunity which I believe is the right move for me and my family at this time."

Everton said they 'will begin the process of appointing a new manager immediately'.

Ancelotti guided Everton to a tenth-placed finish during his only full season in charge having finished 12th in the prior campaign. The Italian has won 15 major trophies during his career

and is one of only three managers to win three European Cups - along with Liverpool legend Bob Paisley and former Real boss Zidane.

He has domestic titles with Milan in his homeland, Chelsea in England, Paris St-Germain in France and also in Germany with Bayern Munich. Ancelotti won the Champions League for a third time while at Real in 2014.

Agencies

Messi negotiations 'going well', says Barca president

SPANISH LEAGUE

Barcelona, Spain - Barcelona president Joan Laporta repeated on Tuesday that negotiations with Lionel Messi 'are going well', less than a month before the Argentine star's club contract expires. "We are in talks with Leo's representatives," Laporta said at the official presentation of Spanish centreback Eric Garcia, who has joined from Manchester City, as a Barcelona player.

"I said it the other day, it's going well and we hope they continue to make progress."

"We want to agree a new contract with Leo. It's going well, but it's not done."

Messi's contract with Barcelona expires on June 30.

Laporta said signing Messi to a new contract did not depend on the outcome of an audit the club is carrying out to find out the exact state of its finances.

"We more or less already have the results for this year under control. This audit, when



Barcelona president Joan Laporta

we finish it in July, will give us more data, but for this deal in particular, we had already made a provision, we had prepared a strategy," Laporta said.

"I have always said that the Leo issue is not a money issue for his part," said Laporta.

"He is showing a lot of understanding, and it is not a question of money, he wants to continue with this process and wants to have a competitive team with which to win Champions League and league titles."

AFP



Kiwis take aim at depleted England on Lord's return



James Bracey of England



Kyle Jamieson of New Zealand

ENGLAND VS NEW ZEALAND FIRST TEST

London, UK - Twenty-three months on from a day of agony and ecstasy, New Zealand are back at Lord's. Nine of their 19-man squad, seven of whom played in that final, are returning to the scene of their World Cup near-miss.

The circumstances this week are very different: New Zealand are only building up to the main event, the inaugural World Test Championship (WTC) final against India, which starts on June 18, while Joe Root is likely to be England's lone representative of the 50-over squad from 2019, in the absence of their IPL returnees and the injured Ben Stokes and Jofra Archer.

Even still, with fans returning to an England home international for the first time since the end of that summer, that Super Over is unlikely to go unmentioned.

With their multi-format players rested following ten days of post-IPL hotel quarantine, England have admitted they are using this as a chance to 'look at new faces' - including two

Broad named England's vice-captain

London, UK - Stuart Broad has been named England's vice-captain for the Test series against New Zealand, which starts at Lord's on Wednesday. Ben Stokes is Joe Root's usual deputy, but will miss the New Zealand series through injury, while Jos Buttler -

Stokes' predecessor, and Eoin Morgan's deputy in limited-overs cricket - has been rested following the IPL. James Anderson also has experience as vice-captain, having filled the role during the 2017-18 tours to Australia and New Zealand, but England

have instead opted to give Broad the role for this series. Broad has some experience of captaining England, leading them in 27 T20Is and three ODIs between 2011 and 2014, but this is his first official leadership role in the Test side.

England's engine room from Nos 5-8, his 17 caps making him a relative veteran.

Kyle Jamieson: His Test record so far is six caps, six wins, 36 wickets and an average of 13.27, but this is set to be his first appearance outside of New Zealand. Pitches at Lord's are rarely particularly springy, but at 6ft 8in, he is unlikely to have too many problems finding bounce.

Teams (likely)

England: Rory Burns, Dom Sibley, Zak Crawley, Joe Root (capt), Ollie Pope, Dan Lawrence, James Bracey (wk), Ollie Robinson, Jack Leach, Stuart Broad, James Anderson.

New Zealand: Tom Latham, Tom Blundell/Devon Conway, Kane Williamson (capt), Ross Taylor, Henry Nicholls, BJ Watling (wk), Colin de Grandhomme/Daryl Mitchell, Mitchell Santner/Matt Henry, Kyle Jamieson, Tim Southee, Neil Wagner.

Match starts at 2pm, Oman time. Cricinfo

ICC expands 2027 ODI World Cup to 14-team tournament

Dubai, UAE - The 2027 men's ODI World Cup will feature 14 teams after the ICC Board on Tuesday decided to expand the quadrennial tournament.

Another marquee event that has been expanded is the men's T20 World Cup.

The tournament will comprise 20 teams and will be held every two years in the ICC's next commercial cycle from 2023-2031.

The ICC has also decided to have an additional event in the form of the 50-overs Championship Trophy in the next Future Tours Programme (FTP) cycle. The tournament will comprise the top eight ranked teams; the first edition will be played in 2025.

The ICC Board also decided to retain the format for the World Test Championship (WTC) in the next cycle with nine teams playing six series each to compete in the final every two years.

Only ten teams contested the 2019 ODI World Cup, won by hosts England, compared to 14 four years earlier.

Deadline for BCCI

Also, the ICC has given BCCI until June 28 to decide about hosting T20 World Cup. The tournament is scheduled between mid-October and November 14 in India, subject to the BCCI fulfilling various obligations.

The ICC board is also believed to have agreed that the governing body should simultaneously step up its preparations vis-à-vis UAE as a the back-up venue.

These were among the key takeaways from the ICC Board's meeting on Tuesday. It was attended by all the 16 directors, including BCCI president Sourav Ganguly.

Cricinfo

Oman's Vaishali picked for ICC Future Leaders Programme

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

Oman women's cricket team captain Vaishali Jesrani is among a total of 40 women from 29 ICC countries who will be mentored as part of the inaugural ICC 100% Cricket Future Leaders Programme, designed to support emerging women leaders in cricket.

Besides Vaishali, Brazil captain Roberta Avery, USA Cricket board member and batter Nadia Gruny, and Indian referee Vijeylaxmi Narasimhan are among the 40 women split into two batches of 20 each.

According to an ICC statement on Tuesday, Greg Barclay, the ICC chair, former Pakistan women captain Sana Mir and former West Indies bowler and now TV broadcaster Ian Bishop are among the mentors.

The 39 year old Vaishali, who is also the convener of women's cricket in Oman, has been picked in the fan engagement category and will be mentored by Anthony Everard of Australia.

Everard is Cricket Australia's



Vaishali Jesrani



Anthony Everard

executive general manager of fan engagement. He was previously Head of the women's Big Bash League and had also worked as head of marketing and commercial for the FINA World Swimming Championships.

Vaishali has been closely associated with Oman women's cricket development for the past decade and led Oman to T20I triangular series final in January 2020 in Qatar.

In a statement, ICC described the programme as a part of its 'long-term commitment to

accelerate the growth of women's cricket and women in cricket', and said that there had been more than 300 applicants from 45 different countries before the final 40 were picked.

"The initial intake will be split into two batches and the programme, which (is) designed to address the low percentage of women in leadership positions in global cricket and build a pipeline of new female leaders in cricket will get underway with batch one beginning this month," the statement said.

"The first two batches reflect the diversity of our regions and their areas of focus, and all have received outstanding endorsements from their respective member boards," Claire Furlong, ICC general manager - marketing and communications, said in the statement.

"The next six months will be incredibly exciting, and we look forward to a productive learning experience for our mentees."

The role of a mentor is to unlock their mentee's potential and help them to be at their best.

This could include being a confidential sounding-board, providing advice, guidance, and connections to reach their potential. The programme will last for a period of six months, and include a kick-off workshop with former Australia captain Belinda Clark, followed by monthly check-ins and a three-month review with the mentees and mentors agreeing the frequency and method of communication.

The second batch of mentees will start in November 2021.

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NADAL'S 101ST WIN AT ROLAND GARROS

Paris, France - Rafael Nadal began his bid for a record-setting 21st Grand Slam title with a straight sets win at the French Open on Tuesday.

Nadal, the 13-time champion in Paris, defeated 63rd-ranked Alexei Popyrin of Australia 6-3, 6-2, 7-6 (7-3) at Roland Garros to take his record at the tournament to 101 wins against just two losses.

"I was lucky to win that third set, I don't know how (I did). The beginning of the match had been very tough too," said Nadal, who had been 2-5 down in the third set, saving two set points.

"In these warm and fast conditions it's always very difficult. He's young and the speed of his ball is very strong."

Up next is fellow 34 year old Richard Gasquet. The pair first played one another when they were children. As professionals, Nadal leads 16-0.

The Spaniard's opening win shifted the emphasis onto world No 1, and potential semifinal opponent, Novak Djokovic who is chasing a second French Open title and 19th Grand Slam. Djokovic was taking on 66th-ranked Tennys Sandgren of the US in an evening session match-up.

Also on Tuesday, seventh seed Andrey Rublev said he was 'unlucky' in his surprise five-set loss to Jan-Lennard Struff in the first round.

In-form Russian Rublev, who beat

Rafael Nadal en route to the Monte Carlo Masters final earlier this season, fought back from two sets down before succumbing 6-3, 7-6 (8-6), 4-6, 3-6, 6-4 in three hours and 46 minutes.

The 23 year old was the third-highest seeded player in his half of the draw, behind Djokovic and Nadal.

"Of course I was thinking that I would like to come back from 2-0 (down), but I don't know, the fifth set I was a bit unlucky," said Rublev.

World No 1 Ashleigh Barty marked her return to Paris for the first time since her 2019 title triumph by beating American left-hander Bernarda Pera 6-4, 3-6, 6-2 but admitted she was fighting a hip problem.

Barty, 25, skipped the defence of her title in 2020 due to the pandemic but this year has won trophies at the Yarra Valley Classic, Miami and on clay in Stuttgart in the run-up to Roland Garros.

After easing through the first set on Court Philippe Chatrier, Barty went off the boil in the second and called for the trainer at the changeover.

"I'm not going to hide behind the fact I'm not quite 100%," said Barty whose left thigh was heavily strapped.

"But I can guarantee that I will go out there with the right attitude every day and be really accepting of that and give it a crack no matter what."

Injured Kvitova withdraws

Also on Tuesday, two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova withdrew due to injury.

The Czech 11th seed, a Roland Garros semifinalist in 2012 and 2020, had saved a match point in her first-round win over Belgian qualifier Greet Minnen on Sunday.

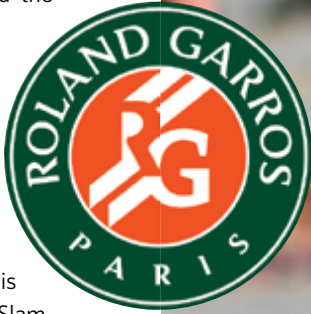
"During my post-match press requirements on Sunday I fell and hurt my ankle. Unfortunately, after an MRI and much discussion with my team, I have made the tough decision that it would be unwise to play on it," said the 31 year old.

Fifth seed Elina Svitolina, a three-time quarter finalist, recovered from a 2-5 second set deficit to beat French teenager Oceane Babel 6-2, 7-5.

Italian 37 year-old Andreas Seppi, playing in his 63rd successive Grand Slam, stunned 20th seeded Felix Auger-Aliassime 6-3, 7-6 (10-8), 4-6, 6-4.

Venus Williams, playing the tournament for the 24th time and a runner-up 19 years ago, saw her 89th Grand Slam end at the first hurdle as Russia's Ekaterina Alexandrova eased to a 6-3, 6-1 win over the 40 year old American.

AFP



SEEDED PLAYER RESULTS (x denotes seeding)

MEN FIRST ROUND:

Ricardas Berankis beat Ugo Humbert (x29) 6-4, 6-4, 2-6, 6-4;
Alex De Minaur (x21) beat Stefano Travaglia 6-2, 6-4, 7-6 (7-4);
Gael Monfilis (x14) beat Albert Ramos Vinolas 1-6, 7-6 (8-6), 6-4, 6-4;
Diego Schwartzman (x10) beat Lu Yen-Hsun 6-2, 6-2, 6-3;
Aslan Karatsev (x24) beat Jenson Brooksby 6-3, 6-4, 6-4.

Sunday: Lorenzo Musetti beat David Goffin (x13) 6-0, 7-5, 7-6 (7-3);
Taylor Fritz (x30) beat Joao Sousa 6-4, 6-2, 6-4;
Lloyd Harris beat Lorenzo Sonego (x26) 7-5, 6-4, 6-4.

WOMEN FIRST ROUND:

Ons Jabeur (x25) beat Yulia Putintseva 7-5, 6-2;
Jennifer Brady (x13) beat Anastasija Sevastova 6-3, 6-3;
Maria Sakkari (x17) beat Katarina Zavatska 6-4, 6-1;

Anett Kontaveit (x30) beat Viktorija Golubic 6-7 (4-7), 7-6 (7-5), 6-0.

Sunday: Jessica Pegula (x28) beat Zhu Lin 6-4, 4-6, 6-4;
Serena Williams (x7) beat Irina Camelia-Begu 7-6 (8-6), 6-2;
Tamara Zidansek beat Bianca Andreescu (x6) 6-7 (1-7), 7-6 (7-2), 9-7.

Osaka crisis throws light on stars' mental health

Paris, France - Naomi Osaka's decision to withdraw from the French Open, after revealing her battle with depression and anxiety, has thrown the tournament into turmoil and cast a harsh light on the mental health of the sport's superstars.

The 23 year old world No 2, and four-time major winner, said she will now take a break from the sport, putting her participation at Wimbledon and even her home Olympics at risk.

Osaka was fined US\$15,000 and threatened with disqualification from Roland Garros after she refused to honour mandatory media commitments.

She claims they are detrimental to her mental health and likened the traditional post-match news conference to 'kicking people when they're down'.

"There's a sense of voyeurism around how it presently works," wrote Peter Terry, a professor of psychology at the University of Southern Queensland in Australia on [theconversation.com](#), on Tuesday.

"Perhaps some want to see athletes crumble and break down into tears, having put them on a pedestal.

"Osaka is a young, introverted, anxious person. We should by now understand that sports stars are not super human, that they have the same doubts and mental health issues as everyone else."

Terry worked with the WTA for over a decade and sat on a commission which drew up guidelines to help players avoid burn-out and deal with pressure when in their mid-teens.

Osaka said her mental health struggles began in 2018 when she won the first of her four majors at the US Open in a controversial final against Serena Williams. She was just 20, stood awkwardly courtside, covering her face with her visor.

"The truth is I have suffered bouts of depression since the US Open in 2018 and I have had a really hard time coping with that."

She added: "In Paris, I was



Naomi Osaka of Japan withdrew from the French Open on Monday evening

already feeling vulnerable and anxious so I thought it was better to exercise self-care and skip the press conferences."

'Feels for Osaka'

Serena said she 'feels for' Osaka and has also experienced 'very

difficult' press conferences in her career. "The only thing I feel is that I feel for Naomi. I feel like I wish I could give her a hug because I know what it's like," said the 39 year old, after her first-round win over Irina-Camelia Begu in the first ever night match

at Roland Garros on Monday.

"We have different personalities, and people are different. Not everyone is the same. I'm thick. Other people are thin. "Everyone is different and everyone handles things differently. You just have to let her

handle it the way she wants to...

"I've been where I've been very difficult to walk in (to press conferences) in those moments. But, you know, it made me stronger."

Sympathy in Japan

Japanese fans and public figures rallied in support of Osaka on Tuesday, offering sympathy after she withdrew from the French Open and opened up about her battles with depression.

Reaction in Japan was largely sympathetic, with one Twitter user urging Osaka to 'take a good, long break'.

"I hope she gets to eat what she wants, watch what she wants and listen to what she wants. I hope she wraps herself up in a fluffy blanket and takes it easy until she feels content."

Osaka is expected to represent Japan at the July-August Tokyo Olympics, and will be one of the host country's highest-profile athletes at the Games if she takes part. But Japanese fans urged her to take care of herself

first and foremost.

Former tennis player Ai Sugiyama told a morning show she hoped Osaka's actions could 'make a splash and create an opportunity to talk about athlete's mental health', the *Sports Hochi* reported.

Grand Slams pledge

Also on Tuesday, the four Grand Slams pledged to 'create meaningful improvements' to their tournaments in an effort to avoid a repeat of the Osaka crisis which hit the French Open.

"We intend to work alongside the players, the tours, the media and the broader tennis community to create meaningful improvements," a statement by the French, US and Australian Opens and Wimbledon said.

On Tuesday, the four Slams said they 'empathise with the unique pressures players face'. However, they added, "Change should come through the lens of maintaining a fair playing field, regardless of ranking or status."

AFP