

HM greetings conveyed to Burundi

Maj Gen Evariste Ndayishimiye, President of Burundi, received at the presidential headquarters Ali bin Abdullah al Mahrouqi, who presented his credentials as the Sultanate's Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary non-resident Ambassador to Burundi. The ambassador conveyed greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and best wishes of good health and well-being to President Ndayishimiye. **DETAILS ON P3**



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OOC GEARS UP FOR TOKYO OLYMPICS



P13

TENDER FOR OMAN'S NEW 100MW WIND PROJECT BY YEAR-END



P20

HEALTHY FOOD: CREATING A MODERN SOLUTION FOR A MODERN PROBLEM



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO CONGO PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Felix Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of Congo on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to President Tshisekedi and the friendly people of Congo further progress and prosperity. — ONA

HM THANKED BY EMIR OF KUWAIT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait, in reply to His Majesty's condolences cable on the death of Shaikh Mansour Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah. In his cable, Shaikh Nawaf expressed his utmost thanks for His Majesty the Sultan's sincere condolences and sympathy, and praying to Allah the Almighty to protect His Majesty against all harm. — ONA

INSIDE



BANGLADESH TO GET 2.5 MILLION COVID VACCINE DOSES

P7



FOR FAMILIES OF THE MISSING, PROGRESS IS AGONISINGLY SLOW

P9

Vaccination for 18 years and above from July 4

854,274 PEOPLE HAVE BEEN VACCNIATED AGAINST COVID-19

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Starting from July 4, the Sultanate will start vaccinating people above 18 years of age, according to the Ministry of Health.

To avail of this service, youngsters need to either register online or request through Tarassud Plus App.

“We will begin vaccinating youngsters aged 18 and above from Sunday (July 4), and all eligible can register either online or on Tarassud Plus App on their phones,” said Dr Zainab al Balushi, Head of Infection and Prevention Control at the ministry.

As many as 7,000 people can be vaccinated in a day at the



Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, where the mass vaccination programme through an online registration is happening. There are nearly 60 booths which can accommodate more than 4,000 people a day, whereas this can be increased to 10,000 as the need be.

As many as 854,274 people have been vaccinated against Covid-19, since the start of National Immunisation Plan in December 2020. The number stands for 24 per cent of the targeted population.

The number of those who took the first dose of Covid-19 vaccination stood at 643,744 comprising 75 per cent, while the number of those who took two doses stood at 210,530 comprising 25 per cent.

The Ministry of Health plans to cover all target segments aged 12 and above, which stands for 70 per cent of the Sultanate's population.

The vaccination process will be carried out in stages, depending on the arrival of supplies of Covid-19 vaccines and in line with the goals set for the National Immunisation Strategy. She further said that the vaccination campaigns are showing heavy turnouts, and the ministry would achieve the targets.

“We organise vaccination campaigns for various target groups. The results are visible from the long queues in front of the vaccination centres.”

TURN TO P2

Terrorism not linked to any religion: Oman

NEW YORK: The Sultanate has reaffirmed that terrorist acts which battered many areas of the world showed that terrorism is a global phenomenon that is not inherently associated with any particular religion or belief or country or people.

This was stated in Oman's speech before the UN second high-level conference, held here, on combating terrorism. It was delivered by Dr Mohammed bin Awad al Hassan, the Sultanate's Permanent Representative to the UN. In his speech, he added that terrorism is a global problem which requires global solutions. “Terrorism threatens the security

and stability of countries and its remedy lies in global solutions.”

Oman called upon the international community to act in a spirit of unison, apply one criterion and speak in one voice against terrorism, away from double standards.

In the speech, the Sultanate called for a reversal of the reigning stereotypical image based on prejudices and racism. It noted that these wrong concepts lead to the spread of negative phenomena that are not less than racism, like hatred of Islam (Islamophobia), hatred of Muslims and hatred of disciples of other religions and foreigners.

TURN TO P3

Majlis ratifies draft amendments

MUSCAT: Majlis AshShura approved a set of draft and proposed laws in addition to reports of the standing committees during its 13th ordinary meeting of the second annual sitting of the eighth-term (2019-2023) held under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis AshShura, on Tuesday.

The session saw the presentation of three urgent statements, the first of which was presented by Ali bin Salim al Jabri, member of the Media and Culture Committee and representative of the Wilayat of Muscat. It was about new regulations for granting government land plots.

Hilal bin Hamad al Sarmi, head of the Health and Environment Committee, representative of the Wilayat of Seeb, presented an urgent statement aimed at reducing the



impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. In his statement, Al Sarmi suggested a number of important points to contain the pandemic and mitigate its impact. Yaqoub bin Mohammed al Rahbi, member of the Education and Scientific Research Committee, representative of the Wilayat of Bidbid, presented an urgent statement on Oman's Vision 2040.

In his statement, Al Rahbi raised a number of questions about the government's evaluation of performance and results of Oman's Vision 2020 and the challenges that faced it.

During the meeting, the council approved the amendments of some provisions of the Civil Status Law.

TURN TO P3

PATEK PHILIPPE

GENEVE



TWENTY~4

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Al-Qurum

MUSCAT - 22009991



Minister visits hospital, praises healthcare workers



SUHAR: Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, on Tuesday visited Sohar Hospital in the Governorate of North Al Batinah to inspect work progress and efforts of health workers in tackling the Covid-19 pandemic.

During the visit, the minister met a number of referrals and medical cadres working in the immunisation clinics and listened to their suggestions to improve the services provided in the hospital.

Al Saeedi also met the medical and administrative staff of the hospital, and praised them for their great efforts that have been made in dealing with the pandemic. He expressed his concern about the exhaustion of the medical staff during the recent



period.

The minister was briefed on the expansion project of Sohar Hospital, which is designated to receive Covid-19 patients to relieve the pressure on the

hospital.

The expansion project at Sohar Hospital will start receiving about thirty Covid-19 patients during an initial stage starting next few days. — ONA

24% of target segments vaccinated

FROM PAGE 1

Oman began to vaccinate the first target group of people some six months ago. The groups included people above 65 years, people suffering from chronic diseases, frontline workers including medical staff and the like at various schools, etc.

The mass vaccination camp for people above 45 years of age began at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on June 20. The ministry has kept on adding more target groups and more government departments, ministries and public authorities in the past few days, and the latest among the target group is the youngsters above 18.

“We encourage the public to



get vaccinated according to the dates and times allotted to each sector, and to be a part of the nation building march and to ignore the negative news as no scientific proof has been identified

to support the fake claims that vaccines have side effects,” the ministry representative added.

Oman received 15,151,30 doses of vaccines for domestic consumption and 854, 274 people have so far taken vaccines till this week. 10,64,804 vaccines were administered on both citizens and residents as of this week which is 70 per cent of the total stock while 3.7 million people are awaiting their doses.

During the first week of June 2021, although only 5 per cent of the target groups were covered with vaccines, the number shot to 24 per cent by this week. While around 75 per cent took their second dose while 25 were first doses.

700 deaths in June till date

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The month of June has been the deadliest for Oman and with no signs of immediate respite, the situation still calls for restraint when it comes to socialisation.

The country has reported nearly 700 deaths due to Covid in June, of which 89 of them were in the last two days.

It took just 62 days to cross the 3,000-mark in terms of the death toll from 2,000th death that was reported on April 28, 2021.

With a total toll of 3,056 deaths, around 1.15 per cent of the total infected people in the country have died.

According to statistics, 11.3 per cent or 30, 193 people are still sick of Covid in Oman.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Tuesday reported 2,234 new cases and 43 deaths over the past 24 days.

181 patients were admitted to hospitals across the country in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients to 1,613 including 525 in intensive care units.

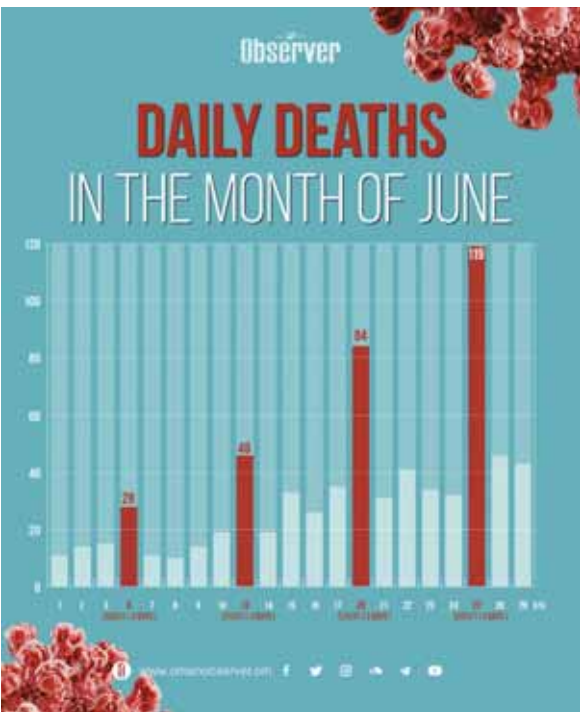
The total number of cases registered in the Sultanate has now reached 266,536, including 3,056 deaths.

The total number of recoveries is 232,287 while the recovery rate is 87.5 per cent.

While WHO has raised concerns of cases in Oman, it also made it clear

People cannot feel safe just because they had the two doses. “They still need to protect themselves,” said Dr Mariangela Simao, WHO assistant director-general for access to medicines and health products.

“My friend was tested positive despite have two



doses of the vaccine. So, it is important to follow government guidelines on safety measures,” said Mohammed al Bulushi, a senior citizen in Muttrah.

“People need to continue to use masks consistently, be in ventilated spaces, hand hygiene... the physical distance, avoid crowding. This still continues to be extremely important, even if you’re vaccinated when you have a community transmission ongoing.”

Vaccines will be complementary to other preventive measures as jabs will not target all populations at once and there will always be risk groups who are not vaccinated thus not prevented unless they comply with preventive measures, the Ministry of Health (MOH) has said.

Simple steps helpful in controlling breathing difficulty

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

The Covid-19 is a virus that infects the respiratory system and causes problems ranging from the common cold to acute respiratory syndrome.

It affects the lungs (during the infection period and extends until after recovery), causing inflammation in the air sacs, which leads to fibrosis and loss of the oxygen-indicating feature.

Difficulty breathing, according to a bulletin of the Royal Hospital, is one of the symptoms that often appear in Covid-19 patients.

Feeling short of breath may lead to anxiety, and that aggravates it. The hospital said it is important to maintain your calm and control shortness of breath by applying the following positions:

- Sitting in a chair with a slight bend forward
- Sitting with the head supported on a pillow and placing the hands on the table
- Standing with the support of the hands on the table
- Standing with the back support

on the wall and placing the hands straight on either side of the body.

Shortness of breath should improve with a gradual increase in your daily activities. However, if it does not improve, this indicates that you need oxygen, and it is preferable to visit the nearest health institution, the bulletin said.

Studies suggest that lying down on the abdomen helps the lungs work better, “this method is followed for patients admitted in ICU and proven to be effective in improving the lungs” the hospital said.

Try to lie on your stomach initially for 10 minutes and then gradually increase to a total of two to three hours a day. If you cannot, try sleeping on your side with the support of a pillow. It is better to change positions from time to time to avoid any other complications.

Besides, several exercises are helpful for people who can control the rate and speed of breathing.

Sit in a comfortable back supported chair. Breathe through the nose or mouth with the hands on rib cage to feel the expansion



of the lungs when enough air enters. Tighten your lips when you breathe out, trying to make a little effort by making your breathing slow and relaxed.

There are also diaphragm breathing exercises. The diaphragm is the primary muscle of respiration. So, stimulating diaphragm breathing is one of the most important exercises that

a person with Covid-19 must practice and stimulate to avoid using other auxiliary muscles and stressing them.

Getting infected with Covid-19 leads to a sense of public pressure and pain in the body, so it is necessary to maintain physical fitness through certain exercises, including moving the upper and lower extremities in proportion

to each patient to stimulate blood circulation and maintain the efficiency of the muscles, in addition to walking exercises.

How do you make sure that you exercise correctly?

Department of Education and Health Awareness Programmes said, “Try to tell a specific sentence of five words. Suppose you could complete the whole sentence

without stopping or feeling breathing difficulty. In that case, this means that you can complete your exercises normally.

“If you couldn’t complete the sentence in one breath, you expose yourself to the point of fatigue, which is dangerous. You should stop exercising immediately and get some rest until you regain your strength and reach a normal breathing rate. The exercises should be sequential after discharge from the hospital.”

The department recommended acquiring a blood oxygen meter and not exercising if the oxygen rate is less than 94 per cent. Also, to stop exercising if the oxygen level has decreased by 3 degrees during the exercise, compared to pre-workout.

If your oxygen level does not improve, you must go to the nearest health institution. “It is important to realise that getting a slight acceleration of the breath during exercise is completely natural, as this enables you to gain physical fitness and prepares you to take on a greater exercise load each time,” the department advised.



Majlis ratifies draft amendments

FROM PAGE 1

Dr Mohammed bin Ibrahim al Zedjali, head of the Legal and Legislative Committee, said the amendments of the Civil Status Law derives its importance from the implementation of the decision of the Supreme National Committee for e-Census of Population, Housing and Establishments, which involved an approval for amending the Civil Status Law by issuing ID card for children aging 10 years. He added that the ID card has become a means for accomplishing a lot of transactions and also it provides digital certification.

Majlis Ashshura also approved the amendments of the motor insurance law. The amendment report was read out by Ahmed bin Said al Sharqi, head and rapporteur of the Economic and Financial Committee.

Al Sharqi explained that the amendments states that insurance does not cover those who don't have a driver's license or it has been withdrawn by a judicial or administrative decision.

The council approved the draft amendment of the Foreigners Residence Law. The amendment involves articles (14) and (40) of the law. The council decided to keep the draft amendment as it was received from the government



without changing it.

The Council approved the proposed patients' rights and safety law and referred it to the State Council.

The Council ratified the vision of the Economic and Financial Committee on the project agreement between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the government of the State of Qatar on the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income and capital.

Majlis Ashshura approved the report of the Youth and Human Resources Committee on the expressed desire regarding the nationalisation of top leadership positions in the banking and financing sector. The report says that it is important that the

Central Bank of Oman (CBO) and the Capital Market Authority (CMA) take an urgent measure to replace the foreigners at senior management level by national competencies in the banking and financing sector. The Council also approved the Youth and Human Resources Committee's report on the expressed desire to upgrade the basic skills for Omani youth in line with the requirements of the labour market.

The aim is to bridge the gap between the outputs of higher education as the supply side and the needs of the labour market as the demand side by finding several solutions and proposals, and improving basic skills programmes taking into consideration reducing the cost and innovating modern methods of training

and rehabilitation at the lowest possible cost using the means of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, in addition to ensuring the quality of training and qualification to prepare the job for the labour market. After studying the subject, the committee suggested a set of criteria that must be taken into account in Oman's Future Skills Initiative, namely: Creating a database for the Oman's Future Skills Initiative through which information is provided about the training programmes and their type, the skills that work on developing them, the specialisation of the programmes, and the number of trainees, discussion sessions, workshops, results and performance level, and everything related to the initiative such as the statistics.

Also discussed at the session was the report of the Food and Water Security Committee on the expressed desire regarding the challenges facing the fisheries sector, which aims to follow up on what would overcome any development challenges (regulatory, financing and investment, supervisory, planning) facing the fisheries sector, which is considered as one of the economic diversification sectors and a main contributor to Oman's Vision 2040.

Burundi president receives ambassador's credentials



GITEGA: Maj Gen Evariste Ndayishimiye, President of the Republic of Burundi, received at the presidential headquarters here Ali bin Abdullah al Mahrouqi, who presented his credentials as the Sultanate's Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary non-resident Ambassador to the Republic of Burundi.

The ambassador conveyed greetings of His Majesty

Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and best wishes of good health and wellbeing to President Ndayishimiye, and the friendly people of Burundi further progress and prosperity.

On his turn, President Ndayishimiye asked the ambassador to convey his greetings to Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and his best wishes to the Omani people. — ONA

Sultanate calls for global efforts to fight terrorism

FROM PAGE 1

"Religions are innocent of terrorism and terrorists represent themselves and their extremist views. No one should be carried away by extremist slogans promoted by some," said in his speech.

The Sultanate also called for

respecting religions, sanctities and symbols of all peoples. It explained that freedom of expression does not warrant harming, humiliating or despising others.

In his speech, Oman's envoy pointed out that ignorance, poverty, suppression, racism, hatred and foreign occupation are all instigators of extremism and

terrorism.

Therefore, the establishment of justice and the propagation of social awareness are means of protection and security that need to be supported and financed by the international community through tangible steps and programmes.

The Sultanate pointed out that

no strategy to control terrorism could succeed unless it is based on solid foundations of respect for the international law and human rights, albeit liberties of individuals and societies.

The speech also stressed the need to secure the rights of women, children and all other segments of society. — ONA

Sultanate participates in AGFUND meeting

MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Social Development, took part on Tuesday in the 23rd meeting of the Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND). Held via video-conferencing, the Sultanate was represented in the meeting by Mohammed bin Ahmed al Mahrouqi, Director-General of Planning and Studies in the Ministry of Social

Development.

During the meeting, the participants approved the minutes of the 22nd meeting, besides reviewing the achievements made during the first half of 2021. The meeting also discussed the suggested funding projects and approved the financial statements for the fiscal year 2020, as well as reviewing the auditors' report.

— ONA

Grand welcome to first Jordan Aviation flight



Airline to fly two weekly flights between Muscat and Amman on Mondays and Fridays

MUSCAT: Muscat International Airport welcomed the inauguration of the first economy flights of Jordan Aviation coming from Queen Alia International Airport.

The flight was welcomed by the traditional water cannon salute and landed at Muscat International Airport with an amid welcome from Oman Airports officials.

There will be two weekly flights between the capitals Muscat and Amman on Mondays and Fridays.

This comes as a culmination of Oman Airports efforts to attract the new airlines



towards the airports in the Sultanate to reinforce the direct international air traffic between the Sultanate and the world, and the constant support provided for these efforts by the relevant authorities in the Sultanate.

The operation of the flights from Jordan to Muscat International Airport comes at a time of increasing demand for travel between the two countries. The new airline will also serve trade operations and the movement of businessmen, students, and tourists of both countries.

— ONA

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June	July	August	September
Sat 05	Thu 01	Sat 07	Sat 04
Sat 12	Sat 10	Thu 12	Sat 11
Thu 17	Sat 17	Sat 21	Thu 16
Sat 19	Sat 24	Sat 28	Sat 25
October	November	December	
Sat 09	Sat 06	Thu 02	
Thu 14	Thu 11	Sat 04	
Sat 23	Sat 20	Sat 11	
Sat 30	Sat 27	Sat 18	

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EXPATS IN A FIX OVER ANNUAL LEAVE PLAN SECOND YEAR IN A ROW

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH[@patkaushal](#)

The Covid-19 has come as a perfect storm for everyone. There are no plans, nothing, and it seems there is a directive from somewhere to be in the flow and follow the global epidemiological chart.

Since the pandemic hit last year, people, especially the expatriates working in the Sultanate, thought of postponing the annual leave for a couple of months, or may be compensated for some less workload days to see their near and dear ones and attend some important works back home.

But the Coronavirus did not even give them that chance, even to think of, due to changing global scenarios and uncertainty of flights coming and going.

Even if there are flights to go; there is no certainty to come back. There are chances of losing jobs and salary cuts. All kinds of uncertainties are there.

Dr Abdulraoof Ahmed Ismail, a faculty member at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), is not able to make any leave plans due to this situation.

He has some two months of annual leave coming any time soon after the completion of college examinations.

“But I am not exploring any plan at this point. I have taken one shot of the vaccine, but I have to wait for the second. Suppose I go but do not come back on time, then there is another issue, and top of it is frequently changing the quarantine schedule. For example, suppose you go home and stay quarantined for 14 days, come back and stay for another 14 days. So for me, I have taken a call not to go”, he said.



Others are worried over the situation back home and the risk of travelling in flights due to the emergence of new mutants “Alpha, Delta, some dots and some numbers” that are said to have the capacity to spread very fast.

Cyril George, an employee in a private firm in Muscat, believes that one should not plan to go back home during annual leave this time around, if not that urgent.

“Request for some time extension, if they agree, it’s good; If not take leave, stay at home, it’s better. In any case, you are saving yourself from catching the virus”, he said, giving his mind about his own vacation plan.

Some parents have children who have completed schooling and expect to write entrance examinations for higher studies. Some dates for those tests have already been announced. They are in a fix what to do. Their vaccination is not complete, and on top of it, they also do not want to take any risk.

Academic Dr Atiya Fatima is no different. She also has shelved her plans to go to India. Not very happy about the decision, but she has decided to accept the situation.

“The only silver lining with me is my location Salalah, where weather is better than many places, even better than my own place in India. So I will enjoy khareef (monsoon) season without any risk of mixing with the crowd, and maybe utilise this time in clearing some pending academic works”, she said.

Of course, she has some family friends in mind who have also decided to stay back during the vacation. With them, she can have a feeling of vacation fun as and when needed.



Campaign to prevent spread of coronavirus in workplaces



MUSCAT: The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates – Madayn has launched “For Your Safety” awareness campaign to curb the spread of coronavirus (Covid-19) in its industrial cities, Knowledge Oasis Muscat and Al Mazunah Free Zone.

The campaign targets the workforce in the industrial units based in the industrial cities, specifically those operating in food and water sectors; the commercial activities related to public health in the industrial cities; and the administrative buildings of the companies based in the Knowledge Oasis Muscat.

The campaign aims at disseminating awareness on the importance of receiving vaccination to reduce infection in the work environment, spreading extensive awareness on the precautionary measures to achieve a safe and healthy workplace, and training the workforce in the industrial units to develop preventive plans and practices against coronavirus disease.



The campaign also highlights the significance of correcting the wrong practices of the workforce with the objective of reaching zero violations while continuing to conduct PCR tests.

Through a series of field visits to the various industrial cities of Madayn and the Knowledge Oasis Muscat, Madayn's officials of health, safety, security and environment will provide the industrial units with the preventive measures

and awareness guidelines to reduce and limit the spread of infection with coronavirus at the work environment.

Over the past years, Madayn has qualified a group of its employees on the basics of inspection and occupational safety in the industrial cities in various fields such as food safety, investor services, field work procedures, and health, safety and environment.

— ONA

Omanisation in higher ed to make youths stronger

DR MOHAMMED SHAFIUDDIN

Oman's government has in recent weeks intensified a long-standing policy, known as Omanisation, to create jobs for its citizens to help shore up an economy weakened by the coronavirus crisis.

The number of foreign workers in the Sultanate began to fall in 2018, having risen year on year before then, national data since 2004 shows. The move is expected to provide a much-needed fillip in Oman's localisation. Currently the higher education sector in Oman has many expatriates employed in administrative, teaching and top management positions.

The decision stipulates that only Omanis can be employed in all administrative and financial positions, professions related to admission and registration, career guidance, student counselling, student affairs and student services in private higher educational institutions is really a good step taken by the administration and proved good to create opportunities to the youth

The hardworking nature of Omani youth gives good results to them and to increase the economical values of the country. They rightly realised the responsibility of individuals as Individual Social Responsibility.

The joint cooperation between the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation and the Ministry of Labour, along with the universities and private colleges is represented through the Coordinating Committee of Private Higher Education Institutions to achieve vision 2040. But Education is the backbone to every country and whereas Oman which is highly populated with youth so the steps are

to be taken with utmost care and plan.

Locals have to come forward in teaching to make their young generation strong and the cultural values are nicely imparted by the locals. The way the government gives importance to education is very good and the new basic principle also stresses the same.

Compulsory education until the end of the Basic Education stage; encouraging the setting up of universities, promoting scholarly research, and sponsoring the talented and innovators is one of the important points which focuses on the importance of education to achieve the goal.

So the planning to Omanise the Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) in Oman needs proper research and the outcomes are carefully to be observed and feasible solutions are to be adopted. Before this expressing the voluntary contribution from the educated youth is welcome.

Not only searching the job in HEIs but by starting technical trade institutes, Paramedical courses, schools, Colleges and Universities will be helpful for them to impart good education to the youth and solve their job issues. Instead of the Job Seeking Approach, the Job Offering Approach is successful in the most developing countries. Issue may not be new but requires a special approach, research to develop the strategy. Any strategy related to education should be followed only after a compressive study and observing the results. Under the pragmatic leadership Omanisation in HEIs is not so far.

*(The writer is an educationist.
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shafishamshad@gmail.com)*

OCS Infotech to groom Omanis as future leaders in technical field

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 29

OCS Infotech has revealed its training programme for Omani employees in order to qualify them to assume leadership roles in the second line of the organisation during the coming period. OCS Infotech is one of the most important companies of Zubair Corporation and one of the first Omani companies in the technical field.

It has over four decades of experience in developing technology solutions for data storage, virtualisation, network solutions, cybersecurity, data centre and infrastructure management, disaster recovery, business continuity and other related services. The company also provides clients with integrated consulting services for comprehensive technical transformation.

Commenting on the company's strategy, Sharifah al Hoti, Head of Human Resources and Administrative Affairs at the company, said, “As part of our future strategy to enable national competencies to take on more roles, the company launched a wide programme to qualify Omani employees to take over leadership tasks in the second line of the executive management. The programme includes assessing the conditions of employees



Shaima al Sharji

and determining their knowledge levels to determine the areas of training required for each of them. This is in addition to identifying new job opportunities, which can be offered to the youth in collaboration with relevant government authorities. We believe that national competencies are the most important resources of the company.”

The Head of Human Resources in the company also emphasised that any employee wishing to be promoted in the private sector should make all required efforts to hone their skills and creativity in his field of work. This is possible by keeping pace with global developments in the field in which they work, as change must start with the employee themselves first.

Several Omani employees working in the company praised the efforts made by the Human



Sharifah al Hoti

Resources Department to train and qualify them in various disciplines through a clear and ambitious work plan.

Mohammed bin Saif al Rashdi, computer engineer in the company, said, “I joined OCS Infotech as an electronic technician in the beginning of 2005. With training and qualification by company officials, I was promoted to higher positions to reach my current position. This promotion comes as a direct result of the efforts made by the Human Resources Department to qualify national competencies to take over the duties of the senior management members in the company. Today, with my experience of more than 16 years, I work to help my colleagues enhance their skills and acquire the knowledge required to assume higher positions. I would like to advise those who are about to work in the private sector to accept



Mohammed al Rashdi

any job, whatever it is. This is because it is only the beginning of a promising career that is determined by the extent of the effort a person makes for promotion.”

Shaima bint Rashid al Sharjiyah, who works in the Contracts and Technical Support Department in the company, talks about her experience, where she says, “I joined the company as an employee in the Technical Support Department. I was trained extensively before being assigned to work in one of the major companies in the Sultanate in this field, which greatly enhanced my abilities to deal with various cases that require emergency technical support. After completing the task, I returned to the company to be appointed in my current position as an official in the Contracts and Technical Support Department.”



Sahara Hospitality Co. (S.A.O.G.)

P.O. Box 311, Muscat, Postal Code 100, Sultanate of Oman.

DIRECTORS' REPORT FOR THE SECOND QUARTER ENDED ON MAY 31, 2021

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to submit the unaudited Financial Statements of the company for the second quarter ended on May 31, 2021 along with related reports.

Revenue was RO 5,402,261 as against RO 6,774,698 in the corresponding period in the previous year whereas net Profit after taxes for the period was RO 1,067,047 as against RO 1,388,014 in the previous year.

The total shareholders fund increased from RO 23,243,623 at the end of May 2020 to RO 24,661,930 at the end of May 2021 and as a result of this growth, the net assets per share has recorded R.O.3.268.

On behalf of the Board of directors, I express our most sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq Bin Taimour for his wise leadership and generous support to the private sector. Furthermore, I would extend our gratitude to his government for their co-operation and assistance with special mention of Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Muscat Security Market and Capital Market Authority.

I conclude this report by expressing our appreciation to our shareholders, Petroleum Development Oman, our bankers and customers for their valued support and cooperation.

For and on behalf of Board of Directors,

TALAL BIN QAIS AL ZAWAWI
CHAIRMAN

Unaudited Consolidated Statement of Financial Position		
at 31 st May, 2021		
	2021 RO. '000	2020 RO. '000
Fixed assets	16,256	17,215
Current assets		
Inventories	29	24
Trade receivables	5,222	5,501
Receivable from related party	47	52
Bank and cash	5,723	4,913
	11,021	10,490
Total assets	27,277	27,705
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	768	611
Payables to related parties	1,036	1,918
Bank loans and over drafts	393	1,179
Lease liability	20	-
Tax liability	180	243
	2,397	3,951
Long term liabilities		
Bank loan	-	393
Lease liability	76	-
Deferred tax liability	142	117
	218	510
Total liabilities	2,615	4,461
Net Assets	24,662	23,244
Shareholders' funds		
Share capital	7,546	6,738
Legal reserve	2,353	2,129
Retained earnings	14,763	14,377
Total shareholders' equity	24,662	23,244

Unaudited Consolidated Statement of Comprehensive Income		
For 6 months ended 31 st May, 2021		
	2021 RO. '000	2020 RO. '000
Turnover/Revenue	5,402	6,775
Gross Profit	1,950	2,444
Depreciation	(541)	(536)
Administration & general expenses	(225)	(308)
Operating profit	1,184	1,600
Finance charges	72	34
Profit before taxation	1,256	1,634
Taxation	(189)	(246)
Net profit attributable to ordinary Shareholders	1,067	1,388
Net profit margin	20%	20%

The complete accounts in either Arabic or English will be delivered to any shareholder within 7 days of receipt of the request. Such requests may be sent to the Board Secretary, Sahara Hospitality Co. (S.A.O.G.), PO Box 311, Postal Code 100, Muscat.

Clashes erupt as Israel begins demolition in Jerusalem’s Silwan

TEL AVIV: Israel demolished a Palestinian shop in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Silwan on Tuesday, triggering scuffles between police and protesters who accused authorities of discriminatory enforcement of building permits in the holy city.

Palestinians seek East Jerusalem, which Israel captured in a 1967 war, for a future state. Israel deems all of Jerusalem its capital — a status not recognised internationally — and has encouraged Jewish settlement of predominantly Palestinian areas.

A bulldozer escorted by Israeli police flattened Harbi Rajabi’s butchers shop in the neighbourhood which is overlooked by the Al Aqsa Mosque, the third holiest shrine in Islam and the most sensitive site in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The shop is one of at least eight properties that residents said were slated for demolition. The residents say many have been there for decades, even from before 1967. The authorities have earmarked the land for a park and say the shops and homes have been built illegally.

Mahmoud Basit who runs the



A Palestinian woman holds her mobile phone as she walks near Israeli security force members during clashes with Palestinians which erupted over Israel's demolition of a shop at Silwan in East Jerusalem on Tuesday. — Reuters

butchers said 14 family members depended on income from there. “We have no other way to support our families,” said Basit, who added he would have to look for new work from scratch.

Deputy Jerusalem Mayor Arie King said “around 20” buildings in Silwan — which Israel refers to by its Hebrew name Shiloach — had received demolition orders. Around another 60 buildings there were in violation of Israeli

zoning laws, he said.

Palestinians in Silwan say it is near-impossible to get building permits. They see the demolitions as designed to drive them from Jerusalem. Disputing this, King said the municipality had approved hundreds of new Palestinian homes in Silwan.

Palestinian medics said 13 people were injured in Tuesday’s confrontations in Silwan. Police said two officers were hurt

by stone-throwers and that three people were arrested for disorderly conduct and assault.

The municipality had given Palestinians until June 28 to dismantle the structures themselves. King said the land would be cleared to make way for the park and public buildings, adding that Silwan’s biblical links made it “an important historical site”.

Nader Abu Diab, who also received a demolition order, lives in fear of the knock on the door from municipal inspectors.

“My grandchildren ask me questions and I can’t answer them. They’re children. What can I tell them? That they’re going to demolish our home?” Abu Diab, 55, said.

His brother, Fakhri Abu Diab said he applied seven times for an Israeli permit to expand his home in Silwan “but it was always rejected”. He added that over a hundred Palestinians could become homeless if the current round of demolitions continues.

The future of another East Jerusalem neighbourhood, Sheikh Jarrah, was one of the flashpoints at the heart of fighting between Israel and Palestinian fighters last month. — Reuters

Iran ‘examining’ whether to extend IAEA monitoring deal

TEHRAN: Iran is “examining” whether to extend an agreement to allow the UN to monitor some of its nuclear activities, government spokesman Ali Rabii said on Tuesday.

Questions around IAEA cameras and other surveillance tools are part of broader talks underway in Vienna to try to salvage Iran’s tattered 2015 nuclear deal with major powers.

Iran restricted access to some of its nuclear facilities to inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN’s nuclear watchdog, in February under a law passed late last year.

Since then, the Islamic Republic has refused to provide real-time footage from IAEA cameras and data from other surveillance devices that the UN agency has installed in these locations.

The IAEA and Tehran have nevertheless negotiated a compromise that guarantees a certain degree of monitoring of Iran’s nuclear programme.

The monitoring equipment remains in the IAEA’s custody, but the data is in the possession of Iran and should not be deleted

We are examining the need [to renew it] and any other possibility, government spokesman Ali Rabii said about the agreement with the IAEA at a press conference

as long as the arrangement remains in force.

Initially agreed for three months, the compromise was extended for a further month but then expired on June 24. The IAEA has since been urging Tehran to inform it of its intentions.

Regarding the agreement with the IAEA, “we are examining the need [to renew it] and any other possibility,” Rabii said on Tuesday, without elaborating, at a press conference in Tehran.

On Monday, the Iranian foreign ministry had said “no decision” on the deletion or retention of the recorded data had been taken yet. — AFP

Abu Dhabi to ban unvaccinated people from many public places

ABU DHABI: The UAE capital Abu Dhabi said it will allow only vaccinated people in many public places, including schools, malls and restaurants, from August 20 in an effort to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

The city announced a colour-coded system on its health app which details testing and vaccination history earlier this month.

Those with “green” status are allowed more freedom of movement in Abu Dhabi, with a list of restricted places such as public beaches already announced earlier this month.

“The Abu Dhabi Emergency, Crisis and Disasters Committee has approved allowing entry into a number of public places for only those vaccinated, effective from Friday, August 20,” it said on Monday. — AFP

Iraqi fighters mourn comrades killed in US strikes

BAGHDAD: Thousands of members of Iraq’s Hashed al Shaabi paramilitary alliance gathered in Baghdad on Tuesday to mourn comrades killed in US air strikes along the Syrian border.

The American raids early on Monday sparked an exchange of fire between militias and the US-led coalition in eastern Syria, and heightened fears of a new US-Iran escalation amid ongoing efforts to revive Tehran’s 2015 nuclear deal with major powers.

With chants of “death to America” and “vengeance for the martyrs”, the Hashed members massed in Freedom Square near the Iraqi capital’s high-security Green Zone where the US embassy is located.

Security forces were deployed in large numbers, sealing off the Green Zone after a string of recent incursions by armed groups.

Several high-ranking Hashed figures took part in the symbolic funeral, including its top commander Faleh Al-Fayyadh



Members of Iraqi Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) attend a symbolic funeral of fellow members of PMF who were killed by US air strikes on the Syria-Iraq border, in Baghdad, on Tuesday. — Reuters

and Hadi al-Ameri, head of one of its main factions, the Badr Organisation.

Many of the mourners, accompanied by vehicles packed with armed men, wore black and

held up signs reading: “Attacks on the Hashed must speed up the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq.”

Others carried pictures of the revered Iranian general Qasem

Soleimani and Hashed’s former second-in-command Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, who were killed in a US drone strike near Baghdad airport early last year.

The Syrian Observatory for

Human Rights war monitoring group said on Tuesday that nine fighters were killed in the strikes near the Albu Kamal district on the Syrian side of the border, updating an earlier toll after two of the wounded had succumbed to their injuries.

The group earlier reported that a weapons store had been destroyed.

The Hashed said four of its fighters were killed in the Qaim region near the border.

The fighters were stationed there to prevent militants infiltrating Iraq, the group said, denying they had taken part in any attacks against US interests or personnel and warning they had “the legal right to respond... and hold the perpetrators accountable on Iraqi soil”.

The Pentagon said the strikes targeted operational and weapons storage facilities at two locations in Syria and one in Iraq, all near the common border, that had been used by militias engaged in drone attacks against US interests in Iraq. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

DUBAI

Israeli Embassy in UAE inaugurated

Israel’s new foreign minister inaugurated its embassy in the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday and offered an olive branch to other former adversaries, saying: “We’re here to stay.” Yair Lapid’s two-day visit is the first to the Gulf state by an Israeli cabinet minister since the countries established ties last year. He was due to sign a bilateral agreement on economic cooperation and open an Israeli consulate in Dubai on Wednesday.

The trip is also an opportunity for the two-week-old Israeli



government of Naftali Bennett, a nationalist who heads an improbable cross-partisan coalition, to make diplomatic inroads despite long-stymied talks with the Palestinians.

GENEVA

Libya talks aim to pave way for Dec polls

Libyan delegates began four days of UN-facilitated talks on Monday aimed at creating the legal conditions for elections they hope will usher in a “new era” for the North African country.

Around 75 representatives hope to agree during the talks in Geneva on the constitutional basis for presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for December 24 in Libya. UN Special Envoy for Libya Jan Kubis said it was



regrettable the issue had not been resolved, adding that leaving without a decision was “not an option” given the timetable.

“I call on you to overcome your differences.”

WASHINGTON

Sudan crosses hurdle towards debt relief

The International Monetary Fund’s executive board has decided that Sudan has reached the decision point for the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, a Sudanese finance ministry official said late on Monday, meaning the country can begin receiving relief on its more than \$50 billion in debt.

A quarter of a century after the IMF and World Bank launched their HIPC debt relief programme, Sudan is the penultimate economy to come



through the process, and “by far the largest case in absolute terms,” an IMF official said last month. The IMF is expected to announce an extended credit facility for Sudan.

In brief

■ TOKYO



'BLACK WIDOW' LOSES FINAL DEATH SENTENCE APPEAL

A Japanese woman dubbed the "Black Widow" who used cyanide to kill her elderly lovers had her final appeal against the death sentence rejected on Tuesday by the country's top court, local media said. Chisako Kakehi, 74, was sentenced to death by hanging in 2017 for the murder of three men — including a husband — and the attempted murder of another, in a case that gripped Japan.

Two years ago, a high court dismissed an appeal by the serial killer who pocketed millions in insurance payouts and inheritance, drawing comparisons in the media with the spider that poisons its mate after copulation.

■ NEW DELHI



POLICE PROBE TWITTER OVER INACCURATE MAP

Indian police have filed preliminary charges against senior Twitter officials over an inaccurate map of the country, an official said on Tuesday, in the latest escalation between the US firm and New Delhi. Uttar Pradesh state police said the criminal case was filed against two Twitter India officials late on Monday following a complaint from the local head of a nationalist group that the US firm's website showed the disputed Kashmir region as an independent country.

The map was already taken down from Twitter's "Tweep Life" career section after an uproar by social media users on Monday against the micro-blogging site.

■ MANILA



PHILIPPINES EXTENDS VIRUS CURBS UNTIL MID-JULY

President Rodrigo Duterte has prolonged restrictions on movement and businesses in the Philippine capital and nearby provinces until mid-July, and retained stricter Covid-19 curbs in central and southern areas, an official said on Tuesday.

Infections in the capital region, home to at least 13 million people, have dropped since peaking in April, but some provinces are battling spikes as the country scrambles to distribute and administer vaccines.

Entertainment venues, amusement parks and contacts sports are prohibited in the capital region and nearby places.

Bangladesh to get 2.5m doses from US; India okays Moderna

WASHINGTON/NEW DELHI: The United States began shipping 2.5 million doses of Moderna's Covid vaccine to Bangladesh on Tuesday, a White House official told AFP, as the South Asian country confronted a wave of new infections.

"Thanks to the US commitment to playing a leading role in ending the pandemic everywhere, 2.5 million doses of the Moderna vaccine will begin to ship to Bangladesh", said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Illustrating the urgency, delivery is expected to be completed this week.

Bangladesh, which neighbours India, began a severe lockdown on Monday in response to spiralling infections from the Delta variant. People are restricted to their homes, with offices closed, traffic shut down and the security forces enforcing compliance.

The South Asian country of around 170 million people recorded nearly 6,000 cases last Friday. Authorities say that districts near the Indian border



A health worker inoculates a woman with a dose of the Covaxin vaccine against Covid-19 inside the premises of the Golden Temple in Amritsar on Tuesday. — AFP

are suffering especially badly, with hospitals in the cities of Khulna and Rajshahi overwhelmed.

Bangladesh "has a 55 per cent week-over-week increase in cases, driven largely by the Delta variant", a White House official said, explaining how the country made it onto the urgent list.

President Joe Biden has declared the United States the

world's vaccine "arsenal" in the war on Covid-19.

APPROVAL FOR MODERNA'S JAB

India on Tuesday authorised the emergency use of Moderna's Covid-19 vaccine as it seeks to ramp up its vaccination drive in the wake of a record-breaking surge in infections and deaths.

The vast nation of 1.3 billion

Five Indian drugmakers to jointly start trial of Merck & Co's Covid-19 drug and the country grants emergency approval for Moderna's Covid-19 vaccine

people was hit by a massive spike in coronavirus cases in April and May that pushed the healthcare system to breaking point.

Moderna's shot is the fourth to be approved by New Delhi after Oxford-AstraZeneca's Covishield and Covaxin, which was developed by Indian firm Bharat Biotech and Russia's Sputnik V.

"I am pleased to inform that an application received from Moderna through an Indian partner of theirs, Cipla, has been granted EUA (Emergency Use Authorisation)", a member of government advisory body NITI Aayog, Vinod K Paul, said at a health ministry briefing. — AFP

Aung San Suu Kyi urges Myanmar to stay 'united'



YANGON: Ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi asked the people of Myanmar to stay "united" in the face of military rule, her lawyers said on Tuesday, as she reappeared in a junta court.

The Nobel laureate, and daughter of independence hero General Aung San, has been under house arrest since a February coup that sparked huge pro-democracy protests the junta has tried to crush with deadly force.

Invisible to the outside world bar a handful of courtroom appearances, Suu Kyi, 76, has been hit with an eclectic raft of charges. She could face more than a decade in prison if convicted on all counts.

On Tuesday, she heard testimony that she flouted coronavirus restrictions during elections her National League for Democracy (NLD) party won by a landslide last year, her lawyer Min Min Soe told reporters.

"She asked the people to stay united and be consistent", she added.

The specially-convened court in the capital Naypyidaw also heard testimony on a separate charge of sedition, although Suu Kyi's legal team argued two documents submitted by the prosecution were inadmissible as they were unsigned.

Former president Win Myint and senior NLD leader Myo Aung are also on trial for sedition and appeared beside Suu Kyi on Tuesday. — AFP

Oxygen prices leap in Indonesia's capital

JAKARTA: Oxygen prices in Indonesia's capital had more than doubled and some suppliers reported shortages on Tuesday after a surge in Covid-19 cases that prompted the Red Cross to warn of a coronavirus "catastrophe" in Southeast Asia's biggest country.

Indonesia has announced record daily Covid-19 infections of more than 20,000 in recent days, in a new wave fuelled by the emergence of highly transmissible virus variants and increased mobility after the Muslim fasting month.

With hospitals filling up in the capital, Jakarta, and patients being turned away, some people sought to secure oxygen for infected family members at home. The

price for a tank of oxygen had jumped to \$140 from the usual \$50, suppliers said.

"I'm queuing here now to refill oxygen for my wife and son who are now positive with Covid-19", said Taufik Hidayat, 51, at one supplier. "I went around and it all was sold out."

Sellers in others areas in Jakarta told Reuters their stocks had also dried up.

But Sulung Mulia Putra, an official at Jakarta health agency, said a shortage at hospitals was temporary and due to distribution issues that were being resolved.

"Distributors don't have enough transport so hospitals will be helped by the police, parks agency and Red Cross to transport



Employees lift an oxygen cylinder to put it on the pick-up truck at a store in Jakarta, on Tuesday. — Reuters

oxygen", he said.

Hospitals in several designated "red zone" areas have reported

overcapacity, including Jakarta, with its isolation beds 93pc occupied as of Sunday. — Reuters

Australia tightens lockdown amid Delta virus outbreak

SYDNEY: Australia reported a slight rise in Covid-19 infections on Tuesday, while officials in several states tightened movement curbs and pushed for vaccinations to limit flare-ups of the highly infectious Delta variant.

After months in which it had nearly stamped out the virus, Australia is battling the variant in five of its eight states and territories, just two weeks after an infection in key city Sydney involving a limousine driver of overseas airline crew.

Worries that the variant first detected in India could touch off outbreaks have forced lockdowns in three large cities and curbs of varying strictness in several more, affecting more than 20 million Australians, or about 80 per cent of the population.

Northern Queensland state imposed a three-day lockdown in capital Brisbane and neighbouring regions from Tuesday evening. The Western Australian capital of Perth began a four-day lockdown from Tuesday, joining Sydney and Darwin.

"The risk is real and we need to



A woman runs with her dog through Elizabeth Quay in Perth on Tuesday as several positive Covid-19 cases have led to a four-day lockdown of the Perth metropolitan area. — AFP

act quickly, we need to go hard, we need to go fast", said Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk said. The state reported two new local cases.

Sydney, home to a fifth of Australia's population, is in a two-week lockdown until July 9, while

a stay-home order in the outback city of Darwin was extended by 72 hours to Friday. The Sydney outbreak has grown to nearly 150 cases.

Mandatory masks and limits on gatherings are among the curbs across Australia.

Police in the most populous state of New South Wales fined Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce A\$200 (\$150) for not wearing a mask inside a petrol station, media said.

Joyce, the highest ranking government official to face such

a fine, confirmed the incident in a media interview, saying he had gone unmasked to pay for petrol bought for his partner.

Even under lockdown, New South Wales reported 19 new locally-acquired infections, up from 18 a day ago.

Western Australia reported no new cases, despite going into lockdown, while the Northern Territory detected two.

VACCINE CONFUSION

Monday's decision to indemnify doctors who give the AstraZeneca vaccine to those younger than 60, a bid to kickstart a sluggish inoculation programme, provoked complaints from doctors who said the medical regulator still recommended the vaccine for those older than 60.

"Phones are ringing off the hook at GP clinics", Karen Price, president of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, said on Twitter.

"We had no warning of last night's announcements and this isn't the first time this has happened." — Reuters

RACE TO CONTAIN COVID

World passes 3-bn vaccine mark

PARIS: More than three billion Covid-19 vaccines have been administered around the world, an AFP tally found on Tuesday, as countries race to contain the virulent Delta variant that is fuelling outbreaks all over the globe.

The highly infectious strain of coronavirus has caught many nations off guard, with Russia reporting its highest daily death toll yet, Australia shutting down city after city and fears growing over major sporting events like Euro 2020 and the Olympic Games.

At least 3.9 million people have died from Covid-19, and while some wealthy countries are succeeding in bringing infections down thanks to strong vaccination drives, others where shots are not as readily available are struggling.

According to the tally, high-income countries as defined by the World Bank have administered an average of 79 doses per 100



A health worker administers a dose of Covid-19 vaccine in Santiago. — AFP

inhabitants, with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Israel taking the lead.

In low-income nations, the figure is just one shot per 100 people.

On Tuesday, foreign ministers from the Group of 20 major economies stressed the need for greater global cooperation in the

face of the pandemic.

“Multilateral cooperation will be key to our collective ability to stop this global health crisis,” US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told the ministers in the ancient Italian city of Matera.

Western leaders have pledged to donate one billion doses to poorer countries, but have been widely

criticised for being too slow to help. Vaccine hesitancy has also played a part in slow uptake.

In Russia, which recorded its highest daily death toll on Tuesday since the outbreak of the pandemic, officials have introduced mandatory shots for some groups of citizens to counter scepticism.

The country reported 652 coronavirus fatalities over the past 24 hours, with a record-high number of daily deaths — 119 — in Saint Petersburg, which is due to host a Euro 2020 quarterfinal on Friday.

Meanwhile, Australian public anger is growing at the slow pace of vaccinations in a country that had been broadly successful in eliminating local transmission and leading an almost-normal life.

The Delta variant has pushed Sydney, Perth, Darwin and Brisbane into lockdown, meaning a total of more than 10 million

Australians are having to stay home.

But so far, less than five per cent of adults are believed to have received both vaccine doses.

The speed of transmission of the Delta variant has fuelled concerns over ongoing or upcoming sporting events.

On Tuesday, Germany urged the British government to reduce the number of fans allowed into Wembley stadium for the final Euro 2020 matches.

UEFA and the British authorities have said some 45,000 supporters will be allowed to attend a game between England and Germany on Tuesday afternoon, equivalent to 50 per cent of capacity.

Attendance will be increased to 75 per cent, or more than 60,000 fans, for the semifinals and final at Wembley, in what will be the largest crowds at a sports event in Britain since the start of the pandemic. — AFP

Ethiopia rebels retake regional capital



Children, who fled the violence in Ethiopia's, Tigray region, wait in line for breakfast organised by a self-volunteer Mahlet Tadesse, 27, in Mekelle, the capital of Tigray region. — AFP

GONDAR: Tigrayan forces made further gains against Ethiopian government troops and their allies on Tuesday, with a spokesman reporting they were in full control of the regional capital while in the northern town of Shire, residents said Eritrean forces had left.

“We are 100 per cent in control of Mekelle,” Getachew Reda, spokesman for the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), said on Tuesday, referring to the regional capital. There had been some fighting on the outskirts of the city, but that was now finished, he said.

“Our forces are still in hot pursuit to south, east, to continue until every square inch of territory is cleared from the enemy”

Reuters could not independently verify his statement because almost all phone links to Tigray are down. But on Monday evening before phone links went down, residents said soldiers had disappeared from the streets and TPLF forces entered Mekelle. Residents greeted them with flags and songs, witnesses said.

A spokeswoman for Ethiopia's prime minister, the head of a government taskforce on Tigray, an Ethiopian military spokesman and Eritrea's information minister did not return messages seeking comment.

The TPLF, an ethnically based political party that dominated Ethiopia's national politics for nearly three decades, has been battling the central government since early November and has made major territorial gains in the past week. — Reuters

EU IMPLEMENTATION FROM JULY 1

Digital Covid certificate roll-out risks chaos

DUBLIN: Groups representing Europe's largest airlines and airports have warned of chaos and hours-long queues unless countries better coordinate the roll-out of the EU's digital Covid-19 certificate and ensure passengers are processed before arriving at airports.

The European Union's system of digital Covid-19 travel certificates is due to come into force on Thursday, but airports group ACI and airlines representative bodies A4E, IATA and ERA warned in a letter to EU national leaders of a “worrying patchwork of approaches” across the continent.

“As passenger traffic increases in the coming weeks, the risk of chaos at European Airports is real,” the groups said in the joint letter sent on Monday and seen by Reuters.

The digital certificates are designed to show, via QR codes, whether passengers are fully vaccinated, have



immunity due to recent recovery from Covid-19 or have had a negative test.

They are designed to be used for travel throughout the EU from July 1, but would require extra checks and the right equipment to read the codes.

The letter said the only way to avoid huge queues and delays during the peak summer season was to implement a system whereby both the vaccination certificate and passenger locator forms are processed remotely before the passenger arrives at the airport. — Reuters

Greece recovers Picasso painting stolen in 2012



The paintings “Woman's Head” by Pablo Picasso and “Mill” by Piet Mondrian, both stolen from Greece's National Gallery in 2012, are displayed during a presentation to members of the media at the Ministry of Citizens Protection in Athens on Tuesday. — Reuters

ATHENS: Greece has recovered works of art by Pablo Picasso and Piet Mondrian, stolen from its National Gallery in 2012, authorities said on Tuesday.

Thieves broke into the gallery and snatched Picasso's 1939 painting “Woman's Head”, donated by the Spanish artist in 1949, and Dutch painter Mondrian's “Mill”.

To mislead the guard, the thieves had activated the gallery's alarm system several times before breaking into the building early in the morning. The guard turned off the alarm only to spot one of the thieves through the motion detector. On Monday, authorities

arrested a 49-year-old Greek man who confessed that he had stolen the paintings and led police to a forest outside Athens where he had hidden them, the Ministry of Citizens Protection said on Tuesday.

Footage handed out by police from the site showed one of the paintings sealed in a package sitting under the bushes.

The arrested man said a sketch by Italian painter Guglielmo Caccia, donated to the gallery in 1907 and also stolen in 2012, had been destroyed, the ministry said.

At a joint news conference with Citizens Protection Minister

Michalis Chrisochoidis, Culture Minister Lina Mendoni said the Picasso painting bore an inscription of the painter to the Greek people for their fight against fascism.

“That is the reason why it was impossible for the painting not only to be sold, but also to be exhibited anywhere,” Mendoni said.

The artist had given the cubist painting to the Greek state in recognition of the country's resistance to Nazi Germany during a painful 1941-44 occupation.

— Agencies

SHORT TAKES

JOHANNESBURG

Zuma gets 15-month jail term

In a historic ruling, South Africa's top court on Tuesday handed the country's former president, Jacob Zuma, a 15-month jail term for “egregious” contempt of court after he refused to appear before graft investigators.

Zuma was told to turn himself in within five days, failing which police will be ordered to arrest him and take him to jail.

The ruling sets a precedent for South Africa — and a benchmark for the continent — by jailing a former head of state for



failing to respond to a corruption probe.

“Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma is guilty of the crime of contempt of court,” Constitutional Court judge Sisi Khampepe said.

BRUSSELS

Asylum applications in EU fall

The number of asylum applications lodged in the EU plummeted by a third last year because of border restrictions thrown up by the coronavirus pandemic, the bloc's asylum assistance agency said on Tuesday.

However, the European Asylum Support Office pointed out in its annual report that this in no way meant that demand for asylum in Europe has dropped.

“We know that globally there are still record numbers



of persons in need of international protection, but they were simply not able to make it to Europe,” the office's head Nina Gregori said as she presented the report.

BARCELONA

Spanish PM to meet Catalan leader

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez will meet Catalonia's new pro-independence regional head on Tuesday for the first time as the central government seeks to improve ties after pardoning nine jailed separatist leaders.

The two are likely to discuss a date to resume negotiations on the region's political conflict.

Catalan head of government Pere Aragonés, who took office last month, has said his main requests at the meeting in Madrid will be an official referendum on



independence and an amnesty for the more than 3,000 separatists under legal investigation.

Sanchez, who opposes independence, has ruled out both demands.

Thank you for your care and goodwill...

Since the breakout of the devastating Covid-19 pandemic, a period marked by the biggest healthcare crisis of our lifetimes, we have all become much more aware of the vital role played by doctors, nurses and other frontliners to keep the virus at bay.

The frontline workers since the beginning of 2020 are overworked and fatigued, with no respite seen in sight as the contagion continues to claim or maim lives.

There have been stories aplenty of how, keeping aside the fears of contracting the virus, they have turned up for duty, day in and out, that too, many of them being forced to stay away from their kith and kin.

These everyday heroes deserve every bit of praise and appreciation for their kind and genuine care for their patients — an attitude imbued with exceptional professionalism. No doubt, there is nothing compared to what they do!

I have been prompted to write this piece as I was a beneficiary of their incredible goodwill, compassion and care during my frightful journey to recovery from a number of fatal



SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyp

SOME WILL SAY
THIS IS JUST A
PART OF THEIR
JOB. BEING
KIND IS NOT
SOMETHING
ONE LEARNS
FROM WORK
EXPERIENCE

complications related to Covid-19 infections.

Whether in ICU or ventilation or in isolation, the gestures of genuine kindness of the healthcare personnel during my hospital admissions in Badr Al Samaa Hospital in Muscat and Christian Mission Hospital in my hometown in the southern Indian state of Kerala were immense and instinctive, and made what was a truly heartbreaking experience to me.

I know just a ‘thank you’ does not convey the gratitude that I feel for the frontline workers. Almost every experience has been overwhelmingly positive. There are no words that send enough love and encouragement and respect for what they have imparted to me and others to keep their fellow human beings safe and healthy.

I know some will say this is just a part of their job, but in my opinion, being kind is not something you learn on work experience. It is a trait with which one is either born with or develops early in life. This is something we should all try to emulate.

Containing and treating the coronavirus requires Herculean

efforts.

As Dr Ravi Perumal, specialist in internal medicine at Badr Al Samaa Hospital, Muscat, puts it, “Many people do not appreciate how stressful it is to work in a busy hospital. Our profession demands to care about people’s welfare and nothing matters other than trying to provide the best care possible. There is a lot of pressure everyday – and I think that you really have to have a certain personality type to do the job and cope with this”.

This period of pandemic has really put a spotlight on what frontline workers do everyday, and I hope that people continue to remember this once everything is back to normal.

Whether directly or indirectly involved in treating coronavirus patients, the world is indebted to them. Words cannot express my gratitude for their commitment and unwavering efforts in managing this unprecedented situation.

Even though I don’t mention all of you who helped survive those ‘dark days’, I will be grateful to you forever! Thank you from the bottom of my heart!

SEARCH FOR SURVIVORS

For the families of the missing, the progress is agonisingly slow

CYRIL JULIEN

It is the fifth day, and rescuers have heard no human sounds from within the massive, smoking pile of twisted metal and concrete.

Miami-area firefighters, their faces tight with exhaustion, tunnel piece by jagged piece into the debris, searching for any sign of the more than 150 people still unaccounted for after the 12-storey beachside apartment building collapsed in the middle of a sweltering Florida summer night, its residents asleep inside. For the families of the missing, the progress is agonisingly slow, and their anger, frustration and grief is palpable.

Rescuers say they understand the desperation.

“I know the families ask why we are not going faster”, says Maggie Castro, a paramedic with the Miami-Dade county fire department.

In a strange way it is hope itself, even now, that is slowing them down, she explains.

“We have the potential for having void spaces, these pockets that can potentially be in the rubble where we can find live victims”, she said.

“If we just jump on these piles of attack, we will collapse these spaces. “It seems slow but it’s as fast as we can go.”

The difficult task — complicated by torrid heat and humidity, regular thunderstorms, and, in the first days, a fire deep within the debris that took a long time to bring under control — must be carried out in a “methodical and strategic way.”

“Heavy machinery cut large pieces and remove the ones that are safe to be removed. When we come to an area where there would potentially be a void space, we work by hand, remove debris bucket by bucket until we get to the area we want to”, Castro, a 52-year-old rescue specialist who has been



A woman hangs flowers on a fence as people mourn at the memorial site in front of the partially collapsed building in Surfside near Miami Beach, Florida. – Reuters

NINE PEOPLE HAVE
BEEN CONFIRMED
DEAD SO FAR
SINCE CHAMPLAIN
TOWERS SOUTH,
IN SURFSIDE, NEAR
MIAMI BEACH

with the department for 17 years, says.

With listening devices and sniffer dogs they strain for any sound that could lead them to life.

“We hear falling debris, twisting metal”, Castro says. “We have not heard human sounds.”

Nine people have been confirmed dead so far since Champlain Towers South, in Surfside, near Miami Beach, partially collapsed in the early hours of last Thursday morning. The first rescuers to arrive in the moments after the tower came down helped evacuate dozens of residents, and pulled one teenage boy alive from the rubble.

As the death toll inches upwards, Castro explains that many of the

residents were likely in bed at the time, meaning there was little chance of finding many of them in one place.

“We don’t know what happened to them when the collapse happened. Nothing falls and stays in place, they go in every direction”, she says.

Moises Soffer, a volunteer with the Latin American Jewish organisation Cadena International, is helping with the search with his dog Oreo, a pomsy who at just under two years old is specially trained to find survivors.

“She can go wherever she wants, into craves, voids where people normally don’t go, because of her weight she can go where there is instability”, says Soffer, 36, from Mexico. — AFP

GREEN GRABBING

Asean missing from push to protect 30% of planet

MICHAEL TAYLOR

A growing global push to safeguard nature by pledging to protect about a third of the planet’s land and oceans by 2030 will fall short unless biodiversity-rich Southeast Asian nations get behind the ambitious proposal, environmentalists have warned.

Leaders of the G7 wealthy nations this month backed a coalition of about 60 countries that have already promised to conserve at least 30 per cent of their land and oceans by 2030 (30x30) to curb climate change and the loss of plant and animal species. Cambodia is the only Southeast Asian nation to have signed up to the goal so far, although it has been endorsed by countries in other parts of Asia-Pacific, including Japan, Pakistan and the Maldives.

Brian O’Donnell, Director of the US-based Campaign for Nature, which is calling on world leaders to back the pledge, said it was “very important” to get governments in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) on board.

“Given the incredible biodiversity in the region, much of which is facing pressure, Asean

“Given the incredible biodiversity in the region, much of which is facing pressure, Asean countries are a key voice to support 30x30”

BRIAN O’DONNELL
Director, Campaign
for Nature

countries are a key voice to support 30x30”, he said.

Southeast Asian countries cover just 3 per cent of the Earth’s surface but are home to three of the world’s 17 “megadiverse” countries — Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, according to the Campaign for Nature.

These “megadiverse” nations have been identified by conservationists as being the richest in species, in a bid to raise awareness and spur protection efforts. Southeast Asia’s land and ocean contain 35 per cent of mangrove forests and 30 per cent of coral reefs, while more than 2,000 animal and plant species have been discovered there over the past two decades.

The region is also home to about 18 per cent of the world’s endangered species, according to the Campaign for Nature.

In Indonesia, for example, the Rawa Singkil Wildlife Reserve is a high-priority conservation area and critical wildlife habitat, dubbed the “orangutan capital of the world”, while the endangered pygmy elephants live in the rainforests of Borneo.

But several Asean countries are experiencing high deforestation rates, with Indonesia, Malaysia, Laos and Cambodia among the top countries for primary forest loss, according to monitoring service Global Forest Watch.

The 30x30 goal is included in the draft text of a new global treaty to protect the planet’s plants, animals and ecosystems, due to be agreed at an October 11-24 summit in China, according to officials at the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

But much of Southeast Asia is currently battling to contain a sharp rise in coronavirus cases, with new restrictions, business closures and attempts to rapidly scale up vaccinations. The crisis has rightly become a higher priority for policymakers than nature conservation, said Ravi Sharma, a former CBD director, adding regional talks had also been disrupted.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

sport

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OOC gears up for Tokyo Olympics

SAYYID KHALID EXPRESSES CONFIDENCE IN ATHLETES TO ACHIEVE NEW RECORDS



Hamad al Khateri



Issa al Adawi



Barakat al Harthy



Amer al Khanjari

SPORTS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 29

The Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) has completed its preparation ahead of the Sultanate squad's participation in the 32nd Olympic Games hosted by Japan in Tokyo, from July 23 to August 8.

The OOC has succeeded in obtaining wild cards for four athletes to participate in Tokyo Games. Swimmer Issa bin Samir al Adawi, runner Barakat bin Mubarak al Harthy, shooter Hamad bin Saeed al Khateri and weightlifter Amer bin Salem al Khanjari received the invites after coordination between OOC and the Sports Federations and International Olympic Committee (IOC). The players were selected based on a set of specific criteria stipulated at the continental and international levels that were adopted as a condition for obtaining the invitation card.

Oman's athletics team includes Barakat bin Mubarak al Harthy, who will participate in the 100 metres race, along with his coach Mohammed bin Abdullah al Houti. In swimming, coach Ayman bin Hamad al Kulaibi will accompany



Taha al Kishry

Issa bin Samir al Adawi, who will participate in the 100 metres freestyle swimming.

The Oman shooting team will comprise Hamad bin Saeed al Khatri, who will participate in the 50m rifle competitions in three positions, along with his coach Sultan bin Salim al Rashidi, and administrator Sulaiman bin Hamad al Hinai. The list of weightlifters includes Amer bin Salem al Khanjari, who will participate in the 81 kg weight category, and his coach Mazen bin Humaid al Badri.

The athletes are undergoing a final phase of intensive training to present their best technical performance representing the Sultanate in this important



OOC Chairman Sayyid Khalid al Busaidy

international event.

OOC will participate in the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games, which will be held on July 23, where swimmer Issa al Adawi will carry the flag of the Sultanate in the march past of the participating countries, in the presence of the head and members of the delegation.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, under the directives of His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, provided continuous support to OOC to ensure its presence in Olympic Games and to enable the players to perform good levels on both the competitive and performance sides.



OOC CHIEF LAUDS MINISTRY SUPPORT

OOC Chairman Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad al Busaidy appreciated Japan for preparing well for the ideal launch 32nd Olympic Games despite challenging circumstances posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Oman will participate with four athletes who were chosen according to the Olympic standards, and they succeeded, with their diligence and determination, to achieve the acceptable rates of participation, by obtaining special invitation cards.



"Our goal remains to achieve new records in this mega sports event, and we have great confidence in our players to achieve this. We had hoped for a larger number of players and national teams to participate, however, unfortunately none of the national teams could qualify for Tokyo Games. This confirms the paramount importance of having serious long-term plans to ensure a good presence in future Olympic participations that must be worked on from now, that is what we always call for and strive to work on in coordination with the Ministry of Culture, Sports, Youth and Sports Federations and Committees. From this point of view comes the attention of the Ministry, headed by HH Sayyid

Theyazin, who provides all the possibilities available in order to make the Olympic champions. His Highness's decision to form a committee for high performance athletes is a practical indication of the correct starting point to achieve this great national goal."

For his part, Taha bin Sulaiman al Kishry, OOC Secretary-General, said that the OOC has performed all its duties to support and follow up the efforts made by the concerned sports federations and committees to prepare athletes to participate in this important global event.

Al Kishry also praised the decision issued by HH Sayyid Theyazin regarding the formation of a committee for high performance athletes, which will contribute significantly to create a supportive and stimulating environment for sports bodies and for athletes to reach high levels and ensure the effective representation of the Sultanate in continental and international sports forums. He affirmed that making Olympic champions is a joint national responsibility that requires continuous and diligent work for consecutive years.



ICC confirms T20 World Cup in UAE and Oman

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JUNE 29

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Tuesday confirmed that the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2021 will be staged in the UAE and Oman due to the ongoing Covid-19 situation in India.

The BCCI will remain the hosts of the event, which will now be held in Dubai International Stadium, the Sheikh Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi, the Sharjah Stadium, and the Oman Cricket Academy Ground, from October 17 to November 14.

Oman Cricket Chairman Pankaj Khimji hailed the decision as big moment for the game in the country.

"This is a historic occasion for Oman Cricket. We will be fully ready by fulfilling all the requirements of the BCCI and ICC. Oman will certainly extend a very warm welcome to all the teams, officials and media in October."

"The Al Amerat ground will be quickly ready by completing some final arrangements of improving the lighting facilities and other amenities," Pankaj said.

"Hosting the World Cup will be giant leap for the game in the Sultanate for sure," he added.

Acting ICC CEO Geoff Allardice said: "Our priority is to deliver the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2021 safely, in full and in its current window. Whilst we are incredibly disappointed not to



Pankaj Khimji with Kaleemullah

be hosting the event in India, the decision gives us the certainty we need to stage the event in a country that is a proven international host of multi-team events in a bio-secure environment. We will work closely with the BCCI, the Emirates Cricket Board and Oman Cricket to ensure fans can enjoy a wonderful celebration of cricket."

BCCI Secretary, Jay Shah, said: "The BCCI made every effort to stage the ICC Men's T20 World Cup in India and provide its passionate fans with a reason to cheer after a long period of gloom. However, the prevailing pandemic situation in the country meant that the health and safety of everyone concerned was fraught with risk should a tournament of this stature be held across the country. The BCCI will continue to host the tournament, which will now be held in the UAE and Oman and

work closely with the ICC to make it a memorable event."

President BCCI Sourav Ganguly said: "The BCCI is looking forward to hosting the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2021 tournament in UAE and Oman. We would have been happier hosting it in India but considering the uncertainty due to the Covid 19 situation and the importance of a world championship, the BCCI will now continue to host this tournament in UAE and Oman. The BCCI is looking forward to creating a spectacle."

Emirates Cricket Board Vice-President Khalid al Zarooni said: "Emirates Cricket Board is honoured that the BCCI and the ICC have entrusted us with staging and delivering the ICC Men's T20 World Cup. The UAE's reputation as being a safe country in which to host high-profile sporting

"This is a big occasion for Oman. Oman Cricket will be fully ready by fulfilling all the requirements of the BCCI and ICC. Oman will certainly extend a very warm welcome to all the teams, officials and media in October"

PANKAJ KHIJMI
Oman Cricket Chairman

events is a strong compliment to our government's unwavering commitment to implementing and monitoring effective health practices during the pandemic. Having hosted a number of high-profile tournaments in recent months our team is well-prepared and ready to mobilise to ensure the success of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup."

The first round of the T20 World Cup, comprising eight qualifying teams, will be split between Oman and UAE. Four of these teams will then progress to the Super 12s round where they will join the eight automatic qualifiers.

The teams competing in the preliminary stage are Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Ireland, Netherlands, Scotland, Namibia, Oman and Papua New Guinea, before the play-off stage and the final on November 14.

Messi scores twice as Argentina overrun Bolivia



Argentina's Lionel Messi drives the ball during the Conmebol Copa America 2021 tournament. - AFP

CUIABA, Brazil: Lionel Messi passed Javier Mascherano as Argentina's most capped international on Monday and scored twice as they beat Bolivia 4-1 to set up a Copa America quarter-final against Ecuador.

Messi was in fine form on his 148th appearance for Argentina and it was his sublime pass that set up Alejandro Gomez to volley home the opening goal after five minutes.

Barcelona forward Messi doubled their lead from the penalty spot just after the half-hour mark and then made it 3-0 shortly before halftime when he ran on to a through ball from Sergio Aguero and lobbed Carlos Lampe.

Bolivia, who had lost their previous 11 Copa America matches, made life more difficult for themselves by repeatedly giving up possession in their own half.

However, they improved after the break and surprised Argentina on the hour when Erwin Saavedra swept home a cross from the right to make it 3-1.

Their slight hopes of a

comeback were extinguished within five minutes as substitute Lautaro Martinez restored Argentina's three-goal advantage within seconds of replacing Sergio Aguero.

Messi's goals were his 74th and 75th for the national side and it could have been more but for another excellent performance by Lampe in the Bolivian goal.

The win extended Argentina's unbeaten streak to 17 games, a run that goes back to the last Copa America when they lost to Brazil in the semi-finals.

"We're in good form going into the quarter-finals," said Giovanni Lo Celso, who came on in the second half.

"The team knows how it is playing and what it wants to do. We're getting better and now comes the most beautiful part."

The result means Argentina will face Ecuador in the last eight on Saturday while Uruguay, who beat Paraguay 1-0, will play Colombia the same day.

Host nation Brazil will take on Chile in Rio de Janeiro on Friday, while Paraguay play Peru the same day.

— Reuters

Oman Sail unveils the 11th edition of Sailing Arabia – The Tour

MUSCAT: Oman Sail has unveiled the details of the 11th edition of Sailing Arabia – The Tour, kicking off from 24 November – 5 December 2021. Since its very first edition in 2011, the race has grown in stature to become a premier annual race and a favourite winter destination for professional and amateur sailors around the globe.

Showcasing the unique coastline and beauty of Oman, the route will take participating teams to unique destinations in Oman starting from Mussanah to Sur and back to Muscat for the finale, with coastal raids and in-port races at each stop. Each team will be competing in an identical DIAM24 trimaran, ensuring each race is a tough test of the teamwork, tactics and the endurance of each crew.

Saleh al Jabri, Project Manager and Acting Head of Sailing Events

& Commercial at Oman Sail, said, "We are really pleased to be able to organise yet another exciting edition of Sailing Arabia – The Tour in 2021. The event has become a sought-after and anticipated fixture in the calendar over the past decade and a high calibre event for talented Omani sailors and a strong international contingent to test themselves in warm winter weather."

He added, "Every year, the event has enhanced Oman's reputation as a world-class host, blessed with perfect sailing conditions and welcoming people. This year will be no different and our deep-rooted maritime traditions will be evident at each stop as the exciting, fast-paced racing captures the imagination of spectators and allows the crew to experience authentic Omani hospitality."



France stunned by Switzerland



Switzerland's goalkeeper Yann Sommer (R) saves a penalty by France's forward Kylian Mbappe. – AFP

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe missed the crucial penalty on Monday as world champions France were sent packing from Euro 2020 in a shoot-out against Switzerland, who go through to a quarter-final tie against Spain after an unforgettable day of drama which featured a total of 14 goals in two games.

Switzerland had never won a knockout tie at the European Championship and had never won a shoot-out, but they triumphed 5-4 on penalties against the World Cup holders after a remarkable 3-3 draw in Bucharest.

France, who came into the tournament as favourites to add the continental crown to the World Cup they won in Russia three years ago, had earlier come from 1-0 down to lead 3-1 and looked to be cruising through, only to concede two late goals.

The game in the Romanian capital followed a 5-3 extra-time win for Spain over Croatia in Copenhagen, and the 2008 and 2012 European champions will face the Swiss in the last eight in Saint Petersburg on Friday.

Switzerland went ahead early on when Haris Seferovic headed in a cross, but they looked set to rue the moment early in the second half when Ricardo Rodriguez's penalty was saved by Hugo Lloris.

By the hour mark, the game — watched by a crowd of around 25,000 after coronavirus restrictions in Bucharest were eased — had been turned on its head by Karim Benzema, who controlled Mbappe's pass to fire in the equaliser and then nodded in Antoine Griezmann's centre.

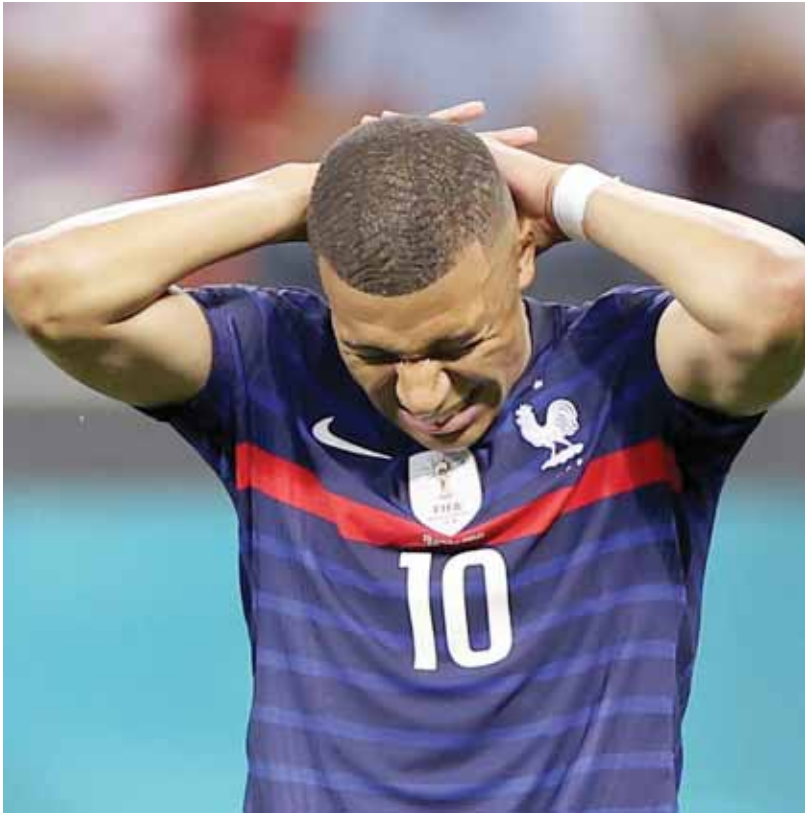
Paul Pogba's stunning curling strike into the top corner seemed to have put Les Bleus out of sight at 3-1 with quarter of an hour left, but Seferovic pulled one back and substitute Mario Gavranovic netted a last-minute equaliser to force extra time.

With no further goals, the tie went to penalties and all nine kicks were converted before Mbappe saw his effort saved by Yann Sommer.

"It is painful," said France captain Lloris.



Switzerland's Yann Sommer celebrates after saving a penalty from France's Kylian Mbappe to win the shoot-out. – Reuters



France's Kylian Mbappe reacts. – Reuters



Spain's Mikel Oyarzabal (L) celebrates with teammates after scoring his team's fifth goal. – AFP



Spain's Alvaro Morata attempts to score next to Croatia's Dujice Caleta-Car. – AFP

"We are the world champions, so to go out in the last 16 is not a good result.

"We were the first ones to expect better. We will need time to get over this disappointment."

Switzerland, who only qualified for the last 16 as one of the best third-placed sides, had not won a knockout tie at a major tournament since the 1938 World Cup. "It was an incredible evening. I am so proud of the team," said goalkeeper Sommer.

CROATIA LOSE EIGHT-GOAL THRILLER

Somehow the drama in Bucharest topped that in Copenhagen earlier, when Alvaro Morata netted an all-important goal as Spain prevailed in extra time against the 2018 World Cup runners-up, but only after they also let slip a 3-1 lead.

Luka Modric's Croatia came back to force the extra half-hour but that was when Morata, the Atletico Madrid striker who has

been panned for his performances by critics and subjected to abuse from fans, controlled a cross and volleyed home in the 100th minute.

Mikel Oyarzabal then secured Spain's victory in what was the highest-scoring game at a European Championship since the opening match of the very first tournament in 1960, when Yugoslavia defeated hosts France 5-4. Croatia had been gifted a first-half lead when Spain goalkeeper

Unai Simon allowed Pedri's back-pass to slip under his foot and in.

But Luis Enrique's side had been the better team prior to that and they levelled through Pablo Sarabia before appearing to run away with the tie in the second half.

Manchester City winger Ferran Torres crossed for Cesar Azpilicueta to head in his first goal for his country and Torres then made it 3-1.

However, Croatia substitute Mislav Orsic pulled one back

with five minutes left, the referee indicating that the ball had just crossed the line, and then fellow substitute Mario Pasalic headed in a stoppage-time equaliser.

Croatia, who came through three ties that were not settled before extra time on their run to the World Cup final in Russia, could not recover after falling 5-3 down. "We were given a second chance in the game, which is not something that often happens," admitted Luis Enrique. — AFP

business

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TRUSTING ALL EASY



Port of Salalah unveils new Flex Hub facility

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 29

Port of Salalah has announced the launch of global shipping giant Maersk's Flex Hub facility at the maritime gateway — a solution that enables shippers to manage the flow of cargo based on their demand patterns by allowing them to store their goods at a port of their choice based on the proximity of their key target markets. Subsequently shippers can transport their goods directly from the Flex Hub port whenever they are ready.

Shippers are looking for faster deliveries and shorter transit times, whilst ensuring the lowest possible cost for shipments, to ensure that they meet their customers' demands.

Port of Salalah provides the Flex Hub facility in cooperation with Maersk as a vital client to the port and as an integrator container logistics company.

Mark Hardiman, CEO of Port of Salalah stated: "Port of Salalah is constantly looking for new opportunities and innovative solutions to cater to our clients' needs. We optimise our strategic location serving the East West trade and realizing the vast

capabilities and opportunities this gives us in contributing to the world trade. Flex Hub is a great initiative by Maersk and we, at Port of Salalah, are pleased to offer this solution to enable our clients to reach their key target markets in an optimum time and at much lower costs. In this day and time, when everyone is looking for faster and efficient solutions, Flex Hub is definitely the way to go in order to achieve that."

Christopher Cook, Managing Director, Maersk UAE commented, "During the pandemic our customers have faced significant variations in demand as countries faced staggered lockdowns. Our Flex Hub solution allows our customers the flexibility to speed up or slow down their supply chains depending on the need from the market whilst keeping visibility through a single platform with a variety of strategic hubs around the world. By building in resilience in the supply chains, we are simplifying our customers' business."

The Port continues to actively contribute to Oman's 2040 vision and objective and support Oman's economic diversification strategy.

Pact confers OPAZ with powers to offer 'Invest Easy' services

SHARED MISSION: Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion signs technical cooperation agreement with Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 29

A technical cooperation agreement signed by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion now enables the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) to exercise the same powers as the former in the operation of the Sultanate's 'Invest Easy' one-stop portal for new licences and permit.

The agreement was signed by Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary for Commerce and Industry, with Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones.

According to the pact, the powers of all electronic services, provided by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion via the "Invest Easy" Portal, will be granted to the one-stop shop in the special economic zones and free zones.

This cooperation programme aims to facilitate and simplify the procedures for investors to



obtain all the approvals, permits and licences necessary for their investment projects in a one-stop shop and a specific period of time. It also serves forming a system of integrated services for investors, in order to create added values for a business environment that attracts investments in the Sultanate.

Further, the programme intends to raise the standard of services provided to investors by fast-tracking, simplifying procedures, consolidating relations with the relevant partners to provide integrated services to the investor, as well as strengthening the relationship with the investor to deliver a safe and attractive business environment.

This cooperation programme aims to facilitate and simplify the procedures for investors to obtain all the approvals, permits and licenses necessary for their investment projects in a one-stop shop and a specific period of time.

The cooperation programme comes in line with the efforts accorded to develop the national economy, provide an attractive environment for investments in the Sultanate, grant the necessary

licences to engage in various economic activities, create a sustainable environment and build continuous cooperation, which helps facilitating procedures and providing high quality services to investors in a record time and fast and easy procedures. Accordingly, this supports achieving the objectives of digital transformation, the Government's directives and Oman Vision 2040.

The programme also aims to encourage investment in the Sultanate in general and the special economic zones and free zones in particular, as well as facilitating and accelerating the process of investor transactions provided by the "Invest Easy" Portal.

Tender for Oman's new 100MW wind project by year-end

GREEN ENERGY: Tractebel-Engie wins award for feasibility study; Worley named technical advisor

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

A competitive tender for the implementation of a new large-scale 100MW wind power project, planned in the southern part of the Sultanate, is due to be floated before the end of this year.

The project, only the second wind-based clean energy project to date — after the successful launch of Oman's maiden wind farm at Harweel in Dhofar Governorate in 2019 — is backed by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and its recently established parent holding company Energy Development Oman (EDO).

According to a senior executive of PDO, the proposed



wind project is currently in the design engineering phase. "We are looking at establishing a wind-based renewable project to produce about 100MW of power", said Zahran al Abri, ICV Manager. "We have already awarded the feasibility study and selected a technical advisor as well. Now at the moment, we are just completing the engineering work, and this might come on

the market towards the end of this year."

Al Abri made the announcement in a presentation on behalf of PDO and EDO during a webinar held on Monday on the theme, 'Connecting the Netherlands to Oman's Business Opportunities'. The online event, organised by Business Gateways International, was supported by Oman's Ministry of Commerce,

Industry and Investment Promotion, and the Government of the Netherlands.

Presenting jointly with his colleague Aiman al Shukaili, Head of Renewable Energy at PDO, Al Abri provided an outline of the shared vision of both PDO and EDO to invest in clean energy in line with the country's energy transition goals.

According to the officials,

The project, only the second wind-based clean energy project to date — after the successful launch of Oman's maiden wind farm at Harweel in Dhofar Governorate in 2019 — is backed by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and its recently established parent holding company Energy Development Oman (EDO)

Tractebel-Engie — a leading player in the global renewable energy space — was awarded the contract by PDO to study the feasibility of developing the wind power scheme in south Oman. Worley, international engineering specialists for the energy, chemicals and resources sectors, were named technical advisors.

Oman's first utility-scale

wind power project — a 50MW capacity scheme operated by the Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer) — part of wholly government-owned Nama Group — came online in November 2019, marking the advent of wind-based power generation in the Gulf region. The project, featuring 13 wind turbines of around 3.8MW capacity each, is located at Harweel. Output from the plant is committed to Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP), also a subsidiary of Nama Group, under a long-term Power Purchase Agreement signed with Tanweer.

Another clean energy project due to go out to tender in the next 'several quarters' is a 100MW solar-based Independent Power Project (IPP) in the north of Oman. Backed by PDO/EDO, the project will also feature, for the first time, battery storage of around 30MW capacity.

Both the South Oman Wind power and North Oman Solar IPP schemes are targeted for commercial launch in 2023.

Consumer confidence in Britain continues to rise

Despite a delay in the lifting of the remaining lockdown restrictions — now scheduled for July 19 — according to the UK government’s step by step road map, announced back in March, consumer confidence has remained resilient, and continued to rise with economic activity marching towards pre-pandemic levels, a closely watched survey has revealed.

Data from GfK shows overall consumer confidence remained unchanged over the last month at minus nine on the index in June 2021 and this is up significantly from minus 30 in June 2020. Elevated household confidence levels are likely to have been caused not just by economic activity continuing to drive toward pre-pandemic levels but

also the success of the vaccination rollout.

Households’ outlook about their future financial position is trending higher. GfK’s Consumer Confidence Index shows forecasts for personal finances over the next 12 months rose one point to 11. Joe Staton, client strategy director GfK, said: “A repetition of last month’s score doesn’t mean confidence is about to nose-dive. The upwards trajectory for the Index since the dark days at the start of the pandemic is currently still on track.”

Inflation poses threat to economic recovery: GfK’s index pointed to mounting concerns over whether rising inflation could dampen the UK’s economic recovery from the pandemic if higher prices result in consumers reining in spending.

The Bank of England has



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INFLATION POSES
THREAT TO ECONOMIC
RECOVERY: GfK’S INDEX
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held interest rates at a record low despite forecasting that CPI inflation will run above its target to reach three per cent. Staton added, “forecasts for rising retail price inflation could weaken consumer confidence quickly and that may cause a dip in the measure for the wider economy in the coming year.”

Expectations for the general economic situation over the coming 12 months is still 46 points higher than at this time last year. Propensity to save money continues to remain high despite the reopening of the UK high streets, with the Savings Index standing at +1 in June.

With consumer confidence high, the number of shoppers in retail destinations rose in June, with a combination of warm weather, a bank holiday and school half-term tempting

shoppers back to the high street. While the number of shoppers on the high street rose quite rapidly according to the latest data from Springboard, footfall in shopping centres and in retail parks was slower by comparison.

Coastal and historical towns saw the biggest uplift in shoppers, up 37.1pc and 24.8pc respectively, though city centres also saw a boost, with footfall in Central London up 23.8pc.

Springboard insight director Diane Wehrle said: “A combination of the late May bank holiday, incredible weather and the school half-term holiday had a hugely beneficial effect on customer activity in UK retail destinations; it not only led to the greatest weekly increase in footfall since the reopening of non-essential retail in April, but also the most modest annual decline since the start of the

pandemic.”

Wehrle said staycations had fuelled an increase in footfall in coastal towns, while the warm weather made for a particularly good month for the high street, where people could spend time outside. Adding to the confidence of consumers are the food and hospitality trades which had been particularly hard hit by lockdown and are now able to welcome visitors to hotels, restaurants and bars.

The financial district of London, known as the ‘City’ has always been a place where culture, heritage work and leisure meet. All these sectors have seen some of the hardest hits by restrictions. It’s a huge relief to them that they are able to open their doors to the public.

(The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK)

Italian Embassy announces scholarships for Omanis to study in Italy

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 29

The Italian Government has launched a call for applications for grants in favour of Omani students who intend to complete their studies or conduct research and training programmes in Italian universities for a period of study of 6 or 9 months. The scholarships also give the candidates the opportunity to apply to attend 3-months Italian language courses in Italy.

The initiative comes in the framework of the ever-growing cultural and academic cooperation between Italy and the Sultanate with the aim to foster international cooperation in the scientific and technological fields as well as to promote Italian language and culture.

For the academic year 2021-2022 Oman



has been included in the list of beneficiary countries with the offer of scholarships in favour of Omani students for a total of 18 months. Grantees will receive a 900 Euros monthly allowance. The deadline for applications is July 13, 2021. The details of the application procedure are available online on the <https://studyinitaly.esteri.it> website, which also includes useful information on Italy’s educational system and life for students.

Italy offers a broad variety of global, top-class universities, covering all sectors

of research, from medicine, engineering, architecture and physics to literature, arts, music and social sciences. Italy is home to the first and oldest university in the world and every year attracts thousands of new international students thanks to courses fully held in English, which open the doors to students who are not familiar with Italian yet.

Specialising in Italy gives professional opportunities in highly advanced sectors of industry and services. Learning Italian can also open job prospects to young Omani students, who can benefit from the presence of a number of Italian companies in the Sultanate as well as a growing amount of tourists visiting Oman every year. To support the professional growth of Omani students the Italian Government is also supporting Italian language courses at Sultan Qaboos University.

Top honour for Oman’s former ambassador to Korea



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 29

On behalf of Moon Jae-in, President of the Republic of Korea, Kim Chang-kyu, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the Sultanate of Oman, conferred on June 28, 2021, the Order of Diplomatic Service Merit, Gwanghwa Medal on Mohammed bin Salim al Harthy, former Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of Korea.

Retired Ambassador Al Harthy has served more than a decade in Seoul, Korea, from December 2009 to December 2019. He was elected Chairman of the Korea-Arab Society (KAS) in 2016 and served two consecutive terms until 2019. Also, Al Harthy was also Dean of Diplomatic Corps in Korea from 2016 to 2019.

The Gwanghwa Medal was presented to Ambassador Al Harthy in recognition of and appreciation for his outstanding and meritorious

services rendered toward the promotion of friendly relations between the Republic of Korea and the Sultanate of Oman.

During the awarding ceremony, the Korean Ambassador to the Sultanate praised the role of Ambassador Al Harthy in widening the scope of the cooperative partnership between the two countries. In turn, Al Harthy reiterated the importance of bilateral relations and expressed his appreciation to the Korean Government for supporting his services in Korea.

The awarding ceremony, held on the premises of the Korean Embassy, was attended by family members of Ambassador Al Harthy as well as senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Sultanate, including Humaid bin Ali al Maani, Chief of Global Department, Zakaria bin Hamad al Saadi, Ambassador of the Sultanate to Korea and also Protocol Department’s representative.

Sohar International extends vaccination drive

MUSCAT: Complimenting the extensive efforts of our esteemed government and playing its corporate social role within the community, Sohar International concluded the first phase of its Covid-19 vaccination drive for employees extending the vaccination to staff first-grade family members. Not only will this significant initiative play a positive role in the overall community increasing the percentage of citizens being vaccinated, but it also plays a vital role in ensuring that our people and staff have a safer environment to work in.

Highlighting the importance of this initiative, Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International said, “We appreciate the significant efforts of the Government in minimising the pandemic spread in the Sultanate. As a socially responsible financial institution,



it is necessary and a national duty to extend our support to the community and our staff. Our employees are our most

valuable asset and we understand that it’s important for them to feel safe not just for themselves, but also for their family members. This underlines our extensive efforts towards also providing vaccination to first family of every individual in the Sohar International team. Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have stayed committed to the cause of the community in which we operate by adopting precautionary measures within our premises to ensure our services are delivered uninterrupted to our valued customers, while safeguarding the health and well-being of our employees, stakeholders, and the nation at large. This continues to remain our priority during challenging times, and we are sure that as a bank, and as a country, we will emerge stronger post-pandemic.”

Enjoy the road in the exciting Toyota Yaris

MUSCAT: The fun and exciting Toyota Yaris is the best companion to make every journey remarkable. From its power-packed driving dynamics to its features and attractive design, the Yaris makes a fine mark on every opportunity.

Owing to its quiet and roomy interior cabin, as well as its powertrain that delivers both dynamic driving performance and fuel economy, the Yaris stands out. Cutting-edge design defines the exterior of the Yaris, with its dynamic angles as well

as sleek headlamps and clearance lamps. The front of the Yaris has a horizontal grille for a wider yet more aerodynamic appearance. Daytime running lamps have also been integrated into the shape of the grille for a sleek appearance, while slimmer LED rear combination taillights adorn the rear of the car with a unique look.

The Yaris hatchback is adorned with a Stylish Radiator Grille, Colour Keyed Front and Rear Bumpers, 15” Alloy Wheels,



Projector Headlamps with Follow Me Home Function, LED Rear Combination Lamps with Line Guide, Day Time Running Lights, Stylish Shark Fin Antenna, LED High Mount Stop Lamp, Front Fog Lamps, Sporty Mesh Type Lower Radiator Grille in the front, Black Luggage Door Garnish with a vibrant Red Accent.

Delivering a dynamic driving experience, the Yaris sedan is equipped with a choice of 1.3L and 1.5L engines and hatchback is equipped with a 1.5-Litre

engine. The 1.3-Litre Four-Cylinder Engine in the Yaris sedan generates a Maximum Output of 98 hp and 12.5 kg-m of torque and is mated to either a Five-Speed Manual Transmission or a CVT Transmission. On the other hand, the 1.5-Litre Four-Cylinder Engine in the Yaris sedan and hatchback, can churn out a Maximum Output of 106 hp and 14.3 kg-m of torque and is mated to the CVT Transmission to offer a smooth shifting experience with excellent fuel efficiency.



Oil drops as Covid-19 surges threaten fuel demand outlook



MELBOURNE: Oil prices dropped for a second day on Tuesday on worries about slower fuel demand growth as outbreaks of the highly contagious Covid-19 variant Delta sparked new mobility restrictions around the world.

Brent crude futures fell 35 cents, or 0.5 per cent, to \$74.26 a barrel by 0706 GMT, after slumping 2 per cent on Monday.

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures fell 34 cents, or 0.5 per cent, to \$72.91 a barrel, extending a 1.5 per cent loss on Monday.

The flare-up in cases of the Delta variant comes as the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec), Russia and allies, together known as Opec+, are set to meet on July 1 to discuss easing their supply curbs.

Opec's demand forecasts show that in the fourth quarter global oil supply will fall short of demand by 2.2 million barrels per day, giving the producers some room to agree to add output. — **Reuters**

Uneven global recovery creates 'daunting challenges' for policymakers, BIS says

LONDON: An uneven global recovery from the Covid-19 crisis will make recalibrating the fiscal and monetary stimulus a "daunting" challenge for policymakers, the Bank for International Settlement's annual report said on Tuesday.

Dubbed the central bank to world's central banks, the Swiss-based BIS said its main scenario was one of a solid global pick-up, albeit at varying speeds across countries.

The bank set out two alternative scenarios. One where large fiscal stimulus and a drawdown of accumulated savings results in stronger growth but also higher inflation and a substantial tightening in global financial conditions. In the other, growth disappoints as the virus proves harder to control.

"While the recovery is under way and the central scenario is relatively benign, we are not out of the woods yet," BIS head Agustin Carstens said.

The uneven recovery could leave emerging market countries at the sharp end of any difficulties, especially in the higher inflation scenario, where major central banks like the US Federal Reserve start looking to raise interest rates.

Carstens, who headed Mexico's central bank before joining the BIS, said it was healthy that some emerging markets were already



The tower of the headquarters of the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) is seen in Basel, Switzerland. — **Reuters**

raising rates in response to rising inflation, but stressed he expected advanced economies to wait.

"It would not be appropriate to tighten monetary policy today just to reduce measured inflation and sacrifice a recovery of the economy," Carstens said. "Is that something (major) central banks would want to do today? I don't think so."

Instead he predicted more periods of "noisiness" for financial

markets after volatility in bond and equity prices between January and March, when vaccination programmes prompted investors to try to pre-empt a tapering of Fed support.

"The main challenge (for the rest of the year) is how to coordinate market expectations with the conduct of policy," Carstens said. "I think one of the hiccups we saw in the last months was the market going ahead of the Fed."

The key question is whether recent strong increases in inflation will be temporary or more persistent. "As of today, we at the BIS consider that it will most likely be temporary," Carstens said, citing base effects and that supply bottlenecks that have also pushed up prices should dissipate.

In the longer-run, many challenges lie ahead and normalising fiscal and monetary policies will not be easy. Public

debt is at a post-World War II peak. Likewise, central bank balance sheets have only rarely reached similar heights, and then only during wars.

"The uneven recovery creates daunting challenges for policymakers," the BIS report said.

"The sustainability of debt can change if interest rates start increasing, Carstens added. "you don't want to be surprised."

— **Reuters**

Nigeria's naira is overvalued by up to 10%

ABUJA: Nigeria's spot naira rate is overvalued by up to 10 per cent, Central Bank Governor Godwin Emefiele told investors last week, two sources familiar with the briefing said.

Emefiele told an investor call last week arranged by Standard Bank that the spot naira rate of 410-412 per dollar would eventually fall by 5 to 10 per cent, according to one person on the call and another who was briefed on it afterward. He based his comments on the central bank's real effective exchange rate (REER) model.

The gap between Nigeria's numerous exchange rates has frustrated investors. The World Bank has demanded closer parity before the release of a much-needed \$1.5 billion budget support loan. Importers have also struggled to access the foreign currency they need to buy goods.



Nigerian naira banknotes are seen in this picture illustration. — **Reuters**

Since March last year, the bank has devalued the naira three times. The devaluation in May, which was an attempt to unify the rates, effectively weakened the currency by 7.7 per cent.

But the currency recently slid to a more than three-year low of 500 naira on the black market as dollar liquidity dropped.

The source on the call said that Emefiele said the currency market would continue operating as it is and "eventually converge towards the fair value". — **Reuters**

Steel sector may be saddled with up to \$70 billion stranded assets

LONDON: The global steel industry may have to write down up to \$70 billion in assets in the coming years because it is still building new blast furnaces using coal that will become obsolete as the world cuts carbon emissions, a report said on Tuesday.

Some 50 million tonnes of steelmaking capacity is under development using blast furnace technology, largely in top producer China, US-based think-tank Global Energy Monitor (GEM) said in the report.

"Building new coal blast furnaces is a bad bet for steel producers and a bad bet for the planet," said Christine Shearer, GEM's coal programme director.

Blast furnaces using coal could become unnecessary or



A worker wearing a face mask works on a production line at a steel factory in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, China. — **Reuters**

inoperable, resulting in "stranded assets" worth \$47 billion to \$70 billion, the report said.

"Based on projections from the IEA and other groups, (they

could become stranded) quite likely by 2030-2040. It could be sooner if more aggressive carbon taxes/restrictions are applied," said Caitlin Swalec, lead author of

the report.

Total direct emissions from the global iron and steel sector must fall by more than 50 per cent by 2050 relative to 2019 to meet goals of the Paris Agreement on climate change, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA).

New plants are being built even though there is large swathes of excess global steelmaking capacity, which was 25 per cent above production levels in 2019, GEM said.

Much of the global steel industry acknowledges it will have to slash carbon emissions since the sector accounts for about 7 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, the group said.

— **Reuters**

SHORT TAKES

BEIRUT

Lebanon raises fuel prices in bid to ease shortages

Lebanon's government raised fuel prices by more than a third on Tuesday, a move aimed at alleviating crippling shortages but which will mount pressure on impoverished consumers.

The government last week effectively cut fuel subsidies as Lebanon grapples with a catastrophic economic collapse that has sunk its currency by more than 90 per cent in less than two years.

The energy ministry said the average price of 20 litres



of 95-octane gasoline was increased by 35 per cent to 61,100 pounds. That is the equivalent of \$40 at Lebanon's official exchange rate but less than \$4 at Tuesday's parallel market exchange rate.

— **Reuters**

LONDON

British consumers get back to borrowing

British consumer borrowing rose in May for the first time since August last year, according to Bank of England data which showed the economy gathering speed as coronavirus restrictions were lifted last month.

Unsecured lending rose by a net £280 million (\$387.66 million) from April as consumers bought cars with dealership finance deals and took out more personal loans.

The Bank of England data also showed net mortgage



lending rising faster than expected in a Reuters poll, jumping by £6.6 billion in May from April as home-buyers rushed to take advantage of an extended tax break offered by Finance Minister Rishi Sunak.

— **Reuters**

CHICAGO

United Airlines confirms largest jet order

United Airlines confirmed its largest ever order for Boeing and Airbus jets on Tuesday, lining up 270 planes worth more than \$30 billion at list prices as the US giant pursues post-pandemic domestic growth.

The 200 Boeing 737 MAX and 70 Airbus A321neo jets will replace smaller mainline planes and at least 200 regional jets between 2022 and 2026.

United is the most exposed US airline to international travel, which suffered heavily during



the coronavirus pandemic and is rebounding more slowly than domestic travel.

America's third largest airline by revenue will be able to boost the number of seats across its domestic network. — **Reuters**

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Inspired by her own experience, young entrepreneur Yasmeeen al Alawi launched Sprout to address the gap in Oman's market for healthy lunch options that satisfied health-conscious individuals. Having lived in three different countries especially Japan, here's why she thinks it's important... **P20**

Al Khoudh old village: A secret haven in Muscat



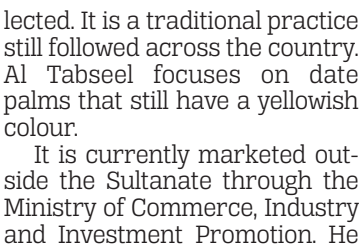
PROBABLY, NOT MANY of us know that inside the capital city of Muscat, some villages give you the feeling that you are in a rural area, villages that are full of palm trees, aflaj on the sides of farms, and simple life.

We all go to Al Khoudh, but few of us visit the Al Khoudh old village. This village will transfer you from the land of modernity to the land of simplicity and relief. It's not only

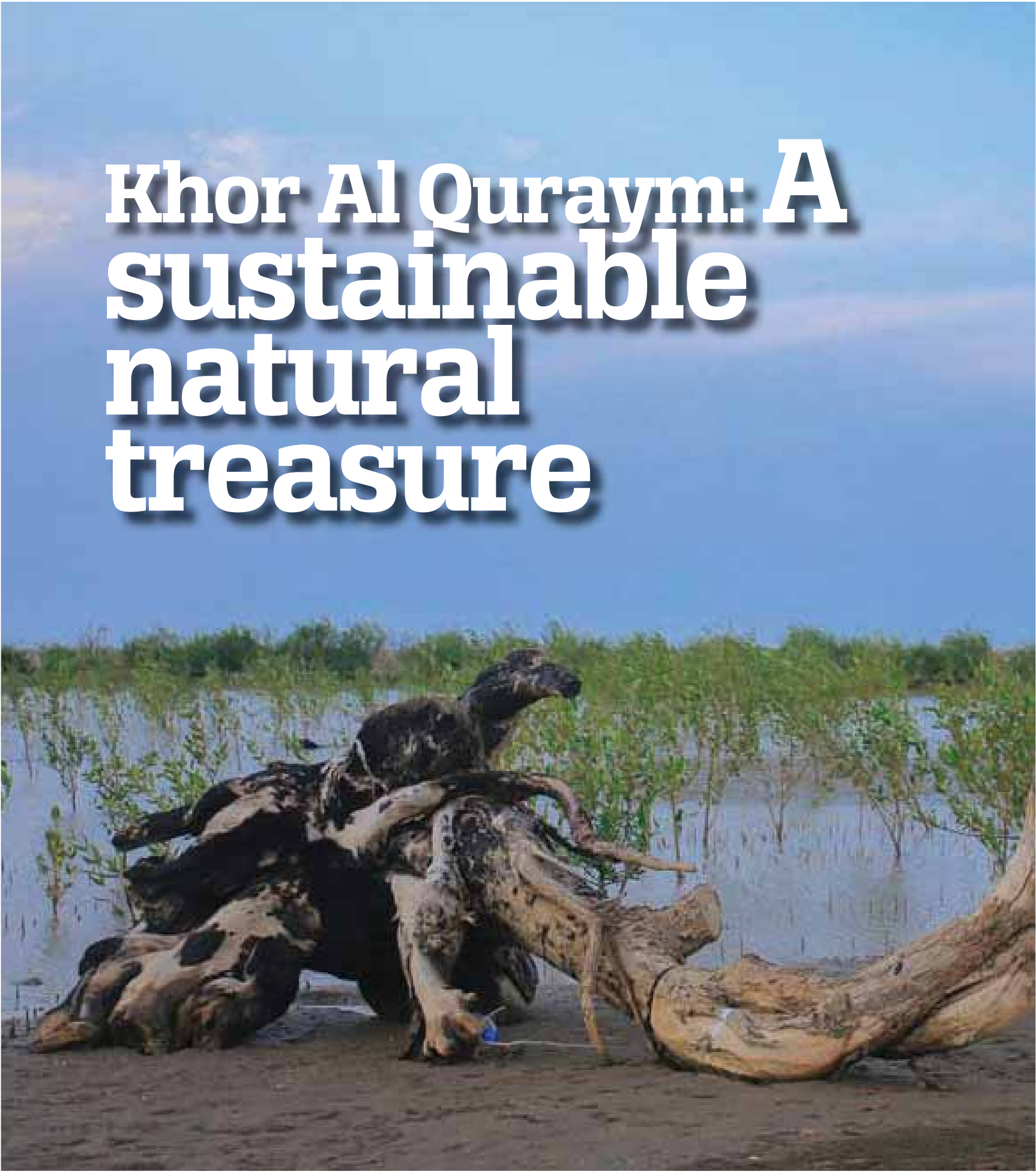
He added that the profession of agriculture is inherited in the rural and mountainous villages of the Sultanate from ancestors. Al Khoudh village is famous for its agriculture, aflaj, fresh springs, palms and lush fruit trees.

He mentioned that he acquired the craft of agriculture from his father. "I took it upon myself to take care of the farm that my father left me after he passed away. My father worked hard to grow these plants and I will continue on the cultivation of different types of trees until I expand the farm and the size of products."

"The village of Al Khoudh has been known since ancient times for the "Busoor industry", which is known locally as Al Tabeel, during which the farmers process the raw dates they have col-



noted that the process of Al Tabseel has disappeared slightly for several reasons, including the tendency of many farmers to wait until the dates get its reddish colour instead of the yellow dates (busoor) and selling it in the market at better prices than the raw crops.



Khor Al Quraym: A sustainable natural treasure

KHOR AL QURAYM is one of the oldest environmental monuments of the Wilayat of Al Mussanah, which is located in the Al Quraym area, west of the Wilayat's centre in the South Al Batinah Governorate.

The Khor is consists of two open tidal channels

through Wadi Al Ais, which in turn flows through the wadis of the Wilayat of Rustaq from Wadi Bani Suq passing through Jamma, then to Wadi Al Ais, and then to Khor Al Quraym.

The khor adds a natural landscape during the tides of the sea, and on its banks

end of September of the same year. The nesting process begins at the beginning of May, a month after its settlement on the banks of the creek.

Khor Al Quraym provides a suitable environment for some local birds to live in, such as the black-winged

viding suitable areas for the life of different types of fish and a source of their food. The mangrove trees that grow on both sides of Khor Al Quraym are an incubator for many marine creatures: fish, crabs and molluscs, and they increase the green cover, which is supportive



from the south and north, through which seawater meets with the water of the wadi, and this happens during climatic conditions, rainfall and wadi flowing. The creek (Khor) is fed by sweet water coming

grows scenic mangroves, providing a temporary home for some migratory birds that come to the Sultanate annually during their usual migration, which starts from the beginning of April each year until the

flycatcher-shrike, the western reef heron, and the common Calidris.

Continuous planting of mangroves contributes to the sustainability of life for some types of wild and marine birds, as well as pro-

of the ecosystem.

The Environment Authority contributed to the cultivation of mangroves in coastal areas, during the celebration of World Wetlands Day, which falls on February 2 each year.

ENTERTAINMENT

Why is Courtney Love calling Olivia Rodrigo a 'rude' copycat?



COURTNEY LOVE has accused pop sensation Olivia Rodrigo of plagiarising artwork from "Live Through This", the 1994 album by Love's band Hole.

What began as a sweet Instagram exchange Thursday between the veteran rocker and the Gen Z superstar spiralled into allegations of intellectual property theft over the weekend when Love accused Rodrigo of "stealing" Hole's concept to promote her upcoming concert film "Sour Prom."

"Spot the difference! #twinning," Love captioned a promotional photo of Rodrigo holding a bouquet of flowers while wearing a tiara and smudged mascara.

The image, shared by Love on Instagram and Facebook, bears a resemblance to the album cover for Hole's "Live Through This," which sees the lead singer in a similar costume and pose.

"love u and live through this sooooo much," Rodrigo replied to Love's Instagram post highlighting the similarities.

"Olivia-you're welcome," Love wrote back. "My favourite florist is in Notting Hill, London! Dm me for deets! I look forward to reading your note!"

Things then turned sour when Love elaborated on Facebook that the photoshoot for Rodrigo's forthcoming YouTube special gave her more than just a little déjà vu.

"It was rude of [Rodrigo and her label] not to ask myself or ["Live Through This" cover photographer] Ellen von unwerth" for permission, Love replied on Facebook to a fan's comment that Rodrigo's artwork was "a total rip-off." "It's happened my whole career so [I don't care]. But manners are manners!"

"Stealing an original idea and not asking permission is



rude. There's no way to be elegant about it," Love added in response to a Facebook user who shamed her for getting mad about "a silly thing" and "sniping at someone paying homage" to her.

"I'm not angry. It happens all the time to me. But this was bad form. That's not bullying or bomb-throwing. This persons music has nothing to do with my life. Possibly never will. It was rude And I haveevery right to stick up for my work. Don't gatekeep me! I'm honourable as f- to my fellow artists, and I expect the same." In yet another reply, Love clarified that she actually expects flowers from the 18-year-old "High School Musical: The Musical: The Series" star for allegedly lifting Hole's work.

"I've informed her I await her flowers [and] note," Love wrote on Facebook. "I sure hope it's long. Does Disney teach kids reading and writing? God knows. Let's see. Yes, this is rude. Rage inducing? Honey if I had a dollar for everyone this happens? I'd be really rich!"

Rodrigo has not responded publicly to Love's Facebook remarks.

Around the same time, Love attacked Rodrigo on social media, a handful of others accused the "Drivers License" hitmaker of copying another band's artwork for her chart-topping single "Good 4 U."

Representatives for Rodrigo did not immediately respond Monday to The Times' requests for comment.

Last week, Rodrigo announced on social media that a pre-recorded virtual concert - featuring songs from her smash debut album, "Sour"- was coming soon.

"since I never got to go to prom, I wanted to throw a little prom party with my fav ppl [you guys obvs]," the singer-songwriter tweeted, along with a link to set a reminder for the event.

Rodrigo's "Sour Prom" debuts Tuesday on YouTube at 8:30 p.m. Pacific. — **tca/dpa**



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ART



Virtual Van Gogh exhibition set to lure shoppers in Dubai

SHOPPERS AND ART lovers will soon be able to step into Van Gogh masterpieces projected onto walls and floors in an immersive experience in a Dubai shopping centre.

The installation by French firm Culturespaces is reminiscent of "Loving Vincent", the 2017 drama chronicling the life of the Dutch post-impressionist, in which moving images were created using frames painted on canvas.

The exhibition, which will showcase digital displays of works from the Saint-Paul Asylum, Saint-Remy collection and others including Irises, opens on July 1 and will run until mid next year.

"Our mission is to make art accessible to all and to be able to share this new way of discovering art with as many people as possible," Catherine Oriol, director of Infinity Des Lumieres at Dubai Mall, said as a pianist played nearby.

The exhibition is in the mould of the Atelier des Lumieres in Paris, where classic works are shown alongside complementary sound and visual displays.

The Dubai Mall exhibition seeks to "connect visitors directly to the art", Oriol said.

One of the seven emirates that make up the United Arab Emirates, Dubai has in recent years become a global hub for tourism and luxury services.

It has sought to remain open to overseas visitors even as the coronavirus pandemic has hammered international travel.

"We hope in the future that we will be able to create new exhibitions related to the region, (such as) calligraphy and poetry," said Oriol.

After an initially strict lockdown, life in the Gulf emirate — one of the first destinations to once again welcome visitors in July last year — has largely returned to normality, with restaurants, hotels and beaches open to the public. It is set to host the six-month World Expo opening in October, after it was delayed by a year due to the pandemic.

Culturespaces has opened a number of digital art exhibitions around the world, including in France and South Korea, and is scheduled to launch another in New York next year. — **AFP**

TRAVEL TALES

Turkish resort frets over second lost summer



THE RUSSIANS are finally coming but the mayor of this empty Turkish resort doubts their converted rubles will save what looks to be another lost summer.

"We closed the last tourism season down 75 per cent," Bodrum mayor Ahmet Aras said in a lavish library overlooking the Aegean Sea.

"We expect a recovery from July with the start of flights from Russia and Europe," but for the sector overall, "that will not happen for a few more years," he said.

Pandemic curbs on travel wrecked Turkey's economy by depriving it of foreign revenue to finance debt and support the lira.

The lack of tourists played a large part in the lira's slide from six to the dollar in March 2020 to around 8.7 now.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government needed an urgent fix therefore to quell public discontent.

He tried to coax tourists to Turkish beaches with exemptions from weekend curfews and other coronavirus rules.

But quarantines placed on travellers returning from Turkey laid the government's plans to waste.

In 2019, Bodrum airport welcomed a record 4.34 million tourists to a city dubbed the "Turkish Saint-Tropez".

Traffic slumped by two-thirds last year, however, and the airport recorded just 350,000 arrivals between January and May.

Things are finally looking up, and Turkish leaders have their fingers crossed.

"God willing, we will jump-start tourism and have a tourist push," Erdogan said this month.

WALKING DEAD

Russia this week lifted a Turkish travel ban that was officially imposed because of the coronavirus but which coincided with a spike in geopolitical tensions.

And more people are expected once EU travel rules ease on July 1.

But the scenic city that stretches from the sea to rolling hills bears little resemblance to the playground of jet setters and moneyed Istanbulites of the past.

"You see all the boats resting on the shore, maybe one of them goes on tour a day," guide organiser Baris Kasal lamented.

"We said the last season was 'dead'. We are calling this one 'the walking dead'," he quipped.

"There's been a little bit of movement but it's very, very weak."

Russians make up the largest share of tourists because Turkey is one of the main holiday destinations they can reach without a visa.

Bodrum airport operations manager Iclal Kayaoglu said it was handling just a tenth of the passengers it did in 2019.

"It's primarily the Russians and British who visit," she said.

LIKE A JOKE

Russians found a way to sneak in even when travel was banned by the Kremlin.

The number of arrivals from Poland spiked after they opted for a circuitous route.

Yet shop owners say the business these holidaymakers drum up barely covers the debts and state loans they took on to survive last summer.

"Last year was like a joke, but we thought it was just that one time, and that we would get over it," said leather shop owner Engin Erkan.

"But we are on our second year now. We are not strong enough to keep standing."

Bodrum Chamber of Commerce board chairman Mahmut Serdar Kocadon said he did not expect tourism levels to return to pre-pandemic levels for at least two more years.

Local business revenues were down 80 per cent from their highs in 2019, he said.

"We've reached a point where businesses are standing on the brink of bankruptcy," Kocadon said. — **AFP**

DISCOVERY

Fossil find adds to evidence of dinosaurs living in Arctic year-round



FOSSILS FROM tiny baby dinosaurs discovered in northernmost Alaska offer strong evidence that the prehistoric creatures lived year-round in the Arctic and were likely warm-blooded, according to a study published on Thursday in the journal *Current Biology*.

The fossils are from at least seven types of dinosaurs just hatched or still in their eggs about 70 million years ago. Researchers have never found evidence of dinosaur nests so far north, said lead author Pat Druckenmiller, director of the University of Alaska Museum of the North.

The find helps upend past assumptions of dinosaurs as giant cold-blooded reptiles.

"If they reproduced, then they over-wintered there. If they overwintered there, they had to deal with conditions that we don't usually associate with dinosaurs, like freezing conditions and snow," Druckenmiller said.

To survive dark Arctic winters, those dinosaurs could not have basked in the sun to warm their bodies, as lizards do, he said.

"At least these groups had endothermy," he said, using the term for the ability of animals to warm their bodies through internal functions. "They had a degree of warm-bloodedness."

The discovery site is a steep bluff on the Colville River on Alaska's North Slope, at latitude 70 and about 250 miles (400 km) north of the Arctic Circle. In the Cretaceous period, when North America was positioned differently, it was even farther north, at latitude 80 or 85, Druckenmiller said.

The region was much warmer then than Alaska's North Slope is now but hardly tropical. From remnants of ancient plants, scientists calculate the average annual temperature at about 6 degrees Celsius (42.8 Fahrenheit) — similar to Juneau, Alaska — meaning below-freezing winters with snow, Druckenmiller said.

While Alaska's North Slope endures two months of total winter darkness now, during the Cretaceous period it was in total darkness for up to four months a year, he said.

Finding the tiny bones and teeth, some the size of a pinhead, was laborious, Druckenmiller said. They were identified through microscopic examination after being sifted out multiple times from sediments collected in expeditions stretching back decades, he said.

"I liken it to gold panning. It's a very slow process," he said. The discovery site, called the Prince Creek Formation, has proved crucial to the modern understanding of the ancient creatures. — **Reuters**



Healthy Food: Creating a modern solution for a modern problem

By Sara al Harthi

Some people who work in an office for eight hours a day can develop negative eating behaviours because of the amount of fast food they consumed through delivery.

Fast food availability and stress may cause an increase in eating in the workplace, which did not sit well with Yasmeen al Alawi, a young entrepreneur who founded the already much talked about Sprout.

Yasmeen was inspired to create this business because of her relatable experience of not having good, healthy choices during lunchtime.

She shared she's one of the people who usually orders during lunch and as per her experience, she couldn't find many healthy options that satisfied her cravings and struggled to find a restaurant with fresh, healthy ingredients.

She wanted something that not only tasted delicious but also made her feel great. And that is what inspired her to start a food blog where she posted healthy food that she cooked everyday.

Yasmeen had a passion for baking ever since she was young. Coming from a multicultural background influenced her to experience and to express herself with a wide variety of cuisines.

She lived in three differently cultured countries: The United States, Australia and Japan, which definitely had an impact on her eating habits.

"In my two years living in Tokyo, those two years were really eye-opening for me in terms of how fresh, healthy and nutritious the food is that Japanese eat", she said.

Living in Japan is what inspired her to start her eating journey the most. Eating a variety of small dishes, their famous school lunch programmes, eating many types of vegetables and a great deal of physical activity, is what she found the most interesting.

"Japanese have a saying 'Hara Hachi Bu' which means to eat until you are 80pc full and this is something taught from a very young age", she shared.

Later on, after starting a

food blog in Oman, she evolved into a licenced home business starting with healthy desserts and salad subscriptions and that led to opening the restaurant Sprout. (Sprout meaning: A young shoot from seed or root.)

Yasmeen's goal is to change the face of healthy eating and to promote sustainability in Oman.

"Currently, 95pc of our packaging is environmentally friendly and this is a big milestone as no current restaurants can say that they achieve these numbers. We are making strides on all fronts in health and with the environment", she said.

Sprout has a lot of original recipes that Yasmeen tweaked and perfected after a long journey of gathering recipes she found online, in books or from her family.

"We then refine the recipes to put the 'Sprout spin' and to make it as nutritious and wholesome as possible", she said.

Yasmeen's future plans are to open a parallel business, expanding to catering services and opening up new branches.

Asked what she can share with those who also want to become entrepreneurs, she said, "I have three pieces of advice for young entrepreneurs. Pursue something that you are passionate about so you wake up refreshed every morning and willing to put in hard work (because much of the work IS hard work and persistence)."

"My second piece of advice is to familiarise yourself with all roles at your company. At times as an entrepreneur, you need to assume various roles at your company. I've been a marketer, statistician, driver, secretary, accountant, social media manager, head chef, cashier etc. You need to be familiar with everything so that one day if you are needed (and you will be!), you can assume these roles temporarily so your business will run smoothly", she said.

And lastly, "My last piece of advice is to keep your personal and business finances separate from Day 1. Another entrepreneur told me this at the start of my journey and this has saved me a lot of time and effort because it is so easy to lose track of your finances if you are not dedicated to keeping track of them. Know your numbers!"