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BINDER'S TYRE GAMBLE PAYS OFF



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INDIA WILL UNVEIL INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN FOR \$1.35 TN



P18

AQUAPONIC FARMS HELP PRODUCE QUALITY HARVEST



**MUSCAT**

**UAE ARMED FORCES CHIEF ARRIVES**

Lt General Hamad Mohammed Thani al Rumaithi, Chief of Staff of the UAE Armed Forces, and his accompanying delegation, arrived here on a several-day official visit to the Sultanate, on Sunday. The guest and his delegation were received upon arrival at Seeb Air Base by Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF). Also in reception was the ambassador of the UAE to the Sultanate.

**NIZWA INDUSTRIAL CITY EXPANSION**

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) is embarked on the implementation of vital projects at Nizwa Industrial City, including the 1 million square metre Phase 3 and Phase 4 expansion project and the construction of a second entrance to the industrial city. The facility has garnered good turnout from local investors wishing to get their projects localised. **DETAILS ON P5**

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There's creativity on the left!

Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami

The adventures of a blonde and a very old car

Rachael MacIver

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MEXICO HASTENS MIGRANT EXPULSIONS

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DOMESTIC WORKERS GET THEIR FIRST JAB

# TARGET TO VACCINATE 320,000 STUDENTS

**KABEER YOUSUF**  
@kabeeryousef

The Ministry of Health continues vaccinating people in all governorates of the Sultanate within the National Immunisation Strategy. The vaccination centres are witnessing good turnout of target segments amid a smooth process of getting the vaccine.

The drive for students aged 12 years and above reached its third week and is witnessing a good turnout of students. The ministries of health and education aim to vaccinate 320,000 students from public and private schools.

The ministry also continues vaccinating target segments eligible for the first dose as well as administering the second dose for those who completed 10 weeks since taking their first dose.

In Ibri alone, as many as 11,923 male and female students have received the vaccine followed by students of international schools



in different governorates including Muscat.

The ministry emphasises the importance of booking appointments in advance before heading to vaccination centres in various governorates of the Sultanate. This is to ensure a safe and smooth process for all, with full adherence to preventive measures.

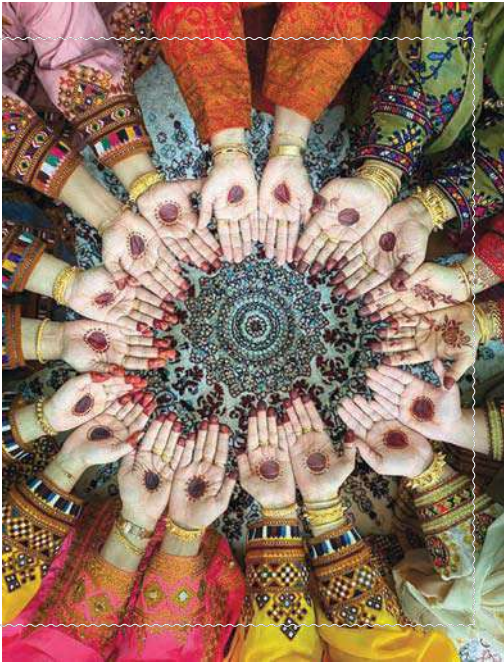
Several people targeted for vaccination applauded the ease

and smoothness of the followed procedures in getting the vaccine. They also valued the efforts exerted by the government in ensuring the well-being and safety of citizens and residents in the Sultanate.

Meanwhile, thousands of domestic workers received their first dose of vaccination against Covid-19 on Sunday at various centres spread across the governorates of the country.

OMANI HERBS AND BEAUTY

For generations, Omani women always relied on plants and herbs for their beautification needs. From henna, to rosewater, to plants which can be utilised as soap and toothpaste, this knowledge of tapping plants has been passed on to the generations of young Omanis. **DETAILS ON P20**



## Sultanate condoles with Lebanon over tank fire

**MUSCAT:** The Sultanate, through a statement from the Foreign Ministry, expressed its condolences and sympathy to the government and people of the brotherly Lebanese Republic on the victims of the fuel tank explosion in Akkar in northern Lebanon, wishing the injured a speedy recovery.

A fuel tank blast in Lebanon on Sunday killed 28 people and left nearly 80 others injured, authorities and medics said, scalding a crowd that was clamouring for gasoline in the crisis-hit country.

The night-time tragedy in the country's remote north overwhelmed medical facilities and heaped new misery on a nation already beset by an economic crisis and severe fuel shortages that have crippled hospitals and caused long power cuts.

It revived bitter memories of an enormous explosion at Beirut port in August last year that killed more than 200 people and destroyed swathes of the capital.

An adviser to the health ministry said the death toll from the blast in Al Tleil village, in the Akkar region, had climbed to 28. The Lebanese Red Cross said 79 others were injured.



The military said a fuel tank that "had been confiscated by the army to distribute to citizens" exploded just before 2:00 am. Soldiers were among those hurt.

The army began raiding gas stations on Saturday to curb hoarding by suppliers following a central bank decision to scrap fuel subsidies. The official National News Agency (NNA) said the blast followed scuffles between "residents that gathered around the container to fill up gasoline" overnight.

Hospitals in Akkar, one of Lebanon's poorest regions near the border with Syria, and in the northern port city of Tripoli said they had to turn away many of the injured because they were ill-equipped to treat severe burns.

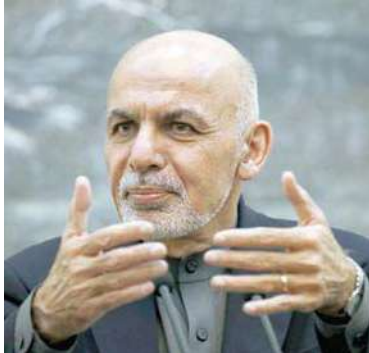
**SEE ALSO P6**

## Afghan President Ghani flees country

**KABUL:** President Ashraf Ghani fled Afghanistan on Sunday, a top official said, effectively ceding power to the Taliban as they reached the capital Kabul to seal a nationwide military victory in just 10 days.

"The former Afghan president has left the nation, leaving the people to this situation", Abdullah Abdullah, who heads the peace process, said in a video on his Facebook page.

He gave no indication where Ghani was going, but leading Afghan media group Tolo news suggested he was heading to Tajikistan. Ghani's departure from office was one of



the key demands of the Taliban in months of peace talks with the government.

In just over a week, the Taliban have carried out a lightning sweep

of the country, with troops incapable of holding onto territory without US military support.

The United States began moving its citizens and Afghan staff to Kabul airport, with the help of thousands of troops deployed to the capital to assist with the evacuation.

However, Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Sunday dismissed comparisons with the chaotic American departure from Saigon in 1975. "The fact of the matter is this: We went to Afghanistan 20 years ago with one mission in mind", he said.

**SEE ALSO P7**

## Aum Al Tair Island to be converted into a nature reserve

**KHASAB:** The Governorate of Musandam boasts rich geographical diversity and stunning natural scenes such as the mountains, valleys and deserts that are home to a wide range of animals and plants. The islands of Musandam are a safe haven for migratory birds. This has made Musandam an attractive tourist destination for overseas tourists wishing to explore the beauties of Musandam.

Abdulsalam bin Hassan al Kamzari, Acting Director of the Environment Department in Musandam Governorate, said that due to the tourism potential of

Musandam and its natural diversity, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued his Royal directives to develop Musandam Governorate by establishing development projects to achieve sustainable development and boost economic diversity.

In comments to Oman News Agency (ONA), he affirmed that the government attaches a great importance to preserving the ecosystems of the Sultanate's in general and the Musandam Governorate in particular by conducting an environmental assessment in an effort to identify the economic and financial value of environmental



terms such as trees, wild animals and plants and endangered animals taking into account the comprehensive economic development the Sultanate has witnessed country.

The Aum Al Tair Island in Musandam Governorate is a safe haven for migratory birds coming from Europe all year round.

There is a proposal to convert the island into a nature reserve under the name Musandam National Park due to its international importance, the official said. The official said that sustainable ecotourism is one of the most important resources for the country. — ONA

■ BRAZIL AMBASSADOR BIDS ADIEU



**MUSCAT:** Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, received Jose Marcos, Ambassador of the Federative Republic of Brazil accredited to the Sultanate, on the occasion of the end of his diplomatic term as his country's ambassador to the Sultanate. The foreign minister expressed his appreciation to the ambassador for the efforts he made to foster relations between the two countries, wishing him success.

■ FRENCH ENVOY ENDS TENURE



**MUSCAT:** Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, received Renaud Salins, Ambassador of the French Republic accredited to the Sultanate on the occasion of the end of his diplomatic term as his country's ambassador to the Sultanate. The foreign minister praised the ambassador's efforts in fostering relations between the two countries, wishing him success. — ONA

Board of Trustees of College of Sharia Sciences meets



**MUSCAT:** The Board of Trustees of the College of Sharia Sciences held its second meeting for this year under the chairmanship of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, on Sunday. The meeting approved minutes of the first meeting and discussed several topics including the reports of the committees tasked with studying distance education at the college, and took decisions. The board also approved the academic system of higher studies, the procedures for licensing academic programmes and the policies for revising academic programmes.

Sultanate, UAE discuss industrial cooperation



**MUSCAT:** Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, held a virtual meeting with Omar bin Ahmed al Suwaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Industry and Advanced Technology of the brotherly United Arab Emirates (UAE). During the meeting the two sides discussed the aspects of joint cooperation, the industrial strategies in both countries and the programmes and initiatives aimed at developing the local content and the role of the fourth industrial revolution in upgrading the industrial sector. They also discussed investment



opportunities in the strategic projects in the fields of industry and renewable energy. The Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, highlighted the importance of joint cooperation between the two brotherly countries in developing the industrial sector through initiatives and programmes that contribute to the promotion and integration of investment projects in brotherly countries. The two sides agreed to form a technical team tasked with drafting a cooperation framework and the future joint initiatives in the industrial sector, investment opportunities and joint projects. — ONA

Oman bans fishing, trading and import of kingfish till Oct 15

KABEER YOUSUF  
@kabeeryousef

A two-months long ban on fishing, trading and import of kingfish has come into force from August 15 till October 15, according to a ministerial decision issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR). Speaking to the *Observer*, Dr Abdul Aziz al Mahrooqi, DG of Fisheries Resources at the MoAFWR said that this seasonal ban is imposed because kingfish is a migratory species and its stock is shared by all GCC as well as regional countries like Iran, Pakistan, Yemen and Iraq hence Oman initiated to have a proper management of the kingfish which is a highly valued species with a high demand in local as well as international markets. “So, it is the first time that Oman is imposing such a ban after its successful resolution at the regional level including Iran and Iraq through a series of meetings held under the umbrella of the FAO, between the GCC fisheries management for shared stock in 2020,” Dr Abdul Aziz said. Accordingly, all fishermen, fish transporters, companies and institutions dealing with the

The two sides discussed investment opportunities in the strategic projects in the fields of industry and renewable energy

fishing and export of kingfish are urged to follow the ministerial decision. Earlier, all concerned were advised to frequent the departments of fisheries in the wilayats to register their stocks of kingfish before the ban entered into force. No tradesmen will be allowed to trade and export unregistered quantities of kingfish during the moratorium period. This highly valued species, which is mostly needed in the region including in Oman, had faced, back in 1990's, a series of overfishing and it was facing extinction. A large scale of traditional fishermen still rely on it for their livelihood. Since it is a shared stock between many countries, a shared management and cooperation and coordination efforts between all the stakeholders was necessitated on the way forward for stock recovery and sustainability, according to Dr Abdul Aziz.



# Gaiety marks 75th I-Day celebrations of India

The 75th Independence Day of India was celebrated in Oman with great enthusiasm and patriotic fervour. India is celebrating this momentous occasion as 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav'. The Amrit Mahotsav was inaugurated by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in March 2021, and it will continue till August 15, 2023.

The Embassy building was lit up in tricolour on the eve of Independence Day. A flag hoisting ceremony was organised in the Embassy on August 15 morning in hybrid format owing to Covid-19 restrictions.

Embassy officials and staff attended the event physically from the Embassy, and it was telecast live, enabling Indian community to join the celebration virtually. Before the start of main event, videos on Amrit Mahotsav, global painting competition launched by Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), Odissi dance performance and patriotic song were played.

The event started with unfurling of the Indian Flag by Munu Mahawar, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate, followed by singing of National Anthem. The Ambassador delivered a speech and read out excerpts from the address of the President of India. He greeted the Indian Community in Oman and thanked them for their contribution in supporting India's fight against Covid-19.

The Ambassador noted that Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav means celebration of elixir of energy of independence and inspiration from the warriors



of freedom movement. He encouraged everyone to be a part of India's growth story and the journey towards self reliance and propagate India's message of peace and development. Videos of patriotic songs and dance by students of Indian School Muscat (ISM) and Indian Social Club (ISC) were played after the speech by Ambassador, adding to the sense of pride and enthusiasm in the celebration.

A video of message by Dr S Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister of India and glimpses of the gala celebration organized by Indian Council for Cultural

Relations (ICCR) on Amrit Mahotsav was played at the end of the event.

A patriotic poetry video blogging competition was organised by Embassy in the run-up to Independence Day, which saw overwhelming response from Indian diaspora. Indian community in Oman enthusiastically participated in the Rashtragaan initiative to celebrate Amrit Mahotsav.

The Embassy, in association with various community organizations has organized several events since March 2021 to celebrate Amrit Mahotsav

including Quiz competitions, Cultural events, Art exhibitions, and panel discussions. The Malayalam wing of ISC organized a quiz competition on the theme of India @ 75 on August 13. A virtual art exhibition highlighting Indian culture was organised by Rangrez art group of ISC on August 14.

The Board of Directors - Indian Schools in Oman in association with the Embassy organised a grand virtual celebration on August 12 to launch Amrit Mahotsav across all Indian Schools in Oman. A tag-line 'My India, My Pride' and e-book containing 75 shades of Indian Art depicting the rich cultural diversity of India was also launched during the event.

A logo making competition, quiz competition, collage making competition on 75 iconic buildings in India and painting competition was organized by Indian School Muscat as part of launch of Amrit Mahotsav in Indian Schools.

Indian Social Club in association with the Embassy will organize a virtual mega cultural event in the evening of 16th August to celebrate Amrit Mahotsav. Sheikh Khalifa bin Ali bin Isa Al Harthy - Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs has kindly consented to be the Chief Guest for the event.

A Special India week is planned in January 2022 to celebrate Amrit Mahotsav.

In addition, Embassy in association with Indian diaspora and friends of India plans to organize several events in future to celebrate Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav in a grand way in Oman.

## Play online games with your kids

SUNDUS YOUSUF  
MUSCAT, AUG 15

Browsing the Internet was a pastime for children but now it has become full-time thanks to remote learning and lockdowns during the pandemic.

Parents should help kids use the web responsibly and keep a tab on what they watch or play, say experts.

The Internet is not just for learning, they should also allow online entertainment. Parents must follow different strategies to prevent children from binge browsing and gaming addiction.

Mouza al Abriyah, a mother of four, said she doesn't mind if her children surf the Internet as long as she monitors them.

"I connect my device to my children's device to watch what they play and what they choose from apps. This way I feel safe," she said.

Zayana al Shukailiyah, a mother of five children, thinks that video games should be controlled and supervised as it makes children antisocial.

"I think playing games makes children isolated from the outside world. I specify certain timings for my children to use their tabs and they know the rules and follow them."

Dr Muna al Shukailiyah, a psychiatrist, said one of the reasons why parents should play games with their children is that "it is easy to have an interactive conversation with children while playing to identify their needs. Video games help children know alternatives to the real world".

Dr Muna said "gaming with children helps parents experience how these games are played so they can evaluate the content and redirect their children to the safe practices."



# COOL ESCAPE FROM FIERY SUMMER

YAHYA AL SALMANI

MUSCAT, AUG 15

The recent rains have added more beauty to Al Khandaq in the Wilayat of Rustaq. Hundreds of tourists are flocking to Al Khandaq or the trench area for swimming or camping in nature to beat the heat.

In addition to the abundance of water, this site is distinguished by its geological formations, where water flows between the two walls of a valley. It is also an opportunity to marvel and ponder about the majestic rocks and the topographical diversity of the Sultanate.

The locals confirm that the number of tourists to this site is increasing, and social media is abuzz with marvellous photos and videos of this amazing site.

The 'wadi expedition' offers a great opportunity to see the orchards and tiny villages along the edges of the mountains. One can also see locals harvesting different types of fruits along the journey and then heading to Al Rustaq for selling them.

Visitors come across crystal-clear pools of water during their expedition. The trench area, a reservoir of freshwater, has high edges (40 metres), from where one gets a view of the depth of the wadi.

This exploration, which takes about one hour, leads visitors to farms built on terraces in a valley. These terraces are managed by



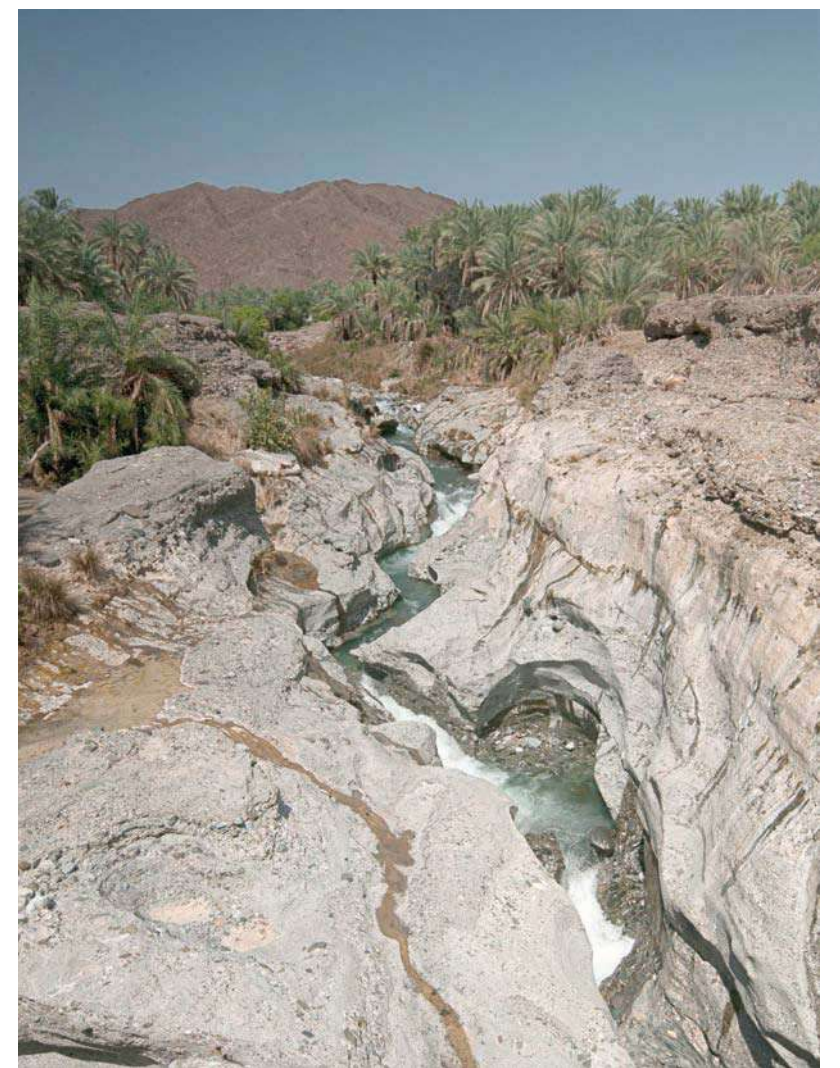
local farmers who use the Al Aflaj irrigation system. The site offers visitors the right environment for refreshing themselves after a long and tiring journey.

During a recent visit, the locals told the *Observer* they were pleased to share with the visitors information relating to the site.

**The locals confirm that the number of tourists to Al Khandaq is increasing, and social media is abuzz with marvellous photos and videos of this amazing site**

They also felt the authorities should install signboards at various places

to warn visitors against swimming or diving in the deep pools as they



are sharp and rocky.

"The signboards should also advise tourists to dress up properly when swimming at the place," they said. Many locals said many fatalities have occurred at the place due to flash floods.

"Many tourists visit the place, but they do not have adequate

information about the weather conditions here," they said.

"Since there is no rescue team in the area, visitors should have enough knowledge before they set off for trekking. They should carry first-aid materials to handle emergencies," they said.

(Photos by the author)

Despite positive signs, businesses will get a boost only if the economies are free of lockdowns and the daily Covid-19 cases are under control due to vaccines

# Major boom expected for economy

VINOD NAIR

@vinot\_nair

The recent World Bank report that the economies of the GCC are recovering is welcome news, especially for small retail businesses that are still struggling to get the cash flow on track.

For retail businesses in Oman, the second and third quarters have been hit by night lockdowns, restrictions on socialising, and poor consumer confidence, among others.

However, the last 15 months also saw the path-breaking transformation as the country quietly ushered in the e-commerce era-home delivery for grocery and food came of age and the widespread use of contactless WIFI debit and credit cards, which will become mandatory from 2021.

"The GCC has done a lot in the last year to contain the effects of the pandemic on their economy, including procuring vaccinations early on", said Issam Abouleiman, World Bank Regional Director of the GCC Countries.

"The region needs to strengthen their competition policies to harness the benefits of telecommunications and the digitalisation of economic activity", the World Bank said.

Oman's economy is forecast to recover in 2021 at a moderate 2.5 per cent growth rate as a sizable infrastructure investment programme gains momentum.

Medium-term growth is projected to average 5.3 per cent over the forecast period.

According to retailers, changes in public confidence are evident in the way vaccinated people flocked this year to the Dhofar Governorate for the khareef.

The occupancy levels permitted to hotels in Salalah were increased from 50 to 75 per cent recently to meet the increasing demand.

"The fine dining and tourism segments are the ones we can expect to bounce back at the slightest ease of restrictions. People are desperate to travel and spend time outside with families and friends", said Mahesh Nair, a senior executive at a UAE-based company that has multiple retail and travel interests.

He added, "We have seen citizens taking chances to time to travel abroad, especially to countries like Georgia, Turkey, and some in Europe that are now welcoming tourists. Pizza, fast food, and some fine dining restaurants have picked up well in the last few months."

Despite these positive signs, businesses will get a boost only if the economies are free of lockdowns and the daily Covid-19 cases are under control due to vaccines.

"While the new variants continue to give a scare, the fact is that we now have vaccines to offer, compared to 2020, even it is the third dose or boosters", said Susan S, who recently retired as senior staff from the healthcare sector.

"The number of people getting admitted to hospitals is on the decline, especially those with critical cases, and that is due to mass vaccination. It has eased the pressure on the system and hopefully, people will have a healthier mind to enjoy and relax", she said.

Oman eased visa rules for tourists and business travellers last year, the results of which are expected to be seen in the advent of the new tourism season from October or November.





# Nizwa Industrial City occupancy stands at 74pc as expansion projects persist



**NIZWA:** The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayin) is embarked on the implementation of vital projects at Nizwa Industrial City, including the 1 million square meter Phase 3 and Phase 4 expansion project and the construction of a second entrance to the industrial city.

Omar bin Mohammed Muqabil, Director General of Nizwa Industrial City, said that

the facility garnered good turnout from local investors wishing to get their projects localised.

This interest was helped by the Industrial City's floating various investment opportunities, particularly in the commercial services zone and in the industrial city's area.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Muqabil said that the total volume of investments

at the city by mid-2021 stood at RO 426 million, constituting a 15 per cent rise over the figure of the corresponding period in 2020.

By the end of June 2021, the number of workers there stood at 5,707, of the 2,568 (45 per cent) were Omanis.

Out of 148 projects at Nizwa Industrial City by mid-2021, 128 have been completed, 10 under construction and 8 were

designated lands in the industrial city's over 3 million square metre area, said Muqabil, noting that this stands for 74 per cent of the total area. Sanad Service Centre (Masar) was among the projects accomplished in the first half of this year.

The project offers a number of government services aimed to facilitate investor's obtaining permits, said Muqabil, adding

that important projects businesses include foodstuff industries and the sale of building materials, glass, timber and steel.

A number of oil and gas firms operating in the fields of maintenance and related industries are stationed at Nizwa Industrial City, which houses small and medium industries and provides services to factories and workers, he explained. — ONA

## 23.1pc rise in SMEs registered till June 2021

**MUSCAT:** The total number of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) registered with the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Riyada) at the end of June 2021 stood at 54,726, compared to 44,448 in the same period of 2020, comprising a rise by 23.1 per cent, according to the data released by the National Centre for Statistics and information (NCSI).

Among the governorates, Muscat topped the list with 18,460 SMEs, comprising an increase by 23.2 per cent, followed by the Governorate of North Al Batinah which went up by 23 per cent to reach 8,642, Al Dakhiliyah with a rise by 20.2 per cent to stand at 6,756, and Dhofar with an increase by 23 per cent to reach 4,586.

Other governorates also saw a rise in the number of SMEs. In the Governorate of South Al-Batinah, it went up by 27 per cent to reach 4,189, the Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah by 20 per cent to reach 3,619, the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah by 29.2 per cent to reach 3,272, the Governorate of Al Dhahirah by 16.9 per cent to reach 3,083, the Governorate of Al Buraimi by 24.7 per cent to reach 1,165, the Governorate of Al Wusta by 45.1 per cent to reach 727 and the Governorate of Musandam by 34.3 per cent to reach 227.

— ONA

## No PCR tests, quarantine for vaccinated travellers to Egypt

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, AUG 15

The national airline, Oman Air, has announced an ease in restrictions for travel to Egypt.

"No PCR test or quarantine is required in Cairo if you're fully vaccinated with a second dose taken at least 14 days prior to arrival," the national airline said in a statement.

The national airline is operating an extra flight between Muscat and Cairo on August 15.

The Supreme Committee lifted Egypt from the list of countries from which arrivals are banned on July 6.

"The Supreme Committee on Covid-19 has decided to extend the suspension of entry until further notice for arrivals from India. Omanis, diplomats, health staff are exempted from the ban and will be subject to entry procedures, Oman Air said in a statement.

# Oman Air boosts flight frequencies between Muscat and Salalah as khareef demand rises

**MUSCAT:** In response to exceptional Khareef season demand for Salalah in Oman's southern Dhofar Governorate, Oman Air has gradually increased weekly flight frequencies from an average of 18 weekly flights in July to a total of 41 weekly flights at the beginning of August. Both Muscat-to-Salalah and Salalah-to-Muscat reached a total of 41 weekly flights and 7820 weekly seats each way, for a grand total of 82 weekly flights and 15,640 weekly seats.

The extra flights reflect Salalah's popularity as a leading domestic destination during Khareef (monsoon) season, a time of year when the region is bathed in an abundance of rain, lush greenery, and cool air.

Adil Al Zadjali, Oman Air Country Manager (Oman) said, "Salalah remains an extremely popular domestic destination and our commitment at Oman Air is to provide travel flexibility for our valued guests with the convenience of extra flights when needed. Khareef season — and all the visual splendour it offers — transforms Muscat to Salalah into one of our busiest routes. By progressively introducing 23 additional weekly flights in each direction, visitors to the region have been able to book their seats with full confidence. As domestic travel rebounds, our aim now is to



develop a revised flight schedule that lets us maintain exceptional year-round frequencies to Salalah."

In July this year, Oman Air scheduled its Boeing 787 Dreamliner with a 3-class configuration on flights between Muscat and Salalah, featuring award-winning Economy and Business Class cabins and luxuriously appointed First Class Suites.

Initially planned to service the

**Muscat-Salalah-Muscat reaches total of 82 weekly flights, 15,640 weekly seats**

route until July 31, the airline will continue to operate the 3-class Dreamliner on select flights to Salalah, adding to an already optimised mix of aircraft types and offering a wider choice of on-board comfort.

Oman Air's First Class Suite is recognised for its Omani-inspired design, modern amenities and exceptional comfort. In 2020 it was named best First Class Suite by German-based iF design, a world leader in design, and also won 'World's Leading Airline — First Class' at the World Travel Awards Middle East.

Our flights are departing on time. For flights operating during the lockdown period, passengers

and those dropping them off or picking them up are allowed to travel to the airport. Please ensure that you always carry a printed copy of travel tickets along with all applicable travel documents and valid ID in the event that you are asked to present them to the relevant authorities.

Guests are invited to always consult [omanair.com](http://omanair.com) for the latest flight schedule and timings, which are subject to change.

# Lebanon fuel tank explosion kills 28

**BEIRUT:** At least 28 people were killed and nearly 80 others injured when a fuel tank exploded in northern Lebanon on Sunday, authorities and medics said, scalding a crowd that was clamouring for gasoline in the crisis-hit country.

The night-time tragedy overwhelmed medical facilities and heaped new misery on a nation already beset by an economic crisis and severe fuel shortages that have crippled hospitals and caused long power cuts.

It revived bitter memories of an enormous explosion at Beirut port in August last year that killed more than 200 people and destroyed swathes of the capital.

An adviser to the health ministry said the death toll from the blast in Al-Tleil village, in the remote northern region of Akkar, had climbed to 28, while the Lebanese Red Cross earlier put the number of wounded at 79.

The military said a fuel tank that “had been confiscated by the army to distribute to citizens” exploded just before 2:00 am (2300 GMT), leaving soldiers also among the wounded.

The army began raiding gas stations on Saturday to curb hoarding by suppliers after the central



Vehicles burn outside the reported home of the lot owner, where the exploded fuel tank was placed, in the village of Al-Tleil on Sunday. — AFP

bank chief announced last week he would scrap fuel subsidies.

The official National News Agency (NNA) said the blast followed scuffles between “residents that gathered around the container to fill up gasoline” overnight.

Hospitals in Akkar, one of Lebanon’s poorest regions near

the border with Syria, and in the northern port city of Tripoli said they had to turn away many of the injured because they were ill-equipped to treat severe burns.

“The corpses are so charred that we can’t identify them,” said Yassine Metlej, an employee at a Akkar hospital where seven bodies and

dozens of injured were brought.

“Some have lost their faces, others their arms,” Metlej said.

The head of Lebanon’s High Relief Council (HRC), Mohammad Kheir, said authorities were “in contact with Turkey and Egypt to transfer the most serious cases abroad”, according to NNA.

## Syrian govt, rebels reach truce in Daraa

**BEIRUT:** Syrian government forces and rebels have agreed on a two-week ceasefire in a volatile area in the south of the war-torn country, a local official has said.

The agreement was reached after talks with the Russian army, a major ally of Syrian President Bashar al Assad, the spokesman for a local coordination committee added late Saturday.

For the past few weeks, government forces have shelled and clashed with opposition fighters in the area of Daraa al-Balad in the province of Daraa, the birthplace of an uprising that erupted against Al Assad’s rule in 2011.

Since June 24, government forces have imposed a siege on Daraa al-Balad.

The rebels surrendered the city of Daraa in 2018 after reaching an agreement with Russia and handed over their heavy weapons.

Parts of the city, however, remained under the control of the opposition.

On Thursday, United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen expressed concern about violence in southern Syria.

“Increased hostilities, which have included heavy shelling and intensified ground clashes, have resulted in civilian casualties. Thousands of civilians have been forced to flee Daraa al-Balad,” Pedersen said. — **dpa**

# Death toll from Turkey floods rises to 58

**BOZKURT:** Flash floods that have swept through towns in the Turkish Black Sea region have killed 58 people, authorities said on Sunday, in the second natural disaster to strike Turkey this month.

The floods brought chaos to northern provinces just as authorities were declaring wildfires had been brought under control after raging through southern coastal regions for two weeks.

Forty-eight people died as a result of floods in Kastamonu province, another nine people died in Sinop and one in Bartın, the Disaster and Emergency Management Directorate (AFAD) said.

Drone footage by Reuters showed massive damage in the town of Bozkurt in Kastamonu province. Emergency workers were searching demolished buildings for the missing.

Torrents of water tossed dozens of cars and heaps of debris along streets, destroyed buildings and bridges, closed roads and cut off electricity to hundreds of villages.

More than 2,000 people were



An aerial view shows damaged buildings close to the Ezine Stream after deadly flash floods broke it’s banks in Bozkurt town in the district of Kastamonu on Sunday. — AFP

evacuated from affected areas, some with the help of helicopters and boats, AFAD said.

According to experts, in addition to climate change, the straightening of rivers and the narrowing of the Ezine river in the Bozkurt district is a factor in the severe flooding.

Residents told local media that the death toll could be much higher than the official figures suggest.

Others claimed in social me-

dia that water had drained from a nearby hydroelectric dam in Bozkurt, exacerbating the flooding. Kastamonu governor’s office rejected reports in social media saying more than 250 had been killed, calling them “fake statements”.

Several bridges have collapsed and some of the affected areas still lack running water and electricity, according to the AFAD.

— **Agencies**

# Tigrayans fear the worst as bodies wash up in river

**WAD AL-HILIOU:** In an east Sudan town, Tigrayan Gabratansay Gabbrakhrastos panics whenever his phone rings: it could be grim news of yet more bodies washing up on the banks of a river bordering Ethiopia.

Gabratansay says he has been receiving such phone calls since late July, when Sudanese villagers found the first corpse floating down the Setit River, known as the Tekeze in Ethiopia.

Since then, he says, a stream of calls has followed, bringing news of even more gruesome discoveries of bloated and deformed bodies with bound hands and severe wounds.

Gabratansay and others like him who recover the bodies fear they are evidence of mass executions by government-allied troops in Tigray, a small but historically powerful region of northern Ethiopia that has been ravaged by more than nine months of fighting between the army and battle-hardened local forces.

Allegations have swirled



A Tigrayan refugee stands on the banks of the Setit river bordering Ethiopia, at Wad al-Hiliou. — AFP

of atrocities, ethnic cleansing and mass killings, including a massacre in the town of Humera, in western Tigray. All have been dismissed by the Ethiopian government as “fabricated”.

Along with other Tigrayans, Gabratansay says he has helped to retrieve and bury some 50 bodies found in the river, including five women. Many of the corpses bore gunshot wounds, others appeared to have suffered burns, deep slashes, or had body parts

missing, and almost all had their hands tied behind their back, he says.

Gabratansay says that based on information received from Humera, “around 150 Tigrayan prisoners were executed by federal forces with their hands tied behind their back”.

These accounts came from Tigrayans who fled Humera as well as people still in the town who spoke of hearing “screams and gunshots”, he says. — **AFP**

## SHORT TAKES

### TRIPOLI

#### Libya without water after sabotage threats

Libyan authorities have shut water supplies to swathes of the country after gunmen demanding the release of a jailed Gaddafi-era official threatened to sabotage the water network. Supplies to western and southwestern Libya were interrupted overnight Saturday to Sunday, the Great Man-Made River water authority said.

It took the decision to cut the supply after gunmen on Thursday stormed several water distribution centres demanding the release of Abdullah al Senussi.



A brother-in-law of longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi, Senussi was sentenced to death in 2015 over his alleged role in attempting to suppress the 2011 uprising that culminated in Gaddafi’s ouster and killing.

### TEHRAN

#### Iran’s daily Covid deaths top 600 in new high

Iran on Sunday reported over 600 daily Covid deaths for the first time, ahead of tightened curbs to contain the spread of the virus.

The country also registered 36,736 new infections in 24 hours, taking the total since the pandemic started to 4,425,821, the health ministry said.

The latest 620 deaths raised the total number of fatalities to 97,828, it added.

Health authorities acknowledge the official figures underes-



timate the country’s real toll.

The Islamic republic is struggling to contain what officials have called a “fifth wave” of the virus driven by the highly infectious Delta variant.

### TELAVIV

#### Israel recalls Poland envoy over claims law

Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid said Saturday he had ordered the country’s charge d’affaires in Warsaw to return after the Polish president approved an “anti-Semitic” law curbing World War II-era property claims.

The law, approved on Saturday by Polish President Andrzej Duda, sets a 30-year time limit on challenges to property confiscations — many of them relating to Poland’s once thriving Jewish community.

Israeli Prime Minister Naf-



tali Bennett slammed the law as “shameful” and said it showed “disgraceful contempt for the Holocaust’s memory”.

“This is a grave measure that Israel cannot remain indifferent to,” he said in a statement.

## In brief

■ KUALA LUMPUR



### 'MALAYSIA PM MUHYIDDIN TO RESIGN TODAY'

Malaysia's Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin will resign on Monday, news portal Malaysiakini reported, citing a cabinet minister. Muhyiddin will submit his resignation to King Al-Sultan Abdullah on Monday, according to Mohd Redzuan Md Yusof, a minister in the prime minister's department, MalaysiaKini reported on Sunday.

Reuters could not immediately reach Mohd Redzuan. The prime minister's office did not immediately respond. Mohd Redzuan said Muhyiddin informed party members of his decision to resign as he had exhausted all other options to sustain the government.

■ JAKARTA



### INDONESIA'S EDWIN WINS GOLDEN LEOPARD

Indonesian director Edwin on Saturday won the Golden Leopard for the best picture at the Locarno Film Festival with "Vengeance Is Mine, All Others Pay Cash", a homage to 1980s Asian all-action movies.

The feature paints a humorous portrait of a violent young man who falls for a woman after fighting her.

Edwin, who uses a single name, had already returned to Jakarta before the awards ceremony but the organisers put out a video in which he said the Golden Leopard was "happiness... it's nice support and it motivates."

■ SYDNEY



### AUSTRALIA BUYS PFIZER VACCINES FROM POLAND

Australia has purchased about 1 million doses of Pfizer Inc's Covid-19 vaccine from Poland to add to its inoculation efforts in Sydney and its home state, which on Saturday entered a snap lockdown amid record new infections.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said on Sunday the extra vaccines would start arriving immediately and over half will be directed to 20- to 39-year-olds in New South Wales, as the state reported its second-largest increase in locally transmitted infections.

Morrison has been under pressure for a sluggish vaccine rollout.

# Kabul falls to Taliban, Ghani flees

**KABUL:** President Ashraf Ghani left Afghanistan on Sunday after Taliban fighters entered the capital Kabul, capping their return to power two decades after being forced out by US-led forces.

American diplomats were evacuated from their embassy by chopper after the militants swept across Afghanistan in days with little resistance from local forces trained and equipped by the United States and others for billions of dollars.

The Taliban urged government officials to stay, but officials said Ghani had left the country.

It was not clear where he was going: a senior Interior Ministry official said he had left for Tajikistan, while a Foreign Ministry official said it was not known what country he would land in.

A representative of the Taliban said the group was checking on Ghani's whereabouts. Some local social media users branded him a "coward" for leaving them in chaos.

Taliban fighters reached Kabul "from all sides", the senior Interior Ministry official told Reuters and there were some reports of sporadic gunfire around the city.

But there was no significant fighting and the group said it was waiting for the Western-backed government to surrender peacefully.

"Taliban fighters are to be on standby on all entrances of Kabul until a peaceful and satisfactory transfer of power is agreed," said



Taliban fighters sit over a vehicle on a street in Laghman province on Sunday. — AFP

spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid.

Many Afghans fear the Taliban will return to past harsh practices in their imposition of Sharia. During their 1996-2001 rule, women were not allowed to work and punishments such as stoning, whipping and hanging were administered.

Taliban sought to project a more moderate face, promising to respect women's rights and protect

both foreigners and Afghans.

Another spokesman, Suhail Shaheen, said the Taliban would protect the rights of women, as well as freedoms for media workers and diplomats.

"We assure the people, particularly in the city of Kabul, that their properties, their lives are safe," he told the BBC, saying a transfer of power was expected in days.

The government's acting interior minister, Abdul Sattar Mirzakawal, said power would be handed over to a transitional administration.

There won't be an attack on the city, it is agreed that there will be a peaceful handover," he tweeted.

A tweet from the Afghan presidential palace account said the firing had been heard at a number of points around Kabul but that

security forces, in coordination with international partners, had control of the city. Many of Kabul's streets were choked by cars and people either trying to rush home or reach the airport, residents said.

"Some people have left their keys in the car and have started walking to the airport," one resident told Reuters. Another said: "People are all going home in fear of fighting." — Reuters

## ■ ANGER SETS OFF FIREWORKS



Fireworks fired by protesters explode over riot police during a demonstration in Bangkok on August 15, 2021, calling for the resignation of Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha over the government's handling of the Covid-19 coronavirus crisis. — AFP

## Philippines detect first Lambda case, death toll tops 30,000

**MANILA:** The Philippines' health ministry said on Sunday it has detected the first case of Covid-19's Lambda variant in the country, and reminded the public to strictly observe minimum public health standards.

The World Health Organization classifies Lambda as a "variant of interest", which was first identified in Peru in December, as laboratory studies showed it has mutations that resist vaccine-induced antibodies.

The first Lambda variant case is a 35-year-old female who has since recovered, the Department of Health said, adding it was still validating if the patient was a Filipino returning from overseas.

The country's death toll from Covid-19 rose by 270 on Sunday, up to 30,340. The number of infections also increased, with 14,749 new cases, bringing the

total caseload to more than 1.74 million, the health department said.

The government has placed the capital region of Metro Manila under strict lockdown until August 20 in a bid to contain a surge in Covid-19 cases suspected to be driven by the highly contagious Delta variant.

It also extended a ban on the entry of travellers from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia until August 31 as part of efforts to contain the spread of the Delta variant.

The entry ban was first implemented on April 29 for travellers from India or those who had recently travelled to the South Asian country. Other countries were later added to the list.

— Agencies

## Japan's PM pledges not to wage war again

**TOKYO:** Japan will never again wage war, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga pledged on Sunday, as he commemorated the end of World War Two while members of his cabinet visited a shrine seen as a symbol of the country's past militarism.

Nearly eight decades since the end of the war, the conflict remains a source of tension between Japan and its neighbours, particularly China and North and South Korea, with the Yasukuni shrine in central Tokyo a focal point for the strain. "Since the end of the war, Japan has consistently walked the path of a country that values peace," Suga said in a speech at a memorial ceremony in Tokyo. "We must never again repeat the devastation of war. We will continue to remain



Japan's Emperor Naruhito (R) and Empress Masako observe a moment of silence during a memorial service marking the 76th anniversary of the end of World War II in Tokyo on Sunday. — AFP

committed to this conviction."

His comments were little changed from those of his predecessor, Shinzo Abe, at

last year's ceremony. Emperor Naruhito again expressed "deep remorse" for Japan's wartime past.

Earlier on Sunday members

of Suga's cabinet, as well as Abe, visited Yasukuni, gestures likely to anger China and both Koreas. Suga did not visit but sent a ritual offering through his secretary, the Sankei newspaper said.

Yasukuni honours Japan's war dead, including 14 World War Two leaders convicted as "Class A" war criminals, making it a flashpoint for tension. Koreans still chafe over Japanese rule from 1910 to 1945, while the Chinese continue to resent Japan's invasion and brutal occupation of parts of China from 1931 to 1945.

Many Japanese pay respects to relatives at the shrine and conservatives say leaders should be able to commemorate the war dead. China and the two Koreas, however, have voiced objection

given that war criminals are included among those honoured at Yasukuni.

The shrine saw a constant stream of visitors from early morning, including families with children and people in military uniform, in the face of persistent rain and a recent spike in novel coronavirus cases in Tokyo.

Environment Minister Shinjiro Koizumi and Education Minister Koichi Hagiuda both paid their respects. Their visits came after Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi went to the shrine on Friday.

"Like any other year, I sincerely offered my heartfelt condolences to those who sacrificed their lives in the previous war and renewed my pledge for everlasting peace," Hagiuda told reporters. — Reuters

## Pressed by US, Mexico expels migrants



An unaccompanied 4 year-old migrant from Honduras waits to be transported by the US Border Patrol after crossing the Rio Grande river into the United States from Mexico in Roma, Texas on Sunday. — Reuters

**MEXICO CITY:** Under pressure from the US government to contain illegal immigration, Mexico has been quietly flying thousands of undocumented migrants to the south of the country to expedite their departure, according to officials and migrants.

The government said in late May it had carried out four return flights of migrants as it began a so-called “air bridge” south, without saying how many people were on them.

Mexico has now sent roughly 13,000 people from northern cities to its southern border on about 100 flights, complementing US efforts to return migrants to Central America, two Mexican officials familiar with the matter said.

Some 1,200 people were flown south in the past week alone, they said. The figures have not

been previously reported.

Mexico’s National Migration Institute declined to comment. The foreign ministry said in a statement it supported a humane migratory system that respected national and international law, and was working with Washington to tackle the causes of migration.

The migrant flights come as the Biden administration faces increasing criticism over its management of the issue.

“This is all being done to accommodate the Americans, who are very worried about migration,” said one of the Mexican officials. “Efforts are being made to speed up expulsions.”

Mexico, meanwhile, is pushing for the United States to lift restrictions on non-essential travel across their shared border that were imposed during the pandemic. — **Reuters**

## Haiti searches for survivors after quake kills at least 304

**PORT-AU-PRINCE:** Rescue workers were scrambling to find survivors after a powerful 7.2-magnitude earthquake struck Haiti, killing at least 304 and toppling buildings in the disaster-plagued Caribbean nation still recovering from a devastating 2010 quake.

The epicentre of the tremor, which rattled homes and sent terrified locals fleeing for safety on Saturday morning, was about 100 miles (160 kilometres) by road west of the center of the densely populated capital Port-au-Prince.

Churches, businesses, schools and homes crumbled in the quake that trapped hundreds of victims under rubble and left at least 1,800 people injured, the country’s civil protection agency said.

Rescuers raced against the clock to find survivors, with the agency tweeting that efforts by “both professional rescuers and members of the public have led to many people being pulled from the rubble,” adding that already overburdened hospitals continued to receive injured.

Hours after the quake, the agency announced the death toll had jumped to 304, ticking upwards throughout the day from a first report of 29 fatalities.

The quake was felt in much of the Caribbean, emanating from



People search through the rubble of what used to be the Manguier Hotel after the earthquake hit on Saturday in Les Cayes, southwest Haiti. — AFP

the epicentre at Haiti’s southwestern peninsula. The civil protection agency said at least 160 people were killed in the country’s South department alone.

“Lots of homes are destroyed, people are dead and some are at the hospital,” 21-year-old Christella Saint Hilaire, who lives near the epicentre, said.

Hospitals in the regions hardest hit by the quake were already struggling to provide emergency care and at least three were full,

according to Jerry Chandler, head of the civil protection agency.

Haiti’s health ministry quickly dispatched personnel and medicine to the southwestern peninsula, but their arrival could be hampered by the insecurity that has for months plagued the poorest country in the Americas.

The United States and other nations swiftly pledged support, with President Joe Biden approving “immediate” aid efforts and Haiti’s neighbour the Dominican

Republic shipping 10,000 food rations and medical equipment.

UN chief Antonio Guterres said he was “following the latest unfolding tragedy in Haiti.”

“The UN is working to support rescue and relief efforts,” he tweeted. A medical brigade of 253 Cuban doctors deployed in Haiti was travelling to treat the injured and adapt a Port-au-Prince hospital until now used for Covid patients, their head said on Cuban television. — **AFP**

## Latvians take to the water for concerts

**RIGA:** Latvians are taking to the country’s waterways for a socially distanced musical experience this summer, boarding kayaks, dinghies and motor yachts to enjoy some music — even if unvaccinated. At a concert on Juglas Lake near the Latvian capital Riga on Saturday, hundreds of boats could be seen bobbing to rock, folk and heavy metal.

“The idea... is so great,” said Vladimirs Kravchenko, a heavy metal fan who has been attending hard rock festivals since the 1990s.

“I hope festivals on lakes like this will continue even after the virus is over,” Kravchenko said.

Organisers said there were around 1,500 people on the water, and 3,500 more watching from the shore. The stage was located on the shore and two floating bars in the lake sold beer and cocktails.

Only people with Covid-19 vaccinations were allowed to attend the concert on the shore



People in a boat listen to Latvian band Dagamba performing during a concert of the crossover music festival Laiva on Juglas Lake near Riga on Sunday. — AFP

while the lake was also open to those without a vaccine.

“This is simply a brilliant idea for how to hold a festival and ensure social distancing for the unvaccinated at the same time,” Anna Berzina, who was rowing a kayak with her husband, said.

The Baltic state has one of the

lowest vaccination rates in the European Union — around 43 per cent.

The government has imposed restrictions for unvaccinated people in a bid to encourage more Latvians to get vaccinated — including threatening soldiers with dismissal if they do not get the jab.

For live events, the rule is that there must be two separate zones for vaccinated and unvaccinated spectators, creating a headache for organisers.

Saturday’s concert was the second in a series designed by Dagamba, a classical and rock music crossover band, which came up with the idea of lake concerts during last year’s lockdowns.

The concerts are called LAIVA — a play on the English word “live” and the Latvian for “on a boat”.

At the concert, the sight of the flotilla in front of him inspired Peteris Kvetkovskis, the frontman of black and folk metal band Skyforger.

“Seeing so many boats in front of us, we will play a song about a Viking raid being launched,” he told the audience from the stage, before launching into the number called “To the Northern Shores”. — **AFP**

## Austria not to lend Aztec headdress to Mexico

**VIENNA:** Even in the 500th year since the conquest of Mexico, Austria will not give away the Aztec feather headdress from the Welt museum in Vienna.



To commemorate the fall of the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan to the Spanish in August 1521, Mexico had sought to exhibit the object known as Moctezuma’s Crown of Feathers in its country of origin.

“Due to the considerable risk of possible damage during transport, the request for a loan cannot be granted,” the statement from the State Secretariat for Culture in Vienna said on Sunday. Austria is aware of the highly symbolic and historical significance of this headdress for Mexico. However, the State Secretariat said a scientific report with Austrian and Mexican participation had established years ago that the object was extremely fragile.

The showpiece of the Welt museum, which translates as World Museum, is made of bright green quetzal feathers and gold plates. It is the only preserved object of its kind in the world. — **dpa**

### SHORT TAKES

#### NEW YORK

##### Musk says Starship orbital stack ready for flight

SpaceX founder Elon Musk said on Saturday the first orbital stack of the Starship rocket should be ready for flight in the coming weeks, taking the unorthodox billionaire a step closer to his dream of orbital and then interplanetary Travel.

SpaceX in May successfully landed its Starship prototype, SN15, a reusable heavy-lift launch vehicle that could eventually carry astronauts and large cargo payloads to the moon and Mars.



The touchdown came after four prototype landing attempts had ended in explosions.

#### MOSCOW

##### Flames spread in forest fire disaster

The forest fire catastrophe in Russia is spreading ominously: On Sunday, the Federal Agency for the Protection of the Forests reported almost 252 fires on a total area of 4.4 million hectares.

This is again more than the day before. According to the report, more than 8,000 helpers are in action to fight the flames, while 14 fire fighting planes are providing support from the air. The situation is still worst in the republic of Yakutia in eastern Siberia. According to the forestry protection



agency, an area of 4.2 million hectares is currently burning there alone. Most recently, the number of firefighting teams there was massively increased on the orders of President Vladimir Putin.

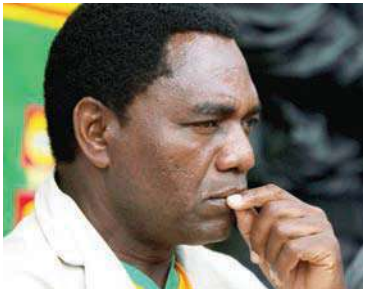
#### LUSAKA

##### Opposition leader takes early lead

Opposition leader Hakainde Hichilema extended his early lead over long-time rival and incumbent Edgar Lungu in Zambia’s presidential election on Saturday, results announced by the electoral commission showed.

Lungu, 64, has been in power since 2015. Hichilema — known as “HH” — is a businessman who has criticised the president’s management of an economy in turmoil.

Investors are closely watching



the outcome of the election, which was held on Thursday: the southern African country is highly indebted and suffered the continent’s first pandemic-era sovereign default in November.

# Taliban surge exposes failure to build Afghan

JONATHAN LANDAY AND IDREES ALI

The rout of Afghan forces as Taliban fighters take one provincial city after another provides a stark answer to anyone wondering about the success of two decades of US-led efforts to build a local army. Despite about \$89 billion budgeted for training the Afghan army, it took the Taliban little more than a month to brush it aside. Over the last few days, the insurgents have seized every major city in Afghanistan — from Kandahar in the south to Mazar-i-Sharif in the north, Herat in the west to Jalalabad in the east. They now stand almost at the gates of Kabul.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani praised Afghan security and defence forces in a brief televised address on Saturday, saying they had “a strong spirit to defend their people and country.”

But still, there has been shock at the lack of resistance put up by many Afghan army units. Some abandoned their posts and others reached agreements with the Taliban to stop fighting and hand over their weapons and equipment.

In some instances, US officials say, provincial governors asked security forces to surrender or escape, perhaps in order to avoid further bloodshed because they believed defeat was unavoidable. Where deals were not cut, Afghan forces still appear to have melted away.

“Once morale goes, it spreads very quickly, and that is at least partly to blame”, a US official said.

American officers have long worried that rampant corruption, well documented in parts of Afghanistan’s military and political leadership, would undermine the resolve of badly paid, ill-fed and erratically supplied front-line soldiers — some of whom have been left for months or even years on end in isolated outposts, where they could be picked off by the Taliban.

Over many years, hundreds of Afghan soldiers were killed each month. But the army fought on, without any of the airborne evacuation of casualties and expert surgical care standard in Western armies, as long as international backing was there. Once that went, their resolve evaporated. “Would you give your life for leaders who don’t pay you on time and are more interested in their own future?” a second US official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, asked. It is an analysis shared by some in the Taliban movement itself. — **Reuters**



Would you give your life for leaders who don’t pay you on time and are more interested in their own future?

AN US OFFICIAL



LIT FOR THE OCCASION

The Chatrapati Shivaji Railway terminus is seen lit up with India’s national flag colours on the eve of the country’s 75th Independence Day celebrations in Mumbai on Sunday. — **AFP**

# There’s creativity on the left!



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami  
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SOME PEOPLE SPEND MUCH OF THEIR TIME TRYING TO FIT IN AND BE LIKE EVERYONE ELSE!

As the fingers of one hand are not all the same, human beings are also born to be different from one another. They are distinguished by their individual differences and psychological characteristics, which are included in cognitive, effective, behavioural and genetic traits attributed to human beings and animals alike. However, some people spend much of their time trying to fit in and be like everyone else! Unfortunately, they undervalue their difference while being unaware of their real strengths and uniqueness.

Such a difference reflects each person’s unique intelligence, personality traits and values, which are neither a fiction nor a worry. They only contribute to shaping one’s behaviours and self-importance in life. One of the key observable individual differences that have been remarkably prominent worldwide between humans is whether one is a right or left-handed. Based on a stereotype, some people tend to look at lefties differently, who look abnormal to them as all others are right-handed! Using a left hand while writing, using a knife or holding something else seems awkward to the righties.

Historically, the left-handedness is often considered a bad omen and associated with evil in some cultures and countries.

Whether a person favours a right hand or the left one and what this reveals about the brain function has been studied for many years. In the past, children who were naturally born left-handed were encouraged or even forced to use their right hand. Mainly, this was because of prejudice against the awkwardness of left-handed writing and the dominance of ‘right-handed’ instruments.

Though lefties experience distinct challenges, benefits and quirks of daily life that most right-handed people usually never even consider, many of the creative people are left-handed. Throughout the centuries, most of the celebrated thinkers and artists have been lefties. From Aristotle, Leonardo Da Vinci, Albert Einstein, Bill Gates to Oprah Winfrey, the world would be a very a different place without the numerous notable lefties. The lengthy list of artistic lefties and strong connection lefties have to the right side of the brain, which is linked to creativity, has reinforced the idea that lefties are more creative.

Therefore, if one has a naturally left-handed child, he/she should not be forced to use the right hand instead. While we know very little about what influences hand preference, we do know that handedness reflects the connection of the individual brain. It is attributed that

babies, at a certain time while in the womb, show a clear preference for sucking one thumb over the other. Hence, handedness is probably hardwired before baby’s birth. However, experts say that parents do not likely get a good sense of their child’s dominant hand until they are 2 or 3 years old.

Most importantly is that genetics play a key role in having a right or left-handed child. On the other hand, humans are not the only one to show a preference between the left and right hand. Other creatures in the animal kingdom also show a 50/50 split when it comes to which hand, foot or paw they use the most! Among the left-handed animals are kangaroos, which tend to favour their left paw for eating. Also, studies have shown that 90 per cent of parrots use their left foot to pick things up.

Accordingly, we all should accord a special tribute to all lefties for they are more creative than the right handed people. They are not only writing differently, but they also think distinctively. As Victor Hugo, a French poet, novelist, and dramatist, said, “The left handed are precious; they take the place that are inconvenient to the rest”. Hence, lefties are in great demand, but limited in supply as they only mark around 10 to 12 per cent of the world’s population.

# The adventures of a blonde and a very old car



Rachael MacIver  
Instagram: @rachael\_maciver

SHISR WAS A SLEEPY VILLAGE ON THE BORDER OF RUB AL KHALI, A DESERT IN ITSELF A LEGEND AND A TOPIC OF MANY STORIES

“Welcome to Ubar, the Lost City of Bedouin Legend”, Mrs J read out to me.

We had taken a slight detour from our planned route to Salalah, and Ol’ Martha, the Pajero still stuck in 3rd gear, had groaned her way down the lonely road to Shisr and the Ubar Museum. Shisr was a sleepy village on the border of Rub al Khali, a desert in itself a legend and a topic of many stories. The museum housed the ruins of what was said to be the ancient caravan oasis of Ubar. Ubar, the Atlantis of The Sands. A city fabled to have been so wild and decadent that God had seen it necessary to destroy it and bury it under the sand.

The ironic thing was, that there didn’t seem to be anyone around to ‘welcome’ us despite the welcoming signboard.

“Hellooooo?” Mrs J peeked through the partially closed gate. Nobody was there to demand an entrance fee or issue a ticket, so we took it to mean that we really were welcome and could just walk in.

Without anyone to guide us, we wandered around at random and looked at the ruins, which were the structures discovered deep under the sand in 1992, guided by satellite images and old maps. The sun faded signboards didn’t help much to generate any form of excitement or drama either. They were as dry as the hot, dusty air around us. Mrs J stood staring at the rubbles.

“As hard as I try I find it really impossible to connect this pile of what looks like a builder’s mess, with a booming immoral city, wicked enough to catch the wrath

of God, and wipe it off the face of the earth”.

It took me a moment to realise, that what tickled my fascination was not so much the tale of a sunken city, but rather the real-life drama surrounding the place. Trying to understand what had motivated real adventurers and explorers, the likes of Bertram Thomas, T E Lawrence (‘Lawrence of Arabia’), William Thesiger and Ranulph Fiennes, listening to almost-forgotten stories told around the camp fire, whispers and old maps. Their unbelievable thirst for adventures, to follow their dreams of pursuing the impossible. This was what Hollywood movies were made of, worthy of blood, sweat (a lot of that, I’m sure) and tears. Each had believed the myths of a Sunken City and had spent

sleepless nights, lots of money and resources to prove that such a city had existed and was to be found deep underneath the sand.

Even Nasa had got involved and their satellite images helped to identify ancient camel tracks and old wells hidden beneath the sand.

This network of trails seemed to converge on Shisr and its water well and supporting the theory that this place had once been an important stopover for caravans and frankincense traders, before starting their long and odious journey through the Empty Quarter.

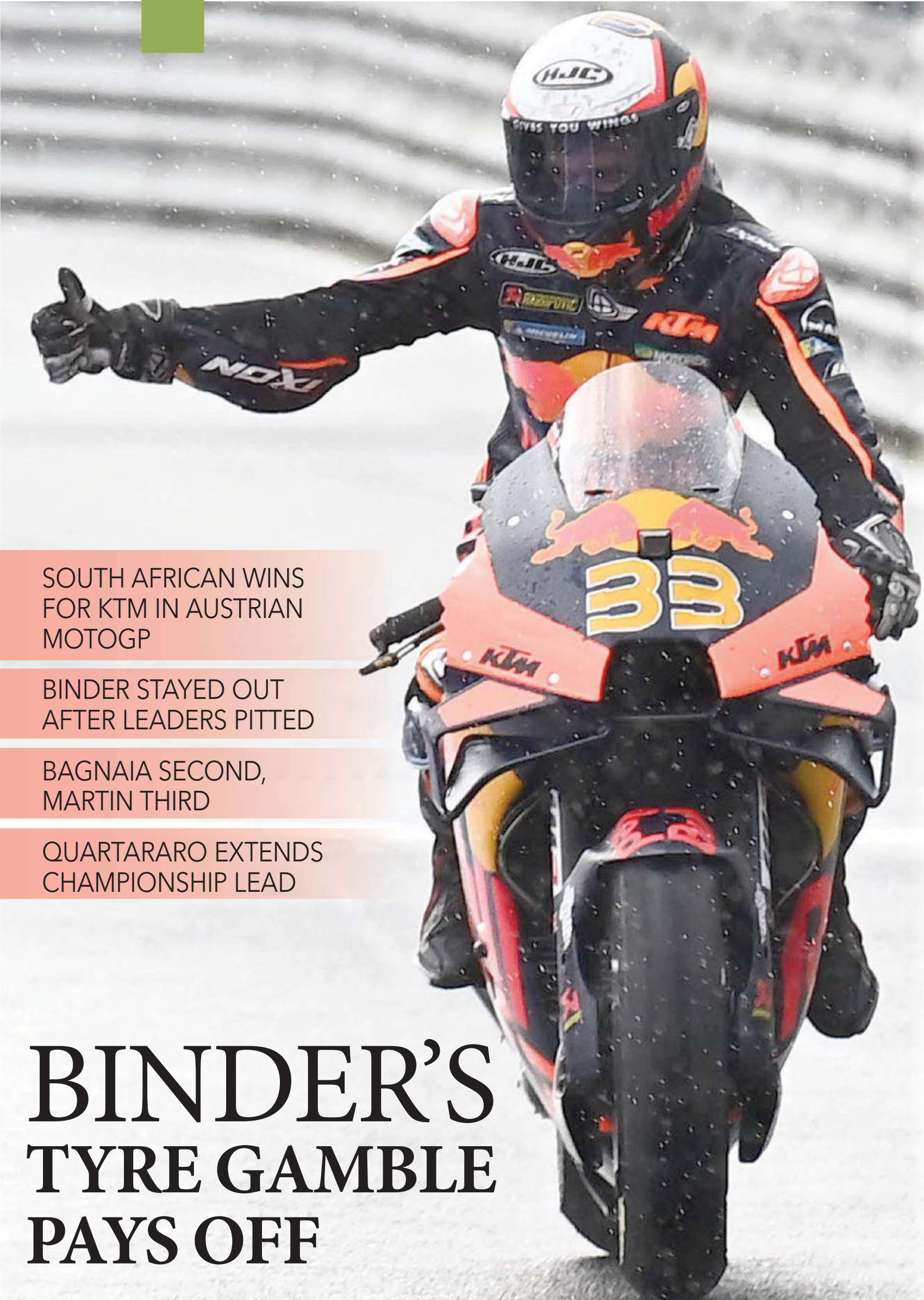
Instead of focusing on the physical remains of dusty walls, I tried to picture a busy fortress full of hustle and bustle, smells of biriyani cooking over fire, camels moaning loudly as they got loaded

up with bags of frankincense, men calling out and catching up on news, a blindfolded donkey pulling water from the well. Was this what the famous explorers had seen in their dreams — or was the purpose of their quests an example of man’s urge to be first, stand out and put your stamp on history? Was it a classic case of ‘I told you so and I proved it’?

I smiled at Mrs J leaned up against the wall, sipping her bottle of cold water from the museum’s coffee shop.

We too had come to Ubar, rested awhile and refilled. We too had in front of us an unpredictable journey at a slow pace. But unlike adventurers gone before us, we didn’t have anything to prove to anyone, we were still stuck in 3rd gear and there was still a long way to Salalah.

# sport



SOUTH AFRICAN WINS  
FOR KTM IN AUSTRIAN  
MOTOGP

BINDER STAYED OUT  
AFTER LEADERS PITTED

BAGNAIA SECOND,  
MARTIN THIRD

QUARTARARO EXTENDS  
CHAMPIONSHIP LEAD

## BINDER'S TYRE GAMBLE PAYS OFF

**SPIELBERG, Austria:** South African Brad Binder delivered a sensational home Austrian MotoGP win for his KTM team on Sunday after a late, crazy gamble to stick to slick tyres on a wet and slippery track paid off.

As the rain came down and the top five peeled into the pits at Spielberg's Red Bull Ring to switch to bikes shod with wet tyres, sixth-placed Binder stayed out and hung on in the downpour for three wild laps.

"Sometimes life favours the brave and today it worked," said the 26-year-old.

Ducati's Italian factory rider Francesco Bagnaia, who had led for much of the race and was one of the frontrunners who pitted, roared back through the field to take second place but was 9.991 seconds behind.

Spanish rookie pole-sitter Jorge Martin, winner on the Pramac Ducati at the same track a weekend earlier, finished third in front of 86,000 spectators.

Yamaha's French rider Fabio Quartararo finished seventh but now leads his closest rivals Bagnaia and Suzuki's reigning world champion Joan Mir, fourth on Sunday, by 47 points.

Binder was handed a three-second penalty for exceeding track limits on the last corner as he struggled to keep the sliding bike on the line but it was ultimately meaningless, with the gap big enough.

The win was the second of his career, after another shock success at Brno in the Czech Republic a year ago in his rookie season.

"That was really scary," he said. "The last two laps were something else."

"I could push quite hard still for the first lap but as soon as the rear and front tyres cooled off it was like riding on ice."

"A couple of corners later my carbon brakes went cold so I had no brakes either. I think there was someone holding me up there today because there were a couple of times where I thought it was over."

Binder said he had been all set to dive up the inside of the leaders at the second to last corner when he sensed they were about to pit.

As soon as he saw them do so, his mind was set and he went straight on. — Reuters



KTM rider Brad Binder celebrates with his trophy. — AFP

### AUSTRIAN MOTOGP RESULTS AND STANDINGS

1. Brad Binder (RSA/KTM) 40min 46.928sec
2. Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati) 9.991
3. Jorge Martin (ESP/Ducati-Pramac) 11.570
4. Joan Mir (ESP/Suzuki) 12.623,
5. Luca Marini (ITA/Ducati-Avinia) 14.831
6. Iker Lecuona (ESP/KTM-Tech3) 14.952
7. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 16.650
8. Valentino Rossi (ITA/Yamaha-SRT) 17.150
9. Alex Marquez (ESP/Honda-LCR) 17.692
10. Aleix Espargaro (ESP/Aprilia) 18.270

**SELECTED:** 15. Marc Marquez (ESP/Honda) 35.459; Abandoned: Johann Zarco (FRA/Ducati-Pramac)

### MOTOGP STANDINGS (AFTER 11 RACES)

1. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 181 points
2. Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati) 134
3. Joan Mir (ESP/Suzuki) 134
4. Johann Zarco (FRA/Ducati-Pramac) 132
5. Jack Miller (AUS/Ducati) 105
6. Brad Binder (RSA/KTM) 98
7. Maverick Vinales (ESP/Yamaha) 95
8. Miguel Oliveira (POR/KTM) 85
9. Aleix Espargaro (ESP/Aprilia) 67
10. Jorge Martin (ESP/Ducati-Pramac) 64

**SELECTED:** 11. Marc Marquez (ESP/Honda) 59, 19. Valentino Rossi (ITA/Yamaha-SRT) 28

## Oman to take part in junior chess World Cup

ADIL AL BALUSHI  
MUSCAT, AUGUST 15

Oman chess players will take part in the Fide Online Cadets and Youth Rapid World Cup which will be held virtually from August 16 to 30 for the first time in history. Oman's talented player Anas al Darwashi will represent the Sultanate chess team in U-18 category while Mohammed al Rashdi will take part in U-16 category. It is historical participation for the national team in the show piece event which will be held this time remotely due to the unstable situation of health crisis of Covid-19 outbreak.

All the national chess team players training sessions were held under the watchful eyes of the Yemeni coach Basheer al Qudaimi. He supervised all the players during the preparatory programme which included virtual chess events and friendly games.



Anas al Darwashi

Also, the Sultanate head coach was eager to enter the players in events which implement similar system of Fide Online Cadets and Youth Rapid to ensure good exposure before the event.

The technical meeting of the top

cadets and youth chess event took place on Saturday remotely. The playing system and regulations were explained to the team's representatives. Chess World Cup for cadets and youth will be held in five age groups including

U-10,12,14,16 and U-18. The tournament will consist two stages. The selection stage will be played by separate online 10-round Swiss system.

As many as 19 chess activities were organised by Oman Chess



The technical meeting of the Fide Online Cadets and Youth Rapid World Cup.



Committee (OCC) this year from February to July despite the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. The OCC managed to implement the virtual communication effectively in all the activities either competition,

events and educational courses. Six domestic tournaments were organised while players attended five overseas events. Four educational courses were held along with four camps and preparatory events.



## Medvedev dominates Isner to face Opelka in final



Daniil Medvedev of Russia returns a ball to John Isner of the United States at Aviva Centre.  
— USA Today Sports

**TORONTO, Canada:** Russian top seed Daniil Medvedev blunted the big serve of American John Isner 6-2, 6-2 on Saturday to set up an ATP Masters 1000 final with Reilly Opelka.

Medvedev dominated throughout in a 54-minute rout against Isner, who was held to a miserly four aces.

With the major part of his game misfiring, the 36-year-old Isner was an easy target for Medvedev, the losing 2019 finalist to Spaniard Rafael Nadal.

Medvedev will Sunday play for his fourth trophy of the season after helping Russia to the ATP Cup in Australia and claiming the honours at Marseille and Mallorca.

He takes on another American two-metre-plus giant in Opelka, who broke new ground as he edged third-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-7 (2/7), 7-6 (7/4), 6-4 to reach the final at the Aviva Centre in Toronto.

Medvedev cannot fault his current form: "I'm really happy with the win. I had very few unforced errors (seven). I'm pleased with my game at this moment.

"I feel I'm playing better and better leading to the US Open."

Isner's game was off the boil and Medvedev took full advantage. "He was not serving like usual and I had to take my opportunities, try and break as much as I could," Medvedev said. "I stayed focused and managed to do that." — **AFP**

## PUJARA, RAHANE HOLD FIRM AGAINST ENGLAND

**LONDON:** India's Cheteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane denied England a fresh breakthrough in the second Test at Lord's on Sunday after they batted through the afternoon session.

Even so India, at 105-3 in their second innings, led by just 78 runs come to tea on the fourth day.

They were far from out of trouble after Mark Wood had removed both openers before Sam Curran captured the prize wicket of captain Virat Kohli to leave India 56-3 at lunch.

Both Pujara and Rahane have been struggling for runs and this was reflected in their slow scoring rates on Sunday.

Pujara was 29 not out off 148 balls and Rahane unbeaten on 24 off 74, with the pair having taken 29 overs to add 50 runs.

The problem for India, with a session and a day left in the game, was to make sure they made enough runs to set England a challenging total and so avoid falling 1-0 behind in this five-Test series.

Simply batting time might not be enough if the fourth-wicket duo both fell cheaply, even though India had more attacking batsmen to come in Rishabh Pant and Ravindra Jadeja.

Play resumed with the match evenly poised after England, with captain Joe Root making 180 not out, had been dismissed for 391 when James Anderson was out to Saturday's last ball.

England now had a slender first-innings lead of 27 runs, transforming the match into a one-innings shoot-out.

Anderson, who had taken 5-62 in India's first innings, and Ollie



India's Cheteshwar Pujara in action. — Reuters

Robinson opened the bowling.

### WOOD AT THE DOUBLE

Sussex seamer Robinson was given just two overs before he was replaced by Wood, recalled after Stuart Broad suffered a series-ending calf injury after appearing in last week's rain-marred drawn the first Test in Nottingham.

It soon looked like an inspired decision by Root.

Opening batsmen KL Rahul and Rohit Sharma had provided the bulk of India's first-innings 364 with 29 and 83 respectively.

But Rahul fell for five on Sunday when, having left the ball so well this series, he edged a 93 mph (150 kph) Wood delivery straight into wicketkeeper Jos Buttler's gloves.

Rohit drew India level when he

pulled a 91 mph Woodball for six. But three balls later Rohit, even though the odds were against him with three men on the boundary for the shot, repeated the stroke.

This time, however, he was well caught low down by Moeen Ali, running in from deep square leg, for 21 and India were effectively none for two.

Kohli got off the mark with a cover-driven four off Wood.

By contrast, Pujara took 35 balls to score his first run with a single off Curran greeted by huge, if ironic, cheers from the large contingent of India fans in a sun-drenched crowd and a touch of the gloves from Kohli.

The India skipper survived Curran's review for lbw on height

after being rapped on the pad by an inswinger.

There was no need for technology, however, when, still on 20 and seemingly playing for the ball that came back, Kohli edged a delivery angled across him and was caught behind off a thin nick, with Curran setting off on a joyful run in celebration.

So becalmed were India after lunch it was not until his 118th ball faced that Pujara hit his first boundary, when he clipped Wood off his pads.

Off-spinner Moeen got the odd delivery to turn but a docile pitch remained a generally good surface on which to bat and there were still 27 overs until the new ball became available. — **AFP**

## Pliskova upsets Sabalenka to set up Giorgi final



Karolina Pliskova from Czech Republic applauds the crowd after her win against Aryna Sabalenka from Belarus during the semifinal at Stade IGA.  
— USA Today Sports

**MONTREAL:** Wimbledon finalist Karolina Pliskova rolled into the final of the WTA hardcourt tournament in Montreal on Saturday with a 6-3, 6-4 victory over top seed Aryna Sabalenka.

The win was a repeat for the fourth-seeded Czech, who defeated her Belarus rival in three sets two months ago in their All England Club semifinal.

Pliskova will fight for the Montreal title against Italy's Camila Giorgi, who needed a deciding set to see off Australian Open quarterfinalist Jessica Pegula 6-3, 3-6, 6-1.

Pliskova lost to Giorgi last month in the third round of the Tokyo Olympics.

"It's an amazing feeling to be in another final," Pliskova said. "I was super-solid today."

"I did what I needed to win. I used my brain and played smart. She was missing a bit too much, I'm quite happy with the performance."

Pliskova broke Sabalenka four times and saved two of the three break points she faced.

Sabalenka, who flung her racquet in disgust in the second, set apologised for any unprofessional behaviour later on Instagram.

Pliskova fired 10 aces for a total of 267 this season, putting her within touching distance of Sabalenka's tour-leading 270.

The Czech won her 39th match of the season, top of the table on the WTA. — **AFP**

## Patient captain helps Pakistan build lead over Windies

**KINGSTON:** A patient unbeaten innings from captain Babar Azam helped Pakistan overcome a lengthy rain interruption to build a 124-run lead over the West Indies, with five wickets in hand, as they reached 160-5 in their second innings on the third day of the first test at Sabina Park on Saturday.

Babar, who is 54 not out, proved the mainstay of the innings as runs came slowly on a difficult pitch after Pakistan dismissed the Windies for 253 not long after the start of the day's play, with the home side adding only two runs to their overnight score of 251-8 for a 36-run first-innings lead.

Azam, whose half-century came off 117 balls, will resume with Faheem Ashraf (12 not out) on Sunday.

West Indies opening bowlers Kemar Roach



Babar Azam of Pakistan hits a 4 during day 3 of the first Test against West Indies. — **AFP**

and Jayden Seales took two wickets each to take the early initiative as Pakistan were 117-4 shortly before tea when a rainstorm stopped

play for more than two hours.

Roach was responsible for the dismissals of Imran Butt, trapped leg before wicket without scoring in just the third over of Pakistan's second innings, and Azhar Ali, who made 23 before having his leg stump uprooted.

Seales took two wickets in a single over as he first had opener Abid Ali caught at second slip by Jason Holder for 34 to see Pakistan slump to 65-3 and then three balls later induced a feint edge from Fawad Alam, who departed without scoring after making 56 in the first innings.

After the break, Holder claimed the wicket of Mohamed Rizwan, caught behind for 30 but Pakistan lost no further wickets to leave the test evenly poised with two days to play on a wicket expected to favour the bowlers more than the batsmen. — **Reuters**

## Liverpool Supporters Club Oman marks 10th anniversary

**MUSCAT:** The Official Liverpool FC Supporters Club in Oman on Saturday celebrated its 10th anniversary of Oman's oldest official football supporters club, Oman Reds.

The fan group has gone from strength to strength since starting with just two friends meeting at a house to watch the games and has now expanded to over 620 members, has English and Arabic sections, and prior to the ongoing pandemic the supporters club met at two different venues on match days.

The Oman Reds do not only gather to watch games together. In

2013, fans travelled to Liverpool and played on the pitch at Anfield against other international supporters' clubs. In 2019, they travelled to Qatar for the Club World Cup and witnessed Liverpool FC winning it for the first time. Members can also get access to match day tickets and the club has got tickets to various matches for their members throughout the past seasons.

Oman Reds members also get to go to Anfield for a black-tie dinner with LFC legends every year. The group has also hosted ex LFC players in Muscat such as Alan Kennedy, who scored the winning

goals in two European Cup finals and Gary McAllister who scored an unforgettable goal against Everton in the Merseyside derby vs Everton.

"It has been an amazing decade for the Official Liverpool FC

Supporters Club in Oman. As the first Official Supporters Club of a European football club in the Sultanate, we paved the way for the founding of other European football team's official supporters' clubs in the country. Our members are the cornerstone of our success. There are no fans like Liverpool FC fans anywhere in the world. We support our team through thick and thin and I'm so proud to call myself a Liverpool fan," said Adam al Jabry, Club Secretary of the Oman Reds.

Al Jabry added, "A special thank you has to go out to our founder Nabil 'Nabs' al Busaidi for giving all Liverpool FC fans in Oman home

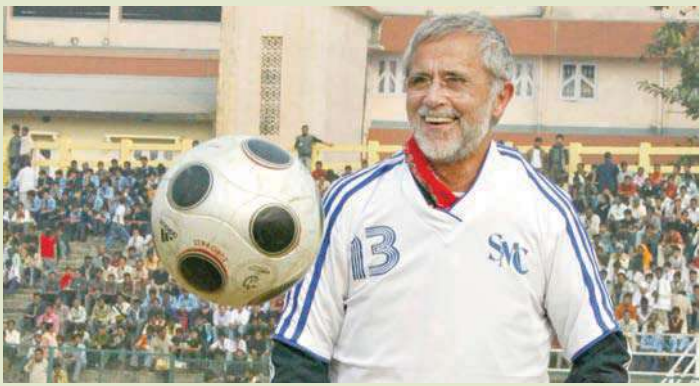
and a sense of pride and belonging. It was his vision of founding an Official Supporters Club that brought us all together."

The committee continues to work on many exciting initiatives for the Oman Reds this season. It is free to join the Official Liverpool Supporters Club in Oman and if you would like to join you can message the committee through 'Oman Reds' on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat or by emailing them on omanreds@gmail.com It has been an exciting few years to be a Liverpool FC fan and the group looks set to grow even more, with many factors boosting

their popularity; the proactivity of the supporters club, the charismatic Jurgen Klopp, attractive attacking play from the team, winning the Champions League, Super Cup, Premier League and Club World cup in recent years and of course, the Arabian hero, Mohammad Salah.

It is worth noting that during the ongoing pandemic and in adherence with all the precautionary measures in place the Official Liverpool FC Supporters Club in Oman ceased all match day gatherings; opting instead to have them remotely via zoom and with everyone safe in their homes.





Gerd Mueller looks on after kicking the ball before the start of a friendly between FC Bayern Munich-II and a Siliguri Mayor's 11 at Kanchenjunga Stadium in Siliguri on January 21, 2009. – AFP

## Legendary German striker Gerd Mueller dead at 75

BERLIN: Legendary German striker Gerd Mueller died in the early hours of Sunday at the age of 75, his former club Bayern Munich has confirmed.

“Today, the world of FC Bayern stands still,” the club wrote on its website.

During a glittering career, Mueller scored a record 365 goals for Bayern in the Bundesliga during the 1960s and 70s, as well as scoring 68 times for West Germany in 62 internationals. “Today is a sad, black day for FC Bayern and its fans,” said Bayern president Herbert Hainer.

“Gerd Mueller was the greatest striker there has ever been — and a fine person, a personality in world football.

“Without Gerd Mueller, FC Bayern would not be the club we all love today.

“His name and the memory of him will live on forever.”

For the last few years, Mueller had been suffering from dementia. He leaves behind his wife Uschi and a daughter.

Largely thanks to his goals, Mueller made history for both Bayern Munich and West Germany. He scored an unbelievable 566 goals in 607 competitive games for FC Bayern.

“Without Gerd’s goals, we’d still be in our old wooden hut on Saebener Strasse (the club training ground),” Franz Beckenbauer once said of his former Bayern and West German team-mate.

Mueller was part of Bayern



West Germany's Gerd Müller (L) raises the World Cup trophy after the 1974 World Cup final. – AFP

teams which won four Bundesliga titles and dominated the former European Cup — now the Champions League — lifting the trophy three consecutive seasons from 1974-76.

Mueller’s Bundesliga record of 40 goals scored in a single season stood from 1971/72 until current Bayern striker Robert Lewandowski scored for the 41st time in 2020/21 last May. Bayern CEO Oliver Kahn described Mueller as “one of the greatest legends in the history of FC Bayern”.

“His achievements are unmatched to this day and will forever be part of the great history of FC Bayern and all of German football,” Kahn added.

With the West German national team, Mueller won the 1972 European championships and the World Cup on home soil in 1974, scoring the winning goal in the final in Munich against the Netherlands.

After his career, he stayed with the club for a long time as a coach for the youth teams. — AFP

# Omani racing star Al Harthy sets out on road to Le Mans

MUSCAT: Oman’s Ahmad al Harthy yesterday morning officially confirmed the eagerly awaited news of his return to the biggest motorsport event in the world with participation in the prestigious ‘Road To Le Mans’ support races at the globally-renowned Le Mans 24 Hours.

Getting underway later this week at the Circuit de la Sarthe in France, with Road To Le Mans races on Thursday, 19th August, and Saturday, 21st August, the Omani motor racing star will be partnered by American driver Michael Dinan in both 55-minute encounters.

Notably, the Omantel, OQ and Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth backed No.95 Aston Martin Vantage GT3 will be prepared and engineered by the official ‘AMR’ Aston Martin Racing team for the event, which also forms the fourth round of the Michelin Le Mans Cup.

Al Harthy, of course, last competed as part of a Le Mans 24 Hours weekend back in 2017 when he and then team-mate Tom Jackson scorched to a memorable, and faultless, double victory in the Michelin Le Mans Cup.

Since then the Omani has been dreaming of a return to the most prestigious race event in world motorsport, with a long-term ambition to one day compete as part of the twice-round-the-clock Le Mans 24 Hours itself. For now, though, his focus is solely on the Road To Le Mans races this week.

“I’m very excited to be heading to Le Mans”, said a jubilant Al Harthy, “The 24 Hours of Le Mans is, by far, the biggest racing event of the year worldwide so for us to be present at the Road To Le Mans, which is one of the biggest support events for the weekend, is something I’m very proud of.

“I’m extremely delighted to be racing alongside Michael Dinan, who is partnering me in the Oman Racing car, and I am obviously very excited to be joining forces with Aston Martin Racing for this



I’m very excited to be heading to Le Mans. The 24 Hours of Le Mans is, by far, the biggest racing event of the year worldwide so for us to be present at the Road To Le Mans, which is one of the biggest support events for the weekend, is something I’m very proud of

AHMAD AL HARTHY  
Omani race driver

event with AMR running the car for us. I’m incredibly proud, as ever, to be representing Oman at such a prestigious event.”

He added: “We had amazing results at Le Mans in 2017 and it’s always a great opportunity to be able to race there. We’ll give it our best, as always, and can’t



wait to see how we can progress through the event. It’s going to be a long race meeting, we have a few testing sessions, two qualifying sessions and then the first race on Thursday, the other on Saturday. I can’t wait to get started on track.”

All of the action for the Road To Le Mans will take place on the very

same full 13.6-kilometre track on which the Le Mans 24 Hours itself will run – meaning all of the world-famous challenges await Al Harthy, such as Tertre Rouge, the Forest Esses, Indianapolis and, of course, the Mulsanne Straight.

Across two classes, GT3 – in which Al Harthy and Dinan will race – and also LMP3, organisers expect a huge entry of 46 cars for the coming week’s action at the Circuit de la Sarthe. Oman Racing’s Aston Martin will battle the likes of Porsche, Ferrari, Mercedes-AMG and Audi.

Following two free practice sessions on Wednesday, 18th August, the race one qualifying session for the Road To Le Mans will get underway at 10.40 local time on Thursday, 19th August, and will then be immediately followed by the second 20-minute session. Race one will then get underway later that evening at 19.30 local time.

Race two is scheduled to begin at 12.15 local time on Saturday, 21st August, less than four hours before this year’s Le Mans 24 Hours begins.

# Bilal bowls Stallions to thrilling victory; Majees, Muscat, AER win

MUSCAT: Oman pace spearhead Bilal Khan’s superb 6 for 58 was the highlight of Oman Stallions’ nail-biting 1-wicket victory against Renaissance at OC Ground 2 in Amerat on Saturday as Premier Division’s 50-over League got off to a thrilling start with interesting results on Friday.

Aqib Ilyas struck an elegant 95 while Pruthvikumar Machhi contributed 46 in Renaissance’s 244 all out. While left-arm pacesman Bilal Khan was outstanding with the ball, his new ball partner Rafiullah was no less impressive, taking 3 for 56 in his 10-over spell.

Stallions recovered from being 33 for 3 to reach 107 thanks to a solid 74-run fourth wicket partnership between Prasad Sankata (62 off 94) and Karan Sonavala (39 off 48). Mehran Khan’s fluent 54 off 57 kept the chase on track before three quick wickets landed the Stallions in trouble.

However, experienced all-rounder Shakeel Ahmed held his nerves to steer his side to a last-



over win with a valuable 28 not out including a smartly-managed 17-run partnership for the last wicket with Mundhir Qader who remained unbeaten at 0 off the only ball he faced.

**BRIEF SCORES (Premier Division):** Renaissance 244 all out in 50 overs (Aqib Ilyas 95 – 10x4, 2x6, Pruthvikumar Machhi 46 – 3x4, Bilal Khan 6-58, Rafi Ullah 3-56) lost to Oman Stallions 248 for 9 in 49.2 overs (Prasad Sankata 62 – 6x4, Mehran Khan 54 – 3x4, 3x6, Aqib Ilyas 3-39, Bilal Muhammad 3-57) by 1 wicket.

### MAJEEES THRASHES IAS

In the day’s other game at OC Ground 1, new entrant Majees made its presence felt with a thumping 8-wicket win over IAS (Ibn Abdul Samad Engineering & Contracting), another new name in the Premier Division.

Majees’s star-studded bowling attack was too hot to handle for IAS as it folded up for a lowly 54 in 26.4 overs. Left-arm spinner Yagnik Pandya bagged 3 for 3 while Nester Dhamba, Khawar Ali and Ahmed Fayyaz Butt

all claimed two wickets each. Hammad Mirza was the only notable scorer with 18.

Openers Chaminda Lakmal (30 not out) and Khurram Khan (22) helped Majees to a comfortable victory in just 6.1 overs.

**BRIEF SCORES (Premier Division):** IAS 54 all out in 26.4 overs (Hammad Mirza 18 – 2x4, Nester Dhamba 9-2, Khawar Ali 2-10, Ahmad Fayyaz Butt 2-11) lost to Majees 56 for 2 in 6.1 overs (Chaminda Lakmal 30 – 2x4, 2x6, Khurram Khan 22 – 3x4, 1x6) by 8 wickets.

### KHANS HELP MUSCAT TO VICTORY

Earlier on Friday, Muscat CT’s mercurial Khans, Shoaib and Ayaan, powered their side to a solid 5-wicket win over Yalla Shabab at OC Ground 1.

Ayaan’s 3 for 23 was the main reason Yalla Shabab was restricted to 200 for 9 in 50 overs though Rana Naeem bowled well too, taking 2 for 17 in 7 overs. Muhammed Nadeem topscored with a typically stoic 58 off 70.

Muscat’s chase was led by Shoaib’s brilliant 69 off 71 with Ayaan (33) and Suraj Kumar (46 not out) making useful contributions as Muscat overhauled the target in the 45th over, scoring 201 for 5. Sanuth Ebrahim picked up 3 for 37.

**BRIEF SCORES (Premier Division):** Yalla Shabab 200 for 9 in 50 overs (Muhammed Nadeem 58 – 2x4, 2x6, Ayaan Khan 3-23, Rana Naeem 2-17) lost to MUSCAT CT 201 for 5 in 44.5 overs (Shoaib Khan 69 – 6x4, 3x6, Suraj Kumar 46 – 4x4, 2x6, Ayaan Khan 33 – 2x4. Sanuth Ebrahim 3-37) by 5 wickets.

### SAJEEED, ZEESHAN SHINE IN AER WIN

In Friday’s second Premier Division game at OC Ground 2, Sajeed Ahmed and Zeeshan Siddiqui were the stars of AER’s comfortable 5-wicket victory against Arabian Region Travel and Tourism (ARTT).

In a forgettable start to the new season, ARTT was bundled out for a paltry 115 due largely to excellent bowling by Sajeed (3 for 25), Danish Mohammed (2 for 13), Aamir Kaleem (2 for 16) and Muzahir Raza (2 for 33). Muhammed Moshin topscored with 32.

Veteran Zeeshan’s 44 and Aamir Kaleem’s 27 were the highlights of AER’s 116 for 5 as it surpassed the small target in 29 overs.

**BRIEF SCORES (Premier Division):** ARTT 115 all out in 49.1 overs (Muhammed Moshin 34 – 1x4, 1x6, Adeel Abbas 25 – 3x4. Sajeed Ahmed 3-25, Danish Mohammad 2-13, Aamir Kaleem 2-16, Muzahir Raza 2-33) lost to AER 116 for 5 in 29 overs (Zeeshan Siddiqui 44 – 3x4, Aamir Kaleem 27 – 4x4, 1x6) by 5 wickets.





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# EDO successfully secures \$2.5 bn financing transaction



UNLOCKING VALUE: The deal was oversubscribed by more than 100 per cent which is a testament to investors' confidence in EDO and Oman's economy

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, AUG 15

Energy Development Oman (EDO) SAOC has successfully secured a \$2.5 billion debut financing transaction, which attracted an overwhelming market response at very competitive rates.

The funding will further support EDO in achieving its key objective of alleviating the Government's Block 6 funding requirements. The Company is also mandated to create growth; enhance efficiencies and governance in Oman's oil, gas, and new energies sector; and unlock value through diversification and value chain integration.

The deal was oversubscribed by more than 100 per cent which is a testament to investors' confidence in EDO and Oman's economy.

EDO Interim Chief Executive Officer Haifa al Khaifi said: "The creation of EDO and the progress made since its establishment constitute a historic achievement for Oman, and it will serve as a vehicle for accelerated development and value creation. In particular, the successful execution of the syndicated deal is a major milestone for EDO and the country."



The strong participation from local, regional and international banks is another sign of Oman's attractiveness for global investors and paves the way for fruitful and sustainable collaboration with international partners

HAIFA AL KHAIFI  
EDO Interim CEO

"The strong participation from local, regional and international banks is another sign of Oman's attractiveness for global investors and paves the way for fruitful and sustainable collaboration with international partners."

EDO was established through Royal Decree (128/2020) following which the Block 6 Oil Concession was transferred (Royal Decree 21/2021) and a new Block 6 Gas Concession was granted (Royal Decree 43/2021).

Since then, EDO has made substantial progress in its journey to become Oman's energy champion and to support the Sultanate's economic diversification.

With a vision "to be a world-class partner for growth, driving a sustainable energy future", EDO takes inspiration from Oman's 2040 vision of transitioning to renewables, leveraging and maximising Oman's world-class development opportunities.

شركة عمان للاستثمارات والتمويل

OMAN INVESTMENT & FINANCE Co. SAOG



Powered By OIFC

Report of the Board of Directors

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I have the pleasure to present the un-audited financial results for the six months period ended 30th June 2021.

**Operating & Financial Performance**

The Group made a net profit after tax of RO. 1.955 million for the six months period ended 30th June 2021, compared to RO. 0.642 million during the corresponding period of the previous year. The net profit after tax of the Parent Company was RO. 1.890 million for the six months period ended 30th June 2021, compared to RO. 1.133 million during the corresponding period of the previous year.

The Group made a profit from operations for the six months period ended 30th June 2021 of RO 0.461 million compared to a loss of RO 0.188 million in the corresponding period of the previous year. This profit was mainly due to the new collection contract, new debt recovery activities and positive rate renegotiation for existing contracts with principles.

**Investments**

The Parent company holds the following Investments in associates:

| S | Company Name                                       | Holding % |           |
|---|----------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
|   |                                                    | June 2021 | June 2020 |
| 1 | Sohar International Bank SAOG                      | 15.42%    | 15.37%    |
| 2 | The Financial Corporation Co. SAOG (FINCORP)       | 21.82%    | 21.82%    |
| 3 | National Bureau Commercial Information SAOC (NBCI) | 7.35%     | 7.35%     |

The shares in profits or losses from associates are accounted as per the standards laid down by the International Financial Reporting Standards.

The value of investment in NBCI has been fully written off in the parent company books since the company is under liquidation.

The Parent Company holds the following Investment in subsidiaries

| S | Company Name        | Holding % |           |
|---|---------------------|-----------|-----------|
|   |                     | June 2021 | June 2020 |
| 1 | Wasel Exchange SAOC | 100%      | 100%      |
| 2 | Afaq Al Musanah LLC | 92%       | 92%       |

The Financial statement of the subsidiary companies have been consolidated as per the standards laid down by the International Financial Reporting Standards.

**Business Outlook**

The collection revenues are steadily improving and we expect improvement to continue. Further the parent company is engaged with multiple principles to explore new business opportunities. Unfortunately the current COVID-19 situation had major impact on the meter reading; disconnection reconnection operations and reduction of field operations had resulted in loss in relevant revenues. The Parent company is actively working on areas for pruning costs and increase efficiencies to cover up for the effected revenues due to the current situation.

**Acknowledgement**

The Board of Directors wishes to express its sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the Government of the Sultanate of Oman. The Company appreciates the support received from Oman Telecommunications Co. SAOG, Muscat Electricity Distribution Co. SAOC, Majan Electricity Company SAOC, Mazoon Electricity Company SAOC, Rural Areas Electricity Company SAOC, Dhofar Integrated Services Company SAOC, Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company SAOC (DIEM), Ooredoo, Awasr, Muscat Municipality, Public Authority for Social Insurance, Capital Market Authority, Central Bank of Oman, the Company's bankers, Muscat Securities Market and Muscat Clearing & Depository Co. SAOC, Business partners, shareholders and employees of the company for their continued support to our company.

**Nasser Mohamed Al Harthy**  
Chairman – Board of Directors

Consolidated Unaudited Statement of Income for the period ended 30th June 2021

| Group 30-Jun-21                              | Group 30-Jun-20 | Parent 30-Jun-21 | Parent 30-Jun-20 |
|----------------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| RO'000                                       | RO'000          | RO'000           | RO'000           |
| Operating income                             | 9,422           | 6,718            | 5,911            |
| Operating expenses                           | (8,508)         | (6,353)          | (5,551)          |
| Doubtful debts                               | 94              | (7)              | 253              |
| Depreciation                                 | (548)           | (546)            | (351)            |
| Operating profit                             | 460             | (188)            | 262              |
| Finance charges                              | (1,485)         | (1,233)          | (1,320)          |
| Investment income                            | 117             | 115              | 117              |
| Other Income                                 | 811             | 271              | 646              |
| Other expenses                               | (413)           | (281)            | (293)            |
| Share of profit in associates                | 2,500           | 1,855            | 2,500            |
| Profit before taxation                       | 1,991           | 540              | 1,912            |
| Taxation                                     | (36)            | 103              | (22)             |
| Net profit attributable to OIFC shareholders | 1,955           | 642              | 1,890            |
| Attributable to:                             |                 |                  |                  |
| Equity holders of the Parent company         | 1,956           | 683              | 1,890            |
| Non-controlling interests                    | (1)             | (41)             | -                |
| Profit for the period / year                 | 1,955           | 642              | 1,890            |
| Basic Earnings per share (RO)                | 0.008           | 0.003            | 0.008            |

Consolidated Unaudited Statement of Comprehensive Income for the period ended 30th June 2021

| Group 30-Jun-21                                                                | Group 30-Jun-20 | Parent 30-Jun-21 | Parent 30-Jun-20 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| RO'000                                                                         | RO'000          | RO'000           | RO'000           |
| Profit/(Loss) for the period                                                   | 1,955           | 642              | 1,890            |
| Other Comprehensive Income                                                     |                 |                  |                  |
| Net release to income statement on sale of available for sale financial assets | 290             | (172)            | 290              |
| Share of reserves movement of associates                                       | 149             | (379)            | 149              |
| Total Comprehensive Income for the period                                      | 439             | (551)            | 439              |
| Profit/(Loss) for the period after Comprehensive Income                        | 2,394           | 91               | 2,329            |
| Attributable to:                                                               |                 |                  |                  |
| Equity holders of the Parent company                                           | 2,395           | 132              | 2,329            |
| Non-controlling interests                                                      | (1)             | (41)             | -                |
| Profit for the period / year                                                   | 2,394           | 91               | 2,329            |

Consolidated Unaudited Statement of Financial Position at 30th June 2021

| Group 30-Jun-21                                   | Group 30-Jun-20 | Group 31-Dec-20 | Parent 30-Jun-21 | Parent 30-Jun-20 | Parent 31-Dec-20 |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| RO'000                                            | RO'000          | RO'000          | RO'000           | RO'000           | RO'000           |
| ASSETS                                            |                 |                 |                  |                  |                  |
| Non-Current Assets                                |                 |                 |                  |                  |                  |
| Property and equipment and intangible             | 3,925           | 3,731           | 3,922            | 1,801            | 2,081            |
| Investment properties                             | 1,880           | 944             | 1,880            | 944              | 1,880            |
| Deferred Tax asset                                | 2,038           | 2,664           | 2,075            | 1,999            | 2,581            |
| Investment in associates and subsidiary           | 63,356          | 65,794          | 61,767           | 69,811           | 72,249           |
| Financial Asset at FVOCI                          | 7,898           | 1,522           | 7,461            | 7,898            | 1,522            |
| Financial assets at amortised costs - non-current | 750             | 750             | 750              | 750              | 750              |
| Deposits                                          | 100             | 100             | 100              | -                | -                |
|                                                   | 79,947          | 75,504          | 77,956           | 84,140           | 79,851           |
| Current Assets                                    |                 |                 |                  |                  |                  |
| Inventories                                       | 582             | 639             | 524              | 74               | 91               |
| Trade and other receivables                       | 26,635          | 22,333          | 25,564           | 22,671           | 21,130           |
| Investments at fair value through profit & loss   | 63              | 70              | 66               | 63               | 70               |
| Cash and bank balances                            | 3,843           | 4,031           | 4,146            | 651              | 1,209            |
|                                                   | 31,124          | 27,072          | 30,300           | 23,459           | 22,500           |
|                                                   | 111,071         | 102,576         | 108,256          | 107,599          | 102,351          |
| Total Assets                                      |                 |                 |                  |                  |                  |
| EQUITY AND LIABILITIES                            |                 |                 |                  |                  |                  |
| Shareholders Funds                                |                 |                 |                  |                  |                  |
| Share Capital                                     | 23,700          | 20,000          | 20,000           | 23,700           | 20,000           |
| Share capital (under registration)                | -               | -               | 3,700            | -                | 3,700            |
| Legal Reserve                                     | 6,902           | 6,693           | 6,902            | 6,842            | 6,667            |
| Change in fair value through OCI                  | 4               | (48)            | (285)            | 4                | (48)             |
| Associate reserves                                | (427)           | (636)           | (576)            | (427)            | (636)            |
| Properties revaluation reserve                    | 535             | 569             | 535              | 535              | 569              |
| Retained earnings                                 | (1,838)         | 2,827           | (1,918)          | 2,687            | 8,053            |
| Shareholder's equity                              | 28,876          | 29,405          | 28,359           | 33,341           | 34,604           |
| Non-controlling interest                          | (192)           | (238)           | (191)            | -                | -                |
| Total equity                                      | 28,685          | 29,167          | 28,168           | 33,341           | 34,604           |
| Non-current liabilities                           |                 |                 |                  |                  |                  |
| Non-current portion of term loan                  | 16,775          | 5,757           | 16,469           | 14,400           | 3,875            |
| Other non current liabilities                     | 782             | 200             | 785              | 776              | 151              |
| End of service benefits                           | 421             | 438             | 403              | 211              | 253              |
| Deferred tax liability                            | 54              | 60              | 54               | 54               | 60               |
|                                                   | 18,032          | 6,455           | 17,711           | 15,441           | 4,339            |
| Current liabilities                               |                 |                 |                  |                  |                  |
| Bank borrowings                                   | 29,290          | 35,204          | 26,340           | 27,547           | 34,772           |
| Trade and other payables                          | 31,437          | 27,581          | 30,632           | 28,169           | 25,386           |
| Payable for business combination                  | -               | -               | 1,426            | -                | 1,426            |
| Current portion of term loan                      | 3,627           | 4,169           | 3,886            | 3,100            | 3,250            |
| Taxation                                          | -               | -               | 93               | -                | 93               |
|                                                   | 64,354          | 66,954          | 62,377           | 58,817           | 63,409           |
| Total Liabilities                                 | 82,385          | 73,409          | 80,088           | 74,258           | 67,747           |
| Total Equity and Liabilities                      | 111,071         | 102,576         | 108,256          | 107,599          | 102,351          |
| Net Assets                                        | 28,685          | 29,167          | 28,168           | 33,341           | 34,604           |
| Net assets per share (RO)                         | 0.122           | 0.146           | 0.120            | 0.141            | 0.139            |

www.oifcoman.com

# KR Group, Asyad Drydock announce partnership

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, AUG 15

The KR Group, through its Marine Solutions business, has partnered with Asyad Drydock to build vessels in the modern shipbuilding and repairs facility in Duqm, Oman.

Khimji Ramdas Marine Solutions is a full-fledged service company specialised in the design and construction of harbour-related infrastructures in addition to ship repair and maintenance. The unit, operating under the KR infrastructure cluster, has grown rapidly since its inception in 2005. Undertaking its maiden project, the team has successfully built a 15m multi-cat vessel “Hulm Al Behar” which has become the first marine vessel to be built in Asyad Drydock.

“The delivery of the first local project is indeed a defining



moment in our growing partnership. This is indeed a monumental achievement for the KR Group Marine Solutions, together with Asyad Drydock, and this accomplishment will be the start of many new

opportunities. While we are still celebrating the launch of the first-ever modern ship built in Oman, ‘Hulm Al Behar’, our focus will continue to remain on the growth and expansion capabilities while contributing

to the nation’s economy. We have also commenced the building of our second vessel “MEFK Pearl”, a 24.0 m High-Speed Aluminium crew boat, to facilitate anchorage support services in Port of Fujairah,” said Hritik Khimji,

Director, of the Khimji Ramdas Group.

Dr Ibrahim al Nadhairi, Chief Executive Officer of Asyad Shipping and Drydock, stated that “We are proud of this achievement. Building the first modern ship with international standards demonstrates the world-class services and operations provided by the Drydock and it is a pivotal milestone for the logistics sector in Oman.”

Al Nadhairi pointed out that, fulfilling our obligations towards our local and global partners and customers, in a safe, fast, and innovative manner indicates that Asyad Group continues implementing its global strategy and achieving its future aspirations, offering integrated logistics services and solutions.

He also added that the completion of ‘Hulm Al Behar’, is a testament to Asyad Group’s

empowerment of national talent. This Project has been a significant opportunity for investing in the development of our Omani talent in various engineering and managerial disciplines, and for providing Oman with a qualified human capital capable of leading and sustaining construction operations in the field of maritime services and industries.

“We are honoured to partner with Asyad Drydock for building ships and vessels in Oman for the very first time. The launch of the 15m multi-cat vessel in Oman’s water in Duqm is the start of many more accolades for the teams. The vessel is the product of the untiring efforts of both our teams to deliver world-class vessels built at the Drydock facility, second to none in the world,” said Ravi Kumar Dhulipala, Chief Operating Officer, Khimji Ramdas — Infrastructure Cluster.

## NBO’s Badeel Travel Card: The ultimate companion on vacation

MUSCAT: With travel starting to return, there’s no better time to pick up a Badeel Travel card. National Bank of Oman’s (NBO) innovative prepaid card comes with a whole host of unique benefits, is super simple to use, and supports multiple international currencies. Providing access to Schengen Approved Travel Medical Insurance, and a host of special offers and discounts through MasterCard, users can easily obtain, top-up and manage it from their phones or at conveniently placed kiosks. Available for customers and non-customers, the Badeel Travel card is the ultimate companion.

Maha al Raisi (pictured), Head of Products at NBO, said, “At NBO we are committed to empowering the people of



Oman through convenient digitally-led solutions and cutting-edge technology. We introduced our prepaid cards in 2018 and since then have not stopped thinking about how we can make them better and more useful. Whether travelling for work or leisure, the Badeel Travel card offers a safe, easy, and cashless way to carry multiple foreign currencies in a single, re-loadable card, ensuring convenience and peace of mind.”

## Appeal to build home for the Centre of Excellence for Children with Disabilities

MUSCAT: Sabah al Bahlani, member of the State Council and CEO of the Association for Early Intervention for Children with Disabilities, appealed to philanthropists, companies and institutions to donate towards the construction of the Centre of Excellence for Children with Disabilities that will benefit more than 300 children with disabilities.

The Centre is designed to provide comprehensive rehabilitation and disability-related services and training for different categories of people with disabilities. When ready, the centre will be used as a rehabilitation facility. In order to generate income, the centre plans to rent the swimming pool, sports area and kitchen area. It will also have a space on the upper floor either to rent or operate as non-profit office and



as an event hall for any other leasing activities

Sabah al Bahlani confirmed that the centre had stopped construction and the inauguration was delayed due to the lack of funds needed to complete it. She said obtaining donations is critical because construction of the building’s structure has been on hold due to the lack of funds. She said

what the centre requires now is the necessary finishes, and once it is ready, the centre will achieve financial sustainability by using accompanying facilities as a source of income.

Al Bahlani added: “The Centre’s vision lies in providing early intervention services on a continuous basis to each child while overcoming developmental challenges and

reaching the maximum possible degree of independence and integration into society. This will help in achieving the highest degrees of independence, self-reliance and integration into society.”

Alizz Islamic Bank and the Ministry of Social Development had earlier unveiled a crowdfunding website (<https://crowdfunding.alizzislamic.com/>) to raise RO 2 million to build the Centre of Excellence for Children with Disabilities.

The crowdfunding website aims to collect RO 2 million from various segments of society by using innovative digital technology. This will allow all groups and segments of society to participate and contribute in building The Centre of Excellence for Children with Disabilities and help children with disabilities.

## Khedmah signs pact with Simpa Marketing Research to enhance customer experience

MUSCAT: Continuing its efforts to enrich customer experience, Oman Investment & Finance Co (Khedmah), one of the leading Investment and Services Companies in the Sultanate, recently signed an agreement with Simpa Marketing Research, with the objective of identifying customer service areas where the company can better experience through enhanced service.

Under the agreement, a survey will be conducted to find the latest trends in the market and aspirations of consumers. Additionally, the survey shall evaluate clients’ satisfaction levels with Khedmah’s services. The agreement was signed by Saud bin Ahmed al Siyabi, Chief Operating Officer of OIFC and Suhail Khan, General Manager of Simpa Marketing Research.

Furthermore, Simpa will implement surveys that targets



various segments of Khedmah’s clients and gauge their satisfaction on the company’s services such as electricity, water and telecommunications bills payment as well as phone recharge, electricity prepaid meter and others.

Furthermore, it will conduct questionnaires and interviews that evaluate customer experiences and showcase their aspirations. Ultimately, it shall submit a comprehensive and detailed report exhibiting outcomes and

recommendations to OIFC.

Commenting on this collaboration, Mohammed bin Nasser al Jabri (pictured), Customer Experience Manager at OIFC, said: “As part of its customer-centric approach, Khedmah constantly aspires to improve customer satisfaction and enrich their experience by enhancing the efficiency and quality of its services and operations.

Therefore, OIFC collaborates with experts in order to develop its offerings and acquire knowledge of consumers’ needs. Our agreement with Simpa is aimed at enhancing our communication with customers and elevate their experiences by making it safe, seamless and swift. We endeavour to provide a unique experience for the beneficiaries that lives up to their expectations. By doing so, we shall continue our journey toward

excellence and innovation.”

OIFC’s exerted efforts are aimed at fulfilling clients’ changing requirements by providing them with effective and easy services.

Through its user friendly and digital solutions, Khedmah mobile app serves as a testament to the company’s vision and objectives. During the past period, the number of Khedmah users witnessed a noticeable rise due to the increased societal awareness about the application’s various effective and beneficial services.

Ease of use, flexibility, along with paying all bills at the push of a button via a mobile phone, were paramount factors for the growing demand. OIFC is one of the leading investment and services company and specialises in billing, collection & debt factoring for electricity, water and telecom services in the Sultanate of Oman.

## Hyundai opens new Dream Centre in Kenya



MUSCAT: Hyundai Motor opened its newest Hyundai Dream Centre — an automotive training and educational facility — in Kenya. The new Dream Centre is the seventh global institute established by Hyundai Motor, following Dream Centres founded in Ghana, Indonesia, Cambodia, Vietnam, Philippines and Peru.

Hyundai Motor held the inauguration ceremony at the Dream Centre, located at the National Industrial Training Authority’s (NITA) Athi River Campus in Nairobi on June 24. Bang Sun Jeong, Vice-President at Hyundai Motor Company and

Head of Middle East and Africa Headquarters, extended his congratulations via video.

“The Hyundai Dream Centre Kenya expects to help underserved youths with practical education in automotive maintenance and opportunities for employment through Hyundai Motor’s wide network,” said Jeong. “Outstanding students will be given field training opportunities at Hyundai Motor’s service and dealership networks as well as industry placements and employment opportunities that ensues after graduation.”

## Fed to unveil bond-buying taper plan next month

**WASHINGTON:** The United States Federal Reserve will announce a plan to taper its asset purchases in September, according to a solid majority of economists polled by Reuters who also said the US jobless rate would remain above its pre-pandemic level for at least a year.

Since the release last week of a strong US jobs report, which showed an unexpectedly sharp drop in the unemployment rate to 5.4 per cent in July, a flurry of Fed officials have suggested the US central bank might start reducing its \$120 billion in monthly purchases of Treasuries and mortgage-backed securities (MBS) sooner rather than later.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents, 28 of 43, said the Fed is likely to announce a taper of its asset purchases — currently set at \$80 billion of Treasuries and \$40 billion of MBS per month — at its September meeting.

But while that timing has become more likely in the minds of many Fed watchers over the past month, it is by no means a done deal for all of them.

“I know some Fed officials are pushing for it to happen at the September meeting, but that is very unlikely”, said Jim O’Sullivan, chief US macro strategist at TD Securities.

“November is possible if the next two employment reports are strong enough, but the odds favor December as the time of the formal announcement.”

More than one-third of respondents in the poll said the central bank’s policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) will wait until November or December. None of the respondents said it would be announced at the Fed’s central banking conference in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, this month, compared with the more than one-quarter who said in a June poll that it would. — **Reuters**



The Federal Reserve Board building on Constitution Avenue is pictured in Washington. — **AFP**

# Modi says India will soon unveil \$1.35 trillion infrastructure plan



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi inspects the honour guard during Independence Day celebrations at the historic Red Fort in Delhi, India. — **Reuters**

**NEW DELHI:** India will launch a 100 trillion rupee (\$1.35 trillion) national infrastructure plan that will help generate jobs and expand use of cleaner fuels to achieve the country’s climate goals, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday.

The infrastructure programme, called “Gati Shakti”, will help boost productivity of industries and boost the economy, Modi said during his speech at the Independence Day

celebrations in New Delhi.

“We will launch a masterplan for Gati Shakti, a big programme ... (it) will create job opportunities for hundreds of thousands”, Modi said from the ramparts of the historic Red Fort in the capital city.

While Modi did not announce details of the plan, he said the plan will help local manufacturers compete globally and create new avenues of future economic growth.

Boosting infrastructure in

Asia’s third largest economy is at the heart of the Modi’s plan to pull back the country from a sharp economic decline worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the last fiscal year, India’s economic output fell by a record 7.3 per cent and a second wave of Covid-19 has delayed economic recovery.

The prime minister also set a target to become energy independent by 2047, saying the goal can be achieved through a

mix of electric mobility, moving to a gas-based economy and making the country a hub for hydrogen production.

Modi said the country spends more than 12 trillion rupees annually on energy imports and becoming energy independent was critical, as he also announced the launch of a National Hydrogen Mission to boost the government’s clean energy plans. “India is moving fast towards achieving its climate goals”, he said. — **Reuters**

## Ford counterattacks in ‘cruise’ dispute with GM

**DETROIT:** Ford Motor Co said it will ask the US Patent Office to rescind trademarks obtained by rival General Motors Co for the terms “Cruise” and “Super Cruise”, escalating a brawl GM began by suing Ford over its use of “Blue Cruise” for an automated driving system.

The legal fight between the two Detroit automakers turns on whether “cruise” is a generic term for technology that allows the car to take over some share of driving tasks

from a human motorist.

The clash underscores the intensity of competition among established automakers to be seen as leaders in automated driving technology, competitive with Silicon Valley rivals Tesla Inc, Alphabet Inc’s Waymo unit and others.

GM filed a federal suit against Ford on July 24, accusing Ford of violating GM trademarks by using the name “Blue Cruise” for a system that enables hands-free driving.

— **Reuters**

## London court orders Binance to trace cryptocurrency hackers

**LONDON:** London’s High Court has ordered Binance, one of the world’s largest cryptocurrency exchanges, to identify hackers and freeze their accounts and assets after one user said it was the victim of a \$2.6 million hack.

In a judgement made public this week, a High Court judge granted requests by artificial intelligence (AI) company Fetch. ai for Binance to take steps to identify the hackers and track and seize the assets.

While involving a relatively



Representations of Bitcoin, Ethereum, DogeCoin, Ripple and Litecoin are seen in front of a displayed Binance logo in this illustration photo. — **Reuters**

small sum, the case is one of the first public ones involving Binance and will be a test of the

English court system’s ability to tackle fraud on cryptocurrency platforms. — **Reuters**

# Investors give value stocks a second look as bond yields rally



A man walks by 14 Wall Street in the financial district of New York. — **Reuters**

**NEW YORK:** US value stocks may be getting a second wind, as bets on economic strength bolster Treasury yields and lift cyclically-sensitive shares that have stagnated in recent months after a powerful rally earlier this year.

The S&P 500 value stock index, which is relatively heavily weighted in shares of financials, energy firms and other economically sensitive companies, is up 5.5 per cent from last month’s lows, outperforming its tech-heavy counterpart by more than a percentage point in a rally that accelerated over the past week. The value index is up 18 per

cent this year, despite stalling after a strong start to 2021.

The move may herald a nascent comeback for the so-called reflation trade, a bet on rebounding economic growth that saw value stocks surge starting late last year alongside Treasury yields. Yields have climbed this time around as well, with the yield on the benchmark 10-year US Treasury, which moves inversely to prices, up about 20 basis points since last week, to 1.36 per cent, before pulling back on Friday.

“I do think value is somewhat of a coiled spring”, said Matt Peron,

Director of Research at Janus Henderson Investors, who believes value could outperform for at least the next six months. “I do think it has another run left in it.”

Investors pointed to several reasons for value’s rosier outlook. While the rise in coronavirus cases spurred by the Delta variant, remains a wildcard, signs that infections may be slowing in Europe and parts of the United States could mean that the lockdowns required last year will not be needed for the foreseeable future, Peron said.

At the same time, some

investors believe growth will remain strong in the US even after peaking in the second quarter. US gross domestic product is expected to rise 6.1 per cent in 2021, and 4.8 per cent in 2022, according to Oxford Economics, stronger than what annual growth has been for the past decade.

“We haven’t seen growth rates this high in some time and that’s why we think... value can keep outperforming, even once the rate of growth peaks”, said Sameer Samana, Senior Global Market Strategist at Wells Fargo Investment Institute. — **Reuters**



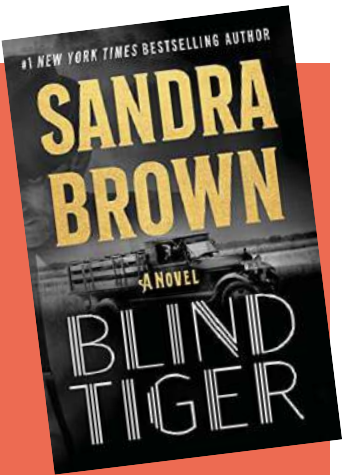


# The prominent role of Oman herbs for female hygiene and beautification

For generations, Omani women always relied on plants and herbs for their beautification needs. From henna, to rosewater, to plants that can be utilised as soap and toothpaste, this knowledge of tapping plants has been passed on to the newer generations of young Omanis. Maryam al Kharousiyah is an Omani author and researcher who is making sure that this knowledge is saved in perpetuity...**P20**

## ENTERTAINMENT

READ



**BLIND TIGER**  
BY SANDRA BROWN

During Prohibition, Thatcher Hutton and Laurel Plummer wind up on opposite sides of a moonshine war in Texas.

### Musicians at Serbian trumpet festival play on despite pandemic

**THE SOUND OF TRUMPETS** filled the air as thousands of people crowded into a small Serbian town late on Friday for the 60th Guca Brass Band Festival, with visitors undeterred by a resurgence of coronavirus cases in the country. Launched in 1961 when just four bands competed for the Golden Trumpet trophy and only 2,500 visitors attended, the festival is now Serbia's liveliest traditional music event but, like many events around the world, it was cancelled in 2020

amid the global pandemic. This year, visitors must show vaccination certificates or a negative Covid-19 test if they want to enter Guca, a small town in the rolling hills of southwestern Serbia. "The situation is like this everywhere in the world, and we have to learn to live with that, we cannot stop the music, we cannot stop living," Horsec, a visitor from Cuba told Reuters. Brass bands have a long tradition in Serbia stretching back to a

royal decree establishing a military ensemble in 1831, and groups of musicians are present at events spanning births to weddings to funerals. More than 15 million visitors have come to Guca during the festival's history, and organisers and local authorities are hoping that despite the health restrictions, sales of tickets and souvenirs, and the taxes and duties paid by restaurateurs can help the local economy rebound. "Many people are prevented from coming because not all of them can follow prescribed measures for the protection from Covid-19," said Jovan Kovacevic, director of the Culture Centre in Guca. Serbia has seen a sharp increase in Covid-19 infections in recent weeks, driven by the spread of the highly infectious Delta variant, mostly in the unvaccinated. — **Reuters**





# Aquaponic agriculture helps produce high-quality harvest

**THE BIO-AGRICULTURE** project at Malik bin Fahm School in the Wilayat of Manah in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah is the first project of its kind at the level of the governorate's schools. It focuses on the installation of an aquaponics system, which includes the cultivation of permanently produced crops that feed on fish residues without using soil, fertilizers or pesticides, and contributes to reducing water depletion and production of high-quality crops. Salem al Abri, a vocational guidance specialist at Malik bin Fahm School and the project supervisor, says that the bio-agriculture project was established in coordination between the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and the Ministry of Education. The idea of the project is based on the reciprocal system between fish waste and crops grown automatically using modern technologies so that the plant growth depends mainly on fish waste, and the fish also benefit from what plants produce without using the soil. "The project aims to introduce students to modern techniques in the agricultural and fisheries fields, train them to implement self-project management and provide a practical means that allows them to apply the knowledge and scientific theories they have studied in agricultural production. This is in addition to supporting the school economically. The project also aims to produce high-quality

crops, conserve energy sources, create a partnership between the school and the local community, and help individuals build a coexistence approach with economic changes", Al Abri said. Al Abri indicated that the

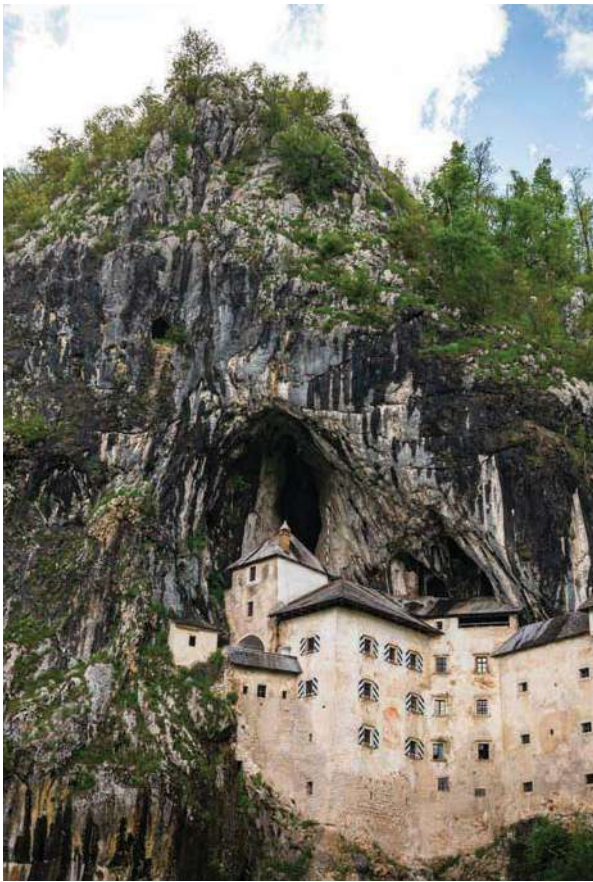


project's mechanism of action is based on growing a group of leafy vegetables such as lettuce and other crops and raising fish inside the greenhouses. these greenhouses contribute to creating good climatic conditions to a large degree for good plant growth, in addition to increasing the yield in terms of quality and quantity, and the growth and reproduction of fish. The seeds are planted in perforated plastic agricultural cups. one seed is planted in each cup and watered with the water from the fish tank until it grows. Approximately 250 fish are cultured in the tank according to the carrying capacity of the culture basin. The fish residues include high nutritional value that allows the plant to grow well. Al Abri explained that the process of harvesting the cultivated crops is done manually in the greenhouses, in batches. The number of harvest times varies according to the crop and the period of growth, some of which take about a month from the beginning of planting seedlings until growth is completed and harvest time is due. As for the fish, after it reaches the required size, it is sold and replaced with other small fish.



## TREASURE TROVE

### Discovering Slovenia's underground labyrinths, one cave at a time



**THE GRASS FLICKERED** gently above a crack in the limestone and Ludvik Husu instinctively knew he had found what he was searching for: a new cave in Slovenia's dramatic Karst region. The seasoned cave enthusiast, with more than 50 years' experience, said that "the conditions were perfect... all the signs pointed to something beneath" as he felt the air current push up from below. The 63-year-old had come across a new, 60-metre (196-foot) deep limestone cave, a discovery that made the headlines this summer in a country that prides itself in its 14,000 underground grottoes. The tiny Alpine nation is unusually rich in caves, which are a major tourist attraction. One even houses an entire castle and another was used by the European Space Agency to help train astronauts.

**BIOLOGICAL TREASURE TROVE** Perhaps best known is the Postojna cave system, the longest in Europe, unearthed by another amateur enthusiast two centuries ago. When local lamplighter Luka Cec decided to explore a hidden crack while scouting out the Postojna area for a visit by Austrian Emperor Franz, he is reputed to have said that he had stumbled on "a new world... a paradise!" The Postojna system extends for 24 kilometres (15 miles) and has offered up valuable finds for biologists. Stanislav Glazar, a Postojna cave guide and speleology enthusiast, said that more than 150 species have been discovered in the system. Among them is the Proteus anguinus or "little dragon", an ancient aquatic salamander that can live up to 100 years and was previously considered living proof that dragons had once existed. A cave-dwelling beetle — the slender neck beetle or Leptodirus hochenwartii — was also found here, reputedly by Cec. Glazar said Postojna is one of the richest caves in the world "in limestone formations, with a dense concentration of stalactites, columns, pillars". The cave, situated some 50 kilometres south of the capital Ljubljana, was also home to the world's first cave tourist train, which began transporting visitors in 1872.

**'NO FEAR'** Elsewhere in the Karst region, the cave systems are of historical, cultural and even extraterrestrial interest. The dramatic, medieval Predjama castle was built in a cave mouth to make access difficult and to provide an escape route through a shaft in the rock face. The Vilenica cave, which Slovenes have been exploring since 1633, is known for the annual eponymous literary prize awarded in its interior. And the UNESCO-listed Skocjan system was where the European Space Agency sent some astronauts to prepare for life in space. "Astronauts know that the Karst world is exceptional, in a similar way to the environment in space: you don't know what to expect at your next step," said Skocjan Caves supervisor Tomaz Zorman. But for Husu, it's the hunt which proves most rewarding. The "ideal time for cave searching is the winter" when the air above ground is cooler than that in the caves. Once he knows there is something beneath, he digs around the crack to widen it and alerts fellow cavers to help gain access. He then uses ropes and a lamp to descend into what are vertical entrances in most caves, known as "chimneys". But doesn't he feel any trepidation at entering such unexplored depths? "You enter a cave out of curiosity, there is no fear! Those who feel fear should stay home," he said. — **AFP**



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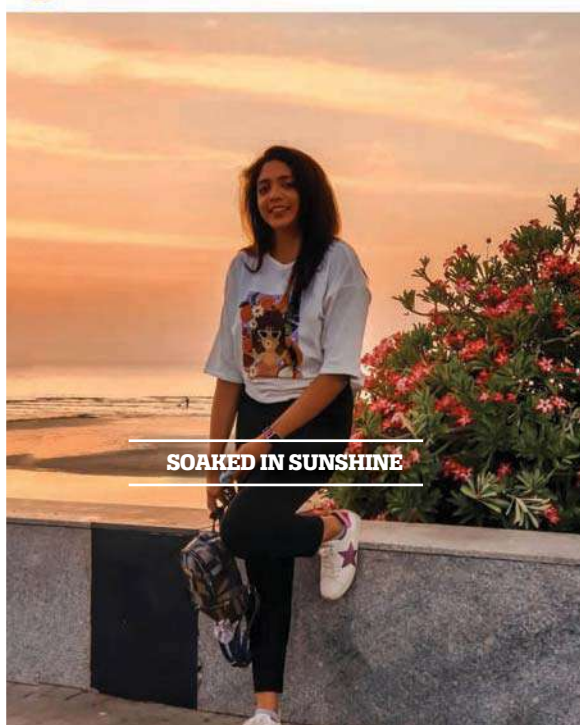
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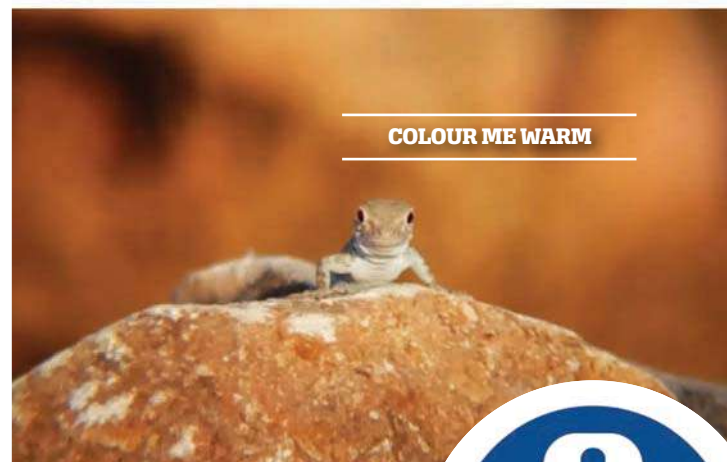
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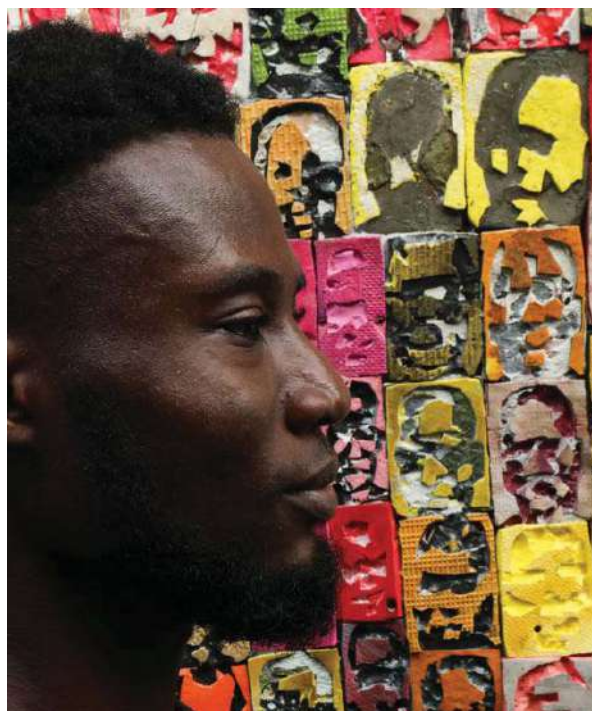
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## AROUND THE WORLD

### ART

## Ivorian artist turns discarded flip-flops from beach into masterpieces



**AS IVORIAN ARTIST** Aristide Kouame combs the beach with a big trash bag to gather discarded flip-flops and other footwear, he is aware that other beachgoers probably take him for a desperate street trader or possibly a madman.

Little do they know that Kouame, 26, transforms the flotsam into artworks valued at up to \$1,000 by cutting the rubber and plastic soles into pieces that he assembles into large collages.

"This is the rubbish people have thrown into the sea and the sea brings it back to us because it doesn't want it," he said on a beach in Abidjan, Ivory Coast's commercial capital.

"I make art from used shoes... It's a way to give life to the objects that litter the beaches."

Sitting on the floor of a narrow alley, Kouame carves shapes, letters and faces into the rubber soles of what he has salvaged from the beach. He makes his own paint by grinding what scraps remain into piles of technicolour pigment.

His technique is both inexpensive and ecologically aware.

Plastic and other waste - including large quantities of flip-flops lost or tossed away - is strewn across most urban beaches in West Africa, as rubbish discarded into city canals is carried out to sea, then back to shore with the shifting tides.

In just a few years, Kouame's original methods have caught the attention of Ivory Coast's art establishment and his works have hung in galleries at home and abroad.

They range from large portraits of civil rights and political leaders such as Nelson Mandela to abstracts evoking societal ills including climate change, Covid-19 and wealth inequality.

### THINKING OF ENVIRONMENT

On a recent afternoon in a chic neighbourhood in southern Abidjan, several of Kouame's works hung in a gallery frequented by foreign art collectors.

Its director enthusiastically ushered patrons towards three large collages, each consisting of around 140 miniature portraits that Kouame carved from discarded flip-flops.

Around 13 million tonnes of plastic waste are dumped into the world's oceans each year, according to the United Nations. Two of Africa's worst culprits, Ghana and Nigeria, share the same Atlantic coastline as the beach Kouame combs for supplies.

"My goal is to get people to question the issue of their environment, in order to create a better life," Kouame said, solemnly looking back toward the plastic faces. —Reuters

### COOK LIKE A CHEF

## Jackfruit cheese nuggets with Quark cheese dip



**EVER WONDER** what makes restaurant food so appetizing? For the high-end food outlets, it's not only because of their talented chefs but also the time and dedication each of the food handlers put into the process. Truth be told, there are some recipes

that just by looking at it, you feel intimidated. This recipe is definitely one of those.

But why go through all the trouble of putting together something this complicated? Because some food is really just worth it. In today's Cook Like a Chef, Alila Hinu Bay

Chef Alessandro Sandrolini may sound like flexing with this complicated dish, but his overall goal for sharing is so that you too can practice your skill and get rewarded in the end with something worth sharing with your family.

### INGREDIENTS

300gm jackfruit tender

### BLANCHING SOLUTION

10gm coriander seeds  
10gm pepper corn  
05gm fennel seeds  
03gm cinnamon stick  
02gm cloves  
03gm star anise  
30gm madras curry powder  
05gm thai red chili  
05gm galangal  
05gm ginger  
25gm garlic  
20gm shallots  
20gm smoked salt  
20gm lemon grass

### SLURRY

30gm flour  
10gm corn flour  
10gm curry powder  
05gm salt  
100ml water

### COATING

120gm panko crumbs

### TO FRY

1200ml canola oil/soybean oil

### QUARK CHEESE DIP

100gm laban  
05gm thyme chopped and slightly cooked in oil

05gm mint fine chopped  
Mix all together

### METHOD OF PREPARATION

Boil the blanching solution.

Add the segmented chunks of Jackfruit

Cook in slow fire

Once cooked take out and blast chill it.

Dip with the slurry and coat with panko crumbs

Deep fry it.

Serve it along with the dip.

### FASHION

## Crypto fashion: why people pay real money for virtual clothes



**PEOPLE CARE** what their avatars are wearing.

When the virtual world Decentraland said in June users could make and sell their own clothing for avatars to wear on the site, Hiroto Kai stayed up all night designing Japanese-inspired garments.

Selling kimonos for around \$140 each, he said he made \$15,000-\$20,000 in just three weeks.

While the idea of spending real money on clothing that does not physically exist is baffling to many, virtual possessions generate real sales in the "metaverse" - online environments where people can congregate, walk around, meet friends and play games.

Digital artist and Japan-enthusiast Kai's real name is Noah. He's a 23-year-old living in New Hampshire.

After making as much in those three weeks as he'd earn in a year at his music store job, he quit to become a full-time designer.

"It just took off," Kai said.

"It was a new way to express yourself and it's walking art, that's what's so cool about it. When you have a piece of clothing, you can go to a party in it, you can dance in it, you can show off and it's a status symbol."

In Decentraland, clothing for avatars - known as "wearables" - can be bought and sold on the blockchain in the form of a crypto asset called a non-fungible token (NFT).

Kai's kimonos include exquisite crushed blue velvet pieces with golden dragon trim.

NFTs exploded in popularity earlier this year, as speculators and crypto enthusiasts flocked to buy the new type of asset, which represents ownership of online-only items such as digital art, trading cards and land in online worlds.

The niche crypto assets are also capturing the attention of some of the world's biggest fashion companies, keen to associate themselves with a new generation of gamers - although most of their forays so far are for marketing.

LVMH-owned Louis Vuitton launched a metaverse game where players can collect NFTs, and Burberry has created branded NFT accessories for Blankos Block Party, a game owned by Mythical Games. Gucci has sold non-NFT clothing for avatars within the game Roblox. "Your avatar represents you," said Imani McEwan, a Miami-based fashion model and NFT enthusiast. "Basically what you're wearing is what makes you who you are."

McEwan reckons he has spent \$15,000 to \$16,000 on 70 NFT wearable items since January, using profit from cryptocurrency investments. His first purchase was a bitcoin-themed sweater and he recently bought a black beret designed by his friend. — Reuters

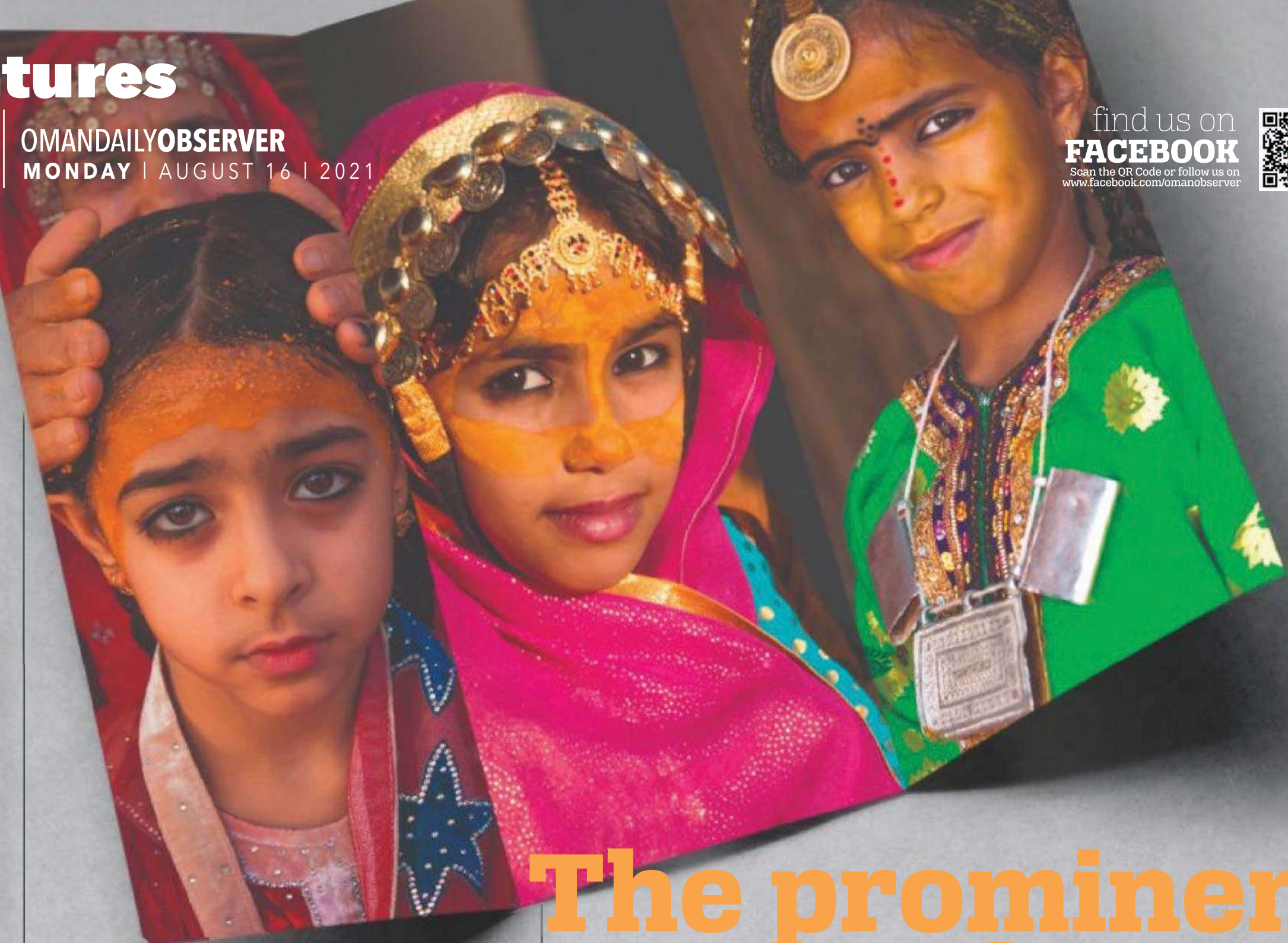


### ABOUT THE CHEF

Alessandro Sandrolini  
Head Chef, Alila Hinu Bay

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

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# The prominent role of Oman herbs for female hygiene and beautification

By Ruqaya al Kindi

**ON A WOODEN** platform made out of Indian teak wood, a mixture of pleasant aromas is scattered. Hanging heavy in the air is the odd but surprising combination of green Henna powder, sweet aromas of rose water, Sandal, Amber and among others. This is a part of the old Omani women's wardrobe of cosmetics.

"Woman and nature are inseparable twins. One of the habits of Omani women in the past is to work on cosmetics, adornment, skincare and hair care products extracting them from plants — either through smart use of their leaves, flowers and oils", Maryam al Kharousiyah said, Omani researcher and author of the book Recipes and Documentation from the Omani Heritage, The Omani Woman's Decoration of Plants.

"The diversity of the agricultural environment in the Sultanate of Oman, between the plain, mountain, valleys and the rocky slopes, has contributed to the diversity of cosmetic products extracted from nature", she noted.

Women of all ages always showcase their best health especially on special occasions such as weddings and holidays. Omani women, therefore, take extra care of their skin particularly the face making sure that they shield it from natural factors that can result in its degradation. From getting hard, tough skin to getting burnt in the sun, or having rashes due to dry or cold air, women make sure that they carefully plan out remedies to prevent this from happening.

To restore the balance of the skin, women use natural materials such as the "Waras" herb that is scien-

tifically called "curcuma aromatica", according to Maryam's book.

"The powder from the Waras is mixed with oil, such as olive, al-Shu', or sesame oil, then it is kept in a bottle and used from time to time by applying it to the entire face. The bride in the past used to apply it for the whole body and was kept unwashed for four to five days, to give the body a white colour and a good smell", she shared.

Sandalwood powder as well is used for face care by mixing it with rose water.

"Its scientific name is "santalum album", and it is a perennial evergreen tree that is grown in the farm of Arzat spring in Dhofar Governorate", she noted.

Omani women still use it until now, "as it is considered one of the most important exfoliators or scrubs for the skin, whitens its colour, reduces dark spots, treats acne and skin melasma, and gives a pink colour to the cheeks naturally", she shared.

With the absence of hair care products, women used "Sidr" leaf powder for hair care, men too. Once water is added to this powder, it produces a foam similar to the texture of soap and becomes ready for use.

It is still widely used by women till now as an alternative to shampoo. It is common, nowadays, to prepare a mixture of yoghurt, different hair oils and Sidr leaf powder, and apply it to the hair for a certain period, and then wash the hair. Omani women still use it also on their skin to protect it from sunlight and moisturize dry skin.

"Sidr is one of the most famous plants that grow on the plains and streams of valleys, and scientifically called "Ziziphus spina-

christi", Maryam said.

"Henna" is still considered one of the most important external adornments for Omani women. It is one of the basics and necessities of the bride's adornment on her wedding day. Women used to put henna on their heads to hide white hair. In the summer, with high temperatures, women put henna on the scalp to cool it and give the hair a fragrant scent. Women were also keen to decorate children, male and female, with henna.

The woman's adornment would not be complete without the Arabic perfume, which is achieved by mixing a group of aromatic herbs. Rosewater is one of the most prominent and most important daily perfumes that women used due to its pleasant smell.

The "Waras" plant is also used to perfume clothes. "The clothes are soaked in "Waras" oil for days to absorb it and wear it in the high summer heat", she said.

"Alaalan" seeds are also used in the making of perfume. "The seeds are grounded and a little hot water is added and then pressed to obtain an aromatic oil. Traditionally, women gather the fruits and arrange them in a thread that they wear around their necks like necklace", she explained. The scientific name of it is "Juniperus Excelsa".

At a time when toothpaste was not available, Omani women used "Al Derm", a type of herb in which they rub the teeth to become whiter and give the lips natural pinkish colour.

Maryam hopes for more investment in this field and that more studies are conducted to uncover the power of such herbs.

