

Majlis values social security initiatives

Majlis Ash'shura valued the Royal blessing by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for a package of social security initiatives which come as part of efforts aimed at framing an integrated social security system in compliance with the Oman Vision 2040 and the strategic programmes included in the Tenth-Five Year Plan (2021-2025). **SEE P2**



Established 1981. Editor-in-chief: Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili

OMAN

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FOR CAMPING LOVERS, WADI THARF IS THE DESTINATION



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DALLAS DOUBLE SEES 10-MAN LEEDS SHOCK MAN CITY



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NANO CITY PROJECT MAKES HEADWAY



MUSCAT

MOON SIGHTING COMMITTEE TO CONVENE TOMORROW

The Main Committee for Moon Sighting of Ramadhan 1442 AH, will convene on Monday at the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. The committee is headed by Shaikh Abdullah bin Mohammed al Salmi, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, and comprises His Eminence Shaikh Ahmed bin Hamad al Khalili, Grand Mufti of the Sultanate. The ministry has called upon citizens and residents to observe the crescent of Ramadhan while abiding by the instructions issued by the Supreme Committee for tackling the Covid-19 pandemic, and to communicate with the sub-committees at the walis' offices. **SEE P3**

100TH ANNIVERSARY OF HOUSE OF 'AL AMANI'

The Sultanate, represented by the National Museum, will mark this year the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the House of 'Al Amani' as the first Omani museum to preserve the cultural heritage of Zanzibar. Jamal bin Hassan al Mousawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, said, "The museum will dedicate a corner named after the late Sultan Qaboos, and a number of historical houses in Muscat will be rehabilitated to form an integrated cultural and tourism system." **SEE P2**



INSIDE



SIX KILLED AFTER QUAKE ROCKS INDONESIA'S JAVA ISLAND

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BATTLE FOR YEMEN'S MARIB HEATS UP, AS 53 DEAD

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PROTECTION FOR FRONTLINE STAFF



NEARLY 32,000 HEALTH WORKERS VACCINATED

VINOD NAIR @vinot_nair

The situation in Oman continues to be a matter of concern, with over ten deaths and 1,000 cases reported daily on average.

Indicating that there is pressure on the hospitals, 96 were hospitalised during the past 24 hours, bringing the total number of inpatient to 652, including 204 in intensive care units.

With a similar situation prevailing across the region, the Director-General of the World Health Organisation, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, called all countries to start vaccinating health workers and those at highest risk in the first 100 days of 2021.

So far, 31,726 healthcare workers have been vaccinated in the Sultanate.

"Through the Covax Facility and the technology access pool (C-TAP) international mechanisms already exist to share know-how, scale-up manufacturing, and roll-out

Don't take ban relaxation for granted

KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

The two-week night movement ban came to an end on Thursday. Still, authorities have called upon both citizens and residents to stick to the anti-Covid-19 precautions.

"All measures of precautions should be followed failing of which punitive actions including fines, jail, naming and shaming, will be taken", according to ROP. **SEE P3**

of vaccines quickly and equitably. COVAX, made up of more than 190 countries and economies, has secured two billion doses of vaccines in 2021, which will start to be rolled out this month", Ghebreyesus said.

He also called for the equitable roll-out of vaccines in every country, starting with health workers and those at highest risk for Covid -19, including vaccine manufacturing.

MoH reported 1, 320 new cases on Thursday, bringing the total number of cases to 168,005. Twelve new Covid-related deaths were reported, bringing the total death toll to 1,747.

The total recovery cases reached 149,969, which is 89.2 per cent of the total cases reported.

WHO reiterated on Friday there was no adequate data on switching vaccines between doses after France said under-55s who received an AstraZeneca first jab should get their second from a different vaccine.



Oil slick not to impact Sohar Port activities

STAFF REPORTER MUSCAT, APRIL 10

The oil slick reported off the Sohar coast will not impact the activities of the main port in the country, said the authorities.

The Environment Authority (EA) said that it was able to deal with an oil slick off Sohar Port, approximately at a distance of eight nautical miles.

The Sohar Port and Free Zone confirmed that an unknown Ocean Oil Spill source was observed just North of South Al Batinah Governorate in the Sultanate territorial waters.

As soon as the Ocean Oil Spill was detected, it was tracked while coming closer **TURN TO P3**



People queue up for vaccination in Nice, France. – Reuters

Lockdowns return as vaccines run short

PARIS/MUMBAI: Fresh lockdowns and curfews were imposed on tens of millions of people from India to Argentina on Saturday, as Covid-19 infections surged again and vaccine roll-outs were hampered by shortages and scares over side effects.

In India, the worst-hit state of Maharashtra was running out of vaccines as the health system buckled under the weight of the contagion, which has killed 2.9 million people worldwide.

India has so far inoculated 94 million of its 1.3 billion people, but *The Times of India* reported on Friday that states on average had just over five days of stock left, citing health ministry data. — AFP

Gun salutes fired across UK in tribute to Prince Philip

LONDON: Gun salutes echoed around the United Kingdom on Saturday as the military paid solemn tribute to Queen Elizabeth II's husband Prince Philip after his death aged 99.

The coordinated 41-round volleys to the former Royal Navy commander were fired at a rate of one per minute from 12:00 (1100 GMT) in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast, as well as at naval bases, from warships at sea, and in the British territory Gibraltar.



The Death Gun Salute is fired to mark the passing of Britain's Prince Philip in central London. – AFP

Similar salutes — the most according to military protocol — were also held in Canberra and Wellington, as the queen is head of state in Australia and New Zealand.

At the Tower of London, a crowd of more than 100 onlookers kept a respectful silence as they watched the Honourable Artillery Company fire shots on the banks of the River Thames.

One onlooker, Heather Uttridge, said she had come to show her respects "for a superhuman".

"It's a great loss to not just the Queen, but actually to the country. He represented stability for all of our lives", the 65-year-old said.

Alexander Beaten, 30, said the royal couple, who had been married for 73 years, had been an integral part of British identity and culture.

"We can disagree with the government, we can disagree with so many things that the country may or may not do, but the Queen and Prince Philip are just such a constant", he said. — AFP

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 32°C Min 24°C SALALAH: Max 30°C Min 24°C NIZWA: Max 35°C Min 22°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 05:50 FAJR: 04:33 DHUHR: 12:13 ASR: 15:40 MAGHRIB: 18:31 ISHA: 19:43

Majlis Ash’shura values social security initiatives

MUSCAT: Majlis Ash’shura has valued the Royal blessing by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for a package of social security initiatives which come as part of efforts aimed at framing an integrated social security system in compliance with the Oman Vision 2040 and the strategic programmes included in the Tenth-Five Year Plan (2021-2025).

Dr Hamood bin Ahmed al Yahyaei, Head of the Services and Social Development Committee, said: “We received with utmost happiness the news of the Royal blessing for a package of social security initiatives as the package comprised significant aspects which affirm His Majesty’s

paternal keenness and attention to the living conditions the Omani citizens are experiencing under the adverse economic conditions caused by Covid-19 pandemic.”

Al Yahyaei said that the committee commends the general framework targeted by the initiatives which was the focus of attention in the committee’s agenda stemming from the need for providing a stable and decent livelihood for Omani citizens and ensuring the precision of the targets of the social support efforts particularly with regard to enhancing support to the Ministry of Social Development’s programmes related to redressing insolvent cases as well as the



initiatives to waive off residential loans by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning for citizens with monthly income below RO 350. The loan waiver issue was handled by the committee in a number of studies and reports related to social housing with the aim of helping low-income families meet housing and sustenance requirements and the importance of considering the exemption from obligation rule for certain segments such as the elderly and disabled.

The head of the Services and Social Development Committee affirmed that the committee values all the social initiatives included in the announced

subsidisation package, noting that the committee hopes to expedite the coverage of job-seekers by the job security services.

Al Yahyaei said the committee underscores the importance of supporting the national effort aimed at setting up an integrated database for social security purposes encompassing all cases, targeting methods, subsidy orientation and the inclusiveness in the processing of data and information. This includes laying down an income limit for subsidy eligibility and the importance of expediting the enactment of legislation and regulations related to social security schemes and social welfare programmes.

Dhofar, Brunel varsities sign academic deal

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 10



Dhofar University, represented by the College of Commerce and Business Administration, signed an academic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Brunel University London to enhance Dhofar University’s endeavour to consolidate academic links with prestigious international universities.

“The MoU included many aspects of academic cooperation between the two universities, such as academic, research and developmental collaborations and exchanges of students, faculty and researchers. This will enhance the skills, knowledge and scientific

capabilities of faculty and students and will be beneficial for the labour market,” said a press release issued by the university.

The MoU was signed by Professor Hassan bin Said Kashoob, Vice-Chancellor of Dhofar University, and Prof Trevor Hoey — Vice-Provost International and Academic Partnerships of Brunel University.

The MoU was approved by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, wishing continued success for the university.

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

The Social Security Scheme packages announced by the Ministry of Finance have been well received by the citizens, terming them as “a protective cover against the increase in regular expenditure”.

“From doubling the amount of subsidised fuel to exempting more commodities from the value-added tax (VAT) net, all the measures will strengthen the livelihood programmes of the government,” said Ahmed al Yakoobi, who works as a driver in a private company.

Last week, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik approved a package of initiatives to expand social security worth more than RO 100 million as part of enhancing support given to the Ministry of Social Development.

“All of us were very concerned about the forthcoming VAT implementation. Exempting more items from the VAT is definitely a protective cover against expenditure rise,” said Abdullah al Saleh, who works at a money exchange company.

The list of basic food commodities charged zero per cent VAT has been expanded from 93 commodities to 488.

At the same time, the government will bear the cost of the VAT charged against electricity and water services for all citizens who own two accounts or less of the residential category. This includes families that were previously eligible for government support for the two services.

“The new packages aim to ensure the welfare of citizens. All the measures reflect the



concern of His Majesty the Sultan regarding the uplift of the poor in Oman,” said Hamed al Balushi, a taxi driver, referring to the increase in the fuel subsidy.

According to the announcement by Ministry of Finance, the package consists of doubling the amount of subsidised fuel per individual within the national fuel subsidy system from 200 litres to 400 litres.

The government will bear the cost of VAT on the subsidised quantities so it is expected that the price of Fuel 91 would continue at the same price of 180 baisas per litre.

The package is also directed towards the private sector and focuses on employment matters.

Omani citizens with monthly income of less than RO 350 will be exempted from the housing loan payments.

In this regard, Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, said more than 650 families

From doubling the amount of subsidised fuel to exempting more commodities from the VAT net, all the measures will strengthen the livelihood programmes of the government

AHMED AL YAKOABI
A driver

will get the benefits of the social protection scheme.

“This decision will strengthen the social stability of more than 650 families; it amounts to approximately RO 20 million,” the minister said in a statement.

Accordingly, it extends the period of disbursing the job security benefit until the end

of the current year, exempts all citizens benefiting from the Sanad and livelihood (Mawarid al Rizq) programmes from paying unpaid amounts and exempting citizens with monthly income below RO 350 benefiting from the soft housing loan programme from their debts.

Through Oman Development Bank (ODB), the government will provide interest-free financial incentives, which include sales and mobile services, household chores, owners of taxis licensed to work in hotels and airports, women’s projects, workers in the field of fishing — all in accordance with the principles to be announced by the bank.

Meanwhile, Abdul Azim bin Abbas al Bahrani, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the ODB, confirmed that the Board of Directors directed the executive management of the bank to form a special work team to implement the decision of the social protection initiatives.

ISC Salalah office-bearers

STAFF REPORTER
SALALAH, APRIL 10

Indian Social Club Salalah elected new office-bearers for a two-year term (2021-2022) after annual general body meeting (AGM) and voting by the bona fide members of the Club.

Due to the Covid-19 situation, the election was held online. The online mode of election was adopted to ensure the safety of the participants and Supreme Committee guidelines.

As per Ministry of Social Welfare and ISC Muscat

guidelines, the bi-annual election took place virtually at Indian Social Club Salalah. A total of 28 candidates filled nomination and after withdrawal of 4 candidates 24 candidates contested.

Out of 395 eligible voters, 381 (96.20 per cent) members cast their votes which was very high compared to previous elections.

Twelve top winning members unanimously selected Rakesh Kumar Jha as the club’s president. Sunny Jacob was nominated vice-president, Dr Sandeep Ojha, general secretary, and Gopakumar PG as treasurer.



National Museum to celebrate 100 years of House of ‘Al Amani’

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 10

The Sultanate, represented by the National Museum, will mark this year the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the House of ‘Al Amani’ as the first Omani museum to preserve the cultural heritage of Zanzibar.

Jamal bin Hassan al Mousawi,

Secretary-General of the National Museum, said, “The museum will dedicate a corner named after the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said, and a number of historical houses in Muscat will be rehabilitated to form an integrated cultural and tourism system.”

He said, “The Sultanate’s cultural diplomacy contributed to the borrowing of the original

manuscript of Ahmed bin Majid al Saadi, from the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences, which is more than 500 years old, and borrowing of the original manuscripts of Ahmed bin Majid al Saadi from the Al Assad Library in Syria and the inauguration of a corner of the Sultanate in the ancient Winter Palace in Russia.”



Taraweeh can be prayed at home

KABEER YOUSUF

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Contrary to what many have concluded so far, the special night prayers during Ramadhan, Taraweeh can be prayed at home with or without the family members, according to the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

The Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from Covid-19 has banned the night prayers from being held at mosques. Accordingly, no Taraweeh prayers or any other prayer or gathering is allowed in any mosques in the country.

The decision to stop Taraweeh prayers at mosques by Supreme Committee comes in the wake of the widespread prevalence of the pandemic in different governorates of the Sultanate.

It has strongly advocated decision to prohibit the performance of Taraweeh congregational prayers in mosques.

"It is perfectly appropriate for anyone to offer Taraweeh prayer, the night worship during the holy month from the eve of Ramadhan moon-sighting till next moon sighting at home. It can be done individually or in a group. In fact, it is better to offer voluntary prayers at home, thus leaving the mosque for obligatory prayers," a senior official from the ministry has told the *Observer*.

He said that it is possible to



The decision to stop Taraweeh prayers at mosques by Supreme Committee comes in the wake of the widespread prevalence of the pandemic in different governorates of the Sultanate

pray in congregation at home with the family and offering this optional prayers during Ramadhan inside the mosque is not necessary. It has nothing to do with the validity of the fast.

"Missing Taraweeh does not make your fasting invalid, and attending Taraweeh does

not rescue an improper or invalid fast hence both have no connection in terms of validity. One is a compulsory obligation while the other is an optional prayers."

During the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the Taraweeh prayers were prayed in congregation for a short period of time, after which the Prophet changed this practice and performed the prayer at home. This was done out of fear that people would start to consider it to be compulsory.

During the time of Umar ibn al Khattab, the second caliph, twenty rak'at of Taraweeh prayer were led in congregation daily.

These practices has been recognised as Sunnah, based on the hadith, he further said.

■ FROM PAGE 1

Oil slick off Suhar not to impact port activities

and washing ashore on beaches of North al Batinah Governorate as well as within Sohar Port.

"Accordingly, the emergency response plan is activated and the departments concerned began the process of cleaning the port and the ships affected by the unexpected ocean oil spill," Sohar Port said.

"For new vessels coming into the port, the risk for pollution is very limited as there are only a few areas where the oil has been observed and a mariners'

notice has been send out to warn ships not to sail through the oil spills in the ocean. Therefore, nautical operations and vessel movements are not affected," it added.

Abdullah bin Saeed al Busafi, an environmental affairs specialist at the pollution control centre at EA, said that he had detected simple oil spots scattered in the Sohar Port area, which were dealt with according to a response plan

An aerial survey carried out

by the Royal Air Force of Oman showed areas of the oil slick at two different locations outside the Omani territorial waters, where the first spot was detected at 27 nautical miles and the second spot at a distance of 19 nautical miles east of Liwa.

The specialist at Pollution Operations Control Center said that vital facilities in the region have been informed to take precautionary measures to protect their facilities and carry out control procedures.

Moon sighting committee to convene tomorrow

MUSCAT: The Main Committee for Moon Sighting of Ramadhan 1442 AH, will convene on Monday at the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

The committee is headed by Shaikh Abdullah bin Mohammed al Salmi, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, and comprises His Eminence Shaikh Ahmed bin Hamad al Khalili, Grand Mufti of the Sultanate; Dr Mohammed

bin Said al Maamari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry Awqaf and Religious Affairs; Engineer Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Interior; Dr Saleh bin Hamad al Rashdi, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Court; Shaikh Abdulrahman bin Abdulsattar al Kamali, Chairman of the Court of Appeal in Musandam Governorate and Shaikh Mohammed bin Salim

al Nahdi, Judge of the Court of Appeal.

The ministry has called upon citizens and residents to observe the crescent of Ramadhan while abiding by the instructions issued by the Supreme Committee for tackling the Covid-19 pandemic, and to communicate with the sub-committees at the walis' offices.

— ONA

DON'T TAKE EASING OF BAN FOR GRANTED

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

The two-week night movement ban came to an end on Thursday. Still, authorities have called upon both citizens and residents to stick to the anti-Covid-19 precautions.

Last week, the Supreme Committee on Covid-19 extended the closure of all commercial activities between 8 pm and 5 am, while allowed movement of individuals and vehicles in all governorates.

This directive got implemented on April 8 (Shaaban 25, 1442 AH) that is to continue till the morning of the first day of Ramadhan.

The standard precautions on health and hygiene and other precautions announced by the Supreme Committee from time to time need to be followed.

"All measures of precautions against the pandemic announced by the Supreme Committee should be followed failing of which punitive actions including fines, jail, naming and shaming and deportation as the case may be, will be taken," according to the Royal Oman Police (ROP).

A nighttime ban on all commercial activities throughout



Ramadhan, movement of individuals and vehicles from 9pm till 4am remain intact. Besides, no Taraweeh prayers or Iftar will be held in any mosques.

All sorts of gatherings, like iftar, in mosques and other places like tents or public assembling areas has been banned in addition to all group activities such as social, sports, cultural, or any other collective activities during the holy month.

Meanwhile, Dr Jan Yaqoub Jabbour, Representative of the World Health Organisation to the Sultanate of Oman, reiterated

on WHO's message that no one is safe until everyone is safe. "We need to continue the preventive measures."

"Various solutions are needed to address the major challenges that impede our success and the Covid-19 pandemic is only the latest example of why WHO focuses on achieving health for all and all through Vision 2023 for the Eastern Mediterranean Region, overcoming barriers that prevent people from obtaining quality health services, and ensuring the availability of these services everywhere and for everyone."

Work on Oman pavilion at Dubai expo nearing completion

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, APRIL 10

Work on the Oman pavilion at Dubai Expo 2020 is 89 per cent complete and it will be ready by the end of June, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) said on Saturday.

The Sultanate's participation with many economic and cultural activities include a visit of the ship *Shabab Oman II* to various ports of GCC countries between November 7 and 21, 2021.

The Oman Pavilion at the expo will bring to life the Sultanate's story of national progress through an exploration of frankincense.

The design of the pavilion is inspired by *Boswellia sacra*, the tree from which the precious resin is harvested.

With an asymmetrical flowing form that is reminiscent of the



tree's low, shade-giving branches, the structure appears to envelop and protect life.

For the past 5,000 years, frankincense has been valued for its power to lift spirits and encourage

well-being. Transported by intrepid navigators who journeyed across land and sea, the resin was traded through a vast network of business partnerships and international friendships, transcend-

ing languages, cultures, and continents.

Visitors to the pavilion will pass through five zones, illuminating how frankincense contributed to Omani advancements in

transportation, knowledge, manufacturing, sustainability, and exploration.

Designed to connect minds across time and space, this journey will feature both large-scale, high-impact moments, as well as subtle interactive experiences created using Oman-developed augmented and mixed reality technology.

Located in Expo's Mobility Thematic District, the Oman Pavilion will showcase the country southward-looking nature, talent, expertise, innovative spirit, and youthful population, as well as its valuable resources and stunning natural beauty.

Recently, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and the commission responsible for Oman Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai has signed an agreement to manage and operate the tourism services and information centre at the pa-

vilion.

The agreement was signed by Maithaa bint Saif al Mahrouqi-yah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism, with Raad bin Khalifa al Abri, CEO of the company, specialised in providing such services.

Al Raqi Business and Services Company will provide all information, services, offers, and tour packages about the Sultanate to visitors to the pavilion and expo visitors in general, in addition to introducing the Sultanate and promoting its tourism components.

The mega event that will run from October 1, 2021, to March 31, 2022, was delayed to safely navigate the impact of Covid-19 and allow the World Expo to focus on a collective desire for new thinking to identify solutions to some of the greatest challenges.

N O S O L U T I O N I N S I G H T



VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

A few questions come to the fore again with several countries in the world imposing national or local-level lockdowns.

Several countries are reporting cases that match the peak season figures last time, and that too despite mass vaccination campaigns and health guidelines introduced such as wearing of masks and social distancing.

World Health Organization (WHO) has reportedly said that large-scale physical distancing measures and movement restrictions often referred to as 'lockdowns', can slow Covid-19 transmission by limiting contact between people.

The business community in Oman that the *Observer* spoke to admitted that lockdowns and ban on movements are desperate measures by the government.

"Despite various packages announced by the government over the last few years, it is still difficult for businesses like mine to survive with restrictions. Our restaurants have been getting a good number of online orders. Still, it is not a suitable alternative to dine-in services. We were hoping the situation to get better this year, but that is not the case so far", said a co-owner of a restaurant chain with multiple branches in the capital.

Both the Minister of Health and the Minister of Commerce and Industry and Investment Promotion have repeatedly said that the lockdowns will significantly impact the economy.

"There is a limit that government can continue to offer relief packages to the businesses and individuals when its revenue sources have been hit. The only solution is to start mass vaccination and make people follow the safety guidelines as much as possible", said a gym operator, whose business has

LOCKING

DOWN

THE

PANDEMIC

WORLD HEALTH
ORGANIZATION

HAS SAID PHYSICAL
DISTANCING MEASURES
AND MOVEMENT
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been affected by repeated restrictions and lockdowns.

It may be noted that even small coffee and tea shops and mobile restaurants are the worst affected as they depend on daily income, generated during peak business hours at night.

"We have to shut down shops by 8 pm and our peak hours are between 9 and 11 pm. It isn't easy to sustain the business for circumstances. I hope that lockdowns become a part of the history in the coming months", said Mustafa, who runs a mobile café in Al Hail.

"However, these measures can have a profound negative impact on individuals, communities and societies by bringing social and economic life to a near stop. Such measures affect disadvantaged groups, including people in poverty, migrants, internally displaced people and refugees, who most often live in overcrowded and under-resourced settings, and depend on daily labour for subsistence.

WHO admits that at certain points, some countries have no choice but to issue stay-at-home orders and other measures, to buy time.

Lockdowns give extra time for authorities to build their capacities to detect, isolate, test and care for all cases; trace and quarantine all contacts.

As for the dependence on vaccines and herd immunity WHO says that the percentage of people who need to be immune to achieve herd immunity varies with each disease.

"Herd immunity against measles requires about 95 per cent of a population to be vaccinated, while the remaining five per cent will be protected by the fact that measles will not spread among those who are vaccinated. For polio, the threshold is about 80 per cent. The proportion of the population that must be vaccinated against Covid-19 to begin inducing herd immunity is not known."



7 killed after quake rocks Java island

JAKARTA: At least seven people were killed after a 6.0-magnitude quake struck off the coast of Indonesia's main Java island, its disaster agency said on Saturday, as the country reels from a cyclone disaster in another part of the archipelago.

The afternoon quake hit off-shore about 45 kilometres south-west of Malang city in East Java.

"The agency has recorded six dead and one person who sustained serious injuries," said National Disaster Mitigation Agency spokesman Raditya Jati, adding that several villages in the region had been evacuated.

It was not clear if the death toll would rise, but the agency did not report anyone missing after the strong quake. The quake struck at a relatively deep 82 kilometres — shallower quakes tend to do more damage than deep ones.

Images from the scene showed a ceiling caved in at a hospital ward and debris strewn across the floor of the local parliament in Blitar, a city southwest of Malang.

"I had just finished praying and was changing my clothes when suddenly the quake struck," Malang resident Ida Magfiroh said.

"It was pretty strong and went for a long time. Everything was swaying... My heart was racing."

The deadly quake comes as the Southeast Asian nation reels from a cyclone that killed more than 200 people in the eastern part of the archipelago and neighbouring East Timor this week.



Damage to a ward is seen at the Ngudi Waluyo hospital in Blitar, East Java, after a 6.0-magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of Indonesia's Java island. — AFP

Indonesia experiences frequent quakes and volcanic eruptions due to its position on the Pacific 'Ring of Fire', an arc of intense seismic activity where tectonic plates collide.

Among Indonesia's string of deadly quakes was a devastating 2004 tremor measuring 9.1 magnitude that struck off the coast of Sumatra and triggered a tsunami that

Indonesia experiences frequent quakes and volcanic eruptions due to its position on the Pacific 'Ring of Fire'

killed 220,000 throughout the region, including about 170,000 in Indonesia.

The Boxing Day disaster was one of the deadliest natural disasters in recorded history.

In 2018, a powerful quake shook the island of Lombok and several more tremors followed over the next couple of weeks, killing more than 550 people on the holiday is-

land and neighbouring Sumbawa.

Later that year, a 7.5-magnitude quake and a subsequent tsunami in Palu on Sulawesi island left more than 4,300 people dead or missing.

In 2006, a 6.3-magnitude quake rocked a densely populated region of Java near the city of Yogyakarta, killing around 6,000 people and injuring tens of thousands more. — AFP

France rescues 84 migrants on way to UK

CALAIS: French maritime authorities said they had rescued 84 people aboard four vessels attempting to reach the UK off France's northern coast on Saturday.

A French navy patrol ship first picked up 11 migrants off the coast at popular resort town le Touquet overnight, dropping them off in Boulogne-sur-Mer, before a tugboat rescued 24 more stranded people including five children.

A surveillance speedboat from the maritime gendarmes then picked up 30 more people, including a woman and a baby, while the French national sea rescue organisation SNSM brought in another 19 migrants including two women and two children.

Since late 2018, the number of illegal Channel crossings has risen sharply as migrants try to reach Britain despite dangers linked to heavy shipping traffic, strong currents and low water temperatures. — AFP

Volcano spewing ash on Caribbean island

ST JOHN'S, ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA: Ash and hot gravel rained down on Friday on the Caribbean island of Saint Vincent, after powerful eruptions from a volcano that had been dormant for decades sent thousands of panicked locals fleeing to safety.

The initial blast from La Soufriere, the highest peak in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, sent plumes of hot ash and smoke 6,000 metres into the air on Friday morning, the local emergency management agency said.

A second, smaller eruption took place on Friday afternoon, belching out a 4,000-metre-high ash cloud, the University of the West Indies Seismic Research Centre said.

"Evacuation of people in the



The eruption of La Soufriere Volcano from Rillan Hill in Saint Vincent. — AFP

red and orange zones to safe areas continues in earnest. Heavy ash fall has halted the process somewhat since visibility is extremely poor," the National Emergency Management Organisation said.

The 4,049-foot La Soufriere — French for "sulphur mine" — had not erupted since 1979 and its largest blow-up happened over a century ago, killing more than 1,000 people in 1902. It had been rumbling for months before it finally blew.

It is now likely to keep erupting for days or weeks, scientists at the University of the West Indies, in Trinidad and Tobago, tweeted.

"Once there is one explosive eruption it is likely others can occur," the university's seismological research centre said. — AFP

Salvini should not face migrant abuse trial

ROME: Italy's far-right leader Matteo Salvini should not be tried for migrant kidnapping, a prosecutor said on Saturday, a month before a judge is expected to decide whether to advance the case.

Salvini is accused of illegally detaining migrants at sea as then-interior minister when he blocked more than 100 people from disembarking from the Italian Gregoretti coastguard boat in July 2019.

His conduct "does not amount to the crime of kidnapping" and "there is no case to answer," prosecutor Andrea Bonomo said in a pre-trial hearing in Catania, Sicily, the ANSA news agency



Far-right leader Matteo Salvini

reported.

According to Bonomo, the leader of the anti-immigration League party "did not breach any international convention" in his treatment of the migrants, and acted with the support of his government.

Pre-trial judge Nunzio Sarpietro is expected to rule on May 14 whether to drop the case or order a trial in which Salvini would face a maximum sentence of 15 years if convicted.

"I'm happy because today the public prosecution said there was no crime, no kidnapping... so I calmly return to my children and hope that this will be over on May 14," the politician said after the hearing.

The migrants were rescued in the Mediterranean on July 25, 2019, after five days at sea.

They were transferred to the Gregoretti the next day, then held on the overcrowded patrol vessel under the fierce

summer sun despite a scabies outbreak and a suspected case of tuberculosis.

Fifteen unaccompanied minors were eventually allowed off on July 29 following pressure from Catania's juvenile court. The remaining 116 migrants disembarked on July 31 after Salvini said a deal had been brokered with fellow EU countries to take some of them in.

The League leader has always defended his hardline stance as a way to force greater burden sharing within the European Union, and discourage more migrants from making the dangerous sea journey from Libya. — AFP



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY
Advertisement No. 13/2021

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following biddings:

Serial	Bidding No.	Bidding description	Document fee	Deadline for obtaining bidding docs.	Deadline for inquires submission	Deadline for submission
1	RE-BB/01/2021	Car Cleaning Service at the Parking of Muscat Municipality Head Office	25/- OMR	2/5/2021	3/5/2021	10/5/2021
2	RE-AB/08/2021	Investing Plot Number (271) At Muttrah	500/- OMR	9/6/2021	20/6/2021	11/7/2021
3	AB/09/2021	Investing & Operating of the building on plot number (1023) at Qurum	450/- OMR	9/6/2021	20/6/2021	11/7/2021
4	AB/10/2021	Rental & Operating of the building on plot number (115) located at Al- Qurum, Wilayat Boushar	90/- OMR	9/6/2021	20/6/2021	11/7/2021
5	BB/11/2021	Rental & Operating A coffee shop located at Muttrah Market for Fishes, Fruits & Vegetables	25/- OMR	9/6/2021	20/6/2021	11/7/2021

Registered companies with Muscat Municipality which are Specialized in above bids are invited to participate in the biddings as per the following:

- Pay the specified document fee for the requested bid via bank deposit to Muscat Municipality's Bank account as follows:
Bank Muscat 0423010702710024
- A copy of the transaction's receipt MUST be send to the following e-mail (MM.PC@mm.gov.om), provided with the company data (name and bid number, delegate name, office phone number, mobile number, email address approved by the company and commercial registration number of the company).
- The tender document will be provided to the company via email.
- 2:00 PM on the above mentioned dates, is the last timing for obtaining Bidding Documents. Any bid's document request received after the specified time will not be considered, even if the fee of the document is paid.

Submitted offers must be accompanied with a bond mentioned in the tender document valid for a period not less than (90) days issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat Municipality. Bidding that do not meet the required bond **will not be accepted**. Documents must be enclosed in a plain envelope sealed with red wax (without any company information). box's locations are As follows:

Bidding at The Serial	The box's location
2-3-4	Third floor at Directorate General of Quantity Surveying and Contracts in Muscat Municipality, Head Office, Darsait
1-5	Muscat Municipality Ruwi Building (Main Entrance), located on Capital Market Street

NOTES:

- Companies which are not registered in Muscat Municipality or their registration has been expired shall register through the municipality's website (www.mm.gov.om). For technical support, please contact Muscat Municipality through email (crm@mm.gov.om).
- If the bidders have any inquiries regarding the scope of the work, they have to sent their inquiries through the following e-mail (MM.PC@mm.gov.om)
- 10:00 AM** on the above submission mentioned dates, is the last timing for receiving bids. Offers submitted after the above mentioned date & time shall not be accepted for any reason.
- Muscat Municipality has the right to accept or reject any offer without assigning any reason.

Website: www.mm.gov.om



A worker carrying a pot at the archaeological site of a 3,000-year old city, dubbed The Rise of Aten, dating to the reign of Amenhotep III, uncovered by the Egyptian mission near Luxor. — AFP

Egypt to unveil ‘portion’ of 3,000-year-old city

LUXOR: Archaeologists near Luxor have unearthed just a portion of the “largest” ancient city ever found in Egypt and dating to a golden pharaonic age 3,000 years ago, officials said on Saturday.

Famed Egyptologist Zahi Hawass had announced earlier this week the discovery of the “lost golden city”, saying the site was uncovered near Luxor, home of the legendary Valley of the Kings.

“We found one portion of the city only. But the city extends to the west and the north,” Hawass said on Saturday ahead of a press conference in the archaeologically rich area.

Betsy Bryan, professor of Egyptian art and archaeology at Johns Hopkins University, had said the find was the “second most important archaeological discovery since the tomb of Tutankhamun”

nearly a century ago, according to the excavation team’s statement on Thursday.

Items of jewellery have been unearthed, along with coloured pottery vessels, scarab beetle amulets and mud bricks bearing seals of Amenhotep III.

The team began excavations in September between the temples of Ramses III and Amenhotep III near Luxor, some 500 kilometres south of Cairo.

Amenhotep III inherited an empire that stretched from the Euphrates River in modern Iraq and Syria to Sudan and died around 1354 BC, ancient historians say.

He ruled for nearly four decades, a reign known for its opulence and the grandeur of its monuments, including the Colossi of Memnon — two massive stone statues near Luxor that represent him and his wife. — AFP

Battle for Yemen’s Marib heats up, as 53 dead in 24 hours

DUBAI: Fighting for the key Yemeni region of Marib has intensified, with 53 pro-government and Ansar Allah fighters killed in the past 24 hours, loyalist military officials said on Saturday.

The Ansar Allah have been trying to seize oil-rich Marib, the government’s last significant pocket of territory in the north, since February.

“The fighters have managed to seize a bit of territory” in the latest fighting northwest of the city, a pro-government military source said, assessing the city of Marib itself was not under threat.

The same source said 22 government soldiers including five officers had been killed, along with 31 fighters.

The Ansar Allah fighters rarely announce casualties on their own side.

The Ansar Allah fighters in late 2014 overran the capital Sanaa, 120 kilometres to the west of Marib, along with much of northern Yemen.

That prompted a coalition to intervene in March 2015 to prop up the government.

Loyalist military officials said on Saturday that coalition aircraft had carried out strikes against the fighters but the Ansar Allah had pushed on with their offensive.

The loss of Marib would be a heavy blow for the Yemeni government, currently based in the southern city of Aden, and for its backers.



A fighter with forces loyal to Yemen’s government holds a position against Ansar Allah fighters in Yemen’s northeastern province of Marib. — AFP

It could also lead to humanitarian disaster, as huge numbers of civilians displaced from fighting elsewhere have sought refuge in Marib camps.

Around 140 sites have sprung up in the region to provide basic shelter for the displaced, who number up to two million, according to Yemen’s government.

The fighters have stepped up missile and drone strikes against neighbouring Saudi Arabia in recent months, demanding the opening of Yemen’s airspace and ports. They have rejected a Saudi proposal for a ceasefire.

In early March, at least 90 fighters on both sides were killed

The loss of Marib would be a heavy blow for the Yemeni government, currently based in the southern city of Aden, and for its backers

in clashes to the west of Marib.

The United Nations last month condemned the “escalation” and warned of a looming humanitarian disaster.

The UN Security Council said the fighting “places one million internally-displaced persons at grave risk and threatens efforts to

secure a political settlement when the international community is increasingly united to end the conflict”.

The UN called on all sides to de-escalate and condemned “the use of child soldiers” in Marib.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken also urged the Ansar Allah fighters on Monday to halt their offensive, as he announced \$191 million in aid at a donor conference.

But he warned that the suffering would not stop until a political solution is found between the Ansar Allah fighters and the internationally-recognised government. — AFP

Iraqi youth see little hope 18 years after Saddam’s fall

BAGHDAD: Eighteen years ago Saddam Hussein’s rule came to an end, but the prospects for young Iraqis who never witnessed his dictatorship remain blighted by insecurity, rampant corruption and joblessness.

When American troops seized Baghdad on April 9, 2003, a different Hussein was barely three years old. Living in Nasiriyah, a cradle of revolts throughout history in the country’s south, he recalls people speaking of a “regime”.

It was one which “embroiled Iraq in wars that wasted many lives and resources,” alongside crippling sanctions from the 1990s, said the political sciences student.

But today the American promises of democracy and freedom made when Saddam was toppled ring hollow, added Hussein, who did not want to give his



Hussein in his hometown Nasiriyah in Iraq’s southern Dhi Qar province. (Right) Rawan Salim in Iraq’s autonomous Kurdistan region. — AFP

second name, as he deplored today’s “incapable” political parties and a “bad system”.

Educated initially in a small mud-brick school, since his earliest memories he has



known an Iraq beset by “hospitals in ruins and zero job prospects.”

Despite the country’s oil wealth, the promise of a booming future has remained beyond grasp for most, especially those

now coming of age.

The country has grappled with a toxic cocktail of endemic corruption and sectarian episodes, culminating in the IS group occupying large swathes of the country for three years from mid-2014.

Iraq remains in a state of “total collapse,” Hussein lamented.

Ibrahim, a young resident of the holy city of Karbala, was equally dismissive of his prospects in contemporary Iraq.

“The poor cannot live in this country,” said the 21-year-old, who said he had “dreamt of joining the military academy”.

“But I had to stop (studying) before middle school” in order to scrape by financially, and today he is stuck, still hawking pink candy floss from a small cart.

Hussein, meanwhile, has tried —

with some success — to juggle both the demands of study and work, taking odd jobs from as early as 13.

These youngsters’ stories are far from uncommon, as 37 per cent of Iraqi children live below the global poverty threshold, according to the UN’s children’s agency Unicef.

After finishing his day’s university classes, Hussein rushes to meet his younger brother, the two of them hustling daily to find a trader who will give them tasks, in order to feed their seven-strong family.

He will soon become the first in the family to hold a degree.

But he finds little joy in the prospect of graduating, in a country where 700,000 new graduate entrants to the job market compete for public sector employment every year. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TEHRAN

Rouhani launches production of new centrifuges

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani launched a production line of new IR-9 centrifuges, which would allow the country to significantly increase its uranium enrichment.

During the opening ceremony, Rowhani spoke of a “great achievement” of the scientists of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), in comments carried by state television.

“We are conforming to the nuclear weapons non-proliferation treaty and don’t pursue military



goals,” Rowhani said.

“That’s why a peaceful nuclear programme is our legitimate right which we will pursue without foreign help.” — dpa

ALGIERS

Algerian president cautions pro-democracy protesters

Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune warned pro-democracy Hirak activists of “non-innocent activities” as authorities say the movement is being hijacked ahead of elections. Tebboune warned against “non-innocent activities” that “attempt to hinder the democratic process”, after meeting of the country’s top security council.

The president has called early elections for June 12 in an attempt to respond to the country’s political and socio-



economic crisis, but Hirak supporters have denounced the vote as a “masquerade”. The Hirak protest movement was sparked over then-president Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s bid for a fifth term in office. — AFP

ISTANBUL

Tunnel discovered between Syrian village, Turkey

Turkish security forces have discovered a tunnel between Syria and Turkey and in the process detained 24 migrants, the Turkish Defence Ministry announced.

The approximately 100-metre-long tunnel ran between the Turkish border province of Hatay and the northern Syrian village of Atmeh in Idlib. It has reportedly been destroyed by Turkish troops.

The armed forces repeatedly report arrests of irregular migrants or refugees at the border,



which is generally closed.

Turkey has taken in the largest number of refugees since the beginning of the war in Syria in 2011. — dpa

In brief

■ MANILA



PHILIPPINES RECORDS 401 CORONAVIRUS DEATHS

The Philippines' health ministry reported 401 new coronavirus deaths, the highest single-day spike in fatalities since the start of the pandemic, and 12,225 additional infections.

In a bulletin, the ministry said total confirmed cases had risen to 840,554, while confirmed deaths had reached 14,520. It said 213 cases previously tagged as recoveries were reclassified as deaths after final validation.

The Philippines had temporarily suspended the use of AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine for those younger than 60 following reports from abroad of rare blood clots in some recipients. — Reuters

■ COLOMBO



SRI LANKA SEEKS \$17M FROM GREEK SHIP OWNER OVER OIL SPILL

Sri Lanka on Friday lodged a claim for \$17.38 million with the Greek owners of an oil tanker that caught fire and left a spill stretching 40 kilometres (25 miles) off the South Asian island.

The *New Diamond* vessel was travelling from Kuwait to India with 270,000 tonnes of crude oil on board in September when a fire broke out as it passed Sri Lanka's east coast.

The crude being carried as cargo was unaffected by the blaze but some of the tanker's fuel leaked into the Indian Ocean.

■ SEOUL



SOUTH KOREA UNVEILS ITS OWN FIGHTER JET PROTOTYPE

After about four years of development, South Korea has unveiled a prototype of a new domestically produced fighter jet.

The goal is to deliver 40 jets under the name KF-21 Boramae by 2028 and 120 jets by 2032, South Korean President Moon Jae In said at a ceremony at the site of aircraft manufacturer Korean Aerospace Industries (KAI) in the southern city of Sacheon. He said production would begin as soon as test flights were completed.

According to KAI, the first test flight is planned for next year. KAI started development in December 2015 and received support from its US partner, defence contractor Lockheed Martin. — dpa

Mumbai in lockdown as vaccines run short



Policemen ride on Segways on a deserted area near the Taj Mahal Hotel during a weekend lockdown imposed by the state government in Mumbai. — AFP

professional Neha Tyagi, 27, said in Mumbai. "This lockdown could have been totally avoided if people would take the virus seriously."

In further grim news, a fire broke in a private hospital in the state killing four patients, the fire brigade said. Last month a blaze at a Mumbai clinic killed 11.

With the country grappling with the new surge, cricket is now being played behind closed

This lockdown could have been totally avoided if people would take the virus seriously

NEHA TYAGI
media professional

doors — including the big-bucks Indian Premier League, which began on Friday — and in many regions including in New Delhi and Bangalore a night curfew is in force.

Election rallies in West Bengal are going ahead however, as is the colossal Kumbh Mela religious festival in Uttarakhand with millions expected next week by the holy Ganges river. — AFP

Indian troops shoot dead four in fresh election bloodshed

KOLKATA: Five people were killed in fresh election bloodshed in the Indian state of West Bengal on Saturday, including four shot dead by paramilitary troops "in self-defence", officials said.

West Bengal in eastern India has seen thousands killed in decades of political violence, and the current state election campaign has triggered deadly clashes between rival parties.

The latest incident in the northern district of Coochbehar 700 kilometres north of Kolkata saw a crowd of around 400 people surround troops guarding a polling station.

"Paramilitary troops opened fire in self-defence after being challenged by over 400 people", a senior Election Commission official said. — AFP

■ BOAT FESTIVAL IN CHINA'S PROVINCE



Boats taking part in a performance during the Qintong boat festival in Taizhou in China's eastern Jiangsu province. — AFP

Cambodian PM threatens quarantine-breakers with jail

PHNOM PENH: Cambodia's strongman premier Hun Sen threatened quarantine-breakers with jail time Saturday and warned civil servants they could lose their jobs if they go unvaccinated, as the country grapples with a growing coronavirus caseload.

In the past two days Cambodia has registered more than 1,000 infections — many among garment workers and market vendors — bringing the country's tally to 4,081 cases and 26 deaths.

Authorities this week banned travel between provinces, imposed a night-time curfew in the capital Phnom Penh and shut down popular tourism sites including the famed Angkor Wat archaeological park.

Wearing face masks is now mandatory in Phnom Penh and

violators face a fine of up to \$250.

But Prime Minister Hun Sen on Saturday threatened harsher measures, saying anyone who flouts a two-week quarantine period would face a "quick trial" and jail time.

"People who break Covid measures must be sentenced", he said on state-run TV.

"I accept being called a dictator, but I will also be admired for protecting my people's lives."

Cambodia has already passed a strict Covid-19 prevention bill that could see people who flout virus rules jailed for up to 20 years.

Hun Sen also announced that being vaccinated was "mandatory" for all state officials and the armed forces, warning them they could be fired if they refuse. — AFP

Myanmar's UN envoy urges action as scores killed

YANGON: Myanmar's own ambassador to the United Nations has urged "strong action" against the junta, as reports emerged of scores killed in the military's latest crackdown.

The country has been in turmoil since the military ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi in February, with protesters refusing to submit to the junta regime and continuing to demand a return to democracy.

With more than 600 people killed by security forces trying to quell the movement, the international community has increasingly raised the alarm on the crisis.

During a UN Security Council meeting on Friday, Myanmar's ambassador pushed for more concrete action — proposing a no-fly zone, an arms embargo and more targeted sanctions against members of the military and their

With more than 600 people killed by security forces trying to quell the movement, the international community has increasingly raised the alarm on the crisis

families. "Your collective, strong action is needed immediately", Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun told the meeting.

"Time is of the essence for us", he said. "Please, please take action."

An independent analyst with the International Crisis Group also warned the council that Myanmar was "at the brink of state failure".

"The vast majority of the population does not want military



Myanmar's Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun addresses the United Nations in Geneva. — Reuters File Photo

rule and will do whatever it takes to prevent that outcome. Yet the military seems determined to impose its will", said Richard Horsey.

"Its actions may be creating

a situation where the country becomes ungovernable. That should be of grave concern to the region and to the broader international community."

China and Russia wield veto

power at the Security Council and generally oppose international sanctions.

However, Beijing — the top ally of Myanmar's military — has voiced growing concern about instability, and has said it is speaking to "all parties".

There have been reports that China has opened contact with the CRPH, a group representing the ousted civilian government.

At least 618 civilians have been killed in the military's crackdown on protests, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a local monitoring group.

Efforts to verify deaths and confirm news of crackdowns have been greatly hindered by the junta's throttling of mobile data within the country — effectively shunting most of the population into an information blackout.

— AFP

Papers around the world react to the death of Prince Philip

LONDON: Pictures of Prince Philip feature on newspapers across the globe after the death of the duke aged 99 on Friday.

The Queen announced the death “with great sorrow,” with many papers reflecting on the service Philip provided during his lifetime.

Under the headline “a life of service to Queen and country,” the *Daily Telegraph*’s leader column speaks of “someone who through his support for the Crown made a lasting contribution to the institution of monarchy and to the nation in his own right.”

It added: “The Duke was often caricatured by republican detractors as gaffe-prone and old-fashioned.

“But he was a man of his generation, a wartime one, indeed, that possessed many of the attributes he displayed — loyalty, courage, stoicism, reticence and discretion. These are virtues, not faults.”

While the *Times* carries a leader in which they speak of Philip as having “strong views, a quick wit and a sharp tongue.”

They wrote: “The prince ... had a thick skin, a sense of humour and a self-awareness that went a long way in mitigating his lack of tact.

“Way back in 1960, he told the General Dental Council: ‘Dontopedologyis the science of opening your mouth and putting your foot in it, a science which I’ve practised for a good many years.’”

Overseas, and several Australian newspapers are among those featuring pictures of the



A spread shows the front pages of British newspapers reporting on the death of Britain’s Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, is pictured in Brighton. — AFP

duke.

The *NT News*, usually known for its irreverent front pages, has a sombre take on the news, while reports also feature on the front of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Australian* and *The Daily Telegraph*.

The *Herald*’s Europe correspondent Bevan Shields wrote the “love story” between the Queen and Philip has “driven much of the grief in Britain following his death.”

He added: “For 73 years they have been the foundation and rock of the United Kingdom. That’s now gone, at a time when Brits are suddenly uncertain about what the future holds. And a time when the royal family itself



A child lays a floral tribute to Britain’s Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, outside Buckingham Palace, central London, the day after his death at the age of 99. — AFP

is fracturing.”

Spanish paper *ABC* carries a picture of the duke doffing a bowler hat during his retirement

from public duty in 2017 and the headline “at the service of her majesty,” while a range of German local papers wrote on the theme of him being “in the shadow of the Queen.”

Elsewhere in Europe, and French papers *Liberation* and *Le Figaro* carry the death on their front pages, while *Le Monde* carries a column suggesting the duke could have had “Prince of Blunders” added to his long list of honorary titles.

A column by Philippe Bernard suggests Philip had “never ceased to feed a repertoire of blunders,” including “offbeat marks of affection, manifestations of British humour or frankly inappropriate or even stupid remarks.” — dpa

World leaders pay tribute to Duke of Edinburgh

LONDON: Current and former world leaders joined a chorus of condolences from around the world following the death of Prince Philip on Friday at the age of 99.

Here are some reactions:

— **Britain:** British Prime Minister Boris Johnson hailed Philip’s “extraordinary life”, sending his condolences to Queen Elizabeth after her husband’s death was announced.

Johnson said the Duke of Edinburgh “earned the affection of generations” at home, in the Commonwealth and across the world.

— **US:** US President Joe Biden paid tribute to Philip as a selfless servant of Britain and its people.

“From his service during World War II, to his 73 years alongside the Queen, and his entire life in the public eye — Prince Philip gladly dedicated

— **Canada:** Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called Philip a “man of great purpose and conviction, who was motivated by a sense of duty to others”, in a tribute on behalf of his Commonwealth nation.

— **European Union:** EU Commission head Ursula von der Leyen said, “I would like to extend my sincere sympathy to Her Majesty The Queen, the Royal Family and the people of the United Kingdom on this very sad day.”

— **India:** Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid tribute to Philip’s long career, saying his “thoughts are with the British people and the Royal family”.

“He had a distinguished career in the military and was at the forefront of many community service initiatives. May his soul rest in peace,” he tweeted.



A well-wisher waits in line to lay a floral tribute to Britain’s Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, outside Buckingham Palace, central London, the day after his death at the age of 99. — AFP

himself to the people of the UK, the Commonwealth, and to his family,” Biden said in a statement.

— **Ireland:** Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin said he was “saddened” by Philip’s death, adding: “Our thoughts and prayers are with Queen Elizabeth and the people of the United Kingdom.”

— **Australia:** Australia’s Prime Minister Scott Morrison ordered flags to be flown at half-mast.

“There are many towering figures that the world has lost and known, but few have been before us in our lifetimes, for such a long time,” Morrison said.

— **France:** French President Emmanuel Macron paid tribute to Philip and sent his condolences to the queen. Philip “lived an exemplary life defined by bravery, a sense of duty and commitment to youth and the environment”, he said on Twitter.

— **Germany:** German Chancellor Angela Merkel said his death filled her with “great sadness”.

— **Israel:** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed his “deepest condolences”.

“Prince Philip was the consummate public servant and will be much missed in Israel and across the world,” he wrote.

— **Kenya:** President Uhuru Kenyatta said he had been a unifying figure.

“His Royal Highness Prince Philip has been a towering symbol of family values and the unity of the British people as well as the entire global community.”

— **Pakistan:** Prime Minister Imran Khan praised the duke for his support for Pakistan, which he last visited with the queen in 1997.

— **Italy:** Italian President Sergio Mattarella praised Philip’s “exemplary dedication, accompanying the evolution of his country with an open and innovative spirit”.

— **Russia:** Russian President Vladimir Putin praised Philip and wished Elizabeth “courage and mental fortitude in the face of a grievous and irreparable loss”. — AFP

Germany’s AfD to launch election bid

DRESDEN: The far-right AfD will firm up its election manifesto this weekend as Germany prepares for the post-Merkel era, with the party seeking to reverse a lag in support amid infighting and an ailing effort to capitalise on the pandemic.

Members of the anti-immigration Alternative for Germany gathered on Saturday despite coronavirus restrictions for a two-day congress in Dresden, to finalise their strategy ahead of the general election on September 26.

With Angela Merkel stepping down after 16 years as chancellor, the AfD’s “Merkel must go” slogan



will need an overhaul.

The AfD caused a sensation in Germany’s last election in

2017 when it secured almost 13 per cent of the vote, entering parliament for the first time as the

largest opposition party.

But it has lost support as Germany reels from the coronavirus pandemic, and has lately been plagued by internal divisions, links to radical Covid-19 deniers and accusations of ties to neo-Nazi fringe groups.

Latest surveys have the party polling at between 10 and 12 per cent, with Merkel’s CDU/CSU on around 27 per cent and the surging Greens not far behind.

In key regional elections in the southern states of Baden-Wuerttemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate in March, the AfD saw its support plunge by around a third. — AFP

NEW YORK

DMX, rap’s explosive, tortured star, dies at 50

DMX, the hardcore hip-hop star whose raw, snarling raps chronicled the struggles of the American street and his own inner pain, has died.

He was 50 years old. The rapper’s longtime lawyer confirmed DMX’s death, with a statement from his family saying Earl Simmons died after nearly a week

on life support following a heart attack.

“Earl was a warrior who fought till the very end,” the



statement released on Friday read, saying the rapper died at White Plains Hospital north of New York City, with loved ones by his side. “He loved his family with all of his heart and we cherish the times we spent with him,” the statement read. — AFP

ATHENS

Greek govt vows probe into killing of journalist

After the killing of a journalist on the streets of Athens, the Greek government vowed to mount a rapid investigation into the shooting. “The Greek police will very quickly find those guilty and bring them to justice,” Civil Protection Minister Michalis Chrysochoidis said on Greek television.

The comments come after Chrysochoidis met Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and both had said the matter needed to be resolved quickly.



The day before, two unknown perpetrators shot one of the most well-known Greek bloggers and reporters in front of his house in the Athens suburb of Alimos. The two men then fled on a motorcycle, according to witnesses. — dpa

TEL AVIV

Pentagon chief to visit Israel amid Iran talks

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin is due to arrive in Jerusalem on Sunday, the highest ranked member of President Joe Biden’s administration to visit Israel. The two-day visit comes as the Biden administration attempts to return to an Iran nuclear deal abandoned by its predecessor — a deal Israel opposes.

Austin is expected to meet Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Defence Minister Benny Gantz and armed forces



chief Lieutenant General Aviv Kochavi.

The trip will also include a tour of the Nevatim air force base and visits to the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial and to a Jerusalem memorial to fallen soldiers. — dpa

This Ramadhan, practise social distancing for greater good

Ramadhan Kareem... the religious time of the renewal, or re-affirmation of the faith is upon us again, and though it will be celebrated modestly this year amidst the pandemic, that could well be a good thing in terms of meeting the nation's current need for reflection.

To be honest, religious reflection is something that is intensely private for me. I do not feel that I can share even the where or when of my most intense religious experiences with those closest to me, let alone the what, so I will not dwell upon the topic. I will say however that, my understanding of how the religious commitment to the fast as a means of demonstrating empathy for, and an understanding of the experiences of those less fortunate, is uniquely balanced by my awareness of the joy of celebrating with the wider family, evident in the demeanor and excitement, often sometimes beatific expressions of joy, and bliss.

This Ramadhan, however, must embrace a greater cause.

This Ramadhan's observance cannot be traditional, or more will perish.

This Ramadhan must embrace social distancing.



Ray Petersen
r.j.petersen52@gmail.com

RAMADHAN 2021
MUST BECOME
A NATIONAL
OPPORTUNITY
TO COME
TOGETHER AND
DEMONSTRATE
THAT WE
CAN 'SUFFER'
SOCIALLY AND
SOCIETALLY, FOR
THE GREATER
GOOD

The Supreme Committee and the government of this amazing nation must be tearing their hair out in frustration that the populace has failed to understand and embrace the need for social reticence, and distancing, for isolation and separation, to stay alive, and keep others alive. Nobody likes being isolated! It is the opposite of what we, as humans are. We are social creatures, but if the current societal behaviour, across the Sultanate continues, the 'Jewel of the Arabian Gulf' will become itself a pariah, an outcast in a world that is coming to terms with the needs of the pandemic and liberating itself, far quicker than we are.

Look around you, at home, at work, at play, wherever you are, and you will see people not masking, maybe with masks around their chins. You will still have visitors and you will still visit, either because "it is our way," because "corona is finished," or because "no corona here." Such responses are deceptive and dangerous. Acceptable only in the eyes of those who utter them, and dangerous to all. When will you understand that Covid-19 is not a myth, is not a media 'beat-up,' and is real, dangerous, and takes lives indiscriminately? Many who have lost

loved ones regret their laxity, but it is too late by then. Do not be among those who will forever bear the pain of thinking they knew best.

Ramadhan 2021 must become a national opportunity for this nation to come together and demonstrate, along with its messages of faith, a message to the world that we can 'suffer' socially and societally, for the greater good, that we can all distance ourselves from others, and that we can do this for each other.

The harsh reality of rejecting this opportunity is that without social responsibility, and consequent economic recovery, the Sultanate faces a future devoid of prospect, and that would surely be a damning indictment of us all. We must, for this one month, demonstrate an awareness of the magnitude of the challenge facing this generation, assume the responsibility for maintaining opportunities and prospects for the next generation, and make distancing as important to us as reflection.

Work with your government and Supreme Committee, your health workers and law enforcement, your friends and neighbours, and we will beat this most insidious of foes... Inshallah.

WRITE FOR US

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VACCINE SCEPTICISM

Calls for awareness programmes to tackle vaccine misinformation

KIM HARRISBERG

Wariness about taking AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine in Africa could be compounded by the African Union's decision to halt plans to procure the shot, health experts said, calling for public awareness programmes to fight misinformation.

The African Union (AU) said its announcement was not related to recent findings by European and British medicine regulators that there are possible links between the vaccine and extremely rare blood clots, but rather a case of diversifying options.

Still, experts said the timing of the announcement could fuel vaccine hesitancy.

"The announcement happening around the same time the European medical authority shared concerns over blood clots gives people more reason to amplify misinformation," said Gregory Rockson, founder of Africa-wide healthcare provider mPharma, which is based in Ghana. "We need strong political leadership and clear messaging to fight growing vaccine scepticism," said Rockson, adding that less than 2 per cent of the Ghanaian population had been vaccinated so far.

The AU said it did not want to replicate the World Health Organization-backed COVAX initiative to ensure equitable access of vaccines for low-income countries, and was focusing on the Johnson & Johnson vaccine to supply 400 million doses.

COVAX aims to deliver 600 million shots — most of them from AstraZeneca — to some 40 African countries this year, enough to vaccinate 20 per cent of their populations.

But with South Africa selling the AstraZeneca vaccine to other AU member states following concern it would be less effective in fighting the local variant, fears over using the shot have spread to other countries, health experts said.

More than 700 million vaccine doses have been administered globally, yet Africa accounts for less than 2 per cent of the total compared to North America's 27 per cent and Europe's 20 per cent share, according to the latest data.

In Malawi, where only about 1 per cent of the population have been vaccinated, conspiracy theories about the AstraZeneca shot run rife, said Precious Makiyi, a medical doctor and behavioural scientist from Blantyre.

"Now more than ever we need to understand why these theories exist and how we frame messaging targeted specifically at Malawians," said Makiyi.

Ayoade Alakija, co-chair of the AU's Africa Vaccine Delivery Alliance for Covid-19, called for "community engagement with data that is locally owned and adapted to a local context".

— Reuters

JUDICIARY REFORM

Rebalancing the US Supreme Court

MICHAEL MATHES

US President Joe Biden on Friday established an expert commission to study reforming the powerful US Supreme Court, including the explosive question of expanding its bench.

The move follows months of debate over whether Democrats should seek to expand the court beyond its current nine justices, after moves during Donald Trump's presidential term gave the bench a firm conservative majority.

The Supreme Court sits as the final arbiter on fundamental American legal matters, which can include minority and LGBTQ rights, racism, the death penalty and electoral controversies — and its justices are appointed for life.

Making good on a campaign promise, Biden signed an executive order creating a bipartisan commission of three dozen experts, including legal and judicial scholars, former administration officials and former federal judges, to weigh the highly-charged issue of reforming the body.

One of the panel's main duties is to produce "an analysis of the principal arguments in the contemporary public debate for and against Supreme Court reform, including an appraisal of the merits and legality of particular reform proposals," said the executive order published by the White House.

The order itself did not specifically address expanding the high court.

But in an earlier statement, the White House said the topics to be studied will include "the length of service and turnover of justices on the Court; the membership and size of the



The US Supreme Court Building is seen in Washington DC. — AFP

MAKING GOOD ON A
CAMPAIGN PROMISE,
BIDEN SIGNED
AN EXECUTIVE
ORDER CREATING
A BIPARTISAN
COMMISSION OF
THREE DOZEN
EXPERTS

Court; and the Court's case selection, rules, and practices."

The order directs the commission to complete its report within 180 days of its first public meeting.

Commissioners include Nancy Gertner, a US District Court judge from 1994 to 2011, and constitutional expert Laurence Tribe, a Harvard University professor and widely read scholar who also worked in Barack Obama's administration.

The commission's creation comes six months after the controversial confirmation of conservative judge

Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court following the September 2020 death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a liberal icon. Trump nominated Barrett days after Ginsburg's death, and weeks before the November election — an election Trump lost to Biden.

The confirmation process triggered outrage from many Democrats, who pointed to the US Senate Republican leadership's refusal to hold hearings for Obama's Supreme Court pick in early 2016, much less a vote, on grounds that it was too close to that year's November presidential election. — AFP

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PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY:

Ministry of Information
P.O. Box 974, Postal Code 100, Muscat,
Sultanate of Oman

sport

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DALLAS DOUBLE SEES 10-MAN LEEDS SHOCK CITY



MANCHESTER: Manchester City suffered just a fourth Premier League defeat of the season as 10-man Leeds United shocked the runaway leaders thanks to Stuart Dallas' double in a 2-1 win at the Etihad on Saturday.

Dallas opened the scoring three minutes before half-time, but hope of a famous win for Marcelo Bielsa's men seemed to have disappeared when captain Liam Cooper was shown a straight red card in first-half stoppage time.

The visitors withstood a City bombardment until Ferran Torres equalised 14 minutes from time.

But Leeds still summoned the energy to pose a threat on the counter-attack and gained their reward when Dallas slotted below Ederson.

Bielsa's first win in five meetings against Pep Guardiola propels Leeds up to ninth in their first season back in the English top flight for 16 years.

"The value of the victory increases because it was achieved in a game where we were dominated and demanded character, effort and personality", said Bielsa, who Guardiola has hailed as one of the major influences on his glorious coaching career.



"From the adversity and effort of the players it was emotional for me. It was a rebellious team. They weren't resigned to lose."

Guardiola paid for heavily rotating his side with Wednesday's Champions League quarterfinal, second leg, against Borussia Dortmund clearly his priority.

Kevin De Bruyne, Ilkay Gundogan, Riyad Mahrez, Phil Foden and Ruben Dias, who were among the stars left on

the bench with City holding a slender 2-1 lead to take to Germany in midweek.

"We did not control it. We did not create enough for the forwards", said Guardiola, who surprisingly did not introduce De Bruyne as a substitute.

"We arrived in the final third and after that we could not create much. At the end (the Leeds goal) can happen because they have a team where the transitions are fantastic."

City still enjoy a 14-point

lead at the top of the Premier League and need just 11 points from their remaining six matches to guarantee a third title in four years.

But Manchester United could close the gap to eight points should the Red Devils win their two games in hand, the first of which is away to Tottenham on Sunday.

A two-minute silence was held before kick-off in honour of Prince Philip, who died aged 99 on Friday.

STERLING OUT OF FAVOUR

Raheem Sterling's presence in what was largely a second string side is a reflection of how the England international has fallen down the pecking order in the past few weeks.

Sterling did not even get on as a substitute in the first leg against Dortmund and did little to further his case for selection in midweek by slicing a great chance wide from Fernandinho's cut-back.

Leeds had wasted a number



The value of the victory increases because it was achieved in a game where we were dominated and demanded character, effort and personality

MARCELO BIELSA

Leeds United manager

of promising attacks with their final ball, but found the finishing touch when Patrick Bamford teed up Dallas to strike low in off the inside the post.

The visitors' joy was short-lived. Just four minutes later they were a man down.

Cooper played the ball first before crashing into Gabriel Jesus, but referee Andre Marriner upgraded a yellow card shown to the Leeds' captain to a red after reviewing the incident on the pitch-side screen. City were camped inside the Leeds half for almost the entire second-half, but were largely reduced to long-range efforts as Illan Meslier saved from Oleksandr Zinchenko, Fernandinho and Joao Cancelo. — AFP



Young carries Hawks past Bulls

Trae Young bounced back from a subpar outing to score 42 points as the Atlanta Hawks overcame Zach LaVine's 50-point performance with a 120-108 win over the Chicago Bulls on Friday in Atlanta. The second meeting of the season between the two teams played out similar to their first game in December.



WC winner De Rossi hospitalised with Covid-19

Former World Cup winner Daniele De Rossi, now a member of Italy's coaching staff, has been hospitalised in Rome with Covid-19, according to reports on Friday. The 37-year-old was one of four members of Italy's staff who were infected during 2022 World Cup qualifiers, in an outbreak which has also hit 8 players.

De Villiers stars as Bangalore win IPL opener

CHENNAI, India: South Africa's AB de Villiers hit a quickfire 48 as Royal Challengers Bangalore prevailed in a last-ball thriller against holders Mumbai Indians in the Indian Premier League opener played behind closed doors on Friday.

The 14th edition of the popular Twenty20 tournament kickstarted in Chennai as Virat Kohli's Bangalore chased down a target of 160 to win by two wickets.

De Villiers single-handedly lifted the team from a precarious 122-6 to take the chase into the final over, but he got run out on the fourth ball.

Harshal Patel, who claimed five wickets to restrict Mumbai to 159-9 in their 20 overs, got the winning run in a tense finish.

"AB is probably the only player who's so versatile and can do what he did on slow pitches today, so we have to understand," Kohli said on the team's decision to make De Villiers bat at number five.

"If there's a partnership on, you might see a totally different order. But in a tricky chase you

Harshal Patel, who claimed five wickets to restrict Mumbai to 159-9, got the winning run in a tense finish

want some options in the back end, where the opposition thinks it's not over till he gets out."

Kohli won the toss and elected to field first at the start of the 52-day tournament that concludes on May 30. Kohli said he "felt like home" on IPL's return to India after last year's edition took place in the United Arab Emirates due to the pandemic.

Glenn Maxwell, who was bought by Bangalore for \$1.95 million in an intense February auction, got going with his captain in a key partnership of 52.

Kohli fell to Mumbai fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah for 33 and Maxwell, promoted to number four, fell to tall South African quick Marco Jansen for 39 as Bangalore faltered.

But De Villiers soon took charge as he hit four fours and two sixes in his 27-ball knock.



Earlier, Patel struck three times in the final over of the Mumbai innings to set up victory for a side searching its first IPL title.

Bangalore batsman Devdutt Padikkal missed the game after he was one of the four IPL players to test positive for Covid-19 ahead of the gala event.

All eight teams are in strict bio-bubbles as case numbers in India have skyrocketed to more than 130,000 a day since players arrived to prepare for the eight-week spectacle.

"We are fortunate enough to be on the park playing cricket. That is more important, we can put a

smile on people in India," said Mumbai skipper Rohit Sharma.

"As a country we are going through tough times and it's important we give them something to look forward to. This tournament is going to be exciting."

— AFP

SCOREBOARD

MUMBAI INDIANS

Rohit Sharma run out (Virat Kohli)19
Chris Lynn c&b W Sundar49
S Yadav c De Villiers b K Jamieson31
I Kishan lbw H Patel28
H Pandya lbw H Patel13
K Pollard c W Sundar b H Patel7
K Pandya c D Christian b H Patel7
M Jansen b H Patel0
J Bumrah not out1
Extras (Ob 0lb 2nb Open 2w)4
Total (20 overs) **159-9**
Fall of wickets: 1-24, 2-94, 3-105, 4-135, 5-145, 6-158, 7-158, 8-158, 9-159
Bowling: Mohammed Siraj 4-0-22-0, Kyle Jamieson 4-0-27-1, Yuzvendra Chahal 4-0-41-0, Shahbaz Ahmed 1-0-14-0, Harshal Patel 4-0-27-5, Daniel Christian 2-0-21-0, Washington Sundar 1-0-7-1

ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE

W Sundar c C Lynn b K Pandya10
V Kohli lbw J Bumrah33
R Patidar b T Boult8
G Maxwell c C Lynn b M Jansen39
AB De Villiers run out (K Pandya)48
S Ahmed c K Pandya b M Jansen1
D Christian c R Chahal b J Bumrah4
K Jamieson run out (Bumrah)4
Harshal P not out4
M Siraj not out0
Extras (Ob 2lb 1nb Open 9w)12
Total (20 overs) **160-8**
Fall of wickets: 1-36, 2-46, 3-98, 4-103, 5-106, 6-122, 7-152, 8-158
Bowling: Trent Boult 4-0-36-1, Jasprit Bumrah 4-0-26-2, Marco Jansen 4-0-28-2, Krunal Pandya 4-0-25-1, Rahul Chahal 4-0-43-0

Kail, Shakeel win Premier awards as season concludes

A DIVISION T20 LEAGUE, KNOCKOUT FINALS CALLED OFF

SHAHZAD RAZA

MUSCAT, APRIL 10

Super bat Kail Khalid of Al Turki NMC was adjudged best batsman while left-arm spinner Shakeel Ahmad of IT Works bagged the best bowler award as Oman Cricket (OC) drew curtains on 2020-21 season after the Supreme Committee on Covid-19 suspended sports activities last month, the second time in a year, due to rise in coronavirus cases in the country.

Before announcing the season's toppers, OC called off the A Division's T20 League as well as the Ramadhan T10 Bash Softball Tournament. The game's governing body in Oman also called off senior and junior knockout finals, declaring Orient Travels and Maniz Azad as joint winners of the Senior Cup. Aflag Group and Pitspot were announced joint winners of the Junior Cup.

Kail Khalid had phenomenal success with the bat, scoring 526 runs in 9 games at an amazing average of 75.1. Kail also struck three hundreds and a fifty for Al Turki.

Shakeel's golden arm not only won games for IT Works but fetch him 20 wickets at an incredible average of 9.1 and economy rate of only 2.5 runs per over.

Former Oman star Zeeshan Ahmed Siddiqui, who was instrumental in ARTT winning the A Division title, won the best batsman award, scoring 323 runs in six matches at an excellent average of 80.8. His aggregate included three half centuries.

Best bowler award also went to an ARTT player as Aqil Khan claimed the award for taking



Rahul Chadha of Vanderlande best bowler, all-rounder D Division



Adnan ul Haq of Maniz Azad best bowler C Division



Samir Faizu of OCT Al Hail B best bowler



Saud Haroon of BSI best all-rounder E Division



Khalid Rahim of OCT Al Hail B best batsman



Shuaib Ismail of best all-rounder



Sakil Khan of Mazoon Dairy best batsman E Division



ARTT players Zeeshan Siddiqui and Aqil Khan



Prashant Rana of Y Horizon best bowler E Division



Noushad Haneefa of LC Tech best bowler B Division



Shah Abbas of Aflag Group best bowler E Division



Khalid Kail of Al Turki NMC best batsman of Premier



Wajid Ali of Pitspot best batsman D Division



Warith al Balushi of OCT Mabela best all-rounder team



Suhaib Abdul Ghani of OCT Al Hail A best all-rounder team

21 wickets in 7 games at an unbelievable average of 8.2, taking five wickets in a game twice this season.

B Division's best batsman Arif Hussain of Orient Travels/Gitacs was the highest scorer in a single tournament, scoring 604 runs at an amazing average of 100.7 and outstanding strike rate of 154.9. Arif's super season included 3 centuries and 2 fifties. He also picked up 13 wickets for his side. Naushad Haneefa of LC Tech claimed the best bowler prize for taking 17 wickets in 5 games at a highly impressive average of 9.1.

D Division's top performer Rahul Chadha of Vanderlande won a dream double for his exploits with bat and ball, claiming

the D Division's best bowler and best all-rounder awards. He was very impressive with the ball, taking 14 wickets in 7 matches at 9.4 and scoring 271 runs at an average of 45.2.

Many Omani players made their presence felt during the season, especially star all-rounder Shoaib Ismail who did well playing for two teams — OCT Ruwi and Maniz Azad. He was adjudged best all-rounder for scoring 204 runs in 7 games for OCT Ruwi and taking 10 wickets. His exploits for Maniz Azad included 170 runs in 4 matches at an average of 56.7 and 9 wickets at an outstanding average of 9.4.

Rafeeq Mohammed (OCT Al Nahdha and Orient Travels) and

Zubair Ali Akbar (OCT Ruwi and Y Horizon) won awards for best batsman and best bowler respectively in a category of an Omani national playing for two teams.

Other award-winning Omani nationals playing for one team included OCT Al Hail B's Khalid Rahim (best batsman), Samir Faizu of OCT Al Hail B (best bowler) and best all-rounders Warith al Balushi of OCT Mabela and Suhaib Abdul Ghani of OCT Al Hail A.

The list of team and individual toppers of season 2020-21: INDIVIDUAL TOPPERS

Omani national playing for one team

Best batsman: Khalid Rahim Bakhsh

al Balushi (OCT Al Hail 'B') Consolation batting: Zafarullah al Balushi (OCT Al Mabela) Best bowler: Samir Faizu Khan Mohamed (OCT Al Hail 'B') Consolation bowling: Nadhir Ghulam (OCT Al Hail 'A') All-rounder: Suhaib Abdul Ghani al Balushi (OCT Al Hail 'A') All-rounder: Warith al Balushi (OCT Al Mabela)

Omani national playing for two teams

Best batsman: Rafeeq Mohammed Siyad al Balushi (OCT Al Nahda/Orient Travels) Best bowler: Zubair Ali Akbar al Balushi (OCT Ruwi/Y Horizon) Consolation bowling: Younis Murad Rahmat (OCT Seeb/Al Jadidi) All-rounder: Shuaib Ismail al Balushi (OCT Ruwi/Maniz Azad) **Premier Division** Best batsman: Kail Khalid (Al Turki NMC) Best bowler: Shakeel Ahmad (IT

Works)

'A' Division

Best batsman: Zeeshan Siddiqui (Arabian Region — ARTT) Best bowler: Aqil Khan (Arabian Region — ARTT) Consolation bowling: Sandip Patel (Sarco LLC)

'B' Division

Best batsman: Arif Hussain (Orient Travels/Gitacs LLC) Best bowler: Noushad Haneefa (LC Tech)

'C' Division

Best batsman: Parvez Beg (Design Group) Best bowler: Adnan Haq (Maniz Azad International)

'D' Division

Best batsman: Wajid Ali (Pitspot) Consolation batting: Vineesh Raj Vijayan Pillai (Jotun Cricket Team) Best bowler: Rahul Chadha (Vanderlande) All-rounder: Rahul Chadha (Vanderlande)

'E' Division

Best batsman: Rafeeq Mohammed Siyad al Balushi (OCT Al Nahdha) Best bowler: Shah Abbas Jaffer Rizvi (Aflag Group CT) Consolation bowling: Saravanan Manickam (Ghantoot Group)

All-rounder: Yusuf Patanwala (Sketch International LLC)

'F' Division

Best batsman: Sakil Khan (Mazoon Dairy Company Saoc) Consolation batting: Rudhi Rasheed (Y Horizon) Best bowler: Prashant Rana (Y Horizon) All-rounder: Saud Haroon Khan (BSI CT)

TEAM TOPPERS

Premier Division: Muscat CT (winners), Al Turki NMC (runners-up) A Division: ARTT (winners), Sarco LLC (runners-up) B Division: Orient Travels/Gitacs (winners), LC Tech (runners-up) C Division: Maniz Azad (winners), Douglas OHL (runners-up) D Division: Vanderlande (winners), Al Jadidi Eng (runners-up) E Division: Mazoon UP (winners), Danmark CC (runners-up) F Division: Israr Ghala (winners), Y Horizon (runners-up)

Ministry activates online platform for club membership

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 10

Towards easing the process of the membership applications in the Sultanate clubs through online well based platforms, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) began the initial sessions to introduce the details of the new system to the clubs’ representatives.

The ministry had introduced the initiative of the online platform system for membership in the clubs in November 2019 as part of the sports heads meeting with the Sports Minister at the sports city in Musannah. The ministry recently organised a meeting with the representatives of the clubs under strict medical protocol, to introduce the trial activation of the advanced platform system for membership



in the clubs. The meeting took place at the ministry headquarters on Wednesday in presence of Hilal bin Abdullah al Mamari, Director of the Private Associations at the MoCSY. Al Mamari said the online system is a new governance

tool in the sporting clubs to share the data and information and will ease the process of taking the decisions. “The new system will smoothen the membership records in all clubs in the Sultanate and enable the person to obtain and



renew the membership in any club within few steps through an easy online system. There are three main windows in the platform including submission applications for new membership, renewal of the membership and the club management,” he said.

Al Mamari explained to the clubs attendees about the detailed process of submitting the application in each window. “For any new membership application, the applicant should upload all the required documents for the membership and complete the payment process. The applicant can follow up the status of the approval by contacting with the clubs’ management. The second window is dedicated for the renewal as all the existing members can renew their membership and pay the renewal fees through payment section. Also, in this window the applicant may get the annual sporting, administration and financial reports of the clubs.” “Also, he can apply for any positions during the election period. Moreover, the members in the clubs can submit their

suggestions, recommendations ahead of any new annual general assembly meeting through this platform,” he added. The ministry official said the last section of the platform is for the clubs’ management. “In this window, the clubs authorised officials can review all the submitted applications and can approve the completed applications and write the status in case of any pending document. Uploading of all the annual reports and attaching the financial data by the authorised management in the clubs will be in this section and will enable the members to view it easily. Furthermore, the management of the clubs can review the submitted applications by selecting and raise the successful applications to the ministry for the final approval,” he ended.

Rose clings to Masters lead

SPIETH, THOMAS GIVE CHASE AFTER SECOND ROUND

AUGUSTA, United States: Justin Rose carried a one-stroke lead into Saturday’s third round of the Masters with major winners Jordan Spieth and Justin Thomas on his heels and thunderstorms in the forecast.

Play began with light winds and overcast morning skies at Augusta National with Rose teeing off at 2:20 pm (1820 GMT) in the final group alongside American Will Zalatoris.

“Day three plays pretty difficult here at Augusta National,” Rose said. “You just have to keep hitting the shots.”

The 40-year-old Englishman is trying to become the sixth wire-to-wire Masters champion after Americans Craig Wood (1941), Arnold Palmer (1960), Jack Nicklaus (1972), Ray Floyd (1976) and Spieth (2015).

Rose, twice a Masters runner-up, won his only major title at the 2013 US Open. He has led or shared the Masters lead after seven career rounds, the most of any player never to win a green jacket.

World number 41 Rose could become the first Englishman to win both the US Open and Masters and join Ben Hogan as

the only players to win majors at Merion and Augusta.

Rose opened with a seven-under par 65 in firm and fast conditions and struggled to a 72 on Friday to stand on seven-under 137 after 36 holes, one stroke ahead of Zalatoris and Brian Harman with Spieth and Australian Mrc Leishman two adrift and Thomas in a pack three back.

“You can see the leaderboard and who is stacking up behind,” Rose said. “I feel like there’s a lot of firepower there.”

Thomas, the 2017 PGA Championship winner, will overtake Dustin Johnson to become world number one if he wins the green jacket after defending champion Johnson missed the cut.

“I definitely have left a lot of shots out there the last two days,” Thomas said. “But I’m in a great position.”

Three-time major winner Spieth leads greens reached in regulation with 30 of 36, two better than Rose and Thomas, and snapped a four-year win drought last week in San Antonio.

Only twice since 1960 has a player won the Masters the week



You can see the leaderboard and who is stacking up behind. I feel like there’s a lot of firepower there

JUSTIN ROSE
English golfer

after a US PGA Tour victory — US left-hander Phil Mickelson in 2006 after a triumph in Atlanta and Scotland’s Sandy Lyle, who won at Greensboro the week before taking the 1988 Masters.

Spieth had not won since capturing the Claret Jug at the 2017 British Open at Royal Birkdale until the Texas Open, but likes the slow and steady improvement he sees in his game and wants to see Augusta National at its most formidable.

“I’m happy that the golf course has the opportunity to play more and more difficult over the weekend,” Spieth said. “I’m looking forward to that kind of challenge, and I think that could be an advantage to me if I’m in

control of the ball.”

It might not happen. Thunderstorms are predicted for late afternoon, when the final groups will be on the back nine, and could soften the lightning-fast layout.

Not since Fuzzy Zoeller in 1979 has a player won the Masters in his debut, but that’s the feat Zalatoris hopes to achieve at age 24.

“The joke I’ve been saying with my family is if I’m stupid enough to think I can play here, then I’m stupid enough to think I can win it,” Zalatoris said. — AFP

SECOND-ROUND SCORES IN THE 85TH MASTERS (USA UNLESS NOTED, A-DENOTES AMATEUR, PAR-72):
137 - Justin Rose (ENG) 65-72
138 - Will Zalatoris 70-68, Brian Harman 69-69
139 - Marc Leishman (AUS) 72-67, Jordan Spieth 71-68
140 - Bernd Wiesberger 74-66, Tony Finau 74-66, Justin Thomas 73-67, Kim Si-woo (KOR) 71-69, Cameron Champ 72-68, Hideki Matsuyama (JPN) 69-71
141 - Xander Schauffele 72-69
142 - Ryan Palmer 74-68, Collin Morikawa 73-69, Cameron Smith (AUS) 74-68, Corey Connors (CAN) 73-69
143 - Bryson DeChambeau 76-67, Matt Jones (AUS) 74-69, Stewart Cink 74-69, Viktor Hovland (NOR) 73-70
144 - Mackenzie Hughes (CAN) 72-72, Robert MacIntyre (SCO) 74-70, Shane Lowry (IRL) 71-73, Tommy Fleetwood (ENG) 74-70, Matthew Fitzpatrick (ENG) 74-70, Michael Thompson 72-72, Henrik Stenson (SWE) 73-71, Brendon Todd 73-71, Abraham Ancer (MEX) 75-69, Bubba Watson 74-70, Jon Rahm (ESP) 72-72



England's Justin Rose hits his tee shot on the 17th hole during the second round at The Masters in Augusta National Golf Club. — Reuters



Paula Badosa

Badosa stuns Barty in Charleston quarters

MIAMI: World number one Ashleigh Barty crashed out of the Charleston WTA quarterfinals on Friday, beaten in straight sets by 71st-ranked Spaniard Paula Badosa.

Badosa fired seven aces — three more than Barty — and saved 12 of 14 break points she faced on the way to a 6-4, 6-3 victory.

It’s the biggest win of Badosa’s career, the Spaniard having notched her first top-20 victory when she beat fifth-seeded Belinda Bencic in the 2nd round.

“I’m still a little bit shocked,” Badosa admitted, adding that when Barty’s final forehand reeled out of court “I was, like, ‘What just happened?’”

“But I’m quite happy with my match, the way that I managed my nerves. It was quite important because sometimes these matches are tough to close.”

Serving for the opening set, Badosa was down 0-40 but won five straight points on the way to sealing it with an overhead winner. They traded breaks in the first two games of the second set, Badosa gaining the advantage again with a break for 4-3 as she won the final four games of the match.

In the semifinals, Badosa will face Russian Veronika Kudermetova, who defeated American Sloane Stephens in straight sets, 6-3, 6-4.

Badosa, a former French Open junior champion, is the lowest-



Ons Jabeur

ranked player to beat Barty since September 2019.

World No 38 Kudermetova has not dropped a set in four matches this week, and more than tripled Stephens’ total of winners in the one hour and 33 minute match.

“I really like to play on the clay because I think I have a lot of time to do what I want,” Kudermetova said. “It’s the first time I beat a player who’s won a Grand Slam and I think that’s really important for me. I tried to play aggressive and not give her time, and I think that was the key for this match.”

In other matches, Tunisia’s Ons Jabeur defeated American Coco Gauff 6-2, 7-6 (7/2) to book a semifinal meeting with Danka Kovinic of Montenegro, a 6-7 (2/7), 7-5, 6-1 winner over Kazakhstan’s Yulia Putintseva. — AFP

features



Improving local honey to cater to buyers abroad

From being a job-seeker for nearly seven years, Ohood al Shibli has to step out of her comfort zone to become an entrepreneur. Armed with creative and marketing skills, she decided to tap into the local Omani honey market, improve on their packaging and expand their reach not only in Oman and the GCC, but also abroad... **P16**

INSIDE STORIES

LOCAL SCENE



FOR CAMPING LOVERS, WADI THARF IS THE DESTINATION

Wadi Tharf in the Wilayat of Duqm, 120 km from the centre of the wilayat, is distinguished by its picturesque nature and its varied dense trees and low temperature throughout the season. It is a tourist destination for lovers of camping, trekking and travel enthusiasts... **Story on P15**

TRAVEL TALES



ITALY'S 'DYING TOWN' SEEKS UNESCO HERITAGE NOD

Calling yourself "The Dying Town" may not sound like the best way of attracting visitors, but Civita has learned to make a living out of dying... **Story on P15**

READ



CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD

BY NEALE DONALD WALSCH

The book chronicles the dramatic true journey of a struggling man turned homeless, who inadvertently becomes a spiritual messenger and bestselling author.

GASTRONOMY



SAY CHEESE! CYPRUS'S HALLOUMI GETS EU PROTECTED STATUS

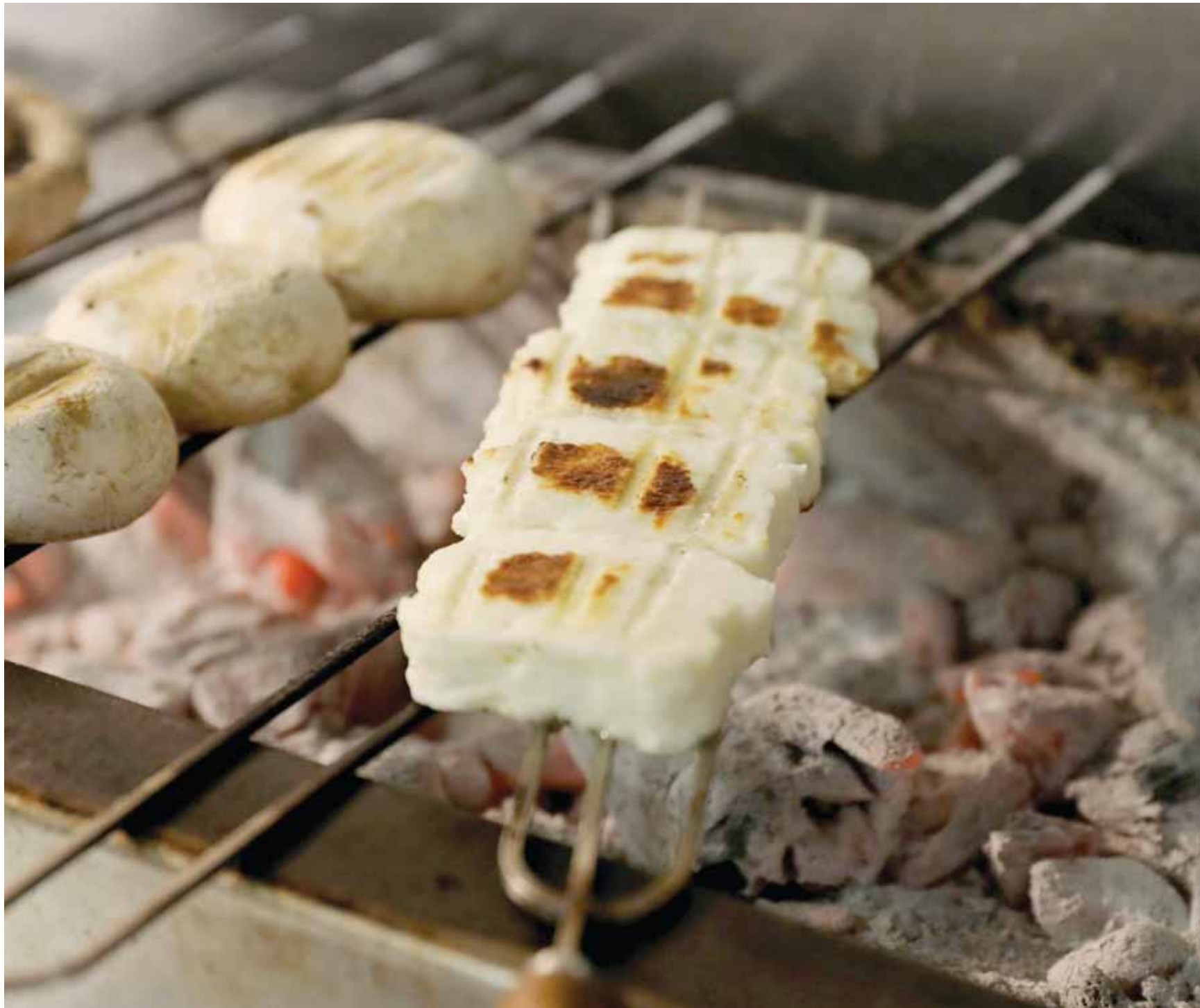
Cyprus is getting protected status for its prized halloumi, giving its producers the sole right to sell the rubbery cheese in the European Union... **Story on P14**

WHAT'S TRENDING



SWISS WATCHMAKERS GO DIGITAL TO SHOW OFF NEW PRODUCTS, REVIVE SALES

Luxury Swiss watchmakers, usually not big fans of online retailing, are launching a new all-digital Watches & Wonders event on Wednesday to display their latest products, hoping to revive sales hit by the coronavirus crisis... **Story on P14**



Say cheese! Cyprus's halloumi gets EU protected status

Cyprus is getting protected status for its prized halloumi, giving its producers the sole right to sell the rubbery cheese in the European Union.

Later this month, the European Union is set to formally give halloumi, or “hellim” in Turkish, the protected designation of origin (PDO) status, which will come into effect from October, according to Cyprus’ agriculture ministry.

The move reaffirms what the industry and state have said for years, said cheese-maker George Petrou, general manager of Petrou Bros. Dairy Products which has about 25 per cent of Cyprus’ export market: that halloumi is Cypriot, with historical accounts suggesting production as early as around 1500.

“Unfortunately in recent years many countries tried to copy us so the registration will help very much, in that other countries will not produce halloumi or something similar which misleads consumers,” he said.

As a child, Petrou learnt the secrets of making halloumi from his late mother, Kakkoulou, who sold it at farmers’ markets. As she gently stirred the milk to separate the curds in a vast “hartzin”, or cauldron, he would mill around the kitchen, observing her.

In 1982, Petrou started selling halloumi under the



Alambra brand to supplement his income as a first-division footballer, and he hasn’t looked back.

From using 250 litres of milk a day to make halloumi, Petrou’s company, initially set up with an elder brother, now processes 250 tonnes of milk per day, employing 220 people and exporting to 40 countries.

Its expansion mirrors that of Cyprus’ halloumi production.

Now the country’s second-most valuable export after pharmaceuticals, the industry has grown between 20 per cent and 22 per cent

annually for the past five years, according to official data. The agriculture ministry says it has now set its sights on penetrating the China market.

There were hurdles to overcome in securing the prized PDO status, including disagreements on the ratios of goat, sheep and cows’ milk in the recipe.

Until 2024, the ratios will be set by decree, and after that at least 50 per cent will be made up of sheep and goats’ milk, with the rest supplemented by cows’ milk.

Though recipes for halloumi abound online, for

locals, enjoyment is in the versatile cheese’s simplest form — tossed in the frying pan or on a barbecue, eaten raw with melon in the summer, or cubed and thrown in to boil with trahana, a cracked wheat and yoghurt soup eaten in winter.

“A lot of tourists come here looking for it,” said Evroulla Ioannou, who serves up grilled halloumi at her popular restaurant in Nicosia, Cyprus’s capital. “Some ... only know it by name so they come to try it, and from what I see, they really like it,” she said.

— Reuters

WHAT’S TRENDING

Swiss watchmakers go digital to show off new products, revive sales



ZURICH: Luxury Swiss watchmakers, usually not big fans of online retailing, are launching a new all-digital Watches & Wonders event on Wednesday to display their latest products, hoping to revive sales hit by the coronavirus crisis.

Makers of high-end watches still largely rely on physical stores for sales, but the success of online platforms for pre-owned watches, such as WatchBox or Richemont’s Watchfinder, have shown it is possible to sell luxury timepieces online.

Pandemic-related factory and store closures hit Swiss watch sales last year and have forced brands to boost their often tiny online business and generally rethink digital activities.

Guillaume de Seynes, executive vice-president at luxury goods group Hermes, said one of the reasons Hermes’ watch business outperformed the industry last year was that its customers were already used to shopping on hermes.com.

Hermes, known for leather goods, silk scarves and perfumes, embraced e-commerce much earlier than pure-play watchmakers, launching its transactional website in the United States almost 20 years ago.

De Seynes said he expected a strong recovery in the group’s watch sales this year, with current trends broadly in line with the 28 per cent increase in the final quarter of 2020.

Rene Weber, analyst at Vontobel, estimated that only about 2 per cent of Swiss watch sales in value terms were currently done online, with the share varying depending on the brand. Other analysts estimated the online share of sales at around 7 per cent to 9 per cent.

Some Swiss luxury watch brands — such as Patek Philippe and Rolex — have preferred to stick with traditional bricks and mortar stores to sell their products that can cost tens of thousands of dollars.

For Patek, selling online is still not an option, and a test run with retailers during the first lockdown confirmed that strategy, President Thierry Stern said.

“People don’t want to buy a Patek online, the watches are expensive, you lose the beauty, the magic.”

The family-owned luxury watchmaker sees a recovery this year after a 20 per cent sales slump in 2020, but does not expect to return to 2019 sales figures yet. “That will maybe take a year or two, Stern said.

Justin Reis, chief executive of pre-owned platform WatchBox, said customers had become much more engaged with the brands during the pandemic as they became used to actively searching information online, via webinars or social media.

In reaction to this trend, Patek Philippe has made some investment in its digital capabilities, hiring staff and setting up a studio to deliver high-quality virtual product presentations.

Small independent brand H Moser & Cie also invested in digital technology ahead of the Watches & Wonders fair and said it was pleased these costs were lower than for physical watch fairs.

LVMH’s Bulgari said e-commerce had increased “dramatically” in a presentation on Wednesday. “We expanded our technologies and made ourselves more available to clients,” Bulgari watch head Antoine Pin said.

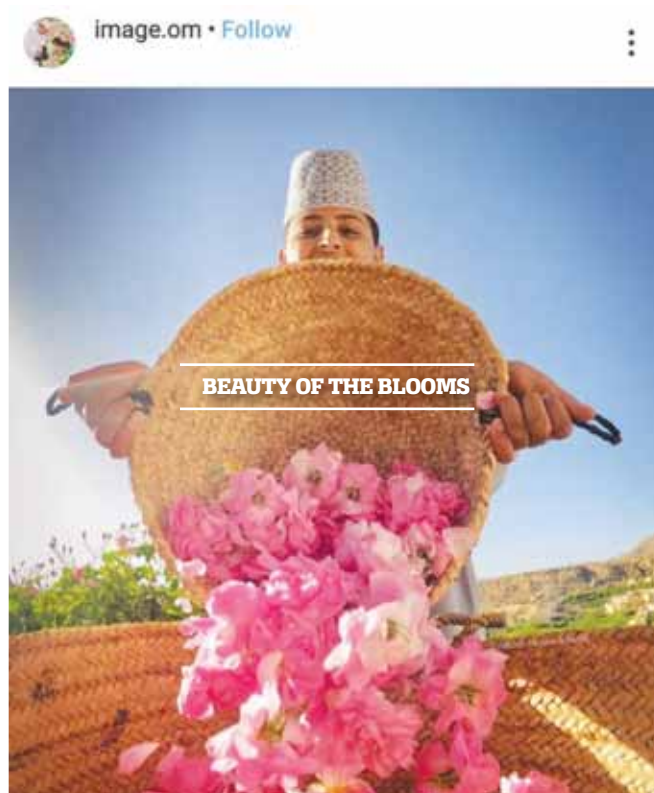
Watches & Wonders’ official platform www.watchesandwonders.com/en, which describes itself as “the biggest watch event ever to take place online”, is giving media and retailers access to presentations held by the 38 participating brands.

“It would be good if consumers could also participate via the Watches & Wonders platform,” Oris Co-Chief Executive Rolf Studer said, saying the brand had developed campaigns to connect more closely with customers on Instagram and launched a watch directly to its online community via Zoom. — Reuters



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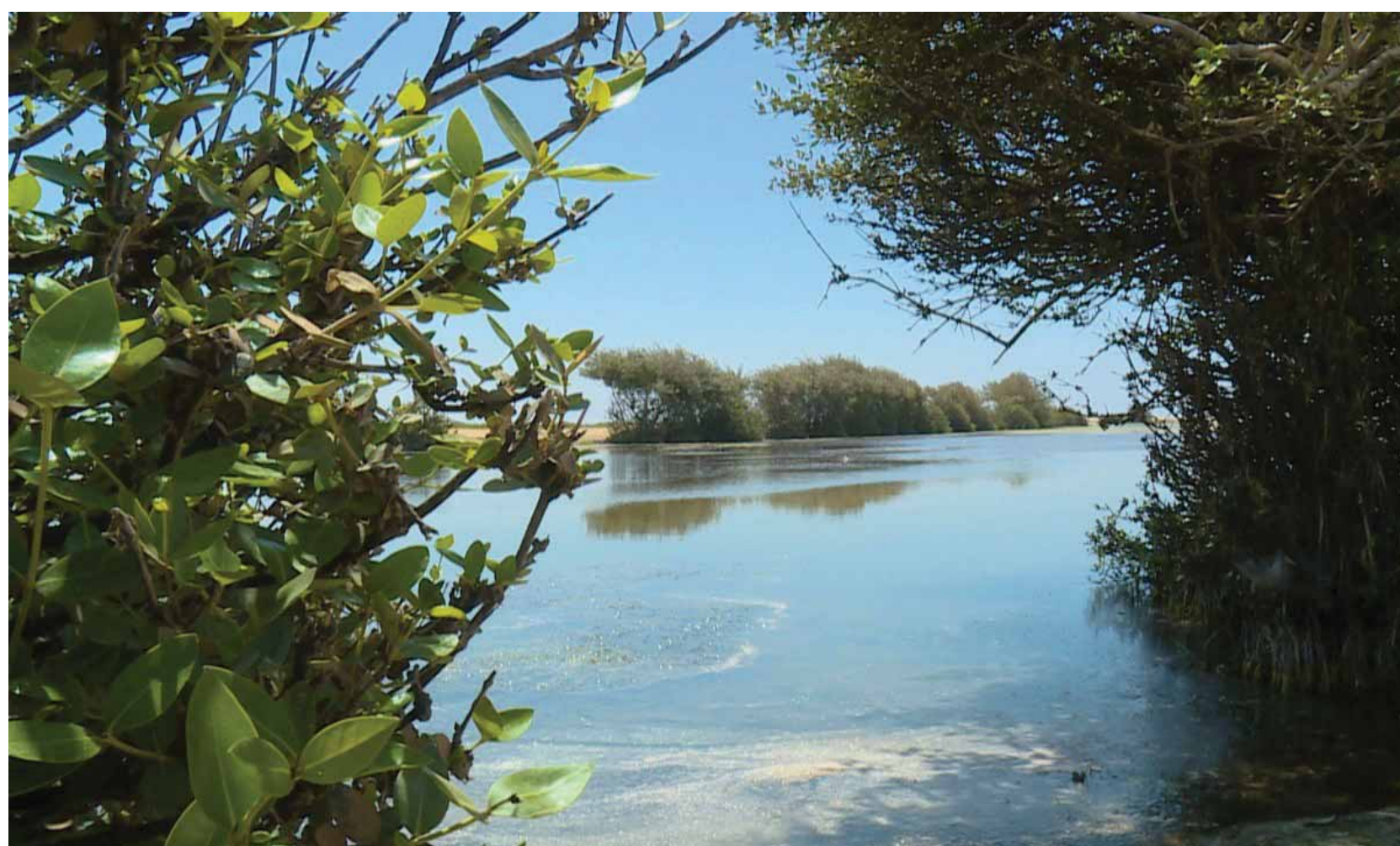
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CHANGING WORLD

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For camping lovers, Wadi Tharf is the destination

Wadi Tharf in the Wilayat of Duqm, 120 km from the centre of the wilayat, is distinguished by its picturesque nature and its varied dense trees and low temperature throughout the season. It is a tourist destination for lovers of camping, trekking and travel enthusiasts.

In the wadi, which is one of the largest wadis in Duqm and the Governorate of Al Wusta in general, there are mangroves, Ghaf trees, palm trees and natural herbs that are commensurate with the nature of the wadi. Several types of migratory birds around the world are present in the four seasons and there are some rocks with beautiful formations.

Khulaid al Junaibi said that Wadi Tharf includes three wells on the eastern side and also have khawrs such as Khawr Dharf, Khawr Mataqa and Al Khor Al Oud, that con-

tain shrimp and bayah fish. There are also five wells on the western side, characterised by soft white sand.

Ayn al Hob, is an ancient well-known spring for the people near the wadi and is distinguished by its freshwater, as these wells were a source for watering the convoys passing by and the people of the wilayat near the wadi and it is still a source of drinking for camels and livestock.

Thuwaini al Junaibi, one of the residents of Wadi Tharf, said that the area of the wadi extends about 50 km in length and flows into the sea. There is an ancient archaeological landmark built of stones in a circular shape called the Sifah in addition to the presence of reefs in it such as Ras Mabid and Ras Ahlit and the reefs of Al Remraam, Halmit, Abu Ghashaba and Khab al Thor, and these places are inhabited by the owners of camels, livestock and the people of the desert.



TRAVEL TALES

Italy's 'Dying Town' seeks Unesco heritage nod



CALLING YOURSELF "The Dying Town" may not sound like the best way of attracting visitors, but Civita has learned to make a living out of dying.

And it has resisted definitive death for so long that Italy has nominated it and the surrounding area of stark cliffs and valleys known as "badlands" to be a Unesco World Heritage Site.

Centuries ago, the town was much larger and connected by road to other settlements. But landslides, earthquakes, cracks and erosion have reduced its size dramatically and left it sitting spectacularly alone at the top of a spur.

When winter clouds are low,

medieval period to reach the present day", said Luca Profili, 32, the Mayor of Bagnoregio, of which Civita is a part.

"This place is so fragile", he said.

That fragility is measured in part by an "extensometer", an external telescopic rod that detects movement.

The Civita that remains today is mostly from the Medieval period and measures about 152 by 91 metres (500 by 300 feet), less than two soccer pitches. Its main square is about the size of a basketball court.

Once spread out on a hill about three times its current size, over the centuries entire



Civita looks like a floating castle in the air. On a clear day, the rock on which it rests looks like a slice of a multi-layered cake.

Clay from an inland sea a million years ago supports strata of compacted ash and magma from subsequent volcanic eruptions.

Civita's past, present and future are the stuff of a geologist's dream, with a major landslide that occurred in 1114 still under study today.

"During three millennia, regressive erosion has practically reduced Civita to a nucleus, leaving the square and a few streets around it", said Luca Costantini, 49, a geologist who is part of project to monitor and slow down the erosion.

In underground caverns cut out of soft volcanic rock known as tufo, steel bars hold walls together.

"Our motto is 'resilience' because Civita was founded by the Etruscans, passed through the Roman era and the entire

neighbourhoods collapsed in landslides. Today it is accessible via a long and steep ramp for pedestrians or golf carts.

The number of permanent residents fluctuates between 10 to 14 depending on the season. Before the pandemic Civita was a draw for tourists travelling between Rome and Florence.

Road signs direct visitors to "Civita — The Dying Town".

Stefano Lucarini, 29, bought a restaurant in Civita in March, 2020, just days before the first Covid lockdown.

"The timing was not great," he joked. But he is optimistic that after the pandemic, the town can get back on its feet.

"The environmental risk is worrying (but) we hope that for many years everyone will be able to enjoy the town", he said.

The mayor's spokesman, Roberto Pomi, said Italy submitted the heritage site proposal in January and expects Unesco to decide in June next year. — **Reuters**



Improving local honey to cater to buyers abroad

BY STAFF REPORTER

An announcement from the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry in North Al Batinah Governorate about targeting 100 small enterprises and home projects during this year has led Ohood al Shibli to benefit from the opportunity to open her own outlet in one of the biggest malls in the wilayat.

The space is free for one month for small entrepreneurs; with the aim of supporting and enabling them to market their products of all kinds.

This gave Ohood the opportunity to obtain an outlet platform in City Centre Sohar, which marked a new start for

pleted 7 years as a job-seeker. She got her degree from Sohar University. Her knowledge in modern marketing and her familiarity with all social media platforms led her to be one of the ambitious Omani youth models in the field of trade.

Ohood, who is today one of the rising entrepreneurs in the North Al Batinah Governorate, shared that starting the project allowed her to coordinate and partner with Omani beekeepers. She tapped into the extensive experience of these Omani beekeepers to get the best products that she in turn can sell to her customers.

Today, Ohood is marketing the company products in Muscat, Sohar and Liwa, in addition to exporting to some foreign markets, especially the Gulf



her in marketing her Omani honey products both locally and abroad.

After she completed the month-long free use of the platform, Ohood found herself ready to expand and compete more. She made the decision to permanently rent a store in the mall — an action which she defines as a qualitative leap in her commercial project.

Since the time she started getting aggressive with her marketing, some foreign shoppers were amazed at the products and the way Omani honey was presented. Some of the shoppers examined the products more with a few of them sending them to laboratories for further study. The completion of the exams led to some proposing to Ohood to import the products to Britain strengthening the status of her products even abroad.

Ohood started the project to produce and sell Omani honey after she com-



markets. She has obtained laboratory certificates that prove the quality of honey for each type, in addition, her knowledge of marketing has helped her to achieve her target. She has prepared brochures for each type of honey listing its benefits, components and the diseases this type of honey could cure from, like the respiratory system or the digestive system, and how to use it.

Ohood and the staff in her company were also affected by the economic effects of Covid-19, but she was able to think of alternative solutions and she succeeded in that. She explained, "To overcome the effects of Corona we made promotions and decided to launch free deliveries. We have introduced new products that the market needs more in the Corona period and focused on them in terms of marketing and promotion."

She added, "We also encountered difficulty in accessing packaging materials that we used to import from China, but we were able to find alternatives in the Sultanate, and our emergency loan from the Oman Development Bank helped to meet the financial obligations to pay the rents and pay the salaries of employees."



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Nano City Project makes headway in Sur



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 10

A high level delegation comprising Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation; Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; and Dr Saleh bin Said bin Salim Masan, Under-Secretary for Commerce and Industry, recently visited Sur Industrial City, which is part of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn).

The delegation was introduced to Nano City project which will comprise nanotechnology related industries on an area of one million sqm focusing on 11 sectors which are cosmetics and personal care; raw materials and chemicals; agriculture, pesticides and biocides; electrical and electronic equipment; healthcare; recycling and waste; textile industry; polymer industry; food industries; building materials; and machinery and metrology, in addition to commercial and residential projects.

The Nano City project aims at

attracting sustainable projects and foreign investments, creating job opportunities, and providing an ideal environment for innovation and entrepreneurship.

During the visit, Eng Abdulqadir bin Salim al Balushi, Director-General of Sur Industrial City, stated that the industrial city is situated on a strategic location on a total area of 36,100,000 sqm and is home to major projects as well as Small and Medium Enterprises in various sectors.

Sur Industrial City also enjoys the presence of several service projects such as Sur Gate, Hay Al Sharooq Residential Complex, and Hay Al Sharooq International School.

“The masterplan of Sur Industrial City comprises key sectors and projects such as the commercial port (5 million sqm), warehouse and logistics sector (2.63 million sqm), heavy industries sector (2.65 million sqm), light and medium industries sector (2.61 million sqm), commercial activities sector (0.9 million sqm), residential sector (3.26 million sqm), and IT sector (1.10 million sqm),” Al Balushi pointed out.

‘MSX’ a new milestone in Oman’s capital market journey

MONUMENTAL STEP: MSX with the support of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), will work to increase Oman’s FDI and help support MSX members to participate in the continued march of renaissance

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 10

Pursuant to Royal Decree 5/2021 issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on January 5, 2021, an Omani closed joint stock company has now been established under the name of Muscat Stock Exchange SAOC (MSX), to takeover and undertake all activities and functions of the Muscat Securities Market (MSM). In accordance with the Royal Decree, all assets, liabilities, activities, rights and functions of MSM stand transferred and assigned to MSX.

Muscat Stock Exchange SAOC will operate under the umbrella of Oman Investment Authority, established to provide financial solutions to the Sultanate’s diverse and growing economic demands. MSX with the support of OIA will work to increase Oman’s Foreign Direct Investments as well as help support MSX members to participate in the continued march of renaissance to find new avenues and instruments for the growth of Sultanate’s national



economy.

The transformation of the market to a closed Omani joint stock company will enhance the investment development process, both by providing an effective platform full of opportunities for listing and trading securities, as well as supporting diversity in economic development plans and ensuring the sustainability of financial instruments. With this transformation, MSX aspires to take a leading role in regional as well international securities arena through various innovative initiatives aimed at developing the stock exchange with transparency, governance, improved companies performance, increased operational effectiveness and the issuance of new investment opportunities and instruments for the benefit of both local and international investors.

On this occasion, Shaikh Abdullah bin Salem al Salmi, Executive President of the Capital Market Authority, said the transformation of MSM into a joint stock company is a monumental step in the development of the Omani capital market. He also noted that today’s date will be recorded in the history as an importance milestone in Oman’s Capital Market journey.

The creation of MSX as an

The creation of MSX is a step that represents a qualitative leap that shall bring upon us a new era of development followed by the developments in the entire economic framework of the Sultanate

SHAIKH ABDULLAH
BIN SALEM AL SALMI
CMA Executive President

independent institution owned by the Oman Investment Authority is a step that represents a qualitative leap that shall bring upon us a new era of development followed by the developments in the entire economic framework of the Sultanate. This step is also in line with the global best practices of governance, which include providing exchanges with independent legislative structure in order for them to perform better and in a more professional and transparent manner, he said.

Mohammed bin Mahfood al Ardhi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Muscat Stock Exchange, said the new entity will

work under the umbrella of the Omani Investment Authority as one of its companies, and this in turn will push the work process according to a commercial method aimed at raising the efficiency of operations in the Stock Exchange and applying the principles of governance. Horizons will also be opened to work with the agency to list companies from various economic sectors, and this will contribute to raising liquidity levels, increasing the stock market’s depth and its investment attractiveness.

Mulham bin Bashir al Jarf, Acting Deputy President — Investments at OIA, said the establishment of MSX under the OIA’s umbrella gives it greater empowerment to deliver on its mandate. MSX will benefit from the investment experience that OIA currently entails. In addition, with its vast investment portfolio and connections across the board, OIA will help increase MSX’s reach and support the growth of the market necessary for its sustainable development. Moreover, being the owner of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), OIA can contribute to the growth of MSX by perhaps preparing SOEs for future public offering and increase the depth of local capital market.

Tethys Oil pledges \$47m investments in Oman assets

PROMISING GROWTH: Swedish energy firm is one of the largest concession holders in the Sultanate in terms of acreage, with a portfolio of assets spread over 55,000 sq kilometres.

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

International energy firm Tethys Oil says investments in its expanding portfolio of upstream Oil & Gas assets in the Sultanate are projected at around \$47 million in 2021.

Oman is presently the Swedish Oil & Gas firm’s core area of focus with a portfolio of four licenses covering a total area of around

55,000 sq kilometres — effectively making Tethys Oil one of the largest concession holders in the Sultanate in terms of acreage.

In a letter to shareholders, featured in the newly published 2020 Annual Report, Tethys Oil Managing Director Magnus Nordin said the company would continue to capitalise on “promising growth opportunities in the Sultanate of Oman” linked to its “enhanced asset portfolio.

“2021 should see five exploration/appraisal wells and new seismic studies conducted across our asset portfolio all funded by our profitable production asset (Blocks 3&4) while leaving room to continue to fund our growth and our (dividend) distributions to shareholders,” Nordin stated.

Of the total commitment of around \$47 million pledged this year, the lion’s share of around \$32 million is earmarked towards



Blocks 3&4, a pair of flagship producing blocks located in central Oman. Tethys Oil has a 30 per cent working interest in the blocks, with the rest shared between CC Energy Development Oman Branch (50 per cent) and Mitsui E&P Middle East (20 per cent). CC Energy Development is also the operator of Blocks 3&4.

“The focus of the work

programme on Blocks 3&4 is continued development drilling, upgrading infrastructure with focus on asset integrity and debottlenecking, continue the gas utilisation project and the drilling of exploration wells,” the company said in its Annual Report.

The work programme for Block 49, located in the southwest of the Sultanate, will primarily

The work programme for Block 49, located in the southwest of the Sultanate, will primarily focus on completing the drilling, testing and evaluation of the newly drilled Thameen-1 exploration well

focus on completing the drilling, testing and evaluation of the newly drilled Thameen-1 exploration well.

Although no flows were recorded at surface, logs indicated a gross hydrocarbon column of close to 40 metres, said the company, adding that it will plan the next steps for the Block once all of the data linked to the well are compiled and evaluated.

Last year, US energy firm EOG Resources acquired a 50 per cent interest in the licence following a farm-out agreement with Tethys Oil, which remains the operator.

Block 56, located in the southeast of the country, will see up to three wells drilled in the Al Jumud area of the concession, in addition to the planning of a 3D seismic acquisition in the central area of the block. Tethys Oil holds a 65 per cent interest in Block 56 and is the operator of the concession.

Finally Block 58, which was awarded to Tethys Oil last July, represents a “new exciting exploration licence”, according to the company.

“The Block borders Tethys Oil’s other operated block, Block 49 and holds some very interesting geological features that hopefully will be upgraded to drillable prospects in the not-too-distant future,” it added.

Key factors for planning a successful business

I am always happy to receive positive feedback for one of the articles that I wrote on the *Oman Daily Observer*. Even more happy if such a testimonial comes from a young Omani entrepreneur.

This time was Ms Hannan who wrote me on LinkedIn. In her message she asked for guidance on how to start planning an e-commerce platform. In her idea there is a market opportunity around the sale and distribution of traditional Omani products, such as perfumes, jewellery, art and garments. My first thought was to ask her about the target audience. “Will you sell outside of Oman?” was my first question.

This is a crucial piece of information because it might change the plan completely. If the idea is to sell abroad, then solving logistics would be my first concern. However, she answered

that she would first want to sell in Oman only. That takes away a lot of headaches for sure, but on the other hand, it substantially reduces the market size. The population of Oman is slightly in excess of 5 million, therefore the potential clients are limited. However, I am very much in support of niche initiatives with a focused target.

Despite the fact that Ms Hannan is aiming to sell within Oman, my second question was about logistic. “Do you have a logistics partner in mind?”. She answered that she does not have one at the moment. I would urge anyone planning to launch an online business to be “rock solid” with the delivery of the products and to have a crystal-clear policy when it comes to returns.

For example: Delivery in 48 hours and return the product within a week. In my experience,



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IF YOU BROWSE THE PRODUCT REVIEWS OF ANY MARKETPLACE, YOU WILL FIND THAT MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, REVIEWS TALK ABOUT THE SERVICE, NOT ONLY THE PRODUCT RECEIVED

finding supplier is easy and driving traffic to a website is an affordable task nowadays. What is really hard — and frankly that is where I see most businesses fail — is to deliver a state of the art service that secures returning customers.

If you browse the product reviews of any marketplace, you will find that more often than not, reviews talk about the service, not only the product received. For example, frequently the one-star reviews (one out of five being the worst) might read along this line: “The packaging was damaged, I asked for a refund and the seller is not responding!”.

When that happens, we can consider this a client lost to competitors. This is why, at the cost of sounding like a broken record, a logistic partnership is a must before we even start onboarding suppliers.

My third question to Ms Hannan was: “How about licences?”. Another hot burning topic. It is essential to obtain all the required licences in order to start a specific business. In Oman we are blessed with endless support for entrepreneurs, and a clear system of licences that allows anyone to get started with a new venture in a reasonably short period of time. Compliance is key when operating any business.

Ms Hannan told me that she is going to keep me updated on her endeavours. I am genuinely looking forward to seeing her business idea taking place and attract the success that it deserves. To all of my reader in Oman I extend my support when it comes to discuss business ideas and plan for execution. *[The columnist is a member of the International Press Association]*

Meethaq offers waiver of first year annual fees

MUSCAT: Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat has announced that customers can avail of a special offer of waiver of annual fees on all primary and supplementary credit cards for the first year.

The offer will be available for a limited time only and is open to all current and new customers who would like to apply for primary and supplementary credit cards for their family members.

Meethaq presently offers 4 different credit cards to its customers including the Hafawa Visa Signature credit card, the Titanium Mastercard credit card, Meethaq-LuLu co-branded credit card and the Standard Mastercard credit card.



MSM WEEKLY REVIEW

MSM Index advances on improved trading activity

The MSM30 Index ended the week up by 1.15 per cent as trading activity picked up as compared to the previous week as well as gain in all sub-indices, led by the Industrial Sector at 2.03 per cent, followed by the Financial Sector at 1.03 per cent and Services Sector at 0.24 per cent. The MSM Shariah Index was lower by 1.05 per cent.

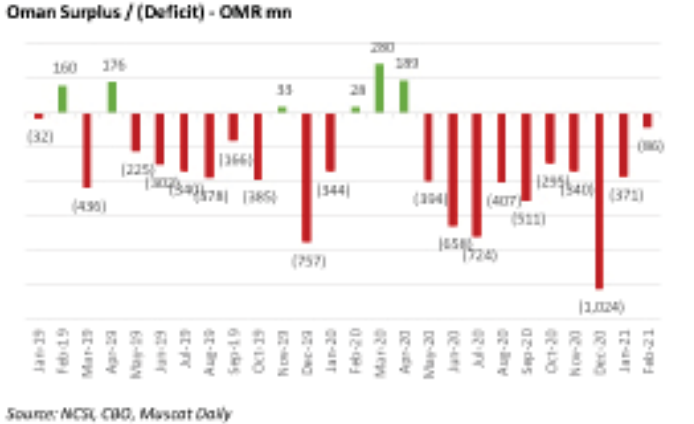
Standard and Poor's (S&P) Global Ratings has affirmed Oman's 'B+/B-' long and short-term foreign and local currency sovereign credit ratings, while maintaining it Stable outlook for the Sultanate.

"We affirmed our ratings on Oman because we consider that the authorities have outlined a more solid path to reduce the historically-high fiscal deficits, backed by stronger political will to implement the related reform measures.

The Omani government has embarked on a 2021-2025 fiscal plan to improve public finances and has implemented several reforms since last year", S&P noted in a statement.

NBO announced that it has successfully concluded the issuance of \$300 million additional tier 1 Basel III compliant capital securities to certain shareholders of NBO (and/or their nominees). NBO mandated Citigroup Global Markets Ltd, The Commercial Bank Qatar and NBO as joint lead managers for the issuance.

The capital securities will carry an initial coupon rate determined by reference to US treasuries with a maturity of five years plus a margin of



Source: MSM, CBO, Muscat Daily

7.144 per cent and are listed on Euronext Dublin.

Oman Arab Bank had also recently announced approval of shareholders at its Annual General Meeting (AGM) for the issuance of Basel III compliant additional Tier 1 Capital Securities of up to RO 97 million, in one or more tranches and to be listed on international exchange.

These capital issuances of banks are expected to provide a boost to their capital adequacy ratios. Ahli Bank's issuance will support its Core Equity Capital Ratio (in addition to the other ratios) while NBO's and OAB's issuance will support its Tier 1 Capital Ratio and Total CAR. The minimum capital adequacy requirement is 11 per cent with minimum of 7 per cent in common equity and 9 per cent in Tier 1 Capital. Capital Conservation Buffer of 2.5 per cent has been set, in addition. (BSD/2018/1 dated March 20, 2018).

Due to covid19, CBO has reduced minimum capital conservation buffer to 1.25 per cent, making total CAR requirement 12.25 per cent.

As per the latest bulletin of Ministry of Finance, by the end of February 2021, total public revenue amounted to RO 1,092m, decreasing by

21.6 per cent as compared to the same period of 2020.

This is mainly due to a decline in net oil revenue by (35 per cent) of total revenue. Net oil revenue generated until end of February 2021, after deducting partners' shares as per Exploration and Production Sharing Agreement (EPSA), amounted to RO 603.4 million. By the end of February 2021, the State's General Budget sees a drop in public spending by 8.8 per cent as compared to the same period of 2020. This is as a result of several factors, including a reduction in spending of various Government units. The deficit stands at RO 456.6 million by the end of February 2021.

The total number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) at the end of February 2021 were 50,558 which is an increase by 14 per cent compared to the same period of 2020.

Among the governorates, Muscat topped the list with 34 per cent SMEs registered in February 2021, followed by North Al Batinah with 16 per cent, Al Dakhiliyah with 13 per cent, Dhofar with 8 per cent and the rest of governorates with 30 per cent. *[Courtesy: U-Capital]*

New regional lab designed to conduct 800 PCR tests per day



COLLABORATIVE EFFORT: Sohar Port spearheads CSR project with support of industrial, logistics and utility tenants

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 10

Under the auspices of Dr Ahmed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, the Ministry of Health saw the inauguration of the regional molecular PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) laboratory in the North Al Batinah Governorate last week.

The PCR laboratory is a joint CSR project, in coordination with existing tenants at Sohar Port, who will collectively support the development of the project. The tenants include OQ, Oiltanking Terminals, Sohar Power Company, C Steinweg Oman, Majis Industrial Services and Sohar International Urea and Chemical Industries.

The establishment of the lab follows the MoU agreement of Sohar with the Ministry of Health is in line with the corporate social responsibility objectives, further supported by existing Sohar tenants.

Highlighting the importance of the inauguration of the lab, Omar bin Mahmood al

Mahrizi, CEO of Sohar Freezone — DCEO of Sohar Port said, “The current situation has had adverse effects on people and countries across the globe. Therefore, we believe that it is a shared responsibility for entities across all sectors, to join hands towards enhancing healthcare services and contribute towards improving the quality of services that are provided to safeguard the well-being of citizens.

This led to the decision to carry out this initiative, in collaboration with our tenant companies and will have a positive effect on the level of health care services that will be provided in general.”

Commenting on the inauguration, Sultan bin Saif al Sadi, Director General of Health Services in North Al Batinah Governorate, said, “With the increase in the number of Covid-19 cases across the North Al Batinah in the recent weeks, the demand for having testing facilities have also arisen.

The PCR laboratory will reinforce the health system and is equipped with the latest tools used in the field to prevent and control sources of infection through the utilisation of modern and advanced technology.

The lab is a testament to the efforts of the private sector to

aid Government directives, by reducing the risk of infections and ensure the provision of enhanced healthcare services within the community at North Al Batinah, for the benefit of the Sultanate at large.”

The laboratory will be vital in accelerating diagnostic processes to allow for timely treatment, with the average time to conduct tests expected to reduce from 2 weeks to less than 2 days, once operational.

The lab will be equipped with the latest polymerisation apparatuses, approved by the Ministry of Health, to conduct the required tests for Covid-19.

The devices are also planned to include analysis capabilities for other ailments, including influenza, haemorrhagic fevers and others in the future.

The tenant companies have contributed to the enhancement of the lab, through the provision of more than 8 of the latest polymerase testing devices. This will enable the lab to conduct 600-800 tests a day, as compared to 80-100 tests currently, in addition to analysing other infectious diseases, positioning it at the same capacity as the public health centre in Darsait. With the opening of the PCR lab, the average time required to perform the tests are expected to decrease to 3 days.



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China hits Alibaba with record \$2.78 bn fine for market abuses

SHANGHAI: Chinese regulators hit e-commerce giant Alibaba with a record 18.2 billion yuan (\$2.78 billion) fine on Saturday over practices deemed to be an abuse of the company's dominant market position.

Alibaba, the Jack Ma-founded Chinese e-commerce leader and one of the world's most valuable companies, said it accepted the penalty and pledged to outline plans on Monday for bringing its operations in compliance.

The fine appeared to cap a government crackdown on major Chinese tech platforms, and Alibaba in particular, over allegations of anti-competitive behaviour and misuse of consumer data.

The State Administration for Market Regulation said it assessed the fine after concluding an investigation into Alibaba that began in December.

The probe centred on Alibaba's practice of forbidding merchants who wish to sell their wares on its popular online marketplaces from simultaneously offering them on rival e-commerce sites.

"Since 2015, Alibaba Group has abused its dominant position in the market" with the exclusivity requirement, the regulator said.

The requirement harmed competition, innovation, and the interests of merchants and consumers, it added.



A logo of Alibaba Group is seen during the World Internet Conference in Wuzhen, Zhejiang province, China. — Reuters

The fine was a record and nearly three times the almost \$1 billion levied against Qualcomm in 2015, Bloomberg said.

The size of the penalty was determined after the market watchdog decided to fine Alibaba four per cent of its 2019 sales of 455.7 billion yuan.

Shortly after the decision was announced, Alibaba issued a contrite statement that used many of the government's recent talking points on the issue, pledging to make changes to safeguard fair competition. "We accept the penalty with sincerity and will ensure our compliance with determination," it said.

The company added that it

would hold a conference call with investors on Monday to share its "thoughts and plans for the long-term healthy development of our business in the future."

"We are committed to ensuring an operating environment for our merchants and partners that is more open, more equitable, more efficient and more inclusive in sharing the fruits of growth," it said.

E-commerce giants Alibaba and JD.com, along with messaging-and-gaming colossus Tencent, became hugely profitable on the back of growing Chinese digital lifestyles and government restrictions on major US competitors in the

domestic market.

But as the platforms amassed hundreds of millions of regular users, concern has risen over their influence in China, where tech-savvy consumers use them to communicate, shop, pay bills, book taxis, take out loans and perform a range of other daily tasks.

Alibaba has faced special scrutiny after Ma criticised Chinese regulators in October as being stuck in the past after they expressed growing concern over the push into online lending, wealth management and insurance products by Alibaba's online-payments arm, Ant Group. — AFP

BHP, Vale Samarco JV files for Brazil bankruptcy protection

RIO DE JANEIRO: Samarco Mineracao SA, a joint venture between Brazilian miner Vale SA and BHP Group Ltd, has filed for bankruptcy protection to prevent creditors' claims from affecting its operations, Vale said in a Friday securities filing.

The collapse of a dam at the Samarco mine complex in 2015 killed 19 people and severely polluted the Doce River with mining waste, one of Brazil's worst environmental disasters. The facility, which resumed production in December, is the focus of significant litigation from bondholders holding nearly \$5 billion in debt.

"The (judicial reorganisation) filing is necessary to prevent legal actions already underway... from affecting Samarco's ability to produce, ship, receive for its exportations and to fund the normal course of its activities," the company said.

Vale said the bankruptcy protection filing would not impact Samarco's ability to pay reparations to those affected by the 2015 dam burst. It said out-of-court



A woman protests against BHP in central London, in this file photo. — Reuters

negotiations with creditors had slowly broken down over time.

The in-court reorganisation request, filed in the state of Minas Gerais, is roughly analogous to a Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing in the United States.

Samarco has \$4.7 billion of financial debt from non-related parties, Vale said. In the years following the Samarco disaster, Samarco had negotiated with creditors to reach a restructuring agreement. However, those talks slowed in 2019 after changes in dam regulations in Brazil, which materially affected operations at Samarco, Vale said.

In 2019, another dam burst at a Vale mine in Brazil, killing some 270 people and prompting a tightening of the rules governing mining dams. — Reuters

Italy's economy to recover in 2022

ROME: Italy's economy, the third largest in the euro zone, will only recover from its slump at the end of next year, the business lobby Confindustria said.

After a record fall of 8.9 per cent last year — the biggest in Italy's postwar history — gross domestic product (GDP) should expand by 4.1 per cent this year and by 4.2 per cent in 2022, the association said.

"The economy should fill the hole created by the pandemic in 2020 at the end of 2022," Confindustria said.

Confindustria's forecasts were more optimistic than the IMF's, which last week predicted growth of 4.2 per cent and 3.6 per cent in 2021 and 2022. — AFP

Saudi Aramco in \$12.4 bn oil pipeline deal with EIG-led group

RIYADH: Energy giant Saudi Aramco said it has struck a \$12.4-billion deal to sell a minority stake in a newly formed oil pipeline business to a consortium led by US-based EIG Global Energy Partners.

The deal underscores how Aramco seeks to monetise its once-untouchable assets to generate revenue for the Saudi government as it accelerates efforts to diversify the oil-reliant economy.

"Upon closing, Aramco will receive upfront proceeds of around \$12.4 billion, further strengthening its balance sheet through one of the largest energy infrastructure deals globally," the company said in a statement.

"As part of the transaction, a newly-formed Aramco subsidiary,

Aramco Oil Pipelines Company, will lease usage rights in Aramco's stabilised crude oil pipelines network for a 25-year period."

The EIG-led consortium will hold a 49-per cent stake in the subsidiary, Aramco said, adding that it will retain "full ownership and operational control".

In a separate statement, EIG, a Washington-based energy investment firm, said the new venture is valued at approximately \$25.3 billion. The deal covers all of Aramco's "existing and future stabilised crude pipelines" in the kingdom, an elaborate network that connects oil fields to downstream facilities, EIG said.

"We are proud to partner with Aramco in this marquee global infrastructure asset," said EIG Chairman R Blair Thomas.



Employees work at Saudi Aramco's oil facility in Abqaiq, Saudi Arabia. — Reuters

Neither company said which other firms were part of the consortium.

The announcement comes as Aramco faces pressure to maintain hefty dividend payments to the Saudi government, its biggest

shareholder, despite posting consecutive falls in profits since it began disclosing earnings in 2019.

Last month, Aramco posted a 44.4-per cent slump in 2020 net profit due to lower crude prices, piling pressure on government

finances as Riyadh pursues multi-billion dollar projects to diversify the economy.

The company's debt has climbed as Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest crude exporter, was hammered last year by the double whammy of low prices and sharp cuts in production triggered by the coronavirus pandemic.

Even so, Aramco said it stuck by its commitment to pay shareholders dividends worth \$75 billion in 2020 — an amount that exceeds the declared profit and available cash flow.

"The (EIG) deal marks an innovative step for Aramco as it seeks to monetise assets to pay down debt, maintain its dividend payments and fund planned investments," the Energy Intelligence group said. — AFP

Airlines pull Boeing 737 MAX jets after production snag

WASHINGTON: Airlines pulled dozens of 737 MAX jets from service on Friday after Boeing Co warned them of a possible electrical insulation fault in the recent production of some planes.

The glitch is the latest problem to beset Boeing's most-sold model but is not related to computer design problems that contributed to a 20-month safety ban in the wake of two crashes.

Regulators said the new problem involved the electrical grounding — or connections designed to maintain safety in



A Boeing 737 MAX takes off during a flight test in Washington. — Reuters

the event of a surge of voltage — inside a backup power control system. Boeing told airlines a fix could take hours or a few days per airplane.

US Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said regulators wanted to ensure "full confidence" in the planes forced to halt flights on Friday, before they could fly again.

Shares in Boeing fell around 1.4 per cent as most analysts told investors the issue was unlikely to cause lengthy disruption.

The issue affects about 90

planes globally, sources briefed on the matter said. That compares with 453 delivered since the plane first went into service, based on data up to end-February.

Boeing said a total of 16 operators were affected.

The top three US 737 MAX operators — Southwest Airlines, American Airlines and United Airlines — said they had removed a total of 63 jets from service following the notice from Boeing.

The chief operating officer of American Airlines, which said the issue affected 17 of its most

recently delivered 737 MAX, told employees that Boeing has traced the issue to a production change made in the installation process.

People familiar with the matter said the problem had been traced back to a change in the material used for insulation once production of the 737 MAX resumed last year. A freeze on deliveries following the crashes was lifted in late 2020.

The status of Boeing deliveries was not immediately clear, with one source saying they too could be briefly disrupted. — Reuters