

Rafo begins recruitment drive

In response to the Royal directives issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Supreme Commander, to expedite the recruitment of nationals, the Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo) is completing the procedures to receive new recruits. The move comes in continuation of the national efforts made by the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) in coordination with the Ministry of Labour to employ nationals in different corps of SAF and the other departments of the Ministry of Defence. **DETAILS ON P2**



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OMAN OBSERVER

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P10

OMAN LOCK HORNS WITH QATAR TODAY

P16

AL AWABI'S KOR AL GHABA A MAJOR ATTRACTION

P20

YELLEN URGES G7 TO KEEP UP FISCAL SUPPORT FOR INVESTMENTS

MUSCAT

PACT TO TRAIN OMANIS AS MEDICS ON RIG SITES

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has signed agreements with two contractors to employ more than 55 Omanis as qualified medics on rig sites. Under the terms of the Memorandums of Collaboration (MoCs), PDO will train the nationals who will then secure work with Abraj Energy Services (AES) and KCA Deutag (KCAD) on the successful completion of their training. The initiative is part of a wider move by PDO to Omanise all rig medical personnel across its entire operation. Participants will be certified by Opal upon successful completion of the programme and will be employed by the contractors. **DETAILS ON P17**

NEW DELHI

INDIA TO EASE LOCKDOWN RULES

India reported 114,460 new coronavirus infections on Sunday, the lowest in two months, while the death toll increased by 2,677, as parts of the country prepared to ease movement restrictions. India has the world's second-largest number of coronavirus infections after the United States with total cases at 28.8 million, according to health ministry data. The country has suffered 346,759 deaths. A second wave of the coronavirus that has largely battered the rural interiors of the country is yet to abate but New Delhi and other cities are working towards allowing more businesses to operate and movement rules to be relaxed from Monday onwards.

INSIDE



SRI LANKA RECOVERS BLACK BOX FROM SINKING SHIP

P7



FROM JERUSALEM NEIGHBOURHOOD TO GLOBAL HASHTAG

P9

HONOURABLE LADY RECEIVES NEPAL AMBASSADOR



The Honourable Lady, Spouse of His Majesty the Sultan, on Sunday received at Al Barakah Palace Sarmila Parajuli Dhakal, Ambassador of Nepal to the Sultanate. During the meeting, she exchanged cordial conversations with the ambassador, wishing her success in her tour of duty in the Sultanate. On her turn, the ambassador expressed her utmost thanks and appreciation for the Honourable Lady's best wishes. She wished her permanent health, happiness and long life. – ONA

First Omani doctor to get Harold Johnson Award

MUSCAT: Dr Arwa bint Zakaria al Riyamiyah, senior consultant haematology at the Sultan Qaboos University Hospital and Director of the haematology programme at the Oman Medical Specialty Board (OMSB), received the Harold Johnson Award from the International Society of Blood Transfusion (ISBT).

In comments to Oman News Agency (ONA), Dr Al Riyamiyah said that the study was conducted in cooperation with the members of the ISBT's advisory board and represents the Middle East region on a study about the impact of coronavirus on the employees of blood banks in the world in the first months of the pandemic.

A total of 283 blood bank employees from the age group 40 years and under including 124 physicians, participated in the study, she said, adding that the study results showed that 41 per cent of the participants declared that the tasks assigned to them increased during the



Dr Al Riyamiyah

pandemic as employees contracted Covid-19, while most employees followed social distancing in their institutions and 46 per cent applied social distancing at their homes.

Dr Al Riyamiyah said that 55 per cent of the respondents admitted that protective equipment is not made adequately available for them at the workplace and more than half of them said they are worried that family members get infected with the virus due to the nature of their work and the lack of protective equipment.

TURN TO P2

MORE VACCINES ARRIVE



The Sultanate received a new batch of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines on Sunday night. The consignment which arrived at Muscat International Airport, includes 210,000 doses. – ONA

GOOD TURNOUT FOR MASS VACCINATION

RUMOURS ON VACCINES ARE UNFOUNDED

KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

The National Immunisation Campaign began in the Sultanate with a good turnout of people at five centres in Muscat Governorate and other locations in different parts of the Sultanate.

People who got the first dose of the vaccine turned up in good numbers to take the second dose.

The first dose for the target group will begin from next week at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, according to the Ministry of Health representatives.

"We have started receiving people from 8 am till 1 pm for second dose vaccination of Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccine. It will continue for the next one week, followed by first dose from next week. Those contacted by the ministry can come and get the vaccine", the ministry officials in charge at the Jabr bin Said School in Wattayah, told the Observer. The school has been converted into a vaccination centre.

In each governorate, every wilayat has a vaccination centre depending upon the number of people within the target groups. People above 65, those suffering from chronic diseases, healthcare workers, other frontline workers, General Education Diploma students and supervisory bodies for the GED examinations and those working for the Royal Oman Police



(ROP) are in the current target group.

People aged 45 and above will be vaccinated from next week, the source further added. Health workers in private health institutions who have not yet received the vaccine, service providers and military and security personnel will also be vaccinated during these days.

FOLLOW-UP MEASURES

Members of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic on Sunday visited the immunisation centre at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex (SQSC) to have a close look at the process of vaccination

of target segments as part of the ongoing National Immunisation Campaign.

The members of the committee listened to a briefing about the procedures for vaccination. They were updated on the mechanisms of coordination and reception of entitled groups, as well as precautionary measures undertaken. They commended the turnout of citizens and residents who came forward to take the vaccine.

Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information and member of the Supreme Covid-19 Committee, said that the visit aims to follow-up the implementation of the anti-Covid-19 Immunisation Plan.

TURN TO P3

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 33°C Min 29°C SALALAH: Max 31°C Min 25°C NIZWA: Max 44°C Min 30°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 05:20 FAJR: 03:53 DHUHR: 12:11 ASR: 15:29 MAGHRIB: 18:57 ISHA: 20:19

His Majesty receives message from Yemen President

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from Field Marshal President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi of the Republic of Yemen.

The message deals with the bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries and means of promoting them in all spheres.

The message was received by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, when he received here on Sunday Dr Ahmad Awad Mubarak, Minister of Foreign and Expatriates Affairs of Yemen.



The meeting reviewed developments of situations in Yemen and the UN efforts to end the war in a way that preserves unity and safety of Yemen. The two sides reiterated

the importance of enhancing cooperation with all parties to achieve security and stability for Yemen by supporting efforts of the UN and US envoys.

The meeting was attended by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, Khalid bin Hashel al Muslahi, Head of the Minister's Office Department, and a number of officials from the Foreign Ministry.

It was also attended by Dr Khalid Saleh, Ambassador of the Republic of Yemen to the Sultanate. — ONA

Nearly 81% of GED students vaccinated



MUSCAT: As many as 61,553 have been vaccinated so far within the current drive being undertaken by the Ministries of Health and Education for immunisation against coronavirus (Covid-19).

The proportion of the General Education Diploma (GED) students and the faculty supervising the GED exams in all governorates vaccinated so far stands at 81 per cent.

Muscat Governorate had the largest number of vaccinated (16,935 or 99 per cent of the target segment), followed by North Al Batinah Governorate (11,397 or 82 per cent of the target segment) and Al Dakhiliyah Governorate (9,360 or 89 per cent of the target

segment).

The Ministry of Education has pointed out that the vaccination of students is optional for all segments and that parents have been notified accordingly. All students will be allowed to sit for the exams, irrespective of whether or not they took the vaccine, affirmed the Ministry. Yet, it advised all to get the vaccine to safeguard their health. All countries plan to make Covid-19 vaccination a prerequisite to travellers' entry to their lands, observed the Ministry, noting that students who obtain scholarships may require the vaccination to pursue their studies abroad.

— ONA

Omani doctor receives Harold Johnson Award

FROM PAGE 1

Regarding the psychological and social impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, Dr Al Riyamiyah said that the study showed that half of the participants experienced increased tension due to different factors including those associated with work such as staff shortage and concerns that they or their family members get infected with the virus, lack of adequate support and attention for their children while they are working, the dependence on distance learning as well as the financial impact of the pandemic and the difficulty in getting basic supplies for their families.

Dr Al Riyamiyah has become the first Omani woman to receive the Harold Johnson award. She focuses on blood transfusion research and has conducted nearly 60 scientific researches in haematology and blood transfusion fields. She also presented working papers at several regional and international conferences.

Dr Al Riyamiyah was selected to serve as an ambassador for the American Association of Blood Banks (AABB) as the first Arab woman ambassador to be chosen to represent the AABB in international events. She was also chosen as chairperson of the advisory board of the International Society of Blood Transfusion (ISBT) in 2018.

— ONA

Rafo begins recruitment



MUSCAT: In response to the Royal directives issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Supreme Commander, to expedite the recruitment of nationals, the Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo) is completing the procedures to receive new recruits.

The move comes in continuation of the national efforts made by the Sultan's Armed

Forces (SAF) in coordination with the ministry of labour to employ nationals in different corps of SAF and the other departments of the ministry of defence.

Rafo has deployed its expertise, capacities as well as its administrative and health requirements and means of transportation, to provide a suitable environment for

speedy implementation of the recruitment procedures for joining the military service.

In addition, SAF continues to receive groups of applicants who meet the general conditions for recruitment in accordance with a scheduled time frame for recruitment at different corps of SAF and the other units of the Ministry of Defence. — ONA

No reprieve from daily Covid cases, deaths

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Sultanate got no reprieve from the daily cases and deaths, which continue to be alarmingly high.

On Sunday, the Ministry of Health (MoH) reported 3,177 and 28 deaths for the last three days.

Of these, 1,157 cases were recorded on Thursday, 940 on Friday, and 1,080 on Saturday.

With 114 new cases admitted to hospitals, the total number of inpatients is nearing 1,000 at 937 and 290 in intensive care units.

While the cases registered in the Sultanate has reached 223,879, including 2,413 deaths, the recovery rate has dropped to 91.3 per cent.

Most cases reported on Sunday were from Muscat (1,491), North Al Batinah (581), South Al Batinah (306), Al Dakhiliyah (217) and South Al Sharqiyah (163).

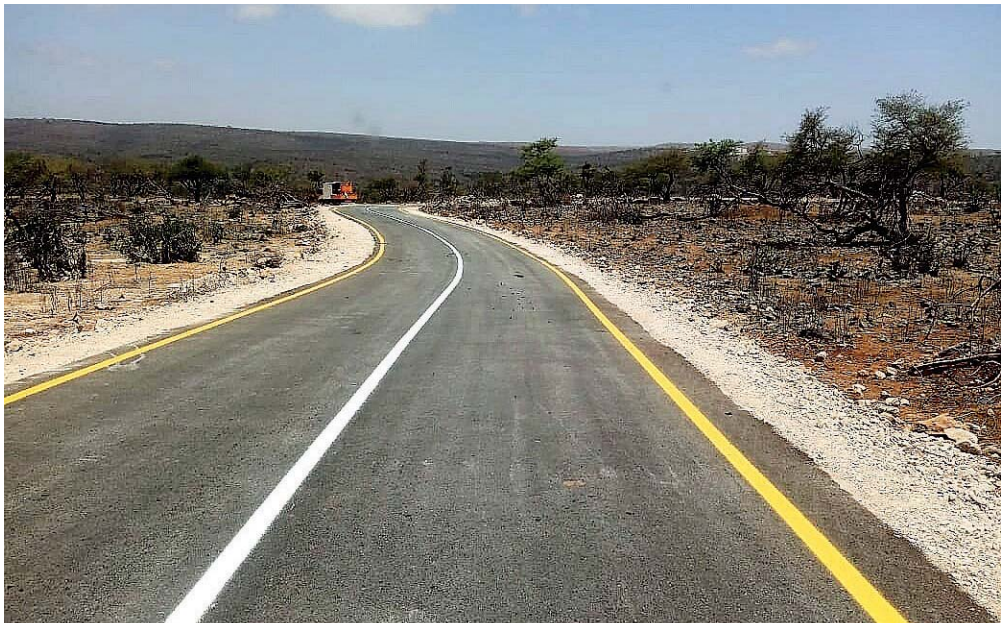
Deaths were also reported

mostly from North Al Batinah (10), Muscat (9) and three each from Dhofar and South Al Sharqiyah governorates.

According to health experts, vaccination campaigns in the coming days will be key because countries with better immunisation indicators have managed to bring down cases, including in the GCC.

Kuwait reported 1, 331 cases on Saturday, Qatar (192), Bahrain (1, 432), Saudi Arabia (1, 144) and UAE (2, 188). Meanwhile, the WHO has called on all countries to support an effort to vaccinate at least 10 per cent of the population of every country by September, and at least 30 per cent by the end of the year, with health workers and at-risk groups as the priority. "As vaccination rates increase, the public health and social measures that have helped to protect people can begin to be eased, but they must be eased cautiously. Lifting them too quickly could be dangerous," the WHO said.

NEW ROADS IN WILAYAT OF RAKHYOUT



SALALAH: The Dhofar Municipality has completed the construction of internal roads in the Wilayat of Rakhyout with a distance of 13 km. The project is part of the municipality's plan to enhance the road network and meet the requirements of the population and urban growth. The project involved construction of internal roads in the Wilayat of Rakhyout and construction of pedestrian pavements and installation of 74 lamp posts and speed bumps and signboards.

INVITATION TO TENDER

SOHAR ALUMINIUM

Sohar Aluminium LLC (SA), PO Box 80, PC- 327, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman hereby invites qualified Suppliers/Contractors for the following tender:

Tender No.	: PR 10180828
Tender Title	: Supply of Anode Pins
Scope	: Contractor shall supply Anode pins as per the material grade quality S235JR2.
Tender No.	: 2021-ENG-SOW-0010
Tender Title	: Main Entrance Electric Gates and Fencing
Scope	: Contractor shall supply, install and Commission-the Electric Gates with Access Control and Fencing for SA main entrance.

Kindly send your email and company profile to: tender@sohar-aluminium.com

For list of active tenders visit: <https://www.sohar-aluminium.com/en/content/tender-listing>



Members of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic on Sunday visited the immunisation centre at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex (SQSC) to view the process of vaccination of target segments against Covid-19 as part of the ongoing National Immunisation Campaign. – ONA

MASS VACCINATION BEGINS

FROM PAGE 1

The minister told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the Supreme Committee took note of the efforts exerted by the specialised medical teams of the Ministry of Health and other health establishments to administer the vaccine as scheduled in the vaccination plan.

In this context, Dr Abdullah said, “During the visit, we observed a highly organised process of immunisation undertaken by working groups and great cooperation from various segments of the society.”

“The Supreme Committee urges all target segments to take the vaccine to protect themselves, their families and society from this disease,” said Dr Abdullah, who stressed that taking the vaccine is the most efficient way of securing self-protection. He also underscored the significance of individuals’ commitment to the measures announced by the authorities concerned, including adherence to social distancing and avoiding all sorts of assembling.

“Undoubtedly, many commercial and economic activities around the world have been seriously impacted by procedures undertaken by countries for protection against this dangerous disease, and the Sultanate is no exception. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, Oman has undertaken elaborate measures that maintained a



balance between public health and business activities. Experts predict that the whole world will shift between closure and opening of business activities till such a time that the vaccine shows positive results in overcoming the disease,” said Dr Abdullah.

“Operating under the close

follow-up by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, we now witness the unfolding of a great plan of safe vaccination that covers all segments of the society,” said Dr Abdullah.

In the meantime, the minister cautioned against entertaining widespread rumours pervading

the whole world about vaccines. Scientists who are well-versed in epidemiology affirm that what is circulating about vaccines and immunisations is totally baseless and there is no truth in them, said the minister, who underlined that the real danger is that believing these rumours increases the chances of the spread of this pandemic.

“Many of those who believed the rumours were affected by the disease or transferred it to their family members, thereby causing immense suffering, culminating in death in many instances. This would have been avoided if the rumours were ignored and if all target segments took initiatives in accordance with the National Immunisation Plan,” said Dr Abdullah.

Oman has chalked out a National Immunisation Campaign against Covid-19 to cover all the targeted groups of the population for vaccination from age 12 and above, which represents 70 per cent of the population.

Based on the availability of vaccines, there will be various phases for vaccination. Oman is expected to receive 12,50,000 doses this month itself at an average rate of 200,000 doses per week, a figure substantiated by the agreements of vaccine procurement and the current rate of supplies. (With inputs from ONA)

ROP officials receive vaccine



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Officials of the Royal Oman Police (ROP) from across the country received vaccines on Sunday.

The medical teams of the General Administration of Medical Services administered the vaccines among the officials, mainly from eight governorates of the country — Muscat, Musandam, North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Buraimi, North Al Sharqiyah and South Al Sharqiyah.

“This vaccination campaign for ROP officials is part of the national campaign,” said First Lieutenant Haitham bin Khamis al Subhi from the General Department of Medical Services. He added that the ROP continues to implement the field vaccination campaign with the anti-coronavirus vaccine for all its employees while taking precautionary and organisational measures against the pandemic. Each governorate and wilayat has allocated time and place for the ROP officials.



BEAT THE HEAT

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Summer is here and the temperature seems to be rising rapidly everyday, especially with some wilayats recording 50 degrees. It is time for everyone to start taking precautions to avoid heatstroke and dehydration.

While we can't control the temperature outside, we can make sure that we are doing all that we possibly can to stay safe and healthy.

The harsh climate can drain you off your energy, making you prone to infections, vomiting, nausea, prickly heat and low blood pressure.

Many wait for the summer holiday season to enjoy beaches and sunny weather. So how can you enjoy the summer and avoid its dangers at the same time?

The hot spell may bring discomfort to some people, especially the elderly, who feel the heat more than others. It may often lead to headache, fatigue, dizziness and loss of concentration. It may even lead to fainting, especially in people who do not drink enough water.

Experts say that some modifications in daily lifestyle can help mitigate the effects of scorching heat on the body.

They advise avoiding heavy meals and caffeinated drinks and not exerting great physical effort, whether in workouts or driving a car during the day. It is also important to make sure to cover the head when it gets too hot.

Staying hydrated is very crucial during summer as it ensures that your body keeps functioning normally. As the heat goes up, it results in excessive sweating, which also reduces energy levels and electrolytes from your body.

Experts stress the need to drink at least two to three litres of water per day and stay away from direct sunlight as much as possible while wearing light-coloured cotton clothes.

They also warn of symptoms such as cramps in the arms, legs, and abdomen or loss of sleep. These signs indicate a lack of fluid in the body, which calls for a visit to the doctor as soon as possible.

The best time for exposure to summer sun is between 8:30 am and 11 am, when the body is fully prepared to produce vitamin D. Avoid sun between 12 and 3 pm in the afternoon, due to the strength and intensity of the sun's rays during this period, which may increase risk of sunstroke and skin sloughing.

STAY COOL IN SCORCHING SUMMER



1

Summer reduces one's appetite. But eat regularly because your body requires the nutrients to fight the heat.



2

Avoid heat generating foods like meat, eggs and other proteins, and even salt intake.



3

Drink plenty of fluids and water. Don't wait until you're thirsty but drink water throughout the day to stay well-hydrated. It is recommended to drink at least 8-10 glasses of water per day.



4

Opt for natural juice without added sugar. This will not only keep you hydrated but also provide you with important nutrients.



5

Avoid caffeinated beverages as these ingredients have a diuretic effect, meaning they can cause dehydration.

Keep a check on your food habits by eating a healthy, balanced diet. Focus on eating more fruits and vegetables that are easy to digest and high in water content.

Fresh fruits and veggies are low in calories and will keep you feeling full and cool for a longer period.

Your digestive system weakens during summers, so it's better to opt for fresh and natural foods that are easily digestible.

Plan your activities to ensure you don't go outside during peak hours of sunlight, when the temperatures and UV rays are at their highest, normally **between 11 am and 3 pm**.

Instead of outdoor walks or activities, consider exercising at a gym, walking on a treadmill. Swimming is a good option as well.

Wear light-coloured and loose clothing, preferably cotton clothes. Avoid dark colours as they absorb the sun's rays.



6



7



8



9



10



11

Construction of 50 housing units begins in Dima W'attayeen



DIMA W'ATTAYEEN: The construction work of 50 residential units began in Hail Al Kufuf village on top of Al Jabal Al Abiadh in the Wilayat of Dima W'attayeen.

Masoud bin Khamis al Saadi, Director of the Social Housing and Projects Department in North Al Batinah Governorate, said the RO 2.2 million project is one of the

most important residential schemes implemented by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning in the Wilayat of Dima W'attayeen. It is expected to be completed at

the end of 2022. He added that the ministry is executing a number of residential projects in North Al Batinah Governorate for the eligible categories. — ONA

RNO Commander heads for S Korea

MUSCAT: Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), and his accompanying military delegation left for South Korea on Sunday on an official several-day visit. — ONA



'Electrical wiring' licence of expats not to be renewed

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 6

The Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) has issued a decision to stop issuing new permits and not renew the existing permits for the 'electrical wiring' licence.

The licence will be limited to Omanis as part of the efforts to implement the strategy to raise the Omanisation rate in the electricity sector.

APSR had earlier launched a programme to create over 800 jobs for citizen.

The jobs will be mainly in the offices of sub-contractors in the electricity sector who are allowed to operate with a permanent licence.

These opportunities spread over various governorates will offer on-the-job training and employment opportunities to Omanis in various technology sectors.

The licenced companies will select the candidates in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and train them through specialised programmes that include both practical and theoretical sessions.

After successful completion of training, the candidates will be absorbed in the on-job training programme, subsequently leading to their enrollment into jobs.

Greening the world with pedal power

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

Two major international events passed calmly last week. Otherwise, the International Day for Cycling (June 3) and World Environment Day (June 5) would have gathered attention with events and awareness programmes from several quarters.

The days didn't go unnoticed by the true nature lovers. They did their bit to save the environment in action and spirit. A medical doctor and an environmental activist, Dr Raj Phanden, who is cycling around the world, carrying the message of preserving the environment, was spotted in Oman in September 2018. Then he had covered 34,000 kms on a cycle covering many countries.

On the International Day for Cycling, he sent a message from Uganda to preserve the environment. He fondly recollected his visit to Oman, which "has great care for the environment and has huge potential for cycling due to its true nature and culture."

During these two-and-a-half years, Dr Phanden added 26,000



Dr Raj on the way to Muscat from Salalah in September 2018.

kms to his cycling journey with a total of 60,000 kms, 57 countries and 102,000 trees that he planted. On his visit to any new country, he plants some trees in association with the local people and some organisations.

"I am serving the purposes of both — the Day for Cycling and Environment Day — and encouraging people to adopt cycling and plant more and more trees. Both are beneficial for the environment," he said.

MUSCAT CYCLING

In Oman, there are informal yet active groups of cyclists. One of the groups, Muscat Cycling, keeps the nature and health lovers

engaged with cycling activities and encourages them to adopt cycling as much as possible.

"If there is one thing that you can use for your work, exercise and recreation, that is a bicycle. Cycling has a lot of benefits which we all know, and it's available on the Internet. Still, most importantly, those who do not know how to cycle can learn cycling in just a few hours, or some people can learn it within a few minutes say, 30 minutes," said Randall Bernard, Group Coordinator of Muscat Cycling.

He calls upon everyone to adopt some physical activity. Cycling, according to him, is the

easiest to adapt and continue.

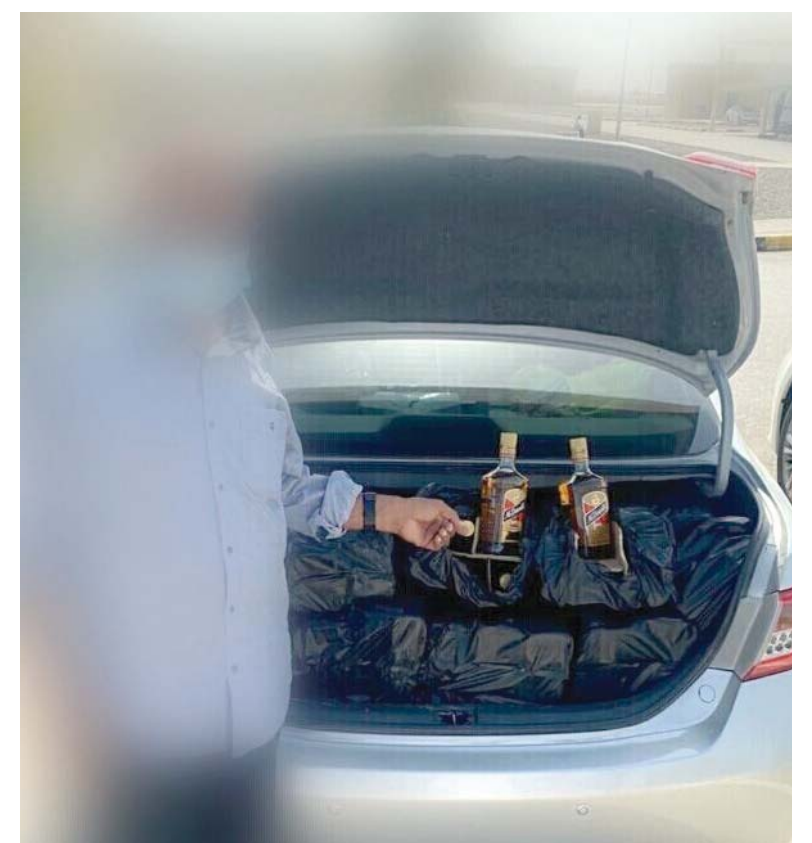
The easiest way to learn to ride a bicycle is to remove the pedals and make sure the seat is high enough or low enough so that your feet touch the ground on both sides, then ask somebody to push you from behind. You have to remember that just like walking on a tight rope, when a person uses a pole for balancing on, the pole goes left and right; in the same way, the bicycle handlebar needs to go left and right for you to have balance, he suggests.

"Once you start cycling, you can always use the bicycle to go and get groceries. Otherwise, a 30-minute cycle ride everyday will help you to have some exercise. Remember always to wear a helmet to protect yourself.

A strong votary of helmet for cyclists, Randall says, "It saves up to 75 per cent of injuries. Cycling on a flat road or downhill is fun and helps in the leg muscles, but if you cycle slightly uphill, you will feel that it is a workout even for your hands and chest."

He advises to "Do it even for sometime daily or weekly, to keep healthy and save the environment by cutting fuel consumption."

■ EXPAT ARRESTED FOR SELLING ALCOHOL



The police command of Al Sharqiyah Governorate arrested an expatriate on charges for possessing and selling alcoholic beverages. The police seized more than 500 bottles of alcoholic drinks from his car. Legal action was launched against the defendant.



Iran holds first pre-election debate broadcast live on TV

TEHRAN: Iran held its first pre-election debate broadcast live on television as the presidential candidates traded accusations on Saturday over the country's economic crisis.

Iranians are set to elect a successor to President Hassan Rouhani on June 18 amid widespread discontent over a deep economic and social crisis caused by the reimposition of crippling sanctions after the US pulled out of the 2015 nuclear deal.

Iran's Guardian Council approved seven candidates to run from a field of about 600 hopefuls.

Judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi is widely seen as a favourite, after the Council disqualified Ali Larijani.

On Saturday, the candidates called on hopeful Abdolnasser Hemmati, who is the country's central bank governor, to take responsibility for the crisis, and accused him of seeking to defend the government's record.

"Mr Hemmati, your governance was catastrophic, you are sitting here as a representative of Mr Rouhani," said Mohsen Rezai, a former chief of Iran's Revolutionary Guards.

Rouhani is Iran's main architect of the 2015 nuclear agreement with world powers.

The accord has been on life support since then-US President Donald Trump unilaterally



An Iranian vendor watches candidate Saeed Jalili speaking during the first televised debate between Iran presidential candidates at a shop in Tehran. – AFP

withdrew from it in 2018, and reimposed crippling sanctions.

Global powers have been meeting in Vienna since early April in a bid to revive the accord.

Hemmati instead took aim at his adversaries' economic plan, saying their pledges of massive direct financial aid were "unrealisable".

He also accused them of undermining Iran's international relations and preventing the country from benefiting from the nuclear deal.

Raisi, who took 38 per cent of the vote in the 2017 presidential

A record 57 per cent of Iranians stayed away from parliamentary elections in February last year

election, avoided direct clashes with the reformists.

"Inflation is one of the serious problems people are facing today. The price of basic products has gone up considerably," he said, adding that the "dishonesty of

certain officials" was one of the main worries of the Iranian people.

Iranian media has expressed concern in recent weeks about the risk of low voter turnout.

A record 57 per cent of Iranians stayed away from parliamentary elections in February last year in which thousands of candidates, many of them moderates and reformists, were barred from running.

Further televised debates are due to be held on Tuesday and Saturday this week.

— AFP/Reuters

Two drones downed over Iraqi military base

BAGHDAD: The Iraqi army said two drones were shot down on Sunday over a military base hosting US-led international forces fighting IS militants.

The air defence system at Ain al Assad base, located in western Iraq, intercepted and shot down the two drones, the Iraqi military-linked Security Media Cell said. No casualties or damage was reported.

The attempted attack was the latest in a series against the same base. Last month, an air attack targeted Ain al Assad, causing no casualties.

In March, a US civilian contractor died in a rocket attack on the facility.

Ain al Assad was one of the bases that Iran attacked in January 2020 to avenge the killing of top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani in US strikes on Baghdad.

In Baghdad, a diplomatic facility was on Saturday the target of a rocket attack without causing casualties, the anti-IS coalition said.

"At approx 0015 local time, the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Centre (BDSC) was attacked by one rocket round. The rocket impacted near the BDSC and caused no injuries or damage. The attack is under investigation," coalition spokesman Wayne Marotto said on Twitter. No claim of responsibility has been made.

The BDSC is a joint US-Iraqi facility located in the military part of the Baghdad international airport.

In recent months, the heavily fortified Green Zone in Baghdad — home to the US embassy — and facilities hosting US troops in Iraq have been the target of repeated attacks blamed on pro-Iranian groups. — dpa



Since the start of this year, there have been 39 attacks against US interests in Iraq. – AFP File Photo

Jordanian Covid survivor recalls nightmare struggle

AMMAN: Jordanian Covid-19 survivor Abdullah Bashiti still suffers disturbing flashbacks from his time in intensive care.

One of the most vivid is a vision of his doctors holding their hands in prayer as he regained consciousness after a sudden critical oxygen lapse.

The 38-year-old father of four recalls the hallucinations and delirium — from images of doomsday to a nightmare of a war zone — that beset him as he struggled for life during 37 days in the ICU ward of a private hospital in Amman.

After he regained consciousness one day, five doctors were at his bedside saying: "Abdullah say amen, Abdullah say dear God."

"I really felt like I was fighting for my life," Bashiti said, surrounded by his family.

In a moment of desperation in January, he sent a message to

Psychiatrists report Covid survivors suffering from anxiety, panic attacks, depression and post traumatic stress disorders that they fear may never go away

his closest friend, urging him to take care of his family and ensure a burial washing ceremony according to Muslim tradition.

"Tell my family to wash my body very, very well," the message said.

Bashiti was hospitalised during a second wave of infections that has now ebbed but which saw hundreds of deaths every week, shocking close-knit Jordanian communities.

Authorities scrambled to add



Abdullah Bashiti who recovered from coronavirus disease sits with his family at home in Amman. – Reuters

hospital beds for fear of a collapse in the health sector as ICU wards were fully occupied and hospitals in many areas were close to capacity.

Like many of Jordan's hospitalised Covid-19 patients, Bashiti, a businessman, was more concerned with getting back to work than taking care of his mental wellbeing.

Jordan's psychiatrists report Covid survivors suffering from anxiety, panic attacks, depression and post-traumatic stress disorders that they fear may never go away.

"It is not enough to count the number of cases and deaths every day. Against every case and death there are thousands of psychiatric cases that they (governments) do not mention, count nor see. They are just abandoning people to fend for themselves," said Walid Sarhan, a leading psychiatrist.

— Reuters

SANAA

17 Yemeni civilians killed in fighter attack

At least 17 civilians were killed in an attack by Yemen's fighters in an embattled city in the war-devastated country, the Yemeni government has said. On Saturday, Ansar Allah fighters fired a ballistic missile at a petrol station in the government-controlled city of Marib, followed by an explosives-laden drone that hit ambulances which rushed to the site to assist victims, Information Minister Moammar al Eryani (pictured), said.



"This resulted in the killing of 17 civilians, including a child whose body was charred, and the injuring of five others," he told state news agency Saba.

— dpa

AMMAN

4 Jordani policemen hurt in clashes

Four Jordanian police officers were wounded on Saturday night when they clashed with supporters of a lawmaker suspended from parliament for railing against chronic power cuts, the security service said. "Four policemen were wounded and hospitalised when they intervened... to put an end to riots, the firing of shots into the air and the burning of cars," said Amer al Satrawi, the public security service's spokesman.

They were wounded by stones, but their lives were not in danger,



Satrawi said in a statement, adding that the clashes took place in Naour, a suburb in the capital's south. Witnesses said the protesters were supporters of lawmaker Oussama al Ajarma.

MOSCOW

Russia: Sudan has not pulled out of agreement

Sudan has not pulled out of an agreement with Russia to set up a Russian naval facility in the country, Interfax news agency reported, citing deputy foreign minister Mikhail Bogdanov. "I think a compromise can always be found," Interfax quoted Bogdanov as saying. "They have not denounced the agreement, have not withdrawn their signature, they said some questions have emerged," he said.

Sudan said earlier this week it was reviewing an agreement



to host a Russian naval base on its Red Sea coast, which was reached by President Omar al Bashir before he was toppled by a popular uprising in 2019.

— Reuters

In brief

■ HERAT



11 KILLED AS ROADSIDE BOMB HITS AFGHAN BUS

At least 11 civilians including four women and three children were killed when a roadside bomb struck a bus in Afghanistan, officials said, in the latest attack targeting passenger vehicles in the violence-ravaged country.

The attack occurred on Saturday in the western province of Badghis, raising fears of fresh violence in the months ahead as the US military continues to pull out its last remaining troops from the country. No group has claimed responsibility for the blast but Badghis governor Heshamuddin Shams accused the Taliban of planting the bomb. — AFP

■ COLOMBO



14 KILLED IN SRI LANKA FLOODING, LANDSLIDES

Heavy rains followed by landslides and flooding in Sri Lanka killed at least 14 people and has affected over 250,000 more in the past two days with warnings that adverse weather conditions will continue, officials said. South-west monsoon rains settling in the country's western, southern and central parts resulted in heavy showers and landslides in several areas, Disaster Management Centre (DMC) officials said.

A family of four was killed on Saturday when they were buried in a landslide in Aranyaka, some 90 kilometres east of Colombo. — dpa

■ DHAKA



TWO DIE IN LANDSLIDES AT ROHINGYA CAMP

Two Rohingyas were killed after heavy monsoon rains triggered landslides in refugee camps in southern Bangladesh, officials said.

"We have information of one man and one woman (who) died in the landslides. We are trying to get details," Mohammad Shamsud Douza, the deputy Bangladesh government official in charge of the refugees, said.

Nearly one million Rohingya are living in squalid camps in the border district of Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, the world's largest refugee settlement, since fleeing a military crackdown in Myanmar's Rakhine state nearly four years ago. — Reuters.

Thailand concerned at Myanmar violence



Anti-coup protesters flash the three-finger salute during a flash mob protest in Yangon. — Reuters

YANGON: Thailand is concerned at the violence in many parts of Myanmar and wants to see the implementation of steps agreed by Southeast Asian leaders with the military junta to help end the turmoil since the February 1 coup, the foreign ministry said on Sunday.

Myanmar's junta has shown little sign of heeding the five point 'consensus' agreed among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) in April — which calls for an end to violence, political talks and the naming of a regional special envoy.

"We have been following developments in Myanmar closely with much concern, especially

Daily protests against the military have evolved in parts of Myanmar into armed insurrections while decade old ethnic conflicts have flared anew

incidents of violence in many parts of the country," foreign ministry spokesperson Tanee Sangrat said in a statement.

He reiterated a call for an end to the violence, the release of all detainees and the "concrete implementation of the Five-Point Consensus" as soon as possible.

The junta has failed to impose

control since seizing power from elected leader Aug San Suu Kyi, who is among more than 4,500 people detained since the coup. At least 847 have been killed, a rights group says. The army disputes that figure.

Meanwhile, daily protests against the military have evolved in parts of Myanmar into armed insurrections while decade old ethnic conflicts have flared anew.

Opponents of the junta have voiced frustration at the lack of tough action by Asean and say the meeting of two representatives of the group with junta leader Min Aung Hlaing on Friday gave him greater legitimacy but brought no benefit. — Reuters/dpa

Elephants escape Myanmar mud pit to cheers from villagers

YANGON: Four wild elephants made their way out of the mud pit in Myanmar where they had been trapped last week, urged on by the villagers who dug them an escape route.

The villagers in the western Rakhine State usually avoid elephants when they come across them in the forest, but feared the animals would have died if they had stayed trapped in the hole.

Video verified by Reuters showed the four animals struggling one by one to gain a foothold on the slope where the villagers spent some five hours digging rough steps for them.

Eventually they all make it

out — the last one appearing to turn briefly towards where villagers are cheering before heading off with its companions.

"We rescued them because we know that elephants are at risk of vanishing worldwide and they are part of our state's heritage," Zaw Phyo Than, 40, said by phone.

"The four animals were so cute and that's why everyone from around our village came to save their lives."

It was unclear how they fell into the pit. Surveys have estimated that only a few hundred elephants remain in Rakhine State, down from thousands just decades ago.

— Reuters



An elephant herd is seen stranded in a mud pit, in Aung Zeha village, Rakhine state, Myanmar. — Reuters

■ STAY SAFE AGAINST THE PANDEMIC



Motorists get swab tests for Covid-19 at a checkpoint in Surabaya. — AFP

Lanka recovers black box from sinking ship

COLOMBO: A black box from a ship loaded with chemical and plastic that is sinking off Sri Lanka has been located, officials said on Sunday, as investigators probe what caused the vessel to catch fire.

The Voyage Data Recorder, also known as a maritime "black box", enables investigators to review procedures and instructions ahead of an accident.

Sri Lankan authorities said they hope it will provide details of the ship's movements and its communications with the harbour in the capital Colombo, where it had been due to dock.



Smoke rises from a fire onboard the MV X-Press Pearl vessel as it sinks while being towed into deep sea off the Colombo Harbour in Sri Lanka. — Reuters

"The navy facilitated technicians to remove the VDR from the bridge which is still above

the waterline," navy spokesman Indika de Silva said.

The Singapore-registered MV X-Press Pearl has been slowly sinking into the Indian Ocean since Wednesday after a fire that raged for nearly two weeks within sight of the coast.

The ship, carrying 25 tonnes of nitric acid and a huge amount of plastic raw materials, was heading to Colombo from Gujarat, India.

Sri Lankan officials have said an acid leak since May 11 may have sparked the blaze. Ports in Qatar and India had refused to offload the leaking nitric acid, they added.

— AFP

Australia's Covid-19 hotspot reports 2 new local cases

MELBOURNE: Australia's second most populous state Victoria on Sunday reported two new locally acquired Covid-19 cases, with the low number raising hopes that a hard lockdown in the state's capital Melbourne will be eased on June 10.

The two new local infections bring Victoria's total cases to 72, including two recovered cases, in the outbreak that began in late May after a man who tested negative in hotel quarantine in Adelaide returned to Melbourne and tested positive.

The daily rise was down from five new cases reported on Saturday and both cases were linked to existing clusters, which authorities said meant Melbourne's restrictions would probably be eased on Thursday.

"If we can, we will lift it early, but at this stage our expectation is



Police patrol a mass vaccination centre against anti-vaccination protesters in Melbourne as the coronavirus lockdown of Australia's second-biggest city was extended by another seven days. — AFP

that it will continue to Thursday," Victoria's deputy chief health officer Allen Cheng told reporters.

Health authorities remain worried about the emergence of the highly infectious Delta variant,

which has now extended to 10 cases, as the source has yet to be identified and there has been no

genomic match so far with any other cases in Australia.

The Delta variant, which has been classified by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as among the four Covid-19 variants of concern due to evidence that it spreads more easily, likely caused the latest devastating outbreak in India.

"The last thing we want to see is this variant of the virus getting out and becoming uncontrollable," state deputy premier James Merlino said.

A family that travelled to a beach town in New South Wales state were the first in Melbourne to be infected by the Delta variant.

"We are concerned about who it was who might have given them the infection and therefore could there be other infections related to that," Cheng said.

— Reuters

Covid eradication not a reasonable target: WHO

LONDON: Global eradication of the coronavirus is not currently a reasonable target, a special envoy on Covid-19 for the World Health Organisation (WHO) said on Sunday.

“Humanity is going to have to learn how to coexist with this virus, preventing it from spiking and then surging and causing hotspots of disease,” Dr David Nabarro told British broadcaster Sky News.

“Eradication is not currently a reasonable target for the world,” he said, adding that people would need to be able to coexist for the foreseeable future.

Nabarro also said reports of a Nepal variant were being examined.

“Each time there is a sudden surge, it does stimulate in one’s mind the thought that there might be a new variant appearing. That wouldn’t be surprising.”

He said that will be “the pattern for the future,” adding “This virus isn’t going away any time soon, there will be variants emerging.”

Meanwhile, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson at next week’s G7 summit will urge leaders to commit to vaccinate the whole world against coronavirus by the end of 2022, Downing Street said on Saturday.

Britain will host the event in Cornwall in southwestern England starting on June 11 with leaders of France, Italy, Japan, Germany, the United States and



A woman takes selfie while receiving vaccine in Harrow near London on Sunday. — Reuters

Canada attending.

The British prime minister will call on fellow G7 leaders to make concrete commitments to “vaccinate the entire world against coronavirus by the end of 2022”, the statement said.

“Vaccinating the world by the end of next year would be the single greatest feat in medical history,” the Prime Minister was quoted as saying.

Johnson added that “the world is looking to us to rise to the greatest challenge of the post-war era: defeating Covid and leading a global recovery driven by our

Humanity is going to have to learn how to coexist with this virus... This virus isn’t going away any time soon, there will be variants emerging

DR DAVID NABARRO
Special Envoy, WHO

shared values”.

Downing Street pointed to the British government’s successes in backing the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine and making it available at cost price around the world, as well as its support for the Covax scheme providing supplies to developing countries.

But facing growing calls to ensure a fairer global distribution of vaccine doses, the G7 health ministers at a meeting on Friday failed to break new ground, reiterating previous commitments to share doses through Covax “as soon as possible”. — dpa/Reuters

El Salvador first to make Bitcoin legal tender

SAN SALVADOR: El Salvador may become the first country to make bitcoin legal tender, President Nayid Bukele announced on Saturday, saying he would soon propose a bill that could transform the remittance-dependent economy.

The move would make the Central American nation the first in the world to formally accept the cryptocurrency as legal money and would “allow the financial inclusion of thousands of people who are outside the legal economy,” Bukele said.

“Next week, I will send to Congress a bill that makes Bitcoin legal money,” the populist leader said during a video message to the Bitcoin 2021 conference in Miami, Florida.

The bill aims to create jobs, he said, in a country where “70 per cent of the population does not have a bank account and works in the informal economy.”

The El Salvador government is yet to give details of the bill, which will require approval from a parliament dominated by the president’s allies.

Remittances from Salvadorans working overseas represent a major chunk of the economy — equivalent to roughly 22 per cent of Gross Domestic Product.

In 2020, remittances to the country totalled \$5.9 billion, according to official reports.

According to Bukele, bitcoin represented “the fastest growing way to transfer” those billions of dollars in remittances and to prevent millions from being lost to intermediaries.

“Thanks to the use of bitcoin, the amount received by more than a million low-income families increases by several billion dollars every year,” said the president. “This improves life and the future of millions of people.” — AFP



A banner that reads “We accept Bitcoin, free, fast and without contagion” is seen at a beach cafe on Punta Roca Beach in La Libertad, El Salvador. — Reuters file photo

William, Kate to spend more time in Scotland to boost union

LONDON: The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge may be asked to spend more time in Scotland under plans reportedly drawn up by palace officials to bolster the Union.

Kate and William would spend more time at Balmoral and strengthen ties with their former university town of St Andrews if the proposals go ahead, according to the *Sunday Times*.

The report comes just days after the couple’s tour of Scotland in which William said the country was “so important” to himself and wife. On the final day of their visit, William and Kate held a meeting with Gordon Brown who has recently launched a renewed campaign to save the Union.

The couple sat down for talks

with the former prime minister and his wife Sarah at the Queen’s official Edinburgh residence.

William later gave a highly personal farewell speech as his week-long tour drew to a close, describing how Scotland has “shaped” him and praising its people and values.

The argument over Scottish independence has intensified after the Scottish National Party’s landslide victory in the Holyrood election in May, which also produced the largest pro-independence majority in the Parliament in the history of devolution.

Boris Johnson has since stood by his pre-election position, saying the focus should be on the recovery from Covid-19 and not on another



independence referendum.

Last month, a spokesperson for Kensington Palace said: “During his time in Scotland Prince William has spoken to a broad range of people from different communities including politicians from across the political spectrum.”

The duke sat down for talks with First Minister Nicola Sturgeon and also met Alistair Carmichael, Liberal Democrat MP for Orkney and Shetland. Soon after the Holyrood election Brown announced his Our Scottish Future think-tank which will become a

“campaigning movement “seeking to appeal to “middle Scotland”, those who are not entrenched in their positions on the union or independence.

Brown, who played a key role in the No campaign during the 2014 vote, has said those in middle Scotland are “patriots not nationalists” who want to see greater cooperation between the UK’s governments.

Ahead of the Scottish independence referendum in 2014 the Queen reportedly said she hoped voters would “think very carefully about the future.”

Before the Queen’s reported comment Buckingham Palace had issued a statement, following speculation she was growing increasingly concerned about

Scotland breaking away, saying any suggestion the monarch would wish to influence the outcome of the referendum was “categorically wrong.”

Speaking in Edinburgh at the closing ceremony of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, William said about some of the memorable individuals he had met: “These people make Scotland the vibrant, friendly, innovative and determined place Catherine and I love, and is so important to us.”

The duke who is the assembly’s Lord High Commissioner added: “I’m shaped by this place. The abiding affection I feel for it is rooted in my experience of its everyday life in people, relationships and its ethic of neighbourliness.” — dpa

LIMA

Peruvians vote to elect president

Peruvians began voting to pick a president on Sunday in an election that has bitterly divided them by class and geography, with urban and higher-income citizens preferring right-wing Keiko Fujimori while the rural poor support leftist political novice Pedro Castillo.

Polls in the runoff election began on Sunday with long queues building up early at some centres in the capital Lima of people bundled up against the cold of the southern hemisphere



late autumn. Citizens have been invited to vote according to their numbers on their identity cards in a bid to avoid large crowds gathering.

MEXICO CITY

Mexicans head to midterm elections

Mexicans headed to the polls on Sunday to vote for a new lower house of Congress, state governors and local lawmakers, in a race seen as a referendum on President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador’s policies and efforts to shake up Mexico’s institutions.

All 500 seats in the lower house, 15 state governorships and thousands of local leadership positions are up for grabs, with some 93.5 million Mexicans eligible to vote.

The elections has been tinged



by the Covid-19 pandemic and vaccine rollout, as well as record criminal violence, with security consultancy Etellekt saying 91 politicians have been killed in this election cycle.

LONDON

‘Delta variant 40% more transmissible’

The Delta variant of the coronavirus is estimated to be 40 per cent more transmissible than the Alpha variant that caused the last wave of infections in the UK, Britain’s health minister said on Sunday.

But people who have received two doses of vaccine, should be equally protected against either variant, he added.

“That figure, around 40 per cent more transmissible, is indeed the latest advice I have,” Health Secretary Matt Hancock



told Sky News. The Delta variant, also known as the Indian variant, is now the dominant strain in the UK, according to Public Health England figures.

Tasting a self-prescribed medication!

Winning an opportunity to be a manager is a milestone, marking a big shift in the career path of oneself. One might work towards becoming a manager for a long time, expecting the chance to share expertise and spend time on higher profile responsibilities.

“If I were a manager”, a wish that is being dreamed of by many people indeed. This could be sometimes attributed to people’s irritation of their own bosses at their work place.

Many employees criticise their work place, which is supposed to be a second home, where they spend most of their daytime. Perhaps, their bosses are the reason behind them being disappointed about the work environment! The unpleasant attitude of the boss, for instance, is what drives employees crazy most of the time. It is true that not many people have the honour and pride to be called a boss! However, being a boss does not grant one the right to ill-behave or humiliate others.

As the boss has the title and the leader has the people, managers should always remember that with authority comes responsibility. Nevertheless, this fact is being ignored by most managers unfortunately. Probably, being superior to others is what pleases managers and inflame their feelings of pride and self-arrogance too.

However, they are bearing no attention to the consequences and challenges behind the responsibility of be-



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“IF I WERE A
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WISH THAT IS
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PEOPLE INDEED

ing a boss. To most, it is just a matter of getting the position and the package of the post.

As they come to the position, they start pretending to be a noble man of a mission who talks nothing, but business and chasing their own dreams and satisfying self-interests! How would such bosses be good leaders?! Will they be able to lead their teams who need more guidance, advice and proper management? Possibly, they mislead their teams instead; an unprofessional bosses for sure. They will break and demotivate their teams. In contrast, employees will be the role model for their bosses who cannot even lead themselves.

On the other hand, the situation is so difficult for both, the boss and employees, especially when not all are in good term and roles are misplaced. Becoming a manager, whether being responsible for one person or a team, is a big challenge. You could be envied of such a position, while sometimes you get to face management obstacles with colleagues.

Your attitude and style of managing your team is what matters and identifies your personality with others. For the employees, it is challenging and frustrating to deal with an unprofessional boss too.

Moreover, there are other issues that are irritating employees every single day at a work place. Not necessar-

ily that those issues are related to their bosses, but could be others regarding the work load, stressed environment, ill management and attitude. Such matters shall be accorded high attention be top management of an organisation. Otherwise, employees will lose interest and be reluctantly forced to come to work. Hence, it will definitely affect their daily performance and overall productivity.

Pleasing all people is an impossible mission, so do not even try to think about it. However, not having a healthy work environment and a good leader is very difficult and unfair to employees and employers. Being in a stress-free work place will highly have a positive impact on employees and accordingly will be reflected in their performance. Sometimes, it is just a matter of maintaining the chemistry and friendly relations of trust between employees themselves and with the management too.

Dear bosses, just remember that a boss values nothing without his colleagues who does almost everything in order to uplift the entire team. Being the boss is a big burden on you; it is your responsibility to pave the way to your team instead of misleading them to the wrong direction.

All what your team needs is some trust, transparency, proper guidance and inspiring teamwork. Otherwise, someday you will be testing your self-prescribed medication.

UPCOMING VOTE

Swiss mired in poisonous row over pesticides

NATHALIE OLOF-ORS

The idyllic image of peaceful Swiss Alpine pastures is being shattered by upcoming votes on pesticides which have sharply divided opinion in rural Switzerland.

The Swiss will vote on June 13 on a proposal which, if it passes, would make Switzerland the first country in the world to ban synthetic pesticides.

Proponents seek to ban pesticides with non-naturally occurring chemicals — and not only for agriculture but also for public green spaces, private gardens, and even for killing the weeds on railway tracks.

The initiative, entitled “For a Switzerland free from synthetic pesticides”, would also ban the import of foodstuffs produced with synthetic pesticides, so as not to put Swiss farmers at a disadvantage.

A campaign marked by heated debates boiled over in the western Vaud region when arsonists torched a trailer in a field displaying banners calling for a “No” vote, infuriating farmers.

Meanwhile, farmers in the “Yes” campaign say they have been the victims of insults, threats and intimidation.

Under Switzerland’s direct democracy system, referendums and popular votes occur every few months at national, regional and local levels. Any topic can be put to a national vote as long as it gathers 100,000 signatures in the wealthy nation of 8.6 million people.

Launched by a committee headed up by a winegrower and a soil biology professor from Neuchatel

University, the pesticides initiative gathered 121,307 signatures. A parallel vote on a second initiative is also being held, on an initiative entitled “For clean drinking water and healthy food”.

Under the proposal, government subsidies to farms would be limited only to those that do not use pesticides, and to those that do not use antibiotics as a preventative measure, but only to treat sick animals.

To limit the amount of slurry being used on fields — and thereby potentially entering the water system — it would also limit subsidies to only farms that can feed animals with the fodder they produce themselves.

Supporters of the initiative, which garnered 113,979 signatures, say taxpayers’ money must not be used to subsidise damage to public health and the environment.

Large agricultural organisations, including the Swiss Farmers’ Union and the Association of Swiss Vegetable Producers, have called for a double “No” vote, deeming the measures too extreme.

“We feed you, we get punished”, runs their slogan.

Beekkeepers want a double “Yes” vote, while the Bio Suisse group of organic producers and gardeners — in a country where organic farming accounts for 15 per cent of all farms — wants a “Yes” vote on pesticides and a “No” vote on the second initiative. It says that despite the second initiative’s good intentions, the fodder limits would make the work of organic farmers all the harder, without resolving the issue of intensive farming — as large farms could simply renounce subsidies and keep big herds. — AFP

GOING VIRAL

#SheikhJarrah: From Jerusalem neighbourhood to global hashtag

SHATHA YAISH

For decades, Sheikh Jarrah was just another neighbourhood in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, but its story has gone viral online since protests flared against the planned expulsion of Palestinians from houses there.

“We have managed... not just to shed light on settlement in Jerusalem but also on the rights of Palestinians to defend themselves, their right to resist the occupier, and their right to their own narrative,” said Muhammad el Kurd.

The 23-year-old poet and writer, one of those facing the loss of their homes, has worked tirelessly to publicise the issue and in the process gained more than 180,000 Twitter followers and more than half a million on Instagram.

He was speaking last week, before Israeli police on Sunday entered his family home, issued a summons for his arrest and detained his twin sister Mona el Kurd, who is a fellow activist with over one million Instagram followers.

“From the beginning of the campaign our discourse has been extremely clear”, Muhammad el Kurd earlier said. “We are talking about colonialism and settlement — not just about human rights abuses.”

The protests in Sheikh Jarrah spread early last month to the city’s Al Aqsa mosque compound, sparking a crack-down by Israeli security forces against Palestinians there.

That triggered an 11-day war between the Jewish state and Palestin-



Palestinian youth run past Roman Catholic Church of All Nations during a marathon race event between Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan in east Jerusalem last Friday. — AFP

FOR DECADES,
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ians in the Gaza Strip, which in turn sparked protests in many countries in support of the Palestinians.

The hashtags #SheikhJarrah and #SaveSheikhJarrah went viral. Celebrities from actors Mark Ruffalo and Viola Davis to Manchester City footballer Riyad Mahrez have posted about the neighbourhood on social media.

While Palestinians and their backers see the issue as a microcosm of the wider conflict over land, Jewish settlers and their supporters have labelled it a mere property dispute, to be decided by Israeli courts.

Israel occupied east Jerusalem

in 1967, later annexing it in a move never recognised by the international community. Under Israeli law, Jewish groups can claim land that belonged to Jews before the foundation of Israel 1948, even if Palestinian families have been living there for decades.

Palestinians whose ancestors became refugees in the 1948 war have no means to retrieve their homes or land in modern-day Israel. Kurd called the situation in Sheikh Jarrah “a tiny sample of Zionist settler colonialism in Jerusalem and Palestine in general” that reflected “the balance of power”.

— AFP



Oman lock horns with Qatar today

Win to boost Red Warriors' chances to top group

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 6

Oman national football team will take on Qatar on Monday in a top Gulf clash in Group E of the joint qualifier of Fifa World Cup Qatar 2022 and AFC Asian Cup China 2023. The match will kick off at the Jassim bin Hamed Stadium in Doha at 9:10 pm (Oman time).

Qatar won the first leg match 2-1 at Al Janoub Stadium in Al Wakrah in October 2019.

Coach Branko Ivankovic's men will target to reach their tally to 15 points and raise the chances to seal a direct spot in the third round of the joint qualifier and to book a direct ticket to the 2023 AFC Asian Cup China. Only a win will revive Oman's chances to compete for first place in the group order.

On the other hand, the opponent Gulf country will depend on Monday's match to capture the winning points to

confirm Qatar's presence in AFC Asian Cup in China in 2023 and to focus more on the long-way warm-up programme for Fifa World Cup Qatar 2022. This is the concluding match for the hosts in the joint qualifier and definitely coach Felix Sanchez's men will be looking forward to claiming the top spot in the group.

QATAR BEAT INDIA

Table-toppers Qatar beat India 1-0 on Thursday to reach 19 points. Abdel Aziz netted the solitary goal of the match against a 10-man India.

India are fourth in the group with three points from six matches while Asian champions Qatar lead the table with 19 points from seven games and Oman are second with 12 points from five matches.

Afghanistan are third with five points and Bangladesh are last with two points.

Red Warriors are set for the top fixture against the hosts



We will face the Asian champions and I am proud to meet Qatar team as this match will determine our technical position. Qatar have strong professional players. We will do our best

BRANKO
IVANKOVIC
Oman head coach



Defeat in this match will mean that we need to wait for other teams results in the group. Therefore, we will target for the victory to seal the direct spot for AFC Asian Cup 2023 in China

FELIX
SANCHEZ
Qatar head coach

Qatar after completion of three overseas camps in Dubai and a short camp in Doha during the last two months. The Sultanate team had two preparatory games during the third camp in Dubai. Oman beat Thailand 1-0 in the initial friendly game while Red Warriors' defeated Indonesia 3-1 in the second warm-up match.

IVANKOVIC CONFIDENT

Ivankovic seems comfortable with the starting line-up of the last two friendly games against Indonesia and Thailand. The 67-year-old may start with the experienced Abdulaziz al Maqbali in the forward line-up with Mohsin al Ghassani with assistance from Zaher al Aghbari and Salah al Yahyaai. The Croatian coach pointed out that Mohammed al Musallami was injured but he will return soon. "There are few injuries in the team. Mohsin al Ghassani is not in the right fitness level after recovery from the injury. However, all of them are

available in the squad in Doha and will see how to utilise them," he said in Doha on Sunday.

Oman's goalkeeper Faye al Rushaidi said the team will work hard to continue in the qualifying stages. "Reaching to the later stages in the qualifying is our target currently. Today's match is a tough assignment and we are set for this difficult fixture," he added.

Mohammed al Musallami will not take part in the match due to injury while Al Munther al Alawi, who had returned after an injury, will be on the bench.

Qatar coach Sancez said Oman are totally different from the first-leg match. "Oman have young talented faces with a new head coach. Players have good technical experience. The assignment will be different than before but we are looking forward to registering a win," he added.

Oman are aiming for their third presence in the final round of the joint qualifiers as they had qualified in 2002 and 2014.



VERSTAPPEN CRASHES, HAMILTON MAKES MISTAKE

Perez wins turbulent Baku GP

BAKU, Azerbaijan: Sergio Perez won the Azerbaijan Grand Prix for Red Bull on Sunday, after then leading team-mate Max Verstappen crashed with five laps left owing to a puncture and Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton made a rare mistake in the closing stages.

Perez got his second career win ahead of Sebastian Vettel whose second place was a first podium for him with Aston Martin. Pierre Gasly completed a surprise podium in third for Alpha Tauri.

Verstappen had completely controlled the race since taking the lead from Hamilton during the first round of pit stops but crashed heavily into the barriers on the home straight, unable to control the car after the left rear tyre punctured.

The Dutchman kicked the rubber in disgust before walking away.

It was the second such incident because Aston Martin's Lance Stroll had suffered exactly the

I have to say sorry to Max, it would have been incredible to get that one-two for the team. But at the end, it was a fantastic day for us. This is definitely a strong boost of confidence for myself.

SERGIO PEREZ,
Red Bull driver

same fate a few laps earlier at the same section.

The race was stopped and a standing start ordered for the last two laps where Hamilton tried to pass Perez from second place but locked up, went straight on in turn one and finished 15th.

It completed a weekend to forget for champions Mercedes

with no points at all as Valtteri Bottas was 12th.

And Hamilton's mishap also meant that Verstappen retained the championship lead four points ahead of him.

"Normally Baku is pretty crazy," Perez said. "I have to say sorry to Max, it would have been incredible to get that one-two for the team."

"But at the end, it was a fantastic day for us. This is definitely a strong boost of confidence for myself."

Vettel said: "I'm over the moon. We were not expecting a podium here."

Charles Leclerc won the start from his surprise pole but it was soon clear that his Ferrari was inferior as Hamilton, Verstappen and Perez impressively moving up from sixth on the grid.

During the first pit stops Hamilton was held up because Gasly arrived, and the precious lost seconds were enough for the

Red Bull duo to move ahead of him.

Stroll was the only driver who hadn't pitted yet but running in fourth, up from 19th at the start, his left rear tyre then punctured and he hit the wall hard at almost top speed entering the home straight.

Stroll luckily got out seemingly unharmed but the safety car was deployed as the stricken car and plenty of debris had to be removed.

There was no change at the top at the restart and Verstappen seemed comfortably on course towards victory when he shockingly suffered the same fate as Stroll.

Hamilton then tried to snatch first place at the death in the restart but was only left to say "I am sorry guys" via team radio after the attempt went horribly wrong.

The season continues on June 20 with the French Grand Prix.

— dpa

New Zealand press for victory over England

LONDON: Neil Wagner saw off first-innings century maker Rory Burns as New Zealand pressed for an enterprising win over England in the first Test at Lord's on Sunday.

Black Caps skipper Kane Williamson's bold declaration at lunch on Sunday's fifth and final day left England with a target of 273 in 75 overs to win the first of this two-match series after the whole of Friday's play was washed out.

But England did not appear in any mood to take up the challenge as they reached tea on 56-2, needing a further 217 runs from 43 overs.

Burns, who anchored England's modest first-innings 275 with 132, had made 25 when he edged a swinging delivery from left-arm paceman Wagner low to second slip Tim Southee.

And England's 49-1 soon became 56-2.

Southee, who had taken 6-43 in England's first innings, had Zak Crawley out for a second two of the game when his sliced drive off a swinging ball to Henry Nicholls in the gully.

Dom Sibley, out for nought in the first innings, had ground his way to just 19 not out off 83 balls, with England captain Joe Root yet to score after coming in just before the break.

Wagner, one of several South Africa-born players in New

Zealand's XI, had tea figures of 1-5 in six overs, with Southee taking 1-21 in nine.

Meanwhile towering paceman Kyle Jamieson started his miserly spell of 0-8 in 10 with five straight maidens.

New Zealand's Devon Conway had marked his Test debut with a remarkable 200 in the tourists' first innings 378.

But New Zealand were missing left-arm spearhead Trent Boult, who only arrived in the UK on Friday after a period of family leave.

England, however, were without four batsmen well-suited to a run chase in injured all-rounder Ben Stokes, with Jos Buttler, Jonny Bairstow and Chris Woakes all rested following quarantine after their stints in the Indian Premier League.

Earlier New Zealand, who after next week's second Test at Edgbaston face India in the inaugural World Test Championship final, saw Ross Taylor make a brisk 33 before Williamson declared on 169-6.

England debutant paceman Ollie Robinson had nightwatchman Wagner caught behind by fellow newcomer James Bracey for 10 on his way to figures of 3-26.

That followed his 4-75 in the first innings and the 42 he made when England batted first time around. — AFP



New Zealand's Ross Taylor in action during the first Test at the Lord's Cricket Ground. — Reuters

Tsitsipas, Medvedev in quarters; Federer pulls out

PARIS: Roger Federer pulled out of what was possibly his last French Open on Sunday as a precautionary measure to rest up before Wimbledon, unwilling to risk his troublesome knee after an injury-plagued past 18 months.

Federer, a 20-time Grand Slam title winner, who will be 40 in two months' time, had battled over three and a half hours until 12.45 am on Sunday morning to reach the last 16 in Paris.

"After discussions with my team, I've decided I will need to pull out of Roland Garros today," Federer said.

"After two knee surgeries and over a year of rehabilitation it's important that I listen to my body and make sure I don't push myself too quickly on my road to recovery."

"I am thrilled to have gotten three matches under my belt. There is no greater feeling than being back on court."

The Swiss star was due to play Italy's Matteo Berrettini on Monday for a place in the quarterfinals, but Federer had cast doubt over whether he would continue following his win over



Roger Federer



Daniil Medvedev

Dominik Koepfer.

Federer was playing only his third tournament since last year's Australian Open and has always said Wimbledon is his main goal.

He is chasing a ninth title at Wimbledon which starts on June 28. He is also scheduled to play the warm-up grass court tournament in Halle beginning on June 14, the



Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas returns a shot to Spain's Pablo Carreno at the Roland Garros 2021 French Open in Paris. — AFP

day after the French Open ends.

"The Roland Garros tournament is sorry about the withdrawal of Roger Federer, who put up an incredible fight last night," said tournament director Guy Forget. "We were all delighted to see Roger back in Paris, where he played three high-level matches. We wish him all the

best for the rest of the season."

If his knife-edge 7-6 (7/5), 6-7 (3/7), 7-6 (7/4), 7-5 win over 59th-ranked Koepfer was his last match in Paris, it will be remembered as a gripping affair on the court, but soulless off it. Due to a government-imposed Covid-19 curfew, Court Philippe Chatrier was devoid of fans.

TSITSIPAS THROUGH

Greek fifth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas, fancied to reach his first Grand Slam final sealed his return to the quarterfinals with a 6-3, 6-2, 7-5 victory over Spain's Pablo Carreno Busta.

Second seed Daniil Medvedev of Russia made the French Open quarterfinals for the first time and

will tackle Tsitsipas for a place in the last four. Medvedev, who had never won a match at Roland Garros before this year, defeated Cristian Garin of Chile 6-2, 6-1, 7-5 in his last 16 tie.

Earlier, Tamara Zidansek became the first Slovenian woman to reach a Grand Slam quarter-final when she defeated Romania's Sorana Cirstea 7-6 (7/4), 6-1.

The world number 85 will meet Paula Badosa for a place in the semifinals after the Spaniard beat 2019 Roland Garros runner-up Marketa Vondrousova 6-4, 3-6, 6-2. Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova returned to the Roland Garros quarterfinals for the first time since 2011, defeating former world number one Victoria Azarenka 5-7, 6-3, 6-2. — AFP

FRENCH OPEN RESULTS

Men (fourth round)
Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE x5) bt Pablo Carreno Busta (ESP x12) 6-3, 6-2, 7-5; Daniil Medvedev (RUS x2) bt Cristian Garin (CHI x22) 6-2, 6-1, 7-5
Women (Last 16)
Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (RUS x31) bt Victoria Azarenka (BLR x15) 5-7, 6-3, 6-2; Tamara Zidansek (SLO) bt Sorana Cirstea (ROM) 7-6 (7/4), 6-1; Paula Badosa (ESP x33) bt Marketa Vondrousova (CZE x20) 6-4, 3-6, 6-2

BROMELL SETS WORLD-LEADING 9.77SEC IN 100M

FRASER-PRYCE CLOCKS 10.63 TO BECOME SECOND FASTEST WOMAN IN HISTORY

MIAMI: US sprinter Trayvon Bromell threw down an Olympic challenge on Saturday, clocking a world-leading 9.77sec to win the 100m at a meeting in Florida and become the seventh-fastest all time.

In a wind of 1.5 m/sec, Bromell stormed to victory at the NACAC New Life Invitational, a World Athletics Continental Tour Silver meeting in Miramar, Florida.

The world indoor 60m champion in 2016, Bromell faced just three competitors in his heat, getting off to a strong start and powering away to become the ninth man to break 9.80sec over 100m.

It continues an impressive build up towards the Tokyo Olympics for Bromell, the 25-year-old who has battled injuries the past few seasons.

In April he clocked a then world-leading 9.88sec at a meet in Jacksonville, Florida.

Bromell's form suggests he is firmly in the frame as a potential 100m gold medallist in Tokyo, where world champion Christian Coleman will be absent because of a doping ban.

Bromell exploded onto the athletics scene in 2015, when he ran a personal best time of 9.84sec for the 100m before his 20th birthday — the fastest time ever run by a teenager over the distance — before later claiming a bronze at that year's World Championships in Beijing.

After winning 60m indoor world gold in 2016 he suffered disappointment at the Rio Olympics, finishing in eighth place in the final won by Usain Bolt.



Jamaica's Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce (R) and Natasha Morrison in action during the women's 100m. Two-time Olympic 100m champion Fraser-Pryce clocked the world's fastest women's 100m in nearly 33 years and the fourth-best time in history. — Reuters

He later suffered a torn Achilles in the final of the 4x100m relay, the start of an injury nightmare that saw him miss two full years of competition.

FRASER-PRYCE SIZZLES

Jamaican sprint star Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce became the second fastest woman in history on Saturday, clocking a world-leading 10.63 seconds (1.3m/sec) for the 100m at the Olympic Destiny meeting in Kingston.

The 34-year-old reigning world and two-time Olympic 100m champion obliterated the field at the National Stadium, finishing



Trayvon Bromell

several metres clear of her closest rival.

Only late US sprinting star Florence Griffith-Joyner, who holds the world record of 10.49sec, has run faster.

Fraser-Pryce's time smashed the previous 2021 world-leading time of 10.72sec set by Sha'Carri Richardson of the United States in March.

Fraser-Pryce had shared the Jamaican national record with Elaine Thompson-Herah at 10.70 seconds and she had a season's best 10.84 seconds coming into the meet, organised by the Jamaica

Olympic Association and the Jamaica Athletics Administrative Association.

After getting off to a bullet-like start, Fraser-Pryce ran away from the field to win by a massive margin, with Natasha Morrison a distant second in 10.95 seconds and Keshia Cameron third on 11.39.

Fraser-Pryce, the 2008 and 2012 Olympic 100m champion, was running her fourth 100m for the season and as surprised by her time as the small gathering at the stadium.

"Honestly, no, I wasn't coming out here to run that fast," she said. "Thank God that I finish healthy."

She said she was able to relax and run as "there was no pressure — just wanted to get one more race in before the national trials."

Fraser-Pryce did hint, however, that she can run faster with the Olympics approaching.

"If I am able to run 10.6 now and trials is some time away, this year I just wanted to break the 10.7 barrier so now I can focus on making the team to the Olympics," she said.

Fraser-Pryce, who passed Americans Marion Jones (10.65) and Carmelita Jeter (10.64) on the all-time list, said Saturday's race should be taken in context.

"It's one part of the process," she said. "I can't get too complacent as I still have to make the national team at the national trials."

Only the top three finishers in the event at the Jamaican Championships set for June 24-27 will be selected to run the 100 metres at the Tokyo Olympics set for July. — AFP



Dutch athlete Sifan Hassan wins the women's 10,000m during the FBK Games and sets new women's 10,000m world record in Hengelo. — AFP

Sifan Hassan sets new women's 10,000m world record

HENGLO, Netherlands: Sifan Hassan of the Netherlands fired a warning shot ahead of the Tokyo Olympics by setting a new world record in the women's 10,000m on Sunday.

Hassan, 28, clocked 29min 06.82sec at the Hengelo meet, smashing the previous best set by Ethiopian Almaz Ayana (29:17.45) in winning gold at the 2016 Rio Games.

Hassan was aided by technology that lit up the track on world record pace as she ran.

"Wow! To run this world record here today in Hengelo is something I could only dream of," said Hassan, who was born in Ethiopia, arrived in the Netherlands in 2008 at the

age of 15 and received Dutch citizenship in 2013.

"It's the perfect confirmation of the hard work we've put in getting ready for Tokyo. I am so happy to share this record in front of my Dutch fans. I am so happy!"

This was the fourth career world record for Hassan, who was coached by the now-banned Alberto Salazar.

The reigning world champion over 1,500m and 10,000m has also posted world records over one mile, one-hour and 5km on the road.

Last October, she smashed Paula Radcliffe's long-standing European record for the women's 10,000m. — AFP

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 6

Oman Olympic (U-23) football team suffered to a 1-0 defeat against Bahrain Olympic team in the first preparatory match late on Saturday at Khalifa Sports city Stadium in Manama. The only goal in the match was netted by Bahrain's Saleh Mohammed in the dying minutes of the match. The second warm-up match between both teams will take place on Tuesday at the same venue.

The international friendly match was the first official test game for the team since the absence during last year period due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Also, it was the initial official match for the Croatian coach Dario Basic since his appointment earlier last year. Despite the loss, the Olympic team players delivered good show and managed to create many scoring attempts. Coach Basic did many substitutions in the second half to test different faces in the squad. It is expected that the coach will have different starting line-up to test the performance of each player in the squad.

The U-23 players are



undergoing an overseas camp in Bahrain for 19 days since May 21. The camp is part of team's preparation for the Asian Olympic Qualifiers that will take place in October. The finals of the AFC Asian (U-23) will be held in September 2022 in Uzbekistan during September 6 to 25. The camp is focusing on improving the fitness and physical sides of

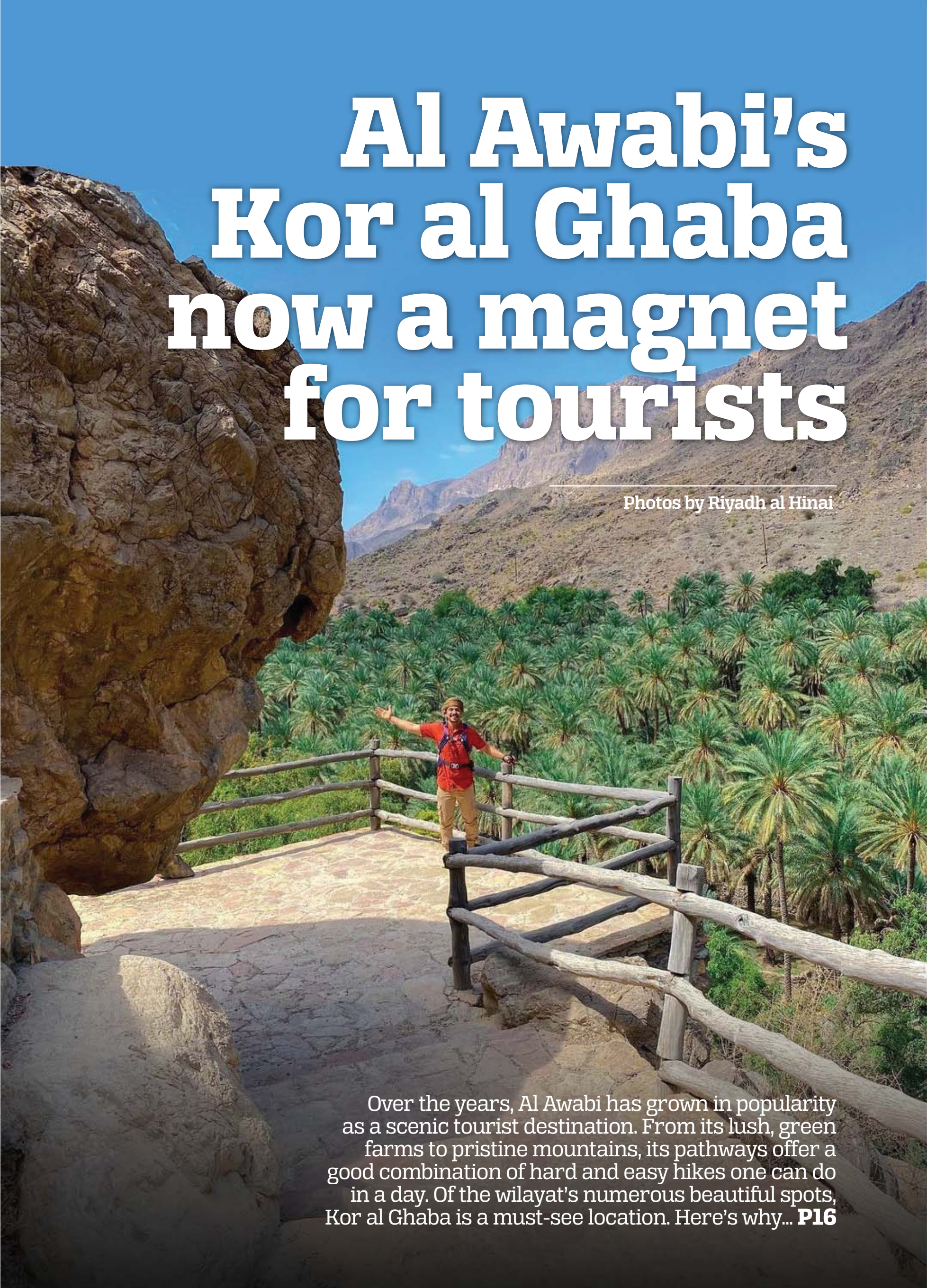
the team members after the long break since last appearance in March.

The team players are having two training sessions daily including gymnasium training in morning sessions while implementing some tactical practices during evening sessions.

OMAN U-23 SQUAD: Essam al Makhzoomi, Faisal al Harthy, Arshad

al Alawi, Yahya al Hudaifi, Awadh al Shari, Hussain al Shari, Najeeb al Shujaibi, Jasim al Noubi, Fahad Bait Obaidan, Essa al Naabi, Saud al Habsi, Al Baraa al Maawali, Islam al Hinai, Fahad al Hajri, Ibrahim al Rajhi, Yusuf al Malki, Abdullah al Balushi, Hani al Nuaumi, Musab al Maamari, Yusuf al Shiyadi, Mohammed al Buraiki, Marwan al Abdulsalam, Hani al Qartoubi and Qasim Mubarak.

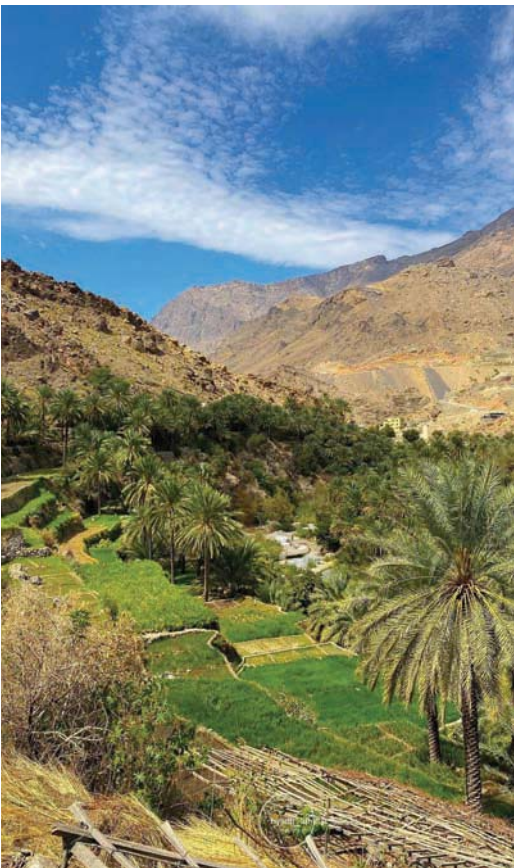
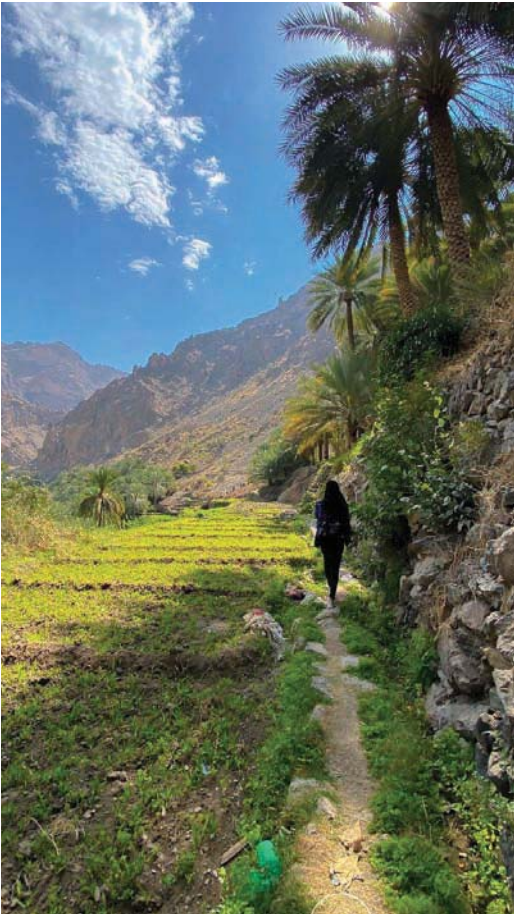
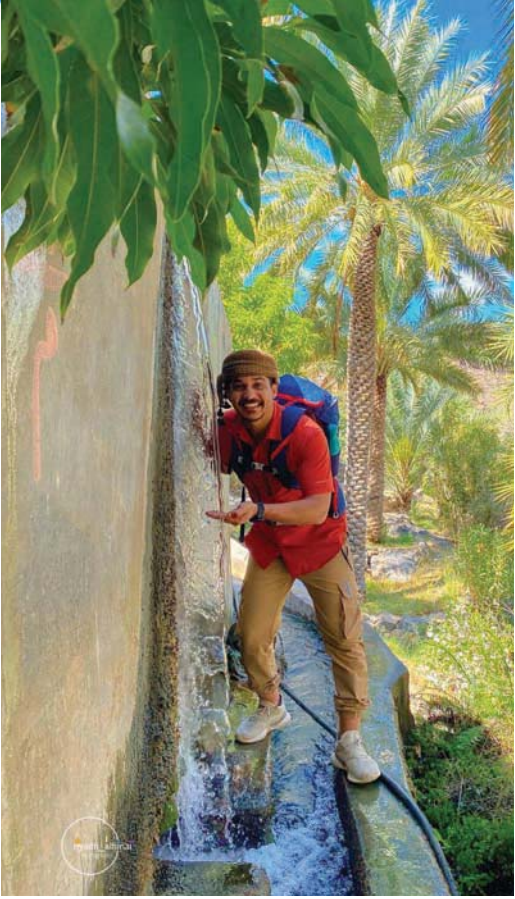
features



Al Awabi's Kor al Ghaba now a magnet for tourists

Photos by Riyadh al Hinai

Over the years, Al Awabi has grown in popularity as a scenic tourist destination. From its lush, green farms to pristine mountains, its pathways offer a good combination of hard and easy hikes one can do in a day. Of the wilayat's numerous beautiful spots, Kor al Ghaba is a must-see location. Here's why... **P16**



CULTURE

READ



THE HANDMAID'S TALE

BY MARGARET ATWOOD

The story of life in the dystopia of Gilead, a totalitarian society in what was the United States. Gilead is ruled by a fundamentalist regime that treats women as property of the state, and is faced with environmental disasters and a plummeting birth rate.

Photography Groups join efforts in promoting culture

THE JAALAN PHOTOGRAPHY Group is a space for creativity to highlight and promote historical and tourist attractions, traditional, popular Omani crafts and authentic Omani costumes. It includes members from the three Wilayats of South Al Sharqiyah Governorate: Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan and Al Kamil W'al Wafi.

The group aims to spread the culture of the art of photography among those interested and to promote their

work to encourage them to give their best in cooperation with the Photographic Society of Oman. This is achieved through lectures, seminars and courses related to photography and participation in various forums.

Muhammad al Jaafari, head of the Jaalan Photography Group, explained that the team was established on February 27, 2014, with the support and patronage of the Al Ashkharah Youth. After two years the team moved to be officially

under the umbrella of Al Wehda Sports Club, and it includes a group of creative young people in the field of photography from all wilayats in Jaalan. The team participated in many forums, festivals and competitions at the level of the Sultanate and abroad, as it won first place and the gold medal in the 2018 Forum for Photography, which was held by the PSO. It achieved more than 600 awards, ranging from gold, silver, bronze and appreciation medals.





Al Mansour Fort: A unique masterpiece in Al Rustaq

The archaeological castles and fortresses scattered in the various governorates of the Sultanate embody the level of Omani skills in the fields of architecture and engineering. These structures' civilised and cultural components will remain as vivid evidence of the ingenuity of the Omani talent and is a testament to their outstanding contributions to human civilisation. The inclusion of some of these archaeological sites on the World Heritage List is evidence of the value of these sites and their importance to the world.

The Wilayat of Rustaq in the South Al Batinah Governorate is rich with many castles and forts, including the Al Mansour Fort, one of the ancient civilisation's enduring monuments. It is an architectural masterpiece built by Imam Saeed Ahmad bin Saeed al Busaidy on the sixth of Shaaban in the year 1204 AH, according to what was written on the door of the fortress. It is considered a cultural reserve that tells an important era in Oman's history. The fort was given care and attention by the government, as it was restored to revive the beauty and



splendour of its architecture.

Al Mansour Fort consists of three floors. The ground floor contains a number of rooms, a store for keeping dates, a store for weapons, and a water well. The second floor contains six rooms, and the third floor contains one room.

There are also two towers in the fortress. The first is located on the eastern side consisting of several floors and it overlooks the

entrance to the fort. The second tower is located on the western side and is wider than the first and consists of two floors.

The fort was built entirely of Omani sarooj and mountain rocks, and its roofs were made of wood. All the doors, windows and walls of the fort have beautiful Islamic inscriptions of great magnificence.

Surrounding the fort are numerous towers built higher than the houses so

they can be used to monitor movements from the ground. Falaj al Mansour passes in front of the fort, and it is still running and watering the palm groves that surround the fort. In the past, the falaj provided water for the residents of the fort. In the western part of the fortress, there is a place for cooking the Al Mabsali palm dates. This is evidence of the great interest in palm trees and agriculture in general.

HERITAGE

Ancient traditional healing rituals go digital in virus-hit S Africa



INCENSE BURNED gently in the corner of a sunlit room as South African traditional healer Makhosi Malatji fixed her smartphone into a tripod and reached for a small bag of divination bones.

A young female face on the screen watched Malatji shake the pouch and scatter its contents across the floor of her Johannesburg home.

She angled the phone to make sure her client could follow and began interpreting the bone pattern, finding cues that prompted the woman to open up about a distressing family feud. Like traditional healers across the country, Malatji, 37, took an ancient practice online last year to continue offering consultations under strict coronavirus restrictions.

The shift has fired a budding pre-pandemic trend of younger traditional healers already engaging clients through social media and video calls.

"Before Covid I had never used a phone or laptop to do a consultation," said Malatji, who trained over a decade ago.

"It was a bit of an adjustment," she laughed, describing her first Skype session as "a mess".

Sceptical at first, Malatji now has professional profiles on Facebook, Instagram and Youtube.

A ring light stood at the back of her brightly coloured consultation room lined with traditional printed fabric and carpeted in animal skin.

Despite the easing of coronavirus restrictions, Malatji still sees half of her clients remotely.

"I actually enjoy the online ones more now because it saves time," she admitted, noting that she also acquired new overseas customers in countries like Dubai, Italy and Sri Lanka.

NEW AGE SANGOMAS

Known as "sangomas" in Zulu language, traditional healers are qualified herbalists, counsellors and mediators as well as diviners.

Many South Africans consult them for illnesses, dream interpretations and conflict resolution.

Shrouded in misconception, sangomas were banned in 1957 under the "Witchcraft Suppression Act" and only legally recognised decades later as "traditional health practitioners".

Knowledge transmission skipped a generation as a result, with grandparents training millennial grandchildren more inclined to break with tradition.

Five years after she became a traditional healer in 2012, Nomfundo Dhlamini branched out into the digital space as a self-proclaimed "new age sangoma".

The 30-year-old uses social media platforms to "advocate for African spirituality", particularly among young people.

As lockdown boosted demand for impersonal healing, Dhlamini distilled traditional herbs into soaps and tea bags she sold online.

A growing number of ailing customers have started discussing symptoms and remedies with her via WhatsApp message. Previously, "the only way to speak to a traditional healer was to go to their place," Dhlamini explained. "Now there are new ways of doing things."

But the digital presence of sangomas remains limited, she added, pointing to a backlash from traditionalists opposed to modernising the practice.

The generational gap can sometimes complicate dialogue. There is "a little bit of tension," Dhlamini noted.

"It's not really easy for an elderly healer to ask a younger healer for help (with technology)."

THROWING BONES CANNOT CHANGE

Khanti Madolo, 39, spotted an information gap about sangomas when he moved to Johannesburg from the Eastern Cape province in 2002.

"A lot of the people who move from rural to more urban areas... don't know where to consult," he explained.

Last year, Madolo and his former classmate Siphiso Lindi set up South Africa's first online directory, "Gogo Online" for traditional healers. "We went into a very traditional space where technology is frowned upon... thinking that people might be averse," Lindi said.

But more than 200 healers have signed up to the platform since its launch last November.

Lockdown "has been a great help", said Madolo, as "traditional healers are starting to move" online.

Yet after struggling with months of telephonic consultations, 66-year-old Gogo Molahlegi was somewhat relieved when authorities allowed traditional healers to resume face-to-face sessions.

The great-grandmother still feels less constrained by face masks and hand sanitiser than a screen.

"At my age... I prefer to see someone here," Molahlegi said, removing her sandals before stepping into a small back yard room lined with jars of herbs and bottles of sacred river water. A younger trainee took notes as Molahlegi lit a candle and sniffed tobacco — rituals that mark the start of a traditional reading. "Throwing bones cannot change," she argued. "You cannot do that digitally... the person has to be here with you." — **AFP**

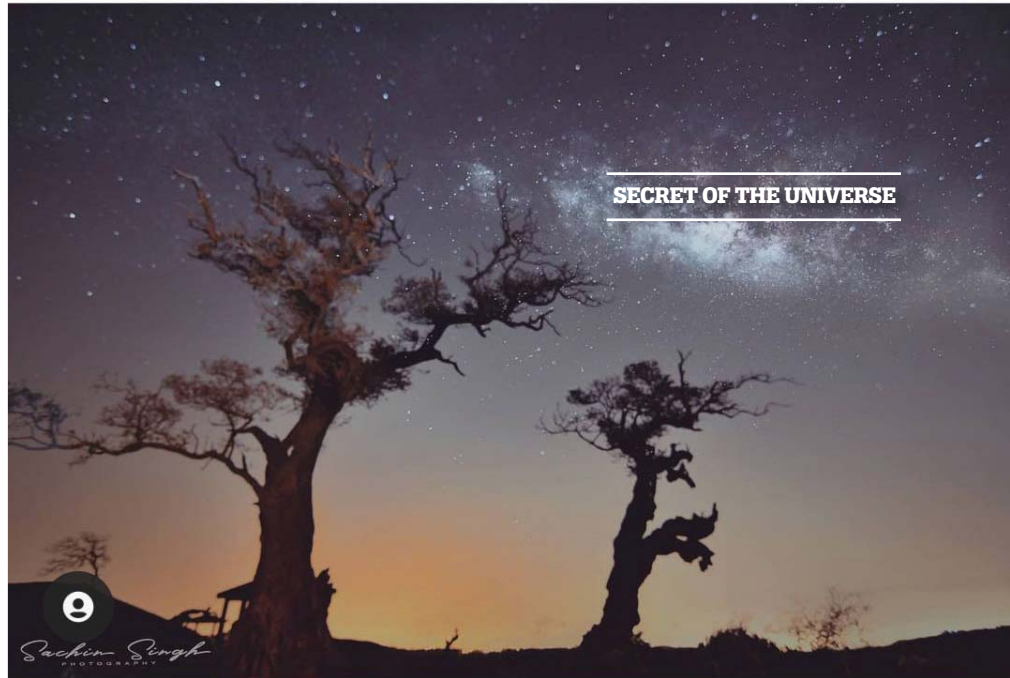


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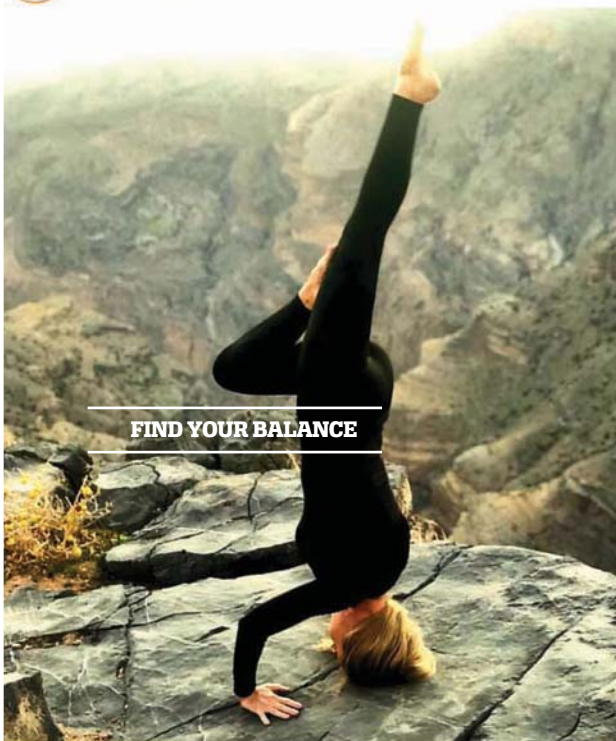
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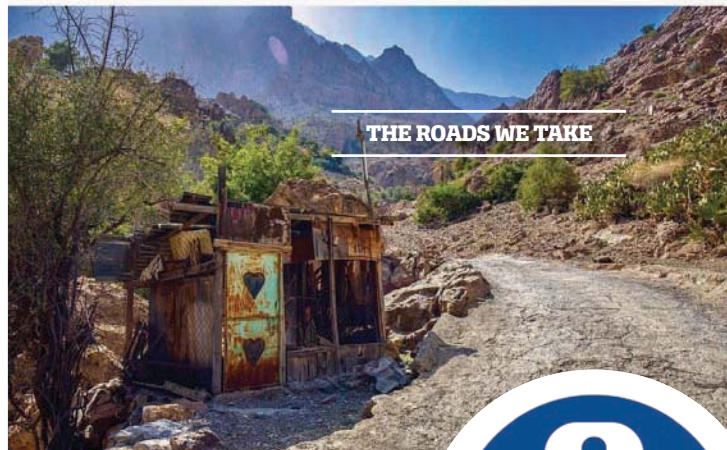
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AROUND THE WORLD

TRAVEL TALES



Turkey says it will defeat 'sea snot' outbreak in Marmara Sea

ISTANBUL: Turkey's environment minister pledged on Sunday to defeat a plague of "sea snot" threatening the Sea of Marmara with a disaster management plan he said would secure its future.

A thick slimy layer of organic matter, known as marine mucilage, has spread through the sea south of Istanbul, posing a threat to marine life and the fishing industry.

Harbours, shorelines and swathes of seawater have been blanketed by the viscous, greyish substance, some of which has also sunk below the waves, suffocating life on the seabed.



"Hopefully, together we will protect our Marmara within the framework of a disaster management plan," Environment Minister Murat Kurum said, speaking from a marine research vessel that has been taking samples of the slimy substance.

"We will take all the necessary steps within 3 years and realize the projects that will save not only the present but also the future together," Kurum said, adding that he would soon give details of the action plan.

Scientists say climate change and pollution have contributed to the proliferation of organic matter, which contains a wide variety of microorganisms and can flourish when nutrient-rich sewage flows into seawater.

President Tayyip Erdogan blamed the outbreak on untreated water from cities including Istanbul, home to 16 million people, and vowed to "clear our seas from the mucilage scourge". — **Reuters**

INSPIRING TALES

Giving back to the community after successful small business launching



SMALL AND MEDIUM Enterprises (Riyada) continues to inspire many Omanis to create their own business and the encouragement has allowed for Omani products to become successful not only locally but they are also starting to find their footing in the international market.

This has been the case for small business owner Samira al Lamkiyah whose perfume and incense business has allowed her to find a great purpose for her time while juggling responsibilities at home.

Samira has started her career in perfumery and frankincense/incense production by attending training courses for the manufacture of perfumes and incense conducted by the Omani Women's Association in Rustaq.

The association has been training women like Samira to find an extension of themselves through productive projects like learning handicrafts or perfumer business.

After learning the course, Samira has decided to use the

knowledge that she earned by jumping into the business of perfumery and incense production seriously.

She indicated that she buys materials and components from Muttrah and Suhar. She said that after learning the basics, she eventually found her way into the small and medium enterprises division of Riyada and after a series of conversations, she became a full-planned entrepreneur after obtaining a commercial registration from the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Samira said that she developed and branched out to other specialties ending up with a variety of products that has their niche markets. Not long after, she has started to export her 47 products abroad. The prices of boxes range between 5 to 15 Omani riyals.

Today, Samira's business has picked up and to give back to the community, she conducts workshops in the manufacturing of incense and perfumes for female students in several schools.

ENTERTAINMENT

Huge Harry Potter store opens in New York



NEW YORK: Wearing Hogwarts robes and witches' hats, hundreds of Potterheads sipped Butterbeer and posed for photos in Hagrid's giant shoes as New York's long-awaited Harry Potter store, the biggest in the world, opened Thursday.

Fans of the boy wizard queued for hours in heavy rain to be among the first inside the three-story shop in Lower Manhattan that hosts the largest collection of Potter products anywhere.

"It's really magical," said Margaret Suarez, whose boyfriend arrived at 6:00 am (1100 GMT) to hold a spot in line four hours ahead of opening.

Suarez, 30, quickly eyed a wand belonging to witch Bellatrix Lestrange to go with the patronus charm memorabilia and funk pop figures that were already in her shopping bag.



"In my heart, I'm a wizard," Suarez said. "I really want to get a wand and personalise it so I can live my best fantasy," the New Yorker added.

Ruben Juarez, 27, and his wife travelled from Dallas, Texas for the grand opening of the 21,000 square-foot (1,950 square metres) store that is near the Flatiron building.

"We're excited to be here. I love everything Harry Potter," said Juarez, wearing the scarlet and gold scarf of the house of Gryffindor.

Large crowds gathered outside the store throughout the morning, with even a few police officers called to ensure order was maintained, as Potterheads waited for their timed ticket entry.

Inside, fans of J. K. Rowling's magical world snapped selfies in front of a red telephone box like the one that transports witches and wizards to the Ministry of Magic, and bought fizzing whizbees candy.

They tried on knitted quidditch jumpers, flicked through copies of the best-selling book series in history and sampled the wizards' favourite drink at the Butterbeer bar.

"Butterbeer is like cream soda but with a kick to it. It's unlike anything, honestly," explained 21-year-old Emilee Rodriguez.

The flagship store was due to open last summer but was delayed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

For 19-year-old Alexandra Ewing, the wait for her first visit to a Potter store was worth it.

"I'm having the time of my life. I'm fighting back tears this whole time, I'm loving it," she said. — **AFP**

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Al Awabi's Kor al Ghaba now a magnet for tourists

By Staff Reporter

Characterised by breathtaking views, Kor al Ghaba in the village of Al Alia in Wadi Bani Kharous is becoming the Wilayat of Al Awabi's hot property attracting a huge number of visitors wanting to experience the location's breathtaking nature.

Located at the mouth of the wadi coming from Jabal Al Akhdhar and boasting emerald green but crystal clear and deep pool with beautiful cascading waterfall surrounded by trees, it's the perfect place to detox with nature.

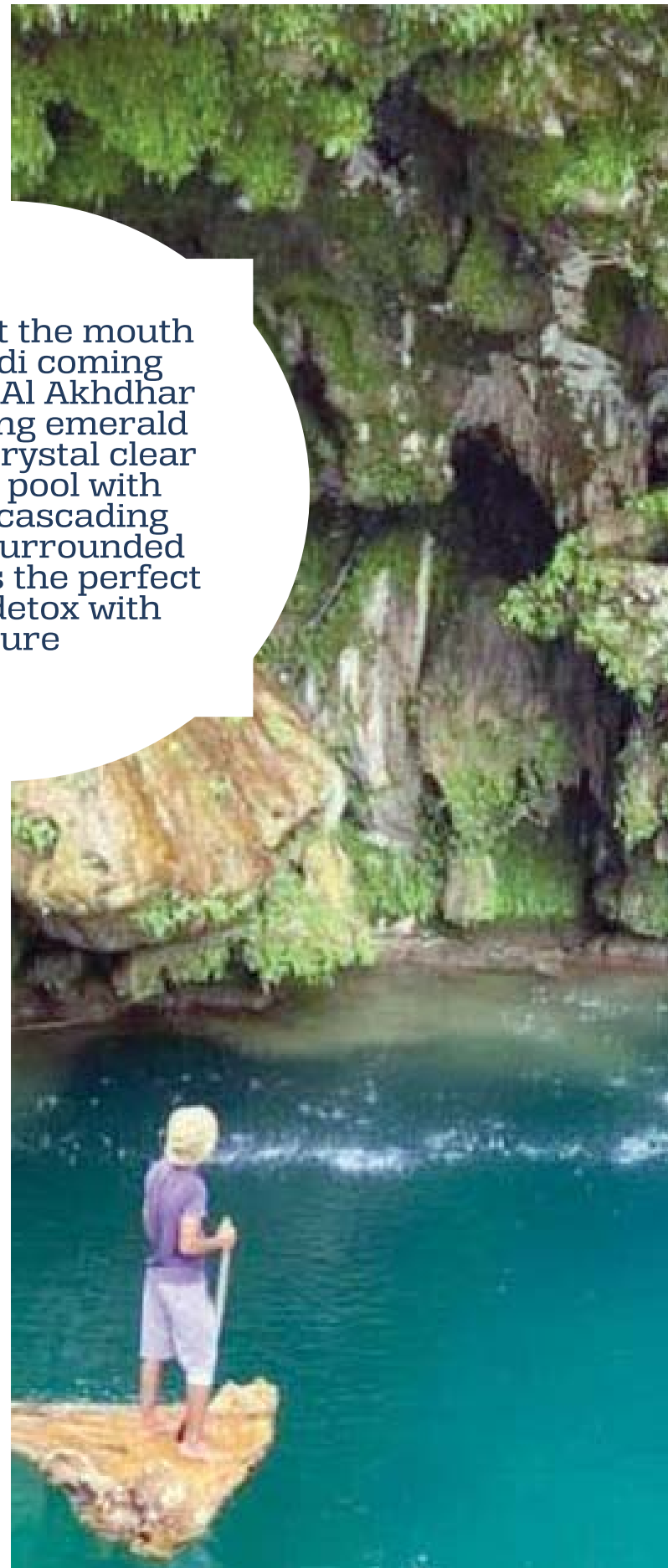
Ahmed al Bahri from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism said, that there are two paths to the Kor al Ghaba that the visitor can choose. The first path starts from the parking lot of the mosque and snakes through wadi and farms. There are some road instruction boards that indicate the direction of the path. As for the second path, it starts from the village of Sahkoun and courses through the rocks of the wadi and the mountainous heights until reaching Mazare' al Dar, which is also a beautiful tourist site for relaxation known for its cool and calm atmosphere and the abundance of mango, grape and Zam trees. The walk continues until reaching a deep water pool called Jabbat Bani Bahri, which is located in the middle of the wadi, fed by a small waterfall with its fresh and ever-flowing water.

This emerald pool with its waterfall is usually one of the stops in Kor al Ghaba. From here, tourists and visitors can enjoy a good dip into its cool water while some actually make this spot an ideal place to cliff dive into the water.

Before reaching Kor al Ghaba, the tourist shall pass by Mazra' al Seer, which takes approximately five hours and an estimated distance of 6 km.

Al Bahri explained that what distinguishes this path is the landscape

Located at the mouth of the wadi coming from Jabal Al Akhdhar and boasting emerald green but crystal clear and deep pool with beautiful cascading waterfall surrounded by trees, it's the perfect place to detox with nature



Yaroubi, and the rock inscriptions that belongs to the family of the scholar Shaikh Jaed bin Khamis al Kharousi.

"There is no danger along the path. It requires fitness and moderate effort, especially before reaching Kor al Ghaba, which requires climbing and jumping between rocks".

"Due to large number of the visitors, the Al Alia National Company for Services was established under the supervision of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to be the organiser and supervisor of tourism and tourists, and to work in preserving the environment and local customs and traditions, and planning the establishment of various tourist activities.

Due to the mountain trails that connect the village with neighbouring villages, such as the Jabal Al Akhdhar in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah, Wadi Mistal and Wadi Bani Harras in Nakhlinthe Governorate of South Al Batinah, the influx of a large number of tourist groups increased. This constant flow of visitor traffic inspired a group of youth to form a mountain hiking team called Al Alia Guide under the umbrella of the national company to play the role of a tour guides to organise tours that also covers Kor al Ghaba path.

Part of the company's plan is to undertake a number of projects within the village that include investing and restoring the heritage houses in the village, establishing resorts on the banks of the wadi, establishing

marketing outlets to display local products, establishing a tourist information centre at the entrance to the village, in addition to implementing a number of events and training workshops for the villagers.

Central banks integrate ESG into mainstream activities

IMPACT INVESTMENT:
Over 80 central banks are now members of the Network for the Greening of the Financial System

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 6

Central banks are increasingly incorporating climate change and environmental, social and governance (ESG) considerations across their mainstream activities — from bank supervision to monetary policy and financial stability, Invesco said in a recent report. More than one-third of the world's central banks are linking policies and reserve asset management to the environment as membership of the Network for the Greening of the Financial

System (NGFS) multiplied 10-fold in the last three years to over 80 central bank members.

“Institutional investors and asset managers globally have been integrating ESG objectives into investment management since the issuance of the UN Principles for Responsible Investment (UNPRI) in 2006,” said Zainab Kufaishi, Head of Middle East and Africa, Invesco, an independent investment management firm.

“From a financial perspective, we have seen that incorporating ESG considerations has the potential to improve risk-adjusted returns by identifying medium-to-long-term exposures that could impact a company's fortunes.”

Central banks' investment activities are gradually following suit. In the Invesco 2020 study of



global sovereign asset managers, about a quarter of the central banks surveyed responded that central bank balance sheets should be used to mitigate climate change. The central challenge of climate risk and potential disruption to domestic commerce, international trade, and global financial markets as the result of rising global

temperatures has been a factor considered by central bankers and reserve managers. As much as monetary policy is becoming increasingly concerned with the growth and financial stability risks posed by ESG challenges, central bank practices are still evolving.

Central banks have moved more slowly as they face some

distinct challenges while seeking to incorporate ESG factors, depending on reserve management objectives, policy framework or asset class composition.

Central banks that hold foreign currency reserves to mitigate the impact of economic shocks will have less leeway due to liquidity and capital preservation requirements, whereas other central banks may have more degrees of freedom.

“The principles and practice of reserve management are evolving as reserve managers have been working to overlay ESG objectives onto traditional investment objectives of capital preservation, liquidity and return,” said Arnab Das, Global Market Strategist at Invesco EMEA. “Incorporating ESG considerations into investment

criteria can play an important part in the prudent protection of a country and economy from potential ravages of climate change, loss of biodiversity and other natural resources that form the wealth of nations.”

Central bank strategies to incorporate ESG criteria have fallen into three categories — exclusionary screening, investment integration and impact investing. Exclusionary screening is the most widely used because of its simplicity to screen and exclude sectors or companies from the investment universe based on ethical, moral, or scientific beliefs. Investment integration seeks to incorporate ESG considerations to improve risk/adjusted returns as well as societal benefits. Impact investing places policy outcomes alongside financial outcomes.

Infiniti Oman's Reference Programme garners great response



MUSCAT: Infiniti Oman's innovative Reference Programme has gathered a good response from its valued customers.

As per the programme, on successful conversion, the referee will be incentivised with an RO 100 gift voucher. The referee should own an Infiniti vehicle that was originally sold by Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (Oman) as a new vehicle.

A senior spokesperson at Infiniti Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles said, “The programme has got great responses from owners of Infiniti vehicle who are our valued customers. The objective of the reference programme has been to produce reference for further conversion to a sale and to build the brand. A reference can be given by any resident of Oman who is an existing Infiniti customer.”

Referrals can be made by logging on to the website <http://referInfiniti.com>. While a reference provided cannot be for self, a referee can submit multiple references.

The referee will be eligible for RO 100 gift voucher if the reference buys a new Infiniti vehicle from any Suhail Bahwan Automobiles in Oman. A pre-owned Infiniti car purchase/ Infiniti purchase from any other outlet will not qualify under the Reference Programme.

Toyota Corolla offers biggest excitement benefits

MUSCAT: Toyota's most popular sedan — the Corolla is an iconic model that has always succeeded in offering owners exciting, fuel-efficient and cost-effective ownership experiences. The present generation Corolla too takes these experiences to even greater levels with its quality, technologies and more.

Customers looking forward to owning the Corolla can benefit with cash gift from RO 1950 up to RO 2600, service 2 years / 20,000 kms (whichever is earlier), 1 year insurance, assured gift voucher and chances to win Grand Raffle — 1 Supra and 2 Camry.



All individual prospects who walk in for an enquiry of any Toyota vehicle are eligible for a raffle of 7 units of iPhone 12, 64

GB. (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year.

Terms & Conditions apply. Visit the showroom for exact details.

The Corolla's distinct personality is completed by its expansive and comfortable cabin, which displays exceptional quality and finishing throughout.

The interior design adopts a simple yet appealing style, with comfortable spaciousness and integrated functional parts combining to create a refined elegance. The ergonomically designed seats feature new cushion material, while the armrest and ample legroom offer superior comfort for the rear-seat passengers.

MCBS launches Be Ready programme



MUSCAT: Modern College of Business and Science (MCBS) takes the hand of Omanis at the beginning of their professional journey by launching Be Ready programme. The programme helps participants discover their strengths and weaknesses, improve their personal and professional skills in various fields, simulate the work environment, work in teams, accomplish tasks and gain more confidence as new leaders.

Be Ready has been designed after a thorough study of the Omani market skills needs, global skills proposed by the World Economic Forum and prepared to be aligned with Oman vision 2040 which aims at developing the national technical and entrepreneurial capabilities.

This initiative is sponsored by Bin Omeir for Research and Charities and Bin Salim Enterprises. It takes place at the college premises every Saturday

and Sunday starting on the 5th of June and ends on the 20th of June.

To ensure that the delivery of the programme is diverse and relevant, MCBS has brought together well qualified, experienced and professional trainers from within the college and from the industry. A team of seven professors and coaches from diverse cultural background is going to train Omani people with the unified goal — equipping young people with skills for a local and international job market.

The first batch of the programme includes 16 participants who will be trained in six themes: Personal and Professional Identity, Leadership and Emotional Intelligence, Communication and Critical Thinking Skills, CV Writing, Interview Preparation and Work Ethics, Professional Writing Skills and Marketing Skills.

NBO kicks off registration for Innovation Incubator

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) has kicked off registration for the most exciting tech event of the year, Innovation Incubator. A collaboration with the SME Development Authority, Oman Academy for SMEs, and Paradigm Consulting, the initiative will take successful applicants on a three-month-long course that will challenge them to come up with ideas for a FinTech start-up. The winners will then get the chance to pitch to investors. All IT students and fresh graduates with a head for FinTech and a passion for entrepreneurship are invited to apply through the bank's website between the 6th and 20th June 2021. With only 30 participants to be selected, the race is on to see who could be Oman's next FinTech superstar.

Sherifa al Maskariyah (pictured), Head of Brand at NBO, said, “We're excited to begin the selection process for our highly-awaited programme. Oman has a huge pool of young talent and this competition is going to find out what they're made of! FinTech's role is becoming more vital than ever, not only in the banking industry, but as part of the Sultanate's vision to be a technologically



advanced nation. Innovation Incubator offers young people an unprecedented opportunity to learn more about it, get ahead of the game, and maybe even make it their career.”

As part of the bank's active corporate social responsibility (CSR) programme, the programme is aimed at college students and fresh graduates. Selected participants will go through a tailored programme delivered by specially trained NBO employees. At the end of the course, three out of the 30 will be selected to pitch their ideas to potential investors, connecting them to bigger opportunities.

With a range of youth-centred initiatives and programmes including Etimad, Outward Bound Oman, and the Hackathon, NBO continues to foster Oman's young people and equip them with the skills and knowledge they need to contribute to the development of the nation.

Sohar International announces 'Transfer Your Salary, Transform Your Life' promotion



MUSCAT: Delivering on its principles of providing more vision, more value, and more velocity to customers and the nation at large, Sohar International has reasserted its customer-centric approach, announcing a host of benefits and rewards for those transferring their salary to the bank.

The special privileges come in the form of reduced interest rates on select loans, free credit card for life, and a host of countless benefits including the enrolment into the bank's ongoing Prize Scheme Draws offering lucrative cash prizes.

All customers who transfer their salaries to Sohar International are entitled to these exclusive benefits that offer interest rates as low as 4.95 per cent on personal loans & housing loans, 5 per cent on auto loans with motor insurances starting at only 1.5 per cent interest, a free for life credit card and free consultations for financial advice with financial industry experts.

The offer also enables customers to enter into the Prize Scheme Draws entitling them to get chances to win in the dedicated Salary Draws totalling RO 12,000 in monthly cash prizes.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcement of Capital Reduction
In accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company RIAM SHINE TRADING, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No 1050346, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from Omani Rials 100,000.000 to 20,000.000. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

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Britain says all state contract bidders must commit to 2050 net zero goal

LONDON: Companies bidding for British government contracts must commit to net zero emissions by 2050 and publish their carbon reduction plans under new rules announced on Saturday.

The announcement, which comes on World Environment Day, is in line with the government's net zero commitment to balance carbon emissions with their removal from the atmosphere by the middle of the century.

"The government spends more than £290 billion (\$411.34 billion) on procurement every year, so it's important we use this purchasing power to help transform our economy to net-zero", said Minister for Efficiency and Transformation Theodore Agnew.

"These measures will help green our economy, while not overly burdening businesses, particularly SMEs."

The rules will be in place by September and apply to all prospective suppliers bidding for contracts above £5 million per year. Anyone failing to comply will be excluded from the contest.

— Reuters

Explainer: What is a global minimum corporate tax and what will it mean?

LONDON: Finance Ministers from the Group of Seven (G7) rich nations reached a landmark accord on Saturday backing the creation of a global minimum corporate tax rate of at least 15 per cent, an agreement that could then form the basis of a worldwide deal.

Such a deal aims to end what US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has called a "30-year race to the bottom on corporate tax rates" as countries compete to lure multinationals.

WHY A GLOBAL MINIMUM TAX?

Major economies are aiming to discourage multinationals from shifting profits — and tax revenues — to low-tax countries regardless of where their sales are made.

Increasingly, income from intangible sources such as drug patents, software and royalties on intellectual property has migrated to these jurisdictions, allowing companies to avoid paying higher taxes in their traditional home countries.

WHERE ARE THE TALKS AT?

The G7 accord feeds into a much broader, existing effort. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has been coordinating tax negotiations among 140 countries for years on rules for taxing cross-border digital services and curbing tax base erosion, including a global corporate minimum tax.

The OECD and G20 countries aim to reach consensus on both by mid-year, but the talks on a global corporate minimum are technically simpler and less contentious. If a broad consensus is reached, it will be extremely



Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak speaks at a meeting of finance ministers from across the G7 nations ahead of the G7 leaders' summit, at Lancaster House in London, Britain. — Reuters

hard for any low-tax country to try and block an agreement.

The minimum is expected to make up the bulk of the \$50-\$80 billion in extra tax that the OECD estimates firms will end up paying globally under deals on both fronts.

HOW WOULD A GLOBAL MINIMUM WORK?

The global minimum tax rate would apply to overseas profits.

Governments could still set whatever local corporate tax rate they want, but if companies pay lower rates in a particular country, their home governments could "top-up" their taxes to the minimum rate, eliminating the advantage of shifting profits.

The OECD said last month that governments broadly agreed on the basic design of the minimum tax but not the rate. Tax experts say that is the thorniest issue, although the G7 accord creates strong momentum around the

15 per cent-plus level.

Other items still to be negotiated include whether investment funds and real estate investment trusts should be covered, when to apply the new rate and ensuring it is compatible with US tax reforms aimed at deterring erosion.

WHAT NEXT

A G20 meeting scheduled for Venice next month will see whether the G7 accord gets broad support from the world's biggest developing and developing countries.

Much still needs to be ironed out — including the metrics that will determine how and to which multinational companies the tax will be applied.

The G7 communique left open what will happen in the meantime to digital services taxes on big technology companies in various jurisdictions, which the United States wanted to be scrapped

as soon as a deal was in place. It said only that there should be "appropriate coordination between the application of the new international tax rules and the removal of all Digital Services Taxes".

Any final agreement could have major repercussions for low-tax countries and tax havens.

The Irish economy has boomed with the influx of billions of dollars in investment from multinationals. Dublin, which has resisted European Union attempts to harmonise its tax rules, is unlikely to accept a higher minimum rate without a fight.

However, the battle for low-tax countries is less likely to be about scuppering the overall talks and more about building support for a minimum rate as close as possible to its 12.5 per cent or seeking certain exemptions.

— Reuters

Yellen urges G7 to keep up fiscal support for recovery, climate investments



LONDON: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen (pictured) said on Saturday that she is urging the G7 wealthy democracies and other countries to keep up fiscal support for their economic recoveries and to make investments to fight climate change and inequality.

"G7 economies have the fiscal space to speed up their recoveries to not only reach pre-Covid levels of GDP but also to support a return to pre-pandemic growth paths", Yellen said. "This is why we continue to urge a shift in our thinking from 'let's not withdraw support too early' to 'what more can we do now.'"

Yellen said the G7 finance ministers agreed to ambitious commitments to de-carbonise their economies and mobilise public and private finance for action to combat climate change. — Reuters

French economy to return to pre-Covid levels by Q1 2022

PARIS: France's economy will return to pre-Covid 19 levels by the first quarter of 2022, Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire (pictured) told weekly JDD, as a return of spending and investments lay the ground for a recovery.

Le Maire, who reaffirmed his target of 5 per cent economic growth for France this year, said the recent surge in credit card payments, rising holiday season bookings

and soaring clothing purchases showed that France was quickly returning to growth.

The minister said the country's debt, which ballooned during the pandemic to fund support measures, should begin to stabilise in 2025 and then decrease. He said he expected the public deficit to be below 3 per cent of gross domestic product in 2027. — Reuters



Elon Musk breakup tweets bruise bitcoin

LONDON/SINGAPORE: Bitcoin fell more than 7 per cent, with tweets by Tesla boss Elon Musk that appeared to lament a breakup with the cryptocurrency again moving markets.

Tesla's big position in bitcoin and Musk's large personal following set crypto markets on edge whenever he tweets, and the price fell after he posted "#Bitcoin", a broken-heart emoji and a picture of a couple discussing a breakup.

Musk followed up by posting a breakup comic strip and replying "nice" to an illustration of rival crypto dogecoin posted by crypto exchange Coinbase. It was unclear what, if anything, any of the tweets meant.

Musk has previously said Tesla would not sell its bitcoin, but his tweets were enough to unsettle markets still fragile following May's crash.



Representations of bitcoin are placed on US Dollar banknotes in this illustration picture. — Reuters

"When Elon Musk tweets any crypto-related content, the market... expects a reaction", said Nick Spanos, co-founder of ZAP Protocol, a crypto project in Switzerland.

Bitcoin's fall pushed it below its 20-day

moving average to as low as \$36,263, and took some of the edge off its week-to-date gains. It is up 2 per cent so far this week.

Musk has been a major promoter of cryptocurrencies but has turned critical of bitcoin since suspending Tesla plans to take it in payment for cars, owing to concerns about its energy use.

Many crypto specialists have struggled to understand the motives behind his tweets.

"He's trolling the community", said Bobby Ong, co-founder of crypto data aggregator and analytics website CoinGecko.

Bitcoin and several other cryptocurrencies are still recovering from a crash last month in the wake of that decision and on news of renewed regulatory scrutiny in China.

— Reuters

Fish and cheese: UK inks trade deals with Norway, Iceland

OSLO: Britain has clinched post-Brexit trade agreements with Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein as it seeks to forge new global trading relationships after leaving the European Union.

The three nations, which are part of the European Economic Area allowing them access to the single market, have relied on temporary trade arrangements with Britain since the end of a Brexit transition period on December 31.

Under the deal with Norway, import



Fish buyers stand next to boxes of cod during the daily auction at the fish market in Grimsby, Britain. — Reuters

tariffs on Norwegian fish and seafood, its second-largest industry after oil and gas production, would be reduced, with no tariffs due on white fish, such as cod — a benefit for the fish processing industry in the north of England.

Britain will be able to export four cheeses to Norway, including Wensleydale and West Country Farmhouse Cheddar, with lower tariff payments than Norway normally imposes on foreign cheese, which can be as high as 277 per cent. The

parties did not say how much lower the tariffs would be.

"We have given on cheese, but we got a little more on fish", Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg said.

Trade between Britain and Norway was worth £20.4 billion (\$28.81 billion) last year, making it Britain's 13th largest trading partner. Britain is Norway's top trading partner, primarily thanks to gas exports, and its third biggest buyer of fish and seafood.

Exports accounted for £8.1 billion and imports for £12.3 billion. Top British goods exports were ships, oil and aircraft, while the largest imports were oil, gas, metals, fish and seafood. "Today's deal will be a major boost for our trade with Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein", British International Trade Secretary Liz Truss said in a statement.

UK is expected to seal a deal with Australia this month, and is seeking to join a trans-Pacific trade pact. — Reuters