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MUSCAT

SAUDI-OMAN DIRECT ROAD GETS FUEL STATION

Oman Oil Marketing Company has opened a comprehensive service station in Wadi al Haitham in Al Dhahirah Governorate, which is on the direct route to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which is expected to be opened for traffic in the coming days. Recently the high-level talks between the two countries discussed the issue of accelerating the procedures for opening the land border linking the Sultanate and Saudi Arabia through the Empty Quarter. The carriageway — traversing the treacherous dunes of the Rub al Khali (The Empty Quarter) — will enable trade flow between the Sultanate and the Saudi heartland. **DETAILS ON P3**

1.6M PASSENGERS USE AIRPORTS

The number of passengers who travelled through the Sultanate's airports (Muscat, Salalah, Sohar and Duqm) in the first half of 2021 stood at 1.647 million, compared to 3.646 million during the same period in 2020, a drop by 45.82 per cent. The number of flight movements through the Sultanate's airports was 15,874 during the first six months of this year, including 11,411 international flights and 4,463 domestic flights, compared to 29,181 flights, including 25,373 international flights (Muscat, Salalah and Sohar) and 3,808 domestic flights (Muscat, Salalah, Sohar and Duqm) by the end of June 2020.

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Sultanate welcomes appointment of new UN envoy to Yemen

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, welcomed the appointment of the Swedish diplomat Hans Grundberg as the UN Special Envoy to Yemen by Antonio Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, to succeed Martin Griffiths, adding that the Sultanate is looking forward to

working with him in this important dossier and continuing efforts aimed at resolving the Yemeni crisis as soon as possible.

The foreign minister valued Grundberg's experience and knowledge of Yemen and the region in general, expressing his hope that his diplomatic experience

will contribute to the efforts being exerted to secure a lasting ceasefire by all parties and facilitate the flow of humanitarian aid and entering into a political process to achieve the aspirations of the friendly people of Yemen towards peace, security, national unity and reconstruction. The 15-member UN council

approved Grundberg as a replacement for Martin Griffiths, who became the UN aid chief last month after trying to mediate an end to the conflict in Yemen for the past three years. The war has killed tens of thousands of people and caused a dire humanitarian crisis, pushing Yemen to the brink of famine.

Grundberg has been the European Union ambassador to Yemen since September 2019. UN officials informally floated his name to council members to solicit views by mid-July and 14 members said they would agree to the appointment, diplomats said.

— Agencies



OMAN BOTANIC GARDEN TO BE READY IN 2023

The Oman Botanic Garden project is expected to be ready in 2023 and its major attractions will include cable cars, said Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, in a statement. Situated in Al Khoudh, the project will be one of the largest botanic gardens in the world with a nursery, visitors centre, research centre, field study centre, outdoor habitat gardens and a nature reserve area. Developed on 423 hectares, the Botanic Garden will present an opportunity for visitors to experience the flora and vegetation of Oman, while learning about the agricultural heritage, rich cultural traditions, and legendary hospitality of the country. **DETAILS ON P3**

New scholarship programme launched

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, has introduced a new internal scholarship programme known as the partial internal scholarship programme for all students to obtain diploma qualification (DS).

The Directorate-General for Scholarships at the ministry affirms that it takes into consideration all proposals or recommendations related to the conditions and specialisations rolled out last year,

particularly under the conditions the world is currently witnessing due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The ministry also affirmed that it is considering the requirements of some government entities such as the health and educational disciplines.

In an interview with Oman News Agency (ONA), Lara bint Ghassan Obeidatyah, Director-General of Scholarships at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, explained that the scientific research

and innovation disciplines offered by the ministry to the students of the General Education Diploma (GED) and its equivalent as part of internal and external scholarship programmes for the academic year (2021/2022), cover a wide range of specialisations that meets the wishes of students and the requirements of various sectors. The internal scholarship programmes also focus on increasing and diversifying the opportunities available to students. — ONA

No refusal to vaccine without medical reason

Sultanate to immunise 65-70% of target groups by August-end



VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Coming weeks will be crucial as the Sultanate's government seeks to expand the national vaccination campaign to students aged 12 and above.

The government aims to immunise 65 to 70 per cent of the target groups with a dose of Covid-19 vaccines by the end of August.

"There will be procedures against any person who refuses to receive the vaccination without a clear medical reason, which will be announced later", the government has warned.

As the country reported only 16,332 cases in the last one month between July 8 and August 5, all eyes are now on the Supreme Committee regarding easing of some restrictions.

Several private businesses have been urging authorities to allow the

return of their expatriate workforce with valid visas as some projects have been affected due to manpower shortage.

The Ministry of Health aims to vaccinate nearly 32,000 students, including expatriates from international schools, in the target groups over the next two to three weeks. The government aims to vaccinate all students in the target groups before the start of the new year.

As per the directives from the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health to vaccinate the students of (12 years and above until Class XII) schools in Oman, which commenced at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on August 3, the Indian schools have sent out the message to parents.

TURN TO P2

'Tiger' among the butterflies is back in Oman after 37 years

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

The Blue Tiger Butterfly, known for its migration in many countries in the Indian subcontinent, has returned to the Sultanate after 37 years.

Researchers have spotted the Blue Tiger, known as Tirumala limniace, during July and August 2020, on four separate occasions in Manah, Al Wafi, Wadi Bani Awf and Wadi Bani Kharous.

According to a scientific paper, the individual butterflies appeared fresh, with the exception of one of the females from Manah which, although notably



worn, clearly exhibits the phenotype of subspecies Tirumala limniace exotica.

"The Tirumala limniace, is recorded from Oman for the second time. This Oriental Region milkweed butterfly was observed at four separate locations to the south and west of Muscat during late July and August 2020", says a report quoting a research that appeared in the April issue of ResearchGate.

The research report uploaded by Ali bin Abdullah al Jahdhami deals with the geographical range and infra-specific taxonomy of this butterfly and also assesses its potential larval host-plants with respect to the Oman flora.

According to the report, which has comments on its taxonomy, host plants and local dispersal by Al Jahdhami, Ali bin Khalfan al Wuhaibi, Ali bin Ahmed al Raeesi and Richard, all the locations at which Blue Tigers were seen were agricultural sites, traditional plantations of date palms.

"The only previous record for Oman, from Masirah Island in August 1983, has been associated with a tropical cyclone thought to have blown migrating Tirumala limniace and other insects off course from the Gujarat region of north-west India", the report reveals.

TURN TO P2



FM holds meeting with Kuwaiti, Indian counterparts



TEHRAN: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, met in Tehran on Thursday with Shaikh Dr Ahmed Nassir al Mohammed al Sabah, Foreign Minister of the State of Kuwait. Sayyid Badr was in Tehran to attend the swearing-in ceremony of new Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi.

The two sides touched on the fraternal relations between the two countries and means of promoting them. They also exchanged views on various regional and international issues of common concern.

The meeting was attended by officials from both sides.

MEETING WITH INDIAN FM: Sayyid Badr also had a meeting in Tehran with Dr S Jaishankar, Indian Minister for External Affairs.

They exchanged views on various topics of mutual interest. They stressed keenness to promote cooperation in different fields, particularly in the economic, trade and investment areas.

The meeting was attended by officials from both sides. — ONA

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
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Amazing tourist destinations in the Sultanate are being ruined by trash much to the chagrin of the people and nature lovers.

Some of them are seeking the setting up of special green police and hefty penalties to tamp down littering especially in the Governorate of Dhofar, which is witnessing an unprecedented turnout of tourists during the Khareef season as well as in other governorates which had rains recently.

Abdullah al Awaid said one should carry garbage bags when going on a trip so that one can collect trash and dispose of it in designated areas instead of abandoning to the elements.

Bader al Kathiri, a resident of the Wilayat of Salalah, said, “We are tired of seeing visitors leaving rubbish in beautiful places.”

Abdullah al Adawi said, “We need environmental police as the issue cannot be resolved just by rules or advice anymore.”

Abu Ali al Mahrooqi said, “Despite the police’s best efforts to control traffic violations, there



are still many who break rules. So, the environmental police will not solve the issue of littering unless people respect the environment

and nature”.

Um al Qasim, a nature lover, lamented, “Waste brings in its wake a plethora of diseases,

rodents and germs. It also pollutes many unique destinations and threatens fragile ecosystems.”

Ahmed bin Abdullah al Shanfari, a lawyer, said education and awareness have proven to be unsuccessful in tackling dumping. Litter bugs should be slapped with RO 100, which can be used to protect the environment, he said. Authorities should use drones to check the menace.

“Most of the countries impose fines, and some of them even refer cases to the courts. It is better to collect garbage in bags and deposit it in the nearest bin instead of tossing it out elsewhere,” Al Shanfari said.

The Environment Authority said the protection of the environment is a shared responsibility. “There will be criminal penalties against anyone who violates and encroaches on the environment. Be an important part in preserving the environment and wildlife to avoid legal accountability.”

According to the Public Prosecution, dumping waste in places other than the designated areas is a crime that carries a penalty of up to 10 days in prison or a fine of RO 300.

Artistic makeover for Imti village

KABEER YOUSUF
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An Omani village is undergoing an artistic makeover and drawing international attention, thanks to the efforts of artists supported by local residents as well as good Samaritans.

Imti, in the Wilayat of Izki in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, is characterised by its archaeological significance but was quite unknown to a traveller at least until the project of the Oman Society for Fine Arts (OSFA) three years ago.

“I’m glad that the Imti project has been garnering international attention as an artistic tourist destination where all my artistic experience and experiments of over 40 years have been put together with the support of the local artists,” said Maryam al Zadjali.

Most of the houses in this village have been transformed into a piece of art in accordance with the guidance from the artists. They, side by side, run small restaurants and cafés offering breakfast and coffee as a value addition to this area for the visitors and the support from the local community is overwhelming, according to Maryam.

Under the art project titled ‘Imti with Colours of Goodness’, many acclaimed artists came together with their brushes and palettes to give the village a new identity that derives its beauty and strength from the elements of the local environment.

“I’m thankful to the private companies and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for the support being extended to the project,” said Maryam.

Under the event titled ‘Let’s Draw Together’, artists from OSFA, namely Anwar Sonia, Salim Sakhi, Abdulkarim al Maimani, Nayla al Maamari, Yousuf al Nahawi, Issa



“I’m glad that the Imti project has been garnering international attention as an artistic tourist destination where all my artistic experience and experiments of over 40 years have been put together

MARYAM AL ZADJALI
Artist

al Mafraji and Saleh al Alawi, besides those from the Samat Artistic group participated in the event under the guidance of Shaikh Masoud bin Ali al Sulaimi.

In order to reach out to more visitors and to more regions a photographic competition for all Omani photographers is arranged.

They can visit the village and take pictures of the village and enter the contest. The images they capture will be shared online.



‘Tiger’ among the butterflies is back in Oman after 37 years

FROM PAGE 1

In most years, Oman is affected by storms and monsoon rains coming from India and Pakistan during May to August. In 2020 a strong storm that apparently originated in the Arabian Sea off the west coast of India seriously affected Dhofar at the end of May.

Butterfly experts say the whole life cycle of Tirumala limniace exoticus in the Eastern Ghats, south India, takes as little as 21-28 days.

Adults of this species in India often live for more than 60 days. So, it is possible that, if Tirumala limniace exoticus somehow reached Oman from India in June or even early July 2020 in sufficient numbers to breed locally, then the butterflies now reported for July 23 to August 4 could be the result.

Those reported on August 21 could also have bred locally from

earlier arrivals, or were perhaps transported by the storm of August 8.

The report reveals that none of the records were by a regular visitor to any of the sites (it was not possible to visit these areas before July due to coronavirus restrictions)—but all live locally to the respective sites and specialise in insect photography, and they did not observe any Blue Tigers before July.

“Although this does not rule out the possibility of earlier arrival and local breeding, it perhaps makes it less likely. Even so, it has been pointed out to us that the most northerly section of the Hajar Mountains, in the United Arab Emirates, received exceptional winter rains during 2019–2020,” the report adds.

To translocate migrating Tirumala from India or Pakistan, winds have to be sufficiently strong to deflect the butterflies from their chosen path.

No refusal to vaccine

FROM PAGE 1

While parents were requested to fill the online form before August 6, the schools added that vaccination is not compulsory for students, but rather voluntary, according to the consent of the parent/guardian.

While the number of daily infections has been stabilising and offering some relief, 535 deaths since July 8, and 56 during the last week is still a matter of concern. It may be noted that daily cases stayed under 300 for most of the last week, except for Tuesday when the 309 infections were recorded.

The recovery rate has improved to 94.9 per cent and

11,351 people of 3.81 per cent of the total infected in Oman are still sick.

Meanwhile, the General Directorate of Health Services in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate will start vaccinating school students from 12 to 17 years old, as part of the national campaign for immunisation against Covid-19.

The directorate has allocated 10 immunisation centres in the governorate, stressing the need for the targeted students to come for vaccination. In this context, the General Directorate has completed the necessary preparations to receive the targeted group (24,385 students from 86 schools) in the governorate.



Sultanate's ports score high in operations

MUSCAT: The Sultanate's ports achieved growth in several commercial operations and volumes of direct import during the first half of this year (2021).

Omani ports have thus affirmed their leading role in enhancing trade activities, augmenting the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the Sultanate and supporting the government's economic diversification goals.

Bolstering the Sultanate's global logistics competitiveness, Omani ports ranked first globally in Port Calls and Port of Salalah came sixth worldwide in operational efficiency.

Working in close cooperation with government agencies and the private sector, Asyad Group introduced many initiatives and offered attractive incentives to maintain the strong operational and logistic performance of Omani ports. As a result, the ports sector achieved sustainable economic growth through increasing direct shipping lines and connecting Oman with major global ports. The overall objective was to facilitate the export of homemade products, build strategic partnerships with inter-

national business markets and reinforce Oman as a global logistics hub.

Omani ports handled nearly 2.5 million containers (TEUs) from January to June 2021 as well as 28.8 million tonnes of general cargo, recording a rise of 18 per cent over its performance in the first six months in 2020. In the meantime, liquid commodity handling grew by 12 per cent to 9.9 million this year, compared to the corresponding period last year. Such steady rise in volumes of liquid and general cargo keeps pace with the growth of economic and business activities in the Sultanate.

Compared to the corresponding period in 2020, imported livestock witnessed a notice spike of 65 per cent during the first six months this year (1.9 million heads). The import of vehicles and equipment dropped by 8 per cent (55,500 vehicles and equipment imported or re-exported) due to the decline in global economy and its impact on local and regional markets.

More than 4,400 vessels visited the Sultanate's ports from January to June 2021.

Mohammed al Mashani, Chief



Corporate Affairs Officer at Port of Salalah, said that the sizeable capacity of Salalah Port and its modern facilities cement its position as a maritime gateway and transshipment hub. The port plays a crucial role in maintaining the flows of vital medical and food supplies, critical agricultural products, en-

ergy streams, and other goods and services essential to enhance commercial activities.

Accordingly, Port of Salalah was ranked sixth out of 351 ports worldwide in operational efficiency when receiving and handling container ships based on the Container Ports Performance Index in

2020.

Batti bin Mohammed al Shibli, Harbour Manager at Sohar Port, said that the port is pressing ahead with its commitment to the local and international business community. "Sohar Port keeps upgrading its logistic operations with the objective of becoming a global lo-

gistics hub connected with Asian, European and African markets. It is already assuming a pivotal role in the global supply chain and it helps in securing the flow of commodities, facilitating the transport and handling of raw and basic cargo and maintaining the continuity of operations round the clock."

"We are proud of the positive results achieved by Sohar Port during the first half of this year (2021). The port saw tangible growth in handling operations (30 per cent up in general cargo handling). This reflects our efforts in the integrating the operations of different business partners as well as our clients in local and international markets. We are confident that the port will continue to maintain its central role in enriching the Sultanate's GDP and supporting the government's economic diversification plans," he added.

Meanwhile, Eng Hashim al Ibrahim, Business Support Director at Port of Duqm company, said that operations at the Port of Duqm are directly associated with and complement all economic and industrial operations in Duqm and the rest of the Sultanate. — ONA

Botanic Garden with cable cars to be ready in 2023



STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, AUG 7

The Oman Botanic Garden is expected to be ready in 2023 and its major attractions will include cable cars, said Salim bin Mohammed Al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, in a statement.

Situated in Al Khoud, the garden will be one of the largest botanic gardens in the world and will consist of a nursery, visitor centre, research centre, field study centre, outdoor habitat gardens, northern mountain biome, southern mountain biome and nature reserve area.

The project includes the construction of giant glass domes which will have multiple entries and exit points for easy accessibility and is situated close to the Muscat Expressway.

Developed on 423 hectares, the botanic garden will present an opportunity for visitors to experience the flora and vegetation of Oman while learning about the agricultural heritage, rich cultural traditions and legendary hospitality of the country.

The project, supervised by the Diwan of Royal Court, will show-



case the traditionally cultivated crops and the many ways that people use plants in Oman.

The garden will offer a variety

of amenity areas, play, and family zones for fun and relaxation in a garden setting that is unique to Oman.

Saudi-Oman direct road gets fuel station

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, AUG 7

Oman Oil Marketing Company has opened a comprehensive service station in Wadi al Haitham in Al Dhahirah Governorate, which is on the direct route to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that is expected to be opened for traffic in the coming days.

Recently the high-level meeting between the two countries discussed the issue of accelerating the procedures for opening the land border linking the Sultanate and Saudi Arabia through the Empty Quarter.

The carriageway — traversing the treacherous dunes of the Rub Al Khali (The Empty Quarter) — will enable trade flows between the Sultanate and the Saudi heartland.

It will also provide a safer, shorter and more convenient



alternative to the existing 1,640-km route that motorists must navigate to reach Saudi Arabia. Traversing the territory of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) en route, the latter route is reputed to take between 16-18 hours to cover.

Years in the making, the new Oman-Saudi desert highway is expected to cut travel time by around 12 hours and the journey by around 800 kilometres.

The strategically important carriageway starts at Tanam in Ibri Wilayat and ends at the Omani border, about 160 km away. On the Saudi side, it runs for a further 550 km before linking up with the key Batha-Haradh highway leading to Riyadh.

Dubbed by experts as a marvel of road engineering, the new road attempts to conquer The Empty Quarter's constantly shifting and soaring sand dunes.

Tender



The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Mada'yn) announces the following Tender:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of Buying	Date of Submission	Type of Work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
7/2021/PEIE/HQ-7	DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION OF SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANT AT SUR INDUSTRIAL CITY	22-08-2021	16-09-2021	Construction	Excellent, First	200

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the Tender value validity for (90) days, and addressed to The Chairman of Tender Committee mentioned in above tenders.

- Tender Inquiry:** All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.
- E-Tendering System Inquiry:** All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@ita.gov.om and +968 24166670, 24166409.

Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

No Document can be accepted as Manual except Original Tender Bond. Scan Copy of Tender Bond needs to be attached in system and original needs to be deposited before Bid Opening.

Mada'yn is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.

mada'yn.om



@mada'ynoman





BEWARE OF ALL THAT WHITENS

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
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Customers lapping up cosmetic brands endorsed by social media influencers without medical recommendations must be careful. Some of the products may lead to discolouration or black spots, warns skin specialists.

Dr Al Mutasim al Qasabi, a dermatologist, said women should be wary of misleading advertisements that promise skin whitening creams.

He said in a post that even if a social media influencer has a certificate of accreditation from the competent authorities, that certificate might be for one product, and not for all products on display. So, it is not possible to judge the quality of the product and its suitability. He said many problems appear later with repeated usage.

In the recent period, there is a growing trend among teenagers to lighten the skin, prompting many influencers to promote home-made concoctions instead of using products with medical advice.

Many people fall into the trap of miracle cures peddled by unscrupulous merchants who pay influencers or the so-called “fashionistas” to promote their products.

DOCTORS WARN AGAINST THE CRAZE OF USING SKIN CREAMS PROMOTED BY SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS JUST FOR MONEY, WHICH IN SOME CASES DAMAGES INTERNAL ORGANS

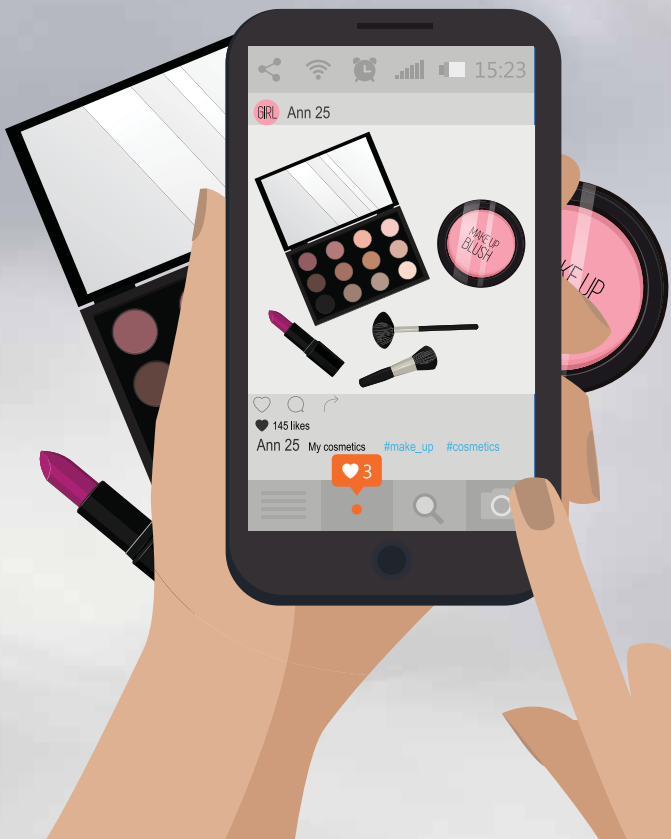
Side effects of the untrusted cosmetics range from skin irritation to burns. In more severe cases, skin becomes tender and scarred, kidneys and livers are damaged. Some ingredients may even pose risk to babies at birth.

Long-term use leads to thinning and atrophy of the skin, appearance of stretch marks, easy bruising and an increased risk of infection. Over time, it affects the entire body and causes high pressure, diabetes, weight gain and osteoporosis.

The World Health Organization indicated that hydroquinone, which exists in many products, causes Ochronosis, which is the deposition of melanin inside some tissues such as joints and cartilage, in addition to causing skin sensitivity in many cases.

Dr Anjali Mahto, a consultant dermatologist, said untested skin creams are being promoted in Pakistan, the Middle East and the Caribbean countries.

While in the UK, it is forbidden by law to sell products without the name, address of the supplier and list of ingredients. If it lacks one of these basic information it means that it was imported illegally and may contain harmful ingredients. “But in the Middle East there is a lax regulation and it is possible to sell such products in markets and stores without any warnings or detailed information.”





Be clear on ticket policies: MoHT

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

With all types of air travel expected to pick up in the coming months, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) has issued some guidelines to travel and tourism offices.

As uncertainties continue to prevail due to new Covid variants, MoHT said, "It has come to our notice that some travel and tourism offices issue air tickets and do not brief travellers on ticket policies such as whether the ticket is valid for refund or exchange and the methods to change the travelling date and cancellation of the ticket, as per the airlines' terms and conditions."

MoHT urged all travel and tourism offices to notify the travellers and provide them with a stamped invoice and explaining the details of the ticket purchased with its cancellation and return policy in both languages Arabic



and English, to protect the passengers' legal rights and avoid legal liability.

SALALAH-SUHAR FLIGHTS

After an interval of more than a year due to a pandemic situation, SalamAir will resume flights between Sohar and Salalah airports from August 7.

The airline will operate four flights per week (Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Wednesday) between Suhar to the summer tourism destination of Salalah.

The number of passengers who travelled through the Sultanate's airports (Muscat, Salalah, Sohar and Duqm) in the first half of

2021 was 1,647,253, compared to 3,646,184 passengers during the same period in 2020.

The number of flight movements through the Sultanate's airports was 15,874 during the first six months of this year, including 11,411 international flights and 4,463 domestic flights, compared to 29,181 flights, including 25,373 international flights (Muscat, Salalah and Sohar) and 3,808 domestic flights (Muscat, Salalah, Sohar and Duqm) by the end of June 2020.

The nationalities of Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani dominated the passenger movement in June 2021 at Muscat International Airport, of which the Indians accounted for 18,520 passengers (452 arrivals and 17,068 departures), Bangladesh nationals (86,000 arrivals and 10,812 departures) and Pakistan nationals (220 arrivals and 5,686 departures).

Indian School students excel in CBSE exams

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, AUG 7

The students of Indian Schools in the Sultanate have set an all-time record in Classes 10 and 12 examinations of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), results of which were announced recently.

The 2021 results showed an increased percentage of high achievers as compared to previous years, thereby setting another benchmark of excellence in academics.

Indian Schools in Oman have achieved 100 per cent results this year both in Class 10 and 12. Class 10 had a total of 1,818 students whereas Class 12 had 1,724.

Class 12 Commerce stream had an all-time record this year. Arjun Amit Athalye of Indian School Muscat (ISM) is the Oman topper with 99.4 per cent and A Rahul Govindarajan of Indian School Al

Ghubra (ISG) came second with 98.2 per cent. The third position was claimed by two students — Liza Andrea D'Sa of ISM and Vidushi Jagnani of Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir (ISWK) — both scoring 97.6 per cent.

The Oman toppers in Class 12 Science stream are as follows: Rahul Sriram of ISM was the topper with 99.2 per cent. The second position was claimed by two students — Indraneel Singh Solanki (ISM) and Anushka Thumiki (Indian School Darsait — ISD) with 99 per cent. The third position was also claimed by two students — Mohammad Khuroo (ISG) and Asfaq Jalal Mohamed Abbas Nisha (ISWK) — both scoring 98.8 per cent.

All three positions in the Humanities stream went to the students of ISM — Anjali Unnithan (99 per cent), Anushka Saha (98.4 per cent) and Snigdha Suresh (97.8 per cent).

Oman Air Holidays streamlines booking process to boost tourism

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, AUG 7

As demand for travel picks up, greater digital integration between airline and package holidays ecosystem aims to streamline booking process to increase inbound tourism to the Sultanate, consistent with economic objectives set out in Oman's Vision 2040 strategy.

Oman Air Holidays on Saturday unveiled its revamped brand, complete with a new wordmark logo and refreshed visual identity. Developed in-house, the new

look and feel supports a shift in the company's strategy towards facilitating in-bound tourism in the Sultanate through integrated 'Fly & Stay' package holidays available on its website.

Aligned closely with Oman's Vision 2040 Strategy, which aims to develop a diversified and sustainable economy through opportunities that strengthen the country's global competitiveness, Oman Air Holidays is redoubling efforts to broaden its integrated offering of flights, hotels, excursions and travel experiences which caters to growing local and



international demand.

Also unveiled were Oman Air Holidays' refocused vision and mission statements, which champion ambitions to become one of the top tourism operators

in the Middle East by leveraging Oman Air's flight frequencies into the Sultanate from international source markets, and position Oman as a uniquely different holiday experience to travel trade

globally.

"The timing is right for Oman Air Holidays to foster closer ties with local and international travel trade," said Mundher al Shaikhani, Senior Manager Oman Air Holidays. "As vaccine roll-out ramps up, we're seeing renewed interest for package holidays and custom stays from locals inquiring about quick getaway options, as well as international guests in the early stages of planning their next overseas holiday. Our refreshed brand, vision and mission statement, and booking platform encapsulate our strategy to de-

velop and offer exclusive 'Fly & Stay' packages here in Oman and everywhere Oman Air flies, with promotions and offers tailored to each traveller."

Oman Air Holidays proudly displays the Safe Travels Stamp from the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). In June this year, it partnered with WebBeds to enhance its digital booking experience to provide greater choice, flexibility and convenience for guests in search of innovative custom holiday packages in Oman and international markets.

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Holding invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission
EHC/2021/20	Supply, Transport and Install of Electrical and Water Devices	17-AUG-2021	19-SEP-2021

- Bids shall be submitted in a single envelope and sealed with red wax addressed to the "Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee" and must write on the envelope the tender name & number.
- 3 separate envelopes shall be included inside the single sealed envelope, and each of these 3 envelopes must be marked with a tenderer name & tender no. as per the below:
 - Commercial Proposal
 - Technical Proposal
 - Bid Bond
- Bids should be dropped in the tender box at Nama Holding reception before 12.00 pm, time of the Sultanate, on 19-SEP-2021.
- Each bid should be accompanied with a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) of the total bid value and valid for a period of (90) days from the last date for submission of offers, addressed to the "Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee". Tenders that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered.
- NH is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- Interested bidders should register in the tender page: www.nama.om/tenders
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 12.00 pm.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.



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4th Gold Oman programme kicks off

MUSCAT: The fourth edition of Gold Oman, organised by the Directorate-General of Scouts and Guides in collaboration with the United Kingdom Guides Association, better known as Girlguiding, was launched via video conferencing, on Saturday.

The project, targeting the Sultanate's guides and rangers, aims to engage the members in the developing of guides programmes and preparing them for future roles as well as developing the quality of the programmes through training the rangers and guides on more effective methods and enabling them to hone their life skills and offer useful and helpful societal activities.

— ONA

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. 32/2021

Specialized Companies in the field of tender shown below and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tender documents from the website through the following link:

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against non-refundable fees until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	E- Tender No.	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date	Grade
PRE/21/052	(42/2021/MM//QS-3)	ADOBE CC RENEWAL (E- Tender)	Rial 25	23/08/2021	07/09/2021	Specialized

Tender Conditions :-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Tender Bonds shall be placed in the Tender Bond Box (B) for E-Tendering in the First floor at Muscat Municipality HQ, Darsait before 10:00 am as per the date Mentioned in the above table. All envelopes are to be clearly marked with the name of the Tender being presented and no other marks.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@ita.gov.om) or call (+968 24166670).

Fighting erupts between rival factions of S Sudan VP’s party

JUBA: Deadly fighting erupted on Saturday between rival factions of South Sudan Vice-President Riek Machar’s SPLA-IO, his military spokesman said in a statement.

The clashes erupted after Machar’s rivals declared this week they had deposed him as the head of the party and its military forces.

Armed forces led by a rival general in the party, Simon Gatwech Dual, had launched an attack on Machar’s men, who had “repulsed the aggressors”, the spokesman Colonel Lam Paul Gabriel said.

Machar’s SPLA-IO forces had killed two major generals and over 27 “enemy” soldiers, while they had lost three men, he added.

The fighting could not be independently confirmed and there was no immediate response

from Gatwech Dual’s side.

Leaders of the military wing of Machar’s SPLM/A-IO said on Wednesday they had deposed the rebel-turned-politician for failing to represent their interests.

The fighting could put pressure on the fragile 2018 power-sharing deal between Machar and his old foe President Salva Kiir.

Machar’s allies on Friday dismissed his ouster as a “failed coup”, insisting he was still in full control of the party.

Machar himself this week accused “peace spoilers” of engineering his removal.

The 68-year-old, a wily leader who survived years of bush warfare, attempts on his life and stretches in exile, served as vice-president alongside Kiir in the first government post independence from Sudan in 2011. — AFP

Lebanon Mikati cites ‘slow progress’ on govt formation



Lebanon’s new PM-designate Najib Mikati

BEIRUT: Talks on forming a new Lebanese government are progressing slowly, premier-designate Najib Mikati said on Thursday, a day after police cracked down on protesters during the grim first anniversary of a deadly port blast.

“We made progress today, and even if the progress was slow, we are determined to form a government,” Mikati said after meeting with President Michel Aoun.

The meeting was a “positive step forward”, Mikati told reporters, but refused to set himself a deadline to present a finalised cabinet line-up. Lebanon is facing one of the world’s worst economic crises in modern history.

But its deeply divided politicians have for more than 11 months failed to agree on a new government to launch reforms, a key condition to unlock billions of dollars in international financial aid.

The government of Hassan Diab, who is still caretaker prime minister, resigned en masse last summer after a huge explosion of fertiliser at the Beirut port killed at



Israeli soldiers stand next to an artillery unit on the Israeli side of the border with Lebanon. — Reuters

A donor conference last week collected \$370m in pledges for urgent humanitarian aid for the Lebanese people

least 214 people.

Mikati, who has been prime minister twice before and is also the country’s richest man, was designated on July 26 to form a government after his two predecessors threw in the towel.

Thousands gathered near the Beirut port on Wednesday as Lebanon marked one year since hundreds of tonnes of ammonium

nitrate exploded on the dockside.

All paid tribute to the victims, but many expressed anger that officials who had known about the hazardous materials stored unsafely at the port for years had still not been held to account.

Dozens were hurt when Lebanese police clashed with protesters demanding accountability over the disaster.

A donor conference on Wednesday collected \$370 million in pledges for urgent humanitarian aid for the Lebanese people, but the international community has held back on any financial aid to the cash-strapped state.

Last month’s designation of

65-year-old Mikati, seen by many as a symbol of Lebanon’s corrupt oligarchy, was met with scepticism both at home and abroad.

Mikati, a businessman-politician, has been trying to form the government since he was designated last month in place of Saad al Hariri, who gave up after nine months of trying, saying he could not agree with President Michel Aoun. “Today’s meeting was a positive step forward,” Mikati said after meeting Aoun.

“Today we made progress ... even if the progress was slow. But we are persevering, and insistent on forming the government,” he said. — Reuters/AFP

■ MAKING A LIVING WITH ANTIQUES



An Iraqi female petroleum engineer, who could not find a job in the oil sector, works on traditional antiques and Iraqi folklore patterns at her home in Basra. — Reuters

‘How will we live?’: Egyptian bread price hike alarms the poor

CAIRO: Plans to raise the price of bread for the first time in 44 years have shocked Egyptians already struggling to get by in a country where state-subsidised loaves have kept the poorest basically fed since the 1960s.

In declaring this week that it was time to hike bread prices, President Abdel Fattah al Sisi aims to curb an expensive subsidy programme that serves some two-thirds of Egypt’s 100 million people and helped keep political dissent at bay.

“How will we live? And how will we pay for the children of our deceased brother who live with us?” said Wafaa Bakr in Shubra El Kheima, a dilapidated working-class district sprawling along the outskirts of Cairo.

“The price of a loaf of subsidised bread is a red line — there are widows and orphans who do not have a fixed income,” said Ahmed Saeed in Sharqia, in the Nile Delta north of Cairo.

Some 30 per cent of Egyptians fall beneath the government’s poverty line, with incomes below 857 pounds a month. Many struggle without running water or sanitation.

The minimum monthly wage is 2,400 pounds (\$153) but that is sometimes not paid in the informal sector, where roughly two-thirds of Egyptians work. Joblessness was at 7.2 per cent at the end of last year, and has been chronically higher among young people.

However, economists have said



An Egyptian child carries a tray of bread in Cairo. — Reuters

First attempt in 44 years to hike subsidised bread price as price sensitive after deadly riots followed 1977 hike

for years that Egypt, the world’s biggest wheat importer and Arab world’s most populous country, must rein in subsidies to modernise its economy. Bread subsidies now weigh ever heavier on the budget as supply jitters have driven up global wheat prices during the coronavirus pandemic.

Bread subsidies were set at nearly 45 billion Egyptian pounds, just over half of the food subsidy bill, for the fiscal year ending in June.

This amounts to roughly 1.8 per cent of overall state spending.

“It is time for the 5-piaster loaf to increase in price,” Sisi said during televised remarks at the opening of a food production plant on Tuesday, referring to a round 90-gram loaf known as ‘eish baladi’.

Sisi said he hoped the news would not be poorly received and that the government was not planning a big increase. “It’s incredible to sell 20 loaves for the price of a cigarette”

The government has already pared back subsidies on electricity and fuel, ushering in annual increases in their price since 2016 as part of market reforms linked to financing from the International Monetary Fund. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

NEW YORK

Swedish diplomat named new UN envoy to Yemen

Swedish diplomat Hans Grundberg (pictured), will succeed Briton Martin Griffiths as UN mediator for war-torn Yemen, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres announced. Grundberg was previously EU ambassador to Yemen and has also worked as a diplomat in Sweden, Egypt, Israel and Brussels, among other places.

His predecessor Griffiths, who earned a reputation as a tireless negotiator in his roughly three years in the position, has



been appointed as the next UN emergency relief coordinator. “The US welcomes the appointment of Hans Grundberg as the new UN special envoy for Yemen. — dpa

BAGHDAD

Iraq temporarily suspends flights to Belarus

Baghdad announced a temporary suspension of flights to Belarus after the European Union accused Minsk of encouraging unauthorised arrivals of mainly Iraqi migrants in retaliation against EU sanctions.

So far this year, Lithuanian border guards have detained more than 4,000 migrants — mostly Iraqis — compared with 81 for all of 2020.

Baghdad has taken measures to protect Iraqi citizens who have been victims of smuggling



networks, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein said. Among the measures is the ‘temporary’ suspension of direct air links between Baghdad and Minsk, he said. — AFP

RABAT

Israeli foreign minister to visit Morocco on Aug 11

Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid is to visit Morocco this week, the two countries said, in the first trip to the kingdom by Israel’s top diplomat since they normalised ties. A source at Morocco’s foreign ministry said that Lapid would visit on August 11-12 and meet with his counterpart, without providing further details.

An Israeli foreign ministry spokesman confirmed the dates. Morocco was one of four Arab states to agree last year to normalise ties with Israel, along with



the UAE, Bahrain and Sudan. The move came as the administration of former US president Donald Trump recognised Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, a disputed and divided former Spanish colony. — AFP

In brief

■ NEW DELHI



INDIA APPROVES J&J COVID-19 VACCINE FOR EMERGENCY USE

India has approved Johnson & Johnson's single-dose Covid-19 vaccine for emergency use on Saturday, Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said in a tweet. The pharmaceutical giant had applied for emergency use approval of its vaccine, the company had said.

The shot will be brought to India through a supply agreement with homegrown vaccine maker Biological E Ltd, J&J had said.

Indian health authorities have so far approved the use of vaccines developed by AstraZeneca (AZNL), Bharat Biotech, Russia's Gamaleya Institute and Moderna (MRNA.O). — Reuters

■ COLOMBO



SRI LANKA TIGHTENS COVID RESTRICTIONS AS HOSPITALS STRUGGLE

Sri Lankan authorities tightened coronavirus restrictions as reports emerged of Covid patients dying while awaiting admission to overcrowded hospitals. The government said state ceremonies and public gatherings were banned until September 1 because of the growing health crisis.

Public servants had previously been asked to return to work from Monday but that order has now been revoked and bosses told to decide who should report for duty on-site. The fresh curbs come after the number of coronavirus deaths and infections in the last week doubled from a month ago. —AFP

■ BANGKOK



THAI POLICE FIRE TEAR GAS, RUBBER BULLETS AT PROTESTERS

Thai police fired tear gas and rubber bullets at hundreds of protesters in Bangkok demanding political reform and calling for a change to the country's coronavirus vaccination programme. Demonstrators defied restrictions on public gatherings introduced as Thailand battles its worst outbreak of the virus to call for Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha to quit.

The Thai government has come under fire for the sluggish rollout of its covid vaccination programme, and the protesters also demanded it start using mRNA shots such as Pfizer and Moderna, rather than China's Sinovac. — AFP

Second Afghan city falls as Taliban tighten noose over countryside

KABUL: The Taliban seized the stronghold of a notorious Afghan warlord on Saturday, officials said, the second provincial capital to fall to the insurgents in less than 24 hours.

The deputy governor of Sheberghan city in Jawzjan said government forces and officials had retreated to the airport on the outskirts of the northern Afghan city, where they were preparing to defend themselves. "The city has unfortunately fallen completely", Jawzjan Deputy Governor Qader Malia said.

The city is home to notorious warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum, who only returned to Afghanistan this week from medical treatment in Turkey but is believed to be in Kabul. The Taliban have gained vast parts of rural Afghanistan since launching a series of offensives in May to coincide with the start of the final withdrawal of foreign troops.

On Friday, Zaranj city in Nimroz fell to the Taliban "without a fight", according to its deputy governor, becoming the first provincial capital to be taken by the insurgents.

There was more resistance in Sheberghan, several sources said, but an aide to Dostum confirmed the city had been taken.

Dostum has overseen one of the largest militias in the north, which



A child sits on a wheelbarrow as a man pushes it past an auto-rickshaw parked along a road in Kabul. — AFP

garnered a fearsome reputation in its fight against the Taliban in the 1990s — along with accusations that his forces massacred thousands of insurgent prisoners of war.

A rout or retreat of his fighters would dent the Kabul government's recent hopes that militia groups could help bolster the country's overstretched military.

Roh Gul Khairzad, the deputy

The Taliban have gained vast parts of rural Afghanistan since launching a series of offensives in May to coincide with the start of the final withdrawal of foreign troops

governor of Nimroz, said on Friday that Zaranj had fallen "without a fight".

Social media posts suggested the Taliban were welcomed by some residents of the desert city, which has long had a reputation for lawlessness.

They showed captured military Humvees, luxury SUVs, and pickups speeding through the streets, flying white Taliban flags

as local residents — mostly youths and young men — cheered them on. One of the first things the insurgents did on entering Zaranj was to open the gates of a local jail, officials said, freeing Taliban prisoners along with common criminals.

Videos on Twitter showed mobs looting government offices, stealing desks, office chairs, cabinets, and televisions.

The veracity of the clips could not immediately be confirmed.

"The Afghan security forces lost their morale due to intense propaganda by the Taliban", a senior official from the city, who asked not to be named, said.

"Even before the Taliban attacks... most of the security forces put their weapons on the ground, took off their uniforms, and left their units and fled", he said. The government has made no official comment yet on the fall of either city.

The capture of Sheberghan comes a day after the head of the Afghan government's media information department was shot dead in Kabul in an attack claimed by the Taliban.

After a failed assassination attempt on the country defence minister Tuesday, the Taliban warned they were now targeting senior administration officials in retaliation for increased air strikes. — AFP

New Asean envoy to Myanmar wants full access when he visits

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN: The Brunei diplomat appointed by a Southeast Asian regional bloc as its special envoy to Myanmar said on Saturday he should be given full access to all parties when he visits the strife-torn country, where the military overthrew an elected government.

Speaking a day after his appointment by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), Brunei's Erywan Yusof (pictured), gave no date for his visit to Myanmar, whose civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other officials have been detained since the February 1 coup.

Erywan has been tasked with overseeing humanitarian aid, ending violence in Myanmar and opening dialogue between the military rulers and opponents, whose protests and civil disobedience campaign have provoked an iron-fisted response.

"The planned visit to Myanmar is in the pipeline, and what we need to do is make sure we're well prepared when we go there, unlike the visit I had in June", Erywan, Brunei's Second Foreign Affairs Minister told reporters in Bandar Seri Begawan, the capital of the tiny sultanate on the island of Borneo.

Erywan said he would seek a more substantive discussion,



particularly on the cessation of violence, dialogue and mediation during the next Asean visit to Myanmar, while emphasising the importance for him to be given full access to all parties.

Myanmar civil society groups have rejected his appointment, saying Asean should have consulted opponents of the junta and other parties. Erywan did not mention a timeline for securing humanitarian aid but said he hoped to garner the support needed for the effort.

The United Nations and many countries have urged Asean, whose 10 members include Myanmar, to spearhead diplomatic efforts to restore stability.

Meanwhile, hundreds of civil society organisations rejected the appointment of a Brunei's top diplomat as the Asean special envoy to Myanmar on Friday, criticising the failure to consult all parties about the nomination. — Agencies

Australia suffers worst Covid day with millions in lockdown

MELBOURNE: Australia saw a record daily number of new coronavirus cases this year on Saturday, with the country's most populous states of New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland recording a total of 361 cases of the highly infectious Delta variant.

With about 15 million people in the three states, or 60 per cent of Australia's population, under a strict lockdown, the country also reported five coronavirus-related deaths, one of the highest this year.

NSW suffered its worst pandemic day, reporting 319 new locally acquired Covid-19 cases, with Sydney and neighbouring regional centres spanning 200 km of coastline under a stay-at-home order for six weeks already.

There are 345 people admitted to hospital in NSW, with 56 in intensive care and 23 under ventilation.

NSW authorities, who had been reluctant to put Sydney into a lockdown, said lack of observance of rules has been a problem.

"What we have happening right now is some people are not complying", NSW Health Minister Brad Hazzard said.

"Just stay at home — that is the circuit breaker. Stay at home and get vaccinated."

Neighbouring Victoria saw the highest daily jump in cases this year, with 29 new infections, as the state remains under a snap seven-day lockdown imposed earlier this week, the state's sixth since the start of the pandemic.

Victoria Premier Dan Andrews



A resident checks her details on a Covid-19 swab test container at a drive-through testing site in western Sydney as Australia's state of New South Wales reported another record day of infections. — AFP

NSW suffered its worst pandemic day, reporting 319 new locally acquired Covid cases, with Sydney and neighbouring regional centres under a stay-at-home order for six weeks already

urged people to follow the public health rules that allow residents to leave their house only for essential work, shopping, care, vaccination or two hours of outdoor exercise.

"This Delta variant spreads so fast", Andrews said. "We don't have enough of people vaccinated, we will finish up with younger people in the hospital, otherwise fit and healthy people. Our system will be overrun if we don't bring this under control."

Queensland recorded 13 new

cases, with all but one isolating while infectious, bringing hopes that the eight-day lockdown in parts of the state will be lifted as planned on Sunday afternoon.

With just over 36,000 Covid-19 cases and 937 deaths, Australia has avoided the high caseloads of other developed countries, but its vaccination figures are among the lowest, with only 20 per cent of people aged over 16 fully vaccinated.

Meanwhile, the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW) announced a record 319 local community transmissions of Covid-19 during the past day on Saturday, the highest number since the start of the pandemic.

"Of these locally acquired cases, 125 are linked to a known case or cluster — 108 are household contacts and 17 are close contacts", the state health authority said in a tweet. — Reuters

GREECE BATTLES WILDFIRES FOR FIFTH DAY

ATHENS: Flames swept through a town near Athens overnight and hundreds of people were evacuated by ferry from the island of Evia east of the capital as wildfires burned across Greece for a fifth day on Saturday.

The fire on Mount Parnitha on the outskirts of Athens has forced the evacuation of thousands of people since late Thursday, with emergency crews facing winds and high temperatures as they battled to contain it.

The flames appeared to die down by Saturday afternoon, but winds were forecast to strengthen, meaning there was still a high threat they would flare again.

“Under no circumstances can we be complacent,” Deputy Civil Protection Minister Nikos Hardalias said during an emergency briefing. “We are fighting a very big battle.”

Wildfires have erupted in many parts of the country amid Greece’s worst heatwave in more than 30 years, tearing through swathes of forestland, destroying homes and businesses and killing animals.

On Friday night, strong winds pushed the fire into the town of Thracomakedones north of Athens, where it burned homes. Residents had been ordered to evacuate and there were no immediate reports of casualties.



A Sikorsky S-64 Skycrane helicopter drops water as fires threaten the suburb of Thracomakedones, near Mount Parnitha, north of Athens. — AFP

The blaze left behind burnt and blackened houses and cars among scorched pine trees. A cloud of smoke hovered over the capital. “(It’s) really bad,” said Thanasis Kaloudis, a resident of Thracomakedones. “All of Greece has

burned.” More than 400 wildfires broke out across Greece in the last 24 hours, with the biggest fronts still burning in Evia and areas in the Peloponnese including Ancient Olympia, the site of the first Ol-

ympic Games. Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis called it a “nightmarish summer”, adding the government’s priority “has been, first and foremost, to protect human lives”. Neighbouring Turkey is also battling what President Tayyip Erdogan says have been the worst wildfires in its history and six fires were still burning in Turkey on Saturday. Eight people have died in the fires that have ravaged Turkey’s

Wildfires have erupted in many parts of the country amid Greece’s worst heatwave in more than 30 years

Aegean and Mediterranean coastal regions for 11 days, burning tens of thousands of hectares and forcing thousands of residents and tourists to leave homes and hotels. In Greece, more than 800 firefighters, including reinforcements from Cyprus, France and Israel, have been deployed to fight the blaze north of Athens, assisted by the army and water-bombing aircraft. Fires are also scattered across the northern part of Evia, Greece’s second biggest island. Hundreds of people, including many elderly residents, were evacuated by ferry late on Friday from the town of Limni on the island as the sky turned an apocalyptic red. One man died in Athens on Friday after being injured by electricity pylon and at least nine others have been injured, authorities said. The government planned to reimburse people affected by the fires and would designate the burned land as areas for reforestation, Mitsotakis said. — AFP

New protests as France set to implement Covid health pass

PARIS: Protesters took to the streets across France on Saturday for the fourth weekend in a row to rally against a new coronavirus health pass needed to enter a cafe or travel on an inter-city train, two days before the new rules come into force.

The new rules championed by President Emmanuel Macron make it obligatory to have either a full course of vaccination against Covid-19, be in possession of a negative test or be recently recovered from the virus to enjoy usually routine activities.

Macron, who faces re-election next year, hopes the new rules will encourage all French to be vaccinated against Covid-19 and defeat the virus and its fast-spreading Delta variant.

But opponents, who have turned out en masse in the streets in the past weeks, argue that the rules encroach on civil liberties in a country where individual freedom is prized.

From Monday, the health pass will be needed to eat in a restaurant or enjoy a drink in a cafe both



French nationalist party The Patriots party leader Florian Philippot (C,L) and far-right party Head of Debout la France's head Nicolas Dupont-Aignan march during a demonstration in Paris. — AFP

indoors and on a terrace. It will be obligatory on inter-city transport including high-speed trains and domestic flights although will not be needed on metro systems and suburban transport.

The pass has already been required since July 21 to visit cultural venues such as cinemas, theatres and museums. Its extension was approved by France’s Constitutional Council on Thursday.

In one of several protests planned in Paris alone, hundreds

marched from the western suburbs to the centre, chanting “freedom!” and “Macron, we don’t want your pass!”. Wearing a mask, Alexandre Fourez, 34, said he was protesting for the first time and that he had himself recovered from Covid. “The problem with the health pass is that our hand is being forced,” said the marketing employee, adding he “really has difficulty believing its use will be temporary”. — AFP

Areas hit by flooding as torrential rain sweeps across parts of UK

LONDON: Parts of the UK have again faced rain and localised flooding, but forecasters have said a drier and sunnier summer could be possible by the end of the month.

The dismal summer weather continued on Saturday with parts of London flooded due to heavy rain and the Met Office warning that torrential rain will continue to affect the south east of England throughout the day.

There are also warnings of heavy rain, thunderstorms, flooding, lightning strikes, cold winds and hail in central and southern Scotland, northern England and Northern Ireland for this weekend.

There is hope that summer may not be over, with drier conditions forecast for later in the month.

Videos and photos of heavy flooding on the roads and drains full of water were posted on social media by people in Walthamstow, east London, and Battersea in south London.

However, it is likely the weather will clear up for a chance at a



People walk over Millennium Bridge during rainfall in London. — Reuters

There are also warnings of heavy rain, thunderstorms, flooding, lightning strikes, cold winds and hail in central and southern Scotland, northern England and Northern Ireland

drier summer towards the end of August. Met Office meteorologist Becky

Mitchell told the PA news agency: “It’s going to stay quite changeable at least for the next week but as we head towards the end of August, there’s a likelihood we’ll see hotter spell of weather and drier more settled weather across the whole of the UK.” While it is too early to predict temperatures at this stage, it could “potentially be in the high 20s.” Mitchell said that even though it may not seem like it, this summer has been “warmer and drier than average.” — dpa

SHORT TAKES

MELBOURNE

NZ grants residency to Google’s co-founder

Larry Page, Google’s co-founder and one of the world’s richest men, has become a New Zealand resident, with immigration services saying he had applied under a category for wealthy investors.

“Larry Page submitted an application for residence under the Investor Plus Category on 3 November 2020,” Immigration New Zealand said in an e-mailed statement.

“As he was offshore at the time his application was not able to be



processed because of Covid-19 restrictions. Once Mr Page entered New Zealand his application was able to be processed and it was approved on 4 February 2021.” — Reuters

ROME

Hundreds of migrants find safe port in Italy

More than 250 migrants disembarked in Sicily from an NGO rescue ship, while another vessel carrying around 550 people was given permission to land on the Italian island. Both ships had put out urgent appeals for a safe port following days at sea in the central Mediterranean, warning of the deteriorating health of those on board, who include children. “The #SeaWatch3 (ship) reached the port of Trapani this morning. We are happy



to finally have a port of safety,” the German organisation Sea Watch International tweeted, saying 257 people were being disembarked. On Thursday, they had warned of a “critical” situation. — AFP

MOSCOW

Russia’s population continues to contract

Russia population continues to contract significantly as Covid-19 continues to spread. Between January and June, almost 422,000 more people died than were born in the country, according to figures released by the Rosstat statistics office on Friday. The population decline was almost 60 per cent higher than in the first half of 2020. According to official statistics, around 163,000 people have died of Covid-19 in Russia so far, but the number of unreported cases



is thought to be far higher. Currently, the more transmissible Delta variant is spreading swiftly in Russia, and the authorities have been reporting more than 800 deaths per day for several weeks. — dpa

Hip-hop dream thrives in India’s largest slum

AMMU KANNAMPILLY

After India’s largest slum defeated the pandemic, some of its young residents pulled out their phones to write, shoot and release a triumphant rap video.

“At first we were afraid, what would happen to us? But we stood with the doctors... now it’s your turn”, rapped the young men in the video.

“We Did It” — “Kar Dikhaya” in Hindi — showcased new talent and won acclaim from celebrities, but its creators’ abiding goal was to fight the stigma dogging this densely-populated corner of Mumbai.

The Dharavi slum is home to around one million people, many of whom live in single-room shanties and share communal toilets.

Its labyrinthine alleys have long been associated with filth and disease despite its remarkable success in the battle against Covid-19, and its residents battle constant discrimination. But Ayush Tegar Renuka, one of the star students of the Dharavi Dream Project hip-hop academy, said he feels “so proud” of belonging to the community.

“The Dharavi shown on TV channels and the real Dharavi are very different places,” the 16-year-old said.

Ayush began breakdancing three years ago, brushing off his widowed mother’s pleas to give up a pursuit she feared would result in a trip to the hospital.

She was not alone. Many parents were initially reluctant to enrol their children in the school’s free classes, dismissing hip-hop as dangerous, a distraction from homework or simply a waste of time. The Dharavi Dream Project’s co-founder Dolly Rateshwar was determined to change their minds.

The daughter of a priest, Rateshwar was nervous about venturing into the neighbourhood, but the teenagers she met struck a chord with her.

“I was raised in a very conservative family... I never knew there was a bigger world out there,” the 38-year-old said.

“And I was worried that these kids might lose out on life because they didn’t know the possibilities open to them.”

The school opened its doors in 2015, offering free classes in breakdancing, beatboxing and rapping to around 20 students, with digital media start-up Qyuki — Rateshwar’s employer — and US entertainment titan Universal Music Group footing the bill. — AFP

The Dharavi shown on TV channels and the real Dharavi are very different places

AYUSH TEGAR
RENUKA

Dharavi Dream Project



A CHILD’S BURDEN!

A boy carries water cans on a wheelbarrow along a road in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Saturday.

– AFP

Tina Turner... you are wrong!



Ray Petersen
rj.petersen52@gmail.com

TINA TURNER
EMERGED FROM
THE WILDERNESS
DURING THE
MID-EIGHTIES
WITH THE
AL GREEN
STANDARD LET’S
STAY TOGETHER

Tina Turner was born Anna Mae Bullock, in Brownsville Tennessee, she is simply five foot nothing of ‘viva voce,’ of ‘life, given voice.’ Born into a violent, loveless marriage, from which her mother fled, and her father remarried soon after, leaving the 11-year-old in the care of her grandmother, you needn’t know. Nor that she was ironically, the subservient half of her own failed nuptials, married to abusive cocaine addict and musician, Ike Turner, for 16 years, only ended in 1977 when the wheel came full circle, and she fled from her husband and was hidden by friends until her divorce was finalised the following year. You don’t need to know... you can hear it in her music.

The frenetic “River Deep, Mountain High,” the pulsating “Proud Mary,” the driving “Nutbush City Limits,” defined Turner as an icon and poster girl for Phil Spector’s ‘wall of sound’ musical phenomenon, in the so called ‘glory days’ of sex, drugs, and rock’n’roll. But little did the world know of the diminutive star’s volatile relationship with her husband, which was to severely affect her ability to work in the industry after their separation. Ike Turner didn’t let go easily and tied his ex-wife in contractual knots for nearly a decade afterwards. Again ironically, but with clear purpose, she kept his name to remind her of his enmity, and how she needed to be strong and independent to emerge from

his shadow.

Tina Turner emerged from the wilderness during the mid-eighties with the Al Green standard “Let’s Stay Together,” showcasing a bluesy edge, “Private Dancer” offering vocal subtlety, poignancy, and vulnerability, “What’s Love Got to Do with It?” demonstrated her personal and professional strength and resilience. Her acting in ‘Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome,’ alongside Mel Gibson garnered praise, and the theme song “We Don’t Need Another Hero,” became a smash hit, and “Simply the Best,” has become iconic, ensuring Turner’s place among the pantheon of true musical legends.

Widely acknowledged today as the “Queen of Rock’n’Roll,” the diminutive Turner was described in the *New York Times* in 2020, as having an inimitable “swagger, sensuality, gravelly vocals and unstoppable energy.” I can tell you, having seen Turner live during the mid-nineties, up-close and impersonal, she is dynamic, her voice is almost guttural, almost visceral, yet at the same time resilient, with an edge of vulnerability. Her duet, with Aussie rocker Jimmy Barnes, of “Simply the Best,” showcases all that she has been and is. You don’t need to know Turner’s story... its all there in her voice, and trust me, she certainly has got the best legs in the business!

So, Tina Turner? This week? How?

What? I’ve got to thinking, and we do need another hero! All of us, all over the world... as we are seeking to emerge from these ‘anni horribiles,’ these dreadful years of the pandemic. We don’t need a windmill tilting Don Quixote, an Arthurian knight in shining armour, or Tony Stark’s ‘Iron Man,’ Clark Kent’s ‘Superman,’ or Bruce Wayne’s ‘Batman.’ Heck, we don’t need our cinematic icons Clint Eastwood, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jean-Claude van Damme, Tom Cruise, Daniel Craig, Scarlet Johannsen, or Angelina Jolie.

Truly, all we are doing now, all of us, everywhere, in every sense of individuality, family, community, society, nationality, and globally, is hanging on... by the skin of our teeth, and nobody is listening to us. Are we frustrated? Yes! Is there an answer? Yes! Come out from behind the safety of your incredible affluence, your eminent domains, and your perceived superiority. As Will Ferrell said, “We all pull our pants on one leg after the other!” Yet, the world over... leaders, politicians, civil servants, and bureaucrats, are doing what they think, mitigating their circumstances, to assuage their own needs, that really aren’t, and that is wrong!

We do need the hero Tina Turner does not need... someone who will listen to us, hear us, and maybe, just maybe for long enough, to walk in our shoes, and to seek to understand us.

A medieval movie with a difference



Rasha Al Raisi
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DIRECTOR
YOUSRI
NASRALLAH
TRIES TO
ANSWER MANY
QUESTIONS IN
HIS MOVIE AFTER
THE BATTLE

To mark the 10th anniversary of the Arab Spring, Netflix streamed the Egyptian movie *After the Battle* (2012) which covers the aftermath of a certain event known in the Arab world as: The Battle of the Camel.

It took place on February 2, 2011 — a week after the abdication of Mubarak — right in the middle of Tahrir Square, where a group of men on camel and horse backs charged right into protesters and innocent bystanders. The shocking scene gave rise to horrified screams from us viewers, as the animals stomped people while their riders violently used sticks and whips to separate the crowds.

It felt like something out of a medieval movie with a difference: everyone wore modern clothes and it was broadcasting live. This

terrible event left 11 killed and 2,000 injured. But what was the reason behind it?

Director Yousri Nasrallah tries to answer this question in this movie by presenting Mahmoud (Bassem Samra) one of the riders taking part in the Battle of the Camel. His deed is instantly punished as he’s shunned by the whole society which held him responsible for the innocent blood that was spilled that day.

However, things change instantly when Reem (Menna Shalabi) the social activist enters his life and tries to understand the motive behind him — along with his other colleagues working in the tourism sector that was badly hit during the Arab Spring — taking part in the battle.

Reem becomes the link between him and the new post-

revolution society, where she presents him with the ideals that many of her young generation believe in and dream of applying in their actual society: a decent existence marked by freedom and dignity.

But could their naïve dreams come true in a society where social classes are world apart? How could their theories of social justice be applied when many of the poor are struggling to make ends meet?

Was Mahmoud just following the orders of the former government by attacking the protesters or was it a premeditated action as claimed by many?

Although the movie tries to justify the action of the participants in the battle, yet it also sheds a light on how many of the low working class were

isolated from the revolution that was taking place nearby them as many believed that it was the reason behind their unemployment.

The choice of actors is good, Bassem Samra perfects the role of the simple horse trainer who’s life centres round his small family and stallion. Nahid El Sebai who plays his wife is very convincing in the role of the working mother who struggles between her menial job, her children and a brooding jobless husband.

The scenes where the two visit the Tahrir Square for the first time is memorable as their initial bewilderment immediately turns into an urge to be part of the rise just like everyone else.

Even the choice of extras was remarkable as all of them were non-actors which made the

dialogues — especially the ones concerning the revolution — genuinely enlightening.

After the Battle was Egypt’s first movie to compete for the Palm d’Or in Cannes film festival in 15 years. However, it didn’t do well in the box office. Many Egyptians boycotted the movie considering it an anti-revolution one that justified heinous murders; where the culprits were never caught or punished.

Also, being co-produced by the French, Nasrallah was accused of making a movie intended for Europeans and international film festivals. But despite the controversy, it’s worth watching as it presents an interesting viewpoint: simple characters caught in a complicated situation.

(The writer is a certified skills trainer and an author)

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CHOPRA WINS HISTORIC JAVELIN GOLD FOR INDIA



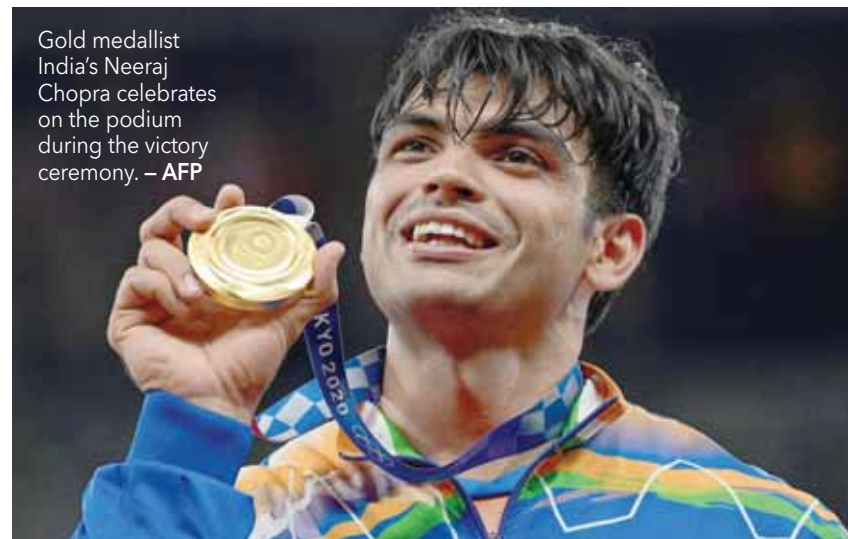
TOKYO: Neeraj Chopra won the men's javelin on Saturday with a best throw of 87.58 metres to claim an historic first Olympic athletics gold medal for India.

The Czech Republic's Jakub Vadlejch won silver with 86.67 metres and Vitezslav Vesely claimed the bronze with 85.44.

Chopra, the 2018 Commonwealth champion, seized the lead with a throw of 87.03 on his first attempt, a distance no other competitor achieved during the final, winning India's first gold of the Tokyo Games as his overjoyed teammates and coaches watched from the stands.

With medals assured, Vadlejch and Vesely attempted to reach the top of the

Gold medallist India's Neeraj Chopra celebrates on the podium during the victory ceremony. — AFP



It feels unbelievable. This is our first Olympic medal for a very long time, and in athletics it is the first time we have gold, so it's a proud moment for me and my country

NEERAJ CHOPRA
Olympic Gold Medallist

podium on their final throws but each fouled.

"It feels unbelievable," said Chopra. "This is our first Olympic medal for a very long time, and in athletics it is the first time we have gold, so it's a proud moment for me and my country."

With a best throw of 86.65 in his qualifying round, Chopra knew his Games were on the right track this week but never considered the gold a sure thing.

"In the qualification round I threw very well so I knew I could do better in the final. I didn't know it would be gold but I am very happy," he said.

Chopra became only the second Indian to win an individual Olympic gold medal after Abhinav Bindra won the 10-metre air rifle event at the 2008 Games.

"Your performance has further elevated what has been evident throughout the Games — that our athletes are not only capable of going toe to toe with

the best, but are firmly establishing ourselves as the favorites," Bindra wrote on Twitter.

"Our first individual gold might have taken over a century to come, but the comparatively miniscule time taken for you to bring home the second is a solid indication that we, as a sporting nation, are on the rise."

Chopra's win prompted celebration among his compatriots — including India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"History has been scripted at Tokyo!" Modi wrote on Twitter. "The young Neeraj has done exceptionally well. He played with remarkable passion and showed unparalleled grit."

The evening was a disappointment for Germany's Johannes Vetter, a favourite for the podium as the only competitor in the final to have thrown over 90 metres. He finished ninth with 82.52. — Reuters

Medals					TOKYO 2020	
Top 10						
By delegation						
As of August 7 at 0500 GMT						
RANKING		Gold	S	B	TOTAL	
▼					▼	
1	China	37	27	17	81	
2	United States	33	36	32	101	
3	Japan	24	11	16	51	
4	Britain	18	20	20	58	
5	ROC*	17	24	22	63	
6	Australia	17	6	21	44	
7	Germany	10	11	16	37	
8	Italy	10	10	18	38	
9	Netherlands	9	10	12	31	
10	France	7	12	9	28	
*Russian athletes					AFP	



“You realise, you know, you finished the job, you get the gold medal, you get the trophy, but when you go through that journey it’s just incredible to be a part of something so special,”
KEVIN DURANT
USA BASKETBALL STAR

DURANT LEADS US TO 16TH MEN’S GOLD

IN REVENGE MATCH AGAINST FRANCE

SAITAMA, Japan: Kevin Durant led Team USA’s victory over France in the men’s basketball final in Tokyo on Saturday, avenging a first-round loss and claiming a 16th gold for the country in the sport.
Durant, who in these Games surpassed Carmelo Anthony as the United States’ highest career scorer, led with 29 points in the 87-82 victory at the Saitama Super Arena.
“You realise, you know, you finished the job, you get the gold medal, you get the trophy,

but when you go through that journey it’s just incredible to be a part of something so special,” said the Brooklyn Nets star who has now won three Olympic gold medals.
“I’m bonded to these guys for life.”
The US team had been slow to start in previous matches, but they kept the heat on France consistently this time. It was 18 turnovers that proved to be the killer for France.
“Details cost us the game for sure,” said French team captain

Nicolas Batum. “You can’t turnover that much against that type of team.”
France earned their third Olympic silver medal in men’s basketball.
The championship attracted the biggest crowd yet in these Games to the arena north of Tokyo, with the bottom bowl of seats about half full of athletes, officials, media and volunteers in place of fans due to Covid-19 restrictions.
The US men have historically been the team to beat, with

15 gold medals since 1936 going into these Games. This championship marks their fourth straight gold medal.
But this year’s team proved to be vulnerable, dropping two straight exhibition games in July and suffering a shock 83-76 defeat to France in the preliminary round of the Games, which was their first defeat <https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/basketball-czech-republic-beat-iran-basketball-begins-tokyo-2021-07-25> on the Olympic stage since 2004.

“The first time we played together as a whole roster was France and lost to them,” said Jrue Holiday, who had 11 points for the United States. “So we just felt like it was only right to meet them in gold and to get our win back.”
In the women’s bronze-medal match, France beat Serbia 91-76. Gabby Williams led the French team with 17 points as the nation claimed its first medal since winning silver in 2012.
France were beaten in the semifinals by Japan, who go on to

challenge the US women for gold on Sunday.
Australia outlasted Slovenia 107-93 in the men’s bronze-medal match. For a nation of just two million people, Slovenia fielded a powerhouse team on its Olympic debut, captained by Dallas Mavericks star Luka Doncic.
Doncic led in points and assists at the Games going into the bronze match. But Australia proved too strong on Saturday, lifted by an astonishing 42 points by Patty Mills. — **Reuters**

Golden Felix finale as USA storm to 4x400m Olympic victory

TOKYO: Allyson Felix brought the curtain down on her glittering Olympic career with a seventh gold medal as the United States stormed to a crushing victory in the 4x400m women’s relay on Saturday.
Felix, who on Friday became the most decorated female track and field athlete of all time with a bronze in the individual 400m, helped a ‘Dream Team’ US quartet romp home in 3min 16.85sec.
Poland took silver, while Jamaica took bronze.
The USA fielded a star-studded line-up which included world record-breaking 400m hurdler and newly crowned Olympic champion Sydney McLaughlin, 400 hurdles silver medallist Dalilah Muhammad and teenage 800m gold medallist Athing Mu alongside the veteran Felix.



Allyson Felix of the United States in action. — **Reuters**

With McLaughlin getting the American women off to a blistering start before handing off to Felix on the second leg, it soon became clear that the

US quartet were racing against history and the Soviet Union’s 33-year-old world record of 3:15.17 set at the drug-tainted Seoul Olympics.
But while Muhammad built up a massive lead for Mu with a blistering third leg, the record remained just out of reach with the 19-year-old from New Jersey crossing the line four seconds clear of Polish anchor runner Justyna Swiety-Ersetic.
Felix, 35, is competing in her fifth and final Summer Games and now has 11 total Olympic medals, extending her record as the most decorated female track and field Olympian in history.
Her 11th medal also took Felix one clear of Carl Lewis’ 10 medals as the most decorated US track and field Olympic athlete.

— **AFP**

Salim al Omri elected as OAA chairman

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 7

The general assembly of Oman Athletics Association (OAA) elected the new board member for (2021-2024) term on Saturday.
Shaikh Salim bin Said al Omri was elected as the chairman of OAA as he received 16 votes among the other three opponents including Adil Khadim al Zari (Masiarh club), Jihad bin Abdullah al Sheikh (Oman club) and Mohammed al Asmi (Al Basaher club) who quit in the second round of voting.
Ahil Sidab representative, Said al Hadi, won the Vice-Chairman position after having 19 votes. He was competing in this position beside Ali al Marzouqi. Asaad al Hosni and Hamdan al Bousheri elected as Secretary General and board treasurer. Khawla al Rawahi and Aisha al Jabri were the two nominees for the woman representative in the board and the former elected for the position as she had 20 votes.



Eight candidates were in the list for board members post including Ahmed BaAbood (Al Itihad), Ahmed al Dhoori (Khasab), Hamood al Shabibi (Al Mudhaibi), Khalfan al Waeli (Bahla), Abdullah al Saidi (Ibri), Mohammed al Balushi (Al Suwaiq), Mohammed al Balushi (Al Salam) and Hadi al Alawi (Al Taleia). Only top four members in voting being selected as the members of the board including: Ahmed al Dhoori, Mohammed al Balushi, Hamood al Shabibi and Khalfan al Waeli.
Post the election, the newly

elected chief of OAA thanked all the club chairmen for their confidence and trust on him to lead OAA in the forthcoming period.
“A special thanks for the previous board of OAA on their efforts and initiatives. We are having three years and as everyone knows it is limited period. However, we will deliver our best towards development of athletics in Oman. Continuation on the previous board plan and will have the right resources to implement and reach the desired objectives,” he ended.

RAHUL, JADEJA REPEL ENGLAND

BEFORE RAIN FRUSTRATES INDIA

NOTTINGHAM, UK: KL Rahul, Ravindra Jadeja and Jasprit Bumrah took a toll of England’s attack in contrasting fashions to leave India well-placed in the first Test on Friday before rain cut short the third day’s play at Trent Bridge.

Opening batsman Rahul, in his first Test for nearly two years, top-scored with 84 as India made 278 in reply to England’s meagre first-innings 183.

Rahul was helped by two dropped slip catches that underlined England’s status as the worst-performing cordon in Test cricket.

At stumps, England were 25-0 in their second innings — a deficit of 70 runs — after rain meant only 50 overs out of the 98 scheduled for the day were bowled.

Earlier, all-rounder Jadeja’s typically dashing 56 featured eight fours and a six and there was more pain for England when tailender Bumrah made a Test-best 28.

“Today I was able to go out there and show a lot of discipline to give my side a good start,” Rahul told reporters after his 12th fifty in 37 Tests.

The 29-year-old, who has also scored five Test hundreds, spent much of his near six-hour innings facing James Anderson and Stuart Broad in overcast conditions that favoured the England pace greats.

“It (the pitch) wasn’t unplayable or anything but having to play against the likes of Anderson and Broad in these conditions is no batsman’s dream. But...I love challenges.”

Ollie Robinson, playing just his second Test after being suspended following the re-emergence of racist and sexist tweets on his England debut against New Zealand on June, led the attack with 5-85 in 26.5 overs — his first five-wicket haul in Tests.

Robinson was glad to have overcome “probably the toughest few weeks I’ve had in cricket to be honest, or in my life actually,” with a haul of wickets.

“It was important for me to show everyone that I am the real deal on the field,” the 27-year-old Sussex seamer added.

Robinson was involved in some verbal confrontations but insisted they were merely



India's KL Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja walk off the pitch for the break. — Reuters

“friendly banter”.

“We were just trying to get them out of their bubble, they were batting well, pretty defensive.

“I was trying to get KL to play some shots against us. It was all good fun.”

Anderson’s figures of 4-54

in 23 overs took him to 621 Test wickets. Only two retired spinners, Sri Lanka’s Muttiah Muralitharan (800) and Australia’s Shane Warne (708), are ahead of him in the all-time list.

India resumed on Friday on 125-4 after Anderson had

dismissed Chestehwar Pujara and India captain Virat Kohli — out for a duck — with successive deliveries.

Rahul was 57 not out, having only been selected after when Mayank Agarwal was hit on the head batting in the nets on Monday.

He should have been out for 52 when Dom Sibley drop a routine slip catch off Anderson.

Rahul had added just one run to his lunch score of 77 when he edged Anderson to first slip only for England captain Joe Root to floor the head-high chance.

Fortunately for England,

SCOREBOARD	
England first Innings: 183	
India first Innings (O/n: 125-4):	
R Sharma c Curran b Robinson	36
KL Rahul c Buttler b Anderson	84
C Pujara c Buttler b Anderson	4
V Kohli c Buttler b Anderson	0
A Rahane (run out)	5
R Pant c Bairstow b Robinson	25
R Jadeja c Broad b Robinson	56
S Thakur c Root b Anderson	0
M Shami b Robinson	13
J Bumrah c Broad b Robinson	28
M Siraj (not out)	7
Extras (B-6, LB-6, NB-8)	20
Total (all out, 84.5 overs)	278
Fall of wickets: 1-97, 2-104, 3-104, 4-112, 5-145, 6-205, 7-205, 8-232, 9-245	
Bowling: Anderson 23-8-54-4, Broad 20-3-70-0, Robinson 26.5-6-85-5, Curran 15-2-57-0	
England second Innings	
R Burns (not out)	11
D Sibley (not out)	9
Extras (NB-4, W-1)	5
Total (For no wkt, 11.1 overs)	25
Bowling: Bumrah 3-0-6-0, Siraj 5.1-2-10-0, Shami 3-1-9-0	

Today I was able to go out there and show a lot of discipline to give my side a good start

KL RAHUL
Indian batsman

Rahul’s near six-hour innings ended when he nicked Anderson into the gloves of wicketkeeper Jos Buttler.

Left-hander Jadeja hoisted Anderson for a superb six high over square leg and celebrated an 81-ball fifty with his ‘sword’ twirl of the bat before Robinson had him caught by Broad at mid-off.

The runs kept coming even when Root took the new ball but, surprisingly, didn’t give it to either Anderson or Broad.

Bumrah, whose previous highest score in his 21 Tests was 10 not out, smashed left-armer Sam Curran for 14 runs in three consecutive balls with two fours either side of a pulled six.

He was last man out when well caught by Broad, running round from fine leg, off Robinson.

Broad, six years to the day since taking a Test-best 8-15 against Australia at Trent Bridge, his Nottinghamshire home ground, finished with 0-70 in 20 overs. — AFP

Ellis enjoys “surreal moment” with debut hat-trick

DHAKA: Nathan Ellis admitted he was fortunate to be a member of Australia’s touring squad in Bangladesh after becoming the first male player to secure a Twenty20 hat-trick on his debut on Friday.

Ellis claimed three wickets with the final three balls of Bangladesh’s innings in Dhaka to set the Australians a target of 128 runs to win the third match in the five-game series.

But while the tourists fell short of their first victory in the series by 10 runs, the match still featured a world first for the

26-year-old.

“It was a surreal moment,” Ellis said of his feat, which had only previously been achieved in the women’s game by Nepal’s Anjali Chand.

“To come out of the other end of it with a hat-trick — it’s not something I planned to happen or thought about happening but pretty amazing and it’s something I will cherish forever. This whole tour has been a bit of a surreal experience for me.

“I’m under no illusions to the fact it’s taken a global pandemic and some boys spending a lot of



Australia's Nathan Ellis celebrates with his team-mates after taking the wicket of Bangladesh's Mahedi Hasan to complete his hat-trick. — Reuters

time in quarantine and bubbles to need a break for me to get here.”

Australia have sent a weakened side on tour to the West Indies and Bangladesh, with the likes of David Warner and Steve Smith not travelling while captain Aaron Finch returned home due to injury from the Caribbean.

Ellis had struggled for much of his four-over spell, conceding 34 runs before making his mark on history to close out the Bangladesh innings.

Captain Mahmudullah saw his off-stump clattered by Ellis before Mustafizur Rahman was caught

in the outfield by Mitchell Marsh. The hat-trick was completed when Mahedi Hasan pulled his attempt into the hands of Ashton Agar at deep square leg.

“It’s my first time bowling on a sub-continental wicket so I’m learning on the run a little bit, just finding what works for me and then setting my fields accordingly and trying to get them to hit to the fielders,” said Ellis.

“So for me it was pretty simple, bowl to my field and hope it goes my way and thankfully it did.”

— Reuters





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Oman poised for 2.5 per cent growth in 2021: WB

RECOVERY UNDER WAY:
GCC countries back on path
to economic growth after
contraction due to pandemic

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 7

The Sultanate's economy is forecast to recover in 2021, albeit at a moderate 2.5 per cent growth rate as a sizable infrastructure investment programme gains momentum. Medium-term growth is projected to average 5.3 per cent over the forecast period, the World Bank has noted in its latest report.

According to the latest issue of the World Bank Gulf Economic Update (GEU), titled 'Covid-19 Pandemic and the Road to Diversification', Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) economies are expected to return to an aggregate growth of 2.2 per cent in 2021 following a year of economic distress. This growth is buoyed by the global economic recovery, projected at 5.6 per cent and the revival of global oil demand and international oil prices.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the decline in global oil demand and prices dealt the GCC countries



a health crisis and a commodity market shock causing a GDP contraction 4.8 per cent in 2020.

Fiscal deficits are projected to persist for most over the forecast period, however, but at narrower ratios to GDP in 2023 than during the economic downturn in 2020.

According to the GEU, the oil

supply cutbacks and the four-year-low average oil price of \$41.30 per barrel slashed the bloc's goods and services exports by 8.1 per cent in real terms and turned the current account surplus of 6.8 per cent of GDP in 2019 into a deficit of 2.9 per cent of GDP in 2020.

Non-oil GDP is proportionately

larger now in all the GCC countries than it was 10 or 20 years ago, but much work remains to be done. Many are still highly reliant on oil and gas exports, which remain over 70 per cent of total goods exports in Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Oman, and on oil revenues, which exceed 70 per cent

“While the GCC has done a lot in the last year to contain the effects of the pandemic on their economy, including procuring vaccinations early on, they must continue to reform their public sector finances

ISSAM
ABOUSLEIMAN

World Bank
Regional Director of the
GCC Countries

of total government revenues in Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain, the report stated.

“While the GCC has done a lot in the last year to contain the effects of the pandemic on their economy, including procuring vaccinations early on, they must continue to reform their public sector finances,” said Issam Abousleiman, World Bank Regional Director of the GCC Countries.

“The region needs to strengthen their competition policies to harness the benefits

of telecommunications and the digitalisation of economic activity.”

This sixth issue of the GEU focuses on fiscal revenues and structural reforms including strategic investments in digitalisation and telecommunications, which can help enable more economic diversification.

Promoting private sector development remains at the core of national and regional economic diversification efforts. The GCC managed to complete only two state-owned enterprise privatisation transactions and only two public-private partnership (PPP) agreements in 2020, but it was a difficult year for commerce and investment anywhere.

Also, advancing the telecommunications frontier is a strategic investment sector for diversification and post Covid-19 recovery, that will serve the GCC well.

Past investments in the sector accorded the GCC sizable benefits during the pandemic as quarantines, lockdowns, and restrictions forced public health surveillance, wholesale and retail commerce, public and private education, banking and financial services, and private and government office work onto digital channels.

CBO foreign assets grow 10 per cent



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 7

Total foreign assets of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) climbed 10 per cent to reach RO 6.945 billion at the end of May 2021, up from RO 6.291 billion a year earlier.

According to the latest figures of the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), total private sector deposits with commercial banks and Islamic windows rose 7.4 per cent to reach RO 17.336 billion, up from RO 16.147 billion a year ago.

Total loans and financial assistance advanced by commercial banks increased 2.1 per cent to RO 27.085 billion as of end-May 2021, up from RO 26.537 billion a year earlier. Domestic liquidity rose 6.5 per cent to RO 20.279 billion versus RO 19.039 billion last year.

Oman's 2040 Targets: New industrial hubs, free zones and tourism clusters

Ambitious goals: Five new industrial cities, three new free zones and up to 22 tourism hubs envisioned in strategy

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](#)

As many as 16 industrial cities and related manufacturing zones are expected to form part of Oman's expanding industrial base by the year 2040 — up from 11 presently — with the non-oil economy playing an increasingly important role in powering economic growth over the next 20 years.

According to an outline of the Oman National Spatial Strategy (ONSS), approved by the government in March this year, the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is projected to grow at the rate of 3-5 per cent annually through to 2040, buoyed by a higher contribution from the non-hydrocarbon sector. Non-oil activities that will drive growth include knowledge and innovation industries, tourism, manufacturing, logistics, finance and services.



A broad roadmap for the achievement of these and other objectives is enshrined in the ONSS. As a “fundamental enabler” of the goals of Oman Vision 2040, the Strategy will ensure the competitiveness of the different cities and regions of the country, and their overall sustainable development in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030.

In other ambitious targets set out in the Strategy, at three new free zones are anticipated

to be established at key locations around the Sultanate by the year 2040, adding to the existing three currently in operation at Suhar, Salalah and Al Mazyouna.

Tourism clusters are projected to balloon from the present four to a total of 22 by 2040. The report cites the potential for varied tourism development — adventure, eco-tourism related, cultural, heritage and marine — at select locations across the expanse of the country.

In addition to well-established

Non-oil activities that will drive growth include knowledge and innovation industries, tourism, manufacturing, logistics, finance and services

tourism industries centring around Muscat, Salalah, Nizwa and Sur, it highlights the potential for adventure tourism in parts of Al Wusta Governorate; eco-tourism in Musandam; a cultural heritage corridor covering the wilayats of Al Rustaq, Nakhl, Wadi Al Maawil and Al Awabi; coastal tourism in Al Musannah; niche tourism activities in Al Dhahirah Governorate; camel-related tourism activities in Bidiya; marine tourism in South Al Sharqiyah; and desert tourism in Al Buraimi.

With a view to monetising Oman's abundant mineral resources, the Strategy has formulated prudent policies that balance this objective with the goal of preserving ecologically valuable areas.

It explained: “The National Strategy has defined mining areas,

classified by priority that takes into account the value of the mineral, and the areas of special planning zones, in a way that preserves those areas and ensures responsible and sustainable mining through investing in high-value mineral resources, in keeping with specific controls and requirements.”

Mining, alongside agriculture and fisheries, are seen as important pillars of growth in rural areas, including parts of North Al Batinah Governorate, Nizwa in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, and Mahdha in Al Buraimi Governorate.

Further, to secure the country's food requirements, the Strategy envisions a dramatic increase in the utilisation of arable land for agricultural purposes.

The target is to bring a total of 1,044 sq km of arable land under agricultural development by 2040, encompassing parts of Nejd in Dhofar, Al Massarat in Al Dhahirah and inland swathes of North Al Batinah. It advocates the sustainable management of limited water resources, exploitation of non-traditional water resources, and use of modern production technologies.

Brazilian port receives world's first ore carrier with rotor sails

DECARBONISATION: A project headed by mining giant Vale, installation of the technology increases efficiency and reduces carbon emissions.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 7

Brazil's Tubarão Port, located in the southeast part of the country, recently received the world's first very large ore carrier equipped with a rotor sail system. The ship, *Sea Zhoushan*, is a Guaibamax category VLOC (Very Large Ore Carrier) with a capacity of 325,000 tonnes.

This will be the first operation for the ship, which embarked from a shipyard in China and will return to the same location with a load of iron ore. Throughout the project, 3D modelling was carried out at the loading ports operated by Vale to analyse the ship's docking.

"The ship was designed to dock at any port. There is no interference caused by the sails during loading since they recline during docking. Tubarão was chosen as the first destination since the teams for nautical



engineering, inspection and local operations played a fundamental part throughout the entire testing process and are now collaborating to make minor adjustments to the system," explains Vale's Global Head of Shipping & Distribution, Guilherme Brega.

The rotor sails are cylindrical rotors four metres in diameter and 24 metres tall — the equivalent of a seven-storey building. During operation, the rotors turn at different speeds depending on the ship's environmental and operating conditions, creating a pressure difference that propels the ship forward, a phenomenon known as the Magnus effect.

There are five sails installed along the length of the vessel, allowing for an increase of up to 8 per cent efficiency and subsequent

reduction of up to 3.4 thousand tonnes of CO2 equivalent per ship per year. If the pilot project proves to be efficient, it is estimated that at least 40 per cent of the fleet will be able to use the technology, which would reduce annual emissions from Vale's maritime iron ore transport by almost 1.5 per cent.

The installation of the technology, completed by Finnish manufacturer Norsepower, is a project led by Vale, relying on support through its partnership with South Korean shipping company Pan Ocean for installation in one of its VLOCs used by Vale. The company Shanghai Ship and Design Research Institute (SDARI) was responsible for the design and integration of the sail into the vessel. Chinese shipyard New

Times Shipbuilding built the ship, which was already adapted to receive the sails installed at another shipyard, PaxOcean Engineering Zhoushan, also in China.

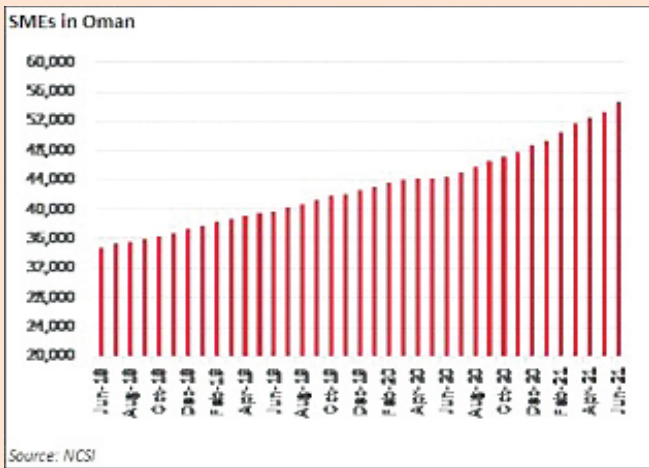
Vale has been compiling studies on the use of wind-assisted ship propulsion technology since 2016. Through the Ecoshipping programme, the company has developed various partnerships in cooperation with ITV (Vale Institute of Technology), as well as universities and laboratories in Brazil and Europe. The objective with this project was to assess the best operating conditions for rotor sails in the contracted fleet and verify the benefits of the technology in terms of reduction in fuel consumption and CO2 emissions.

The ship chosen was awaiting construction and moving from detailed design to manufacturing and installation of the equipment took one year. In addition to laboratory testing and numerical analysis, the engineers studied wind patterns on the Brazil-China route. "We discovered that we have an advantage in relation to our competitors: the Brazil-Asia route has, on average, more favourable winds than Australia-Asia", Brega added.



MSX WEEKLY REVIEW

MSX ends week 0.70 per cent lower



M SX30 Index ended the week lower by 0.70 per cent. The index was mainly down due to a drop in financial sector. Financial sector declined 1.34 per cent.

While Service sector and industrial sector went up by 0.48 per cent and 0.78 per cent respectively. MSX Shariah Index closed higher by 0.31 per cent.

Sohar International Bank announced that it has obtained the regulatory approvals from the Central Bank of Oman and the Capital Market Authority for the Rights Issue of 555,555,555 shares at a price of Baisa 92 per share (with a share price of Baisa 90 per share plus issue expenses of Baisa 2 per share).

Oman is reconsidering plans to scale back electricity subsidies for Omani residential and other small consumers. State-run Oman News Agency said on Monday the government plans to amend tariffs, giving consumers on lower rates access to more supply, and recalculate bills for May and June.

The Authority of Public Services Regulation has received more than 5,000 complaints over "significant increases" in bills. The government had said late last year utility tariffs will be raised gradually until the subsidies are lifted completely in 2025. Subsidies for electricity and water totalled about \$1.95 billion, according to the 2020 budget.

As per the CBO, Oman's narrow money supply (M1) decreased during the month of May 2021 by 1.6 per cent MoM. The MoM contraction was due to a decline in Demand Deposits by 2.7 per cent while currency outside commercial banks was higher by 1.8 per cent MoM. Broad money (M2) supply increased by 1.2 per cent MoM and was higher by 6.5 per cent YoY. YoY increase was led by an 8.8 per cent rise in Quasi Money.

While on monthly basis, domestic liquidity

The total number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) at the end of June 2021 were 54,726 which is an increase by 23 per cent compared to the same period of 2020.

increased by about RO 238m i.e. 1.2 per cent.

CBO's foreign assets which include bullion, IMF reserve assets, placements abroad and foreign securities, rose to RO 6.94bn as at the end of May'21, having increased by 0.8 per cent MoM 1.2 per cent YoY.

CBO Fx assets were higher on MoM basis by 0.8 per cent. The MoM expansion was brought on by a 1.0 per cent MoM increase in placements abroad and 0.6 per cent MoM growth in IMF reserve assets.

Share of securities of the total was 46.2 per cent while that of placements abroad was 52.0 per cent while the rest amounting to 1.8 per cent was held by IMF reserve assets.

The total number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) at the end of June 2021 were 54,726 which is an increase by 23 per cent compared to the same period of 2020.

Among the governorates, Al Wusta topped the list with 45.1 per cent SMEs registered in June 2021, followed by Musandam with 34.3 per cent, Al Sharqiyah South with 29.2 per cent, Al Batinah South with 27 per cent, and the rest are from the other governorates.

The Governorate of Muscat had 18,460 SMEs registered at the end of June 2021, followed by North Al Batinah with 8,642, Al Dakhiliyah with 6,756, Dhofar with 4,586, South Al Batinah with 4,189 and North Al Sharqiyah with 3,619 SMEs registered. This was followed by South Al Sharqiyah with 3,272 SMEs, Al Dhahirah with 3,083 SMEs and Al Buraimi with 1,165 registered SMEs.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]



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JOSE CHACKO

It is necessary to assess client due diligence to the extent to which a business is exposed to money laundering and terrorist financing risks. In the Sultanate, as per the law, all entities are required to submit Suspicious Activity Reports (SAR) to Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) if there are any suspected regulatory violations or any potential money laundering or terrorist financing activities.

National Centre for Financial Information (NCFI) is the legal entity established under the law to receive suspicious activity reports.

As per the law, various supervisory authorities are Central Bank of Oman, Capital Market Authority, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, Ministry of Social Development and Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs. National Committee can designate any other party as a supervisory authority for anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) laws.

This is to be done when there are reasonable grounds for suspicion and should be done within the specified time frame as per guidelines. Suspicious Activity



Report can be initiated during customer onboarding stage, regular ongoing due diligence, while doing sanction screening or during normal operations. It is your responsibility to block economic crimes by filing SAR.

In some jurisdictions, it is referred to as Suspicious Transaction Report — STR or Suspicious Matter Report-SMR. Suspicious Activity is defined as a transaction that is inconsistent with a customer's known legitimate line of business or personal activity for the kind of business or account.

Any entity that fails to submit Suspicious Activity Reports to the regulators will face punitive measures as per the law in the Sultanate. The reports are to be submitted when there are reasonable grounds for suspicion and should be done within the specified time frame as per guidelines.

Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an inter-governmental policy making body that sets Anti Money Laundering (AML) standards and counter terrorist financing measures worldwide. FATF issues international

standards towards AML/CFT controls. In almost all countries FATF's 40 recommendations plays a key role in forming their country's respective AML laws. Its recommendations do not have the force of law.

But when it is adapted to a country's laws, it is legally binding. FATF develops annual typology reports showcasing money laundering and terrorist financing trends and methods worldwide. The FATF conducts peer reviews of each member through mutual evaluations to assess levels of implementation of the FATF Recommendations. This exercise will assess the effectiveness of measures to combat money laundering and terrorism financing.

According to FATF, countries should establish local Financial Intelligence Units (FIU) to receive analyse and disseminate the suspicious activity reports to the concerned authorities. (To be continued)

(The writer is Partner-Forensic Technology Services, Crowe Oman. Email: jose.chacko@crowe.om)



China exports robust in July as port activity rebounds



Coal is loaded into a bulk carrier at Qingdao Port, Shandong province, China. — Reuters

BEIJING: China's exports remained robust in July despite losing some steam, customs data showed, with analysts noting a rebound in port activity but warning that the recent spread of the Delta variant could act as a drag on growth.

Outbound shipments from the world's second-largest economy have remained resilient this year, boosted by demand for goods like medical gear and electronics needed to work from home — with a resurgence in coronavirus cases elsewhere increasing reliance on Chinese products.

With strict lockdowns and mass testing, business activity has largely returned to normal in China, although the country is now stepping up measures to contain the spread of the Delta variant with local outbreaks detected in more than a dozen provinces.

But trade remained strong in July, with exports growing slightly less than expected at 19.3 per cent from a year ago, said the Customs Administration. — AFP

Investors wary on Washington, balancing debt ceiling and infrastructure bill

NEW YORK: The economic boost from an expected \$1 trillion infrastructure bill working its way through the US Senate has helped push Wall Street stocks near record levels, but some investors are concerned that the next two months in Washington could be rocky.

At issue is not only the bipartisan infrastructure bill, but an expected \$3.5 trillion in proposed spending in a Democrat-led reconciliation bill. There is also a showdown coming over the debt ceiling, which could lead to a federal government shutdown if a deal is not reached to increase the borrowing limit by October.

Few expect the US government will default on its debt and upend the \$22 trillion Treasury market. Still, some analysts say a drawn out debt ceiling fight could increase volatility in a US stock market where valuations have become stretched with prices near record highs.

Other worries include a looming unwind of the Federal Reserve's easy money policies and a resurgence of Covid-19 that threatens to dent growth.

"When I look at Washington I see a lot of risk," said Steve Chiavarone, a portfolio manager and equity strategist at Federated Hermes.

He said he is concerned political posturing around the debt ceiling could escalate ahead of the 2022 Congressional elections, and that the reconciliation bill could boost corporate or individual tax rates, weighing on investor sentiment.

As a result, he is holding cash in anticipation of adding to value or cyclical stocks that may fall during



Construction workers are seen as they build an apartment building in Fairfax, Virginia. — AFP

a market sell-off, he said.

Overall, global fund managers increased their cash positions in July from 3.9 per cent to 4.1 per cent of assets while adding to shares of large technology companies, according to Bank of America Merrill Lynch. At the same time, options markets indicate that investors see limited gains in the months ahead, according to Barclays.

Esty Dwek, head of global market strategy at Natixis Investment Managers Solutions, said that she has also been raising cash to reposition for more volatility in the months ahead.

"We now have less visibility into the second half of the year"

given the emergence of the Delta variant of the coronavirus and the potential for higher taxes as part

Few expect the US government will default on its debt and upend the \$22 trillion Treasury market. Still, some analysts say a drawn out debt ceiling fight could increase volatility in a US stock market where valuations have become stretched with prices near record highs

of a broad reconciliation bill, she said.

The rising sense of concern comes as investors anticipate possible further details on plans to pull back emergency-level supports of the economy from

the Federal Reserve at the Jackson Hole annual conference of central bankers.

A surprisingly hawkish turn from the Fed in June led to a brief selloff in equities and the fixed income market.

Investors will get additional insights into the pace of inflation with the release of the consumer price index reading on Wednesday and the producer price index on Thursday.

Ultra-low interest rates, along with the highest percentage of companies in the S&P 500 beating analyst expectations since at least 1994, have pushed the S&P 500 up 17.2 per cent for the year to date.

The S&P 500 now trades at 21.7 times its expected earnings over the next 12 months, down slightly from the 24 times expected

earnings at the start of the year yet still well above its historical average. Senators could vote on the infrastructure bill in the next few days, lawmakers said.

While passage of the upcoming infrastructure and reconciliation bills will likely bolster the economy over the next several years, short-term concerns over rising taxes and the debt ceiling could weigh on the S&P 500 in the months ahead, said Jon Adams, senior investment strategist for BMO Global Asset Management.

"There's going to be a lot of details that need to be ironed out that will be closely watched by the markets," he said. "We expect to see a lot of volatility and posturing here over the next few months and we think that it will last until October." — Reuters

Investors, Indian start-ups press Modi for overseas listings

NEW DELHI: Leading investors including Tiger Global, Sequoia Capital and Lightspeed have called on India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi to spur rules to allow companies to list overseas for better access to capital.

India in September allowed companies to list directly on foreign exchanges like the New York Stock Exchange or Nasdaq, but the government has yet to announce rules required to govern such listings.

Calling it an "unfinished reform agenda", some 22 investors and top Indian start-ups such as food-delivery app Swiggy and

online tutoring firm Byju's wrote to Modi urging him to expedite the policy.

"The current inability of unlisted companies to tap international markets for raising capital is an impediment to the growth ambitions of Indian startups", they said in a letter.

The new policy is seen as a shot in the arm for Indian unicorn start-ups valued at more than \$1 billion and the digital unit of conglomerate Reliance, which is eyeing a US listing after raising more than \$20 billion from investors last year.

But the letter comes when



A man walks past the Bombay Stock Exchange building in Mumbai. — Reuters

many are choosing to list in India. China's Ant Group-backed

Indian food delivery firm Zomato had a stellar debut on Indian

bourses recently, valuing the firm at \$13 billion, while others including ride-hailing firm Ola are also eyeing local listings.

"Even as some companies are gearing up to list in India, many others are keen to evaluate the option of an international listing", the letter said, highlighting how companies in other markets like the US have a much bigger market capitalization than in India.

The London Stock Exchange, which is tracking India's policy change closely, said last year it had been in talks with several Indian tech firms on overseas listings. Such listings will present

an opportunity for some of the world's leading exchanges to vie for India's rapidly growing start-up companies.

The Indian government however had been concerned that overseas listing could mean that companies hunting for higher valuations through access to a wider group of investors would choose to only list abroad, hurting prospects of Indian markets.

The group of investors and start-ups told Modi such concerns were "unfounded" and that overseas listings will increase interest of foreign investors in Indian start-ups. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

FRANKFURT

SUV sales likely to remain high in Germany

German car buyers are likely to keep on purchasing SUVs in the next few years, an industry expert said, despite growing criticism that the large vehicles are not environmentally friendly, and block crowded urban streets.

In the first half of the year, SUVs and similar models won a record market share of almost 35 per cent in Germany, making them by far the most popular model, according to industry expert Ferdinand Dudenhoeffer.



Far more growth is possible, Dudenhoeffer said. Even if the growth rates of the past 10 years for SUVs were to fall by half, the model's market share would reach around 45 per cent by 2026. — dpa

TOKYO

Japan's economy recovers slightly in Q2

Japan's economy recovered slightly in the second quarter from a steep slump at the start of the year, a poll showed, as solid exports and capital expenditure cushioned some of the blow to consumption from the coronavirus pandemic.

But analysts expect the world's third-largest economy to lag other advanced nations emerging from the doldrums, as expanded state of emergency curbs and a resurgence in infections weigh on household spending.



"There won't be much of a rebound from the first quarter's big contraction. The data will show the economy continues to stagnate", said Yoshiki Shinke, Chief Economist at Dai-ichi Life Research Institute. — Reuters

LONDON

UK supermarket nods higher bid in takeover tussle

British supermarket group Morrisons on Friday accepted an improved takeover bid from an international consortium worth £6.7 billion (\$9.3 billion, 7.87 billion euros) as it faces a possible rival offer.

The consortium, headed by Softbank-owned Fortress, said it had increased its original £6.3 billion offer as US private equity rival Clayton, Dubilier & Rice is reportedly mulling its own improved bid ahead of a deadline on Monday.



Morrisons, Britain's fourth-biggest supermarket on sales, has been caught in a bidding war as the country's supermarket sector benefits hugely from a shift to online shopping during the pandemic. — AFP

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features



Rare: An art collector's dream space

The Rare Exhibit is an art collector's dream place — one that will introduce you to 35 different artists in one setting. It is a “unique art exhibition by renowned artists presenting a kaleidoscope of mixed media creations, inspired by their experiences currently ongoing at the Art and Soul Gallery located in Waterfront in Qurum... **P20**

READ

REFUGEE
BY ALAN GRATZ

Three children in three different conflicts look for safe haven.

French grape farm owners face worst harvests in history

French grape farm owners are bracing for a miserable harvest in 2021, with the yield expected to decline by 24 to 30 per cent on the year, due to damaging frost that struck in April, the Agriculture Ministry announced in Paris on Friday.

With an estimated 32.6 to 35.6 million hectolitres, this year's

grape harvest is set to become one of the worst in the grape-loving nation's history, dropping to levels only seen in 1977.

Almost all grape-growing districts were affected, the ministry said, with the early-blossoming vines of the Chardonnay and Merlot varieties particularly hit. The subsequent wet weather also

favoured diseases, it said.

The late frost has also impacted the apricot harvest in France, according to data provided by the ministry, with the worst harvest in 42 years expected in the sector.

However, at the moment growers are achieving higher prices for their apricots than the average of previous years. — **dpa**





Hot-shot director Waititi shares indigenous humour in ‘Reservation Dogs’

LONG BEFORE he won an Oscar or directed a Marvel superhero blockbuster, Taika Waititi had a recurring problem while making movies about his native Maori community in New Zealand.

“My early films would get negative feedback about them because they were like, ‘Well there’s not enough cultural specificity’”, he recalled.

“And I was like — I get what’s happening. All they want is to see us riding whales, talking to trees, playing flutes on mountaintops and talking to ghosts, and learning something from our grandmother. And that’s it.”

Now, as one of Hollywood’s most in-demand directors, with “Thor: Ragnarok” and “Jojo Rabbit” under his belt and a “Star Wars” movie on the way, Waititi has the opportunity to “twist those expectations.”

The result is “Reservation Dogs”, a television comedy with dark edges set in an indigenous town in rural Oklahoma, which Waititi co-created and wrote with Sterlin Harjo, a film-maker of Seminole and Muscogee heritage.

Streaming on Hulu from Monday, it follows a group of Native American teenagers trying to hustle, thief and bluff their way out of their hometown and off to the land of their dreams — California.

While Waititi was born 7,000 miles (11,000 kilometres) away in a different hemisphere, he and long-time friend Harjo found their stories about growing up in indigenous communities “seemed exactly the same.”

Part of that was an upbringing that combined traditions handed down over the generations with “a solid diet of pop culture”, he told a recent Television Critics Association panel in Los Angeles.

“There’s so much humour in our communities — so many



jokers”, said Waititi, who played a charismatic but buffoonish ex-con in his acclaimed 2010 New Zealand film “Boy”, set in his own childhood Maori village and starring members of his own family.

“Reservation Dogs” draws more on the experiences of Oklahoma-born Harjo, with Waititi initially intending to direct but settling for writing and “just to help get the show made.”

In between performing sage ceremonies and placing ancient curses on their enemies, its characters scrawl graffiti, compare their Instagram follower counts and listen to hip-hop.

‘UNCOORDINATED WARRIORS’

Like Waititi, Harjo was tired of being told by producers that “Native films don’t sell” or that movies could not be made without famous actors.

Hollywood has very few stars of Indigenous origin, and most

parts come in the occasional Western “where Native actors get to come and get killed in front of a camp”, said Harjo.

Thankfully, “streaming and TV changed that”, he added.

A respected annual study in April found Hollywood had finally made major gains in minority and female on-screen representation, in large part because of the proliferation of low-budget streaming titles and the postponement of major studio releases during the pandemic.

Harjo took his casting director thousands of miles from Hollywood to indigenous communities such as his own in Oklahoma to find young unknown stars, who he hopes will change outsiders’ perceptions.

The series also had an all-indigenous writers’ room.

To help subvert expectations, the series features teenage boy Bear — played by newcomer D’Pharaoh Woon-A-Tai — being visited by the spirit of a horse-

back warrior wearing a head-dress.

Rather than imparting sage advice, the rider admits he was at a legendary battle but accidentally fell off his horse and was crushed to death before he could do any fighting.

“I always loved the idea that in any of these big battles like the Battle of Little Bighorn, there were some pretty uncoordinated warriors!” said Waititi.

“There were dudes falling off their horses... just like with every culture there’s people who aren’t very good at stuff.”

Next on Waititi’s busy schedule is much-anticipated Marvel sequel “Thor: Love and Thunder” in May, before a new untitled “Star Wars” film he will write and direct, and a “Flash Gordon” movie.

“The Hollywood things are fun”, said Waititi, but “Reservation Dogs” is “probably closer to my heart.”

“Because it just means more to me.” — AFP

DIGITAL TRENDS

Belgian collects a treasure trove of 60,000 vintage tin boxes



THE VIBRANT tins stacked high around Belgian collection agency Yvette Dardenne made use of to consist of products varying from delicious chocolates, toffees, coffee and also rice to cigarette, talc and also footwear gloss, and also origi-

throughout the second world war.

Later on, the tins simply involved her, she stated.

“I have not been anywhere. I was not taking a trip. Individuals still assume I have actually taken a trip a whole lot. It promptly ended up being



nate from as away as India.

Yvette Dardenne, 83, has actually collected virtually 60,000 vintage tin boxes from throughout the globe because beginning her collection some 30 years back.

The collection, which currently inhabits 4 homes, all started with a Cote d’Or delicious chocolate box cited a paint of a blonde lady in a blue hat, Dardenne informed Reuters, standing in the middle of the meticulously set up tin boxes in the middle ages watermill she has alongside her residence.

A female stands up a piggy financial institution with a swastika icon, dispersed by the Nazi routine to accumulate cash

well-known (that I accumulated boxes). Often, right after my other half left for the workplace, a person would certainly appear to provide me something”, stated Dardenne, that resides in Grand-Hallet in Belgium’s Liege district.

Among Dardenne’s best prizes is an elaborately formed box from 1868 revealing a symbol with 2 steeds ahead, constructed to hold biscuits made by Huntley & Palmers of Analysis, England.

It is thought about to be the very first box to have actually been lithographed, according to Dardenne, whose collection can be seen by consultation.

— Reuters



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ENTERTAINMENT

Jennifer Aniston defends cutting ties with unvaccinated friends



ACTOR JENNIFER ANISTON is defending her decision to drop friends and acquaintances who won't say if they are vaccinated against Covid-19 after questions on social media about the move.

The "Friends" and "The Morning Show" star said in an *InStyle* magazine interview published this week that there was still a "large group of people who are anti-vaxxers or just don't listen to the facts."

She added that she had unfortunately "lost a few people" from her weekly routine who would not disclose if they have been vaccinated.

She was challenged by some followers on Instagram, including Robyn Law, author of weight-loss book "The Body Plan," who asked why Aniston was worried about being around unvaccinated people when she has been vaccinated.

Aniston responded on her account.

"Because if you have the variant, you are still able to give it to me. I may get slightly sick but I will not be admitted to a hospital and or die. BUT I CAN give it to someone else who does not have the vaccine and whose health is compromised (or has a previous existing condition) — and therefore I would put their lives at risk," wrote Aniston.

"THAT is why I worry. We have to care about more than just ourselves here," she added.

Aniston, who has 37.7 million followers on Instagram, rose to fame as Rachel Green in US television sitcom "Friends" from 1994 to 2004. It followed a group of six New Yorkers in their 20s and 30s. — **Reuters**

TRAVEL TALES



FROM A DISTANCE, the black cliffs appear featureless, scorched by a blazing desert sun. But up close, the basalt reveals engravings of giraffe, ostrich and antelope made 7,000 years ago.

These masterful works, etched onto stone in northern Djibouti, are among the most important examples of rock art in the Horn of Africa, a region rich in archaeological heritage and the birthplace of humanity.

Stretching three kilometres (almost two miles), some 900 panels at Abourma depict in wonderful relief prehistoric life in these parts, dramatic scenes of early man confronting wildlife, and droving cows.

But these centuries-old images, rendered by flint onto igneous rock, also offer a valuable record of a bygone era — and a land drastically reshaped by millennia of climate change.

The wildlife illustrated are still found today on Africa's plains and grasslands, but not in Djibouti, a harsh desert landscape where water and greenery have been scarce for thousands of years.

"Today, Abourma is something of a cemetery because we don't have these animals here anymore. At the time, they roamed here because Djibouti was covered in forest," said Omar Mohamed Kamil, a young tour guide who takes visitors to Abourma.

"In Abourma... we are a little removed from civilisation. We are in the prehistory, we are living in prehistory."

MILLENNIA UPON MILLENNIA

This treasure trove lies a six-hour drive away from the capital, Djibouti



City, then a further one hour on foot over a craggy expanse of boulders.

It would be all-but impossible to find were it not for Ibrahim Dabale Loubak, a camel breeder and Abourma's custodian, who claims to "know every stone, every nook and cranny" of this rocky massif.

The 41-year-old is from the Afar community, a historically nomadic people who wandered the arid fringes of Djibouti, Eritrea and Ethiopia, and have known about the carvings for generations.

"Our grandfathers told our fathers and then our fathers told it to us," said Loubak, a traditional turban and cloth

skirt cladding his slim figure.

Despite this local wisdom — and roughly 70 centuries of existence — Abourma was not visited by archaeologists until 2005.

It was Loubak who guided the first French team to the site, trailed by a caravan of camels bringing food, sleeping quarters, and other essential equipment including a generator for the remote investigation.

Archaeologist Benoit Poisblaud, who was part of the team, still evokes with wonder the "extraordinary site", not found anywhere else in the region that he studied as a 25-year-old researcher.

"Abourma is a continuity, over several millennia, of passages, engravings, made by very different people: hunters, pastoralists, and those after... Thousands upon thousands of representations," he said.

The oldest carvings predate the birth of Christ by 5,000 years, while newer examples were painted around two millennia ago, he said.

DESERT CUSTODIANS

Africa boasts a wealth of archaeological sites, but few, especially rock art, have been fully studied, said Emmanuel Ndiema, head of archaeology at the National Museums of Kenya in Nairobi.

"Up to now, as we speak, we still get reports about sites here in Kenya, not even elsewhere," he said, estimating that just 10-20 per cent of archaeological troves in sub-Saharan Africa had been properly researched.

This risks the universal value and preservation of these finds, experts say, which if nurtured could in time attract tourists and history buffs, generating much-needed government revenue.

However, greater visibility comes with its own potential cost for heritage.

Abourma, for example, receives so few visitors there are no fences, barricades or rules or any kind for those who make the journey to this vast, hidden-away expanse.

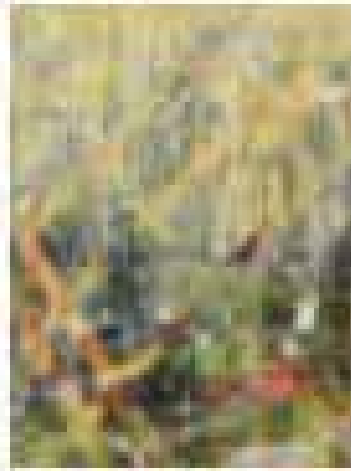
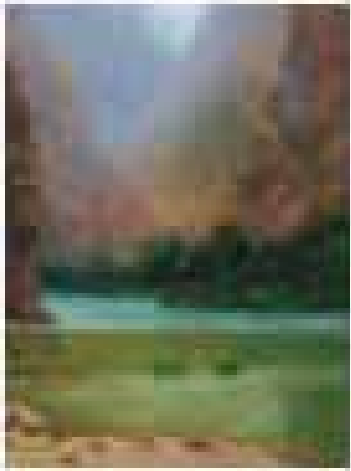
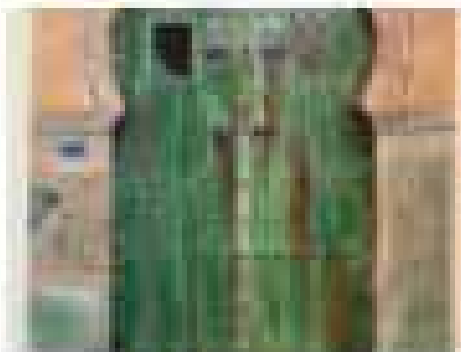
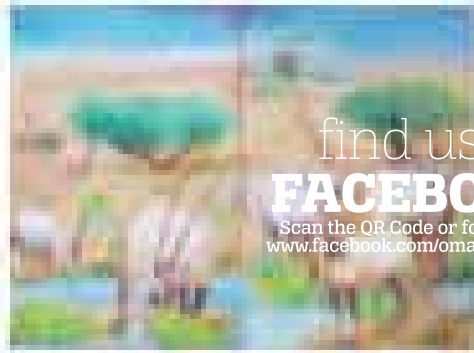
Loubak, however, is not too worried about threats to these millennia-old artworks, with eyes everywhere reporting the slightest disturbances or outsider presence.

"Nobody can come here without my knowledge," he said. — **AFP**



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Rare: An art collector's dream space

By Yeru Ebuén
Instagram: @yru_here

At the centre of the wide hall is a familiar face — pouting, elegant, the face of sophistication that has captured the world's fascination. Marilyn Monroe is bigger than life persona and in this particular exhibit, she is right where she belongs — at the centre where her multi-coloured presence pulls you in.

Before you reach her imposing canvas, however, you would have to pass through dozens of other works — 35 in fact from 35 different artists — curated within the confines of their uniqueness and

overall, their rarity.

Because that's what this exhibit curated by Art and Soul Gallery is all about, "Rare: Beyond Inspirations".

We were fortunate to get an invite into the opening night. It went as smoothly as it should kicking off with the ribbon-cutting that signified the beginning of the exhibit. The Guest of Honour was one of Oman's supporters of the art, Abdulrauf Wood, who continued to encourage the artists to do what they do best. Launched in a time of corona with everyone in attendance in masks, the event was a fine example of how events like art openings can still be possible.

As promised by the organisers, it is a "unique art exhibition by renowned

artists presenting a kaleidoscope of mixed media creations, inspired by their experiences.

The artists in attendance and part of the exhibition are also some of the big names in the art sector — an amazing combination of expats and Omanis coming under one gallery to showcase what they have to offer.

Walking through the gallery quenches the thirst for an art experience that has been dimmed by so many restrictions. Each of the pieces as remarkable as the stories that brought them to life.

Other than Marilyn Monroe, there are Omani women in their traditional clothing presented in such a manner you would have not thought possi-

ble. Another is a silhouette, layers upon layers of enigma all tied together by strings on nails the same materials that have been used, only more colourful and flamboyant for the demanding peacock at Monroe's side. There's also a lion-shaped from millions of pieces of sand and watercolour work speaking of the numerous wonders of Oman's daily scenes.

Not to miss is the collage of late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos made by pieces of gadgets and keyboards that would have been discarded had it not found its way to the canvas.

There are many other creations that were smart and innovative — from the smart use of weave palm fronds to the magnificent play of light for black and white photography and to the explosion of colours to some of the best art pieces not often seen on display.

Overall, the Rare Exhibit is an art collector's dream place — one that will introduce you to 35 different artists in one setting.

If you pass by the first level of Waterfront in Qurum between August 1 to 14, towards the creative space put up by Art and Soul Gallery, you would discover a Wonderland especially curated for the artists and lovers of the art of Oman.

