

EU approves BioNTech-Pfizer vaccine for children 12 and up

Children aged 12 and up in the European Union can be administered with the Covid-19 vaccine made by BioNTech-Pfizer after the European Commission granted its approval on Monday. "Member states can now choose to expand their vaccination roll-out to young people", European Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides said, announcing the decision on Twitter. – dpa



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'QUIT REAL MADRID BECAUSE OF LACK OF FAITH'



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SUPERWORMS WILL BECOME THE NEW SUPERFOOD



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OECD SEES HIGHER WORLD GDP GROWTH



MUSCAT

VEHICLE FIRES DOWN BY 21%

Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority on Monday reported that the number of fire accidents in land transport vehicles last year dropped from 769 to 606, down by 21.1 per cent. The a-uthority said that automobile fires happen as a result of negligence, failure to maintain the vehicles or conduct safety checks on them, low volume of water in a vehicle's radiator, fixing extra devices that increase pressure on the engine or require higher power that is beyond a vehicle's capacity or risking driving a vehicle with high temperature readings.

DETAILS ON P3

50 investment opportunities in industrial sector unveiled

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), launched 50 investment opportunities in the industrial sector, at a virtual event held here on Monday.

The investment opportunities are the translation of the Industrial Strategy 2040 Goals and part of the ministry's initiatives to find investment opportunities for various sectors in cooperation with the

partners in the public and the private sector. The move is also aimed to push forward the government's economic diversification strategy, generate job opportunities, improve the Sultanate's credit ranking at the international indexes, boost foreign direct investment, increase and diversify the Sultanate's export as well as create balanced development in the governorates of the Sultanate.

The investment opportunities

The opportunities are integrated with the Economic Stimulus Plan approved by His Majesty

QAIS AL YOUSUF

are integrated with the Economic Stimulus Plan (ESP) approved by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, presided over the launch ceremony.

Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, said that

the Oman Vision-2040 underscored the importance of economic diversification in the main economic-supporting non-oil sectors with the industrial sector being one of its pillars and the nerve centre of the economy. He added that the government, represented by the ministry alongside the other competent authorities, is striving to uplift the industrial sector to achieve self-sufficiency and reduce imports.

TURN TO P2

1,820 EMPLOYEES RETIRED TILL APRIL

The number of pensioners registered at the Civil Service Employees Pension Fund from the beginning of the year till end of April stood at 1,820 of whom 63 per cent are males and 37 per cent are females. The data showed that the average age upon retirement was 49 years. The average years of service was 25 years and the average monthly pension was RO 970. The total number of pensioners stood at 70,174 as at the end of April with total monthly pensions of RO 40 million.

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CHINA ALLOWS COUPLES TO HAVE THREE CHILDREN

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In implementation of the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to speed up the process of employment for job-seekers and, in pursuance of the Sultan's Armed Forces keenness to provide opportunities to all to join military service, the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) on Monday began the recruitment of job-seekers who applied recently.

DETAILS ON P3

UN envoy seeks ceasefire in Yemen

SANAA: The UN envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, urged rival Yemeni forces on Monday to "bridge the gap" to reach a ceasefire, praising a diplomatic push for peace in the devastated country.

Yemen's civil war, which started in 2014, pits Ansar Allah fighters against an internationally recognised government supported by a military coalition.

"Throughout the process we have suggested several ways to bridge the gap between the parties",

Griffiths told reporters, speaking after meeting Ansar Allah officials in Sanaa.

"There's an extraordinary amount of diplomatic consensus... there is a real diplomatic energy now, which hasn't always been the case", the UN envoy said.

The effort to secure peace in Yemen comes after Saudi Arabia and Iran restarted talks last month, their first high-level meeting since 2016.

While the United Nations and the US administration of President

Joe Biden are pushing to end the grinding conflict, the Ansar Allah has demanded the re-opening of Sanaa airport before any ceasefire agreement.

The Saudi-led coalition imposed an air blockade on the Ansar Allah, which has resulted in the closure of Sanaa airport to commercial flights since 2016.

"All of our proposals have also guaranteed the reopening of this airport where we are speaking today, Sanaa airport", he said. — AFP

BREAST CANCER HIGH AMONG BELOW 50 WOMEN: STUDY

KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

The majority of breast cancer patients in Oman are women below 50 years of age compared to 63 years in Western countries. According to a study, most of them get the disease due to unhealthy lifestyles, if not genetic.

Despite efforts to improve the early detection of breast cancer, nearly one-third of women have either regional or distant metastatic spread at the time of diagnosis. The joint study carried out by Dr Mohammed al

Azri, Dr Jasem al Khamayasi, Yaseen al Lawati, three from the Sultan Qaboos University; Dr Khalid al Baimani, Dr Huda al Awaisi, Dr Zahid al Mandhari, from Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care Centre (SQCCCCC); and Sathiya Murthi Panchatcharam, Oman Medical Specialty Board (OMSB), suggest that approximately 58 per cent of women have advanced stages of breast cancer at diagnosis and that makes the cure extremely difficult. The study shows that 33 per cent of women who suffer from breast cancer report late (usually after the disease enters the third or fourth stage)...

33% REPORT LATE MAKING IT DIFFICULT TO CURE

Climate talks resume online as pressure to act grows

PARIS: For the first time since 2019 and following a flurry of net-zero pledges from the world's largest emitters, UN climate negotiations resumed on Monday in a virtual format less than six months before the crunch COP26 summit.

The talks, nominally hosted by the United Nations climate change programme in the German city of Bonn, will all be online and informal, meaning that no decisions

will be taken during the three-week discussions. But with increasingly dire climate warnings from scientists, the pressure for progress to be made on a number of thorny issues is high.

"We meet in the shadow of a global crisis, unprecedented in scope and scale", UN climate chief Patricia Espinosa said in opening remarks via video link.

In 2018, countries agreed to many elements of the "rulebook" of the

landmark Paris climate agreement signed three years earlier, governing how each nation implements its goals under the deal.

But several issues remain unresolved, including rules about transparency, carbon markets, and a unified time frame for all countries to ratchet up their emissions cuts.

At the last UN climate summit in December 2019, countries also failed to agree upon a universal system of

reporting on spending on measures to combat and adapt to climate change. This year alone several large emitters including the US have committed to make their economies carbon neutral by mid-century.

Espinosa welcomed these pledges — which under Paris should increase in scope every five years.

But she added: "Our current trajectory is not in line with the climate goals of the Paris agreement",

which aims to limit global warming to below 2°C. "It's time to get the job done."

One of the thorniest debates during recent UN climate talks has been Article 6 of the Paris agreement, which deals with the trade of emissions cuts. A major sticking point remains over rules to avoid double counting emissions reductions within both bilateral and international markets. — AFP



50 investment opportunities in industrial sector unveiled

FROM PAGE 1

Besides, the industrial sector is an instrument for developing the other economic sectors. In 2019, the manufacturing sector contributed over RO 3 billion which represents 10 per cent of the Sultanate's GDP. The shares of the industrial companies accounted for 25 per cent of Muscat Stock Exchange in 2021. Besides, the value of exported non-oil goods increased to RO 3.23 billion in 2019 compared to

RO 1.8 billion in 2009, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The launch of investment opportunities in the industrial sector is the translation to the Oman Vision-2040 goals and the industrial strategy. It is also one of the fruits of cooperation between the ministry and a multiple partner in the public and the private sectors including the Public Establishment for Industrial

Estates (Madayn), Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI). The first phase involves 50 investment opportunities in 14 industrial activities all of which have feasibility studies. There are 7 opportunities in the food industry field at an estimated value of RO 27 million in addition to 5 investment opportunities in the plastic and rubber industry at an approximate

value of RO 8 million, 11 investment opportunities in the field of non-metallic products at an approximate value of RO 72 million and 11 investment opportunities in the metallic products industry at an approximate value of RO 12 million, the official said adding that these investment opportunities are expected to attract an estimated RO 200 million worth of investments. — ONA

Riyada opens registration for incubation programmes

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
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Registration with the Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Riyada) is now open. The entrepreneurs can apply for Riyada's incubation programmes till July 30, the authority has announced. The incubation programmes aim to build an ideal environment for supporting emerging enterprises and prepare a generation of entrepreneurs to promote the SME sector. The incubation programme provides necessary resources and technical services for the establishment and growth of the project. It helps build programmes designed to support innovative ideas and emerging projects and assists in the innovation and diversification of the projects that support the national economy. The programme adopts all economic and commercial activities. "The applicant must have a project of creative nature, he must pass the interview, and that the owner of the institution or one of his partners must be an Omani to manage the project on a full-time basis," the Riyada sources said. The conditions also include that there should be no more than four employees in the company,

including the applicant. The applicant should also not have previously benefited from one of the incubators affiliated with other government agencies. The applicant should adhere to the training and guidance programme if accepted. In light of the health conditions associated with the Covid-19 pandemic and the consequent significant economic impacts, the entrepreneurship sector, one of the most important financial components, is suffering from the closure procedures. It has led many small and medium enterprises to retreat their activities and revenues. Others have closed the activity entirely due to their inability to repay the accumulated debts and losses. The government has sought to take a set of incentives that help these institutions overcome this crisis and keep their activities in place in the market. According to the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the small and medium enterprises sector exceeds 85 per cent of the total private sector establishments in the Sultanate. Reda bin Jumah al Saleh, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Board of Directors, had called for an extension in the government's incentives and facilities to the private sector enterprises until the end of 2021.

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Oman Air and Qatar Airways strengthen cooperation

MUSCAT: Oman Air and Qatar Airways have expanded their codeshare partnership to cover more than 80 destinations on Qatar Airways' network. The expansion of the agreement will provide more convenient and seamless travel options for both airlines' passengers. This expansion follows shortly after the two airlines announced an agreement to significantly strengthen strategic cooperation between the two airlines in December 2020. Oman Air Chief Executive Officer Abdulaziz al Raisi, said: "Oman Air's expanding partnership with Qatar Airways underscores the commitment of both airlines to provide their guests with more flights, more choice of destinations, and greater flexibility throughout their travels with us. For Oman Air and many airlines around the world, the key to post-pandemic recovery lies in strategic collaborations with industry partners and in identifying innovative route expansion opportunities as we navigate a constantly changing environment. Our longstanding cooperation with Qatar Airways reflects a highly valued relationship and we look forward to growing our networks together." Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive, Akbar al Baker, said: "We are delighted to further expand our partnership with Oman Air, so recently after announcing our plans in December 2020 to further strengthen strategic cooperation between our two leading Gulf airlines. Despite the challenges of the pandemic,

For Oman Air and many airlines around the world, the key to post-pandemic recovery lies in strategic collaborations with industry partners and in identifying innovative route expansion opportunities as we navigate a constantly changing environment

we have remained committed to forging and expanding our global network of partners to provide more seamless and flexible travel options for our

millions of passengers. Having first established commercial cooperation with Oman Air over 20 years ago, we look forward to continuing to build upon our strong and historic partnership and offering our customers in Oman and across the globe even more benefits." The expansion of the strategic partnership will enable Oman Air passengers to enjoy seamless connections via the Best Airport in the Middle East to and from 16 new routes* — Adana, Ankara, Antalya, Bodrum, Istanbul Sabiha and Izmir in Turkey; Berlin and Munich, Germany; Mykonos, Greece; St Petersburg, Russia; Zurich, Switzerland; Atlanta and Seattle in USA; Abuja, Nigeria; Johannesburg, South Africa; and Gassim, Saudi Arabia.



■ OPPORTUNITIES TO JOIN MILITARY SERVICE



MUSCAT: In implementation of the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to speed up the process of employment for job seekers and, in pursuance of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF)'s keenness to provide opportunities to all to join military service, the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) on Monday began steps for the recruitment of job seekers who applied recently.

Coordinated with the Ministry of Labour, the employment procedures were finalised after the assessment and approval

of the applicants, who will then be given training as soldier recruits at the RAO.

The RAO put all its administrative, health and transport means at the service of the selected candidates to help them join the ranks of military service and serve their nation alongside their seniors.

The efforts reflect the SAF's willingness to provide employment for job seekers in accordance with plans set for recruitment by the Defence Ministry.

— ONA



Breast cancer high among below 50 women: Study

FROM PAGE 1

despite the fact that they were aware that their chances of recovery depend on early diagnosis.

Chances of cure are high if the disease is diagnosed at an early stage and adequately treated, according to the breakthrough study titled 'An Omani study: Knowledge of symptoms, time to presentation and barriers to medical help-seeking among Omani women diagnosed with breast cancer.'

"In the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, approximately half of patients are under 50 years of age at the time of diagnosis, with a median age of 49-52 years compared to 63 years in Western countries," said doctors

who presented the study.

SURVIVAL RATES

Women who begin treatment within 3-5 months of developing symptoms have significantly worse survival rates than those who seek medical help in less than three months.

Worldwide, breast cancer accounts for 10 per cent of all cancers diagnosed annually and around 15 per cent of all cancer deaths. Oman follows a similar pattern, with breast cancer being also the most diagnosed cancer and accounts for 12.8 per cent of all cancers and 21.2 per cent of cancers affecting women.

This study aimed to investigate the knowledge of breast cancer

symptoms, time taken to seek medical help and barriers to medical help-seeking among Omani women diagnosed with breast cancer.

"There are many factors contributing to young women with breast cancer. Most importantly, it is genetically followed by sticking to a more 'westernised' lifestyles, reduced levels of physical activity and higher rates of obesity, a decrease in breastfeeding and the presence of potential carcinogens, such as substances that have the potential to cause cancer, in the local environment," doctors added.

The study concludes that there should be more efforts to build a trusting and cooperative rela-

tionship with female patients to help address emotional barriers to medical help-seeking and encourage them to disclose potential symptoms, thus reducing delays in diagnosis.

The study was aimed to spread awareness about breast cancer symptoms and the duration it takes to get medical consultancy. It also outlines the factors causing Omani women's delayed reporting of the disease.

The study was conducted from November 2018 to April 2019 at the Royal Hospital's Centre for Breast Cancer Tumour Treatment, as well as the Cancer Treatment Unit at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.

21 per cent drop in vehicle fire accidents



MUSCAT: Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) on Monday reported that the number of fire accidents in land transport vehicles last year dropped from 769 to 606, down by 21.1%.

The CDAA explained that automobile fires happen as a result of negligence, failure to maintain the vehicles or conduct safety checks on them, low volume of water in a vehicle's radiator, fixing extra devices that increase pressure on the engine or require higher power that is beyond a vehicle's capacity or risking driving a vehicle with high-temperature readings.

The CDAA noted that automobile fires increase considerably in summer and usually cause human and material losses, which can be avoided by getting the vehicles maintained on a regular basis and through adherence to precau-

tionary safety measures prior to starting the vehicles.

Also, all vehicles should be supplied with security and safety equipment like fire extinguishers, and automobile users have to be trained to use the equipment.

Only original spare parts have to be fixed on vehicles when replacing the damaged ones, added the CDAA, which also advised automobile owners and drivers to get their vehicles repaired at approved workshops and to avoid keeping any combustibles on-board, including lighters and perfumes.

Children should never be left alone in cars with running engines, said the CDAA, which stressed that when a vehicle is at high temperature or catching fire, it should be parked immediately on the side of the road and not driven any further. — ONA

Unicef workshop reviews welfare of children

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

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Joint teamwork headed by Unicef Oman convened a virtual workshop with international experts on Monday to review the collection and analysis of data that will underpin a new campaign to enhance children's welfare in the Sultanate.

The workshop was attended by representatives from the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Information and the National Centre for



Statistics and Information.

With Unicef support, the Sultanate is preparing to launch a campaign that seeks to encourage good practices relating to early childhood education and develop-

ment, the protection of children against violence, and the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream environments.

The workshop looked at how data was collected and analysed,

and then used to build an evidence-backed communications strategy to promote positive behaviour change and outcomes for children.

Topics included childhood nutrition (including breastfeeding), treating childhood illnesses, play-based learning, positive discipline practices, and safe online behaviours.

Workshop participants reviewed examples of international best practice.

They discussed how data collection methodologies could be best adapted in the Omani context.



PANDEMIC HIGHLIGHTS FAMILY-FRIENDLY JOB

WORKING PARENTS NEED GREATER SUPPORT AS COVID-19
BLURS LINE BETWEEN HOME AND OFFICE

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

It was in 2012 when the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization designated June 1 as the Global Day of Parents. The objective was to lay stress on the critical role of parents in the rearing of children.

The day brings the prominence of children growing up in a family environment and in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. But the day is also considered as an opportunity to appreciate all parents.

The UN stated that it is a day to recognise the parents for their selfless commitment to children and their lifelong sacrifice towards nurturing this relationship.

The pandemic has been a challenge for parents because children are out of school while they still have to work.

According to the UN, parents are the anchors of the family and foundation of the communities and societies, “Parents have the responsibility of sheltering their families from harm, caring for out of school children and at the same time continuing with their work responsibilities. They pointed out that without support from parents,

children’s health, education and emotional well being is at risk.

What they have proposed is introduction of family-friendly workplace policies and practices, companies and organisations will be in a better position to promote children’s safety and well being by providing systematic support to employees.

Parents are currently overwhelmed, said Abeer al Mujaini, practicing psychologist in Oman and Head of Psychology of Youth Volunteering Team. “No doubt the role of parents is important especially during the pandemic. Unfortunately there has been so much more of a burden in regard to education of their children and keeping children healthy, protecting them from Covid-19 and being able to entertain children during the pandemic. They have not been getting enough support and I think it is very important to know that parents’ mental health is part of a child’s well being, development as well as family’s well being. If the parents are healthy it results in an environment that is fit for the well being of the children.”

According to her parents are burned out and the rate of depression and anxiety among the parents have

“
Parents have not been getting enough support and I think it is very important to know that parents’ mental health is part of a child’s well-being, development as well as family’s well being. If the parents are healthy it results in an environment that is fit for the well-being of the children

ABEER AL MUJAINI
psychologist

increased and that will definitely result in more problems for a child.

Abeer recommends, “I think first of all schools need to understand the parents’ role in education is limited because of the responsibility they have especially if they are working parents. I think the schools have to recognise that parents cannot take on a teacher’s role. That does not mean they do not care for children’s education. Also I think that more support with psychological services should be available for parents whether it is in a community, school or clinic setting. We need more support groups and we need more therapies that are accessible should anyone need them. It should not just be related to the child and that parents come in second place. We need to care more for fathers and mothers who are working hard. We need to recognise that even if it is a small part of appreciation or giving them more time to have an opportunity for self care that will reflect on children being in a better place.”

Children are only with teachers for a few hours but what is important is the teaching of values that is given by parents, said Chitra Narayan,

educator and founder of Middle East Nursery.

“Children are like saplings and with well directed love parents can bring up children in the right. We can see the result reflected in the children’s attitude and the emotions, which is the foundation of character that is established during the crucial years. It is the responsibility of both the parents. The parents must lay the foundation straight because it is the future of the children.

What they must impart is the knowledge of their own culture, must inculcate faith in the values and they have to practice spiritual discipline in order to achieve mental peace. Children must grow up in the atmosphere of reverence, devotion, mutual service and cooperation. It is always parents first and teachers next and playmates and companions can come later. Teachers are moulders but the time with the students is limited, whereas parents and home have the maximum influence,” she reflected.

She pointed out that the most important aspect is that children have to realise the value of parents, “They have to be guided to appreciate and respect their parents.”



NRKs send 25 oxygen cylinders to Kerala

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

As many as 25 oxygen cylinders and other medical emergency materials were sourced by the expatriates from the Indian state of Kerala for the state.

These compressed units of lifesaving materials were collected as part of 'Care for Kerala', a government initiative under the umbrella of Norka Roots.

The initiative is part of the ongoing support to India and the state, as sending the collected items has become easy following exemption on import duties on medical equipment, medicines and medical supplies under the prevailing covid-19 pandemic situation in the country.

Accordingly, a committee was formed under the chairmanship of PM Jabir, Director, Norka Roots, an organisation set up to address the issues of migrant Keralites.

'Care for Kerala' group has a vast support base. It has decided to continue sourcing medical equipment and other materials needed for relief amid the pandemic.

"We are collecting essential and lifesaving equipment as the Indian state governments or bodies appointed by the state

governments are authorised to procure, collect or receive medical relief from individuals, corporate, associations and NGOs from overseas countries", PM Jabir, who is also the head of Community Welfare wing of Indian Social Club, said.

On behalf of the government of Kerala, the official consignee for receiving the medical relief material from overseas would be the Kerala Medical Services Corporation Limited (KMSCL), a government of Kerala entity.

KMSCL will initiate steps to distribute the medical relief with hospitals or beneficiaries as per the requirement of the Covid-19 task force set up by the government of Kerala.

A Special Task Force under IAS officers, Dr Ellangovan Principal Secretary (Industries & NORKA), Dr S Karthikeyan, V R Krishna Teja Mylavarapu, Vigneshwari and Norka Roots CEO Shri Hari Krishnan

Namboothiri, have been assigned by the state to monitor the facilitation and distribution of medical relief from overseas.

Care for Kerala is an initiative by NRIs in Gulf countries supported by Norka Roots to seek support from potential sponsors who could contribute towards the mission.



Cases, inpatients go up again

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

Even after months of restrictions, including strict night lockdowns, the country seems to be still far away from flattening the curve.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Monday reported 1,041 new cases and 11 deaths, alarmingly crossing the 1,000 mark after a break of few weeks.

Over 104 new patients were admitted to hospitals, bringing the total number of inpatients to 808, including 247 in intensive care units.

The total number of cases registered in the Sultanate has now reached 217,224, including 2,345 deaths.

The total number of recoveries is 199,960, while the recovery rate is 92.1 per cent.

The figures are a matter of concern as more and more people are getting infected and admitted to hospitals, including private institutions.

Currently, hospitals in the country are facing demand-supply issues with more patients being admitted to hospitals and spending more time for treatment, especially those with chronic diseases.

Speaking to the *Observer*, a senior official of a private hospital said, "Things will be in control only once a large chunk of people is vaccinated like in the neighbouring countries. While

The figures are a matter of concern as more and more people are getting infected and admitted to hospitals, including private institutions

infections will continue despite vaccinations, it will help reduce the number of people developing complications and losing lives.

He added that lockdowns are not economically viable. The people need to follow the same precautions, such as wearing masks and social distancing.

In the GCC, Saudi Arabia has a mortality rate of 1.63 per cent, Oman 1.08 per cent, Kuwait 0.58 per cent, Bahrain 0.40 per cent, Qatar 0.26 per cent and UAE 0.29 per cent.

According to the world vaccination tracker, Oman has vaccinated 6 per 100 people compared to 129 in the UAE, 102 in Bahrain, 87 in Qatar, 43 in Kuwait and 40 in Saudi Arabia. The world average is 24 doses per 100 people.

Meanwhile, as part of its corporate social responsibility, Occidental Oman has signed an agreement to support the Ministry of Health's efforts in purchasing Covid-19 vaccines with an amount of \$2.5 million.



University of Technology and Applied Sciences

Local Tender Announcement

University of Technology and Applied Science invites to the following tenders:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Company entitled to participate	Tender Price	Deadline for distributing documents	Deadline for submission of tenders
1/2021	Providing Cleaning Services for Sur University of Technology and Applied Sciences Buildings.	Companies and institutions specialized in same field and registered with the Tender Board in the field of providing cleaning services in the Second degree or higher	25/= OMR	16/06/2021	10:00 AM 20/06/2021
2/2021	Providing Operation and Maintenance Services for Sur University of Technology and Applied Sciences Buildings.	Companies and institutions specialized in same field and registered with the Tender Board in the field of providing cleaning services in the First degree or higher	25/= OMR	16/06/2021	10:00 AM 20/06/2021

Tender's documents containing the conditions and specifications can be obtained from Department of Administrative and Financial Affairs at Sur University of Technology and Applied Sciences building from **Tuesday 01/06/2021**.

Copies will be distributed starting from **9:00 AM** until **12:30 PM**.

All companies must attach with their tender a temporary deposit in the form of bank guarantee or a certified check issued from a working bank in the Sultanate of not less than (1%) of the tender value addressed to His Excellency Dr. / Chairman of the Internal Tenders Committee and valid for (90) days from the date of tender submission. Any Tender not accompanied with the required deposit will not be considered.

Tenders must be submitted signed and sealed on the form prepared for this and on the table of categories accompanying it in envelopes sealed with red wax and in the name of the Chairman of the Internal Tenders Committee of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences. Tender number and name shall be written on the envelope. Nothing should be written to display the identity of the Tenderer.

Tenders must be placed in the sub-tendering box of the aforementioned department before (10:00 AM) of the day specified in the above table; The tenders submitted after this date will not be considered, regardless of the reasons for delay.

Preference will be given to companies or small and medium enterprises registered in the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority whose tender includes the highest percentage of Omanisation and a possible percentage for purchasing national products.

The university is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Tender.

Chairman of the Internal Tenders Committee
University of Technology and Applied Sciences

1,820 employees retired till April-end

MUZNA AL FAHDIYAH

MUSCAT, MAY 31

The number of pensioners registered at the Civil Service Employees Pension Fund (CSEPF) from the beginning of the year till end of April stood at 1,820 of whom 63 per cent are males and 37 per cent are females.

The CSEPF data showed that the average age upon retirement was 49 years. The average years of service was 25 years and the average monthly pension was RO 970.

The total number of pensioners stood at 70,174 as at the end of April with total monthly pensions of RO 40 million. The average age at the end of service was 50 years old while the average length of service was 22 years and the average monthly pension was RO 574.

The total number of beneficiaries from retirement pension was 85,086 including 48,651 living pensioners and 36,435 heirs entitled for pensions.

The data shows that Muscat Governorate topped the rest of the governorates in terms of the number of beneficiaries accounting for 23 per cent followed by Al Dakhiliyah (14 per cent), North Al Batinah (13 per cent), Dhofar (12 per cent), South Al Batinah (11 per cent), South Al Sharqiyah (9 per cent), North Al Sharqiyah (8 per cent), Al Dhahirah (5 per cent), Al Buraimi (2 per cent) and Al Wusta 1 per cent.



Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtaining of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-refundable)
13/2021	Supplying computers and tablets for the child care center at Al Khoudh	Companies specialized in supplying communications and information technology devices and registered with the general secretariat of the tender board	Sunday 20-6-2021 02:00 PM	Sunday 11-7-2021 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

- ❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On Tuesday 1/6/2021.
- ❖ Tender shall be submitted in compliance with the technical specifications and terms along with a local bank warranty at (1%) of the tender value, valid ninety (90) days from the date of e-submission.
- ❖ The original (1%) bank warranty to be submitted at same day of submitting at tender box located in Directorate of Finance & Administration at MOSD HQ.
- ❖ For Inquiry, please contact through the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) Tel. (24402222 or 24166670)

" The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry "

www.mosd.gov.om

Egypt’s intelligence chief holds truce talks with Hamas

GAZA: Egypt’s intelligence chief met Hamas leaders in Gaza on Monday to try to bolster a ceasefire between the Palestinian activist group and Israel and to discuss reconstruction plans following the recent hostilities, Egyptian and Palestinian officials said.

The visit was the first by an Egyptian intelligence chief to the enclave since the early 2000s.

“The discussion is focused on ways to cement the calm and Gaza reconstruction plans following the recent Israeli aggression,” said a Hamas official, who asked not to be named.

Hamas officials, led by Gaza chief Yehya al Sinwar, would urge Cairo to pressure Israel to stop “its assaults against our people in Jerusalem and Sheikh Jarrah,” he said.

Eleven days of fighting between Israel and Hamas erupted on May 10 amid Palestinian anger at Israeli police raids around the Al Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem and plans to evict Palestinians from the Sheikh Jarrah district of the city to make way for Jewish settlers.

Gaza medical officials said 253 Palestinians were killed during the fighting. Palestinian rockets and missiles killed 13 people in Israel.

Large posters of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al Sisi and Egyptian flags decorated



Yahya Sinwar (L), Hamas’ political chief in Gaza, with General Abbas Kamel, Egypt’s intelligence chief, as the latter arrives for a meeting with leaders of Hamas in Gaza City. – AFP

streets across the enclave to greet intelligence chief Abbas Kamel.

Hundreds of people lined up outside the entrance to Gaza waving Egyptian flags as his motorcade drove by.

Kamel’s visit is seen as an effort by Cairo to regain a more vital role in mediation between Israel and Hamas and revive the stalled Israel-Palestinian peace process.

Sisi directed Egyptian officials

Kamel’s visit is seen as an effort by Egypt to regain a vital mediatory role between Israel and Hamas and revive the stalled peace process

to continue efforts and meetings to solve the problem of prisoners and missing people between Israel and Hamas, Egypt’s state news agency MENA reported on Sunday.

Following the meeting with Kamel in Gaza, Sinwar’s deputy Gaza chief Khalil al Hayya said discussion over a new prisoners’ swap deal with Israel must be isolated from truce talks.

— Reuters

Mitsotakis, Erdogan to meet at Nato summit on June 14

ATHENS: Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will meet on the sidelines of the Nato summit in Brussels on June 14, Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias and his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu have announced.

The announcement was made on Monday afternoon after the two ministers had held joint talks in Athens.

The meeting would be an important step in normalising communication between the two quarrelling neighbouring states, they said.

Erdogan and Mitsotakis have met only once since the Greek premier took office in the summer of 2019 — also on the sidelines of a Nato meeting. Since then, tensions between the countries have increased.

Mitsotakis had earlier on Monday received Cavusoglu in a warm and relaxed atmosphere.

The tone during the meeting, which lasted almost an hour, was very good, according to government sources in Athens.

Afterwards, Dendias and Cavusoglu walked along closed-off, deserted main streets in the centre of Athens to the Foreign Ministry to continue the talks. — dpa



Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias talks with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu during a meeting in Athens. – Reuters

ICC chief prosecutor in landmark visit to Darfur

KHARTOUM: International Criminal Court chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda urged Sudan to hand over suspects wanted by the ICC for crimes committed in Darfur, during a landmark visit to the conflict region.

“It is like a dream come true,” Bensouda said of her visit, which is taking place 16 years after the UN tasked the ICC to probe the Darfur conflict, according to the official Sudanese news agency SUNA.

The United Nations says 300,000 people were killed and 2.5 million were displaced in the conflict.

Fighting broke out in 2003 when African minority rebels, complaining of systematic discrimination, took up arms against the regime of ousted Sudanese leader Omar al Bashir. Khartoum responded by unleashing a notorious militia known as the Janjaweed, recruited from among the region’s nomadic tribes.

Bensouda arrived in Darfur for

Bensouda arrived in Darfur where she had a ‘productive first meeting’ with Darfur governor Minni Minnawi

a 48-hour visit, travelling there from Khartoum, where she had a “productive first meeting” with Darfur governor Minni Minnawi, she tweeted.

“I’m inspired by the resilience and courage of Darfurians,” Bensouda said in the tweet after talks with Minnawi, who was a former leader of the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army rebel group.

In El Fasher, capital of North Darfur State, she met the governor Mohamed Hassan Arabi and other officials, SUNA said.

She also toured a camp for internally displaced people and



International Criminal Court chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda speaks to reporters in Nyala, capital of Sudan’s South Darfur. – AFP

met with families seeking justice for atrocities allegedly committed against them, the agency said.

SUNA quoted Bensouda as saying that the ICC would continue

to demand the Sudan government hand over people wanted by the court for crimes committed in Darfur.

She said that Ali Muhammad

Ali Abd al Rahman, a leader of the Janjaweed also known as Ali Kushayb, who was the first person to appear before the court last month on charges over the conflict,

would “not be the last”.

Abd al Rahman was in court at The Hague on May 24 for a hearing to decide if there is enough evidence for a full trial on 31 charges

Prosecutors have said that Abd al Rahman, an ally of Bashir, was an “energetic perpetrator” of murders in the Darfur war in 2003-04.

The 70-year-old suspect, who handed himself in last year, after years on the run, denies the charges.

Bashir, who ruled Sudan with an iron fist for three decades, was deposed in April 2019 following months of protests in Sudan and is wanted by the ICC for genocide.

Sudan’s transitional administration is still in talks with the ICC about options for trying Bashir and his aides. Bensouda, who steps down next month, stressed on Sunday that the ICC was determined to achieve justice for Darfur, SUNA said. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TELAVIV

Israel, UAE sign tax treaty to boost cooperation

Israel and the United Arab Emirates signed a tax treaty on Monday, Israel’s Finance Ministry said, describing the move as a spur to business development between the countries after they normalised relations last year.

The UAE Finance Ministry said in October that it had reached a preliminary agreement with Israel on avoiding double taxation.

The tax convention, once ratified by ministers and parliament this year, will be



Israel’s 59th and go into effect on January 1, 2022.

It is the first tax treaty reached in the wake of Israel’s normalising relations with the UAE and Bahrain last year. — Reuters

TEHRAN

Iran says Saudi talks ongoing in ‘good atmosphere’

Iran’s foreign ministry said that the Islamic republic is continuing talks with Saudi Arabia in a “good atmosphere,” in the hope of reaching a “common understanding”. Media reports last month revealed that Iranian and Saudi officials met in Baghdad in April, their first high-level meeting since Riyadh cut diplomatic ties with Tehran in 2016.

“Talks are still continuing in a good atmosphere,” ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh



said at a press conference.

“We hope these talks can achieve a common understanding between Iran and Saudi Arabia,” he added.

— AFP

VATICAN CITY

Pope to hold crisis summit with Lebanese leaders

Pope Francis, who has promised to visit Lebanon if fractious politicians agree on a new government, said he would meet its Christian leaders to discuss the country’s worst crisis since its civil war that ended in 1990. He told pilgrims and tourists in St Peter’s Square for his weekly blessing that the meeting in the Vatican on July 1 would be a “day of reflection on the worrying situation in the country”.

Lebanon is still reeling from



a huge chemical explosion at the Beirut port last year that killed 200 people and caused billions of dollars worth of damage, further weakening an economy already facing meltdown. — Reuters

In brief

■ HANOI



HANOI AIRPORT TO CEASE ARRIVALS AS COVID CASES RISE

Hanoi's Noi Bai International airport will stop receiving international arrivals as the nation faces a worsening coronavirus outbreak, state media said. New arrivals will be stopped until at least June 7, although outbound flights will continue as normal, according to online newspaper *VnExpress*.

Ho Chi Minh City's Tan Son Nhat International Airport has also stopped inbound international flights. The city's officials imposed a two-week period of social distancing starting from Monday for the first time since April 2020.

The decision was made after the city found more than 100 new virus cases linked to the Christian mission cluster that first emerged on Wednesday, with the source of transmission unknown. — **dpa**

■ SINGAPORE



SINGAPORE TO RELAX SOCIAL CURBS IF SITUATION IMPROVES

Singapore should be able to relax recently imposed restrictions on social gatherings after two weeks if the local Covid-19 situation continues to improve, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said. "The number of daily cases has come down. Barring another super-spreader or big cluster, we should be on track to bring this outbreak under control," Lee said in a speech.

The current restrictions are to last until June 13. Lee also said he expected two-thirds of residents to have received at least one dose of a vaccine by early July and that contact tracing and testing would be increased and expedited. — **Reuters**

■ WELLINGTON



NEW ZEALAND MILITARY CALLED IN AS HUNDREDS FLEE FLOODS

New Zealand's military was deployed to evacuate hundreds of residents from flood-hit areas of the South Island as heavy rains washed away bridges and cut roads. Rivers burst their banks as a weather system dumped 400 millimetres of rain in two days, an amount meteorologists said exceeded the entire rainfall so far this year in some areas.

Authorities issued a rare 'red' weather warning and declared a state of emergency in the Canterbury region, one of the South Pacific nation's farming hubs. — **dpa**

China allows couples to have three children as birthrate falls

BEIJING: Married Chinese couples may have up to three children, China announced on Monday, in a major shift from the existing limit of two after recent data showed a dramatic decline in births in the world's most populous country.

Beijing scrapped its decades-old one-child policy in 2016, replacing it with a two-child limit to try and stave off risks to its economy from a rapidly ageing population. But that failed to result in a sustained surge in births given the high cost of raising children in Chinese cities, a challenge that persists to this day.

The policy change will come with "supportive measures, which will be conducive to improving our country's population structure, fulfilling the country's strategy of actively coping with an ageing population", the official Xinhua news agency said following a politburo meeting chaired by President Xi Jinping.

Among those measures, China will lower educational costs for families, step up tax and housing support, guarantee the legal interests of working women and clamp down on "sky-high" dowries, it said, without giving specifics. It would also look to educate young people "on marriage and love".

China had a fertility rate of just 1.3 children per woman in 2020, recent data showed, on par with ageing societies like Japan and Italy and far short of the roughly 2.1 needed for replacement level.

"People are held back not by the two-children limit, but by the incredibly high costs of raising



Children play at a kindergarten in Yantai in China's eastern Shandong province. — **AFP**

children in today's China. Housing, extracurricular activities, food, trips, and everything else add up quickly," Yifei Li, a sociologist at NYU Shanghai, said.

"Raising the limit itself is unlikely to tilt anyone's calculus in a meaningful way, in my view."

In a poll on Xinhua's Weibo account asking #AreYouReady for the three-child policy, about 29,000 of 31,000 respondents said they would "never think of it" while the remainder chose among the options: "I'm ready and very eager to do so", "it's on my agenda", or "I'm hesitating and there's a lot to consider".

The census showed that the population grew at its slowest rate during the last decade since the 1950s, to 1.41 billion, fueling concerns that China would grow old before it gets wealthy

The poll was later removed. "I am willing to have three children if you give me 5 million yuan (\$785,650)," one user posted. Share prices in birth-and fertility-related companies surged.

Early this month, a once-in-

a-decade census showed that the population grew at its slowest rate during the last decade since the 1950s, to 1.41 billion, fueling concerns that China would grow old before it gets wealthy as well as criticism that it had waited too long to address declining births.

"This is without a doubt a step in the right direction, but still it's a bit timid," Shuang Ding, chief economist at Standard Chartered in Hong Kong, said. "A fully liberalised birth policy should have been implemented at least five years ago, but it's too late now, although its better late than never," he said. — **Reuters**

Sri Lanka questions burning cargo ship crew



Members of Sri Lankan Navy remove debris washed ashore from the Singapore-registered container ship MV X-Press Pearl, in the sea off Galle Face Beach in Colombo. — **AFP**

NEGOMBO: Sri Lanka's criminal investigators began questioning the crew of a burning cargo ship Monday, as the Singapore-registered carrier smouldered for a 12th straight day in one of the island's worst-ever marine ecological disasters.

A fire broke out aboard the MV X-Press Pearl, which was carrying 25 tonnes of nitric acid and a huge amount of plastic raw materials, as it was about to enter Colombo harbour on May 20.

The intense flames, still burning at the rear of the 186-metre vessel, have destroyed much of the cargo, some of which has fallen into the Indian Ocean.

Tonnes of microplastic granules from the ship and its nearly 1,500 containers have inundated Sri Lanka's famed beaches, forcing a fishing ban

and sparking fears of ecological devastation.

The Marine Environment Protection Authority (MEPA) chief Dharshani Lahandapura said they were still assessing the ecological damage, but believed it was the "worst ever in my lifetime".

The Police Inspector-General has ordered the Criminal Investigation Department to investigate the fire as well as the huge environmental damage caused, an official said.

"The 25-member crew have completed their quarantine and we are able to question them today," a police spokesman said.

MEPA said the captain of the vessel had known about a nitric acid leak on May 11, long before the vessel entered Sri Lankan waters. — **AFP**

SE Asia's coronavirus surge prompts shutdowns, alarm

KUALA LUMPUR: A sharp rise in coronavirus cases from new variants in parts of Southeast Asia that had been less affected by the pandemic has prompted new restrictions, factory closures and attempts to rapidly scale up vaccination programmes across the region.

The number of daily new Covid-19 cases in Malaysia has soared past India's on a per capita basis, while total cases in Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and East Timor have all more than doubled in the past month.

Thailand, which was the second country to record infections after China, had won plaudits for containing its first wave of cases, but its death toll has risen ten-fold over two months — though at just over 1,000 is still low by global standards.

Adding to concerns, Vietnamese officials revealed the discovery over the weekend of a "very dangerous" combination of Indian and UK Covid-19 variants, which spreads quickly by air.

"Covid-19 infection rates are very alarming in countries across Southeast Asia," Alexander Matheou, Asia Pacific Director, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, said. "The more dangerous and deadly variants highlight the



A health personnel inoculates a man with the second dose of China's Sinovac coronavirus vaccine in Bangkok. — **AFP**

Some SE Asian countries have placed less emphasis on vaccine procurement than Western nations or simply could not afford them and now have limited access

urgent need for much faster global sharing and manufacture of vaccines to contain this outbreak and to help avoid huge mass casualties."

In the absence of vaccines, containment is the priority. Vietnam crushed earlier waves —

Afghanistan runs out of vaccine amid surge in Covid

KABUL: Afghanistan is waiting for new deliveries of Covid-19 vaccines amid a surge in infections with a third wave of the pandemic.

The country's Health Ministry spokesman Dastagir Nazari said on Monday that the process of vaccinating new people has been stopped in the country.

Only individuals who have had the first shot are currently receiving jabs.

The country with an estimated population of 37 million has so far received 500,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine from India and another 468,000 doses from the international vaccine-sharing programme Covax.

The doses were used to vaccinate health workers, members of the armed forces, teachers and media staff.

The country is expected to receive another 700,000 doses of vaccines from China "in the near future," but there is no exact date for the deliveries, Nazari said.

Afghanistan is struggling to receive vaccines for the entire population. The country is supposed to receive vaccines for a fifth of the population through Covax.

For another 28 per cent of the population, Kabul has the budget to buy vaccines itself, Nazari said. The government was trying to get vaccines as soon as possible.

— **dpa**

and the country of 98 million has still suffered fewer than 50 deaths — but new distancing measures started in its business hub Ho Chi Minh City on Monday.

In the north of the country, factories supplying global tech firms such as Apple and Samsung are operating below capacity because of outbreaks, industry sources said.

Thailand's largest agribusiness, Charoen Pokphand Foods Pcl closed a poultry factory for five days after workers tested positive for Covid-19. Thousands of more cases have been found at factories, construction sites and prisons.

— **Reuters**

Denmark accused of helping US spy European leaders

COPENHAGEN: France warned on Monday that alleged US spying on European allies using Danish underwater cables would be “extremely serious” if confirmed, as questions mounted over whether Denmark knew what the US was doing.

In an investigative report on Sunday, Danish public broadcaster Danmarks Radio (DR) revealed together with several other European media outlets that the US National Security Agency (NSA) had eavesdropped on Danish underwater Internet cables from 2012 to 2014 to spy on top politicians in Germany, Sweden, Norway and France.

The NSA was able to access text messages, telephone calls and Internet traffic including searches, chats and messaging services — including those of Germany’s Chancellor Angela Merkel, then-foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and then-opposition leader Peer Steinbrück, DR said.

“It is extremely serious,” France’s Europe Minister Clement Beaune told France Info radio.

“We need to see if our partners in the EU, the Danes, have committed errors or faults in their cooperation with American services.”

He added it would also be very disturbing if Washington had been spying on EU leaders.

“Between allies, there must be trust, a minimal cooperation, so these potential facts are serious,” said the minister.

He said the facts must first “be verified” and then “conclusions drawn in terms of cooperation”.

Denmark’s neighbours Sweden and Norway have also demanded



National Security Agency (NSA) had eavesdropped on Danish underwater Internet cables from 2012 to 2014 to spy on top politicians in Germany, Sweden, Norway and France

explanations from Copenhagen, though the tone has been more cautious.

And a German government spokesman said on Monday that Berlin was “in contact with all relevant national and international interlocutors to get clarification”.

DR said the NSA had taken advantage of a surveillance collaboration with Denmark’s military intelligence unit FE to eavesdrop on the cables.

But it was unclear whether Denmark knew at the time that the US was using the cables to spy on Denmark’s neighbours.

Contacted by AFP, FE refused to comment on the revelations.

Defence Minister Trine Bramsen, who took over the defence portfolio in June 2019, has neither confirmed nor denied DR’s report, telling AFP only that “systematic eavesdropping of close allies is unacceptable”.

US eavesdropping on European leaders is, however, not new.

In 2013, former NSA contractor Edward Snowden revealed thousands of classified documents exposing the vast US surveillance put in place after the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Among other things, the documents showed the US government was spying on its own citizens and carrying out

widespread tapping worldwide, including of Merkel’s mobile phone.

However, if the Danish-US spying is confirmed, it went on during and after the 2013 Snowden affair.

In 2014, following the Snowden scandal, a secret internal working group at FE began looking into whether the NSA had used a Danish-US spying collaboration — called XKeyscore — to spy on Denmark’s allies, DR said.

The group’s report, codenamed Operation Dunhammer, was presented to top FE management in May 2015.

— AFP

Tarzan actor among 7 presumed dead in US plane crash

WASHINGTON: All seven passengers aboard a plane, including Tarzan actor Joe Lara and his diet guru wife, are presumed dead after it crashed in a lake near the US city of Nashville, authorities said.

The small business jet crashed at around 11:00 am local time on Saturday, shortly after taking off from the Smyrna, Tennessee airport for Palm Beach, Florida, Rutherford County Fire & Rescue (RCFR) said on Facebook.

The plane went down into Percy Priest Lake, about 12 miles (19 kilometres) south of Nashville.

The Federal Aviation Administration confirmed seven people had been aboard the plane, CNN reported.

By Saturday night, operations had switched from search and rescue to recovery efforts, RCFR incident commander Captain Joshua Sanders told a press conference.

“We are no longer in an attempt to (look) for live victims at this point so we’re now recovering as much as we can from the crash site,” he said.

On Sunday afternoon, RCFR said on Facebook that recovery operations had found “several components of the aircraft



as well as human remains” in a debris field about half a mile wide.

Operations would continue until dark and resume on Monday morning, RCFR wrote.

Lara played Tarzan in the 1989 television movie “Tarzan in Manhattan.” He later starred in the television series “Tarzan: The Epic Adventures,” which ran from 1996-1997.

His wife Gwen Shamblin Lara, whom he married in 2018, was the leader of a Christian weight-loss group called Weigh Down Ministries. She founded the group in 1986, and then in 1999 founded the Remnant Fellowship Church in Brentwood, Tennessee.

She is survived by two children from a previous marriage, according to a statement posted on the church’s website. — AFP

French restaurant serves up food of the future: Insects

PARIS: Laurent Veyet’s tasting menu is not for the faint-hearted, but may point to the future of feeding a booming world population — there is a prawn salad with yellow mealworm, crunchy insects on a bed of vegetables and chocolate-coated grasshoppers.

As sun bathed the outdoor restaurant terraces in Paris, Veyet’s ornate dishes were winning approving nods and murmurs of satisfaction from his adventurous clientele.

“It’s the ideal dish for first-timers,” the Parisian chef said, preparing a serving of pasta made with mealworm flour, sweet potato

and sauteed insect larvae. “There are some really interesting flavours. Not many people could say they don’t like that.”

The European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) in January deemed the mealworm fit for human consumption and in May approved its sale on the market. The agency has fielded more than a dozen other applications for insect-based food products, including crickets and locusts.

Mealworm, and insects more generally, could offer a sustainable and low carbon-emission food source for the future.

Dining with his two daughters,



French chef Laurent Veyet displays a dish as he poses in his restaurant Inoveat serving insect-based food in Paris. — Reuters

Soheil Ayari gave his endorsement: “I feel like I am in a traditional restaurant except the concept behind what I’m eating is different. And honestly, the tastes are very similar (to regular food).” Ayari’s young daughter was equally positive: “It’s environmentally friendly and what’s more, it’s good.”

Veyet grows his mealworm on site, feeding them porridge oats and vegetables. While the mealworm may look like an unappetising maggot, it is in fact the larvae of the darkling beetle, rich in protein, fat and fibre.

A versatile ingredient, the mealworm can be used whole in

curries or salads, or ground to make flour for pasta, biscuits or bread.

“Insects are nutritious,” said Stefan De Keersmaecker, a health and food safety spokesman at the European Commission. “They can really help us switch to a more healthy and sustainable diet and food system.”

For Veyet, the challenge is two-fold: winning over public opinion and learning how to match the insects’ taste with other foods.

“You have to find the right flavours, the right accompaniments. All that is fascinating, any chef will tell you the same,” he said.

— Reuters

SHORT TAKES

MOSCOW

Air France cancels flights as Russia withholds nod

Air France cancelled two more flights to Moscow on Monday after Russian authorities failed to approve flight plans that avoid Belarus airspace.

The European Union has urged its airlines to avoid Belarus amid outrage over the forced landing of a Ryanair jet en route to Lithuania from Greece on May 23 and the arrest of a dissident journalist on board.

“Air France confirms the cancellation of flights AF1154 and AF1654 from Paris-Charles



de Gaulle to Moscow on 31 May 2021 as the authorisations from Russian authorities to enter their territory have not been granted,” the airline said.

GAROWE

Somaliland holds first parliamentary vote

Somalia’s breakaway Somaliland region held its first parliamentary election for 16 years on Monday, in what politicians there describe as evidence of its comparative stability.

The region, which broke away from Somalia in 1991 but has not gained widespread international recognition for its independence, has been largely peaceful while the rest of Somalia has suffered three decades of civil war. “Vote in peace,” President Musi Bihi said in televised remarks after



casting his ballot. Opposition leader Abdirahmaan Mohamed Abdulahi echoed the sentiment: “I urge the Somaliland people to vote in peace and calmly.”

GENEVA

183 million watched Eurovision Song Contest

Some 183 million people tuned in to watch this year’s Eurovision Song Contest, organisers said on Monday, with young online fans driving up viewing figures for the pop extravaganza.

Across 36 countries, the May 22 grand final in Rotterdam saw an average of 40.5 per cent of television viewers tuning into the world’s biggest live music event — up four per cent from the last contest in 2019, the European Broadcasting Union said.



The Geneva-based EBU puts together the kitsch annual competition, which was cancelled last year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Who will tell the mother?

An expat life is an interesting one. There is a sense of adventure to venture out into the unknown and experience the newness of a country and learn more about it at the same time to make a living.

There are moments of nostalgia for the homeland and love for the nation one is currently living in. One holds onto the memories until they visit their land and be with their loved ones again.

Travel to explore and earn is not something that has been in practice for a century, instead it is a trait the man has carried with him ever since he learnt the basic naval skills and began to cross seas to trade and thrive.

We may never know all the details of the emotions and experiences of those days, but we know people continue to cross oceans till today and now they are known as expatriates and in some cases migrants. If it were oceans before it is the sky now and as the flight takes off looking down to land the minds gently utter, “Until we meet again.”

The latest challenge for the expatriates has been travelling as it is well understood minimal travel is hassle free from quarantine to lack of continuity in flights due to the pandemic Covid-19. Sometimes an expat keeps worries from their family members back home. And this young 35-year-old environmentalist and



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volunteer who cared for the land he was living in as his own, did the same when he began to develop Covid-19 symptoms. Until I heard the question, “Do you think that hospital would have a vacant bed?”

A person unknown to me but felt comforting to know he has found a safe person to heal. He too did not want to worry his mother unnecessarily and probably thought he would tell her once he recovers and leave the whole episode behind.

Little did we know that Covid would win this battle. He who had the courage and could rescue unknown dogs with ease suddenly went silent. His friends who were planning out meals for him during the hospital stay looked suddenly aimless. Words failed them.

For we were not reading a figure as part of the total number affected by Covid stated in the media but a person who had been working, volunteering to go for beach cleaning and rescuing animals. The heaviness of the situation was that his mother was unaware of everything — the infection, hospitalisation and the demise.

Who would tell her?
The world must have shaken when she heard the fact and who would ever be able to console her? The unspoken words are louder at times.

She should know that he left a mark in this world and made his life

meaningful and he lived with hope.
Covid has changed so many factors of lives across the globe. It continues to evolve with the latest variant being detected in Vietnam, which is considered to be a highly transmissible coronavirus variant.

The more we want to look away from Covid-19 the more it tends to seek everyone’s attention. The debate continues the only difference is the focus is now on the new variant — is it a hybrid between two variants?

Amidst all this life must go on and June 1 is the Global Day of Parents designated by the United Nations’ General Assembly in 2012 to appreciate all parents throughout the world. The Global Day of Parents recognises that the family has the primary responsibility for the nurturing and protection of children. “For the full and harmonious development of their personality, children should grow up in a family environment and in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding”, states the UN.

Last year and this year must have been painful and sad for both parents and children as many family units have lost parents or sons and daughters. This year the day is observed with the message greater support is needed for working parents as Covid-19 takes hold.

Maybe more than ever before parents need emotional support.

SLUGGISH HANDLING

WHO could face major shake-up!

STEPHANIE NEBEHAY

The World Health Organization, at the heart of the world’s sluggish handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, faces a potential shake-up to prevent future outbreaks as a top official warned that “the pathogens have the upper hand”.

Health ministers agreed on Monday to study recommendations for ambitious reforms made by independent experts to strengthen the capacity of both the UN agency and countries to contain new viruses.

Under the resolution submitted by the European Union, and adopted by consensus, member states are to be firmly in the driver’s seat of the reforms through a year-long process.

The new virus has infected more than 170 million people and killed nearly 3.7 million, according to a Reuters tally of official national figures.

Health ministers from WHO’s 194 member states will also meet from November 29 to decide whether to launch negotiations on an international treaty aimed at boosting defences against any future pandemic.

WHO’s Emergencies Director, Mike Ryan,



We need to turn that very thing that has exposed us in this pandemic, our interconnectedness, we need to turn that into a strength

MIKE RYAN
WHO Emergencies Director

welcomed the decisions, telling its annual ministerial assembly: “Right now the pathogens have the upper hand, they are emerging more frequently and often silently in a planet that is out of balance. “We need to turn that very thing that has exposed us in this

pandemic, our interconnectedness, we need to turn that into a strength”, he said.

The decisions were adopted in a plenary session on Monday at the end of its week-long assembly.

“A pandemic treaty under the roof of the WHO is the preferred way forward to strengthen the multilateral health architecture including the IHR (International Health Regulations) and to heed the call by so many experts to reset the system”, Chile’s Ambassador Frank Tressler Zamorano said on behalf of 60 countries.

One panel, headed by former New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a former president of Liberia, said that a new global system should be set up to respond faster to disease outbreaks to help ensure no future virus causes a pandemic as devastating as Covid-19.

The experts, who found crucial failures in the global response in early 2020, said that the WHO should be given the power to send investigators swiftly to chase down new disease outbreaks and to publish their full findings without delay.

They also called for setting up a Global Health Threats Council to maintain high-level political commitment to pandemic preparedness.

“The world was hit by this virus unprepared. And if another virus emerged tomorrow this would be still be the case”, Björn Kümmel, of Germany’s federal health ministry, said last week.

“A green light for this treaty process is the greatest commitment to learn from this crisis that this Assembly could have sent out. It is the most effective way to make sure that the global health crisis becomes the final one.” — Reuters

DIGITAL DIVIDE

How to unmute climate voices in poorer nations

SONIA ELKS

Zambian climate campaigner Precious Kalombwana was thrilled to take part in an online training workshop with former US vice-president Al Gore. But when she wanted to speak, a shaky Internet connection meant no one could hear her.

Pandemic moves to virtual events — including UN climate talks starting on Monday — have made it easier for experts and activists worldwide to participate, but many living in places without reliable connectivity say they are still missing out. For Kalombwana, 27, the workshop with Gore turned out to be a frustrating experience.

“It was very devastating and very stressful when you are trying to be connected and you can’t speak”, said Kalombwana, who belongs to the Citizens Network for Community Development Zambia, a non-profit campaigning for climate action.

“I would like to take part in those meetings because they’re very important to me as a climate activist. I want to get in contact with people, to hear more ideas of what we can do. I get frustrated when I can’t attend”, she said by phone.

Before Covid-19 put a stop to most large, in-person gatherings early last year, activists like Kalombwana faced a different set of obstacles if they wanted to take part in overseas climate events.

Onerous visa regimes, long jour-



Children hold placards during a global climate change strike rally in Nicosia, Cyprus. — Reuters file photo

THE SHIFT TO
VIRTUAL EVENTS
HAS, HOWEVER,
PROMPTED DEBATE
ABOUT HOW TO
OFFER PRACTICAL
SUPPORT TO
ENSURE PEOPLE
WITH PATCHY
CONNECTIONS ARE
NOT EXCLUDED

neys and costly airfares made engaging hard. The switch online, as a result of the pandemic, made it possible to simply log into events instead.

But the shift has also highlighted digital divides, with people living in poorer areas and developing nations on the frontlines of climate change often struggling with the worst connectivity.

Many people rely on their office for Internet but can no longer go there due to pandemic restrictions, while others

face deliberate shutdowns by authorities, such as in Myanmar or are limited to poor-quality mobile phone data.

“It’s going to lead to unfair outcomes and it is going to reinforce power inequalities that exist between nations and also allow for the opposing voices to be shut out”, said Harjeet Singh, a senior adviser on climate impacts with the Climate Action Network International. “That is a real fear — and we do see that happening.”

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“I am a born winner and I was here to win trophies, but beyond this there are human beings, emotions, life and I have the feeling that these things have not been valued, that it has not been understood that this is also how the dynamic of a great club is maintained.”

ZINEDINE ZIDANE
former Real Madrid coach



Former Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane. – Reuters

‘QUIT REAL MADRID BECAUSE OF LACK OF FAITH’

MADRID: Zinedine Zidane resigned as Real Madrid coach because he felt the Spanish club no longer had any confidence in him, he wrote in an open letter on Monday.

“I’m leaving because I feel the club no longer has the faith in me I need, and doesn’t offer me the support to build something in the medium or long term,” the Frenchman wrote in the letter published in the sports daily AS.

“I am a born winner and I was here to win trophies, but beyond this there are human beings, emotions, life and I have the feeling that these things have not been valued, that it has not been understood that this is also how the dynamic of a great club is maintained,” he said.

“But everything I built on a

daily basis, what I brought to the relationship with the players... has been forgotten.”

“I’m leaving, but I’m not jumping ship and I’m not tired of coaching,” he added.

Real had a disappointing season, finishing second in La Liga behind neighbours Atletico Madrid and losing to eventual winners Chelsea in the Champions League semifinals.

It was the first time that the 13-time European champions had failed to win a trophy in 11 seasons.

It is the second time that Zidane has resigned as Real Madrid coach.

The 1998 World Cup winner first took the helm in January 2016 and guided Real an unprecedented hat-trick of

Champions League titles as well as a La Liga title in 2017, before abruptly quitting on May 31, 2018.

Less than a year later he returned after Julen Lopetegui and Santiago Solari were sacked in quick succession.

‘HURT ME’

In his letter, Zidane said he left the club in 2018 because it needed “a different voice to keep itself at the very top” but this time “things are different”.

“I want what we have achieved together to be respected. I would have liked in recent months my relationship with the club and with the president (Florentino Perez) to have been a little different from that of other coaches,” Zidane said.

“I wasn’t asking for privileges, of course not, but a little more memory,” added Zidane.

“It hurt me a great deal when I would read in the press, after a loss, that they were going to fire me if I did not win the next match.

“It hurt me and the entire team because these messages which were intentionally leaked to the media created negative interferences with the squad, they created doubts and misunderstandings.”

Zidane’s contract with Real was set to expire in 2022 but he had repeatedly refused to confirm he would still be at the club next season.

‘ALWAYS BE GRATEFUL’

He has a history of making

surprise announcements: as a player, he initially announced his retirement from international football in 2004 before coming back for the 2006 World Cup, after which he retired for good following his red card for headbutting Italy’s Marco Materazzi as France lost the final.

“Spending 20 years in Madrid has been the most beautiful thing that has ever happened to me in life and I know that I owe it exclusively to Florentino Perez who bet on me in 2001,” Zidane said in the letter.

“I say it from the heart, I will always be grateful to the ‘presi’ for it. Always,” he added.

Zidane also had a message to Real fans, saying he wanted them to know that “we gave 100 per cent”.

Zidane’s resignation roiled an already turbulent coaching picture at the continent’s elite clubs.

One of Zidane’s former clubs, Juventus, has replaced Andrea Pirlo with Massimiliano Allegri. Antonio Conte, a former team-mate of Zidane’s at Juventus, quit Inter Milan after leading them to the Serie A title.

Bundesliga champions Bayern Munich have replaced Hansi Flick with Julian Nagelsmann. There is doubt about the future of Ronald Koeman who became coach at Barcelona last August, while Mauricio Pochettino, who took over at Paris Saint-Germain in January, is reportedly being courted by former employer Tottenham Hotspur and has also been linked with Madrid. — AFP



In this file photo taken on December 03, 2019, Brazilian former footballer Juninho Paulista presents the Copa America trophy on the stage during the draw of the Copa America 2020. — AFP

Copa America in Argentina suspended over coronavirus surge

ASUNCION: Argentina's hosting of the Copa America football tournament has been suspended "in view of the current circumstances," CONMEBOL said on Sunday, as the country endures a record coronavirus surge.

The South American football body, which last week stripped Colombia of co-hosting duties over deadly unrest, said it was considering other offers to hold the tournament. "CONMEBOL informs that in view of the current circumstances it has decided to suspend the organisation of the Copa America in Argentina," the governing body tweeted.

"CONMEBOL is evaluating the offer of other countries that showed interest in hosting the

continental tournament."

The Copa America was originally due to take place last year, but was postponed for 12 months because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Officials are expected to meet on Monday to decide on the next move for hosting the tournament.

An Argentine poll published on Friday found that most respondents were against holding the tournament as the country experiences its worst phase of the pandemic so far.

Less than two weeks before Copa America's scheduled start, Argentina is under a nine-day lockdown and experiencing record daily infections.

The Fernandez administration

CONMEBOL informs that in view of the current circumstances it has decided to suspend the organisation of the Copa America in Argentina

CONMEBOL statement

was hoping that the lockdown that began on May 22 would flatten the curve of infections ahead of the sports event.

Argentina had presented its

"strict protocol" to CONMEBOL to host the tournament in its entirety, which involved preparing additional stadiums.

On May 20 CONMEBOL rejected a plea by Colombia to further delay the June 13-July 10 tournament following a wave of protests and social unrest, coupled with an upsurge in Covid-19 cases.

It left Argentina as the sole host, but a survey conducted by pollsters Poliarquia among a representative sample of 1,274 city-dwelling adults, found that 70 per cent believe the country should withdraw.

Only 20 per cent believed the championship should continue on Argentine soil, and 10 per cent were undecided. — dpa

WTC final as good as World Cup decider for NZ's Wagner



LONDON: Neil Wagner has never been able to break into New Zealand's limited-overs squads but the left-arm fast bowler says next month's World Test Championship (WTC) final against India will feel like a World Cup title decider.

The 35-year-old pacer played 51 tests but has always been overlooked for the shorter formats, in which New Zealand reached the finals of the last two 50-overs World Cups.

Wagner said the final of the inaugural WTC in Southampton from June 18 held huge significance for him.

"It is like a World Cup final for me," the bowler told reporters on Sunday.

"The biggest disappointment in my career is that I've never really played a white-ball game for New Zealand or never been able to crack into the T20 or the

one-day game. That ship has probably sailed now ...

"For me now, it's about putting all my focus and energy into test cricket and to be able to play in a World Test Championship final is like a World Cup for me."

Kane Williamson's team play a two-test series against England before the WTC final, which is likely to be a battle between New Zealand's formidable pace attack and India's vaunted batting lineup headlined by skipper Virat Kohli.

"I know this final is the first and there isn't a lot of history around it, but it's the start of something that's pretty big," Wagner said.

"To play in a one-off test final against India — one of the best teams in the world, if not the best team in the world — to be able to test yourself against the best on the highest and biggest stage, that's what it's about." — Reuters

AFC moves World Cup qualifying group out of China

HONG KONG: Matches in Group A of Asia's 2022 World Cup preliminaries will be played in an as-yet-undetermined neutral venue after the Chinese Football Association announced the games could no longer be played in China, the Asian Football Confederation has said.

The remaining matches involving China, the Maldives, Syria, the Philippines and Guam were due to be held in a bio-secure bubble in Suzhou that would have allowed overseas players and officials into the Chinese city without quarantine.

But a series of positive tests among players from Syria and the Maldives meant teams travelling to China would have been required to isolate upon arrival in the country.

"The Asian Football Confederation has today decided to move the remaining centralised Group A matches of the Asian qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and AFC Asian Cup China 2023 from China PR to a neutral venue, which will be decided and announced in the



coming days," the statement said.

"The decision was made due to the mounting challenges faced

by several participating teams in travelling to China PR."

The AFC said it was working

with the Chinese Football Association and the other participating nations as well as

potential venues to determine the next course of action, with the aim of completing the qualifying

schedule.

The Chinese Football Association had said in an earlier statement the games would be played in Dubai.

Only the group winners are guaranteed to advance to the next round of Asia's preliminaries along with the four runners-up across the eight groups with the best records.

China resumed their qualifying schedule on Sunday after 18 months without a competitive game due to the ongoing pandemic as Li Tie's side defeated Guam 7-0 in the former Everton midfielder's first game as coach.

Nearly 30,000 football-starved fans were in attendance in Suzhou for the match and watched Spain-based striker Wu Lei and naturalised forward Alan Carvalho both score twice. — Reuters





Italy's Jannik Sinner in action during his first round match against France's Pierre-Hugues Herbert. – Reuters

Sinner saves match point en route to second round

PARIS: Italian prospect Jannik Sinner saved a match point as he laboured to a 6-1 4-6 6-7(4) 7-5 6-4 victory against France's Pierre-Hugues Herbert in the first round of the French Open on Monday.

The 19-year-old Sinner, who reached the quarter-finals on his Roland Garros debut last year, was 5-4 down in the fourth set when Herbert sent a backhand wide to give the world number 19 a lifeline.

Sinner barely got out of first gear in a one-sided opening set before Herbert started to put pressure on his first serve, rushing to the net to unsettle the Italian. The plan worked to perfection as Sinner misfired and appeared to lose his cool. But his powerful groundstrokes

eventually wore Herbert out, who missed out on an upset a year after forcing German Alexander to a five-setter - which he had lost, too - in Paris.

"When I saw the draw I knew it would be tough, also knowing that the crowd is for him but it's good to have crowds," said Sinner on court Suzanne Lenglen.

"Being a match point down and winning... it's a crazy sport but I'm happy it went my way."

Sinner next faces fellow Italian Gianluca Mager on his way to a potential fourth-round clash with 13-time champion Rafael Nadal, who ended his run last year.

'SWIATEK CELEBRATES BIRTHDAY WITH WIN'
Iga Swiatek started her French Open title defence with a

French Open results

Results (Prefix denotes seedings):

FIRST ROUND:
MEN: Jannik Sinner (Ita) bt Pierre Hughes Herbert (Fra) 6-1, 4-6, 6-7 (4), 7-5, 6-4; Filip Krajinovic (Srb) bt Maximilian Marterer (Ger) 6-4, 6-1, 7-6 (7-3), 31-John Isner (US) bt Sam Querrey (US) 7-6 (7-2), 6-3, 6-4; Thiago Monteiro (Bra) bt Francisco Cerundolo (Arg) 6-3, 6-4, 6-3

WOMEN (FIRST RD):
8-Iga Swiatek (Pol) bt Kaja Juvan (Slo) 6-0, 7-5; Madison Brengle (US) bt Maria Camila Osorio (Col) 7-5, 6-4; Polona Hercog (Slo) bt 16-Kiki Bertens (Ned) 6-1, 3-6, 6-4; Harmony Tan (Fra) bt Alize Cornet (Fra) 6-4, 6-4 20-Marketa Vondrousova (Cze) bt Kaia Kanepi (Est) 4-6, 6-3, 6-0

straight-sets win over her good friend Kaja Juvan in the first round on her 20th birthday on Monday.

The Pole, who powered to a surprise triumph last year at Roland Garros, won 6-0, 7-5 against her Slovenian opponent.

“When I saw the draw I knew it would be tough, also knowing that the crowd is for him but it’s good to have crowds.”

JANNIK SINNER, ITALY

birthday.

Swiatek will face either Sweden's Rebecca Peterson or American Shelby Rogers in the second round.

The first set was the eighth seed's third straight bagel after thumping Karolina Pliskova

6-0, 6-0 in the Italian Open final earlier this month, which saw her break into the world's top 10.

Juvan put up much more of a fight in the second set, though, battling back from 3-1 down before missing two break points in the 11th game.

But her resistance ended shortly afterwards, as Swiatek came back from 40-0 down in the next game and secured victory on her fourth match point in the sunshine on Court Philippe Chatrier.

"In the second set it was really hard, she didn't give me any birthday gifts," added Swiatek. "So I'm really happy I could win those important points."

— Reuters/AFP

features



Colouring the soul

'Rangrez,' the artist group in the Sultanate presents works of seven talented and innovative artists virtually to the art world. The Muscat-based artists were inspired by the style of works from famous artists born in the month of May... **P16**

INSIDE STORIES

GASTRONOMY



KUWAITI BREEDER HOPES SUPERWORMS WILL BECOME THE NEW SUPERFOOD

Kuwaiti businessman Jassem Buabbas has spent years breeding "superworms" for animal feed and now hopes the creatures will find their way into the diets of Gulf citizens... **Story on P16**

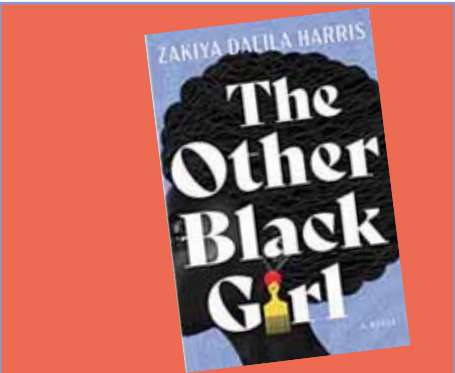
FASHION



GREECE APPROVES DIOR SHOOT AT KEY ANCIENT SITES

Greece's top archaeological advisory body on Wednesday approved use of several key sites including the Acropolis for an upcoming shoot by French fashion house Dior; a culture ministry source said... **Story on P15**

READ



THE OTHER BLACK GIRL

BY ZAKIYA DALILA HARRIS

Two young Black women, Nella and Hazel, meet against the starkly white backdrop of New York City book publishing while working together at Wagner Books

LOCAL ATTRACTIONS



THE DIVERSE FLORA AND FAUNA THAT THRIVE AT AL SALEEL RESERVE

The Al Saleel Reserve is located in the Wilayat of Al Kamil Wal Wafi in the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah, and it is one of the beautiful natural reserves that cover a large area... **Story on P15**

ENTERTAINMENT



'QUIET PLACE' MAKES N AMERICA BOX OFFICE NOISE AS COVID CURBS EASE

Horror film "A Quiet Place: Part II" opened in North America this weekend to considerable fanfare and with numbers unlike any seen since the pandemic began, as Covid curbs began falling and theaters began filling up again... **Story on P15**



Colouring the soul



BY LIJU CHERIAN
Instagram: journocherie

A group of 75 participants came together to celebrate 75 years of India's independence. 'Rangrez', the artist group of Indian Social Club (ISC), went virtual due to the Corona pandemic as part of the celebrations.

In 2019, Dr Satish Nambiar, Chairman, ISC and Suhail Khan, Joint General Secretary and Entertainment Secretary, ISC, requested art aficionado Sushmita Gupta to put a group together of artists of Indian origin.

"It was a very pleasurable project for me as I prepared an introductory note, followed up with a call on social media and in the Indian Social Club wings," she recalls. Sushmita who led the artist community of Indian origin in Muscat says the team is forever delighted and grateful for the support they received from the Embassy of India in Muscat.

As the group was formed effortlessly, she named it 'Rangrez' which means dyer in the Persian language. "In Sufi tradition, it connotes someone who colours the soul in his or her own colours," she explained.

The end of May turned special for the artists who participated in an exhibition curated by Pragya Bhatnagar, one of the innovative artists of the group. She is not only good at presenting her art but also excels in curation too.

Pragya shared: "We at 'Rangrez' celebrate art every month by showcasing beautiful artworks painted by our immensely talented artists and plan to continue the celebrations. For 'Rangrez,' we chose to get inspired by the style of works from

his paintings promptly paved the way for Fauvism. Cross initiated the second phase of Neo-Impressionism in the 1890s replacing the pointillism technique of small dots with larger, square-like brushstrokes that produce a greater intensity of colour on the canvas.

ANJANA LOOMBA

'Family': Through the hard-edge abstract style, one sees a family in the set of windows that I pass by everyday. The black and white palette conveys a pure bond of love between the family members against the darkness of the world. The artist I chose inspired me by his simplistic style, use of solid colours, love for windows and minimalistic approach.

ASHWINI KELKAR

'The Wardrobe': My art here is inspired by Franz Kline, a great American abstract expressionist. He was known for his monochromatic, black on white gestural paintings. I was intrigued and challenged by his method of expressing only with big, bold, aggressive black strokes on a white canvas. I have tried to imitate his method here, by using strokes of black as the main colour, and other colours give an impression of a wardrobe.

NEZZIE NAZARANE

'Conch': I chose artist Robert Ryman as he stood out among others. He mainly focused on materials he used and the paint application rather than portraying real objects. His later works consisted mainly of white-on-white paintings. Sometimes he used primary colours and then covered it mostly with strokes of white. Looking at Ryman's work, immediately brought the image of a conch to my mind and hence decided to paint it. I made the painting mostly in white with a



famous master artists born in the month of May.

The main idea of this exhibition is to push our skills further while enjoying the creative process, to study, explore and experiment with different style of work done by almost 30 international and Indian master artists from the 17th century to the present and to take inspiration from the masters to create their own diptych or quadriptych art pieces."

Pragya is excited to be part of the show and is indebted to 'Rangrez' for providing an opportunity to curate the show and all the participating artists towards making it a success.

Here are the details of the seven of the 39 curated paintings from some of the talented artists who exhibited including Pragya's own, WFH - The New Normal.

ANEESHA B S

'Santorini': My works on canvases include landscapes, abstracts, portraits, impressionism and floral paintings. One of the foremost practitioners of Neo-Impressionism, Henri-Edmond Cross produced an array of work. The abstracted forms and dazzling colours that the artist displays in

little bit of blue, gold and grey. The canvas is textured to add interest.

PRAGYA BHATNAGAR

'WFH: The New Normal': My work shows how life has changed everyone's perspective from 2020 onwards due to the pandemic environment. I was drawn towards the cartoonish pen and ink illustrations with few coloured elements, revolving around everyday life of common men in Mario Miranda's style of work which I have chosen as my inspiration.

REMA SIVAKUMAR

'Freedom is your choice': My work is inspired by artist and poet Gabriel Rossetti. His work had purity and the female characters of emotions and feelings. Each painting had a story and a poetic touch. My painting depicts the use of our freedom as compared to a bird. We have the freedom of choice which I have shown in floral designs and female form.

SARIKA TALWAR

'Landscape': I am inspired by American artist Fredric Edwin Church who was a landscape painter and well-known for his large landscapes often depicting mountains, waterfalls and sunset.



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FASHION



Greece approves Dior shoot at key ancient sites

GREECE'S TOP archaeological advisory body on Wednesday approved use of several key sites including the Acropolis for an upcoming shoot by French fashion house Dior, a culture ministry source said.

The photo shoots will be held for material to be presented during a runway show in Athens next month, the ministry official said.

The trip will pay homage to an iconic photo session at the Acropolis 70 years ago for an haute couture collection by Christian Dior.

The official said the central archaeological council had "unanimously" approved the shoots.

In addition to the Acropolis, photo shoots will be held at the Odeon of Herodes Atticus, the Ancient Agora in Athens, the temple of Poseidon at Sounio and the temple of Zeus at Nemea, the official said.

A further request to shoot at the Panathenaic stadium, where the 1896 Olympics were held, will be discussed on Thursday.

Dior will hold a runway show on June 17 in Athens to launch its inter-season collection.

"This is not a runway show at the Acropolis", the official emphasised.

The move comes on the heels of ongoing criticism of the Greek government by the opposition over its management of the country's priceless archaeological heritage.

In March, there was criticism over restoration work at the Acropolis that includes a new concrete footpath. The culture ministry has said the redesign improves wheelchair accessibility.

AFP has contacted Unesco for comment.

There is also an ongoing row over the planned relocation of antiquities in Thessaloniki for metro construction.

Earlier this month, dozens of intellectuals including several Byzantine experts penned an open letter, calling on the Greek state to leave the antiquities in place. — **AFP**

LOCAL ATTRACTION

The diverse flora and fauna that thrive at Al Saleel Reserve



THE AL SALEEL RESERVE is located in the Wilayat of Al Kamil W'al Wafi in the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah, and it is one of the beautiful natural reserve that covers a large area.

The reserve is located in the arid and semi-arid regions. It receives less rainfall all throughout the year but is consist of a wide muddy and gravel plain extending from the east.

This environment provides an important natural space for the Sumr trees which resulted in an important forest that provides a natural environment and habi-

ard. Around 166 species of insects also call this home. The reserve also created a safe haven for wild birds, as three types of wild birds were recorded here. Most notably of birds that thrive in this area include the bulbul, the hoopoe, the wild pigeon, the cordoned pigeon, the Arab babbler, sparrows, the great grey shrike, the catbirds, and also the yellowish, as well as the Egyptian eagle, the bald eagle and the steppe eagle.

With regard to human heritage, it has been discovered that there are archaeological tombs



tat for different types of creatures, especially the Arabian deer scattered along the reserve.

The reserve is also characterised by the spread of more than 100 species of plants and trees distributed throughout the reserve. Some plants that can be found here include sidr trees, couches, Al-shu'a and Al-sarah. There are also more than eight types of mammals living here such as the Arabian deer, the Arabian ibex, the red fox and the wild rabbit.

As for reptiles, the reserve is home to eight types of reptiles which include the Egyptian liz-

ard. Around 166 species of insects also call this home. The reserve also created a safe haven for wild birds, as three types of wild birds were recorded here. Most notably of birds that thrive in this area include the bulbul, the hoopoe, the wild pigeon, the cordoned pigeon, the Arab babbler, sparrows, the great grey shrike, the catbirds, and also the yellowish, as well as the Egyptian eagle, the bald eagle and the steppe eagle.

With regard to human heritage, it has been discovered that there are archaeological tombs

ENTERTAINMENT

'Quiet Place' makes N America box office noise as Covid curbs ease



HORROR FILM "A Quiet Place: Part II" opened in North America this weekend to considerable fanfare and with numbers unlike any seen since the pandemic began, as Covid curbs began falling and theaters began filling up again.

So after Hollywood's brutal year of dark screens and empty seats, movies are starting to come back.

"The symbolic importance of this Memorial Day Weekend to the movie theatre industry cannot be overstated", said Paul Dergarabedian, a senior analyst at Comscore. The numbers, he said, "tell an indisputable story about the resilience and continued relevance of the big screen experience."

The latest "Quiet Place" — a John Krasinski-directed sequel to the popular 2018 film about a young family trying to outwit horrific blind monsters with frighteningly keen hearing — is projected to take in \$58.5 million for the four-day Memorial Day weekend, said industry watcher Exhibitor Relations.

That pushed the combined gross for the weekend's top 12 films to \$78.1 million, up from \$18.8 million the previous weekend and from a flat-lining zero in the corresponding 2020 weekend.

"This bodes well for the future of the theatrical exhibition and is thus a huge relief for the movie industry at large", Dergarabedian said.

In second place for the weekend was Disney's live-action "Cruella" at \$27 million. The movie, with a snarling Emma Stone as the title baddie and Emma Thompson in a supporting role, has a ways to go to attain the box-office status of its 1961 precursor "One Hundred and One Dalmatians", but its opening weekend was seen as "promising", *Variety* said, given conditions.

"Cruella" can also be streamed on the Disney+ channel. There was a steep dropoff to third spot, which went to Lionsgate's horror film "Spiral", at \$3 million. The latest addition to the "Saw" franchise stars Chris Rock, Max Minghella and Samuel L. Jackson.

In fourth, at \$2.8 million, was "Wrath of Man", from United Artists. The action thriller, directed by Guy Ritchie, stars Jason Statham as an armored truck driver who thwarts a robbery but then faces unwanted attention due to his troubled past.

And in fifth was Disney's computer-animated fantasy "Raya and the Last Dragon", at \$2.4 million. Its mainly Asian-American cast includes the voices of Kelly Marie Tran as Raya, Awkwafina, Gemma Chan and Sandra Oh.

ROUNDING OUT THE TOP FILMS WERE:

"Godzilla vs. Kong" (\$1 million)
"Dream Horse" (\$817,000)
"Those Who Wish Me Dead" (\$641,000)
"Mortal Kombat" (\$302,000) — **AFP**



Kuwaiti breeder hopes superworms will become the new superfood

Kuwaiti businessman Jassem Buabbas has spent years breeding “superworms” for animal feed and now hopes the creatures will find their way into the diets of Gulf citizens.

In a small, dark room outside Kuwait City, Buabbas places the worm-like larvae of the darkling beetle, famed for their high protein content, into a transparent box on a bed of bran and cornflour.

In another, he puts the mature beetles for mating.

“My ambition is for worms to be a successful food alternative for humans,” he said.

Insects are widely eaten around the globe, with an estimated 1,000 species appearing on the dinner plates of some two billion people in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

But apart from traditional diets, cricket pasta and mealworm smoothies have become the latest food trend in some world capitals, with edible insects being promoted as a sustainable alternative to regular protein sources.

Some Gulf states have a tradition of eating dried and baked locusts, which can appear in plague proportions. They are considered a delicacy by some, although consumption has fallen out of favour in modern times.

While superworms — in high demand among owners of birds, fish, amphibians and reptiles — have not yet been approved for human consumption in Kuwait, Buabbas is hopeful that people will be willing to try them.

He aims to expand his business beyond the pet trade and get the invertebrates onto dinner plates, in what would be the first such restaurant in the Gulf.

He is now experimenting with recipes before seeking permission from the Kuwaiti authorities.

“I have so far created three types of sauces... and colleagues of mine have tried and liked them,” said Buabbas, who apart from breeding superworms works in the government sector.

Regulation is catching up with the food trend—in May, the European Commission approved dried mealworms for human consumption after the 27-nation bloc’s food watchdog said they were safe to eat.

The decision was good news for the burgeoning insect farming industry in Europe.

EVER TRIED THEM?

Buabbas said a fascination with the secrets of superworms prompted him to travel to Thailand in 2018 to learn more about the animals which are a popular snack there.

“At first, I was disgusted by them, but... then I got used to the worms, understanding their behaviour and what poses a danger to them,” he said.

He spends two hours with the creatures every day, feeding them oats, bran, potatoes and carrots, as well as tweaking humidity and temperature levels.

He usually produces between 3,000 and 6,000 worms every three months, and at times up to 10,000.

The superworms take about 90 days to mature enough to be ready for sale — each weighing approximately a gram at six centimetres (two inches) long. They fetch \$3 for 25 larvae.

Buabbas said the superworm business has been lucrative, with bird-breeder customers buying thousands of dollars worth at a time to feed their cardinals and nightingales.

Before borders closed due to the coronavirus pandemic, he would transport boxes of worms to other Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia.

Buabbas markets his business on social media, while he works on superworm recipes that he says will incorporate elements of local cuisine.

But when asked how they tasted, he said he didn’t know. He’s never tried them. — **AFP**



business

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Occidental Oman donates \$2.5m towards vaccine procurement



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 31

Occidental Oman has signed a sponsorship agreement with the Ministry of Health to fund the purchase of Covid-19 vaccine doses worth \$2.5 million. The sponsorship aims to enhance vaccination levels in the country against the coronavirus, particularly for high-risk individuals and the Ministry’s targeted groups.

This vaccine programme continues Occidental Oman’s support for Covid-19-related initiatives in the previous year and in 2021.

The company has sponsored an E-Platform for teachers in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, provided support to Dar Al Atta’as Covid-19 donation campaign, supported Ibri Hospital with medical equipment, and sponsored

This vaccine programme continues Occidental Oman’s support for Covid-19-related initiatives in the previous year and in 2021.

the purchase of temperature measuring devices for all schools in Al Wusta governorate.

“We are proud of our commitment to the well-being of Oman’s communities throughout the pandemic, as Occidental Oman has directly addressed community needs through our CSR projects, both on a national scale, as well responding to the needs of our local concession areas,” said Stephen Kelly, President and General Manager of Occidental Oman.

National drive to weed out energy-inefficient light bulbs gains pace

KEY GOAL: Retailers and distributors invited to attend inaugural workshop

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](https://twitter.com/conradprabhu)

A national initiative to rid the Omani market of incandescent light systems, among other energy-inefficient light bulbs, is being formally unveiled tomorrow, June 2, at a virtual forum hosted by the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) with the participation of consultants tasked with formulating a strategy in support of this goal.

Invited to take part in the proceedings are importers, distributors and retailers of lighting systems that will be covered by the proposed national curbs. When eventually adopted and implemented, the national strategy will not only result in the complete elimination of energy-inefficient light bulbs from the domestic market, but also prohibit their local manufacture or import.

Earlier this year, the Authority appointed the partnership of Three Pillars Consulting (TPC) – Oman-based renewable energy and sustainable development specialists – and Econoler of Canada to assist in the formulation



of a national programme to phase out energy-inefficient light bulbs from the country.

“The Authority has commissioned Three Pillars Consulting in partnership with Econoler to conduct a comprehensive study on phasing-out inefficient lights. The study will put forward a recommended national policy and programme to be submitted to the Ministry of Energy and Minerals for approval,” said the regulator in a statement announcing this week’s virtual forum.

The workshop, the Authority said, will provide an overview of the current lighting market and include an interactive session

on a “range of policies that are being considered to phase-out inefficient lights and improve energy efficiency”.

According to APSR officials, the need to rid the local market of incandescent and other energy-inefficient light bulbs is not only driven by a desire to conserve limited natural gas resources – currently the principal source of fuel for power generation – but also help reduce Oman’s carbon footprint.

Furthermore, until state subsidy is completed phased out as envisioned over the next five years, power supply will continue to pose an additional fiscal burden on the government’s already

constrained budgetary resources.

Most developed economies around world, including the United States, Canada, Russia, Australia and countries of the European Union have already enacted legislation banning the manufacture, distribution, sale, and use of incandescent bulbs. This is because up to 90 per cent of the electricity consumed by an incandescent bulb ends up as wasteful heat energy rather than light energy. The advent of light-emitting diode (LED) based light systems, compact fluorescent lamps and other energy efficient systems has also led to the rapid eradication of incandescent light bulbs from many countries.

Survey predicts K-shaped recovery from Covid-19 pandemic

DISTINCT SHIFT: Plurality of CFA Charterholders predicts a divergent economic recovery, marking a distinct shift in opinion from one year ago

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 31

CFA Institute, the global association of investment professionals, surveyed its membership to analyze the effects of the current economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic on the financial markets and the investment management industry.

The survey finds that 44 per cent of respondents globally are predicting a “K-shaped” recovery and are concerned about the real risk of the recovery taking different forms and degrees of momentum in various parts of the world, varying across

industries and workforces.

The survey and forthcoming report, Covid-19, One Year Later – Capital Markets Entering Uncharted Waters, follows the analysis of member sentiment reported in 2020. The K-shaped recovery marks a distinct shift away from the “hockey-stick shaped” recovery predicted last year, when close to 75 per cent of respondents thought that any upturn would be slow or stagnant in the short term, before picking up in the medium term.

“Our members around the globe continue to provide unique insights into the impact of the pandemic on capital markets and the finance industry at large,” said Margaret Franklin, CFA, President and CEO of CFA Institute.

“Their views provide an invaluable bellwether of trends and future-state indicators at the global, regional and market level. In a post-pandemic world – one that is only starting to emerge – the views of CFA charterholders provide meaningful and actionable insights on current



market, regulatory and economic developments, rooted in professionalism and high standards for capital markets integrity.”

Of the 6,040 global respondents, 44 per cent predicted a K-shape recovery, indicating a globally divergent recovery.

Then, 32 per cent of the respondents opine that the economy is on a steady path towards fully recovering and operating at a pre-pandemic pace within the next one to

three years. China’s recovery is considered to be ahead of most markets; respondents in that country report more optimism for a full recovery in one to three years (39 per cent).

Approximately 10 per cent of respondents said a W-shaped economic recovery is forming, whereby the economy will see-saw after an initial strong rebound.

Another 5 per cent predicted the economy will worsen over the next one to three years, before progressively recovering. About

The K-shaped recovery marks a distinct shift away from the “hockey-stick shaped” recovery predicted last year, when close to 75 per cent of respondents thought that any upturn would be slow or stagnant in the short term, before picking up in the medium term

MARGARET FRANKLIN
President and CEO, CFA Institute

the same percentage (4 per cent) believe there will not be a real recovery and that long-term economic stagnation will ensue. Last, 4 per cent were not certain of the recovery’s progress.

Elsewhere, further analysis suggests that specific regions appear to be less optimistic than others. In particular, Europe is among those that are marginally less optimistic to believe that the economy is already on a steady path to full recovery.

Switzerland is an exception in Europe, with 37 per cent of respondents indicating that the economy is steadily improving. Only 27 per cent of the remaining European respondents chose that option compared with 34 per cent in North America (36 per cent in the United States) and 36 per cent in South Asia.

In general, emerging economies appear to be less optimistic about economic recovery. Only 23 per cent, 25 per cent, and 27 per cent of respondents in Latin America and Caribbean, Middle East, and Africa, respectively, believe their economy is already on a steady path to recovery. They also believe in higher proportion that a real economic recovery will not occur and that long-term stagnation will ensue.

Alizz Islamic launches Oman’s first fintech solution

MUSCAT: Alizz Islamic Bank and IFIN (first Islamic Fintech of its kind) have partnered to launch the first instant ‘Goods Financing’ product in Oman and the Islamic finance world.

The bank has inaugurated this instant finance solution with Danube Home’s Al Khuwair Branch as the first outlet to welcome Alizz Islamic Bank customers able to avail instant finance on their furniture right at the store.

The service is being rolled out across the entire branch network

of Danube Home over the course of next few weeks.

It is the first time in the Sultanate when customers will be able to instantly take home their desired goods from the store having them financed for up to 120 months without the need of visiting any bank branch.

The process of availing finance has been simplified into a simple 10-minute process at the store’s checkout counter, where the customer will go through an online verification



process and sign the finance contract following an immediate approval.

IFIN is the world’s first Sharia

compliant, multi-institutional, multi-product, multi-channel Islamic FinTech solution facilitating instant Islamic financing at the retailer outlets. This game-changing solution is geared to redefine the way Islamic financing is being done, making it secure, quick and easy for everyone.

The first product offered by Alizz Islamic bank on IFIN is the Goods Murabaha, where the bank purchases the goods desired by the customer, from the authorised dealer and sells

the same to the customer at an agreed price that is paid in instalments.

The advantage is complete transparency as the customer knows the bank’s profit margin and instalment plan at the time of signing the contract. This arrangement allows for immediate possession and ownership of the goods by the customer who never pays more than agreed amount.

Speaking at the occasion of the launch, Mohammed al Ghasani, AGM — Acting Chief

Consumer Banking Officer at Alizz Islamic Bank, said: “The launch of the IFIN instant financing solution comes as part of our plans to provide a wide range of carefully-designed solutions that meet all clients’ needs. The way people bank has changed, convenience and speed are keys to the modern customer and thanks to the efforts of our team, we are extremely proud to be the first Islamic bank in the entire Islamic banking industry globally to launch this innovative solution.”

All new Nisan Sunny now available at 0 % interest



MUSCAT: Nissan Oman from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA), is offering a wide range of benefits for the patrons of Nissan Sunny as part of its on-going offer which is valid till June 3, 2021. Nissan Sunny, with its modern, expressive design, fresh interiors and confidence-inspiring performance is much loved by its owners.

Customers of Nissan Sunny are being offered attractive benefits including special interest rate, cash gift, free service, insurance and more.

A spokesperson for Nissan Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) said, “With an attractive offer available, this is the ideal time to buy Nissan Sunny. Its great design, smart technological upgrades and best-in-class spacious interiors make it a perfect car for customers looking for a sophisticated driving experience. The car continues to be a popular choice amongst customers in the segment because of its outstanding design, intelligent technology and remarkable performance.”

OTC opens admissions for new academic year

MUSCAT: Oman Tourism College (OTC) announced the opening of the admissions for the new academic year (2021-2022) for the various academic programmes that it offers. This also includes the General Foundation, Diploma and Bachelor (Honours) programmes.

Moreover, OTC is offering a special discount of 20 per cent off on the total tuition fees for part-time students from low-income families and a 25 per cent discount for part-time students who are OTC Diploma graduates. Additionally, the college will reduce the fees of a student by 10 per cent if they register with a sibling and offers a 20 per cent discount to international students.

Dr Abdulkarim bin Sultan al Mughairi,



Dean of OTC said, “As part of our social responsibility efforts, we decided to reduce the tuition fees for our students. This way, we can support them in continuing their studies and enabling them to achieve their goals and dreams within the tourism sector. OTC offers a range

of academic programmes, which are accredited by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and quality assured by the Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin).

We provide BSc (Hons) and Diploma in four primary majors, namely, Tourism and Hospitality Management, Tourism Marketing, Event Management and Business Enterprise, alongside pathway courses in Service Management or Innovation & Entrepreneurship.

The college also offers a full-time or part-time study system to provide students in various fields of tourism with an opportunity to further develop their qualifications and skillsets to advance their career.”

Bank Muscat’s Baituna makes your dream home come true



MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, has announced the availability of its Baituna home finance at competitive interest rates in line with its commitment to national development and priorities.

Omani customers looking for the best home finance deals in the Sultanate will find Baituna with its maximum tenor of 25 years a particularly attractive option. Based on customer feedback, the bank is continuing to launch new innovative features and benefits for customers in its various financing options.

Abdullah bin Tamman al Maashani (pictured), Deputy General Manager — Institutional Sales & Product Development, said: “The real estate sector is a major component of the national economy and Bank Muscat is committed to supporting this crucial sector and strengthening its role in the development and growth of the Omani economy. Baituna facilitates purchase and construction of new homes as well as land for residential use. It also offers insurance coverage and fast processing of applications across the bank’s extensive network of branches and dedicated Sales Centres. The finance offers flexible payment options and requires only simple documentation.”

Lexus reaches 2 million sales of electrified vehicles

MUSCAT: Lexus has been a pioneer of new technologies that promote environment-friendly solutions. For years together the Hybrid Electric range from Lexus has led the way becoming a major source of inspiration for many. Recently Lexus announced that the luxury brand eclipsed the milestone of 2 million global sales of electrified vehicles at the end of April 2021.

Since the launch of the RX400h in 2005, Lexus has been a pioneer of electrification in the luxury market, and the models have continued to evolve on the mission of balancing excellent driving performance with environmental sensitivity. Lexus has continued to expand its line-up of electrified vehicles to provide a wide range of options tailored to meet the needs of our customers and society. Based on a philosophy of “right time, right product, right place”, Lexus hopes to further develop its electrified product



portfolio to best respond to a varied range of energy sources and infrastructure environments encountered around the world.

As a result, Lexus now sells nine models of electrified vehicles, including HEVs and BEVs, in approximately 90 countries and regions around the world. In 2020, 33 per cent of the Lexus models sold globally were of the electrified variety.

Since 2005, Lexus electrified vehicles have contributed to a cumulative reduction in CO2 emissions of approximately 19 million tonnes. This reduction is equivalent to the combined CO2 output of approximately 300,000 passenger cars each year for the past 15 years.

A’Safwah unveils mascot for flavoured milk

MUSCAT: Oman’s oldest and popular milk brand, A’Safwah is back with yet another ‘fun in a bottle’ offering of its flavoured milk range. The brand has officially unveiled a new mascot for its strawberry and banana flavoured milk products, enticing children to experience the delicious flavours of this locally produced milk, enriched with the goodness of fruits.

With superhero Safwan, A’Safwah intends to pave the way for an evolving and fast-growing category of milk products, and reach out to its target audience, primarily kids, through creatively engaging ways. The hero, Safwan, is a fun and energetic child, who derives his superhero-like qualities from A’Safwah strawberry and banana milk shakes. With the introduction of Safwan, the oldest and one of the largest integrated dairy company in the Sultanate, reflects its determination for diversification and innovation offered by its high-quality products, which today enjoy wide trust among children and adults alike.

A company spokesperson said, “We launched the flavoured milk with Safwan character, to encourage children to keep drinking milk, taking advantage of its nutrients that boost their body strength and health. We also recognise that the character of the little Omani Safwan will help mothers attract the child’s interest in healthy food and stimulate their sense of fun when drinking strawberry and banana flavoured milk.”



Lulu hands over car keys to Dream Drive 2021 winners



MUSCAT: With the successful conclusion of its annual Dream Drive mega promotion, Lulu Oman handed over the keys of Nissan Patrol 4WDs to 8 lucky winners. The seventh and eighth draws marked the end of this year’s mega promotion, which was spread over two months from March 21 until the May 19, 2021 coinciding with Ramadhan and Eid.

Officials representing Lulu Group handed over the keys to the 8 winners who drove home brand new Nissan Patrol 4WDs. The

eight winners were Mohammed Shareef, Muzna al Balushi, Jasem Ghaedi, Manoor al Riyami, Abdul Hakeem Juma Abdullah al Junabi, Mohammed Hamed, Khalid al Hathmi and Arun Sinha. Apart from the grand prize, many others won an array of gift products from Ikon.

The registration and draws were digital and the winners of all the draws were selected through the eRaffle Winner Management System under the supervision of the officials from the Ministry

of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Ananth A V, Regional Director of Lulu Hypermarkets Oman, India & Sri Lanka, remarked “We are truly excited to conclude this year’s Dream Drive promotion on a very happy note. We would like to congratulate all the winners of this promotion and thank everyone who supported the campaign so far. It is indeed a joy to be part of our customers’ proud moments. This promotion is an opportunity to reward our valuable customers

and add more excitement to their overall shopping experience during Ramadhan. Like all the previous years, Dream Drive promotion had created lots of enthusiasm and interest among customers and has attracted new shoppers too.”

Speaking after the event, Shabeer K A, Director — Lulu Hypermarkets, Oman, stated “We organise Dream Drive promotion every year to brighten up our customers’ festival season and give them another reason to shop with us.”



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ANNOUNCEMENT
Announcement of Capital Reduction
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In brief

NEW DELHI



INDIA'S 2020/21 FISCAL DEFICIT AT 9.3 PER CENT OF GDP

India's federal fiscal deficit for 2020/21 that ended on March 31 stood at 18.21 trillion rupees (\$251 billion), or 9.3 per cent of country's gross domestic product (GDP), government data showed on Monday.

Net tax receipts were 14.24 trillion rupees, while total expenditure was 35.11 trillion rupees, the data showed.

On February 1, the government revised its fiscal deficit target for 2020/21 to 9.5 per cent of GDP, instead of its original target of 3.5 per cent of GDP as the coronavirus pandemic led to lower tax collection and higher spending. — Reuters

ATHENS



GREECE RETAIL SALES FALL FURTHER

Greece retail sales declined further in March, data released by the Hellenic Statistical Authority showed on Monday.

Retail sales volume decreased 0.9 per cent year-on-year in March, following a 2.8 per cent fall in April. Excluding auto fuel, retail sales fell 2.6 per cent annually in March, following 1.6 per cent decrease in the previous month.

On a monthly basis, retail sales volume grew 0.6 per cent in March, after 1 per cent fall in the preceding month.

Data showed that retail turnover increased 3 per cent annually in March and gained 0.2 per cent from the previous month. — dpa

ROME



ITALY CONSUMER PRICES INCREASE IN MAY

Italy's consumer prices increased in May, preliminary estimates from the statistical office Istat showed on Monday.

Consumer prices increased 1.3 per cent yearly in May, following a 1.1 per cent rise in April. Economists had forecast a rise of 1.0 per cent.

On a month-on-month basis, consumer prices remained unchanged in May.

Economists had expected a 0.4 per cent rise. The core inflation remained unchanged at 0.3 per cent in May.

Inflation, based on the harmonised index of consumer prices, grew to 1.3 per cent in May from 1.0 per cent April. This was in line with economists' expectation. — Reuters

OECD sees higher world GDP growth but fears 'headwinds'

PARIS: The OECD raised its 2021 global GDP growth forecast on Monday, but warned that "too many headwinds persist" as not enough Covid vaccines are reaching emerging economies and markets worry about inflation.

The world economy will expand by 5.8 per cent this year, the highest since 1973 and up from a previous estimate of 5.6 per cent, the Paris-based Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development said in a report.

Most economies should return to their 2019, pre-pandemic levels next year, the OECD said.

This follows a massive global recession last year that was caused by lockdowns and travel curbs imposed by governments to slow the spread of Covid-19.

"It is with some relief that we can see the economic outlook brightening, but with some discomfort that it is doing so in a very uneven way", OECD chief Laurence Boone said in the report.

The recovery is uneven so far, with the United States and China returning to pre-pandemic levels and forecast to have much stronger growth than other major economies such as Japan and Germany.

While the US and South Korea are back to their pre-pandemic income levels, it could take an additional year for much of Europe and three to five years for Mexico and South Africa to catch up.



Shipping containers are unloaded from ships at a container terminal in Los Angeles, California. — Reuters

The 38-nation organisation, whose members account for 60 per cent of global gross domestic product, applauded the rapid reaction of governments to prop up the economy.

"Never in a crisis has policy support — be it health, with the record speed of vaccine development, monetary, fiscal or financial — been so swift and effective", Boone said.

"Yet, too many headwinds persist", she warned.

Boone said it was "very disturbing" that not enough vaccines were reaching emerging and low-income economies.

"This is exposing these economies to a fundamental threat because they have less policy capacity to support activity than advanced economies", she

said.

The warning comes as the emergence of more contagious coronavirus variants has raised concerns around the world, with India battling a strain that has caused a surge in cases and deaths.

"As long as the vast majority of the global population is not vaccinated, all of us remain vulnerable to the emergence of new variants", Boone said.

New lockdowns would hurt confidence while companies, which are saddled with more debt than before the pandemic, could go bankrupt, Boone said.

The OECD's outgoing secretary-general, Angel Gurría, called for a multilateral approach to put an end to the pandemic.

"Effective vaccination programmes in many countries has meant today's Economic Outlook is more promising than at any time since the start of this devastating pandemic", he said.

"But for millions around the world getting a jab still remains a distant prospect. We urgently need to step up the production and equitable distribution of vaccines", said Gurría, who will be succeeded by Australian Finance Minister Mathias Cormann on Tuesday after 15 years on the job.

Gurría expressed confidence, meanwhile, that negotiations to establish a global minimum corporate tax — championed by the United States — could be wrapped up by a G20 meeting in October. — AFP

China's factory activity grows at slightly slower pace in May

BEIJING: China's factory activity growth slowed slightly in May as raw materials costs grew at their fastest pace in over a decade, weighing on the output of small and export-oriented firms.

The official manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) inched lower to 51.0 in May, against analyst expectations that it would remain unchanged from April at 51.1, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed on Monday.

The official PMI has stood above the 50-point mark that separates growth from contraction for over a year.

While the Chinese economy has largely shaken off the gloom from the Covid-19 pandemic, officials warn the foundations for the recovery are not yet secure amid problems like higher raw material costs and the pandemic situation overseas.

Iris Pang, chief economist for Greater China at ING, said in a note that "external demand will likely remain flat" as economic recoveries in the United States and parts of Europe are likely to be "offset by increasing Covid cases in Asean, which is the biggest trade partner of China."

— Reuters



A man works at a steel factory in Sichuan province, China. — Reuters

How are robots redefining education?

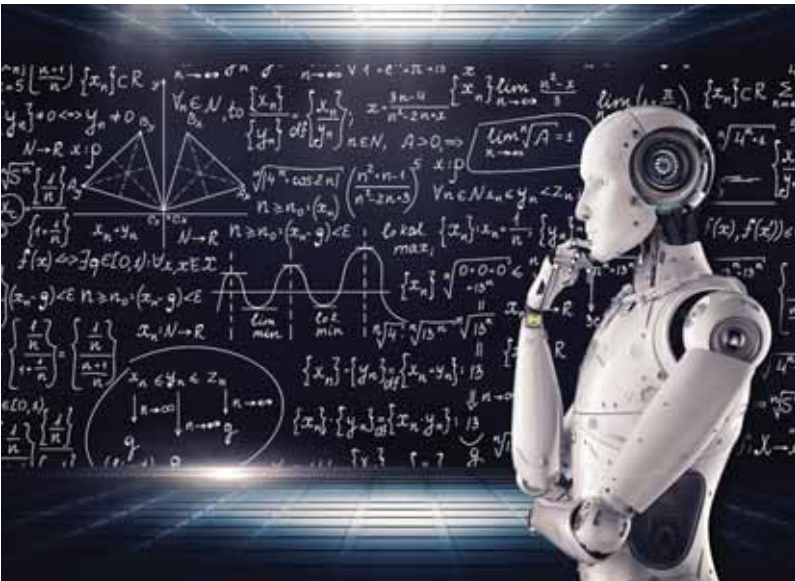


PAVEL MAKAREVICH

Technological advancements like robotics and artificial intelligence (AI) have transformed the workplace in the twenty-first century. It is challenging to manage our day-to-day activities without software, algorithms, or computers in today's era. The global education system has also gone through several changes over the years.

Not long ago, someone who needed information or needed to write a paper had to visit the library. However, today, almost every piece of information is readily available and accessible, thanks to the Internet. Our educational methods are evolving, as are our tools; robots are increasingly becoming part of the classroom environment.

Advanced technologies and globalisation are pushing the education sector towards a sustainable and equitable future. Future growth in the education sector is achievable through the collaboration of humans and robots.



A classic example is an international school in India that introduced humanoid robots to teach students and work alongside teachers. Under this collaborative learning model, the robot took over the responsibility of providing knowledge-based content, which teachers used to achieve by spending 90 per cent of their time on Google.

This gave teachers plenty of time to concentrate on mentoring the students, offering emotional support and care that a machine cannot provide. The collaboration between humans and robots helped bridge the gap between efficient learning and comprehensive guidance. Several schools across the world have already started to test these robots in a classroom setting. Some

experts have predicted that within 10 years, encountering robots in schools would be a common phenomenon worldwide.

The education sector presents an excellent potential for robotics and its implementation to make the most positive impact. Working with robots can improve educational programs' quality, act as an effective tool for STEAM education (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Math), encourage special education, and improve educational outcomes. It can also help enhance cognitive skills like critical thinking and problem-solving at a very early stage.

Robots can be programmed to assess students' growth against personal goals and measure their success by tracking annual

progress reports and targeted benchmarks. Teachers can gather valuable data about students with the help of robots and help them set their actionable learning goals.

One such famous humanoid robot is NAO, which caters to the needs of students and teachers in over 6,000 academic institutes in more than 70 countries across the globe.

It is employed as a teaching assistant where the teacher-student ratio is small. Its visual and intuitive interface simplifies content development, allowing personalised teaching activities on a one-to-one basis or a small group.

NAO can easily create an empathetic link with the students and teachers with its human-like appearance and humanoid behaviours. The versatile nature of NAO allows academic institutions to expand their basic curriculum by introducing STEAM education and language learning to children at a very early stage.

Pepper and NAO can also be effective tools in promoting IEP (Individualised Education Programme) for students with determination. NAO's neutral expression can be therapeutic for special needs children and help boost their confidence and social skills.

An Australian study revealed that when students engage with humanoid robots, it enhances

their curiosity and enables critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication skills. Teachers have also observed that a student's coding skills automatically expand beyond the expected level as they directly interact with electrical and mechanical processes and procedures.

Another exciting aspect of robotics' demand is the assistance it offers by video interactions to homeschooled students or those who cannot attend a school. Double 3 is a two-wheeled self-driving video conferencing robot that revolutionises how you learn remotely. By providing students and teaching staff a physical presence where they cannot be in person, Double 3 helps them feel more connected to their classroom.

Over 13,000 humanoid robots have already been deployed in various schools and universities around the world. This number is projected to grow further in the coming years. The next step will be assessing how far robotics can be integrated into our educational system to ensure that it operates in sync with humans. As the technological world unveils innovations daily, it would be fair to conclude that the education sector will continue to benefit from robotics and AI.

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