

Taliban told to adopt Afghan ceasefire

Qatar called on the Taliban to adopt a ceasefire and reduce escalation on Saturday as the group's lightning advance across Afghanistan entered a decisive phase. Doha has facilitated on and off meetings between the militants and the Afghan government for months, with little sign of progress as the Taliban presses its rout of government forces. **DETAILS ON P7**



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OMAN OBSERVER

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P10
FERNANDES, POGBA
SHINE AS FIVE-STAR
UNITED THRASH LEEDS



P13
DEDICATED ZONE
FOR AI ACTIVITIES
IN DUQM SEZ



P20
INSPIRED BY WAKAN,
FASHION DEDICATED TO
RESILIENCE OF WOMEN



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO
INDIAN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Ram Nath Kovind of India, on the occasion of his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health and happiness to the President and the friendly Indian people more progress and prosperity. — ONA

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His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Moon Jae-In of the Republic of Korea, on the occasion of his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health and happiness to the president and the friendly Korean people more progress and prosperity. — ONA



A 16-PAGE SUPPLEMENT ON
**INDIAN
INDEPENDENCE DAY**
IS DISTRIBUTED WITH
TODAY'S EDITION

INSIDE



JAPAN URGES EVACUATIONS
AS RAIN SPARKS FLOODS

P7



TERROR THREAT WARNING
AHEAD OF 9/11 ANNIVERSARY

P8

National plan seeks protection and preservation of natural resources

MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the Environment Authority, has submitted its sixth national report on biodiversity to the United Nations Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), within the framework of the national reporting on biodiversity status in the Sultanate which is considered among the basic obligations that should be met by the member states routinely

every two or three years.

In comments to Oman News Agency (ONA), Saleh bin Nagmoosh al Saadi, Director of Biodiversity Department at the Environment Authority, said that this report is one of the tools used for evaluating progress in the implementation of the national goals and International Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity

Targets. He noted that such reports are considered as one of the mechanisms for measuring success and challenges facing countries in the implementation of their national plans and programmes for biodiversity and help them identify the scientific and technical needs and build their capacities.

Al Saadi added that the Sultanate submitted its first report to the United

Nations Convention on Biological Diversity in 1998, after joining the convention on December 7, 1994 as per the Royal Decree No 119/94. All previous reports focused on the implementation of the national goals and global strategic plans prepared every 10 years by the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and are adopted by member states through the Conferences of the

Parties.

The officials stressed that Oman Vision 2040 addressed the axis of environmental protection and the preservation of natural resources as one of the government's priorities which aims to achieve sustainable development goals and protect people from harmful environmental effects, generate economic opportunities.

DETAILS ON P3

POPULATION DENSITY DECLINES IN MUSCAT

Oman's population
to increase to around
7-7.5 million by 2040

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@vinot_nair

While the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning has unveiled its mega plans for all major cities by 2040, in the short-term population density in Muscat Governorate, which is home to the capital saw a decline in 2020.

According to the data released by the National

Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the density of population in Muscat dropped from 363.3 people per square kilometre in 2018 to 355.4 per square km in 2019 and 326.5 per square km in 2020.

Overall, the population in Muscat fell from 1,454,518 in 2018 to 1,306,055 in 2020.

The population density in North Al Batinah which is home to Suhar, increased from 96.3 per square km in 2018 to 98.3 per square km in 2020.

TURN TO P2

3 PCR tests make travel a costly affair

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

Travel during a pandemic leaves a big hole in the budget with three coronavirus tests and institutional quarantine for families.

If one is flying back from abroad, one must undergo three PCR tests for Covid-19 costing RO 25 each; before departure, upon arrival and after 8 days of home or institutional quarantine.

For those families with more members, it is a huge burden on top of exorbitant air fares. The bill goes up if one is coming back to the Sultanate from a third country after 14 days of quarantine in a hotel.

Many citizens and residents are pleading with authorities for exempting or reducing the number of PCR tests at least for those who are fully vaccinated.

Awadh al Hashami called upon authorities to reconsider travel requirements and waive off tests for double-jabbed. They can do away with one test on arrival as they have already done that in the destination of origin.

"Such an exemption would encourage those who haven't taken



the vaccine so far. Many people find themselves obliged to pay for tests close to the ticket price which is a burden if they want to travel", Al Hashami said.

Social media is galore with demands for ease in test requirements as the Sultanate is preparing to open up air travel amid fall in coronavirus cases and increase in the vaccination of target groups and children.

TURN TO P3

Great Cities to greet visitors to Oman

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyp

Major cities come at the top of settlement hierarchy in the Sultanate, and that by 2040, Oman would have established future-proofed livable smart cities.

In line with Vision 2040, Oman is introducing Greater Cities concept as they play as major engines of growth thanks to their role as economic gateways and national centres.

"The significant economic and population growth in these cities will require expansion of their urban containment boundary so that they integrate with their neighbouring settlements", affirms Oman National Spatial Strategy report.

This, according to the report, in turn will benefit from the opportunities available in the larger cities, leading to the emergence of

The significant economic and population growth in these cities will require expansion of their urban containment boundary so that they integrate with their neighbouring settlements

OMAN NATIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY REPORT

Greater Cities concept, represented in Greater Muscat, Greater Salalah, Greater Suhar and Greater Nizwa.

"The cities will provide high-quality services, qualifying them to

be centres of innovation, creativity and advanced education, involving various sectors that provide services to a wider range of urban and rural areas", points out the report.

The report expects that smart, sustainable and vibrant cities and a vital countryside with a viable architecture that ensures high quality of life, work and leisure.

Greater Muscat is based on a diversified economic base. It is absorbed by Barka, and revolves around a finance, knowledge and innovation-based economy, including logistics and tourism sectors.

It is planned to be a major regional capital city, supported by growth of the knowledge and innovation economy, logistics, finance, tourism and the service sector.

TURN TO P2

25 REVERSE VENDING MACHINES



Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah), the nation's solid waste management entity, says it will oversee the roll-out of at least 25 reverse vending machines (RVMs) at key locations across Muscat Governorate this year – part of a pilot to weigh the feasibility of a broader deployment.

DETAILS ON P13

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 35°C Min 30°C SALALAH: Max 27°C Min 24°C NIZWA: Max 44°C Min 28°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 05:43 FAJR: 04:23 DHUHR: 12:16 ASR: 15:42 MAGHRIB: 18:45 ISHA: 20:00

MoSD to disburse cash assistance for affected families in Sur

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Social Development in cooperation with public and private establishments and individuals, this week starts disbursing cash assistance to families whose houses were affected by heavy rains and flash floods that hit the Wilayat of Sur in mid-July, according to Hasib bin Zahran al Amri, Director-General of Social Development in the governorates of North and South Al Sharqiyah and supervisor of the relief and sheltering sector.

The official affirmed that all families that were evacuated to sheltering centres have returned to their houses apart from only



two families who are temporarily living in rented houses until their houses are repaired.

Some 386 houses were directly affected by the heavy rain in Sur, Al Amri said adding that the

Ministry of Social Development, represented by the Directorate-General of Social Development in the governorates of North and South Al Sharqiyah, continue to work with public and private

partners and philanthropists to cope with the devastation wreaked by heavy rains and flash floods which occurred in the Wilayat of Sur in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

Health research driving improvement in the Sultanate’s medical sector

RAY PETERSEN
NIZWA, AUGUST 14

The Sultanate needs a strong, effective health research environment. The global Covid-19 pandemic's one positive outcome has been the recognition by smaller nations and economies, that medical assistance will always have strings attached.

Life expectancy in Oman last year was 78 years old, but as recently as only 1971, it was only 51 years of age! That was 1971... not 1871! Stefan J M Skrzywanek, Chief Operating Officer at KIMS Oman explained that “Medical research has been a significant contributing factor to this increase in life expectancy. It’s important to remember that, without medical research, we would be unable to treat common conditions such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, and vaccinating against measles, polio, and eradicating communicable diseases such as smallpox the scourge of the late 20th century. Medical research has also led to improvements in radiology and imaging to improve diagnostics and offer improved clinical outcomes for patients.”

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saedi, Minister of Health, in 2014 said, “Health research is among the most important pillars of any health system. The Ministry of Health is concerned to develop health research capacity and has taken effective steps to equip human resources with research capabilities and established systematic mechanisms for funding health research.” In the 2021, 2nd Edition of ‘Health Research Priorities,’ he reiterated the government’s commitment to research. This report identifies High body-mass index (BMI), High fasting plasma glucose, Dietary risks, High blood pressure, High total cholesterol, Occupational hazards and Tobacco, as current issues of greatest concern.

The critical elements of health research are knowledge, expertise, and funding, the concerns of Dr Fatma bint Mohammed al Ajmi, Under-Secretary for Administrative, Financial, and Planning Affairs, who favours pragmatic approaches that Oman must



take to national health research, saying “Without research, there can be no development. Without development, the organisation remains static. And if an organisation remains static, it becomes irrelevant.” Therefore, research plays a key role in the future development of healthcare provision, and as NHS (UK) Clinical Education Facilitator, Christian Nevin commented, “As healthcare providers, medical research ensures the care we provide to our patients is evidence based, safe, effective as possible.”

Head of the Emergency Department at KIMS Oman, Dr Amin Paracha explained, “The world of medicine relies on peer reviewed research from countless medical journals to direct diagnosis and treatment towards their best possible outcomes. Research methodologies, sample sizes, inclusion/exclusion criteria, gender, race, bias, and other variables are sampled for unbiased research accuracy. Even diverse cultures, traditions, environments, beliefs, genetic variables, diagnoses, and treatments may be assessed as specific to race, gender, age, genetic disposition. Hence it is crucial that the medical society of each country has a vigorous research culture and process to enable peer reviews, enable and encourage research and lead the healthcare sector towards a sustainable level of self-sufficiency.”

Recent high profile research, conducted in the Sultanate includes these contributions from among thousands published globally, by Omanis:

- **Adhra al Mawali, et al.** “Oman vision 2050 for health research: a strategic plan for the future based on the past and present experience.”



Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saedi



Dr Fatma bint Mohammed al Ajmi

- **Salam al Kindi, Nada al Umairi, and Anil Pathare.** “Prevalence of Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and HIV in Sickle Cell Disease Patients from Oman.”
- **Ibrahim al Busaidy.** “Diabetic foot disease in Oman: A call for more research.”
- **Fakhriya al Houqani, Ameena al Mukhaini, and Rahma al Kindi.** “Prevalence of depression among Oman medical specialty board (OMSB) residents.”
- **Nashat al Sukaiti et al.** “A Decade Experience on Severe

Combined Immunodeficiency Phenotype in Oman, Bridging to Newborn Screening.”

- **Mohammed al Rashdi, Bakathir Abdulaziz, and Khalid al Balushi.** “Drug prescribing practices in dental care patients at a Dental and Maxillofacial Surgery clinic in Oman.”
 - **Jawad al Lawati, et al.** “Cancer incidence in Oman (1996–2015).”
 - **Nasser al Balushi, et al.** “Prevalence and predictors of depressive symptoms among caregivers of children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder attending a tertiary care facility: a cross-sectional analytical study from Muscat.”
- The diversity of current Omani medical research is good. Self-sufficiency in health research may be a pipe dream, but active, committed research, as prioritised by the government, is ultra-positive. Experienced NHS registered nurse, Elisabetta Montessi, focused on the nursing perspective saying, “Research gives the health professionals the best tools and instruments to improve patient outcomes. But the hope it offers to patients is immeasurable.” The human body has challenged mankind from the time of Ibn Sina, through Pasteur, Curie, Freud, Fleming, Rontgen, and Barnard. Oman’s challenge now is to sustain that journey.



FROM PAGE 1

Great Cities to greet visitors to Oman

The city emerges as a pioneer at the level of the Gulf Cooperation Council due to its natural characteristics attracting people to live, work and recreate altogether.

“Allocating specific sites of a specific economic nature that have financial and regulatory incentives will enable them to attract investments and promote economic growth”, the report says.

In this direction the report names hubs such as business area in Ghala and the airport, the knowledge and innovation area in Al Khoudh and Halban, and the clean industries area like Al Misfah and Al Rusayl.

Urban transformation in the city areas include renewal areas (Ruwi and Muttrah), and redevelopment areas such as Ghala, enabling them to play their new role as a central business and commercial area characterised by high density and versatility.

Directing the development around integrated public transport stations, as the scope of influence of these stations has been limited to about 800 metres on the light metro track and the express bus route, and then around these stations will be a dense, multi-use development, including business and retail offices and housing.

Seven parks and longitudinal parks were identified in the valleys within the city of Muscat.

Greater Suhar, by including Liwa, becomes the main engine for growth in the governorate, with an emphasis on the manufacturing and logistics sector.

Greater Salalah, through its integration with Taqah, emerges as the economic nucleus of the governorate, especially with the presence of the port, airport, free zone and its environs Industrial and logistical activities.

The beautiful and green city of Salalah has a pleasant climate that attracts highly skilled workers, both nationals and expats, to boost the newly established high-tech industries in and near the port, the free zone and the airport.

The National Strategy seeks to protect and value the assets of cultural heritage aligned with the requirements of sustainable urban, social and economic planning.

Accordingly, Greater Nizwa, including Manah and Birkat Al Mouz, focuses on development in the supporting sectors for knowledge and innovation, such as higher education, research and services commercial, marketing, mining and tourism (natural and heritage).

Population density declines in Muscat

The population density in South Al Batinah, home to Barka, increased from 80 people per square km in 2018 to 87.6 per square km in 2020.

The population density in Dhofar Governorate, home to Salalah, dropped from 4.6 per square km in 2018 to 4.2 per square km in 2020.

Al Wusta which is home to the future city of Duqm saw an increase from 47,604 in 2018 to 52,451 in 2020.

Muscat is home to an expatriate population of 762,762 compared to 543,293 citizens. In Muscat, the Omani population is concentrated in Al Seeb (258,089) and Al Amerat (90,220), while the expatriate population is concentrated in Bausher (293,800), Seeb (221,804), and Muttrah (192,427).

As per the ministry’s estimates, the population of Oman will increase to around 7-7.5 million from current levels by 2040.

The Omani workforce will increase by 32 per cent to reach 3.9 million, including skilled workers. There will be significant growth in the private sector by 83 per cent, with an increase in annual GDP of 5 per cent, foreign direct investment (FDI) contribution to GDP will increase by 10 per cent.

There will be an increase in public spaces for recreation in urban areas by 10 square metres per capita, and an increase in demand for housing units to 911,400 and the total area of private areas is 73,544 square metres.

Muscat will emerge as a global city and Oman’s gateway to the

world by 2040 with a population of 2.5 million and a workforce of 2.3 million, of which the national workforce will be 1.7 million (75 per cent) and the rest expatriates (25 per cent).

By 2040, the population in South Al Batinah will be one million, of which 263,000 will be in Barka. The total workforce will be 551,000 (Omani and expatriate workforce constituting 50 per cent each).

North Al Batinah Governorate will be one of the main centres for international trade and will play a major role due to industries, availability of minerals, and agriculture. The governorate will have a population of 1.3 million, of which 550,00 will be in Suhar, with a workforce of 650,000 Omanis constituting 34 per cent of them.

Al Wusta Governorate will have a population of 250,000, of which Duqm will be home to 200,000 people. The total workforce will be 188,000 with expatriates constituting 91 per cent of them.

Dhofar Governorate will witness economic growth due to the economic zone and the airport. With a population of 600,000, Salalah will be home to around 480,000.

The total workforce will be 364,000, equally divided between Omanis and expatriates.

Al Dhahirah Governorate will witness economic growth in the areas of logistics, applied engineering, food processing, and agriculture. The total population will be 290,000, of which 130,000 will be in Ibri. Omanis will constitute 70 per cent of the total workforce in the governorate.

Vaccination: New expat target group from Monday



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Moving ahead with the national vaccination campaign, the newest groups in the target segment will get vaccinated from Sunday and Monday, according to the Ministry of Health (MoH) representative.

Hundreds of students of various international schools received their first dose of vaccine on Saturday morning.

Oman started giving vaccines to expatriates with the first phase in Masirah since Friday and several hundreds of expatriates, predominantly from south Asian countries, accepted the first dose of jabs. There are nearly 6,000 expatriate workforce and family members living in Masirah Island.

In the Governorate of Al Dhahirah, the vaccination campaign for foreign residents of the governorate will start on Sunday, August 15. This will cover employ-



ees of barber shops, women workers in the beauty salons, domestic workers and foreign workers in various farms of the governorate.

In the Al Batinah Governorate, the vaccination campaign for expat labour force will begin on Monday and includes barbers and others working in men's grooming centres, all women working in beauty salons and other centres meant

for women as well as employees of restaurants, coffee shops and other joints who are included in the first such category.

"We will begin vaccinating the new group of recipients from Sunday in Al Dhahirah and Monday in Al Batinah. The employees of restaurants, coffee shops, and other joints, workers at the barber shops and beauty salons are included in

the new category," Dr Lamia al Balushi, head of the epidemiological investigation team at the Directorate-General of Health Services in Muscat Governorate told the *Observer*.

The initiative for select expat category which will be held from 8 am on Monday at the Sohar Sport Complex is intended only for those falling into these target groups of residents. Other groups for the first dose of Covid-19 vaccination will be added in the coming days to get their jabs, according to her.

"Other target groups, such as people falling into the labour categories and other sectors which have close interaction with the customers or employers will be scheduled in the coming days," she added.

All in the aforesaid categories are advised to approach the centres with their valid resident cards or make an appointment for vaccine through the MoH link.



Three PCR tests make travel a costly affair

FROM PAGE 1

According to the decisions of the Supreme Committee, travellers coming to Oman must wear the Tarrasud+ bracelet and undergo three PCR tests. Omanis must quarantine at home and expatriates in institutions for 7 days.

Last Thursday, the Ministry of Health reported 224 new cases and 6 deaths. The total number of recoveries is 287,244 taking the recovery rate up to 96 per cent.

The National Immunisation Campaign is also in a full swing as 2,008,140 people have been vaccinated against Covid-19 in the Sultanate, representing 57 per cent of the targeted population.

The number of those who took the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine stood at 1,359,622 comprising 68 per cent.

The number of those who were fully vaccinated stood at 648,518 comprising 32 per cent, according to the latest updates.

SULTANATE SUBMITS BIODIVERSITY REPORT TO UNCBD

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In comments to Oman News Agency (ONA), Engineer Saleh bin Nagmoosh al Saadi, Director of Biodiversity Department at the Environment Authority, said that this report is one of the tools used for evaluating progress in the implementation of the national goals and International Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. He noted that such reports are considered as one of the mechanisms for measuring success and

challenges facing countries in the implementation of their national plans and programmes for biodiversity and help them identify the scientific and technical needs and build their capacities.

Al Saadi added that the Sultanate submitted its first report to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity in 1998, after joining the convention on December 7, 1994, as per the Royal Decree No 119/94. All previous reports focused on the implementation of the national goals and global strategic plans prepared every 10 years by the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and are adopted by member states through the Conferences of the Parties.

The officials stressed that Oman Vision 2040 addressed the axis of environmental protection and the preservation of natural resources as one of the government's priorities which



Oman Vision 2040 addresses the topic of environmental protection and the preservation of natural resources as one of the government's priorities which aims to achieve sustainable development goals and protect people from harmful environmental effects

aims to achieve sustainable development goals and protect people from harmful environmental effects, generate economic opportunities through benefiting from the environment and effectively managing the environment. He noted that among the most important



objectives of the biodiversity axis from the strategic perspective of the vision is the optimal and balanced use of natural resources and their sustainability in support of energy security and the national economy and reaching food and water security based on renewable resources

and advanced technologies and the optimal utilisation of the strategic location and biodiversity of the Sultanate.

As for the adoption of the national goals related to the conservation of biodiversity and the preservation of natural resources, Al Saadi said that

the draft national strategy and the biodiversity action plan for the Sultanate has been finalised in accordance with the International Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. However, owing to the CBD's trend during this year or next year to adopt a new ten-year strategic plan (the post-2020 global strategic plan), in addition to the Environment Authority's trend to develop Oman's environmental strategy, the Authority decided to include all national strategies and plans concerned with the environment into a single framework. He added that a national plan for biodiversity is devised every 10 years and that the next national plan will be prepared in line with the framework of the post-2020 global strategic plan for biodiversity. — ONA

COFFEE HAS CONQUERED OUR HOMES AND
OFFICES. WE SOCIALISE WITH OUR COLLEAGUES
AND BEAT THE STRESS OF OFFICE DURING THE
"COFFEE BREAK." AT HOME, IT BRINGS TOGETHER
FAMILY MEMBERS FOR CHIT-CHAT. THERE'S
NOTHING LIKE REMINISCING WITH FRIENDS
OVER A GOOD CUP OF COFFEE

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
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A good cup of coffee is an opportunity to break the ice and build bonds. It is part of the Arab tradition to welcome the guests with a cup of this thick brown liquid. In Oman, guests are offered welcome drink of qahwa with halwa or juicy dates.

Coffee is the most consumed drink aside from water. Tea lovers may beg to differ. For most people, coffee gets the day started and then continues to get them through the day.

Coffee's story starts in the lush highlands of Ethiopia centuries ago when a farmer found his goats super charged after eating coffee cherries.

Although they are called "coffee beans", the plant is not a legume, and the fruits of the coffee tree look more like cherries when they are first picked. The seeds inside are extracted and dried before the process of roasting turns them into the hard, nutty nodules we feed into our grinders.

Exactly how and when it spread beyond Ethiopia is still the subject of many legends. Perhaps, the Sufis of Yemen were the first truly devoted drinkers outside

BOND OF BEANS

Africa in the Middle Ages — where it was intimately connected with their mystic rituals.

Today, coffee has conquered our homes and offices. We socialise with our colleagues and beat the stress of office during the "coffee break." At home, it brings together family members for chit-chat. There's nothing like reminiscing with friends over a good cup of coffee.

Coffee drinkers love to socialise over their favourite drinks of choice, which expanded beyond simply brewed coffee, to also include specially-crafted espresso drinks. Coffee houses have been around for more than 500 years, but the explosion of coffee house locations since the 1990s is undeniable. Culture is inherently infused in coffee, and coffee houses drew intellectuals, writers, artists and the people. It stimulated discussions and meetings.

In general, the elderly is more inclined to Arabic coffee while the youth prefer espresso, cappuccino and teenagers cold and flavoured varieties.

In the Arab world, cafes have played a major role in shaping the literary and cultural movements, which was evident in the works of Nobel laureate and Egyptian author Naguib Mahfouz and fellow countryman Ihsan Abdel Quddous.

In Oman, cafes, since ancient times, have been the setting for social gatherings, meetings and strengthening relations between individuals. Before the pandemic struck, nobody missed a chance to discuss work and life over a cup of coffee and dates.

Mona Salem, a coffee lover, said, "It cannot be denied that the aroma of coffee lightens the mood and stimulates the mind. Many studies have proven the effect of caffeine has effect on the brain."

A Khanjari, who frequents cafes, said, "Enjoying a cup of coffee is a different experience. Youths prefer to browse Internet in trendy cafes despite high prices. I like going to cafés, where I meet my friends. We usually prefer to go to cafés near the sea."



TALES TREASURED FOREVER

LIJU CHERIAN

@lijucherianoman

“Whom do you like the most?
Your father or your mother?”

As children many of us would have faced this question umpteen times. The answer most of us would say is grandmother or grandfather, mostly the former. They always pampered us, chided us for our little foibles and transported us to the world of wonders and magic with their anecdotes and stories.

A columnist, lawyer and a few teachers in Muscat schools share their childhood stories and what they learned from grandparents.

Rachel MacIver, columnist: “The lesson I learnt in life was one cannot live your life worrying about what other people think of you. Others will always have an opinion of you, a judgement slathered in envy, fear, pity or plain ignorance.”

Rachel recalls her grandmother who came from the big city and her only crime was to fall in love with a gardener from a small island.

She arrived with her big city suitcases and her silk scarf tied firmly around her permed head, to my grandfather's rented cottage on the small Danish island of Thuro in 1932. Her leather suitcases were carried inside closely watched by the island's kids who had never seen anything so fancy before. They thought the queen was visiting.

“In the 60 years I lived on the island I never quite managed to lose my city accent,” my grandmother admitted “and the islanders never stopped teasing me about it either!” Even after becoming a mother, a grandmother and even a great grandmother, our family was always referred to as: ‘The Newcomers’ as her ways were different.



On the island you would just slip on a pair of wooden clogs when going shopping. My grandmother would rather be struck by lightning than being spotted leaving the house without wearing lipstick. The kids would stare and giggle, the women would tut and shake their heads and the men would secretly feel a bit of heart flutter when she walked by. But my grandmother would pretend not to notice.

My grandmother just tightened her head scarf a little tighter and walked with her head held high. She loved my grandfather, and he loved her.

Faiz Mohammad Khan, lawyer and husband of Sara Riaz Khan, visual artist, shares the dare devil stories of Princess Abida Sultan of Bhopal, her great aunt.

The lesson he learnt from this ‘achiever’ was from her diary which is documented in ‘Memoirs of a Rebel Princess’. What he remembers best was when she took him back to Bhopal to share family history and was the only

Stories we heard from our grandparents still soothe our inner turmoil and help us to negotiate the treacherous world. Recall those moments we spent with them just to flush out daily stress

time that he met his grandfather and great-grandmother as well.

Her paternal grandmother, Princess Abida Sultaan, was a wonderful storyteller with a great sense of humour. Wherever we met her, either in Malir, the home she built on the outskirts of Karachi when she moved to Pakistan or in London, she was full of fun and wisdom.

A self-described ‘rebel’, she defied all norms and would break any kind of tradition and was unstoppable.

My grandmother (respectfully called ‘huzoor’) was an excellent sportswoman, playing squash,

football, tennis, polo and hockey. She never allowed her gender to stand in her way or stop her from doing things.

Inspired by news of Amy Johnson and Lindberg's achievements, she became passionate about learning to fly. She learnt in secret at the Bombay and Calcutta flying clubs, as my great-grandfather had disapproved her from taking lessons. He thought it was too dangerous, and tracked her down and brought her back to Bhopal. However, she was determined to learn, as it was an exciting break from her daily routine. My grandmother eventually persuaded her father and continued with her lessons to become the second woman in South Asia to have a pilot's licence.

Another story she told us about was becoming a professional stunt driver.

A senior teacher Department of English, ISG, **Shubha Jose**, recalls her incredible days of childhood with her grandparents. She reminisces about how they

went out of their way to help a young pregnant woman who became an outcast due to leprosy, suffering near a bush. She was in labour and grandma offered help by tearing a portion of her mundu (traditional attire of Kerala) and kept her warm. After hours of pain, she gave birth to a boy which was handed to the Christian family after she passed away. Thus the Josephs were blessed with Hari who was always in tantrums with my grandma who hugged Hari and whispered, “Don't you dare leave me!”

“When I looked at Hari uncle, I saw him in tears but his eyes spoke volumes of immense love.”

Marifilis D'Souza, a kindergarten teacher in-charge at ISG, recalls her morals of not neglecting anyone who seeks help, or else one might lose them. She mentions the story the Crow called Cou and the Sparrow named Chiu. In the story, during heavy rains the crow seeks shelter at the home of the sparrow. The crow repeatedly knocks on the door but the sparrow was too busy feeding and taking care of her baby.

When the rains stopped, she went out in search of the crow, but couldn't find him. The sparrow couldn't see her friend anywhere and the crow never returned to the tree. The saddened sparrow realised that because of her negligence she had lost a true friend.

Ann Thomas, a secondary school English teacher, recalls the childhood summer vacation tales of her maternal grandmother in her ancestral home in Kerala. Her stories are still an antidote for her cousins as they continue to tread through life's unpredictable terrains. Her tale of the two adventurous frogs has been an inspiration and continues to spur her during the midst of challenges.

Philippines extends ban on travellers from Oman

MUSCAT: The Philippines has extended a ban on travellers from Oman and nine other countries to the end of August because of concerns posed by the highly contagious Delta variant of the coronavirus, the presidential spokesperson said on Friday.

President Rodrigo Duterte approved the recommendation of the coronavirus task force to extend the travel restrictions from August 16 to August 31, presidential spokesperson Harry Roque said in a statement.

As cases surge, more hospitals in the capital region have reported intensive care units, isolation beds and wards were nearing full capacity, and some have had to refuse new patients because of a lack of beds and ventilators.

The Philippine Embassy in Muscat recently arranged the second repatriation flight on August 10 for Filipino nationals in Oman affected by the travel in the Philippines.

The priority was given to those with medical conditions, and those who may need immediate medical care in the Philippines, pregnant women in their third trimester of pregnancy with a compelling reason to return to the Philippines, those who have been approved for the Ministry of Labour programme for the waiver of fines and penalties for the expatriate workers, provided that the departure from Oman is permanent, those who have been terminated from their employment, and those who have finished their employment.

ISM launches new initiative to equip students with entrepreneurial skills

MUSCAT: ISM Bridge, an endeavour of Indian School Muscat, seeks to empower students to become their own bosses and learn new skills. It is the new initiative to equip students with the skills they need to make a good difference in themselves and the world.

ISM BRIDGE (Business Research, Incubation, and Innovation Development Growth Entrepreneurship) aims to feed students' new ideas, equip them with abilities to develop entrepreneurial skills in young people, promote creativity and self-confidence, encourage creative start-ups and elevate the role of entrepreneurship in society and the economy. The school has made huge strides in bridging the ISM vision with Oman Vision 2040.

Chief guest Mohammed al Rasbi, Managing Director, Techween & OTF Accelerator programme and Entrepreneur, virtually unveiled ISM Bridge Logo on Zoom Platform. He was ecstatic to reveal the new logo, which was created by Tetala Satya Narayana Reddy of 12 F. The logo was designed exclusively to represent the ISM Bridge vision — Inspiration, Innovation and Incubation of ideas which are represented by the three high-rising I-s in the logo. Students, teachers and management are metaphorically represented as working together to achieve new heights of achievement. The exquisite bridge symbolises the core fulcrum of Indian School Muscat, which aspires to bring the students' ideas to life.



Guest of honour Dr Biswajit Saha, Director of Skill Education and Training at CBSE, virtually launched ISM Bridge website and delivered a keynote address in which he hailed the extraordinary efforts and initiatives of the school, particularly during this pandemic. He also asked parents and teachers to encourage the students so that they may use their creative brains to solve real-world challenges that are not covered in textbooks. And he advised parents to enable their wards to choose one skill topic from class nine.

During this event, Shreya Sunil, a talented student entrepreneur from 12 H, delivered a highly interesting and creative PowerPoint presentation on ‘CREATO’, which is the name of the chair that includes sensors to correct the postures of users when attending long online classes or

meetings. Moreover, this chair, which is developed and built with sensors, allows for automatic adjustment and might even be converted into a trolley.

She also mentioned that the product was environmentally friendly and that it was affordable to individuals of all income levels.

Sachin Toprani, President of the School Management Committee, and Principal Dr Rajeev Kumar Chauhan praised the student and promised her that the suggested plan will attract the investment she seeks and wished her a successful career.

Principals of other Indian Schools, vice-principals, heads of departments, teachers and other dignitaries witnessed the ceremony virtually and the same was livestreamed on YouTube for the parents, students and well-wishers.





Tender Announcement

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

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non- refundable)
14/2021	Providing and supplying prosthetic devices & aids for people with disabilities	All companies registered in general secretariat of tender board with supplying medical supplies grade Excellent or first or second or third or forth	Thursday 02/09/2021 02:00 PM	Thursday 23/09/2021 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 Sunday 15/08/2021.
- ❖ 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

Powerful earthquake strikes Haiti

PORT-AU-PRINCE/HAVANA: A major earthquake struck western Haiti on Saturday, likely causing high casualties and widespread disaster, the US Geological Survey said, and sending shock waves across the Caribbean, where people fled their homes for fear they might collapse.

The 7.2-magnitude earthquake struck 8 km (5 miles) from the town of Petit Trou de Nippes, about 150 km west of the capital Port-au-Prince, at a depth of 10 km, the USGS said.

That made the earthquake potentially bigger and shallower than the magnitude 7 earthquake that struck Haiti 11 years ago, killing tens if not hundreds of thousands of people, flattening buildings and leaving many homeless.

The US Tsunami Warning System issued a tsunami warning after the quake, lifting it shortly thereafter, although Haitian media outlets reported some people along the coast had already fled to the mountains.

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Haiti's Civil Protection service said on Twitter there were initial reports of likely casualties from its teams.

Images posted on social media — which Reuters was not immediately able to verify — showed homes and part of



a church in the nearby town of Jeremie reduced to rubble.

"In my neighbourhood, I heard people screaming. They were flying outside," said Port-au-Prince resident Sephora Pierre Louis, adding she was still in a state of shock. "At least they know to go

outside. In 2010, they didn't know what to do. People are still outside in the street." The earthquake comes as Haiti is already mired in intertwined political, humanitarian and security crises.

The government is in turmoil, a month after the assassination

of President Jovenel Moise, while swaths of the country are facing growing hunger and healthcare services are overwhelmed by Covid-19. Access to the southern region, where the quake struck, has been restricted by gang control of key areas.

"This country just never finds a break! Each year of mismanagement did not hurt but the cumulative effects made us vulnerable to everything," said Haitian entrepreneur Marc Alain Boucicault on Twitter. "Its going to take years to fix things and we have not even started!"

The quake was felt as far as Cuba and Jamaica although there were no reports of material damage, deaths or injuries there.

"Everyone is really afraid. It's been years since such a big earthquake," said Daniel Ross, a resident in the eastern Cuban city of Guantanamo.

He said his home stood firm but the furniture shook.

"I feel it, man. It wake me up. My roof kind of make some noise," said Danny Bailey, 49, in Kingston.

The European-Mediterranean Seismological Centre (EMSC) also reported a quake in the region, saying it was magnitude 7.6, while Cuba's seismological centre said it registered a magnitude of 7.4.

— Reuters

No survivors of Turkey fire-fighting plane crash, floods kill 44



This videograb image shows a general view of the wreckage of a Russian Bombardier Be-200 aircraft at Kahramanmaraş, southern Turkey. — AFP

ISTANBUL: Turkey battled disaster on two fronts on Saturday with eight people dying in the crash a fire-fighting aircraft and rescuers racing to find survivors of flash floods in the north that have killed at least 44.

In Moscow, the defence ministry said all eight people on the Russian plane had perished on the fire-fighting mission.

The air tragedy came just as Turkey was gaining control over hundreds of wildfires that killed eight people and destroyed swathes of forest along the scenic southern coast.

Scientists believe such natural disasters are becoming more intense and frequent because of global warming caused by polluting emissions.

Turkey's official disaster

agency AFAD said teams were combing through the rubble of dozens of homes that collapsed due to the floods that hit Black Sea regions on Wednesday after heavy rains.

In Moscow, news agencies quoted the defence ministry as saying five Russian servicemen and three Turkish citizens were on board the Russian Be-200 plane that went down around 1330 GMT.

Television footage showed a column of smoke rising from the remote mountainous zone in the south of the country.

Turkey's defence ministry issued a statement saying the aircraft on loan from Russia had taken off from Adana to help extinguish fires burning at Kahramanmaraş. — AFP

West Baghdad without water after 'attack' on power grid

BAGHDAD: Baghdad's west has been cut off from the city's water network after the IS group attacked an electricity pylon powering a pumping station, authorities and residents said on Saturday.

Unclaimed attacks on Iraq's electricity network have been increasing since the start of summer, at a time when the country is facing severe power shortages.

Authorities normally accuse "terrorists" of being behind the attacks, without identifying a particular group.

But the Iraqi army said in a statement on Saturday that IS fighters were behind an "attack" on Friday on a pylon in Tarmiya, north of the capital.

The pylon supplies the Tarmiya pumping station which serves Karkh, the city's west and home to several million people. Baghdad announced victory over the Islamic State group in 2017, though troops continue to fight sleeper cells. — AFP

Lebanon army seizes pumps

BEIRUT: Lebanon's army on Saturday seized fuel from gas stations to curb hoarding amid crippling shortages as the central bank chief stood firm on his decision to scrap fuel subsidies.

As Lebanon's economic crisis deepened, one of the country's top private hospitals said it could close due to power outages caused by shortages of diesel.

Lebanon is grappling with a financial crisis branded by the World Bank as one of the planet's worse since the 1850s.

Foreign currency reserves are fast depleting, forcing the central bank to scale-down funding for imports in an effort to shore up the little money Lebanon has left.

The Lebanese pound has lost more than 90 per cent of its value on the black market, and 78 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line.

On Wednesday central bank chief Riad Salameh said he would scrap fuel subsidies to ease pressure on foreign reserves which have fallen to \$14 billion.

His decision sparked panic, with huge queues forming outside bakeries and petrol stations as Lebanese — 78 per cent of whom live below the poverty line — struggled to stock up.

Salameh told a radio station on Saturday he would not back down.

"I will not review the removal of subsidies on fuel unless the use of



Lebanese soldiers at a petrol station in Beirut on Saturday. — AFP

compulsory reserves is legalised," by a parliamentary vote, he said.

Fuel shortages have led to power cuts lasting more than 22 hours a day, forcing the closure of businesses.

Decrying an "imminent disaster", the American University of Beirut Medical Centre said it would be forced to cease operations within 48 hours.

Without fuel, "forty adult patients and fifteen children living on respirators will die immediately," it warned in a statement.

"One hundred and eighty people suffering from renal failure

will die poisoned after a few days... Hundreds of cancer patients, adults and children, will die in subsequent weeks."

Fuel importers blame the crisis on a delay by the central bank in opening credit lines to fund imports.

Salameh on Saturday accusing importers and distributors of hoarding fuel to sell at higher prices in the black market, or across the border in Syria.

With the situation rapidly deteriorating, the army raided gas stations on Saturday and seized fuel to distribute to desperate customers. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TUNIS

Aid ship, Tunisian navy save 200 migrants

The private rescue ship *ResQ People* picked up 85 migrants in the Mediterranean on Friday while the Tunisian navy saved 98 others.

The migrants saved by *ResQ People* were on a small wooden boat and were in distress, the aid organisation which runs the ship said, adding that the operation took place in the Libyan search and rescue zone. The *ResQ People* used to belong to the Germany-based Sea Eye rescue group. The ship formerly sailed under the



name Alan Kurdi, in memory of a dead Syrian boy who washed up on a Turkish beach.

Sea Eye sold the ship to ResQ to raise funds for another boat.

In the central Mediterranean, private organisations repeatedly rescue migrants at sea.

TEHRAN

Iran orders travel ban and shutdown

Iran is to impose a one-week lockdown and a ban on road travel amid a fifth Covid-19 surge in the worst-hit country in the Middle East, state television reported on Saturday.

All non-essential businesses and offices will have to close under the nationwide lockdown from Monday to August 21, in an effort to curb the highly contagious Delta variant.

Authorities are also imposing a driving ban from Sunday until August 27, except for essential



vehicles. "All roads will be closed except for trucks carrying food and essential goods and ambulances. This traffic ban will be very strictly imposed," Alireza Raisi, spokesman for the national coronavirus task force, told the television.

CAIRO

Egypt gets new AstraZeneca vaccine batch

Egypt received a new batch of about 1.7 million AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine doses through the global COVAX initiative, the health ministry said late on Friday.

The new shipment, the third of its kind, brings the total number of AstraZeneca shots received by Egypt via COVAX to about 4.3 million doses.

COVAX was established by the Geneva-based GAVI vaccine alliance and the World Health Organisation (WHO)



for the equitable distribution of vaccines.

Egypt has also received shipments of the Sputnik, Sinopharm, Sinovac and Johnson & Johnson shots. It also recently began locally producing Sinovac's Covid-19 vaccines.

In brief

■ BEIJING



CHINA COVID CASES CONTINUES TO FALL

China on Saturday reported 30 new locally transmitted Covid-19 cases for August 13, down for the fourth consecutive day, offering fresh signs that a month-long outbreak may be waning.

The country reported 66 coronavirus infections in the mainland, down from 99 a day earlier, according to the National Health Commission. There were 36 imported cases.

The number of locally transmitted cases fell from 47 a day earlier to the lowest since July 30. China reported 19 new asymptomatic coronavirus cases, which it does not classify as confirmed infections, compared with 34 a day earlier.

■ KUALA LUMPUR



PM'S OFFER FOR SUPPORT REJECTED

Malaysia's opposition parties and a key ally have rejected a plea for support from embattled Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin in exchange for political and electoral reforms, urging him to resign immediately.

Muhyiddin's grip on power has been shaky since coming to office in March 2020 with a slim majority and unstable coalition. He has defied mounting calls to quit, with the pressure reaching fever pitch this month after some lawmakers in his ruling coalition withdrew support. In a televised address on Friday, Muhyiddin acknowledged for the first time that he lacks a majority and urged opposition lawmakers to back him in a confidence vote, in a bid to shore up his government and prevent an election during a Covid-19 resurgence.

■ MANILA



'NO CORRUPTION IN \$1.3 BILLION PANDEMIC FUNDS'

The Philippine health minister, facing questions over more than \$1 billion in Covid-19 spending, denied on Saturday that any money was "stolen", as his department vowed to account for every peso.

The country is battling one of Asia's worst coronavirus outbreaks, and the spread of the virulent Delta variant is overwhelming hospitals and healthcare workers.

"You will be assured that no money went into corruption. None was stolen. I am sure of that", Health Secretary Francisco Duque told DZMM radio on Saturday.

Afghan president vows to stop bloodshed as Taliban fighters close in on capital Kabul

KABUL: Afghanistan's beleaguered president vowed on Saturday to prevent further bloodshed, as Taliban fighters closed in on Kabul after routing his armed forces over the past 10 days.

In a recorded address to the nation — his first since the Taliban launched their sweeping offensive — Ashraf Ghani said he wanted to stop the violence "as a historic mission".

"I will not let the imposed war on people cause more deaths", he said, appearing sombre and sitting before an Afghan flag.

The president gave no hint he would resign or take responsibility for the calamitous military collapse, but said the armed forces could be "remobilized" and consultations were taking place to try to help end the war.

But he offered few specifics on what his administration was planning, with government control over Afghanistan all but collapsed.

Ghani's speech came as US Marines were sent in to oversee an evacuation of embassy employees and thousands of Afghans, and their families, who fear retribution for working for the United States during its 20-year occupation.

With the country's second-and third-largest cities having fallen



Internally displaced Afghan families, who fled from the northern province due to battle between Taliban and Afghan security forces, sit in the courtyard of the Wazir Akbar Khan mosque in Kabul on Saturday. — AFP

into Taliban hands, Kabul has effectively become the besieged last stand for government forces who have offered little or no resistance elsewhere.

As the Taliban closed in on Kabul, panicked residents formed long lines outside banks, hoping to withdraw their savings. Some branches appeared to have already run of cash.

Insurgent fighters are now camped just 50 kilometres (30

miles) away from Kabul, with the United States and other countries scrambling to airlift their nationals out of the Afghan capital ahead of a feared all-out assault.

Heaving fighting was also reported around Mazar-i-Sharif, an isolated holdout in the north where warlord and former vice president Abdul Rashid Dostum had gathered his virulently anti-Taliban militia. The only other cities of any significance not to be

taken yet were Jalalabad, Gardez, and Khost — Pashtun-dominated and unlikely to offer much resistance now.

In Kabul, US Embassy staff were ordered to begin shredding and burning sensitive material, as the first American troops from a planned 3,000-strong re-deployment started arriving to secure the airport and oversee evacuations.

A host of European countries

— including Britain, Germany, Denmark and Spain — all announced the withdrawal of personnel from their respective embassies on Friday.

For Kabul residents and the tens of thousands who have sought refuge there in recent weeks, the overwhelming mood was one of confusion and fear.

Muzhda, 35, a single woman who arrived in the capital with her two sisters after fleeing nearby Parwan, said she was terrified for the future. "I am crying day and night", she told AFP.

"I have turned down marriage proposals in the past... If the Taliban come and force me to marry, I will commit suicide."

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he was "deeply disturbed" by accounts of poor treatment of women in areas seized by the Taliban, who imposed an ultra-austere brand of Islam on Afghanistan during their 1996-2001 rule.

The scale and speed of the Taliban advance have shocked Afghans and the US-led alliance that poured billions into the country after toppling the insurgents in the wake of the September 11 attacks nearly 20 years ago. — AFP

Japan urges evacuations as torrential rain sparks floods and landslides



Local residents walk in a road flooded by heavy rain in Kurume, Fukuoka prefecture on Saturday. — Reuters

TOKYO: Nearly two million people were urged to seek shelter as torrential rain triggered floods and landslides in western Japan on Saturday, leaving at least one dead and three missing.

Authorities in seven regions, mainly in the northern part of Kyushu island, issued their highest evacuation alert as the weather agency reported unprecedented levels of rain in the area. Under the non-compulsory alert, more than 1.8 million residents have been asked to leave their homes immediately, according to public broadcaster NHK.

TV footage showed rescuers towing residents through submerged streets on a lifeboat in the town of Kurume in Fukuoka, while a man who was rescued in neighbouring Saga prefecture said he had never seen rain like it.

"This situation is different", he told NHK. "I've had a similar experience before, but (this time) I was scared."

The government said 14 rivers had burst their banks and 14 landslides had occurred, mainly in western Japan.

A 59-year-old woman died and two of her family members were missing after a landslide destroyed two houses in Unzen, Nagasaki, a local official said.

"More than 150 troops, police and firefighters were dispatched to the site for rescue operations", Takumi Kumasaki told AFP.

"They are carefully searching for the missing residents, while watching out for further mudslides as the heavy rain continues."

A 76-year-old man was also missing in Kumamoto after he tried to secure his fishing boat at a surging river, a regional official told AFP.

Downpours are forecast for several more days over a large swathe of the country.

Scientists say climate change is intensifying the risk of heavy rain in Japan and elsewhere, because a warmer atmosphere holds more water. "Unprecedented levels of heavy rain have been observed," Yushi Adachi, a meteorological agency official, told reporters in Tokyo.

— Agencies

Sydney lockdown fines hiked

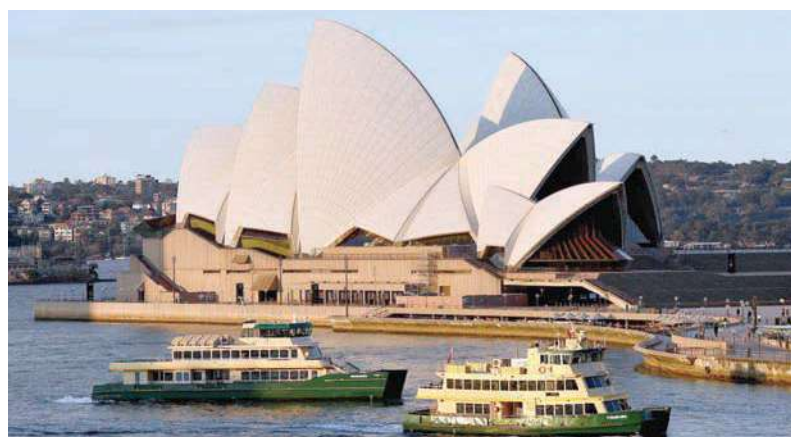
SYDNEY: On-the-spot fines for people breaking lockdown rules in Sydney and the rest of its home state of New South Wales have been raised sharply to as much as A\$5,000 (\$3,700) as the state logged a record jump in daily new Covid-19 infections.

State police will fine people for breaching stay-at-home orders or for lying to contract-tracing officials, said state Premier Gladys Berejiklian. Previously breaching quarantine orders had carried a A\$1,000 fine.

"We have to accept that this is the worst situation New South Wales has been in since day one. And it's also regrettably, because of that, the worst situation Australia's been in", she told a news conference.

Locally transmitted infections surged by a record 466 over the previous 24 hours, eclipsing the previous daily high of 390 set on Friday. Four deaths were recorded on Saturday, taking the state's total in the latest outbreak to 42.

It is becoming increasingly unlikely Sydney will end its



Near-empty ferries pass in front of the Opera House in Sydney on Saturday. — AFP

nine-week lockdown on August 28 as planned. Authorities had been talking about easing some restrictions if enough people are vaccinated and case numbers fall.

"We will get through this, but September and October are going to be very difficult", Berejiklian said.

"This is literally a war, and we've known we've been in a war for some time, but never to this extent."

Hundreds more defence personnel will be deployed next week to Sydney to help enforce

the lockdown, with authorities particularly concerned about the spread of the virus to several regional towns.

Stay-at-home orders will also be introduced for regional areas not currently in lockdown on Saturday and a new A\$3,000 fine will apply to people entering regional areas without an official permit.

The permit will only be granted for certain reasons including authorised work, property inspections or urgent work repairs on a second home. — Reuters

■ PAKISTAN MARKS INDEPENDENCE DAY



A girl poses with flags of Pakistan at the tomb of national poet Allama Mohammad Iqbal during Pakistan's 75th Independence Day celebrations in Lahore on Saturday. — AFP

Britain to cut price of Covid tests for arrivals after criticism

LONDON: The cost of travel tests from the British National Health Service (NHS) Test and Trace for people who arrive from abroad is to be cut, the Health Department has said.

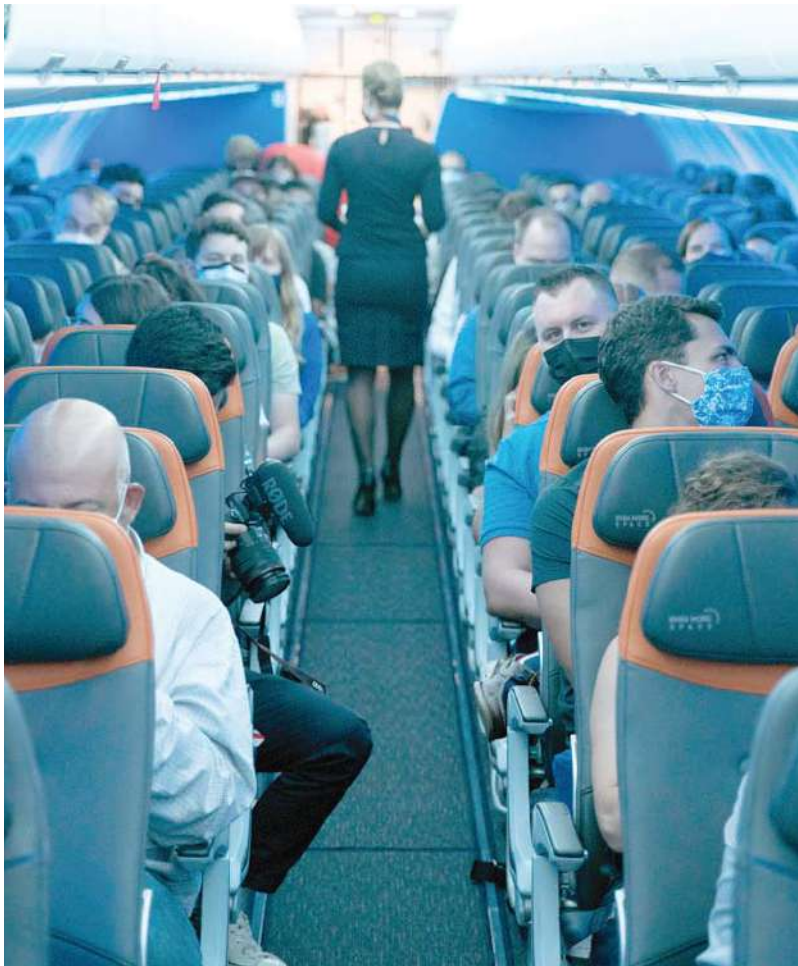
It is to go down from £88 (\$122) to £68 for UK travellers who have come from green list countries, or those who have arrived from amber list countries and have been fully vaccinated.

The cost for people arriving from amber list countries who are not fully vaccinated is to go down from £170 to £136 for two tests.

Health Secretary Sajid Javid also said there will be a 10-day internal review starting this weekend of the pricing and standards of service from providers of the tests that are to be taken by those who have returned to England on days two and eight of their arrival from abroad.

Javid said that the cost of PCR testing can be “a barrier” to people who were looking forward to taking a summer holiday.

Consumers and families need to be protected from “exploitative practices,” according to Javid, who said he wants to ensure that high quality tests are available at a reasonable price. NHS Test and Trace advertises these tests alongside private companies’ testing packages and they are available to buy to fulfil the UK government’s testing requirements for international travel.



Passengers wearing protective masks are seen aboard before a flight to London at JFK International Airport in the Queens borough of New York City. — Reuters

Javid said he has ordered his department to urgently review the list of private providers on gov.uk to ensure pricing is clearer and transparent.

“Any provider found to be misleading the public will be kicked off. Too many providers are acting like cowboys and that needs to stop. The public should

be allowed to enjoy their summer holidays without having to face excessive costs or anxiety.”

Airport Operators Association Chief Executive Karen Dee, who described the cost of testing for travel as “sky-high,” said: “However, this small reduction is little more than tinkering and does not go anywhere near far enough

to meaningfully cut the costs of travel.”

She called on the government to “get a grip on testing and replace costly PCR tests with more affordable rapid tests for low-risk countries and bring international travel in line with the rest of the economy.”

The price reduction comes as the Competition and Markets Authority(CMA) said it is looking at whether there are any “immediate actions “the government can take amid concerns about the high cost of PCR tests for travel abroad.

The competition watchdog had previously confirmed it will look into issues around testing, following a request from Javid, but said it will give its recommendations “within the next month.”

Now the watchdog has said it is also looking at “steps that could be considered in the interim” to address what it described as a “particularly pressing issue.”

The CMA said it is looking at three areas; whether individual PCR providers may be breaching their obligations under consumer law and should be subject to enforcement action; whether there are structural problems in the market for PCR tests, affecting price or reliability; and whether there are any immediate actions that the government can take in the meantime. — dpa

New terror threat warning ahead of 9/11 anniversary



The 9/11 Tear Drop Memorial in Bayonne, New Jersey. — AFP

WASHINGTON: The US Department of Homeland Security issued a new terrorism threat advisory on Friday ahead of the anniversary of the September 11 terror attacks and amid a resurgence of the coronavirus pandemic.

The National Terrorism Advisory System Bulletin said the United States faces a “heightened threat environment” from both domestic terrorists “and those inspired or motivated by foreign terrorists and other malign foreign influences.”

It cited increased use of “online forums to influence and spread violent extremist narratives and promote violent activity.”

The new advisory updated a January alert following the attack on the US Congress by

supporters of then-president Donald Trump, when DHS said the country faced “increasingly complex and volatile” threats from anti-government and racially motivated extremists, often stirred up by online influence from abroad.

The bulletin had already been amended in May, with DHS warning violent extremists could exploit the easing of Covid-19 restrictions to conduct attacks.

“Extremists may seek to exploit the emergence of Covid-19 variants by viewing the potential re-establishment of public health restrictions across the United States as a rationale to conduct attacks,” the DHS advisory said, adding that “pandemic-related stressors... may contribute to more violence this year.” — AFP

BBC reporter says Russia told her never to return

MOSCOW: A BBC journalist said on Saturday that Russia was expelling her and had told her she could never return in “devastating” treatment showing the country she reported on for years was turning inwards.

In an unusual move at a time of already poor bilateral ties, Russia said Sarah Rainsford — one of the British broadcaster’s two English-language Moscow correspondents — was being sent home after London’s refusal to give visas to Russian journalists.

In a BBC interview, Rainsford said she was shocked by the decision which she felt was part of a wider diplomatic game at a time when Russia’s ties with the West were on the slide.

The move not to renew her Russian visa beyond the end of this month looked like a technical one, but was not, she said.

“I am being expelled,” she said. “I have been told (by Russian officials) that I cannot come back ever. It’s devastating personally.”

Rainsford, who is on a second stint in Moscow, said



It’s another really bad sign about the state of affairs in Russia. Another sign that Russia is closing in on itself

SARAH RAINSFORD

she had lived for almost one third of her life in Russia and had dedicated years to studying it. Her departure before the end of this month follows a period before parliamentary elections in September when the authorities in Russia have cracked down on Russian-language media at home that they deem backed by malign foreign interests intent on stoking unrest. — Reuters

US allows Covid boosters for those with weak immunity to fight surge

WASHINGTON: The United States authorised an extra dose of Covid-19 vaccine for people with weakened immune systems overnight Thursday to Friday, as the country struggles to thwart the Delta variant.

Emergency use authorisation for a third injection of Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines was granted by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulator.

“The country has entered yet another wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the FDA is especially cognizant that immunocompromised people are particularly at risk for severe disease,” said acting FDA Commissioner Janet Woodcock in



Caitlyn Jendreas, 15, wears a protective face mask amid the coronavirus pandemic while receiving her second dose of the Pfizer vaccine from pharmacist Shane Dixon at the Watson Pharmacy in Fordyce, Arkansas, US. — Reuters

a statement.

The FDA said the additional dose was for solid organ transplant recipients or those with equivalent

weakened immune systems.

US health authorities had been debating whether a third dose may be required, following a similar

move by Israel.

Some media reports suggest that one million Americans may have had unauthorised third doses in an attempt to increase protection against the coronavirus.

“Individuals who are fully vaccinated are adequately protected and do not need an additional dose of Covid-19 vaccine at this time,” Woodcock said.

A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advisory committee voted in favour of the decision on Friday, with the agency subsequently publishing its recommendations for the administration of a third dose for use by healthcare professionals.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

STRASBOURG

New protests across France over Covid rules

Resentment over stricter Covid-19 rules in France has driven many people onto the streets for the fifth weekend in a row.

The authorities expected a total of around 250,000 demonstrators nationwide on Saturday, more than twice the number attending the protests when they began in mid-July.

The participants’ anger is directed against compulsory vaccinations for health workers and strict new rules about who



can enter various institutions.

People must present a health passport when going to restaurants or cinemas, travelling by long-distance train and, in some places, when entering shopping centres.

WARSAW

Poland limits restitution claims

Poland’s president has decided to sign a bill that would set limits on the ability of Jews to recover property seized by Nazi German occupiers and retained by post-war communist rulers, a move likely to fuel tensions with Israel and the United States.

“I made a decision today on the act, which in recent months was the subject of a lively and loud debate at home and abroad,” Andrzej Duda said. “After an in-depth analysis, I have decided to sign the amendment.”



Up to now Jewish expatriates could make a claim that a property was seized against the law and demand its return, but Polish officials argued this was causing uncertainty over property ownership.

MOSCOW

Putin alarmed by natural disasters

President Vladimir Putin on Saturday said the scale of natural disasters that have hit Russia this year is “absolutely unprecedented” as local officials ask for Moscow’s help to tackle fires and floods.

A former skeptic of man-made climate change, the Russian leader called on authorities to do everything possible to help Siberians affected by the region’s gigantic wildfires, as well as Russians living in the flood-hit south of the country.



Speaking at a video conference with the leaders of the affected eastern and southern regions, Putin said he received daily reports on the climate situation in the country.

Biden faces mounting blame for Afghan debacle

SHAUN TANDON

The Taliban's stunning advances in Afghanistan threaten to be a stain on President Joe Biden's record, but he has stood firm on withdrawing US troops and believes the public is with him.

Twenty years of investment that cost \$2 trillion and nearly 2,500 US lives were disintegrating within days as the insurgents seized two of the largest cities with little resistance and closed in on the capital Kabul.

Republican rivals predictably attacked Biden but he also faced the most critical coverage of his presidency, with television networks juxtaposing images of Afghanistan's collapse with his remarks a little more than a month ago that "the Taliban overrunning everything and owning the whole country is highly unlikely."

In a scathing editorial, *The Washington Post* said that Biden had put at risk the real progress in Afghanistan since 2001 including education for girls, banned by the Taliban when they last ruled. "Afghan lives ruined or lost will belong to Mr Biden's legacy just as surely as any dollars and lives his decision may save," the newspaper wrote.

The United States was rushing back 3,000 troops — roughly the same number removed in this month's final withdrawal — to evacuate embassy staff and was flying out Afghans whose work with US forces puts them at risk.

But Biden, who through his decades in public life earned a reputation for empathy, has been unmoved when asked about Afghan losses and instead speaks of protecting US troops, a deeply personal matter as his late son Beau served in Iraq.

Both the former vice-president and US opinion polls have shared his view for years. VoteVets, an advocacy group, hailed Biden for finally "having the strength to stand up to those who want endless war."

Biden argues that the United States long ago achieved its main goal of defeating Al Qaeda after the September 11, 2001 attacks and had done more than enough by training 300,000 Afghan troops. "They've got to fight for themselves, fight for their nation," Biden said last Tuesday.

— AFP

I think it's hard not to conclude that, not the US withdrawal, but the way in which we withdrew had a critical role to play in this

ANDREW WILDER
An Afghanistan Expert



CELEBRATION TIME

Pakistani Ranger's Wing Commander Hassan (L) presents sweets to Indian Border Security Force (BSF) Commandant Jasbir Singh during a ceremony to celebrate Pakistan's 75th Independence Day at the India-Pakistan Wagah border post, some 35 km from Amritsar on Saturday. — APF

Pandemic effect on shipping costs!



Ray Petersen
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RISING DEMAND FOR SHIPPING SERVICES IS TOUTED AS A REASON, YET SHIPPING COMPANIES HAD CUT CAPACITIES ON MAJOR ROUTES

Cargo transport, shipping, and freight costs for returning home expatriates that have gone ballistic, thus adding to the pain of the departure. Significant numbers of freight forwarders, shipping, and logistics agencies have made media statements blaming several issues for the rise in container transport costs. Now any one of these could be argued as a meaningful contributor to a rise in costs, but there is an increasing litany of excuses that veritably contradict and confuse, which is probably their purpose. But, having dwelt further... the plot thickens.

Rising demand for shipping services is touted as a reason, yet shipping companies had cut capacities on major routes, in reaction to the pandemic, but now, as global trade is re-opening, and ocean freight capacity intensifies, demand has become stronger, and logistics agencies are prioritising big business, which has the financial clout to demand priority. In fact, most large retailers and manufacturers sign annual deals with the ocean carriers to lock in their container freight rates. Gordon Downes, CEO of the New York Shipping Exchange, an online cargo platform, said that "larger businesses can often secure better shipping rates thanks to the size of their orders." Smaller ones, however, are at the mercy of spot rates, price increases and surcharges that can be attributed to anything from weather and ship congestion to the cost of fuel and raw materials.

Container stocks have fallen globally. Of course, they have... PortaStore USA estimates that there are between 42 and 73 million containers, in use, at any time around the world. Forgetting the inanity of that disparity (which screams: 'We don't know'), they also identify two thirds of those as out-of-service which begs the question of the industry's ability to oversee its operations effectively... if they don't know where 20 million of their containers are? There is an example of the mind-boggling incompetence that has dogged the shipping sector forever... yet society always bails them out! To be fair, 'Sea-Intelligence, ING' states that the new containers and container vessels onstream for current roll-out, may not improve the resource situation until 2023.

Charter prices for containers have risen. Well of course, they must pay for all those ones that they can't find, and it's no wonder... You can find 974 of them for a start, at the Ras Abu Aboud Stadium is located on the waterfront of the downtown West Bay area with views of the Corniche in Doha and is currently nearing completion as one of eight host venues for the 2022 Football World Cup showpiece. According to bifa.org 1,382 were lost at sea last year, and to top it off, Shipping container architecture is now a legitimate form of architecture using 'steel intermodal containers' as the chief structural element, which is referred to as 'cargotecture' or 'arkitainer' design.

Buildwithrise.com estimates most of the 14 million 'unused' containers around the world are re-purposed in this way. Short of containers? I wonder why?

Ship availability and capacity is restricted. No, it is not! The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, whose slogan is, ironically, "Prosperity for all," says, "Globally, capacity has recovered to levels before 2020." Cancelled port calls had cut 10 per cent of scheduled capacity during the first quarter, but signs of improvement point to a 4 per cent. They also commented "that global ports and terminals need to track and measure performance as port performance metrics enable sound strategic port planning, investment and decision-making," and in doing so, clearly submit that if the shipping industry has issues, they also have a responsibility to fix them, themselves.

For higher value products, say Baltic Exchange, one of the world's largest shipping derivatives contractors, air transport has been the preferred alternative, but with the severe reductions in airline operations, most have been forced towards the seafaring alternative. So, the reality is that the big bully boys in the playground are running the show. It is despicable. It may be nobody's fault here, but given expatriate job losses, and higher electricity tariffs, it feels a bit like we are being sent, with a kick up the backside to go with the earlier black eye, and bloody nose.

An 80-year-old woman's struggle with memory loss



Rasha Al Raisi
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ELIZABETH IS MISSING IS HEALEY'S DEBUT NOVEL THAT WON HER THE COSTA BOOK AWARD FOR FIRST NOVEL IN 2014

In her novel *Elizabeth is Missing* published in 2014, writer Emma Healey's main character is an 80 years old woman struggling with memory loss.

Maud Horsham's daily life is not easy, she can't remember where she is or the people who visit her (including her aid and family) even what she went to buy from the supermarket. She keeps writing notes to remind herself of what's happening around her, yet this memory aid backfires most of the time as she doesn't remember when or why she wrote it.

One of the notes she finds in her pocket says that her friend Elizabeth is missing. Nobody seems to know where she is, not even her daughter Helen or Elizabeth's son Peter whose rude and aggressive behaviour

convinces Maud that he's hiding something. She decides to go to the police to report her friend's disappearance to discover that she'd already been there before and nobody in the station is taking her seriously.

Elizabeth's disappearance provokes old memories of Sukey — Maud's elder sister — who disappeared 70 years ago.

Maud was 10 at the time and went searching for her missing sister along with her family and Sukey's husband Frank. But how could the two disappearances be related? Can solving one lead to solving the other? Would Maud be able to do that even though her memory loss is worsening by the day? Emma Healey does a brilliant job using the first-person narrative to transform you

directly to Maud's world, what is it like to be old and forgetful?

How can daily tasks become frustrating because you can't remember how to do them? There are times when even thinking straight is impossible as old memories suddenly gets on the way of new ones, and everything becomes jumbled up.

Even objects names are sometimes lost and the reader relies on Maud's description of what she'd come across, for example: the thing that they tie the hair with.

However, the saddest part is that Maud is aware of how her situation is affecting others as she describes the roll of eyes and mockery she's met with. But amid all that muddle, moments of clarity come like sunlight

breaking through dark clouds in the form of Maud's childhood memories in post-war time Britain, a short interval from old age confusion and a reminder that old people are not born that way; they were once young and to many aging is something they still can't identify with.

Maud's family (her daughter and granddaughter) are side characters that support her yet at times are forgotten or confused with people from the past. The only fault I found in the narrative is that the reason behind Maud's memory loss is not identified — old age or Alzheimer's? — but this might be left out intentionally as Maud doesn't know either.

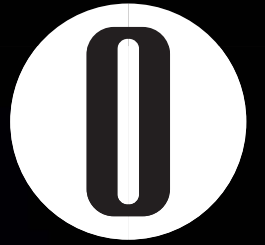
Elizabeth is Missing is Healey's debut novel that won her the Costa Book Award for First

Novel in 2014 followed by the Betty Trask Award that is given to writers under the age of 35 in 2015.

Her second book *Whilst in the Dark* was published in 2018. *Elizabeth is Missing* was made into a TV series by the same name in 2019, starring Glenda Jackson as Maud and Maggie Steed as Elizabeth. It was well received by critics and Glenda Jackson won Best Actress in many British festivals including British Academy Television Awards and Edinburgh TV Awards. She also won an Emmy for the role last year. The book is a rare compassionate insight into the world of aging and memory loss. A powerful and a memorable read for all ages. (**The writer is a certified skills trainer and an author**)

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FERNANDES, PAUL POGBA

SHINE AS FIVE-STAR
UNITED THRASH LEEDS



IN FRONT OF **73,000**, THE BIGGEST
FOOTBALL CROWD IN THE UNITED
KINGDOM SINCE MARCH 2020,
UNITED RAN RIOT WITH THEIR TWO
MIDFIELD MAESTROS SPARKING
HOPE OF A CHALLENGE FOR A FIRST
LEAGUE TITLE SINCE ALEX FERGUSON
RETIRED AS MANAGER IN 2013

MANCHESTER, United Kingdom: Bruno Fernandes scored a hat-trick and Paul Pogba provided four assists as Manchester United thrashed Leeds 5-1 at a packed Old Trafford on Saturday to get their Premier League season off to a flying start.

In front of 73,000, the biggest football crowd in the United Kingdom since March 2020, United ran riot with their two midfield maestros sparking hope of a challenge for a first league title since Alex Ferguson retired as manager in 2013.

Fernandes gave the home side a deserved half-time lead, but Leeds levelled early in the second-half through Luke Ayling's stunning strike.

However, with Pogba in scintillating form, United were not to be denied as the Frenchman teed up Mason Greenwood, Fernandes and Fred, while Fernandes completed his first United hat-trick in thumping fashion.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men finished a distant second to Manchester City in the Premier League last season with any hope of a title challenge undone by their poor record in front of an empty Old Trafford.

The Theatre of Dreams was transformed into a cacophony of noise by a full house, which resulted in a similar transformation on the field from United.

The home fans were on their feet even before a ball was kicked to welcome Raphael Varane as the French centre-back was paraded on the pitch following his arrival from Real Madrid for a reported £40 million (\$55 million).

Varane was not registered in time to make his debut, while United's other big money signing of the summer Jadon Sancho started on the bench.

United were also without Marcus Rashford and Edinson Cavani, but that allowed Pogba to star in his favoured role on the left of a front three.

The 28-year-old has again been the source of speculation in recent weeks after starring for France in an otherwise disappointing Euro 2020 for the world champions.

But Pogba finally produced his international form for United as he surpassed his tally of assists for the entire 2020/21 league season inside 90 minutes.

The only blot on the former Juventus midfielder's day was his finishing as he slotted wide with just Illan Meslier to beat midway through the first-half.

Fernandes showed Pogba how to do it as United cut Leeds apart for the opening goal.

Pogba's dinked ball over the top perfectly picked out the Portuguese and Meslier could not keep out his powerful effort despite getting his foot to it.

Leeds were lucky to go in at half-time only one goal behind and looked to have regrouped at the break when they levelled in stunning fashion three minutes into the second-half.

Ayling strode forward from right-back to unleash an unstoppable effort from 25 yards into the top corner for his first ever Premier League goal. However, the jubilation of the travelling Leeds support was short-lived thanks to Pogba's vision four minutes later.

Greenwood was the recipient of the defence-splitting pass this time as he sprinted clear of Pascal Struijk and fired accurately in off the far post.

Fernandes then slotted home his second of the afternoon from another Pogba pass before completing his first United hat-trick in style with a thumping finish into the roof of the net from Victor Lindelof's long ball.

Leeds were thrashed 6-2 on their first league visit to Old Trafford for 16 years last season and Marcelo Bielsa's men headed back to Yorkshire with their tails between their legs once more as United ran riot.

Pogba's fourth assist of the afternoon teed up Fred to slot home a rare goal from the edge of the box. — AFP



Kraig Brathwaite (R) of West Indies hits a boundary at Sabina Park, Kingston, Jamaica. — AFP



I would have loved to have been there at the end and to get three figures, but it was my error and I have to take responsibility for that

KRAIGG
BRATHWAITE
West Indies batsman

BRATHWAITE

MISSSES CENTURY AS WI EDGE AHEAD OF PAKISTAN

KINGSTON, Jamaica: Kraigg Brathwaite ran himself out for 97 but the West Indies captain's typically obdurate innings worked his team into a potentially useful first innings lead over Pakistan on day two of the first Test at Sabina Park on Friday.

With support from former skipper Jason Holder (58) in a pivotal sixth-wicket partnership of 96, the home side rallied from the discomfort of 100 for five to 251 for eight at stumps, a lead of 34 runs with two wickets in hand going into the third day.

Starting the morning with his team already in trouble at two for two, replying to the tourists' first

day total of 217, Brathwaite played his favourite sheet-anchor role to perfection.

The phlegmatic opener put on 50 with overnight partner Roston Chase (21) for the third wicket, followed immediately by a stand of 49 with Jermaine Blackwood.

However Blackwood's demise to Shaheen Shah Afridi was followed next ball by the dismissal of Kyle Mayers, tilting the balance of the contest Pakistan's way.

That balance could have been decisively theirs just two balls later when Shaheen got a leg-before verdict against Holder before he had scored, only for the decision to be overturned on review of the

television replay.

It proved a critical reprieve as Holder's innings, initially watchful against the faster bowlers, blossomed with the introduction of the infrequently-used wrist-spinner Yasir Shah.

Yet it was the deceptive pace of Faheem Ashraf which broke the partnership after tea just as Babar Azam's men seemed to be running out of ideas.

Holder edged a delivery through to wicketkeeper Mohammad Rizwan to leave all attention focused on Brathwaite as he crept towards what would have been his 11th Test century.

All that hard work was undone

by his own error of judgement.

As he turned a delivery from Yasir to short fine-leg, he decided to come back for a second run only for Hasan Ali's direct hit to find him well short of his ground.

Brathwaite's innings, following a succession of low scores amid his team's struggles in the two-Test series against South Africa in St Lucia two months earlier, spanned six hours during which he faced 221 deliveries and struck 12 fours.

"I would have loved to have been there at the end and to get three figures, but it was my error and I have to take responsibility for that," he said in

reflecting on his effort.

"I would like us to show the same fight we did today and when we start bowling again, we need to be disciplined and that should be the key."

Pakistan's hopes of a swift end to the West Indies innings were thwarted by Joshua da Silva.

He ensured the threat of the second new ball did not completely overwhelm the tail and allows the home side to continue on the third morning hoping to extend what could already be an uncomfortable deficit for their opponents.

Having ended day one with two wickets in two balls, Mohammad Abbas finished day two with the

SCOREBOARD

Pakistan first Innings: 217	
West Indies first Innings (0/n: 2-2)	
K Brathwaite (run out).....	97
K Powell c I Butt b M Abbas.....	0
N Bonner lbw M Abbas.....	0
R Chase c M Rizwan b H Ali.....	21
J Blackwood c M Abbas b SS Afridi.....	22
K Mayers lbw SS Afridi.....	0
J Holder c M Rizwan b N Ashraf.....	58
J da Silva (not out).....	20
K Roach lbw b M Abbas.....	13
J Warrican (not out).....	1
Extras (B-3, LB-10, NB-6).....	19
Total (for 8 wickets, 87 overs).....	251
Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-1, 3-51, 4-100, 5-100, 6-196, 7-221, 8-249	
Bowling: M Abbas 21-9-42-3, SS Afridi 20-5-59-2, Y Shah 13-1-46-0, F Ashraf 14-6-37-1, H Ali 19-4-54-1	

wicket of Kemar Roach to lead the bowling effort for Pakistan with figures of three for 42. — AFP

‘Australia lack depth but still a T20 Cup contender’

MELBOURNE: Australia lack depth in their squad but will be a title contender at this year's Twenty20 World Cup in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) when several frontline players return to the side, former captain Ricky Ponting said.

Batting mainstays Steve Smith and David Warner as well as pace spearhead Pat Cummins are among several first-choice players who skipped the recent tours of West Indies and Bangladesh.

Australia's Twenty20 squad suffered identical 4-1 defeats on both tours, the low point being bundled out for 62, their lowest score in this format, by

Bangladesh.

"It just goes to show the depth around Australian cricket right now is not where it needs to be. There's work to do there," Ponting said on SEN radio.

"The T20 World Cup is not far away (but) with everyone fit and healthy in the UAE, I still think the Australian team can push really hard to win that title that's eluded us."

Skipper Aaron Finch, who underwent a knee surgery on Thursday, is expected to lead the side in the tournament scheduled in October-November.

Most of the Australians also play in the Indian Premier League

(IPL), which has now been rescheduled to take place in the UAE and this will serve as ideal preparation for the returning players, Ponting said.

"Those guys that haven't played for three or four months now, they need to get back into the groove of playing high-quality cricket against the best players in the world," said Ponting, who coaches Delhi Capitals in the IPL.

"No doubt it's their best preparation to be in those exact conditions, playing in probably the strongest domestic T20 tournament in the world."

— Reuters



Former Australian captain Ricky Ponting. — Reuters file photo

Root and Bairstow repel India in second Test



England's Joe Root in action. – Reuters



England's Jonny Bairstow celebrates reaching his half century. – Reuters

LONDON: England captain Joe Root hit his third successive fifty of the series as India were denied a wicket on the third morning of the second Test at Lord's on Saturday.

England were 216-3 at lunch in reply to India's first innings 364, still 148 runs behind.

Root, was 88 not out and Jonny Bairstow 51 not out, with the Yorkshire duo sharing an unbroken partnership of 108 for the fourth wicket.

England resumed on 119-3, a

deficit of 245 runs, after opener Rory Burns had fallen for a well-made 49 late on Friday.

They were once again left relying on Root, 48 not out overnight.

Not for the first time, the England skipper had come in to bat with his side in trouble, reduced to 23-2 when India paceman Mohammed Siraj removed Dom Sibley and the recalled Haseeb Hameed, out for a first-ball nought, with successive deliveries.

Root, the only England batsman

Root, was 88 not out and Jonny Bairstow 51 not out, with the Yorkshire duo sharing an unbroken partnership of 108 for the fourth wicket

to pass fifty in last week's rain-marred drawn first Test at Trent Bridge, with scores of 64 and 109, went to another half-century with a stylish square-driven four off Siraj. It was his seventh boundary in 82 balls faced.

Bairstow, who started the day on six not out, found his touch with commanding straight-driven fours off Mohammed Shami and Siraj.

With little movement in the air or off a placid pitch, India captain

Virat Kohli brought left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja into the attack for Saturday's tenth over.

But nor was there much in the way of turn, with Bairstow sweeping Jadeja for four.

Conditions were more in favour of the batsmen than on the first two days but England, even though they had Moon Ali and Jos Buttler to come, still had work to do to get back on level terms.

A legside clip single off Ishant Sharma saw Bairstow to a 90-ball

fifty including six fours.

India's total was built on impressive innings by their openers, with KL Rahul making a well-judged 129 and Rohit Sharma 83.

James Anderson, already third in the all-time list of leading Test wicket-takers, led England's attack with 5-62.

It was the 39-year-old swing bowler's 31st five-wicket haul in 164 matches at this level and seventh at Lord's. — AFP

Indian players among strong Mumbai side coming to Oman

SHAHZAD RAZA
MUSCAT, AUG 14

A strong Mumbai squad with many India players will play its first T20 game against Oman on Sunday, August 22, at the picturesque Oman Cricket Academy Ground 1 in Al Amerat.

Coached by renowned cricketer Amol Muzumdar, one of the best batsmen not to have played for India, Mumbai team comprises many star players who have represented India including Shivam Dube, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Armaan Jaffer.

The other two T20 matches will be played on August 24 and 26 followed by the three 50-over games on August 29, 31 and September 2. All the matches will start at 7.30 am.

All-rounder Dube, who bats left-handed and bowls right-arm medium pace, has played 13 T20 Internationals and one ODI for India. He played for Royal Challengers Bangalore in the IPL last year and will be representing Rajasthan Royal this season.

Jaiswal is another batting stalwart in the team and is seen by many to be an India prospect after he became the player of the

We are glad that we will be up against a strong Mumbai side, providing us a perfect preparation for the WCL League 2 tri-series in September and the T20 World Cup in October

DULEEP MENDIS
Chief Development Officer,
Oman Cricket

tournament at ICC Under-19 World Cup 2020 in South Africa. His batting exploits led him to become a hot property at the 2020 IPL auction where Rajasthan Royal signed him up for 24 million rupees (over \$340,000). He is also a wily leg-break bowler.

The team also includes right hand batsman Armaan Jaffer, who became famous for breaking the schools cricket record by scoring 498 for Rizvi Springfield School in a Giles Shield tournament in 2010. Armaan is nephew of former India opener Wasim Jaffer who was Mumbai captain for a long



time. Armaan was picked for India squad for the 2019 ACC Emerging Teams Asia Cup in Bangladesh.

Oman squad is training hard to be ready for the games under the watchful eyes of coach Duleep Mendis.

"We are glad that we will be up against a strong Mumbai side, providing us a perfect preparation for the WCL League 2 tri-series in September and the T20 World Cup in October," said Mendis, who is also Oman Cricket's Chief Development Officer.

Oman is going to host two triangular series as part of the WCL League 2 tournament; first against Nepal and USA from September 13 to 20 followed by tri-series against Scotland and PNG from September 25 to October 2 and games against Mumbai will mean the much needed match practice for Oman against a quality side.

Mumbai squad: Shams Mulani, Aakarshit Gome, Hardik Tamore, Armaan Jaffer, Chimany Sutar, Shivam Dube, Aman Khan, Sujit Naik, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shashank Attarde, Mohit Avasthi, Ravindra Solanki, Deepak Shetty, Drumil Matkar.

Team Manager: Arman Mallick.
Coach: Amol Muzumdar. Physio: Abhishek Sawant. Fielding coach: Wilkin Mota. Bowling coach: Vishal Mahadik. Trainer: Dinesh Suvarna.



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TOTAL WEEKLY PRIZES OHR 171,600 (5 WINNERS PER BRANCH)	TOTAL MONTHLY PRIZES OHR 343,200 (10 WINNERS PER BRANCH) PRIZES FOR KIDS, STANDARD & PRIORITY CUSTOMERS	TOTAL MID-YEAR PRIZES OHR 16,000 PRIZES FOR KIDS, STANDARD & PRIORITY CUSTOMERS
TOTAL NATIONAL DAY PRIZES OHR 55,000 (5 WINNERS PER BRANCH)	TOTAL PRIZES FOR LADIES OHR 11,000 (1 WINNER PER BRANCH)	TOTAL MEGA PRIZES OHR 112,000 PRIZES FOR KIDS, STANDARD & PRIORITY CUSTOMERS

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Dedicated zone for AI activities in Duqm SEZ

HIGH-TECH MANUFACTURING:
18 sq km site earmarked for artificial intelligence, drone experiments and future technologies

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 14

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) organised a field visit for the Steering Committee in charge of supervising the zone designated for artificial intelligence activities (AI) at Duqm. The steering committee includes representatives from several government entities, namely the Ministry of Defence,



Royal Oman Police, Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, Ministry of Transport, Communications and

Information Technology, and Telecommunication Regulatory Authority. OPAZ had recently announced

the allocation of around 18 sq km of land to support and encourage the use of modern technologies, including artificial intelligence



in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm. Ahmed bin Saleh al Farsi (pictured), Chairman of the Committee, explained that: “The Authority is seeking to achieve several key objectives, most importantly, the localisation of investment opportunities in the

field of artificial intelligence, drone experiments and future technology, in addition to building basic infrastructure to apply e-government strategy and smart cities, creating and implementing research opportunities in the zone under the supervision of the committee for practical and academic uses, and to overcome the challenges and difficulties facing the implementation of artificial intelligence projects, drones and future technology in the zone.” The committee approved the initial plan for the AI zone, and incentives and facilities to be offered to investors. It also studied proposals for prototyping AI based products that can be then introduced to international markets.

Oman’s be’ah plans first-ever ‘Raptor Restaurants’ to sustain rare birds



NATURE CONSERVATION: Two specially-designed feeding sites to be established at be’ah facilities during 2021

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](#)

Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be’ah), the country’s solid waste management entity, says it plans to introduce the concept of ‘raptor restaurants’—sites within landfills where slaughterhouse waste can provide sustenance to endangered species of raptor birds found in the Sultanate. Raptors, a generic description for all birds of prey, are essentially carnivorous birds distinguished by their large

talons, strong bills and superior flight capabilities. Sightings of raptors in the Sultanate include the Egyptian Vulture and the Steppe Eagle, which are classified as ‘endangered’ in the IUCN’s Red List of Threatened Species. According to be’ah — part of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — raptors are a common sight over its landfills. Citing studies undertaken by the Environmental Society of Oman (ESO) and the Office for the Conservation of the Environment (Diwan of Royal Court), it noted that multiple sightings of these birds have been recorded over dumpsites at Al Multaqa, Tahwa, Masirah and Raysut in the Sultanate. “These conservation bodies approached be’ah with this data,

and concerns that the birds’ local population was falling, citing decline in food availability due to decommissioning of traditional open dumpsites, as the reason. The company worked on an initiative that could boost their numbers in these areas and thus, Raptor Restaurants were born. It explained that the concept grew out of its quest for innovative waste disposal practices. “be’ah continues to innovate to find better solutions to waste disposal challenges. “It strives to include the local biodiversity and wildlife in its scope as these are important pillars and the reason for all initiatives towards sustainability,” the company

“These conservation bodies approached be’ah with this data, and concerns that the birds’ local population was falling, citing decline in food availability due to decommissioning of traditional open dumpsites, as the reason. The company worked on an initiative that could boost their numbers in these areas and thus, Raptor Restaurants were born

be’ah

stated. Significantly, at least two such Raptor Restaurants are proposed to be established at be’ah’s dumpsite facilities in the Sultanate during 2021. These feeding areas are essentially “dedicated sites where clean and safe waste from slaughterhouses is laid out for the raptors without compromising the safety and hygiene of the US EPA-standard landfills”, the company said. Following a pilot study launched in 2019 to test the concept in Oman, bird populations rose from under 20 to around 500, be’ah added.

Twenty-five reverse vending machines to be piloted in Muscat

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](#)

Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be’ah), the nation’s solid waste management entity, says it will oversee the roll-out of at least 25 reverse vending machines (RVMs) at key locations across Muscat Governorate this year — part of a pilot to weigh the feasibility of a broader deployment. In all, 50 such machines are planned for installation across the capital city, the government-owned company noted. To this end, it has signed agreements with a number of corporate partners who “share the same sustainability objectives”, it stated. Targeted primarily at PET waste, the machines will serve as kiosks for people to dispose of empty PET bottles. Non-PET bottles and other

items will be rejected by the machines, which are equipped with sensors to accept only PET containers. As an incentive-driven scheme to encourage sustainable recycling practices, the RVMs will offer points that can be converted into rewards from be’ah’s partners in the venture. PET bottles collected from the machines will be periodically sent for recycling as part of a wider effort to divert plastic waste currently ending up in landfills into the circular economy. As much as a fifth of all municipal waste is made up of plastic, with PET bottles accounting for a substantial portion of this volume, says be’ah. Data collected from the pilot project will be analysed to study its effectiveness and aid similar recycling initiatives in the future, be’ah added.



MG Motor launches first ever pick-up truck — MG T60 — in Oman

MUSCAT: The British born brand with a commitment to Do More, MG Motor has launched its first ever pick-up truck — the MG T60 — for its customers in Oman. The MG T60 is a reliable and versatile partner in the light-weight pick-up category. It has been designed to offer superior performance as a practical truck made for cargo as well as personal transportation needs.

The truck is available in two engine types: diesel and gasoline. It is also available in two transmission systems: 2WD and 4WD. This makes the MG T60 an ideal vehicle that meets all your needs — wherever you go and for whatever purpose.

Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani; CEO; MHD ACERE — the sole distributor of MG Motor vehicles in Oman — comments: “This launch is indeed a special one. Till now we have brought superior MG sedans and SUVs for individuals and families in Oman but with MG T60 we have forayed into commercial vehicles category and will be able to meet the needs of wider customer segments.

MG T60 is a highly versatile and highly reliable vehicle. At MHD ACERE, our efforts are always inclined towards bringing high quality products for our customers and with this launch, we feel we have moved a step



ahead in pursuit of excellence and customer satisfaction.”

Whether you are hauling loads to a construction site or taking your family on an off-road adventure, the MG T60 enables you to Do More. With two engine options — a 2.8L turbo diesel producing 150 HP and 360 Nm and a 2.4L petrol engine producing 143 HP, MG T60 promises to give power packed as well as economical performance.

Its exterior is strong and graceful. The high ground clearance is one of the key

features of the MG T60 as it allows the truck to be driven on various road types, including rocky and rough terrains. The large front grille made of vertical bars surrounded by a bright chrome frame adds a touch of defiance and boldness to the vehicle.

While the MG T60's exterior is all muscle, its interior is crafted for comfort. Behind the wheel, both the driver and passenger can benefit from a range of adjustment settings, while the intuitive cockpit is designed to ensure every control is within

easy reach. The cabin is roomy and can seat up to five, offering plenty of head and legroom for adults. There is automatic air conditioning that circulates to the rear via dedicated vents, as well as a four-speaker stereo system with radio to keep you informed as well as entertained.

To know more about the vehicle, you can visit MG Motor showrooms located in Wattayah, Al Athaiba, Al Manuma, Bidiya, Suhar, Nizwa, Salalah, Sur, Ibra and Ibri. You can also book a test drive and purchase the vehicle online on <https://mg-om.com/>

CBFS appoints new dean



MUSCAT: College of Banking and Financial Studies (CBFS) has announced the appointment of Dr Zahran al Salti (pictured) as Dean of the college. Dr Al Salti has more than 23 years of experience at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and Sultan Qaboos University.

Dr Al Salti started his career at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation where he held a number of technical and administrative positions, the last of which was the Director of Postgraduate Studies at the Directorate General of Scholarships.

In 2004, he moved to Sultan Qaboos University as a faculty member of the College of Economics and Political Science at Sultan Qaboos University and later as the Director of the Center for Community Service and Continuing Education in addition to his academic work from 2017 to 2020.

Dr Al Salti holds a Bachelor's degree from USA and Masters and Doctorate degrees from the UK.

Discover exceptional experience on any terrain with Toyota SUV range

MUSCAT: Toyota SUVs are engineered to go the distance and stop at nothing, to give you on-road and off-road experiences unlike any other. The Toyota SUV range includes some of the most coveted and proven names in Oman.

Toyota Rush is available with a 1.5-litre four-cylinder engine that generates a maximum output of 103.3 hp and 13.87 kg-m of torque and incorporates the Dual VVT-i (Variable Valve Timing-intelligent) technology, which continuously optimises intake and exhaust valve timing in response to driving conditions for exceptional performance. The engine of the Rush is mated to a four-speed automatic transmission to offer a smooth shifting experience with superior fuel efficiency.

Complementing the RAV4's daring looks is a thrilling drive personality imbued by a 2.5-litre four-cylinder engine which produces 204 hp and 24.8 kg-m. of torque, mated to an eight-speed automatic transmission (8AT), resulting in a quicker and smoother acceleration.

The Fortuner is available with Petrol Engines that include a 2.7 Litre Four Cylinder Engine producing 164 HP & 25.0 Kg-m of Torque. The 4.0 Litre V6 Engine churns-out 235 HP along with 38.3 Kg-m of Torque. The 6-speed Automatic Transmission, available as a standard option, provides thrilling acceleration.



The FJ is equipped with a powerful and muscular 4-Litre, V6 petrol engine with Dual VVTi that whips up a massive 268 HP. Optimally matched with the drive train is the 5-speed, Automatic transmission, designed to deliver excellent performance, smooth gear shifting and lower noise levels.

The Prado has two petrol engine variants — 4.0 Litre delivering 271 HP and 2.7 Litre delivering 163 HP. It offers 6-speed Automatic Transmission on Petrol models along with Full-Time 4WD with Centre Differential Limited Slip Differential.

Available in either 17” or 18” Alloy Wheels, the Prado has LED Type Headlamp & Clearance Lamps and Moonroof.

Hailed as a timeless icon, the Toyota Land Cruiser has a loyalty unmatched by any other SUV. At the heart of the indomitable 4WD Land Cruiser's capability is

a 3.5-litre, twin-turbo V6 Engine generating 409 hp at 66.2 kg.m. torque. A smooth and quiet drive results from the Land Cruiser's advanced 10-speed Transmission.

Specifications of vehicle imported from Toyota Motor Corporation are as per the GSO Conformity Certificate applicable to the model/grade. Parameters such as vehicle weight, dimensions & fuel economy could vary from the GSO Conformity Certificate due to fitment of dealer installed accessories. Pictures and colours shown may differ from actual specifications.

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MSX WEEKLY REVIEW

MSX30 Index ends week flat



MSX30 Index ended the week almost flat. Financial sector rose 0.11 per cent, Industrial by 0.85 per cent while Services sector declined by 0.18 per cent. MSX Shariah Index closed higher by 1.11 per cent.

Oman's capital markets regulator, the Capital Market Authority, is preparing regulations to allow and licence crowdfunding platforms in the Sultanate. Crowdfunding is a way of funding start-ups, small projects and businesses by raising funds from a large number of people through licensed online platforms.

The CMA's board of directors has approved the necessary amendment in the capital market legislations to licence crowdfunding platforms in the Sultanate.

The CMA acknowledged that the crowdfunding platforms are innovative instruments and financial technologies which enable entrepreneurs and micro, small and medium enterprises to get more appropriate financing mechanisms.

The CMA board emphasised the importance of launching such type of digital platforms for their significance as financing options for SMEs in the Sultanate to enhance economic development, job creation and financial inclusion.

Oman Food Investment Holding Company (OFIC) — the government's food sector investment and development arm — has revealed that it is offering an equity stake of up to 35 per cent in its flagship poultry venture, A'Namma Poultry, slated to commence commercial operation in January 2022.

According to an official of wholly-state-owned OFIC, an affiliate of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — the country's integrated sovereign wealth fund — the available stake is primarily targeted at local and international private investors.

At full capacity, A'Namma Poultry is projected to generate Earnings before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization (EBITDA) of RO 13.7 million, while the Internal Rate of Return

The crowdfunding platforms are innovative instruments and financial technologies which enable entrepreneurs and micro, small and medium enterprises to get more appropriate financing mechanisms.

(IRR) is estimated at 17.5 per cent, according to the official.

Value of traded property in Oman went up by 30.4 per cent in 6M/2021 to RO 1,370.7m compared to RO 1,050m in 6M/2020. Traded value of mortgage contracts during the same period went up by 16.3 per cent to RO 757.7m compared to RO 651.7m in same period last year.

Traded value of sale contracts rose by 70 per cent to RO 602m compared to RO 354m in 6M/2020. Number of properties issued during 6M/2021 also rose by 68 per cent to 129,149K compared to 76,818 in 6M/2020.

The total number of vehicles registered in the Sultanate totalled 1.541m in June 2021, representing a small decline over the December 2020 registered vehicles at 1.557m, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information. Private vehicles topped the list of vehicles registered at 1.220m, followed by 0.232m commercial vehicles and 29,169 taxis. The number of vehicles with temporary registration reached 10,687 compared to 15,351 vehicles in December 2020.

The total number of guests in hotel properties of the 3 to 5-star category in the Sultanate increased to 522,329 guest till end of June 2021, compared to 425,905 guests for the same period of 2020.

The occupancy rate for month end of June increased by 29.8 per cent, according to the latest monthly statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Total revenues of these hotels fell by 35.8 per cent per cent to RO 37,013K in June 2021, compared to RO 57,670K during the same period of the previous year. [U-Capital]



Add-backs in business valuation (Part 1)

I have dedicated the past few weeks to the comparison of some of the largest companies in the world. In the next two weeks I will go back to talk about small businesses in a two-parts article on business valuation.

Among the emails that I have received from the readers recently, two of them stood out for their opposite nature. One of them was from Sultan, who wrote me to share his negative experience of having sold his business too cheap.

The other one was from Jen, who was asking me why nobody seemed interested in buying her company. I sense that the topic of small businesses valuation is always sensitive and interesting to discuss.

Given that there is not a “one size fit all” in this field, the principle that I will share in this

article are to be taken as simple guidelines, and certainly not the only rules of the game.

Let us start with Sultan's claim. My first question to him was: “What makes you say that you sold the business too cheap?”

His answer made me feel that his perceptions were in the way. He said that the new owner is making a lot of money... more than Sultan used to do when he owned the business. For as much as truth might hurt, a simple explanation could be that the new owner is just better at running the business.

Perhaps Sultan was not optimising costs and his profits were not maximised. That is certainly a possibility. Regardless of the reason, Sultan could have factored in his inability to maximise profits as part of the sales price. We will back to this in a minute.



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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THE USUAL METHOD FOR A VALUATION IS TO TAKE THE YEARLY SALES, AND SUBTRACT THE OPERATION EXPENSES AND THE COST OF GOODS SOLD. BY DOING SO WE REACH THE NET INCOME

Jen, on the other hand, seems to value her business too much. When I asked her how much is her yearly net income, she replied by stating the amount of sales per month.

Such number alone is useless in a proper business valuation. No smart investor would commit on a “sales per month” figure without context.

In fact, when I asked a few more questions on how Jen is managing the business, it became clear that in her case too, she is not factoring in costs and she is taking profits out of context.

So, both Sultan and Jen are experiencing the same issue, but with different outcomes. Because Sultan was not able to quantify his lack of profit maximisation, he ended up “selling cheap”.

Because Jen is not rationalising costs, she cannot find a buyer for her business.

My suspect is that both of them are not familiar with the concept of Add-backs. These are — to put it simply — costs that are currently affecting the business, but they might not occur in the future. In other words, these are costs that are applicable to Sultan and not to Jen, but the new owner might or might not have.

The usual method for a valuation is to take the yearly sales, and subtract the Operation Expenses and the Cost of Goods Sold. By doing so we reach the Net Income. This amount is a first indicator of the business valuation, but it is not all we need to know to correctly value.

Next week we will see how this amount without context could render highly inaccurate valuation. *(The columnist is a member of the International Press Association)*

Opec+ supply boost unlikely

NEW YORK: US investment bank Goldman Sachs said a recent call by the United States to Opec+ to boost oil output is unlikely to result in higher production over the short-term given the threat to demand from the coronavirus Delta variant. US President Joe Biden's administration urged the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies (Opec+), to boost output to tackle rising gasoline prices that they see as a threat to the global economic recovery.

“We don't see the recent White House statement as threatening the current market deficit nor the pace of the rebalancing in 2H21”, Goldman Sachs said in a note dated on Thursday, maintaining their year-end Brent forecast at \$80 per barrel. — **Reuters**

US consumer sentiment plummets to decade low

NEW YORK: US consumer sentiment dropped sharply in early August to its lowest level in a decade, in a worrying sign for the economy as Americans gave faltering outlooks on everything from personal finances to inflation and employment.

The unexpected reading could give Federal Reserve policymakers pause if it translates in the months ahead to a dent in economic activity.

The central bank has been getting closer to a decision on when to begin pulling back the extraordinary stimulus it put in place to shield the economy.

The University of Michigan said its preliminary consumer sentiment index fell to 70.2 in the first half of this month from a final reading of 81.2 in July. That was the lowest level since 2011, and there have been only two

larger declines in the index over the past 50 years. Those were at the depths of the 2007-2009 recession and during the first wave of shutdowns in April 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic.

The losses were widespread across income, age, and education subgroups and spanned all regions. Economists had forecast the index would remain unchanged at 81.2.

US stock market indexes slipped immediately after the report was released, while the price of gold gained ground. US Treasury bond yields hit session lows.

“The renewed plunge suggests the latest wave of virus cases driven by the Delta variant could be a bigger drag on the economy than we had thought”, said Andrew Hunter, an economist at Capital Economics. — **Reuters**



Shoppers carry bags of purchased merchandise in Pennsylvania. — **Reuters**

Droughts shrink hydropower, pose risk to global push to clean energy

CALIFORNIA: Severe droughts are drying up rivers and reservoirs vital for the production of zero-emissions hydropower in several countries around the globe, in some cases leading governments to rely more heavily on fossil fuels.

The emerging problems with hydropower production in places like the United States, China and Brazil represent what scientists and energy experts say is going to be a long-term issue for the industry as climate change triggers more erratic weather and makes water access less reliable.

They also could pose a threat to international ambitions to fight global warming by hindering one of the leading forms of existing clean power. Hydropower is the world's top source of clean energy and makes up close to 16pc of world electricity generation, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA).

This year, climate-driven droughts have triggered the biggest disruptions in hydropower generation in decades in places like the western United States and Brazil. China is still recovering from the effects of last year's severe drought on hydro production in Yunnan province in the southwestern part of the country.

Elsewhere, too much water is the problem.

Last year in Malawi, for



A boy stands on the cracked ground of the Boqueirao reservoir in the Metropolitan Region of Campina Grande, Paraiba state, Brazil. — **Reuters**

example, flooding and debris from megastorms forced two power stations to go offline, reducing hydropower capacity from 320 megawatts (MW) to 50 MW, according to the IEA.

Those effects have forced power grid operators to rely more heavily on thermal power plants, often fired by natural gas or coal, and to ask businesses to curtail electricity use to prevent outages, according to Reuters interviews with grid operators and regulators.

“When we're talking about

hydropower we're really talking about making sure we have enough water to get electricity”, said Kristen Averyt, a research professor focusing on climate resilience at the University of Nevada in Las Vegas. “What does that hydro generation get replaced with?”

In California, the State Water Project was forced to shut down a 750-MW hydroelectric power plant at Lake Oroville this month for the first time since it was built in 1967 because of low water

levels. In good years, the plant can power half a million homes.

Power facilities at Lake Shasta, the largest reservoir in the federal government's Central Valley Project in California, were also generating about 30pc less power than usual this summer, said Cary Fox, a team leader for the Bureau of Reclamation's operations in the state.

The lake usually provides about 710 MW during the summer, but in July was producing only 500 MW, Fox said. — **Reuters**

SHORT TAKES

SHANGHAI

China tightens scrutiny over IPO price-setting

China's securities regulators punished 19 institutional investors as authorities tighten scrutiny over price-setting behaviours under a more liberalised listing system.

China launched the tech-focused STAR Market in Shanghai, along with the introduction of a US-style, registration-based initial public offering (IPO) system in that market. A joint probe with the Shanghai Stock Exchange over STAR IPOs had exposed issues



with 19 institutional investors.

The problems included weak internal controls, inadequate rationale for price-settings, non-compliance with procedures and improper storage of working papers. — **Reuters**

NEW DELHI

India's commerce minister faces heat for remarks

India's commerce minister faced heat on social media on Saturday for his remarks that many big domestic businesses had overlooked national interests and that \$106 billion Tata Group's objections to proposed policy changes for e-commerce had upset him.

At an event organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Minister Piyush Goyal criticised Tata and more broadly said local businesses should not just focus on profits



or think of bypassing local laws.

The comments caught public attention and stoked a debate on social media after a newspaper reported the government had asked the CII to block videos with Goyal's comments. — **Reuters**

TOKYO

Japan's refiners face pandemic stress again

Japan's major oil refiners have recovered from last year's steep losses with all reporting a profit for Q2, but they continue to face headwinds as Covid-19 cases spiral to record highs.

Eneos, Japan's biggest refiner that accounts for about half of Japan's fuel market, on Friday reported profit of 98 billion yen (\$888 million) for the first fiscal quarter, versus a 5 billion yen loss a year earlier. Sales rose 44pc but were 12pc below the same quarter in 2019 before the pandemic.



“The impact of the spike in new coronavirus variant infections is uncertain and there is a risk that the recovery in fuel demand will be delayed”, Eneos Senior Vice-President Soichiro Tanaka told reporters. — **Reuters**

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features

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Inspired by Wakan, fashion dedicated to resilience of women

The fashion industry has not been spared by the negative effects of Covid-19 but it doesn't mean that industry players are throwing in the towel. For revered fashion icon Amal al Raisi, the challenges were but an opportunity to do something else. Launching her Autumn Winter 21 collection, she took inspiration from the village of Wakan and dedicated the new designs to resilient women...**P20**

LOCAL TRAVEL

READ

BILLY SUMMERS
BY STEPHEN KING

A killer for hire who only takes out bad guys seeks redemption as he does one final job.

Reemi, a green oasis with inveterate history

REEMI IN BILAD AL SHAHOUM in the Wilayat of Ibri, which is about 70 kilometres from the centre of the wilayat, acquires an extraordinary glamour as it is surrounded by tall mountains, picturesque nature and wonderful views. It has many attractive features with amazing tourism potentials and its location is unique, making it a green oasis worth visiting.

During the year, Reemi enjoys a cold winter climate and a mild summer, surrounded by high mountains,

plain heights, farms and orchards, in addition to the diversity of its agricultural crops due to the abundance of groundwater, well water and springs.

Reemi is often flocked by visitors from nearby wilayats including those from other governorates who usually visit for recreation and to enjoy its natural beauty.

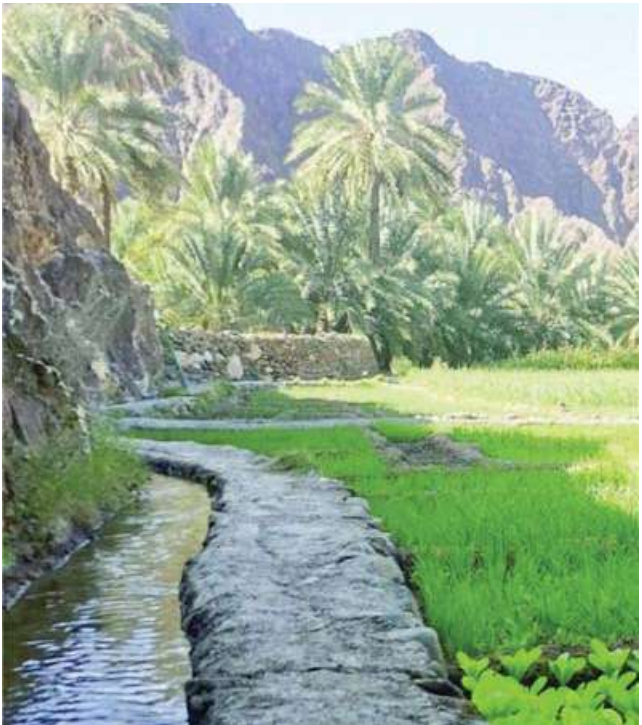
Villagers in Reemi enjoy farming and it is their main source of income. Farms here produce the best types of mango, lemon and pomegranate. The

fresh environment, abundant agricultural crops and water give relief to villagers who are quite contented and satisfied with their bountiful land.

This alluring nature makes the historical landmarks shine as the greenery mixes with the brown mud to produce a picture that is unmatched and can't be found in many places.

Reemi fortress, which is the largest fortification of Bilad al Shahuom, has three floors and is distinguished by its construction inspired by Omani architecture and engineering. Inside it is a water well that is still used to this day. Perhaps the most famous tower in this ancient fort is the Wind Tower, which overlooks the lush oases.

Visitors can reach Reemi in Bilad al Shahuom via paved roads, whether coming to it from South Al Batinah Governorate through the Rustaq-Ibri road or from North Al Batinah via the Suhar-Yanqul-Ibri road.





With ambition, nothing is impossible for a woman

by Thekra al Manji

WOMEN HAD always played a vital role in the society since time immemorial. Through sheer persistence, they have become a driving force in its advancement. Despite the numerous contributions they made in society and the many successes they have shown working along with their counterparts, time and again, their abilities are still always put in question. But they haven't let the fear of trying and failing stop them knowing very well that without it, there is no success.

Today, Omani women continue the upward trajectory to prove that they can be a success in any endeavour. They are diligent educators with no limits for giving and for it, they are becoming a role model for each other.

Maryam bint Saeed al Ameriyah is among the country's most accomplished of women. She is currently the head of the Digital Communications Department at the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs — a position that seldom sees a woman in the lead.

As a mother, it shouldn't be easy for any female to excel in motherhood and also in a career. One would need to exert all possible energy to balance both world but Maryam is one of the women who showed it's possible.

Maryam's story began when she became distinguished academically and excelled in school when

she was young. But her most remarkable achievements started when she joined university. Holding a BA in Civil Engineering from Sohar University, she was in a male dominated field of which didn't intimidate her at all.

Earning her degree opened up an ever wider world expanding her knowledge and viewpoint. By the time she graduated, she realised then that she has an inner wish to become a productive member of the community.

"The drive to succeed is always about seeing the many opportunities around you, understanding yourself and believing that you can do it", she shared.

Maryam said, "A person is born with ambition and grows with the care of the family, the school and the surrounding community. It is like a seed that needs irrigation and attention to produce the finest fruits. As a person grows older, his ambitions grow the picture about his future gets clearer."

"My first achievement that I have always been proud of is my graduation as an engineer with distinction. Being a mother of two, it was a real challenge as I have to reconcile things between studies and raising my children. But I did it successfully. I have got the first place at the Sultanate's level in the Nama Ambassadors competition, where we were in a challenge with 100 distinguished students in their field, but with diligence

nothing is impossible", she shared.

She added, "From there, it was all about seizing every opportunities. It was about winning university competitions to collect money. From there, I was able to start my dream project while studying. My first venture was a coffee shop. It was a haven for me to work and a source of inspiration for my distinction and my academic struggle. It has been six years since I opened my store, and it has become one of the well-known stores in Suhar."

Maryam has also worked on some translations. Her Arabic and English translation has been influential in different Middle Eastern countries. She later on obtained an international arbitrator diploma accredited in 19 Arab countries and represented the Sultanate in the Interfaith Dialogue Programme in Cambridge and on the International Day of Tolerance. She holds a volunteer licence and is a certified trainer from the British Academy for Development and Qualification.

Maryam said that every woman, "is capable and you can change an entire society if your thinking is positive. Believe in yourself and your abilities and strive to achieve what you want... Make yourself strong and prove to the world that you can and that nothing can stop you from trying and feeling the pleasure of victory."



LOCAL SCENE

Oman's Sidr trees can live up to 350 years



SIDR TREES are spread in many valleys, plains and high places in the Sultanate and are cultivated on the roadsides. It is a perennial tree that grows in areas with seasonal rains.

The Omani Encyclopaedia has devoted the fifth volume for Sidr Trees and addressed the scientific classification of Sidr trees, which are referred by several local names, including Sidra, Dheed, Alab, Oud, Canar and wild Sidr and Dhabeed.

According to the Omani Encyclopaedia, the Sidr tree is considered as one of the large and perennial trees found in the Sultanate and are spread widely in areas like Al Rawda Natural Park in Musandam Governorate comprising nearly 90 per cent of the trees planted in the governorate.

The oldest Sidr trees are found in the village of Al Madam in the Wilayat of Yanqul in Al Dhahirah Governorate, while another Sidra in the village of Al Subaikhi in the Wilayat of Ibri is estimated by the locals to be 350 years old. These trees can live long lives in fact two trees, one in Al Mazem in Ibri and the other in Suqa in the Wilayat of Qurayat in the Governorate of Muscat are reported to be around 250 years old. A Sidra tree in Al Faiqin in the Wilayat of Manah is also reported to have exceeded 150 years.



The encyclopaedia also highlighted the characteristics and types of Sidra, its height, whereabouts, its spread, its adaptation to different environmental and climatic conditions, and the places of its cultivation inside and outside the Sultanate. It explained that it is grown from North Africa to Afghanistan and in the eastern region of northwestern India, as well as in the Arabian Peninsula in order to benefit from its fruits and timber.

The Omani Encyclopaedia included an accurate description of the components of Sidra, its leaves, fruits, maturity, flowering season and its transformation into fruits from September to November. It pointed out that Sidr trees grow in sandy soils and hot and temperate areas, as they are drought-tolerant and grow well below an altitude of (914) metres from sea level.

The Omani Encyclopaedia also clarified the benefits of the Sidr tree, as it is an important source for honey bees and is called Sidr honey. The leaves and branches of the Sidr tree are a place and a source of food for some birds, reptiles and mammals, and livestock feed on the leaves of this tree in times of drought.

On the benefit of Sidr trees, the Omani Encyclopaedia covered several areas, including Sidr wood, which is included in many Omani traditional industries such as boats, coal, heating and cooking, in addition to making use of its wood in the manufacture of some different tools. The Sidr leaves are used in the Sultanate in the past before the appearance of soap and detergents. It was mashed and ground and then the body and hair were cleaned with it.

Some places in the Sultanate are named after the Sidr trees due to their importance of the Omani man in the past and the huge availability of the tree such as Sidra in the Wilayat of Mahout and Al Sedira in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi and Al Sadirat in the Wilayat of Al Amerat and Wardat al Sidr in the Wilayat of Wadi al Maawil and Tawi al Sidr in the Wilayat of Mahdha.



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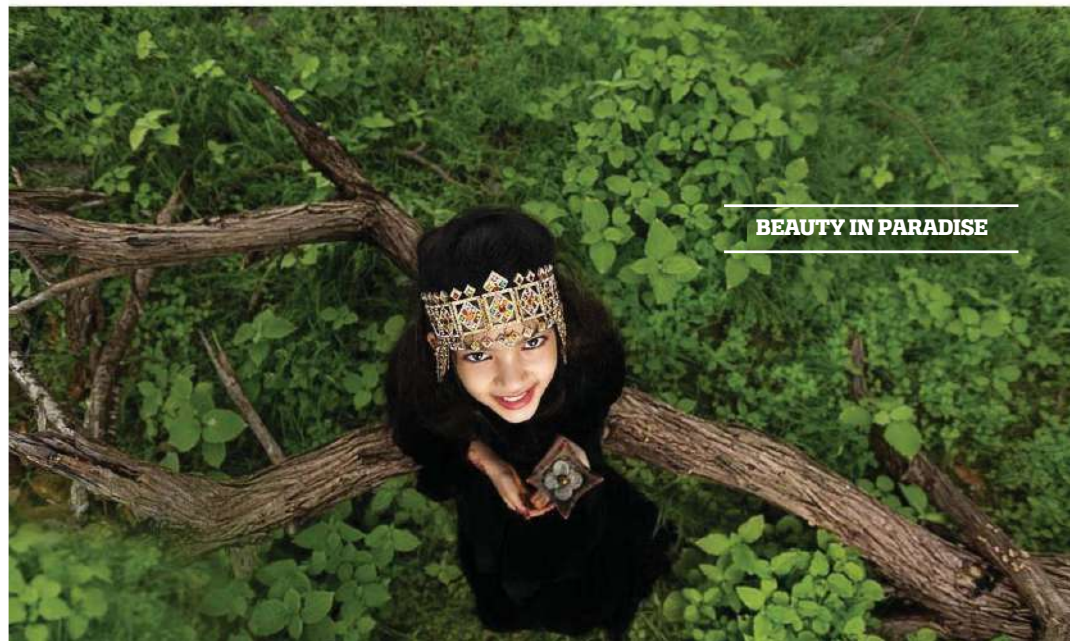
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AROUND THE WORLD

TRAVEL TALES

Cameron Diaz explains decision to walk away from acting career



CAMERON DIAZ has explained her decision to step away from acting, saying her career on the big screen was preventing her from managing other parts of her life.

The actress, 48, was one of the industry's most bankable stars, known for films including *There's Something About Mary*, *Charlie's Angels* and *The Holiday*.

Her last movie was the 2014 adaptation of *Annie*, in which she played Hannigan.

Speaking to actor and comedian Kevin Hart on his new talk show, *Hart to Heart*, she said: "When you do something at a really high level for a long period of time, when you're the person that is delivering one thing, you're the person on the screen, all parts of you that isn't that has to sort of be handed off to other people."

She said this included "different parts of my life, my home, every aspect, from finance, just the management of me as a human being, not me as Cameron Diaz the machine."

"For my personal, spiritual self, I was realising that that one part of me that functioned at a high level wasn't enough."

"It's fun to do, I love it, I love acting, I could go forever, I sometimes feel like I have unlimited energy and inertia. I just looked around and there were so many parts of my life that I wasn't touching and that I wasn't managing, and I couldn't really manage, because everything was so massive."

Diaz said she reached this conclusion when she was around 40 and it gave her the opportunity to reassess every aspect of her life.

She added: "I have a lot of great friends and incredible people who supported me for so long, and I believe it's about the people you have in your life who help you keep things moving."

"I had some amazing people but I had other people who were not serving my best interests always, but you don't have time to figure those things out if you are just going with blinders on, you're in the tunnel."

"For me, I just really wanted to make my life manageable by me. My routine in a day is literally what I can manage to do by myself."

"It's the best feeling, I feel whole."

Diaz, who is married to Good Charlotte star Benji Madden, with whom she welcomed daughter Raddix in December 2019, added: "I met my husband, we started a family, all the things I didn't have time for before, and not just the time for but didn't have the space to make the decisions, the right decision for me at the time." — **TCP/dpa**

GASTRONOMY

How Yemeni fish became Djibouti's national dish



IT'S LUNCHTIME in Djibouti's capital and "Chez Hamdani" is buzzing. Local celebrities, visiting diaspora and nomadic herders: every-one flocks to this decades-old establishment for a taste of Yemeni fish, the only dish on the menu.

Split in two, coated with a red pepper paste and then baked in a traditional oven: its spicy flavour evokes the complex, multicultural history of this tiny coastal nation nestled between Africa and Arabia.

"It's a recipe imported from Yemen that we have adopted and which is part of our eating habits," explains Abubakar Moussa, a former television anchor, as he waits for his order to be prepared.

"All Djiboutians, whether they are young or old, consume it," adds the 63-year-old, a regular at the establishment.

The heavy Djibouti heat — which the ceiling fans vainly try to dispel — does little to dampen the enthusiasm of Moussa or his visiting Belgian grandchildren.

"Every time I come to Djibouti, he takes me here and I'm so happy," says Sohane, 16, who discovered the dish with her grandfather.

"When we make it at home in Brussels, it doesn't taste the same, but it reminds me of Djibouti, it's a little memory."

'THE CHILLI IS MOST IMPORTANT'

Several times a day, fishermen deliver sea bream,

mullet and other offerings to the many Yemeni fish restaurants or "moukbasa" dotting the port city, which is separated from Yemen by the Gulf of Aden.

Then, it's time for the chefs to get to work.

The fish is cut lengthwise and salted, before a paste made from mild red peppers — imported from Ethiopia — is applied using a paintbrush.

"The most important thing is the chilli," says one of the cooks, beaded with sweat, as he secures the fish to a long metal rod, before plunging it into a traditional terracotta oven, which resembles an Indian tandoor.

The finished dish — retrieved 15 minutes later — owes both its gentle heat and its intense red colour to the peppers.

Across Djibouti City, Yemeni fish is eaten with pancakes and "fata," a paste made from bananas or dates, and usually sold for around 1,000 Djiboutian francs (five euros or \$5.60).

Restaurateur Omar Hamdani credits his grandfather's "world-famous" recipe for his establishment's enduring popularity, nearly a century after he emigrated to Djibouti from Yemen.

Not much has changed at "Chez Hamdani" since then, but for the addition of a second floor.

Its walls are still adorned with earthenware and traditional moldings. A small dining room in the back is reserved for women who wish to dine alone. And the

recipe remains the same.

"My grandfather brought it back from Yemen, he opened this restaurant, then my father took over from him, and now it's my turn to take the lead," the bearded entrepreneur, who is in his late 30s, tells AFP.

TASTE OF HOME

The Yemenis are the third largest ethnic community in Djibouti, behind the Issa and the Afar.

Migration and trade between the two countries have existed for millennia.

But in recent years, their shared history has taken a tragic turn, with thousands of Yemenis crossing the Bab el-Mandeb strait to seek refuge in Djibouti and escape the war that has ravaged their country since 2014.

After fleeing Sanaa for Djibouti, former civil servant Amin Maqal set up a moukbasa called "Le Kaaboul" with two other immigrants — a reflection of their desire for a fresh start and their longing for a taste of home.

"As long as I am in this restaurant, I eat here, I am surrounded by my compatriots, I feel good. Because everything I had in Yemen, I have it here," the soft-spoken 45-year-old tells AFP.

He is both moved and amused by the local craze for Yemeni fish, which is only one among dozens of delicacies in his home country.

In the end, "demand is stronger in Djibouti than in Yemen," he says with a smile. — **AFP**

ART

Banksy shows off his British seaside "spraycation"



BANKSY, BRITAIN'S most famous street artist, on Friday confirmed what many had already suspected — that he is indeed the author of a number of works that have appeared recently in British seaside towns.

An Instagram video clip, just over three minutes long and entitled "A Great British Spraycation", shows the elusive artist taking a summer road trip in a beat-up camper van with cans of spray paint stashed in a cooler. In one work on the concrete sea-defence wall of a British beach, a rat lounges in a deckchair, sipping a cocktail.

In another, sticking to the seaside theme, a mechanical claw dangles above a public bench — as if anyone who sits there is about to be plucked up like a prize in an arcade game.

Another shows a giant seagull swooping down to snatch some outsized chips — French fries to US readers — from a waste skip or dumpster.



A fourth shows three children in a rickety boat. One looks ahead while another is busy bailing out water with a bucket. Above them, appears the inscription: "We're all in the same boat." On the roof of a bus shelter, a couple also dance to the tune of a flat-capped accordion player; in a black and white painting evoking the faded, down-at-heel feel of many of the country's once-prosperous seaside resorts.

In recent years, the Bristol artist, who cleverly maintains the mystery of his identity, has kept the attention of the contemporary art world with his social commentaries and causes — migrants, opposition to Brexit, denunciation of Islamist radicals — as well as stirring the excitement of the moneyed art markets.

Last March, a work honouring caregivers fetched a record 14.4 million pounds (about \$20 million, 20 million euros). The proceeds went to a hospital charity, Christie's auctioneers said at the time. — **AFP**

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Inspired by Wakan, fashion dedicated to resilience of women

By Yeru Ebuon

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A REVERED NAME in Oman's growing fashion industry, Amal al Raisi views the pandemic as a period in modern history that many of us have not experienced before. It is a very challenging time that pushes almost everyone, including businesses to rise to the new challenges and think out of the box, including the industry which she falls under.

"We as human beings are going through a phase we have never experienced before. I must say it is challenging. When it comes to business, I am someone who plans ahead of time and has my goals set for the coming year but Covid-19 changed everything", she shared during an exclusive email interview with *Oman Daily Observer*.

Amal added, "From doing yearly goals to narrowing it down to daily goals has been tough but I am learning to embrace the beauty of taking each day as it comes."

From Amal's viewpoint, the fashion industry, too, has taken a very alarming downward trend.

"There had been many changes in the fashion industry during the last two years. Yes, it had a huge impact on the fashion industry. Personally, I take part in fashion shows regularly across the globe and I miss that", she said.

"Although I must say that social media has played a major role in uplifting local and regional brands during the pandemic, to run a successful business, part of what we do is understanding the buying behaviour of our clients which is extremely important. I think the pandemic taught us to take up new challenges and push ourselves to think out of the box", she added.

Amal noted that people are still trying their best to have a sense of normalcy in their day to day activities despite the day to day challenges.

"I believe that people dress up for themselves and if it brings them joy and happiness, then why not? I think it's important to stay strong and happy during such tough times for our loved ones", she said.

Just as any other business, Amal has taken the opportunity to venture into new things amid the pandemic realising how important it is to keep going despite the challenges.

"I introduce new products that cater to the current needs and I am happy that I did. I think my most remarkable achievement during this time was introducing my Resort Line which is the perfect stay at home relaxed loungewear that everyone can wear. I curated the resort line catering to the needs of my clients in the current scenario", she said.

"My latest collection is Autumn Winter 21 which was inspired by Wakan Village. It is dedicated to resilient women and I've looked into the strong layers embedded in each woman to come up with the pieces to stay true to my inspiration. With flowy silhouettes and feminine aesthetics, this collection is as dreamy as the Wakan Village", Amal said.

She explained, "The collection offers trendy collars and balloon sleeves which are embellished with the signature style of the Amal al Raisi brand along with a variety of cuts suitable to all body types."

Asked how Wakan plays into the collection, Amal uses the summary of her lookbook saying, "Similar to the Sakura blossom in Japan, when the apricot fowers of Wakan Village are in full bloom, the village turns into a paradise with white fowers that are visible from miles away. These flowers symbolise change and new beginnings which is captured in the latest collection through the signature embroidery of leaves and flowers."

She added, "Strong hues of grey and black which signify fortitude and power are fused with hints of turquoise symbolising emotional balance and femininity while pale rose expresses grace. Together these colours offer a meaningful colour palette. Playing with hard and soft fabrics in this collection depicts how underneath the tough exterior that women portray, there lies a delicate side."

Amal hopes "things will go back to normal in the coming months with borders finally opening up and everything falling back into place."

"I think the pandemic taught me, perhaps everyone, the importance of staying healthy leading a healthier lifestyle. For our followers and the community in general, I hope we all find the positive side of our grave situation. This is a very difficult phase we are going through but once all this ends, I am hoping it will be a beautiful time because the pandemic taught us to value every little thing in our life", she said.

