



P12

SUPER SECOND PLACE FINISH FOR OMAN RACING



P15

OIL POSTS BIGGEST WEEK OF LOSSES IN NINE MONTHS



P18

LOOKING INTO SUSTAINABLE RECYCLING OF PALM AND COTTON FIBRES



MUSCAT

HM GREET'S NEW ZAMBIA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Hakainde Hichilema on the occasion of his election as new president of Zambia. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings to the president-elect wishing him success in leading the people of Zambia towards further progress and prosperity, wishing that the friendship relations between the two countries witness more development. — ONA

WORK TO BEGIN ON NEW INDUSTRIAL CITY

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has awarded a contract for the construction of infrastructure facilities linked to the establishment of the first phase of a new industrial city at Ibri in Dhahirah Governorate. The contract, valued at around RO 9 million, covers a 3 million sq metre area, with a completion timeframe of 18 months. Eng Nasser al Mabsali, Director General of Ibri Industrial City, stated that Madayn will invest in developing the infrastructure including roads, lighting, water and communication networks, sewage networks, landscaping and electricity network in coordination with Majan Electricity Company. **DETAILS ON P13**

NIGHT LOCKDOWN AND MOVEMENT BAN ENDS

ONUS ON PUBLIC TO STOP SPREAD OF COVID-19

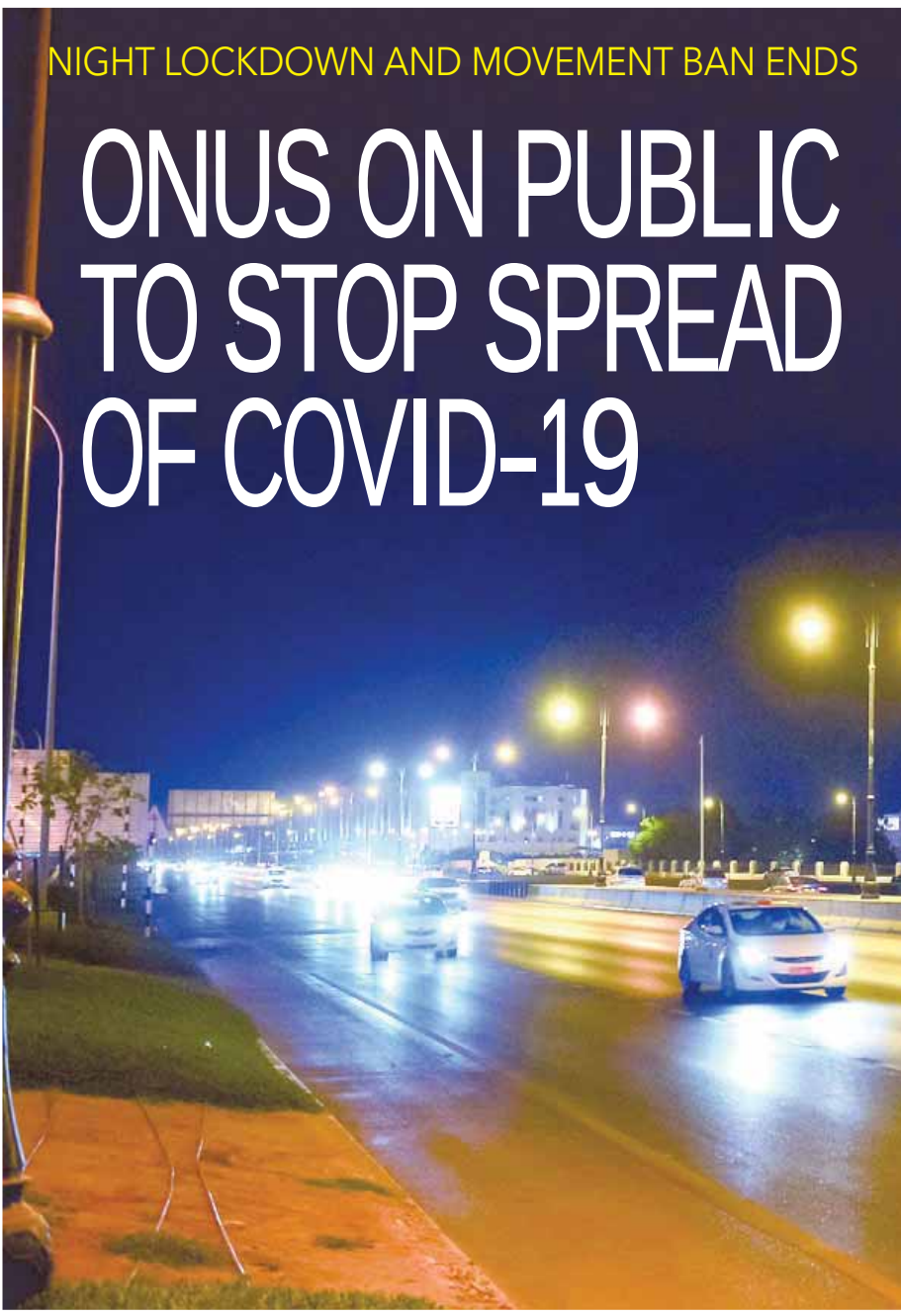
KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

The end of night lockdown and sharp decrease in coronavirus cases have put more responsibility on people to adhere Covid-19 appropriate behaviour. They must take two doses of Covid-19 vaccine, wear face mask, wash hands with soap or sanitiser and strictly follow social distancing, caution health experts.

“One shouldn’t fail to adhere to the precautionary measures including wearing masks and social distancing and all other precautions have to be strictly followed”, Dr Faryal al Lawati, Senior Consultant and Head of Infection Diseases Section at Royal Hospital, said.

“The outcome of the total lockdown over the past few months will only be visible in the coming weeks from now or so and one cannot expect the results of any preventive measure immediately”, said Dr Mahmood al Rahbi, Head of Emergencies at Al Nahdha Hospital.

“We are slowly flattening the curve and we all need to be careful in our daily routines and follow the preventive measures. We will soon start witnessing the result of the lockdown **TURN TO P2**



Schools to open on September 12

ZAINAB AL NASSRI @zainabalnasseri

The new school academic year will begin on September 12 as vaccination for students and teaching staff gather pace and new coronavirus infections decline.

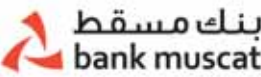
According to the Ministry of Education the opening of schools in the second week of next month will be based on strict adherence of Covid-19 protocol. The academic year will end on July 7, 2022.

For grades 1 to 6, a blended education system — a combination of in-person and online classes — will be followed. Low-density schools however, with no more than 20 students to a class, will follow the direct education system where students. **DETAILS ON P3**

US tells citizens not to go to Kabul airport

KABUL: The United States advised Americans in Afghanistan to avoid travelling to Kabul airport on Saturday, citing security risks as thousands gathered trying to flee the country almost a week after Taliban took control.

Crowds have grown at the airport in the heat and dust of the day over the last week, with mothers, fathers and children pushed up against concrete blast walls in the crush as they plead for their families to be allowed to leave. **DETAILS ON P7**



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WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 34°C Min 30°C SALALAH: Max 26°C Min 23°C NIZWA: Max 40°C Min 26°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 05:45 FAJR: 04:27 DHUHR: 12:15 ASR: 15:42 MAGHRIB: 18:39 ISHA: 19:53



RAFO RECEIVES NEW BATCH OF RECRUITS

MUSCAT: In response to the Royal directives issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, to speed up the process of recruitment of national job-seekers, and in continuation to the national efforts exerted by the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) to open the door for citizens to join the military service and get the honour of serving this dear nation, the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), in coordination



with the Ministry of Labour, on Saturday received a new batch of citizens.
RAFO took all precautionary measurements against Covid-19 to initiate the basic military training for the new batch of air cadets after passing evaluation, physical fitness testing and personal interviews.
RAFO employed its expertise and administrative capacities as well as its means of transportation in order to provide a suitable environment for conducting the necessary procedures for the new recruits in a speedy and a seamless manner.
These vigorous efforts made by the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) to recruit citizens are in line with the plans and programmes for the employment of nationals at SAF and the other departments of the Ministry of Defence to enable them to serve the country, its leader and the Omani people.
— ONA

Onus on public to stop spread of Covid

FROM PAGE 1
in the coming weeks and expecting any positive results so soon is not advised," said Dr Ramla al Qassabi, a senior medical specialist.
The Supreme Committee tasked with following up the developments arising out of the pandemic on Thursday said the night lockdown will end on Saturday and ban on commercial activities and movement of individuals and vehicles will be lifted.
"All the precautions which have been in existence since the outbreak of the pandemic need to be followed, the failure of which will attract punitive actions against the offender," the Supreme Committee and the Ministry of Health (MoH) said in the statements.



Onam in Oman: Citizens join expats

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Oman celebrated Onam, a festival of India, especially of the South with traditional floral decorations on the floor, elaborate feast and people wearing the authentic golden threaded sarees and dhotis.
Whereas many families celebrated Onam with their close relatives with traditional floral carpet and delicious meals, others gathered in hotels where they rejoiced memories of a bygone era as the history has it.
Hotels and restaurants were abuzz with people visiting for take away 'sadya', as the extended meal on a banana leaf platter is called, from forenoon till evening and were arranged on a prebooking basis.

However, a special attention to following strict Covid-19 rules and regulations was witnessed in all the hotels we visited as warnings of strict actions against the offenders of Covid rules were circulated days before. Even children were seen adhering to the regulations and wore masks.
Onam, coined as the 'Harvest Festival of Kerala', is a day of memories in abundance and most of them are connected to childhood days.
As the myth aptly indicates an era of sweet memories, people rejoice those days of their childhood they spent in their villages.
"Thiruvonam is on the tenth day of the Malayalam month 'Chingam' and is a combination of myths, folklore and traditions and one of the great occasions where Malayalis rejoice together and reaffirm the values of harmony and coexistence," Piya Pawani, a model and actress, said.
What makes the Onam celebrations even more the merrier is the fact that citizens with their families joined their expat fraternity in celebrating the feast festi-



val at the hotels.
"I know the mythical story behind Onam and we enjoy joining hands with our Hindu brothers who celebrate the harvest festival. We joined them for feast at the Foodlands and enjoyed clicking photos near the floral carpet," said Dr Qais al Hooti, from Qurayat, who was seen with family at the venue.
"The sadya with some 12 side dishes was fantastic. Actually, Onam is a cultural convergence of minds," he added.
A number of associations and under the umbrella of Indian Social Club and other NGOs are organising festivities and cultural celebrations which culminate in the delicious 'Onam Sadya', a treat of a vast range of side dishes, predominantly made of vegetables, which accompany traditional rice on a plantain leaf.
The most notable one is the 'Universal Humanity Floral Decor' organised by the Kerala Travel and Tourism Department that aimed at unifying the people from the state residing across the globe.
"Anyone, whether individually or as a group or as an organisation, can participate in the festival organised in association with the World Kerala Sabha," PM Jabir, Director, Norka Welfare Board, told the Observer.
One can register their expression of interest on <https://www.keralatourism.org/contest/pookkalam2021> till August 23.

Tender Announcement

مدائن
madayn

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates – Madayn- is pleased to invite for the following tender:

Tender No.	Name of Project	Last Date for Purchase of Bidding's Documents	Last Date for Bid Submission	Type of Business	Grade of Company	Purchase Amount (RO)
NIZ/1/2021	Consultancy services of Hill lands survey at Nizwa Industrial City	3/9/2021	19/9/2021	Consultancy Offices	First	25

Companies specialized in the aforesaid works and holder of a valid registration certificate from the Board of Tender may subscribe to the tender and obtain tender-related documents according to the following procedures:

- Deposit the purchase amount of the tender document into the Madayn Bank Muscat account no. (0378007322810019).
- Email payment receipt and contact information to (Nizwa-finance@peie.om) in order to obtain the tender documents.
- Inquiries related to the project are to be sent to (Nizwa.Operation@madayn.om).
- Bids, contained in red-wax-sealed envelopes and addressed to the Head of Procurement Committee (P.O Box 998, PC 611 Nizwa), are to be submitted in the Nizwa Industrial City. The envelopes should not bear the name of or any indication to the tenderer. The bids should be submitted no later than 12:00 pm on the last date for bid submission and are to enclose a banking bond totaling 1 per cent of the bid's value and valid for 90 days from the last date for bid submission.

Madayn is not obligated to accept the lowest or any other bid.
Madayn may cancel the tender and bidders are not entitled to any compensation.

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Schools to open on September 12

BLENDED EDUCATION FOR JUNIORS,
CLASSROOM LEARNING FOR SENIORS

ZAINAB AL NASSERI

@zainabalnasseri

The new school academic year will begin on September 12 as vaccination for students and teaching staff gather pace and new coronavirus infections decline.

According to the Ministry of Education the opening of schools in the second week of next month will be based on strict adherence of Covid-19 protocol. The academic year will end on July 7, 2022.

For grades 1 to 6, a blended education system — a combination of in-person and online classes — will be followed. Low-density schools, however, with no more than 20 students to a class, will follow the direct education system where students attend classes on all school days.

The direct education system will be followed for grades 7 to 11. Schools with over 30 students to a class, however, will follow

the blended education system.

The direct education system will be followed for grade 12. The ministry will announce the specific mechanism for blended and direct education at a later date.

The Sultanate had ended the last academic year early in May following a sharp spike in coronavirus infections.

The decision was based on the latest epidemiological situation in the Sultanate as the cases of Covid-19 infection in the country saw significant decline recently.

On Thursday last week, the Ministry of Health (MoH) reported 186 new cases and 7 deaths, while the recovery rate went up to 96.2 per cent.

Based on a recent study on how to reduce Covid-19 infections in schools, Dr Zaid al Hinai, a Paediatrics Consultant, said, "opening windows decreases infection 14-fold, face masks 8-fold, while other precautions decrease infection 30-fold."

Last of the lockdowns? Depends on number of cases

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

Thanks to the fall in number of cases and rapid pace of vaccinations, the Sultanate is finally free of months of partial and full lockdowns. Whether it is the last of the series depends on the number of cases. But businessmen are upbeat as cases fall and vaccinations gather pace.

Many Omani and expatriate businessmen that the *Observer* spoke to just hoped that they had seen the last of lockdowns in the country.

The lifting of lockdowns, even with conditions, are important for businesses such as restaurants, cafes, street vendors and entertainment centres as most of the outings take place at late night in Muscat.

"Sheer survival has become difficult these days due to lockdowns. Now that more than half of the population has got vaccinated, I just hope we have seen the last of lockdowns. Our next hope is that tourists should return to Oman from the upcoming season, especially with the start of Expo 2020 and from cruise ships," said a popular restaurant operator in Muttrah Seaside.

The partial night lockdown (limited to the closure of commercial activities) was introduced for the first time this year on March 25 between 8 pm and 5 am.



The reasons that led to that lockdown were mass gatherings and crowding at public places such as restaurants and malls, despite the health protocols put in place by the authorities.

Cases doubled between December 2020 and March of this year when the country was relatively free of lockdowns at the time.

Full and partial lockdowns have continued since, including during the holy month of Ramadhan, Eid al Fitr, and Eid al Adha.

The ease of restrictions is important to ensure public health on the one hand and the continuity of business in all

government units and private sector facilities.

The Royal Oman Police has been praised for its efforts to ensure the effectiveness of lockdowns by activating all check points, which were equally respected by citizens and residents.

Oman has joined the rest of the GCC countries that eased restrictions since the beginning of this month.

Kuwait has decided to lift the evening closure of commercial activities and allow entry only for those who are vaccinated against Covid-19. It will open all activities for children from September 1.

Bahrain has opened malls,

restaurants, cafes, and sports centres for everyone. The kingdom allows vaccinated individuals, those recovering from the virus, and children under 12 years old accompanied by a vaccinated person, to enter cinemas and organise events and conferences indoors.

Abu Dhabi emirate has ended a partial lockdown imposed in July as part of efforts to prevent the spread of Covid-19 variants, the government's media office said.

From August 1, Saudi Arabia has stopped people from entering its shopping malls unless they have been vaccinated against Covid-19.

Air travel curbs to ease soon?



SAMUEL KUTTY

@samkuttv

Stranded expatriates in different South Asian countries are upbeat with expectations that the Sultanate will fully open its skies in the first week of September.

Sparkling their optimism is the announcement last Thursday by the Oman authorities that two doses of vaccines are mandatory for entering the Sultanate.

"Entry to the Sultanate from all land, sea and airports will require travellers to present proof of two doses of vaccinations that are approved in the Sultanate," announced the Supreme Committee tackling the Covid-19 situation in the country.

Starting September 1, travellers from the age of 18 and above must take two doses of vaccine if they are coming through land, air and sea ports.

The Committee also said that

visitors and travellers are required to undergo a PCR test prior to travel and upon arrival in the Sultanate.

"A seven-day quarantine is a must for all with a positive PCR test report. They need to take another test on the eight day. The decision will take effect from September 1," said the statement.

The Supreme Committee has also completely lifted a three-week nationwide curfew from Saturday following a drastic fall in the number of new daily Covid-19 infections in the recent weeks.

Experts in the air travel industry are of the opinion that the latest easing of restrictive measures almost certainly provides a scope for reopening of flights from the red-list countries from the first week of September.

"Although not conspicuous, indications are that flights will be allowed to Oman from the first

week of September. Unlike in the previous announcements relating to restrictions, the Supreme Committee was specific about measures that air travellers need to take," said an official with a travel agency in Al Qurum.

Some travel agencies have already started contacting passengers to collect details for booking tickets as airlines have reopened sale of tickets.

"A lot of people are enquiring about ticket availability. And they are optimistic that flights will reopen in the first week of September. Many of them want to travel urgently as their work permits are expiring or businesses halted," said Afzal Ahmed, who works in a travel agency in Kochi.

Fights have been suspended for travellers from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and some other countries by the Sultanate as part of Covid-19 precautionary measures.



Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender Committee of Ministry of Finance hereby announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Document Fee	Purchase Document Deadline	Submission Deadline
6/2021	Supply of smart screens with accessories	R.O 25	Thursday 10:00 A.M 09.09.2021	Thursday 10:00 A.M 30.09.2021

► All specialized companies who wish to bid must be registered in E-tendering system of the Tender Board, and have a valid registration certificate. To obtain the tender document, companies shall pay the Tender fee online through E-payment portal via the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

► The bids shall be submitted online through the following E-tendering link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>. Bids received after the closing bid date, shall not be accepted in the System.

► All companies shall attach a copy bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any registered bank in the Sultanate of Oman. The value of the cheque shall not be less than (1%) and shall be valid for Nineteen (90) days from the date of the bid closing date.

For further queries or technical support, please contact us via telephone No. 24166670, or E-mail: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om

THE INTERIOR
COORDINATION
OF HOME CAN
CHANGE OUR
MOOD AND
EVEN CONTROL
FEELINGS SUCH
AS HAPPINESS,
DEPRESSION OR
SADNESS

DOES YOUR HOME REFLECT YOUR MOOD?

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabnasseri

Many people believe that home decor and furniture do not affect us the way we feel. But, this is proving to be very wrong. Studies have proven that interior coordination of a home is able to change one's mood and even control feelings such as happiness, depression or sadness. So maybe you should consider remodelling your home if you don't feel happy enough while you're in it.

"We all know that coming home means comfort, but did you know that this comfort is not only physical, but also psychological? Let's assume that blue reminds you of clear sky and beautiful ocean. It is nice to come home after a stressful day at work to rest your eyes in the colours derived from blue, for example? This is exactly what makes returning home psychologically

comfortable," says Salma Ahmed, an interior designer.

"Home's furniture, colours and décor can change how we feel and bring comfort and peace to our interior if we design our home the way we like it," she adds.

Have you ever felt completely comfortable in your own home or in somebody else's home? Did you notice the features that made you feel comfortable?

There are many things that have the ability to make you feel very comfortable and even more energised. For example, a house overlooking a garden or a house that has many plants is one of the houses that increase the feeling of comfort, reassurance and security.

Also, it is not surprising that colours affect our lives, the way we think and the feelings we feel. Yet, many people still do not know how to properly deal with these colours. "We all know that

the correct use of colours in our home means more happiness and psychological comfort", Salma elaborates, stressing that the effects of the main colours in the house on our mood are as follows: red colour symbolizes strength, passion and attraction, and you can use it in bedrooms or large homes because it gives a feeling of intimacy, tranquillity and warmth.

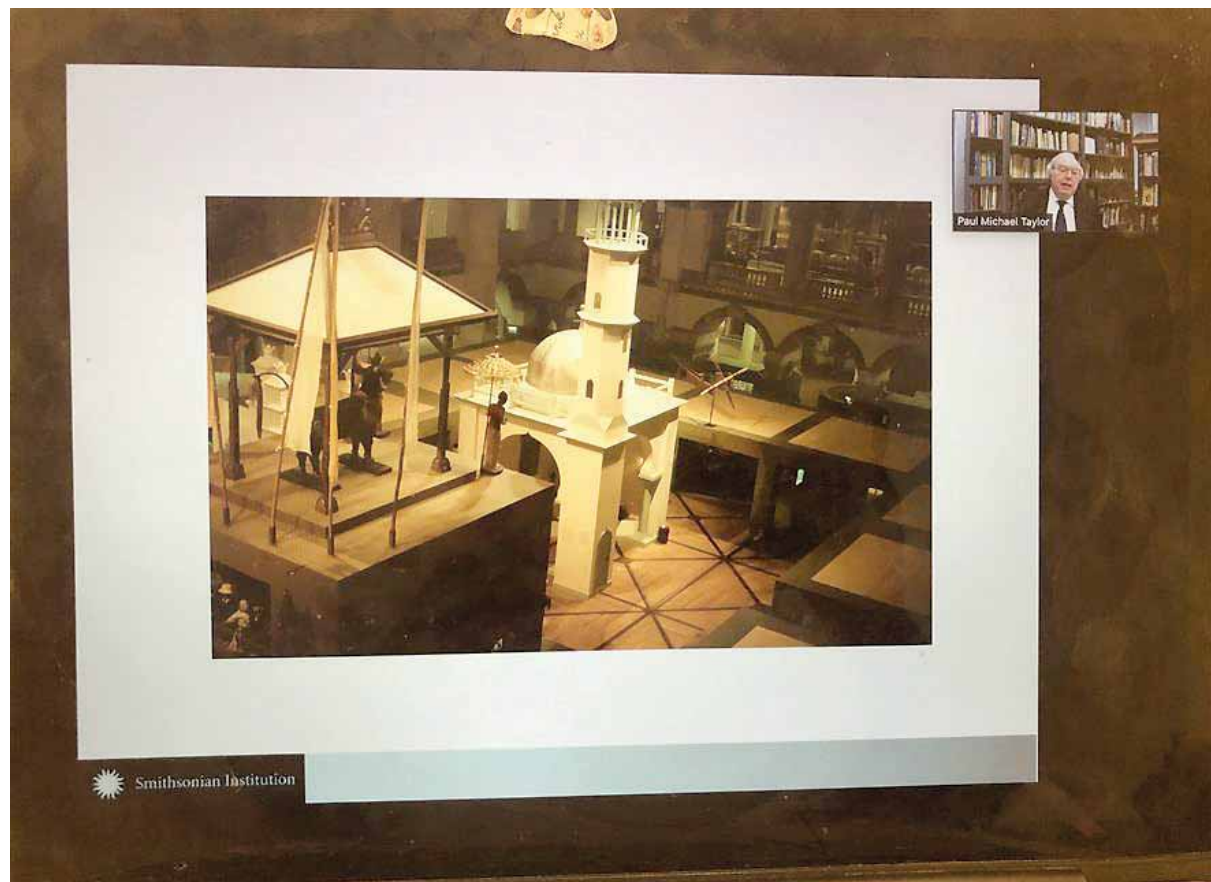
Orange; it makes you feel energetic, but it is exhausting for the eyes. so try not to overdo it at home because it will make you feel tired. Yellow; it is associated with happiness and relaxation, and it is a colour that is found in nature in abundance, so it helps you to create a nice and peaceful environment in your home that is close to nature.

Green; it has soothing and has gentle properties, you can use it in the entrance of the house or in the foyer to create a suitable atmosphere during the transition from outdoors to indoors.

Blue; it is considered a calm colour it gives your home a calm character making those in the house feel the need for calm. It can be used in children's rooms, or in areas of the house such as balconies or the back garden.

"There are many things that change our mood and our inner feelings in the blink of an eye. It is possible to get angry due to some traffic jam even though we were happy a few moments ago. Therefore, it is necessary to prepare the house to be a reason for our inner happiness and psychological comfort from the moment we enter it", says Salma.

Some of the things that help us to feel inner happiness is to buy your own piece of furniture, use a nice scent or perfume in the house, put some natural flowers in the hallway, and to keep your house clean because a clean house means psychological comfort.



Lecture on representation of cultures in museums

MUSCAT: The National Museum, represented by the Learning Centre and in collaboration with the United States Smithsonian Institution and the US Embassy in Muscat, hosted the second lecture in a series on museum management in the twenty-first century for Omani specialists and students within the museum field.

The series is another sign of the strong partnership between Oman and the United States.

Titled "The History of Representation of Cultures in Museums and Cultural Centres," the virtual webinar was hosted by Dr Paul Michael Taylor, Research Anthropologist at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, Director of the Museum's Asian Cultural History, European and Middle



Eastern Cultures and Director of the Asian Cultural History Programme and curator of Asian, European and Middle Eastern Ethnology.

The webinar targeted employees of the National Museum, employees of public and private museums, employees of private art galleries, employees of cultural agencies and administrative divisions that fall under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, in addition

to tourism students from Sultan Qaboos University and Oman College Tourism.

Dr Taylor will also present three additional lectures this year addressing a range of topics: "Virtual Exhibitions and Other Museums Uses of the Web," "Programme Development: Development of Dynamic Programmes and Visitor Participation," and "Activities of Museums or Cultural Centres" Modern: Prosperity in the Twenty-first Century." In addition to a sixth lecture on "Exhibition Development: A Case Study of Money as Material Culture: Acquisitions and Organisation in the American Museum of Money," by Douglas Mudd of the Colorado Museum of Money in the United States. — ONA

OMSB discusses academic training methods, plans

MUSCAT: The Executive Council of Oman Medical Specialty Board (OMSB) on Thursday held its third meeting for 2021 via video-conferencing, with participation of Dr Hilal al Sabti, OMSB Executive President.

The board approved minutes of the previous meeting and followed up the previous decisions and action plans. It also discussed the methods of academic training and results of the survey on resident doctors and faculty members.

The meeting also discussed the work plan, the modification of the training period for the General Dentistry programme, the half-yearly accreditation report for the anesthesiology programme, and the internal accreditation report of Al Rustaq



Hospital.

The executive board of OMSB comprises an executive president as chairman, the dean of College of Medicine and Health Science in Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), director-general of

Health Affairs in the Ministry of Health (MoH), director-general of Human Resources Development in the MoH, representative of Health Services in the Royal Oman Police (ROP), representative of Health Services in the Ministry of Defence, representative of Private Medical Colleges, heads of specialised departments and committees in OMSB, and two experts assigned by the Minister of Health every three years.

The meeting of the executive board is held periodically to follow up the training programmes' plans and their implementation, approve the standards to accredit training hospitals, manage the training and examination affairs, and propose acceptance criteria for residency and fellowship training programmes. — ONA



Literary group organises programme on India's 75th Independence Day

MUSCAT: The Poetry Literary Group (PLG) based in Muscat recently organised a programme on the occasion of the 75th Independence Day of India. PLG international participated in the 12-hour non-stop celebration under the theme, "Hum sab ek hain". The programme was inaugurated by permanent ambassador of India to UN Indramani Pandeyji from his UN office in Geneva.

Munu Mahawar, Indian Ambassador to the Sultanate, conveyed greetings and felicitations to the participants of the poetry programme while presiding over the Middle East part of an event organised by PLG international.

The Global President of PLG, Tufail Ahmad, presided over a series of literary and cultural events brought by various units of PLG spread all over the world. It kick-started with a mushaira, Kavi Sammelan presented by PLG India which was followed by PLG southeast Asia and Australia, PLG Middle East, PLG Europe and Africa and finally PLG North America and Canada.

PLG children's wing headed by Simmi Kumari and Dazy Ali organised a special programme for children titled Azad parindey which unified all in a national celebration.

The most interesting programme of the series was Triveni Sangam, a confluence of writing skills, singing and acting, conceived by Bipin Pandya, Vice-President of PLG social Oman. The trilogy of arts was presented by PLG member poets, writers and actors, providing an exciting journey of



song, music, expression and freedom based on Bollywood tunes.

Tufail Ahmad extended warm greetings to all members of PLG International and to all the Indians living in India and abroad. "Today is the beginning of the 75th year of independence of India and fitting to the occasion this day is being celebrated in a

very special way what is known as Aazadi ka Amrit Mahotsav. We at PLG felt that it's our duty to be part of this Amrit Mahotsav and play a significant role in the related programmes. We can proudly say that PLG is presenting probably the best and most widely represented literary programme," he said.

Looking for job, car, flat and furniture? Check out the Observer classified page. It's where buyers meet sellers.

SALE OF USED CONCRETE PLACER BOOMS

A leading construction company in Oman intends to sell their following used equipment located at Seeb Heights, in 'as-is-where-is' condition. The Details of the equipment are as under:-

1. **Schwing Concrete Placer Booms 32 Meter-2 Nos.**
2. **Schwing Concrete Placer Booms 35 Meter-1 Nos.** with 500 meters delivery pipes, cross base, accessories and foundation anchors. 2016 make in good condition and ready to use.

The above machines are presently located at construction site near Seeb Heights adjacent to Express Highway Bridge No 10 and will be offered for inspection during project working time.

Interested parties may contact Mr. Shibumon Hameed, Mob: 99857115 at site for inspection of the machines and submit closed quotation at their Al Khoud office (Tel: 24525345) on or before 31st August 2021.



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Notice of Issued Share Capital Reduction

Based on the decision of the Extraordinary General Meeting of the Company held on 18 August 2021 and in accordance with the provisions of articles 141 and 142 of the Commercial Companies Law No. 18/2019, United Power Company SAOC, which is registered in the Commercial Register with commercial registration number 1460366, announces that it is in the process of reducing its issued share capital of RO 2,000,000 (Two Million) to 500,000 (Five Hundred Thousand).

Creditors that have any objection to the proposed share capital reduction are required to submit the reasons for their objection to the company's headquarters at the following address:

United Power Company SAOC,
PO Box 147, PC 134, Jawharat Al Shatti, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman,
for the attention of: Mr. Zoher Karachiwala,

with a copy of the objection to the Secretariat of the Commercial Register at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 15 (Fifteen) days from the date of this notice.

■ ON THE SHORE OF NEW NORMAL



Residents sit on benches in front of a ferry boat in the port of Kadikoy, on the northern shore of the Sea of Marmara, in Istanbul Province, on Saturday. — AFP

Raisi says tackling Covid, reviving economy priorities

TEHRAN: Iran President Ebrahim Raisi said on Saturday his government will prioritise tackling Covid and accelerating vaccinations ahead of an economic revival, as he defended his cabinet choices before parliament.

The parliament began debating the male-only, largely conservative lineup in the morning ahead of a vote of confidence expected later this week.

“The government’s first priority is controlling the coronavirus, improving the health situation and widespread vaccination,” Raisi said.

“The economy and the livelihood situation is the second” priority, he added, noting that his lineup is meant to bring about “justice and progress”.

Since late June, Iran has seen what officials have called a “fifth wave” of Covid-19 infections, the country’s worst yet, which they have largely blamed on the more contagious Delta variant of the



Ebrahim Raisi during a parliament session reviewing his cabinet selection in the capital Tehran on Saturday. — AFP

virus. Daily infections and deaths have hit record highs several times this month, raising total cases since the pandemic started to over 4.5 million and fatalities to more than 100,000.

Iran, battling the Middle East’s deadliest Covid outbreak, launched a vaccination drive in February but it has progressed slower than authorities had hoped.

Choked by US sanctions that have made it difficult to transfer money abroad, Iran says it has struggled to import vaccines.

— AFP

Lebanon unlivable as fuel and power shortage become norm

BEIRUT: It wasn’t a late-night craving that brought Ayla to a Beirut cafe but the air-conditioning that let her children, slouched in a sofa next to her, get some proper rest.

Lebanon’s energy crisis is dragging people to unlikely places in their desperate quest for life’s essentials, be it fresh air, electricity, a working fridge or petrol for their cars.

“For two days, we have not had a single minute of power at home. The children can no longer sleep,” said Ayla, a woman in her 30s.

“Here, my kids can at least gain a few hours of rest in an air-conditioned space,” she said, her 8-year-old daughter curled up on the sofa, while her 5-year-old son slept on her lap.

Power cuts lasting more than 22 hours a day have become the new norm in a bankrupt country running out of literally everything, from fuel and gas to medicine and bread.

Lebanon’s inhabitants are also low on patience and courage, months into a seemingly bottomless economic free fall turning the country into a shell of its former self.

“What we are going through is mind-blowing. We have nothing left, we are deprived of everything, even sleep,” Ayla said.

“This is hell on earth.”

In a Beirut barbershop, Ahmad has given up on waiting for the light to come back on.

The 20-year-old trimmed a client’s beard using his cellphone torch in the simmering summer heat.

“We work in very degrading



A barber uses flashlight of his phone as he shaves a customer at his shop in Beirut. — AFP

conditions,” he said, sweat staining his T-shirt.

Others have opted to move their barber chairs onto the pavement to get direct daylight.

Lebanon’s economic collapse has stripped the national currency of most of its value and left four out of five inhabitants below the poverty line.

The slow-motion collapse of the state switched to fast-forward this month after central bank governor Riad Salameh announced an end to subsidised fuel imports.

Widespread panic ensued, with distributors scaling down fuel supply and motorists flocking to pumps ahead of price hikes.

At night, endless lines of empty cars whose drivers went home for some sleep but wanted to keep

their spot in the petrol station queue clog up the lightless streets of Beirut.

Most traffic lights switched off months ago, soon followed by street lamps and shop signs, creating an eerie dystopian feel.

In the morning, when drivers return to their double-parked cars to resume the wait for petrol, the mood is a mix of explosive anger and muted desperation.

“My car has been parked in a queue outside the filling station for two days but I still have no petrol,” taxi driver Abu Karim said from a Beirut station.

“Is there anything more degrading and humiliating than this?” he asked, other empty vehicles lined for kilometres (miles) behind him.

The country’s leaders — widely accused of corruption and negligence — live in a separate bubble, Abu Karim said.

“They lack nothing, not electricity, nor fuel and live totally disconnected from this reality.”

In recent weeks, employees have stayed at home or slept at work for lack of transport options.

Many cafes, restaurants and stores have been forced shut by electricity and fuel shortages.

Those that remain open are frequented mostly by people looking to charge their devices, or catch a few hours of rest. A popular bakery chain that operates eight outlets across the country has closed three of its branches and slashed operating hours so that it can stay afloat. — AFP

Megaship that blocked Suez crosses canal again

ISMAILIA: The giant container ship *Ever Given*, which blocked the Suez canal for six days in March, crossed the waterway on Friday for the first time since it left Egypt after the incident.

The ship, en route from the United Kingdom to China, crossed the canal among a convoy of 26 vessels sailing from the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea, the Suez Canal Authority (SCA) said in a statement. Another 36 ships crossed the waterway from the south.

A group of SCA senior pilots and two tugboats escorted the *Ever Given* throughout its journey through the canal, the authority said in a statement.

The vessel, one of the world’s largest container ships, became jammed across the canal in high winds on March 23, halting traffic in both directions and disrupting global trade.

Once it was dislodged, the 400-metre (1,312-foot) vessel left Egypt on July 7, 106 days after becoming wedged across a southern section of the waterway.

Egypt released the *Ever Given* after protracted negotiations and an undisclosed settlement reached between the SCA and the ship’s owners and insurers. It arrived in the Dutch port of Rotterdam on July 29 before heading to Felixstowe, England.

Roughly 15 per cent of world



Ever Given, one of the world’s largest container ships, is seen after sailing through Suez Canal in Ismailia on Friday. — Reuters

shipping traffic transits the Suez Canal, the shortest shipping route between Europe and Asia. Friday’s voyage through the canal was the *Ever Given*’s 22nd in the waterway.

Shipping websites Marinetraffic.com and Vesselfinder.com showed the ship in the Red Sea after crossing the canal.

The Taiwanese-operated vessel steamed out of the Suez last month after the Japanese owners reached a compensation deal with Egypt.

The terms of the deal were not disclosed publicly but Egypt had originally demanded more than \$900 million in compensation, which it later reduced to \$550 million.

One employee of the SCA was killed during the rescue operation.

In May, Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah al Sisi approved a two-year project to widen and deepen the southern part of the waterway where the ship ran aground to avoid any repetition of the crisis.

Egypt, which takes a toll from ships traversing the canal, said the crisis cost it as much as \$15 million per day, while maritime insurers estimated the hit to world trade to be in the billions.

Last month, the SCA said the canal netted Egypt a record \$5.84 billion in the last tax year, despite the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on world trade plus the cargo ship’s blockage. — Agencies

SHORT TAKES

ISTANBUL

New rector at Istanbul’s Bogazici university

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has appointed a new rector of Istanbul’s prestigious Bogazici University, a month after he removed his predecessor following student protests.

Naci Inci, who has been the acting rector since Bulu’s removal in mid-July, has replaced Melih Bulu, according to a presidential decree published on Official Gazette early on Saturday. Bulu was seen as a close Erdogan ally.

Erdogan has had the authority to pick rectors since 2018 when



Turkey switched to an executive presidency with extended powers for the head of state. Bogazici academics and students have insisted they should be allowed to elect their own rector.

TEL AVIV

Vandals snatch iron cross from church

Vandals have stolen a cross from outside a church in northern Israel where Christians believe Jesus performed the miracle of the loaves and fishes, a church official said on Saturday.

Thieves on Thursday pried the iron cross out of a basalt rock altar outside the Church of the Multiplication of Loaves and Fishes in Tabgha, at the Sea of Galilee, said Georg Roewekamp.

Roewekamp, who represents the German Association of the Holy Land that owns the



property where the church is located, denounced an “anti-Christian” act.

“It shows that people can invade and desecrate our property,” he said.

RABAT

Morocco keen on strong ties with Spain

Morocco is keen to strengthen ties with Spain after a rift between the two countries this spring, Moroccan King Mohammed said on Friday, though he added the crisis had shaken mutual trust.

“We are keen today to strengthen (ties) bearing in mind the need for a common understanding of the two nations’ interests,” he said in a speech.

However, he added that Morocco would not accept “that its best interests be trampled on”.

In April, Morocco was angered



after Spain admitted a Western Sahara independence leader for medical treatment using Algerian documents, saying it had not been informed. Morocco regards the territory as its own.

In brief

WASHINGTON



BIDEN APPOINTS NEW ENVOYS TO CHINA, JAPAN

President Joe Biden on Friday nominated career diplomat Nicholas Burns (pictured left) as ambassador to China and former Chicago mayor and Democratic party heavyweight Rahm Emanuel to head the embassy in Japan.

The White House also announced Biden had tapped another experienced diplomat, Michael Battle, for ambassador in Tanzania. The ambassador posts require confirmation in the almost evenly divided Senate. Beijing and Tokyo are in the top drawer of US diplomatic posts, with China an ever-stronger economic competitor, as well as a rising military rival in the Indo-Pacific, while Japan has been a key US ally for more than half a century. — dpa

MANILA



DUTERTE ORDERS PAYMENT OF HEALTHCARE WORKERS

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte ordered the health and budget ministries to arrange payment for healthcare workers who have not received their benefits on time, following nurses' threats to resign and strike warnings by unions.

Hospitals fear that desertions of medical staff, particularly nurses, have reached a critical point just as the Delta variant sends infections cases soaring, as it has elsewhere in Southeast Asia and globally.

BANGKOK



THAILAND PLANS VACCINE BOOSTERS AFTER CASES TOP 1M

Thailand's passed the 1 million mark in coronavirus cases on Friday, 97pc of which were recorded in the past five months, as the country struggles to boost vaccinations and get on top of one of Asia's most severe Covid-19 outbreaks.

Authorities on Friday reported 19,851 cases and 240 fatalities, taking total confirmed infections past 1 million and deaths to 8,826, a death ratio of 0.87pc of confirmed cases.

Thailand had kept the coronavirus largely under control and enjoyed only partial restrictions for much of the pandemic until it was hit in April by the virulent Alpha variant, followed later by the Delta variant, when few people were vaccinated.

Thousands besiege Kabul airport in frantic attempt to flee Taliban

KABUL: Thousands of people are besieging the entrances to Kabul's airport, the main lifeline for Afghans and foreign citizens trying to flee the country as the Taliban take over.

Shots continued to be fired almost continuously outside the heavily armed airport compound, a witness at the scene said.

In the days since the Taliban took control of the Afghan capital and the country on August 15, thousands of people have been airlifted out of Afghanistan from the airport, the only part of the capital controlled by international troops.

Many desperate Afghans who have either worked with international troops during the past two decades or who work in areas such as human rights are fearing for their lives, with many trying to get themselves or family members inside the airport.

A report compiled for the United Nations warned that the Taliban is conducting targeted searches for supposed collaborators with the ousted government, despite assurances by the radical group that it would not carry out reprisals.

There have been repeated armed confrontations at the gates to the airport compound. The US military decides on when and how to open and close the gates, and the timing is not predictable.

Loudspeaker announcements at the northern entrance said the gate would now be closed for two



US Marines provide assistance during an evacuation at Hamid Karzai International Airport, in Kabul, on Friday. — AFP

days, the witness said.

A second witness said that people from all walks of life were outside the airport: Actors, TV personalities, young people, women with newborn babies or people in wheelchairs among many others.

Images of a baby being handed to troops over the compound wall went viral on Friday. A soldier grabbed the baby by the right arm and handed it to colleagues.

The Afghan Civil Aviation Authority issued a statement on Saturday asking people not to travel to the airport. "There [are]

no civilian and commercial flights in Hamid Karzai International Airport", it advised via Facebook.

The US Embassy also called on US citizens to avoid the airport unless instructed otherwise by a US government representative because of "potential security threats outside the gates", in a security alert issued on Saturday.

Only two days prior, the embassy had asked US citizens to travel to the airport "when you judge it is safe to do so."

US President Joe Biden has assured US citizens and Afghans who worked with the Americans

that they will brought home, but there are many thousands still in the country.

Troops from many other countries, including Germany, Britain and Turkey, are carrying out simultaneous evacuation operations from the airport.

The small EU member state of Luxembourg has also joined evacuation efforts, with the country's only military aircraft awaiting a Belgian plane evacuating people from Afghanistan at the airport in Islamabad, the Defence Ministry said on Saturday.

— dpa

Greece completes border wall extension to stop Afghans

ATHENS: Greece said on Friday it had completed a 40-km fence on its border with Turkey and a new surveillance system was in place to stop possible asylum seekers from trying to reach Europe following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan.

Events in Afghanistan have fuelled fears in the European Union of a repeat of the 2015 refugee crisis, when nearly a million people fleeing war and poverty in the Middle East and beyond crossed to Greece from Turkey before travelling north to wealthier states.

Greece was on the frontline of that crisis and has said its border forces are on alert to make sure it does not become Europe's gateway again.

The Afghanistan crisis had created "possibilities for migrant flows", Citizens' Protection Minister Michalis Chrisochoidis said after visiting the region of Evros on Friday with the defence minister and the head of the armed forces.

— Reuters



A border fence between Greece and Turkey in Alexandroupolis.

— Reuters

China asks Pakistan to enhance security of its nationals

ISLAMABAD: China has issued a fresh warning to its nationals in Pakistan over the precarious security situation there and asked authorities to ensure their safety following a suicide attack in the south-western province of Balochistan.

At least two children were killed and four others including a Chinese national were wounded when a suicide bomber attacked

a vehicle carrying Chinese nationals in Gwadar on Friday.

"Pakistan must take practical and effective measures... to ensure that similar incidents will not happen again", said a statement issued by the Chinese Embassy in Islamabad.

The embassy also asked Chinese citizens in Pakistan to be vigilant, strengthen safety precautions, reduce unnecessary

outings and take effective security measures.

The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), a group of separatist insurgents, claimed responsibility for the bombing in Gwadar.

Gwadar is a coastal region near the Iranian border where China has built a deep sea port as part of its multi-billion dollar investment project in Pakistan, which is opposed by Baloch separatists.

China is undertaking an estimated \$62 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project and a special security division comprising 15,000 troops has been set up to protect thousands of Chinese nationals.

However, Chinese nationals in particular and CPEC projects have been the subject of targeted attacks.

Last month, nine Chinese workers and four Pakistanis were killed when terrorists attacked a bus carrying Chinese workers in northern Pakistan.

Balochistan, Pakistan's largest and most volatile province, which borders both Afghanistan and Iran, is threatened by militants, sectarian groups and sub-nationalist rebels.

— Agencies

World's first Covid-19 DNA vaccine without needle

BENGALURU: India's drug regulator has granted emergency use approval for Zydus Cadila's Covid-19 vaccine, the world's first DNA shot against the coronavirus, in adults and children aged 12 years and above.

The approval gives a boost to India's vaccination programme, which aims to inoculate all eligible adults by December, and will provide the first shot for those under 18, as the country still struggles to contain the virus spread in some states.

The vaccine, ZyCoV-D, uses a section of genetic material from the virus that gives instructions as either DNA or RNA to make the specific protein that the immune system recognises and responds to. Unlike most Covid-19 vaccines, which need two doses or even a single dose, ZyCoV-D is administered in three doses.

The generic drugmaker, listed as Cadila Healthcare Ltd, aims to make 100 million to 120 million

doses of ZyCoV-D annually and has already begun stockpiling the vaccine. Zydus Cadila's vaccine, developed in partnership with the Department of Biotechnology, is the second home-grown shot to get emergency authorisation in India after Bharat Biotech's Covaxin.

The drugmaker said in July its Covid-19 vaccine was effective against the new coronavirus mutants, especially the Delta variant, and that the shot is administered using a needle-free applicator as opposed to traditional syringes.

The regulatory nod makes ZyCoV-D the sixth vaccine authorised for use in the country where only about 9.18 per cent of the entire population has been fully vaccinated so far, according to Johns Hopkins data. Earlier, Moderna, Oxford-AstraZeneca's Covishield, Covaxin — which was developed by Indian firm Bharat Biotech, Russia's Sputnik V and Johnson and Johnson got the nod.



Unlike most Covid-19 vaccines, which need two doses or even a single dose, ZyCoV-D is administered in three doses

Zydus Cadila had also submitted data evaluating a two-dose regimen for the shot in July and plans to seek regulatory approval for the same.

The firm had applied for the authorisation of ZyCoV-D on July 1, based on an efficacy rate of 66.6

per cent in a late-stage trial of over 28,000 volunteers nationwide.

"This three-dose vaccine... when injected produces the spike protein of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and elicits an immune response", the biotechnology department, which partnered with Zydus

Cadila, said in a statement.

"The plug-and-play technology on which the plasmid DNA platform is based can be easily adapted to deal with mutations in the virus, such as those already occurring", it added.

More than 574 million jabs have been administered so far in India.

The country broke its daily record earlier this week by administering more than 9.2 million vaccine doses in the mass vaccination programme which began in mid-January.

Logistical challenges make Indian vaccines, which don't need any special storage facilities, the easiest to transport and use across the country.

The nation of 1.3 billion people was hit by a massive spike of coronavirus cases in April and May that pushed the health care system to breaking point.

India has so far recorded at least 433,589 deaths and more than 32 million Covid-19 infections.

As more get jabbed, fewer give blood

SEOUL: From Seoul to Paris, and Moscow to Bangkok, people are lining up for vaccine shots as Covid-19 case numbers swell. That may ease pressure on stretched hospitals around the world, but with it comes a hangover — a severe shortage of blood donors.

A number of countries don't allow people who have just been vaccinated to give blood, as well as banning those in recovery from coronavirus. With others simply staying home as new infections rise, doctors say donor pools have shrunk to alarmingly low levels, menacing urgent operations.

In South Korea, now grappling with record cases, donors can't give blood for seven days after a Covid-19 vaccine shot — and supply is down to just 3.2 days, as of Wednesday, from 6.5 days' worth this time last year, according to the Korean Red Cross.

The Korean Medical Association (KMA) has launched a blood drive, starting with doctors themselves, warning that patients in need of urgent surgery or transfusions could face emergency situations, KMA spokeswoman Park Soo-hyun said.

Recurrent waves of infections, driven by the highly transmissible Delta variant, and extension of

A number of countries don't allow people who have just been vaccinated to give blood, as well as banning those in recovery from coronavirus

lockdowns have started taking a bigger toll on donations, according to a Reuters review of the situation in different countries.

In Thailand, confirmed cases topped 1 million on Friday with authorities reporting record increases in deaths in recent weeks.

Like South Korea, Russia prohibits blood donations from the fully vaccinated — but for a whole month, not just seven days. It also doesn't accept blood from those in the middle of Covid-19 vaccination cycle.

The *Kommersant* business daily reported last week that donor activity in Russia has slumped, hit by the vaccination campaign, with blood service workers in six different regions reporting the problem to the paper.

In the United States, supplies of donated blood — already strained by the pandemic — tightened



A nurse collects samples at a blood donation centre during the outbreak of the coronavirus disease in Lausanne. — Reuters file photo

further in the spring as hospitals ramped up surgeries that had been on hold, according to Dr Claudia Cohn, chief medical officer at AABB, previously known as the American Association of Blood Banks.

Under US guidelines, people receiving authorised vaccines do not have to wait before donating blood, but individuals given a different type of vaccine, possibly in another country, need to wait 14 days.

To be sure, in western Europe concerns over vaccination-hit donations have been exacerbated by the traditional summer holiday period.

France's blood supply agency, the Etablissement Francais du

Sang (EFS), said stocks were too tight for comfort. It said there are 85,000 red blood cell bags in reserve, below a comfortable level of 100,000 or more.

In Italy, the National Blood Centre said there were worrying shortages in a number of regions, including Lazio, centred on the capital Rome, which had led some hospitals to postpone planned operations to conserve stocks for emergencies. It blamed the shortfall mainly on many people being away on holiday and a lack of staff in some collection centres.

Across Europe, donation levels have also been plagued by uncertainty over whether people can give blood if they have not been vaccinated, officials in various countries said. Spain's Health Ministry, for instance, issued a call for donations this week, telling people it's safe to donate during the pandemic.

In Greece, "People are afraid to go and donate blood to hospitals because of the coronavirus", said Konstantinos Stamoulis, scientific director of Hellenic National Blood Center in Athens. "There are days when there is a reduction of up to 50 per cent in blood donations compared to 2019," he said.

— Reuters

Haiti faces anger and despair a week after quake

MARCELINE: Tensions in Haiti were rising on Saturday over a lack of aid to remote areas of the impoverished Caribbean country hardest hit by last week's devastating earthquake that killed more than 2,000 people.

Many Haitians whose homes and livelihoods were destroyed by the magnitude 7.2 quake that struck on August 14 said they were unsure how to even start rebuilding.

Exasperation over the time it is taking for aid to come through began to boil over on Friday, with residents attacking aid trucks in several towns across the south of the nation.

A confrontation also erupted after former president Michel Martelly visited a local hospital in the city of Les Cayes, where one of his staff left behind an envelope of money that set off a violent scramble.

"We are concerned about the deteriorating security situation that may disrupt our assistance



A man throws a bag of rice into a crowd of earthquake victims gathered for the distribution of food and water at the "4 Chemins" crossroads in Les Cayes on Friday. — AFP

to vulnerable Haitians. We are talking to the authorities and all actors to try and prevent this," said Pierre Honnorat, head of the UN World Food Program in Haiti.

The official death toll from the earthquake stands at 2,189 people, with an estimated 332 people still missing. Residents in towns across the southern rural countryside are still digging for bodies believed to

lie underneath the rubble.

Tens of thousands of homes are in ruins, leaving many families with no option but to sleep outside despite torrential downpours at night. The hurricane season in the Caribbean runs until the end of November, and Prime Minister Ariel Henry has warned residents to brace for more storms.

— Reuters

Hurricane causes power outage

TECOLUTLA: Hurricane Grace battered eastern Mexico with torrential rain and howling winds early on Saturday, causing power outages and downing trees after becoming one of the most powerful storms in years to hit the country's Gulf coast.

Grace was whipping up maximum sustained winds of 125 miles per hour (201 km per hour), a category 3 on the five-step Saffir-Simpson scale, when it slammed into the coast near the resort town of Tecolutla in Veracruz state in the early morning. Federal authorities said much of central and eastern Mexico would be hit by torrential rain, but did not provide any early word of the damage caused by Grace.

Civil protection authorities in Veracruz said Grace had caused power cuts and brought down trees. Video footage and photos posted on social media showed some damage to buildings, but there were no immediate reports of casualties.

Grace weakened as it moved inland but the National Hurricane Centre warned of a



A woman removes umbrellas from the beach as strong waves reach the coast due to Hurricane Grace, which has reached category 2, in Boca del Rio, Veracruz, Mexico, on Friday. — AFP

dangerous storm surge — when sea water is pushed above its normal tide levels — as the hurricane struck.

By 7 am CDT (1200 GMT), it was a category 1 storm with top winds of 90 mph (150 kph). The centre was about 60 miles (100 km) east-northeast of Mexico City, the Miami-based centre said. Before Grace hit land, President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador urged people in five states to seek shelter.

"I ask the people of the regions of Veracruz, Puebla, San Luis Potosi, Tamaulipas and Hidalgo to seek refuge in high places with relatives and in shelters that are being set up," Lopez Obrador said on Twitter.

Thousands of emergency workers from the civil protection service, the military and state power utility Comision Federal de Electricidad (CFE) were prepared for Grace, he said.

— Reuters

BERLIN

Merkel attempts to boost successor

German Chancellor Angela Merkel entered the electoral fray on behalf of her conservative alliance on Saturday with wholehearted support for her potential successor from the Christian Democrats (CDU), Armin Laschet.

Laschet has seen his poll numbers slide in recent days, and the centre-right bloc is now hovering only a few percentage points above its rivals according to several recent voter surveys.

Describing Laschet as the



"future chancellor of Germany" at a showcase event at Berlin's Tempodrom concert venue, Merkel praised him as a politician driven by Christian values and dedicated to "building bridges" between people.

N'DJAMENA

Chad withdrawing 600 soldiers from Sahel

Chad is to half its contingent in the multinational G5 Sahel force in the troubled three-borders region of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, recalling 600 soldiers, the government announced on Saturday. "This is a strategic redeployment to better adapt to the organisation of the terrorists," spokesman Abderaman Koulamallah said, referring to the terror groups active in the region.

Chad's 1,200-strong contingent was deployed there



to fight the militants, part of a force to which all five of the Sahel region countries have contributed since 2017.

"That still leaves around 600 soldiers on the ground," said Koulamallah.

LONDON

UK, US sanction more Russians

Britain and the United States sanctioned several Russian officials and entities on the first anniversary on Friday of the near-fatal poisoning of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, which the West blames on Moscow.

Separately, Washington blacklisted two unnamed Russians and a vessel for their involvement in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

The individuals covered by the joint sanctions are all members of Russia's domestic security



service the FSB, successor to the KGB, and accused of planning or carrying out the August 20, 2020 nerve agent attack on Navalny.

They now face asset freezes and travel bans under the second round of reprisals.

Climate science struggles with ‘blind spots’

MAYA GEBEILY

This month’s hard-hitting report from the UN climate science panel sounded the alarm on the surging impacts of global warming — but its authors and independent researchers said it did not provide enough insight on threats in poorer parts of the world.

Despite progress in recent years, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) still relies primarily on lead authors and research from Europe, North America and Oceania, making its findings less relevant to developing nations.

“It is by far the biggest and the best collaborative global scientific enterprise that mankind has done — but it still has certain blind spots,” said Saleemul Huq, head of the Bangladesh-based International Centre for Climate Change and Development.

One of those blind spots is reflected in the composition of the latest report’s 234 authors, who come from 66 countries but are mostly based in rich nations including the United States, Britain, Germany and Australia.

Only 35 per cent of the authors working on the sixth assessment report — the current series that will culminate in a synthesis due to be finalised in September next year — hail from developing countries, according to a study published in the MDPI journal *Climate*, up from 31 per cent for the fifth assessment report.

Huq said that during his time working on the third and fourth IPCC assessment reports, published in 2001 and 2007, the number of scientists’ nationalities increased — but countries in the Global South were represented by just one or two authors.

“We are neglected. We are the most vulnerable countries to climate change and we should be prioritised, which we aren’t,” he said.

A second blind spot is in the research considered: the IPCC does not conduct its own studies, but assesses thousands of climate-related papers on which the IPCC authors base their findings, projections and conclusions.

The most recent report was a review of more than 14,000 research papers produced over the eight years since the last one in 2013 — but the authors themselves noted the data available to them “is unevenly distributed across the world”.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

“It is by far the biggest and the best collaborative global scientific enterprise that mankind has done — but it still has certain blind spots”
SALEEMUL HUQ
Climate Expert



A FRUIT CAR!

A fruit vendor selling bananas displayed on a car waits for customers along a roadside in Amritsar, India, on Saturday.
— AFP

Afghanistan, New Zealand and Japan hit the headlines this week



Ray Petersen
r.j.petersen52@gmail.com

THE OLYMPIC GAMES OF 2020, NO THAT IS NOT A TYPO, IN TOKYO, WERE PROBABLY A SUCCESS WITH NOTABLY FEW CONTROVERSIES

What a tumultuous week it has been with the United States withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Olympic Games, New Zealand’s return to lockdown, and a rude awakening for sports men and women in a turbulent and tumultuous week.

Since its halcyon days at the centre of the Silk Road, Afghanistan has suffered. They don’t need anyone else clumping around in their size ten boots! Russia tried and failed, now America tried and failed, so Plan ‘C’ should be just to stay away. Let them determine what is right or wrong for them, themselves, because there is no subtlety in invasion, and nobody, but nobody, likes an uninvited guest!

The Olympic Games of 2020, no that is not a typo, in Tokyo, were probably a success with notably few controversies. Lauren Hubbard, the New Zealand weightlifter failed to register a legal lift, and that saved what could have been a distasteful situation. Speaking of which, another New Zealander, boxer David Nyika must have been a tasty morsel, as Moroccan Youness Balla tried to bite him. Nyika went on to take the Bronze Medal, Balla went to McDonalds and made do with a Big Mac!

For much of the Olympics the focus was on two superstars who had minimal participation. In practice for the event Simone Biles (USA) was achieving never-before gymnastic feats, but she got the

‘twisties,’ or lost spatial awareness. Now I know why I can’t do cartwheels! Japanese tennis star Naomi Osaka (WTA ranking, 2) was a crowd favourite, but went out in the Third Round to the unheralded Marketa Vondrousova, ranked 41st. Not for the first time recently, the pressure affected Osaka who blames the media for her recent failings.

Well, for my money she doth protest too much. How can Osaka bellyache about media pressure, volatility, and intrusion, while she flaunts herself, swim-suited and glowing, on *Vogue* and *Sports Illustrated*? Sports is very much about handling pressure, and I am very much aware of the way ordinary people have always had to ‘walk on eggshells,’ around sporting icons, and how their ‘falls from grace’ are as much news as their achievements, but well, that’s why you get the big bucks! BTW... Osaka is worth \$60 million and rising.

The psychological aspects related to sport are keenly felt currently, with Joe Root the England cricket captain admitting that his ‘confrontational’ persona, his ‘bad side,’ caused a lack of focus and awareness that led his team folding meekly on the last day of the Lords test against India, whose captain Virat Kohli exhorted his team to stern countenances and serious faces as India chased the win on the last afternoon. He wanted the England batsmen to feel like they were ‘in hell’ out in the middle,

isolated and alone... and it worked a treat as England rolled over under pressure... hmmm there’s that word again.

Not managing pressure and expectation however is not something that should be ignored, especially as social media allows access to sports stars virtually on a one-to-one basis. Going back to New Zealand again, All Blacks rugby halfback Aaron Smith offered some good advice to sports men and women on their way to the top. “Read all your press, or none of it,” he said, intimating that many get, or have got, inflated egos from reading “only the good bits. You need balance.”

As in all things, support can alleviate pressure, and unfortunately young, beautiful, talented, track cyclist Olivia Podmore never heard the message, never appeared to be out of her depth psychologically, and yet the day her New Zealand cycling team-mates returned home with their Olympic medals, she took her young life. Her support needs, in hindsight remarkably clear, after qualifying for Osaka but not being selected, were never identified... and now a family grieves.

New Zealand has gone back into Covid-19 lockdown this week as inflight protocols appear to have not been followed in one instance, but on that nation’s lips read... regret... we should have done better. RIP Olivia Podmore.

When Mama Dog didn’t expect the warm welcome...



Rasha Al Raisi
rashabooks@yahoo.com

STRAY DOGS WERE RARE IN OUR AREA UNTIL A FEW YEARS AGO WHEN CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS STARTED ON TOP OF THE SURROUNDING MOUNTAINS

It was December when Mama Dog decided to descend from the mountain and deliver her litter on the north side of our tiny wadi. At the time, the south side of the wadi was controlled by my banished cats and the two sides were separated by a paved way that passed through our neighbourhood.

Mama Dog didn’t expect the warm welcome from the residents. She didn’t know that it was our first time to witness such an occurrence in the neighbourhood.

Stray dogs were rare in our area until a few years ago when construction projects started on top of the surrounding mountains. This brought them down in packs, raiding garbage cans and attacking cats as their

natural habitat with all its riches that included hares and quails was being demolished.

While nursing her puppies, Mama Dog was given food, water and blankets from our neighbour Khadija and her daughter, whose wall was adjacent to the wadi and offered the nursing dog and her litter shade.

Other neighbours also left water tubs and dry food for her, as every other house owned a breed dog or two. Visitors — especially children — came to see them on daily basis. I was the only one who wasn’t interested in the whole affair, after a few of my cats were either attacked or killed by their kind.

Nevertheless, Sham the helper kept me updated with

their news as he passed by them everyday when throwing the garbage. Sham’s updates were to be taken with a pinch of salt as exaggeration was a second nature to him: “Mam! There are 8 puppies in the wadi!” (There were only 5, one disappeared and 4 remained as I learned later from my English neighbour).

“Mam! the English neighbours adopted 3 puppies and the Malaysians took 2. There are only 3 left!” (The English adopted 2 and the Malaysians none. 2 puppies were left). My first contact with the puppies was just before Ramadhan when I went to fetch Rocky from the house across the wadi.

One of the puppies was sniffing the garbage can and I felt sorry

for him. Dropping Rocky home, I took back some dry food for the hungry puppy. Upon seeing me, he wagged his tail and I noticed that the water tub was filled with green stale water. I went home again and got a new tub and 2 bottles of fresh tap water to fill it with. I realised then what exactly had happened.

The novelty of the puppies had worn off, Mama Dog had left and this puppy was expected to fend for himself after months of being pampered. I went home grumbling to Mom about the unkindness of the dog owners surrounding us.

What difference it would make if each continued giving a handful of dry food to the starving puppy! We decided to include him in the

daily feed along with the other Kitzanians.

The following day, I went to feed the puppy and noticed — to my own surprise — that he couldn’t see the food offered to him. He walked aimlessly and kept banging his head into the adjacent wall. His eyes were bright blue, a sudden change from the black ones that met mine yesterday.

Even worst, flies were swarming around him and kept me company till I reached home. I lost sleep and suffered from tension headache the very next day, thinking about what sudden affliction could’ve occurred to him within a day? It was time to get some answers by getting in touch with my friend Mr T, the pet expert. (To be continued...)

sport

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TOP SEEDS MEDVEDEV, BARTY SECURE TRIUMPHS AT CINCINNATI



Ashleigh Barty (AUS) returns a shot during her match against Barbora Krejcikova. – USA Today Sports



Daniil Medvedev

CINCINNATI: Daniil Medvedev took quick revenge on Friday for his Olympic loss to Pablo Carreno Busta, with the top seed at the ATP and WTA Cincinnati Masters delivering a crushing 6-1, 6-1 verdict.

The Russian world number two had it all his way into the semifinals with a 56-minute rout, which ended on the Spaniard's double-fault.

"I was feeling great during the match. In these conditions you try to win the match as fast as possible, especially against Carreno Busta, who can catch fire at any moment and start getting you into long rallies," Medvedev said.

"I tried to keep pushing him and I am really happy I managed to do it."

Women's top seed Ashleigh Barty recovered from being down a break in the second set to sweep past fellow French Open champion Barbora Krejcikova 6-2, 6-4.

The Australian handed her Czech opponent only a third loss since mid-May.

Krejcikova won Roland Garros in June while Barty claimed the Paris title in 2019 and Wimbledon this season.

"I feel like I did a good job looking after my own serves," Barty said. "For all but one service game, I felt like a lot of the time I was in control."

"It was just staying patient, knowing that I was doing the right things."

Medvedev, last week's Toronto champion, won his eighth match in a row as he prepares for a final four contest against compatriot Andrey Rublev.

Fourth seed Rublev defeated France's Benoit Paire 6-3, 4-6, 6-3 with the Russian advancing to his fourth Masters 1000 quarterfinal in six tournaments this season.

Sefanos Tsitsipas, the second seed, had to lift after Felix Auger-Aliassime saved two match points late in the second set.

But the Greek did just that to post a 6-2, 5-7, 6-1 win for his

I was feeling great during the match. In these conditions you try to win the match as fast as possible, especially against Carreno Busta, who can catch fire at any moment and start getting you into long rallies

DANIIL MEDVEDEV

World number two

ninth semifinal of the season.

"Things got tough in the second set and I had to find different solutions. I stepped in with aggression in the third," he said.

"It took a lot of patience to find my opportunities in the third set. But I was determined and I didn't let go."

Norway's Casper Ruud, a wizard on clay this summer with three titles in three weeks, was taken apart by Olympic gold medallist Alexander Zverev 6-1, 6-3 as the top four men's seeds took their places in the semis.

Medvedev has won all four tour matches against Rublev, including the quarters here in 2019 when Medvedev went on to win the title.

"I'm happy to play against him, because it's a nice challenge for me to see what I need to improve," Rublev said.

In Saturday's women's semifinals, Barty will face German Angelique Kerber, who advanced 6-4, 3-3 when Czech opponent Petra Kvitova retired with gastric illness.

The fairytale story for wild card Jil Teichmann continued with a 6-3, 6-2 defeat of Tokyo Olympic champion Belinda Bencic, a fellow Swiss.

"Everything went right, I felt good from the beginning," Teichmann said. "I served well, defended well, it all worked out." — AFP

BABAR, FAWAD

LEAD PAKISTAN RECOVERY IN SECOND TEST

KINGSTON, Jamaica: Babar Azam missed out on a hundred but Fawad Alam may yet have the chance to reach three figures after the pair lifted Pakistan from a horrific start to end day one of the second Test against the West Indies in relative comfort at 212 for four at Sabina Park on Friday.

Babar's composed 75 through almost five hours at the crease and Fawad's typically pugnacious 76 before retiring hurt from severe leg cramps just after tea rescued the tourists from the depths of three for two.

Kemar Roach once again led the charge with the ball for the home side, taking three for 49 off 17 overs, striking in his first two overs of the match.

He then returned in the final session to claim the all-important wicket of Babar when the Pakistan captain appeared to be moving serenely towards a sixth Test century.

His fourth-wicket stand with Fawad was worth 158 when the awkward-looking left-hander had to limp off the field on a sweltering afternoon in the Jamaican capital where temperatures hit 34 degrees.

Those dehydrating conditions also claimed West Indies wicketkeeper Joshua da Silva who was replaced by Jahmar Hamilton for the rest of the day when the first-choice gloveman left the field just before tea.

Despite Babar's dismissal and the temporary loss of Fawad, Pakistan remain on course for a challenging first innings total with Mohammad Rizwan and Faheem Ashraf set to resume on the second morning in a fifth-wicket partnership that has added 44 runs.



Fawad Alam (L) and Babar Azam (R) of Pakistan during their hundred run partnership. — AFP

That promising position was in stark contrast though to the situation Pakistan found themselves in when they were tottering at two for three just four overs into the day.

'BUCKLED DOWN'

Their hopes for a solid start after being put in crumbled in the very first over when Abid Ali fell to a good low catch by Jermaine Blackwood at third slip off Roach.

Revelling in the bowler-friendly conditions, the senior seamer then dismissed Azhar

Ali without scoring, the former captain edging a delivery through to da Silva.

Jayden Seales, man of the match in the first Test when he claimed eight wickets including five in the second innings, enjoyed his share of the early spoils.

He drew the other opener, Imran Butt, into playing at another full-length delivery for da Silva to take his second straightforward catch in nine balls.

Babar and Fawad then displayed admirable grit and

discipline in defying West Indies' all-pace attack with the elegant skipper countering with a handful of handsome boundaries.

Fawad was again a model of unorthodox defiance given his much-talked about exaggerated square-on batting stance.

"I thought Kemar (Roach) should have extended his opening spell for a couple more overs given that he was bowling so well and the conditions were really helpful to the bowlers at that time," said West Indies

bowling coach Roddy Estwick.

"Still, you have to give credit to the way Babar and Fawad played because they buckled down well and worked hard to get their team in a decent position."

The pair played with increasing freedom in the post-lunch period as 83 runs were added in the two hours of play.

They looked set to prosper even more in the day's final session but Fawad fell victim to the conditions.

Whether or not his departure



I thought Kemar (Roach) should have extended his opening spell for a couple more overs given that he was bowling so well and the conditions were really helpful to the bowlers at that time

RODDY ESTWICK

West Indies bowling coach

SCOREBOARD

Pakistan first innings	
A Ali c Blackwood b Roach	1
I Butt c da Silva b Seales	1
A Ali c da Silva b Roach	0
B Azam c Holder b Roach	75
F Alam (retired hurt)	76
M Rizwan (not out)	22
F Ashraf (not out)	23
Extras (B-1, LB-8, NB-5)	14
Total (For 4 wickets, 74 overs)	212
Fall of wickets: 1-2, 2-2, 3-2, 4-168	
Bowling: K Roach 17-6-49-3, J Seales 11-3-25-1, A Joseph 12-1-54-0, J Holder 15-7-25-0, K Mayers 11-5-17-0, R Chase 7-0-27-0, N Bonner 1-0-6-0	

upset his skipper's concentration, Babar's innings ended an hour into the post-tea period via a sharp low catch at second slip by Jason Holder off Roach.

West Indies are seeking a first Test series triumph over Pakistan for 21 years.

The visitors are hoping to repeat the efforts of the 2005 and 2011 tours of the Caribbean when they lost the first encounters before rebounding to square both two-Test series.

— AFP

RCB coach Katich steps down, Hesson takes over for rest of IPL

BANGALORE: Royal Challengers Bangalore said on Saturday their Australian coach Simon Katich will be unavailable for the remainder of the Indian Premier League campaign due to personal reasons, with Director of Cricket Operation Mike Hesson taking over.

The eight-team Twenty20 competition was suspended in May after several players and backroom staff tested positive for the novel coronavirus amid a devastating second wave of Covid-19 in India.

The lucrative tournament is scheduled to resume from September 19 in the United Arab Emirates, with the final set for October 15.

The Bangalore team also announced three signings with Sri Lankans Wanindu Hasaranga and Dushmantha Chameera as well as Singapore's Tim David



joining captain Virat Kohli's side.

Australians Adam Zampa and Daniel Sams and New Zealand's Finn Allen were unavailable for the team.

Elsewhere, Australia pace bowler Nathan Ellis will join Punjab Kings for the second half of the tournament, the team said late on Friday.

ELLIS TO JOIN PUNJAB KINGS

Australia pace bowler Nathan Ellis will join Punjab Kings for the second half of the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 tournament, the team said late on Friday.

Ellis, who became the first male player to secure a T20

The Bangalore team also announced three signings with Sri Lankans Wanindu Hasaranga and Dushmantha Chameera as well as Singapore's Tim David joining captain Virat Kohli's side

hat-trick on his debut against Bangladesh this month, was named on Thursday as one of Australia's three reserve players for the T20 World Cup, which begins in October.

Elsewhere, Royal Challengers Bangalore announced three signings, with Sri Lanka duo Wanindu Hasaranga and



Dushmantha Chameera and as well as Singapore's Tim David joining captain Virat Kohli's team.

This came after Australian pair Adam Zampa and Daniel Sams and New Zealand's Finn Allen were unavailable.

The eight-team IPL was suspended in May after several

players and backroom staff tested positive for the coronavirus amid a devastating second wave of Covid-19 in India.

The lucrative tournament is scheduled to resume from September 19 in the United Arab Emirates, with the final set for October 15.

— Reuters



SUPER SECOND PLACE FINISH FOR OMAN RACING

MUSCAT: Ahmad al Harthy and Michael Dinan secured an outstanding second place finish for Oman Racing in Road To Le Mans race one at the Circuit de la Sarthe in France on Thursday, August 19, with a star performance from eighth on the GT3 class grid.

Celebrating a very well deserved podium in the 55-minute evening encounter, which got underway at 19.30 local time, Al Harthy and Dinan now carry great confidence into race two which will take place on Saturday, August 21 — just a few hours before the famed Le Mans 24 Hours itself begins.

American racer Dinan started Thursday's race from the fourth row of the GT3 grid, having earlier qualified eighth fastest in the No.95 Aston Martin Vantage GT3, and stormed into the top four on lap one alone before breaking into the podium placings on lap two.

Oman Racing took the lead of GT3 in the mid-race pit-stop, with Al Harthy ultimately bringing the Aston Martin Racing-prepared car to the chequered flag in second place — slipping back from the lead with just three laps to go as a result of some unfortunate slow zones and yellow flag areas.

"What a race — unbelievable!", said the Omantel, OQ and Oman



I'm delighted with the way we all performed, Michael did a great job in the opening stint being able to take it up to P2 and then we had a great pit-stop. It was very tough in my stint as there were so many cautions, yellow flags and slow zones which are very difficult to manage at this circuit

AHMAD AL HARTHY
Omani race driver



under Safety Car conditions.

Al Harthy got behind the wheel of the striking black, orange and white No.95 Aston Martin Vantage and a fantastic turnaround in the pits by the AMR mechanics enabled the Omani to leapfrog the Audi and take the lead of the race.

When the action resumed on lap six, Al Harthy continued to lead and improved his pace with each lap of the 13.6-kilometre track. Setting a best GT3 lap of 3m57.551 seconds on lap eight, the second fastest of the race, the next time around the No.8 Ferrari managed to get back ahead into the lead as yellow flag slow zones worked against Al Harthy.

Maintaining second place to the finish on lap 12, after 55 minutes of racing, the result was just reward for a terrific performance and marked the second podium in as many events for Al Harthy — having taken a stunning race victory on his return to the British GT Championship two weeks ago.

The second of the two Road To Le Mans races will get underway at 12.15 local time tomorrow, Saturday, August 21, at the Circuit de la Sarthe in France. Live online streaming and live timing will be available here: <https://live.lemanscup.com/en/>

Super knocks mark one-sided victories for Muscat, Stallions

MUSCAT: Muscat CT recorded a massive 336-run victory against Ibn Abdul Samad Eng and Cons (IAS) while Oman Stallions thrashed Arabian Region Travel and Tourism (ARTT) by 159 runs in two one-sided Premier Division League games played at Oman Cricket grounds in Al Amerat on Friday.

Openers Kashyapkumar Prajapati (162 off 93) and Jatinder Singh (111 off 98) were involved in a 216-run partnership before top all-rounders Ayaan Khan (98 off 63) and Sandeep Goud (98 not out off 39) added 166 runs for the

fourth wicket as Muscat posted a massive 488 for 4 on the board in 50 overs. A total of 23 sixes were hit — 10 by Sandeep while 6 each by Kashyap and Ayaan.

IAS failed to make a match of it, folding up for a disappointing 152 in the 37th over. Sudeep Chavan top-scored with 37 as leggie Samay Shrivastava picked up 4 for 49 while Ayaan and Munis Ansari claimed three wickets each.

Brief Scores (Premier Division): Muscat CT 488 for 4 in 50 overs (Kashyapkumar Prajapati 162 — 19x4, 6x6, Jatinder Singh 111 — 13x4, 1x6, Sandeep Goud 98 not out



Rafiullah of Oman Stallions

— 4x4, 10x6, Ayaan Khan 98 — 6x4, 6x6) beat IAS (Ibn Abdul Samad Eng & Cons) 152 all out in 36.4 overs (Sudeep Chavan 37 — 2x4, 3x6, Samay Shrivastava 4-49, Ayaan Khan 3-23, Munis Ansari 3-32) by 336 runs.

Struggling at 72 for 5 and 117 for 7, Oman Stallions was rescued by a belligerent Rafiullah who came in at No 9 and smashed 71 off only 27 deliveries to take his team's total to 218 all out in the 44th over. He struck 8 sixes in his whirlwind knock. Karan Sonavala contributed 36 off 35. Aqil Khan bowled well, taking 4 for 29 while Malik Ali and Sanjaya Raj bagged

two wickets each.

ARTT's hopes of a good start were dashed in the beginning as they ran into red hot Bilal Khan and Shakeel Ahmed whose 4 for 12 and 3 for 13 respectively led to its dismissal for a disastrous 59 all out. Mohammed Ali Akbar bowled well too, taking 2 for 7.

Brief Scores (Premier Division): Oman Stallions 218 all out in 43.5 overs (Rafi Ullah 71 — 3x4, 8x6, Karan Sonavala 36 — 3x4, 2x6, Aqil Khan 4-29, Malik Ali 2-15, Sanjaya Raj 2-49) beat ARTT 59 all out in 29 overs (Abid Ali 19 — 4x4, Bilal Khan 4-12, Shakeel Ahmed 3-13, Mohammed Ali Akbar 2-7) by 159 runs.



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Work set to begin on new Ibri Industrial City

Investment hub: Ibri Industrial City targets investments related to oil and gas services, food industries, building materials, warehouses and showrooms

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 21

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has awarded a contract for the construction of infrastructure facilities linked to the establishment of the first phase of a new industrial city at Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate. The contract, valued at around RO 9 million, covers a 3-million sq metre area, with a completion timeframe of 18 months.

Eng Nasser al Mabsali

(pictured), Director-General of Ibri Industrial City, stated that Madayn will invest in developing the infrastructure including roads, lighting, water and communication networks, sewage networks, landscaping and electricity network in coordination with Majan Electricity Company. “The strategic location of Ibri Industrial City on the road leading to Saudi Arabia and due to its close proximity to Oman’s oil concession areas. Located about 200 km from Sohar Port and 300 km from Muscat Governorate, the industrial city will serve the mining, marble and food investment sectors,” Al Mabsali pointed out.

By establishing Ibri Industrial City, Madayn aims to achieve its vision in spreading a line-up of industrial cities throughout the Sultanate’s governorates,



contributing to the advancement of the national economy, and providing direct and indirect job opportunities for the nationals in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

In terms of incentives and privileges granted to investors to boost investment opportunities in Ibri Industrial City, Madayn has announced earlier this year exemption from rental value for a period of two years for all new projects, followed by a reduction in the rental value for a period



of three years by 50 per cent for contracts concluded during the period from 2021 to 2024, in addition to reducing all other fees listed in Annex (1) of the Investment Regulations by 50 per cent for all new projects during the period from 2021 to 2024.

Ibri Industrial City will comprise a variety of industries

ranging from oil and gas services, food industries, building materials, warehouses and showrooms. Al Mabsali explained that interested investors wishing to set up their projects in Ibri Industrial City can apply through www.madayn.om and they will be contacted shortly; or they may visit the office of Ibri Industrial City or the nearest

Masar Service Centre for the same purpose.

He added, “Once the Rub Al Khali (Empty Quarter) border opens, it will facilitate the movement of goods from Saudi Arabia and the Levant countries, activate the warehousing and storage sector, and boost the volume of exports in marble, foodstuff and other sectors.”

Al Mabsali affirmed that Madayn, in coordination with Al Dhahirah branch of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), are making efforts to enable and support contractors and suppliers in Al Dhahirah Governorate to apply for projects and services implemented by Madayn. There are also projects that shall be assigned to the Small and Medium Enterprises registered in Riyada from Al Dhahirah Governorate.

Omanis account for majority of private hospital outpatient visits

Healthcare preference: 57 per cent of outpatient visits recorded by private hospitals and clinics last year were by nationals, while expatriates made up the balance 43 per cent, according to the Ministry of Health

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Omanis accounted for the lion’s share of outpatient visits recorded by private hospitals around the Sultanate last year, underscoring the increasingly important role that private healthcare institutions play in meeting the healthcare needs of the local population.

According to the 2020 Annual Report of the Ministry of Health, published last week, the country’s expanding network of private hospitals and clinics logged around 1.618 million outpatient visits by Omanis, representing 57 per cent of total outpatient visits estimated at 2.852 million over the course of last year. Expatriates accounted for the balance with 1.233 million outpatient visits, equating to 43 per cent of the total.

The figures bode well for stronger investment in the private healthcare sector as the government, weighed down by budgetary cuts and rising public debt, increasingly looks to the private sector to shoulder part of the sizable healthcare burden.



The uptick in private healthcare demand comes amid a robust expansion of the healthcare insurance services segment in the Sultanate, which was the biggest contributor to gross direct premiums in 2020, with a roughly 33 per cent share (RO 155.193 million), surpassing motor insurance (RO 113.364 million), and property insurance (RO 71.376 million).

Healthcare insurance is projected to grow exponentially when the Dhamani scheme, centring on the introduction of mandatory medical insurance coverage for public sector employees and their dependents, as well as tourists and visitors, comes into effect, starting from later this year.

Starting from the launch of the first private hospital in 1995, private healthcare services have grown significantly over the past 25 years to presently comprise 27 full-fledged hospitals distributed across the Sultanate, in addition to 432 general clinics, 447 specialised clinics and polyclinics, 302 dental clinics, 794

pharmacies, and 49 Chinese and Indian clinics. The total number of hospital beds offered by the private sector has climbed from 985 in 2019 to 1,054 last year.

However, comparative figures for 2019 and 2020 suggest a degree of consolidation, albeit modest, in the overall size and make-up of the private health sector. For example, the total number of ‘Clinics/Diagnostics Clinics’, spanning all of the specialisations, dipped to 1,230 last year, down from 1,254 in 2019. This decline has been attributed by experts partly to the economic slump triggered by collapsing oil prices aggravated by the pandemic, and the resulting outflow of large numbers of expatriates.

However, the size of the workforce employed by private health establishments grew to 14,162 last year, up from 13,414 in 2019. Nurses represented the largest segment (3,960), followed by doctors (2,506), pharmacists (2,050), and dentists (1,127). Omanisation remains at a low 13 per cent in the sector, according to the Ministry.

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Add-backs in business valuation (Part II)



STEFANO VIRGILI
stefano@virgili.com

ADD-BACKS ARE NOT THE KEY FACTORS IN VALUATING A BUSINESS, BUT GIVEN THEIR NATURE, IN CASE OF A SUB-OPTIMAL MANAGEMENT THEY MIGHT REPRESENT A DRASTIC SHIFT IN THE FINAL VALUATION

Last week we have seen how Sultan and Jen made both the same mistake of misjudging Add-backs into their business valuation, ending up in Sultan selling out cheap and Jen struggling to find a buyer.

We have covered how the standard formula for Net Income is given by Yearly Sales minus Operation Expenses and minus Cost of Goods Sold. We mentioned that such number alone could be misleading. In fact, some costs included in or excluded from the Operation Expenses could be only applicable to the current management.

For example, Sultan is an avid fitness enthusiast, and every day takes 2 to 3 hours to practice his

favourite sports.

To enjoy this liberty, he needed to hire someone to replace him at work during his absence.

And since he had someone to back him up, he used to stretch his break all the way up to 5 hours a day including commuting and meals.

Sultan lost more than 100 hours of productivity a year. Yet, he did not factor that in when pricing his business. Not only he was paying an extra employee that the new owner does not need, but he also did not fully capitalise on his product knowledge and expertise to boost sales.

So to make Sultan's valuation more accurate, he should have subtracted his extra costs and his loss of income. I did a rough

calculation on his behalf: he was paying RO 750 for his staff to replace him, and I simulated a 15 per cent loss of income due to his absence.

All together it summed up to nearly RO 20 thousand a year! Sultan applied a x3 multiplier when he valued his business, meaning that he took his yearly Net Income and multiplied it by 3. Before doing so, he should have added back the add-backs at RO 20,000 times 3 years, for a total of RO 60,000 higher valuation.

Jen's case is the opposite. She runs her business seven days a week with her sister, and neither of the two pay themselves a monthly salary.

They just use the business'

cash to pay for their expenses, which is greatly discouraged for proper accounting.

Moreover, they live together with their parents, so they do not pay any rent. In a nutshell, Jen's Operation Expenses are extremely low.

Too low for anyone else that could buy her business, unless she finds someone who is also willing to work 7 days a week with no formal salary.

In her case the Add-backs should be estimated on normal conditions, with one day off a week (reduced income) and at least one and a half salaries to be paid.

By omitting these Add-backs, she is over valuating her Net Income, and since she is also

applying a x4 multiplier, nobody seems to be interested in taking over her company.

Add-backs are not the key factors in valuating a business, but given their nature, in case of a sub-optimal management they might represent a drastic shift in the final valuation.

My recommendation is to engage skilled accountants that are able to segment costs based on their category. Some costs could indeed be part of the Operation Expenses, but the ability to separate Add-backs could represent a substantial difference in the final business valuation.

[The columnist is a member of the International Press Association]



MSX WEEKLY REVIEW

Financial sector pulls down MSX Index

The MSX30 Index ended the week down by 0.48 per cent largely on weakness seen in the financial index which fell by 0.93 per cent. The services index also fell by 0.08 per cent while the Industrial sector rose by 0.28 per cent. MSX Shariah Index closed higher by 0.11 per cent.

During the week, Bank Muscat announced the acquisition of an additional stake in SICO BSC. At end-2020, Bank Muscat had announced a 72.71 per cent stake sale in Muscat Capital Company (CJSC), based in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) to SICO BSC (c), a Bahrain based investment bank and an acquisition of 9 per cent shareholding in SICO BSC by Bank Muscat.

Bank Muscat now announced that it has obtained necessary regulatory approvals to acquire a further 1.38 per cent shareholding in SICO BSC via a secondary market purchase. After this transaction, Bank Muscat's shareholding in SICO BSC (c) will be 10.38 per cent. Net worth of SICO BSC (c) as at the end of June 30, 2021 was BHD 66,965,000, the bank said.

We believe that this additional investment by Bank Muscat in SICO BSC is likely on account of increasing its shareholding stake in the said bank, in order gain significance in the Board of Directors.

SICO is one of the best Investment Banks in the region. It is the number 1 broker on the Bahrain Bourse, ad through its subsidiary SICO Capital, is also expanding presence in Saudi Arabia. Further, SICO reported BD 2.8m net profit in the first half of 2021, due to strong income growth across diversified business activities and a 66 per cent year-to-date increase in assets under management.



Bank Nizwa announced during the week that it has received regulatory approvals for rights issue of RO 75m. The bank is offering about 789.5m shares at a price of RO 0.095 per share in order to raise RO 75m. Each shareholder will be offered 53 per cent of his/her shareholding in terms of rights to new share subscription.

The rights can be traded on the MSX between September 5 – 12, 2021, while rights subscription will open between September 7 – 16. The bank aims to improve its capital adequacy metrics, in order to continue on its growth path. The bank posted a 20 per cent YoY and 3 per cent QoQ growth in its Islamic Financing portfolio in 2Q21.

Further, Covid-related delinquencies have been weighing on the bank's asset quality metrics (which are superior to the local peer group but have been weakening), amid requirements to build provision buffers.

Currently, the bank ranks 4th within its local peer group in terms of Core Equity Ratio Tier 1 CET1 Ratio as at the end of 1H21, while the minimum regulatory requirement, under the revised guidelines due to covid, is 8.25 per cent, along with certain allowances for prudential buffer. Record Date of the rights issue will be August 29, 2021.

Sohar International has also floated rights issue in order to raise RO 55m, subscription to which is opening on August 22, 2021.

Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MEM) and

Indian Rare Earths Limited (IREL) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to cement cooperation in the field of minerals. The MoU provides for the exchange of laws and regulations endorsed by the two countries in the exploitation of mineral resources and data about investment opportunities.

The MoU comes in pursuance of the MEM's efforts to develop the minerals sector in a manner that responds to aspirations attached to this vital sector.

While Oman's mining sector's contribution to the GDP is minimal, we have seen some recovery in its growth rate in 2021, despite the pandemic. Further, this sector is a key pillar in economic diversification as envisaged by Oman 2040 Vision.

Energy Development Oman (EDO) has successfully secured a \$2.5 billion debt financing transaction, which attracted an overwhelming market response at very competitive rates. The funding will further support EDO in achieving its key objective of alleviating the Government's Block 6 funding requirements. The Company is also mandated to create growth; enhance efficiencies and governance in Oman's oil, gas, and new energies sector; and unlock value through diversification and value chain integration. The deal was oversubscribed by more than 100 per cent which is a testament to investors' confidence in EDO and Oman's economy.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

Bank Muscat holds monthly Al Mazyona draws, gives away RO 600,000 in cash prizes

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, continues to bring joy and happiness to its customers through its innovative Al Mazyona prize draws. In line with its commitment to promoting a good savings habit, the bank recently gave away 661 cash prizes worth RO 640,000 during the monthly draws for July.

The winners included lucky customers from the Governorate of Dhofar, which was highlighted during the draw.

Draws were also conducted for a number of customer segments including Asalah Priority Banking, Al Jawhar Privilege Banking, the monthly mega draw and draws for all the governorates, in line with the bank's keenness to provide as many chances as possible to its customers to win attractive prizes.

Al Mazyona draws, which are livestreamed on the bank's social media channels on Twitter, YouTube and Instagram, are well known for their transparency and are keenly followed by the bank's customers and the general



public. During the draws for July, Bank Muscat highlighted its excellent network in Dhofar, where the bank operates 13 branches in addition to 38 ATMs, 7 CDMs and 18 FFM (full-function machines) for the benefit and convenience of its customers.

The monthly draws for Dhofar and other governorates saw a total of 420 winners winning prizes of RO 500 each, while one lucky winner won the monthly mega prize of RO 50,000. All customers who maintained a minimum balance of RO 100 were automatically entered into the monthly draws for governorates while the winner of the mega draw was chosen from amongst customers maintaining a minimum balance of RO 1,000.

Also, 10 Asalah customers won RO 25,000 each and 20 Al Jawhar customers won RO 5,000 each in the other draws. It must be noted that all Asalah customers who maintained a minimum balance of RO 30,000 and Al Jawhar customers maintaining a minimum balance of RO 10,000 were automatically entered into these monthly draws. Ten Zeinah customers won RO 1,000 each in the draws, which followed the main draws. Draws were also held for the bank's Shababi and Children's account holders with 100 winners each being selected in the two categories to win RO 100 each.

Al Mazyona is the longest-running savings scheme, offering the largest prizes in the country.

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WIPO programme to support tech transfer: Ministry

KEY INITIATIVE: WIPO

Member States can access technological information that helps inventors develop their creative potential, and strengthen their intellectual property rights

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, AUG 21

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) says it plans to harness the opportunities provided by the Technology and Innovation Support Centre (TISC) programme provided by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) as a part of the latter's strategic goal to enable countries to access patent information, scientific and technical literature and search tools and databases, and make more effective use of it to boost their intellectual property (IP) skills, use and to enhance technology transfer.

According to the Ministry,

WIPO is designing a working methodology for the intellectual property databases of member states, as it aims at international comparison of data and methodologies.

The global design incorporates the current international best practices in structuring IP data for the purposes of economic analysis.

To this end, the Ministry seeks to obtain best practices from leading intellectual property offices including (WIPO), the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO), the

European Patent Office (EPO), the United Kingdom Intellectual Property Office (UKIPO) and any other source related to intellectual property data and economic data.

Eng Khalid bin Hamoud al Hinai, Head of Patents and Industrial Designs at National Intellectual Property Office of the Ministry, said: "The ministry seeks to establish a national network at the Technology Transfer and Innovation Support Centre in order to benefit from the services it provides, and to invest inventions and turn

The ministry seeks to establish a national network at the Technology Transfer and Innovation Support Centre in order to benefit from the services it provides, and to invest inventions and turn them into national products, which can be marketed locally and globally

ENG KHALID BIN HAMOUD AL HINAI

Head of Patents and Industrial Designs at National Intellectual Property Office, MoCIIP

them into national products, which can be marketed locally and globally, where the ministry is exerting efforts to encourage the submission of patent applications of individual and establishments' investors by providing high-quality government services in

accordance with the strategic targets of Oman vision 2040.

He added that the WIPO Programme on TISCs for the WIPO Member States provides the chances to access to technological information, which helps the inventors to exploit their creative potential, developing their intellectual property rights, protecting and managing it.

The services provided by the WIPO Programme include access to international electronic sources of scientific and technical patents related to patents, as this contributes to the boost technology transfer, while this technical information can also be used to solve many problems that facing the existing and emerging modern industries.

Eng Al Hinai added: "The Technology and Innovation Support Centres also provide training in how to search for technical information of patents, which contributes to enhancing the results of the research, where it helps to strengthen the inventor's idea and the possibility of protecting his/her

idea by searching in documents similar or close to the same idea through the electronic sources (international databases) in order to save effort, money and time for the owner of the idea and reducing repetitive ideas as well as focusing on new and unique ideas that can be converted into commercial and industrial projects."

In addition, these sources include important technical information that can be sorted and categorised, to provide a detailed picture to the policymakers that show them the trends of modern technology in accordance with the market changes, where it can facilitate the transfer of technology and localising the modern technology and thus contribute strongly to the emergence of a modern manufacturing of national products capable of competing with other products in the local, regional and international markets, and as a result, will contribute to enhancing the economic diversification in accordance with the Oman vision 2040.

Oil posts biggest week of losses in nine months



A 3D printed oil pump jack is seen in front of displayed stock graph in this illustration picture. — Reuters

NEW YORK: Oil prices closed out their biggest week of losses in more than nine months with another down day on Friday, as investors sold futures in anticipation of weakened fuel demand worldwide due to a surge in Covid-19 cases.

The crude market has now posted seven consecutive days of losses. Numerous nations worldwide are responding to the rising infection rate due to the coronavirus Delta variant by adding travel restrictions to cut off the spread.

China has imposed stricter disinfection methods at ports,

causing congestion, nations including Australia have ratcheted up travel restrictions, and global jet fuel demand is softening after improving for most of the summer.

"It's hard for prices to find support with this kind of uncertainty," an analyst said. Brent crude fell 8pc on the week, settling down \$1.27, or 1.9pc, to \$65.18 a barrel, its lowest since April and down about 8pc for the week. US West Texas Intermediate crude for September settled down \$1.37, or 2.2pc, to \$62.32 a barrel on Friday, to lose more than 9pc for the week. — Reuters

FAIR MARKET POLICIES:

Oman's Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Centre has received a number of complaints related to foodstuffs, electronic machines, and a number of other commodity goods

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, AUG 21

The Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Centre set up under the auspices of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) seeks to ensure transparency and fairness in the domestic marketplace in line with international best practice.

Faisal bin Saud al Nabhani, Head of the Directorate of Monitoring and Analysis in Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Centre, said: "The centre aims at enhancing competition, opening new horizons towards a free and attractive economy



for investment, protecting and encouraging competition, preventing monopolistic practices, regulating the freedom of economic activities in the local market, and the consolidating the principle of free market rules and freedom of prices for the benefit of the national economy and the consumer as well."

In support of its objectives, the Centre will undertake research and market studies, investigate complaints and undertake awareness activities to highlight these goals.

According to the official, the Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Centre has received a number of complaints related to foodstuffs, electronic machines, and a number of other commodity goods.

The Centre, he said, has the authority to impose administrative fines in cases where a violation of the law is proven, or to refer the cases to the Public Prosecution if needed.

The centre also receives requests for economic concentration from various companies across different

sectors. It evaluates these requests and issues appropriate decisions. In addition, the Centre also receives requests for exemption from the implementation of the Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Law, which it studies as well.

Al Nabhani said the Centre is currently working on integrated study for the retail sector. It is also coordinating with GCC countries in the formulation of a Unified Gulf Competition Law that can work to protect and encourage competition in the Gulf market.

SHORT TAKES

CALIFORNIA

Court rules gig worker initiative is unconstitutional

A 2020 ballot measure that exempted ride-share and food delivery drivers from a state labour law is unconstitutional, a California judge ruled on Friday, as it infringes on the legislature's power to set workplace standards.

The ballot measure aimed to cement app-based food delivery and ride-hail drivers' status as independent contractors, not employees. Gig economy companies such as Uber, Lyft, Doordash and Instacart were pushing to keep drivers'



independent contractor status, albeit with additional benefits.

However, in a ruling, Alameda Superior Court Judge Frank Roesch wrote that the measure, known as Proposition 22, was unconstitutional. — Reuters

WASHINGTON

GM expands Chevy Bolt EV recall for fire risk

General Motors Co said on Friday it would take a hit of \$1 billion to expand the recall of its Chevrolet Bolt electric vehicles due to the risk of fires from the high-voltage battery pack — a blow for the largest US automaker as it seeks to ramp up EV sales.

The Detroit company also said it would indefinitely halt sales of the EVs due to the issue and will seek reimbursement from battery supplier LG. The latest recall covers 73,000 vehicles from model years 2019 through 2022.



"The reserves and ratio of cost to the recall will be decided depending on the result of the investigation looking into the root cause, being held by GM, LG Electronics and LG Energy Solution", LG said. — Reuters

MEXICO CITY

Mexico wants talks with US over auto content rules

Mexico sought formal consultation with the United States on Friday over the interpretation and application of tougher content rules for automobiles set out in the USMCA trade pact.

In May, Mexico voiced disagreement over the issue in a three-way online virtual meeting when it cited differences with the United States methods. Canada and Mexico use more flexible interpretations.

"Mexico has identified a



divergent position between our governments on the interpretation of... provisions on rules of origin for the automotive sector", Economy Minister Tatiana Clouthier said in a letter. — Reuters

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcement of Capital Reduction

IN accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **Delmon Ideal Projects**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No **1120443**, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from RO **250,000.000** to **20,000.000**. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

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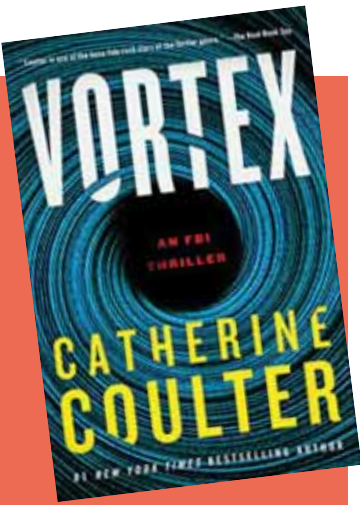
features

OMAN OBSERVER f t i y o www.omanobserver.om editor@omanobserver.om

First Omani to get a volunteering passport encourages others to do their part

Being the first Omani to obtain a volunteering passport from the Arab Union for Voluntary Work, Bakheet al Amari is proud to be able to contribute to the global humanitarian effort to make the world a little bit better. In Oman, his goal is to encourage and foster others to embrace the spirit of volunteerism for the greater good... **P20**

READ



VORTEX
BY CATHERINE COULTER

The 25th book in the FBI Thriller series. A college frat rave and a mission in Iran offer clues for agents Sherlock and Savich.

Beat route: Congolese rumba bids for UN heritage listing

DR CONGO HAS given the official kick-off to a campaign to enshrine Congolese rumba, one of the most popular forms of music in Africa, on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list.

The bid is being pushed by both the Democratic Republic of Congo and its smaller neighbour, the Republic of

Congo, also called Congo-Brazzaville.

Culture Minister Catherine Kathungu Furaha, in a ceremony in Kinshasa on Tuesday, called for Congolese embassies, universities, schools and social networks to throw their weight behind the effort.

Rumba "has been part of our identity, descendants of

Africa and all of us, throughout the ages," she said.

The application to put rumba on the list was lodged last year.

The Director-General of the National Institute of the Arts, Andre Yoka Lye Mudaba, who is chairing the campaign committee, said work now lay in a "promotion and lobbying phase" which would unfold over the coming months.

Congolese rumba developed in the Congo River basin in the 1940s, inspired by Latin and Caribbean music.

It gained widespread popularity in the 1960s and 70s, developing spinoffs, including a high-tempo version called soukous.

The Cuban strain of rumba was admitted to the UNESCO list in 2016. — **AFP**



HERITAGE



Looking into sustainable recycling of palm and cotton fibres for textile production

THE STUDENT COMPANY "Noura" at the National University of Science and Technology has succeeded in producing textiles from palm fibres in pursuit to invest in palm waste and recycle the leftovers to achieve environmental sustainability and reduce pollution.

The company seeks to benefit from fibres to manufacture several household products. The company continues its various experiments to reach high-quality textile material that enables the company to supply the local and foreign market with these textile fibres that can become essential components in the manufacture of fabrics.

Yaqeen al Nuaimiyah, Financial Director of Noura Student Company said that the company specialises in environmental-friendly products and sustainability and is closely aligning itself in the recycling sector, stressing the company's endeavour to find innovative solutions to reduce environmental pollution as a result of burning green waste. This is done by investing palm and cotton fibres as a raw material in the production of palm fibres and thus producing commercial quantities of it, as the company aspires to be a leader in the field of fibre fabric manufacturing and supplying.

She pointed out that the textile manufacturing process goes through several stages, starting with the process of collecting palm fibres from farms and then

carrying out the process of separating the solid part of the fibres, extracting them, then washing and drying them. The following stage is preparing a solution of sodium hydroxide using caustic soda flakes and distilled water and soaking these fibres inside the solution for a certain period. The fibres later are cleaned with materials selected by the company, leading to the processes of cleaning them with water to remove chemicals, and finally reaching the second drying and combing operations.

She pointed out that the process of manufacturing and producing threads begin with combing the fibres and untangling the knots. Then, the process of winding these fibres with cotton threads, and then comes the stage of textile production, which passes through the processing of the loom with threads and weaving.

Yaqeen explained that the "Mirad" textile product, which is made of palm fibres, is abundant in the Sultanate. It is a raw material that we supply to factories that manufacture fabrics. She also indicated that the material is used in the manufacture of fabrics, bags, clothes and many other industries, and it is undoubtedly environmentally friendly products. She noted that the product is a "fold" measuring two meters and the selling price is RO 1.6.

She said that the company faced many challenges and difficulties, during the Corona pandemic, which made the company's operations and



business very limited. The company also lost connection with many companies and wasn't able to enhance partnership due to the restrictions that took place in the world. Some of the challenges were addressed through the application of several ideas, including allocating the support team, dividing the tasks among its members. The team has learnt to seize every possible opportunity.

Regarding the added market value of the product, Yaqeen said that the company is working to invest natural resources from the Omani environment and achieve sustainability by reducing the burning of palm waste and harming the environment. the company is keen to provide opportunities to train students and graduates and work to provide job opportunities for Omani graduates and craftsmen.

ANIMAL PLANET

Some baby bats babble like human infants, scientists find



HUMAN BABIES ARE not the only babblers, said a study published on Thursday, some bats are also very talkative in their infancy and even make sounds that recall the googoo-gagas of our own tots.

Babbling in human children is key to developing the careful control over the vocal apparatus necessary for speech.

The study published in the journal *Science* indicates the same is true for the greater sac-winged bat, or *Saccopteryx bilineata*, native to Central America.

"Human infants seem to babble on the one hand to interact with their caregivers, but they also do that when they're completely alone, seemingly happily just exploring their voice, and that's the same what our bats are doing", study co-author Mirjam Knornschild, behavioural ecologist at the Museum of Natural History in Berlin, told AFP.

Bats communicate by ultrasound, sound waves at frequencies above human hearing, but they can also make sounds audible to people.

"It sounds like a high pitched twittering to our ears... it's melodic", said Knornschild, who has worked with bats since 2003.

Saccopteryx bilineata don't hide away in gloomy caves, but prefer to live in trees, making them easier to observe.

The babbling of 20 baby bats was recorded in Costa Rica and Panama between 2015 and 2016 by researcher Ahana Fernandez, also affiliated with the Museum of Natural History in Berlin, who spent hours with the bats in the forest.

UP TO 43 MINUTES

The mammals, like us, have a larynx, and start babbling about three weeks after birth, for about 7 to 10 weeks — until they are weaned.

During this period, the bats spend around 30 per cent of their days babbling, with sessions lasting on average about seven minutes, the researchers calculated.

But one bat babbled for a full 43 minutes, a long stretch considering adult communication generally lasts but a few seconds.

"That's something really, really peculiar that the other bat species that have been studied to date simply don't do", said Knornschild.

"They're very chatty."

The vocalizations were converted into images, called spectrograms.

"Each syllable has a very specific shape, so to say, and they are easy to distinguish by eye", Knornschild added.

The researchers analysed more than 55,000 produced syllables, finding universal characteristics of babbling in human infants in the bats, such as repetition, lack of meaning, but also that the sounds followed a certain rhythm.

On top of that, like with humans, the learning curve is not linear.

Out of 25 syllables in the adult repertoire, young bats have not yet mastered all of them by the time they are weaned, suggesting that they continue to learn. — AFP



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INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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ENTERTAINMENT

Delayed Bond film 'No Time To Die' set for Royal Albert Hall premiere



THE WORLD PREMIERE of the James Bond film "No Time To Die" will be on September 28 at the Royal Albert Hall in London, it has been confirmed.

Daniel Craig's final outing as 007 has been repeatedly delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

A message on the film's official Twitter account said Craig will be joined by producers Michael G Wilson and Barbara Broccoli and director Cary Joji Fukunaga on the red carpet.

The premiere will come two days before the film is released in cinemas on September 30.

A number of Bond premieres have taken place at the famous London venue, including 2015's "Spectre" where the duke and duchess of Cambridge and duke of Sussex were in attendance.

"No Time To Die" was the first major film to fall victim to the pandemic when its April 2020 release was pushed to November as the virus swept the globe. It was subsequently delayed a number of times while cinemas around the world remained shuttered.

"No Time To Die" also stars Lea Seydoux, Rami Malek, Lashana Lynch and Ana De Armas and is directed by Fukunaga, with a script co-written by "Fleabag" creator Phoebe Waller-Bridge.

"No Time To Die" finds Bond having left active service and enjoying a tranquil life in Jamaica when his old friend Felix Leiter, played by Jeffrey Wright, from the CIA turns up asking for help.

Danny Boyle was originally hired to direct but stepped away from the project due to "creative differences." — **PA Media/dpa**

COOK LIKE A CHEF

Mouthwatering sweet regag



OMAN HAS MORE than 100 varieties of dates planted all over the country with tonnes of fruits every year which is why it is important to learn how to incorporate this healthy fruit into many of your desserts and dishes. But other than the local

favourites, finding a good recipe that includes dates is hard to come by.

In today's Cook Like a Chef, Chef Alessandro is sharing one recipe which he can attest will be a welcome new breakfast or snacks for your family but

prepared with the flair of a high-end restaurant.

Using some of the easiest ingredients to find in your local department store or produce markets, regag is one dish you'd be really happy to know how to make.

INGREDIENTS

PORTION: 8 PIECES

200gm green bean sprouts
30gm chickpeas
100gm raw rice
5gm salt table
20gm datella (dates chocolate spread)
15gm berries
15ml dates Honey
40gm slices ripen banana

METHOD OF PREPARATION:

BATTER

Soak the whole green moong dal, raw rice and fenugreek seeds for 5-6 hours. Overnight is fine too. After soaking, drain the water and grind the mixture to a fine paste along with the fenugreek seeds. Add up to a cup of water while grinding. Heat the griddle until medium-hot.

Add 1/3 cup batter and swirl to completely cover the griddle. Sprinkle 1/4 teaspoon of ghee.

Apply the datella. Cook for 30 seconds. Cook until the underside of the regag is golden brown.

At this moment you can top the bread with a thin layer of date chocolate spread, whisked egg and sliced banana.

Served with berries and dates honey.

ABOUT THE CHEF

Alessandro Sandrolini
Head Chef, Alila Hinu Bay



Born and raised in Bologna, Italy, Alessandro started his passion for hospitality at the Istituto Alberghiero Statale Riolo Terme, where he studied Hotel Management. He then began his first job as a Commis to Sous Chef at Ristorante Silverio in Italy. The restaurant was a new big entry in Bologna and was awarded 1 Michelin star in 1989. In 1991, five years later, Alessandro moved on to a bigger dream, by following a family legacy. He became the Chef-Owner at the Ristorante da Angelo, an old Italian restaurant opened by his father in 1968. When the restaurant closed, he became the Chef de Cuisine at the Ristorante Al Ghisello in 1995 managing the kitchen operation for 10 years. In 2005, he moved to Belgrade to become the Italian Chef at Hyatt Regency. Alessandro's entry to the Middle East started in 2009 when he moved with his family to Oman. This would be followed by different movements from Delhi to Jeddah and back to Italy. Now with almost three decades of experience, specialising in fine Italian cuisine, Alessandro contributes his humble and extensive knowledge as Head Chef at Alila Hinu Bay. His passion for food and innovation keeps him motivated, and his dream to work in a casual Italian restaurant by the sea has become a perfect reality.

TRAVEL TALES

Singapore gets sweet pandemic distraction as Museum of Ice Cream opens



AMERICA'S MUSEUM of Ice Cream launched its first international outlet in Singapore on Thursday, providing some sweet distraction from the coronavirus after curbs put a halt to many entertainment activities across the city state.

Visitors were required to book in advance to prevent crowding and many were excited about the interactive exhibits — free-flow ice cream and children's ball pool filled with plastic multi-coloured ice cream sprinkles.

"We had a lot of fun in the bouncy castle, we were wearing our masks, but bouncing off the calories," said health coach Trudy Sweeney, while biting into a red bean potong ice cream, one of the Singapore edition's local offerings.

Her friend Mitch Tugade said the museum was a nice break from the pandemic.

"It's really a good place to be — it's happy and you forget about what's happening outside when you're here."

The Museum of Ice Cream said it planned to expand to more locations soon, the next opening in Austin, Texas, on Saturday.

Its flagship New York museum is wildly popular with social media influencers and frequently attracts celebrities.

Pirakash T, Asia Pacific head at Museum of Ice Cream Singapore, said a big plus was seeing people happy.

"It also helps the creative side of your brain, helps you forget about things. So I definitely do think that it is beneficial, allows you to take a break from things that are happening outside," he said.

The 60,000 square foot (5,574 sq m) museum has strict coronavirus protocols, including mandatory check-ins and showing of vaccination certificates or negative Covid-19 tests.

"We definitely feel safe, we are all wearing our masks, except when we are eating the treats, and the vaccination rate is so high here," said personal trainer Amanda Lim. "We felt like it was a no-risk situation, so we are happy to be here." — **Reuters**



First Omani to get a volunteering passport encourages others to do their part



Volunteer work is one of the most important noble values carried out by many individuals to serve the community. The Sultanate contains a large group of associations interested in the affairs of voluntary work. But for Bakheet, more is needed. While he strive to do his part, one of his objectives is make sure that the community is aware of what difference they make and encourage especially the young ones to follow the path of helping others

IN A WORLD DRIVEN by money, there are still those who go against the tide and embrace volunteerism to be of service to humanity.

Being the first Omani to obtain a volunteering passport from the Arab Union for Voluntary Work, Bakheet al Amari is proud to be able to contribute to the global humanitarian effort to make the world a little bit better.

Through the volunteering passport, Bakheet will be able to travel to perform hours of service for civic, charitable or humanitarian efforts – something that the world badly needed right now especially that many countries all over the world especially the developing ones are suffering from refugee and humanitarian crisis.

“Volunteer work in the Sultanate in its various forms and levels has gone through different stages. Today, through volunteer teams under government umbrellas supported by all parties and members of society, it is developing with lofty and planned goals according to specific and successful schedules”, Bakheet shared.

Al Amari added, “My experience in volunteer work began in 2007 and I realized that it is a religious and patriotic duty to practice towards the country and to provide aid and assistance to everyone who needed help in this country”.

He said, “I received moral support from the community and those close to me which prompted me to continue in this field and it has become my daily duty. I have earned a lot of experience to expand work outside my wilayat. I participated with various volunteer teams in Dhofar Governorate, and various local and international volunteer teams and benefited greatly from their volunteer programmes.”

From his small initiatives, Bakheet is expanding his efforts by making sure that others also learn the values of volunteerism.

He shared, “I contributed to the establishment of some volunteer teams. I also worked with Tarabut Center to present annual international conferences in cooperation with the United Nations, in which nearly 300 participants from various governorates of the Sultanate and Arab countries participated.”

He narrated, “At Tarabut Center, we trained nearly 500 young men and women volunteers to promote the role of volunteer work and the ethics of volunteer work. We distributed a book entitled *Psychological Happiness* to families and educational and cultural bodies free of charge, and a new book entitled ‘Bullying’ that will be distributed free of charge, after completing the certification procedures for scientific benefit.”

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The Sultanate contains a large group of associations interested in the affairs of voluntary work. But for Bakheet, more is needed. While he strive to do his part, one of his objectives is make sure that the community is aware of what difference they make and encourage especially the young ones to follow the path of helping others.

“I received many awards, the latest of which was from the Ministry of Social Development. I was honoured among the most prominent volunteer figures in the Governorate of Dhofar”, Bakheet shared. These accolades inspire him to work harder to make a big difference.

“I volunteered with the Executive Office of the Ministers of Labour Council and the Council of Ministers of Social Affairs in the GCC countries. I obtained the Volunteering passport from the Arab Federation for Voluntary Work to be the first Omani to obtain this passport. The work doesn't really stop and the more people freely volunteer their time, experience and knowledge, the better it is for the world”, he said.

