

National airline to train Omani pilots

Oman Air said it continues with its commitment to train the next generation of Omani cadets with the aim to increase the number of national pilots at the airline and contribute to Oman's Vision 2040 Omanisation objectives. With 102 Omani cadets currently enrolled in the ATPL programme, the airline is enthusiastically reshaping the pilot profession for Omani nationals in anticipation of a robust restart to aviation and post-pandemic travel. The ATPL programme launched in 2018 with cadets undergoing training at Oman Aviation Academy in Suhar is approved by Oman's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA). **DETAILS ON P2**



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VERSTAPPEN ON A ROLL WITH RED BULL



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BITCOIN DIVES AS CHINA WIDENS CRACKDOWN ON CRYPTO MINING



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AL DHAHIRAH: HOME TO RARE PLANTS, ENDANGERED ANIMALS



MUSCAT

HM THANKED BY IRAQI PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a cable of thanks from President Barham Ahmed Salih of the Republic of Iraq, in reply to His Majesty's condolences cable on the incident at Ibn Al Khatib Hospital. In his cable, President Barham expressed his utmost thanks for His Majesty's heartfelt sympathy and prayers. He wished His Majesty the Sultan good health and success, and the Omani people further progress and prosperity.

— ONA

OMAN, SAUDI REVIEW TRADE COOPERATION

Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Under-Secretary for Investment Promotion at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, met Majid bin Abdullah al Qasabi, Minister of Commerce and Investment of Saudi Arabia, at his office in the presence of HH Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, the Sultanate's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. The meeting was part of a visit by the Omani delegation to Saudi Arabia from June 19 to 22. The delegation comprises a number of officials from the public and private sectors. The meeting discussed ways of boosting investment and trade exchange between Oman and Saudi through the investment opportunities and the exchange of expertise and reviewing the Saudi experience in the investment sector.

DETAILS ON P3



INSIDE



Majlis to host higher education minister next week

MUSCAT: Majlis Ash'shura will host the Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, at its 14th ordinary meeting to be held on June 30.

The Majlis will also hold its 13th ordinary meeting of the second annual sitting (2020-2021) of the ninth term (2019-2021), on Tuesday.

The was stated by Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-

General of Majlis Ash'shura, on Monday.

Shaikh Al Nadabi added that the Majlis will host Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, to present the ministry's statement which will explain the policies of higher education, research and innovation and the ministry's strategies in light of the Oman

Vision 2040. The statement will discuss the ministry's policies and their implementation mechanisms in light of the Oman Vision 2040 as well as the adaptation policies of the specialisations in the public and the private higher education institutions to the labour market as well as the ministry's five-year plans and strategies for higher education, vocational training and scientific

research in line with the Oman Vision 2040 and the ninth five-year plan and its executive programmes and under the current economic crisis, among other topics, he added.

Majlis Ash'shura will discuss, during its 13th meeting, a number of laws referred to it from the government in addition to a number of expressed desires presented by the council's members. The council's

members will listen to responses from ministries and government units to the written question presented by the council's members, Shaikh Al Nadabi said. Shaikh Al Nadabi noted that the session will be public and will be attended by journalists and citizens after presenting a request for attendance on the council's website or by directly contracting the secretariat-general.

CONCERN AS COVID-19 DAILY CASES HIT 2,529

1,448 INPATIENTS IN HOSPITALS, INCLUDING 428 IN ICUS

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 21

There is a serious concern for lack of enough beds in hospitals across the Sultanate as the number of inpatients have shot up phenomenally over the past two weeks.

There are 1,448 inpatients in hospitals, including 428 in intensive care units (ICUs).

The Ministry of Health on Monday reported 2,529 new cases and 31 deaths.

The total number of cases registered in the country has now reached 250,572, including 2,741 deaths.

The Sultan Qaboos University Hospital in Muscat has 82 patients in all categories, of which 37 of them are critical ICU patients. There are 45 patients who do not require non-



invasive assisted ventilation.

The number of inpatients in the Dhofar Governorate is 42, including 15 in ICUs.

There have been reports of patients being rushed from one to hospital (both governments and private) due to lack of beds. Both expatriates and citizens

have lost lives likely recently as their relatives found it difficult to find hospital beds for treatment on time.

The ministry officials have told the *Observer* that the situation is highly worrying, and it will take some time before the positive results of mass

vaccination are visible. "Till then people have no option, but show same commitment towards safety and preventive measures."

"We get calls from relatives and colleagues of Covid-19 sick patients with requests for beds, most of them in serious condition which require hospitalisation. All private hospitals try to help each other by sharing information on vacant beds and ventilators, but the situation now calls for extreme caution," senior officials of several private hospitals, said.

Meanwhile, a medical team for vaccination visited the headquarters of the Muscat Municipality in Darsait and Seeb as part of its programme to government units to vaccinate its workers.

NIZWA EYES JUICY HARVEST OF GRAPES

Hamad bin Masoud al Sinani, his sons and grandchildren, begin their day early at their farm, which is located in Al Madah in the Wilayat of Nizwa. They are busy picking the black grapes or Ahshal. Each of them takes turns in harvesting the crop. They take small baskets made of date palm fronds to collect the shiny bunch of globules. Each of them fills his basket with what he can. Children also help in this harvest. It is a labour of love that brings cheer to all in the household.

DETAILS ON P3

EU farming policy failing to fight climate change

BRUSSELS: The European Union's huge subsidy programme for agriculture is failing to rein in greenhouse gas emissions from farming, despite 100 billion euros of such subsidies being labelled as climate spending since 2014, auditors said on Monday.

The environmental impact of agriculture is under increased scrutiny, as the EU seeks to eliminate its net emissions by 2050 — including the 10 per cent of emissions that come from farming.

EU negotiators will this week attempt to agree new rules for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the farming subsidy scheme that will spend 387 billion euros, a third of

EU SEEKS TO ELIMINATE NET EMISSIONS BY 2050, INCLUDING THE 10% OF EMISSIONS FROM FARMING

the EU budget for 2021-2027. A key sticking point is whether the money should be tied to protecting the environment.

A report by the European Court

of Auditors on Monday said so far, the CAP has failed to support more climate-friendly farming.

"The 100 billion euros of CAP funds attributed during the period 2014-2020 to climate action had little impact on agricultural emissions," report author Viorel Stefan said.

The auditors said the new CAP should incentivise emissions reductions from livestock and fertilisers, and pay farmers to restore drained land so it can absorb and store CO2.

They said in future, the European Commission should vet countries' plans to spend their CAP money to ensure they do not risk raising emissions. — **Reuters**



ALILA HINU IN MIRBAT TO BOOST TOURISM

Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group), the executive arm of the Sultanate for tourism development, announced the soft opening of Alila Hinu, to kick-off its operational activities on Sunday. The boutique - beachfront eco-resort, rests on an endless bay and beach with stunning views of the Arabian Sea just off the southwest coast of the Wilayat of Mirbat, Governorate of Dhofar. The five-star Alila Hinu is another addition to tourism scene in the Sultanate and its opening marks the operational launch of Omran Group's second property under the Alila Hotels & Resorts luxury hotel brand in the Sultanate.

DETAILS ON P2

Over 14,000 artificial coral reefs at 154 sites in Oman

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The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, represented by the General Directorate of Agricultural and Fisheries and Water Resources in Musandam, implemented a project of lowering four artificial reefs at 30 to 50 metres in the Wilayat of Dibba in Musandam Governorate.

The project, execution of which is financed by the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund, was conceived due to the increase in the number of fishermen, limited places where natural coral reefs exist, and wrong fishing practices in places where natural coral reefs are located. Such practices caused damage to coral reefs and polluted the marine environment.

The project aims to enhance, sustain and protect natural fisheries, improve the level of fisheries stock in Musandam, and improve the economic living conditions of fishermen in the governorate.

There are 14,022 artificial coral



reef units distributed at 154 sites in various governorates of the Sultanate.

According to the ministry's

statistics, with a total of 7,992 artificial coral reef units distributed over 89 sites, the Governorate of North Al Batinah

obtained the highest number, followed by the Governorate of Muscat (2,661 units at 27 sites), Governorate of South Al Batinah (2,115 units at 22 sites), and Musandam Governorate (1,194 units at 12 sites). The governorates of South Al Sharqiyah and Dhofar recorded the lowest number of artificial coral reef units with 50 and 10 units, respectively.

Coral reefs are considered a safe environment for the survival and reproduction of many living marine organisms.

They are one of the most suitable environments for the reproduction of benthic fish.

At the end of 2019, the ministry launched the artificial reefs farm project in the Wilayat of Suwaiq, which is the largest farm in the Middle East, with a length of 20 km on the coastline, a width of 7 km and depth ranging from 15 to 30 metres.

The project includes the landing of 4,280 units of artificial reefs of three different models: The Arab pyramid, the cube and the steel model.

OMAN NATIONAL HYDROGRAPHIC OFFICE



MUSCAT: The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) opened the Oman National Hydrographic Office, under the auspices of Vice-Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis bin Abdullah al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces, on Monday. – ONA

673 housing loans worth RO 29m subsidised

MUSCAT: Oman Housing Bank said that 673 loans having a lump sum value of about RO 29.2 million were subsidised by the government in the first five months of 2021.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Adnan Haider Darwish, CEO of Oman Housing Bank, said that the bank will accelerate the pace of approval of subsidised housing loans over the next few months, despite the situation with the

current Covid-19 pandemic. This reflects the bank's commitment to developing the housing sector in the Sultanate in line with preset plans, said Adnan Haider Darwish.

The bank's management focuses on realising the visions of the government, led by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, aimed at providing decent housing for Omani citizens, Adnan explained.

— ONA

Alila Hinu in Mirbat opens to guests

MIRBAT: Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN Group), the executive arm of the Sultanate for tourism development, announced the soft opening of Alila Hinu, to kick-off its operational activities.

The boutique; beachfront eco-resort, rests on an endless bay and beach with stunning views of the Arabian Sea just off the southwest coast of the Wilayat of Mirbat, Governorate of Dhofar.

The five-star Alila Hinu is another addition to the tourism scene in the Sultanate and its opening marks the operational launch of OMRAN Group's second property under the Alila Hotels & Resorts luxury hotel brand in the Sultanate.

This will play an important role to meet the growing tourist demand and support the hospitality sector. In addition, the resort has been established to reflect the diligence towards sustainability considering environmental aspects, the architecture and the balance between tradition and modernity.

Hashil bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, CEO of OMRAN Group said: "The soft opening of Alila Hinu is an important step that reaffirms



OMRAN Group's role in driving growth through the investment in sustainable developments across the Sultanate. This also highlights the aligned efforts between OMRAN in partnership with Oman Investment Authority towards economic diversification, as well as our collaborative efforts with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in line with the National Tourism Strategy 2040.

Alila Hinu is a remarkable tourist addition to Dhofar Governorate, and we are confident that this resort will bring unparalleled experiences, enticing local visitors and global travellers to discover Oman from another perspective

"We are delighted to showcase

the 'Alila Experience' in such a spectacular location. Alila Hinu proudly settles in Mirbat, benefiting from its rich culture, humble villages, and beautiful landscape. To support this incredible nature, we are even more pleased to name this as an eco-luxury resort," Martin Persson, General Manager of Alila Hinu, said.

Offering the best of both worlds, the resort flourishes in both marine life and nature reserves. Located between Jabal Samhan and the Arabian Sea, Alila Hinu is a nature lovers paradise, boasting the richest historical and cultural settings in the coastal town of Mirbat, in the Dhofar governorate, 87 kilometres from Salalah

Airport and accessible by road from the various governorates and wilayats in the Sultanate.

Alila Hinu will represent a new dimension for tourism offerings in the Sultanate in general, and Dhofar Governorate in particular. The Resort will house 112 stylish rooms, including various tourist facilities that contribute to enriching the visitors' experiences, such as high-end villas equipped with all services, in addition to a range of recreational facilities to ensure a unique experience for the guests, as well as restaurants, swimming pools, and facilities for children.

As the largest hospitality investment group in the Sultanate, OMRAN creates new lifestyle and tourism destinations that support domestic tourism and enhance the experience of local, regional, and international visitors. The Group Owns and oversees an array of renowned regional and international hospitality brands, amounting to 25 hotels and resorts with over 4,000 hotel rooms, as well as heritage and eco-tourism destinations celebrating the local culture and authentic Omani hospitality.

Oman Air paving way for Omani pilots

MUSCAT: Oman Air, the national carrier of the Sultanate of Oman, continues its commitment to train the next generation of Omani cadets with the aim to increase the number of national pilots at the airline and contribute to Oman's Vision 2040 Omatisation objectives.

With 102 Omani cadets currently enrolled in the ATPL programme, the airline is enthusiastically reshaping the pilot profession for Omani nationals in anticipation of a robust restart to aviation and post-pandemic travel.

The ATPL programme launched in 2018 with cadets undergoing training at Oman Aviation Academy in Sohar in partnership with CAE Oxford, and is approved by Oman's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and

Oman Aviation Academy bolsters in-country value with 102 Omani Cadets in Airline Transport Pilot Licence Programme

the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA).

Additional training takes place at Oman Air's state-of-the-art Flight Training Centre at its headquarters in Muscat. With Covid-19 restrictions limiting access to Oman Aviation Academy, this year's cohort of 102 cadets, which includes 5 female cadets, is completing the course at various CAE training sites around the world including in the UK and Spain.

Command and Staff College delegation visits Majlis Ash'shura

MUSCAT: Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary General of Majlis Ash'shura, received a delegation from the Command and Staff College at the council's premises, on Monday.

Al Nadabi presented a visual display explaining the purviews and working mechanisms of Majlis Ash'shura, to the delegation. He explained the council's legislative role in discussing and approving the draft laws referred to the council from the government, proposing new laws and amending the existing ones.

Al Nadabi also explained the council's oversight role in accordance with the applied regulations stated by the Council of Oman's Law. He reviewed statistics indicating the activation of the role and purviews of Majlis Ash'shura during the eighth and ninth terms.



Oman and Malta hold political talks session



MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, on Monday held a session of political talks with Evarist Bartolo, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs in the Republic of Malta.

The session reviewed the bilateral cooperation in economic, scientific, and cultural areas between the two friendly countries and means of promoting them.

The two sides also exchanged views on several regional and international issues of common interest. They touched on the international response in battling Covid-19 pandemic and its new mutations, as well as the international cooperation in providing vaccines which are pivotal in recovering from the pandemic and its health, social and economic impacts. — ONA

ROP participates in GCC meeting

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) on Monday participated in the 28th meeting of the GCC Border and Coast Guard Officials.

The virtual meeting, run from the GCC Secretariat General,

reviewed several topics related to border and coast guard in the GCC member states.

The Sultanate's side was headed by Brigadier Ali bin Saif al Muqbali, Commander Coast Guard Police. — ONA

Oman, Saudi Arabia explore ways to boost trade and investments

RIYDAH: Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Under-Secretary for Investment Promotion at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, met with Majid bin Abdullah al Qasabi, Minister of Commerce and Investment of Saudi Arabia in his office in the presence of Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, the Sultanate's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia.

The meeting was part of a visit by the Omani delegation to Saudi Arabia from June 19 to 22. The delegation comprises a number of officials from the public and private sectors.

The meeting discussed ways of boosting investment and trade exchange between Oman and Saudi Arabia through the investment opportunities and the exchange of expertise and reviewing the Saudi experience in the investment sector. Besides, the two sides held a joint workshop to ways to bolster investment between the two countries.

The Omani side presented a visual display about the investment environment in the Sultanate and the most important developments in the investment sector and the



investment opportunities available in various fields in the Sultanate.

On the other side, the Saudi delegation reviewed the developments that took place in the investment sectors and displayed the programmes of the national firms and the invest in Saudi Arabia initiative.

Besides, Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Under-Secretary for Investment Promotion at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, met with Khalid al Falih, Minister

Omani delegation is holding meetings with a number of Saudi businessmen to offer investment opportunities in the Sultanate

of Investment of Saudi Arabia and Saleh al Rasheed, Governor of the General Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises

(Monsha'at) and a number of Saudi officials to discuss ways to boost commercial cooperation. The Omani delegation is holding meetings with a number of Saudi businessmen to offer investment opportunities in the Sultanate.

The visit is aimed at developing and fostering joint cooperation and finding a clear vision for integrated investment action between the two brotherly countries to achieve the goals of Oman Vision 2040 and the Saudi Vision 2030.



NIZWA EYES JUICY HARVEST OF DELICIOUS GRAPES

TEXT BY AMAL AL RIYAMI
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PHOTOS BY SAMI AL HINAI

Hamad bin Masoud al Sinani, his sons and grandchildren, begin their day early at their farm, which is located in Al Madah in the Wilayat of Nizwa. They are busy picking the black grapes or Ahshal.

Each of them takes turns in the harvest. They take small baskets made of date palm fronds to collect the shiny bunch of globules. Each of them fills his basket with what he can. Children also help in this harvest. It is a labour of love that brings cheer to all in the household.

Al Sinani said that preparations for the grape harvest begins in February with the pruning of leaves. Grape vines are also given support with wooden planks. Then, cow or sheep dung is sprinkled to boost the yield. Fish residue is also added on top of it.

"We start the grape harvest at the beginning of June till the end of the same month. The production, thank God, is abundant and is estimated at about 300 to 400 kilos. We sell harvested grapes in the Nizwa market by auction or sell them in vegetable and fruit stores where the price of a kilo ranges between RO 2 and RO 3."



Grape cultivation is widespread in many wilayats of the Sultanate especially in the mountainous regions, which are characterised by moderate temperatures in the summer.

The fertility of soil and the abundance of water throughout the year also support grape cultivation. Grapes offer great economic return for farmers

The availability of fertile soil and freshwater whether from Aflaj or wells contribute greatly to the success of the grape cultivation.

In the Sultanate black, white, and Lebanese grapes are cultivated.



'COVID BATCH' IS NO LESS SMART

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Students of all ages are the most misunderstood lot during the pandemic that has created a new divide of pre-corona students and students during corona. Out of this has emerged a 'Covid Batch' of students. They either got promotions to superior classes or wrote their exams with the hope of promotion to the next level.

For no fault of theirs, they are in a situation in which they cannot go to schools and colleges, missing friends and campus environment, and are constantly under the supervision of their parents.

On top of it, their educational standards are doubted due to learning through online mode and even writing exams in an online setting.

Clinical psychologist Mini Joseph called for understanding for these students who do not have proper outlets to express, play, laugh and share their emotions with friends and teachers.

"This is a tough time for them. They are young, energetic and need some outlet to express themselves. They want to hear from friends and be heard, which is possible only in a campus atmosphere. The parents and the generation of parents should understand and create an atmosphere for them to express," she said.

She also warned against too much screen-time engagement and its psychological impact. "This is human nature to interact with a human. You cannot get the same level online even though you are talking to your best friend," she said.

She called for understanding for the current day students.

Aditi, a Grade 10 student, is upset over her parents' and relatives' understanding that she got promoted to Grade 11 without writing her exams.

"Not our fault; we are put in a situation. With my level of preparation, I bet I would have fared well had the proper examination happened. I do not react, but feel bad for the general understanding that the 'Covid Batch' passed without writing any test," she said.

A senior faculty member of the Mass Communication Department, University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), also felt that students could not attend college classes.

"Even we miss our students. All the students are not at the same level. Some are smart,

some are shy but intelligent, and some need some push to do well. In the current online mode it is not possible to give the same attention that we used to give during pre-corona days," he said and added that this was a situation forced upon everyone.

He also mentioned that the 'Covid Batch' should not be misunderstood for online learning. "I see the students have learned many new skills. Their research abilities have increased, and they know many other resources other than the course materials that they were provided earlier."

"I am sure the effort being made by the education authorities, teachers, students and parents will not go in vain; this 'Covid Batch' would emerge as a 'Smart Batch' for their global reach and global understanding," he said.



I see the students have learned many new skills. Their research abilities have increased, and they know many other resources other than the course materials that they were provided earlier

**SENIOR FACULTY
MEMBER**
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TECHNOLOGY AND
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Covid-19 protocol part of occupational safety

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Even if vaccinated, one should follow all Covid-19 protocols to reduce the number of cases, especially workplaces should be proactive to fight against the virus while focusing on the employees' mental health.

Dr Abdulnasser bin Jamal al Maawali said in an interview with Observer, "Even if vaccinated, they should comply with the precautions till we reach the desired percentage of vaccination."

"I think in Oman, most of the people have accepted the vaccination, there are few who have been refusing, but some have unfortunately got the infection or someone in the family had suffered or even passed away due to the virus.

One more reason for the rush to vaccination we see now is due to the new variants of the virus. Recently the numbers of cases have been growing very fast as well as death cases," pointed out Dr Al Maawali.

Concerning some people opting not to wear a mask at the workplace, he said, "Wearing a mask is not an option. It is self-commitment to protect yourself and the community from the virus. If you decided to remove the mask at the workplace, you would risk your colleagues and the workplace for the disease resulting in very serious consequences."

Each organisation should pay attention to the mitigation that will protect the spread of the virus at the workplace, according to Dr Al Maawali.

"It is easier and cost-effective to



Wearing a mask is not an option. It is self-commitment to protect yourself and the community from the virus. If you decided to remove the mask at the workplace, you would risk your colleagues and the workplace for the disease resulting in very serious consequences

DR ABDULNASSER JAMAL AL MAAWALI

prevent the infection than dealing with an outbreak. Employees should be reminded regularly about the guidelines, wearing a mask, keeping two-metre distance and washing hands frequently. Also, masks and sanitisers should be provided for everybody. The guidelines should be clear for everyone and can be conveyed through posters or e-mails," he explained.

He advised that the involvement of the top management is important.

"They should be the first to follow the guidelines, and this is one way to encourage the rest of the employees," he noted.

"Emergency response team should be formed in such crises and should meet regularly to make sure the guidelines are set, easy to be followed and up to date. There are guidelines set by the Supreme Committee and Ministry of Health which give each organisation the way to start in protecting their employees and workplaces, he said."

There have been incidents where someone in the family has contracted the virus or the working individuals themselves, and they continue to report to work.

"Self-declaration is very crucial in protecting the workplace from the Covid-19, the instruction should be clear to all, if any Covid-19 related symptoms have started or a positive case contact encountered, the employee should isolate immediately.

If any positive case is identified at the workplace, proper contact tracing should be done to avoid an outbreak," he stressed.

Dr Al Maawali suggested that working online is very effective, "So many organisations have utilised it throughout the world. Each organisation should consider this option very seriously to use it in case of lockdown or outbreaks. Depending on the size and number of staff in the organisation, the guidelines will be almost similar as a basic."

As much as physical health, it is important to take care of employee's mental health, Dr Al Maawali said, "As so many people have suffered from this pandemic in different ways, the organisation should support them by providing a friendly environment where the employees can express their feelings and concerns."

Real estate sector set to grow post-pandemic



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The real estate sector is growing, and it is poised to see good growth post-pandemic.

According to Siham bint Ahmad al Harthy, real estate expert and co-founder of Asawer Real Estate, the sector has growth potential, as it is open for investment for both foreign and local investors.

The Asawer Real Estate is the force behind the ambitious Muscat Pavilion project.

Speaking to *the Observer* on the sidelines of the launch of the project, she said, "The set of initiatives announced before and during the pandemic would fetch positive results in the coming months."

"We will leave the scars of the pandemic and march forward with a life full of action. The sector is poised to grow manifold, and this sector is a good option for both local and foreign investors," she added.

In the background of the recent announcement that foreigners can own property in the Sultanate, the Muscat Pavilion is a landmark project that can boost the real estate sector and help attract investment. The event was held under the auspices of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat, in the presence of dignitaries, media professionals and journalists.

"To achieve substantial growth in the real estate sector, we need to change

the ways at which we look at things. One of them is the traditional way we managed our offices and organisations. The solution is creating smart offices and workplaces where we need to incorporate more modern amenities," she adds.

A plethora of initiatives is listed to be the substantiating factors behind the projected growth. Besides allowing expatriates to own properties in mixed-use residential and commercial buildings, the reduction in the real estate transaction fees from five per cent to three per cent, and consent for the developers to add additional floors to their buildings for a fee, are measures that can boost the sector.

The real estate fees raised to five per cent in 2016, were reduced as the earlier decision resulted in slouching revenues to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning. The real estate fees were reduced after consultations with the representatives of the real estate sector and the ministry and fixed at pre-2016 levels.

"People can opt to invest in real estate for many reasons. The first being their choice and the second being their economic and financial reasons, and they can have greater impacts on the sector in the days to come."

She further said that the present project meets the requirements of the Omani market for offices with high-quality specifications, characterised by privacy and tranquillity in a strategic location, and contributes to the growth and development of businesses in the Sultanate.

Initiative to foster talents of Omani employees



STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 21

Oasis Water Company provides an appropriate climate for a healthy work environment. This includes training and qualification courses or incentives and promotion programmes. This raises the experience that the Omani youth has gained during their work at the Oasis Water Company and is evidence of their ability to perform higher tasks and take on more responsibilities in the private sector.

Saleh bin Sulaiman al Ameri, Deputy Director-General of Administration and Human Resources at Al Waha Water Company, said "The company seeks to empower young Omani talents in various departments through its policy of investing in training and qualifying the national workforce. This is part of the company's larger plan to develop their capabilities by upskilling them, providing on-the-job training and enhancing their professional aspects in diverse work environments."

He pointed out that the Oasis Water Company is one of the leading companies in the field of Omanisation, as it was able to achieve a high rate of 38 per cent. The number of Omani staff is around 392, and the company is training and looking to bring in 11 new Omani employees in the sales representative positions.

Ali bin Khalfan al Hatali, Assistant Director of Administration at the Oasis Water Company, added, "Ever since joining Oman Oasis as a truck driver in 2000, I have been able to move up the career ladder with hard work, diligence, and perseverance and overcome challenges."

He explained, "The Company has provided us with many training and qualification opportunities, both within and outside the company, which has contributed greatly to the company's career progression and my access to this position.



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY
Advertisement No. 26/2021

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following biddings :

Serial	Bidding No.	Bidding description	Document fee	Deadline for obtaining bidding docs.	Deadline for inquiry submission	Deadline for submission
1	RE-Bidding - BB/06/2021	Rental a Site for Selling Snacks at Al-Mahj Walkway in AL- Amerat	25/- OMR	12/07/2021	13/07/2021	21/07/2021
2	BB/12/2021	Building, Management & Operation the Coffee Shop in Plot Number (830), Block (Phase 1) at Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos	25/- OMR	12/07/2021	13/07/2021	21/07/2021
3	BB/13/2021	Building, Management & Operation the Coffee Shop located in Plot No. (478), Block (Phase 3) at Al-Khoud	25/- OMR	12/07/2021	13/07/2021	21/07/2021
4	AB/14/2021	Building, Management & Operation the Coffee Shop located in Plot No. (808), Block (Phase 1) at Al Ghubrah North & Holding various recreational activities in the park located on Plot No. (785)	600/- OMR	22/08/2021	30/08/2021	19/09/2021

Registered companies with Muscat Municipality which are Specialized in above bids are invited to participate in the biddings as per the following:

1. Pay the specified document fee for the requested bid via bank deposit to Muscat Municipality's Bank account as follows:
Bank Muscat 0423010702710024
2. A copy of the transaction's receipt MUST be send to the following e-mail (MM.PC@mm.gov.om), provided with the company data (name and bid number, company name, commercial registration number of the company, delegate name, office phone number, mobile number and email address approved by the company).
3. The bidding documents will be send to the company via email.
4. **2:00 PM** on the above mentioned dates, is the last timing for obtaining Bidding Documents. Any bid's document request received after the specified time will not be considered.

Submitted offers must be accompanied with a bond mentioned in the tender document valid for a period not less than (90) days issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat Municipality. Bidding that do not meet the required bond **will not be accepted**. Documents must be enclosed in a plain envelope sealed with red wax (without any company information). box's locations are As follows:

Bidding at The Serial	The Box's Location
1-2-3	Muscat Municipality Ruwi Building (Main Entrance), located on Capital Market Street
4	Third floor at Directorate General of Quantity Surveying and Contracts in Muscat Municipality, Head Office, Darsait

NOTES:

1. Companies which are not registered in Muscat Municipality or their registration has been expired shall register through the municipality's website (**www.mm.gov.om**). For technical support, please contact Muscat Municipality through email (**crm@mm.gov.om**).
2. If the bidders have any inquiries regarding the scope of the work, they have to send their inquiries through the following e-mail (**MM.PC@mm.gov.om**)
3. **10:00 AM** on the above submission mentioned dates, is the last timing for receiving bids. Offers submitted after the above mentioned date & time shall not be accepted for any reason.
4. Muscat Municipality has the right to accept or reject any offer without assigning any reason.

Website: www.mm.gov.om



Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Sultan Qaboos University Hospital announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Subject	Non-Refundable Fee	Last Date of Collection the Tenders	Site Visit Date	Last Date of Submission
392	SERVICE CONTRACT FOR HOSPITAL CLEANING AND PEST CONTROL SERVICE	R.O 105	29/06/2021	30/06/2021	09/08/2021

Tender Conditions:

1. The companies who are registered in Tender Board shall collect the documents during office hours from 8.00 am to 1.00 pm from the Procurement Department/ Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.
2. The site visit shall be at 09.00 am in the Technical Affairs Department building/ Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.
3. The Tenderers shall submit with the form of tender a certified cheque or tender bond from a locally registered bank in the sum of (1%) of the tender value and valid for 90 days from the date of tender submission and addressed to the chairman of tender committee, Sultan Qaboos University.
4. The tender quotations shall be sealed and addressed to Procurement Director; Sultan Qaboos University Hospital. The tender number and the name of the tender shall be mentioned on the tender document. It is not accepted to indicate or mention the name of the company or its logo on the envelop.
5. The quotations are subject to the Tender General Terms & Conditions for the Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.
6. Sultan Qaboos University Hospital is not bound to accept the lowest bid or any other bid.

Procurement Directorate
Sultan Qaboos University Hospital
AL Khoudh / Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24144688 / 24144633
Fax: 24413156
E-mail: hospitalprocure@squ.edu.om
www.squh.edu.om

■ YOGA ON THE BEACH



Palestinian paramedics perform yoga on International Day of Yoga on a beach in Gaza City. – Reuters

Libyan PM declares coast road open

MISRATA: The head of Libya’s unity government on Sunday declared the main coast road across its inactive frontline reopened, but eastern-based forces allowed no traffic through, underscoring unresolved divisions that threaten a fragile peace process.

Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibeh used a mechanical digger to remove the earth roadblock at the last western checkpoint on the highway.

“We will meet soon in Sirte”, he said, referring to the city just across the frontline further down the desert road as he opened its western end, three days before international talks on Libya are due to resume in Germany.

But the eastern-based Libyan National Army (LNA) of Khalifa Haftar — which holds most of eastern and southern Libya — did not open the road beyond the frontline, and a media unit of the LNA said there was “no truth to what is rumoured about it reopening”.



An excavator removes rubble during a ceremony in marking the reopening of 300 kilometre road between the cities of Misrata and Sirte. – AFP

Dbeibeh’s convoy headed east towards Sirte but stopped at point nearer LNA positions, where shipping containers and another earthen rampart cut the road and turned back.

The incident highlights the difficulties facing Dbeibeh, whose government is officially recognised by both sides in Libya and their foreign backers. The eastern-based parliament has for weeks blocked Dbeibeh’s efforts

to pass a budget and, earlier on Sunday, the LNA said it had closed the border with Algeria after deploying forces in the south.

Libya, a major North African oil producer, has had little peace or stability since a Nato-backed uprising against Gaddafi in 2011 and a split in 2014 between warring eastern and western factions. Several armed groups still wield power in different areas. — AFP

Raisi: Priority for improving relations with neighbours

DUBAI: President-elect Ebrahim Raisi said on Monday Iran’s foreign policy priority would be improving ties with Gulf Arab neighbours.

Raisi, 60, will take over from Hassan Rouhani in August as Iran seeks to salvage the tattered nuclear deal and be rid of punishing US sanctions that have crippled Iran’s economy.

Raisi said Iranian foreign policy would not be limited to the nuclear deal. “Iran wants interaction with the world...My government’s priority will be improving ties with our neighbours in the region,” he told his first news conference in Tehran, televised by state media, since winning Friday’s election.

Iranian and Western officials alike say Raisi’s rise is unlikely to alter Iran’s negotiating stance in talks to revive the nuclear deal — Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei already has final say on all major policy.

Raisi further said the United States had violated the deal and the European Union had failed to fulfil its commitments.

“I urge the United States to return to its commitment to the deal...All sanctions imposed on Iran must be lifted and verified by Tehran,” he said.

Asked if he would meet US President Joe Biden if those sanctions were lifted, Raisi simply answered “No.”

Raisi has declined any meeting with US President Joe Biden so long as US sanctions remain in place, and also spoke out against a full renegotiation of the 2015 nuclear deal that prompted some of those sanctions.

During his first press conference after his recent election win, Raisi



Iran’s President-elect Ebrahim Raisi speaks during a news conference in Tehran. — Reuters

Iran’s newly elected president has strictly declined meeting US President Joe Biden

said he could not imagine meeting Biden, saying the US president had ignored the 2015 nuclear deal by supporting “inhuman sanctions” against the Iranian population. “Biden has to lift the sanctions first to make the United States look credible again in Iran,” Raisi said.

Negotiations have been ongoing in Vienna since April to work out how Iran and the United States can both return to compliance with the nuclear pact, which Washington abandoned in 2018 under then-President Donald Trump and then reimposed sanctions on Iran.

Iran has subsequently breached

the deal’s limits on enrichment of uranium, designed to minimise the risk of it developing nuclear weapons potential.

Tehran has long denied having any such ambition.

Raisi said Iran’s ballistic missile programme was non-negotiable, despite demands by the West and Gulf Arab countries that it be included in the ongoing talks to revive the nuclear agreement.

“Regional and missile issues are not negotiable. They (United States) did not comply with the previous agreement, how do they want to enter into new discussions?” he said.

Raisi is under US sanctions over a past which includes what the United States and human rights groups say was his involvement in the extrajudicial killing of thousands of political prisoners in the Islamic Republic in 1988.

— Reuters

Syrian drought puts Assad’s ‘year of wheat’ in danger

AMMAN: The “year of wheat” campaign pushed by Syrian President Bashar al Assad is in jeopardy after low rainfall risked leaving an import gap of at least 1.5 million tonnes, according to preliminary estimates by officials and experts.

The agricultural blow and lack of funds to finance the imports will add to pressure on a Syrian economy already reeling from ten years of conflict and buckling under the pressure of US sanctions, neighbouring Lebanon’s financial collapse and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Local buying target of 1.2 million tonnes unrealistic as irrigated area doubled this season in self-sufficiency drive

Russia, one of the world’s largest exporters of wheat and Assad’s staunch ally, has said it would sell one million tonnes of grain to Syria throughout the year to help it meet the four million tonnes of annual domestic demand.

But its cargoes have been



A farmer holds stalks of wheat in Deir Khabieh, Damascus suburbs. – Reuters

slow to arrive in recent years as funds grew scarce, with publicly available customs data showing no significant supplies to Syria.

Officials and an expert at the Rome-based Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimated at least 1.5 million tonnes of wheat imports were needed. They said a 1.2 million-tonne government purchasing target, driven by forced sales to the government, now looked wildly unrealistic.

Abdullah Khader, 49, a landowner and farmer in Raqqa province, said the lack of rain meant his crop was almost a

quarter of last year’s.

Minister of Agriculture Mohammed Hassan Qatana talked about the fate of the domestic crop during a tour with his team this week of the country’s bread basket in the northeast Hasaka province, where much of the country’s cereals crop is in the hands of breakaway Kurds.

“It’s clear from the tour the huge impact of the climatic changes, that all rain-fed plantations have been taken out of investments and even the irrigated wheat areas production has gone down 50-70 per cent”, Qatana said. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

TEL AVIV

Lapid first Israeli foreign minister to visit UAE

Israel’s new Foreign Minister Yair Lapid is to become the first to visit the UAE, with a trip planned for next week.

The head of the Yesh Atid party is to travel to UAE for a two-day visit next Tuesday as a guest of his counterpart Abdullah bin Zayed, Lapid’s office announced.

He is also due to inaugurate the Israeli Embassy in Abu Dhabi and a general consulate in Dubai. “Ties between Israel and the UAE are an important



relationship, the fruits of which will be enjoyed not only by the citizens of the two countries, but by the entire Middle East”, a Foreign Ministry statement said.

GAZA

Exports resume from Gaza as Israel eases blockade

Trucks carrying clothes and fabric rolled out of the Palestinian enclave of Gaza as Israel lifted some restrictions it had imposed during last month’s conflict.

The crowded Mediterranean territory has been under an Israeli blockade since 2007. The resumption of some trade and the postal service came one month after a ceasefire between Israel and the enclave’s Hamas rulers to end an 11-day conflict.



A reporter saw trucks loaded with fabric go through the Kerem Shalom crossing while Palestinians in the Gaza Strip reported that some mail also had been allowed in.

BEIRUT

Syria government shelling on Idlib kills 9

Syrian government shelling on the rebel-controlled enclave of Idlib on Monday killed at least nine people, including four civilians, a war monitor reported.

The violence was the latest in a spate of violations of a ceasefire deal that was brokered by Turkey and Russia in March 2020 and had largely held since.

Monday’s artillery fire struck several locations near the ceasefire lines and one Syrian soldier was killed in retaliatory fire, the



Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

In one incident in the village of Al Bara, two women were killed by regime shelling, the Observatory said.

In brief

■ MANILA



PHILIPPINES SEALS BIGGEST COVID VACCINE ORDER YET

The Philippine government has signed a supply agreement for 40 million doses of the Covid-19 vaccine developed by Pfizer Inc and BioNTech SE, in its biggest coronavirus vaccine deal to date. Deliveries of the vaccine will begin in late September, Carlito Galvez, head of the government's Covid-19 vaccine procurement, said on Sunday. It "will significantly boost our national immunisation programme and will enable us to realise our goal of achieving herd immunity by year-end," he said.

The Philippines has now ordered 113 million doses from five vaccine manufacturers, including 26 million from China's Sinovac, 10 million of Russia's Sputnik V, 20 million doses from Moderna and 17 million doses from Astra-Zeneca. — **Reuters**

■ SYDNEY



AUSTRALIA DEPUTY PM LOSES JOB IN GOVT CLIMATE SPLIT

A climate change revolt in Australia's governing coalition brought in a new deputy prime minister likely to challenge the country's already hesitant moves to cut greenhouse gas emissions. Barnaby Joyce, best known internationally for threatening to euthanise Johnny Depp's dogs, defeated incumbent Michael McCormack (pictured), in a snap internal party vote, elevating him to the role of deputy PM.

The vote for the leadership of junior coalition partner the Nationals came as apparent cracks emerged in the ruling coalition over climate change policy. Prime Minister Scott Morrison told G7 leaders last week that Australia wants to achieve net-zero carbon emissions "as soon as possible", and preferably by 2050. McCormack had reportedly been accused by party colleagues of failing to push back against such accelerated climate action, a charged topic among the Nationals' rural conservative voters. — **AFP**

■ JAKARTA



CROCODILES KILL INDONESIAN MINEWORKER

A mineworker who had a habit of feeding crocodiles was killed by the reptiles on Indonesia's Belitung island, an official said on Monday. Juperi Ahmad, 53, went missing on Friday while manning a sluice gate in a lake at the mining site in Dendang district, said Danu Wahyudi, the head of the local search and rescue agency. His mutilated body was found the next day, he said. "Locals told us that he often fed crocodiles there," Danu said. A co-worker said the victim often scolded him for chasing crocodiles away. "He would say that we should feed them so they wouldn't disturb us. He often fed them dogs," the colleague was quoted as saying by Tribunnnews.com. — **dpa**



A health worker inoculates a woman with a jab of Coronavirus vaccine at a vaccination Centre in New Delhi after India opened up free vaccinations to all adults. — **AFP**

India begins inoculating all adults with free shots

NEW DELHI: India on Monday began a nationwide campaign of free Covid-19 shots for all adults after weeks of criticism that a chaotic rollout had caused acute shortages and intensified a deadly second wave that killed hundreds of thousands in April and May.

Earlier this month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reversed a policy under which states made their own purchases from drug makers and along with private hospitals were administering doses to people aged 18-45.

And as most states shut down vaccination centres for the younger population citing shortages, a majority turned to private hospitals that charged between \$9-\$24 a dose and supply gaps widened between urban and rural areas.

The country is using domestically made doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine and Indian company Bharat Biotech's Covaxin.

The Indian government is attempting to secure foreign vaccines such as Pfizer and has waived strict rules to allow quicker imports.

Experts have warned of a potential third wave as only about 5 per cent of all 950 million eligible people are fully inoculated with two doses even as daily infections have fallen this month.

Over the last 24 hours, India reported 53,256 infections, the lowest since March 24. Infections hit a peak

Yoga a 'source of inner strength' during pandemic, says Modi

NEW DELHI: Yoga has become a source of strength for people amid the Covid-19 pandemic, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday during a virtual address on the occasion of International Yoga Day.

"When Covid emerged, no country was prepared. At this time yoga became a source of inner strength. Yoga helps in self-discipline, it inculcated faith in people that they could fight this virus," Modi said.

Modi said frontline health workers had told him that they had made yoga a tool in fighting the virus and that experts recommended yoga's breathing exercises, or pranayama, to strengthen respiratory systems.

Television footage showed ministers in the Modi government doing yoga poses at their homes and security forces and paramilitary personnel practising yoga — some on desert dunes with camels standing by and others on a battleship in the high seas.

In the years before the pandemic Modi and his ministers would lead big yoga events.

India was collaborating with the World Health Organization (WHO) to launch a mobile app with yoga training videos in different languages, Modi added.

Yoga, an ancient discipline first practised by Hindu sages thousands of years ago, is one of India's biggest cultural exports, with millions of practitioners worldwide. The discipline is more than just stretching or acrobatics. It's a philosophy that also includes meditation and breathing exercises designed to promote harmony with one's inner self and nature.

Global yoga events were held for the first time in 2015, when June 21 was declared International Day of Yoga by the United Nations to coincide with the summer solstice in the Northern Hemisphere. — **dpa**

of about 400,000 a day in May and deaths soared to around 170,000 in April-May.

And as most cities have begun lifting lockdown curbs, experts have cautioned that a swift reopening could complicate a vaccination programme that needs to be at least four times faster.

India's daily vaccinations hit a

peak of 4.5 million shots on April 5 but have since fallen sharply.

In the last 30 days, India has been administering an average 2.7 million doses a day. In the western state of Maharashtra, hardest hit by the second wave, authorities said older age groups between 30-45 would be a priority as supplies were scarce. — **Reuters**

US envoy offers to meet North Korea 'anywhere anytime'

SEOUL: The United States' new top envoy for North Korea said on Monday in Seoul that he looks forward to a "positive response soon" on dialogue from North Korea.

US special representative for North Korea Sung Kim is in South Korea for a five-day visit, amid an impasse in denuclearisation talks with Pyongyang, with no word of any planned efforts to contact the North.

"We continue to hope that the DPRK will respond positively for our outreach and our offer to meet anywhere, anytime without preconditions," Kim said, using the initials of North Korea's official name.

Kim arrived on Saturday, a day after North Korean state media reported that leader Kim Jong Un urged preparation for both dialogue and confrontation with the United States, particularly the latter.

"We will be prepared for either, because you know, we are still waiting to hear back from Pyongyang for a meeting," Sung Kim said. "Hopefully dialogue indicates that we will get a positive response soon."

In the meantime, the United States will continue to enforce UN Security Council resolutions that have imposed sanctions on North Korea over its nuclear weapons programme and urge other countries to do the same, Kim said.

Kim, who doubles as ambassador to Indonesia, had back-to-back meetings with South Korea's top nuclear envoy, Noh Kyu-duk, as well as a trilateral session involving his Japanese counterpart, Takehiro Funakoshi.

Noh said he and Kim discussed ways to cooperate and facilitate the "prompt" resumption of dialogue with North Korea.



We continue to hope that the DPRK will respond positively for our outreach and our offer to meet anywhere, anytime without preconditions

SUNG KIM

Noh and Funakoshi were also scheduled to have a bilateral meeting to discuss North Korea.

Kim's appointment came after US President Joe Biden's administration conducted a review of North Korea policy that concluded the United States would seek to find "calibrated and practical" ways of inducing Pyongyang to give up its nuclear weapons.

The United States said on Sunday it saw Kim's comments as an "interesting signal," but added that Washington was still waiting for direct communication from Pyongyang to start any talks relating to denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula.

China is North Korea's only major ally, and is seen as a key player in any efforts to resolve tensions over Pyongyang's nuclear programme.

In a rare op-ed published in North Korea's main state newspaper on Monday, China's top envoy to Pyongyang, Ambassador Li Jinjun emphasised the long-standing ties between the two countries. — **Reuters**

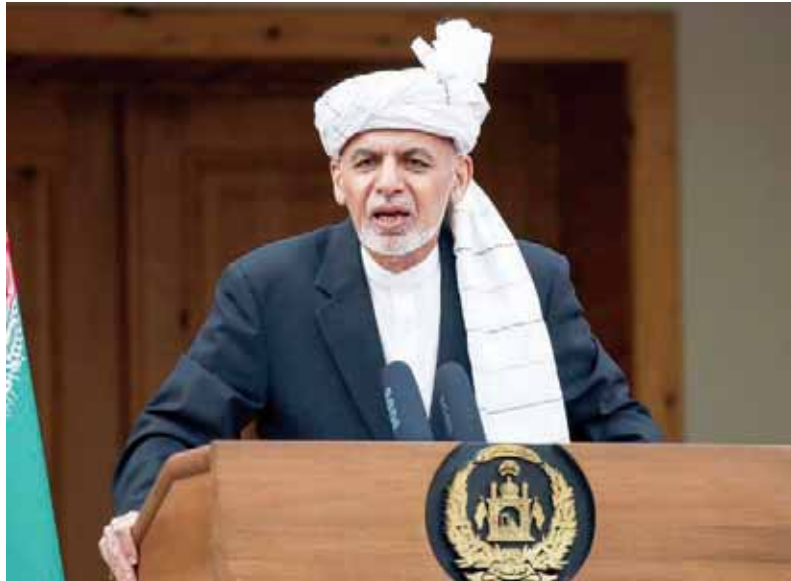
Biden, Ghani to meet at the White House for talks

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden will meet at the White House with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and the chairman of Afghanistan's High Council for National Reconciliation Abdullah Abdullah on Friday to discuss US troop withdrawal amid a surge in fighting between Afghan forces and the Taliban across the country.

In their first face-to-face meeting, Biden will seek to reassure Ghani and Abdullah of US support for the Afghan people including diplomatic, economic and humanitarian assistance, the White House said in a statement.

Biden will also repeat his pledge to ensure that the country never becomes a safe haven for fighter groups.

"The visit by President Ghani



Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani

and Dr Abdullah will highlight the enduring partnership between the United States and Afghanistan as the military drawdown contin-

ues," the White House said.

However, since Biden's decision in April to pull out all US troops before September 11 to

The visit comes in the face of slow progress in talks between the Taliban and Afghan govt representatives in Qatar

end America's longest war after nearly 20 years of conflict, at least 30 districts have been seized by the Taliban.

The group has staged a campaign to expand its influence across the country as the United States began withdrawing troops on May 1 and closed some bases and handed them over to the Afghan government. The Taliban said the visit would be "useless."

"They (Ghani and Abdullah) will talk with the US officials for

preservation of their power and personal interest," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said. "It won't benefit Afghanistan."

There was no immediate reaction from Ghani's office but a senior Afghan official said the Afghan president would be seeking assurances from the US over its continued support for Afghan security forces in the aftermath of the withdrawal.

The visit would also come in the face of slow progress in talks between the Taliban and Afghan government representatives in Qatar. Officials have raised concerns over the stalling negotiations and have said the Taliban has not yet submitted a written peace proposal that could be used as a starting point for substantive talks. — **Reuters**

Setbacks for Le Pen and Macron parties in French regional vote

PARIS: France’s far-right led by Marine Le Pen insisted on Monday it could recover from a disappointing first round of regional polls marked by a strong result from the traditional right and another feeble performance by President Emmanuel Macron’s ruling party.

The vote on Sunday was widely watched as the last national electoral test ahead of presidential and parliamentary elections next year which polls currently show as being a close race between Le Pen and Macron.

The National Rally (RN) of Le Pen badly underperformed forecasts, while Macron’s centrist Republic on the Move party received barely over 10 per cent of ballots in an election marked by record high abstention.

The vote determines who leads the 13 regions of mainland France, with the outcome due to be decided in second round run-off on this coming Sunday.

“Of course we’re asking ourselves questions”, RN Vice-President Jordan Bardella told RMC radio on Monday morning. “But it’s a two-round election and it’s not because we had results that were weaker than we expected that the election is a foregone conclusion.

“There’s a second round and voters will have another chance to express themselves”, he added.

Traditional right-wing candidates topped the vote in six out of 13 regions in mainland France, with the Republicans (LR) party the dominant force nationally, while the traditional left led by the Socialists finished



French President Emmanuel Macron. — AFP

first in five.

The National Rally emerged in pole position in only one, the southeastern Provence-Alpes-Cote d’Azur region, which is home to Marseille, Saint-Tropez and Cannes.

“Our voters didn’t turn out”, Le Pen said on Sunday night in comments from her stronghold of Henin-Beaumont in northern France. “I call on them to respond urgently.”

PERFORMANCE

She had been hoping for a strong party performance to give her momentum ahead of next year’s presidential test.

It is hard to predict the ultimate winners of the polls because of the two-round electoral system and the impact of tactical voting, which usually sees mainstream

parties gang up to keep the far-right out of power.

But in the Provence-Alpes-Cote d’Azur region, left-wing candidate Jean-Laurent Felizia, who finished third, said he planned to stand in the run-off despite pressure to withdraw.

If he maintains his candidacy, it would split the vote and help his RN rival, Thierry Mariani, who finished top on Sunday and could become the first ever far-right head of a region.

Meanwhile, the leader of Macron’s LREM, Stanislas Guerini, did not try to hide his disappointment at yet more evidence that the party has failed to convert five years in power at the national level into grassroots support.

“It is a reminder that we, as the presidential majority, have work

to do to build up a local presence, which is a long and laborious task that doesn’t happen in one election”, he told France Inter radio.

The abstention rate of 66.1-68.6 per cent — the highest for an election since at least 1958 — has shocked observers and led to speculation about the causes.

It also makes it extremely hazardous to draw any conclusions about the national political picture, particularly about the presidential race next year, analysts warn.

The lack of public campaigning due to Covid-19 restrictions appears to have played a part, as did the warm, summer weather that saw people snub the voting booth in favour of time with friends and family after months of lockdown. — AFP

Ethiopia votes, despite war and famine

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopians voted on Monday in a delayed national election against the backdrop of war and famine in the northern Tigray region and questions over the poll’s credibility.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, 44, is facing voters for the first time since coming to power in 2018 championing a democratic revival in Africa’s second-most populous country, and a break from its authoritarian past.

Abiy, a Nobel Peace laureate who freed political prisoners, welcomed back exiles and ended a cold war with neighbouring Eritrea, had promised Ethiopia’s most competitive election in history, free of the repression that marred previous ballots.

Voting in his hometown of Beshasha, central Ethiopia, Abiy said all who participated deserved respect no matter the outcome.

“What we’re witnessing right now is the spirit of the people. In so many ways, this election has been better than those past”, Abiy told the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, a state-run network.

In Addis Ababa, voters queued for hours to cast their ballots, with long lines snaking around city blocks.

First-time voter Bezawit Mekonnen said it was worth the wait. “I want to see change, and I feel that my vote matters now”, said the 30-year-old public health officer.

Others turned out before dawn, wrapped in blankets against the morning cold, to secure a spot at the front of the line.

“This election is different”, said Milyon Gebregziabher, a 45-year-old travel agent voting in Addis Ababa.

“There are a number of parties to choose from. In the past there was just one — we did not have the luxury of choice.”

Voters wore face masks, and electoral officials sprayed their hands with sanitiser before checking their IDs against the register.

In Bahir Dar, capital of the northwestern Amhara region neighbouring Tigray, voters said peace and economic growth were the priorities. — AFP



Ethiopian PM Abiy Ahmed casts a ballot at a polling station in Beshasha on Monday. — Reuters

LONGEST DAY OF THE YEAR MARKED



A person performs with fire during the celebration of the Summer Solstice, despite official events being cancelled amid the spread of the coronavirus disease, in Avebury, Britain, on Tuesday. — Reuters

‘Please do have the jab,’ says woman who received world’s first Covid vaccine

LONDON: The woman who received the world’s first Covid jab outside trial conditions has urged other people to get vaccinated.

Margaret Keenan was given the dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine at Coventry’s University Hospital on December 8, 2020.

The 91-year-old told BBC Breakfast: “Whatever you thought before, please do have the jab.

“There is nothing to it. Don’t be afraid of a needle. It is just to save your life and to save other lives.”

She added that it “did feel very important to have it done” and she had hoped at the time that it would get “the ball rolling” in kickstarting the vaccination programme.

Keenan said she had wanted to do it not just for herself but for “everybody and the NHS.”

Six months on from that first jab, more than 40 million people in the UK, or three-quarters of the adult population, had joined her in receiving a first dose of vaccine.



Keenan received a second dose on December 29, becoming one of what are now nearly 28 million people in the UK — more

than half the adult population — to be fully vaccinated against coronavirus.

Matron May Parsons, who administered the jab, said it was “an absolute privilege” to have given Keenan her first jab and they have since built a friendship.

She spoke of her pride in her work and of the vaccination programme, saying “our NHS is like a gem and we need to look after it, it is something we should be proud of.” — dpa

SHORT TAKES

SWEDEN

Swedish PM Lofven voted out

Sweden’s parliament ousted Prime Minister Stefan Lofven in a no-confidence vote on Monday, giving the Social Democrat leader a week to resign and hand the speaker the job of finding a new government, or call a snap election.

The nationalist Sweden Democrats had seized the chance to call the vote after the formerly communist Left Party withdrew support for the centre-left government over a plan to ease rent controls for new-build



apartments. Sweden Democrat leader Jimmie Akesson told parliament the government was harmful and historically weak, adding: “It should never have come into power.”

YEREVAN

Armenia PM wins majority in polls

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on Monday scored a decisive victory in snap parliamentary elections, bolstering his rule after months of discontent and protests following a historic military defeat to Azerbaijan.

Pashinyan’s Civil Contract party swept to an easy victory with almost 54 per cent of the vote, overcoming anger at his handling of the devastating fight for control of the Nagorno-Karabakh region and securing a strong majority.

“The people of Armenia



gave our Civil Contract party a mandate to lead the country and personally to me to lead the country as prime minister”, Pashinyan announced in the early hours of Monday.

BARCELONA

Spain to pardon Catalan separatists

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said his government would pardon the nine jailed leaders of Catalonia’s failed 2017 independence bid on Tuesday as a first step towards ending the political conflict over the wealthy region. As he spoke in Barcelona’s opera house, several hundred separatists protested outside, demanding still more concessions, and one member of the audience interrupted him for a few seconds shouting “Independence.”

“I am convinced that getting



these nine people out of prison... is a clear message of concord”, Sanchez said on Monday at the event in the region’s main city attended by around 300 members of Catalan civil society.

An interviewee under the spotlight...

Self expression is essential for a healthy mind, but should our urge for expressing ourselves be a torture for others?

A perfect example has been seen on the social media. There are some who want to say what they think it is by posting a statement and a whole lot of others who feel they know better and fill in their thoughts on the comments box.

One of the latest incidents has been the viral post of a person who had those moments when we are lost for words when on air — those blank moments, which can happen to anyone. But to highlight this moment and share this video on social media was not exactly of good taste. What would have been the point? Most importantly the tweets must have damaged the person's confidence. But you can bounce back.

Stage fear can happen to anyone. Sometimes it needs training and smaller opportunities to partake in public speaking.

A blank moment does not indicate lack of knowledge, it just means the person is conscious of the television lights, cameras and most importantly people — the interviewer, camera people and the viewers.

There are introverts and extroverts. In regard to introverts, their expertise might be high but lack the confidence to put it out together for that moment.

A television or a radio studio is not an easy place as you can literally hear the silence.

So others have been arguing, "If a person is not confident then why



Lakshmi Kothaneth
lakshmiobserver@gmail.com

A BLANK
MOMENT DOES
NOT INDICATE
LACK OF
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THE TELEVISION
LIGHTS

accept an interview invitation?"

My response to it is, "Why not?" There should always be a first time.

If the person has the experience he or she has every right to be interviewed. The media fraternity would know how important professionals and experts are. No one is perfect and it is tough experiences that make us learn better. Yes it is a challenging moment when an interviewee does not flow with the answers at ease but this is where the interviewer should step in.

What we need is a sense of humour. To accept others flaws or uncomfortable situations and give them time to recover and not slam them down just because we have access to social media. The technique is simple — this is something the late Shaikh Khalfan al Esry had talked about in our radio programme.

As a matter of fact it is a very thin line between self expression and cyber bullying.

And the same goes with being politically correct and incorrect. On social media language is not a barrier as with one click the text is translated. It is saddening to note when a group of people are talked about and they do not even know about it as in to defend themselves. What's on social media can stay forever even if it is deleted. It can prove to be an embarrassment if not now, later.

One of the quotes of late Sultan Qaboos which has always inspired me is, "Power is responsibility."

Freedom of expression is power and power is responsibility.

One post can trigger reactions and influence many other people's thoughts.

As for this particular interviewee's predicament I would suggest saying yes again to another invitation for an interview.

The interviewer is comfortable in the setting of the studio so let us not forget to break the ice for the guests to open up.

One of the best ways to break the ice is to ask simple questions about them.

If the interviewer senses discomfort or nervousness, jump in and follow up with an easy question to have a conversation.

We have to always remember the interviewee is the star. They are giving us their time and our objective as an interviewer is information. So the interviewer should not be just equipped with questions but should be alert to pick up signs of discomfort or nervousness.

Enjoy the spotlight and take it as an important platform to share your knowledge.

A conversation is an art and one of the skills that is important to retain the interviewee's attention so he or she forgets about the camera, lights and viewers. Each interview will build up your experience and confidence.

The saying goes practice makes man perfect but remember, disasters also make us perfect. It is a learning experience. Learning is a continuous process.

So say yes to the next interview and excel!

SPIRAL OF VIOLENCE

In Berlin, a new push for lasting peace in Libya

HUI MIN NEO

Germany will seek to broker lasting peace in Libya on Wednesday, gathering world powers in Berlin to extract a firm promise to withdraw foreign fighters and keep the North African country on track for its December 24 election.

The efforts to end a decade-long spiral of violence in Libya would bring the country's transitional government, as well as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, to Berlin for the in-person UN-sponsored talks.

In a phone call with Libyan interim Foreign Minister Najla Mangoush just days ahead of the meeting, Blinken "stressed the United States' commitment to increasing diplomatic engagement to promote international efforts supporting progress in Libya."

Like host German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, Blinken and Mangoush harked back to a first meeting in January 2020 in the German capital where pledges were made which have not been fully implemented.

The presidents of Russia, Turkey and France had then vowed to end foreign meddling in Libya and withdraw foreign militants or troops.

Since those talks, a formal truce was agreed last October that led to the creation of a transitional government under Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah and a presidential council headed by Mohammad Younes Menfi which have promised to hold polls. However, the UN has warned that progress has stalled, notably on a key requisite of the polls — the pullout of all foreign soldiers. The oil-rich country descended into chaos after Muammar Gaddafi was toppled and killed in a 2011 Nato-backed uprising, resulting in multiple forces vying for power.

In recent years Libya has been split between two rival administrations backed by foreign forces and countless militias.

In October, after Turkey-backed forces of the Government of National Accord (GNA) based in Tripoli routed those of eastern military strongman Khalifa Haftar, the two camps agreed a ceasefire in Geneva. The security situation in Libya has been slowly improving since.

But the presence of an estimated 20,000 foreign fighters and mercenaries on Libya's territory is seen as a threat to the UN-backed transition leading to the elections.

Western leaders have repeatedly called on the foreign fighters to depart.

But Russian mercenaries supporting Haftar's side in the east of the country are still in place. Turkey meanwhile has troops in Tripoli, which it argues were sent under a bilateral agreement with the government, implying that they are not affected by a request for foreign troops to leave. Diplomats underlined the delicate balancing act needed to ensure that any withdrawal does not spark new flareups or leaves one side at a disadvantage.

"Foreign forces must leave the country in a gradual and uniform manner, so that there won't be a sudden military imbalance that could be used by one side for a sudden offensive", Maas told *Die Welt* daily in an interview. — AFP

Foreign forces must leave the country in a gradual and uniform manner, so that there won't be a sudden military imbalance that could be used by one side for a sudden offensive

HEIKO MAAS
German Foreign Minister

ECONOMIC MELTDOWN

As Lebanon battles crisis, coastal city Batroun thrives on local tourism

YARA ABI NADER

While businesses across Lebanon are fighting to survive a monumental economic meltdown, the coastal city of Batroun is thriving as a tourist destination for Lebanese whose summer plans have been scuppered by the crisis and the pandemic.

Crowds stroll along Batroun's streets and visit its historical sites, others sunbathe on beaches despite the pandemic and their country's financial crisis dubbed by the World Bank as one of the deepest depressions of modern history.

"Lebanese can't go for tourism abroad anymore", 54-year-old restaurant owner Maguy al Mouhawas said.

"They find that this city embraces them and their children, it treats them like its own, and this is why there's a bigger turnout."

Mouhawas notes that more properties are being rented out or purchased and that more businesses are investing in Batroun, in stark contrast to the large exodus from the capital a little over an hour's drive away.

Lebanon's financial crisis has wiped out jobs, propelled more than half of the population into poverty and slashed 90 per cent of the value of the country's local currency.

Beirut is also still recovering from the aftermath of last year's huge port blast that killed hundreds, injured



People are seen at a rooftop pub near the beach in Batroun, Lebanon. — Reuters

CROWDS STROLL
ALONG BATROUN'S
STREETS AND VISIT
ITS HISTORICAL
SITES, OTHERS
SUNBATHE ON
BEACHES DESPITE
THE PANDEMIC

thousands and destroyed large swathes of the capital. Back in Batroun, John Bechara, who works for the municipality as a tourist guide, takes visitors on tours of the city's ancient churches, Phoenician sea wall and main monuments.

"My love for Batroun made me look at every stone, every corner and every person I meet in the streets to ask about the history, and this is how I am getting attached to my city more and more", the 54-year-old Bechara said.

On a random weekend or even on summer weekdays, the city's streets,

beaches, restaurants, cafes and pubs are full of life.

"This atmosphere was not created overnight. We knew our city is a touristic city par excellence, what you are seeing now is the result of 22 years of work", said the head of Batroun municipality Marcelino al Hark.

Small businesses and famous brands are multiplying in Batroun, especially in the hospitality and food and beverage sectors. Lebanon has recently eased its coronavirus restrictions and is recording low Covid-19 daily cases.

— Reuters

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JOB WELL DONE BY OMAN PLAYERS: IVANKOVIC

RED WARRIORS EDGE SOMALIA TO SEAL SPOT IN ARAB CUP



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 21

Oman head coach Branko Ivankovic appreciated the national team players for accomplishing the goal of reaching the finals of the inaugural edition Fifa Arab Cup after edging Somalia in the qualifier in Doha on Sunday night.

"We were under pressure during the dying minutes but finally the players managed to end the match on a successful note," the Croatian coach said after the match.

Oman confirmed their attendance at the Fifa Arab Cup in Qatar after registering a tough 2-1 victory against Somalia at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium. Oman's goals were netted by Mohsin al Ghassani and Salah al Yahyai, while Somalia's consolation goal was scored by Abel Gigli.

Ivankovic said the Sultanate players entered the fixture seriously and Oman showed their intent by scoring early in the game. "I am happy with this important win and Oman's presence in this mega footballing event. The players were required to play tough and official encounters as these matches will



shape them for the upcoming assignments. The Covid pandemic impacted negatively on the team and technical performance of the players," he said.

Commenting on Oman team performance during the match, coach Branko responded that the squad delivered all their best in the previous games. "The team

members tried to deliver their best against Somalia in 90 minutes but the circumstances affected them. We are expecting the players will be in better condition after having the right period for rest," he said.

With the triumph against East African opponent, the Red Warriors will join Group A teams at Fifa Arab Cup 2021 beside hosts

Qatar, Iraq and the winner of Bahrain vs Kuwait match which will be played on Friday.

The finals of the Fifa Arab Cup 2021 will take place from November 30 until December 18 and this event act as a rehearsal for the hosts Qatar ahead of the Fifa World Cup 2022. As many as 16 teams will take part in the finals. The confirmed teams in the tournament till now include Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Iraq, UAE, and hosts Qatar.

The 67-year-old promised a whole-hearted effort at the Fifa Arab Cup.

"We will have an intensive plan to prepare well for the event," he concluded.

Oman's Harib al Saadi congratulated all for the winner. "Our aim as players were clear to seal a spot in the final round of 2022 Fifa World Cup Asian Qualification, 2023 AFC Asian Championship and Fifa Arab Cup 2021. We fully understood fans concerns about the national football team. However, we will assure them to show our best in the upcoming matches," he ended.

Oman to host Youth Sailing Worlds in December



MUSCAT: Oman Sail and World Sailing has announced that the 50th edition of the Youth Sailing World Championships presented by Hempel will be held at Mussanah Sports City, Oman, from December 11-18, 2021.

Mussanah Sports City has played host to several Olympic class sailing events, including the Laser World Championships in 2013 and the RS:X World Championships in 2015. In April this year the venue hosted the 2021 Mussanah Open Championship, a Tokyo 2020 qualification event for African and Asian nations.

Located approximately 100km north of Muscat International Airport, Mussanah is a top-class, purpose-built sporting venue, capable of hosting large-scale events and facilitating hundreds of athletes.

It is renowned for its high-quality sailing conditions all year round. During December, temperatures are expected to be around 24°C on average, while the average wind strength is expected to be around 10-17 knots.

Quanhai Li, World Sailing President, said, "For the last five decades, the Youth Sailing World Championships have provided young athletes from all around the world with the opportunity to showcase their talent and test themselves against the very best opposition."

"The Youth Worlds also allows young sailors to learn about the importance

of sport and fair competition, and to forge lifelong friendships with like-minded people from all corners of the globe. It is a hugely important event on our calendar, and it is with great pleasure that we can announce this year's hosts. I am confident that Oman Sail will put on a fantastic show."

David Graham, Chief Executive Officer at World Sailing, said, "The sailors at the Youth Worlds are the future stars of our sport and we aim to provide the best possible experience for them. We were really impressed with both Oman's and Malta's bids, and it was a tough choice for the Evaluation Panel, with both venues demonstrating the expertise to host a memorable championship."

"Oman's outstanding facilities and sailing conditions will help to make this Youth Worlds a memorable one for all involved."

Dr Khamisal Jabri, Chief Executive Officer at Oman Sail, said, "We are delighted to have been selected as host nation for the 2021 Youth World Sailing Championships presented by Hempel, following a very competitive bid process. Oman has a proven track record in hosting major international sporting events, and we look forward to welcoming the best young sailors from around the world to experience the Sultanate's legendary hospitality and majestic waters later this year."



In brief

■ SOUTHAMPTON



RAIN STOPS WORLD TEST CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL AGAIN

Rain once more interrupted the World Test Championship final between India and New Zealand at Southampton, with a heavy downpour preventing any play before lunch on Monday's fourth day. Overnight and early morning rain meant the pitch and square at Hampshire's headquarters remained fully covered when the match should have resumed at 10:30 am local time (0930 GMT).

An absorbing day of high-quality cricket on Sunday, cut short by bad light despite the use of the Hampshire Bowl's floodlights, ended with New Zealand 101-2 in reply to India's first innings 217 — a deficit of 116 runs.

■ GROS-ISLET



VAN DER DUSSEN, RABADA PUT SA IN CHARGE

Rassie van der Dussen's unbeaten 75 and support from Kagiso Rabada saved South Africa from a complete second innings collapse as they recovered from 73 for seven to eventually be dismissed for 174 on the rain-shortened third day of the second Test against the West Indies in St Lucia on Sunday.

That left the home side with a daunting victory target of 324 to level the series.

Captain Kraigg Brathwaite and opening partner Kieran Powell negotiated six overs to the close of play with the Caribbean side set to resume on the fourth day at 15 without loss.

■ LOS ANGELES



HAWKS UPSET TOP SEEDED SIXERS TO SEAL SPOT IIN EAST FINALS

Kevin Huerter scored a play-off career-high 27 points as the upstart Atlanta Hawks punched their ticket to their first Eastern Conference finals in six years on Sunday, with a 103-96 game seven win over the Philadelphia 76ers.

All-star Trae Young finished with 21 points and 10 assists, John Collins had 14 points and 16 rebounds and Danilo Gallinari came off the bench to score 17 points for the Hawks, who won three games in Philadelphia to take the series 4-3. "Winning game seven is a treat for us," said Huerter. "We are a little naive. We always believe we can win."

The Hawks will now face the Milwaukee Bucks in game one of their series on Wednesday.

Verstappen on a roll with Red Bull

■ Verstappen goes 12 points clear after third win of the year

■ Hamilton second, Perez third at Le Castellet

■ Angry Bottas finished fourth



PARIS: Formula One leader Max Verstappen passed Mercedes rival Lewis Hamilton on the penultimate lap to win a tense French Grand Prix for Red Bull on Sunday and canter 12 points clear at the top.

The victory from pole position at Le Castellet was the third in a row for Red Bull, picking up speed as they bid to end seven years of Mercedes domination, after wins on the streets of Monaco and Baku.

Verstappen's Mexican team-mate Sergio Perez, winner in Azerbaijan after the Dutch driver suffered a high-speed blowout while leading, finished third after passing Valtteri Bottas's Mercedes in the closing laps.

"It's a little bit of payback for earlier in the year," said Red Bull team boss Christian Horner, referring to last month's Spanish Grand Prix when seven times world champion Hamilton used strategy to similar effect.



French Grand Prix			Le Castellet - Paul Ricard circuit		
1	Max Verstappen (NED)	3h 27:25.770	Max Verstappen (NED)	131	
2	Lewis Hamilton (GBR)	at 2.904 sec.	Hamilton (GBR)	119	
3	Sergio Perez (MEX)	at 8.811	Perez (MEX)	84	
4	Valtteri Bottas (FIN)	at 14.618	Norris (GBR)	76	
5	Lando Norris (GBR)	at 1:04.032	Bottas (FIN)	59	
			Red Bull	215	
			Mercedes	178	
			McLaren	110	
			Ferrari	94	

Hamilton led from the second corner as Verstappen drifted wide, caught out by a tailwind on a gusty afternoon, but the race was ultimately decided by strategy and tyre wear.

The Dutch youngster made two pitstops to Hamilton's one and the 23-year-old used his fresher tyres to hunt down his British rival and win by 2.904 seconds.

"We made the call to do the two stopper, luckily in the end it paid off. We had to work hard for it, but very rewarding," said Verstappen, who now has 13 career wins.

Mercedes had made the first move on the pitstops, with Bottas coming in and Verstappen reacting before

Hamilton pitted another lap later.

Hamilton had been told it was 'hammer time', and his stop appeared quickest, but when he rejoined the track it was just behind a rival who had found what he needed.

"OK Lewis, not sure what happened there mate," his race engineer said over the radio.

NO TYRES LEFT

Verstappen then pitted again from the lead on lap 32. Set a target of 18 seconds to make up in 19 laps, he did what was asked.

Now level with Hamilton on three wins for the season, he also took a bonus point for fastest lap and now has 131 to his rival's 119. Red Bull pulled further ahead of champions Mercedes in the constructors' standings with a lead of 37 points.

"I had no tyres left at the end so unfortunately lost the position but still it was a good race," said Hamilton. "Obviously they had a good strategy and it worked well for them... the only option was to stay out as long as possible and hope the tyres hold together."

The podium was the first time Verstappen and Perez, who joined Red Bull this season, had appeared together in the top three as team-mates. It was also the first time Mercedes had been beaten at Le Castellet since the southern circuit returned to the calendar in 2018.

"I'm not massively disappointed," said the champion. "Overall they've been quicker than us all weekend. It's a true reflection of the pace they have." — **Reuters**

Hernandez snatches Copa draw for Venezuela

RIO DE JANEIRO: Ronald Hernandez scored an injury time equaliser to earn minnows Venezuela a share of the spoils in a 2-2 draw with Ecuador at the Copa America on Sunday.

Ecuador twice took the lead through Ayrton Preciado and Gonzalo Plata either side of a powerful headed goal from Venezuela's Edson Castillo.

It was a remarkable achievement for a team still missing 12 players due to testing positive for Covid-19 or injury. "I have no words to describe my admiration for these lads," said Venezuela's coach Jose Peseiro. "The way they played for the first time in the professional team, they're here showing an ability to sacrifice, to fight, to defend the Burgundy (jersey), which excites me."

The point left Ecuador bottom of the five team group on one point, with Venezuela a place and a point above them after having played a game more.

Hosts Brazil lead the group with a perfect two wins from two ahead of Colombia, who lost 2-1 to third-placed Peru in Goiania.

Ecuador were off to a bright start with both Leonardo Campana and Enner Valencia shooting narrowly wide from good scoring positions.



Venezuela's Ronald Hernandez and Ecuador's Gonzalo Plata in action. — AFP

Cristian Casseres was Venezuela's main threat but he skied one great chance from 12 yards out, before breaking the offside trap and seeing his chip over goalkeeper Pedro Ortiz cleared off the line by Pedro Hincapié.

The deadlock was broken in scrappy circumstances six minutes before half-time.

Pervis Estupinan sent a freekick into the box that Campana won in the air, causing havoc before Preciado stabbed home the loose ball after it ricocheted off goalkeeper Wuilker Farinez.

Venezuela were level, though, just six minutes into the second half when Castillo rose unmarked eight yards out to plant a bullet



Peru's Andre Carrillo (C) celebrates with team-mate Anderson Santamaria after defeating Colombia. — AFP

header from Jose Martinez's cross into the top corner, leaving Ortiz rooted to his line.

Three minutes later, Farinez got down quickly to save a header from Campana as Ecuador looked to hit back immediately.

They did move back in front 19 minutes from time after a length of the field counter-attack from a Venezuela corner. Plata ran from one box to the other with the ball and although Farinez saved his tired effort, Christian Noboa's follow-up ricocheted back to him off a back-tracking defender and Plata poked home.

After his earlier heroics, Plata was at fault for Venezuela's

equaliser, caught out of position as Hernandez ran past him to head Edson Castillo's long ball into the box past a stranded Ortiz.

MINA BLUNDER

Peru bounced back from their opening 4-0 defeat to Brazil to stun Colombia 2-1 thanks to a Yerry Mina own goal.

Sergio Pena gave Peru a first half lead but Miguel Borja equalised from the penalty spot early in the second period. However, Mina inadvertently bundled the ball past goalkeeper David Ospina from a corner to hand Peru victory.

Peru took the lead on 17 minutes as Yoshimar Yotun took aim from almost 30 yards out to the left, and

I have no words to describe my admiration for these lads. The way they played for the first time in the professional team, they're here showing an ability to sacrifice, to fight, to defend the Burgundy (jersey), which excites me

JOSE PESEIRO
Venezuela coach

when his stunning shot came back off the far post, the ball fell kindly to Pena to drill home. Colombia were given a lifeline early in the second half when Borja got in behind Peru's defence only to be brought down in the penalty area by a rash challenge from goalkeeper Pedro Gallese.

Borja made no mistake from 12 yards, sending Gallese, who was booked for his challenge, the wrong way on 53 minutes. — **AFP**

Italy beat Wales as both teams advance to last 16

ROME: Italy finished top of their Euro 2020 group on Sunday as Matteo Pessina's first half goal helped a much-changed Azzurri side beat 10-man Wales 1-0 in Rome, while the visitors held on to second place despite the defeat.

The Italians had already guaranteed their progress from Group A, but they assured themselves of first place with victory, while Wales secured a berth too by finishing ahead of Switzerland on goal difference.

The Swiss, who could still advance as one of the four best third-placed teams, beat Turkey 3-1 in Baku.

Italy are now unbeaten in 30 games, equalling their all-time best run recorded from 1935 to 1939, and kept a clean sheet for an 11th consecutive match to underline their credentials as potential tournament winners.

Pessina volleyed the dominant hosts in front at a lively Stadio Olimpico after 39 minutes as they put in an impressive display despite coach Roberto Mancini making eight changes to his starting line-up.

Wales' task was made harder when defender Ethan Ampadu was sent off in the 56th minute for a stamp on Federico Bernardeschi's ankle minutes after the Italian winger's free-kick had struck the post.

Italy's relentless pressure continued as they pushed for a second, but Gareth Bale squandered a rare chance to earn Wales a draw when he volleyed over unmarked from 12 yards.

Italy will face the runners-up of Group C next in London on June 26, while Wales will take on the runners-up of Group B on the same day in Amsterdam.

With Italy already through to the knockout stages, Mancini made eight changes to his team, a joint record number for the Azzurri between games at a major tournament.

But the new-look Italy side appeared comfortable on a hot, muggy evening in Rome.



Italy's Matteo Pessina scores their first goal. — Reuters

Andrea Belotti flashed a shot wide from a tight angle, Chris Gunter headed narrowly over from a corner for the Welsh and Federico Chiesa's volley was deflected off the line during a frantic five-minute spell midway through the half.

Marco Verratti, making his first appearance at Euro 2020 after a lengthy injury lay-off, was influential in midfield and played a key role in the goal after 39 minutes as he won a free-kick on the right wing and swung it in to the near post for Pessina to finish.

It was Italy's seventh goal of the tournament, matching their best-ever tally from the 1998 World Cup after three group stage matches at a major tournament.

Mancini's side were inches away

The Italians had already guaranteed their progress from Group A, but they assured themselves of first place with victory, while Wales secured a berth too by finishing ahead of Switzerland on goal difference

from a second early in the second half when Bernardeschi cannoned a free-kick off the foot of the post, and a few minutes later the Italy winger had his foot stamped on by

Standings

Group A

 Italy

 Switz.

 Wales

 Turkey

Standings	Pts	P	W	D	L	f	a	D
1 Italy	9	3	3	0	0	7	0	7
2 Wales	4	3	1	1	1	3	2	1
2 Switzerland	4	3	1	1	1	4	5	-1
4 Turkey	0	3	0	0	3	1	8	-7

Matches: Played - Won - Drawn - Lost

Goals: for- against - Difference

Source: UEFA



Ampadu, leading to the defender's dismissal.

Shaqiri shines as Swiss beat Turkey
Xherdan Shaqiri scored two

superb goals as Switzerland secured third place in Group A at Euro 2020 with a 3-1 win over Turkey, but they now face an anxious wait to see if they will reach the last 16.

The Swiss, who finished level on four points with Wales but behind on goal difference, will hope to secure a spot in the knockouts as one of the four best third-placed finishers from the six groups.

Turkey, who finished fourth with three defeats, were tipped pre-tournament as dark horses, but will head home after a dismal effort in the group stage.

The game encapsulated Turkey's tournament, as they began full of fire and fury and started at a scintillating pace, only to

collapse quickly as Switzerland outmanoeuvred them tactically to take an early lead.

The Swiss took the lead when Haris Seferovic received a pass from Steven Zuber on the edge of the area before rifling the ball into the bottom right corner in the sixth minute.

Exasperated, Turkey regrouped and tried again, but they went 2-0 when Zuber found Shaqiri in a similar position, and he curled an exquisite shot beyond the despairing dive of Ugurcan Cakir 20 minutes later.

Turkey had their chances, but Swiss keeper Yann Sommer made a string of superb first-half saves as they searched for their first goal of the tournament. — Reuters

Podium finish and GT Open Series lead for Al Zubair, Soucek

SPA FRANCORCHAMPS (BELGIUM): Oman's Al Faisal Al Zubair and Spanish team-mate Andy Soucek finished the second of the GT Open races at Belgium's Spa-Francorchamps circuit in third position and retained their lead in the 2021 International GT Open points' standings after two rounds.

Coupled with their victory at the first race on Saturday afternoon, the Lechner Racing Team Porsche 911 GT3 R duo now hold a single point advantage over the Vincenzo Sospirri Racing Lamborghini crew of Frederick Schandorff/Michele Beretta in the title race with the second VSR Lamborghini duo of Yuki Nemoto and Baptiste Moulin in third.

With the FIA handicap system penalising a winning team with 10 seconds for the pit stop in a subsequent race and five seconds for second place, finishing third overall was all the more impressive for the Lechner Racing team that had won the opening race on Saturday.

Beretta and Schandorff won the second race by 14.067 seconds from their team-mates with Soucek and Al Zubair 16.872 seconds adrift at the chequered flag, despite



the handicap. Poland's Patryk Krupinski and Austrian team-mate Christian Klien finished fourth in the JP Motorsport McLaren.

"This was an amazing race weekend, coming out with a win, a third place and leading the championship," said Al Zubair. "We definitely could not have asked for more. The first race we were so happy to get our first win in the GP Open, for myself, Andy and Lechner Racing. It was a big step."

The one-hour second race was also held in warm and sunny conditions and Al Zubair lined up in sixth place on the grid behind Adam Carroll's Audi R8, Loris



This was an amazing race weekend, coming out with a win, a third place and leading the championship. We definitely could not have asked for more. The first race we were so happy to get our first win in the GP Open, for myself, Andy and Lechner Racing. It was a big step

AL FAISAL AL ZUBAIR

Omani race driver

Spinelli (Mercedes AMG), Robbie Foley (Aston Martin), Michele Beretta (Lamborghini) and Yuki Nemoto (Lamborghini).

Al Zubair slipped behind Jens



and Foley. Al Zubair held fifth as the race reached its mid point and he pitted after 11 laps for Soucek to take over for the final stint having slipped to seventh.

Once the front-runners had all pitted and switched drivers, Frederick Schandorff held the lead from Baptiste Moulin and Michael Dinan with Soucek in sixth place heading into the final 23 minutes.

Soucek began to close in on his rivals and moved up to third place in the final quarter of the race and retained his position to the finish to cap an excellent weekend for the Lechner Racing Porsche.

"Coming in with the handicap in the pit stop, which gave us an

extra 10 seconds in the race, I think the job was really amazing," added Al Zubair. "The car felt good in the first stint. I lost a position to the Honda and then had a good move around and started catching the Lamborghini. We switched to Andy and he put on some better tyres and had a good stint to go up to third place. We are very happy with it. It seems like the whole team is working well together."

Al Zubair replaced Soucek for qualifying duties for Sunday's slightly shorter second race. Saturday's victory had given the Lechner Racing duo a six-point series lead over the Schandorff/Beretta Lamborghini and an eight-point advantage over the McLaren of Brendan Iribe and Ollie Millroy.

The Omani qualified the Lechner Porsche in sixth with a best lap of 2min 18.240sec, with pole position falling to the Audi R8 of the British duo of Shaun Balfé and Adam Carroll with a tour of 2min 16.598sec. Al Zubair's Pro category rivals qualified in third, fourth and fifth behind the Mercedes AMG of Alexander Molseev and Loris Spinelli.

The series heads to Hungary's Hungaroring for round three on July 9-11.

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Oman attends GCC Trade Cooperation Committee

MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion participated on Monday in the preparatory meeting of the GCC

Commerce Under-Secretaries for the 60th session of the GCC Trade Cooperation Committee. The Sultanate was represented in the virtual meeting by Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, the



Ministry's Under-Secretary for Commerce and Industry. The meeting discussed topics related to the commerce sector, and the executive regulations for the GCC Patents Law. It also

reviewed the challenges facing GCC states in activating the GCC joint action programme. The meeting also viewed recent updates on implementing the unified GCC standards,

systems, and regulations. In addition, initiatives of entrepreneurs, and means of supporting small and medium enterprises were reviewed during the meeting. — ONA

Total banking credit rises 3% to RO 27.2 billion: CBO

Positive uptrend: Investment in Government Development Bonds increased by 27.3 per cent compared to the same period last year to RO 2.2 billion

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 21

The total outstanding credit extended by conventional and Islamic banks (collectively known as Other Depository Corporations / ODCs) in the Sultanate grew 3.0 per cent to RO 27.2 billion at the end of April 2021, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) said in its monthly report for April. Credit to the private sector demonstrated a relatively moderate growth of 1.2 per cent (Y-o-Y) to reach RO 23.3 billion, it said. Of this total, the shares of the non-financial corporate and household sectors (mainly under personal loans) stood at 46.7 per cent and 45.1 per cent respectively at the end of April 2021. The share of financial corporations was 4.8 per cent and other sectors received the remaining 3.4 per cent of the total private sector credit.



Total deposits held with ODCs registered a Y-o-Y growth of 4.1 per cent to reach RO 24.9 billion at the end of April 2021. Total private sector deposits increased by 6.8 per cent to RO 17.3 billion. Deposits from households accounted for 50.9 per cent of total private sector deposits, followed by non-financial corporations (32.4 per cent), financial corporations (14.2 per cent) and the other sectors (2.5 per cent). The combined balance sheet of conventional banks showed a Y-o-Y growth of 1.5 per cent in total outstanding credit as of end-April 2021. Credit to the private sector declined by 0.4 to reach RO 19.1 billion while their overall

investments in securities went up by 40.6 per cent to RO 4.8 billion at end-April 2021. Investment in Government Development Bonds increased by 27.3 per cent compared to the same period last year to RO 2.2 billion while their investments in foreign securities declined by 9.9 per cent to RO 0.88 billion at the end of April 2021. Aggregate deposits held with the conventional banks increased by 2.3 per cent Y-o-Y to RO 20.9 billion at end-April 2021. Government deposits with conventional banks witnessed a decrease of 8.9 per cent at RO 4.4 billion, likewise, deposits of public enterprises declined by 2.2 per cent to RO 1.3 billion. Private sector deposits, which accounted for

70.6 per cent of total deposits with conventional banks, increased by 6.1 per cent as of April 2021 to reach RO 14.7 billion. Islamic banking entities provided financing of RO 4.5 billion at the end of April 2021, recording a growth of 11.2 per cent over that a year ago. Total deposits held with Islamic banks and windows increased by 14.7 per cent to RO 4.1 billion. The total assets of Islamic Banks and Windows increased by 11.6 per cent on a Y-o-Y basis to RO 5.5 billion and constituted about 14.6 per cent of the banking system's assets as at end-April 2021. Among the indicators of monetary aggregates, broad money supply M2 at end-April 2021 grew by 5.8 per cent to reach RO 20 billion. This increase was the outcome of 4.1 per cent expansion in narrow money (M1) and 6.6 per cent increase in quasi-money (Rial Omani saving and time deposits, certificates of deposit issued by banks, margin deposits and foreign currency denominated deposits). Likewise, the increase in M1 resulted from the growth of demand deposits by 6.6 per cent, during the same period under discussion.

DME achieves new milestone in delivery of Oman crude

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 21

Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME), the trading platform for DME Oman — the Oman crude oil benchmark — has crossed a new milestone with the delivery of 2.5 billion barrels of crude oil since its inception in 2007. The increased interest in DME over the past couple of years and the trust earned from major national oil companies (NOCs) has contributed to the success of the exchange which is, today, the only transparent platform capable of bridging the most significant global crude oil corridor between the Middle East and Asia, the energy-focused commodities exchange said. Raid al Salami, Managing Director, DME said: “The growth of DME underlines the great market appetite for risk management and hedging solutions, especially after 2018, when major NOCs included DME Oman as a major component into their crude oil pricing formulae, and made it



possible for customers to fully hedge their exposure.” DME Oman is pricing more than 170 million barrels of crude oil per month since 2018 compared to around 30 million barrel per month prior to Saudi, Kuwait and Bahrain switch. The contract is regarded as the most reliable crude oil futures price benchmark, due to the quality of Oman Blend, which represents the majority of the GCC crude oil grades. “Oman blend is a key composite to our success, as historically Oman crude has always been a de facto benchmark used by NOCs. We look forward to establishing a closer relationship with our global customers, strengthen our ties with regional producers to serve the region and provide a fair value to one of the most important regional commodity,” Al Salami added.

Madayn signs deal to transfer gas networks to OQ

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 21

OQ Gas Networks — a subsidiary of OQ, the Sultanate's global integrated energy group — has signed an agreement with the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) for the acquisition of the gas networks constructed by the latter to provide natural gas to industrial consumers within their industrial parks. The agreement was signed by Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO of Madayn, with Engineer Mansour bin Ali al Abdali, Vice President of OQ Gas Networks. The agreement provides for the transfer of ownership and operations of Madayn's gas distribution networks to wholly

Optimisation: Networks supplying gas to five industrial cities to pass into the hands of Oman's state-owned gas grid operator

state-owned OQ Gas Networks. The asset transfer agreement is in line with principles set out in Oman's Vision 2040 recommending the optimal use of national resources and assets to support economic development effectively and cost-competitively. OQ Gas Networks oversees a massive gas grid that includes more than 4,000 kilometres of pipelines channelling natural gas



from a number of production fields to main distribution lines that supply a large number of

consumers. Around 98 industrial companies operating within the

industrial cities of Sur, Suhar, Rusayl, Nizwa and Raysut currently receive gas via networks

initially built by Madayn for the benefit of investors. Having now acquired these networks, OQ Gas Networks will not take on this responsibility of supplying gas to the industrial cities. Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO of Madayn, said the transfer of its assets to OQ Gas Networks will help in the standardisation of supply and services to industrial consumers operating within its industrial parks. Mansour bin Ali al Abdali, Vice President of OQ Gas Networks, stressed the importance of strategic cooperation with government agencies to ensure efficient delivery of gas and optimal utilisation of natural gas resources. (With inputs from ONA) (Picture for illustration only)

The Business Year inks pact with Oman Vision 2040 follow-up unit

INSIGHTS: *The Business Year* is set to include a special chapter on Oman Vision 2040 in its eighth edition focusing on the Sultanate as a business destination

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 21

The Business Year, a global media group that has been providing investors, businesses, and governments with first-hand insights into the world's most dynamic markets for over a decade, has signed a partnership agreement with the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation and Follow-Up Unit for the creation of a special chapter in *TBY*'s eighth annual publication on the Omani economy.

The MoU was signed in Muscat between Talal al Rahbi, Vice Chairman of the unit and *TBY*'s Country Manager for Oman, Andrea Tsiachtsiri.

The agreement lays the foundations for the preparation



of a chapter on Vision 2040 to be included in *The Business Year: Oman 2021*. Through its research, *TBY* will shed light on the pillars of Vision 2040 and share exclusive insights from leading political and business figures working to achieve the long-term vision.

TBY's team in Oman has already started conducting interviews with leaders from all major sectors of the economy, including, finance, energy, agriculture, industry, logistics, ICT, health and education, tourism and others. With its eighth edition on Oman, *TBY* aims to promote the country as an important player in the region and

a solid investment destination. Furthermore, *TBY* plans to highlight the steps Oman is taking towards a more sustainable future. In order to do so, in April, the global media group signed a partnership agreement with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP).

Andrea Tsiachtsiri, Country Manager for Oman, emphasised the importance of covering Oman's long-term ambitions in parallel to monitoring the year-to-year developments in the sultanate, stating: "*The Business Year* has been following up on all the changes happening in Oman

over the past eight years and now it is time to see how all of these developments align with the long-term vision of where the country is heading. We are excited to be getting the support of the Unit in this endeavour."

The edition will reach a targeted global audience through its print edition, and will be available on a range of digital platforms, including Bloomberg Terminal, Dow Jones Factiva, FactSet and Refinitiv Eikon, not to mention PressReader and Google Books, as well as on the *TBY* Reader app, available on iOS. *The Business Year: Oman* will be published in 4Q2021.

More than 1,400 registered for NBO's Innovation Incubator

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) has received more than 1,400 applications for its tech event of the year, Innovation Incubator. The initiative, a collaboration with the SME Development Authority, Oman Academy for SMEs, and Paradigm Consulting, will take 30 IT students and fresh graduates through a tailored three-month programme delivered by specially trained NBO employees. In that time, they will be challenged to come up with ideas for a FinTech start-up and those that are successful will get the chance to pitch to potential investors.

Innovation Incubator is part of the NBO's active corporate social responsibility (CSR) programme. Through it, the bank continues to fulfil its long-standing commitment to the Sultanate's young people with



initiatives Outward Bound Oman and NBO's Scholarship programme, offering merit-based scholarships to create opportunities for and empower young people from low-income families. By continuing to foster partnerships between the private and public sectors through a range of educational and youth-led programmes, the bank is fulfilling its goals to empower local talent and position Oman as a future-ready economy.

Maisarah conducts weekly & monthly prize draws



MUSCAT: As part of its expansive selection of comprehensive Islamic banking solutions, and to promote the culture of saving among customers nationwide, Maisarah Islamic Banking Services recently conducted weekly and monthly draws, announcing the winners of attractive cash prizes under its flagship Prize Account.

The Prize Account is a personal savings account that is based on the Islamic concept of Mudaraba. In addition to the expected profit of up to 2.5pc per annum (subject to the weightages applicable for each month), the account allows customers to win cash prizes distributed from the shareholders' funds.

Commenting on the draws, Nasser bin Said al Bahantah, Maisarah's Chief Retail Banking Officer, said: "Each RO 100 gives customers the chance to win cash prizes as per terms and conditions of the scheme. Winners are randomly selected by an automated system in line with the approved procedures for the prize draw."

"We encourage our customers to save for unanticipated expenses, use their savings wisely, and always be prepared for unexpected situations. Hence, we introduced this scheme to cater to their needs and requirements. It is an incredible way to put aside funds and save for the future.

Bank Nizwa signs pact to launch iFinovation

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa's ability to innovate and introduce new sharia-compliant financial services has earned it commendable recognition and established it as the leading Islamic bank in the Sultanate. The bank has been at forefront of progressive change in the Islamic banking industry, building awareness around the sector's products and service offering. Continuing with this commitment, Bank Nizwa has partnered with Accounting and Auditing Organisation for Islamic Financial Institutions (AAOIFI) and Fingel Global to host a series of webinars under the name iFinovation (Islamic Banking Knowledge Series).

The agreement was signed virtually between the organisations as they announced the commencement of the



programme. The virtual signing ceremony was attended by Khalid al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa along with other members from the executive management of the bank. Other distinguished guests included Omar Mustafa Ansari, Secretary General at AAOIFI, Mughees Shaukat Chairman Advisory Board Fingel Global Inc, Canada, Dr Muhammad Fuad

who is the President of ASAS, Malaysia as well as Mukhtar Abdullah CEO of ASAS Malaysia. Other important individuals were Mohammed Kateeb, CEO of Path Solutions and Tan Sri Syed Jalauddine, Senior Adviser of FGI.

The signing ceremony also witnessed the participation of key local dignitaries.

Home ownership made easier at Al Mouj Muscat with Tayseer plan

MUSCAT: A new direct financing plan has launched at Al Mouj Muscat where only 20 per cent is needed as a down payment on new, completed homes with the remaining 80 per cent settled over five years.

Called Tayseer, this affordable and flexible post-handover payment plan is available directly and exclusively from Al Mouj Muscat until the end of 2021. It has been introduced to make financing ownership of a home straightforward and is ideal for anyone wanting to make the move away from renting or for buyers looking for a valuable investment.

Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani,

CEO of Al Mouj Muscat says: "Our award-winning community offers an incredible lifestyle for families and individuals alike. With Tayseer, home ownership is now within reach.

"This flexible finance plan illustrates how Al Mouj Muscat continues to respond to buyer aspirations and market demand. Not only do we create exceptional homes, but we are making it possible for buyers and investors to secure a dream home in this luxurious, vibrant destination."

The plan simplifies the buying process as buyers can arrange the payment plan directly through Al Mouj Muscat, rather than



arranging finance via a bank. With no legal fees, owners can settle the remainder of the purchase price sooner than five years without penalties.

Tayseer is expected to attract strong interest from investors as properties in Al Mouj Muscat continue to command a premium, either as rental properties or at resale.

The plan is available on ready-to-move-into properties from garden-facing townhouses to oceanfront apartments. All are situated within the established neighbourhoods and communities of Ghadeer, Juman One, Marsa and Marsa Gardens.

Ahli Islamic offers a cash prize worth RO 100,000 for one lucky winner

MUSCAT: Ahli Islamic invites its customers to chase their dreams by encouraging them to save and invest more and participate in 2021 Qitaf quarterly draws. The bank will announce the winner of cash prize RO100,000 of the second quarterly draw live stream on its official social media pages.

Commenting upon the upcoming draw, Yousuf bin Salim al Rawahi, Deputy General Manager and Head of Ahli Islamic said, "The bank has always tried to increase the categories of customers who can benefit in our 2021 Qitaf draws and double their chances to win. The Islamic Qitaf prize scheme not only supports and encourages a saving culture in the Sultanate, but also helps people to invest their capital in profitable assets, in accordance with Islamic Mudaraba principles."

Being one of the most preferred Islamic windows in



Oman, Ahli Islamic continues to offer innovative and attractive programmes to reward its customers, encouraging them to adopt the best financial practices and achieve their long-term goals. The Islamic window rewards the customers for their commitment by making quarterly, monthly, weekly and special event draws.

"The bank is committed to help customers in achieving their goals by providing valuable offers and services while giving them opportunities to save and grow their funds with maximum comfort.



NORWEGIAN AIR REPLACES CEO WITH IMMEDIATE EFFECT

OSLO: Norwegian Air has sacked Chief Executive Jacob Schram and the budget carrier which has emerged from bankruptcy protection said it was promoting Chief Financial Officer Geir Karlsen to the top job with immediate effect.

The board voted on June

20 to end Schram's 18-month tenure, although he will continue to support the carrier on a full-time basis during his notice period up to March 31, the airline said.

Karlsen has been a chief financial officer since 2018 and was acting CEO for six months

in 2019 for the carrier, which is coming out of bankruptcy protection after the Covid-19 crisis plunged the heavily indebted airline into a financial crisis.

The survival plan ended Norwegian's long-haul business, leaving a slimmed-down carrier

with Nordic and European routes.

The company declined to elaborate on Schram's departure but said his replacement was the right person for the job.

"Karlsen has successfully led the financial reconstruction of Norwegian and has the

competencies, focus, trust and dedication that makes him the best choice as CEO of Norwegian," said Svein Harald Oeygard, the chair of Norwegian's board.

The board tussled with Schram over his severance package, which gives him the

right to 15 months pay on top of the nine-month notice period.

"An effort has been made by the board to bring the severance payments to a level reflecting the challenges of the industry, but no agreement could be reached," Norwegian said.

— Reuters

ECB makes good progress on new strategy, Lagarde says

FRANKFURT: European Central Bank policymakers made "good progress" in reshaping the ECB's strategic goals, including the role it plays in fighting climate change and a revised approach to inflation, President Christine Lagarde said.

The 25 members of the ECB's Governing Council gathered in a hotel near Frankfurt to add impetus to the bank's first review of its approach to monetary policy in nearly two decades, which it aims to conclude in the second half of the year.

Lagarde gave no detail of the outcome of the talks, saying only that they covered the ECB's inflation goal and time horizon, links between climate change and monetary policy and the modernisation of central bank communications.

"I am glad we were able to have in-depth discussions and we made good progress in shaping the concrete features of our future monetary policy strategy," Lagarde said in a statement after the three-day gathering.

Started in early 2020 and then delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic, the overhaul has



ECB President Lagarde attends a plenary session at the European Parliament in Brussels

fuelled a public debate among policymakers.

The ECB's elusive inflation goal, currently set "below but close to 2 per cent", seems almost certain to get a facelift and be set at 2 per cent, with a tolerance for overshooting after periods of sluggish price growth.

The ECB could also look at alternative inflation measures to take account of rising housing costs for households, and even calculate its own inflation figures — though, with inflation having lagged below target goal for a decade, that might risk giving the impression of massaging numbers.

— Reuters

Bank of England set to stay split on QE after inflation jump

LONDON: Britain's top central bank officials look set to remain divided this week over whether to pull the plug on their 875 billion-pound (\$1.2 trillion) government bond purchase programme, after inflation hit its highest in nearly two years.

Bank of England chief economist Andy Haldane was alone in May when he voted to halt the quantitative easing (QE) bond purchases in August once they reached 825 billion pounds.

Economists expect Haldane to retain this stance when the BoE announces its latest policy decision on Thursday and are looking to see if others on the Monetary Policy Committee join him.

Haldane has ramped up his anti-inflation rhetoric ahead of what will be his final MPC meeting before leaving the BoE. In early June he described the policy outlook as the most dangerous since sterling dropped out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism in 1992.

May's consumer price inflation came in above the BoE's and other economists'



Mounted police officers sitting outside the Royal Exchange and the Bank of England in London. — AFP

Economic output in April was still almost 4% below pre-pandemic levels after a near 10% slump in 2020, and 1.7 million people — 7% of employees — were relying on government furlough support at the end of May

forecasts at 2.1%, the first time it had surpassed the BoE's 2% target since July 2019. Some economists now see inflation

exceeding 3% later this year versus BoE forecasts of 2.5% for the end of 2021.

"Stronger growth, labour

market and inflation data, thus far, should tilt next week's policy statement in a slightly more hawkish direction," Deutsche Bank economist Sanjay Raja said.

Although British inflation is below the 5% last recorded in the United States, and its post-Covid recovery is less advanced, financial markets expect the BoE to begin raising rates before the US Federal Reserve — a historically rare sequence. — Reuters

Bitcoin dives as China widens crackdown on crypto mining

BEIJING: Bitcoin tumbled more than 10 per cent Monday after China broadened a crackdown on its massive cryptocurrency mining industry with a ban on mines in a key southwestern province.

Chinese mines power nearly 80 per cent of the global trade in cryptocurrencies despite a domestic trading ban since 2017, but in recent months several provinces have ordered mines to close as Beijing turns a sharp eye to the industry.

Authorities in the province of Sichuan ordered the closure of 26 mines last week, according to a notice widely circulated on Chinese

social media and confirmed by a former bitcoin miner.

The price of bitcoin sank to as low as \$32,309. The unit has taken a severe hit in recent weeks, having hit a record near \$65,000 in April, partly because of Beijing's crackdown. The notice reportedly instructed power companies to stop supplying electricity to all cryptocurrency mines by Sunday.

It vowed a "complete clean-up" and ordered local governments to carry out a "dragnet-style investigation" to find and shut down suspected crypto mines.

The province represents one of the largest bases for mining in the



Small toy figurines and representations of the Bitcoin virtual currency are seen in this illustration picture. — Reuters

Chinese mines power nearly 80 per cent of the global trade in cryptocurrencies despite a domestic trading ban since 2017

country. A former cryptocurrency miner said they had "closed everything" in line with the requirements in recent days.

"There have been working groups coming to check... making sure we shut down operations and removed the machines," he said.

Sichuan, a mountainous region

in southwest China, is home to a large number of cryptocurrency miners, which require a colossal amount of energy supplied by the province's cheap and abundant hydropower.

According to a report in the state tabloid the Global Times, the closure of mines in the province has resulted in the shutting down of more than 90 per cent of the country's bitcoin mining capacity.

Beijing has turned the screw on cryptocurrency miners to stamp out financial risks from speculation, although environmental concerns about the gas-guzzling mines is also a factor. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

SINGAPORE

Oil prices climb on summer demand, Iran talks

Oil prices rose on Monday, underpinned by strong demand during the summer driving season and a pause in talks to revive the Iran nuclear deal that could indicate a delay in the resumption of supplies from the Opec producer.

Brent crude for August gained 23 cents, or 0.3%, to \$73.74 a barrel by 0622 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude for July was at \$71.94 a barrel, up 30 cents, or 0.4 per cent.

Both benchmarks have risen



for the past four weeks amid optimism over the pace of global vaccinations and a pick up in summer travel. The rebound has pushed up spot premiums for crude in Asia and Europe to multi-month highs.

ROME

Italy will call for tougher 'gig economy' rules

Italy will call for tougher rules governing 'gig economy' workers when it hosts labour ministers of the world's biggest economies in the Group of 20 next week.

Italy's labour minister, Andrea Orlando, said countries should require big companies such as Amazon to take responsibility for working conditions at their suppliers, as part of reforms to ensure contractors are well-treated.

"Large corporations must



also take responsibility for small ones.

They can no longer say that what happens outside their sheds does not concern them," Orlando was quoted as saying by Italian daily La Repubblica.

BERLIN

Union calls for Amazon workers to strike

A German trade union called on workers at seven Amazon warehouses to go on strike on Monday for several days to coincide with the global Prime Day promotion.

Verdi said it was organising the three-day strike as part of a long-running battle with the US tech giant in Germany over better pay and working conditions.

"The workers in the mail order centres have to cope with the rush of customers and don't get a cent more for the additionally



intensified workload," said Verdi representative Orhan Akman in a statement.

Germany is Amazon's biggest market after the United States, and the Verdi union has been organising strikes at Amazon.

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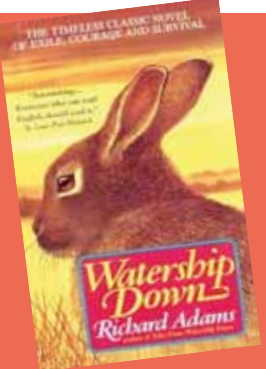
To experience what ancient Omani village is like, visit Qafifa

Home to the Al Manji tribe and located about 170 km from the capital Muscat, Qafifa is one of North Al Sharqiyah's unimposing villages but where one can fully experience what an old Omani settlement is like. From the sweet smell of frankincense and Omani baked bread in the air to lush nature, here's why you should visit it next... **P20**



DISCOVERY

READ



WATERSHIP DOWN

BY RICHARD ADAMS

When a young rabbit named Fiver (Richard Briers) has a prophetic vision that the end of his warren is near, he persuades seven other rabbits to leave with him in search of a new home.

Fish once labelled a 'living fossil' surprises scientists again

CAPE TOWN: The coelacanth — a wondrous fish that was thought to have gone extinct 66 million years ago before unexpectedly being found alive and well in 1938 off South Africa's east coast — is offering up even more surprises.

Scientists said a new study of these large and nocturnal deep-sea denizens shows that they boast a lifespan about five times longer than previously believed — roughly a century — and that the females carry their young for five years, the longest-

known gestation period of any animal.

Focusing on one of the two living species of coelacanth, the scientists determined that it develops and grows at among the slowest pace of any fish and does not reach sexual maturity until about age 55.

The researchers used annual growth rings deposited on the fish's scales to determine the age of individual coelacanths — “just as one reads tree rings”, said marine biologist Kelig Mahe of the French oceanographic institution Ifremer, who is lead author of the study published last week in the journal *Current Biology*.

Coelacanths first appeared during the Devonian Period roughly 400 million years ago, about 170 million years before the dinosaurs. They were thought to have vanished during the mass extinction that wiped out about three-quarters of Earth's species following an asteroid strike at the end of the Cretaceous Period.

After being found alive, the coelacanth was dubbed a “living fossil”, a description now shunned by scientists. “By definition, a fossil is dead, and the coelacanths have evolved a lot since the Devonian,” said biologist and study co-author Marc Herbin of the National Museum of Natural History in Paris.

It is called a lobe-finned fish



based on the shape of its fins, which are thought to have paved the way for the limbs of the first land vertebrates to evolve.

Coelacanths reside at depths of as much as 800m. During daylight hours, they stay in volcanic caves alone or in small groups. Females are somewhat

larger than males, reaching about 2m long and weighing 110kg. Previous research had suggested roughly a 20-year lifespan and among the fastest body growth of any fish. It turns out that this was based on a misreading decades ago of another type of ring deposited in the scales — **Reuters**



Al Dhahirah: Home to rare plants, endangered animals

What do we know of the Al Dhahirah Governorate? For both Omanis and expats, there's not a lot. But break the information down to the respective wilayat that fall under this governorate and something will begin to bubble.

The Al Dhahirah Governorate covers the amazing wilayats of Ibri, Yanqul and Dhank and hearing these names, you'd surely recognise something outstanding about these places.

Because of its location, Al Dhahirah has a very unique and distinguished biodiversity thanks especially to its diverse topography and climate conditions.

The east side of the governorate is surrounded by majestic mountains that are moderate in summer and cold in winter. Here, one would find rare trees, the most important of which is the Alelan tree, located in the Jabal Al Sarat area in the Wilayat of Ibri.

Wadis descend from these mountains that reach even the desert areas. Because of the abundance of water not only from springs and wadis but also the often visiting rains, various animals and plants thrive here.

Eng Tariq Al Maamari, Director of the Environment Department in Al Dhahirah Governorate, explained that the governorate is riddled by different seasons which is ideal for the migration of birds. Some birds come during the flowering season and plant reproduction where they are essential in aiding the pollination process. Examples are the migration of the European magpie in the spring, along with the most important endangered bird, the Houbara Bustard, which lives in the desert areas of the governorate, as it enjoys during the autumn and winter period the availability of food, shelter and the appropriate atmosphere for this bird.

Al Maamari added that the Wilayat of Ibri is famous for the catbird, which is one of the local birds and lives in the desert areas of the wilayat. It is one of the most widespread birds that live in groups. The governorate also hosts many giant birds such as the eagle, which is one of the migratory birds that breed in the governorate.

The governorate is home to many rare and endangered animals due to its different terrain, the most important: the Arabian ibex, the Arabian gazelle, the Afghan fox and the lynx.

As for the plains area in the governorate, Al Maamari indicated that it is famous for many wild trees, the most important of which is the Sumr and Sidr tree, which is one of the most widespread trees in the Sultanate, noting that the governorate is characterised by its hot climate and lack of vegetation. Therefore, the Environment Department



has recently intensified efforts to plant wild trees and encourage the public and private sectors and the local community in all its spectrum to support the initiative and plant Sumr, Ghaf, Sidr and Shua trees. It raised awareness of their importance in increasing vegetation cover, as they are able to withstand the hot climate in the region. They are perennial trees that hold the cultural heritage of the Sultanate.

The eastern part of the governorate, which falls within the Star Lights Reserve, is known for the presence of Alelan trees, which are durable and rare trees worldwide. Engineer Al Maamari touched on the efforts being made in this aspect, saying that from this point of view, the Environment Department in Al Dhahirah Governorate is making many efforts to preserve the system. In order to achieve

a clean and sustainable environment, one of these efforts is the implementation of continuous monitoring patrols to preserve wildlife and the implementation of many joint patrols with other neighbouring governorates, especially during the migration seasons of endangered birds.

It also works to receive reports from citizens cooperating in preserving wildlife around the clock. The administration is in continuous with the security authorities to support and make maximum efforts to limit abuses towards wildlife.

The authority of the environment seeks to continue its efforts to develop Oman's strategy for the environment and some sustainable environmental projects such as the project to plant 10 million wild trees throughout the Sultanate to combat desertification and spread the green area.

FOOD GUIDE

He Said, She Said

WITH BOSKY DUTIA AND SAMI AL SALMI

Boasting nearly 30,000 following across their social media accounts, the duo behind Oman Restaurant Review is sharing some of their feedbacks about the food scene in Oman.

Follow them on Instagram: @oman_restaurant_review

A journey into the 'Island of Pearls'

A TINY LANDLOCKED Arab nation that during its vibrant history has absorbed a mélange of cultures from its neighbours and visitors into its own, giving vivacity to a unique, quaint, and exciting lifestyle that one must experience to understand. When one dives into any culture, one takes in art, literature, and the gastronomic delights into consideration first. Such a journey is what we experienced with our recent visit to the famed franchise Basta23 that has just opened at the Waterfront in Shatti Qurum.

HE SAID: Born and raised in Bahrain, I have first-hand experience of what goes on in a local kitchen. Bahraini food is a rich combination of its history and the explorers who choose to reside and trade there. Influences have been taken from the Indians, Persians and Arabs who discovered this jewel during their voyages.

SHE SAID: As a complete novice to Bahraini culture or cuisines, I was just excited to try the food! Our epicurean tour started with the feeling that we walked into the last



century. Basta23 has the feel of a timeworn Bahraini Freej. Antique wooden doors, graffiti, and posters on the walls along with the impression that we had gathered in a courtyard with friends to dine. As these kinds of reviews go, we decided on a three-course lunch with appetisers, mains, and a dessert.

HE SAID: Excited to try dishes from my childhood, we picked the Mix Samboosa, and the Bahraini Kebab. Out of the three flavours of Samboosa, the potato one transported me back to the 80s and 90s when I ate these with my friends on the streets of Manama. The Bahraini Kebab while reminiscent of every Ramadan as a child, turned out to be appetising but slightly overdone.

SHE SAID: The three kinds of Samboosa were cheese, potato, and spinach. The spinach and cheese were the regular selection we find anywhere but the potato one took me by surprise. A hint of tang due to lemon, a bite of the onion and garlic, this Samboosa was a class apart. The Bahraini Kebab is a patty made from chickpea flour mixed in with veggies. This was served with a gorgeous Bahraini chilli Mabooch and boy did this enhance the flavour of every bite.

HE SAID: I picked the Meat Tikka for my main. Cubes of beef well-marinated in dried lime, onions, and black pepper cooked to perfection. The Tikka was served on a Khubz Tanoor and the meat just melted in the mouth and kept us wanting more. However, it could have been sharper with the addition of more dried lime. I also had a taste of the Bamiya with meat and I was surprised that they managed to capture the essence of old school Bahraini cooking.

SHE SAID: Baamiya with meat served with white rice is my go-to curry at any Arab restaurant. Who doesn't love okra and soft meat cooked slowly in a tomato-based gravy? This version was piquant yet delicate, and absolutely sublime. The meat was soft, and the okra still had a bite to it. Very well done.

HE SAID: We choose to try the Saffron Cake. As I took the first bite, I realised that this was a modern version of Khanfarooosh. A light sponge deftly seasoned with saffron, cardamom and rose water then topped with sesame. Well done Team Basta23 for taking this traditional dessert to another level.

WE SAID: The ambience, décor, and menu of Basta23 reflected the essence of old Bahrain and gratified us immensely. The prices were mid to high range for some dishes as we felt the portion sizes were rather small. Service was a bit of hit and miss, having to call for the servers as they vanished time and again. Would we go back again? Yes, we would go back for the excellent food.

Ambience: 5/5
Taste of food: 4.5/5
Presentation: 3.5/5
Service: 3/5
Value for money: 3/5



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ART



'This is madness': Mona Lisa copy sold for 2.9m euros in Paris auction

A EUROPEAN collector has bought a 17th century copy of Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa painting for 2.9 million euros (\$3.4 million), a record for a Mona Lisa reproduction, in an auction at Christie's in Paris on Friday.

Known as the "Hekking Mona Lisa," after its owner who unsuccessfully argued that a copy he had bought in the 1950s was the real thing, is one of many reproductions of the original, which hangs in the Paris Louvre museum.

"This is madness, this is an absolute record for a Mona Lisa reproduction", a Christie's spokeswoman said. She said there had been 14 bidders in an international auction and that in the last hour, the bids soared from 500,000 to 2.4 million euros, before a final bid of 2.9 million was made.

The Louvre's original is not for sale. But in 2017, Christie's New York sold da Vinci's "Salvator Mundi" for \$450 million to an unidentified telephone bidder, making it the most expensive piece of art ever sold at auction. — **Reuters**

Lost Kandinsky sold at auction for more than 1 million euros

MORE THAN 70 years after it disappeared from the public eye, the painting "Gebogene Spitzen" (which loosely translates as "Curved Tips") by Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky has been sold at auction in Munich for much more than originally thought.

The painting was sold for 1.25 million euros (\$1.48 million), the auction house Ketterer said.

Experts had estimated the painting to be worth 300,000 euros.

The water colour came from the estate of a private collection in Germany. With its strict geometric compositions, it is one of the artist's most sought-after works on paper, according to the auction house.

The water colour is said to have already been on display during Kandinsky's lifetime (1866-1944), in Berlin, Paris and Stockholm, for example.

The latest known exhibition was in 1932, the auction house said. Kandinsky is then believed to have given the work to an art dealer who sold it in 1949, according to the experts. — **dpa**

ENTERTAINMENT



Placido Domingo:
**'We cannot
rewrite
our past'**

TWO YEARS after sexual harassment accusations that cost him his career in the United States, opera legend Placido Domingo is back on stage in Europe, determined to salvage his reputation.

For a while, the tenor-turned-baritone's career looked in jeopardy after the Associated Press published allegations in 2019 from some 20 women in the US.

They accused him of forcing kisses on them, inappropriate touching and sexual remarks, protected by his power to make and break careers.

But Domingo, still considered the king of opera, is performing in Paris on Monday for the first time since January 2019, at the Gaveau Hall.

It follows appearances from Moscow to Munich in recent weeks, with more to come in Italy and Austria.

Earlier this month, the 80-year-old returned to the stage in Madrid, where he was born in 1941, for a charity gala that he says was the most emotional moment of his career.

"To climb the stage and have the audience on their feet and applauding for eight minutes non-stop — it was a tremendous feeling", he told AFP.

"As I started, I thought I would not be able to sing due to the force of the emotion."

'EYES OF THE PRESENT'

The concert in Madrid came barely a year after the Spanish Ministry of Culture cancelled a series of his shows at the city's Teatro de la Zarzuela in the fall-out from the harassment

investigation.

An enquiry by AGMA, the leading singers union in the US, had concluded he had engaged in "inappropriate behaviour".

Domingo has always denied the allegations, which date back to the 1980s, saying he "never behaved aggressively towards anyone", and he has not faced any judicial proceedings.

But he has apologised if his behaviour made any colleagues "feel uncomfortable", and gave up his post as director of the Los Angeles Opera, effectively ending his career in the United States.

"They were very difficult months, but they have passed and I am happy to have resumed contact with the press in a very sincere way", he told AFP.

"I made a mistake in not doing so earlier, because the whole thing was a trial by media", he added.

Although he spoke to AFP in person, the answers to questions about the harassment allegations were conducted by email, on the request of his PR team.

He repeated his claim that the allegations were "unjust" and "without foundation".

But he added: "These days, we must look at the past with the eyes of the present, because it is right to pose these questions in order to open the way for a new sensitivity and conscience."

"We cannot rewrite our past. We should understand it in context and criticise it, severely if necessary, but it makes no sense to destroy it", he said. — **AFP**

FILM

'Hitman's Wife's Bodyguard' hits top of North American box office



NORTH AMERICAN moviegoers again showed their love of action comedies this weekend as new release "The Hitman's Wife's Bodyguard" shot to the top of the box office, taking in an estimated \$11.7 million, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported.

Total takes remain pale compared to their pre-pandemic levels, but Hollywood watchers have taken heart in the progressive reopening of theaters and the lifting of capacity limits in many cities.

As a sequel to Lionsgate's popular "The Hitman's Bodyguard" from 2017 — and with Ryan Reynolds, Samuel L Jackson and Salma Hayek reprising their leading roles — the new "Bodyguard" was expected to do well. But it will have to keep doing well to make up for its \$70 million production cost, *Variety* said.

Last week's box office leader "A Quiet Place: Part II" — hovering at or near the top since its release four weeks ago — slipped slightly to second spot, taking in \$9.4 million for the three-day weekend. The Paramount horror flick about ferocious unseen monsters stars Emily Blunt. Her husband John Krasinski directs.

In third was Sony's family-friendly "Peter Rabbit 2: The Runaway", at \$6.1 million. The mixed live-action/animation features the voice of James Corden in the title role, with live performances by Rose Byrne, Domhnall Gleeson and David Oyelowo.

Fourth spot went to another horror movie, Warner Bros.' "The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It", at \$5.2 million. Patrick Wilson and Vera Farmiga again star as paranormal investigators fighting demonic nastiness.

And in fifth was Disney's family-friendly "Cruella", at \$5.1 million. Emma Stone stars as the puppy-persecuting title villain.

ROUNDING OUT THE TOP 10 WERE:

"In the Heights" (\$4.2 million)
"Spirit Untamed" (\$1.6 million)
"12 Mighty Orphans" (\$870,000)
"The House Next Door: Meet the Blacks" (\$604,000)
"Wrath of Man" (\$350,000) — **AFP**



To experience what ancient Omani village is like, visit Qafifa

With a population of barely 100 people, the Qafifa Village in Ibra can be very deceiving both in its beauty and history.

Home to the Al Manji tribe and located about 170 km from the capital Muscat, it is one of North Al Sharqiyah's unimposing villages but it is where one can fully experience what an old Omani settlement is like.

Walking around the village with its homes both a mix of mod-

ern and the past with some made out of mud and straws, one will smell the Omani frankincense pervading in the air as one passes through each door. The sweet smell of Oman's luban usually is made even more noticeable as it mixes with the smell of Omani baked bread from some of the home's kitchen.

Qafifa is one of the fortunate villages that enjoy an abundant flow of water throughout the year. During the rainy season, this water reserve transforms

the village into a lush oasis with different crops growing everywhere enveloping the place in greenery.

The homes of the villagers, seen from a distance, is that of calmness and simplicity and exploring its alleys and surrounding gardens is best done in the morning when the birds serenade the visitors with their beautiful songs and the morning breeze providing the much needed peaceful backdrop.

As home to the Al Manji tribe,

there is also a lot to learn from Qafifa.

Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammad bin Issa al Harthy shared, "If you want to know what the ancient Omanis are like, from their appearance to their characters, then you have to visit the Al Manji tribes".

Al Harthy explained that the tribe has been known for their bravery and generosity. "To their guest, they are always friendly and hospitable," he said.

Wadi Qafifa, named after the village, is the main source of water for the people and irrigation. It is considered one of the largest wadis in the Wilayat of Ibra where many tourists come for recreation and to spend holiday times in summer or weekends. The fresh air, cool breezes, an abundance of water completed by the palm trees surrounding the whole wadi not only makes the place worth a visit but gives one peace of soul and mind.

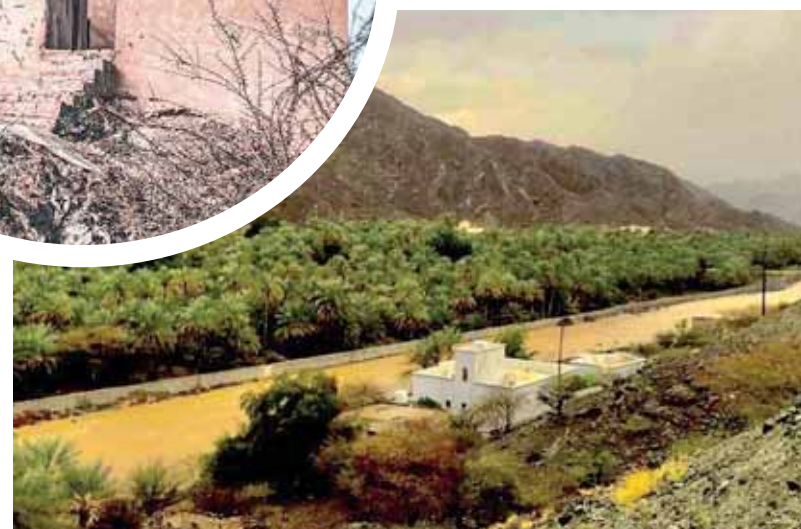
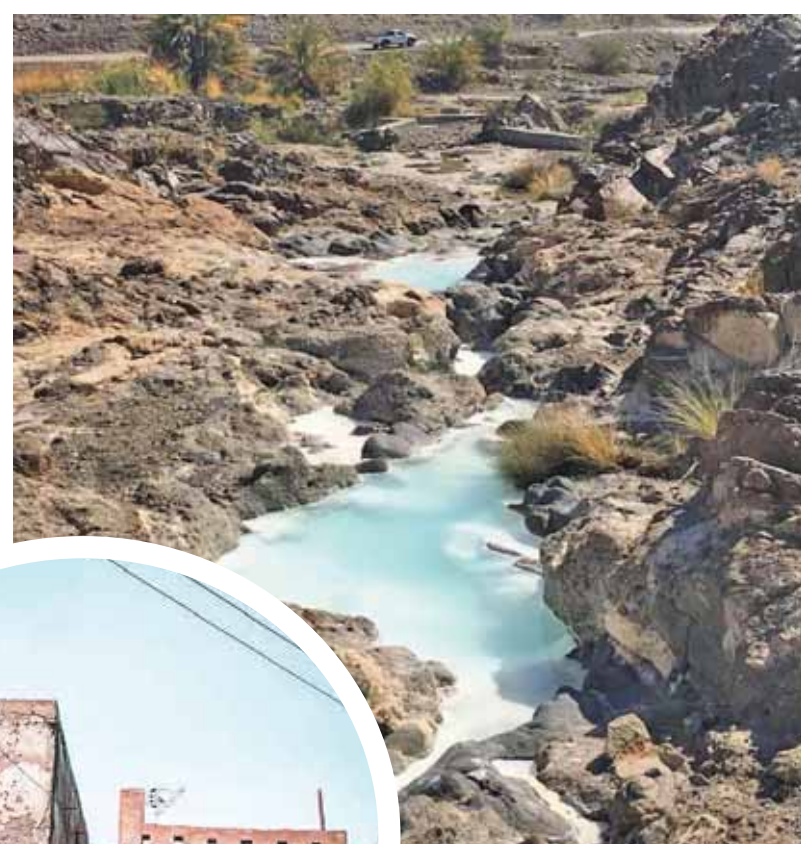
The people in the village of Qafifa depend on this wadi to irrigate farms. Many important crops are spread on the outskirts of this village, such as dates, Quince, barley, wheat, onions, garlic, fennel, guava, figs, pomegranates, and many others.

However, the Henna and Yas are the two plants that grow in abundance in this village. Due to their medical benefits in Oman, the increase of demand for these two plantations made people grow them as a business. Women in the village of Qafifa use them for adornment and for treating hair problems, and also for the treatment of many diseases.

The Qafifa Falaj, which is 2 km long, also gets its freshwater from the big Qafifa Wadi. The Falaj is constantly flowing, as the people of the village of Qafifa also depend on it to irrigate farms. There is a close relationship between man and the aflaj, as the aflaj are the lifeblood of the people of the village of Qafifa, and it witnessed the struggle of the Omani people and their strong will to build with intelligence a complete irrigation system with archaic tools.

Like everywhere else in Oman, Qafifa becomes more beautiful and full of cheerfulness during Eid when people gather in mosques in the early morning to pray the Eid prayer. After completing the prayer, they dance Al Razha and Al Azi, along with some of the Omani folk arts which are considered part of the customs and traditions.

The village is also distinguished by the presence of many beautiful heritage places that embody the life of the peo-



ple of the ancient village of Qafifa, such as the ancient archaeological houses, which represent historical evidence of Omani architecture, where they still stand, although they were built decades ago. Some of the owners of these houses still pay frequent visits to their homes to remember their old days and also to spend the Eid and holidays in the cool weather of the village.

The Qaith season is sacred here. Al Qaith happens in the summer period where the whole village is involved in collecting palms, sort out the dates, in preparation for storing them

for winter. All families gather from morning to afternoon, each one is busy with a specific task. The solidarity seen in this village is an example of the nature of the Omani people who are kind, who joins hands with each other, even in simple daily issues.

There are also traditional Omani crafts practised by the elderly people of Qafifa, especially palm fronds and leather crafts. Out of goat or sheep wool, they produce a high-quality fabric used in the making of camps. They used to exploit the simple resources to create things that benefit them in their lives.

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