

243 applicants for National Research Award

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation has closed the registration for the eighth cycle of the National Research Award 2021. For this year's registration, there was an increase in the number of research projects submitted for participation compared to the previous cycle by 11.4 per cent as the total number of applications submitted reached 243. **DETAILS ON P5**



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OMAN OBSERVER

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OMAN STUN
SENEGAL TO
WRAP UP WC
CAMPAIGN



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BLACK & VEATCH IN
TALKS FOR ROLE IN
OMAN'S \$3.5 BN
GREEN PROJECT



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MUSANDAM DIVING
CENTER OFFERS VIEW
OF UNDERWATER
TREASURE



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO
URUGUAY PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Luis Lacalle Pou of the Oriental Republic of Uruguay on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Lacalle Pou and the friendly people of Uruguay further progress and prosperity. — ONA

MARKETING OUTLETS
TO SELL OMANI HONEY

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources on Tuesday launched two marketing outlets in the Grand Mall and Oman Avenues Mall to sell honey from Omani beekeepers. Yaqoob bin Jamil al Daroushi, Head of the Agricultural Export and Import Promotion Department in the ministry, said that these marketing outlets replace the Omani Honey Market, which was cancelled during the past period due to the current Covid-19 pandemic situation. **DETAILS ON P5**



READ IN

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Be truthful to data,
avoid manipulations
Samuel Kutty

Coronavirus is
here forever!
Dr Yousuf Ali Al Mulla

INSIDE



PALESTINIAN BOY KILLED
IN ISRAEL MILITARY RAID

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CLIMATE CHANGE RISKS
EXTREME RAINFALL

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AN ATTRACTION FOR ALL

At the peak of the sea turtle nesting season pre-corona, dozens of visitors usually head out towards the beaches of Ras Al Jinz to witness one of nature's most amazing miracles. Guided by a staff from the Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve Hotel, these visitors are asked to put on a red headlight and in the darkness, sometimes as early as 4 in the morning, would walk by batch towards the beach for a rendezvous with the turtles all due for laying their eggs. These distinctive rock formations in Ras Al Jinz in Ras Al Hadd in the Wilayat of Sur now attracts the interest of a wide range of professional and amateur photographers, tourists, geologists and students. **DETAILS ON P20**



YOUTHS MAKE A BEELINE
TO TAKE VACCINES

AROUND 11,000 VACCINATED DAILY

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

More youngsters are lining up to get their second dose of Covid-19 vaccine than the elderly at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), according to the Ministry of Health.

On a given day, around 11,000 people take vaccines from 8 am to 2 pm which is 10 per cent more than the pre-registered recipients. Sixty per cent of them are women.

"We receive at least 10,000 to 11,000 people and majority of them are youngsters", according to Dr Nada al Barwaniyah, in-charge of the vaccination programme at the centre. She said the acceptance of vaccination has increased in the past few days more than ever since Oman embarked upon a mass vaccination campaign and started adding various target groups.

"There has been a constant, proportionate increase in the number of people taking vaccines since the vaccination campaign started and it is doubling as more target groups are added", she added.

Oman started coronavirus vaccinations in December 2020.

The expatriate population in Oman began to receive vaccines



from August 14 with the first phase in Masirah where several hundreds, predominantly from

South Asian countries, took the first dose. There are nearly 6,000 expatriate workforce and family

members living on Masirah Island.

In Al Dhahirah Governorate, vaccination campaign for residents started on August 15, and covered employees working in barber shops and salons, domestic workers and workers of various farms in the governorate.

In Al Batinah Governorate, expats working in similar professions were vaccinated from Monday, and all women working in beauty salons and other centres meant for women as well as employees of restaurants, coffee shops and others were included.

The Ministry of Health keeps adding newer target groups such as labourers and others who have close interaction with the customers. The national vaccination programme aims to administer at least 95 per cent of people with the first dose and 50 per cent with second dose in the coming months.

To aid the quicker vaccination programmes, the Sultanate has reduced the gap between two doses of Covid-19 vaccines to six weeks instead of 10 weeks. Nearly 2.5 million people have been given either single or two doses.

SEE ALSO P2

Prices of
building
materials
under lens

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
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The reasons for the increasing prices of construction materials are being probed, the Consumer Protection Authority officials informed the Majlis Ash'shura Council.

Citing regional and GCC markets data, the price increase is not only limited to the Sultanate also to other countries, they said in the session of Majlis Council presided over by Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman.

THE PRICE
INCREASE IS
NOT ONLY
LIMITED TO
THE SULTANATE
BUT ALSO
TO OTHER
COUNTRIES

A report of the Economic and Financial Committee on the challenges and incentives required for small and medium enterprises, was also discussed. It included statistics of small and medium enterprises, the challenges they face and impact of the pandemic, and suggestions for development of these firms.

TURN TO P2

Biden likely to stick to Aug 31 Afghanistan pullout deadline

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden has decided to stick to his August 31 deadline to pull American forces out of Afghanistan, US media reported on Tuesday.

Biden made the decision after talks with G7 counterparts and a demand by the Taliban that the United States not extend its stay past the end of this month, CNN, Fox News and other media reported, citing senior US officials.

He was expected to announce

his decision amid concerns that US citizens and thousands of Afghans who worked for American and allied coalition troops in the country could be left behind. It means that the nearly 6,000 US troops who have taken control of Kabul's Hamid Karzai international Airport since August 14 have just seven days to wind up their operation and exit.

The decision comes a day after officials in Germany, Britain, France and other countries



expressed hopes that the United States will keep the airlift going after the end of the month to enable all of their local staff as well as their nationals to get out.

But the G7 leaders, in a video conference early on Tuesday, apparently agreed to stick to the deadline that Biden set in April.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said after the meeting that the Taliban must "guarantee" safe passage for those fleeing — even beyond the August 31 deadline.

Johnson, who convened the emergency G7 meeting, said that he and his colleagues had agreed "a roadmap for the way in which we're going to engage with the Taliban" in the future.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid has the group, which took Kabul on August 15 in a lightning victory that stunned the world and brought an abrupt end to 20 years of war, would not agree to an extension to the deadline. — AFP

SEE ALSO P7

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 33°C Min 30°C SALALAH: Max 30°C Min 26°C NIZWA: Max 41°C Min 25°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

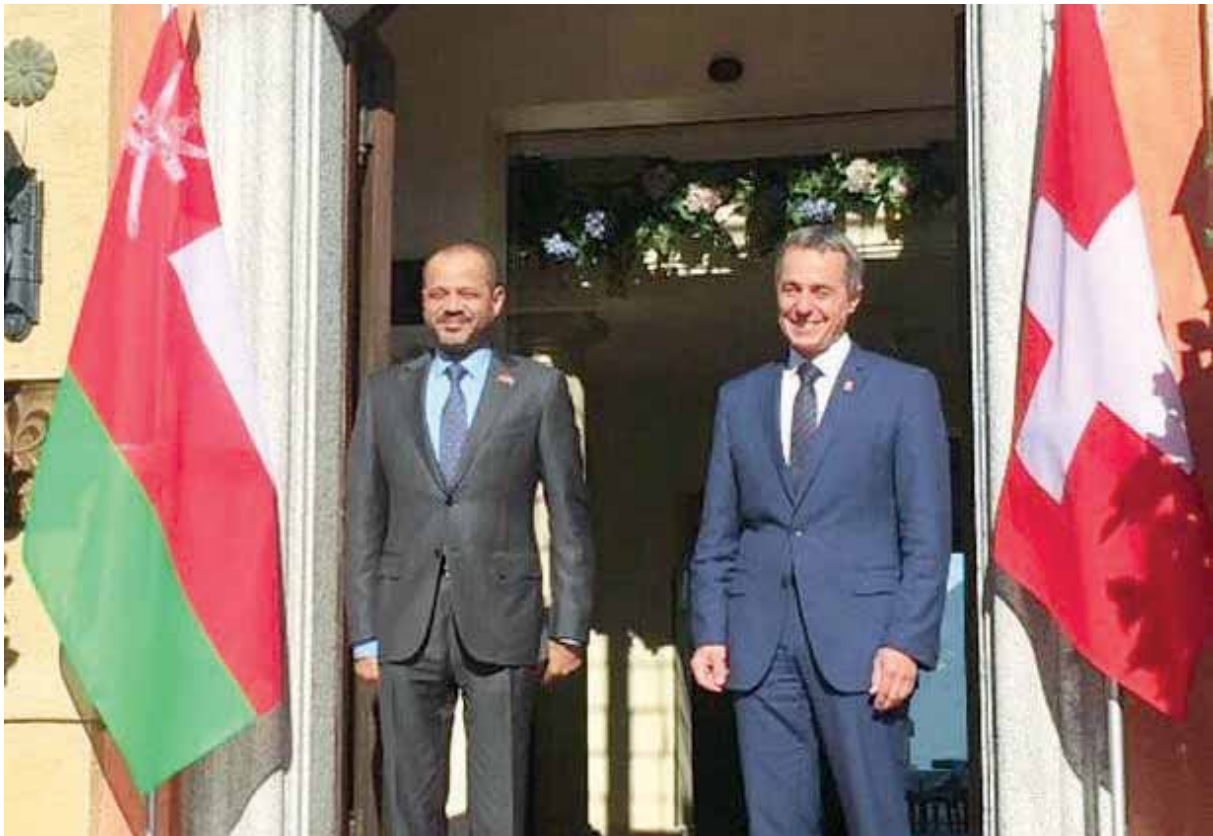
SUNRISE: 05:46 FAJR: 04:28 DHUHR: 12:14 ASR: 15:41 MAGHRIB: 18:37 ISHA: 19:50

Oman, Switzerland discuss ties

LUGANO: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, held a session of political talks with Ignazio Cassis, Vice-President of the Federal Council, Head of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA).

The session, held in Lugano, Switzerland, reviewed the joint relations of cooperation and exchanged views on regional and international matters of common interest.

The session was attended by Khalid bin Hashil al Masalhi, Head of the Minister's Office Department, Salim bin Ahmed al Kindi, Charge d'Affaires of the Sultanate's Embassy in Bern, Balz Abplanalp, Ambassador of Switzerland to the Sultanate, and several officials from the FDFA. — ONA



Only Omani drivers can transport fuel, foodstuffs, agricultural materials

MUSCAT: With an aim to create job opportunities in various sectors, the Ministry of Labour (MoL) has announced that professions of driving vehicles for transporting fuel, foodstuffs, agricultural items, fodder and grass will be reserved to Omanis.

According to MoL, SMEs fully owned and managed by Omani employers are entitled to have only one worker to transport agricultural materials and foodstuffs as a distributor of goods, provided the enterprise has to be a commercial entity that is registered with the Small and Medium Enterprises

Development Authority (Riyada).

A total of 18,824 job opportunities were announced in the private sector in the first half of the year.

It was a first-time that 5,583 male and female citizens were appointed in the sector. Of which, 1,718 people with a general education diploma and its equivalent, 683 with a university diploma, 1,813 university graduates, and 40 were master and PhD holders. The number of people appointed through turnover of staff (between one company and another in the sector) reached 13,241 male and female citizens.



Prices of building materials under lens



FROM PAGE 1

The report also looked into proposals to postpone the application of value added tax on electricity, water and sewage

services until 2022. It contained the committee's vision and recommendations not to burden the citizen.

It also focused on the need to reconsider calculating and

reducing the cost of directing electricity subsidies to economic sectors, the importance of reviewing losses in the water sector and reviewing production and distribution costs for public

water networks.

The meeting discussed a number of ministerial responses on various topics which were submitted by the members of the Council to the Ministers.

Delta fears remain despite successful vaccination drive



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@vinot_nair

Oman will join the league of countries in the GCC, Europe and the US that hope to restore normalcy following a successful mass vaccination drive.

As of August 24, the country had only 169 inpatients, including 75 in intensive care units.

With the recovery rate going up to 96.4 per cent, only 6,896 people are still sick in the country.

The Supreme Committee on Covid-19 has made vaccination a condition for entry to government and private sector establishments (including commercial complexes, restaurants, and other business outlets), as well as venues hosting cultural, sports and group activities. The heads

of government units will be responsible to take necessary action to implement the public safety measures.

Two-dose vaccination will be mandatory for people aged 18 years and above who wish to enter the Sultanate through all land, sea and air outlets, in addition to a PCR test before or upon arrival to the Sultanate. Those who got infected with the virus must undergo a 7-day quarantine and redo the PCR test on the 8th.

Wearing face masks and maintaining the physical distance at residences, workplaces and public places will have to always be maintained.

Delta is more likely than other variants to spread through vaccinated people.

Cases are still likely to

surge with the easing of travel restrictions with the Covid-19 data from the United States, the UK, and Singapore showing that vaccinated people who become infected with Delta variant can carry as much virus in their nose as do unvaccinated people.

The Supreme Committee also warned that it will continue to follow up the situation and take appropriate decisions.

The MoH will continue with the campaign to immunise the target groups, including school students from 12 years of age and above, and expatriate workers. The campaign for the second dose will also continue.

Until Monday, 2,336,980 people have been vaccinated at the rate of 66 per cent of the total target group.

MORE YOUTHS TAKE VACCINE



More youngsters are lining up to get their second dose of Covid-19 vaccine than the elderly at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), according to the Ministry of Health. On a given day, around 11,000 people take vaccines from 8 am to 2 pm which is 10 per cent more than the pre-registered recipients. Sixty per cent of them are women.



Steady decline in marriage rate in 10 years, says report

VINOD NAIR

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The general marriage rate in Oman has seen a steady decline from the two digits at the start of the last decade, according to the latest reports from NCSI.

In 2011, the general marriage rate was 10, which went up to 11 in 2012, nine in 2013 and 2014, and eight in 2015. In the last half of the last decade, it declined further to seven in 2016, six in 2016, 5.6 in 2017, 5.2 in 2018 and 5.4 in 2019.

At the same time, the general divorce rate has remained constant at one for most of the last decade, only to rise marginally to 1.1 in 2019.

Among governorates, in 2018, a total of 3,572 marriage certificates were issued in Muscat, which went down to 3,290 in 2019 and 3,446 in 2020.

At the same time, the number of divorce certificates issued in Muscat went up from 823 in 2018 to 912 in 2019 but dropped to 796 in 2020.

The total marriage certificates issued in the country dropped from 20,005 in 2020, 18,243 in 2019 and 18,762 in 2020.

Similarly, the number of divorce certificates issued has been steady at 3,662 in 2020, 3,278 in 2019 and 3,426 in 2020.

Subsequently, the crude birth rate (per 1,000 Omani population)



has dropped from 32.2 in 2020 to 30 in 2019 and 28.2 in 2020.

A study conducted in 2015 at SQU has pointed out that divorce is higher among people who are younger and those who have lower education and financial levels and in the first four years of marriage.

Marriage has become a costly affair these days and many youngsters are finding it too difficult to meet the demands of this big occasion. "I got married only at 36, while parents were well settled by their late-twenties. The fanfare and spending associated with marriage has increased and

youngsters are moving to big cities to stay alone, which means getting burdened with various types of loans," said Sulaiman, an employee with a logistics firm for 13 years.

Dr Hamed al Sinawi, the Senior Consultant of Behavioural Medicine at Sultan Qaboos

University Hospital, has repeatedly said that "Divorces are on the rise because of many things like traditional marriages, miscommunication between the two parties, financial pardons, gap of age, lack of awareness on commitment towards family, besides domestic violence."

Action taken against fishermen for catching whale shark

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has initiated legal measures against fishermen who caught a whale shark in Muscat Governorate.

The ministry said in a statement that hunting is a punishable violation in accordance with Article (11) of the law, and the ministry has taken legal measures against the fishermen.

The ministry called on the fishermen to take precautionary measures to preserve the whales.



Trekkers urged to take safety precautions

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Trekkers who make it to the vast mountains of the Sultanate as a sport have been cautioned to take necessary safety measures for their own safety and of others as many fatal incidents have been reported. Trekking or mountain-climbing has been gaining popularity in the Sultanate and this sport is used by individuals and groups for fun and leisure, and by corporates as a team building exercise.

However, many people who engage themselves in the sport with less or no safety measures have faced dangers which sometimes were fatal and the authorities have warned them to take necessary precautions.

"We call upon all citizens and residents to take care while venturing out in wadis and mountains and to take necessary precautions before going to the mountainous areas. Safety measures should be followed during the trail too in order to protect one and all," the Civil Defence and Ambulance Department said. The rescue teams at the Civil Defence and Ambulance Department in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate airlifted three people, who were unable to continue walking in one of the mountains in the Al Awena area, in Birkat Al Moaz.

"Hiking is a wonderful sport and leisure activity for youngsters and it is really enjoyable for many in terms of the adrenaline rush that it gives and the health benefits that it provides," says Mahmoud bin Juma al Qasimi, an avid mountaineer who has conquered many peaks



in the country. However, if a naive resort to this sport with less or no safety gear, he or she will face hazards which can sometimes be dangerous, according to Al Qasimi.

"One should know the location where he is trekking, first of all. Secondly or more importantly, having sufficient water to drink during the trail pays a lot. One gets more dehydrated as he or she goes further on the rough terrain."

Earlier this year, three accidents involving three Omani hikers with two of them succumbing to their injuries shook the thriving hiking fraternity in the country. "One should make sure if he is physically and mentally fit to conquer the heights and a good pair of shoes, gloves, etc are very important."

For many of the trekkers in the country, the Jahal mountain



range near Wadi Shab is one of the hardest trekking line that only very experienced trekkers can endure.

Mahmoud was faced with death during one of his hardest adventures after he got dehydrated and the ROP had to airlift him to the Rustaq Hospital in a critical state. He had to be hydrated for next 3 days before he could come back to life, he recalled.

Rahees Melekkandy, another passionate trekker, advises trekkers to plan their trip and try smaller mountain ranges to start with.

"After one is confident enough to climb bigger mountains, he should keep ample amount of water and be in proper trekking gear," said Rahees. "He should be able to adapt himself to the circumstances and carry gears to protect him from the hazards of climbing the peaks."

INNOVATION FACTORY CENTRE HELPS YOUNG OMANIS TO TURN THEIR DREAMS INTO
REALITY AS WELL AS ENCOURAGING THEM TO INNOVATE AND IDEATE. IT PROVIDES A
PLATFORM TO MAKE PROTOTYPES OF THEIR INVENTIONS AT NOMINAL COSTS

CHANGE

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Innovation helps Oman to move to a knowledge-based economy and reap benefits of the fourth industrial revolution. An ecosystem of innovation is needed to support innovators to transform their ideas into market viable projects or applications.

Many agree on the importance of investing in transmitting the culture of innovation and developing the skills of innovators in various fields. For that, cooperation between the concerned authorities and private sector institutions is needed.

Among the institutions working to spread the culture of innovation is the Innovation Factory Centre, located at Knowledge Oasis.

The centre, which opened in 2017, is one of the incubators that help young Omanis to change their dreams into reality as well as encouraging them to innovate and ideate. It will help them to unleash their talents and provides a platform to make prototypes of their inventions at nominal costs.

Everyone, especially students of universities and technical colleges, can benefit from the services provided by the centre, as it provides all kinds of support necessary for innovators and inventors.

Siham al Harthyah, CEO of Asawer company, said: "I encourage everyone to visit the centre along with their children. It will help them to widen their thinking and give new direction to their ideas."

The centre hosts 50 sub-factories and a number of innovators and creators from all sections of Omani society. It provides development and

manufacturing services for government and private sector institutions.

This centre has won several awards, including Entrepreneurship Award as the best small enterprise in 2017. It also designs and develops the Sultanate's pavilion in the Dubai Expo 2020, which will be held in October.

Firas bin Khamis al Musafir, CEO of the Innovation Factory for Scientific Research and Development stated earlier that the Innovation Factory resulted from "a need to create an environment that contributes to providing space and the basic needs for innovation using modern technologies for digital moulding".

"We seek to provide advice to innovators to employ their ideas in solving the challenges faced by the society using technology, and provide the necessary support and consultations to transform innovative ideas into prototypes that can be manufactured and commercially marketed."

The Factory conducts a scientific research and development study with users to study and develop innovative ideas and transform them into products or commercial solutions. It also aims to build and develop the capabilities of innovators within a specific time frame using the project-based learning methodology.

The Innovation Factory Programme for Young People consists of school visits with the aim of spreading the culture of innovation through scientific experiments and games.

In the field of community events, the centre conducts a variety of activities throughout the year to spread the culture of innovation and digital stereotyping.



IDEAS

INTO

PRODUCTS

MoH launches training programme on NCDs

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health, represented by the Department of Non-Communicable Diseases under the Directorate-General of Primary Healthcare, launched a strategic educational programme in Oman named NCD Academy.

The programme comes in collaboration with Viartis (Mylan + Upjohn, a legacy division of Pfizer) and in partnership with the American College of Cardiology (ACC) along with the World Heart Federation and NCD Alliance.

The programme aims to equip primary healthcare workers with comprehensive education on non-communicable disease (NCD) care.



The NCD Academy application includes a number of interactive courses that have been accredited by the American College of Cardiology. It also includes modules on the prevention of non-communicable diseases, management and

prevention of diabetes, cancer and the effect of Covid-19 on those living with non-communicable diseases. The application also includes modules on the early detection and management of the most common mental disorders.

It should be noted that the

NCD Academy is a first of its kind collaboration between major actors in global health. It is available to all healthcare providers in the Sultanate who are interested in obtaining the most recent developments on dealing with NCDs and mental illnesses. — ONA

243 applications submitted for National Research Award

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) has closed the registration for the eighth cycle of the National Research Award 2021.

For this year's registration, there is an increase in the number of research projects submitted for participation compared to the previous cycle by 11.4 per cent as the total number of applications submitted reached 243.

The National Research Award (NRA) is divided into two categories; best published research led by a PhD holder or equivalent (Senior Specialist or higher in the medical field) and best published research led by a young researcher (a non-PhD holder). Out of the 243 applications submitted for the NRA, 143 applications were submitted in the PhD holder or equivalent category, while 100 applications were submitted in the Young Researcher's category.

The research applications were submitted in accordance to the six research fields of the award in both the PhD and Young Researcher categories,



with 48 applications in the Education and Human Resources field, 21 applications in the Information and Communication Technologies field, 60 applications in the Health and Social Services field, 42 applications in the Cultural, Social and Basic Sciences field, 22 applications in the Energy and Industry field, and 50 applications in the Environmental and Biological Resources field. The winners of the National Research Award will be announced in the upcoming Annual Research Forum. — ONA

Outlets to sell Omani honey



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources on Tuesday launched two marketing outlets in the Grand Mall and Oman Avenues Mall to sell honey from Omani beekeepers.

Yaqoob bin Jamil al Daroushi, Head of the Agricultural Export and Import Promotion Department in the ministry, said that these marketing outlets replace the Omani Honey Market, which was cancelled during the

past due to the current Covid-19 pandemic situation.

Al Daroushi added that the number of participants this year stands at 55 beekeepers from various governorates, while the quantity of displayed honey

exceeds eight tonnes of various types. The number of beekeepers in Oman Avenues Mall reaches 20, while in the Grand Mall they are 35. The outlets will remain open during 24-31 August, Al Daroushi added. — ONA

Good response to CMYF blood camp



MUSCAT: Chiru Mega Youth Force (CMYF), a voluntary organisation, conducted a blood donation camp on Friday. The camp held at Bausher Blood Bank, opposite to the Royal Hospital, received good response as many volunteers turned out to donate blood. CMYF founder-

president Ramdas Chandaka thanked all those who came forward for this humanitarian cause.

The CMYF has been honoured by the Ministry of Health on several occasions in recognition of its continuing support for blood collection services.

1,200 mangrove saplings planted in Al Wusta

MUSCAT: As part of the efforts to implement the national initiative to plant 10 million trees and rehabilitate khors in the Sultanate, the Environment Authority planted 1,200 mangrove saplings in Khor Ghawi in the Wilayat of Al Jazir in the Al Wusta Governorate.

"The mangroves have great

benefits in maintaining the ecological balance, as they work to preserve beaches from erosion and are incubating areas for many commercially valuable fish and other marine creatures, in addition to their contribution to storing carbon dioxide," the authority said in a statement issued online.



Tender Announcement

Tender Number Re-T-03-2021

"Mwasalat" invites professional firms for the following tender:

Tender Name Mwasalat Vessels & Pontoons Underwater hull Cleaning Service.

Project Summary Framework Agreement to provide works of vessels underwater hull cleaning and bottom underwater survey for company fleet and pontoons.

Tender Fee OMR 50/-

Grade & Specialty Qualified & Specialized Companies in the Field

Start date for tender document distribution WED 25th August 2021

Last date for tender document distribution WED 1st September 2021

Last date for submission WED 8th September 2021

The Tender documents may be shared by email during official working hours between 9:00 A.M - 2:00 P.M.
Tenderers are requested to share commercial registration (CR) & business card through email
Tenders@mwasalat.om and tender number as the subject of email.

All Tenderers shall submit with their offers a Tender Bond in the amount of not less than one percent (1%) of the Tender Value, valid for (120) days from the date of Tender Submission obtained from a locally registered Bank, drawn in favor of The Chairman of Procurement Committee, National Ferries Company LLC "Mwasalat". Any bid without tender bond will be rejected.

The submission Date / Time shall be on or before the deadline specified in the above table.

Participants should submit their offers in the tender box located in the head-quarter of Oman National Transport Company SAOC (Mwasalat) at Ghala, Muscat (Jabal Shams Building 5th floor). Any proposal submitted after the given Date & Time shall be rejected.

"Mwasalat"
Head Quarter, Ghala Tel: +968 24121500/24121555
P.O.Box: 911, Al Khuwair, PC: 133, Sultanate of Oman

For more information please send to:
tenders@mwasalat.om

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

ELECTRONIC TENDER

The Internal Tenders Committee of the Ministry of Higher Education Research & Innovation announced the following tenders:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Company that are entitled to participate	Tender Price	Last Date for purchasing Tender	The deadline for submission of Tenders
11/2021	Data Centre Contract for MOHERI Head Quarter	Specialized in providing Same service and registered with the Tender Board with Grade: Excellent, First, Second, Third, Fourth	25 +/- RO	13/09/2021	03/10/2021

The purchasing of the tender documents by E-Tendering system will starting on Wednesday 25/08/2021 at 07:30 am. To purchasing, please visit the following link:
<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om/>

All companies that are bidding must provide a bank guarantee or a certified cheque from a bank operating in the Sultanate for at least (1%) of the tender value on behalf of His Excellency Dr. / Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee.

Preference will be given to companies' or small and medium enterprises registered with the General Authority for the development of Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) that includes the largest proportion of its tender Organization.

Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender.

Chairman of tender committee
Ministry of Higher Education Research & Innovation

www.mohe.gov.om

15-year-old killed in Israel raid

RAMALLAH: A teenager has been killed in a raid by the Israeli military in the occupied West Bank, according to the Palestinian rescue services.

The 15-year-old was shot in the head, the Health Ministry in Ramallah announced on Tuesday.

According to the army, soldiers had arrested a suspect for terrorist activities in a refugee camp in Nablus. In the process, the soldiers came under fire from surrounding rooftops, it said. The troops fired back.

Among other things, Palestinians threw stone blocks from buildings at the troops. Soldiers saw a suspect try to throw a large object at a soldier below him, they said. "One of the soldier's responded with live fire and a hit was identified," the Israeli army said.

There were no injuries on the Israeli side, the army said.

Meanwhile, Israel's air force has again attacked positions of Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The army described the strikes as a reaction to incendiary balloons sent to Israel from Gaza on Monday, as well as to machine-gun fire from Hamas.

The air force attacked a weapons manufacturing site, entrances to two "terror tunnels" and an underground rocket-launching site.

Palestinian militants repeatedly fly balloons with explosive and



A Palestinian boy rides a bicycle as Israeli soldiers patrol the village of Salem, east of Nablus on Tuesday. — AFP

incendiary devices from the Gaza Strip into Israel.

These often cause fires in southern Israel.

The Israeli air force had previously attacked several Hamas positions in the Gaza Strip after confrontations at the Gaza border fence on Saturday.

Following the latest clashes, two Palestinians, aged 13 and 14, and

an Israeli border policeman are in critical condition, according to official reports.

Egypt subsequently closed the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Sinai, according to Hamas.

Egyptian security sources said that this was due to maintenance work.

Israeli radio, on the other hand,

reported that it was a response to the clashes.

In May, Israel and Palestinian militants engaged in an armed conflict for 11 days.

According to the Ministry of Health, 255 people died in the Gaza Strip. In Israel, there were 13 deaths, according to official figures.

— dpa

Fighting in Syria's Daraa displaces 38,000

BEIRUT: Fighting between government forces and former rebels in the Syrian province of Daraa has displaced more than 38,000 people over the past month, the United Nations said on Tuesday, as truce talks falter.

Daraa, retaken by government forces in 2018, has emerged as a new flashpoint in recent weeks as government forces tightened control over Daraa al Balad, a southern district of the provincial capital that is considered a hub for former rebel fighters.

Clashes, including artillery exchanges, between the two sides since late July have marked the biggest challenge yet to the Russian-brokered deal that returned the southern province to government control but allowed rebels to stay on in some

areas.

Russian-sponsored truce talks launched in the wake of the latest fighting have made little headway as the government has stepped up its campaign to root out remaining rebel fighters from Daraa al-Balad.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said that 38,600 internally displaced persons are registered in and around Daraa, with most having fled from Daraa al-Balad. "This includes almost 15,000 women, over 3,200 men and elderly and over 20,400 children," OCHA said.

It warned of a critical situation in the volatile district, saying that access to goods and services, including food and power, is "extremely challenging." — AFP



Children play along a street in a rebel-held part of the southern city of Daraa, Syria. — Reuters file photo

■ COOLING THE HOOVES



A sheep swims in the Euphrates river in the countryside of Raqa in east-central Syria on Tuesday amidst a heatwave and low river water levels. — AFP

All-women choir smashes taboos in Egypt

CAIRO: The words of the Islamic hymns being rehearsed in a small studio just outside Cairo are well known among Egyptian Muslims, but they have never sounded so different. Here, they are being sung by women.

Choral songs and recitals in praise of God and the Prophet are a common religious custom in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East, but they are almost always performed by men and boys.

The members of Alhour, Egypt's first all-female Muslim recitation choir, are determined to change that — challenging deep-rooted taboos about women singing in public or reciting from the Quran in the country.

"Having women in the religious chanting field not only breaks social stereotypes about female chanters. It also gives a new, distinctive style to an art that has long been dominated by only men," said Alhour founder Nemaa Fathi, 26.

Sitting on chairs in the wood-panelled studio during a recent



rehearsal, seven young women and girls scanned the lyrics on their mobile phones before closing their eyes and belting out the hymns, accompanied by a piano and drums.

Most wore brightly coloured headscarves to cover their hair, but some shunned the hijab, where the debate about gender inequality has intensified in recent years.

Fathi started attending a school dedicated to the Arabic musical discipline known as "maqam", or

chanting, when she was 19, but dropped out after several teachers said they did not want women in the classroom.

While the practice has both secular and religious uses in the Middle East, "maqams" are almost always sung by men in the region, where women who perform music or sing publicly are often viewed as promiscuous.

In Islam, "maqams" are used to put religious sayings including verses from the Quran to music

Having women in the religious chanting field not only breaks social stereotypes about female chanters. It also gives a new, distinctive style to an art that has long been dominated by only men

NEMAA FATHI
Founder of Alhour

and sing them with fellow believers.

That makes female performers even more taboo, and Fathi said she had faced repeated criticism since she launched Alhour in 2017 after connecting with other women and girls who wanted to follow their passion for the musical form.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

TEHRAN

Iran's Covid-19 deaths hit record 709

Iran on Tuesday reported a record daily 709 deaths from Covid-19 as the worst-hit country in the Middle East faced a fifth surge in infections led by the highly contagious Delta variant.

The health ministry said the total number of cases had reached 4.75 million with 40,623 new infections over the past 24 hours. Total fatalities rose to 103,357, state TV reported.

Authorities imposed a two-week road travel ban between cities in the Islamic



Republic until Aug. 27, except for essential vehicles. Non-essential businesses and public offices were allowed to reopen on Sunday after a week of a mandatory shutdown to help limit the spread of coronavirus infections.

BEIRUT

Lebanon to reopen classrooms next month

Students in Lebanon will return to the classroom starting next month, the education minister said on Monday, amid fears an accelerating economic crisis and the coronavirus pandemic would prevent schools from reopening.

Rights groups have decried an "education catastrophe", with more than a million children in Lebanon out of school since the country's Covid-19 outbreak began in February last year.

Other students are at risk of never returning, the groups



have warned, due to a financial downturn that has seen poverty rates soar to reach 78 per cent of the population. Classrooms will gradually reopen starting September 27, outgoing education minister Tarek Majzoub told a press conference on Monday.

TELAVIV

Israel PM set for first White House visit

New Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett plans to push for a new Iran strategy during his first White House visit, saying he will urge US President Joe Biden not to revive the 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran.

Biden's aides hope the talks will set a positive tone for his relationship with Bennett, a far-right politician and high-tech millionaire who ended Benjamin Netanyahu's record 12-year run as prime minister in June.

This would stand in sharp



contrast to years of tensions between the conservative Netanyahu, who was close to former President Donald Trump, and the last Democratic administration led by Barack Obama with Biden as his vice president.

In brief

■ YANGON



MYANMAR JUNTA MULLS RAISING VILLAGE MILITIAS

Myanmar's junta is considering raising village militias to combat opposition to its rule, state media said on Tuesday, as it struggles to assert control more than six months after seizing power.

The country has been in turmoil since Aung San Suu Kyi's government was ousted in a February coup, sparking huge pro-democracy protests and a bloody military crackdown. Local "self-defence groups" have sprung up to fight the military, often using hunting rifles or weapons manufactured at makeshift jungle factories. The groups have added to the volatile mix in Myanmar, where more than 20 ethnic rebel groups were already in various stages of conflict with the military before the coup.

■ WASHINGTON



US TO SHIP 3M DOSES OF VACCINE TO PAKISTAN

The United States will ship just over 3 million doses of Covid-19 vaccine to Pakistan via the COVAX global distribution programme on Tuesday, bringing the total number of doses sent there to around 8.5 million, a White House official said.

An additional 700,000 doses will follow, the official said. It was not immediately clear when they would be shipped to Pakistan.

Scientific teams and legal and regulatory authorities from both countries worked together to ensure the delivery of the 3,006,900 vaccine lots made by Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech, the official said.

■ JAKARTA



INDONESIA EASES COVID-19 CURBS AS CASES DROP

Indonesia will start reopening restaurants, malls and places of worship in some areas including the capital Jakarta, President Joko Widodo said on Monday, as new coronavirus cases have fallen sharply from their peak and vaccinations rise.

Starting on Tuesday, restaurants and places of worship in parts of the world's fourth most populous country will be able to operate at 25 per cent capacity and shopping malls at 50 per cent, Widodo told a virtual press conference.

"Since July 15, cases have fallen 78 per cent. The recovery rate is also higher than new positive cases", he said.

■ ORCHID DIPLOMACY



US Vice-President Kamala Harris poses next to an orchid named after her in Singapore on Tuesday. The orchid, named Papilionanda Kamala Harris, was presented to Harris at the Istana, the office of the President of Singapore, in what city state has termed "orchid diplomacy". The Vice-President landed in Singapore on Sunday morning on a three-day visit to kick off her first official visit to Asia, a trip which will also include Vietnam. — Reuters

India to extend trial of homegrown mRNA vaccine

BENGALURU: India on Tuesday approved further clinical trials for its first homegrown mRNA-based Covid-19 vaccine, being developed by Gennova Biopharmaceuticals, after the shot was found to be safe and effective in an early-stage study.

The country has authorised emergency use for two domestically developed Covid-19 shots, made by Bharat Biotech and Zydus Cadila, but does not have mRNA-based vaccines yet in its immunisation programme ahead of a potential third coronavirus wave.

Gennova plans to conduct a mid-stage study at about 10 to 15 sites and a late-stage trial at 22 to 27 sites in India, the government said in a statement.

Clinical trials of Gennova's vaccine candidate began in December last year and are partly funded by the biotechnology department of India's Ministry of Science and

Technology.

The company did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

"It's too early to get excited about this vaccine as phase-3 trials are yet to be completed. By the time this vaccine reaches the market, India would have vaccinated a majority of its population already", said Prashant Khadayat, a pharma analyst at GlobalData.

Developing an mRNA vaccine would however help India "display its scientific innovation at a global level", Khadayat said.

The technology behind Gennova's vaccine, also used in shots made by US drugmakers Moderna Inc and Pfizer Inc, prompts the human body to make a protein that is part of the virus to trigger an immune response.

Moderna's vaccine won an emergency use approval from the Indian government in June, but the company is still sorting out issues over indemnity and imports. — Reuters

Stop evacuating skilled Afghans: Taliban

KABUL: A Taliban spokesman on Tuesday said the United States should stop evacuating skilled Afghans, and warned Western forces against extending the August 31 deadline for airlifts out of the country.

The group said Americans were taking "Afghan experts" such as engineers out of Afghanistan.

"We ask them to stop this process", spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said at a press conference in Kabul.

The Taliban's top spokesman laid out a series of demands during a live broadcast on Tuesday as US-led troops have ramped up operations to get thousands of people out of Kabul.

The spokesman repeated the group's earlier announcement that the Taliban would not allow the US to extend next week's deadline for a complete withdrawal.

"They have planes, they have the airport, they should get their citizens and contractors out of



Taliban fighters in a vehicle patrol the streets of Kabul on Monday. — AFP

here", said Mujahid.

President Joe Biden has said he hopes to stick to the August 31 deadline he set to pull out American forces, but he is facing pressure from European allies and Britain to go beyond the date.

About 50,000 foreigners and Afghans have fled the country from Kabul's airport since the Taliban swept into power nine

days ago, according to the US government.

Many Afghans fear a repeat of the brutal interpretation of sharia law the Taliban implemented when they were first in power from 1996-2001, and retribution for working with the US-backed government over the past two decades.

The Taliban, who ended

two decades of war with an astonishingly swift rout of government forces, have been publicly tolerant of the evacuation effort.

European nations have said they would not be able to airlift at-risk Afghans before the August 31 cut-off, and United States President Joe Biden has faced calls from all corners to extend the evacuation window.

But speaking at a press conference in the capital Kabul, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the militant group would not agree to an extension, and told the US to stop evacuating skilled Afghans.

Mujahid also said female Afghan government workers should stay home until security conditions in the country improve.

Germany said on Tuesday that Western allies simply cannot fly every Afghan who needs protection out of Kabul before the cut-off date.

"Even if (the evacuation) goes on until August 31 or even a few days longer, it will not be enough to allow those who we, or the United States, want to fly out", Foreign Minister Heiko Maas told Bild TV.

Earlier France said it would have to end evacuations from Kabul's airport on Thursday if the US stuck to the deadline, and Spain said it would not be able to rescue all Afghans who served Spanish missions.

Britain, meanwhile, has said it will lobby for an extension at a virtual G7 summit later on Tuesday.

According to the Washington Post, US Central Intelligence Agency chief William Burns held a secret meeting in Kabul on Monday with Taliban co-founder Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, although no details were reported and neither the CIA nor the Taliban confirmed it.

— Agencies

Some Sri Lankans opt for cardboard coffins

COLOMBO: At a factory in Sri Lanka's Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia city, workers use staples and glue to assemble long cardboard boxes, which will be used as coffins for some of the country's coronavirus victims.

The coffin is made out of recycled paper and costs a sixth of the cheapest wooden casket, according to 51-year-old Priyantha Sahabandu, the local government official who first came up with the idea.

As Sri Lanka's death toll from Covid-19 surges, some are opting for these cardboard coffins when they cremate

their loved ones. The country recorded its highest daily death toll of 198 on Friday, with total fatalities reaching 7,560.

Currently, about 400 people die per day on average in Sri Lanka of various causes, including Covid-19, said Sahabandu, a member of the municipal council for Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia, a city in Colombo district.

"To make 400 coffins you have to cut some 250 to 300 trees. To prevent that environmental destruction I proposed this concept to the health committee of the council", he said. — Reuters

President Duterte vice-presidential candidate in 2022 polls

MANILA: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has agreed to be the ruling party's vice-presidential candidate in next year's elections, the PDP-Laban party said on Tuesday, prompting accusations by opponents that it was a ploy to maintain his grip on power.

The announcement came ahead of the party's national convention on September 8, where it is also expected to endorse Duterte's aide and incumbent senator Christopher "Bong" Go to be its presidential candidate in the 2022 polls. Duterte was heeding "the clamour of the people", Karlo Nograles, Executive Vice-President of the PDP-Laban party,



said in a statement.

Under the constitution a president can only serve one term, and the announcement had been widely anticipated as Duterte, had already hinted he could seek the number two job, a move seen by political observers and critics as a backdoor to the presidency.

They believe he could be making a play for retaining power

by taking over as president under a scenario in which Go wins and then resigns, enabling Duterte to shield himself from possible legal actions when he leaves office.

"This is really part of the scheme of the Duterte clique to extend not only influence but control of government", said opposition congressman Carlos Zarate.

Duterte-backer Nograles said the move would "guarantee continuity of the administration's programmes during the past five years", including his war on drugs, which an International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor wants investigated. — Reuters

Climate change risks extreme rainfall

FRANKFURT: Climate change increases the likelihood of extreme rainfall and thus of flooding events like the one that hit western Germany last month, according to a study published on Tuesday.

Given current climate conditions, it can be expected that a region in Western Europe could be hit by such a devastating event about once every 400 years, an international team which included scientists found out.

As temperatures continue to rise, extreme rain events become more frequent. If temperatures were to rise by another 0.8 degrees Celsius, the frequency would increase to every 300 years and the intensity of the heavy rain would also increase.

The scientists looked at a region encompassing France, western Germany, the eastern part of Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and northern the North of Switzerland and asked how likely the entire area was to experience extreme heavy rain and to what extent this was influenced by rising temperatures around the world.

The likelihood of such disasters has increased by a factor of between 1.2 and 9 compared to the end of the 19th century, and



A man carries his belongings out of his house in the flooded neighbourhood of Keur Massar, Dakar. – AFP file photo

the maximum amount of rain is between 3 and 19 per cent greater.

“All available evidence taken together (...) gives high confidence that human-induced climate change has increased the

likelihood and intensity of such an event to occur and these changes will continue in a rapidly warming climate,” the authors wrote.

The study was carried out as part of the World Weather Attribution

Initiative, which investigates the possible effects of climate change on extreme weather events.

Floods are natural phenomena, but climate change is altering Earth’s rainfall patterns, making

some regions wetter and others drier.

Scientists say climate change is intensifying the risk of heavy rain around the world, because a warmer atmosphere holds more

water.

According to an international study published on Tuesday, climate change made the deadly floods that devastated parts of Germany and Belgium last month up to nine times more likely.

Meanwhile, President Joe Biden has declared a major disaster in the southern US state of Tennessee and approved federal funding after devastating floods over the weekend left at least 21 dead, the White House said in a statement said on Tuesday.

Tennessee was hit on Saturday by what meteorologists called historic storms and flooding, dumping as much as 17 inches (38 centimetres) of rain. Rural roads, state highways, bridges and hundreds of homes were washed out and widespread power outages affected thousands of people.

The move makes federal funding available to people affected in Humphreys County, where the downpour on Saturday broke a 24-hour rainfall record for Tennessee, the National Weather Service said.

Help for residents includes “grants for temporary housing and home repairs”, as well as “low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses”, the White House said.

— Agencies

Ukraine marches with Nato allies on 30th independence anniversary

KIEV: Ukrainian soldiers marched through Kiev Tuesday alongside servicemen of Nato member countries as the country marked the 30th anniversary of its independence from the Soviet Union.

The show of solidarity came after Ukraine and its Western allies agreed in a summit in Kiev on Monday to work towards ending Russia’s “occupation” of Crimea.

Ukraine is not a member of Nato, despite wanting to join.

More than 5,000 Ukrainian servicemen saluted President Volodymyr Zelensky during the parade, marching with dozens of soldiers from countries including the United States, Britain and Canada.

Polish President Andrzej Duda, Lithuanian President Gitanas Nauseda and French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian were in attendance.

Most of the marching Ukrainian soldiers had fought against pro-Russia separatists in an ongoing conflict in the eastern



Ukrainian military band members march during the Independence Day military parade in Kiev on Tuesday. – AFP

Donbass region that broke out in 2014 after Moscow annexed the Crimean peninsula.

“On this holiday we need to remember those who have made it possible for us to be here. These are our defenders of Ukraine, our independence,” Zelensky said at the parade.

“It is possible to temporarily occupy territories, but it is impossible to occupy people’s love for Ukraine,” he said, adding that the Donbass and Crimea “will

come back”.

Thousands of spectators waving Ukrainian blue-and-yellow flags watched as more than 400 tanks and armoured vehicles rolled past.

As part of the show, some 100 helicopters and jets including Polish F-16 fighters and British Eurofighter Typhoon jets flew over the Ukrainian capital. Ukrainian Navy ships also took part in a parade in the Black Sea around the port city of Odessa as part of the commemorations. — AFP

France recommends Covid booster jab for over-65s

PARIS: France’s health watchdog on Tuesday recommended a third dose of the Covid-19 vaccine for people aged over 65 or considered at risk of developing serious forms of the disease.

The advice from the HAS watchdog was for people who had already received two vaccine doses, who will now be offered an mRNA vaccine such as the ones produced by Pfizer or Moderna, which France has ample supply of.

Last month, the French health ministry announced a booster shot for around five million of the most vulnerable people, including those in retirement homes.

In its statement, the HAS suggested widening the criteria for those eligible for a third shot while adding that the “priority for the next few weeks is to increase vaccination coverage in particular in the 80+ age group where vaccination coverage remains insufficient (at 79.9 per cent).”

France is averaging around 20,000 new Covid-19 cases a day, with the return of schools next week after the summer holidays



Nurse Kevin Grellman administers a third booster dose of Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine to Armida Gomez, 81, as her husband Jose Gomez, 80, waits for his turn during a vaccination clinic in California. – AFP

raising concern about a new surge in infections. The World Health Organization has called for a moratorium on booster shots until at least the end of September in order to address inequalities in global dose distribution.

Israel became one of the first countries to begin administering booster shots at the end of July after a spike in new cases.

With an open economy and most curbs scrapped, Israel went from single-digit daily infections

and zero deaths to around 7,500 daily cases last week, 600 people hospitalised in serious condition and more than 150 people dying in that week alone.

On July 30, it began administering a third dose of the Pfizer/BioNtech vaccine to people over 60, the first country to do so. On Thursday, it expanded eligibility to 30-year-olds and up whose second dose was given at least 5 months prior, saying the age may drop further. — Agencies

SHORT TAKES

DAKAR

Former Chad strongman dies of Covid

Hissene Habre, the former strongman president of Chad and security ally of the West during the Cold War who was later jailed for war crimes, died on Tuesday in Senegal at the age of 79, Senegal’s justice minister said.

Habre contracted Covid-19 at a clinic in the capital Dakar where he was taken 10 days ago from jail for medical reasons, Justice Minister Malick Sall said. When his condition worsened, he was taken to Principal Hospital,



where he died.

Habre’s 1982-90 rule saw widespread killings by his infamous political police who rounded up opponents and held them in secret detention centres.

LUSAKA

Zambia new president sworn in

Zambia’s newly elected president Hakainde Hichilema on Tuesday promised to rebuild the ailing economy and alleviate poverty as he was sworn in following an election hailed as a milestone for African opposition movements.

“We will grow our economy so we can lift more people out of poverty than ever before,” 59-year-old Hichilema told thousands of jubilant supporters — sporting the red and yellow colours of his United Party for



National Development — in the Heroes Stadium in Lusaka.

Hichilema also vowed to restore respect for human rights and liberties eroded under his predecessor.

BERLIN

Poll shows surprise lead for SPD party

Germany’s centre-left Social Democrats (SPD) edged ahead in the race towards September elections on Tuesday, beating Angela Merkel’s conservatives in a poll for the first time since 2006. The survey of 2,504 people for the NTV broadcaster had the centre-left party in the lead on 23 per cent, with Merkel’s CDU-CSU alliance trailing behind on 22 per cent. Until a few weeks ago, the SPD had been polling so badly that many had written off the possibility that it would be



part of the next government.

A survey published on Friday also showed 41 per cent of voters would prefer the SPD candidate Olaf Scholz to be the next chancellor.

Sport in Afghanistan faces uncertain future

CLAAS HENNIG

The absence of athletes from Afghanistan at the Tokyo Paralympics which opened on Tuesday highlights that sport in general and women's sport in particular face an uncertain future in the country. The return of the Taliban to power after 20 years is raising major fears because the grouping did not recognise women's rights and used stadiums for executions during their first reign 1996-2001. And footage from the presidential palace of Taliban fighters trying out fitness equipment of president Ashraf Ghani who has fled the country is nothing but deceiving.

Taekwondo fighter Zakia Khudadadi was supposed to be the first woman from Afghanistan to perform at the Paralympics, together with athletics countryman Hossain Rasouli. But they failed to get out of Kabul before all commercial flights were suspended - and now only the nation's flag was to be paraded at the opening ceremony as an act of solidarity.

"We would like to have them here, unfortunately, it is not possible, but they will be here in spirit," Paralympics boss Andrew Parsons said on Monday.

Afghan International Olympic Committee (IOC) member Samira Asghari had last week pleaded to the international community in a new deleted tweet: "Please Afghanistan national female athletes, coaches and their entourage need your help, we must get them out of Taliban's hands, out of Afghanistan in particular Kabul."

Sport gained in importance over the past 20 years, with former boxer Hamid Rahimi saying it "brought everyone together" from the various ethnic groups because "religion played no role there."

Surfer Afridun Amu who was raised in Germany said that Afghans competing at big events were a sign of hope and freedom which has now ended because he doesn't see a future for the sport in a country ruled by the Taliban.

Former football international Sangar Amadi told broadcasters NDR that women will suffer most, saying: "I don't think there will be any more women's sport. Women will have no rights at all or only very few." — dpa

We would like to have them here, unfortunately it is not possible, but they will be here in spirit

ANDREW PARSONS
Paralympics Boss



ARMY-2021

Russian honour guards look on after the opening ceremony of the International Military-Technical Forum "Army-2021" held in the Patriot Park, Kubinka, near Moscow, on Monday. — AFP

Be truthful to data, avoid manipulations



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyvp

TO BE HONEST AND ETHICAL INVOLVES THE PRACTICES OF NOT LYING, NOT HIDING THE TRUTH

From a very young age, we have been schooled to be honest in all our dealings and taught that honesty is the most important virtue. We are also repeatedly reminded about the adage honesty is the best policy.

We often sign affidavits, "I declare that the information provided in the document, to the best of knowledge, is true". But how honest is the person who declares that the subject matter of the document is true?

In filling out self-reported documents such as research papers, applications, tax forms or insurance claims, we sign to declare that the information in the documents are truthful.

If you describe someone as honest, you mean that they always tell the truth, and do not try to deceive people or break the law. It is not surprising to see an affidavit of a person who committed a felony, declaring that "I had been honest about what I was doing".

After the roll-out of online education following the Covid-19 outbreak, a

university in New Zealand advised teaching staff to include a statement relating to academic integrity and honesty in all assessments.

The advisory note warns that any identified form of poor academic practice or academic misconduct will be followed up and may result in disciplinary action.

There is no doubt that we do care, as individual beings, about being good and moral, but there is equally compelling evidence that we often cross ethical boundaries when we have the opportunity to do so. In the hustle and bustle of today's busy interactions, it's likely that we forget about honesty and ethics.

This is because, at the end of the day, you can hide the truth from the world but not from yourself. Being true to yourself is important if you wish to be proud of who you are. Nothing in the world is constant. Everything changes.

However, for something to exist forever, it has to be true and authentic.

To be honest means not lying, not hiding the truth, and never purposefully

omitting or misdirecting people from the truth.

But deliberate attempts to manipulate facts, especially suppressing data that can deprive the poor of their rights, have no excuses.

There have been numerous claims that some countries do not reveal their reported cases of Covid-19 truthfully. They are publishing statistics that have been massaged to reveal a rosier version of reality.

It's true that getting real quantitative and qualitative data especially from surveys and sampling are too hard. As a result, researchers sometimes manipulate data to support hypotheses and fulfil objectives resulting in doing harm to real facts.

Honesty and authenticity should be the first priority of declaration. The better option is to avoid doing manipulations. Being honest with yourself requires courage. It can sometimes be challenging to make contact with your truth, and even harder to take action based on that truth!

Coronavirus won't be eradicated fully... is here forever!



Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla

IN FACT, IT SEEMS THAT THE STAGE (ENDEMICITY) OF THIS VIRUS AND ITS END GAME IS QUITE CLEAR, BUT HOW TO REACH IT IS LESS CLEAR

Many families have gone through sad days during the past weeks as a result of losing a loved one who was infected with the coronavirus (Covid-19) and it may be really difficult to imagine the future with the intensive care units being filled again if people do not continue to adhere to precautionary measures, in addition to receiving the vaccine. Somehow the pandemic will end one way or the other... It will!

However, when a sufficient number of people acquire some immunity through vaccination or infection — vaccination is preferred — this virus may move to a stage called an endemic (meaning it will be a disease that is permanently present in a certain area or populated group but is stable), where it won't be

eradicated, but also it won't turn our lives around anymore. Perhaps at that point, we will see fewer hospitalisations and fewer deaths from the coronavirus. Especially since the booster vaccination can restore and stimulate immunity periodically as well. Nevertheless, cases may continue to rise and fall in this scenario, maybe seasonally, but the worst outcomes will undoubtedly be avoided.

Of course, we will all have to change our thinking about the coronavirus. This virus is not something we can avoid forever; we have to prepare for the possibility that all of us will be exposed in one way or another. Rather — and if I may say — this is something we have to live with as long as it does not affect healthcare as a whole and here I

think we can do it.

In fact, it seems that the stage (endemicity) of this virus and its end game is quite clear, but how to reach it is less clear. This may be partly because that stage depends on us! As the possibility of the spread of the coronavirus — endemic — does not mean that we should abandon all precautions. The path to becoming endemic of the coronavirus will undoubtedly depend on how far the virus itself continues to mutate.

We're now where we thought we had to be a year ago. Vaccines still protect against serious diseases, as expected. In fact, the virus will continue to spread, but fewer people will get sick enough to be hospitalised or die. Not to mention, as more people gain immunity through infection

or vaccination, the coronavirus will try to find ways to evade that immunity as well. This is a natural consequence of living with a circulating virus. The flu virus also mutates every year in response to existing immunity. But in the endemic corona scenario, where many people have some immunity, the coronavirus will not be able to infect a large number of people and will not multiply several times in every person it infects.

On the other hand, the transmission of the coronavirus as a pandemic to an endemic virus is also psychological. When everyone has some immunity, a diagnosis of Covid-19 becomes like a routine as a diagnosis of influenza — not good news - but it is not a cause for fear, anxiety or

embarrassment either. I believe that more importantly and realistically, the risks will be much smaller than they are now amid a Delta wave, but they will never go away.

In the end, better vaccines and best treatments may well reduce the risk of contracting the coronavirus and the experience may also lead people to take all respiratory viruses seriously, leading to permanent changes in mask-wearing and ventilation for instance.

So when we get to the endemic stage of the coronavirus, it means finding a new, tolerable way to live with this virus. You will feel weird for a while and then it will be normal!

(The author is a physician, medical innovator and a writer)

Sport

Oman stun Senegal to wrap up WC campaign

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 24

Oman beach soccer team ended their campaign at the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup Russia 2021 on bright note as they registered a 3-2 victory against Senegal on Tuesday in the concluding fixture of Group D.

Coach Talib Hilal's men missed the opportunity to move into the second round for the first time ever as they suffered two consecutive losses against title holders Portugal 5-3 in the opening match on Friday and from Uruguay 4-2 on Sunday.

In the Senegal match, Oman players aimed to post their first win in this edition of World Cup.

Abdullah al Souti scored the opening goal for Oman before four minutes of completion of the first period. Senegal's Boye received red card in the first period from referee Roman Borisov.

The Sultanate's experienced beach soccer player, Yahya al Oraimi, added the second goal for Oman in the dying minute of the second period.

In the following period, Senegal focused on attack to reduce the deficit. Later, Balde netted the first goal for the opponents.

Oman's Salim al Oraimi made it difficult for Senegal as he struck the third goal for the Sultanate making it 3-1. Senegal's Diatta scored one goal to reduce deficit further at 3-2. But Oman players defended well to post a deserving victory in this edition of World Cup.

Despite the loss, Senegal advanced with six points as they had outclassed Uruguay 6-1 in the opening match and edged Portugal 5-3 in the second match.

Oman's long-serving national coach, Talib Hilal, expressed his disappointment after the



“In Uruguay match, the players missed many scoring attempts which could have put us in better position now. Our target was to earn one of the direct tickets to the next round but luck was not on our side

TALIB HILAL
Oman head coach

Uruguay match. “I expected better result against Uruguay and the loss hurt the team's chances to move into quarterfinals. The preparation plan was perfect. During the three months, we had played top friendlies. We had started with a tough match against Portugal and the players put up brilliant performance despite the final result. In Uruguay match, the players missed many scoring attempts which could have put us in better position now. Our target was to earn one of the direct tickets to the next round but luck was not on our side”, he said.

In all the four editions of the Sultanate team's presence at the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup, Oman had played 12 fixtures. Three matches ended with victory results — against Costa Rica, Negirera and Senegal. The Sultanate team had suffered nine losses — against Argentina, El Salvador, Brazil, Switzerland, Italy, Uruguay and Portugal (three times).

Amur good Olympic medal prospect: Coach

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 24

Mazin al Badri, head coach of Oman weightlifting team, said that lifter Amur al Khanjari has the capability to become an Olympic champion for the Sultanate if the requirements and needs provided to him in a sufficient time. “Despite the challenges of Covid pandemic on Amur's preparation for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, he managed to finish second in his Group B and 10th in the overall order. We have prepared an intensive plan for Amur to develop him to an Olympic champion. The plan is presented to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and to the Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) officials. The plan featured many main factors which will assist the lifter to become the Sultanate's Olympic star”, he said.



Explaining some essential requirements, the Iraqi coach said: “Continuous domestic camp at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher and permanent accommodation for the weightlifter is required as this will help him to train twice

daily instead of returning back to his home in Maabela (Seeb). Overseas camps for a period of three months every year. This international step will raise the technical performance of Amur and will expose him to the other competing environment in

different parts of the world.” “Taking part in six top international, regional and continental championships each year will allow him to earn the direct ticket to the Olympics and world championships events. The world ranking

events will start in second quarter of 2022. Providing nutritional supplements for the whole year is necessary along with his daily required supplements which will help him to perform better during the training sessions and the



Amur al Khanjari (centre) with coach Mazin al Badri (right) during Tokyo Olympics.

top events. Presence of physio therapist for the weightlifter is needed to maintain health and fitness ahead of taking part in any top weightlifting events or the training sessions”, the coach pointed out.

The Iraqi coach assured that he will update the top officials in the Ministry and OOC on the technical progress of the weightlifter. “I am optimistic that Amur will get the required support as the Ministry recently established a ministerial committee for the athletes of high performance”, he concluded.

Amur al Khanjari made his debut in Tokyo 2020 Olympics last month as runner-up in men's 81kg weightlifting group B event and 10th overall in the category. The 20-year-old managed to register his personal best record in his debut as he lifted a total 317 kg adding 4 kg to his previous record.

In brief

CHICAGO



VENUS OUSTED IN OPENING MATCH AT CHICAGO WOMEN'S OPEN

Former world number one Venus Williams crashed out of the WTA Chicago Women's Open on Monday, losing in straight sets to Taiwan's Hsieh Su-Wei, 6-2, 6-3.

The seven-time Grand Slam winner Williams, who is the oldest player in the draw at 41, spent just 67 minutes on the court in a one-sided opening round match at the Washington Park tennis facility on Chicago's South Side.

Williams is now just 3-9 on the season and has seen her ranking drop to 147 in the world. Of those nine losses this season, two have been against the 125th-ranked Anna Karolina Schmiedlova.

BERLIN



MBAPPE SHOULD STAY AT PSG: HENRY

Thierry Henry hopes Kylian Mbappe remains at Paris Saint-Germain amid growing links with Real Madrid.

Mbappe has long been tipped to join Madrid and speculation is continuing to claim the La Liga giants will try to prise the Frenchstar from PSG before the transfer window closes, while Manchester United and Liverpool have also been linked.

PSG forward Mbappe is in the final year of his contract in Paris, where the 2018 World Cup winner is no closer to re-signing despite the arrival of Lionel Messi.

French great Henry, who played for Monaco like Mbappe before starring for Arsenal and Barcelona, wants the 22-year-old to stay at PSG.

BUENOS AIRES



ARGENTINA CALL UP MESSI FOR WC QUALIFIER AGAINST BRAZIL

Superstar Lionel Messi was called up on Monday to the Argentina squad due to face his new Paris Saint-Germain team-mate Neymar and Brazil in a World Cup qualifier next month.

The crunch Conmebol encounter on September 5 will mark the first time the two icons face each other as PSG teammates, and will come less than two months after Messi inspired Argentina to a 1-0 victory over Brazil in the Copa America final.

The highly-anticipated encounter is sandwiched between two other World Cup qualifiers, with Argentina playing Venezuela on September 2 and Bolivia a week later.

Diaz gets Milan off the mark

MILAN: AC Milan opened their Serie A campaign on Monday with a 1-0 win at Sampdoria as coach Stefano Pioli fielded a host of new signings including Olivier Giroud.

Giroud, who turns 35 next month, is expected to make a sizeable impact for the Rossoneri alongside the club's other ageing star Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

As the towering Swede recovers from knee surgery, Pioli will hope France's second-highest scorer of all time can make as big an impact as he did at Chelsea, helping the Blues to the Champions League title last season.

With Milan back in the Champions League for the first time since 2013/14, a reliable presence in front of goal could be just what Pioli's team need.

There was a new presence too between the goalposts, with Mike Maignan, recruited from French champions Lille to try to fill the outsize boots of Italy's Euro 2020 winner Gianluigi Donnarumma, now with Paris Saint-Germain.

Looking assured in his new surroundings it was Maignan's long pass that set up the only goal of the game, Davide Calabria then providing the assist with Sampdoria keeper Emil Audero unable to cope with Brahim Diaz's low shot.

The Spanish midfielder joined on loan from Real Madrid last season and that has been extended



AC Milan's Spanish midfielder Brahim Diaz (R) celebrates after scoring against Sampdoria in Genova. — Reuters

for two more years.

With Sampdoria marking Giroud out of the game, the French forward was given little chance to open his Milan account.

Towards the end Piolo blooded another of his summer intake, Alessandro Florenzi, who completed his season-long loan

move from Roma at the weekend.

CAGLIARI FIGHT BACK

Earlier, former Paris Saint-Germain midfielder Thiago Motta had hopes of opening his second stint as a Serie A manager with victory, when Spezia led Cagliari 2-0 with an hour played.

The ex-Italy international, a

successor to Vincenzo Italiano, was back in the dugout for the first time in 18 months after his first managerial role at Genoa ended after 10 games in the sack.

Emmanuel Gyasi put his new club into an early lead, with Simone Bastoni doubling up on 58 minutes.

But home side Cagliari were back in it when Joao Pedro scored in the 62nd minute, and levelled from the penalty spot four minutes later. — AFP

Italian Serie A results on Monday: Cagliari 2 (Pedro 62, 66-pen) Spezia 2 (Gyasi 7, Bastoni 58) Sampdoria 0 AC Milan 1 (Diaz 9)

Pakistan on top in second West Indies Test

KINGSTON, Jamaica: Pakistan threw down the gauntlet to the West Indies on the penultimate day of their two-match Test series on Monday, setting the hosts 329 to win as the visitors chase a series-levelling victory at Sabina Park.

West Indies will start Tuesday's final day at 49 for one, 280 runs away from the target as Pakistan bid to square the series after losing a thriller by one wicket in the first Test at the same venue.

A fourth day's play almost completely dominated by the visitors saw Shaheen Shah Afridi claim Test-best innings figures of six for 51 as the West Indies were routed for 150 in the first innings just after the lunch interval.

Building on a healthy advantage of 152, the Pakistanis threw caution to the wind in racing to 176 for six at better than a run-a-ball through the afternoon, declaring for the second time in the match when captain Babar Azam was dismissed to give their bowlers more than 90 minutes to attack the home side's top order.

However, the West Indies opening pair of skipper Kraigg Brathwaite and Kieran Powell were negotiating that potentially tricky period comfortably until Powell was a run out victim of his own carelessness in completing a third run.

It left Brathwaite and Alzarri Joseph, nightwatchman for the second day in a row, to reach the close.

Resuming at the overnight position of 39 for three in reply to the tourists' first innings effort of 302 for nine declared, the home side lost their last six wickets for 45 runs to be dismissed shortly after lunch as 21-year-old Shaheen



Mohammad Abbas of Pakistan celebrates the dismissal of Joshua de Silva of West Indies. — AFP

reinforced his domination of the Caribbean batsmen to take his wicket tally in the series to 14.

"For me it was about keeping a good line throughout because with the support of the other bowlers we always felt we had a chance," said Shaheen.

As impressively as Shaheen bowled, it was Mohammad Abbas who triggered the pivotal collapse with a three-wicket burst in the last half-hour of the morning session as the West Indies crashed from 105 for four to 116 for eight.

Abbas, who had gone wicketless before that spell, made amends with the wickets of top-scorer Nkrumah Bonner (37) and Kyle Mayers off successive balls before adding Joshua da Silva in the penultimate over before lunch.

Shaheen, who disposed of nightwatchman Joseph swiftly at the start of the day, joined in the midday clatter of wickets by having Jermaine Blackwood taken for 33 by a diving Fawad Alam at gully.

Bonner and Blackwood put on

60 for the fifth wicket in the only period of play when the Pakistan bowlers appeared to be growing in frustration.

Their effort could not be sustained though, and having taken the first two wickets of the innings late on the third day, Shaheen terminated the bold hitting of Jason Holder and had Kemar Roach taken at mid-on to complete an effective mopping up job in the early afternoon.

Emboldened by their dominant position in starting the second

innings with a lead of 152 runs, Abid Ali and Imran Butt cut loose to put on 70 by just the 10th over of the second innings.

Both fell before tea but Pakistan continued to press the accelerator, even promoting Hasan Ali to provide some hefty blows although their efforts were frustrated by negative West Indies tactics which earned Brathwaite a sharp lecture from umpire Joel Wilson. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

Pakistan 1st Innings - 302-9 decl	
West Indies 1st Innings	
K Brathwaite b Shaheen Afridi	4
K Powell lbw Shaheen Afridi	5
N Bonner c M Rizwan b M Abbas	37
R Chase b Faheem Ashraf	10
A Joseph c Babar Azam b Shaheen	4
J Blackwood c Fawad Alam b Shaheen	33
K Mayers c M Rizwan b M Abbas	0
J Holder c M Rizwan b Shaheen	26
J da Silva lbw M Abbas	6
K Roach c Babar b Shaheen	8
J Seales not out	0
Extras (lb-10, nb-6, w-1)	17
Total (51.3 overs, all out)	150
Fall of wickets: 1-8, 2-9, 3-34, 4-45, 5-105, 6-105, 7-109, 8-116, 9-143	
Bowling: Mohammad Abbas 18-6-44-3, Shaheen Shah Afridi 17.3-7-51-6, Hasan Ali 8-1-30-0, Faheem Ashraf 7-4-14-1, Nauman Ali 1-0-1-0	
Pakistan 2nd Innings	
Imran Butt c Bonner b Mayers	37
Abid Ali c sub b Joseph	29
Azhar Ali c Blackwood b Brathwaite	22
Babar Azam c Bonner b Joseph	33
Hasan Ali c Da Silva b Holder	17
Faheem Ashraf lbw Holder	9
Mohammad Rizwan not out	10
Extras (b-5, lb-6, nb-1, w-7)	19
Total (27.2 overs, 6 wkts declared)	176
Fall of wickets: 1-70, 2-90, 3-107, 4-145, 5-160, 6-176	
Bowling: K Roach 3-1-11-0, J Seales 3-0-32-0, J Holder 6-0-27-2, A Joseph 4-2-0-24-2, K Mayers 7-0-43-1, K Brathwaite 4-0-28-1	
West Indies 2nd Innings	
K Brathwaite not out	17
K Powell run out	23
A Joseph not out	8
Extras (lb-1)	1
Total (19 overs, 1 wkt)	49
Bowling: Mohammad Abbas 5-1-18-0, Shaheen Shah Afridi 5-3-5-0, Hasan Ali 5-2-20-0, Faheem Ashraf 4-3-5-0	

MAQSOOD, KHUSHI STAR IN OMAN'S THRILLING WIN OVER MUMBAI

SHAHZAD RAZA
MUSCAT, AUG 24

Oman rode on Muhammed Naseem Khushi's hurricane 39 off just 12 balls to beat a fighting Mumbai by two wickets in the first of three-match T20 series here at Oman Cricket Ground One in Amerat on Tuesday.

Khushi slammed five huge sixes and a four in no time to take the game away from Mumbai who looked to be in pole position to win the game when Oman was in trouble at 7 for 101 in the 17th over. Oman sealed the win in the 19th over when Khushi whacked Mohit Avasthi for a six over mid wicket. Captain Zeeshan Maqsood laid the foundation for Khushi's late onslaught with a typically solid 50 off 39 that included 4 sixes.

Oman captain said his team had worked hard and was enjoying playing in home conditions after a long time.

"We have had a long summer and boys are in great shape after months of training. Mumbai bowled exceptionally well to put us under pressure but I knew we had the players to take the fight deep and Khushi finished the game in great style", said Maqsood.

"I must thank the team management for the wonderful support given to us all the way and we hope to do well in pursuit of our main goals this season", he added.

Oman's new ball bowlers Muhammed Nadeem and Kaleemullah put Mumbai under pressure by taking early wickets. Maqsood's accurate left-arm spin fetched him two wickets as Mumbai was restricted to 131 for 9 in 20 overs.

Oman's start was equally precarious as it was reduced to 88 for



Oman appeals for a wicket against Mumbai at Al Amerat. – Faisal al Balushi



We have had a long summer and boys are in great shape after months of training. Mumbai bowled exceptionally well to put us under pressure but I knew we had the players to take the fight deep and Khushi finished the game in great style

ZEESHAN MAQSOOD
Oman captain

5 in 13 overs.

However, Maqsood and Khushi kept their calm amid the ruins, cutting loose occasional to keep the run rate under check. Khushi's late onslaught then powered Oman to a nail-biting win over Mumbai, which is packed with first class cricketers including those who have represented India in various formats.

The two teams will lock horns again in the second T20 on Thursday and the third and last on Friday before playing a four-match one-day series on August 29, 31, September 2 and 3.

BRIEF SCORES: Mumbai 131 for 9 in 20 overs (Aakarshit Gome 33 – 4x4, Hardik Tamore 23- 2x6, Shams Mulani 19 – 1x6. Muhammed Nadeem 3-23, Zeeshan Maqsood 2-17, Kaleemullah 2-21) lost to Oman (Zeeshan Maqsood 50 – 2x4, 4x6, Naseem Khushi 39 not out – 1x4, 5x6. Shashank Attarde 2-23, Mohit Acasthi 2-32, Shams Mulani 2-34) by 2 wickets.

Kail, Shakeel win top Premier Division awards

SHAHZAD RAZA
MUSCAT, AUG 24

Kail Khalid of Al Turki NMC and Shakeel Ahmad of IT Works walked away with the best batsman and best bowler awards for the Premier Division season 2020-21 while Zeeshan Siddiqui (best batsman) and Aqil Khan (best bowler) won the top awards for A Division at a prize ceremony held by Oman Cricket at OC Ground One in Al Amerat on Monday.

Sarco's Sandip Patel received the consolation prize for his brilliant bowling during the season.

The prizes were presented by Oman Cricket Board Directors including Madhu Jesrani, OC Secretary, Kiran Asher, Treasurer, Dilip Mehta and Anil Khimji, Director, Khimji Ramdas, in the presence of Duleep Mendis, Chief Development Officer, Oman Cricket.

Premier Division League champion Muscat CT was awarded the winner's trophy while the runner-up prize went to Al Turki NMC.

A Division toppler Arabian

OMAN CRICKET ALSO RECOGNISES A DIVISION, OMANI TOPPERS



A Division Winner



Best Bowler - Premier



Best Batsman - A Division



Best Batsman - Premier

Region Travel and Tourism (ARTT) was awarded the winner's trophy while Sarco received the runner-up prize.

In a mood to acknowledge the top performers of the season 2020-21, Oman Cricket also presented awards to Omani players who had an excellent season. OCT Al Hail dominated the evening, claiming most of the top awards.

Of Omani players representing one team, Khalid Rahim of OCT Al Hail B was adjudged best batsman while his team-mates Samir Faizu and Suhaib Abdul Ghani received the best bowler and best all-rounder awards respectively. Sharing the honour, Warith al Balushi of OCT Mabela was also presented best all-rounder award for his excellent performance with the bat and ball.

Representing two teams, Rafiq Mohammed won the best batsman award playing for OCT Al Nahdha and Orient Travels. Zubair Ali Akbar (OCT Ruwi/Y Horizon) and Shuaib Ismail (OCT Ruwi/Maniz Azad) claimed best bowler and best all-rounder awards.

business

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Nearly
14,000 truck
operating
cards issued
in H1 2021



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology issued through the national platform for land transport services ‘Naql’ as many as 13,944 land transport vehicle operating cards and 139 exceptional cargo transport permits during the first half of this year. The ministry also approved 413 licences for land transport activities through the “Invest Easy” portal. The ‘Naql’ platform enables beneficiaries to obtain and renew transport vehicles registration cards, taxi licences and exceptional cargo permits. The platform is linked with the vehicle registration systems of the Royal Oman Police (ROP) and the “Invest Easy” portal to verify vehicles details and their licensed activities (for individuals or institutions). — ONA

SQU’s SERC unveils hybrid power project

KEY FEATURE: The hybrid system depends on a solar PV system, hydrogen fuel cell and a fossil fuel diesel generator

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 24

Global endeavours towards achieving sustainable development and ecological balance necessitate a focus on utilising renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind energy, to produce and store electrical power. This drive is one of the main factors associated with the establishment of the Hybrid Power Plant by the Sustainable Energy Research Centre at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). The experimental station is considered one of the most important of the centre’s projects as it seeks to conduct experiments related to energy security and efficiency while also minimising costs and reducing environmentally harmful emissions. The Hybrid Power Plant is equipped with state-of-the-art equipment and devices, including a Smart Micro-Grid System, Electrochemical Hydrogen Fuel Cells that operate through a methanol fuel reformer, and a Deionised Water System, in addition to providing cutting-edge laboratories for electrochemical experimentations and a methanol storage room. The plant also includes a diesel generator, a wind turbine, and both ground-mounted and



rooftop photovoltaic (PV) systems while continuing efforts are being made to ensure the plant has the necessary equipment to achieve its primary objectives. Through these efforts, the Sustainable Energy Research Centre remains at the forefront of research into the generation of electricity through renewable energy sources in place of diesel fuel, especially in rural areas. The construction of the hybrid plant has already progressed through several stages. The first began in 2017 with a research project entitled “Studying the Performance and Monitoring of Solar Photovoltaic Energy” conducted by a research team led by SQU’s Dr Rashid al Abri and Dr Amer al Hinai. The project was funded by Nafath Renewable Energy LLC. During this stage, the plant included a 4 kW ground-mounted

PV system combined with a 3 kW wind turbine, and storage batteries with power capacity of 900 Wh. The hybrid system was designed to operate in stand-alone mode or grid-connected to the SQU distribution network. In 2019, the second phase of the plant’s development was associated with a research project funded by Salalah Methanol Company LLC (currently OQ) and led again by Dr Amer al Hinai. The project focused on evaluating the potential for methanol to generate electricity in rural and remote areas in the Sultanate. The plant, at this stage, included a laboratory, researcher offices, methanol storage, and a water treatment and purification plant to produce distilled water that is used in the production of fuel-mix for the hydrogen fuel-cell. Current work at the plant encompasses a project that

includes 5 kilowatts hydrogen fuel cell equipped with methanol reformer, a 6 kW diesel generator, a 5 kW rooftop PV system, and 15 kWh lithium-ion storage batteries. In addition, the smart energy management system connects the integrated resources to the university’s distribution grid or can be operated as an isolated microgrid system that feeds the local loads in the plant. The project generally focuses on using methanol to generate electricity in an economical and eco-friendly way due to the low levels of harmful emissions. Following the conclusion of the first two phases of the plant’s construction, efforts have been geared first towards the evaluation of utilising methanol to generate electricity for rural and remote areas. The research team is working to integrate various energy

The Hybrid Power Plant is equipped with state-of-the-art equipment and devices, including a Smart Micro-Grid System, Electrochemical Hydrogen Fuel Cells that operate through a methanol fuel reformer, and a Deionised Water System, in addition to providing cutting-edge laboratories for electrochemical experimentations and a methanol storage room

sources to effectively produce electricity through the utilisation of renewable energy resources. In addition, a battery energy storage system will be used to mitigate energy fluctuations and stabilise the system. The hybrid system depends on a solar PV system, hydrogen fuel cell and a fossil fuel diesel generator. Batteries are used to store energy during excess production and can be reused during production shortfalls. It is intended that the Hybrid Power Plant will soon be operational and synchronised to the SQU distribution network. Efforts will continue to be extended towards the production of green methanol utilising renewable energy. (With inputs from ONA)

Black & Veatch in talks for role in Oman’s \$3.5 bn green hydrogen project

ENERGY HUB: Global firm finalising engagement plan with India’s ACME Group in delivery of world-scale clean energy venture at Duqm

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Leading global engineering, consulting and construction giant Black & Veatch says it is in discussion with the lead developer of a major clean energy project planned at the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Duqm in the southeast of Oman. On Monday, the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), which oversees the Sultanate’s SEZs and free zone developments, signed an agreement earmarking a sizable swathe of land for a world-scale Green Hydrogen & Green Ammonia project

promoted by ACME Group, India’s largest solar power developer. ACME has outlined plans for an integrated facility powered by 3 GWp of solar and 0.5 GWp of wind energy to produce 2,400 tonnes per day (TPD) of green ammonia equating to about 0.9 million tonnes annually. Black & Veatch, a leading player in the global renewable and green hydrogen space, has confirmed to the Observer that it is in talks with ACME Group in the implementation of the prestigious project. “Black & Veatch is very pleased to be in discussion with ACME in supporting the company’s green hydrogen and ammonia project in Oman. Black & Veatch is finalising its engagement plan with ACME for the various stages of the project,” a spokesperson from the company stated in response to a query from the newspaper. Earlier, in a press statement



ACME has outlined plans for an integrated facility powered by 3 GWp of solar and 0.5 GWp of wind energy to produce 2,400 tonnes per day (TPD) of green ammonia equating to about 0.9 million tonnes annually

following the signing of the land lease agreement with OPAZ, Manoj K Upadhyay, Founder and Chairman, ACME Group, commented: “The signing of land reservation agreement

will allow us to kick start pre-construction activities. We have hired environmental consultants and owner’s engineers Black & Veatch and we plan to start the construction at Oman as soon

we commission our first green hydrogen and green ammonia plant at Bikaner in India. The plant in Oman would be developed in phases and the first phase is likely to be commissioned by end of 2022.” Also present at the virtual event were Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Board of Directors of OPAZ, and Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman, and Jalal al Lawati, Director – Marketing, OPAZ. Collaborating with ACME Group as its partner in the Oman venture is the Oman Company for the Development of SEZ at Duqm SAOC (Tatweer), a wholly owned subsidiary of OPAZ. The two sides had signed an MoU to this effect in March. ACME Group is also in the process of establishing itself as a major player in India’s burgeoning renewables and green hydrogen industry. It is currently commissioning what is billed as

the world’s first integrated green hydrogen and green ammonia plant in Bikaner in northwest India. The Group also holds a portfolio of operational and under-construction solar projects of a total capacity of 6 GWp distributed across India. US-headquartered Black & Veatch already has a well-established presence in the Sultanate, notably in the power and water infrastructure sectors. Founded in 1915, Black & Veatch specialises in infrastructure development in energy, water, telecommunications, management consulting, federal and environmental markets. Services include conceptual and preliminary engineering services, engineering design, procurement, construction, financial management and asset management. The employee-owned company has more than 110 offices worldwide.

Muscat University launches Master’s Degree in Renewable Energy

MUSCAT: As part of its continuous support for renewable development projects in the Sultanate, Muscat University announced the launch of new academic programmes, including the Master of Renewable Energy Engineering which is offered for the first time in the Sultanate.

In addition, a further eight new programmes will be offered in the academic year 2021/2022.

These programmes consist of master’s, bachelor’s, advanced diplomas and diplomas in the fields of Transportation, Logistics, Engineering, Information Technology and Business Management. All programmes are designed to meet the needs of the Omani labour market.

The Faculty of Engineering is offering students the opportunity to study for a diploma, advanced diploma, or bachelor’s degree in chemical engineering and energy engineering.

While the faculty of Business and Management provides a diploma, an advanced diploma and bachelor’s qualifications in Accounting, Finance, Business



Administration and Marketing. The university is working towards offering a professional doctorate in business administration in association with a reputable UK university which will be the first of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman

In this regard, Khalil bin Abdullah al Khonji, Chairman

of the Board of Directors of Muscat University, said: “From the beginning Muscat University set out to provide a high-quality academic experience for its students aligned with the needs of a global economy forging pioneering paths in higher education.

The founders and members of the Board of Directors worked on strategies to enhance the educational services provided by the university in order to reach a high level of academic quality and research output. The launch of this new suite of programmes reflects the continuous development and modernisation of the Sultanate based on the country’s development plans.”

Professor Khamis bin Hamad al Yahyai, Vice Chancellor of Muscat University, commented: “We are very happy with this launch of new programmes and specialisations, some of which are being introduced for the first time in the Sultanate. The new programmes came after a thorough study of market needs listening to the aspirations and desires of partners and the business community in line with the objectives of The Sultanate’s Vision 2040. The programmes were designed to meet the needs of a diversified and sustainable economy based on knowledge and innovation in undergraduate and postgraduate studies.”



Imtidad, Dar Al Atta’a collaborate to support community welfare

MUSCAT: With a solid commitment towards helping improve the quality of life of those in need within our community, National Finance has once again partnered with Dar Al Atta’a under ‘Imtidad’, an independent wing for the company’s CSR and sustainable initiatives.

Dedicated to creating positive, long-term and sustainable impacts in the local community, National Finance has been a key contributor to Dar Al Atta’a’s charity programmes, particularly for family welfare, ever since 2018. Under the most recent partnership, National Finance

joins hands with Dar Al Atta’a in order to support families with low incomes through sustainable initiatives that focus on helping families with limited income.

“We believe that by maintaining a strong culture of sustainability, giving and community service, we will pave the path for a brighter future. Our partnerships with organisations like Dar Al Atta’a, enable us to be a part of something bigger, expand our reach and extend the support to those that need it the most”, said Ali al Mani, Acting CEO at National Finance.

Radisson Hotel Group thanks MoH healthcare professionals

MUSCAT: In support to healthcare professionals that worked tirelessly during the pandemic, our hotels in Muscat welcome nurses with complimentary dining gift certificates.

Radisson Hotels in Muscat have opened their restaurants’ doors to the nurses of Ministry of Health in gratitude for their round-the-clock efforts to fight Covid-19. Nurses on the frontline attending to Covid-19 patients have been working through the most trying circumstances to save lives and offer care to those affected by the virus.

The initiative, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, is to celebrate the hard work and dedication of nurses. Maha al Maskari, Senior Specialised Critical Care Nurse from Risk Management Office in

DGPHE-MoH said this dining experience will be welcome relief for the nurses enduring long hours under challenging circumstances. “Knowing that there is a nice meal waiting for you at the end of a long shift can make all the difference in the world right now.”

“During this crisis, we have seen so many nurses working in the most challenging circumstances, sacrificing their own needs for the greater cause. They truly are frontline heroes”, said Panos Panagis, District Director of RHG Oman. “We are honoured to extend our hospitality across our Muscat properties — Hormuz Grand Muscat, A Radisson Collection Hotel, Radisson Blu Hotel, Muscat; Park Inn by Radisson Muscat to them during this difficult time.”

Ahlibank’s graduate development programme to prepare individuals to excel in banking career

MUSCAT: Reflecting its commitment to empowering young people and developing their abilities to enhance their career opportunities in the banking industry, ahlibank has announced the launch of the 7th edition of its renowned Graduate Development Programme (GDP).

The programme aims at providing jobs for the aspiring banking professionals in several different disciplines of the industry, after undergoing an intensive training and leadership led coaching that allows them to obtain basic knowledge suitable for a lucrative and rewarding career in Oman’s banking industry.

Ever since its inception, ahlibank has put concerted focus on training and developing human resources as one of the key elements of its operational strategies, and as an important pillar of its growth. The bank believes in effectively



contributing to the national agenda as outlined in Oman Vision 2040, of meeting the needs of the labour market, through job creation and skill development of the local population, especially the young national workforce.

In line with the same, the Graduate Development Programme, an annual initiative,

is designed to accelerate the participant’s career growth and prepares them to take up leadership roles at the bank.

Speaking on the success of the programme, Mohammed al Mufargi, AGM-Head of Human Resources ahlibank said, “Creating jobs for Omani youth is a top priority for the bank, and its efforts

have been reflected in supporting the government’s direction to develop youth skills and benefit from their capabilities by providing a platform to help them grow and prosper faster. In line with Oman Vision 2040, which adopts a strategic plan to promote training and operational programmes for youth, the bank affirms its commitment to contributing to the development of young people’s skills, encouraging and guiding them towards improving their professional performance for a brighter future.

Ahlibank’s advanced levels of skill development, and training to meet the modern-day requirements of the banking industry sets a benchmark by not only preparing the young graduates for a banking career but also by giving them a first-hand experiential with full-time job offers.”

Go places on every journey in the Toyota Land Cruiser



MUSCAT: The Land Cruiser’s impressive capability and prowess makes it the finest SUV that surpasses expectations and goes beyond to make a mark on any terrain. Throughout its 70-year history, it has served as an indispensable tool that supports people’s livelihoods in remote destinations, contributes to humanitarian aid and disaster relief efforts, and enriches people’s lives through experiences only the Land Cruiser can provide.

The 2022 Land Cruiser is equipped with a choice of three powertrain options, including two newly developed V6 twin-turbo engines. The V6 twin-turbo 3.5-litre petrol engine achieves class-leading performance that

surpasses that of a conventional V8, producing 409 hp and up to 650 nm. Meanwhile, the V6 twin-turbo engine 3.3-litre diesel variant, which will be available to buy in the region soon, is capable of 302 hp and up to 700 nm.

Both of these newly developed engines are mated to a 10-speed automatic transmission. The vehicle is also available with a naturally aspirated 4.0-liter V6 petrol engine that produces 271 hp and up to 385 nm mated to a 6-speed automatic transmission. Additionally, the vehicle is available with Adaptive Variable Suspension System (AVS), the All-Wheel Drive Integrated Management (AIM) concept, which delivers integrated control of the vehicle’s drive force,

AWD, suspension, braking and steering systems according to driving conditions to enhance driving pleasure.

The all-new Land Cruiser is equipped with the latest off-road driver assistance features, including the new 3D-Multi Terrain Monitor (3D-MTM) assists the driver in determining the road conditions around the vehicle, a first for Toyota that facilitates safer and more confident low-speed manoeuvring.

A new AUTO mode enhances the capabilities of Multi-Terrain Select by adjusting according to road conditions such as sand, rock, dirt, and mud. The vehicle also features crawl control and turn assist functions.



Regulators propose strict measures to boost diversity



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

THE UK'S TOP THREE FINANCIAL REGULATORS SAID THAT THEY HAD COLLABORATED TO DEVELOP A MORE ROBUST STANDARD ON EQUALITY, TO ENSURE WIDESPREAD CHANGE ACROSS THE INDUSTRY

In a sweeping set of policy recommendations, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), the Bank of England and the Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA) said firms in the financial district of London — known as the “City” — have not done enough to increase diversity and narrow the gender pay gap.

These plans could be tailored to specific categories of firms to ensure proportionate impact, they added. Financial services firms in the UK should be required to link pay to metrics on diversity and inclusion and make those at the top directly accountable for falling short, the financial regulators have put forward.

Proposals to combat the lack of change included using targets for representing unreserved

groups, and revising the regulators’ approach to tackling diversity and inclusion in areas of non-financial misconduct, such as workplace sexism, homophobia and sexual harassment.

The UK’s top three financial regulators said last month in a discussion paper that they had collaborated to develop a more robust standard on equality, to ensure widespread change across the industry.

Data included in the paper showed that last year, only 13 of the chief executives at the top of FTSE 350 companies were women, or 5 per cent, while female representation at senior management reached 32 per cent on average.

While the statistics for women have been improving over the years, the regulators said, “the

situation for ethnic minorities shows signs of going into reverse.”

Chief Executive of the FCA, Nikhil Rathi, said in a statement alongside the paper: “We are concerned that the lack of diversity and inclusion within firms can weaken the quality of decision-making.”

The authorities have proposed collecting data from City firms about the make up of their workforce, issuing a survey to help develop the proposals and test how companies can provide data to support regular reporting on diversity and inclusion.

Deputy governor for financial stability at the Bank of England, Sir Jon Cunliffe, said: “Groupthink and overconfidence are often at the root of financial crisis.” He added: “Enabling a diversity of thought and allowing for an array of

perspectives to coexist supports a resilient, safe and effective financial system.”

Industry initiatives to improve diversity such as the Women in Finance Charter and the Race at Work Charter have largely relied on “exerting peer pressure for change”, the two leaders said in a joint statement alongside PRA Deputy Governor Sam Wood.

More than half the firms that signed up to boost gender diversity as part of the Women in Finance Charter last year failed to do so, including companies such as Black Rock, Deloitte and PwC, as well as regulators themselves, including the Bank of England.

Rathi admitted last month the FCA also has “more work to do” on achieving an inclusive environment inside the watchdog, falling behind its target on female representation

and ethnic minority action.

The FCA has a target for women to make up 50 per cent of its senior leadership positions by 2025. The regulator’s top team was 40 per cent female in September last year, with no change from a year earlier, while the percentage of those from minority ethnic backgrounds rose from 7 to 10 per cent.

The pandemic may have caused a ‘slow down’ in the fight for diversity within the financial sector.

But while the crisis may have shifted some attention away from the issue and can lead to the retreat of those who would otherwise strive to make a change, finding ways to maximise female access to professional development must remain a priority in every sector. *(The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK)*

Oil extends gains on demand outlook, outages

LONDON: Oil prices rose on Tuesday, extending sharp gains on a bullish demand outlook as Mexico suffered a big production outage and US regulators issued their first full approval for a Covid-19 vaccine. Brent crude oil futures were up \$1.09, or 1.6 per cent, at \$69.84 a barrel by 1223 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate gained 97 cents, or 1.5 per cent, to \$66.61. Both benchmarks jumped more than 5 per cent on Monday, helped by a weaker dollar, after marking their biggest week of losses in more than nine months last week.

“Even though the pandemic resurges and fuels health system concerns, economically harmful containment measures seem rather unlikely, not least as the vaccines prove their merits”, Norbert Rucker, Analyst at bank



A petrol station attendant prepares to refuel a car in Rome. — Reuters

Julius Baer said.

Also supporting oil prices was a fire on an oil platform off Mexico on Sunday that killed five workers and took 421,000 barrels per day of production — about a quarter of the country’s overall output — off line. The US Department of Energy said on Monday it would sell up to 20 million barrels of crude from the emergency oil reserve to comply with legislation, with deliveries to take place between October 1 and December 15.

— Reuters

Delta blow knocks wind out of Asia’s economic recovery

TOKYO: Asia’s robust economic recovery from last year’s coronavirus low is losing momentum as a surge in Covid-19 cases sees shops empty again and factories close, dimming prospects for corporate profit growth after a blockbuster half year.

The rapid spread of the highly infectious Delta variant of the novel coronavirus and low vaccination rates have caught here much of the region off-guard, especially in emerging markets, even as economies in Europe and North America reopen.

“It’s clear that economies across the region are suffering more from Covid-19 than they previously did. The biggest factor is that Asia is poorly



Few people are seen inside a shopping mall in Jakarta, Indonesia. — Reuters

vaccinated”, said Rob Carnell, Asia-Pacific head of research at ING in Singapore.

While year-on-year corporate and economic indicators continue to show strong recovery, flattered by comparisons with 2020’s sharp declines, quarter-on-quarter indicators reveal flagging

momentum.

Asia’s biggest firms and companies are likely to post their first quarter-on-quarter profit decline in six quarters in July-September, falling 6.19 per cent, showed a Reuters calculation based on Refinitiv Eikon analyst data of 1,069 companies — Reuters

House sales slump 62 per cent in UK

LONDON: House sales in Britain slumped by nearly two thirds last month as activity cooled after the end of the full stamp duty holiday, new figures have shown. HM Revenue and Customs said an estimated 82,110 residential property sales took place in July, down 62 per cent on June’s record levels.

It compares with a frenzied June for Britain’s property market, when HMRC reported 213,120 sales, the highest monthly British total since the introduction of the statistics in April 2005. Following last month’s stamp duty deadline, “an expected but noticeable decrease has been observed within provisional July 2021 UK residential transactions statistics.” — dpa

S&P Global Platts to launch six new carbon credit indices

DECARBONISATION: New voluntary carbon credit and co-benefits indices bring transparency to emerging environmental commodity space

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 24

S&P Global Platts, the leading independent provider of information and benchmark prices for the commodities and energy markets, announced on Tuesday that it has launched six new CARBEX carbon credit indices with its partner Viridios AI, an environmental technology company that has built artificial intelligence (AI) technology to bring pricing transparency to the emerging environmental commodity space.

The six new carbon credit indices reflect the value of different types of voluntary carbon credits and enhance market transparency in the complex voluntary carbon credit and co-benefit markets.

Co-benefits are attributes of carbon credits which provide

evidence of meeting the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) defined by the United Nations General Assembly, including gender equality, clean water and biodiversity.

In partnership with Viridios, Platts has launched the following six AI-driven carbon credit indices:

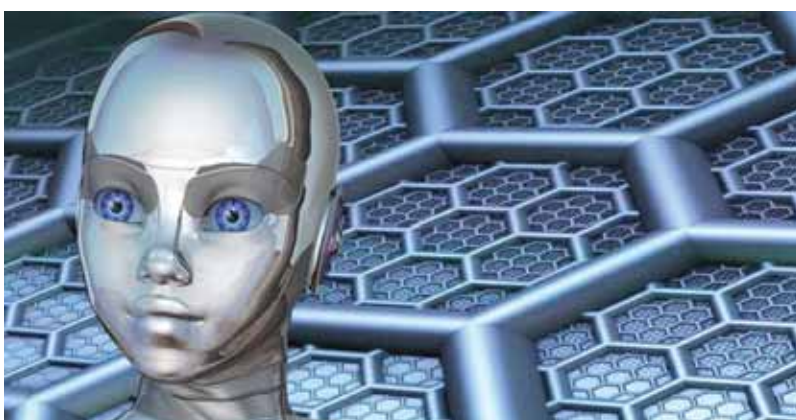
(i) **Household Devices CARBEX:** Projects that are focused on sustainable development within individual communities by upgrading basic needs with cleaner alternatives.

This index includes Cookstoves and Water Purification projects.

(ii) **Soil CARBEX:** Projects that focus on improvements to agriculture and commit to best practice land-use management, resulting in the increased sequestration of CO2 from the atmosphere and the development of soil organic carbon.

This index includes regenerative farming involving a range of activities from residue and nutrient management (mulching, composting, cover crops, etc) to agronomic practices (no-till/low-till, crop rotation, agroforestry, etc.).

(iii) **Eco Create CARBEX:** Projects that are focused on carbon



sequestration through activities such as reforestation, afforestation and wetlands restoration.

(iv) **Eco Create CARBEX Biodiverse:** Projects that are focused on carbon sequestration as outlined in Eco Create CARBEX above, but also include critical additional SDGs protecting biodiversity on both land and in water.

(v) **Eco Protect CARBEX:** Projects that focus on avoiding deforestation and forest degradation. This index includes REDD/REDD+ projects

(vi) **Eco Protect CARBEX Social:** Projects that focus on avoiding deforestation and forest degradation as outlined in Eco Protect CARBEX above, but also meet additional SDGs that

encourage sustainable economic development such as No Poverty, Quality Education, Gender Equality and Clean Water & Sanitation.

Paula VanLaningham, Global Head of Carbon at S&P Global Platts said: “We are pleased to work alongside Viridios to launch these six new AI-driven carbon indices, amid a rapidly evolving and complex voluntary carbon market where data-backed intelligence is in significant demand.

This partnership brings to market the best of Platts’ longstanding experience developing robust and trusted price assessments with Viridios’ proven environmental AI technology representing transactions across the range of carbon projects

around the world.

We are confident the creation of this new series of indices will provide market participants greater transparency into the market value of voluntary carbon credits and their associated co-benefits, and play a growing role in supporting the energy transition.”

Marcelo Labre, CEO of Viridios AI says: “We have developed artificial intelligence software that generates current values for a range of carbon credits. The values generated are based on historic relationships between a broad data set of carbon credit transactions and related commodity prices.

We see our partnership with S&P Global Platts as another important step in bringing value discovery and transparency to the carbon markets.”

Viridios AI software has been trained using Platts commodity and S&P Global Dow Jones Indices data, combined with Viridios’ extensive database of carbon credit transaction data. It will then generate daily Carbon Index Prices for explicitly defined parameters, based on daily inputs.

The new CARBEX carbon credit indices will differ from Platts traditional price assessments,

which reflect market activity at the time of assessment.

Instead, the AI will generate daily indices that reflect the complex set of relationships between traded credits and specified underlying benchmarks over the previous five years.

Platts and Viridios will review the inputs and outputs periodically to ensure the indices remain relevant and invite feedback on the suitability of the published indices. Benchmark inputs have been chosen based on an AI-driven analysis of the strongest correlations with value changes across the carbon complex.

The new CARBEX carbon credit indices will be standard-neutral, global and reflect current year vintage and delivery. The CARBEX carbon credit indices complement Platts’ growing suite of voluntary carbon price assessments.

These include the first Platts CEC, which reflect the daily value of CORSIA-eligible carbon credits, and was successfully launched in January 2021. Platts coverage of the voluntary carbon market was further expanded this year to cover household devices and nature-based credits, amongst others.

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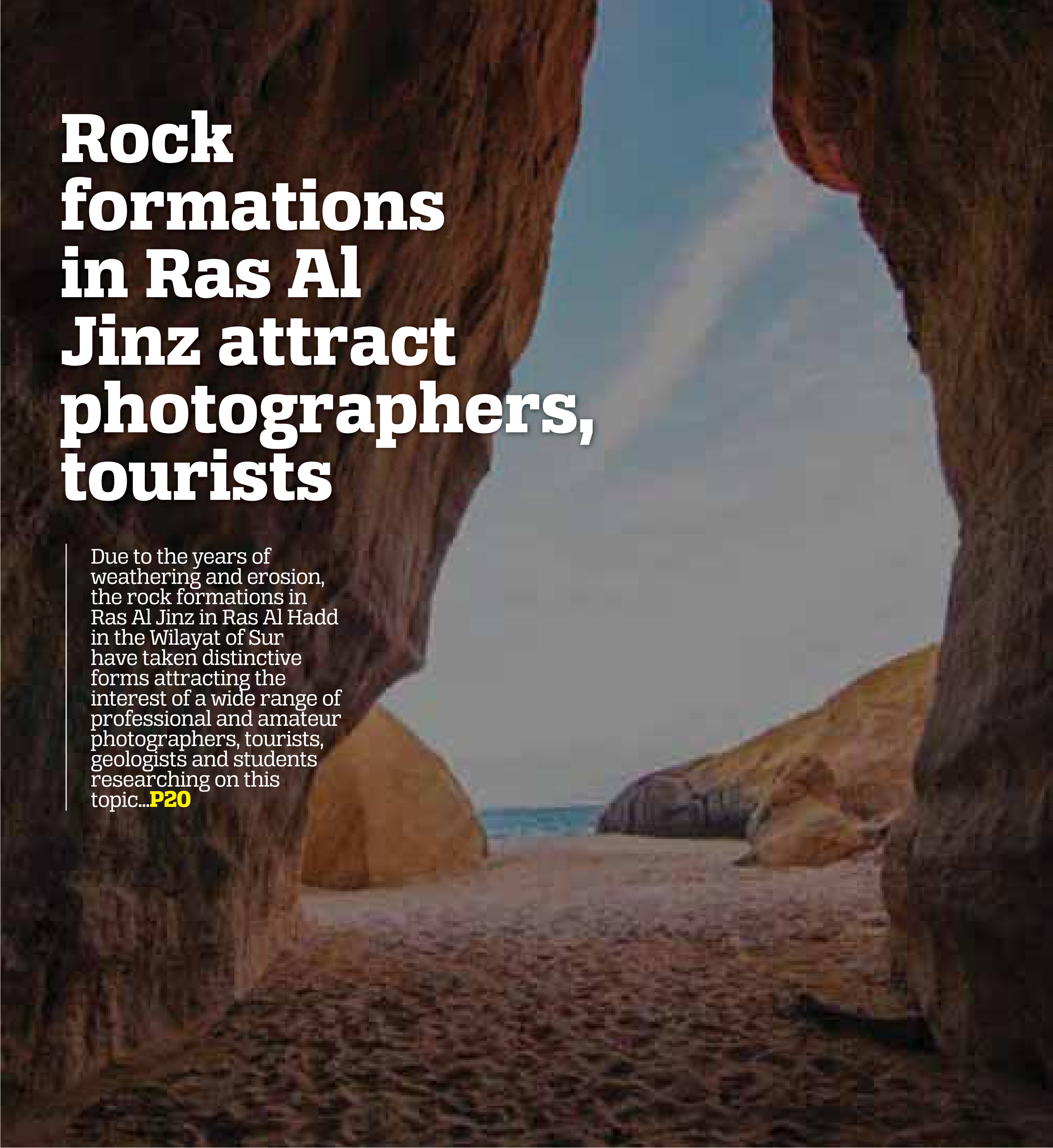
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features



Rock formations in Ras Al Jinz attract photographers, tourists

Due to the years of weathering and erosion, the rock formations in Ras Al Jinz in Ras Al Hadd in the Wilayat of Sur have taken distinctive forms attracting the interest of a wide range of professional and amateur photographers, tourists, geologists and students researching on this topic...**P20**

TRAVEL TALES

READ



GROUND ZERO
BY ALAN GRATZ

Parallel storylines of Brandon and Reshmina take place on Sept. 11th, in 2001 and 2019.

Room without a view - French war bunker reborn as guesthouse

A BUNKER BUILT by German troops in northern France during World War Two has been restored and refitted as an underground guesthouse. The northern coast is still strewn with fortifications left by the German army, which built up a so-called Atlantic Wall to try to fend off Allied Forces. In Saint-Pabu, on the Breton coast, concrete bunkers are half-buried along the

sandy beaches in an area that once operated as a radar station. Serge Colliou bought up a plot of land around one of them and spent 18 months digging out and renovating the 400-square-metre structure, turning it into a rental for up to eight people, complete with a bar and living room. "We adapted (the bunker) while preserving a certain

feel," Colliou said. "We wanted to give the building a second life, so we are not going to live in the past forever. We saved some aspects, you know where you are, there are historic cues, but this isn't a museum either." War-time touches in Bunker L479 include helmets, reproduction guns and signs on the walls. Both German and French guests have stayed there since it opened a year ago, Colliou said. Some mayors have tried to remove bunkers and other remains from the coastline, in case there is a danger to swimmers. Others in Saint-Nazaire, La Rochelle, Brest and other areas have taken steps to restore the historic sites.



"We are starting to pre-serve those famous bunkers and it is a good thing, but we cannot save them all," said

Herve Farrant, a bunker specialist and author who began to explore the structures in the 1980s. — **Reuters**



Exploring relations through travel photography

BY KABEER YOUSUF

Do the peaks of Oman and India have something in common? Do they share the emotions of people of two lands? How are the vibes being exchanged when a person meets with another for the first time?

How does the chemistry work out between two strangers and what makes relations last longer or break up sooner?

These are the questions being asked continuously by a discerning traveller who is passionate about capturing flashy moments in the form of images and preserve them for a lifetime. And he has been travelling for a pretty long time by now.

Meet Sanjoy Sengupta, a wanderlust who eyes the world through his travelling expeditions and unlike many of his peer photographers who do more or less the same follows a unique style of capturing. Before capturing the images, he speaks not only to fellow humans but also to every existing entity on the earth.

Being a Chemical Engineer by profession, he intensely looks at the meeting of two personalities as the contact of two chemical substances. In other words, he is keen enough to understand the mystery of human chemistry. Accordingly, Sanjoy portrays the glimpse of humans, who might be strangers and their accidental assemblage lasts for a split second, he captures alternate truths about themselves that were hidden not only to others but perhaps even to themselves. That is his uniqueness.

His lens captures the rising of soft sand in spirals and the riding on berserk camels in the desert. His photos of dunes seemed to move as the wind whistled over them, ruffling them like fingers running through thick tresses. His images of landscapes, black-and-white, travel photography as well as Astrophotography show his own style. It is no exaggeration to say that Sanjoy's name is often seen, heard in the world of Photography. He has been always a forerunner in the list of awardees for photography competitions anywhere in the world for the past half-century.

The myriad images of this avid traveller from his years of exploring the Sultanate of Oman are now put in the form of a book and will soon hit the stands.



The Andhra Pradesh Photography Akademi (APA), where he has been a member for some time, will be bringing out the book titled "Eyeing Through Travel" by Sanjoy Sengupta with his rarest and invaluable photographs on the occasion of world photography day August 19, 2021.

"We haven't met each other but we share new photos every week, for sure. Sanjoy was fascinated by the camera during his school days. Settling in the profession and focusing on his ambitions, he rose to the level of being on par with those in travel photography on the other hand. Received honours from international photography organisations such as RPS, PSA, FIAP. He is in Director-Mentor service in

the Photographic Society of America. He excelled in that institution by winning the Grand Master honour. His photo exhibitions have been held abroad in Oman, Europe, Mongolia, Bangladesh, other continents, besides in India.

Over 7,000 photos of him have been selected for exhibition in 85 countries of the world in the last five years. He is the second Indian who received the Grand Master Award from the Photographic Society of America.

Sanjoy Sengupta has been an Akademi advisor as well as a lifelong member of the APA and has won honours from the Photography Society of America.

"I always cherish his brilliant association with the APA and appreciate his encouragement to fellow Akademi members in aspiring for more and achieving greater heights. It is a great pleasure to bring his photographs in this book format to mark the occasion of the Formation day of APA," said T Srinivasa Reddy, General Secretary of APA.

LOCAL SCENE

Musandam Diving Discovery Center offers exceptional view of governorate's underwater treasure



HE HAS DREAMT of becoming a diver since he was 8 years old. It was a lifelong wanting to wear a diving suit and dive into the ocean to explore not only the underwater canyons but also the different marine creatures and coral reefs hiding under the surface.

In order to make this dream come true, he had the opportunity initially to work as a delegate in a diving centre, and at the end of 2005, he obtained his first diving licence and then the second in 2006.



In 2014, Badr al Shehi joined a licenced diving instructor course and then opened a shop selling tools and clothes needed by a diver. In 2018, he got a break by establishing the Musandam Diving Discovery Center after he established the first volunteer diving team in Musandam Governorate, which started with ten people and now includes 45 people. The team was formed to clean coral reefs, trapping fishing nets, observing the growth of reefs, and participating in saving people from drowning accidents.



Al Shehi said he invested RO 35,000 to build his centre, and he now owns three boats and employs three Omanis (one of whom is a captain and the other two as guides for divers). The centre also includes facilities, a reception room, a room for filling oxygen cylinders in which the centre owns 60 cylinders, a drying room for equipment, washbasins and swimming pools for men and women.

"The centre currently has around 150 members currently. Membership costs RO 150 for Omanis and RO 220 for expats. We are also earning from the daily rent of non-members. Before corona, about 15 people dive per day in order to explore the depths of the sea and take photographs. Those pay 50 OMR per hour, including equipment and food, but now about 3 to 4 people dive on Thursdays and Fridays.

He said that the centre has allocated 30 diving sites that include a number of islands and bays in Musandam, and there are several types of diving. Recreational diving involves up to 40 metres for the purpose of photography and exploration. Commercial diving with gas cylinders are used for the purpose of working underwater, and free diving without using equipment, explaining that there is a health form that the diver fills out before diving.



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AROUND THE WORLD

DIGITAL TRENDS

McDonald's milkshakes off the British menu after supply chain issues



MCDONALD'S SAID it had taken milkshakes and bottled drinks off the menu at all of its British restaurants as it battled the supply chain issues that are hitting businesses across the retail and hospitality sector.

The company did not specify what the issues were but said it was working hard to return the items to the menu as soon as possible.

"Like most retailers, we are currently experiencing some supply chain issues, impacting the availability of a small number of products," a McDonald's UK and Ireland spokesperson said in a statement on Tuesday.

"Bottled drinks and milkshakes are temporarily unavailable in restaurants across England, Scotland and Wales."

British retailers, cafes and restaurants are struggling to cope with a shortage of drivers, and in particular heavy goods vehicle (HGV) drivers, and food processing staff after Covid-19.

The problem is not unique to Britain - the United States and other European countries also have truck driver shortages - but Brexit has made matters worse, industry groups say. While new drivers struggled to train and qualify during spells of the pandemic, Britain has been hit by an exodus of European drivers, with the Road Haulage Association estimating that around 30,000 have stopped operating in the country since it left the EU single market in January.

Chicken restaurant chain Nando's last week was forced to temporarily close more than 40 outlets in Britain due to staff shortages in its chicken supply chain. McDonald's rival KFC has also said on Twitter it was struggling to stock some items or use its normal packaging due to "disruption" in recent weeks.

Unprecedented shortages of both staff and materials are hampering Britain's post-lockdown economic rebound, a closely watched economic survey showed on Monday. — **Reuters**

Al Capone's guns to go under the hammer in US auction

GUNS ONCE OWNED by Al Capone, one of the most notorious gangsters in United States history, are to go under the hammer at a California auction.

The mobster's favoured .45 automatic pistol is among the haul, which also includes vintage photos, a letter to his son written from Alcatraz, and the bed he shared with his wife at their luxury Florida mansion.

The 174 items on sale in October are a collection entitled "A Century of Notoriety: the Estate of Al Capone," in what auctioneers say "will no doubt go down as one of the most important celebrity auctions in history."

Capone was one of the most feared figures in organised crime during the Prohibition Era, when the sale or production of alcohol was banned in the United States.

He was the boss of the Chicago Outfit, a 1920s gang that beat out rivals in bootlegging and racketeering with increasingly brutal methods. These culminated in the 1929 St Valentine's Day Massacre, when seven members of a rival gang were killed, execution-style.

Capone was famously never convicted for violence, but jailed for tax evasion, ultimately ending up at Alcatraz, an island fortress of San Francisco. — **AFP**

ENTERTAINMENT

Sony rallies big-screen hopes with 'Spider-Man' and 'Ghostbusters' at CinemaCon



SPOOKED BY THE pandemic and streaming platforms, the embattled movie theatre industry called on new "Ghostbusters" and "Spider-Man" films as it vowed to fight back at a major trade summit in Las Vegas Monday.

CinemaCon — which typically sees Hollywood studios bring glitzy stars and never-before-seen footage to a Las Vegas casino to woo theatre bosses — did not take place at all last year as the pandemic shuttered cinemas around the world.

But with nearly 90 per cent of domestic theatres now back open, Sony Pictures used its opening night presentation slot at Caesars Palace to set the tone for a returning event that is determined to prove the future of the big screen.

Studio bosses showed a new trailer for its much-anticipated "Spider-Man: No Way Home" superhero sequel, before previewing "Ghostbusters: Afterlife" — a heavily nostalgic follow-up to the 1984 supernatural comedy classic — in full to a rapturous crowd.

"Over the last 19 months, there's been a lot of doom and gloom," said Josh Greenstein, president of Sony's motion pictures division.

"But we know movie theatres, and the theatrical movie experience, will triumph," he added.

The presentation also squeezed in brief footage of

"Bullet Train" starring Brad Pitt, and future superhero fare including a sequel to "Venom," and "Morbius."

Clips from Denzel Washington's "A Journal for Jordan" and a movie adaptation of the bestselling novel "Where the Crawdads Sing" produced by Reese Witherspoon were also shown, before a longer "Spider-Man" trailer teased how the film will tie in with other popular Marvel characters including Benedict Cumberbatch's "Doctor Strange."

Attendees then settled in for "Ghostbusters: After Life," introduced by its director Jason Reitman and his father Ivan, who directed the original.

Plot details are under strict embargo, but the film, set almost four decades after the first movie, finds young descendants of the original's wise-cracking ghouls hunters picking up the mantle — and vacuum backpack.

- 'NOT TOO BRIGHT' -

CinemaCon is taking place despite fears about the Delta variant that have caused some pandemic restrictions to be reimposed on Hollywood in California, and glitzy A-listers have largely stayed away from the Las Vegas event.

Organisers have forged ahead with Covid protocols in place, including proof of

vaccination or a recent negative test for attendees.

While Disney is largely absent, other traditional major Hollywood studios showing their wares this week include Warner, Universal and Paramount.

Each of those studios has experimented in some form during the pandemic with using streaming platforms to launch their movies — an ever-growing concern for big-screen movie theatre chains.

Sony, the only major Hollywood studio without its own streaming service, drew loud cheers with its "commitment to preserving and protecting the exclusive theatrical window" — referring to the traditional time period in which movies can initially only be shown in theatres. "Viewing movies simultaneously in theatres, and in the home, is devastating for our collective industry," said Greenstein.

Sony movies CEO Tom Rothman pointed to the recent success in movie theatres of "Free Guy," a comedy from a rival Disney-owned studio. While other recent releases have flopped, "that film has done great business, because, number one, it's terrific — and number two, you actually can't watch it at home on television," he said.

"We're not too bright out in Hollywood, but we'll figure it out," he added.

CinemaCon runs until Thursday. — **AFP**

TRAVEL TALES

Mexico City taps solar energy to clean up historic Aztec-era canals



MEXICAN SCIENTISTS have developed a unique "nanobubble" system using solar energy to improve water quality in the canals of Mexico City's Xochimilco ecological zone, a popular tourist attraction.

Officials in Mexico City have been focused on cleaning up the long-polluted waters of Xochimilco, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the few areas of the capital that still boasts canal networks dating back to Aztec times.

A team of researchers from the Center for Research and Advanced Studies (Cinvestav) has developed a method using solar energy to activate a pump that sends cleansing "nanobubbles" into the water.

The bubbles help oxygenate the water, eliminating harmful pollutants and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, which leads to healthier flora and fauna, according to Refugio Rodriguez Vazquez, a Cinvestav researcher.

"We've seen in the places that we have bubbled a good proliferation of the Montezuma frog," Rodriguez said, referring to one of Mexico's native amphibian species.

Xochimilco is known for "chinampas," floating beds of farm produce cultivated by the Aztecs in the 14th century to feed the population of the pre-Hispanic city.

The nanobubble system enables local farmers "to be able to work on their chinampas and make them productive by having a cleaner environment and conditions," Rodriguez said.

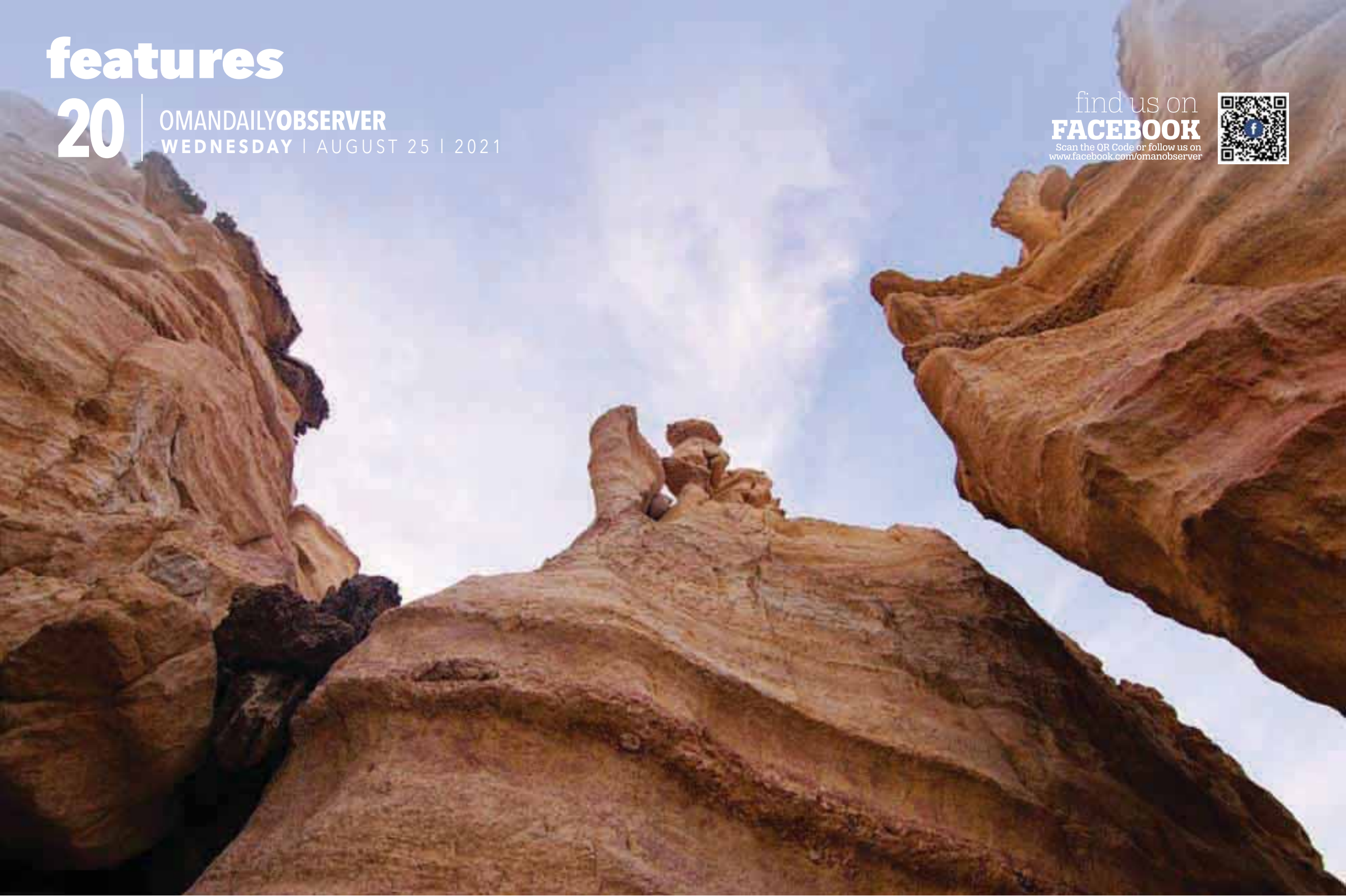
The Cinvestav team said the nanobubble system was also being applied in two water treatment plants.

It could also potentially be replicated in other waterways in Mexico City, where water quality is considered poor and supplies are often at the mercy of droughts.

The solar panels powering the nanobubble technology sit atop Xochimilco's famous "trajineras," barge-like boats that shuttle tourists through the canals. They also provide onboard electricity.

"It can give us more benefits, both national and international tourism," said Miguel Poblano Lugo, a trajinera service provider. "People who bring their cell phone and don't have a battery can recharge them right there." — **Reuters**

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Rock formations in Ras Al Jinz attract photographers, tourists

By Yeru Ebuen
With translation
by Mai al Abri

At the peak of the sea turtle nesting season pre-corona, dozens of visitors usually head out towards the beaches of Ras Al Jinz to witness one of nature's most amazing miracles.

Guided by staff from the Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve hotel, these visitors are asked to put on a red headlight and in the darkness, sometimes as early as 4 in the morning, would walk by batch towards the beach for a rendezvous with the turtles all due for laying their eggs.

This seasonal event is what Ras Al Hadd vis a vis, Ras Al Jinz has been known for — a sanctuary for sea turtles and a beautiful place to enjoy the usually lighter, cold breeze even during the summer.

Once the sea turtles rush back to the sea, however, and the sun started to embrace to usually empty shores with warm light, the next thing everyone will notice are the amazing rock formations that pepper this side of the Wilayat of Sur.

These distinctive rock formations in Ras Al Jinz in Ras Al Hadd in the Wilayat of Sur had now attracted the interest of a wide range of professional and amateur photographers, tourists, geologists and students researching on this topic.

In my personal visit a year ago, I've checked out several of the rock formations located about 100 metres away from the hotel. While the rock garden of Duqm is now protected and has been thoroughly catalogue, no such effort has been made yet for the

impressive rock formations of Ras Al Jinz. No names had been given or attributed nor its potential as another attraction has been explored.

One of the most memorable formations that I've spotted is the formation I called the "Tres Marias" or the Triple Goddess simply because they reminded me of the Maiden, Mother and Crone from popular Greek Mythology. The rocks, due to the years of weathering and erosion, somehow resembles women with their garbs on each whispering to each other. There are others too, like the tabletop rock and the different animal-shaped formations that I thought are great learning opportunities especially for kids who usually found their way into Ras Al Jinz's remote shores.

The beauty of these rock formations didn't escape photographer Hussein bin Ali al Amri when he visited Ras Al Jinz.

He said, 'Ras Al Jinz beach has always attracted tourists and photography enthusiasts because of the diversity of the landscape and how nature has created this breathtaking view. The natural beauty of the place allows anyone with a camera to capture the most beautiful pictures and the most wonderful moments, from sunrise and sunset, mountain views, waterfalls and green spaces, lakes, sea waves, lighthouses, desert and other charming scenery.'

He added that Ras Al Jinz is characterised by its magnificent rock formations, which attract photographers, who try to choose the best angles to produce an impressive picture.

Al Ameri is especially impressed with the narrow passageways created by the rock formations and the view between these rocks create a beautiful window of the sea, shore and the little things that make Oman's waters

some of the best in the world.

Like other photographers, Al Amri believed that rock formations on their own can become amazing attractions, it just needed development and story so that it will intrigue more people.

Once these rock formations are looked after, they can become another attraction that visitors can visit any time of the year and in the greater efforts of tourism, can make Ras Al Jins and the greater Ras Al Hadd area a year-long destination because of its usually cool weather and amazing beaches.

Ras Al Hadd is one of the most important and prominent tourist attractions and is the first spot on which the sun rises in the Sultanate and the Arabian Peninsula. It is characterised by a diverse landscape and mild weather throughout the year. The place has many natural features and beautiful bays, the most important of which is Ras Al Jinz.

Ras Al Jinz is a fishing village located in the Ras Al Hadd, on the eastern shores of the Arabian Peninsula. The village features earth's raw beauty, with unique landscapes, and extraordinary animals, such as sea turtles, which Ras Al Jinz makes the perfect home for.

