

MoU on maritime security signed

The Maritime Security Centre (MSC) and the Indian Navy signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) aimed at enhancing the existing joint cooperation between the MSC and the Indian Navy's Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) in the fields of maritime security and information exchange between the two friendly countries in order to maintain safety in the maritime navigation against various hazards. **DETAILS ON P2**



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A STUNNING LOOK OF ANCIENT VILLAGES FROM AL HAMRA



Foreign policy based on good neighbourliness



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy

MUSCAT: The Sultanate, under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, has affirmed its continuous commitment to the main fundamentals and principles of its foreign policy.

Oman's foreign policy advocates good neighbourliness, non-interference in the internal affairs of others, respect for international laws and charters, support for cooperation among countries and the enhancement of opportunities for internal dialogue.

The Sultanate also stressed its conviction on the need to resolve differences in a spirit of harmony and tolerance that has always been the mainstay of the

country's human civilisation. Oman believes that harmony and tolerance lead to better and more lasting results than could be achieved by conflict and strife.

This was stated in the Sultanate's speech delivered by Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy before the 76th session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly on Monday.

Sayyid Badr reiterated the Sultanate's continued cooperation with the UN Secretary General and all member states with the prime aim of achieving the UN's noble goals, notably establishing and consolidating international peace and security.

DETAILS ON P4

360° DIGITAL TOUR



The Royal Opera House Muscat has launched a new 360° degree digital tour of the Opera House and House of Musical Arts on the occasion of World Tourism Day, featuring members of the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra and the First Royal Band for Music and Folklore. The new 360° tour will complement the existing guided tours which have been running successfully at the Opera House since it opened in 2011.

DETAILS ON P3

MUSCAT

DEAL FOR AIR QUALITY DETECTION PROJECT

The Environment Authority signed an agreement with Middle East Scientific Equipment Corporation for a project to develop the national programme for monitoring the environment and the detection of surrounding air quality in the Sultanate. The project comes as part of the country's 10-Year Plan, the first leg in Oman Vision 2040. The programme aims to protect the environment and human health and support sustainable development goals. **DETAILS ON P3**

INSIDE



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SYDNEY GETS 'BLUEPRINT FOR FREEDOM' TO OPEN

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SULTANATE'S GDP POSTS OVER 10% GROWTH

OIL ACTIVITIES POSTED A RISE OF 8.7% TO REACH RO 4.428 BILLION

SAMUEL KUTTY @samkuttyvp

The gross domestic product (GDP) of Oman registered a significant increase of 10.1 per cent at the end of the second quarter of 2021, compared to the corresponding period last year.

According to statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the Sultanate's GDP at current prices reached RO 15.301 billion by the end of June this year.

Oil activities posted a rise of 8.7 per cent to reach RO 4.428 billion, compared to RO 4.742 billion at the end of the second quarter of 2020.

While the share of crude oil from oil activities by the end of the second quarter of 2021 stood at RO 3.723 billion, an increase of 11 per cent, natural gas registered a fall of 2 per cent

with RO 705.4 million during the period against RO 719.8 billion in the previous year.

With regard to non-oil activities, there has been an across-the-board rise in all segments.

The non-oil segment recorded a notable growth of 11.1 per cent to help the state coffers get RO 11.456 billion at the end of the second quarter in the current year.

Contribution from the non-oil sector stood at RO 10.309 billion at the end of June 2020 except construction activities which went down by 3.3 per cent compared to the end of the second quarter of 2020.

According to the NCSI figures, service sector leads the table with an 11 per cent rise over the corresponding period with a total of RO 7.912 billion at the end of June 2021.

TURN TO P2

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Oman, India sign MoU to enhance maritime security cooperation

MUSCAT: The Maritime Security Center (MSC) and the Indian Naval Forces signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) at the MSC's HQs in Al Murtafaa Camp on Monday.

The MoU was signed by Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), Head of the Maritime Security Committee, and from the Indian side by Admiral Karambir Singh, Chief of the Naval Staff in the Republic of India.

The MoU aims at enhancing the existing joint cooperation between the MSC and the Indian Navy's Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) in the fields of maritime security and information exchange between the two friendly countries in order to maintain safety in the maritime navigation against various hazards.

After the signing ceremony, the Indian military official toured the MSC's facilities. He was briefed on the tasks and roles of the centre in managing and leading operations of the maritime security in terms of maritime hazards, mainly



search and rescue operations and protecting the marine environment from various risks.

MEETING WITH OFFICIALS

Earlier, Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raeesi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), received in his office at Al Murtafaa Camp on Monday Admiral Karambir Singh, Chief of the Naval Staff in the Republic of India and his delegation, currently visiting the Sultanate.

The meeting discussed means of enhancing the existing military

cooperation between the armed forces of the two friendly countries and reviewed several matters of common interests.

Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), also received Admiral Singh and his delegation.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed fields of the existing maritime cooperation between the RNO and the Indian Navy, as well as exchanging views on several matters of common interests.

Admiral Singh also met with Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Zaabi,

Secretary General of the Ministry of Defence.

The two sides exchanged views on several military matters of common interest.

The meeting was attended by Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of Royal Navy of Oman, the Indian Ambassador to the Sultanate, Defence Attaché at the Indian Embassy in Muscat and the delegation accompanying the guest.

VISIT TO NDC

Admiral Singh and his delegation visited the National Defence College (NDC).

Upon the guest's arrival, he was received by Air Vice Marshal Saleh bin Yahya al Maskari, NDC Commandant.

The guest and his accompanying delegation were briefed on the college's facilities and equipment, as well as various departments and halls designed according to the latest specifications and equipped with the best educational systems, training aids and multi-purpose electronic network systems.

— ONA



Education minister meets new teachers

MUSCAT: Within the framework of the Ministry of Education's plans to accommodate the teaching staff in the educational field, Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, met with a number of new female teachers who graduated from the Broad Scholarship Programme in educational (scientific) disciplines.

The meeting began with

Dr Al Shaibaniyah welcoming the teachers, listening to their experiences during their studies, and to which extent they benefited from them, and the challenges they faced and how they overcame them.

ENRICHING THE FIELD

It is worth noting that scholarship students for educational specialisations aims to extend

the educational field with the outputs coming from prestigious universities whose mother tongue is English. It also aims to prepare them to be of assistance to the Omani national outputs and the outputs of the sisterly Arab countries in a mixture that combines the various methods of teaching and educational qualification. It also seeks to enrich the educational field with

new scientific cultures that the ministry hopes will benefit the educational field.

The teachers appreciated the efforts made by the ministry in cooperation with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. They also appreciated the support of specialists in the two ministries to advance the Omani teacher and the educational process.

Arab Agricultural Day celebrated

MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, joined the rest of Arab countries in marking the Arab Agriculture Day.

The Arab Agriculture Day falls on September 27 of each year which is also the date in which the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD) began performing its duties in 1972.

FOOD SYSTEMS

The organisation chose the theme: "Towards Resilient Agriculture and Food Systems Responsive to Changes" for this year's celebration.

The Sultanate was represented in the online event broadcasted from Alfaisal University in Saudi Arabia by Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The ministry plays an essential role in developing the agricultural sector in the Sultanate through implementing many agricultural projects, making decisions and defining policies to increase production, diversifying food projects and

The total volume of plant production in Oman reached 3,034 tonnes in 2020, compared to 3,018 tonnes in 2019.

The increase is attributed to the increase in productivity as a result of using modern technologies

enhancing food security.

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The increase is attributed to the increase in productivity as a result of using modern technologies and adopting integrated packages for production and prevention.

The ministry has exerted great efforts in producing agricultural seedlings and distributing them to farmers. — ONA



FROM P1

GDP posts strong over 10 per cent growth

At the end of the second quarter in 2020, contribution from the service sector activities stood at RO 7 billion.

Activities related to agriculture, and fisheries saw an increase of 7 per cent, registering RO 421 million, compared to the corresponding period during which it stood at RO 393.8 million.

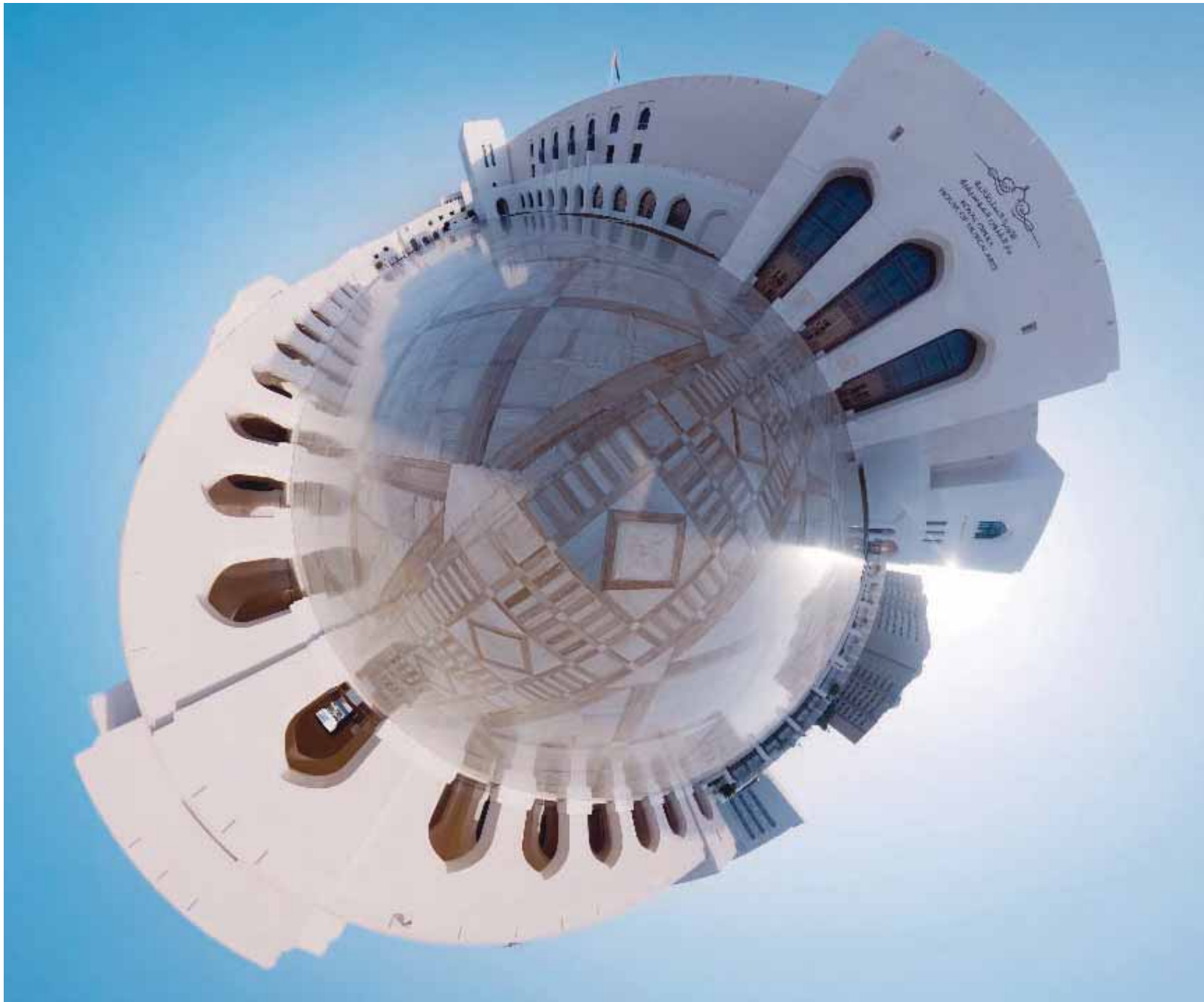
At the same time, mining and quarrying rose by 7.7 per cent, manufacturing by 34.2 per cent with refined petroleum production witnessing an increase of 43.3 per cent.

Meanwhile, transportation and storage activities went up by 23.3 per cent. Real estate, vocations, technology, and administration services rose by 21 per cent. An increase was also witnessed in the wholesale and retail trade by 19 per cent, financial and insurance activities by 11.5 per cent, other services by 7 per cent, residency activities and food services by 1.1 per cent.

Industrial activities reached RO 3,122,300,000 by the end of the second quarter of 2021 compared to RO 2,785,100,000 by the end of the second quarter of 2020, comprising a rise by 12.1 per cent.

A rise was also witnessed in the mining and quarrying by 7.7 per cent, manufacturing by 34.2 per cent, other manufacturing industries (including refined petroleum products manufacturing) by 43.3 per cent, the value of basic chemicals activity by 20.7 per cent, electricity and water supply and sewage by 7.6 per cent. However, construction activities went down by 3.3 per cent compared to the end of the second quarter of 2020.

The activities related to agriculture and fisheries rose by 7 per cent to reach RO 421.200 million by the end of the second quarter of 2021 compared to RO 393.800 million by the end of the second quarter of 2020. (With ONA inputs)



Royal Opera House Muscat offers new 360-degree digital tour

MUSCAT: The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) has launched a new 360-degree digital tour of the Opera House and House of Musical Arts on the occasion of world tourism day, featuring members of the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra and the First Royal Band for Music and Folklore.

With stunning footage from the main areas, the opera house has created an exciting new way to explore the world class performance space housed within the incredible buildings and

beautiful architecture.

Heralded in the region as a beacon of cultural exchange and admired worldwide for its national identity and artistic integrity, the Royal Opera House Muscat is a very special place to visit.

The virtual tour will open the opera house to a host of new eyes across the world. Everyone is invited to take a glimpse through the doors, up the stairs, along the red carpet and into the magic of the auditorium of both the Royal Opera House Muscat and the

House of Musical Arts, taking in the splendour, design details and inspiring artistry on the way.

The experience of exploring the interior is now accessible to people who may not have been inside the opera house before, those who may never had the chance to visit and to those who are planning to travel to Oman. The new 360-degree tour will complement the existing guided tours which have been running successfully at the opera house since it opened in 2011.

Omani musicians accompany

the tour with soft classical music as each image offers the chance to explore the space through 360, enabling a wonderful immersive voyage of discovery. Each tour features cameo performances from members of the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra and the First Royal Band for Music & Folklore.

The 360-degree tour reflects the ROHM's policy to embrace new technologies in the development of this wonderful cultural asset, so that anyone, anywhere can enjoy the opera house. — ONA

Sultanate marks World Tourism Day

MUSCAT: The digital platform for travel and tourism in the Sultanate organised an introductory meeting on tourism in Oman to mark the World Tourism Day (WTD).

The WTD, which falls on September 27 every year, comes this year under the theme "Tourism for Inclusive Growth".

The meeting, held at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, reviewed the latest updates

within the phased development of the platform after launching its commercial identity and work plan in the fourth quarter of this year.

The platform aims to strengthen ties between the local travel supply chain and the travel sector in major international markets. The platform will provide information on partnership opportunities with the travel sector around the world. — ONA



Pact signed for monitoring environment, air quality

MUSCAT: The Environment Authority on Monday signed an agreement with Middle East Scientific Equipment Corporation for a project to develop the national programme for monitoring the environment and the detection of surrounding air quality in the Sultanate. The project comes as part of the country's 10-Year Plan (2021-2040), the first leg in Oman Vision 2040.

The programme aims to protect the environment and human health and support sustainable development goals, besides enhancing the Sultanate's position in international environmental indexes and data and indices of Sustainable Development Goals 2030. It incorporates the Environmental Performance Indicator and international

economic competitiveness reports. The programme also supports other priorities in Oman Vision 2040, like the priority of health, the development of governorates, scholarly research and innovation, and information to assist the government in taking objective decisions based on solid methodical grounds.

The programme will help meet the obligations set for joining regional and international conventions and the requirements of UN organisations specialised in health, environment and society issues. The agreement was signed by Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority and Ahmed al Habsi, General Manager of Middle East Scientific Equipment Corporation. — ONA

Omani pavilion all set to receive Expo 2020 Dubai visitors

MUSCAT: Mohsin bin Khamis al Balushi, Adviser to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and Commissioner-General of the Sultanate at Expo 2020 Dubai, confirmed the Sultanate's full readiness for this global event.

He noted that the Omani pavilion is all set to receive visitors of Expo 2020 Dubai, which comes under the slogan "Connecting Minds, Creating the Future". As many as 191 countries, as well as regional and international organisations will participate in the Expo.

Al Balushi said in a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA) that the Sultanate seeks, through Expo 2020 Dubai, to be part of the global march towards innovative solutions for challenges facing humanity and highlighting concepts and principles of sustainable development to ensure a bright future for the coming generations. The participation is also a step towards maximising Oman's desired gains at all levels, most important of which is the economic, social and cultural, Al Balushi added.

The participation also aims to introduce the Sultanate as a distinct



Mohsin bin Khamis al Balushi

tourism and business destination, as well as highlighting the Omani identity and the rich ancient Omani heritage, promoting investment opportunities in various sectors, and communicating and interacting with the international community in various fields.

The pavilion is inspired by the frankincense tree, which played a leading role in promoting Omani trade in the ancient civilisations, as the design tells the story of Oman throughout history.

The pavilion is divided into five sections that simulate in their content the life cycle of frankincense, syncing with the three sub-themes of Expo 2020 Dubai, which are Mobility, Sustainability and Opportunity.



Young Omani competencies from the Innovation Factory Company carried out the designing, manufacturing and implementation of devices, equipment and technologies that will be used in telling and reviewing the content of the pavilion's story.

The design and content selection take the visitors of the Omani pavilion on an educational and recreational journey, which is also

interesting and entertaining.

Over the course of six months, the pavilion will host a series of Omani events and participations, including scientific, artistic, cultural and economic seminars on various topics.

In addition, certain weeks will be specified for fields that have the potential to maximise economic gains such as the Omani Products Exhibition, the SMEs Exhibition,

and the Omani Investment Week, in which the concerned authorities will take part and preview promising investment opportunities in Oman.

The participation will also include several initiatives, including participating in the Women's Pavilion to celebrate Omani Women's Day next October, and organising a cruise onboard "Oman Youth Ship 2" in addition to the Sale Outlet that

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where more than 2,000 types of goods and products of nearly 400 SMEs for artisans, productive families and rural area's women will be displayed and sold in this global event.

It is noteworthy that the Expo is one of the oldest and most important global events in terms of the magnitude and the interest of global media. It consolidates public understanding about human achievements in various societal sectors on various national, regional and global levels.

It is also a successful communication channel between different peoples and civilisations to consolidate sustainable development and global peace principles. — ONA

Sayyid Badr delivers Sultanate’s speech at the UN General Assembly

PEACE, TOLERANCE, CO-EXISTENCE

MUSCAT: The Sultanate, under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, has affirmed its continuous commitment to the main fundamentals and principles of its foreign policy.

Oman’s foreign policy advocates good neighbourliness, non-interference in the internal affairs of others, respect for international laws and charters, support for cooperation among countries and the enhancement of opportunities for internal dialogue.

The Sultanate also stressed its conviction on the need to resolve differences in a spirit of harmony and tolerance that has always been the mainstay of the country’s human civilization. Oman believes that harmony and tolerance lead to better and more lasting results than could be achieved by conflict and strife.

This was stated in the Sultanate’s speech delivered by Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi before the 76th session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly.

Sayyid Badr reiterated the Sultanate’s continued cooperation with the UN Secretary General and all member states with the prime aim of achieving the UN’s noble goals, notably establishing and consolidating international peace and security.

In the speech, Sayyid Badr also highlighted the efforts exerted by the Sultanate while dealing with coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. He said that “Crises and challenges are also opportunities for nations to test their readiness and enhance their capabilities. Despite the great challenges and hurdles posed to our daily lives by Covid-19, the pandemic did not discourage us, neither did weaken our resolve to confront it or address its impacts and repercussions.

PANDEMIC MEASURES

“In the Sultanate of Oman, the availability of vaccines has had a significant positive effect in strengthening our drive to address this pandemic. This consolidated our hope to eradicate the pandemic and experience a gradual return to normal life,” said Sayyid Badr. “Through preventive measures and by conducting the National Immunisation Campaign (covering all targeted age-groups), my country has been able to curb the spread of the epidemic and cut down the number of infections deaths and cases of hospitalization. This helped us resume to normalcy all economic, commercial and social activities and opening all sorts of travel, while at the same time adhering to preventive and precautionary measures,” Sayyid Badr added.

“As we continue our efforts to tackle this pandemic, we call upon the international community to strengthen cooperation and solidarity. We also urge vaccine producing and donor states to do their best to ensure an equitable distribution of vaccines to all countries and peoples, especially those in less developed regions suffering



sharp shortage of medical facilities and capabilities. The aim is to sustain international cooperation and societal interdependence and to ensure decent life for people everywhere,” said Sayyid Badr.

“We seize this opportunity to offer a word of sincere appreciation and admiration to those in charge of health systems, especially frontline teams in all countries of the world. We value the tremendous efforts and great sacrifices made by international organisations for the sake of all humanity,” said Sayyid Badr.

The rest of the speech reads as follows: “We, in the Sultanate of Oman, are part of this interconnected world with which we share common interests and destiny. We are pleased with what pleases the world and regret what is harmful to it. Therefore, we strive with all our energies and capabilities to contribute to the advancement of peace at all regional and international levels. We are committed to our position of clarity, frankness and objectivity. We are also firm in our adherence to our values and principles. We uphold a balanced and constructive approach in dealing with all issues.

From this standpoint, my country supported and welcomed positive developments that resulted from Al-Ula summit held in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. We appreciate the success of reconciliation efforts led by the State of Kuwait.

SUPPORT TO PALESTINIANS

We also affirm our support for the fair cause of Palestinian people and their legitimate demands for independence from Israel. We support Palestinian people’s right to establish their own independent state, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the international

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Sultanate will go ahead with its persistent efforts and will continue to work with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Nations envoy, the United States envoy for Yemen, and the Yemeni parties concerned, with the aim of ending the war by reaching a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire respected by all sides

Sultanate committed to enabling women and youth to acquire knowledge and all possible capabilities, and to ensure their active participation in the process of construction, development, innovation and prosperity

law, relevant Security Council Resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

As for the Yemeni crisis, my country will go ahead with its persistent efforts and will continue to work with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Nations (UN) envoy, the United States envoy for Yemen and the Yemeni parties concerned, with the aim of ending the war by reaching a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire respected by all sides, as well as full resumption of humanitarian efforts to provide the needs of the brethren in Yemen, especially medicine, healthcare, food, fuel and housing.

We add our voice to all who believe in the need to reach a comprehensive political

settlement to crisis in Yemen in a manner that restores to its people a return to security, stability and normal life, while at the same time safeguarding the security and interests of the countries of the region.

In the meantime, we hope that the Vienna talks over Iran’s nuclear programme will lead to results that achieve the desired consensus among all parties because we strongly believe that this will be in the interest of the region and the entire world.

Like the rest of world countries, we have followed up the recent developments in Afghanistan. Here, we would like to express our hope that all Afghan parties would work towards reconciliation and advance the higher interests of the Afghan people and

their aspiration for security, stability, economic and social development as well as measures to establish positive relations with neighbouring countries and the international community.

My country condemns all forms and manifestations of terrorism and supports all efforts and strategies aimed to eradicate this negative phenomenon which contradicts religious and human values, clashes with civilized ethics and threatens global security and stability.

The Sultanate also calls for eliminating threats to international maritime trade. It urges full adherence to treaties, agreements and the international law to ensure freedom of navigation in a manner that secures the flow of trade between countries and enhances opportunities for economic growth. We appeal to all member states to fulfil their commitments made under relevant treaties and disarmament agreements, in particular treaties on denuclearization and removal of weapons of mass destruction in order to secure global stability.

OMAN VISION 2040

My country has sought to translate its international commitment towards the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDG 2030) by integrating its three SDG components (economic, social and environmental), as well as the goals of the Sultanate’s development strategies and plans. We view this as a major pillar of Oman Vision 2040 and its executive plans.

We are fully aware that the road to sustainable development remains a long and difficult one and that, to meet our obligations, we have to depend on our ability to face challenges, and this requires solid international

and regional cooperation. Towards this end, we recognize that renewed commitment to social justice serves as the real foundation for work at both levels of national and international policy. Here, we welcome and support investment and economic diversification programmes, which constitute key priorities of development plans in the Sultanate of Oman. This will contribute to maximizing benefits and imparting opportunities to our partners and society.

Like other countries of the world, the Sultanate of Oman attaches great attention to the risks posed by climate change. They are hazards that affect environmental, agricultural, economic and infrastructure systems. To counter climate change and limit its increasing negative effects, the Sultanate of Oman has implemented the draft National Strategy for Adaptation and Mitigation of Climate Change, which includes reports on the expected impacts on development sectors and sets out plans for appropriate adaptation. My country has recently submitted the second Nationally Determined Contributions Report on reducing greenhouse gas emissions as part of its commitments to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The world has been witnessing new transformations brought about by scientific and technological progress, which makes it incumbent upon us all, once again, to emphasise the importance of strengthening global partnership in order to maximise the benefits to be gained from advanced technologies. It is also necessary to keep pace with technological progress within the context of SDG and to confront the challenges of the modern age, a byproduct of which is the threat to the climate.

PRIORITIES FOR YOUTH

There is no doubt that women have a great role to play, alongside men, in building a social fabric that ensures the proper upbringing of young people upon whom the hopes of nations rest. You are well aware that young people are the hope of the present and the mainstay of the future and countries rely upon their young generations for their development. Therefore, it has been essential for governments to place youth on top their priorities, and to provide everything that would advance young people’s capabilities. I emphasise my country’s commitment to enabling women and youth to acquire knowledge and all possible capabilities, and to ensure their active participation in the process of construction, development, innovation and prosperity.

In conclusion, Your Excellency the President, we observe that the international community faces pressing issues that must be addressed with international cooperation to attain the goals of stability, harmony and prosperity as aspired by humanity. — **ONA**

Omani researcher marks a milestone in Covid-19 diagnosis

KABEER YOUSUF

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A young Omani researcher has identified ELISA, the antibody test to be supportive to the PCR test in identifying Covid-19 patients who might have a false negative PCR test on initial presentation as part of the research titled 'Detection of asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic contacts of confirmed Covid-19 cases in Oman using ELISA test.

The study also tried to address why some patients develop severe illness while others do not have same severity.

The study was carried out by Dr Asma al Balushi, Specialist in Infectious Diseases, as part of her fellowship training programme at the Royal Liverpool University Hospital in collaboration with the research team in Oman. As per the study, an asymptomatic or less symptomatic case can also be a positive case whose symptoms are less evident or hidden and can be a carrier without his/her knowledge.

There have been cases that tested negative when first presented using PCR swab test. But the ELISA antibody test, which was done at two stages "on presentation and at 4 to 6 weeks," showed that some patients had actually been infected with the virus at that time, Dr Asma al Balushi told the *Observer*.

The team conducted the research by visiting houses of confirmed Covid-19 patients with the support of the Ministry of Health (MoH). It aimed to detect early asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic contacts of Covid-19 cases by using the ELISA test in addition to the accredited PCR test through nasal and throat swabs.

The research team also



collected blood samples from mild confirmed cases that did not require hospitalisation and compared them to those with more severe cases admitted to the hospitals. Different inflammatory markers have been studied to know which markers are correlated with disease severity in Covid-19 patients. Genetic testing of the human genome, especially ACE-2 genome, was also performed.

The most important finding of this research project is that ELISA test and PCR testing can be used to detect those affected by Coronavirus without the appearance of any symptoms. Some of these patients had the symptoms appear after 2 or 3 days of testing, and some remained asymptomatic.

"This is very important as it increases awareness of people and enhances early recognition of Covid-19 cases. Therefore, people can be cautious and follow the precautionary measures more strictly and reduce the transmission of the virus.

It is noteworthy that some people did not show a significant immune response; thus, antibody testing by ELISA was negative," said Dr Al Balushi.

In addition to the above, the



The team conducted the research by visiting houses of confirmed Covid-19 patients with the support of the Ministry of Health

research team aimed to identify Covid-19 patients who are at a greater risk of deterioration.

The appearance of different Covid-19 variants, each with different severity, prompts early identification of those patients who might deteriorate more rapidly.

This project helped to recognise patients who might deteriorate earlier by performing special blood tests and inflammatory markers that reflect the immune response to fight the virus.

EARLY INTERVENTIONS

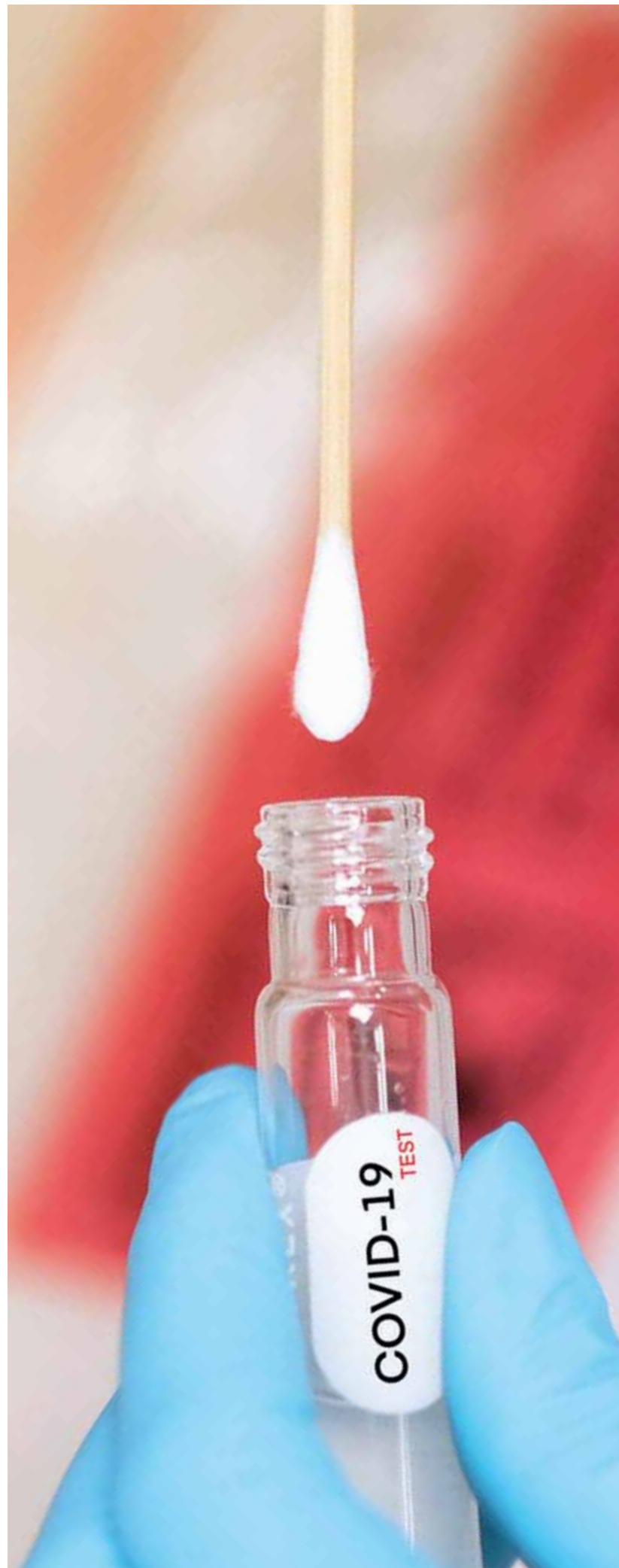
Knowing these markers and which ones to use to predict patients' deterioration and disease progression can be used to prevent further deterioration by implementing early interventions while managing these cases. This reduces the load on intensive care units and might even prevent death. These findings have been

published as a scientific paper at the "International Journal of Infectious Diseases".

The Covid-19 Research Programme of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) has witnessed an array of research projects that dives into different aspects regarding the Covid-19 pandemic and studies like this have their value on national and international levels in the present scenario when the country is winning over the pandemic.

"These projects promote and enhance research level in the country to compete with other countries with high research level to provide scientific materials to understand diseases. Moreover, this attracts experienced people from all over the world to collaborate with researchers from our country", adds Dr Al Balushi.

The research was conducted in collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI), Ministry of Health, Royal Hospital, Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, Royal Liverpool University Hospital in the United Kingdom, the Central Public Health Laboratories and the National Genetic Center in Oman.



Over 2.8m vaccinated against Covid-19



MUSCAT: As many as 2,896,271 people have been vaccinated against Covid-19 in Oman with at least the first jab since launching the National Immunization Campaign in December 2020 till Sunday September 26, reaching 82 per cent of the target segment.

The number of those who received two jabs of Covid-19 vaccine stood at 2,050,716 comprising 58 per cent. The total number of administered doses stood at 4,946,987.

The Ministry of Health continues vaccinating the target segments against Covid-19 in all governorates of the Sultanate as vaccination centres witness a good daily turnout.

34 NEW CASES

Meanwhile, 34 new cases of coronavirus (Covid-19) were registered in the Sultanate during the past 24 hours, in addition to zero new Covid-19-related deaths.

This brings the total number of positive Covid-19 cases to 303,673. The total number of Covid-19-related death cases reached 4,095.

The ministry added that 390 new cases have recovered, bringing the total number to 296,917 recoveries. The ministry also pointed out that 6 cases were hospitalised over the past 24 hours, as the total number of current hospitalised Covid-19-infected patients stands at 43 of them 22 are in intensive care units. — ONA



**Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Defence
ENGINEERING SERVICES**

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Ministry of Defence invites contractors/ consultants specialized in the below-mentioned works and registered with the Ministry of Defence and Tender Board to take part in the following tenders:

Tender No	Tender Name	Contractor's / Consultant's Grade	Last Date for Collection of Documents	Last Date for Bid Submission	Tender Price (RO)
010/2021	Construction Work- Al Buraimi	1st & Above	07 Oct 2021	09 Nov 2021	RO 200/-
013/2021	Construction Work- Aidam	1st & Above	07 Oct 2021	09 Nov 2021	RO 360/-
015/2021	Construction Work- Khasab	Excellent	07 Oct 2021	16 Nov 2021	RO 1200/-

* For further clarification about the tenders' details, please visit Gate No. (14)

- Tender's electronic documents can be obtained from the Office of the Secretariat of the Tender Committee, Gate No. (14), Muskar Al Murtafa'a (Sunday to Thursday) between 9:00 am and 1:00 pm against payment of the price mentioned above.
- The tender's payment should be made electronically by using Smart Card, Credit Card (Visa) or Visa Electron Card (Sunday to Thursday) between 9:00 am and 1:00 pm.
- The bid should be enclosed with a temporary bond (1%) of the bid's value in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified by a bank operating in the country and addressed to the Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Bids should be submitted as hard copy and soft copy in red-wax sealed envelopes, addressed to the Chairman of the Tender Committee and marked with tender name and number without making reference or mention to the bidder's name.
- Bids should be deposited in the Tender Box at Gate No. (14), Muskar Al Murtafa'a no later than 1:00 pm on the assigned date for submission of bids.
- We would like to draw the attention of contractors/ consultants to the significance of adhering to the submission date. Queries submitted to the Engineering Services will not be heard by the Ministry of Defence fourteen days prior to the submission of offers.
- It's worth mentioning that tender submission which does not meet the following items shall not be considered:
 - Percentage of Omanisation within the organization supported by an expat worker list certified by the Ministry of Labour (Updated copy).
 - Detailed breakdown of works related to the project as per drawings and scope.
 - Full set of stamped offers should be submitted, tender form and the bidder's tender bond should be submitted as hard copy whereas other documentations should be submitted as soft copy in two separate files:
 - Financial offer (Bill 1 & 2 are separated from Bill 3).
 - Technical offer.
 - Written confirmation of site visit.
 - All addendums and circulars.
 - List of executed projects in the past 5 years and ongoing projects.
 - List of suppliers and sub-contractors certified and registered with the Ministry of Defence and their project acceptance letter.
 - Valid registration certificate from the Tender Board.
 - Financial statement of the company for the last 3 years.



Ministry of Social Development

Tender Announcement

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

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)
20/2021	Construction of Water Unit Building of Alwafa Rehabilitation Center at Wilayat Nizwa (Hydrotherapy)	Specialized construction and maintenance contractors in second degree	Friday 15-10-2021 01:00 PM	Thursday 4-11-2021 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

- Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>), On Sunday 26/9/2021.
- Tender shall be submitted in compliance with the technical specifications and terms along with a local bank warranty at (1%) of the tender value, valid ninety (90) days from the date of e-submission.
- The original (1%) bank warranty to be submitted at same day of submitting at tender box located in Directorate of Finance & Administration at MOSD HQ.
- For Inquiry, please contact through the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

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

www.mosd.gov.om

TEHRAN SAYS UN NUCLEAR WATCHDOG’S CLAIM ‘NOT ACCURATE’

EU urges Iran to allow UN nuclear watchdog full access

VIENNA: The EU on Monday urged Iran to allow inspectors access to a nuclear site, while Tehran argued the facility was exempt from a recent agreement with the UN watchdog.

The Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said on Sunday it had been denied “indispensable” access to the TESA Karaj centrifuge component manufacturing workshop near Tehran contrary to a September 12 agreement with Iran.

Iran’s Ambassador to the IAEA Kazem Gharibabadi on Monday rejected the charge on Twitter.

“During the discussions in Tehran and Vienna, Iran indicated that... equipment related to this Complex are not included for servicing,” he wrote, referring to IAEA work on its surveillance equipment.

Sunday’s IAEA statement “isn’t accurate and goes beyond the agreed terms,” he added.

At a Vienna meeting of the IAEA board of governors, the EU said it urged Iran to allow access “without any further delay”, expressing its “deepest concern”. “This is a worrying



The Iranian flag waves in front of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) headquarters in Vienna, Austria. — Reuters

development,” the statement said. This month’s agreement between the IAEA and Iran came days after the nuclear watchdog had decried a lack of cooperation from Tehran.

Agency inspectors had been allowed to service monitoring and surveillance equipment and to replace storage media at “all necessary locations” except the TESA Karaj workshop, the IAEA said on Sunday.

IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi in his latest report on Iran

informed member states that the Islamic republic had granted all other access from September 20-22. The IAEA’s latest report comes amid stalled EU-brokered negotiations to revive a 2015 landmark agreement scaling back Iran’s nuclear programme in exchange for sanctions relief.

That deal started to fall apart in 2018 when the US withdrew from it and reinstated sanctions. Iran in turn again started to ramp up its nuclear activities. Talks began in April in Vienna between

Agency inspectors had been allowed to service monitoring and surveillance equipment and to replace storage media at “all necessary locations” except the TESA Karaj workshop, the IAEA said on Sunday

Tehran and the remaining five parties to the 2015 deal aimed at bringing Washington back into the agreement.

But that dialogue has been stalled since June, when ultraconservative Ebrahim Raisi won Iran’s presidential election.

Iran’s foreign minister said on Friday that talks would restart “very soon”, but the US has called for a clear timetable.

“(It’s) important #ViennaTalks resume asap from where we left off on 20 June,” Vienna-based EU Ambassador Stephan Klement wrote on Twitter on Monday. — AFP

Turkey plans to buy more Russian defence systems

WASHINGTON: President Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey still intended to buy a second batch of S-400 missile defence systems from Russia, a move that could deepen a rift with Nato ally Washington and trigger new US sanctions.

Washington says the S-400s pose a threat to its F-35 fighter jets and to Nato’s broader defence systems. Turkey says it was unable to procure air defence systems from any Nato ally on satisfactory terms.

“In the future, nobody will be able to interfere in terms of what kind of defence systems we acquire, from which country at what level,” Erdogan said in an interview that aired on CBS News’ “Face the Nation” on Sunday. “Nobody can interfere with that. We are the only ones to make such decisions.”

The United States imposed sanctions on Turkey’s Defence Industry Directorate, its chief, Ismail Demir, and three other employees in December following the country’s acquisition of a first batch of S-400s. Talks continued between Russia and Turkey about the delivery of a second batch, which Washington has repeatedly said would almost certainly trigger new sanctions.

“We urge Turkey at every level and opportunity not to retain



Recep Tayyip Erdogan

the S-400 system and to refrain from purchasing any additional Russian military equipment,” said a State Department spokesperson when asked about Erdogan’s comments.

“We continue to make clear to Turkey that any significant new Russian arms purchases would risk triggering CAATSA 231 sanctions separate from and in addition to those imposed in December 2020,” the spokesperson added, referring to the 2017 Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act. The spokesperson also said the United States regards Turkey as an ally and friend and seeks ways to strengthen their partnership “even when we disagree.”

Erdogan will meet with President Vladimir Putin in Russia on Wednesday to discuss issues including the violence in northwestern Syria. — AFP

Lebanon blast probe suspended for second time

BEIRUT: The lead investigator into the deadly 2020 Beirut port blast suspended his probe on Monday after an ex-minister he has called in for questioning requested his removal, a Lebanese court official said.

In a second such suspension, Tarek Bitar will pause blast investigations until a court votes on whether to replace him in response to a complaint filed last week by ex-interior minister Nohad Machnouk, the official said.

Machnouk is one of a raft of top officials suspected of negligence ahead of the port explosion that killed more than 200 people on August 4 last year. If removed, Bitar would be the second investigator to be sacked since the explosion amid widespread accusations of obstruction by Lebanon’s political barons, who have largely dodged interrogation.

“Bitar has paused his investigation and all procedures linked to the case pending a ruling by the court of appeals,” the official



A person rides a motorbike near the site of the 2020 port blast in Beirut, Lebanon, on Monday. — Reuters

said. Bitar’s predecessor Fadi Sawan was removed in February after ex-ministers he had called in for questioning submitted a similar request for a replacement.

The move sparked an outcry from rights groups and relatives of blast victims who accused the political elite of undermining the investigation into Lebanon’s worst

peacetime disaster every step of the way.

Aya Majzoub, Lebanon researcher at Human Rights Watch, said the latest complaints

“should make it patently clear that the Lebanese political class will do everything in their power to derail, obstruct and undermine the investigation and escape

justice”.

More than a year after the blast that destroyed swathes of the capital, the probe has yet to identify a single culprit.

Resulting calls for an independent international investigation have been roundly rejected by Lebanon’s political leaders.

The explosion was caused by hundreds of tonnes of haphazardly stocked ammonium nitrate but what lit the fire remains unclear.

Top officials in parliament, government and top security agencies where all aware of the fertiliser’s presence.

Bitar in July demanded that parliament lift the immunity of Machnouk, ex-finance minister Ali Hassan Khalil and former public works minister Ghazi Zaiter so that they can sit for questioning.

But parliament has turned down his request and top leaders, including Hezbollah, have accused Bitar of political bias.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

ADEN

Protests in Yemen against crumbling currency

Security forces fired shots in the air to disperse hundreds of protesters in Yemen’s third-largest city of Taiz on Monday as unrest over poverty spread in areas held by the government. Dozens of people blocked a street and entrances to several districts in the disputed southwestern city with rocks and burning tyres, witnesses said, before the crowd swelled to hundreds protesting sharp drops in the currency that has stoked inflation.

Earlier this month, three peo-



ple were killed in violent protests in Aden and other southern cities controlled by the internationally recognised government, which was ousted from the capital Sanaa by Ansar Allah.

RAMALLAH

Officers go on trial over death of a critic

A Palestinian military court on Monday began the trial of 14 security officers charged with beating to death a prominent critic of President Mahmoud Abbas, in a case that has drawn widespread protests and calls for his resignation.

Nizar Banat’s death following his arrest on June 24 has heightened criticism of Abbas’ Palestinian Authority and his security forces, who human rights groups say regularly arrest critics in the occupied West Bank. Abbas de-



nies the charges.

An autopsy carried out the day Banat died showed he was struck in the head and over the body with metal rods, leading to his death.

WASHINGTON

US top security adviser heads to Saudi

US President Joe Biden’s national security adviser Jake Sullivan will travel to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates along with the US special envoy to Yemen, the White House National Security Council said on Monday.

Brett McGurk, the NSC’s Middle East and North Africa Coordinator, will also join Sullivan and Tim Lenderking, the council spokeswoman Emily Horne said in a statement, adding that Sullivan will meet “with senior leaders on a range of regional and



global challenges.”

Sullivan will hold discussions with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman about Yemen, according to the Associated Press, which first reported the trip.

In brief

■ HANOI



GERMANY SENDS 2.6M COVID VACCINES TO VIETNAM

Germany has donated 2.6 million doses of the AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine to Vietnam, which arrive as the nation is seeking to reopen its economy, the German Embassy in Hanoi said in a statement on Monday.

The donated vaccines arrived in Ho Chi Minh City on Sunday. Including a smaller contribution earlier in September, Germany has now donated 3.45 million Covid-19 vaccine doses to the South-East Asian country.

Since its fourth wave of the coronavirus began in April, Vietnam has reported more than 750,000 cases and 18,584 deaths, leading authorities in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to enact a series of strict orders.

■ NEW DELHI



INDIA TO EXPORT 8 MILLION COVID-19 JABS IN OCTOBER

India will export eight million coronavirus vaccine jabs by the end of October after ending its ban on sending doses abroad, a top foreign ministry official said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised to resume exports at a meeting of leaders from the so-called Quad in Washington.

Foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla told reporters that most of the eight million doses of the Johnson & Johnson single-shot vaccine will be sent to Asia-Pacific countries. "This would be ready by the end of October. This is an immediate delivery, from the Quad into the Indo-Pacific region", Shringla told reporters.

■ BANGKOK



THAILAND TO CUT QUARANTINE FOR VACCINATED TOURISTS

Thailand is to cut the quarantine for vaccinated travellers to seven days starting in October, officials said on Monday, as it seeks to revive its battered tourism industry. Pre-pandemic Thailand attracted nearly 40 million visitors a year, but Covid-related travel restrictions have hammered the sector, contributing to the economy's worst performance in more than 20 years. The kingdom is pushing to reopen despite still being in the grips of a deadly third wave of infections.

Authorities said that starting on Friday, the quarantine period for fully jabbed visitors will be seven days.

THE RACE HAS INTRODUCED A RARE DOSE OF POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY

Outcome uncertain as Japan's LDP heads to vote on next PM

TOKYO: Japan's ruling party votes on Wednesday for the country's next prime minister in an election that has turned into the most unpredictable race since Shinzo Abe made a surprise comeback almost a decade ago, defeating a popular rival in a runoff.

The winner of the September 29 contest to lead the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is almost certain to succeed unpopular Yoshihide Suga as premier because the party has a majority in parliament's powerful lower house.

Running for the top post are popular vaccine minister Taro Kono, 58, a US-educated former defence and foreign minister seen as a maverick; ex-foreign minister Fumio Kishida, a consensus-builder saddled with a bland image; former internal affairs minister Sanae Takaichi, 60, an ultra-conservative; and Seiko Noda, 61, from the party's dwindling liberal wing.

The race has introduced a rare dose of uncertainty into Japanese politics after Abe's nearly eight-year tenure that made him the country's longest-serving premier. Abe ran uncontested in 2015 and roundly defeated his sole rival



Sanae Takaichi, former internal affairs minister and Seiko Noda, former internal affairs minister, two of four candidates for the presidential election of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party in Tokyo. — Reuters

three years later.

Last year, LDP factions rallied around Suga after Abe quit, citing ill-health. But Suga's voter ratings tanked over his handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, prompting him to announce his departure ahead of a general election that must be held by November 28. "This time there is no band-wagon to jump on and factions are divided", said Steven Reed, a professor emeritus at Chuo University. "That's pretty rare."

Contenders need to attract

votes from grassroots LDP members and rookie lawmakers, more likely to be swayed by popularity ratings, while also wooing party bosses. But rank-and-file members will have less say if no candidate wins a majority and a second-round vote is held between the top two contenders.

Public broadcaster NHK reported on Sunday that Kishida led among lawmakers and Kono, followed by Takaichi, among party members and that a second-round runoff vote was inevitable.

Neither Takaichi nor Noda,

seeking to become Japan's first female premier, were initially viewed as having any chance. But analysts say support from Abe and core conservatives has bolstered Takaichi's chances, though she remains a long shot.

A win by Kono or Kishida is unlikely to trigger a huge shift in policies as Japan seeks to cope with China and revive an economy hit by the pandemic, but Kono's push for renewable energy and to remove bureaucratic obstacles to reform have made him appealing to investors and business chiefs.

Both share a broad consensus on the need to beef up Japan's defences and strengthen security ties with Washington and other partners including the QUAD grouping of Japan, the United States, Australia and India, while preserving vital economic ties with China and holding regular summit meetings.

"The consensus in Japan and the LDP is that to strike a balance between America and China, Japan must be tough on defence but maintain economic ties with China", said Tsuneo Watanabe, a senior fellow at the Sasakawa Peace Foundation.

— Agencies

■ INDIAN FARMERS STAGE NATIONWIDE PROTESTS



Farmers shout slogans as they block a road during a nationwide strike against the central government's agricultural reforms on the outskirts of Amritsar on Monday. — AFP

Japan awaits wedding news as royal sweetheart returns

TOKYO: Japanese romantics and royal-watchers held their breath for a wedding announcement as Princess Mako's boyfriend returned to Tokyo on Monday, following years of public controversy over their marriage.

The reunion has sparked a media frenzy, with reporters chasing 29-year-old Kei Komuro in recent days through the streets of New York, where he moved for law school.

Major TV networks carried live footage of his plane landing, with reports saying the long-delayed



Kei Komuro, the boyfriend of Japan's Princess Mako, arrives at Narita airport in Chiba Prefecture on Monday from the United States. — AFP

wedding could go ahead as soon as next month — more than three years after it was dramatically postponed. Mako, also 29, is the eldest granddaughter of Emperor Akihito, although Japan's imperial succession rules mean she will lose her title after marriage to a commoner.

The pair's union was delayed after a scandal erupted around reports that Komuro's family had run into financial difficulties, with his mother failing to repay a four-million-yen (\$36,000) loan from a former fiancée.

Local media said it was his first return to Japan since he left for America in 2018 in a move seen as a bid to defuse negative attention following the tabloid reports. As he stepped off the plane at an airport near Tokyo on Monday, Komuro was met by camera flashes, video crews and a gaggle of eager reporters.

Dressed in a dark suit with his long hair tied back, he bowed deeply to the journalists and did not speak.

He will quarantine for two weeks, as required by Japan's

Myanmar air strikes reported in battle

YANGON: Myanmar's military launched air strikes at the weekend after clashes with fighters opposed to the junta in the Sagaing region, according to media and a militia member, as phone lines and the Internet were also severed in some districts.

The Southeast Asian country has been in crisis since the army seized power on February 1, ending a decade of tentative steps towards democracy and triggering outrage at home and abroad and the setting up of People's Defence Forces (PDFs) to take on the military.

The DVB news portal reported the air strikes occurred as the army staged an offensive in the Pinlebu area of Sagaing in northwest Myanmar, citing residents who heard aircraft and explosions on Saturday night before phone lines and the Internet went down.

A member of the Pinlebu PDF, speaking from outside the area, also confirmed by telephone that air strikes had taken place, but said there had been no casualties amongst his group.

"We cannot contact them due to the Internet and phone lines blackout", the activist, who declined to be identified, said of his opposition colleagues.

Reuters could not independently verify any of the claims and a spokesman for the military did not answer calls seeking comment.

The National Unity Government (NUG), a shadow administration set up by ousted lawmakers and others opposed to the junta, said an arms cache including a rocket propelled grenade, small arms and shells had been seized in the fighting. It said more than 25 government soldiers had been killed.

There has been an upsurge in bloodshed in areas like Sagaing after the underground NUG declared an uprising on September 7 and called on PDFs to target the junta and its assets. Earlier in the conflict, the military had at times shut down the internet, particularly in cities, in a bid to curb demonstrations.

Since Thursday, the military had cut Internet access in 11 conflict-hit districts in Chin State and in the Magway region. — Reuters

border restrictions. Public broadcaster NHK said the Imperial Household Agency was planning a wedding next month and would announce it soon.

Mako is also said to be planning to move to the United States after her wedding, drawing inevitable comparisons with another controversial royal couple: Britain's Prince Harry and Meghan Markle.

Earlier this month, Japanese media said the pair had decided to wed without some traditional ceremonies. — AFP

German SPD seeks three-way alliance to succeed Merkel



Top candidate for Berlin mayor and co-leader of the German Social Democratic SPD party Franziska Giffey, German Finance Minister, and SPD Party's candidate for chancellor Olaf Scholz and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania's state premier Manuela Schwesig at the party's headquarters in Berlin. – AFP

BERLIN: German Social Democrat Olaf Scholz vowed on Monday to strengthen the European Union and keep up the transatlantic partnership in a three-way coalition government he hopes to form by Christmas to take over from Angela Merkel's conservatives.

Scholz's Social Democrats (SPD) came first in Sunday's national election, just ahead of the conservatives, and aim to lead a government for the first time since 2005 in a coalition with the Greens and the liberal Free Democrats (FDP).

Scholz projected a sense of calm assurance when asked whether the close election result and the prospect of prolonged coalition negotiations sent a message of instability in Germany to its European partners.

SPD's Scholz to start sounding out potential coalition partners as Conservative Laschet also vows to seek coalition

"Germany always has coalition governments and it was always stable," he said in fluent English, standing beside a statue of Willy Brandt, a Cold War-era SPD chancellor awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for fostering dialogue between East and West.

The SPD, Germany's oldest party, won 25.7 per cent of the vote, up five percentage points from the 2017 federal election, ahead of Merkel's CDU/CSU conservative bloc on 24.1 per cent, provisional results showed. The Greens came in with 14.8 per cent and the FDP won 11.5 per cent.

The SPD's recovery marks a tentative revival for centre-



Parliamentary group co-leader and top candidate of Germany's Alternative for Germany (AfD) party Tino Chrupalla and AfD party co-leader Joerg Meuthen address a news conference in Berlin. – Reuters

left parties in parts of Europe, following the election of Democrat Joe Biden as US president in 2020. Norway's centre-left opposition party also won an election earlier this month.

Scholz, who served as finance minister in Merkel's outgoing 'grand coalition', said a government led by him would offer the United States continuity in transatlantic relations.

"The transatlantic partnership is of essence for us in Germany... So you can rely on continuity in this question," he said, adding it was important for democracies to work together in a dangerous world even allowing for occasional

"conflicts".

Scholz said he hoped to agree a coalition before Christmas, "if possible".

However, his conservative rival Armin Laschet, 60, said he could still try to form a government despite leading his CDU-CSU bloc to their worst ever national election result.

The parties will start sounding each other out on Monday about possible alliances in informal discussions.

The Greens and FDP said late on Sunday they would first talk to each other to seek areas of compromise before starting negotiations with either the SPD or the conservatives.

Merkel, who did not seek a fifth term as chancellor, will stay on in a caretaker role during the coalition negotiations that — AFP

One dead in strong quake on Greek island of Crete

ATHENS: A strong earthquake struck the Greek island of Crete early on Monday, killing a man who was working in a church that collapsed and injuring 11 others, officials said.

The quake, measuring magnitude 5.8 according to Greece's seismological observatory, sent panicked residents rushing into the streets and damaged buildings on Greece's largest island.

It struck at 9:17 am, 23 kilometres from the Crete capital of Heraklion.

"So far, one man is dead and 11 people are in hospital suffering mostly from fractures, according to a spokesman from the National Centre for Emergency Care.

Spiros Georgiou, spokesman for the civil protection agency, had earlier said nine people were slightly injured in the farming town of Arkalochori which was particularly badly hit.

He said the man died in a small church that collapsed in the town.

Images on ERT public television showed old buildings

that had collapsed in Arkalochori and surrounding villages near Heraklion.

"It's an earthquake that we did not expect, for the moment there are aftershocks of 4.5," said Efthymis Lekkas, the head of Greece's quake protection agency, quoted by the ANA news agency.

The minister for civil protection Christos Stylianides was to visit the area later on Monday accompanied by Lekkas and other experts, ERT said.

The Athens observatory said the epicentre of the quake was 346 kilometres south of Athens and at a depth of 10 kilometres.

Greece is located on a number of fault lines, and is sporadically hit by earthquakes.

The last deadly quake in the country occurred on March 3 in the central town of Elasona, killing one person, injuring 10 and causing major damage.

On October 30, 2020 a magnitude 7.0 quake hit in the Aegean Sea between the Greek island of Samos and the city of Izmir in western Turkey. — dpa



A demolished house following an earthquake in Arkalochori village on the Crete island. – AFP

Sydney gets 'blueprint for freedom' as virus cases fall

SYDNEY: Vaccinated Sydney residents will finally emerge from a lengthy Covid lockdown by mid-October, Australian officials said on Monday, outlining a three-stage "blueprint for freedom" as case numbers fell in the city.

Stay-at-home orders are set to be lifted in Sydney and surrounding New South Wales when the double-dose vaccination rate hits 70 per cent, with state premier Gladys Berejiklian saying "quite confidently" that was now expected to occur on October 11.

Shuttered pubs, restaurants and shops will be allowed to reopen to the vaccinated while friends and families living across Australia's biggest city will be able to reunite

for the first time in more than three months.

"It is just this week and next week that we have to hang in there for," Berejiklian said.

"We are nearly, nearly there and let's not give up at the last minute."

Deputy premier John Barilaro said the "blueprint for freedom" would allow travel across New South Wales under its second stage — once 80 per cent of over-16s are fully vaccinated — which is likely by the end of October.

Restrictions on guest numbers at funerals and weddings would be lifted at the same time, while sporting fixtures would also be permitted to resume.

However, unvaccinated adults



A police officer wearing a protective face mask patrol in the city centre during a lockdown to curb the spread of Covid-19 outbreak in Sydney. – Reuters

will need to wait until at least December 1 to enjoy the same eased restrictions under the road map's third stage, when it is predicted that around 90 per cent of the eligible population will be vaccinated, officials said.

"I think today is a very disappointing day for those who aren't vaccinated. They will have to wait five or six weeks after others (for freedoms)," Berejiklian said.

The announcement came as new daily cases dipped below 800 in New South Wales on Monday — down from peaks of around 1,500 earlier in September — and the number of adults with at least one vaccine dose reached 85 per cent.

Berejiklian warned that hospitals

still faced being overwhelmed by a surge in Covid-19 patients in the coming weeks.

"We know that once we start reopening at 70 per cent (fully vaccinated) that the case numbers will go through the roof," she said.

"But what will protect us is the fact that so many people have received at least the first dose of the vaccine and those people will have that extra layer of protection against ending up in hospital or worse."

Australia has been grappling with a winter spike in the highly contagious Delta coronavirus variant that forced its two biggest cities, Sydney and Melbourne, into months-long lockdowns. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BAKU/YEREVAN

Thousands mourned on war anniversary

Armenia and Azerbaijan mourned thousands of people killed in their brief but brutal war for control of the Nagorno-Karabakh region on the first anniversary of the conflict. People in both countries observed a minute of silence and congregated for memorial services in churches and mosques in memory of those left dead in six weeks of fighting that erupted on September 27 last year.

The war for control of the mountainous region left some



6,500 people dead and sparked mutual allegations of war crimes. It ended in November with a Russian-brokered ceasefire that saw Armenia hand over to Baku swathes of contested territories it had controlled for decades.

LA PALMA

La Palma volcano spews lava again

The volcano on Spain's La Palma has begun spewing lava and smoke again, researchers said after activity had earlier slowed to a near halt, while some coastal villages locked down in anticipation of the lava reaching the sea. The Canary Islands' Involcan volcanology institute confirmed the renewed eruption via Twitter while Reuters witnesses saw a column of white smoke rising from the cone after several hours of calm.

Involcan and the National



Geographic Institute had said earlier on Monday the explosions and tremors around the Cumbre Vieja volcano had slowed down but the calm was short-lived and the eruption resumed shortly before 11 am local time.

LISBON

Socialists win municipal elections in Portugal

The ruling Socialists won municipal elections in Portugal, but suffered a surprise defeat by a right-wing coalition in the capital Lisbon, according to official results.

Prime Minister Antonio Costa's Socialist party had hoped to ride the success of a vaccine campaign that has seen the country clock some of the highest inoculation rates in the world. Last week, his government said almost all Covid restrictions would



be lifted from October 1 after infections dropped in recent months. Costa's camp garnered 34.4 per cent of Sunday's vote and won in at least 147 municipalities, out of a total of 308 up for grabs. — AFP

Electric supercars need to lose weight and cool down

NICK CAREY AND GIULIO PIOVACCARI

Speed has always been paramount for supercar makers, and now they’re in the race of their lives to go electric before climate policy cuts their combustion engines.

That’s why the likes of Ferrari and Mercedes-Benz are turning to startups such as Oxford-based electric motor company YASA for expertise and technology to solve the unique challenges of electrifying the highest-performance vehicles.

Batteries are immensely heavy and electric motors overheat if driven too hard — big problems for a niche industry that charges hundreds of thousands of dollars for lightweight cars capable of screaming round 10 laps of a track at full throttle.

This year Daimler bought YASA, which has developed an “axial flux” high-performance electric motor that weighs 23 kg a fraction of a near-300 kg V12 engine in a Ferrari, and is about the size and shape of a steering wheel.

YASA already makes motors for Ferrari, Swedish supercar maker Koenigsegg, plus an unnamed British supercar company. It will now supply the high-performance AMG brand at Daimler, which will soon assume the name of its car business Mercedes-Benz.

Based just a few miles from YASA, Saietta has developed a range of water-cooled axial flux motors. The company is gearing up to produce motors for the vast Asian motorbike market, but said it had created a larger prototype and was in talks with one hypercar maker, and that two others had expressed interest.

“These manufacturers know combustion engines forwards, backwards and inside out. But they don’t know electric powertrains and what they’re looking for is someone to hold their hand.”

Yet this is uncharted territory, with no clear road map to electric for high-performance vehicles yet.

— Reuters

These manufacturers know combustion engines forwards, backwards and inside out. But they don’t know electric powertrains and what they’re looking for is someone to hold their hand

GRAHAM LENDEN
Saietta Chief Commercial Officer



HAPPY TO STUDY!

Afghan girls are pictured as they step out of their respective classes, in a school in Kandahar on Monday. – AFP

It is not a global village!



Lakshmi Kothaneth
lakshmiobserver@gmail.com

THE CRY OF PAIN IS INVOLUNTARY REACTION TO THE EMBARRASSMENT OF OTHERS

Fall has many meanings from a season to giving in to gravity.

The season, fall has a time period, more or less, but when it comes to trip, miss and come in contact with ground – it is something that can happen to anyone at any time.

I have plenty of incidents where I have had mishaps just because thoughts were faster than steps, but a recent misfortune has not been too comfortable, instead has been a test of patience. The pain one has never known before can make one humble. The cry of pain is involuntary reaction to the embarrassment of others.

There is always a longing to go back to being normal but the fact is it takes time to heal, which is why it was nerve racking to see someone climb up the steps at the entrance of a building while looking at the phone, hardly conscious about where they were placing the next step.

Well texting and driving is a chargeable offence because the driver could also prove to be dangerous to others on the road in addition to causing damage to public utilities. But what if one could cause harm to oneself due to carelessness?

The suffering is not just for the individual but for the family members as well.

A fall can be due to many reasons and causes but let it be not due to texting or watching video on mobile phone.

We could apply the mathematical

law of probability to understand the frequency of falls and their reasons.

Now this does not mean everyone has to live in fear of fall but the fact remains osteoporosis continues to be a major concern. According to womenshealth.gov one in three women is likely to have a fracture caused by osteoporosis. But it does not just affect women; men can also suffer from osteoporosis because the main cause of it is lack of intake of calcium throughout life, which is why health experts treat osteoporosis with calcium and vitamin D.

This is one of the reasons why youngsters should remain aware on what could face them in future if they are relying on fad diets or fall prey to eating disorders. What seems to be attractive later can turn out to be costly in the future not just monetary wise but in quality of life. At the same time overweight also seems to be a problem. Like everything else in life what requires seem to be finding the right balance of life – in thoughts and actions.

These are the days when teenagers question and challenge parents and elders no matter whether they are parents, family members or teachers. It seems it is not the case of the past where parents had to compete with peer influence but tackle the flow of information and entertainment.

Would one categorise gaming under entertainment and hobby? Then this is

one area that is having parents locked out of children’s lives. It is a whole new world, with characters and terminologies parents might have never come across because they have been making a living. But that living is of a loss if it fails to provide an open conversation with their child. What seemed to happen is that both parties seemed to be passing judgment on each other.

The youth might feel it is essential to know gaming or know the latest trends in order to be accepted, but they miss out on the fact that it might be important to have the beautiful link with parents. They would need them at some point in life more than ever at the same time there are parents who take time to read and research on the latest happenings to understand where their young ones stand and where they might falter and be ready to catch them when they do.

We have also been a teenager and it might be easy to say, ‘We were not like that in our teens.’ But the teenagers today live in a world that is full of immediacy that carries an influence of not just the school campus and neighbourhood, their radius of influence is the whole wide world with a small tool called social media. It is not a global village, it is a global cosmopolitan. If you are a parent or an adult worried about the young ones in the family, time to read and find out more to reach into the teenagers’ world and then have a conversation.

A dark alley...



Dr Khalid Mohammed al Balushi
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SHOULD WE HAVE TALKED WHILE HEAVY CLOUDS WERE HANGING OVER OUR HEADS?

The following are translations of poems from Zahir al Ghafri’s collection: Whenever an Angel Appeared in the Fort (Beirut: 2008)

A Dark Alley

No one in the dark alley but you
The mouth’s flower in the dark
You’re the woman of the last breaths
And empty archways.
Hands in water, knees in soil
Each signal from you is a high threshold to exile.
The sea before your door is the refuge for passers-by
The sea is white in your blue palm
And a mark of my love-stricken heart.
Rebellious memory stirred the autumn leaves
Under the door
You went to pick them up
I was the cold light wind.
Inspiration comes with no

compass
Under the riverbank,
You’re the selfsame woman
In the street or the dark alley
Before others.
Did I say “gloom”?
Did you laugh at the spring that let us down?
Was winter what you meant?
This misunderstanding is a bow
Hanging in ice
Perhaps there should be... no end.
Checkmate
Should we have talked
While heavy clouds were hanging over our heads?
Was our talk like the throw of white dice
And did our spring happiness gush out
Like an archipelago of light?
Silence sails, on a light land, to Beirut
My life returns to the springhead

Like the mast of a prophethess
Carrying treasures and gifts.
These walls have never deserted me
Nor has this beauty that glitters
Over your black eyelid
Like lightning.
You’re, in truth, the enemy’s barking.
O enemy
My last glance was her resort that night,
Thus love sails with knee’s water
With the power of an angel on a bed
Between a mirror, a well and a blue closet.
Between the alleys barks the one that can’t
Be named.
Between the clouds as I fall asleep
There slip the white dice, the prophethess’ mast
The knee water, the mirror, the well and the blue closet

Into the fountain of happiness.
“Checkmate”
Said the sage.
Not Today, Not Tomorrow
Not today, not tomorrow
Not like this
Never like this.
You should wait till towers of silence rise from your bowels
Like someone hearing the posts
Collide with the howling of a wolf at night.
To be a man and woman at once
Near the riverbanks
The moment is the same: a skilled hunter
Like Hamlet’s madness at its height
Unarmed but with words
But with keys
Keys that are just a few dreams in your cold palm.
The grand miracle seeks that cloud of despair
As it beats on a horizon as a flag of sins.

Go alone if you wish
To reach the fort
But not today, not tomorrow.
You should also wait for savages who will come
You may find some solution
And write that verse.
Searching for a Dream
Not now...
This window won’t open but a small injury.
You dream like someone
Begging for sleep in the forest.
There
With a single stone throw
The dead wake up on the riverbank.
You walk on the edge of the world
To get to the valleys you lost.
On your way stones glisten
Like a golden memory.
The journey is very long
The wind goes after the hands’ waving
Despair lights your eyes
dreaming of stars.

sport

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Oman Sail compete during the Marina Militare Nastro Rosa Tour 2021 in Italy.

OMAN SAIL CLAIM SILVER IN ITALY

TEAM FINISHES SECOND AT MARINA MILITARE NASTRO ROSA TOUR

MUSCAT: Oman Sail's team finished the Marina Militare Nastro Rosa Tour in Italy in second place after powering through tough conditions to claim the silver medals. An excellent first week which saw the team leading at the halfway stage was followed by a solid second week against very strong competition. The team from France took the gold ahead of Oman, with Italian Luna Rosa team in third.

The event was a showcase for offshore and inshore racing in identical DIAM24 crafts around the Italian coastline starting in Genova a month ago. The tour then visited Rome, Gaeta, Napoli, Brindisi, Bari, Ravenna and concluded in Venice.

Starting strong, the crew notched up two first place finishes in their opening three races. This form continued as overall performance improved, culminating in an excellent performance on day one in Naples where they won all three races.



Oman Sail crew at the Marina Militare Nastro Rosa Tour 2021.

The second week began in Brindisi after a week of recovery and work in the gym. Conditions were difficult as winds changed but the team finished in second overall, although did have to contend with a disqualification in the final race of the day for a minor infraction. The remaining races included two inshore races and a 50 nautical mile coastal race, which the team coped with well, finishing third overall. They

improved the following day with a second-place finish in Bari before heading to Ravenna for a short race, where they finished sixth, and a long 76 nautical mile coastal race where they finished fourth. Venice hosted the finale and the team started well before succumbing to another disqualification in the last race of the penultimate day. They battled back on the final day but could not make the leap



Group shot of the team in Italy.

into first. The team had been scheduled to withdraw after racing at Brindisi in order to begin training in Switzerland, but the run of excellent performances resulted in the team remaining in Italy to complete the final race. Nasser al Mashari, Oman Sail team captain, said, "To finish second in our first event back after a long break is extremely impressive. Originally, we were not intending to finish, so to end

the Tour in second has exceeded all expectations. I am proud of the entire team. It was great to get back on the water and test ourselves in the DIAM24. The in-port races and offshore legs provided a difficult test at times but we learned together and this bond will be valuable in our next adventure at the Star Sailors League in Switzerland. After that the team will return home to face visiting crews in Oman. It's a busy season but we're glad

to be back sailing again." Training for the Star Sailors League Finals began on September 21. Team manager Hashim al Rashdi, Yassir al Rahbi, Waleed al Kindi, Musab al Hadi, Ahmed al Hasani, Abdulrahman al Mashari and Raad al Hadi were already in Switzerland preparing for the race against 12 teams from around the world. Team captain Nasser al Mashari, Hussain al Jabri, Ali al Balushi, Haitham al Wahaibi and Akram al Wahaibi will now join them as they prepare to battle it out in a series of Inshore Races for the Sir Roland Symonette Trophy, the first major international tournament for Oman's team of elite sailors post-pandemic. Crews from the Nastro Rosa Tour are due to take part in Sailing Arabia — The Tour 2021, starting in Mussanah on November 24 and ending in Muscat on December 5 as a busy winter season of sailing in the Sultanate comes to a close.

Oman Cricket signs sponsorship deals for T20 World Cup

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, SEPT 27

As the Sultanate is getting ready for the first ever hosting of Twenty 20 World Cup cricket, Oman Cricket has signed some multi-sponsorship agreements with a host of companies on Monday. The sponsorship agreements were signed at the Oman Cricket Academy, Al Amerat with Oman LNG, Oman Telecommunications, Oman India Fertiliser Company, Jindal Iron & Steel, SOHAR Port and Freezone and Sohar Aluminium. The agreements are related to Oman hosting the first round of the seventh edition ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2021. Chief guests Abdulsalam al Murshidi, Head of Oman Investment Authority, and Basil

bin Ahmed al Rowas — Under Secretary for Sports and Youth, were present at the event along with Oman Cricket Chairman Pankaj Khimji, who signed the deals on behalf of Oman Cricket. Dr Amor al Matani — CEO of Oman LNG Development Foundation, Aladdin Abdullah Hassan Baitfadhil, Vice President of Consumer Unit, Oman Telecommunications, Khalid bin Mohammed al Fanah — Corporate Sustainability Manager, OMIFCO, Sanjay Anand — COO and Head- Jindal Shaded Iron and Steel LLC, Ahmed al Musallami — CEO, Sohar International LLC, Omar bin Mahmood al Mahrzi — CEO — SOHAR Free zone/Deputy CEO — SOHAR Port and Ayad bin Ali al Balushi — Chairman, Sohar Aluminium LLC were present as the signing authorities



of the respective sponsors. Pankaj Khimji, Chairman, Oman Cricket Board, said, "The ICC T20 World Cup 2021 is one of the major events hosted in Oman and will be extremely instrumental in gaining recognition for the sport in our country. Striking sponsorship with leading companies will only help us put for the best for our participants and viewers."

The OC chief also thanked the different sponsors for their support in hosting the prestigious tournament in Oman. The T20 World Cup will be hosted by the BCCI in Oman and the United Arab Emirates from October 17. Seasoned campaigner Zeeshan Maqsood will lead Oman in the tournament.

Oman will take on Papua New Guinea in their first match on October 17. **TOP TEST** Top test for Oman will be against Bangladesh, the top ranking team in Group B, on October 19 at the Al Amerat Ground. The hosts wrap up their group proceedings with another tough challenge against Scotland on

October 21. In run-up to the World Cup, Oman are hosting ICC World Cricket League 2 series. In the first tri-series involving Oman, USA and Nepal from September 13 to 20, Oman came on top by winning three out of four matches. Oman also stretched their lead to 22 points from 14 matches. USA are a distant second with 14 points from 16 games followed by Scotland at 9 from 8. The tournament is a qualification round to the ICC World Cup 2023. In the second tri-series now under way, Oman thrashed World Cup group mates PNG on Sunday by eight wickets. On Tuesday, the Sultanate team will take on another World Cup group mates Scotland in a crunch match.

**Europe cruise to Laver Cup triumph**

LOS ANGELES: Europe completed a fourth consecutive victory in the Laver Cup team tennis tournament on Sunday, with doubles duo Andrey Rublev and Alexander Zverev downing Reilly Opelka and Denis Shapovalov to seal a 14-1 rout. Team Europe needed only one win on Sunday against Team World to seal victory.

**Kontaveit claims third career title in Ostrava**

OSTRAVA: World number 30 Anett Kontaveit picked up her second title of the season with a 6-2, 7-5 win over Greece's Maria Sakkari in the final of the Ostrava Open on Sunday. The unseeded Estonian had not dropped a set all week before powering past fourth seed Sakkari to claim the biggest title of her career and her third overall.

Maxwell, Patel hat-trick help Bangalore thrash Mumbai

DUBAI: Glenn Maxwell's all-round show and a hat-trick by Harshal Patel helped Royal Challengers Bangalore hammer holders Mumbai Indians by 54 runs in the Indian Premier league on Sunday.

In the first match of the day, M.S. Dhoni's Chennai Super Kings beat Kolkata Knight Riders by two wickets in a last-ball thriller to move top of the eight-team table.

Australia's Maxwell held centre-stage in game two with a quickfire 56 guiding Bangalore to 165-6 and then his off-spin got two key wickets including skipper Rohit Sharma, for 43, to bowl out Mumbai for 111 in 18.1 overs in Dubai.

Patel flattened Mumbai's batting with his medium-pace bowling as he sent back Hardik Pandya (3), Kieron Pollard (7) and Rahul Chahar (0) to get his first IPL hat-trick and return figures of 4-17.

Skipper Virat Kohli also played a key part as he went past 10,000 runs in T20 cricket with a six off Mumbai quick Jasprit Bumrah and become the fifth international batsman to achieve the feat.

Kohli has been under the spotlight since announcing this month that he would step down as India's T20 captain after the World Cup and the Bangalore captaincy after this IPL tournament.

Kohli's team are still searching for an IPL title as they revived their campaign with a win after three straight losses this pandemic-hit season

The star batsman (51) came all guns blazing after Bangalore were invited to bat first and took apart the bowlers, albeit with some luck through dropped catches on nought and 37.

He put on key partnerships including a 68-run second-wicket stand with Srikar Bharat and then put on 51 runs with Maxwell.

Maxwell used the reverse sweep to good effect and hit six fours and three sixes in his 37-ball knock.

Bumrah took three wickets including Maxwell and AB de Villiers off successive deliveries to check the opposition but Bangalore's total proved enough.

In reply, Sharma and Quinton de Kock, who made 23, started



Royal Challengers Bangalore's Glenn Maxwell makes an appeal. — BCCI

strongly but the duo's departure saw five-time champions Mumbai lose momentum and sink to their third straight loss.

Earlier in Abu Dhabi, Ravindra Jadeja's crucial cameo and 43 by Faf du Plessis helped Chennai Super Kings topple Delhi Capitals from the top of the table.

Needing 26 off 12 deliveries while chasing 172 for victory, Chennai reached their target on

the final ball to record their third straight win.

The left-handed Jadeja, who made 22 off eight balls, smashed fast bowler Prasad Krishna for two sixes and two fours in the 19th over to leave Chennai needing four to win off the final six balls.

Spinner Sunil Narine bowled the 20th over and tried to defend four runs. He took two key wickets including Sam Curran, for four,

and Jadeja to take the match to the final ball with the scores level.

New man Deepak Chahar kept his calm to hit the winning run.

— AFP

BRIEF SCORES: Royal Challengers Bangalore 165/6 (Glenn Maxwell 56, Virat Kohli 51; Jasprit Bumrah 3/36) beat Mumbai Indians 111 all out (Rohit Sharma 43, Quinton de Kock 24; Harshal Patel 4/17) by 54 runs.

Must wins for Mumbai and Kolkata Knight Riders



Kolkata Knight Riders are set to lock horns with Delhi Capitals in Match No.41 of the 2021 Indian Premier League on Tuesday, September 28 at the Sharjah Cricket Stadium. The Knight Riders, started the UAE leg with two wins on the trot, but lost to the Chennai Super Kings by two wickets on Sunday.

Sunil Narine almost defended four runs off the last over after Ravindra Jadeja laid into Prasad Krishna. Despite the loss, the Knights stayed at fourth in the points table. Kolkata needs to win all their 4 encounters to qualify. The Rishabh Pant-led Capitals, on the other hand, are nearly through to the playoffs, having got eight wins from 10 games.

In their previous game, Pant's men defeated the Rajasthan Royals by 33 runs despite Sanju Samson an unbeaten 70. If the Capitals go on to win their next game, they will not only qualify for the playoffs, but also will assure themselves a berth among the two teams in the league.

What to expect from the game?

The match is at Sharjah Cricket Stadium, where the Avg first innings score: 141 (2 matches in the IPL 2021 at Sharjah). The pitch in Sharjah has been a spinner's paradise and batting has been tough. The batters will look to score runs off the pacers. Chasing should be the way forward for the teams. Scoring runs in the powerplay will hold a lot of importance.

Players to watch out for?

Kolkata Knight Riders — Shabman Gill, Venkatesh Iyer and Rahul Tripathi with the bat. Expect some lusty blows from Andre Russell, Dinesh Karthik and Eoin Morgan. With the ball Its Sunil Narine and Varun Chakaravorthy might shine.

Delhi Capitals — Liam Livingstone, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Sanju Samson with the bat. Killer Miller or Mahipal Lomror might strike a few big ones. With the

ball Ravi Ashwin and Axar Patel might pick some crucial wickets.

Match Prediction — With the quality and balance of the Kolkata Knight Riders, expect them to shine and slow the progression of Delhi Capitals in this game.

MUMBAI VS PUNJAB

Mumbai Indians are placed at the 7th spot in the Indian Premier League 2021 points table with 4 wins and 6 losses from their 10 matches of the league. The team is with 8 points. Mumbai needs win all of their remaining games to qualify for the play offs.

Meanwhile, Punjab Kings are placed at the 5th spot in the Indian Premier League 2021 points table with 4 wins and 6 losses from their 10 matches of the league. The team is with 8 points. Punjab, just like Mumbai, also needs to win all of their remaining games to qualify for the play offs. In their last game, Mumbai was thrashed by Royal Challengers Bangalore, while Punjab won it's game against Sunrisers Hyderabad.

What to expect from the match?

Both Punjab Kings and Mumbai Indians will look to chase on this Abu Dhabi wicket where spinners have been able to extract some good amount of turn. Batters have in general struggled to adapt to this wicket.

Average first inning total on this wicket has been around 145 and teams will be looking to get to around 150-160 and then defend it.

Players to Watch out for:

Punjab Kings — KL Rahul, Mayank Agarwal and Chris Gayle will be looking for a big one, at the same time, expect some big ones from Nicholas Pooran and Deepak Hooda. In the bowling expect Harpreet Brar and Ravi Bishnoi to shine.

Mumbai Indians — Rohit Sharma, Quinton de Kock and Suryakumar Yadav might go after the bowlers with the bat. Kieron Pollard and Hardik Pandya could strike a few out of the ground. With the ball in hand, Rahul Chahar will have all eyes on him. Anukul Roy could come in and shine with the ball.

Oman to compete at 2021 ITTF-ATTU Asian TT

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 27

Oman senior TT team will take part at the 2021 ITTF-ATTU Asian Table Tennis Championships which will take place in Doha from Tuesday to October 5.

The paddlers who will represent the Sultanate team in the Asian event including Asaad al Raisi, Muhannad al Balushi and Haitham al Mandhari.

The national team representatives arrived in Doha on Sunday and resumed their training sessions.

Oman's TT paddler Asaad

and his team-mates began the preparation for the Asian event through a domestic camp which was held in Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex during last weeks.

The selection of the Sultanate TT players were based on the players results in the last regional, continental and international championships.

Oman's international referees will attend the Asian event to officiate fixtures in different competitions. The umpires list include Mohammed al Alawi, Al Julanda al Mawali, Hisham al Sibani and Ahmed al Arawi. The



Sultanate's umpiring representative managed to attend in different regional and international meets in the past few years.

The 2021 ITTF-ATTU Asian Table Tennis Championships will act as a new additional experience for them and it is expected the umpires will officiate top fixtures in top Asian event.

OTTA Chairman Abdullah Bamukhalef affirmed that the association is keen to take part in different continental and international championships.

"These events are very crucial for the players to gain the required

experience and exposure. We wish good luck for the national team players who will compete against the Asian opponents and to register top results," he said.

OTTA officials will take part in the Asian Congress which will be held on October 3 including OTTA Chairman Abdullah Bamakhalif, Vice-Chairman Sajad Baqir and Secretary General Adil al Balushi.

The Asian Congress will feature election for the new term. Oman's TT chairman will be competing for the board member post while Vice-Chairman for treasurer position.

SUPERB SECOND IN THE RAIN FOR AL FAISAL, SOUCEK



MONZA, Italy: Al Faisal al Zubair and Andy Soucek overcame the wet and demanding race conditions to seal a hard-earned second place in the second International GT Open race at Italy's Monza circuit on Sunday afternoon.

The Lechner Racing Porsche 911 GT3 R crew started out on slicks and opted to pit straight away for wet tyres and the strategy paid off with another useful haul of championship points and a podium finish.

Chilean driver Benjamin Hites and Italian team-mate Fabrizio Crestani overcame the wet and challenging race conditions to seal victory by 8.372 seconds in the Rinaldi Racing Ferrari 488.

Michele Beretta and Frederick Schandorff rounded off the podium places in their Vincenzo Sospiri Racing Lamborghini behind Al Zubair and Soucek. They remain firm favourites to clinch the International GT Open title at the final race meeting.

Al Zubair said: "This weekend was good, especially the second race starting P9 after the rain in qualifying. This really put us on the back foot but we knew we had a strong car if the rain came down. Coming out on the formation lap on slicks seemed like the right call. But, just before the race started, we pitted for wet tyres. This was the best call and, ultimately, made the race for us from P9 to P2.

"We are very happy with this. We did not expect a P2 in the second race after starting so far back. The team did an amazing job when we came into the pits. We jumped three cars in the pit itself due to the team's pit stop, which was great. I am now looking forward to the next race in Barcelona in one month."

The Lechner Racing Porsche lined up in ninth position for the second of the weekend's races with pole position going to the Inception Racing McLaren of Joe Osborne and Nick Moss. Jacopo Guidetti qualified the Reno

Racing Honda NSX in second place. Damp conditions and light drizzle was present at the start and Al Zubair and Guidetti pitted from the rolling start to put wet weather tyres on their cars. Yuki Nemoto managed to pass Osborne to take the lead with Gerhard Tweraser moving up to third.

After the pit stop, Al Zubair and Guidetti rejoined in 18th and 22nd places, as several of the other front-runners also opted to pit in the difficult conditions. Osborne regained the lead on the second lap, with Loris Spinelli moving up to second place and Al Zubair climbing back to 13th heading into lap three.

Spinelli opted to pit soon after and Cup runner Daan Pijl inherited a surprise lead in his Bonaldi Motorsport Porsche. Al Zubair's early pit stop decision was proving to be a good one and the Omani climbed to eighth position. When Marcus Paverud pitted, Al Zubair moved up

“
We are very happy with this. We did not expect a P2 in the second race after starting so far back. The team did an amazing job when we came into the pits

AL FAISAL AL ZUBAIR

another place to seventh and was the second of the Pro runners behind Fabrizio Crestani. The rain intensified as the leaders headed into lap five with Crestani moving up to fourth and Al Zubair and Schandorff starting to reel in the Cup cars ahead from sixth and seventh positions.

Al Zubair and Schandorff moved up to fifth and sixth on lap six but Pijl and Mateusz Lisowski continued to fend off a charging Crestani at the head of the leader board until the Pro class car moved into the lead heading into lap seven. Schandorff passed Al-Zubair to take fifth, but the Lamborghini and the Porsche continued to reel in the Cup cars running ahead.

Slick Gunners stun Spurs with early attack

ANDY JALIL



Arsenal's Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang celebrates after the match. – Reuters

North London derbies have always been passionately fought contests and this one saw Arsenal emerge victorious by three goals to one over their fiercest rivals Tottenham Hotspur. With three goals in the first 35 minutes, the Gunners quickly established their superiority which they maintained throughout the match.

Their manager, Mikel Arteta, whose team have made rapid improvement after their worst start to the season losing their first three Premier League games, said: "When you are trying to rebuild and trying to do the right things you have to stay by your values. It's not about winning but the way we've done it, against a top team on the most special day of the season against our rivals."

He added: "Now we have to be consistent. This win is for the fans. They've been incredible in tough moments when we needed their support, and it doesn't get much better than the atmosphere today. We started really strong, really convincingly, determined. It's probably one of the best games I've seen us play for the first half."

Arsenal didn't allow their opponents to settle and went on the offensive to score early with Martin Odegaard passing to Bukayo Saka on the right. Saka having made good ground crossed to Emile Smith Rowe who right-footed into the net in the 12th minute. Within a further 15 minutes Arsenal were two up. Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang flicked the ball on the halfway line to Smith Rowe who raced ahead before passing to Aubameyang from the left for the striker to score just inside the right post.

The Gunners were fully in control by this stage, dominating the midfield in which Odegaard was outstanding, ensuring that his team had possession for long periods in that area. The third goal came 10 minutes before halftime. Harry Kane lost the ball to Partey who fed Saka, Kane chased and tried to tackle Saka but failed, and after beating Eric Dyer, Saka gave Hugo Lloris no chance as he drilled the ball in.

In the 80th minute after Kane had missed a good chance to reduce the margin, Spurs managed to get a goal, having put some pressure on their opponents with Bryan Gil and Oliver skipp on as substitutes. Son Heung-Min scored the consolation goal from a cross by Sergio Reguilon.

Spurs manager, Nuno Espirito Santo, said: "The performance was not good. The game plan was not good. It was definitely not a good day for us. Players were not able to do what I told them. A lot of things went wrong starting with the decisions I made."

He added: "When you have a game plan you have to make the right decisions in terms of who you want on the pitch. I won't name individuals but the plan was not right for the players. We weren't aggressive enough to control in midfield. We suffered when we wanted to go in front and let Arsenal to come to us. Bad decisions."

Wahaibi fights back strongly to finish Cyprus Rally

NICOSIA, Cyprus: Omani rallying legend Hamed al Wahaibi overcame his first day disappointment to set several stunning stage times to reach the finish of the Cyprus Rally, the fourth round of the 2021 FIA Middle East Rally Championship (Merc), in Nicosia on Sunday.

On a day where local driver Alexandros Tsoulftas sealed his first ever Merc victory, Al Wahaibi set three second quickest stages times and a third fastest time to move back up the field to finish the event in 16th position. Had it not been for a power steering issue on stage nine and a clogged radiator delay on the penultimate timed test, he would have climbed back within sight of the top 10.

It was also a successful event for Oman's Abdullah al Rawahi, who finished in third place behind Cypriot driver Petros Panteli.

"It was a really enjoyable rally," said Al Wahaibi. "I came here to get the experience and regain the knowledge. My notes were a bit off and we struggled with it a little but Tony and I now understand more and more. The speed this weekend

was so high. Congratulations also to Abdullah (al Rawahi) on his excellent result."

Sircombe added: "It's been great to be back in the car with Hamed after 20 years. Both of us haven't done many rallies over the past 10 years. We were a bit rusty and had a few cobwebs to blow out. But it was good to finish the rally and get some miles in preparation for the Oman Rally in two months' time."

Running with logistical support from Asyad Express (an Omani delivery and logistics company) and Sandan Development LLC, the 53-year-old was permitted to restart under the Rally2 ruling on Sunday from 21st in the overall classification.

Two passes through three sinuous stages of 13.01km (Lythrodontas), 19.02km (Ayios Ephifanios) and 10.96km (Ayia Marina) were on the agenda for the final day.

The Omani was into a competitive pace from the outset and a third fastest time behind Tsoulftas and Panteli lifted Al Wahaibi two places to 19th. He was now into the groove and only

“
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HAMED AL WAHAIBI Omani rally driver

rally leader Tsoulftas managed to beat him in the second stage of the morning.

Al Wahaibi dropped around two minutes with a power steering issue in the third timed test but still managed to move up a place to 18th overall.

With the power steering issue repaired by the Motortune



Hamed al Wahaibi in action in Cyprus.

mechanics at the service stop, Al-Wahaibi attacked again on the repeat run through Lythrodontas and beat his previous time by 29 seconds to set another second quickest time. This lifted the Škoda Fabia 1.6 driver into 16th position.

But Al Wahaibi suffered another 11-minute time loss on

the 11th stage when he was forced to stop and unblock a clogged radiator to prevent the engine from overheating. He continued when the engine had cooled down sufficiently.

Al Wahaibi regrouped before the final special and another second fastest time enabled the Omani to complete the rally in

16th overall. A fastest time gave Alex Tsoulftas his first ever victory at the Cyprus Rally and a maiden Merc victory. Panteli managed to overtake Al Rawahi to snatch second place.

The penultimate round of the 2021 FIA Middle East Rally Championship takes place in Kuwait on November 11-13.

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MAKING RO BETTER

Land lease pact inked for HYPOR Duqm green hydrogen project

MAJOR MILESTONE:
Agreement signed by The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) with OQ Group and DEMA Concessions

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 27

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) on Monday signed a land reservation agreement for the green hydrogen project of Hypor Duqm Company, a joint project of alternative energy between OQ and the Belgian DEMA Concessions.

According to the agreement, Hypor Duqm will now continue to move forward with the early engineering works and site data collection to establish a Green Hydrogen and Ammonia project in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

The agreement was signed by Dr Ali Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), and on behalf of Hypor Duqm by Dr Salim al Huthaili, OQ Alternative Energy CEO, and Chairman of Hypor Duqm Company and Alain Bernard, Chairman and Managing Director of DEMA Concessions.

The project will be established in part of the land already allocated for the renewable energy projects, in an area of 150 square kilometres and is located in the southern part of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm. Thus, ideally located along the windy and sunny Omani coast and the Arabian Sea. This strategic land will accommodate both an onshore wind



and solar PV farm with a combined capacity of 1.3 GW, which will be developed in subsequent expandable project phases.

Hypor Duqm is currently completing the installation and commissioning of four meteorological wind masts and two meteorological solar stations within the site in order to confirm Duqm's excellent solar and wind conditions which are available throughout the year and which form the basis of a successful green hydrogen to green ammonia project.

The Hypor Duqm project fits well in the Sultanate's strategy of developing the Al Wusta Governorate, while also contributing in achieving the renewable energy and other targets of the Oman Vision 2040.

Commenting on the land reservation agreement, Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, pointed out: "OPAZ welcomes this project in the Special Economic Zones at Duqm. It aspires to be a pioneering project that will introduce

green hydrogen and green Ammonia to the country, which will lead the diversification beyond hydrocarbons efforts and contributing to Vision 2040". Salim al Huthaili, CEO Alternative Energy at OQ, commented: "The land reservation agreement is yet another milestone in the development of this important project. The Special Economic Zone at Duqm will be a global Green Hydrogen hub combining power, manufacturing and logistics activities while focusing on effort of decarbonisation and electrification."

"The excellent renewable resources and the existing infrastructures along with the upcoming national grid connection makes the Duqm zone an attractive and competitive destination for renewable projects. Oman continues to be a global leader in delivering clean energy projects to accelerate the energy transition effort. OQ and our shareholders The Oman Investment Authority continue to support this project and our strategy to grow this important sector," he added.

Alain Bernard, Executive Chairman DEMA Concessions,

stated: "Our flagship Green Hydrogen project HYPOR Duqm strikes another important milestone which underwrites DEMA Concessions' strong commitment in making the necessary project progress. HYPOR Duqm responds not only to the call for projects supporting the global energy transition; the project will form an integral part of SEZAD's ambitious growth under the strong leadership of OPAZ. Finally, this milestone strengthens DEMA Concession's sustainable, long-term presence in SEZAD, complementing e.g. its shareholder's role in Port of Duqm."

Dr Al Sunaidy had discussed with Tinne Van der Straeten, Minister of Energy of Belgium, in a meeting on Sunday, the localisation of clean hydrogen and ammonia industry in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD). The meeting also highlighted ways to ensure the entry of clean hydrogen and green ammonia products that will be produced in Duqm, by the Omani-Belgian Hypor joint project, to European Union countries through the Belgian market.

Oman Re to raise RO 10m via IPO

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 27

The Initial Public Offering (IPO) of Oman Reinsurance Company SAOG (Under Transformation), the first reinsurance company to be established in the Sultanate, opens on October 3, 2021 with 117.647 million shares available for public subscription at a fixed price of 86 baisas per share (inclusive of 1 baisas per share as issue expenses).

The issue of 117.647 million new shares amounting to RO 10 million will increase the issued capital of the Company to RO 40,000,000 divided into 417,647,059 shares, Oman Re said in its prospectus.

"The Company is undertaking the IPO in order to comply with the requirements of Royal Decree 39/2014 which amended the Insurance Law, requiring existing licensed insurance and reinsurance companies to be established as SAOG by August 17, 2017 and as per 2019 EGM, and to increase the issued capital to RO 40 million. The proceeds of the Offer (including Offer expenses) will accrue entirely to the Company to fund its operations and growth plans," it further noted.

The IPO will increase the issued and paid-up capital from RO 30 million to RO 40



million, assuming full subscription. The Offer will be open to Omani and non-Omani individuals and juristic persons, who have their accounts with the MCD, as on the date of / or during the subscription period, which closes on October 17, 2021.

Leading investment advisory firm Ubhar Capital SAOC is the Financial Adviser & Issue Manager for the IPO. Collecting banks are National Bank of Oman, Oman Arab Bank and Sohar International Bank.

Incorporated in July 2008 with a paid-up capital of RO 5,000,000, Oman Re's capital was gradually increased to RO 30,000,000 (approx \$78 million). The capital of Oman Re is proposed to be increased to RO 40 million post-IPO.

The official business started in 2009 and company wrote a premium of RO 1.2 million. Since then, the company has grown significantly and have closed 2020 with gross premium of RO 24.8 million.

Work begins on major Omani copper-gold project

MINERAL BOOST:
Production of copper concentrates to start from Q4 2022

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Al Hadeetha Resources LLC, a joint venture Omani-Australian minerals exploration and development company, has announced the formal commencement of construction work on a major copper-gold project in the Washihi-Majazza area of Al Mudhaibi Wilayat in the Sultanate.

The project, which heralds a new era in copper ore exploration

and processing in the Sultanate, involves the construction of an open pit mine, the installation of a one million tonnes per annum (MTPA) copper concentrator plant and other associated infrastructure, said Atmavishreshwar Shapak, Managing Director, Al Hadeetha Resources.

"With support from all Oman government authorities, financial institutions, and JV partners we are very pleased to report that construction of the Washihi Majazza copper project in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate has now commenced. The project will offer several socioeconomic benefits in the Sultanate such as direct employment, local skill development, opportunities for local supplier/vendors,



(Picture for illustration only)

infrastructural development like electricity and roads in the region," Shapak noted in a statement to the Observer.

Australian-based mining firm

Alara Resources is a majority investor in the joint venture with a 51 per cent stake. Al Hadeetha (30 per cent) and Al Tasnim (19 per cent) are partners as well. The goal

of the project is to commercialise an estimated 16 million tonnes of copper ore — billed as the largest single copper resource in the Sultanate to date.

Following the receipt of approvals from the local municipality, the contractor began mobilising its team and equipment at the mine site. A makeshift village is being constructed to house the project's 325-strong workforce representing construction, mining and plant operation crews.

In addition, contracts for equipment purchases and other support infrastructure totalling \$17.8 million have been awarded, according to Al Hadeetha Resources. Mining, rock breaking and crushing equipment, as well as conveyor belts, grinding

mills, vibrating screens and related electrical systems have been procured from a number of countries, including China, India, Finland, Italy, and USA, besides Oman.

"The project construction period is estimated to be 18 months with production of copper concentrates commencing by the last quarter of 2022," Shapak added.

In June 2018, Al Hadeetha Resources became the first international joint venture company to be awarded a copper mining licence in Oman. Other investors have since followed suit, adding new momentum to efforts to revive the Sultanate's longstanding copper mining industry.

ahli islamic launches Children’s Account

MUSCAT: ahli islamic has initiated various schemes to encourage its customers to save wisely and plan for the future. The bank has expanded its product offering by launching a special account dedicated to children.

Offering a wide range of benefits, the ahli islamic Children’s Account will help parents efficiently manage their child’s accounts while inculcating a savings habit amongst them from a young age. The new Children’s Account which is targeted at children up to 18 years of age is tailor-made to suit the varying requirements of the younger population.

“Whether for adults or children, all our banking solutions follow Islamic guidelines and are Sharia-compliant. Addressing the changing needs of our diverse client portfolio, we continue to come up with innovative ways to service our customers,” said Yousuf Al Rawahi, DGM and Head of ahli islamic.

“The minors along with the youth, make up a significant portion of the Omani population, and are the future of the nation. It is imperative that we instil the right



values, ethics and culture in them when they are young so they are able to contribute positively to the economy when they’re older. The ahli islamic Children’s Account is a step in that direction. By giving parents of young children the opportunity to open bank accounts

for their greater good and long-term security through effective fund management, we introduce a sense of responsibility amongst this young customer segment. In addition to this, our generous draws under Qitaf will further serve the objective of inculcating

a savings culture amongst them which will help them achieve their future goals and aspirations.”

To safeguard the interests of the account holders and in line with the bank’s policies for minors, the ahli islamic Children’s Account can only be opened under the supervision of

a parent. This ensures that while the account is still under the name of the minor, the parents reserve the liberty to handle the transactions. Once the account is active, the account holder will be eligible to enter Qitaf prize, and participate in weekly, monthly and quarterly draws, along with the draws dedicated for children.

The Children’s Savings account includes many benefits which are allocated to help meet the requirements of this category, including opportunities to win cash prizes, exclusive offers and discounts on purchases, reduced profit rates on education funding, and permanent fee-free payment orders.

The Children’s Savings account allows parents to manage their children’s accounts until the child reaches the age of 18. Demonstrating its keenness to provide best-in-class services for its customers, ahli islamic continues to come up with innovative plans offering customers meaningful avenues to grow their funds in accordance with Sharia-compliant banking.

Zubair Automotive Group gets new Omani CEO



MUSCAT: The Zubair Corporation has announced the appointment of Mohammad bin Yahya al Farei (pictured), to the position of Chief Operating Officer COO for the Zubair Automotive Group, as of October 1. In his new role, he will supervise the group of companies under the umbrella of the Zubair Automotive Group, including General Automotive Company, represented by the Mitsubishi and Fuso brands, Dhofar Automotive Company, the official distributor for Jeep, Dodge, Chrysler, RAM, Fiat, Alfa Romeo, Mopar and International Heavy Equipment, which represents a large number of renowned brands in the world of heavy equipment and machinery such as Volvo, Bobcat and Renault Trucks.

The group of companies also comprise of Sayarti, provider of professional car care services, the Mega Body Shop, an integrated service facility for car bodies that provides a package of services including repair, painting and modification and extends its services for all models of various brands. Also included in the group is Zubair Leasing & Rental Company, which provides the best services and innovative car rental solutions for fleets and individual customers.

Rashad al Zubair, Chairman of The Zubair Corporation said, “Mohammad al Farei was chosen for this position because he is one of the notable national competencies, who has worked within The Zubair Corporation for many years. During this time, he held a number of positions across the group companies and proved his management skills and ability to encourage change.

Bank Muscat successfully concludes Shababi Gamerz Tournament

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat has successfully concluded its first Bank Muscat eSports Tournament (Shababi Gamerz) with the grand finale being held recently at the bank’s Head Office. The cross-platform tournament was a roaring success with as many as 2,304 registrations from wilayats across the Sultanate. A total of 1,724 players including many as young as 13 years took part in the two electronic games — Fifa and FORTNITE — at the tournament. The online FORTNITE game saw 700 players battling it out, while 1,024 players competed in the Fifa tournament.

Marwan bin Mahmood al Raisi, Jaifar bin Nasser al Balushi and Abdulrahman bin Mohammed al Balushi emerged as the top three winners in the Fifa game while Muhanad bin Hafeedh al Shanfari, Ahmed bin Muneer al Raisi and Sulieman bin Yahya al Mashari emerged as the top players in FORTNITE. The first prize winner took home RO 500, while the runner up and the second runner



up took RO 300 and RO 200 respectively in the tournament. Through the tournament, Bank Muscat continues to reach out to Omani youth to support them in demonstrating their skills across various fields. Inspired by the excellent response from the youth, the bank hopes to make the tournament an annual exercise. Abdullah bin Tamman al Mashani, Deputy General Manager — Institutional Sales

and Product Development, said: “Electronic and computer games have become very popular with Omani youth and I would like to especially congratulate the winners for their excellent display of skills, and for further bettering the standards of the game. I hope that we will be able to see more Omani competitors take part in the world championships of various electronic games in the future.”

Alizz Islamic Bank’s Bushra Prize Savings monthly draw

MUSCAT: Three lucky winners of Alizz Islamic Bank won a total of RO 25,000 each in the monthly draw of the popular Bushra Prize Savings Account. The draw was held at the bank’s Maabela Branch. The Bank has given away RO 91,000 as prize money, including the monthly prize of RO 75,000 split among three winners, with RO 25,000 each. The rest of the prize money — RO 16,000 — was distributed equally among 32 winners (16 men and 16 women); with one winner from every branch of Alizz Islamic Bank throughout the Sultanate.

The Bushra Prize Savings Account has proven to be a bestseller, as it continues to bring hope and happiness to a host of customers, many of who have won in the Bank’s regular draws, which have changed their fortunes and relieved their stress. But what makes these wins all the more attractive is the fact that the draws are not dictated by the amounts saved, and this has translated into good tidings for several account holders, some of



who have been able to build their dream home, while others have realised set goals.

The prize money, incorporated within Bushra Prize Savings Account — with its daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, half-yearly and annual prizes — has been increased from RO 1.8 million in 2020 to RO 2 million this year. In addition, the annual grand prize will amount to RO 150,000, and RO 100,000 was designated as the half-yearly prize. Besides, three winners will be picked in the quarterly draws, with each winner getting a whopping RO 50,000.

Own the Lexus GX SUV with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: The powerful Lexus GX is bold, luxurious, capable and engineered to take you places without a worry. The Lexus GX is now available with Free Service 4 Years / 40,000 kms (Whichever is earlier), and 1 Year Free Registration. The campaign is valid up to October 21.

The Lexus GX is versatile, playing a dual-role as a city vehicle and one that is purpose-built for off-road trips too. The GX is equipped with a 292-horsepower 4.6-litre V8 producing 44.7 Kg.M. of peak torque.

Utilising the technology of the Kinetic Dynamic Suspension System (KDSS), the GX 460 enhances handling and ride comfort by helping to keep the vehicle level in both on and off-

road conditions. When the GX encounters an uneven surface, one compressed cylinder causes fluid to flow to the other cylinder, helping the vehicle to keep all four wheels on the ground. The system works without any action needed by the driver.

Thanks to an Off-Road Package featuring Multi-Terrain Select, tackling tough terrain is equally as easy. Adding extra peace of mind is GX’s Lexus Safety System+, completing Lexus’ milestone of equipping models with active safety equipment.

A TORSSEN torque-sensing limited slip centre differential distributes power under most driving conditions and changes the ratio as needed based on



wheel slip. The four-wheel drive system offers a low range for slow speed off-road driving. With Downhill Assist Control (DAC), Hill-start Assist Control (HAC), Active Traction Control (A-TRAC), Vehicle Stability Control (VSC) and available Crawl Control, the GX can roam unpaved roads, trails, and steep inclines with confidence.

Multi-Terrain Select allows you to choose from multiple surfaces such as loose rocks, mud and sand, moguls, and more to optimise drivability.

Activated with the press of a button, the available Crawl Control system is designed to automatically maintain an optimal slow and steady pace over demanding landscapes.

Bolstering this mission is the Lexus Safety System+ suite of technologies that includes Pre-Collision System, Lane Departure Alert, Intelligent High Beams and High-Speed Dynamic Radar Cruise Control

In Oman, every Lexus vehicle comes with special benefits and privileges such as Manufacturer’s Warranty of 4 years/100,000 Kms (whichever is earlier) and 24 hours on-road assistance from AAA.

For more information, please visit www.lexusoman.com or www.youtube.com/lexusoman or www.facebook.com/LexusOmanSBA or instagram.com/oman.lexus/. Conditions apply. Visit any Lexus showroom for details.



In brief

■ MUNICH

**EV MAKER POLESTAR TO GO PUBLIC AT \$20 BN VALUATION**

Swedish electric car maker Polestar is nearing a deal to go public through a merger with blank-cheque firm Gores Guggenheim Inc at a valuation of \$20 billion including debt, according to people familiar with the matter. The premium EV maker, owned by China's Geely and Volvo Cars, could announce its plan to go public as soon as Monday, the people said. Polestar raised \$550 million in external funding in April and announced plans in June to build Polestar 3 electric sport utility vehicles at Volvo's US plant in South Carolina starting in the second half of 2022.

■ KUALA LUMPUR

**MALAYSIA PLEDGES SPENDING, GREEN GOALS IN ECONOMIC PLAN**

Malaysia's Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob tabled a new five-year economic plan, boosting infrastructure spending and committing to a carbon tax under climate change goals as the country looks to chart its way out of a pandemic-induced slump. Launching the 12th Malaysia Plan in parliament, Ismail Sabri said the country's financial position was expected to improve in 2023, with the economy targeted to grow 4.5-5.5 per cent per annum in the next five years.

Malaysia posted average annual growth of 2.7 per cent between 2016-2020, dragged down by a 5.6 per cent contraction last year due to the outbreak of Covid-19, the premier said.

■ LONDON

**ALDI TO INVEST \$1.8 BN TO ACCELERATE GROWTH IN BRITAIN**

The British and Irish arm of German discount supermarket group Aldi will invest £1.3 billion in its business over the next two years as it attempts to accelerate its growth in market share. The retailer plans to open another 100 new stores in Britain, expand its logistics infrastructure, including a new distribution centre in central England, and invest in technology.

It said it expected to create more than 2,000 new British jobs next year, adding to the 7,000 permanent roles created over the past two years. Aldi and German rival Lidl have grown rapidly over the last decade, forcing Britain's big four supermarkets of Tesco, Sainsbury's Asda and Morrisons to cut prices and compete more aggressively.

S&P Global Platts launches crude carbon intensity calculations

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, SEPT 27

S&P Global Platts, the leading independent provider of information, analytics and benchmark prices for the commodities and energy markets, has announced that commencing October 1, it will launch the first ever daily carbon offset premiums alongside monthly carbon intensity calculations for 14 major crude fields around the world.

The marginal carbon intensity (CI) calculations for different oil fields will help producers, investors, shareholders and downstream purchasers better understand the emission attributes of the crude where over time the carbon intensity of the production process can become its own attribute of the crude itself, like the density of the crude and how much sulfur is included.

Increased scrutiny of the upstream carbon intensity associated with the production of fossil fuels has led to investors, consumers and producers looking to reduce their carbon footprint or emissions, which has resulted in a growing demand for "low-carbon crude".

Calculating the carbon intensity of different commodities has become one of the ways the market has started to measure greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from specific types of production. Oil produced with a lower amount of GHG emissions has a lower carbon intensity than crudes produced with higher emissions.

In turn, crudes that are produced with a higher volume of GHG emissions have a higher carbon intensity. Hence high CI crudes will carry a greater carbon intensity premium and require a greater volume of voluntary carbon credits to offset emissions



Pumpjacks taken out of production temporarily stand idle at a Hess site while new wells are fracked near Williston.

than crudes with a lower CI.

Deb Ryan, Head of Low Carbon Market Analytics at S&P Global Platts, said: "Oil and gas will remain part of the energy mix for decades to come. In order for the world to meet ambitious emissions reduction targets, a premium value needs to be associated with the lowest carbon intensity oil and gas assets as these fossil fuels continue to play a role in the overall energy mix. By launching carbon intensity values and price premiums, Platts is bringing much needed transparency into the market. Awareness of carbon intensity values — while working in tandem with carbon markets, both voluntary and compliance-based, will accelerate investments into projects that will reduce or avoid greenhouse gas emissions for the future."

INCREASED SCRUTINY: Carbon Intensity set to be major component in measurement of crude emissions

Paula VanLaningham, Global Head of Carbon at S&P Global Platts, said: "Interest from the market on carbon intensity, and recent trades to account for carbon emissions are important steps in the right direction. Calculating carbon intensity for oil fields allows a greater understanding of the respective carbon footprint, which enables market participants to focus on utilising the lowest carbon assets. Significantly

reducing emissions generated from the oil and gas industry is critical to mitigating the effects of climate change. Our new upstream carbon intensity calculations provide new transparency in an important first step to drive further evolution in this area."

From October 1, Platts will begin publishing monthly assessments of crude oil field carbon intensity in kilograms of carbon dioxide equivalent per barrel of oil equivalent (kgCO₂e/boe); monthly assessments of transportation carbon intensity along one relevant route per crude in kilograms of carbon dioxide equivalent per barrel (KgCO₂e/b); and daily assessments in \$/boe and \$/b respectively using the daily Platts Carbon Removal Credit (CRC) voluntary carbon credit assessment.

Energy, bank shares lead charge as oil hits 3-yr high

LONDON: Global energy shares led equity gains on Monday as crude oil prices hit three-year highs of almost \$80 a barrel, while US government borrowing costs advanced for a sixth week on bets that higher interest rates were on the way.

Stocks also benefited from an easing in Sino-US tensions and Chinese authorities' decision to pump in more cash to offset the fallout from real estate firm Evergrande's woes, while there was some relief Germany's election outcome had ruled out a pure left-wing coalition government.

Instead, a coalition of the centre-left Social Democrats with the Greens and the liberal FDP looks likely

While early German equity gains fizzled, European energy and banking shares surged around 2.5 per cent benefiting from the jump in crude prices and bond yields respectively, with the former at the highest since February 2020.

— Reuters



Panic buying leaves fuel pumps dry in major British cities

LONDON: Up to 90 per cent of British fuel stations ran dry across major English cities on Monday after panic buying deepened a supply chain crisis triggered by a shortage of truckers that retailers are warning could batter the world's fifth-largest economy.

A dire post-Brexit shortage of lorry drivers emerging after the Covid-19 pandemic has sown chaos through British supply chains in everything from food to fuel, raising the spectre of disruptions and price rises in the run up to Christmas.

Just days after Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government spent millions of pounds to avert a food shortage due to a spike in prices for natural gas, the biggest cost in fertiliser production, ministers asked people to refrain from panic buying.

But queues of dozens of cars snaked back from petrol stations across the country on Sunday, swallowing up supplies and forcing many gas stations to simply close. Pumps across British cities were either closed or had signs saying fuel was unavailable on Monday, Reuters reporters said.

The Petrol Retailers Association (PRA), which represents independent fuel retailers which now account for 65 per cent of all



An 'out of use' sign covers fuel pumps at a petrol station in Birkenhead, northwest England. — AFP

UK forecourts, said members had reported that 50 per cent to 90 per cent of pumps were dry in some areas.

"We are unfortunately seeing panic buying of fuel in many areas of the country", Gordon Balmer, executive director of the PRA, who worked for BP for 30 years, said.

"We need some calm", Balmer said. "Please don't panic buy: if

people drain the network then it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy."

Britain is considering calling in the army to ensure fuel supplies reach consumers, according to *The Times* and *Financial Times*.

But hauliers, gas stations and retailers warned that there were no quick fixes as the shortfall of truck drivers — estimated to be around 100,000 — was so acute

— and because transporting fuel demands additional training and licensing.

Britain's retail industry warned the government on Friday that unless it moves to alleviate an acute shortage of truckers in the next 10 days significant disruption was inevitable in the run-up to Christmas.

For months, supermarkets,

Trucker shortage strains British economy as gas stations appeal for calm after panic buying

processors and farmers have warned that a shortage of heavy goods vehicle (HGV) drivers was straining supply chains to breaking point — making it harder to get goods onto shelves.

BP said on Sunday that nearly a third of its British petrol stations had run out of the two main grades of fuel as panic buying forced the government to suspend competition laws and allow firms to work together to ease shortages.

Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said the suspension would allow firms to share information and coordinate their response.

"This step will allow government to work constructively with fuel producers, suppliers, hauliers and retailers to ensure that disruption is minimised as far as possible", the business department said in a statement. The government on Sunday announced a plan to issue temporary visas for 5,000 foreign truck drivers. — Reuters

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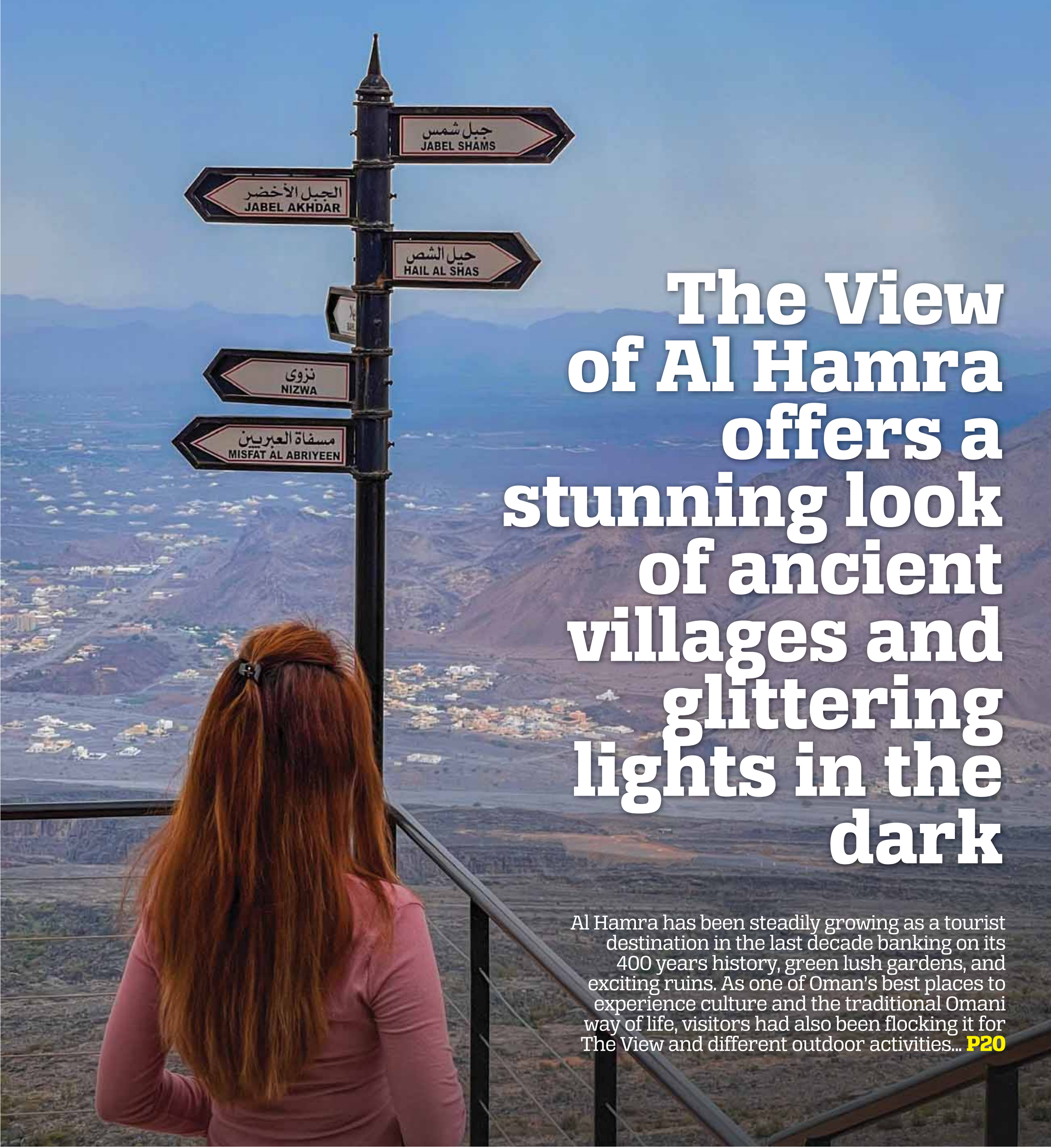
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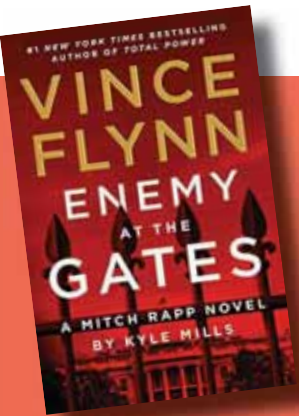


The View of Al Hamra offers a stunning look of ancient villages and glittering lights in the dark

Al Hamra has been steadily growing as a tourist destination in the last decade banking on its 400 years history, green lush gardens, and exciting ruins. As one of Oman's best places to experience culture and the traditional Omani way of life, visitors had also been flocking it for The View and different outdoor activities... **P20**

FASHION

READ



VINCE FLYNN: ENEMY AT THE GATES

BY KYLE MILLS

Anthony Cook, an autocratic president, distrusts Mitch Rapp, who is working to uncover a traitor.

French luxury brand Saint Laurent goes fur-free

FRENCH HIGH-END fashion brand Saint Laurent will stop using fur in its collections from next year, its parent company Kering said on Friday, joining a growing list of global companies.

Kering brand Brioni will also forsake fur, the company said, making all the fashion group's houses fur-free.

Animal rights groups have long lobbied the global fashion industry to give up fur and several, including Versace, Chanel

and Michael Kors, had already stopped using it.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) took the lead in protesting against Saint Laurent, demonstrating outside its store in the fashionable Avenue Montaigne in Paris this year after super-model Kate Moss appeared in an advertising campaign for the brand wearing a fox coat.

"There is nothing glamorous about fur," PETA told Saint Laurent.

Within the Kering group, Gucci was the first to drop fur in 2017, followed by Balenciaga, Bottega Veneta et Alexander McQueen.

"The world has changed, along with our clients, and luxury naturally needs to adapt to that," Kering CEO François-Henri Pinault said in a statement. Kering would be entirely fur-free from the Fall 2022 collections.

On Friday, among the fur items still available in Saint Laurent's webstore were a rabbit coat priced at 5,500 euros (\$6,450), a sleeveless fox vest for the same price, and a pair of mink mules for 995 euros.

"We believe that killing animals not to eat them but only for their fur doesn't correspond to modern luxury which must be ethical, in sync with its times and the questions of our socie-



ties," Marie-Claire Daveu, head of sustainable development at Kering, said.

LVMH, the world's largest luxury group and Kering rival, meanwhile said that it continued to allow its brands to meet

customer demand for fur products.

These were being made "in the most ethical and responsible way possible", LVMH said, adding that it had banned all fur from endangered species. — **AFP**



A trip into the Land of Wonders

A RAINBOW SPREAD on the table and the smell of mouthwatering fare in the air — this is how Iranian tables spread their love of food. All food is homely, well-made and tastes like heaven. Food is a major part of Persian culture; however, it is far less known over the world than it deserves. We believe Iranian cuisine is the mother of all cuisines, sophisticated yet simple. A subtle balance of sweet and sour, hot and cold with the use of fresh herbs and spices. The gastronomy is rich and diverse with countless local dishes,

from meat to vegetables, fish, street foods, pickles, bread and sweets. What makes it so unique is the use of many local ingredients, which give its characteristic taste: Pomegranate, saffron, turmeric, rose water, cardamom, pistachio, walnuts, mint, orange and so much more. Along with these fresh ingredients, Persians take their time to cook. The best place to discover these truly divine flavours are by sharing a meal in an Iranian house, as the secrets of all these delicious recipes are transmitted

over generations as a precious legacy. As we didn't have the luxury of that, we chose the next best thing. An Iranian restaurant that could mimic those authentic Persian flavours. We decided on a relatively unknown place, wanting to explore some. We came across the Kish Island Restaurant, located inside the Parkside Plaza Hotel. As these reviews go, we picked two appetisers and two mains and the lovely gentleman serving us, brought us, complimentary dessert and tea. Nooshe Jan!

HE SAID: For our appetisers, we picked the Shirazi Salad and the Kashke Badenjan. Shirazi Salad is a traditional salad made of diced cucumber, onion and tomato marinated with lemon juice, salt and dry mint. It was well prepared and with balanced flavours. On the other hand, Kashke Badenjan is a dish made of Kashke (dry yoghurt) and eggplant. Basically, it is mashed fried eggplant, onion and garlic mixed with Kashke and then garnished with fried onion, garlic, mint and sesame paste. It was yummy. Both of those starters can be also side dishes for grills.

SHE SAID: I loved the Shirazi Salad. It wasn't overpoweringly sour or salty. Just the right bite of both with evenly diced veggies. A standard fare very well executed. The Kashke Badenjan, I felt like it lacked seasoning and could do with a little more salt. The addition of fried onions, roasted garlic and the sesame paste is a smart move. These elements work to enhance flavours even more.

HE SAID: For our mains, we ordered the mixed grill platter (for two) and Okra stew with meat. The mixed grill consisted of skewers of grilled minced meat, minced chicken and meat kebab served with three types of rice (white rice, saffron rice and saffron with dried barberry rice). Wow, I don't think it can get better than this, well seasoned and the meat just melted in the mouth like butter. The Okra stew was not any less, it was flavourful and the meat was very soft, the okra was juicy and cooked to perfection. No wonder we were confused were to end our last bite; with the stew or the grill.

SHE SAID: For our mains, we picked the Okra stew with meat and the mixed grill for two, both served with rice. I was honestly blown away by both dishes. Each competing for the top spot on this review. The Okra stew with meat was tangy, earthy and the meat just melted in your mouth. Mixed in with rice, this stew is just out of this



world. The mixed grill for two was an absolute delight. Each skewer of meat was tender, whether it was their tikka or kebabs. Each piece was meticulously marinated and cooked to perfection.

HE SAID: We were lucky that evening as the menu had no desert section. However, somebody preordered some Bamiyeh. It is an Iranian version of the Balah el sham as it is well-known in the Arab world (though it's originally a Turkish dessert). A crispy fried dough soaked for some time in special sugar syrup and then garnished with coconut shreds. It was well balanced in sweetness level the inside was very soft. Very well prepared.

SHE SAID: They have no dessert on the menu, unfortunately, but they do make an Iranian sweet called Bamiyeh by order. A fried dough sweetened with sugar syrup cooked in Ramadhan commonly. We were lucky enough to be there on a day when they had it. It was crisp yet soft on the inside and not cloyingly so. A perfect end and accompaniment to the Iranian tea they served us. Did you know the origin of this dish goes back to Levant city where they prepared Ottoman cuisine's desserts? Iranians call this sweet Bamiyeh because it looked like an orange version of the vegetable okra.

WE SAID: What a fantastic journey this meal was, we are glad we picked a new place to experience different facets of this vast and rich cuisine. Service was efficient but the ambience needs work. Would we go back? Yes, that's a definitive yes!

OVERALL RATING:
Ambience: 2.5/5
Taste of food: 5/5
Presentation: 4.5/5
Service: 5/5
Value for money: 4/5

DISCLAIMER:
The ORR team reviews anonymously and pays for their own meals. The opinion of the team does not reflect the opinion of the newspaper or its editors.

DISCOVERY

'Ancestor' of Mediterranean mosaics discovered in Turkey



THE DISCOVERY OF a 3,500-year-old paving stone, described as the "ancestor" of Mediterranean mosaics, offers illuminating details into the daily lives of the mysterious Bronze Age Hittites. The assembly of over 3,000 stones — in natural shades of beige, red and black, and arranged in triangles and curves — was unearthed in the remains of a 15th century BC Hittite temple, 700 years before the oldest known mosaics of ancient Greece. "It is the ancestor of the classical period of mosaics that are obviously more sophisticated. This is a sort of first attempt to do it", says Anacleto D'Agostino, excavation director of Usakli Hoyuk, near Yozgat, in central Turkey. At the site three hours from

of the storm god and frequently mentioned in Hittite tablets, Zippalanda's exact location has remained a mystery. "Researchers agree that Usakli Hoyuk is one of two most likely sites. With the discovery of the palace remains alongside the luxurious ceramics and glassware, the likelihood has increased", D'Agostino says. "We only need the ultimate proof: a tablet carrying the name of the city." The treasures of Usakli Hoyuk, for which cedar trees were brought from Lebanon to build temples and palaces, were swallowed up like the rest of the Hittite world towards the end of the Bronze Age. The reason is still not known. But some believe a change in climate accompanied by social unrest is the cause.



Turkey's capital Ankara, first located in 2018, Turkish and Italian archaeologists painstakingly use shovels and brushes to learn more about the towns of the Hittites, one of the most powerful kingdoms in ancient Anatolia. "For the first time, people felt the necessity to produce some geometric patterns and to do something different from a simple pavement", D'Agostino says. "Maybe we are dealing with a genius? Maybe not. It was maybe a man who said 'build me a floor' and he decided to do something weird?" The discovery was made opposite Kerkenes mountain and the temple where the mosaic is located was dedicated to Teshub, the storm god worshipped by the Hittites, equivalent to Zeus for the ancient Greeks. "Probably here the priests were looking at the picture of Kerkenes mountain for some rituals and so on", D'Agostino adds.

LOST CITY'S TREASURES?
The archaeologists this week also discovered ceramics and the remains of a palace, supporting the theory that Usakli Hoyuk could indeed be the lost city of Zippalanda. A significant place of worship

'SPIRITUAL CONNECTION'
Nearly 3,000 years after their disappearance, the Hittites continue to inhabit Turkish imagination. A Hittite figure representing the sun is Ankara's symbol. And in the 1930s, the founder of the modern Turkish republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, presented Turks as the direct descendants of the Hittites. "I don't know if we can find a connection between ancient Hittites and people living here now. Centuries and millennia have passed, and people moved from one place to another", D'Agostino says. "But I would like to imagine that some sort of spiritual connection exists." In an attempt to honour this connection, the excavation team recreated Hittite culinary traditions, trying ancient recipes on ceramics produced as they would have been at the time using the same technique and clay. "We reproduced the Hittite ceramics with the clay found in the village where the site is located: We baked dates and bread with them as the Hittites used to eat", says Valentina Orsi, Co-director of the excavation. "It was very good." — **AFP**



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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

Rolling Stones mark first tour without Charlie Watts with video tribute



THE ROLLING STONES kicked off the US leg of their "No Filter" tour on Sunday with a video tribute to their late drummer Charlie Watts.

The veteran British band, on their first tour since 1963 without Watts, displayed photos and video of him on huge projections at the St. Louis, Missouri, arena against a drum solo soundtrack.

As the crowd of some 60,000 shouted "Charlie," "Charlie" Mick Jagger, Keith Richards and Ron Wood bounded onto the stage for opening number "Street Fighting Man."

"It was quite emotional seeing those pictures of Charlie up on the screen. This is our first tour that we've ever done without him," said Jagger, holding hands onstage with Richards.

He thanked fans for their messages of support and tributes to Watts, saying the band had found them "really touching."

"We all miss Charlie so much both on the stage and off the stage," Jagger added.

Contrary to rumours ahead of time, there was no black-tongued Stones logo at the show to mark the passing of Watts in August at age 80. The drummer died in London after undergoing surgery for an unspecified condition.

In St Louis on Sunday, Steve Jordan took the place of Watts on drums. Jordan had been announced in August as a temporary replacement for Watts, whom it was initially thought would return after needing time to recuperate.

The 13-date tour, which was delayed because of the coronavirus pandemic, ends in November and the band has been ambivalent about whether it will be their last.

"I've been asked that question since I was 31," Jagger, 78, who had heart surgery in 2019, said in an interview last week.

"I don't know. I mean, anything could happen. You know, if things are good next year and everyone's feeling good about touring, I'm sure we'll do shows. I'm just trying to concentrate on this tour now." — **Reuters**

WILDLIFE

Good friends and fresh blood: the social life of a vampire bat



WHEN ONE THINKS of vampire bats, friendship and cooperation may not be among the qualities that come to mind for these blood-feasting creatures of the night. But maybe they should.

Scientists on Thursday provided a deeper understanding of social relationships among vampire bats, showing how those that have forged bonds akin to "friendships" with others will rendezvous with these buddies while foraging for a meal.

Researchers attached small devices to 50 vampire bats to track nighttime foraging in Panama, when these flying mammals drink blood from wounds they inflict upon cattle in pastures. The study involved female bats, known to have stronger social relationships than males.

Among the bats were 23 wild-born individuals that had been kept in captivity for about two years during related research into bat social behaviour. Social bonds already had been observed among some of them. After being released back into the wild, the bats were found to often join a "friend" during foraging, possibly coordinating the hunt.

"Each bat maintains its own network of close cooperative social bonds," said behavioural ecologist Gerald Carter of the Ohio State University and the

Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, who led the research published in the journal *PLoS Biology*.

Social bonds among vampire bats as they roost in trees include grooming one another and regurgitating blood meals for hungry pals. The study showed that the social bonds formed in roosts extended into the hunt.

"This study opens up an exciting new window into the social lives of these animals," Carter said.

The researchers suspect that the bats, while almost never departing on foraging forays with their "friends," link up with them during the hunt — perhaps even recognising one another's vocalisations — for mutual benefit. They hypothesise the bats might exchange information about prey location or access to an open wound for feeding.

Vampire bats, which inhabit warmer regions of Latin America and boast wingspans of about 7 inches (18 cm), are the only mammals with a blood-only diet. They reside in colonies ranging from tens to thousands of individuals.

"People's first reaction to vampire bats is usually, 'Uh, scary.' But once you tell them about their complex social lives, they are quite surprised that we can find such behaviour that is somewhat similar to what humans do - and which one would maybe expect in pri-

mates - in bats," said study co-author Simon Ripperger, a Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute post-doctoral researcher.

Ripperger called them "amazing creatures" for several reasons.

"Even besides their social lives, vampire bats are quite special: specialising in a diet of 100 per cent blood is already quite rare among vertebrates," Ripperger said. "They are amazing runners, which you wouldn't expect in a bat. They have heat sensors in their snouts that help them find a spot to make a bite. They have a protein in their saliva that prevents blood from coagulation, which is actually being used in medical trials to help prevent blood clots in patients who suffered a stroke."

The bats attack prey from the ground, using their sharp teeth to open a wound, lapping up blood with their tongues.

Carter said there is reason to fear vampire bats because they can transmit rabies to livestock and people.

"But I do think they are beautiful and interesting animals in their own right," Carter added. "In this way they are a bit like grizzly bears, sharks, rats and venomous snakes: animals that might not help people in any way and might even endanger them, but should still be appreciated for their own sake." — **Reuters**

BROADWAY

'Moulin Rouge!' wins big as Tony Awards return to Broadway



BROADWAY ON SUNDAY finally honoured its best and brightest at the Tony Awards, more than a year late due to the coronavirus pandemic, with jukebox musical "Moulin Rouge!" sweeping the competition with 10 trophies.

The event took on a new look this year: most of the awards were handed out in a two-hour ceremony live-streamed before the main event — a concert celebrating the return of live theatre in New York after an 18-month hiatus.

"Everyone here is vexed and tested, and everyone is wearing a mask — every Broadway theatre is going to look like this for a while and that's ok," host Leslie Odom Jr said at the start of the concert gala at the Winter Garden Theatre.

"Moulin Rouge! The Musical" — a stage adaptation of the popular 2001 Baz Luhrmann film of the same name about the famed Paris nightclub — won for best musical, best actor and best actor in a featured role, as well as a host of technical honours.

The cast served up a colourful, sassy medley of hits from the show at their home theatre, as did the cast of "Jagged Little Pill," a musical inspired by Alanis Morissette's seminal 1995 album of the same name.

Adrienne Warren, who won the Tony for best actress in a musical for her portrayal of Tina Turner in "Tina," gave a rousing performance with her cast-mates. The concert also featured classic duets from popular musicals "Rent," "Wicked," "Ragtime" and "Hamilton," featuring a stream of Broadway A-listers.

The Tony for best play went to "The Inheritance," a reimaging of the EM Forster novel "Howards End" set in modern-day New York. The play won a total of four awards, including best director for Stephen Daldry.

"A Soldier's Play," a look at racism in the US military, won the award for best revival of a play — and also scored an acting trophy for David Alan Grier, one of several first-time winners of the night. A revival of "A Christmas Carol" took home five prizes.

'BROADWAY IS BACK'

This year's honours were a bit different — the number of shows eligible to compete for the 2019-2020 season was pared back considerably when the Great White Way was forced to shut down as the pandemic took hold, especially in New York.

Several shows have recently reopened, with more to come in the next few months.

"Broadway is back, and it must and it will be better," actress Audra McDonald, a six-time winner and a nominee again this year, said as she hosted the early ceremony.

In a quirky result, Aaron Tveit took home the prize for best actor in a musical for "Moulin Rouge" — he was the only nominee but needed to earn 60 per cent of votes to win. He choked up as he accepted his award, his first Tony.

"We are so privileged to get to do this, to be on Broadway," he said.

Among the other first-time winners was Lois Smith, who won for best actress in a featured role in a play for "The Inheritance" — at age 90. She is the oldest performer ever to win a Tony for acting. — **AFP**

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The View of Al Hamra offers stunning look of ancient villages and glittering lights in the dark

By Roselyn Banguis-Ebuen

Al Hamra is one of Oman's best places to experience culture and the traditional Omani way of life. Rightfully so, this charming town is said to be 400 years old and many of its ruins scattered both across the mountainous areas and its plains speak of the more than 1,001 adventures the inhabitants lived through in the last several decades.

While accessing the town is no longer as hard as it is in the past, thanks to the modern highways and facilities created by the government especially during the Renaissance period, the people still manage to protect their identity and is one of the best places to witness different traditional celebrations like Al Razha especially before Covid-19.

Slowly though, the transformations are taking place because of the collaborative effort of both the citizens and investors who want to see the area grow and thrive banking on its old charm to attract tourists. But the transformation, thankfully, is sustainable and something that respects the very core of Omani traditions.

Over the last few years, one of the main attractions of Al Hamra is the old village where Bait al Safah belongs. Transforming into a live museum, it is a place where people can

visit and see a live demonstration not only of Omani women doing different household chores but also in making the beloved Omani bread and al shue oil but also of showcasing the traditional style of dressing as well as presenting a house.

A recent trip to Al Hamra had opened my eyes to the real beauty of the town. Perched on top of its mountain, Hail al Shas, overlooking the sprawling village of modern houses, forgotten ruins and lush gardens is the beautiful The View Hotel, a luxury mountain resort that can only be accessed with 4WD vehicles located about 7.5 kilometres from the town centre.

Boasting more than 30 rooms, its 1,400 metres elevation allows one to see the wonders that Al Dakhiliyah hides. On a clear day, one can see even Bahla.

It's a facility that adds dimension to the place providing the much-needed escape that both locals and visitors can enjoy at the luxury of peace in a nice mountain setting.

Walking through its elevated pathways made of steel and wood, it's like a set of Maldives cabins interconnected by long elevated pathways but only in the middle of a rocky mountain almost married to its surroundings.

There are numerous things to appreciate about

the facility. The centre-piece of the property is a long infinity pool that stops just right where you can watch the nearby towns in their beautiful ancient splendour.

"Al Hamra's The View is actually a gateway to the many wonders of Al Dakhiliyah. From here, you can do numerous activities — from visiting the nearby old village of Misfat al Abriyeen to conquering the scenic Balcony Walk of Wadi Ghul in Jabal Shams," said Abbas Akbar, the general manager of the facility.

To spend an afternoon exploring the different hiking paths of Hail al Shas is already an experience in itself. Frequenting by goat-herders, just like many mountains in Oman, some wadis usually get filled with water when it rains.

"The beauty of Al Hamra and this property is that it also allows you to easily take an adventure in the nearby Al Hoota Cave, a great example of a karst cave system where its central lake is home to some rare fishes and also, we are a stone's throw away from the Unesco heritage site of Bahla. All of this creates a well-rounded experience for guests coming to visit Oman," Abbas added.

While Jabal Akhdhar and Jabal Shams are already seeing massive growth when it comes to tourism facilities, the rest

of the smaller mountains in Oman are also on their way to follow suit.

One of my realisations is that Al Hamra itself has been slowly but steadily creating a niche for itself as a destination. I also like the property because of its valley view open-air deck, its multi-purpose hall that is also converted as a children's play area, a mesmerising pool deck — one of the best, definitely in Oman, and the green area alongside the walkways.

I'm looking forward to more developments in the different small corners of Oman. We also visited the nearby Misfat al Abriyeen and was happy to discover that there are already several lodging places to stay for guests who would like to experience the Omani way of life. We also visited Jabal Hatt in the past and even the said location has been seeing growth in lodging for guests.

If you're eyeing Al Hamra for visit, other than Bait al Safah, there are more little activities you can do to gain insight regarding how the locals live their day to day lives.

If you're looking for a place to stay, all you have to do is look up and once you're on the top of the mountain, you will be amazed by the glittering village lights below, a real indication that Al Hamra will always be a beauty even in the dark.

