

Night lockdown begins

The Supreme Committee's decision to impose a ban on movement of people and vehicles, and ordered the closure of all public places and commercial activities (while allowing home delivery service) from 8 pm to 4 am, started from Sunday. The decision exempts activities and segments excluded from similar bans announced earlier. The Supreme Committee urges all target segments to take the initiative and get vaccinated against Covid-19 to protect themselves, their families and their communities from this disease.



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OMAN OBSERVER

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AL FAISAL CLAIMS RACE ONE WIN AT SPA



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AIRLINES, HOLIDAY COMPANIES RAMP UP PRESSURE ON BRITAIN TO EASE TRAVEL RULES



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TO VISIT THIS FANTASTIC VILLAGE, YOU WOULD NEED A PERMIT FIRST



MUSCAT

REGISTRATION FOR NATIONAL RESEARCH AWARD OPENS

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation on Sunday opened the registration for the eighth cycle of the National Research Award (NRA) 2021, which will remain open until 2.00 pm on August 19. The NRA is divided into two categories — Best published research led by a PhD holder or equivalent (senior specialist or higher in the medical field) and Best published research led by a young researcher (a non-PhD holder). As for the research fields, it consists of six fields, namely education and human resources, information systems and communication technologies, health and community service, cultural and social sciences, energy and industry and environmental and biological resources. **DETAILS ON P3**

Khareef arrives in Salalah, season begins

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH @patkaushal

It is a great coincidence that the monsoon (khareef) touched Salalah just a day before the season, which as per the official calendar, starts on June 21 and continues till the end of August. This coincidence was seen last in 2018 when the actual monsoon and start of the official khareef calendar met precisely on June 21. An official from the Met Office said that the monsoon almost touched Salalah on Saturday. It will keep on building in the coming days. On Sunday morning, the city witnessed light drizzling, the

background for which was created some 20 days before when the hovering clouds started touching the mountains, humidity built up, and Salalah received its first pre-monsoon rain on June 8. Salalah's greenery is a phenomenon that is associated with the advent of khareef. The pre-monsoon rain and drizzling on the mountains have advanced the greenery process at least by 20 days. There may not be many visitors from outside due to Covid-19 pandemic, but the nature would be there for them to welcome, as and when things get normal. **DETAILS ON P3**

10,000 CAN BE VACCINATED A DAY

VACCINATION BEGINS AT OMAN CONVENTION AND EXHIBITION CENTRE



KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

Those going for vaccination should inform the health officials or the volunteers at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre about any pre-existing medical condition, allergies, pregnancy, or any other condition for the staff to advise the precautions while vaccinating, said the Ministry of Health. While a pregnant woman can take vaccine within strict preventive measures in her second or third trimester, others will be advised

about their vaccination programme by an expert. "People who come for vaccination should alert the registration counter if they are suffering from any diseases or having a severe allergy or being pregnant. The public should bear in mind that they should register all medical condition or inform the front desk if they are suffering from any of these, said Dr Zainab al Balushi, Head of Infection and Prevention Control at the ministry. **TURN TO P2**

84 deaths and 5,320 new cases in 3 days

As many as 5,320 new cases of coronavirus (Covid-19) were registered in the Sultanate during the past 3 days, in addition to 84 new Covid-19 related deaths. This brings the total number of positive Covid-19 cases to 248,043 in the Sultanate. The total number of deaths reached 2,710, the Ministry of Health said.

Artificial reefs to boost aquatic life



The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, represented by the Directorate-General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Musandam Governorate, has begun installing artificial reefs in the Wilayat of Dibba to boost aquatic life. The project is financed by the Agriculture and Fisheries Development Fund. The project aims to sustain and preserve the natural fisheries, boost marine reserves and improve the economic condition of fishermen. In all, four artificial reefs were placed at a depth of 30 to 50 metres. **DETAILS ON P3**

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5,320 cases, 84 deaths in 72 hours

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Continuing with the alarming trend, the Ministry of Health (MoH) on Sunday reported 5,320 new cases, including 84 deaths in 72 hours.

While the death toll has gone up to 2,710; 170 new patients were admitted to hospitals bringing the total number of inpatients to 1,436, including 414 in intensive care units.

The Sultan Qaboos University Hospital (SQUH) in Muscat has reported a bed occupancy rate of 133 per cent with 73 inpatients, while the total bed capacity is only



55.

Thirty-five patients require assisted ventilation, 13 on invasive medical ventilation, 22 on non-invasive medical ventilation and 38 in Covid-19 wards without the need for assisted ventilation.

Last week, the Sultanate recorded 159 deaths, and most of them were from the governorates of Muscat and North al Batinah.

There were 26,217 sick patients in the country, which saw an increase of 10.8 per cent from the previous week.

The number of cases also shot

up to 12,504 cases, an increase of 2,987 cases from 9,517 recorded the previous week.

The 2,626 deaths reported as of Thursday were 1.08 per cent of the total cases registered in the Sultanate.

Most of the deaths that have been reported in Muscat (841) till Thursday were from Seeb, Muttrah, Bausher, and Amerat.

The number of cases currently in hospitals and public and private health centres as of Thursday reached 1,306, an increase of 246 cases under the previous week.

The number of ICU patients reached 382, recording an increase of 37 cases from last week.

PALESTINIAN PM RECEIVES ENVOY



Mohammad Shtayyeh, Prime Minister of the State of Palestine received Salim bin Habeeb al Amiri, Charge d'affairs of the Sultanate's Embassy to the State of Palestine, on Sunday. The meeting discussed ways of fostering trade cooperation between the two brotherly countries and the exchange of experiences in various fields as well as ways to form a joint ministerial committee. — ONA

10,000 can be vaccinated a day at OCEC

FROM PAGE 1

This is the first time a mass vaccination campaign has begun on Sunday through an online registration is carried out aiming at people from all professions above 45 years of age.

"We have reached a stage where people above 45 years can be vaccinated against Covid-19 from the community. When we prepared the plans to begin the vaccination at the OCEC, infection control and prevention was put in the first place. This would help people get themselves vaccinated

in the safest environment. Several important measures were added to be followed at the entrance, and those who register should disclose their ailments or any allergy," adds Dr Zainab.

A certain category of medical cases will not be allowed to enter the vaccination centre if they are in quarantine or have travelled abroad, or were exposed to a confirmed coronavirus case or those who have symptoms like fever or respiratory tract infection.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Dr Lamy al Balushi, Director,

Diseases Surveillance and Control Department at the ministry, said that more women are coming for getting their jab than men. More people are expected to come to the OCEC in the coming days, according to her.

Nearly 60 booths which can accommodate more than 4,000 people a day are sent, and this can be increased to 10,000 as the need be.

"As many as five to seven thousand people can be vaccinated in a day at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre where the

mass vaccination programme through online registration got under way on Sunday. This capacity can be further enhanced to 10,000 depending upon the demand in the coming days," she added.

Vaccination in Oman started six months ago for selected target groups, including people above 65 years, people suffering from chronic diseases, frontline workers, and medical staff. To get vaccinated, one needs to download Tarassud plus app and go to self-registration.

Vaccines for SQU staff, students



MUSCAT: A two-month campaign to vaccinate students and staff members of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) against coronavirus (Covid-19) will kick off today at the SQU Cultural Centre's grand hall, where 20 vaccination units have been dedicated to conduct the drive.

The vaccines will be administered by a team comprising 20 nurses, two doctors and five students from the SQU's College of Medicine and Health Sciences.

SQU Students and staff members are required to electronically book their appointments in advance. The vaccination unit at the SQU will receive applicants between 8 am and 1 pm on all days of the week, except the weekend. — ONA

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Oman, Bahrain seek to boost investment cooperation



MUSCAT: Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, on Sunday met with Zayed bin Rashid al Zayani, Minister of Industry, Commerce and Tourism in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

During the virtual meeting, they reviewed aspects of joint cooperation in the field of investment. They also reviewed the available investment opportunities in the two countries, particularly in the economic diversification projects.

The two sides highlighted the investment and business climate, as well as the pivotal role of the private sector in the economic development.

The meeting previewed Bahrain's experience in e-commerce and means of regulating it. It also touched on the Bahraini experience in regulating food vending vehicles.

Meanwhile, the Omani side previewed Oman Vision 2040 and the target economic sectors, in addition to means of supporting small and medium businesses, and entrepreneurs. — **ONA**

Artificial reefs installed in Dibba

DIBBA: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, represented by the Directorate-General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Musandam Governorate, has begun to install artificial reefs in the Wilayat of Dibba to boost aquatic life. The project is financed by the Agriculture and Fisheries Development Fund.

The project aims to sustain and preserve the natural fisheries, boost marine reserves and improve the economic condition of fishermen. In all, four artificial reefs were placed at a depth of 30 to 50 metres.

Natural coral reefs are some of the most diverse ecosystems in the world. They provide a safe environment for a multitude of marine species and are suitable habitats for most benthic species.

The implementation of the



project in the Wilayat of Dibba is aimed to meet the increase in the number of fishermen and

the limited area of natural coral reefs and the increased fishing activities in these areas which

caused maritime pollution and destruction of coral reefs.

— **ONA**

Registration for National Research Award opens

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) on Sunday opened the registration for the eighth cycle of the National Research Award (NRA) 2021, which will remain open until 2 pm on Thursday, August 19.

The National Research Award (NRA) is divided into two categories; Best published research led by a PhD holder or equivalent (Senior Specialist or higher in the medical field) and Best published research led by a young researcher (a non-PhD holder).

As for the research fields, it consists of six fields, namely Education and Human Resources, Information Systems and Communication Technologies, Health and Community Service, Cultural and Social Sciences, Energy and Industry, and Environmental

and Biological Resources.

Interested applicants can apply through (home.trc.gov.om/NRA/SubmissionForm.aspx).

Some of the general conditions are that research article must be of relevance to the Sultanate and falls under one of the six research fields of the award, the published research must not have won any other award nationally or internationally, the award is limited only to original research studies and articles, only one application per cycle is allowed, the applicant must provide written consent from each team member to prove his or her approval to participate in the competition, and only complete applications for the award, submitted electronically on NRA's website, and supplemented with all the required documents as

attachments, will be considered for evaluation.

The research of an applicant must have been published after March 15, 2018, in a refereed journal, indexed in either Scopus or Web of Science or in one of the Arabic periodicals listed on the Award's website page. Applicants can find additional information regarding the conditions through the NRA's official website (www.trc.gov.om).

The NRA aims to encourage researchers to conduct high quality and relevant research in areas of national interest, encourage researchers to continue their activities and initiatives in conducting high-quality research, and increase the level of awareness about MoHERI and its various initiatives and programmes to support research and innovation. — **ONA**

Maltese foreign minister arrives on official visit



MUSCAT: Evarist Bartolo, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs in the Republic of Malta, arrived here on Sunday on an official three-day visit to the Sultanate.

During the visit, he will meet with some officials in the Sultanate. He will also conduct a political talks session.

The Maltese minister and his accompanying delegation were received upon their arrival by Dr Khalid Said al Jaradi, Head of the Protocols Department at the Foreign Ministry and a number of officials.

MEETING WITH OCCI CHIEF

Ridha bin Juma Al Saleh, Chairman of the Board

of Directors of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, received Evarist Bartolo in his office on Sunday. During the reception, the promotion of trade exchange between the two friendly countries and benefiting from the incentives offered by the Sultanate to investors were reviewed.

MEETING WITH OIA CHIEF

Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), also received in his office Evarist Bartolo.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed means of boosting cooperation in investment fields and benefiting from available opportunities in the two countries. — **ONA**

Khareef arrives in Salalah, season begins

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

It is a great coincidence that the monsoon (khareef) touched Salalah just a day before the season, which as per the official calendar, starts on June 21 and continues till the end of August.

This coincidence was seen last in 2018 when the actual monsoon and start of the official khareef calendar met precisely on June 21.

An official from the Met Office said that the monsoon almost touched Salalah on Saturday. It will keep on building in the coming days.

On Sunday morning, the city witnessed light drizzling, the background for which was created some 20 days before when the hovering clouds started touching the mountains, humidity built up, and Salalah received its first pre-monsoon rain on June 8.

Salalah's greenery is a phenomenon that is associated with the advent of khareef. The



pre-monsoon rain and drizzling on the mountains have advanced the greenery process at least by 20 days.

There may not be many visitors from outside due to Covid-19 pandemic, but the nature would be there for them to welcome, as and when things get normal.

Under the impact of early morning drizzle, the temperature in Salalah has come down to 28 degrees, which is likely to come down further in the coming days, depending on the mood of the monsoon.

During peak of the khareef

Salalah gets many natural waterfalls and overflowing springs offer enchanting views in all the four directions.

Since the impact of the monsoon is more on the mountains, it becomes difficult for the camels to walk on a slippery slope. Their



owners bring them to the plains for the entire season.

The residents of mountain villages of Itin, Qairun Hariti, Zeik, Hagif, Gadau, Titam, Al San, Madinat al Haq and Tawi Atir etc, have started bringing their camels on Salalah plains and keeping

them inside the enclosures in Itin or any other area suitable to them.

Had there been no pandemic, Salalah would have been a hub of cultural, official and social events. Everyone is waiting for the pandemic to go and indulge in the beauty of Salalah this time around.

TURN READING INTO AN ENJOYABLE EXPERIENCE

PARENTS CAN HELP THE CHILD BECOME A GOOD READER WITHOUT FORCING HIM TO READ

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

@zainabalnasseri

Quarantine has forced families to stay home all day. It is undoubtedly difficult to find new games always or ways to spend time with children and avoid nervousness at a time when coronavirus is spreading everywhere.

Among the things in which time can be invested is reading because it is one of the most important basic skills that a child must learn. It is his first step towards education. The excellent reader child is a self-confident, bold, self-respecting child to a large extent, able with ease to move from educational or career success to a greater one.

Some may ask how we can make reading favourable to a child?

Experts say: "Teach the child to read through encouragement. Parents can help the child become a good reader without forcing him to read; compulsion leads a child to hate reading and to consider it a tedious and obnoxious routine task."

One of the most important things to make a child like reading is reading an interesting story for the child at night before bed, which is the first step for him to learn and enjoy it. From the moment he is born until he reaches the age of five, he shows a strong curiosity to learn about everything and anything. This is a good opportunity to introduce him to books. Besides, reading to the child at night creates strong bonds between mother and child, it helps relieve them of stress and helps the child sleep.

Also, the child should be taught to read at an early age.

The child at this age is eager to get the attention of others and have an influence on their feelings. The mother should take the opportunity and start reading short stories. She needs to represent each of the characters by changing the tone of her voice. This helps the child to enjoy this fun experience.

Regarding the importance of reading, Zwan al Rahbi, a reader of children's literature, says, "By reading, the child's language and communication skills develop. It is important for a mother to make reading experience an enjoyable thing for the child. She should encourage her child to read aloud because reading aloud helps the child understand the text, enhances his ability to focus, and improves his verbal skill".

She added that the mother should follow a daily programme of reading to her child. "Nothing encourages the child to love reading and to have his own book except reading to him, especially aloud. While the mother is reading to her child, she must move her finger in the direction of the words; this helps the child connect both words; the read and the printed."

A new study confirmed that reading from a young age can increase the levels of general intelligence in a child and strengthen the general cognitive abilities of the human later. Also, reading from childhood helps train children's abstract thinking; because they usually have to imagine people, places and things that are strange to them while reading. Reading from a young age also helps to solve general problems and helps improve child's results in intelligence tests, allowing him to have a successful career path in the future.



Omani physician becomes chairperson of MENATOX

MUSCAT: Dr Badria bint Ali al Hatali, Head of Toxicology Section at the Department of Environmental and Occupational Health of the Health Ministry's Directorate General of Disease Surveillance and Control, has been selected to occupy the post of Chairperson of the Middle East and North Africa Clinical Toxicology Association (MENA-TOX).

Dr Badria said in a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA) that the MENATOX has, since its establishment in 2010 in the US state of Massachusetts, strived to raise social and global awareness about poisons and ways to avoid them and protect society and individuals against them.



Dr Badria bint Ali al Hatali

Dr Badria pointed out that the MENATOX contributes to most of the research featuring clinical toxicology with a view to upgrading this type of medical study, facilitate the mission of the association's members and researchers in the field and provide the best possible standards of healthcare

MENATOX strives to raise social and global awareness about poisons and ways to avoid them and protect society and individuals against them

to patients.

Dr Badria obtained BSc in Health Sciences and PhD in Medicine from Sultan Qaboos University. She also obtained Oman Medical Specialty Board's accreditation in Emergency Medicine in 2012 and clinical toxicology fellowship from the University of Emory, Georgia, United States in 2014. — ONA



'From the arcades of National Museum'

MUSCAT: Oman News Agency (ONA) will today release a series of visual narratives in cooperation with the National Museum titled "From Arcades of the National Museum".

The edition features artefacts, craft industries, manuscripts, historical documents, correspondences, ancient publications, philately, replicas of ships and boats, navigation instruments and ancient weapons.

The series also covers high

definition replicas of forts, castles, historical monuments and other antiques related to architecture and farming tools and equipment, as well as all that relates to aflaj, coins and currencies, pottery and earthenware, furniture, applied arts, photographs, fine arts and musical instruments.

The weekly series, to be transmitted every Monday, seeks to depict the cultural and historical dimensions of Omani civilisation and enhance the National Museum's educational

and humanitarian mission.

Situated in the heart of Muscat city, the National Museum figures high among cultural tourism edifices of the Sultanate. The museum, which occupies an area of 13,700 square metres, consists of 14 galleries showcasing a large number of exhibits.

The National Museum portrays human heritage in the Arabian Peninsula since the earliest settlement ever known in history dating about two million years ago. — ONA

Corporate vaccination picking up

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Various power generation and oil and gas companies have begun to get their employees vaccinated against Covid-19. They are successfully moving forward with the set targets.

Several corporate vaccination drives are being organised in liaison with the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the General Directorate of Infection and Prevention Control.

Various electricity generating companies are currently in the pipeline to get their staff vaccinated, while many companies have already done with this.

"Understanding the responsibility, we kept in mind safety of our crew to maintain the duty of supplying power especially to sensitive places like hospitals and all medical centres which contribute with their full capacity to save people," said Hazzaa al Dawoodi, one who led the vaccine



campaign at Phoneix Operations and Maintenance Company. Phoneix Power is one of the first companies to provide vaccines for all its team, including staff of subcontracting companies working with them.

This comes as part of the Supreme Committee decision and MoH instructions to the company and is based on its

mission to provide a healthy and safe working environment.

She added, "Awareness was created about the importance of the vaccine and the required precautionary measure ahead of the vaccine campaign."

"We have been carefully following the rules and guidelines imposed by the Supreme Committee since the

beginning of the pandemic and we have been in touch with the required health authorities and ministry to facilitate this campaign to secure the vaccines and start the vaccination process for Phoneix employees from last week," Khalid al Maawali, Plant General Manager, who is responsible for this campaign, told the *Observer*.

PASI LAUNCHES 'ONE ACCOUNT' INITIATIVE

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 20

The public authority for Social Insurance (PASI) has launched the 'One Account' initiative to collect contributions of the insurance protection extension system.

The project is PASI's strategic plan to improve the level and quality of electronic services. It aims to provide easy, flexible and sustainable procedures to collect contributions under the insurance protection extension system, as the project includes all companies registered in the system of extending insurance protection in the GCC.

The PASI launched a media initiative, 'One Account', to fasten financial transactions. The system also allows easy identification of the deposited amounts, automatic confirmation of paid contributions and other features. Aliya al Hinai, Head of the Revenue and Treasury Section of the

Finance and Accounts Department of PASI, gave a detailed understanding.

"PASI began virtual accounts for contributions in July 2019, in coordination with HSBC Bank to collect contributions to the insurance protection extension system, as the project includes all companies registered in the insurance protection extension system in the GCC For the Arab Gulf states," said Al Hinai.

Commenting on facilities, she said, "Facilities and benefits include, overcoming many of the previous challenges. It is aimed at dispensing with manual procedures and saving efforts and time for PASI."

Al Hinai said, "Number of companies using virtual accounts to pay contributions in the GCC is 164 out of a total number of active 824 companies until February 2021. UAE has 113 companies, Saudi Arabia 21, Kuwait 14, Bahrain 13 companies, and Qatar has three companies."

International Yoga Day observed

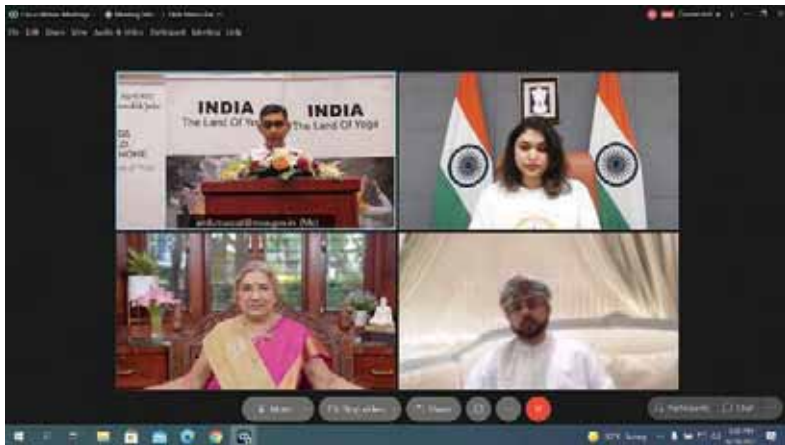
STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 20

Embassy of India, Muscat, organised a special event on Saturday, to celebrate the 7th International Day of Yoga (IDY). The event was held virtually due to Covid-19 pandemic restrictions on public assembly. The event saw enthusiastic participation of many Yoga lovers in Oman, an embassy press release said.

"Theme of this year's IDY celebration is 'Yoga for Wellness'. The event was graced by Mohammed bin Ahmed al Shanfari, Chief of West Asia Department, Foreign Ministry as Chief Guest and Dr Hansaji J Yogendra delivered an engaging talk on Yoga and wellness. Short compilation of video messages by Omani and other dignitaries was played during the event.

The embassy organised total 37 sessions online in association with various Yoga organisations in the run up to the main IDY event. The sessions were held on diverse themes including, yoga for



thanked all the Yoga organisations in Oman for their continuous contributions for promoting Yoga.

The Chief Guest, Mohammed bin Ahmed al Shanfari conveyed his wishes on the occasion. Dr Hansaji J Yogendra delivered an engaging talk on Yoga and wellness. Short compilation of video messages by Omani and other dignitaries was played during the event.

The embassy organised total 37 sessions online in association with various Yoga organisations in the run up to the main IDY event. The sessions were held on diverse themes including, yoga for

immunity, holistic health, mental health, women well-being, child health & youth, Surya Namaskar, yoga at workplace, etc. which saw enthusiastic response.

The videos of entries received by the embassy for Yoga demonstration video contests were played towards the end of event, after which the names of winners of all the contests were announced.

The event concluded with Common Yoga Protocol, with all participants performing various Yoga postures in complete harmony.

Meetings, gatherings banned at hotels

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) urged hotels and tourism facilities to abide by the law and close all meeting and celebration halls, and ban gatherings of any kind from today, till further notice.

The ministry said that hotels and tourism facilities must close

Hotels and tourism facilities urged to abide by the law and close all meeting and celebration halls, and ban gatherings of any kind from today

all public places from 8 pm to 4 am, as dining will be allowed only through room service during the ban period.

The ministry stated that all hotels and tourism facilities must adhere to the instructions and decisions issued by the Covid-19 Supreme Committee. — ONA



Tender Announcement		
Tender Number	T-03-2021 (Re-Tender)	
"Mwasalat" Invites professional firms for the following tender:		
Tender Name	Mwasalat Vessels and Pontons underwater hull Cleaning Service	
Project Summary	Framework Agreement to provide works of vessels underwater hull cleaning and bottom underwater survey for company fleet and pontoons.	
Tender Fee	50 OMR	Grade & Specialty
		Qualified & Specialized Companies having Lloyd's Register (LR) Class Approval from IACS, in the Field.
Start date for tender document distribution	Last date for tender document distribution	Last date for submission
MON, 21st June 2021	SUN, 27th June 2021	MON, 05th July 2021
Interested specialized companies may obtain the Tender Documents from the E-Tendering website https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents.		
Tenders should be submitted online on the given website; no documents can be accepted as manual submission except original Tender Bond.		
The Tenderer shall register in E-tendering portal to enable purchase and collection of the Tender Documents.		
All correspondences pertaining to the Tender inquiry must be online at the e-tendering system.		
Any clarification pertaining to the E-tendering system technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email ID etenderhd@its.gov.om and phone number: +968 24166670, 24166409.		
"Mwasalat" Head Quarter, Ghala Tel: +968 24121500/24121555 P.O.Box: 911, Al Khuwair, PC: 133, Sultanate of Oman		

Iran says nuclear talks to be adjourned

DUBAI: Negotiators for Iran and six world powers will on Sunday adjourn talks on reviving their 2015 nuclear deal and return to respective capitals for consultations as remaining differences cannot be easily overcome, Tehran's delegation chief said.

"We are now closer than ever to an agreement but the distance that exists between us and an agreement remains and bridging it is not an easy job," Abbas Araqchi told Iranian state TV from Vienna. "We will return to Tehran tonight."

Parties to the pact were holding a formal meeting in Vienna on Sunday from 2:30 pm, the European Union said on Saturday.

Ebrahim Raisi, won Iran's presidential election on Friday and will take office in early August,

Differences narrowed but not easy to bridge, Iran says as onus mainly on US to clinch new deal

replacing Hassan Rouhani. But this is unlikely to disrupt Iran's effort under Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has final say on all major policy, to restore the nuclear pact and be rid of tough US oil and financial sanctions.

Negotiations have been going on in Vienna since April to work out the nature and sequencing of steps Iran and the United States must take on nuclear activities and sanctions to return to full compliance with the nuclear pact. Washington under then-



Abbas Araghchi, political deputy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran, leaves after the closed-door nuclear talks in Vienna. — AFP

President Donald Trump left the deal in 2018, branding it too flawed to remove the risk of Iran developing nuclear weapons capability, and reimposed sanctions on the Islamic Republic.



The ambassador of the Permanent Mission of China to the UN, Wang Qun arrives for the closed-door nuclear talks in Vienna where diplomats of Britain, the EU, China, Russia and Iran hold their talks. — AFP

Iran has since breached the deal's strict limits on uranium enrichment. It has said its moves would be reversed if the United States rescinded all sanctions. "Bridging the gaps requires

decisions that mainly the other party (Washington) has to take. I hope in the next round we will travel this short distance albeit a difficult one," Araqchi said.

Raisi has never publicly addressed allegations around his role in what the United States and human rights groups have called the extrajudicial executions of thousands of political prisoners in 1988.

Bennett, has hewed to the opposition of conservative predecessor Benjamin Netanyahu to the nuclear deal, whose caps on projects with atomic bomb-making potential Israel deemed too lax.

Iran has always denied seeking nuclear weapons. Raisi, like Khamenei, has supported

the nuclear talks as a route to cancelling US sanctions that have laid waste to the Islamic Republic's oil-based economy and dramatically worsened economic hardships, stirring widespread discontent.

The new government will hope to claim credit for any economic benefits arising from the revival of the accord, something the outgoing administration might clinch before Raisi takes office.

"If the deal is finalised when Rouhani is (still) president, Raisi cannot be criticised by hardline supporters for giving concessions to the West," a government official who is close to the talks said.

"Also Rouhani, not Raisi, will be blamed for any future problems regarding the deal." — Reuters

■ SYRIA OPENS CELLULAR THERAPY FOR KIDS



Asma Assad, wife of Syrian President Bashar al Assad, poses for photos with children outside Syria's first centre for stem cells transplantation and cellular therapy for children that is due to open in weeks, in Damascus. — Reuters

Dozens killed as battle for Marib flares

DUBAI: Renewed battles between government forces and Ansar Allah fighters over the strategic city of Marib in northern Yemen have left 47 dead, including 16 pro-government forces, military sources said on Saturday.

The fighters are seeking to seize control of Marib and its surrounding oil fields, the Yemeni government's last stronghold in the north after six years of fighting that has plunged the country into a humanitarian crisis.

Diplomatic efforts to secure a ceasefire in Yemen had intensified, in parallel with the fierce campaign for control of Marib, which has left thousands dead on both sides. But with no agreement in

sight, the fighting has flared again after a lull over the past month.

Sources with the internationally recognised government said that 16 soldiers from their ranks were killed, including six officers, on Saturday.

The insurgents rarely report their casualties.

The Ansar Allah fighters "launched attacks on various fronts, in an attempt to advance, but they were mostly repelled," one of the officials said.

The sources said that warplanes from the coalition, which supports the beleaguered government, launched air strikes on Ansar Allah fighters sites.

The Ansar Allah said on their Al Masirah television channel that the coalition had also carried out 17 air strikes in different parts of Marib province.

The renewed fighting over Marib comes after the failure of a diplomatic push by the United Nations, the United States and regional nations to secure a ceasefire in Yemen.

The outgoing UN envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths on Tuesday told the Security Council his own efforts over the past three years to end the war have been "in vain".

"It is with deep regret that I report today that the parties have not overcome their differences," he said.

— AFP

Work from car: Long queues for fuel force Lebanese to adapt

BEIRUT: Stuck in a stationary queue of cars waiting for fuel in Beirut, game designer Ali Kattouaa works the phone to make the most of the long holdup.

"I'm in a meeting while I'm waiting for gas. What can I say?" he said wearily, listening to a conference call on speaker while monitoring the queue for any hint of progress. "Lebanon is pushing us to the limits... throwing all challenges at us."

Fuel shortages, part of wider problems which have plunged the country into deep economic crisis, have forced motorists in recent weeks to queue for hours for petrol — sometimes for less than a quarter of a tank.

Dozens of cars line up in the capital and cities across Lebanon, often waiting at stations before they open. Tempers sometimes flare. Local media reported an exchange of fire at a petrol station in the northern city of Tripoli on Friday. For some people, filling up the tank is a daily quest with everything at stake.

"Everyday the same story — if there's fuel we go to work. No fuel, we stay home," said decorator Alaa Saade, sitting in his truck with other labourers. "We wait for gas station owners to show empathy and

Dozens of cars line up in the capital and cities across Lebanon, often waiting at stations before they open

let us fill our tanks."

For Kattouaa and others, the queues offer a chance to multitask.

"While waiting I noticed that the water company is here, so I paid the bill," said accountant Marie Kevorkian, brandishing her receipt. She said she would check what other chores needed doing

before she finally arrived at work.

Long-suffering motorists will face new challenges soon as the government says the country has run out of reserves to fund a \$6 billion-a-year subsidy programme, half of it spent on fuel.

Energy Minister Raymond Ghajar said last week that Lebanese drivers must get used to the idea that subsidies, which kept the cost of a tank of fuel at a fifth of its real level, would come to an end.

"Those who can't pay 200,000 Lebanese pounds (\$13 on the informal market) for a tank should stop using a car and use something else," he said. — Reuters



A view shows cars stuck in a traffic jam in Beirut. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

ISMAILIA

New offer made over Suez Canal blockage

The owners of a giant container ship that blocked the Suez Canal in March have made a new offer in a compensation dispute with the canal authority, a lawyer for the authority said. The Ever Given container ship has been anchored in a lake between two stretches of the canal since it was dislodged on March 29. It had been grounded across the canal for six days, blocking hundreds of ships and disrupting global trade.



The Suez Canal Authority (SCA) demanded \$916 million in compensation to cover salvage efforts, reputational damage and lost revenue, before publicly lowering the request to \$550 million. — Reuters

BEIRUT

Lebanon's leader says he still wants Hariri as PM

The leader of Lebanon's biggest Christian political party said he still wanted Prime Minister-designate Saad al Hariri to form a new government, and blamed political opponents for months of political paralysis. Lebanon's politicians have argued over the structure of a new government since the last one quit in the aftermath of the devastating August 2020 Beirut port explosion, leaving the country adrift as it sinks deeper into economic crisis.



"We want a government today, not tomorrow and with the leadership of Saad al Hariri," Gebran Bassil (pictured), leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, the biggest Christian bloc, said in a televised address. — Reuters

WASHINGTON

Biden to host Israeli President Rivlin on June 28

US President Joe Biden plans to host Israel's new president, Reuven Rivlin, at the White House on June 28, the White House said. "President Rivlin's visit will highlight the enduring partnership between the United States and Israel and the deep ties between our governments and our people," White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said in a statement.

Rivlin will visit shortly before he is due to end his seven-year term in July. Isaac Herzog



was elected the country's new president this month in elections that marked the end of the era of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu era in Israel.

— Reuters

In brief

■ KATHMANDU

**WORKERS AMONG 11 KILLED IN NEPAL FLOODS, 25 MISSING**

Landslides and flash floods triggered by heavy rain across Nepal this week killed 11 people including one Indian and two Chinese workers at a development project, while 25 people were missing elsewhere, officials said. The bodies of the three workers were recovered near the town of Melamchi in Sindhupalchowk district, northeast of Kathmandu, which was hit by flash floods on Wednesday that also forced many people from their homes, district administrators said in a statement.

"The foreign nationals were working for a Chinese company that is building a drinking water project", district official Baburam Khanal said. — **Reuters**

■ MANILA

**PHILIPPINES SEALS DEAL FOR 40M COVID DOSES**

The Philippine government has signed a supply agreement for 40 million doses of the Covid-19 vaccine developed by Pfizer Inc and BioNTech SE in its biggest coronavirus vaccine deal to date. Deliveries of the vaccine, among several brands of coronavirus shots allowed for emergency use in the Southeast Asian country, will begin in August, Carlito Galvez, head of the government's Covid-19 vaccine procurement, said.

The Philippines last week started a programme to vaccinate 35 million people working outside their homes, while continuing to inoculate priority sectors such as healthcare workers and elderly citizens, hoping to achieve herd immunity this year. — **Reuters**

■ BEIJING

**CHINA VACCINE DOSES PASS ONE BILLION MARK**

The number of Covid-19 jabs administered in China has passed the one billion mark, health officials said, more than a third of the doses given worldwide.

The announcement by the National Health Commission comes after the number of shots administered globally surpassed 2.5 billion on Friday, according to an AFP count from official sources.

It is unclear what percentage of China's population has now been inoculated but its vaccination drive got off to a slow start after a successful fight against the virus left little sense of urgency to get jabbed. — **AFP**

India logs lowest daily rise in virus cases in nearly 3 months

NEW DELHI: India recorded 58,419 new coronavirus cases over the past 24 hours on Sunday, the lowest daily figure in nearly three months, as the second wave of the pandemic continues to wane in the country.

The overall caseload climbed to 29.88 million, a federal Health Ministry bulletin said, the world's second-highest number of coronavirus infections after the United States.

Daily infections were at the lowest since March 24, when India logged 53,476 cases, according to data on the website of Johns Hopkins University.

The daily numbers represent a sharp slowdown from the peak of the second wave in early May when India was registering over 400,000 cases every day.

A total of 1,576 deaths were reported on Sunday, bringing the overall death toll to 386,713, the ministry said. Experts say both coronavirus infections and related deaths in India are likely much higher due to undercounting by government agencies.

Many Indian states have begun easing regional lockdowns amid the receding second wave.

Courts and federal government have however urged regional governments to ensure physical distancing and coronavirus-appropriate behaviour as huge crowds thronged markets and malls.

Randeep Guleria, a top



Multiple medical staff try to pacify a Person With Disability (PWD) who refused to get inoculated with the coronavirus vaccine during a special vaccination drive for differently abled people in Mumbai. — **AFP**

government doctor and adviser, has also warned that a third Covid-19 wave may hit India in six to eight weeks if people lowered their guard.

India's main challenge remains vaccinating its huge population, he said. So far, only 3.8 per cent of the more than 1.3 billion inhabitants in India have been fully vaccinated against Covid-19.

Meanwhile, a few weeks ago, New Delhi's crematoriums were operating around the clock dealing with Covid-19 victims. Now the

The daily numbers represent a sharp slowdown from the peak of the second wave in early May when India was registering over 400,000 cases every day

Indian capital's shopping malls and markets are buzzing again. But doctors are worried that India is letting its guard down again,

just like in January and February before a devastating coronavirus surge that led to a near-collapse of the healthcare system.

Clutching a bag of clothes as she shopped with her new husband at Delhi's busy Select City Walk mall, Surili Gupta said she was "fed up being cooped up inside".

"I needed this break, for how long you can remain locked up?" the 26-year-old sales executive said as she waited for a table at the mall's packed food hall. "The coronavirus is not going any

time soon, so one has to learn to live with it. I am sure with the vaccinations and all, we will be fine."

Behind her, a big weekend crowd chatted and laughed over Indian dosas and Chinese noodles, paying scant regard to public announcements reminding them about social distancing and wearing masks.

A couple queueing at a popular burger joint squabbled, masks hanging from their faces. Mall staff performed perfunctory temperature checks and reminded people to sanitise their hands. Not far away, shoppers thronged the open-air warren of shops and stalls at Lajpat Nagar market, bargaining for scarves, bangles and cheap cosmetics.

There was lively trade for food vendors, who sold kulchey-chholey — flatbread served with spicy chickpeas — and other favourites to punters, masks dangling as they ate.

"I would not have come today but it was very urgent," Perna Jain, 21, a college student who had come with her mother, said. "My cousin is getting married and I needed to buy some stuff. I know it's not yet safe but what can I do? This (event) is equally important."

Delhi, a megacity of 20 million people, saw horrendous scenes in April and May when coronavirus cases went through the roof, as they did across the country.

— **dpa/AFP**

Afghan president replaces two top ministers, army chief

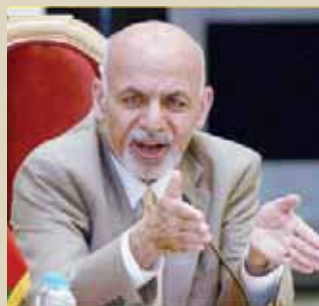
KABUL: Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has replaced his defence and interior ministers and the army chief of staff amid rising casualties among Afghanistan's security forces in sharply increased fighting with the Taliban.

The changes, announced late on Saturday by the presidential palace, come as Afghan security forces battle the Taliban in 28 of 34 provinces in the country, with the hardline group claiming more territory in recent weeks.

Bismillah Khan Mohammadi was appointed as caretaker defence minister replacing Asadullah Khalid, who had recently returned to the country after a prolonged illness while Abdul Sattar Mirzakwal was picked as new interior minister replacing Hayatullah Hayat.

A senior commander under late anti-Soviet resistance hero Ahmad Shah Massoud, Mohammadi has had a long military career and served as interior minister, defence minister and army chief of staff in the government of former president Hamid Karzai.

General Wali Mohammad



Afghan President Ashraf Ghani

Ahmadzai was appointed as the new chief of army staff, replacing General Yasin Zia, the palace said.

On Friday, 24 members of Afghan special forces soldiers were killed and dozens more wounded during a fight to retake a district captured by the Taliban in northern Faryab province, security officials said.

The Taliban has staged a months-long campaign to expand its influence across the country as the United States has begun withdrawing troops from May 1 and closed some bases and handed them over to the Afghan government.

Since the United States announced plans in April to pull out all of its troops by September 11, at least 30 districts have been seized by the Taliban.

— **Reuters**

Pope joins Myanmar bishops' appeal for humanitarian corridors

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis on Sunday appealed to Myanmar's military leaders to allow aid to reach displaced, hungry people who have fled fighting since the February 1 coup and to respect religious sites as places of sanctuary.

Speaking at his Sunday blessing to crowds in St Peter's Square, Francis said he wanted to "add my voice" to an appeal last week by Myanmar's Catholic bishops.

The pope, who has made many appeals for the release of political prisoners in Myanmar, spoke of the "heartbreaking experience of thousands of people in that country who are displaced and are dying of hunger".

He backed the bishops' appeal to authorities to allow humanitarian corridors in order to get aid to displaced people and to respect churches, pagodas, monasteries, mosques, temples, schools and hospitals, as neutral places of refuge. The United Nations General Assembly on Friday called for a stop to the flow of arms to Myanmar and urged the military to respect November election results and release political detainees, including detained leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Meanwhile, anti-coup protesters in Myanmar donned flowers in their hair on Saturday to mark the birthday of ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who remains under house arrest and is



Men with flowers in their hair in support of Myanmar's detained leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, pose next to the cake with frosting imprint of her face to mark her birthday in Myanmar. — **Reuters**

The pope spoke of the 'heartbreaking experience of thousands of people in Myanmar who are displaced and are dying of hunger'

due to face court again next week.

Suu Kyi's elected government was overthrown in a February 1 coup that sparked mass protests and renewed clashes between the military and ethnic rebel armies in border regions.

Flowers tucked into a bun have long been a signature look of Suu Kyi, who turned 76 on Saturday. Many replicated the floral hair-

style and uploaded pictures onto social media across Myanmar for the occasion.

Among them was Myanmar Miss Universe beauty queen Thu-zar Wint Lwin, who wore red flowers in her hair and wrote: "May our leader be healthy."

In commercial capital Yangon, protesters put up posters on power lines wishing Suu Kyi a happy birthday and expressing solidarity.

"Happy Birthday Mother Suu. We are right behind you", the signs read.

Some marched with black umbrellas and banners that read "freedom from fear" alongside pictures of Suu Kyi.

— **Reuters/AFP**

Brazil clocks half million Covid deaths

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil on Saturday became the second country after the United States to surpass 500,000 Covid-19 deaths as the South American giant grapples with a third wave of the pandemic.

“500,000 lives lost due to the pandemic that affects our Brazil and the world,” Health Minister Marcelo Queiroga tweeted.

The Health Ministry reported 500,800 deaths, including 2,301 in the last 24 hours, a toll that many experts say underestimate the real toll from the health crisis.

This week the average number of daily deaths surpassed 2,000 for the first time since May 10.

“The third wave is arriving, there’s already in a change in the case and death curves,” Ethel Maciel, an epidemiologist from Espirito Santo University, said.

“Our vaccination (program), which could make a difference, is slow and there are no signs of restrictive measures, quite the contrary.”

In large cities, life seems almost back to normal with restaurants, bars and shops open and many people in the streets not wearing face masks.

And yet the situation is critical



A demonstrator takes part in a protest against Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on Saturday. — AFP

in 19 of Brazil’s 27 states with more than 80 per cent occupancy of intensive care beds — in nine of those states, it’s over 90 per cent.

The “second wave,” from

January to April this year, was particularly deadly.

The number of deaths increased exponentially with the arrival of the Gamma virus variant that originated in Manaus,

in the north of Brazil.

It gradually began to fall in May thanks in part to the closure of businesses when the pandemic was at its worst.

But many epidemiologists

believe lockdown restrictions were lifted too soon at a time when daily deaths were still up around the 2,000 mark.

Contrary to what has been seen in Europe, there’s been no real trough between the different waves in Brazil.

“I don’t know if it’s a third wave ... it seems we never got out of the first one,” said Alexandre da Silva, a specialist in public health at the University of Sao Paulo.

“It seems the pandemic has now turned into a marathon runner who is pacing his race. It’s not a sprinter who does his sprint but then loses power.”

Brazil has recently received several batches of vaccines, including from US pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, but the country has only managed to fully vaccinate 11 per cent of the population, with 29 per cent receiving one dose.

The vaccination drive began late in mid-January using the AstraZeneca and Coronavac jabs.

Far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, who previously hit out at vaccines, has promised to immunise the entire population by the end of the year — something specialists consider unlikely. — AFP

Russian ambassador returns to Washington

MOSCOW: The Russian ambassador in Washington flew back Sunday to the United States saying he hoped to build “equal and pragmatic” ties after a US-Russia summit in Geneva aimed at reducing tensions.

The plane transporting ambassador Anatoly Antonov, who was recalled in March for consultations, took off at 9:20 a.m. (0620 GMT) from Moscow’s Sheremetyevo airport for New York, where he will travel on to Washington, Russian news agencies reported.

“Given the results of the meeting between the two presidents, I am counting on constructive work with my American colleagues to build equal and pragmatic relations,” Antonov told the Ria Novosti agency, adding he was in an “optimistic mood.”

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday that Moscow and Washington agreed for their ambassadors to return, after summit talks in Geneva with US counterpart Joe Biden.

Diplomatic relations between Moscow and Washington had all but broken down since Biden took office and accused the Kremlin of interfering in US elections and launching cyberattacks. — AFP

Scientists warn more lockdowns possible in tough winter

LONDON: An emergence of new respiratory viruses means a “pretty miserable winter” is ahead for the UK with further lockdowns a possibility, scientists have warned.

Professor Calum Semple, a member of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage), which advises the Government, has said that children and elderly people will be vulnerable to endemic viruses at the end of the year. health expert warned that hospitals could become “overwhelmed” at some point in the winter.

On Sunday morning, Professor Semple told Times Radio: “I suspect we’ll have a pretty miserable winter because the other respiratory viruses are going to come back and bite us quite hard. But after that, I think we’ll be seeing business as normal next year.”

“There’s a sting in the tail after every pandemic, because social distancing will have reduced exposure, particularly of pregnant women and their newborn babies, they will have not been exposed to the usual endemic respi-



A man Covid-19 vaccine at a mass vaccination centre in London on Sunday. — Reuters

ratory viruses.

“The protection that a pregnant woman would give to their unborn child has not occurred.

“So we are going to see a rise in a disease called bronchiolitis, and a rise in community-acquired pneumonia in children and in the frail elderly, to the other respiratory viruses for which we don’t have vaccines.

“So that’s why we’re predicting a rough July, August and then a rough winter period.”

Professor Semple called it the

“fourth wave winter” but added it would be much milder than the previous ones.

Dr Susan Hopkins, the strategic response director for Covid-19 at Public Health England (PHE) also warned of a possible rise in cases at the end of the year.

She told the BBC’s The Andrew Marr Show: “We may have to do further lockdowns this winter, I can’t predict the future, it really depends on whether the hospitals start to become overwhelmed at some point. — dpa

Cuba’s trial of homegrown Covid vaccine shows promise

HAVANA: Cuba’s Soberana 2 vaccine candidate has shown 62 per cent efficacy with just two of its three doses, state-run biopharmaceutical corporation BioCubaFarma said on Saturday, citing preliminary data from late-phase trials.

Cuba, whose biotech sector has exported vaccines for decades, has five vaccine candidates in clinical trials, of which two - Soberana 2 and Abdala — are in late-phase trials.

“In a few weeks we should have the results for the efficacy with three doses which we expect will be superior,” said Vicente Várez, director of the state-run Finlay Vaccine Institute, which developed Soberana 2.

The news comes as the Caribbean’s largest island is facing its worst outbreak since the start of the pandemic in the wake of the arrival of more contagious variants, setting new records of daily coronavirus cases.

The Communist-run country has opted not to import foreign vaccines but rather to rely on its own. Experts say it is a risky bet but if it pays off, Cuba could burnish its scientific reputation, generate much-needed hard currency through exports and strengthen the vaccination drive worldwide.

“We know our government has not been able to provide this project all the funding it required, and nonetheless this is a result of global standing,” President Miguel Diaz-Canel said at the presentation of the results on state-run television.

Several countries from Argentina and Jamaica to



A man is vaccinated in Havana. — Reuters

Mexico and Venezuela have expressed an interest in buying Cuba’s vaccines. Iran started producing Soberana 2 earlier this year as part of late-phase clinical trials.

Cuba’s authorities have started administering the experimental vaccines en masse <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/cuba-raises-latam-hopes-it-starts-mass-inoculation-with-own-Covid-19-shot-2021-05-12> as part of “intervention studies” they hope will slow the spread of the virus.

Daily cases have halved in the capital since the start of this vaccination campaign, according to official data, although that may also be due to stricter lockdown measures.

— Reuters

SHORT TAKES

MOSCOW

Armenia votes in close parliamentary poll

Voting was underway in a parliamentary election in Armenia on Sunday, with opinion polls putting the party of acting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and that of former President Robert Kocharyan neck-and-neck.

The Armenian government called the snap election to try to end a political crisis that erupted after ethnic Armenian forces lost a six-week war against Azerbaijan last year and ceded territory in and around the



Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Pashinyan has been under pressure ever since, with regular street protests demanding him to step down over the terms of the peace agreement that ended the conflict.

PARIS

Regional elections kick off in France

The first round of regional elections kicked off in France on Sunday, in what is to be a bellwether for upcoming presidential elections next spring.

Almost 46 million people are eligible to vote for local political offices.

The polls opened first in the French overseas territory La Reunion, and will close last in Martinique and Guadeloupe.

All eyes will be on the right-wing parties during the vote.



Polls predict Marine Le Pen’s National Rally could win about a quarter of votes, and possibly win one or several regions for the first time in the run-off, due on June 27.

VATICAN CITY

Schuman, a father of Europe, on sainthood path

Pope Francis on Saturday put 20th-century statesman Robert Schuman, one of the founders of modern Europe, on the path to sainthood in the Roman Catholic Church. A Vatican statement said the pope approved a decree recognising the “heroic virtues” of Schuman, who died in 1963.

Recognition is one of the earliest stages of the long process that can lead to canonisation.

Schuman’s work was instrumental in the founding of today’s European institutions,



such as the European Union.

Schuman, who served as French prime minister and foreign minister in the immediate post-World War II period, also played a role in the founding of NATO.

Internship a gate pass for experience...

Having a first-hand experience is very essential indeed for all graduates and undergraduates alike. Leaving higher education institutions while armed only with theories and educational degrees is not enough to compete for a job opportunity. Certainly, what they need more is to get an internship opportunity, marking as a ticket to get an insight of how the real world looks like! Obtaining a real-life-experience, regardless how big or small it is, would help them for employment, as well as enrich their theoretical knowledge.

Actually, practical internship helps building the personality of all graduates, and undergraduates and job-seekers too. Either personally, professionally or educational, it undoubtedly serves developing all aspects of a person. Hence, receiving an internship experience counts when road mapping one's career future from the beginning. Those who were lucky to get an internship opportunity are having a plus point on their CVs, in comparison to others. As Benjamin Franklin said, "Tell me I forget, teach me I may remember, involve me and I learn".

The competition in getting a good job is definitely a continuous process while applying for an opening! Therefore, each applicant, regardless of his educational qualification, has to be more professionally qualified



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than others to win the race. In view of that, going to a college or a university is essential of course, but classroom learning should be backed by gaining real world experience. Here comes the significance of internship, which undergraduates highly look for.

As a matter of fact, internship experience is what distinguishes the competency of graduates from one another. Internship is the gate pass for graduates towards speedy job hunting after graduation. Likewise, sometimes it marks a pre-graduation prerequisite for some undergraduates. It is a must-to-have requirement for it enriches their knowledge and hones interpersonal skills. Case in a point, undergraduates of some scientific specialisations at colleges and universities are obliged to undergo an internship experience to pass a certain course. Besides, getting a training experience marks an obligatory task to complete for technical specialties undergraduates.

As practice makes perfect, both undergraduates and graduates are in need of training and internship opportunity so that they can integrate theoretical and practical learnings. Through internship, they can get a first-hand experience at a work place where knowledge and practice are converged.

Similarly, internship helps in building a network with employers and

gaining new resources and business relations perhaps. During internship period, interns could interact with many people whom will be potential contacts for their network and could be a referral when seeking a job later. It also presents a good time for interns to market themselves for employers. Many advantages could be acquired from internship, but unfortunately sometimes it is difficult for interns to secure an opportunity himself.

Accordingly, higher education institutions should promote internship programmes for their undergraduates. A mutual coordination and cooperation internship programmes must also be arranged between higher education institutions and different employers from both government and private sectors.

In some institutions, there are dedicated employees who are assigned work on such kind of business cooperation and understanding with relevant parties. This reflects the strong belief of a university or college on the significance of internship and training opportunities. Based on undergraduates' different specialties, they are offered a relevant internship opportunity. On the other hand, all undergraduates and graduates shall take internship and training seriously for the sake of having insightful academic and practical knowledge and proficiency.

AS PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT, BOTH UNDERGRADUATES AND GRADUATES ARE IN NEED OF TRAINING AND INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITY

GIVING THEIR VOICE

Vienna gives space for female architects as women build the city

BLAISE GAUQUELIN

Women may hold up half the sky, but when it comes to designing the public spaces and buildings in which they live, their voices have too often been silenced.

A visionary project in Vienna aims to turn that notion on its head, with a suburb in the Austrian capital designed by and for women.

It exemplifies how the city is trying to make urban space more inclusive, from brighter lights to broader pavements that make room for pushchairs, and how female architects and designers are driving the change.

The new Seestadt district has been in the throes of development since 2012, a sprawling building site on the city's eastern edge that is projected to expand from its 8,300 population now to 20,000 by 2030. Giant letters on hoardings around some of the construction sites proclaim "Women build the city".

By turning the focus on the role of women in urban design, Vienna is helping to highlight the still dominant role men play in shaping the built environment.

The developers and bankers who often make the crucial decisions when it comes to urban development are still overwhelmingly male, says Sabina Riss, an architect and university researcher who studies the relationship between gender and urban planning.

She estimates that in most countries "the percentage of women in the decision-making process at between five and 10 per cent at most".

As well as being heavily involved

A VISIONARY PROJECT IN VIENNA AIMS TO TURN THAT NOTION ON ITS HEAD, WITH A SUBURB IN THE AUSTRIAN CAPITAL DESIGNED BY AND FOR WOMEN



A general view of an apartment building at the Vienna's suburb Seestadt, Austria. — AFP

in the design of the new buildings in Seestadt, women also take centre stage when it comes to naming the new streets.

The philosopher Hannah Arendt, singer Janis Joplin and children's book heroine Pippi Longstocking are just a few of the names to grace the new addresses.

The district is also hosting a new exhibition showcasing female architects that runs until October 15.

According to architect Carla Lo — who herself has contributed designs for one of Seestadt's interior courtyards —

Vienna's planning policies have been refreshed since Kathrin Gaal in 2018 became the first woman to head the city's powerful housing department, overseeing an annual budget of more than a billion euros (\$1.2 billion).

"Since she has been there, suddenly the particular needs of single mothers are considered when tenders go out for projects", Lo says.

Having given her input to the development of Seestadt, Gaal says she wants the exhibition there to encourage other women "to make their visions reality". — AFP

METHANE MENACE

Survey spots 'super-emitter' landfills

NICHOLA GROOM

The US waste-management industry has become a darling of environmentally minded investors for its work in recycling trash and harvesting gases from landfills as an alternative fuel.

Leading firms Waste Management Inc and Republic Services Inc are included in the Dow Jones Sustainability World Index, a benchmark for socially conscious investing. The firms' major investors include funds controlled by billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates and wealth-management icon Larry Fink, founder of BlackRock Inc, who are both leading advocates for corporate climate action.

But the waste industry may be doing far more harm to the planet than investors think, according to a years-long aerial survey commissioned by California air-quality regulators. The survey found "super-emitter" landfills accounted for 43pc the measured emissions of the potent greenhouse gas methane — outpacing the fossil-fuel and agricultural sectors.

Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena and leak-detection firm Scientifc Aviation have been conducting the flyovers since 2016.

The research could also bring scrutiny on the waste management industry from both policymakers and green investors — who until now have been focused mainly on reducing greenhouse-gas emissions from fossil fuels

ELIOT CAROOM
A Researcher

They found that some trash dumps operated by top US landfill companies including Republic Services and Waste Management have been leaking methane at rates as much as six times the facility-level estimates from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The ten biggest methane-emitting landfills pumped out the gas at rates averaging 2.27 times the

federal estimates, which are produced by waste firms using EPA methodology.

The California research may have wide-ranging global implications by showing the waste-management industry is playing a bigger role in accelerating climate change than regulators had believed. The surveys could also reveal flaws with United Nations guidelines for estimating methane emissions that are followed by the major governments including the United States, according to scientists involved in the surveys and regulators interviewed by Reuters.

The research could also bring scrutiny on the waste management industry from both policymakers and green investors — who until now have been focused mainly on reducing greenhouse-gas emissions from fossil fuels, said Eliot Caroom, a researcher at TruValue Labs, which provides investors with environmental and social-governance data and analysis.

"One of the largest emitting industries, waste management, deserves more attention," he said.

Gates — who earlier this year published a book titled, How to Avoid a Climate Disaster — owns more than a third of Republic Services. He owns about 8 per cent of Waste Management through stakes held by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Trust and his personal investment vehicle Cascade Investment LLC, according to fund disclosures. BlackRock owns a 4.6 per cent share of Republic Services and 5 per cent of Waste Management, mainly through funds that track third-party indexes. — Reuters

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AL FAISAL CLAIMS RACE ONE WIN AT SPA

OMANI DRIVER AND TEAM-MATE SOUCEK LEAD GT OPEN

SPA FRANCORCHAMPS

(Belgium): Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair and Spanish team-mate Andy Soucek won the first of the weekend's two GT Open races at Belgium's Spa-Francorchamps circuit in the Ardennes and now lead the 2021 International GT Open series.

The Lechner Racing Team Porsche 911 GT3 R began the first of the weekend's two races from second place on the qualifying grid and Al Zubair managed to overhaul Brendan Iribe's McLaren with around 20 minutes of the race to run to snatch a stunning victory.

In dry and sunny conditions, the 23-year-old Omani opened up a gap of over five seconds with 17 minutes of the race to run. Robbie Foley managed to pass Iribe in the TF Sport Aston Martin GT3 and claim second place with 14 minutes on the clock but Al-Zubair had extended the Lechner Racing Porsche's advantage to over nine seconds heading into the final 10 minutes.

Al Zubair held on over the closing laps to pass the chequered flag 7.181 seconds in front of Foley, with Iribe finishing third in the Inception Racing McLaren after the 24-lap race.

Al Zubair said: "This was a dream result. Honestly I could not be happier. The second race weekend and we come up with an



overall win. The car felt great and Andy did a superb job of putting it second in qualifying. There were no complaints. From the start of the weekend until now was just a build up for this. A first overall win in Europe...I am very happy with it."

Yuki Nemoto brought the

Vincenzo Sospirri Racing Lamborghini home in fourth place to keep his and Baptiste Moulin's title challenge alive. Michele Beretta (Lamborghini) and Adam Carroll (Audi R8) were fifth and sixth after Loris Spinelli (Mercedes AMG) slipped down the leader board to eighth in the

closing minutes.

Soucek qualified the Porsche on pole in the Pro category for the first of the weekend's two races and second on the entire grid behind the McLaren of Iribe and Ollie Millroy. A lap of 2min 17.235sec was sufficient to claim the spot ahead of the Schandorff/

Beretta Lamborghini and the Aston of Michael Dinan and Foley.

Al Zubair and Soucek also enjoyed a solid first practice session on Friday. They were classified fourth in the entire field and first in the Pro class after running for 19 laps and posting a



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AL FAISAL AL ZUBAIR

Omani race driver

best tour of 2min 19.176sec.

The duo faired even better in the second practice session and a best tour of 2min 19.377sec put them in second place in the entire field and again on top in the Pro class and nearly 1.4 seconds faster than the VSR Lamborghini crew of Frederick Schandorff/Michele Beretta.

"I think it was a very positive start," said Al Zubair. "The car felt very positive to start with and then we made the necessary changes. In the first practice we were just getting used to the track. The second practice we almost did qualifying simulation and Andy did race simulation. The car felt pretty good."



New Zealand's Kyle Jamieson appeals successfully for the wicket of India's Virat Kohli. — Reuters

JAMIESON

STRIKES TO PUT INDIA IN TROUBLE

SOUTHAMPTON, UK: Kyle Jamieson captured the prize wickets of India captain Virat Kohli and Rishabh Pant in quick succession to give New Zealand the edge in the disrupted World Test Championship final at Southampton on Sunday.

India were 211-7 in their first innings at lunch on the third day, with the towering Jamieson — in only his eighth Test — boasting the miserly figures of 3-26 in 20 overs including 12 maidens.

To make matters worse for India, the well-set Ajinkya Rahane then holed out for 49 in a session when his side lost four wickets for 65 runs having resumed on 146-3.

But Ravindra Jadeja (15 not out) and Ravichandran Ashwin (23) counter-attacked with some well-struck boundaries either side of the arrival of the new ball.

After a wet outfield delayed Sunday's start by 30 minutes, India resumed with Kohli 44 not out and Rahane unbeaten on 29 in a match where weather interruptions meant only 64.4 overs out of a scheduled 180 had been bowled on the first two days.

Conditions were tough for batting, with the gloomy skies, which saw the ground's floodlights switched on and a green-tinged pitch all in favour of a New Zealand pace attack looking to generate swing movement through the air and seam the ball off the surface.

Kohli, 10 years to the day since his Test debut against the West Indies in Kingston, fell to the eighth ball he faced on Sunday when the towering Jamieson got a full-length delivery to nip back and strike the star batsman on the front



India's Ravindra Jadeja in action. — Reuters

pad. The India skipper reviewed Michael Gough's decision but the English umpire's 'out' verdict was upheld to end a stand of 61, with ball-tracking technology indicating the delivery would have hit the top of leg stump.

ACCURACY

Such was New Zealand's accuracy, Kohli's 132-ball innings included just one boundary — a cover-driven four off left-armer Neil Wagner to get off the mark.

Pant was still on nought when a tight umpire's call verdict spared him an lbw to Jamieson, bowling round the wicket to the left-hander. The usually free-scoring Pant needed 20 balls to get off the mark, with a four through midwicket off Jamieson.

Two balls later, Jamieson

Ravindra Jadeja (15 not out) and Ravichandran Ashwin (23) counter-attacked with some well-struck boundaries either side of the arrival of the new ball

dismissed the wicketkeeper when Pant, unable to resist a full-length delivery that was moving away, drove loosely outside off stump and was well caught at second slip by Tom Latham.

Rahane had batted in composed fashion during an admirable 117-ball innings with five fours.

But, one run shy of a fifty, he was cramped trying to pull a Wagner short ball and lobbed a simple catch to Latham, now at

mid-wicket.

Ashwin's enterprising innings ended when he was caught in the cordon by Latham off Tim Southee before, in a rare New Zealand lapse, third slip Southee dropped Jadeja, on 11, off new-ball partner Trent Boult.

Friday's first day was washed out completely, but match referee Chris Broad does have a special dispensation to extend this final into a sixth day if he rules extra time is required to compensate for overs lost in the game.

This match, the culmination of the inaugural World Test Championship that has spanned two years of series between the leading Test nations, is worth \$1.6 million to the winners and \$800,000 to the runners-up.

— AFP

Shihab delivers FIVB coaching programme in Saudi Arabia

SPORTS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 19

FIVB has nominated Oman's FIVB international instructor, Shihab al Riyami, to deliver International Federation Volleyball (FIVB) coaches course stage 1 (FIVB Coaching Programme) which begins in Riyadh city in Saudi Arabia on Sunday and will conclude on Friday.

The course is organised by the Saudi Arabian Volleyball Federation and Saudi Olympic committee at the Al Reyath Volleyball Training Centre. As many as 38 participants will take part in the course including former national players, volleyball coaches from different clubs, universities, physical education teachers and military.

The FIVB international volleyball instructor appreciated the KSA federation's plan. "Saudi Arabian Volleyball Federation has set a proper plan in developing volleyball coaches and increasing number of qualified national trainers through series of local and international courses. The presentations by certified and qualified international coaches will assist the coaches to develop their technical coaching skills



and thereby improve players' performance," he added.

Course director Shihab Ahmed al Riyami was thankful to the FIVB development department and Saudi Arabian Volleyball Federation in conducting coaches course online during this pandemic.

"It is an essential step in building coaches' knowledge and upgrading their skills in sports science"

"Also, the international course includes practical sessions, which presents many fundamental and core subjects in volleyball, coaching skills, physical conditioning, the basics of mini volleyball and updates on training information", Al Riyami concluded.

Bucks reach East finals after Antetokounmpo outduels Durant

LOS ANGELES: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 40 points and 13 rebounds as the Milwaukee Bucks defeated the Brooklyn Nets 115-111 in a thrilling game-seven overtime on Saturday to advance to the Eastern Conference finals.

The best-of-seven series has featured almost everything, including epic scoring performances, aggressive fouls, rim-rattling dunks, series-ending injuries and of course, Saturday's winner-take-all game seven which turned into a see-saw affair with dozens of lead changes throughout.

The only thing missing was an overtime which Kevin Durant set the stage for in game seven when he drained a turnaround jump shot at the buzzer in regulation to level the score at 109 all in front of a crowd of 16,200 at Barclays Center arena in New York.

Two-time league MVP Antetokounmpo shot 15-of-24 and had five assists in 50 minutes

of playing time in the head-to-head match-up with Durant.

"I want to be great," Antetokounmpo said. "We had to give everything."

Durant finished with 48 points, nine rebounds and six assists but missed two jumpers in the final minute of overtime that could have tied the score and possibly forced a second extra session.

"We got looks, we just didn't knock them down," said Durant.

The Bucks will advance to the Eastern Conference finals where they will play either the Atlanta Hawks or the Philadelphia 76ers, who face off in another game seven on Sunday.

"At the end of the day, I try not to get too high, not to get too low. But I almost got emotional a little bit out there because the team really tried their best," Antetokounmpo said. "We kept our composure. We were down 2-0. A lot of people didn't believe we could make it."



Milwaukee Bucks forward Giannis Antetokounmpo (34) drives past Brooklyn Nets forward Kevin Durant (7) for a lay-up. — USA Today Sports

Germany brush aside holders Portugal

MUNICH: Germany got their Euro 2020 campaign back on track — and blew Group F wide open — with a 4-2 romp against Portugal in Munich on Saturday.

France’s 1-1 draw with Hungary earlier in Budapest and Germany’s win mean there is all to play for in Wednesday’s final group games when the Germans host Hungary and the French meet holders Portugal.

“Overall, it was a great performance: great attitude and great morale,” said Germany coach Joachim Loew.

“We rightly won by that amount and created many chances.”

After Cristiano Ronaldo claimed his 107th international goal, leaving him two short of Ali Daei’s all-time record, to give Portugal an early lead, the Germans roared back with four unanswered goals.

German pressure forced their own goals by Ruben Dias and Raphael Guerreiro to put the hosts 2-1 up at half-time.

A Kai Havertz goal underlined Germany’s dominance before left-back Robin Gosens capped his man-of-the-match display by heading in Germany’s fourth to add to his two assists.

Portugal hit back when Diogo Jota tapped in Ronaldo’s hooked volley to make it 4-2 with 23 minutes left.

Germany continued their domination of Portugal, who they have now beaten five consecutive times at World Cup or European Championship finals since Euro 2000.

“Germany were the better team and I take responsibility for this (defeat), but whether we progress now is up to us and how we respond,” said Portugal coach Fernando Santos.

Germany created a huge amount of chances compared to Tuesday’s 1-0 defeat by France, while Portugal lacked the composure of their 3-0 win over Hungary the same day.

The match began at a frantic pace amid sweltering conditions in the Bavarian capital.



Germany's Kai Havertz scores their third goal. — Reuters

The Germans had a goal disallowed after five minutes when VAR spotted Serge Gnabry was offside as Gosens hit a spectacular volley.

However, sloppy Germany defending saw Portugal take the lead.

With only Gosens and Havertz defending at a German corner, Bernardo Silva started a counter-attack, then picked out Jota in the area with a world-class pass.

The Liverpool forward squared to Ronaldo, who sprinted into the box to slot the ball past Germany captain Manuel Neuer with less than 15 minutes gone.

It was Ronaldo’s first goal against



Germany's Kai Havertz (left) celebrates with midfielder Toni Kroos after scoring his team's third goal. — AFP

Germany to extend his record tally to 12 goals at five European Championship finals.

However, two own goals inside four minutes turned the game.

Germany drew level when another Gosens volley was flicked towards the net by Havertz, with Dias getting the final touch as the ball flew past Rui Patricio on 35 minutes.

The second goal soon followed when Guerreiro turned Kimmich’s cross into his own net while trying to stop the ball from reaching the on-rushing German forwards.

Gosens caused Portugal problems all afternoon on the left flank.

Standings group F



France



Portugal



Germany



Hungary

Standings	Pts	P	W	D	L	f	a	D
1 France	4	2	1	1	0	2	1	1
2 Germany	3	2	1	0	1	4	3	1
3 Portugal	3	2	1	0	1	5	4	1
4 Hungary	1	2	0	1	1	1	4	-3

Matches: Played - Won - Drawn - Lost

Goals: for - against - Difference

Source: UEFA

AFP

Overall, it was a great performance: great attitude and great morale. We rightly won by that amount and created many chances

JOACHIM LOEW
Germany coach

His low cross was tapped in by Havertz six minutes after the break.

The Atalanta player then capped a superb display by powering in a close-range header from Kimmich’s cross on the hour mark.

German fans sang their approval, with “Oh, wie ist das schoen” (oh, is that beautiful) echoing around the Allianz Arena.

Gosens was substituted soon after with his name being chanted.

Portugal pulled a goal back when Guerreiro’s free-kick was hooked back by Ronaldo and turned in by Jota.

Germany nearly claimed a late fifth goal when Havertz’s replacement Leon Goretzka fired over after another surging attack by the hosts.

This is the first time Portugal have conceded four goals since losing 4-0 to Germany at the 2014 World Cup.

Spain in ‘huge mess’ after another draw against Poland

SEVILLE: Spain’s Euro 2020 had been turbulent before it began due to Covid-19 complications, but now the crisis is on the pitch where players lack spark, confidence or cutting edge - and are in serious danger of a shock group-stage exit.

Saturday’s 1-1 draw with Poland was a step back performance-wise from the opening 0-0 draw with Sweden and left Spain in the unexpected position of third in an unimposing Group E and needing to beat Slovakia in their last game to go through.

“The main word on my lips is frustration. If only we’d scored that penalty and all those chances. But we need to believe in ourselves and stay strong,” said defender Pau Torres.

Self-confidence looks the lowest in recent memory.

Gerard Moreno had scored all 13 penalties he took for Villarreal last season but smashed his spot-kick against the Poles’ post while Alvaro Morata - who looked to have recovered confidence after scoring the opener - fluffed the rebound. “We’re in a huge mess,” said the front cover of *Marca* newspaper, while daily *AS* said Spain were “on red alert”.



Poland's Robert Lewandowski celebrates scoring their first goal. — Reuters

Spain’s midfield, which used to be the team’s heartbeat, looked sloppy and slow, unable to cope with an aggressive Poland who disrupted their passing and forced them to hurry.

PITCH HARMING US

For the second game in a row, instead of hailing home advantage, players blamed the La Cartuja pitch.

“The pitch wasn’t in the best

state for us to execute our style of play against a team that sat deep. The pitch is harming us a lot,” said midfielder Rodri.

Poland managed to cause former world champions Spain

plenty of problems with their direct play, hitting the woodwork twice and equalising with a towering header from the talismanic Robert Lewandowski.

Coach Luis Enrique was

unhappy with Sweden’s tactics in the first game but doffed his cap to Paulo Sousa’s side.

“I’d hoped we could have played better but we have to recognise the power of Poland and the excellent game they played.”

“They pressed us very high and blocked our passing avenues. They impressed me,” Enrique added.

Fans booed Spain off the pitch in a new chapter of disarray for Luis Enrique, who was criticised for leaving Sergio Ramos out of the squad and then faced huge upheaval when captain Sergio Busquets tested positive for Covid-19.

Busquets watched the Poland game from the sidelines and is expected to return for the crunch encounter against Slovakia, when Spain will be fighting to avoid a second group stage exit since the Euros was expanded to 16 teams in 1996.

“We have to be more united than ever, we have to win no matter what and that’s what we’re going to do,” said midfielder Pablo Sarabia.

Defender Pau added: “It’s as if the knockout stage starts for us on Wednesday.” — Reuters



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GCC e-Government System reviewed



MUSCAT: Oman, represented by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, participated in the 23rd meeting of the GCC E-Government Executive Committee on Sunday. The virtual meeting was attended by heads of GCC public authorities and e-government programmes.

The meeting reviewed the report of the Secretariat General on what was implemented from the 22nd meeting's decisions, as well as following up what was

carried out of joint initiatives and work papers raised by the GCC member states.

The meeting also reviewed the progress of the GCC E-Government System project and the proposal of forming a work team specialised in artificial intelligence and emerging technologies. The Sultanate was represented in the meeting by Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, the ministry's Under-Secretary for Communications and Information Technology.

— ONA

UK plans to regulate streaming giants

LONDON: The UK government plans to regulate streaming giants such as Netflix, Disney+ and Amazon Prime in the same way as traditional broadcasters such as the BBC and ITV.

Under plans to be published next week, media watchdog Ofcom would extend the same control over on-demand services, meaning it could rule on complaints relating to issues including bias and inaccuracy.

Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden is expected to set out the proposal in a broadcasting white paper. Public service broadcasters (PSBs) face increasing pressure from streaming services with large budgets for original productions and increasing numbers of young subscribers. — dpa

Oman launches electronic One Stop Shop for free zones, SEZ

NEW MILESTONE: Steps underway to complete the addition of Al Mazunah Free Zone to the portal

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 20

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) launched on Sunday an electronic One Stop Shop for Salalah Free Zone and Sohar Freezone, building on the digital transformation march that began earlier with the automation of the One Stop Shop in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm. Steps are being taken to complete the addition of Al Mazunah Free Zone to the One-Stop Shop portal.

The launch of Electronic One-Stop Shop services aims to support the Authority's efforts in attracting investments to the zones under its supervision, accelerating the completion of investor applications, facilitating starting business and transforming paper applications to electronic applications, and ensuring that transparency and clarity principles are achieved in the pathways of each service.

Services offered by OPAZ's One-Stop Shop can be accessed at: <https://eoss.opaz.gov.om>

Throughout the past months, OPAZ has unified the procedures for obtaining the services offered by special economic zones and



free zones through their electronic portals.

The electronic One - stop shop allows investors access to many services, most notably: applying for land usufruct, demarcation of plots, EIA service, appointment of project consultant, appointment of project contractor, project plans submission,

building permit submission, commencement of construction, and building completion certificate request, and other services will be added in the coming period.

Investors in special economic zones and free zones can apply through the electronic services portal of each zone and follow up their



The launch of Electronic One-Stop Shop services aims to support the Authority's efforts in attracting investments to the zones under its supervision, accelerating the completion of investor applications, facilitating starting business and transforming paper applications to electronic applications, and ensuring that transparency and clarity principles are achieved in the pathways of each service

applications through the dashboard. The portal also allows the feature of attaching required files and the feature of e-payment; which enables employees of the One-Stop Shop in each zone, receive applications and give necessary approvals, starting from receiving the application and ending with application completion.

Uptake of health insurance coverage declines 47% in 2020

PANDEMIC IMPACTS: General, life, motor, marine, property and engineering insurance segments report fewer policies last year

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](https://twitter.com/conradprabhu)

The uptake of insurance coverage in the Sultanate fell in most of the key segments of the sector during 2020 as the protracted global economic downturn, compounded by the coronavirus pandemic, took its toll, a new report by the Capital Market Authority (CMA) — the sector regulator — has revealed.

Motor insurance policies issued in 2020 slumped 9.3 per cent to 1.402 million policies, down from 1.546 million a year earlier, the Authority disclosed in its newly published Insurance Market Index 2019 – 2021. The decline was fuelled by, among other factors, a 13 per cent drop in third party motor insurance policies, the report said.

Life insurance policies tumbled by a steep 41.2 per cent to 131,676 policies last year, down from 224,115



policies in 2019.

The biggest drop was seen in coverage for groups, plunging by as much as 81.7 per cent to 19,071 policies in 2020, down from 104,229 policies a year earlier.

However, life coverage for individuals (for more than one year) posted a marginal dip of 6.1 per cent to 112,605 policies in 2020.

Property insurance policies issued last year declined 13.6 per cent to 15,042 policies, down from 17,413 in 2019.

Other segments reporting weakened demand are: marine insurance (-8.7 per cent), engineering insurance (-21.1 per cent), and other types of insurance (-44.4 per cent). The sole bright spot was Liability Insurance which jumped 24.2 per cent last year.

A big surprise was health insurance — by far the fastest growing sector in terms of premiums — which registered a sharp 47 per cent decline (12,234 policies) in policies issued last year, down from

23,099 policies in 2019.

Despite the downtrend in insurance uptake, the industry performed relatively well overall given the circumstances.

Total direct written premiums of insurance companies declined by about 4.3 per cent to RO 465.895 million in 2020, compared to RO 486.582 million in 2019. Gross direct premiums from general insurance dipped 3.2 per cent to RO 412.143 in 2020 (RO 425.880 million in 2019). Gross direct premiums for

There was slight adverse impact on the insurance sector but didn't cause remarkable increase in the costs of insurance claims while there were positive aspects for the pandemic in that the sector relied on modern technology and media in marketing, underwriting, opening files and payment of indemnities

CAPITAL MARKET AUTHORITY

life insurance fell 11.4 per cent to RO 53,752 million in 2020 (RO 60,702 million in 2019).

As anticipated, the burgeoning health insurance segment was the biggest contributor to gross direct

premiums with a roughly 33 per cent share (RO 155.193 million) last year, followed by motor insurance (RO 113.364 million), and property insurance (RO 71,376 million).

Despite the challenging economic conditions last year, insurance companies posted total net profits of RO 48.539 million in 2020, compared to RO 35.921 million in 2019, a jump of 35 per cent. National insurance companies accounted for the lion's share of RO 33.601 million in 2020 (23 per cent increase over corresponding net profit of 2019), while foreign insurance companies saw their net plunge 73 per cent to RO 14.938 million).

Commenting on the results, the Authority stated: "Based on the results of the reports issued by the CMA related to analysis of the performance of the insurance companies in the light of the coronavirus pandemic, we can say there was slight adverse impact on the insurance sector but didn't cause remarkable increase in the costs of insurance claims while there were positive aspects for the pandemic in that the sector relied on modern technology and media in marketing, underwriting, opening files and payment of indemnities."

Omran Group and PDO ink pact to enhance ICV

Localisation: Memorandum of Collaboration to help boost the tourism value chain through activities and initiatives aimed at maximising ICV in the Sultanate

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 20

In continuation of the efforts and initiatives aimed at enhancing In-Country Value (ICV), Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) - the executive arm of the Sultanate for tourism development - signed a Memorandum of Collaboration (MOC) with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) to share knowledge, benefit from

PDO's expertise in various fields, including ICV, and explore collaboration opportunities to implement initiatives in the tourism sector.

The agreement also aims to look into potential opportunities to implement strategies and programmes to enhance ICV in order to secure sustainable long-term commercial benefits.

Furthermore, it aims at maximising the use of local content, encouraging knowledge sharing to improve the capacity and capability of the local businesses and vendors in the tourism sector, and exploring opportunities to establish local community tourism companies.

In addition, the MOC covers the potential collaboration to support high-potential investment opportunities and related projects in the tourism sector, as well as sharing best practices and



experiences in the fields of health, safety, and environment (HSE) and Lean methodology.

The terms of the agreement also include enhancing cooperation in providing training and secondment opportunities for Omanis and supporting PDO's efforts in the National Initiative

for Plantation of 10 Million Trees and other environmental-related initiatives. It further establishes a potential strategic partnership between Omran Group and PDO in the development of geo-tourism in Oman and the implementation of community programmes to develop tourism experiences with

The agreement also aims at maximising the use of local content, encouraging knowledge sharing to improve the capacity and capability of the local businesses and vendors in the tourism sector, and exploring opportunities to establish local community tourism companies

the National Travel Operator "visitoman.om".

Chief Executive Officer of Omran Group Hashil bin Obaid al Mahrouqi said: "This agreement is in line with Omran Group's directions and efforts to enhance the tourism value chain through activities and initiatives aimed at maximising ICV in the Sultanate,

which reflects the objectives of the comprehensive ICV strategy that aims to focus on domestic supply chains, empower the national product, and develop local suppliers and contractors, as well as boosting opportunities for local companies and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism sector. These also include increasing Omanisation, developing and training national cadres, and activating areas of social investment."

PDO Managing Director Raoul Restucci, who signed the MOC with Omran, said: "The MOCs are an example of the continuous collaboration efforts between PDO and its key partners. We look forward to working with Omran on enhancing ICV in the tourism sector as it is vital that we sustain partnerships across different fields to create benefits for Oman's workforce and economy."

Mazoon Electricity encourages customers to use bill calculator



MUSCAT: To help better understand their electricity consumption pattern, Mazoon Electricity, the leading electricity provider in Oman, urges its customers to use the electricity bill calculator.

The company has provided the calculator for self-assessment and ease of use. The electricity bill calculator allows consumers to estimate their electricity cost in a simple way.

With the help of the bill calculator, customers will get a sense of their electricity consumption, and get additional information and bill details.

The bill calculator can be easily accessed on Mazoon Electricity website using the link <https://mzec.nama.om/en-us/Pages/billcalculator.aspx>.

Once the customers click the link, they have to select their bill type (residential, tourism, agriculture, commercial) and then enter the 'from' and 'to' date they want the bill to be calculated. They must also enter their previous and current meter reading. Once they click the calculate button, the calculator will show the total amount.

Alizz Islamic Bank announces launch of Shari'a compliant corporate credit cards

MUSCAT: Alizz Islamic Bank, in collaboration with Mastercard, announces the launch of Shari'a compliant corporate credit cards to provide corporate clients with enhanced efficiency, flexibility, and convenience in managing their business expenses.

The new premium offering from Alizz Islamic Bank enables customers to seamlessly track and organise business-related expenditures online.

Additionally, the service offers cardholder level, department level, and company level statements for monitoring and accountability. The cards come with a minimum limit of RO 1,000 and a maximum limit of RO 25,000 for the Executive Card and a minimum limit of RO 1,000 and a maximum limit of RO 15,000 for the World card.

Corporate credit card products have been designed with business' needs in mind. The offering enables corporates, businesses,



and SMEs to effectively manage their expenses, payables, and overall cash flow.

This will also drive better visibility and efficiency into corporate purchasing decisions and general expenditures.

The Executive and World Mastercards will give corporate customers a number of unique privileges and services, including

access to airport lounges in several major cities. Customers can also avail special offers ranging from dining and shopping to exciting travel and entertainment experiences.

Touching on the launch, Sulaiman al Harthy, Chief Executive officer of Alizz Islamic Bank said, "Alizz Islamic Bank is Oman's first full-fledged Islamic

Bank to offer Shari'a compliant credit cards for retail customers and we are proud to announce this new strategic product, which is in line with our objective to cross-sell new products to our corporate client-based and further strengthen our relationships by providing innovative business solutions."

Al Harthy added, "We are constantly striving to provide the right foundation and tools for companies and corporate entities, whether large, medium or small, to operate their business with maximum efficiency through our suite of products that we provide in order to help them to grow. Our business relationships go beyond simply offering products. At Alizz Islamic Bank, our vision is to partner with businesses to help them identify the areas for growth and efficiency while recommending practical, cost-effective ways to make the most of the opportunities that arise."

Enjoy exceptional experiences in Lexus ES



MUSCAT: The Lexus ES makes a fine mark with its sleek design, attractive looks, luxurious appointments and more. The Lexus ES continues the expression of the brand's design direction and commitment towards crafting vehicles with heightened excitement, emotion, and passion, expanding that vision of the brand's future to a broader audience.

Complementing the Lexus ES emotional design is a thrilling drive personality imbued by two powertrain options. The ES350 is powered by a 3.5-litre V6 engine that is designed to deliver commanding acceleration along with an invigorating sound. With the D4-S fuel injection system, the impressively smooth engine produces 298 hp and 36.3 kg-m of torque, while the ES250 is powered by, high-efficiency 2.5-litre 4-cylinder engine that produces 204 hp and 24.8 kg-m of torque.

Oman Data Park wins four awards at COMEX 2021

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 20

Oman Data Park, the first and leading provider of cloud and managed services in the Sultanate, won four awards within the COMEX Awards for Excellence in Technology for the year

2021, in which many Omani and international companies participated. The four awards received by Oman Data Park included the Data Center Award, Cyber Security Award, Comex Star Exhibitor Award, and Best of Best.

Oman Data Park's winning of



the Data Center award a testament to its commitment to offering the best and the largest choice of data centre services in Oman and the company dedicates the award to the 800+ customers who have placed their trust in them.

In a statement about these recognitions, Engineer Maqbool

al Wahaibi (pictured), CEO of Oman Data Park, said: "Winning these awards within the COMEX Technology Excellence Awards 2021 further confirms our role in supporting the digital transformation efforts made by the government and the private sector."

Al Mouj Muscat shows community spirit on World Blood Donor Day

MUSCAT: World Blood Donor Day took place this week and was very well supported by the Al Mouj Muscat community as part of a global initiative to help boost supplies and raise awareness of the importance of giving blood.

Thanks to the Ministry of Health's Department of Blood Banks Services, the Al Mouj Blood Donation Drive was one of many across the nation to be set up to encourage more people to donate blood regularly, helping to save lives and contribute to



The Al Mouj Blood Donation Drive was one of many across the nation to be set up to encourage more people to donate blood regularly, helping to save lives and contribute to better health

better health.

Now in its 16th year and with the slogan 'Give blood and keep the world beating', World

Blood Donor Day has never had more significance as Covid-19 has resulted in a sharp decline in blood donations worldwide. Restrictions in travel, fear of contracting the virus in crowded hospitals as well as guidelines that prevent some vaccinated people from giving blood are all contributory factors.

Commenting on Al Mouj Muscat's 'Celebrate Life, Donate Blood' campaign, Nasser bin Masoud al Shaibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat said: "It was

humbling to see that so many people from our community came together to give blood in support of this extremely important initiative.

"There is a constant need for safe blood and blood products for transfusion, and voluntary blood donors are critical to the replenishment of resources and supplies, particularly during the pandemic. Everyone's efforts are hugely appreciated and we know will make a difference to those who need it most."



Airlines, holiday companies ramp up pressure on Britain to ease travel rules

LONDON: Britain's airlines and holiday companies are planning a "day of action" on Wednesday to ramp up pressure on the government to ease travel restrictions, with just weeks to go before the start of the peak summer season.

Travel companies, whose finances have been stretched to breaking point during the pandemic, are desperate to avoid another summer lost to Covid-19.

But with Britain's strict quarantine requirements still in place that now looks likely.

As the clock ticks down to July, Europe's biggest airline Ryanair and Manchester Airports Group on Thursday launched legal action to try to get the government to ease the



An aircraft takes off at Heathrow Airport amid the spread of the coronavirus disease pandemic in London, Britain. — Reuters

rules before the industry's most profitable season starts.

On Wednesday, June 23, pilots, cabin crew and travel agents will gather in Westminster, central London, and at airports across Britain to try to drum up support.

Britain's aviation industry has been harder hit by the pandemic than its European peers, according to data published by pilots trade union BALPA on Sunday.

That showed daily arrivals and departures into the United Kingdom were down 73 per cent on an average day earlier this month compared to before the pandemic, the biggest drop in Europe. Spain, Greece and France were down less than 60 per cent. — Reuters

UK's Sunak considers cap to annual pension rise



LONDON: British Finance Minister Rishi Sunak (pictured) is considering blocking a near 6 per cent rise in old-age pension payments as part of a wider effort to rein in the cost of Prime Minister Boris Johnson's spending, the *Sunday Times* newspaper said.

Under a pension promise in the Conservative Party's 2019 election campaign, state pensions are meant to rise each year by the highest of the annual inflation rate, wage growth or 2.5 per cent.

Due partly to distortions from the coronavirus pandemic, annual wages in the three months to April grew by an annual 5.6 per cent — creating an extra £4 billion annual cost for future pensions. The *Sunday Times* said the finance ministry wanted to break the link between pensions and wages for a year. — Reuters

Carmakers in India's hub allowed to operate at full capacity

CHENNAI: Global carmakers such as Renault-Nissan, Hyundai Motor Co and Ford Motor Co may operate with their full workforces in India's automaking hub from Sunday, despite worker protests over safety in the pandemic.

Tamil Nadu state, one of the country's worst-hit, allowed industrial units with export commitments to operate at 100 per cent capacity, boosting its flourishing automobile industry.

New cases in the state have

fallen from more than 30,000 a day in May to about 8,000 but still account for one-seventh of all cases in India, which is second only to the US in total infections.

"Any company which exports or supplies to export-oriented industries will be allowed to operate at full capacity as cases have come down," a senior state government official said.

An Indian court tasked industrial safety officials this month with visiting carmakers



Workers assemble cars at a plant of Ford India in Chengalpattu, India. — Reuters

in the southern state to draw up uniform safety guidelines.

The Madras High Court was responding to a case filed last month by workers at the Indian unit of the French-Japanese alliance of Renault SA Nissan Motor Co.

They asked for operations to be halted, saying social distancing norms were being flouted and the risk to their lives outweighed the health benefits provided by the company. — Reuters

Six ways APIs enhance organisational cyber defences



ANDREW WILLIAM

The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital technologies across industries and regions. While lockdowns have largely been lifted in the Middle East region, employees have adopted a hybrid working model where they switch between home and the office. Maintaining business productivity therefore remains a top priority and is essential to an organisation's success.

Cloud-based email platforms have seen a dramatic rise in adoption: Microsoft365 alone now counts a quarter of a billion monthly active users. Online collaboration tools such as Slack and Zoom have seen huge increases in user numbers, with 96 per cent of UAE respondents using them according to Mimecast's State of Email Security 2021 report. With it has come a corresponding increase in the volume of data — including sensitive company

information — exchanged over these platforms.

Add to this the escalation of cybercrime and the growing volume of targeted and untargated attack types launched by the global cybercrime industry, and organisations have never had a more challenging time with protecting their systems and users and keeping their data safe. Cybercriminals have pivoted their attack strategies to target these cloud services and remote employees.

In the face of the growing volume and sophistication of cyberattacks, organisations may be tempted to implement more and more security products and solutions — one study found that the average enterprise now has 75 security solutions in its mix.

While adding technologies to an organisation's infrastructure is easy, getting them to work together is not. Managing so many products can also be immensely challenging and require skills that are not always readily available.

The growing shift to the cloud, however, could hold the promise of simpler but more effective cybersecurity by enabling organisations to rethink how security and related controls are implemented, integrated and automated. However, this can bring in



additional complexities with the multi-cloud environments organisations have in place today, and the differing controls each cloud platform provides.

A key to effective security integration in a cloud-enabled environment is the adoption of Application Programming Interfaces (APIs). APIs help to automate data integration and exchange across multiple security tools, such as those used for Security Information and Event Management (SIEM), Security Orchestration, Automation and Response (SOAR), endpoint security, and IT Service Management System (ITSM) solutions.

In combination with an integrated security strategy, APIs can dramatically improve the effectiveness of security infrastructure and provide consolidated management capabilities, both of which play a central role in securing hybrid working environments that rely

on digitalisation.

A security strategy that integrates APIs as part of the broader security mix can deliver several benefits, including:

1. Gain visibility into the entire security ecosystem

Threat intelligence is shared and centralised, giving you greater insight into your entire security ecosystem that results in faster and more efficient threat prevention, detection, investigation and response.

2. Automate repetitive tasks

No organisation wants to waste their people's productivity on slow, repetitive or manual threat detection and response tasks, such as combing through endless product reports for potential threats. Automating these processes via open API integrations can not only improve the efficiency of IT security teams, but also enhance the efficacy of the security tools themselves.

In the face of the growing volume and sophistication of cyberattacks, organisations may be tempted to implement more and more security products and solutions

3. Streamline infrastructure

Integrating security tools helps organisations consolidate infrastructure management, which reduces complexity and frees IT security teams to focus on strategic initiatives, such as threat prevention, detection and response.

4. Expedite threat detection and response

Many open API platforms can generate reports on your comprehensive security ecosystem in minutes, drastically reducing the time it takes for security professionals to make important decisions about potential threats compared to the one-tool-at-a-time approach.

5. Defend against multi-vector attacks

APIs give organisations the cross-tool visibility required to detect and defend against multi-vector attacks, where cybercriminals are attacking

multiple points of entry. Without this threat intelligence integration, data is so compartmentalised within each tool that organisations may not be aware of an attack of this nature until it's too late.

6. Build a customised cyber resilient strategy

With security integration and APIs, organisations can leverage the collective power of the best solutions from a variety of vendors to build a cyber defence programme that matches their specific risk environment.

Some might argue that it's easier to rely on one vendor for all your security needs, than to worry about integrating multiple solutions. But if you buy a bundle of solutions, you're not necessarily buying the best of a specific solution. They're also often acquired and not integrated, which defeats the purpose of using one multi-product vendor.

Cyber resilience strategies that integrate open APIs can help enable best-of-breed security, and help reduce the burden on overstretched IT security teams while maximising the ROI of IT security spend. More importantly, it enables organisations to more effectively manage the new, cloud-based, remote work-enabled, enterprise IT landscape.

[The author is a cyber-security expert at Mimecast]

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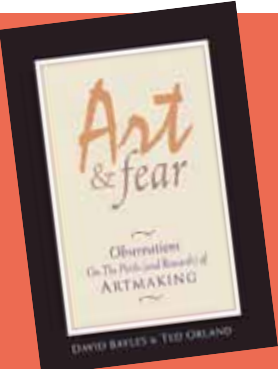


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CULTURE

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Spinning wool: Still a source of livelihood for some families in Bidiya

FOR SOME Omani families, traditional crafts — it's practise and growth — is actually one of the sources of livelihood for these families' day to day living.

In the Wilayat of Adam in the Governorate of Al

Dakhiliyah, there are many of these traditional crafts, including the craft of spinning wool, which is famous in the Wilayat of Bidiya, due to its association with camels and their decorations.

This traditional craft

involves the spinning of natural or synthetic fibres together to form a thread, or a rope. The fibres are spun by hand using simple tools such as a spindle.

Sabha Al Direi said, "We have practiced the craft of spinning for decades, and we learned it from our parents and grandparents, and it is the source of our livelihood to us. We are still maintaining this work up to the present time using the old traditional methods, starting with cutting animal wool, then washing and cleaning it, drying and spinning it and then using the spindle machine to get the required threads."

Al Direi added that

several tools and products are made from these threads, such as camel kits in general, medals, bags, headbands, incense containers, and others. Industrial wool with multiple colours is currently used due to its availability in the market and ease of work with it, despite the big difference between it and the natural in quality and durability.

Sabha pointed out that the craft of palm fronds also exists. We make different types of containers of all sizes out of it. This work takes us more time and more effort, and the demand for it has decreased nowadays due to the reluctance of people to



buy it due to its high price and the competition with the imported materials in the markets.

She added that the process of marketing all products was based on participation in events and festivals that are held in Adam and in neighbouring wilayat, especially in camel races, and in light of the current conditions of the Corona pandemic, there are currently no permanent outlets for selling artisan products.



From a small entrepreneur to a successful businessman

FOR ENTREPRENEUR Mohammed al Batrani, it's not only about honing his skills for his craft which he inherited from his father but growing the business and rightfully so, as he was able to create a full factory for his company.

Specialising in traditional carpentry, Al Batrani just used to accompany his father in their old carpentry shop. This frequent visit led him to learning wood engraving, how to properly make windows and doors, and develop business acumen and customer service.

Upon the death of his father, Al Batrani said that he has to step up to the plate at a young age taking over the company's operation. With hands on business and with the skills he learned about carpentry, he was able to acquire modern machines and equipment that led to the growth of the business.

With a strong mindset to grow, Al Batrani has conducted different studies to further the success of the business. He consulted experienced people to know the difficulties and challenges. Later, he was able to provide capital to import devices and raw materials from inside and outside the Sultanate, and provided machines, devices and manpower.

Mohammed bin Khamis confirmed that Al Batrani was able to keep pace with modern developments to get out of the traditional manufacturing circle to modern manufacturing, indicating that ambition does not stop at a certain limit, as he was able to open other branches to expand his institution.

Khamis said that he markets through social media, in addition to participating in internal and external exhibitions, some of them through



the branch of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the Wilayat of Nizwa in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

He also clarified that he seeks to increase the Omanisation rate in his organisation, pointing out that this success was not born today, but after going through multiple experiences and having courses in entrepreneurship and mentoring programmes inside and outside the

Sultanate. He urges young people to start working in small projects and then gradually they will develop their

skills and expand their businesses. He aspires to establish an international factory with a global brand of his own.

TRAVEL TALES

Where peanuts are grown nearly the whole year round



WHILE MAJORITY of places in the Sultanate are often challenged by drought and heat, some are proving to be ideal for year-round farming. Masah, which is located 10 kilometres away from the Wilayat of Mahdha in Al Buraimi Governorate, is one of the agricultural villages that fit this criteria.

The mountains surround the town from all sides which help the moderately cool atmosphere of the place throughout the year. Its location is also abundant with flowing water. There are two Aflaj, one of which is sweet and stemming from the belly of the valley, and another falaj with bitter sulphur flows throughout the



year with the water collected in Jel; a dam-like container designated for collecting the water.

Khalid bin Saeed al Kaabi, one of the residents and farmers who is keen on growing different types of plants, explained that the most famous crops for their village include Shami saffron, cumin, broccoli, as well as peanuts, which achieved good production this year.

He added that the abundance of water throughout the year, the moderate climate and the use of natural fertilisers are important factors in the success of the cultivation of agricultural crops, especially peanuts, as the people and farmers in the village are keen not to introduce non-local fertilisers (chemical fertilisers). It is one of the factors that help in the cultivation of various seasonal agricultural crops and other types of soil fertility that makes the place unique.



On the success of peanut cultivation, Al Kaabi explained that this crop has been planted previously and has achieved success and abundant production, knowing that the season of this crop is in January and February, but thankfully grows the whole year long in Masah.

"We have abundant production of the peanut crop. Now, we are in June, its growing season has ended in other places but we still have it. It can be planted more than once or twice and gives abundant production due to the nature of the place, the temperate climate, the fertility of the land, the abundance of water and the location of the village between a chain of mountains.

Al Kaabi added that after the crop is harvested, it is transferred to a sunny and open place called (Al-Janour) and placed for several days to dry, then transported to homes where peanuts are included in several local meals that are used on some occasions. In addition to the cultivation of peanuts, the people grow many crops, fruits and vegetables, as well as many varieties of palm trees, lemons, mangoes, figs and grapes, in addition to the other varieties.

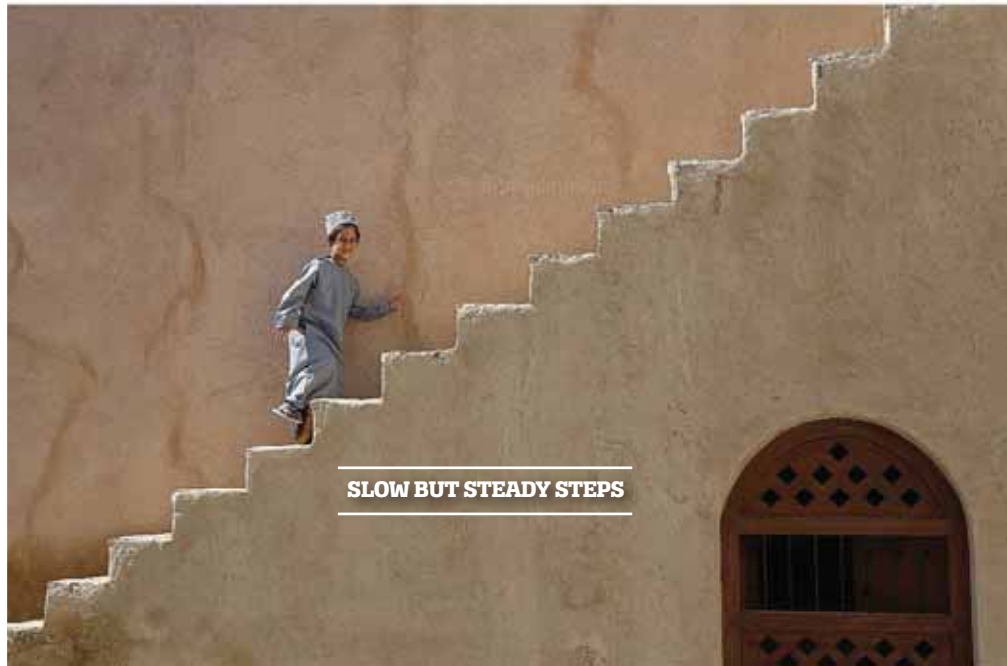


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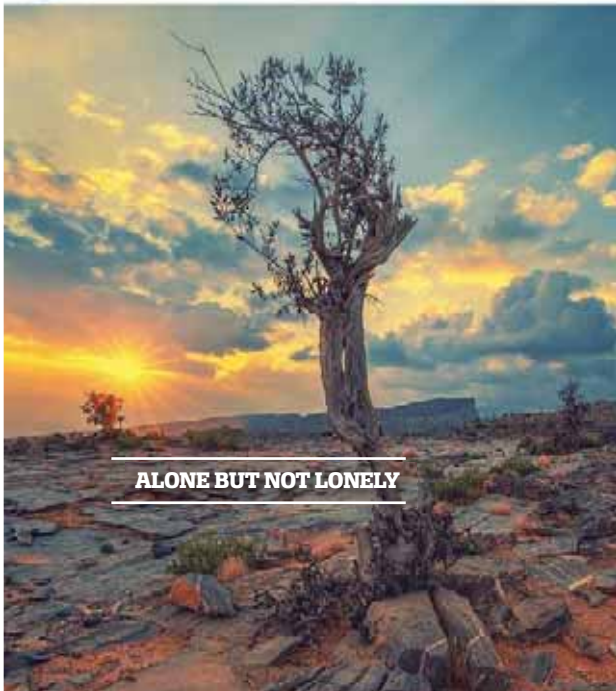
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FASHION



Nigeria models look to rock the runways

LAGOS: Beverage corks popped and sequins sparkled like a thousand tiny stars in Nigeria's economic capital Lagos, where an international model casting was on the hunt for the face of the future.

Elizabeth Elohor is sure that it will be an African one. The former top model created the first modelling agency in Nigeria back in 2004, when there was no Fashion Week on the continent, very few local designers and little high-end fashion.

Now with her "Future Face Africa" casting, Elohor hopes to expand the search for future talent from Nigeria to the rest of the continent.

Before the 2000s, there were few black faces gracing the covers of women's magazines with the exception of iconic figures like Naomi Campbell, Donyale Luna and Beverly Johnson.

In Nigeria, Africa's most populous country with more than 200 million people, the few who at the time dared to venture into modelling were independent, vulnerable, and had to distribute their own portfolios to companies specialising in events and advertising.

When Elohor returned from London in 2004 to start Beth Model Agency, she was breaking new ground, said Marius Isikalu, a former top model at barely 30, who now works alongside her.

"Elizabeth was a pioneer. She signed all the known models back then and she said 'If you want to use them, this is how much you're going to pay, and those are the conditions,'" Isikalu said standing on the event's red carpet. "She set the rules, the rates, she set the pace."

The turning point for Africa's modelling world came in 2010 when South Africa and Nigeria organised fashion weeks that were recognised on the international scene as "select" in fashion world.

The recent Black Lives Matter movement and high-profile advocates for the beauty of black women are also helping to change trends around the world. But the reasons are also economic.

"International designers like Louis Vuitton, Dolce & Gabbana, Balmain... have started realising that a lot of their clients are actually from Africa," Elohor said, seated in a mustard yellow armchair by a Nigerian designer.

"AFRICA IS THE FUTURE"

Tobi Momoh is one of the new generation of models. Smiling and full of life, the 19-year-old goes from table to table in her fitted black dress, greeting stars from Nigeria's Nollywood film scene, Afropop music royalty or reality TV stars.

"I grew up thinking that I would be like any other girls struggling to find a job after school. But Elizabeth saw me on the road, she asked permission from my mom to sign me in her agency and now! Look at me! It was so simple," she said.

The growing sector has allowed the emergence of many actors, designers, make-up artists, but also photographers. Kola Oshalusi, a famous Nigerian fashion photographer, has also witnessed the explosion in demand and the professionalisation of modelling in Africa over the past decade. Even Nigeria's growing security troubles, high inflation and economic woes can't take away the glitz and sense of hope.

"Africa is the future," Oshalusi said sporting an elegant beige hat and cotton jacket.

"Nigeria is Africa. Nigerian models are confident, they are bringing so much energy on the runways, they know what they want, and it's helped to build an incredible reputation on the international scene." — **AFP**

CULTURE



Tunisians on the margins find escape in ram fighting

TUNIS: The rams stamped in the dust and charged, butting horns with a crash that drew roars from the crowd on a dusty wasteland near the Old City of Tunis, where young men on the margins of society rear animals to fight.

The rams were raised by two groups of men in the city's Bab Souika district who said the sport gave them a connection to their neighbourhoods and history, and an escape from unemployment, dreams of migration and COVID-19 restrictions.

In the vaulted cellar down a cobbled alley where they keep their ram, one group said few of them had jobs and that the 2011 revolution that brought democracy to Tunisia had not changed their lives.

"This is something that lets us get away from our cares," said Mourad, owner of the ram which he looks after with a dozen or so friends who had gathered there, most of them in their 20s.

"Nothing changed in this neighbourhood after the revolution. Prices went up and nothing changed."

Behind a gate their ram, "2Pac", was chained to a ring in the cracked tile floor, pawing at the straw. Religious charms and a hand drum hung from nails above.

Popular across North Africa, ram fighting is restricted in Tunisia. Fights need a police licence that is seldom given and animal rights groups criticise them as cruel.

Garlanded in thick leather halters and ornamented with studs and sea-shells like the belts of boxing champions, prize fighting rams are sometimes paraded by their owners in local streets.

Mourad, who owns a small cafe, declined to give his family name. He has lived in Bab Souika all his life.

Frustration has risen across Tunisia since the revolution at the lack of jobs, high prices and deteriorating state services. Protests this week included rioting by young men in poor districts.

The International Monetary Fund estimates Tunisian unemployment at over 16 per cent affecting young people, women and low-skilled workers

disproportionately.

Some young men from the neighbourhood had made the dangerous voyage in smugglers' boats to the Italian island of Lampedusa as emigrants, said Mourad.

One man in the cellar lived in Italy and Germany for five years before he was sent home for lack of papers. He will soon try to return, he said.

'THE FIRE TO FIGHT'

The afternoon's fight was to be 2Pac's first and the ram, with a black head and rich grey fleece, reared high in the pen.

Mourad and his friends bought the ram early this year and fed him to make him strong, he said. Now, they decided, he was ready to fight.

The rival ram was close by along narrow cobbled alleys lined with tall white houses with blue shutters and laundry flapping on balconies.

Mourad said he and the other ram's owner, Hussein al Din Meslati, had known each other since childhood.

Meslati and some friends bought their creamy white ram, "Lahmer Bousayala", last year from a farmer in the mountains.

"If the ram has the aggression, the fire to fight, we see that and we invest in him," he said.

Meslati said ram fighting, which often attracts illicit gambling, had a poor image among many Tunisians. But he said it gave him a connection to his community.

The fight was arranged for late afternoon between Old City dwellings and a steep bank running up to a highway, where spectators stood for a better view.

Mourad and Meslati, along with their friends, strutted in with their rams. Men and boys crowded close in while women watched from windows.

The rams battled, hoofs pounding and horns smashing, as blood stained their wool. Finally Mourad conceded, scowling as friends consoled him.

Spectators drifted away down the alleys into Bab Souika. All that remained was a clot of blood drying in the dust under the long shadows of the sun. — **Reuters**

ENTERTAINMENT

Sreesanth to don garbs of investigator for Bollywood flick



INDIAN CRICKETER Sreesanth will soon be seen donning the garbs of an Investigator along with bigwigs of Bollywood in a nerve-wracking action flick.

"Patta", as the former Indian pacer's next film is called, is a Nirup Gupta's Bollywood production under the banner of the Oman-based NNG Films and written and directed by South Indian director R Radhakrishnan.

"Patta is an innovative, experimental political thriller movie that no one has ever told before. I had many people in mind to become this character but my quest reached Sreesanth. As soon as he heard the story, Sreesanth happily agreed to become a CBI officer," says the director.

The protagonist is a handsome and intelligent CBI officer who does not give his colleagues a grip on what is going to happen next.

"It's pretty much sure that the story is captivating and all the actors, including Sreesanth who plays the lead will be a must-watch one as there is an innovative element that will captivate audiences from all walks of life," Nirup Gupta, Patta's producer told the *Observer*.

The film is expected to go on floors soon, once COVID restrictions are lifted, according to the director and producer.

Sreesanth will be joined by other Bollywood stars. Cinematography — Prakash Kutty, Editing — Suresh URS, Music — Suresh Peters, Spot Editing — Rathin Radhakrishnan, Choreography — Sridhar, Art — Sajay Madhavan, Design — Shabeer, PRO — Ajay Thundathil



To visit this fantastic village, you would need a permit first

By Thekra al Manji

There are certain tribes in Oman who chose to live in remote areas. These tribes hold on to their traditions and simplicity so tight, yet they are very welcoming and hospitable. Tourists flock to these areas, opting for the peace of mind and leaving all their troubles behind.

The Al Jabal Al Abyadh in the North Al Sharqiyah Governorate, specifically in Wilayat Dima W'attayeen is one of the remote mountains known for its simplicity and peace. Tourists visiting the place will witness life that is less hectic, and even a short visit will already lead to an enjoyable experience of living with fewer possessions.

To visit this village, prior permission is required from the Environmental Conservation Office, and it can be accessed by four-wheel-drive vehicles, because of the unpaved roads.

The inhabitants of the mountain start their mornings by getting up early to graze the sheep, collect firewood and cultivate.

Al Jabal Al Abyadh is home to the thyme plant in the Sultanate of Oman. This mountain provides the appropriate climate for the growth of these aromatic flora. The thyme plant is a low-growing evergreen plant, with small leaves, thin stems, and a distinctive aromatic smell. It is considered a perennial plant. It is used for culinary and medicinal purposes.

The thyme plant contains vitamins A, B and C, which are important for the health of the immune system, digestive system, respiratory and nervous systems. This plant is considered a disinfectant for the body and calms the mood also helps relieve coughing pain.

Due to the health benefits of the thyme plant, it has become very popular in the medical scene and people tend to search for the finest type of thyme around the Sultanate. Al Jabal Al Abyadh provides a very good type and there are some people in the place who turned it into business.

Shayib Saleem thyme project is one of the best sellers around the Sultanate. His team decided to design special bags with a modern design that allow the preservation of thyme of the process. It was named Zaatar Al Shayib Saleem because of the trust invested in this man to care for this plant. The product is very popular among Omani traders and shop owners. There is more than one outlet for selling the product throughout Oman.

There are other crops that also grow in abundance in this village such as boot, Al Dajja and Al Faqa. The temperature in Al Hail Al Kabeer village is moderate in summer and relatively cold in winter, as it is suitable for tourists in all seasons. Camping overnight is not allowed in the Al Jabal Al Abyadh due to the presence of the Sirin Nature Reserve.

While it is a hard-to-reach location, Al Jabal Al Abyadh villagers exemplify some of the best Omani traits.

Saleem bin Raziq al Handhali has gained great popularity due to his comic clips that contain relevant and relatable content and his advice given in a comic style touches the hearts and minds of different age groups.

Saleem lives in the village of Al Hail Al Kabeer in the Al Jabal Al Abyadh. Saleem always speaks in his unique dialect when he creates his digital content. He also touches on current events which have won the community's admiration and pushed him to keep pace with this generation.

Since joining the digital world last year, Saleem's following has dramatically grown in just a year boasting 16,000 followers by today.

As a resident of the village, Saleem also demonstrates how the day-to-day living is in their area. He is known as a brave mountain man, passionate and kind who also mastered shepherding sheep. Saleem, who is already in his 70s, has been admired for his special characteristic of giving without expecting anything in return.

The people of the village praise the role of the government, which built houses and provided water and electricity, but they pointed out that the village still needs support and development particularly in the areas of road improvement and communication networks. The villagers explained that if both of these issues will be addressed, it would become easy to travel towards the village and the children will also have better access to education. The villagers also hope to see the establishment of a school and a health centre that serves this mountain because access to these basic and important institutions usually become very challenging when they have heavy rains and the mountain paths become flooded.

Sometimes, it is not the place but the people living in that place that make you repeat the visit a million times. Al Jabal Al Abyadh is one of those places and the people and the visitors here are able to experience life that is close to nature, to God, to purity and peace.

