

HEAC to conduct admission tests

The Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC) at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, will begin to conduct admission tests and interviews from Monday (August 23 to 29) for students who have completed General Education Diploma (GED) or equivalent and received their certificates/diplomas this year as per the scheduled programmes.

DETAILS ON P5



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OMAN OBSERVER

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SRI LANKA TO TOUR
OMAN FOR 2 T20
GAMES IN OCTOBER

P15

OIL PRICES WEIGHED
DOWN BY WEAK
ASIAN DEMAND

P20

THIS WATER PARK IS
BECOMING BAHLA'S
TOP ATTRACTION

HIS MAJESTY CHAIRS MEETING OF COVID-19 SUPREME COMMITTEE TAKE VACCINES TO BEAT THE PANDEMIC



- HM hails efforts of all departments, notably the health sector
- Royal thanks to all members of society, government and private sectors
- Satisfaction with the progress in National Immunisation Strategy
- Efforts of military and security departments during lockdowns hailed
- Undertake measures to tackle the pandemic in the next stage
- HM thanks business community and private sector firms

SALALAH: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik chaired a meeting of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (Covid-19) at Al Mamourah Palace in Salalah on Wednesday.

At the outset of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan gave thanks and praise to the Almighty Allah for the considerable decline in the number of Covid-19 infection cases in the Sultanate. He expressed his satisfaction with the progress of the National Immunization Strategy against this disease. His Majesty affirmed that this improvement would not have happened without the issuance of appropriate decisions (by the Covid-19 Supreme Committee) and the efforts exerted by all departments in the Sultanate, notably the health sector, as well as the high sense of responsibility shouldered by all members of

society and their commitment to the decisions. The achievement is also attributed to the designated departments' endorsing regulations that safeguarded public health — individuals and all Omani society, His Majesty added.

His Majesty the Sultan gave his Royal directives to the Supreme Committee to undertake suitable measures to tackle the pandemic in the next stage in a manner that secures public health and ensures the sustainability of tasks of all state departments.

His Majesty the Sultan also thanked the Supreme Committee for the elaborate efforts it exerted while handling the pandemic at all stages and developments. He extended his Royal thanks to all members of society — citizens and residents, to government and private establishments for providing services and healthcare in all governorates of the Sultanate.

TURN TO P2

Royal Decree promulgates system of OIA

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Wednesday issued a Royal Decree No 57/2021 on promulgating the System (Bylaw) of Oman Investment Authority.

Article (1) stipulates that the provisions of the System of Oman Investment Authority, attached to this Decree, shall be enforced.

Article (2) states that the Chairman of the Board of Oman Investment Authority shall issue the organisational regulations of the Authority, as well as other regulations and decisions necessary for the application of the System attached. Till such time, the existing regulations and decisions shall continue to be enforced without prejudice to the provisions of the System attached (to this Decree).

Article (3) cancels all that contradicts the attached system or contravenes its provisions.

Article (4) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced on the day following its date of publishing.

— ONA

INSIDE



LEBANON BURIES VICTIMS OF FUEL TANK BLAST

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GLOBAL ALERT OF COVID-19 VACCINE SCAMS

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Otaxi gets nod for Musandam services

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has granted approval for Otaxi to operate services in Musandam, within the framework of enabling the public transport service in Musandam Governorate. The decision is expected to stimulate the attraction of tourists, increase commercial and development growth in the governorate, and support small and medium enterprises. The company which had a slow and humble beginning now has 1,500 taxis in its fleet in Muscat and has plans to equip all vehicles with facilities such as Wi-Fi and premium or VIP services.

DETAILS ON P3

19,023 jobs generated in public, private sectors

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour has said that a total of 19,023 jobs were generated in the public and private sectors during the first six months of this year.

Of this, 58.9 per cent of vacancies were filled in accordance with the executive plan for the target set for 2021.

It also reflects the efforts undertaken by the Ministry of Labour, which issued a set of procedures to regulate the labour market and develop human resources as per the declared plan.

As part of the employment opportunities unveiled, a total of 8,493 jobs were generated in the state administrative apparatus (government units) as follows: The Ministry of Education (3,381 jobs),



the Ministry of Health (1,965 jobs), the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (292 jobs) and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (175 jobs), while (2,680 jobs) went to other state units.

A report issued by the Labour

Ministry, of which Oman News Agency (ONA) received a copy, indicates that 951 employment opportunities were generated in different sectors supervised by government authorities and units.

The report also states that 5,583 Omanis were appointed

for the first time in the private sector. Of those 1,718 were holders of General Education Diploma (GED) or its equivalent, while 1,329 were holders of qualification below the GED, 1,813 were holders of university degrees, 638 were holders of university diplomas and 40 postgraduate, Masters or PhD degree holders.

In the meantime, 547 employment opportunities were generated through initiatives of the Ministry of Labour and 3,449 jobs resulted from training and qualification through on-the-job training (the human resources development sector) and the SME entrepreneurship programme.

— ONA

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 34°C Min 29°C SALALAH: Max 27°C Min 24°C NIZWA: Max 42°C Min 28°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 05:44 FAJR: 04:25 DHUHR: 12:16 ASR: 15:42 MAGHRIB: 18:42 ISHA: 19:56

HM chairs meeting of Covid-19 Supreme Committee



FROM PAGE 1

In particular, His Majesty the Sultan valued the efforts of military and security departments to ensure the success of lockdowns, movement bans and other decisions taken to curb the spread of the disease.

His Majesty the Sultan voiced his appreciation for the role of all media establishments in spreading valid knowledge and disseminating accurate news and

awareness about the disease, ways to prevent infection and means of protection against the virus. His Majesty the Sultan also expressed his thanks to the business community and private sector firms for understanding the situation and for their collaboration in implementing precautionary measures to stem the disease.

His Majesty the Sultan urged all people to take the vaccines against Covid-19 in line with the programme set for that purpose. He

also exhorted all to keep up the commitment to the decisions and regulations endorsed by the Covid-19 Supreme Committee to shield public health and protect individuals and society.

May the Almighty Allah protect His Majesty the Sultan and guard him as a symbol of pride to this nation and may He perpetuate the bounties of progress and prosperity in Oman under His Majesty the Sultan's wise leadership. — ONA





Offences against property tops crime in Sultanate

VINOD NAIR
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The offences against property topped the types of crimes committed in 2020, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) in its recent annual report.

As per the statistics, 4,335 cases of offences against property were reported in 2020, followed by offences against persons (3,242), offences against public administration (838), offences against chastity and public morality (599), narcotic offences (1,931), liquor and drunkenness (615), violation of the law (4,134) and firearms-related (53).

Among males, most of the offenders were in the age group 30-39 (5,816) and charges against them include offences against

property, persons, and violation of the law.

Among females, most of the offenders were in the age groups 30-39 (625) and 18-29 (496). The main charges against females were offences against persons, property, and offences against chastity and public morality.

Overall, 11,312 crimes were committed by 16,665 offenders in 2020 in the Sultanate. Of these, 53 per cent of crimes were committed by non-Omanis and 47 per cent by citizens.

Among governorates, 3,810 of 11,312 crimes were committed in Muscat, 1,699 in Dhofar, 1,578 in North Batinah and 928 in South Batinah.

The majority of the victims were the public (5,020) while 336 victims were from the private sector.

ARAB CONFERENCE ON CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION



The Sultanate, represented by the Royal Oman Police (ROP), participated in the 18th Arab conference of the heads of criminal investigation departments. The virtual meeting was hosted by the Secretariat General of the Arab Interior Ministers Council (AIMC). The ROP was represented in the conference by Colonel Ahmed bin Ali al Rowas, Assistant Director-General of Criminal Investigation. The conference discussed topics related to criminal investigations in Arab countries. — ONA

RAFO opens recruitment in non-combat positions

SHAMSA AL RIYAMIYAH
MUSCAT, AUGUST 18

The Ministry of Labour in coordination with the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), announced the opening of appointments in medical, educational, engineering and technical jobs. The ministry said that it is receiving applications for jobs from August 18 to 26.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik gave his orders to speed up the implementation of employment initiatives that target to provide 32,000 jobs this year including 12,000 jobs in the civil and military sectors.

The employment initiatives also involve the provision of 2,000 jobs in the public sector on a temporary contract basis according to the actual needs of the government departments as well as the provision of a total of 1 million hours of part-time work in the public sector.

Otaxi to be first private taxi operator in Musandam

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 18

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has granted approval to operate Otaxi to operate services via a mobile application in Musandam, within the framework of enabling the public transport service in Musandam Governorate.

The decision is expected to stimulate the attraction of tourists, increasing commercial and development growth in the governorate, and supporting small and medium enterprises.

The company that had a slow and humble start now has 1,500 taxis in its fleet in Muscat and has plans to equip all vehicles with facilities such as Wi-Fi and premium or VIP services.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the governorate attracted 200,000 tourists

annually.

The number of visitors to Musandam's forts and castles reached 50,000 per year while cruise passenger arrivals reached 129,453, the official said.

Musandam Governorate has 10 hotels with a total capacity of 512 rooms.



The ministry targets to increase the number of hotels and resorts within the tourism projects and has distributed land plots for tourism projects.

As per the recent royal directives focus on development, the Musandam Governorate tourism projects are exempted from paying fees and taxes for a certain period.

Among the tourism projects coming up in Musandam Governorate is the Adventure Center project, developed by Omran, which recently completed the implementation of the first phase.

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

The number of craftspeople in the Sultanate reached 23,383, most of whom are in Dhofar governorate (6,902), according to the figures provided by the National Center for Statistics and Information.

North Al Sharqiyah came second with 5,336 craftspeople followed by North Al Batinah North (3438), Dakhiliyah (2095), Al Wusta (1,487), South Al Batinah (1,316), South Al Sharqiyah (1,154), Muscat (587), Al Dhahirah (456), Musandam (387) and Al Buraimi (225).

Cotton textile segment employs around 7,502 craftspeople, while 5,327 are in weaving wool and 4,045 in making incense and cosmetics.

Craftspeople play a key role in preserving heritage. Riyada (The Authority for SME Development) is keen on developing these industries along the lines of small enterprises and creating opportunities for promoting and marketing their products locally and globally.

Meanwhile, Riyada said that there is a continuous increase in the number of small and medium enterprises registered with the Authority. Till August, SMEs grew up by 22.58 per cent, to reach 56,040 units compared to 45,718 in the same month last year. "This is a reflection of the efforts, procedures, initiatives and incentives approved by the government to support the SME sector and mitigate the effects of the pandemic," Riyada said.

The number of SMEs that obtained the entrepreneurship card (Riyada Card) increased by 53.94 per cent to reach 22,205

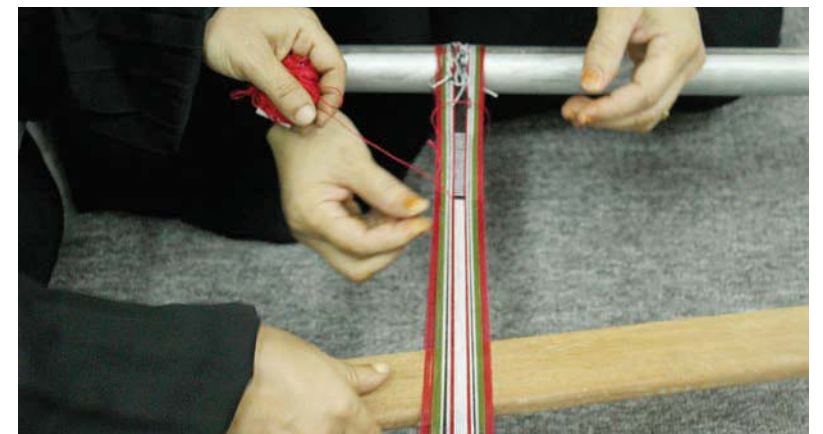


22.58%
increase in the number
of small and medium
enterprises registered
till August 2021

enterprises till August, compared to 14,424 enterprises in the same month last year.

According to Riyada, the most registered activities are wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, as well as construction and manufacturing activities.

The small and medium enterprise sector has received keen attention from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and this was evident through a number of measures and initiatives approved by the government to support this sector with the aim of mitigating the effects of the pandemic, and creating a supportive work environment for



these institutions.

Measures of the authority included providing credit incentives and relief like postponement of loan repayments and rescheduling of loans, reduction of income tax, exemption from tourist and municipal tax.

The Authority's efforts in this aspect also included exemptions for licensing fees for small and medium enterprises, postponing the payment of monthly contributions to the social insurance system,

reducing fees, exemption from late fees, emergency financing programmes, and postponing the payment of power and water dues.

Moreover, following implementation of the royal directives to adopt a package of social initiatives and to enhance the activity and sustainability of small and medium enterprises, the Authority launched the emergency financing programme directed to entrepreneurs who hold Riyada Card, with a ceiling of up to RO 10,000 and launching a package of operational initiatives.




Dialogue session for small and medium enterprises (Riyada)

Rural Areas Electricity Company "Tanweer", Member of Nama Group, announces the opening of registration for small and medium enterprises (Riyada) during three days divided between companies according to bellow schedule:

- Location:** Salalah Regional Office, Dhofar Governorate
Time : 09:00 A.M to 02:00 P.M
Date : 22/08/2021 - 24/08/2021
- Location :** Khasab Regional Office, Musandam Governorate
Time : 09:00 A.M to 02:00 P.M
Date : 05/09/2021 - 07/09/2021
- Location:** Doqum Regional Office, Al Wusta Governorate
Time : 09:00 A.M to 02:00 P.M
Date : 03/10/2021 - 05/10/2021

For registration and enquiry
Mr. Ahmed Al Azhar Al Hinai email: ahmed.alhinai@tanweer.nama.om
Contact : 91419579

The application will be accepted by sending an email contains a details of the company (Name of the company, mobile No, commercial registration No, Riyada certificate No , and the commercial activities you work with).


tanweer_oman



GROWTH NOT AT THE COST OF NATURE

SAMUEL KUTTY

[@samkuttyvp](#)

Environmental protection and natural resources are the integral parts of Oman Vision 2040 priorities. They help to achieve sustainable development goals with an assurance that economic growth does not occur at the expense of the country's natural environment.

The Sultanate, represented by the Environment Authority, recently submitted its sixth national report on biodiversity to the United Nations Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Although Oman has signed a number of international climate treaties, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1992 and ratified in 1994, the domestic inclusion of climate-change policies alongside environmental policies was mainly triggered by the devastating Cyclone Gonu that lashed the country in 2007.

Following this, the Sultanate has adopted a number of steps to preserve its national wealth by enacting laws and regulations that protect natural habitats and wildlife and guarantee the right of all generations to benefit from natural resources in a balanced and equitable manner.

Forests and fields in the country

are located on the coasts (the Crimean trees) and in the mountains of the Al Alanan fields in the Al Hajar Al Gharbi mountains and the Al Sughut forests in the south.

Forests cover about 20 square kilometres and fields 13,000 square kilometres in Oman.

Mountains form a large proportion of the Omani geographical environment, and plant and animal environments vary in these mountains; The Hajar Mountains, located in northern Oman, extend from the Musandam peninsula in the north to Ras Al Hadd. They are considered the highest mountains, rising about 3,000 metres above sea level. In the south, the Dhofar Mountains range from east to west.

Samhan Mountain, which includes the Jabal Samhan and Jabal Al Qamr Nature Reserves, is the most important mountain in the region.

Omani's inhabited environment varies in the mountains.

According to Oman's Sustainable Development Goals 2030, the government seeks to create all the conditions under which Omani people can integrate the life around the mountains, especially in the light of modern development.

"This has contributed to varying degrees in changing the customs and practices of the Sultanate. But the life

The Sultanate has adopted a number of steps to preserve its national wealth by enacting laws and regulations that protect natural habitats and wildlife and guarantee the right of all generations to benefit from natural resources in a balanced and equitable manner

of people in the mountains of Oman is based on traditions and practices throughout the history of Oman," points out the report.

The mountain environment, according to the report, still retains its beauty and characteristics, despite the features of change, comprehensive development, progress and modernisation witnessed by Oman in all regions of the Sultanate.

The Sultanate has already unveiled a number of protected areas including desert reserves, some of them freely and others in mountainous areas

with difficult geological terrain, representing 3.77 per cent of the total area of the Sultanate.

The Qurum Nature Reserve, located in the heart of Muscat Governorate, was declared the first protected site for Ramsar in the Sultanate, with a total area of 80 hectares of Avicennia Marina forests, the only existing species that can adapt to the climate of the Omani environment. The total area covered by the Crimean trees in the Sultanate is about 1,030 hectares.

The Wetlands Reserve in the Wilayat of Mahout in Al Wusta Governorate is one of the top 25 sites to migratory birds during the winter in the Middle East, within the migration path of Asia and East Africa, with an estimated area of 2,621 square kilometres, and is in the process of being announced as a second Ramsar site in the Sultanate.

The Omani Action Plan to Combat Desertification and Land Degradation was initiated for the development of a natural resource registry for the Sultanate containing water sources, vegetation cover and soil.

It also implemented several projects to alleviate land degradation and combat desertification, in which many scientific and research institutions participated to ensure quality of implementation and access to reference information at the

national level.

The most important projects implemented are the fog harvesting project in Dhofar Governorate, the draft land degradation map, and the land rehabilitation of areas affected by desertification factors. These projects identified degraded areas and lands prone to degradation, the development of a spatial database and a monitoring system based on high-resolution satellite data.

The Sultanate is enforcing the laws and regulations related to the protection of wildlife and endangered species. It seeks to enforce more strict rules and regulations for the protection of wildlife and endangered species and prepared national protection strategies and plans, such as the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, the National Strategy for Economic Botany species.

It also issued the national Red Lists for endangered species, and established several governmental authorities and research centres for the implementation of strategies and projects related to the continuous preservation of endangered species.

The Sultanate deployed many efforts for the protection of threatened fauna, as it implemented protection programmes and declared many sites as reserves for the aforementioned species.



Study on improvement at Unesco sites earns Omani student master's

KABEER YOUSUF

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A study conducted by Manal al Mughiriyah, a student at the Department of Tourism at the College of Arts and Social Sciences, dealt with an important topic within the various topics of tourism and world heritage sites, and their resilience to the impact of natural and human hazards, is inviting the attention of the scholars.

The study, titled "Improving the resilience of Unesco World Heritage Sites: A case study", aims to enhance the resilience of the aflaj irrigation system, by highlighting Falaj Daris as a case study for this research as it is a world heritage site.

The results of the study revealed poor coordination between the various stakeholders, which leads to random planning and duplication of roles in management, exposing these sites to many risks resulting from human practices.

"The most common dangers that threaten Falaj Daris are the encroachment on the borders and the separating areas of the falaj, urban expansion, pollution, and the lack of tourism activities and tourism interpretation methods," said Manal.

Added to these, according to her, the irresponsible behaviour of some residents of the region has been affecting the smooth flow of the falaj water to various parts of each wilayat.

"The major issue is the man-made dangers that harm the structure and flow of various aflaj including Falaj Daris. As long as every single human being living in the country behaves responsibly, the aflaj system cannot be revived," added Manal.

The study included four chapters



in addition to the introduction and conclusion. The second chapter dealt with a review of practices and frameworks applied globally to manage risks in world heritage

sites and the international efforts to protect them.

The third chapter dealt with the case study of Falaj Daris, in addition to the five aflaj included in

The most common dangers that threaten Falaj Daris are the encroachment on the borders and the separating areas of the falaj, urban expansion, pollution, and the lack of tourism activities and tourism interpretation methods

MANAL AL MUGHIRIYAH

A student

the world heritage list, and the most important dangers that threaten them.

The fourth chapter was concerned with the research methodology used to collect and analyse data, while the fifth chapter was devoted to discussing the results of the study.

The thesis was supervised by Dr Magda bint Hamoud al Saltiyah, Assistant Professor of Crisis and Disaster Management in the Department of Tourism and Dr Yaqoub bin Salim al Busaidy, Assistant Professor of Sustainable Tourism, and Dr Huda bint Juma al Balushiyyah, Assistant Professor in Flight Catering and Service Quality.

The committee was chaired by Dr Fathia bint Abdullah al Rashidiyyah, with the membership of Dr Suad bint Saud al Manjiyyah, from the Ministry of Education, and Dr Hamad bin Muhammad al Mehrzi, Assistant Professor in the Department of Tourism.



Muscat Municipality organises training workshop

MUSCAT: Muscat Municipality, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, organised a training workshop on the individual performance and institutional excellence measurement system, on Wednesday.

The workshop was attended by Sayyid Saud bin Hilal bin Hamad al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat, and Engineer Essam bin Saud al Zadjali, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, and senior officials at the municipality.

The workshop was presented by Mohammed bin al Waleed al Hinai, director of project individual performance and institutional excellence measurement system.

The individual performance measurement system earned Royal blessing being one of the enablers of the Oman Vision 2040. It aims to develop the human resources system by building a culture of proficiency in job performance, improving performance appraisal systems, and linking productivity with incentives which results in improving services and enhancing community confidence in government performance.

This will be followed by a series of training workshops to be implemented as per schedule.

SALE OF USED CONCRETE PLACER BOOMS

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

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

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

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

HEAC to conduct admission tests, interviews from August 23-29

MUSCAT: The Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC) at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, will begin to conduct admission tests and interviews from Monday, August 23 to 29 for students who completed general education diploma or equivalent and received their certificates/diplomas this year as per the scheduled programmes.

In a statement issued recently, the HEAC said that the students can view (via its website) the venues, and dates and contact numbers accorded to each programme. The names of students selected for the tests/interviews will be available under "registration" page on HEAC website from Sunday, August 22.

HEAC advises those unable



to attend the interviews/tests due to health reasons (like contracting Covid-19 infection or mixing with Covid-19 patients or any other health reasons) to directly contact the establishments concerned and

discuss alternative dates.

The dates set for tests and interviews have been fixed after the end of the "Period of Amendment/Change of Choices" by August 17 via HEAC website.

The number of successful candidates who applied via the HEAC website stood at 35,753 students. The HEAC reminds all that the first results of sorting will be available from Sunday, September 5, 2021. — ONA

CMYF blood camp on Friday

MUSCAT: Chiru Mega Youth Force (CMYF), a voluntary organisation, is conducting a blood donation camp on Friday from 9 am. The camp will be held at Bausher Blood

Bank, opposite to the Royal Hospital. CMYF founder-president Ramdas Chandaka called upon all humanitarians to participate in this noble cause of saving other's

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



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. 35/2021

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following biddings:

Serial	Bidding No.	Bidding description	Companies targeted	Document fee	Last date for obtaining bidding docs.	Last Date for inquiries submission	Last Date for submission
1	RE-Bidding - BB/02/2021	Car Cleaning Service for the Parking at Al-Khuwair - Bowsher	Riyada card holders (Specialized)	25/- OMR	08/09/2021	13/09/2021	19/09/2021
2	RE-Bidding - BB/03/2021	Rental and Operating of Cold Stores Nos. (C: B9), (B:D1) & (D:16) at the Central Market of Fruit & Vegetable	Specialized	25/- OMR	08/09/2021	13/09/2021	19/09/2021
3	RE-Bidding - BB/11/2021	Operating a Coffee Shop at Muttrah Fish, Fruits & Vegetables Market	Specialized	25/- OMR	28/09/2021	04/10/2021	18/10/2021
4	BB/16/2021	Re-Using of Waste at Central Market for Vegetables and Fruits at Al-Mawaleh	Specialized	25/- OMR	08/09/2021	13/09/2021	19/09/2021
5	AB/17/2021	Operating of Restaurant at Muttrah Fish, Fruits & Vegetables Market	Specialized	45/- OMR	28/09/2021	04/10/2021	18/10/2021
6	AB/18/2021	Investment & Managing of Muscat Municipality Building at Ghala Heights	Specialized	750/- OMR	28/09/2021	04/10/2021	18/10/2021

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

1. Pay the specified document fee for the requested bid via bank deposit to Muscat Municipality's Bank account as follows:

Bank Muscat | 0423010702710024

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

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

Bidding at The Serial	The box's location
1-2-3-4	First floor at Directorate General of Quantity Surveying and Contracts in Muscat Municipality, Head Office, Darsait
5-6	Third floor at Directorate General of Quantity Surveying and Contracts in Muscat Municipality, Head Office, Darsait

NOTES:

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

Website: www.mm.gov.om

Lebanon buries victims of fuel tank explosion

AL DAOUSEH: Families laid to rest on Wednesday victims of a fuel tank blast that killed at least 28 people in northern Lebanon amid anger and sorrow over the crisis-hit country’s latest tragedy.

The explosion on Sunday in Al Tleil in the Akkar region scorched crowds clamouring for petrol that the army was distributing in light of severe fuel shortages that have paralysed a country also beset by medicine, gas and bread shortages.

The victims included soldiers and Akkar residents who darted to Al-Tleil after midnight to fill gasoline in plastic containers straight from a fuel tank that exploded in circumstances that remain unclear.

The tank was among supplies confiscated by the military, which has lately wrested supplies from alleged fuel hoarders across the country.

The disaster came on top of an economic crisis branded by the World Bank as one of the planet’s worst in modern times and follows an explosion of poorly stored fertiliser at Beirut port last summer that killed more than 200 people and destroyed swathes of the capital.

Akkar, one of Lebanon’s poorest regions, buried around 15 blast



Relatives of one of the wounded in Akkar’s fuel tank explosion mourn at the As Salam Hospital in Tripoli. – AFP

victims on Wednesday, after their corpses were identified and transported from hospitals hit by power and telecom outages, with even landlines disrupted.

The Akkar village of Al Daouseh held funerals for four of its dead, all of whom are from the Shraytiah family.

“They died for petrol — if we had fuel this would have never happened,” said Mouin Shraytiah

who was burying two sons — one 16 and the other 20.

“Political leaders and officials should consider what it is like to have two young boys and find them burned and charred in front of your own eyes,” the man in his fifties said at the funeral.

Dozens had gathered at the family’s home when a convoy of vehicles carrying the corpses arrived from a nearby hospital, an

AFP correspondent said.

Fawaz Shraytiah, a relative of Mouin, was burying two brothers, both army soldiers.

“What happened is because of deprivation, Akkar is a deprived region,” he said.

But “all we do is pay with our blood,” he added, explaining that soldiers make up the bulk of Al-Daouseh’s male population.

— AFP

Afghan President Ghani and family in UAE

ABU DHABI: The United Arab Emirates said on Wednesday that it is hosting former Afghan president Ashraf Ghani “on humanitarian grounds”, after he fled his country amid a Taliban takeover.

“The UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation can confirm that the UAE has welcomed President Ashraf Ghani and his family into the country on humanitarian grounds,” it said in a brief statement.

Ghani fled Afghanistan on Sunday as the Taliban closed in on Kabul, before the insurgents walked into the Afghan capital unopposed.

In a Facebook post, Ghani said the “Taliban have won” and that he fled to avoid a “flood of bloodshed”.

His whereabouts were unknown until Wednesday, with speculation that he had fled to Tajikistan or Uzbekistan.

This would not be the first time that the oil-rich Gulf country opens its arms to former leaders and their relatives, now persona



non grata in their country.

In 2017, the emirate of Dubai hosted former Thai prime minister Yingluck Shinawatra, who was sentenced in absentia to five years in prison.

Spain’s king Juan Carlos went into self-exile in the UAE in August last year as questions mounted over the origins of his fortune, and the UAE was Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto’s home during her eight years in exile before she was assassinated in her home country in 2007.

The UAE is one of three nations, including Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, which recognised the previous Taliban regime, which ruled from 1996 to 2001.

— Agencies

Haitians grow impatient for quake aid as rains complicate rescues



People make repairs and create shelter, after spending the night outside in the aftermath of the earthquake, facing the severe inclement weather of Tropical Storm Grace near Les Cayes, Haiti on Wednesday. – AFP

LES CAYES: Haitians left homeless by a calamitous earthquake that killed about 2,000 people were on Wednesday increasingly angry at the slow pace of government aid efforts after spending a fourth night in the open, many without clean water and food.

Prime Minister Ariel Henry, who flew to visit the worst-affected town of Les Cayes in southwest Haiti soon after Saturday’s quake of magnitude 7.2, had praised the dignity shown by survivors and promised a rapid escalation of aid.

But following another night of rains, residents in Les Cayes, including those camped in a mushrooming tent city in the center of the town, complained of scant help on the ground.

Pierre Ceneel, a local judge in Les Cayes, aimed his ire at the government in Port-au-Prince, echoing the bubbling frustration in the hardest-hit regions.

“As a judge, I must not have a political opinion. But as a man, as a man concerned about the situation of my country, nothing is working. They didn’t do anything to prepare for this disaster,” Ceneel said in downtown Les Cayes.

Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas, is still recovering from a quake 11 years ago that killed more than 200,000. The latest calamity comes just over a month after the July 7 assassination of President Jovenel Moise plunged the country into political turmoil.

— Reuters

Syria ‘power cut video’ goes viral

DAMASCUS: It’s a typical Arabic song of forlorn love and heartache but it was power cuts that added low-lit romance to the music video of Syria’s latest hit.

In Damascus, the economic situation is worse now than at the height of the decade-old conflict that is still ravaging parts of Syria, and electricity has become a rare commodity.

When singer Shadi Safadi and the band he co-founded, “Safar”, brainstormed over a low-budget video, the only way not to be defeated by power outages was to embrace them.

The result is filled with humour and relatable to most of the Syrian population, who spend long unventilated summer evenings in the dark.

The video for the song “Ya Weel Weely”, which topped five million views on YouTube within days of its release, was shot entirely in a small room lit by battery-powered devices.

The all-male band stand



The Safar Musical band, creators of the video for the song “Ya Weel Weely”, which topped five million views on YouTube within days of its release and was shot entirely in a small room lit by battery-powered devices. – AFP

donning black shirts, their instruments and microphone festooned with LED strip lights.

“The electricity situation is so bad we had to rely entirely

on batteries to shoot our video,” Safadi said. “Some days the electricity would barely come on for an hour.”

The conflict since 2011 in

Syria has left key infrastructure in tatters and displaced half of the population.

Key oil fields were damaged or lost to the regime’s rivals and Syria with its massively devalued national currency can scarcely purchase electricity from abroad.

The national grid once provided steady power to the population but rationing is now peaking at over 20 hours a day in most regions.

“The song was done with love and for sure people liked the lyrics and music, but what connected the most with our audience was the video,” said Wafi al-Abbas, another of the band’s founding members.

The video’s success marks a breakthrough for Safar, an outfit formed two decades ago but little known to the wider Syrian public until last month.

In the sea of escapist music videos out there, director Yazan Shorbaji said, a script that reflects people’s daily lives could be just as potent to carry a love song. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

KAMPALA

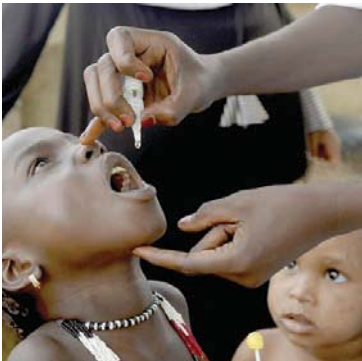
Uganda declares polio emergency

Uganda announced a polio emergency on Tuesday and blamed the outbreak to the Covid-19 pandemic during which resources were diverted from polio vaccination projects.

The Health Ministry said in a statement that scientists have isolated a polio strain from two sewage treatment plants in the capital Kampala.

The strain, it said, had a genetic linkage to the types reported in Sudan.

“The resurgence of polio in



Uganda may be attributed to routine immunisation in the country during the Covid-19 pandemic,” the ministry said.

BAGHDAD

Toll of Turkish air strike in Iraq rises to eight

The death toll in a Turkish air raid on a clinic in Iraq’s Sinjar province has risen to eight, local officials said on Wednesday, a day after the attack.

Turkey regularly targets northwest Iraq in operations against the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which Ankara considers a terrorist organisation.

The Kurdish separatists have waged a decades-long insurgency against Turkey and maintain bases in the rugged mountains across the border in Iraq.



“The number of martyrs in the Turkish bombardment is eight,” officials said in Sinjar, updating an initial toll of three.

CAIRO

Egyptian president invites Israel’s Bennett

Egypt’s president invited Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett on Wednesday for an official visit in the next few weeks, a statement issued by Bennett’s office said.

“The invitation from President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi was conveyed by Egypt’s intelligence minister during a meeting with Bennett in Jerusalem,” the statement said.

Bennett’s predecessor, Benjamin Netanyahu, was the last Israeli prime minister to make an official visit to Egypt, in 2011,



when the late Hosni Mubarak was in power there. Israeli media reports said Netanyahu secretly met Sisi in Egypt in 2018.

In brief

■ WELLINGTON



PM WARNS VIRUS OUTBREAK WILL GROW

New Zealanders must brace for additional Covid-19 cases from an outbreak that has plunged the previously virus-free country into a snap lockdown, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern warned on Wednesday after nine more positive tests.

Ardern confirmed New Zealand was dealing with the highly transmissible Delta variant linked to the outbreak in Australia that authorities have so far been unable to contain.

Ardern said the rapid rise, taking the total number of cases to 10, justified her decision to issue nationwide stay-at-home orders on Tuesday when just one case had been identified.

■ SINGAPORE



BRITON JAILED FOR NOT WEARING MASK

A Singapore court sentenced a British man to six weeks in prison on Wednesday, local media reported, after he repeatedly breached coronavirus protocols by refusing to wear a face mask in public.

Benjamin Glynn, 40, was found guilty on four charges over his failure to wear a mask on a train in May and at a subsequent court appearance in July, as well as causing a public nuisance and using threatening words towards public servants.

Glynn was earlier subjected to a psychiatric assessment ordered by the judge as a result of his conduct and remarks in court.

■ NEW DELHI



SHASHI THAROOR CLEARED IN WIFE'S SUICIDE CASE

An Indian court on Wednesday cleared prominent politician and former UN diplomat Shashi Tharoor of abetment to suicide and other charges linked to the death of his wife Sunanda Pushkar in 2014.

Pushkar was found dead in a luxury hotel in the Indian capital on January 17, 2014, following which Tharoor was charged with abetment to suicide and cruelty in marriage.

Police first claimed Pushkar was poisoned and had opened a murder investigation without naming any suspect. Her death was subsequently treated as suicide.

Afghan girls return to school in Herat



Schoolgirls attend class in Herat on Tuesday. — AFP

HERAT: Girls wearing white hijabs and black tunics crammed into classrooms in the western Afghan city of Herat just days after the Taliban's takeover.

As the school opened its doors, the students scurried down corridors and chatted in courtyards, seemingly oblivious to the turmoil that has engulfed the country in the past two weeks.

The scenes — which many feared would be banned under the Taliban — were filmed by an AFP cameraman this week, just days after fighters from the hardline Islamist group took the city following the collapse of government forces and local

militia.

"We want to progress like other countries," said student Roqia.

"And we hope the Taliban will maintain security. We don't want war, we want peace in our country."

With its close proximity to the Iranian border, the ancient Silk Road city of Herat has long been a cosmopolitan exception to more conservative centres.

Women and girls walked more freely in the streets, attending schools and colleges in huge numbers in a city famed for its poetry and arts.

Its long-term future remains uncertain, however.

— AFP

■ CAN'T KEEP MUM ON COVID



A cat lies across the shoulders of a protester during a demonstration calling for the resignation of Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha over the government's handling of the coronavirus crisis in Bangkok on Wednesday. — AFP

Taliban pledge to be 'different', as Afghans flee

KABUL: The Taliban have offered a pledge of reconciliation, vowing no revenge against opponents and to respect women's rights in a "different" rule of Afghanistan from two decades ago.

The announcements came on Tuesday night shortly after the return to Afghanistan of their co-founder, crowning the group's astonishing comeback after being ousted by a US-led invasion in 2001.

With huge concerns globally about the Taliban's brutal human rights record — and tens of thousands of Afghans still trying to flee the country — they held their first press conference from Kabul.

"All those in the opposite side are pardoned from A to Z," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told foreign and local reporters, revealing his identity for the first time.

"We will not seek revenge."

Mujahid said the new regime would be "positively different" from their 1996-2001 stint, which was infamous for deaths by stoning, girls being banned from school and women from working in contact with men.

"If the question is based on ideology, and beliefs, there is no difference... but if we calculate it based on experience, maturity, and insight, no doubt there are many differences," Mujahid told reporters.

He also said they were "committed to letting women work in accordance with the principles of Islam", without offering specifics.

A spokesman for the group in Doha, Suhail Shaheen, told Britain's Sky News that women would not be required to wear the all-covering burqa, but did not say what attire would be acceptable.

Nevertheless, Afghans and foreigners continued to flee



Afghan nationals cross the border into Pakistan at the Pakistan-Afghanistan border crossing in Chaman on Wednesday. — AFP

the country, with US and other nations stepping up evacuation airlifts from Kabul airport.

Desperate scenes from the airport at the start of the week have created searing images of Afghans terrified of the Taliban, and a diminished United States unable to protect them.

Some footage showed hundreds of people running alongside a US Air Force plane as it rolled down the runway, with some clinging to the side of it.

The United Nations Human Rights Council announced on Tuesday it would hold a special session on Afghanistan next week to address the "serious human rights concerns" under the Taliban.

President Joe Biden's administration gave a non-committal response to the Taliban's pledges of tolerance.

"If the Taliban says they are going to respect the rights of their citizens, we will be looking for them to uphold that statement

and make good on that statement," State Department spokesman Ned Price said.

Russia and China have quickly signalled their willingness to work with the Taliban.

Russia said on Tuesday that the Taliban's initial assurances had been a "positive signal" and that the militants were behaving in a "civilised manner".

Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the co-founder and deputy leader of the Taliban, arrived back in Afghanistan on Tuesday night.

He chose to touch down in Afghanistan's second biggest city Kandahar — the Taliban's spiritual birthplace and capital during their first time in power.

He arrived from Qatar, where he has spent months leading talks with the United States and then Afghan peace negotiators. Footage released by pro-Taliban media showed crowds gathering around Baradar at the airport, pumping their fists in the air and chanting in celebration. — AFP

China eyes its rich in drive to reduce inequality

BEIJING: China's top leaders plan to redistribute wealth, "adjust excessive incomes" and crack down on illicit gains in a bid to tackle inequality that could dent the fortunes of its richest, state media reported on Wednesday.

The policy goal, announced in the readout from an economic planning meeting attended on Tuesday by President Xi Jinping, comes amid a sweeping push by Beijing to rein in the country's largest private firms in industries ranging from tech to education.

It also follows a wider effort to alleviate poverty — a central pillar of Xi's leadership — and as rumblings from the state crescendo on the type of capitalism China wants to have.

The meeting of the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs agreed that China should "make basic institutional arrangements on income distribution," raise incomes for people down the economic pyramid and "adjust excessive incomes and prohibit illicit income," the official Xinhua news agency reported on Wednesday.

Xinhua said this was intended to "promote social fairness and justice".



The wealth gap in China is massive, with the top 10 per cent of the population accounting for around 40 per cent of national income in the last decade

The wealth gap in China is massive, with the top 10 per cent of the population accounting for around 40 percent of national income in the last decade, according to a 2019 study in the American Economic Review.

China does not currently have nationwide direct property taxes, and does not levy an inheritance

tax.

The number of billionaires in China nearly doubled to more than 1,000 in the past five years, according to the Hurun Report.

Meanwhile, the country's super wealthy became a record \$1.5 trillion richer in 2020, including bottled water magnate Zhong Shanshan and Alibaba founder

Jack Ma, even as ordinary people struggled to find jobs amid Covid lockdowns last year.

The country's largest private firms have in recent months been hit with new regulations and anti-trust probes aimed at curbing their outsized influence on nearly every aspect of life in China, wiping out billions of dollars in shares. — AFP

Myanmar crackdown death toll passes 1,000

B A N G K O K : Myanmar's security forces have killed more than 1,000 civilians since the military ousted Aung San Suu Kyi from power six months ago, an advocacy group said on Wednesday.

The country has been in turmoil since February 1, when the armed forces seized power in a lightning coup, triggering dissent as protesters demanded a return to democracy.

Security forces responded with bloody crackdowns, using live rounds against civilians. But anti-junta mobs — some of whom have formed self-defence groups — are still taking to the streets daily in flash marches. — AFP

Beware of fake Covid-19 vaccines

Conmen claim to represent a vaccine maker or a govt agency

PARIS: The WHO and Interpol have issued global alerts as fraudsters target governments with Covid-19 vaccine scams.

The World Health Organization (WHO) said fake Covishield vaccines were circulating in India and Uganda. In more than 60 cases in 40 countries, representatives of health ministries and hospitals have received offers to buy vaccines approved for distribution in their country, Interpol said on Monday.

According to the statement, the fraudsters usually claim to represent a vaccine manufacturer or a government organisation facilitating the distribution of vaccines.

They try to establish contact via the private e-mail addresses of the persons concerned as well as by telephone. They also use fake websites and social media profiles.

“Even when a fraud fails, it is important that it is reported to the police so that potential links can be identified and also, as in the case of the alert Interpol has issued, to warn law enforcement about these threats,” Secretary General Juergen Stock said.

Criminals have tried to make profit at every stage of the coronavirus pandemic so far, be it with the fake sale of protective equipment, the production and



A health worker vaccinates a man in Abidjan, Nigeria, on Wednesday. — AFP

sale of fake vaccines or hacking attacks on critical infrastructure.

“The genuine manufacturer of Covishield (Serum Institute of India Pvt. Ltd.) has confirmed that the products listed in this alert are falsified. These falsified products have been reported at the patient level in Uganda and India,” WHO said.

WHO said the products were confirmed as falsified on the basis that they deliberately/fraudulently misrepresent their identity, composition or source.

The counterfeit Covishield vial detected in Uganda was a 5-ml dosage form containing 10 doses. It had a batch number 4121Z040 and the falsified expiry date of August 10.

This isn't the first time that counterfeit Covid-19 vaccines have been detected. WHO has earlier identified as counterfeit Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 circulating in Americas. These counterfeit products were supplied and administered to patients outside of authorised vaccination

programmes.

Counterfeit drugs and vaccines are a major problem in South Asia and Africa. WHO has expressed concern about fake vaccines in circulation.

“Falsified Covid-19 vaccines pose a serious risk to global public health and place an additional burden on vulnerable populations and health systems. It is important to detect and remove these falsified products from circulation to prevent harm to patients,” the agency said. — **dpa**

19-year-old begins bid to smash world solo flight record

BRUSSELS: Pilot Zara Rutherford, 19, took off on Wednesday at the start of a three-month bid to become the youngest woman to fly solo round the world.

Rutherford departed from Kortrijk-Wevelgem Airport in western Belgium in her Shark ultralight, the world's fastest microlight aircraft.

The British-Belgian flyer hopes her voyage will encourage more girls and women to study and work in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), and spark girls' interest in aviation.

“Growing up, I loved aviation and STEM — science, technology, engineering and mathematics, but I didn't see many other women or girls doing that. I just always thought that was quite sad or discouraging,” Rutherford said. “I'm hoping that I can encourage girls to go into this field.”

Rutherford is seeking to win the title from Shaesta Wais, who became the youngest woman to fly solo round the world at 30.

The youngest male record holder, Mason Andrews, was 18 years old when he made the journey.

Rutherford's route will take about three months, with stops in 52 countries — including Greenland, China and Nicaragua — where she will stay with local families or in hotels.



Zara Rutherford

Born to parents who are both pilots, Rutherford will start university next year, with the dream of becoming an astronaut.

“I love adventure, and I think space is probably the biggest adventure out there,” she said.

“The moment that you lift off the ground, you forget everything. It's just you and the plane,” Rutherford said ahead of her departure.

Currently, the record is held by Shaesta Waiz of the United States, who flew around the planet alone at the age of 30. The male record-holder is an 18-year-old — something Rutherford told the media was a sign of gender inequality.

She hopes her epic expedition will get more women and girls interested in flying, or generally inspire them to “pursue their dreams,” according to her website. — **Agencies**

Twitter allows some users to flag ‘misleading’ content

SAN FRANCISCO: Twitter on Tuesday announced a new feature to allow users to flag content that could contain misinformation, a scourge that has only grown during the pandemic.

“We're testing a feature for you to report Tweets that seem misleading — as you see them,” the social network said from its safety and security account.

Starting on Tuesday, a button would be visible to some users from the United States, South Korea and Australia to choose “it's misleading” after clicking “report tweet.”

Users can then be more specific, flagging the misleading tweet as potentially containing misinformation about “health,” “politics” and “other.” “We're assessing if this is an effective approach so we're starting small,” the San Francisco-based company

said.

“We may not take action on and cannot respond to each report in the experiment, but your input will help us identify trends so that we can improve the speed and scale of our broader misinformation work.”

Twitter, like Facebook and YouTube, regularly comes under fire from critics who say it does not do enough to fight the spread of misinformation.

But the platform does not have the resources of its Silicon Valley neighbours, and so often relies on experimental techniques that are less expensive than recruiting armies of moderators.

Such efforts have ramped up as Twitter toughened its misinformation rules during the Covid-19 pandemic and during the US presidential election between Donald Trump and Joe Biden. — **AFP**

Gurkha veterans hold hunger strike in London over pension grievances

LONDON: Gurkha military veterans on Tuesday vowed a “fast until death” unless the British government agrees to meet them to discuss their longstanding grievances over pension rights.

Several hunger strikers have been camped out under makeshift shelters around the clock opposite Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Downing Street office, taking no food for the last 11 days.

Surrounded by flowers and candles left by supporters, they want the government to resolve their complaints about alleged discrimination and inequalities.

Veteran Yam Gurung, 71, said Gurkhas — Nepalese soldiers who served with the British Army — had fought alongside their British comrades in conflicts across the world.

But he said they were not treated the same.

“We are facing humiliation,



Support Our Gurkhas protesters Pushpa Rana Ghale (L) and Gyanraj Rai continue their hunger strike as they demonstrate for equal pensions outside Downing Street in central London. — **AFP**

racial discrimination... exploitation is there, alienation is there, vitriol by the British government is continuing,” he said.

“We are also human beings. We also feel and hurt.”

The Gurkhas, who carry razor-

sharp kukri fighting knives, have gained a reputation for fierce fighting, loyalty and bravery.

They first served as part of the Indian army in British-ruled India in 1815 and around 2,700 are currently enlisted in Britain's armed forces.

But it is only since 2007 that they have had the same pay and conditions as British soldiers.

Those who served before 1997 receive only a fraction of their British counterparts' salary, as it was assumed they would return to Nepal after leaving the army, where the cost of living is significantly lower.

They previously lost a legal challenge against the situation, and say it has left some 25,000 older Nepalese veterans out of pocket — a situation made worse by the global coronavirus pandemic that has left many in poverty.

“We are paid less so we are struggling hard,” said Gurung, who served in the first Gulf War in 1991.

“We want that there shouldn't be any division. There should be one rule for everybody. We should be paid equally. Equal danger, equal reward,” he said. — **AFP**

VATICAN CITY

‘Get vaccines for the good of all’

Pope Francis issued an appeal on Wednesday urging people to get inoculated against Covid-19, saying the vaccines could bring an end to the pandemic, but needed to be taken by everyone.

“Thanks to God's grace and to the work of many, we now have vaccines to protect us from Covid-19,” the pope said in a video message made on behalf of the nonprofit US group the Ad Council and the public health coalition COVID Collaborative.

“They grant us the hope of



ending the pandemic, but only if they are available to all and if we work together.”

Medical experts have warned that ever-more dangerous variants might develop if the virus is allowed to circulate in large pools of non-vaccinated people.

PARIS

Bardot mobilises against shooting of 3,000 foxes

Acting icon and animal rights activist Brigitte Bardot is mobilising against the planned shooting of 3,000 foxes in northern France. The permission to shoot the foxes is a scandal, the 86-year-old wrote in an open letter to the Prefecture in Beauvais on Wednesday.

“These animals enrich biodiversity and are important allies of farmers, your killing permit is nothing but a submission to the hunting lobby,” Bardot raged at the Prefect.



Other animal protection organisations had already protested against the regulation of the fox population in the district of Oise with the originally planned shooting of 1,370 foxes, the newspaper *Le Parisien* reported.

VALLETTA

Tycoon to face trial for journalist's murder

One of Malta's wealthiest businessmen, Yorgen Fenech, has been indicted for the murder of anti-corruption journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, prosecutors said in court documents filed on Wednesday.

No date for the trial has yet been set.

Fenech has been under arrest since November 2019, accused of complicity to murder. He has since been undergoing a pre-trial compilation of evidence where he pleaded not guilty.



Caruana Galizia was blown up by a car bomb as she drove out of her residence on October 16, 2017, in a killing that shocked Europe and raised questions about the rule of law in the European Union's smallest member state.

Despite Taliban assurances, world frets again

CHARLOTTE GREENFIELD AND
SABINE SIEBOLD

Many groups around the world have hailed the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan, sparking global alarm that the country could once again become a safe haven for militants inspired by its success. The Taliban has said it will not allow Afghanistan to be used to launch attacks on other nations.

But experts say that ties remain with Al Qaeda, whose attacks against the United States prompted Washington to invade the country in 2001, as well as other militant groups including in neighbouring Pakistan.

One of the Taliban's top leaders is Sirajuddin Haqqani, the head of the militant Haqqani network. The United States has designated him a global terrorist and offered \$5 million for information leading to his arrest.

"Militants writ large are jubilant and electrified by the Taliban's return," said Asfandyar Mir, a South Asia security scholar affiliated with Stanford University's Center for International Security and Cooperation.

"Major militant constituencies across South Asia, Middle East and Africa have taken note... (and) Al Qaeda's eco-system sees the Taliban's return as its own victory."

Besides groups affiliated to Al Qaeda, congratulatory messages to the Taliban have come from Somalia's Al Shabaab and others.

The Pakistani Taliban, which is not part of the Afghan group, pledged allegiance, and said hundreds of its members were freed from prisons when the Afghan Taliban swept through the country in recent days.

World leaders have been sceptical of the Taliban's moderate public pronouncements since seizing power, although some diplomatic officials familiar with its negotiations say the group is seeking international recognition and possibly development assistance.

Zabihullah Mujahid, the group's spokesman, promised at a news conference in Kabul on Tuesday that Afghanistan would not be used to launch any attacks on foreign countries. — Reuters

Militants writ large are jubilant and electrified by the Taliban's return. Major militant constituencies across South Asia, Middle East and Africa have taken note... (and) Al Qaeda's eco-system sees the Taliban's return as its own victory

ASFANDYAR MIR

A South Asia security scholar



DOUSING THE FIRES

A Royal Moroccan Air Force Canadair plane douses a wildfire in the region of Chefchaouen of northern Morocco on Wednesday. Firefighters in northern Morocco are battling to put out two forest blazes, an official said, as the North African kingdom swelters in a heatwave. Firefighting planes were being used to tackle the conflagrations which had already destroyed some 500 acres of forest. — AFP

Internship opportunities for students...



Ali al Matani
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THE TRAINING AND INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES GIVEN TO STUDENTS ADD VALUE TO THE AREAS OF TECHNOLOGY, BUSINESS AND MEDICAL SCIENCES

Universities and colleges in Oman are now facing acute difficulty in finding training and internship opportunities in both public and private sectors for their students. This is their requirement to fulfil before they finally graduate. This is the biggest dilemma ever faced by higher education institutions of the country. It will have negative implications on public and private organisations, as well as on the completion of the practical part of the training programmes of students. It is the requirement of the labour market that the students should have practical training and internship in their areas of specialisation before they are hired.

A practical solution is required as a way out from this Catch 22 situation being faced by both public and private sectors. All efforts to bring high-quality human resources to address our ambitions should not go in vain. These human resources could contribute to advancement of research, innovation and development of new ideas for a better future. With the skills and competencies, they have developed, they could seriously restructure our lives and make it more modern.

In many parts of the world, particularly Europe and America, the situation is different. In those countries, it is the government and private sector organisations which take initiatives to train students and give them internship

opportunities. They pay lot of money to the universities and students to encourage them to get training with them and work in scientific research in their workshops and factories.

If organisations treat students as liability, they will never be able to give the results which we are looking for. Therefore, clear mechanisms should be made to train students from colleges and universities. This will be a real contribution to skills and capacities of all. Giving students opportunities for training and internships is the responsibility of both public and private sectors. They could work together for it. Those who do not agree with this idea are unaware of the potential we can lose due to the lack of such opportunities.

The training and internship opportunities given to students add value to the areas of technology, business and medical sciences. It is always advisable to benefit from the fresh ideas of youth for the development of any sector. They bring fresh ideas and rejuvenate the sector with their innovative skills and ability to find solutions of issues which are normally at the tips of their fingers.

Those who are giving opportunities to students for internships do not welcome them with big heart. They create lot of fuss on the issue. They just treat it as a formality. Though such

training opportunities are crucial for getting their degrees and to their higher studies and develop skills as per their specialisations. To avoid such situation, certain rules and regulations should be made.

Some universities and colleges, because of their students not getting training opportunities, use some methods which do not match with the internship and training at all. Neither this serves the objective of the required efforts nor satisfies the young souls. Such practices should not be allowed in the country.

Despite all hurdles, we should learn from others' experiences. Some companies realise the importance of training and internship in their own businesses in certain sectors. But majority of the companies do not have any programmes and ideas to accommodate youth for training and internship.

In view of insincerity on the issue of training and internship opportunities to develop better skilled human resources, restructuring of the system is required. This is possible only by formulating new rules and regulations binding both the public and private sectors as well as the students to fulfil certain requirements. Building of a nation needs honest and strict procedures for development of human resources.

The importance of genetic resources in the Sultanate



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THE GENE BANK ESTABLISHED BY THE CENTRE AIMS TO CREATE A DATABASE, STUDIES THE CHARACTERISTICS AND VARIETIES IN THE SULTANATE

The Sultanate enjoys many genetic economic resources which constitute a treasure trove of wealth for the country, both on land and at sea. These resources require strenuous efforts to discover them, and some of them are related to genetic resources, which represent great commercial opportunities, that requires awareness of individuals, institutions and companies of the importance of exploiting them commercially and establishing projects that can provide thousands of job opportunities for citizens and expatriates.

Dr Nadia bint Abu Bakr al Saadiyah, Executive Director of the Oman Centre for Animal and Plant Genetic Resources at the

Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, says that these resources include livestock on land as well as aquatic resources in marine life, which requires converting them into commodities to benefit in the process of feeding and medical treatment that can bring benefits to the people of the Sultanate, as it is happening in many countries located in Africa and Asia.

Through the establishment of the Omani Centre for Livestock and Water Resources in 2012, it is also working on following up on the development of these resources and promoting their optimal use in the future. The centre is concerned with their sustainability in promoting the genetic diversity

of livestock, plants and other microorganisms, and working to highlight them by activating the means of knowledge and benefiting from it in the economic and social sectors. It is also enhancing its added value through scientific research and innovation, and its exploitation in industries and scientific innovations. Today there are many coral reefs, turtles, plants, birds, livestock and various types of fish in the Sultanate, all of which represent a huge economic wealth. The centre also conducts multiplication of some seeds and plants, inventory of fungi, follow-up of the genetic characteristics of gazelle and work on a project to study the genetic characterisation of insects, in addition to benefiting

from studies and research in order to improve the quality of agricultural and animal production.

The gene bank established by the centre aims to create a database, study the characteristics and varieties in the Sultanate, preserve the existing plant strains from drought, provide production and resist diseases, in addition to preserving the seeds and types of plants present, as well as preserving animals and knowing their genetic genes and diseases that affect plants and animals.

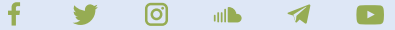
It was found that these resources can be extracted from various types of medicines and cosmetics, as some types of flowers, plants and palm kernel can be used, for

example, in these preparations, in addition to achieving food security by improving the breeds of animal resources in the country.

Some of these types of animal and plant resources are unique to the Sultanate and cannot be seen in other countries, at a time when the centre works with Oman Vision 2040 of sustainability and helping the national economy. It is interested in promoting tourism by paying attention to some types of animals such as deer and scorpions and how to benefit from them in medical work, as well as paying attention to goats and the genes they carry in order to multiply them, besides caring for other animals, whether in the field of nutrition or treatment.

sport

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ALI STORMS TO 100M FINAL IN WORLD U20 ATHLETICS



Ali al Balushi (R)
with his coach

OMAN SPRINTER
CLOCKS THIRD BEST
TIME OF 10.27 IN SEMIS

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 18

Oman sprinter Ali bin Anwar al Balushi progressed into final of the men's 100 metres in the 2021 World Athletics U20 Championships in Kenyan capital of Nairobi on Wednesday. The 19-year-old clocked a third-best timing of 10.27 seconds in the semifinal heats to make it to the final. The timing was also a national U20 record for Ali with only a wind assistance of +0.4.

Letsile Tebogo of Botswana set the new national U20 record of 10.11 seconds (+0.4 wind assist) to top the semifinal. Godson Oke Oghenebrume of Nigeria was second with 10.22 seconds (+0.8 wind assist).

The men's 100m finals are set for 6.50 pm (Oman Time) on Thursday.

Ali finished fourth in the preliminary heat six with a time of 10.5 sec at the Moi International Sports Centre, Kasarani in Nairobi, Kenya. Jamaica's Bryan Levell claimed the first place of heat six with a time of 10.43 sec while Hungarian's Dominik Illovszky finished second in 10.51 second. Ali's reaction time was 0.158 sec.

Following the conclusion of all the six heats, Letsile Tebogo (BOT) was the fastest as he finished the distance within 10.22 sec. Ali's timing positioned him in 18th place out of 47 competitors.

As many as 1,000 athletes representing more than 110 countries are taking part in the 2021 World Athletics U20 Championships in Nairobi.

On the other hand, the Sultanate's runner Hussain al



Farsi will take part in the men's 800 metres race on Thursday and Ali will represent the Sultanate in 200 metres.

Ali al Balushi, who trained under national head coach Fahad al Mashieky, managed to earn direct ticket to the World Athletics after he had clocked 10.53 seconds in a tournament during his camp in Turkey. He claimed the gold medal and broke his own national U20 record of 10.64 seconds.

Ali had won the gold medal in the 200 metres for Oman at the West Asian Junior Athletics Championships in Beirut, Lebanon in August 2019. He had completed 200 metres within 21.97 seconds.

Al Balushi holds the national youth record in both 100 and 200 metres. He was able to set 100 metres record of 10.69 seconds at the Asian Youth Athletics Championship in Hong Kong in March 2019.

The best personal record for Ali was registered at the Junior Olympic Games held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in October 2018. Ali clocked his best timing of 21.36 seconds in 200 metres. He had won a bronze medal at the Morocco 2018 Gymnasiade School Summer Games in 200 metres.

Sri Lanka to tour Oman for 2 T20 games in October

SHAHZAD RAZA
MUSCAT, AUGUST 18

A full-strength Sri Lanka will be touring Oman in October before proceeding to the UAE for the ICC T20 Cricket World Cup Round 1 matches where it will compete with Ireland, The Netherlands and Namibia for passage to the Super 12.

Oman's weather and playing conditions are similar to the UAE, presenting an ideal platform to The Lions to prepare for the World Cup. The two T20 matches will be played on OC Ground 1 in Amerat on October 7 and 9.

"Sri Lanka will be playing two T20 matches against Oman during the tour and we are extremely pleased that they decided to come to Oman on their way to the UAE," confirmed Oman coach Duleep Mendis.

"We are glad that Oman team will be getting the opportunity to play a full-strength Sri Lanka squad which will participate in the ICC T20 Cricket World Cup Round 1. The two T20 matches will help both teams as Sri Lanka will have acclimatised before reaching the UAE and Oman would have a crack at a top side just before the tournament starts,"

he added.

Sri Lanka is placed in Group A along with Ireland, The Netherlands and Namibia while Oman has Bangladesh, Scotland and PNG in Group B. Top two teams from each group will join cricket's eight elite sides in the tournament's Super 12 stage.

Coached by Mickey Arthur, Sri Lanka is a young side in transition with some exciting players in the ranks. The Lions recently beat touring India 3-1 in a four-match T20 series, tough India was without many of its main stars like Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma and Jasprit Bumrah.



In brief

MUSCAT



OC TO AWARD JUNIOR DIVISION CHAMPS, TOPPERS ON AUG 22

Oman Cricket will award the champion sides of the Junior Division League tournament of the season 2020-21 at Oman Cricket Academy in Amerat at 5 pm on Sunday, August 22.

Prizes will also be presented to all the toppers including best batsmen, best bowlers and best all-rounders across various age-group tournaments held during the season.

In an amazingly successful season Muscat Cricket Coaching Centre (MCCC) teams swept the honours by winning all three tournament formats; Under-19, Under-16 and Under-13.

MILAN



BRAZIL TEEN JORGE SIGNS 5-YEAR DEAL WITH JUVE

Juventus have completed the signing of Brazilian striker Kaio Jorge from Santos, the Italian side said. Kaio Jorge signed a deal until 2026 with the Turin club on Tuesday, two weeks after Santos said Juventus had agreed on terms to sign the 19-year-old.

"I am very happy to be here ... It's a big club, one of the biggest in Europe, and it's always been my dream to play for Juve," he said. Italian media reported Juventus would pay up to 4 million euros (\$4.69 million) for the player.

Kaio Jorge broke into the Santos first team aged 16, becoming their sixth-youngest league debutant when he made his professional bow in September 2018.

DORTMUND



LEWANDOWSKI POWERS BAYERN TO SUPER CUP WIN

Robert Lewandowski scored twice as Bayern Munich beat Borussia Dortmund 3-1 to win the German Super Cup on Tuesday, continuing a superb run of form that saw him score 41 goals last season in the Bundesliga.

Bayern keeper Manuel Neuer pulled off two great saves to deny Marco Reus and Erling Haaland before Lewandowski struck, arriving late to meet Serge Gnabry's cross with a powerful header that flew into the net in the 41st minute.

Lewandowski set the single-season league scoring record on the final day of last season to break a 49-year-old mark held by Bayern Munich legend Gerd Mueller, who died on Sunday aged 75.



Shakhtar Donetsk's Pedrinho (2ndL) is challenged by Monaco's Benoit Badiashile Mukinayi (L) and Guillermo Maripan on his way to scoring in Monaco. — AFP

Shakhtar, Salzburg and Sheriff close in on CL group stage

BELGRADE: Shakhtar Donetsk, RB Salzburg and Sheriff Tiraspol edged closer to the lucrative Champions League group stage after winning the first legs of their playoff-round ties on Tuesday.

A Pedrinho goal gave Shakhtar a 1-0 win at Monaco while Salzburg fought back from a goal down to beat Brondby 2-1 at home as Karim Adeyemi and Brenden Aaronson cancelled out Mikael Uhre's opener for the visitors.

Sheriff staged the shock of the night with a 3-0 home rout of Croatian champions Dinamo Zagreb as they bid to become the first Moldovan team to reach the group stage of Europe's premier

club competition.

Monaco dominated Shakhtar but Pedrinho earned a smash-and-grab win for the visitors as he weaved his way past three defenders in the 19th minute and beat goalkeeper Radoslaw Majecki with a clinical finish from 11 metres. The home side missed a string of chances to come away with something from the game as Shakhtar keeper Anatolii Trubin pulled off several fine saves and substitute Myron Boadu hit the post for Monaco.

Uhre fired Brondby into a fourth-minute lead in a pulsating clash at Salzburg as he held off a marker and turned to drill in a low

shot after good work from Kevin Mensah on the left flank.

Adeyemi levelled in the 54th minute when he swept in a loose ball from inside the penalty area and Salzburg then piled on the pressure as they kept visiting keeper Mads Hermansen busy, while Anis Ben Slimane rattled the crossbar at the other end.

Halftime substitute Aaronson delighted the home fans in the 90th minute when he planted his shot inside the near post after a fine solo run by centre back Oumar Solet, who fed the scorer with a defence-splitting pass.

Sheriff had Dinamo on the back foot from the start and

Adama Traore fired them ahead on the stroke of halftime when he rifled in an unstoppable shot past goalkeeper Dominik Livakovic after a clever pass by right-back Cristiano.

Dimitris Kolovos made it 2-0 in the 54th with the goal of the night, unleashing a sumptuous first-time volley as he demonstrated sublime individual skill to meet Momo Yansane's cross from the left.

Traore added the icing on the cake for Sheriff with his second in the 80th minute, racing clear of his markers to cap a counter-attack as the home side broke away after a Dinamo free-kick at the other end. Dinamo's international winger

Mislav Orsic was livid.

"This is the club's worst performance since I've been here and I am at a loss to describe how disappointed we are," Orsic was quoted as saying by Croatian media.

"The score doesn't flatter Sheriff, it flatters us. There will be no sleeping tonight and we'll need nothing less than a miracle in the return leg."

In Wednesday's standout fixture, former European Cup winners Benfica and PSV Eindhoven clash in Lisbon while Malmo entertain Ludogorets Razgrad and Young Boys are at home to Ferencváros. — **Reuters**

Cricket Australia defends Langer's leadership

SYDNEY: Cricket Australia chief Nick Hockley defended Justin Langer on Wednesday after mounting concern over his management style sparked uncertainty around his position heading into the Twenty20 World Cup and a home Ashes series.

The Australian head coach was forced to address negative feedback earlier this year when discontent surfaced about his "headmaster-like" leadership and shifting moods.

He took the

criticism on board and admitted he had been "grumpy and intense" most of his life.

Langer faced controversy again last week after reports of a heated argument with a Cricket

Australia journalist following a poor white-ball tour of the West Indies and Bangladesh.

The confrontation is said to have taken place in the team hotel, with players and staff watching, leading to feverish media speculation over his future.

Hockley praised the "incredible job" Langer had done in rebuilding the culture of Australian cricket since being hired in the aftermath of the notorious "Sandpaper-gate" ball-tampering tour of South Africa in 2018.

"His efforts have restored public faith in the

national team, which is a side all Australians can be incredibly proud of," he said in a statement.

Hockley didn't directly address Langer's management style but noted it had been an "extremely disruptive and challenging 18 months" during the pandemic with border closures and cricketers living in bio-secure bubbles.

"Despite those challenges the side has had great success in one-day, Test and T20 cricket, when all players were available," he said.

"Justin, his coaching staff and the leaders within the team have an equally important part to play in ensuring a successful summer ahead for the Australian cricket team."

Earlier this week, Langer's friend and former teammate Adam Gilchrist said growing speculation around his position could "derail the summer", while

urging Cricket Australia to stamp out leaks to the media.

"The bigger issue... is the fact these journalists have a direct line of contact with people within the inner sanctum there, and the people in that inner sanctum are happy to let it get out," he said.

HAIR TRIGGER

White ball skipper Aaron Finch said he believed Australia's recent poor form had amplified tension related to Langer, but it wasn't "a great look" that teammates were leaking details.

"There's always tension when results don't go your way," he told SEN commercial radio on Wednesday. "It's disappointing that things are coming to the front the way that they are."

While Langer has been widely praised for restoring the culture of the Australian team, rumours of dressing-room friction have never been far away. — **AFP**



Halep earns injury comeback win

GAUFF TO FACE OSAKA, KONTA OUT IN CINCINNATI

LOS ANGELES: Simona Halep earned her first victory since last May's calf injury pause as the three-time finalist defeated Magda Linette 6-4, 3-6, 6-1 on Tuesday at the ATP-WTA Cincinnati Masters.

American teenager Coco Gauff lined up a contest with second seed Naomi Osaka through a 6-1, 6-2 hammering of Hsieh Su-Wei.

On a day when rain forced a reorganisation of the afternoon and evening schedule, women's top seed Ashleigh Barty and Olympic gold medalist Alexander Zverev never made it onto court.

Halep only returned to the Tour last week in Montreal, losing in the opening round. She remained confident that progress was not far away after her injury in Rome three months ago.

The Romanian defeated her Polish opponent for a second time, taking just over two hours.

"It was a strong match. In my opinion, both of us played really well," the 29-year-old said. "Maybe the rain delay helped me a little bit to find energy. I was a little bit stronger physically and mentally in the third set."

"It means a lot, I'm really happy to win. It's always important to have victories when you come back from an injury."

"This was the first time in my life that I've had this kind of problem, and I didn't really know how to manage it. But I'm happy to be back, happy to play pain-free. I'm just trying to build my confidence back."

The 12th seed, a former number one, played Cincinnati finals in 2015, 2017 and 2018. She dominated her 44th-ranked opponent with 11 aces and four breaks of serve.

Gauff won her last match with four-time Grand Slam champion Osaka at the Australian Open last year. Gauff, 1-1 in the series, will play Osaka for the first time outside of a Grand Slam.

"I've learned (from their past matches) to just focus on me and not on the expectations of others,"



Simona Halep (ROU) serves against Magda Linette (POL) in Cincinnati. – USA Today Sports



Jessica Pegula of USA hits a shot against Camila Giorgi of Italy. – USA Today Sports

she said of the high-profile meeting with the former number one.

Montreal champion Camila Giorgi fell 6-2, 6-2 in her opening match to Jessica Pegula in a re-run of the pair's semifinal last Saturday in Canada.

Hopes ended for Britain's Johanna Konta in a 3-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-2 loss to Czech Karolina Muchova.

Konta has now lost in the Cincinnati first round in three of her last four appearances at the tournament, reaching the semifinals in 2020 when the event was staged in New York under strict Covid-19 protocols.

BERRETTINI THROUGH
In the men's draw, Wimbledon finalist Matteo Berrettini returned from a thigh injury layoff but only



Coco Gauff (USA) returns a shot against Su-wei Hsieh (TPE). – USA Today Sports

just managed a 6-7 (5-7), 6-3, 7-5 defeat of Spaniard Albert Ramos-Vinolas.

The Italian fifth seed showed rust after last playing the All England Club final against Novak Djokovic,

But he prevailed after saving five break points in the final set to end it on a drop shot winner on match point.

"I knew it would be tough, but I'm really happy — as much with the mindset as with the tennis," Berrettini said.

Last week's Toronto quarterfinalist Gael Monfils was untroubled by Serb Dusan Lajovic in a 7-6(7/0), 6-2 win in 91 minutes as the Frenchman overcame nine double-faults.

Grigor Dimitrov advanced to the

ATP/WTA CINCINNATI RESULTS

Men (first round)
Alexander Bublik (KAZ) bt Marcos Giron (USA) 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/5); Grigor Dimitrov (BUL) bt Roberto Bautista (ESP x13) 6-3, 6-4; Hubert Hurkacz (POL x9) bt Alejandro Davidovich (ESP) 6-1, 6-7 (3/7), 6-1; Marin Cilic (CRO) bt Aslan Karatsev (RUS) 7-5, 6-3; Gael Monfils (FRA) bt Dusan Lajovic (SRB) 7-6 (7/0), 6-2; John Isner (USA) bt Cameron Norrie (GBR) 4-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-4; Reilly Opelka (USA) bt Corentin Moutet (FRA) 7-6 (7/3), 4-6, 6-4; Frances Tiafoe (USA) bt Ugo Humbert (FRA) 7-5, 7-6 (11/9); Tommy Paul (USA) bt Christian Garin (CHI x16) 4-6, 6-3, 6-4; Lorenzo Sonego (ITA) bt Carlos Alcaraz (ESP) 6-3, 7-6 (8/6); Sebastian Korda (USA) bt Laslo Djere (SRB) 6-4, 6-4
Second round
Matteo Berrettini (ITA x5) bt Albert Ramos (ESP) 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 7-5; Benoit Paire (FRA) bt Denis Shapovalov (CAN x6) 6-3, 4-6, 7-5
Women (first round)
Victoria Azarenka (BLR x14) bt Liudmila Samsonova (RUS) 6-2, 6-3; Dayana Yastremska (UKR) bt Caty McNally (USA) 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (7/1); Veronika Kudermetova (RUS) bt Jasmine Paolini (ITA) 6-3, 6-2; Ons Jabeur (TUN) bt Anett Kontaveit (EST) 6-2, 4-6, 7-5; Jessica Pegula (USA) bt Camila Giorgi (ITA) 6-2, 6-2; Simona Halep (ROM x12) bt Magda Linette (POL) 6-4, 3-6, 6-1; Elena Rybakina (KAZ) bt Samantha Stosur (AUS) 6-3, 6-3; Karolina Muchova (CZE) bt Johanna Konta (GBR) 3-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-2; Bernarda Pera (USA) bt Rebecca Peterson (SWE) 6-4, 6-1; Coco Gauff (USA) bt Hsieh Su-Wei (TPE) 6-1, 6-2; Belinda Bencic (SUI x10) bt Marketa Vondrousova (CZE) 6-3, 7-5

second round as he eliminated 13th seed Roberto Bautista Agut 6-3, 6-4. American Sebastian Korda won his 23rd match this season as he quickly brushed aside Serb Laslo Djere 6-4, 6-4 to line up against second seed Stefanos Tsitsipas.

Weekend Toronto semifinalist John Isner was bothered by back pain throughout but relied on his huge serve to wrap up a 4-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-4 comeback over Brit Cameron Norrie.

Isner finished off with his 26th ace as Norrie lost in a first round for the second week in succession.

The 36-year-old American moved into the second round to play Italy's 11th seed Jannick Sinner. — AFP

Wrist injury rules champion Thiem out of US Open



PARIS: Defending champion Dominic Thiem announced on social media on Wednesday the "tough decision" to pull out of this month's US Open after failing to recover sufficiently from a wrist injury he picked up in Mallorca in June.

The 27-year-old Austrian, who will also miss the remainder of the 2021 season, said he had been making a good recovery before feeling renewed pain last week.

"It has been a tough decision but I know this is what I have to do," he said.

Thiem staged a memorable comeback in New York last year, losing the first two sets in the final before beating Alexander Zverev in five.

The world number six struggled with form after the victory, taking a break from the game before losing his first-round match at the French Open when he gave away at two-set lead against Pablo Andujar.

"Unfortunately, I've had to withdraw from the US Open and will miss the rest of the 2021

I'm really disappointed not to be able to defend the title in New York but I haven't recovered from the wrist injury I suffered back in June at the Mallorca Open

DOMINIC THIEM
Austrian player

season," he posted on Twitter.

"I'm really disappointed not to be able to defend the title in New York but I haven't recovered from the wrist injury I suffered back in June at the Mallorca Open."

On Sunday, another former champion Roger Federer also pulled out of the US Open.

The 40-year-old said he needed further knee surgery and admitted he "will be out for many months".

— AFP

business

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Mega Omani mining block found to be resource-rich

MEGA PROJECT: Leading global management consultancy firm Kearney Middle East completes preliminary assessment of 3,314 sq km block's mineral potential

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

A mammoth 3,314 sq kilometre mining block located in the southeast of the Sultanate has yielded evidence of prodigious quantities of high quality mineral ores comprising gypsum, limestone, dolomite and attapulgit, according to a new report.

The 'Economic Diversification Report 2020', issued earlier this week by the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, says a high-level panel of officials representing various government sector stakeholders is making headway in facilitating the requisite approvals and permits necessary for unlocking the massive mineral potential of the so-called 'Shaleem Mining Block'.

Ranked among the largest



mineral blocks identified by authorities for development in the Sultanate, the Shaleem Block covers a vast area straddling the governorates of Al Wusta and Dhofar.

Located about 350 km from Duqm, the giant block begins in Wilayat Al Jazir in Al Wusta Governorate and ends in Wilayat Shaleem and Al Halaniyat Islands in Dhofar Governorate.

Global management consulting firm Kearney Middle East was initially tapped by the government

to undertake exploratory work in the sprawling block. The study covered preliminary and detailed market analysis of the block's mineral resources.

"For each mineral, resources were determined and the targeted market was studied. Also, it was identified what minerals to be downstreamed and what to be exported," the Implementation Follow-up Unit noted in its report.

Furthermore, the consultants weighed a number of options

for the transport of the mineral resources from the site to coastal locations for shipping overseas or for value-addition activities locally. An option to upgrade an existing fishery harbour located closest to the block has been identified as the "most suitably logistics option", it added.

Given its potential to be a game-changer for the mining sector, and the wider economy as a whole, a number of government ministries and agencies have come together to be a part of a high-level team

For each mineral, resources were determined and the targeted market was studied. Also, it was identified what minerals to be downstreamed and what to be exported

IMPLEMENTATION FOLLOW-UP UNIT

assembled by the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit to help accelerate the delivery of the Shaleem project.

Represented on the committee are officials representing the Ministry of Energy and Minerals; Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning; Ministry of Interior; Ministry of Heritage and Tourism; Ministry of Defence; Royal Oman Police; Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources; and the Environment Authority.

Further exploration studies

have been prescribed before an initial mining licence for a part of Shaleem Block is sought from the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

With the government now prioritising value-addition of Oman's mineral resources over raw exports, experts foresee a significant uptick in mineral processing investments in the Duqm SEZ, as well as other parts of the country.

Limestone is a key ingredient in building materials, cement and steel industries, in addition to the pharmaceutical sector.

Gypsum on the other hand has extensive application in cement manufacturing, wallboard production, fertilisers and soil conditioning, among other usages.

Dolomite has diverse uses as well. It is used as a source of magnesium metal or magnesia (MgO), a feed additive for livestock, a sintering agent and flux in metal processing, and as an ingredient in the production of glass, bricks and ceramics. Attapulgit, a mineral clay, has been used in medical products primarily as an anti-diarrheal agent, in addition to the production of fertilisers, and as a bleaching agent.

Surge in insurance claims over traffic accidents in Oman



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 18

The Capital Market Authority (CMA), which regulates the insurance industry in the Sultanate, has reported a 121-per cent surge in the number of insurance claims arising out of traffic accidents recorded during Q2 2021 versus figures for the previous quarter.

As many as 15,200 traffic accidents were reported in the second quarter, comprising around 3,000 major mishaps and 12,200 minor ones. This represented a 119-per cent jump over corresponding figures for Q1 2021. Insurance claims raised in Q2 totalled 24,900, representing a 121-per cent increase over Q1.

Compensation paid out totalled RO 5.19 million, representing a 189-per cent increase over Q2 2020, while total claims (paid claims and unsettled claims) reached RO 23.31 million, representing an increase of 77 per cent versus figures for Q2 2020.

Suhar cotton yarn project set for peak production next month

NEW MILESTONE: SV Pittie Sohar Textiles' factory in Sohar Free Zone to achieve 100 per cent plant utilisation by September 21

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 18

India's largest cotton yarn manufacturer, SVP Global Ventures, has announced that its Omani subsidiary, SV Pittie Sohar Textiles (FZC), is gearing up to ramp up production at its plant in Sohar Free Zone to peak capacity next month.

SV Pittie Sohar Textiles owns and operates the Middle East's first cotton yarn mill at the free zone adjoining Sohar Port, which it set up with an investment of around \$150 million. The plant, which forms the nucleus of a proposed textile and fabrics hub at the free zone, features 150,000 spindles and 3,500 rotors.

Significantly, the yarn factory is anticipated to achieve peak utilisation by September 21,



2021, the parent organisation said in a regulatory filing this week. Following the completion of the Suhar textile plant, the total operational capacity of SVP Global Ventures has gone up to 400,000 spindles and 5,900 rotors, it said, adding that the Oman operations will contribute significantly to the Group's overall revenue.

Commenting on the development, Chirag Pittie, Director, SVP Group, said, "The expansion of Oman plant consisting of 150,000 spindles and 3,500 rotors has been successfully completed and is

expected to fully contribute to the financial performance starting in September 2021. The strong demand for high margin combed compact cotton yarn coupled with sales off-take agreements will enable us to fully utilise the new capacities and enhance value for our stakeholders. We have a vision to be a leading integrated textile manufacturer of the world."

Maj Gen (Retd) O P Gulia, CEO of SVP Group, stated: "Our strategic growth initiatives, enhanced capacity and operational efficiencies, product and geographical expansion with

focus on high margin products are likely to drive profitability and contribute to the growth of the company. The Group is now ready to foray into the complete value chain of textile."

Founded in 1898, SVP Group is engaged mainly in manufacturing polyester, polyester and cotton blend, and 100 per cent cotton yarn. The Group has two manufacturing facilities in India: Jhalawar in Rajasthan, and Ramnad in Coimbatore, and one in Suhar in Oman.

Through its investment in the Sultanate, SVP Group Ventures has sought to capitalise on an array of benefits offered by Oman, notably strategic, operational, financial and logistics-related.

These include a lower capital and power cost as compared to the home market in India, negligible import/export duties and over 25 years of corporate tax holiday. Oman also has free trade agreements with the United States, Turkey and a number of other countries, it added.

Bank Nizwa gets approval for RO 75m rights issue

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa, Oman's first full-fledged Islamic lender, has announced that it has secured regulatory approvals from the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) and the Capital Market Authority (CMA) for its Rights Issue of 789,473 million shares at a price of 95 baisas per share, aggregating to RO 75 million.

In a filing to the CMA, Khalid al Kayed, CEO, said the Board of Directors had resolved that the record date of the rights issue is set for August 29, 2021.

"Subscription for the rights issue is open to shareholders whose names appear in the Bank's shareholder register with the MCDC as on the record date. Persons who purchase the rights on the MSX within the rights trading period are also eligible to subscribe for the offer shares before the subscription closing date," he said.

Rights trading opens on September 5, 2021 and closes on September 12, while subscription opens on September 7 and closes on September 16, 2021. Listing and allotment are set for September 26, 2021.

Enjoy peaceful travels with BankDhofar's travel insurance

MUSCAT: Aiming to expand its offerings for its customers, BankDhofar offers Travel Insurance with competitive rates and privileges. The insurance provides comprehensive coverage, including Covid-19 cover for travellers on international flights.

Muhannad al Raisi (pictured), Executive Manager — Assets Products Development and Bancassurance, at BankDhofar, said: "With the current conditions prevailing in the globe due to Covid-19 pandemic, it is important to have the risks related to travel covered, which ensures protection against financial loss. The Travel Insurance covers Covid-19 to help protect customers who test positive and experience Covid-19 related disruption during their trip. At BankDhofar, we always cater to provide the best experience for our customers, and with the Travel Insurance they may fly to their



loved destinations needless to worry about any risks."

With a host of benefits, BankDhofar's comprehensive Travel Insurance offers customers competitive premium rates starting from RO 10 for international flights. The insurance covers travel up to 365 days, and age up to 75 years old. Customers may benefit from the insurance and travel with peace of mind. The insurance offers different levels of protection for travel and belongings, including cover for medical expenses, trip cancellation or delays, and lost or stolen baggage or money.

Mazoon Dairy fetes outstanding students of Al Buraimi Governorate

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 18

Mazoon Dairy held on Wednesday a celebration to honour 21 outstanding students from public, private, as well as from literacy schools in Al Buraimi Governorate at the company's headquarters in Wilayat Al Sinaina.

The event was part of Mazoon's social responsibility strategy and within Ejada programme which, in its first phase, targets Al Buraimi Governorate's schools. In the future, the programme looks forward to other governorates and broader fields such as education, development, and innovation.

On behalf of Mazoon Dairy Company, Corporate Affairs Manager Yousuf bin Khamis al Fazari said the company spares no effort in supporting educational activities and developing the local community in the governorate, where social responsibility is an integral part of Mazoon Dairy's activities.

He added that the company plays a leading role in creating sustainable societies in the Sultanate by providing training,



education and community empowerment, which are basic pillars in the revival of nations parallel and with Oman Vision 2040.

Dr Sultan bin Khamis al Yahyai, Assistant General Director at Al Buraimi Directorate of Education, stated: "Those ventures have a major role in motivating students outstanding in the General Diploma at the level of the governorate's schools for the academic year 2020-2021."

He added that Mazoon Dairy always works alongside Al Buraimi Directorate of Education by supporting various educational

activities and events.

The ceremony included an introductory visit for the distinguished students and several of the Directorate officials to the farm and factory facilities, where the attendees learnt about the techniques used in food manufacturing processes.

Rashid bin Khalfan al Muqbali, Administration and Facilities Manager at Mazoon Dairy, asserted on the importance of the introductory visits for students, which aim to introduce them to the state-of-art techniques used in the company's facilities.

"The attendees also toured

the factory, which consists of four main sections: main manufacturing unit, the training building, the plastic packaging factory and the services unit.

"The factory was constructed on an area of 50,000 square metres. It is one of the largest food processing facilities in the region, with a production capacity of up to one million litres per day.

"The attendees learnt about the mechanism of the biogas production plant, which converts farm waste into gas that is used as an alternative energy to operate some equipment in the factory," he added.

Live the Moment in the Exciting Toyota Yaris

MUSCAT: The Toyota Yaris with its exciting profile, design and style, makes a fantastic car to own and move around the city. The Yaris stands out with its quiet and roomy interior cabin, as well as its powertrain that delivers both dynamic driving performance and fuel economy.

Cutting-edge design defines the exterior of the Yaris, with its dynamic angles as well as sleek headlamps and clearance lamps. The front of the Yaris has a horizontal grille for a wider yet more aerodynamic appearance. Daytime running lamps have also been integrated into the shape of the grille for a sleek appearance, while slimmer LED rear combination taillights adorn the rear of the car with a unique look.

The Yaris hatchback is adorned with a stylish radiator grille, colour



keyed front and rear bumpers, 15" alloy wheels, projector headlamps with follow-me-home function, LED rear combination lamps with line guide, daytime running lights, stylish shark fin antenna,

LED high mount stop lamp, front fog lamps, sporty mesh type lower radiator grille in the front, black luggage door garnish with a vibrant red accent.

Delivering a dynamic driving

experience, the Yaris sedan is equipped with a choice of 1.3L and 1.5L engine and hatchback is equipped with a 1.5-litre engine. The 1.3-litre four-cylinder engine in the Yaris sedan generates a maximum output of 98 hp and 12.5 kg-m of torque and is mated to either a five-speed manual transmission or a CVT transmission.

On the other hand, the 1.5-litre four-cylinder engine in the Yaris sedan and hatchback, can churn out a maximum output of 106 hp and 14.3 kg-m of torque and is mated to the CVT transmission to offer a smooth shifting experience with excellent fuel efficiency.

With an exciting interior featuring a distinctive design, and offering convenience and comfort with a layer of luxury, the Yaris sedan's cabin has an exclusive profile.

Enjoy 4.45% rate on salary transfer to Muzn

MUSCAT: Continuing to provide innovative banking solutions that meet its customers' needs and aspirations, Muzn, National Bank of Oman's (NBO) Islamic banking window, is offering rates for as low as 4.45 per cent on salary and liabilities transfers. Available on all personal and housing financing packages, the offer also includes customers who already have their salaries with the bank.

Salima al Marzouqi (pictured), Chief Islamic Banking Officer (CIBO), said, "We're pleased to launch our salary transfer campaign, which complements our range of financing facilities. With lower rates than ever, it's part of Muzn's aim to reward our customers



with value-added benefits while offering them an enjoyable and world class banking experience under one roof."

Utilising approved Islamic concepts, Muzn's financing facilities offer an easy application process, fast processing and low monthly instalments, providing tailored options for life's biggest investments.

Huawei Watch 3 Pro is a beast of a smartwatch

MUSCAT: Huawei recently announced the launch of the Huawei Watch 3 and Watch 3 Pro which bring convenient and smart life experiences that are underpinned by enhanced interaction, independent connectivity and all-scenario interconnectivity. If you are on the lookout for grabbing a new smartwatch in Oman then you must surely have the new Huawei Watch 3 Pro in your radar and here is exactly why.

Mobile phones undoubtedly have brought more convenience to everyday life. The Huawei Watch 3 Pro features an ultra-long battery life, supporting five-day battery life in smart mode and provides 21 days in ultra-long battery life mode.

The Huawei Watch 3 Pro strikes a balance between smartwatch



and traditional watch aesthetics. The polished stainless steel watch body is adorned with a pane of ultra-curved 3D glass and a large display, culminating an elegant design for the smart timepiece

series. The Huawei Watch 3 Pro is the first Huawei smartwatch to come with a 3D rotating crown that offers tactile feedback. Thanks to the high precision finger movement recognition, users can

zoom in and out of images and slide across the menu options accurately with full ease.

The Huawei Watch 3 Pro is made of an aerospace-grade titanium fused with sapphire glass

lens that guarantees durability. This smartwatch is not only aesthetically pleasing, but also capable of withstanding harsh weather conditions and the test of time, offering an incredible level of protection at any given moment.

The Huawei Watch 3 Pro debuts with a more expansive selection of watch faces that provide options for users to personalise their smartwatch.

With a wide range of innovative and interesting themes including technology, gaming, DIY and short videos.

The Huawei Watch 3 Pro is a professional fitness monitoring assistant, offering over 100 workout modes, skin temperature detection with the new high-precision temperature sensor, fall detection and SOS alert.

Coupled with health

monitoring features such as heart rate monitoring, 24 hour SpO2 monitoring, sleep and pressure, the smartwatch comprehensive feature set allows you to stay up to date on your health condition.

Thanks to its Super Device capabilities providing a truly intelligent experience across all types of scenarios, Huawei Watch 3 Pro users can connect directly from the convenience of their smartwatches to several smart applications.

Huawei has collaborated with many local, regional and international entities to release their apps into the Huawei Watch 3 Pro such as talabat, one of the leading food delivery apps in the region and one of the first Huawei partners to see their apps running on the new Huawei Watch 3 Pro.



ePlatform to help boost Oman's mining sector

GOING DIGITAL: Mining portal to serve as centralised database offering complete information on mining blocks and mineral resources for the convenience of investors

CONRAD PRABHU

@conradprabhu

An online platform serving as a portal for investors weighing opportunities in Oman's promising mining sector is on the anvil.

Well-known international professional services firm EY has been roped in to assist in the initial groundwork aimed at establishing the proposed eMining Platform, according to a report by the Implementation Follow-up Unit of Oman Vision 2040. The high-powered unit is facilitating the requisite government approvals, and even legislative amendments where necessary, to accelerate the delivery of a number of strategic



projects and initiatives imperative to Oman's long-term economic growth.

At the heart of the eMining Platform initiative is a centralised database featuring, among other details, comprehensive information on the many mineral blocks offered by the Omani government for investors, the

mineral potential of each block, and associated application procedures for license approvals.

"The aim of this initiative was to assess the e-readiness of the (Ministry of Energy and Minerals) to deliver government online services and develop a detailed scope of work for transforming the services by a consultant, then

implementing it. The primary objective of implementing this initiative was to improve the delivery of government services and e-Services (in the Ministry) by streamlining government processes required to deliver the online services, and enabling customer-centric government e-Services for individuals and businesses," said

The aim of this initiative was to assess the e-readiness of the (Ministry of Energy and Minerals) to deliver government online services and develop a detailed scope of work for transforming the services by a consultant, then implementing it

IMPLEMENTATION FOLLOW-UP UNIT

the Implementation Follow-up Unit in its latest report.

A Request for Proposals (RfP) for the eMining Platform initiative garnered a large number of offers, according to the report. However, following the transfer of the mining

and minerals portfolio from the erstwhile Public Authority for Mining (PAM) to the restructured Ministry of Energy and Minerals, efforts to progress the initiative suffered some delay.

At the same time, authorities are working to simplify the licensing process governing mining exploration and production activities.

"This initiative aims to streamline the procedures that every investor goes through in order to obtain exploration and mining licences," said the Implementation Follow-up Unit.

The process currently requires as many as eight different government ministries and agencies to give their respective approvals for any license application – a cumbersome system that does not bode well for Oman's efforts to attract investors. The objective is to create a mechanism for investors to have their applications reviewed and approved via a single window / one stop arrangement.

Oil steadies, Delta outbreaks cloud demand prospects

LONDON: Oil prices steadied on Wednesday after four days of declines with investors still worried about the outlook for fuel demand as the use of rail, air and other forms of transport remained constrained amid surging Covid-19 cases worldwide.

Brent crude was up 70 cents or 1 per cent at \$69.74 a barrel by 0649 GMT. US oil gained 54 cents or 0.8 per cent to \$67.13 a barrel.

"In the short-term, the oil market may be volatile with frequent pull-backs as crude prices are beginning to struggle as demand in Europe and India faces headwinds," said Avtar Sandu, senior manager, commodities at Phillip Futures in Singapore.

A stronger dollar was also hitting commodities across the board, with metals and precious gold in particular as "equally fragile" as oil, ANZ Research said in a note.

Crude is typically priced



in dollars so a stronger greenback makes oil more expensive, hitting demand.

In the United States, more supply is set to hit the market if official forecasts prove right.

US shale oil production is expected to rise to 8.1 million barrels per day (bpd) in September, the highest since April 2020, according to the government's Energy Information Administration's monthly drilling output report.

US crude oil and gasoline inventories fell last week, according to two market sources, citing American Petroleum Institute figures on Tuesday, while distillate stocks rose. — Reuters

Philippines slashes 2021 economic growth target amid lockdown

MANILA: The Philippines lowered its economic growth target for this year, reflecting the impact of a two-week lockdown of the capital region to contain the spread of the Delta coronavirus variant, a government inter-agency panel said on Wednesday.

This year's growth target was cut to 4.0 per cent to 5.0 per cent, from 6.0 per cent to 7.0 per cent expected previously, the Development Budget Coordination Committee (DBCC) said in a statement.

Next year's growth target was kept at 7.0 per cent to 9.0 per cent.

The downgrade was still a significant improvement from last year's record contraction of 9.6 per cent.

"Our strategy is to continue managing the risks carefully by imposing granular quarantines, while allowing a vast number of people to earn a living," the DBCC said, referring to lockdown measures.

Central bank Governor Benjamin Diokno said "the road to full recovery remains bumpy."

But the central bank will continue to do what is needed until there is hard evidence of



Construction workers are seen at Bonifacio global city in Philippines. — Reuters

full recovery, Diokno said in a statement.

Policymakers last week kept the benchmark interest rate steady at a record low of 2.0 per cent, providing monetary support for an economic recovery.

The Southeast Asian nation, which was among the fastest growing economies in Asia before the pandemic, exited recession in the second quarter after five consecutive quarters of contraction.

But a renewed surge in Covid-19 cases, driven by the Delta variant, forced authorities

to impose a two-week lockdown of the capital region from August ., undermining the economy's expected rebound this year.

More than a year and a half into the pandemic, reported coronavirus infections in the Philippines have reached more than 1.77 million, the second-highest level in Southeast Asia, while deaths have exceeded 30,600.

The Philippines has so far fully immunised about 11 per cent of its 110 million people against Covid-19, leaving millions still vulnerable. — Reuters

WTO goods trade indicator hits record high

BERLIN: The World Trade Organization said on Wednesday its global goods barometer hit a record high, confirming the strength of trade's recovery after the deep shock caused in 2020 by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Geneva-based body said its goods trade barometer rose to 110.4 points, the highest since the indicator was first released in July 2016 and up by more than 20 points year-on-year.

"The rise in the barometer reflects both the strength of current trade expansion and the depth of the pandemic-induced shock in 2020," the WTO said on its website, adding the outlook for world trade continues to be overshadowed by downside risks. — Reuters



World Trade Organization logo is pictured at its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. — Reuters

Sovereign funds pull \$4.2bn from market strategies in Q2

LONDON: Sovereign wealth funds pulled \$4.2 billion from public market investment strategies in the second quarter, driven largely by exits from stocks, data from eVestment showed.

The pullback continues the outflows seen in the first three quarters since the Covid-19 pandemic, according to the data which captures all global equity and bond strategies run by third-party fund managers.

The outflows, which follows \$23.9 billion in first quarter inflows, included \$3.5 billion out of equity strategies.

Stocks scaled record peaks during the second quarter and have since held near highs on

The pullback continues the outflows seen in the first three quarters since the Covid-19 pandemic, according to the data which captures all global equity and bond strategies run by third-party fund managers

signs of an economic rebound from the Covid-19 crisis.

To help their governments cope with the fallout from the pandemic, several funds, including those from Norway, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, last



A dealer works at his desk whilst screens show market data at CMC Markets in London, Britain. — Reuters

year planned withdrawals. Chile reported withdrawals of \$3.5 billion from its funds in June.

A number of the sovereign funds have stated they may still need to continue to cover specific pandemic-related expenses, so it is possible they are preparing to cover some of that or take some of the very strong rebound in US equities and redeploy that into other strategies," said Rod Ringrow, head of official institutions at Invesco.

The asset manager was still seeing active interest from the sovereign community in equity investment, said Ringrow, including emerging market equities.

Equities make up one of the largest portions of investment allocations for most sovereign funds.

Of the few that disclose their movements in public equities every quarter via US filings, Singapore's Temasek Holdings and Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund both saw their holdings grow during the second quarter, mainly due to a stocks rally, said Global SWE.

Temasek's allocations to US public equities increased by a third from the previous quarter to \$32.2 billion as it raised its exposure to financial services, retail and consumer services, said the data specialist. — Reuters

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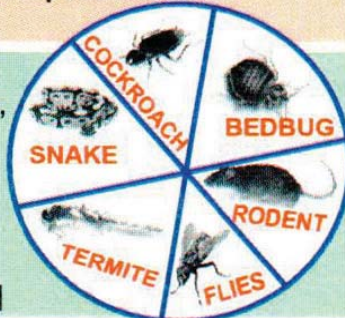
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■ ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcement of Capital Reduction

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

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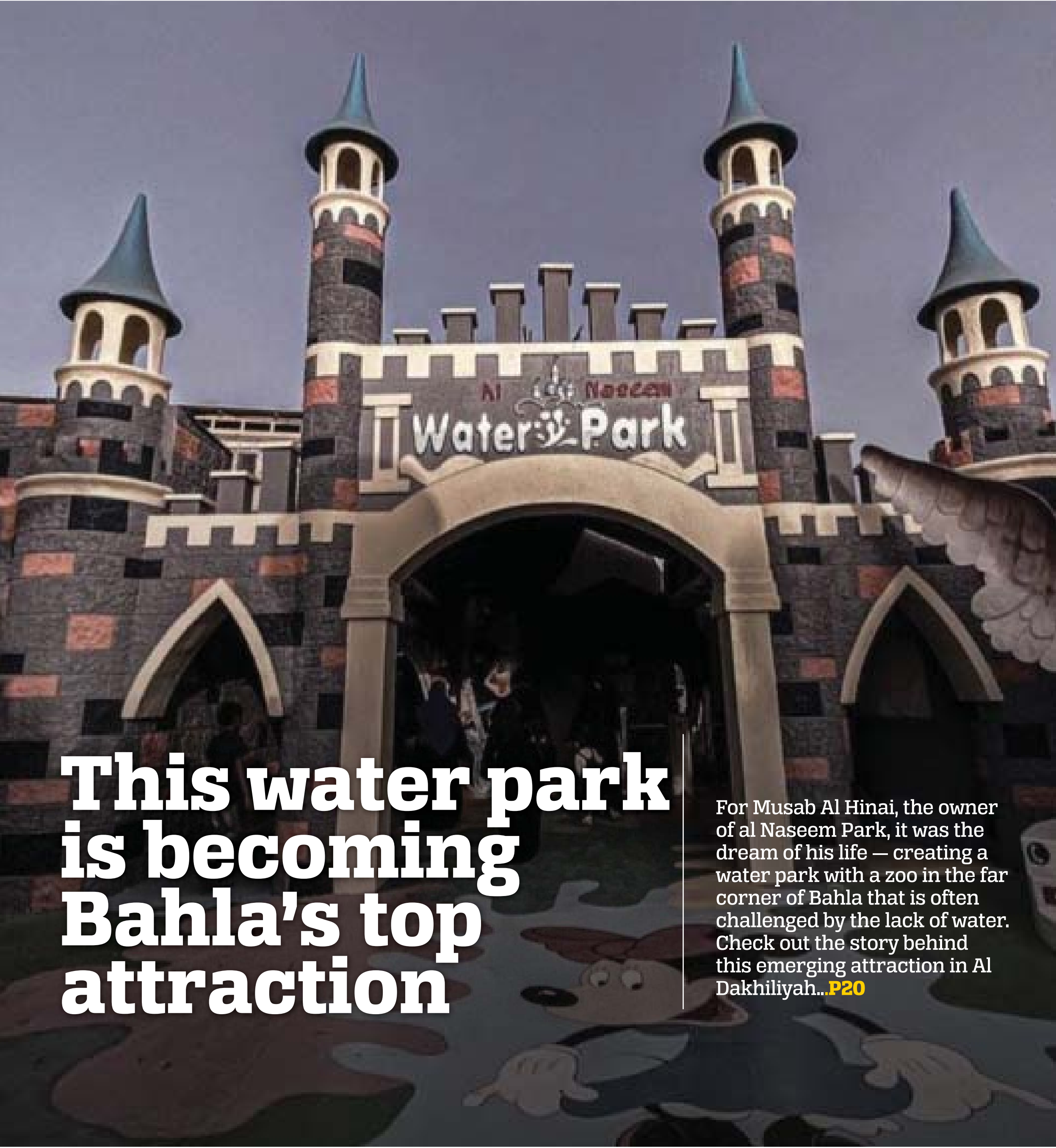
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features



This water park is becoming Bahla’s top attraction

For Musab Al Hinai, the owner of al Naseem Park, it was the dream of his life — creating a water park with a zoo in the far corner of Bahla that is often challenged by the lack of water. Check out the story behind this emerging attraction in Al Dakhiliyah...**P20**

READ

THE PREMONITION
BY MICHAEL LEWIS

Stories of skeptics who went against the official response of the Trump administration to the outbreak of Covid-19. The profiles include a local public-health officer and a group of doctors nicknamed the Wolverines.

ART

Art lovers flock to see master Antonio Lopez paint on Madrid square

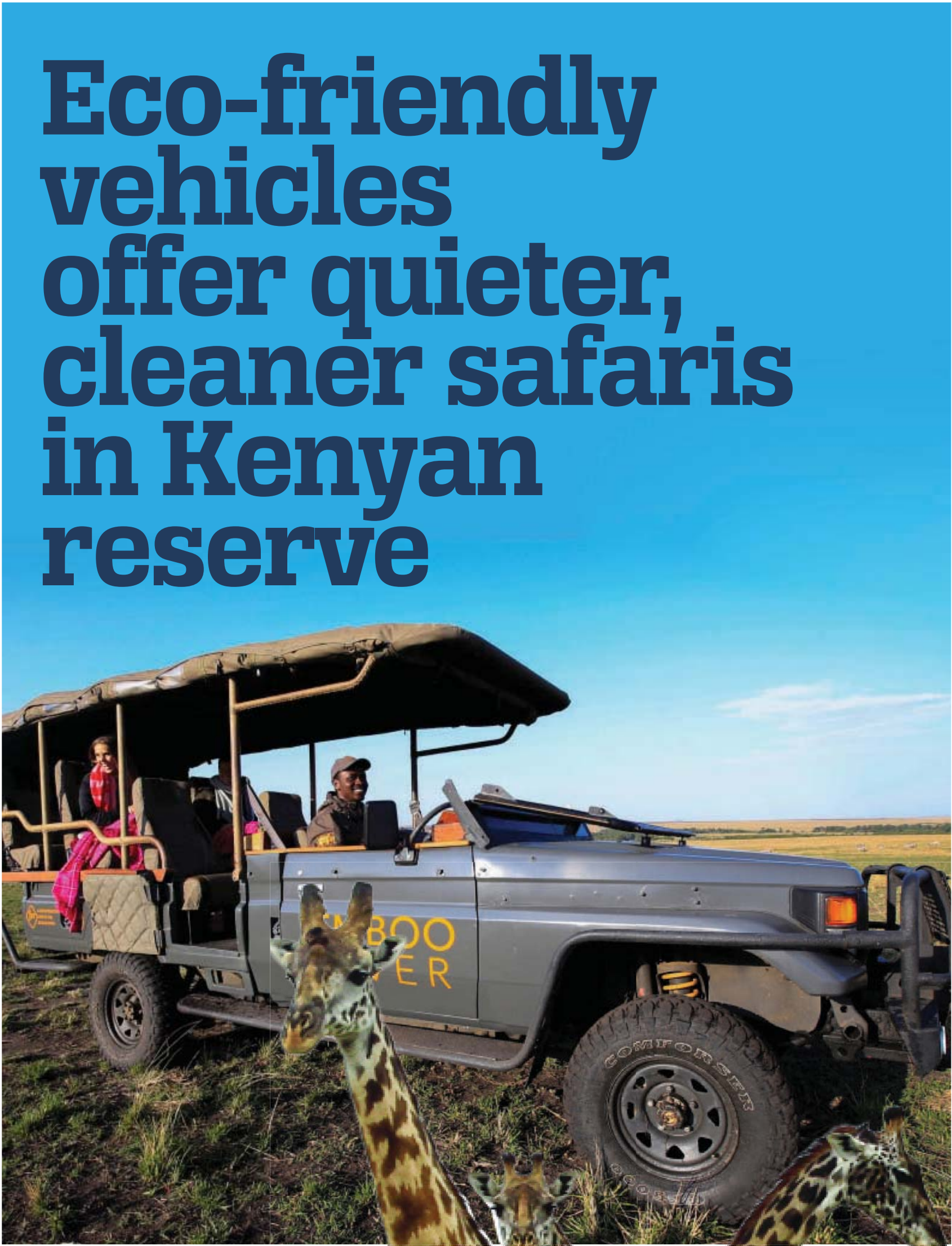
IT'S NOT OFTEN you get the chance to see a master at work, but Madrid residents have recently been able to watch one of Spain's greatest living artists set up his studio under the blazing sun on the famous Puerta del Sol square. Every day from 6.30 pm to 9 pm since the start of July, painter and sculptor Antonio

Lopez, 85, has positioned his large easel and canvas and begun mixing his paints, as a crowd of shoppers, dog walkers and art lovers assembles around him. Seeing such a famous face installed among the tourist shops and lottery stalls of Puerta del Sol has excited many locals. "It's a once-in-a-lifetime

moment because Antonio Lopez is a living legend of Spanish art," said art teacher Javier Mateo, 33, who was inspired by Lopez to study art himself. Lopez, who has enjoyed a long career in Spain and features in the permanent collections of museums around the world, is renowned for his life-like depictions of everyday subjects, from city scenes to portraits. He famously does not rush his work – a portrait of Spain's royal family was unveiled in 2014, 20 years after it was commissioned. And it's not the first time Lopez has tried to take on the iconic square in the centre of the Spanish capital. "Puerta del Sol is a very old idea of mine and this is my



third attempt," Lopez said. He first tried to depict the square more than 20 years ago. A second try coincided with construction work, which forced him again to abandon the painting. Now he has decided the time is right to resume the work he started in 2010. "I hope that this is the definitive one that I can finally complete and take to the limit of what I can do," he said. — Reuters



IN KENYA'S Maasai Mara National Reserve, the Toyota 4x4 Landcruiser of tour guide and driver Sylvester Mukenye glides silently past a herd of grazing elephants, then past a pride of lions lying in the grass.

The animals are completely unperturbed by the proximity of the vehicle because its diesel engine has been replaced by an electric one that eliminates the rumbling noise and, just as importantly, reduces the emission of diesel fumes.

"If you drive here silently, you will of course get much closer to animals, especially the elephants that we are next to right now, because there are no vibrations on the ground and there are no fumes that they get the smell from like in other cars," Mukenye said.

His vehicle was converted by Opibus, a Nairobi-based Kenyan-Swedish company founded in 2017. It is, for now, the only company in Kenya that converts off-road safari vehicles from diesel and petrol to electric power.

Off-road vehicles are a common sight in Maasai Mara, world-famous for the annual wildebeest migration but these are the first in the usually carbon-heavy business of safari tours to be entirely powered by electric batteries.

Wanjiru Kamau, an electrical engineer at Opibus, said the company had so far converted 10 vehicles used in Kenyan game parks, including three in the Maasai Mara.

As well as being more environmentally friendly than diesel engines, the electric motors cut operating costs by half, she added.

"In Kenya our fuel prices are



always rising... Why not save on that?" she told Reuters at the Opibus workshop, where assembled vehicles were in various stages of electrification.

Kamau said her company uses 35% locally made materials and aims eventually to use only local materials. — Reuters

ANIMAL PLANET

Bees' pleas: Habitat loss, pesticides killing pollinators



DESTRUCTION OF NATURE and the rampant use of pesticides are the main drivers behind a rapid worldwide loss of bees and other pollinator species, an international panel of experts reported Monday.

Shifts in land use to mono-crops, expanded grazing for livestock, and the widespread use of chemical fertilisers has also contributed significantly to their collapse, according to a global index of the causes and effects of pollinator decline.

For people everywhere, dwindling pollinator populations have potentially devastating consequences.

Bees, butterflies, wasps, beetles, bats, flies and hummingbirds that distribute pollen are vital for the reproduction of more than three-quarters of food crops and flowering plants, including coffee, rapeseed and most fruits.

"What happens to pollinators could have huge knock-on effects for humanity," said Lynn Dicks, a professor in Cambridge's Department of Zoology and lead author of a study in Nature Ecology & Evolution.

"These small creatures play central roles in the world's ecosystems, including many that humans and other animals rely on for nutrition," she added in a statement.

"If they go, we may be in serious trouble."

The world has seen a three-fold increase in pollinator-dependent food production — valued at nearly \$600 billion annually — over the last 50 years, according to a major UN report from 2016 to which Dicks contributed.

To get an up-to-date overview of pollinator status and the risks associated with their decline, Dicks worked with 20 scientists and indigenous representatives from around the world.

The causes and impacts of decline varied across regions.

'WE FEEL THEIR LOSS'

Mass die-offs due to disease and so-called colony collapse disorder in industrial beehives and other "managed pollinators" ranked as a high risk in North America, where they play a key role in apple and almond production.

In Africa, Asia-Pacific and Latin America — regions where poorer rural populations rely on wild-growing foods — the impact of pollinator decline on wild plants and fruits poses a serious risk.

Latin America was viewed as the region with the most to lose.

Insect-pollinated crops such as cashews, soybean, coffee and cocoa are essential to the region's food supply and international trade.

Indigenous populations also depend heavily on pollinated plants, with some pollinator species such as hummingbirds embedded in oral culture and history.

"This study highlights just how much we still don't know about pollinator decline and the impacts on human societies, particularly in parts of the developing world," said co-author Tom Breeze, Ecological Economics Research Fellow at the University of Reading.

In China and India — increasingly reliant on fruit and vegetable crops that need pollinators — the loss of natural sources means it must sometimes be done by hand.

"Pollinators are often the most immediate representatives of the natural world in our daily lives," said Dicks. "These are the creatures that captivate us early in life. We notice and feel their loss."

"We are in the midst of a species extinction crisis, but for many people that is intangible," she added. "Perhaps pollinators are the bellwether of mass extinction."

Another potential driver of pollinator decline that is likely to get worse is climate change, the study noted.

Some species of hummingbirds in Latin America, for example, can only collect nectar — and, in the process, pollen — in the shade during evermore frequent heatwaves, making it more difficult to feed themselves, according to one study. — AFP

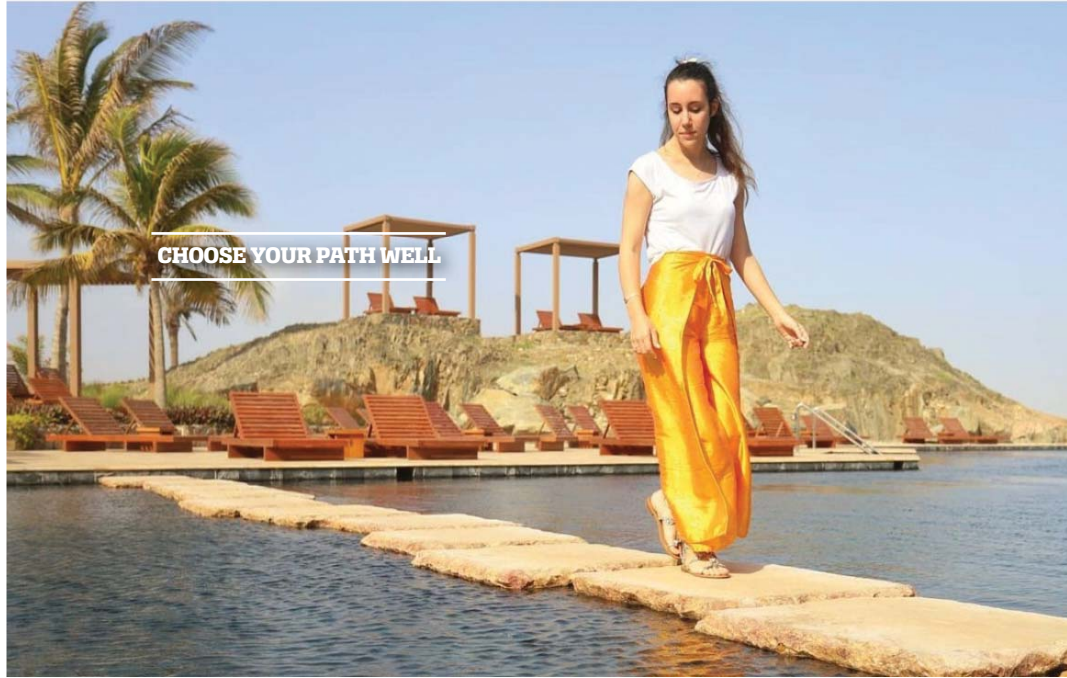


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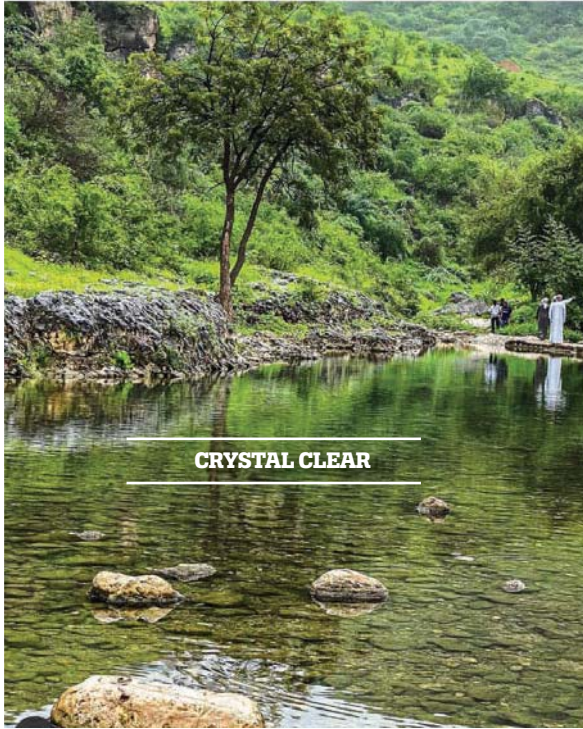
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AROUND THE WORLD

FASHION

Fast fashion spurs bleach-like pollution of Africa's rivers - report



GLOBAL FAST FASHION brands are helping drive pollution that has dyed African rivers blue or turned their waters as alkaline as bleach, according to a report published on Tuesday.

Water Witness International's (WWI) report featured the polluted rivers in Lesotho in southern Africa and Tanzania to highlight the risks posed as global brands increasingly source garments from contractors in Africa, attracted by cheap labour and tax incentives.

Global brands could force better practices, but so far their presence in Africa has done little to stem rife pollution, water hoarding by contracting factories or even ensure adequate water and sanitation for factory staff, Nick Hepworth, director of WWI and author of the report, said.

"The flip side is that (fast fashion) could be a force for change," he continued, but brands and investors needed to take the lead.

In Lesotho, researchers found a river visibly polluted with blue dye for denim jeans. Samples were taken from Tanzania's Msimbazi river in Dar es Salaam meanwhile tested a pH of 12 - the same as bleach - near a textiles factory, the report said, adding local communities use the Msimbazi for washing, irrigation and more.

It identified some 50 international brands that source or have sourced their clothes from African nations, including Inditex's Zara, ASOS and H&M, but didn't tie the pollution to any company's supply chain.

Zara did not provide a comment. ASOS and H&M confirmed they source from Africa but pointed to initiatives to ensure sustainability or address water risks.

Brands can and do make environmentally sustainable clothing, and consumer pressure was key to encouraging more, said Katrina Charles, an expert on water security and quality at the University of Oxford who has worked with governments in Africa and Asia.

The textiles sector offered opportunities for African nations, including growth and jobs, but these would not pay off if pollution management and adequate working conditions weren't ensured, she said.

"Making the textile industry a force for good in Africa is a very delicate balance," she said. — Reuters

COOK LIKE A CHEF

Tasty crispy fried prawns



Prawns are very easy to source in Oman. Coming in different sizes, these are always an amazing addition to any meal. When visiting Dhofar, don't forget to check out the freshest seafood especially by the waters of

Mirbat. Fishermen usually have an amazing catch of the day and are sold at an affordable price in some of the fish markets spread across the governorate. In today's Cook Like A Chef, Chef Alessandro is sharing

one of the best ways on how to enjoy prawns. While they can easily be prepared with a simple steaming process, these crispy fried prawns served at the Alila Hinu Bay in Dhofar is definitely worth checking out.

INGREDIENTS

24 pcs prawns
10gm salt
10gm pepper
50gm desiccated coconut
100gm all-purpose flour
3gm lime leaves
3pcs eggs
1pc lemon juice
300ml oil(fry)
75ml grapeseed oil
10gm fresh coriander
1pc fresh lime
30gm Thai rice noodles
50gm panko crumbs

METHOD OF PREPARATION:

Peel the prawns and make it a butterfly then marinate with salt, pepper, lime and chopped lime leaves keep them in the chiller to absorb the marinade.

Take a bowl add 2 eggs and 30 gm of flour, salt and pepper mix well with water, make a batter for coating

In another container add the remaining flour some salt and pepper to make a dust

Remove the shrimps from the chiller dust with seasoned flour, coat with egg batter then crumb with coconut and bread crumbs then fry in the hot oil and serve with coriander aioli on a bed of fried Thai rice noodles.

CORIANDER AIOLI METHOD:

In thermomixer or a blender add egg white, salt, pepper, lime juice, lime zest, fresh coriander blend then start to emulsify with grape seed oil.

ABOUT THE CHEF

Alessandro Sandrolini
Head Chef, Alila Hinu Bay



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

ENVIRONMENT

Nepal's first locally made electric motorbike woos petrol purists



AN EARLY ENTRANT in the petrol-to-electric race, Nepal has tens of thousands of electrified cars, buses and rickshaws on its roads but few motorcycles - the most popular form of transport in the Himalayan nation.

With the launch of its sleek e-motorbikes, startup Yatri Motorcycles believes it can convert Nepalis to electric vehicles that can clean up the country's toxic air, save money, reduce petrol imports and help to achieve its climate goals.

"We need to switch to electric vehicles," said Ashim Pandey, founder of Yatri, which means traveller.

"It is only a matter of time when battery technology surpasses the energy density hurdle to make internal combustion engines obsolete."

Across the world, manufacturers are competing to develop affordable, low-emission vehicles as a growing number of countries have announced plans to ban the sale of new fossil fuel-powered cars in a bid to combat global warming.

At risk from glacier melt and torrential monsoon rains, Nepal pledged in the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change that 20% of its vehicles would be electric by 2020, but this is currently 1%, according to the Climate Action Tracker website.

Nepal is a small emitter of carbon globally, with 40% of the country under forest cover and most of its electricity coming from hydropower. But emissions are rising, with a surge in petrol and diesel vehicle imports and fossil fuel consumption.

The government has set out ambitious plans to transition to e-vehicles through reduced taxes and customs duties on imports and the installation of more charging stations.

But implementation is slow, despite a pledge that e-vehicles will make up 90% of all private passenger vehicle sales by 2030.

The country currently has about 700 electric cars, 5,000 electric scooters, and 40,000 electric rickshaws, according to the Electric Vehicle Association of Nepal, a lobby group.

WORLD-CLASS

Yatri Motorcycles was set up in 2017 with the dream of designing, engineering and manufacturing world-class electric vehicles from the ground up in Nepal.

"We are looking into markets beyond the borders of Nepal," said Pandey. "We have to start exporting cutting-edge technology and capital goods and not be limited to handicrafts and boutique items," he said, referring to Nepal's traditional exports.

Pandey, who moved to The Netherlands to train as an aerospace engineer in 2010 and designed hydrogen-powered race cars when he was a student at the Delft University of Technology, has an ambitious 10-year plan.

He kicked off in 2019 with Project Zero, a top-end motorbike with a digital dashboard, in-built 4G connectivity, a keyless start, a range of 240km and a maximum speed of 140km/hour that recharges in two hours.

It easily outclasses most two-wheelers on the market, which are made in China and India and have a lower range and speed but costs almost 2,000,000 Nepalese rupees (\$16,797) - almost seven times that of a petrol motorbike.

In April, Yatri launched a more affordable model, Project One, for 500,000 rupees and received 50 orders within a week. — Reuters

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This water park is becoming Bahla's top attraction

By Azza al Hinai

A WATER PARK In a wilayat that is suffering from water scarcity in summer seems to be an impossible one to achieve, yet a young entrepreneur in Bahla was able to make it a reality by implementing innovative ideas and getting inspiration from modern techniques.

For Musab al Hinai, the owner of Al Naseem Park, it was the dream of his life.

"The water park you see now didn't happen as it is. It started from a very simple beginning," he shared.

"I love taking care of animals and I used to have plenty of them in my house. Then it came to my mind to start a zoo and this whole idea was tuned into a unique future investment. From being a small zoo, it became an educational recreational tourism project which opened in 2017," he added.

The recreational centre is located in Bilad Sait Village in Bahla, in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. It's passing through the main street that leads to the Wilayat of Al Hamra.

Musab believes that good planning results to a good outcome. The strategic location of the park makes it a pleasant stop for visitors going to Al Hamra. There are also other attractions within the area: Al Hoota Cave, Hasat Bin Salt, Misfat Al Abriyeen and Jabal Shams. If one is headed to Bahla, there's the renowned Bahla Fort, Sur Bahla, Jabreen Castle, the archaeological village of Saloot and Saloot Castle, Nizwa Fort and other touristic places in the neighbouring villages.

Project owners have used a total of 9,000 m2 of land which they then divided into three different sections.

One of those sections is dedicated to a zoo containing 70 species of animals from different countries of the world. Animals vary between pets and predators. It also includes rare animals.

"Providing a specialised staff to take care of animals, the Park received special attention from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq. His Majesty ordered to donate several rare wild animals from his own farm, including llamas and Indian deer. This reflects His Majesty's generosity and keenness to take care of everything that serves and develops the human being and the Omani environment," Musab shared.

The other section is the gaming arena which contains a range of recreational games including electric outdoor and electronic indoor areas for all age groups. The area has been provided with air conditioning and security and safety measures.

Al Hinai mentioned that the closure caused by the pandemic did not adversely affect his business. In fact, it allowed him to provide a unique and rare service in Oman, namely, the establishment of a water park, which is the first of its kind in Oman. The water park has been built in an area of 3,000 m2 of the total park. It was opened on June 17, 2021.

It is also a new recreational destination for the residents of Al Dakhiliyah Governorate and tourists that offer entertaining outdoor games and some of the best quality slides and swimming pools.

While the park is built in a usually dry area suffering from low water levels especially during the summer, Musab was able to create an artificial entertainment centre that adheres to international standards and transforming it to become a major attraction in the area.

As of today, the water park also caters to specialised schedules. For instance, Saturdays from 4 to 7 pm are for women and children below 10 only. The entire staff at the water park at that time will be women employees.

Typical of other water parks, visitors are required to wear swimming clothes only taking into consideration modest clothing when entering and exiting the park. The management also has a rule that monitoring the children is the parent's responsibility.

Under the current situation, the capacity of entry doesn't exceed 200 people, keeping true to the 50 per cent capacity requirement mandated by the Supreme Committee. Pre-bookings is also a must to enter the park.

Musab is proud to share that the water park is also manned by nearly all Omani well-trained staff.

Al Hinai shared that he also plans to bring the idea to Muscat setting a branch that will be enjoyable for the people. He is still resolving some matters regarding the commercial plots and other procedures. Globally, Musab aspires to launch the largest entertainment interface in the Arabian Gulf. It will have a gaming city, a water park, a snow village, and an integrated entertainment village.

