

Two Omani firms ink cloud services deal with Alibaba

Two Omani firms, Data Mount Company (Green Mountain Data Company) and International Emerging Company (ETCO), signed an agreement with Chinese group Alibaba in the field of cloud computing. The agreement, signed in cooperation with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, states that the two firms will manage, operate and market Alibaba cloud computing centre and services in the region. **DETAILS ON P17**



P12

DJOKOVIC SURVIVES MUSETTI SCARE



P14

KEEPING AN AUTHENTIC OMANI SPORT ALIVE



P20

CHINA'S IMPORTS GROW AT FASTEST PACE IN A DECADE



MUSCAT

CRUDE PRICES AT \$70.35 A BARREL

Oman oil price for August delivery reached \$70.35, comprising a decline by 3 cents from the price of last Friday, which was \$70.38. The average price of Oman oil for June delivery has stabilised at \$63.10, thus \$1.33 per barrel lower than May delivery. Meanwhile, global oil prices ran into profit-taking after Brent topped \$72 a barrel for the first time since 2019 last week as Opec+ supply discipline and recovering demand countered concerns about a patchy global Covid-19 vaccination rollout. Brent slipped 0.6 per cent to \$71.48 a barrel, while US crude eased 0.5 per cent to \$69.26.

LONDON

DECISION ON US-UK FLIGHTS EXPECTED

British and US airlines on Monday said they were hoping for a quick decision to restart transatlantic flights, citing vaccination campaign successes and the need to maintain economic ties. Leaders of the G7 wealthiest nations, including British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and US President Joe Biden, meet in Cornwall, southwest England, this week. At an online news conference, bosses at major airlines and London's Heathrow airport said the high-profile meeting was the right moment to announce the restart of flights. "The borders have been shut down since March 2020", said Shai Weiss, Chief Executive of Virgin Atlantic, referring to the start of the first coronavirus lockdown in Britain.

— AFP

INSIDE



SPACE NARROWING FOR IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL | P6



50 YEARS OF EMERGENCY, REVOLT AND DREAMS | P9

WHEN SHOULD WE GO FOR THE VACCINE?

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

A person who has tested positive for Covid-19 needs one dose after six weeks of infection and a person sceptical about the possibility of infection previously, but was not proven in the laboratory, needs two doses of the vaccine, and a person infected with Covid-19 after taking the first dose of the vaccine, must take the second dose after six weeks have passed since the date of infection.

This was clarified by Dr Zakariya al Balushi, Infectious Disease Consultant, Royal Hospital, who elaborated on cases in which people may doubt the necessity and timing of taking the vaccine.

"There is no need for any tests before taking the vaccine", Dr Al Balushi added.

About potential effects of taking the vaccine after recovering from the virus, Dr Al Balushi explained that there are no risks, as some countries are still adopting two-dose policy, even if there was a previous infection, especially the countries where the vaccine is available in large quantities, such as the United States.

Some other countries have adopted one dose policy after the infection. "Both are scientifically correct and proven by studies", he added.

SULTANATE REPORTS 1,216 NEW CASES AND 11 DEATHS



NO OBJECTION

The Ministry of Health has clarified that there is no objection to a breastfeeding woman from taking the vaccine. It is recommended not to stop breastfeeding if she took the vaccine. Besides, there are no issues for a woman who plans to become pregnant to take the vaccine. There is no need to have a gap between the vaccine and pregnancy. The Sultanate on Sunday started phase one of the mass vaccination with the second dose administered at different locations.

The Supreme Committee has urged all those from the target group to take the vaccine to protect themselves, their families and their community from this disease, explaining that the vaccine is the safest means to prevent it.

Meanwhile, the number of new cases continues to surge in the country. The Ministry of Health on Monday reported 1,216 new cases of Covid-19 and 11 deaths. The total number of cases registered in the Sultanate has reached 225,095, including 2,424 deaths. The total number of recoveries is 205,305, while the recovery rate is 91.2 per cent. One hundred and fourteen people were admitted to hospitals across the country, bringing the total number of inpatients to 966, including 297 in intensive care units.

National Museum restores Oman photographs album

MUSCAT: The National Museum finished restoring an album of photographs of Oman, Iraq and India that Louis Maguire presented, the United States Consul in Muscat, to Lt Colonel S B Miles, the British Political Agent in the Gulf, on September 6, 1885.

This project restored and preserved a photo album which contains images historically significant to Oman, including the second-oldest known photograph of Muscat, photos from inside the US Consulate at the time, and the oldest known photo of Matrah. Not only important to Oman, but these significant photos also illustrate the long, historical ties between Oman and the United States. The restoration of these critical shared memories between the two countries is one of only three projects in the Middle East in 2019 CE.

Furthermore, the ECA has awarded the National Museum with one of its coveted grants from the AFCP for 2019, from a diverse international and worthy applicant pool, the selection committee approved the project "Oman: Conservation of 19th-Century Photographs in the Collection of the National Museum of Oman".

DETAILS ON P2

Pakistan express trains collision kills at least 43

DHARKI: At least 43 people were killed and dozens injured on Monday when a packed Pakistani inter-city train ploughed into another express that had derailed just minutes earlier, officials said.

Several people were trapped for hours in the mangled wreckage left by the collision near Daharki, in a remote part of rural Sindh province, before rescue workers with specialist equipment could reach them.

Huge crowds from nearby villages gathered around the carnage of the overturned Pakistan Railways carriages, with twisted and shredded metal scattered across the ground, along with piles of luggage.

On Monday evening army and civil engineers led a mass effort to clear and repair the tracks, with one official saying they hoped the line would be open by midnight.

The double accident happened around 3.30 am when most of the 1,200 passengers aboard the two trains would have been dozing.

"We tumbled upon each other, but that was not so fatal", Akhtar Rajput, a passenger on the train that derailed, said. "Then another train hit us from nowhere, and that hit us harder. When I regained my senses, I saw passengers lying around me, some were trying to get out of the coach."

The Millat Express was heading from Karachi to Lala Musa when it derailed, its carriages strewn over the tracks as the Sir Syed Express from Rawalpindi arrived minutes later in the opposite direction, smashing into it. **SEE ALSO P7**



If cloud comes, khareef can't be far behind in Dhofar

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

Even though the hovering clouds have increased the humidity level in Salalah, the people here are welcoming it as a sign of the arrival of the khareef season and getting into the mood even though the Covid-19 is playing spoil sport over the festivities and businesses associated with them.

The first sign of the monsoon season is witnessed every year in Dhofar's southern district, Dhalkout.

The visitors to Dhalkout have started experiencing sporadic drizzling here and there, and as soon as they reach the place called Mukura, they have to be careful in driving further due to low visibility caused by fog from this point up to Dhalkout.

Dr Sandeep Ojha, who loves to explore the natural spots in Dhofar, experienced pleasant weather all through his drive from Mughsayl up to Dhalkout and drizzling off and on.

"Previous weekend, I decided to drive towards Dhalkout. I was



surprised to notice the difference in temperature between Salalah and some places on the way to Dhalkout. In Salalah the temperature was 28/26, and I noticed temperature up to 20 degrees at some places", said Dr Ojha.

The sun played hide-and-seek with the clouds that left people sweating due to the raised humidity level that went up to up to 86 per cent on Monday. The temperature in Salalah city shuffled between 30 and 28 degrees Celsius.

TURN TO P2

National Museum restores 1885 CE photo album

Photos illustrate long, historical ties between Oman and US



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 7

The National Museum recently finished restoring an album of photographs of Oman, Iraq and India that Louis Maguire presented, the United States Consul in Muscat, to Lit Colonel S B Miles, the British Political Agent in the Gulf, on 6 September 1885 CE.

This project restored and preserved a photo album that contains images historically significant to Oman, including the second-oldest known photograph of Muscat, photos from inside the US Consulate at the time, and the oldest known photo of Mattrah. Not only important to Oman, but these significant photos also

The album contains approximately 65 photographs of Oman, nearly all taken in and around Muscat, including the nearby town of Mattrah

illustrate the long, historical ties between Oman and the United States. The restoration of these critical shared memories between the two countries is one of only three projects in the Middle East in 2019 CE.

Furthermore, the ECA has awarded the National Museum with one of its coveted grants from the AFCP for 2019, from a diverse international and worthy applicant



pool, the selection committee approved the project “Oman: Conservation of 19th-Century Photographs in the Collection of the National Museum of Oman”. In this context, Leslie M Tsou, US Ambassador to the Sultanate, visited the National Museum and was greeted by Jamal bin Hassan al Moosawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, to view the album.

By working with the National Museum to support the preservation of Oman’s cultural heritage, the AFCP will help restore vitality and culturally defining historical artefacts to ensure their enjoyment and relevance, not only today but for generations to come.

It is worth noting that this

album is dated back to 1885 CE (1288- 1302 AH / 1871-85 CE) and consists of 88 pages and 93 albumen print. The album contains approximately 65 photographs of Oman, nearly all taken in and around Muscat, including the nearby town of Mattrah. Many of the pictures were attributed to Louis Maguire, with at least three photographs taken by S B Miles in 1885 CE. The album contains the earliest ever-known photographs of Muttrah, Al Rustaq Fort, Jabreen Castle from the town’s market, and Jabal Misht.

The album has a presentation inscription in ink on the first mount indicates and pencil captions on the mounts attributed to Miles.

Sultanate reports 3,500 deaths in four months

KHALID AL ADAWI
MUSCAT, JUNE 7

The number of deaths reported from the beginning of the year till the end of April stood at 3,541 deaths including 3,192 (1,877 males and 1,009 females). Deaths among residents during the same period was 349 (294 males and 55 females).

In April alone, 1,086 deaths were reported, including that of 981 Omanis (576 males and 405 females) and 105 residents (86 males and 19 females). March saw 877 deaths including 793 Omanis (471 males and 322 females) and 84 residents (72 males and 12



females). In February there were 741 deaths including 671 Omanis (389 males and 282 females) and

70 residents (60 males and 10 females). In January the number of deaths was 863 including 686 Omanis (425 males and 261

females) and 177 residents of whom 148 were males and 29 were females.

Last year, the Sultanate reported 10,496 including 8,576 (5,015 males and 3,561 females) and 1,920 residents of whom 1,623 were males and 297 were females.

A total of 23,912 live births were reported in the Sultanate in the first four months of the year including 22,318 Omanis (11,486 males and 10,832 females). Live births among the expat population was 1,594 (810 males and 562 females), according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Digital vaccine passport, next travel document

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

A new travel document in the form of a ‘vaccine passport’ may become handy for future travellers to explore the places and be safe even in the post-Covid era.

A vaccine passport is an application that runs on the mobile phone, where it stores Covid-19 related tests/ results. It includes details such as PCR tests, fully vaccinated status if both doses of vaccine taken. This info is digitised and converted into QR code for easy access and machine-readable capability so that travellers do not have issues and queuing up in lines at airports across the world.

Experts in the travel and tourism sector opine that having vaccinated against the coronavirus would be the prime deciding factor of your next travel plan; hence getting the two jabs in time is the need of the hour.

“Undoubtedly, the vaccine passports will help the travel and tourism industry in Oman along with the international travel sector to return to normalcy, however specialised reports referred that this might not be until 2024, a year later than predicted,” says Abeer al Balushi, Assistant Manager — Corporate Communications, Governance Risk Management and Compliance at Oman Air.

She further said that the national carrier is currently in talks with the IATA for a digital passport that will help travellers move more quickly in the age of coronavirus and after the pandemic.

“Vaccine passport does not replace identity booklet called passport issued by a government. On the other hand, they both play a distinct and specific role,” adds Sunil D’Souza, CEO, Travel City Group.

A passport is a person’s identity issued by the respective government of a country across the world. It allows people entry into a foreign



country provided they have valid visas.

“Original will always be original, and vaccine passport will be a supplement to aid one’s travel to another country,” representative of Air India adds.

As of now, both passport and vaccine passport play different roles. Yet critical for one to enter a foreign country during these challenging Covid-19 times.

“Vaccine passport is the next big thing to unlock business travel and most importantly leisure travel every country is adopting different strategy to inoculate their population and it is expected to cover the major part of the population by this year end,” adds Venkat, another travel expert.

The travel pass enables passengers to create a digital passport to verify their pre-travel test or vaccination meets the requirements of the destination. They will be able to share the test and vaccination certificates with authorities and airlines to facilitate travel. Furthermore, the new app will also enable travellers to manage all travel documentation digitally and seamlessly throughout the travel experience.

As previously announced, IATA and International Airlines have been working together to develop this solution. They will undertake a trial to demonstrate that this platform, combined with Covid-19 testing, can reopen international travel and replace quarantines. And in this regard, it is essentially required that Airlines and governments work together to reopen international travel and borders sooner.

If cloud comes, khareef can’t be far behind in Dhofar



FROM PAGE 1

The city remained cloudy most of the day.

“Thick clouds hovering over Salalah for the last two days has built up the humidity, and we were sure that these are the indications of rain. We were pleasantly surprised to see some raindrops on our cars early in the morning,” said Mohammed, a resident of Dahariz.

In search of early monsoon clouds Rajesh Pardeshi, another Salalah explorer, drove up to the Itin mountain area early in the morning. Hoping there would be cool weather over the mountain, he put on a light sweater. But to his disappointment, there was high humidity, and he had to throw his sweater in the car.



“I witnessed a sudden drop in temperature as soon as I started driving up. Due to clouds moving at a lower altitude, the humidity was very high... Greenery is gradually returning on the mountains. In coming days the visitors can see full greenery on the mountains and plains soon after the arrival of the monsoon,” he said.

As per the official calendar,

the khareef season starts on June 21 and continues until the end of August.

Khareef is the time when Salalah turns into lush greenery. Its hills are surrounded by white fog. Light rains drizzle to cool the air.

It is frequented by many visitors, especially from within Oman and the neighbouring GCC countries during the season.

Sultanate's efforts to resolve Yemeni crisis reviewed

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office on Monday Dr Ahmad Awad Mubarak, Minister for Foreign and Expatriates Affairs in the Republic of Yemen.

During the meeting, the two sides exchanged cordial conversations on march of fraternal relations binding the Sultanate and Yemen.

The meeting also reviewed fields of cooperation and means of promoting them to serve the joint interests of the two countries. It also touched on several matters of common interest, particularly the Sultanate's efforts to help resolve the Yemeni crisis by coordinating with all international parties concerned.

The meeting was attended by Dr Khalid Saleh, Ambassador of the Republic of Yemen to the Sultanate.



Islamic architectural designs of the mosque.

The guest also toured facilities of the mosque, such as the Institute of Islamic Sciences, the library and lectures hall.

VISIT TO NATIONAL MUSEUM

Dr Ahmad Awad Mubarak also visited the National Museum. The Yemeni guest and his delegation toured the halls of the National

Museum, which epitomise important aspects of the Omani cultural heritage.

They were briefed about the historic manuscripts in the museum. — ONA



MoCIIP discusses ways to develop local industries

MUSCAT: The national Committee for developing national industry and supporting Omani products held its first meeting on Monday under the chairmanship of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

The meeting was attended by representatives of the Tender Board, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), Royal Oman Police (ROP), Oman Investment Authority (OIA), Industrial Innovation Centre (IIC), Oman Industrialists Association as well as representatives of the private sector.

The committee targets to

support and develop the national industries. It also oversees the implementation of the Industrial Strategy 2040, and strives to develop manufacturing and keep up with technology and knowledge, enhance the industrial innovation culture and devise programmes and mechanisms to boost the contribution of the small and medium enterprises to the industrial sector.

The committee is entrusted with devising strategies, policies, measures and principles for applying the In-Country Value (ICV) strategy in the industrial sector.

Also among its purviews is the creation of new investment opportunities, laying down programmes and mechanisms to uplift the quality of the Omani products.

MoU signed for enabling national cadres in telecom, mail services



MUSCAT: The Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA) on Monday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Global Computers Services Company (GlobCom).

The MoU aims to create an online platform for attracting national competencies in different technological fields, as well as areas of telecom

and mailing services in order to supply the labour market with competent Omani job seekers.

The MoU was signed by Ahmed bin Hasan al Hadabi, TRA Acting Executive Manager — Strategy Planning Unit, and Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Numani, General Manager of GlobCom.

The Acting Executive

Manager of the TRA's Strategy Planning Unit pointed out that they are working with the operators and the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development to allocate more projects and work to the competent Omani graduates to enhance their capabilities and sharpen their skills through training programmes. — ONA

13.5% rise in fixed Internet subscriptions

MUSCAT: The Sultanate's total fixed Internet subscriptions increased by 13.5% to reach 514,512 at the end of April 2021, compared to the same period of 2020.

Fixed telephone lines rose by 0.8% to 593,802 at the end of April 2021, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Analogue fixed telephones comprised 292,768 subscribers whereas the number of fixed telephones connected to the Internet reached 244,953.

Digital network lines for integrated services declined by 4.8% to reach 47,971 subscriptions. The number of fixed wireless subscriptions went down by 16.8% to 1,309.

The total number of mobile subscriptions fell by 3.3% to 6,031,325 until the end of April 2021. Prepaid mobile connections fell by 9.3% to 4,915,485. Out of those, the number of subscribers in service operators stood at 3,904,632, and the number of subscribers in resellers stood at 1,010,853.

Fixed broadband Internet connections, which have more than 256 kilobytes speed, increased by 4.6% to reach 512,466 compared to the same period in the previous year.

The number of low-speed Internet connections, which have less than 256 kilobytes speed, increased by 1.1% to reach 2,046 subscriptions.

— ONA

Production and consumption of safe food stressed

MUSCAT: The Sultanate joined the rest of the world on Monday to mark the World Food Safety Day (WFSD) which is celebrated on June 7 each year.

The WFSD aims to draw attention and inspire action to help prevent, detect and manage foodborne risks, contributing to food security, human health, economic prosperity, agriculture, market access, tourism and sustainable development.

This year's theme, 'Safe food today for a healthy tomorrow', stresses that production and consumption of safe food has immediate and long-term benefits



for people, the planet and the economy. Recognising the systemic connections between the

health of people, animals, plants, the environment and the economy will help us meet the needs of the

future.

Haitham bin Khalafan al Akhzaami, Director-General of the

Food Quality and Safety Centre at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said that ensuring the safety and quality of food constitutes the principal objective in the national efforts for protecting public health and consumer safety.

In an interview with Oman News Agency (ONA), Al Akhzaami affirmed that it has become imperative to enhance national efforts in the food safety field through uplifting the inspection and monitoring system and ensuring the safety and quality of food in various stages of production, transportation,

storage and marketing inside the Sultanate and at the border outlets. This is in addition to conducting lab tests for food, water and scientific research on food and water.

The ministry's labs are playing an effective role in protecting public health and ensuring the safety and quality of food and water by conducting lab tests for food and water samples. Both imported and home-grown foods undergo testing in the ministry's labs, Al Akhzaami said, noting that these labs also conduct research and studies related to the safety of food products. — ONA

CONQUERING CORONAVIRUS

KABEER YOUSUF[@kabeeryousef](#)

Relief in Covid-19 restrictions does not mean that the pandemic is over. We have to live with the virus and don't let the guard down.

The freedom to move around with children below 12 and the opening of beaches and parks don't mean the number of cases has gone down or that it's safe to let safety measures go.

On the other hand, everyone must follow the preventive measures and take part in the national fight against the coronavirus.

"This is the time we need to be extra cautious. We will only conquer the pandemic if every citizen and resident take part in the fight. However, it is a matter of concern that people are not paying any heed to the precautionary measures that must be taken in the pandemic," says Dr Mahmoud al Rahbi, Head of Emergency at Al Nahdha Hospital.

Dr P Mohammed Ali said all our behaviour should not dampen the efforts of the authorities and we all should behave carefully. The restrictions are lifted, and it would make people feel at ease, but I would urge caution. The restrictions were imposed with a purpose and for people to behave very responsibly abiding by the Covid-19 protocol."

P Chandrasekar, Group General Manager of Jawad Sultan Group LLC, said we must follow all the health protocols and it should not be breached at all. We will have to face greater risk

and sacrifices if we don't follow the norms.

"We are still not out of the woods, and it is the collective will of the people, which should work in tandem with the government and overcome with pandemic decisively. We are all looking to get back to normal."

The Sultanate of Oman has been making enormous efforts on two major counts. It has ramped up the vaccination given the considerable challenges and at the same time took painstaking efforts to curb the spread by putting in restrictions on movements and on business which yield desired results.

"I'm also happy that many businesses have come back on track after a long closure, which is a positive sign. I hope the people maintain distance and take necessary precautions. Let's all fight this pandemic together," said Arun Edathil, a young sales executive in Salalah.

Ani Chiravakkath of Sheraton said, "It's parents'

responsibility to educate children about the pandemic and encourage them to maintain social distancing and wash hands. We still need to care for our children's mental health."

Aneeta Kurian, an executive, feels that a good thing that the disease's severity among children is less compared to adults. Most of the cases of Covid-19 in children are mild diseases like other viral infections.

"Therefore, even though the restrictions have been lifted now, parents should take complete measures to reduce or prevent the risk of infections."

"There is fear of the spread as much as relief of being able to take them out. It's a mixed feeling of caution and relief," Ajay Menon, a media person.

"I still will not take my children to a mall. Going out to a park or beach will be something that we might be looking out for once the curbs are lifted, but not to a mall," says Anu Joseph.

"This initiative by the government should encourage SMEs to move ahead with their plans on refocusing on further investments and expand their business avenues in the near future," Venkat, an aviation executive, said. "Taking children to the beach and parks without taking them to the shopping mall is good for their mental health," said Anu Mathew of Lama Polyclinic.

Bhaskar, a management executive, said that Oman's excellent family culture is laudable and we need to uphold the values.



This is the time we need to be extra cautious. We will only conquer the pandemic if every citizen and resident take part in the fight. However, it is a matter of concern that people are not paying any heed to the precautionary measures,"

**DR MAHMOUD
AL RAHBI**

Head of Emergency,
Al Nahdha Hospital



OFFICIALS DISCUSS GCC ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

MUSCAT: The Sultanate took part in the 41st meeting of the GCC Under-Secretaries for Environment via video-conferencing on Monday.

The Sultanate was represented in the meeting by Dr

Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority. The meeting discussed working papers presented by the member countries to be submitted to the GCC Ministers Responsible

for Environmental Affairs.

The 23rd meeting of the GCC ministers responsible for environmental affairs will be held on Tuesday via video-conferencing.

The meeting will discuss

several environmental issues concerning the GCC countries in terms of enhancing the joint environmental action in light of the global challenges facing the environment and climate. — ONA

Oceans critical to our existence



STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 7

Oceans are critical to the future of our planet as they regulate the climate and generate income and livelihoods for millions of people who depend on fisheries and aquaculture to make a living. They also generate 80 per cent of our oxygen. However, obstacles such as climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and over fishing are threatening their future and the precious resources they provide for food and livelihoods. A healthy and sustainable ocean is a necessity, not an aspiration.

In 2008, with the view to raising awareness on Oceans as an essential component of the Earth's ecosystem, and a source of biodiversity, food, and life, the United Nations designated June 8 as World Oceans Day. The goal of this celebration is to inform the public of the impact of human actions, develop a worldwide movement of citizens, as well as mobilise people around the

WORLD OCEANS DAY 2021

The Sultanate has identified fisheries and aquaculture as one of the key pillars of its vision 2040 to diversify its national economy. It is constantly looking for ways to improve the contribution of its seas to the Blue Economy

world on a project for the sustainable management of the world's oceans.

The theme selected by the United Nations for this year is "The Ocean: Life and Livelihoods", in line with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14, "Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources".

The World Oceans Day serves to inform people about the importance of protecting waterways, watersheds and ocean waters and habitat and to encourage citizens of the world to take action to preserve and protect the oceans. Furthermore, the theme is especially relevant ahead of the

celebration of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, scheduled from 2021 to 2030 with the view to strengthening international cooperation to develop scientific research and innovative technologies that can connect ocean science with the needs of society.

As a technical agency of the United Nations aiming at eliminating hunger and achieving food security in the world, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is working with countries and partners across the world to ensure oceans, seas and marine resources are used sustainably for the benefit of present and future generations.

FAO is responsible for binding and non-binding instruments negotiated with member countries that can help achieve SDG 14. FAO also provides countries with information on optimum levels of fishing, aquaculture and fair and secure access to living aquatic resources and markets.

The Sultanate of Oman, a coastal nation endowed with an extensive maritime history, has identified fisheries and aquaculture as one of the key pillars of its vision 2040 to diversify its national economy.

It is constantly looking for ways to improve the contribution of its seas to the Blue Economy which encompasses the Sultanate's vision for developing opportunities in Fisheries, Aquaculture, Logistics/ Shipping, Offshore Oil and Gas, Offshore Renewable Energy and Marine Mining.

One example of these efforts is the fish production in the Sultanate that rose by 38 per cent between 2019 and 2020 to reach nearly 800,000 metric tonnes.

Bait Al Zubair Musuem continues welcoming visitors

MUSCAT: Bait Al Zubair Museum continues receiving guests with precautionary measures and social distance consideration. The museum opens from Sunday to Thursday (9 am - 5 pm).

Bait Al Zubair Museum opened its doors for the first time in 1998 at Al Zubair's family house.

It contains the family gleanings for centuries.

The museum is formed by many buildings, Bait Al Bagh, Bait Al Oud, Bait Al Nahdha and Bait Al Dalaleel in addition to the garden and the

coffee shop and the gift shop.

The museum was the first institute that won Sultan Qaboos Prize for Architect and now it is one of the cognitive points for tourists and citizens.

Since 2005, the museum expanded to be a comprehensive institute that holds cultural events in various fields, arts, theatre, literature and others.

Also, the foundation promotes cultural initiatives and offers an environment that hosts and invests the innovative and cultural projects.



Workshop on Efqm Excellence Model, Kaizen Strategy

MUSCAT: The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates — Madayn, represented by Madayn Industrial Academy, organised a workshop on the European Foundation for Quality Management (Efqm) Excellence Model and the Japanese Kaizen Strategy.

The workshop comes as part of a series of workshops held along the lines of the agreement signed by Madayn with the European Business Centre for Training and Development to lay the groundwork for Madayn to obtain 'Committed to Excellence — C2E' certification.

Dr Khamis al Muniri, Director General of Madayn Industrial Academy, stated that the programme aims at disseminating continuous improvement concept and practices (Kaizen) and enhancing comprehensive quality and

application of Efqm standards in Madayn. "Achieving these will qualify Madayn to obtain European Foundation for Quality Management (Efqm) Certification through organising a series of workshops to spread awareness on Kaizen and Efqm within Madayn and gear Madayn up for the excellence award", Al Muniri said.

Delivered by Dr Munthir al Qaderi of the European Business Centre, a workshop was delivered to highlight several related topics including an introduction to the project, its components and the action plan.

The workshop also reviewed the theoretical background related to quality, development, change, continuous improvement, maintenance management and waste management at the work environment. — ONA

SALE OF USED EXCAVATOR / GANTRY CRANE

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

1. **Excavator Hitachi EX 1200 -5D**, 2010 Model, with 28 meter long reach (long boom + long Arm), Hours covered:26403 Hrs.
2. **Double Girder Gantry Crane 75 MT**, 2012 Model, Winch Capacity 75MT, Motor 98.3kw, Aux Hoist Motor 26.8kw span, Radio Remote Controlled.

The above machines are presently located at Duqm and will be offered for inspection during project working time. Interested parties may contact Mr.Lawrance, Mob:99416252, at Duqm site for inspection of the machines and submit closed quotation at their Al Khoud office (Tel: 24525345) on or before 20th June 2021.

Tribal fighting in South Darfur kills 36: media

KHARTOUM: Weekend clashes between Arab and non-Arab tribes in South Darfur have killed at least 36 people and left dozens wounded, according to state media and witnesses.

The fighting broke out on Saturday between the Arab al-Taisha and ethnic African Fallata tribes in the remote Um Dafuq area of South Darfur, witnesses said.

Official news agency SUNA said calm was restored by Monday.

“Military forces were deployed to the areas of clashes to resolve the conflict between Fallata and Taisha tribes which left 36 killed and 32 wounded,” SUNA reported late Sunday citing South Darfur officials.

It was not immediately clear what triggered the clashes but

similar fighting often erupts in the Darfur region over land and access to water.

“We heard the sound of heavy weapons throughout the fighting,” which broke out Saturday and continued on Sunday, Um Dafuq resident Eissa Omar said by telephone.

The vast Darfur region, located in western Sudan, has been the scene of similar bouts of violence in recent months.

In April, at least 132 people were killed in West Darfur fighting between members of the Massalit tribe and Arab communities, forcing authorities to impose a state of emergency.

In January, renewed clashes between Arab and non-Arab tribes in the West and South Darfur regions killed more than 250 people. — AFP



‘Space narrowing’ for temporary Iran N-agreement: IAEA chief

VIENNA: The UN nuclear watchdog’s head said on Monday it was “becoming increasingly difficult” to extend a temporary inspections arrangement with Iran, as Tehran and world powers try to salvage a nuclear deal.

In February, Tehran suspended some IAEA inspections, leading the agency to strike a temporary three-month deal allowing it to continue its activities despite the reduced level of access.

“I can see this space narrowing down,” International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director-General Rafael Grossi told journalists in Vienna at the beginning of the quarterly meeting of the IAEA’s board of governors.

In late May the ad hoc arrangement was extended until June 24, with Grossi describing the remaining time as “very short”.

Referring to negotiations underway in central Vienna between world powers and Tehran on the possible revival of the international 2015 deal on Iran’s nuclear programme, Grossi said he hoped that by “wider general agreement that’s being worked on downtown or by some other means, we are not going to see our... inspection capacities curtailed any more”.

“We cannot limit and continue to curtail the ability of the



IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi attends a news conference during a board of governors meeting at the IAEA headquarters in Vienna. — Reuters



Iran’s Governor to the IAEA Kazem Gharib Abadi attends the IAEA Board of Governors meeting at the agency’s headquarters in Vienna. — AFP

inspectors to inspect and at the same time pretend that there is trust,” he said.

He also referred to a long-running attempt by the IAEA to get clarity on several undeclared Iranian sites where nuclear activity may have taken place, mostly in the early 2000s.

In April the IAEA launched a new process of “technical discussions” with Iran in an effort to “break the impasse” over the sites.

But a report issued last week made clear that the IAEA’s queries had not been resolved.

Grossi said on Monday that his “expectations were not met” and that there had been no “concrete progress” on the issue, despite the Iranian authorities’ stated willingness to cooperate.

Diplomats are hoping to conclude the talks on reviving the 2015 deal before Iran’s presidential election on June 18

“Talk must lead to conclusions,” he said.

While stressing that the issue of the undeclared sites and the broader talks to revive the 2015 deal were not directly connected, Grossi underscored the importance of trust.

“This is where everything you do with any country is interconnected,” he said.

“For me, the road to trust goes through information, clarification,

inspections and full transparency,” he added.

Diplomats are hoping to conclude the talks on reviving the 2015 deal before Iran’s presidential election on June 18.

The deal has been disintegrating ever since former US President Donald Trump dramatically withdrew from it in 2018 and went on to re-impose swingeing sanctions on Iran.

In retaliation Iran has been disregarding limits laid down in the deal on its nuclear activities.

Grossi reiterated on Monday that the situation in Iran was “serious”. “We have a country that has a very developed and ambitious nuclear programme which is enriching at very high levels... very close to weapons-grade,” he said. — AFP

Iraq’s last gas bottle delivery crooner dreams of stardom

BAGHDAD: In the Karrada district of Iraq’s capital, residents awake to a gas bottle deliveryman’s dulcet tones — once a country-wide tradition, but now a solo act. “My heart rediscovers love, as if it learnt nothing from past suffering,” croons Mountazar Abbas, in homage to famous Iraqi singer Yass Khodr.

The 22-year-old is the last gas deliveryman in Baghdad to announce the arrival of his cylinder-laden rickshaw by singing.

In doing so, he brings smiles to customers’ faces.

“When people recognise my voice, they open the door of their home and shout out to me,” Abbas said. “Others call me on the phone — but they still ask me to sing.” Carrying on the trade of his father, Abbas has traversed the streets and alleys of this shopping district in the heart of Baghdad since 2007.

Ahmad Ali, a 30-year-old grocer, appreciates the tradition of the

Crooner Abbas dreams of becoming a second Hatem al Iraqi, an Iraqi singer-songwriter who now lives in Dubai

singing gas deliveryman. “There were many in the past, but it’s over,” he lamented.

Deliverymen nowadays play “pre-recorded music to announce their arrival”, Ali explained. Many broadcast songs by famous artists through loudspeakers. “Frankly, it’s annoying,” said Ali. So “I buy my supplies from (Abbas)... who has a nice voice,” he added with a smile. The often melancholy choices of deliverymen who opt for pre-recorded songs sometimes triggers online ridicule.

“Why do they then want to subject us to sad tunes when they deliver our gas?” asked a mocking



Deliveryman Mountazar Abbas announces the arrival of his cylinder-laden rickshaw by singing in the Karrada district of Iraq’s capital Baghdad. — AFP

Mukhtar Taleb.

In the past, there were many singing deliverymen, recalls 55-year-old Kamal, who lives in the Al Jadida district of the capital.

“I used to tell them that they had a beautiful voice and I even encouraged several of them to take part in competitions on the radio.”

Under Saddam Hussein, who was deposed in the 2003 US-led invasion, a panel on Iraqi TV and radio would assess singing talents.

Comprised of musicians, art critics and poets, the panel’s choice would go on to record a song. It was a launchpad for many musical careers.

After the invasion, which was followed by bouts of sectarian violence, the panel disappeared.

For a period from 2005 to 2007, fighters controlling parts of Baghdad banned singing and orchestrated crackdowns — some musicians were killed; others saw their instruments destroyed.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

TRIPOLI

Blast kills 2 at southern Libya checkpoint

A blast struck a checkpoint in the southern Libyan city of Sebha on Sunday, killing at least two people including a senior police officer, local police, city officials and medics said. A security source in Sebha said the blast was caused by a bomber who detonated a car bomb. IS claimed responsibility for the attack, saying one of its militants stormed the checkpoint using an explosive-laden car.

Sebha is in the deep south of Libya, about 130 kilometres from Taraghin, where IS carried out a



bomb attack last year that caused no casualties. Libya has suffered a decade of chaos and violence since a 2011 Nato-backed uprising ousted the then head of state Muammar Gaddafi, but its two main warring sides this year consented to a new government.

ANKARA

Top Kurdish official killed in Turkish operation

A senior official from Turkey’s outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) was killed in a Turkish intelligence operation in Iraq, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said. Erdogan accuses the PKK of using the mountainous area in Iraq’s north as a springboard for its insurgency against the Turkish state.

The Turkish president said Selman Bozkir, also known as Doctor Huseyin, was the PKK chief in Makhmur, a Kurdish



refugee camp in northern Iraq. “We will not allow the gruesome separatist organisation to use Makhmur as an incubator for terrorism,” Erdogan said on Twitter. “We will continue to exterminate terrorism at its source,” he added. — AFP

PARIS

France probes Lebanese central bank chief’s wealth

France has opened a probe into the personal wealth of Riad Salameh (pictured), central bank chief in crisis-hit Lebanon, sources said. Paris financial prosecutors have opened a preliminary probe into criminal association and money laundering by Salameh, a source close to the investigation and a judicial source said, following a similar move by Switzerland.

Its findings could shed light onto the origins of the 70-year-old former Merrill Lynch



banker’s wealth. In post since 1993 and once hailed by political and business leaders, Salameh has been repeatedly accused by the government of caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab of being responsible for the collapse of the Lebanese pound. — AFP

In brief

MANILA



PHILIPPINES TO OPEN VACCINATIONS TO INCLUDE MORE WORKERS

The Philippines will open up its vaccination drive this week to include around 35 million people working outside their homes, such as public transport staff, in a bid to help curb Covid-19 transmission and to open up the economy, officials said.

The next phase in the rollout that started in March comes after vaccines were initially targeted at healthcare workers, senior citizens and people with existing health conditions. Presidential spokesman Harry Roque said those eligible to join the new phase, which includes workers in the informal sector, will be able to register from Wednesday, with the country expecting more vaccines to arrive in the second half.

NAYPYIDAW



TRIAL OF SUU KYI TO BEGIN NEXT WEEK

The trial of ousted Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi will begin next week, her lawyer told AFP on Monday, with the Nobel laureate facing an eclectic raft of charges, from possessing unlicensed walkie-talkies to flouting coronavirus restrictions during last year's election campaign. Myanmar has been in uproar since Suu Kyi was ousted in a February 1 coup, with near-daily protests and a nationwide civil disobedience movement.

Almost 850 people have been killed by the military, according to a local monitoring group. The junta has hit Suu Kyi, 75, with a string of criminal charges. The most serious alleges that she violated the country's colonial-era Official Secrets Act.

COLOMBO



HEAVY RAIN, FLOODS KILL AT LEAST 17 IN SRI LANKA

Heavy rain has lashed Sri Lanka triggering floods and landslides that have killed at least 17 people and forced tens of thousands from their homes, officials said. After days of rain, rivers on the island nation's southern and western plains overflowed on the weekend, inundating low-lying areas and forcing thousands into relief centres.

"Water levels are receding but landslide warnings are still in place in 10 districts," Pradeep Kodippili, assistant director of the National Disaster Management Centre, said. More than 270,000 people have been affected and about 100,000 buildings lost power, he added.



Security personnel and onlookers stand at the site of a train accident in Daharki area of the northern Sindh province. — AFP

40 killed as express trains collide in Pakistan

DAHARKI, Pakistan: At least 40 people were killed and dozens injured on Monday when a packed Pakistani inter-city train ploughed into another express that had derailed just minutes earlier, officials said.

Several people were still trapped in the mangled wreckage near Daharki, in a remote part of rural Sindh province, which took rescue workers with specialist equipment hours to reach.

The double accident happened around 3.30 am when most of the 1,200 passengers aboard the two trains would have been dozing.

"We tumbled upon each other, but that was not so fatal," Akhtar Rajput, a passenger on the train that derailed, said.

"Then another train hit us from

nowhere, and that hit us harder. When I regained my senses, I saw passengers lying around me, some were trying to get out of the coach."

The Millat Express was heading from Karachi to Sargodha when it derailed, spilling carriages onto the track carrying the Sir Syed Express from Rawalpindi in the opposite direction. Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry said the incidents were just minutes apart.

"I was disoriented and trying to figure out what happened to us when the other train hit," Shahid, another passenger, said.

Senior Daharki police officer Umar Tufail said 40 people were killed and dozens injured.

"One coach is under the engine, and we can see three bodies trapped inside," he said. "Two

Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid says the track where the accident occurred was built in the 1880s and described it as 'a shambles'

other bodies have been reported elsewhere too, so we fear that the death toll will rise," Tufail added.

A clip aired on a local channel showed medics giving an intravenous drip to a conscious passenger whose lower torso was trapped between crushed carriage benches.

Local farmers and villagers were the first at the site, with huge crowds gathering around the carnage of several overturned

Pakistan Railways carriages — some clambering on top in an attempt to reach survivors.

The dead were laid out in rows on train seat benches and covered in traditional scarves.

The accident happened on a raised section of track surrounded by lush farmlands.

Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid, a former railways minister, said the track where the accident occurred was built in the 1880s and described it as "a shambles".

A senior police official said he had already warned authorities about the "dangerous condition" of the tracks and carriages.

The Pakistan army and paramilitary rangers from nearby bases were at the site to help.

Prime Minister Imran Khan

said he was "shocked" by the accident and promised a full inquiry.

Gul Mohammad, who works with the Edhi Foundation ambulance service which was helping move dead bodies away from the site, said communication problems were hindering the coordination of the rescue efforts.

"I am talking to you as I stand on the rooftop of my ambulance for better signal," he said.

Rail accidents are common in Pakistan, which inherited thousands of kilometres of track and trains from former colonial power Britain.

But the network has seen decades of decline due to corruption, mismanagement and lack of investment. — AFP

India re-opens major cities for business



A staff member wearing protective gear attends a customer after personal grooming services were allowed to resume at a hair salon in Mumbai. — AFP

NEW DELHI: Key Indian cities re-opened for business on Monday, with long queues for buses in the financial hub of Mumbai while traffic returned to the roads of New Delhi after a devastating second wave of coronavirus that killed hundreds of thousands.

The 100,636 new infections of the past 24 hours were the lowest in the world's second most populous nation since April 6, and well off last month's peaks of more than 400,000, allowing authorities to re-open parts of the economy.

"We have to save ourselves from infection but also bring the economy back on track," Delhi's Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Twitter.

He ordered half the capital's shops to open on odd and even numbered days of the month respectively, in a bid to limit crowds, but allowed offices and the Delhi underground rail network to run at 50 per cent of capacity.

But some curbs were retained, such as the ban on dining in restaurants and the use of theatres and gyms in a city still slowly recovering from a surge in the months of April and May that overwhelmed hospitals.

They ran short of beds and medical oxygen, and people died in hospital parking lots and homes, while crematoriums and morgues struggled to cope with an incessant flow of corpses.

— Reuters

Afghan schoolgirl determine to return to school after blast

KABUL: Teenager Fatima Noori and her fellow pupils hug and pray as they gather in their Kabul classroom, just weeks after bombs exploded right outside the school gates, killing scores of their classmates.

The Sayed Ul Shuhada High School in the west of the city has remained closed since the May 8 bombings, but a local NGO and the Ministry of Public Health have been holding psychotherapy classes there for girls to help with any trauma.

"When I first entered the school (after the blast) to attend the psychotherapy class, I was very scared and worried that the same incident might happen again," 15-year-old Fatima said last month. "I even fainted near the school gate."

But Fatima said her resolve had grown since then and she was determined to return to school, even with the potential threat of another explosion.

"I want to come back to school even more strongly than before and continue my studies," she said. "I want to continue the path of those who were martyred."

Girls and boys at the high school study in three shifts. The



Fatima Noori hugs her friend as she arrives to attend psychotherapy class in Kabul. — Reuters

I want to come back to school even more strongly than before and continue my studies. I want to continue the path of those who were martyred

FATIMA NOORI

Teenage student

May 8 attack targeted the second shift, which is for female students, Najiba Arian, spokeswoman for the Ministry of Education, said.

Fatima was in the school corridor getting ready to go home when the first bomb exploded outside the school gate. Two more bombs detonated as people rushed to escape. At least 80 people were killed and 160 injured, most of them schoolgirls.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack and the Taliban denied responsibility. But the minority Hazara neighbourhood where the school is located has repeatedly been targeted by militants. The United States and many other Western nations have touted girls' education as one of the key successes of years of foreign presence in Afghanistan. — Reuters

Spain allows vaccinated travellers

MALAGA: Hoards of beaming tourists were flying into the sun-soaked resort of Malaga on Monday after Spain opened its borders to all vaccinated travellers from all over the world.

“We’re thrilled, delighted. We love Spain, the sun, the food and everything about it,” said Irish holidaymaker Gillian Ford, who flew in from rainy Dublin after being fully vaccinated.

“You only live once so you need to get out and enjoy,” she said before heading off to the beaches of Marbella with her husband Edward.

In throwing open its borders, Spain is hoping the influx of visitors will revitalise its all-important tourism sector that has been battered by the pandemic.

With vaccination rates rising across Europe, many are hoping it will be a busy summer for tourism, and by mid-morning, there were a steady flow of arrivals at Malaga airport in the southern Andalucia region, among them German, Irish and Belgian tourists.

At least 20 international flights landed in the morning, with the arrivals delighted to finally be able to hit the beach after more than a year of lockdown.

“I haven’t left Belgium for a year,” says 73-year-old Rose Huo, a Belgian national who came to visit her sister who lives in southern Spain. “It’s always bad weather in Belgium, it’s always raining but here it’s always sunny.. We’ll still have to be very careful but it’s a start!”

Under the new rules, anyone who has completed their vaccinations at least 14 days before



Tourists wearing protective face masks walk with their luggage as they arrive at Malaga-Costa del Sol Airport, in Malaga, Spain, on Monday. – Reuters

travel is allowed into Spain.

Europeans who haven’t yet been vaccinated, who could already enter Spain with a negative PCR test taken within 72 hours, can now come with a cheaper antigen test taken 48 hours prior to arrival.

Under cloudless blue skies on Marbella beach, 20-year-old Irish student Alex Walsh, who took a PCR test before flying, said he felt safe to travel given the number of people being vaccinated.

“I couldn’t wait to get here, I’m just very relieved and happy,” he

told AFP, saying he was “sick of being in Ireland” and had flown in from Dublin with a group of friends.

Heavily-dependent on tourism, Spain saw its economy contract by a sharp 10.8 per cent in 2020, one of the worst performers in the eurozone, with its key tourism sector battered by the pandemic travel restrictions.

Spain also opened its ports to international cruise ships on Monday, ending a ban first put in place in March 2020 at the start of the pandemic.

But there are still clouds on the horizon with the UK keeping Spain off its ‘green list’ of safe countries, meaning any Briton holidaying in Spain will have to quarantine and take expensive PCR tests on their return home, putting many people off. The British normally make up the largest contingent of tourists to Spain — in 2019 over one-fifth of Spain’s 83.5 million arrivals were from the United Kingdom.

The decision to keep Spain on Britain’s amber list was “disappointing”, Health Minister Carolina Darias said.

Bezos to take first Blue Origin flight into space

WASHINGTON: Amazon founder Jeff Bezos announced Monday he will fly into space next month on the first human flight launched by his Blue Origin rocket firm.

“Ever since I was five years old, I’ve dreamed of travelling to space. On July 20th, I will take that journey with my brother,” Bezos said on his Instagram account.

Blue Origin said Bezos and his brother Mark will travel on the first crewed flight of the company’s New Shepard capsule.

The company is auctioning off the third spot, and that bidding is already at \$2.8 million with nearly 6,000 participants from 143 countries.

The trip will last a total of 10 minutes, four of which passengers will spend above the Karman line that marks the recognised boundary between Earth’s atmosphere and space.

The reusable suborbital rocket system was named after Alan Shepard, the first American in space 60 years ago.

The proceeds from the auction will go to Blue Origin’s foundation, Club for the Future, which aims to inspire future generations to pursue careers in STEM.

After lift-off, the capsule separates from its booster, then spends four minutes at an altitude exceeding 60 miles (100 kilometres), during which time those on board experience weightlessness and can observe the curvature of Earth from space.

The booster lands autonomously on a pad two miles from the launch site, and the capsule floats back to the surface with three large parachutes that slow it down to about a mile an hour when it lands. — Agencies



Jeff Bezos addresses the media about the New Shepard rocket booster and Crew Capsule mockup at the 33rd Space Symposium in Colorado Springs, Colorado. – Reuters file photo

Airline bosses call on UK and US to lift travel curbs

LONDON: The bosses of all airlines flying passenger services between Britain and the United States called on Monday for the countries’ governments to relax COVID-19 restrictions to reopen travel routes between the two countries.

After more than a year of restrictions, the CEOs of American Airlines, IAG unit British Airways, Delta Air Lines, United Airlines and JetBlue Airways Corp said high vaccination rates in both countries meant travel could restart safely.

The push for reopening trans-Atlantic routes on Monday comes ahead

of meetings between US President Joe Biden and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson at the G7 meeting of advanced economies later this week in Cornwall, southwest England, this week.

The pair must use those meetings to agree to restart travel, British Airways chief executive Sean Doyle said in a statement ahead of an online press conference.

“We urgently need them to look to the science and base their judgements on a proper risk analysis, allowing us all to benefit from the protection offered by our successful vaccine rollouts,” Doyle said.

MH17 crash trial seeks ‘clarity’ for relatives

BADHOEVEDORP: Dutch judges said Monday they wanted relatives of victims to finally have “clarity” about the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 over Ukraine as the trial of four suspects entered a key phase.

Some relatives were in court for the start of a week in which judges will at last examine evidence against the three Russians and one Ukrainian, who are on trial in absentia over the July 2014 disaster.

The trial formally began in March 2020 but has until now dealt with legal arguments, mainly about the admissibility of evidence in the crash in which all 298 passengers and crew on the Boeing 777 were killed.

“Up until today no one has come forward and said they are even partially responsible for the



Lawyers attend the MH17 trial of three Russians and a Ukrainian as it enters a critical next stage, in the Schiphol Judicial Complex, Badhoevedorp on Monday. – Reuters

crash of MH17,” presiding judge Hendrik Steenhuis told the court.

Steenhuis said it was crucial for the evidence to be heard in open court despite the absence of Russian nationals Oleg Pulatov,

Igor Girkin and Sergei Dubinsky, and Ukrainian citizen Leonid Kharchenko.

Only Pulatov has legal representation.

“The hearing being public is

important to society in general, and to the relatives particularly, that there will be clarity about the result of the investigation after years of investigation,” the judge said.

Judges said the court will this week look at evidence about three key questions: whether the Boeing 777 was shot down by a Russian-made missile; the location the missile was fired from, and the role of the four suspects in the crash.

The idea that the plane had been downed by a BUK surface-to-air missile operated by pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine was the “main scenario”, Steenhuis added, but they would also look at theories including that a plane had shot down MH17. The court would be highlighting key parts of the evidence and not going over every part in court, he warned. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BAMAKO

Mali coup leader interim president

Assimi Goita, the Malian colonel who has overthrown two presidents in the past nine months, said he would oversee a transition toward democratic elections as he was sworn in as interim president on Monday.

Goita, a 38-year-old special forces commander, had already been declared president by the constitutional court last month after ousting Bah Ndaw, but was formally sworn in on Monday during a ceremony in the capital Bamako.



He is under pressure from regional and international powers to ensure elections go ahead next February as scheduled, who worry the political upheaval could jeopardise gains made against Islamist insurgents based in the country’s desert north.

LIMA

Fujimori leads in tight Peru vote

Right-wing populist Keiko Fujimori held a narrow lead Monday in Peru’s presidential election, but the crisis-hit nation’s race was too close to call as votes were still being tabulated from countryside bastions of support for radical leftist Pedro Castillo.

Fujimori had 50.27 per cent of ballots to Castillo’s 49.7 per cent, according to partial results from Peru’s electoral body, with about 90 per cent of polling stations counted after voting on Sunday in a country battered by years of



political turbulence.

Whoever wins will take leadership of a nation in crisis, suffering from recession and with the worst coronavirus fatality rate in the world after recording more than 184,000 deaths among its 33 million population.

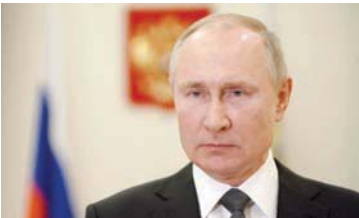
MOSCOW

Russia exits Open Skies treaty

President Vladimir Putin has signed a law withdrawing Russia from the Open Skies treaty, an arms control pact with the United States that permitted unarmed surveillance flights over military facilities in both countries.

The law went into effect upon publication by the Kremlin on Monday.

The Kremlin leader himself had ordered the withdrawal from Open Skies. The military observation flights were seen as key to building confidence



between Russia and the West after the Cold War. The decision to abandon the pact was mutual. The administration of former US President Donald Trump announced a year ago that the US would withdraw from Open Skies.

A world of smartness...

Covid-19 has been intriguing because it seems it is almost smart. It seemed to know the age groups and locations and when one thinks that they have understood the virus it comes up with a variant in different parts of the world and thanks to the scientific evolution, experts are able to keep up with it.

People who were hesitant about taking vaccines are now keen on taking them bewildered with the number of cases and treatment cost.

Well, it is the era of the 'Smart'. We have to rewire our thinking — it is not about working hard anymore as we all know it is about working smart. It is not about putting in the hours instead it is about how efficient one can be. It is about gaining knowledge but also advance in emotional intelligence.

It is time we stopped putting down people who are sensitive because just like people who have the talent but are not able to monetise it because of the lack of skills, the sensitive people too just need to move their energy towards enhancing their natural characteristics to a special trait which is in needed at most today — emotional intelligence.

For instance, a friend who has recovered from Covid-19 says that the most difficult part is post covid. According to him, while at the hospital there is the medical team to support it when you are in the normal surroundings the reality



Lakshmi Kothaneth
lakshmiobserver@gmail.com

PEOPLE WHO
WERE HESITANT
ABOUT VACCINES
ARE NOW KEEN
ON TAKING THEM
BEWILDERED
WITH THE
NUMBER OF
CASES AND
TREATMENT
COST

hits. According to him it is not only traumatic but a dramatic turn in life. Here he is talking about other complications that might rise due to covid at the same time in recuperation and changes in lifestyle one has to go through to come back to normalcy. No one should take it lightly, he says.

Yet on the other side there is another person mourning losing a childhood friend to covid.

What the pandemic has taught us is to accept the unpredictability of life. While the rush for the vaccine has been building up stress, the best step to take is to continue with Covid-19 protocol — some of them being avoiding gatherings, maintaining distance, wearing facial masks and washing hands regularly.

At times it makes you wonder if it is better to work in the wilderness. Dr Eric Hopkins has been doing that in a way. For two years he has been conducting his research on western Al Hajar Mountains studying sideroxylon mascatense because Oman has two types. The fruits of which are often sold on the roadside when we visit mountainous areas of Oman. The trees have always been there but the fruits known for antioxidants and other benefits could be what we need today. Now is the time again to think of smart methods to utilise these underutilised wild trees and find ways to cultivate

them. They are native plants and might just need a little assistance with irrigation probably but could benefit farmers and consumers if they are able to reach commercial markets.

The world is today celebrating Ocean Day with the theme 'Oceans: Life and livelihood' interestingly because one in 10 people in the world depends on fisheries and aquaculture for their livelihoods. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization small-scale fisheries contribute about 50 per cent of global fish catches and employ more than 90 per cent of people working in fisheries, around 97 per cent of them live in developing countries. Another factor is the industry has been the cause of empowerment as well, especially for women — about 50 per cent of all people who fish, farm, harvest, process and trade fish are women.

Oceans have always caught our imagination; it has inspired poets and has resulted in folk stories woven with imagination and realism. Sindbad the sailor crossed seas and trade routes were established by explorers even before the water boundaries were measured out.

And if we were to make the whole ocean experience sustainable then we would have to make it smart too. And how would we ensure that? Adapt sustainable measures to ensure continuity.

THREAT OF EMISSIONS

Climate risks threaten more conflicts

LAURIE GOERING

New global rules are urgently needed to tackle climate-driven migration and regulate emerging "geoengineering" technologies that could potentially be used to deal with runaway warming, military and security officials said on Monday.

Without coordinated policies on both issues, the world "risks more contestation and conflict without any mechanism for addressing that at the international level", said Erin Sikorsky, Deputy Director of the Washington-based Center for Climate and Security.

So-called "solar geoengineering" techniques, in which particles could be sprayed into the planet's stratosphere to deflect more sunlight away from a heating Earth, are of particular concern, she said.

"When we ask security professionals what they're worried about, this issue is coming up more and more", she said by phone. "The concern is the science is moving ahead of the rules of the road."

In a report released on Monday, experts from the International Military Council on Climate and Security (IMCCS), called for swifter action to curb planet-heating emissions and

greater efforts to deal with the consequences of climate change.

When we ask security professionals what they're worried about, this issue is coming up more and more. The concern is the science is moving ahead of the rules of the road

"The increasing pace and intensity of climate hazards will strain military and security services around the world as they are called on to respond to climate-driven crises", they warned.

Military forces' own infrastructure is increasingly at risk from climate impacts such as rising sea levels

and worsening storms, they said.

From a record drought in the US West to harsher hurricanes and cyclones around the world and surging Central American migration linked to storms and failed crops, climate impacts are already presenting security risks, they said. "Climate change is no longer a 'future' risk that will strike decades from now. Warming temperatures and climate impacts are already actively shaping the security landscape for all countries", said Kate Guy, Deputy Director of the IMCCS.

The experts said military forces around the world now agree that climate change is a security risk, but that steps to address the issue through changes to development strategy, diplomacy and international defence accords were only starting to emerge.

"The actual number of implemented measures is small", said Sherri Goodman, former US deputy under-secretary of defence and the IMCCS's secretary-general, in a statement.

"The transition from concepts of climate security to implementation is critical and urgently needed", she added.

Analysts said they hoped that Nato countries meeting on June 14 might agree for the first time to push ahead with a climate programme aimed at addressing some of the issues.

With US President Joe Biden pushing for climate action, "it's time to seize the initiative and not miss this moment", Sikorsky said.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

HUMANITARIAN WORK

Doctors Without Borders — 50 years of emergency and dreams

PHILIPPE ALFROY

It grew out of the ideals of a group of newly qualified French doctors who wanted to be on the ground helping those most in need anywhere in the world.

For 50 years, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) has brought medical care to the victims of earthquakes, famines, epidemics, conflicts and other disasters.

Today, from helping those displaced by Yemen's civil war, to fighting the Ebola virus in Africa and saving migrants in the Mediterranean, the organisation has about 100 operations in nearly 75 countries.

But its evolution from being the dream of a dedicated few with little or no resources, to becoming globally recognised for its humanitarian work — winning a Nobel Peace Prize along the way — has not been without controversy or acrimony.

"From a dream, we created an epic story", Xavier Emmanuelli, 83, a co-founder of MSF, said proudly.

"We wanted to go wherever people are suffering. Today that may seem trite, at the time it was revolutionary", said another of its founders, Bernard Kouchner. The dream, however, began from a nightmare.

In 1968, the Biafra war was raging between secessionists in southeastern Nigeria and government troops.

In Paris, where in May that year students and unions took to the streets in revolt, several doctors just out of university responded to an appeal by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Arriving in Nigeria,



In this file photo taken on December 10, 1999 Marie-Eve Raguenaud poses after receiving the medal for the Nobel Peace Prize for Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF, Doctors Without Borders). — AFP

FOR 50 YEARS, MSF HAS BROUGHT MEDICAL CARE TO THE VICTIMS OF EARTHQUAKES, FAMINES, EPIDEMICS, CONFLICTS AND OTHER DISASTERS

they were to witness the horror and chaos for themselves.

"The children were dying en masse because the army was blocking all supplies. It was clear to us young doctors that speaking out against this situation was our duty as medics."

Flying in the face of the ICRC's policy of silence, the doctors decided to expose the realities of the Biafra conflict through the media. In

providing care — but also bearing witness — the move gave rise to the modern concept of humanitarian aid.

MSF was founded in December 1971, its name chosen during an evening of smoking and drinking, Emmanuelli recalled. The early days were difficult. Without funding, the nascent organisation effectively served as a source of doctors for hire by other NGOs. — AFP

HEAD OFFICE

Tel: 24649444, 24649450,
24649451, 24604563,
24699437
Fax: 24699643

SALALAH OFFICE

Tel: 23292633
Fax: 23293909

NIZWA OFFICE

Tel: 25411099
P.O. Box 955, P.C. 611

ADVERTISING

AL OMANEYA ADVERTISING &
PUBLIC RELATIONS, P.O. Box 3303, P.C.
112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: SWITCHBOARD: 24649444,
24649430/24649437/24649401
Fax: 24649434

DISTRIBUTION AGENT

Al OMANEYA for Distribution &
Marketing, P.O. Box 974, P.C. 100,
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24649351/24649360
Fax: 24649379

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY:

Ministry of Information
P.O. Box 974, Postal Code 100, Muscat,
Sultanate of Oman



Belgium’s forward Romelu Lukaku (L) controls the ball during the international friendly against Croatia at the King Baudouin Stadium in Brussels, ahead of the Euro 2020-21 tournament. – AFP

LUKAKU HELPS BELGIUM EDGE CROATIA

NETHERLANDS CRUISE PAST GEORGIA IN PRE-EURO 2020 FRIENDLY

PARIS: Belgium and the Netherlands completed their Euro 2020 preparations on Sunday with respective wins over Croatia and Georgia. Belgium, the world’s top-ranked side, beat the 2018 World Cup runners up 1-0 thanks to a first-half goal from in-form Romelu Lukaku, fresh from winning the Serie A title with Inter Milan. Roberto Martinez’s side will be one of the favourites to win what would be their first-ever major international trophy and line up in Group B alongside Denmark, Finland and Russia. In a tight match, it was Lukaku, 28, who was the difference between the two sides in a cagey contest, and he was unlucky not to open the scoring in the 31st minute with a wonder goal.

Holding off three Croatia defenders, Lukaku unleashed a curling shot that looked to be heading in before it crashed out off the bar, with Yannick Carrasco’s header on the rebound also thudding onto the woodwork. However, he gave his side the lead seven minutes later when he pounced following confusion in the Croatia penalty area and lashed home his 60th international goal. Few clear-cut chances came along after that, but Lukaku should have netted his second of the night with a minute remaining when his close-range header was somehow kept out by Croatia goalkeeper Dominik Livakovic. **DUTCH SHINE** The Dutch had an easier time of



Netherlands’ forward Wout Weghorst shoots to score his team’s second goal during the friendly against Georgia in Enschede. – AFP

it with a 3-0 win over Georgia. Frank de Boer’s team will be aiming to make a big impression at their first major tournament since the 2014 World Cup and play all their Group C matches with Ukraine, Austria and North Macedonia in Amsterdam.

They took the lead in the 10th minute through a Memphis Depay penalty and the Lyon forward was unlucky not to double his tally six minutes later, with Giorgi Loria pulling off a marvellous save to deny him. Loria made another magnificent stop just before the break, tipping away Frenkie de Jong’s long-range drive which was arrowing into his top right-hand corner. Wout Weghorst did make it two 11 minutes after the restart when he collected impressive Depay’s well-time through ball and lashed home from close range. Loria continued his superb display between the sticks with another great save from Depay’s drilled effort from the edge of the area, but couldn’t stop Ryan Gravenberch from adding a

third with 14 minutes left. The 35-year-old had again denied Depay, this time from inside the area, but Ajax teenager Gravenberch followed up to nod home and complete the victory. Denmark also go into the tournament on a high after seeing off Bosnia and Herzegovina 2-0 in Brondby. Goals from Martin Braithwaite and Andreas Cornelius were enough for Kasper Hjulmand’s side to grab the win ahead of their opening Group B fixture with Finland in Copenhagen on Saturday. Austria drew 0-0 with Slovakia while Scotland scraped a 1-0 win over 10-man Luxembourg ahead of their first major international tournament appearance for 23 years. — AFP

In brief

■ BERLIN



OSAKA PULLS OUT
OF BERLIN WTA
TOURNAMENT

Naomi Osaka has pulled out of next week's Berlin WTA grasscourt tournament in the wake of her controversial exit from the French Open, organisers confirmed on Monday. "We have received notification that Naomi Osaka cannot start in Berlin. After consulting her management, she will take a break," said a spokesman for the Berlin tournament, which starts on June 14.

Osaka has not said when she plans to play next, casting doubt on her participation at Wimbledon, which starts on June 28, and the Tokyo Olympics.

■ PARIS



MBAPPE TO STAY
NEXT SEASON,
SAYS PSG CHIEF

Paris St Germain forward Kylian Mbappe will stay at the Ligue 1 club next season, club president Nasser al Khelaifi said, responding to media speculation about the French international's future.

Mbappe, who scored 42 goals in all competitions for PSG this season, has a contract at the French club until June 2022 but has been linked with a move to La Liga's Real Madrid.

"I will be clear, Mbappe is going to stay in Paris," Al Khelaifi told *L'Equipe* newspaper. "We will never sell him and he will never leave on a free (transfer). Mbappe has everything he needs in Paris."

■ WASHINGTON



MCLAUGHLIN SETS
WORLD-BEST TIME IN
400M HURDLES

American Sydney McLaughlin set this year's world-best time on Sunday by winning the 400-metre hurdles in 52.83 seconds at the Music City Track Carnival in Nashville, Tennessee. Her victory came in a tune-up meet for the US Olympic trials at Eugene, ahead of next month's Tokyo Olympics.

McLaughlin will be among the favourites after a runner-up 400 hurdles showing at the 2019 world championships in Doha, her personal best of 52.23 leaving her behind the world-record effort of 52.16 behind winner Dalilah Muhammad, the reigning Olympic champion.

McLaughlin, 21, surpassed the 53.12 set on Monday by American Shamier Little.

'ANGRY' WOLFF AND 'HUMBLED' HAMILTON SAY TEAM MUST IMPROVE

Mercedes sweat in F1 title race



It's one of the toughest moments I've had for a while — one moment we had all the points and the next we had none but for sure, we'll regroup and come back

LEWIS HAMILTON

Mercedes driver

BAKU: After a second disastrous race, Mercedes has been left agonising over its biggest crisis since it began dominating Formula One.

For the first time since the 2018 Austrian Grand Prix, Mercedes failed to pick up a point on Sunday as Valtteri Bottas limped in 12th in Azerbaijan while reigning champion Lewis Hamilton crawled home 15th. In the previous race, in Monaco on May 23, Hamilton was seventh and Bottas did not finish.

"We can't continue losing points like we did in Monaco and here. It's just not acceptable, for all of us," team principal Toto Wolff said on Sunday.

Despite their lack of speed compared to Red Bull, Mercedes

only missed out on victory in Baku because of a slow pit stop and a braking error by Hamilton when he was trying to regain first place at the end.

Red Bull dominated. Their Mexican driver Sergio Perez won after his team-mate Max Verstappen crashed when a tyre blew out while he was leading with five laps to go.

That halted racing and when it restarted, Hamilton was on the front row and in a position to reclaim the championship lead from Dutchman Verstappen, but the Briton locked up his tyres on the first corner and the chance was gone.

"A humbling experience," said Hamilton on the team website. "It's one of the toughest moments

Azerbaijan Grand Prix

Baku City circuit

June 6



1	Sergio Perez (MEX)	2h 13:36.410*	25
		Red Bull	
2	Sebastian Vettel (GER)	at 1.385 sec	18
		Aston Martin	
3	Pierre Gasly (FRA)	at 2.762	15
		AlphaTauri	
4	Charles Leclerc (MON)	at 3.828	12
		Ferrari	
5	Lando Norris (GBR)	at 4.754	10
		McLaren	

Driver standings

Max Verstappen (NED)	105
Hamilton (GBR)	101
Perez (MEX)	69
Norris (GBR)	66
Leclerc (MON)	52

Team standings

Red Bull	174
Mercedes	148
Ferrari	94
McLaren	92

Source: Formula1.com



I've had for a while — one moment we had all the points and the next we had none but for sure, we'll regroup and come back."

Wolff was visibly more emotional than usual in a video press conference after the race.

He said that he and Hamilton were both "destroyed".

'SO STRONG AND ANGRY'

"It's really painful," Wolff said. "We had one hand on the trophy and Max was not scoring any points.

"It is not only the incident at the end that frustrates, it is overall not meeting our expectations, all of us together — Lewis, the engineers, myself, everyone in the team.

"It's the frustration that dominates. For him, victory was so

close and then it was gone. For me, as a leader, we just have to be the best we can be."

"In Monaco and here we didn't have a car that was competitive, full stop. We have underlying issues — we are not getting the car in a happy window for the tyres. We know the deficit and we know we have gaps which we simply have to overcome," Wolff said. "There's just so much we need to improve that I just want to get on it right now to make sure we are able to compete for this championship. Because we can't continue losing points like we did in Monaco and here. It's just not acceptable, for all of us."

Bottas was also frustrated after Baku. "Today in the race I was lacking pace," the Finn told the team website. "I was trying

everything I could but something just wasn't right with the car for me this weekend. We need to work hard to figure out why and move on quickly from this."

Hamilton and Mercedes were leading the drivers' and constructors' rankings at the end of the Spanish Grand Prix, the fourth round of the season at the beginning of May. One month and two races later, the situation has changed.

The seven-time world champion, who had a 14-point lead over Verstappen, is now four points behind and his team, which led by 29 points, are 26 points behind Red Bull with 17 rounds still left.

The next race is in France where practice starts on June 18 for the race on June 20. — AFP

Williamson urges NZ to 'start afresh' in second Test

LONDON: New Zealand captain Kane Williamson has told his side they must "start afresh" in next week's second and final Test against England at Edgbaston after some "superb" cricket enabled them to have the better of a drawn series opener at Lord's.

The Black Caps were in charge from the outset as opener Devon Conway marked his Test debut with a brilliant 200.

Veteran seamer Tim Southee then took 6-43 as New Zealand, who after this series face India in the inaugural World Test Championship final later this month, established a first-innings lead of over a hundred runs.

But Friday's total washout frustrated New Zealand's bid for only a second Test-match win at Lord's to set alongside their 1999 success at the 'home of cricket'.

Williamson's sporting declaration at lunch on Sunday's final day left England with a target of 273 in 75 overs. Neil Wagner took 2-27 but even the lion-hearted left-arm quick was unable to prevent England grinding their way to 170-3 in 70 overs by the time a draw was agreed.

"I thought the guys played some superb cricket throughout to give us that potential opportunity," Williamson told reporters.



New Zealand's Kane Williamson bats during the first Test. — Reuters

"Unfortunately it wasn't to be today, losing a day to weather doesn't help the cause."

'Docile' — He added: "We declared for a reason and that was to try and push for a victory. Although it seemed unlikely for a period, if one spun out of the rough or you were able to open up and end then anything could happen reasonably quickly, and we were holding on to that hope

for as long as we could.

"But clearly things became quite docile out there."

Looking to the second Test, the star batsman said: "We know the quality England have and they're a very difficult side to beat. It's important we to get back to our plans, starting afresh at a new ground, and look to execute."

But the Black Caps will travel to Birmingham buoyed by two

memorable individual efforts from in what was their first match at Lord's since an agonising Super Over loss to England in the 2019 World Cup final. "Devon has shown his class — a debut Test at 'the home of cricket' and he just looked so comfortable," said Williamson. To score a double century is an incredible feat."

As for Southee, the skipper said: "Tim led the attack beautifully,"

ROOT DEFENDS APPROACH

Meanwhile England captain Joe Root defended the hosts' obdurate approach to the run-chased.

"You look at the declaration, it looked like quite a generous one in many ways," he said. "But, you look at the run-rates throughout the game — no one has scored over three an over throughout the whole game even when the pitch was at its absolute best.

"Once we got through an initial phase it just didn't feel like it was a realistic opportunity for us to win the game."

England's Dom Sibley batted for more than five hours on Sunday for his 60 not out, having failed to reach double figures in his six previous international innings.

Root, who shared a stand of 80 with Sibley after the loss of two quick wickets, lauded the Warwickshire opener's "great resilience and character".

The England skipper added: "He really did trust his defence, trust his game and showed that he has the mental capacity for Test cricket.

"Sometimes you learn a lot about players in those situations and those environments, on a surface like that where it was up and down." — AFP



DJOKOVIC

SURVIVES MUSETTI SCARE



Coco Gauff



PARIS: Novak Djokovic survived a major scare from teenager Lorenzo Musetti on Monday to reach a 15th French Open quarterfinal and stay on course to become the first man in over 50 years to win all four Grand Slams twice.

The world number one dropped the first two sets, then comfortably levelled before the 19-year-old Italian retired in the final set.

Djokovic's 6-7 (7/9), 6-7 (2/7), 6-1, 6-0, 4-0 win set up a last-eight clash with Matteo Berrettini, another Italian, who progressed after Roger Federer's withdrawal.

Djokovic, the 2016 champion and chasing a 19th major, was facing his earliest exit in Paris since 2009 when 19-year-old Musetti stormed through the first two sets, hitting blistering winners and finding the acutest of angles.

But the 76th-ranked Italian, making his Grand Slam debut, then went dramatically off the boil.

Where the first two sets had taken 75 and 66 minutes, Djokovic swept the third in 24 minutes and the fourth in just 17.

Musetti won only 14 points in the third and fourth sets before leaving the court for a medical time-out.

Djokovic broke for 1-0 in the decider, injuring a finger as he smashed a winner while losing his balance and falling into the clay. Musetti gamely fought on but after being broken twice again, he called it quits.

SCHWARTZMAN THROUGH

Argentine 10th seed Diego Schwartzman reached his third French Open quarterfinal with a 7-6 (11/9), 6-4, 7-5 win over Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff.

Schwartzman will face 13-time champion Rafael Nadal or Italian teenager Jannik Sinner for a place in the last four. He was beaten by the Spaniard in last year's semifinals.

The 28-year-old saved seven set points in the first set as he rallied from a 5-1 deficit against the 42nd-ranked Struff, who had only once before made the fourth round at a major.

Schwartzman let a 4-0 lead slip in the third set but held on to make his fifth Grand Slam quarterfinal.

GAUFF DOMINATES

American teenager Coco Gauff became the youngest woman to reach a Grand Slam quarterfinal in 15 years after sweeping to an impressive 53-minute, 6-3, 6-1 win over Tunisia's Ons Jabeur.

At just 17, she is the youngest woman to reach the last eight of

FRENCH OPEN RESULTS

Men (fourth round)

Novak Djokovic (SRB x1) bt Lorenzo Musetti (ITA) 6-7 (7/9), 6-7 (2/7), 6-1, 6-0, 4-0 — retired; Matteo Berrettini (ITA x9) bt Roger Federer (SUI x8) — walkover; Diego Schwartzman (ARG x10) bt Jan-Lennard Struff (GER) 7-6 (11/9), 6-4, 7-5

Women (fourth round)

Coco Gauff (USA x24) bt Ons Jabeur (TUN x25) 6-3, 6-1; Barbora Krejickova (CZE) bt Sloane Stephens (USA) 6-2, 6-0; Maria Sakkari (GRE x17) bt Sofia Kenin (USA x4) 6-1, 6-3



Argentina's Diego Schwartzman in action against Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff at the Roland Garros 2021 French Open in Paris. — AFP

a Slam since Nicole Pietrangeli who made the quarter-finals at Roland Garros in 2006.

Gauff is also the youngest American woman to book a place in the last eight in Paris since Jennifer Capriati in 1993.

In a composed performance on Court Philippe Chatrier on Monday, the American teenager, seeded 24, broke her Tunisian opponent three times without facing a break point herself.

"I am super happy to reach my first Grand Slam quarter-final. I played really well today," said Gauff who has yet to drop a set and also learned she had claimed a place on the American team for the Tokyo Olympics.

Gauff, who famously raced to the Wimbledon fourth round in 2019 as a 15-year-old qualifier, faces Barbora Krejickova for a place in the semifinals.

The 33rd-ranked Czech also reached her first Grand Slam quarterfinal with a 6-2, 6-0 win over 2018 runner-up and former US Open champion Sloane Stephens.

Only two of the women's top 10 seeds are now left after Serena Williams saw her push for a record-equalling 24th major foiled again in a last 16 defeat on Sunday by Elena Rybakina.

World number one Ashleigh Barty, second-ranked Naomi Osaka and third seed Aryna Sabalenka all exited in the first week. — AFP

features



Horseback riding: Keeping an authentic Omani sport alive

In Oman, great attention has been given to horsebreeding and horse riding sports with numerous conservation efforts made not only to enhance and advance the sport but also take care of the different horse breed. This effort is due to the horse's close ties to many of the country's traditions and culture... **P16**

DEVELOPMENT

READ

**THE YEAR OF
MAGICAL THINKING**
BY JOAN DIDION

The book is an account of the year following the death of the author's husband John Gregory Dunne. Published by Knopf in October 2005, The Year of Magical Thinking was immediately acclaimed as a classic book about mourning.

Lotus Lubricants Company: An economic and social addition in Buraimi

The Lotus Lubricants Factory is one of the Omani factories that was established in Al Buraimi Industrial City in 2014, on an area of 6,000 square metres, with a capital of half a million Omani riyals, to be a real economic and social addition to the Buraimi Governorate.

Hamdan al Esaei, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Lotus Lubricants Company, said that the production capacity of the factory is estimated at the equivalent of 1,500 tonnes of products per month, to meet the increasing needs of these products and supply the local

market with an Omani product under international standards approved by Directorate General for Specifications and Metrology at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

"The product was tested in several laboratories in the Sultanate and abroad, and it was used in the field in factories with heavy equipment in quarries and others, and the results were all good", he assured. "The factory produces different types of petroleum oils, including diesel, hydraulic and lubricant."

He stressed that the factory achieved in the past years a growth in its monthly sales, to rise from 6 thousand riyals per month to 30 thousand riyals. There is an ambition to increase sales during the coming period by signing more commercial agency contracts to distribute the factory's products inside and outside the Sultanate".

He explained that the company, based on the importance of the presence of the Omani product in global markets, has exported the factory's products to several Arab and Gulf countries such as Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Libya and Rwanda in the African market. The local market is also covered by a network of Omani distributors in the various governorates of the Sultanate.

Al Esaei pointed out that the factory attaches great importance to the employment of



young Omanis, as the percentage of Omanisation in the factory's admin jobs has reached 90 per cent, and the door to qualification and training for higher education outputs has been opened, as nearly 15 trainees from specialised colleges have been trained to refine and stimulate young Omani talents to the labour market.

Al Esaei explained that the

company is seeking during the coming period to search for more young distributors in the various governorates of the Sultanate to distribute the company's products and provide them with jobs, as the company currently has distributors in the governorates of North and South Al Batinah, Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah and Muscat.



Horseback riding: Keeping an authentic Omani sport alive

BY TALIB AL WUHAIBI

Horses are esteemed animals in the Middle East and among Muslims not only because of their domestic value but also because of their role in the Hadith of our Prophet (goodness is tied to the forelocks of horses until the Day of Resurrection.)

In the Sultanate, great attention has been given to them and numerous conservation efforts were made not only to enhance and advance the sport of horse riding in the country but also in horse breeding.

Oman has many well-known customs and traditions tied up with horses and these traditions had been passed from generation to generation with numerous races and contests held all over the country as evidence of how they'd been engraved into the society.

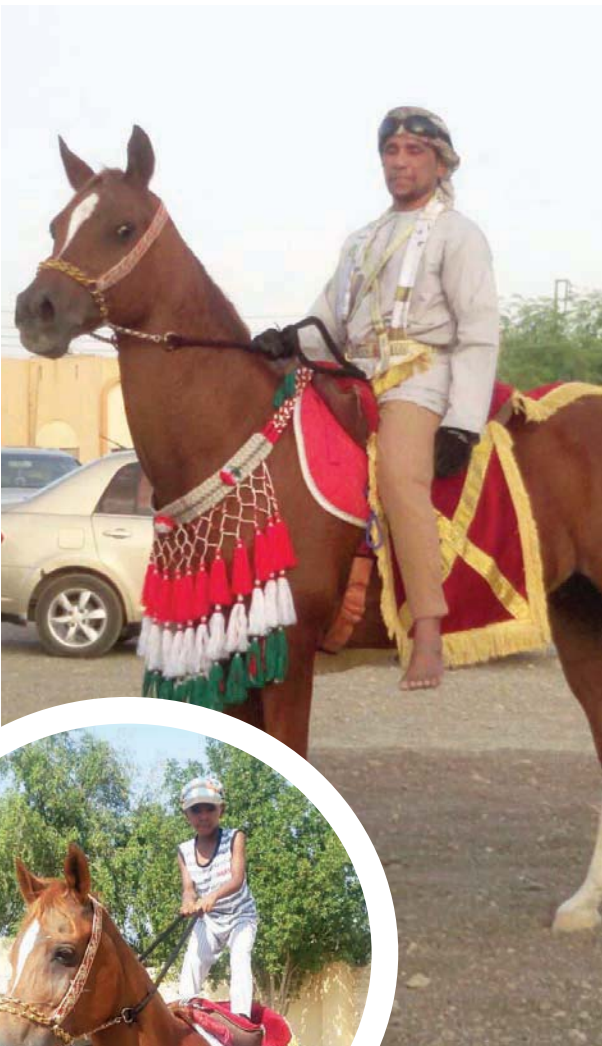
Salem al Ghafri is a lover of horseback riding. He used to be one of the avid fans of the sport and used to attend races on tracks held in different wilayats. That love for the sport eventually led him to practise and master horseback riding and become a professional on it.

"I feel very proud wearing the Omani knight outfit. It is an enjoyable pastime and a good sport", he shared.

Al Ghafri owns several horses as of today. One of them he named "Jalmoud" and is holding an Oman Equestrian Federation passport. The other is "Al Balqa" with the Royal Cavalry passport. With these horses, he has participated in many different celebrations and have presented wonderful performances and won several prizes and races.

His love for horses and the sport would eventually flow towards his son. Al Ghafri is now training his son to follow in his footsteps and because of their keen interest, he instil in them not only the love for the horses but also a deep appreciation for customs and traditions at an early age.

Raising and owning horses had challenges of their own. For instance, the horse must reach two years of age before being tamed.



After two years, breeders can start with some exercises such as using ropes and letting them run in circular motions. It must also be taught to obey instructions, and the horse must be fed healthy grass, fodder mixed with corn, dates, honey and other foods that give it activity, strength and health.

In Oman, a horse riders also have to abide by certain rules and conducts.

Al Ghafri said, "First of all, the Omani rider must be bound by the Omani dress, which gives him a strong personality. He must have fitness, especially as he stands on the back of the horse during parades."

He added, "This skill is used in events like Al Ardah riding, ancient Omani art in which riders always compete to show their ingenuity and skill. Here the riders should have the courage to stand on the back of the horse while holding

each other's hands, each on his horse and at high speed.

This type of sport is one of the most dangerous sports which can cause accidents if not practised with caution. The knight must be trained on riding the horse well and he must wear a helmet and other safety measures that protect the rider from fractures."

For horses, Al Ghafri shared that they must come with exceptional personalities.

"Among these qualities that make horses different from other animals is, for example, the love of music. Some horses love music and in celebrations sometimes you can see the horse swaying to the beat of the drum and other musical instruments. Horses in general should be healthy, patient, and should have the ability to withstand

hardships and win long races. They should be intelligent, witty, loyal to their owners and they should love learning."

Al Ghafri said that there are different races organised with the horse serving front and centre.

Al Ghafri shared, "One is Endurance Race and this type of sport measures the horse's ability to participate in other races as well as the hurdles race, which reveals the horse's jumping ability."

He added, "There are many different types of horses, such as the purebred Arabian horse, the English horse, the Arabian horse (hybrid), and others, and they differ in terms of shape, colour, size, speed, and the purebred Arabian horse is considered one of the best horses. They come in different colours: blond, grey, red and other colours that reveal their beauty."

FILM

Horror film 'Conjuring' scares up a N America box office lead



As if 2020 didn't bring horrors enough, North American moviegoers seem to crave more: Fright film "The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It" earned an estimated \$24 million this weekend to top the box office as more and more theatres reopen after a bleak year.

The new Warner Bros. release, the latest in the "Conjuring" franchise, shouldered aside last weekend's breakthrough box office leader, "A Quiet Place: Part II."

Its result was considered especially positive for Warner since "Conjuring" is already available online to HBO Max subscribers at no extra cost. The film again has Patrick Wilson and Vera Farmiga as paranormal investigators grappling with demonic nastiness.

"Quiet Place," another scare film, directed by John Krasinski and starring his wife Emily Blunt, took in \$19.5 million for the Friday-through-Sunday period, down from last weekend's \$48 million but still considered a solid result with 75 per cent of theatres now open.

The Paramount film, about a family in a post-apocalyptic world haunted by fierce but mostly unseen monsters, is slated to become the quickest film to cross the \$100 million mark in North America since Covid-19 plunged the world — and the film industry — into crisis.

"The landscape is becoming competitive again," Hollywood Reporter quoted Warner executive Jeff Goldstein as saying, "which is a great sign of things to come in the summer and fall."

In third place was Disney's family-friendly "Cruella," an origin story based on its popular "One Hundred and One Dalmatians." With Emma Stone as the sneering title villain, the live-action film took in \$11.2 million.

The fourth spot went to Universal's computer-animated "Spirit Untamed" at \$6.2 million. Isabela Merced voices a young girl who befriends a wild mustang named Spirit. Jake Gyllenhaal and Julianne Moore also star.

In fifth place, for the second straight week, was Disney's computer-animated fantasy "Raya and the Last Dragon," at \$1.3 million. Its mostly Asian-American cast includes the voices of Awkwafina and Sandra Oh.

Rounding out the top 10 were:
"Wrath of Man" (\$13 million)
"Spiral" (\$890,000)
"Demon Slayer the Movie: Mugen Train" (\$750,000)
"Godzilla vs. Kong" (\$463,000)
"Dream Horse" (\$230,000) — **AFP**



find us on
TWITTER
Scan the QR Code or follow us on
www.twitter.com/omanobserver

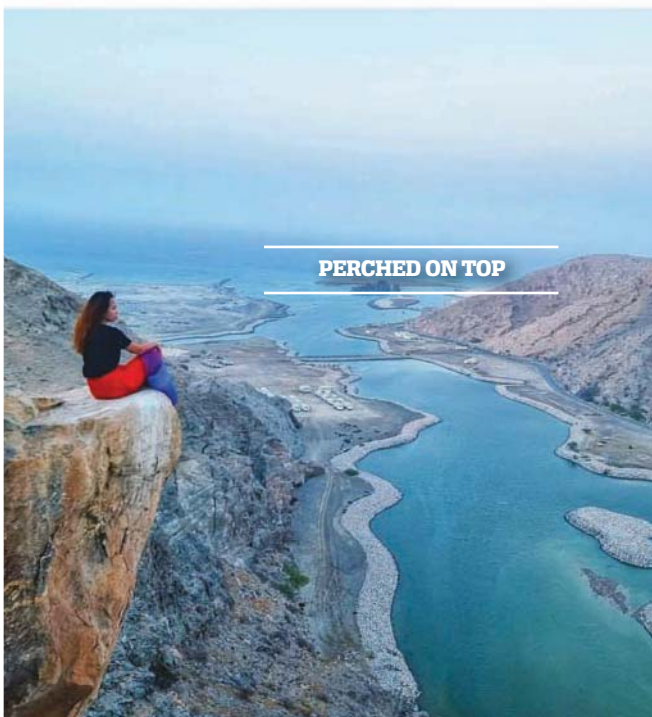
INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



icchuzz_ • Follow
Al Khaluf Beach شاطئ خلوف



duchessofmuscat •



thamooooor84 • Follow
Salalah, Oman



SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. To be featured: Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use **#OmanObserver** and **#BeAnObserver**.



AROUND THE WORLD

Get full stories online at www.omanobserver.om

ART



Museum protesters denounce Picasso's treatment of women

A PROFESSOR from a Barcelona art school has staged a protest at a museum dedicated to Pablo Picasso intending to shed light on the Spanish painter's sometimes callous behaviour towards women.

Maria Llopis and seven of her female students appeared at the Picasso Museum wearing T-shirts that read "Picasso, women abuser" and others that referred to Dora Maar, a French artist who is believed to have suffered abuse by Picasso during their relationship in the 1930s and 1940s.

The protest last week echoed the global debate on men's treatment of women, led by the #MeToo movement, which includes reassessing the conduct of deceased personalities as well as the living. In Spain, women's rights have moved to the political forefront in recent years after several high-profile rape and abuse cases.

Llopis, 45, said she wanted to make a low-key protest to say that the museum was not putting enough focus on Picasso's female relationships, in particular in Maar's work and her troubled life after their break-up.

"It was not an attack on Picasso", she said. "I don't believe at all in cancel culture. I believe in the truth, in not hiding things."

The museum director, Emmanuel Guigon, said he respected the protest and deemed the debate it prompted fundamental. He said that a talk next autumn on Picasso's relationship with women and exhibitions on the issue were already planned.

"We cannot look at Picasso's work and life as we did 20, 40 or 50 years ago", he said. "It can always be looked with new and critical eyes, but we will not remove Picasso's work from art history." He said that Picasso was undeniably "very machista" but that he did not know of cases of physical abuse.

Picasso, who lived from 1881 to 1973, had many relationships throughout his life.

In a 2001 book, his granddaughter Marina Picasso wrote that he would dispose of women after he "submitted them to his animal sexuality, tamed them, bewitched them, ingested them and crushed them onto his canvas".

Art historian Victoria Combalia, the author of a biography on Maar, accused Llopis' protest of being superficial but she backed putting information in museums about the context behind some paintings.

Asked about that possibility, museum director Guigon ruled it out, saying it was more important to hold debates.

There is evidence that at least once Picasso very likely punched Maar on her eye, and that he could be seen as abusive to women in general, Combalia said. — **Reuters**

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Diving teams spreading awareness on environmental protection



SINCE ITS ESTABLISHMENT in 2010, the Al Salam Diving Club team in Liwa and Shinas has been working on several environmental initiatives and volunteer work by cleaning the seabed and basins of ports from various types of waste.

Hamad al Amri, head and founder of the team, explained that the ultimate goal of establishing the team is to spread awareness of the importance of the marine environment, maintain its cleanliness and sustainability, as well as promoting the sport of diving among members of the community to attract those interested in this sport to develop their skills and benefit from them in the field of preserving the Omani marine environment.

He added that the team seeks to preserve coral reefs, follow their growth stages and create a suitable environment for the reproduction and growth of fish through the work of artificial marine reserves. He referred to the team's participation at the Gulf level, most notably the participation in the Gulf Diving Teams Forum in Kuwait in 2013 and 2015 as well as the participation with The Emirates Diving Association in seminars for the preservation of the marine environment and in Arab clean-up campaigns to clean coral reefs and ports, as well as the participation of team members with divers in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in coral reef clean-up campaigns.

Regarding the local participation, Al Amri says that several different participations were carried out periodically at the level of the wilayats of the Sultanate in the

areas of spreading awareness about diving, in addition to participating in hygiene campaigns in islands and marine reserves.

Al Amri said that the team includes 85 members who provide various community services, from helping fishermen to recover the engines of sunken boats, moving iron cages from their place, as well as helping them to construct marine dams for the reproduction and growth of fish.

He pointed out to the team's participation in the search for drowning cases in cooperation with the competent authorities. The team's interest in the awareness aspect is recognised through the establishment of guidance campaigns for fishermen about the importance of having a life jacket when going out on fishing trips, in addition to the danger of throwing plastic and fishing waste into the sea, which causes pollution.

"The team works to hold training courses periodically for those wishing to enter this field through training them on diving with modern equipment in cooperation with an international diving organisation. participants learn about the principles of diving and the types of equipment used and their functions, in addition to introducing the physics of diving by explaining the risks that the diver may be exposed to when diving, which are coldness, heat, the relationship between pressure, volume and density, as well as knowing the relationship between the disappearance of colours and the movement of water, the formation of sea currents and other basics.

ENTERTAINMENT

Meghan and Harry name new baby daughter after Queen and Diana



MEGHAN, BRITAIN'S Duchess of Sussex, has given birth to her second child, a baby girl, whom she and husband Prince Harry have named after Queen Elizabeth and his late mother Princess Diana.

Lilibet 'Lili' Diana Mountbatten-Windsor was born on Friday at the Santa Barbara Cottage Hospital in California, with Harry in attendance.

The birth follows a tumultuous year for the couple, who have stepped down from royal duties and moved to the United States to live more independent lives, but rarely been seen out of the public spotlight.

"On June 4th, we were blessed with the arrival of our daughter, Lili. She is more than we could have ever imagined, and we remain grateful for the love and prayers we've felt from across the globe", Harry and Meghan said in a statement.

"Thank you for your continued kindness and support during this very special time for our family."

Both mother and baby were doing well and were back at home, their press secretary said.

Lilibet was Queen Elizabeth's childhood nickname. Harry and Meghan's decision to name their daughter after the 95-year-old monarch came less than two months after the death of her husband Prince Philip, the royal family's patriarchal figure.

Diana, the former wife of Prince Charles and mother to Harry and his elder brother William, died in a Paris car crash in 1997.

Meghan, 39, announced she was expecting a girl during an explosive US television interview in March with Oprah Winfrey, in which she accused the royal family of racism and said she had felt suicidal in the early days of her marriage.

The interview threw the family into crisis, deepening a rift between Harry and William, and with his father, heir-to-the throne Prince Charles.

Harry, 36, has spoken recently about how the trauma of the loss was compounded when he had to walk as a 12-year-old behind his mother Diana's coffin in her funeral cortege under the glare of the world's media. — **Reuters**



Yemen's Socotra, isolated island at strategic crossroads

Only goats seeking shade now use the long-abandoned lines of Soviet-era T-34 tanks, but the rusting relics point to the strategic value that Yemen's Socotra islands hold for foreign powers.

The archipelago's remote location helped it forge its astonishing nature millennia ago — a third of the main island's plants are unique, from bulbous bottle and cucumber trees to alien aloes.

But the 130-kilometre long island — the biggest in the Middle East region — also oversees busy global shipping lanes at the crossroads between Africa and the Arabian Peninsula.

With mainland Yemen wracked by civil war, Socotra is under the rule of the Southern Transitional Council (STC), part of a UN-recognised unity government.

OVERLOOKING CARGO ROUTES

It is not only oil tankers that must pass Socotra from the Gulf to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal.

The island also lies on seaways from Pakistan's Gwadar port — a stepping stone on China's trillion-dollar Belt and Road infrastructure initiative giving Beijing access to the Arabian Sea — to Djibouti and into east Africa.

Sea routes are key for shipping hub Dubai, one of the UAE's emirates, where the logistics industry makes up more than 14 per cent of GDP, according to official statistics.

But beyond its strategic value, Socotra is also surrounded by rich

fishing waters, where trawlers — long deterred by the deadly pirates from nearby Somalia — are now operating.

And, while nearly three-quarters of the island has environmental protection, there are vast white beaches unscrupulous tourist developers would die for.

For centuries, Socotra was known by traders as a source of frankincense — some islanders suggest its name comes from the Arabic for "market of resin" — but the island was cut off during monsoon months by rough seas.

It was an isolation that gave rise to legends. In the 13th century, Italian traveller Marco Polo described Socotra as a feared pirate base, and its inhabitants as "the best enchanters in the world".

Last century it was first a British colonial outpost, then a Soviet base.

But for decades, few others visited. When British historian Tim Mackintosh-Smith visited in the 1990s, sailing from the mainland on a two-day journey, "not a lot had really changed for eons", he said.

He recorded the Socotri language, with its roots in ancient south Arabia.

While Socotra is some 350 kilometres south of Yemen's coast, it lies closer to Africa; it is just 230 kilometres from Somalia.

Socotra's ancient culture, blending Arabia with Africa and India, evolved with the unique environment.

"It was an ark of a very ancient human existence from the South Arabian mainland a couple of thousand years ago," Mackintosh-Smith said.

When he pulled out a disposable lighter to smoke a pipe, it sparked "astonishment" among islanders.

The island is "a symbiosis of an extraordinary biodiversity with cultural and linguistic diversity," he said.

"We sailed around under enormous cliffs plunging to the sea... staying in stone houses with roofs made of tree branches and beams of ancient wrecks," he said. "To our eyes it seemed absolute pristine."

'PRISTINE' TO CLOGGED

Islanders say things changed rapidly when an airport opened from 2003.

Today, plastic water bottles and bags clog up creeks near villages and steady streams of tourists arrive on a weekly two-hour flight from Abu Dhabi.

The visitors post pictures on social media of the island's stunning — but incredibly fragile — beauty.

Balancing the protection of the environment with the needs of people for roads, healthcare, jobs and opportunities is a hard task.

"Socotris are proud of their heritage, and are keen to protect it," said Saeed Salim Abdulrahman, who is completing a degree translating oral histories from the Socotri language into Arabic and English.

But rapid changes have sparked fears the island's age-old equilibrium has been damaged.

Poring over faded photographs at the Socotra Folk Museum at Riqeleh, Abulrahman showed how fast Socotra had shifted in just a few decades.

"On an island, everything depends on something else," said Abdulrahman.

"Now some people look at the island's resources and say, 'how can I make money from it?'" — **AFP**



business

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE

3,967.11



CRUDE OIL PRICE

Oman Crude \$70.35

Brent Crude \$71.47

Light Crude \$69.26



OMAN OBSERVER

www.omanobserver.om

follow us: @oman_biz





#Win_easily
with Maisarah Prize Account Scheme
Over 4900 winners and still counting!

Open a Maisarah Prize Account today!
For more information, visit: <http://bit.ly/PrizeAccountEn>

TOTAL WEEKLY PRIZES OHR 171,600 5 WINNERS PER WEEK	TOTAL MONTHLY PRIZES OHR 343,200 5 WINNERS PER MONTH PRIZES FOR KIDS, STANDARD & PRIORITY CUSTOMERS	TOTAL MID-YEAR PRIZES OHR 16,000 PRIZES FOR KIDS, STANDARD & PRIORITY CUSTOMERS
TOTAL NATIONAL DAY PRIZES OHR 55,000 5 WINNERS PER DAY	TOTAL PRIZES FOR LADIES OHR 11,000 5 WINNERS PER MONTH	TOTAL MEGA PRIZES OHR 112,000 PRIZES FOR KIDS, STANDARD & PRIORITY CUSTOMERS

2477 5777 | www.maisarah-oman.com | [f/MaisarahOman](#) | [@MaisarahIslamic](#) | [@Maisarah.Islamic](#)



MAISARAH

making life easy

Official Sponsor of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education

Fishermen Village design competition attracts 120 entries



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 7

As many as 120 entries have been received in response to a competition announced by Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN Group) — the executive arm of the Sultanate for tourism development — for the design of a village for fishermen in Sirab Village in the Wilayat of Mahout, Al Wusta Governorate.

Of this number, 85 met the criteria for participating in the competition, the deadline for which now stands extended to July 1, 2021, Omran said in a post

on Monday.

The contest which is being organised by Omran Group in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, has been open to fresh Omani graduates that are majoring in architecture and urban planning.

The participants are competing for three top positions, in addition to an additional incentive award.

The first winning design will be taken for implementation stage on the ground in addition to receiving a financial prize.

The second and third winners will be honoured with financial prizes too.

China’s Alibaba to invest in cloud computing centre in Oman

NEW OPPORTUNITIES:
Omani firms Datamount and International Emerging Technology Company join hands with Alibaba Cloud to offer cloud computing technologies and services in the Sultanate

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 7

Chinese IT technology and e-commerce giant Alibaba Group has signed an agreement with the partnership of Datamount and International Emerging Technology Company (ETCO), both Oman-based IT services providers, for the establishment of a cloud computing centre in the Sultanate. The initiative is backed by Oman’s Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT).

Under the pact, Datamount and ETCO will manage, operate and market cloud computing services of Alibaba Cloud in the region — a move that will strengthen Oman’s position as a regional gateway for cloud computing services and technologies.

Under the agreement, Alibaba will invest about \$10 million during the early stages of development, with the provision of key equipment and modern technologies.

Datamount will invest approximately \$4 million towards



data processing infrastructure. All three parties will provide data processing services and cloud hosting, while also training Omanis in the use of Alibaba Cloud software, thus enhancing the cloud computing market in the Sultanate and the wider region.

A significant number of direct and indirect jobs will be created in Oman as a result.

The agreement was signed in the presence of Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaidhani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology; Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion; Selina Yuan, Vice-President of Alibaba Cloud Company; Abdul Hakim bin Amer al Salhi, CEO of Datamount; and Abdul Aziz Jaafar, CEO of ETCO.

Dr Al Shaidhani said the agreement reflects the ministry’s efforts in promoting Oman as a cloud services centre, encouraging

foreign technical investments, supporting Omani companies working in the ICT sector to develop their services and products to compete in local and international markets, contribute to advancing development and the national economy and providing training and employment opportunities for Omani youth in the modern technology sectors.

He stressed that the ministry supports the joint agreements between international companies working in the telecommunications and information technology sector and their counterparts from local companies because this represents a clear indication of the confidence of major companies such as Alibaba in the importance of Oman as a cloud services centre.

Selina Yuna, Vice-President, Alibaba, said: “Through this partnership, we aim to provide secure and reliable cloud services and technologies to organisations in Oman in particular and the region in general. Under the partnership, Alibaba Cloud will provide cloud computing services

and related technologies, while Datamount, in collaboration with ETCO, will manage and operate the data centre, cloud hosting services and manage and market Alibaba Cloud software.

A subsidiary of Alibaba Group, Alibaba Cloud is the fastest growing business of the Chinese e-commerce powerhouse.

Alibaba Cloud provides cloud computing services to online businesses and Alibaba’s own e-commerce ecosystem. Its international operations are registered and headquartered in Singapore.

Muscat-headquartered Datamount operates a multi-location datacentre and currently serves customers from two locations in the Sultanate: Al Dakhiliyah Governorate and Al Jabal al Akhdhar.

International Emerging Technology Company (ETCO) operates in the advanced technology sector with a focus on attracting innovative projects, providing consulting services, propelling technology transfer locally and internationally.

(With inputs from ONA)

Oman-India JV launches engineered quartz stone project in Sohar FZ

PROMISING EXPORTS:
\$10 million plant eyes
US, European and Mideast
markets

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](#)

An Omani-Indian joint venture has announced the commercial launch of its new engineered quartz stone products manufacturing plant at Sohar Free Zone — an investment that will further strengthen the Sultanate’s credentials as a leading manufacturer and exporter of natural and engineered stones for the global construction industry.

Madhav Surfaces FZC LLC, a partnership of Al Khanjar Commercial Agencies LLC, a subsidiary of well-diversified Omani business house Khimji

Ramdas LLC, and Madhav Ashok Ventures Private Limited (MAVPL), a leading Indian manufacturer of marble and granite surfaces, has invested around \$10 million in the establishment of a high-tech plant at the free zone in Suhar.

The Indian JV partner stated in a filing to the local stock exchange on Monday that the Omani plant successfully commenced commercial production last week after a trial run of its plant and machinery.

“With the start of this project, we will now be able to cater to demand for engineered stone in the US, European and Middle East markets,” the Indian company said.

The announcement comes nearly 18 months after Sohar Port and Freezone signed a land lease agreement with the JV partners covering a roughly 20,000 sq metre site for the establishment



of the quartz stone manufacturing plant within the free zone.

The facility has been designed for the manufacturing of quartz slabs and other quartz products using chrome ore and calcined lime from the local market, to be exported to the USA and Europe, alongside the polishing of quartz

slabs, the investors said at the time.

Output from the new Suhar plant will complement Oman’s already extensive offering of natural stone products manufactured from blocks or slabs of marble and granite for use as floorings, wall claddings, kitchen tops and other construction purposes.



The facility has been designed for the manufacturing of quartz slabs and other quartz products using chrome ore and calcined lime from the local market, to be exported to the USA and Europe, alongside the polishing of quartz slabs

MADHAV ASHOK VENTURES PRIVATE LIMITED

While natural stone products enjoy huge appeal globally, engineered stone products are rapidly gaining popularity as well.

Unlike marble and granite, which are cut and polished from slabs or blocks, engineered stone is manufactured from a mix of quartz aggregate chips. Blended with a polyester resin binder and other additives, the mixture is then subjected to heavy pressure and later cured in a kiln. The process ensures that some of the flaws inherent in natural stone products, such as porosity, small holes, and susceptibility to staining, are completely eliminated.

Engineered stone products are uniform and consistent in dimension and shade; they are also more scratch resistant, thus making them ideal as floorings and countertops. They can also be cleaned and maintained with normal or soapy water.

Mazoon Electricity embarks on concerted Omanisation

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 7

As part of its concerted efforts to align with national directions and policies and add value to the national workforce in the power sector, Mazoon Electricity Company, the leading electricity provider in Oman, has embarked on an intensive Omanisation process.

The campaign is part of an initiative designed to recruit a number of Omani talents in the emergency and maintenance contractors with electricity companies, in coordination with the Ministry of Labour, the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) and Nama Holding Company. This is with reference to (APSR)'s announcement earlier to train and recruit Omani nationals for 800 technical positions.

With an aim to boost Omanisation, Mazoon Electricity has already formed a number of committees, including one main committee and six secondary committees, to carry out the required processes.

Evaluation and interviews process is underway to recruit qualified talents to join the contracts of emergency and maintenance companies which will replace the expatriate workforce.

As part of the first phase of



the employment process, the company in the next few days will interview around 700 candidates out of which 300 will be selected for supervisory and technical jobs such as maintenance engineer, maintenance supervisor, HSE Officer, electrical technician, cable jointer (line extension) and lineman in the emergency and maintenance contractors' companies within Mazoon Electricity.

Eng Majid Nasser al Busaidy, Chief Operations Officer-Distribution of Mazoon Electricity Company said, "We are committed to recruiting and nurturing dynamic young Omanis to meet our manpower needs. This is in line with the

directive of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to support Omani human resources and enable them to contribute to the overall national development."

He added, "We are keenly involved in the recruitment of qualified Omani candidates to the company. Within our existing payrolls, we have successfully used the skills of Omani talents including in the department of operations, customer services, HSE, IT, communications, HR, among others.

We constantly encourage our contractors to hire Omani talents. The selected Omanis will undergo intensive training including theoretical, practical and on the job training. It is

worth mentioning that Mazoon Electricity service area covers almost 45% of Oman, through its licensed areas which include Al Dakhiliyah, South Al Sharqiyah, North Al Sharqiyah, South Al Batinah governorates and Suwaiq in North Batinah governorate.

The nature of work at the company is technical and challenging. Despite this, we are confident in our Omani manpower and their capability to overcome these challenges. We are proud to state that our national workforce delivers high-quality, and results-driven performance. We are committed to making significant, ongoing investment in developing highly qualified Omani personnel at the organisation."

Increase your savings to win big in Meethaq Hibati Mid-Year Draw

MUSCAT: Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat, invites all its Hibati savings account customers to increase their savings to get more chances to win cash prize in its upcoming Mid-Year draw, which will be held in July 2021. In line with its vision 'To serve you better, everyday' and with its commitment to promote a healthy savings culture in Oman, Meethaq is offering a total cash prize money of RO 300,000 for the Hibati Mid-Year draw to be won by Hibati savings account customers. The draw will be broadcast live on social media channels of the bank to further increase the excitement and engagement of the bank's customers.

The Hibati Mid-Year draw is one of the two Grand draws in the Hibati scheme in addition to the End-of-Year draw. By simply maintaining a quarterly average balance of RO 30,000, Hibati account holders shall be entitled to one entry to the Mid-Year draw and for every incremental RO 30,000 average balance, customers would be getting an additional entry to the draw, thus increasing the chances of winning.

Four grand prizes of RO 50,000 each and one attractive grand prize of RO 100,000 will be given away during the Hibati Mid-Year draw, which will see a total of RO 300,000 being given



away to 5 winners.

Speaking on the occasion, Amor Said al Amri, Meethaq Head of Retail Branches said: "We are delighted to announce the Hibati Mid-Year draw for 2021 and we invite all our valued customers to increase their savings to get more chances to win. The Hibati prize scheme has been constantly updated taking into account customer feedback from across the Sultanate over the last few years. It must be noted that the scheme now provides more chances to win valuable prizes compared to previous years." He thanked customers for their strong confidence in the Hibati scheme and the various products and services offered by the bank. Since its launch in 2018, the Hibati Savings Scheme has grown rapidly to become one of the biggest cash prize scheme in Oman offering special quarterly, National Day and Omani Women's Day cash prizes. The Hibati scheme also features weekly draws which reward 100 winners every week.

OAB announces winners of Hasaad Savings Scheme for April

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank recently announced the names of the winners of its Hasaad Savings Scheme for April. The draw saw 101 customers winning prizes of RO 500 each. As for Elite account holders, two customers won RO 10,000 each from the Al Batinah and Muscat branches.

Commenting on the results of the April draw, Rashad al Shaikh, Head of the Retail Banking Division at OAB, said, "The current conditions have encouraged our customers to increase their savings in order to ensure that they have finances to rely on. This, in turn, enables



them to improve their chases of winning several exciting prizes that can be availed as part of the Hasaad Savings scheme.

We are proud that through the implementation of Hasaad, we have enabled our customers to embrace the need to save for unprecedented situations, which

has proved beneficial, especially during these difficult times. To showcase our appreciation, we continue to offer them incredible rewards until the end of the year."

The Hasaad Savings Scheme 2021 will see 101 lucky winners each month from the 54 branches winning RO 500 each.

This is in addition to a Big Prize draw which will see two winners of RO 10,000 each, every quarter. The Elite Draws will see two winners every month of RO 10,000 each. This is replaced by an Elite grand prize draw conducted every three months with one lucky winner of RO 25,000.

Khedmah adopts strict measures during the pandemic

MUSCAT: Committed to maintain the safety of its clients and employees, Oman Investment and Finance Company's (OIFC), Khedmah, has adopted a set of procedures and precautionary measures in the wake of the on-going pandemic. These efforts came in line with the directives of the Supreme Committee entrusted with undertaking measures to tackle developments resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. The measures taken by the company, with the objective of



ensuring the continuation of its business with high efficiency; included updating many of the services provided to clients, to meet their needs and ensure their safety.

Harith Khamis al Hinai, HSSE Manager at OIFC said:

"The health and safety of our clients and employees are our first priority. Hence, we at OIFC adhere to the highest standards of safety in our operations and services provided to customers. The applied measures and procedures had a positive impact on the public and employee's safety as well as the smooth running of operations." "The company aspires to enrich customers experience by delivering easy and flexible services to them despite of the current challenges."

Own a GAC Motor GS8 SUV with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: Customers looking forward to owning the turbocharged, flagship SUV – the GS8 can avail exclusive benefits like manufacturer's warranty of 5 years / 150,000 kms, assured service of 5 years / 50,000 kms (whichever is earlier), cash gift of RO 2955, comprehensive 1-year insurance (Oman coverage) and 3M window tint (For 21 YM Models). (Conditions apply. For more details, please visit any GAC Motor showroom).

The GS8 with its stunning exterior makes a memorable impression on every opportunity.

The exterior design looks muscular and sports an aerodynamic design. The new 'Flying Dynamics' grille design with chrome trims makes the car look wider and magnificent.

A 2.0-litre turbocharged engine designed for low fuel consumption and quieter transmission powers it. Its powerful engine packs 320 Nm of torque and 198 horsepower. The gloss black finish on the D-Pillar gives a floating roof appeal, giving it an elongated feel and adds a lot of style to the elegant SUV.



The vertical Matrix-style Full LED headlamps with

LED DRLs provide a greater light distribution, resulting in

optimum visibility at night.

LED DRLs creates a better vision and is comparable to that offered by Luxury Car brands. Sculpted 19" Split-spoke alloy wheels offer easy manoeuvring and greater stability, both while adding a lot of oomph to the SUV's stance.

The LED Combination Tail lights are inspired by the Dual U-style Tunnel design and stand out boldly compared to other vehicles. The 10-inch HD Touchscreen with Apple CarPlay, Bluetooth Connectivity, and other vital

features makes for a wonderful way to stay connected while on the move.

The screen is linked to a 360° Surround View Camera, assisted with Dynamic Guidelines & Lane Change Assist that provides greater convenience & makes driving hassle-free. Exclusive Three-Zone Air-conditioning system with Automatic Climate Control ensures you and your loved ones have a relaxing drive at all times. Dedicated rear A/C vents along with USB Charging ports keep the rear seat passengers at ease.

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 Salalah 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

أوربيت ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease

- Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
- Choose from a wide range of brands & models
- PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
- Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

Classifieds

Work Shop For Rent

5 room + 2 Toilet
+ 1 in the Work shop.
For Industrial purpose Use.

Work shop Location in Al Seeb-Al Jefnen
(1281 Sqm Area) Phase 4, Plot No: 611, CR No. 3618/1

Contact:
71029290 - 99606116

FOR RENT

Wadi Kabir
1BHK and 2
BHK flats in
new multistorey
building for
rent. Camera
surveillance,
WIFI connection,
split AC fixed
72371474

SIT. VACANT

WANTED female,
**X-Ray technician
and Staff Nurse**
for our clinic
with valid MOH
licence. Contact:
95503988.

A **Patisier** to work
in a pastry in Wilayat
of Al Hamra. Tel:
99891881

URGENTLY
required **assistant
HR & Admin
manager** (only
Omani national),
oil & gas experience
must. Contact:
hrrecruit2828@
gmail.com

BUYING

AL Awsad
Modern llc,
electronic and
furniture used.
99834373.

FOR SALE/RENT

COLD store in
Al Seeb for lease
or sale. Contact:
94272979,
96252664.

NEW 3 storey
villas for sale/rents
Wadi Kabir/Al
Khuwair), (Shops/
offices for rent/ Al
Khuwair) (Flats for
rent/Wadi Kabir).
96596348.

FOR RENT

FLAT for rent in
Maabela 3 master
rooms. 96088926.

A BEDROOM
with a toilet. The
rent is inclusive
of electricity
and water bills.
It has a WiFi
and located in
North Al Ghubra
and Al Athaiba.
98877003.

FLATS in Al
Khuwair. 99899273.

FLAT in Al Khuwair.
1 BHK and 2 BHK.
99341138, 90991079.

FLAT in Ghubra,
near Indian School.
1 BHK and 2 BHK.
99341138, 90991079.

FOR rent:
INDUSTRIAL land
in Al Rusayl Area,
1,000 sqm, good
location. 99202224,
99417541.

FOR rent: Cooling
store in Al Seeb.
99202224, 94272979.

1BHK & 2 bhk flats
for rent at Ruwi
and Al Khoudh.
93994402, 93994403,
24834644.

2 BEDROOM flat Al
Khuwair. 99322344.

3 BHK Flat & studio
flat in central Ruwi &
2 BHK in Medinat Al
Ilam. Call 99238012/
24704994.

ACC AVAILABLE

SINGLE room with
attached bathroom
and air-condition for
executive bachelor,
non- cooking, Wadi
Kabir/ Al Falaj/ Ruwi
High Street area.
Contact 99657906

SIT. WANTED

EXPERIENCED
Light Driver
looking for job
79250786.

B.E Mechanical
Engineering,
Designation -
Field engineer,
Field/Marine
Eng with 4
years of offshore
experience and
proficiency
in AutoCad,
seeks suitable
placement in Oil
& Gas Industry/
Offshore industry.
Shamshodin Aga.
House No 227,
near Indian School
Darsait. 98406202.

DRIVER experience,
5 years in Oman,
speaking Arabic,
English and Hindi.
95860266.

EGYPTIAN Civil
Engineer have 11
years experience
in Oman as a
project manager/
structural designer
with private projects
or government.
96965100.

CIVIL engineer/QS
engineer, 11 years in
UAE, freelance &
Oman driving licence
available, looking for
full-time or part-
time job 97299165.

INDIAN male, 24
years of total experi-
ence in which 16
years in a Multina-
tional Freight For-
warding and Logistic
Co., worked under
the capacity of Senior
Operation Executive/
Senior Accountant
having thorough
knowledge in Ocean
Freight, Air Freight,
Land Transport,
Warehouse Opera-
tions and Finance &
Accounting. NOC
available. Contact
93587605

MECHANICAL
engineer, 21, Indian
male currently in
Oman looking
to work at any
engineering
field. Contact
96511338. Email:
rkdhanush11@
gmail.com

INDIAN male,
24, B.E. computer
science, masters
in GIS from
UK. Seeking
placement in
GIS field. Having
Oman driving
licence. Contact:
99738614.

YOUNG experienced
Pakistani driver with
Omani light vehicle
driving licence seeks
suitable opening.
Speaks Arabic,
Hindi, English
and familiar with
interior and Muscat
areas. Contact GSM
95856719.

THREE years
experienced in
administration /
sales and marketing
seeking placement.
Omani D/L, and
NOC available.
Gsm- 98270993

SALES/Marketing/
retail executive
BMS in Marketing.
6 years experience.
Contact 93920174.
Rehankadri91@
hotmail.com

OMANI male, 17
years experience as
driver. Looking for
transporting job for
nurses, office goers,
sight seeing. Contact:
97947900.

SMART Indian,
excellent English,
Arabic speaker,
17 years Oman
experience in
Airport, Hospital,
Media EPC
seeks Admin/
Hr/ Project
coordinator/
Operations.
99283938.

FINANCE
Manager/ CFO.
Indian Chartered
Accountant and Cost
Accountant with 25
years of experience in
Trade Finance, MIS,
Budget, Planning,
Strategy, Projects,
Procurement,
Admin, seeks suitable
placement. Contact.
99884291 / 99741875
Email vipul70@gmail.
com

MANAGER Sales
and Distribution
seeks suitable
placement. Sales
Professional with
25 years' experience
in Oman, includes
12 years in Sales
Management, with
LEADING FMCG,
Consumer Durables
Companies.
Currently working
with a leading
group as Branch
Manager for Retail
and Distribution.
Accountable for
the total business
and P&L. NOC
available. 99369127.

INDIAN, male,
Master Degree in
Accounting, 15+
years of experience in
Oman, UAE & India
as Finance / Accounts
Manager/ Chief
Accountant. Looking
for a job and have
noc on visit. Contact:
79007124/ 78039524.
email: kadercok@
outlook.com

FOR SALE

INSTITUTION
Licence contact
95595512.

VILLA in Al Mouj, 2
bedrooms, family hall,
kitchen and 3 toilets.
Special price. 99328880.

NEW villa in
Bausher (Al Muna), 5
bedrooms, RO 190,000.
99328880.

VILLA in Rumais, 4
bedrooms, RO 55,000.
99328880.

FLAT in Al Mouj, 2
bedrooms and Majlis,
RO 145,000. 99328880.

FLAT in Muscat Grand
Mall, 3 bedrooms,
majlis, A/C and car
park, RO 130,000.
99328880.

LAND in Rumais on
main road, 940 sqm,
RO 165,000. 99328880.

OLD house in Ruwi,
150 sqm, RO 18,000.
99328880.

3BHK flat for sale in
Al Khoud Commerical
Road with an allocated
parking space. Call:
99411330.

FOR sale in SFZ, near
port — 4-storey factory
for Guar Gum powder,
total 3,7000 square
metres, warehouse
1,700 Square metres,
with or without
machines. Write to
guargulf@gmail.com
or call +968 94615439
(www.gulfguargum.
com)

WE supply quantities
of excellent
mountainous soil in
Bausher (suitable for
compaction and filling)
99242445, 99327939.

DIESEL Tanker,
1,600 gallon Volvo,
1987. 92836774

**PEST CONTROL
OMAN CO. L.L.C.**

**Supply of Pesticides, Gel (crocoraches),
Public Health chemicals, Agriculture
chemicals, Snake repellent, Rodent baits
and other insect repellent from
UK & USA**

**PROFESSIONALS in
Pest Control Service,
Bedbug Treatment,
Rodent Treatment,
Snake Treatment
and Termite
Treatment [Pre
& Post Construction]**

**Tel: 24787606, 24787503
Direct Line: 24786077
GSM: 99382355, 99172309**

**pcomctom@omantel.net.om
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman**

RENT A CAR SERVICES

abc
R E N T A C A R
**SPECIAL Rates on New
Cars & 4 WDs RENTING
& LEASING**
Tours and Airport Transfer
Tel: 24582663 GSM:
95859497, Fax: 24582664,
abcrent@omantel.net.om

**Buttercup
Rent A Car
AMAZING OFFERS**
○ Rent a car for 10
days and get an
extra free day.
○ Rent for one month
and get 5 days free.
All the cars are
2016 brand new
special prices for
public departments,
companies and
long-term contracts.
☎972494490.

LUXURIOUS Toyota bus
2016, air-conditioned, 30
passengers, offered for
daily/monthly/annually,
Muscat. Contact:
98080609, 96316269.

A LEGAL
translation office
needs **Marketeers**.
Contact E-mail:
oman4n@gmail.
com

1. AC maintenance
and servicing. 2.
Fridge, washing
machine and dish
washer repairing.
3. Painting and
cleaning services. 4.
Electrical, plumbing
and carpentry work
97014234, 99447257,
24290686.

ORIENT Trading
llc, Shampooing,
sofa, carpet, floor
polishing. Old house
repairing. 99834373.

AL SUMRI AC
maintenance. We
are ready to repair
and install all types
of Air-Conditioner
within Muscat
Governorate.
94301888.

SITUATION VACANT

❖ Required for **Ras Al Hamra Recreation Center**
❖ Omani Gym. Instructor/Trainer (Male or Female)

Qualification: Must be certified instructor for Less
Mills Group Exercises and other Fitness Training
Courses.

Experience: 2 years and above as fitness instructor
in a fitness facility.

Please email CV to: **oceanint@omantel.net.om**

URGENTLY REQUIRED

A leading **Healthcare Speciality Trading
Organisation** operating in 16 countries in the
Middle East and North Africa region requires:
FIELD SERVICE ENGINEER (Male) with the
following qualifications:
● Graduate of Biomedical or Electronics
Engineering
● With 0 to 2 years' experience repairing
medical devices
● With English communication skills
● Knowledge of SAP will be an advantage
● Knowledge of MS Office Software
● Omani National
Location: Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

Please send your application to:
E-mail: careers@amicogroup.com

OMAN DAILY

Observer

For Advertisements

Please Contact our Team

Head Office
Mohd Al Rashdi
99841230
m.alrahd86@yahoo.com

Salalah Office
Bakhit Al Shihri
92998577
bakhit.omandaily@gmail.com

Nizwa Office
Abdullah Al Abri
99429094
nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om

Suhar Office
Musalam Al Saidi
99429192
sohardaily@outlook.com

In brief

■ FRANKFURT



GERMAN INDUSTRIAL ORDERS UNEXPECTEDLY DOWN AS DOMESTIC DEMAND FALLS

German industrial orders unexpectedly fell for the first time in four months in April as domestic demand dropped, official data showed on Monday.

Orders were down 0.2 per cent compared to March, according to federal statistics office Destatis, though analysts surveyed by financial data firm Factset had expected another month of growth.

On an annual basis, however, new orders surged by 79 per cent compared April 2020, when they dropped to their lowest level on record as economic activity shut down due to the coronavirus pandemic. — **AFP**

■ ZURICH



SWISS WILL REMAIN BUSINESS-FRIENDLY AFTER G7 TAX DEAL

Switzerland will make sure it remains attractive to business, the government said, after Group of Seven (G7) nations reached a landmark deal to reduce the incentive of multinational companies to shift profits to low-tax offshore havens.

The finance ministry said on Monday that traditionally low-tax Switzerland had taken note of the G7's declaration of intent.

"For Switzerland, the focus is on the overall package of competitive framework conditions for its own business location. Either way, Switzerland will take the necessary measures to continue to be a highly attractive business location", it added. — **Reuters**

■ PARIS



FRANCE FINES GOOGLE €220 MILLION OVER ONLINE AD DOMINANCE

France's competition regulator on Monday fined Google €220 million (\$ 267 million) after finding it had abused its dominant market position for placing online ads, the latest move by European authorities to take tougher stances against US tech giants.

The penalty is part of a settlement reached after three media groups accused Google of effectively having a monopoly over online ad sales.

The Autorite de la Concurrence determined that Google gave preferential treatment to its own ad auction service AdX and Doubleclick Ad Exchange platform, a real-time auction platform. — **AFP**

China's imports grow at fastest pace in decade as materials prices surge

BEIJING: China's imports grew at their fastest pace in 10 years in May, fuelled by surging demand for raw materials, although export growth slowed more than expected amid disruptions caused by Covid-19 cases at the country's major southern ports.

While a brisk recovery in developed markets has bolstered demand for Chinese products, a global semiconductor shortage, higher raw material and freight costs, logistics bottlenecks and a strengthening yuan have dimmed the outlook for the world's largest exporting nation.

China's exports in dollar terms in May grew 27.9 per cent from a year earlier, slower than the 32.3 per cent growth reported in April and missing analysts' forecast of 32.1 per cent.

"Exports surprised a bit on the downside, maybe due to the Covid cases in Guangdong province which slowed down the turnover in Shenzhen and Guangzhou ports", said Zhiwei Zhang, Chief Economist at Pinpoint Asset Management, adding that turnover at ports in Guangdong will likely remain slow in June.

Major shipping companies warned clients of worsening congestion at Shenzhen's Yantian port in Guangdong province after the discovery of several cases among port staff.

On the ground in Guangdong, factories have yet to report



Port workers dock a container ship on a quay at the Port of Qingdao in Qingdao City, China's Shandong Province. — **Reuters**

widespread capacity cuts over the outbreak but admitted efficiency issues as they tried to meet overseas demand.

Chen Linsheng, Chief Operating Officer at Anlan, a Shenzhen-based manufacturer of skincare and beauty-care devices, said while there was no impact on production, staff are now subject to a series of Covid tests and not allowed back into the factory without a negative result. "We are not allowed going out (of the city). We need to report in advance and cannot even go to Guangzhou or Foshan on our own", said Chen, adding

that a lot of meetings have moved back online.

Besides the impact of Covid cases in Guangdong, the global chip shortage has started to hit all of China's export items related to semiconductors, said Iris Pang, Greater China Chief Economist at ING.

For example, auto processing products and parts, the biggest export item, fell 4 per cent from a year earlier, Pang added.

Two-year average growth for exports dropped to 23.4 per cent in May from 36.3 per cent in April, pointing to weaker export momentum as the reopening of

developed economies reduce demand for personal protective equipment (PPE) and work-from-home (WFH) products, analysts at Nomura said in a note.

At the same time, the currency's extended rally in recent weeks to near three-year highs against the dollar could further saddle US consumers with higher prices.

Imports increased 51.1 per cent on year last month in dollar terms, the fastest growth since January 2011 but slower than the 51.5 per cent rise tipped by the Reuters poll. — **Reuters**

Sustainability Reporting — looking beyond profit



JAMES RAVI

Historically, the primary responsibility of a corporation was to provide a reasonable return on investment to its owners and stakeholders. This was measured through financial metrics like profitability and solvency as presented in their financial statements. In the past few decades, a broader view of measuring the non-financial metrics, beyond profits, has emerged that includes Sustainability Reporting. Initially some chemical and mining companies published such reports as a way of countering the negative image that had acquired by their treatment of the environment and of the local communities in which they operated. Today majority of the global corporate houses report on sustainability and in many jurisdictions around the globe, they are mandatory.

What is Sustainability Reporting?

Sustainability Reporting is the practice of measuring and disclosing organisational performance towards the goal of sustainable development and being accountable to internal and external stakeholders. A Sustainability Report should



provide a balanced and reasonable representation of the sustainable performance of an organisation, including its positive and negative contributions. Sustainability Reporting includes a wide range of topics from ethical business practices to environmental biodiversity. The most common methodology to Sustainability Reporting is the "triple bottom line approach", which covers the three aspects of sustainability: Economic performance, social responsibility and the environmental impact.

Global Initiatives for Sustainability Reporting

Over decades numerous initiatives have been taken worldwide by various organisations on corporate Sustainability Reporting. The European Union issued the EU Non-financial Reporting Directive and is in the process of developing non-financial reporting standards. The World Economic Forum has released its paper on common metrics and consistent reporting for sustainable value creation, defining core metrics.

Sustainability Reporting Standards

The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), established in 1997, is often referred to as the de facto guideline for Sustainability Reporting. In the USA the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) has developed standards for material sustainability issues designed for disclosure in mandatory filings.

Additionally, the International Integrated Reporting Council (IIRC) is an entity consisting of international regulators, investors, companies, standard providers, accountants and non-governmental organisations whose mission is to enable integrated sustainability reporting to become a mainstream practice in both the public and private sectors.

The major non-financial reporting organisations (GRI, SASB and IIRC) have published a Statement of Intent, committing to work together towards comprehensive corporate reporting. Recently, momentum has grown behind increased coalescence of the major non-financial reporting standards. Finally, the IFRS (International Financial Reporting Standards) Foundation started to update the Management Commentary

Practice Statement that will emphasise the disclosure of factors affecting companies' prospects over the long-term. The Foundation, which is increasingly being encouraged to take a global role in non-financial reporting, issued a consultation to gauge market views on a global standard for sustainability reporting to be set by a body under the Foundation's umbrella. The Exposure Draft from the consultation is due shortly which has already received strong support from other organisations, including IOSCO (International Organization of Securities Commissions).

Sustainability Index

Company performance in sustainability reporting is monitored by independent organisations that award "sustainability index" rankings. They are now of considerable influence and are used as guides for environmentally and socially responsible financial investment. The leading indices are Dow Jones Sustainability World Index, Community's CR Index, FTSE4Good Index, Global Sustainability Index, etc. The Dow Jones Sustainability World Index identifies global sustainability leaders through their Corporate Sustainability Reporting.

It is based on a consistent improvement in their strategies for climate change, energy consumption, human resources development, knowledge management, stakeholder relations and corporate governance. The Community's CR Index ranks companies on their environmental

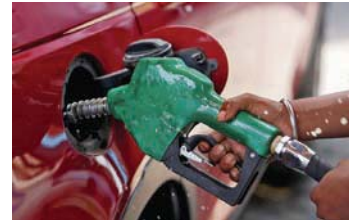
Oil retreats as investors await Iran nuclear talks this week

SINGAPORE: Oil pulled back after hitting fresh multi-year highs on Monday, as investors awaited the outcome of this week's talks between Iran and world powers over a nuclear deal that is expected to boost crude supplies.

Brent crude futures for August fell 66 cents, or 0.9 per cent, to \$71.23 a barrel by 0645 GMT, after earlier hitting \$72.27, their highest since May 2019. US West Texas Intermediate crude for July touched \$70 for the first time since October 2018 but reversed course to be at \$69.10 a barrel, down 52 cents, or 0.8 per cent.

Investors may have sold off some contracts to take profit when WTI hit \$70, said Avtar Sandu, a senior commodities manager at Phillips Futures in Singapore.

"The primary concern is about Iranian barrels coming back into the market but I don't think there will be a deal before the Iranian presidential election", he added. — **Reuters**



A worker holds a nozzle to pump petrol into a vehicle at a fuel station in Mumbai, India. — **Reuters**

stewardship, their social contributions and the extent to which responsible business practice is integrated into their strategy.

Third party assurance

Sustainability Reporting is a tool for a company to report the economic, environmental and social aspects of what it does and the way it governs itself. But it can also be misused to suggest that a company has an environmental and ethical agenda when in reality little is done — a practice known as "green-washing". In addition to the self-declaration, reporting organisations can choose to have an independent assurance provider offer an opinion on the self-declaration to increase its credibility.

Our planet faces significant social and environmental challenges from growing economic inequality to climate change to the current pandemic. By doing business in a way that aligns long-term commercial strategies with care for people and the environment, companies can play a crucial role towards sustainable development.

Corporate sustainability is not just a buzzword — for many industry leaders and corporations, it has become an invaluable tool for exploring ways to reduce costs, manage risks, create new products, and drive fundamental internal changes in culture and structure. It enhances brand image and the reputation of the company.

(James Ravi is Director — Crowe Oman; email: james.ravi@crowe.om)