

Sharia-compliant sukuk bonds worth \$1.75 billion launched

The Ministry of Finance has issued international sharia-compliant sukuk bonds worth \$1.75 billion for nine-year maturity period. The move comes as part of funding operations listed in the government's plan endorsed earlier this year to meet its financial requirements based on fiscal control and management of public debt levels. **DETAILS ON P17**



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OMAN OBSERVER

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OMAN U-23 SIDE CONCLUDES BAHRAIN TRAINING CAMP



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AN IMPORTANT ARM IN PRESERVING AND PROTECTING WILDLIFE IN OMAN



P17

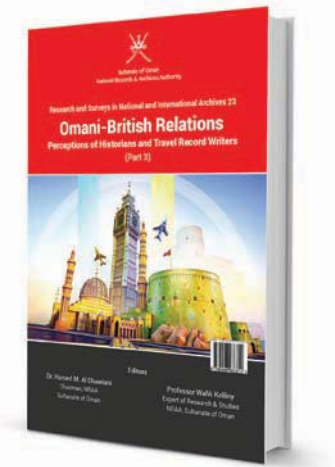
OMAN'S CAPITAL MARKET SIZE GROWS TO RO 20.24 BN IN PANDEMIC-HIT 2020



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO PORTUGAL PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa of the Portuguese Republic, on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President De Sousa. His Majesty the Sultan also wished the friendly Portuguese people further progress and prosperity. — ONA



BOOK ON OMAN-UK RELATIONS RELEASED

The National Records and Archives Authority has released the third part of the book "Omani-British Relations during the 17th to 19th century", within the 23rd volume of the "Studies Series on National and International Documents". The book consists of 523 pages, including 17 research papers in Arabic and English for researchers and scholars with different views. The book offers a balanced presentation for researchers and those interested in Omani history and Omani-Britain relations from the political, economic and military aspects of the 17th to the end of 19th century. **DETAILS ON P2**

INSIDE



EARLY MONSOON RAINS FLOOD MUMBAI

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ON HM DIRECTIVES, COUNCIL OF MINISTERS ISSUE DECISIONS

NEW PROJECTS TO BOOST MUSANDAM DEVELOPMENT

MUSCAT: Within the context of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's attention and keenness to achieve comprehensive, sustainable development in the Governorate of Musandam and to bring about economic diversification based on the competitive potential of the governorate and, to make it more attractive for investment, the Council of Ministers has issued the following decisions.

To set up a branch for the University of Technology and Applied Sciences which provides a number of specialisations.

To establish an integrated system of strategic stocks to achieve food security and medicinal drug stocks.

To convert the Port of Khasab into a logistics hub in a bid to provide services and facilities that stimulate imports, exports and open direct export routes.

To set up specialised



economic and tourism zones that act as a propeller of tourism investment and related logistics activity. Also, to declare the area of Mahas as an economic zone with the purpose of establishing and regulating light and medium industries, along with storage facilities to bolster Khasab Port activity.

His Majesty the Sultan gave directives to speed up the implementation of decisions of the Council of Ministers. His Majesty also

gave directives to develop a system of management and operation for those economic zones, set frameworks for incentives, enhance competitiveness and propose proper mechanisms to float them for investment.

May the Almighty Allah protect His Majesty the Sultan and guard him as a source of inspiration for this country's progress and prosperity.

— ONA
SEE ALSO P3



A BRANCH FOR UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY AND APPLIED SCIENCES



AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM OF STRATEGIC STOCK FOR FOOD AND MEDICINES



TO CONVERT PORT OF KHASAB INTO A LOGISTICS HUB



SPECIALISED ECONOMIC AND TOURISM ZONES TO ATTRACT INVESTMENTS



TO DECLARE THE AREA OF MAHAS AS AN ECONOMIC ZONE

Oman sets new Covid-19 daily record

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnassri

The Ministry of Health revealed on Wednesday that the number of Covid-19 patients in intensive care units in the Sultanate reached 329, while the number of inpatients in health institutions reached 1,021, which is the highest for a single disease in the country.

For the past 24 hours, the Sultanate recorded 14 new deaths and 1,931 new cases of the coronavirus, bringing the total number of cases registered in the Sultanate to 228,579, and deaths to 2248.

The ministry called on everyone to assume individual and societal responsibility and to fully adhere to the precautionary measures, especially wearing a mask, maintaining physical distance, and constantly cleaning hands with soap and water or using an approved alcohol sanitiser, avoiding touching the face, nose, mouth and eyes, and following healthy habits when sneezing and coughing.

Dr Faryal Ali al Lawati, Senior Consultant of the Infectious Diseases Unit, said,



1,021 INPATIENTS, 329 ICU AND 14 NEW DEATHS

"It is known that covid causes clots, but this wave causes many clots as we have seen in many patients admitted to hospitals. Indicators are worrying, and I expect the numbers to rise in the coming weeks. This rise is a result of gatherings during Eid holidays and due to the opening of activities."

She also added: "Some may rule out infection with Covid after taking the vaccine. So they are negligent in wearing a mask and taking precautionary

measures. However, this is not true. We need to continue to adhere to these procedures, at least until the target percentage is vaccinated, maybe three months from now."

Dr Al Lawati asserted that the increase in numbers is causing a burden on the health sector. Although the ministry has increased the capacity of rooms to receive Covid patients, this affects other services.

TURN TO P5

Mobile vaccination units soon

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

There is a move to introduce mobile vaccination units in the Sultanate. The authorities are making efforts to introduce this plan as soon as possible.

"We are in the final phase to roll out mobile vaccination units to cater people who live in remote places and find it difficult to reach the vaccination centres," said a source at the Ministry of Health said.

Some buses are being converted into mobile vaccination units in partnership with a private hospital. The units will soon be active in Muscat and other governorates based on future demand.

DETAILS ON P4



HIS MAJESTY MESSAGE TO SAUDI KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sent a written message to King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of Saudi Arabia. The message pertains to the strong fraternal relations binding the two countries and peoples as well as enhancing joint cooperation between the two countries. The message was delivered by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, when he was received by Prince Faisal bin Farhan al Saud, Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs. **DETAILS ON P2**

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 37°C Min 30°C SALALAH: Max 31°C Min 27°C NIZWA: Max 45°C Min 30°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 05:20 FAJR: 03:52 DHUHR: 12:11 ASR: 15:30 MAGHRIB: 18:58 ISHA: 20:20

ROYAL OFFICE MINISTER RECEIVES IRANIAN ENVOY



MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office on Wednesday Ali Najafi Khoshroudi, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Sultanate. During the meeting, Al Numani welcomed the ambassador, who thanked the Sultanate for its efforts in the region. The meeting touched on several topics of joint interest and reviewed the march of the relations binding the Sultanate and Iran. — ONA

Relations with Korea discussed



MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, received in his office on Wednesday Kim Chang Kyu, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the Sultanate. The meeting reviewed the bilateral relations between the two friendly countries. It also exchanged views on aspects of the existing cooperation in the cultural, sports and youth fields, as well as means of enhancing cooperation to serve the interests of the two countries. — ONA

NRAA releases
Omani-British
Relations - Part 3



MUSCAT: The National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) has released the 3rd part of the book *Omani-British Relations During the 17th to 19th Century*, within the 23rd volume of the 'Studies Series on National and International Documents'. The 523-page book includes 17 research papers in Arabic and English for researchers and scholars with different views. The book offers a balanced presentation for researchers and those interested in Omani history and Omani-Britain relations from the political, economic and military aspects of the

17th to the end of 19th century. Dr Hamad bin Mohammed al Dhawiani, NRAA Chairman, explained that the 23rd part of the book discusses aspects of the Omani-British relations from several sides, in addition to the visits and tours made by travellers to Oman and their descriptions of the geographic, political, economic and social life in Oman. He added, "The relations in this part from the perspective of historians and travellers will enable the researchers to investigate the events that the region witnessed in the context of these relations during successive periods." — ONA

HM sends written message to Saudi King

RIYADH: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of Saudi Arabia. The message pertains to the strong fraternal relations binding the two countries and peoples as well as enhancing joint cooperation between the two countries. The message was delivered

by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Hamoud al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, when he was received by Prince Faisal bin Farhan al Saud, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Sayyid Badr conveyed the greetings of His Majesty to the King of Saudi Arabia along with his wishes of good health and happiness and the Saudi

people continued progress and prosperity. Prince Faisal asked Sayyid Badr to convey the greetings and best wishes of King Salman to His Majesty along with his best wishes of permanent progress and prosperity to the Omani people. The two sides reviewed the existing bilateral relations between the brotherly

countries and ways of bolstering them in various fields, and discussed the latest developments in the regional and international arenas. The meeting was attended by His Highness Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, the Sultanate's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the accompanying delegation. — ONA

Council panel, TRA
debate distance
education challenges

MUSCAT: The State Council's Education and Research Committee held its 15th regular meeting of the second annual session under the chairmanship of Mohammed bin Hamdan al Toobi, committee chairman, on Wednesday. The committee hosted Engineer Omar bin Hamdan al Ismaili, CEO of the Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA) within the context of the committee's study on the reality, policies and legislations of distance education in the Sultanate. The committee discussed with the CEO

and officials of TRA a number of topics related to the study including the strategies of TRA to provide the infrastructure required by the telecom and IT sector in order to realise the Sultanate's digital transformation and e-government strategies as part of the Oman Vision 2040, the legislations and policies adopted by the authority to set up the government's unified network, providing broadband services to the entire population of the Sultanate and the plans and programmes approved by the Authority to ensure sustainable e-services.

Cambridge Programme
batch graduates



MUSCAT: Polyglot Group celebrated on Wednesday the graduation of 22 students from the first batch of Cambridge Programme to rehabilitate English teachers. The programme targeted English Language degree holders from higher education institutes. The programme was conducted in Polyglot Institute in three phases based on the

candidates' English skill levels (English Teaching, English literature and Linguistics), after which they received the (CELTA) degree for teaching English language. The graduation ceremony was held under the patronage of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. — ONA

Career opportunity
Finance & Investment Manager

Al Anwar Investments SAOG (formerly Al Anwar Holdings SAOG) is seeking to appoint a Finance & Investment Manager. Al Anwar Investments, established in 1994, is one of Oman's leading investment company publicly listed on the Muscat Securities Market. Following the Private Equity business model, Al Anwar invests in sectors such as financial services, insurance and manufacturing in Oman and other emerging markets. The Finance and Investment Manager's key responsibilities would include efficient financial planning, supervising accounting functions, preparation of financial statements, budgeting, assisting CEO in evaluating investment/ divestment proposals and performance monitoring of the investee companies. The ideal candidate would be a Chartered Accountant, with a minimum of 7 years' post-qualification experience in a similar profile. If this opportunity interests you and you meet the above criteria, please send your resume in English with clear details of your qualifications and work experiences (without certificates), to FIM@bridgeoman.com within 7 days of publishing this advertisement.



Shura services panel hosts APSR chief



MUSCAT: The Services and Social Development Committee of Majlis Ash'shura on Wednesday hosted Dr Mansoor bin Talib al Hinai, Chairman of the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), and a number of officials at the Authority to discuss topics related to the reorientation of the government subsidy and the anticipated social security policies. At the meeting headed by Dr Hamood bin Ahmed al Yahyaei, Head of the Services and Social Development Committee, Dr Mansoor bin Talib al Hinai presented a visual display about the

structure and activities of the electricity sector, the Authority's responsibilities and regulatory roles and the approved tariff categories for citizens and residents. Regarding the Authority's Omanisation strategy, the chairman said that the Authority has replaced

expats by national workforce and is targeting to nationalise 800 jobs this year. The committee reviewed its vision on a number of topics referred to it by the members of Majlis Ash'shura including for: reconsidering the conditions and regulations for

granting residential lands, reconsidering allocating a portion of the Zakat money transferred from the wilayats to the account of the Fak Kurba initiative, regulating the trucks used for collecting scrap in the residential quarters and regulating street vendors.



Transport Ministry going ahead with KHASAB PORT DEVELOPMENT

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has said that it is pressing ahead with plans set for the development of the Port of Khasab.

The plans build on tenders launched earlier to manage, operate and develop Khasab Port, including aspects related to supplying vessels with fuel, operating piers, connecting the port with global terminals and granting lands for investment in the

logistics and light industries' fields, according to a statement issued by the Ministry on Wednesday.

The statement indicated that, with a view to linking the Wilayat of Khasab with the Wilayat of Dibba and, to facilitate the movement of citizens and residents within the Governorate of Musandam, the ministry announced a consultative tender to select a route for the Dibba-Lima-Khasab carriageway and to prepare tender

documents for project implementation.

In a bid to enhance the system of transport in the Governorate of Musandam and, to facilitate the movement of members of the public, the Ministry will allow individuals to operate their vehicles in private transport services through the use of smart apps.

In the field of air transport, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) will coordinate with the departments concerned to utilise Khasab Airport for civil-cum-military

services after the completion of a study to develop the airport and enrich tourism and economic activities in the Governorate.

The CAA has endorsed regulatory terms and conditions for water aerodromes, inviting bids by interested investors to establish an amphibious aircraft company to operate in different sites in the Sultanate, among them Khasab and Dibba in Musandam Governorate.

— ONA

New applied science varsity to boost economy

MUSCAT: The University of Technology and Applied Sciences affirmed that the establishment of a branch of the university in Musandam Governorate is a project that has economic, scientific and tourist and social dimensions besides being part of the comprehensive development and urban strategy which aims to develop the governorate in line with the Oman Vision 2040.

In a statement, the university said that the project will be executed in two phases the first of which involves the following programmes: mechanical engineering, transportation systems engineering, energy engineering, construction and building maintenance engineering, logistics services management and systems management. The second phase includes maritime navigation, processing techniques of fisheries products and water sports management.

The project is expected to contribute to achieving balanced development between the governorates of the Sultanate as well as attract investments and develop the services and the economy in Musandam Governorate in the fields of tourism, transportation services, renewable energy and fisheries.

Additionally, the project will human development and generate job opportunities for the local community and provide the labour market with university graduates thus meeting the requirements of the comprehensive development strategy.

In its statement, the university affirmed that the presence of such a scientific edifice acquires great significance and will become a scientific and intellectual icon that will contribute to innovation and development in the governorate.

— ONA

OCCI branch hails HM directives

KHASAB: Raed bin Mohammed al Shuhi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Musandam branch of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the staff and private sector executives, hailed the Royal directives issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to develop Musandam Governorate.

He said that the establishment of a branch of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in the Wilayat of Khasab, is a long-awaited demand and will be a beacon for science and education and a tributary of the local economy as well as strength the purchasing power and stimulate air and sea transport lines.

He added that the establishment of an integrated system of strategic stock achieves food and medicine security in the governorate.

The conversion of the Port of Khasab to a special logistics zone is aimed at providing facilities and services to stir import and export activities and open direct lines for export as well as establishing special



economic and tourist zones to serve as a driver for investments in the governorate, the official said.

Al Shuhi affirmed that His Majesty's directives to the government to speed up the implementation of what has been approved by the Council of Ministers reflects a serious desire to expedite the achievement of results on the ground which requires concerted efforts and integration between different entities, he added.

He noted that the diligent follow-up by the minister of the state and governor of Musandam and the walis and the efforts of the Musandam branch of OCCI, the members of the State Council and Majlis Ash'shura and the other stakeholders, played a big role in delivering these demands which are added to a series of projects announced earlier and are currently under implementation.

— ONA

Move to launch mobile vaccination units

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

There is a move to introduce mobile vaccination units in the Sultanate. The authorities are making efforts to introduce this plan as soon as possible.

“We are in the final phase to roll out mobile vaccination units to cater people who live in remote places and find it difficult to reach the vaccination centres,” said a source at the Ministry of Health (MoH) said.

Some buses are being converted into mobile vaccination units in partnership with Aster. The units will soon be active in the capital area and in other governorates and regions based on future demand.

The trial run is underway in the Oman Automotive Association premises.

“These vehicles will predominantly cater to Omanis above 45 and who find it

We are in the final phase to roll out mobile vaccination units to cater people who live in remote places and find it difficult to reach the vaccination centres

MOH OFFICIAL

inaccessible to the vaccination centres,” added the source.

TARGET GROUP TO GET VACCINATED

“Those who are in the target group wouldn’t fail to receive the vaccine and help the nation achieve its goals in time. We are

aiming to reach the number of vaccinated people at 1.5 million by the end of June, including new target groups and all falling in these groups should come forward to get vaccinated,” the source said.

The target groups include those over the age of 45, pilgrims, citizens of Musandam Governorate, frontline staff including health workers and employees in government institutions, Royal Oman Police, Sultan’s Armed Forces, higher education institutions, academic staff, and Grade 12 students in schools, employees of vital sectors such as oil and gas sector, ports, airports, and some private sector institutions.

The deployment of vaccination centres across the Governorates is being prepared, including the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center (OCEC). The vaccines will be made available through these centres.

Drive-through vaccination on anvil

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 9

Technical aspects related to the immunisation against Covid-19 inside the car are being worked out at the Oman Automobile Association (OAA), a statement from the Ministry of Health (MoH) said.

The launch date of this service and the target group will be announced upon completion of the regulatory procedures.

The service will be an initiative of the OAA and in coordination with the Directorate General of Health Services of the Governorate of



Muscat.

The MoH has said that vaccinations will become a condition for entering educational and government institutions in the future.

The ministry sources added that the ministry will complete immunising 30 per cent of the

population before July at the current pace of vaccine supply.

The ministry has announced that the target groups as part of the national campaign for immunisation for June and July would represent a large segment of the population.

Herd immunity effective in war against Covid-19, says expert

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

From the beginning of the pandemic, experts have been talking about herd immunity. How does a nation reach there?

The importance of building immunity to fight against Covid-19 has been proven, but how can it be attained, especially when variants continue to emerge?

Observer spoke to Dr Ahmed Shahrabani, Omani doctor based in the UK, NIA Fellow and Co-Founder at Locum’s Nest, working in Covid-19 ward.

According to him, it is of paramount importance that countries achieve herd immunity in the war against Covid-19. For many reasons, the most palpable being the achievement of herd immunity will lead to the virus slowly dissipating out of existence which results in a rapid decrease in the sickness and ultimately an even more significant reduction in fatalities, he pointed out.

“It also considerably decreases the risk of new variants emerging. It is theorised that to achieve herd immunity, 70 per cent of the population needs to be immune to the virus – this could be in the

Observer spoke to Dr Ahmed Shahrabani, Omani doctor based in UK, NIA Fellow and Co-Founder at Locum’s Nest, working in Covid-19 ward

form of receiving a vaccination or having developed antibodies following exposure to the virus. Looking at the global data on Johnson & Johnson, the vaccine that Oman has invested heavily in, studies estimate the vaccine has an efficacy of 66-72 per cent. Assuming it is 70 per cent effective, this means that 100 per cent of the population in Oman needs to be vaccinated in order to achieve herd immunity.

“However, this isn’t completely accurate as one needs to include the immunity of those that have had the virus and developed natural immunity as well as those that have received alternative vaccines,” he said.

Analysing the current situation, he further explained to Observer, “Thus far, it appears as though 80,000 people in Oman are fully vaccinated, and just over

220,000 have recovered from Covid-19 – totalling 300,000 people (roughly 10 per cent of the population). This highlights to me the importance of everybody currently in Oman going to the medical centre to receive the vaccine when made available to them – we will still need 19 of 20 people who are offered the vaccine to go and have it to achieve herd immunity in the Sultanate.”

In terms of children below 15 being affected by Covid19 Dr Ahmed, said, “Right from the beginning, it was clear that Covid-19 adversely affected the elderly and more clinically vulnerable than the young. This is still the case; however, vaccinating children will be very effective in reducing the transmission of the virus amongst the rest of the population as we all know that the virus can be transmitted even via asymptomatic carriers. The risk of blood clots is exceptionally low, and the overall benefit to the nation is of paramount importance.

In regard to the variants, Dr Ahmed believes that as long as Covid-19 is in existence, there will be variants emerging, much like any other virus that can mutate as it is transmitted.

WHO meet debates nuances of hiring foreign health staff



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

A working paper on the Sultanate’s leading experience in dealing with the non-Omani health workers of various specialities was presented at the World Health Organization (WHO) tri-regional policy dialogue which seeks solutions to challenges facing international mobility of health professionals during the pandemic.

Presented by Dr Halima Qalam, Acting Director-General of Planning and Studies at the Ministry of Health (MoH), the paper highlighted the conditions of the health workforce in Oman during the Covid-19.

“Various nuances of employing the foreign health workers, and approaches towards them to make use of the skills and abilities of the workforce especially during the current health crisis were detailed at the conference,” a representative of the MoH said.

Representatives from the WHO said the virtual tri-regional policy dialogue was conducted to assess the joint efforts and to address challenges of international mobility of health professionals, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic and holds significance as 2021 marks the International Year of Health and Care Workers.

Representatives of ministries joined Dr Ahmed al Mandhari, Dr Hans Kluge and Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, WHO Regional Directors for the

Presented by Dr Halima Qalam, Acting Director-General of Planning and Studies at the Ministry of Health, the paper highlighted the conditions of the health workforce in Oman during the Covid-19 pandemic

expanding and transforming the education, training, recruitment, development, distribution, retention and financing of the health workforce as well as improving working conditions and creating attractive jobs,” said Al Mandhari.

“Health and care is the largest employment sector in the WHO European Region, employing some 13 million people. This is one of the reasons why addressing health worker mobility is vital for the 53 member states we serve, said Hans Henri P Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe.

This unique event discussed challenges, opportunities, policy responses and innovations in WHO regions concerning international ethical recruitment, fair and effective employment and integration of foreign health workers, and approaches to harness the contribution of diaspora health workers.

According to the WHO and the MoH, the international mobility of health workers has been increasing. There is an estimated global shortage of 18 million health workers by 2030. Only through strengthened management of mobility through improved information, policy and international cooperation, framed by the WHO Code on International Recruitment of Health Personnel, can we ensure that the mobility of health worker to the development of Healthcare services, it is learnt.

Eastern Mediterranean, Europe and South-east Asia, health professional regulatory bodies, UN agencies, development partners, and technical experts from the WHO regions and participants from around the world and across sectors of development, education, finance, migration and trade, during the two-day meeting to review trends and policy responses in the area.

“The current pandemic has highlighted the centrality of health workers for health security and the health-related Sustainable Development Goals,” said Dr Ahmed al Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

“Countries must invest in a sustainable national health workforce that meets the current and future needs of their populations. That means



RECALL CAMPAIGN FOR SUZUKI JIMNY MODEL VEHICLES



Model Year	Division	Vehicle Model	Affected Vehicle Vin Range	No. of Affected Vehicles in Oman
2019	Suzuki	Jimny	JS3JB7D19K5100020 to JS3JB7D10K5100391	33

DESCRIPTION:
The fuel feeding impeller in the fuel pump, which is made of the resin material, may be swollen and deformed in fuel due to the insufficient material density caused by the improper injection molding process. The impeller may interfere with the fuel pump housing, resulting in the fuel pump malfunction. In the worst case, it could cause the engine stalling while driving.

PROCEDURE:
Dealers are required to replace the Fuel Pump Set

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Customers of the above mentioned vehicles may please call Moosa Abdul Rahman Hassan & Co LLC for Suzuki.

CONTACT DETAILS:
Toll free number for MARH 80076200 on all working days between 8.30am to 1.00pm and 4.00pm to 6.30pm.



New Covid-19 daily record

From page 1

"We will have to use the cadre of these services to take care of Covid patients, which negatively harms patients who need other types of care," she said.

On May 15, ban on the movement of individuals and vehicles was lifted after almost two months of partial lockdown. The Supreme Committee allowed receiving customers inside stores in all governorates of the Sultanate, while entry to complexes, shops, restaurants,

and cafes continue to be only 50 per cent capacity.

The committee also decided to resume work with a decision to reduce the number of employees who are required to attend the workplace in the units of the state's administrative apparatus and other public legal staff to 50 per cent of the total number of employees, provided that employees who do not attend the workplace perform their duties assigned remotely.

RAFO Commander attends GCC meeting



MUSCAT: Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), took part on Wednesday in the 25th meeting of the GCC Air Force Commanders. The virtual meeting discussed several topics that aim to enhance the joint military cooperation between the member countries.

— ONA



Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Center

TENDERS ADVERTISEMENT

The operational committee of Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Centre announces to retender the following Medical Equipment:

Tender	Tender Fee	Codes	Equipment	Quantity
CCCCRC/T/187/2021	70 R.O	[MEQ-MEQ-0053]	Body Composition Analyzer	1
		[MEQ-MEQ-0051]	Hand Grip Dynamometer	16
		[MEQ-MEQ-0054]	Skinfold Caliper	5
		[MEQ-MEQ-0076]	Bipolar Electrohydraulic Lithotripsy System	1
		[MEQ-MEQ-0109]	Hand Lift Table Hydraulic Lifter	1

Qualified companies interested in participating in this Tender shall collect the Tender specifications from the date of this advertisement till 16/06/2021 from the following address:

Operational Committee of the Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre

Knowledge Oasis, Building No4 (KOM4) First Floor.

Biddings that meet the above requirement should be submitted on or before 23/06/2021 in a sealed envelope by an Omani National from your company addressed to the head of Purchase Committee in the tender box located at:

Operational Committee of the Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre

Knowledge Oasis Building No4 (KOM4), First Floor.

Please note:

- Bids received after the deadline indicated above, for whatever reason, will not be considered.
- Queries/ clarifications should be submitted immediately, but not later than one week before the date of tender submission.
- For Queries you may Contact on Tel: 22584132 or 22584133 or via e-mail: purchase@cccrc.gov.om.
- The committee is not obliged to accept the lowest price of the bid or any other bid.



Notice and agenda of the General Meeting of the holders of Sukuk certificates issued by Mohammed Al Barwani Sukuk Issue SAOC (the Company)

The agent of Sukuk holders, Muscat Clearing & Depository Company SAOC (MCD), has the pleasure to invite all Sukuk holders of the USD certificates and the OMR certificates (together the **Certificates**) to attend the General Meeting (GM) of the holders of the Certificates scheduled to be held on 24 June 2021 at 3 p.m. in respect of the USD certificates and on the same date at 4 p.m. in respect of the OMR certificates through the electronic platform for general meetings accessible through Muscat Clearing and Depository (MCD) company's website (www.mcd.om).

In the event the required quorum is not met to hold the first meeting, the second meeting shall take place at on 27 June 2021 via the same electronic platform set out above at 3 p.m. in respect of the USD Certificates and on the same day at 4 p.m. in respect of the OMR Certificates to discuss the following agenda item:

The First item: To consider and approve the proposal to amend some of the terms and conditions of the sukuk, as follows:

- The proposal of amending the terms and conditions of the Certificates in connection with the prospectus approved by the Capital Market Authority by way of an Administrative Decision to extending the existing final maturity dates of the Certificates from 29 June 2021, to 29 June 2023 (the **Extension**) as per the explanatory memorandum in Schedule 1;
- The proposal to amend the optional dissolution right set out in the conditions to the Certificates in order to allow the Company the flexibility to redeem the Certificates in whole or in part on any day after 29 June 2021 and up to (but excluding) 29 June 2023 (the Option) as per the explanatory memorandum in Schedule 1; and
- The board of directors of the Company to be authorised to undertake and implement all steps and documentation necessary or desirable to give effect to the proposed Extension and the Option, including any steps involving third parties, such as the CMA and/or MCD and other parties.

In accordance with the Declaration of Agency agreements and the Capital Market Authority Rules Governing General Meetings through electronic means, please note the following:

- Only a juristic / corporate entity may appoint a natural person to act on its behalf in connection with the meeting and any adjournment of the meeting, provided that the authorization should be made in writing using the proxy form set out in Schedule 2 to this notice and which is also available at MCD or from the Company and must be submitted electronically not less than 24 hours before the scheduled time of start of the meeting, i.e. by 12 p.m. on Wednesday, 23 June 2021 and the proxy should have an Investor Number from MCD in order to vote.
- The voting on any of the items on the agenda shall begin through the online MCD platform from 3 p.m. on Monday, 21 June 2021 and until the voting is completed on the day of the meeting.
- MCD will effect a block on the trading of the Certificates from 8 a.m. on Sunday, 20 June 2021.

The specific amendments and the form of GM Resolution are more particularly detailed in a consent solicitation memorandum which will be available to registered Certificate holders, either from the MCD by email request to yaqoob@mcd.gov.om or from the Company by contacting sukusupport@mbholdingco.com (the **Consent Solicitation Memorandum**).

For any inquiries, please contact **Mr. Yaqoob Al-Wahibi** at MCD on +968 24822274 or yaqoob@mcd.gov.om or by emailing the Company at sukusupport@mbholdingco.com or telephone 92888395.

Realty deals rise 24.8pc in April

MUSCAT: The total value of property transactions in the Sultanate at the end of April 2021 increased by 24.8 per cent to reach RO 991 million.

The collected real estate transaction fees were RO 28.6 million, comprising a rise by 47.4 per cent.

The traded value of sales contracts by the end of April 2021 went up by 81.1 per cent

to reach RO 424.5 million, and the number of executed sales contracts saw a rise by 123.9 per cent to reach 31,175 compared to 13,923 contracts in April 2020.

The traded value of mortgage contracts went up 1.3 per cent to reach RO 558.5 million compared to RO 551.2 million in the same period of 2020. The number

of mortgage contracts reached 6,427 comprising a surge by 79.8 per cent compared to 3,575 in April 2020.

The traded value of exchange (barter) contracts dropped by 6.8 per cent to reach RO 7.9 million compared to RO 8.4 million in the same period of 2020.

The number of plots issued

at the end of April 2021 was 92,779, which is an increase of 75 per cent compared to the end of April 2020, when 53,031 plots were issued.

The number of plots allocated to GCC citizens went up by 63.6 per cent to reach 270 plots compared to 165 plots during the same period of 2020, the data showed. — ONA

‘Be Innovative’ programme trains teachers



STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 9

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General for Special Education and Continuing Learning, has organised a virtual training programme under the title ‘Be Innovative’ under the auspices of Eng Hilal bin Nasser al Shibli, Director General of the Oman Makers Center, in the presence of Dr Fathia bint Khalfan al Sidiyah, Director-General of the Directorate. The three-day training programme concluded on Wednesday with wide participation from supervisors and teachers of special education in private schools across the Sultanate.

The programme aimed at evaluating teachers’ creativity and innovation capabilities, and applying creative thinking skills and methods, whether in the school environment, or through daily life situations and the surrounding community, and employing creative thinking strategies in their field of work, and the details of educational life.

The training programme included morning and evening sessions in which six different papers were presented by trainers specialised in the field of innovation, which focused on innovation in education and intellectual property rights. The programme also included workshops on professional web design, 3D printers in the educational process, innovation from idea to product, along with the success story of the Innovation Factory.

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:-

- Excavator Hitachi EX 1200 -5D**, 2010 Model, with 28 meter long reach (long boom + long Arm), Hours covered:26403 Hrs.
- 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.



Sultan Qaboos University

TENDER NOTICE

The Investment & Revenue Department at Sultan Qaboos University would like to invite companies to submit their quotations for:

S/N	Type of Business	Location	Total Area	Duration of Contract in Years	Date of site visit	Class	Tender #
1	SQU Drive through corner	On the plot next to SQU Petrol Station Integrated Services (Oman Oil)	10,000 M ²	25	15/06/2021 9:00 am	Excellent Classs	SQU.IRD. 1/21

- Tenderers who wish to participate in this Tender may collect Tender Documents from The Section of Revenue And Expenditures at the Investment & Revenue Department, Sultan Qaboos University, during the working hours for an amount of RO. 25 for each tender document (non-refundable). The last date for collecting the Document is 20/06/2021.
- The Site Visit for the selected shop is necessary. It will be on the above mentioned date and tome. The assembly point will be at the Investment & Revenue Department.
- The last date for submission of the quotations: 27/06/2021. The quotations should be submitted in a sealed envelope addressed to the Director of theInvestment & Revenue Department, Sultan Qaboos University and deposited in the Tender Box kept in the Department, before 10:00 a.m.
- The exterior of the envelope should be marked with the name and number of the Tender being presented and should bear no identification or mark of the Tenderer.
- The Tenderer should submit (enclose) with his tender a Bank Guarantee Document for sum of 1% of the total Duration of contract rental value quoted by the Tenderer and valid for 120 (One hundred and Twenty) days from the date specified for submission of Tender. Tender documents submitted after the deadline or without a Bank Guarantee will be excluded.
- Sultan Qaboos University reserves the right to reject any quotation not fulfilling the requirements and does not bid itself to accept the highest rent or any other quotations.

The Investment & Revenue Department
P.O BOX 50, P.C. 123, ALKHOD, SULTANATE OF OMAN
Tel: 24142691 – 24142682 Fax: 24142688



Fighting leaves scar on Gaza children

GAZA: Three weeks since Suzy Eshkuntana was pulled from the rubble of her house, destroyed by an Israeli airstrike, the six-year-old girl has barely spoken except to ask for her mother and four siblings who were killed that day.

Her life turned upside down, Suzy and her father are now living with her uncle, who said she barely eats, doesn't sleep well and cannot muster the will to play.

"She asks a lot about her mother, and we tell her mama is in heaven," said Suzy's uncle Ramzi, who said she previously was full of energy.

"She doesn't play, and she screams when someone comes near her."

Half of the young people in Gaza — around 500,000 children — could be in need of psychological support after 11 days of fighting in May between the enclave's Hamas rulers and Israel, according to officials from the UN children's fund Unicef.

At least 66 children were among over 250 Palestinians killed by Israeli airstrikes on Gaza. Two children were among 13 killed in Israel by Gaza militant rocket fire, which sent thousands of Israeli families running for bomb shelters where they cradled



Palestinian children play inside a car destroyed during the May 2021 conflict between Hamas and Israel, in Beit Hanun in the northern Gaza Strip. — AFP

their children for hours on end.

Suzy's home was struck in a wave of Israeli attacks on Gaza City on May 16 that Gaza health officials said killed 42 people, including 10 children.

Israel said those strikes targeted an underground tunnel system used by Hamas to transport weapons, and that the

Around 500,000 children could be in need of psychological support after 11 days of fighting in May between Hamas and Israel

houses collapsed as a result of the tunnel network crumbling.

The Israeli military said the civilian casualties were unintentional, and that it does all it can to avoid civilian harm.

Psychologists have paid Suzy regular visits to help her process her trauma. At an art therapy session on Sunday, she sat silently

as she and her cousins painted their names on paper.

Alongside her name, Suzy painted two large hearts, in red.

"She was taken from her family's lap, from her mother's lap ... she survived death with a miracle," said psychologist Samar Awad, who oversees Suzy's case.

Around half of Gaza's two million population are under 18. Many carry the trauma of three previous wars and several other violent conflicts fought between Israel and Gaza militant groups since 2008, psychologists said.

Lucia Elmi, Unicef's special representative in Palestinian territories, said that even before the May fighting, one out of three children was in need of psycho-social support.

"Today, the assessments are ongoing and this figure could reach 500,000 children, so it is increasing," she told reporters.

Depression and insecurity were the most common psychological issues among Gaza children, said Sami Owaida, a psychiatrist in Gaza who specialises in adolescents.

"That means you have no self-esteem. You (feel like) you have nothing. You (feel) helpless, hopeless, worthless," he said.

— AFP

Israeli strikes kill 11 Syria troops

DAMASCUS: Israeli air strikes in central Syria killed at least 11 government troops and militiamen late on Tuesday, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The strikes were the first carried out by Israel in Syria since 11 days of heavy fighting with the Hamas rulers of Gaza ended with an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire on May 21, the Britain-based war monitor said.

"At least seven army soldiers and four National Defence Forces militiamen were killed," Observatory chief Rami Abdul Rahman told AFP, adding that all of the dead were Syrian.

The Observatory said the strikes targeted air force positions near the village of Khirbet al-Tin on the outskirts of Homs, as well as an arms depot belonging to the Lebanese Hezbollah movement.

The Israeli air force carried out Tuesday evening strikes in several regions of Syria, in the capital Damascus as well as in Homs, Hama and Latakia provinces, the Observatory said. — Agencies

Gunmen kill 10 mine-clearing workers in Afghanistan

KUNDUZ: Masked gunmen killed 10 people working for the HALO Trust mine-clearing organisation in northern Afghanistan in an attack the government blamed on the Taliban Wednesday, but the UK-based charity said the insurgents actually helped end the assault.

The raid happened late on Tuesday as dozens of deminers were relaxing at a HALO compound in Baghlan province, around 260 kilometres (160 miles) north of the capital, after a day spent looking for ordnance in the area.

Baghlan has seen fierce fighting in recent months, with near-daily battles between the Taliban and government forces in several districts.

A survivor of Tuesday's attack said that five or six armed men scaled the compound walls and gathered everyone together before asking if there were any Hazara present.

Afghanistan's Hazara community is often targeted by the IS, who consider them heretics.



Wounded people receive treatments at a hospital following an attack by masked gunmen which killed 10 people working for the HALO Trust mine-clearing organisation, at Pol-e-Khomri in Baghlan Province on Wednesday. — AFP

"Nobody responded," said the survivor, who asked not to be identified. He said the gunmen then asked the compound leader to identify himself, before shooting him dead.

"Then one of them said 'kill them all,'" he said.

"As they opened fire, we all tried to escape. Some were killed and some, like me, were wounded."

Afghan Vice President Amrullah Saleh blamed the Taliban for the attack, saying in a tweet the insurgents wanted to "steal money and unexploded devices" from the HALO base.

But James Cowan, chief executive of HALO, told BBC radio that the insurgents actually helped end the assault that also left 16 workers wounded.

Cowan said the attackers went "bed to bed, murdering in cold blood my staff". — AFP

Israel appeals to Prince Charles over terminally-ill girl

TEL AVIV: Israel's president appealed to Prince Charles on Wednesday to help bring to Israel a 2-year-old Israeli girl with a serious brain injury, after the High Court in London ruled that her life-sustaining care in a British hospital be withdrawn.

The family of Alta Fixsler say their Ultra-Orthodox Jewish faith means they cannot agree with any course of action that would bring her death any closer. They have sought to appeal the May 28 ruling.

In its decision, the court found that no action could improve Alta's condition and that the transfer procedure itself could cause her suffering.

In a letter on Wednesday, Israeli President Reuven Rivlin urged Charles, the heir to the British throne, to help to fulfil Alta's parents' request to bring her to Israel.

"Their religious beliefs directly oppose ceasing medical treatment that could extend her life and have



Alta is seen with her brother Tzvi and father Abraham, in Manchester. — AFP

made arrangements for her safe transfer and continued treatment in Israel," Rivlin wrote.

"It would be a tragedy if these parents' wishes could not be accommodated in a way that respects both the law and their religious beliefs."

Israel's health minister appealed to Britain's government last week on the family's behalf to

say that Israel wished to take her in for treatment.

Alta's father, Avraham Fixsler, said he had Israeli doctors who were willing to come to Manchester, where she is in hospital, and give the family their options for treating her.

"We believe she is not suffering and we want to have the right to keep her," he said. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

ANKARA

Erdogan to visit Karabakh region

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Wednesday he will visit Azerbaijan to celebrate its victory over Armenia in a brief war last year, touring a region recaptured in disputed Nagorno-Karabakh.

Azerbaijan seized back swathes of territory in the separatist ethnic Armenia region with the help of Turkish combat drones and other weaponry from Ankara.

The conflict claimed 6,000 lives and ended with a Russian-



brokered truce in November that saw ethnic Armenians pushed out of large parts of the land they had won during a brutal post-Soviet war in the 1990s.

DUBAI

UAE bars entry from 3 African countries

The United Arab Emirates will suspend entry for travellers coming from Zambia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda starting June 11, as part of efforts to contain the spread of the coronavirus, the state news agency WAM said on Wednesday. The UAE Ministry of Health and Prevention reported 2,179 cases of the Covid-19 coronavirus, along with 2,151 recoveries and 6 deaths. The new cases were detected through 254,412 additional tests. The



total number of cases in UAE as on June 9 are 589,423, while total recoveries stand at 568,828. The death toll now stands at 1,710. Covid-19 safety rules have been eased across the UAE, with gatherings and events allowed.

KHARTOUM

Sudan ends fuel subsidies, raises prices

Sudan fully liberalised gasoline and diesel prices on Tuesday, according to a statement from the finance ministry that said previous prices would be canceled and gave new prices that it said were in line with import costs.

Sudan has been implementing aggressive IMF-monitored reforms in the hopes of turning around its economy and attracting debt relief and renewed financing.

The reforms have been painful and annual inflation climbed



to 363 per cent in April. Sudanese officials and the IMF have said the reforms, which included a sharp currency devaluation, would cause prices to rise and add to pressure on citizens.

In brief

■ SEOUL



SOUTH KOREA BUILDING
COLLAPSE KILLS 9

At least nine people were killed and eight were injured when a five-storey building collapsed suddenly on Wednesday while it was in the midst of a demolition process and fell on to a busy street in South Korea, officials at a local fire station said.

The building collapsed as it was being demolished in Gwangju, some 270 kilometres of southwest of capital Seoul, officials at the Gwangju Fire and Safety Headquarters said.

The reason for the collapse was unclear, according to the fire station. Gwangju Fire and Safety Headquarters officials said the fire station had received the report of the collapse, which buried a bus that was near the construction site.

■ ISLAMABAD



10M VACCINE DOSES
GIVEN IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan on Wednesday hailed the administering of 10 million doses of coronavirus vaccines as an important step towards its goal of vaccinating 70 million people by the end of the year.

“Thank God, we have succeeded in administering 10 million vaccine (doses)”, the minister in-charge for Covid-19 operations, Asad Umar, told a ceremony to mark the milestone in Islamabad. Pakistan faced initial vaccination hesitancy and a shortage of supplies but it started a mass vaccination campaign late last month.

It has relied heavily on ally China for its vaccine supplies with three out of its six approved does coming from Chinese producers: Sinopharm, SinoVac and CanSinoBio.

■ BANGKOK



UN SAYS 100,000 FLEEING
VIOLENCE IN MYANMAR

At least 100,000 people in eastern Myanmar are on the run because of violent “attacks” by the army, the United Nations estimates.

Kayah state, on the border with Thailand, is particularly badly affected, according to a statement by the UN mission in Myanmar.

The people fled after “indiscriminate attacks by security forces against civilian areas”, read the statement, which was dated from Tuesday.

“This crisis could push people across international borders seeking safety, as already seen in other parts of the country”, it said.

South Asian nations turn to China, Russia for jabs

KATHMANDU: Sri Lanka began injecting pregnant women with a Chinese coronavirus vaccine on Wednesday and Nepal resumed inoculations with a China-made jab as India’s neighbours turn to Beijing and Moscow for help with supplies.

Nepal halted inoculations at the end of May after its stock of AstraZeneca shots and Chinese Sinopharm jabs ran short.

The programme resumed on Tuesday after a million more Sinopharm doses arrived from China, the only country that has so far responded to its appeals for help.

India had previously supplied Nepal with the AstraZeneca vaccine from its manufacturer Serum Institute but in March froze vaccine exports as infections soared domestically.

“Nepal has sent requests to many countries including both neighbours, US, Russia and other countries but no additional vaccine has arrived yet”, health ministry official Samir Kumar Adhikari said.

Barely two per cent of the country’s people are fully vaccinated.



A health worker inoculates a pregnant woman with a dose of Sinopharm Covid-19 coronavirus vaccine in Colombo on Wednesday. — AFP

nated.

Around 1.3 million people received one AstraZeneca dose in March but have since been unable to get a second.

Sri Lanka meanwhile has been aggressively rolling out China’s Sinopharm jab after receiving two

million doses in the past week.

On Wednesday the programme was opened to pregnant women.

The island, in the middle of a ferocious third wave of infections, announced last month it was also buying 13 million Sputnik V vaccines from Russia.

Early monsoon rains flood Mumbai

NEW DELHI: Roads and markets were flooded and some buses and local trains stalled in Mumbai on Wednesday as annual monsoon rains hit India’s financial hub, in a city already reeling from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The monsoon reached Mumbai earlier than scheduled. The weather office has sounded a red alert for the city and neighbouring districts like Thane, Raigad and Palghar, with a forecast of further heavy showers, the next 48 hours.

The flooding and rains affected the vaccination programme and also disrupted traffic, NDTV news channel reported.

The city started partially opening up on Monday after weeks of lockdown due to the pandemic, which is now on the



A family wades along a waterlogged street following a heavy monsoon rainfall in Mumbai on Wednesday. — AFP

wane.

Mumbai has reported more than 700,000 of India’s 2.9 million infections since March 2020, and 15,073 deaths.

On Tuesday, the city reported 673 fresh infections, its lowest

daily number since February 23, according to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).

As of Monday, bus service has resumed and shops have reopened. Restaurants salons and spas have opened with 50 per

cent capacity. Experts had raised alarms that the pandemic could affect preparations for the annual monsoon rains. Some worried drains wouldn’t be cleared properly.

Local television showed streets with flowing streams and stranded buses and cars.

The BMC said it had to shut down a vaccination centre in the Byculla area of the city. Santa Cruz and Colaba were among the other areas affected.

The monsoon season routinely brings Mumbai, located along the Arabian sea, to a standstill with large-scale inundations after heavy rains.

Deaths are often caused by house collapses, electrocution and drowning. — dpa

Melbourne to exit lockdown but some curbs stay

SYDNEY: Australia’s second largest city Melbourne will exit a Covid-19 hard lockdown as planned on Thursday night, Victoria state authorities said, although some restrictions on travel and gatherings would likely remain for another week.

After two weeks in a strict lockdown that forced people to remain home except for essential business, Melbourne’s five million residents will get more freedom to step outside from 11:59 pm local time (1359 GMT) on Thursday.

However, people must stay within 25 kms (15 miles) of their homes, officials said, in an effort to stop transmission during an upcoming long weekend. There will also be a total ban on house gatherings and masks will be mandatory indoors.

“This is a good day”, Victoria state Acting Premier James Merlino told reporters in Melbourne on Wednesday.

“But we know this isn’t over yet and until we have widespread vaccination across Victoria and the country, the virus will still be with us.”

Merlino said further easing of restrictions for Melbourne could happen within a week barring any spike in cases.

Australia has effectively reined in Covid-19, recording just over 30,200 cases and 910 deaths, due to speedy tracing systems, snap lockdowns and strict social distancing rules. — Reuters

Faulty carriage link blamed for Pakistan crash

LAHORE: A train that derailed into the path of another oncoming passenger express began its journey despite a faulty carriage link, Pakistan’s railway minister said on Wednesday, as authorities probed the cause of a crash that killed 63 people.

The Sir Syed Express passenger train on Monday ploughed through carriages of the Millat Express, which had derailed minutes earlier near Daharki in Sindh province.

The accident has reignited debate about the parlous state of Pakistan’s public transport system — particularly a rail network that has seen little investment in decades.

“The buffer joint of coach number 10 of Millat Express was faulty and bolts were also loose that led to derailment”, Railways Minister Azam Swati told a press conference in Lahore.



Workers repair a railway track near the wreckage of a train in Daharki on Wednesday, two days after a inter-city train ploughed into another express that had derailed killing at least 63 people. — AFP

The buffer joint, or coupling, connects carriages.

Swati blamed the accident on ageing rolling stock — some of

which is more than 50 years old — and called for massive investment in the country’s creaking and accident-prone rail network.

“We are a poor country and do not even have new technology to overhaul coaches”, he said, adding technicians were “still using ham-

mers”.

Swati said some 22 senior and junior level officials had some responsibility for a chain of errors that led to the accident and would be “taken to task”.

He said most of the casualties came from the collision of the trains rather than the derailment.

The incident happened before dawn on a remote part of the track surrounded by farmland.

While locals rushed to the scene to help, it took hours for specialist machinery to arrive to cut people from the tangled wreckage.

The majority of Pakistan’s train passengers are working-class people who cannot afford the quicker bus journeys. More than 300 people were killed and 700 injured in 1990 when an overloaded 16-carriage inter-city train crashed into a stationary freight train near the city of Sukkur in Sindh. — AFP

France, Belgium ease virus curbs as US decision boosts travel hopes

PARIS: France and Belgium further relaxed their Covid-19 restrictions Wednesday, allowing restaurants and cafes to serve indoors, while the United States eased travel warnings for dozens of countries as vaccinations boost hopes of a return to normal life.

The pandemic's impact on life around the planet was also illustrated on Wednesday with a shake-up of the list of the world's most liveable cities, with Auckland rocketing to the top on the back of New Zealand's successful coronavirus response.

With more than 3.7 million lives lost globally, many nations are still struggling to contain their coronavirus outbreaks, but the rapid vaccine rollout in wealthier parts of the world such as Europe is allowing the return of some activities considered unthinkable just a few months ago.

"A new step will be taken" on Wednesday, President Emmanuel Macron wrote on Twitter, when people in France will be able to enjoy outdoor dining and staying out until 11 pm. "Life will resume across our lands."

If all goes to plan, French authorities will drop the overnight curfew entirely on June 30. In virtually all of France, however, masks remain obligatory even outdoors.

Belgium will also relax restrictions, allowing cafes and restaurants to serve indoors. Prime Minister Alexander De Croo announced longer operating hours for businesses and the easing of



French Prime Minister Jean Castex (L) meet people as they leave the Brasserie Lipp restaurant after lunch as France reopens indoor restaurant dining and relaxation of a curfew, the third phase in a four-stage lifting of virus restrictions, in Paris on Wednesday. - AFP

restrictions on sports venues and cinemas.

European nations are ramping up vaccinations as they try to strike a balance between public health and reviving sectors such as tourism that were devastated by pandemic travel restrictions.

The hopeful outlook in Europe is a far cry from the early days of the pandemic, when it was one of the worst-hit regions in the world.

The impact of that phase was visible in the world's most liveable cities list released on Wednesday, which saw cities in Australia, Japan and New Zealand — all with swift coronavirus responses — leaping ahead of those in Europe.

"Auckland rose to the top of the ranking owing to its successful approach in containing the Covid-19 pandemic, which allowed its society to remain open and the city to score strongly," said the Economist Intelligence Unit, which compiles the list.

It cited the stress on health infrastructure for the poor showing of European cities, which also had a knock-on effect on culture and overall liveability because of restrictions on movement.

Australia's successful coronavirus response has included snap lockdowns for even small outbreaks. Five million Melbourne residents are set to emerge from

one such two-week lockdown on Thursday, imposed in response to the detection of a cluster.

The United States on Tuesday eased its warnings against travel to dozens of countries including Olympics host Japan and much of Europe, with the State Department asking Americans to reconsider travel but ending blanket advice to not go at all.

The United States has had one of the most successful vaccine rollouts in the world, and President Joe Biden has set a goal of giving at least one shot to 70 per cent of American adults by July 4 — a goal still within reach but imperilled by hesitancy. — AFP

G7 called on to make more commitments on climate

LONDON: Ahead of this week-end's summit in the English county of Cornwall, development organisations have called for greater efforts by the rich industrial nations in the G7 to combat climate change.

Carbon dioxide emissions must be reduced faster and to much lower levels than previously promised, and financial commitments for climate protection and the necessary adjustments in poorer countries must also be expanded, they demanded on Wednesday.

"What is on the table now is not enough," Joern Kalinski of Oxfam International said on Wednesday ahead of the G7 summit in the village of Carbis Bay, in the remote southwest of the country.

The heads of state and government from the United States, Germany, Britain, Canada, France, Italy and Japan, as well as EU representatives, are meeting from Friday to Sunday for their summit in the Cornish

seaside resort.

In addition to the pandemic, the fight against global warming is one of the central topics ahead of the UN climate change conference -known as COP26 - in the Scottish city of Glasgow in November.

The G7 countries have not kept their earlier pledges to provide around 100 billion dollars a year in climate change assistance to developing countries, complained Kalinski.

Oxfam estimates that this climate aid has so far only amounted to \$39 billion. Half of this money is to be used by poorer countries to expand protection against climate change and make themselves more resilient to impacts such as extreme weather.

In May, the highest level of carbon dioxide concentrations to date was measured, Dirk Bathe of the German aid agency World Vision pointed out. If anything, the levels are continuing to rise. With warming, the susceptibility to diseases is increasing. — dpa



A sculpture of the G7 leaders shaped like Mount Rushmore made of electronic waste has been erected in Cornwall ahead of the G7 Summit. It has been named "Mount Recyclemore" and bids to highlight the damage caused by the disposal of electronic devices.



A woman tries to make a Bitcoin transaction at a Bitcoin support office at El Zonte Beach in Chilitupan, El Salvador on Tuesday. - Reuters

El Salvador makes bitcoin legal tender

SAN SALVADOR: El Salvador has become the first country in the world to adopt bitcoin as legal tender after Congress approved President Nayib Bukele's proposal to embrace cryptocurrency.

With 62 out of 84 possible votes, lawmakers voted in favour of the move to create a law to adopt bitcoin, despite concern about the potential impact on El Salvador's program with the International Monetary Fund.

Bukele has touted the use of bitcoin for its potential to help Salvadorans living abroad to send remittances back home, while saying the U.S. dollar will also continue as legal tender.

"It will bring financial inclusion, investment, tourism, innovation and economic development for

our country," Bukele said in a tweet shortly before the vote in Congress, which is controlled by his party and allies.

The use of bitcoin will be optional for individuals and would not bring risks to users, Bukele said. The government will guarantee convertibility to dollars at the time of transaction through a trust created at the country's development bank BANDESAL.

Its use as legal tender will go into law in 90 days, with the bitcoin-dollar exchange rate set by the market.

Under the law, bitcoin must be accepted by firms when offered as payment for goods and services. Tax contributions can also be paid in bitcoin.

Analysts have said the move

could complicate talks with the IMF, where El Salvador seeks a more than \$1 billion program.

Bitcoin enjoyed its best day in two weeks, rising 5 per cent to \$35,197.

"The market will now be focused on adoption through El Salvador and whether other nations follow," said Richard Galvin of crypto fund Digital Asset Capital Management. "This could be a key catalyst for bitcoin over the next two to three years."

Emerging economies - where bank penetration is much lower than in developed countries and reliance on money transfers from abroad much higher - have been at the forefront of the cryptocurrency bonanza.

Outside the U.S., countries with

the highest trading volumes and mining activity are all developing nations, according to BofA, including China, Colombia, India, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Ukraine and Vietnam.

But the use of digital currencies can also pose risks for dollarized economies, such as El Salvador, the bank added.

"Dollarisation, the use of foreign currencies, is a major problem for macro and financial stability in many emerging markets, and it could worsen if digitalisation facilitates access to foreign currencies," said David Hauner at BofA.

"The root cause of dollarisation is high local inflation, which could worsen, too, if digital currencies prove inflationary." — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

LIMA

Castillo inches nearer win in Peru poll

Peruvian socialist Pedro Castillo was holding on to a razor-thin lead in the deeply divided country's presidential election on Wednesday with almost all votes processed, though, with a gap of just 70,000, contested ballots could still be decisive.

Castillo, the son of illiterate farmers who has rattled the Andean nation's political elite and garnered huge support from the rural poor, had 50.2 per cent with 99.8 per cent of votes processed, just 0.4 per cent percentage point



ahead of right-wing rival Keiko Fujimori.

The tally is, however, preliminary because about 300,000 votes have been contested, which will need to be further scrutinised by an electoral jury.

THE HAGUE

'Butcher of Bosnia' sentence upheld

UN judges on Tuesday upheld the genocide life sentence of former Bosnian Serb military chief Ratko Mladic over the 1995 Srebrenica massacre, in the final verdict on Europe's worst act of bloodshed since World War II.

US President Joe Biden hailed the "historic" confirmation that the man dubbed the "Butcher of Bosnia" will spend the rest of his life in jail for the atrocities he oversaw during the 1992-95 Bosnian war.

The grey-haired Mladic, in his



late 70s, briefly closed his eyes and shook his head as the Hague tribunal rejected his appeal against his 2017 conviction and sentence for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

AMSTERDAM

Fastly blames bug for Internet outage

Fastly Inc., the company behind a major global Internet outage this week, said on Wednesday the incident was caused by a bug in its software that was triggered when one of its customers changed their settings.

Tuesday's outage raised questions about the reliance of the Internet on a few infrastructure companies. Fastly <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/Fastly-cloud-company-behind-global-Internet-outage-2021-06-08> 's



issue knocked out high traffic sites including news providers such as *The Guardian* and *New York Times*, as well as British government sites, Reddit and Amazon.com.

How can an App satisfy you?

I called up 1422 to inquire about water bills. But the employee on the other end did not bother to even ask my problem and respond accordingly. Instead, she promptly asked me to download the app. I asked her, if it is the customer service for which you are trained so that you can be in this position at the call centre. Aren't you asking me to download the app without knowing my issue?... I continued. Then came the response that she was not in charge of the billing section and she deals with only the issue of water cuts. I told her that on this number in the bill there is an option available on this line. Then how are you telling this, I asked her. Why doesn't the company inform the subscribers that the inquiry service regarding bills is suspended or not available anymore? This requires at least respecting the customers. I told her that at least you should not reply to the customers in this manner.

I have always said that companies such as water, electricity, telecommunication, banks and those which provide services to the people should improve their customer services to respond to the queries and demands of the customers. They should greet them and give them a warm welcome and respond in a very polite manner.

Those who are working in this area or at the front desk should be trained



Ali Al Matani
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THE SERVICES
OF THE CALL
CENTRES MUST
SEE RADICAL
AND DRASTIC
CHANGES,
STARTING WITH
THE SELECTION
OF EMPLOYEES

how to welcome customers and deal with their issues. This is the customer service on which the reputation of a company depends.

A few years ago I did a detailed feature on customer services in the country. Since then, nothing has changed. Whatever progress has been made is marginal and negligible. The reason is that those who provide these services themselves are not satisfied with this service. They do not believe that this is a particularly important service to make an impression of those who contact it. The companies should focus on all aspects of these services.

The services of the call centres must see radical and drastic changes, starting with the selection of employees who have smiling faces, sweet tongue, broad heart, and wider horizons in front of them. They should have the mindset to help others and have good behaviour. For all these qualities, they should be examined and tested. These are some of the basic issues on which the employees of call centres should be assessed. It is unfortunate that most of those who respond from the call centres lack these qualities.

Instead, they have memorised certain sentences like "download the app" etc as response to your issues. Ideally, they should show interest in the problems of the customers and try to act in a way as if they want to ensure

that the issues are solved. They should listen patiently and then respond in a manner which satisfies the customer.

These days our mobile phones are full of applications. Everybody is making an application and sending us a one line message "download the app." Now we depend more on applications than on those who are actually capable of providing services.

Improvement is required as much as modern technologies are important to deal with whatever issues we have. But at any cost we should not forget our values, principles, traditions and practices while dealing with others and greeting them. We should not randomly ask a customer to download the app without knowing his or her problem.

The name and fame of call centres is music to the ears, in the beginning when you call them and at the end when you hand up. This is what they should be. Many call centres feel privileged to thank you for contacting you in a short mobile message which reaches you even after you finish your work and disconnect the call.

Our call centres should display all values which are rooted in our cultural and civilisational heritage and faith. The call centre workers are ambassadors of our culture. They need to be trained and patronised by their companies only in this manner.

PANDEMIC EFFECT

Poor US students pushed into working odd jobs

DELPHINE TOUITOU

When his father lost his job last year, Togi, then 16, wasted little time before looking for work to support his family, even though he knew it could put him at risk of contracting Covid-19.

He ended up working at a fast food restaurant in a suburb of Washington, juggling the job with attending school held online as the world's largest Covid-19 outbreak tore through the United States.

"It's exhausting," Togi said, describing long days spent between school and work, leaving little time for the teenager, who was born in Mongolia, to socialise.

The twin health and economic crises caused by the pandemic in the United States have forced some teenagers to take on odd jobs, mostly in the fast food industry, while trying to keep up with the demands of virtual schooling.

Educators say many students have fallen off schools' radar, and may not return to classrooms when in-person learning resumes as the pandemic ebbs.

Most students are Black or hispanic – "communities that were disproportionately affected by the pandemic, both in the numbers of infections and deaths," said Elmer G Roldan,

“These kids are not working because that’s fun, or they’re making lots of money. They’re working because they have financial needs that need to be met

HAILLY KORMAN
Bellwether Education
Partners

executive director of Communities In Schools of Los Angeles, which works to stop young people from dropping out.

Students from families whose parents are undocumented and not able to access government relief measures enacted during the pandemic are also facing pressure to work, he said.

There are no official statistics for how many students may end up leaving school to work.

Hailly Korman, a senior associate partner at Bellwether Education Partners, which is focused on improving schooling, said some students have simply been unable to avoid working, after parents or caregivers lost work due to the virus.

"These kids are not working because that's fun, or they're making lots of money. They're working because they have financial needs that need to be met. And if the choice is go to work, or your family is out on the street, that's not a choice at all," she said.

Teachers and professionals in the CIS Network have said the number of high school students working has increased dramatically during the pandemic, and the hours of those already working has increased to as much as 35 hours per-week.

"Legally, students are supposed to work no more than 20 hours if they are working part time," but in practice, "it's hard to monitor," Roldan said.

Johanna, a 17-year-old high school student in Los Angeles, works in a fast food restaurant, balancing the job that pays around \$450 per-week with attending class online.

She sometimes stays up till midnight to finish work, with only Wednesdays and Saturdays off, but says she's intent on finishing her studies. "I know if I drop out of school... I'm just gonna keep working at a restaurant," said Johanna, who hopes to be a music therapist.

Yet Korman says many working students won't be able to hold on.

— AFP

AMERICA IS BACK

Joe Biden touts ‘tight’ US-Europe alliance on departure for G7 summit

SEBASTIAN SMITH

Joe Biden left on the first foreign trip of his presidency on Wednesday, touting the strong transatlantic alliance ahead of summits with G7, European and Nato partners, then a face-to-face with Russia's Vladimir Putin.

Boarding Air Force One outside Washington, Biden said his trip would make "clear to Putin and China that Europe and the United States are tight."

The 78-year-old president was headed first to Britain for a G7 summit in a Cornish seaside resort from Friday to Sunday. From there, in rapid succession, he will visit Queen Elizabeth II at Windsor Castle, fly to Brussels for summits with the Nato military alliance and the European Union, then finish up in Geneva, where he meets Putin next Wednesday.

With the world still crawling out from under the wreckage of Covid-19, Biden has cast his diplomatic marathon as a return to badly needed US leadership.

But beyond the immediate challenges of boosting vaccine donations to poorer regions and reinvigorating post-pandemic economies, Biden's agenda features the even bigger task of shoring up a somewhat-tattered group of democracies.

"This is a defining question of our time," Biden wrote in *The Washington Post* ahead of his trip.

Biden's pitch marks a return to traditional US diplomacy after four



US President Joe Biden boards Air Force One at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland, US, as he departs on travel to attend the G-7 Summit in England, on Wednesday. – AFP

WITH THE WORLD
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BADLY NEEDED US
LEADERSHIP

years during which Donald Trump flirted with autocrats and recast multilateralism as a dirty word. US allies are looking for concrete signs of change.

As Biden departed Washington, the European Union trade commissioner, Valdis Dombrovskis, called on "the US to walk the talk" when it comes to resolving lingering Trump-era trade disputes.

For now, Biden is accentuating the feel-good factor, repeating the mantra "America is back."

That's a message that the trip's

choreography, with Biden meeting a Who's Who of US allies before sitting down with Putin, reinforces. "He will go into this (Putin) meeting with the wind at his back," National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said.

As he boarded his plane, Biden jokingly warned journalists to "watch out for cicadas," saying one of the insects currently invading the Washington area had just landed on him. Earlier, a separate plane carrying White House journalists was delayed due to technical problems caused by a cicada swarm. — AFP

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Giroud stars as France blank Bulgaria

SPAIN THUMP LITHUANIA AFTER CAPTAIN TESTS COVID POSITIVE

PARIS: Karim Benzema was forced to leave the pitch with a dead leg on Tuesday as world champions France beat Bulgaria 3-0 in their final friendly one week before beginning their Euro 2020 campaign.

Benzema was taken off in the 39th minute at the Stade De France in what is France's last match before they take on Germany in their opening Group F match of the European Championship against Germany on June 15.

France also face reigning European champions Portugal and Hungary, who will play two of their group matches in front of big crowds at the Puskas Arena in Budapest.

The 33-year-old Benzema had been recalled with great fanfare to the national team following a near six-year exile, but his replacement Olivier Giroud showed why Les Bleus are considered among the favourites for the tournament with a late brace which took his France total to 46.

Giroud, 34, is now just five goals behind France's all-time top scorer Thierry Henry but will likely be sidelined when Benzema returns. "When people call on me, the most important thing is to do the job," Giroud told broadcaster M6. "I had good service from my team-mates. They know where I'm going to be in the box so I just tried to finish well."

Antoine Griezmann scored the opening goal in front of 5,000 joyous supporters who were also celebrating their return to live football in the stadium.

Charlene Lecuir was one of those fans lucky enough to get a ticket for Tuesday's match, and said she let out a "scream of joy" when she learned she would be



France's Olivier Giroud scoring the second goal against Bulgaria. – Reuters

attending.

Fans were allowed in if they had a negative test for Covid-19 within the previous 48 hours or proof they had been completely inoculated for the virus.

BENZEMA'S 'DEAD LEG'

The supporters were worried when, with France already ahead thanks to Griezmann, Benzema sat down in the middle of the pitch and was checked over by team doctors after having fallen heavily when attempting a header a few minutes earlier.



France's Olivier Giroud (L) celebrates with Wissam Ben Yedder after scoring a goal during the friendly against Bulgaria. – AFP

He then left the field, but France coach Didier Deschamps played down the injury, saying it was a "dead leg".

"He took a good hit on the muscle above the knee," Deschamps told M6.

"He stopped playing because he felt it hardening... the medical staff are at his side."

Benzema had been sidelined by Les Bleus since 2015 over his alleged role in a blackmail plot involving his former international team-mate Mathieu Valbuena.

He missed out on France's 2018

World Cup win and their run to the Euro 2016 final on home soil.

Benzema has scored 27 goals for France and was last month named as this season's best French foreign-based player by the country's players' association.

He scored 29 goals last season for Real Madrid, passing 20 league goals in all three seasons since Cristiano Ronaldo left for Juventus in 2018.

BUSQUETS TESTS COVID POSITIVE

Elsewhere a Spain side made up of young players due to captain Sergio Busquets' positive Covid-19 test, which led to the entire first team squad being put in isolation, thumped Lithuania 4-0. Hugo Guillamon began the rout in the fourth minute before AC Milan forward Brahim Diaz doubled their lead 20 minutes later.

Abel Ruiz missed a penalty on the half-hour mark but nine minutes after the break Juan Miranda made it three with a perfectly placed free-kick. Javi Puado rounded off the scoring in the 73rd minute.

Spain, whose first team squad will be vaccinated on Wednesday according to the country's health ministry, open their Euro campaign in Group E against Sweden in Seville on Monday.

The Swedes have also been affected by the virus, announcing on Tuesday positive tests for Dejan Kulusevski and Mattias Svanberg.

Robert Lewandowski drew a blank as Poland drew 2-2 at home with Iceland, Karol Swiderski replacing the Bayern Munich forward and saving the Poles' blushes with two minutes remaining. — AFP

Oman U-23 side concludes Bahrain training camp

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT, JUNE 9

Oman Olympic (U-23) football team ended the first overseas training camp in Bahrain successfully after a long break due to the pandemic. The external camp which lasted for 19 days featured two preparatory matches against Bahrain Olympic team.

Oman suffered 1-0 defeats in both friendlies with the goal scored in the dying minutes. In the second match which was held late on Tuesday at Khalifa Sports City Stadium in Manama, AbdulRahman Sayed netted the winner. Saleh Mohammed scored the only goal in the opening match for Bahrain.

U-23 head coach Dario Basic said Bahrain camp was the first external gathering for the team since suspension of the sporting activities in the Sultanate. "The squad included new faces who joined recently in the national Olympic team and the players were playing together for the first time," he said.

The Croatian coach pointed



out that the Sultanate Olympic team delivered good show in both warm-up fixtures. The reason of the defeat in both games could be attributed to less technical experience and fitness levels of the players. Furthermore, improving players' fitness level should become as priority for the team

as it was the significant reason for the loss," he said.

Dario described Bahrain warm-up gathering as a successful camp for the team. "We managed to have many sessions to develop the players with good physique and enhance their qualities. Also, the camp

was an opportunity to have more connectivity and integrity among the players and determine the starting line-up," he ended.

Both international friendly matches in Bahrain camp were the first official test for the Croatian coach since his appointment earlier last year. Dario implemented

many substitutions in both games to test different faces in the squad.

The camp was part of team's preparation for the Asian Olympic Qualifiers that will take place in October. The finals of the AFC Asian (U-23) will be held in September 2022 in Uzbekistan during September 6 to 25.



OMAN U-23 SQUAD: Essam al Makhzoomi, Faisal al Harthy, Arshad al Alawi, Yahya al Hudaifi, Awadh al Shari, Hussain al Shari, Najeeb al Shujaibi, Jasim al Noubi, Fahad Bait Obaidan, Essa al Naabi, Saud al Habsi, Al Baraa al Maawali, Islam al Hina, Fahad al Hajri, Ibrahim al Rajhi, Yusuf al Malki, Abdullah al Balushi, Hani al Nuaimi, Musab al Maamari, Yusuf al Shiyadi, Mohammed al Buraiki, Marwan al Abdulsalam, Hani al Qartoubi and Qasim Mubarak.



Great Britain's Helen Glover and Polly Swann during training. – Reuters

Double Olympic champion Glover secures ticket to Tokyo

LONDON: Britain's double Olympic rowing champion Helen Glover secured her ticket to Tokyo on Wednesday as a 34-year-old mother of three and said it felt like the biggest achievement of her career.

Glover won coxless pairs gold at the London 2012 and Rio de Janeiro 2016 Games with now-retired Heather Stanning and has paired up with Polly Swann, who won silver with the women's eight in 2016.

"Today's announcement is something that when I first thought about a comeback was just like 'Oh, that's a nice dream to have'", Glover told reporters. "It didn't feel like it was going to happen."

"My reality was staying up all night with the twins, trying to fit in sessions here and there. To be here today I think is in some ways the biggest achievement of my career."

"Before it's always been about performance and that result at the Olympics. But this was not just getting onto the team but what



In this file photo taken on August 12, 2016 Britain's Heather Stanning (L) and Britain's Helen Glover pose with their medals on the podium of the Women's Pair final rowing competition. – AFP

getting onto the team represents."

Glover will be the first British mother to row at an Olympics. She gave birth to boy and girl twins Kit and Bo last year, with the world about to be swept by the Covid-19 pandemic, and also has a two-year-old son Logan.

She said she had wanted to show her children what commitment and passion looked

like, but she also struck a chord with a much wider audience.

"It's amazing how much it just came from saying 'I'm going to try, and I might fail'."

"I think that makes today just feel like much more of a moment than it ever has done from my other two Olympic Games."

"This feels like a moment I can celebrate and then get really

Today's announcement is something that when I first thought about a comeback was just like 'Oh, that's a nice dream to have

HELEN GLOVER
Double Olympic rowing champion

excited and optimistic about what's to come."

Team GB announced a rowing team of 24 women and 21 men, including 37 Olympic debutants.

Rio 2016 Olympic coxless four gold medallist Mohamed Sbihi returns as part of the men's eight, with which he won a bronze in 2012.

Vicky Thornley, a double sculls silver medallist in Rio, will be at her third games in the single sculls. — Reuters

Asher-Smith eyes Tokyo, dubs Fraser-Pryce 'amazing'

FLORENCE, Italy: World 200m champion Dina Asher-Smith said on Wednesday that Shelley-Ann Fraser-Pryce's scintillating 10.63sec 100m run was "amazing" for the sport.

At the age of 34, and having taken time away from the track to give birth to a baby boy, Fraser-Pryce has hit some of the form of her life just six weeks before the Tokyo Olympics.

The Jamaican looks poised to be the women's sprinter with the biggest target on her back, not least after the reigning world and two-time Olympic 100m champion's performance at the Olympic Destiny meeting in Kingston on Saturday.

Only late US sprinting star Florence Griffith-Joyner, who holds the world record of 10.49sec, has run faster.

Britain's Asher-Smith said Fraser-Pryce "is absolutely amazing, I sent her a message saying 'Oh my god, you're amazing'."

"My coach sent me a video showing her leg speed and he said 'this is what I'm talking about, you need to move your legs like that!'"

'100% RUST'

Asher-Smith, who won the world 200m title in Doha in 2019 and silver in the 100m, added: "I'm a competitor, but you can't ignore the fact Shelly-Ann is an amazing athlete."

"It's amazing not only for her but also our sport", the 25-year-old Londoner said of her rival's new world leading time.

Turning to her own season, Asher-Smith admitted to some ring rustiness after time away from the track due to Covid-19 restrictions.

"To be fair, I'm definitely still getting back into swing of things", she said.

"I'm definitely one of those people that when championships come I'm ready to go."

Asher-Smith could only finish fifth in the 200m at the 2016 Rio Olympics, but had the consolation of picking up a bronze with the 4x100m relay team. Likewise at the 2017 London worlds, she finished fourth in the 200m, but won relay silver.

A year later, she hit treble European gold in the 100, 200 and 4x100m relay in Berlin. — AFP



Bank Muscat announces increase in Green Sports beneficiaries

MUSCAT: As one of the pioneers of CSR and Sustainability initiatives in Oman, Bank Muscat has always been committed to creating a meaningful change in the pursuit of a sustainable future. With the launch of its flagship Green Sports programme in 2012, Bank Muscat successfully created and implemented an annual programme that brings together different generations on one platform towards one common goal, sports. This year the bank is celebrating the 10th anniversary of the programme which has supported 143 teams across various governorates in the Sultanate.

The response to the Green Sports programme has been growing by leaps and bounds annually since its launch, with intense competition amongst the participants to be announced as one of the winning teams every year. So far, as many as 36,900 members from the winning teams have benefited from the programme and more are expected to be part of it in the



future. Bank Muscat has been encouraged by the tremendous success of Green Sports in transforming sports infrastructure across the country. Currently, 95 teams have received support for installation of artificial turf or natural grass on their fields, while 40 teams have received support for floodlighting and 8 teams for water desalination plants. Till date, the bank has handed over 111 Green Sports fields to their respective teams,

and more Green Sports fields are at present nearing completion.

On this occasion, Shaikh Waleed K al Hashar, Chief Executive Officer, Bank Muscat, said: "The Green Sports programme is an example of the bank's commitment to Public-Private partnership and the continuous efforts to build a sustainable sports infrastructure for the benefit of Omani youth and communities across the country. The bank's landmark Green Sports



programme supports the installation of artificial turf or natural grass on sports fields, floodlighting and water-desalination systems by sports teams across the country. The success of Green Sports over the past many years has encouraged the bank to step up its efforts even more."

Shaikh Waleed K al Hashar added: "Given the excellent response over the years and to celebrate the 10th anniversary of its launch, the

bank is very pleased to increase the number of beneficiaries to 20 teams from this year onwards, up from 15 per year. By redoubling its efforts and investments in the programme, the bank strengthens its commitment to Omani youth. We take this opportunity to thank all our partners, sports teams across the country and the media for all their efforts, which has greatly encouraged the bank to further expand its role in the field of Corpo-

rate Social Responsibility. I would also like to extend my heartiest congratulations to all the winners of 2021 and assure them that the bank will closely work with them in ensuring the successful implementation of Green Sports fields."

The 20 beneficiaries this year include: Al Farfarah Sports Team (Bidbid); Al Kifah Sports Team (Al Suwaiq); Al Kefah Sports Team (Suhar); Al Mahader Sports & Cultural Team (Rustaq); Al Humida Sports & Cultural Team (Izki); Al Hajr Sports & Cultural Team (Qurayat); Al Ettihad Cultural Team (Bidiya); Al Arid Sports & Cultural Team (Ibri); Al Memoura Sports & Cultural Team (Al Kamil wal Wafi); Al Samdi Sports Team (Samayil); Al Khuwairat Sports & Cultural Team (Khabourah); Al Dhahir Sports Team (Jaalan Bani Bu Ali); Al Ghalila Sports, Cultural and Social Team (Al Suwaiq); and Al Ettifaq Sports and Cultural Team (Liwa). These teams will be provided with floodlighting for their sports fields.

Krejcikova into French Open last four



Czech Republic's Barbora Krejcikova returns the ball to Coco Gauff of the US during their women's singles quarter-final. — AFP

PARIS: Barbora Krejcikova took a rollercoaster ride into a maiden Grand Slam semifinal at the French Open on Wednesday as Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal closed in on another blockbuster clash.

Czech world number 33 Krejcikova knocked out American 17-year-old Coco Gauff 7-6 (8/6), 6-3 after saving five set points in the opener and then needing six match points to finish the job.

She goes on to face either eighth-seeded defending champion Iga Swiatek, the only top 10 player to reach the quarter-finals, or Greece's Maria Sakkari.

Gauff, the 24th seed and the youngest quarter-finalist at a major in 15 years, was undone by seven double faults and 41 unforced errors.

"I never really imagined I'd be standing here one day on this court, especially in singles, and being able to win," said Krejcikova, who had been so paralysed by fear before her last 16 victory over Sloane Stephens that she locked herself in a stadium office and wept.

Krejcikova, now on a 10-match winning streak, is having a busy week. She is also in the semi-finals of the women's doubles.

I never really imagined I'd be standing here one day on this court, especially in singles, and being able to win

BARBARA KREJCIKOVA
World No 33

Swiatek, Poland's first Grand Slam singles champion, is on a run of 22 straight sets won in Paris.

She is also winning rave reviews including from Britain's two-time Wimbledon champion Andy Murray who tweeted his admiration for the Pole's style of play.

"Thank you Sir Andy! Are you by any chance up for a practice? I really need to improve my skills on grass," she tweeted back to the former world number one.

Murray replied: "Anytime just promise to go easy on me as I'm a bit old and fragile now!"

Like Krejcikova, Swiatek is also into the women's doubles semi-finals with US partner Bethanie Mattek-Sands.

SAKKARI BOOKS SEMIFINAL BERTH

Maria Sakkari defeated defending champion Iga Swiatek 6-4, 6-4 to become the first Greek woman to reach a Grand Slam semi-final at the French Open on Wednesday.

The world number 18 will face unseeded Barbora Krejcikova of the Czech Republic for a place in the final after seeing off Swiatek who had required a medical timeout early in the second set.

Thursday's other semi-final sees Russian 31st seed Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova tackle unseeded Tamara Zidansek of Slovenia.

FRENCH OPEN RESULTS

WOMEN (QUARTERFINALS):
Barbora Krejcikova (Cze) bt 24-Coco Gauff (US) 7-6 (8-6), 6-3; Maria Sakkari bt Iga Swiatek 6-4, 6-4.

"I am speechless. It is a dream coming true. I don't know, it is a very nice feeling and I could not have done it without my team and their support," said the 25-year-old.

"We have a long way to go but we made a huge step today.

"I enjoyed myself and sat down and said to myself it is an important match but to enjoy it. I had to enjoy it." For only the second time in the Open era, there are four first-time Grand Slam semi-finalists in women's singles, after the 1978 Australian Open.

Furthermore, for just the fifth time in Roland Garros history, a player seeded outside the top 10 will lift the Coupe Suzanne Lenglen on Saturday.

Sakkari is the second Greek in the semi-finals of the singles at this year's French Open after Stefanos Tsitsipas made the men's last four on Tuesday.

Swiatek had carved a break for 2-0 in the first set before the Greek quickly levelled, breaking again for a 5-4 lead. Sakkari confidently pocketed the opener, ending the champion's run of 22 straight sets won at the tournament.

When Swiatek slipped 0-2 down in the second set, the Pole left the court for a medical timeout, returning with her right thigh tightly strapped.

Swiatek had to battle to avoid going a double break down in the fifth game but eventually succumbed in the 10th.

Sakkari reaped the reward for her all-out attacking game with five aces and 26 winners. — AFP

Tsitsipas ends Medvedev run to book semifinals

PARIS: Fifth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas beat world number two Daniil Medvedev in straight sets on Tuesday to advance to the French Open semi-finals for the second straight year and end the Russian's surprise run on the Parisian clay.

The Greek got revenge for his Australian Open semi-final loss to the Russian this year and improved his Grand Slam quarter-final record to 4-0 with a 6-3 7-6(3) 7-5 win that teed up a last-four clash against Germany's Alexander Zverev.

"It was a very close match and we both served pretty well," Tsitsipas said. "It was intense.

"I was playing against one of the best guys on the tour. I had to keep up the intensity and elevate my game throughout the entire match. I am happy to keep repeating, trying to go further."

Medvedev, who squandered two set points in the second set and only converted two of his eight break points, had not won a single match at the French Open prior to his run to the last eight this year.

Yet having finally found his feet on the red dirt, he had few chances against the 22-year-old Tsitsipas, who has had a superb clay season so far.

Tsitsipas, a winner in Lyon



Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas returns the ball to Russia's Daniil Medvedev during their men's singles quarterfinal. — AFP

and Monte Carlo on clay this year, wrong-footed the Russian to convert his first break point for 3-1 lead as he comfortably held

serve in the first set.

Medvedev, who made 44 unforced errors in the match, almost twice as many as the

Greek, saved a Tsitsipas set point at 5-2 but the fifth seed wrapped it up a game later with a volley.

Tsitsipas then won 11 straight

points to break the Russian again early in the second set and cruise to a 3-1 lead.

Yet his opponent launched a

FRENCH OPEN RESULTS

MEN (QUARTERFINALS):
6-Alexander Zverev (Ger) bt Alejandro Davidovich Fokina (Esp) 6-4, 6-1, 6-1; 5-Stefanos Tsitsipas (Gre) bt 2-Daniil Medvedev (Rus) 6-3, 7-6 (7/3), 7-5.

WOMEN (QUARTERFINALS):
31-Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (Rus) bt 21-Elena Rybakina (Kaz) 6-7 (2-7), 6-2, 9-7; Tamara Zidansek (Slo) bt 33-Paula Badosa (Esp) 7-5, 4-6, 8-6.

comeback, bagging his own first break en route to a three-game run. Medvedev improved his first-serve percentage and even carved out two set points but his opponent saved them to hold and force a tiebreak.

Tsitsipas survived his second set wobble to clinch it with a volley on his first set point.

The pair traded breaks in the third before Tsitsipas broke again, winning on his first match point following an underarm serve from Medvedev. — Reuters

features



A modern approach to preserving dates

With a diverse landscape that is ideal for growing this wonder plant and producing more than 100 varieties of dates, farmers in the country face different challenges when it comes to preserving and drying the harvest. Qaith Student Company introduces a new device that resolves most of these challenges, a device called Cooler, which is an environmentally sustainable device that works with clean energy... **P16**

ART

READ

START WITH WHY
BY SIMON SINEK

It is the author's mission to help others do work, which inspires them, and uses real-world examples of great leaders to show you how they communicate and how you can adapt their mindset to inspire others yourself.

Giant drone sculpture menaces New York City, with intent

A GIANT, WHITE sculpture of a drone has appeared 25 feet (7.6 m) over Manhattan's High Line park, unnerving New Yorkers — which was the creators' intention. Sam Durant, the artist behind the fiberglass "Untitled (drone)," said the work was designed to "remind the public that drones and surveillance are a tragic and pervasive presence in the daily lives of many living outside — and

within — the United States." The white sculpture of the predator drone stands out against the blue summer skies, appearing to hover over 10th Avenue, and rotating on its pole when pushed by the wind. "What we want to do with High Line Art is to bring to the public not just beautiful artworks, but also thought provoking artworks that can generate conversations," said Cecilia Alemani, chief curator

of High Line Art, which sponsored Durant's work. California resident Ariella Figueroa said the drone made her think about the future. "It's the same technology that we were using in Iraq and Afghanistan 10, 12 years ago that is now handheld and anyone can buy," said Figueroa. "It's a little intimidating, a little scary, especially here in New York City." — **Reuters**





Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre in Barka

An important arm in preserving and protecting wildlife in Oman

The Wildlife Rehabilitation and Propagation Centre in the Wilayat of Barka in South Al Batinah Governorate is one of the important centres concerned with the conservation, preservation and propagation of wildlife in all its aspects in the Sultanate.

The centre, which was established in 2001, is located in the back area of Barka Public Park, where the area of the centre's land is estimated at about 33,000 square metres, and it is supervised by the Environment Department in South Al Batinah Governorate. The Wildlife Rehabilitation and Propagation Centre seeks to preserve wildlife and birds from different parts of the Sultanate, whether by government agencies or by citizens who have a major role in preserving them.

The centre also works to save, rehabilitate and multiply local wildlife species in their natural habitats and help them return to their original habitat or to be used in scientific or educational fields.

Talal al Khudairi, the administrative supervisor at the centre, said that the centre aims to provide medical care for infected animals and birds and rehabilitate them to release them in their natural environments, in addition to focusing on their reproduction and care, while providing guidance and awareness for citizens who raise wildlife.

"The centre specialises in caring for and rehabilitating wild animals to return them to their natural habitats or use them for scientific or educational purposes. This



is in addition to other responsibilities including the multiplication of local species of wild animals and the development of resettlement programmes in natural sites, as well as participating in conducting studies and preparing reports on the status of wildlife in the Sultanate with proposing plans and programmes related to the management and follow-up of wildlife and participating in their implementation."

He added, "The centre also works to spread awareness in cooperation with the concerned authorities of the importance of preserving

wildlife and exchanging experiences and research with regional and international counterpart centres and institutions specialised in the field of rehabilitation and propagation of wildlife."

Talal said that the centre has succeeded in the breeding programmes of the Arabian deer, oryx, and mainly Reem gazelle, in addition to some birds of prey confiscated during illegal attempts to poach them adding that the target species in the centre is the Arabian deer. The centre began implementing its breeding programmes in 2005, by

bringing in 16 Arab deer from the deer barn located in the Al Salil Natural Park Reserve in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate; for the purpose of propagating this type of wild animals and resettling them in their natural habitats.

He added that 60 Arabian Oryx were transferred in 2013 from the birth centre of the Royal Court Affairs to the breeding centre of the ministry to be resettled in their natural environments, while 5 Reem gazelles were transferred in 2013 from the maternity centre of the Royal Court Affairs to the Ministry's breeding centre with the aim of resettling them in their natural habitats. The centre has also rehabilitated a number of species of birds of prey, such as the Egyptian eagle, the bald eagle, and hawks, including both migrating and endemic ones.

Those types of birds imported to the centre are found from the governorates of the Sultanate.

As these wild animals and birds receive the necessary treatment and immunisations at the Rehabilitation and Reproduction Centre, the number of births is increasing, especially during this year. Currently, there are 100 Arabian gazelles, 102 Arabian Oryx, in addition to 31 ibexes, as well as many wild birds.

CULTURE

As war destroys Yemen's present, museums struggle to preserve its past



A BRONZE STATUE of the main god of the kingdom of Saba, located in what is now the Yemeni province of Marib, lies in a dark and fortified room of the Sanaa National Museum.

The piece was made by a man named Hawtar Athat in the first half of the sixth century BC. It has been lucky enough to survive the latest war in Yemen. Many other artefacts have not.

The Sanaa museum miraculously escaped years of bombing by coalition forces in their war against the Ansar Allah group.

"Other areas around the museum were targeted and that led to the destruction of some artefacts and to cracks in the walls of the building itself," said Ibrahim al Hadi, the museum's director.

Most of the collection was moved to safe rooms in the museum when the coalition intervened in Yemen in 2015.

Collections of Arabian swords, rifles and helmets, some decorated with gold, are packed in boxes and covered with sheets. Two bronze lions from the pagan kingdom of Qataban, restored at the Louvre in 2008, are snarling at the dark.

"This storeroom is a model," said Abdullah Ishaq, an expert working with the museum. "It has been set up with scientific, modern and international standards."



But Yemen's museums, the richest in the Arabian peninsula, are a reminder of the toll that war has taken on the country's cultural heritage, often eclipsed by civilian casualties and the dire humanitarian situation.

In the disputed city of Taiz, nature has combined with conflict to leave the historic National Museum building in ruins.

Charred manuscripts, burned shelves and shattered glass are scattered inside. Acacia trees have taken root and helped to tear down the walls.

"Shelling destroyed the buildings... the collection was looted and fires burned down storerooms," said Ramzi al Damini, the Taiz museum director.

The Yemeni General Authority for Antiquities and Museums has started working with the Global Heritage Fund to restore parts of the buildings.

But the museum has already lost around 70 per cent of its collection, even though some stolen artefacts have been recovered from local markets and volunteers have brought back other pieces.

"We know that many of those articles have been smuggled outside Taiz and even abroad. It is not easy to get them out of Yemen, only powerful people with international connections can do that," said Ahmed Jassar, director of antiquities in the Taiz museum. — Reuters



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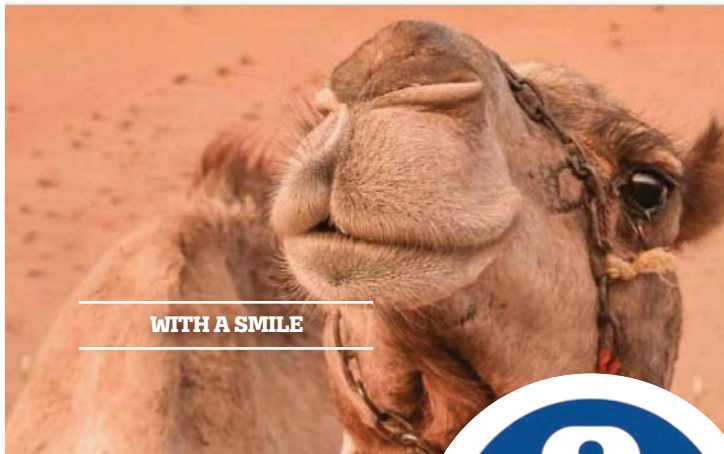
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TRAVEL TALES



Lausanne — a natural escape from city life for a romantic break

WITH BREATHTAKING scenery of winding roads through the mountain valleys, Lausanne remains to be one of the places in the world where visitors can enjoy some of the finer things in life offering a natural escape from city life for a romantic break or a family adventure alike.

The region's captivating lakes are a stunning backdrop to the offerings around the region, which include some of the world's finest Michelin starred restaurants and wellness retreats. In addition to the natural panorama, there is much to do in the region, from walking holidays to exploring the region's history and culture, with the backdrop of some of the Alps' most dramatic peaks. The Lavaux vineyard terraces, now listed as a Unesco World Heritage Site, are among the region's natural wonders, in addition to the unforgettable Lake Geneva and the region's highest point, Glacier 3000.

The region hosts some of the country's finest hotels where luxury meets heritage, such as the world-renowned Hôtel de Ville de Crissier and Beau-Rivage Palace, which both pay homage to the region's rich history and culture. Other visitor favourites include the Lausanne Palace, Royal Savoy Hotel and Spa and the 12th-century Chateau d'Ouchy.



Gastronomes will find an array of fine dining options to tempt them to the region, with several world-class, Michelin starred restaurants in some of the most magical locations. Topping the gastro-tour would be the three-star Restaurant de l'Hôtel de Ville de Crissier, while two-star Anne-Sophie is not to be missed either. With one-star, the area also offers La Table du Lausanne Palace, Le Berceau des Sens and Auberge de l'Abbaye de Montheron, ensuring that everyday can bring a new gastronomic experience.

For relaxation and well-being, the region is rich with some of the world's best spas set in the most luxurious of locations. Internationally renowned spas include Spa Cinq Mondes at Beau-Rivage Palace, CBE Concept Spa du Lausanne Palace and Spa du Royal Savoy, all offering unforgettable escapes.

But it is not only relaxation which visitors can find in the region. Activities and culture abound with offerings such as lake cruises, heli-tours and a raft of museums and historical sites to entice guests. Château de Chillon is just one of the stunning castle's guests can visit in the region, while the Olympic Museum is a firm favourite with sports fans.

Offering year-round snow, active travel lovers can walk on the only suspension bridge in the world that connects two mountain peaks at Glacier 3000, while water sports, cycling and an array of thrill-seeking activities await those who prefer the warmer climes.

Whether road-tripping by car around the region or hopping on the Montreux Oberland Bernois Railway, getting around the expansive area is simple.

DISCOVERY

Insect pest eats into Lebanon's 'white gold' pine nut trade



THE SCENIC region of Mount Lebanon has long produced pine seed, a regional delicacy, but harvests have collapsed amid an exotic insect infestation experts say is accelerated by climate change.

Lebanon, wedged between the mountains and the Mediterranean Sea, is best known for the iconic cedar tree depicted on its national flag — but it also has pine trees that make up nearly 10 per cent of total forest cover.

Pine nuts harvested from their cones — a popular ingredient in Middle Eastern cuisine — have been dubbed "white gold" because of their traditionally lucrative sales, especially to wealthy Gulf states.

But the natural treasure trove is now under attack.

The culprit is the western conifer seed bug, native to the western United States where it is sometimes called the "stink bug", and which has spread to Eurasia, most likely by hitchhiking on timber shipments.

In the Qsaybeh pine forest east of Beirut, Elias Neaimeh, head of the syndicate of pine seed farmers, pointed to the damage it has caused: The dry, dead trunk of one pine tree, and cones scattered on the forest floor.

In a normal year in the past, Neaimeh said, "I used to produce around 16 tonnes of pine cones, but today I barely harvest 100 kilograms".

He used to make more than \$40,000 a year from selling around 600 kilograms of white pine nuts a year, but now his income has dried up, at a time when Lebanon's deep economic crisis has plunged millions into poverty.

HEAT STRESS

In Lebanon, farmers started noticing a decline in output in 2012, but it took them three more years to detect the cause.

Entomology expert Nabil Nemer identified the insect as the western conifer seed bug, or WCSB, which

pierces cones to suck out sap and developing seeds.

The insect reached Turkey from Europe in 2010 before arriving in Lebanon, where it has since spread across most conifer forests.

"It is very harmful", Nemer told AFP of the pest that attacks pines, cedars and cypresses.

"We noticed that sometimes up to 10 insects feed on a single cone", said Nemer, a professor at the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik.

"When they infest small developing cones, the cones wither completely and fall to the ground."

Nemer said climate change is creating a favourable environment for the insects.

"Higher temperatures and less precipitation extends the life cycle of insects and also weakens trees", he said.

The bugs' infestation is compounded by the absence of its natural predators native to the United States, he said.

Many farmers have turned to pesticides, but Nemer warned that chemicals "could cause problems for exports and food safety".

Back in Qsaybeh, Neaimeh said that pesticides had allowed for a temporary and modest recovery in 2016 and 2017.

"There was a 30 percent decrease in the number of infested cones", he said, bringing some relief from an infestation rate of 85-90 per cent.

But in the absence of a centralised pest control policy, many forests remain neglected, further devastating output.

"Today we produce no more than 200 tonnes of pine nuts annually across all of Lebanon", down from 1,200 tonnes before 2015, Neaimeh said.

This, in turn, has caused prices to skyrocket, with one kilogram (2.2 pounds) of pine nuts now selling for more than one million Lebanese pounds (\$650) — almost twice the monthly minimum wage. — **AFP**

CHANGING WORLD

Meet Grace, the healthcare robot Covid-19 created



THE HONG KONG team behind celebrity humanoid robot Sophia is launching a new prototype, Grace, targeted at the healthcare market and designed to interact with the elderly and those isolated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Dressed in a blue nurse's uniform, Grace has Asian features, collar-length brown hair and a thermal camera in her chest to take your temperature and measure your responsiveness. She uses artificial intelligence to diagnose a patient and can speak English, Mandarin and Cantonese.

"I can visit with people and brighten their day with social stimulation... but can also do talk therapy, take bio readings and help healthcare providers", Grace told Reuters as she stood next to her "sister", Sophia, in creator Hanson Robotics' Hong Kong workshop.

Grace's resemblance to a healthcare professional and capacity for social interaction is aimed at relieving the burden of front-line hospital staff overwhelmed during the pandemic, said founder David Hanson.

"A human-like appearance facilitates trust and natural engagement because we are wired for human face-to-face interactions", Hanson said, explaining how Grace can simulate the action of more than 48 major facial muscles, and has a comforting demeanour designed to look a little like anime characters, often a fusion of Asian and Western styles.

Awakening Health intends to mass-produce a beta version of Grace by August, said David Lake, Chief Executive of the joint venture between Hanson Robotics and Singularity Studio, and there are plans to fully deploy her next year in locations including Hong Kong, mainland China, Japan and Korea.

The cost of making the robots, now akin to luxury car pricing, will decrease once the company is manufacturing tens or hundreds of thousands of units, Hanson added.

Grace's launch comes as the global impact of the coronavirus has made the need for humanoid robots urgent, said Kim Min-Sun, a communication professor at the University of Hawaii.

Stuck at home during Covid-19 lockdowns, many people have had their mental states affected with negative thoughts.

"If they can get help through the deployment of these social robots in intimate settings, certainly it will have a positive impact on society", she said. — **Reuters**



A modern approach to preserving dates

By Staff Reporter

Oman's role in global dates production has been growing significantly and with the 1 Million Dates project, its position as dates producer will be dramatically felt not only in the region but internationally in the coming years.

With a diverse landscape that is ideal for growing this wonder plant, Oman is home to over 100 varieties of dates, each with its own unique qualities and production value.

Qaith Student Company at the National University of Science and Technology succeeded in inventing a new device called Cooler, which is an environmentally sustainable device that works with clean energy.

This product maintains the quality of dates production and protects it from the problems of dust, moisture, rain and insects and birds. The device allows the use of less space when drying dates.

Qusai al Sabahi, CEO of Qaith Company, said that the innovative "Mibrad" is a device that dries dates with the help of clean energy at a faster pace than the traditional method, and works to protect it from exposure to insects and various weather factors.

He added that the device was designed using polycarbonate material that works to distribute sunlight and isolate ultraviolet rays. It consists of several layers that can be moved horizontally made of stainless steel, and the device specialises in drying dates using clean solar-powered fans that reduce humidity inside the device, in addition to taking advantage of natural sunlight. Equipped with sensors, the fans will turn on when the humidity inside the device rises to more than 30 per cent and they shut down when the humidity drops to less than 25 per cent and when the temperature rises to more than 40 degrees Celsius.



He explained that the company has taken advantage of artificial intelligence by launching the "Mibrad" application for smartphones which allow users to be connected to the drying device, providing the customer with important information like the position of the device during drying, the degree of humidity and temperature inside the device, and

ultimately, getting a notification when the dates are dried.

Qusai al Sabahi said the innovation stems from the Omani environment as the date crop is widely grown all over the country. The team noticed the different challenges the farmers face from dust to humidity to challenges like pests and insects and even the



space it needs to dry them. Mibrad was created to address most of these issues and help the farmers by introducing a modern method to a time-honoured tradition.

For its advantages, Al Sabahi said that the device is an envi-

ronmental-friendly product with high efficiency and quality, and it saves time and effort in the drying process. It is also characterised by ease of transportation and use and can be used to dry other crops during harvest season.

Being the first device nationally with its qualitative performance and capacity, the device is priced at RO 240 that the CEO explained take into consideration different factors.

"The device is portable, meaning it can be transferred from one location to another. Because of the challenges it resolves, it allows the farmers to be even more productive in producing high-quality dates that are free from the exposure of temperature and humidity. No other devices in the market offer this level of ease and support," Qusai said.

He added, "the company provides free maintenance for the product for two months with one-year warranty, and we also offer free training on using the machine."

The team is planning to make the device available in the market starting in August.

"We are currently working on developing and modernising the device, which is a continuous process in each production stage," Qusai said.

The company is also looking into the expansion of investment by increasing the company's capital to RO 30k in the next five years. Qaith Company also looks forward to investing and contracting with the Oman Palm Development Company to increase the production of the crops and train workers in its operations department.

business

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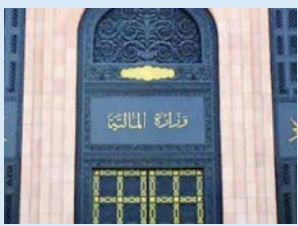
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Huge response to Oman's \$1.75 billion sukuk issuance



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 9

The Ministry of Finance announced on Wednesday that it had successfully completed the issuance of sharia-compliant Islamic instruments — known as sukuk — worth \$1.75 billion with a maturity period of up to nine years.

The issuance was part of the government's efforts to raise funds to finance the budget based on a strategy espousing fiscal discipline and public debt reduction.

The response from international investors, as well as asset management and investment institutions, was robust with the issuance garnering more than \$11.5 billion in bid offers, representing a 6.5 fold oversubscription.

Offers were received from geographically diverse investors from as far afield as the Gulf, Asian, European and American markets.

(With inputs from ONA)

Oman's capital market size grows to RO 20.24 bn in pandemic-hit 2020

POSITIVE TRENDS:
RO 3.5 billion sukuk and bonds help finance developmental and investment initiatives

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

Oman's capital market grew a significant 7.86 per cent in volume to reach a value of RO 20.24 billion at the end of 2020, up from RO 18.77 billion a year earlier — an increase that attested to heightened trading activity and investment interest notwithstanding disruptions unleashed by the pandemic and the wider economic downturn.

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) ascribed the market's positive performance partly to the array of measures adopted by the regulator, in conjunction with other government stakeholder institutions, to help mitigate pandemic-related impacts to trading operations.

"The Sultanate of Oman and the world witnessed in 2020 an exceptional (twin crisis) that required taking precautionary and corrective measures at the local and global levels to reduce and mitigate the loss of human life and economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Sultanate's response received commendation and praise," Shaikh Abdullah bin Salim al Salmi, CMA Executive President,



Continuation of the financial market and trading in the Sultanate was inevitable in the exceptional circumstances to measure the impact on the economy and the participants to detect any symptoms for timely remedy, besides enabling all market participants to exercise selling and buying transactions without hindrance to achieve the market's role in facilitating financing and stimulating investment for all the parties

SHAIKH ABDULLAH AL SALMI
CMA Executive President



stated in the Authority's newly released 2020 Annual Report.

The pandemic, according to the report, led to a global recession and economic downturn that disrupted stock markets around the world and caused investors to flee to safe havens.

"Continuation of the financial market and trading in the Sultanate was inevitable in the exceptional circumstances to measure the impact on the economy and the participants to detect any symptoms for timely remedy, besides enabling all market participants to exercise selling

and buying transactions without hindrance to achieve the market's role in facilitating financing and stimulating investment for all the parties," it stated.

Al Salmi noted in particular the capital market's important role in financing developmental projects and investment initiatives mainly through long-term debt instruments, such as sukuk and bonds. The total value of bonds and sukuk listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange was in the order of RO 3.5 billion at the end of 2020, with sukuk representing about 20 per cent (RO 733 million) of this

figure, and bonds accounting for the remaining 80 per cent (RO 2.8 billion). In addition, as many as 16 issues of corporate bonds worth RO 551 million and six corporate sukuk issuances totalling RO 173 million are listed as well.

As anticipated, there were no new Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) during 2020 as companies held off from going public due to pandemic-induced market uncertainties. However, RO 796 million worth of issuances of investment and real estate funds were listed on the market as of end-2020, the report added.

Omani banks explore trade financing options with US EXIM Bank

Ongoing commitment:
Latest roundtable follows EXIM Bank's \$500 million MoU signed earlier this year between EXIM Bank and Oman

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 9

In line with its mission to foster the development of trade and commercial activity between Oman and the United States, the OABC (US Chamber of Commerce affiliate in Oman), together with the US Embassy in Oman organised a private roundtable discussion on Tuesday with Rick Angiuoni, Business Development Specialist and Regional Director of Africa at the Export-Import Bank of the United States (EXIM), via ZOOM.



The roundtable discussion introduced key stakeholders and Heads of Corporate working in the top banks of Oman to the mission and services of EXIM Bank. Attendees also discussed the status of financing opportunities already provided by EXIM Bank in Oman and discussed new ways to facilitate additional trade and collaboration between EXIM Bank and Omani banks and companies.

The session featured opening remarks by US Ambassador to Oman Leslie



Tsou and a presentation by Rick Angiuoni (pictured), Business Development Specialist and Regional Director of Africa, EXIM.

"This roundtable follows the OABC webinar held in March 2021 and EXIM Bank's \$500

million MoU signed earlier this year between EXIM Bank and the Foreign Ministry of Oman," says Rick Angiuoni, who presented on behalf of EXIM Bank.

"After the success of our first event with the OABC, which shared with Omani companies

about the benefits and opportunities provided by the US EXIM Bank, we decided the step to build on this momentum would be to host a roundtable meeting with Omani finance executives to discuss EXIM Bank as a source of efficient cost of funds in financing US exports for the benefits of Omani importers and to enhance US-Omani trade."

"This session was a very successful one, and we thank our presenter and partners for an engaging discussion. Sessions like today's roundtable provide more insight into approaches for utilising the US-Oman Free Trade Agreement, and continue to foster investment and trade between Oman and the United States."

"Today's event shows EXIM's ongoing commitment to promoting international commerce by extending loans, commercial loan guarantees, and

export credit insurance for the export of US goods and services to Oman and other markets," US Ambassador Tsou stated.

"EXIM is therefore an important tool to advance our bilateral trade partnership, and we hope the private sector's use of this tool will continue to grow. We believe that having more Omani entities take advantage of EXIM products will advance bilateral commercial opportunities and increase prosperity for Omanis and Americans alike."

The Export-Import Bank of the United States (EXIM) is the official export credit agency of the United States. EXIM supports the purchases of US-made capital equipment and ancillary services by creditworthy international buyers that cannot obtain credit through traditional trade finance sources. EXIM offers trade financing solutions and helps turn business opportunities into real transactions.

Strong industrial sector key to development

Recently, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion announced the launch of 50 industrial investment opportunities for those who wish to invest in these projects in the near future.

These project opportunities are expected to attract investments of more than RO 200 million. Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, unveiled these project proposals in the presence of a number of Omani ambassadors.

The initiative aims to create job opportunities for Omanis, as well as raise the Sultanate's classification in various international indicators. It also aims to attract foreign direct

investment (FDI) and support economic development in various governorates across the Sultanate.

The Omani industrial sector has expanded during the last five decades, helping add non-oil income sources, while positioning the country for future investments in line with the Oman 2040 vision — a goal that will help stimulate economic activity and encourage Omanis to work in the private sector.

The tremendous efforts exerted during this period are evident from the industrial cities distributed across the country, starting with Rusayl Industrial City.

Duqm, the latest hub for industry, has already become a magnet for investment. The government has offered many incentives besides financial



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THE INITIATIVE AIMS TO CREATE JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR OMANIS, AS WELL AS RAISE THE SULTANATE'S CLASSIFICATION IN VARIOUS INTERNATIONAL INDICATORS

support and direct exemptions to improve the investment climate.

But some were able to defraud this sector during those years by establishing dubious industrial projects on which millions of rials were invested and squandered.

The individuals, as well as officials who contributed to the companies turning sick, were not brought to account. The collapse of projects formed as public joint stock companies led to losses to shareholders, especially small investors.

Many Omanis lost their jobs as a result. Due to instability of national labour in this sector, the industrial sector failed to achieve 30 per cent Omanisation during the past fifty years.

Today, the percentage of workers in the industrial

sector (Omanis in addition to expatriates) is about 10 per cent of the total number of people employed by the private sector, according to 2019 statistics.

As for the percentage of Omanis in the industrial sector, it amounts only to 14 per cent of the total, underscoring the great potential to create more job opportunities for nationals.

With the inauguration of the 50 industrial projects, everyone expects that job opportunities will be granted to Omanis in this sector and double them annually.

Today the Sultanate, by promoting transparency and governance in both public and private sector institutions, will inevitably contribute to new industrial sector that supports the growth of an advanced industrial base.

BankDhofar provides Covid-19 vaccines for its employees



MUSCAT: As part of BankDhofar's interest to protect the employees and their families from Covid-19, the bank, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, has started to provide vaccines for the employees and their spouses. This initiative translates BankDhofar's endeavour to support the government's efforts to combat the pandemic.

Dr Khalid bin Salim al Hamadani, Acting Chief Human Resources Officer at BankDhofar, said: "Our employees' wellbeing is our priority at BankDhofar. Thus, we constantly conduct initiatives to promote healthy lifestyle and wellbeing. Since the outbreak of Covid-19, we introduced an internal campaign to raise the awareness about the pandemic and the protective measures to be followed by our employees for their safety and our customers' safety as well."

"As part of our social responsibility, and in support of the immense efforts done by the government to combat Coronavirus through the healthcare services and the vaccination campaigns, we have collaborated with the Ministry of Health to provide vaccines to our staff and their spouses."

Since the outbreak of Covid-19, BankDhofar has applied several preventive measures, for its staff and customers to avoid the wide spread of coronavirus. The Bank launched external and internal campaigns including: "Your Health is Our Priority" digital campaign, which was launched to spread awareness among customers and the public.

BP Oman announces graduate jobs for 2021 intake

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 9

BP has announced jobs for Omani engineering graduates as part of the 2021 intake of its successful 'Challenger' programme. The Challenger programme, which has been running since 2010, demonstrates BP's commitment to developing local talent. Attracting the best graduates in Oman, the programme supports technical and leadership development across BP. Over 80 Omanis have joined the programme since its launch.

Last month seven Omanis



(Pre-Covid image)

successfully graduated from the Challenger programme in the Wells team.

Vice-President of Wells for BP in Oman, Mohammed al Najwani, commented: "I am delighted to see young Omanis pursue their ambitions and develop professionally through BP's Challenger programme. We are proud to support Omani careers in the energy industry through this programme and look forward to welcoming some new graduates this year."

Positions for the 2021 intake were announced on Petrojobs in the disciplines of instrument and

control, electrical and mechanical engineering. The final date to apply is June 21, 2021.

The Challenger programme is a two to three-year competency-based course, designed to prepare graduates for roles across BP's business in various disciplines including environment, engineering, subsurface, people & culture, finance, procurement & supply chain management and business & administration.

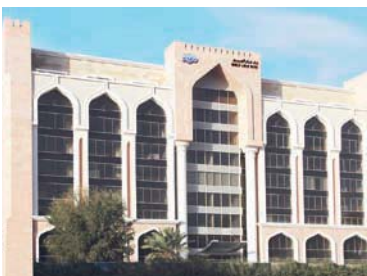
Last month, BP released its first socioeconomic review in Oman which includes examples of how the company has supported local employment and Omanisation.

Oman Arab Bank announces Covid-19 vaccination initiative

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) announced a Covid-19 vaccination initiative for its employees and their families including spouses and children over the age of 18 years, in conjunction with the national vaccination campaign supervised by the Ministry of Health.

There are currently 1,400 registrations, with the final number expected to exceed 2,000 people.

This step is also in line with the Wiqaya programme, launched by the Human Resources Division since the onset of the pandemic.



The initiative will run in coordination with multiple hospitals across the various wilayats, providing ease and accessibility to staff, without the need for them to travel to Muscat.

Rashad al Musafir, CEO of the bank said, "At OAB, we believe in safeguarding the health and well-being of all our employees and their families. Since the beginning of this pandemic, we have ensured business continuity while maintaining the highest level of precautionary measures within our premises. Based on the directives of the Supreme Committee, we are well prepared to cover the costs of the vaccinations for our employees and their families, to ensure peace of mind within the communities."

World Oceans Day painting competition winners announced

MUSCAT: The Dawoodi Bohra community in Oman announced the winners of its Middle East region-wide painting competition to mark the occasion of World Oceans Day. Themed around The Ocean: Life & Livelihoods, the competition saw the participation of over 40 students between ages 5-15.

A spokesperson of the Dawoodi Bohra community said, "It is overwhelming to see so many children participate in this competition to express their imagination about oceans and their ecosystems through their paintings." With lockdown restrictions throughout the country,



the competition was held online", he added. All the three winners of the competition will be felicitated.

One of the judges of the competition expressed, "These environment-led competitions help in creating awareness among children at the grassroots level while also inspiring them to take action and realise their collective responsibility towards nature and its resources."

OETC completes personal interviews to employ job-seekers

MUSCAT: Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) has completed personal interviews to employ 50 job-seekers, in coordination with the Ministry of Labour, Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) and Nama Holding Company, where the Ministry of Labour and APSR announced earlier about these opportunities through the associated training mechanism, employing 800 Omanis in the electricity sector in the Sultanate.

OETC conducted personal interviews with about 150 candidates for the available jobs to select 50 job-seekers to work in supervisory and technical positions such as assistant engineer, maintenance supervisor, health, safety and environment officer, electrical technician and line installers.

The company has formed three committees to conduct personal interviews and evaluate the candidates to select those who are qualified to join the contracts



of the contracting companies to replace the expatriates.

On the company's efforts to provide job opportunities for national cadres, Mubarak al Jahwari, Senior Manager of the Human Resources Department, said: "The company is committed to achieving a high percentage of Omanisation for our national cadres, as the company's Omanisation rate has reached 95 per cent, and we are currently working with our partners, the contracting companies, to

replace the expatriates with national cadres, and in the coming days, 50 job-seekers will be trained and employed, and we are trying to increase this number successively.

He added: We will continue to support Omani youth and give them training opportunities on the job, as the company annually trains a number of graduates from different universities and colleges to hone their skills and their knowledge experiences to prepare them for the labour market."

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Oil prices climb on signs of strong fuel demand recovery



A 3D printed oil pump jack is placed on dollar banknotes, in this illustration picture. — Reuters

SINGAPORE: Oil prices rose for a second session on Wednesday on signs of strong fuel demand in western economies. Brent crude futures were up 32 cents, or 0.4 per cent, at \$72.54 a barrel at 06:40 GMT, having earlier touched \$72.83, the highest since May 20, 2019. Brent rose 1 per cent on Tuesday.

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures climbed 31 cents, or 0.4 per cent, to \$70.36 a barrel, after rising to as high as \$70.62, highest since October 17, 2018. WTI prices climbed 1.2 per cent on Tuesday. “Improved demand outlook appears to be bolstering crude oil prices, as the successful vaccine rollouts and summer driving season in the United States and Europe continues to support fuel demand,” said Margaret Yang, a strategist at Singapore-based DailyFX.

Recent traffic data suggests travellers are hitting the roads as restrictions ease, ANZ Research analysts said, pointing to TomTom data which showed traffic congestion in 15 European cities had hit its highest since the coronavirus pandemic began.

On Tuesday, the US Energy Information Administration forecast fuel consumption growth this year in the United States, the world's biggest oil user, would be 1.49 million barrels per day (bpd), up from a previous forecast of 1.39 million bpd.

In another positive sign, industry data showed US crude oil inventories fell last week, in line with analysts' expectations, according to a poll. — Reuters

China producer inflation highest in 12 years

BEIJING: China's factory gate prices rose at their fastest annual pace in over 12 years in May, driven by surging commodity prices, highlighting global inflation pressures at a time when policymakers are trying to revitalise Covid-hit growth.

Investors are increasingly worried that pandemic-driven stimulus measures could supercharge global inflation and force central banks to tighten policy, potentially curbing the recovery.

China's producer price index (PPI) increased 9.0 per cent, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said in a statement, as prices bounced back from last year's pandemic lows.

The PPI rise — the fastest monthly gain since September 2008 — was driven by significant price increases in crude oil, iron ore and non-ferrous metals, the NBS said.

Analysts in a poll had expected the PPI to rise 8.5 per cent after a 6.8 per cent increase in April. The surge in PPI has yet to feed through to China's consumer inflation, meaning the People's Bank of China is unlikely to worry for now.

But there are some signs Chinese factories, with already tight profit margins, are passing on higher raw material and component costs to overseas clients, which could reinforce the



A man on a face mask works on a production line manufacturing bicycle steel rim at a factory in Zhejiang, China. — Reuters

global inflation loop.

“The worry is PPI may hover at an elevated level for an extended period of time, which would create economic headaches if mid- or downstream firms fail to absorb higher costs,” said Nie Wen, chief economist at Hwabao Trust.

Consumer prices saw their biggest year-on-year increase in eight months but came in below expectations and remained well below the government's official target of around 3 per cent.

“Producer price inflation is

probably close to a peak...we don't expect (consumer price inflation) to rise much above 2 per cent in the coming quarters. As such, (the data) is unlikely to trigger any shift in monetary policy,” said Julian Evans-Pritchard, senior China economist at Capital Economics.

The release comes as US inflation data on Thursday is being closely watched by investors, who worry another high reading might put pressure on the Federal Reserve to start thinking about tapering its stimulus.

Chinese coal and resource shares rose after the NBS's producer price inflation data, driving the broader stock market higher. On a monthly basis, the PPI rose 1.6 per cent, up from a 0.9 per cent uptick in April.

Coal-fired power plants also stocked up on thermal coal to meet surging electricity demand during the summer peak, resulting in a 10.6 per cent month-on-month increase in prices in the coal mining and washing sector, up from 2.8 per cent the previous

Prices for commodities including coal, steel, iron ore and copper, which affect the PPI, have surged this year, fuelled by post-lockdown recoveries in demand and ample global liquidity

month, said Dong Lijuan, senior statistician at the NBS.

Prices for commodities including coal, steel, iron ore and copper, which affect the PPI, have surged this year, fuelled by post-lockdown recoveries in demand and ample global liquidity.

Higher commodity prices and low bases last year could further drive up China's producer price inflation in the second and third quarters, China's central bank has said.

Chinese policymakers have pledged to take measures to cool red hot commodity prices and prevent them being passed on to consumers, while the state planner has said China will strengthen price controls of iron ore, copper, corn and other commodities.

NBS data also showed China's consumer price index (CPI) rose 1.3 per cent in May in annual terms, up from a 0.9 per cent gain in April but lower than the 1.6 per cent forecast in the poll.

— Reuters

Japan economic policy blueprint focuses on green, digital



Japanese Prime Minister Suga holds a news conference in Tokyo. — Reuters

TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga plans to accelerate investment in green projects and digital transformation, setting his eyes on new sources of economic growth in the post-Covid era, according to a draft blueprint of policy priorities for the coming fiscal year released on Wednesday.

The first mid-year blueprint under Suga's administration marked a gradual shift away from the crisis mode seen last year when the focus centred on efforts to cope with the coronavirus pandemic.

“It's a step in the right direction to spend money in the most promising areas,” said Masaki Kuwahara, senior economist at Nomura Securities. “The question is, how they will follow up with concrete steps.”

The blueprint was presented at the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy, the premier's top advisory panel comprised of ministers, ruling party lawmakers, central bank governor and private-sector advisers.

Though it does not set out specific spending

recommendations, the framework serves as a backbone for this year's economic policymaking and provides the basis for the coming fiscal year's draft budget to be compiled in late December. It will be approved by the cabinet on June 18 after deliberations by the ruling bloc.

For next year's budget, the blueprint urged directing more resources to four areas: digital transformation, a greener society, the revival of regions and childcare support to cope with the fast-ageing population. — Reuters

Cybercriminals are weaponising your favourite brands



DUANE NICOL

If you're a marketer or brand owner in 2021, it's not enough to protect your brands and trademarks in real life. You have to build a fort around your online assets too. Brand marketers are increasingly losing leads, brand affinity and customer loyalty to cybercriminals who impersonate their brands to scam their customers and prospects.

Some of the Middle East's — and the world's — best-known brands came under unprecedented attack in 2020. As the world truly embraced digitisation, cybercriminals impersonated trusted brands at increasing rates

in their efforts to steal customer information and defraud them.

How big is the problem? Mimecast has released a new report entitled The State of Brand Protection 2021 that takes a look at the dramatic rise of online brand impersonation and how companies can defend themselves.

Data is based on analyses of Mimecast's customer email traffic as well as public data. Mimecast's Brand Exploit Protect web-scanning tool found that companies on the BrandZ Top 100 Most Valuable Global Brands 2020 list experienced a 381 per cent spike in brand impersonation attacks during May and June 2020, over January and February respectively.

Brands are losing trust — and business leads — to cybercriminals

As harmful as lost trust can be to a brand's reputation (Frost & Sullivan research shows 48 per cent of survey respondents



stopped using an online service when it had a data breach), lost business leads are a far more tangible pain point.

Every click-through from a fake email to a spoofed web page can steal a marketer's lead. In upcoming brand trust research conducted by Mimecast, 50 per cent of European consumers said they would stop spending money with their favourite brand if they fell victim to a phishing attack involving that brand.

All brands are at risk

If your brand has an online presence, it's at risk.

Between October 1, 2020 to January 31, 2021, Mimecast found approximately 2.9 million email phishing attempts that impersonated a top 100 brand — an average of 715,600 email phishing attacks every month.

Smaller organisations also face the financial and reputational repercussions of brand exploitation and can be less

equipped to handle the issue.

Brands don't realise the extent of the problem

In the State of Email Security report, 40 per cent saw an increase in the volume of spoofed e-mails that misused their organisation's brand during the past year. Others may not be paying close attention to the problem.

After all, while brand impersonation ‘in real life’ is tangible — counterfeit goods, trademarks and copyrights are obvious to brand marketers — brand impersonation online is invisible until you proactively look for it.

There's a clear gap in brand safety

Despite the rapidly increasing virulence of brand impersonation attacks and the growing list of potential consequences, many small and mid-size companies remain oblivious to the danger threatening their brands.

At the same time, some

consumers remain unaware of the threat and are unsure what checks they should be carrying out to determine email and website legitimacy.

Brand monitoring/protection services are a must

Services that provide monitoring to identify brand impersonation, including third-party brand protection technologies and the Domain-based Message Authentication, Reporting and Conformance (DMARC) email protocol, are a must for online brand safety.

They shed light on the severity of the issue and can help brands mitigate the problem more rapidly.

The bottom line? Brand impersonation is a scary thought — but businesses that put the right measures in place and increase collaboration between marketing and cybersecurity professionals, can weather the storm. The time to act is now. [Duane Nicol is a cybersecurity expert at Mimecast]