

50 opportunities in industrial sector

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) will unveil today as many as 50 different investment opportunities in the Sultanate's industrial sector. Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, will outline the investment opportunities at a virtual forum due to be attended by the ministry's under-secretaries, foreign ambassadors, representatives of chambers of commerce of the GCC states, business leaders and investors. **DETAILS ON P17**



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SUSPENDED IPL MOVED TO UAE IN SEPT, OCT



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TRAILING THE ARABIAN HUMPBACK WHALES



P17

25,000 SMART METERS INSTALLED IN MUSCAT



## OHRC probes video clip of alleged assault on citizen

MUSCAT: Acting through its specialised departments, Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) exerts efforts to follow up adherence to human rights in the Sultanate, a report published on its website said.

“OHRC ‘detection mechanism’, which was a standard measure of monitoring social media and electronic websites, spotted a visual clip about Omani citizen Abdulaziz bin Hamad al Balushi contending he was roughed up in 2011. Accordingly, OHRC launched a probe aimed to ensure the legal rights of the person under custody, to check his health condition, and verify the circulated matter in coordination with the departments concerned.”

On May 28, 2021, the OHRC met Abdulaziz al Balushi, who, then, reported that he was being treated decently by Royal Oman Police (ROP) personnel in charge and that he was enjoying good health.

He also said that the statements made in the video clip circulated via social media networks were not meant to claim that he was subject to beating by the authorities concerned during the 2011 events.

SEE P2



### INSIDE



BELARUS OPPN LEADER CALLS FOR GLOBAL SUPPORT

# Arab Parliament speaker hails HM’s wise policies, vision

CAIRO: Adel al Asoomi, Speaker of the Arab Parliament, received Ambassador Abdullah bin Nassir bin al Rahbi, Sultanate’s Ambassador to Egypt and Permanent Representative to the Arab League, at the headquarters of the Arab Parliament.

The meeting was attended by Dr Hassan bin Ali al Madhani, Deputy Speaker of the Arab Parliament and dealt with the issues and development in the Arab world.

The speaker of the Arab Parliament hailed the wise policies of

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and his constructive vision to push the Sultanate ahead towards broader horizons and a promising future for the Omani people.

He praised the Oman Future Vision 2040 which aims to boost the

standard of living for Omani citizens and realise a promising future and a modern and renewed renaissance for the Sultanate.

The speaker of the Arab Parliament stressed the role played by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin

Tarik in supporting the joint Arab action, expressing his sincere wishes of good health and well-being to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the Omani people more security, stability and progress under his wise leadership. — ONA

## Most active Covid-19 cases in 15-59 age group



VINOD NAIR @vinot\_nair

The fact that vaccines are the only tool to fight the virus is evident from the Ministry of Health figures.

The Sultanate recorded an increase in deaths and new cases last week, and the virus took 64 lives. As of Thursday, the hospitals had 746 inpatients, including 239 (18 in Salalah) in intensive care units.

More importantly, 6.8 per cent or 14,401 active cases have not recovered and are under treatment, including 6,011 Omanis and 8,390 expatriates.

Most of these patients are in the age group of 15-59 with 13,503 cases, compared to 813 in the age group 60 years and above.

According to statistics, the total death toll is 2,303 deaths, which is 1.07 per cent of the total cases recorded in the Sultanate.

More Omanis (1,688) compared to 615 non-Omanis lost their lives, and most of the victims (1,475) were in the age group 60 and above by cases. Also, 663 women lost lives against 1,630 men.

TURN TO P5

# Ministry moves to expedite employment initiatives

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, MAY 29

In implementation of the directives issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to expedite the employment initiatives and the appointment of citizens in various sectors, the Ministry of Labour held a joint meeting with the director-generals of human resources at different government units on Friday.

The meeting aimed to lay down a time frame for the appointment of nationals through job grades, the replacing of expat workers by nationals or the appointment on temporary contracts or part-time jobs according to the actual needs.

The meeting confirmed that the government units should commit to speed up the appointment procedures according to a certain time frame.

The Ministry of Labour affirmed that according to the Royal directives, the financial grades will be provided in accordance to the approved employment plan and the ministry will follow-up the employment procedures in different sectors and will announce the steps for implementing the Royal directives regarding the employment of nationals.



## 2,733 teachers to be appointed soon

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education (MoE) announced that it is finalising the procedures for appointing 2,733 teachers for the academic year 2021-2022 from fresh graduates who have undergone written tests this year as well as the graduates from the previous years and whose names are in the waiting list. Of these 369 jobs have been secured through replacement of expat teachers.

The ministry affirmed that it has followed the applicable



standard appointment procedures. An official source at the ministry explained that the names of the newly-appointed teachers will be announced by June after completing the administrative

procedures, noting that the number of appointees may rise during the upcoming period due to the replacement process and will stabilise through the outset of the next academic year. — ONA

# Now, bring your containers for plastic-free shopping!

LONDON: Ella Shone’s small electric truck used to deliver milk but now she drives it around London, selling groceries and household goods that are free of plastic packaging.

The 32-year-old bought her “top-up truck” last year after the first coronavirus lockdown got her thinking about innovative ways to reduce waste.

She has found plenty of demand for her service, with customers scooping up dry groceries such as lentils or filling bottles from large dispensers of

vinegar or washing detergent.

On a rainy day in May, she plied a route to eight stops in the up-and-coming district of Hackney.

The mobile shop was created to bring “packaging-free” shopping to people’s doors, tapping into a growing demand for deliveries during the stay-at-home restrictions. “I felt that there was a need to make it easier, to make it more accessible, more visible”, she said. The electric vehicles — known commonly as milk floats — were once commonly used by milkmen and



A customer tops up her own bottle from the electric milk float converted into a zero waste shop which brings ‘packaging-free’ shopping to people’s doors in east London. — AFP

women to deliver pint bottles of fresh milk on household doorsteps.

Customers returned them for reuse and Shone says her truck prompts a “nostalgic” reaction. But she is responding to very current concerns over plastic packaging, which disintegrates over time, creating ubiquitous microplastic pollution.

Activism targeting governments and corporations can help, she said, but added: “I think there’s a lot that needs to be done at consumer level.”

— AFP

## OHRC spots, probes video clip on citizen's alleged bashing in 2011

MUSCAT: A report published on the website of Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) reads as follows:

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Accordingly, OHRC launched a probe aimed to ensure the legal rights of the person under custody, to check his health condition and verify the circulated matter in coordination with the departments concerned.

On May 28, 2021, the OHRC met Abdulaziz al Balushi, who, then, reported that he was being treated decently by Royal Oman Police (ROP) personnel in charge and that he was enjoying good health. He also said that the statements made in the video clip circulated via social media networks was not meant to claim that he was subjected to beating by the authorities concerned during the 2011 events. He reported that, in that year, he was only 11 years old and that he was not



Acting through its specialised departments, Oman Human Rights Commission exerts efforts to follow up adherence to human rights in the Sultanate

present in the 2011 incidents.

As for the traces of bruises that appeared on his back, he said, they were the outcome of a family dispute when he was young.

He admitted that the "action he perpetrated (alleged abuse during 2011 events) was due to financial and family pressures". — ONA

## SQU experts find way to convert used cooking oil into biodiesel

KABEER YOUSUF  
@kabeeryousef

A group of experts from Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has come out with a solution to recycle used cooking oil and convert it into biodiesel.

If it works well, this can be a breakthrough achievement for the Sultanate's scientific community.

The project called 'Biodiesel production from waste cooking oil for use as fuel: Integrating environmental, economic, and social aspects' by Principal Investigator Dr Sanket Joshi from the Oil and Gas Research Centre and his project is one of the seven research projects that won the 2021 Royal Grant.

"Biodiesel is one such alternative liquid fuel which is almost similar to petro-based diesel and is defined as monoalkyl esters of long chain fatty acids derived from a renewable lipid feedstock, such as vegetable oil or animal fat, for use in diesel engines," says Dr Sanket Joshi.

His study is based on the background that worldwide fossil fuel (liquid/crude oil-based) demand is projected to exceed 100 million bpd (barrel per day) by 2040, with diesel dominated by more than five million barrels per day, according to the International Energy Association, 2019-20 report.

Hence, the need of the hour is a better and long-lasting, renewable and environment-friendly energy fuel



substitute in light of the dwindling resources, uncertainty in crude oil prices, and harmful environmental impact.

"The conversion of vegetable oils into biodiesel is an effective way to overcome all the problems associated with the vegetable oils. Dilution, micro-emulsification, pyrolysis, and transesterification are some of the techniques applied to solve the problems encountered with the high fuel viscosity," he said.

Biodiesel is an oxygenated, sulfur-free, biodegradable, non-toxic, and eco-friendly alternative-diesel oil. It is typically produced by a catalysed transesterification reaction in which vegetable oil or animal fat reacts with alcohol and alkali. As an alternative fuel, biodiesel can be used in the 'neat form (B100) or mixed with petroleum-

based diesel. No engine modification to the vehicle is required, resulting in a less expensive, renewable, clean-burning fuel.

Biodiesel can be made from various natural vegetable (edible) oils, non-edible oils, animal fat, algae, recycled cooking oil, and even wood.

We can also use vegetable oil in diesel engines; however, the injection and atomisation characteristics of the vegetable oils are significantly different from those of petroleum-derived diesel fuels, mainly due to their high viscosities.

Modern diesel engines have a fuel-injection system that is sensitive to viscosity change. According to Dr Sanket, one way to avoid these problems is to reduce the fuel viscosity of vegetable oil to improve its performance.

## Cultural event puts balm on pandemic blues



KAUSHALENDRA SINGH  
@patkaushal

When stress is the order of the day due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a community social wing came out to entertain people with an event, which worked as a mood elevator for all those who took part in it.

There was a free flow of humour, satire and soft poetry during the programme titled 'Hasya Kavi Sammelan' (humorous poetry session). The programme was organised on a virtual platform by the Rajasthani wing of the Indian Social Club (ISC) Salalah on Friday.

The programme enthused people to clap, cheer and indulge in the 'play of words' and brush aside the negativities caused by the pandemic.

Amraram Gujjar, the chief guest of the occasion, hailed the programme as a stress buster when people tackled so many social and personal issues related to their health, emotions and livelihood.

"I felt honoured to be part of it, as I saw many known faces after a long time. Most importantly, I saw them smiling and appreciating due to the setting of the programme, which was light, informal yet full of messages for the contemporary world," he said.

Sandeep Ojha, an active community member, introduced the poets to a comparatively large audience for a virtual programme.

Among the poets were Anvesha Srivastava, Neer Gorakhpuri, Vipin Chauhan, Pankaj Sharma, Dr Suresh Avasthi and Pankaj Srivastava.

Ajay Anjam compered the programme and kept the audience intact until the show's end that evoked a very good response from the poetry lovers.

Pankaj Sharma stood out with his gratitude and feelings for Oman for extending helping hands to India in the time of pandemic crisis.

"The gesture shown by Oman touched me, and I felt that humanity is still alive amid so much negativity, which is the biggest challenge of the contemporary world," he said.

The audience was in splits of laughter and appreciation in these gloomy days of the pandemic.

Rakesh Jha, Chairman of the ISC Salalah, called it a moment of great relief and distraction from so many issues he is facing.

He committed to coming out with more such events to keep the community positively engaged and keep them healthy, mentally and physically.

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# Health ministers' meet reviews steps to fight Covid

GCC COUNTRIES TO RECEIVE SAUDI RIAL 1 MILLION FOR CORONAVIRUS GENOME STUDY

**MUSCAT:** The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Health, participated in the 5th extraordinary meeting of the GCC Health Ministers, which was held through video conference on Saturday.

The Sultanate's delegation was headed by Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health.

The meeting reviewed the developments of the Covid-19 pandemic and the measures taken by each country to contain the pandemic.

The current situation in the Sultanate in terms of updating the epidemiological indicators of the pandemic was also discussed.

The meeting reviewed the latest developments related to the Covid-19 vaccines particularly those approved by the Sultanate in addition to a summary about the Sultanate's participation in the council's technical meetings.



Besides, the meeting discussed the vaccination guidelines in terms of the groups prioritised for vaccination, the side effects of the vaccines, which were prepared by the GCC technical committee. This is in addition to the approved

protective measures and health protocols for the entry of the GCC citizens through the outlets of the GCC countries.

Visual displays of the outcomes of the GCC health under-secretaries committee and the

vaccination experience in Bahrain, were displayed during the meeting.

At the end of the meeting, the GCC health ministers commended the great efforts exerted by the health workers of the ministries of health and the other public and

private establishments and all the community members in the GCC countries who have contributed positively to overcome the crisis.

They also commended the increase in vaccination rates among individuals of the GCC

countries and the awareness campaigns about the importance of the vaccination and the safety and effectiveness of the vaccines as a way for protecting the communities and overcoming the pandemic.

They underscored the importance of exchanging information between the member states regarding the latest developments of the pandemic, the viral mutations, the protective measures and information about the vaccines and their effectiveness across all age groups and the side effects detected as a result of vaccination.

The GCC health ministers agreed to allocate Saudi Riyal 1 million for each country from the GCC's account to study the genome sequencing of coronavirus. It will be optional for the GCC countries to share their studies while stressing the data privacy of each country. — ONA

## ARAB PARLIAMENT SPEAKER RECEIVES ENVOY



**CAIRO:** Adel al Asoomi, Speaker of the Arab Parliament, received Abdullah bin Nassir al Rahbi, Sultanate's Ambassador to Egypt and Permanent Representative to the Arab League, at the headquarters of the Arab Parliament. The meeting, also attended by Dr Hassan bin Ali al Madhani, Deputy Speaker of the Arab Parliament, dealt with the issues and development in the Arab world. — ONA

# Sultanate to host workshop on drafting patent application

**STAFF REPORTER**  
MUSCAT, MAY 29

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), in cooperation with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), will host a virtual international workshop on drafting a patent application from May 31 to June 3.

The workshop, which targets those concerned with intellectual property at several institutions, inventors and innovators, includes a number of axes, such as the efforts of MoCIIP in assisting and supporting inventors, identifying innovative concepts, obtaining all information from the inventor, practical exercises

on how to draft the patent application, in addition to identifying the protection elements, its types, and its components.

Eng Khalid bin Hammoud al Hina'i, Head of the Patents and Industrial Designs Department in the National Office for Intellectual Property at the MoCIIP, said that the workshop is part of the ministry's plans in the field of intellectual property during the next phase as such workshops and training courses would introduce the inventors and owners of creative ideas to how to formulate a patent application in accordance with the orderly arrangement for drafting a patent application.

He added that the patent application is a complete clarification

for the details of the inventor's invention who must clearly describe the technical characteristics of his/her invention so that the technical inspector can obviously implement the invention.

The patent application shall be submitted to the concerned authority which usually grants the required patents in the country.

Al Hina'i pointed out that a sound "drafting of a patent application" for the invention application contributes to reducing the process of modifications made to the application and thus speeding the procedures for granting a patent as well as avoiding neglect of any technical advantage that may be important to the implementation of the invention or its improvement.

# Education Ministry to conduct forum on blended education

**STAFF REPORTER**  
MUSCAT, MAY 29

The Ministry of Education is hosting the first virtual educational forum under the title 'Towards Sustainable Blended Education' on Tuesday. The virtual forum is organised under the patronage of Majid bin Said al Bahri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Administrative and Financial Affairs, in the presence of Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education.

The two-day forum is targeting teachers of different educational levels from all educational directorates in the governorates of the Sultanate.

The ministry, through this forum, seeks to highlight efforts

and review the distinguished initiatives of teachers from various government schools, which had a positive impact on the continuation of learning (distance) and the interaction between the parties to the educational process.

The forum aims at defining the requirements for implementing these initiatives, identifying their results, and reviewing the distinct models in order to benefit from them.

It also seeks to motivate teachers to develop their educational methods in line with the stage of distance learning and blended learning.

In addition, the forum seeks to popularise the application of these distinguished initiatives, and publish them in the Gulf, regional and international forums and conferences.

It intends to spread the culture the digital transformation in learning by employing information and communication technology in the educational process. It also aims to enable other teachers to adopt and develop the participating initiatives, while preserving their rights to the initiator teacher.

In its first round, this virtual educational forum is covering five main topics.

These topics are 'Effective application of simultaneous lessons', 'Effective application of the merging between simultaneous and asynchronous classes', 'Effective application of electronic evaluation methods', 'Increasing students' motivation in distance learning,' and 'Production and application of interactive lessons in educational platforms'.

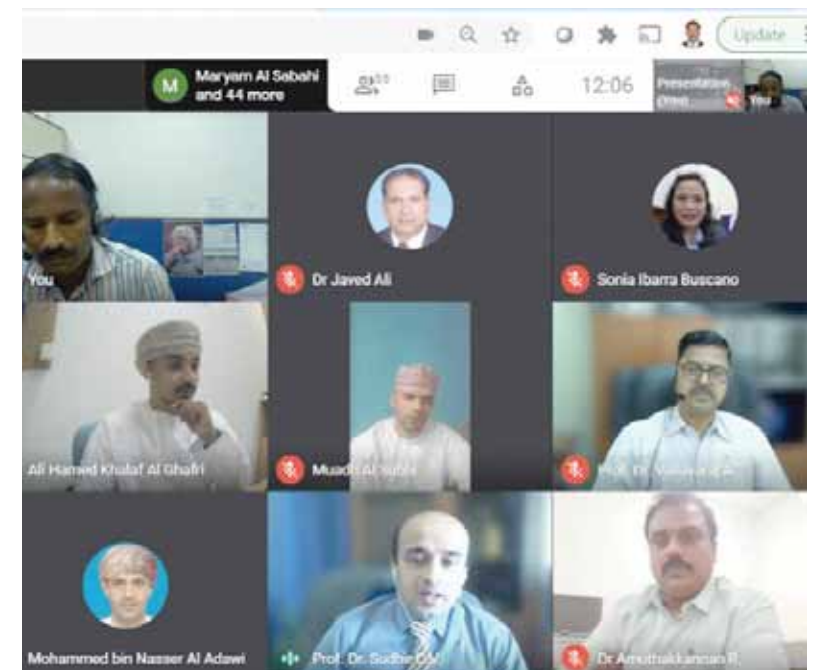
# Save Globe Fest held at College of Engineering

**STAFF REPORTER**  
MUSCAT, MAY 29

The Department of Mechanical Industrial Engineering in association with Student Affairs Office, College of Engineering, National University of Science and Technology, organised the Save Globe Fest 2021 on May 19 and 20 through a virtual platform.

The objective of the event was to provide a forum for the young emerging brains to display and discuss their ideas on Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle (RRR) of wastes/plastics and to acquire a novel solution for the current environmental issues.

The series of events included (1) Project presentation (2) Video making competition (3) Quiz Competition and (4) Essay competition with topics focusing more on the globe and the atmosphere. Save Globe Fest 2021 was initiated by Professor Ahmed al Balushi, the Dean, College of Engineering as a CSR for the benefit of students community and the society.



The event was inaugurated by Engineer Muadh al Subhi, the managing director of Rassen Pet Food Factory. In his speech Al Subhi emphasised on the responsibility of each individual to save the planet by a proper balance with the nature.

Professor A Vallavaraj, Assistant Dean, Undergraduate Studies, urged the students to

take up novel projects in the domain of waste to energy. Professor Sudhir, head of the department of mechanical and industrial engineering, welcomed the gatherings.

The online event was attended by more than 60 students. A total of RO500 cash awards have been bagged by the students in Save Globe Fest 2021.

# RIGHT HABITS FROM CHILDHOOD KEEP CANCERS AT BAY



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

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Can cancer be prevented? It is a question that has always been asked for years. Today, there seem to be more studies that conclude that cancer can be prevented in many situations.

According to the World Health Organization, Cancer is one of the most common causes of death, with nearly seven million deaths each year worldwide. Some 24.6 million people are living with cancer, and by the end of 2020, it is projected that there will be 16 million new cancer cases and 10 million cancer deaths every year.

Dr Rajyashree Kutty, a specialist surgeon who conducts awareness lectures on cancer in Oman and internationally, and founder of Barakath al Noor and a board member of Oman Cancer Association said, “About 15 per cent of the cancer is only because of certain factors that we cannot control and 85 per cent of them are because of what we can change. So if we can make that change, it can be prevented. Factors such as genes we cannot prevent, certain changes such as being a woman, increasing age are all factors. For example, prostate cancer cannot happen in youngsters as it happens in old age. So these factors could be what we cannot change, but what can we change?”

She pointed out, “About 85 per cent of cancers are because of our lifestyle. When we talk about lifestyle, there are three major factors: Diet and food habits, obesity and one’s weight, physical activity and fitness. There is no point in working out for so many hours and not taking care of what you eat. On the other hand, if you

“  
About 15 per cent of the cancers are only because of certain factors that we cannot control and 85 per cent of them are because of what we can change

DR RAJYASHREE KUTTY  
Specialist surgeon

eat healthy food but prefer to sit on the couch and not exercise, that is not helpful.

When it comes to breast cancer, apples, pomegranates, berries, cherries and peaches are known to prevent breast cancer to a great extent. WHO says that eating five fruits a day prevents breast cancer. These fruits are available in Oman. These fruits and vegetables prevent a type of cancer called hormone-dependent breast cancer. It can arrest breast cancer if a person is suffering from it. Do not forget the cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, brussels sprouts etc”, noted Dr Kutty.

There are two other factors that are important in the present era, said the specialist surgeon.

“Stress is directly responsible for producing certain cancers. The stress hormones have tendencies to trigger off the cancer gene, and the next one is sleep. An adult requires a minimum sleep of six to seven hours. If you do not have that, the chance of getting cancer is high”, Dr Kutty pointed out.

One of the main reasons, according to her, is that our circadian rhythm has been altered. “If you see nature, the plants bloom with sunrise, and by sunset, we can see the birds go back to their nests, but human beings have gone completely against nature”, she said.

## LET US BEGIN FROM CHILDHOOD

“A child is not born with a taste for chocolates and chillies. So the mother and father at home must train the child from early years to have a vegetable

salad and fruit salad everyday. God has made every vegetable and fruit with some element of vitamin or mineral or some sort of property such as antioxidant and anticancer. The need to drink enough water has to be stressed. It prevents blood pressure, diabetes, gastritis, stones and so many other diseases. Incorporating all these natural elements into life makes a big difference”, she explained.

Meat, chicken and fish are good, but processed meat with added hormones begins to accumulate in the consumer’s body from the early years. Later, when they reach the reproductive stage, they face problems as everything is altered, so the progeny that comes in also has new traits and genes susceptible to all these diseases.

“So the best thing is to try to follow natural food habits. Once we teach a child a habit at home that remains life-long. Chubby kids are cute, but we have to remember the heart is only the size of our fist so we should not put unnecessary strain on it. Unfortunately, it is when people hit their 40s when they want to jog and workout until then, nobody does. Instead, let us start from childhood with the right habits.” Different people have various types of stress. For students, it is studies at adolescent age, it is about friends so it is natural, but what is important is how we neutralise it, says Dr Kutty.

“It is best to take up a passion, art, games, gardening or having pets is something that we should let them develop at early years and do not wait to be in the 30s.”



## OEA reviews economic outlook with IMF team

**MUSCAT:** The Omani Economic Association (OEA) held a virtual meeting on Saturday with the International Monetary Fund delegation within the framework of its annual visit which started on Monday and will continue till June 6.

The visit of the IMF's delegation comes within the framework of Article IV consultations, during which the delegation meets with officials from the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Economy, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), the State Council and the Omani Economic Association.

The IMF delegation was led, during the meeting, by Dr Daniel Stanley while the OEA delegation was headed by Dr Khalid bin Said al Amri, Chairman of OEA Board of Directors.

At the outset of the meeting, Al Amri reviewed the economic and financial developments in the Sultanate for the current year, the future expectations and the

government measures to contain the Covid-19 pandemic.

Al Amri spoke about the economic and financial improvements including the Medium Term Fiscal Balance Plan (2021-2024), the Economic Stimulus Plan (ESP), the economic diversification strategy and the 10th Five-Year Development Plan.

**The IMF delegation was led, during the meeting, by Dr Daniel Stanley while the OEA delegation was headed by Dr Khalid bin Said al Amri, Chairman of OEA Board of Directors**

Dr Khalid bin Said al Amri, Chairman of OEA, noted that the meeting, which was attended by economic experts from the OEA board of directors and its members, focused on taking the OEA visions with regard to the economic and financial developments in the Sultanate, and the future outlook of the Sultanate's economy.

He added that the IMF recommended holding public dialogue before passing any law and to shed light on such dialogues by wide media participation. — ONA

KABEER YOUSUF

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In honour of the sufferings of Palestinians struggling for an independent state, the proposed closing ceremony of the second edition of the Cinemana Arab Film Festival has been called off, according to the festival organisers.

"Out of respect for the feelings of our people in the beloved State of Palestine and solidarity with their just cause, which is the cause of every Muslim Arab, the Supreme Committee of the Cinemana Arab Film Festival has decided to call off the closing ceremony," Dr Khalid al Zadjali, director of the festival, told the *Observer*.

Oman bagged two of the coveted titles at the festival, which witnessed more than 131 participants in various competition categories, including short fictional films, documentary films, animation films and hosted a galaxy of luminaries who took part in the virtual platform.

The results of the second edition of the Cinemana Arab Film Festival came as follows:

### SHORT FICTION CATEGORY WINNERS

1. **'The Final Mistress'** by Mustafa Fermat, Mahmoud Yassin award for Best Short Fictional Film for Morocco,
2. **'The Last Survivor'** by Abdul Wahid al Hinai, Prize of



the Jury for Sultanate of Oman, 3. **'Crossing'** by Salman Youssef, Certificate of Appreciation for Excellence and Creativity, Bahrain, and 4. **'Hayat Bel Qattara'** by Khamis Hassan Al Masry, the jury prize for Palestine.

### WINNERS OF THE DOCUMENTARY FILM CATEGORY

1. **'White Gold'** by Hamid al Amiri, Kuwaiti Film Producer Youssef al Amiri Prize for the Best Documentary Film for Sultanate of Oman,
2. **'Abu Nasser'** by director Saeed and Hassan al Jirani, the award of the Saudi jury, and
3. **'Toshret'** by Amer Abu Hassiba, Certificate of Appreciation for Excellence and Creativity for Egypt.

### ANIMATION FILM CATEGORY WINNERS

1. **'Memories of Mara'**, director Wad al Hajaji, Effat University, award for the best animation film, Saudi Arabia,
2. **'Seed'**, director Uday Abdel Kazim, the prize for Iraq.

An excellent repertoire of experts from across the region and beyond formed the panel of judges adjudicating a vast number of entries to the festival.

Acclaimed writer and critic Abdullah Abu Awad from Morocco, director Abd al Hay Salih from Mauritania, director Fattis from Saudi Arabia, and director Fayek Jarada from Palestine were the jury of short documentary films.

The jury for the short fictional film consisted of the Lebanese artist Madeleine Tabar, Omani

artist Shamaa Muhammad, Jordanian director Khamis Majdalawiya, and Libyan artist and producer Khadouja Sabri.

As for the animation film jury, renowned director Mohamed Ghazaleh from Egypt, director and film-maker of animation Yusef al Buqshi, Kuwait, film director Dr Mustafa al Shawki from Iraq, and director and writer Abdullah al Battashi from the Sultanate of Oman formed the jury.

A 'cinematic evening', hosted by the director of the festival, Dr Khalid al Zadjali and attended by several participants from across the world, in addition to contributions from members of the festival's competition categories jury, made the 2nd edition of the Cinemana Arab Film Festival remarkable.

## Most active Covid cases in 15-59 age group

FROM PAGE 1

The Governorate of Muscat has maximum deaths so far (727, including 271 in Seeb), followed by North Al Batinah (415, including 147 in Suhar), Dhofar (248, including 226 in Salalah), South Al Batinah (248, including 80 in Rustaq), Al Dakhiliyah (229, including 74 in Nizwa), South Al Sharqiyah 145 (including 67 in Sur).

With a mass vaccination drive set to start next month, the Ministry of Health has stressed that vaccines are one of the most effective and safe means of preventing diseases.

Vaccines stimulate the body's immune system to produce antibodies, this kind of immunity known as acquired immunity, and this method of obtaining immunity against the

disease is more effective and safer than obtaining immunity by stimulating the immune system through getting the infection in what is known as natural immunity.

The importance of taking a vaccine against Covid-19 is that it will reduce the disease burden among people in communities, reduce the number of people admitted in intensive care and re-

duce mortality, thereby reducing the pressure on the healthcare sector.

In addition, it will gradually reduce the current measures such as physical distancing, closure of activities, travel restrictions and other preventive measures in preparation for the return of life to normal and recovery from the effects of the pandemic in various aspects of life.



With a mass vaccination drive set to start next month, the Ministry of Health has stressed that vaccines are one of the most effective and safe means of preventing diseases.



## Unesco meet discusses gender equality, coordination urged

**PARIS:** Dr Hamad bin Saif al Hamami, the Sultanate's Permanent Representative to Unesco, presided over the first meeting of the Group of Friends for Gender Equality for 2021, through video conference.

In his welcome speech, Al Hamami underscored the importance of coordination and the integration of efforts between the Unesco and the other international organisations concerned with gender equality in addition to monitoring and evaluating the effect of the

programmes and their results on the ground.

Al Hamami highlighted the importance of revising the curricula to keep pace with the developments of gender equality and embracing clear-cut policies for women empowerment in various fields.

Al Hamami also stressed the importance of providing the Unesco regional offices with the required expertise so as to be able to implement effective programmes that support gender equality.



## UN extends South Sudan arms embargo until May 31, 2022

**UNITED NATIONS:** The UN Security Council on Friday extended for one year the arms embargo imposed on South Sudan since 2018, with a clause providing for a review of its relevance in April 2022.

Written by the United States, the draft resolution extending the embargo until May 31, 2022 was adopted by 13 votes in favour on the 15-member panel, according to diplomats. India and Kenya abstained.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have long called for the renewal of the arms embargo.

It is “essential for South Sudan’s civilians, given the widespread human rights abuses and increasing violence on the ground,” Human Rights Watch said.

The resolution said the Security Council had “deep concern at continued fighting in South Sudan” and condemned “repeated violations” of agreements on cessation of hostilities, protection of civilians and humanitarian access.

The text said the Council was “strongly condemning past and ongoing human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law,” as well as “harassment and targeting of civil society, humanitarian personnel and journalists.”

The Security Council “expresses its readiness to review arms embargo measures, through inter alia modification, suspension, or progressive lifting of these measures, in the light of progress achieved” on key objectives listed in the resolution.

They include a restructuring of defence and security forces, the implementation of a disarmament programme, demobilisation and reintegration of combatants and a reform of armament and ammunition stockpile management. — AFP

# Iran presidential poll campaign makes low-key kick-off

**TEHRAN:** Iran’s presidential election campaign officially kicked off on Friday, without fanfare and in an atmosphere of indifference.

On the streets of the capital Tehran, for now just occasional posters urge Iranians to vote on June 18 with a “single voice”, for the future of an “eternal Iran”.

Hamidreza, a 41-year-old engineer, said he was hesitant about voting for the moment. “I don’t even know if I’ll vote or not,” he said.

Like others AFP spoke to, he declined to provide his surname.

The vote comes amid widespread discontent over a deep economic and social crisis, and after the violent protests in the winter of 2017-18 and in 2019.

Only two candidates, neither with broad national appeal, are facing five runners.

Hamid, a 52-year-old insurance agent, indicated he had already made his choice: judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi.

Raisi “really worked well in the justice system and did a good job at fighting corruption”, Hamid said.

The Islamic republic’s candidate-vetting Guardian Council this week approved seven candidates to run in the election from a field of about 600 hopefuls.

The council — an unelected body — disqualified Ali Larijani and first vice-president Eshaq Jahangiri, as well as firebrand



An Iranian man walks past an electoral poster depicting judiciary chief and presidential candidate Ebrahim Raisi in Tehran. — AFP

former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The move appears to have cleared the way for a strong run by Raisi.

But it also unleashed a flood of criticism of the Guardian Council and is expected to lead to an increase in voter abstention.

“I prefer not to vote than to make the wrong choice, or to have to choose between bad and worst,” said Arezou, a private sector worker.

Larijani, an adviser to supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and

former parliamentary speaker, was seen as the only person capable of challenging Raisi, according to local media.

Raisi won 38 per cent of the vote in the 2017 presidential election but was defeated by incumbent President Hassan Rouhani, who is constitutionally barred from running for a third consecutive term.

Rouhani, who has governed with the support of reformists like Larijani, has been an advocate of detente with the West and of ending Iran’s international

isolation.

Instead, Iran was plunged into a deep recession after former US president Donald Trump torpedoed Rouhani’s signature achievement, the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers which offered sanctions relief in return for Tehran’s pledge never to acquire an atomic weapon.

The deal galvanised ultra-conservative opposition.

But with negotiations under way in Vienna on reviving the accord, it is not expected to be the focus of the election campaign. — AFP

# Tunisia pins tourism hopes on Russians, East Europeans

**SOUSSE, Tunisia:** With its economy hit hard by the pandemic, Tunisia is counting on Russians and eastern Europeans to salvage its tourist sector whose employees fear hunger more than Covid-19.

“The need to work is stronger than the fear of being contaminated,” said lifeguard Aymen Abdallah, glancing at a half-empty beach in the Mediterranean resort of Sousse where Russians are making a comeback.

“If we don’t work, we’ll starve to death,” added Abdallah, donning sunglasses and a mask.

The lifeguard is relieved to be back at work after an idle eight months. But “normally, the beach would have been full at this time”, he sighed.

The North African country reopened its borders to tour operators in late April but then ordered a new week-long partial lockdown at the start of May

**Tunisia’s economic woes have been compounded by the coronavirus pandemic and lockdown measures**

because of a spike in coronavirus cases.

Up to 10 flights a week, mostly from Russia and eastern Europe, have in the past month been touching down at Enfidha, an airport serving Tunisia’s tourism towns.

But revenues are down more than 60 per cent on 2019, before the pandemic hit. Hotels are authorised to operate at 50 per cent of capacity but are struggling to reach that level. “There’s not much profit with just 30 per cent hotel occupancy,” lamented Adel Mlayah, deputy director of



European tourists fill up forms upon their arrival at Enfidha-Hammamet International Airport near the Mediterranean town of Sousse. — AFP

the high-end Mouradi Palace in Sousse.

The hotel normally employs at least 260 staff, but this year no

more than 120 are working.

Eastern Europe also came to the rescue after the 2015 attacks on the capital’s Bardo Museum and in

Sousse that killed 60 people, all but one of them tourists, bringing the crucial sector of Tunisia’s economy to its knees.

While visitors from most West countries are deterred from travel by their governments, those from Russia, the Czech Republic and Poland appeared to have few such qualms.

“There are not that many countries where we can go,” said Andrej Radiokove, newly arrived from Moscow.

“Turkey closed its borders — that’s why we chose Tunisia.”

Like most of the others in his tour group, he has not been vaccinated. “We had Covid two months ago, so we’re not scared,” he said.

Only around two per cent of Tunisia’s population has so far been vaccinated.

The pandemic has claimed more than 12,000 lives in the country of 12 million people. But the high local toll does not appear to have deterred the sun-seekers.

— AFP

### SHORT TAKES

#### KIEV

##### Ukraine, Russia evacuate dozens from Gaza

Ukraine and Russia both said last week they had evacuated dozens of their citizens from the Gaza Strip following hostilities between Israel and armed Palestinian groups there. The worst exchange of fire in years between the Jewish state and Palestinian groups in the enclave started on May 10 after clashes in Jerusalem’s Al Aqsa mosque compound.

In 11 days of fighting, Israeli air strikes and artillery fire on Gaza killed 254 Palestinians, including



66 children, and wounded more than 1,900 people, the health ministry in Gaza says. A plane carrying 109 Ukrainian passport-holders who had requested to leave the enclave landed in a Kiev airport early on Thursday, President Volodymyr Zelensky’s office said in a statement. — AFP

#### ALGIERS

##### Algerian medics fear infections as borders reopen

Algerian medics fear next week’s reopening of national borders will trigger a new surge in Covid-19 cases despite health measures, as people living abroad rush home to see family. The borders have been mostly closed since the global pandemic struck in early 2020, marooning thousands of Algerians working overseas and separating families with dual nationality but helping to protect against a more serious infection rate.

“I am afraid of a likely increase



in cases after the opening. Risks are high because of the variants,” said Wafa, a doctor working at a private clinic in Algiers who asked not to give her family name when criticising state policy.

— Reuters

#### CAIRO

##### 2 dead, 300 hurt in celebratory gunfire for Assad

At least two people were killed and 317 others injured by gunfire at celebrations in Syria marking President Bashar al Assad’s re-election to a fourth term, a war monitor reported. The casualties resulted from celebratory shots fired randomly by Assad’s loyalists in several areas including the capital Damascus and the northern city of Aleppo, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights added.

The two who died were a



young man and a child in Aleppo, the Britain-based observatory said.

Al Assad was re-elected for a fourth seven-year term with 95.1 per cent of the ballots in the election in government-held areas and dismissed by the opposition as a sham. — dpa



## In brief

## ■ NEGOMBO



## LANKA FACING MARINE DISASTER FROM BURNING SHIP

Sri Lanka is facing its worst beach pollution crisis as tonnes of plastic waste from a burning container ship wash ashore, a senior environment official said. Fishermen have been banned from an 80-kilometre stretch of coast near the Singapore-registered *MV X-Press Pearl* as an international firefighting operation went into a 10th day. "There is smoke and intermittent flames seen from the ship", navy spokesman Captain Indika de Silva said. "However, the vessel is stable and it is still in anchorage." Authorities are more worried about millions of polyethylene pellets washing up on beaches and threatening fish-breeding shallow waters. — **AFP**

## ■ KABUL



## SCHOOLS IN KABUL CLOSED FOR 2 WEEKS AS COVID CASES SURGE

Afghanistan's Health Ministry on Saturday announced the closure of many schools, universities and educational centres across the country, including the capital Kabul, to prevent the further spread of the Covid-19. All government and private educational institutions will close for two weeks in 16 of the country's 34 provinces from Saturday, the ministry said.

The decision was made after 977 reported new cases on Friday, the highest number of positive cases over 24 hours since the outbreak began. Afghanistan is fighting a third wave of the virus. More than 70,000 cases and 2,899 deaths have been recorded in the country. — **dpa**

## ■ MANILA



## PHILIPPINES PROTESTS 'ILLEGAL' SOUTH CHINA SEA PRESENCE

The Philippines has protested China's continuing "illegal presence and activities" near an island in the South China Sea held by the Southeast Asian nation, the foreign ministry said. Manila lodged the diplomatic protest on Friday over the "incessant deployment, prolonged presence, and illegal activities of Chinese maritime assets and fishing vessels" in the vicinity of Thitu island.

It demanded its giant neighbour withdraw the vessels. The Chinese Embassy in Manila did not immediately respond to a request for comment outside business hours. — **AFP**

## Blinken: US, India united in tackling Covid

WASHINGTON: Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday the United States and India are united in trying to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic together and Washington is determined to help India with its coronavirus crisis.

Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, who has spent the past week in the United States seeking help amid a devastating second wave of infections at home, told reporters while standing with Blinken at a State Department meeting that India is grateful to Washington for strong support and solidarity.

"In the earlier days of Covid, India was there for the United States — something we will never forget", Blinken said. "And now we want to make sure that we're there for India as well." Blinken said the partnership between the two countries is "vital", "strong" and "increasingly productive."

"We're united in confronting Covid-19 together", Blinken said.

He said the two countries were also united in addressing climate change, and were partnered together directly through the Quad — a four country group that also includes Japan and Australia — and through UN institutions "in dealing with many of the challenges we face in the region and around the world."

India, the world's second most-



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar at the State Department in Washington, DC. — **Reuters**

populous country, this month has recorded its highest Covid-19 death toll since the pandemic began last year. Only about 3 per cent of India's 1.3 billion people have been fully vaccinated, the lowest rate among the 10 countries with the most cases.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has faced mounting criticism for its failure to secure Covid-19 vaccines for its people, even though India is one of the world's biggest producers

**Blinken says the partnership between the two countries is 'vital', 'strong' and 'increasingly productive'. 'We're united in confronting Covid-19 together'**

of vaccines. Indian officials have said Jaishankar has been seeking supplies while in the United States.

## ■ EXAMINING SYMPTOMS FOR BLACK FUNGUS



A doctor (Right) examines a patient who recovered from the Covid-19 coronavirus for symptoms of Black Fungus or scientifically known as Mucormycosis, a deadly fungal infection at an eye hospital in Bhopal, India. — **AFP**

## Myanmar's shadow govt parades new armed force

YANGON: The underground government set up by opponents of Myanmar's military junta said its first batch of recruits have finished training for a new defence force, releasing video of them parading in uniform.

The National Unity Government had announced it would form a People's Defence Force to challenge the army, which seized power on February 1, ousting elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi and plunging the Southeast Asian country into chaos.

The video of the graduation ceremony was released on Friday

in the name of Yee Mon, the shadow government's defence minister. "This military is established by the official civilian government", an unidentified officer says at the ceremony.

"The People's Defence Force must be aligned with the people and protect the people. We will fight to win this battle."

A junta spokesman did not answer calls seeking comment.

The military authorities say the National Unity Government is treasonous and that both it and the People's Defence Force have been designated as terrorist groups. — **Reuters**

## Coronavirus sweeps through Thailand's prisons

BANGKOK: A coronavirus surge sweeping through Thailand's prisons has thrown the spotlight on the kingdom's overcrowded penal system, where some inmates have less space to sleep than the inside of a coffin.

More than 22,000 people have tested positive inside jails, where inmates living cheek by jowl have been encouraged to keep wearing their masks even while they sleep.

Authorities have floated plans to give early releases to prisoners with underlying medical conditions and have announced funding for more testing and medical care in recent days.

But those behind bars say they have been kept in the dark about the seriousness of the outbreak.

"Prisoners don't have the knowledge to protect themselves", said Somyot Prueksakasemsuk, a high-profile activist facing charges under Thailand's harsh royal defamation law.

Somyot was bailed last month and said that he had not been

**Officials have tested more than 36,000 inmates in recent weeks and begun delivering Covid vaccines to inmates and prison staff**

tested for Covid-19 once during his 10-week stint in custody.

He was not worried about contracting the disease while in jail because he had no idea about the level of risk.

"But after this I'm so scared (for everyone still inside)... if you are inside the prison you are at risk, it's unavoidable", he said.

Thailand's prison outbreak has skyrocketed from just 10 publicly announced cases a month ago and sparked growing public concern after a handful of prominent activists contracted the illness.

Among them was student leader Panusaya "Rung" Sithijirawattanakul, who helped lead a series of rallies last year



Prison inmates work in a sewing workshop at a prison in Ayutthaya, north of Bangkok. — **AFP File Photo**

demanding political reforms in the kingdom, and who tested positive after she was released on bail.

The Thai prison population stood at around 311,000 earlier this year, the International Federation for Human Rights said — more than two and a half times the system's official capacity.

Four inmates in every five are serving time for drug charges

because of harsh anti-narcotics laws that can see offenders jailed for a decade for possessing just a few methamphetamine pills.

Many cells are so packed with bodies that some inmates only have half a metre of space.

"That is less room for a body than the inside of a coffin", Justice Minister Somsak Thepsutin told local media in February.

Officials have tested more than 36,000 inmates in recent weeks and begun delivering Covid vaccines to inmates and prison staff.

Somsak said he was examining ways to give early releases to prisoners with underlying medical conditions, possibly through a royal pardon.

Even if the plan goes ahead, prisoners will still have to complete a quarantine before returning home.

"For us to bail anyone or do anything, it has to be done properly", Somsak told reporters on Monday. "We can't allow them to spread infections."

Rights groups say the plan should go further and urged authorities to also free non-violent offenders in order to reduce overcrowding.

"Authorities should reduce the detainee population... of those held on politically motivated charges or for minor offences", said Brad Adams of Human Rights Watch.

— **AFP**

# US targets Belarus with sanctions amid Western outcry

WASHINGTON: The United States on Friday announced punitive measures against Belarus targeting the regime of strongman President Alexander Lukashenko, who met with Russian leader Vladimir Putin amid a global outcry over the forced diversion of a European plane.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki called for “a credible international investigation into the events of May 23,” which she called “a direct affront to international norms.”

Belarus scrambled a military jet to divert a Ryanair plane and arrested 26-year-old opposition journalist and activist Roman Protasevich who was onboard, triggering a global outcry.

The White House announced it was working with the European Union on a list of targeted sanctions against key members of Lukashenko’s regime.

Meanwhile, economic sanctions against nine Belarusian state-owned enterprises, reimposed by Washington in April following a crackdown on pro-democracy protests, will come into effect on June 3.

Further US moves on Belarus could target “those that support corruption, the abuse of human rights, and attacks on democracy,”



AFP File Photo of Ryanair Flight

Psaki said.

The White House also issued a “Do Not Travel” warning for Belarus to US citizens, and warned American passenger planes to “exercise extreme caution” if considering flying over Belarusian airspace.

The European Union has also urged EU-based carriers to avoid Belarusian airspace.

However, President Vladimir Putin celebrated Russia’s close ties with Belarus on Friday as he hosted Lukashenko in the Black Sea resort of Sochi.

With observers closely watching the talks to see how far the Kremlin would go to support the regime, the Russian leader said he was “very glad” to see Lukashenko and agreed with him the Western reaction was an “outburst of emotion”.

Lukashenko complained the West was seeking to stir unrest in Belarus.

“An attempt is underway to rock the boat to reach the level of last August,” he said, referring to anti-regime protests following a disputed election. “It’s clear what



There has to be a credible international investigation into the events of May 23 as it is a direct affront to international norms

JEN PSAKI

White House Press Secy

these Western friends want from us.”

The Belarus strongman, who arrived with a briefcase, said he wanted to show Putin “some documents” related to the Ryanair incident and thanked him for his support in the latest standoff with the West. The talks lasted for more than five hours but their results were not announced.

Over the past years Lukashenko has had a volatile relationship with Moscow, playing it off against the West and ruling out outright unification with Russia. — AFP



Belarusian opposition leader Svetlana Tikhonovskaya

## Belarus oppn leader calls for global support

MOSCOW: Belarusian opposition leader Svetlana Tikhonovskaya called for the world to stand with political prisoners on the one-year anniversary of her husband’s jailing.

From her exile in Lithuania, Tikhonovskaya urged rallies to take place and once again demanded that Roman Protasevich, an opposition journalist and vocal critic of the Belarusian regime, be released.

Protasevich was arrested in Belarus after being taken off a diverted Ryanair flight from Greece to Lithuania nearly a week ago.

The incident triggered international condemnation and put the spotlight once again on the plight of journalists and activists in the authoritarian Eastern European country.

Tikhonovskaya’s husband Sergei had wanted to run against long-time leader Alexander Lukashenko in the presidential election held in August, but was arrested at the end of last May. He faces years in prison. His wife ran in his place.

According to the official results, she lost the election, which was widely regarded as rigged.

The country’s pro-democracy movement, however, sees her as the true winner and for weeks stage mass post-election rallies, often resulting in hundreds of people detained. Tikhonovskaya fled to Lithuania for her safety. — dpa

## Hungary marks anniversary of Danube boat disaster



Sailors lay a wreath during a ceremony to honour the victims on the 2nd anniversary of the Mermaid boat accident near Margaret bridge in Budapest. — Reuters

BUDAPEST: With the tolling of a bell and a wreath lowered into the water, Hungary marked the second anniversary on Saturday of a Budapest boat accident which killed 27 people, mostly South Korean tourists, in the worst river accident on the Danube in decades.

The 135-metre Swiss river cruiser *Viking Sigyn* hit a 27-metre tourist boat called *Mermaid*, causing it to capsize and sink under a bridge during heavy rain on the evening of May 29, 2019.

“It is still very strange to be here,” said Zsolt Sogor, a legal representative of the company that owned the *Mermaid*. “I am here because there are many for whom this day opens deep wounds.”

After a sailor lowered the wreath into the river from a boat, those on board threw flowers into the water to remember the victims at the commemoration event, led by the Hungarian Ecumenical Church.

Of 33 passengers and two crew members, only seven Korean passengers survived. One South Korean tourist who was onboard remains missing. — Reuters

# DR Congo govt says second volcanic eruption a ‘false alarm’

GOMA, DR Congo: DR Congo’s government said Saturday that the eruption of a second volcano it had announced hours earlier was a “false alarm,” the scare coming a week after Mount Nyiragongo roared back into life, causing devastation and sparking a mass exodus.

The government had said that Murara volcano had a “low intensity” eruption on Saturday morning, sending lava flowing into an uninhabited area of Virunga Park, a wildlife reserve home to a quarter of the world’s critically endangered mountain gorillas.

Murara is a small volcano considered to be a crater of Mount Nyamuragira, which along with Nyiragongo is known for strong volcanic activity.

However the communications ministry then issued another statement saying “false alarm on



A child runs on the solidified lava flow of the Nyiragongo volcano in the northern neighbourhoods of Goma, the provincial capital of North Kivu. — AFP

Nyamuragira”.

“A plane has just flown over the entire area on the sides of this volcano. No eruption was observed,” it added.

“It was instead intense activities

of carbonising wood into charcoal, the smoke of which was perceived as volcanic activity.”

Aerial images of Nyamuragira taken Saturday morning and viewed by AFP showed just a

few wisps of white smoke in the volcano’s crater. Murara rises 25 kilometres north of Goma, capital of North Kivu province.

Located on the shores of Lake Kivu in the shadow of Nyiragongo, Africa’s most active volcano, the city has lived in fear since it erupted last Saturday.

The strato-volcano spewed rivers of lava that claimed nearly three dozen lives and destroyed the homes of some 20,000 people before the eruption stopped.

Hundreds of aftershocks have rocked the region since and around 400,000 people have been evacuated from Goma.

Scientists have warned of a potentially catastrophic scenario — a “limnic eruption” which occurs when lava combines with a deep lake and spews out lethal, suffocating gas across a potentially large area. — AFP

### ROME

#### Mourning for victims of Italy cable car accident

The Italian region of Piedmont has declared a day of mourning for the victims of a deadly cable car accident a week ago. Regional president Alberto Cirio issued a decree calling on the population to observe a minute’s silence at midday on Sunday.

“A week after what happened on the morning of May 23, Piedmont stands once again closely with the families of the victims of the tragedy that shook our territory,” an official statement said on Saturday.



The accident killed 14 people and seriously injured a 5-year-old boy who lost several members of his family. The evidence so far indicates that a cable broke shortly before the gondola arrived at the mountain station about 1,300 metres above sea level. — dpa

### MUNICH

#### Forged vaccine certificates surface in Germany

The first forged Covid-19 vaccination certificates are appearing in Germany, with the numbers expected to grow.

According to local police authorities, in Bavaria alone there have been “a number of cases in the low double-digits.”

“Compared to other criminal offers of personal and identity documents, the forgery of vaccination certificates is still a minor phenomenon in numerical terms,” a spokesman for the Federal Criminal Police



Office (BKA) said on Saturday.

“However, an increase in demand and thus also in the supply of forged vaccination certificates is expected due to the legal relaxations for vaccinated persons.” — dpa

### AMSTERDAM

#### Dutch Prime Minister announces end of lockdown

The Netherlands has announced the end of its anti-coronavirus lockdown. In view of rapidly falling infection figures, almost all sectors could be reopened from June 5 — albeit still subject to clear conditions, Prime Minister Mark Rutte said on Friday. “This is a great moment,” he said.

From June 5, museums, theatres and cinemas will be allowed to reopen and receive at least a limited number of visitors. Restaurants will be allowed to



serve guests indoors, subject to conditions, and opening hours will be extended until 10 pm. Citizens are allowed to receive four visitors at home instead of the previous two. — dpa

# Effective educational pathways key to future... as it should be

Recent displays of raw emotion are understandable in times of stress and frustration. These are difficult times, but times during which genuine compassion and understanding are needed. We may not understand disaffected young people all the time, but maybe if we listen, and try to understand them?

The 'sinking lid' policies, which are seeing thousands of white collar expatriates depart the Sultanate to return home, offers middle and senior management greater opportunities, but they are for those already in the workforce. They are already on that ladder where progress becomes a matter of merit, excellence, and effectiveness. Where success comes through commitment, professional development, and achievements.

As meritorious and praiseworthy is the private sector in driving those opportunities for Omanis with job experience, and displaying an aptitude for the fiscally pressured, 'dog eat dog,' constantly changing, constantly demanding industrial, marketing and production private sectors, those opportunities do little to alleviate youth employment.

This same issue has proven a carbuncle on the global employment landscape, for most governments, especially during the last three or four decades. School, college, and university leavers have an expectation of a job when they finish their studies, even though that may be unrealistic. We must, I feel, recognise that those transitioning basic education fit into one of the following four basic categories and align educational



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THE BALANCING OF EDUCATIONAL PRIORITIES IS A CONUNDRUM THAT EVERY SOCIETY AND CIVILISATION HAS BEEN FORCED TO ADDRESS THROUGHOUT THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES

objectives more effectively towards job market needs.

First are the vocational candidates, such as fishermen, farmers, mechanics, builders, engineers, welders, heavy machinery operators, soldiers, sailors, and builders. Their skills are developed through practice and experience, they work under an education, training, and supervised practical programme, during which their progress in terms of skills, knowledge and understanding is continually assessed, and verified. Usually, following a four of five-year apprenticeship, they may consider opening their own business though of course the forces have longer enlistments. Apprenticeship models are traditionally privately funded, and government administered.

Then, the artists, and artistes, this is a small, by definition, an elite group in any society, of those not only with the talent to entertain us through their dance, songs, poetry, writing, painting, and sculpture, using conscious skill and imagination.

They perpetuate much of the culture, and many of the traditions of a society, and only in excellence will they survive. It is not enough to say, "I want to be a painter," and it will happen...you need a God given talent.

This educational model must be funded individually, through scholarships and from endowments.

Those who continue to higher education include teachers, military officer candidates, doctors, nurses, accountants, scientists, diplomats, lawyers, clerics, and so many more. Most will achieve a degree which will prepare them somewhat for their work

ahead, but for most, the experience of higher education sets them up to ask, and answer questions, to be enquiring learners, in their chosen professions. This sector, catering to around 50 per cent of the age demographic is a purely governmental responsibility.

The fourth group is of career scholars, such as medical specialists and researchers, philosophers, educationalists, psychologists, scientists. As with artists, they will have demonstrated exceptional skills and abilities, and again, like the artists, there is no place for 'wannabees...' you are either intensely talented, committed, and focused. Most research and innovation models are funded by the private sector.

A revision of educational and employment objectives, aligned to the needs of its school leavers, youth, and unemployed, will benefit individuals, communities, societies, and the Sultanate.

It may be a bitter pill to take at any time, to recognise that new directions are imperative because what you have is not working, but better to take that pill now!

This balancing of educational priorities is a conundrum that every society and civilisation has been forced to address throughout the 20th and 21st centuries.

Inequalities, money worries, self-esteem, and dignity concerns, rise during testing times. Feel the frustration, reflect upon the disappointment, understand the emotion, and act with compassion, and no little sense of purpose. Not your purpose... but theirs.

## IN SHORT SUPPLY

### Quarantine-free travel bubbles fail to inflate

NEIL SANDS

Quarantine-free travel bubbles were hailed as tourism's "saviours" earlier this year, but cancellations and suspensions have deflated hopes they will herald a return to pre-pandemic normality.

Perhaps the world's most high-profile bubble opened between Australia and New Zealand on April 19, leading to emotional scenes as families split when borders closed almost 400 days earlier were reunited.

Since then, New Zealand has ordered partial shutdowns on four occasions due to virus scares in Australian states, the most serious of which forced Melbourne into a snap lockdown this week.

A spike of Covid-19 cases in Taiwan burst its bubble with the tiny Pacific nation of Palau last week, while Hong Kong and Singapore have been struggling to stand up a quarantine-free travel arrangement for six months.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison will take advantage of the trans-Tasman bubble on Sunday, when he travels to New Zealand for the first time since the pandemic hit for talks with Kiwi counterpart Jacinda Ardern.

The pair will meet in the South Island

mountain resort of Queenstown, where Ardern has vowed to show him the sights, including adventure activities and glacier-fed lakes.

Like tourist centres everywhere, the so-called "adrenaline capital of the world" struggled without overseas travellers, and Queenstown restaurateur Alex Boyes said the trans-Tasman bubble had not proved a panacea. Boyes had

**We acknowledge this as a difficult time. It's disruptive and it's probably expensive if you're staying in paid accommodation — that's one of the realities of travelling in the era of Covid**

CHRIS HIPKINS

New Zealand's Covid-19 response minister

hoped the bubble would lift his business to about 70 per cent of its pre-pandemic level but that has not yet happened.

'HUNKER DOWN'

The reason for the caution became apparent this week when New Zealand suspended the bubble with Victoria state and officials in Wellington made it clear that Kiwis stranded in Melbourne's lockdown were on their own.

"Hunker down and follow the rules," New Zealand's Covid-19 response minister Chris Hipkins advised.

"We acknowledge this as a difficult time. It's disruptive and it's probably expensive if you're staying in paid accommodation — that's one of the realities of travelling in the era of Covid."

Tourism New Zealand acknowledged such a scare would cause temporary disruption and lead to a "wait-and-see" approach among potential passengers. But it said Australian market arrivals had recovered to 50 per cent, describing it as "a great result and strong contribution".

Palau President Surangel Whipps was also taking a glass-half-full approach after the bubble with Taiwan lasted just seven weeks and resulted in fewer than 300 tourists visiting the island nation. Whipps has described such bubbles as a symbolic "ray of light" in a pandemic-hit world and vowed to reopen the travel corridor with Taiwan as soon as practicable.

"I believe it was a success because any tourist, more than one, is a success," he said. — AFP

## GAZA CONFLICT & COVID-19 RESPONSE

### What's harder to survive? War or corona?

MAYA GEBEILY

With a first Covid-19 jab under his belt and the second a few weeks away, Imad Agha was overwhelmed with relief. But his hopes of immunity were dashed when violence erupted in Gaza.

The 11-day conflict between Israel and Gaza killed nearly 250 Palestinians and more than a dozen in Israel before a ceasefire took hold on May 21.

During that time, primary health-care facilities turned to treating war-wounded instead of vaccinating, and the main COVID-19 testing lab was put out of service by bombing.

"Of course I never got that second dose," said Agha, a 39-year-old doctoral student who has been unable to leave Gaza to complete his studies in Malaysia since the coronavirus pandemic began more than a year ago.

"All we were thinking about was surviving," he said from his hometown of Khan Younis.

More than 107,000 people have been infected and 1,010 have died of Covid-19 in Gaza since the first case was recorded in March 2020.

Only 8,000 out of Khan Younis's 350,000 residents have received at least one vaccine dose, Agha said.

When the conflict began exactly a month later, worries about coronavirus



A Palestinian girl is seen through the remains of a damaged building as she walks on a beach, amid the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) outbreak, in Gaza City. — Reuters

WHEN CONFLICT BEGAN, WORRIES ABOUT CORONAVIRUS WERE OVERTAKEN BY FEARS OF INJURY AND DEATH

were overtaken by fears of injury and death.

"People, including myself, forgot the virus. What's harder to survive? War or corona?" asked Agha, who dropped his Covid-related responsibilities to check on families in bombed-out neighbourhoods or keep his kids distracted from shelling.

"They stopped wearing masks, they slept 10 to 20 people in a single room. What can you say to someone in that situation?"

Agha doesn't know when he will get his second Sputnik dose — but fears a new coronavirus spike is around the corner.

"No one is wearing masks today," he said anxiously.

"There are funerals in every street and everyone is shaking hands as they give their condolences. You think we can say 'Oh, no, let me disinfect my hands' in a situation like that? You think you can elbow-bump?"

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

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f t i y

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# SUSPENDED IPL MOVED TO UAE IN SEPT, OCT

INDIA SEEKS MORE TIME FOR WORLD CUP DECISION

**NEW DELHI:** The Indian Premier League, suspended as a new coronavirus wave hit India, will be finished in the United Arab Emirates in September and October, India's national cricket board said on Saturday.

The Board of Control for Cricket (BCCI) in India also said it will ask the global governing body for more time to make a decision on whether the Twenty20 World Cup should be held in India in October and November.

The IPL, the world's richest cricket tournament, was half finished when it was halted on May 4 after a number of players and team officials caught coronavirus despite being in bio-secure bubbles.

The board has since been in tough negotiations with other countries and the International Cricket Council on when to squeeze the remaining matches into the crowded international calendar.

About 160,000 people have died in India since April 1 in a devastating wave that has seen hospitals overwhelmed. There are fears that the country could be hit by another surge later this year.

The BCCI said it was moving the remaining matches to the UAE — which staged all of last year's IPL — because of the monsoon season and did not mention the pandemic.

The board said a special general meeting had "unanimously agreed" for the



remaining matches to be held in the UAE "considering the monsoon season in India in the months of September-October this year."

The monsoon season is generally considered to run from June to mid-September.

The World Cup is due to be held in India from October but it is also at risk from the pandemic threat.

The BCCI said the general meeting authorised its leaders "to seek an extension of time from the ICC to take an

appropriate call on the hosting of ICC T20 World Cup 2021."

The tournament is due to be discussed by the ICC next Tuesday, though no decision is expected to be taken.

No deadline to announce whether the tournament will be

The BCCI said the general meeting authorised its leaders "to seek an extension of time from the ICC to take an appropriate call on the hosting of ICC T20 World Cup 2021

before going to the World Test Championship final against New Zealand starting on June 18 in Southampton, England.

The British government has given a special exemption from its coronavirus rules so that the inaugural championship can be held.

The Indian team will be in their own bio-bubble for 14 days before arriving in England on June 3.

Every player must provide a negative Covid-19 certificate.

They will be taken to a hotel that is part of Hampshire's Rose Bowl complex, where they will be tested again before beginning a new "managed isolation" with more tests, the ICC said in a statement.

With each round of tests, players will go from "exercise in isolation to small group and then larger squad activity, whilst always remaining within the bio-secure venue."

New Zealand are already in England preparing for a Test series against the host nation.

— AFP

# Perera and Chameera power Sri Lanka to consolation win

SKIPPER HITS CENTURY, CHAMEERA TAKES 5 WICKETS



Bangladesh and Sri Lanka players pose for a group photo after the third and final ODI in Dhaka. — AFP

**DHAKA:** Skipper Kusal Perera hit 120 and Dushmantha Chameera took five wickets as Sri Lanka thrashed Bangladesh by 97 runs for a consolation win in the third one-day international on Friday.

Perera's sixth ODI century and an unbeaten 55 by Dhananjaya de Silva guided Sri Lanka to 286-6, a total they defended by bowling out Bangladesh for 189 in 42.3 overs in Dhaka. The hosts won the series 2-1.

Chameera claimed his maiden five-wicket ODI haul with figures of 5-16 from his nine overs to help Sri Lanka end a run of five straight 50-over losses.

Bangladesh, who won the first two matches, never looked competitive once Chameera's three-wicket burst in the opening spell reduced them to 28-3.

Mahmudullah Riyad top-scored with 53 while Mosaddek Hossain made 51 off 72 balls.

Debutant Ramesh Mendis claimed 2-40 and leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga played his part by also picking up two wickets.

Chameera was named player of the match while Bangladesh's Mushfiqur Rahim, who scored 237 runs including a century in three innings, was named player of the series.

"We needed a win badly,



Bangladesh's captain Tamim Iqbal holds the tournament trophy. — AFP

although we lost the series," said Perera.

"We needed to get the big scores and that's why I shifted gears. Our bowling department did a really good job. Fielding was also good."

## 11 BOUNDARIES

The left-handed Perera, who took over from Dimuth Karunaratne as captain in this series, earlier smashed 11 fours and one six in his 122-ball knock to set up the win.

However, he was dropped on 66, 79 and 99 before being dismissed by teenage left-arm quick Shoriful Islam.

Mahmudullah took a fine catch at long-on after he dropped the opener one run away from his century.

Perera and Danushka Gunathilaka put on 82 runs for the first wicket to lay the foundations of their total before fast bowler Taskin Ahmed took three wickets. Taskin bowled Gunathilaka for 39 and had Pathum Nissanka caught by Mushfiqur for a duck in the same over.

Perera shared two key partnerships of 69 runs and 65 for the third and fourth wicket respectively with Kusal Mendis (22) and De Silva to rebuild the Sri Lankan innings.

Bangladesh did well in the last 10 overs, giving away just 69 runs to check the batting surge.

"As I said in the last game, we have won the series but I never felt that we played the complete game. Never played to our potential,"

said Bangladesh captain Tamim Iqbal.

"When opportunity came (today), we didn't take our catches. If we had taken those, could have been maybe 30 runs lesser." Taskin, one of two changes for Bangladesh in the match, finished with figures of 4-46. — AFP

## SCOREBOARD

### SRI LANKA

Danushka b Taskin .....39  
Kusal Mahmudullah b Shoriful .....120  
Nissanka c Rahim b Taskin .....0  
K Mendis c Tamim b Taskin .....22  
Dhananjaya not out .....55  
Niroshan run out (Shoriful) .....7  
W Hasaranga c Mehidy b Taskin .....18  
R Mendis not out .....8  
Extras (lb 9, w7, nb1) .....17  
**Total** (6 wickets; 50 overs) .....286  
**Fall of wickets:** 1-82, 2-82, 3-151, 4-216, 5-231, 6-266  
**Bowling:** Shoriful 8-0-56-1, Mehidy 10-0-48-0, Mosaddek 3-0-32-0, Taskin 9-0-46-4, Mustafizur 10-0-47-0, Shakib 10-0-48-0

### BANGLADESH (TARGET 287)

Tamim c Dickwella b Chameera .....17  
Naim c Mendis b Chameera .....1  
Shakib c Mendis b Chameera .....4  
Mushfiqur c de Silva b Mendis .....28  
Mosaddek c Fernando b Mendis .....51  
M Riyad c Dickwella b Fernando .....53  
Afif c Chameera b Hasaranga .....16  
Mehidy c Gunathilaka b Chameera .....0  
Taskin b Chameera .....0  
Shoriful c Dickwella b Hasaranga .....8  
Mustafizur not out .....0  
Extras (b4, lb1, w6) .....11  
**Total** (all out; 42.3 overs) .....189  
**Fall of wickets:** 1-2, 2-9, 3-28, 4-84, 5-125, 6-158, 7-162, 8-162, 9-181  
**Bowling:** De Silva 4-0-14-0, Chameera 9-1-16-5, Fernando 6-3-0-33-1, Karunaratne 6-0-34-0, Hasaranga 10-0-47-2, Mendis 7-0-40-2

# Al Attiyah romps to historic 14th title in Jordan

**DEAD SEA, Jordan:** Qatar's Nasser Saleh al Attiyah completely dominated the 2021 Jordan Rally to confirm an historic 14th victory on the event by the winning margin of 17min 04.8sec on Saturday.

The Volkswagen Polo GTi driver and his Andorra-based co-driver Matthieu Baume won each of the 10 special stages in the Dead Sea and Mount Nebo areas to extend their leads in the FIA Middle East Rally Championship (Merc). Al Attiyah is bidding for a record-breaking 17th regional title this year, as he secured a 78th career Merc event win and Baume sealed personal win number 27.

Al Attiyah said: "This is a good feeling. A good day. It was a nice rally for us. A win again, 14 times in Jordan, and we have a good lead in the Middle East Championship. The next step will be Lebanon Rally and we try to defend our title."

Kuwait's Meshari al Thefiri began the day with a 40.8-second cushion at the head of the Merc2 category and the second-placed Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X driver confirmed another 'showroom' class success after nearest rival

Alex Feghali opted to drive cautiously over the final day to conserve a first ever podium place on a Merc rally.

"All is good and thank God we passed all the stages and made it to the end," said Feghali. "This is the first time we finished this rally and I am on the podium, so that is amazing."

Shadi Sheban missed out on a second Jordan National Rally victory to a resurgent Khaled Juma, but had the consolation of finishing a career-best fourth in the FIA event and being the first Jordanian home. He also takes an early lead in the National Championship following a win and a second place over the two days.

A flat tyre and front differential issues cost Lebanon's Shadi El Fakih a lot of time on the opening two stages of the final day and he slipped into the clutches of Qatar's Nasser Khalifa al Atya after incurring time penalties for leaving service late and then going OTL in stage nine. Al Atya duly claimed fifth overall with Italian navigator Giovanni Bernacchini.

Omani driver Abdullah al Rawahi had retired due to engine damage on Friday.

## 2021 Jordan Rally - positions after SS10:

|                                                                            |                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Nasser Saleh al Attiyah (QAT)/Matthieu Baume (FRA) Volkswagen Polo GTI  | 2hr 49min 06.0sec |
| 2. Meshari al Thefiri (KWT)/Nasser al Kuwari (QAT) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X | 3hr 06min 10.8sec |
| 3. Alex El Feghali (LBN)/Georges Deaibess (LBN) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X    | 3hr 08min 36.6sec |
| 4. Shadi Sheban (JOR)/Emad Juma (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX             | 3hr 24min 38.9sec |
| 5. Nasser Khalifa al Atya (QAT)/Giovanni Bernacchini (ITA) Ford Fiesta     | 3hr 39min 13.1sec |
| 6. Saleh al Saif (SAU)/Feisal al Suwayh (SAU) Can-Am Maverick X3           | 3hr 52min 03.5sec |
| 7. Ihab al Shourafa (JOR)/Yousef Juma (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX       | 3hr 56min 33.1sec |
| 8. Asem Aref (JOR)/Ahmed Jankhot (JOR) Renault Clio RS                     | 4hr 12min 33.0sec |
| 9. Henry Kahy (LBN)/Carlos Hanna (LBN) Skoda Fabia 1.6                     | 4hr 48min 49.4sec |



Nasser Saleh al Attiyah

# Also-rans South Africa motivated by missing Test final

**CENTURION, South Africa:** New South African captain Dean Elgar is well aware of the cricketing contrast when he leads his team in two Test matches against the West Indies in St Lucia next month.

The start date of the second Test on June 18 is the same as that for the world Test championship final between India and New Zealand in Southampton, England.

Both West Indies and South Africa were well out of contention for a place in the final, finishing sixth and seventh respectively on the nine-team log table.

South Africa's low placing is something that opening batsman Elgar wants to change when the next championship cycle gets under way.

"We need to play better cricket," said Elgar, 33. "We're very conscious that we haven't been very consistent. Our skill level hasn't been where it should be."

"Ultimately, of course, we want to compete and we want to

**I believe very strongly that we have to follow that process and climb up the rankings again. Where we are the moment is not doing us any favours**

**DEAN ELGAR**

SA captain

play in the final of a world Test championship. We need to be more consistent and get back to the South African way again."

He described the South African way as "fast bowlers taking wickets and batting line-ups that score big runs — what we got used to watching as we were growing up."

He said one of his challenges would be get players to believe in a process that would lead to



Dean Elgar

significant improvement.

"I believe very strongly that we have to follow that process and climb up the rankings again. Where we are the moment is not doing us any favours."

Looking ahead, Elgar said he welcomed the return of experienced players to the South African domestic scene next season following the end of the Kolpak system in English county

cricket.

"The players coming back are going to improve and strengthen our domestic game and will also add a lot of competition in our system, which, maybe, we have

lacked over the past few years," said Elgar.

"I see it as a massive positive with those guys coming back. If they're knocking down the door it will be a great thing for the current squad to get a little firecracker and motivate their game in a good way."

Among the returning players signed to provincial teams are Duanne Olivier, Kyle Abbott, Simon Harmer and Stiaan van Zyl.

The South African Test squad assembled in Centurion on Friday and will fly out on Monday. They will face four days of "lockdown" when they arrive at a luxury resort in St Lucia, during which they will have two Covid Tests before they can leave their rooms and start training ahead of the first Test on June 10.

South Africa have not played Test cricket in the West Indies since 2010 when Graeme Smith led them to a 2-0 win in a three-match series. None of the current squad were on that tour. — AFP

BEDNAREK EDGES DE GRASSE FOR 200M WIN  
AT DOHA DIAMOND LEAGUE

FRASER-PRYCE STORMS TO 100M VICTORY

**DOHA:** Jamaican sprint star Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce raced to victory in the 100m at the Diamond League in Doha on Friday in a confidence boost in the run-up to the Tokyo Olympics.

The 34-year-old four-time world champion timed an impressive season's best of 10.84 seconds for the win, another important step in her quest to become the first female athlete to win three Olympic 100m golds after previously topping the podiums in 2008 and 2012 in Beijing and London respectively.

Fresh from finishing fourth in

the opening elite meeting in a wet, wind-swept Gateshead last week, Fraser-Pryce made no mistake in the much balmier surroundings of the Qatari capital.

Fraser-Pryce, who also won 200m silver at the 2012 London Games and 100m bronze in Rio in 2016, beat home Nigerian Blessing Okagbare (10.90) and American Javianne Oliver (11.03).

"I'm happy that I put together a good race, and of course I'm happy that I won because its far away from the fourth place that I did last time," the Jamaican said.

"It's going to be my final

Olympic appearance so I hope it will be good. The last three Olympics I went to I was able to stand on the podium and I'm hoping to be able to make it there again."

Doha is the second stop on the 13-leg Diamond League circuit, with now only five more elite meetings before the Olympic Games in Japan, which start on July 23 after being postponed for a year because

There were victories for Kenya in the men's 800m and 1,500m, and women's 800m

of the coronavirus pandemic.

Arguably the highest-quality field of the night was in the women's triple jump, which had the top three from the 2016 Rio Olympics and 2019 Doha worlds in the field.

Coming out on top was in-form Venezuelan Yulimar Rojas, whose first effort of 15.15m was enough for victory ahead of Jamaican pair Kimberly Williams

and Shanieka Ricketts.

Rojas, the Olympic silver medallist in Rio who took the world titles in Doha and in London in 2017, jumped a personal best of 15.43m in Spain last week — the furthest jump in the world this year to date and the second furthest of all time.

"We are on the right path," said Rojas. "I feel good physically and it's good for me, I'm happy to leave a footprint here in Doha."

"I enjoy this path and when it's Tokyo's turn, I'll be prepared and try to win the gold medal."

Reigning Olympic champion

Caterine Ibarguen of Colombia, a former world champion and multiple world medallist, including bronze in 2019, opened her summer campaign with an eighth place (13.86m).

There were victories for Kenya in the men's 800m and 1,500m, and women's 800m.

First Faith Kipyegon, world 1,500m silver medallist, won the two-lap race in 1:58.26 before world champion Timothy Cheruiyot blasted to a win in the 1,500m in 3:30.48 and Wyclife Kinyamal won the 800m in a rapid 1:43.91. — AFP

Jamaica's Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce celebrates after winning the women's 100m final during the Diamond League athletics at the Qatar Sports Club stadium in Doha. — AFP



Kenya's Beatrice Chebet celebrates after setting a World Lead in the women's 3,000m final. — AFP



Kenya's Wycliffe Kinyamal (C) competes in the men's 800m final. — AFP



(Centre picture) US Kenny Bednarek celebrates after winning the men's 200m final during the Diamond League athletics at the Qatar Sports Club stadium in Doha. — AFP

Venezuela's Yulimar Rojas celebrates after setting a stadium record in the women's triple jump final. — AFP



Katie Nageotte of the US competes in the women's pole vault final. — AFP

Djokovic wins on home soil ahead of French Open

**BELGRADE:** Novak Djokovic enjoyed success at his own tennis centre when he won the Belgrade Open with a 6-4, 6-3 win over Slovakian Alex Molcan in Saturday's final but his performance left a lot to be desired ahead of the French Open.

World number one Djokovic received a standing ovation from the home crowd by the Danube river in the Serbian capital after an erratic display against world number 255 Molcan, who battled through from the qualifying



Serbia's Novak Djokovic claps hands with volunteers after winning the final against Slovakian Alex Molcan in Belgrade. — AFP

rounds.

It was Djokovic's first triumph since he clinched his 18th major at the Australian Open in February.

Since then, he has endured patchy claycourt season, including a last 16 exit at the Monte Carlo Masters.

Djokovic also lost to Russian Aslan Karatsev in the Serbia Open semifinals before being defeated by Rafael Nadal in the Rome Masters final and his display against Molcan was at times unconvincing.

But Djokovic struck a happy figure as he lifted the trophy.

"I want to thank everyone who turned up and made this a memorable day, I have to admit that part of my mind is already in Paris," Djokovic said in a court-side interview.

"It was an easy decision to enter this tournament, I never had any second thoughts and I am delighted that we came through so magnificently with this event."

"I am aiming for the title at Roland Garros." — Reuters

# features



## Trailing the Arabian humpback whales in the open sea

Photographer Haitham al Farsi, Muslim al Mahri and personnel from the Environment Enter in Hasik spent seven days out in the open sea with the goal of documenting the Arabian humpback whales. They spent the first three days of their open water search in vain but their efforts will soon get rewarded as they eventually spot a total of nine whales in different locations... **P16**

### INSIDE STORIES

LOCAL TRAVEL

SILVER SANDS OF FUSHI BEACH FORM A BREATHTAKING SCENE

Fushi Beach in the Wilayat of Sadah in Dhofar Governorate is one of the most important sites and the most visited beaches in the Sultanate... **Story on P15**

COOK LIKE A CHEF

HUQQA FLYING BBQ

This recipe can look a little bit intimidating because of its many separate elements but its worth the effort. Afterall, HuQqa will not serve it in their restaurants if they cannot guarantee its fantastic flavour. Check this recipe out... **Story on P15**

READ

PEOPLE WE MEET ON VACATION

BY EMILY HENRY

Opposites Poppy and Alex meet to vacation together one more time in hopes of saving their relationship.

DISCOVERY

ECUADOR CONFIRMS GALAPAGOS TORTOISE IS FROM SPECIES THOUGHT EXTINCT

Officials in Ecuador said on Tuesday that genetic tests had confirmed that a turtle found in 2019 on the Galapagos island of Fernandina is a member a species thought to have gone extinct a century ago... **Story on P15**

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

THE WOMAN WHO MASTERS KHANJAR MAKING

The Omani woman in Al Khabourah, with her capabilities and ingenuity, was able to transform silver threads between her fingertips into high-quality technical details and these women have mastered the manufacture of khanjars that the wilayat is famous for... **Story on P14**



# Laurence des Cars to head Louvre, first woman boss in its history



France on Wednesday appointed Laurence des Cars, known for promoting social issues through art, as the new head of the Louvre — the first time a woman will be in charge of the world's biggest museum more than two centuries after it first opened.

Des Cars currently runs the Musée d'Orsay, the Paris landmark museum dedicated to 19th-century art, where she is already the first-ever woman boss.

Her legacy there includes boosting young visitor numbers and giving art and guests more physical space.

During her four years at the Orsay, the 54-year-old art historian has taken a stance on controversial topics through her work, including some related to race.

On Wednesday, she told France Inter radio that she wanted the Louvre to become "an echo chamber of society".

**'I COULD FEEL FEAR'**

She has also come out in favour of restituting works looted by Nazis.

"A great museum must face history, including by looking back at the history of our own institutions", she

told AFP in an interview in April.

She was instrumental in the French government's decision for the Orsay to hand back a Gustav Klimt painting, "Roses", to the heirs of its previous owner Nora Stiasny. The Nazis had stolen it from her in Vienna in 1938.

Under Des Cars's leadership, the museum's 2019 exhibition "Black Models: From Géricault to Matisse" explored racial and social issues through the representation of black figures in visual arts.

"It was a sensitive topic for which I brought together the best historians", she told AFP.

"When I first announced it, I could feel fear around the table. But in the end, there wasn't an ounce of controversy."

**'BIG ISSUES'**

A museum's shows should reflect "the big issues in society, and thus attract new generations" of visitors "of all ages and from all social-cultural backgrounds", she said.

Des Cars, who comes from a family of writers and journalists, will in September succeed Jean-Luc Martinez, the current Louvre chief who is credited with making the museum more accessible and less elitist.

He was rewarded by a record annual visitor number of over 10 million in 2019 before Covid-19 restrictions badly dented visitor numbers, with the museum closed for several months.

The Louvre, best-known as the home of the Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci, is the world's largest art museum.

It opened in 1793 in the aftermath of the French Revolution, with an exhibition of just over 500 paintings.

It now owns hundreds of thousands of pieces of art, with less than 10 per cent of the total on permanent display.

In March, as it was closed because of Covid, the Louvre said it had put nearly half a million items from its collection online for the public to visit free of charge.

The move was part of a major revamp of its online presence, and came after a huge increase in visits to its main website, louvre.fr.

Also in March, the museum announced that it would step up efforts to restore items looted from Jewish families by the Nazi regime.

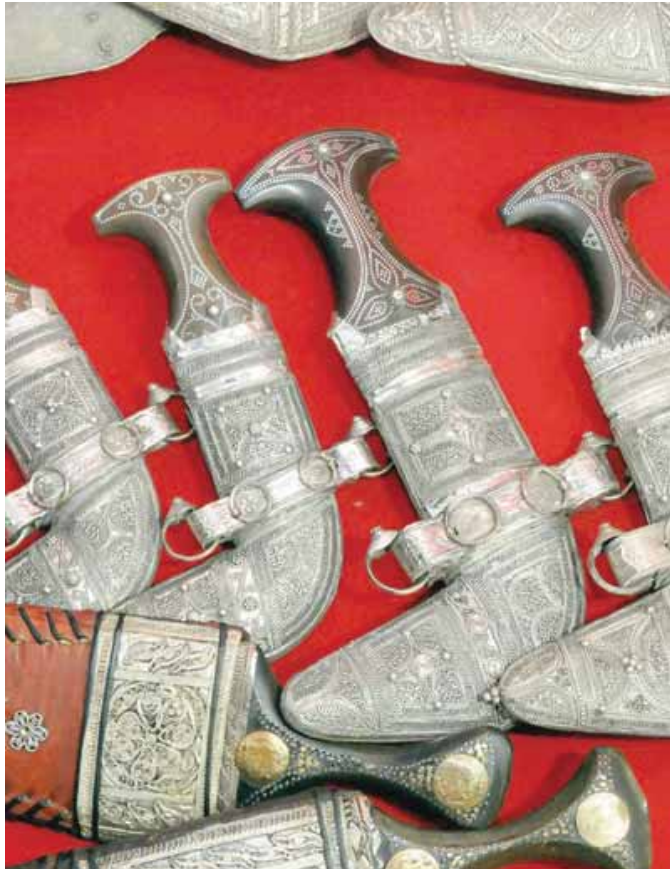
It is working to complete the verification of all 13,943 items acquired between 1933 and 1945, a process it hopes to complete within five years. — **AFP**

## The woman who masters Khanjar making



**THE OMANI** woman in Al Khabourah, with her capabilities and ingenuity, was able to transform silver threads between her fingertips into high-quality technical details and these women have mastered the manufacture of khanjars that the wilayat is famous for.

Mahfudha al Balushi excelled in the manufacture of Omani khanjars since she was a young lady, as she acquired this traditional craft from her family known since ancient times in that craft. Her family was a destination for lovers of elegance, the beautiful details, the distinct engravings of khanjars. People come from various places to search



for the khanjar that satisfies their taste.

Al Balushi has been determined to find her way with this craft. She established her own shop for khanjar making and then this shop has turned to the first destination for Omanis and people from the Gulf and she was able to earn the trust of her customers.

Mahfudha said that the Khanjars made in Al Khabourah are distinguished by a tiny engraving with pens. She inherited these pens from her father and uncle and their price may reach RO 300. She masters the making of Khanjars from Nizwa, Sur and the Saidi Khanjar.



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### LOCAL TRAVEL



## Silver sands of Fushi Beach form a breathtaking scene

**FUSHI BEACH** in the Wilayat of Sadah in Dhofar Governorate is one of the most important sites and the most visited beaches in the Sultanate.

The fine silver sand, clean water, and a beautiful view on the banks of the Arabian Sea make this beach extraordinarily beautiful.



The beach is characterised by its calm atmosphere throughout the year. Large numbers of visitors from inside and outside the Sultanate come to enjoy the splendid weather in the area, especially in the Khareef season. The large sandy areas allow beach sports fans to enjoy diving, swimming, and various water activities and games. The beach is surrounded on the north by silver-coloured sand dunes which added to its elegance and beauty. The combination of all its elements forms an aesthetic of a painting that gives comfort and pleasure to the eye. It allows people to spend the best times and enjoy the sunset from these dunes.



The sandy hills surrounding the beach are a wonderful place that attracts large groups of camping enthusiasts, especially during the winter season. The beach is a passageway that leads to the Khisat Showder, located at the foot of Mount Nasira, which is a stop for fishermen while fishing, particularly during diving seasons.

### COOK LIKE A CHEF

## HUQQA FLYING BBQ



### INGREDIENTS

MEAT, CHICKEN & SHRIMP MARINADE

Olive oil 35g  
Rosemary 12g  
Thyme 10g  
Salt 10g  
Take beef tenderloin, lamb chops, chicken thigh and prawns in separate bowls and add salt, pepper, olive oil and finely chopped rosemary and thyme. Leave it for a few minutes to marinate.

### RECIPE FOR MEATBALL

Mins Beef brisket 50g  
Garlic 4g  
Thyme 4g  
Pepper black powder 3g  
Paprika 5g  
Cumin 5g  
Lamb fat 10g  
Bread crumb 8g  
Salt 5g

Secondly, to prepare meatballs take a mixing bowl, add minced beef brisket, minced lamb fat, cumin powder, paprika powder, salt, black pepper powder, chopped garlic, chopped thyme and bread crumbs. Mix all together until fully combined. After that, shape it into small balls.

### RECIPE FOR RISOTTO AL FUNGI

Mushroom porcini 80g  
Basil leaves 5g  
Cheese Parmesan 50g  
Cook Rice risotto 80g  
Spice salt 2g  
Butter 25g  
Tomato 30g

To boil risotto rice, On a medium heat put a heavy-bottomed pot or saucepan, bring salted water to boil over medium-high heat. Add 1 tablespoon of olive oil or butter, return to the boil, and then add risotto rice. Cover and reduce heat to medium-low. Simmer until liquid is fully absorbed and rice is al dente, about 20 minutes. Melt butter in a large saucepan over medium-high heat. Stir in the mushrooms, and cook until soft, about 3 minutes. Add tomato to it and cook after that add pre cooked risotto rice and mix. Add salt to taste and basil leaves, mix all together until fully combined. Finally on top can add the grated parmesan cheese.

### RECIPE FOR RANCH SAUCE

Mayonnaise 30g  
Dill 1g  
Parsley 1g  
Chive 1g



### ABOUT THE CHEF

**CHEF GÖKHAN ÇÖKELEZ**  
**HEAD CHEF**  
**HUQQA**

Head Chef GÖKHAN ÇÖKELEZ leads the culinary team of HuQqa and The Market across Muscat and the region. Having started his career in Istanbul, GÖKHAN boasts over 12 years experience within the premium food and beverage landscape. His work has carried him from Turkey to the Middle East and Canada. Some of his former roles include Grosvenor House, Qbara, JW Marriott Marquis, Emerald Palace Kempinski Dubai and Shook Kitchen. Today, Chef GÖKHAN holds an integral role within the Q Food and Beverage Group, developing both pleasurable and instagrammable dishes for HuQqa and The Market.

Sauce mustard 2g  
Lemon 2g  
Vinegar rice 3 drops  
Salt 1g  
Cooking cream 5ml  
To a mixing bowl, add all these ingredients and mix until fully combined.  
Recipe for demi-glaze  
Demi powder 25g  
Water  
Put a pan in medium heat and add demi glaze powder and water, stir it and cook to get a thick sauce

### DISCOVERY

## Ecuador confirms Galapagos tortoise is from species thought extinct



**OFFICIALS IN** Ecuador said on Tuesday that genetic tests had confirmed that a turtle found in 2019 on the Galapagos island of Fernandina is a member of a species thought to have gone extinct a century ago.

"It was believed to have gone extinct more than 100 years ago!" Environment Minister Gustavo Marique said in a statement.

"We have reconfirmed its existence. The tortoise of the species *Chelonoidis phantasticus* was found in #Galapagos", he said.

Geneticists from Yale University in the United States compared DNA from the female turtle found two years ago with a sample extracted from a male of the species in 1906. The specimen, which is kept in a museum, had been collected during an expedition by the California Academy of Sciences.



The *Chelonoidis phantasticus*, typical of Fernandina Island, is one of the 15 species of giant tortoises native to the Galapagos archipelago. The *Chelonoidis* species of Santa Fe Island and the *Abingdonii* species of Santa Fe Island have disappeared.

"This discovery undoubtedly renews our hope for the recovery of this species, in order to avoid a fate similar to that of Lonesome George," said Danny Rueda, director of the Galapagos National Park, in a statements released by the environment ministry. Lonesome George, a member of the species *Chelonoidis abingdonii*, died in 2012 without offspring after refusing to mate in captivity with females of related subspecies.

He became an emblem of the Galapagos, an archipelago located 1,000 kilometres (600 miles) off the coast of Ecuador and which takes its name from the gigantic turtles. — **AFP**



# Trailing the Arabian humpback whales in the open sea

By Staff Reporter

The passion and love of exploration and highlighting the biodiversity of the different Omani environments were among the most important motives that led us to carry out this journey that took seven consecutive days in the sea off the shores of Hasik. We were able to spot nine whales in different and close locations during the last three days of the trip

Haitham al Farsi  
Photographer

The marine environment in the Sultanate is rich in many rare and diverse aquatic organisms on its coasts, which extend for a distance of more than three thousand kilometres and overlook three seas: the Arabian Gulf, the Sea of Oman and the Arabian Sea.

Twenty species of great whales and dolphins live in the waters of Oman, which prompted a group of young amateurs in cooperation with the Environment Authority to undertake a marine search trip to monitor the Arabian humpback whale in the waters of the Arabian Sea near the shores of Hasik, Sadah.

Haitham al Farsi, an Omani photographer, said that the idea of the trip to search for the Arabian humpback whale "has been haunting me for years and planning for it was enjoyable but difficult due to the lack of logistical capabilities."

He said that they only manage to pull it off "thanks to the efforts of the Environment Authority and some colleagues."

Al Farsi was overjoyed being able to undertake the expedition and he said it meant a lot to be able to monitor the Arabian humpback whale in the waters of the Arabian Sea.

Al Farsi added, "The passion and love of exploration and highlighting the biodiversity of the different Omani environments were among the most important motives that led us to carry out this journey that took seven consecutive days in the sea off the shores of Hasik. We were able to spot nine whales in different and close locations during the last three days of the trip."

He shared, "There were many challenges, especially that we did not have special tracking devices, so we wasted five days without finding the humpback whale, in addition to the fluctuations of the weather and the high waves."

Muslim al Mahri, head of the Environment Centre in Hasik, said, "The surveying of whales has been going on for several

years, in cooperation with the Environment Society of Oman and some youth teams interested in photography."

Al Mahri said, "During the past three years, the search was under way in the shores of Sadah, extending from the Wilayat of Sadah in the west to Ras Al Hamra, as well as eastward towards Al Halaniyat Islands. The process of research and studies was resumed during this year in March due to the calm conditions of the sea during these months and the approach of whales to the beaches, as well as the floating of whales to the surface."

Al Mahri added, "Research studies and satellite tracking have proven that the Omani humpback whale is, in fact, a resident whale that remains in its habitat near the Omani coast due to the seasonal climatic conditions that occur in the area south of Oman, which provides various food sources for these whales throughout the year, in addition to their migration to the Antarctic seas in search of food, which makes them extremely rare creatures. Only 100 whales were spotted."

Al Mahri referred to the efforts of the Environment Authority in cooperation with partners in ESO and the companies operating in the Sultanate's waters by developing an integrated plan in the port of Duqm to protect whales from transiting ships because it is a critical and important area for the reproduction and feeding of these creatures.

He posited that it is important to study the cases of death to find out the causes of their death, ridding them from the nets and saving them in if they are exposed to these ghost fishing nets.

The authority provides all facilities, prepares all requirements, provides technical support, including boats, vehicles, or houses. Specialists from the Authority also accompanies research teams and those interested, such as photographers, to document such kind of whales.



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Over 25,000 smart meters installed across Muscat



CONRAD PRABHU  
@conradprabhu

Automated Meter Reading (AMR) devices have now been installed at the premises of as many as 25,520 large electricity customers in the capital region of the Sultanate — an ongoing initiative designed to help them monitor their power consumption.

According to Muscat Electricity Distribution Company (MEDC), the state-owned utility responsible for power distribution and supply in Muscat Governorate, AMR installations have grown year-on-year, rising from 16,144 in 2019 to 25,520 at the end of 2020. They are mainly offered to major government, commercial and industrial consumers, among other high-value customers, who are subject to Cost-Reflective Tariffs (CRT) which do not come with any built-in government subsidy.

First piloted in the Sultanate in 2017 at the directives of the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), the AMR system is a central standard smart metering system that enables electricity utilities to obtain accurate, hourly meter readings from high value customers and collect their consumption details in an automated manner. The system also supports a higher level of interconnectivity, engagement and sustainability with the goal of enhancing the quality and speed of processing metering data. Furthermore, AMR devices help customers understand their consumption behaviour, which helps them to optimise and effectively manage consumption levels especially during peak loads.

Following its successful launch, all of the distribution companies of Nama Group — the holding company of state-owned power and water subsidiaries — have begun rolling out AMR meter installations for large customers across their respective jurisdictions. In 2020, large customers accounted for 37.5 per cent of total electricity sales in the licence of MEDC, the utility noted in its 2020 Annual Report.

Meanwhile, MEDC reported a significant increase in the uptake of prepaid metering services in the capital region. As many as 73,800 electricity customers have opted for prepaid metering — also known as ‘Sabiq’ — which enables consumers to have a bill-free service with full monitoring over their consumption. Sabiq customers now represent around 17.7 per cent of MEDC’s total customer base of around 417,079 accounts.

Around 10,805 new accounts were added to the utility’s customer base in 2020, underscoring continued population and organic growth in the capital region. But for the first time since its establishment in 2005, MEDC also reported a dip in electricity demand — a trend witnessed across the power sector and linked to the economic downturn compounded by the pandemic. Total electricity units sold in 2020 declined to 10,911 gigawatt-hours (GWh) compared to 11,507 GWh in 2019.

The company achieved total revenue of RO 347.101 million for the year, with net profit climbing to RO 15.313 million compared to RO 11.959 million in 2019.

Oman to unveil RO 200 million worth of industrial investment opportunities

**WIDE PORTFOLIO:** Project proposals span mining, quarrying, food processing, chemicals, electrical equipment manufacturing, paper, waste processing and recycling, metals and non-metals based manufacturing, and so on

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, MAY 29

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) will unveil tomorrow, May 31, 2021, as many as 50 different investment opportunities in the Sultanate’s industrial sector.

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, will outline the investment opportunities at a virtual forum due to be attended by the Ministry’s under-secretaries, foreign ambassadors, representatives of chambers of commerce of the GCC states, business leaders and investors.

Total investment in these business opportunities is estimated in excess of RO 200 million.

According to the Ministry, the industrial sector has attracted RO 4.110 billion in investment as of September 2020. Manufacturing companies account for 25 per cent of shares traded on the Muscat Stock Exchange. Non-oil commodity exports have also climbed to RO 3.23 billion in 2019, compared to RO 3.17 billion in 2017.



**Manufacturing companies account for 25 per cent of shares traded on the Muscat Stock Exchange. Non-oil commodity exports have also climbed to RO 3.23 billion in 2019, compared to RO 3.17 billion in 2017**

Engineer Sami bin Salim al Sahib, Director-General of Industry at MoCIIP, said: “The upcoming action plan of MoCIIP is in alignment with Oman Vision 2040, which aims at the

diversification and enhancing economic growth, creating new job opportunities, raising the Sultanate’s ranking in international indicators, strengthening local added value, promoting foreign direct investment, achieving balanced development across the governorates of the Sultanate, and enhancing the diversification of country’s exports.”

The proposed projects pertain to mining and quarrying activities, food processing, and manufacturing of paper products, chemical products, rubber and plastics products, non-metallic products, base metals, electrical equipment, machinery and equipment, transportation equipment, mineral

processing, waste collection, treatment, disposal and recycling, and HVAC assembly plant construction. Also proposed is a Centre of Excellence for Food Industries.

The new industrial investment proposals, he said, have been subject to a three-stage process of vetting.

In the first stage, they are evaluated for their anticipated contribution to the government’s 2040 Manufacturing Strategy. In the second phase, preliminary feasibility studies are undertaken to promote the projects to potential investors. Finally, in the third stage, the investors join together to conduct final feasibility studies for each project.

Oman Arab Bank completes debut issuance of \$250 million bond on LSE

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, MAY 29

Oman Arab Bank SAOG (OAB) has successfully issued \$250 million Additional tier-1 Perpetual Bonds, listed in the International Securities Market (ISM) of the London Stock Exchange. This makes OAB the first local bank this year to do so, ensuring a positive impact on its shareholders and the national economy at large.

Rashad al Zubair, Chairman of OAB, commented, “This recent issuance marks another successful milestone in the history of OAB and our journey of growth. Furthermore, it is in line with the vision of the Central Bank of Oman, focusing on the need for local banks to expand and enhance their position and capabilities to finance developmental projects for

the Sultanate, under the overarching strategy of Oman Vision 2040.

“I would like to extend, on behalf of OAB Board, a warm welcome to the diversified set of international investors who have placed their trust on the growth story of Oman’s economy in general and OAB in particular.”

Highlighting the importance of this milestone, Rashad al Musafir (pictured), CEO of OAB, said, “This is a huge step for us, especially following the successful acquisition of 100 per cent of shares of Alizz Islamic Bank (AIB) and merging our Islamic banking window with AIB. As of mid-2020, Oman Arab Bank was transformed into a public joint-stock company, with its shares listed on the Muscat Securities Market, marking a fundamental achievement in



our history that spans across nearly four decades.

“Today, we are proud to announce another success in the history of OAB’s expansion with the issuance of an International Perpetual Bond of \$250 million on the London Stock Exchange, one of the largest securities markets in the world.

“This will contribute towards our efforts in attracting foreign investments to the local banking sector to

meet the Bank’s growth and development plans.”

“We are proud of the positive reaction of OAB’s first international offering that has generated widespread interest from international investors that included several top-notch funds from the London market. The final order book was valued over \$1.1 billion, which is a testimony to the high level of confidence placed by international investors on Omani economy and local banking sector, as well as the financial performance of OAB,” he added.

This step is considered the first issue of its kind for OAB in foreign currency and is also the first international issuance of public AT1 (Additional tier-1 bonds) in the last three years from Oman.

Therefore, making it significant in enhancing domestic liquidity with a

continuous flow of foreign investments, especially during the current market conditions. The issuance was jointly managed by Emirates NBD Bank PJSC, First Abu Dhabi Bank PJSC, Kamco Investment Company, Standard Chartered Bank and Ubhar Capital SAOC.

Oman Arab Bank has a rich and proud history as one of the first financial institutions to be established in the Sultanate. In June 2020, OAB completed its acquisition of Alizz Islamic Bank and merging it with its Islamic banking window.

OAB was transformed into a public joint-stock company, with its shares listed on the Muscat Securities Market for the first time. Today, the bank operates a nationwide network of 53 branches and representative offices with 160 ATMs spread across Oman.

# Two trainer planes arrive at Oman Aviation Academy

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, MAY 29

Oman Aviation Academy, currently being developed at Suhar Airport, has taken delivery of its first two training aircraft — part of a fleet that will help position the Sultanate’s first aviation academy as a leading provider of world-class pilot training for the civil and military aviation sectors in the wider Middle East region.

Oman Airports, which operates Suhar Airport, said the two planes were accorded



a traditional water salute upon their arrival in Suhar on Friday.

Oman Aviation Academy was established in February 2018 as a partnership involving, among

others, the Ministry of Defence Pension Fund, Oman National Investments Development Company (TANMIA) and Al Hosn Investment Company, among other government agencies.

Also playing a key role as an offset partner is Airbus Helicopters, while CAE, a global aviation training organisation, is a strategic partner in the establishment of the campus and its curriculum.

This partnership was assembled and delivered through the Tawazun (Offset)

programme.

Plans drawn up by the Academy envision a campus designed to “meet and exceed international standards” for aviation training services providers. Featuring a total built up area of 35,000 sqm, the facility has a capacity to accommodate around 150 students per annum and will be equipped with state-of-the art training systems, including four flight simulators. An 80-foot high Air Traffic Control (ATC) will be integrated with the main building.

## MSX WEEKLY REVIEW

### MSX ends in red led by financial sector

The MSX30 index ended the week lower by 0.94 per cent. All sub-indices ended in red. Industrial sector ended down 0.40 per cent while services sector and financial sector closed down by 0.17 per cent and 0.81 per cent respectively. MSX Shariah Index declined by 0.48 per cent. Foreign investors were net sellers during the week.

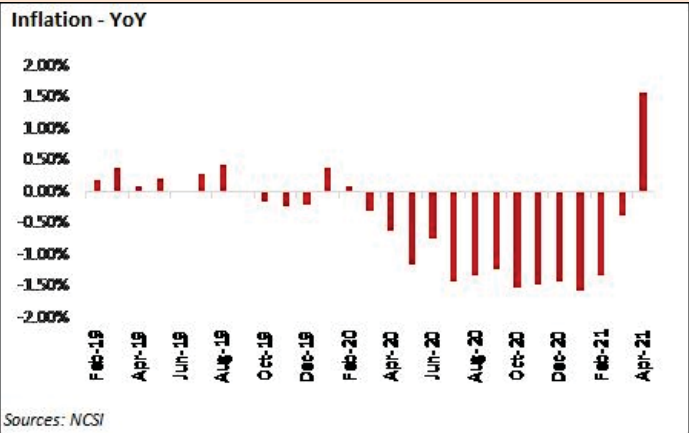
UK-based infrastructure management firm Helios Towers has pledged to build at least 300 telecom towers around Oman as part of a landmark long-term master services agreement reached with Omantel, the majority state-owned telecom services provider of the Sultanate.

This was revealed by Chief Executive Officer of Omantel, at a virtual session with investors hosted by Muscat Securities Exchange (MSX). Detailing the schematics of the agreement, CEO said Omantel will sell 2,890 towers in the Sultanate to Helios Towers for a cash consideration of \$575 million, an amount which has made the transaction among the highest in valuation in the emerging markets in recent years.

National Finance has announced that subsequent to the CEO resignation, the ex-CEO, Shahin Mohammed al Balushi filed a legal (labour Case) action claiming compensation. The primary court issued a judgment on January 6, 2021 ordering the company to pay RO 36k. The ex-CEO appealed, and the appeal court issued a judgment on May 19, 2021 ordering the company to pay an amount of RO 840k.

National Finance intends to challenge the judgment before the supreme court as it strongly believes that the judgment of the appeal court did not reflect the law, the internal policies and the contractual arrangements between the parties.

Oman inflation rate



which remained in negative territory for more than year has turned positive, reflecting the increase in prices of certain items after the implementation of VAT. The inflation rate in the Sultanate increased by 1.59 per cent in April 2021 compared to the same month of 2020, according to data from the National Centre for Statistics and information (NCSI).

The inflation rate during April 2021 also rose by 1.47 per cent compared to March 2021. The increase of prices in April 2021 is attributed to the rise of prices in main groups, such as the transportation group by 6.46 per cent, tobacco by 4.07 per cent, miscellaneous goods and services by 3.18 per cent, recreation and culture by 1.94 per cent, furnishings, household equipment and routine household maintenance by 1.26 per cent, food and non-alcoholic beverages by 0.29 per cent, clothing and footwear by 0.15 per cent, education by 0.08 per cent, housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels group by 0.07 per cent, and health by 0.06 per cent.

Global credit ratings agency Capital Intelligence (CI) Ratings announced that it has affirmed the long-term and short-term foreign currency ratings of Bank Muscat, National Bank of Oman (NBO) and Oman Arab Bank (OAB). CI Ratings has also affirmed the long-term and short-term ratings of Alizz Islamic Bank on Oman national scale. CI Ratings has affirmed the long-term foreign currency rating and short-term

foreign currency rating of Bank Muscat at ‘BB’ and ‘B’, respectively.

The ratings agency kept its outlook on Bank Muscat negative, according to the statement issued by the agency. At the same time, CI Ratings has affirmed Bank Muscat’s bank standalone rating of ‘bb’, core financial strength rating of ‘bbb’ and extraordinary support level of ‘moderate’.

For NBO, CI Ratings has affirmed the long-term foreign currency rating and short-term foreign currency rating of the bank at ‘BB’ and ‘B’, respectively. At the same time, CI Ratings has affirmed NBO’s bank standalone rating of ‘bb’, core financial strength rating of ‘bbb-’ and extraordinary support level of ‘moderate’.

CI Ratings has also affirmed the long-term foreign currency rating and short-term foreign currency rating of OAB at ‘BB’ and ‘B’, respectively. The ratings agency has affirmed OAB’s bank standalone rating of ‘bb’, core financial strength rating of ‘bbb’ and extraordinary support level of ‘moderate’.

Additionally, CI Ratings affirmed Alizz Islamic Bank’s ratings and kept outlook negative.

It has affirmed Alizz Islamic Bank’s long-term and short-term ratings on the Oman national scale at ‘omAA’ and ‘omA1+’, respectively. The outlook on Alizz Islamic Bank’s ratings remains negative, in line with the outlook assigned to Oman’s sovereign ratings, CI Ratings said.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

## Port of Duqm records 833 vessel calls in 2020



BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, MAY 29

Port of Duqm Company has announced the completion of the transfer of staff from its Muscat office to the site of its Duqm operations in Al Wusta Governorate.

Engineer Hashim bin Taher al Ibrahim, Director — Business Support, said the transfer was necessitated by the steady uptick in vessel and cargo movements at the port. It also comes as the new head office of the Port of Duqm has been fully commissioned and operational in Duqm.

The fully-equipped complex includes integrated facilities for suppliers and exporters, includ-

ing a one-stop-shop through which transactions related to imports and exports, traffic permits, customs inspections, and so on, are processed. Also located on the premises are the offices of the ROP Customers, and the ministries of Health and Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and so on.

Port of Duqm features a commercial berth comprising dedicated yards for multi-purpose cargoes, Ro-Ro cargo, liquid terminal, and a dry bulk terminal. In addition to 187.9 square kilometres of port area, the port also has around 2,000 hectares of land have been allocated for industrial areas and 1,000 hectares for the port’s logistic areas.

## Perfect season to own the high-class driving experience Renault Megane



MUSCAT: As part of the ongoing Ramadhan promotion, Renault Oman from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA), has announced unlimited benefits on its popular models Renault Megane.

Renault Oman is offering attractive value benefits such as special interest rate (0 per cent up to three years or 1.99 per cent for four years or 2.49 per cent for five years or 2.99 per cent for six years), assured cash gift, free periodic vehicle service package, free insurance, digital promotion, assured RO 100 gift voucher and free registration on Renault Megane. Social media users who participate in the Ramadhan promotional campaign will also be eligible for attractive prizes.

The Renault Ramadhan promotion which has already begun will go on till June 6, 2021.

## The best time to own a Lexus ending soon

MUSCAT: If you have a Lexus in mind, then now is the best time to make the most of. Before it ends on June 10, 2021. The exclusive offer includes Free Service 6 Years or 60,000 Kms and Free First Year Registration. (Conditions apply. Visit any Lexus showroom for details).

In Oman, the Lexus range includes the IS, ES, LS, NX, UX, RX, GX, LX and RC.

The IS350 is equipped with a 3.5-litre engine that’s paired to an 8-speed automatic transmission. The turbocharged IS300 features a 2.0-liter twin-scroll turbocharged inline four-cylinder engine with intercooler that generates 241 Hp.

The ES is available in options of an affordable 2.5L, 16 Valve, engine with a fuel efficiency of 17.2 km/L and a classy 3.5 Litre, engine paired to a 8-speed automatic transmission with a fuel efficiency of 13.6 km/L. The ES is also available in Hybrid version with a 2.5-litre DOHC direct injection Atkinson cycle 4-cylinder with intake VVT-i E and exhaust VVT-i with a total system output of 215 hp, offering 24.1 km/L mileage.

The LS is the flagship of the Lexus brand. It is available in 3.5-litre V6 Multi Stage Hybrid System producing 354 hp, a 3.5-litre V6 naturally aspirated Atkinson-cycle producing 311 hp and 38.7 Kg.M Torque, and a 3.5-litre twin-turbo V6 engine producing 415 hp and 61.2 Kg.M of Torque.

The NX300’s advanced turbocharged 238hp, 2.0-litre engine combines fuel efficiency with outstanding power output, generating exhilarating



acceleration for sporty driving, together with exceptional fuel economy.

The Lexus UX has a front-wheel drive configuration and is powered by a high-efficiency 2.0 litre, four-cylinder engine, which is coupled with a Direct Shift Continuously Variable Transmission (DCVT).

The five-seat Lexus RX350 is equipped with a 3.5-litre V6 that is mated to an eight speed automatic transmission. The RX is also available in a 3-row 7-seater option. Also available is the Lexus RX450h, a hybrid version featuring a 3.5-litre Atkinson-cycle engine.

The Lexus GX460 is perfect for families who seek no-holds-barred adventure on their days off, yet also desire an easy-driving, comfortable and versatile luxury SUV for the work week. The Lexus GX460 features a 4.6L engine that provides outstanding power and responsive performance.

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# Oman to host major ‘Green Hydrogen Summit’ in September

**KEY GOAL:** The summit will provide a comprehensive overview on the strategies – commercial and technical – that need to be considered to fulfil Oman’s vision to become a powerhouse of Green Hydrogen



**BUSINESS REPORTER**  
MUSCAT, MAY 29

Key stakeholders and decision-makers driving Oman’s transition from a carbon-based to a hydrogen-based society have come together to support the ‘Oman Green Hydrogen Summit’, which takes place in the Sultanate during September 21–23, 2021 on the theme, ‘Shaping the Future of Oman’s Green Energy Industry’.

The three-day forum has been organised by Birba Energy Services with the support of Oman’s Ministry of Energy and Minerals and in strategic partnership with Energy Renewal, in association with Oman Hydrogen Centre.

Commenting on the significance of the summit, Dr Abdullah al Abri, Executive President – Energy Renewal, said: “The Oman Green Hydrogen Summit will chart the contours of a roadmap for a future industry, underpinned by a wider ecosystem, around green fuels in general and green hydrogen in particular, in the Sultanate. With the newly rebranded Energy Renewal given the government’s mandate to craft a national hydrogen strategy towards this vital goal, we aim to make maximum use of the summit to serve as a platform to bring together all of the players — national and international — that can support the realisation of this objective.”

The summit will provide a

comprehensive overview on the strategies — commercial and technical — that need to be considered to fulfil Oman’s vision to become a powerhouse of Green Hydrogen. The main themes of the summit will be to discuss Oman’s national strategy for green hydrogen along with the current project developments.

Other topics will include taking a look at successful case studies from regional and international projects, investment opportunities, public and private partnerships and latest trends on the technological front.

Prof Dr Ing Michael Modigell, Director of Oman Hydrogen Centre and Chair of the Oman Green Hydrogen Summit

Advisory Committee, stated, “Oman’s geographical location lends itself to becoming a major contributor in the field of energy renewables. Abundant natural and water resources coupled with large areas of land to implement large-scale solar projects promise to pave the way for the growth of a predominantly renewables-based green hydrogen industry in the Sultanate.”

The summit is also supported by key stakeholders who are part of the advisory board, with representatives from institutions such as Oman Society for Petroleum Services (OPAL), Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) — the Sultanate’s Oil and Gas Major, OQ — the Sultanate’s Integrated Global Energy Group, Siemens Energy, and Sustainable Energy Research Centre of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU).

Abdullah al Harthy, Chairman of Birba Energy Services, commented, “This summit aims to create a platform to bring together a variety of sectors such as solar, logistics, technology and more to engage and act upon how we can best achieve Oman’s Green Energy vision. We can jointly play a vital role in the economic diversification and job creation efforts in the Sultanate.”

## Pent-up demand and supply constraints fuel US inflation



Shoppers browse in a supermarket while wearing masks to help slow the spread of coronavirus disease in north St. Louis, Missouri. — Reuters

**WASHINGTON:** US consumer prices surged in April, with a measure of underlying inflation blowing past the Federal Reserve’s 2 per cent target and posting its largest annual gain since 1992, because of pent-up demand and supply constraints as the economy reopens.

The strong inflation readings reported by the Commerce Department on Friday had been widely anticipated as the pandemic’s grip eases, thanks to vaccinations, and will have no impact on monetary policy. Fed Chair Jerome Powell has repeatedly stated that higher inflation will be transitory.

The US central bank slashed its benchmark overnight interest rate to near zero last year and is pumping money into the economy through monthly bond purchases. It has signalled it could tolerate higher inflation for some time to offset years in which inflation was lodged below its target, a flexible average.

The supply constraints largely reflect a shift in demand towards goods and away from services during the pandemic. A reversal is

underway, with Americans flying to vacation destinations and staying at hotels among other activities. Year-on-year inflation is also accelerating as last spring’s weak readings drop from the calculation.

“Many goods are in short supply amid very strong demand and supply chain disruptions, and some services prices are up sharply as consumers start to go out again,” said Gus Faucher, chief economist at PNC Financial in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. “Shortages of labour in some industries are also contributing to higher prices. But many of these factors will prove transitory, and inflation will slow in the second half of 2021.”

Consumer prices as measured by the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index, excluding the volatile food and energy components, increased 0.7 per cent last month amid strong gains in both goods and services. That was the biggest rise in the so-called core PCE price index since October 2001 and followed a 0.4-per cent gain in March.

— Reuters

## China, US can find common ground on tariff exclusions

**BEIJING:** The Biden administration is unlikely to remove tariffs on Chinese goods in the short term, but China and the US might find a middle ground by increasing tariff exclusions as a way to reduce tensions, a Chinese

think-tank said.

With even free trade advocates in the US lobbying that Washington should use tariff cuts as a tool for new trade negotiations with China, tariffs are likely to remain in place, said

a report from China Finance 40 forum (CF40) on Saturday, a finance think tank with members from regulators, academia and financial institutions.

But with the United States facing inflationary pressures

in the first half of this year, Washington may look to reduce the tariff burden through tariff exclusions, which would avoid resistance in congress and ease political pressure, the report said.

— Reuters

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