



P10

OLYMPICS CHIEF
VOWS TO MINIMISE
VIRUS RISK TO JAPAN



P15

OIL PRICES SLIP
AS CHINA'S CRUDE
IMPORT DROPS



P18

THE SCENIC BEAUTY
OF NATURE AT
AL FAZAYIH BEACH



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO CHINESE PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China on the Centennial of founding the Chinese Communist Party. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Jinping. His Majesty the Sultan also wished the friendly people of China further progress and prosperity. — ONA

HM THANKED BY EMIR OF KUWAIT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmed Al Jabir al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, in reply to His Majesty's condolences cable on the death of Shaikh Faisal Mohammed Abdulaziz al Sabah. In his cable, Shaikh Nawaf expressed his thanks and appreciation for His Majesty's heartfelt sympathies and praying to the Almighty Allah to protect His Majesty against all harms. — ONA



READ IN

OPINION

HM's Saudi visit to bring GCC prosperity
Ali al Matani

Health insurance sector poised to witness strong growth
Haider al Lawati

INSIDE



PAKISTAN BUS BLAST KILLS 13 INCLUDING CHINESE

P7



EU PROPOSES WORLD'S FIRST CARBON BORDER TAX

P8

Royal directives terminate second annual sitting of Majlis

MUSCAT: The second annual session (2020-2021) of the ninth term (2019-2023) of Majlis Ashshura will come to an end on Thursday (July 15), as per the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and in accordance with Article (41) of the Council of Oman Law.

This was stated by Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis Ashshura, on Wednesday.

The second annual session witnessed the issuance of the Basic Law of the State and the Law of the



Council of Oman, which defined the relationship of the Council with the government and the legislative work procedures with the State Council,

in addition to the internal work procedures in the mechanisms of managing the council's sessions and standing committees. The law also

allowed the council to formulate its bylaws in accordance with the law and the Basic Law of the State, Al Nadabi said.

Al Nadabi added that Majlis Ashshura, during its second annual session, followed with great attention the developments of the Covid-19 pandemic since its outset. In March 2020, the council submitted a number of recommendations to the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling the developments resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, including many proposals for addressing health,

social, and economic conditions that affected the society, and those recommendations were accepted by the Supreme Committee. Besides, the council members contributed to supporting the fund dedicated to combating the impact of Covid-19. During the council's session with the minister of health held in January 2021, the council members discussed the most prominent efforts made by the Ministry of Health to handle the pandemic and the ministry's efforts to provide vaccines.

TURN TO P3

EXTENDED LOCKDOWN AND MOVEMENT BAN FROM FRIDAY

TOTAL LOCKDOWN DURING EID AL ADHA

MUSCAT: The Supreme Committee's decision to impose the evening-time lockdown of commercial activities and ban on individual and vehicle movement from 5 pm to 4 am, will be enforced from Friday (July 16) with the exception of the three days of Eid al Adha which will see total lockdown.

The committee also decided not to hold Eid al Adha congregational prayers as well as the traditional habta markets. The ban also includes all forms of gatherings in all governorates of the Sultanate, including family gatherings, greeting groups and mass festivities.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) stated that in order to ensure the availability of basic services and to ease the emergency movement of people, the police accident centre will be operating during the period of total lockdown with the



participation of some key sectors of the public institutions namely the sectors of health, municipal, tourism, transport sector communications and information technology, relief and sheltering sectors, agricultural,

fisheries, water resources, commerce and industry.

The ROP stated that inquiries from citizens and residents will be handled through the centres and that facilitations will be provided

in accordance with the emergency cases facing individuals during the lockdown period, adding that the centre will be operating around the clock through the number 1099.

With the advent of the khareef season in Dhofar Governorate, the ROP affirms that entry to the governorate is restricted to citizens and residents who have taken at least one shot of the Covid-19 vaccine, while visitors from abroad should be fully vaccinated.

The ROP confirms its readiness to implement necessary measures to ensure the safety of the community safety, through police presence in all governorates and wilayats of the Sultanate to enforce the decisions of the Supreme Committee, in addition to its role in keeping security and spreading peace.

TURN TO P3

EU undecided on mixing and matching Covid-19 vaccines

THE HAGUE: Europe's drug regulator on Wednesday refrained from making any recommendations on mixing shots of Covid-19 vaccines from different drugmakers and said it was too early to confirm if and when an additional booster dose would be needed.

The European Medicines Agency (EMA), however, did say both doses of a coronavirus vaccine are needed to protect against the fast-spreading Delta variant.

"Adherence to the recommended vaccination course, in line with the product information, is vital to benefit from the highest level of protection against the virus," EMA said in a statement.

The European Centre for Disease



Prevention and Control has estimated that the Delta variant will account for 90 per cent of strains in circulation in the European Union by the end of August.

The variant, first identified in India, has led to a surge in cases worldwide and is hurting recovery

plans. Researchers and drugmakers are having to tweak vaccines quickly to prevent them from losing effectiveness against new, emerging variants.

The World Health Organization said on Wednesday the Delta variant has been detected in at least 111 countries in the last two months, and was likely to become the dominant variant globally over the coming months.

"Adherence to the recommended vaccination course is vital to benefit from the highest level of protection."

Calling it a "variant of concern", the Delta strain "is spreading fast in Europe and may seriously hamper efforts to control the pandemic," the EMA said. — Agencies



RO 3.5 MILLION FOR PROJECTS IN MUSANDAM

Musandam Governorate will witness large investments in the coming years. This was stated by Dr Said bin Humaid al Harthy, Wali of Khasab. He said that RO 3.5 million will be spent on various development projects in the governorate this year. Asas Company will establish a park and coordination is under way to establish a hotel facility on the beach of Bassa. In the coming days, Omran will also tender for a zipline, which will be from the top of the mountain down to the sea. **DETAILS ON P2**



Musandam set to get massive investment boost

Investors in tourism projects are exempted from paying fees and taxes for a certain period

KHASAB: The strategic location of the Governorate of Musandam, which overlooks the Strait of Hormuz, with its islands and bays makes it unique compared to the rest of the Sultanate's governorates.

Dr Said bin Humaid al Harthy, Wali of Khasab, said that the Governorate of Musandam receives great attention from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq. He added that the recent royal directives focus on the development of the Governorate

to make it a hub for local and international investors.

He explained that the governorate receives investors who are keen to view the available investment opportunities and incentives, particularly in the tourism sector, pointing out that investors in tourism projects are exempted from paying fees and taxes for a certain period.

This year, RO 3.5 million will be spent on the development of the Governorate, said Dr Said, who added that there are other

development projects to be implemented by the private sector as part of the social responsibility.

The Wali of Khasab said, "The Governorate of Musandam will witness a focus on entertainment and shopping projects. The Governor's Office, represented by the Municipality of Musandam works on building parks and walkways. Once the university and the hospital projects are completed, there will be an environment that attracts commercial investments in the



Governorate, which in turn will boost the shopping power.

The projects in the Governorate also include constructing a port in the Wilayat of Dibba, in addition to other projects, such as the new seafront and parks.

In the Wilayat of Bukha, several touristic facilities are undergoing development such as Hul park, with camping sites on its beach. More projects are soon to be launched in the wilayat.

— ONA

Platform to help locals participate in development



NIZWA: Al Dakhiliyah Governor Office on Wednesday launched a link that enables locals of the governorate to contribute with initiatives, innovations and ideas for the comprehensive development plan in the governorate.

The step reflects the importance of involving the society to achieve the tenth five-year plan and Oman Vision 2040.

Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, said that all participations will be taken into consideration with the prime aim to meet the aspirations of the governorate's locals. — ONA

Midhyaf scheme attracts 2,000 applications from job-seekers

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 14

Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group), the executive arm of the Sultanate for tourism development, announced that its recently launched training for employment programme, 'Midhyaf', saw a significant turnout from Omani job-seekers, with over 2,000 job applications received since the launch of the programme on July 1 till date.

The programme is part of Oman Investment Authority's initiative to provide over 4,800 job and training opportunities within its owned companies, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour.

This substantial turnout in the first phase of the programme reflects the interest of Omani youth to work in the tourism and hospitality sector and be qualified to enrol in the programme which will expose them to a number of stages and professional disciplines, to ultimately succeed and thrive in this dynamic sector.

All submitted applications



will be subject to an evaluation and selection process after the registration process is completed on July 22. In order for the participant to qualify for the programme, they must meet the registration requirements, accept the training and work requirements and pass the interviews and personal performance tests.

The registration requirements for the programme include being a high school graduate or holding a Diploma or Bachelor's degree, being registered as a job-seeker at the Ministry of Labour, not above 30 years of age and should not have benefited from similar training programmes provided by the Ministry of Labour.

The programme will include professional training courses that will be offered by Oman Tourism College in cooperation with a number of the world's most prestigious hospitality academies and institutes, including the Saudi Academy of Culinary Arts 'ZADK', the British Butler Institute, the American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute (AHLEI), Lobster Ink Institute, and the Highfield Institute. For the aim of qualifying Omani talents as per the highest standards and to ensure that they obtain accredited specialised certificates, up to 11 professional certificates, according to the type of training programme.

1,679 insured in insurance protection system

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

The number of Omani workers registered in the Insurance Protection Extension System has doubled seven times during the period from 2006 to 2020, according to the Public Authority for Social Insurance PASI.

The number of insured persons in the system reached about 1,679 by the end of 2020, down 7.2 per cent from the year before.

The Insurance Protection Extension System is protection for Omanis working outside the Sultanate. According to the annual report of PASI, the percentage of the insured in Bahrain increased by 1.3 per cent, while the percentage of the insured in Kuwait decreased by 14 per cent.

It is also noted that from every thirty insured in the system, 22 are males and 8 are females.

Yet, the number of the insured in all insurance systems of PASI amounted to 250,893 persons.

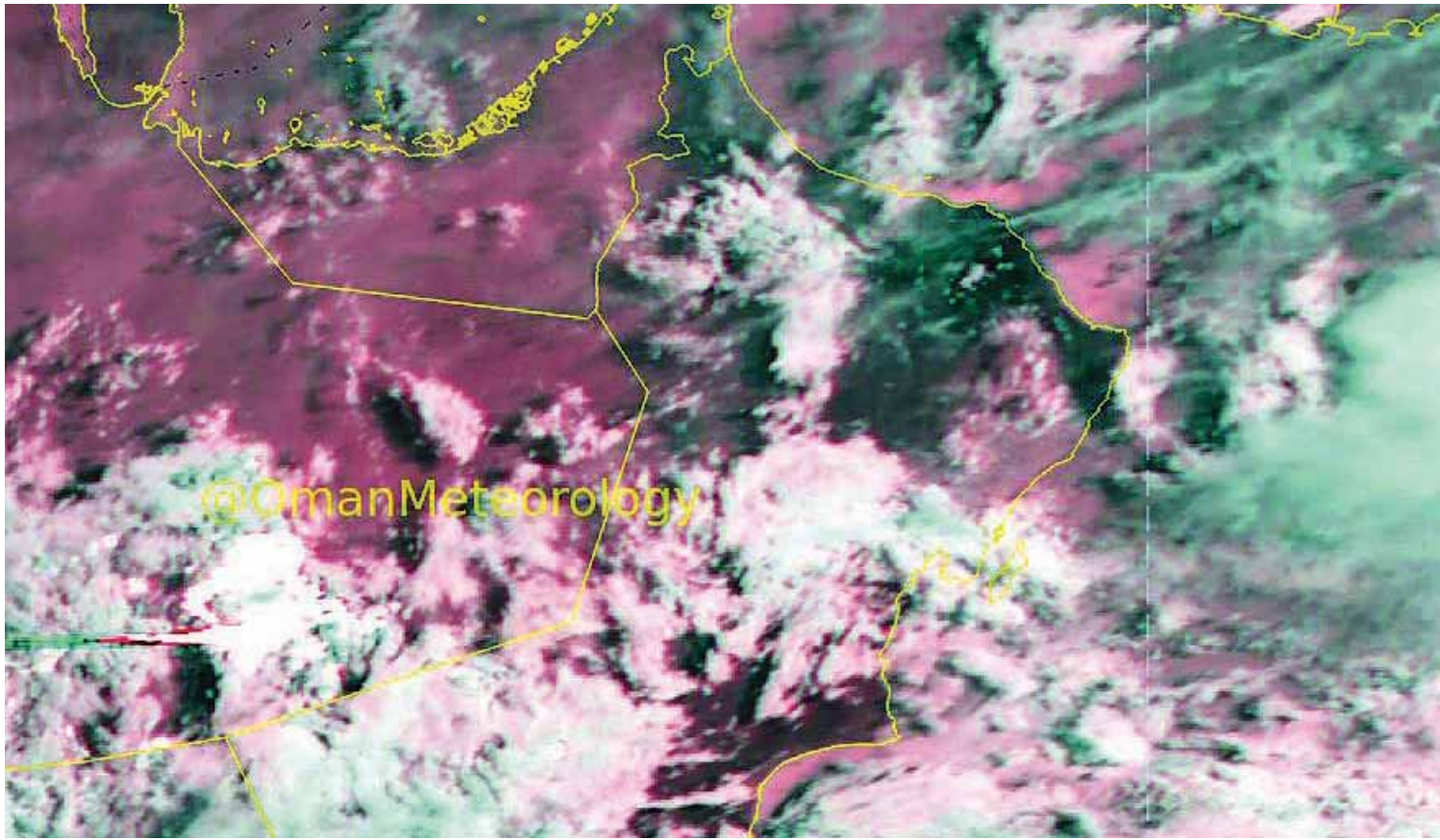
Extension of insurance Protection means the extension of social insurance coverage to include citizens of GCC countries working outside their countries. The Unified Law of Insurance Protection Extension

was issued pursuant to the decision taken by the Supreme Council of the Gulf Cooperation Council in its 25th session, which was held in the Kingdom of Bahrain in December 2004.

The law is mandatory on GCC citizens working in the private sector abroad in any Member State of the Council as of January, 1, 2006, except for Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, which applied the law on 1/1/2007.

In this respect, PASI provides insurance coverage for the Omanis nationals working abroad in the private sector in any GCC state. The provisions of the insurance law applicable to the Omanis who work inside the country.

The applicants must be Omanis, and their employer must be subject to the social insurance law/scheme in the state of the place of business. The applicant must also be, at the date when he/she commences the work, not be less than 15 and not exceeding 59 years (upon registering for the first time in the social insurance scheme. The employee must not be under any other insurance/pension scheme at the time of registration. The employee must not be retired from any government unit.



The latest weather charts and analysis of the National Multi Hazards Early Warning Center show that the upper air trough over the Arabian Sea continues to affect most of the Sultanate causing advection of clouds with chances of rain and thundershowers.

Dhofar, Al Wusta likely to receive heavy rains

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The easterly disturbance continues to churn out the clouds from the Arabian Sea ensuring rain and increasing humidity in the coming days. The two places that are expected to receive the most rain are Dhofar and Al Wusta. "The rainfall is expected on July 16, 17, 18 as per the charts. Al Hajar Mountain and the adjoining areas have chances too as well as the

coastal areas. In Muscat, Al Amerat and coastal areas might receive light rain on July 17," said the weather forecaster at Oman Met Office at Civil Aviation Authority. Dhofar when under the influence of monsoon experiences high humidity, but with the upper air low pressure from the Arabian Sea creating overcast weather over most parts of Oman humidity will also be on the higher side with humidity pointed out the weather

expert.

While Muscat is expected to have humidity ranging between 65 per cent to 85 per cent, Salalah's humidity rate is expected to range between 80 per cent to 97 per cent.

The weather bulletin states partly cloudy to cloudy skies along coastal areas of Dhofar governorate and adjoining mountains with chances of isolated rain occasionally thundershower. Clouds advection over most of the sultanate with a chance

of isolated rain. Chances of isolated convective clouds development and thundershowers associated with fresh downdraft winds may cause flash floods over Al Hajar Mountains and adjoining areas.

As the coasts overlooking the Arabian Sea are expected to have high sea waves due to the impact of the air trough, Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority have warned the public to avoid swimming and be cautious with children.

Royal directives terminate second annual sitting of Majlis Ash'shura

FROM PAGE 1

The council activated a number of oversight tools with the aim of following up on the social impact of Covid-19 in the form of questions and requests for briefing. The council members submitted a series of correspondences to the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) requesting the postponement of instalments on borrowers. Besides, two urgent statements were discussed regarding the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic and proposals for developing mechanisms to handle the pandemic. The Health Committee hosted a number of officials from the relevant authorities, and as a result, a number of recommendations were raised to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, Al Nadabi said.

The secretary-general of Majlis Ash'shura indicated that the council during the second annual session held a number of coordination meetings with the Council of Ministers, based on the provisions of the Basic Law of the State and the Law of the Council of Oman and within the framework of cooperation and coordination between the two councils.

The secretary-general of Majlis Ash'shura stressed that the second annual session (2020-2021) of the ninth period (2019-2023) witnessed a notable achievement on the legislative level as a number of draft laws and follow-up tools were accomplished. The council



Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis Ash'shura

held (14) regular sessions which saw the approval of 10 draft laws and agreements referred by the government, including the draft state budget for fiscal 2021. Also approved were the draft amendments of some provisions of the Insurance Companies Law, the draft amendments to the Takaful Insurance Law. The council also discussed and approved the draft unified GCC Anti-Commercial Fraud Law, the draft Securities Law, the draft amendments of some provisions of the Civil Status Law, the draft amendment of some provisions of the Motor Insurance Law, and a draft amendment of some provisions of the Foreigners' Residence Law the draft amendments to some provisions of the Records and Archives Law.

Extended movement ban timings from Friday



FROM PAGE 1

The ROP has extended thanks and appreciation to citizens and residents for their compliance with the decisions of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling the developments resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, and their commitment to the precautionary measures which will contribute to the decline of the epidemic and the

decrease in the number of cases.

ROP has urged everyone to continue to adhere to the directives and decisions issued by the Supreme Committee and to cooperate with the authorities concerned during the upcoming period in order to achieve the public interest and to maintain the safety and health of all.

— ONA

Donors can donate blood during lockdown

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Blood donation activity will continue even during the lockdown. Those who want to donate blood during the lockdown period can do so, according to the Central Blood Bank, Ministry of Health (MoH) Bausher.

A temporary arrangement has been made with the authorities to allow those who travel to the Blood Bank to help donors and support those who need blood.

"Donors can move to the Central Blood Bank which will remain open during the holidays and lockdown and donate blood at the Centre as we have made a special arrangement with the authorities concerned," Dr Zainab bint Salim al Araiimi, Director of Blood Banks Services at the Ministry of Health, told the Observer.

To avail of the permit, one has to send the word 'PERMIT' to Whatsapp number 94555648, and a message allowing the person to travel to and from the blood bank will be sent back.

However, the Blood bank will not function on the first day of Eid and Fridays (from 3 pm to 8 pm). Other days, the Bank will remain open from 8 am to 3 pm.

Meanwhile, the only blood bank in Oman is seeking donors to support its efforts in collecting a sufficient number of units to cover the long holidays and the lockdown period as people wouldn't be venturing out in view of the lockdown.

"We would like to urge all individuals, public and private organisations to conduct blood donation camps and to reach out the maximum number of donors to help the Bank secure enough blood units for the upcoming holidays," adds she.



DONATION CAMPS

Many organisations have shown interest in conducting blood donation camps. However, for the lack of proper information, some of them could not organise the camps, according to some blood donors.

"Anyone or any organisation can conduct a blood donation camp in consultation with the Bausher Blood Bank and any such gesture is more than welcome," said Kala Praveen, one of the organisers of the recent mass blood donation campaign organised by the 'Nanma Kasargod', a group of expats from Kasargod district, in Association with Central Blood Bank Royal Hospital Bausher. Rajan, Chairman; Praveen Kumar, President; Sreenath, General Secretary; and Rakesh, Treasurer, coordinated the donors.

A large number of donors took part in the one-day blood donation camp.

Speaking about the initiative, Viswan Pady, welfare convenor said, "Nanma Kasargod is a group of

expatriates that organises social, cultural and welfare activities in Oman for the past eight years and feel very happy and proud that the blood donation camp that helped the blood bank was a successful one."

Several women and youngsters volunteered to donate blood, and it is expected that more associations and alumni organisations are currently in touch with the Blood Bank to organise blood donation camps and help reduce the shortage of blood units to some extent in Oman during this pandemic.

"Any NGO or governmental organisation registered with the Ministry of Social Development or any company that has legal entity can conduct a blood donation drive in coordination with the Central Blood Bank," adds Dr Zainab.

"Any adult who hasn't travelled out of Oman in the last 4 months can donate blood at the Central Blood Bank in Bausher and all he or she has to do is just take a booking so that Covid-19 protocols can be followed."

IN THE MATTER OF THE EXEMPTED PARTNERSHIP ACT 1992 OF BERMUDA

and

IN THE MATTER OF PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS (the "Partnership")

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN pursuant to Section 13B(2)(f) of the Exempted Partnership Act 1992 of Bermuda that the Partnership intends to de-register under the laws of Bermuda and continue in the Dubai International Financial Centre as if the Partnership had been incorporated under the laws of the Dubai International Financial Centre.

Dated: 27 June 2021 at the Sultanate of Oman

For and on behalf of PricewaterhouseCoopers LLC



VACCINATION HOPE FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

@patkaushal

With the announcements of a new academic calendar in most of the Higher Education institutions (HEIs) abroad, a section of parents and students are seen managing both the vaccine doses before their scheduled departure for respective countries to be part of the admission processes.

Even though the vaccination is picking up fast in the Sultanate, some people want to finish it off as soon as possible so that there is no hindrance in travel even if ‘vaccination complete’ becomes a mandatory code for any kind of international travel.

In a recent interview with the *Observer*, Renu Bitling, Team Lead of the Oman chapter of IDP Education, admitted that there is widespread demand for admissions in HEIs abroad.

“This year, there has been an increasing interest for Canada. Though we are still receiving enquiries for Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Ireland and the United States”, she said.

All these candidates have to travel as per schedules announced by the institutions. They want to clear the vaccine doses and want to be in a readiness to travel.

“Since European countries, particularly the UK, are likely to open soon. We want to be ready with both the doses to ensure hassle-free travel and last-minute rush for the vaccine”, said Amit, who has decided to pursue

medicine course in UK.

There are chances of less number of admission travellers this session due to instructions made by some European universities “to come alone for admission and have requested the parents not to join their wards to avoid crowding on the campuses”, said Daniel. His son has to travel to Canada for some IT course.

“Still both of us, wife and I, and my son George have taken the vaccines”, said Daniel.

Similarly, Pradeep Kumar Dash, whose son has to take admission in medicine after completing Secondary schooling in Oman, has to travel to India in mid-August to meet the September deadline for National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET).

“I took the first dose of the vaccine on Tuesday. By August 2, I will be able to finish both doses. My son has already got the shot in his school, so it will be easy and safe for both of us to travel and engage in admission process soon after reaching India”, he said.

Such parents and students are also hoping to have some relaxation in ‘travel quarantine time’ after reaching their destination. That is also appealing to them to go for the vaccine and save time.

“All in all, the vaccination has evoked good response from the most quarters of the society in Oman. Therefore, vaccination along with a certain degree of good pandemic precautions will lead to stop the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic”, said an official of the Ministry of Health.



RECALL CAMPAIGN

FOR CADILLAC ESCALADE, ESCALADE ESV, CT4, CT5 / CHEVROLET CORVETTE Y2, TAHOE, SUBURBAN / GMC YUKON, YUKON XL MODEL VEHICLES



Date of Recall: 15/07/2021

Campaign Type: Safety Recall

Recall Segment: Airbags

Product Description: Cadillac Escalade 2021 / Cadillac Escalade ESV 2021 / Cadillac CT4 2021 / Cadillac CT5 2021 / Chevrolet Corvette Y2 2021 / Chevrolet Tahoe 2021 / Chevrolet Suburban 2021 / GMC Yukon 2021 / GMC Yukon XL2021

Model Year	Division	Vehicle Model	Affected Vehicle Vin Range	No. of Affected Vehicles in Oman
2021	Cadillac	Escalade	1GYS37KL0MR220301 to 1GYS47KLXMR366346	26
2021	Cadillac	Escalade ESV	1GYS48KL0MR115681 to 1GYS48KLXMR363971	9
2021	Cadillac	CT4	1G6D95RK0M0129230 to 1G6D95RLXM0132970	1
2021	Cadillac	CT5	1G6D85RK0M0126590 to 1G6D85RWXM0135252	10
2021	Chevrolet	Corvette Y2	1G1Y92D40M5103387 to 1G1Y93D4XM5105850	6
2021	Chevrolet	Tahoe	1GN5C8ED0MR160432 to 1GNSK8KDXMR370415	335
2021	Chevrolet	Suburban	1GN5C9ED0MR159612 to 1GNSK9KDXMR369268	19
2021	GMC	Yukon	1GKS17ED0MR158127 to 1GKS27KLXMR370445	221
2021	GMC	Yukon XL	1GKS18ED0MR160143 to 1GKS28KLXMR363789	24

DESCRIPTION:
A software problem exists in certain of these vehicles which would cause a sensing diagnostic module (SDM) communications fault to illuminate the airbag malfunction indicator lamp, but only on alternating ignition cycles. As a result, a SDM communications fault would not consistently illuminate the airbag light on every ignition cycle to indicate a problem to the driver. A driver might not be warned of a SDM loss of communication fault which might indicate a problem with airbag deployment.

PROCEDURE:
Dealers will update the software in the vehicles' serial data gateway module.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Customers of the above mentioned vehicles may please call Oman Trading Establishment LLC for Chevrolet & Cadillac and Moosa Abdul Rahman Hassan & Co LLC for GMC.

CONTACT DETAILS:
For OTE Toll free No 80050002 on all working days between 8.00am to 1.00pm and 2.00pm to 5.30pm
Toll free number for MARH 80076200 on all working days between 8.30am to 1.00pm and 4.00pm to 6.30pm.



■ SULTANATE, SRI LANKA REVIEW TRADE TIES



MUSCAT: Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, met with Tharaka Balasuriya, State Minister of Regional Cooperation of Sri Lanka, through video-conferencing, on Wednesday. The meeting reviewed the relations between the two friendly countries and discussed trade and economic cooperation. A proposal to roll out a direct line between the Sultanate and Sri Lanka to facilitate export of Omani products and import of Sri Lankan products through the Omani and Sri Lankan ports. The meeting also discussed the establishment of Sri Lankan industries in the Sultanate benefiting from the location and the trade agreements of the Sultanate. The two sides were informed about the establishment of a Sri Lankan company in the field of rubber products in the Sultanate.

Online summer programme taps talents of special school students

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, JULY 14

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General of Special Education and Continuous Learning, organised the first virtual summer programme for special education schools themed "We continue for you", under the auspices of Dr Ali al Shukaili, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Private Schools at the Ministry. In its first edition, the virtual summer programme aimed providing participants with the necessary knowledge and skills, which would enable them to improve their educational achievement, discover and refine their talents, support their experiences, and develop their various skills.

The virtual summer programme



Dr Fathia al Sidiyah

also aims to direct these students' behavioural emotions, intellectual and energies in a positive way to engage them during their summer vacation, as well as training them on skills such as public speaking, environmental awareness and recycling.

On the importance of this



Dr Ali Al Shukaili

virtual summer programme for students of special education schools, Dr Fathia al Sidiyah, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Special Education and Continuous Learning at the Ministry, said: "This summer programme comes in continuation of the efforts

of the Ministry of Education to present its educational mission, and to enhance its societal roles outside the actual study times for students, by providing educational activities in which knowledge is mixed with application and entertainment in a flexible manner in a virtual educational atmosphere full of suspense." The first virtual summer programme covered many activities with training in practical workshops suitable for students with disabilities that helped them develop appreciation to their abilities, discover and develop their talents, and enhance their self-confidence as good individuals capable of reconstructing and building the renaissance of their society with all its scientific and practical requirements.

Paramedical courses may enhance job skills, help localisation

DR MOHAMMED SHAFI UDDIN

Oman is very eagerly trying to find ways to support the youth by providing jobs in different sectors. Paramedical courses will help citizens to set up their own businesses and give jobs for their brothers and sisters.

The pandemic has underscored the need for and importance of talented paramedical professionals. Paramedical courses present ample employment opportunities to the youth. These courses are job oriented skilling programmes that transform the individual learner as a competent health worker.

In Oman paramedical is mostly in the hands of expatriates. So if the paramedical institutions are started then Omani youth may be able to open their own medical labs. Medical laboratory technician course is much in demand. Ophthalmic assistant, anaesthesia assistant, physiotherapist, dental technician, operation theatre technology specialists, X-Ray technician, healthcare technology management specialists, and health insurance and billing experts are also in demand.

The duration of paramedical courses varies between six months to three year depending upon the nature of the courses. These courses are meant for students who complete school education. Even the government need not provide jobs to these trainees. They can open their own labs and start providing jobs to others. It is



evidently proved that Omani doctor's services are excellent and they are doing good service to the society. In Oman medical insurance is one of the biggest fields. Every hospital requires at least three Health Insurance and Billing agents and at least one Healthcare Technology Management person. If roughly 500 hospitals are there, then we require 2,000 People. If they open their own labs, then they can provide jobs to few people.

Paramedic professionals are among some of the forefront runners serving the hospitals, clinics, laboratories and carrying out the coronavirus tests.

Paramedicals are the first response medical staff. Whenever you call an ambulance or receive immediate care in hospitals; it is done by the paramedical staff. Paramedic professionals are among the most sought after medical experts who will be at your service in any given circumstance.

(The author is an educationist, teacher and career development specialist. shafishamshad@gmail.com)

Vendors in Salalah await khareef visitors

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Shopkeepers in Dhofar Governorate, especially those in Salalah, are hopeful of making the most of the khareef season as the region known for its cool climate was open to tourists who have taken at least one dose of Covid-19 vaccine.

The southern tip of the Sultanate, blessed with natural abundance, had reported a relatively higher number of cases but it was brought under control and businesses were allowed to open to the public under Covid protocol.

"Those who run business in the souq and outside have been badly affected by the pandemic and all our Eid seasons were either under lockdown or had no sales as people feared to come out," said Mohammed Rafeeqe, an expatriate vendor, told the *Observer*.

Besides the two Eid seasons for vendors in Salalah, the khareef season which lasts for nearly 3 months is yet another period when they welcome both foreign and domestic travellers. But the pandemic



has spoiled the party for the second year in a row.

"Souq is slightly enlivened these days as people have started visiting the major markets and it is a sight that small vendors in this region have wanted to see since the last two years," said Nasser Sonic Peringathur, a businessman and social worker in Salalah.

"Business is really affected. Flats and apartments were

leased by agents but they too have been affected badly. Hope this khareef would bring in a change," Nasser said.

"We at the souk get up each day with hopes of a better day as visitors who have taken vaccination were allowed to visit the region. I'm optimistic that we can make good business prior to Eid within the Covid protocols," Saifudheen, another vendor said.

AUCTION ANNOUNCEMENT NO. (GPDC/2021/2)

Al Ghubrah Power and Desalination Company SAOC, announces the following auction:

SR.	Material to be sold	Location	Date of site visit	Last submission date
1	Used Materials & Scrap (firefighting pumps, AC unites compressor, cables & some disposal scraps)	Al Ghubrah North	1/8/2021 3/8/2021	5/8/2021

Terms and conditions:

- Offers to be submitted in an envelope, sealed with red wax addressed and titled with the auction name and auction No. to the Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee without mentioning the name of the bidder.
- Offer should be dropped in the tender box at the Nama Holding reception area before 1.00 pm, time of the Sultanate, on Thursday 5 August 2021.
- Who wins the auction or part of it commits must pay its value in cash or certified bank check in the Sultanate during a period of three days from the day of notification.
- The buyer must transfer the materials within three weeks from the date of payment. In case of failure to transfer the purchased materials during the specified period, the materials are confiscated for the company. The buyer is not entitled to claim compensation and shall bear all expenses of the resale process.
- The buyer shall bear all risks involve in materials transfer or reuse.
- The buyer can quote for any item line as per the received lists.
- Bidders can preview the materials during working hours on the dates specified above, from 9:00 am until 12:00 pm with all PPE.

To preview the materials in Al Ghubrah Power & Desalination Company, please contact Mr. Ibrahim Al Hadi Tel: (0096899884074) or Mr. Saif Al Bousaidi Tel: (0096898085311), or by Email: saif.bousaidi@GPDC.nama.om.



Location to submit the offer :Nama Holding
In Beach One Building, 3rd Floor (Units 305 & 307) Shatti Al Qurum
P.O Box 850, Post Code 116, Sultanate of Oman.
Phone Number : +968 24559200 / 277
E-Mail: Siham.alaamri@holding.nama.om



Iran says it can enrich uranium to 90pc purity

DUBAI: Iran said on Wednesday it could enrich uranium up to 90 per cent purity — weapons grade — if its nuclear reactors needed it, but added it still sought the revival of a 2015 deal that would limit its atomic programme in return for a lifting of sanctions.

President Hassan Rouhani's remark is his second such public comment this year about 90 per cent enrichment — a level suitable for a nuclear bomb.

The biggest obstacle to producing nuclear weapons is obtaining enough fissile material — weapons-grade highly enriched uranium or plutonium — for the bomb's core. Iran says it has never sought nuclear weapons. "Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation can enrich uranium by 20 per cent and 60 per cent and if one day our reactors need it, it can enrich uranium to 90 per cent purity," Rouhani told a cabinet meeting, Iranian state media reported.

The nuclear deal caps the fissile purity to which Tehran can refine uranium at 3.67 per cent, well under the 20 per cent achieved before the pact and far below the 90 per cent suitable for a nuclear weapon.

Rouhani, who will hand over the presidency to Ebrahim Raisi on August 5, implicitly criticised Iran's top decision makers for "not allowing" his government to reinstate the nuclear deal during its term in office.

"They took away the opportunity to reach an agreement from this government.



President Hassan Rouhani

We deeply regret missing this opportunity," the state news agency IRNA quoted Rouhani as saying.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, not the president, has the last say on all state matters such as nuclear policy.

Like Khamenei, Raisi has backed indirect talks between Tehran and Washington aimed at bringing back the arch foes into full compliance with the accord. Former US president Donald Trump quit the deal three years ago, saying it was biased in favour of Iran, and reimposed crippling sanctions on Tehran.

The sixth round of nuclear talks in Vienna adjourned on June 20. The next round of the talks has yet to be scheduled, and Iranian and Western officials have said that significant gaps still remain to be resolved.

Two senior Iranian officials said that president-elect Raisi planned to adopt "a harder line" in the talks after taking office, adding that the next round might resume in late September or early October. — Reuters

Sisi offers help as Hariri visits Cairo

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el Sisi expressed full support on Wednesday for visiting Lebanese Prime Minister-designate Saad al Hariri in his efforts to form a cabinet and resolve a crippling economic and political crisis.

Lebanon is battling an economic meltdown dubbed by the World Bank as one of the deepest depressions in modern history.

The financial crisis, which has propelled more than half of the population into poverty and seen the value of the currency drop by more than 90 per cent in nearly two years, has been deepened by political deadlock.

Egypt holds diplomatic weight in the region and has provided some aid to Lebanon during the crisis. It is allied with Gulf powers that long channelled funds into Lebanon but have recently become alarmed by the rising influence of the armed Lebanese group Hezbollah.

Veteran politician Hariri has been at loggerheads for months with President Michel Aoun over forming a new government. He is due to meet Aoun at the Baabda



Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry meets with Lebanese Prime Minister-designate Saad al Hariri at Tahrir Palace in Cairo, Egypt, on Wednesday. — Reuters

presidential palace on his return from Cairo.

Earlier on Wednesday, Aoun said he hoped Hariri would carry "positive indications" to the meeting, adding that efforts were still under way to form a cabinet.

In Egypt, Sisi welcomed Hariri, "reaffirming Egypt's full support for Hariri's political path which aims at restoring stability to Lebanon", and for his attempts to

deal with challenges including the formation of a government, a presidency statement said.

Amid speculation that Hariri would stand down this week, Egypt urged him not to give up on forming a cabinet, Saudi Arabian state-owned broadcaster Al Hadath said, citing unnamed sources.

Cairo would coordinate Arab efforts to help chart a way out of

the crisis, the channel reported.

Hariri also met Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, who stated Egypt's support for Lebanon's "exit from the current situation, and the necessity for all Lebanese parties to prioritise Lebanon's highest interest over any narrow interests", according to tweets from Hariri and the Egyptian foreign ministry.

— Reuters

Aid offers hope as Tunisia struggles to cope with Covid surge

TUNIS: In Charles Nicolle Hospital in the Tunisian capital, the emergency department is filled with patients who are sharing oxygen in rooms and even hallways.

After successfully containing the initial wave of the Covid-19 pandemic last year, Tunisia is struggling to cope with a resurgence of the virus, with

intensive care wards full and doctors overburdened by a rapid rise in cases and deaths.

"Doctors are exhausted, as the number of patients exceeded the capacity of the hospital," Ahmed Ghoul, a nurse at Charles Nicolle, said. "Even the mortuary was full and we could no longer find a place for them."

— Reuters



Qatari soldiers gather inside a field hospital donated by Qatar for Covid-19 patients, outside El Yasminet hospital in Ben Arous, Tunisia, on Tuesday. — Reuters

Sadr demands action over deadly Covid unit fire in Iraq

BAGHDAD: Populist cleric Moqtada Sadr has warned he will hold the Iraqi government responsible if it fails to take action over a devastating fire that killed at least 60 people in a Covid isolation unit.

The warning comes just months before Iraq is scheduled to go to the polls in October for an early parliamentary election that was demanded by a protest movement backed by Sadr's supporters.

"It is incumbent on the government to work immediately to firmly and seriously punish those to blame for hospital fires, whether in Nasiriyah or other provinces, no

matter their (political) affiliation," Sadr tweeted late on Tuesday.

"Otherwise, this government will be held responsible from its lowest to its highest (official)."

The devastating blaze, which swept through the Covid isolation unit of Al Hussein Hospital in the southern city of Nasiriyah on Monday evening, was the second such fire in Iraq in three months.

An April fire at a Baghdad Covid hospital killed 82 people and was also blamed on the explosion of badly stored oxygen bottles.

That blaze triggered widespread



People light up candles for a vigil in mourning for the victims of a fire that swept through a Covid-19 isolation unit at Al Hussein Hospital in Iraq's southern city of Nasiriyah on Tuesday. — AFP

anger and resulted in the suspension of then health minister Hassan al Tamimi, a nominee of Sadr's powerful political bloc.

Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi has ordered an investigation into Monday's blaze "that will lead to those directly responsible", his office said.

He already dismissed the hospital's manager, the provincial health director and the local civil defence chief.

Arrest warrants have been issued for 13 officials, including the provincial health director.

Sadr demanded that the

findings of the official inquiry be released quickly.

"It must not end up like others conducted into previous hospital fires. Or else we have other means of protecting people's safety and dignity."

The health ministry said on Wednesday that 60 people had been confirmed to have died in the fire. Forensics experts had identified 39 bodies while 21 were still unidentified.

Demonstrations in honour of the victims were planned in Nasiriyah later after residents held a candle-lit vigil late on Tuesday.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

TEL AVIV

UAE opens Israel embassy after deal

The United Arab Emirates opened an embassy in Israel on Wednesday, housed in Tel Aviv's new stock exchange building, in the latest normalisation move under a deal brokered by Washington last year.

The venue in the heart of Israel's financial district highlighted the central role of economic cooperation in their ties since the UAE became only the third Arab country to recognise the Jewish state.

At the ceremony, attended



by new Israeli President Isaac Herzog, Emirati Ambassador Mohamed al Khaja called the embassy opening "an important milestone in the growing relationship between our two countries".

WASHINGTON

Biden taps Jeff Flake as Turkey envoy

Jeff Flake, a former senator and one of the most outspoken Republican foes of Donald Trump, was nominated on Tuesday by President Joe Biden as ambassador to Turkey, tasked with managing one of the most complicated US alliances.

Flake, who unlike many Republicans has never retracted his criticism of Trump and went so far as to campaign for Biden in last year's election, said he was "humbled and honoured" to be



chosen as ambassador.

"This is a pivotal post at an important time for both of our countries," Flake wrote in a blog post as his nomination was announced in a routine White House statement.

NAIROBI

Ethiopia says UN role in dam row 'unhelpful'

Ethiopia on Tuesday blasted as "unhelpful" the intervention of the United Nations in a long-running dispute over its controversial Nile River megadam.

The huge dam, set to be Africa's largest hydroelectric project when completed, has sparked an almost decade-long diplomatic row between Addis Ababa and downstream nations Egypt and Sudan. Ethiopia says the project is essential to its development, but Cairo and Khartoum fear it



could restrict their citizens' water access.

With no binding agreement, the UN Security Council met on July 8 to broker a deal on the use and management of the \$4.2 billion project.

In brief

SEOUL



S KOREA EXTENDS COVID CURBS AS NEW CASES SPIKE

South Korea tightened social distancing rules across most of the country on Wednesday to tackle its worst-ever outbreak of coronavirus a day after new cases soared to a new daily peak of 1,615.

The latest daily tally easily surpassed the previous record of 1,378 set last Friday, adding to growing worries centred on the rapid spread of the more contagious Delta variant and a slowing vaccination campaign.

Clusters of infections have sprung up quickly around the capital Seoul and neighbouring areas fuelled by the Delta variant, the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) said.

SYDNEY



LOCKDOWN EXTENDED AS SYDNEY OUTBREAK NEARS 900 INFECTIONS

Australian authorities extended a lockdown in Sydney on Wednesday by at least 14 days, after three weeks of initial restrictions failed to stamp out the biggest outbreak of Covid-19 this year in the country's largest city.

New South Wales state Premier Gladys Berejiklian said restrictions would remain in place until at least July 30 after reporting 97 new locally transmitted cases, a slight increase from a day earlier.

Total infections across the harbour city of 5 million now stand at just under 900 and two deaths have been reported, the first for the country this year.

JAKARTA



CONCERN GROWS AS DELTA VARIANT RAVAGES INDONESIA'S JAVA

Concerns are mounting in Indonesia over the ability of its regions to cope with a spike in coronavirus cases, according to its health minister, as the highly transmissible Delta variant spreads quickly across the world's largest archipelago.

Indonesia is struggling to slow the pace of Covid-19 transmission and on Wednesday reported a record 54,000 infections, up more than ten-fold on the number of cases at the start of June, despite new containment measures.

The Delta variant first identified in India has been found in 11 areas outside of the densely populated Java island, Health Minister Budi Gunadi Sadikin said.

Taliban seize border crossing with Pakistan

KABUL: Taliban fighters in Afghanistan said on Wednesday they had taken control of one of the main border crossings with Pakistan, perhaps the most strategic objective they have captured so far in a rapid advance across the country as US forces pull out.

A Pakistani official said fighters had taken down the Afghan government flag from atop the Friendship Gate at the border crossing between the Pakistani town of Chaman and the Afghan town of Wesh.

The crossing, south of Afghanistan's main southern city Kandahar, is the landlocked country's second busiest entry point and the main link between its vast southwest and Pakistani ports. Afghan government data show it is used by 900 trucks a day.

The takeover forced Pakistan to seal parts of its border with Afghanistan after heavy fighting between Taliban and Afghan forces around Wesh.

Afghan officials said



People wave Taliban flags as they drive through the Pakistani border town of Chaman on Wednesday. — AFP

government forces had pushed back the Taliban fighters and were in control of the Spin Boldak border district in Kandahar province. But civilians and Pakistani officials said the Taliban

controlled the Wesh border posts.

"Wesh, which has great importance in Afghan trade with Pakistan and other countries, has been captured by the Taliban", said a Pakistani security official

deployed at the border area.

Officials in Chaman said the Taliban had suspended all travel through the gate.

"The mujahideen have captured an important border town called

The takeover, in a major advance, forced Pakistan to seal parts of its border with Afghanistan after heavy fighting between Taliban and Afghan forces around Wesh

Wesh", Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said in a statement.

The Taliban, fighting to expel foreign forces and defeat the US-backed government in Kabul since they were ousted in 2001, have in recent days seized other major border crossings, in Herat, Farah and Kunduz provinces in the north and west.

Control of border posts allows the Taliban to collect revenue, said Shafiqullah Attai, Chairman of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment in the capital, Kabul.

— Reuters

Pakistan bus blast kills 13, including nine Chinese

PESHAWAR: Rescuers pulled survivors on Wednesday from a ravine in northern Pakistan after an explosion sent their bus over the edge, killing 13 passengers, among them nine Chinese nationals and two Pakistani soldiers, sources said.

For several years, Chinese engineers and Pakistani construction workers have been working on hydroelectric projects as part of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative in the remote province of Khyber-Paktunkhwa, where the blast took place.

"The entire government machinery has been mobilised to rescue the injured by air ambulance", a senior government official said on condition of anonymity, adding that "heavy losses" resulted from the plunge into the ravine.

While Pakistan's foreign ministry blamed a mechanical failure for a "leakage of gas that caused a blast", China's foreign ministry decried the incident as a bomb attack that caused injuries and death to its nationals.

Nine Chinese were killed, the Embassy in Pakistan said in a statement.

In Beijing, a foreign ministry spokesman offered condolences,



Rescue workers and onlookers gather around a wreck after a bus plunged into a ravine following a bomb explosion, in Kohistan district of Khyber-Paktunkhwa province, on Wednesday. — AFP

urging the south Asian nation to thoroughly investigate the blast and protect the safety of Chinese personnel, institutions and projects.

A senior administrative officer of the Hazara region said the bus was carrying more than 30 Chinese engineers to the site of the Dasu dam in Upper Kohistan.

The Dasu hydroelectric project is part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a \$65 billion investment plan that aims to link western China to the southern Pakistani port of Gwadar.

The casualties, including the Chinese engineers, were taken to a hospital in Dasu, about 10 km

from the blast site.

"Police and the bomb disposal squad are at the site", regional official Arif Khan Yousufzai told reporters outside the hospital, adding that authorities were waiting for an investigation report to ascertain details.

Initially, it had not been clear if the blast was caused by a device beside the road or planted in the bus.

"Looks like sabotage", the province's top police official, Inspector General Moazzam Jah Ansari, had said earlier. Police were investigating the incident whose casualties included two soldiers and two locals, as well as the injured, he added. — Reuters

After 24-year search, Chinese man reunited with kidnapped son

BEIJING: A man has finally reunited with his abducted son after a 24-year hunt across China, handing out missing-person flyers, that burned through his savings and left him with massive debts.

Guo Gangtang, 51, began searching for his then 2-year-old son after he was kidnapped in 1997 from their home in a village in the eastern province of Shandong.

After initial efforts found no trace of his son, Guo refused to give up and began a decades-long search.

Guo travelled China on a motorcycle with a flag attached bearing his lost son's image and carrying a bag full of flyers.

Police in June tracked down a man fitting his son's description in central Henan province, the official Xinhua news agency reported. After a DNA test confirming the relationship, a family reunion with his son Guo Xinzhen, 26, now a teacher, was arranged on Sunday.

Guo's son was found after the Ministry of Public Security launched a nationwide campaign this January to solve cold cases involving child abduction. — Reuters



Guo Gangtang, 51, and his wife reunite with their son Guo Xinzhen.

— Reuters

3,000 confined to cruise ship after Covid case

SINGAPORE: A Genting Cruise Lines ship on a "cruise to nowhere" has returned to Singapore after a confirmed case of Covid-19 in a passenger, and the nearly 3,000 passengers and crew on board were confined to their cabins through most of Wednesday.

The 40-year-old passenger tested positive on board and the result was confirmed after the person was taken to hospital once the ship docked early on Wednesday, the Singapore Tourism Board said, following the detection of the suspected case.

"The passenger was identified

as a close contact of a confirmed case on land, and was immediately isolated as part of on board health protocols", the board said in a statement.

Passengers said they found out about the suspected case in an announcement at around 1am and had been asked to stay in their rooms since.

The global cruise industry has taken a major hit from the coronavirus pandemic, with some of the earliest big outbreaks occurring on cruise ships in Asian waters.

Singapore, which has seen



A cruise ship is docked at harbour after turning back due to positive Covid-19 case on board, in Singapore on Wednesday. — Reuters

relatively few domestic Covid-19 cases, launched "round trips" on luxury liners in November, with no port of call during a few days

of sailing.

The World Dream cruise liner had 1,646 passengers and 1,249 crew members on board and all of

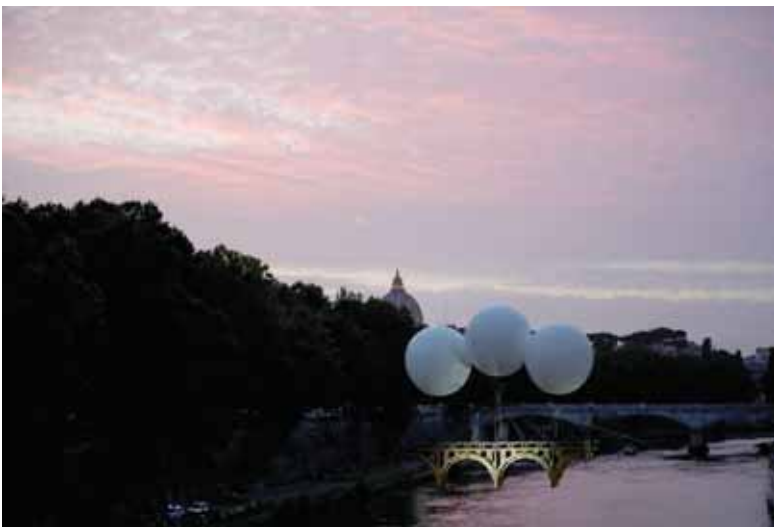
them were required to remain in their staterooms with contactless meals sent to them, according to Dream Cruises, a part of Genting Cruise Lines.

The guest suspected of having Covid-19 had tested negative in a mandatory, pre-departure antigen rapid test before the ship set sail for a three-night cruise on Sunday.

The infected passenger's three travelling companions tested negative and were isolated while further contact tracing was being done, the tourism board said.

— Reuters

■ MICHELANGELO’S DREAM COMES TRUE



ROME: An illuminated 18-metre long cardboard bridge suspended by three large white helium balloons is floating above Rome’s Tiber River, bringing to life a project imagined but never realised by Michelangelo. Pope Paul III commissioned the artist to create a bridge connecting the Palazzo Farnese, a 16th century family palace that now hosts the French Embassy to Italy, with the gardens of a villa on the other side of the river. It was never completed after Michelangelo’s death, but the “Farnese Bridge” installation by French artist Olivier Grossetete is a tribute to the Renaissance master. The installation will remain in place until July 18. The cardboard will then be recycled. – Reuters

Crowds rampage, hospital operations hit in South Africa

JOHANNESBURG: Crowds looted shops and offices in South Africa on Wednesday, defying government calls to end a week of violence that has killed more than 70 people and wrecked hundreds of businesses.

The unrest, the worst in South Africa for years, also disrupted hospitals struggling to cope with a third wave of Covid-19 and forced the closure of a refinery.

Protests triggered by the jailing of ex-president Jacob Zuma for failing to appear at a corruption inquiry last week have widened into looting and an outpouring of general anger over the hardship and inequality that persist 27 years after the end of apartheid.

Shopping malls and warehouses have been ransacked or set ablaze in several cities, mostly in Zuma’s home in KwaZulu-Natal province, and the financial and economic centre Johannesburg and surrounding Gauteng province.

Overnight it spread to two

other provinces — Mpumalanga, just east of Gauteng, and Northern Cape, police said.

A Reuters photographer saw several shops being looted in the town of Hammersdale, Kwazulu-Natal, on Wednesday. Local TV stations meanwhile showed more looting of shops in South Africa’s largest township Soweto, and in the Indian Ocean port city of Durban.

Soldiers have been sent onto the streets to help outnumbered police contain the unrest and order was being restored in some places on Wednesday, such as the northern Johannesburg township of Alexandra, local TV reported.

The National Hospital Network (NHN), representing 241 public hospitals already under strain from Africa’s worst Covid-19 epidemic, said it was running out of oxygen and drugs, most of which are imported through Durban, as well as food.

— Reuters



Looters take away few items left to grab in a vandalised mall in Vosloorus on Wednesday. – Reuters

European Union moots world’s first carbon border tax

BRUSSELS: The European Commission on Wednesday put forward plans for the world’s first “carbon border tax” on imports of carbon-intensive goods, including steel, cement, fertilisers and aluminium, as part of a programme to meet its new climate target.

The border levy should be phased in from 2026, the Commission said. The measure is designed to protect European industries from competitors abroad not subject to the same carbon levies.

A transitional phase from 2023-25 will see importers monitoring and reporting their emissions, a Commission document said.

Under the proposal, importers will be required to buy digital certificates representing the tonnage of carbon dioxide emissions embedded in their imported goods.

Importers may be able to claim a reduction in carbon border costs if the goods have already been subject to a carbon levy in their country of manufacture.

It is part of the of their most ambitious plan yet to tackle climate change, aiming to turn green goals into concrete action this decade, and in doing so lead the way for the world’s other big economies.

The European Commission, the EU executive body, set out



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen gestures as she presents the EU’s new climate policy proposals with Vice-President Frans Timmermans and EU Commissioners Kadri Simson, Paolo Gentiloni, Adina-Ioana Vălean, in Brussels on Wednesday. – Reuters

in painstaking detail how the bloc’s 27 countries can meet their collective goal to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by 55 per cent from 1990 levels by 2030 — a step towards “net zero” emissions by 2050.

This will mean raising the cost of emitting carbon for heating, transport and manufacturing, taxing high-carbon aviation fuel and shipping fuel that have not been taxed before. It will consign the internal combustion engine to history.

EU’s 27 countries to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by 55 per cent from 1990 levels by 2030 — a step towards “net zero” emissions by 2050

“We’re going to ask a lot of our citizens. We’re also going to ask a lot of our industries, but we do it for good cause,” EU climate policy

chief Frans Timmermans said.

“We do it to give humanity a fighting chance.”

The “Fit for 55” measures will require approval by member states and the European parliament, a process that could take two years.

They are also likely to face intense lobbying from some industrial sectors, from poorer European member states that want to protect their citizens from price rises, and from more polluting countries facing a costly transition.

— Reuters

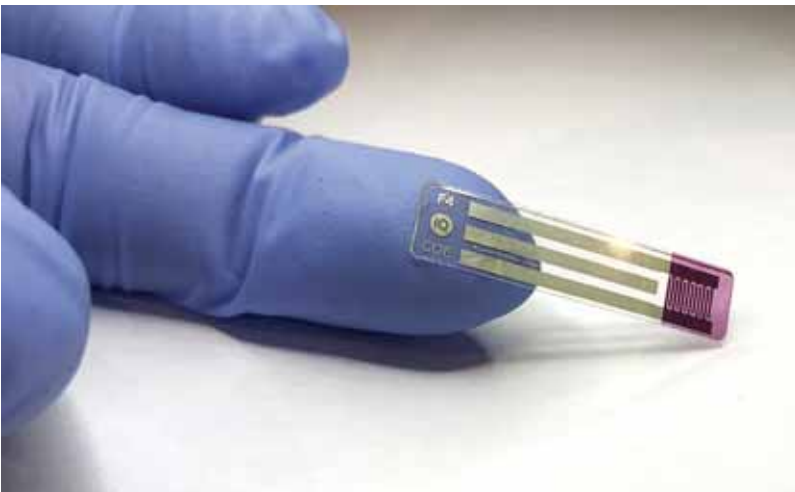
Pain-free blood sugar test for diabetics

SYDNEY: Australian scientists say they have developed the “holy grail” of blood sugar testing for diabetics, a non-invasive strip that checks glucose levels via saliva.

For diabetics, managing their blood sugar levels typically means pricking their fingers multiple times a day with a lancet and then placing a drop of blood on a testing strip. Understandably, some diabetes sufferers avoid the painful process by minimising their tests.

However, this latest test works by embedding an enzyme that detects glucose into a transistor that can then transmit the presence of glucose, according to Paul Dastoor, Professor of Physics at the University of Newcastle in Australia, who led the team that created it.

Since the electronic materials in the transistor are inks, the test can be made through printing at a low



A non-invasive, printable saliva test strip for diabetics is seen at the University of Newcastle in Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia. – Reuters

cost, Dastoor said.

“The holy grail of glucose testing has been something that is non-invasive,” said Dastoor.

“[This test] really does open up the prospect of pain-free, low-cost glucose testing and hopefully much better outcomes for diabetes sufferers,” he said.

The new test, Dastoor said, was created by chance as scientists were working on solar cells.

The project secured A\$6.3 million (\$4.7 million) in funding from the Australian government to establish a facility to produce the test kits should clinical trials be passed.

They could just place the strip on their tongue, wait a few minutes and then see the results on a smartphone app

Dastoor says the technology could also be transferred to Covid-19 testing and allergen, hormone and cancer testing.

The university is already working with Harvard University on a test for Covid-19 using same technology, but it’s the implications for other testing that has the physicist excited about the potential for the sensors.

“I think it’s going to radically change the way we think about medical devices and in particular sensors because we can print these at remarkably low cost,” said Dastoor. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

BRASILIA

Brazil’s Bolsonaro hospitalised

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro was hospitalised on Wednesday to identify the cause of chronic hiccups, the president’s office said, in the latest health scare for the far-right leader who was stabbed in the gut on the campaign trail in 2018.

Bolsonaro went to the military hospital in Brasilia and is expected to be under observation for between 24 and 48 hours, although not necessarily in hospital,



the statement said. “He is feeling good and doing well,” it said.

Local media outlet Globo reported that Bolsonaro had been admitted for unspecified medical testing after feeling abdominal pains during the early hours of Wednesday.

WASHINGTON

Four charged for plot to kidnap journo

US prosecutors have charged four Iranians, alleged to be intelligence operatives for Tehran, with plotting to kidnap a New York journalist and human rights activist who was critical of Iran, according to a Justice Department indictment unsealed on Tuesday.

In recent years, Iranian intelligence officers have tricked a number of overseas activists to travel to destinations where they were kidnapped and sent back to Iran, US authorities said.



While the indictment did not name the target of the plot, Reuters has confirmed she is Iranian-American journalist Masih Alinejad, who has contributed to the US government-funded Voice of America Persian language service and reports on human rights issues in Iran.

LONDON

Johnson vows to tackle online racist abuse

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson pledged on Wednesday to strengthen measures against online racist abuse of soccer players, banning fans from games if they are found guilty of such offences and fining social media for failing to remove it.

Johnson and his Interior Minister, Priti Patel, have come under fire for some of their earlier comments since three black soccer players were subjected to online racist abuse after England’s defeat in the final



of Euro 2020 on Sunday.

The prime minister, who again said he condemned the racist abuse of the players and defended Patel by saying she also faced such abuse, said his government was determined to tackle the issue, acknowledging that racism was a problem in Britain.

Garment workers hit by Covid-19 rights rollback

ANURADHA NAGARAJ

Sacked from his job at a Pakistani garment factory in the early days of the pandemic, Abdul Wasid was rehired three months later — for lower pay and longer hours. He now has to borrow money to make ends meet.

Wasid's experience reflects a rollback on labour rights in the global garment industry due to Covid-19 as fashion brands pile pressure on their suppliers and, in turn, on factory workers, according to two new reports by labour advocacy groups.

"I was desperate because I hadn't earned anything for months after being fired and agreed to everything they said. Now I'm depending on small loans to survive," Wasid, 35, said by video call from his Karachi home after finishing a 10-hour shift.

Under Wasid's new temporary contract, he could be fired again if he complains about one month's pay he said he is still owed from last year.

Labour rights campaigners have said millions of garment workers around the world are owed wages and severance pay due since the health crisis began.

"Wage theft is intrinsic to the business model of global fashion brands, and it has been exacerbated by the pandemic," said Anannya Bhattacharjee, international coordinator with Asia Floor Wage Alliance (AFWA), which represents garment workers.

In a report titled "Money Heist", which interviewed workers from 189 factories in six countries, the nonprofit accuses profitable global brands of "transferring the risks of business" to manufacturers.

The livelihoods of an estimated 60 million garment workers around the world were put at risk as brands failed to set up systems to support people working down their supply chains, fashion industry experts and campaigners said last year. At the height of the crisis, suppliers were left short of cash to pay workers as brands refused to pay for shipments that had already been delivered or cancelled orders for which factories had already purchased supplies, the AFWA report said.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation



Wage theft is intrinsic to the business model of global fashion brands, and it has been exacerbated by the pandemic

ANANNYA BHATTACHARJEE
Asia Floor Wage Alliance



FLOODED CITY IN GERMANY

An aerial view taken on Wednesday shows the flooded centre of the city of Hagen, western Germany, after heavy rains hit parts of the country, causing widespread flooding. — AFP

HM's Saudi visit to bring GCC prosperity



Ali Al Matani
alimatani2@gmail.com

THE VISIT HAS NOT ONLY CREATED GREAT INTEREST INTERNATIONALLY, BUT ALSO HELPED IN BOOSTING RELATIONSHIPS IN GCC

When His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik visited the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia many eyes turned towards the region. This was the first official visit of His Majesty the Sultan to any foreign country since he took over the leadership of the country a year and a half ago. This visit has massive regional and international importance as well as being highly significant for the bilateral ties between the two neighbouring countries. Any move which widens the horizons of bilateral relations and economic cooperation between the two countries draws interest from everywhere domestically and internationally. This is primarily because any such step directly serves the interests of the people of the two brotherly countries.

It should not surprise anyone that the meeting between the two leaders His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Salman of Saudi Arabia will bring lot of virtues for the entire region. The relations between the two countries are historic. Therefore, it is natural that when the two leaders met there is an ambition to bring more comfort and prosperity in the lives of the people of the friendly nations. Their plans will be reflected in more bilateral economic activities.

Recently, officials of the two countries

have been frequently shuffling between Muscat and Riyadh with files of economic cooperation. These visits were meant for finding wider horizons for partnerships between the two brotherly nations. The people of the two countries have always lived as neighbours and always looked for areas of mutual economic and trade interests. This was the idea which was reflected in the form of the agreements signed between the two countries. Such relations always set examples for countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council as well as strengthen the region. This shows how to settle disputes, if they appear, between any of the countries in the region and take pragmatic steps for coexistence and cooperation.

The visit has not only created great interest internationally, but also helped in boosting GCC relationships which have been stagnant for many years affecting normal life, economy and investments in the region.

There are indications that the meeting of the two leaders in the region will help in finding peace in the region. This will also block chances of any future conflicts in the region. The Sultanate of Oman has always worked for harmony in the region and called for exemplary peaceful

solutions to conflicts. This vision can also work in Yemen which has seen enough bloodshed and destruction.

When His Majesty the Sultan and Saudi King sat together for talks it was also meant that a new chapter of peace will begin in the region. This can be used for the economic cooperation and development of the region. Stability is the only way for sustainable development which can lead to prosperity in the region.

Of course, there are many major economic, health and geopolitical challenges before the countries in the region. The Sultanate and the Kingdom are two integral parts of the region and the steps they take together determine its future.

Lot of analysis was done and speculations made everywhere about the outcome of this highest level of meeting between the two countries, but it is the people of the region who will reap the fruits of this meeting. This is because both the Sultanate and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are on the course of expanding infrastructure projects which will help more bilateral economic and trade activities and investments. These are the relationships which determine the future of the region.

Health insurance sector poised to witness strong growth



Haider al Lawati
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

OMAN IS CARRYING OUT COMPREHENSIVE REFORMS TO HEALTH INSURANCE SYSTEM BY OBLIGATING PRIVATE SECTOR TO PROVIDE INSURANCE TO EMPLOYEES

The current pandemic has made people aware of the need to pay attention to their healthcare issues, and to conduct periodic examinations to unearth any diseases lurking below the surface.

Many of those who died during this pandemic had underlying ailments which has hastened their unfortunate demise when exposed to Covid-19. In contrast, those who paid attention to their health through periodic examinations with specialised doctors and consultants prevented similar outcomes.

Today, the issue of health assumes great priority in the policies of governments and stakeholders, ensuring that

people have access to regular healthcare on the basis of robust health insurance laws. Oman is one such country which pays attention to this issue and makes amendments to laws related to health insurance and the restructuring of the medical sector in general.

Recently, the Omani government issued a decision to amend the laws regulating insurance companies and Takaful insurance, so that this activity becomes independent, while also opening up new opportunities for businessmen and investors to engage in this field. Today, health insurance is considered one of the most prominent medical services in any society.

Oman is carrying out comprehensive reforms to this system by obligating private sector employers to provide health insurance coverage to their employees – citizens and expatriates and their dependents. Visitors are obliged to obtain health insurance as well when coming to the Sultanate. This step will help in developing health services and raise the quality of protection afforded to people from sudden exposure to diseases or ailments. It will also help attract more competencies, investments and modern technologies to this vital sector, so that Oman will become one of the best healthcare hubs in the Gulf region.

Development of the healthcare sector comes within Oman's vision to diversify sources of income and provide treatment opportunities for all through the formulation of effective health insurance systems. This will push them towards competitiveness in the region.

The new laws will stimulate the growth of jobs in the private sector too. Officials from the Capital Market Authority affirm that the recent amendments to health insurance sector regulations will stimulate stronger growth in this sector. The changes will result in the emergence of health insurance as an activity independent from other insurance activities

collectively referred to as general insurance. This will contribute to health insurance evolving into a thriving insurance industry on its own in Oman.

The health sector has been growing rapidly in the country through investments in private hospitals that have also contributed to the creation of large number of jobs for Omanis as well as foreign medical cadre. Insurance premiums have also witnessed a significant increase in the field of healthcare.

Officials expect the health insurance sector to attract local and international investments and will contribute to economic growth and provide high quality insurance and health services.

sport



IOC President Thomas Bach speaks to the media after meeting Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga at the prime minister's official residence in Tokyo. — AFP

Olympics chief vows to minimise virus risk to Japan



Members of the US swimming team arrive for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at Narita International Airport in Narita, Chiba prefecture. — AFP

TOKYO: Olympics chief Thomas Bach pledged on Wednesday “not to bring any risk” to Japan with the Games, seeking to reassure a sceptical public as virus cases surge just over a week before Tokyo 2020 begins.

Fans have been banned from Olympic events in the capital, which is under emergency restrictions to curb rising infection numbers that on Wednesday hit highs not seen since January.

As more athletes arrive in Japan and move into the Olympic Village, International Olympic Committee chief Bach promised a safe summer Games.

“We are making all our efforts and the Japanese people have all our commitment to contribute in the best way to fight this virus and not to bring any risk to the Japanese people,” Bach told reporters after meeting Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga.

Bach said “85 per cent of all the residents in the Olympic Village and almost 100 per cent of the IOC members and staff coming here to Tokyo arrive vaccinated.

“This is why I’d like to humbly ask the Japanese people to warmly welcome the athletes from all around the world who have overcome, like the Japanese people, so many challenges.”

Japan has seen a less severe Covid-19 outbreak than many other countries, with around 15,000 deaths overall, but experts warn another wave driven by more infectious variants could stretch medical facilities.

Around 20 per cent of the population are fully vaccinated, and Tokyo’s emergency measures, mainly limiting alcohol sales and restaurant opening hours, will be in place

throughout the Games.

On Wednesday there were 1,149 new cases recorded in Tokyo, the highest since January 22. In opinion polls, the Japanese public have consistently expressed apprehension about Tokyo 2020, which was postponed by a year due to the pandemic and will finally open on July 23.

Organisers announced the decision to ban spectators from all but a tiny number of Olympic events last week, following repeated warnings from experts about the risk of crowds gathering as infections rise.

DOUBTS ‘EVERY DAY’

In an exchange with major global press agencies later on Wednesday, Bach said his team had strived to maintain a confident stance after Tokyo 2020 was postponed in March last year.

“In these 15 months, we had doubts every day. This was a situation of high uncertainty,” he said.

“Quite honestly, it was way, way more complex than we thought it would be when we agreed on this postponement.”

But by projecting confidence and taking decisions seriously, the IOC kept other parties on side, from athletes to sports federations and local authorities, Bach said.

“Only because they all stayed on board, we can be here now, nine days before the opening of the Games.” The US softball team moved into the Olympic Village on Wednesday, local media said, the day after the compound opened without any of the welcome ceremonies or media opportunities often seen at the Games. — AFP



A large-scale reproduction of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games gold medal as part of the Olympic Agora event at Mitsui Tower in Tokyo. — AFP

85 per cent of all the residents in the Olympic Village and almost 100 per cent of the IOC members and staff coming here to Tokyo arrive vaccinated

THOMAS BACH
IOC president

2021
7/1 (THU) –
8/15 (SUN)



OLYMPIC
AGORA

In brief

■ DUBLIN



BALBIRNIE STARS IN LANDMARK IRELAND WIN OVER SA

Ireland captain Andy Balbirnie led from the front with a hundred as his side beat South Africa for the first time in a one-day international with a 43-run success at Malahide on Tuesday.

Balbirnie's 102, his seventh hundred at this level, was the centrepiece of Ireland's 290-5.

South Africa could only manage 247 all out in reply as the hosts took an unassailable 1-0 lead in a series reduced to two matches following Sunday's washout, although the Proteas can square the campaign by winning on Friday.

Ireland's victory also gave them 10 points in the World Cup Super League, which will qualify teams for the 2023 50-over showpiece in India.

■ SYDNEY



BIG BASH LEAGUE UNVEILS DEC 5 SEASON START

Australia's Big Bash Twenty20 League will begin on December 5 with a full home-and-away schedule, although officials on Wednesday said they were ready to be flexible given Covid-19 uncertainty.

The 11th season of the eight-franchise Twenty20 tournament will get under way when reigning champions Sydney Sixers take on the Melbourne Stars at the Sydney Cricket Ground, the first of 56 games over 46 days.

It will take in 14 venues and culminate with a finals series from January 21 ahead of the decider seven days later.

"Like all leagues globally, we remain conscious of the need to be agile in response to the challenges of the pandemic," said BBL chief Alistair Dobson.

■ DHAKA



MUSHFIQUR TO MISS REMAINDER OF ZIMBABWE SERIES

Wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim will leave Bangladesh's tour of Zimbabwe on Wednesday for family reasons, the national board said.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board said the 34-year-old would fly straight back to Dhaka and appealed for the media to "respect" his privacy.

Mushfiqur will miss Bangladesh's three one-day internationals against Zimbabwe on July 16, 18, and 20.

He had already been granted leave to miss the three Twenty20 internationals that follow the series.



England players celebrate with the trophy after winning the match. — Reuters

England complete Pakistan sweep

TON-UP VINCE TRUMPS AZAM CENTURY IN THIRD ODI

BIRMINGHAM, United Kingdom: James Vince hit a maiden one-day international century and Lewis Gregory made 77 as a new-look England beat Pakistan by three wickets at Edgbaston on Tuesday to complete a remarkable 3-0 series clean sweep.

Set a challenging 332 to win 50-over world champions England, without most of their first-choice players because of a pre-series Covid outbreak, were faltering at 165-5.

But a stand of 129 between Vince, who made 102, and Gregory turned the tide.

Pakistan paceman Haris Rauf removed both batsmen in quick succession on his way to 4-65.

But England, to the delight of most of a sun-drenched crowd of 19,500, won with two overs to spare when Brydon Carse, who had earlier taken five wickets, drove Shaheen Shah Afridi for four.

"It's pleasing to make a contribution, this time last

week I didn't expect to get this opportunity", said Vince, the player of the match. "I'm delighted."

Earlier, Pakistan captain Babar Azam returned to form with a superb ODI best 158 during the tourists' 331-9.

Together with Mohammad Rizwan (74) he shared a partnership of 179 — the highest for any Pakistan wicket against England in an ODI — after opener Imam-ul-Haq had made 56.

But from 292-2, Pakistan, significantly, lost seven wickets for 37 runs.

Fast bowler Carse checked Pakistan's progress with 5-61, his maiden five-wicket haul at this level. "The boys' efforts, not just today but throughout the series, the guys who have turned out, has been fantastic", said England stand-in captain Ben Stokes.

"It has been a tough week, but we've managed to pull through."

Meanwhile, a disappointed Azam said: "We started well but we were sloppy in the field.

SCOREBOARD

PAKISTAN	
Imam-ul-Haq b Parkinson	56
Fakhar Zaman c Crawley b Mahmood	6
Babar Azam c Malan b Carse	158
Mohammad Rizwan c Simpson b Carse ..	74
Sohaib Maqsood c Vince b Carse	8
Hasan Ali c Crawley b Carse	4
Faheem Ashraf b Mahmood	10
Shadab Khan c Simpson b Mahmood	0
Saud Shakeel not out	3
Shaheen Shah Afridi c Vince b Carse ..	0
Haris Rauf not out	0
Extras: (lb3, w9)	12
Total: (9 wkts, 50 overs)	331
Fall of wickets: 1-21, 2-113, 3-292, 4-305, 5-309, 6-324, 7-324, 8-328, 9-329	
Bowling: Mahmood 10-2-60-3, Gregory 7-0-42-0, Overton 10-0-64-0, Carse 10-0-61-5, Stokes 4-0-31-0, Parkinson 9-0-70-1	

ENGLAND	
P Salt c Zaman b Rauf	37
D Malan c Rizwan b Ali	0
Z Crawley b Rauf	39
J Vince c Azam b Rauf	102
B Stokes c Rizwan b Khan	32
J Simpson lbw Khan	3
L Gregory c Khan b Rauf	77
C Overton not out	18
B Carse not out	12
Extras: (lb5, w7)	12
Total: (7 wkts, 48 overs)	332
Fall of wickets: 1-19, 2-53, 3-104, 4-151, 5-165, 6-294, 7-303	
Bowling: Afridi 10-0-78-0, Ali 9-0-69-1, Rauf 9-0-65-4, Ashraf 6-0-34-0, Khan 10-0-61-2, Shakeel 4-0-20-0	

"We will learn from our

mistakes and hopefully not repeat them", he added ahead of a three-match T20 series against England.

Azam, the world's top-ranked ODI batsman, had been dismissed for nought and 19 by fast bowler Saqib Mahmood, the player of the series, as England enjoyed commanding nine-wicket and 52-run wins at Cardiff and Lord's respectively.

But he responded in style.

BOLD START

Despite being without their usual top order, England began their chase in bold fashion.

Phil Salt hit 16 off the first over of their reply courtesy of four fours off Afridi, whose 10 overs cost an expensive 78 runs, including a fine straight drive off the left-arm.

But Hasan Ali dismissed Dawid Malan for a duck for the second match in a row, with both teams unchanged from Lord's.

Salt's dashing 37 ended when Rauf struck first ball to have him caught at midwicket.

Pakistan should have dismissed

Stokes for just seven when he hoisted Shadab Khan straight to fine leg only for Ali to drop a routine catch and knock the ball on for four.

Stokes was reprieved again off leg-spinner Khan on 18 when a drive to long-on was dropped by Sohaib Maqsood and deflected over the rope for another four.

But an elated Khan got Stokes for 32, wicketkeeper Rizwan holding an edged sweep.

Hampshire captain Vince, so often an England nearly man, batted in stylish fashion and brought up a 91-ball hundred when he pulled Ali for four.

Gregory struck four fours and a six in his fifty. Earlier, Azam spent 14 balls on nought and went to fifty in a relatively sedate 72 balls.

But so long as he stayed in there was every chance he would increase his scoring rate, with a cut boundary off Mahmood taking him to a 104-ball hundred.

He was dropped on 126 when Carse failed to hold a tough chance at midwicket. — AFP

Equal points system for next World Test event

NEW DELHI: The International Cricket Council on Wednesday said the next World Test Championship will have a "simpler" equal points system to decide the finalists after the previous system came under criticism.

The second championship will kick off with a five-Test series between hosts England and India in August and September.

The ICC switched from the original system of total points to percentage of points won midway through the first championship which was severely disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic.

Each match will now earn 12 points for a win, four for a draw and six for a tie, the ICC said in a statement.

The top nine Test nations will play six series each, three home

and three away before March 31, 2023.

"We received feedback that the previous points system needed to be simplified", ICC Chief Executive Geoff Allardice said.

"The Cricket Committee took this into consideration when proposing a new, standardised points system for each match."

He added: "During the pandemic we had to change to ranking teams on the points table using the percentage of available points won by each team, since all series could not be completed."

Kane Williamson's New Zealand beat India in the first WTC final and both teams will be among the favourites again.

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson said: "It was obviously pretty special to win the inaugural ICC World Test Championship in



Southampton last month and it's exciting to now look ahead to the second edition.

"The WTC has certainly added more context and brought new meaning to Test cricket and it was awesome to see the interest that was generated around the final

against India."

"We know trying to defend the title will be a huge challenge, but our focus will be on making sure we prepare as well as we can for the tours ahead and trying to maintain our level of performance."

India captain Virat Kohli said: "We will regroup with new energy for the next cycle starting with our series against England, hoping to give our fans a lot to cheer about."

England captain Joe Root said: "We start our campaign in the second edition of the ICC World Test Championship against the finalists of last time, which is an interesting challenge straight away.

"India are a fine all-round side and it would be good to test them in our home conditions. "We narrowly missed out on qualifying for the final last time and are looking to do better this time.

"Test cricket is a format we all want to excel in and with points at stake for each match, everyone has to be at their best all the time."

— AFP

BROMELL CRUISES TO DIAMOND LEAGUE WIN

THOMPSON-HERAH ROMPS TO 200M TRIUMPH



Trayvon Bromell of the US on his way to win the men's 100m at the Gateshead Diamond League athletics. – Reuters

GATESHEAD, England: Trayvon Bromell underlined his position as the favourite for the Olympic Games 100 metres when he delivered a dominant gun to tape performance to win in 9.98 seconds at the final Diamond League meeting before Tokyo on Tuesday.

Bromell, the winner of the US trials and the fastest in the world this year with 9.77, will be seeking to reclaim the Olympic crown for the US after 13 years in the possession of Usain Bolt.

And, despite cool conditions in Gateshead on the northeast English coast, he looked in great shape to do so, getting out quickly, consolidating by halfway and cruising over the line by a distance from British duo CJ Ujah (10.10) and Zharnel Hughes (10.13).

Fellow Tokyo-bound American Fred Kerley, however, faded to fifth in 10.13 after a good start, while Canadian Andre de Grasse (fourth in 10.13), looked much sharper running the anchor leg in a 4x100 metre relay later in the evening, just failing to chase down Nethaneel Mitchell-Blake who brought home the British team in a world lead of 38.27 seconds.

The expected women's 200m showdown disappeared with the injury withdrawal of home favourite Dina Asher-Smith and instead, Olympic 200m and 100m champion Elaine Thompson-Herah did all she needed, though she looked a touch uncomfortable as she crossed the line in 22.43.

"It was great to come out here today and finish healthy and as preparation for the Olympics, I'm pretty pleased," said Thompson-Herah, who was well clear of Briton Jodie



Jamaica's Elaine Thompson-Herah (C) on her way to winning the women's 200m final. – AFP



Netherland's Femke Bol wins the women's 400m hurdles final. – AFP

Williams (22.60) and Nigerian Blessing Okagbare (22.61).

"I'll go home, train, re-set and stay healthy and focussed."

Olympic champion Omar McLeod, who failed to qualify for Tokyo after hitting a hurdle in the Jamaican trials, was hoping to prove a point in the 110m hurdles but could finish only second in 13.42 behind trials winner Ronald Levy (13.22), with Britain's indoor world champion Andrew Pozzi third. Briton Cindy Sember was an impressive winner of a tight 100m hurdles in 12.69, edging American Payton Chadwick (12.75) and heads to Tokyo as a real medal prospect.

"I'm so happy that the conditions held up and I'm just really happy to execute the performance today," she said. "I had an iffy British trial so I'm pleased to come back and show what I'm capable of doing and I'm happy with it."

BOL WINS 400M HURDLES

Dutch athlete Femke Bol won the women's 400m hurdles in 53.24sec.

The Gateshead event was without a host of stars but dozens of British athletes were competing before flying to Tokyo.

British heptathlete Katarina Johnson-Thompson pitted her wits in the long jump against Germany's world champion Malaika Mihambo but Ukraine's Maryna Bekh-Romanchuk emerged as the winner with a leap of 6.77 metres.

The heptathlon world champion ruptured the Achilles tendon in her jumping leg in December and has negotiated a gruelling path back to fitness since, though she believes she is fit for the Olympics.

— Agencies

business

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Investment opportunities abound in Oman’s annual \$500 million pharma market

Vast potential: Local production currently accounts for a meagre 8 per cent share of annual demand

CONRAD PRAHU
@conradprahu

Imports currently make up the vast bulk of the estimated \$500 million spent annually on pharmaceutical products and medical devices consumed in the Sultanate, underscoring the strong potential for investment in this key sector, according to officials of the Ministry of Health.

Taking part in an online webinar recently, Ahmed bin Abdullah al Khonji, Adviser for Development Affairs, and his colleague, Dr Mohammed, noted that local pharmaceutical production accounts for barely eight per cent by value of the Sultanate’s total annual demand. This leaves open a lucrative and diverse market for investment in a wide range of products, medical devices, consumables, expertise and services spanning this vital sector, they noted.

The comments came in a webinar on the theme, ‘Connecting Denmark to Oman’s Business Opportunities’, organised



The domestic pharmaceutical manufacturing industry is still in its infancy, but growing, according to the officials

by Business Gateways International, with the support of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. Topics covered during the online discussion included energy efficiency, renewable and alternative energy development, food security, and healthcare.

The domestic pharmaceutical manufacturing industry is still in its infancy, but growing, according to the officials. Of five companies in operation, three focus on finished products, while the other two have varying capabilities in raw materials and semi-finished goods production as well. But they are long way off from meeting Oman’s requirement of pharmaceutical goods and medical devices, which is growing at the rate of about 10 per cent annually, they said.

Significantly, the healthcare sector is currently almost entirely dependent on

imports when it comes to pharmaceuticals such as biosimilar injectables, oncology products, insulins and vaccines, as well as consumables like face masks, gloves, blood sample tubes, blood bags, and disposable syringes.

Likewise, all of Oman’s requirement of large and small volumes parenterals (IV fluids) is being sourced from abroad, although the country’s first-ever IV fluids production facility is currently under construction in Salalah. Equally promising are opportunities in bioequivalence testing facilities, which are currently lacking in the country and in the wider region as well.

Outside of pharmaceutical production and medical device manufacturing, investment opportunities also abound across the wider healthcare landscape of the Sultanate, according to the officials. These avenues span

building and construction projects, human resources development, and Artificial Intelligence use in healthcare management.

Notable are plans for the roll-out of renal dialysis services to be provided by the private sector on a public private partnership (PPP) basis. A consultancy study is currently looking at the financial, technical and legal aspects of the initiative before it is floated for competitive bidding, according to the officials.

Also due to be offered for implementation on a PPP basis is a drug rehabilitation centre similar to the one currently planned in Suhar with funding support from corporates.

Additionally, the Ministry foresees the potential for private investors to provide specialist services necessary to operate four 150-bed hospitals currently under development at different locations around the Sultanate. These opportunities relate to the provision of nursing services, medicine supply, rehabilitation, and so on.

Significantly, the private sector currently accounts for a 19.9 per cent share of total healthcare services market in the Sultanate — a figure that the government is eager to see significantly ramped up going forward.

Oman offers three hydrocarbon blocks for development

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 14

The 2021 Licensing Round of the Sultanate of Oman was unveiled by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals on Wednesday. On offer are three hydrocarbon concessions for Oil & Gas exploration and development. Bidding for Blocks 23, 38 and 66 will open effective from early August 2021, the Ministry said.

Block 23 is an offshore concession to the west of Masirah Oil Limited’s (MOL) Block 50 where the first petroleum system was unearthed off Oman’s east coast in 2014. Block 66, on the other hand, is located in the west on the Sultanate adjoining Oman’s border with Saudi Arabia. Block 38, the third of the three concessions offered as part of the latest bid round, is located in Dhofar Governorate, adjoining Oman’s border with Yemen.



Total bank deposits rise 4.2% to RO 25.1 billion: CBO

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 14

Total deposits held by conventional and Islamic banks in the Sultanate (collectively known as Other Depository Corporations or ODCs) registered a Y-o-Y growth of 4.2 per cent to reach RO 25.1 billion at the end of May 2021, according to the Central Bank of Oman. Total private sector deposits increased 7.4 per cent to RO 17.3 billion, it said.

The total outstanding credit extended by ODCs grew by 2.1 per cent to RO 27.1 billion at the end of May 2021, while credit to the private sector demonstrated moderate decline of 0.1 per



cent (Y-o-Y) to reach RO 23.1 billion, for the first time since the beginning of the year. The non-financial corporate sector receives the highest share of the total private sector credit, over 46.5 per cent, followed by household sector accounted for 45.3 per cent, by end-May 2021. The share of financial corporations was 4.8 per cent and other sectors received the remaining 3.4 per cent of the total private sector credit as at end- May 2021.

In terms of the sector-wise composition of private sector deposits, the biggest share goes to household deposits at 51.0 per cent, followed by non-financial corporations at 32.0 per cent, financial corporations at 14.6 per cent and the other sectors at 2.4 per cent.

The combined balance sheet of conventional banks showed a Y-o-Y growth of 0.4 per cent in total outstanding credit as of end- May 2021. Credit to the private sector declined by 1.9 to reach RO 18.8 billion while their overall investments in securities went up by 35 per cent to RO 4.7 billion at end- May 2021.

Investment in Government Development Bonds increased

by 18.7 per cent compared to the same period last year to RO 2.2 billion while their investments in foreign securities declined by 4.9 per cent to RO 0.83 billion at the end of May 2021. Aggregate deposits held with the conventional banks increased by 2.3 per cent Y-o-Y to RO 21.0 billion at end-May 2021.

Government deposits with conventional banks witnessed a decrease of 11.1 per cent at RO 4.3 billion, deposits of public enterprises went up by 1.6 per cent to RO 1.4 billion. Private sector deposits, which accounted for 70.4 per cent of total deposits with conventional banks, increased by 6.3 per cent as of May 2021 to reach RO 14.8 billion.



Ministry of Commerce and Industry
Al Dhahirah Branch

Tender

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry - Al Dhahirah Branch would like to announce the following public tender:

Tender No	Name of Tender	Tender document Fee (non refundable)	Offeror companies	Last date for tender purchase	Deadline for Tender submission
3 / 2021	Maintenance work In the OCCI- Al Dhahirah Branch	25/- R.O	specialized companies (Contracting, interior design & decoration works)	29/7 / 2021	12 PM 5/8 2021

Companies specialized in tenders can obtain documents of conditions and specifications through the branch building of the OCCI- Al Dhahirah Branch - Department of Administrative and Financial Affairs, during official working hours.

■ Tender Terms:

- The commercial register , oman chamber of commerce and industry affiliation certificate, the tax certificate and all required documents must be valid.
- Bids/offers shall be submitted in envelopes with red wax and titled on behalf- Head of Procurement Committee - Al Dhahirah Branch, and the tender number and subject is written on it and the name of the bidder / offeror or what refers to it shall not be written on the envelope.
- The bids should be accompanied with a temporary insurance in the form of a bank guarantee or a certificate check of (1%) of the bid value certified from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, valid from a period of (90) days from the last date of the submission the bid / offer and addressed to the OCCI- Al Dhahirah Branch. Note that any bid/offer that do not meet the required temporary insurance will not be considered.
- The bids/offers should be dropped in the Tender Box at OCCI- Al Dhahirah Branch.
- The OCCI- Al Dhahirah Branch is not bound to accept the lowest or any other bids. It has the right to accept or reject the bid without showing reasons.
- Interested companies should submit the Tenders before 12 PM on 5/8/2021.

For further details, you may call to: 25689674 or email to: Khadija.Musali@chamberoman.om



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Al Dhahirah Branch

Messenger apps popular route for phishing attacks

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 14

Anonymised data, voluntarily provided by Internet security provider Kaspersky for Android users, has shown which messenger apps are the most popular among phishing scammers.

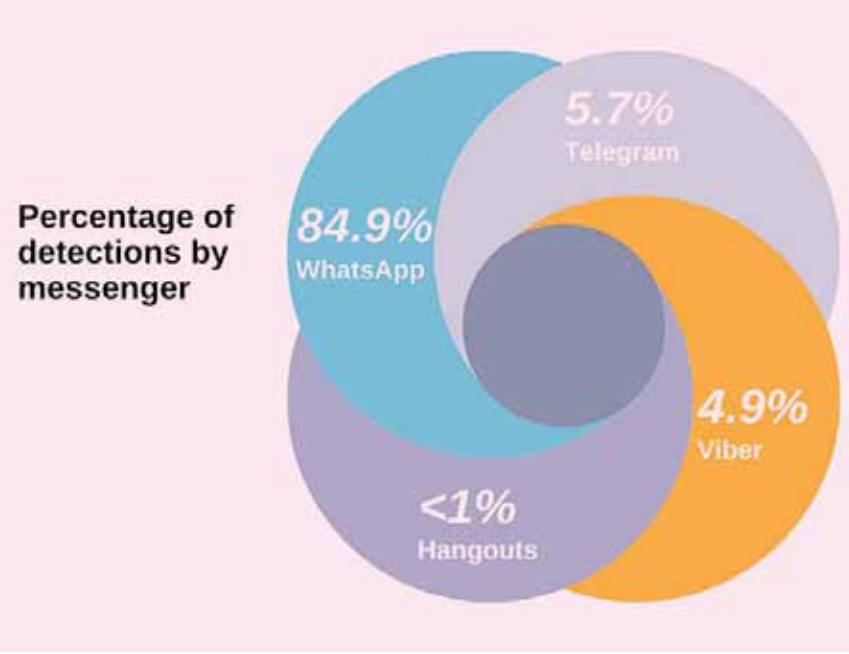
The biggest share of detected malicious links between December 2020 and May 2021 were sent via WhatsApp (84.9 per cent), followed by Telegram (5.7 per cent). Viber is in third place with a share of 4.9 per cent and Hangouts has less than one per cent.

Countries experiencing the highest number of phishing

attacks were Russia (46 per cent), Brazil (15 per cent) and India (7 per cent). Globally, 480 detections were recorded per day.

According to research, messenger apps outstripped social networks by 20 per cent in 2020, in terms of popularity among users, and became the most popular tool for communication. Survey results also show that in 2020, the global audience for messengers amounted to 2.7 billion people, and by 2023 it is expected to grow to 3.1 billion. That is almost 40 per cent of the world's population.

According to the statistics, the biggest number of malicious links was detected in WhatsApp, partly



due to the fact that it is the most popular messenger globally.

The biggest share of such messages was detected in Russia (42 per cent), Brazil (17 per cent) and India (7 per cent). Telegram had the least amount of detections, but was similar in geography to WhatsApp.

The biggest number of malicious links was detected in Russia (56 per cent), India (6 per cent) and Turkey (4 per cent). High figures in Russia are probably due to the increased level of popularity of this messenger in the country.

Based on statistics, Viber and Hangouts received a smaller number of recorded detections.

The key difference between them is regional representation.

The biggest number of detects in Viber was identified mostly in Russia with 89 per cent, and the CIS countries — Ukraine 5 per cent and Belarus 2 per cent, and the majority of Hangouts' detections were from the USA (39 per cent) and France (39 per cent).

In terms of the number of phishing attacks recorded per user on WhatsApp, Brazil (177) and India (158) led the way. At the same time, Russian users have become leaders in the number of detections on Viber (305) and Telegram (79) compared to other countries.

LuLu Exchange opens new branch at Salalah Grand Mall

SALALAH: LuLu Exchange – the Sultanate's leading payments provider, has opened its newest branch in the country at Salalah in the centrally located Salalah Grand Mall.

Offering superior, affordable and world-class cross-border remittances and currency exchange services, the branch was inaugurated by Shaik Mohammed bin Hamed bin Ali al Ghazali, Director, LuLu Exchange, in the presence of Adeeb Ahamed, Managing Director of LuLu

Financial Group and other senior management in a grand virtual opening ceremony. The new branch is the company's 37th in Oman and the sixth in the Dhofar region. It also marks the 236th Global Branch under LuLu Financial Group.

Adeeb Ahamed, Managing Director of LuLu Financial Group, congratulated the team for maintaining a positive growth rate in 2021 despite the many challenges, and said, "The new branch at Salalah Grand Mall reaffirms our commitment to the



economy.

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, Oman's standing as a hub of global business has increased in recent months, especially with several progressive regulations aiding the growth of the payments sector.

Through our new branch, we aspire to leverage the emerging possibilities to bridge the gap between our offerings and the people who trust in our services, in line with our vision to innovate value and inspire experiences."

Khedmah delivers community initiatives thru its CSR programme

MUSCAT: Aspiring to support local communities and strengthen collaboration with national entities, Oman Investment & Finance Co (Khedmah), continued to deliver various initiatives during 2021 under its corporate social responsibility programme. The initiatives were directed toward different vital segments of the society.

The company provided financial support to the Ministry of Social Development in order to purchase medical equipment and assistive devices for severely disabled in-house residence of Al-Aman Rehabilitation Centre affiliated with the Ministry. This initiative comes as part of OIFC's continued approach since last year aimed at enhancing its collaboration with the Ministry



and promote social initiatives.

Furthermore, Khedmah signed an agreement with Oman Charitable Organization to allocate an annual contribution from the company as per the requirements set by the organisation.

The objectives of this collaboration are to help a number of families affected by fires and support others in purchasing remote study supplies

for their children. The company additionally provided support to many charitable teams to distribute food supplies to some regions during the pandemic.

Khalid bin Kahoor al Balushi, Senior Director of Human Resources and Administration, and Chairman of the CSR Committee at OIFC said: "We at Khedmah pay great attention to nation development through delivering community initiatives. Seeking to implement the directives of the company's board of directors with regard to CSR, we place social responsibility among our priorities by conducting a plethora of effective programmes that target various segments of society. This is in collaboration with government authorities, charitable and local community institutions."

Kia's Black Edition Sportage now in Oman

MUSCAT: Black, bold, eye-catching and thrilling, Kia's exciting Sportage SUV now raises the bar on impressions and expectations with a Black Edition version now in Oman. Equipped with stunning black alloy wheels and overall black colour, the Sportage Black Edition underlines its stunning presence on every arrival and at any given opportunity.

According to a representative from Reliable International Automotive, "The Black Edition Sportage is what wishes are made of. Sporting a bold black shade and designed to elevate its style quotient, the Sportage will definitely appeal for the young customers as well as the young at heart. Interested enthusiasts who wish to get first hand experience of the Black Edition Sportage are



welcomed to visit their nearest Kia showroom."

The stylish and powerful Black Edition Kia Sportage makes a mark with its advanced features, fuel-efficient performance and inspiring technology. The Sportage features front and rear fog lamps and LED projection headlamps with LED daytime running lights, 17" black pack alloy wheels and Continental tyres that enhance the SUV's overall looks for a more modern appearance.

Tanweer vaccinates 70% of its employees

MUSCAT: In accordance with the national strategy for immunisation against Covid-19, the Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer) — a member of Nama Group — has vaccinated more than 70 per cent of its employees and is continuing its efforts to vaccinate the team fully.

Tanweer reflects its most profound appreciation of its staff's well-being by vaccinating its employees in all departments and committing to the importance of preserving the safety and health of its human resources as one of



the company's most valued assets.

The company's vaccination plan is also driven by the need to sustainably provide its services to its customers in the various regions of the Sultanate in which it operates. The intensive vaccination campaign comes as a continuation of Tanweer efforts, in coordination with Nama Holding, since the beginning of the pandemic and the spread of Covid-19, which included taking a set of preventive measures to limit the spread of this virus.

The committee in charge with setting and following up on

implementing these measures adopted several precautionary steps, the most important of which is awareness campaign for employees to notify them of all the measures that must be adhered to in the work environment.

Within the framework and directives by the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling the developments resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic and the Ministry of Health, Tanweer is working effortlessly to support the employees to ensure their safety by providing a healthy work environment.

National Finance wins 'Best SME Finance Solution 2021'



MUSCAT: National Finance, Oman's leading finance company, was recently recognised with the 'Best SME Finance Solution 2021' award by Capital Finance International.

The accolade came to recognise National Finance's sterling efforts in supporting the development of the local SME ecosystem and its tailor-made financial solutions for this category.

National Finance's easy, fast and flexible solutions dedicated for SMEs, reflects the company's belief in the significance of the SME sector and their role in the socio-economic development of the Sultanate.

Over the past three decades, National Finance has directed its recourses to meet clients' requirements and fulfil their aspirations.

The company's efforts come in line with the national priorities that aim to stimulate the economy, ultimately achieving the objectives of the Oman Vision 2040, seeking to create a diverse and sustainable roadmap for overall progress.

"We are proud of this accomplishment. This award serves as testimony to the company's endeavours toward uplifting this vital sector by supporting SMEs and encouraging Omanis to enter the field of entrepreneurship. National Finance will constantly strive to add value to local talents and support them in achieving their business goals," Robert Pancras, CEO at National Finance.



Oil prices slip as China's crude import drops



TOKYO: Oil prices fell on Wednesday on future demand concerns after data showed that China's first-half crude imports dropped, but were still holding near a one-week high amid concerns about supplies as the world recovers from the coronavirus pandemic.

Brent crude was down 8 cents, or 0.1 per cent, at \$76.41 a barrel by 0141 GMT, after gaining 1.8 per cent on Tuesday. West Texas Intermediate was off by 13 cents, or 0.2 per cent, at \$75.12 a barrel, having jumped 1.6 per cent in the previous session.

China's crude imports dropped by 3 per cent from January to June compared with a year earlier, the first such contraction since 2013, as import quota shortages, refinery maintenance and rising global prices curbed buying.

"Imports were scaled back as surging prices for crude oil have eroded refinery profit margins," Eurasia Group said in a note.

"If OPEC doesn't agree to raise supply soon, high oil prices will also likely lead to demand destruction in even more cost-sensitive emerging markets, especially India," Eurasia said.

The International Energy Agency said global withdrawals from storage in the third quarter were set to be the most in at least a decade, pointing to early June stock draws from the United States, Europe and Japan.

US stockpiles of oil and gasoline inventories fell last week, according to two market sources on Tuesday, citing American Petroleum Institute figures.

Crude inventories declined by 4.1 million barrels for the week ended July 9, the sources said, which would be their eighth straight weekly fall. — **Reuters**

British inflation tests BoE as it jumps to highest since 2018

LONDON: British inflation surged further above the Bank of England's target in June to strike 2.5 per cent, its highest since August 2018, increasing speculation that the BoE will have to consider sooner whether to ease off its huge stimulus programme.

Prices for food, fuel, second-hand cars, clothing and footwear rose as the economy bounced back from its lockdown slump, the Office for National Statistics said.

The jump was sharper than forecast by economists in a Reuters poll, who had mostly seen CPI edging up to 2.2 per cent from May's 2.1 per cent, and comes a day after US inflation hit its highest in 13 years at 5.4 per cent.

Sterling strengthened against the dollar and euro. Two-year British government bond yields, which are sensitive to short-term inflation and interest rates, touched a three-week high.

"The Bank (of England) will likely feel that the time is rapidly approaching to dial down the level of support they are providing to the economy," said Hugh Gimber, global market strategist at J P Morgan Asset Management.

Most central bankers think the global surge in inflation will be temporary and reflects supply-chain bottlenecks as Western economies emerge from the



Shoppers wearing face masks at a market in Cambridge, Britain. — **Reuters**

coronavirus pandemic.

BoE Deputy Governor Jon Cunliffe said the central bank would take a closer look at how persistent inflation was likely to be when it publishes forecasts next month, but that much of the increase was linked to the reopening of the economy.

"You have to see today's print in the context of what's happening in the UK and similar things are happening in other parts of the

world," he told CNBC.

The BoE revised up its forecast for inflation last month to predict a peak of over 3 per cent. Its outgoing chief economist, Andy Haldane, sees it nearer 4 per cent by the end of the year.

The BoE expects inflation to fall back towards its 2 per cent target over the next couple of years, as subdued pre-pandemic price trends and weak pay growth resume.

But Wednesday's data revive questions about the BoE's decision last November to commit to 100 billion pounds (\$138 billion) of new bond purchases throughout 2021. Haldane voted in May and June to stop the programme early.

Financial markets are now pricing in the first rise in BoE interest rates to 0.25 per cent from their current 0.1 per cent by August 2022. — **Reuters**

Lured by cheap lira, curb-free travel, tourists turn to Turkey

ISTANBUL: Arab visitors attracted by quarantine-free travel and a cheap lira are helping bolster a rebound for Turkey's tourism industry, as it struggles to plug the gap left by Britons, for whom the country remains off-limits.

Holidaying with his family in Istanbul, Jordanian Omar Zahra, 48, said flying there from Amman was a better choice than Gulf destinations, where a failed Covid-19 test would lead to quarantine, or ones in the European Union, which briefly banned travellers from Jordan.

"You don't have to go to Europe. It is a lot more expensive ... and they still have some restrictions," he said this week on a Bosphorus strait boat tour as nine Jordanians sipped Turkish coffee and snapped pictures of Ottoman-era palaces.

His sister Muna Abuzahra asked the tour guide whether they would sail near the Abud Efendi

Turkey's tourism sector accounts for up to 12 per cent of the economy and is a key source of foreign revenue to offset big trade imbalances.

Yalisi waterside villa, where the Turkish TV series "Noor" — one of the most popular in Arab countries — is filmed. "This is the best place to go for price, culture, nature, food and weather," Zahra added.

Turkey's tourism sector accounts for up to 12 per cent of the economy and is a key source of foreign revenue to offset big trade imbalances.

Last year it got hammered by fallout from the coronavirus. This year activity is forecast to return closer to pre-pandemic levels,



A tourist poses for a souvenir photo outside the historic Suleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul, Turkey. — **Reuters**

despite early-season cancellations after a surge in Covid-19 cases prompted a partial lockdown

in May. In the first week of July, airport passenger numbers were at their highest since the pandemic

struck, according to the State Airports Authority.

Flights from Russia, Turkey's

biggest source of holidaymakers, re-started last month and Germans, the second-biggest source, are also making reservations.

But the absence of Britons, for whom it remains a red list destination restricted for all but essential travel, in part meant Turkey's international air traffic was still down 52 per cent in June compared with June 2019.

Meanwhile, quarantine-free travel and a lira that has fallen more than 50 per cent versus the dollar in the last three years, has boosted demand from the Middle East, executives say.

"We see a huge demand and high-budget reservations from Jordan... For now, it seems to be our top market in the region," said Serdar Ali Abet, chairman of Karnak Travel, which mainly specialises in Gulf and Middle East markets. — **Reuters**

SHORT TAKES

MUMBAI

India's Zomato kicks off \$1.3 billion IPO

Food delivery giant Zomato on Wednesday launched its much-anticipated IPO to raise 93.75 billion rupees (\$1.3 billion), India's biggest this year and the first of a series of public listings by tech unicorns.

Zomato is one of the country's hottest tech start-ups and dominates India's booming app-based food-delivery space.

Fresh shares priced at between 72 and 76 rupees were issued as part of the initial public offering, which closes on Friday.



Ahead of the IPO, Zomato raised over 41.96 billion rupees (\$560 million) from 186 marquee institutional investors, including global investment funds like Blackrock, Fidelity, JPMorgan and Morgan Stanley. — **AFP**

NEW YORK

BlackRock profit beats Q2 estimates

BlackRock Inc, the world's largest asset manager, reported a better-than-expected quarterly profit as investors poured more money into the company's funds, boosting its assets under management to new highs.

BlackRock's assets under management jumped to a record \$9.49 trillion in Q2. Revenue from investment advisory and administration fees stood at \$3.62 billion, driven primarily by record levels of global dealmaking.



The US economy displayed signs of a recovery over the past quarter, helped by large government stimulus and steady vaccination programmes, while capital markets saw record levels of activity. — **Reuters**

TOKYO

BoJ to assess banks' anti-money laundering steps

The Bank of Japan (BoJ) plans to launch a sweeping investigation to see how well regional financial institutions' anti-money laundering measures are functioning.

The move comes as the global dirty money watchdog Financial Action Task Force will likely point out inadequate internal control systems at Japanese financial institutions in an assessment it will publish in August.

The Bank of Japan aims to learn if regional banks and



other local financial institutions are implementing sufficient steps against fraudulent money transfers and, if found to be inadequate, the BoJ will ask them to take corrective action.

— **Reuters**

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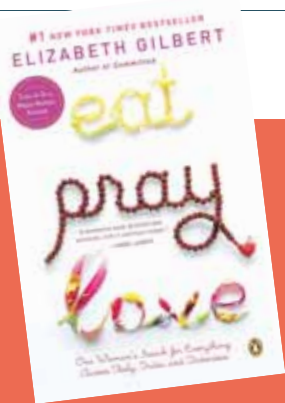
features



Thy Yard creates a new trend on food experience

Food influences culture in many forms; cultural practices and rituals, and family food traditions passed down within generations. However, these features distinguish us from other people within our society, as food can impact the way people eat and practice their traditions... **P20**

READ



EAT, PRAY, LOVE
BY ELIZABETH GILBERT

The memoir chronicles the author's trip around the world after her divorce and what she discovered during her travels.

Serbia's Exit Festival attracts over 40,000 visitors per night

SERBIA'S EXIT FESTIVAL, held in the northern city of Novi Sad over the weekend, has attracted tens of thousands of young people from all over Europe. According to the organisers, over 40,000 visitors per

night flocked to the Petrovaradin Fortress above the Danube, the atmospheric venue of the festival, which began on Thursday and ends on Sunday. The line-up included musi-

cians and DJs such as France's David Guetta, Nina Kraviz of Russia and Germany's Paul Kalkbrenner. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, visitors had to provide proof that they have been vaccinated against the pathogen, have recovered from Covid-19 or present a negative test result. Ticket holders were also offered free rapid antigen tests on Novi Sad's exhibition grounds. Exit draws world famous performers across musical genres and is one of the biggest and best-known music festivals in Eastern Europe. This year, the event celebrated its 20th anniversary. It initially launched as part of protests against the late Slobodan Milosevic's regime. — dpa



FESTIVAL



The scenic beauty of nature at Al Fazayih Beach

Al Fazayih is one of the tourist areas in the Governorate of Dhofar, adding more splendour to the beauty of the governorate. It has a beautiful nature and a diversity of terrain that attracts visitors. The coastal environment is rich in rocks and small islands scattered throughout the place, which form bays and mini-archipelagos.

Al Fazayih is located in the Wilayat of Rakhyout, west of the Wilayat of Salalah, approximately 20 km after Mughsayl Beach. It is a coastal area extending for 10 km and is frequented by fishermen during the fishing seasons and herds-men during the winter and khareef season; due to its mild weather and abundance of animal pastures, along with its sandy beaches, high mountains and scattered islands, which constitute a distinctive ecological and touristic character for the governorate.

The area is famous for the abundance of frankincense trees and the presence of many small islands scattered along the coast. The mountains overlook it from the north and is bordered by the Arabian Sea from the south, Mughsayl from the east, and Mount Ras Sager from the west. The visitor of the area is welcomed by the smells of frankincense and natural oud due to the green areas of frankincense trees that uniquely smell good, in addition to the agarwood plant, locally called "Qatir", which made the area the focus of attention and a destination for tourists and residents.



Its most important landmarks are "Gore, Defort", a salty water well due to the existence of the sulphur element and Khaisa, Salima, Al Sharqiah and Al Qablia. There is also another landmark, the fort, which ruins still remain until now. It is an ancient archaeological tower that was built nearly 450 years ago.

Among the landmarks is the "Merhat" and it has a natural port that was used in the past as a berth for ships and sailing boats. There is also a tower to monitor ships and boats and its traces still remain. There is also "Qarhafen" which got its name because of the presence of the bay or the breakwater in which sardines congregate. It is also attributed to the sound of oysters with the roar of the waves, along with the "Gishar", which in the past was a station for collecting frankincense and exporting it to various places across the sea.

"Sinkhat" is one of the distinctive places featured by its bright whiteness. There is a salt water spring in it in addition to the "Aham" spring, meaning the snake's eye.

LOCAL SCENE

Local Apple cider vinegar producer in Nizwa



APPLE CIDER VINEGAR is used as a medicinal product for thousands of years for the purpose of disinfection, food preservation and dental treatment. Mohammad al Hadidi is one of the producers of apple cider vinegar in the Wilayat of Nizwa, and he has been in the profession for four years.

"Apple cider vinegar goes through six stages until it becomes vinegar and in a specific period of time, starting from the collection and selection of apples, then storage, fermentation, squeezing, to the stage of marketing, sale and



use", Al Hadidi explained.

He added that the customary period is forty days, and there is no harm in extending it to forty-five to ensure that it is free of alcohol. manufacturing takes place in a certain time of the year in the season of apple harvesting. After the season ends, it will be economically costly.

He pointed out that these stages must meet all safety requirements, such as the hygiene and sterilisation of used utensils, and that the storage places are free of pollutants and lights exposure.

Al Hadidi explained that there are different types of natural vinegar, such as grape vinegar, apple vinegar, date vinegar, coconut vinegar and others. Its quality depends on the period of its storage, the method of its manufacture and preservation. Its colours vary according to the type. Grape vinegar is red, while dates and apple vinegar is brown. At the beginning of the squeezing, the colour starts at yellowish green until it begins to turn to a transparent brown. The colour becomes darker as the fermentation period extends.

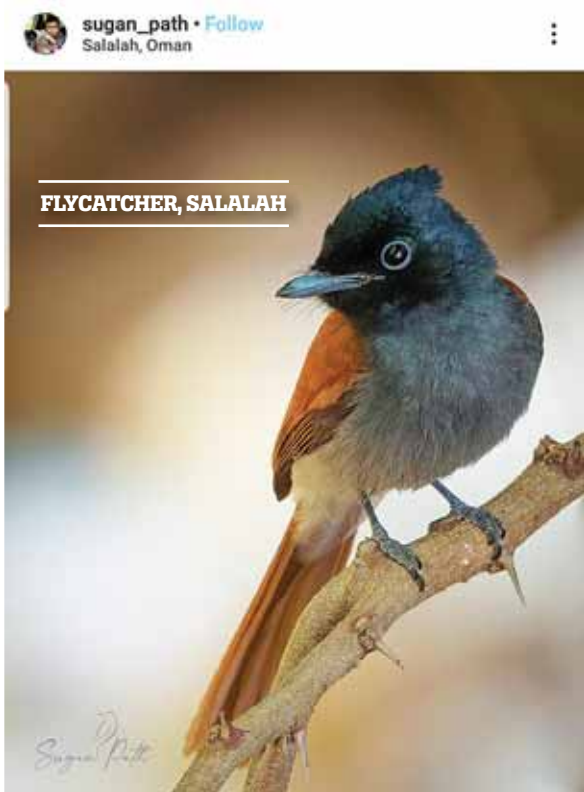
It is worth noting that apple cider vinegar has many health benefits that help overcome some diseases and reduce weight.





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EXPERIMENTS

Kyrgyz cricket farm hopes to tap Chinese insects market



WITH ONE EYE on the lucrative Chinese market just across the border, an entrepreneur has launched Kyrgyzstan's first cricket farm and is producing high-protein insect flour and fried cricket snacks.

Accompanied by loud chirping from his one tonne of crickets at the farm, Adyl Gaparov said his idea was inspired by online articles about

per kilogram.

"We are in talks with several companies that are looking to procure large quantities of powder — which we cannot produce at the moment — to make sports protein bars, for example, for athletes and for people trying to lose weight", he says.

Gaparov says that to thrive, crickets need above all a stable tem-



breeding crickets.

"Our main business is producing cricket flour with high protein content", Gaparov said. "Our flour contains no less than 70pc of protein and many micro and macro elements."

Gaparov has about one tonne (2,200 pounds) of live crickets at his farm, but he says serious business such as shipments to China starts with at least five-tonne cargoes. He is offering flour for sale at 7,000 soms (\$82)

perature above 30 degrees and minimal humidity.

"In this regard, Kyrgyzstan is ideally suited for cricket farming. We can open such farms literally in every province and export the produce", he says. "China consumes 30,000 tonnes of insects a year, but only produces 20,000 tonnes."

Despite the abundance of guides and manuals online, Gaparov says he had to learn through trial and error. — **Reuters**

Despite ancient cat connections, Cyprus is swamped with strays

Everyday at dawn, as Dinos Ayiomamitis' small truck slowly navigates the pathway of a cemetery, cats quietly emerge from among the surrounding tombstones.

"Here you go, Bourekka mou", he murmurs using a Cypriot term of endearment, as the animals circle his legs and wait for him to scoop food from the back of his pick-up for them to eat.

Ayiomamitis is one of a number of volunteers struggling to feed the thousands of stray cats on the

Mediterranean island.

"There has been no official count, but based on our own assessment it's equal to the number of people, at least", said Ayiomamitis, who feeds up to 200 cats daily at various locations around Cyprus' capital Nicosia.

"We are looking at a feral cat population approaching a million, that's a rough estimate", said Ayiomamitis, Chairman of the Cat PAWS society.

Cyprus' affiliation with cats goes back thousands of years. In 2004, French archaeologists reported



what was described at the time as the earliest historical record of cat domestication, in a 9,500-year-old burial site.

In 400 AD, Helen of Constantinople was said to have sent boatloads of cats to the island to hunt venomous snakes.

At a cat sanctuary 80 km (65 miles) from the capital, volunteers find abandoned cats and their kittens dumped outside the fence virtually everyday.

Malcolm's Cats, a sanctuary named after its founder Malcolm CP Stevenson, hosts around 200 cats. Here they are kept in a safe, clean environment with access to food and vets.

Around 100 are re-homed every year, but the number of arrivals easily outpaces

departures.

"A lot of unneutered, unsterilised cats, means a lot of kittens every year. People are constantly phoning us, dumping cats outside", said David Fender, Operations Manager and Chairman of the Malcolm Cat Protection Society.

In recent years the state has set aside 75,000 euros annually for cat sterilisations. This year's programme started on June 1, but with a ballooning cat population both Fender and Ayiomamitis called it a drop in the ocean.

"The numbers need to be controlled, and they need to be controlled in a humane way, in an organised way which is led by the government", said Fender.

— **Reuters**



Thy Yard creates a new trend on food experience



ANAN AL BALUSHI

Have you ever been madly in love with food and left with no words to describe? Has food made you travel back in time and reminiscence memories?

Well, delicious food ought to give you goosebumps: the smell, taste, and emotions involved create a memory in our brains. Therefore, when having our favourite meal over time, it causes a 'Deja Vu', (a French word means flashback).

Food influences culture in many forms; cultural practices and rituals, and family food traditions passed down within generations. However, these features distinguish us from other people within our society, as food can impact the way people eat and practice their traditions. Food sharing brings people together in many shapes and forms, celebrations, family and friend's gatherings, charities, etc. Besides, food is a crucial part of a culture, as it shapes social identity. Diversity of people leads to existing various types of foods. For instance: foreigners cooking their traditional food away from home is considered one way of preserving food culture. Also, it is a form of cultural appreciation where the main idea is to get closer to home.

Further, the food concept among generations is inconstant and is closely related to human development. Modern food has risen in the past decades, influencing consuming various food ranges both locally and globally.

Besides, the younger generation has shown a significant potential to change their eating habits. For instance, the urge to try new foods and beverages has become a trend nowadays, offering them a generous



amount of money in exchange. However, others believe that criticising food by providing reviews on their blogs attract more people to their circle as it seems more genuine to the public eye.

Wasan al Malki, the owner of 'Thy Yard', says that market demand has adapted to significant changes in Oman specifically in the F&B sector. Also, the comparison among the availability of food services now and then is inevitable. Adding to that, the call of diversity has

increased among youngsters as they are more out-going, always looking for somewhere new to take a chill pill and enjoy their time with friends.

The concept behind converting your dream business into a reality has come true. 'Thy Yard' offers you a magnificent experience where everything is right in your hands! The restaurants are placed into containers a-like and a diverse selection of tasty street food is offered. Adding to the menu range of tea, coffee alongside

with your dessert, and lastly an ice-cream perhaps. Most importantly, those individual restaurants are under one roof as Al Malki refers to them 'Thy Yard Family'.

'Thy Yard' is a family and kids-zone area, as well as youths. Many events have been created to entertain all audiences such as comedy shows, singing, young artists, winter fun activities, and drawing including graffiti on the walls as a way to teach youngsters to be confident and have the cour-

age to share their talents. Contribution to supporting local businesses is crucial to 'Thy Yard Family', and young singers and bands are allowed to express themselves freely having their own space with no charges. Supporting Small and Medium Enterprises (SME's) is very important. We know the struggle to start your business and the difficulties you go through. We try to have more family members joining us and helping them to stand on their feet without any charges especially those who have small businesses. As well as, allowing college students to display their artwork and any other talents such as photography skills. Charities take a part in thy yard family contribution. We make sure we have a free space for baking as a part of our contribution to help the needy.

"I was inspired by the idea when I was studying abroad, and the university campus had a restaurant based on a container where the main idea was to grab your food and go without causing people to wait long queues to be seated," she added. Smart businesses have been booming lately, such as fast delivery to get your products/ services to your customer's doorstep.

"Another point is preserving the quality of your product, this could succeed through direct communication between the customer and the business representative. However, business owners should always look at the big picture to help their business grow and improve by getting consonant customer feedback.

"We always look forward to hearing our customers and their needs, taking notes of the positive and negative feedback is important to help improve our business. Besides, to take a step forward into taking our customer service seriously we created a survey that allows our customers to feel free to let us know how they feel and what needs to be improved."