

University of Technology designed to keep pace with Vision 2040

The University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) values the Royal Decree No 47/2021, which promulgated the UTAS system of functioning. The establishment of the UTAS under Royal Decree No 76/2020 set the stage for the university to keep pace with Oman Vision 2040's goals of upgrading scientific research and innovation within the context of Fourth Industrial Revolution and associated techniques and enhancing scientific progress in the Sultanate. **DETAILS ON P3**



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DJOKOVIC READY TO BE FIRST AMONG EQUALS



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US CONSUMER SPENDING TAKES BREATH AMID SHORTAGES



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THE GROWING TREND OF OMANI MEN WORKING IN THE KITCHEN



MUSCAT

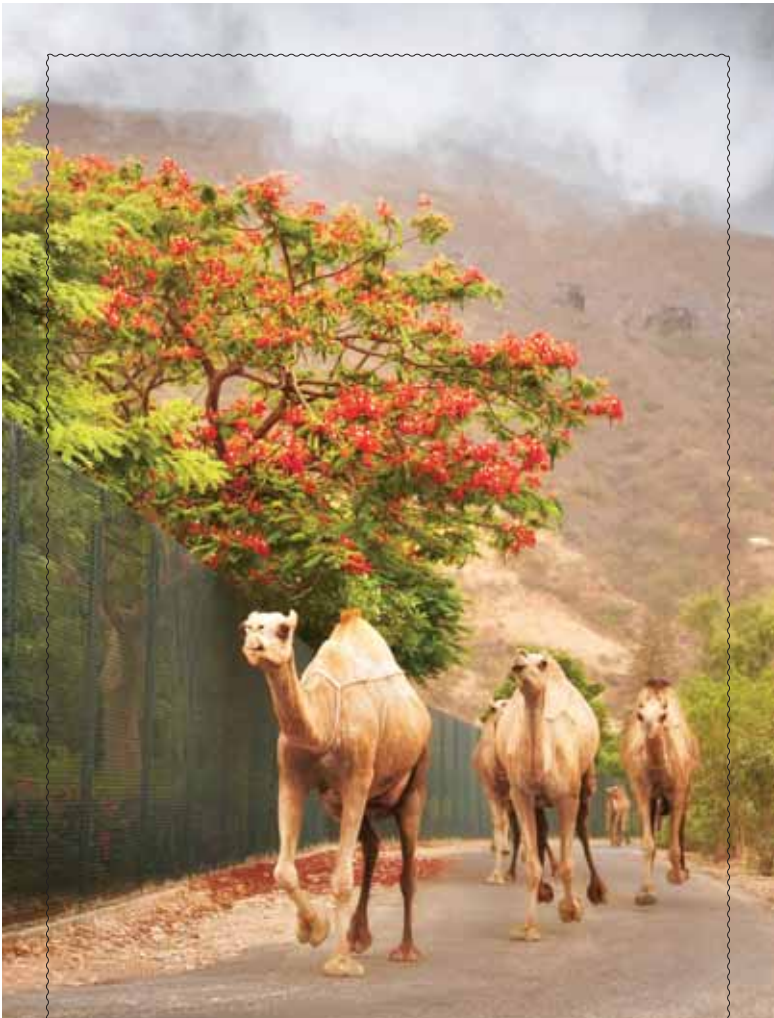
24 DIALYSIS CENTRES ARE SERVING SOCIETY

Dialysis centres provide one of main services offered by the Ministry of Health to the society. Currently as many as 24 dialysis centres operate in different governorates of the Sultanate, sparing patients the need to go abroad for treatment. One of the longest serving and largest dialysis centres is in the Wilayat of Bausher. Dr Yaqoub bin Ahmed al Maimani, Head of Bausher Dialysis Centre, said that the facility, opened in 1998, started operating with 28 beds serving 120 patients. By 2020, Bausher centre's capacity rose to 52 beds serving 350 patients round the clock, he added. **DETAILS ON P2**

SANAA

40 DEAD AS FIGHTING INTENSIFIES IN YEMEN

Fighting has intensified between Yemen's government forces and Ansar Allah fighters in the energy-rich province of Marib, leaving at least 40 fighters dead, a government military official said on Sunday. The fighters had initiated an offensive in February to capture Marib, the last area under the government's control in northern Yemen. Repeated international calls have since been made to stop military escalation and revive peace talks to end Yemen's war of more than six years. Fierce clashes had erupted between both sides in Marib from Saturday night until early Sunday, Lieutenant Colonel Abdel-Raqeab al Shadadi, a military government adviser, said. There were several attacks on the positions of pro-government forces in the area, he said. — dpa



BLOOMING TIME IN SALALAH

The monsoon (khareef) has just touched Salalah before the season, which as per the calendar, starts on June 21 and continues till the end of August. Salalah's greenery is a phenomenon associated with the advent of khareef and the pre-monsoon drizzles on the mountains have increased the greenery with trees in full bloom.

PHOTO BY DR SACHIN SINGH

RACE AGAINST TIME

SEARCH ON TO FIND MISSING IN FLORIDA

Searchers worked on Sunday to find more than 150 missing residents amid the rubble of a Florida apartment building that collapsed three days ago, as questions arose about the tower's structural integrity. The death toll was certain to rise as emergency workers in Surfside, a shore town near Miami, were joined by teams from Mexico. "Everybody that is needed is on the site and doing the work and we're continuing our efforts to find people alive", Miami-Dade County Mayor said. — dpa



5,517 NEW CASES, 119 DEATHS IN 3 DAYS

SPREAD OF NEW VARIANTS A MAJOR CONCERN

VINOD NAIR @vinot_nair

Even as the country nears one month of the mass vaccination campaign, the Sultanate reported over 100 deaths for the first time on a Sunday. It may be noted that Sunday's figure includes cases and deaths recorded on Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

The Ministry of Health reported 5,517 new cases and 119 deaths. Of these, 42 deaths were recorded on Thursday, 35 on Friday and 42 on Saturday.

However, the number of Covid-sick patients in the country has dropped from 29,617 on Friday to 29,094 on Sunday.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organization (WHO) has said that six countries in the region reported an increase in new cases last week, compared to a week before.

Around 214 patients were admitted to hospitals, bringing the total number of inpatients to 1,635, including 489 in intensive care units. The total number of cases registered in the Sultanate is 262,059, including 2,967 deaths. The total number of recoveries is 229,998, while the recovery rate is 87.8 per cent.

The case increase in Oman and Yemen exceeded 20 per cent, and Afghanistan, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen have reported more than 20 per cent increase in the number of deaths.

"There are several reasons for these increases, including the spread of variants of concern, lack of adherence to preventative measures, and vaccine inequity, which, along with vaccine hesitancy, is being witnessed globally and across our region", the WHO said.

The region still needs over 400 million doses to vaccinate priority groups — who make up 40 per cent of the region's population — by the end of the year.



The Ministry of Health on Sunday resumed drive-through vaccination service at the Oman Automobile Association for the age group of 45 years and above.

Vaccination could be must to enter offices

KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

Proof of having received the anti-Covid-19 vaccine would be the next criteria to enter government offices, public service premises and schools, according to the Minister of Health.

Oman started to vaccinate the target groups in December 2020 with people above 65 years of age, those suffering from chronic diseases and frontline workers and other groups.

Speaking at the last meeting of the Supreme Committee, Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, said lack of proof of having vaccinated

would disqualify people from entering the government office premises.

"A document showing vaccination will be made a criteria to enter any public office or government divisions and schools in future", he added.

The Sultanate will receive 3.2 million Covid-19 vaccines between July and September to cover the maximum number of citizens and residents. Oman has received more than 1,515,130 doses of vaccines so far.

As many as 1 million and 8,000 doses have been administered, covering 23 per cent of the target population.

TURN TO P5



INSIDE



VENTILATOR 'BANK' BOOSTS COVID-19 FIGHT IN NEPAL

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DELTA FORCES NEW LOCKDOWNS AS EUROPE EASES CURBS

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'UFO report' does not rule out extraterrestrial origin

CALIFORNIA: A US government report on UFOs said defence and intelligence analysts lack sufficient data to determine the nature of mysterious flying objects observed by American military pilots including whether they are advanced earthly technologies, atmospherics or of an extraterrestrial origin.

The unclassified nine-page report released to Congress and the public, encompasses 144 observations — mostly from US Navy personnel — of what the government officially calls

"unidentified aerial phenomenon", or UAP, dating back to 2004.

Labelled a preliminary assessment, it was compiled by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence in conjunction with a Navy-led task force created by the Pentagon last year.

"UAP clearly pose a safety of flight issue and may pose a challenge to US national security", the report stated, adding that the phenomena "probably lack a single explanation."

The report marked a turning point for the US government after



the military spent decades deflecting, debunking and discrediting observations of unidentified flying

objects and "flying saucers" dating back to the 1940s.

The report includes some UAP cases that previously came to light in the Pentagon's release of video from naval aviators showing enigmatic aircraft off the US East and West Coasts exhibiting speed and maneuverability exceeding known aviation technologies and lacking any visible means of propulsion or flight-control surfaces. All but one of the listed sightings — an instance attributed to a large, deflating balloon

— remain unexplained, subject to further analysis, the report said. For the other 143 cases, the report found that too little data exists to conclude whether they represent some exotic aerial system developed either by a US government or commercial entity, or by a foreign power.

In some observations, UAP appeared to exhibit "unusual patterns or flight characteristics", but those may stem from sensor glitches or witness misperceptions and "require analysis", the report said. — Reuters

A weekend of cheer for hotels in Salalah, as arrivals increase



KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

Vaccination drive is picking up in the Sultanate, so is arrivals in Salalah. The hoteliers in Salalah have confirmed that the weekend that passed brought them many guests, mainly from north of Oman that is reeling under the scorching heat.

Vaccination may be one factor for the people to decide for a Salalah trip. Having both the doses gives the receivers confidence to take a chance, but the main reason seems to be the closure of schools.

Both parents and children have a craving for going somewhere. That somewhere is no better than Salalah in the current circumstances. It depends only if the situation permits and the authorities have confidence that any decision to keep Salalah open would not adversely affect



the pandemic's epidemiological situation.

"Among the visitors last weekend were mostly from Oman. Some UAE number-plated vehicles were spotted, but they mostly were business purpose visitors, as leisure visitors from GCC have not yet started venturing out for Salalah," said Khalid, reception manager in of the hotels in Salalah.

Apparently, the sudden rise in the number of cars on Salalah roads

gives everyone an impression that the tourists have started arriving.

The good thing about the outside visitors is that they are taking all possible care for pandemic protocols.

They in fact, are calling upon the people in Salalah to go fully for the National Immunisation Programme against Covid-19 so that the destination gives the tourists comfort of safety and authorities get some level of

confidence about the control of the virus spread, which is in a very crucial stage now.

Of course, no one will ignore mass health for the sake of some days of tourism. "So everyone is keeping his fingers crossed and waiting for a wise decision from the authorities," said Ahmed, staff in a Taqah-based hotel.

"Another factor behind the last week's rush, maybe the people's apprehension about the opening of tourism in coming days due to increasing number of Covid-19 cases and admissions in hospital ICUs," said a tourism facility operator who has not yet sure about the opening of his venture this season.

He agreed with people's desire to go out for a vacation to beat the monotony, more than the heat, but gave a word of caution, "Safety first. Venture out only when you are safe."



Strategic exercise 'Decision Making-8' begins

MUSCAT: Activities of the annual strategic exercise "Decision Making- 8" began at the National Defence College (NDC) on Sunday.

The exercise is carried out by the NDC eighth batch from the various military, security and civil units.

The 5-day exercise aims to enhance the joint cooperation and integration among the participating units. It also targets the actual practice of strategic planning tools at the national level, as well as managing events, and exceptional and emergency cases from a strategic perspective.



It is worth noting that the exercise is being conducted with full adherence to the precautionary and preventive measures set by the Covid-19 Supreme Committee. — ONA



127 archaeological sites on Masirah Island



MUSCAT: More than 127 archaeological sites have been discovered on Masirah Island so far. These sites include monuments dating back to the prehistoric period, the bronze age, the iron age, the Islamic age and the middle ages, according to Hamad bin Mohammed al Ghailani, Historical Researcher.

According to the researcher, the human bones that were unearthed in Masirah Island dated between 4,700 BC and 3,826 BC are the oldest bones found in Oman and the Arabian Peninsula. — ONA

81 ancient quarantines found

MUSCAT: Eighty-one quarantines have so far been documented across the Sultanate by the Ministry of Tourism and Heritage represented by the Directorate-General of Antiquities

The presence of these primitive quarantines — mostly caves and wadis — proves that the early Omanis were aware about the significance of health quarantines to protect the community against infectious diseases and pandemics such as plague and smallpox and other diseases.



24 fully equipped dialysis centres provide services

OVER 2,500 PATIENTS WITH CHRONIC KIDNEY FAILURE DISEASES RECEIVE MEDICAL ATTENTION

MUSCAT: Dialysis centres provide one of main services offered by the Ministry of Health to society.

Currently as many as 24 dialysis centres operate in different governorates of the Sultanate, sparing patients the need to go abroad for treatment.

One of the longest serving and largest dialysis centres is the one in the Wilayat of Bausher.

Dr Yaqoub bin Ahmed al Maimani, Head of Bausher Dialysis Centre, said that the facility, opened



in 1998, started operating with 28 beds serving 120 patients. By 2020, Bausher centre's capacity rose to 52 beds serving 350 patients round the clock, he added.

Al Maimani pointed out that 2,500 patients suffer kidney failure in the Sultanate, with more than 600 of them in Muscat Governorate and receive medical attention in the

governorates. In Muscat, kidney failure patients get treatment in Bausher and Al Seeb, in addition to a dialysis unit attached to Qurayat Hospital. The three facilities in

Muscat have a total of 95 dialysis beds, Al Maimani added. He said the Ministry of Health tries its best to offer treatment to patients in their respective wilayats, and,

accordingly, increased the number of centres (to 24 having a total of 373 beds), while the facilities in general serve all the 2,500 kidney failure patients. — ONA



Majlis office discusses Omanisation of top positions in finance sector

MUSCAT: The Office of Majlis Ashshura approved a number of monitoring tools which included expressed desires regarding the nationalisation of the upper leadership jobs in the banking and financing sector, the challenges facing the fishing sector, enhancing and diversifying the sources of sustainable financing for the public and the private media.

The Office of Majlis Ashshura held its 21st ordinary meeting of the second annual sitting of the ninth term (2019-2023), under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Majlis Ashshura Chairman.

The Office approved a request for briefing presented to the minister of finance regarding the public debt and another request for briefing to the chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) related to the implementation phases of the medical city.

Besides, the Office looked into a number of expressed desires presented by Council members regarding several issues including the conditions of eligibility for electricity and water subsidy in the National Subsidy System, the coverage of agricultural and fisheries activities by the electricity and water subsidy, determining the Omanisation rate in the economic diversification sectors



in accordance to the directives of the 10th Five-year Development Plan. The Office decided to refer them all to the Economic and Financial Committee for study.

The Office approved a number of questions presented by members of Majlis Ashshura including a question to the Minister of Education about the ministry's development projects in the 10th Five-Year Development Plan in addition to the question to same minister regarding the inclusion of the Palestinian cause in the national curricula.

The Office approved a parliamentary question to

the Minister of Housing and Urban Planning regarding the maintenance of the residential units as part of the housing assistance programme. Also, the Office approved a question to the Minister of Labour about the employment of 38,000 foreign employees with bachelor's degrees in a single year. The Office approved a request for briefing presented to the chairman of the Consumer Protection Authority about the increase in the prices of construction materials in the local market.

The Office of Majlis Ashshura reviewed a number of reports of the

standing committees including a report from the Legislative and Legal Committee on the amendment of the Civil Status Law, and the Youth and Human Resources Committee's report about the nationalisation of the top leadership positions in the banking and financing sector.

In addition, the Office viewed a set of reports presented by the Economic and Financial Committee including a report about creating a modern method (a database) for collecting the due amounts from land usufruct contracts and reducing taxes on the innovation-supporting companies.

UTAS designed to keep pace with Vision 2040 goals

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The Royal speech of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in February 2020 reaffirmed determination to accord attention to the quality

of education and make it one of the Sultanate's priorities over the forthcoming stage of development.

This was stated in the Royal Speech on February 23, 2020 as follows: "On top of our national priorities is the education sector, with all its types and levels. It will receive full attention, and it will be provided with a supporting environment which motivates research and innovation. We will also provide it with all means of empowerment, since it is the base upon which our children will be able to participate in meeting the requirements of the coming phase of development."

— ONA



CONDOLENCE

The Management and employees **Seeh AL Sarya Engineering** extend their heartfelt condolences to

Mohammed bin Said bin Rashid AL Darai

Nasir bin Said bin Rashid AL Darai

Saud bin Said bin Rashid AL Darai

Saif bin Said bin Rashid AL Darai

Khalid bin Said bin Rashid AL Darai

Ahmed bin Said bin Rashid AL Darai

Mahmood bin Said bin Rashid AL Darai

Sulaiman bin Said bin Rashid AL Darai

And entire family members on the sad demise of

Said bin Rashid bin Ali AL Darai

The Father of – SAS Board of Directors who passed away on Sunday 27th June, 2021.

May God rest his soul in eternal peace and give his family members the strength to bear this loss.

"We belong to Allah and to Him we shall return"



Make your own low cost garden

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

[@zainabalnasseri](#)

It may seem not easy to think of a home garden because that needs a gardener and expensive materials. In fact, if you make your garden, it does not cost much, and you can do it at a minimal cost.

The thing you need is to dig out your buried skills. Then, one can make a miniature garden to decorate the corners and entrances of the house. All one needs is some flower seeds and fertilisers. Simple materials can turn into beautiful decorations.

Have you ever thought of turning your old rubber shoes into pots for flowers?

So, first, plant flowers in your home garden, focus on growing your family's favourite fruits and vegetables and stay away

from the varieties they don't like to eat.

Second, make sure about the type of crops suitable for the area you live in, taking into account the temperature and the type of soil available.

The start of planting depends on seasons, as some plants such as turnips and lilies tolerate cold, so you can plant them in fall or late winter.

Tomatoes, peppers, okra, cucumbers and most types of annual flowers prefer warm temperature, so you can start planting them only after the end of winter days. As for perennial plants, it is recommended to plant them in late summer.

Many garden designs may be an inspiration, like Country Garden. The formal English-style garden is filled with exotic plants, besides the

CREATING
A GARDEN IN
YOUR HOME
HELPS PURIFY
THE AIR AND
GIVES YOU A
SENSE OF
RELAXATION

modern Australian Country Garden rich in native and ornamental plants.

Moreover, Country Yard Garden is inspired by

Moroccan homes and is ideal for spending the most beautiful summer times. Formal Gardens, however, are based on classic plants and water additions.

Herbs Garden can be created in the outside yard of the house in special basins, yet; it can also be designed indoors in a small pot in the kitchen near the window. In addition, there is a Japanese Inspired Garden which usually includes large stones, bridges, ponds and bamboo.

After selecting types of plants, time, place and designs, you can now decorate your home garden at a small financial cost, using the things you do not need anymore.

For example, you can use old chairs as a place to put small plant pots. You can also use the old cart to give the

garden an antique look, put a ladder with flowerbeds, or use a wooden staircase as a basin for growing plants or small flowers.

It would also be nice to put the flowers in a metal bucket, hang it on the wall, or use old teacups to plant small flowers. If you have a small bike that doesn't work, you can install the bike next to a group of flowers and roses, which gives the garden a distinctly classic feel.

Whatever the size of your house or apartment, you can establish a beautiful home garden in your home. All you need is ideas and good planning. Creating a garden in your home helps purify the air and gives you a sense of relaxation, helps you face frustration and gives you a great sense of accomplishment.



Sultanate participates in GCC trade cooperation meeting

MUSCAT: The 60th meeting of the Trade Cooperation Committee of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), was held via video conference, on Sunday.

The meeting was attended by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry and a number of officials from the foreign ministry, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority and the Consumer Protection Authority.

A number of topics were discussed at the meeting including the GCC Patent Executive Regulations and the purviews of the GCC Patents Committee, the

flow of intra trade between the GCC countries, the standardised commercial laws which include the draft GCC Competition Law, the Executive Regulations of the GCC Consumer Protection Law in addition to other topics pertaining to business entrepreneurs, the knowledge economy of the small and medium enterprises in the GCC countries and the Secretariat-General's vision for enhancing the joint GCC action for the post-Covid-19 period.

The meeting approved the Executive Regulations of the GCC Patent Law and the purviews of the GCC Patent Committee. It also ratified the vision for supporting business entrepreneurs and the knowledge economy of the small and medium enterprises in the GCC countries.

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 27

The Directorate General of Quality Assurance Centre (DGQAC), represented by the Accreditation and Standards Development Department, recently organised a workshop on 'Accreditation of health institutions and diagnostic medical laboratories via video conference in cooperation with the Gulf Accreditation Council.

Ahmed al Mutairi, Director General of GCC Accreditation Centre (GAC), inaugurated the workshop and touched upon the importance of accreditation of health institutions locally and internationally, as well as obtaining the diagnostic medical laboratories for the ISO 15189 in line with its basic and effective role to provide high quality and safety health services.

Dr Qamra al Sariri, Director General of Quality Assurance Centre, gave a visual presentation on setting up the Omani accreditation system project and the next phases that will be implemented in this project.

Al Sariri explained the importance of the workshop for the health workers in general and the health workers in the national diagnostic medical laboratories,



in particular, to provide them with the required knowledge in applying the approved standards in health institutions and the medical laboratories to ensure providing quality and safe health care.

In addition, the workshop addressed some topics, starting with introducing the ISO 15189 system for diagnostic medical

laboratories.

The workshop concluded with questions to the lecturers about implementing the Omani national accreditation system for health institutions, unifying the Gulf standards for health institutions in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

The workshop was attended by approximately 100 health workers

from various governmental and private health institutions in the Sultanate and GCC countries.

At the conclusion of the workshop, Director General of Quality Assurance Centre thanked Ahmed al Mutairi, GAC Director General, the employees of the centre, the speakers for their valuable lectures and the organisers of the workshop.

■ RAIN IN PARTS OF OMAN



Rainfall of varying intensity accompanied by active winds and hail have been reported in wilayats located on the Al Hajar Mountains and the neighbouring wilayats on Sunday.

Vaccination could be must to enter offices

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The drive-thru service, which was stopped temporarily, will be resumed this week, and a new service for vaccinating persons with special needs at their respective residences, will be announced later.

GET THEIR JAB

All pregnant women have been urged to get vaccines against the coronavirus, and they are given priority at all vaccination centres. This is in the wake of many pregnant women found in intensive care units, and there could be a danger to them and the

fetus.

"We call on them to go to the vaccination centres and get vaccinated to protect themselves and their families," the minister said.

Accordingly, all pregnant women after completing 14 weeks or more can get vaccinated at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), and Sahil Health Centre in Qurayat provided they are not vaccinated in the last 14 days, and they should bring their green card. This is applicable to both Omanis and non-Omanis, the ministry representative has said.

Online chess tournament held in Nizwa

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 27

The Zubair Chess Centre in the Wilayat of Nizwa hosted the first virtual tournament for participants under 16 years old last week. It was organised in cooperation with the Oman Chess Committee, with the aim to enable competition among the affiliates of the participating Zubair Chess Centres. The tournament saw 47 participants with the competition being conducted through Lichess, an online platform with a digital board dedicated to the game.

The tournament was held as per the Swiss system of chess, with 9 rounds, a thinking time of 5 minutes and an addition of 5 seconds for each move. The tournament was run by a group of renowned judges, Muslim al Wadhahi, Bashir al Qadimi and Hamdan al Hinai. The results saw Hamoud al Busaidy from the Zubair Chess Centre from the Al



Dakhiliyah Governorate winning first place, Abdulrahman al Zadjali from the Muscat Governorate placing second and Asail al

Maamari of North Al Batinah Governorate in the third place.

This tournament stems from the framework of The



Zubair Corporation's adoption of the activities of the Oman Chess Committee, to enhance competition among the members

of the various Zubair Chess Centres.

Commenting on holding this virtual tournament, Hilal al Siyabi, Chief Corporate Services Officer at the Zubair Corporation, stated, "The organisation of this first virtual tournament is part of our continuous endeavour to support the continuity of sports activities, especially in light of the current health conditions that have imposed great challenges in this field. Therefore, the idea arose of organising a virtual tournament among the members of the ten Zubair Chess Centres through an online platform. This helps maintain the momentum that was achieved during the last four years, following the start of the joint cooperation between The Zubair Corporation and the Oman Chess Committee in 2017."

Ahmed bin Darwish al Balushi, Chairman of the Oman Chess Committee, said, "The Oman Chess

Committee seeks to encourage this game among the junior segments to establish a broad ground for this sport in the Omani society. In this way, the game can be developed and they can compete regionally and internationally during the upcoming period.

In light of the recent health conditions, the pace of activities has decreased especially due to the adherence to the decisions issued by the relevant authorities. Hence, the idea of organising these tournaments via online platforms helps keep it going and encourages players to continue and develop their skills while ensuring their safety."

The Zubair Chess Centres are spread in various governorates of the Sultanate. Currently, there are 10 centres located in the governorates of Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, North and South Al Batinah, Muscat, Musandam, South Al Sharqiyah, Dhofar, Al Buraimi and Al Wusta.

Sudan peace talks stumble over division of powers

JUBA: Peace talks between the transitional government of Sudan and a rebel group in the south of the country have stumbled over the delegation of powers from Khartoum, the group said last week.

Talks in Juba, South Sudan, between the government and the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Sudan-North (SPLM-North) were adjourned in mid-June due to disagreements that were not specified at the time.

SPLM-North chief negotiator Amar Amon said that while many topics related to the economy, security and politics were resolved, crucial issues like the delegation of powers between the central government and the regions were not.

“Resolving these issues is part of addressing the root causes of the Sudanese problems,” Amon said in an interview on Friday evening.

The SPLM-North, established in the states of Kordofan-South and Blue Nile, is pushing for a decentralised political system.

The powers wielded by the central government in Khartoum are the cause of the conflicts that have afflicted the country for more than 60 years, Amon said.

These conflicts included the



The peace talks began in South Sudan and aim to put an end to conflicts in Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan, where rebels have fought bloody campaigns against their marginalisation by Khartoum. — AFP

war of independence with South Sudan and the recurrent violent episodes in the regions of South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur.

Another crucial issue that had not been resolved was of the integration of the country’s armed groups into the Sudanese army, he said.

“We agreed that major national

Resolving these issues is part of addressing the root causes of the Sudanese problems

AMAR AMON
SPLM-North chief negotiator

issues should be subjected to popular referendum in future,” he said.

The interim civilian-military Sudanese government was set up after the popular revolt that led to the dismissal in April 2019 of former president Omar al Bashir, and has made peace with the rebels its priority. In October 2020, it signed a historic agreement with



Sudan’s Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok gives an address in the capital Khartoum

several rebel groups.

The SPLM-North has signed a separate ceasefire, allowing its fighters to keep their weapons “to ensure their own protection” until the constitution is amended to guarantee a secular state. No date has yet been given for the resumption of talks.

CUT ON GOVT SPENDING: Meanwhile, Sudan will cut its government spending and increase social spending, the cabinet said on Saturday, after completing a raft of rapid economic reforms this month that threaten to compound pressures on the majority of the population.

Earlier this month, Sudan fully removed subsidies on car petrol

and diesel, and in February it devalued its currency and began a policy of a flexible managed float.

Last week it eliminated its customs exchange rate, used to calculate import duties, as the final step in a devaluation of its local currency.

The country will cut costs of external official trips by 50 per cent, reduce fuel quotas for government vehicles by 20 per cent, sell all surplus government vehicles and cut embassies’ budgets by 25 per cent among other measures, the cabinet said on Saturday after three days of closed meetings.

The government will expand the registration of a family support project called Thamarat or Fruits to include three million families or about 15 million people within two months, it added.

Through the programme financed by the World Bank and other donors, Sudan is paying out monthly cash allowances to these families to ease economic pain. The new measures include increasing the budget of another programme that was meant to provide cheap food commodities from two billion Sudanese pounds (\$4.51 million) to 10 billion pounds (\$22.54 million). — Reuters

Fighting in Yemen’s Marib heats up again



Children look on as they stand near tents at the Suweida camp for people internally displaced by conflict, near Yemen’s northern city of Marib. — AFP File Photo

ADEN: Fighting between Yemen’s warring parties in the gas-rich Marib region, the recognised government’s last northern stronghold, intensified late on Saturday, three sources said, at a time the United Nations and United States are pushing for a peace deal.

The Ansar Allah who have been battling a military coalition for over six years, have been trying to seize Marib in an offensive described by Washington as the most serious threat to efforts to achieve a truce.

Battles had abated as

diplomatic efforts ramped up in recent weeks, but three pro-government Yemeni sources said tens of fighters from both sides were killed in fighting after a fresh Ansar Allah assault that was met with intense coalition air strikes.

Ansar Allah-run Al Masirah television channel said coalition warplanes conducted 13 strikes late on Saturday.

“The fighting continued until the early morning,” one of the sources, a local official, said. “They are the heaviest in weeks.” — AFP

Lebanon protesters clash with security forces as currency plunges

BEIRUT: Nearly twenty people were wounded in overnight scuffles in northern Lebanon between security forces and protesters angered by a spiralling economic crisis, a medical association said on Sunday.

The protests in the city of Tripoli came as the Lebanese pound plumbed fresh lows on the black market due to a financial crisis that the World Bank says is likely to rank among the world’s worst since the mid-19th century.

Calm returned to the city on Sunday after protesters tried to storm official buildings, including a branch of the central bank, overnight, forcing the army to deploy.

“18 people, both civilians and soldiers, were injured, including four who were hospitalised,” said the Emergency and Relief Corps, a local medical charity that dispatched ambulances to treat the wounded.

Rubber bullets and shrapnel from stun grenades accounted for some of the injuries, a spokesperson for the charity said.



Demonstrators burn tires to block the Martyrs’ Square in the centre of Beirut as they protest against dire living conditions amidst the ongoing economical and political crisis. — AFP

The army said 10 soldiers were wounded in the Tripoli clashes, the majority in a single incident that it said involved a group of protesters on motorcycles throwing stun grenades at personnel.

The southern city of Sidon and the capital Beirut saw smaller

demonstrations against the ongoing dramatic fall in living standards.

The Lebanese pound, officially pegged to the dollar at 1,507 since 1997, traded at 17,300-17,500 to the dollar on the black market on Saturday — a record low.

Some social media users said it had fallen as low as 18,000, down from 15,000 earlier in the week.

The country is also grappling with a fuel crisis that has led to seemingly endless queues at gas pumps in recent weeks. — AFP

DUBAI

UAE ban on entry from India unchanged

A UAE ban on entry from India, South Africa and Nigeria remains in place, the federal aviation authority said on Sunday, after Dubai had announced it would ease entry restrictions from those countries. Throughout the pandemic the UAE’s seven emirates have set some of their own Covid-19 policies.

In a Notice to Airmen on Sunday, the UAE’s General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) referenced a June 21 GCAA document stating entry from 13 countries,



including Pakistan, was banned due to the coronavirus pandemic. Dubai had said on June 19 that an entry ban on those who in the past 14 days had visited India, Nigeria and South Africa would ease from June 23. — AFP

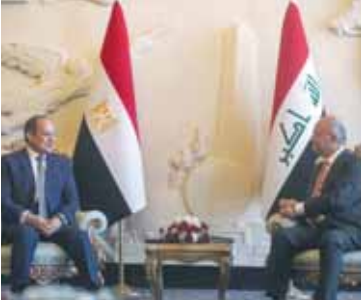
CAIRO

First visit to Iraq by Egyptian leader in decades

Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah al Sisi arrived in Baghdad, becoming the first Egyptian head of state to travel to Iraq since former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990.

The conflict ruptured diplomatic ties between Iraq and Egypt but relations have improved in recent years with many senior officials from both countries exchanging visits.

Sisi’s visit to Iraq is part of a summit between Egypt, Jordan



and Iraq, the fourth round of talks meant to strengthen security, economic, trade and investment cooperation between the three Arab countries. — AFP

ALGIERS

Algeria president starts consultations on new govt

Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune began consultations on the formation of a new government, his office said, after a parliamentary election marred by record-low turnout. The country’s incumbent National Liberation Front (FLN) won the most seats in the June 12 vote that saw a just 23 per cent voter participation.

Prime Minister Abdelaziz Djerad on Thursday presented his government’s resignation to Tebboune, who asked him to continue handling current af-



fairs. Baadji said after the meeting that Tebboune had offered the FLN a place in the new government, adding it was “logical” that most of the ministerial portfolios should go to his party. — AFP

In brief

■ BEIJING



CHINA REPORTS 14 NEW COVID-19 CASES

China reported 14 new coronavirus cases in the mainland for Saturday, down from 25 a day earlier, the health authority said. All of the new infections were imported, the National Health Commission said in a statement on Sunday. There were no new deaths.

China also reported 21 new asymptomatic patients, compared with 23 a day earlier. As of Saturday, mainland China had a total of 91,732 confirmed coronavirus cases, it said. The death toll from the coronavirus remained at 4,636.

Meanwhile, China had administered about 1.165 billion doses of Covid-19 vaccines by June 26, data from the National Health Commission showed on Sunday. — **Reuters**

■ BANGKOK



THAILAND TO REIMPOSE CORONAVIRUS CURBS TO CONTAIN OUTBREAK

Thailand from Monday will reimpose Covid-19 restrictions on restaurants, construction sites and gatherings in the capital Bangkok and its suburbs as it tries to contain a wave of coronavirus cases. After a year of relative success in keeping infection rates low, Thailand's latest wave kicked off in April when a cluster was found in upscale Bangkok clubs typically frequented by the elite.

Since then, more have been discovered in its overcrowded prison system, as well as among migrant workers who toil in its construction and service industries. — **AFP**

■ COLOMBO



CRIPPLED CARGO SHIP TOWED TO SINGAPORE AFTER FIRE

A container ship left adrift in the Indian Ocean after an engine room fire was being towed to Singapore on Saturday, Sri Lanka's navy said.

The Indian coastguard helped extinguish the blaze after it erupted aboard the *MV MSC Messina* on Friday about 787 kilometres from Port Blair in India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

"We were informed that the fire was completely doused by this afternoon and the ship is being towed to Singapore", Sri Lanka navy spokesman Indika de Silva said. One of the 28 crew members remains missing after the fire. — **AFP**

Millions of Sydney residents in coronavirus lockdown

SYDNEY: Millions of Sydney residents began the first full day of a two-week coronavirus lockdown on Sunday, as Australia imposed new restrictions to contain an outbreak of the highly contagious Delta variant.

Restaurants, bars and cafes were shuttered after stay-at-home orders for central neighbourhoods were extended on Saturday evening across the sprawling city and to the coastal and mountainous regions surrounding it.

While the city centre was virtually deserted, large numbers of surfers and swimmers hit the water at Sydney's Bondi Beach, with outdoor exercise still allowed.

Australia's northern city of Darwin also entered a separate snap 48-hour lockdown on Sunday after a handful of cases were linked to a coronavirus outbreak on a remote gold mine.

Northern Territory Chief Minister Michael Gunner said officials were concerned about being unable to reach close contacts of infected people in the region, home to a large Indigenous population feared to be more vulnerable to Covid-19.

"We are taking extreme action right now to stop or slow any spread before the coronavirus is let loose in the Territory, and that means we need a lockdown", he said.

Health experts had advised that



Tables and chairs sit empty along the water in Circular Quay in central Sydney on the first full day of a two-week coronavirus lockdown to contain an outbreak of the highly contagious Delta variant. — **AFP**

a shorter snap lockdown of Sydney — which has proved effective in other Australian cities in recent months — would not be enough to contain the growing cluster, New South Wales state Premier Gladys Berejiklian said.

More than 110 Covid-19 cases have been reported since a driver for an international flight crew tested positive in mid-June to the

This is the latest in a string of 'circuit-breaker' lockdowns across major Australian metropolises, with most cases linked to quarantining returning travellers

highly contagious Delta variant, which first emerged in India.

"Given how contagious this strain of the virus is, we do anticipate that in the next few days case numbers are likely to increase even beyond what we have seen today", Berejiklian told reporters Sunday.

The flare-up has been a shock for a city that had returned to rela-

tive normality after months with few local cases.

Matt Daly, 37, who lives south of Sydney, said he supported the measures but anticipated a "testing" period of working from home and entertaining his two young children who are on school holidays.

"A lot of juggling over the next two weeks. Really hope it doesn't extend further", he said.

Sydney's restrictions require people to stay home until at least July 9, only venturing out to purchase essential goods, obtain medical care, exercise, go to school or if they are unable to work from home.

Professional musician Blain Cunneen, 27, said his work — performing gigs, studio sessions and teaching students — had gone "up in smoke" overnight.

"All that was starting to operate again almost as normal... very suddenly overnight I got a bunch of emails and texts about everything being cancelled", he said.

Anyone outside of the lockdown zone who had visited Sydney since Monday was also instructed to self-isolate for 14 days, while several other states have banned travel to and from the city.

It is the latest in a string of "circuit-breaker" lockdowns across major Australian metropolises, with most cases linked to quarantining returning travellers. — **AFP**

Ventillator 'bank' boosts Covid fight in Nepal's hospitals

KATHAMANDU: A ventilator "bank" where hospitals can rent critical care machines for Covid-19 patients has given Nepal's cash-strapped healthcare system a much-needed lifeline.

The Himalayan nation, like its South Asian neighbours, experienced a spike in infections in April and May with hospitals overwhelmed and medical supplies running low.

As the infectious disease started to spread across the impoverished nation a year ago, Nepal only had 840 ventilators for a population of nearly 30 million, according to government data. Most of the ventilators — needed to help severely ill Covid-19 patients breathe — were in the capital Kathmandu, leaving regional and rural hospitals vulnerable.

While daily infections have since declined from a peak of more than 9,000 cases in mid-May, authorities say hospitals remain under pressure.

But Nepal Ventilator Services, a non-profit that has bought 85 of the machines through donations since the start of the pandemic last year, has helped to meet the surge in demand. "Nepal is chronically, insufficiently equipped with machines like ventilators", the group's co-founder, 42-year-old doctor Bishal Dhakal, said.

"It does not have even required numbers, which is about 2,000 to 3,000 machines for a 30 million population of Nepal."

The heart surgeon turned gen-



Co-founder of the non-profit organisation Nepal Ventilator Services, Bishal Dhakal, checks ventilators at a warehouse before they are rented out to hospitals in Kathmandu. — **AFP**

Nepal is chronically, insufficiently equipped with machines like ventilators

DR BISHAL DHAKAL
Nepal Ventilator Services founder

eral practitioner reached out to donors for funding in April last year and money poured in, allowing the organisation to buy 20 ventilators to rent out to hospitals at cost.

Bhim Hospital in the country's south, which had one ventilator, loaned two from Dhakal's group in August for three months.

"Our patients needed ventilators but we did not have enough budget to immediately buy any,"

the government hospital's medical superintendent, Shakuntala Gupta, said. "The bureaucratic process for an approval is also long."

Since then, the ventilators have been used for nearly 1,500 patients across the country.

Hospitals are charged 3,000 rupees (\$25) per day to cover maintenance and transportation costs.

Karuna Hospital in Kathmandu, which has been renting eight ventilators since April this year, said the "bank" was life-saving.

"At the peak, almost every patient who was admitted in the ICU required ventilator support", the private hospital's chief executive, Ram Kumar Shrestha, said. "If the ventilator 'bank' did not exist, the death rate would perhaps be beyond our imagination, not just here but in many places of Nepal." — **AFP**



A fruit vendor pulls his cart as he walks past a wall mural depicting a frontline coronavirus worker wearing a face mask in New Delhi. — **AFP**

PM Modi urges India to get Covid shots amid Delta variant concerns

NEW DELHI: India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged people on Sunday to overcome their hesitancy and get Covid-19 vaccinations as soon as possible, as concerns grow about the highly infectious Delta variant being detected in some states.

After a fall in infections from May's daily peak of 400,000, India has redoubled its efforts to inoculate the country's 940 million adults amid supply constraints and fears of a third wave of pandemic.

"Get vaccinated", Modi said in his monthly radio address, urging the public to adhere to social distancing and wear masks. "That is a good safety shield. Think about that."

India must administer 10 million doses a day to achieve its aim of inoculating all

adults by December, experts say. But the country has fully vaccinated fewer than 6 per cent with two doses.

Interacting with some villagers in a virtual meeting, Modi asked community leaders to foster awareness among villagers about the benefits of vaccination and curb rumours about ill effects.

He said this month the government would buy 75 per cent of all vaccines from drugmakers and distribute them for free to states, which along with private hospitals had been buying shots for people aged 18 to 45.

India's daily Covid-19 infections rose by 50,040, while the death toll rose by 1,258, including 511 deaths in the state of Maharashtra, health ministry data showed.

— **Reuters**

Vaccines weaken link between infections and deaths in UK

LONDON: Britain's mass Covid-19 vaccination campaign has weakened the link between infections and deaths but it has not yet been completely broken, the head of a scientific advisory body to the government said on Sunday.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson is hoping to lift most remaining coronavirus restrictions on July 19 after being forced to postpone any further easing this month because of a growing number of cases largely from the more infectious Delta variant.

Peter Horby, chair of the government's New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG), told the BBC's "Andrew Marr Show" that Britain was seeing a "much lower level of hospitalisation".

He was asked if there was enough data to say vaccinations had broken the link between the virus and serious illness and death.

"They've certainly weakened the link," Horby said of the vaccination programme, which has given a first dose to more than



A woman receives Covid-19 vaccine in London. — AFP

80 per cent of the adult population and a second dose to more than 60 per cent, according to official data.

"We're definitely seeing increasing infection rates, but what we're seeing is a much lower level of hospitalisation, so that link is really, really much weaker which is really fantastic but it's not completely broken."

The United Kingdom recorded 18,270 new coronavirus infections on Saturday, the highest daily rise since Feb. 5, and 23 deaths, official data showed. Overall, Britain has had one of the highest coronavirus death tolls in the world, with more

than 128,000 deaths.

Horby also said there might be a case to argue that the arrival and spread of the Delta variant — which has driven the current wave of infections — could have been delayed or prevented if stronger border measures had been in place. — Reuters

Secret UK documents about ship found

LONDON: Sensitive defence documents containing details about the HMS Defender, a military vessel that made headlines this week, and the military have been found by a member of the public at a bus stop, according to reports.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) said the employee concerned with the loss of documents reported it last week, and the department has launched an investigation.

A member of the public, who wanted to remain anonymous, contacted the BBC after finding 50 pages of classified information in a soggy heap behind a bus stop in Kent early on Tuesday.

The papers included one set of documents that discussed the potential Russian reaction to HMS Defender's travel through Ukrainian waters off the Crimea coast on Wednesday, according to the BBC, while another laid out plans for a possible British military presence in Afghanistan.

The MoD said that HMS Defender "conducted innocent passage through Ukrainian territorial waters in accordance with international law and that "all potential factors" are considered when making "operational decisions."

A spokesperson said: "As the public would expect, the Ministry of Defence plans carefully. "As a matter of routine, that includes analysing all the potential factors affecting operational decisions.

The spokesperson added: "The Ministry of Defence was informed last week of an incident in which sensitive defence papers were recovered by a member of the public.

"The department takes the security of information extremely seriously and an investigation has been launched.

"The employee concerned reported the loss at the time. "It would be inappropriate to comment further."

The HMS Defender is part of the UK Carrier Strike Group currently heading to the Indo-Pacific region.

However, it was announced earlier this month that it would be temporarily breaking away from the group to carry out its "own set of missions" in the Black Sea. — dpa

Five dead, 156 still missing in Florida building collapse

SURFSIDE: Searchers worked early on Sunday to find more than 150 missing residents amid the rubble of a Florida condo building that collapsed three days ago as questions arose about the tower's structural integrity.

The death toll rose to five on Saturday after emergency workers found a victim in their methodical search of the site in Surfside, a shore town near Miami, Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava said during an evening news briefing.

"Our top priority continues to be search and rescue and saving any lives that we can," Levine Cava said.

Workers also found some human remains; three other victims were identified and their family members notified, she said.

Officials said they harboured hope that some of the 156 people unaccounted for might be alive. Firefighters on Saturday made progress on a smouldering fire and smoke beneath the rubble



Rescue personnel continue to search the rubble at the site of a collapsed building in Surfside, Florida, north of Miami Beach, on Sunday. — AFP

of the 40-year-old building, allowing rescuers to search with fewer limitations, officials said.

Aided by dogs, infrared scanning and heavy equipment, rescuers hope that people can survive in air pockets that may have formed in the debris.

"The biggest thing now is hope," Fire Chief Alan Cominsky said. "That's what's driving us. It's an extremely difficult situation."

A 2018 report showed that an engineer found evidence of major structural damage beneath the pool deck and "concrete deterioration" in the underground parking garage of the 12-story oceanfront condominium.

The report, released by town officials, was produced for the condominium board in preparation for a major repair project set for this year.

It was not immediately clear whether the damage described in the report was connected to the collapse at about 1:30 am (0530 GMT) on Thursday.

— Reuters

Macron, Le Pen face off in regional poll run-offs

PARIS: France was voting in the second round of regional elections on Sunday after a first-round that saw a drubbing for President Emmanuel Macron's ruling party, disappointment for Marine Le Pen's far-right and record low turnout.

For some observers, the outcome of the June 20 first-round raised doubts over whether the 2022 presidential election would come down to a duel between Macron and Le Pen in a run-off long seen as the most likely scenario.

The first-round results marked a boost for the traditional right-wing The Republicans as well as the Socialist Party, who have been squeezed after the centrist Macron surged into power in 2017 with his brand-new Republic on the Move (LREM) party.

Analysts warn against too much extrapolation onto a nationwide scale from the results



French President's wife Brigitte Macron (L) greets a friend after voting in Le Touquet, for the second round of the French regional elections on Sunday. — AFP

of the regional elections, which choose the heads of France's 13 mainland regions from Brittany in the northwest to the Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur (PACA) region in the southeast.

But there was cross-party concern over the turnout for last week's polls, which were shunned by 66.72 per cent of voters — a record in modern France.

"What we are seeing is the culmination of a disconnection between voters and the political class," said Jessica Sainty, a politics lecturer at Avignon University, while acknowledging the Covid-19 crisis also played a role in the high abstention rate. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

WELLINGTON

Trump hints at 2024 elections plans

At his first rally since leaving the White House, former President Donald Trump on Saturday lambasted the Biden administration's immigration policies and sought to energise Republicans to take back majorities in Congress next year.

Appearing to relish being back in front of thousands of supporters, Trump repeated his false claim that his defeat in the November 2020 election was marred by fraud.

Trump left office in the



aftermath of the deadly Jan. 6 attack on the US Capitol by his supporters, shortly after a speech in which he urged a crowd to "fight" when then President-elect Joe Biden's victory was about to be certified by lawmakers.

LOS ANGELES

Five die in hot air balloon accident

Five people died in a hot air balloon accident in Albuquerque, in the southwestern United States, the city's police announced Saturday. The accident caused power outages in the area for several hours after the balloon came into contact with a power line.

"Unfortunately, 4 individuals died as a result of their wounds from the hot air balloon crash," Albuquerque police said on Twitter, adding that one person was taken to a hospital in critical condition.



LONDON

Javid replaces Hancock as health secretary

Former chancellor and home secretary Sajid Javid will replace Matt Hancock as health secretary, Downing Street has announced.

The appointment came the day after video footage emerged of Hancock kissing an aide in his ministerial office in a breach of coronavirus restrictions.

Images and video showed Hancock in an embrace with aide Gina Coladangelo last month, and the former health secretary was facing increasing pressure to quit.



In a letter to the prime minister, Hancock said: "The last thing I would want is for my private life to distract attention from the single-minded focus that is leading us out of this crisis.

Watch out the radar at workplace...

Sustaining quality marks a matter of high significance to whatever one does or cares about. It really counts more when delivering a product, service or managing a property or shouldering a responsibility, to name a few examples. However, are we ensuring that much of attention to quality when it comes to what we do or what others do for us?! Let us all just think of how serious and adequate we are at work, for instance! Are we managing our deliverables the right way as they are supposed to be delivered? Are we serving customers or clients in responsibly, efficiently and satisfactory enough if we were on their shoes?!

Here comes the importance of believing and having self-responsibility and honesty in what one does. Case in a point, what really matters at a workplace is not just making a living out of what we do, but doing it responsibly, professionally and adequately. Complying with the particularly set standards of quality is always a-must-to-do accountability. Otherwise, tasks and responsibilities will be just delivered for the sake of ticking the completion box with no consideration to quality and sufficiency. Hence, this reflects one's selfish dishonesty to the assigned responsibility and compromise of quality over money and self-interests.

For that reason, evaluating employees' performance becomes serious necessity regardless of their job responsibilities or the organisations they work for. Regular evaluation



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EMPLOYEES ARE ALWAYS THE CORE FACTOR OF RUNNING A GOOD BUSINESS WHERE QUALITY IS A CONCERN AND CUSTOMERS ARE VALUED

is always significant to ensure their accountability and quality of their work. This would definitely help employers distinguish hard workers to reward them in return of their dedication and excellence. Acknowledging employees' outstanding contributions and performance reflects their value to the team, department and the entire organisation. Those should be placed in leading positions to be exemplary role models for their colleagues and workmates.

On the other hand, the low-performing or irresponsible employees could easily be identified when conducting performance evaluation procedures. As sometimes they are undercover of other colleagues, someday they would definitely be spotted by the radar of their boss or human resources spies! Possibly, a directive advice and guidance from the line manager might work as an initial action to raise the flag to them. Alternatively, forcing them to regret their irresponsibility and unaccountability to their duties, or probably warning them could work as a simple remedial punishment. Overloading them with extra tasks might also work to teach them responsibility principle the hard way!

On the contrary having a valuable reward as an outcome of the overall performance evaluation process is key. Certainly, it would serve ensuring employees' dedication towards their responsibilities. Likewise, sustaining quality would always matter to

them if that is also counted in their performance appraisal. Accordingly, having a proper evaluation procedure or clear system for employees' performance is undoubtedly of a high importance. There is not doubt that such administrative process supports not only employers to make a successful business, but builds competent and devoted employees too.

Thus, to ensure objectivity in the evaluation process in any organisation, employees should be involved in setting their goals and when conducting their regular or year-end performance evaluation. Mutual understanding and trust between bosses and employees is extremely important to ensure a healthy and inspiring work environment. Being in a comfortable work place will instill trust and devotion in employees towards their employers as well as urge them to bring about their best expertise at work. Evaluation must be very constructive as it helps all employees discover their points of strength and weakness regardless of their performance levels.

This practice will go far in creating a workforce that is engaged, productive and trustworthy. Researches indicated that employees have three prime needs that are interesting work, recognition for doing a good job and being aware of things that are happening around them. Employees are always the core factor of running a good business where quality is a concern and customers are valued.

RACIAL INJUSTICE

Classrooms grapple with racial slurs

THOMAS URBAIN

The recent dismissal of a white New York professor for reading aloud the "N-word" from a Mark Twain novel has shone a spotlight on the use of racial slurs in American classrooms.

It has renewed a long-standing debate about how books from some of the United States' most famous authors should be taught during an age of reckoning with racial injustice.

After years of hearing the term read from the texts of writers such as Twain and William Faulkner, students are increasingly taking a stand.

"There was no reason that I should have to go to my class and hear that slur", said Dylan Gilbert recalling the time in 2019 when her white English teacher at the University of Michigan uttered the term while reciting a passage from Faulkner. Gilbert, who is Black, walked out of class.

"It felt like a reminder that even though I had gotten into Michigan I would still not be afforded the same opportunity for a safe learning environment as my white peers", she said.

The issue came into sharp focus again last month when Hannah Berliner Fischthal, who is white, departed St John's University in Queens, NYC.

She apologised after upsetting several students by pronouncing the racial slur out loud while reading an extract from Twain's 1894 book "Pudd'nhead Wilson" — having first explained the context for the word in Twain's text and saying she hoped it would not cause offence.

The incident came after another professor, also white, this time at Duquesne University in Pennsylvania, was dismissed for using the slur during a course.

"The word has such a history and such a psychological emotional impact that just hearing the word, for some people, can be disruptive", said Arizona State University English professor Neal Lester, who is Black.

Derived from a Latin word, it became widely used in 18th Century America, partly to dehumanise African Americans and cast them as an inferior race. Lester says he never says the word in his classroom.

Vershawn Young, a Black communications professor, takes a different view.

When, in June 2020, his employer, the University of Waterloo, announced that the word was banned on campus, Young refused to adhere to the new rule.

"When reading from a text, I say the word", he said. "When students quote the text, they too are free to speak what they read. However, they also may replace the word with its euphemism. What they can't do is ignore it"

Young says he always prepares his students that it is coming so they aren't shocked.

"Outside of quotes, I do not use the word because I recognize my authority in relation to the multiple sensitivities that my students embody", he added. — AFP

HIGHLY CONTAGIOUS

Delta variant forces new lockdowns as Europe eases curbs

MARINA KORENEVA AND ANDREW LEESON

Australia's largest city Sydney entered a two-week lockdown on Saturday to contain a sudden coronavirus surge and Russia's Saint Petersburg announced a record death toll, as several European nations lifted restrictions despite the spread of the highly contagious Delta variant.

Britain's health minister meanwhile resigned after revelations that he had broken the government's own coronavirus restrictions during an affair with a close aide.

While vaccination drives have brought down infections in wealthy countries, the Delta strain, which first emerged in India, has fuelled fears that the pandemic may be far from over, having already claimed nearly four million lives.

Bangladesh announced that it would impose a new national lockdown from Monday over the variant, with offices shut for a week and only medical-related transport allowed.

Sydney's normally bustling harbourside centre was nearly deserted after people were ordered to stay home except for essential trips to contain on outbreak of the variant.

And New Zealand, citing "multiple outbreaks" in Australia, announced a three-day suspension of its quarantine-free travel arrangement with its larger neighbour.



A person arrives to get tested for Covid-19 before the Mobile World Congress at Fira de Barcelona, in Barcelona, Spain, on Sunday. — Reuters

THE DELTA VARIANT IS SO CONTAGIOUS THAT EXPERTS SAY MORE THAN 80 PER CENT OF A POPULATION WOULD NEED TO BE JABBED IN ORDER TO CONTAIN IT

The Sydney lockdown, affecting more than five million people in the city and nearby towns, was met with dismay after months of very few cases. "Today just feels like another kick while you're slowly getting up", said Chris Kriketos, 32, who works at a bakery in central Sydney.

The Delta variant has also been fuelling rising case numbers in Russia, where Saint Petersburg on Saturday reported the country's highest daily Covid-19 death toll for a city since the start of the pandemic.

Russia's second city, which has hosted six Euro 2020 matches and is

due to host a quarterfinal next Friday, recorded 107 virus deaths over the last 24 hours.

Globally the pandemic is still slowing down, with the World Health Organization reporting the lowest number of new cases worldwide since February and decreasing deaths attributed to Covid-19.

But there is rising concern over the Delta variant, which has now spread to at least 85 countries and is the most contagious of any Covid-19 strain identified, according to WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

— Reuters

sport

ITALY STRUGGLE PAST GRITTY AUSTRIA

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, JUNE 27

Despite being regarded by many as the best team in the Euro 2020 tournament, Italy were hard-pressed to beat a well-organised Austrian side, 2-1, to reach the quarterfinal stage after needing extra time. The first 90 minutes of the match was filled with missed chances at goal by both sides.

Austria began brightly as they seemed to continue in the same mode as they displayed in the win against Ukraine in their last group match. It was a little surprising to see Italy taking time to settle as it all seemed right in terms of their prospects coming into this match. They had thrashed Turkey and Switzerland both by three goals to nil and beaten Wales with a changed and perhaps, weakened side.

As the game progressed, Jorginho and Marco Verratti began to dominate the midfield with short passes and on the left flank, Leonardo Spinazzola was fast, making several openings. After 20 minutes he created a fine chance for Italy with a cross to Nicola Barella whose shot from 15 yards was saved by the outstretched leg of goalkeeper Daniel Bachmann.

Bachmann followed that with another save when Verratti found Lorenzo Insigne who went past the Austrian defence but his curling shot was smothered by a diving Bachmann.

Austria too missed a chance soon after when Marko Arnautovic raced on to a ball well upfield and with goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma not quite in position, he lashed his shot over the bar.

While Italy increased their attack as the first half



Italy's Leonardo Bonucci celebrates with teammates after the match. – Reuters



Italy's Matteo Pessina scores their second goal. – Reuters

It was a little surprising to see Italy taking time to settle as it all seemed right in terms of their prospects coming into this match

progressed, Austria defence stayed firm. They had proved to be a side that would not be easily shaken after impressive wins over North Macedonia and Ukraine in the group matches to book a place for the first time in the knockout stages of a major tournament since the 1954 World Cup when they reached the semifinal.

Early in the second half, Austria missed a chance after Gianni Di Lorenzo was booked for a foul on the edge of the box. David Alba took the free-kick and shot inches over the bar. After 64 minutes it seemed Austria had taken the lead when Arnautovic's header had found the net but VAR disallowed it on a close offside decision.

After a goalless 90 minutes, three goals came rapidly in extra time. Within five minutes substitute, Federico Chiesa controlled a bouncing ball on his chest and neatly beat Martin Hinteregger before hitting a firm shot across goal and into the corner. He had emulated his father Enrico who had scored in the Euro tournament for Italy twenty-five years ago.

Ten minutes later it was 2-0. Matteo Pessina got to a ball after a corner and drove a shot in across Bachmann. But Austria were not quite finished yet. After 114 minutes they finally managed to score through a header by Sasa Kalajdzic. The last six minutes were nerve-racking for Italy as they held on with Austria pressing hard for the equaliser.

Denmark demolish Wales to reach Euro quarters

AMSTERDAM: Dominant Denmark thrashed Wales 4-0 to sweep into the European Championship quarterfinals on Saturday and continue a wave of positive emotion generated by sympathy for Christian Eriksen.

The midfielder, who is recovering from a cardiac arrest during Denmark's opening game, was remembered at the start of the last 16 game in Amsterdam, again inspiring teammates.

Forward Kasper Dolberg struck in each half while Joakim Maehle and Martin Braithwaite got in on the act late on, enabling Danes to dream of repeating their 1992 Euros win while banishing Welsh hopes of matching their 2016 semi-final run.

Dolberg, making his first start of the tournament, gave his side the lead with a fine individual goal in the 27th minute, curling into the top corner from outside the area.

He doubled Denmark's advantage in Amsterdam early in the second half, ruthlessly



Denmark's forward Kasper Dolberg (L) shoots and scores his team's second goal. – AFP

pouncing on a loose ball after Wales failed to clear a cross following a galloping run down the right-wing from Dolberg's strike partner Braithwaite.

"This is total madness. It's surreal. It was here it all started for me, and to play here again in this setting was insane," said Dolberg, who began his career at Ajax in the same stadium.

Braithwaite missed a glaring opportunity to add to Denmark's lead but Maehle sealed the win in the 88th minute.

Wales' frustrations spilt over when Harry Wilson was sent off for a wild tackle on Maehle in added time.

Braithwaite finally got the goal he had craved by netting at the death, though he had to wait for a

“This is total madness. It’s surreal. It was here it all started for me, and to play here again in this setting was insane

KASPER DOLBERG
Denmark forward



Denmark's Kasper Dolberg celebrates scoring their second goal. – AFP

DELIGHTED DANES

Denmark were playing away from Copenhagen for the first time but still counted on loud support as thousands of their fans descended on the Johan Cruyff Arena and outnumbered the Welsh.

Kasper Hjulmand's side were without injured striker Yussuf Poulsen, who had scored in the 2-1 defeat to Belgium and

4-1 thumping of Russia which propelled them into the last 16.

Yet in a sign of the team's unity, the player joined his team on the pitch to sing the national anthem before kickoff, standing side-by-side with the substitutes and coaching staff.

Wales had a flurry of early attacks and talisman Gareth Bale nearly gave them an early lead when he went for goal from range.

"It's not how we wanted the game to go, from our point of view we started very well and then the game changed," Bale said. "We tried to play in the second half but made a mistake to concede which killed the momentum on our side."

More than compensating for Poulsen's absence, Dolberg had more luck than Bale with a distance strike that flew past Wales keeper Danny Ward for the Danes' opener. Denmark hardly looked back from then on, dominating possession as Wales failed to recreate the fighting spirit of their famous run in France five years ago. — Reuters

In brief

NEW YORK



GOLD WINNER SERENA TO SKIP TOKYO GAMES

Serena Williams will not be travelling to Tokyo for the Olympic Games, the 23-time Grand Slam singles tennis champion said on Sunday without giving the reasons behind her decision. American Williams, who will turn 40 in September, won the singles title at the London Olympics in 2012 and she has also picked up three gold medals in doubles with sister Venus — in Sydney (2000), Beijing (2008) and London. “Yeah, I’m actually not on the Olympic list, so... Not that I’m aware of. If so, then I shouldn’t be on it,” Williams told reporters on the eve of the Wimbledon Grand Slam.

LONDON



OSTAPENKO WINS BALTIC BATTLE FOR EASTBOURNE TITLE

Latvia’s Jelena Ostapenko warmed up for Wimbledon by winning an all-Baltic battle against Anett Kontaveit to claim the Eastbourne title on Saturday, crowning an impressive week with a 6-3, 6-3 victory at Devonshire Park. The 2017 French Open champion has struggled in recent years to match that form but the Latvian’s fourth career title will send her to the All England Club full of confidence. “I’m really happy with the way I played the whole week,” Ostapenko said. Australian Alex de Minaur won the men’s title, beating Italian Lorenzo Sonego 4-6, 6-4, 7-6(5) to claim his fifth career title and first on grasscourts.

MADRID



SPAIN’S SUAREZ NAVARRO GETS OLYMPICS TICKET

Carla Suarez Navarro is one among eight Spaniards selected to compete at the Olympic Games in Tokyo next month, the Royal Spanish Tennis Federation has said, giving the veteran player a fitting farewell before her retirement. A former world number six, Suarez Navarro announced in September last year that she was being treated for the early stages of Hodgkin lymphoma. The 32-year-old made her comeback to the tour at the French Open this month after declaring she had won her battle with cancer. She is playing world number one Ash Barty in the first round at Wimbledon. “Happy to represent Spain at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. Honoured to have this opportunity as an athlete. Can’t wait,” Suarez Navarro, now ranked 138th in the world, said on Twitter on Sunday.

Verstappen tightens grip on top

DUTCHMAN CRUISES PAST HAMILTON IN STYRIAN GP

SPIELBERG, Austria: Red Bull’s Max Verstappen won the Styrian Grand Prix by a massive margin on Sunday to power 18 points clear of Lewis Hamilton in the Formula One championship battle.

Verstappen led from start to finish at Austria’s Red Bull Ring, with seven-times world champion Hamilton second for Mercedes.

The Briton was 35.743 seconds behind at the chequered flag after a late stop for fresh tyres to bag a bonus point for fastest lap.

It was the first time since 2013 that mighty Mercedes had gone four races in a row without a win and the first time since then that Red Bull had celebrated four successive victories.

“Unbelievable. The car was on fire today,” said Verstappen over the team radio after the 23-year-old Dutch driver’s fourth win in eight races this season, second in a row and 14th of his career.

“You never know how it’s going to end up but straight away I felt a good balance in the car,” he added after stepping out of the car.

“It was good to manage the tyres from the start. It felt like to the end that I had tyres left.”

Valtteri Bottas was third for Mercedes, just holding off Verstappen’s Mexican team mate Sergio Perez, who had fresher tyres, by a mere 0.527.

Everybody else was lapped by Verstappen, who started on pole and has now won more races than anyone else this year as Red Bull emerge as the biggest threat to Mercedes since the start of the V6 turbo hybrid era in 2014.

“That is the most dominant win we’ve had so far this year,” said Red Bull team boss Christian Horner.

Red Bull are now 40 points ahead of Mercedes in the constructors’ championship.

“It was a bit of a lonely race



Red Bull’s Dutch driver Max Verstappen stands on his car after winning the Formula One Styrian Grand Prix at the Red Bull Ring race track in Spielberg, Austria. — AFP

really,” said Hamilton. “I was trying to keep up with those guys but the speed they have, they’ve obviously made some big improvements over the last couple of races and it’s impossible to keep up.

“I think their long run seems to be a bit better...it feels like we lose a lot down the straights.”

The scenic Spielberg circuit hosts another race next weekend, the Austrian Grand Prix.

McLaren’s Lando Norris finished fifth with Ferrari’s Carlos Sainz and Charles Leclerc sixth and seventh respectively.

Canadian Lance Stroll was eighth for Aston Martin, ahead of Alpine’s Fernando Alonso and Japanese rookie Yuki Tsunoda taking the final point for AlphaTauri. — Reuters



Max Verstappen poses on the podium with his trophy after winning the Formula One Styrian Grand Prix. — AFP

Lewis guides Windies to 8-wicket win over SA

ST GEORGE’S, Grenada: Evin Lewis led a rampaging assault by the West Indies as they made a mockery of a potentially tricky target of 161 in an eight-wicket victory with five overs to spare in the opening fixture of their five-match T20 series against South Africa on Saturday.

In a performance which emphasised the vast difference between international cricket’s shortest format and the traditional game, Lewis tore into the same bowlers who dominated the Caribbean side in the just-concluded two-Test series in St Lucia.

He blazed 71 off just 35 deliveries with seven sixes and four fours decorating a pyrotechnic innings.

He and opening partner Andre Fletcher set about the South African bowlers with such gusto that they raced to 85 before the end of the seventh over when Fletcher was run out at the non-striker’s end for 30 off 19 balls.

Lewis looked on course for a hundred before he miscued another attempted big hit and was caught at long-off by David Miller off wrist-spinner Tabraiz Shamsi.

It left two other celebrated power-hitters, Chris Gayle and Andre Russell to finish the job, Russell appropriately finishing the



Evin Lewis of West Indies hits a six during the first T20I against South Africa at Grenada National Cricket Stadium, Saint George’s, Grenada. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

SOUTH AFRICA
R Hendricks b Allen17
Q de Kock c Holder b Russell37
T Bavuma c Lewis b Allen22
R van der Dussen not out56
H Klaasen c Allen b Holder7
D Miller c Pollard b Bravo9
G Linde c Sinclair b Bravo0
K Rabada not out6
Extras (b1, lb2, w3)6
Total (20 overs, 6 wkts)160
Fall of wickets: 1-33, 2-61, 3-95, 4-112, 5-140, 6-140
Bowling: Sinclair 2-0-21-0, Holder 3-0-29-1, Allen 4-0-18-2, Russell 3-0-29-1, McCoy 4-0-30-0, Bravo 4-0-30-2

WEST INDIES
A Fletcher run out30
E Lewis c Lewis b Shamsi71
C Gayle not out32
A Russell not out23
Extras (lb1, w4)5
Total (15 overs, 2 wkts)161
Fall of wickets: 1-86, 2-124
Bowling: Linde 2-0-24-0, Rabada 3-0-32-0, Nortje 2-0-10-0, Ngidi 3-0-46-0, Shamsi 4-0-27-1, Hendricks 1-0-21-0

match with a six over mid-wicket.

In all the West Indies tallied 15 sixes and nine fours (126 runs) in their innings.

“I always like batting on this pitch because the ball comes on nicely and you can play your shots,” said Lewis in reflecting on his spectacular knock.

“I was thinking a bit about the hundred but I decided to keep playing my shots because the most important thing for us was to get

on that winning track.”

Kagiso Rabada, Lungi Nigidi and Anrich Norje, the three pacers who tormented the West Indies in the Tests, bowled a combined eight wicketless overs in conceding 88 runs.

Rassie van der Dussen picked up from where he left off in the Test series with an unbeaten half-century to lift South Africa to what looked at the time to be a competitive total of 160 for six batting first.

Fresh from a vital innings of 75 which set up the Proteas to complete a clean sweep of the Test series, the tall right-hander steadied his team’s innings.

He then provided the late impetus in getting to an unbeaten 56 off 38 balls with four fours and two sixes after they were put in to bat.

Quinton de Kock, man of the series in the Test matches, got his team off to a flying start before his demise for 37 to the bowling of Russell left the innings sputtering in the middle overs.

However van der Dussen’s experience proved invaluable with wickets falling around him as he was able to manufacture important boundary hits against an experienced and varied West Indies bowling attack. — AFP



WORLD NO 1 IS HALFWAY
TO EMULATING DON BUDGE
(1937) AND ROD LAVER
(1962 AND 1969) IN
SWEEPING ALL FOUR
MAJORS IN THE SAME YEAR

DJOKOVIC
READY TO
BE FIRST
AMONG
EQUALS

Serbia's Novak Djokovic jumps over his physiotherapist Ulises Badi ahead of Wimbledon in London. – Reuters

Wimbledon 2021

June 28 to July 11

No. 1 Court*
Capacity: 12,345

- Millennium Building
- Media centre
 - Competitors areas
 - Members' enclosure

* Retractable roof
Closes in 10 minutes

Centre Court*
15,000

BRITAIN

LONDON

15 km

THAMES

Wimbledon

Broadcast Centre

No. 2 Court

Novak Djokovic
Serbia
2019 men's
singles champion

Last winners were in 2019,
as Wimbledon 2020 was
cancelled due to Covid-19

No. 3 Court

Simona Halep
Romania
2019 women's
singles champion
Withdrawn due to injury

Source: Wimbledon/
AFP Photo: Glyn Kirk,
Laurence Griffiths
AFP

LONDON: Novak Djokovic targets a record-equalling 20th major and sixth Wimbledon title from Monday which will edge him tantalisingly closer to becoming only the third man in history to complete a calendar Grand Slam.

The world number one has already won a ninth Australian Open and second French Open this season.

That has put him halfway to emulating Don Budge (1937) and Rod Laver (1962 and 1969) in sweeping all four majors in the same year.

It is a feat even his closest

rivals Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal have never managed.

"Everything is possible," said 34-year-old Djokovic after winning the French Open earlier this month when asked if the Golden Slam of all four majors and Olympic gold was a realistic target.

Djokovic memorably captured a fifth Wimbledon in 2019, saving two championship points to defeat Federer in the longest ever final at the All England Club at four hours and 57 minutes.

He was deprived of defending his title in 2020 when Wimbledon was cancelled due to

the pandemic.

Djokovic has won seven of the last 11 Slams as he ramps up his assault on the record of 20 majors held jointly by Federer and Nadal.

The Serb starts his defence on Monday against British world number 250 Jack Draper who was born just six miles (9.5km) from the All England Club.

World No 2 Nadal, the Wimbledon champion in 2008 and 2010, has already withdrawn from this year's tournament, still scarred by the bruising loss to Djokovic in the French Open semifinals.

FEDERER EYES 9TH TITLE

Eight-time winner Federer, meanwhile, will be 40 in August and won just one match on grass at Halle in the build-up to Wimbledon.

Federer, who underwent two knee surgeries in 2020, won the last of his eight Wimbledons in 2017 and the most recent of his 20 majors in Australia in 2018.

The Swiss star has lost three finals to Djokovic at the All England Club — 2014, 2015 and the epic 2019 clash.

"Truthfully, I don't think my goal was to play till, whatever, 39 or 40 or more," said Federer on

Wimbledon 2021				
Five women to watch for				
Ashleigh Barty	Serena Williams	Petra Kvitová	Aryna Sabalenka	Venus Williams
Country: Australia	United States	Czech Republic	Belarus	United States
Rank: 1	5	10	4	25
Age: 29	35	32	27	41
Five men to watch for				
Novak Djokovic	Roger Federer	Daniil Medvedev	Stefanos Tsitsipas	Nick Kyrgios
Country: Serbia	Switzerland	Russia	Greece	Australia
Rank: 1	2	3	6	31
Age: 34	36	28	27	28



Australia's Ashleigh Barty ahead of Wimbledon. – Reuters

Saturday. "It was maybe more like 35 maybe I was thinking, which was already a high number at the time."

Federer, in the opposite half of the draw to Djokovic, begins his campaign on Tuesday against France's Adrian Mannarino against whom he holds a 6-0 head-to-head advantage.

The rest of the current top 10 have endured relatively mediocre Wimbledon records.

Only 33-year-old Roberto Bautista Agut, a surprise semifinalist two years ago, has reached further than the last 16.

Daniil Medvedev has made

only the third round but was buoyed on Saturday by a first grass court title in Mallorca.

Dominic Thiem has withdrawn due to a wrist injury.

Alexander Zverev had a best last-16 run in 2017 but was a first-round loser two years ago while Andrey Rublev has yet to get past the second round.

Of the remainder of the top 10, French Open runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas and Matteo Berrettini are Djokovic's most likely threats. Tsitsipas made the last 16 in 2018 before exiting in the first round two years ago.

— AFP



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OCCI proposes creation of National Health Council to strengthen medical insurance, healthcare sectors

NEW RECOMMENDATIONS:
Chamber moots introduction of hospital rating system; Establishment of new Central Reinsurance Company via Public Private Partnership (PPP) route



A key part of its remit is to provide sound advice on equitable and cost-competitive pricing of medical services provided by private healthcare institutions that are, while market-driven, also suitably structured to meet the vital healthcare requirements of the target population

MURTADHA BIN MOHAMMED BIN JAWAD AL JAMALANI
Chairman, OCCI's Finance and Insurance Committee

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has proposed the establishment of an autonomous, high-level agency to assist the Capital Market Authority (CMA) and Ministry of Health in the effective regulation of the health insurance and healthcare sectors when health coverage become mandatory for private sector employees and visitors to the Sultanate.

The proposal is part of a list of recommendations made by the Chamber to the sector regulator, the CMA, aimed at underpinning the growth and sustainability of a robust economic industry around insurance services, notably by ensuring liquidity and effective cash flow.

Also notable is a recommendation for the creation of a National Central Reinsurance Company (NCRC) as a Public Private Partnership (PPP) initiative to support, among other objectives, premium retention, cash flow management and foreign currency inflows into the country. Separately, the Chamber has called for the introduction of a classification system covering all private hospitals in the Sultanate — a scheme that would allow for healthcare tariffs and prices to be structured based on their grades.

The recommendations come on the heels of last week's Royal Decree amending the Insurance Companies Law and Takaful Insurance Law as a prelude to the implementation of Mandatory Health Insurance

(Dhamani) in the Sultanate. When it eventually comes into force, licenced insurers are required to run their healthcare insurance business professionally independent of their other insurance activities — a move that recognises healthcare insurance as the new dominant stream of the insurance industry. The measure will also help attract new players into the Insurance and healthcare sectors in the Sultanate.

While many of the key regulatory, technical and administrative components necessary to sustain the Dhamani scheme are essentially in place, missing from the picture is an agency with responsibility for, among other things, setting criteria to ensure fair and competitive pricing of hospital services, according to a high level official of



the OCCI.

"We had conveyed through the Economic Committee at the Majlis Ashshura the importance of constituting an independent national agency, on the lines of a National Health Council, to strengthen overall supervisory oversight of health insurance services when coverage becomes mandatory", said Murtadha bin Mohammed bin Jawad al Jamalani, Chairman of OCCI's Finance and Insurance Committee.

Cost-competitive sector

The National Health Council, the official explained, will primarily assist the sector regulator — the Capital Market Authority (CMA) — in making informed decisions, particularly with regard to the pricing and standards of healthcare products and services provided by clinics, hospitals, diagnostics centres and pharmacies.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Al Jamalani pointed out that most advanced economies of the world already have an independent and financially autonomous body performing this function with the goal of sustaining a fair, competitive and sound health insurance practices industry. Examples include the National Health Service (NHS)

of the UK, Saudi Health Council of Saudi Arabia, National Council of the Netherlands, National Health Council of the USA, and so on.

A key part of its remit is to provide sound advice on equitable and cost-competitive pricing of medical services provided by private healthcare institutions that are, while market-driven, also suitably structured to meet the vital healthcare requirements of the target population. This is also imperative from the standpoint of the Omani government's prioritisation of quality healthcare for the general population, he said.

Significantly, the Chamber's proposals underscore the health insurance segment's growth into the biggest insurance class in the Sultanate. Gross written premiums totalled RO 155.193 million in 2020, representing 33.3 per cent of total gross premiums collected across all insurance classes. Health insurance gross claims amounted to RO 120.749 million for the year, accounting for 41.7 per cent of total gross claim for the insurance sector. The Claims Vs Gross Premium ratio was 77.8 per cent for the year.

Contrary to the widely held notion, hospital treatments for victims of road accidents are covered by motor insurance, which

services at reasonable prices — a balance that the proposed National Health Council will try to achieve in conjunction with the CMA", he explained.

Thus, as an agency mandated to ensure the equitable nature of health insurance services for the general public in the face of competition for maximum profit and high dividends by the private players, the proposed National Health Council should be headed not by the Ministry of Health, but the Ministry of Social Development, the official noted. In line with its mandate, the Council should also have representatives from the CMA, Ministry of Health, Royal Oman Police, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Finance and OCCI, he said.

Rating system

Al Jamalani also made a plea for the introduction of a system of rating hospitals and private healthcare institutions to help support the formulation of a tier-based tariff system for medical services.

"By rating hospitals akin to the system of grading hotels and restaurants, the Council can propose a price band for a specific type of treatment or service provided by a certain grade of institutions. This is indispensable to the goal of combating the potential for price gouging by service providers."

In addition to buttressing the health insurance industry, the proposed Council will also contribute to ensuring its sustainability and stability in the face of structural challenges currently inherent in the sector, according to the official.

"If you look at the insurance sector in Oman, you will find a rather disparate sector made up of around 11 national insurers and nine foreign companies, in addition to one specialised reinsurance company (owned jointly by local and foreign players) and handful of third party administrators (TPAs).

TURN TO PAGE 15

Electronic system to directly link insurance companies and ROP

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 27

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has floated a tender the roll-out of an e-insurance system that links insurance companies directly with the Royal Oman Police (ROP) and policyholders. The new electronic link builds on the Authority's efforts to provide integrated digitalised services to consumers.

"The CMA aims to enhance



the role of technology and maximise its uses especially in serving policyholders and

other stakeholders to ease the registration, renewal, transfer and export of motor vehicles, and the issuance of registration certificates.

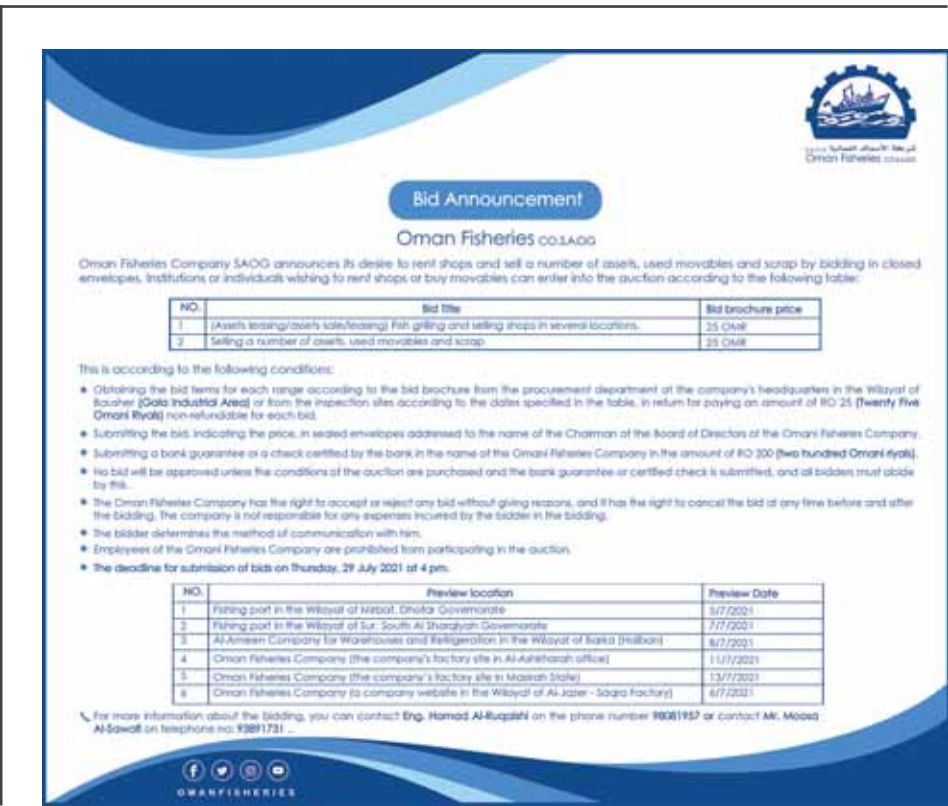
It also provides for insurance companies a database containing specific data on the drivers and vehicles, such as traffic accidents and violations for use in underwriting", the Authority said in a press statement.

The new system also enables the Authority to monitor

and follow up the business of insurance companies and evaluate their performance.

The system will connect 15 insurance companies carrying out motor insurance business with policyholders and the ROP.

Motor insurance is among the top insurance activities with more than 1.402 million insurance policies, accounting for 85.4 per cent of insurance policies and RO 113.3 million in direct premiums.



Bid Announcement

Oman Fisheries CO.SAOG

Oman Fisheries Company SAOG announces its desire to rent shops and sell a number of assets, used movables and scrap by bidding in closed envelopes. Institutions or individuals wishing to rent shops or buy movables can enter into the auction according to the following table:

NO.	Bid title	Bid brochure price
1	(Assets: freezing/chilling/refrigerating) Fish grilling and selling shops in several locations.	25 OMR
2	Selling a number of assets, used movables and scrap.	25 OMR

This is according to the following conditions:

- Obtaining the bid terms for each range according to the bid brochure from the procurement department of the company's headquarters in the Wilayat of Sohar (Sohar Industrial Area) or from the inspection site according to the dates specified in the table, in return for paying an amount of RO 25 (Twenty five Omani Rials) non-refundable for each bid.
- Submitting the bid, indicating the price, in sealed envelopes addressed to the name of the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Fisheries Company.
- Submitting a bank guarantee as a check certified by the bank in the name of the Oman Fisheries Company in the amount of RO 300 (Two hundred Omani Rials).
- No bid will be accepted unless the conditions of the auction are purchased and the bank guarantee or certified check is submitted, and all bidders must abide by this.
- The Oman Fisheries Company has the right to accept or reject any bid without giving reasons, and it has the right to cancel the bid at any time before and after the bidding. The company is not responsible for any expenses incurred by the bidder in the bidding.
- The bidder determines the method of communication with him.
- Employees of the Oman Fisheries Company are prohibited from participating in the auction.
- The deadline for submission of bids on Thursday, 29 July 2021 at 4 pm.

NO.	Preview location	Preview Date
1	Fishing port in the Wilayat of Muscat, Dhaka Governorate	5/7/2021
2	Fishing port in the Wilayat of Sur, South Al Sharqiyah Governorate	7/7/2021
3	Al-Jawabir Company for Fisheries and Refrigeration in the Wilayat of Sohar (Sohar)	8/7/2021
4	Oman Fisheries Company (the company's factory site in Al-Ashkharah office)	11/7/2021
5	Oman Fisheries Company (the company's factory site in Maashan Sals)	13/7/2021
6	Oman Fisheries Company (a company website in the Wilayat of Al-Jazan - Jazira Factory)	6/7/2021

For more information about the bidding, you can contact Eng. Hamad Al-Rugaili on the phone number 98081197 or contact Mr. Moosa Al-Sawafi on telephone no 93891731.

OMAN FISHERIES

Madayn delegation explores enhanced economic ties during visit to Sri Lanka

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 27

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa received an Omani delegation from Shumookh Investment and Services SAOC, which is the investment arm of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) of the Sultanate of Oman, at Temple Trees, the Official Residence of the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, recently.

The Shumookh delegation comprised of Chief Executive Officer Eng Musallam bin Juma al Hadaifi; Executive Director Abdullah al Balushi, and Shumookh Legal Counsel Robin Mande. Also present were the Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Sri Lanka Shaikh Jumah bin Hamdan al Shehi and First Secretary Mohammed al



Mukhaiani of the Omani Embassy in Colombo.
Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and the Omani

delegation discussed ways and means to enhance economic cooperation between Sri Lanka and Oman including investment

opportunities in particular.
The Omani delegation also met with State Minister of Finance, Capital Markets and

State Enterprise Reforms Ajith Nivard Cabraal at the Ministry of Finance in Colombo and explored areas for economic collaboration.

They also held a series of meetings including with officials of different Ministries, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka and with the Chairman of the Board of Investment (BoI) of Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka Embassy in Muscat jointly with the Embassy of Oman in Colombo organised the visit to Sri Lanka from Shumookh Investment and Services of Madayn Oman under the investment bubble corridor.

Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman Ameer Ajwad stated that the visit of the Omani delegation would open new vistas for economic cooperation between the two countries.

20 per cent
jump in
new SME
registrations



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 27

The total number of new small and medium enterprises (SMEs) registered with the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development surged 20.3 per cent to 53,166 units as of the end of May 2021, up from 44,197 units over the corresponding period of 2020, underscoring the strong growth of this key sector.

According to the National Centre for Information and Statistics (NCISI), Muscat Governorate topped the list, with a 20.3 per cent increase in registrations, followed by North Al Batinah (20.4 per cent), Al Dakhiliyah (18.5 per cent), Dhofar (19.3 per cent), South Al Batinah (23.6 per cent), North Al Sharqiyah (17.5 per cent), South Al Sharqiyah (25.5 per cent), Al Dhahirah (14.7 per cent), Al Buraimi (22.3 per cent), Al Wusta (39 per cent), and Musandam (17.3 per cent).

The distribution of SMEs across the Sultanate is as follows: Muscat Governorate (17,927) at the end of May 2021, North Al Batinah (8,411), Al Dakhiliyah (6,616), Dhofar (4,439), South Al Batinah (4,049), North Al Sharqiyah (3,527), South Al Sharqiyah (3,158), Al Dhahirah (3,016), Al Buraimi (1,135), Al Wusta (691) and Musandam (197).

— ONA

Successful OAB career story: From teller to head of operation



MUSCAT: Mahfoudh al Rawahi (pictured) spent over three decades at Oman Arab Bank, moving from one position to another until he reached his current position as Head of Central Operation at the Bank's headquarters.

Mahfoudh began his career with OAB in 1988 as a Teller, following his graduation from the Institute of Vocational Training, Accounting Division. Over the course of the following years, he proved himself as one of the most prominent national competencies, showcasing sincerity and determination to achieve success. He maintained this position while completing his academic career, graduating from Waljat College with Bachelor's degree in Business, while still working as a Teller. This drew the attention of the Bank's management, who paved the way for his career advancement.

With regard to his experience at OAB, Mahfoudh al Rawahi said, "Ever since my first days at the Bank, I have found support from the management, who were keen on enabling the young national workforce to enhance in the banking sector. Work was challenging and we, as Omanis, had to prove our ability to perform well in a sector that was the backbone of the economic development in that particular period. Thankfully, I was able to demonstrate my capabilities and within only two years I moved up to manage Customer Service and Remittances, for two years. After which, I was positioned at the Accounting Department and worked there for 3 years."

KR-Eshraqa Entrepreneurship Academy is now 'Tasees'

MUSCAT: Eshraqa, Khimji Ramdas Social Development Arm, announced 'Tasees' as the new identity for its Entrepreneurship Academy. Tasees aims to play an important role to incubate, mentor and guide budding entrepreneurs on their journey to achieve their innovative business ideas into reality.

Established in 2018 with a vision to help nurture the dreams and give flight to the ambitions of aspiring Omani entrepreneurs, to achieve their entrepreneurial freedom and growth through viable business solutions to compete in the marketplace. Tasees aims to be a one-stop-solutions-provider for Startups and MSME's, giving them the scope and opportunity to change the socio - economic fabric of Oman. To know more about Tasees and its programmes, log on to www.eshraqa.om/tasees/ Designed by Bluerance, an



Omani start-up design agency, the logo of Tasees is a modern interpretation of the true purpose of the programme. It represents a progress bar which stands for growth & prosperity. It manifests the core offering of the Tasees programme in a simple and engaging manner.

"Found on the principles of giving back to the community, Tasees aligns itself to the Oman Vision 2040 mirroring the country's interests in creating an entrepreneurial mindset for its youth, encouraging the ongoing development of knowledge and skills amongst professionals by creating a favorable environment and new entrepreneurship opportunities for its aspiring youth," said Nailesh Khimji, Director, Khimji Ramdas.

Lexus Service launches 'Al Nukhbah' loyalty programme

MUSCAT: Lexus Service has recently introduced Al Nukhbah, a uniquely rewarding service loyalty programme specially designed for Lexus vehicle owners across Oman. As a Lexus Al Nukhbah member, you can benefit from outstanding rewards by redeeming points earned on your Lexus card every time you pay for service or repair jobs or purchase service contracts for your Lexus vehicle at a Saud Bahwan service facility.

Lexus vehicles are some of the finest luxury vehicles in the industry. Right from design, technology, safety features and more, every Lexus vehicle stands out to offer some of the finest ownership experiences.

The key to enjoying amazing experiences in your Lexus, is aptly adhering to the prescribed service schedule as advised by the experts



at Lexus Service. The advantage is your Lexus will continue to remain healthy and offer fine driving experiences for longer too.

At Lexus Service, talented professionals undergo regular training, both in-house and at Lexus Japan, to ensure you benefit from the finest service experiences. The customer care at Lexus Service, promptly reminds customers of their service schedule and assists with making prior appointments, for a smooth and hassle-free

Renault Oman to cover VAT of customers on service packages

MUSCAT: Renault Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles has launched a 'VAT on us' offer on service packages. As part of the offer Renault Oman will cover the value-added tax (VAT) their customers are required to pay on service packages purchased until June 30, 2021.

A spokesperson for Renault Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles, said, "We are happy to bear the tax our customers have to pay during 'VAT on us' offer period. Renault offers various service packages that help care for your car and customers can experience peace of mind when you buy service packages."

He added, "Renault service makes driving more enjoyable for an easier life. With the packages, automotive maintenance is no longer a chore. To save time and give greater peace of mind, Renault Oman offers quick and



easy service solutions to suit customer needs."

Understanding the importance of car servicing, Renault Oman ensures peace of mind when customers buy service packages. The benefits for those who buy service packages include priority service, package price lower than paying for every service, protection against price increase. BankMuscat and National Bank of Oman credit cardholders can opt for easy payment options of 0 per cent interest for 12 instalments.

Omantel self-service machines to enable car insurance purchase

MUSCAT: Omantel has joined hands with National Life and General Insurance company (NLG Oman), an Ominvest Group company, to enable the purchase of car insurance and premium payment through its Self-Service Machines located across the country, and in the process, becoming the first company in Oman to provide this facility.

This facility is an addition to the ROP services which Omantel had enabled access to for users from its Self-Service Machines (SSMs) a year ago. It will bring more convenience for NLG clients, be it individual car owners, new buyers, government clients or corporate organisations by saving their time and effort.

To buy car insurance or pay the premium, a user can proceed in easy steps at any of the 15 Omantel Self Service Machines (SSMs) that are available at primary locations across the country.



The easy user interface and navigation guide the user to the NLG page wherein he/she is prompted to fill in the required details like the type of insurance cover (third party or comprehensive), Civil ID number, license plate number and code, mobile number, vehicle seating capacity and vehicle value (if comprehensive policy).

Once these details are punched in, the user is directed to the next steps of entering their name, choosing the financial institution if mortgaged, confirmation of the premium amount and lastly clicking on the 'pay' tab to finalise the transaction. The facility completes the transaction in a matter of minutes and easily.

US consumer spending takes breather amid shortages

WASHINGTON: US consumer spending paused in May as shortages hurt motor vehicle purchases, but the supply constraints and increased demand for services helped to lift prices, with the Federal Reserve's main inflation measure rising by the most in 29 years.

There was, however, some good news on inflation.

Consumers this month perceived higher inflation to be temporary, a survey showed on Friday, aligning with the views of Fed Chair Jerome Powell and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen. Consumers' inflation expectations are key as they can influence households' behaviour.

With at least 150 million Americans fully vaccinated against Covid-19, which is allowing the economy to reopen and people to travel, dine out and engage in other activities that were restricted during the pandemic, consumer



A man searches for an item for a delivery order in a Safeway grocery store while wearing a respirator mask to help protect himself and slow the spread of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) in Tucson, Arizona. — Reuters

spending is expected to pick up in the coming months. Trillions of dollars in excess savings and rising household wealth due to gains in

stock prices and home values are expected to provide a powerful tailwind.

"Spending growth will shift to

services from goods, and drive a strong economic recovery throughout the rest of 2021 and all of 2022," said Gus Faucher,

chief economist at PNC Financial in Pittsburgh. "The biggest drags are higher prices for some goods and services and shortages due to production bottlenecks."

The unchanged reading in consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of US economic activity, followed an upwardly revised 0.9 per cent jump in April, the Commerce Department said. Consumer spending was previously reported to have increased 0.5 per cent in April. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast consumer spending would rise 0.4 per cent in May.

Motor vehicles and some household appliances are scarce because of supply bottlenecks stemming from the pandemic. A global shortage of semiconductors is hampering motor vehicle production. Spending is also starting to shift back to the services part of the economy,

which accounts for two-thirds of consumer spending, though the pace last month was insufficient to offset the drag from goods.

Spending on services rose 0.7 per cent, led by recreation, restaurants and hotels as well as housing and utilities. Spending on goods fell 1.3 per cent, with outlays of long-lasting goods like motor vehicles tumbling 2.8 per cent. Goods spending surged as the pandemic confined people to their homes.

The personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index, excluding the volatile food and energy components, increased 0.5 per cent after advancing 0.7 per cent in April.

In the 12 months through May, the so-called core PCE price index shot up 3.4 per cent, the largest gain since April 1992. The core PCE price index rose 3.1 per cent on a year-on-year basis in April.

— Reuters

Renaissance rolls out extensive vaccination programme for employees



MUSCAT: Renaissance Services, Oman's leading services solutions company, has deployed a mega Covid-19 vaccination program for its employees. The initiative is one of the large-scale healthcare efforts in Oman, covering over 8,800 employees serving at over 100 locations across the country.

Since the arrival of the pandemic, Renaissance has implemented several initiatives under a comprehensive strategy of 'In Service to the Nation', a determined campaign supporting the Government of Oman and the Supreme Committee for Covid-19 to meet the challenge.

Commenting on the initiative, Samir J Fancy, Chairman – Renaissance Services said, "This extensive vaccination drive undertaken by Renaissance reflects our core values of safety, service and care for our employees, clients and the community. The programme will ensure that our people are protected and substantially reduce the pressure on public health systems and help Oman return to normalcy by countering the challenges caused by the pandemic more effectively. We are extremely grateful for the valuable support of the Ministry of Health, SEZAD, our esteemed clients, and our healthcare partners."

Profit growth at China's industrial firms slows again

BEIJING: Profit growth at China's industrial firms slowed again in May as surging raw material prices squeezed margins and weighed on factory activity.

Profits at China's industrial firms rose 36.4 per cent in May from a year earlier to 829.92 billion yuan (\$128.58 billion) official data showed on Sunday. That was a slowdown from the 57 per cent surge reported in April, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

The world's second-largest economy has largely recovered from disruptions caused by Covid-19, but it faces new challenges such as



A man works on a production line at a factory in Deqing county, Zhejiang, China. — Reuters

elevated raw material costs and global supply chain crunches. Officials warn that China's recovery remains uneven.

Imbalances in profitability became prominent between upstream and downstream firms due to high commodity prices, said Zhu Hong, an official at the statistics bureau. "The foundation for recovery is not yet solid," he said in a statement accompanying the data.

Profits grew rapidly in the metals, chemicals and petroleum sectors, while smaller and downstream enterprises saw

much more pressure, Zhu said.

For the January-May period, industrial firms' profits grew 83.4 per cent from the same period a year earlier to 3.42 trillion yuan. Factory-gate inflation saw its fastest annual growth in over 12 years in May driven by surging commodity prices, posing risks to profit margins for mid- and downstream firms.

Chinese policymakers have stepped up efforts in recent weeks to cool runaway metals prices, including selling supplies from state reserves. — Reuters

OCCI proposes creation of National Health Council to strengthen medical insurance, healthcare sectors

FROM PAGE 13

In all, we have 204 company branches, 152 agents and a network of 69 brokers across the country. I fear that when the mandatory health insurance scheme is implemented, there will be a race to the bottom in the pricing of policies, service standards will plummet, and the vulnerable players will be forced out of the market. But with a National Health Council, many of these scenarios can be quickly addressed and resolved. A sound supervisory and regulatory framework will also make it attractive for foreign players in the health sector to enter the market."

Dispute resolution

Al Jamalani also envisions a role for the proposed Council in adjudicating disputes and other contentious issues between some of the market players. "At the Chamber, we often get complaints from hospitals accusing insurance firms of lengthy delays in settling their invoices.

This is partly because insurance companies fail to collect the premiums on time from their clients upfront, preferring to give them credit sometimes extending over six months and more. Consequently, they are unable to make timely payments to the hospitals. The latter, for their part, are accused of inflated and other dubious billing practices



that are contested by the insurers. With clear-cut ground rules and guidance from the proposed National Health Council, many of these unfortunate scenarios can be avoided."

Also as part of its remit, the Council can be asked to weigh, among other things, requests for medical treatment overseas where suitable treatment is not available in the private sector locally.

Al Jamalani explained: "In the past, the Ministry of Health used to send Omanis for treatment abroad if suitable facilities and expertise was not available locally. Although the trend has reduced dramatically, there will be cases from the time of nationals who cannot find the appropriate specialist care within Oman. The Council can be tasked with evaluating the merit of any

such applications for treatment abroad if the patient is a valid policyholder."

Central National Reinsurance

Also imperative at this juncture is a joint venture national reinsurance company to help improve retention of premium, he said.

Agencies for foreign reinsurance companies, he said, typically operate on the basis of less risk retention and high commission – a business model that results in high cash outflows.

Gross written premium totalled RO 465.895 million in 2020, down 4.3 per cent from the previous figure of RO 486.582 million. Total retained premium was 56.52 per cent (versus 60.54 per cent in 2019, a decline of 4.02 per cent.

The highest net retention was recorded in the Motor and Health insurance classes of business. For Motor Insurance, the net retention ratio was 90.09 per cent in 2020 (down from 91.44 per cent in 2019). For Health Insurance, the net retention ratio was 73.96 per cent in 2020 (against 72.06 per cent in 2019).

"Retention of premium can be further strengthened by encouraging mergers and acquisitions among the multitude of players in the industry, underpinned by the establishment of a new central reinsurance company," said Al Jamalani. "These moves will help limit cash outflows, attract new inflows, support job creation for local Omanis and boost stock market trading activities."

European bank chief eyes transition as world recovers



LONDON: Odile Renaud-Basso (pictured), the first female president at Europe's development bank, hopes to restore the EBRD's green investment targets while addressing workplace equality as Covid-hit economies recover.

Before presiding over her first EBRD annual meeting this week, Renaud-Basso also highlighted the rapid workplace digitalisation that is affecting the bank's regions of investment as well as her own institution.

The lender, whose shareholders comprise almost 70 countries, has grown to invest in 38 emerging economies spanning central and eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa.

"On average, 2020 was less negative than expected" in the EBRD's countries of investment, Renaud-Basso said.

This year the EBRD foresees "much better than expected" economic growth across its countries of investment, after most economies contracted last year owing to pandemic turmoil, she said. — AFP

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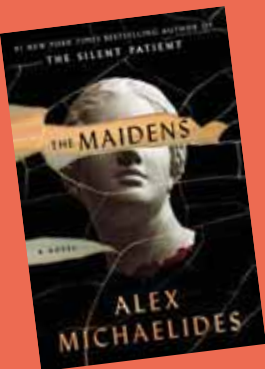


The growing trend of Omani men working in the kitchen

Traditionally, particularly in this part of the world, the kitchen has always been viewed as a woman's turf. But Omani men had been challenging this and as of today, many men have skillfully mastered the art of preparing mouth-watering dishes and are being voted as better cooks... **P20**

HERITAGE

READ



THE MAIDENS
BY ALEX MICHAELIDES

A therapist suspects a Greek tragedy professor at Cambridge University of committing murder.

Al Mashafra Wall in Barka tells a story of story

THE AL MASHAFRA wall is located about 9 km in the village of Al Rumais, east of the Wilayat of Barka, near the old road extending from Al Seeb. The walls of the towers range in length between approximately 18 and 23 metres. The fence is entered through an arched door, topped by an opening for firing from guns, and it is

adorned with carved inscriptions and decorative panels on the wooden upper threshold. The northern wall is also interspersed with wide barricade openings, and there are at least two towers crowned with very wide arched openings, and the whole building is built by clay with a layer of plaster. The name of the wall was men-

tioned in the Book of Castles and Forts. The book says that this wall was named "Al Rumais Castle", and that this fortress is surrounded by the remains of a dry trench and the remains of a gate known locally as Al Bab Al Kabeer. It is located about 25 metres in the northeast from the outer side of the trench.





The growing trend of Omani men working in the kitchen

By Thekra al Manji



Cooking has become one of the biggest trends on social media. As the coronavirus pandemic presses on, people have settled into routines that involve a lot more home cooking.

Women have traditionally been the predominant food shoppers and preparers and within the regional context, any kitchen is a woman's turf. But men, time and time again, had been challenging this and as of today, many men have skillfully mastered the art of preparing mouth-watering dishes and are being voted as better cooks.

So when it comes to men who have a deep passion for cooking, what is up with that?

Twenty-nine-year-old Chef Mohammad Bin Ali shared that for him, learning it was a necessity.

"I started cooking when I was studying in another country. I used to eat from restaurants and several times, I got food poisoning. So I decided to learn cooking and from there, my passion grew," he shared.

"I realised that cooking requires patience before skills," he added.

Mohammad bin Ali is a self-learner and he developed his cooking abilities on his own.

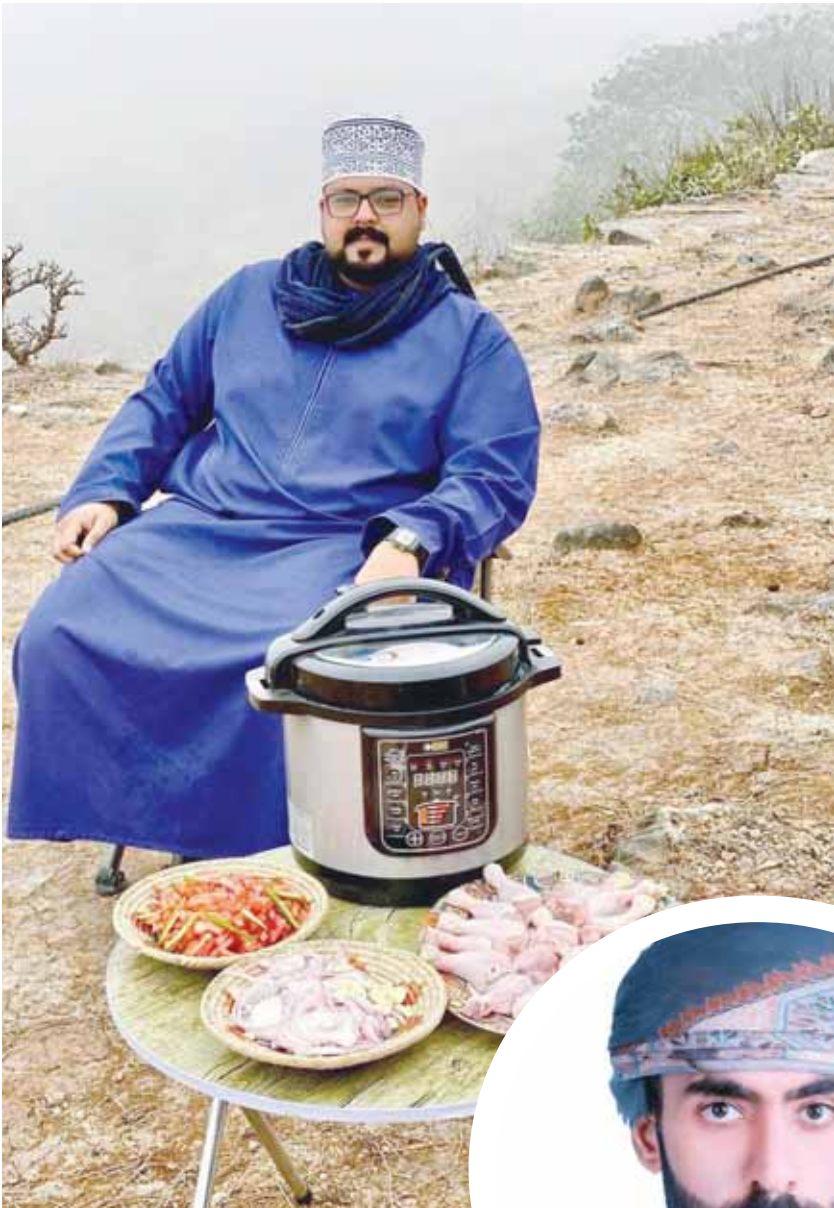
"I did many experiments to reach this level. I mostly select my own ingredients and create my own recipe. Nothing is impossible if you have passion," he said.

Mohammad shared that he faced a lot of difficulty and pressure from the community in the beginning primarily because people pointed out that it wasn't his profession. Back then, it was rare for an Omani man to work as a chef.

"Despite the challenges I faced, I continued with my passion until finally, I got a break. Nowadays, there are a lot of men in this profession and social media made it easier for society to accept the idea," he said.

"The sociality of cooking is not only about leisure but also a way for men to maintain relationships and assume domestic responsibility", he said.

Omani chef Hussam al Jabri is another cook who created his own sphere within different



social media platforms. As a content creator, he thrives in creating recipes that are easy to prepare and follow.

"My journey with cooking began when I start working away from home. I had to learn cooking for myself through YouTube, as I do not like to eat from restaurants," he shared.

He shared that from his personal experience, cooking requires a lot of passion and love for experimentation. Chef Hussam believes that it is important for anyone who wanted to get into the field to get the necessary education and must seek assistance from an experienced chef to have a level of mastery which he also personally did to advance his learnings.

As a content creator who specialises in cooking, Chef Hussam shared that "Making content on social media is very stressful, as I do the cooking,

shoot- ing, preparation, and montage on my own, and this is not easy as some followers think. However, if we look at its results, it is worth the effort."

Chef Hussam prides himself in being able to diversify the Omani cuisine by introducing new recipes.

"I was encouraged by the diversity and excellence of authentic Omani dishes, as it was my beginning to develop my own recipes. I combined Omani recipes with recipes from other countries and produced new dishes with a delicious taste."

Both Chef Mohammad and



Hussam are in agreement that aligning with the cooking industry does not affect their manhood in a negative way. They both profess that cooking is an art and an honourable profession and that it requires constant development and innovation and is totally worth being proud of. The passion for cooking among men has become an art, a way of life, and a good opportunity to compete and be creative.

Both men also said that within the region, more and more male chefs are finding success especially in catering because men had the opportunity to work long hours and manage pressure.

LOCAL SCENE

The History of Science Centre: An educational and cultural tributary for generations



THE SCIENCE HISTORY Center at the German University of Technology in the Sultanate is an educational and cultural tributary for generations to highlight the civilisation contribution and human communication of peoples in the development of applied sciences, in addition to clarifying the history of transferring ideas and theories.

This centre comes to appreciate the great Islamic history and the achievements of the early Muslim scholars. The German University of Technology in the Sultanate has shown an interest in establishing an educational centre that shows the extent to which the early Muslims benefited from previous civilisations and how they influenced new civilisations and modern sciences.

The centre was called the "History of Science Center", as it is concerned with the development of applied sciences from the classical Greco-Roman era - and then its extension in the Islamic period, and how it was activated in modern times. This is the first centre for the history of science in Islam that adheres to these standards and contributes to presenting the history of Arab sciences in a clear and systematic way.

The Center presents an outstanding and accurate depiction of the results reached by scholars of the golden era in Islamic civilisation in the mathematical sciences, such as mathematics, astronomy, landscape, mechanics, statics, and mathematical geography. The centre's distinctive exhibits objectively and accurately demonstrate the scientific foundations that were relied upon to reach the brilliant discoveries made by Muslim scholars to be presented to a wide audience.

The centre allocated part of the first floor for the scientific library in the history of science that enriches the educational process and scientific research and serves the various segments of society. The other part contains the educational programmes that are related to their education within the academic programmes of the university, and a section for scientific fellowships hosting specialists, and for conducting scientific research.

The upper floor contains a museum that exhibits all: mathematics, astronomy, optics, mechanics, static and motion sciences, and mathematical geography. It was chosen with the aim of showing the foundations of modern sciences, taking into account objectivity and accuracy to ensure that these exhibits are the first in the history of the Islamic era in compliance with these standards.



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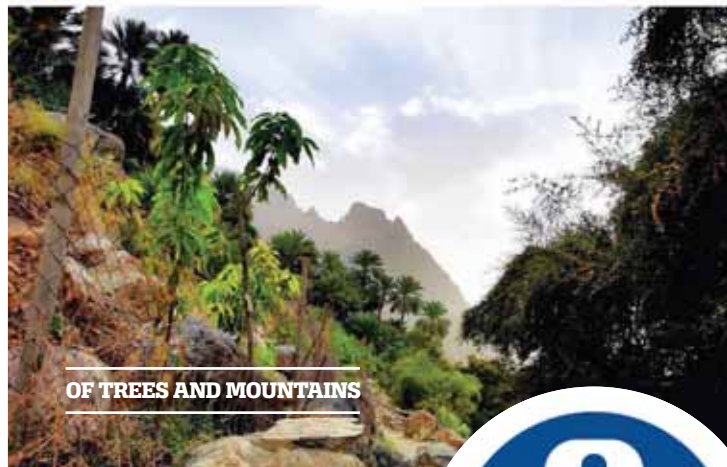
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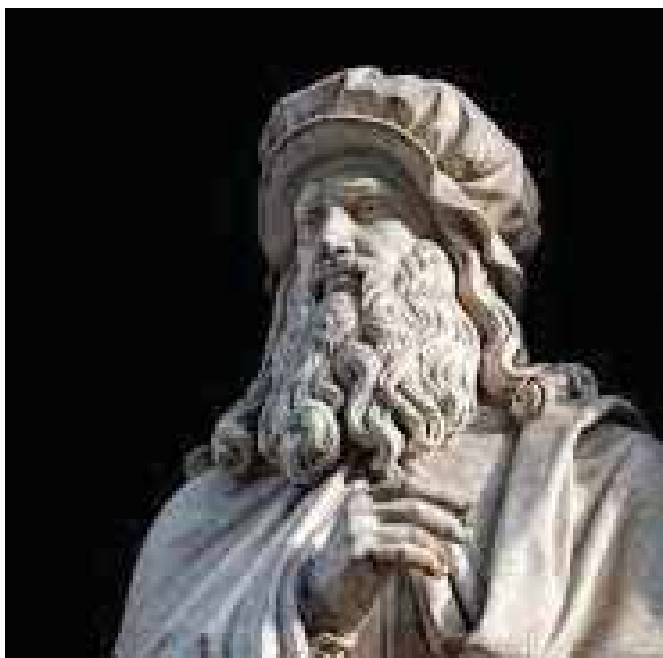
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ART



In France, virtual gallery showcases Leonardo's 'power and grace'

A NEW VIRTUAL gallery of Leonardo da Vinci's paintings that plunges the viewer into the Renaissance master's creative process opens on Friday at the manor in central France where he spent the last three years of his life.

The 12-minute immersive experience envelops the visitor with the paintings and the sketches that preceded them, projected onto the walls and rounded ceiling of a darkened gallery at the Clos Luce in the town of Amboise.

Close-ups, notably of faces and hands from masterpieces such as The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne but also of fabric folds, flora and other details, deepen the viewer's appreciation of the artist's virtuosity.

The Last Supper is shown in its stages, starting with the background, adding the table and finally Jesus and the Apostles.

The virtual masterclass also delves into Leonardo's trademark sfumato technique — the subtle blurring of the edges of images that creates a 3D effect — and his mastery of perspective.

"Nothing is left to chance in Leonardo's masterpieces," said Clos Luce president Francois Saint Bris, who led exhaustive documentary research to select the drawings.

The immersive experience "evokes Leonardo's power and grace," he told reporters.

Anne Carles of Arc-en-Scene, the show's principal creator, likened it to a concerto: "an overture with the 17 works gathered in an imaginary gallery" followed by a series of themed sequences, "from smiles to drapery, from background landscapes to perspective".

Then, "each of the scenes is deepened by the presentation of all his preparatory drawings," Carles said.

For her, Leonardo "became a very intimate subject. You enter into dialogue with the universal artist."

The virtual show brings together more than 200 works including all the paintings fully attributed to the Florentine, housed at 13 institutions around the world.

"We created this miracle of uniting them all in the same place," Carles, 65, said by telephone from Tahiti, where she is working on her latest project.

The two floors of the repurposed industrial building — a watermill still turns nearby — cover 500 square metres (5,400 square feet), twice its original size.

Four years in the making at a cost of 2.3 million euros (\$2.7 million), the overall project involved 60 companies.

"The project allowed us to support employment and maintain our staff" during the coronavirus pandemic, remarked Saint Bris, 69, whose family has owned the Clos Luce for 166 years.

It is the latest phase in the "digital transformation of the Clos Luce", he added.

One half of the upper floor, flooded with light thanks to the building's industrial "shed" shape, explores Leonardo's work as an architect and urban planner, also offering displays attesting to his musical and mathematical gifts. — AFP

TRAVEL TALES

Colosseum's visitors finally stand among the ghosts of lions and gladiators



"THE BEATING HEART of Rome is not the marble of the Senate, it's the sand of the Colosseum," the Roman senator Gracchus said in the 2000 Oscar-winning movie "Gladiator".

The towering 2,000-year-old stone amphitheatre, the biggest in the Roman empire, is Italy's most popular tourist attraction, drawing 7.6 million visitors in 2019.

But its own beating heart, the underground passages, cages and rooms where prisoners, animals and gladiators waited to pass through trapdoors to enter the arena above their heads — itself long gone — only opened to the paying public on Friday after lengthy renovations.

More than 80 archaeologists, architects and engineers worked on the 15,000 sq metre "hypogeum" for two years to "bring back to the centre of the attention a monument that the whole world loves", according to Diego della Valle, chairman of Tod's, the Italian fashion group that funded the work.

The circular balconies, long accessible to tourists, used to accommodate up to 70,000 spectators to watch gladiator fights, executions and animal hunts. The arena could also — before the hypogeum was built — be filled with water to re-enact sea battles.

Now a new 160 metre (525 ft) walkway reveals a part of the monument that has not been accessible to visitors.

It is the second part of a three-stage process that started eight years ago, with Tod's pledging 25 million euros (\$30 million) to pay for the project — one of a number of restorations of Italian landmarks funded by luxury goods firms.

"It is... important for relevant companies to make themselves available to the country, understanding what they can do for the country," Della Valle said.

"This is about important pieces for Italy, monuments that are well-



known all over the world, and tourism, which is not only entertainment but an important business in Italy which, if cared for properly, has no rival anywhere in the world."

The first phase of the makeover, including a cleanup of the facade, was unveiled in 2016. The final phase involves renewing the galleries and the lighting system and creating a new visitor centre. The project is set to be completed in about three years.

Separately, the government has decided to provide the ancient Roman landmark with new hi-tech flooring, which is expected to be in place by 2023.

Della Valle, who also helps fund Milan's La Scala opera house, called on fellow entrepreneurs to "take a monument each, restore it, let's be quick!". — Reuters

FILM

'Dune' to lead Toronto film festival's return to in-person moviegoing



THE TORONTO FILM festival announced on Wednesday it will resume in-person screenings at its September gala — including Denis Villeneuve's "Dune" remake — after the pandemic forced it to scale down and go virtual last year.

But there won't be any popcorn at the September 9-18 event as theatre snack bars will be closed.

And the red carpets will look different due to social distancing and masking rules, as well as a possible clampdown on large crowds.

Canada also currently prohibits foreigners from entering the country for discretionary travel, so it's not yet clear if Hollywood movie stars will be in attendance.

"We are so proud of the calibre of the films and the diversity of the stories we will be presenting this year," festival executive director Joana Vicente said in a statement.

"It is so powerful to be able to share these films with festival-goers in theatres," she said, noting the world is finally and "definitely moving towards a degree of normalcy."

Villeneuve's highly anticipated adaptation of Frank Herbert's epic sci-fi fantasy novel "Dune" will have its first IMAX screening in Toronto, roughly one week after its premiere at the Venice film festival.

Other films at the Toronto festival will include the Alanis Morissette documentary "Jagged," the film "Petite Maman" directed by Celine Sciamma, Kenneth Branagh's "Belfast" starring Judi Dench, the Naomi Watts-led thriller "Lakewood," and the documentary "Dionne Warwick: Don't Make Me Over."

The largest film festival in North America is in a normal year crucial for Oscar-conscious studios and distributors, attracting hundreds of film-makers and actors to Canada's largest city.

This year's hybrid festival, which will see reduced cinema seating as well as screenings at drive-ins, is doubling to 100 the number of films that will be shown from last year, but is still down from its pre-pandemic average of roughly 300 feature and short films.

Digital screenings introduced last year will also return and likely continue into the future, allowing cinephiles across Canada to see the films from the comfort of their couch. — AFP



Khareef season's extended effect in Khor Jarama

By Yeru Ebuen

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A solitary structure stood by the water overlooking the more than dozen of dhows anchored in the nearby still waters of the Khor. This structure is a recent addition, a makeshift port, that allows the free coming and going of the small boats that take passengers to the floating chalets scattered in the nearly 10 kilometres of the Khor.

Summer in Khor Jarama is two times better than Muscat. It still gets disturbingly hot between 11 to 3 pm but the evenings are usually nicer, cooler.

The climate here benefits from the cold breeze coming from the sea that brings about the khareef season. In the nearby Ashkara, the temperature is even colder but Jarama makes do with the kinder temperature it is gifted with compared to the rest of the country.

The last time we visited Khor Jarama was three years back and we came home disappointed because, like many of the tourist sites in Oman, it started to lose its beauty due to the thousands of plastic wantonly displaced in nearly every nook and cranny of the Khor.

That disappointment has turned to relief as we discovered that Khor Jarama is one of the success stories of conservation and restoration. The corners that I refused to check out in the past had now been cleaned, the garbages picked up and disposed of by the municipality to where they should go.

The air also smelled cleaner and the mountains surrounding the Khor added to the beauty that has made us go back to this place so many times in the past.

When you visit Khor Jarama, it is impossible to not notice the floating chalets that pepper the emerald waters of the Khor. Owned by a local named Nasser, it is an initiative that gives guests a different outdoor adventure — one that offers the

comfort of a floating home with the water ready to be explored for a swim at any time.

Our original plan of staying for one day was extended to another. The chalets were built to fully take advantage of the beautiful sight that surrounds you. Under the strawberry full moon, serenaded by the cold breeze that gets colder as the night goes deeper, it was the perfect place for reflection, for nice conversation and even fun games and activities.

Other than swimming and barbecue on the chalet, there are other adventures you can book following strict protocols from the Supreme Committee. Third-party providers offer kayak and jetski adventures which needed to be pre-booked in advance.

Khor Jarama also has some of the most beautiful and remote beaches and if you're the kind of explorer that wants to spend your time lounging in the sun, then it is a perfect getaway.

The nearby mountains by the old fishing village is also a great spot to start hiking. We've done it in the past and as we look at the imposing peaks, there was a sense of pride within us to know that we've conquered them once and would gladly do so again in the future.

The two days we stayed at the chalet in Jarama became a blur. There was satisfaction in finishing a book, in enjoying a hastily made pasta, in being with people that matters to you all while enjoying a good breeze and kinder weather.

Muscat and a lot of places, especially this summer, had experienced an agonising rise in temperature. Added to the limitations of the pandemic, the day to day living has even become dreary. But thanks to places like Khor Jarama and the adventures they offer, we get to enjoy a little bit of peace and quiet and a rejuvenation that we badly need especially at this very trying time.

