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DISCOVERIES DATING
BACK TO THE IRON AGE



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO MONTENEGRO

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Milo Dukanovic of the Republic of Montenegro on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to President Dukanovic and the friendly people of Montenegro. His Majesty has sent a cable of greetings to President Evaristo Carvalho of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe on his country's Independence Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Carvalho, and the friendly people of Sao Tome and Principe.

OVER 1.35 MILLION VACCINATED IN OMAN

The total number of people vaccinated in the Sultanate since the beginning of the national campaign for immunisation against Covid-19 has reached 1.35 million which is 38 per cent of the total target groups. The total of those vaccinated with the first dose reached 1,081,547, at a rate of 80 per cent, while the total of those vaccinated with two doses stood at 272,141 people, at a rate of 20 per cent.

READ IN

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Pass around the positivity
Lakshmi Kothaneth

A philosophical touch for small details of life
Dr Khalid al Balushi

INSIDE



AFGHAN SPECIAL FORCES
MOVED IN ON TALIBAN

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BRANSON SOARS TO SPACE
ABOARD VIRGIN FLIGHT

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HM SAUDI VISIT CONSOLIDATES TIES

MUSCAT: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman on Monday issued a joint communiqué reading as follows: Based on their deep-rooted historical relations and bonds of affinity between the leaderships and peoples of the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and, to consolidate the distinguished bilateral relations between the two countries, and in response to a valued invitation from the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, His Majesty

Sultan Haitham bin Tarik paid a state visit to the Kingdom on July 11 and 12.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud held a session of talks during which they reviewed ways to develop cooperation between the two countries in various fields. The talks were held in the presence of Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence.

The two sides reviewed various aspects of cooperation and ways

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The two countries agreed to launch joint initiatives covering key areas of cooperation, including investment in the Duqm Zone

JOINT COMMUNIQUE

of enhancing joint action in many spheres. They commended the current level of coordination in political, military and security fields aimed at achieving security and stability for the two brotherly countries.

The two sides welcomed the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on the establishment of an Omani-Saudi Coordination Council — co-chaired by the foreign ministers of both countries — to strengthen bilateral relations in all fields.

They also agreed to direct the

departments concerned to expedite the opening of the direct land route and border checkpoint, which will contribute to the smooth movement of the citizens of the two countries and ease the connectivity of supply chains, paving the way for a highly anticipated full economic integration between the two countries.

The two sides welcomed the effective interaction between their respective ministers to discuss issues of mutual interest. They also directed the officials concerned to work on finalising a number of agreements and MoUs. **SEE ALSO P3**

HM extends an invitation to King Salman to visit Oman

The two sides commended the current level of coordination

Omani-Saudi Coordination Council to strengthen ties

To expedite the opening of direct land route and border checkpoint

Identical views on the need to find solution to Yemen crisis

Officials told to work on finalising MoUs in various fields

To enhance cooperation on Middle East Green Initiative

HM returns home after Saudi visit



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik returned home after paying a two-day state visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) in response to the invitation of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the KSA.

During the visit, His Majesty the Sultan held a round of official talks with the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques at Neom city. The two leaders reviewed means of enhancing relations and cooperation between the two countries, as well as strengthening fraternal ties between the two brotherly Omani and Saudi peoples.

His Majesty was received at the Royal Airport by HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Council of

Ministers; HH Sayyid Fatik bin Fahar al Said, Special Envoy to His Majesty the Sultan; HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth; Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council; Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance; Nasr bin Hamoud al Kindi, Secretary General of the Royal Court Affairs; Shaikh Abdullah bin Mohammed al Salmi, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs; Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saedi, Minister of Health; Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education; Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat; Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs; Lt Gen Said

bin Ali al Hilali, Head of the Internal Security Service; Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raeesi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces; Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman; Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman; Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman; and Maj Gen Musallam bin Mohammed Jaboub, Commander of the Sultan's Special Force (SSF).

During the visit, His Majesty the Sultan was accompanied by an official high-level delegation comprised HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs; Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy,

Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court; Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office; Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior; Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister; Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology; Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA); and HH Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, the Sultanate's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia.

Sultan Haitham bin Tarik was seen off at the Neom Bay Airport by Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence; Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud al Saud, Minister of Interior (Head of Mission of Honour); Abdullah bin Saud al Anzi, Saudi Ambassador to the Sultanate; members of the Mission of Honour, a number of Saudi senior officials, and members of the Sultanate's Embassy in the Kingdom.

CABLE OF THANKS TO SAUDI KING

While leaving Neom city, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sent a cable of thanks to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin

Abdulaziz al Saud.

In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt appreciation for the hospitality accorded to him and his delegation.

His Majesty the Sultan lauded the outcome of the visit, notably the talks, joint meetings and agreements which, he said will have a positive impact on consolidating the deep-rooted historical ties. This, His Majesty affirmed, will bring about plenty of benefits to the peoples of the two countries.

His Majesty the Sultan prayed to the Almighty Allah to grant King Salman continued good health. He wished that the people of Saudi Arabia would enjoy further progress and prosperity under the wise leadership of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. — ONA

LEAVES SAUDI ARABIA
Earlier in the day, His Majesty





HIS MAJESTY'S VISIT TO SAUDI ARABIA CONSOLIDATES BILATERAL TIES

MUSCAT: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman on Monday issued a joint communiqué reading as follows: Based on their deep-rooted historical relations and bonds of affinity between the leaderships and peoples of the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and, to consolidate the distinguished bilateral relations between the two countries, and in response to a valued invitation from the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik paid a state visit to the Kingdom on July 11 and 12.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud held a session of talks during which they reviewed ways to develop cooperation between the two countries in various fields. The talks were held in the presence of Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence.

The two sides reviewed various aspects of cooperation and ways of enhancing joint action in many spheres. They commended the current level of coordination in political, military and security fields aimed at achieving security and stability for the two brotherly countries.

The two sides welcomed the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on the establishment of an Omani-Saudi Coordination Council — co-chaired by the foreign ministers of both countries — to strengthen bilateral relations in all fields.

They also agreed to direct the departments concerned to expedite the opening of the direct land route and border checkpoint, which will contribute to the smooth movement of the citizens of the two countries and ease the connectivity of supply chains, paving the way for a highly anticipated full economic integration between the two countries.

The two sides welcomed the

effective interaction between their respective ministers to discuss issues of mutual interest. They also directed the officials concerned to work on finalising a number of agreements and MoUs for cooperation in various economic, commercial, investment, security, cultural, diplomatic and educational fields and everything that might generate benefits or bring about prosperity to the peoples of the two countries.

ECONOMIC TIES

The two sides reaffirmed their determination to accelerate the pace of economic cooperation between the two countries, notably by encouraging government and private sectors to realise meaningful commercial and investment exchanges that will live up to the aspirations and expectations of their peoples and meet the goals of Saudi Vision 2030 and Oman Vision 2040. This can be done through the launch of joint initiatives covering key areas of cooperation, including investment in the Duqm zone, cooperation in the field of energy, partnership in food security and

cooperation in the fields of culture, sports and tourism.

The two sides welcomed the virtual meeting of the Omani-Saudi Business Council, which convened via videoconferencing on July 4 in the presence of the Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Head of the Saudi Chambers Federation and the chairmen of the Omani-Saudi Business Council. The meeting helped to promote direct and indirect investment opportunities between the private sectors in both countries. It will also speed up the rate of visits of business owners, the holding of conferences and exhibitions and the establishment of joint economic projects.

The two sides agreed to enhance cooperation in the fields of environment, food security and the “Middle East Green Initiative” unveiled by Prince Mohammed bin Salman, all with the prime aim of serving the interests of the two countries at the local, regional and global levels.

The two sides lauded the efforts of the Opec plus countries, led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

and with the participation of the Sultanate of Oman, noting that such efforts brought about stability and balance to oil markets, despite weak demand resulting from the successive waves of the Coronavirus pandemic that still cripples a large part of the world. To this effect, the two sides stressed the necessity of maintaining cooperation to support oil market stability.

They also welcomed support for cooperation towards adopting the “Circular Carbon Economy (CCE)” approach, endorsed by the G20 as an integrated and comprehensive framework to address and manage the challenges arising from greenhouse gas emissions. The CCE is an approach that constitutes an economically sustainable way to manage emissions through the applications of its four elements, namely reduction, reuse, recycle and elimination.

In this context, the two sides noted the importance of utilising sources of renewable energy and associated technologies, since they contribute to sustaining global

energy supplies. The two sides agreed to direct the authorities concerned to study opportunities for mutual investments in advanced technologies, innovation, energy projects, renewable energy, industry, health sector, pharmaceutical industries, real estate development, tourism, petrochemicals, converting industries, supply chains, logistical partnership, information technology and financial technology (fintech) that may benefit both countries-bearing in mind available potential and opportunities in both countries.

The two sides also welcomed the participation of Saudi companies' investment in quality projects that the Sultanate seeks to accomplish. The two sides also exchanged views on regional and international issues of common concern and agreed to coordinate their positions in a way that would serve their interests and support security and stability in the region and the entire world.

YEMEN SITUATION

Regarding Yemen, the two

sides expressed identical views on the need to continue their efforts to find a comprehensive political solution to the Yemeni crisis based on the GCC Initiative and its executive mechanism, as well as the outcomes of Yemen's Comprehensive National Dialogue Conference, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2216 and the Saudi Initiative to end the Yemeni crisis.

The aim is to alleviate the human suffering of the brotherly people of Yemen. The two sides also stressed the importance of cooperating and dealing seriously and effectively with all aspects and implications, as well as repercussions of the Iranian nuclear and ballistic missile file in a manner that will contribute to achieving regional and international security and stability.

They reiterated the principle of good neighbourliness, respect for the resolutions of the United Nations and international legitimacy to spare the region all activities that might compromise its stability.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik extended an invitation to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud to visit Oman. King Salman expressed his appreciation for this invitation and welcomed it.

At the end of the visit, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik expressed his deep thanks to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, and to Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. His Majesty the Sultan valued the warm reception and unique hospitality accorded to him and his accompanying delegation. King Salman expressed his best wishes to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. He wished Omani people further progress and prosperity.

— ONA



Oman, KSA discuss new carriageway opening

NEOM: Within the framework of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq's visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, on Monday met with his Saudi Counterpart Prince

Abdulaziz bin Saud al Saud, Minister of Interior. The two sides reviewed means of enhancing the relations between the two countries. It also touched on matters of common interest.

Moreover, the meeting discussed speeding up the procedures related to opening the new carriageway that will connect the two countries through the Empty Quarter. — ONA



State Council okays study on growth accelerators

MUSCAT: The State Council on Monday approved a proposed study titled "Accelerators of Growth of Omani Economy" presented by the Council's Economic Committee. The study was approved during a meeting of the sixth plenary specialised committee (comprising members of the Economic Committee and heads of standing committees), held as part of the Council's second annual sitting of the 7th Term. The meeting stressed the need to lay emphasis on the cited accelerators of economic growth at the macroeconomic level to ensure sustained growth



of the volume of the local product in consummation of the government's efforts in this regard. The study aims to identify challenges posed to the

development of the economy and focuses on the banking sector and the labour market in a manner that enhances the government's plans and maintain steady growth of the economy.

The study also determines economic growth accelerators and enablers to be given priority due to their role in diversification seen within the context of the Economic Stimulus Plan. — ONA

Saudi Arabia is important trading partner of Oman

HAMAD AL HASHMI

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, affirmed that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was among the most important trading partners of the Sultanate in 2020. Saudi Arabia ranked second among the most important importing countries for Omani non-oil exports, and second at the level of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and fourth on the world level as an importer of Omani fish in 2019. KSA ranked fourth in re-export, and fifth in the list of countries from which the Sultanate imports. The ministry explained that the volume of trade exchange between the Sultanate and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia rose to RO 959.9 million in 2020, up from RO 506.2 million in 2010, an increase of RO 453.6 million in a 10 years' period. The ministry pointed to an increase in the number of Saudi companies in the Sultanate from 467 companies in 2010 to 1,235 companies in this year, an

increase by 768 companies in the last 11 years. It noted that the trade, construction and services sectors are the top 3 sectors for the Saudi investments in the Sultanate. The ministry indicated that the volume of Omani exports to Saudi Arabia stood at RO 548.5 million in 2020, and the volume of Saudi imports to the Sultanate amounted to RO 411.3 million last year. It explained that Saudi Arabia is a strategic partner in a number of economic projects in the Sultanate including the Salalah Independent Power Plant, Manah Power Plant, the Salalah Independent Water Desalination Plant, Ibri II Solar PV Independent Power Plant Project and the Saudi Development Fund. The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion confirmed that the Omani-Saudi trade relations are historic and sustainable, pointing to the integration between Oman Vision 2040 and Saudi Vision 2030, in terms of economic diversification, improving policies and legislation, investment opportunities, knowledge and innovation.

GCC health officials review Covid-19 situation



MUSCAT: The GCC Health Under-Secretaries on Monday including the latest developments of the Coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic in the Gulf. During the 18th virtual meeting, a standard definition for infected persons and deaths related to Covid-19 in the GCC countries was agreed upon, as well as unifying the test procedures of gene sequencing for the different variants of the virus. Furthermore, the meeting set a standardised classification of high-risk countries and adopted the standards of the WHO.

The meeting reviewed a number of related issues including the latest developments of immunisation in the GCC countries, Gulf Unified Treatment Manual and the Covid-19 Gulf Unified Manual. The Under-Secretaries urged all citizens and residents in the GCC countries to adhere to preventive measures such as wearing masks and avoiding gatherings during Eid Al Adha. The virtual meeting was attended by Dr Mohammed bin Saif al Hosni, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Health Affairs. — ONA

Muscat slaughterhouses schedule announced

MUSCAT: Following the decision issued by the Supreme Committee for tackling the developments resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic to avoid gatherings at the slaughterhouses, Muscat Municipality adopted an online system to enable individuals to pre-reserve their sacrifices, starting from Wednesday July 14 to Sunday July 18. Muscat Municipality said that the slaughtering of pre-preserved private livestock, or for butcheries and companies, should be collected in the evening without the presence of individuals. Individuals willing to receive

carcasses can go directly to the slaughterhouse stockyards to make a reservation from 7 am to 12 noon and from 3 pm to 4:30 pm. The carcasses can be collected the next morning. Local Omani goats and sheep of individuals will be received and numbered in a limited number from Thursday July 15 to Sunday July 18 between 3 pm to 4:30 pm and the carcasses will be collected in the next morning from the slaughterhouses' refrigerators. The work in the slaughterhouse of Seeb and Al Amerat will resume for individuals and companies on July 24 in the morning period.



CSC celebrates graduation of new batch



MUSCAT: The Sultan's Armed Forces Command and Staff College (CSC) celebrated the graduation of the 34th Command and Staff Course under the auspices of Sayyid Lt Gen Munthir bin Majid al Said, Head of Liaison and Coordination at the Royal Office, on Monday. The event was held at the premises of the Command and Staff College in Mu'askar Bait Al Falaj amid precautionary measures against Covid-19. The Commandant of the Command and Staff College delivered a speech in which he

said that readiness, flexibility and the ability to respond quickly to various environmental and variables and conditions are among the skills that the college believes and it was only by applying those skills that the CSC was able to handle the Covid-19 pandemic efficiently. The awareness and responsibility of the affiliates of the CSC as well as its technical capabilities, facilities and integrated academic environment have all contributed to overcoming the difficulties and mitigating the



THE COMMANDANT OF THE CSC URGED THE GRADUATES TO PURSUE SCIENCE AND TO SEEK KNOWLEDGE FROM ITS VARIOUS SOURCES AND TO DEAL WITH THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND THE DEVELOPMENTS IN TECHNOLOGY AND COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS

impact of the pandemic and provided an opportunity for the implementation of the course programmes. The Commandant of the CSC urged the graduates to pursue science and to seek knowledge from its various sources, and to deal with the fourth industrial revolution and the developments in technology and communications systems. Sayyid Lt Gen Munthir bin Majid al Said, Head of Liaison and Coordination at the Royal Office, the Chief Guest handed over the awards and certificates to the graduates. — ONA



Officials visit science, technology centre in Dakhiliyah Governorate



NIZWA: Dr Ali bin Amer al Shithani, Communications and Information Technology Under-Secretary, visited the Science and Technology Centre in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

He was briefed on the centre's experience and training programmes it offers for students, teachers, supervisors, university students, colleges and the community, in addition to the student projects that achieved high rankings in various

competitions.

The visit included discussions on the partnership between the Governorate's Directorate of Education and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, as well as means of cooperation and support between them.

The under-secretary was accompanied during the visit by Shaikh Dr Faisal bin Ali al Zeidi, Wali of Manah, Acting Wali of Nizwa. — ONA



MoH conference discusses lower limb musculoskeletal disorders

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, JULY 12

The Directorate General of Specialised Medical Care-Medical Rehabilitation Section of the Ministry of Health (MoH) organised a scientific conference on 'Rehabilitation of lower limbs musculoskeletal disorders'.

The three-day event was held in collaboration with the 'PhysioPod' platform, UK and the Omani Physiotherapy Association (OPTA) on Friday.

The conference witnessed the wide participation of around 2,800 local and international experts and specialists from the health sector. In addition, some 21 lectures happened during the session.

D Kadhim Jafar Suleiman, Director General of SMC emphasised the keenness of the DGSMC represented by the Medical Rehabilitation Services section to implement training programmes and safely utilise the available means to achieve the desired goals of these programmes set to qualify and train health workers in various fields and thus provide high quality health services, and keeping pace with the scientific development.

Head of the Medical

Rehabilitation Services at the General Directorate of Specialised Medical Care, Samia al Raisi highlighted the importance of benefiting from international experiences and expertise in physical therapy and rehabilitation and continuing cooperation with the relevant authorities.

She affirmed that the section seeks to support different forms of physical therapy, which scientific studies have proven successful, including manual therapy and the muscular efficiency programme. The conference addressed a spectrum of topics related to lower limb musculoskeletal disorders cases. Theoretical and practical lectures reviewed the clinical examination methods applied for bones, joints, muscles and ligaments issues and highlighted the various therapeutic and rehabilitative methods used in rehabilitating patients to lead proper daily activities.

The event also discussed medical rehabilitation in the Middle East, outlining the academic education of the various medical rehabilitation specialisations, improving the profession in general, and benefiting from international experiences and expertise in this field.

SQAPS receives new batch of officer cadets



NIZWA: The Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences (SQAPS) in the Wilayat of Nizwa has received a new batch of officer cadets, holders of bachelor degree, to join Royal Oman Police (ROP).

The officer cadets will undergo

a foundation programme to prepare them in carrying out their duties as ROP personnel. Alongside their military and physical training, the officer cadets will also be taught basic police sciences, law and practical applications.

SQAPS is keen on conducting its training programmes with full adherence to precautionary measures against Covid-19 to ensure the safety of the personnel and the training staff.

— ONA

Webinar series offers free career guidance for youth

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 12

With Covid-19 having a severe and detrimental impact on our economy and our young people this year, the future career prospects of our young people have been affected.

Our youth face the risk of reduced opportunities. The career decisions that young people make this year will be crucial. It is essential to support, motivate, and help them make intelligent career choices. This webinar series is

brought forth by Muscat University. This webinar series aims to empower the youth in Oman and bring transformation in the community. 'Be The Champion' is an initiative to educate young people and contribute to society and the nation.

Starting from July 15, this series has three webinars and will help all high school and college students to understand their strengths and career preferences. It will also help youth make their educational, training, and occupational choices aligned with the emerging job market. Parents and caregivers will be able to understand their role in mapping the career plan for their children. This initiative will also aim to provide career guidance to re-engage early leavers from education and training.

The first of the webinars will discuss how to Make a Career Choice.

Find the registration for the webinar on this link- <https://www.massratshaikh.com/product/bethechampion/>

MAJIS INDUSTRIAL SERVICES SAOC (Majis)
P.O. Box No. 553, Falaj Al Qabail, Postal Code 322, Sultanate of Oman
Tel No. 26852421 Email: Tender@miscoman.com
(Office Location: Administration Building, Opposite Sohar Aluminium and Sohar Power Co. at Sohar Industrial Port Area)

TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

Majis Industrial Services SAOC (Majis) is a closely held joint stock company fully owned by the Government of Oman. Majis is engaged in providing various water utility services at the Sohar Industrial Port Area.

Tenders are invited from local and international qualified firms for the following (Note: small description of TOR will be shared upon the request from bidder's side).

Sl. No.	Tender No.	Tender Description	Bids fees in R.O.	Last date for paying bid fee	Last date for tender submission
1.	Majis/22/2021	Langelier Saturation Index (LSI) Control System and other associated works for Majis RO Desalination Plant at Sohar Industrial Port Area	250/-	Tuesday 13th July 2021	Tuesday 10th August 2021
2.	Majis/23/2021	Disposal and dump Generated Sludge from Majis ETP at Sohar Port	40/-	Tuesday 13th July 2021	2nd August 2021

The companies participating must be registered with Majis' e-tendering system (<http://tendering.majis.om/ VendorLogin.aspx>) on or before 13th July 2021. Bidders who have made electronic transfer of bid fee will be provided the soft copy of the tender documents on Tuesday 13th July 2021 through our e tendering system. The payment of bid fee should be made by direct transfer to the following bank account of Majis. (Account Name: Majis Industrial Services SAOC, Bank : Bank Muscat SAOG, Account Number: 0423010783830018).

While making payment by direct bank transfer name of the firm should be clearly mentioned and an email sent to tender@miscoman.com with a copy of the money transmittal advice as well upload the tender fees receipt in our e tendering system. Tender documents will be published to such firms only.

The Tender should be submitted into our e-tendering system under the respective tender Nos., addressed to the Management Committee, Majis Industrial Service SAOC, P.O. Box No. 553, Falaj Al Qabail, Postal Code 322, Sultanate of Oman (at Majis's reception).

Tenderers must not display their identities on envelopes. Majis is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender.

Questions regarding this procurement process shall be directed to Majis e tendering system under "pre tender clarification section". For any technical issues facing in the e tendering system, the bidders are requested to send the screen shot of error page and send it to tender@miscoman.com.

TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

MAZOOON ELECTRICITY COMPANY (MZEC) WOULD LIKE TO MENTION THE EXTENSION TIME OF PURCHASING THE TENDER TO BE AS FOLLOWING:

Tender No	Description	Last Date of Purchasing	Last Date for Submission	Tender Board Grade	Type of Participation	Tender Price R.O
31/MZEC/2021	CONSTRUCTION OF PROPOSED MZEC BRANCH OFFICE AT WADI TAYEEN THE SITE VISIT WILL BE ON 28/07/2021 AT 10:00 AM IN WADI TAYEEN OFFICE	26/7/2021	17/8/2021	FOURTH	LOCAL	75.000

Tender No	Description	Last Date of Purchasing	Last Date for Submission	DCRP Grade	Type of Participation	Tender Price R.O
32/MZEC/2021	HSE WORKS - CONVERSION OF EXISTING 33KV OHL TO U/G CABLE FROM BB.ALI GRID TO BH-BA-II-152 AT SEAH AL SHARQ IN JA'ALAN BANI BU ALI AT SOUTH SHARQIYAH GOVERNORATE THE SITE VISIT WILL BE ON 28/07/2021 AT 10:00 AM IN JBBA OFFICE	26/7/2021	17/8/2021	B	LOCAL	60.000

- Specialized companies registered with the DCRP and the Tender Board and their valid registration can subscribe and obtain technical specifications and tender conditions by submitting an application with all company documents attached via e-mail: scm.tenders@mzec.co.om during working hours. The official time is from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm. In return for paying the amount specified above for one copy (non-refundable) via bank deposit to the company's account.
- The tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of tender price valid (90) days as a bid bond and addressed to the chairperson of the (Internal Tender Committee) of Mazoon Electricity Company S.A.O.C and **any offer is not including the bond will be rejected immediately.**
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic conditions, offers will be submitted by sending offers to the e-mail: mzec-offerssubmission@MZEC.co.om and that the offers are valid for a period of not less than (90) days from the date of bid submission.
- Bids must be sent before (10:00 am) from the date specified as the last day for bid submission.
- The priority of the awarding will be given to those bidders who assure recruitment of the maximum numbers of Omani staff and utilizing Omani products.
- All Clarifications are to be sent to the email address: MZEC-Clarification@mzec.co.om and the Last date for receiving vendor's clarifications will be on 06/08/2021.**
- Mazoon Electricity Company S.A.O.C. is not bound to accept the lowest tender.
- We would like to inform you that above documents prices do not include VAT 5% and it will be charged if purchase invoice issued.

(WE LIGHT...WE CARE)

Tenders & Contracts Section : (+968) 72722787 / 97292777 / 92858543

شركة كهرباء مزون ش.م.ع.
 MAZOOON ELECTRICITY COMPANY S.A.O.C.
 إحدى شركات مجموعة أماد
 Member of Nama Group

Mazoon.co
 Mazoon_co
 Mazoon_co
 80077771
 mzec.nama.om

Egypt
tightens law
to sack civil
servants

CAIRO: Egypt’s parliament on Monday approved legal amendments expanding the government’s ability to sack civil servants with suspected links to terrorist groups without prior disciplinary action, parliamentary sources said.

The move was described by state media as a major step in a campaign to “purify” government bodies of members of the Brotherhood, which Egypt classifies as a terrorist group.

The legal amendments seen by Reuters allow the government to immediately fire any employee whose name appears on its terrorism list. This includes suspects still under investigation or on trial as well as those convicted in terrorism cases.

The list includes some liberal and leftist activists.

Individuals added to the terrorism list by court orders are generally subjected to an asset freeze and a travel ban and have 60 days to appeal the decision. Public prosecutors submit requests in court to put people or groups on the list, and the court decides on the matter. — Reuters

Afghan special forces moved in on Taliban,
only to find they had melted away

KANDAHAR: Soldiers from Afghanistan’s special forces paused for a short prayer late on Sunday night on a deserted stretch of highway in the southern province of Kandahar. They do so each time they prepare to face Taliban militants in battle.

The highly trained troops had been called in to flush out insurgents who attacked regular forces and local police hours earlier, only to find that the Taliban had disappeared into the darkness leaving behind a few civilians and wounded soldiers.

“We received a report that the enemy had infiltrated here and wanted to overthrow the district,” Major Mohammad din Tasir, a member of the special forces unit deployed in the Taliban’s former stronghold of Kandahar, said after the operation.

The report had suggested up to 300 Taliban fighters were present in the area, he said.

“Unfortunately, what we heard in the report and what we saw on the scene did not match.”

Tasir said the absence of Taliban fighters showed that claims by the group that they now controlled up to 85 per cent of the country’s territory were exaggerated.

It also underlined the difficulty in facing an enemy that mixes open assaults on checkpoints, vil-



A member of the Afghan Special Forces drives a humvee during a combat mission against Taliban, in Kandahar province. — Reuters

lages, towns and cities with hit-and-run tactics that tend to avoid heavy casualties.

Recent territorial gains by the Taliban come as foreign troops led by the US military withdraw from Afghanistan after 20 years of war, leaving the task of pulling the country from a spiralling security crisis to local forces.

On Monday, the US general leading the war in Afghanistan, Austin Miller, will relinquish his command, in a symbolic end to

America’s longest conflict.

Kandahar is one of many provinces to see a recent surge in offensives by the Taliban, which says it wants to be involved in running the country peacefully although it has always opposed the presence of foreign forces.

In the last week the group has been advancing in the west of the country near the border with Iran and has surrounded the central city of Ghazni.

The special forces unit had

been called in after insurgents attempted to take control of Khan Baba village in the Dand district of Kandahar, unleashing RPGs and heavy machinegun fire at Afghan security forces and local police.

The soldiers travelled there under cover of darkness, using night vision equipment and moving in Humvee vehicles scarred with bullet holes from previous missions, some of them carried out with US allies. — Reuters

US general to
step down from
command

KABUL: The US general leading the war in Afghanistan, Austin Miller, will relinquish command on Monday, US officials say, in a symbolic end to America’s longest conflict even as Taliban insurgents gain momentum.

Miller will become America’s last four-star general on the ground in Afghanistan in a ceremony in Kabul that will come ahead of a formal end to the military mission there on August 31, a date set by President Joe Biden as he looks to extricate American troops from the two-decade-old war.

While the ceremony may offer some sense of closure for US veterans who served in Afghanistan, it’s unclear whether it will succeed in reassuring the Western-backed Afghan government as the Taliban press ground offensives that have given them control of more territory than at any time since the conflict began.

US Marine General Kenneth McKenzie flew into Kabul to underscore America’s future assistance to Afghan security forces.

— Reuters

Abide by N-deal: Iran
foreign minister to Raisi

TEHRAN: Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has urged President-elect Ebrahim Raisi and his government to honour the 2015 Vienna nuclear agreement.



according to ISNA. Raisi is due to succeed Hassan Rowhani on August 5. The cleric won the presidential election in June with the backing of the country’s hardliners.

“This could also lead to an enormous upswing in the country in the new political era, from which future generations would also benefit,” Zarif wrote in a letter to parliament on Monday cited by the ISNA news agency.

When it came to the nuclear deal, the new government should focus on long-term national interests and not on ideology, Iran’s chief diplomat said,

The 60-year-old had repeatedly criticised the agreement in recent years and, according to observers, will not continue the moderate nuclear policy of Rowhani and Zarif.

But during the election campaign Raisi also promised a quick end to the economic crisis — something only realistically achievable if US sanctions are lifted within the framework of the nuclear deal. — dpa

Lebanon to probe sick baby’s death

BEIRUT: The health ministry said on Sunday it will investigate the death of a baby girl whose family said she was not able to access proper hospital treatment amid Lebanon’s severe medical shortages.

Jouri al Sayyid, 10 months old, died on Saturday in the village of Mazboud, southeast of Beirut, three days into a high fever that caused lung inflammation.

Her uncle Aymen al Sayyid said she had died because of a “lack of proper care in hospital and lack of medicines”.

“Drugs weren’t available at the hospital, so her father went to the pharmacy to buy some, but it was closed,” Sayyid added.

“We’re living in a country where the hospitals don’t have medicine, and the pharmacies are closed.”

Many of Lebanon’s pharmacies closed their doors on Friday in a protest strike over the lack of



A volunteer handles boxes of Metformin diabetes medications in the village of Mazraat el Dahr in Mount Lebanon province, where medications are obtained from nationals arriving from abroad and stored to be distributed to those who need them free of charge. — AFP

medicines caused by the country’s economic crisis. Mazboud hospital, where the

girl died, denied any wrongdoing. It said in a statement that Jouri had received “full, appropriate

treatment including all necessary medicines”, and she had died shortly after being removed from the hospital to be treated elsewhere. Dr Kamal Mourad said she had been taken out of the facility without hospital medics being consulted.

The girl’s death sparked fury on social media in Lebanon, which has spiralled into an economic meltdown involving supercharged inflation and shortages of basic goods including food, fuel and essential drugs.

Health Minister Hamad Hassan vowed in a statement to open an investigation into the circumstances of the baby’s death.

A widely-shared video showed the father carrying the girl in his arms, wrapped in a sheet, and taking to task Lebanon’s under-fire political class blamed for its economic collapse and exodus of capital. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

ISTANBUL

11 migrants die in Turkey bus crash

At least 12 people have been killed in a mini bus crash in eastern Turkey, 11 of them migrants.

The vehicle overturned and caught fire in Van province near the Iranian border on Sunday, state news agency Anadolu reported citing the provincial governor. Another 26 migrants were injured in the accident, it said. Their nationality was not immediately clear.

Turkey’s Van province, which borders Iran, is a common route for migrants from Afghanistan,



Pakistan and Iran, with people smugglers often looking to bring them to big cities like Istanbul.

At least 60 migrants drowned in July last year, after their boat capsized on Lake Van, the largest lake in Turkey.

MOSCOW

Sudan mulls Russian navy base deal

Sudan’s Foreign Minister Mariam al Mahdi said during a visit to Moscow on Monday that lawmakers in the African country would consider an agreement brokered by its ousted leader to establish a Russian naval base there. Russian President Vladimir Putin held talks with Sudan’s former president Omar al Bashir in 2017 on establishing a naval base in Port Sudan, on Sudan’s Red Sea coast.

But Bashir was overthrown in 2019, and Sudan has since moved



closed to the United States.

No announcement was ever made by the Sudanese side but Russia said it had signed a 25-year agreement with Khartoum in December last year to build and operate the base.

TELAVIV

Israel expands Gaza fishing zone

Israel said on Monday it had expanded the fishing zone off Gaza and would allow additional imports into the blockaded Palestinian territory following “recent security calm”.

The Jewish state regularly restricts fishing and imports for Gazans in response to unrest, including during an 11-day conflict in May that saw Israel launch hundreds of air strikes on the enclave and its rulers Hamas fire thousands of rockets at Israel.

“In light of the recent secu-



urity calm... the fishing zone in the Gaza Strip will be extended from 9 to 12 nautical miles,” said a statement from the Israeli military branch responsible for civil affairs in the Palestinian territories (COGAT).

In brief

BALI



BALI DEPORTS TOURISTS FOR BREAKING VIRUS RULES

Several foreign tourists were kicked out of Bali Monday for breaking the Indonesian holiday island's stricter virus rules, as the country is slammed by its deadliest Covid-19 wave.

Three visitors from the United States, Russia and Ireland were put on planes bound for their home countries after being nabbed for not wearing masks in public, violating Bali's new zero-tolerance policy, authorities said.

"They broke minimum virus rules requiring face masks during the emergency restriction period," said Jamaruli Manihuruk, head of Bali's legal and justice office, which oversees immigration enforcement.

JAIPUR



18 PEOPLE KILLED AS LIGHTNING STRIKES IN INDIA

At least 18 people, including seven children, were killed and 16 others injured by lightning strikes in the northwestern Indian state of Rajasthan late on Sunday, local officials said.

Eleven of those killed were tourists visiting the Amer Fort on the outskirts of the state capital Jaipur, after lightning struck a watchtower near the site.

"As it started raining visitors took cover at a watchtower near the fort. Lightning struck the watchtower killing 11 people on the spot and injuring others," Jairam, a local police officer who identified himself by only one name, told Reuters on Monday.

MANILA



DUTERTE DESCRIBES POLL CHARGES 'NONSENSE'

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's office on Monday described as "nonsense" a suggestion by a former foreign minister that Beijing may have helped to determine the outcome of a 2016 election that swept the mercurial leader to power.

Speaking at a forum on Monday, former foreign secretary Albert del Rosario said a "most reliable international entity" had informed him that senior Chinese officials were "bragging that they had been able to influence the 2016 Philippine elections so that Duterte would be president."

Thailand to mix Sinovac, AstraZeneca jabs

T O B O O S T P R O T E C T I O N A G A I N S T D E L T A

BANGKOK: Thailand will use AstraZeneca Plc's Covid-19 vaccine as a second dose for those who received Sinovac's shot as their first dose in a bid to increase protection, it said on Monday.

The move is the first publicly announced mix-and-match of a Chinese vaccine and a Western-developed shot, as a new preliminary Thai study raised doubts about the longer-term protection of the two-dose course Sinovac vaccine.

"This is to improve protection against the Delta variant and build a high level of immunity against the disease," Health Minister Anutin Charnvirakul told reporters, adding that the second dose of AstraZeneca would come three or four weeks after the first Sinovac shot.

There have been no studies specifically on mixing Sinovac and AstraZeneca released, but a growing number of countries are looking at mix-and-match of different vaccines or giving a third

The move is the first publicly announced mix-and-match of a Chinese vaccine and a Western-developed shot, as a new preliminary Thai study raised doubts about the longer-term protection of the two-dose course Sinovac

booster dose amid concerns new and more contagious variants may escape approved vaccines.

The announcement came a day after Thailand's health ministry said 618 medical workers out of 677,348 personnel who received two doses of the Sinovac vaccine became infected from April to July. One nurse died.

Neighbouring Indonesia has also reported breakthrough infections among medical and front-



A woman gets a free Covid-19 test after queueing overnight in Bangkok on Sunday. — Reuters

line workers who are fully inoculated with the Sinovac vaccine.

Thailand now plans to give booster shots of imported mRNA vaccine to its frontline workers - who were given imported Sinovac before the locally manufactured AstraZeneca vaccine was available in June. Indonesia is considering similar boosters.

On Monday, a preliminary Thai study of 700 medical workers indicated that Sinovac's protection rate as measured by antibody level ranged between 60 per cent and 70 per cent for the first 60 days after the second dose, but the rate steadily went down over time and appeared to halve every 40 days.

"From our research, if our

medical staff received two doses of Sinovac ... they should definitely get a third booster shot," Sira Nanthapaisal, a researcher at Thammasat University's Faculty of Medicine, said. The researchers have yet to release their full study data.

"They can do that either between AstraZeneca or Pfizer when it arrives, and we will continue to monitor their antibodies," Sira said.

An AstraZeneca representative declined to comment on Thailand's decision, saying only that vaccination policy is a matter for each country to decide.

Sinovac did not respond to requests for comment on Monday.

Last month, Sinovac spokesman Liu Peicheng told Reuters preliminary results from blood samples of the vaccinated showed a three-fold reduction in neutralising effect against the Delta variant and suggested a third Sinovac shot could elicit a more durable antibody reaction. — Reuters

N Korea slams US humanitarian aid

SEOUL: US humanitarian aid is a "sinister political scheme" to put pressure on other countries, a North Korean researcher said, after suggestions from US allies such as South Korea that coronavirus vaccines or other help could promote cooperation.

North Korea's foreign ministry published the criticism of US aid on an official website on Sunday, a clear indication that it reflects government thinking, Kang Hyon Chol, identified as a senior re-

searcher at the ministry-affiliated Association for the Promotion of International Economic and Technological Exchange, listed a series of examples from around the world that he said highlight a US practice of linking aid to its foreign policy goals or pressure on human rights issues.

"This vividly reveals that the American ulterior intention of linking 'humanitarian assistance' with 'human rights issue' is to legitimise their pressure on the

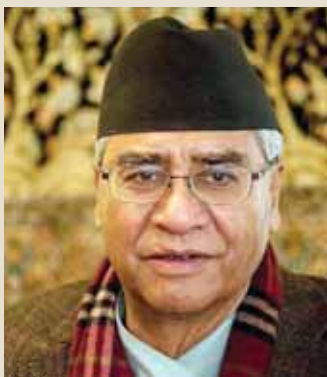
sovereign states and achieve their sinister political scheme," Kang wrote. Among the examples he listed was declining American assistance to the government in Afghanistan, where the United States is due to withdraw the last of its troops in the coming weeks.

"In actual practice, many countries have undergone bitter tastes as a result of pinning much hope on the American 'aid' and 'humanitarian assistance,'" Kang said. — Reuters

Nepal court ousts PM Oli, reinstates dissolved parliament



KP Sharma Oli



Sher Bahadur Deuba

KATHMANDU: Nepal's top court ousted the sitting prime minister and reinstated the dissolved parliament on Monday, plunging the Himalayan nation into further political uncertainty.

The country has been in a political crisis for months amid infighting between Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli and senior leaders of his party.

"The dissolved parliament will be reinstated," the court wrote in its judgement.

Oli first moved to dismiss parliament in December, but it was reinstated by the Supreme Court, which called his move unconstitutional.

The 69-year-old then lost a vote of confidence in the lower house of parliament.

But he was reinstated as PM after the main opposition parties were unable to obtain a majority of support in the bicameral parliament.

Oli tried again to dissolve parliament in May, but his decision was challenged by lawmakers and political activists in the top court.

The court said in its judgement that the main opposition leader Sher Bahadur Deuba should replace Oli by late Tuesday, as he had presented "a claim (of majority)... as the prime minister".

Deuba has to win a vote of confidence in the lower

house within a month to retain the prime ministership.

Deuba, the head of the Nepali Congress, earlier claimed to have the support of 149 members of the 275-seat lower house.

The Oli government came to power in 2018 with a two-thirds majority.

There was optimism that his strong mandate at the polls would end years of instability and short-lived governments exacerbated by a devastating earthquake in 2015.

Deuba was elected as Nepal's prime minister four times between 1995 and 2018, including during the brutal, decade-long Maoist insurgency.

str-pm/grk/leg
"The court has not left any room for political manoeuvring by the outgoing prime minister," said Bipin Adhikari, a constitutional expert and analyst.

"The court has saved democracy. Now five political parties will form a coalition government," Deuba said.

Oli was not immediately available for comment but his aide, Rajan Bhattarai, called the court's move "a wrong political decision, which will have long term implications on the parliamentary democracy in our country". — Agencies

S Korea's Covid rules demand slower workout music in gyms



Gym members use the treadmill amid the coronavirus disease pandemic at a fitness club in Seoul. — Reuters

SEOUL: Plenty of gym-goers rely on a good tune to get themselves through that workout, but in South Korea their musical options have just reduced significantly under new Covid-19 rules.

To the standard restrictions such as social distancing and travel curbs, South Korea has added a requirement that gyms do not play music with higher than 120 beats per minute (bpm) during group exercises such as aerobics and spinning.

Health officials say the measure was intended to prevent breathing too fast or splashing sweat to other people while avoiding having to close such

businesses entirely, as they have during previous waves.

The rule has invited ridicule from some opposition lawmakers, who called it "nonsense", and gym owners see the rules as barely effective or unrealistic to maintain.

For Kang Hyun-ku, an owner of a gym in northern Seoul, lining up fast, funky K-pop songs on his playlist was his morning routine.

"Playing bright tracks is to cheer up our members and the overall mood, but my biggest question is whether playing classical music or BTS songs has proven to have any impact on

spreading the virus," Kang told Reuters.

"Many people use their own earphones and wearable devices these days, and how do you control their playlists?"

The government imposed its highest level of distancing rules in Seoul and neighbouring regions starting Monday, as the country battles its worst-ever Covid-19 outbreak.

The rules also limit treadmill speeds to a maximum of 6 km (3.73 miles) per hour, ban the use of showers at gyms, and restrict table tennis matches to two people per table, among other measures. — Reuters

Hunger, malnutrition soared last year mostly due to Covid-19

LONDON: World hunger and malnutrition levels worsened dramatically last year, with most of the increase likely due to the Covid-19 pandemic, according to a multi-agency United Nations (UN) report published on Monday.

After remaining virtually unchanged for five years, the number of undernourished people rose to around 768 million last year - equivalent to 10 per cent of the world's population and an increase of around 118 million versus 2019, the report said.

Authored by UN agencies including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organisation (WHO), the

Of the 768 million undernourished people, 418 million were in Asia, 282 million in Africa and 60 million in Latin America and the Caribbean

report is the first comprehensive assessment of food insecurity and nutrition since the pandemic emerged.

“Unfortunately, the pandemic continues to expose weaknesses in our food systems, which threaten lives and livelihoods. No region of the world has been spared,” the UN agencies said in a joint statement.

The 2021 edition of “The State

of Food Security and Nutrition in the World” estimated that on current trends, the UN sustainable development goal of zero hunger by 2030 will be missed by a margin of nearly 660 million people.

That number is 30 million higher than in a scenario where the pandemic had not occurred.

“Our worst fears are coming true. Reversing such high levels of chronic hunger will take years if not decades,” said WFP chief economist Arif Husain.

There is increased diplomatic momentum this year to tackle hunger and malnutrition with upcoming summits like the UN Food Systems Summit and the Nutrition for Growth Summit. But the report stressed the challenge was huge.

The number of people unable to access adequate food year-round rose by 320 million to 2.37 billion last year - a rise in one year equal to the preceding five years combined.

Of the 768 million undernourished people, 418 million were in Asia, 282 million in Africa and 60 million in Latin America and the Caribbean. In Africa though, 21 per cent of people are undernourished, more than double that of any other region.

After declining for several decades, food insecurity has been on the rise since the mid-2010s, especially in countries affected by conflict, climate extremes, economic downturns, or battling high inequality. — Reuters



Lithuanian army soldiers install razor wire on border with Belarus in Druskininkai, Lithuania. — Reuters

Lithuania: Belarus using refugees as ‘political weapon’

BRUSSELS: The European Union should consider imposing more sanctions on Belarus because Minsk is flying in migrants from abroad to send them illegally into the bloc, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis said on Monday.

His government accuses Belarusian authorities of sending hundreds of mainly Iraqi migrants across the border into Lithuania, an EU member state.

Lithuania began building a 550-km (320-mile) razor wire barrier on its frontier with Belarus on Friday, a move that EU foreign ministers, lawmakers and officials discussed in a series of separate meetings in Brussels.

“When refugees are used as a political weapon..., I will talk to my colleagues in order for the European Union to have a common strategy,” Landsbergis said as he arrived for the meeting of EU foreign ministers.

He suggested the migrants were being turned into a means

of pressure on the EU, which has imposed a series of sanctions on Belarus since a disputed presidential election last August that was followed by a police crackdown on street protests.

“We need to be very strict with the regimes that are using these sorts of weapons, first of all with sanctions,” Landsbergis said.

Lithuanian centre-right EU lawmaker Rasa Juknevičienė told a meeting with EU and Lithuanian officials that Belarus and Russia were organising human smuggling networks with the help of Iran to fly people to the Lithuanian border, although she did not provide any evidence. Minsk and Moscow deny any such operations.

Landsbergis said the EU should draw up a fifth package of sanctions, following blacklistings of Belarusian officials that began as a response to the presidential election but now seek to punish wider abuses. Lukashenko has denied electoral fraud.

— Reuters

HEATWAVE CLIMBS NEW HIGH



Triple digit temperatures after 9pm are seen on what is billed as the World's Tallest Thermometer in the Mojave Desert town of Baker, California where temperatures hit 118 degrees as California is gripped in another heatwave. Millions of people across the western United States and Canada were hit on Sunday by a new round of scorching hot temperatures, with some roads closed, train traffic limited and new evacuations ordered. — AFP

Experience of a lifetime, says Branson after space flight

SPACEPORT AMERICA: British billionaire Richard Branson flew into space on Sunday aboard a Virgin Galactic vessel, a voyage he described as the “experience of a lifetime” — and one he hopes will usher in an era of lucrative space tourism.

“Congratulations to all our wonderful team at Virgin Galactic for 17 years of hard, hard work to get us this far,” he said during a live feed as the VSS Unity spaceship glided back to Spaceport America in New Mexico.

It reached a peak altitude of around 53 miles (85 kilometres)

— beyond the boundary of space, according to the United States — allowing the passengers to experience weightlessness and admire the Earth's curvature.

The trip proceeded without drama, and touchdown occurred at around 9:40 am Mountain Time (15:40 GMT), about an hour after take-off.

The mission's success means Branson has beaten fellow billionaire Jeff Bezos in the race to be the first tycoon to cross the final frontier in a ship built by a company he founded.

After Sunday, Virgin Galactic



Sir Richard Branson holds up photos that he brought with him into space, as he speaks after flying into space aboard a Virgin Galactic vessel. — AFP

plans two further flights, and then the start of regular commercial operations from early 2022. The ultimate goal is to conduct 400 flights per year.

Some 600 tickets have already been sold to people from 60 different countries — including Hollywood celebrities — for prices ranging from \$200,000 to \$250,000.

And though, according to Branson, “space belongs to us all,” the opportunity for now remains the preserve of the privileged.

“When we return, I will announce something very

exciting to give more people the chance to become an astronaut,” he promised.

The competition in the space tourism sector, whose imminent rise has been announced for years, has come to a head this month.

Bezos, the richest person in the world, is due to fly on July 20 on Blue Origin's New Shepard rocket.

Blue Origin posted an infographic on Friday boasting the ways in which the experience it offers is superior.

The principal point: New Shepard climbs up to more than 60

miles in altitude, thus exceeding what is called the Karman line, the frontier of space according to international convention.

Bezos himself wished Branson “best of luck” in an Instagram post.

Branson's participation in Sunday's flight, announced just over a week ago, typified his persona as the daredevil executive whose various Virgin brands — from airlines to music companies — have long been associated with his ocean-crossing exploits in sailboats and hot-air balloons.

— Agencies

SHORT TAKES

LONDON

Ryanair to hire 2,000 new pilots

Irish no-frills airline Ryanair unveiled plans on Monday to hire more than 2,000 additional pilots as it navigates a recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

The pilots will fly Ryanair's planned new fleet of Boeing 737 MAX aircraft, which are aimed at cutting costs, fuel consumption, noise and CO2 emissions, the Dublin-based carrier added in a statement.

Ryanair had in May posted an annual net loss of 1.0 billion euros (\$1.18 billion) as the



Covid grounded the global aviation sector and ravaged travel demand, but the airline is now charting a path to recovery.

GENEVA

UN urges reparations for slavery, colonialism

The UN rights chief called on Monday for countries to dismantle systemic racism and to acknowledge and provide “reparatory justice” for past wrongs like slavery and colonialism.

Speaking before the UN Human Rights Council, Michelle Bachelet described how deeply-embedded racism against Africans and people of African descent continues to affect all aspects of their lives.

Presenting a report called for



following the murder of George Floyd by a white US police officer last year, she said there was “an urgent need to confront the legacies of enslavement”.

AMSTERDAM

PM apologises for easing of Covid curbs

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte conceded on Monday that coronavirus restrictions had been lifted too soon in the Netherlands and he apologised as infections surged to their highest levels of the year.

Rutte last Friday reimposed curbs on bars, restaurants and nightclubs in an effort to stop a spate of infections among young adults, just two weeks after most lockdown measures in the country were lifted as cases were falling.



“What we thought would be possible, turned out not to be possible in practice,” Rutte told reporters on Monday. “We had poor judgement, which we regret and for which we apologise.”

Can 3D-printed schools tackle classroom shortage?

CHARLES PENSULO

Gathered under the hot sun, dozens of women danced and sang in jubilation as children from the village of Salima, in central Malawi, started their first day at their new 3D-printed school, which had been built from the ground up in only 15 hours.

Made of concrete placed layer by layer through a computer-controlled nozzle, the school is made up of a single room with rounded corners and is big enough to accommodate 50 students.

Olipa Elisa said her 10-year-old son used to have to hike 5 km everyday to the nearest school, often arriving late and exhausted.

“I am very excited that we now have a school closer to my home, and my child will not have to take the long journey”, said Elisa, 38. “What we need is more of these learning blocks to accommodate other classes.”

Run by 14Trees, a joint venture between Swiss cement manufacturer LafargeHolcim and British development finance agency CDC Group, the project was faster, cheaper and less energy-intensive than conventional construction, said 14Trees Managing Director Francois Perrot.

Its success shows how 3D printing could be transformative in Africa, where there is a dire shortage of classroom space, he said.

The UN children’s agency Unicef estimates there is a shortfall of 36,000 primary school classrooms in Malawi alone, a gap that Perrot estimates could be closed in 10 years using 3D-printing technology.

“Based on our calculations, if we rely on conventional methods it would take about 70 years to clear that backlog”, he said in an email. Large-scale 3D-printing is gaining steam around the world, with some projects producing a home in just 24 hours of printing time for a few thousand dollars. — Thomson Reuters Foundation



STRUGGLE FOR DRINKING WATER

A girl stands by a donkey carrying jerrycans of water filled from a cistern at a make-shift camp for the internally displaced in Yemen’s northern Hajjah province on Monday, amidst an extreme heatwave and severe water shortage. — AFP

Pass around the positivity...



Lakshmi Kothaneth lakshmiobserver@gmail.com

WHILE DOCTORS CAN TREAT A PERSON’S PHYSICAL HEALTH BUT WHEN IT COMES TO THE MIND THERE IS A LOT MORE THAT IS NEEDED THAN JUST MEDICINE

We take many aspects of life for granted from breathing to walking, but the last year and 2021 has taught us many lessons.

The emotions have played a crucial role no matter what the nationality, religion or profession they are from.

I happened to read a Dalai Lama quote and it made pure sense, “Happiness derived from mere physical comfort tends to be shallow and fleeting. It fails to pacify anxiety and fear. Whereas if we have a calm mind it is effective in overcoming even physical pain, therefore we should not neglect the inner values that are a source of a calm mind.”

It is true is it not? Many feel money and being financially independent are what guarantee a troubled free life, but the reality is that the detriment factor is state of mind. What can calm down the mind?

I remember Shaikh Khalfan al Esry explaining to me that one of the best ways to calm your mind is accepting the situation and when something is beyond your comprehension seek an expert. The situation changes.

This is especially true when it comes to contracts related to finance, business and other legal matters.

In fear of health and cost of healthcare many might be silently suffering from pain and fear. While doctors can treat a person’s physical health but when it comes to the mind there is a lot more that is needed than just medicine.

Ever wondered who is in control of our thoughts? Is it possible to talk to your own mind? Where do the thoughts originate from? Is it from our past experiences or what we have been going through? It might even be what we are reading about.

This is where it is important to have positive people around. It may not be easy to control thoughts but there is something all of us can do said Bharat Rawal who promotes the concept of affirmations, “Why not request for our thoughts to be blessed?”

The concept of thoughts and healing of the mind may not be everyone’s cup of tea. But the fact it is already in the mainstream — for example job-seekers are constantly reminded that attitude can make or break. It has even been noted that having the right attitude might have an organisation ending up in even creating a post to absorb the person. When a person becomes a solver the person is often looked up as an asset.

Attitude can often be contagious as an optimist can have a positive impact on people around him/her and a pessimist can bring down the people around. The question is why are our minds so vulnerable?

Some people need proof and scientific evidence to accept concepts but what is remarkable is how faith has helped in strengthening the mind.

When it comes to a patient’s health, strength of the mind is important for doctors and for their treatment to be successful.

It is the power of the mind that brings self confidence in a person, and the weaknesses and insecurities that causes lack of confidence, yet if it is not well placed the same mind can result in over confidence which may not receive much appreciation.

Equanimity may be hard to practice but will be worth trying to achieve. Here again accepting the situation and circumstances would be the first step and not to forget to connect the mind with breathing. If you are one of those with positivity, this might be the best time to pass around your positivity — the world for sure needs it.

A philosophical touch for small details of life



Dr Khalid Mohammed al Balushi khalidalbalushi@hotmail.com

AL RAHBI HAS PLAYED A PIONEERING ROLE IN USHERING IN A NEW POETIC DICTION IN OMAN. FORMALLY, HE CHAMPIONS A FORM OF POETRY FREE FROM TRADITIONAL MUSICAL PATTERNS

Saif al Rahbi is amongst Oman’s most well-known and prominent contemporary poets. Born in 1956, he lived abroad during his youth for over two decades.

Seeking knowledge and occasionally practising journalism, he moved into a number of Arabian and Western cities, such as Cairo, Beirut, Damascus, Paris, London, Amsterdam and Bonn.

Upon his return to Oman, he founded a quarterly cultural magazine ‘Nizwa’. At its outset, the magazine showcased (and still does) articles, research studies, reviews, translations and literary works, both fiction and prose.

Drawing upon his exposure to these cultural centres and upon the Arabic cultural and literary heritage, Al Rahbi has played a pioneering role in ushering in a new poetic diction in Oman. Formally, he champions a form of poetry free from traditional musical patterns and a vocabulary accessible to a wide audience.

Thematically, he elevates the everyday, the common and the down-to-earth by bestowing upon the small details of life subtle philosophical touches.

He published a number of poetry collections such as ‘Jabal Akhdar’ (1981), ‘One Knife Is Hardly Enough for Slaughtering a Sparrow’ (1988) and ‘The Soldier that Saw the Bird in His Sleep’ (2000). He has won several regional awards (including the highly prestigious Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Letters). He still supervises the magazine in his capacity as its editor-in-chief.

The East
At the beginning of everyday
As I pluck out my first steps
To the jungle
The east dawns from my blood
Like a strange sun
I see horses rushing
With manes touching the sky.
A Night
(To Imro al Qais[1])
A night you can’t cut with a saw

Or arrest in a cup
A foxy, moody night
It sometimes seems like a clown
before a crowd
And slips sleekly like a bridegroom’s fur
The night of diviners and truck drivers
Hasn’t yet loosened its curtains
But insidiously made its creatures gossip
Strangers loom on their sea-facing balconies
Ships sink in sailors’ memory.
An unassailable night
A rugged night
It’s loosened its curtains on the world’s neck.
The Stranger
This man who takes us to his distant lands
Unfolds on his bed and the table
The heaps of faces and places
Traces the borders of his days
Hill after hill
A tower, a deserted village, a city devoured by war
Bites on an apple, smokes,

remembering:
The graveyard of his grandparents
His mother in rags sleeping between sand dunes
The glass grabbed by hands
Before he sips its dregs and sleeps.
The wind hisses outside like a wolf
(Truly, he’d seen a wolf-pack in childhood)
The stranger heaps on his table faces and destinies
Tries to write
About what?
O soul of winged carriages
O soul of rains and dawn’s trains
The soul of a stranger weeping at the start of the road!
A Bag
A man living in a bag
His feet are crossways
At every cross there’s a gloomy sky.
He once on a horizon saw ewes
Remembered his grandfather
Lit a candle in a cave

Kept roaming around
Century after century
Till his shadow cracked
And his days overflowed with tears.
A Special Sky
This eagle that redesigns the sky
Along with his peculiar mood
Sometimes stoops to see
The beauty of the painting he drew away from God.
This eagle
With a beak carrying storms like rabbits
Sways into ecstasy and memory:
A spring where he descended with his mate
Plains and valleys he crossed with an old friend
Peaks of the Himalayas
And Jabal Alakhdar (2).
Dreaming of eagles to fill solitude’s expanse.
The sky’s wild scapegoat remembers too the glory of his personal wars
And offspring on the edge of extinction.



HOCKEY5S WORLD CUP IN OMAN TO REVOLUTIONISE GAME: AHF CHIEF

MEN'S TEAM READY, WORK TO BE DONE FOR WOMEN'S TEAM: OHA CHIEF

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JULY 12

The first ever FIH Hockey5s World Cup to be hosted by Oman in January 2024 will revolutionise the popularity of the game worldwide, according to Asian Hockey Federation CEO Tayyab Ikram on Monday.

Ikram was speaking during the first media conference in Muscat after Oman won the bid to host the Hockey5s World Cup recently.

“The Hockey5s format is an exciting version of hockey and the International Hockey Federation (FIH) and AHF are confident that this World Cup will hugely boost the popularity of the game and especially the fast and shorter version of hockey5s,” Ikram, executive board member of FIH, told *Oman Observer*. “We firmly believe that this format will make quick inroads into the youth and sports-loving audience thereby seeing the overall interest in hockey,” he said.



Talib al Wahaibi presents hockey sticks to Rashad al Hinai. – Saleh al Sharji

The Men's and Women's Hockey5s World Cup 2024 will be held from January from 24 to 31.

Ikram appreciated the efforts of Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Oman Hockey Association (OHA) led by Talib al Wahaibi.

OHA Chairman Talib said Oman winning the hosting rights is result of a team work.

“Winning the bid is a great matter of pride for the Sultanate with the hard work of the Oman World Cup bid team bear fruits

at the FIH voting. We express our gratitude to Tayyab Ikram for lending us support in this vital project to secure the rights to host the World Cup,” Captain Talib said.

MUSCAT TO HOST ASIAN QUALIFIERS

Oman will also host the Asian qualifiers for the Hockey5s World Cup, the AHF chief announced. “This is a fantastic opportunity for the entire GCC region regarding the top events in the game coming to Muscat.

We expect to involve the citizens and residents of Oman in this global event. Moreover, the AHF and FIH want the future young generation to take benefit from the experience,” Ikram added.

Oman will participate in the both events in men's and women's sections, the OHA chief said in reply to a question.

“Our men's team is ready and team formation is not a concern. But we need to do a lot of work for the women's team. We are trying to arrange a team with the help of a Indian women's coach. But there is a long way till we form a team for the international events,” Talib said.

Rashad al Hinai, Under-Secretary for Sports and Youth at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, who headed the bid presentation team with the OHA chairman as the assistant, and Oman Olympic Committee Secretary-General Taha al Kishry were present on the occasion.

Others present included veteran hockey personality SAS Naqvi and OHA goalkeeping coach Shakir Munir.



This is a fantastic opportunity for the entire GCC region regarding the top events in the game coming to Muscat

TAYYAB IKRAM
Asian Hockey Federation CEO

HOCKEY5S SUITABLE FOR OMANI PLAYERS

Former Oman coach Tahir Zaman was among the guests and said the World Cup will be an exciting opportunity for Oman to showcase its hockey as well as tourism potentials.

“I believe the hockey5s format is very much suitable for the Omani players. I think they can excel in the format from my knowledge of coaching them in the past,” the Pakistan great, who was in Muscat as part of AHF team, told *Observer*.

Zaman is yet to sign a contract with the Oman team as its head coach ahead of the World Cup.

On a query, Zaman said he is “very open and ready to head the Oman coaching team for the World Cup though the decision has to be taken by the OHA.”

“I was among the members of AHF, who conceptualised the hockey5s format. So it is exciting for me to see to progress and I'm looking ahead to a wonderful World Cup,” Zaman added.



DJOKOVIC

BATTLES BERRETTINI AND HISTORY TO CLAIM 20TH GRAND SLAM TITLE

LONDON: Novak Djokovic had the weight of tennis history on his shoulders and an Italian with dynamite on his racket strings to contend with but emerged victorious to earn a sixth Wimbledon and a record-levelling 20th Grand Slam title on Sunday.

Matteo Berrettini, playing inspired tennis in his first Grand Slam final, unleashed everything in his formidable arsenal to rock Djokovic in a riveting contest.

But it was not enough to stop the indefatigable Serb, who found his best when required, to pull through 6-7(4) 6-4 6-4 6-3 on what looks like being a momentous day in the raging argument about who will go down as the greatest of all time.

For the first time in his career Djokovic shares the men's record for the most Grand Slam singles titles with Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal and looks primed to leave both in his wake.

In a year that is brewing into something extraordinary, the world number one has won the season's first three majors and will become the first man since Rod Laver in 1969 to complete the calendar-year Grand Slam if he wins the US Open in September.

Not only that but with the Olympics looming, the one title to elude Djokovic, he is within sight of the fabled Golden Slam — something no man has achieved.

The celebrations on a frenzied Centre Court, that at times sounded more like Wembley Stadium, were unconstrained after Berrettini chipped a backhand into the net to end the final.

Djokovic fell to his back before standing arms aloft, soaking in the acclaim of 15,000 fans who, while edging towards underdog Berrettini throughout the match, realised they were watching a special player making history.

After chewing on a blade of grass, Djokovic threw his arms out to all four sides of stadium as the crowd roared 'Nole' before he climbed up into the stands to embrace his coaching team and even stopped for a selfie with a young fan.

"That was more than a battle. He has a true hammer, an Italian hammer and I felt that on my skin



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates with the trophy after winning his final match against Italy's Matteo Berrettini. — Reuters

today," Djokovic said.

Before Djokovic captured his second Grand Slam title in 2011, Federer already owned 16 and Nadal nine.

Yet he has reeled them in relentlessly and his thirst for silverware is unquenched.

INCREDIBLE JOURNEY

"I have to pay a tribute to Rafa and Roger, they are legends of the sport and they are the two most important players I ever faced in my career and the reason I am where I am today," Djokovic said on court.

"Something shifted in 2011. The last 10 years have been an incredible journey and it's not stopping here."

Federer, who lost to Djokovic in the 2019 Wimbledon final after saving match points, offered his congratulations.

"Congrats Novak on your 20th major. I'm proud to have the opportunity to play in a special era of tennis champions. Wonderful performance, well done!"

Spaniard Nadal, who missed Wimbledon, added: "20 Grand Slam titles is huge and it is amazing that we are three players tied on this. Well done and congrats to you and your team!"

Actor Tom Cruise was amongst the crowd on Centre Court to watch seventh seed Berrettini's attempt to accomplish what many believe to be Mission Impossible — taking three sets off Djokovic in a Grand Slam match.

Yet in the first part of seismic sporting on Sunday for his nation, with Italy facing England at Wembley in the Euro 2020 final later, he played like a gladiator in Rome's Colosseum.

No Italian, man or woman, had



That was more than a battle. He has a true hammer, an Italian hammer and I felt that on my skin today

NOVAK DJOKOVIC
2021 Wimbledon champion

won a Wimbledon singles title and Berrettini was bidding to become the first Italian man to win a major since Adriano Panatta's 1976 Roland Garros success.

When he slipped 5-2 down in the opening set against a man playing his 30th Grand Slam final and seventh at Wimbledon, it looked as though the day might

pass him by.

But after surviving an exhausting 11-minute service game, in which he saved a set point, the 25-year-old began to ratchet up the power, booming down 130mph serves and sledgehammer forehands to dent Djokovic's armour.

Djokovic looked nervous as he failed to serve out the set at 5-3 as Berrettini chased a dropshot to break. After earning himself a tiebreak, Berrettini was the aggressor and he moved a set ahead after firing down a 138 mph ace.

The effort of snatching a 71-minute first set took its toll on Berrettini though, and Djokovic stormed 4-0 ahead in the second before withstanding another fightback to level the match.

Looking calmer, Djokovic struck the early blow at 1-1 in the third set as a net-skimming

backhand from out wide forced a volley error from the Italian.

Nothing was straightforward though for Djokovic and Berrettini threatened to break straight back when he launched a forehand winner past the Serb in the next game to reach deuce before Djokovic steadied to take a 3-1 lead.

When Djokovic survived another tough service game to move 4-2 ahead, he cupped his hand to his ear — and the crowd responded with soccer-style chanting that shook the rafters.

Even after Djokovic had taken the third set Berrettini still looked dangerous but when the Italian double-faulted on break point in the seventh game of the fourth, his hopes of stopping Djokovic's assault on the record books were over.

— Reuters

OOC meeting to discuss Sultanate's Tokyo plans

MUSCAT: The Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) will organise a meeting today with the Sultanate's Tokyo Olympics bound delegation comprising players and officials.

The meeting will be held in the presence of Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad al Busaidy, OOC President, and Taha bin Suleiman al Kishry, OOC Secretary General, and all the participants.

During the meeting, details related to participation in OG and the preparation programmes held by players after obtaining invitation cards will be highlighted, namely the swimmer Issa bin Samir al Adawi, the runner Barakat bin Mubarak al Harthy, the shooter Hamad bin Saeed al Khatiri and the weightlifter Amer bin Salem al



Khanjari.

It will also address the most important guiding measures for athletes and administrators that will be implemented in Tokyo, and the preventive safety rules that must be adhered against Covid-19, which will allow sports competitions to be held safely and



provide a safe sports environment for all participants in OG.

OOC has completed all requirements and procedures related to participation, and the official delegation includes Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad al Busaidy, OOC President — Head of Delegation, Taha bin Sulaiman al Kishry, OOC



Secretary General, Kazem bin Khan Muhammad al Balushi, Chef De Mission, and Adel bin Ibrahim al Balushi, the media delegate, in addition to Shuaib bin Muhammad al Zadjali, the doping examination officer, and the international referee, Abdel Moneim bin Khamis al Alawi.

Our national athletics team competitions will start on the 31st of this month, as the list includes the player Barakat bin Mubarak al Harthy, who will participate in the 100-metre run, accompanied by coach Mohammed bin Abdullah al Houti.

Swimmer Issa bin Samir al

Adawi will participate in the 100-metre freestyle race, which will take place on July 27, accompanied by his coach Ayman bin Hamad al Kulaibi.

The Sultanate will also be represented in shooting by Hamad bin Saeed al Khatiri, who will participate in the 50m rifle competitions in 3 positions on August 2, along with his coach Sultan bin Salim al Rashidi, and the administrator Sulaiman bin Hamad al Hinai. The list of weightlifters includes the weightlifter Amer bin Salem al Khanjiri, who will participate in the 81-kg weight category. The competitions will be held on July 31, accompanied by his coach, Mazen bin Humaid al Badri.

ITALY WRECK ENGLAND PARTY



ANDY JALIL

LONDON: The chant from England supporters, ‘Football is coming home’, that rang through the air for weeks with much anticipation, proved to be premature. The hype was unprecedented and expectation of achieving glory turned to bitter disappointment with their team going down to Italy, 3-2, on penalties after a goal by each side during normal and extra time of the Euro 2020 final.

England manager, Gareth Southgate, said: “Our players have done themselves proud, but I’m unbelievably disappointed to not go that one step further. When you have been in a semi-final (last World Cup) and now final, it’s a step in the right direction. When you’ve been so close it’s even more painful. Tonight, the devastation of coming so close to giving the country the trophy is hard to put in context.”

He further said: “As a manager you have to accept whenever there is a defeat there is a lot of analysis. I need time to reflect on all of that. We make hundreds of decisions, not all of it will be right and I have to accept that.”

Southgate’s choice of penalty takers did seem strange. He said: “We worked on it in training and that’s the order we came to.” He brought on substitutes Marcus Rashford and Jadon Sancho for the extra time period with a view for them to take penalties if it came to it, while 19-year-old Bukayo Saka came on 15 minutes before end of normal time. All three missed their spot kicks with the inexperienced Saka having to take the crucial last kick.

Earlier, England had got

off to a dream start taking the lead in less than two minutes. Luke Shaw started and finished the move. He passed to Harry Kane in midfield who moved up to find Kieran Trippier on the right. Shaw had run up on the left and received the cross from Trippier which he hit on the half volley to score off the inside of the near post. With over 60,000 inside the stadium, it thundered at such a sensational start.



We did well. The lads were wonderful, I don’t know what more to say. It’s important for all the people and all the fans. I hope they’re celebrating (in Italy)

ROBERTO MANCINI
Italy coach

Italy were taking time to settle while England enjoyed long periods of ball possession though both sides had chances that were wasted with both goalkeepers being kept busy making saves. It wasn’t until midway through the second half that Italy began to apply serious pressure. They could have equalised in the 57th minute when Lorenzo Insigne forced an excellent save from Jordan Pickford and in the 62nd minute a shot from Federico Chiesa was pushed away. The equaliser finally came in the 67th minute with a corner coming to Marco Verratti whose header was pushed on to the post but Leonardo Bonnucci was quick to react in the goalmouth scramble to put the ball into the net. Italy were now in some control and could have scored again but Domenico Berardi, having gone past England’s defence, shot over.

With both sides tiring, the nail-biting extra time brought no benefit to either and the dreaded penalties followed. Italy missed the first attempt but the next three went in before missing the last. England smashed the first two powerfully before the third hit a post and the last two were saved by Gianluigi Donnarumma who was also awarded the player of the tournament trophy.

Argentina celebrate Copa win, dream even bigger

BUENOS AIRES: Argentina’s first major title in 28 years sent the nation into a frenzy of celebrations on Sunday with the Copa America victory over arch-rivals Brazil instilling hope they may once again rise to be serious World Cup contenders.

Argentina beat Brazil 1-0 at the Maracana stadium in Rio de Janeiro on Saturday night to claim their first Copa since 1993 and give captain Lionel Messi a long-coveted first medal for the national team to join his multiple accolades with Barcelona.

It was a hard-fought match, with 41 fouls, nine yellow cards, and Argentina spending much of the second half defending their first half lead from Angel Di Maria’s goal.

Yet the details were

unimportant to the hundreds of thousands of people celebrating across Argentina. All that mattered was the long and painful drought was over.

“I had been very close (to winning a title) for many years. I knew that it was going to come right at some point, and I think there is no better moment than this,” said a jubilant Messi, who had been desperate to emulate World Cup winner Diego Maradona’s international success with Argentina.

“We are still not aware of what we did, but it will be a match that will remain in history not only for being champions of America, but also for beating Brazil in Brazil,” added Messi, who was joint player of the tournament.

Later, Messi dedicated



Argentina’s Copa America triumph over Brazil to his family, his country and also late idol Diego Maradona.

“I want to dedicate this success to my family, who have always given me the strength to continue, to my friends whom

I love so much, to all the people who support us and above all to 45 millions Argentinians who have suffered so with this dreadful virus,” Barcelona megastar Messi wrote on Instagram.

Messi will be 35 when next year’s World Cup kicks-off in

Qatar. But he is surrounded by younger players, with Rodrigo De Paul outstanding in the final and others such as defender Christian Romero, marksman Lautaro Martinez and goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez at the start of their international careers.

Whether Argentina have what it takes to challenge outside Latin America and win a third World Cup is an open question.

They have been effective but unspectacular in the qualifiers and trail leaders Brazil by six points after six games.

How they might fare against major European nations is an incognito. South American sides have found it almost impossible to test themselves against top European countries over the last few years as the Nations League

has squeezed the timetable.

‘WE ARE CHAMPIONS’

Tostao, a Brazilian former World Cup winner, said Argentina had progressed since the 2018 World Cup — where eventual winners France eliminated them 4-3 in the last 16 — on both an individual and collective level.

But Brazil were still stronger, even despite the Copa loss, he added. “Brazil are at the level of the strong European sides. Argentina need to improve a bit to get to the same level as Brazil and have chances of winning the World Cup.”

The gap in quality between the Euros and the Copa America was evident over the last four weeks, with the South American game noticeably slower, more truncated — and dirty. — **Reuters**

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Qatari lender gives up bid for additional stake in NBO

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 12

National Bank of Oman (NBO) announced on Monday that Qatari lender Commercial Bank PSQC (CB) has withdrawn its offer to



acquire an additional 15.2 per cent of the issued capital of NBO. It comes as CB's offer failed to muster the required interest from NBO shareholders.

In a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA), Abdullah bin Zahran al Hinai, CEO of NBO, said: "The CB announced, through its Offer Manager, that the offer of acquisition has been accepted by certain shareholders of NBO, representing 7.74 per cent of the shares of the issued capital of NBO.

Since the acceptance by NBO shareholders is less than the 15.2 per cent minimum threshold acceptance by CB the acquisition, Commercial Bank has decided to exercise the option of withdrawing the offer in its entirety."

Last month, the Qatari bank launched a public offer to acquire an additional 15.2 per cent of the issued share capital of NBO, a move that would increase the former's stake in the Omani lender to 50.1 per cent. The offer opened on June 10, 2021 and closed on July 11, 2021.

First phase of Dhamani insurance scheme to launch in September

LOOMING ROLL-OUT: CMA ANNOUNCES SCHEDULE FOR INTRODUCTION OF NEW PLATFORM TO VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS AND MARKET PLAYERS

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 12

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has announced the operationalisation of the electronic platform supporting the mandatory health insurance system (Dhamani) in preparation for the anticipated launch of first phase of the platform in September this year.

Covered in this stage are providers of insurance service and healthcare service in Oman in addition to information technology solutions firms focusing on acquainting the participants with the functioning of the platform and its role in health insurance transactions among the market players.

This stage of the programme will cover the medical coding, electronic transfer of funds and



other functions such as investment opportunities available in the platform for IT firms. The CMA will execute the introductory programme of Dhamani for each category of healthcare and insurance service provider through the Zoom platform.

The first meeting will be on July

27, 2021 for insurance companies and health insurance third party administrators.

The second meeting will be on August 2, 2021 for private health institutions and the third meeting will be on August 5, 2021 for private health institutions and IT solutions firms and a general meeting will be held on August 9, 2021 for general questions.

The Dhamani platform will link between the regulators and supervisors in the Sultanate including the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour, Royal Oman Police, insurance and health

services providers to exchange data and information related to health insurance service and will be implemented in three phases, the first is the electronic link for exchange of data and information and the second for exchange of medical referral data and the third is the operation of the platform.

Under the Dhamani scheme, private sector employees and their dependents will be covered by mandatory health insurance. Tourists and visitors to the Sultanate will be brought under the purview of the programme as well.

Pact signed for new 'Power Plant on Wheels' in Duqm SEZ

ENERGY SOLUTIONS: MARAFIQ AND GE INK AGREEMENT TO SUPPORT TANWEER TO PRODUCE SUSTAINABLE ELECTRICITY WITH DIESEL-TO-GAS SWITCHING

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 12

Leading international energy services specialist GE Gas Power has signed an agreement to build, own and operate a power plant equipped with mobile TM2500 aero-derivative gas turbines for the Centralized Utilities Company (Marafiq) in Oman. Rural Areas Electricity Company SAOC (Tanweer) will purchase from Marafiq the power generated at the new plant in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm pursuant to a power purchase agreement entered into by and between Tanweer and Marafiq.

Tanweer is an Oman government owned company mandated to provide power in various regions of the country, including the Special Economic Zone in Duqm.

GE will supply four TM2500 units for the project. These four units will be made available to provide up to 80 megawatts (MW) of power. GE is expected to commission the



plant in as little as five months' time. The facility will then be operated for a minimum of three years, until the area is connected to the main 400 kilovolts (kV) grid.

Often described as GE's 'Power Plant on Wheels', the TM2500 aero-derivative gas turbine is an easy to install, fast power, complete turnkey energy solution that can be redeployed from one location to another.

The TM2500 units will replace power currently generated by diesel generators in Duqm. This will lead to significant environmental benefits, as generating 80 MW of gas-based power instead of diesel-based power, is estimated to reduce annual carbon dioxide emissions by



Tanweer, Marafiq and GE's focus was to identify a reliable power solution that could be implemented quickly and in a more environmentally sustainable and cost-effective manner than diesel-fuelled technologies

AHMED AL HARTHY
Acting CEO, Tanweer

up to 90 thousand tonnes per year — the equivalent of taking up to 20 thousand cars off the roads.

Ahmed al Hartthy, Tanweer's CEO (Acting), said, "The Special Economic Zone at Duqm is a major new driver of socio-economic

development in the Sultanate of Oman. Tanweer, Marafiq and GE's focus was to identify a reliable power solution that could be implemented quickly and in a more environmentally sustainable and cost-effective manner than diesel-

fuelled technologies."

"GE's TM2500 solution is an excellent fit for this new project at Duqm", said Hamed bin Ali al Wahibi, GM Business Development & Strategy at Marafiq. "The technology offers a reliability rate of over 99 per cent and more than 20 years of proven experience with over 300 units installed around the world and we believe it can bring significant benefits to Duqm."

GE's TM2500 solution can provide a baseload bridge to permanent power installations; generate backup power in the wake of plant shutdowns, grid instability or natural disasters; and be installed at isolated locations.

It also offers significant flexibility,

operating on a wide variety of fuels including natural gas, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and distillate liquid fuel; offering a quick start time of five minutes; and the ability to ramp up power output at 20 MW per minute.

"Access to dependable power enables growth, health and connectivity and we are honoured to support Marafiq and Tanweer on their journey to further strengthen and decarbonise the power sector in Duqm", said Joseph Anis, President & CEO of GE Gas Power Europe, Middle East and Africa.

"The project illustrates how switching from diesel or oil-fuelled power generation to gas can help power producers to generate more sustainable electricity, without compromising on the reliability, flexibility and affordability of power supply."

GE has been a committed partner in the development of Oman's energy infrastructure over the decades. Amongst other contributions, the company has supplied Oman's first gas turbine; delivered various power generation solutions to support the country's oil and gas exploration and production sectors; and provided nine high efficiency F-class gas turbines for projects in the Dhofar Governorate in southern Oman.

Strong sovereign performance provides liquidity amid pandemic: Study

More than half of sovereign investors in the Middle East saw drawdowns in 2020, with many stepping in to support local economies or plug fiscal deficits

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 12

Leading investment management firm Invesco released its ninth annual Global Sovereign Asset Management Study on Monday. The study detailed the views and opinions of 141 chief investment officers, heads of asset classes and senior portfolio strategists at 82 sovereign wealth funds and 59 central banks across the globe, who together manage \$19 trillion in assets.

With Covid-19 top of mind, impacting both operations and investment strategies, the impact of the ongoing pandemic is a major theme running throughout this year's report.

In response to Covid-19, governments rushed to implement policy measures designed to prop up their economies and public services such as health, as well as providing support for businesses and households at a time when tax revenues retreated with depressed economic activity.

The impact on public finances led some governments to tap their sovereign wealth funds for capital to fund spending and plug budget



The impact on public finances led some governments to tap their sovereign wealth funds for capital to fund spending and plug budget deficits as more than a third of sovereigns

deficits as more than a third of sovereigns, and 57 per cent in the Middle East, saw drawdowns during 2020 including 78 per cent of liquidity sovereigns and 58 per cent of investment sovereigns.

Josette Rizk, Director Institutional Clients Middle East & Africa at Invesco, said: "The Covid-19 pandemic has prompted a focus on liquidity for Middle East sovereign funds, both to fund short term demands and to take advantage of future opportunities.

Given the commodity-based nature of regional sovereigns, it is not surprising that they were called on for support to fund necessary business relief as the result of

the Covid-19 pandemic through drawdowns."

Many sovereign funds had learned the importance of building large liquidity reserves, following the global financial crisis, and were successful in supporting local economies and large companies in need of stabilisation finance.

But the scale and speed of withdrawals for those that hadn't, meant a significant impact on allocations, and led sovereigns to reevaluate liquidity risk management.

This has prompted a shift towards cash, with portfolio cash reserves more than doubling during 2020, as some sovereigns continued

to focus on liquidity in anticipation of possible further withdrawals.

However, sovereigns also noted that the pandemic had shone a spotlight on the importance of liquidity more generally, both as a buffer for future black swan events and to afford the flexibility to take advantage of market opportunities when they arise, such as the early run in equities at the start of 2020.

The study also revealed a shift in asset allocation as sovereigns were forced to look elsewhere in the face of falling fixed-income yields, as the widespread easing of monetary policy pushed rates lower. Fixed-income allocations fell from 34 per cent to 30 per cent globally as concerns about stimulus-driven inflation returned.

The volatility present in markets through the first quarter of 2020 caused an uptick in equities, reversing a two-year

trend of declining allocations. Global sovereigns increased their allocations by 2 per cent from 2020, rising to 28 per cent.

A further 30 per cent of respondents, including 14 per cent in the Middle East, expect to increase their allocation to equities over the next 12 months.

Looking across asset allocations, Middle East sovereigns expect to significantly increase their allocations to real estate (57 per cent), private equity (29 per cent), infrastructure (43 per cent) and direct strategic investments (29 per cent).

Josette Rizk said: "While the pandemic did cause initial drawdown requirements, the long-term investment horizon of Middle East sovereigns makes rising allocations to these more illiquid private markets more attractive."

Rod Ringrow, Head of Official Institutions at Invesco said: "Governments, faced with fiscal challenges, have turned to sovereigns to help plug their spending deficits.

While some funds were well prepared, others have had to make adjustments to generate liquidity.

Sovereigns have also become aware of the importance of maintaining liquidity in order to take advantage of market opportunities as they arise. At the same time, generating sufficient returns in the face of an extremely low-interest rate environment is having a substantial and potentially long-lasting impact on strategic asset allocations and perception of market risk."

Alizz Islamic Bank to hold Bushra Prize Savings account half yearly draw



MUSCAT: As part of its efforts to reward its loyal customers, Alizz Islamic Bank will conduct the Bushra Prize Savings account half-yearly draw in the middle of July. Alizz Islamic Bank's Bushra Prize Savings account is Oman's first Shari'a-compliant prize savings account and reflects the bank's commitment to pioneering innovative Shari'a-compliant products and services that cater to customers' needs.

There will be 19 winners in the half-yearly draw. The more you increase your savings the more chances you have to enter the draw.

The value of the half yearly prize is RO 100,000 which will be allocated to one winner. A total prize value of RO 30,000 will be distributed among three 'Tharwa' customers with each winner receiving RO 10,000.

Employees of the Ministry of Education who have a Bushra account will have an exclusive draw for them with an amount of RO 1,500 being distributed amongst three winners from the Ministry who will each receive RO 500.

In appreciation of the roles of the employees working in the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Health, Alizz Islamic Bank also has dedicated special draws for both sectors with three winners from the Ministry of Defence and three winners from the Ministry of Health winning RO 500 each.

Valuing the pioneering roles played by the employees of the Royal Oman Police Alizz Islamic Bank will also conduct special draws for them with three winners from the Royal Oman Police each receiving cash prizes of RO 500.

Pensioners will also have a chance to win with a special draw exclusively for them where they will have a chance to win RO 500 each.

Nonagenarian woman undergoes complex surgery at Aster Al Raffah Hospital Sohar

MUSCAT: A 92-year blind woman brought to Aster Al Raffah Hospital Sohar with severe gynaecological complications underwent successful surgery, attesting to the superior skills of the hospital's faculty.

According to Dr Zaheeda Abdullah (pictured), Gynecology Specialist, the patient was brought in a wheelchair with severe pain and swelling in the genital region. On examination, complete prolapse of the uterus, bladder, and rectum outside of the vaginal region was observed.

"The patient had previously reported to a number of hospitals with the same complaint, was advised non-surgical treatment for the same — that is the insertion of ring pessary — as she is very high risk for surgery considering also a number of comorbidities, electrolyte imbalance, and age factor with poor heart function," said

Dr Zaheeda. Left with no hope, the family approached Aster Hospital Sohar.

"Our team comprising the gynaecologist, anaesthetists, ICU team, cardiology team, and with the support of our hospital MD and operations, thought to go ahead with the surgery and relieve the old lady's pain and give her a good quality of life," she continued.

"Surgery was done with utmost care and less time taken so as to not expose the patient to prolonged anaesthesia. The patient was shifted to ICU with good monitoring and blood arranged and transfused. Our hospital staff donated blood to the patient as it was not available in the blood bank of the same group. The patient improved by God's grace and in the next 24 hours, post-surgery and patient was up and about smiling!" Dr Zaheeda added.



BankDhofar executes first transaction linked to SOFR

MUSCAT: BankDhofar executed its first Secured Overnight Financing Rate (SOFR) linked transaction. The transaction was a trade finance facility availed from Wells Fargo Bank N A.

The facility will further help the bank provide trade finance facilities to its corporate customers. BankDhofar is one of the first banks in Oman and the region to execute a SOFR linked transaction.

SOFR is a benchmark interest rate for dollar-denominated derivatives and loans. Unlike the London interbank offered rate



(LIBOR), SOFR is calculated based on past transactions and is considered a close proxy for a risk-free rate.

SOFR is an identified replacement for USD LIBOR (London Inter-Bank Offered Rate) which will be phased out at the end of 2021 for some tenors and end June 2023 for other tenors.

Commenting on the transaction, Abdul Hakeem al Ojaili (pictured), Chief Executive Officer said, "This transaction is testimony to our strong relationship with global banks. The transaction was priced off SOFR averages and represents a significant breakthrough for the bank as the industry transitions away from the Interbank Offered Rate (IBOR). The transaction also demonstrates BankDhofar's position as a leader in adapting and aligning its systems and processes to embrace Alternate Reference Rates (ARRs)."

Welcome impressive savings with Toyota HEV range

MUSCAT: Toyota's leading range of Hybrid Electric Vehicles offer an unparalleled advantage of twin power from an electric motor and a petrol engine, to offer maximum mileage than expected.

That is lesser visits to the gas station and journeys full of impressive savings. The self-charging HEV range of vehicles from Toyota is powered by an electric motor when driven at speeds below 60 km/h (Conditions apply) and for speeds above that, the petrol engine takes over. Toyota has long pioneered Hybrid

Electric technology that is self-charging and doesn't compromise on powerful performance and fuel efficiency.

In Oman, Toyota Hybrid Electric vehicle range includes Corolla, C-HR, Camry, RAV4 and Highlander.

Corolla HEV is a hybrid electric model which combines two power sources consisting of a petrol engine and an electric motor with a combined power of 121 hp. It is also paired with an Electrically Controlled Continuously Variable Transmission, which provides an



outstanding fuel consumption value of 27.6km/L while improving the driving experience.

As with any other Toyota model, safety remains a top priority for the all-new Corolla, which includes a comprehensive array of features to protect its occupants, such as SRS airbags, Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), Brake Assist, Electronic Brakeforce Distribution (EBD), Tyre Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS), among many others.

The C-HR's compact crossover comes with a 1.8-litre full-

hybrid powertrain delivering a total output of 121 horsepower with power sent to the wheels through an electrically controlled continuously variable automatic transmission.

The C-HR is built on the Toyota New Global Architecture (TNGA) platform, which promises an involved driving experience. The C-HR is equipped with an array of active and passive safety features including Vehicle Stability Control, Electronic Brakeforce Distribution and Tyre Pressure Monitoring System among others.



Oil prices slip as economic worries offset tightening supplies



Crude oil storage tanks are seen in an aerial photograph at an oil hub in Cushing, Oklahoma. — Reuters

SINGAPORE: Crude futures slipped on Monday as concerns over slowing global growth outweighed the prospect of tightening supply after talks among key producers to raise output in coming months stalled.

Brent crude for September fell 35 cents, or 0.5 per cent, to \$75.20 a barrel by 0641 GMT while US West Texas Intermediate crude for August was at \$74.23 a barrel, down 33 cents, or 0.4 per cent.

The spread of coronavirus variants and unequal access to vaccines threaten the global economic recovery, finance chiefs of the G20 large economies warned. A tally of new Covid-19 infections shows them rising in 69 countries, with the daily rate pointing upwards since late-June and now hitting 478,000.

— Reuters

Big Oil keeps brakes on spending even with crude rally windfall

LONDON: Leading international energy companies are resisting the temptation to rush and spend an unexpected windfall from rallying oil and natural gas prices as they focus on longer-term energy transition challenges, executives and analysts said.

Benchmark crude oil prices more than doubled in the second quarter of 2021 from a year earlier and have risen further in recent weeks to close to \$78 a barrel, their highest in almost three years as Opec and other major producers failed to strike an agreement to lift output.

That, along with higher global natural gas prices because of supply issues, will boost the coffers of oil companies after firms like Exxon Mobil, Royal Dutch Shell and BP sharply cut costs in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic last year.

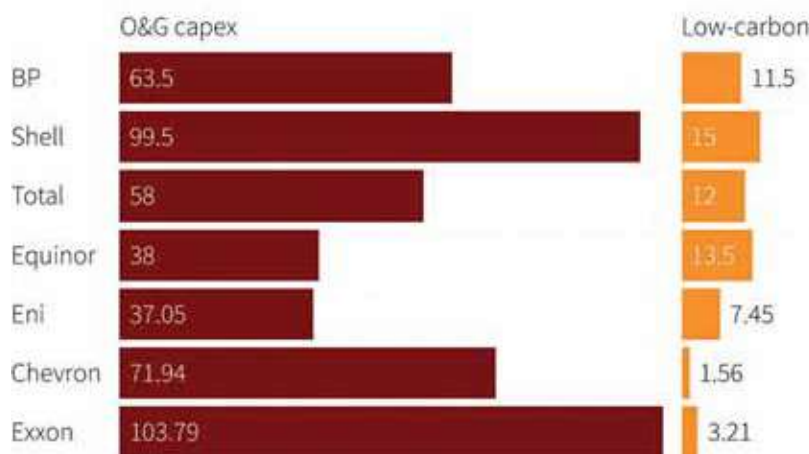
“The cash flow for majors is looking very strong, they’re certainly firing on the oil and natural gas cylinders,” Redburn analyst Stuart Joyner said, adding that things could improve further once demand for refined products fully recovers.

The companies are expected to provide updates on their spending plans in second quarter earnings reports over coming weeks, but are unlikely to significantly shift tack with investors laser-focused on securing higher returns from the sector after a disappointing decade.

While the heads of top energy companies said last month \$100-a-barrel oil was achievable again in coming years, they added prices would be volatile, meaning

Big Oil's energy transition

The Oil Majors' spending on oil and gas will continue to dwarf spending on low-carbon and renewable energy over the next five years



Note: Cumulative spending for 2021-2025 in billions of \$
Source: Company presentations, Reuters estimates

For companies such as BP and Shell, France's TotalEnergies and Spain's Repsol, the coronavirus crisis has already accelerated the roll-out of new strategies aimed at lowering carbon emissions and growing renewables businesses

there is little incentive, at least for now, to commit billions to projects that could take a decade or more to show a return on investment.

Also dampening the bullish mood is huge uncertainty over near-term energy demand due to the resurgence of Covid-19 in parts of the world and longer-term with the shift to lower carbon fuels to fight climate change.

“The international oil companies are still rebuilding their balance sheets,” Brian Gilvary, CEO of INEOS’ oil and gas division INEOS Energy and a former BP chief financial officer said.

Shell said last week it will increase returns to shareholders earlier than expected thanks to higher revenue, holding its annual capital expenditure at no more than \$22 billion.

For companies such as BP and Shell, France's TotalEnergies and Spain's Repsol, the coronavirus crisis has already accelerated the roll-out of new strategies aimed at lowering carbon emissions and growing renewables businesses.

So, unlike previous cycles when rising oil prices loosened purse strings, executives will likely stick to their spending discipline and focus on their energy transition

strategies.

“Higher oil prices allow us to extract more value from our existing businesses, which in turn will generate more resources for our spending on transformation in line with our energy transition roadmap,” Repsol Chief Executive Josu Jon Imaz said in a statement.

BP will stick to its plan to reduce oil output by 40 per cent, or roughly 1 million barrels per day, by 2030, including through the sale of oil and gas assets, CEO Bernard Looney said at the Reuters Energy Transition conference last month.

“Strong oil prices are very positive for our strategy,” Looney said. “Those assets that we sell, will be selling in a much higher price environment, potentially, and therefore will generate more proceeds.” — Reuters

Japan prices surge as import costs hit record

TOKYO: Japanese wholesale prices continued to surge in June as import costs spiked at the fastest pace on record, data showed on Monday, a sign rising raw material costs were weighing on corporate profits.

Households may also start to feel the pinch as recent increases in oil costs are likely to push up consumer inflation in coming months, though the rebound will be more modest in Japan than in other advanced nations due to weak demand, analysts say.

The corporate goods price index (CGPI), which measures the price companies charge each other for their goods and services, rose 5.0 per cent in June from a year earlier, Bank of Japan data showed, beating a median market forecast for a 4.7 per cent gain.

It followed a 5.1 per cent increase in May, which was the fastest pace of growth since September 2008, and marked the fourth straight month of year-on-year gain.

“Wholesale prices will remain under upward pressure as steady Covid-19 vaccinations continue to support the global economic recovery,” said Shigeru Shimizu, head of BoJ's price division. — Reuters



Wholesalers check the quality of frozen tuna displayed during the tuna auctions at Toyosu fish market in Tokyo. — Reuters

Indonesia central bank slashes 2021 GDP outlook to 3.8%

JAKARTA: Indonesia's central bank has cut its forecast for 2021 economic growth to 3.8 per cent based on early assessment of the impact of recent coronavirus restrictions, from a previous forecast of 4.6 per cent, its governor said on Monday.

Southeast Asia's largest economy has been battling the region's worst Covid-19 epidemic, with cases and deaths climbing at an alarming rate and many hospitals inundated. The archipelago has imposed broad restrictions on Java and Bali islands and added more measures last week in several other regions. Authorities have said the July



A woman walks past a poster of a one thousand rupiah coin inside Indonesia's central bank in Jakarta. — Reuters

3-20 curbs could be extended if necessary and the finance

ministry is using an assumption of 4- to 6-week-long restrictions for

its GDP outlook.

Bank Indonesia's (BI) new forecast was based on an assumption that mobility restrictions could successfully bring down cases after a month, the governor said.

“Initially we estimated that ... Indonesia's GDP can grow 4.1 per cent to 5.1 per cent this year, or the midpoint was 4.6 per cent,” Governor Perry Warjiyo told a hearing with parliament's budget committee. “Our early assessment of 2021 economic growth is it will be below this earlier forecast,” he said.

“If this emergency mobility restrictions are conducted in a

month and can bring down Covid, economic growth will drop to 3.8 per cent.” The government's 2021 growth forecast is between 3.7 per cent to 4.5 per cent. Last year, GDP contracted for the first time since 1998 by 2.1 per cent.

Warjiyo also said measures were needed to mitigate the impact of the containment measures on private consumption. However, the governor also warned that Bank Indonesia's was juggling supporting economic growth with maintaining financial markets stability amid the prospect of a US monetary policy tightening, which could trigger outflows.

The rupiah has been weakening in line with comparable markets, but “there could be pressure in the future”, Warjiyo said while pledging to continue to support the currency.

To support the recovery, Warjiyo said rates will be kept low and liquidity ample. BI has cut its key rate by a total of 150 basis points to a record low and injected over \$55 billion of liquidity into the financial system during the pandemic. Prior to the recent outbreak, some economists had expected it would keep its benchmark unchanged throughout the year.

— Reuters

SHORT TAKES

NEW YORK

Amazon's online store down for users globally

E-commerce giant Amazon.com Inc's online store was grappling with widespread outages on Sunday night, according to outage monitoring website Downdetector, the second broad disruption to services late June.

Its online store showed error messages on several regional domains. “We're sorry that some customers may be experiencing issues while shopping. We appreciate your patience as we work to resolve the issue,” an Amazon spokesperson said.



More than 38,000 user reports indicated issues with Amazon's online store site, while nearly 500 users reported problems with the Amazon Web Services, according to Downdetector.

— Reuters

KUALA LUMPUR

Malaysia cuts economic growth forecast

Malaysia's economy will fall short of growth targets this year, Finance Minister Tengku Zafrul Abdul Aziz said on Monday, with 4 per cent deemed a more realistic target than the government's earlier 6-7 per cent range.

“We are in the midst of revising the forecast,” the minister told Bloomberg TV. Official data released on Monday showed economic activity contract in May, when the government imposed a third pandemic lockdown.



Industrial production fell 0.3 per cent month-on-month, the Department of Statistics said, with wholesale and retail trade down 2.5 per cent and manufacturing sales down 6 per cent. — dpa

BENGALURU

Walmart's Flipkart raises \$3.6 billion in funding

Walmart Inc-owned Indian online retailer Flipkart said on Monday it has raised \$3.6 billion in a round of funding, after which it will be valued at \$37.6 billion.

The funding was led by investors GIC, Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, SoftBank Vision Fund 2 and Walmart. It also attracted investments from sovereign funds DisruptAD, Qatar Investment Authority, Khazanah Nasional Berhad and private equity firm



Blackstone Group Inc — backed Antara Capital among others. Japan's SoftBank, which sold its roughly 20 per cent stake in the e-commerce firm to Walmart in 2018, has returned as a shareholder. — Reuters

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features



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SPECIES

Australia's famous Bondi Beach closed due to numerous sharks in water

THE WORLD-FAMOUS Bondi Beach in Sydney, Australia, was temporarily closed on Friday due to numerous sharks in the water. Helicopters in the area

spotted the predatory fish in the sea very close to dozens of surfers and swimmers. The sharks were apparently chasing a large school of fish. In photos published by

broadcaster ABC, the menacing dark outlines of the animals could be seen just below the surface of the sea. The lifeguards who were immediately alerted went out on jet skis to chase away the sharks and warn the people in the water. It was not yet clear what species of shark was involved. Bondi Beach is one of Australia's most famous beaches and attracted tourists from all over the world before the coronavirus pandemic. However, there is a risk of shark attacks there – as in all parts of the country. Only on Monday, a surfer at Crescent Head between Brisbane and Sydney was attacked by a 3-metre-long great white shark who seriously injured his arm. — **dpa**





Archaeological discoveries dating back to the Iron Age in Ibri

A NATIONAL TEAM from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism excavated antiquities in Bilad Al Shahoum in the Wilayat of Ibri and on the Wadi Al Hajar road. The presence of archaeological tombs of various shapes were discovered between the pyramid-shaped or beehive-shaped and Oval tombs.

The external shape of the antiquities were also found similar to Islamic cemeteries to some extent, which were discovered in 2013 during the survey of the road linking Wadi Al Hajar and Bilad Al Shahoum. Last June, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism began excavations in the two mentioned sites.

Mohammad bin Al Murr Al Kalbani, head of the surveys department at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said that the tombs in Bilad Al Shahoum in Ibri are different from the tombs located on the path of the road linking Wadi Al Hajar and Bilad Al Shahoum, and they date back to 300 BC. They are built in the ground, sometimes reaching a depth of two metres, so that the stone ceilings covering the burial chamber begin to appear when descending to a level of 60 or 70 cm underground.

Al Kalbani added that these tombs were used for burial purposes. The tombs included the remains of human bones and the presence of traces of pots made of soapstone, a local stone extracted from the mountains of Oman. They are of various shapes, decorated with circles dotted with geometric shapes, in addition to the presence of some women's jewellery such as earrings made of bronze and beads of various colours and sizes.

He pointed out to the importance of the site due to the presence of an ancient civilisational link between the trade lines or the commercial caravan crossing that connects the coast with the interior, as the site is located close to the Bat civilisation. the presence of women's jewellery and the abundance of pottery indicate the existence of ancient commercial relations between civilisations, which confirms the existence of open relations between the Sultanate, Mesopotamia, the civilisation of Sindh and Iran.

As for the tombs of Wadi Al Hajar, they are different in terms of external appearance and are built on the surface. the tomb consists of a pile of stones



built in the form of rings that wrap around the burial chamber, which was found in two shapes, one circular in shape and the other longitudinal. This indicates that the tombs are built in two time periods: The third and second millennium BC.

Al Kalbani explained that the national team, consisting of a group of young Omanis from the Department of



Archaeological Surveys and Excavations at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, has proven their presence in such sites, and has benefited from practical and applied experiences in dealing with these places.

Omani youth have proven their ability in excavations in archaeological sites in the various governorates of the Sultanate.

LOCAL SCENE

Rare plants in Nakhl



MOUNTAINS, PLAINS AND plateaus, the diversity of natural resources, vegetation cover are found in all places around the Sultanate but not all of them contain different types of rare plants that constitute an environmental wealth. Wilayat of Nakhl is one of the richest areas in the Sultanate with these rare plants.

Youssef al Qarshoubi, who is interested in the Omani plant field, said that there are some plants with rare properties found in the wilayat, pointing to the presence of Acacia nilotica trees in Wadi Al Sabbat, which are perennial trees where their fruits are used for tanning leather.

He also pointed out to the presence of the Pergularia tomentosa plant, which was used to remove hair from leather before tanning. It is considered one of the poisonous trees, as a white liquid similar to milk is extracted from it, indicating that some historical accounts mentioned that its liquid was used in ancient battles as a poison covering spears and arrows.

Chrozophora is also found in the wadi, the dusty tree that was used in the past in the manufacture of writing ink, which was extracted from its fruits. The fruits are pressed and a transparent liquid emerges from it that turns blackish-blue after a while.

In the agricultural lands in the Wilayat of Nakhl, the Verbascum plant spreads. It is one of the beautiful plants with its yellow flowers. Youssef adds that it is one of the strange habits of this plant that if it is hit with a stick, even a light blow, its flowers will fall off after about 30 seconds until it gives up all its flowers. Verbascum plant is called locally (mayta) and was used in the past to catch small fish from the wadi by scattering plant parts and then throwing them into the water so that the fish float on the surface or jump out of the water.

Antioch mentioned about the cat's eye plant (Anagallis arvensis) as (the whale intoxicant), which grows under the palm trees. It is strange that it closes its flowers when exposed to direct sunlight, and also closes them when rain approaches or the sky becomes overcast.

Youssef pointed out that the cat's eye plant is also called the soap plant because it produces a foam like soap if rubbed with

water. In the past it was used for washing, indicating that Ibn Sina mentioned that it is an insect repellent.

One of the beautiful plants is the "fern", its leaves resemble palm fronds, as it is one of the ornamental plants that are grown indoors.

Youssef explained that the arak tree (Salvadora persica) has an aromatic smell and is evergreen and bears heat and drought. It is cultivated in some countries to stabilise the sandy soil and toothpicks are extracted from its branches, which are useful for oral and dental health. Its fruits are also known as kabath, which is similar to boot fruit in colour and shape.

He also touched on the presence of hundreds of wild plants and flowers in the Wilayat of Nakhl, which are distributed in mountainous areas, wadis and fertile agricultural lands, which are a natural wealth that contributes to increasing the areas of vegetation cover and the diversity of its natural resources.





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CELEBRITIES

Acting with daughter, Sean Penn explores family ties in Cannes film



SEAN PENN SAID on Saturday he nearly passed up the chance to act opposite his daughter Dylan for the first time in "Flag Day", his latest movie which is vying for awards at the Cannes Film Festival – until actor Matt Damon egged him on. Oscar-winning Penn plays John Vogel, a real-life wheeler-dealer who lurched from one failed business venture to another, causing heart-break for daughter Jennifer, who reveres him. Based on a book by journalist Jennifer Vogel, Penn told a news conference in Cannes that he had an image of daughter Dylan when reading the script – but took some convincing to step into Jennifer's father's shoes, when he was already down to direct. "The last effort I made to not play it was when I sent the script about a month and a half before shooting started to Matt Damon, who called me, not to say that he could do it, not to say that he can't do it, but to say that I was a stupid schmuck not to do it," Penn said. Vogel was a notorious petty criminal who ended up involved in counter-

feiting, although "Flag Day" is more interested in how he dupes those he loves and lies to himself. The "Into The Wild" director's latest effort behind the camera has so far earned him mixed reviews, with critics at Screendaily pointing to holes in the way the characters are presented, including Jennifer's transition from an angst-ridden teenager to a budding journalist. Most reviewers praised the acting duo at its centre, however, including Dylan's performance, and Sean Penn as the exuberant, fun-loving father who tries to keep up his great illusion as his American dream goes awry. **'BOTH ALPHA'** The film is competing against entries from other big-name directors such as Wes Anderson, in the festival's return to the French Riviera after it was cancelled in 2020 due to Covid-19. Dylan Penn is also joined by her real-life brother Hopper Jack Penn on screen. Their mother Robin Wright, also an actress, divorced Sean Penn in 2010. — Reuters



Frida Kahlo exhibition brings her work alive

WITH LARGER-THAN-LIFE projections of her work, music and journal extracts, a new exhibition aims to bring Mexican surrealist Frida Kahlo's paintings to life to mark the 114th anniversary of her birth. "Frida. The Immersive Experience" presents 26 of the most emblematic works of the late painter, known for her striking self-portraits often brimming with pain and isolation. The idea is "to get to know Frida's paintings, which have been around the world, but with a little bit of familiarity and intimacy," the artist's great-grandniece Mara de Anda said. "I believe that Frida was very avant-garde and modern so this fits perfectly. She was a woman ahead of her time," she said at the

launch on Tuesday. Visitors immerse themselves for about 35 minutes in the heart and mind of one of the 20th century's most celebrated artists, who died in 1954 aged 47. Works such as "The Two Fridas" and "The Broken Column" converge in a digital art experience fusing video, music and interactive elements inside the Fronton Mexico, an art deco building in the Mexican capital. "This experience makes it easier for everyone to achieve that connection, and also to understand it because Frida's paintings are special. They are not easy to understand," said 39-year-old Diana Olguin from Colombia. A different way The exhibition touches

on the difficult times in the life of the painter, who contracted polio when she was a young child, a disease that stunted the growth of her right leg. When she was 18, a metal tube pierced Kahlo's abdomen during a bus crash, subjecting her to painful operations and long periods of bed rest throughout her life. The artist, who twice married muralist Diego Rivera and was a close friend of Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky, turned to painting while convalescing, using a mirror for self-portraits. Her works are accompanied at the exhibition by a digital app and an interactive room, as well as poems and pieces of original Mexican music.





AL ANOOD AL WAHAIBI

Growing up in Portsmouth in south of England, and moved to London to pursue her undergraduate studies, couldn't divert Dina's attention on her cooking hobby, especially her concern on the Omani cuisine. Dina Macki, originally from Oman, has been introduced to many cultures throughout her life like the swahili, Bahraini, and Irani heritage.

Also known as DinewithDina across the social media platform, Instagram. by the end of 2018, Dina started sharing food recipes. However, she started building an audience in 2019, when she began sharing food recipes, focusing on her culture specifically, along with recipes from the Middle East, and Western recipes. Today, Macki has more than 19 thousand followers on her platform.

"My mother has a big influence on me. She has always told me since I was little that I need to get more involved with the internet applications and programs", Macki says. "My mother always made me think out of the box to create new, unfamiliar recipes". Another source of inspiration to Macki is her grandmother who taught her how to cook.

What makes her recipes unique is the spices she uses. by the end of 2020, she launched her own locally made spices. Although Macki has already paved her way in the field of cooking back in London where people enjoyed tasting the delicious meals she prepares, she felt that her food needs to taste unique. She wanted a different flavor to introduce the Omani and Zanzibari food culture.

"I wanted to make the Omani and swahili cuisine the first choice of people in London and also wanted to make a fingerprint and a change in gastronomy field", she expresses.

To promote Omani food along with supporting Omani local farmers, Dinewithdina collaborated with Omani local farmers. Currently, spices include Omani Zaatar (thyme) and Lumi (lemon) from Omani farmers in willayat Al Kamil, al Sharqiya Governorate.

"the idea is to work with local farmers in Oman because they grow products of good quality and they also need the support to promote for their products. They even deserve to promote for them internationally", she adds.

One of Macki's achievements throughout her journey in sharing food recipes and spices is her collaboration with Middle East Eye, a news outlet based in London covering Middle Eastern Events. They approached her to film a series called Dine and Discover that showcased Middle Eastern food. "You don't see many Middle Eastern or Omani food recipes filmed nicely online, so throughout Dine and Discover, people are introduced to Middle East food", says Macki.

The pandemic may not have been a good year for some, but it was a good year for Macki because people spent more time on screens and more time cooking. it was her opportunity to launch the spices. "I noticed that people changed their opinion on the local products and started to appreciate them more and support small initiatives", she says.

Macki's future plans involve creating more videos showing her special content, along with exploring her country, Oman, thoroughly and document it to the Western world. Besides that, a recipe book is one of Macki's main goals that would exhibit both Omani and Zanzibar food. "I'd like also to expand the food products from the local farmers and be able to sell them in supermarkets to have a bigger range that would represent Oman", she adds.

To get to know more about Dinewithdina and purchase her spices, visit her website <https://www.dinewithdina.co.uk>

DinewithDina introduces Oman through food

