

Sultanate’s humanitarian role hailed

The International Committee of the Red Cross has affirmed that the Sultanate attaches great interest to humanitarian issues within the context of its political and diplomatic endeavours to come up with peaceful solutions for regional conflicts and disputes. In a press statement, Peter Maurer, President of ICRC, said that his meetings with Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and Mohammed Hamoud al Thehli, CEO of Oman Charitable Organization (OCO), were aimed at discussing matters of common interest and means of enhancing cooperation in the humanitarian arena. – ONA



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SAILING IN WATERCOLOURS, ADRIFT IN THE SPACE OF ART



RIYADH

SAUDI CABINET NOD ON AGREEMENTS

The Council of Ministers in Saudi Arabia at a meeting held on Tuesday under the chairmanship of King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, authorised to discuss and sign draft agreements between Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman in the fields of youth and sports, culture, standardisation, commerce, audio-visual media, radio and television, investment promotion, communications, information technology, post and transport. The Council of Ministers gave its directives to submit the final documents for completion of the regular procedures.

MUSCAT

IMF HAILS OMAN ON PANDEMIC FIGHT

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has lauded the Omani government’s response to the pandemic alongside its efforts to alleviate its impacts on the local economy and vulnerable sections of the population. A report following the recent conclusion of Article IV consultations with the Omani government also endorsed fiscal reforms and strategies adopted by authorities to aid the country’s financial stability and recovery. “The authorities have acted decisively to address the health and economic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic,” the world body stated in its report published on Tuesday. **DETAILS ON P13**

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Haider al Lawati

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Ali al Matani

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Decree ratifies GCC Unified Agreement on Value Added Tax

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Wednesday issued two Royal Decrees.

Royal Decree No 50/2021 on the ratification of the GCC Unified Agreement on the Value Added Tax (VAT), signed on November 27, 2016.

Article (1) ratifies the GCC Unified VAT Agreement in accordance with the version attached to this Decree.

Article (2) instructs the departments concerned to deposit the document ratifying the aforesaid agreement in accordance with its

provisions. Article (3) says that this Decree shall be published in the official gazette and enforced on its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 51/2021 on the ratification of the GCC Unified Agreement on the Excise Tax, signed

on November 27, 2016. Article (1) ratifies the GCC Unified Agreement on the Excise Tax in accordance with the version attached to this Decree.

Article (2) instructs the departments concerned to deposit

the document ratifying the aforesaid agreement in accordance with its provisions.

Article (3) says that this Decree shall be published in the official gazette and enforced on its date of issue. — ONA



LATE IRON AGE SITE UNEARTHED IN SAMAYIL

The survey conducted by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism unearthed an archaeological site in Al Khobar town, the Wilayat of Samayil, in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. The ministry has managed to discover an archaeological tomb dating back to late Iron Age, or the so-called Samad era. The features of 14 tombs were identified. This comes within the framework of the continuous surveying and documenting of archaeological sites carried out by the ministry in various governorates of Oman. **DETAILS ON P5**

Oman sees drop in daily deaths and ICU patients

99% OF THE POPULATION IN MUSANDAM VACCINATED

VINOD NAIR

@vinoth_nair

Following the deadliest Covid month for the Sultanate, July brings a ray of hope with the mass vaccination campaign now extended to youngsters.

Experts are also unclear on what percentage of a population needs to be vaccinated or recovered from Covid-19 before herd immunity kicks in. According to studies, predictions vary between 60 and 70 per cent.

While 143 deaths were recorded on Sunday, which included 50 single-day deaths on July 2, only 73 deaths have been reported since, including Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health on Wednesday reported 1,675 new cases and 17 deaths.

The number of new patient admissions dropped to 156 from 163 on Tuesday; the inpatients in hospitals dropped to 1,491 from 1,520.

Patients in intensive care units also declined to 493 from 512 on Tuesday.

The number of active cases dropped slightly from 28,755 on Tuesday to 28,728, which means 10.25 per cent of the total infected patients are sick.

It may be noted that most cases recorded in the country are from Muscat, North and South Al Batinah.

According to the Ministry of



Health, nearly 99 per cent of the population in Musandam has been vaccinated, including students and teaching staff associated with the General Education Diploma (GED) exams.

Meanwhile, health experts have warned that Delta variant has been detected in 98 countries worldwide, including 13 countries in the East Mediterranean region. It is spreading quickly regardless of vaccination coverage. It is fuelling current surge

in cases and deaths.

The Delta variant seems to be spreading faster than the original strain.

“The rapid spread of the Delta variant is contributing to an increase in disease transmission both globally and the region. Countries should prepare by strengthening surveillance and detection, social measures, and ensuring health systems can cope with increasing numbers of moderate and severe cases,” the experts said.

Record June temperatures point to more extremes in world

LONDON: North America experienced its warmest June on record, according to the EU’s Earth observation programme. That will come as no surprise given the unprecedentedly high temperatures recently recorded during the heatwave that hit Canada and parts of the United States.

But the United Kingdom residents may be startled to learn that despite the rain and cloud they experienced, it was the second warmest June on record for Europe. It was also the fourth warmest June ever recorded worldwide.

Copernicus, the EU’s Earth

observation programme, produces its figures for world temperatures from computer-generated analyses using billions of measurements from satellites, aircraft and weather stations around the world.

Climate experts say the findings point to a frightening escalation in temperature extremes.

“We are getting used to recording high temperatures being recorded somewhere around the world every year now,” said Prof Peter Stott of the UK Met Office.

He added what meteorologists like him find shocking is not that the



Iraqi youth react to the heat as they wait to buy ice blocks at a factory in Sadr City, east of Baghdad. – AFP

world is experiencing more heatwaves, but that temperature records are increasingly being broken by such large margins.

In Canada and the north-western US, several cities recorded temperatures a full 5 degrees Celsius above previous records. A Siberian heatwave in 2020 saw temperatures more than 5C° above the previous record between January and June.

A study by the Met Office on the extreme heat in the Russian region found that reaching such temperatures was almost impossible without human-caused climate change. — Agencies



State Council reviews Cabinet’s response to 10th Five-Year Plan

MUSCAT: The State Council Office on Wednesday met under the chairmanship of Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council.

The meeting reviewed a response of the Council of Ministers to the State Council’s recommendations on the draft

10th Five-Year Development Plan 2021-2025, and the draft state budget for the fiscal year 2021.

The Council’s Office also discussed the Social Committee’s report on a proposal to review the Law on Conservation of the Environment and Prevention of Pollution issued by the Royal

A PROPOSAL TO
REVIEW THE LAW ON
CONSERVATION OF
THE ENVIRONMENT
AND PREVENTION OF
POLLUTION WAS ALSO
DISCUSSED

Decree No 114/2001 and another proposal on the cybersecurity project.

The State Council’s Chairman stressed the importance of the outcomes of the Council’s efforts and its valuable contributions to the development process in the Sultanate.

— ONA

Pact signed to fund labs at Saham Vocational College



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation signed an agreement with Oman LNG Development Foundation to fund preparing the mechanical engineering laboratories for Saham Vocational College at a total cost of RO 99,689.

The agreement was signed by Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and Dr Amer bin Nasser al Matani, CEO of the Development Foundation.

The agreement states that Oman LNG Development Foundation will fund preparing the mechanical engineering laboratories, which consist of the Fluid Mechanics Laboratory, the Applied Mechanics

laboratory, and the Materials Science laboratory.

Dr Rahma al Mahrouqiyah said that this agreement is part of the ministry’s plan to develop and upgrade vocational colleges to contribute to the economy in the Sultanate. This can be achieved by preparing skilled professionals and technicians for the job market. She added that the agreement is a manifestation of constructive cooperation between the ministry and the industrial sector. It also reflects one of the pillars of Oman Vision 2040 in promoting partnership and integration between different sectors, especially between the academic sector and the job market.

— ONA

Urban strategy to boost infrastructure and generate jobs

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 7

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning is set to conduct a number of initiatives to achieve balanced urban development in all governorates in line with Oman Vision 2040.

A major highlight of the Urban strategy is the establishment of major cities such as Greater Muscat, Greater Salalah, Greater Suhar, and Greater Nizwa.

The strategy will be discussed in a series of workshops in cooperation with the Governors’ Offices with the aim to align projects to be implemented in the governorates with the Regional Urban Strategy.

Dr Hanan bint Amer al Jabriyah, DG of Urban Planning at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, stated that the urban strategy is the main engine for all development sectors and a road map to guide urban growth over the next twenty years. This is based on sustainable urban planning characterised by the flexibility to deal with the national and global variables to achieve sustainable development.

Dr Al Jabriyah confirmed that the strategy seeks to achieve seven major goals; the creation of flexible and livable cities and communities; the preservation of the Omani identity; climate change response, adaptation and mitigation; achievement of growth and economic diversification based on the potentials of each governorate; sustainable use of resources and the production of energy with its renewable sources and the efficiency of water and waste management. It will also address the protection and promotion of the environment, food security and efficient management of water resources, finding alternative and sustainable means of transport.

Dr Hanan added that the urban strategy primarily seeks to achieve balanced urban development in all governorates, by providing guidance to growth through a

series of centres identified by the strategy, based on the hierarchy of population centres to achieve and guide economic growth in governorate centres, contributing to the availability of employment opportunities, services and facilities to reduce internal migration.

NATIONAL GATES

She said that the national gates identified in the urban strategy come at the top of the hierarchy of population centres in the Sultanate, as the idea of developing the concept of greater cities in the Strategy came to respond to the functional roles these national economic gates and centres will play in the development.

This shall enable them to provide employment opportunities and infrastructure in alignment with the expected economic and population growth in these cities, which will integrate with its neighbouring communities. This is expected to lead to the establishment of major cities such as Greater Muscat, Greater Salalah, Greater Suhar, and Greater Nizwa. Meanwhile, Duqm shall continue to develop its main scheme in proportion to its development momentum.

REGIONAL AND ECONOMIC CENTRES

The DG of Urban Planning at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning explained that according to the Strategy, major regional cities like Khasab, Al Rustaq, Al Buraimi, Ibr, Sur and Haima will work as administrative centres for the governorates. They shall provide job opportunities in those regional cities, in addition to services and facilities, to the population centres that they are linked with.

Whereas, Barka and Suwaiq shall be regional economic centres with important economic functions, supporting the main gates owing to their strategic locations, offering a variety of employment opportunities and administrative services for the



communities located within their scope.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

As for the economic goals of the Urban Strategy, Dr Al Jabriyah stated that the strategy considered the projected population growth, which is expected to reach approximately 7.1 to 7.5 million by 2040 with a 3 per cent to 5 per cent GDP increase, as part of the economic growth. This is achieved through the establishment of economic activities zones.

These five free economic zones will improve the competitiveness capacity of the Sultanate in attracting direct foreign investment, increasing the efficiency of the business environment, improving the economic performance, raising the contribution of foreign direct investment in GDP by 10 per cent, and increasing the numbers of the skilled labour force in the private sector to make up about 83 per cent.

FUTURE ECONOMIC SECTORS

She said that achieving economic growth and prosperity revolves around non-oil sectors in the

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governorates and the efforts to strengthen and develop them based on the potentials of each governorate, such as knowledge, innovation, tourism and manufacturing industries, in addition to logistics, finance and services.

RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Dr Hanan al Jabriyah confirmed that the urban strategy pays attention to the potential impacts of climate change and has put in place precautionary measures to reduce expected losses, adapt to necessary changes that may occur during the preparation and implementation of plans and projects, and assess all necessary strategies and plans in terms of impact on sustainability with its various social, economic, environmental and cultural dimensions.

REDUCING WASTE AND GAS EMISSIONS

Furthermore, Dr Hanan said that the urban strategy also seeks to shift towards a circular economy to reduce the waste of materials and energy through recycling and reuse of materials instead

of the common pattern of waste dumping.

This shall reduce waste, gas emissions and raw materials depletion by 70 per cent, contributing to the creation of economic and investment opportunities, in addition to focusing on renewable energy systems as a main source of energy through renewable energy projects which will contribute to the production of clean and renewable energy by up to 62 per cent.

NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

On her part, Dr Thuraiya bint Said bin Khamis al Sarriyah, Assistant Director of Nature Conservation in the Environment Authority, said that the urban strategy has taken into account the topic of natural and cultural heritage and focused on two elements, namely; environmental and natural resources, and special natural areas, to ensure environmental protection and sustainable management of the Sultanate’s diverse natural heritage.

This is to be achieved through the establishment of a network of natural reserves, the provision of infrastructure and cadres necessary to preserve the natural heritage outside protected areas, and the identification and classification of important environmental and heritage resources, integrating them into the urban development processes, in addition to the possibilities of reinvesting them economically while ensuring their protection and preservation for the future generations.

AREAS OF SPECIAL NATURE

Dr Thuraiya stated that the planning of special nature areas comes as a new schematic classification aiming to offer protection for coastal and terrestrial areas of distinctive characteristics that combine natural landscapes, economic and cultural value, in addition to geological resources.



Focus on accelerating health-related SDGs

MUSCAT: Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, participated in the virtual High-level Side Event held on the Margins of the United Nations High-level Political Forum (HLPF), 'Accelerating Progress towards the Health-Related SDGs in a Time of Crisis: Solutions for an Equitable and Resilient Recovery.'

The Sultanate has been selected due to its international health status in the region.

The event focused on key acceleration solutions in support of country leadership and community engagement and in particular the role of primary health in driving Covid-19 recovery, while boosting resilience to future shocks and enhancing health security, a focus on equity, including the importance of disaggregated data and multi-sectoral action to reach those who must not be left behind and the relevance of collaboration to accelerate Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) progress.

The event highlighted leadership by countries and

regions and showcased how these could be further scaled through the support of WHO and its multilateral partners in and beyond the SDGs Global Action Plan. The event also focused on the reasons health is relevant across the SDGs and why multilateral collaboration is key to overcome the pandemic, improve health security and accelerate progress to deliver on our vision to achieve healthy lives and well-being for all by 2030.

The Minister of Health spoke about the importance of achieving the 10th goal of the Sustainable Development Goals, concerning reducing inequality and disparities to ensure equitable access to basic services and universal health coverage, as well as financial protection.

The minister added that addressing the sixteenth goal of the Sustainable Development Goals by promoting peace, justice and strengthening institutions will have a positive impact on the health and well-being of individuals, and thus increase the prosperity and productivity of populations.

99% of Musandam population inoculated against Covid-19

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The strategic tourist destination of Musandam has been at the forefront of Oman's battle against Covid-19.

According to the Ministry of Health, nearly 99 per cent of the Musandam population has been vaccinated, including General Education Diploma (GED) students and staff as part of the National Vaccination Campaign.

The vaccination campaign of the governorate assumes importance as citizens and residents need to visit the neighbouring countries like the UAE and Iran and cities Muscat, Suhar, and other towns in North Batinah for business and work purposes.

As Musandam attracts several international and domestic tourists, the Ministry of Health decided to vaccinate all population of the governorate.

According to sources in the government, the development of Musandam is key to tap its tourism potential as well as to strengthen economic relations



between the Sultanate and neighbouring countries.

On Tuesday, the Supreme Committee said that entry to Musandam Governorate will be allowed only for those who have received one dose of the vaccine at least for people aged 18 years and above.

The government has a number of initiatives to boost the economy of the Governorate of Musandam.

Mussalam, a local tour operator and the guide told

the Observer, "We had a tough year in 2020 and cannot afford to have another 2021 washed away without any business. It was a wise decision to get all population of the governorate vaccinated at an early stage. Several people, both residents, and expatriates are required to travel to UAE cities, Suhar and Muscat for both personal and official work."

A branch of Oman's University of Technology and Applied Sciences will be opened

in the mountainous peninsula, while the Port of Khasab will be developed into a logistics hub with the aim of stimulating trade. Economic and tourism zones will be created, including Mahas, which will be focused on light and medium industries.

"There is an ongoing discussion on various matters related to logistics and food security, including the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and the management of Khasab Port," Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidi, Minister of State and Governor of Musandam, said in an interview. He said the new projects approved for Musandam are in line with the Oman 2040

The head of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in Musandam has said that enabling the business environment and facilitating procedures is a necessity to attract more investments to the governorate to ensure the exploitation of the many opportunities available there.

Workers of Mawaleh market get vaccinated

KABEER YOUSUF

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Hundreds of workers, employers and other stakeholders inside the Central Fruit and Vegetable Market in Mawaleh got vaccinated with the first dose on Wednesday as part of the ongoing mass vaccination campaign.

The camp that began inside the hall adjacent to the Municipality office at the market's main entrance saw an excited crowd queuing up since 7 am well before the campaign started at 8 am.

As many as 1,500 people can get the shot per day while nearly 4,000 workers are engaged in commercial activities directly or indirectly with the market, one of the region's largest vegetable markets.

"We are able to vaccinate nearly 1,500 people a day, and we are giving Sinovac vaccine free of cost to the people associated with the Central Fruits and Vegetable Market and it is going smoothly," a Muscat



Municipality official told the Observer.

Oman keeps adding newer groups to the existing list of target groups as part of the national vaccination strategy and workers inside the Mawaleh market are the new target group and this is expected to help achieve the goal of vaccinating 70 per cent of the population by the year-end, according to the Ministry officials.

In association with various bodies, the Ministry of Health

(MoH) has been organising vaccination campaigns for various target groups and ministries as well as public and private groups and the majority of people are seen taking their vaccine from the vaccination centres and private hospitals.

Oman launched a vaccination programme with the first target group of people, and the groups included people above 65 years, people suffering from chronic diseases, frontline workers including medical staff and the

like at various schools, grounds and the like some six months ago.

Later, the mass vaccination camp for people above 45 years of age began at the OCEC on June 20 and continued for many weeks. The MoH kept on adding more target groups and more governmental departments, ministries and Public Authorities in the past few weeks and the target group of youngsters above 18 was added a week ago.

■ SOHAR HOSPITAL GETS 13 VENTILATORS



Sohar Referral Hospital received 13 ventilators from the Social Committee of the Wilayat of Liwa in support of the coronavirus patients, at a cost of RO 5,000. The hospital receives coronavirus patients from the wilayats of North Al Batinah Governorate amid an increase in daily cases.

Rain and thunderstorm in some parts bring respite from heat



MUSCAT: Wilayat of Izki experienced moderate to heavy rains associated with thunderstorms for the fourth consecutive day, on Wednesday.

The rain caused some wadis to overflow in a number of villages in Izki, reviving dry aflaj, filling the wells and raising the level of groundwater.



'FLEXIBLE LABOUR POLICIES WOULD EASE HUMAN
RESOURCE REALLOCATION AND ENHANCE
EMPLOYMENT GENERATION IN OMAN'

OPENING DOORS TO JOBS



SAMUEL KUTTY
[@samkuttyvp](#)

While expressing optimism over the recent reforms in the labour policies adopted in the Sultanate, a top global agency called for enhancing employment opportunities for women in the country.

"Flexible labour policies would ease human resource reallocation and strengthen job creation in Oman", said a statement as part of the

preliminary findings of International Monetary Fund (IMF) staff at the end of an official staff visit or 'mission' to Oman.

It also recommended that increased attention should be paid to further increasing female employment to promote inclusive growth.

"To foster sustained private sector job creation", recommends the IMF mission, "public sector wage (and benefits) growth should not outpace that of the private sector.

However, the mission said that plans to further reduce the labour cost gap between Omanis and expatriates by increasing fees for hiring expatriates

should be implemented with caution to avoid undermining the price competitiveness of the private sector.

According to its findings, the simplification of multiple minimum wages linked to qualification levels and the monthly single minimum wage are positive signs of a strategy that will spur job growth targeted at Omani nationals.

Regardless of the qualifications, Omanis will be paid RO 325, which is the minimum prescribed salary for Omani job-seekers.

Also came in for appreciation are the time-bound wage subsidy of RO 200 month for first time Omani job-seekers to facilitate private sector employment of Omanis. The programme is

initially expected to cover about 15,000 people.

Other findings of the mission include the Job Security Fund — an unemployment benefit scheme — to facilitate the reallocation of workers between different employers and relaxation of restrictions on job transfers for expatriates.

"Policies aimed at enhancing productivity growth and the ongoing reforms that aim at enhancing labour market flexibility, promoting investment, and improving the business climate go in the right direction", it said.

Oman's Ministry of Labour has been initiating several moves to ensure more and more job availability for Omanis in private as well as government sector.

More recently several vacancies in the fields of various government related services, including health sector, were announced, calling

for Omani candidates.

The Labour Ministry officials have also been regularly meeting private sector representatives on creating job opportunities for Omani citizens as well as to review the Omanisation process in organisations.

Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, while giving a visual presentation before the Majlis Ash'shura last week about the ministry's plan for the Sultanate's labour market in 2021, disclosed that the ministry was in the process of reviewing the laws and legislation relating to the labour market in the Sultanate.

These include a national strategy for Oman's digital society and e-government, replacement and employment management in cooperation with relevant, developing labour market policies, enhancing the attractiveness of the private sector, and national programmes for rehabilitation and training of Omani job-seekers.



Archaeological excavation unearths tombs in Samayil



SAMAYIL: The latest survey conducted by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism unearthed an archaeological site in Al Khobar town, the Wilayat of Samayil, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The ministry has managed to discover an archaeological tombs dating back to the late Iron Age, or the so-called Samad era. The features of 14 tombs were identified.

This comes within the framework of the continuous surveying and documenting of archaeological sites carried out by the ministry in various governorates of Oman. — ONA



To have a healthy mind and soul, we need to tame our thoughts, build positivity and gratitude and cultivate an empathetic approach towards others. Life is hard for everyone and we need to come up empowering and uplifting each other because definitely.

Booster dose for healthy mind and soul

DR NISMA HARIS

The world paid harshly and gravely to the Covid-19 pandemic not only in terms of physical health but also in terms of mental and social health. We lost millions of lives, across the globe, but it didn't stop there; the social isolation and mental suffering which this pandemic brought along gave a final blow to the situation turning life upside down for everyone.

FROM SOCIAL TO VIRTUAL

Work-life changed from real to online; we are fenced in our own spaces without being aware we are getting lost in this virtual world. We are not born to live a virtual life. We need real people and a real environment to groom and blossom. This drift from real to virtual is a major threat to our declining mental and social health.

OVERFLOWING INFORMATION

Our minds are cannoned with pandemic information now and then on the Internet which affects our behaviour and mental state considerably. Also, at times it is misleading and contributes to confusion and chaos.

Incorporating few changes during the pandemic routine:

Our daily routine is disrupted by not moving out from the home to work and with this 'work from home' thing our mind remains in a constant phase of alertness.

Here are some real quick to help with our mental well-being:

Kick start the day by practicing some stretching exercises, yoga, or meditation. Do have a healthy and wholesome breakfast in the early morning hours to keep the body

metabolically active and refreshing.

Try to balance work and other activities by laying out a proper plan for the day so that our brains get accustomed to a particular routine which helps in reactivating our mind and regaining focus.

Minimise social media usage to stay focused and not get swayed with misinformation now and then. Instead, watch a movie, read a book, or go for any offline hobby that interests you. It will give a magical boost to your body and help you unwind.

To have a healthy mind and soul, we need to tame our thoughts, build positivity and gratitude and cultivate an empathetic approach towards others. Life is hard for everyone and we need to come up empowering and uplifting each other because definitely, together we can create happy healthy families.

DEVELOPING AN OPTIMISTIC ATTITUDE

Mankind witnessed deadlier pandemics before the Covid-19 pandemic but we successfully rooted them out from the core. We need to be patient, follow the necessary guidelines, and need not panic. We might have to struggle with these circumstances for a little longer but we need to keep the hope alive we will surely beat this off one day and we will emerge out much stronger than ever before.

It is all up to us how we cope, how we sustain our physical, mental, and social health. Days will come when stories will be told, books will be written and movies will be made portraying us, depicting our unified role and strategies to survive and sustain. (The author is a physician and wellness advisor based in Salalah. Email: dr.nisma.amu@gmail.com)

COMBATING COCONUT LEAF BEETLE



SALALAH: The Directorate-General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, concluded a month-long spraying campaign for fighting coconut leaf beetle (*Brontispa longissima*) in Dhofar Governorate. The campaign focused on 11 infected areas which were identified by a comprehensive field survey in the wilayats of Salalah and Taqah. — ONA

Mangrove saplings planted in dhofar



The Environment Authority, in coordination with the Directorate General of Environment in the Governorate of Dhofar, has planted 1,000 saplings of mangrove in Khor Fagara in the Wilayat of Shaleem and Al Halaniyat Islands of Dhofar Governorate as part of the efforts to implement the national initiative to plant 10 million trees and rehabilitate khors in the Sultanate.



Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Heritage & Tourism

ANNOUNCEMENT OF PUBLIC TENDERS

Tender No.	Tender Name	Tender Document Fees (Non-refundable)	Last Date for Purchase of Document Tenders	Last Date for Bids Submission	Grade
9/2021	Project of Fencing Auqad Site and Al Maghsail Site in the Governorate of Dhufar	RO 25/=	26/7/2021	18/8/2021	1 st
10/2021	Project of Fencing (3) Archeological Sites Affiliated to the Ministry (Qurs Al Birin in Al Amirat, Qurs Al Asal in Bausher, Qurs Halban in Nakhal)	RO 25/=	26/7/2021	18/8/2021	4 th

- Specialized companies and bureaus registered with the General Secretary of Tender Board in the aforesaid grade and interested in subscribing in the tender mentioned above may obtain tender-related documents through the digital portal of e-tendering of the General Secretary of the Tender Board via the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- Bids are submitted in line with technical specifications and requirements along with a temporary banking bond issued by a local bank totaling an amount not less than 1 per cent of the bid's value and valid for 90 days from the date of electronically submitting it. The original temporary banking bond shall be submitted at the Department of Tenders and Contracts, 2nd floor, before one day from the date of bid submission.
- The period of bid submission starts once the period of inquiries indicated in the e-tendering system finishes promptly and continues till the last date for bid submission by 10 am.

For support and inquiries:

- For inquiries related to the tender, kindly communicate electronically via the e-tendering system (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For inquiries related to the technical support of the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through the email (etenderhd@ita.gov.om) or the telephone no. (24166670).

The Ministry shall not be obligated to accept the lowest or any other bid.
www.omantourism.gov.om

For more details, kindly communicate through the email sotoc@omantourism.gov.om or by telephone on 22088085 - 22088348



Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Defence

ENGINEERING SERVICES

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Ministry of Defence invites Contractors specialized in the under mentioned works and registered with the Govt. Tender Board and Ministry of Defence to participate in the following tender.

Tender No	Tender Name	Contractors Grade	Last Date to Obtain Tender	Tender Submission Date	Tender Price (RO)
06/2021	Construction Work - MAM	Excellent	15th July 2021	31th August 2021	275/-

*For more information about the above Tenders please visit gate number (14)

- Tender Documents (Electronic Tender Document) can be obtained from the Tender office, Gate No: 14, Muaskar Al Murtafa'a after payment of the tender fee indicated above.
- The Payment should be made electronically by using SMART CARD, VISA CARD and VISA ELECTRON. Sunday to Thursday (0900 - 1300 Hours).
- The Bid to be accompanied by Tender Bond in the value of (1%) of the bid value in the form of a Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local bank and addressed to HE the Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Bids are to be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to HE the Chairman of Tender Committee and marked with Tender Number and Name. Name of Bidder or any other marks should not be printed on the envelopes.
- Bids to be deposited in the Tender office at Gate No: 14 Muaskar Al Murtafa'a before 1300 hours on the assigned day for submission of the Tender.
- We would like to draw your attention to the importance of adherence to the submission date, request and any queries related should not be submitted to MODES fourteen days prior to submission of offer.

You are requested to submit the following items within your tender submission, failure to submit the required information may result a disqualification of your offer without any further notification.

- Percentage of Omanisation within the company supported by an authenticated certificate from the Ministry of Manpower (Updated Copy).
- Detailed priced breakdown to be specified as per scope and drawings.
- Full set of stamped drawings and documents, Tender Form and Tender Bonds to be submitted as hard copy and others documentation shall be as soft copy (USB) in two separate files:
 - Financial (bill 1&2 separated from bill3).
 - Technical files.
- Confirmation of site visit.
- All addendums and circulars.
- List of sub-contractors/suppliers and their acceptance letter to this project.
- List of current and executed projects.
- Valid Registration Certificates from Tender Board.
- Financial Statement for the last Three years.

Megaship heads out of Suez after Egypt deal

ISMAILIA: The megaship MV Ever Given which blocked the Suez Canal for six days in March headed out of the waterway on Wednesday as Egypt and the vessel's Japanese owners signed a final compensation deal that lifted its arrest.

The ship weighed anchor and started to move north from the central canal city of Ismailia towards the Mediterranean Sea, shortly after 11:30 am local time (0930 GMT).

The nearly 200,000-tonne container vessel became wedged across the canal during a sandstorm on March 23, blocking a vital artery from Asia to Europe that carries 10 per cent of global maritime trade and pumps vital revenues into Egyptian state coffers.

After a round-the-clock salvage operation to dislodge it, Egypt seized the ship and demanded compensation from Japanese owners Shoen Kisen Kaisha for lost canal revenues, salvage costs and damage to the canal.

In a ceremony attended by ambassadors and international media, Suez Canal Authority chief (SCA) Osama Rabie inked a final deal with representatives of the ship's owners.

"I announce to the world that

The nearly 200,000-tonne container vessel MV Ever Given became wedged across the Suez Canal during a sandstorm on March 23, blocking a vital artery from Asia to Europe

we have reached a deal," Rabie said, flanked by Egyptian and Japanese flags in the ceremony carried live on Egypt's state television.

He described the six-day salvage operations in March as a "race against time" to restore global shipping flows.

"We were facing a tough test with the world watching," he added.

The SCA announced last month that it had signed a non-disclosure agreement with the Japanese firm ahead of reaching a final deal.

Khaled Abou Bakr, a prominent lawyer who headed the negotiation team of the SCA, reiterated on Wednesday the "secrecy" of the final compensation package shortly before the signing.

"I can unequivocally state that we preserved the full rights of the Authority," he said.

Cairo had initially demanded



Journalists on a nearby boat film the Panama-flagged MV 'Ever Given' container ship sailing along Suez Canal on Tuesday. — AFP

\$916 million in compensation before slashing that to around \$550 million, but the final amount has been the subject of tough negotiations.

Egypt, which earns over \$5 billion a year from the Suez, lost between \$12 million and \$15 million in revenues for each day the

waterway was closed, according to the SCA.

The MV Ever Given's grounding and the intensive salvage efforts needed to refloat it also resulted in significant damage to the canal.

In April, maritime data company Lloyd's List said the blockage by the vessel, longer than

four football fields, held up some \$9.6 billion-worth of cargo each day it was stuck.

The Taiwanese-operated and Panama-flagged vessel was refloated on March 29, and tailbacks totalling 420 vessels at the northern and southern entrances to the canal were cleared in early

April.

On Tuesday, the Ismailia Economic Court ruled the seized ship with its crew on board was being released following a request from the SCA.

According to tracking service MarineTraffic, the ship had been moored in the northern part of Great Bitter Lake.

It departed with its complete cargo of 18,300 containers intact, SCA sources said.

In a Sunday interview with a private television channel, Rabie said the Ever Given had suffered "no leakage".

He said Egypt would also receive a 75-tonne tugboat from Shoen Kisen Kaisha as part of the compensation package, and noted that the family of one rescue worker who died during the salvage operation would also be compensated.

"The Suez canal has always been a site of sacrifices since it was built," he said.

Rabie waved off the megaship as it headed to the Mediterranean surrounded by captains clad in white waving Egyptian flags.

In a show of appreciation, the SCA also presented a silver plaque to the Ever Given's captain and crew, who had been stranded for months. — AFP

Tunisia hospitals struggle with Covid 'tsunami'

KAIROUAN: Tunisian hospitals are battling to keep operating as the number of people dying of Covid-19 spikes and bodies are left in rooms because mortuaries are running at full capacity.

"Some patients have died without us realising it," said Imen Fteiti a nurse at the Ibn Jazzar hospital in the central city of Kairouan, one of the hardest hit by the pandemic.

Some bodies of Covid victims have been left lying in rooms, next to other patients, for up to 24 hours because there were not enough staff to organise their transfer to overstretched mortuaries.

Tunisia has officially recorded more than 15,000 deaths since the start of the pandemic last year with the toll rising in recent weeks.

More than 600 Covid patients are in intensive care units around the country, and authorities have set up field hospitals to cope with a crisis they have compared to a "tsunami".

Doctors, nurses and non-governmental organisations have sounded the alarm particularly for Kairouan, a marginalised region



A medic attends to patients at a gym that was converted to deal with a surge in new Covid-19 infections in the east-central city of Kairouan. — AFP

where intensive care beds and oxygen supplies are lacking.

"We have reached a point where we don't know who to assist first," Fteiti said.

In Kairouan, 5,500 litres of oxygen are now needed daily to treat those stricken by Covid compared to 400-500 litres two weeks ago before the number of cases spiked, regional health officials said.

And there are only 45 beds in intensive care units in Kairouan

hospitals, both private and public, and just 250 oxygen cylinders are available, they added.

Since June 20, authorities have imposed a total lockdown on six regions across Tunisia, including Kairouan, as the number of Covid cases spiralled in the North African country.

The capital Tunis has been placed under partial lockdown since last week, with weekend lockdowns from July 10 to prevent crowds at beaches. — AFP

Iraq sizzles as blackouts hit four southern provinces

BAGHDAD: When the mercury soared to 52 degrees Celsius (125 Fahrenheit) this week in Iraq, Ali Karrar placed his baby for a couple of minutes in the fridge.

But when the power went off on Thursday night across Iraq, people were left at a loss as to how to escape the torrid heat.

Those with the means hooked up fridges, air conditioning units and fans to private generators — but not Karrar, who lives in the town of Al-Hillah, as well as others across the impoverished and rural south.

Four southern provinces have been without electricity since Tuesday, including Basra — home to Iraq's main port.

Sizzling temperatures have been compounded by high levels of humidity.

"The children sleep right on the floor to try and stay cool, but us, the adults, haven't slept a wink these past nights," Meshaal Hashem, a Basra docker and father of three, said.

In the city of Diwaniyah, Rahi



A child jumps into the Tigris river to cool down in the summer heat, in Baghdad. — Reuters

Abdelhussein buys bags of ice to cool down his children, saying it helps hydrate them.

Shops have placed hoses and makeshift showers outdoors to attract customers to stop.

BLAME GAME

Anger has mounted among Iraq's 40-million population, with corrupt politicians at the centre of

a blame game for its poor services and dilapidated infrastructure.

"The politicians just shrug and say, 'We've got to live with it,'" Iraqi political analyst Sajad Jiyad tweeted.

Boiling temperatures and power outages often go hand in hand during the summer months in Iraq, but there are other factors behind the latest crisis. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TEHRAN

Rouhani apologises for blackouts, blames heat

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani apologised on Wednesday for a wave of blackouts sweeping the country, blaming a searing drought he said had virtually halted hydroelectric power generation and prompted record consumption.

Since last week, Tehran and Iran's other major cities have experienced frequent power outages that authorities say may continue until late July.

"We regret the problems the



people have had in the past few days," Rouhani said in televised remarks at a cabinet meeting mostly dedicated to the power cuts, which have sparked a chorus of complaints.

BEIRUT

Syria Kurds say thwarted drone attacks

Syrian Kurdish forces said they repelled drone attacks on Wednesday near a major base of the US-led coalition battling IS group remnants, in the second such attack in days. "Our frontline forces against IS and coalition forces in the area of the Omar oil field dealt with drone attacks," the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces said.

They said initial reports indicated the attacks had caused no damage.

It was the second such



attempted attack in days after the SDF reported "two unidentified rocket-propelled grenades landed on the western side of the Al-Omar oil field" late on Sunday, without causing casualties.

ANKARA

Turkish court frees pro-Kurdish ex-MP

A Turkish court on Tuesday ordered the release of a pro-Kurdish opposition politician who had been in prison since April on terror-related charges, local media and his family said. Omer Faruk Gergerlioglu, an outspoken rights defender from the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), was handed a two-and-a-half-year prison sentence in April for spreading "terrorist propaganda" online over a post he shared in 2016 before he was



elected an MP.

He had commented on a story which reported on outlawed Kurdish fighters calling on the Turkish state to take a step towards peace.



In brief

■ NEW DELHI

12 MINISTERS RESIGN,
43 INDUCTED AS MODI
RESHUFFLES CABINET

Twelve Indian ministers resigned on Wednesday including Health Minister Harsh Vardhan following a catastrophic surge in Covid-19 cases earlier this year. The resignations form part of a major reshuffle by Prime Minister Narendra Modi ahead of seven state elections in 2022. Ravi Shankar Prasad, Minister for Law and Justice and Information Technology, also resigned. Prasad, a close ally of Modi, was however expected to be given an important role in the ruling BJP.

Forty-three new ministers were sworn-in later the evening. The names in the cabinet reshuffle include several new entrants as well as existing ministers who will be reassigned.

■ SYDNEY

SYDNEY EXTENDS VIRUS
LOCKDOWN AS DELTA
CLUSTER GROWS

More than five million Sydney residents will spend at least another week in coronavirus lockdown, Australian authorities said on Wednesday, after detecting another 27 new cases.

Stay-at-home orders have already been in place in the country's biggest city for two weeks, as authorities try to curb an outbreak of the highly contagious Delta variant.

State officials said progress had been made, but light-touch measures — allowing residents to leave home for work, exercise and shopping — needed to continue.

■ YANGON

MYANMAR PROTESTERS
MARK 1962 RALLIES
AGAINST FIRST JUNTA

Protesters hit the streets across Myanmar on Wednesday to mark the anniversary of 1962 student protests against the country's first junta, vowing defiance against its latest incarnation more than five months after it seized power.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the generals ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's government in February, with pro-democracy protests met by a brutal military crackdown that has killed more than 880, according to a local monitoring group.

The economy is in freefall with thousands of civil servants and doctors on strike and coronavirus cases in the impoverished country spiking.

Taliban launch assault on
Afghan provincial capital

Afghan delegation meets with Taliban representatives in Tehran



Afghan policemen sit on an armoured vehicle at a checkpoint in Panjwai district of Kandahar province after the Taliban captured a key district in their former bastion recently. — AFP

HERAT: The Taliban launched a major assault on a provincial capital in Afghanistan on Wednesday, the first since the US military began its final drawdown of troops from the country, as insurgents press on with a blistering offensive.

Fierce fighting erupted in the western city of Qala-i-Naw, the capital of Badghis, with the militants seizing police headquarters and offices of the country's spy agency.

Afghanistan's Defence Minister Bismillah Mohammadi said government forces were in a "very sensitive military situation", adding that "the war is raging" with the Taliban.

The onslaught came just hours after Washington announced US forces on the ground had completed more than 90 per cent of their withdrawal from Afghanistan, and as the Kabul government held talks with Taliban representatives in neighbouring Iran.

The militants have waged a dizzying campaign across Afghanistan since US and Nato forces announced the final withdrawal from the country in early May, seizing dozens of rural districts and stirring fears that the government is in crisis.

"The enemy has entered the

Fierce fighting erupted
in the western city of
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headquarters and
offices of the country's
spy agency

city, all the districts have fallen", Badghis Governor Hessamuddin Shams told reporters in a text message. Badghis provincial council chief Abdul Aziz Bek confirmed the assault, saying some security officials had surrendered to the Taliban.

"The provincial council officials have fled to an army camp in the city. Fighting continues in the city", added Badghis provincial council member Zia Gul Habibi.

She said the Taliban had entered the city's police headquarters and the local office of the country's spy agency, the National Directorate of Security.

In a separate video message sent to reporters, Shams attempted to calm the residents of the city, even as he appeared armed with a rifle with gunfire rattling in the distance.

"My message is please keep your calm. I assure you that we

will, all of us, together defend the city", he said.

IRAN TALKS

As news of the attack spread, social media was flooded with videos of the fight for the city, with some videos showing armed Taliban fighters on motorbikes entering Qala-i-Naw as onlookers cheered.

The fight for the city coincided with a high-level summit across the border in Iran, where an Afghan delegation met with Taliban representatives in Tehran, according to the Iranian foreign ministry.

Opening the Tehran talks, Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif welcomed the US departure from its eastern neighbour but warned: "Today the people and political leaders of Afghanistan must make difficult decisions for the future of their country."

Last week, all US and Nato forces left Bagram Air Base near Kabul — the command centre for anti-Taliban operations — effectively wrapping up their exit after 20 years of military involvement that began in the wake of the September 11 attacks.

Vital US air support for the Afghan forces has been massively curtailed by the handover. — AFP

Adieu to Bollywood's
'tragedy king'

TRIBUTES POUR IN FOR DILIP KUMAR

MUMBAI: Dilip Kumar, one of Bollywood's most accomplished and respected film stars, died on Wednesday aged 98, prompting tributes from across Indian and Pakistani cinema, politics, sport and even animal rights.

Alongside Dev Anand and Raj Kapoor, Kumar was one of three big names who dominated the golden age of Indian cinema from the 1940s to the 1960s, enjoying a career spanning more than 50 years and nearly 60 films.

Nicknamed "The Tragedy King" with brooding good looks, tousled hair and a deep voice, he played the lead in some of the Indian film industry's most commercially successful films of the period.

But he missed out on international fame after famously turning down the chance to play Sherif Ali in David Lean's 1962 classic "Lawrence of Arabia". The part went to then little-known Egyptian actor Omar Sharif.

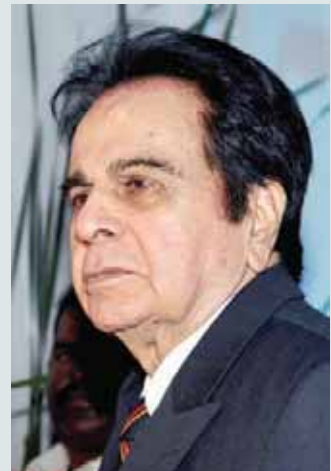
Kumar was born Mohammed Yusuf Khan on December 11, 1922, in Peshawar, Pakistan, then part of British-ruled India. His father was a fruit merchant who took his family to India's entertainment capital in the 1930s.

Actress Devika Rani spotted him on his father's fruit stall in then Bombay, leading to a part in his first film, "Jwar Bhata", in 1944.

Rani persuaded him to change his name, so he chose Dilip Kumar, allowing him to hide what he was doing from his disapproving father.

Although "Jwar Bhata" flopped and leading film magazines criticised his performance, Kumar was undeterred and broke through with the 1946 film "Milan".

Among his most remembered roles was the lavish historical romance "Mughal-e-Azam", based on



Alongside Dev Anand and Raj Kapoor, Kumar was one of three big names who dominated the golden age of Indian cinema from the 1940s to the 1960s

the life of a great Mughal prince. It became one of Bollywood's biggest-grossing films of all time.

Kumar, who cited Hollywood greats Marlon Brando, Gary Cooper and Spencer Tracy as influences, later won acclaim in 1964 for the nationalistic "Leader".

POLITICS

The 1970s saw fewer roles, as younger actors like Amitabh Bachchan, now the biggest star in India's hugely prolific Hindi-language cinema industry, took centre stage.

Kumar even took a five-year break after a string of flops, returning in 1981 with the hit "Kranti" (Revolution) and a part alongside Bachchan in "Shakti" (Strength) the following year, plus a string of character roles.

Later Kumar took up a more active role in politics in 1998 and worked to end the feuding between India and Pakistan. — AFP

Thousands flock to see dwarf cow in Bangladesh

CHARIGRAM: Thousands of people are defying a nationwide coronavirus lockdown in Bangladesh to see Rani, a 51 centimetre tall cow whose owners claim it is the world's smallest.

The 23-month-old dwarf cow has become a media star with scores of newspapers and television stations throwing the spotlight on the tiny bovine at a farm near Dhaka. Pictures of Rani on social media platforms have set off a tourist frenzy.

Despite a nationwide transport shutdown because of record coronavirus infections and deaths, people are flocking in rickshaws to the farm in Charigram, 30 kilometres southwest of Dhaka.

"I have never seen anything like this in my life. Never", said Rina Begum, 30, who came from a neighbouring town.

Rani is 66 centimetres long and weighs only 26 kilograms but the



A domestic cattle stands next to a dwarf cow named Rani at a cattle farm in Charigram. — AFP

owners say it is 10 centimetres shorter than the smallest cow in Guinness World Records.

M A Hasan Howlader, Manager of Shikor Agro farm, used a tape measure to show dozens of

onlookers how Rani dwarfs her closest rival Manikyam, a cow in the Indian state Kerala that

currently holds the world record.

"People come long distances despite the coronavirus lockdown. Most want to take selfies with Rani", Howlader said, adding Guinness World Records had promised a decision in three months.

"More than 15,000 people have come to see Rani in the past three days alone", he said.

"Honestly speaking, we are tired."

Guinness World Records said Manikyam, from the Vechur breed, was 61 centimetres high in June 2014.

Rani is a Bhutti, or Bhutanese, cow which is prized for its meat in Bangladesh. The other Bhuttis on the farm are twice Rani's size.

"We did not expect such huge interest. We did not think people would leave their homes because of the worsening virus situation. But they have come here in droves", the manager said. — AFP

Global Covid deaths down, infections up



A man receives a dose of vaccine in Moscow on Wednesday. — AFP

GENEVA: The World Health Organization (WHO) has registered the lowest level of deaths due to Covid-19 since early October 2020, it said on Wednesday.

There were just under 54,000 deaths in the week from June 28 to July 4 — 7 per cent fewer than in the previous week, the organisation said.

However case numbers have risen, with just over 2.6 million in the same week, as infections increase especially in Europe.

There were 30 per cent more cases in the European area which, under the WHO's mapping of the regions, spans 53 countries from Portugal to Tajikistan.

The more transmissible Delta variant of the virus was identified in seven additional countries and is now confirmed as present in 104 of the 194 countries that are members of the WHO.

Worldwide, the WHO has registered 183 million cases since the pandemic began, and nearly 4 million deaths.

However, the true figures are widely thought to be higher as not all countries detect and report all cases.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has added further anti-inflammatory drugs to the range of medications recommended for treatment against Covid-19. — dpa

Haiti President shot dead at home

PORT-AU-PRINCE: Haiti President Jovenel Moise was assassinated and his wife wounded on Wednesday in an armed attack at their home, the interim prime minister announced.

Claude Joseph said he was now in charge of the country and urged the public to remain calm, while insisting the police and army would ensure the population's safety.

"The president was assassinated at his home by foreigners who spoke English and Spanish," Joseph said.

Moise had been ruling Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas, by decree, after legislative elections due in 2018 were delayed in the wake of disputes, including on when his own term ends.

In addition to the political crisis, kidnappings for ransom have surged in recent months, further reflecting the growing influence of armed gangs in the Caribbean nation.

Haiti also faces chronic poverty and recurrent natural disasters.

The president faced steep opposition from swathes of the population that deemed his mandate illegitimate, and he churned through a series of seven prime ministers in four years. Most recently, Joseph was supposed to be replaced this week after only three months in the post.



President Jovenel Moise

In addition to presidential, legislative and local elections, Haiti was due to have a constitutional referendum in September after it was twice postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Supported by Moise, the text of the constitutional reform, aimed at strengthening the executive branch, has been overwhelmingly rejected by the opposition and many civil society organisations.

The constitution currently in force was written in 1987 after the fall of the Duvalier dictatorship and declares that "any popular

consultation aimed at modifying the Constitution by referendum is formally prohibited."

Critics had also claimed it was impossible to organise a poll, given the general insecurity in the country.

Moise had been accused of inaction in the face of the multiple crises, and faces steep opposition from swathes of the population.

The United Nations Security Council, the United States and Europe have called for free and transparent legislative and presidential elections to be held by

Moise had been ruling Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas, by decree, after legislative elections due in 2018 were delayed in the wake of disputes, including on when his own term ends

the end of 2021.

Henry, 71, has been part of Haiti's coronavirus response and previously held posts in the government in 2015 and 2016 as interior minister then social affairs and labor minister.

He was also a member of the health minister's cabinet from June 2006 to September 2008, before becoming chief of staff, a post he held from September 2008 to October 2011.

Moise had tasked Henry with "forming a broad-based government" to "solve the glaring problem of insecurity" and to work toward "the holding of general elections and the referendum".

Henry is close to the opposition, but his appointment was not welcomed by the majority of opposition parties, who has continued to demand the president step down. — AFP

Heathrow airport plans to fast-track queues for fully vaccinated passengers

LONDON: London's Heathrow airport said Wednesday it plans to offer fast-track lanes for fully vaccinated arriving passengers, as the UK government winds down its pandemic curbs.

The government is expected to announce on Thursday that travellers coming to England from "amber" countries — the middle ranking for Covid-19 incidence, covering most of Europe — will no longer have to quarantine.

In advance, Heathrow said it was launching a pilot plan for passengers coming from selected destinations to enter an immigration fast track on arrival, after showing proof they have received both doses of a coronavirus vaccine.

The trial will initially cover passengers flying in on designated flights from Athens, Los Angeles, Montego Bay in Jamaica, and New York.

"This pilot will allow us to show that pre-departure and arrival checks of vaccination status can



be carried out safely at check-in, so that fully vaccinated passengers can avoid quarantine from July 19," Heathrow chief executive John Holland-Kaye said.

July 19 is the government's target date for lifting most pandemic restrictions in England, although many scientists are worried about the plan as infection rates soar from the more contagious Delta variant.

The variant first emerged in India and spread in Britain while

Prime Minister Boris Johnson wrestled with a decision over banning travel from the country ahead of his own planned trip to New Delhi in April.

In the end, the Indian government called off the trip, and opposition Labour leader Keir Starmer on Wednesday said the Delta strain should now be called "the Johnson variant".

Addressing the prime minister in parliament, Starmer said Johnson was being "reckless"

The government is expected to announce on Thursday that travellers coming to England from "amber" countries — the middle ranking for Covid-19 incidence, covering most of Europe — will no longer have to quarantine.

in planning to lift virtually all restrictions on July 19, including a requirement to wear face masks in enclosed spaces.

The government, however, says a successful mass vaccination programme has weakened the link connecting infections to hospitalisations and deaths.

More than 86 percent of adults in the UK have received at least one jab, and 64 percent are fully vaccinated, according to official data. — AFP

Dutch crime reporter fights for his life after shooting

BERLIN: Two men have been identified as suspects in the attack on high-profile Dutch crime reporter Peter R de Vries, Amsterdam police said on Wednesday.

A 35-year-old living in Maurik in the south-east of the country and a 21-year-old from Rotterdam were arrested on a highway 60 kilometres from Amsterdam a few hours after the attack, police said.

They are set to be arraigned on Friday.

A third man who was arrested on Tuesday night was released again and did not have anything to do with the attack, police said.

During raids in Maurik, Rotterdam and Tiel, police seized computers and ammunition.

Leading crime reporter de Vries was shot after leaving a television studio in Amsterdam and is currently in hospital with life-threatening injuries.

The Dutch royal family on Wednesday strongly condemned the attack, which shocked the country, prompting TV channels to air special reports



Peter R de Vries

about the case.

The incident was "an attack on journalism," King Willem-Alexander said on Wednesday in an interview broadcast by NOS.

Journalism is "a cornerstone of our democracy. This is also an attack on our constitutional state," the king said.

Speaking in front of Dutch journalists, the king also expressed his compassion. "It must be horrible when this happens to a colleague."

De Vries is a leading crime reporter in the Netherlands and also regularly appears as a spokesperson for victims or witnesses at trials. — Agencies

SHORT TAKES

OTTAWA

Canada names first indigenous governor general

Canada named Mary Simon on Tuesday as its first indigenous governor general — Queen Elizabeth II's official representative in the Commonwealth country — as the nation faces a reckoning with its colonial history.

"Today, after 154 years, our country takes a historic step," Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told a news conference. "I cannot think of a better person to meet the moment."

Simon, a former broadcast



journalist, diplomat and advocate of indigenous rights, has previously served as president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Canada's national Inuit organisation.

PARIS

Warmest June in North America

Last month was the hottest June on record in North America, stoked by a deadly heatwave searing across parts of the region, the European Union's climate monitoring service reported Wednesday, saying it illustrates the impacts of global warming.

Record-breaking heat scorched from the southwest to the northwest of the United States and into Canada, where the all-time record daily temperature was broken three days in a row in British Columbia.



The region was 1.2 degrees Celsius (34.2 degrees Fahrenheit) above the 1991-2020 average in June, according to the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S).

WASHINGTON

Biden calls for 'courage' in Capitol attack probe

Six months after the insurrection at the US Capitol by supporters of Donald Trump, President Joe Biden called on Congress to investigate the assault, calling it an "existential crisis" for democracy.

"Not even during the Civil War did insurrectionists breach our Capitol, the citadel of our democracy," Biden said in a statement. "But six months ago today, insurrectionists did."

"This was not dissent. It was



disorder. It posed an existential crisis and a test of whether our democracy could survive — a sad reminder that there is nothing guaranteed about our democracy," Biden said.

Asylum law to give border police more powers

FLORA THOMPSON

Britain's Border Force officers could be given powers to turn migrants away from the UK while at sea under laws proposed as part of sweeping reforms of the asylum system. The Government's Nationality and Borders Bill, which was introduced to Parliament on Tuesday, also contains provisions to set up offshore processing centres and allow asylum seekers to be sent away from the UK while their claims are determined.

The legislation — dubbed the “anti-refugee Bill” by campaigners critical of the plans — intends to make it a criminal offence to knowingly arrive in the UK without permission, with the maximum sentence for those entering the country unlawfully rising from six months' imprisonment to four years.

It means that, for the first time, how someone enters the UK -legally or “illegally” — will have an impact on how their asylum claim progresses and on their status in the UK if that claim is successful.

Convicted people-smugglers could also face life behind bars, up from the current maximum tariff of 14 years, under the proposals.

According to the papers setting out the proposals of the Bill, Border Force would be given the power to intervene at sea to tackle people-smugglers and turn migrant boats away from the UK but they would need the agreement of other states, like France, to drive them back into foreign waters. The documents also suggest officers may be able to use “reasonable force, if necessary”.

The Bill includes clauses to allow the UK to be able to send asylum seekers to a “safe third country” and to submit claims at a “designated place” determined by the Secretary of State. Although little detail is provided on this, officials believe the Bill gives the potential to allow for offshore processing centres to be set up overseas, akin to policies used in Australia.

This could give rise to reports that the UK is considering sharing a processing centre with Denmark in Rwanda and may even revive speculation over suggestions that Ascension Island could be sought as another destination. — dpa

“The most radical changes in decades will prioritise those most in need of protection while stopping the abuse of the system

BRITISH HOME OFFICE



1,174-CARAT DIAMOND!

A member of the Botswana cabinet holds a 1,174-carat diamond in Gaborone, Botswana, on Wednesday, that the Lucara Botswana found during an eleven day production run in June. – AFP

Oman-Saudi relations to witness new momentum



Haider al Lawati
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

THE INITIATIVES BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES TO ENHANCE ECONOMIC RELATIONS HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO A NEW HIGH, PARTICULARLY IN THE ECONOMIC DOMAIN

Omani-Saudi relations are witnessing more coordination between the two countries in a number of political and economic arenas, while observers expect that the relations will witness new momentum in all spheres during the coming period in the wake of the anticipated visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Riyadh.

During the past period, a number of Omani and Saudi officials have stressed the importance of these relations in the light of the developments in contacts between the two countries at various levels, starting with the visit of King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud to Muscat to offer condolences to His Majesty Sultan Haitham and the Omani government on the death of late Sultan Qaboos, followed by several reciprocal visits by officials and ministers.

The initiatives between the two countries to enhance economic relations have contributed to a new high, particularly in the economic domain, with Saudi Arabia moving to set up some strategic economic project in the Sultanate during the coming period. Both countries are also expected to sign a number of bilateral agreements in the

commercial, industrial and logistical fields during the coming period.

His Majesty's visit aims to strengthen bilateral relations between the two countries, with focus on economic prospects and investment opportunities that will have positive impact for the wider region. The two sides are expected to attend the signing of a number of trade agreements between the two countries, in addition to discussing regional files, including the conflict in Yemen, and resolving this crisis. Muscat has played a mediatory role between the parties involved in the conflict.

On Tuesday, the Saudi Press Agency, quoting the Saudi Council of Ministers, reported that a number of agreements will be signed between the Kingdom and the Sultanate in the fields of youth, sports, culture, commercial fields, audio-visual media, radio and television, investment promotion, communications, information technology, mail and transportation. This confirms a common desire to enhance bilateral cooperation between the two countries in these areas.

The two countries also stress the importance of developing a long-term strategy to help them achieve more

success in these sectors, and turn them into economic poles in the presence of the human elements and capabilities available in the two countries, while enabling the Kingdom to reach the Arabian Sea in the Indian Ocean by establishing industrial and commercial projects in the Duqm Special Economic Zone. At the same time, the two countries have a timeline to open the first land route linking Saudi and the Sultanate directly without passing through any third country.

Duqm Special Economic Zone, with its strategic location, has attracted a lot of local, Arab and foreign investments during the past decade. It has become one of the most prominent industrial and logistics areas in the region and the wider world. The new overland route will cut the distance between the two countries by about 800 km, which will help reduce travel time significantly.

In this regard, Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, Sultanate's Ambassador to Saudi, had referred to bilateral cooperation agreements that will be signed between the two countries, stressing the role of the private sector to benefit from them, and the investment opportunities available in those areas.

Need for reasonable balance between health and economic interests



Ali Al Matani
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THE GUIDELINES AND PREVENTIVE MEASURES SHOULD BE FOLLOWED WITHOUT ANY DOUBT. THE PROCEDURES NEED TO BE ACCORDING TO INTERNATIONAL HEALTH PROTOCOLS

The role played by the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic is highly commendable. The work of the Ministry of Health is not less important.

These efforts have helped contain the impact of the coronavirus which has devastated many countries. However, some of the procedures followed for examination and testing of those coming from other countries are exaggerated, compared to the health protocols followed in the world.

This is particularly in the case of those who have already received two doses of vaccines, in addition to the PCR tests in the countries from where they are coming 48 hours before their arrival in Oman.

The health procedures followed, whether they are in the form of re-examination, mandatory quarantine, or payment of certain amount of money, seem to be more than all health precautions followed around the world.

There is an urgent need to mitigate the burden of these procedures so that entry for investors and residents who are associated with businesses and companies in the country become easy.

This will also prevent private sector companies from making losses. Those who have completed all required health procedures in their countries, prior to arrival, should be allowed to enter in the country without any hassle.

Therefore, the health protocols and procedures being practiced in the country need to be re-

visited. Work should be done to introduce reasonable procedures particularly for those who are coming from countries where similar health procedures are followed.

But at the same time, there is no doubt that the preventive measures to reduce the impact of the coronavirus are required. There is no ambiguity in this. All the guidelines and preventive measures announced should be followed without any doubt. The procedures need to be according to international health protocols as we are a part of the world.

We also believe that any exaggeration in the procedures will have negative effect on the economy of the Sultanate. The travel and aviation sectors are also suffering huge losses. Restricting movement has economic costs which cannot be avoided.

The existing procedures a person follows in the country from where he or she is coming as well as on arrival in the Sultanate are very expensive. Despite taking both the doses of vaccination, RTPCR after RTPCR and then mandatory quarantine is financially burdening the travellers.

This is increasing the burden on the traveller. If a person is already vaccinated and before travelling to Oman, he did RTPCR, there is no logic that it should be repeated on arrival. Similar is the case of home or institutional quarantine despite vaccination. This is not only a burden on an individual but on the health facilities of the Sultanate.

Vaccination, repetition of testing procedures, then quarantine not only has financial

effects but also has adverse psychological implications on individuals.

The matter should be looked into at the earliest. Health measures are required, but within reasonable limits. We should not exaggerate them and create trouble and a sense of alienation among the travellers.

We should simply follow the procedures decided by the World Health Organization and not deprived the private sector from their workforce.

We expect that the health procedures would be revisited and made more practical and reasonable. It should be same as are followed in other countries around the world.

There is a need for reasonable balance between health and economic interests. The interest of the country is supreme.

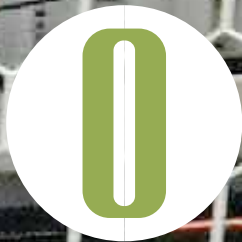
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sport



Argentina's goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez stops the shot by Colombia's Yerry Mina. – AFP

BRASILIA: Goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez was the hero as Argentina defeated Colombia on penalties on Tuesday to set up a dream Copa America final against Brazil.

Argentina stopper Martinez saved three penalties in the shoot-out after a bruising 1-1 draw in Brasilia.

Hosts Brazil beat Peru 1-0 in Monday's first semifinal meaning their star forward Neymar will line up against Lionel Messi's Argentina on Saturday at Rio de Janeiro's iconic Maracana stadium.

Two years ago, a Brazil team missing the injured Neymar knocked out Argentina in the semifinals before winning their ninth Copa title on home soil.

finished with blood seeping visibly from his left ankle — was amongst the scorers to give them a 3-2 victory on spot-kicks.

Saving penalties “is a question of luck and today it was my turn to be the glorious one,” said Martinez.

“We said it the first day, we want to play the final and what better than playing Brazil on their pitch.”

Argentina and Colombia were actually supposed to be joint hosts but South



Argentina's goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez celebrates with team-mates. – AFP

For Messi, 34, time is running out to win a first major international title with his national team, having previously lost in three Copa finals and the 2014 World Cup final.

For once he wasn't his country's main hero, although he did create the opening goal for Lautaro Martinez on seven minutes, before Luis Diaz equalised just after the hour mark.

In the shoot-out, goalkeeper Martinez three times dived to his left to save penalties from centre-backs Davinson Sanchez and Yerry Mina, as well as midfielder Edwin Cardona.

And although Rodrigo De Paul skied his penalty for Argentina, Messi — who

American football's governing body Conmebol switched venues at the 11th hour due to the coronavirus pandemic and social unrest in Colombia.

Despite the defeat, Colombia coach Reinaldo Rueda was feeling positive, saying their performance “invites us to dream, to think we're on the right path.”

“We should lift our heads, look each other in the eyes and know we have nothing to reproach ourselves about,” he added.

FAST ARGENTINA START

Messi produced some early magic to beat three players and cross for Martinez to head wide.

Colombia didn't heed the warning and on seven

ARGENTINA SETS UP BRAZIL FINAL

GOALKEEPER MARTINEZ SAVES 3 PENALTIES IN SHOOT-OUT



Argentina's goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez and Lionel Messi celebrate at the end of the Copa America semifinal against Colombia. – AFP

minutes, Giovanni Lo Celso found Messi in the box, the diminutive star held off the giant Mina and picked out Martinez to fire into the far corner.

Colombia almost hit back immediately but goalkeeper Martinez was down quickly to keep out Juan Cuadrado's low strike. After Argentina's fast start, Colombia started to dominate and Cuadrado sent a free-kick just over the bar.

The Cafeteros cranked up the pressure and hit the

Nicolas Gonzalez powered a header from a Messi corner goalwards, with Colombia goalkeeper David Ospina somehow scooping the ball over the bar.

DI MARIA IMPACT

Colombia remained the better side after the break with Duvan Zapata having a shot blocked and substitute Miguel Borja firing wide.

But they deservedly equalised on 61 minutes when Cardona took a quick free-kick from inside his own half and sent Diaz scampering away to hold off German Pezzella and dink a clever finish over Martinez.

Argentina brought on Angel Di Maria for Gonzalez and the tricky winger immediately



Argentina's Lautaro Martinez (L) celebrates with Lionel Messi, Nicolas Gonzalez (R) and Rodrigo De Paul after scoring against Colombia. – AFP

“We said it the first day, we want to play the final and what better than playing Brazil on their pitch
EMILIANO MARTINEZ
Argentina goalkeeper

woodwork twice in quick succession.

After Wilmar Barrios's half-volley deflected off Lo Celso's hand and struck the post, Mina headed the resulting corner onto the bar.

But Argentina were a whisker away from doubling their advantage on the stroke of half-time when

brought more urgency to his side's attack.

But Di Maria and Martinez contrived to butcher a glorious chance to give Argentina the lead again.

Daniel Munoz's wayward back pass sent Di Maria scampering towards goal. He dribbled round Ospina and teed up Martinez whose shot was blocked on the line by Barrios before Di Maria blazed the rebound over.

Di Maria then played in Messi who thudded a shot off the post before De Paul's follow up was charged down by Sanchez.

Messi shot a late free-kick into the wall but after the 90 minutes were up, it was Martinez who took centre stage. — AFP

In brief

HARARE



CAPTAIN HAQUE RESCUES BANGLADESH

Captain Mominul Haque was unbeaten on 32 at lunch as Bangladesh struggled to 70-3 on the first day of a one-off Test against Zimbabwe at Harare Sports Club on Wednesday.

Seeking just a second victory in nine Tests as skipper, Haque struck six fours as the Tigers returned to the southern Africa nation after an eight-year absence. A match staged behind closed doors because of the coronavirus pandemic began dramatically with Saif Hassan bowled for a duck just five balls into the first session.

Brief scores: Bangladesh 70-3 in 23 overs (Haque 32 not out, Islam 23; Muzarabani 2-5) vs Zimbabwe

COLOMBO



SRI LANKA CRICKETERS SIGN PAY DEALS

Sri Lankan cricketers due to play India in a series this month signed new performance-related contracts after being given a Wednesday deadline, but Test captain Dimuth Karunaratne and former skipper Angelo Mathews have been left out, sources said.

The national squad, which has suffered a number of defeats on the pitch and discipline problems out of competition, has been at loggerheads with Sri Lanka Cricket since May over the new contracts. Karunaratne and Mathews have been left out of the squad to play India in three one-day internationals and three Twenty20 games against India starting July 13 in Colombo.

KABUL



RASHID KHAN IS AFGHAN T20 SKIPPER

The Afghanistan Cricket Board on Tuesday appointed spinner Rashid Khan as skipper for the upcoming Twenty20 World Cup to be held in the United Arab Emirates.

The 22-year-old had briefly led Afghanistan in 2018-19 before leaving the post saying he was better off as a player.

While he had recently voiced reservations about leading the team, fearing it could affect his bowling, Khan expressed gratitude on Tuesday.

"It is my duty now to serve my country & my team", he tweeted. "Thank you #ACBofficials for the trust & believing in me. It is a dream journey & my fans support will be the key."



SPAIN MISS OUT ON PENALTIES 4-2 IN WELL-FOUGHT SEMIFINAL

ITALY MARCH INTO EURO FINAL

ANDY JALIL,
LONDON, JULY 7

Tempo, tension and quality, this enthralling semifinal had it all. In the end it needed a dramatic shootout — after a goal by each team during normal and extra time — to produce the result in favour of Italy, who converted 4 spot kicks against 2 by Spain, to send their supporters into ecstasy.

Italy's delighted Manager, Roberto Mancini, said: "We knew it was going to be a very tough match because in terms of ball possession Spain are now the best around. This caused us problems, we needed to dig in. We tried to score or open opportunities when we could. It was a very open match,

there were some issues because we didn't have much possession. We kept trying to score because penalties are a lottery but I take my hat off to Spain they are a wonderful side."

He added: "We are very happy for all of this. I thank the players, they believed from day one that we could produce something incredible. But we haven't done everything we need to, there is still one step to go and we have to rest up because this was very challenging. I did say before the match this was going to be our hardest game because if you go into your sixth match in such quick succession with all the travelling it becomes very tiring but we wanted to make the final."



We kept trying to score because penalties are a lottery but I take my hat off to Spain they are a wonderful side

ROBERTO MANCINI
Italy manager

The first half was breathless with a series of missed chances by both sides. Nicolo Barella was marginally offside when his shot hit a post while for Spain Ferran Torres pulled a shot wide and Dani Olmo's low drive brought a fine diving

save by Gianluigi Donnarumma in the Italian goal. He later saved from Mikel Oyarzabal while at the other end Unai Simon brought off excellent saves from Federico Chiesa's hit while Sergio Busquets shot over the bar.

The game was a master-class throughout, particularly in terms of Spain's ball control and keeping possession and Italy's brilliance in counter attacks. It was one of these quick incursions that brought the first goal on the hour. Ciro Immobile broke through from a long pass and found Chiesa whose magnificent right-footed curling shot went into the far corner.

Spain immediately brought on substitute Alvaro Morata for Torres and pushed forward looking for

the equaliser. It came soon after a shot by Oyarzabal went narrowly wide and so did one from Morata. But with just ten minutes of normal time remaining, Morata did a quick one-two with Olmo and calmly placed his left-footed shot inside the near post to take the game into extra time.

With neither side able to find the net during the 30 minutes while applying caution as well, the dreaded penalties followed. Both sides nervously missed their first attempts, Spain then missed two more, the last was a tame effort from Morata. Finally, Jorginho with his unique skip/hop sent the goalkeeper the wrong way and Italian fans, among the 66,000 in the stadium, into a frenzy.

Oman futsal team to take part in Thailand tourney

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 7

Oman futsal team will take part at the friendly international futsal tournament in Thailand during August. The Sultanate team, under supervision of the national experienced coach Younis al Fahdi, is gearing up to participate in the qualification of AFC Asian Futsal Championship in Kuwait in 2022. The qualifications will take place in April 2022.

Ahead of travelling to Bangkok city, the national futsal team will begin a domestic camp soon after receiving a final confirmation from the Sports Ministry and Oman Football Association (OFA).

The camp is vital for the team members to continue in their preparatory programme and shape the players' readiness for the Asian assignment. It was



Younis Al Fahdi

supposed that coach Younis al Fahdi's men would participate in another friendly tournament in Iran during July. However, the friendly tournament in the Tehran city was cancelled due to the current Covid-19 situation in many countries.

Thailand International futsal tournament in August will act as an alternative preparatory event instead of cancelled tournament in Iran. Many of tough Asian futsal teams are expected to attend the friendly tournament in Thailand.



The 2021 Fifa Futsal World Cup in Lithuania, which is scheduled to take place from September 12 to October 3, will feature participation of Thailand in Group C alongside to Portugal, Morocco, and Solomon Islands. The other Asian nations which will take part in the world futsal championship include Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam and IR Iran.

The Sultanate futsal team was absent from training for the last five months after the cancellation of the 2020 AFC Asian Futsal Championship in Kuwait but the host country Kuwait will have all the rights to host the forthcoming edition in 2022.

The previous squad of the Oman futsal team included the following probables: Ammar

al Busaidy, Hisham al Wahaibi, Waleed al Farsi, Abdulaziz al Raqadi, Mohammed al Lawati, Samer al Balushi, Khalfan al Maawali, Mansoor al Hadi, Muhannad al Shibli, Essa al Balushi, Mohammed al Adawi, Loay al Wahaibi, Mutasim al Shamsi, Zamil al Balushi, Mukhaled al Raqadi and Abdullah al Wahaibi.

DJOKOVIC STORMS TO 10TH WIMBLEDON SEMIFINAL

LONDON: World number one and five-time champion Novak Djokovic reached his 10th Wimbledon semifinal on Wednesday with a straight-set win over Marton Fucsovics of Hungary.

Djokovic, chasing a record-equalling 20th Grand Slam title, won 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 and will face either Russia's Karen Khachanov or Denis Shapovalov of Canada for a place in Sunday's final.

It was 34-year-old Djokovic's 100th career grass court win as he made the last-four of a major for the 41st time.

"It was a solid performance, I started extremely well and didn't do many things wrong in the first five games," said Djokovic.

"One break of serve in the second and third set was enough to clinch the victory. But credit to Marton for fighting and hanging in there, he had a great tournament."

Djokovic became only the third man to capture all four majors more than once with his second French Open victory last month.

Now he is halfway to becoming the first man since 1969, and only the third in history, to complete a calendar Grand Slam of all four majors.

"I'm aware of certain stats, I love this sport with all my heart, body and soul and have been devoted to it since I was four," he added.

"Sometimes things do look surreal for me but I try to live in the moment and take every opportunity I have on the court.

"Going for history is a huge inspiration for me, let's keep it going."

Djokovic raced into a 5-0 lead in the first set on Wednesday before 29-year-old Fucsovics got on the board.

The world number 48, bidding to become the first Hungarian man since 1948 to make the semifinals at Wimbledon, saved five set points.

However, the rearguard action was too late to prevent the champion edging ahead.

The top seed broke for the only time in the second set in the ninth game which was enough for a two sets lead.

Djokovic had spent three hours fewer than the muscular Fucsovics in get-ting to the last-eight and his freshness showed when he crucially broke in the first game of the third set and then fought off two break points in the sixth.

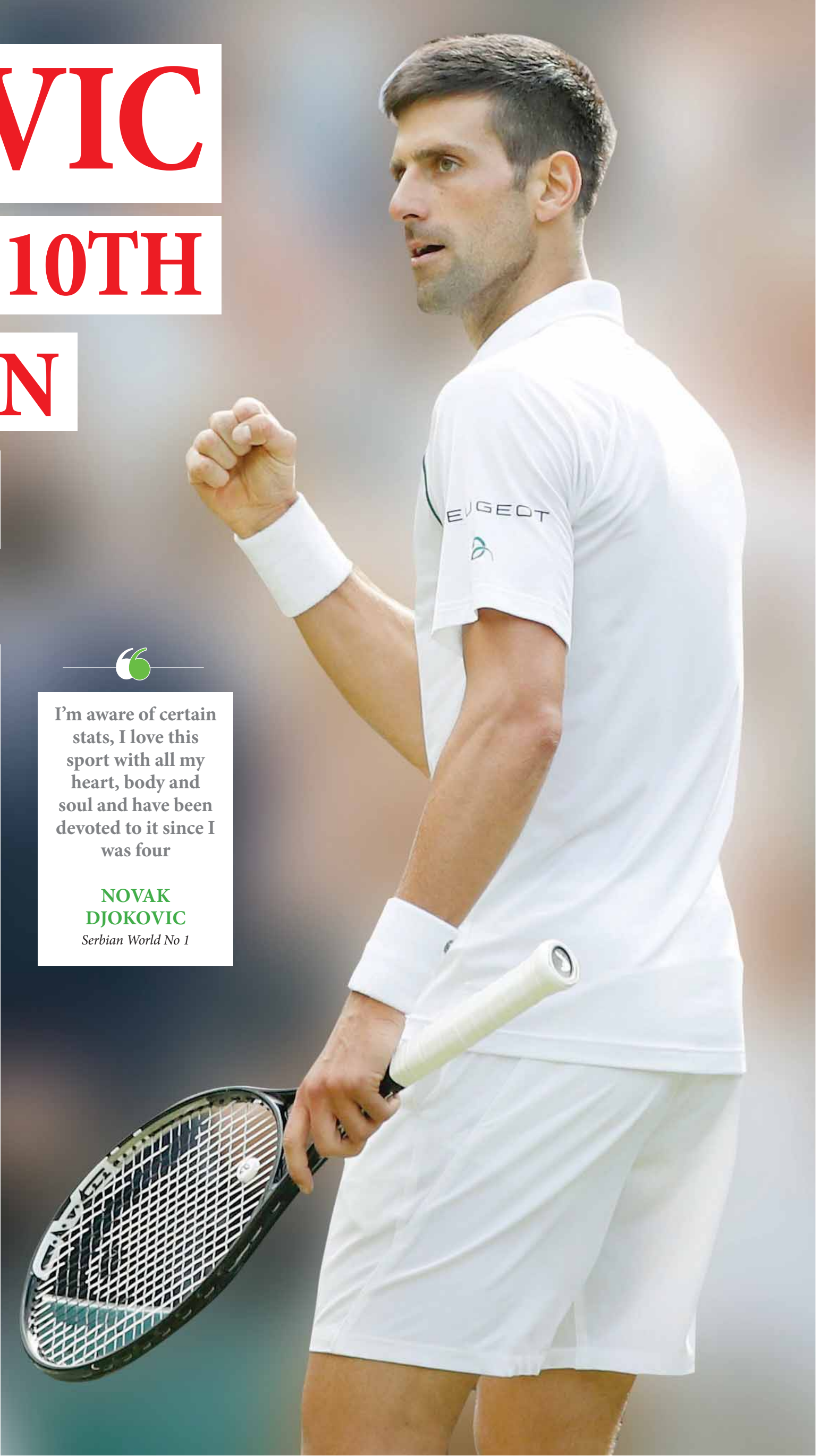
— AFP



I'm aware of certain stats, I love this sport with all my heart, body and soul and have been devoted to it since I was four

NOVAK
DJOKOVIC

Serbian World No 1



Virus emergency to be 'imposed' in Tokyo during Games

TOKYO: The Japanese government plans to impose a virus state of emergency in Tokyo during the Olympics, reports said on Wednesday, meaning spectators could be barred from venues.

The emergency measures — less strict than a blanket lockdown — would be in force until August 22, several Japanese media outlets reported, following a rise in cases less than three weeks before the Games begin.

"The government decided to declare the fourth state of emergency for Tokyo and communicated the decision to the ruling parties," public broadcaster NHK said.

Ministers will consult with experts on Thursday and make a formal decision at a virus task force meeting later that day, it added.

Kyodo News, citing a senior government official, said it was now likely the Olympics would be held behind closed doors.

The pandemic-postponed 2020 Games will take place under strict anti-infection rules, with overseas fans already banned.

Organisers set a limit last month of 10,000 fans, or half of each venue's capacity, but recently warned that a closed-door Games remains an option as the virus situation worsens.

Japan's Covid-19 outbreak has



The logo of Tokyo 2020 is displayed near Odaiba Seaside Park in Tokyo. — AFP

not been as severe as in some countries, with around 14,800 deaths, but experts say another wave could stretch medical

services as the Games begin.

Around 15 per cent of Japan's population is fully vaccinated against the deadly respiratory

disease. The announcement of the results of a ticket lottery for oversubscribed events has been pushed back to Saturday — less than two weeks before the July 23 opening ceremony.

Fans have also been urged not to line the route of the Olympic marathon in the northern city of Sapporo. Tokyo and other regions are currently under softer virus restrictions, due to end on Sunday, that cap spectators at non-Olympic sports events at 5,000, and limit bar and restaurant opening hours.

The capital has already had a state of emergency, which gives local authorities more powers to request business closures,

imposed three times since the pandemic began.

The last emergency had been successful in bringing cases down in Tokyo, but infections have risen since it ended last month, with fears growing over the spread of new variants.

Games participants have already begun arriving in Japan, with 11,000 Olympic athletes from around 200 countries set to take part. International Olympic Committee chief Thomas Bach is due to arrive in Japan on Thursday, and will isolate for three days on arrival. He had initially been expected to visit Tokyo in May, but that trip was cancelled over virus restrictions. — AFP

business

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Omantel Innovation Labs to support tech start-ups



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 7

Omantel has announced the launch of the Omantel Innovation Labs, which will contribute to Oman Vision 2040 and promote innovation and entrepreneurship in new and emerging technologies.

Under this new initiative, Omantel will leverage its expertise, partnerships, reach and access to technology to build a tech-based start-up ecosystem.

The key focus of Omantel Innovation Labs is to cultivate entrepreneurial skills among the youth and accelerate the growth of relevant Oman-based technology start-ups across five technological verticals: 5G, Internet of Things, Cybersecurity, Customer Experience Technology and Big Data.

Located in a 1,100-square metre facility at Omantel headquarters in Muscat, the Innovation Labs will organise, participate in and host multiple

activities to support the company's internal innovation agenda by providing systematic spaces, approaches, events and activities that can accelerate product conceptualisation, prototyping, testing and deployment of solutions to Oman and Omantel-centric challenges.

"We want to support and tap into new ideas and technologies, stay ahead of the curve and drive local innovation. For this, we need to optimally deploy our resources and create an environment wherein caliber and opportunities match national digital transformation goals.

"Omantel Innovations Labs have been conceptualised and designed to fit perfectly into this ecosystem and aim to put the company at the heart of Oman's emerging culture of entrepreneurial growth, knowledge sharing, collaboration and economic development through digitisation," said Talal al Mamari, Chief Executive Officer of Omantel.

Tender for installation of solar panels atop homes by year-end

CLEAN ENERGY: Homes in Muscat Governorate to be covered in first stage of implementation of National Renewable Energy Initiative (Sahim)

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

A competitive tender for the installation of solar panels atop residential homes and buildings in Muscat Governorate — part of the Omani government's National Renewable Energy Initiative (Sahim) — will be launched before the end of this year, according to the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR).

The Authority, which is overseeing the roll-out of grid-connected solar photovoltaic-based rooftop capacity in the Sultanate, said an award stemming from the tender will cover the requirements of around 500 owners of residential buildings and homes.

It will mark the first in a series of tenders, initially targeting homes in the capital city, but eventually expanded to cover between 10 per cent and 30 per cent of all residential buildings across the Sultanate. "The Authority aims to launch the first tender under the umbrella of the 'Sahim' project for residential



buildings before the end of this year (2021)," the regulator announced in its newly published 2020 Annual Report.

"The Authority, in coordination with specialised consultants, has developed a draft framework that defines the foundations and principles necessary for planning, implementing and developing the technical and financial models for the Sahim initiative for residential buildings, along with the role and responsibilities of all the parties concerned," it further noted.

Phase 1 of the Sahim initiative, targeted primarily at government, private, commercial and industrial buildings, has so far garnered more than 100 applications to set up solar PV systems on their premises. Solar PV systems offering a total

of around 45 MW of capacity have so far been installed as part of this phase.

Phase 2 of the programme is directed at residential homes, which account for around 45 per cent of total electricity consumption and 80 per cent of the subsidy earmarked for the sector.

Fitted with solar panels offering between 3 to 10 kilowatt-hours of capacity, these grid-connected homes will be able to turn to clean energy for their requirement and inject any surplus output into the grid.

Significantly, the rollout of grid-connected solar rooftop systems will be governed by a carefully crafted mechanism designed to ensure that all parties concerned — consumers, private developers and

local distribution companies — are suitably incentivised in line with the overall objectives of the Sahim programme.

"The Authority has managed to set up mechanisms to provide the necessary funding for installing solar panels in cooperation with the private sector. The cost recovery mechanism for the private developers will be attained through long-term contracts with licensed electricity supply companies, with participating customers required to pay a small financial contribution based on the expected electricity bill savings," APSR said in its report.

A specialised company has also been contracted to "monitor the installation and commissioning of the systems, as well as monitor the energy output," it added.

Pandemic mitigation key priority for Oman government

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 7

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has lauded the Omani government's response to the pandemic alongside its efforts to alleviate its impacts on the local economy and vulnerable sections of the population. A report following the recent conclusion of Article IV consultations with the Omani government also endorsed fiscal reforms and strategies adopted by authorities to aid the country's financial stability and recovery.

"The authorities have acted decisively to address the health and economic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic," the world body stated in its report published on Tuesday. "While gradual recovery is expected in 2021 and beyond, combating the pandemic and mitigating its effects remains the key near-term priority until the recovery is firmly established," it noted.

According to the IMF, containment measures and health support to the population have limited the cases

and fatalities associated with the pandemic.

Fiscal, monetary and financial support measures introduced by the government have been deployed to ease the burden on households, firms and banks, it said. Significantly, the Fund voiced confidence that the Omani economy is expected to gradually recover from the pandemic and strengthen over the medium term.

Citing official provisional data, it noted that real GDP contracted by 2.8 per cent in 2020, with non-hydrocarbon growth at -3.9 per cent and a shallower decline in hydrocarbon GDP.

"Benefiting from the projected modest increase of hydrocarbon production, overall GDP is projected to grow around 2.5 per cent in 2021 with about 3 per cent average growth over the medium term. Non-hydrocarbon GDP growth of 1.5 per cent is projected for 2021, as vaccine rollout gradually restores domestic economic activity along with the recovery of external demand.

"Thereafter, it increases gradually



over the medium term as the impact of fiscal adjustment subsides, reaching 4 per cent in 2026. Inflation turned negative in 2020 owing to subdued demand, but it is expected to increase to 3 per cent in 2021 given the introduction of VAT and recovery in aggregate demand, before declining to about 2.5 per cent over the medium term," the IMF stated.

Additionally, the report foresees considerable improvement in Oman's fiscal and external balances over the medium term.

After deteriorating sharply in 2020

to a deficit of about 19.3 per cent of GDP, reflecting lower oil revenue and a slump in economic activity, the fiscal balance is projected to improve to -2.4 per cent of GDP in 2021, it said.

It attributed this improvement to a number of factors: recovery of hydrocarbon revenue beyond that anticipated in the MTFP, hiving off hydrocarbon expenditure to Energy Development Oman (EDO), significantly higher nominal GDP reflecting a rebound in hydrocarbon prices, and fiscal adjustment measures.

WELCOME MEASURES: THE IMF HAS VOICED CONFIDENCE THAT THE OMANI ECONOMY IS EXPECTED TO GRADUALLY RECOVER FROM THE PANDEMIC AND STRENGTHEN OVER THE MEDIUM TERM

Furthermore, after rising to 13.7 per cent of GDP in 2020, the current account deficit is expected to decline to 0.6 per cent of GDP over the medium term due to fiscal consolidation and higher trade balance surplus, it said.

Omani banks are well-capitalised and liquid, the report said. It noted however a slight uptick in the non-performing loans ratio, while profitability has declined and credit risk is a concern going forward.

In this regard, it urged the Central Bank of Oman to continue to have a forward-looking assessment of banks' asset quality and ensure adequate capital buffers to withstand credit risks if they materialise. Extending loan moratoria should be data-

dependent and increasingly targeted to distressed but viable borrowers, it stressed.

The report also welcomed the efforts of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) to reform state-owned enterprises (SOEs), noting that the move would "enhance competition" and achieve "more efficient use of public resources."

"The OIA's plan to enhance the efficiency and governance of SOEs and privatise some of the SOEs is progressing well," said the Fund. "The near-term priorities should continue to be strengthening corporate governance by publishing audited financial statements, assessing each entity's business strategy and public policy considerations, and mitigating financial exposures including intra-public sector assets and liabilities. OIA and Capital Market Authority are working together to develop a Code of Governance for SOEs to strengthen corporate governance, making it easier for SOEs to go through initial public offerings, and meet the required transparency," it added.

Omanisation at Bank Muscat at over 95%

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 7

In line with its pioneering role in the development of Omani human resources, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, has appointed over 120 Omani nationals in its different departments at the Head Office and branches across the country, from the beginning of the year till date taking the total number of Omanis working in the bank to 3,584.

The bank, which has an Omanisation ratio of over 95 per cent, will be continuing its recruitment drive and recruiting more talented Omani youth in the coming months. It must be mentioned in this regard that the bank has recruited 184 Omani nationals in 2020.

With its positive work culture, common values, fostering of innovation, employee engagement activities, and sound HSE (Health, Safety and Environment) practices, Bank Muscat is a dream employer for many job-seekers in the Sultanate, particularly those who are interested in the banking and financial services sector.



“The bank is moving forward in close alignment to its strategic plan of developing Omani human resources in the best manner possible

SAID BIN SALIM AL AUFI

Group Deputy General Manager - Human Resources, Bank Muscat

It is notable in this regard that Bank Muscat has excellent gender equality. About 49 per cent of its



employees are women, who work across different departments and at all levels including the bank's management.

The Bank recruits Omani talent through its strong relationships with leading higher educational institutions, career fairs and through posts on its official social media accounts.

Speaking about the many successes and achievements by the

Bank over the last four decades, Said bin Salim al Auqi (pictured), Group Deputy General Manager - Human Resources, Bank Muscat, said: “The bank is moving forward in close alignment to its strategic plan of developing Omani human resources in the best manner possible. It takes into account the need to develop Omani human resources across different specialties and disciplines for all

round development.

“To ensure success in its mission to develop the Sultanate's human resources, the Bank works in close partnership with many government organisations and higher education institutions. This ensures that Bank Muscat is a much sought-after employer and is able to attract and retain the best and most talented Omani nationals.”

Majan Electricity urges customers to use e-payments channels



SUHAR: Majan Electricity Company, a leading electricity provider in Oman, has advised customers to use its e-payments platforms to pay bills for the ease and convenience it offers. Majan Electricity offers several smart, hassle-free and interactive options to pay the bills. Customers can pay their bills online from anywhere by accessing their account through the Majan Electricity's e-channels.

The customers can use various banking channels linked to the system such as Nama Group portal www.electricity.com.om, mobile applications, online banking and corporate banking. For corporate and government customers, Majan offers a direct transfer of key subscribers to the company's designated local bank accounts.

Majan customers can pay their electricity bills through mobile applications of companies such as Nama app, <https://oss.nama.om/ar-om/login.aspx>, Bill & Pay Mobile Application- (ONEIC), Khedmah Service mobile application (OIFC), Tasdeed portal <https://www.tasdeed.om/EFportal/WhereToPay> for safe and easy payment.

In addition, they can also pay through Omantel's electronic payment machines available at Omantel's customer service outlets, commercial centres and some fuel filling stations or through direct debiting from the subscriber's bank account to the company's account in accordance with a tripartite agreement.

On the other hand, customers can pay electricity bills by visiting the branches of the collection agents like Oman National Engineering and Investment Co (ONEIC) and Oman Investment and Finance Coy (OIFC), which have branches all over the Sultanate.

Deloitte releases annual Top Global Retailers List 2021

MUSCAT: Two retail giants from the UAE have made it to the world's top 250 most powerful retailers. International consultancy Deloitte's 'Global Power of Retailing 2021', has ranked the UAE-based Lulu Group and Majid Al Futtaim Holding among the powerful retail brands.

Lulu Group — which operates hypermarkets and superstores across 10 countries — posted \$7.4 billion revenues in the financial year ending 2019, achieving a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5 per cent. The UAE-headquartered Lulu has 210 stores across GCC, Egypt, India, Indonesia and Malaysia.

While Majid Al Futtaim Holding group revenues reached \$9.57 billion, it posted group net retail income of \$7.65 billion with CAGR retail revenue of 6.5 per cent, reveals Deloitte report.

The list is led by US giants



with WalMart Stores at No 1 followed by Amazon, Costco Wholesale Corp, Schwarz Group, The Kroger Co among others. \$4.85 trillion is the total aggregate retail revenue generated by the Top 250 retailers with 4.4 per cent composite year over year retail revenue growth.

Some of the key impact of Covid-19 on leading global retailers as per the report are essential versus non-essential retail, reduced demand,

enforced store closure and travels bans.

On the other hand, online retailers have benefited from consumers aversion to in-store shopping due to the pandemic crisis.

However, leading retailers were able to capitalise on the new consumer opportunities presented by the pandemic, particularly online shopping and delivery and were able to continue trading from their stores.

Bank Nizwa appoints new member of Sharia Supervisory Board

MUSCAT: Strengthening its leadership in the Islamic banking industry, Bank Nizwa announced during its recent Annual General Meeting the appointment of Ali bin Suleiman al Jahdhami (pictured), as a non-voting member of the bank's Sharia Supervisory Board.

Al Jahdhami is well acquainted with the field of Islamic studies. He acquired an extensive experience of the industry during his professional career. Since 2007, he worked as a Fatwa researcher in the Fatwa Department of the Office of the Grand Mufti of the Sultanate.

In addition, he is a visiting teacher at the College of Sharia Sciences for BA and MA students.

He is a PhD researcher in the Department of Jurisprudence and its Foundations in College of Knowledge of Revelation and Humanities at International Islamic University Malaysia.

Additionally, he acquired a



Master in Economics and Islamic Banking from Yarmouk University in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, a Bachelor degree of Jurisprudence and Dawah from the College of Sharia Sciences, Sultanate of Oman, and many others accreditations in Islamic Banking Industry.

Furthering his prolific career, Al Jahdhami authored several scientific researches and studies including Sharia perspective on banking cards, Sharia perspective on generating money and an analytical study on the impact of Sharia policy on financing operations in Islamic Banking in the Sultanate of Oman.

Asyad Express signs agreement with Vodafone Oman

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 7

Asyad Express, logistics service provider for the Asyad Group, signed an agreement with Vodafone Oman for the provision of end-to-end fulfilment and express delivery services.

Managed from its new state-of-the-art fulfilment centre, this is the latest partnership for Asyad Express as it continues to position itself as a regional fulfilment and distribution hub for e-commerce and integrated logistics services.

Nasser bin Ahmed al Sharji, Acting Chief Executive Officer of

Oman Post and Asyad Express, said, “As our business accelerates, we continue to evolve to drive the growth and modernisation of the logistics sector in the Sultanate.

“Our new partnership with Vodafone Oman will allow us to maximise on this growth, and deliver a great service for our customers.

“It is among a rising number of businesses who are showing their confidence and trust in our unique services and capabilities as we contribute to the streamlining of e-commerce across the country.”

Lujaina al Kharusi, Head of Regulatory and Corporate Affairs at Vodafone, said, “Fulfilment



services are growing in popularity and offer many advantages that make them a cost-effective choice.

“Especially as we are just

entering the market in Oman, we are glad to draw on Asyad Express' experience and established network. The partnership will

Managed from its new state-of-the-art fulfilment centre, this is the latest partnership for Asyad Express as it continues to position itself as a regional fulfilment and distribution hub for e-commerce and integrated logistics services

enable us to streamline our entire delivery process, and ultimately offer our distributors and customers a more improved

service.”

Located on Sultan Qaboos Highway in Muscat, the state-of-the-art fulfilment centre is part of the 3,000 m2 Asyad Express hub, and offers a comprehensive service that includes the storage of products, the pick, pack and dispatch of online orders for last-mile domestic and international delivery, and the handling of returns.

In close proximity to Muscat International Airport, the facility is equipped to serve local and international retailers of all sizes, offering them an easier, quicker and more efficient way to do business.

**Samsung flags jump in Q2 profit**

Samsung Electronics reported a likely 53 per cent jump in Q2 profit, beating market estimates on the back of strong chip prices and demand despite lower smartphone sales. — **Reuters**

**German industrial output dips**

German industrial production fell for the second month in a row in May, official data showed Wednesday, with bottlenecks in the supply of materials continuing to squeeze output. — **dpa**

**Greek unemployment rises to 17%**

Greece's jobless rate rose to 17 per cent in April from an upwardly revised 16.8 per cent in the previous month, data from statistics service ELSTAT showed on Wednesday. — **Reuters**

IMF chief sees risk of sustained rise in US inflation

WASHINGTON:

The International Monetary Fund on Wednesday said further fiscal support in the United States could fuel inflationary pressures and warned that the risk of a sustained rise in prices could require raising interest rates earlier than expected.

Higher US interest rates, in turn, could lead to a sharp tightening of global financial conditions and significant capital outflows from emerging and developing economies, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said in a blog published on Wednesday with the IMF's surveillance note for G20 countries.

The IMF's assessment of US inflation risks comes amid sharp criticism by Republican lawmakers of President Joe Biden's multi-trillion-dollar plans to boost spending on infrastructure, child care, community college tuition and expanded coverage of home care for the elderly and disabled.

Georgieva said an accelerated recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic in the United States, where growth is seen reaching 7 per cent in 2021, would benefit many countries through increased



trade, but rising inflation could be more sustained than expected. The IMF forecasts global growth of 6 per cent.

Other countries face rising commodity and food prices, which are now at their highest level since 2014, putting millions of people at risk of food insecurity,

the IMF said in its report.

Market expectations suggested commodity prices would remain contained over the next few years, but inflation developments varied within advanced economies and were picking up more rapidly in Britain, the United States and the euro area, while remaining

subdued in others, like Japan.

The IMF said the global economic outlook remained uncertain given questions about the evolution of the pandemic and progress on vaccinations, as well as the possibility that the pickup in inflation would prove "more persistent" than expected.

While further fiscal support in some major advanced economies, including the United States, would benefit growth more broadly, it could also further fuel inflationary pressures

KRISTALINA GEORGIEVA

Managing Director, IMF

"While further fiscal support in some major advanced economies, including the United States, would benefit growth more broadly, it could also further fuel inflationary pressures," the IMF said.

A more sustained increase in prices could necessitate earlier-than-expected tightening of US monetary policy, which could hit emerging and developing

economies particularly hard, widening the divergence in recovery prospects.

Georgieva repeated her call for urgent action by the G20 countries to accelerate vaccinations to high-risk populations, warning of a "worsening two-track recovery" that is leaving a large number of countries behind while the United States, China, the euro area and a few others are recovering quickly.

Acting quickly could save more than half a million lives in the next six months alone, she said.

The IMF was working with the World Bank and other institutions to move forward on its \$50 billion plan to end the pandemic, she said, arguing that quicker progress could result in trillions of dollars of added global economic output.

The IMF urged countries to continue accommodative monetary policies, while closely monitoring inflation and financial stability risks.

In countries where the recovery was accelerating, such as the United States, it would be "essential" to avoid overreacting to transitory increases in inflation, Georgieva said. — **Reuters**

British recruiters signal recovery in hiring

LONDON: British recruiters PageGroup and Robert Walters raised their annual profit forecasts on Wednesday on increased hiring across their biggest markets last month, signalling a recovery for an industry hammered by the pandemic.

Shares in PageGroup and Robert Walters rose as much as 6 per cent each in morning trade following the news. Recruiting firms globally suffered last year as the pandemic forced most businesses to halt hiring, but Covid-19 vaccinations and the re-opening of some economies have encouraged firms to resume recruiting.



A woman looks at the adverts in the window of a job agency in London. — **Reuters**

Both PageGroup and Robert Walters, which each operate in more than 30 countries, reported higher June-quarter profits from a year earlier but struck a cautiously optimistic tone in their respective statements on Wednesday. — **Reuters**

Shell to hike shareholder payouts

LONDON: Oil giant Royal Dutch Shell has said it will hike payouts to shareholders amid the recovery in the global economy. The group said it plans to increase shareholder distributions to within the range of 20 per cent to 30 per cent of cash flow from operations, starting from its second-quarter results announcement on July 29.

It said the move comes on the back of a "strong operational and financial delivery, combined with an improved macro-economic outlook".

Oil prices have been rebounding as demand for crude has begun to recover, with many countries now emerging out of



A Shell oil delivery truck is parked outside an oil refinery plant in Houston, Texas. — **Reuters**

coronavirus lockdowns thanks to vaccination programmes.

Earlier this year, Shell reported a better-than-expected 13 per cent rise in earnings for the Q1 after the cost of crude had jumped by nearly 50 per cent since the end of last year.

Shell also revealed that it expects to have further slashed its debt pile in its second quarter and will ditch its "milestone" \$65 billion debt target, instead of moving to goals including further strengthening of its balance sheet. — **dpa**

US releases Trump report on foreign auto threat

WASHINGTON: The US Commerce Department on Tuesday released a confidential Trump administration report that was the basis for the former president's threats in 2019 to impose tariffs on imported automobiles on grounds of national security.

Then-US President Donald Trump in May 2019 declared that some unidentified imported autos posed national security risks. He refused to release the report to Congress or the public, which prompted a lawsuit seeking its disclosure.

Republican Senator Pat Toomey, who drafted legislation to require the report's release, said in a statement that "a quick glance confirms what we expected: The justification for these tariffs was so entirely unfounded that even the authors were too embarrassed to let it see the light of day."

Trump threatened but never imposed tariffs of up to 25 per cent on imported cars or auto parts. Automakers said tariffs would result in the loss of hundreds of thousands of auto jobs, raise vehicle prices and threaten industry spending on self-driving cars.

The redacted 116-page report said research and spending by the largest foreign-owned automobile producers reflected de facto subsidies in their home markets, citing Volkswagen AG and Toyota Motor Corp. — **Reuters**

Global tax reform plan goes to the G20



US secretary of state Antony Blinken arrives at a G20 foreign ministers meeting in Matera, Italy. — **Reuters**

MILAN: G20 finance ministers meeting in Venice on Friday and

Saturday could rally the world's top economies behind a global

plan to tax multinationals more fairly, already hashed out among 130 countries representing 90 per cent of world output.

On the face of it, the Group of 20 — the world's 19 biggest economies plus the European Union — have already backed the framework for global tax reform, agreed on July 1 among members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) alongside China and India.

But negotiations continue behind the scenes to convince low-tax EU countries such as Hungary, Ireland and Estonia, who declined to sign up to the OECD deal to tax global companies at a rate of at least 15 per cent.

Italian Finance Minister

Daniele Franco, whose country holds the G20 presidency, said he is "confident" of reaching a "political agreement" among finance ministers in Venice that would "radically change the current international tax architecture".

The hold-out European countries have relied on low tax rates to attract multinationals and build their economies. Ireland, the EU home to tech giants Facebook, Google and Apple, has a corporate tax rate of just 12.5 per cent, while Hungary has one of 9.0 per cent and Estonia almost only taxes dividend payments.

However, the support of these three countries is crucial for the EU, as the adoption of a minimum

tax rate would require unanimous backing from member states. The minimum rate is one of two pillars of global tax reform.

The other is less controversial — a plan to tax companies where they make their profits rather than simply where they are headquartered. It has in its sights digital giants such as Google, Amazon, Facebook and Apple, which have profited enormously during the pandemic but pay tax rates that are derisory when compared to their income.

When the new tax regime is in place the OECD is aiming for 2023 — then national digital taxes imposed by countries such as France, Italy and Spain will disappear. — **AFP**

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features



Sailing in watercolours, adrift in the space of art

Artists like Sheikha al Kalbani take years to master their craft. They also venture into using different mediums and eventually settle with what works best for them. For Sheikha, the journey of finding her voice through watercolour painting resulted in some of the best works on Oman landscapes... **P20**

HERITAGE

READ

THE LAST THING HE TOLD ME

BY LAURA DAVE

Hannah Hall discovers truths about her missing husband and bonds with his daughter from a previous relationship.

Belgian-Congolese chef opens Senegal's first artisan chocolate shop

Danuta Nganko, a Belgian-Congolese cook in Senegal's capital Dakar, forced by the Covid-19 pandemic to give up plans to open a restaurant, opted for an even tastier endeavour instead: the first gourmet of the country to become a chocolatier.

"When COVID started, all of

my activities stopped," she said. "I thought about working with a product and thought, 'Why not chocolate?' ... Since I love technical cooking techniques very much, I thought it was something for me."

Since then, Nganko has realised a new dream with the opening of Venko — Senegal's

first and only artisanal chocolate company. By merging Belgian chocolate with ingredients from the region such as bissap or the hibiscus blossom and moringa, Venko quickly gained a reputation for combining unique flavours with a stylish presentation, which makes Nganko chocolate a coveted delicacy among Senegalese confectionery lovers.

"The idea is to take a very classic chocolate and process it with local flavours," Nganko said ahead of World Chocolate Day on July 7th. "I hope that in the future my work can help bring these flavours a little bit into fashion."

Named for a bakery Nganko's parents started during their childhood — a merger of the couple's last names — Venko managed the Covid-19 outbreak by focusing heavily on deliveries



and special events.

Although lacking the cocoa culture of other regional powerhouses such as Ivory Coast and Ghana, Senegal's stability makes it an attractive destination for investors and entrepreneurs, including Nganko.

Nganko wants to change the Senegalese view of chocolate.

"I think the next challenge will be to get Senegalese customers used to buying chocolate every day," she said. "They're not buying chocolate just to have in the fridge and bite, but we'll make it." — Reuters



This Omani man is proof that physical disability is not a hindrance to success

Wheelchair-bound Abdullah al Balushi believed that “Disability need not be an obstacle to success.”

Also one of the most influential people in his wilayat, Abdullah’s career trajectory is proof of what he is saying. Abdullah suffered from polio when he was just a child which resulted in the weakening of his muscles.

He persevered, struggled and worked to make a great imprint in society, and represented the Sultanate in many events and won many awards and certificates.

The Sultanate has paid great attention to caring for people with disabilities and meeting their needs, which enabled them to practice their normal lives and continue to be creative. The disabled proved their presence in various fields.

Al Balushi said that he has been playing popular games since he was young with his peers, adding that he started his school education at the age of eight, where he received praise from teachers in most of the school stages. He pointed out that he moved to the Centre for the Care and Rehabilitation of the Disabled at that time upon completing the first preparatory grade in the academic year and received a course in Arabic printing and general secretarial principles. After which he joined the private sector in one of the companies that manufacture shoes before working in the public sector in



an administrative position for 15 years. During the work period, he completed his studies and was referred to medical retirement due to some other diseases besides disability.

Abdullah al Balushi has also some hobbies, including traditional handicrafts, especially in the field of woodwork by making miniature models such as (doors, heritage houses and buildings). Al Balushi is also a poet, play writer and author. In the past, he has made three films, the first entitled (Please commit) to raise awareness

about the Corona pandemic, and the other is “The Joy of a Homeland” on the occasion of the glorious 50th National Day, in addition to a movie entitled “With Disability, we create” on the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

Through his various hobbies, Abdullah al Balushi was able to prove to himself and others that disability was not and will not be a barrier or obstacle to him, but rather the motive to exert continuous effort, always adhering to will, determination, optimism and patience in all matters. he

organised and participated in several events, activities, forums and training workshops in cooperation with some governmental and private entities to integrate and empower people with disabilities in society, showing their creativity and motivating them to continue to work and be creative.

Abdullah stressed the necessity of paying attention to persons with disabilities and give them chances to practice their normal lives with ease. Society should have a true belief in their capabilities and creativity.

CONSERVATION

Finland rallies to save one of world's most endangered seals



THE SERENE, icy waters of Finland's Lake Saimaa are a boon to fishermen and tourists, but their presence also threatens one of the world's rarest and most endangered seals.

Despite seeing numbers recover in recent decades, the Saimaa ringed seal still faces extinction amid climate change and die-hard fishing habits.

Out on Saimaa, a dark grey, whiskered creature pops its head up and breaks the surface in Finland's lake district, close to the Russian border.

“That's Eeva, she's not swimming away because we've known each other for almost 30 years”, smiles Risto Eronen, a retiree who since childhood has closely watched the seals, which are found only in the lake's fresh water.

“She's the old lady of Saimaa and has given birth to 10 pups in her life”, he tells AFP in his boat just metres away.

The population of ‘saimaannorppa’, as the mammal is called in Finnish, reached 400 this year – four times more than in the 1980s when it was expected to die out completely.

But this is still nowhere near enough to ensure the sub-species' survival, campaigners say.

“The mild winters caused by climate change have made their lives harder”, as the seals need ice and snow to build their breeding lairs, Kaarina Tiainen from the Finnish Association for Nature Conservation (SLL) explains.

But the most acute danger for the seal, according to campaigners, is fishing for vendace, a small whitefish and a summertime delicacy – with four to eight seal pups dying annually, caught in the nets.

By mid-June, the seals have all left their rocky breeding spots for the depths of the lake, except for Eeva, who prefers the surface and is recognisable by her unusual bark.

“Most likely it's because of a fishing hook in her throat”, Eronen says.

“She got caught on a line and that same spring-time started making heavy wheezing sounds” and spending longer on the surface taking in oxygen.

NET-FISHING BAN LIFTED

Most of Saimaa's 4,400 square kilometres were covered by net-fishing restrictions, but the government declined to renew them at the end of June, preferring voluntary arrangements.

Curbs on net fishing have generated impassioned resistance in the tourist hotspot dotted with 50,000 summer cottages and which attracted over a million overnight stays a year before the pandemic.

“Fishing for vendace with nets is a way of life for many here”, says Teemu Himanen, whose local association issued 980 net fishing licences last year for just one part of Saimaa.

“People are chomping at the bit to be able to start net-fishing again in July”, he says, adding that many feel the threat to the seals is overstated.

“If the net is properly anchored to the bottom, the seal can easily avoid getting caught in it, even if it eats the fish out of it.”

To compensate for the end of the net ban, the SLL and volunteers have been constructing 100 seal-safe fish traps with green wire mesh, to distribute free of charge.

On a Saturday morning in the village of Koikkala, 100 male and female fishing enthusiasts queue at a tent to sign a declaration that they will give up net fishing, before being given a free trap.

The popularity of the initiative is a sign that “the desire to protect the ringed seal has been rising sharply” in recent years, conservationist Tiainen says.

Himanen welcomes the move, but adds: “I don't believe you'll ever fully get rid of nets on Saimaa.

“You just can't catch the same numbers in a trap.”

TIGHTER LEGISLATION

This year Finnish authorities submitted a bid for the habitats of the Saimaa ringed seal – distinguishable by distinctive white circles on its fur – to be added to the Unesco World Heritage List.

The subspecies is already classed as ‘endangered’ by Finnish and EU authorities, and polls show a majority of Finns support tighter legislation to protect the animals.

As the plight of the seal gains more attention, “more people want to come to the region to see the animals themselves, so there's a constant balancing act”, Tiainen admits.

And as saimaannorppa numbers grow, the question arises of when to relax protective measures.

“When there were only 300 seals they said we need controls on nets to get the number up to 400. But now we're past 400 and that conversation still hasn't stopped”, Himanen notes.

The government wants to reach “an appropriate level of protection” without setting a figure, yet for campaigners the population will need to be at least a thousand or two before protections can be loosened.

“But we may never be in a situation where it isn't in some way threatened and needing protection”, says Tiainen. — **AFP**



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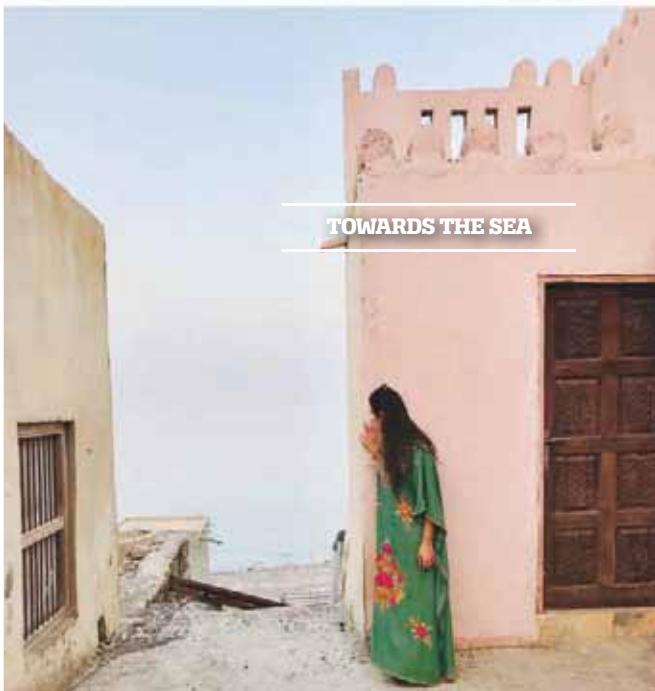


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ART



Sale of rare Leonardo drawing triggers legal battle in France

A small pen-and-ink drawing attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, which lay buried unrecognised in a box for decades, is at the centre of a battle between its owner and France's culture ministry that will play out in a Paris court on Wednesday.

The court will begin hearing if the the drawing of a martyred Saint Sebastian lashed to a tree is allowed to leave France for eventual purchase by a foreign buyer.

The piece was among several drawings and engravings that Jean B., the owner, who is in his 80s and has asked not to be fully

named, received as a gift from his father for passing his medical school exams in 1959.

Being more of a rock enthusiast than an art lover at the time, the young doctor put it aside and promptly forgot about it for over half a century.

Stumbling across the box of drawings again during a move in 2016 he decided to give them to the Tajan auction house to have them valued.

The head of Tajan's Old Masters department, Thaddee Prate, quickly identified the hand of a master, without specifying who, and valued it at between 20,000 and 30,000

euros (\$17,000-\$25,000).

If Jean B. thought he was lucky then, he was about to become far more fortunate.

Another expert, Patrick de Bayser, concluded that the two-sided drawing — the other side is inscribed with scientific studies of candle light — was by none other than Leonardo, an opinion backed by a third specialist, Carmen Bambach of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

"The attribution of the St Sebastian drawing to Leonardo is absolutely solid", she told *The New York Times*, noting that it was complementary to other drawings of Saint Sebastian by the artist.

A 'NATIONAL TREASURE'

In an instant, the work's estimated value rocketed, reaching between 8 and 12 million euros (\$6.75 million-\$10 million).

But it's not everyday that a new Leonardo turns up and the French government soon stepped in, designating the drawing a "national treasure" and giving itself 30 months to acquire it on behalf of the Louvre museum in Paris, home of the Mona Lisa.

An offer from the state duly followed — 10 million euros — but with a new valuation estimating the drawing at 15 million euros, Jean B. refused and the culture ministry threw in the towel. But the affair did not end there.

Jean B. promptly applied for an export permit to be able to

sell the drawing to a foreign buyer but the culture ministry refused, claiming that the drawing may in fact have been stolen.

On Wednesday, the retired doctor will ask a Paris court to order Culture Minister Roselyne Bachelot and a senior official in charge of art collections to allow the drawing to leave France.

AFTER THE SALVATOR MUNDI

Jean B.'s lawyer Olivier Baratelli termed the government's handling of the painting's discovery as "catastrophic".

"A culture ministry worthy of its name would have ensured the French state acquire such a drawing", he argued.

Meanwhile Jean B. has also fallen out with Tajan.

Saying he learned through the press of their plans to put the drawing up for auction without his consent he revoked their sale mandate.

Baratelli claimed that Tajan had been "intoxicated" by the prospect of a hefty commission after the sale of "Salvator Mundi" attributed to Leonardo which set a record for the most expensive painting ever sold at auction in 2017 when it was acquired by the Saudi royal family for \$450 million at Christie's.

Tajan, for its part, has sued the drawing's owner for 2 million euros for breach of contract, asking that he compensate the auction house for all the work it has carried out on his behalf. — AFP

ENTERTAINMENT

Marion Cotillard, Jodie Foster lead Cannes glamour in red carpet return



DECKED OUT in a shimmering silver Chanel gown, Oscar-winning actress Marion Cotillard helped kick off Cannes' comeback on Tuesday as movie stars from far and wide descended onto the red carpet for the French cinema showcase.

The world's biggest film festival is marking its return after skipping 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, in slightly more subdued form, with fewer attendees and parties over the 12-day whirlwind of film premieres.

Stars were out in force on the French Riviera for the opening ceremony, in a show of support for an industry hammered by the pandemic after theatres closed for months.

"It will be my first time in a cinema for 15 months", Brazilian film-maker Kleber Mendonca Filho, one of the jury members who will pick the winner of the top Palme D'Or award, told a news conference earlier on Tuesday.

Hollywood stars Jessica Chastain and Adam Driver — who stars alongside Cotillard in musical "Annette", the opening film — were among celebrities who travelled to France for the event, along with Spanish film Director Pedro Almodovar and British actress Helen Mirren.

In a pearl-coloured Givenchy shift dress, Jodie Foster, who first came to Cannes as a 13-year-old when she starred in "Taxi Driver", arrived to received a lifetime achievement award.

Sean Penn and Wes Anderson will be among heavy hitters vying for prizes in the main film competition, one of several parallel events and premieres taking place over the next fortnight.

They include outdoor screenings on the beach along Cannes' famed Croisette walkway, where tourists beginning their summer holidays in the resort city will get a chance to catch a glimpse of Hollywood royalty.

The festival retains a very French flavour, and will showcase the latest outings by directors Francois Ozon and Jacques Audiard as well as Catherine Corsini's "The Divide", set in modern day France against the backdrop of 'Yellow Vest' anti-government demonstrations.

Festival Director Thierry Fremaux on Monday stood by strict French rules barring inclusion in the movie competition for films promoted by streaming platforms like Netflix unless they get a run in cinema theatres first.

US director Spike Lee, who wore a hot pink suit for the opening ceremony, chimed into the long-running Cannes versus Netflix debate, supporting the platform on which he released "Da 5 Bloods" at the height of pandemic lockdowns last year.

"Cinema and screening platforms can coexist at one time", Lee told a news conference on Tuesday. "There was a thinking once that TV was going to kill cinema. This stuff is not new." — Reuters



Sailing in watercolours, adrift in the space of art

By Mai al Abri



Like a drop in the ocean, this is how artist Sheikha al Kalbani describes herself in the field of arts that branches into lots of types.

Scattered thoughts and enthusiasm to try everything, is always how each artist starts until they finally find a particular type of art to focus on.

"I used to move between different mediums — from acrylic, oil and pastel pens, and at other times I would return to pencil. I dabbled with them for quite some time until I found myself strongly connected to watercolours. I began to delve into it to explore what is hidden there," Sheikha said.

"Experimenting things, moving between different types of art can nourish the creative side of the artist, so I kept returning to other types from time to time. But while doing so, I kept my art into the shades of the Omani identity. I photographed some of the Omani legacies such as palm fronds, camel breeding and Islamic architecture, Omani landscape and social life," she continues.

"Watercolours give me a different feeling from the rest of the media or artistic materials. That feeling was very much like a feeling of peace and harmony. When I start painting with watercolours, I quickly felt as if I have moved with my brush and colours into a world of harmony with myself. The interaction of colour with water has an expressive and emotional presence at the same time through

which I can introspect. In addition, watercolours dry quickly and are free from strong smells. This was helpful to practice the art smoothly and comfortably," she shared.

For each type of art, there are certain rules that the artist should concentrate on.

"One of the basics of watercolour painting is to maintain the transparency of colour, and this comes through being able to determine the proportion of colour and water and sometimes the artist should equalise between them. Then comes the need to take into account the distribution of shades and light, as watercolours cannot tolerate errors. It is always difficult to correct the error, especially if a dark colour is placed in a place that is supposed to be lit".

She added, "Dealing with watercolours, especially in painting portraiture is difficult especially if the artist doesn't have full control over colours. It is not easy to paint the different details of the face with watercolours or to balance the shades. From a personal point of view, I see that it just requires constant practice to overcome these difficulties."

Water represents the main mediator in the process of colouring with watercolours, Sheikha said.

"Water brings life to the artwork with its interactions with colours and this happens mutually when increasing the proportion of water over colour and vice versa. When the proportion of water is increased over colour, harmonious

colour interactions appear, and when the colour ratio is increased, melodious colours appear to interact with the painting in a way that you feel that everything is flowing altogether," she said.

Speaking about her favourite piece of work, Al Kalbani said, "I remember on one of the university trips, we went to Muttrah to visit the National Museum, and as usual I prefer to sit by the window. I was looking out the window at the corridors of the wilayat with great love until my eyes fell directly on the Great Prophet's Mosque. It was the first time that I saw the mosque on the ground. I felt greatly attracted to the structure and the details of the mosque. I went searching for it and found that it dates back to the fifteenth century, as it represents one of the models of traditional Islamic architecture. I drew that mosque with love and it took a long time as I felt that I want to spend much time in the feeling it created inside of me."

The painting represents one of the corners of the Great Mosque of the Prophet, so the minaret of the mosque appears high in the middle of the artwork, and thus the minaret represents the element of sovereignty in the whole artwork. Next to the mosque, on the left of the painting appears part of the houses of Muttrah, with their windows designed in arabesque art made of wood.

