

1,400 applicants appear for Assistant Public Prosecutor job

The Public Prosecution Department on Tuesday conducted written test for 1,400 applicants, from among holders of BA in Sharia and Law and above, who competed for the job of assistant public prosecutor. The candidates were put in two groups as a precautionary measure to curb the spread of coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic in line with the medical protocol endorsed in such cases. The sorting of candidates will be processed electronically as per a programme set by the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) for tests of government institutions. **DETAILS ON P3**



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REFEREEING ERRORS DASH OMAN HOPES



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THE HISTORICAL AND SCIENTIFIC IMPORTANCE OF AL AWABI



P20

WORLD BANK SLASHES GDP GROWTH FORECASTS FOR THE PHILIPPINES



MUSCAT

HM SENDS CABLES TO JORDAN, PAKISTAN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Abdullah II of Jordan, on the anniversary of his accession to the throne. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health, happiness and long life to King Abdullah II. His Majesty also prayed to the Almighty Allah for the return of this and similar occasions on the King of Jordan, while the brotherly people of Jordan realise aspirations of progress and prosperity. His Majesty has sent a cable of condolences to President Dr Arif Alvi of Pakistan, on victims of the train collision in Sindh province. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy to President Alvi, families of the victims and the friendly people of Pakistan. His Majesty prayed to Allah the Almighty to rest the victims' souls in peace in paradise and grant their families patience, wishing the injured a quick recovery. — ONA

NEW YORK

OMAN MEMBER OF TOP UN BODY

The Sultanate on Tuesday won membership to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for the period 2022-2024 after receiving the majority of votes when UN member states convened here on Monday night. Dr Mohammed bin Awadh al Hassan, Sultanate's Permanent Representative at the UN, said in a statement to Oman News Agency that "This is yet another podium ascended by the Sultanate in the international arena. The opportunity will be utilised to develop economic and social sectors in the Sultanate within the context of Oman Vision 2040." The ECOSOC is the third highest UN organisation after the General Assembly and the Security Council. **DETAILS ON P3**

OMAN AND SAUDI REVIEW COOPERATION

HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, on Tuesday received Abdullah Saud al Anzi, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia appointed to the Sultanate. HH Sayyid Fahd welcomed the ambassador, wishing him success in his assignments. The conversation during the meeting reviewed the fraternal relations and means of developing them to serve interests of the two countries' brotherly peoples and enhance the GCC march. **DETAILS ON P2**
PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI



Big surge in ICU patients, cases

SULTANATE TARGETS 30% VACCINATION BY END OF JULY

VINOD NAIR & KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JUNE 8

The Sultanate saw a major surge in cases, including ICU patients, even as the government unveiled a major plan to vaccinate 30 per cent of the population by the end of next month. The Ministry of Health on Tuesday reported 1,553 new cases and 10 deaths.

A total of 129 people were admitted to hospitals across the country, bringing the total inpatients to 983, including 303 in intensive care units.

With 18,188 patients still sick of Covid in the country, the recovery rate dropped to 90.9 per cent on Tuesday.

CHALLENGES

There are still some challenges in the vaccination programme as some people are reluctant to take doses due to misinformation.

Badr bin Saif al Rawahi, Director of the Department of Infectious Diseases Control at the Ministry of Health, said that taking vaccinations will become



Vaccination centres are witnessing heavy turnout.

a condition for entering educational and government institutions in the future.

He added that it would complete

immunising 30 per cent of the population before July at the current pace of vaccine supply.

Meanwhile, the ministry has started

vaccinating all Omani employees in the public sector, irrespective of their age.

However, the second dose of vaccine is provided to both citizens and expatriates, officials at one of the main centres told the *Observer*.

Mai al Abri got vaccinated at the Jaber bin Zaid School vaccination centre in Wattayah on Tuesday. "The turnout was good, but there is still scope for the process to be better organised. They should allow a certain number of people to enter the halls. There should be some order," she added.

The ministry has announced that the target groups as part of the national campaign for immunisation against Covid-19 for June and July would represent a large segment of the population.

The first stage, which started on May 26, included the General Education Diploma students and the supervising teams.

TURN TO P5

Yemen counts on Sultanate's role in peace talks: FM



Dr Ahmed Awad Mubarak

MUSCAT: Yemen counts on the role of the Sultanate under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in rallying international and regional efforts to stop the war in the country and establish rapprochement among the disputing Yemeni parties in preparation for a return to the political track.

Speaking to Oman News Agency (ONA) and Oman TV, Dr Ahmed Awad Mubarak, Minister of Foreign and Expatriate Affairs of Yemen, said that his visit to the Sultanate includes conveying a message to His Majesty the Sultan from President Abderabu Mansour of Yemen Republic. The message expressed thanks, commendation and appreciation for Oman's great role in Yemen's stability, the minister added.

"Based on the Sultanate's good relations with all parties in Yemen, we count on Oman's role in creating a convergence of views among the Yemeni disputing parties," said Dr Ahmed.

TURN TO P5

INSIDE



TURKEY OFFERS TO RUN KABUL AIRPORT AFTER NATO LEAVES

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GERMAN GREENS GET THE BLUES AHEAD OF POLL VICTORY

P9

New committee for electronic games

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, on Tuesday issued a decision announcing the Oman Committee for Electronic Games and Sports (OCEGS) and forming its board of directors.

The decision reflects the minister's keenness to develop the capabilities of Omani youth in all spheres to enable them to compete in regional and international games and achieve high rankings.

The OCEGS will specialise in regulating administrative, financial and technical affairs of electronic games and sports in line with plans and programmes endorsed by the ministry. It will also draft plans and programmes necessary for publishing electronic sports in the Sultanate, besides

developing them technically by consulting international systems and principles.

The committee will also be entrusted with organising competitions and championships, devising necessary rules, terms and conditions, granting titles and giving awards and positions after obtaining the ministry's approval in all cases.

The committee equips national teams which represent the Sultanate in international and regional tournaments and championships.

The committee is headed by Majid bin Abdullah al Salti (Chairman) and has Abdulrahman bin Said al Adawi as Treasurer and the following as members: Asma bint Said al Yahya'eeyah, Mustafa bin Salim al Ajmi and Al Miqdam bin Ahmed al Adawi. — ONA



RANKED 6TH GLOBALLY IN EFFICIENCY

Despite the challenges posed by the ongoing global pandemic, the Port of Salalah not only finished 2020 with record breaking container volume, but also achieved world-class efficiency. This has been recognised by the World Bank in its report on Container Port Performance Index (CPPI 2020) which has been produced by the Transport Global Practice of the World Bank, in collaboration with IHS Markit where Port of Salalah ranked sixth among 351 ports globally. **DETAILS ON P17**

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 34°C Min 30°C SALALAH: Max 30°C Min 27°C NIZWA: Max 45°C Min 27°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 05:20 FAJR: 03:52 DHUHR: 12:11 ASR: 15:29 MAGHRIB: 18:58 ISHA: 20:20

Oman, Saudi review fraternal ties

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, on Tuesday received Abdullah Saud al Anzi, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) appointed to the Sultanate. Sayyid Fahd welcomed the ambassador, wishing him success in his assignments.

the meeting reviewed the fraternal relations and means of developing them to serve interests of the two countries' brotherly peoples and enhance the GCC march.

The ambassador expressed satisfaction of his country's government over the growing relations between the two countries. He commended the Sultanate's constant efforts to

promote joint understanding and cooperation. He also pointed out that the leadership of the KSA accords appreciation and respect for the Sultanate and its balanced respect at the regional and international levels.

The meeting was attended by Shaikh Al Fadhl bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers.

— ONA



State Council chairman receives Yemeni minister

MUSCAT: Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, on Tuesday received Dr Ahmad Awad Mubarak, Minister for Foreign and Expatriates Affairs in the Republic of Yemen, within the framework of his current visit to the Sultanate.

two brotherly countries and means of enhancing them, as well as discussing the current regional situations.

Shaikh Abdulmalik hoped this visit would achieve its desired goals, wishing for Yemen security, peace and stability.

On his turn, the Yemeni guest hailed the Sultanate's constant stands towards supporting

security, stability and unity of Yemen, in addition to its role in backing peace process and ending conflicts in the region.

The meeting was attended by Mohammed bin Yousef al Zarafi, member of the State Council, the Secretary-General of the State Council and the Yemeni Ambassador to the Sultanate. — ONA

■ INTERIOR MINISTER RECEIVES GCC SECRETARY-GENERAL



MUSCAT: Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, received in his office on Tuesday Dr Nayef Falah al Hajraf, GCC Secretary-General. The meeting reviewed several matters relevant to the GCC march in supporting the security work, as well as efforts of the GCC Secretariat-General to foster cooperation and strengthen existing ties of brotherliness. — ONA

Wage support scheme for private companies

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Following the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Ministry of Labour will implement the scheme to support the wages of workers in the private sector.

As per the scheme, the ministry will support the salaries of the newcomers with RO 200, provided the employer bears the agreed wage difference. The scheme will cover 15,000 job opportunities for a period of two years.

The ministry will receive

applications from private sector companies who wish to benefit from wage support between June 8 and July 8.

A team from the Ministry of Labour will review applications along with the list of professions, which will be followed by signing an agreement with the companies.

The ministry also called for registering the employment contract directly from the beginning of the government support.

Employment should be at least for a period equal to government support (four

years).

The scheme will be for a job-seeker who has been not previously employed.

The distribution of support will be according to educational qualifications (30 per cent for those with a general education diploma, 30 per cent for those with a post-secondary diploma, 40 per cent for university graduates).

The initiative does not include job-seekers in universities, colleges and institutes.

Recruitment must take place a month after the final approval.

Tender Notice

The Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI),
announces following E-Tenders for 2021

Tender Number	Tender Name	Deadline for Specifications Request	Deadline for tender bids	Tender Price
03/2021	(Re-tender) LED Lighting Retrofit for Common Areas Light Fittings - TAMNIAT COMPLEX	23 June 2021	07 July 2021	25 OMR

Interested companies registered with Tender Board may obtain Tender document from the E.Tendering website: <http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>. Tenders should be submitted online on given website. The Tenderer should enclose scanned copy of bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of (2%) of the Tender value validity for (120) days from the deadline for the tender bids and addressed to the Public Authority for Social Insurance. And original document of the same should be submitted later directly to the Administration Department - Purchase and General Services Section / Third Floor, PASI Head Office in Bawshar.

CORRESPONDANCE:

1. Tender inquiry : All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at E-Tendering system (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
2. E-Tendering system inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering system technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: Tel : **+968 24166670** , E-mail : etenderhd@ita.gov.om

PASI is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other tender that may be received

PASI
With you .. For You

www.pasi.gov.om | [TaminatOman](#) | Contact us **800 77 600**

Committee debates distance education

MUSCAT: The State Council's Education and Research Committee continued its discussion on the policies and legislations of distance education in the Sultanate. The panel seeks to identify the significance and effects of distance education and challenges facing it as well as finding appropriate regulations to apply distance education in line with the best international practises. It also aims to propose policies that can ensure its effectiveness and continuity.

During the meeting, the committee hosted Professor Fuad Shadid, Vice-Chancellor of Al Sharqiyah University (ASU) and Abdul Hakim Mohamed, Director of E-Learning Centre at Al Sharqiyah University (ASU).

SOHAR Port and Freezone invites Tenderers in the following Tender

NO	Tender Ref	Tender Title	Tender Fee OMR
1	SIPC 21/111	Web Mapping (Geo Hub) Phase 3.	RO 26.250
2	SIPC 21/110	SOHAR Hologram & VR.	RO 26.250
3	SIPC 21/145	Settlement and Crack Monitoring of Wet concrete Structure at SOHAR Port.	RO 262.500
4	SIPC 2021/153	Network Security Threat Protection System. (Supply, Installation and Configuration of Network Security Threat Protection System to provide functionalities of Intrusion Detection/Prevention solutions or similar solutions and preferably includes advanced features like autonomous detection & response and built-in Machine learning & AI capabilities).	RO 26.250

The above-mentioned tender fees including the VAT 5%. Tenderers can request to receive the electronic tender documents from 9:00 am on Wednesday, 09/06/2021 until 4:00 pm on Tuesday, 22/06/2021.

Tenderers to follow the below procedures and steps to obtain the electronic tender documents:

Step 1: Interested Tenderers should remit the stated tender fees as per the below bank details:

Account Name	Sohar Industrial Port Co
Account Number	3101-007970-500
Bank Name	Oman Arab bank SAOC – Main Br
SWIT	OMABOMRXXXX
Note: Bank transfers is the only mode of payment accepted	

Step 2: Tenderers to send the following documents:
A request for the electronic tender documents
Scanned bank transfer
The firm's commercial registration documents
All shall be communicated to the following e-mail address:
sipc.procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

Step 3: Tenderers will receive the electronic tender documents.
The Technical and Commercial proposals must be in separate, marked "Technical and Commercial" addressed to:
SOHAR Port and Freezone
Bid Opening Committee
Tender Reference No. **2021/**
Tender Name:
• SOHAR reserves the right to accept or reject any tender without assigning any reasons.
• All SMES are requested to provide their Green Card along with the required documents.
• For any clarification regarding the tenders please send an e-mail to:
sipc.procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

soharportandfreezone.com

It all starts here
+968 2685 2700 | soharportandfreezone.com



Oman joins UN Economic and Social Council

NEW YORK: The Sultanate on Tuesday won membership to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for the period (2022-2024) after receiving the majority of votes when UN member states convened here last night.

Dr Mohammed bin Awadh al Hassan, the Sultanate's Permanent Representative at the UN, said in a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA) that "This is yet another podium ascended by the Sultanate in the international arena. The opportunity will be utilised to develop economic and social sectors in the Sultanate within the context of Oman Vision 2040."

The strong, prominent support of the global community at this significant economic and social event figures as the best manifestation of recognition of the Sultanate's role and status in today's world.

The ECOSOC is the third highest UN organisation after the General Assembly and the Security Council. It supervises economic and social plans of member states. — ONA

Over 1,400 applicants vie for assistant public prosecutor job

MUSCAT: The Public Prosecution Department on Tuesday conducted written tests for 1,400 applicants, from among holders of BA in Sharia and Law and above, who competed for the job of public prosecution assistant.

The candidates were put in two groups as a precautionary measure to curb the spread of coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic in line with the medical protocol endorsed in such cases. The sorting of candidates will be processed electronically as per a programme set by the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) for



tests of government institutions.

Nasr bin Khamis al Sawāe, Attorney General went on an inspection tour to follow up efforts made to conduct the

The fact that Muscat has been endorsed as venue for the GCC Statistics Centre reflects the Sultanate's keenness to promote joint GCC action.

The Centre aims to build capacities of GCC institutions to keep pace with modern statistical requirements. It will also help develop joint working programmes, unify GCC national statistical strategies and standardise them in line with the best international practices and enhancing proper use of statistical data in making decisions and devising policies.

— ONA

GCC environmental initiatives discussed

MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the Environment Authority (EA), on Tuesday took part in the 23rd meeting of GCC environment ministers.

Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, EA Chairman, represented the Sultanate in the meeting.

The meeting, held via video-conferencing, discussed the recommendations of the meeting of GCC environment undersecretaries.

The ministers' meeting also addressed several environment issues of concern to the GCC states in light of the global challenges facing the

environment and climate.

The ministers also discussed decisions of the GCC Supreme Council's 40th meeting relating to environment affairs in the GCC states, non-customs restraints, the GCC countries' efforts in curbing Covid-19, and the strategic plans for the environment affairs ministers' committee.

The ministers also discussed the G20 initiatives presented by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the environmental events in the GCC countries' pavilion in EXPO 2020 Dubai.

— ONA



Efforts on to preserve and protect marine environment

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

@zainabalnasseri

The Sultanate achieved remarkable growth in fish production. With an annual growth rate of about 19 per cent, the total fish output stands at about 580,000 tonnes.

"Its geographical location and the length of its coastal strip in the region distinguishes the Sultanate. It attributes high production of small-sized pelagic fish that contributes 62 per cent of the artisanal fishing production in the Sultanate" said Dr Fatima bint Rashid al Kiyumiyah, Director General of Fisheries Research, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, on the occasion of World Oceans Day.

She stressed that the importance that the Sultanate attaches to its relationship with regional countries in the Indian Ocean has its role in the country's economic, social, civilisational and cultural development.

Additionally, the Sultanate's political history, where there are elements of positive development, is evident in the country's diverse richness of communities.

"This also reflects the Royal approach followed in the Sultanate of Oman with the countries of the Indian Ocean to highlight these aspects and embody this relationship and its continuity, develop communication and brotherhood, and consolidate them within the generations" she added.



The Sultanate is also a member of the Regional Organisation for the Protection of the Marine Environment known as ROPME, which is dedicated to protecting the marine environment in the organisation's work area for the Gulf States, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Iraq.

The United Nations Environment Programme helps prevent marine pollution in the region. It is also concerned with issues of the marine environment of the region's countries and the development of appropriate strategies and mechanisms to combat or reduce them.

Suleiman bin Nasser al Akhzami, Director General of Nature Conservation at the Environment Authority, laid out the priorities to protect the marine environment and management of coastal areas.

"It is about preventing further deterioration in the coastal environment, restoring degraded areas to normal, conducting studies and research for the potential impacts on

the marine environment and its natural resources, besides continuous monitoring of the coastal environment to ensure its preservation, coastal land-use planning, public awareness and citizens' involvement in the protection of coastal resources."

He noted that "one of the factors limiting the protection of the marine environment is the acute shortage of qualified technical human cadres and modern technologies."

However, it is essential to support the efforts of the relevant authorities with more human and material capabilities. It is important due to the expansion of the territorial waters of the Sultanate. The coastal region witnesses the impact of the accelerated development either through the establishment of free industrial zones, commercial ports, fishing ports, marinas and tourist resorts, or through urban development and impact on coral reefs, through traditional fishing methods, like throwing of nets as well as the damage caused by diving" he added.

Salalah gets first pre-monsoon rain

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

@patkaushal

Early morning drizzling took people by pleasant surprise in Salalah even as two more weeks to go when the actual Khareef season starts. The official Khareef season begins on June 21.

High humidity that was building for over a week was the reason behind the pre-monsoon rain. The drizzling started early morning on Tuesday and lasted for about an hour or two.

Suburban Salalah also received light drizzling. Areas like Dahariz, Sada, Awqad and Raysut also witnessed drizzling.

People restricted themselves to their houses due to Covid-19 precautions even after the drizzling. Otherwise, it would have been long queues of cars in the city and roads that lead to mountains.

The drizzling did not make any difference in temperature as the humidity level rose after that. The 'feel-like' temperature was more than Monday. Salalah recorded temperature between 28 and 31 degrees Celsius on Tuesday.

Khareef is when Salalah turns into lush greenery. The pre-monsoon rain will help bring greenery early on the mountains. It is a good sign for the visitors

who are planning to visit Salalah during the Eid Al Adha holiday. By that time, Salalah is expected to have the season in full bloom.

However, the visit of tourists will depend on the pandemic situation and the decisions of the Supreme Committee.

Had there been no Covid, the tourists from the GCC would have started frequenting to get an advance glimpse of Khareef that surrounds the hills by white fog. Drizzle and cool air are mesmerising during the season when no one from the GCC wants to miss it, giving the hotels a chance to do brisk business. Everything, however, depends

on the Covid situation and the decisions of the authorities.

Dhofar includes a remarkable natural diversity where the coast blends with the mountains and the desert in extraordinary harmony. The hills look like a fertile crescent, rising to a height of 1,500 metres and then descending into a flat plain that embraces sandy beaches stretching for hundreds of kilometres.

One can imagine the magnificence of this province with 20-26 degrees Celsius temperature when most of the Arabian Peninsula witnesses a rise in temperature up to 45-50 degrees Celsius in summer.





These fruits have greater nutritional properties than those found in wetter climates as plants under drought stress tend to produce fruit with higher mineral contents and more potent essential oils and alkaloids. From an ethnobotanical aspect it is considered as a health tonic

DR ERIC HOPKINS
SQU

SUPER FRUITS

A RESEARCH STUDY FINDS THAT BOOT AND HEGIMT COULD PLAY A MORE IMPORTANT ROLE IN AGRICULTURE OF OMAN

TEXT BY
LAKSHMI
KOTHANETH

PHOTOS BY
DR ERIC
HOPKINS



RECALL CAMPAIGN FOR CHEVROLET SILVERADO, BLAZER AND TRAVERSE / GMC SIERRA AND ACADIA MODEL VEHICLES



Date of Recall: 09/06/2021

Campaign Type: Safety Recall

Recall Segment: Tires

Product Description: Chevrolet Silverado 2018 / Chevrolet Blazer 2019 / Chevrolet Traverse 2020 / GMC Sierra 2018-2020 / GMC Acadia 2019-2020

Model Year	Division	Vehicle Model	Affected Vehicle Vin Range	No. of Affected Vehicles in Oman
2018	Chevrolet	Silverado	1GCNC9EC0JZ327242 to 1GCVK9EC7JZ334921	1
2019	Chevrolet	Blazer	3GNKB8RA1KS664615 to 3GNKB8RA5KS667596	0
2020	Chevrolet	Traverse	1GNER8KW4LJ122247 to 1GNEV9KWXLJ198864	3
2018 - 2020	GMC	Sierra	1GTN19EC0JZ333256 to 1GTV29EC9JZ334760	6
2019 - 2020	GMC	Acadia	1GKKN8L40LZ201960 to 1GKKN8LSXLZ201849	0

DESCRIPTION:

In these vehicles, the tires may have an overcure condition and Continental Tires the Americas (CTA) has initiated a safety recall for these tires. According to CTA, overcured tires may experience a carcass break in the sidewall with sudden air loss or could develop a belt edge separation which could lead to partial or full tread/belt loss.

PROCEDURE:

Dealers will inspect vehicles and replace tires that have DOT number and production mold number combinations identified by Continental.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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

CONTACT DETAILS:

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

Boot has been traditionally part of the attraction while visiting the mountain areas of Oman, but these fruit bearing shrubs could have more significance according to a latest study.

Sideroxylon mascatense has been the focus of PhD research by Dr Eric Hopkins, at Department of Plant Sciences, College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences, Sultan Qaboos University. According to Dr Hopkins, it is a super fruit yet to be recognised in the global or local markets.

A wild fruit-producing plant belonging to the family Sapotaceae, Sideroxylon mascatense or Boot is found at high altitudes in Oman as in the case of western part of Al Hajar Mountains, North Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia.

“Two fruiting types of S. mascatense are found in Oman, both of which are seasonally harvested by mountain inhabitants and sold in markets as well as along the roadsides. One has purple fruits (Boot) while the other scarcer variety bears fruit yellow brown in colour and is known as Hegimt in Oman.

HEALTH TONIC

Both are considered to be of great value. The purple fruit bearing trees are also found in Pakistan and Afghanistan and yellow-brown ones are also found in North Africa. “There is a lot of research on Boot in Pakistan with the variety that is available there, but there is no research on Hegimt as far as nutritional or chemical content. I did a small mineral content analysis, which is yet to be published. These fruits, especially from Oman, have greater nutritional properties than those found in wetter climates as plants under drought stress tend to produce fruit with higher mineral contents and more potent essential oils and alkaloids. From an ethnobotanical aspect it is considered as a health tonic. It has



been consumed for a long time in the mountains here and needs to get out into the broader market”, said Dr Hopkins to the Observer.

He also expressed his gratitude to Sultan Qaboos University for the opportunity to conduct this research and to his supervisor Dr Rashid al Yahyai for his guidance and support throughout his postgraduate work at SQU,

COMMERCIAL POTENTIAL

Right now, the fruits are harvested in the mountains of Oman. Dr Hopkins is of the opinion that the trees could be cultivated commercially as they are currently underutilized. However, the trees that are located at the higher altitudes are already facing challenges. His study covered an area of 900 square metres. In order to access those areas he hiked 200 km over two summers.

“During those hikes, I found zero juvenile plants. So right now there is no recruitment of this species. In the lower and higher

altitude limits of its habitat in Western Hajar Mountains, there is a marked decline. But in the middle areas of the habitat range, such as on Jabal Akhdhar for example Saiq Plateau, the plants are thriving. It is also a dominant feature in the landscapes of Jabal Shams and Jabal Sarat”, he pointed out.

NEW FRUIT CROP

According to Hopkins, who completed his Masters and PhD at Sultan Qaboos University and has been in Oman for the last eight years, climate change due to global warming has adverse effects on the agro-ecosystems of mountain regions in marginal climate zones.

As temperatures increase an alternative way to combat the effects of climate change would be to adapt various strategies. “A possible adaptation strategy that agricultural systems could embrace would be selecting new crops that could thrive in the changing ecosystems. In the Western Al Hajar Mountains this could mean a reduction in the cultivation of temperate fruit crops and an increase in cultivation of crops that can tolerate higher temperatures and consume less water. Native plants and underutilized crops could be an alternative to extensive breeding projects and genetically modified crops. Sideroxylon mascatense, a plant native to Oman is one of many such plants”, writes Eric in his paper on Sideroxylon mascatense — A new crop for high elevation arid climates. But the most important factor would have to be water management.

“An interesting observation is that farmers in the mountains tend to adopt a plant near their farms and take care of it. Someone I spoke to said he goes to water them once a week when it is not raining in the summertime. And they would be able to harvest the yield later. So, there is a definite possibility for commercial cultivation”, he said.



ASYAD to focus on ports, shipping, e-commerce

MUSCAT: The Board of Directors of ASYAD Group has decided to restructure its business units in line with its efforts to focus on key logistics activities, such as port services, free zones, shipping, dry-docks, e-commerce services, and last-mile delivery. The decision comes as part of ASYAD's efforts to boost its local and international commercial presence, in light of its plans to grow and enhance its performance.

The restructure of the sector will result in the dissolution of the Oman Roads and Transport Management Company (ORTMC). The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology will supervise all transport and road responsibilities previously assigned to ORTMC according to the Ministry's jurisdiction under the new state administrative apparatus.

The dissolution of ORTMC comes following a review of the company's objectives and its profitability forecasts in the future. The evaluation indicated that the activities of ORTMC do not fall within the scope of integrated logistics activities that the ASYAD Group focuses on.

ASYAD's Board of Directors has put in consideration that there are no negative impacts on the employees because of this decision. As such, the employees will be redeployed across ASYAD Group companies, and the employees seconded to ORTMC will return to their respective companies. Contracts related to existing projects will be automatically transferred to the Ministry of



Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

Looking forward, ASYAD will focus on embodying the direction of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) in cooperating with the private sector by empowering it, and partnering and integrating with it, which constitutes a fundamental pillar of its new operating model. As such, several projects for partnership with the private sector have been identified.

OIA is positive about the remarkable development in the performance of ASYAD Group, which has been achieved during the short period operationally and financially, as well as the expansion of the scope of its service, which contributed to the ranking of the Sultanate's ports as the first globally in container

handling.

OIA affirms its support for all efforts that would advance the Group to achieve its goals and contribute to the economic diversification efforts adopted by the Sultanate.

OIA emphasises that it continues the implementation of its strategy to maximise the financial and economic returns of its entities by reviewing the organisational and operational structures. OIA works on preparing the investments of these companies for mergers, exits, partnerships with the private sector, or listing in public capital markets to promote promising industries in the Sultanate and enhance its position on the global economic map to achieve the aspirations of Oman Vision 2040. — ONA

Documentary to draw attention of tourists, investors to Jaalan

MUSCAT: Maithaa bint Saif al Mahrouqiyah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism, inaugurated at the ministry on Tuesday a documentary themed "Tourism in Jaalan Sector".

The documentary aims to highlight the tourism components in the three wilayats of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan and Al Kamil W'al Wafi in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate. It also seeks to enrich tourism and support existing projects.

The documentary includes clips of new tourist sites that have not been shown before, in cooperation with a group of licensed tourist establishments and local community institutions.

The documentary was produced by Salim al Sunaidy, and the drone shots were taken

by Mustafa al Sunaidy. Nearly 981 different shots were filmed and 142 clips were approved for publication in the film.

As for the idea of the documentary, Salim al Sunaidy said that the three wilayats of Jaalan share history and the present as the unity and familiarity between them are obvious in customs, traditions and similar popular heritage. In addition to the fact that each corner of the three Jaalan wilayats is characterised by a unique story told to the tourists, starting from Al Kamil W'al Wafi where the fertile land and the towering mountains, golden sands and fresh valleys. Village of Siq is prominent in the documentary to represent Al Kamil W'al Wafi.

He added that as for Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, it is unique in collecting all tourist components

of mountains, valleys, sands and seas. Mount Qahwan is yet another attraction to be discovered where sands waiting to be ridden. Village of Falaj al Mashaikh expresses the beauty of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan. As for my hometown, Jaalan Bani Bu Ali has a charming beach that is characterised by warmth in winter and cold in the summer.

He further said that Al Ashkharah is a jewel representing Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, not to mention the valleys and sand dunes as well.

He also pointed out that the three wilayats of Jaalan have many forts and castles narrating the fragrant tale of the past and the present. This documentary is not only an invitation to tourists, but also to investors to invest in the tourism, industrial and commercial sectors of the three wilayats. — ONA

Yemen counts on Oman's role in peace talks

FROM PAGE 1

Speaking about international endeavours to end the conflict in Yemen, Dr Ahmed explained that the UN initiative towards this objective includes four main targets including comprehensive ceasefire, opening Sanaa Airport, facilitating export of oil products via Al Hudeidah Port and calling for the

resumption of consultations on Yemen's future. "We have welcomed all those elements," said Dr Ahmed, noting that any concessions that the Government of Yemen makes will be in favour of the people of Yemen.

Dr Ahmed pointed out that solution for the Yemeni crisis is not difficult and that strong factors exist

for a solution in Yemen, including the National Dialogue, the GCC Initiative and International Resolutions, particularly Resolution No 2216, which chart out a general framework for terminating the conflict in Yemen.

About economic cooperation with the Sultanate, the minister said that one of the objectives

of his visit to the Sultanate is "supporting investment cooperation between the two countries", including joint work on marine cable between the Sultanate and Yemen's Al Mahra area. This is in addition to connecting seaports of the two countries to enhance exports and imports, the Yemeni minister added.

— ONA

Big surge in ICU patients, cases

FROM PAGE 1

The same stage will include full immunisation of the population of Musandam Governorate with the second dose, the second dose for those who have completed 10 weeks from the date of the first, basic service providers working in the Royal Oman Police, the Sultan's Armed Forces, and the security services, basic service providers in the government sector, complete immunisation of health workers in private health institutions.

Vaccines will be made available at all private health institutions during this period.

The second stage (from June 21) will cover all adults 45 years and above. The third stage (first half of July) will be for the immunisation of higher education students, workers in the education sector, and academics in the higher education sector.

SALE OF USED EXCAVATOR / GANTRY CRANE

A leading construction company in Oman intends to sell their following used equipment located at Duqm, in 'as is where is' condition. The details of the equipment are as under:-

1. **Excavator Hitachi EX 1200 -5D**, 2010 Model, with 28 meter long reach (long boom + long Arm), Hours covered:26403 Hrs.
2. **Double Girder Gantry Crane 75 MT**, 2012 Model, Winch Capacity 75MT, Motor 98.3kw, Aux Hoist Motor 26.8kw span, Radio Remote Controlled.

The above machines are presently located at Duqm and will be offered for inspection during project working time. Interested parties may contact Mr.Lawrance, Mob:99416252, at Duqm site for inspection of the machines and submit closed quotation at their Al Khoud office (Tel: 24525345) on or before 20th June 2021.



Notice and agenda of the General Meeting of the holders of Sukuk certificates issued by Mohammed Al Barwani Sukuk Issue SAOC (the Company)

The agent of Sukuk holders, Muscat Clearing & Depository Company SAOC (MCD), has the pleasure to invite all Sukuk holders of the USD certificates and the OMR certificates (together the **Certificates**) to attend the General Meeting (GM) of the holders of the Certificates scheduled to be held on 24 June 2021 at 3 p.m. in respect of the USD certificates and on the same date at 4 p.m. in respect of the OMR certificates through the electronic platform for general meetings accessible through Muscat Clearing and Depository (MCD) company's website (www.mcd.om).

In the event the required quorum is not met to hold the first meeting, the second meeting shall take place at on 27 June 2021 via the same electronic platform set out above at 3 p.m. in respect of the USD Certificates and on the same day at 4 p.m. in respect of the OMR Certificates to discuss the following agenda item:

The First item: To consider and approve the proposal to amend some of the terms and conditions of the sukuk, as follows:

- (a) The proposal of amending the terms and conditions of the Certificates in connection with the prospectus approved by the Capital Market Authority by way of an Administrative Decision to extending the existing final maturity dates of the Certificates from 29 June 2021, to 29 June 2023 (the **Extension**) as per the explanatory memorandum in Schedule 1;
- (b) The proposal to amend the optional dissolution right set out in the conditions to the Certificates in order to allow the Company the flexibility to redeem the Certificates in whole or in part on any day after 29 June 2021 and up to (but excluding) 29 June 2023 (the Option) as per the explanatory memorandum in Schedule 1; and
- (c) The board of directors of the Company to be authorised to undertake and implement all steps and documentation necessary or desirable to give effect to the proposed Extension and the Option, including any steps involving third parties, such as the CMA and/or MCD and other parties.

In accordance with the Declaration of Agency agreements and the Capital Market Authority Rules Governing General Meetings through electronic means, please note the following:

- Only a juristic / corporate entity may appoint a natural person to act on its behalf in connection with the meeting and any adjournment of the meeting, provided that the authorization should be made in writing using the proxy form set out in Schedule 2 to this notice and which is also available at MCD or from the Company and must be submitted electronically not less than 24 hours before the scheduled time of start of the meeting, i.e. by 12 p.m. on Wednesday, 23 June 2021 and the proxy should have an Investor Number from MCD in order to vote.
- The voting on any of the items on the agenda shall begin through the online MCD platform from 3 p.m. on Monday, 21 June 2021 and until the voting is completed on the day of the meeting.
- MCD will effect a block on the trading of the Certificates from 8 a.m. on Sunday, 20 June 2021.

The specific amendments and the form of GM Resolution are more particularly detailed in a consent solicitation memorandum which will be available to registered Certificate holders, either from the MCD by email request to yaqoob@mcd.gov.om or from the Company by contacting sukusupport@mbholdingco.com (the **Consent Solicitation Memorandum**).

For any inquiries, please contact **Mr. Yaqoob Al-Wahibi** at MCD on +968 24822274 or yaqoob@mcd.gov.om or by emailing the Company at sukusupport@mbholdingco.com or telephone 92888395.

STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL



A Palestinian street vendor sells corn across the destroyed Al Shuruq tower in Gaza City's Al Rimal neighbourhood which was targeted by Israeli strikes during the recent confrontations between Hamas and Israel, on Monday. — AFP

Israel lawmakers to vote on Sunday on anti-Netanyahu government

TEL AVIV: After weeks of political wrangling the Israeli parliament will vote on Sunday on whether to install a “change” coalition and end Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s record 12 consecutive years in power.

Announcing the date for the confidence vote on Tuesday, speaker Yariv Levin, a Netanyahu ally, said “a special session of parliament” would debate and vote on the fragile eight-party alliance.

If the crunch vote hands a majority to the coalition, which is united only by hostility to Netanyahu’s rule, it would spell the end of an era.

The divisive incumbent has dominated Israeli politics for more than a decade, pushing it firmly to the right.

Since the coalition was announced last week, Netanyahu has lived up to his reputation as a ruthless political operator, piling pressure on right-wingers within its ranks to reject this “dangerous left-wing government”.

The anti-Netanyahu bloc includes three right-wing, two centrist and two left-wing parties, along with an Arab Islam-



ic conservative party.

On paper it commands a wafer-thin majority, but Netanyahu has urged his supporters to shame right-wing lawmakers in its ranks into returning to the fold under his leadership.

If the new government is confirmed, Netanyahu’s right-wing opponent Naftali Bennett would serve as premier for two years, after which the “change” coalition’s centrist architect, Yair Lapid, would take over.

“The unity government is on the way and ready to work on behalf of all the people of Israel,” Lapid, a former television presenter, said in a statement following the announcement of the vote.

Netanyahu, who faces cor-

ruption charges that could result in jail time, has refused to go without a messy fight.

Bitter recriminations within the Israeli right and far right prompted Israeli security services to issue a rare warning against incitement online, which Netanyahu’s opponents say was a warning to the prime minister.

Alarm has grown over angry rallies by supporters of Netanyahu’s right-wing Likud party, including protests outside the homes of right-wing lawmakers accused of “betrayal” for joining the coalition. Security has been stepped up for some of the MPs.

The 71-year-old prime minister has rejected allegations of incitement, saying “there is a very thin line between political criticism and inciting violence”.

Bennett, who served as Netanyahu’s aide before turning against him, has urged his former boss to “let go”.

Should 11th-hour defections torpedo the fledgling coalition, Israel would likely have to return to the polls for a fifth election in just over two years. — AFP

N-talks stand not to change after presidential vote: Iran

DUBAI: Iran’s policy in talks with world powers to revive Tehran’s 2015 nuclear accord will remain unchanged after its June 18 presidential election because the issue is decided by its highest leadership, a government spokesman said on Tuesday.

A host of barriers to the revival of the nuclear deal remain firmly in place ahead of talks due to resume this week, suggesting a return to compliance with the accord is still a way off, diplomats, Iranian officials and analysts said.

“We have shown that we adhere to our international obligations under all circumstances, and this was a national decision,” cabinet spokesman Ali Rabiei told a weekly news conference.

Rabiei said Iran’s nuclear policy, set by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is not linked to internal developments and that the new government would maintain the same policies as those followed in the Vienna talks which began in April.

“As long as all parties to the nuclear accord abide by their commitments, they can be sure that Iran will not abandon its obligations,” Rabiei said.

On Monday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the United States still does not know



An Iranian man walks by posters of presidential candidate Ebrahim Raisi outside a campaign office in Tehran. — AFP

We have shown that we adhere to our international obligations under all circumstances, and this was a national decision

ALI RABIEI
Cabinet spokesman

whether Iran is ready to resume compliance with the nuclear deal and if Tehran continues to violate the pact, the “breakout time” it needs to amass enough fissile

material for a nuclear weapon will shrink to weeks.

Former US President Donald Trump withdrew from the deal in 2018, prompting Iran to steadily overstep the accord’s limits on its nuclear programme designed to make it harder to develop an atomic bomb — an ambition Tehran denies.

With the hardline-led election watchdog, the Guardian Council, barring leading moderate and conservative candidates, the turnout is likely to be low in a seven-man race between hardline and somewhat less hardline candidates, and two low-profile moderates. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

ARBIL

Iraqi Kurd soldier killed by PKK fighters

An Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga fighter was killed on Tuesday in an attack by Turkey’s outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a local mayor said.

A peshmerga was killed by PKK fire, as peshmerga and Iraqi border guards patrolled the Darkar area,” on the border with Turkey, local mayor Adib Jaafar said. The killing comes after five Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga fighters were killed on Saturday in a PKK ambush in northern Iraq, which the rebels said was because they had



“refused entry of the peshmerga” into an area under their control. The PKK’s pan-Kurdish agenda has often put it at odds with Iraq’s autonomous Kurdish govt, which has sought to maintain good relations with Ankara. — AFP

ISTANBUL

HDP says closure case is ‘political operation’

Turkey’s pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) said on Tuesday that a closure case against it for alleged ties to hardliners was a “political operation”. The case, refiled on Monday by a prosecutor at the Court of Cassation, was initially sent back from the Constitutional Court in March on procedural grounds for lack of details.

The prosecutor’s move in March was the culmination of a years-long crackdown on the HDP, parliament’s third-largest



party, under which thousands of its members were tried on mainly terrorism charges.

Pervin Buldan, co-leader of the HDP, said the judiciary should investigate recent allegations of corruption. — Reuters

JORDAN

Israel frees Jordanian bus bomber after 20 years

A Palestinian-Jordanian man jailed in Israel after planting a bomb on a bus that wounded 13 civilians in 2000 was released on Tuesday after serving his 20-year sentence. Abdullah Abu Jaber, 46, was welcomed with flowers and shouts of joy by his family after he entered Jordan across the Sheikh Hussein Bridge.

Jaber, originally from Jordan’s Baqaa refugee camp, hid a bomb on a bus in Tel Aviv on December 28, 2000, detonating it remotely and wounding 13 people. He was



arrested the following day. “Twenty years ago, I made a journey not for tourism, but of resistance,” Jaber said, draped in Jordanian and Palestinian keffiyeh headscarves. — AFP

In brief

■ SEOUL



SOUTH KOREA'S VACCINATION DRIVE PICKS UP SPEED

South Korea injected 857,000 Covid-19 vaccine doses on Monday, setting a daily record in its inoculation drive that took its vaccination rate to 16.4% for a first dose, data from the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) showed.

Hitherto, a slow vaccine rollout due to global shortages and shipment delays had complicated South Korea's efforts to subdue the latest wave of infections.

South Korea said last week that it expects to meet its vaccination target for the first half of the year by inoculating up to 14 million people ahead of schedule. — Reuters

■ SHANGHAI



WILD ELEPHANTS ON THE MOVE AGAIN AFTER DAY OF REST

A roaming herd of 15 wild elephants is on the move again after resting for a day in a patch of forest on the outskirts of the city of Kunming in southwest China, resuming a year-long, 500-kilometre trek that has captured the public's imagination.

Drone photographs taken on Monday by the provincial forest fire brigade showed members of the herd sleeping in a clearing in the middle of a forest in the district of Jinning, which has been hit by heavy rain and thunderstorms. The elephants began moving again on Tuesday morning, prompting a fresh round of activity by authorities, according to state broadcaster CCTV. — Reuters

■ TOKYO



TOP JAPANESE VIROLOGIST WARNS OF RISKS OF TOKYO GAMES

A top Japanese virologist and government adviser has said there was a risk of spreading Covid-19 infections during the Tokyo Olympics, the Times of London reported on Tuesday, the latest high-profile warning about the global sporting showpiece.

Tohoku University professor Hiroshi Oshitani was an architect of Japan's "Three Cs" approach to the pandemic, which advises avoiding closed spaces, crowds and close contact situations.

"The government and the organising committee, including the IOC (International Olympic Committee), keep saying they're holding a safe Olympics.

— Reuters

Pakistan train crash toll hits 63 as rescuers comb through wreckage

DAHARKI: Pakistani engineers on Tuesday combed the mangled wreckage of two trains that collided in a remote farming region, an accident that killed dozens and highlighted huge safety problems on the nation's dilapidated rail network.

At least 63 people were killed early on Monday when a high-speed passenger train knifed through carriages of another express that had derailed minutes earlier near Daharki in Sindh province. Army and civil engineers have cleared much of the wreckage of carriages crushed like tin cans in the collision, and welders were finalising repairs to the damaged rails.

A heavy stench of diesel, sweat and blood hung over the scene, with workers saying bodies were still being pulled overnight from mangled carriages.

"This is the most colossal accident I have seen in about 10 years of service," railway engineer Jahan Zeb said, his eyes puffy from sleeplessness.

The Millat Express was heading from Karachi to Sargodha when it derailed, its carriages strewn over the tracks as the Sir Syed Express from Rawalpindi arrived minutes later in the opposite direction, smashing into it.

The accident has reignited debate about the parlous state of Pakistan's public transport system --



Farmer Ali Nawaz stands beside the wreckage of a train in Daharki on Tuesday. — AFP

particularly a rail network that has seen little investment in decades.

It is not known what caused the Millat Express to jump its tracks, but Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid -- a former railways minister -- described that section of the line as "a shambles", while current minister Azam Swati called it "really dangerous".

Usman Abdullah, the deputy provincial commissioner, said that 63 people had died in the accident, issuing two lists that named 51 victims and marked 12 others as unidentified.

They ranged from a months-

old infant to a woman who was 81.

Pakistan Railways spokesman Ijaz Shah said the families of those killed would receive compensation of 1.5 million rupees (around \$9,600).

HELL LET LOOSE

Khan Mohammad, station master at nearby Reti junction, said more lives could have been saved if they had had just a few more minutes after the derailment.

"I saw a six or a seven-year-old girl trapped underneath the locomotive, her knee stuck in the track," he said.

"We somehow rescued her, and she was miraculously alive."

But then the oncoming train hit. "If there had been a delay of about 10 minutes, this accident could have been averted," he said.

The crash happened around 3:30 am (2230 GMT) when most of the 1,200 passengers aboard the two trains would have been dozing.

Farmer Ali Nawaz was out watering his crop — normal at this time of year to stop summer evaporation — when he heard screeching sounds and then saw flames.

— AFP



A health worker checks the body temperature of a passenger during a Covid-19 screening as she arrives with her child at a railway platform on a long-distance train, in Mumbai on Tuesday. — AFP

Daily virus cases in India fall below 100,000 after two months

NEW DELHI: India reported fewer than 100,000 new coronavirus infections after a gap of 63 days, government data showed on Tuesday.

A single-day rise of 86,498 cases was registered, the lowest spike in 66 days, taking the total caseload to nearly 29 million, according to the federal Health Ministry bulletin.

Covid-19 claimed 2,123 more victims, taking the overall death toll past 350,000, it said. The positivity rate - or the number of positive cases identified per 100 people - stands at 4.62 per cent.

India, hit hard by the second wave of the pandemic, registered over 400,000 cases daily during its peak in early May.

So far, only some 3.5 per cent of the more than 1.3 billion inhabitants in India have been fully vaccinated against Covid-19.

On Monday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced free vaccine doses for all adults after the government's vaccination strategy was heavily criticised by the Supreme Court. — dpa

Turkey offers to run Kabul airport after Nato pullout

ANKARA: Turkey has offered to guard and run Kabul's airport after the United States and other Nato forces withdraw from Afghanistan, but US officials say Ankara is imposing conditions which need to be resolved as their leaders prepare to meet next week.

Turkish officials say Ankara made the proposal at a Nato meeting in May when the United States and its partners agreed a plan to withdraw troops by September 11 after 20 years of war trying to defeat Taliban forces.

Turkish and US officials have discussed possible requirements for the mission, some of which Washington has agreed to address, one Turkish official said.

"Following the United States' decision to withdraw from Afghanistan, Turkey has made an offer to ensure the security of Kabul airport. In this framework, there are talks underway with Nato and the United States," the Turkish official said.

A Turkish role securing the airport for international flights could help improve ties between Ankara and the West, sorely strained by Turkey's purchase of Russian defence systems and disputes with European countries over drilling rights in east Mediterranean waters.

Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar said on Monday that Ankara's offer was contingent on backup from those allies.

"We intend to stay in Afghanistan depending on



A Nato helicopter flies over the city of Kabul, on June 29, 2020.

— Reuters file photo

conditions. What are our conditions? Political, financial and logistical support. If these are met, we can remain at Hamid Karzai International Airport," his ministry quoted Akar as saying.

US officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said they welcomed the Turkish proposal but that Ankara was asking for too many US "enablers" for the mission.

The officials also cited some US concern about Turkey's reliability, given their other disagreements, but said Washington would find a way to make it work.

Nato leaders will discuss Afghanistan at a summit next Monday, where Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan will meet Joe Biden for the first time since the US president took office.

With efforts to resolve the dispute over Turkey's purchase of Russian S-400 missile defences, which led Washington to impose

sanctions on Turkey's arms industry last year, the airport plan may offer a rare opportunity to build goodwill.

The two countries are also at odds over US support for Syrian Kurdish fighters, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a US court case against a Turkish state bank.

ESCALATING VIOLENCE

The proposal comes as clashes over territory in Afghanistan raged, three months before the planned withdrawal. On Monday, senior government officials said at least 150 Afghan troops were killed or injured in a surge of attacks by Taliban militants in the previous 24 hours.

Securing Kabul airport could help persuade some countries to maintain a diplomatic presence in Afghanistan. Last month Australia shut its embassy there due to security concerns.

— Reuters



Children and elders displaced from recent fighting between government troops and ethnic rebels in their area, wait for food distribution from a volunteer group while taking refuge at a monastery in Namlan town, in Myanmar's eastern Shan state, recently. — AFP

UN says estimated 100,000 displaced by Myanmar violence

YANGON: The United Nations said on Tuesday an estimated 100,000 people had been displaced in Myanmar's Kayah State by recent violence, including "indiscriminate attacks by security forces" against civilian areas.

"The United Nations in Myanmar is concerned about the rapidly deteriorating security and humanitarian situation," the United Nations in Myanmar said in a statement.

Meanwhile, the Myanmar state media reported on Tuesday that the junta's foreign minister had defended its plan for restoring democracy, after a meeting at which Southeast Asian counterparts pressed the army to implement a regional agreement meant to end turmoil.

The junta has paid little heed to demands from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) to respect a "consensus" agreed in late April to end violence and hold political talks with its opponents.

Southeast foreign ministers expressed disappointment at the meeting in China on Monday at the "very slow" progress made by Myanmar on its proposal for ending the turmoil since the army overthrew elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1.

State media cited junta-appointed foreign minister Wunna Maung Lwin as telling the Asean-China foreign ministers' meeting that the military had made progress on its own five-step roadmap for the country unveiled after its coup. — Reuters

App helps to bust narcos in 17 countries

800 DRUG SMUGGLERS ARRESTED IN AUSTRALIA, MIDDLE EAST, ASIA AND SOUTH AMERICA

CANBERRA/AMSTERDAM: A global sting in which organised crime gangs were sold encrypted phones that law enforcement officials could monitor has led to more than 800 arrests in 17 countries, officials said on Tuesday.

The operation by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation, Australian and European police ensnared suspects in Australia, Asia, Europe, South America and the Middle East involved in the global narcotics trade, the officials said.

More than 800 suspected members of organised crime gangs and \$148 million in cash were seized in raids around the world, along with tonnes of drugs, cryptocurrencies, weapons and luxury cars.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the operation had “struck a heavy blow against organised crime — not just in this country, but that will echo... around the world”.

Operation Greenlight/Trojan Shield, conceived by Australian police and the FBI in 2018, was one of the biggest infiltrations and takeovers of a specialised encrypted network.

It began when US officials got involved in the development of An0m, a supposedly secure encrypted messaging app, which was then sold to organised crime



Motorcycles seized by Australian Federal Police are pictured after its Operation Ironside against organised crime. — Reuters

networks.

The FBI helped to infiltrate the phones into 300 criminal groups in more than 100 countries, Calvin Shivers of the FBI’s Criminal Investigative Division told reporters in The Hague.

In a pattern repeated elsewhere, one Australian underworld figure began distributing phones containing the app to his associates, believing their communications

were secure because the phones had been customised to remove all capabilities, including voice and camera functions, apart from An0m.

As a result, there was no attempt to conceal or code the details of the messages — which police were reading.

“It was there to be seen, including ‘we’ll have a speedboat meet you at this point’, ‘this is who

will do this’ and so on”, Australian Federal Police Commissioner Reece Kershaw said.

“We have been in the back pockets of organised crime... All they talk about is drugs, violence, hits on each other, innocent people who are going to be murdered.”

Shivers said the FBI had been able to see photographs of “hundreds of tons of cocaine that were concealed in shipments of

fruit”.

Australian police said they had arrested 224 people, including members of outlawed motorcycle gangs.

On Monday alone, they seized 104 firearms, including a military-grade sniper rifle, as well as almost A\$45 million (\$35 million) in cash, including A\$7 million from a safe buried under a garden shed in a suburb of Sydney. — AFP

Websites back online after global outage

PARIS: Several media, government and social sites such as the UK government, the White House and Reddit suffered temporary outages on Tuesday due to a glitch in cloud computing services provider Fastly.

Fastly said, “the issue has been identified and a fix has been applied. Customers may experience increased origin load as global services return.”

In a later tweet, it said: “We identified a service configuration that triggered disruptions... Our global network is coming back online.”

When it sent that tweet at around 1110 GMT, access was restored to a vast majority of the sites.

Experts told AFP said an external attack appeared unlikely.

Messages such as “Error 503 Service Unavailable” and “connection failure” appeared on the websites of CNN, the *Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, France’s *Le Monde* newspaper, Italy’s *Corriere della Sera* and Spanish daily *El Mundo* as well as social and entertainment site Reddit.

The BBC and the *New York Times* were temporarily inaccessible, but also later returned.

A number of websites were down in the Nordic region including those of Swedish newspapers *Aftonbladet* and *Svenska Dagbladet*. — AFP

One of biggest dinosaur species found in Australia

SYDNEY: Scientists have confirmed the discovery of a new dinosaur species in Australia, one of the largest found in the world, more than a decade after cattle farmers first uncovered bones of the animal.

The plant-eating sauropod lived in the Cretaceous period between 92 million and 96 million years ago when Australia was attached to Antarctica, according to a research paper published on Monday. Palaeontologists estimated the dinosaur reached a height of 5-6.5 metres at the hip and 25-30 metres in length, making it as long as a basketball court and as tall as a two storey building.

That makes the new species the largest dinosaur ever found in Australia and puts it in the top five in the world, joining an elite group



Dr Scott Hocknull and Robyn Mackenzie pose with a 3D reconstruction and the humerus bone of “Cooper”, a new species of dinosaur discovered in Queensland. — Reuters

of titanosaurs previously only discovered in South America.

“Discoveries like this are just the tip of the iceberg”, said Queensland Museum curator and palaeontologist Scott Hocknull.

Palaeontologists have named

the sauropod “Australotitan cooperensis”, combining “southern titan” with the name of a creek near where the first of the creature’s bones were found in 2006 on a cattle farming property in Eromanga in Queensland state. — Reuters

Macron slapped in face during walkabout

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron was slapped in the face on Tuesday by a man in a crowd of onlookers while on a walkabout in southern France, video of the incident showed.

Macron’s security entourage quickly intervened to pull the man to the ground and move Macron away from him. Two people were arrested in connection with the incident, broadcasters BFM TV and RMC radio reported.

The incident took place while Macron was on a visit to the Drome region in south-eastern France, where he met restaurateurs and students to talk about how life is returning to normal after the Covid-19 epidemic.

In video circulating on social media, Macron, dressed in shirt sleeves, could be seen walking towards a crowd of well-wishers who were behind a metal barrier.

The French president reached out his hand to greet one man, in a green T-Shirt, with glasses and a face mask.



Emmanuel Macron (C) talks with students, on June 8, 2021 in the kitchen of the Hospitality school in Tain-l’Hermitage, during a visit in Drome, the second stage of a nationwide tour ahead of next year’s presidential election. — AFP

The man could be heard shouting out “Down with Macronia” (“A Bas La Macronie”) and then he delivered a slap to Macron’s face.

Two of Macron’s security detail tackled the man in the green T-shirt, while another ushered Macron away. But Macron re-

mained in the vicinity of the crowd for a few more seconds, and appeared to be talking to someone on the other side of the barriers. The presidential administration said there had been an attempt to strike Macron, but declined further comment.

— Reuters

SHORT TAKES

MEXICO CITY

Harris bid to lower migration

US Vice-President Kamala Harris will meet Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador on Tuesday, after mid-term elections in the country eroded his power base in Congress, and officials from both countries will sign an accord to cooperate on efforts aimed at lowering migration from Central America.

Lopez Obrador’s leftist party the National Regeneration Movement’s (MORENA) hold on the Lower House of Congress weakened but the party domi-



nated state votes.

A Mexican government official said the timing of Harris’s visit was not ideal. Speaking on condition of anonymity, the official said the US had pushed for the visit.

UNITED NATIONS

Share vaccines with poor nations

Nearly 30 celebrities, from singer Katy Perry to footballer David Beckham, called on the G7 on Tuesday to share Covid-19 vaccines with poorer countries ahead of a summit in Britain this weekend.

The entertainment and sports figures urged the seven countries — France, Italy, the UK, Canada, Japan, Germany and the United States — to pledge at least 20 per cent of their supply between June and August, amounting to 150 million doses.



“The world has spent a year and a half battling the Covid-19 pandemic, but the virus is still spreading in many countries and producing new variants with the potential to put us all back where we started”, the missive warned.

DURBAN

Mahatma Gandhi scion gets jail for fraud

A 56-year-old great-granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi, who was accused in a six-million rand fraud and forgery case, has been sentenced to seven years in jail by a Durban court. Ashish Lata Ramgobin was found guilty by the court on Monday.

She was accused of defrauding businessman SR Maharaj after he advanced R6.2 million to her for allegedly clearing import and Customs duties for a non-existent consignment from India. He was promised a share of profits. Lata



Ramgobin, who is the daughter of noted rights activists Ela Gandhi and late Mewa Ramgobind, was also refused leave to appeal both the conviction and the sentence by the Durban Specialised Commercial Crime Court.

Is AI taking over job hiring?

AVI ASHER-SCHAPIRO

Since graduating from a US university four years ago, Kevin Carballo has lost count of the number of times he has applied for a job only to receive a swift, automated rejection email - sometimes just hours after applying.

Like many job-seekers around the world, Carballo's applications are increasingly being screened by algorithms built to automatically flag attractive applicants to hiring managers. "There's no way to apply for a job these days without being analyzed by some sort of automated system," said Carballo, 27, who is Latino and the first member of his family to go to university.

"It feels like shooting in the dark while being blindfolded - there's just no way for me to tell my full story when a machine is assessing me," Carballo, who hoped to get work experience at a law firm before applying to law school, said by phone.

From Artificial Intelligence (AI) programmes that assess an applicant's facial expressions during a video interview, to resume screening platforms predicting job performance, the AI recruitment industry is valued at more than \$500 million.

"They are proliferating, they are fast, they are relatively cheap - they are everywhere," said Alex Enger, a fellow at the Brookings Institute, who studies AI in hiring.

"But at this point, there's very little

THE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE RECRUITMENT INDUSTRY IS VALUED AT MORE THAN \$500 MILLION

incentive to build these tools in a way that's not biased," he added, saying the cost and time involved in thoroughly testing a system for bias was likely to be prohibitive without regulations requiring it. For Carballo, racial bias is his topmost concern.

"I worry these algorithms aren't designed by people like me, and they aren't designed to pick people like me," he said, adding that he has undergone a plethora of different AI assessments - from video analytics to custom logic games.

The risk of discrimination is also a central issue for lawmakers around the world as they weigh how to regulate the use of AI technology, particularly in the labour market.

While the EU is set to impose rules on the use of AI in hiring, US lawmakers are considering federal laws to address algorithmic bias. Last year, legislators in New York City proposed law specifically to regulate AI in hiring. "We're approaching an inflection point," Enger said.

According to the most recent survey by human resource (HR) industry group Mercer, more than 55 per cent of HR managers in the United States use predictive algorithms to help them make hiring choices.

AI is being introduced at every stage of the hiring pipeline, from the job adverts that potential applicants see to the analysis and assessment of their applications and resumes. The

Covid-19 pandemic has sped up the adoption of such tools. HireVue, an AI hiring firm that builds tools to analyse and score the answers job applicants give in video interviews, reported a 46 per cent surge in usage this year compared to last.

The rise in AI could represent a real opportunity to root out prejudice in the hiring process, said Manish Raghavan, a computer scientist at Cornell University who studies bias in hiring algorithms. "No one is going to tell you that traditional hiring was equitable," he said. "And with AI systems we can test them in ways we could never test or audit people's own biases."

Subjecting all candidates to the same interview, judged by the same algorithm, eliminates the subjectivity and bias of people in hiring, said Kevin Parker, chief executive of HireVue. "We can measure how men and women score, and compare how people of colour score against white candidates," he said. "We really try to fine-tune the algorithm to eliminate anything that can cause an adverse impact, and come to very close parity."

But the problem, Raghavan said, is that when you build a machine learning algorithm, bias can creep into it in many ways that are difficult to detect. Enger echoed that view. "Natural language processing systems have been shown to associate white names as being more qualified."

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

WHERE DO WE STAND

Four decades on, where's the HIV vaccine?

ISSAM AHMED

In the four decades since the first cases of what would come to be known as Aids were documented, scientists have made huge strides in HIV treatment, transforming what was once a death sentence into a manageable condition.

What we still don't have is a vaccine that would train human immune systems to ward off the infection before it ever takes root.

More people than ever now have access to medications called antiretroviral therapy or ART, which when taken as prescribed, keeps down the amount of virus in their body. This keeps them healthy and unable to transmit HIV to their partners. Beyond ART, people at high risk for infection can now get pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP, a pill taken every day that reduces the risk of infection by 99 per cent.

"But access to medication is not organised in every part of the world," Hanneke Schuitemaker, global head of viral vaccine discovery at Johnson & Johnson's Janssen Vaccines, said.

Even within wealthy countries, wide socio-economic and racial disparities exist in accessing these medicines, and vaccines have historically been the most effective tools to eradicate infectious diseases. J&J is currently carrying out two human efficacy trials for its HIV vaccine candidate, and initial results from one of them may come as early as "the end of this year," Schuitemaker said.

“The human immune system doesn't self-cure HIV, whereas what was very clear was the human immune system was quite capable of self-curing Covid-19

LARRY COREY
principal investigator of HVTN

Vaccines against Covid-19 were developed in record time and have shown remarkable levels of safety and efficacy, helping drive down caseloads in the countries fortunate enough to have wide access. Many of these shots were developed using technologies that were previously being tried out on HIV -- so why haven't we had breakthroughs yet? "The human immune system doesn't self-cure HIV, whereas what was very clear was the human immune system was quite capable of self-curing Covid-19," Larry Corey, principal investigator of HVTN, a global organisation funding HIV vaccine development, said.

Covid vaccines work by eliciting antibodies that bind to the virus' spike protein and stop it from infecting human cells.

HIV also has spike-shaped proteins on its surface, which are the target of HIV vaccine development.

But while Covid has tens of well-known variants circulating worldwide, HIV has hundreds or thousands of variants inside each infected person, William Schief, an immunologist leading the development of an mRNA HIV vaccine at Scripps Research Institute said.

Because it's a "retrovirus" it quickly incorporates itself into its host's DNA. An effective vaccine will need to stop the infection dead in its tracks, not just reduce the amount of virus and leave the remainder to stay with the person forever.

Efforts to develop a vaccine have been going on for decades but have so far all ended in failure.

Last year, a study called Uhambo that was taking place in South Africa and involved the only vaccine candidate ever shown to provide some protection against the virus frustratingly ended in failure. J&J's vaccine candidate is currently being trialled in 2,600 women in sub-Saharan Africa in the Imbokodo trial, which is expected to report results in the coming months. — AFP

SERIES OF SETBACKS

Germany's Greens get the blues ahead of hoped-for national election victory

THOMAS ESCRITT AND PAUL CARREL

Just when they dared to dream of their first-ever national election victory, Germany's Greens have been knocked off course.

A thumping by the conservatives in a regional election on Sunday rounded out a brutal couple of weeks for the ecologists that saw their squeaky-clean image tarnished by a bonus payment scandal and their suggestion that Germany should arm Ukraine.

With their eye on Germany's chancellery for the first time in their 40-year history, the Greens are suddenly having to grow up fast to handle an assault from Angela Merkel's conservatives, stepped-up social media attacks and creeping pressure from Russia against their support for Ukraine and clean energy.

Six weeks ago things looked very different. Projecting change, youth and vitality after 16 years of Merkel rule, the Greens surged ahead of her conservatives in polls for the September 26 election when they picked Annalena Baerbock to run for chancellor. A 40-year-old mother of two, she captured voters' imagination with her pitch for a "new start".

But the Greens' weak performance in Saxony-Anhalt on Sunday, when they took just 6 per cent of the vote, left one senior conservative crowing: "This evening, the Baerbock train came off the rails."

The Greens actually gained 0.7 points from the last Saxony-Anhalt



Germany's Green Party co-chairwoman Annalena Baerbock speaks to media in Berlin on Sunday. — Reuters

THE GREENS ACTUALLY GAINED 0.7 POINTS FROM THE LAST SAXONY-ANHALT ELECTION IN 2016, BUT THAT WAS DWARFED BY A HEFTY 7.3 PER CENT GAIN FOR THE CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS

election in 2016, but that was dwarfed by a hefty 7.3 per cent gain for the conservative Christian Democrats.

"The Greens can certainly still win (in September), but Sunday's result highlights the magnitude of the challenge," said Carsten Nickel at Teneo, a political risk consultancy.

To be sure, Saxony-Anhalt, a poorer, rightward-leaning state in Germany's east, does not mirror the broader country. The Greens can expect to do better in more urban, middle-class areas of Germany, especially in the more populous west, in September.

A party congress this weekend gives

them a platform to launch a rebound.

At stake is the future direction of Germany, Europe's largest economy and kingpin in its ties with Russia. With Merkel set to bow out after the September 26 election, Germany's policy path hinges on whether the Greens or conservatives win.

Losing their poll lead, Greens activists are frustrated, insiders say, by Baerbock's failure to declare to parliament a Christmas bonus paid to her by the party - a scandal that makes it look as grubby as more established rivals.

— Reuters

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Refereeing errors dash Oman hopes

BRANKO CREDITS PLAYERS FOR TOP PERFORMANCE AGAINST QATAR

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 8

Sri Lankan professional football referee, Chrisantha Dilan Perera, dashed Oman’s hopes in the crucial match against Qatar due to his unfair decisions taken during the match late on Monday at Jassim bin Hamed Stadium.

Qatar beat Oman 1-0 with the only goal netted by Hasan al Haydous in the 39th minute through a controversial penalty.

The triumph confirmed Group E toppers Qatar, the hosts of 2022 Fifa World Cup, a place in the 2023 AFC Asian Cup in China with 22 points.

Despite the defeat, Red Warrior’s chances to book spot as among five best second-placed teams are still alive if they win against Afghanistan on Friday. The last match result against Bangladesh on June 15 is not calculated due to the withdrawal of Korea Republic from the qualification.



Abdullah al Hilali

IMPROPER DECISIONS

Oman’s former national professional football referee, Abdullah al Hilali, said that selecting the right and strong umpiring team for any significant fixtures should be a top priority, according to some strong criteria. “There should be full revision for the criteria of nominating the right umpiring team to officiate a crucial match. Many decisions made by the Sri Lankan referee can be classified as ‘umpiring blunders’ and such mistakes are not accepted even for a



Branko Ivankovic

referee who is beginning his career,” Al Hilali said in exclusive remarks to the *Observer*.

Commenting on the major refereeing mistakes, Al Hilali said: “The first incorrect decision from the referee was the penalty for Qatar in the 39th minute. Oman defender’s leg was directed to the ball and not to the player. The referee location was not in the proper side which would allow him for the right decision.”

“Next, a valid penalty for Oman was not given by the referee Perera



after Mohsin al Ghassani was brought down by Qatar’s goalkeeper Saad al Sheeb. The goalkeeper used force on Al Ghassani and blocked him. The third major case is the cancellation of a correct goal scored by Khalid al Hajri in the dying minutes over offside. The player was not in offside position,” the former referee said.

The experienced Omani referee pointed out that he knew the Sri Lankan since very long. “I did not remember the Sri Lankan referee nominated for any top clashes.

The AFC should stop him from officiating in the rest of the qualifier matches,” he pointed out.

Al Hilali added that using the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) is a must. “I was surprised on absence of VAR implementation during this round of qualifier and in this important match. VAR is applied in Qatar’s league and was implemented also in many major Asian events.”

OFA makes official complaint

Meanwhile, the Oman Football Association (OFA) raised an

official complaint to the AFC over the poor refereeing and improper decisions made by the Sri Lankan referee Chrisantha Dilan Perera. OFA requested AFC to terminate the referee from international badge holders, assigning right and competency for umpiring team for the top clashes and restructuring on the committees and panels who are responsible for naming the umpiring list of the matches.

TOP PERFORMANCE

Oman head coach Branko Ivankovic congratulated the Qatari team for the victory. “They are the best team in Asia in the last few years. Oman national team players delivered top show. We have scored correct goal and we should have got two penalties but all of that are not accepted by the referee and I do not know what is the reasons behind that,” he said.

The Croatian coach voiced confidence that the team will qualify to the next round and will register the desired results in the upcoming matches.

MUELLER ON THE MARK AS GERMANY THRASH LATVIA

DÜSSELDORF, Germany: Thomas Mueller scored his first international goal for three years on Monday as Germany crushed minnows Latvia 7-1 in their final warm-up friendly before the Euro 2020 finals.

Latvia, ranked 138th in the world, rarely got out of their half as Germany tuned up for their opening game of the European Championship against world champions France in eight days time in Munich.

After a two-year exile from international football, 2014 World Cup winner Mueller got on the scoresheet while Premier League stars Ilkay Gundogan and Timo Werner also found the net in the rout.

"The result wasn't the most important thing, it was more about the way we wanted to play football and implement things," said Mueller, who claimed his first Germany goal since March 2018.

"It felt good, it was a convincing win, but we know that France will be a different proposition, that's clear."

Germany captain Manuel Neuer was applauded onto the pitch by his team-mates before kick-off as he became the first goalkeeper to make 100 appearances for the national team.

The 35-year-old veteran had one of the quietest nights of his career in Dusseldorf.

He was largely untested until Latvia midfielder Aleksis Savelskis caught the German defence napping with a consolation goal 15 minutes from time.



Germany's Thomas Mueller celebrates after scoring the 3-0 goal during the friendly against Latvia in Dusseldorf, western Germany. — AFP

Germany head coach Joachim Loew made four changes from the side held to a frustrating 1-1 draw with Denmark.

Chelsea's Champions League

winner Antonio Ruediger came into the defence with his club team-mate Kai Havertz, who played the first half, impressing up front.

Manchester City's Gundogan partnered Real Madrid's Toni Kroos in a solid midfield pairing. The Germans wasted little time. Havertz ghosted through the

Latvia defence to set up the opener as left-back Robin Gosens claimed his first international goal, then 86 seconds later Gundogan crashed in the second.

The result wasn't the most important thing, it was more about the way we wanted to play football and implement things

THOMAS MUELLER
Germany striker

Germany were 3-0 up inside 27 minutes when Mueller hit the net for his 39th goal in 102 caps for Germany.

It was 5-0 at the break as Latvia goalkeeper Robert Ozols fumbled the ball into his own net, then Serge Gnabry volleyed into the top corner just before half-time.

Werner replaced Havertz for the second half and fired home between Ozols legs with 50 minutes gone.

The Germans were caught napping when Savelskis's superb shot flew past the diving Neuer, before Sane made amends for his earlier miss by tapping home's Mueller's pass.

The win was a timely confidence booster on the eve of the Euro 2020 finals, but Germany can expect much harder games against France and reigning European champions Portugal in Group F.

"We've kept things free until the middle of July — anything can happen," joked Mueller, with the Euro 2020 final scheduled for London's Wembley Stadium on July 11. — AFP

'NZ won't be haunted by 2019 Cup agony in WTC final'



New Zealand's Kane Williamson during practice. — Reuters

LONDON: New Zealand captain Kane Williamson said his team will carry no scars from their agonising loss to England in the 2019 World Cup decider when they take on India in the final of the World Test Championship (WTC) in Southampton on June 18.

England were crowned 50-overs world champions in 2019 via a controversial boundary-count rule, which has since been scrapped, after the final ended in a tie even after a Super Over.

Williamson is back in England chasing test cricket's biggest honour and the 30-year-old said the New Zealand team was not haunted by the heartbreak of two years ago.

"No, I do not think so, certainly not something that the guys have spoken about," Williamson told the International Cricket Council (ICC), pointing out "a different side" would be playing a "different format" at the Rose Bowl.

"The focus is definitely on the transition from not playing much cricket or from where the guys who have played white-ball cricket to just change into that test format."

"The match... was a very memorable one and obviously it had some controversy and it had everything, and people loved watching it at the end of the day. That is why people got a lot out of it," he said of the 2019 encounter.

New Zealand won their home series against India last year but Williamson would not underestimate an opponent who overcame a litany of injuries to triumph in Australia this year.

"Throughout we have seen the depth they have as well, certainly saw that in Australia as well," Williamson said of the India team under Virat Kohli.

"A lot of strengths in their fast bowling and spin department... a brilliant side, ranked right up the top, which is fair enough and an exciting opportunity for us to be involved in the final taking on the best." — Reuters

OOA holds organising and hosting sports events management course



MUSCAT: Organising and hosting sports events management course, organised by the Oman Olympic Academy, was launched yesterday "online" and will continue until tomorrow.

This will be in line with enabling those concerned with hosting sports events in sports bodies to transfer knowledge in the design, management and organisation of various sports events. The event will look at enhancing practices that facilitate hosting sports events and excel in their design, implementation and production

through the available resources.

The course was attended by Dr Abdul Rahim bin Muslim Al Daroushi, Assistant Professor of Sports Administration and Sports Policies at the College of Education at Sultan Qaboos University, with the participation of 15 employees from Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), sports federations and committees, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Military Sports affiliates.

The course includes many topics, including the classification of sports events, identification

of their organisational principles and the concepts of soft power and the legacy associated with them.

It also includes the use of volunteer management programmes in sports events, the extraction of appropriate marketing methods for the sports event, the application of qualitative and quantitative evaluation processes and the identification of aspects that can be developed, in addition to discussing how to plan and organise an integrated sporting event and the steps to be followed.

Merciless Nadal marches into French Open quarterfinals



Spain's Rafael Nadal in action during his fourth round match against Italy's Jannik Sinner. – Reuters

“I think the lights went on too early. The court is covered from one side. When the sun was lower and hit the light, it created shadow on the court. It was tricky.

RAFAEL NADAL
13 times French Open champion

PARIS: Claycourt king Rafael Nadal overcame a wobbly start and issues with the stadium lights to subdue Italian teenager Jannik Sinner 7-5 6-3 6-0 on Monday and book a place in the French Open quarterfinals.

The Spanish defending champion, looking to claim a record-extending 14th Roland Garros singles title and become the only man to win 21 Grand Slam singles crowns, has won 35 consecutive sets in Paris.

World number 19 Sinner, who at 19 years old has been labelled as the next big thing in

tennis, hit a brick wall on court Philippe Chatrier after leading 5-3 in the opening set.

Third seed Nadal will face Diego Schwartzman for a place in the semifinals after beating the Argentine in the last four last year.

Although the sun shone throughout, part of the match was played under the floodlights.

“I think the lights went on too early. The court is covered from one side. When the sun was lower and hit the light, it created shadow on the court. It was tricky”, Nadal told a news conference.

“Honestly, I don’t know why they put on the lights that early. We have been playing without lights here in Roland Garros forever.”

The 20-times Grand Slam champion still produced his best tennis when it mattered most.

“I played against a very good player who has a great future and I’m very happy with the win”, Nadal said.

“I started playing well the first couple of games and then I played too defensive for a few games and gave him the chance to step into the court and play his shots. After that

the match changed a lot.”

Facing the ultimate challenge on clay, Sinner struggled to get into the groove before cancelling out an early break as Nadal experienced problems with his first serve.

Sinner, who lost to the claycourt master in the quarterfinals here last year, found himself up a break after two Nadal double faults and a few uncharacteristic errors.

Serving for the set, however, Sinner lost the game to love and Nadal levelled at 5-5 on his opponent’s 25th unforced error before breaking to love again to seal the opening set.

After losing eight games in a row, Sinner stopped the rot with a break, clinching it after rushing to the net to retrieve a drop shot and delivering a stunning crosscourt passing shot.

Nadal quickly recovered to break again, however, and he served out to take a two-set lead before securing his 104th match win at Roland Garros.

The Spaniard has not lost at the Paris Grand Slam tournament since 2015 when he was knocked out in the last eight by Novak Djokovic, his potential semifinal opponent.

— Reuters

FRENCH OPEN RESULTS

MEN (FOURTH ROUND):
1-Novak Djokovic (Srb) bt Lorenzo Musetti (Ita) 6-7 (7-9), 6-7 (2-7), 6-1, 6-0, 4-0 - ret;d; 9-Matteo Berrettini (Ita) bt 8-Roger Federer (Sui) w/o; 3-Rafael Nadal (Esp) bt 18-Jannik Sinner (Ita) 7-5, 6-3, 6-0; 10-Diego Schwartzman (Arg) bt Jan-Lennard Struff (Ger) 7-6 (11-9), 6-4, 7-5.

WOMEN (FOURTH ROUND):
24-Coco Gauff (US) bt 25-Ons Jabeur (Tun) 6-3, 6-1; Barbora Krejickova (Cze) bt Sloane Stephens (US) 6-2, 6-0; 17-Maria Sakkari (Gre) bt 4-Sofia Kenin (US) 6-1, 6-3; 8-Iga Swiatek (Pol) bt Marta Kostyuk (Ukr) 6-3, 6-4.

Swiatek holds off Kostyuk to reach last eight

PARIS: Defending champion Iga Swiatek held off a fierce challenge from Ukraine’s Marta Kostyuk to reach the French Open quarterfinals with a 6-3 6-4 victory on Monday.

The eighth-seeded Pole has now won 22 consecutive sets at Roland Garros going into her clash with Greek 17th seed Maria Sakkari as she bids to become the first woman to retain the Roland Garros title since Justine Henin in 2007.

Against an 18-year-old opponent who threw everything at her, Swiatek kept her composure

on an empty court Philippe Chatrier, with fans not allowed to attend due to Paris’s 9 pm Covid-19 curfew.

“There were so many differences (from a day match)”, said Swiatek.

“It was hard for me to adapt. The light are really bright and I had to adjust, sometimes I was facing the lights when I had to smash, it was hard.”

Kostyuk, who had not dropped a set in powering through the first three rounds, piled on the pressure early on to put Swiatek on the back foot and earn a break



Poland’s Iga Swiatek celebrates winning her fourth round match against Ukraine’s Marta Kostyuk. – Reuters

for 2-1.

An unfazed Swiatek, however, broke straight back before gaining the upper hand in the eighth game when Kostyuk’s attempted backhand down the line went wide.

The Pole served out to take the lead after a hugely competitive set in which she faced five break points.

Swiatek capitalised on her opponent’s errors to break for a 2-1 lead in the second, only for Kostyuk to level at 2-2.

The decisive break for Swiatek came in the seventh game when

Kostyuk netted a sliced forehand while attempting to retrieve a lob.

Kostyuk bounced her racket in frustration after Swiatek earned a match point at 5-3, but the Pole squandered that chance.

Kostyuk went 30-0 up in the 10th game but Swiatek won four points in a row, wrapping it up with a superb lob at the end of a quick exchange at the net.

“Her defence was crazy, it was hard for me to finish the points a few times”, said Swiatek. “She was getting everywhere, so big bravo to her, she has a bright future ahead of her.” — Reuters

features



Young Omani inventor wants to put Oman on innovation map

Young inventor Imad bin Abdullah Obaidoun is one of the young Omani cadres who want to challenge the country and push the innovation potentials to even greater heights. Check out what innovations he is working on next... **P14**

ENTERTAINMENT

READ



IT'S OK THAT YOU'RE NOT OK
BY MEGAN DEVINE

Challenging conventional wisdom on grief, a pioneering therapist offers a new resource for those experiencing loss .

Jennifer Lopez signs production deal with Netflix

JENNIFER LOPEZ and her production company have signed a first-look deal with Netflix, the streaming giant announced.

Lopez's Nuyorican Productions will produce films and series — both scripted and unscripted — with a focus on projects supporting “diverse female actors, writers and film-makers,” Netflix said.

The deal includes two previously announced films, both starring Lopez. “The Mother” is directed by “Mulan” filmmaker Niki Caro and follows a deadly female assassin who comes out of hiding to help her daughter survive. Lopez is in training for the role, with film-

ing set to begin next year ahead of its planned release in late 2022.

The second film, “The Cipher,” is based on the novel by Isabel Ojeda Maldonado.

Nuyorican Productions is co-run by Lopez, 51, and her producing partner Elaine Goldsmith-Thomas and the couple will also work with Benny Medina.

Chart-topping singer Lopez served as a producer on films including “Second Act” and “Hustlers”, both of which she starred in.

She said in a statement: “I am excited to announce my new partnership with Netflix. Elaine, Benny and I believe

there is no better home for us than a forward leaning content creation company that seeks to defy conventional wisdom and directly market to the millions across the globe who no longer view art and entertainment with the kind of boundaries and limitations of the past.”

Scott Stuber, Netflix head of global films, said: “Throughout every aspect of her career, Jennifer Lopez has been a force in entertainment. In partnering with her and Nuyorican we know she will continue to bring impactful stories, joy and inspiration to audiences around the world.”

— **PA Media-dpa**





Young Omani inventor wants to put Oman on innovation map

Medicine with reduced side effects, vehicles with lesser carbon emissions, Omani plants' potential in curing numerous diseases — the focus may be vast but an Omani inventor is looking into these areas to put Oman on the map as a country that drives innovation.

Young inventor Imad bin Abdullah Obaidoun is one of the young Omani cadres who want to challenge the country and push the innovation potentials to even greater heights.

Obaidoun wants to fully exploit his talents which is why he has been participating in numerous internal and external scientific and innovation competitions bringing glory to the Sultanate. His latest achievement was landing second place in the invention competition that was held in Lebanon.

Imad, a chemical analyst at Okiyo Salalah Liquefied Gas Group, said that his passion for inventions began when he was still in the university. He was very interested in the field of chemistry and this eventually led to refining his skills in the subject and paving the road to joining different competitions. With the full support of his parents, he was able to

draw inspiration not only from people around him but by the needs of individuals that have the potential to change how society does things.

Imad shared that during his participation in the 12th International Exhibition of Inventions in the Middle East held in Kuwait last year, he won first place — something he considers a very important achievement that propels him to move forward. The idea of his innovation came during his studies at the undergraduate level, and it aimed to create a technology that treats contaminated water without any chemical intervention.

Obaidoun registered in the Falling Walls Laboratory, which is supervised by the Scientific Research Council of the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, and he looks forward and is gearing to participate in contests in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

Imad has already swept



awards in different competitions including the 2019 Vision Award for the organic solar energy project, through which he achieved first place for the Renewable Energy

Department, while he achieved the second prize for the electrochemical treatment project. He also got the second prize in the Salalah Sanitary Services Competition in 2020 for a water treatment project using the electrochemical method.

Other than working on projects like reducing medicinal side effects and reduction of carbon emissions, he is also working on three projects in electrochemical water treatment, silver nanoparticles, Omani tree extracts and their role in the medical field.

YOUTH

Young CEO programme for the youth



ONE HUNDRED and sixty participants of the world's first Online Short-Term Entrepreneurship Programme for School Students of Grade 6 to 12 were congratulated upon completion of their programme at a virtual ceremony presided over by the management team of White Canvas India (WCI) and mentors from several Indian Institute of Managements all over India.

WCI is an 8-year-old student and parent engagement company with 2 National Records, based in Noida, India.

Designed by WCI in collaboration with mentors from IIM, LSR, Forbes magazine, Harvard Business Review and several leading entrepreneurs, the 6-month entrepreneurship programme enables students at an early age to learn skills like identifying opportunity, problem solving, risk taking, critical thinking, idea to execution etc and many more.

The first batch commenced classes on July 25 with 40 participants from all over India. The certification programme, including 100 credits, was delivered through online webinars, case studies, assignments, live projects and final evaluation. All passing out students have created their new entrepreneurship and registered them in an exclusive student's catalogue.

"The programme imparted skills to prospective young student entrepreneurs at an early age and empowered them to take on entrepreneurship. This will help them grow their confidence, experiment more and make them future-ready and create more options for their career."

"This initiative is in sync with our plans to empower students to become 'Future Ready' and contributes to building a new India in compliance with our prime minister's vision," said Samaresh Shah, Founder Director of White Canvas India. It has drawn up plans to give New India over 50,000 Young CEO over the next five years.

Besides India, the Young CEO programme is being facilitated for students from the US, UK, UAE, New Zealand, Hong Kong and Australia.

ANIMAL PLANET

Heavy sleepers: Elephants on epic trek take nap



A HERD of wild elephants in southwestern China have been captured on camera taking a breather from a 500-kilometre march of chaos that has caused more than \$1 million in damage.

Chinese state television has launched a 24-hour live feed of the herd as the country remains on watch following the 15 elephants' epic trek through homes, barns and crops in Yunnan province.

Footage from state broadcaster CCTV filmed on Monday shows the herd, tired from their adventures, curled up in a forest on the outskirts of the provincial capital Kunming.

At one point in the footage, a calf on its back stirs itself, trunk and feet sprawled in the air, before hauling itself onto a sleeping adult and nodding off again.

The adventures of the huge mammals have captivated the nation, with hundreds of millions taking to social media to discuss their journey.

The elephants have been closely monitored by authorities as they lumber through lush countryside. More than 400 people have been mobilised to ensure public safety and dozens of drones are now following their every step.

Convoys of trucks have lined roads in a bid to keep the herd away from densely populated areas, including the more than eight million people who live in nearby Kunming.

The local government has warned villagers not to leave corn or salt out in their yards that might attract the animals.

It has also evacuated residents in the elephants' path and distributed more than two tonnes of feed to the scavenging herd.

Experts are unsure why the group first migrated away from their original habitat, a nature reserve in the province. — **AFP**



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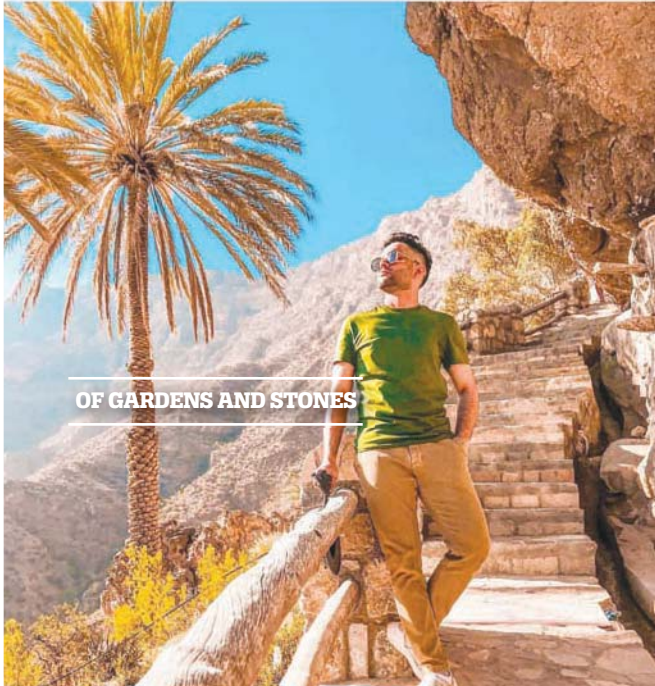
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AROUND THE WORLD

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CONSERVATION



Endangered bamboo sharks given helping hand in Gulf of Thailand

In the Gulf of Thailand, fisheries researchers use a guideline to scuba dive to the ocean floor where they release baskets full of young bamboo sharks.

The small, slow-moving, bottom-dwelling sharks with striped bodies and an extra-long tail have become endangered in recent years because of their popularity with fish collectors and exotic food diners.

Researchers have released scores of juvenile bamboo sharks in the Gulf over the past several months, hoping to remove the species from the International Union for Conservation of Nature's "Near Threatened" red list.

"We dive down to the sea base to release the fishes in a safe area so they have a better chance to survive, rather than releasing them on the water surface like most other animals," fisheries official Udom Krueniam told Reuters from a dive boat earlier this month. "If we release them on the water surface, there's more chance they'll be eaten by bigger fish or swim out from shelter."

Researchers last week released 40 of the brown-band-



ed bamboo sharks, aged between 2 and 3 months, in a purpose-built artificial coral reef at a depth of 18 metres (60 feet).

The species is native to the Gulf of Thailand, and is also found across Southeast Asia, Japan, and Northern Australia.

The sharks are one of the smallest marine predators, growing to a maximum length of around 1.2 metres (4 feet), and are not threatening to humans. They feed mainly at night, using their small teeth to grasp or crush prey.

Researchers hope the released sharks will settle in to their new home, where they will initially be sheltered by the man-made reef and hopefully reproduce.

Back at a research facility on land, Panida BuaLangka carefully uses scissors to cut off the end of an egg sheath to help release the baby shark inside. Researchers help hatch the eggs in an aquarium, rather than in the open sea where they are vulnerable to other predators.

Udom said a successful egg hatching project last year was providing researchers with more baby sharks to release this year.

The project has so far helped hatch, nurse and deliver more than 200 bamboo sharks to the Gulf of Thailand. — **Reuters**

TRAVEL TALES

Swedish 'flying' boat aims to help save Venice from the waves



Venice has long been in peril from the waves that motorboats create along its canals, eroding the foundations of historic buildings and threatening them with collapse.

A new electric boat that flies above the water, presented during the Salone di Nautica boat show, might be a solution.

Erosion - a problem known as "moto ondoso" - is caused by the wakes of motorboats, water buses and ferries washing against the walls of buildings along the canals.



Swedish company Candela's electric boat, the Candela C-7, runs on computer-controlled hydrofoils, or underwater "wings", that lift the hull into the air and make it appear to fly over the water. Candela says its technology significantly reduces "moto ondoso" damage.

"The boat has five sensors that read the water and speak to the computer system in the boat and the computer system tells the

foils to move and they move 100 times a second, back and forth and diagonal to keep the boat stable. So when you are up flying it takes off at about 15 knots," said Candela's Maria Rohman as she piloted the C-7 over the Venice lagoon during a test drive at the weekend.

"It's extremely stable with no slamming against the waves and you just cruise along," she said.

Candela says the boat travels silently on battery power using little energy and creating a wake

less than 5 cm high, similar to traditional rowing boats.

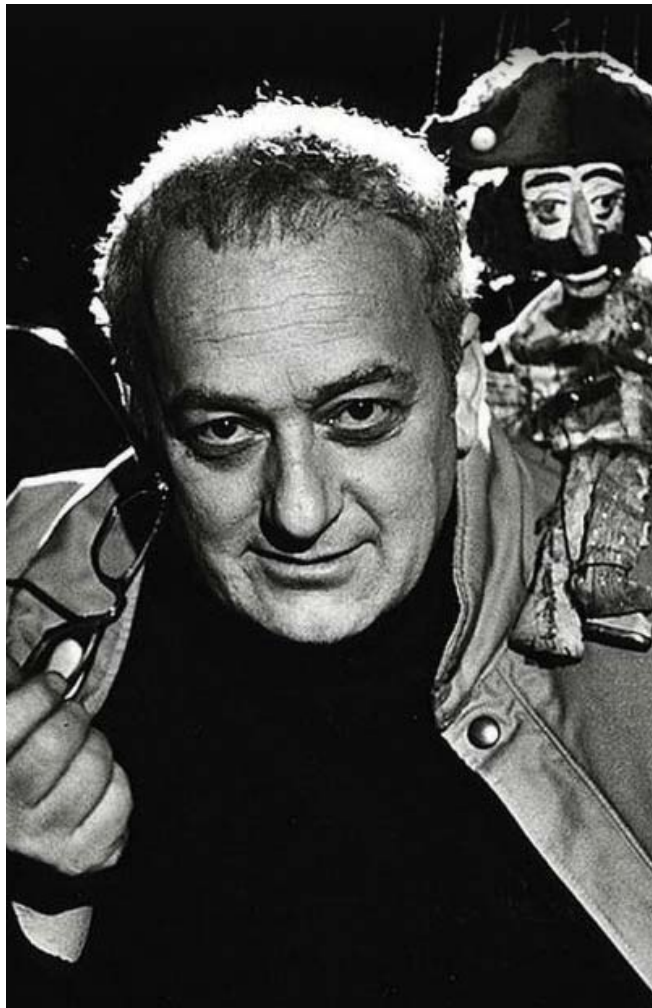
The company is also working on a water taxi and a ferry, using the same technology.

Candela hopes its hydrofoils will become a regular means of travelling through Venice, reducing pollution and erosion.

"This is an ancient city. We all love Venice and if we can help to save it, we should," Rohman said. — **Reuters**

ENTERTAINMENT

Georgia mourns iconic scriptwriter and puppeteer Rezo Gabriadze



Georgians mourned Monday the death of famed scriptwriter, puppeteer and painter Rezo Gabriadze whose internationally acclaimed productions deeply marked the Caucasus nation's cultural landscape.

He died Sunday aged 84, his family told the First Channel of Georgia's public television.

A rare example of intellectual and artistic freedom in the tightly controlled Soviet empire, Gabriadze's creative work spanned cinema, theatre, painting and literature.

Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili led tributes to Gabriadze Monday writing on Facebook that "Georgian culture has suffered an immense loss."

Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili expressed condolences to Gabriadze's family, calling him "a great artist whose huge talent produced numerous masterpieces."

"Warmth, kindness, and love have been the fulcrum of Rezo Gabriadze's creative work," he said in a statement Sunday.

Gabriadze's friend, writer and linguist Levan Berdzenishvili, Monday praised AFP Gabriadze's "luminous and versatile talent that combined incomparable humour and melancholy."

Gabriadze wrote 35 screenplays over his decades-long career including iconic Soviet-era comic films like cult science fiction movie "Kin-dza-dza" and "Mimino," a tale of a provincial helicopter pilot's bid to fly commercial airliners in Moscow.

Gabriadze won worldwide recognition and international acclaim touring with numerous plays he staged in Tbilisi's Puppet Theatre, which he founded in the Georgian capital in 1981 and headed until his death.

His theatrical productions included the Autumn of Our Springtime, based on his post-WW2 childhood memories in his native city of Kutaisi.

The New York Times described another production, The Battle of Stalingrad, as a "timeless elegy with the delicacy of lacework whose effect is beautiful, poignant and lingering."

Gabriadze was awarded Georgia's pre-eminent decoration in the fields of arts and literature, the Rustaveli Prize, and the French Order of Arts and Letters. — **AFP**



The historical and scientific importance of Al Awabi

By Staff Reporter

The Wilayat of Al Awabi is one of the wilayats of the South Al Batinah Governorate, and it was named "Sony" after the western mountain overlooking it, called Mount Sony. 'Sony' was used in ancient times and continued until the Yaariba Era until its eventual change to Al Awabi.

The Wilayat of Al Awabi is located in Al Hajar Al Gharbi, near to Nakhl, Wadi Al Maawil, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and the Wilayat of Al Rustaq. It is about 156 kilometres from the capital, Muscat.

There are 32 villages that falls under the Wilayat of Al Awabi namely: Al Awabi, Al Rami, Al Waliya, Al Dhahir, Tawi Al Sih, Al Rajma, Falaj Bani Khuzair, Subaikha, Al Mandhur, Al Baramiyah, Ghaz Al Muhainiah, Al Hajeer, Halhal, Dhahrat Al Dhawahir, Stal, Misfat Al Hataallah, Saniba, Shuwa, Thuqb, Al Hajar, Misfat Al Shraiyyeen, Hadas, Al Houdaina, Al Muhasana, Al Alia, Al Markh, Ain Karfas, Saqr, Sahkoon, Al Dukm and Al Dar.

Al Awabi has a long history and a wide scientific standing as it gave birth to many imams and scholars, including Imam Al Warith bin Kaab al Kharousi, whose origin is from the village of Al Hajar, Imam Al Salt bin Malik al Kharousi, from the village of Stal, Imam Azzan bin Tamim al Kharousi, from the village of Al Misfah, and Imam Khalid bin Mohammad al Kharousi, from the village of Al Hajeer, Imam Khalid bin Saud al Kharousi from the village of Al Hajeer, the poet Shaikh Salem bin Ghassan Al Lawah al Kharousi, the author of *Diwan Al Lawah*, from the village of Thuqb, the poet Shaikh Saeed bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al

Ghashari al Kharousi, the author of *Al Ghashari Diwan*, and the poet Shaikh Abu Bakr Ahmed bin Saeed Al Satalli al Kharousi, the author of *Al Satalli's Diwan*.

As a result of the historical legacy of the wilayat, the pen and the inkwell (used as an emblem for the wilayat) represent an indication of the scientific and historical standing. One of the most important cultural phenomena that define Al Awabi is rock writing, which is a unique cultural art that has its own features and characteristics. Through rock writing, the most important events and issues are recorded. It includes various aspects of life in previous eras, and it was considered as a big book that preserved many events and news of the past decades. These writings include many important events related to the history of the wilayat.

The Wilayat of Al Awabi, like the rest of the wilayats of the Sultanate, hosts



village Bani Kharous, from the east bank, opposite the Al Awabi Fort.

There is also the Dam Tower, which is a circular tower built on a small hill and is approximately ten meters high from the surface of the earth. It was built of stones, the Omani sarooj, and the Al Hajeer Fort, which is two separate buildings located in a mountainous plateau that rises from the surface of the earth by about (250) metres.

There are a number of ancient mosques in the wilayat, the most important of which is the Al Ghamama Mosque, which is located in the village of Al Hajar in Wadi Bani Kharous and was built by Imam Al Warith bin Kaab al Kharousi and was recently restored. Al Hasha Mosque, which is located in the village of Al Alia in Bani Kharous and has been renovated to preserve its modern architectural character in addition to three old mosques located in Salut in the village of Stal.

There are also a number of ancient houses in the wilayat like Bait Al Ras, which is located in the village of Al Alia and Bait Al Sarooj in Al Alia and the House of Al Misfah Fortress, which is located in the village of Misfat Al Shraiyyeen and the House of Al Waliya, which is a large house in the Al Waliya area, and the Al Khatma House in Al Alia.

The area also abounds with beautiful and picturesque tourist attractions, engraved by nature without human intervention due to its geographical location and beautiful climate. The wilayat has great tourism potentials that made it a stop for visitors who come to it during vacations and official holidays to enjoy the contents of these tourist components.

many archaeological and historical spots that bear witness to the civilisation and heritage of this wilayat, which is one of the treasures of the Governorate of South Al Batinah, including the forts scattered in the wilayat. The most important of which is the Al Awabi Fort, which some call "the Western House" and the Al Fawq House. It is located at the entrance to the Wadi Bani Kharous from the western side. It controls the entrance to the wilayat and the main point of distribution of the Al Awabi Falaj. It was the headquarter of the governor and was built in the early thirteenth century AH.

The fortress of Salut, which is located at the top of a mountain overlooking the falaj of the village of Stal in Wadi Bani Kharous, and the fortress of Wadi Arak, which is located in the village of Subaikha in the western mountain before the entrance to the

business

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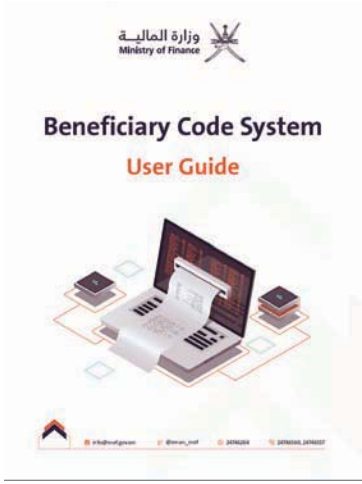
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New online system for disbursal of payments for government contracts

Streamlined process: ‘Beneficiary Code System’ enables all government contractors to obtain a reference number through which their payments will be transferred

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu



Contractors and vendors are required to use the newly introduced ‘Beneficiary Code System’ to invoice and receive payment for goods and services provided to any ministry or department of the Omani government, the Ministry of Finance reaffirmed here on Tuesday.

Consequently, all contractors and service providers must be registered via the dedicated portal instituted by the Ministry to process all payments in a streamlined and transparent fashion.

A unique reference number, renewable every two years, enables registered service providers to follow up on pending payments and receive payment vouchers for goods and services rendered to the government.

In details published yesterday, the Ministry described the Beneficiary Code System (BCS) as an online service that “enables all government contractors such as individuals, enterprises, and companies to obtain a reference number through

which their payments due for providing services or works to the government units shall be transferred”.

Created as part of the Ministry’s www.mof.gov.om website, the BCS specifies different registration processes for corporate entities with Commercial Registration (CR) numbers, on the one hand, and small-time individual private contractors, on the other.

The former will have their particulars automatically validated by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

The latter, whether owners of school buses or water tankers and other such service providers, can upload their particulars and obtain a ‘beneficiary code’.

“Once the application is submitted, it will be reviewed by the competent staff at the Ministry of Finance, and the user will be notified by a text message accordingly. In case the application is approved, a specific fee will be applicable in order to complete the registration,” the Ministry added.

Oman LNG to deliver region’s first carbon-neutral LNG cargo

NEW MILESTONE: Maiden carbon-neutral shipment uses nature-based carbon credits to offset full lifecycle CO2 emissions generated across the LNG value chain

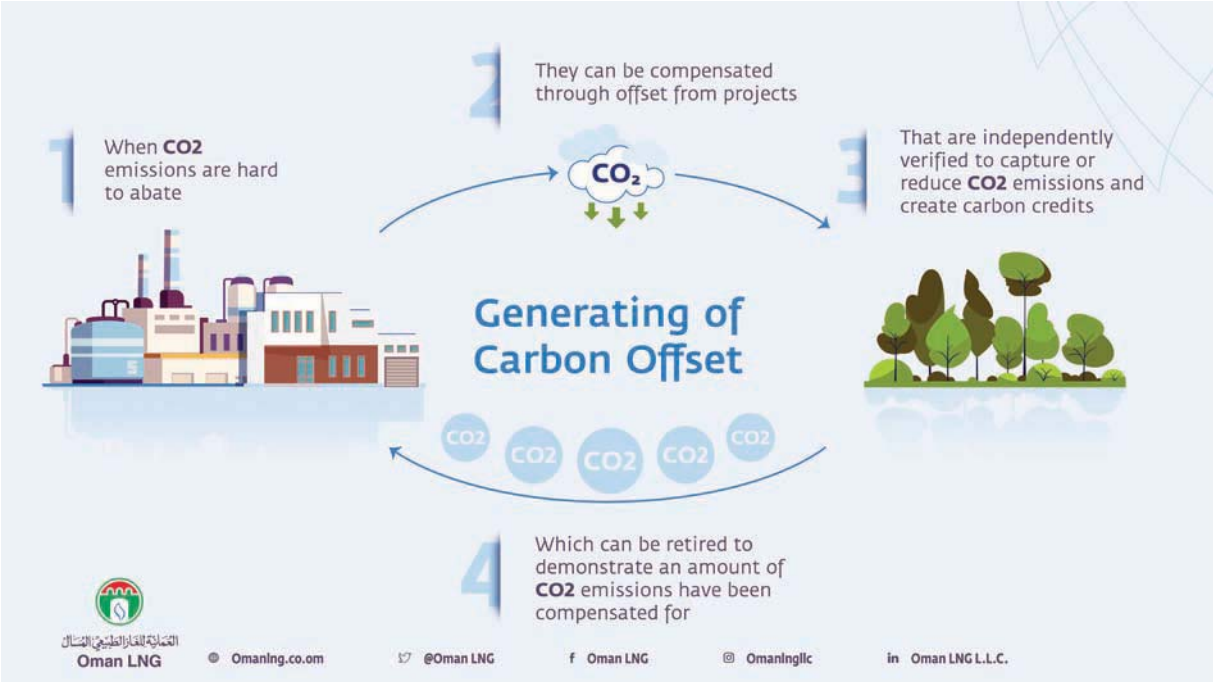
BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 8

Attesting to its robust efforts in delivering clean and reliable energy, Oman LNG has signed a pivotal agreement with Shell to deliver the Middle East first carbon-neutral LNG cargo from Oman LNG’s world-class facility in Sur.

The cargo, which is expected to be delivered in the region, is the first carbon-neutral LNG from the Middle East using nature-based carbon credits to offset full lifecycle CO2 emissions generated across the LNG value chain; from exploring and producing the natural gas to its end use by the final consumer.

Nature-based projects aim to protect, transform or restore land and enable nature to add oxygen and absorb CO2 emissions from the atmosphere. Such activities lead to the creation of ‘carbon credits’ where each credit represents the avoidance or removal of greenhouse gases.

With more than half of global LNG demand by 2040 expected to be from countries with net-zero emissions targets, all levers need to be pulled to decarbonise LNG. Speaking on this milestone,



Using high-quality nature-based offsets for Oman LNG’s first carbon-neutral LNG cargo offering is a testimony of our commitment to the environment, and our focus on decarbonisation

HAMED AL NAAMANY
CEO, Oman LNG



first LNG carbon-neutral cargo. This forward-looking step reflects Oman LNG’s commitment to be a pioneer in decarbonisation, which complements the Sultanate’s Vision “Oman 2040”, on the environmental preservation front.

Oman LNG will continue its journey delivering world-class business performance, safety, efficiency, and decarbonisation efforts. Great to achieve this milestone.”

Hamed al Naamany (pictured), CEO of Oman LNG commented: “Oman LNG has taken major steps over the past few years such as introducing new technologies and replacing machines to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions. Our role in protecting and restoring natural ecosystems could play an important role in limiting global warming. These changes ultimately ensure the efficiency and sustainability of our plant and machinery.”

Al Naamany added, “Using high-quality nature-based offsets for Oman LNG’s first carbon-neutral LNG cargo offering is a testimony of our commitment to the environment, and our focus on decarbonisation. We continue to be amongst the top quartile of the premium LNG market, and aim to remain in this position post-2025.”

TURN TO PAGE 20

Port of Salalah ranked 6th globally in efficiency

New records: Oman’s ports rated No. 1 in the world in terms of speed of container handling, as per the UNCTAD annual index 2020

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 8

Despite the challenges posed by the ongoing global pandemic, the Port of Salalah not only finished 2020 with record-breaking container volume but also achieved world-class efficiency.

This has been recognised by the World Bank in its report on Container Port Performance Index (CPPI 2020) which has

been produced by the Transport Global Practice of the World Bank, in collaboration with IHS Markit where Port of Salalah ranked 6th amongst 351 ports globally! The CPPI measures the operational efficiency with which ports receive and turn around container ships.

“The Covid-19 pandemic has underlined the critical role that ports, and their associated logistical chains, play in the global economy.

It has also highlighted the need to ensure business continuity and improve the resilience of maritime gateways, as ports play a crucial role in the global logistics system, keeping supply chains moving, economies functioning, and people employed.

Ports maintain the flows of



vital medical and food supplies, critical agricultural products, energy streams, and other goods and services essential to facilitate the economic life of a country” adds the World Bank report.

This has been further

acknowledged and validated by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) which also rated Oman’s ports as No. 1 in the world in terms of speed of container handling, as per the

UNCTAD annual index 2020.

According to UNCTAD’s Port Liner Shipping Connectivity Index (PLSCI), the Port of Salalah provides the highest liner shipping connectivity in Oman (PLSCI value 55 in Q3 2020) and has continued to do so since the PLSCI statistics was first published back in Q1 2006.

The Port of Salalah, in its statement, confirmed that the port stay of a ship, or the speed with which it is turned around, is determined by various factors of which, needless to say, port productivity plays a vital role.

The prompt services of the various authorities including our own Marine Services, ROP Customs and the Ministry of Health authorities also play a critical role in all of this and for that, we express our deep

appreciation.

“We are proud, through our efficient port operations, to have contributed to raising the profile of Omani ports on the global stage.

This would not have been possible without the strong commitment and dedication displayed by the staff at every level across the organisation and a strong commitment of our customers, stakeholders and business partners which has helped us retain one of the top spots globally. I would like to further thank Ministry of Transport, Communication and Information Technology, APM Terminals and ASYAD for their continued support leading to this achievement,” commented Mark Hardiman, CEO of Port of Salalah.

Rise in UK manufacturing and construction activity

It is not surprising that the IMF recently raised the growth forecast for UK's economy, considering the progress of two significant sectors — construction and manufacturing. Construction output grew at the fastest rate in nearly seven years in May as a record increase in new orders spurred on the industry.

IHS Markit's Construction Purchasing Managers' Index jumped to 64.2 in May from 61.6 the previous month, its highest level since September 2014. The reading surpassed economists' forecasts of 62.3, with anything over 50 signifying growth.

Growth was fastest in the housebuilding sector, reflecting a boom in the housing market, with prices surging by more than ten per cent in annual terms. The PMI's gauge of new orders shot up to its highest level since the

survey started in 1997. "Even allowing for the fact that the purchasing managers' surveys can overstate movements in the economy at times of rapid change, the level of the May construction PMI is impressive", said Howard Archer, Chief Economic Adviser to the EY Item Club.

"UK construction companies reported another month of rapid output growth amid a surge in residential work and the fastest rise in commercial building since August 2007", said Tim Moore, Economics Director at survey compiler IHS Markit.

Cost pressures for construction companies rose at the fastest rate since record began, with a sharp increase in supplier delivery times. "Despite severe challenges with materials availability, construction firms remain highly upbeat about their near-term growth prospect",



ANDY JALIL
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GROWTH WAS FASTEST IN THE HOUSEBUILDING SECTOR, REFLECTING A BOOM IN THE HOUSING MARKET, WITH PRICES SURGING BY MORE THAN TEN PER CENT IN ANNUAL TERMS

Moore added.

Employment growth in construction firms was the highest since 2014, with demand for staff surging to a record pace in May. The survey added to signs that the economy is on track for a swift rebound after shrinking ten per cent last year.

The Bank of England last month backed the economy to grow at its fastest rate since World War Two during 2021. "Looking ahead, however, growth likely will start to slow as supply-side constraints bite", said Samuel Tombs, Chief Economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics.

MANUFACTURING: The UK's manufacturing growth gathered pace in May as production increased for the 12th consecutive month with demand particularly strong from the EU, the US and China.

The IHS Markit/CIPS UK

Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index rose from 60.9 in April to 65.6 last month, marking the highest reading since 1994. The growth was driven by a third straight month of higher new orders, helped by stronger client confidence and the reopening of more parts of the economy.

Employment in the sector also rose for a fourth straight month due to the increase in business. However, delays related to supply chains due to Brexit and Covid-19 and input shortages pushed prices up again, leading to fears of inflation.

Director at IHS Markit, Rob Dobson, said: "The UK PMI surged to an unprecedented high in May, as record growth of new orders and employment supported one of the steepest increases in production volumes in the near 30-year survey history."

"Growth is being boosted by the unlocking of economies from Covid restrictions and ongoing vaccination programmes. This is being felt across the globe, as highlighted by a record rise in new export business during the latest survey month."

Sarah Banks, Managing Director of Freight and Logistics at Accenture Global said: "While figures are positive overall, the worsening supply situation is still a concern, with rates of both input costs and selling price inflation running far above anything previously seen."

"Shipping delays and material shortages are driving backlogs of uncompleted work and the surge in manufacturing orders is leading to many firms struggling to boost operating capacity to keep up with demand."

(The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK)

Muzn named Islamic Bank of the Year - Oman 2021



MUSCAT: Muzn, National Bank of Oman's (NBO) Islamic banking window, has been named Islamic Bank of the Year — Oman 2021 by globally renowned finance publication, *The Banker*.

The award, which has been running for the past nine years and attracts submissions from institutions all over the world, was given to Muzn in recognition of its leading position in Islamic finance in the Sultanate, its pioneering role in digital innovation, and its efforts to drive growth in the sector.

Sharakah-backed Omani SME broadens horizons

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 8

Mint Marketing, an Omani SME specialising in offering creative marketing solutions to corporate and institutional clients, is the brain behind the recently launched revamped brand identity of Oman Animal & Plant Genetic Resources Centre (Mawarid).

The new brand makeover included developing marketing strategies, social media accounts management and the launch of creative artwork that matches the change. Established in 2013, Mint Marketing works in creative solutions, especially marketing strategies and graphic designs.

"We have aimed in the last three years to expand our operations to include government entities and large corporations, after working closely with Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) since our establishment."

"The experience we have gained and the positive feedback received from our clients enabled us to move forward and target



bigger clients", said Israa al Lawati (pictured), Founder of Mint Marketing.

The company specialises in providing strategic services include developing a marketing plan, social media plan, creative direction, consulting and workshops for marketing departments in corporates. Its portfolio of services also includes the development of branding identity, branding guidelines, and other digital artworks like posts and website. Mint Marketing received financial and advisory support from the Fund for Development of Youth Projects (Sharakah), which offers financial and advisory services for new and existing businesses.

Bank Nizwa signs MoU with Imam Jabir Bin Zaid Waqf Foundation



MUSCAT: Continuing its efforts to contribute to social development, Bank Nizwa, the leading Islamic bank in the Sultanate, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Imam Jabir Bin Zaid Waqf Foundation.

The aim of the agreement is to support the charitable endowment shared electronic platform that was launched recently by the foundation.

The initiative is in alignment with Bank Nizwa's commitment to support local communities by forming effective partnerships with

various institutions.

The agreement was signed by Khalid al Kayed, Chief Executive Officer at Bank Nizwa and Eng Ahmed al Rashdi, CEO of Imam Jabir Bin Zaid Waqf Foundation.

As per the agreement, the bank will support the charitable endowment platform that allows individuals and charitable individuals to directly contribute to the foundation's projects through the platform, in addition to presenting endowment gifts to relatives and friends.

Maisarah honours top performing staff and branches



MUSCAT: Maisarah Islamic Banking Services, the leading Islamic Banking arm of BankDhofar, conducted Q1 2021 Staff and Branches Quarterly Recognition Programme at the Bank's Performance Academy. The programme was developed as part of the bank's performance culture strategy to promote, recognise and reward high performance.

During the function, Abdul Hakeem al Ojaili, Chief Executive Officer of BankDhofar, expressed his appreciation and congratulated the participants and winners — both staff members and branches — for their unwavering dedication and effort in delivering consistent and sustained business performance leading to superior customer services and experience.

Delivering a message at the event, Nasser al Bahantah (pictured), Maisarah Chief Retail Banking Officer, congratulated members of staff and branches for their contributions and high caliber that made a real difference to the experience of stakeholders, customers, shareholders and associates, as well as the development of the Islamic banking industry in the Sultanate.

Al Bahantah added that employees who were recognised for their top performance would be assigned as top performance champions across all branches to coach and mentor their colleagues at work so that they could improve and achieve a higher performance culture across Maisarah.

OAB supports families affected by storm

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank has launched an initiative to help low-income families that have sustained damage to their homes by the recent storm in North Al Batinah Governorate. This initiative is conducted in coordination with the Ministry of Social Development.

Commenting on this initiative, Feras al Farsi (pictured), Sustainability and CSR Specialist at OAB said, "We continuously strive to strengthen our relationship with the community because that is one of the main pillars of our sustainability strategy. We



encourage our employees from branches across the Sultanate to follow up with any families in need within the areas they serve and to inform us of any critical cases that require immediate support.

We then review these cases and based on the analysis, take necessary action to support those that are affected. In this particular instance, The regional management of the bank's branches in the governorate has presented a report to the executive management, which includes suggestions as to how OAB can provide support to families in need."

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MUSCAT: Customers looking forward to owning an RX can make the most of the best time now and benefit with free service 6 years/60,000 kms and free registration (Conditions apply. Please visit your nearest Lexus showroom for details).

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Meanwhile, the RX 450h hybrid variant is equipped with a 3.5-liter V6 petrol engine and two electric motors and produces a combined system output of 308 hp.

The RX Hybrid is available with a hybrid battery warranty of 8 years or 1,60,000 kms, whichever is earlier.



The Lexus RX 450h can be driven in EV drive mode to reduce noise while driving in residential areas and to reduce exhaust gas in indoor parking lots and garages or through a combination of its petrol engine and two electric motors, depending on the vehicle's speed and customer's driving behaviour.

The batteries in the hybrid electric drivetrain are

automatically charged by either the petrol engine or when braking and decelerating, eliminating the need to plug in a power cord.

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FLAT in Al Khuwair. 1 BHK and 2 BHK. 99341138, 90991079.

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FOR rent: Cooling store in Al Seeb. 99202224, 94272979.

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2 BEDROOM flat Al Khuwair. 99322344.

3 BHK Flat & studio flat in central Ruwi & 2 BHK in Medinat Al Ilam. Call 99238012/ 24704994.

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DRIVER experience, 5 years in Oman, speaking Arabic, English and Hindi. 95860266.

EGYPTIAN Civil Engineer have 11 years experience in Oman as a project manager/ structural designer with private projects or government. 96965100.

CIVIL engineer/QS engineer, 11 years in UAE, freelance & Oman driving licence available, looking for full-time or part-time job 97299165.

INDIAN male, 24 years of total experience in which 16 years in a Multinational Freight Forwarding and Logistic Co., worked under the capacity of Senior Operation Executive/ Senior Accountant having thorough knowledge in Ocean Freight, Air Freight, Land Transport, Warehouse Operations and Finance & Accounting. NOC available. Contact 93587605

MECHANICAL engineer, 21, Indian male currently in Oman looking to work at any engineering field. Contact 96511338. Email: rkdhanush11@gmail.com

INDIAN male, 24, B.E. computer science, masters in GIS from UK. Seeking placement in GIS field. Having Oman driving licence. Contact: 99738614.

YOUNG experienced Pakistani driver with Omani light vehicle driving licence seeks suitable opening. Speaks Arabic, Hindi, English and familiar with interior and Muscat areas. Contact GSM 95856719.

THREE years experienced in administration / sales and marketing seeking placement. Omani D/L, and NOC available. Gsm- 98270993

SALES/Marketing/ retail executive BMS in Marketing. 6 years experience. Contact 93920174. Rehankadri91@hotmail.com

OMANI male, 17 years experience as driver. Looking for transporting job for nurses, office goers, sight seeing. Contact: 97947900.

SMART Indian, excellent English, Arabic speaker, 17 years Oman experience in Airport, Hospital, Media EPC seeks Admin/ Hr/ Project coordinator/ Operations. 99283938.

FINANCE Manager/ CFO. Indian Chartered Accountant and Cost Accountant with 25 years of experience in Trade Finance, MIS, Budget, Planning, Strategy, Projects, Procurement, Admin, seeks suitable placement. Contact. 99884291 / 99741875 Email vipul70@gmail.com

MANAGER Sales and Distribution seeks suitable placement. Sales Professional with 25 years' experience in Oman, includes 12 years in Sales Management, with LEADING FMCG, Consumer Durables Companies. Currently working with a leading group as Branch Manager for Retail and Distribution. Accountable for the total business and P&L. NOC available. 99369127.

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VILLA in Al Rumais, 4 bedrooms, RO 55,000. 99328880.

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FLAT in Muscat Grand Mall, 3 bedrooms, majlis, A/C and car park, RO 130,000. 99328880.

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Oman LNG to deliver region’s first carbon-neutral LNG cargo

FROM PAGE 17

The current energy landscape worldwide is ever-challenging requiring mutual and intense efforts to be taken by energy companies, and adopting the most efficient practices to remain reliable and agile suppliers to customers.

The agreement inked represents a long-time history and relations between Oman LNG and Shell. Shell is a leading supplier of carbon-neutral LNG after delivering the world’s first cargoes in 2019 and many more subsequently. This collaboration allows Oman LNG to tap into the knowledge and expertise of Shell while it translates Oman LNG’s bold commitment

towards knowledge sharing as well as exploring suitable mechanisms to reduce emissions. Natural gas is the cleanest-burning hydrocarbon, producing half the greenhouse gas emissions and less than one-tenth of the air pollutants of coal when used to generate electricity. Using nature-based offsets in conjunction with LNG provides a unique clean energy solution.

Walid Hadi, VP Oman and Shell Country Chair stated: “Shell is proud to partner with Oman LNG on its journey in support of the energy transition. As a shareholder and technical service provider we have been supporting O LNG to reduce its own GHG emissions from operations, and today’s announcements for the first



carbon-neutral LNG cargo from Oman further strengthens the deep partnership between O LNG and Shell.”

Environmental performance tops Oman LNG’s priorities since inception.

Lately, the company has initiated a number of projects to eliminate its carbon footprint such as the ongoing Power Project Plant at site. The move to introduce the gas engine power plant is to conserve natural gas and reduce emissions. Gas savings accumulated through this project are aimed at producing power for Oman LNG’s facility with less natural gas by optimising gas resources and therefore yielding less environmental emissions.

These efforts by the company complement the Sultanate’s Vision Oman 2040 which focuses on four main axes; one of which is themed “environment whose resources are sustainable”. This axis covers aspects of the environment performance

and natural resources, which puts significant emphasis on environmental perspective to be considered during the creation of policies, decisions making in industrial planning and implementation.

Oman LNG provides cleaner and efficient LNG to customers from which tangible value is reached for the Sultanate of Oman and its people through a wide swath of social investment programmes that addresses many economic and social needs, including avenues to generate In-Country Value and Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) development. The LNG industry in Oman has now grown to be the largest income earner for the Sultanate, after oil.

US Republicans oppose Yellen’s G7 tax deal, casting doubt on its future



US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen speaks during a news conference at Winfield House in London, Britain. – Reuters

WASHINGTON: Several top US Senate Republicans on Monday rejected Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen’s G7 deal to impose a global minimum corporate tax and allow more countries to tax big multinational firms, raising questions about the US ability to implement a broader global agreement.

The opposition from Republicans may push President Joe Biden to attempt to use budget procedures to pass the initiatives with only Democratic votes.

It left lawyers and tax experts in Washington wondering whether it could get done without crafting a new international treaty, which requires approval by a two-thirds majority in the evenly split 100-member Senate.

“It’s wrong for the United

States,” Republican Senator John Barrasso said of the tax deal struck on Saturday by finance ministers from the G7 wealthy democracies.

“I think it’s going to be anti-competitive, anti-US, harmful for us as we try to continue to grow the economy and certainly at a time when we’re coming out of a pandemic,” Barrasso, who chairs the Senate Republican Conference, told reporters at the US Capitol.

In the landmark agreement, G7 finance ministers agreed to pursue a global minimum tax rate of at least 15 per cent and to allow market countries to tax up to 20 per cent of the excess profits - above a 10 per cent margin - of around 100 large, high-profit companies.

Yellen said the “significant, unprecedented commitment”

would end what she called a race to the bottom on global taxation.

In exchange, G7 countries agreed to end digital services taxes, but the timing for that is dependent on the new rules being implemented.

The deal could pave the way for broader buy-in by G20 countries and some 140 economies participating in international negotiations over how to tax large technology firms such as Alphabet Inc’s Google, Facebook Inc, Amazon.com Inc and Apple Inc.

All are expected to be included in the new, broader mechanism, which is targeted for a final international agreement in October.

Republican Senator Pat Toomey said the deal would drain tax revenues away from the US

I think it’s going to be anti-competitive, anti-US, harmful for us as we try to continue to grow the economy and certainly at a time when we’re coming out of a pandemic

JOHN BARRASSO
Republican Senator

Treasury to other countries, adding that he hoped some Democrats would be unwilling “to subject the American economy to this kind of misery.” “There will be no Republican support for this, and they’ll have to do this on a party-line vote. That needs to fail,” Toomey said.

Daniel Bunn, an international tax expert at the Tax Foundation, a right-leaning think tank in Washington, said he believed that establishing new taxing rights on 100 multinational firms would require a new tax treaty.

The US Constitution gives the president the right to make international treaties “if two-thirds of Senators present concur.” US participation in some international treaties has been hampered by domestic partisan divides, in which a president approves the deals but they are not ratified by Congress.

Manal Corwin, head of KPMG’s Washington National Tax Practice and a former US Treasury official, said Yellen’s G7 deal could be done through legislation that overrides existing bilateral tax treaties — using a simple majority as part of budget reconciliation procedures.

— Reuters

World Bank slashes GDP growth forecasts for the Philippines

MANILA: The World Bank has slashed its Philippine growth projection for this year due to a deeper-than-expected contraction in the first quarter and the reimposition of stricter quarantine measures in the capital region to contain a surge in Covid-19 cases. While growth in the Philippines remains on track for recovery, the bounce back this year will likely be lower than previously expected at 4.7 per cent, Kevin Chua, World Bank senior economist, told a media briefing.

The World Bank’s forecast was cut from its previous projection of 5.5 per cent and compares with the Philippine government’s 2021 growth target of 6.0 per cent-7.0 per cent.

The economy contracted by a record 9.6 per cent last year. Chua flagged a host of “significant downside risks” to the World Bank’s outlook, including the resurgence of infections due to new Covid-19 variants and extended mobility restrictions.

The Southeast Asian country is battling one of Asia’s worst coronavirus outbreaks with more than 1.27 million cases recorded and nearly 22,000 deaths.

Philippine authorities are banking on a steadier flow of vaccine deliveries in the second half to ramp up its immunisation drive to allow a further reopening of the economy and more people to return to work.

The unemployment rate climbed to 8.7 per cent in April, equivalent to more than 4 million jobless people, from 7.1 per cent in March, government data showed.

The World Bank also lowered its growth forecast for the Philippines for next year and in 2023 to 5.9 per cent and 6.0 per cent, respectively, from the 6.3 per cent and 6.2 per cent estimates it announced in March.

“The key policy challenges are to manage the pandemic, effectively deliver social protection and mobilise sector participation in the recovery,” Chua said. — Reuters



A worker installs steel rods at a construction site in Manila. – Reuters

SHORT TAKES

BANGKOK

Thai industries sentiment hits 11-month low

Thailand’s industries sentiment dropped for a second straight month in May, hitting an 11-month low, due to a third wave of coronavirus infections and a slow vaccine rollout, an industries group said on Tuesday.

The Federation of Thai Industries (FTI) said its Thai industries sentiment index fell to 82.3 last month from 84.3 in April, when its biggest outbreak so far emerged.

“The third wave has yet resolved while new clusters



continue to emerge, especially in factories, affecting the manufacturing sector. Vaccinations have also been slow,” FTI chairman Supant Mongkolsuthree told a briefing.

— Reuters

TOKYO

Oil drops again on doubts over demand rebound

Oil prices extended their losses on Tuesday as concerns about the fragile state of the global recovery in demand for crude and fuels were heightened by data showing China’s oil imports fell in May.

Brent crude was down 49 cents, or 0.7 per cent, at \$71.00 a barrel by 0643 GMT, after declining 0.6 per cent overnight.

The United States oil was off by 44 cents, or 0.6 per cent, at \$68.79 a barrel, having dropped by 0.6 per cent in the previous



session.

“Chinese oil imports at a five-month low ... would tend to confirm weakness in the Asia market,” said Bob Yawger, director of energy futures at Mizhuo Securities. — Reuters

HONG KONG

Cathay given extension to draw down \$1 bn loan

Cathay Pacific Airways Ltd said on Tuesday that the Hong Kong government had agreed to extend the drawdown period for a HK\$7.8 billion (\$1.01 billion) loan facility by a year to June 2022, giving it more flexibility to manage liquidity.

The bridge loan was part of a \$5 billion rescue package led by the Hong Kong government and Cathay’s major shareholders Swire Pacific Ltd and Air China Ltd last year to help the airline weather the Covid-19 crisis.



Cathay CEO Augustus Tang said the airline had not yet drawn down on the loan as it adopted a suite of measures to save cash, but the extension would give it more flexibility to manage its liquidity position. — Reuters