

Sultanate reports 2,126 Covid cases

The Ministry of Health on Tuesday reported three Covid-related black fungus cases in the Sultanate for the first time as the Sultanate recorded the highest daily cases of Covid-19, which stood at 2,126 and 33 deaths, bringing the total number of cases registered in the country to 238,566, and 2,565 deaths. The recovery rate continued to decline to reach 89 per cent, with 212,064 total recoveries. **DETAILS ON P3**



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OMAN OBSERVER

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SWEDEN HOLD
DOMINANT
SPAIN



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EU, US SET TO UNVEIL
TRUCE IN 17-YEAR
AIRCRAFT BATTLE



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TWITTER ADDS 'ARABIC
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IN DIVERSITY DRIVE



HM BLESSES
THE LAUNCH
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HM PRESIDES OVER CABINET MEETING

TOP PRIORITY TO PROVIDE
JOBS FOR YOUTH

HM GIVES
DIRECTIVES TO
EMPOWER NEP
TO ACHIEVE
ITS GOALS



ISSUE OF
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GOVERNMENT'S
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ATTENTION TO
DEVELOP
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AND UPGRADE
THE QUALITY
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COMMENDS
INITIATIVES
TO PROVIDE
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APPRECIATES
THE EFFORTS
MADE TO
TACKLE THE
PANDEMIC

NEP ANALYSES
JOB-SEEKERS
DATA ON
A REGULAR
BASIS

STRESSES THE
SIGNIFICANCE
OF NATIONAL
IMMUNISATION
CAMPAIGN

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday presided over a meeting of the Council of Ministers at the Cabinet's premises in Muscat.

At the outset of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan gave thanks and praise to the Almighty Allah for the bounties He has bestowed on Oman and its noble people. He prayed that these bounties be eternalised for all people in Oman

and that the coronavirus pandemic be lifted from all humanity.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan reviewed local and regional conditions.

He said that the issue of employment of Omani job-seekers tops the government's priorities, and he underscored the significance of exerting maximum efforts to help the unemployed find jobs or professions across different sectors.

In this context, His Majesty the Sultan laid emphasis on the integration of efforts of state departments, exhorting them to cooperate towards realising concrete results and enabling youth to contribute to the march of development and nation building.

His Majesty the Sultan commended the package of initiatives unveiled recently to provide employment opportunities

for job-seekers. His Majesty the Sultan blessed the launch of the National Employment Programme (NEP), which stems from Oman Vision-2040, as it is accorded continuous attention.

The NEP targets the development of sustainable solutions for the issue of employment in all of state sectors (civil, military and security), as well as private sector companies.

TURN TO P2





HM PRESIDES OVER COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING

FROM PAGE 1

The NEP analyses job-seekers data on a regular basis till they join the labour market. It also seeks other options to fill the gap of knowledge and skills needed by the labour market so that the unemployed immediately get jobs when they are available.

The NEP is carried out in accordance with a specific executive plan and time-frame linked to performance indicators that are monitored on a regular basis to ensure the attainment of the desired goals.

His Majesty the Sultan gave directives to the departments concerned to empower the National Employment Programme and provide all means of support to the NEP so that it could achieve its objectives.

QUALITY EDUCATION

Within the context of His Majesty's Royal attention to develop education, upgrade the quality of school education and adapt its outcomes to labour market needs in accordance with Oman Vision-2040, His Majesty the Sultan underlined the importance of accelerating procedures necessary for analysing the requirements of technical and vocational education for the post-basic education stage to suit the labour market needs.

His Majesty the Sultan stressed the importance of devising a comprehensive plan to realise this objective and determine the expertise and human resources required to achieve it.

His Majesty the Sultan pointed out that the next stage requires

the collaboration of efforts of all state institutions towards rendering top quality services and eliminating any obstacles that might impede the march of comprehensive development. This involves the formulation of a new, efficient mechanism of action to ensure the smooth operation of all sectors, to refine and accelerate output, His Majesty said.

IMMUNISATION CAMPAIGN

His Majesty the Sultan also commended the efforts made to tackle coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. He thanked all health workers and expressed his appreciation for their valuable contribution to curb the pandemic.

His Majesty the Sultan also stressed the significance of pressing ahead with the national immunisation campaign and the importance of raising the awareness of citizens and residents about commitment to adhere to measures set by the departments concerned in this respect.

Speaking about regional issues, His Majesty the Sultan laid emphasis on the continuation of the GCC economic cooperation programmes. He also reaffirmed the Sultanate's permanent stands and principles advocating rapprochement among countries to achieve security and establish stability for all. His Majesty also spoke about other issues of concern to citizens and the country.

At the conclusion, His Majesty the Sultan wished success for all.

— ONA





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BLACK FUNGUS
cases reported
in the Sultanate

Over 2,000 new cases, 33 deaths in one day

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The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Tuesday reported three Covid-related black fungus in the Sultanate for the first time.

Black fungus, also known as Mucormycosis, is a rare but dangerous infection. It is caused by getting into contact with fungus spores in the environment.

"The black fungus is not a virus and there can be many guesses about the causes of infection for the three announced cases," Dr Zakariya al Balushi, Consultant of Infectious Diseases, explained.

He said, "The cases must be studied before any conclusion because this kind of fungus affects certain people and in certain circumstances," confirming that there is no need to panic.

He advised not to spread rumours and that people should continue taking vaccinations and not pay attention to malicious rumours.

On Tuesday, the ministry



also announced the highest daily cases of Covid-19, which stood up at 2,126 and 33 deaths, bringing the total number of cases registered in the Sultanate to 238,566, and 2,565 deaths.

The recovery rate continued to decline to reach 89 per cent, with 212,064 total recoveries. One hundred sixty-four Covid-19 patients were admitted to hospitals across the country, bringing the total number of inpatients to 1,247, including 374 in intensive care units.

The ministry clarified that 10,000 samples arrive daily to the ministry's laboratories, 26 per cent of which are positive.

As the cases continue

to escalate, the ministry called upon all to adhere to precautionary measures, wear masks, wash hands constantly with water and soap, and use sanitisers.

On Sunday, the Sultanate announced the detection of laboratory-confirmed cases of the fast-spreading mutant, known as "Delta", after Bahrain, which detected the mutated virus on May 2.

Kuwait also announced on Monday infections with the mutant in the country.

Dr Said bin Mohammad al Toubi, medical laboratory specialist, said the surge in cases had been observed globally, and he attributed this increase to "the spread of mutated strains, including the Indian, which has a rapid spread."

Late last month, the World Health Organization said that the mutated "Delta" strain of the coronavirus had reached more than 60 countries worldwide and is 60 per cent more contagious than the British one, warning of the expansion of its spread.

Vaccination picking up in Dhofar

STAFF REPORTER
SALALAH, JUN 15

The national vaccination campaign in Dhofar Governorate is picking up at various immunisation centres in the state.

The Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah stood out in the vaccination programme due to its capabilities and response.

A large number of health, medical and technical services have been put into service that led to the largest percentage of the target population turning up for vaccination.

Mohammed bin Saeed al Shahri, Head of the Infectious Diseases Department at the General-Directorate of Health Services in the Governorate of Dhofar and the field supervisor of the immunisation campaign at the Complex, explained that the immunisation process in the complex has facilities both for



men and women.

"After receiving the vaccine, the vaccinated people are directed to places designated to wait for a period of not more than 15 minutes to ensure that no side effects occur after soon after the vaccination," he said.

Those who receive the vaccine get all possible information about the vaccination, its process, symptoms, any other queries that they have.

The head of the Infectious

Diseases Department in Dhofar Health Department confirmed the safety and efficacy of the vaccines.

"A team of 20 people — 10 each in men and women sections — is engaged in the vaccination campaign at the Complex," he said.

Al Shahri said the Complex is keeping the facility for 2,000 people per day. This is done for the twin purposes of covering maximum people and avoid crowding at one place.

Oman, Iran review ties, cooperation

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received Ali Asghar Khaji, Senior Adviser to the Iranian Foreign Minister for Special Political Affairs, here on Tuesday.

The two sides affirmed the friendship relations between the two countries and their determination to continue bilateral cooperation and partnership in various fields.

On the political side, the two sides exchanged opinions and points of view on a number of regional and international issues of common concern.

The meeting was attended by Saud bin Ahmed al Barwani, Head of the GCC Department and Ali



Najafi, Ambassador of Iran to the Sultanate and a number official.

TALKS SESSION

An official session of talks was held at the Foreign Ministry here on Tuesday between the Sultanate and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Omani side was headed by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy,

Under-Secretary for Diplomatic Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, while the Iranian side was chaired by Ali Asghar Khaji, Senior Adviser to the Iranian Foreign Minister. The talks reviewed aspects of cooperation between the two friendly countries and stressed keenness on enhancing them on different areas. — ONA



Arab FM's discuss Palestinian cause

DOHA: The Sultanate took part in the consultative meeting of the Arab foreign ministers, which was held in the Qatari Capital, Doha, on Tuesday.

The Sultanate was represented in the meeting by Mohammed bin Nasser al Wahaibi, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Administrative and Financial

Affairs.

The meeting discussed several issues of common concern, most importantly the Palestinian cause and its developments. — ONA

دليل النفط ش.م.م.
DALEEL PETROLEUM L.L.C.

AUCTION ANNOUNCEMENT

Daleel Petroleum LLC would like to announce an open invitation to the general public to participate in a sealed auction described in the table below.

Auction No.	Subject	Location	Site Visit Date	Bid Closing Date	Bank Guarantee Amount
PRCR-21-147	Scrap Steel Materials	Daleel Field	19 th June 2021 to 23 rd June 2021	24 th June 2021	OMR 5,000
PRCR-21-147	Used Forklifts	Daleel Field	19 th June 2021 to 23 rd June 2021	24 th June 2021	OMR 300
PRCR-21-147	Surplus Material in Good condition	Daleel Field	19 th June 2021 to 23 rd June 2021	24 th June 2021	Free of cost

- Interested bidders or individual who would like to view and inspect the scrap "As it is - Where it is" at Daleel field, must coordinate with Field Service Support Supervisor before 24 hours prior to going to the field (92726844 / 25218644 / 92051081).
- Auction documents can be obtained from the reception at Daleel Head office during office hours. Interested bidders or individuals must submit their bids in a closed envelope sealed and addressed to "Supply Chain Senior Manager" at Daleel Petroleum LLC. The Auction number and Subject shall be written on the envelope with nothing that might indicate the identity of the tenderer. Auction submission will be at Daleel Petroleum reception during working hours.
- Interested bidders or individuals shall submit a bid bond or certified cheque (dual signatory) for each category separately equal to the amount stated in the table above addressed to "Daleel Petroleum LLC" along with the purchase form valid for 120 days. This is refundable amount and shall be returned to the non-successful bidders after bid evaluation.
- The successful bidder shall pay full bid amount for the awarded category within ten (10) working days from the date of notification of award. In the event that awarded bidder fails to pay the outstanding amounts within the specified period, the bidder shall be disqualified and the guarantee provided as part of the bid will be forfeited.
- The successful bidder is responsible to follow Daleel's instruction & QHSE procedure and to provide all the necessary arrangement for loading and transporting all material on this Tender from Daleel field yard to outside Daleel concession area.
- The successful bidder shall have a maximum of sixty (60) calendar days from notification date to make the necessary arrangement to collect the material and transport it outside Daleel concession area. Failing to do so will result in paying penalty charges of 50 OMR for each day of delay beyond the above period.
- Value Added Tax (VAT) shall be excluded from Bidder's Commercial Proposal.
- Bidders or individuals wishing to inspect the materials must abide by the decisions of the Supreme Committee in charge of dealing with the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19).
- For any further details regarding the auction, please contact Jasim Al Masroori: 24995421 / 99236145

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Manufacturing of PPE (personal protective equipment) kits picked up in a big way in the past 14 months after the spread of coronavirus. The kits, being used by many people in different professions today, were used exclusively by medical professionals pre-Corona.

“Until the pandemic, PPEs were largely restricted to the medical and industrial sector. Covid-19 has brought them to the mainstream”, says Saju George, MD, Al Farsi National Enterprises LLC, a leading Omani manufacturer and supplier of medical equipment to government and private hospitals. The unit is based in Al Misfah Industrial Area.

During the early days of the pandemic, there was over ten-fold increase (1000 per cent) in PPE demand. Currently, the demand has stabilised, but it is still well above the pre-pandemic levels. And the competition, it’s getting even fiercer by the day as players try to undercut their opponent with products imported straight from the place of production.

“Industrial units which are

PPE DEMAND GOES BEYOND EXPECTATION

making PPE have witnessed a leap in business over the past one year”, says Mohammed Aneise, MD of Med Life.

The need for PPE products at all hospitals, clinics, polyclinic and medical colleges, and nursing institutes has jumped manifold.

“We used to manage our PPE requirement from the local market, but with the Covid-19, we started importing as our consumption went up several times”, a representative of Oman Dental College said.

The biggest in-demand item is medical-grade surgical face masks such as Viral Filtration Efficiency (VFE)

UNTIL THE PANDEMIC, PPEs WERE LARGELY RESTRICTED TO THE MEDICAL AND INDUSTRIAL SECTOR. COVID-19 HAS BROUGHT THEM TO THE MAINSTREAM

rated product like Trusta and hospital-grade hand sanitisers, Sterillium for instance. In addition, customers are also demanding surface disinfection products such as wipes and surface sprays for use in home and offices. N-95 respirators, coveralls, surface disinfectants and face shields continue to be in demand in the front-line healthcare sector and people seeking out during air travel.

“However, the hand sanitiser sector could sustain the growth in business while other products have been more or less replaced with cheaper, imported products while demand for the same is

saturated to a great extent”, he adds.

Surgical Masks that were confined to the labs, operation theatres and post-operation wards of hospitals touched a RO 10 for a box of 50 pieces during the peak Corona days.

However, they fell back to an all-time low of 500 baisa per box as production and supply increased, and imports too went high.

“We started producing both surgical masks and N-95 masks in 2020, which saw great demand from both local as well as international markets”, says Saju.

CHALLENGES:

The biggest challenge from a customer point of view is the quality of the PPE used. The market is awash with cheap products of questionable quality. It is essential to recognise that style and affordable pricing does not come at the expense of protection.

“One should always check for the quality certifications such as Viral Filtration Efficiency (VFE), Particulate Filtration Efficiency (PFE), Bacterial Filtration Efficiency (BFE) and Fluid Resistance, adds Saju.





Over 11,000 divorced women

Half are under 45 years

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In 2020, the government spent RO 10,554,262 for 11,010 divorced women, representing 11 per cent of the total amount disbursed for the social security categories.

Divorced women represent 15 per cent of the total cases. Statistics show that more than 6,000 cases of divorced women under the umbrella of social security are under 45.

These details came in a

discussion on 'Enhancing family cohesion inside the Omani society' held by the Services and Social Development Committee of Majlis Ash'shura on Tuesday.

The meeting hosted Rashid bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development, and Adnan bin Mustafa al Farsi, Director of the Technical Secretariat of the National Family Committee.

The meeting looked into divorce as one of the social problems that need more attention and more awareness

efforts because of its clear impact on the cohesion of society.

The meeting emphasised the original role of the family in addressing many societal problems through its responsibility in education, follow-up of the children, and sensing their emotional needs at each age stage in a way that enhances the cohesion of the family, and forms a protection fence for the children in front of the many influences surrounding them.

The attendees also agreed that various external factors have started affecting the society, and contributing to the exacerbation of family problems and creation of negative societal behaviours, including impact of open spaces and virtual worlds, as well as dramas that emotionally affected the family and indirectly promoted many social phenomena and disturbing behaviours. Therefore, a family must follow up on all these influences to avoid their risks to the individual and society.

Sultanate participates in FAO conference

MUSCAT: The Sultanate took part in the 42nd session of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) virtual conference, held during 14-18 June.

Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, chaired the Sultanate's delegation.

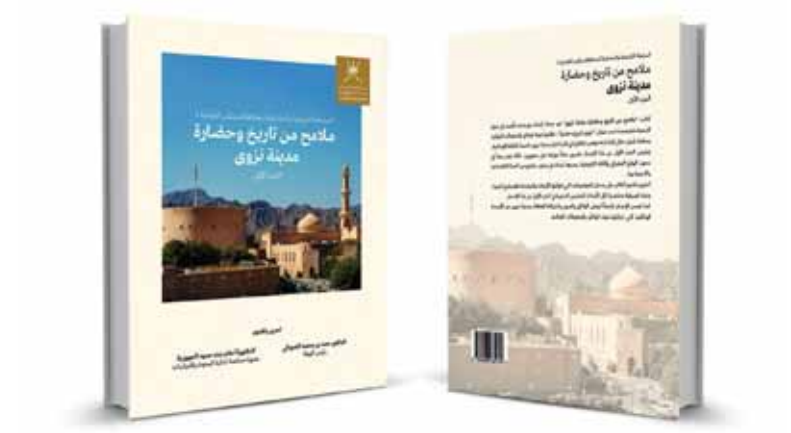
During the conference, Dr Saud previewed the crucial role of

sustainable agricultural and food systems, and utilising innovation to combat hunger and climate change.

The conference discusses the state of food and agriculture: "Agriculture Food Systems Transformation: From Strategy to Action". It also touches on other subjective, managerial, legal and financial matters.

— ONA

NRAA releases book on Nizwa civilisation



MUSCAT: The National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) has released part 1 of a book titled *Nizwa City, Aspects of History and Civilisation*. It is part of volume 1 of the historical and civilisational series of Oman's governorates and cities.

The book sheds light on the vital role of Nizwa city in cultural interaction. It also

elaborates on the city's historical status, as well as its economic, social, cultural and intellectual contributions.

The 371-page book includes 20 research papers scattered among the themes of "Geographic Location and Historical Status" and "Aspects of the Economic and Social life".

— ONA



Upgrade program extends the date of registration

MUSCAT: The registration for the 5th edition of the Upgrade program, a program that transforms the best graduation projects in the 4th Industrial Revolution technologies into successful ICT start-ups to bring socio-economic benefit to Oman, has extended to August 5, 2021.

Upgrade is a competition-based program in which the winners will be assisted to transform their graduation projects into start-ups in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector on topics such as Smart Cities, Internet of Things, Information Security, Artificial Intelligence, Big Data and Blockchain.

The registration for the program has opened on May 23 and will end on August 5. The participating projects will then be sorted and filtered by a

jury consisting of the program partners through three stages of evaluation to choose the best three winning projects.

The process of incubating and developing the winning projects will start after choosing the three winning projects. The winning teams will be provided with incubation services, business and marketing consultation, networking and mentoring opportunities, as well as educational awareness programs that include a group of workshops and lectures in various universities and colleges in the Sultanate.

Upgrade is a collaborative partnership between the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, which is concerned with management and regulation, Omantel, which is concerned with seed funding and program financing, Oman Technology Fund (OTF), which

is concerned with training and investment preparations, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, which is concerned with professional and leadership development, Sas Center for Entrepreneurship of the Ministry of Technology and Communications, which is concerned with the incubation services, and the Authority for SME Development, which is concerned with providing commercial, financial and marketing guidance to the winning teams.

Upgrade program has previously succeeded during the previous years in transforming twelve student graduation projects into start-ups, providing opportunities for self-employment with continued financial support and commercial and marketing guidance that will benefit the winners of the program.

Outward Bound Oman introduces 'Family Course'

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

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Coinciding with Father's Day, Outward Bound Oman is introducing a Family Course — a three-day experience filled with expeditions and activities aimed exclusively at fathers and their children.

Outward Bound Oman has regularly been training youth as well corporate members, but there had been requests from families and this year's Father's Day, which is celebrated on June 20, will see the launch of a three-day course for fathers and their children maintaining all protocols of Covid-19.

"This is a new type of course for us here at Outward Bound Oman, but it has been very successful for Outward Bound Brazil. The concept of Outward Bound Oman is taking people into the outdoors to give them the experience to unlock their potential," said Anisa al Raisi, Head of Corporate Training at Outward Bound Oman.

The focus has always been on getting individuals out of their comfort zone, being with people you are not familiar with or being in the environment or being on expeditions which you are not comfortable with and so on.

"When you are stretched out,



you can accomplish more — to accomplish more than you think you are capable of. So this is a real opportunity planned out for Father's Day. It is an opportunity for families to bond.

The course is exclusively for fathers and their sons or daughters. The age group we are looking for is between 11 to 14-year-olds. In the future, it will be open for moms and their children and offer it to different age groups," Anisa explained.

The three-day planner starting from Friday to Sunday is filled with activities while camping in Jabal Al Akhdhar, which continues to enjoy cool temperatures through the summer.

"The three-day focus will be on strengthening the family bond and values within the family. Just like in the corporate world, values are important. Sometimes it is not talked about, and sometimes, parents expect children to live

up to their expectations and live with the values of the family. So building the communication and allowing them to be resilient together as a family unit through an expedition, navigation, etc is what it is going to be about," she pointed out.

Navigation will be trained using the sun, stars, GPS, maps and compass, and learning outdoor skills by asking, 'how can we do better, especially as a team?'

"The instructors are super excited," she noted.

In addition to the environmental factor, the instructors are hoping to see a switch of roles as parents who usually control situations. At the same time, especially outdoors where there could be a bit of risk involved is expected to develop trust in their children and see their development in these three days.

Five Afghan polio vaccinators shot dead



An Afghan man cries for his brother who was one of polio vaccination health workers shot and killed by unknown gunmen at separate locations in Jalalabad on Tuesday. — Reuters

JALALABAD: At least five polio workers were shot dead in eastern Afghanistan on Tuesday, officials said, in the latest attack on vaccinators in one of the last places on earth where the disease still exists.

The workers were gunned down in three separate locations within hours in a “coordinated attack”, Nangarhar provincial police spokesman Farid Khan said.

“This is the work of the Taliban, targeting health workers to deprive people of polio vaccines,” he said.

Health ministry spokesman Osman Taheri confirmed the attacks. The Taliban denied responsibility.

Polio has been eradicated across the world apart from Afghanistan and neighbouring Pakistan, where distrust of vaccines and eradication campaigns is rife.

The Taliban and religious leaders often tell communities that vaccines are a Western conspiracy aimed at sterilising children, and they also suspect immunisation drives are used to spy on militant activities.

Officials say the Taliban do not allow door-to-door vaccination campaigns in areas they control.

Tuesday saw five vaccine workers killed and one wounded in a spate of attacks across Nangarhar, the local government said. Three were also wounded in the provincial capital, Jalalabad.

The inoculation drive in the province had now been halted, a health official said.

“These were all targeted attacks against polio vaccinators, and for now we have stopped all polio vaccination drives in Nangarhar province,” the official said, asking not to be named. — AFP

Bodies wash up on Yemen coast after boat mishap

DUBAI: A number of bodies washed up at Ras al Arah on Yemen’s Red Sea coast on Monday from a suspected migrant boat that sank offshore, a local official said.

The stretch of coast is notorious for the smuggling of migrants from the Horn of Africa into Yemen.

Residents in Ras al Arah said bodies had washed up at dawn on Monday. A boat sank around 18 nautical miles off the coast of al-Mokha, the local official said.

The perilous sea journey from Horn of Africa countries including Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Djibouti, is part of a long-standing migration route to take people north through Yemen into the Gulf states for work.

“IOM is verifying reports that a vessel carrying a large number

of migrants from the Horn of Africa has sunk off the coast of Yemen,” the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), a United Nations agency, said on Twitter.

“IOM teams are on the ground and ready to respond to the needs of any survivors.”

Drownings on the route, run by people smugglers, are commonplace.

With Covid-19 and security restrictions blocking routes into Gulf states, some migrants are even making the return journey back to the Horn of Africa out of Yemen.

Yemen has been mired in violence since a Saudi-led coalition intervened against the Ansar Allah in 2015, with 80 per cent of Yemen’s population needing aid. — Reuters

Arab states call on UN Security Council to meet over Ethiopia dam

CAIRO/DUBAI: Arab states whose foreign ministers met in Qatar on Tuesday have called on the United Nations Security Council to discuss the dispute over Ethiopia’s plan to fill a dam built on the Blue Nile, Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit said.

The Arab League may also take “gradual measures” to support Egypt and Sudan in the dispute over the Grand Renaissance dam, Qatari Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani told a joint news conference with Aboul Gheit. No more details were given.

Meanwhile Sudan will only be willing to strike an interim deal with Ethiopia over its controversial Nile dam on conditions including an assurance of further talks, the water minister said on Monday.

Downstream Egypt and Sudan have been pushing upstream Ethiopia to ink a binding deal over the filling and operation of its massive dam on the Blue Nile that broke ground in 2011.

“Given the time constraints, Sudan will accept an interim agreement based on certain conditions which include signing on all the terms that have been already agreed,” Water Minister Yasser Abbas told reporters in Khartoum.

“There should also be guarantees that negotiations will continue ... and that those talks will be held within a defined timeframe.”



Grand Renaissance Dam. — Reuters file photo

The minister said the three countries had already “reached consensus” over most technical matters but failed to reach a binding deal.

There had been “no development” in talks since African Union (AU) sponsored negotiations in Kinshasa in April.

Addis Ababa, which said it reached its first target of filling the dam last year, has announced it will proceed in July with or without a deal. Egypt, which depends on

the Nile for about 97 per cent of its irrigation and drinking water, sees the dam as an existential threat.

Sudan hopes the project will regulate annual flooding, but fears its own dams would be harmed without agreement on its operation.

Dozens of Sudanese protesters gathered outside the Italian embassy in Khartoum on Monday to protest the role of Italian contracting giant Salini Impregilo in the dam’s construction.

“We want to voice our rejection of the company’s role especially as there are not enough studies on the structure’s safety,” protester Walid Ali said.

“If Ethiopia goes ahead with the second stage of filling, it will be catastrophic,” Ali said.

Last week, foreign and water ministers from Egypt and Sudan agreed at a meeting in Khartoum to “coordinate efforts... to push Ethiopia to seriously negotiate a deal”. — Agencies

Libya’s Benghazi hosts rare ‘week of culture’

BENGHAZI: Libya’s eastern city of Benghazi is hosting a rare “week of culture” featuring art, music and theatre, as the country attempts to turn the page on a decade of violence.

“It’s an honour to have an exhibition for the first time in Benghazi,” said Elham el-Ferjani, an artist who travelled from the capital Tripoli in the country’s west specially for the event.

Benghazi was the first city to rise up against longtime dictator Moamer Kadhafi in 2011 in a Nato-backed revolt.

The situation deteriorated into a complex war involving Libyan armed groups, foreign mercenaries and foreign powers, and an ensuing political crisis saw the oil-rich country split in recent years between rival authorities in the east and west.

An October truce set in



Artists perform during a rare cultural event in Benghazi on Monday. — AFP

motion a UN-sponsored process that led to the creation of an interim government tasked with preparing the country for elections this December and

unifying its institutions.

Ferjani, whose work is inspired by Libyan desert rock art, Amazigh (Berber) culture and the North African country’s

decade of conflict, is displaying her paintings at the Barah cultural centre in the heart of Libya’s ancient second city.

The opportunity to meet with artists who have travelled from all over the country was “a source of joy”, said Ferjani, whose show kicked off the week’s events.

Other activities include workshops on glass painting, photography and sculpture, as well as roundtables and conferences, said organiser Hazem el-Ferjani, who is not related to the artist.

The aim of the cultural week, which runs until Saturday, was “to revive the artistic and cultural life of Benghazi”, a city long associated with violence, he said.

The programme also features debates on Libyan cinema, a concert of Arab-Andalusian music and a play performed by a Libyan theatre troop. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TUNIS

Tunisia court orders release of Karoui

Tunisia’s Court of Cassation on Tuesday decided to release media mogul and former presidential candidate Nabil Karoui after he spent months in preventive detention, his lawyer said. Nazih Souii said the court appeared to have considered that Karoui, leader of the liberal Qalb Tounes party, had been held in custody for longer than the maximum six-month period.

He said the 57-year-old had not yet left prison. Karoui is a business and media mogul



whose party came second in the October 2019 parliamentary election and allied itself with the Ennahdha party. President Kais Saied has accused the two parties of corruption.

DOHA

Egypt’s minister meets Qatar Emir

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry (pictured) met Qatari Emir Tamim bin Hamad al Thani on Tuesday in Doha, in the diplomat’s first visit to the Gulf country since a regional rift erupted in 2017. Shoukry was carrying a message from Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el Sisi to Tamim, Foreign Ministry spokesman Ahmed Hafez said.

The letter focused on bilateral relations and ways to strengthen and develop them as well as prominent regional and interna-



tional developments, according to the Qatari news agency. Shoukry arrived in Doha on Monday and held a meeting with his Qatari counterpart Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani.

BAKU

Erdogan visits symbolic Karabakh city

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Tuesday was visiting the symbolic town of Shusha that was recaptured by his country’s close ally Azerbaijan during a war last year with Armenia for the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Turkey was a key backer of Azerbaijan during the conflict, which erupted in September and ended with a Russian-brokered ceasefire after six weeks of fighting and some 6,000 deaths.



The truce saw Armenia cede territories it had controlled for decades, including Shusha, which both Armenians and Azerbaijanis claim as a cradle of their culture.

In brief

■ NEW DELHI



INDIA DROPS CASE AGAINST ITALIAN MARINES

India's top court on Tuesday dropped long-running proceedings against two Italian marines who shot dead two fishermen off Kerala in 2012, but said that the soldiers should now be tried in their own country.

Salvatore Gironi and Massimiliano Latorre killed the unarmed fishermen off the southern Indian coast in February 2012 while protecting an Italian oil tanker as part of an anti-piracy mission.

After a legal saga that has dogged relations between Rome and New Delhi for almost a decade, India in April accepted a compensation offer of Rs 100 million (\$1.4 million).

■ COLOMBO



LANKA ARRESTS CAPTAIN OVER SHIP FIRE

The Russian skipper of a container ship that caught fire and burned for almost two weeks before sinking off Sri Lanka's coast has been arrested and is expected to be charged with marine pollution, police said on Monday. The island nation is seeking \$40 million in damages from the operators of the ship, which released tonnes of plastic raw materials that swamped local beaches in what officials called the "worst marine disaster" in the country's history.

Vitaly Tyutkalo, the captain of the Singapore-registered *MV X-Press Pearl*, was arrested at his hotel in the capital Colombo on Monday and faced the High Court before being released on bail.

■ BANGKOK



THAI PM SORRY FOR VACCINATION DELAYS

Thailand's prime minister apologised and took the blame on Tuesday for coronavirus vaccination delays, while thousands of private companies and public organisations raced to secure doses imported by a royal-backed academy.

Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha said holdups were caused by supply and distribution issues, after some hospitals in Bangkok were forced to postpone scheduled inoculations this week.

"I apologise for the problem and would like to take full responsibility for solving it," Prayuth told reporters.

"We will try to manage this better going forward."

Philippines won't cooperate with ICC probe into war on drugs

The investigation will cover the period of July 2016 to March 2019 when at least 20,000 killings were committed in connection with the anti-narcotics campaign

MANILA: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte will not cooperate with an investigation into the country's bloody war on drugs planned by the International Criminal Court (ICC), his spokesperson said on Tuesday while defending the administration's record on human rights.

Rights groups and critics of the drug killings have welcomed the step by the ICC, saying a full-scale investigation will bring justice closer for the families of thousands of people killed.

Despite concerns from the international community about the crackdown on drugs, Duterte remains popular at home and many Filipinos back his tough stance on crime.



Normita Lopez, 56, is photographed while holding a portrait of her son Djustin Lopez, in a church nearby her home in Manila on Tuesday. Lopez, whose son was a victim of the Philippines' bloody narcotics campaign, is among the many International Criminal Court (ICC) complainants calling for President Rodrigo Duterte's international indictment over thousands of alleged extrajudicial killings. — Reuters

"We will not cooperate because we are no longer a member," the president's spokesperson Harry Roque told a news conference.

Duterte cancelled the Philippines' membership of the ICC's founding treaty in March 2018, although, under its statute, the ICC has jurisdiction for crimes committed while a country was a

member until a year after it sought to withdraw.

"We do not need foreigners to investigate killings in the drug war because the legal system is working in the Philippines," Roque said, adding he believed launching a formal probe was "legally erroneous and politically motivated."

An ICC prosecutor sought authorisation on Monday to open a full investigation into the killings, saying crimes against humanity could have been committed.

"There is a reasonable basis to believe that the alleged conduct was committed as part of a widespread and systematic attack directed against a civilian population

pursuant to or in furtherance of a state policy," ICC chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda said in a report.

The investigation will cover the period of July 2016 to March 2019 when at least 20,000 killings were committed in connection with the anti-narcotics campaign.

Since Duterte took office in 2016 until the end of April this year, police have killed more than 6,100 suspected drug dealers in sting operations, government data show.

"The long arm of the law will soon catch up with Duterte and his accomplices," former opposition senator Antonio Trillanes said in a statement.

The International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines said in a statement: "The perpetrators and architects of these crimes must be held to account."

The foreign ministry in Manila said the Philippines adhered to norms on human rights and had a "long track record of constructive engagement with international and regional partners."

Roque said police used appropriate force and there was "no intention to target and kill civilians." — Reuters

China ready to launch first crew to new space station

BEIJING: The first crew for China's new space station prepared to blast off this week for the latest step in Beijing's ambitious programme to establish itself as a space power.

The mission is China's first crewed spaceflight in nearly five years, and a matter of prestige for the government as it prepares to mark the 100th birthday of the ruling Communist Party on July 1 with a propaganda blitz.

A Long March-2F rocket carrying three astronauts in the Shenzhou-12 spacecraft is slated to lift off from a base in northwest China's Gobi desert on Thursday, according to experts with knowledge of the matter.



The Long March-2F Y12 rocket carrying the Shenzhou-12 spacecraft is transferred to the launch pad at Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in Gansu province. — Reuters

They plan to spend three months on the Tiangong station, China's longest crewed space mission to date, with spacewalks among their tasks.

The astronauts will aim to "get their new home in space kitted out and ready to use," said Jonathan McDowell, an astronomer at the Harvard Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics.

"It's a practical goal rather than a groundbreaking one."

The Long March rocket, with the Shenzhou craft attached, was moved to the launch pad at the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center last week, according to the Chinese space agency. — AFP

China says radiation levels normal around Taishan reactor

BEIJING: China said on Tuesday that radiation levels around the Taishan nuclear project in the southeastern province of Guangdong remained normal, following media reports of a leak at one of its reactors.

French utility EDF, one of the project's owners, said on Monday that it was investigating media reports that abnormal levels of radioactive gas had leaked from the plant.

CNN had reported that Framatome, the EDF unit that designed Taishan's reactors, was warning of an "imminent radiological threat" at the project following a build-up of krypton and xenon.

Zhao Lijian, a spokesman for

China's foreign ministry, told a news briefing that the plant was fully compliant with all requirements and there were no signs of abnormalities in its vicinity.

"So far China's nuclear power plants have maintained a good operating record, with no incidents affecting the environment and public health," Zhao said.

EDF said on Monday that the problem at the plant could have been caused by fuel rods supplied by Framatome.

"Under normal operating conditions it is true some gases like krypton and xenon will escape and be detected but in this case the concentrations are much higher, so something is happening," said

Tatsujiro Suzuki, a former vice-chairman of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission.

"Once radioactive gas is leaking to the environment it is a serious issue. It could get worse. I think there could be problems with the fuel. It is unusual."

The Taishan project, completed in 2019, consists of two French-designed reactors, and is located around 200 km (124 miles) from Hong Kong.

Earlier, Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam told reporters that the Hong Kong Observatory and the Water Supplies Department have been monitoring radiation levels and have so far not detected anything abnormal. — Reuters

Australia releases Tamil asylum-seeking family



Tharunicaa (right) was medically evacuated to the Australian mainland last week.

BRISBANE: Australia's conservative government bowed to public pressure and announced the release of a Tamil asylum-seeking family from island detention on Tuesday, after the youngest daughter fell ill.

The Murugappan family of four have been held at the remote Christmas Island immigration detention centre since August 2019, as they fight deportation to Sri Lanka.

The family's neighbours in the small, rural Queensland town of Biloela have been waging a vocal campaign for them to remain in Australia, giving their case national prominence.

Amid growing support for their case, Priya and Nades Murugappan along with their Australian-born daughters Kopika and Tharunicaa will now be allowed to live temporarily in Perth, Western Australia.

It comes after four-year-old Tharunicaa was airlifted to a hospital in Perth last week to receive treatment for a blood infection.

Immigration Minister Alex Hawke announced on Monday

the family would stay in Perth while they exhaust their legal options, as the government faced a backlash within its own political ranks over its handling of the case.

"In making this determination I am balancing the government's ongoing commitment to strong border protection policies with appropriate compassion in circumstances involving children in detention," he said in a statement.

Australia's hardline immigration stance prohibits anyone who arrives by boat — as the Murugappans did separately in 2012 and 2013 — from staying in the country permanently, and the couple have not been accepted as refugees.

Their lawyer, Carina Ford, said the family was "relieved" at being reunited and leaving detention after more than three years, both on Christmas Island and in Melbourne.

The "Home to Bilo" campaign welcomed Monday's decision, saying it was "the first important step in getting them home" to the Biloela community. — AFP

Trump tried to enlist Justice dept to overturn election

WASHINGTON: Documents released by a US congressional panel on Tuesday revealed new details of how then-president Donald Trump tried to mobilise the Justice Department last year to join his failed effort to overturn his election defeat based on his false claims of voting fraud.

The House of Representatives Oversight and Reform Committee, which sought the records, outlined a series of overtures made by the Republican former president, then-White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows and an outside private attorney, Kurt Olsen, pushing the department to act on Trump's claims.

The department ultimately did not join the effort and numerous courts rejected lawsuits seeking



Donald Trump departs with White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows from the White House to travel to North Carolina for an election rally. – Reuters file photo

to overturn election results in various states.

Congress also is investigating the deadly January 6 assault on the US Capitol by a mob of Trump supporters trying to stop the formal certification of Democratic President Joe Biden's election victory.

"These documents show that president Trump tried to corrupt our nation's chief law enforcement

agency in a brazen attempt to overturn an election that he lost", said Committee Chairwoman Carolyn Maloney, a Democrat.

These overtures were separate from the revelations that the Trump-era Justice Department secretly sought the phone records of at least two Democratic lawmakers, a move that led Biden's Attorney General Merrick Garland on Monday to vow to strengthen policies aiming to protect the department from political influence.

The department under outgoing Attorney General William Barr, who left his post on December 23, and his short-term replacement Jeffrey Rosen decided not to act on the false claims of voting fraud.

— Reuters

Biden official says expectations low for Putin summit



Swiss President Guy Parmelin welcomes US President Joe Biden at Cointrin airport in Geneva on Tuesday. – Reuters

GENEVA: A senior official in US President Joe Biden's administration said on Tuesday that he did not expect big outcomes from Biden's first summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"We're not expecting a big set of deliverables out of this meeting", said the US official as Air Force One landed in Geneva ahead of the planned meeting on Wednesday. Biden flew in to Geneva at 4:16 pm (1416 GMT) on the last leg of his first foreign trip as president, after mending relations with Washington's closest allies during G7 and Nato summits in Britain and Brussels.

He arrived in Geneva on the eve of the first meeting between US and Russian leaders since 2018, when Putin met Biden's predecessor Donald Trump in Helsinki.

Biden was greeted on the Geneva Airport tarmac by Swiss President Guy Parmelin,

flanked by the heads of the Geneva cantonal and city authorities and US diplomats based in the city.

After handshakes and a few brief exchanges, he climbed into his armoured limousine known as "The Beast" and was whisked off to the five-star InterContinental Hotel, just a mile (1.6 kilometres) away.

Switzerland has launched a massive security operation to ensure the safety of Biden, Putin and their large entourages, deploying around 4,000 police, troops and security personnel to guard the summit from all angles. The summit venue, the La Grange villa and its surrounding park, has been ringed with two kilometres of barbed wire-topped security fencing.

Several blocks around Biden's hotel, near the United Nations' European headquarters, were also blocked off with barbed-wire fencing. — Agencies

With child-size needles, France starts giving Covid jab to 12-year-olds

VITRY-SUR-SEINE: Perceval Gete, a 12-year-old French boy, is one of the youngest people in Europe to receive a Covid-19 vaccination, and to accommodate his young age, the nurse administering the jab had to use a special child-size needle.

His mother brought Perceval to a vaccination centre near Paris on Tuesday, the first day the age of eligibility in France was lowered to 12, because, she said, the more people get

inoculated, the sooner pandemic restrictions can be lifted.

"I wanted it to be done as soon as possible", his mother, Melanie Gete, said at the vaccination centre in the suburb of Vitry-sur-Seine after Perceval had the jab.

France's government has made people from 12 years upwards eligible for the vaccination, provided they have parental consent.

Previously, the youngest

age in France was 18, or 16 if the person had underlying conditions, or was in contact with a person vulnerable to the virus.

In wealthy nations worldwide, governments have been expanding their vaccination programmes to include younger people, who are less liable than older people to get seriously ill from Covid-19.

But the limit of 12 years in France is one of the lowest of any

major European Union state.

Nurse Aurelie Job, who administered the vaccine to Perceval Gete on Tuesday, used a needle which is around half the length of the standard size used for adults.

"Children have smaller arms so we need smaller needles to vaccinate children", she said. "It prevents us from touching the bone while vaccinating children, and it's less upsetting for them."

— Reuters

Inventor Berners-Lee puts original World Wide Web files up for auction

LONDON: The original files of the World Wide Web are being sold at auction by British inventor Sir Tim Berners-Lee.

Digitally-signed source code documents written by the computer scientist three decades ago will go under the hammer as a non-fungible token (NFT).

An NFT is a limited edition asset which is sold without any physical form via blockchain, effectively providing certification of ownership.

They have been hailed as a way to sell digital artwork and assets.

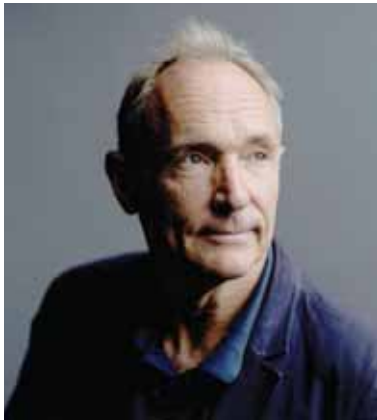
Sir Tim said it felt like the

"natural thing" to do with an entirely digital artefact.

As well as the opportunity to delve into the bare bones of the web's early architecture, the winning bidder will receive an animated visualisation of the code, a letter written by Sir Tim about its creation, as well as a digital poster of the full code.

Sotheby's will launch the auction on June 23 for one week, with bidding starting at \$1,000.

Money raised from the auction will be donated to initiatives supported by the computer scientist and his wife.



FILE PHOTO: World Wide Web founder Tim Berners-Lee poses for a photograph following a speech at the Mozilla Festival 2018 in London.

“Three decades ago, I created something which, with the subsequent help of a huge number of collaborators across the world, has been a powerful tool for humanity... For me, the best bit about the web has been the spirit of collaboration”

SIR TIM BERNERS-LEE
Inventor of Internet

“Three decades ago, I created something which, with the subsequent help of a huge number

of collaborators across the world, has been a powerful tool for humanity”, Sir Tim said.

“For me, the best bit about the web has been the spirit of collaboration.”

“While I do not make predictions about the future, I sincerely hope its use, knowledge and potential will remain open and available to us all to continue to innovate, create and initiate the next technological transformation, that we cannot yet imagine.

“NFTs, be they artworks or a digital artefact like this, are the latest playful creations in this realm, and the most appropriate means of ownership that exists.

— dpa

SHORT TAKES

MADRID

First cruise ship docks in Spain

An international cruise ship carrying German tourists docked on Tuesday in Malaga, southern Spain, the first such arrival in more than a year, officials said.

On June 7, Spain's transport ministry lifted a ban on international cruise ships that had been imposed at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020.

The ban was lifted after the virus began to ease in Europe, where most cruise passengers come from, and also owing to



rising vaccination numbers.

"This is the first international cruise ship", a spokesman for Spain's port authorities told AFP after the *Mein Schiff 2* docked in the southern resort.

PARIS

Sarkozy denies illegal campaign financing

France's former president Nicolas Sarkozy on Tuesday denied being responsible for massive over-spending on his failed 2012 re-election bid, in a second court appearance this year after his March conviction for corruption.

The 66-year-old rightwinger is on trial in Paris for illegal campaign financing — one of several cases stemming from a flurry of investigations into his affairs since he lost his presidential immunity. In March, he became France's first post-war president



to be given a custodial sentence when judges gave him a three-year term, two years of which were suspended, for corruption and influence peddling over his alleged attempts to secure favours

LONDON

'Belarus ban not in airlines interests'

Ryanair chief Michael O'Leary said on Tuesday he opposes a long-term ban on flights over Belarus after Minsk forced his airline's plane to land and detained passengers.

Belarusian traffic controllers told Ryanair pilots to divert an Athens to Vilnius flight on May 23, citing a bomb threat that proved to be false and scrambling a military jet to accompany the plane. On landing, Belarus detained two passengers — opposition campaigner Roman Protasevich and his Rus-



sian girlfriend — sparking global outrage. Britain and the European Union responded by telling airlines to avoid Belarusian airspace and banning the ex-Soviet country's flagship carrier Belavia.

Medics and prayers saved me...

When I woke up on April 14, I felt something was amiss. I was feeling tired and lethargic. I decided I should go for a Covid-19 test just to reassure myself even though I firmly believed that I would never catch the virus. Despite taking precautions like masking, use of sanitisers and other measures to keep the virus at bay, the unexpected happened that I was tested positive. I am still unaware of how I came down with it.

It is hard to explain the trauma. Many critically ill coronavirus patients have not been as fortunate as I have been. What I remember is that I reached the hospital to collect my test report. By then the nasty virus had already started showing the worst symptoms I've experienced to this day that I wouldn't wish upon anyone.

What followed was weeks of anxiety and desperation. I thought I was knocking on hell's door. My condition continued to worsen. My strength and energy were zapped. I felt like my lungs were getting harder. The sensation was overwhelmingly hard because of the breathing, congestion and constant coughing.

My chances of survival were very low. I had developed pneumonia as well and my oxygen saturation level dipped to 70s, from a normal level in the low 90s. My X-rays were worrying with bone white lungs swamped by inflamed cells. The air sacs were filled with fluid, impeding the flow of oxygen to the organs and acute renal failure. Adding to the woes was septic cardiomyopathy.

But after 15 days on the ventilator and an equal number of days in the intensive care unit and some more days in isolation in the hospital, I made what my doctors who treated me termed a "miraculous" survival. After nearly 40 days of treatment, nurtured by the care of



SAMUEL KUTTY
samkuttyobserver@gmail.com

MY CHANCES OF SURVIVAL WERE VERY LOW. I HAD DEVELOPED PNEUMONIA AS WELL AND MY OXYGEN SATURATION LEVEL DIPPED TO 70S, FROM A NORMAL LEVEL IN THE LOW 90S

brave medical staff and soothing voices from my family members, colleagues, friends and well-wishers, I was wheeled out of the hospital on May 26. And I do feel incredibly blessed that I have survived. It was a nightmare! It is not just that I survived, but that the doctors, nurses, therapists, and other medical personnel saved my life. The story, if there is one, is not necessarily that I survived, but that these people saved my life.

No words can express how grateful I am. The one thing I would like you to share is the phenomenal care I received at Bader al Sama Hospital. I would like to especially thank the Managing Director Abdul Latheef and Marketing Manager Devassy K O, medical staff at the hospital including Dr Ravi Perumal, Dr Basheer, Dr Vijay, nurses, who attended to me and no words can express how grateful I am to them. They are truly my heroes! They went above and beyond in all aspects of care.

Their professionalism is astounding. We can see that they have had a hard time for more than a year. They need far more appreciation than they are getting.

Equally valuable were the visits and positive vibes extended by my Editor-in-Chief Abdullah al Shueili and all my colleagues, kith and kin, embassy staff and many others — the list of which cannot be penned down for its length. Their prayers and support were of immense help to me in my recovery. I am for the rest of my life indebted to you all!

Just before I was placed in a medically-induced coma and on a ventilator I fought for my life and at no time did I give up. I was determined to make it and overcome a disease that has caused so much upset to the world.

But that recovery came at a cost. I lost more than one third of my weight

in less than two weeks; mostly muscle weight. It left me weak; unable to walk. Even though physical therapy and a slow return to my normal exercise routine is helping me recover, but mentally, I find myself returning to my days in the hospital when I was overwhelmed by the tests; the sounds, the unknowing and, most of all, the loneliness.

Besides health problems, Covid-19 had robbed me of my peace of mind and all the more my personal freedom. I was not able to do (still I am not healthy enough of doing small things on my own) even simple things like feeding myself. It was hard for me because I'm used to doing a lot of things on my own and being on the go. Being a journalist and a person like myself, it was very depressing.

My family has not yet recovered from mental anguish left by the virus. Tears flow when they talk about the pain and strain they underwent during those dark days of my stay in the hospital.

When my wife and children made a video call to me, I just gazed at the glowing phone screen. I had no idea what was going on. It was a blur. But I remember something. I think I hallucinated when I was in the coma. Talking to family members over video calls further inspired me to win this Covid-19 battle, aided by Dr Ravi's continuous presence with me.

I have no idea what the ultimate effects of the coronavirus will be upon my body. Obviously, I am hoping for the best, but long-term health consequences are possible.

Still I'm enjoying life everyday right now. What used to be taken for granted is now precious, like the blue sky, the clouds and the rains. That's the best thing in the world, just to focus on the little things!

A GAME-CHANGER

G7 climate pledge could shift Asia's coal policy

BEH LIH YI AND MICHAEL TAYLOR

The G7 wealthy nations failed to go far enough at their weekend summit to halt the use of coal, but a pledge to phase out international funding for new coal power this year could help shift Asia's policy on the dirty fuel, analysts said on Monday.

At a meeting in Britain, leaders of the powerful group of nations said they supported "a green revolution" and committed to stop by the end of 2021 new international funding for coal-fired plants that are not fitted with technology to reduce their planet-warming carbon emissions. Green groups welcomed the move, which had been expected after it was recently agreed by environment ministers.

But climate campaigners criticised G7 leaders for not signing up to specific targets on ending the use of coal at home, and for offering insufficient new funding to help developing nations shift to renewable energy.

"After decades of rising emissions, just a statement on limiting coal-fired power by G7 (via) direct funding can hardly be seen as going far enough," said Shobhakar Dhakal, vice president for academic affairs at the Thailand-based Asian Institute of Technology.

The commitment would have been stronger with a clear timeline for phasing out fossil fuel infrastructure, added Dhakal, a professor in the department of energy, environment and climate change. But it could nonetheless prove a "game-changer" in Asia-Pacific where coal remains a mainstay for power generation, he said in e-mailed comments.

SHOBHAKAR DHAKAL
Asian Institute of Technology

The region consumed about 77 per cent of the world's coal in 2019, up from half 20 years ago, according to BP's Statistical Review of World Energy. The G7 decision to end new overseas coal funding will ratchet up pressure on Asian countries, from economic giants such as China to fast-developing economies like Bangladesh and Cambodia, to move away from coal, Dhakal said.

"Without Asia changing course, the world cannot meet any meaningful global targets," he added.

But others said Asian nations were unlikely to be swayed, given the G7 themselves spent more money on fossil fuel projects than clean energy between January 2020 and March 2021, according to academic Danny Marks.

"They won't see it as a game-changer but merely just words," said Marks, assistant professor of environmental politics and policy at Dublin City University in Ireland.

An end to coal financing from the G7 could push Asian nations to turn to China for funding in a bid to boost energy security, he added. "This announcement could actually backfire against the G7's aim and increase China's growing influence in its own region," he said.

Governments and energy firms are being pushed to wean themselves off fossil fuels, whose continued production and use are viewed as a big threat to the 2015 Paris Agreement goals of capping global warming at "well below" 2 degrees Celsius and ideally 1.5C.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

A SIGH OF RELIEF

Netanyahu defeat brings relief to Biden

SHAUN TANDON

When Joe Biden entered the White House, he waited nearly a month to speak to Benjamin Netanyahu, fuelling perceptions he was in no hurry to please the divisive Israeli leader.

After Netanyahu was unseated on Sunday, the White House fired off a statement in minutes congratulating the new prime minister, Naftali Bennett, with Biden quickly calling and telling him that "Israel has no better friend than the United States."

The fall of Netanyahu, the longest-serving prime minister in Israeli history, is bringing a sigh of relief to many in the Biden administration, who will no longer have to deal with the pugnacious right-winger who had closely allied himself in US politics with the rival Republican Party.

But the shift could be more about tone than substance. The new Israeli government is unlikely to take a different view on Iran, a major source of disagreement between Biden's Democratic Party and Netanyahu, and the unwieldiness of the coalition — which unites Bennett, a staunch supporter of Jewish settlement of the West Bank, with centrists and leftists — makes prospects slim for any dramatic moves on the Palestinian issue.



US President Joe Biden walks to Air Force One at Brussels Airport on Tuesday. — AFP

THE FALL OF NETANYAHU IS BRINGING A SIGH OF RELIEF TO MANY IN THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

"Netanyahu played a brazen game of partisan politics in the US, and I'm sure it is a relief for the Biden administration to be dealing with a different prime minister — even if they don't really know what to expect from him yet," said Michele Dunne, director of the Middle East programme at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

"What the Biden administration will hope for is that the government headed by Bennett will manage the US-Israel relationship more quietly

and amicably than Netanyahu did, and will also be more careful about avoiding actions in Jerusalem and elsewhere that can inflame relations with Palestinians," she said.

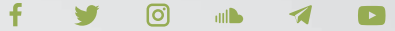
Brian Katulis, a senior fellow at the left-leaning Center for American Progress, said Netanyahu's downfall could "stabilise the bilateral relationship in important ways in part because of the lack of trust and confidence that existed at a very personal level with Netanyahu."

— AFP

sport

SLOVAKIA EDGE POLAND TO GO TOP OF GROUP E

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Players vie for the header during the Uefa Euro 2020 Group E match between Spain and Sweden in Sevilla.
— AFP



Spain's Marcos Llorente (top) jumps over Sweden's goalkeeper Robin Olsen.
— AFP



Spain's Alvaro Morata in action with Sweden's Sebastian Larsson and Victor Lindelof. — Reuters



SWEDEN HOLD DOMINANT SPAIN

GLASGOW: Spain opened their Euro 2020 campaign with a goalless draw against Sweden in Seville on Monday night after their preparations were badly affected by Covid-19.

Elsewhere on day four of the tournament, Slovakia edged out 10-man Poland 2-1 in Saint Petersburg.

They lead the early Group E table ahead of Spain and Sweden, after the Scandinavians held on for a point at La Cartuja, with Alvaro

Morata wasting the hosts' best opportunity.

"There are no doubts about a striker like Morata," Aymeric Laporte said of his team-mate.

"We know what he can do, it didn't go in for him today it's true, but in the next game he can score three and shut everyone's mouth."

Jordi Alba captained Spain in the absence of Sergio Busquets, who is still self-isolating at home after testing positive for the coronavirus.

Defender Diego Llorente was only allowed to rejoin the group on Saturday after giving a fourth consecutive negative test and was an unused substitute against the Swedes.

The squad was forced to train individually and their last friendly against Lithuania was passed over to the under-21s.

But Spain, bidding for a record fourth European Championship title, started strongly against Sweden, dominating possession.

Morata fired the clearest chance of the first half wide though, while Alexander Isak saw an effort deflected onto his own post at the other end by Marcos Llorente.

Juventus striker Morata dragged another effort off target early in the second half, while Sweden striker Marcus Berg miskicked wide of an open goal.

Spain laid siege to the visitors' net late on, but a series of blocks and an excellent save

by Robin Olsen to deny Gerard Moreno preserved Sweden's point.

CZECHS GO TOP

The Scots, absent from major tournament finals since the 1998 World Cup, were sunk by Bayer Leverkusen striker Schick in front of 12,000 fans at Hampden Park.

The home side started the Group D contest brightly in Glasgow but fell behind shortly before half-time as Schick headed home Vladimir Coufal's cross.

There was even better to come from the 25-year-old Schick, as he struck a high, curling shot from just inside the Scotland half over the head of back-peddalling Scottish goalkeeper David Marshall and into the net.

"The ball bounced back, the goalkeeper was quite high, I took a look, I saw he was out there so I slammed it in," said Schick. Czech goalkeeper Tomas Vachek made two important second-half saves from Scotland striker Lyndon Dykes as the hosts tried to force their way back into the game.

But there was no way through for Steve Clarke's men, as the Czech Republic moved top of Group D ahead of their game with Croatia at Hampden on Friday.

"We want to advance, we are now facing the two favourites,

sometimes you can get there on three points, but I think we'll have to clinch one more to be sure," said Czech Republic coach Jaroslav Silhavy.

The Scots will next face old rivals England, who made a successful start to their campaign with a 1-0 win over Croatia on Sunday, at Wembley on Friday.

FIRST SENT-OFF

Poland will rue Grzegorz Krychowiak's 62nd-minute second yellow card in Russia as the midfielder became the first player to be sent off in this year's tournament.

Slovakia had taken an 18th-minute lead when Robert Mak's shot hit the post and bounced in off Poland goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny before Karol Linetty levelled shortly after the break.

The game was settled with 21 minutes to play, though, as Inter Milan defender Milan Skriniar drilled in to give Slovakia a winning start.

Poland striker Robert Lewandowski was a peripheral figure and has still only scored two goals in 12 appearances at major finals. — AFP

EURO 2020 RESULTS ON MONDAY:

Group D
At Glasgow, Scotland
Scotland 0 Czech Republic 2 (Schick 42, 52)

Group E
At Saint Petersburg, Russia
Poland 1 (Linetty 46) Slovakia 2 (Szczesny 18-og, Skriniar 69)
At Seville, Spain
Spain 0 Sweden 0

In brief

■ COPENHAGEN



ERIKSEN REASSURES AS DENMARK TRY TO MOVE ON WITH EURO 2020

Denmark's Christian Eriksen on Tuesday published a photo of his tired but smiling face from his hospital bed after his collapse during his country's opening Euro 2020 game, as UEFA defended the decision to resume the match.

In a scene that shocked the sporting world and beyond, the 29-year-old Inter Milan midfielder suddenly collapsed on the field in the 43rd minute of Denmark's Group B game on Saturday against Finland in Copenhagen.

"I'm fine — under the circumstances, I still have to go through some examinations at the hospital, but I feel okay," he wrote in a post to Instagram accompanying a photo of him smiling and giving a thumbs-up while lying in bed.

■ LOS ANGELES



YOUNG SHINES AS HAWKS RALLY PAST SIXERS

Trae Young poured in 25 points and added 18 assists as the Atlanta Hawks rallied on Monday to beat the Philadelphia 76ers in game four of their second-round Eastern Conference playoff series.

Young shot eight of 26 from the floor and drained three threes but he had plenty of help from his supporting cast as all five Hawks starters finished in double figures to level the best-of-seven series at 2-2.

His 18 assists equalled a career high but he also busted out from under the watchful eye of Philadelphia's defensive specialist Ben Simmons, who was given the task of guarding him.

■ LONDON



DJOKOVIC TO PLAY DOUBLES IN MALLORCA AHEAD OF WIMBLEDON

World number one Novak Djokovic has taken an unusual route to prepare for his title defence at Wimbledon by confirming his participation in doubles at next week's ATP grasscourt event in Mallorca, Spain.

The Mallorca Championships was originally set to make its debut in 2020 but was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ATP 250 event will be the first in Spain to be played on grass in the lead-up to Wimbledon, which starts on June 28. Organisers announced the Serbian's participation in the tournament on social media on Tuesday. Djokovic won his fifth Wimbledon crown in 2019 and was unable to defend his title last year with the grasscourt Grand Slam cancelled due to the pandemic.



ONAIWU BAGS SIX-MINUTE HAT-TRICK

JAPAN CRUSH KYRGYZ REPUBLIC



SUITA, Japan: Striker Ado Onaiwu bagged a six-minute first-half hat-trick as Japan confirmed their dominance in Group F of Asian 2022 World Cup qualifying with a crushing 5-1 win over the Kyrgyz Republic in Suita on Tuesday.

Manager Hajime Moriyasu made five changes to the side that beat Tajikistan 4-1 a week ago and opted for Onaiwu to lead the attack in the absence of Takumi Minamino, who withdrew from the squad last week "due to club circumstances".

Onaiwu did not disappoint, opening the scoring from the penalty spot in the 27th minute after a handball by Aizar Akmatov.

He tapped in for his second four minutes later at the far post after good work down the right by Kawabe Hayao and completed his quickfire treble in the 33rd minute with a towering header.

Takuma Asano and Sho Sasaki added two more after the break while Kyrgyz captain Mirlan Murzaev scored their consolation penalty in first-half stoppage time.

Minamino, who had netted in all seven of Japan's group matches, reportedly left after playing in the 1-0 friendly win against Serbia on Thursday in order to sort out a move from Premier League Liverpool to Southampton with qualification secured.

Minamino, who spent much of last season on loan at Southampton, had tied a national record set by Japan hero Keisuke Honda by scoring in seven consecutive qualifying matches with his goal in the 4-1 win against Tajikistan eight days ago.

"Takumi Minamino will be leaving due to club circumstances," said a brief statement from the Japan Football Association.

Onaiwu's hat-trick was not the fastest hat-trick in World Cup history and was almost pedestrian compared with Egypt substitute Abdul Hamid Bassiouny's 2001 effort.

Bassiouny took just 117 seconds to score three times after coming on in the 8-2 win against Namibia in an African qualifying match.

The dominant Samurai Blue

confirmed their place at the AFC 2023 Asian Cup in China and in the final round of Qatar World Cup 2022 Qualifiers with a perfect eight wins from eight, scoring 46 goals and conceding only two.

In the other Group F match, Tajikistan beat Myanmar 4-0 in Osaka to seal second place.

Only the top team in each of the eight groups automatically progress to the third phase of World Cup qualifying, where they will be joined by the best four group runners-up. — AFP



Athletes compete during a test event for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, in Sapporo, Japan. — Reuters

Athletes face Olympic ban for violating virus rules

TOKYO: Athletes could be kicked out of the Tokyo Olympics if they violate virus rules including daily testing and mask-wearing, organisers said on Tuesday as they unveiled updated guidelines just over five weeks before the opening ceremony.

The latest and final version of the rules for athletes runs 70 pages, complete with comic strips intended to explain the complex web of rules that organisers say will keep the Games safe.

Officials hope the restrictions will build confidence among Japan's sceptical public that the Games

can be held safely even though the pandemic has not yet been brought under control.

Olympic officials and Tokyo 2020 organisers emphasised new specific penalties for athletes if they violate rules — including warnings, fines or even "temporary or permanent ineligibility or exclusion from the Games."

Officials did not clarify whether that sanction meant athletes could be barred from future Olympics as well as Tokyo.

"We expect you to play by the rules, but if you don't there will be sanctions that could be coming your

way," said Pierre Ducrey, Olympic Games operations director for the International Olympic Committee.

With just weeks to go, Tokyo is under a virus state of emergency and no decision has yet been taken on whether any domestic spectators will even be allowed to attend, after overseas fans were banned earlier this year.

Organisers are trying to shift the narrative, emphasising the safety measures they are taking and that the majority of athletes and those in the Olympic village will be vaccinated and kept away from the Japanese public. — AFP



Paraguay's Alejandro Romero Gamarrara celebrates after scoring against Bolivia. — AFP

Paraguay come from behind to beat Bolivia

GOIANIA, Brazil: Paraguay went behind to an early penalty but scored three times in the second half for a 3-1 win over Bolivia, who were reduced to 10 men just before halftime in their Copa America opener on Monday.

Bolivia were without five players who tested positive for Covid-19, including striker Marcelo Martins, who scored seven times in Bolivia's last seven games.

They had not beaten Paraguay in a Copa America clash since 1963 but their hopes were raised after only 10 minutes when they took the lead from the penalty spot. The Video Assistant Referee (VAR) awarded a penalty for handball and Erwin Saavedra converted low to the keeper's left.

Paraguay were also awarded a penalty midway through the first half but VAR overturned the decision due to an offside, and while they dominated they could not turn their pressure into goals.

Striker Kaku, who plays his league football in Saudi Arabia, was guilty of a desperate miss when he fired wide three minutes before halftime when it looked easier to score. The game swung Paraguay's way in added time at the end of the first half when 19-year-old Bolivian forward Jaime Cuellar was sent off for a second yellow card offence.

Paraguay dominated from the restart and made the breakthrough after 62 minutes when Kaku's low volley skipped past a diving Ruben Cordano.

After failing to win a match at the last two Copa America tournaments, Paraguay made sure of the points thanks to Angel Romero, who prodded home after 65 minutes when Cordano failed to hold a goal-bound header and then finished smartly by slipping a shot between the keeper and his near post with 10 minutes left. — Reuters

VARGAS SPOILS MESSI'S PARTY IN COPA

RIO DE JANEIRO: Argentina superstar Lionel Messi scored a stunning freekick but Chile hit back to earn a 1-1 draw in the Copa America on Monday.

Messi's magical left foot gave dominant Argentina a deserved first half lead but Eduardo Vargas equalised in the second half after Argentina goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez saved veteran midfielder Arturo Vidal's penalty.

Despite Argentina's dominance, Messi lamented that "we weren't calm, we didn't have control of the ball."

His coach Lionel Scaloni saw things differently, though.

"We deserved to win but in the end we drew. In any case, it's only the start of a very tough tournament", said Scaloni.

Before the Group A game started in the Nelson Santos Stadium in Rio de Janeiro, there was a light and effects tribute to Argentina legend Diego Maradona, who died in November aged 60, although the ground was empty due to coronavirus restrictions.

The first chance fell to Messi on eight minutes as Leandro Paredes picked out Nicolas Tagliafico on the left and the fullback nodded the ball down for his captain, who sent a volley wide.

Minutes later, Giovanni Lo Celso crossed from the left but a sliding Lautaro Martinez could only spoon the ball over the bar from inside the six-yard box.

Argentina were in total command and Lo Celso picked out Nicolas Gonzalez to shoot from 20 yards but goalkeeper Claudio Bravo got down well to his right to tip the ball around the post.

From Messi's corner Gonzalez headed over the bar and moments later he was released by Lo Celso but shot straight at Bravo.

It would be a frustrating night for Gonzalez.

Argentina got the goal their domination deserved



Argentina's Lionel Messi in action with Chile's Tomas Alarcon. — Reuters



Chile's Eduardo Vargas celebrates scoring their first goal with team-mates. — Reuters

on 33 minutes, and inevitably it was Messi who scored, curling a free-kick from 25 yards out just beyond Bravo's dive. They should have had a second soon afterwards but teed up by Gonzalo Montiel 10 yards out, Martinez screwed his shot horribly wide.

"I would be worried if the

team wasn't creating chances. The important thing is we are, we're getting lots of players in the box. And it will go in", said Scaloni.

'DEFIANT' CHILEANS

Chile started the second half with more intent and Erick Pulgar played Vargas into the area but his shot

on the stretch was saved by Martinez.

However, Vidal stormed in to try to fire home the rebound and was caught by Tagliafico as he shot.

Referee Wilmar Roldan consulted VAR and then awarded a penalty.

Martinez tipped Vidal's effort onto the crossbar

“We deserved to win but in the end we drew. In any case, it's only the start of a very tough tournament

LIONEL SCALONI
Argentina coach

but Vargas was quickest to the ball to head home the equaliser.

Argentina were soon back on the attack but Chile centre-back Gary Medel blocked a volley from Gonzalez, who later headed over from a Messi free-kick.

Twenty minutes from time, Messi created space in the box but Bravo was down well to save his low shot.

Gonzalez's night to forget would get worse 10 minutes from time when he ran onto a perfect chipped pass from Messi but headed over from just seven yards out when it looked easier to score.

It was his last involvement as he was substituted before Bravo took the goalkick.

Argentina kept pushing but Messi headed over the bar in injury time as Chile held on for a point.

"This team didn't want to be beaten, even though they didn't play well. This group of players are defiant", said Chile coach Martin Lasarte.

Angel Romero scored twice as Paraguay bounced back to beat 10-man Bolivia 3-1 in Goiania and top Group A. Erwin Saavedra gave Bolivia the lead from the penalty spot on 10 minutes after a long VAR review.

Paraguay dominated throughout but the game changed deep into first half stoppage time when Bolivia's Jaime Cuellar was sent off for a second booking.

Alejandro Romero Gamarra restored parity just past the hour mark and Romero put Paraguay in front three minutes later.

— AFP

Oman to take part in Arab Athletics in Tunisia

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

Oman's national athletics team will take part in the 22nd Arab Senior Athletics Championship (men and women) which will begin on Wednesday and conclude on Sunday at the Rades Stadium in Tunisia.

The five-day championship will register participation of the Sultanate's top sprinter Barakat al Harthy and Hussain Hatim in 100 metres sprint while Mazoon al Alawi will compete at the women's 100 metres.

Oman'sacelong-distancerunner Mohammed al Suliemani will join in the semifinals of 1,500 metres run. Oman 4x100 metres relay race team for this Arab athletics event



will comprise Barakat al Harthy, Sameer al Riyami, Rashid al Asmi and Mohammed al Saadi.

As many as 400 athletes will take part in this edition of

championship representing 19 countries including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iraq, Oman, Bahrain, Syria, Somalia, Djibouti, Yemen, Palestine, Jordan, Sudan, Bahrain,



Kuwait, Egypt, Algeria, Lebanon, Comoros and the hosts Tunisia.

The 22nd Arab Senior Athletics Championship is an approved athletics event by the

International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF). This Arabian meet will be the last chance for the Arab athletes to qualify for the forthcoming 2020

Olympic Games in Tokyo which will take place from July 23 to August 8.

Oman's top athletes, Barakat and Mazoon, completed the long external camp in Turkey and travelled directly to Tunisia.

Other Omani athletes got prepared previously during the domestic gathering in Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex and Sohar Sports Complex prior to the suspension the sporting activities in Oman. Barakat and Mazoon will aim to register the Olympic qualification timing to make it to the Tokyo Games.

Moreover, other athletes will compete to confirm their attendance at the 2020 World Athletics U20 Championships by finding the qualifying marks.

business

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Oman’s 2022 State Budget under preparation

Finance, Economy ministries join hands to draft guidelines for budget preparation

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

The Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economy jointly issued a circular outlining ‘Rules for Drafting State Budget 2022’ to ensure the budget formulations are in line with (i) Oman Vision 2040 and programmes listed in the Strategic Programmes Ledger of the 10th Five-Year Plan, and (ii) initiatives of the Fiscal Balance Plan through which the government seeks to achieve financial sustainability and improve the business environment.

Government units can submit



details of their budget estimates electronically via a new link in the e-government transformation network.

The aim is to streamline procedures related to dealing with ministries, government departments and public authorities and establishments.

The circular requires all ministries and other government entities to prepare their (current, developmental) budget estimates in accordance with the model attached to the aforementioned electronic link and submit the same via the link, which will be made available to all parties, along with a username and password.

Budget estimate projects have to be made in line with the rules stated in the circular. The circular urges all ministries and

other government entities to present their respective budget estimates for 2022 on or before July 29, 2021, and send them via the electronic link.

A brief of the required budget allocation has to be approved by the Head of Unit and sent to the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Economy.

The circular stresses the necessity of entering estimates for the required budget (revenues, expenditure), including options for situational budgets, additional budgets and new project operation budgets in a computerised design referred to as “Unified Financial System” by the deadline of 29 July 2021.

All of this data has to be compatible with estimates made for the budget project, as well as models prescribed by the Finance Ministry, said the circular. *(With inputs from ONA)*

SOEs will not compete with Oman’s private sector: OIA

Commitment to partnership: ‘We believe that the most significant role in driving the Omani economy will be played by the private sector during the coming period’ - OIA President



CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the Sultanate’s integrated sovereign wealth fund, has reaffirmed that State-of-Enterprises (SOEs) operating under its auspices will not compete with the private sector.

OIA President Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi emphasised the primacy of the private sector in driving the local economy, noting that state-owned businesses will ally with, rather than challenge, privately owned firms in the marketplace.

Explaining the Authority’s stand in this regard, Al Murshidi said: “OIA continues to allocate resources to each sector targeted by Oman Vision 2040 while focusing on cooperating and empowering the private sector.

Therefore, SOEs will not compete with the private sector if it proves its capability in performing on its own; if not, then OIA and its entities will offer their partnership. We believe that the most significant role in driving the Omani economy will be played by the private sector during the coming period.”

The official made the comments in an interview featured in the latest edition of Eejaz, the quarterly newsletter of the Authority. It comes on the first anniversary of the Authority’s establishment by

Financial institutions under OIA, such as Oman Development Bank, played a significant role in implementing the Royal Directives to assist groups affected by the pandemic, including home-based businesses and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

ABDULSALAM BIN MOHAMMED AL MURSHIDI
President, Oman Investment Authority

Royal Decree on June 4, 2020, effectively bringing all sovereign wealth funds and state-owned assets (with the exception of the government’s stake in Petroleum Development Oman) under one all-encompassing banner.

Exemplifying the Authority’s approach to the empowerment of the private sector is the example of Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), said Al Murshidi.

The restructuring and corporatisation of the erstwhile Muscat Stock Market “represent a

tool for transferring the leadership of the economy from state-owned entities to the private sector”, he noted.

With a presence in nearly 36 countries, and with assets estimated by experts in the proximity of \$17 billion, OIA has been given a robust mandate to fuel Oman’s economic diversification and sustain growth. These investments are distributed across diverse sectors and geographies.

Among its many achievements of the past year was the successful roll-out of the ‘Rawabet’ programme — a landmark initiative that seeks to strengthen governance of the SOEs, enhance productivity and cooperation between the entities, and boost their efficiency and ability to share resources available to them, whether in terms of human resources or fixed or moveable assets, said the President.

The Authority also leveraged the capabilities of state-owned subsidiaries to help mitigate the effects of the pandemic, notably by facilities supplies of essential commodities. Omani ports, for example, were prepped to handle the influx of direct imports in response to closures of airports and land borders.

Ferries were mobilised to ensure continuous linkages with the governorates, thereby providing ease of convenience in the movement of people and goods.

“Additionally, financial institutions under OIA, such as Oman Development Bank, played a significant role in implementing the Royal Directives to assist groups affected by the pandemic, including home-based businesses and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs),” Al Murshidi added.



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Operate, Maintain and Update e-Insurance System

The project aims to operate the direct and immediate the current electronic link system between insurance companies and the Royal Oman Police to exchange data related to vehicle insurance documents issued by insurance companies and link them with police systems to facilitate the process of registration, renewal, transfer and export of vehicles and issuance of titles. The system also provides insurance companies with a central database containing: Specific data about drivers and vehicles such as accident data and traffic violations, so that insurance companies benefit from this data in the underwriting process.

The system also authorizes CMA to access the system to carry out follow-up and obtain reports related to the work of insurance companies and evaluate their use of the system. The project includes software, operating licenses, connectivity devices and servers that provide the appropriate environment to connect (15) insurance companies engaged in vehicle insurance, the Capital Market Authority and the Royal Oman Police.

Tender Number	Description	Release Request for Bids	Last date for Specifications Purchase	Last date of Bid Submission	Tender Fee OMR
5 / 2021	Operate, Maintain and Update e-Insurance System	20 June 2021	24 June 2021 3:00 PM	15 July 2021 3:00 PM	200 /- OMR Non Refundable

Specialized companies interested in participating in the above tender must deposit the tender fee into CMA bank account and must submit the original receipt of the tender along with a copy of the commercial registration certificate and the contact details of the authorized individual (business card) to the admin department; hence, we shall provide you with the Tender Specifications.

- All RFQs submitted become the property of CMA.
- Tenderer should submit a Tender Bond not less than (%2) of the Tender value, valid for Ninety (90) Days from the latest date of submission.
- The CMA reserves the right to cancel any RFQ at any time and reserves the right to accept or reject any or all Proposals, or any or all of the items in one of the Proposals, without assigning any reasons.
- CMA is not obligated to accept the lowest bid or any other bid.

Name of beneficiary: Capital Market authority
Account no : 0423019706330018
Bank: Bank Muscat- Corporate Branch- CBD
SWIFT code: BMUSOMRXXXX
Please attach a copy of the deposit receipt

If the tender is not awarded to the company, the bank guarantee will be refunded.
For inquiries, please contact :
e-mail : admin@cma.gov.om
Telephone Number : 24823299
From 8 am to 3 pm
(Sunday to Thursday).



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UK property market boom will widen wealth gap

With the UK economy beginning to rise and forecast of considerable growth, not least by the IMF, there has been a sharp increase in property prices which has taken the average up to a record high of £261,743.

Chief economist at the Bank of England (BoE) Andy Haldane, said the UK housing market is “on fire” and as a result is likely to hit those without property especially hard.

The housing market has been fuelled by a combination of government incentives for buyers, like the stamp duty holiday, more demand from households with savings after the lockdowns, and a lack of homes for sale, Haldane said.

The chief economist said the recent rise in house prices

— which topped 10 per cent, according to official data — was very likely to worsen pre-existing wealth inequalities. In the 12 months to May, the average house price has increased by £22,000, according to Halifax data.

The government’s stamp duty holiday, which saw stamp duty scrapped on properties worth up to £500,000, is largely the reason behind the UK’s booming house prices in the last year.

The BoE’s deputy governor Jon Cunliffe said the Bank was watching the housing market “very carefully” in the wake of the boom.

Prior to that, Sir Dave Ramsden, another one of the central bank’s deputy governors, said the BoE expects the price pressures to be temporary.

“There is a risk that demand gets ahead of supply and that



ANDY JALIL
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THE GOVERNMENT’S
STAMP DUTY HOLIDAY,
WHICH SAW STAMP
DUTY SCRAPPED ON
PROPERTIES WORTH UP
TO £500,000, IS LARGELY
THE REASON BEHIND
THE UK’S BOOMING
HOUSE PRICES IN THE
LAST YEAR

will lead to a more generalised pick-up in inflationary pressure,” Ramsden said. “That’s something we’re absolutely going to guard against. We’re looking carefully at the housing market and a raft of real-term indicators.”

Foreign buyers from primarily East Asian nations are cashing in across London’s new-build market as a result of a weaker pound.

According to new research by the defect management firm BuildScan, fluctuating exchange rates during the pandemic added to the appeal of the London property market for many foreign homebuyers, particularly those from China, South Korea and Japan.

BuildScan analysed new build property prices across London and found that throughout 2020, Covid caused them to slump by -3.4 per cent, until the sharp rise

began this year.

The exchange rate has provided the Asian buyers with considerable discounts. But the change in exchange rates didn’t benefit every East Asian nation.

During 2020, the pound strengthened when compared to the Singapore dollar, meaning that while a London new build was still more, this discount sat at just -2 per cent.

Homebuyers from Thailand (-1.8 per cent), Malaysia (-1.2 per cent) and Hong Kong (-0.9 per cent) also secured a smaller discount, while those from Indonesia were actually paying 2.2 per cent more despite a drop in new build property values.

“Despite the problems posed by the pandemic, we’ve continued to see a high degree of interest in the London market from East Asia. This has been driven, in

part, by factors such as British National Overseas (BNO) visa availability for those relocating from Hong Kong, as well as the opportunity to cash in on a stamp duty saving,” explained Harry Yates, founder and managing director of BuildScan.

“In addition to these draws, we’ve also seen fluctuating exchange rates boost the affordability of London new build homes which has also caused many savvy investors to act sooner rather than later,” he said.

“Although the pound has rallied of late, the London market remains an area of focus for many foreign buyers and with market momentum returning at a slower rate than elsewhere around the UK, now remains a good time to invest,” Yates added.

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

ACFE Oman Board meets with CMA

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

Shaikh Abdullah bin Salim al Salmi, Executive President of the Capital Market Authority (CMA), received in his office the board members of the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE) Oman Chapter.

The delegation comprised Jose Chacko, President ACFE Oman Chapter and board members Davis Kallukaran, Khalil bin Nabhan al Rawahi and Fathiya bint Salim al Maskariyah. Also present were Mohammed bin Saeed al Abri, Vice-President of the Capital Market Sector, Ahmed bin Ali al Maamari, Vice President, Insurance Sector and Ahmed bin Ali al Mukhaini, Advisor in the CEO’s Office.

Several areas of cooperation between the authority and the association were discussed, including expediting the dissemination of anti-fraud awareness in all its forms to



all segments of society and to government and private institutions, and setting plans in place to increase the number of certified fraud examiners in the Government institutions, banking and finance sectors

The Executive President emphasised the importance of increased anti-fraud awareness in the society to minimise this nuisance affecting the businesses

and the economy at large.

The Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE), headquartered in Texas, United States, is the world’s largest anti-fraud organisation with more than 85,000 members, striving to reduce business fraud worldwide.

ACFE Oman Chapter is sponsored by the College of Banking and Financial Studies.

The CMA had recently

established the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorist Financing Department, which is responsible for monitoring and supervising and ensuring that all companies subject to its control comply with the legislation and instructions related to combating money laundering and terrorist financing, and auditing them.

Tanweer provides UPS systems for customers with special needs

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

Oman Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer), a member of Nama Group, contributed in providing one of its customers in the Wilayat of Mahout, Al Wusta Governorate, with an Uninterrupted Power Supply (UPS) device to ensure sustainable power during emergency or programmed outages.

Tanweer is committed to keeping a register for customers with special needs to sustain special services to customers who rely on electric-powered medical support equipment, suffer from disabilities, chronic diseases, those with limited income or an elderly who have reached the age of retirement.

The company pays special attention to this category of customers by providing the necessary control tools and connections for electrical



appliances and metres (including prepaid metres) and shifting meters.

Tanweer also provides awareness on electricity usage, steps to be taken during power outages, and the necessary arrangements to limit the disconnection of electricity to customers with special needs.

Customers of this category can update their data to benefit from these facilities by filling out the Special Needs Assessment Form available on Tanweer’s website or calling the Contact Centre on the toll-free number 80077787.

Last few days to enjoy special interest rates on Renault Duster, Koleos and Megane



MUSCAT: As part of the ongoing promotion, Renault Oman from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA), has announced unlimited benefits on its popular models Duster, Koleos and Megane.

Renault Oman is offering attractive value benefits such as special interest rate (0% up to three years or 1.99% for four years or 2.49% for five years or 2.99% for six years), assured cash gift, free periodic vehicle service package, free insurance, digital promotion, assured RO 100 gift voucher and free registration

on models Duster, Koleos and Megane. Social media users who participate in the Ramadan promotional campaign will also be eligible for attractive prizes.

The Renault promotion which has already begun will go on till June 17, 2021. All retail customers purchasing Renault vehicles are entitled to the special offer. Vehicles purchased with commercial registration will not be eligible for the scheme. Vehicles bought for taxi, driving school, ministries, fleet, and rent-a-car usage will not be eligible for this scheme.

Pact with Alibaba Cloud to upscale local cloud computing market

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

With an aim of upscaling the local cloud computing market in the Sultanate, Jebel Akhdar Data Center (Datamount) and International Emerging Technology Company (ETCO), two leading local companies in technology, teamed up with Alibaba Cloud, the digital technology and intelligence backbone of Alibaba Group, to bring advanced, secure and reliable cloud services and technologies to businesses in Oman.

With the support of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, the signing of the agreement comes on the sidelines of the Communications and Information Technology Exhibition (COMEX 2021).

The event was held in



Knowledge Oasis, in the presence of Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaidani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Dr Mohammed al Maamari, Chairman of Mus-haf Muscat Endowment Fund and the Related Applications, and Dr Taher al Kindi, Chairman of Datamount.

Under the partnership, Alibaba Cloud will provide cloud computing and related technology services while Datamount will be

a local reseller partner to market the cloud computing services of Alibaba cloud in Oman.

Phillip Liu, General Manager of the Middle East and Africa, Alibaba Cloud Intelligence, said: “We are happy to build up the partnership with Datamount and ETCO to bring advanced, secure and reliable cloud services and technologies to businesses in Oman. We believe the partnership will further upscale the local cloud computing market and

better support the local businesses to embrace the digital economy.”

In addition, Abdul Hakeem al Muslahi, CEO at Datamount stated: “With Datamount’s main objective, to make Oman a regional Data Hub by bringing cutting edge technologies to serve the Sultanate and the region, today’s agreement marks the beginning of many more to come.

Signing this agreement, with one of the leading technology providers Alibaba Cloud, which in its terms, upscales the technology in Oman and enhances the skills of local IT experts.”

“At ETCO, we are continually working on aligning our roadmap with the Sultanate plans deriving from ‘Oman Vision 2040’ by partnering with pioneering companies to position Oman as a technologically advanced society, and a technology hub in the region and East Asian markets,” said Abdalaziz Jaafar, CEO at



Britain and Australia announce free trade deal

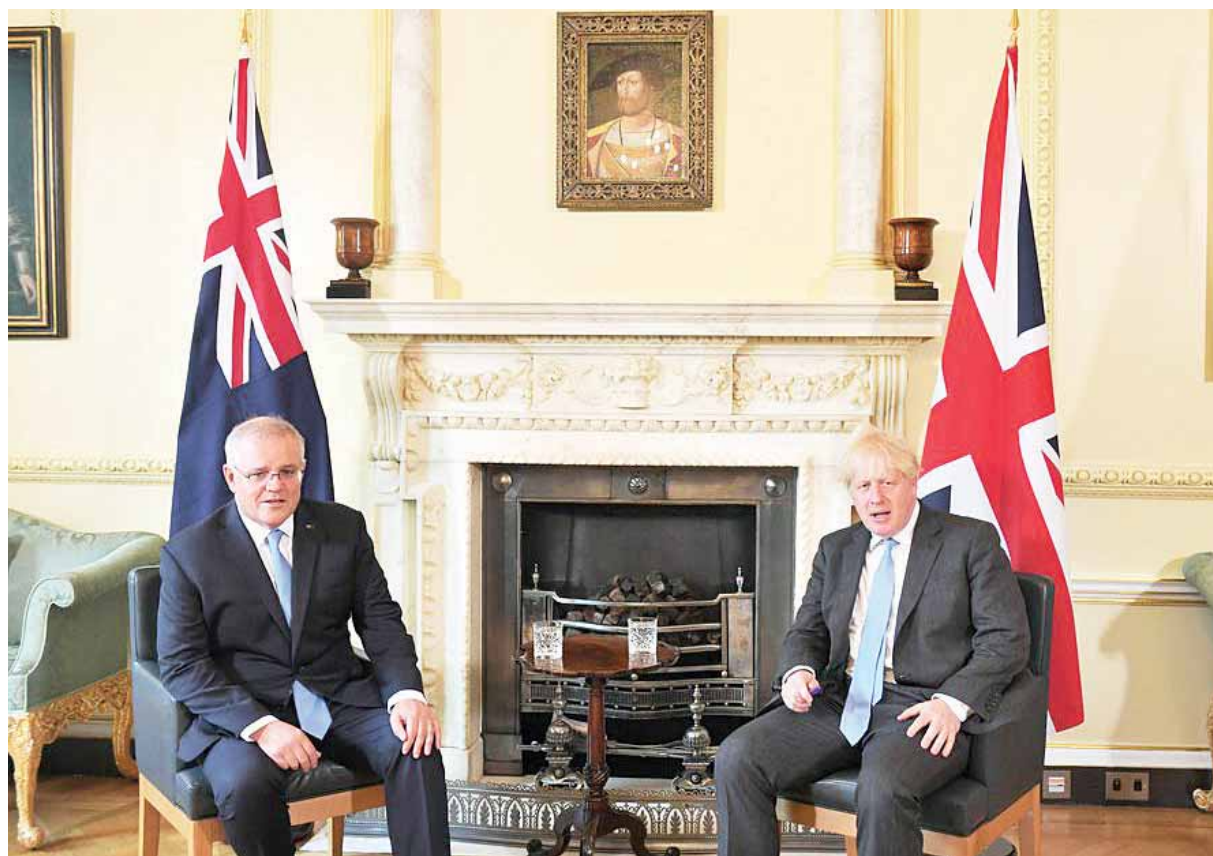
CANBERRA/LONDON: Britain and Australia announced a trade deal on Tuesday that will eliminate tariffs and red tape, hailed by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson as “a new dawn” in the two countries’ relations.

The British government sees the deal as an important piece of its post-Brexit trade and diplomatic strategy to shift the country’s economic centre away from Europe and seek out new opportunities in higher-growth Indo-Pacific nations.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Johnson overcame sticking points during talks after the Group of Seven meeting in Britain over the weekend, which Morrison attended as a guest.

“Today marks a new dawn in the UK’s relationship with Australia, underpinned by our shared history and common values,” Johnson said in a statement.

Britain is Australia’s eighth-largest trading partner and Australia is Britain 20th largest, with two-way trade worth A\$26.9



Australia’s Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Britain’s Prime Minister Boris Johnson speak at 10 Downing Street, ahead of a meeting to formally announce a trade deal, in London, Britain. — Reuters

billion. Prior to Britain joining the then European common market

in 1973, Britain was Australia’s most lucrative trading market.

Though details have yet to emerge, some official estimates

“It is a fundamentally liberalising agreement that removes tariffs on all British goods, opens new opportunities for our services providers and tech firms, and makes it easier for our people to travel and work together”

LIZ TRUSS

British trade minister

say the agreement could add 500 million pounds (\$705.7 million) to British economic output over the long term — a small fraction for an economy worth around 2 trillion pounds.

Nevertheless, it was hailed as an important stepping stone as Britain develops its own trade policy for the first time in decades

following its departure from the European Union.

“It is a fundamentally liberalising agreement that removes tariffs on all British goods, opens new opportunities for our services providers and tech firms, and makes it easier for our people to travel and work together,” British trade minister Liz Truss said.

The deal will be scrutinised by British farmers, who fear they could be forced out of business if the deal eliminates tariffs on lamb and beef imports from Australia. The government said British farmers would be protected by a cap on tariff-free imports for 15 years.

Australian Minister for Trade David Littleproud declined to reveal details but said Australian farmers would benefit from the deal. “Overall, this is going to be a great win for Australian agriculture,” Littleproud told 4BC Radio Australia’s economy is, however, focused on Asia. — Reuters

Oil gains as risk of Iran supply resumption recedes



TOKYO: Oil prices rose on Tuesday, with Brent gaining for a fourth consecutive session, as the prospect of extra supply coming to the market soon from Iran faded with talks dragging on over the United States rejoining a nuclear agreement with Tehran.

Brent crude was up by 38 cents, or 0.5 per cent, at \$73.24 a barrel by 0651 GMT, having risen 0.2 per cent on Monday. US oil gained 33 cents, or 0.5 per cent, to \$71.21 a barrel, having slipped 3 cents in the previous session.

Indirect discussions between the United States and Iran, along with other parties to the 2015 deal on Tehran’s nuclear programme, resumed on Saturday in Vienna and were described as “intense” by the EU.

A US return to the deal would pave the way for the lifting of sanctions on Iran that would allow it to resume exports of crude. — Reuters

EU, US set to unveil truce in 17-year aircraft battle

BRUSSELS: The European Union and the United States were on the verge of announcing a truce on Tuesday in their 17-year conflict over aircraft subsidies, bringing to a close one set of Trump-era tariffs which had soured relations between them.

The two sides have been battling since 2004 in parallel cases at the World Trade Organization over subsidies for US planemaker Boeing and European rival Airbus.

They agreed in March to a four-month suspension of tariffs on \$11.5 billion of goods from EU wine to US tobacco and spirits, which they had imposed in response to the row. On Tuesday they were set to remove them for five years, while still working on an overall deal on what subsidies to allow.

“I am very positive that we will find an agreement on the Airbus-Boeing issue today in conversation with our American friends,” European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen told a news conference on Tuesday.

The agreement, to be announced during an EU-US summit with US President Joe Biden, should allow them to focus on the threat posed by China’s



An Airbus A350 jetliner flies over a Boeing flag during an air show at Le Bourget airport near Paris, in this file photo. — Reuters

nascent commercial aircraft industry.

It will also remove one of two major trade irritants leftover from Donald Trump’s presidency, the other being tariffs imposed on grounds of national security on EU steel and aluminium imports.

The European Commission, which oversees EU trade policy, last month suspended for up to six months a threatened June 1 doubling of retaliatory tariffs on Harley-Davidson motorbikes, US whiskey and motorboats, and refrained from slapping tariffs on more US products from lipstick to sports shoes.

Brussels and Washington have

said they would seek to address excess global capacity largely centred in China.

The United States may find it tougher to remove the metals tariffs, which also apply to other countries such as China, because they are still backed by many US metal producers and workers.

Brussels is also pushing what is dubs a new “positive agenda” on trade with Washington, including forging an alliance to drive WTO reform. The two are also likely to agree to cooperate on trade and technology, such as for setting compatible standards and facilitating trade in artificial intelligence. — Reuters

Japan Q2 growth forecasts cut sharply

TOKYO: Japan’s economy likely grew and avoided slipping into recession this quarter but an extension of emergency measures to stem a rise in coronavirus infections has dented the growth outlook, a Reuters poll showed.

Just over a month before Tokyo is set to host the Olympic Games, the world’s third-largest economy was seen expanding an annualised 0.5 per cent this quarter, less than a third of the 1.7 per cent economists projected last month, according to the June 2-14 poll of 36 economists.

Japan’s gross domestic product shrank by an annualised 3.9 per cent in January-March, the first contraction in three quarters.

About 85 per cent of analysts polled expected the next policy move by the Bank of Japan, which is set to meet this week, to be an unwinding of stimulus, but 90 per cent don’t expect that to happen until 2023 or later and the remaining 10 per cent not until next year.

About two-thirds of economists, 23 of 36, expected the economy to grow this quarter, while the other 13 anticipated it would shrink, which would push it into recession — as marked by two straight quarters of contraction. Japan was last in recession through the second quarter last year. — Reuters



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

SHORT TAKES

NEW DELHI

India to expedite Amazon, Flipkart antitrust probe

India’s antitrust watchdog plans to expedite a restarted probe into allegations of anti-competitive behaviour at Amazon.com Inc and Walmart Inc’s Flipkart, as it intensifies scrutiny of big-tech firms, two sources said.

The comments come as major US technology firms are at loggerheads with the government over issues such as data privacy bills and policies some industry executives have called protectionist. The Competition Commission of



India (CCI) initiated a probe in January last year on the basis of a complaint alleging Amazon and Flipkart promoted select sellers on their e-commerce platforms and that deep discounts stifled competition. — Reuters

BANGKOK

Thai cenbank asked to review rates for credit cards

Thailand’s government has asked the central bank to review interest rates for credit cards and personal loans to try to tackle high household debt, its prime minister said on Tuesday.

Prayuth Chan-ocha said a range of measures prepared for solving debt problems include reducing peoples’ interest rate burden, debt repayment adjustments and promoting competition for lower interest rates.

The central bank has been



asked to review the ceiling of interest rates and supervise credit cards, personal loans and auto title loans. “If our people still have a lot of debt and at a young age, it will affect their whole lives,” Prayuth said. — Reuters

VERSAILLES

French court convicts Ikea in mass spying scandal

A French court on Tuesday found the French subsidiary of Swedish furniture giant Ikea guilty of setting up an elaborate system to illegally spy on hundreds of employees and job applicants from 2009 to 2012.

The company’s French unit was fined one million euros (\$1.2 million) and former CEO Jean-Louis Baillot was handed a suspended two-year prison sentence. The ruling was less severe than recommended by prosecutors, who accused the



furniture company of illicitly carrying out “mass surveillance.” Baillot, Ikea France’s boss between 1996 and 2002, was also fined 50,000 euros after found guilty of “receiving personal data by fraudulent means.” — AFP

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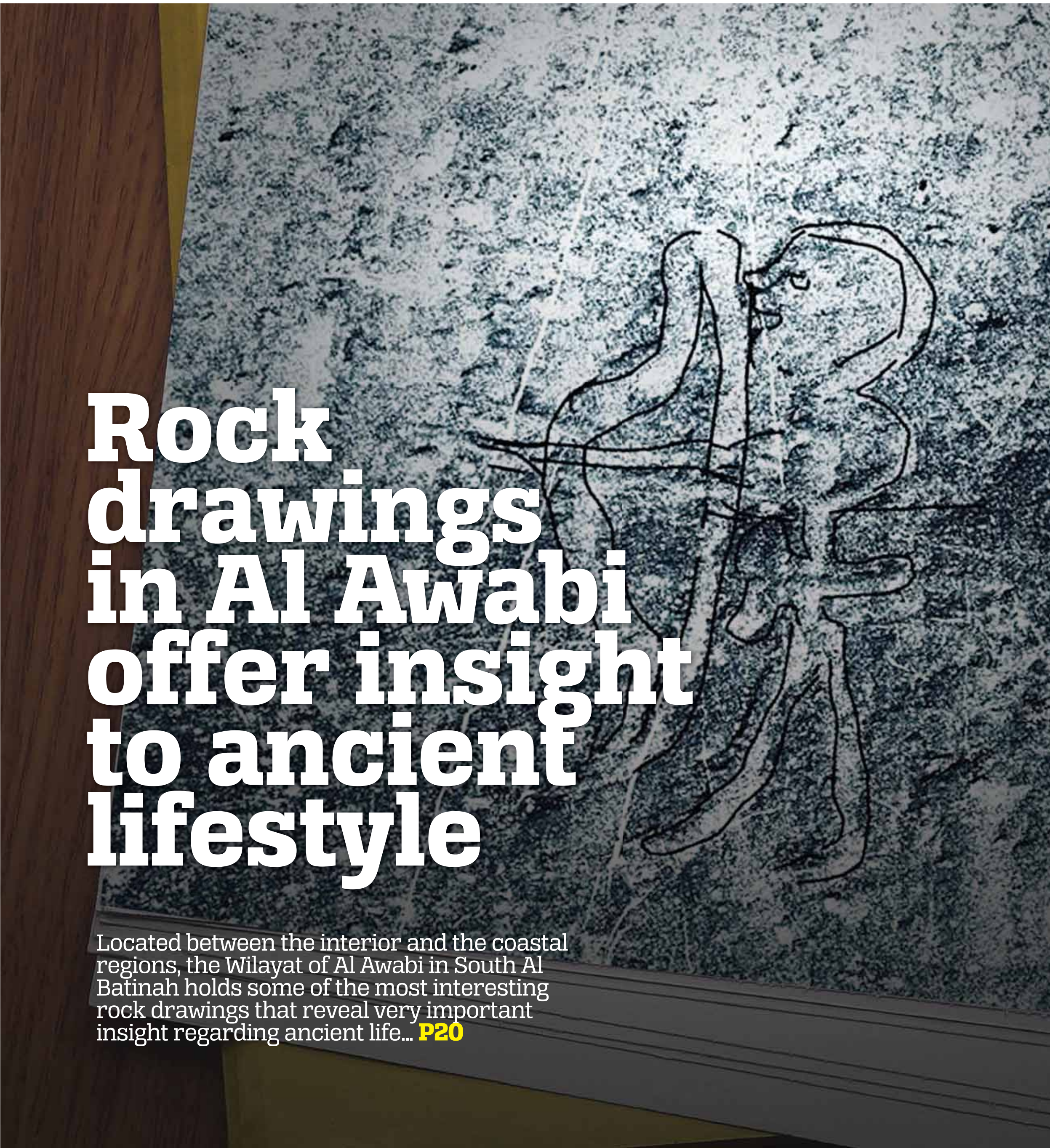
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features



Rock drawings in Al Awabi offer insight to ancient lifestyle

Located between the interior and the coastal regions, the Wilayat of Al Awabi in South Al Batinah holds some of the most interesting rock drawings that reveal very important insight regarding ancient life... **P20**

HERITAGE

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IN THE SERVICE OF THE SULTAN
BY IAN GARDINER

A memoir of how a small number of British officers led Muslim soldiers in the hard-fought anti-insurgency war that has shaped today's Gulf.

Meet the Moroccan women making Argan oil for the beauty industry

IN THE ARID mountains of southern Morocco, local women harvest argan oil, a natural product they have long used in cooking but which has become highly prized by the global beauty industry as an anti-ageing skin treatment and restorative for hair.

Most argan oil is produced by local cooperatives of Amazigh-speaking Berber women around the cities of Agadir, Essaouira and

Taroudant where the argan tree, which bears small green fruit resembling an olive, is common.

For centuries the oil, among the most expensive in the world, has been extracted by drying argan fruit in the sun, peeling and mashing the fruit then crushing and grinding the kernel with stones.

The oil was traditionally used as a flavouring and a savoury dip for bread. As an

ingredient it is still common in Morocco and now also exported for food.

Its use as a beauty product has created a surge in demand for the oil by international cosmetics companies, however. It also means that local groups are investing in more appealing packaging. The oil now costs around \$30-50 a litre locally, but can sell on the international market in smaller high-end bottles for up to \$250 a litre.

In the Tiout oasis near Taroudant (600 km south of Rabat), the Taitmatine cooperative employs 100 women to produce argan oil, offering them a salary, free childcare, health insurance and literacy courses.

The cooperative, whose name in Amazigh means "sisters", was set up in 2002.

Although new machines



they use to help process the fruit have helped speed up the work, the women still have to remove the hard shell of the kernels by hand by pounding it with a stone, before the inner kernel can be pressed by a machine to extract the oil.

"It takes up to three days of grinding for every woman to get one litre of Argan oil", said

Mina Ait Taleb, head of the Taitmatine cooperative.

"We work here but we also have fun and sing together", said Zahra Haqqi speaking in a room where dozens of women were grinding outer argan kernels using stones.

Haqqi said the job had helped her earn a regular income.

— Reuters



Al Rustaq Charitable Team: 21 years of relentless volunteer work and community service

THE RUSTAQ CHARITABLE TEAM of the Social Development Committee in the Wilayat of Rustaq in the South Al Batinah Governorate has been one of the leading teams in the field of voluntary work and social solidarity in the Sultanate for 21 years. Its community projects, which numbered more than twenty, touched the needs of a group of the poor, the needy, orphans, the social security category and those with limited income.

The team's revenues in 2020 amounted to RO 700,000, from which more than two thousand families from various regions and villages of the Wilayat of Rustaq benefited.

During the recent period, it has implemented a number of investment projects that enabled it to carry out its societal roles to the fullest. In this context, Hafedh al Hanawi, deputy head of the Rustaq Charitable Team, said "The Rustaq Charitable Team is a seed of good that was planted 21 years ago, during which it grew little by little until it grew and became a fruitful tree that benefited a large number of segments of society.

Al Hanawi stated that the team's work began within the programmes of the Cultural Committee at Al Rustaq Club in 2000, and the cash and in-kind proceeds at that time were few within the limits of RO 1,350, in addition to a small number of food parcels, stressing that the team's revenues are increasing year after year until it reached in 2020 seven hundred thousand Omani riyals.

He added that the team was included through several stages and several names, the last of which was the Social Solidarity Team of the Cultural Committee at Al Rustaq Sports Club, it is listed in the Social Development Committee in the wilayat. It is headed by Wali Al Rustaq in order to develop, expand and organise its work mechanism according to a new vision and identity, and the team was announced Officially on May 16, 2016.

Al Rustaq Charitable Team aims to achieve the principle of



social solidarity among members of society and translate it into a tangible reality by alleviating the suffering of poor families, instilling the value of spending among members of society. This is in addition to bringing joy and pleasure into the hearts of the needy, and accustoming people to institutional collective work in the social field according to the vision of the team which stems from the principle of working in the spirit of one team to achieve social solidarity among all segments of society.

He pointed out that the number of members of the team consists of 125 members, in addition to the 12-member board of directors. The team has 5 bank accounts and supervises more than 60 donation boxes distributed among commercial centres, libraries and mosques.

He stated that the team had formed several committees, including The Families Study Committee, the Admission Committee, the Media Committee, the Coordination and Follow-up Committee, the Sharia Committee, the Finance Committee, the Funds Management and Revenue Development Committee, and the Maintenance Committee, the Orphans Committee, the Endowment Committee, and the Women's Committee. He noted that the Rustaq Charitable Team

works in cooperation and coordination with the Zakat Committee in the wilayat within the scope and boundaries of the Wilayat of Rustaq.

The deputy head of the Al Rustaq Charitable Team explained that the team developed a plan to implement and own a number of investment projects, namely the charitable endowment project to find private endowments, the proceeds of which go to the team's programmes and projects.

Saleh al Sakhbouri, head of the team's media committee, said that the Al Rustaq Charitable Team has become a link between donors and those eligible for donations through central distribution at the wilayat level according to a specific and clear mechanism. He stressed that the team's projects have received great interaction from citizens and government and civil institutions over the past years because of the trust gained by this team from different segments of society. On the media aspects of the team, he said, "The media committee is working to acquaint community members with charitable projects and their goals and promote them and urge people to donate through publications that are published through the team's accounts on social media, stressing that they enjoy great interaction and response from community mem-

bers."

He pointed out that the team works in partnership with all institutions that have a role in voluntary and charitable work, whether governmental or private, in order to improve work and promote it in order to provide financial and in-kind assistance to the needy through programmes and projects established by the team.

The team provided food aid during the Covid-19 pandemic, which included most of the affected families, as well as the expatriates who were affected by the closure of their stores, and the aid of citizens who were dismissed from their jobs.

The team relies on several sources of income to implement these projects, the most important of which are: the daily and seasonal contributions of individuals, the contributions of private institutions, and the rents collected from the team's endowment buildings.

The team has a number of projects and participation, the most important of which are: building prayer rooms in Al Rustaq Public Park, organising the first and second mass wedding in the wilayat, celebrating the International Orphan Day, in addition to participating in the activities of the International Volunteer Day and the Omani Volunteer Day.

ENVIRONMENT

World Sea Turtle Day: A timely reminder that Oman's sea turtles need saving



WITH ITS PRISTINE beaches and balmy waters, the Sultanate offers the ideal home for sea turtles. In fact, it hosts the second largest population of Loggerhead sea turtles in the world, one of the most important nesting areas for Green turtles across the northern Indian Ocean, in addition to two other species (Hawksbill and Olive Ridley) that return annually to nest on its long stretch of coastline. As we celebrate World Sea Turtle Day today, our attention is drawn to this remarkable species, which has lived in the world's oceans for over 100 million years, and which faces various threats.

A combination of disturbances like coastal development and beach driving, bycatch (accidental capture of turtles in fishing nets), ghost fishing, light pollution, plastic pollution and climate change are negatively impacting the sea turtles habitat and ecosystem, with each of the four species found in Oman now listed as threatened (either vulnerable or in some cases critically endangered), on the IUCN Red List, a global repository that categorises the conservation status of different species. Last year, researchers published the disheartening finding that there has been a 79-per cent decline in the nesting population of Loggerhead turtles on the island of Masirah, a traditional stronghold over the past few dec-



ades. For the last 13 years, the Environment Society of Oman, in collaboration with the Environment Authority, has been trying to counteract this loss, for the sake of conserving the species, maintaining a healthy marine environment, and of preserving the socio-economic balance of communities. This long-term programme has been funded by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and implemented with the help of local collaborators including Five Oceans Environmental Services LLC and Future Seas SPC.

"Sea turtles play an important role in maintaining healthy ocean ecosystems, as well as being integral to the very delicate food chain. This of course has huge implications for fishing communities, not to mention those who rely on income from turtle-related tourism," said Suaad al Harthi, ESO's Executive Director. "The situation is extremely worrying, yet it is these communities who are now helping us to rectify it. This is why, as well as our research work, we put significant effort into engaging locals, raising their awareness of the importance of marine turtles, and garnering their support on key conservation actions. Through a holistic community approach, we aim to work together to reverse the declining trend".

As such, ESO has spearheaded a range of activities including dedicated net clean-ups, awareness videos, community outreach programmes, and several publications. On the ground, it has assembled a field team of Masirah Island residents to monitor and protect populations, part of its mandate to train and hire Omanis in conservation strategies, community engagement and NGO management, as well as supporting the livelihood of local communities. The field teams are also supplemented with graduates from ESO's capacity building programme. These efforts are growing year on year, as ESO focuses on engaging and inspiring the next generation. Meanwhile, it continues to accelerate knowledge and understanding of turtle biology, ecology and conservation needs, as well as raising the international profile of Oman's turtles.

"ESO will forever advocate for our precious marine turtle populations, but our challenges are far from over. We have to continue this momentum and we know it is only with the involvement of the local community, and by promoting this culture among young people, our future environmental ambassadors, that we can be successful in conserving our natural resources and ensuring that they are still around for future generations," added Suaad.

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FASHION



Grand designs: The refugees in Paris with an eye on fashion

From old denim fabrics, Afghan refugee Bagher Hussein fashioned a pair of baggy jeans with fringed patches that he hopes will be paraded down a French catwalk later this year.

Hussein has worked with a sewing machine before. He made his way to Iran after fleeing fighting in Afghanistan's Ghazni province, surviving on a modest tailor's income.



Now he's involved in a collaboration between French fashion students and migrants from Afghanistan and the Middle East. The Reprise project aims to train to give migrants the skills to turn second-hand clothes into edgy menswear.

"I enjoy selecting different colors, different types of fabric ... and then making something special out of them," Hussein said in his native Dari language.

New to his repertoire are jeans, jackets and hats, sometimes inspired by traditional Afghan clothing.



Reprise evolved from a rudimentary sewing workshop. The workshop is based inside a holding centre that houses 200 asylum-seekers in a southern Paris suburb.

Once or twice a week, a group of asylum seekers join the workshop, honing new skills in embroidery, crocheting, and modeling.

"I like to come to model. Model and (play) cricket," said asylum seeker Imran Hazarabuz, who used to play cricket in his native Afghanistan. "I don't know which work is better for me, we will see."

The fashion students and social workers want to get hold of professional sewing machines and fabric from fashion brands. If they are able to speed up the pace at which apparel items can be made, a first collection could be marketed later this year.

"The story is there, and the clothes breathe this story," said fashion student Hugo Castejon-Blanchard. — **Reuters**

CHANGING WORLD



'Diamond rush' grips South African village after discovery of unidentified stones

KWAHLATHI, SOUTH AFRICA: More than 1,000 fortune seekers on Monday flocked to the village of KwaHlathi in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province in search of what they believed to be diamonds after a discovery of unidentified stones in the area.

The people travelled from across South Africa to join villagers who have been digging since Saturday, after a herd man who dug up the first stone on an open field, which some believe to be quartz crystals, put out the word.

The discovery was a life changer, said one digger Mendo Sabelo as he held a handful of tiny stones.

"This means our lives will change because no one had a proper job, I do odd jobs. When I returned home with them, (the family was) really overjoyed," said the 27-year old father of two.

Unemployed Skhumbuzo Mbhele concurred, adding: "I hadn't seen or touched a diamond in my life. It's my first time touching it here."

The mines department said on Monday it was sending a team comprising of geological and mining experts to the site to collect samples and conduct an analysis.

A formal technical report will be issued in due course, the department said.

The lack of an analysis of the stones has not deterred the fortune seekers

as long lines of parked cars on both sides of the gravel road could be seen just a few metres from the open field, where the young, old, female and male dug through the soil with picks, shovels and forks to find riches.

South Africa's economy has long suffered from extremely high levels of unemployment, trapping millions in



poverty and contributing to stark inequalities that persist nearly three decades after the end of apartheid in 1994. The coronavirus pandemic has made it worse.

Some people have started selling the stones, with the starting price ranging from 100 rand (\$7.29) to 300 rand.

The provincial government has since requested all those involved to leave the site to allow authorities to conduct a proper inspection, amid fears the people digging at the site could potentially be spreading the coronavirus. — **Reuters**

DIGITAL TREND

Twitter adds 'Arabic (feminine)' language option in diversity drive



On Tuesday introduced an "Arabic (feminine)" language setting enabling the social media site to speak to users using feminine grammar, part of what it said was an inclusion and diversity drive.

"We want our service to reflect the voices that shape the conversations that take place on our service," said Rasha Fawakhiri, Twitter's communications head for the Middle East and North Africa.

In Arabic, verbs agree with the gender of their subject. Masculine forms are used to address mixed or unknown audiences and are the default in most texts.

Twitter did not introduce a non-binary gender language option in Arabic, but Fawakhiri said the company has other gender-neutral projects in the works for the site. It has plans to add a designated gender pronoun field to Twitter profiles so people can display how they prefer to be addressed.

Until now, the instruction for the user to Tweet in Arabic had appeared only in the masculine form "gharrid". With a change of settings, this command can now appear on Twitter as "gharridi", the feminine form.

Twitter says it is the first social media site to introduce an "Arabic (feminine)" language option. Dubai-based global logistics company Aramex (ARMX.DU) in April added a similar language option to its corporate website.

"We want to provide people with the option of how they prefer to be addressed," Fawakhiri said.

Twitter started with Arabic and the initiative could be expanded to other languages, Fawakhiri said.

Last year the company amended some of the language used by its engineers in their processes to be more inclusive. This included "they/them/their" pronouns and replacing "man hours" with "person or engineer hours", and "master/slave" with "leader/follower". — **Reuters**



Rock drawings in Al Awabi offer insight to ancient lifestyle

By Staff Reporter

Rock drawings may look like a child's art to some but they actually help scientists and experts understand what life was like in the past. The Wilayat of Al Awabi in the Governorate of South Al Batinah has been home to some of these important historical drawings.

Located between the interior and the coastal regions, the drawings in Al Awabi date back to distant times, a document-of-sort to the important events that took place. These rock drawings and writings serve as a cultural archive and a source of ancient Omani history.

Researcher Engineer Harith al Kharousi said: "We can trace the history of rock drawings and writings in the Wilayat of Al Awabi at the beginning of human existence, where the ancient man-made these drawings and writings that document their life and beliefs. Some of these drawings date back to thirty thousand years, and this date can be inferred by comparing the style of drawings with other similar styles in the world and the Arabian Peninsula in particular."

Al Kharousi added that the period of rock writings began to increase with the end of the last ice age (about 11,000 years ago) when a suitable climate prevailed for the flourishing of life and the abundance of fruits and game, and consequently the increase in the number of people and their activity. A human cultural

wave prevailed and these humans started to think about the universe and worship. It is during this time when knowledge flourished and with it, the emergence of human settlements and the transformation of man to agriculture and stability. This is evidenced by the widespread inscriptions and drawings of ancient sacred creatures such as caribou, bull and sun.

The early humans documented their lives by painting stories that represent heroism such as battle scenes. These drawings, together with the discovery of prehistoric man-made tools created a better understanding of the era where hunting and war was part of their early struggle.

In Oman, some pictures depicted the prehistoric Omani man's use of the war-barrel tool in hunting and war, which is a tube of wood that is placed inside a projectile and released by blowing. This tool is still used in a number of remote areas in the world such as forests Amazon, Africa, Sumatra and Australia.

Al Kharousi explained that after man invented the letter (a symbol that represents a specific sound), he began translating his feelings and thoughts on the rocks, like the modern man who writes his thoughts in a newspaper or modern means of communication, and with the arrival of the current Arabic letter to Oman and the Islamic religion, a qualitative and quantitative leap appeared in the

rock writings.

He pointed out that specialised families appeared documenting things on a variety of topics. For example, we find, Shathan bin Malik writes some sentences in the year (399) AH about the village of Stal, and Mohammad bin Abdullah bin Mohammad al Stali writes some sentences in the year (302) AH about Al Hajir, and the topics were varied including cultural topics such as verses of poetry and governance, social and political topics.

Perhaps the most important political writings are what was written in Al Jalia Cave in the village of Al Hajir about the Imamate contract of Imam Al Khalil bin Shathan in the fifth century AH. It is mentioned that coins were found in the Wilayat of Bahla belonging to the aforementioned Imam. There are also topics related to the weather, such as what Imam Mani' bin Ali bin Mohammad bin Ismail wrote in the village of Stal on Friday 29 Shaaban in the year (970) AH. He chronicled a massive flood that destroyed fifty houses and the uprooting of five hundred palm trees in the village of Stal. He mentions that the poet Ibn Shawwal al Husayni al Kidhawi chronicled the same event in one of his poems, and the writer also mentions that Mani' bin Ali bin Mohammad bin Ismail was held for the Imamate in Nizwa in the year (982) AH.

He said that there are — in Wadi Bani Kharous — several writings that chronicle impor-

tant economic events such as the reclamation of several agricultural lands in the village of Al Alia during the era of the Yarubi Imamate, as well as the important writings inscribed by Shaikh Mohammad bin Khamis bin Mubarak al Kharousi, the older brother of Shaikh Ja'id bin Khamis al Kharousi, who recorded the occurrence of date palm lesion caused by the dubas palm bug and that he sold the date crop in that year for a thousand toman (currency), which is an indication of the movement of economic activity in that period. Shaikh Mohammad bin Khamis bin Mubarak al Kharousi had many inscriptions on the rocks, the most prominent of which was what he wrote about Al Awabi on the news of the establishment of the falaj and the re-planning and implementation of the Aflaj, where he indicated that the giant project began with a dream that he determined to achieve it. the falaj is still standing and is the largest in the wilayat.

Engineer Al Kharousi said "The human path must be chronicled, and those who chronicled that human path through time in drawing and writing are true historians. Without them, we would not have known the ancient past.

The human heritage is a source of pride for the younger generations and a human cultural potential that must be exploited optimally through cultural and tourism investment.