

P10

LIVERPOOL, CHELSEA SEAL CL SPOTS



P14

CHRONICLING THE WILD LIFE OF NORTH AL BATINAH



P20

CHINA CRYPTO MINING BUSINESS HIT BY CRACKDOWN



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO KING OF JORDAN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Abdullah II of Jordan on his country's 75th Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to King Abdullah II, praying to the Almighty Allah for the return of this and similar occasions on him and the brotherly people of Jordan at a time they achieved further progress and prosperity.

— ONA

HM GREETINGS TO ARGENTINA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Alberto Fernandez of the Argentine Republic on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Fernandez. His Majesty the Sultan also wished the friendly people of Argentine further progress and prosperity.

— ONA

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OMAN OBSERVER

INSIDE



IRAN, UN NUCLEAR MONITOR EXTEND INSPECTION DEAL **P6**



BOOKSHOP OWNER'S DREAMS BURIED UNDER GAZA RUBBLE **P9**

Job-seekers, laid-off workers seek status settlement

MUSCAT: A number of job-seekers and workers whose services were terminated visited the directorates of the Ministry of Labour on Monday, where they urged the authorities to settle their status at a time the government is pressing ahead with its programme of employment of citizens.

The government is providing employment opportunities through its programme of training and replacement of expatriate workers in the public sector with Omanis.

The government also facilitates employment in different private sector areas. This includes the announcement made on Monday regarding the finalisation of appointment procedures for 2,364 teachers during the School Year 2021-2022, as well as the Sultan Qaboos Naval Academy's announcement of receiving a new batch of recruits on Sunday.

Meanwhile, the Job Security Fund (JSF) began disbursing the dues of workers whose services were terminated in accordance with mechanisms endorsed since November 2020. By April 2021, the number of JSF beneficiaries stood at 6,413, of them 78.7 per cent are men and 21.3 per cent are women.

The JSF was established in March 2020 and its funding kicked off with a RO 10 million donation by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, among wide-scale participation from various segments of society. The JSF provides protection for people who have lost their jobs for reasons beyond their control.

TURN TO **P5**

PANDEMIC IS STILL TAKING TOO MANY LIVES

MUSCAT: Despite the progress that has been made in understanding the pandemic's nature and root causes, identifying some measures for its prevention, managing its spread and part of its effects, and developing a bank of knowledge lessons about it, it was not enough as the pandemic is still taking too many lives.

This was stated by Dr Ahmed Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, while attending the 74th session of the World Health Assembly (WHA73), which began on Monday.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Al Saeedi emphasised the need to end the pandemic.

The meeting was attended by under-secretaries and senior officials from the ministry, in addition to Ambassador Idris bin Abdulrahman al Khanjari, the Sultanate's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and International Organizations in Geneva.

He underscored the Sultanate's strong belief in advocating human security and peace through global



Oman has reaffirmed its regional commitment with partners from across the globe in expanding cooperation in health, especially within the context of Covid-19, as a tool to bring international solidarity, stability and peace

DR AL SAEEDI
Minister of Health

cooperation as the country hosted in cooperation with the WHO and the UN Secretariat a meeting to Call for Health Security and Peace in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

TURN TO **P3**

12-MEMBER CREW RESCUED FROM SUNKEN SHIP



The Maritime Security Centre (MSC) in coordination with the Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo) and other military, security and civil bodies, carried out a rescue operation to save 12-member crew of a Togolese commercial ship that sank near Al Halaniyat Islands in Dhfoar Governorate after a water leak and engine failure. A Rafo helicopter rescued six Syrian nationals and six Indian nationals from the ship and transferred them to Dhfoar Governorate for medical care. — ONA

Pact for Turkish industrial zone in Duqm

MUSCAT: The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, on Monday signed a cooperation programme with a trade delegation from the Turkish Gebze Organized Industrial Zone (GOSB) to attract Turkish investments through the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

The Turkish delegation's visit to the Sultanate is organised by the investment promotion arm of the ministry, in cooperation with OPAZ. The visit aims to discuss ways of trade and investment cooperation between the two countries and to meet with officials from a number of authorities concerned.

During the visit, an initial agreement was signed for an investment project to replicate a model for the Gebze Organized Industrial Zone (GOSB) in SEZAD. The key joint investment sectors include mining, petrochemicals, food and logistics. This joint investment project will lead to the establishment of a Turkish Industrial Zone in Duqm.

The pact was signed by Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of OPAZ; Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Under-Secretary of the ministry; and Fahit Yildirim, Chairman of Turkish Gebze Organized Industrial Zone.

DETAILS ON **P17**

Why mercury is rising over 40 in Muscat during nights?

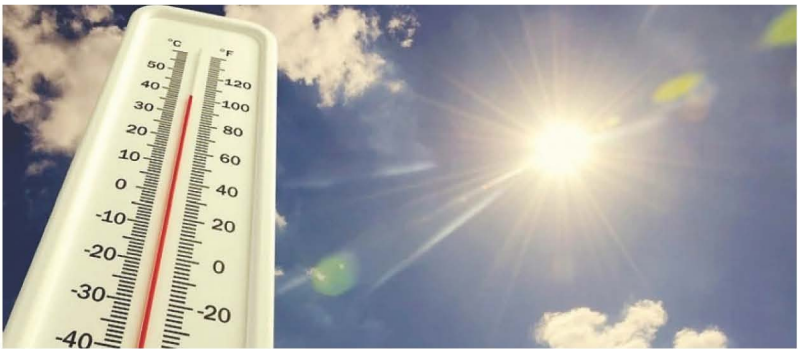
STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 24

Oman's met office on Monday explained why some wilayats in the Sultanate have been experiencing extreme temperatures for the last couple of days.

A phenomenon called (Foehn wind) was reported over the last two days in the Sultanate, pushing the temperatures to rise above 40 degrees Celsius during midnight in the Governorate of Muscat.

This happens when southwest winds blew from Wadi Samayil, a mountainous area, to the coastal areas of the Sea of Oman (Muscat Governorate).

The Foehn wind happens due to a change from wet and cold conditions on one side of a mountain to warmer and drier conditions on the other (leeward) side. It is generated when a moving mass of warm humid air meets a mountain on its path. By inertia, the mass of air moves against the mountain and the air is forced to rise along the sides of the mountains.



Sayyid Shihab
receives message
from Qatari minister



MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received a written message from Dr Khalid Mohamed al Attiyah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs in the State of Qatar. The message deals with the military cooperation between the two brotherly countries. The message was handed over to Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Za'abi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence, when he received on Monday Rashid Said al Khayarin, Chargé D'affaires of the Qatari Embassy in Muscat.

The two sides reviewed the strong relations between the two brotherly countries and exchanged views on several matters of common concern. The meeting was attended by Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raeesi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces, and the Military Attaché at the Qatari Embassy in Muscat. — ONA

Shura refers GCC Anti-commercial
Fraud Law to State Council

MUSCAT: Majlis Ash'shura held its 12th ordinary session of the second annual sitting (2019-2020) of the ninth term (2019-2023), under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Majlis Ash'shura Chairman, in the presence of Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of the Majlis Ash'shura.

Majlis Ash'shura referred the draft unified GCC Anti-Commercial Fraud Law to the State Council without changes. Ahmed bin Said al Sharqi, head and rapporteur of the Economic and Financial Committee read out the committee's report about the law. He noted that the draft law stems its importance from fighting commercial fraud and its multiple and developed methods, in addition to the importance of protecting consumers' health. He noted that the law, once passed, will support the work and remit of the Consumer Protection Authority.

The council discussed the Education and Scientific Research Committee's report on an expressed desire regarding the Science and Math Chain Project. The council decided to return the report to the committee for more study.



The council also approved the Legal and Legislative Committee's report on the introduction of a legal article that allows for the cancellation of vehicle registration either permanently or temporarily. The report said that a vehicle owner may be forced under certain circumstances to cancel his vehicle registration either permanently or temporarily to avoid financial obligations. The report said that the proposal takes into consideration the conditions of citizens working in the transport, construction and contracting sectors and the other related sectors which were affected by the economic crisis that resulted from the Covid-19 pandemic as some vehicle owners had to stop using their vehicles for more than a year.

The members of Majlis Ash'shura listened to a number of ministerial responses to parliamentary questions raised by the council members including a ministerial response from the Minister of Labour to a question regarding the offices of recruitment of domestic workers. The council also reviewed a ministerial response from the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources regarding the period of application for changing the purpose of agricultural land. In his response the minister said that determining the period aims to regulate the work and reduce pressure on the employees.

شركة الدقم لتوليد الكهرباء ش.م.س.
Duqm Power Company S.P.C.

Tender Announcement

Request for Proposal for Construction of
Landscape works for DIPWP Project in Duqm
Tender No: DPW-IOM-DPC-0020

Introduction

Duqm Power Company SPC (the "Company") is established to provide state-of-the art, reliable, efficient and cost-effective utilities, such as power and water, industrial gases, etc., to industries in the Duqm Special Economic Zone (SEZ).

As part of the Company's ongoing development in Duqm area. DPC invites proposals from Companies registered in Duqm and SMEs registered in Al Wusta region to undertake the contract of Construction of Landscape works for the DIPWP Project Located at Duqm.

In view of the above, Company invites Bidders to submit their Expression of Interest as described below.

Scope of Work

The Contractor's scope of works will be for construction of landscape (Hardscape and Softscape) works in Duqm, Al Wusta Region. The brief Scope of Works as follows:

- Construction of landscape works for DPC located at Duqm.
- Building external finishing works.
- Irrigation and other related works through completion.

Request for proposal

The RFP for the Service will be made available in electronic form only from 09:00 AM, on 27-May-2021 Oman time.

Tender Fees

R.O. 50 +VAT (non-refundable by bank transfer)

Contractor Minimum Qualifications

Contractor must hold valid registration with relevant Government Authority for works of this nature, and have necessary experience in Oman for similar services. We particularly encourage Contractors currently operating in Duqm area (Al Wusta Region).

Interested Contractors shall contact Marafiq via email to tender@marafiq.om with the subject heading "Construction of Landscape works in DIPWP Project in Duqm" to receive further instructions related to payment of tender fee and collection of RFP Package.

Bid Closing

The closing date for the receipt of proposals will be 02:00 PM, 20-June-2021 Oman time.

P.O. Box 80 P.C. 102
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
www.marafiq.om

شركة الدقم لتوليد الكهرباء ش.م.س.
Duqm Power Company S.P.C.

Tender Announcement

Request for Proposal for Cleaning Services for Staff
Accommodation and office premises in Duqm,
Al Wusta Region.
Tender No: CUC-000-00-000-LE-TND-0005

Introduction

Marafiq (Centralized Utilities Company LLC) (herein the "Employer") inviting proposals from reputed and experienced Tenderers to undertake the contract for Cleaning Services for Staff Accommodation and office premises in Duqm, Al Wusta Region.

In view of the above, Company invites Local Companies (Duqm registered SMEs) registered and operating in Duqm area (Al Wusta Region) to submit their Expression of Interest as described below.

Scope of Work

The Contractor's scope of works will be for Routine Cleaning Services for Staff Accommodation and Office Premises in Duqm, Al Wusta Region.

Request for proposal

The RFP for the Service will be made available in electronic form only from 9:00 AM, 27-May-2021 Oman time.

Contractor Minimum Qualifications

Contractor must hold valid registration with works of this nature, and have necessary experience in Oman for similar services. We particularly encourage Contractors currently operating in Duqm area (Al Wusta Region).

Interested Contractors shall contact Marafiq via email to tender@marafiq.om with the subject heading "Cleaning Services for Staff Accommodation and office premises in Duqm" to receive further instructions and collection of RFP Package.

Bid Closing

The closing date for the receipt of proposals will be 02:00 PM, 13-June-2021 Oman time.

P.O. Box 80 P.C. 102
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
www.marafiq.om



The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Health, participates in the seventy-fourth session of the World Health Assembly with a delegation headed by Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health. — ONA

Pandemic still taking too many lives

FROM PAGE 1

“In the meeting, Oman reaffirmed its regional commitment with partners from across the globe in expanding cooperation in health, especially within the context of Covid-19, as a tool to bring international solidarity, stability, and peace,” said Dr Al Saeedi.

To emphasise the Sultanate's efforts in supporting peace and health, the minister further noted that Oman, in cooperation with Switzerland, has submitted a Global Health for Peace Initiative to the WHO, which will be discussed in January during the Executive Board Meeting-150, calling everyone to join that initiative.

Dr Al Saeedi added that Oman participated in June last year in launching the coalition for a universal health protection architecture, which calls for a multilateral cooperation approach to protect everyone's health anywhere and at any time.

The meeting reviews report of the Executive Board on its 147th and 148th sessions, and on its special session on the Covid-19 response, implementation of the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016–2030), Health in

the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the WHO programme and financial reports for 2020–2021.

The current session addresses a number of documents, most important of which are public health emergencies: preparedness and response, mental health preparedness for and response to the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as a political declaration of the third high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases, WHO's work in health emergencies, and the five-year action plan for health employment and inclusive economic growth (2017–2021).

The meeting additionally will touch upon the integrated people-centred eye care, and enhancement of laboratory biosafety, as well as health conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan.

Furthermore, the WHA74 will submit a progress report of sustainable health financing structures and universal coverage, prevention of deafness and hearing loss, in addition to progress in the rational use of medicines, and Global technical strategy for malaria 2016–2030,

and Smallpox eradication.

The 9-day meeting will further highlight expanding access to effective treatments for cancer and rare and orphan diseases, including medicines, vaccines, medical devices, diagnostics, assistive products, cell- and gene-based therapies and other health technologies; and improving the transparency of markets for medicines, vaccines, and other health products, in addition to integrated people-centred eye care, including preventable vision impairment and blindness.

The meeting of the session examines multiple technical and administrative documents such as the WHO programme and financial reports for 2020–2021, including audited financial statements for 2020, and report of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Board.

It should be noted that the World Health Assembly is the decision-making body of WHO. It is held annually and attended by delegations from all WHO Member States and focuses on a specific health agenda prepared by the Executive Board. The main functions of the World Health Assembly are to determine the policies of the Organization and supervise financial and administrative policies. — ONA

MoSD invites applications for social security pension

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

@zainabalnasseri

The Ministry of Social Development has invited applications from those who meet the conditions to get a social security pension. The eligible candidates can submit applications at the nearest Department of Social Development in their governorates or wilayats, accompanied by the supporting documents.

A post on its social media platforms mentioned the following conditions to be eligible to get the pension. The applicant should be an Omani citizen, fall within the categories mentioned in the Social Security Law, not have a source of income for living equivalent to the amount

of the due pension, and that the applicant not have a breadwinner capable of support.

The number of groups benefiting from the security pension according to the regulation is eight categories, namely: orphans, widows, divorced women, abandoned women, unmarried girls who do not have a breadwinner, besides the elderly, families of prisoners and the disabled who have permanent diseases and are unable to do a suitable job and have no support.

The ministry said that the social security service aims to provide financial assistance to financially needy individuals and families, provide social protection for needy groups, and achieve integration in security net coverage.

The number of cases benefiting from the social security pension by the end of 2019 was 74,029 cases, for which RO 113,812,073 was spent along with Eid and Ramadhan grants. The total number of beneficiaries from the social security pension stood at 136,795. The social care sector includes various programmes and services provided by the ministry to groups and cases in need of care and assistance to enable them and provide a decent life.

Moreover, within the framework of the ministry's efforts to employ members of social security families, job opportunities were created for 408 members within priorities, plans and targeted social policies in partnership with the relevant authorities.

NBEC prepares for intellectual forum



MUSCAT: The National Biological Ethics Committee (NBEC) on Monday discussed preparations for the 10th Intellectual Forum due to be held by the end of 2021.

The panel, which met at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), looked into a proposal to form a sub-committee to endorse research papers from an ethical

point of view for researchers whose institutions do not have specialised committees for this purpose.

The NBEC's second meeting chaired by HH Sayyid Fahd bin Al Julanda al Said, SQU Vice-Chancellor and Chairman of the NBEC.

The meeting also discussed a proposal to develop an electronic

website to cover all activities and documents of the NBEC and to serve as a point of reference for all issues pertaining to biological ethics.

The committee also followed up the progress of work on establishing a Waqf Fund (endowment fund) for the committee with a view to financing future activities. — ONA

PINK LAKES OF WILAYAT OF AL JAZER



MUSCAT: The pink lakes in the Wilayat of Al Jazer are among the most popular tourist attractions to visitors due to their rare colour.

They are 10 kilometres from the centre of the wilayat to the east. One is at the end of the paved road, and the other which is about 1 km north of the wilayat is the largest and most beautiful. It is

surrounded by green trees which adds to its beauty.

Both the lakes are affected by the tide and fill up during ebb tides

Many tourists have visited these pink lakes in recent years, camping on the soft sands and enjoying the beautiful scenery, especially after a 10-kilometre paved road was built to facilitate access to them.



TAPPING TOURISTS FROM TWO MEGA-EVENTS

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

While consecutive two years have been nearly a washout for the tourism industry in the country because of the pandemic, the two mega-events projected for the region are a ray of hope for the sector.

Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, said that there is a plan to cooperate with the authorities concerned to take advantage of the Dubai Expo 2020 and 2022 World Cup in Qatar to attract tourists to the country.

Expo 2020, which will

run from October to March, is expected to bring over 5 million tourists to Dubai.

Oman can tap the Expo as an opportunity as the next-door neighbour easily accessed by a good road network and a fully established aviation sector.

With the vaccination drive expected to pick up in Oman from next month, the authorities are expected to open the travel between the two countries with restrictions and formalities.

The World Cup 2022 in Qatar is also expected to bring different tourists to the region, even though the country is not directly accessible to Oman by

road.

“Expo 2020 is more important to Oman because of the accessibility and proximity. With less than four months to go for the start of the event, we need to launch some major preparations and planning,” said an Omani tourism operator, who has been seriously affected by the restrictions to limit the spread of the virus.

He said, “First we have to activate the taxi services as the operators have been badly affected by the continuous lockdowns over the past year. With tourists most likely to travel by road, they must

DUBAI EXPO 2020 AND 2022 WORLD CUP IN QATAR

are expected to bring millions of tourists to the region. Oman can tap the opportunity and attract some visitors of the events to the Sultanate

be provided with affordable transport. Secondly, we also need a few budget hotels that are close to tourist and commercial attractions. Government should offer incentives to property owners and small and medium tour operators so that can put infrastructure in place within a time frame.”

Apart from the infrastructure, Oman should be able to offer more than its famed beaches and mountains or wadis.

Oman has also exempted 130 nationalities from tourist visas, which will benefit the visitors to Dubai Expo 2020.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) recently called for requests to establish and operate amphibious aircraft services.

The bid is for an operating license ‘for aircraft with a capacity of 19 seats or less or with a maximum take-off weight of fewer than 10 tonnes.

“What we offer here in Oman are also available in other cities on a larger scale. The unique selling point is the hospitality and friendly local population. We need to activate services for trekking, affordable trips to mountains, deserts and water.”



Impact of Covid-19 on education discussed

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 24

The virtual symposium titled “Learning Loss in the Coronavirus Pandemic: Effects and Solutions” organized by the Ministry of Education began on Monday under the auspices of Dr Madiha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education.

Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, and a number of experts from UNICEF, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the International Association for Educational Achievement Assessment (IEA) attended the virtual symposium.

The symposium is aimed at teachers, administrators, supervisors, social and psychological specialists, students, and their parents in different governorates, as well as those concerned from the ministry, and a number of government and private agencies.

Dr Al Shaibaniyah said in her welcoming speech, “The statistics of the UNESCO show that 94 per cent of students around the world are affected by the pandemic. The Sultanate quickly responded to the spread of Covid-19 by implementing all precautions and moving to the online learning environment to ensure the continuity of the learning process. Schools and teachers made great efforts in implementing the online platforms in their teaching from the beginning of the pandemic until today.”

The minister also praised all



Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education

the efforts made by everyone in facilitating the implementation of the online educational platforms and in training on utilising them in teaching.

The first day of the symposium included four main sessions. In the first session, Dr Ambusaidi delivered a paper titled “Education



Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education

the learning loss; what data is already available to support data-driven policies; and what future data and opportunities can support countries in finding solutions during this unprecedented time.

In the third session, Andreas Schleicher, Director of Education and Skills at OECD, presented a

the Covid-19 Pandemic — Experiences Around the World and the Way Forward” presented by Suad Nabhan, Expert of Education and Youth Programs at Unicef. In her paper, she touched on the effects of the pandemic on education and how different countries reacted to the spread of the Covid-19 with Oman being amongst these countries. She also reflected on new initiatives in education from around the world.

It is worth noting that this symposium is covering three main topics as follows; “the causes and magnitude of learning loss, and its effects due to the Covid-19 pandemic,” “local and international experiences and initiatives in assessing and following up on learning loss”, and “appropriate solutions and plans to address learning loss in the Sultanate.”

The symposium seeks to reduce the learning loss, identify educational, psychological, and social priorities and needs, treatment methods, and the course of policies related in the next phase.

It also aims to find innovative and effective solutions, and to limit its short-term and long-term effects, as well as to highlight the roles of stakeholders from the educational field and the partners from the public and private sectors in addressing it.

In addition, the symposium seeks to make use of the best local and international experiences and practices in evaluating and addressing learning loss, and to identify national priorities for the learning process in the next academic year 2021-2022.

SAI chairs ARABOSAI meeting of Capacity Building Committee



MUSCAT: Deliberations of the 18th meeting of the Capacity Building Committee (CBC) at the Arab Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (ARABOSAI) kicked off on Monday under the chairmanship of the State Audit Institution (SAI).

The two-day meeting is being held via video-conferencing with participation of the SAI's members of the committee.

The meeting's agenda includes topics, mainly addressing the findings of implementing the action plan in the training and scientific research for the year 2020 and discussing implementation of the online training course on “SAIs Role in Audit amidst Crisis”, as well as

reviewing the draft action plan in training 2021.

The meeting also discusses the outcomes of the workshop on “Dealing with Grantors” that was implemented by the INTOSAI Development Initiative (IDI), besides reviewing the e-learning plan and the phases executed.

Furthermore, the meeting reviews the progress of the organisation's plan in the field of auditing extractive industries and the proposals of preparing a database for capacity building fields.

The meeting will also devise an operational plan for the year 2021 and address the detailed plan of the integrity self-assessment workshop (INTOSaint). — ONA

Job-seekers, laid-off workers seek status settlement

FROM PAGE 1

The JSF works to fill the transition gap experienced by laid-off workers before they get new jobs. It provides insured workers with decent living conditions, including the offer

of a time-limited earning equal to their previous income or part of it, besides helping them to look for jobs. The issue of employment tops the priorities of the government. His Majesty the Sultan follows up the developments in person. — ONA

Central market's shift from Mawaleh to ease city traffic

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Shifting of the Central Fruits and Vegetables Market from Mawaleh to Khazaen will substantially reduce the vehicular traffic around the highly-dense Mawaleh and Al Hail areas, according to the Muscat Municipality.

An agreement to transfer wholesale activities from the Central Market of Vegetables and Fruits to Khazaen Economic City was signed on Sunday to organise the wholesale business and employment in the market.

“By shifting completely from Mawaleh to Khazaen, we are expecting to reduce traffic snarls as we regulate movement of trucks in the Muscat Governorate,” an official from Muscat Municipality said.

There were complaints of traffic bottlenecks in the area due to the movement of heavy vehicles to cater to the market, which is one of the largest in the region.

The new market is spread over 800,000 sq mts, and the construction cost is about RO 43 million.



Spacious entry and exit points, regulated tracks and vast parking areas have been provisioned in the master plan to regulate traffic and ease day-to-day business around the new market.

According to sources in the Muscat Municipality, the move will improve urban planning in the Muscat Governorate and ensure the development of the existing central market.

The agreement's signatories were Essam bin Saud al Zadjali, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, and Salem bin Sulaiman al Dhahli, CEO of Khazaen Economic City.

“We are considering to convert the current market

activities into retail market with the addition of some other commercial components that will be announced later after the completion of the transfer of wholesale activities to the market,” he said.

The new central fruit and vegetable market, which constitutes one of the main components of the Khazaen Economic City, is also expected to enhance the Sultanate's food security within the national food security strategy.

The market and economic feasibility studies have been completed, and an international consultant has been appointed for the overall layout and design.

College of Banking and
Financial Studiesكلية الدراسات
المصرفية والمالية

Tender Announcement

Grid Connected Roof Mounted Solar System

College of Banking and Financial Studies would like to invite interested companies registered with AER / DCPR for design, supply, installation and commissioning of grid connected roof top solar system of size 140-200 KWp, to participate in the following tender:

Name of the Tender	Grid Connected Roof Top Solar System Project
Tender No.	20/ACC/20735
Place of availability of Tender Documents (RFPs)	CBFS, Finance Department (Sunday to Thursday 8:00 am to 2:00 pm on working days)
Address to send Prebid queries	tc@cbfs.edu.om Phone no. 12/22059911
Tender Document fees	R.O 25
Last Date to Collect Document	Thursdays, 8 th June 2021
Last Date to Submit proposal	Thursday, 29 th July 2021

Iran, IAEA extend inspection deal till June

VIENNA: The UN nuclear watchdog and Iran on Monday said an agreement to monitor Tehran's activities would be extended by a month till June 24, as world powers hold talks to revive a 2015 nuclear deal.

Global powers have been meeting in Vienna since early April in a bid to bring Washington back to the deal — which the US left in 2018.

The withdrawal under then president Donald Trump and re-imposition of sanctions led to Iran stepping up its nuclear activities.

Iran in late February limited the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s access to nuclear sites it has been monitoring as part of the 2015 deal.

A three-month agreement reached on February 21 allowing some inspections to continue was extended by another month, the IAEA announced.

"The verification and the monitoring activities that we agreed will continue as they are now for one month expiring on June 24th, 2021," IAEA director general Rafael Grossi told a news conference.

Tehran has also agreed that information collected so far by agency equipment in Iran would

not be erased, he added.

Grossi said the outcome of this "long discussion" was "important" but the situation was "not ideal".

"We should all be reminded that the temporary understanding is a sort of stop-gap measure. It is something that we came up with as a way to avoid flying completely blind," he said.

Iran's Supreme National Security Council said in a statement that the one-month extension aimed to "provide the needed opportunity for negotiations to progress and produce results."

Iran's envoy to the IAEA, Kazem Gharibabadi, also confirmed the agreement's extension, Iranian news agency IRNA reported.

"I advise (the countries taking part in Vienna talks) that this opportunity, which was provided over Iran's good faith, be used towards the complete lifting of sanctions in a practical and verifiable manner," he was quoted as saying.

Iran insists Washington must lift sanctions it imposed after leaving the deal before Tehran steps back its nuclear activities again.

The 2015 accord had Iran curtail its nuclear programme in return for sanctions relief.

Iranian foreign ministry



IAEA Director-General Rafael Grossi addresses the media at the IAEA headquarters in Vienna. — Reuters

spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said Monday that talks in Vienna depend on a "political decision" by the US, after Washington questioned Tehran's readiness to return to compliance with the accord.

"We have had very significant progress and still think that an agreement is within reach," he told reporters.

on Sunday, ahead of a fifth round of talks, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken had said it

remained unclear whether Iran is "ready and willing" to take the necessary steps to return to compliance with the multi-nation nuclear agreement.

Washington and Tehran have been taking part in indirect

negotiations in the Austrian capital since early April.

The EU-chaired talks also comprise Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia — with them acting as intermediaries between Washington and Tehran.

On Wednesday EU negotiator Enrique Mora said an agreement was "shaping up" to bring the US back into the deal though there were still things that needed to be worked out. The aim is to finish negotiations ahead of Iran's presidential elections in mid-June.

The 2015 accord is designed to ensure Iran cannot develop nuclear weapons by restricting its uranium enrichment programme. Tehran says it has never wanted to build atomic bombs.

Former US President Donald Trump's administration abandoned the nuclear accord three years ago and then reimposed harsh economic and trade sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

Iran responded by breaching the 2015 deal's restrictions on its nuclear activities. Its move to curb IAEA access arose from legislation widely seen as a means of pressuring President Joe Biden's administration to return to the nuclear pact and lift sanctions.

— AFP

Poland to become first Nato nation to buy Turkish drones



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan welcomes Poland's President Andrzej Duda ahead of their meeting at the Presidential Complex in Ankara. — AFP

WARSAW: Poland will buy 24 armed drones from Turkey, the Polish defence minister said, becoming the first Nato member to buy Turkish-made unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

The Bayraktar TB2 drones, the first of which are due to be delivered next year, will be armed with anti-tank projectiles. Poland will also buy a logistics and training package, said Defence Minister Mariusz Blaszczak.

Blaszczak told state radio the Bayraktar TB2 drones "have proven themselves in wars" and added that the UAVs would be serviced by a military company, without giving further details.

The contract, which will be concluded without a procurement process, will be signed during a visit by Polish President Andrzej Duda to Turkey on Monday.

Authorities in fellow Nato member Turkey say the country has become the world's fourth-largest drone producer since President Tayyip Erdogan increased domestic production to reduce reliance on Western arms.

Turkish defence company Baykar has sold its Bayraktar TB2 armed drone to Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Qatar and Libya. Erdogan said in March that Saudi Arabia was also interested in buying Turkish drones. — Reuters

US says primary focus is to ensure ceasefire holds, aid delivered to Gaza

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will focus primarily on ensuring that a ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinians holds during his visit to the region later on Monday, and work to get assistance delivered to the people of Gaza, a senior State Department official said.

Washington has "every hope and expectation" that the ceasefire, brokered by Egypt and now in its fourth day after 11 days of hostilities, will hold, the US official said in a call with reporters but said it was too early for wider peace talks.

Blinken will travel to Jerusalem, Ramallah, Cairo and Amman through Thursday and meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi and Jordan's King Abdullah.

"Our primary focus is on maintaining the ceasefire, getting the assistance to the people who needed, it" the official said.

"The United States remains



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken

committed to the two-state solution...We are not wavering from that in any way. It's probably premature at this time to invite the parties to Washington or anywhere else," the official said.

The United States' Secretary of State's trip aimed at consolidating the ceasefire that brought 11 days of deadly bombardment between Israel and Hamas to a halt.

"Secretary Blinken will meet with Israeli leaders about our

ironclad commitment to Israel's security," US President Joe Biden said in a statement.

"He will continue our administration's efforts to rebuild ties to, and support for, the Palestinian people and leaders, after years of neglect."

Biden, who came under criticism from many within his own Democratic party for not pushing US ally Israel more publicly to call a ceasefire, has

touted his administration's "quiet, relentless diplomacy" to bring about a halt in the fighting.

Israel's response to the Hamas rocket barrages also drew sharp criticism from some liberal members of the US Congress who have questioned American arms sales to the Jewish state.

Blinken's trip, in addition to meetings with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Mahmud Abbas, will take him to Cairo for consultations with President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and then to Amman to speak with Jordan's King Abdullah II.

The State Department confirmed the trip's itinerary but did not elaborate on the topics that would be addressed during the secretary's visit.

In a tweet, Blinken said the trip would aim to support "efforts to solidify a ceasefire".

"The United States has engaged in intensive diplomacy to bring an end to the hostilities and reduce tensions," he said. — AFP/Reuters

JUBA

South Sudan aid doctor killed 'in cold blood'

A South Sudanese doctor was murdered in the northern, oil-rich Unity State, and colleagues threatened Sunday to go on strike if those responsible are not found. The murder, which took place last week, follows the killing of a nurse in April in Eastern Equatoria, a southeastern state.

On Sunday, a statement released by The South Sudan Doctors' Union (SSDU), said it was "deeply saddened on the killing of our member, Dr Louis Edward Saleh in Ganyiel village in Unity



State."

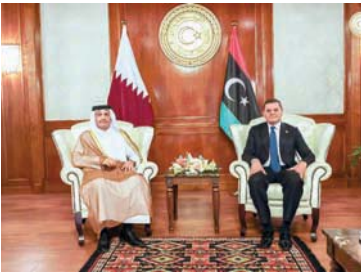
South Sudan is one of the most dangerous countries for humanitarians, with nine aid workers killed there last year, according to the UN. — AFP

TRIPOLI

Qatar offers backing to Libya unity govt

Qatar gave its support to Libya's internationally-backed political process, which aims to lift the North African nation out of a decade of conflict and foreign interference. "We support the UN-sponsored political process in the hope that it preserves the territorial integrity of Libya and prevents foreign interference in its affairs," Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said on a visit to the Libyan capital.

"Our exchanges were fruitful,



in particular on support for the transition process in Libya... Qatar's position is firm," he told reporters, standing alongside his Libyan counterpart, Najla al Mangoush. — AFP

CAIRO

Court allows Suez Canal to keep holding Ever Given

An Egyptian court rejected a complaint by the Japanese owner of a container ship that blocked traffic in the Suez Canal for six days in March against the vessel's continued detention by canal authorities, a lawyer said. The Ever Given, one of the world's largest container ships, became jammed across the canal in high winds on March 23, halting traffic in both directions and disrupting global trade.

The complaint was attached to a case at the economic court in



Ismailia in which the Suez Canal Authority (SCA) sought \$916 million in compensation from the Ever Given's owner Shoei Kisen.

— AFP

In brief

■ MANILA

PHILIPPINES' ACTIVE
VOLCANO SPEWS
STEAM-LADEN PLUMES

The Philippines' second most active volcano on Monday spewed steam-laden plumes reaching 1 kilometre high following days of volcanic earthquakes, the government's volcanology institute said.

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) has monitored hundreds of quakes since last week at Taal Volcano in Batangas province, 66 kilometres south of Manila. "Low-level background tremors" have also persisted since April 8, the institute said in its bulletin. On Monday, an "upwelling of hot volcanic fluids in (the volcano's) lake... generated plumes that reached 1 kilometre tall", while sulphur dioxide emissions remained high amid steady ground deformation, the bulletin added. — **dpa**

■ PHNOM PENH

CAMBODIAN CURFEW
LIFTED BUT COVID
CASES CLIMB

Cambodian authorities further eased restrictions over the weekend but a Covid outbreak at the country's most overcrowded prison provided cause for concern. Cambodia's Ministry of Health reported 556 new cases. The tally comes after an 8 pm curfew in place since April was lifted by authorities in Phnom Penh. They also lifted a ban on alcohol sales.

The city's Governor Khuong Sreng warned restrictions would be re-imposed if case numbers spiked, or if people began flouting public health orders like those requiring masks to be worn, the *Khmer Times* reported on Monday. — **dpa**

■ KABUL

SECURITY OFFICIALS
ARRESTED IN
AFGHANISTAN

Around 100 security officials in Afghanistan have been arrested over negligence of their duties after the Taliban attacked the capital of Eastern Laghman province, officials said. The militants were able to break through the security belt of the provincial capital, Mehtarlam, on Sunday and attacked the central prison before they were pushed back by security forces, said local councillors Gulzar Sangarwal and Atiqullah Abdul Rahimzai.

According to a spokesman for the provincial governor, the deputy of the National Directorate of Security secret service was among the 100 officials arrested after the attack was repelled. — **dpa**

Myanmar's Suu Kyi defiant
in first comments since coup

NAYPYIDAW: Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Monday voiced defiance as she made her first court appearance since being detained in a coup, vowing her ousted political party would live on.

Myanmar has been in uproar since the February 1 putsch, with near-daily protests and a nationwide civil disobedience movement. More than 800 people have been killed by the military, according to a local monitoring group.

The junta has threatened to dissolve her National League for Democracy — which swept elections in 2020 — over alleged voter fraud.

The Nobel laureate — who has not been seen in public since the coup — sounded "healthy and fully confident" during the 30-minute meeting, her lawyer Min Min Soe said.

"She wishes her people to stay healthy as well as affirmed the NLD will exist as long as people exist because it was founded for people."

Suu Kyi has been hit with a string of criminal charges including flouting



Lawyers Khin Maung Zaw (R) and Min Min Soe, representing detained Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi, address members of the media at Khin Maung Zaw's house in Naypyidaw. — **AFP**

coronavirus restrictions during last year's election campaign and possessing unlicensed walkie-talkies.

There was a heavy security presence in the capital Naypyidaw, a correspondent said, with the road to the specially-constructed courthouse blocked by police trucks.

There have been weeks of delays to Suu Kyi's legal case and her lawyers have

struggled to gain access to her. The next hearing was set for June 7, Min Min Soe said, adding she had also met with former president Win Myint, who was ousted and detained along with Suu Kyi.

"It's hard to say why this meeting was now allowed", Richard Horsey, Senior Adviser on Myanmar to the International Crisis Group said.

— **AFP/Reuters**

India warns against mass farmers protest

NEW DELHI: Indian government leaders appealed to farmers to call off a mass protest this week for fear it could prove a viral "super-spreader" event as the country's overall death toll from Covid-19 crossed 300,000 on Monday.

Over a third have died over the past three weeks during a devastating second wave fuelled by a new virus variant detected in India, mass political and religious gatherings, and lowering of the guard by the public, health officials and experts say.

Now farmers have stirred fresh alarm by saying they will hold mass protests across the country on Wednesday to mark six months of their campaign against deregulation of agriculture markets.

Farmers are camped out on Delhi's outskirts despite a great risk of infection to themselves, the joint committee of farmers organisations said in a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to repeal laws to liberalise the farm sector.

"We have no desire to expose the protesting farmers or anyone else to avoidable health hazards", the letter said.

But challenging laws that would make farmer livelihoods vulnerable to corporate agri-



A health worker inoculates a man with a dose of the coronavirus vaccine at a vaccination camp held at a wholesale vegetable market on the outskirts of Amritsar. — **AFP**

businesses is itself a life and death matter, it said.

Twelve opposition parties including Congress issued a statement saying they stood by the farmers, who are an influential voting bloc in India's vast countryside.

The fear is that a mass rally on the edges of the capital Delhi could become a "super-spreader"

Farmers are camped
out on Delhi's outskirts
despite a great risk of
infection to themselves

incident like the Great Pitcher festival on the banks of the river Ganges last month when thousands took a holy dip, or

the crowded political rallies that were held in states holding local elections. "Please don't act irresponsibly, this kind of protest is totally unacceptable when the lives of people are at stake", Amarinder Singh, Chief Minister of Punjab state where the farmer demonstrations originated, said in a statement.

India's daily tally of new

coronavirus infections rose by 222,315, government data showed on Monday although it has fallen off highs of over 400,000 earlier this month.

The giant South Asian country has recorded a total of 26.75 million Covid-19 infections, second only to the United States. Deaths rose by 4,454 to reach a total of 303,720.

Health experts say the actual number of fatalities could be several times higher as many are not being reported as Covid-19 deaths. Scores of bodies have washed up in the Ganges or have been found in shallow graves by the riverbank.

EVACUATION: Meanwhile, Indian authorities on Monday ordered the evacuation of nearly half a million people out of the path of a new cyclone heading towards eastern India just one week after another deadly storm smashed into the west coast.

The cyclones are hitting as India reels from a surge in coronavirus infections that has plunged the healthcare system into crisis and pushed the country's Covid-19 death toll above 300,000. Experts say storms off India's coast are increasing in frequency and intensity as climate change warms ocean waters. — **Reuters/AFP**

Japan opens mass
vaccination sites
for elderly

A pensioner receives the Moderna coronavirus disease vaccine at the newly-opened mass vaccination centre in Tokyo. — **Reuters**

TOKYO: Japan opened mass inoculation centres on Monday as it races to vaccinate most of its elderly population before the start of the Tokyo Olympics.

The centres in Tokyo and Osaka will vaccinate thousands of people everyday, giving a boost to Japan's sluggish inoculation drive as officials battle a fourth wave of coronavirus infections.

"It's better to get it early", said Tetsuya Urano, 66, who was among the first to be vaccinated in Tokyo. "It went pretty smoothly, all in all."

The Tokyo facility will operate 12 hours a day to dispense shots to 10,000 people daily for the next three months. The site in Osaka, Japan's western metropolis, will build up to about 5,000 shots a day.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga called for the centres last month to speed up the vaccination rollout. Large-scale inoculation sites operated by local governments also opened in the prefectures of Aichi, Miyagi, and Gunma. The fourth wave of infections has led authorities to make state of emergency declarations covering much of the country, including Tokyo, raising some concerns about the Olympic Games due to begin on July 23. The states of emergency for most regions are due to end on May 31.

The government is leaning towards extending the measures, several people with knowledge of the decision told Reuters. Osaka Governor Hirofumi Yoshimura, whose region has been among the hardest hit in the current wave, told reporters he would decide on whether to request an extension of the emergency on Tuesday.

Just 4.4 per cent of Japan's population of 125 million have received at least one vaccine dose, according to Reuters' global tracker, the slowest rate among the world's larger, rich countries. — **Reuters**

Samoa's first woman PM locked out of parliament



Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa

WELLINGTON: Samoa's first female prime minister-elect held her own swearing-in ceremony on Monday after being locked out of parliament. The Pacific nation had been stuck in an electoral deadlock since voters went to the polls on April 9, with the Faatuatua i le Atua Samoa ua Tasi (FAST) party claiming victory over the Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP). A court finally confirmed the FAST party had a razor-thin majority last week, giving the go-ahead for the first change of government since 1982 and for Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa to become prime minister. Monday marked the end of the 45-day deadline for parliament to sit after an election under Samoa's constitution. But the FAST party was locked out of parliament so held its own swearing-in of the new government and streamed it live via Facebook. — dpa

115,000 health workers died from Covid: WHO

GENEVA: At least 115,000 health and care workers have died from Covid-19 since the beginning of the pandemic, the WHO chief said on Monday, calling for a dramatic scale-up of vaccination in all countries. At the opening of the World Health Organization's main annual assembly, Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus hailed the sacrifices made by health workers around the world to battle the pandemic. "For almost 18 months, health and care workers all over the world have stood in the breach between life and death," he said. "They have saved countless lives and fought for others who, despite their best efforts, slipped away. "Many have themselves become infected, and while reporting is scant, we estimate that at least 115,000 health and care workers have paid the ultimate price in the service of others." He said many health workers have since the start of the crisis felt "frustrated, helpless and unprotected, with a lack of access to personal protective equipment and vaccines." And they are not alone. He described the overall inequity in access to vaccines as "scandalous," warning it was "perpetuating the pandemic." More than 75 per cent of all Covid-19 vaccines have gone to just 10 countries. "The number of doses administered globally so far would have been enough to cover all health workers and older people if they had been distributed



A doctor and ICU nurses wearing personal protection equipment (PPE) treat a patient suffering from Covid-19 in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) at the King Chulalongkorn Memorial Hospital in Bangkok. — Reuters

“There is no diplomatic way to say it: that small group of countries that make and buy the majority of the world’s vaccines control the fate of the rest of the world

TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS
WHO chief

equitably,” he said. “There is no diplomatic way to say it: that small group of countries that make and buy the majority of the world’s vaccines control the

fate of the rest of the world.” He urged those countries that have large stocks of vaccines to share them, and greater cooperation to scale up production and distribution of the jabs. The WHO and others have created Covax, a global vaccine-sharing programme, but it remains severely underfunded and has faced significant supply shortages, delaying efforts to roll out jabs in poorer countries. “We have shipped every single one of the 72 million doses we have been able to get our hands on so far to 125 countries and economies,” Tedros said. But he lamented that those doses were only enough to barely cover one per cent of the combined populations in those countries. — AFP

EU mulls Belarus sanctions after plane ‘hijacking’

BRUSSELS: EU leaders will debate tougher sanctions against Belarus on Monday after President Alexander Lukashenko's regime scrambled a fighter to force a European airliner to land and arrested a dissident onboard. Journalist Roman Protasevich and his girlfriend were detained at Minsk airport on Sunday after Ryanair flight FR4978 was diverted from its Athens-to-Vilnius route, after what Belarus alleged was a bomb threat. The forced landing of a commercial flight carrying more than 120 civilians between two EU nations sparked international condemnation and commandeered the agenda of Monday's EU summit in Brussels. “The outrageous and illegal behaviour of the regime in

Belarus will have consequences,” EU chief Ursula von der Leyen tweeted. “Those responsible for the Ryanair hijacking must be sanctioned.” Some European leaders immediately pressed for a range of tough options. Lithuania and France called for Belarusian airspace to be blocked and aircraft from the country stopped from landing in EU airports. Italy labelled the action a “state hijacking” and Belarus’ neighbour Poland called it an “act of state terrorism.” A statement from EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell on behalf of 27-member bloc insisted an “international investigation into this incident must be carried out to ascertain any breach of international aviation rules.” — Reuters



A woman stands with a poster reading 'Where is Roman (Protasevich)?!' in the arrival area as passengers disembark from a Ryanair passenger plane from Athens, Greece, that was diverted to Minsk on the same day by Belarus authorities, after it landed at the airport in Vilnius, its initial destination, on Sunday. — AFP

Volcano death toll rises as aftershocks shake DR Congo

GOMA: Five people were found choked to death on toxic fumes from the eruption of eastern DR Congo's Nyiragongo volcano on Monday, as strong aftershocks rocked the city of Goma. The deaths bring to 20 the number killed since Africa's most active volcano erupted on Saturday, spewing red-hot molten lava that engulfed houses in its wake. "We have just discovered five dead people," civil society leader Mambo Kawayia said, saying that they were "asphyxiated by the gas" as they tried to cross the cooling lava some 13 kilometres (eight miles) north of Goma. A sixth person is in a "critical state with trouble breathing and has been taken to hospital," Kawayia said. Goma, a city of some 1.5 million people in the shadow of the volcano, was on edge as violent aftershocks continued through the night and into Monday morning.

"They're multiplying and they come at any moment," one resident said, describing the aftershocks as "very worrying". "The night was long — there is fear in our stomachs," she said. Tens of thousands of residents had fled the city in panic — around 7,000 of them to neighbouring Rwanda — when Nyiragongo began erupting on Saturday evening. Along with the five people found dead on Monday, at least 15 people have died, although most were not killed directly by the eruption. Authorities said nine people died in accidents during the rush to evacuate, while four prisoners were killed while trying to escape in the melee. Two people were found burned to death. Officials said 17 villages on the city's fringes had suffered major damage. While the river of lava stopped at the



Residents pick up remains of their destroyed homes from the smouldering lava deposited by the eruption of Mount Nyiragongo volcano near Goma on Sunday. — Reuters

edge of Goma and many residents have now returned, each aftershock brought anxious residents back out onto the streets on Monday. "We just had a big aftershock — I'm scared to stay in my office," said a resident who gave her name only as Deborah, an employee at an international organisation, reached by telephone. "I'm wondering if I should stay or go home. The electricity has cut out," she said. Schools are still shut with pupils told to stay at home, although businesses and petrol stations were open again. Nyiragongo's last major eruption, in 2002, claimed around 100 lives. By Monday the blackish solidified lava was still hot and smoking, with dozens of people turning out to inspect it or even walk on it, despite the risk of inhaling toxic fumes. — AFP The volcano appeared calm on the

SHORT TAKES

MOSCOW

Russia accuses US of arms treaty breach

Russia's foreign ministry on Monday raised concerns over Washington's implementation of the New START nuclear arms control treaty and said the number of US launchers and bombers exceeded the agreed limit. Russia and Washington extended the New START treaty in February. It is a cornerstone of global arms control and limits the numbers of strategic nuclear warheads, missiles and bombers that Russia and the United States can deploy.



The remarks by Russia's foreign ministry come amid a push to organise a summit between Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Joe Biden next month despite dire ties between the two countries.

LOS ANGELES

Dylan's lyrics heads to auction

Bob Dylan's handwritten lyrics to "Lay Lady Lay," a cheeky self-portrait by Kurt Cobain and five guitars designed by the late Eddie Van Halen are among 1,300 items going up for auction in June. A series of hand-written letters from Britney Spears to her high school boyfriend will also be offered for sale in the Music Icons event at Julien's Auctions in Beverly Hills. The lyrics to Dylan's 1969 song, written in pencil on a sheet of notepaper from a lumber company, carry an estimate of \$500,000-600,000. Cobain's self-portrait is a caricature in black felt pen that he drew in 1992 during a tour in Singapore for his punk band Nirvana's "Nevermind" album.



WASHINGTON

Family marks first anniversary of Floyd's death

Relatives of George Floyd, the African-American whose death triggered protests against racism and police brutality across the US and around the world, gathered on Sunday in a rally to mark the first anniversary of his death. Floyd died after a Minneapolis police officer knelt on his neck for more than eight minutes on May 25 last year. His dying words, "I can't breathe," became a rallying cry in a wave of street demonstrations against his killing. Derek Chauvin, a white former Minneapolis policeman, was found guilty of murdering him. Chauvin and three other former Minneapolis police officers faced federal civil rights charges for their role in the arrest and murder of Floyd.



Bridge between mind and senses...

As one sleeps on a ventilator what does the mind do? Does it rest? Do memories flash by? One such person floated through awareness and silence and woke up from the deep sleep hearing at first a murmur and then the clear voices floating around and in a few more minutes the direction the voices were coming were distinct. It was then when there was clarity to the voices and the words were taking shape.

“He has been on a ventilator for too many days and there has been no response. Maybe it is time to take a decision. Let us take a call by 10.45”, he heard the voice say.

The person who was waking up to his surroundings knew that they were talking about him and he would have liked to participate in the conversation and have his say but could not even lift a finger to raise his point but alas, leave the finger he could not open his eyelids. But the ‘will’ was not going to give up.

The life energy that flows through the body could be the gentle air we inhale and exhale in a rhythm but the senses of hearing picked up the voices, which are actually waves but the brain that has been trained in the language woke up the mind – the house of the will.



Lakshmi Kothaneth
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LIFE NEVER COMES WITH A BLUE PRINT AND THAT IS THE BEAUTY AND THE IRONY OF THIS GIFT

The will was in full gear since then and then a little later the door opened again, “Doctor I am alive”, said the person who has been sleeping. Someone in the team broke down.

“It is the will of God”, he explained later to a friend.

Even otherwise we go into deep slumber in the routine day to day lifestyle not really having the urge to go through self growth when all of a sudden a sharp shake wakes you up into reality. It takes so long to drift but a few seconds once reality strikes it urges us to appreciate what we have and how we ought to utilise what we have.

Life never comes with a blue print and that is the beauty and the irony of this gift. It gives us full freedom to choose our form of existence such that we have our freedom on how to plan our time to the experiences we want to seek.

A lot of time it is said that our environment makes us who we are but if that is true how does the lotus stand spotless being in the muddy water? The lotus has only one focus – the sun and it takes all the nourishment from the water. It rises with the sun and closes to rest as the sun sets. Yet again there are flowers who wait to bloom just for the moon and interesting that they are in white colour to ensure they can be

spotted at night under the moonlight.

The flowers have a purpose and so does everything on earth, except that none of them causes destruction to earth as much as man. We have got water and air polluted, we have left plastic and nets in the oceans and exhausted trees and greenery and cannot bear the heat and climate change.

All because we were gifted with the mind to think and plan for the future. In the heat of the summer the ants are working nonstop for the winter. But we are not able to safeguard our future instead debating on who is the supreme power and competing on who knows better.

The bridge between the mind and the senses is the breath. Follow it and you will realise how your mind influences the breath and how you can control your mind with the breath. That is when you realise the games thoughts play. But are thoughts separated from the mind. This is where the ‘will’ comes to focus. The will can tell the mind to ‘wake up’ and to reach that state we need energy that can be brought in from the breath and lots of positivity around us and not to forget food.

And what could be the most nourishing gifts we can give each other – kind words.

POST-COVID WORLD

194 countries mull WHO reform

NINA LARSON

Vaccine sharing, strengthening the WHO and adopting a pandemic treaty were among proposals from world leaders on Monday on how to halt the Covid-19 pandemic and prevent future health catastrophes.

The World Health Organization kicked off the main annual gathering of its 194 member states with all eyes on the global response to Covid-19 — and what concrete steps can be taken to avert future pandemics.

“We are at war with a virus”, United Nations chief Antonio Guterres told the opening of the 74th World Health Assembly (WHA). “We need the logic and urgency of a war economy, to boost the capacity of our weapons”, he said.

With the Covid-19 crisis still raging and wealthy nations hoarding most doses of life-saving vaccines, the WHO’s main decision-making body has plenty to discuss.

The assembly, being held virtually until June 1, will focus heavily on efforts to rein in the pandemic and on calls to revamp the entire global health approach to help prevent future Covid-like catastrophes.

There is much at stake, with WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus saying this

“This is not the time for incremental improvements or tinkering at the edges. This is the moment for bold ideas, bold commitment and bold leadership, for doing things that have never been done before

TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS
WHO Chief

year’s WHA was “arguably one of the most important” in the UN health agency’s history. “The pandemic is not over”, he said, pointing out that just during the first hour or so of the assembly, nearly 1,000 people had died worldwide from Covid. He called for strong actions to rein in Covid-19, which has already killed more than 3.4 million people globally, and prepare for the next pandemic

threats ahead. “This is not the time for incremental improvements or tinkering at the edges”, he told the assembly.

“This is the moment for bold ideas, bold commitment and bold leadership, for doing things that have never been done before.”

A number of mainly European countries are calling for significant strengthening of the WHO, which has been pushed to the brink by Covid. They want to boost its independence, flexibility and funding.

The WHO “must be the heart, the compass, of our global health approach”, French President Emmanuel Macron told the assembly.

“This organisation must be robust in times of crisis, it must be flexible enough to react to emergencies”, he said.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel meanwhile said “the priority must be to enable the world to respond to a pandemic threat as rapidly as possible”, and voiced support for the creation of a global health threats council.

There are particular disagreements over proposals to boost the WHO’s powers, and to hand it more independence to investigate and sound the alarm about serious health threats.

On Tuesday, ministers and diplomats will discuss the findings of three separate independent panels that assessed aspects of the global pandemic response.

— AFP

ATTACK ON CULTURE

Gaza bookshop owner’s dreams buried under the rubble

GUILLAUME LAVALLEE

For decades, it was the place to go for books in the blockaded Gaza Strip, from school texts to the Holy Quran to Arabic translations of European literary classics.

But last Tuesday, owner Samir al Mansour watched in disbelief as the bookshop and publishing house he had poured his life into went up in smoke.

“Forty years of my life were obliterated in less than a second”, said the man in his 50s, a cigarette between his fingers, staring at a mound of concrete, paper and squashed plastic chairs.

“There are 100,000 books under this rubble”, he said.

At around 5 am on Tuesday, Mansour was at home watching television when the channel reported the Israeli air force was about to hit the building housing his bookshop.

Mansour rushed over, but came to a dead stop some 200 metres away from the building, just in time to see a missile obliterate his life’s work.

The latest deadly clashes lasted 11 days and saw Israel launch air strikes in response to a rocket barrage by Hamas, which rules Gaza, and other groups.

“I have nothing to do with any group, a political faction”, Mansour said.

“It’s an attack on culture.”

Mansour started working in his father’s bookshop in the 1980s, when he was just 14 years old, then took over in 2000 and soon branched out into publishing.

As rescue workers continue to look



Samir al Mansour poses on the rubble of the bookshop after it was destroyed by Israeli air strikes, in Gaza City, on Saturday. — AFP

MANSOUR STARTED WORKING IN HIS FATHER’S BOOKSHOP IN THE 1980S, WHEN HE WAS JUST 14 YEARS OLD, THEN TOOK OVER IN 2000 AND SOON BRANCHED OUT INTO PUBLISHING

for bodies and survivors in the rubble after the military conflict, Mansour was mourning all that he has lost.

Buried in the rubble were copies of Islamic religious texts, children’s picture books and a copy of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s “The Brothers Karamazov”.

Israeli strikes on Gaza since May 10 have killed 248 Palestinians, including 66 children, and have wounded over 1,900 people, the Gaza health ministry says.

Rockets and other fire from Gaza have claimed 12 lives in Israel, including one child and an Arab-Israeli teenager, an Israeli soldier, one Indian, and two

Thai nationals, medics say. Some 357 people in Israel have been wounded.

There is controversy about how many of those killed in Gaza were combatants, and how many were civilians. Mansour said he had lived through two Palestinian uprisings and three Gaza wars.

“But this had never happened, my bookshop was never destroyed”, he said. His son-in-law Montasser Saleh had arrived in Gaza from Norway to visit the family just before the conflict started, and was with him when his life was turned upside down.

“We were at home, watching television”, Saleh said. — AFP

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Liverpool's Sadio Mane celebrates scoring their first goal with team-mates. – Reuters

LIVERPOOL, CHELSEA SEAL CL SPOTS
LEICESTER MISS OUT AGAIN AFTER LOSS TO SPURS

ANDY JALIL
BIRMINGHAM, MAY 24

On a dramatic final day of the Premier League, which brought unexpected results, Chelsea finished fourth, and despite a 2-1 loss to Aston Villa they scraped through for next season's Champions League after Leicester lost, 4-2, to Tottenham.

With the two Manchester clubs already having qualified in first and second positions, only two of three teams could have filled the remaining two slots. Leicester's surprising defeat knocked them out, leaving Liverpool, who beat Crystal Palace, 2-0, and Chelsea to go through after a tense finish for all three teams.

Chelsea's defeat was a shock result and they will need to compose themselves before the current Champions League final against Manchester City next Saturday. Their manager, Thomas Tuchel, said: "We were lucky Tottenham did the job for us. We need to adjust details and be spot-on next Saturday because we want a positive result. We will try to evolve and make them better and learn. It is our story this season. We needed many clean sheets to overcome this lack of composure and lack of precision."

He added: "We conceded two



Chelsea's Ben Chilwell in action with Aston Villa's Jacob Ramsey. – Reuters

goals out of nothing and from set-pieces. We made it hard to come back but had enough chances to turn it around. The performance was by far good enough to win the game. We did not score, conceded two cheap goals and it was a defeat in the end."

Despite enjoying most of the possession and playing well

Chelsea lacked finishing. They missed excellent chances to take the lead when Mason Mount fired over the bar and Timo Werner miscued on the volley. Villa too missed chances with Bertrand Traore forcing a fine save and John McGinn shooting wide.

But two minutes before half time Villa took the lead. Chelsea

conceded a corner which Matt Targett pulled back to Traore whose shot hit the underside of the crossbar and went over the line. The goalkeeper Edouard Mendy hurt himself against the post and was replaced at half-time. Villa doubled their lead seven minutes into the second half.

On receiving a pass from Jack Grealish, Traore was fouled by Jorginho and the referee pointed to the spot. Chelsea players disputed but the VAR backed the decision and Anwar El Ghazi sent Kepa Arrizabalaga the wrong way.

Finally, with 20 minutes remaining Chelsea scored. Pulisic crossed to the far post and Ben Chilwell raced in for a shot which crossed the line. Azpilicueta was sent off in the 89th minute for lashing out at Grealish as the pair fell in a tackle. Chelsea threw everything forward to get a positive result but instead it was the result from the match 40 miles away that brought them massive relief and joy.

On Mendy's injury, Tuchel said: "He has big pain in his ribs. We need to wait and do some images and have an update. We have a week to prepare (for the final) and we will do all we can to see he is involved on Saturday."

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE TABLE AFTER SUNDAY'S FINAL ROUND OF MATCHES							
	PLAYED	WON	DRAWN	LOST	GOALS FOR	GOALS AGAINST	POINTS
Man City	38	27	5	6	83	32	86
Man United	38	21	11	6	73	44	74
Liverpool	38	20	9	9	68	42	69
Chelsea	38	19	10	9	58	36	67
Leicester	38	20	6	12	68	50	66
West Ham	38	19	8	11	62	47	65
Tottenham	38	18	8	12	68	45	62
Arsenal	38	18	7	13	55	39	61
Leeds	38	18	5	15	62	54	59
Everton	38	17	8	13	47	48	59
Aston Villa	38	16	7	15	55	46	55
Newcastle	38	12	9	17	46	62	45
Wolves	38	12	9	17	36	52	45
Crystal Palace	38	12	8	18	41	66	44
Southampton	38	12	7	19	47	68	43
Brighton	38	9	14	15	40	46	41
Burnley	38	10	9	19	33	55	39
Fulham	38	5	13	20	27	53	28
West Brom	38	5	11	22	35	76	26
Sheffield United	38	7	2	29	20	63	23

Note: Top four qualify for Champions League, fifth and sixth-placed teams qualify for Europa League, seventh qualifies for Europa Conference League, bottom three relegated

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE RESULTS ON SUNDAY:
Arsenal 2 (Pepe 49, 60) Brighton 0
Aston Villa 2 (Traore 43, El Ghazi 52-pen) Chelsea 1 (Chilwell 70)
Fulham 0 Newcastle 2 (Willock 23, Schaer 88-pen)
Leeds 3 (Rodrigo 17, Phillips 42, Bamford 79-pen) West Brom 1 (Robson-Kanu 90)
Leicester 2 (Vardy 18-pen, 52-pen) Tottenham 4 (Kane 41, Schmeichel 76-og, Bale 87, 90+6)
Liverpool 2 (Mane 36, 74) Crystal Palace 0
Manchester City 5 (De Bruyne 11, Jesus 14, Foden 53, Aguero 71, 76) Everton 0
Sheffield United 1 (McGoldrick 24) Burnley 0
West Ham 3 (Fornals 30, 33, Rice 86) Southampton 0
Wolves 1 (Semedo 39) Manchester Utd 2 (Elanga 13, Mata 45+4-pen)

In brief

■ MONTREAL



SHAPOVALOV OUT OF ROLAND GARROS WITH SHOULDER INJURY

Canada's world number 15 Denis Shapovalov withdrew from Roland Garros due to a shoulder injury on Sunday. "I am saddened to share that after consulting with my medical team I have made the difficult decision to withdraw from Roland Garros," the 22-year-old wrote on Instagram.

"Unfortunately, my shoulder has been bothering me over the last few weeks and, while all medical tests look good, it is for the best to play it safe and rest."

Shapovalov was runner-up to Casper Ruud in the Geneva clay court final on Saturday.

Former champions Stan Wawrinka and Simona Halep had also pulled out of the event.

■ MONTE CARLO



MERCEDES WAIT TO REMOVE STUCK WHEEL ON BOTTAS CAR

Formula One champions Mercedes had still to remove a stuck wheel from Valtteri Bottas's car on Monday, a day after the problem forced the Finn out of the Monaco Grand Prix.

Bottas pitted from second place on lap 29 but watched in dismay as time ticked away while mechanics struggled and failed to remove the front right.

The retirement cost Mercedes precious points, with seven-times world champion Lewis Hamilton struggling in seventh, and led to the team losing their lead in the constructors' standings to Red Bull.

■ MADRID



RAMOS LEFT OUT OF SPAIN'S SQUAD FOR EURO 2020

Spain captain Sergio Ramos has been left out of the squad for Euro 2020, coach Luis Enrique said on Monday. The Real Madrid centre-back won the last of his 180 caps in March but has endured an injury-plagued season that has limited him to just 15 La Liga appearances and only five games in all competitions in 2021.

Manchester City's Aymeric Laporte was included after Fifa approved his switch from France to Spain earlier this month.

"I've not included Ramos because he's not been able to play much this season, especially since January he's not been fit enough, and at times not even training with the group at his club," Enrique, who named 24 players in the 26 spots available, said.

Mehidy puts Sri Lanka in a spin

LATE FIGHTBACK FROM HASARANGA GOES IN VAIN IN FIRST ODI

DHAKA: Spinner Mehidy Hasan Miraz claimed four wickets as Bangladesh overcame a late fightback from Wanindu Hasaranga to beat Sri Lanka by 33 runs in the first one-day international on Sunday.

Mehidy returned figures of 4-30 from 10 overs of his off-spin to help bowl out Sri Lanka for 224 in the tourists' chase of 258. Number eight Hasaranga hit a valiant 74 off 60 balls.

Mustafizur Rahman took three wickets with fellow fast bowler Mohammad Saifuddin claiming two.

Earlier Mushfiquur Rahim (84) and Mahmudullah Riyad (54) put on 109 runs for the fifth wicket to guide Bangladesh to 257-6 after they opted to bat at the start of the three-match series.

In reply, Sri Lanka were in trouble at 102-6 before Hasaranga put on 47 runs with Dasun Shanaka and then 62 with Isuru Udana for the eighth wicket to revive their hopes.

Saifuddin (2-49) bowled Shanaka for 14 and then claimed the wicket of Hasaranga, who hit three fours and five sixes in his 60-ball knock.

Mustafizur, who finished with figures of 3-34, sent back Udana for 21 on the very next ball.

Sri Lanka suffered a blow before the match as all-rounder Shiran Fernando was ruled out after



Bangladesh's Mehidy Hasan Miraz (R) celebrates with teammate Mushfiquur Rahim after taking the wicket of Sri Lanka's captain Kusal Perera during the first ODI at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Dhaka. — AFP

being tested Covid-19 positive twice in two days.

COVID SCARE

The match was thrown into

uncertainty as fast bowler Udana and bowling coach Chaminda Vaas also tested Covid-19 positive alongside Fernando.

SCOREBOARD

BANGLADESH

Tamim c de Silva b Chameera 52
Liton Das c Nissanka b Gunathilaka 0
Shakib c Nissanka b Gunathilaka 15
Mushfiquur c Udana b Sandakan 84
M Mithun lbw de Silva 0
M Riyad b de Silva 54
Afif Hossain not out 27
M Saifuddin not out 13
Extras (lb1, nb2, w9) 12
Total (6 wickets, 50 overs) 257
Fall of wickets: 1-5, 2-43, 3-99, 4-99, 5-208, 6-230
Bowling: Udana 10-1-64-0, Chameera 8-0-39-1, De Silva 10-0-45-3, Gunathilaka 2-0-5-1, Hasaranga 10-0-48-0, Sandakan 10-0-55-1

SRI LANKA (TARGET 258)

D Gunathilaka c and b Mehidy 21
K Perera b Mehidy 30
P Nissanka c Afif b Mustafizur 8
K Mendis c Mehidy b Shakib 24
D De Silva b Mehidy 9
A Bandara b Mehidy 3
D Shanaka b Saifuddin 14
W Hasaranga c Afif b Saifuddin 74
I Udana c Mehidy b Mustafizur 21
L Sandakan not out 8
D Chameera c Saifuddin b Mustafizur 5
Extras (lb4, w3) 7
Total (all out, 48.1 overs) 224
Fall of wickets: 1-30, 2-41, 3-82, 4-94, 5-97, 6-102, 7-149, 8-211, 9-211
Bowling: Mehidy Hasan Miraz 10-2-30-4, Taskin Ahmed 9-0-62-0, Mustafizur Rahman 9-0-34-3, Mohammad Saifuddin 10-0-49-2, Shakib Al Hasan 10-0-44-1, Mahmudullah 0.1-0-1-0

A second test cleared Udana and Vaas of the virus and the match began on time.

Sri Lankan players, who are also involved in pay row with country's cricket authorities ahead of the series, were led by Kusal Perera.

Juve, Milan qualify; Napoli out of CL



AC Milan players celebrate at the end of the Italian Serie A match against Atalanta Bergamo in Bergamo. — AFP

MILAN: Juventus qualified for the Champions League on the final day of the season on Sunday with a 4-1 win at Bologna and were joined by AC Milan who beat Atalanta 2-0.

Napoli had to settle for a Europa League spot, finishing fifth, one point behind Juventus, after a 1-1 draw at home against Hellas Verona.

A pair of Franck Kessie penalties at the end of either half ensured AC Milan finished the season second — 12 points behind city rivals Inter Milan — and return to the Champions League for the first time since the 2013-2014 season.

"We deserved the Champions League as well as second place," said Milan coach Stefano Pioli whose side had missed the chance to seal their berth last weekend against Cagliari.

"We went through the

whole championship at the top, unfortunately, we had thrown away the match point on last Sunday.

"I'm really excited, happy, I have to thank the club because they made us work in a spectacular way."

Atalanta had already ensured a third consecutive season of Champions League football but missed out on a first second-place Serie A finish days after losing out in the Coppa Italia final to Juventus.

Cristiano Ronaldo was left on the bench by Juventus coach Andrea Pirlo who opted for an attacking line-up of Paulo Dybala and Alvaro Morata flanked by Federico Chiesa and Dejan Kulusevski. "It was a shared choice, Ronaldo was tired after the fatigue on Wednesday," said Pirlo.

"He made himself available

to the team but I chose to have another player named Morata play, who is not the latest arrival. I have a quality team, with many choices available."

A Morata brace along with goals from Chiesa and Adrien Rabiot prevented Juventus from missing out on the elite European competition for the first time since 2012.

In Naples, Amir Rrahmani scored for Napoli after an hour against his former club, which would have been enough to secure a berth at the top table but Davide Faraoni pulled one back for the visitors nine minutes.

Gennaro Gattuso's side were denied a return to elite European action after also missing out last season.

In a tense game in Bergamo, Milan held on despite playing without injured star striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic. — AFP



ITALIAN SERIE A TABLE ON SUNDAY AFTER THE FINAL DAY OF THE 2020-2021 SEASON (PLAYED, WON, DRAWN, LOST, GOALS FOR, GOALS AGAINST, POINTS):

Inter Milan	38	28	7	3	89	35	91
AC Milan	38	24	7	7	74	41	79
Atalanta	38	23	9	6	90	47	78
Juventus	38	23	9	6	77	38	78
Napoli	38	24	5	9	86	41	77
Lazio	38	21	5	12	61	55	68
Roma	38	18	8	12	68	58	62
Sassuolo	38	17	11	10	64	56	62
Sampdoria	38	15	7	16	52	54	52
Hellas Verona	38	11	12	15	46	48	45
Genoa	38	10	12	16	47	58	42
Bologna	38	10	11	17	51	65	41
Fiorentina	38	9	13	16	47	59	40
Udinese	38	10	10	18	42	58	40
Spezia	38	9	12	17	52	72	39
Cagliari	38	9	10	19	43	59	37
Torino	38	7	16	15	50	69	37
Benevento	38	7	12	19	40	75	33
Crotone	38	6	5	27	45	92	23
Parma	38	3	11	24	39	83	20

Note: Top four qualify for Champions League; fifth and sixth qualify for Europa League; bottom three relegated

Italian Serie A results on Sunday:

Inter Milan 5 (Young 8, Eriksen 44, Martinez 55-pen), Perisic 64, Lukaku 71) Udinese 1 (Pereyra 79-pen)
Sassuolo 2 (Kyriakopoulos 10, Berardi 78-pen) Lazio 0
Spezia 2 (Verde 6, Pobega 38) Roma 2 (El Shaarawy 52, Mkhitaryan 85)
Torino 1 (Bremer 29) Benevento 1 (Tello 72)
Napoli 1 (Rrahmani 60) Hellas Verona 1 (Faraoni 69)
Bologna 1 (Orsolini 85) Juventus 4 (Chiesa 6, Morata 29, 47, Rabiot 45)
Atalanta 0 AC Milan 2 (Kessie 43-pen, 90+3-pen)
On Saturday
Sampdoria 3 (Quagliarella 20, Colley 44, Gabbiadini 64) Parma 0
Crotone 0 Fiorentina 0
Cagliari 0 Genoa 1 (Shomurodov 15)

"Losing isn't good, but we had a lot of positives. The bowlers bowled in the right directions. Batting wise Wanindu (Hasaranga) did a good job," said Perera.

Bangladesh skipper Tamim Iqbal hit 52 before Dhananjaya de Silva's two wickets in two balls in the 23rd over put them in trouble at 99-4.

Mushfiquur and Mahmudullah then put on a key stand to thwart the Sri Lankan bowling with some attacking batting.

Mushfiquur's 87-ball innings ended when he was caught by Udana at short third man off Lakshan Sandakan while attempting a reverse sweep.

"It wasn't an easy wicket to bat on, we lost a couple of early wickets but I thought Tamim batted really well. I took my time and Riyad too batted well," said player of the match Mushfiquur.

Mahmudullah's dismissal to de Silva, who claimed 3-45, meant Bangladesh were unable to find a late spark they were looking for.

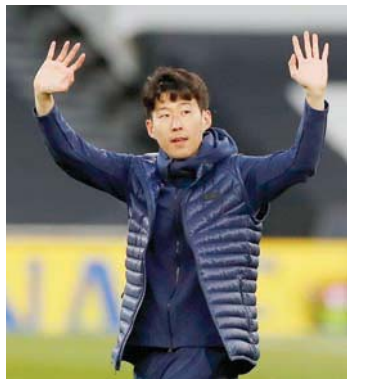
Number seven Afif Hossain's 22-ball 27 helped Bangladesh go past the 250-run mark.

"Winning is happiness. Boys are really happy. We hope we can put on a better show next time," said Bangladesh captain Tamim.

The second match will be held at the same ground on Tuesday.

— AFP

Son to lead South Korea in World Cup qualifiers



Tottenham Hotspur's Son Heung-min applauds to fans. — Reuters

SEOUL: Tottenham Hotspur's prolific striker Son Heung-min was named on Monday to lead a 28-strong South Korea squad for next month's World Cup qualifiers.

Fixtures in Asia's eight qualifying groups for the 2022 finals in Qatar will be completed at centralised venues next month because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The remaining Group H matches will all take place in South Korea, with the Taeguk Warriors — who have qualified for nine successive World Cups — facing Turkmenistan, Sri Lanka and Lebanon but not North Korea, who were part of the group, but pulled out earlier this month citing coronavirus fears.

Son, 28, has scored more Premier League goals than any other Asian player in history.

He found the net 22 times in all competitions for Spurs in the season that ended on Sunday, 17 of them coming in the league. — AFP



Authorised Neutral Athlete Mariya Lasitskene competes in the women’s high jump during the Diamond League athletics meeting at Gateshead International Stadium in Gateshead, north-east England. – AFP

ASHER-SMITH STUNS RICHARDSON

DUPLANTIS SUFFERS RARE DEFEAT IN FIRST DIAMOND LEAGUE MEET OF SEASON

GATESHEAD, United Kingdom: Dina Asher-Smith shocked US sprint sensation Sha’Carri Richardson to win the women’s 100m as Swedish pole vaulter Armand Duplantis suffered a rare defeat in the first Diamond League meet of the season on Sunday.

The northeastern English city of Gateshead stepped in to host the pre-Olympic event after Rabat pulled out because of coronavirus restrictions in Morocco.

There are only six Diamond League meetings after Gateshead before the Olympic Games in Japan, which start on July 23.

And after a 2020 season badly disrupted by the global Covid-19 pandemic, there is no shortage of athletes in search of top-quality competition.

Britain’s Asher-Smith, 25,

started the final strongly in wet and cool conditions and crossed the line to take gold in a time of 11.35 seconds, with Richardson second in 11.44.

The Ivory Coast’s Marie-Josée Ta Lou was third in 11.48.

Richardson is fresh from clocking 10.72sec at the Miramar Invitational last month, making her the sixth-fastest female sprinter ever.

The strong field for the final in Gateshead also included Jamaican 100m world champion Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, who finished fourth, and Blessing Okagbare of Nigeria.

It was the kind of statement Asher-Smith desired after taking a prolonged absence from the track following her 200m gold at the 2019 world championships in Doha.

“I was really happy to start

It is essential to race the best. The only way to get race-fit is to race the best in the world. These are the type of races you want to be in

DINA ASHER-SMITH
British sprinter



my 100m season with a win,” she said. “It was far from ideal conditions (but) this is good practice for staying in the moment.

“It is essential to race the best. The only way to get race-fit is to race the best in the world. These

are the type of races you want to be in.”

The vanquished Richardson, 21, lived up to her bold persona afterwards, insisting: “I’m happy with the execution of the performance, knowing what I have to work on, and just

continuing to grow and show the world I’m here to stay.

“I’m excited to show the world that my times aren’t a fluke. I can run, I am pretty, and I am a force to be reckoned with. I want all the women and the world to watch out.”

American Sam Kendricks beat Sweden’s Duplantis — who set a pole vault world record of 6.18m in Glasgow last year — clearing 5.74 metres. Duplantis was second with a jump of 5.55m.

INGEBRIGTSEN WIN

Double European gold medallist Jakob Ingebrigtsen of Norway justified his favourite tag in the men’s 1500m, winning in a time of 3min 36.27sec.

Ingebrigtsen, 20, said he was used to the wind and the rain from racing in Norway.

“I want to race as much as

possible, that’s why I’m doing this,” he said. “At the same Tokyo is my main focus so I need to be smart and do what I can.

“There are not too many competitions in the near future so I have to race what I can and hopefully be prepared when Tokyo comes.”

Poland’s Kamila Licwinko won the women’s high jump with a best of 1.91m, with three-time world champion Mariya Lasitskene trailing in fourth place.

In-form American Kenny Bednarek won the men’s 200m in 20.33sec, coming home ahead of Canadian pair Aaron Brown and Andre de Grasse.

Home favourite Laura Muir destroyed her rivals in the women’s 1500m, charging down the home straight to take victory in 4:03.73. — AFP

Young upsets Lyles in Boston Games

LOS ANGELES: Veteran US sprinter Isiah Young upset Olympic hopeful Noah Lyles at the Boston Games track meet on Sunday, romping to victory in the 100m with a time of 9.94 seconds.

World 200m champion Lyles — who is targeting a 100m and 200m double at the Tokyo Olympics — never recovered after a slow start, coming home second in 10.10secs in overcast

conditions on the temporary track set up in downtown Boston.

Jamaica’s Nickel Ashmeade was third in 10.17sec.

Young, 31, raced for the United States at the 2012 London Olympics but failed to make the US team for Rio in 2016.

The veteran will be chasing a place on the US squad for Tokyo at the US Olympic trials in Eugene, Oregon next month.

In other races, Canada’s Jerome Blake took the 200m in a time of 19.89sec, with Britain’s Zharnel Hughes second in 19.93sec.

South Africa’s Olympic 400m champion and world record holder Wayde van Niekerk was fourth in 20.86sec.

The women’s 200m was won by the Bahama’s 2016 Olympic 400m champion Shaunae Miller-Uibo, who won on the straight

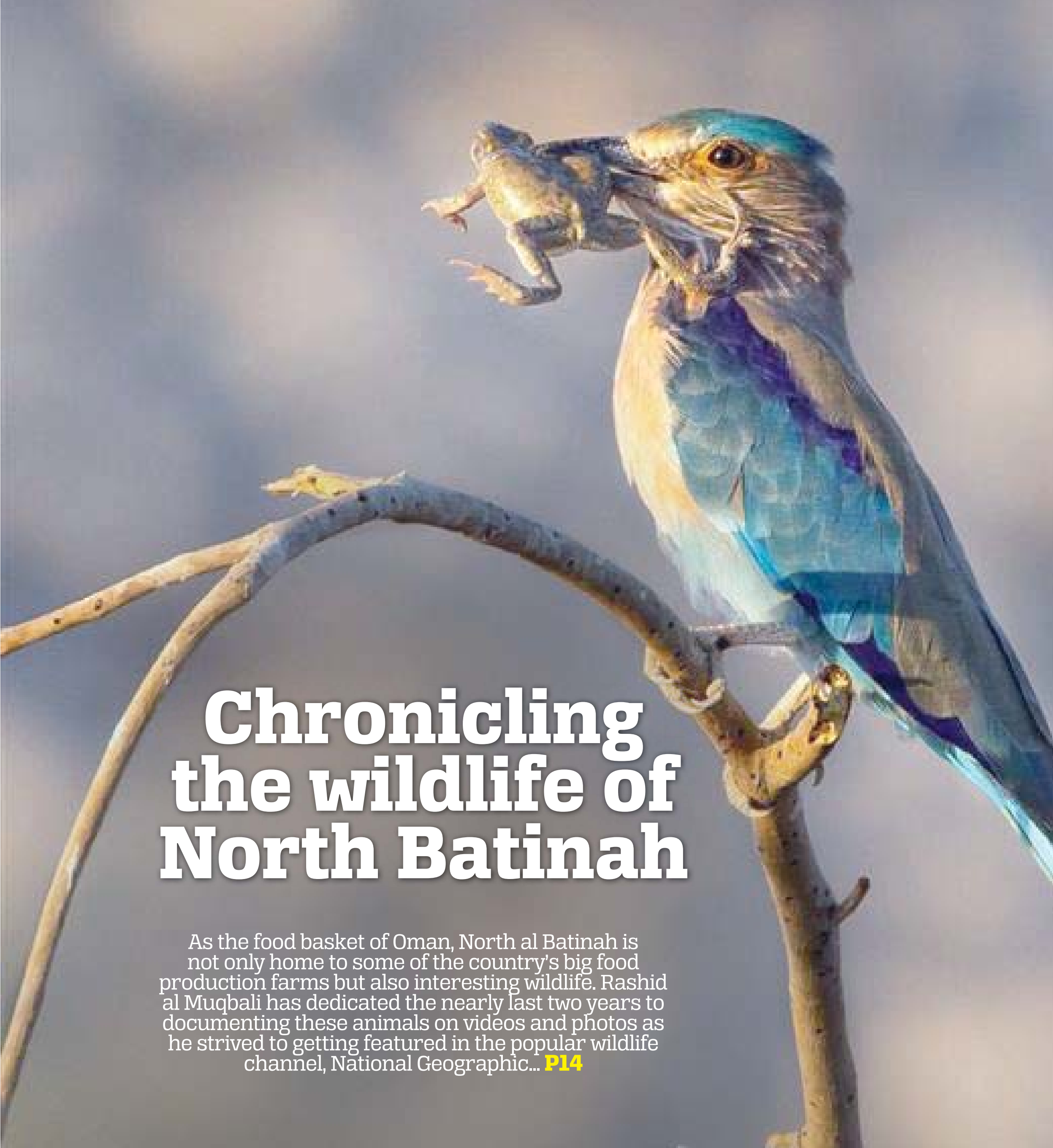
track in 22.08sec, just ahead of Kortnei Johnson of the United States in 22.40 and Wadeline Jonathas in 22.57.

In the men’s 110m hurdles, the USA’s 2019 World Champion Grant Holloway cruised home first in 13.20.

Shane Braithwaite of Barbados was second in 13.71sec, with Hungary’s Valdo Szucs third in 13.72. — AFP



features



Chronicling the wildlife of North Batinah

As the food basket of Oman, North al Batinah is not only home to some of the country's big food production farms but also interesting wildlife. Rashid al Muqbali has dedicated the nearly last two years to documenting these animals on videos and photos as he strived to getting featured in the popular wildlife channel, National Geographic... **P14**

INSIDE STORIES

FASHION

FASHION'S GREEN FUTURE OF SEAWEED COATS AND MUSHROOM SHOES

From making algae-sequin dresses, dyeing clothes with bacteria to planting trackable pigments in cotton, an emerging tide of technological innovations offers the fashion industry a chance to clean up its woeful environmental record... **Story on P16**



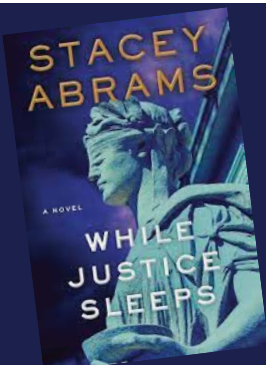
ART



DRESDEN DISCOVERS LOST BERNINI IN ITS SCULPTURE COLLECTION

Art historians at Dresden's state sculpture collection believe they have uncovered a long-lost work by the Italian master Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680), hidden in plain view in the famous collection... **Story on P15**

READ



WHILE JUSTICE SLEEPS
BY STACEY ABRAMS

When Justice Wynn slips into a coma, his law clerk, Avery Keene, must unravel the clues of a controversial case.

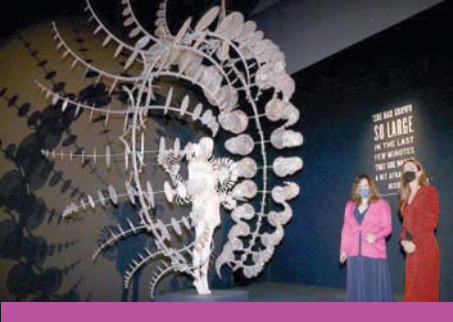
FILM



DELICIOUSLY EVIL WITH SWEET DOGS: TWO EMMAS GO TOE-TO-TOE IN 'CRUELLA'

Oscar-winners Emma Stone and Emma Thompson battle it out for the title of the world's cruellest and best dressed woman in the new Disney live action film "Cruella"... **Story on P15**

ENTERTAINMENT



LONDON'S V&A REOPENS WITH ALICE IN WONDERLAND EXHIBITION

After a year of the coronavirus pandemic's mind-bending assault on normal life, London's Victoria & Albert Museum reopens this week, taking visitors down another rabbit hole... **Story on P15**

Chronicling the wild life of North Al Batinah

BY STAFF REPORTER

North Al Batinah will always be known as Oman's food basket because of its rich and fertile agricultural land that allows for the production of many of Oman's produce. It might also be the reason by it is also the best spot to become a wildlife photographer.

Dozens of photographers had discovered that if one wants some of Oman's fascinating wildlife, North Al Batinah offers diverse species of living creatures and many of them wild, spread between its plains and valleys.

One of those avid wildlife photographers is Rashid al Muqbali whose passion for the wildlife has brought him not only to the historic wilayat of Sohar but across the governorates diverse topography.

Always armed with his trusted gears, Rashid managed to document many of Oman's aloof animals and has shared his discovery, whether videos or photos, on his social media account – one of his ways to further his reach and hopefully, get his photos of wild animals and birds get published on one of the most popular wild animals' sites in the planet, "National Geographic".

Al Muqbali shared that he was very young when he started to dabble in photography but that it was only within the last two years that he specialised in wildlife photography. This decision was prompted by his acquisition of special tools and equipment that aid him to get the best shot of animals in the wild.

"Serving the nation can be done in many ways. Photographing the wildlife is one of these methods," Rashid shared.

In the last couple of years, Rashid has been out and about crossing various terrains of Al Batinah to get his shots.

"I have plans to travel to all regions and governorates of the Sultanate for photography but for now, I think the Al Batinah region deserves the focus. It has many wildlife treasures and it is only through my commitment to documenting these wild animals that I've grown to understand how massive they are just in Al Batinah alone," he said.

As a photographer monitoring wildlife, Al Muqbali noted that there are a number of rare animals in North Al Batinah in particular.

"Many birds, reptiles and animals were photographed in several ways, including the wild "Gordon" cat and Blanford's fox, and I still have plans to search for rare animals that are believed to have disappeared from here," he said.

He added, "There are also many migratory bird and rodents of all kinds. The wildlife in the Sultanate is rich and varied. "

Rashid employs the help of different social media channels to learn about photography and the animals that he meets in the wild.

Al Muqbali considers publishing photos with "National Geographic" as a pioneering experience that all photographers strive for.

He said: "I think that all photographers hope that their photos would one day appear in National Geographic sites and publications. I consider it an important step in my professional path of photographing wildlife".

Rashid shared that he receives a lot of encouragement from people interested in wildlife.

"This gives me motivation to achieve better. There is positive interaction from fans outside the Sultanate as well," he noted.

For his efforts of documenting the wildlife of Oman particularly North al Batina, he was appreciated by several official bodies in the country.

"So far, two parties have contacted me exclusively, namely the Omani Wildlife Center of the Royal Court Affairs to take care of the Gordon wild cat that I photographed in the mountains of Sohar, and also Al Wisal channel to prepare a report on the Indian palm squirrel," he said.

He added, "This report, about Indian palm squirrel, in particular, received a huge turnout and interest from people."

"I have a set of future goals and aspirations in the field of wildlife, including holding an exhibition introducing wildlife in the Sultanate, in addition to publishing a book about wildlife," he said.





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ENTERTAINMENT



London's V&A reopens with Alice in Wonderland exhibition

AFTER A YEAR of the coronavirus pandemic's mind-bending assault on normal life, London's Victoria & Albert Museum reopens this week, taking visitors down another rabbit hole.

"Alice: Curiouser and Curiouser" explores the global impact of "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland", Lewis Carroll's classic 1865 novel, and its enduring appeal to artists. The exhibition opens to the public on Saturday, and plunges visitors, like Alice, straight down a rabbit hole — the museum stairs — with a jumble of signs in every direction.

As they emerge from the V&A's dimly lit basement, guests are immersed in theatrical costumes, film extracts, manuscripts and drawings.

The installations combine sound and visual effects, "to explore the origins, adaptations and reinventions" of the work first imagined by Carroll, an Oxford mathematician whose real name was Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. Each section of the exhibition, which is meant to appeal to visitors of all ages, has its own distinct look.

Guests walk across a Victorian beachfront, reminiscent of the time Carroll himself was writing, and encounter scenes from the book: the murderous Queen of Hearts' rose garden and the Mad Hatter's tea party with the March Hare.

EVERYTHING IS UPSIDE DOWN

Museums were allowed to reopen their doors on Monday after months of restrictions to curb the spread of coronavirus which has claimed nearly 128,000 lives across Britain.

At the V&A in west London, as elsewhere, social distancing, hand sanitiser and facemasks are the order of the day for the reopening.

Interactive booths, like those where visitors can play virtual reality croquet against the Queen of Hearts, are cleaned regularly. The Alice exhibition was originally planned to open in June 2020, but its opening now — nearly a year later — is fitting, said assistant curator Harriet Reed.

"We are so thrilled that we can bump this back in and enjoy the exhibition safely, and share it with the world," she said.

"I think we're all feeling a little bit tired, a little bit jaded, a little bit uninspired maybe," she said, suggesting Alice's world could offer a restorative "boost of optimism".

Reed said in the face of the pandemic, everyone can learn from Alice's "amazing determination, bravery" and the way she "stands up for what she believes in".

"We definitely feel like we live in a crazy wonderland right now. Everything is upside down," she said.

"I think we can really relate to that sense of complete displacement right now." — **AFP**

FILM

DELICIOUSLY EVIL WITH SWEET DOGS: TWO EMMAS GO TOE-TO-TOE IN 'CRUELLA'



OSCAR-WINNERS Emma Stone and Emma Thompson battle it out for the title of the world's cruellest and best dressed woman in the new Disney live action film "Cruella".

An origin story of the "101 Dalmatians" villain Cruella de Vil, the movie describes how a chance encounter with celebrated couture designer The Baroness (Thompson) sends fashion-obsessed orphan Estella (Stone) over the edge and turns her into the famously monochromed menace.

Set amid the punk movement of 1970s London, "Cruella" sees the daring young woman use fashion as her weapon against the traditional Baroness. Costume designer Jenny Beavan created 47 looks for Stone, and 33 for Thompson.

"Getting to be with Emma T and getting to play these two women who are going toe-to-toe and really just the top of what they do — they're so good at what they do and they're so bad deep down — was really a delicious thing," Stone said.

Director Craig Gillespie described watching the two actresses in action, sparring with one another, as "blissful".

"Every time they were in a scene together it would just be such a fun, joyous day, just the

banter and the rhythm that they would have with each other," the Australian filmmaker said.

But it was his other leading stars that really stole the show according to the cast.

"I truly believe one of the great loves of my life is the dog Buddy who is played by the dog Bobby, who was a rescue dog and one of the sweetest dogs I have ever met," Stone said of the street dog Estella takes in.

"Buddy was a star," agreed British actor Joel Fry who plays Estella's friend and accomplice Jasper. "Buddy and Wink really stood out as stars of the animal showbiz world," he said referring to a chihuahua who also features in the movie.

The movie, released in cinemas and on Disney+ on May 28, was shot in England over 65 days with several gala scenes featuring large scale sets and 300-400 extras in full costume.

Gillespie, who directed the 2007 movie "I, Tonya", said he hoped the "absolute whirlwind" of the shoot had translated into a fast-paced, energetic and entertaining movie.

"I just want you to be able to walk out and be like 'wow, that was a lot of fun,'" he said. "And it feels like that's what we need right now." — **Reuters**

ART

Dresden discovers lost Bernini in its sculpture collection



DRESDEN: Art historians at Dresden's state sculpture collection believe they have uncovered a long-lost work by the Italian master Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680), hidden in plain view in the famous collection.

The work, a life-size and realistic human skull sculpted from white Carrara marble, is to be the highlight of the exhibition "Bernini, the Pope and Death" that opens on May 28 in the city's Semper Gallery.

The marble skull was part of the Chigi Collection in Rome until it was bought in 1728 by August the Strong, elector of Saxony, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania, according to information published by the Dresden State Art Collections on Friday.

Research conducted in the run-up to the exhibition confirmed that the artwork is a Bernini that was commissioned in 1655 by Pope Alexander VII, a member of the Chigi family, to be placed on his desk.

The Dresden State Art Collections described the discovery as "sensational." The work was previously listed as "unattributed" in the museum's collection.

The exhibition describes how the plague hit Rome in 1656-7, and how the pope contained it through quarantine, mask-wearing and restrictions on public life. Elsewhere in Europe the outbreak had a devastating effect.

The exhibition also includes a portrait loaned by the Knights of Malta in Rome. It shows Alexander holding the Bernini skull. — **dpa**



FASHION'S green future of seaweed coats and mushroom shoes



From making algae-sequin dresses, dyeing clothes with bacteria to planting trackable pigments in cotton, an emerging tide of technological innovations offers the fashion industry a chance to clean up its woeful environmental record.

Change is urgently needed, since the industry consumes 93 billion cubic metres of water per year, dumps 500,000 tonnes of plastic microfibres into the ocean, and accounts for 10 per cent of global carbon emissions, according to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation.

The growing demands for change have generated ingenious responses, such as New York designer Charlotte McCurdy's seaweed raincoat.

The shimmering algae-plastic she concocted in a lab made for a striking (and carbon-free) garment, even more so when she teamed up with fashion designer Phillip Lim to make a sequin dress.

They are unlikely to show up in department stores. She sees them more as a way to demonstrate that decarbonised clothes are possible.

"I'm not trying to monetise it. I just want to plant a seed", she said.

"Material development is so slow and it's so hard to compete with cellphone apps for funding. Frankly, I take climate change seriously and I don't have time", said McCurdy, whose focus now is on forming an innovation and outreach hub.

BACTERIAL COLOURS

Others, like Dutch designers Laura Luchtman and Ilfa Siebenhaar of Living Colour, are finding ways to reduce the toxic chemicals and intensive water consumption of dyeing clothes.

They found an unlikely ally in bacteria.

Certain micro-organisms release natural pigments as they multiply, and by deploying them on fabric, they dye clothes in

striking colours and patterns.

The research is published freely online and the pair have no interest in mass-production.

Luchtman, who previously worked in fast-fashion, saw "up close the negative impact of that industry in terms of exploiting people and ecological problems" and is determined to stay small-scale.

Others, however, hope such ideas can infiltrate big business.

Californian start-up Bolt Threads recently teamed with Adidas, Lululemon, Kering and Stella McCartney to build production facilities for Mylo, a leather made from mushroom roots.

McCartney displayed her first Mylo collection in March, and Adidas has promised a Mylo sneaker by the end of the year.

BUSINESS IMPERATIVE

Some experts are sceptical that such initiatives can lead to large-scale transformation.

"Maybe some of these things will get a foothold in the industry, but the bar is very high for new approaches", warns Mark Sumner, a sustainability expert at the University of Leeds School of Design.

"It's an incredibly diverse industry with thousands of factories and operators all doing different things. It's not like the car industry where you only have to convince six or seven major companies to try something new."

Sumner sees the biggest impact coming from improving rather than replacing the existing systems and says pressure from consumers and NGOs means this is already happening.

"Among responsible brands and retailers, this has genuinely moved away from being a fad. They are now considering sustainability as a business imperative", he told AFP.

Not that there are any right or wrong answers. The sustainability movement's strength comes from many actors pulling in the same direction.

"Many different strategies need to run together", said Celine Semaan, founder of the Slow Factory Foundation which supports multiple social and environmental justice initiatives around fashion, including McCurdy's algae-sequin dress.

"Technology won't resolve the issues on its own. It needs policy, culture, ethics", Semaan said.

COTTON TRACING

One area many see as a priority, however, is transparency, and here technology has a clear role to play.

Such is the complexity of supply chains that "many companies have no idea where their garments are made, where fabrics come from, who provides their raw materials", said Delphine Williot, policy coordinator for Fashion Revolution, a campaign group.

Recent uproar over reports that cotton from China's Xinjiang region was picked by forced labour was compounded by the difficulty of knowing where this cotton ended up. Beijing denies the allegations.

Fibretrace, which won a sustainability award from Drapers magazine this year, offers a possible solution.

It implants an indestructible bioluminescent pigment into threads. Any resulting garment can then be scanned like a barcode to find its origins.

"You can't find the environmental impact of anything unless you know where it was made", Andrew Olah, Fibretrace's sales director, said.

Combined with data sites like SourceMap and Open Apparel Registry that give companies unprecedented clarity on their supply chains, it has become increasingly hard to plead ignorance.

"When you don't share your supply chain, you either do it because you're hiding something or you're stupid", said Olah.

"There's a lot of work to do", he added. "But I'm very optimistic." — AFP





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BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 24

Mazoon Electricity Company SAOC (MZEC), a subsidiary of Nama Holding, announced the signing of its debut Islamic financing facility for an amount of \$235,000,000. The proceeds will be used to finance the capital expenditure plans of MZEC for 2021 mainly comprising investments in the electricity distribution and supply network in its licence areas in Oman.

The facility is structured as a 2-year Ijarah bridge facility marking the first Islamic bank facility for Nama Group that has in the past raised several conventional bank loan facilities and issuances in the debt capital markets under RegS and 144a format, including a 10-year \$500,000,000 debut Sukuk in 2017.

The facility received interest from regional banks of Bahrain, Kuwait and UAE with 12 financiers participating in the facility and an oversubscribed order book.

“The inaugural Islamic financing facility is a milestone transaction for Mazoon Electricity, adding new banking relationships to the group and providing it access to Islamic financiers of the region to fund the investment in electricity distribution infrastructure of the Sultanate”, said Salim bin Said al Kamyani, CEO of Mazoon Electricity.

“We are very pleased with the support received from Islamic financiers to this transaction and it reinforces the confidence placed by a broad array of capital providers in the transparent and robust regulatory framework of the electricity sector of Oman and its strong credit fundamentals,” said Ahmed Tufail, Group Chief Financial Officer of Nama Holding.

Landmark project to unlock Oman’s carbon storage potential

DECARBONISATION AMBITIONS: Sultanate’s innovation-driven start-up 44.01 to collaborate with Climeworks of Switzerland in exploring carbon capture utilising geological formations in the Sultanate

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu



Climeworks’ direct air capture in Oman together with 44.01.

The geological conditions as well as the high availability of renewable energy make this a perfect location for testing prior to expanding our technology portfolio,” said Christoph Gebald, co-CEO and co-founder of Climeworks, in a statement.

Talal Hasan (pictured), founder and CEO of 44.01, added: “We are excited to be working with Climeworks on such an important project. Climeworks is a pioneer in the field of direct air capture

and brings in a lot of expertise. The launch of this direct air capture plant is a major step forward for the region which has some of the highest CO₂ emissions per capita in the world.”

The landmark project, which has global implications for the goal of reversing rising CO₂ levels blamed for climate change, will capitalise on peridotite’s well-known ability to store CO₂ as part of a natural mineralisation process. Atmospheric CO₂ naturally reacts with peridotite rocks rich in magnesium and calcium to precipitate carbonates.

“Oman has great potential to remove CO₂ permanently and safely in peridotite formations. Additionally, 44.01 powers its process with solar energy and biofuel produced by local circular economies,” Climeworks explained in a press statement.

The partnership seeks to leverage the combination of their individual capabilities to speed up the carbonisation process with the goal

of decarbonising Oman in line with the Paris Agreement.

This process of geological storage of CO₂ is seen as not only safe but permanent as well, offering a practical and cost-competitive solution to the threat posed by global warming.

The Sultanate, given its vantage geographical location and its abundance of renewable energy resources, such as solar and wind, is seen as ideally placed to support this initiative.

Climeworks noted: “One location in which suitable rock formations occur is Oman. This is why Climeworks and 44.01 are jointly testing the combination of Climeworks’ direct air capture technology with geological storage of CO₂ in Oman,” the company stated.

“Oman is party to the Paris Agreement and needs to decarbonise. Our partnership with Climeworks is a massive step forward for Oman and the region in the fight against climate change,” added Talal.

Pact to create Turkish industrial zone in Duqm SEZ

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 24

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion signed on Monday a cooperation programme with a trade delegation from the Turkish Gebze Organized Industrial Zone (GOSB) to attract Turkish investments to the Sultanate through the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

The Turkish delegation’s visit to the Sultanate is organised by the investment promotion arm of the ministry, in cooperation with OPAZ. The visit aims to discuss ways of trade and investment cooperation between the two countries and to meet with officials from a number of concerned authorities. During the visit, an initial

agreement was signed for an investment project to replicate a model for the Gebze Organized Industrial Zone (GOSB) in SEZAD. The key joint investment sectors include mining, petrochemicals, food and logistics.

This joint investment project will lead to the establishment of a Turkish Industrial Zone in Duqm.

The Cooperation Programme was signed by Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of OPAZ; Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion; and Fahit Yildirim, Chairman of Turkish Gebze Organized Industrial Zone.

“The Turkish delegation will explore the potential opportunities in Duqm to attract the Turkish companies. OPAZ is fully prepared to provide all facilities to these companies, which could



easily access the regional and African markets through the Port of Duqm. As well, there are lands designated for gas-dependent projects as the gas pipeline project to Duqm is already completed and Duqm Refinery Project is on the way to complete too,” said Al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of OPAZ.

Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah added: “In light of the interest

in developing trade relations between the Sultanate and the Republic of Turkey, different ways of strengthening trade cooperation between the two countries in various spheres were discussed in the meeting. Likewise, the delegation expressed high interest to form real partnerships in the targeted sectors, so the delegation will visit a number of concerned bodies during their stay in the

“
OPAZ is fully prepared to provide all facilities to these companies, which could easily access the regional and African markets through the Port of Duqm
”
ENG AHMED BIN HASSAN AL DHEEB
Deputy Chairman, OPAZ

Sultanate.”

According to the Cooperation Programme, OPAZ will allocate a land in the Medium Industries Zone at SEZAD, so that the Turkish Gebze Organized Industrial Zone,

as an investment developer, will promote the zone to companies operating in its industrial zone. The Gebze Organized Industrial Zone (GOSB) is located in the centre of the Marmara District, with an estimated area of 5,160,000 sqm of land, constituting two-thirds of Turkey’s market. There are about 43 foreign companies and 163 companies in 188 industrial units in the Zone, with total exports estimated at about \$11 billion from the Zone in 2020.

The production industries in the Zone include electronics, food, motors, rubber, plastics, chemicals and others. The Gebze Organized Industrial Zone is distinguished from others by the high-quality services it provides to the companies within the Zone. It is the only organised industrial zone in Turkey that provides a call, service and data centre, in addition to having a technology centre.

How SMEs can adapt to the new normal



TAAREK HINEDI

Small to medium enterprises (SMEs) in the Middle East and North Africa contribute approximately \$1 trillion to the region's economy every year. However, crises like the Covid-19 pandemic remind us that no economy is safe from challenges.

With the ongoing restrictions on travel and movement in certain countries, the pandemic has drastically changed the way people shop and use products, services and technology.

It has also changed how organisations approach their day-to-day business. Many SMEs are quick to act - thanks to either their size or singular focus. This gives them a unique opportunity to build business resilience and ensure recovery by focusing on their customers, their team members, and processes.

CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT



Since social distancing has become the new normal, customers increasingly appreciate businesses that use creative ways to engage and indulge them. For instance, rather than eat at a restaurant, a family might prefer to create a dine-in experience at home where they are most comfortable.

From e-commerce and contactless deliveries to digital payments and virtual malls, people are shopping for things that reflect

their health and safety priorities.

According to a study by Mastercard, 73 per cent of UAE consumers are shopping online more since the pandemic started.

With changing consumer behaviour, small businesses should take advantage of the new opportunities, to address customers' new priorities. This way, you will be able to retain existing customers and potentially widen your market outside of your

geographic area.

BUSINESS RESILIENCE

No company, regardless of its size, is immune to economic or environmental challenges. To gain your team's continued support in delivering the best service, it's important that you are transparent from the very beginning about future plans and considerations and seize every opportunity to re-engage with your team.

Even as the situation normalises,

make it a business practice to keep them informed on how you plan to prioritize their health and safety, especially if their job role requires them to be in the field, interacting with customers.

Do regular catch-ups with your team to make sure they feel comfortable and understand the changes the business is going through. Explain what is expected from them and discuss the pain points or challenges they might face with their work.

Understanding the processes of each department, from inventory and warehouse management to transportation and product orders, helps you deliver a better customer experience.

Most SMEs are made up of a close-knit team, where all members practice an "all hands on deck" approach to business. Small technical blind spots may turn into business issues in times of crisis, when the organisations are further stretched.

For example, if a retailer only stocks products when a customer places their order online, less visibility across your logistics process might lead to delays in scheduling deliveries or miscommunicating the committed delivery timeline.

To be better prepared, continuously imagine the "what

if" scenarios, such as how your logistics partner can support you in notifying customers about delays in advance or update you on the border restrictions in certain areas.

Where possible, divide the vulnerabilities you find in a process into phases so that you know when something needs your urgent attention. This way, you can make quick decisions and assign additional team support where needed.

Covid-19 has revived the importance of preparation and planning for business continuity and recovery. Using e-commerce to bring your services closer to people, being team-focused and having greater visibility across all processes will help to effectively manage demand, distribution, and deliveries.

Doing so will meet customer needs in a convenient and considerate way, which is key for business recovery.

In short, by strengthening and enabling three pillars of business continuity: customers, team members, and processes, SMEs will achieve business resilience, ensure business continuity and emerge stronger despite challenging times.

[Taarek Hinedi is Vice President of FedEx Express Middle East and Africa Operations]

New banking Trojan malware going global

MUSCAT: Cybersecurity experts have discovered a new banking malware from Brazil, named Bizarro, targeting 70 banks from different European and South American countries. Last year, Kaspersky researchers saw several banking trojans from South America (Guildma, Javali, Melcoz and Grandoreiro), expanding their operations all over the globe. Collectively recognised as "the Tétrade", these

families employed a variety of new, innovative and sophisticated techniques.

2021 has seen a continuation of this trend - as a new local player, Bizarro, goes global. Bizarro is a new banking Trojan family originating in Brazil, that is now also in other countries, such as Argentina, Chile, Germany, Spain, Portugal, France, and Italy.

Just like Tétrade, Bizarro is using affiliates

or recruiting money mules to operationalize their attacks, doing the cashout or simply helping with translations.

At the same time, cybercriminals behind this malware family are adopting various technical methods to complicate malware analysis and detection, as well as social engineering tricks that help convince targets to give out their online banking credentials.

Demand for air travel could come back by Q4 2021: ATM Virtual 2021



BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 24

Following last week's in-person Arabian Travel Market the Middle East's largest travel and tourism showcase, continued this week with the opening on Monday of ATM Virtual. Under the same theme of 'A new dawn for travel & tourism', the three-day event, which was specifically designed for those industry professionals unable to attend the in-person ATM event, kicked off this year with a high-level official giving a candid outlook about the recovery of the aviation industry.

During a virtual conversation with top aviation consultant, John Strickland, who conducted the interview from London, Sir Tim Clark, President of Emirates Airlines, initially gave his opinion on the recovery timescale of the aviation sector.

"The ideal situation is that the vaccine programme beats the virus by autumn of this year and we get some relief then demand will come back at a staggering rate. Low cost (airlines) will benefit from intra-European travel, the US domestic market, China's domestic market and international travel will (also) return in large numbers," said Sir Tim.

"But the problem (with this scenario) will be twofold. The ability

of airlines to meet the demand when it comes and two, the conditionality of country access requirements," he added.

On the latter point, Sir Tim explained that even though there is massive pent-up demand, there may well be inhibitors too. Some passengers might be nervous and worried about variant strains of the Coronavirus, the situation in India he said is creating a ripple effect across the global economy. Although airlines and airports had really worked hard to 'sanitise' how they managed passenger welfare, mitigating risk through their protocols, that alone would not be enough.

"It's a question of how we navigate the next six months and if we do it right with equitable vaccine distribution, testing regimes simplified and made cheaper, all of this lends to the theory that by the end of the year, we'll be back in business in some scale," he said.

Sir Tim then moved on to talk about business travel and said: "Business travel will return in absolute terms, but segments will change. Airlines will have to adapt to the changing nature of demand. An a la carte menu for business class which allows you to pick and choose products at various price points that go with it, is a smart idea."

Hino Motors Honours Saud Bahwan Automotive with Excellence Awards

MUSCAT: Recently, Hino Motors Limited, honoured Saud Bahwan Automotive, the distributors of Hino vehicles in Oman, with two prestigious awards. They include the 3S Award and Vehicle Sales Achievement Award.

The awards were presented by Koji Nagata, Operating Officer, Area Marketing Operations, Hino Motors Limited.

Speaking on the occasion, Koji Nagata said, "I congratulate the Chairman of Saud Bahwan Automotive for this remarkable achievement.

Saud Bahwan Automotive's inspiring marketing initiatives and steadfast commitment for high levels of customer satisfaction have driven Hino to be a trusted and dependable brand in Oman."

"We at Hino Motors Limited are very pleased to be associated with Saud Bahwan Automotive in Oman. And are very impressed with their achievement. This year, we are all in the midst of a very turbulent and unpredictable environment. Yet we are confident that by working



together, we can overcome all the challenges facing us and emerge even stronger in the post-pandemic era. We wish them all the best for the future," he continued.

Saud Bahwan Automotive remains committed to supporting Hino Motors with its world-class Customer Care and unparalleled after-sales support. Hino's large facility located in Muscat, includes

Sales, Service and Spare Parts facilities under one roof.

The Spare Parts operations feature a customer-centric approach in its design and management systems. The warehouse has a vast storage area ensuring an impressive 95 per cent availability of parts off the shelf.

The Central Parts Distribution Centre remains connected to other Hino spare

part outlets across Oman via a digital network and has special online access to the stock at Hino Motors to minimise response time.

In Oman Hino has a wide range of products starting from 6.5 ton GVW to 100-ton GCW, catering to the variety of requirements of the customers. These include Light Duty Trucks - DUTRO - 300 Series, Medium Duty Trucks - 500 Series and Heavy Duty Trucks - 700 Series.

While Hino is renowned for its exceptional quality, durability and reliability, peace of mind forms an integral component of the entire process and service heritage. Saud Bahwan Automotive's range of customer-focused service care programs brings greater value and confidence while ensuring low cost of ownership for the customers.

At Saud Bahwan Automotive, high levels of customer satisfaction have always remained the cornerstone of all activities, encouraging the team to deliver the finest experiences for every customer.

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SAMAH Elsayed Abdelfattah Mohamed has lost Egyptian passport No A26123507. Finder please handover to ROP.

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HSBC CEO says Bitcoin not for us

HSBC has no plans to offer the digital coins as an investment to customers, because they are too volatile and lack transparency, its Chief Executive Noel Quinn said. — Reuters



Dollar stuck near 3-month lows

The dollar was pinned near three-month lows against a basket of major currencies on Monday. The dollar index hovered around the 90 mark, broadly flat on the day. — Reuters



Gold hovers near 4-1/2 month high

Gold prices climbed on Monday to hover near a 4-1/2 month high. Spot gold was up 0.2 per cent at \$1,883.12 per ounce. Last week, gold prices hit their highest level since Jan 8. — Reuters

British employers call to overhaul regulation, tax rules



People walk past a sign in a shop window amid the outbreak of Covid-19 in Manchester, Britain. — Reuters

LONDON: British employers called on Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Monday to overhaul regulation and tax rules to help them meet the challenges of Brexit, the post-pandemic recovery and preparing for a net-zero carbon economy.

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) said 2021 should be a turning point for economic policy to break the pattern of weak productivity that has weighed on growth for more than a decade.

“This country will never have a greater opportunity to transform our economy and society”, CBI Director-General Tony Danker said.

“This is the moment where we have a genuine chance to make big bets on how the UK

economy will grow and compete.” The CBI urged regulators to prioritise investment, the creation of economic clusters around the country to foster innovation and better skills training.

It also said a long-term plan was needed for taxation that would allow Britain to fix the damage to its public finances wrought by the biggest ever budget deficit in peacetime without hurting business investment.

Britain’s economy slumped by almost 10 per cent last year and is due to grow by 7.25 per cent in 2021, according to the Bank of England. But the central bank has forecast that growth after 2022 will return to its slow, pre-pandemic pace. — Reuters

China crypto mining business hit by crackdown, bitcoin tumbles

BEIJING: Cryptocurrency miners, including HashCow and BTC.TOP, have halted all or part of their China operations after Beijing intensified a crackdown on bitcoin mining and trading, hammering digital currencies amid heightened global regulatory scrutiny.

A State Council committee led by Vice Premier Liu He announced the crackdown as part of efforts to fend off financial risks. It was the first time China’s cabinet has targeted virtual currency mining, a sizable business in the world’s second-biggest economy that some estimates say accounts for as much as 70 per cent of the global crypto supply.

Cryptocurrency exchange Huobi on Monday suspended both crypto-mining and some trading services to new clients from mainland China, adding it will instead focus on overseas businesses.

BTC.TOP, a crypto mining pool, also announced the suspension of its China business citing regulatory risks, while crypto miner HashCow said it would halt buying new bitcoin mining rigs.

Crypto miners use increasingly powerful, specially-designed computer equipment, or rigs, to verify virtual coin transactions in a process which produces newly minted crypto currencies such as bitcoin.

“Crypto mining consumes a lot of energy, which runs counter to China’s carbon neutrality goals”, said Chen Jiahe, Chief Investment



Small toy figurines and representations of the Bitcoin virtual currency are seen in this illustration picture. — Reuters

Crypto miners use increasingly powerful, specially-designed computer equipment, or rigs, to verify virtual coin transactions in a process which produces newly minted crypto currencies such as bitcoin

officer of Beijing-based family office Novem Arcae Technologies.

The crackdown is also part of China’s stepped-up drive to curb speculative crypto trading, he added.

Bitcoin took a beating after the latest Chinese move, and is now down nearly 50 per cent from its all-time high.

It shed as much as 17 per cent on Sunday, before paring some losses and was last trading steady in Asia.

Elsewhere, Ether fell to a two-month low on Sunday, down 60 per cent from a record peak hit just 12 days ago, Investor protection and money laundering are particular concerns of global financial regulators who are grappling with whether and how they should regulate the cryptocurrency industry.

The latest shakeout in digital currencies also stems from tighter

scrutiny in the United States.

Last Thursday, US Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said they pose risks to financial stability, and indicating that greater regulation of the increasingly popular electronic currency may be warranted.

“Huobi always strives to abide by the evolving policies and regulations of each jurisdiction”, Huobi said.

BTC.TOP founder Jiang Zhuoer said in a micro blog post via Weibo that its mining business will no longer be open to mainland China, while HashCow said it would suspend new businesses in China in a notice to clients. — Reuters

Goldman Sachs sees oil hitting \$80 per barrel despite likely return of Iran supply

NEW YORK: Goldman Sachs said it expects oil prices to climb to \$80 per barrel in the fourth quarter of this year, arguing that the market has underestimated a rebound in demand even with a possible resumption in Iranian supply.

“The case for higher oil prices therefore remains intact given the large vaccine-driven increase in demand in the face of inelastic supply”, the bank said in a note. Even “aggressively assuming” a restart of Iranian exports in July, Brent prices would still reach the \$80 mark by the fourth quarter, it said.

Oil prices fell last week after Iran’s President Hassan Rouhani, said the United States was ready to lift sanctions on Tehran’s oil, banking and shipping sectors.

Crude recouped some of those losses on Monday as a potential snag emerged in reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal that could add more oil supply, with indirect talks between Washington and Tehran due to resume this week.



A man inspects oil barrels at Pertamina plant in Kalimantan, Indonesia. — Reuters

Goldman Sachs said a demand recovery in developed markets would offset a recent coronavirus-led hit to consumption and likely slower recovery in South Asia and Latin America.

Global demand could increase by 4.6 million barrels per day through year-end, with most of the gains likely in the next 3 months, it said. “Mobility is rapidly increasing in

the US and Europe, as vaccinations accelerate and lockdowns are lifted, with freight and industrial activity also surging”, the note said.

The bank also expects the Organization of the Oil Producing Countries (Opec) and allies including Russia, a grouping known as Opec+, to offset any ramp-up in Iran production by halting for two months an increase

Oil prices up over \$1

SINGAPORE: Oil prices rose on Monday as a potential snag emerged in reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal that could add more oil supply, while Goldman Sachs said the case for higher prices remains intact even with increased Iran exports.

Brent crude oil futures for July rose \$1.25, or 1.9 per cent, to \$67.69 a barrel by 0950 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate for July was at \$64.73 a barrel, up \$1.15, or 1.8 per cent.

Oil prices fell almost 3 per cent last week after Iran’s President Hassan Rouhani, said the United States was

ready to lift sanctions on his country’s oil, banking and shipping sectors.

However, the speaker of Iran’s parliament said on Sunday a three-month monitoring deal between Iran and the UN nuclear watchdog had expired and that its access to images from inside some Iranian nuclear sites would cease.

European diplomats said last week that failure to agree an extension of the monitoring deal would plunge wider, indirect talks between Washington and Tehran on reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal into crisis. — Reuters

in its output in the second half of 2021. This would help offset the perceived bearish impact in the

physical market of the release of Iranian floating storage, it said. — Reuters

G7 is close to agreement on taxation of world’s largest companies

LONDON: G7 countries are close to reaching agreement on the corporate taxation of multinationals, clearing the way for a global deal later in the year, the Financial Times said.

After the US agreed to accept a minimum rate of at least 15 per cent, France, Germany and Italy said the new proposal was a good basis for sealing an international deal by July.

A G7 deal could be agreed as early as Friday after progress was made among top officials in recent days, the FT said. “The world is closer than ever before to a global minimum tax”, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said. “Great to hear the positive reception to our proposal. This is what it looks like to lead the world to end the race to the bottom.”

Nearly 140 countries aim to reach broad agreement this summer to rework rules for taxing multinational groups and big technology companies, such as Alphabet Inc and Facebook Inc. — Reuters