

50 Omani students selected for higher studies in Hungary

Fifty Omani students specialising in various subjects will have a rare opportunity to pursue higher studies in Hungary next year in English. The agreement to support Omani students to pursue masters and PhD was signed recently between the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MHERI) with the Government of Hungary in the field of higher education and scholarships. These young Omani students on scholarship in Hungary will participate in local and international conferences and scientific workshops and support and facilitate study and learning of the Arabic and Hungarian languages. **P2**



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IIC TRAINS OMANIS IN SMOKED FISH PREPARATION



MUSCAT

SULTANATE GREET'S UAE ON UNSC MEMBERSHIP

Oman's foreign ministry on Saturday expressed the Sultanate's congratulations to the brotherly United Arab Emirates (UAE) for being elected to the United Nations Security Council for the 2022-2023 term. In a statement, the foreign ministry expressed the Sultanate's support to the government of the UAE in its missions towards the issue of international peace and in serving the interests of the GCC countries and the Arab and Islamic issues. — ONA

SQU ADVANCES IN UNIVERSITY RANKINGS

The Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has made continuous improvement in the QS World University Rankings for the past six consecutive years. SQU was ranked 368th in 2022 advancing 7 notches from the 375th position in 2021. A total of 1,673 institutions, including 145 new entrants, across 93 countries have been analyzed by QS this year. SQU endeavoured to better its international ranking through continued work aimed at improving performance indicators and updating its information required by the QS. At the beginning of this year, SQU strove to adapt its ranking strategy to the Oman Vision 2040. **SEE P5**



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Vaccination begins for govt employees

NO SERIOUS COMPLICATIONS REPORTED FROM JABS

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The first dose of vaccines will be given to the employees of the state's administrative apparatus in the Governorate of Muscat, according to prior coordination with each authority, the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) in Muscat said on Saturday.

The Ministry of Health will also continue to give the second dose of vaccines to all eligible citizens.

The DGHS said that the centres are Allenbhae School for Basic Education in Seeb, Quriyat polyclinic, Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, Imam Jaber bin Zaid School in Wattayah, and Office of the Governor of Al Amerat. Timings are between 8 am and 2 pm.

The MoH announced that the



target groups as part of the national campaign for immunization against Covid-19 for the months June and July will represent a large segment

of the population. Vaccination of the population above 45 years of age will commence from June 21.

While vaccination is a safe and

effective way to avoid Covid-19, it is also important to adhere to precautionary measures that would contribute to return to normal life

soon, health experts said. The MoH has confirmed the safety of the vaccines used in the Sultanate and added that no serious complications have been reported from vaccinated target groups.

Dr Reda bin Issa al Lawati, an internal medicine expert, has said that rumors have created a reluctance among some people to take doses, which often result in people falling ill and getting hospitalized.

At the same time, many people take doses without fear.

He stated that among the safe and effective vaccines used in the Sultanate, the first to be used and approved by all countries is Pfizer-BioNtech vaccines. With trials conducted on 44,000, it has an efficiency percentage of 95 percent.

Oxford-AstraZeneca is also approved in the Sultanate.

Sultanate respects all human beings

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 12

The Sultanate respects all human beings, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister and Chairman of the National Committee of Human Rights to Combat Human Trafficking, said during an 'Insan' campaign.

"The Sultanate of Oman is a country that respects all human beings. This is the principle that the late Sultan Qaboos made clear in his speech at the Annual Session of the Council of Oman in 2003. In his speech he said, 'We are against injustice

and darkness and on the side of justice, light and harmony. Mankind will only enjoy happiness and a sense of security if there is justice and respect for all those things which guarantee human beings their legitimate rights. First and foremost of these is their right to honour, dignity and freedom from humiliation, and their right to liberty and independence."

This is the same principle that His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik reinforced in his speech on February 23, 2020.

FULL REPORT ON P2



Extinction Rebellion environmental activists and supporters protest during the G7 summit. — Reuters

G7 outlines plan to prevent future pandemics

CARBIS BAY: The G7 on Saturday unveiled US-led plans to counter China in infrastructure funding for poorer nations, and a new accord to prevent future pandemics, as the elite group sought to showcase Western unity at its first in-person summit since 2019.

Promising to "collectively catalyse" hundreds of billions of infrastructure investment for low- and middle-income countries, the G7 leaders said they would offer a "values-driven, high-standard and transparent" partnership.

The White House said President Joe Biden and fellow leaders addressed "strategic competition" with Beijing on the second day of their three-day summit.

Britain meanwhile hailed G7 agreement on the "Carbis Bay Declaration" — a series of commitments to curb future pandemics after Covid-19 wrecked economies and claimed millions of lives around the world.

The collective steps include slashing the time taken to develop and license vaccines, treatments and diagnostics for any future disease to under 100 days, while reinforcing global surveillance networks. — AFP

Whale swallows fisherman alive, then spits out

NEW YORK: It sounds like a real-life take on "Pinocchio" -- a US lobster fisherman says he was scooped into the mouth of a humpback whale on Friday and yet lived to tell the story.

"I was in his closed mouth for about 30 to 40 seconds before he rose to the surface and spit me out," Michael Packard wrote on Facebook hours after his brush with the depths.

"A humpback whale tried to eat me," he added. "I am very bruised up but have no broken bones."

Packard's beyond-belief big fish yarn began, he told local paper Cape Cod Times, when he was diving for lobster off the coast of the northeastern state of Massachusetts.

"All of a sudden, I felt this huge



A US lobster fisherman says he was scooped into the mouth of a humpback whale on Friday and yet lived to tell the story. — AFP

shove and the next thing I knew it was completely black," he said after being released from the hospital.

He was about 35 feet down and his first thought was that he had been

attacked by a shark, but the lack of teeth and obvious wounds made him reconsider.

Packard said he began to struggle — but unlike in the classic children's

tale "Pinocchio" there was no need to build a fire to secure his escape.

"I saw light, and he started throwing his head side-to-side and the next thing I knew I was outside (in the water)," Packard told the paper.

The story says Packard's fishing mate Josiah Mayo "saw the explosion of water as the whale surfaced and Packard was ejected," but doesn't include any quotes attributed to him.

Jooke Robbins, director of humpback whale studies at the Center for Coastal Studies said she had no reason to doubt the account.

"I didn't think it was a hoax because I knew the people involved... So I have every reason to believe that what they say is true," she said. — AFP

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 42°C Min 31°C SALALAH: Max 32°C Min 28°C NIZWA: Max 47°C Min 32°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 05:20 FAJR: 03:52 DHUHR: 12:12 ASR: 15:30 MAGHRIB: 18:59 ISHA: 20:21

Insan campaign renews pledge to combat human trafficking

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 12

An awareness campaign, launched by the National Committee of Human Rights to Combat Human Trafficking on March 1 titled 'Insan', concluded on May 31, 2021.

The campaign was aimed at generating awareness among various segments of society about human trafficking crimes, ways to detect them and how government efforts can be supported to deal with such cases.

Commenting on the conclusion of the campaign, Sayyid Badr al Busaidy, Foreign Minister and Chairman of the Committee, said: "The Sultanate of Oman is a country that respects all human beings. This is the principle that the late Sultan Qaboos made clear in his speech at the Annual Session of the Council of Oman in 2003. In his speech he said, 'We are against injustice and darkness and on the side of justice, light and harmony. Mankind will only enjoy happiness and a sense of security if there is justice and respect for all those things which guarantee human beings their legitimate rights. First and foremost of these is their right to honour, dignity and freedom from humiliation, and their right to liberty and independence'."

This is the same principle that His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik reinforced in his speech on February 23, 2020.

His Majesty the Sultan said, "We are proud that the citizens and residents in our dear country live, thanks to the Almighty, in the purview of the State of Law and institutions, a state built on the principles of freedom, indiscrimination, and equal opportunities, a state established on justice and dignity of individuals whose rights and liberties are secured therein."

"Therefore, these are the principles of the Omani people, which make them a means of support and strength of the law enforcement forces as it continues its battle against heinous crimes in society."



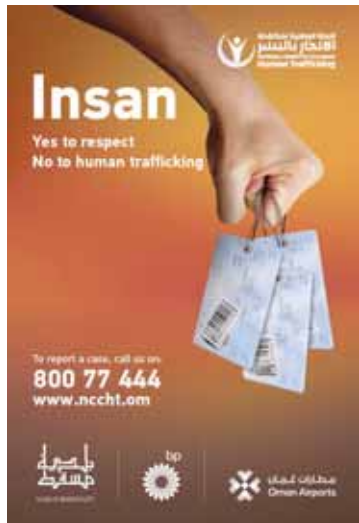
Sayyid Badr al Busaidy



Nasr bin Khamis al Sawai

"I would like to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to all the parties who were a part of the campaign. I am especially grateful to the members of the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking, who worked tirelessly to achieve the objectives of the campaign. Moreover, we are proud of their efforts to deliver this message to farthest reaches of society and especially to the groups who are the most vulnerable to being victims of trafficking."

Nasr bin Khamis al Sawai, Attorney General and Deputy Chairman of the Committee, stated, "The Government of Oman, represented by the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking, strives tirelessly to combat human trafficking crimes. This is made further possible by reviewing the legislative system and proposing laws for perpetrators of the crime. The committee is also keen on tracking the crime index through the statistical systems, providing care and protection to the victims. Furthermore, the committee continues to



Sayyid Ammar al Busaidy

organise campaigns to educate the different segments of society about human trafficking and various methods of reporting. We are proud of the positive results that have been reflected through the media and advertising campaign, which affirms that the community does not tolerate such crimes."

Sayyid Ammar bin Abdullah al Busaidy, First Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Supervisor of the Human Trafficking Committee, said, "We believe that combating human trafficking is not just the task of a particular entity. Rather, this is a joint effort from everyone involved through a means of collaboration of everyone within society, working towards this endeavour."

"The Insan campaign focused on targeting various segments of society through awareness and motivational messages, intending to encourage their participation in combatting human trafficking. We are extremely proud of the positive results of the campaign, which showcased the high level of

interaction within different segments of society. This way, we were able to detect cases that would have been overseen and not detected, if it were not without the support and awareness of the community, especially concerning extending care to the victims. A few of the campaign's awareness activities will continue to take place until the end of the year as scheduled."

The Insan campaign included several media, advertising and digital activities that were implemented in partnership and cooperation with various public and private entities.

These included Omantel, Ooredoo, Muscat Municipality, BP Oman and the Oman Airports Management Company, who significantly contributed to the success of the campaign.

Also, several media representatives and social media influencers participated in the campaign including, Khalid al Zadjali, Moosa al Farei, Buthaina al Balushi, Ibrahim al Zadjali and Ali al Habsi. Each of them recorded a short video, expressing their support of the Insan campaign that focused on the concept of humanity. They also pointed out the Islamic values and morals that define the Omani character in their communication with others.

Sayyid Ammar bin Abdullah al Busaidy, commented, "When social influencers participate and take part in promoting such awareness campaigns, these campaigns receive widespread acclaim. Apart from receiving immense acceptance by the public and from our experience with Omani influencers who have participated with us in the Insan campaign, we can say that the cooperation proved very fruitful and was engaging. We are always keen to welcome and encourage such initiatives. On behalf of the chairman and members of the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking, I would like to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to all who have contributed in supporting the efforts of the campaign and seeing it to success."



Action against hotel for non-compliance

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The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) announced the closure of The Chedi Muscat Hotel for the approved time period, in addition to applying the penalties, after cases were confirmed as a result of non-compliance with implementing the preventive measures to be applied.

"The safety, health of our guests and employees is our priority, and The Chedi Muscat will spare no expense and effort to ensure that they are well looked after and cared for during this challenging period. The hotel's management is working closely with all respective authorities, including the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, to ensure that all protocols are implemented. As such, the hotel will remain closed to guests until June 15, 2021, as directed by the ministry," The Chedi Muscat said in a statement.

The ministry said that this procedure came within the framework of a follow-up to tourism and hotel facilities and travel and tourism offices in cooperation and coordination with the relevant government agencies to ensure the implementation of the decisions of the Supreme Committee.

MoHT has called on all tourist and hotel facilities and

travel and tourism offices to fully comply with the decisions issued by the Supreme Committee and the Ministry of Health.

The authorities have warned that the decision to reduce entry to complexes, shops, restaurants and cafes to 50 per cent of its capacity is still in effect and that violating these decisions will lead to strict action and penalties.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has initiated action against one of the hotel establishments, which included complete closure for violating the decisions issued by the Supreme Committee.

The Supreme Committee last week decided to lift the ban on conducting businesses across the Sultanate between 8 pm and 4 am and to continue working with the decision to reduce the entry of visitors to complexes, shops, restaurants and cafes to no more than 50 per cent of capacity. Children under 12 years of age will be now allowed to enter malls and other commercial establishments

It decided to allow the reopening of exhibitions, wedding halls, and other commercial activities which require people to gather together, provided not to exceed 30 per cent of their capacity, and not to exceed 300 people in whatever case for halls with large capacities, while adhering to all preventive measures and requirements.

Tanweer announces Omanisation of 180 jobs

MUSCAT: The Rural Areas Electricity Company "Tanweer", a subsidiary of Nama Group, announced the nationalisation of 800 jobs.

Tanweer stated that it is going to nationalise 180 jobs that are part of the contracts it awarded to contractors with a view to increasing Omanisation rates in these companies in different concession areas belonging to Tanweer.

Tanweer, in cooperation with the contractors, will provide training for Omani youth with the aim of future jobs. The announcement for the vacant jobs has recently been published in coordination with the Ministry of Labour.

Ahmed bin Said al Harthi, Acting CEO of Tanweer, said the initiative is part of the company's efforts to raise Omanisation rates in the contracts awarded by Tanweer to contractors. He noted that the interviews for the vacant jobs will begin this month.

It is noteworthy that Tanweer began working with Nama Group to increase the Omanisation rates in the contracting companies stemming from its belief in the ability of the national workforce to increase the productivity in the energy sectors given the diversity of the company's projects which include renewable energy such as solar and wind power and electricity grids.

50 Omani students selected for higher studies in Hungary

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Fifty Omani students specialising in various subjects will have a rare opportunity to pursue higher studies in Hungary next year in English, thanks to the Stipendium Hungaricum Scholarship agreement signed between the Sultanate of Oman and Hungary. The first group of fifty students will travel to Hungary Q3 2022, the Hungarian diplomatic representatives have told the *Observer*.

The agreement to support Omani students to pursue masters and PhD was signed

recently between the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation with the Government of Hungary in the field of higher education and scholarships.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Dr Tibor Szatmári, Ambassador of Hungary to the Sultanate, said that the Stipendium Hungaricum annual 50 scholarships from Hungary would further boost bilateral relations. These scholarships for fifty brilliant Omani youths for graduate and postgraduate students in various scientific disciplines signify our keenness in enhancing the bilateral ties.

Oman and Hungary share



Dr Tibor Szatmári

many commonalities and contrasts, making the country a place of choice for Omanis. "We are expecting more Omanis to explore our country, once travel

is open just as we encourage Hungarians to visit Oman. We receive high appreciation from those who visit each other," said the ambassador.

These young Omani students on scholarship in Hungary will participate in local and international conferences and scientific workshops and support and facilitate study and learning of the Arabic and Hungarian languages. The scholarship agreement also aims to promote cooperation in research and expertise exchange in various sciences, knowledge and modern technology, which enjoy common interest from both sides.

The bird carefully lays eggs in rocky places so that it can hide them and save them from being eaten up by other birds and animals



Bridled tern's breeding season begins

AT THIS TIME OF EVERY YEAR, BRIDLED TERN CAN BE SEEN IN LARGE NUMBERS IN THE COASTAL AREAS OF THE SULTANATE



TEXT & PHOTOS BY:
YAHYA AL SALMANI

With the temperatures crossing 40 degrees Celsius in the coastal areas of the Sultanate, the breeding season of bridled tern (*Onychoprion anaethetus*) has started under the hot and humid weather.

During this time of each year, this bird can be seen in the coastal areas. The bird carefully lays eggs in rocky places so that it can hide them and save them from being eaten up by other birds and animals.

It is a common seabird found in Oman and in many tropical areas of India and African countries. It does not dive, but takes food from the surface of the water.

This is a medium-sized tern, at 30-32 cm in length and with a 77-81 cm wingspan similar to the common tern in size, but more heavily built. The wings and deeply forked tail are long, and it has dark grey upperparts and white underparts. The forehead and eyebrows are white, as is a striking collar on the hindneck. It has black legs and bill. Juvenile bridled terns are scaly grey above and pale below.

This species is unlikely to be confused with any tern apart from the similarly dark-backed sooty tern and the spectacled

tern from the Tropical Pacific. It is paler-backed than that sooty, (but not as pale as the grey-backed) and has a narrower white forehead and a pale neck collar.

Environmental researchers say that "this species breeds in colonies on rocky islands. It nests in a ground scrape or hole and lays one egg. It feeds by plunge-diving for fish in marine environments, but will also pick from the surface like the black tern and the gull-billed tern. It usually dives directly, and not from the "stepped-hover" favoured by the Arctic tern. The offering of fish by the male to the female is part of the courtship display".

At this time of the year, there are tens of thousands of this bird, especially in the northern regions of the Sultanate. Therefore, this season attracts many ornithologists to study and verify data related to this beautiful bird. There are also many birdwatchers and photographers interested in the types of Omani birds who spend days documenting this bird photographically.

There are more than 500 species of birds in the Sultanate, and the institutions of the Sultanate are making great efforts to contain and preserve them from the risks of being overhunted.



Omani students' scientific research excels at GLOBE Program

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 12

The head office of GLOBE (GIO) Environmental Program has announced that seven Omani student scientific research papers were selected from among the 234 participant research papers from around the world at the global virtual exhibition of scientific research for the GLOBE Environmental Program for the academic year 2020-2021.

The Sultanate's schools participated in the virtual exhibition held in the US during March 29 to April 5, and achieved advanced ranking this year. Five of the Omani schools obtained the highest grades of evaluation

represented in obtaining four stars, which is the full mark. The four stars grade is the highest classification in the evaluation stage that qualifies later for competing for the winning centres, which are chosen randomly by lottery system for all the winning research papers from all countries participating in the exhibition.

This exhibition is an event in which the Sultanate's schools maintained achieving advanced positions every year. This year, despite the Covid 19 pandemic, which directly affected education, the Omani students had a distinguished participation and continued to work, research, and strive towards achieving the



best results.

The winning schools were as follows: Umm Dhar Al-Ghafari School in Al Buraimi Governorate, with the research

titled "Causes of Death of Aquatic and Plant Organisms in the Laboratory of Umm Dhar Al-Ghafari School", and Alyat Fada School in Al Dhahirah Governorate, with two research papers titled "Study of the Causes of Non-Germination of Fig Trees in Al Dhuhairiyah District in Wilayat of Dhank", and "Study of the Causes of the Growth-Stop and Wilting of the Cranberry Plant in the Wilayat of Dhank", and Umm Hani School in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, with a research titled "Study of the Causes of Water Loss from the Governmental Distribution Networks in the Wilayat of Samayil: Effects and Possibility of Use", and Sultan Said bin Taimur

School in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, with a research titled "Effects of Omani Samer Tree Charcoal on Soil Fertility and on Generating Electric Current in Electrochemical Cells", and Hafsa Bint Sirin School in Al Buraimi Governorate, with a research titled "Effects of Bio-Charging on Improving Productivity of Sandy Soil in the Hamasa area in Al Buraimi Governorate.

The ministry pays great attention to the environmental GLOBE program, since its implementation in 2009, because of its role and impact in transforming students' learning towards the practical side through scientific protocols

applied in collecting readings and data from the field using scientific tools and devices with accurate readings, namely the water protocol, the atmosphere protocol, the soil protocol, and the land cover protocol, through which students prepare their scientific research, in the international scientific exhibition, the regional exhibition, as well as the local exhibitions in the Sultanate. All these data are shared through the website as these scientific research that students undertake in cooperation with their supervisors, contribute in providing scientific solutions to many environmental problems and challenges in their regions.



SUMMER TOURISM: LONG WAY TO GO?



Return of international tourists to Oman looks unlikely before November. But on the positive side, the domestic tourists helped us stay afloat, which was not enough but highly valuable under the circumstances

A RESORT MANAGER, *Based in South Batinah*

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

With last year's summer season almost washed away, the recovery chart offers some hope now as vaccination drive picks up in the country and elsewhere.

While vaccines have been not foolproof against infections, countries that managed to vaccinate a substantial percentage of the population have succeeded to achieve herd immunity and limit the daily fatalities.

Here in Oman, authorities have repeatedly been advocating that vaccines will be key to economic recovery and restoring normalcy to the lives of the average population.

Oman seeks to vaccinate nearly 30 per cent of the population by the end of July.

"Return of international tourists to Oman looks unlikely before November. But on the positive side, the domestic tourists helped us stay afloat, which was not enough but highly valuable under the circumstances", said a resort manager based in South Batinah.

"Despite the drop in revenues, the big brands were better positioned due to cross funding from projects in other parts of the world. As you may know, some markets did even in 2020."

Tourism operators in Salalah who spoke to the *Observer* hoped that Dhofar Governorate will not be closed this season, which means domestic tourists can take a break from peak summer in Muscat and Suhar.

Despite the hope, both travellers and the travel sector have a long journey ahead to regain the lost ground before covering the new areas.

Two straight years of the shutdown of the tourism sector will hit the tourism and travel so hard that any rebound will be harder and longer, perhaps extending to the next decade.

On the positive side, the European Union, known for beaches and summer holidays, decided to ease restrictions to allow fully vaccinated tourists to avoid tests or quarantines.

From July 1, the EU has launched Covid-19 certificates that will indicate whether the person is vaccinated, has immunity because they were previously infected, or has had a recent negative test.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) also confirmed that Phuket would be the first destination in Thailand to reopen to vaccinated foreign tourists without quarantine requirements from July 1, 2021.

"All of us at the Tourism Authority of Thailand share the excitement and anticipation of everyone in Phuket in the preparation to welcome back foreign tourists in the not-too-distant future. From July 1, 2021, vaccinated foreign tourists will be allowed to visit Phuket without quarantine. Hence, the countdown starts now to the reopening of Phuket", it said in a statement.



Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Heritage & Tourism

ANNOUNCEMENT

Extention of time for Competition Documents Purchasing [Renting, Operation & Utilization of Mutrah Fort & Al Bait Al Kabir] for Tourism Purposes

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is pleased to announce extending the period of purchasing competition documents (Requirements & Specifications) for the operation & utilization of Mutrah Fort & Al Bait Al Kabir for Tourism Purposes.

The documents are available at Finance Department during official office hours as of Sunday June 13, 2021 till Thursday June 17, 2021. The purchase is made against an amount totals RO 25 (Twenty Five Omani Rials only). Note that the last date for bid submission is on Sunday June 27, 2021.

Looking for job, car, flat and furniture? Check out the *Observer* classified page. It's where buyers meet sellers.

Social Development Minister concludes Musandam visit

MUSCAT: Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, concluded her visit to Musandam Governorate, during which she met with the minister of state and governor of Musandam, walis and citizens. During her

visit, the minister met citizens in the wilayats of Khasab, Bukha, Daba and Mad'ha and listened to their demands and proposals to speed up the march of social development in the governorate.

The minister discussed

with the walis various topics pertaining to the ministry's purview and the joint cooperation between the ministry's institutions and the walis' offices. The minister listened to citizens' demands and the work of the charitable

teams in the field of social development and their role in providing assistance to citizens.

The minister affirmed the ministry's keenness to facilitate the implementation of the proposals and recommendations.

SQU ranks 368th among world universities

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has made continuous improvement in the QS World University Rankings for the past six consecutive years. SQU was ranked 368th in 2022 advancing 7 notches from the 375th position in 2021.

A total of 1,673 institutions, including 145 new entrants, across 93 countries have been analysed by QS this year.

SQU endeavoured to better its international ranking through continued work aimed at improving performance indicators and updating

its information required by the QS. At the beginning of this year, SQU strove to adapt its ranking strategy to the Oman Vision 2040.

SQU has achieved an excellent academic reputation through encouraging the members of the academic staff to participate in the scientific research platforms and to publish their researches and the job satisfaction indicators by communicating with the university's graduates and their employers to explore the extent of quality of their performance.

— ONA



Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtaining of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-refundable)
14/2021	Providing and supplying prosthetic devices and aids for people with disabilities	Companies specialized in supplying medical equipment and registered with the general secretariat of the tender board	Tuesday 29-6-2021 02:00 PM	Monday 19-7-2021 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

- ❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On Thursday 10/6/2021.
- ❖ Tender shall be submitted in compliance with the technical specifications and terms along with a local bank warranty at (1%) of the tender value, valid ninety (90) days from the date of e-submission.
- ❖ The original (1%) bank warranty to be submitted at same day of submitting at tender box located in Directorate of Finance & Administration at MOSD HQ.
- ❖ For Inquiry, please contact through the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402222 or 24166670).

"The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry"

www.mosd.gov.om

TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

THE MAZOOON ELECTRICITY COMPANY (MZEC) INVITES THE FOLLOWING LOCAL TENDERS:

Tender No	Description	Last Date of Purchasing	Last Date for Submission	Tender Board Grade	Type of Participation	Tender Price R.O
28/MZEC/2021	SURVEY AND DESIGN WORKS OF 11KV & LT ELECTRICAL NETWORKS NEW EXTENSIONS AND REINFORCEMENTS AT SOUTH BATINAH GOVERNORATE & AL SUWAIQ DISTRICT & AL MANUMA AREA	17/06/2021	20/07/2021	Grade 1 Type 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Local	724

- Interested companies registered with DCRP and Tender Board and having a valid Registrations may obtain tenders documents through scm.tenders@mzec.co.om.
- Value of each tender document copy is non-refundable.
- The offers and related documents should be submitted in a sealed with red wax envelope addressed to the chairman of the **(Internal Tender Committee)**.
- On the top of the envelopes bidder should write the tender number and the subject only and no other marks or any reference thereto should be written outside the envelopes.
- The tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of tender price valid (90) days as a bid bond and addressed to the chairperson of the (Internal Tender Committee) of Mazoon Electricity Company S.A.O.C and **any offer is not including the bond will be rejected immediately.**
- The completed tenders should be deposited in the tender box at main head office building in Al Saih Al Hmer - BidBid before 10:00 am on the assigned closing date for submission of the tender.
- The priority of the awarding will be given to those bidders who assure recruitment of the maximum numbers of Omani staff and utilizing Omani products.
- The related parties only are invited to attend the tender opening meeting based on the assigned date.
- All Clarifications are to be sent to the email address: MZEC-Clarification@mzec.co.om and the Last date for receiving vendor's clarifications will be on 13/07/2021.**
- Mazoon Electricity Company S.A.O.C. is not bound to accept the lowest tender.
- We would like to inform you that above documents prices do not include VAT 5% and it will be charged if purchase invoice issued.

(WE LIGHT...WE CARE)

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



Attention

Majan Electricity Company announces amendment in the Period Buying & Submission date in the following tender below:

Tender No.	Description	Grade	Last date for buying	Submission date	Tender price R.O.
72/2021	PROVISION OF FUNCTIONAL SUPPORT SERVICE FOR FIXED ASSETS, ACCOUNTS PAYABLE, ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE AND BANK RECONCILIATION FOR MAJAN ELECTRICITY COMPANY	SPECIALIZED	20/6/2021	29/6/2021	30 /=

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Algeria votes in early polls marred by calls for boycott

ALGIERS: Algeria voted on Saturday in a parliamentary election overshadowed by a crackdown on a long-running protest movement that has campaigned for a mass boycott.

Pro-government parties have urged a big turnout for the ‘crucial vote’ which they hope will restore stability after two years of turmoil since the forced resignation of veteran president Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

The protest movement, which had held weekly demonstrations for reform until they were effectively banned last month, has denounced the election as a ‘sham’ that betrays the hopes of the hundreds of thousands of Algerians whose protests forced Bouteflika from power.

Seven leading protest movement figures were arrested ahead of polling day while police deployed heavily in the capital Algiers to preempt any attempt to rally.

Polls closed at 7 pm and results are not expected before the coming days. Authorities are hoping for a solid turnout, but the two previous national votes since Bouteflika stepped down — a presidential election and a constitutional referendum — both saw record low voting after the protest movement urged a boycott.

In Algiers, only a trickle of people were seen entering polling



Algeria's President Abdelmadjid Tebboune arrives with his wife at a polling station in Bouchaoui, on the western outskirts of Algeria's capital Algiers. – AFP

stations on Saturday, with most people getting on with their daily lives. “I’ve never voted, and this time it’s no different. I don’t believe it would change anything,” said Fatiha, a shopkeeper in her 50s.

Hamid, a 60-year-old office manager, said he had voted for the sake of “stability”.

“We are surrounded by danger. Those who reject this election aren’t putting forward any realistic alternative,” he said.

In the opposition stronghold of Kabylie, a mainly Berber region

east of the capital, most polling stations in the main cities of Bejaia and Tizi Ouzou remained closed, said Said Salhi, deputy head of the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LADDH).

Boycott calls from the region’s two main parties were almost universally respected in the previous two votes since Bouteflika’s ouster.

President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, who was elected on an official turnout of less than 40 in late 2019, put a brave face on the

likely low legislative turnout.

“For me, it’s not the turnout percentage that’s important, it’s whether the lawmakers that the people elect have sufficient legitimacy,” the president said after casting his vote at a polling station on the outskirts of Algiers.

More than 13,000 candidates are standing for the 407 seats in parliament, more than half listed as “independent”. The LADDH vice-president deplored the crackdown that preceded the vote.

— AFP

Yemen FM warns attacks threaten peace process

BRUSSELS: Yemen’s foreign minister warned last week that Ansar Allah fighters could thwart a renewed diplomatic push for peace as they scramble to seize a key city before discussing any ceasefire. In an interview with AFP, Ahmad Awad bin Mubarak said mediators had made progress in efforts to broker a ceasefire, but urged Europe to maintain pressure on the fighters.

And he suggested that the Ansar Allah fighters had backed recent bloody attacks, alleging they want to use Yemen as a bargaining chip to maintain leverage in nuclear talks with world powers in Vienna.

“There is a lot of hope in Yemen, and also challenges,” said the 52-year-old official, who has been foreign minister in President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi’s embattled government since December 2020.

Yemen has been left devastated by a civil war since 2014, and millions of civilians are on the brink of famine.

Hadi’s government is backed by a military coalition, which announced it had halted attacks on Ansar Allah targets to pave the way to ceasefire talks.

The UN and US envoys to Yemen, Martin Griffiths and Tim Lenderking, along with Iran’s



Yemeni Foreign Minister Ahmad Awad bin Mubarak speaks during an interview at Yemen Embassy in Brussels. – AFP

Mubarak is in Europe lobbying officials to take a strong line on Ansar Allah and hold them to account, alleged that the fighters had snubbed the diplomatic outreach

Foreign Minister Javad Zarif have met the mediators and some officials see a diplomatic opening.

But Mubarak, who is in Europe lobbying officials to take a strong line on Ansar Allah and hold them to account, alleged that the fighters had snubbed the diplomatic outreach.

— AFP

Major shortages in fuel, medical supplies hit Lebanon

BEIRUT: Lebanon is struggling with major shortages of medical supplies and fuel, leaving motorists queuing for hours at gas stations across the country, amid a deepening economic crisis.

Lebanon’s streets were blocked by long lines of vehicles on Friday as drivers waited to fill their cars, with each only allowed 10 litres of petrol.

The lines of cars caused numerous traffic jams and occasionally chaos broke out as motorists scrambled to obtain their portion of fuel, witnesses said.

Experiencing its worst economic crisis since the end of its 15-year civil war in 1990, Lebanon is suffering from a shortage of foreign currency reserves necessary to import essential goods.

Experts have warned that the fuel shortage could cause Lebanon’s power supply to collapse completely and trigger an Internet outage in the near future.

Experts warn that the fuel shortage could cause Lebanon’s power supply to collapse completely and trigger an Internet outage in the near future

Meanwhile healthcare officials expressed concerns about the acute shortage of medicines and other supplies.

Chairman of the Beirut Doctors’ Syndicate, Sharaf Abu Sharaf, said that urgently-needed supplies were running low.

“The situation is very difficult. All hospitals are only performing emergency operations now,” he said.

On Friday, pharmacies nationwide began a two-day strike, protesting about the shortages of



An employee fills a car with gasoline at a petrol station in Beirut amidst severe fuel shortages. – AFP

medicines.

Lebanon is suffering one of the world’s worst economic crises in

more than 150 years, according to the World Bank.

The Lebanese pound has lost

about 90 per cent of its value against the dollar since 2019.

The country has been under

pressure from international financing institutions to introduce economic reforms and act against corruption amid a political deadlock on the formation of a new government.

Meanwhile, the head of Lebanon’s powerful Hezbollah said last week that the country could soon be forced to rely on fuel imports from Iran, amid an ongoing economic collapse.

Lebanon has been facing increasingly severe fuel shortages in recent months, with long queues at service stations and some drivers waiting more than an hour to buy even small quantities of supplies.

Describing the situation as humiliating, Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah called on authorities to take a “courageous decision” and override their “fear” of the US to import fuel supplies from Iran, a country under hefty American sanctions. — dpa/AFP

UNITED NATIONS

Iran pays UN debts, restoring its voting rights

Iran has paid off some \$16.2 million in arrears it owed to the United Nations, allowing it to regain voting rights and participate in the General Assembly’s selection of five new members for the Security Council for 2022-2023 on Friday, diplomats said.

“After more than 6 months of working on it, the UN today announced it has received the funds,” said Iran’s Ambassador to the UN, Majid Takht Ravanchi, on Twitter. He blamed ‘illegal US



sanctions’ for the delay in settling the debts, saying they had “not just deprived our people of medicine; they have also prevented Iran from paying our dues in arrears to the UN.” That led to the suspension of Iran’s voting rights at the world body back in January.

BAGHDAD

US offers \$3m for info on Iraq attacks

The US Department of State’s Rewards for Justice programme said it was offering a reward of up to \$3 million for information on attacks against Americans in Iraq. The announcement comes a day after an attack was carried out with three “explosive-laden” drones on Baghdad airport.

“O faithful people of Iraq, cowardly terrorists are attacking US diplomatic missions in Iraq, then they are fleeing to hide among civilians,” said a statement in Arabic on the Twitter account



of Rewards for Justice. “America is offering a reward of up to \$3 million for information on planned attacks or past ones against American diplomatic installations,” said the statement, which was accompanied by a video. — AFP

BEN GUERDANE

Tunisian navy rescues 54 migrants

The Tunisian navy and coastguards rescued 54 migrants last week on a boat heading to Europe that was about to sink in Mediterranean waters, the defence ministry said. The migrants, aged between 15 and 40 and almost all men, left from neighbouring Libya.

But their boat began to founder in waters off the southern Tunisian port of Ben Guerlane, the defence ministry said.

The migrants — who include citizens of multiple nationalities,



many from sub-Saharan African countries — were taken to Ben Guerlane. Tunisia and Libya are key departure points for migrants attempting the dangerous crossing from the North African coast to Europe, particularly Italy.

— AFP

In brief

■ ISLAMABAD



PAKISTAN SETS GROWTH TARGET WITH \$54 BN BUDGET
Pakistan announced a budget of Rs 8.4 trillion for the next fiscal year, basing it on an ambitious growth target of 4.5 per cent and tripling spending on public sector development with an election just two years away. Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin's presentation to the National Assembly drew jeers from opposition lawmakers. Khan has presented himself as a champion of the poor and pledged to lift the country out of poverty, but Pakistan is heavily indebted and desperate for foreign investment. Rising inflation has left many struggling with higher food prices and energy bills. — **Reuters**

■ PHNOM PENH



CAMBODIA BEGINS EVICTING FLOATING HOMES
Cambodia's capital of Phnom Penh began overseeing the dismantling of "floating home" communities on the banks of the Tonle Sap River over the objections of longtime residents who say they have nowhere else to go. For generations, the floating wooden houseboats of Phnom Penh have been both livelihood and way of life for mostly ethnic Vietnamese families, home to fish farming and interconnected by warrens of hand-built bridges interspersed with sunken poles and small boats. "Our ancestors have always been here", said Kith Dong, 54, as he and relatives dismantled his home of consisting of a grayling timber platform with a sloped tin roof off the shore of Phnom Penh's Prek Pnov district. — **Reuters**

■ MANILA



WHO DECLARES PHILIPPINES POLIO-FREE
The Philippines is once again polio-free, the World Health Organization said after a successful vaccination campaign that has raised hopes for Covid-19 inoculations in a country plagued by mistrust of jabs. Polio re-emerged in the country in 2019, nearly two decades after its last cases were detected, sparking a nationwide effort to immunise millions of children against the crippling disease. At least 17 people were infected, but health authorities said they have not detected the virus in a child or the environment in the past 16 months. — **AFP**

Kabul twin explosions kill at least 7

KABUL: Blasts hit two buses in western Kabul on Saturday, killing at least seven people, according to police. The explosions took place in a neighbourhood dominated by the minority Hazara community where similar attacks on buses earlier this month killed 12 civilians. Basir Mujahid, Kabul's police spokesman, added that six people had also been wounded in Saturday's blasts. Violence has been rising as foreign forces withdraw from the country by September 11 and efforts to broker a peace settlement between the Afghan government and insurgent Taliban have slowed. It was not immediately clear who was behind Saturday's attacks. The Hazara community has also been the target of a number of attacks from the IS group. In May an unclaimed attack on a school in the area left around 80, mostly school girls, dead. Meanwhile, Taliban militants have captured two more district centres in Afghanistan, officials confirmed on Saturday. In the country's western province of Ghor, the militants took control of Tolak district after clashes with government forces, three lawmakers representing the province in the parliament



Afghan police officer inspects a damaged van after a blast in Kabul. — Reuters File Photo

confirmed. Over a dozen members of pro-government forces were killed while several others were wounded in the overnight clashes, MP Keramuddin Rezazada said. The district governor along with his personnel surrendered to the militants on Saturday morning, Rezazada further claimed.

Local officials in the province could not be reached, as telecommunications were down due to threats by the militants. In the country's northern

The Hazara community has also been the target of a number of attacks from the IS group

province of Balkh, Taliban fighters took control of the Zara district after forcing members of the government forces to evacuate the district centre, two local officials said. Provincial councillor Afzal Hadid said that the insurgents had blocked the supply of water to the security forces stationed in the district, and that they had been under siege for a long time. The security forces evacuated the district without any casualties with the help of the air forces, Hadid added. However, a spokesman for the 209th military corps in the north of the country said that the forces had been relocated to a village in the same district on Saturday after a decision by the provincial military council. The militants have seen a string of gains in the country recently. Since the beginning of the official withdrawal of the US and other Nato troops in Afghanistan on May 1, at least 17 districts have fallen to the Taliban. — **dpa**

Indonesia dengue fever study offers hope in disease battle



JAKARTA: Dengue fever infections dropped dramatically in an Indonesian study where a bacteria was introduced into disease-carrying mosquitoes, offering hope in the battle against an illness that sickens millions annually around the world. Results of the three-year study, published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* this week, found that infecting dengue-carrying mosquitoes with a harmless bacteria called Wolbachia led to a 77 per cent drop in human cases. Infections requiring hospitalisation also fell by 86 per cent in Wolbachia-treated areas of Yogyakarta, a city on Java island where the experiment was conducted, researchers said. The study was conducted by the World Mosquito Programme at Monash University in Australia and Indonesia's Gadjah Mada university. "The 77 per cent figure is honestly quite fantastic for a transmittable disease and we're very grateful with the result", said Adi Utarini, a public-health

The trial involved releasing Wolbachia into the mosquito population across specific parts of Yogyakarta to measure how it impacted the incidence of infections

researcher from Gadjah Mada university who was a co-lead on the study. The trial involved releasing Wolbachia into the mosquito population across specific parts of Yogyakarta to measure how it impacted the incidence of infections among three- to 45-year-olds. It has now been expanded to other parts of the city. Wolbachia suppresses the ability of the virus to replicate in dengue-carrying *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes and cause infections when they bite humans. Previous trials involving Wolbachia — commonly found in fruit flies and other insects — also showed positive results in reducing

dengue cases, researchers said. Scientists hope the method could be a game-changer in a global battle against the disease, which can sometimes be fatal. Symptoms typically include body aches, fever and nausea. "This is the result we've been waiting for", said World Mosquito Programme director Scott O'Neill. "We have evidence our Wolbachia method is safe, sustainable and dramatically reduces incidence of dengue. "It gives us great confidence in the positive impact this method will have worldwide when provided to communities at risk of these mosquito-transmitted diseases", he added. Dengue is the most rapidly spreading mosquito-borne disease in the world with more than 50 million cases globally every year, including about eight million in Indonesia. Studies have also shown the Wolbachia method can be effective in preventing the transmission of Zika, chikungunya, yellow fever and other mosquito-borne illnesses, researchers said. — **AFP**

India cuts taxes on medicines, equipment to treat Covid-19

NEW DELHI: India on Saturday cut taxes on medical equipment such as oxygen concentrators and drugs used to treat Covid-19 infections, after widespread criticism over healthcare costs during a devastating second wave of the virus in April and May. The government cut taxes on medical grade oxygen, ventilators, the remdesivir antiviral drug, diagnostic kits, pulse oximeters and hand sanitisers to 5 per cent from 12-18 per cent with immediate effect. The new levies will be in place until the end of September, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said, adding it would include taxes on electric furnaces in crematoriums and ambulances. "The rate cut has not be done with any cost implication (on government finances) in mind, it has been done so that people get some ease... the decision has been taken to provide ultimate ease to patients", Revenue Secretary Tarun Bajaj told a news conference. The government, however, would continue to tax vaccines at 5 per cent, he added. The world's second-most populous country, where

coronavirus cases hit a peak of 400,000 a day in May, reported 84,332 new infections on Saturday, the lowest in more than two months, data from the health ministry showed. There were 4,002 deaths. The South Asian country's total Covid-19 cases stands at 29.4 million, with 367,081 fatalities. During the second wave of the virus many people resorted to costly private treatment in what is still a low-income country. Others paid twenty times the usual price for oxygen cylinders on the black market and huge sums to secure ambulances and hearses. Experts have said millions of people remain vulnerable to new surges of infections, particularly in the countryside where two-thirds of the population lives. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said the government would take over the inoculation programme from Indian states and offer free doses to everyone over the age of 18. The government would allow private hospitals to have 25 per cent of all vaccine supplies, but not to charge more than Rs 150 over the cost of the dose, he said. — **Reuters**



Dr Vikas Ghattargi, demonstrates a Coviself Rapid Antigen Test self kit at the Mylab Discovery Solutions manufacturing facility in Lonavla, south-east of Mumbai. — **AFP**

Germany’s Greens confirm candidate for chancellor post

BERLIN: The leader of the German Greens, Annalena Baerbock, was confirmed as her party’s candidate to replace Chancellor Angela Merkel in September’s general elections in a vote on Saturday at the party conference.

Delegates confirmed her by a large majority, along with her party co-chair, Robert Habeck, as the election campaign team leaders.

Together they were backed by 678 of 688 attendees at the conference that was held online.

Merkel is stepping down following the elections in September, after some 16 years in power.

The three-day Green party conference began on Friday and is being held online, attended by 800 delegates.

Baerbock, 40, was nominated for the post as chancellor-candidate by her party’s executive committee in April.

On Friday, the leader of the committee praised her as someone who leads “with a clear compass and masters the challenges of these times with heart and mind.”

A Green chancellor is conceivable, committee head Michael Kellner said.

However, after riding high



Germany’s Green Party co-chairwoman Annalena Baerbock after being nominated as the party’s chancellor candidate during a party convention in Berlin. – Reuters

Annalena’s call for higher petrol prices as a way of confronting climate change also opened her up for attack from party opponents

in voter surveys, support for Baerbock dipped after a series of missteps.

Delegates will also vote on her party co-chair, Robert Habeck, in the poll that is due to be held on Saturday afternoon. Baerbock’s nomination nearly two months ago also prompted a wave of new members to sign up to the party.

But after riding high in voter

surveys, support for Baerbock has dipped back after she appeared sloppy in declaring party-related income and inflated items on her resume.

Her call for higher petrol prices as a way of confronting climate change also opened her up for attack from party opponents.

An opinion poll published on Friday by German public

television ARD showed support for the Greens dropping 6 points over the last four weeks to 20 per cent. Baerbock has admitted her errors with other Green Party figures springing to her defence.

“I obviously made a mistake there, and I’m very, very sorry about that, because it’s actually about other big issues right now in our country,” Baerbock said.

Friday’s survey also showed Armin Laschet, the chancellor-candidate of Merkel’s conservative Christian Democrats (CDU) and their Bavarian-based Christian Social Union allies (CSU) as emerging as voters’ current choice as the next government leader.

Baerbock also came under pressure this week following her party’s disappointing performance in a weekend state election in Saxony-Anhalt, which was seen as her first major electoral test.

But Baerbock received some surprising support for her stance on petrol prices with Ralph Brinkhaus, a CDU-CSU parliamentary leader saying petrol prices would rise under a CDU-CSU led government.

“The fight against climate change will not be for free,” Brinkhaus told German public television. — dpa

Gunmen kill 53 villagers in northern Nigeria

KANO: Armed cattle thieves have killed 53 people in northwest Nigeria’s Zamfara state, police and local residents said on Saturday, the latest violence to hit the restive region.

Scores of motorcycle-riding gunmen called bandits by locals on Thursday through Friday, invaded the villages of Kadawa, Kwata, Maduba, Ganda Samu, Saulawa and Askawa in the Zurmi district, shooting residents, they said.

The gang attacked farmers in their fields and pursued others who fled to escape the assaults. Zamfara police spokesman Mohammed Shehu said 14 bodies had been taken to the state capital Gusau on Friday, and added that “policemen deployed in the area following the attacks.”

Local residents said 39 more bodies had been recovered and buried in the neighbouring town of Dauran.

“We recovered 28 bodies yesterday and 11 more this morning from the villages and buried them here,” said Dauran resident Haruna Abdulkarim.

“It was dangerous to conduct the funeral there because the bandits are harbouring in the Zurmi forest and could return to attack the funeral,” said another resident, Musa Arzika who reported the same death toll.



A police officer confronts protesters during a Democracy Day protest at the Gani Fawehinmi Park in Ojota, Lagos. – Reuters

Military parade marks queen’s official birthday

LONDON: British Queen Elizabeth II has received her official birthday gift from the nation’s armed forces — a ceremony of pomp and pageantry in her honour. Windsor Castle was the setting for the spectacle dubbed a mini Trooping the Colour, featuring soldiers who have supported communities and the NHS during the pandemic or served overseas on military operations.

From her dais, the Queen watched the ceremony unfold with Guardsmen in their scarlet tunics and bearskins and the Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment in their breast plates and plumed helmets.

The birthday parade is a gift from the Household Division — the Army’s most prestigious regiments — which has a close affinity with the monarch and is keen to show its loyalty to the Crown.

The traditional Trooping the Colour ceremony, which is normally staged in London and

features hundreds of servicemen and women and thousands of spectators, was ruled out for the second successive year because of the threat of coronavirus.

Lieutenant Colonel Guy Stone, who planned the Queen’s official birthday celebrations in Windsor Castle’s quadrangle, said he wanted to create a ‘memorable and uplifting day’ for the monarch.

After a year which has seen the Queen mourn the loss of her beloved husband the Duke of Edinburgh and experience family upheavals following accusations made by the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, the ceremony was a positive event.

Lt Col Stone, Brigade Major Household Division, who was also in overall charge of the military arrangements for Philip’s funeral, said: “It is the highlight of the year and a poignant way for the Household Division to thank Her Majesty for all that she does for the nation, particularly through this challenging time.”



Britain’s Queen Elizabeth II watches a military ceremony to mark her official birthday at Windsor Castle in Windsor. – AFP

The Queen’s cousin the Duke of Kent joined her on the dais in his role as Colonel of the Scots Guards.

The Colour or ceremonial flag being trooped past the soldiers was

the Colour of the 2nd Battalion Scots Guards with the regiment’s Company given the task of performing the honour. On parade in front of the Queen in bright

summer sunshine was an array of socially distanced Guardsmen, mounted Troopers and the King’s Troop Royal Horse Artillery.

They were joined by a massed

band of the Household Division — musicians from all of the five Foot Guards Bands and the 1st Battalion Scots Guards Pipes and Drums.

The servicemen and women on parade numbered almost 275, with 70 horses, compared with the 85 soldiers who took part in the ceremony last summer. A rare sight on the parade ground were two officers who were father and son.

Colonel Jeremy Bagshaw, Chief of Staff at Army Headquarters London District, was stood close to the Queen’s dais while his 18-year-old son, 2nd Lieutenant Henry Bagshaw, Coldstream Guards, was formed up in front of the monarch.

A small handful of seated guests lined part of the quadrangle — a change from last year when only the military were present.

The playing of the national anthem as a royal salute was given by soldiers signalled the start of the ceremony and the Massed Bands marched past first in slow then quick time. — dpa

SHORT TAKES

MOSCOW

Moscow residents told to stay off work

Moscow’s mayor has effectively declared a public holiday for all of next week to combat a surge in Covid-19 cases. Sergei Sobyanin (pictured), announced the decision on Saturday, saying it would not affect organisations that maintain the Russian capital’s infrastructure, the military, and other strategically important enterprises. Monday is anyway a public holiday, and the mayor told people to also stay off work for the rest of the week.



“To stop the rising rate of sickness and to save lives, today I signed a decree providing for non-working days from 15 to 19 June 2021 with pay for employees,” Sobyanin said on his official blog. — AFP

SANTIAGO

Santiago shut again as vaccines fail to quell cases

Chilean health authorities announced a blanket lockdown across the capital Santiago following some of the worst Covid-19 case numbers since the pandemic began, despite having fully vaccinated more than half its population.

The development, which will alarm authorities elsewhere who are debating how fast to reopen as vaccination campaigns gather steam, comes as Chile’s confirmed daily caseload surged 17 per



cent in the past two weeks nationwide and 25 per cent in the Metropolitan region that includes Santiago and is home to half the country’s population. — Reuters

HOUSTON

Downtown shooting in Texas injures 13

Gunfire erupted in a busy entertainment district in the Texas city of Austin early on Saturday, injuring 13 people according to authorities who were still searching for a suspect.

Police said they responded to multiple shots fired just before 1:30 am in bustling downtown Austin, where a large crowd began to disperse.

A statement from the city’s police department said “13 victims sustained gunshot



wounds or were injured, and a suspect remains at-large”. “Our officers responded very quickly,” Austin’s interim police chief Joseph Chacon told a news conference. — AFP

Importance of responding to people’s needs on time

Always looking at Oman and Omanis from an expatriate perspective, I must say I was surprised last week to read that more than 57,000 citizens had updated their personal data pertaining to residential land applications with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning. I thought to myself, “goodness me, that is a lot of applications to be outstanding considering the number of wide-open spaces in the Sultanate, it’s probably a mistake,” and I read on...

... to where Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, the Minister of Housing and Urban Planning had called upon citizens to ‘urgently’ update their data so the ministry could “proceed with dealing with the applications according to the priority issued within the Royal Decree 42 – 2021.” Insisting that giving families an opportunity for home ownership as a priority, and the objective of the decree. It is incredible there are so many outstanding applications for building plots in Muscat and Salalah from between 2008 and 2011, and from 2008 to 2015 throughout the other governorates.

57,000 is a big number, but the unresolved figure is more likely



Ray Petersen
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significantly higher, which begs the question why so many applications from as far back as 2008 were outstanding, as the ministry website makes the statement that, “The plot shall be granted when and wherever (sic) it is available in each governorate or region and as per the housing schemes and priority of request.”

Although originally the right to ownership of a land plot was only for males, widowed and divorced females, the scheme was extended to include all females in 2008, regardless of their designation, so the plot ownership became a recognition of female rights. The most recent changes however indicate that the land plots will be assigned, not to individual ownership, but to (shared) family ownership, which is significant, affecting what was a previously given right to those females in 2008. The new concept also has greater potential for matrimonial property disputes and conflict in the future. A simple solution would have been for a social impact assessment to gauge the impact of joint ownership of land.

In fact, social impact reporting, and continuous updates and recognition of social change is imperative as a component of all policy change. We

cannot pretend that nothing has changed in society during recent years and the role of government in an enlightened world is to respond to its people’s needs, in a timely manner. There is certainly sufficient land in the Sultanate, so plots should be allocated as soon as possible providing timely and appropriate response to societal need. They should, wrote Shaikh Al Jaami, be “provided with what benefits them when it benefits them.”

Further to that concept, these young applicants need the land when they apply, not ten or fifteen years later, but now, prior to their marriage, or starting a family. Let them build a home for their new family to grow up in. It would mean they would not be paying rent but paying off their own home. It would mean they could have their own space and grow their own personalities, their children, and their lives in the way they wish, not constrained by family, but enriching it.

Good intentions towards those who are “understanding and patient in hardship and poverty,” the true and righteous, however, that patience and understanding may well be wearing exceedingly thin in the face of bureaucracy.

CRYPTOCURRENCY

Remittance firms slow to add bitcoin

TOM ARNOLD AND TOM WILSON

El Salvador may be touting bitcoin’s use to help its citizens living abroad send funds back home, but the biggest remittance firms are cautious about offering cryptocurrency services.

In a move that could be a harbinger of crypto becoming a more popular way to send money across borders, El Salvador on Wednesday became the first country to adopt bitcoin as a parallel legal tender.

President Nayib Bukele played up bitcoin’s potential as a remittance currency for Salvadorans overseas.

But despite the possible long-term risk to their business if such moves escalate, only a few of the traditional remittance companies who send the bulk of cross-border transfers are dabbling.

Any efforts to get into crypto could be a double-edged sword, pushing down the fees that form the bedrock of their business.

“For Western Union and some of the other remittance providers keep in mind that most of the volume in the remittance industry is going from developed markets to emerging markets primarily to people — families and friends — that operate in cash,” said Kenneth Suchoski, US payments and fintech analyst at Autonomous Research.

“To the extent that bitcoin isn’t adopted and there’s not widespread acceptance, these remittance providers are still going to be relevant for the years to come,” he added.

“For Western Union and some of the other remittance providers keep in mind that most of the volume in the remittance industry is going from developed markets to emerging markets primarily to people — families and friends — that operate in cash,”

KENNETH SUCHOSKI
Analyst, Autonomous Research

Less than 1 per cent of the volume of global cross-border remittances are currently in crypto, estimated Suchoski. But in the future crypto is expected to account for a larger slice of the more than \$500 billion in global annual remittances.

Yet bitcoin offers, in theory, a quick and cheap way to send money across borders without relying on traditional remittance channels.

An early mover among remittance firms, MoneyGram International said last month it will allow customers to buy and sell bitcoin for cash at 12,000 US retail locations under a partnership with Coinme, the US’s largest licensed crypto cash exchange.

“We’ve built a bridge to connect bitcoin and other digital currencies to local fiat currency,” MoneyGram said in an emailed statement to Reuters. “As crypto and digital currencies rise in prominence, a core barrier to further growth is the on/off ramps to local fiat currencies.”

Western Union, the largest remittance business, had tested using bitcoin and crypto in the past and hadn’t come up with a good “use case” that involved significant cost savings, said Suchoski.

The remittance industry has successfully made the evolution from transfers via physical retail outlets to online in recent years, a trend hastened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cross-border remittances via mobile money rose by 65 per cent in 2020 to \$12 billion.

But any transition from digital to crypto may prove more challenging.

— Reuters

AMERICA IS BACK!

Biden rebuilding US ties with world

JEROME CARTILLIER

“Everybody in the water!” President Joe Biden joked to his fellow G7 leaders at a family photo on the beach, underlining an assured transformation in tone from the antagonistic Donald Trump.

Where Trump alienated and exasperated, undermining the Western alliance at every turn, Biden declared that “America is back!” after starting his first foreign tour as president in Britain.

US service personnel were standing stiffly to attention in respect for their commander-in-chief as Biden addressed them on Wednesday at an air force base in eastern England.

“Please, at ease,” he said, urging them to relax. “I keep forgetting I’m president.”

It was hard to imagine such an avuncular line ever coming from Trump, and G7 leaders have been equally at ease in the company of the 78-year-old former senator and vice-president.

Britain’s Prime Minister Boris Johnson, one of the few foreign leaders praised by Trump, called Biden “a big breath of fresh air”.

French President Emmanuel Macron, after contesting a years-long battle of wills with Trump, eagerly grabbed Biden by the arm for a good-natured chat after Friday’s G7 photo at Carbis Bay in southwest England.

Biden is on solid ground at the G7. The leaders of Canada, France and Germany all endured tongue-lashings from Trump, and there is palpable relief at the reversion to traditional diplomatic modes.



Britain’s Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his spouse Carrie Johnson greet US President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden, during the G7 summit. – Reuters

ACCORDING
TO A SURVEY
CARRIED OUT IN
16 COUNTRIES,
62 PER CENT OF
PEOPLE NOW HAVE
A “FAVOURABLE
IMAGE” OF THE
WORLD’S LEADING
POWER, COMPARED
WITH ONLY 34 PER
CENT IN 2020

It is a stark contrast to Trump’s first presidential trip to Europe, in May 2017, for a Nato summit in Brussels and a G7 in Sicily. At one point he unceremoniously shoved aside Montenegro’s leader at a family photo.

But while the mood music has turned more harmonious, Biden’s tour will be judged on results, according to Stephen Pomper, interim chief of policy at the International Crisis Group.

“Of course the G7 crowd will prefer ‘America is back’ and ‘democracy delivers’ to Trump’s tirades and shakedowns,” he said.

“The big question is whether this meeting can help generate the kind of energy, vision and unity that Washington wants to project given the competitive challenges it now faces.”

But for the time being, Biden can

boast of having restored some of America’s popularity abroad after it plunged to historic lows during the Trump years.

According to a survey carried out in 16 countries by the Pew Research Center, 62 per cent of people now have a “favourable image” of the world’s leading power, compared with only 34 per cent in 2020.

Biden’s rapid moves to take the United States back in to the World Health Organization and the Paris climate accord met with strong approval among those surveyed in Canada, Europe and the Asia-Pacific.

But the scale of the rebuilding task faced by Biden after Trump is also apparent: a majority of those polled no longer see America as a model democracy.

— AFP

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OMAN SNATCHES CRUCIAL WIN AGAINST FIGHTING AFGHANISTAN



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 12

Oman's Abdullah Fawaz was the star of the match as he netted winning goals and gave Oman the winning points as they defeated a fighting Afghanistan 2-1 late on Friday at Jassim bin Hamed Stadium in Doha in the Group E qualifier matches of 2022 Fifa World Cup and 2023 AFC Asian Cup.

The first leg match ended for the Sultanate team with a 3-0 victory over Afghanistan in October 2019.

With the triumph, Oman sealed a direct spot for 2023 AFC

Asian Cup after snatching three points and reached in the tally to 15 points behind Qatar which completed the qualifier matches as the topper of the group by 22 points. Registering a draw or victory in the upcoming match against Bangladesh on Tuesday will confirm the Sultanate's team presence for the third time in the final round of 2022 Fifa World Cup qualifier.

Abdullah Fawaz put the national team ahead in the match as he scored the opening goal in the 14th minute as he hit a strong ball from distance that went to the net.



Congratulations to all the players for this important win. I reminded all the players on the difficulty of the encounter. All the players were aware about snatching the match points and kept reminding them on concentration during the match

BRANKO IVANKOVIC
Oman head coach

Nine minutes later, a header from Afghanistan's Omid Popalzay equalised the result to 1-1. Fawaz approved his solid show and managed to return Oman into

the lead with a similar scenario to the first goal as he struck the second goal which grant Oman the victory points.

After the match, the head

coach of the national team Branko Ivankovic thanked all the payers for the significant win. "Congratulations to all the players for this important win. I remind all the players on the difficulty of the encounter. All the players were aware on snatching the match points and keep informing them on concentration during the match", he added.

The Croatian coach commented on team's performance during the match as he said". Despite our determination, I expected difficulty in scoring as the opponent was depending on the defence side. At the end, our players managed to end the match on triumph status to keep us in joy and the fans in home", he pointed out.

The 67-year-old concluded his statement in the post match press conference that pandemic crises have negative impact on the national team. "Definitely, the Covid pandemic affected the national team as many domestic competitions were cancelled including the top-tier league. However, we hope that everything will be back to the normal situation soon to proceed with the extensive preparation plan for the upcoming events", he ended.



Italy's Lorenzo Insigne celebrates scoring their third goal. – Reuters

Perfect start for Italy in Euro 2020 quest

ROME: Italy capped a perfect night in the Stadio Olimpico with a Euro 2020 opening win over Turkey but coach Roberto Mancini warned that the road was long between Rome and Wembley.

A 28-match unbeaten run has put Mancini two games short of Italy's two-time World Cup winning coach Vittorio Pozzo's record of 30 unbeaten games between 1935 and 1939.

"We still have six games ahead of us. It's a long way," said the 56-year-old former Manchester City manager who took over in 2018 after Italy failed to qualify for the World Cup that year.

Amid the euphoria veteran defender Leonardo Bonucci called for "cool heads, humility and a down to earth" approach while maintaining "hearts of fire".

In front of 16,000 fans, and preceded by a glittering opening ceremony, the spark was lit for a

run which Mancini hopes will end with a second European title after 1968 in London on July 11.

Italy have the advantage of playing their Group A matches at home and next meet Switzerland in Rome on Wednesday followed by Wales four days later.

For Lazio forward Ciro Immobile, the group games at home are "pure adrenaline" as the 31-year-old scored his first international goal in his club stadium.

Merih Demiral's own goal got the ball rolling in the second half before Immobile and Lorenzo Insigne completed the victory.

"We did what we had to do, it was our duty to win the first game on front of our fans," said Immobile, who has scored four goals in the last five matches.

'SPINE-CHILLING'
Mancini's front-line trio of



Italy's Ciro Immobile celebrates scoring their second goal. – Reuters

A 28-match unbeaten run has put Mancini two games short of Italy's two-time World Cup winning coach Vittorio Pozzo's record of 30 unbeaten games between 1935 and 1939

Immobile, Lorenzo Insigne and Domenico Berardi proved efficient for an Italy who are without a stand-out star striker.

Italy missed out on the 2018 World Cup, and the 'Azzurri' had not hosted an international match since the 1990 World Cup.

Tenor Andrea Bocelli's rousing performance to 'Nessun Dorma', popularised during that world tournament, set the tone for the night. "There was an incredible emotion before the match, it was spine-chilling," said Roma midfielder Leonardo Spinazzola, UEFA's man-of-the-match, after his performance in his club stadium.

"Then it was a perfect match, zero goals conceded and we played great football.

"We have a strong team, an incredible mix of strength and technique."

Berardi had a role in all three

goals against Turkey, and has scored five goals in his last seven games for Italy. "Our secret is the group," said Napoli's Insigne.

"No one's place is guaranteed, those who play know what to do and we put ourselves at the service of each other."

Veteran coach Claudio Ranieri praised Mancini's style which has proved so successful in reviving the four-time world champions.

"What lucidity Mancini has, he knows how to manage emotions," Ranieri wrote in *La Gazzetta dello Sport* on Saturday.

"The first game is always the most dangerous, there is the pressure of the debut, the desire to overdo it can sometimes lead you to make mistakes, but Roberto Mancini was really good.

"He managed emotions, the tactical plan, the most delicate moments of the match with clarity." — AFP

Taylor stars as NZ gain first-innings lead

BIRMINGHAM, UK: Ross Taylor's 80 helped guide New Zealand into a first-innings lead over England in the second and final Test at Edgbaston on Saturday.

New Zealand were 326-5 at lunch on the third day, 23 runs ahead of England's 303.

The Blackcaps had the better of the session, scoring 97 runs for the loss of two wickets.

Tom Blundell was 24 not out after being dropped on nought by opposing wicket-keeper James Bracey.

Daryl Mitchell, one of six changes, including Blundell, to the New Zealand side that drew last week's first Test at Lord's, was unbeaten on three.

New Zealand resumed on 229-3, a deficit of 74, after Will Young had been dismissed for 82 off the last ball of Friday's play when part-time off-spinner Dan Lawrence

had him caught at short leg.

Taylor, was 46 not out after opener Devon Conway had followed his stunning 200 on debut in last week's drawn first Test at Lord's with 80.

The experienced Taylor completed just his second fifty in 15 Test innings when he swept Lawrence for four, his seventh boundary in 101 balls faced.

It was an encouraging sign for New Zealand ahead of their appearance in next week's inaugural World Test Championship final against India at Southampton.

Taylor, however, should have been out for 68 but a miscued hook off Stuart Broad was dropped by substitute Sam Billings at fine leg as England missed yet another chance.

England continued to endure a tough first hour, despite taking the



New Zealand's Ross Taylor in action. – Reuters

new ball, with Bracey, fresh from his second duck in as many Tests, conceding nine byes.

Taylor's impressive innings ended, however, with New Zealand in sight of a first-innings lead, when he tried to attack Olly Stone but succeeded only in edging to Bracey.

New Zealand were then 292-4, with Taylor having missed out on a fourth Test century in England.

But Bracey's joy turned to despair three balls later when the relatively novice gloveman dropped new batsman Blundell after failing to hang to a low one-handed chance off Stone as he dived to his right.

But Bracey's see-saw match continued when Henry Nicholls ball after being hit on the helmet by a Mark Wood bouncer, gloved down the legside on 21 and was well caught by the keeper. — AFP

World number one **DJOKOVIC** takes on Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas for the title with tennis history on the line. Victory for the Serb will take him alongside Roy Emerson and Rod Laver as the only men to capture the four majors more than once



Spain's Rafael Nadal leaves court after losing his semifinal match against Serbia's Novak Djokovic. – Reuters

DJOKOVIC CONQUERS 'EVEREST', EYES 52-YEAR LANDMARK

PARIS: Novak

Djokovic can become the first man in 52 years to win all four Grand Slam titles twice in the French Open final on Sunday after conquering Rafael Nadal, the 'Mount Everest' of Roland Garros.

World number one Djokovic takes on Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas for the title with tennis history on the line.

Victory for the Serb will take him alongside Roy Emerson and Rod Laver as the only men to capture the four majors more than once.

It's an achievement that has proved even beyond the capabilities of Nadal and Roger Federer.

It is so rare an accomplishment that it hasn't happened since 1969 when Laver completed his second calendar Grand Slam.

Djokovic can pocket a 19th Slam with victory and move just one behind the record of 20 jointly held by Nadal and Federer.

Djokovic insists there will be no letdown physically or emotionally after reaching the final in Paris for a sixth time with an epic triumph over 13-time champion Nadal.

"It's not the first time that I play an epic semifinal in a Grand Slam and then I have to come back in less than 48 hours and play finals," said the 34-year-old.

"My recovery abilities have been pretty good

throughout my career." His four-hour, four-set battle with Nadal is already jostling for a prime spot in the list of "greatest ever matches" at the Slams.

'NEVER BELIEVED'

It featured a lung-busting 92-minute third set and required government intervention to allow the 5,000 fans inside Court Philippe Chatrier to watch the match's conclusion despite it extending beyond the 11pm Covid-19 curfew.

The 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/4), 6-2 triumph gave Djokovic the honour of being the only man to have beaten Nadal in Paris more than once, having first achieved it in the 2015 quarterfinals.

Nadal has only lost three times in 108 matches since his title-winning debut in 2005.

Djokovic, the 2016 champion, said it was his best win in Paris and ranked it among his "three greatest" ever performances.

He broke the Spaniard eight times from 22 break points and fired 50 winners.

A weary Nadal committed 55 unforced errors.

"It's hard to find words bigger than all the superlatives you can think of for Rafa's achievements at Roland Garros," said Djokovic who now leads their series 30-28 and had lost three finals in the French capital to Nadal.

"Each time you step on the court with him, you know that you have to kind of climb Mount Everest to win against this guy here," Nadal, the defending champion and chasing a record-setting 21st Grand Slam title, refused to dwell on the consequences.

— AFP



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates winning his semifinal match against Spain's Rafael Nadal. – Reuters

Oman to launch Green Hydrogen Alliance

Exports reached 261,500 barrels, an 82 per cent decrease from the same period in 2020, when exports reached 1,479,900 barrels. *(With inputs from ONA)*

IIC trains Omanis in smoked fish preparation

KEY GOAL: Course helps sharpen skills of fish grilling shops owners, staff of fish selling outlets and job-seekers in general

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 12

The Fishery Industries Innovation Unit at the Industrial Innovation Centre (IIC) in the Wilayat of Al Musannah, conducted a training course on the production and processing of smoked fish.

The three-day programme, presented by seafood specialist Eng Younis Zanati, is targeted at, among others, owners of fish grill shops, staff of fish selling outlets, and job-seekers interesting in entering the seafood processing sector.

The course covers the



preparation of smoked Long tail Tuna (locally called 'Sahwah') and Indian Mackerel (Dhala'aha), which are considered ideal types of fish for smoking. As part of the preparation process, the feedstock

must be preserved in a mixture of salt and melted ice for around 17 hours and then smoked in the special device that uses wood sawdust.

Through such workshop, the



Industrial Innovation Centre is keen to train and empower Omani youth in various value-added industries, particularly fisheries.

Fisheries production exceeded 600,000 tonnes in 2020, offering

ample opportunities for the development of value-added industries that enhance the commercial value of fresh fish rather than selling them as primary products.

Commenting on the course, Muzna al Hatimia, CEO of Laames Company, a private Omani start-up currently being incubated by the Fisheries Industries Innovation Unit, said the initiative is in line with Oman's Vision 2040 strategy to create a sustainable national economy. She also stressed on the important role of the small and medium enterprises SMEs in supporting the national economy, diversifying its sources and creating job opportunities for Omani youth.

In addition to the Fisheries Industries Innovation Unit, the Industrial Innovation Centre (IIC) has also established the Food & Beverage Innovation Unit and the Animal Feed Innovation Unit, which were set up in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. These innovation units also help entrepreneurs innovate and manufacture prototypes for eventual commercialisation.

MSX WEEKLY REVIEW

MSX ends the week 2.47 per cent higher

M S X 3 0 Index ended the week higher by 2.47 per cent. All sub-indices ended in green. Financial sector led gaining 3.55 per cent. Services sector and industrial sector closed up by 2.49 per cent and 1.68 per cent respectively. MSX Shariah Index increased by 0.48 per cent.

MSX30 cross 4,000 level after 15 months. Industrial index have gone above the pre-pandemic level whereas Financial is closer to pre-pandemic level and Services Index has a lot to catch-up. Factors behind the recovery:

- Nominal GDP growth estimate of 17.0 per cent for 2021 compared to -15 per cent recorded in 2020.
- Better outlook by rating agencies.
- Better management of current account and budget deficit because of the prudent government policies.
- Sound policies announced by the government to address Covid-19 related challenges.
- Better debt management and tightening of rates on debt issuances.
- Government announcement of mechanism of payments for public and private sector companies.
- Average oil price of \$64/bbl YTD in 2021 compared to average oil price of \$43/bbl recorded in 2020.
- Cheap multiples across the board specially in banking and insurance sector.
- Higher profits of commodity play companies.
- Organic & Inorganic expansions announced by many companies.
- Higher dividend yields.
- Dhofar International



MSX30 cross 4,000 level after 15 months. Industrial index have gone above the pre-pandemic level whereas Financial is closer to pre-pandemic level and Services Index has a lot to catch-up

Development and investment holding (DIDI) received approval of the Capital Market Authority (CMA) on the prospectus of the company's share capital increase through a right issue.

The offering of 150,526,316 shares to the company's shareholders as on the record data of June 14, 2021 at an issue price of 190 baisa/share.

Oman sold \$1.75 billion in nine-year sukuk, or Islamic bonds, after drawing more than \$11.5 billion in orders for its second international bond issuance this year, a document showed.

It launched the bonds at 4.875 per cent, tightened from initial price guidance of 5.375 per cent-5.5 per cent. The issuance was Oman's first dollar sukuk sale since 2018.

The prospectus for the bonds, reviewed by Reuters,

forecasts a 2021 deficit of RO 2.23 billion (\$5.79 billion), or 8.6 per cent of gross domestic product, falling to RO 1.66 billion in 2022, RO 605 million in 2023 and RO 165 millions in 2024, or 5.9 per cent, 2 per cent and 0.5 per cent of GDP respectively.

Total premiums of insurance companies in Oman decreased by 4.3 per cent to RO 465.9 million in 2020 compared with RO 486.6 million recorded in 2019, according to Capital Market Authority (CMA).

Gross direct premiums for general insurance decreased by 3.2 per cent to RO 412.14 million in 2020 compared to RO 425.88 million in 2019, while gross direct premiums of life insurance fell 11.4 per cent to RO 53.75 million compared to RO 60.7 million in the previous year.

Gross direct premiums of national insurance companies decreased by 4.4 per cent to RO 384.63 million in 2020 compared to RO 402.25 million in the previous year.

Despite a decline in total premiums, insurance companies in Oman received a profit boost for the year 2020, thanks to fewer motor and medical claims because of strict coronavirus-related lockdowns that cut the amount of traffic and

accidents last year. Most of the Omani insurance firms reported robust growth in their profitability for 2020 versus 2019.

In 2020, the total investment funds in Oman were 23 funds compared to 21 investment funds in 2019. Net assets of Investment funds in Oman increased by 1.2 per cent at RO 330 million as of 2020 compared to RO 326 million in 2019.

18 of the funds were open ended in 2020 with AUM of RO 212 million compared to 17 open ended funds with AUM of RO 244 million.

The decrease in open AUM was mostly due to the impact of Covid-19 and drop of oil prices, which resulted in economical slow down worldwide. AUMs of closed ended fund were higher by 44 per cent in 2020 at RO 118 million.

Oman posted deficit of RO 827 million in 4M-2021. Government's total revenues in the first four months of 2021 decreased by 27.7 per cent to RO 2.769 billion compared with RO 3.829 billion recorded in the same period of last year, according to the Ministry of Finance.

Average daily oil production in the first four months of this year decreased to 952,000 barrels per day from 1.08 million barrels per day in the same period of 2020.

Average oil price during the first four months of 2021 remained lower at \$54.79 per barrel compared with \$64.89 in the corresponding period a year ago.

The Sultanate's total public expenditure decreased by 2.66 per cent to RO 3.596 billion during January-April period of 2021 from RO 3.695 billion in the corresponding a year ago. *[Courtesy: U-Capital]*

Bank Muscat ranked amongst the top 100 listed companies in the region

MUSCAT: In recognition of its continuous leadership and expertise, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, has been ranked by *Forbes* Middle East amongst its Top 100 Listed Companies for 2021.

This prestigious list recognises the region's largest, most valuable, and most profitable companies. *Forbes* Middle East gathered data from listed stock exchanges in the Arab world and evaluated



companies based on Market Value, Sales, Assets and Profits to arrive at the final list, which also included 41 other Middle Eastern banking and financial services providers.

Own a Kia Sonet with exclusive benefits



MUSCAT: Customers looking forward to owning a second car or even gifting their loved ones a reliable Sonet SUV can benefit with Kia Oman paying your VAT (5% VAT on net selling price will be borne by Kia Oman). You also save from RO 10 to RO 12 on monthly EMIs for a loan tenure of 4 years.

Customers can choose from two options Flexible option: Cash Gift of up to RO 1500 & Service of 3 years/30,000 kms. OR Bundle option: Cash Gift of RO 1800, Registration, Insurance and Service up to 8 years / 80,000 kms. Also get Assured Cash for fuel Scratch N Win coupon up to RO 1000 with every purchase. Kia customers who wish to upgrade to the Sonet SUV will now receive Cash Gift RO 200 when they purchase the All-New Sonet. Offer ends on June 17,

2021. (Conditions apply. Please visit showroom for details).

The powerful and affordable 5-seater Sonet SUV has a 1.5L Engine paired to a CVT Transmission and offers 17.5KmpL fuel average. It is also equipped with an 8" Audio & Car Play and Remote Engine Start among other features.

Boasting multiple segment-first features that offer the ultimate driving experience for customers, the Sonet provides comfort, convenience, and safety. Fitted with 8" Audio Display, the Sonet also comes with other smart features such as remote engine start, auto cruise control and more.

Reliable International Automotive (RIA), the distributor for Kia in Oman provides a rewarding ownership experience for customers.



Biden considers giving refiners relief from US biofuel laws

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden's administration, under pressure from labour unions and US senators including from his home state of Delaware, is considering ways to provide relief to US oil refiners from biofuel blending mandates, three sources familiar with the matter said.

The issue pits two of the administration's important political constituencies against each other: blue-collar refinery workers and farmers who depend on biofuel mandates to prop up a massive market for corn.

It could prompt an about-face for the administration, which had been rolling back former president Donald Trump's dramatic expansion of waivers for US refiners from the Renewable Fuel Standard.

The law requires them to blend billions of gallons of ethanol and other biofuels into their fuel each year or buy credits from those that do.

The credits, known as RINs, are currently at their highest price in the programme's 13-year history, and refiners have said the policy threatens to bankrupt fuel makers already slammed by sinking demand during the pandemic.

Biofuel advocates counter that fuel makers should have invested in biofuel blending facilities years ago and can pass through added costs for buying credits.

Renewable fuel credits traded down 15 per cent on Friday morning after the news. Credits traded at \$1.70 each, down from \$2.00 on Thursday, traders said. Prices later traded at \$1.85 each.

Democratic senators Chris Coons and Tom Carper of Delaware have held at least two discussions in recent weeks with Michael Regan, head of the US Environmental Protection Agency, to discuss providing relief for refiners, according to the three sources. — **Reuters**



A man fills up a portable gas container in Durham, North Carolina. — **Reuters**

G7 to counter China's BRI with global infrastructure project

WASHINGTON: The Group of Seven will seek to rival China's multi-trillion-dollar Belt and Road initiative on Saturday by announcing a global infrastructure plan to help developing nations, a senior official in US President Joe Biden's administration said.

The G7 is trying to find a coherent response to the growing assertiveness of President Xi Jinping after China's spectacular economic and military rise over the past 40 years.

The US official, who spoke to reporters on condition of anonymity, said the United States would also push the other G7 leaders for "concrete action on forced labour" in China in their final communique from a three-day summit in southwest England.

"This is not just about confronting or taking on China," the official said. "But until now we haven't offered a positive alternative that reflects our values, our standards and our way of doing business."

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a multi-trillion-dollar infrastructure scheme that Xi launched in 2013, involving development and investment initiatives that would stretch from Asia to Europe and beyond.

More than 100 countries have signed agreements with China to cooperate in BRI projects like railways, ports, highways and other infrastructure.

The re-emergence of China as a leading global power is considered to be one of the most significant geopolitical events



Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, European Council President Charles Michel, US President Joe Biden, Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Italy's Prime Minister Mario Draghi, French President Emmanuel Macron, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and German Chancellor Angela Merkel pose for a group photo at the G7 summit, in Carbis Bay, Britain. — **Reuters**

More than 100 countries have signed agreements with China to cooperate in BRI projects like railways, ports, highways and other infrastructure

of recent times, alongside the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union that ended the Cold War.

China in 1979 had an economy that was smaller than Italy's, but after opening to foreign investment and introducing market reforms, it has become the world's second-largest economy and is a global leader in a range of new technologies.

Leaders of the G7 — the United States, Canada, Britain,

Germany, Italy, France and Japan — want to use their gathering in the seaside resort of Carbis Bay to show the world that the richest democracies can offer an alternative to China's growing clout.

"So tomorrow we'll be announcing 'build back better for the world,' an ambitious new global infrastructure initiative with our G7 partners that won't just be an alternative to the BRI," the official said.

According to a Refinitiv database, as of mid-last year, more than 2,600 projects at a cost of \$3.7 trillion were linked to the Belt and Road Initiative, although the Chinese foreign ministry said last June that about 20 per cent of projects had

been seriously affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

There were no specifics on how the global infrastructure scheme would be funded. The plan would involve raising hundreds of billions in public and private money to help close a \$40 trillion infrastructure gap in needy countries by 2035, the official said.

The aim was to work with the US Congress to supplement existing development financing "with the hope that, together with G7 partners, the private sector and other stakeholders, we soon be collectively catalysing hundreds of billions of dollars in infrastructure investment for low and middle income countries that need it". — **Reuters**

UK PM stands firm on post-Brexit trade, calls for pragmatism

CARBIS BAY: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson stood firm in his position on post-Brexit trade with Northern Ireland in talks with French, German and European Union leaders on Saturday, urging "pragmatism and compromise" to find a solution.

His spokesman told reporters other issues were raised in the talks with the leaders and rejected the idea that President Emmanuel Macron had demanded Britain stick to its divorce deal with the EU if it wanted a reset in relations with France.

Johnson, who is hosting a

meeting of the G7 — the world's most advanced economies — in southwestern England this weekend, is keen to downplay a row with the EU over their divorce agreement and put the focus on global issues.

But the spokesman said the so-called Northern Ireland protocol, part of the Brexit deal which covers trade with the British province, had been raised in talks with Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and EU leaders on Saturday.

"It's important to stress again, with Macron and Merkel a



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson reacts during the G7 summit in Carbis Bay, Cornwall, Britain. — **Reuters**

The PM (prime minister) in all cases (expressed) confidence in the UK's position as regards to the Northern Ireland protocol and the desire for pragmatism and compromise on all sides

SPOKESMAN

number of issues were raised ... The PM (prime minister) in all cases

(expressed) confidence in the UK's position as regards to the Northern Ireland protocol and the desire for pragmatism and compromise on all sides," the spokesman said.

Asked about Macron's proposal for a reset in relations if Britain showed it would abide by the Brexit deal it signed, he added: "That's not how I would characterise the meeting this morning. The prime minister and President Macron agreed on the need to deepen the bilateral relationship between the UK and France... there was no dependence placed on that linked to the protocol." — **Reuters**

SHORT TAKES

TOKYO

ISS recommends vote against Toshiba chairman

Toshiba Corp shareholders should vote against the re-appointment of board chairman Osamu Nagayama and four other directors, shareholder advisory firm ISS recommended on Saturday.

The recommendation by Institutional Shareholder Services Inc (ISS) follows an explosive, shareholder-commissioned investigation that accused Toshiba of colluding with the Japanese government to pressure foreign investors.



The report of that investigation, released on Thursday, revealed how the conglomerate reached out to the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) to get it to "beat up" foreign shareholders. — **Reuters**

HONG KONG

HK bankers can now access corporate registry

Hong Kong bankers and lawyers will be able to search the city's companies registry under proposed exemptions to plans to tighten public access to the database, Secretary for Financial Services Christopher Hui said.

Business and governance experts have criticised a government plan to restrict access to the personal information of company directors, outlined this year, saying it will reduce transparency in the city's corporate sector.



Dealmakers working through the due diligence phase of corporate transactions regularly consult the database to research and verify the history and identities of executives and directors. — **Reuters**

BERLIN

Carbon tax needs to rise faster

The carbon tax on fossil fuels needs to increase significantly by the end of the decade, according to a top German environment official, who warned that otherwise society would pay a high price.

Experts say the carbon tax will only have a "steering effect" when it is higher than 100 euros (\$121) per tonne, the president of the federal environment protection agency, Dirk Messner, told Deutschlandfunk radio station on Saturday.



As of January 1, under Germany's carbon tax, every tonne of carbon emitted by burning fossil fuels costs 25 euros, making petrol is more expensive, for example, which has an impact on drivers' behaviour. — **dpa**

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The nobility of Omani heritage preserved in classical realistic art

Tackling different social themes including childhood and heritage, artist Ahmed al Hajri is one of Oman's prolific classical realist painters. From his point of view, realist art can be freed from the constraints of reality and allows the artist to let his imagination run wild but at the same time hide messages between the folds of the paintings... **P20**

ROYAL TRENDS

READ



THE FIVE DYSFUNCTIONS OF A TEAM

BY PATRICK LENCIONI

It describes the many pitfalls that teams face as they seek to "grow together". This book explores the fundamental causes of organisational politics and team failure.



Royal frocks, including Diana wedding dress, on display in London

The voluminous ivory dress Princess Diana wore to marry Prince Charles in 1981 has gone on display at her former London home, as part of a new exhibition showcasing a selection of gowns worn by members of Britain's royal family.





The growing demand for leather industry in Sadah

The leather industry has an important role in human life, and it is one of the ancient Omani crafts whose by-product has a significant impact on Omani's day to day life. Leather was used as a bed and container that preserves water, food and many different products. Today, this craft still constitutes one of the most important tributaries in the traditional industries sector in the Sultanate.

Craftswoman Maizon al Hakmani said that she has worked in the leather industry since the sixties and while she has grown in years, she is still at the helm of this craft. Her start, she describes, was very modest, and the people's need for leather at the time in order to use them for their various purposes prompted her to master the process of tanning leather and manufacturing it in its various forms, especially at that stage when metal pots and plastic containers were scarce, and the leather was of great importance to Omanis.

To make leather, Al Hakmani shared that the skin passes through several stages until it becomes usable. The first of these stages is the pre-tanning stage and includes the skinning process. The skin must be flayed in a technical way called (dahsh), meaning opening the skin from the middle of the carcass towards the legs and inserting the hand between the skin. The skin is hollow, and this facilitates the task of suturing the skin later.

She explained, "Immediately after skinning, we clean it from the remnants of meat and fat and extract the legs, then sprinkle it with salt, add dates to it



and put it in a piece of cloth and leave it for three days. In cases of urgent needs, they scrape the hair of the skin quickly.

"We use the juice of the leaves of the Al-Ayrib tree or the leaves of the Aram plant, which is a plant that exists in the wadis of the wilayats of Sadah, Mirbat and Jabal Samhan. These plants help make the process of scraping hair fast and within one day. At this stage, the skin is called (Mishit)", she said.

She explained that the second stage is tanning where the leaves and flowers of a parasitic plant that grows on tree



branches called (Ansadot) or the leaves of another tree called (Dhuha), is used. The leaves and flowers of these plants are collected and chopped, then dried and re-

grounded until they turn into a powder and the skin is tanned with it. The tanning process lasts from two to three days, and after the tanning stage is completed, the skin is ready to be tailored to any type the user wants. This stage is locally called (Ghasge'ez).

The third stage — the stage of detailing — and it is called (laked), which is the process of knitting. After the leather is prepared, it can be separated in the form of Aneet, need, shasab, or qurba and each of these has different uses.

She referred to the types of skins, their uses and the way they were detailed previously. People used to utilise the skins of goats, deer and ibex, but now they use only goat skins. Deer skins are only used for containers to preserve milk or churn curd due to its softness. As for the goat skin leather, (Need) is made from it due to its large size. The goat skin leather is used for all kinds of purposes according to the size of the sheet. Each type of these leather has special weaving and embroidery process.

Al Hakmani confirmed that in the past, the leather was not tanned with its hair, but now, after the development of the leathercraft industry, leather has become tanned with hair for the sake of adornment. The price of some leather products was very little, but at present, the price of some of them ranges between RO 20 to 40 sometimes, and it may reach more than that.

"The tools that are used in the weaving and embroidery process are scissors, a needle inserted into wood called mushfa, palm fronds, zari threads and leather strips".

CHANGING WORLD

Save Fairy Creek: The battle over Western Canada's ancient forests



NOLAN PAQUETTE started working part-time at his local sawmill more than 20 years ago while still at school, pushing a broom on the clean-up team. Now 38, Paquette drives trucks and operates machinery at the same Western Forest Products-owned mill in Duke Point, Nanaimo, the third generation of his family to work in forestry on British Columbia's Vancouver Island.

He is one of 38,000 workers in Canada's westernmost province whose job, according to the industry, depends on the logging of towering old-growth trees, such as cedars, Douglas firs and western hemlocks aged at least 250 years, and in some cases more than a thousand.

The dispute over felling British Columbia's ancient forests has been thrust into the limelight by a months-long blockade of private logging company Teal Jones in the Fairy Creek watershed on western Vancouver Island. Protests that started last August have intensified in recent weeks, leading to more than 150 arrests.

Environmentalists camped out in the dense coastal rainforest say they are fighting Canada's version of the ivory trade. This weekend activists urged more supporters to carpool and convoy to Fairy Creek headquarters to show solidarity in a last stand.

The forestry industry says protestors are endangering the livelihoods of thousands of hardworking families.

The Pacheedaht First Nation, in whose territory Fairy Creek lies, are divided on the issue.

The increasingly bitter struggle — taking place in BC Premier John Horgan's own electoral district — is playing out amid record-breaking North American lumber prices, and a provincial government promise to review policies allowing old-growth logging.

"It would devastate the economy if we lost old growth", Paquette said, referring to environmentalists' calls to ban the practice. "You're not going to find a C\$31 an hour (\$26) unskilled job on the island without forestry."

DECLINING INDUSTRY

British Columbia used to be the epicentre of the North American lumber trade thanks to its vast untouched forests and it still supplies nearly half of Canada's softwood lumber. Nationally, the industry contributed C\$24 billion (\$19.8 billion) to Canada's nominal GDP in 2019, and exports worth C\$33 billion.

But reliance on old-growth logging, which makes up a quarter of BC's annual timber harvest, is becoming an increasing problem as the ancient forests shrink.

Some coastal BC sawmills — like Duke Point — are set up to process only large to very large trees.

ANCIENT ECOSYSTEMS

In a statement Surrey, Vancouver-based Teal Jones said harvesting work within its tree farm licensing area was responsible and sustained hundreds of jobs. Throughout the protests the company has continued to log what trees it can, and gained access to the nearby Caycuse watershed in late May after police cleared blockades there.

Last week the left-leaning BC government released details of a plan to modernise the forestry industry. It continues to work on implementing the recommendations of an independent review published last year, which called for a "paradigm shift" to protect old growth and defer logging in certain areas.

The province will announce deferrals in more old-growth areas later this summer, BC Minister of Forests Katrine Conroy told Reuters, adding her goal was to consult with First Nations and protect forestry jobs as well as ancient forests.

"It's a balance", she said. "I don't believe we have to give up the environment for the economy."

BC's lumber trade was built on valley-bottom forests — the cathedral-like groves seen in tourist brochures — as loggers focused on the most lucrative and accessible trees. It has been understood for decades a transition would be needed as they run out, said Ken Lertzman, professor of forest ecology at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, BC.

"There's no question it's important to the industry from an economic perspective, but that doesn't mean you don't need to bear the cost of protecting it anyway", he said.

SURGING PRICES

An unprecedented rally in lumber due to pandemic-induced supply chain interruptions and homeowner demand is starting to drag on North American housing starts, though it has given logging companies a chance to repair balance sheets after a number of tough years.

The centre of the North American industry has shifted to the warmer southern United States, where trees grow faster, said BMO Capital Markets analyst Mark Wilde. Major Canadian companies including West Fraser Timber Co Ltd and Interfor Corp are investing there.

High prices have further polarised Canada's old-growth debate.

"These prices make it really difficult to say to people we are going to walk away from this resource", said John Innes, dean of forestry at the University of British Columbia.

— Reuters

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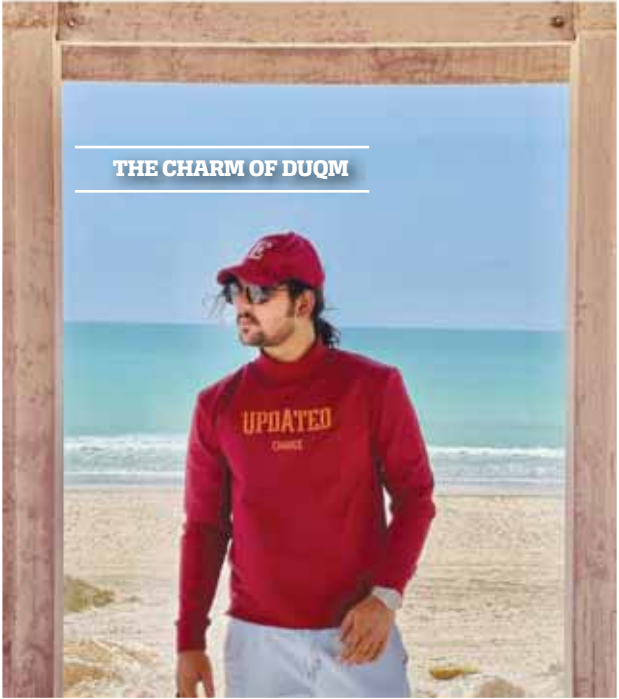


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FOOD



Flying off the shelves:
Chocolate-covered cicadas a hit in Maryland

SOME MIGHT cringe, but at one Maryland chocolate shop, 17-year-old insects are flying off the shelves. Sarah Dwyer, of Chouquette Chocolates in Bethesda, started coating cicadas in chocolate and selling them when the periodical Brood X emerged this spring for the first time since 2004. Now her chocolate shop has a ten-day backlog for cicada orders. They are delicious, she says. "When you combine the chocolate, the cinnamon, and the nuttiness of the bugs, it really gives you that holiday feeling of when you're walking around a big city and they're roasting nuts on the sidewalk, that cinnamon smell, it's really what it tastes like," Dwyer said.



Dwyer and her employees gather the cicadas from a copse of trees behind their chocolaterie. The bugs are so numerous, they land right on the employees. The cicadas are then put in a paper bag and placed in the freezer, where the cold temperature puts them to sleep before they die. She then boils the cicadas to clean them, and crisps them in an air fryer. Once the cicadas have been fried, Dwyer sprinkles them with either cinnamon or savory Old Bay seasoning and they are ready to be covered in chocolate. "I did go to pastry school in Paris to learn my dipping technique. I'm pretty sure no one thought I would be using it on cicadas," she said. For Dwyer, this is a chance for consumers to become more familiar with a type of protein she thinks will be a lot more popular by the next time these insects start to sing again. "There's not enough protein to go around, and I think, I really do think that in 2038, people will not think twice about eating a bug at all," Dwyer said. — **Reuters**

CONSERVATION

Havana Zoo introduces Yanek, a rare white tiger, Cuba's first



A HAVANA ZOO has introduced the country's first-ever white Bengal tiger, a rare type not known to exist in the wild. Mother Fiona gave birth to four cubs — including white tiger Yanek — at the National Zoo of Cuba in March; but only now, it said, are the cubs independent enough to be presented to the public as they play and swim in their special zoo pool. "We are very happy that a white tiger has been born in Cuba; it is the first time that this has happened," said the animals' caretaker Angel Cordero. They were also the first tiger cubs born on Cuban soil in more than 20 years. Along with Yanek, Fiona and fellow Bengal tiger Garfield are the proud parents of sisters Melissa and Gaby, and brother Miguel. Conservation group WWF describes white tigers as "a genetic anomaly," with none known to exist in the wild. There are several dozen in captivity. White tigers are Bengal tigers whose parents carry a recessive gene, according to the non-profit Wildcat Sanctuary in Minnesota, which helps and studies felines. They are not albinos or a separate species. Some parks and zoos inbreed

white tigers, as the rarity draws more visitors, though this is often at the cost of malformations and other genetic problems, according to the sanctuary website. The Asian big cats are classified as endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The WWF says about 3,900 tigers remain in the wild, "but much more work is needed to protect this species if we are to secure its future in the wild." "In some areas, including much of Southeast Asia, tigers are still in crisis and declining in number," the WWF website says. Cordero said the cubs were displaying typical "aggressive" behaviour, mimicking their mother as they mock-attack one another. At the zoo, Fiona receives 10 kilograms (22 pounds) of meat per day, while the cubs, already weighing in at between eight and 11 kilograms each, get two kilograms of meat each. — **AFP**



DIGITAL TRENDS

Smartphones continue to evolve allowing users to dare to express



IN A DYNAMIC world where everyone is constantly on the go, smartphones play a significant role in terms of photography, music, and productivity. Everyone needs a smartphone to fulfil all their daily tasks, get the most out of their day, and look good doing it. With the younger and stylish crowds in mind, Huawei created its HUAWEI nova Series. A series of sophisticated mid-ranged smartphones that deliver a flagship experience. Equipped with a wide spectrum of innovative features, the company's brand-new HUAWEI nova 7 5G enables those with a creative spark to explore their passion with the phone's innovative camera features, 5G connectivity, powerful performance, and millennial design. But above all, it opens a window for them to express themselves!

STEP UP YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY SKILLS! To be fully expressive is a state of mind. Young people at heart are always seizing the best out of their moments and sharing them with their loved ones and the world. To best capture, these moments, a powerhouse device with impressive camera quality and AI features is a necessity. This phone is fitted with a 64MP Hi-res AI quad camera and is able to support 64MP ultra-high-definition photo shooting, up to 20X digital zoom, 8MP ultra-wide-angle shots, 8MP Telephoto camera and 2MP macro photography. It is also equipped with a Handheld Super Night mode that allows for crisp nighttime shots without the need for flash or extra lighting.

VIDEOGRAPHY RE-EXPLORED When it comes to recording videos, the nova 7 5G ensures that every video, whether fast-moving, time-lapse, or normal, is produced in a super clear 4K quality at all times, allowing users to record their adventures in a starry desert night or hot summer day by the beach. It also has a 32MP front camera that supports Super Night Selfie 3.0, a mode that allows users to brighten the screen and provide fill-in light in dark pictures, and enhance skin textures. One of trendy smartphone's amazing features is the DUAL-VIEW Video Mode that uses both the front and rear cameras to record videos simultaneously. This mode can record Ultra-Wide clips along with 64MP Hi-res main rear camera at the same time. This feature allows for a close-up and wide-angle video recording and is the perfect tool for vloggers, content creators and dare-devils alike.

A DARING PERFORMANCE! Powered with Kirin 985 5G SoC, the new flagship chip and engineered with such intricacy, this combines flagship performance with high energy efficiency to earn its name as the star of modern smartphones. Not to mention the impressive 4,000 mAh battery, and 45W HUAWEI SuperCharge support, that allows users to charge up to 75 per cent in 30 minutes while they refuel for their next spontaneous adventure.



The nobility of Omani heritage preserved in classical realistic art

BY MAZOUN AL GHAILANI
Instagram: @mazoun_alghailani

Art has grown tremendously over the years. The rise of contemporary art as a genre has paved the way for new voices to take the spotlight and be recognised for their originality and authenticity.

Despite the different branches of art opening better opportunities for artists, classic, realistic painter Ahmed al Hajri stuck with what he knows best tackling different social themes in his growing collection of paintings.

Ahmed has a Bachelor of Arts in Education from Sultan Qaboos University, has worked as an art teacher and is currently an educational supervisor for the arts.

"I drew most of the animals I saw on documentaries, but some other animals had a special place for me, and that love grew as I also become mature. I think it's where my love for drawing horses and especially the Arabian horses started," Ahmed said.

Across his more than two dozens of paintings, Ahmed has showcased childhood, desert life, Arabian horses, customs, traditions and portrait.

He paints scenes that showcase the

nobility of the Omani heritage. That is why horses became a common theme amongst his work because it is one of the animals associated with the Omani heritage and to the authentic identity of the Omanis as individuals.

In looking at Ahmed's paintings, it's impossible not to notice the details.

"In the realistic classical artistic style that I follow, the subtle details cannot be overlooked or ignored. Every detail, no matter how small, adds aesthetic value and visual pleasure, and a great addition to the overall of the artwork," he said. His paintings on horses included all the tiny details that distinguish the Arabian horse from others.

"One of the difficulties that I faced, in the beginning, was to show anthropomorphism of the muscles and the body of the horse, as it needs a high concentration and a thoughtful touch to show the three-dimensional muscles in a stylised manner. I think that I have reached a good stage of mastery in this aspect," he added.

As for the historical or tourist attraction in Oman, he said, "I have always been a lover of history and a reader of it to the extent that I knew the history of Oman and its epics and its great men.

My love for the heritage and greatness of this country increased. The details of the Omani cultural heritage are interesting and rich, and have a visual pleasure that you do not realise unless you bring up the history, its stories and epics, which give it prestige and greatness," he shared.

Artist Ahmed's path to creating a painting begins with an idea. Then he visualises the artistic composition of the painting. The next step is taking a large group of photographs of the required composition, after that he sorts and collects the elements of the painting, and drawing a miniature sketch of the artistic composition that expresses the first idea, and then he draws, plans and colours the work.

"Sometimes there may be cooperation between me and a professional photographer. I tend to collaborate with photographers when I see the photos they capture reminiscent of my label," he said.

Some of the unforgettable paintings by Ahmed are the "Haneen" (nostalgia) and "Twoq" (longing) paintings.

"The reason lies in the lazy and happy look that is full of nostalgia and longing, as the work documents an authentic Omani custom called "alkhotot" (the lines) in the Wilayat of Bidiya and known in some other wilayats as Al Mahlab wa safran, which is a mixture of saffron, sandal and alwas used to decorate the face of women. But this artwork went beyond documenting the habit to catching the poetic moment of the charming look of the girls," he explained.

From his point of view, realist art can be freed from the constraints of reality, but at the same time it always conveys the details of this reality, it allows the artist's imagination to place a special imprint that carries a hidden message between the folds of the painting.

"The field of portrait needs a lot of serious studies, starting from understanding the shape of the human skull and then studying the anatomical aspect and building muscles above the skull, and ending with controlling the proportions of the face. As well as studying each part of the face separately," he shared.

"Then comes the colouring stage, which is the most difficult stage because it needs accurate sensing of all the shades in the face, in which the artist uses most colours of various degrees, and here is the need to understand the colour circle in-depth," he said.

He pointed out that the process of painting the portrait according to the method that he follows is on three colour layers, each layer is an independent stage that has its own rules and brushes.

"I spend around a month to 6 months in each portrait and this depends on the size of the portrait, the number of elements in it, and the quality of the details that it contains," he said.

