

Israeli ‘change’ bloc steps up effort to oust Netanyahu

Israelis waited on Sunday to see whether nationalist hardliner Naftali Bennett would agree to join a governing coalition that could end the rule of the country's longest-serving leader, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Lawmakers opposed to right-wing Netanyahu were in intense talks ahead of a Wednesday deadline, as a ceasefire held following the latest deadly conflict with Hamas in the Gaza Strip.



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OMAN OBSERVER

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WINNING START FOR OSAKA



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PRODUCT TO ENHANCE DESERT AGRICULTURE



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LET'S SPEND IT – WHITE HOUSE \$6TN BUDGET MESSAGE



MUSCAT

HM CONGRATULATES SYRIAN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to President Dr Bashar al Assad of the Syrian Arab Republic, on the occasion of him being re-elected as a president of his country for a new term. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere congratulations and best wishes of success to President Assad in leading the brotherly Syrian people towards further aspirations of stability, progress and prosperity. — ONA

73,123 GET SOCIAL SECURITY SCHEME PAY

The number of people benefiting from the Social Security Scheme (SSS) in May stood at 73,123 individuals and families, with a total of RO 7.7 million distributed among them. In a statement to ONA, Salim bin Ali al Oweisi of the Social Welfare Department, the Ministry of Social Development, said that the SSS beneficiaries fall in eight categories. Outlining conditions for applying to the SSS Assistance, Al Oweisi said that the applicant should be an Omani citizen, be among the mentioned eight deserving cases or a person not having any regular source of livelihood.

DETAILS ON P3



INSIDE



CHINA CARGO CRAFT DOCKS WITH SPACE STATION MODULE

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GAZA CEASEFIRE SHIFTS FOCUS TO EGYPT'S REGIONAL ROLE

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A NEW BATCH OF POLICE RECRUITS



A training course for a new batch of police recruits was opened at the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences, Nizwa, on Sunday. The new batch comprises holders of the General Education Diploma (GED) who have passed evaluation tests and medical fitness examinations. — ONA

Vaccination of Grade 12 students progressing well

809 PATIENTS IN HOSPITALS AND 242 IN ICUS

VINOD NAIR @vinot_nair

The vaccination programme for Grade 12 students is progressing well even as there has been no respite from the spread of Covid-19 infection.

The Ministry of Health on Sunday reported 2,399 new cases of Covid-19 and 31 deaths in three days. Of these, 847 were on Thursday, 735 on Friday, and 817 on Saturday.

Hundred people were admitted to various hospitals across the country, bringing the total number of inpatients to 809, including 242 in intensive care units.

Sources at the ministry told the Observer that students had received the call for vaccination without hesitation, and so far, there have been no reports of any serious side effects.

The vaccination programme is progressing well according to plans. It will continue until the beginning of June, before the start of their final examinations.

Dr Thamrah bint Saeed al



Ghafriyah, Acting Director-General of Health Services in Muscat, said students are receiving doses at Qurayat Health Complex and Bausher Sports Complex, designated schools in Bausher, Muttrah, Al Amerat and Al Seeb under the supervision of a medical team as per the schedule fixed by the health and education directorates.

“According to procedures, students are under observation for 15-20 minutes after taking the

vaccination, and are allowed to leave if they show no immediate symptoms of side effects.”

MORE CASES

The total number of cases registered in the Sultanate has now reached 216,183, including 2,334 deaths. The total number of recoveries is 199,287, while the recovery rate is 92.2 per cent.

More importantly, 6.8 per cent or 14,401 active cases have not recovered and are under treatment, including 6,011 Omanis and 8,390 expatriates.

Most of these patients are in the age group of 15-59 with 13,503 cases, compared to 813 in the age group 60 years and above.

According to statistics, the total death toll is 2,303, which is 1.07 per cent of the total cases recorded in the Sultanate.

More Omanis (1,688) compared to 615 non-Omanis lost their lives, and most of the victims (1,475) were in the age group of 60 and above by cases. Also, 663 women lost lives against 1,630 men.

Expats can convert visit visas to work permit

STAFF REPORTER MUSCAT, MAY 30

A decision to amend some provisions of the executive regulations of the Foreigners’ Residence Law was issued by Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector-General of Police and Customs, on Sunday.

The decision stipulates to amend some provisions of the executive regulations of the Foreigners’ Residence Law issued by Royal Decree No 16/95, and to the executive regulations of the Foreigners’ Residence Law issued

by Resolution 63/96, based on the requirements of the public interest.

Article 1 seeks to replace the text of the last paragraph of Article (10) of the Executive Regulations of the Foreigners’ Residence Law.

“The competent authority may transfer the effects stipulated in Clauses (3/A, 3/B, 3/D, 3/E, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16) from this article to a work permit or temporary work if available as per the conditions, controls set by the competent authority, and after payment of the prescribed fee.”

TURN TO P5

CAPTURING THE TRADITION



The Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan photography team employs innovation to feature and promote the historic and tourist landmarks, Omani traditional crafts and the traditional dresses peculiar to the wilayats of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan and Al Kami W'al Wafi. SEE ALSO P2

Consumer survey to measure purchasing power

MUSCAT: The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) will conduct the 30th cycle of the Consumer Confidence Survey for the second quarter of this year from Monday till June 10, which targets citizens who are 18 years and above.

The survey aims to identify the development of the financial status of Omani families this year, when compared to last year, the factors

affecting the Omani economy both positively and negatively, the future prospects of the economy, the purchasing power of household appliances, goods and cars of the families, in addition to the availability of job opportunities at the present time and their future expectations as well.

The survey includes 1,500 samples, including Omani nationals

aged 18 or above, distributed across the governorates of the Sultanate, taking into account the representation of men and women in relation to society, groups and different educational levels.

Data collection will be done over mobile phones. The methodology involves a simple arithmetic average of three sub-indicators, namely the current economic conditions index,

household income level index and consumer expectations index.

The consumer confidence index is a reflection of the behaviour of consumers. An increase in customer spending leads to a rise in demand for various goods and services. This results in increased production and a rise in production facilities to meet that demand, which in turn aids the economic

recovery process.

Accordingly, the Consumer Confidence Index provides a futuristic vision to where the economy is heading.

Starting from the first quarter of 2015, the Consumer Confidence Index (as well as the sub-indices) are calculated as a record number attributed to the last quarter of 2014. — ONA

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 45°C Min 33°C SALALAH: Max 31°C Min 27°C NIZWA: Max 44°C Min 28°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 05:20 FAJR: 03:54 DHUHR: 12:10 ASR: 15:29 MAGHRIB: 18:54 ISHA: 20:15

Strategy to support private investment in health sector

OHOOO AL JAILANIYAH
MUSCAT, MAY 30

The Ministry of Health affirmed that it had taken several measures to reduce the cost of healthcare services. The ministry laid down a well-studied methodology for an investment strategy to find permanent alternatives for the health funding.

The ministry encourages investment in the existing healthcare facilities and strives to overcome the challenges facing investment in the health sector such as the slow cooperation of the competent authorities, the poor business environment and government subsidy as well as the shortage of qualified cadres in the field of health economic studies.

The ministry said in a statement that the public healthcare system in the Sultanate has been providing free health services to citizens since the outset of the blessed Renaissance. Such a political commitment has played a great role in uplifting the health situation in the Sultanate and achieving high rates in health development and this has earned the Sultanate commendation from international organisations. On the other side, there has been an increasing demand for free health services and often an unjustified use of these services. Also, the demand for health services has grown alongside a population increase of 2.53 per cent but the annual budget allocated to the ministry has remained unchanged.

The ministry said that in 2019, the total government spending on health services was 82 per cent of the overall health expenditure. The ministry's net spending represented 66 per cent of the total cost calculations while health spending per person was estimated at RO 84.

Over the past two decades, the healthcare system experienced a new challenge as the epidemiological map in the Sultanate changed from severe infectious diseases that require



a short period of time to cure, to chronic diseases associated with lifestyle and ageing the treatment of which is too costly. Besides, the progress in medical technology has imposed a high cost on the healthcare system.

Among the most notable measures taken by the ministry of health to reduce the cost of health services are those related to the alternatives for funding health services in terms of refunding the fees on health services, privatization of health services, encouraging the private sector to invest in the healthcare sector in order to reduce the burden from the government such as the financial support for investment in the healthcare sector which will be enacted to encourage investment in the healthcare sector.

A 20-YEAR OF ACHIEVEMENTS

The Ministry of Health (MOH), represented by the Health Community Initiatives Department issued a book titled "Health Committees; a 20-year of Achievements" that documents the health committees march.

These committees are a unique model for sectoral cooperation to enhance health. The joint intersectoral action for health is a coordinated action that aims to promote people's health and improve their lifestyle, positively



The demand for health services has grown alongside a population increase of 2.53 per cent but the annual budget allocated to the ministry has remained unchanged

affecting health determinants. it is also considered as a key factor in achieving justice in distributing health services. In addition, the intersectoral action also contributes to promoting partners' capacity to deal with complicated health issues, activating partnership with the community, and utilising the available opportunities in achieving sustainable development goals by joining efforts, resources, and experiences to achieve significant results.

CRITERIA OF HEALTH SERVICES

The Ministry of Health, represented by the Directorate General of Planning and Studies (DGPS) organised a virtual workshop on Sunday to discuss the modern criteria of health services with the participation of specialists and health workers from various governorates of the Sultanate.

Dr Halima bint Qalam al Hinaiyah, DGPS Director-General, affirmed that the health policy in the Sultanate attaches great attention to providing health services and distributing them equitably for all community members regardless of the social and economic status and geographic location. She added that the Government is committed to providing a high level of health services for all populations in the governorates.

(with inputs from ONA)

Beware of fraudulent offers of migration

KABEER YOUSUF
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Philip Thomas, an expatriate working in the Sultanate, was clueless for nearly two years that he was duped by the 'agent' he dealt with for immigration to Canada.

When he did a ground study, a couple of others shared their stories that they were also cheated by the 'agency' that collected their money for documentation etc for migration purposes.

He applied for migration some two years ago. He kept on following up with the person who offered him a job and permanent residency in Canada for an initial payment of RO 650. After two years, he was informed that he couldn't make it through the eligibility tests and that his money would be refunded in equal instalments.

"The recruiting agency took my file and advance money of RO 450, knowing that I was not qualified for migration. Later, they collected another RO 200. After several emails and phone calls, I was told after two years that they would refund 30 per cent and they would retain 70 per cent for doing nothing," Philip told *the Observer*.

"It is a kind of business where the applicants' money is used as a temporary capital for reinvestment to earn a profit before the capital is to be refunded in two or three or more years' time. A business where you don't need any capital from one's pocket", according to another victim who doesn't want to be named.

What connects all these incidents is that they are contacted on social media after they were lured to a beautifully made video of the migration services of the

company. Kala Rao, Country Manager of IDP Education, says doing due diligence is paramount before committing to a migration agent.

"Although we are not migration experts, I can advise you to apply due diligence and carry out a thorough study about the immigration agency with which one is applying to migrate. Checking online about their registered office in the country, their credibility, having a face to face meeting are some other options in front of anyone who wouldn't want to be duped.

Additionally, there are online reviews, success rate of the middleman, and taking referrals from those who have enjoyed their services are other options to depend upon while applying for migration, according to Rao.

It is strongly advised not to listen to people who tell you that they can 'arrange' a visa for a sum of money in return.

Experts working in immigration services were unanimous when they said a set of factors must be checked, verified and understood before dealing with an agency.

"One should perform due diligence and make sure that he or she is communicating with the actual representative before engaging their services, as some fraudulent individuals can impersonate authorised lawyers and consultants," says NP Mohammed, a travel agent in Ruwi.

"While making telephone calls, verify that you are speaking to the right person by taking steps such as visiting their official website, confirming their office location, and reaching out to them directly through an officially recognised communication channel," he said.

■ PHOTOGRAPHERS SHED LIGHT ON BEAUTY OF LOCAL SPOTS



The Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan photography team employs innovation to feature and promote the historic and tourist landmarks, Omani traditional crafts and the traditional dresses peculiar to the wilayats of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan and Al Kamil Wal Wafi. The team aims to disseminate the culture of photography among the stakeholders as well as encourage and nurture novice talents through lectures, seminars, training courses and participation in international photography events. – ONA

Over 57,000 citizens update housing applications

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

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About 57,304 citizens have updated their data on residential land applications in the Sultanate till Saturday, announced the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

This comes as the ministry earlier requested citizens who have applied for land plots in Muscat and Salalah between 2008 and 2011, and citizens who applied for land plots in Qurayat and the rest of the governorates between 2008 and 2015 to urgently update their data so the ministry will proceed with dealing with the applications according to the priority issued within the Royal Decree 42 – 20121.

Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, said in a statement to TV that the stability of families is a priority and the new regulations will reduce the waiting period for a family that does not own a home or land suitable for construction.

“Giving Omani families the right to own property is one of the most important objectives of the new law,” he said. He added that the last decree was issued in 1984, and living conditions and realities were completely different, confirming that old housing applications will not be cancelled,



and we will deal with the matter professionally.

“After Eid Al Fitr, the ministry launched a programme to study land requests and create a specific mechanism to determine eligibility. Over the past ten years show that 334,000 land plots were distributed in various governorates, and women received 78 per cent of it, but the urbanisation rate did not exceed seven per cent. Also, around 4,000 plots of land are now ready for distribution.”

The minister clarified that the

Giving Omani families the right to own property is one of the most important objectives of the new law

DR KHALFAN BIN SAID AL SHUEILI

Minister of Housing and Urban Planning

law does not link the Omani family to marriage, as every person who has never been married has the right to apply. “No citizen will lose his or her right to acquire land, but it will bring them closer to obtaining land.”

He added that even citizens with housing loans have the right to obtain residential land. “There are many requests for social housing, and the ministry has distributed 500 social housing at a value RO 15 million, and we have the housing aid programme with a budget of RO 20 million.”

73,123 benefit from Social Security Scheme

MUSCAT: The number of people benefiting from the Social Security Scheme (SSS) in May 2021 stood at 73,123 individuals and families, with a total of RO 7.8 million distributed to them.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Salim bin Ali al Oweisi of the Social Welfare Department, the Ministry of Social Development, said that the SSS beneficiaries fall into eight categories and get pay as follows:

As many 2,307 cases fall in the category of “Orphans”, with a sum of RO 249,479 disbursed to them monthly; 3,577 cases of “Widows” (RO 439,358); 11,244 cases of “Divorced” women (RO 906,682); 31,288 “Elderly” people (RO 3,467,465); 3,184 “Unmarried” girls (RO 274,914); 5,949 cases of “Disability” (RO 2,416,656); 186 “Families of Imprisoned” supporters



(RO 28,327) and 91 cases of “Deserted” persons (RO 12,464).

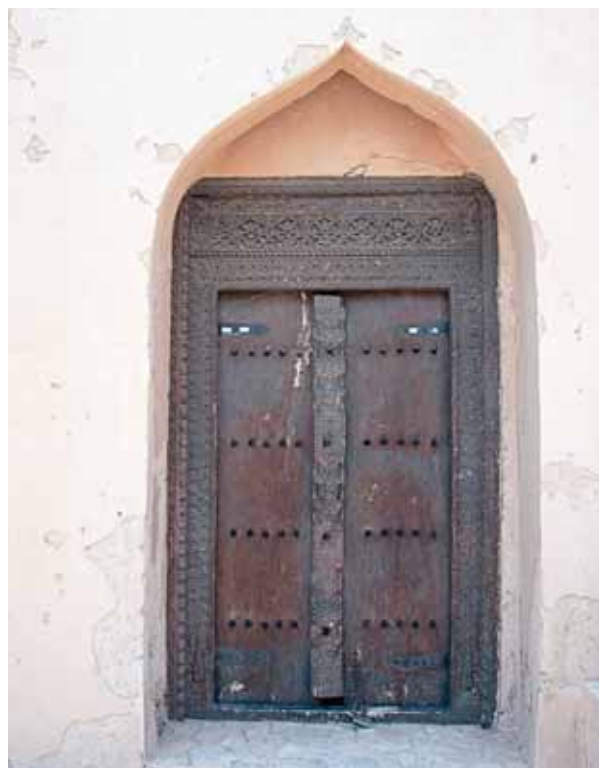
Outlining conditions for applying to the SSS assistance, Al Oweisi told ONA that the applicant should be of Omani citizenship, be among the above-mentioned eight deserving cases or a person not having any regular source of livelihood that covers or exceeds its needs as per the schedule set for pension cases stated in the SSS Law or a person not having any supporter who is capable of bearing the cost of sustaining the case. — ONA

Registration for Falling Walls Lab Oman extended till June 30

MUSCAT: The Falling Walls Lab Oman 2021 competition, organised by The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) in collaboration with Falling Walls Foundation in Germany, has extended the registration date until June 30. Students, entrepreneurs, early-career researchers and academics of all disciplines can apply through this link (<https://falling-walls.com/lab/apply/oman-online-lab/>).

The idea of the Falling Walls Lab Oman competition, which is organised in the Sultanate for the sixth consecutive year, is to present, in English, an idea of a research project, entrepreneurial or social initiative that is relevant to the world of today in just 3 minutes on the competition's stage.

Shining star of ancient architecture, history



TEXT & PHOTOS BY YAHYA ALSALMANI

Samayil in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate is dotted with historically important sites. Having played a role in the wilayat which dates back to the pre-Islamic era, has more than its fair share of stories to tell from its glorious past.

Among the many notable attractions are Bait Al Sarooj, which is located in the village of Al Khubar (4 km from the centre of the Wilayat) on a mountainous plateau overlooking Wadi Samayil. It is surrounded by an agricultural oasis that includes various local trees.

The construction of this building was begun by Shaikh Ali bin Jaber al Jabri. After his departure to Zanzibar, his son Shaikh Saud bin Ali al Jabri completed its construction in 1694. Due to the heritage and historical importance of these monuments, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

restored it in 1990. Bait Al Sarooj was also called Bait al Khubar and Bait al Jabri. The building got its present name from the red clay with which it was made of.

Bait Al Sarooj consists of two defensive towers. It includes 15 rooms and there are also several hoardings like in ancient forts and castles, which had slats or slots to allow defenders to drop hot liquids and projectiles on besiegers.

The building also has a well, storerooms for keeping food, gunpowder and watchtowers. Bait Al Sarooj contains two large doors that were imported from Zanzibar. On the top of each of them, there are slots for pouring hot liquids on invaders. The house also includes corridors, large arches and a strategic tower in the western corner overlooking the wadi of Samayil.

This historic site attracts a lot of tourists who are eager to discover Omani history and the ancient architecture of the Sultanate.





GO CORONA GO!

MISSING DELIGHT OF KHAREEF SEASON

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
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The coronavirus scare has its direct impact on tourism due to restricted movement of people and restrictions imposed by the authorities to check the spread of the deadly virus that has unique ways of being calm for some time and enormous again.

This is the second consecutive year for Salalah when there is no enthusiasm for the much-awaited Khareef (monsoon) season, which otherwise is a mood elevator, boost for businesses and full of cultural activities here

and there. People are waiting for the virus to go and indulge in festivity with full enthusiasm. With the onset of summer, the residents of Dhofar Governorate start preparing for the season with house renovations, preparations for small and big businesses etc. At the same time, it is a full-time job for the local authorities to manage the influx of tourists, maintenance of sites, roads and facilities, and many other unforeseen issues during the season. All these activities are missing as there is no clarity as to how and when the sector will open

PEOPLE ARE WAITING
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for the tourists from outside or even for domestic tourists. The hospitality operators are hoping against hope that the situation would improve in a couple of weeks, and the sector will open even in a limited and restricted manner. “In the given situation, there is no concrete assurance from anywhere. The virus is very much there, a bit controlled due to the restrictions. So how can we expect that the tourists will be allowed to visit during the season,” said small businessman Abdulrahim. Tackling the spread of the

virus would always be a priority of the government. “If we look at the calendar, only 21 days are left for the season to start. Keeping people healthy has always been the priority of the government, which is taking all possible measures from creating awareness to ensuring health and hygiene to every member of the society,” said a tourist operator. People are missing the festivity but are realising the challenge which has come in the form of Coronavirus. The last Khareef festival was organised on a full scale in 2019.

Last season Salalah recorded 766,772 visitors, and the visitors’ spending reached RO 78 million, up 1.4 per cent compared to the 2018 season. People are waiting for the return of the good times, as a section of them are yet to settle fully with the new normal of face masks, gloves, and even virtual meetings. They keep their fingers crossed and pinning hopes on the season, which has started giving signals of arrival with the building up of humidity and low clouds that pass by and drop a few drops of water off and on.

Employers look for skills and qualities before hiring staff

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The job-seekers of today have to prepare a lot more than the previous generation. Today when the job interviews are conducted, the potential employer is not just interested in the resume alone. From attitude to skills and understanding diversity and inclusiveness, there is an extensive preparedness one has to take before appearing for the job interview.

An entrepreneur with a keen interest in people development, Khalid al Huraibi, Managing Director of a start-up specialising in AI technology, Impact Integrated, feels the requirements that job-seekers in Oman have to meet today are much more than qualification.

“Now when the job-seekers attend an interview they have to prepare, as the potential employer will like to see more than their certificate. They would also look into their attitude with a lot more focus and vigour. They would want to see if this person will care for the sustainability of the organisation. They would like to understand how their morals and work ethics are. We should also understand what is expected of the new person joining the new organisation”, said Al Huraibi.

The expectations were different just one generation ago, pointed out Al Huraibi, “In our generation the stress was on being highly educated with the right degree and joining work and learning new skills as we go along. But now, organisations have so many people to choose



from that they can afford to look at only the outer layers or the people who are quite exceptional. This is why it is very important to show that you are not a machine and that you can produce for the organisation a lot more than a report or a degree because you can think, feel and can be a productive person.”

Most importantly, one has to prove that they have teamwork skills and will pursue excellence. So the expectations might be more from the job-seekers today, but learning new skills and adding further qualifications are more accessible than ever before.

“There are many opportunities available today

because of the Internet when it comes to self-improvement and teaching yourself so I hope they will avail for themselves all the facilities that are available today from online learning portals to develop their skills and attitude towards organisations”, he urged.

It might be an era of technology, but emotional intelligence is most important in today's scenario.

“Definitely, emotional intelligence is required, especially when it comes to working within dynamic teams. In the past it was common to work for example either in a multinational organisation or a local organisation and the diversity of the team would

be two or three nationalities from a similar background, but now if you notice since the pandemic one zoom meeting consists of 15 to 20 nationalities with different languages and backgrounds. So this generation of job-seekers has to be a lot more open-minded and tolerant of others and need to realise that organisations will ask and evaluate them on the awareness of D & I — Diversity and Inclusion. They would want to know if this person is okay working with different genders and people from different nationalities so diversity and inclusiveness have become a very important part of emotional intelligence”, concluded Al Huraibi.

RH clarifies on vacant beds, shortage of nurses

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 30

The Royal Hospital has issued a clarification on a video clip about the refusal to accept Covid-19 patients despite the availability of beds.

In a statement released it said, “The Royal Hospital is the largest hospital in the Sultanate and one of the largest hospitals in the region, with a capacity of 1,200 beds.”

There is currently a limited number of vacant and unused beds that are unused due to the shortage of medical and nursing staff following the significant increase in the number of ICU patients over the last two years. “More nurses are now attending ICU patients while some of them retired early, which has led to a shortage. The numbers indicate that the hospital needs additional numbers of nurses to be able to operate all services well.”



Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Agricultural,
Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

TENDERS NOTICE

The Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Tenders :-

Tender No.	Description	Tender Documents Price (R.O)	Class	Last Date for Collection of Documents	Last Date for Submission of Documents
166/2021/MAFWR/HQ-12	Remodelling of Fish Landing Site at Al Jari & Gamdah In Musandam Governorate	210/-	Excellent	Sunday 13/6/2021	Sunday 4/7/2021
167/2021/MAFWR/HQ-13	General maintenance of Net Repair Sheds at Wilayet of Quriyat	25/-	Fourth	Sunday 13/6/2021	Sunday 4/7/2021
168/2021/MAFWR/HQ-14	General maintenance of Net Repair Sheds at Wilayet of Muscat	25/-	Fourth	Sunday 13/6/2021	Sunday 4/7/2021
169/2021/MAFWR/HQ-15	Central Laboratory for Animal Health Requirements for 2021	25/-	Specialized	Sunday 13/6/2021	Sunday 4/7/2021
171/2021/MAFWR/HQ-16	Cleaning and Servicing the Fish Markets Buildings in Sultanate of Oman for 2021	25/-	Specialized	Sunday 13/6/2021	Sunday 4/7/2021
172/2021/MAFWR/HQ-17	Dredging works at Quriyat Fishery Harbor	70/-	First	Sunday 13/6/2021	Sunday 4/7/2021
180/2021/MAFWR/HQ-18	Supply of High Pressure Spray Machines	25/-	Specialized	Thursday 17/6/2021	Wednesday 7/7/2021

- Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman (as required in the tender), and addressed to the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: **+968 24166670** or etenderhd@ita.gov.om
- Note:** Bid Submission will be online only. Scan Copy of Tender Bond needs to be attached in system.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

Expats can convert visit visas to work permits



FROM PAGE 1

The second article states that anything that contradicts this decision or contradicts its provisions shall be repealed.

Article 3 states that this decision shall be published in the official Gazette and shall take effect from the day following the date of its publication.

With this decision, expatriates and visitors entering Oman on visit visas can get them converted into work permits. The rule also applies to those with family joining visas and student visas, among others, provided stipulated conditions are met.

Competent authorities can convert the following visas stipulated in the Foreigners' Residence Law, into a work visa or temporary work visa: “A visit visa issued to residents of GCC countries, a visit visa issued to meet relatives and friends in the country, single-entry tourist visas (valid for up to 10 days or a month), single and multiple-entry business visas, express visas, investor visas, student visas, visas provided to sailors serving on board, or passengers aboard cruise ships, visas for owners of residential units and their family members.”



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY
Advertisement No. 23/2021

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following biddings:

Bidding No.	Bidding description	Document fee	Deadline for obtaining bidding docs.	Deadline for inquiry submission	Deadline for submission
RE-BB/07/2020	Constructing and Operating of Coffee Shop & Shop in the Plot Number (4510), Block (Phase 1) at Al-Maabilah	25/- OMR	20/06/2021	24/06/2021	29/06/2021
RE-BB/08/2020	Operating of the Shop located at Al-Bustan	25/- OMR	20/06/2021	24/06/2021	29/06/2021
RE-BB/01/2021	Provide Car Cleaning Service at Muscat Municipality (Head Office)	25/- OMR	20/06/2021	24/06/2021	29/06/2021

Registered companies with Muscat Municipality which are Specialized in above bids are invited to participate in the biddings as per the following:

- Pay the specified document fee for the requested bid via bank deposit to Muscat Municipality's Bank account as follows:

Bank Muscat

0423010702710024
- A copy of the transaction's receipt MUST be send to the following e-mail (MM.PC@mm.gov.om), provided with the company data (name and bid number, company name, commercial registration number of the company, delegate name, office phone number, mobile number and email address approved by the company).
- The bidding documents will be send to the company via email.
- 2:00 PM** on the above mentioned dates, is the last timing for obtaining Bidding Documents. Any bid's document request received after the specified time will not be considered.

Submitted offers must be accompanied with a bond mentioned in the tender document valid for a period not less than (90) days issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat Municipality. Bidding that do not meet the required bond **will not be accepted.**

Documents must be enclosed in a plain envelope sealed with red wax (without any company information). In a box located in Muscat Municipality Ruwi Building (Main Entrance), located on Capital Market Street

NOTES:

- Companies which are not registered in Muscat Municipality or their registration has been expired shall register through the municipality's website (www.mm.gov.om). For technical support, please contact Muscat Municipality through email (crm@mm.gov.om).
- If the bidders have any inquiries regarding the scope of the work, they have to send their inquiries through the following e-mail (MM.PC@mm.gov.om).
- 10:00 AM** on the above submission mentioned dates, is the last timing for receiving bids. Offers submitted after the above mentioned date & time shall not be accepted for any reason.
- Muscat Municipality has the right to accept or reject any offer without assigning any reason.

Website: www.mm.gov.om

شركة النماء للدواجن ش.م.ع
A' Namaa Poultry Co. S.A.O.C

Suppliers Pre-Qualification

A'Namaa Poultry Co. (S.A.O.C) would like to invite well reputed companies in the below mentioned fields who wish to participate in supplying the following.

1	Poultry PET/PE Trays for Fresh and Frozen Chicken
2	Poultry PE Bags for Fresh and Frozen Chicken
3	Poultry Cartons for Fresh and Frozen Chicken
4	Plain / transparent Top Web Film with Anti Fog for Fresh Whole Chicken PET/PE Trays
5	Pre-printed Top Web Film with Anti Fog for Fresh and Frozen Chicken Parts PET/PE Trays
6	Poultry Foam Tray for Chicken Twin Pack
7	Production and Expiry Date seal tape for Frozen PE Bags
8	Labels / Stickers on Fresh Whole Chicken PET/PE Trays
9	Poultry Soaker Pads for Chicken Trays
10	Poultry Carton wrapping film

Companies wishing to participate in this Pre-Qualification to submit officially the following documents:

- The company Profile.
- Financial statement for the latest 6 months.
- A list of after-sales services and available technical support.
- Presenting the agency certificates or official Letter from the Manufacturer company in case the supplier is the agent of one of the specialized international companies.
- A list of clients for the last five years.
- The Product certificates (i.e., GMP, Free sale, etc.).
- The documents, should be sent to info@anamaa.com with Subject Suppliers **Pre-Qualification - A'Namaa Poultry CO.**
- Deadline to send the applications is on **02nd June 2021** at 4:00 pm.

A'Namaa Poultry reserves the right to accept or reject any of the prequalification requests without giving any reasons. Qualified manufacturers and suppliers will be notified after the pre-qualification process in accordance with the company's standards.

For inquiries or further clarification please contact the company via

Email: info@anamaa.com Or Phone (96822504480)

Libya strongman Haftar eyes Dec polls

TRIPOLI: Libya's military strongman Khalifa Haftar is polishing his political image ahead of elections, after a crippling rout on the battlefield and with his support waning at home and abroad, analysts say.

Haftar's eastern-based forces battled for more than a year to seize the capital Tripoli in the west, but their defeat last June set the stage for UN-backed peace talks, a unity government and a nationwide poll planned for December.

"He is hoping the elections will secure him a political victory after his military defeat," said international relations professor Miloud el Hajj.

Haftar has emerged as a key player during the decade of violence that followed the 2011 overthrow of former ruler Muammar Gaddafi.

The field marshal has battled fighters and had built a solid base of support among eastern Libya's influential tribes — as well as



Libyan strongman Khalifa Haftar. — AFP

neighbouring Egypt, the UAE and Russia.

But two years since his self-styled Libyan National Army launched its offensive to overthrow a Turkish-backed unity government in Tripoli, the landscape is very different.

A formal truce last October set in motion a UN-led process that led to the creation of an interim government tasked with unifying the country's divided institutions, launching reconstruction efforts and preparing for December polls.

Haftar kept a low profile



A satellite image shows fighter aircraft, transport planes and helicopters for a Libyan National Army (LNA) military parade at Benina Airport in Benghazi. — Reuters

throughout the talks, but in recent weeks he has made a comeback with public rallies and pledges to build three new towns and thousands of housing units for the

families of "martyrs".

"His tone and language have changed... He has dropped his military discourse" in favour of pledges to improve living

conditions, said Hajj.

Haftar built his power base around Libya's second city of Benghazi, the eastern cradle of the 2011 Nato-backed uprising that

topped and killed Gaddafi.

He found allies among the region's powerful tribes, who provided much of the manpower for Haftar's various offensives.

But today, Haftar has "lost his base of support", according to Libyan analyst Mahmoud Khalfallah.

"He no longer enjoys the indisputable support of the tribes, who blame him for having involved their sons in a war in which many died for nothing," Khalfallah added.

"He knows they no longer trust him and that they would not give up their sons again for another war."

And despite several meetings with tribal leaders in a bid to regain their support, Haftar is now faced with "serious problems of defiance" according to Libya specialist Jalel Harchaoui.

"His finances have dried up and his hopes for territorial expansion in the west have been blocked", Harchaoui added. — AFP

■ IMMUNISATION CAMPAIGN IN YEMEN



A Yemeni child receives a polio vaccination as part of an immunisation campaign at a clinic in the capital Sanaa. — AFP

Turkish FM starts two-day Greece visit

ATHENS: Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu arrived in Greece on Sunday for a two-day visit, as part of ongoing efforts to maintain dialogue between the two countries, at loggerheads over a host of issues.

Cavusoglu met with Greek citizens of faith — some of whom with Turkish roots — who live in the country's north-east, a minority of around 120,000.

On Monday, Cavusoglu is due to meet Prime Minister Kyriakos



Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu waters a tree during his visit to Komotini, Northern Greece. — AFP

Mitsotakis, in the official part of the visit.

The exchanges are seen as part of ongoing efforts to ease tensions between the two countries.

In April, a meeting of the Turkish and Greek foreign ministers culminated in a press conference marred by an exchange of accusations.

Meanwhile, simmering disputes remain unresolved, from migration policy to natural gas reserves in the Mediterranean. — dpa

No camel rides in Tunisian town as Covid slowly kills tourism

EL JEM, Tunisia: Two Bulgarian visitors stood in the ancient El Jem amphitheatre, one of Tunisia's top attractions, alone apart from swallows flitting under stone arches — a sight foretelling another tourist season wrecked by Covid-19.

The 3rd century structure, so symbolic of Tunisia that it features on the 20-dinar note, usually receives about 190,000 visitors a year, but in 2020 only 45,000 came, and so far this year it has been deserted most of the time.

Over the past two weeks numbers have picked up a little after the government relaxed quarantine rules for package tours to salvage some foreign revenue from the summer high season, but they are still nowhere near where they were pre-pandemic.

"There are no tourists and the beach is empty. It is very sad," said Tatiana Vasileva, one of the two Bulgarians. She had arrived in Tunisia two days earlier and joined a tour to El Jem arranged by her hotel.

In the plaza outside the amphitheatre, tourism businesses are slowly dying, as they are across the country, putting lives on hold and driving people into



Aroussi Obay inside his souvenir shop in El Jem amid the coronavirus disease outbreak. — Reuters

Once vibrant tourist town deserted in pandemic as small business owners put lives on hold

other walks of life.

Aroussi Obay, 42, has invested savings into olive oil production to raise money while his antique shop idles. His neighbour Nofal Zeid, 43, has delayed his wedding for lack of income from his El Hana cafe.

"I have postponed all my projects, even my marriage," said Zeid, who has laid off the

few family members he usually employs in the summer season.

But though days pass without a customer, he has laid each of the seven tables facing the amphitheatre with a bright red cloth and a bowl of oranges, ready for business.

Tunisia, which is dependent on foreign help to obtain Covid-19 vaccines, is struggling with low stocks.

It has been allocated 4.3 million doses through the Covax scheme for poorer countries, but only 670,000 of them have arrived. It has received some other doses through a separate agreement with Pfizer.

— Reuters

SHORT TAKES

CAIRO

Egypt, Israel hold talks on Gaza ceasefire

Egypt and Israel on Sunday held high-level talks on strengthening a ceasefire between Israel and the Gaza Strip's ruling Hamas and rebuilding the enclave after a recent conflict.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukri met in Cairo with his Israeli counterpart Gabi Ashkenazi, who landed in Egypt, in the first formal visit by an Israeli foreign minister to the Arab country in nearly 13 years.

The Egyptian Foreign Minis-



try said in a statement that the meeting was part of "Egypt's relentless and continued efforts to revive peacemaking and building on the ceasefire in Gaza." — dpa

BEIRUT

High turnout for Lebanon vaccination marathon

Lebanon vaccinated more than 10,000 people on Saturday as part of a day-long vaccine "marathon" organised by the health ministry to ramp up inoculation rates in the crisis-hit country.

The ministry said that by 6:30 pm, 10,452 people over the age of 30 received jabs of the Astra-Zeneca vaccine at different facilities across the country.

They were allowed to enter vaccination centres on a walk-in basis from early on Saturday morning in what health authori-



ties have dubbed a vaccine 'marathon.' The capital Beirut and some other parts of the country were excluded from the initiative. — AFP

DUBAI

Iraq to release \$125 m of frozen funds for vaccines

Iraq has agreed to transfer \$125 million of frozen Iranian funds to a European bank for the purchase of 16 million Covid-19 vaccine doses, Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian was quoted as saying by state media on Saturday.

Iran, the hardest hit Middle Eastern country by Covid-19, has complained that US sanctions were preventing it from making payments to buy vaccines. Ardakanian said the payments would go towards the purchase



of vaccines from the World Health Organization (WHO) — sponsored global COVAX vaccine-sharing plan, state news agency IRNA reported.

— Reuters



In brief

■ KABUL

**6 DEAD AS TALIBAN-FIRED SHELL HITS AFGHAN WEDDING**

A mortar bomb fired by the Taliban struck a wedding ceremony in a province north of the Afghan capital, killing at least six people including women and children, officials said.

The incident happened late on Saturday in Kapisa province when a shell aimed at an army checkpoint hit a house where a crowd had gathered for a wedding, officials said.

"Six civilians were killed and four were wounded when a Taliban rocket hit a wedding ceremony in Kapisa province," defence ministry spokesman Fawad Aman said on Twitter. — AFP

■ BANGKOK

**UKRAINE'S ENVOY TO THAILAND DIES ON BEACH ISLAND**

Ukraine's ambassador to Thailand died early on Sunday on the southern beach island of Koh Lipe while on vacation with his son, police said, with the cause of death still undetermined. Andrii Beshta is a 45-year-old career diplomat who was appointed as Ukraine's ambassador in Thailand in 2016.

The National Police said on Sunday Beshta was found dead around 5:30 am in his room at a hotel resort in Koh Lipe, an idyllic beach island popular with travellers for its crystal-blue waters. — dpa

World leaders call for action, inclusion at climate summit

SEOUL: World leaders on Sunday called for more action and inclusion of all countries in the global drive towards a cleaner and greener planet at a climate summit hosted virtually by South Korea.

Climate change is a major threat to global growth, with perils ranging from declines in crop yields, extreme weather that devastates tourist economies, disease outbreaks and other catastrophes that would sap productivity.

South Korea — which recently announced plans to cut finance for international coal projects — is seeking a bigger role in the global initiative to go green.

"South Korea will play a responsible role as a bridging nation between developing and advanced nations," said President Moon Jae-in as he opened the 2021 Partnering for Green



South Korean President Moon Jae-in addressing the opening session of the Partnering for Green Growth and the Global Goals 2030, or P4G, summit virtually by South Korea. — AFP

Growth and the Global Goals 2030, or P4G, summit.

The two-day summit is the second of its kind following the inaugural meeting held in Copenhagen in 2018, and

is focused on public-private partnerships, especially in developing countries.

Advanced nations have laid out ambitious emissions-cutting goals in recent months, as well as plans to ultimately go carbon neutral by 2050.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel called on the countries to phase out their dependence on fossil fuels, warning climate change is threatening people's lives and the economy as much as the Covid-19 pandemic.

Earlier this month Germany tightened its targets to reduce CO2 emissions — including a 65 per cent cut in emissions by 2030 — after a landmark ruling by the country's top court declared a flagship climate protection law "insufficient".

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said countries must now deliver on their green pledges.

"It's a great start, but let's not pat ourselves on the back just yet because our planet and our people need more," he said.

"We need governments that will not just make promises on climate and nature but match those words with deeds."

World leaders committed under the 2015 Paris accord to keeping the global temperature increase to under two degrees Celsius — and ideally closer to 1.5C — by 2050.

Yet many of the largest emitters have so far failed to keep up their commitments and countries have not even agreed on a unified rulebook governing how the Paris agreement works in practice.

The UN says that emissions must fall nearly eight per cent annually to keep 1.5C in play — equivalent to the emissions saved during the pandemic every single year through 2030. — AFP

Nearly 300 rescued in Indonesia ferry accident

TERANTE, Indonesia: Search teams are looking for one missing person after rescuing all other passengers from a large ferry that caught fire in Indonesia, an official said on Sunday.

The KM Karya Indah was heading to Sanana, a remote port in the northeast of the Indonesian archipelago when it was engulfed in flames.

Shortly after departing, the ferry caught fire, forcing passengers and crew to jump into the sea to save themselves. There are no reported casualties.

"There were 275 people on board, 274 had been evacuated safely," Muhammad Arafah, the head of the local search and rescue team told Kompas TV on Sunday. "One person, a 43-year-old man, is still being searched for."

He added that at least 35 passengers were children.

Dozens of rescuers are still scouring the area for the missing person.

Images shared by the search and rescue agency showed the large ferryboat enveloped in thick, dark smoke while passengers in life jackets were rescued by rafts.

More than a dozen crew members have been detained and questioned by the local police to determine the cause of the fire.

Maritime accidents are common in Indonesia due to poor safety standards. — AFP

China cargo craft docks with space station module

BEIJING: A Chinese cargo space-craft carrying equipment and supplies successfully docked with the core module of the country's future space station on Sunday, state media said.

A Long March 7 rocket carrying the Tianzhou-2 cargo craft — loaded with essentials such as food, equipment and fuel — blasted off late on Saturday from the Wenchang launch site on the tropical southern island of Hainan, the Xinhua news agency reported.

The docking with the space station's Tianhe core module was completed at 5:01 am Beijing time, the agency said, citing the China Manned Space Agency (CMSA).

China will need to carry out around 10 missions in total to complete assembly of the space station — named Tiangong, meaning "heavenly palace" — in



A Long March 7 rocket, carrying China's Tianzhou-2 cargo craft, lifts off from the Wenchang Space Launch Centre in southern China's Hainan province. — AFP

orbit. The station is expected to become fully operational in 2022. Once completed, it is expected to

remain in low Earth orbit for up to 15 years. With the possible retirement of the International Space

Station after 2028, Tiangong could become the only human outpost in Earth's orbit. — AFP

Sri Lanka to sue Singapore ship owners over marine pollution

NEGOMBO: Sri Lankan authorities on Sunday said they will sue the owners of a Singapore-registered cargo carrier which has burned for 11 straight days off the island's west coast and caused some of its worst-ever marine pollution.

Police said a criminal investigation was also launched into the blaze aboard the MV X-Press Pearl, which was carrying 25 tonnes of nitric acid and a huge amount of plastic raw materials.

The intense fire, still burning at the rear of the 186 metre vessel, has destroyed much of the cargo, some of which also fell into the Indian Ocean.

Tonnes of microplastic granules have inundated the South Asian nation's famed beaches, forcing a fishing ban and sparking fears of ecological devastation.

Sri Lanka's Marine Environment Protection Authority said it met with



Sri Lanka's Air force personnel remove debris washed ashore from the Singapore-registered container ship MV X-Press Pearl on a beach in Colombo. — AFP

attorney general Sanjaya Rajaratnam on Sunday to plan legal action against the owners of the vessel, its crew, as well as insurers.

"We have gone through the details and will be taking action against those responsible," MEPA Chairman Dharshani Lahandapura told reporters in

Colombo.

She said they were, however, yet to make an assessment of the environmental damage, but she believed it was the "worst marine pollution" Sri Lanka has ever suffered.

Sri Lanka's navy chief, Vice Admiral Nishantha Ulugetenne, who was also at

Sunday's talks with the island's chief prosecutor, said the X-Press Pearl was still on fire, but the blaze was now under control.

"It will take a few more days to completely extinguish the fire," Ulugetenne said, adding that his assessment was that there was no danger of the vessel breaking up.

But he ruled out towing it away from Sri Lankan waters until the fire was completely put out and experts examined the vessel for any structural weaknesses.

International salvage firm SMIT is leading efforts to douse the flames and is being assisted by Sri Lanka's navy and the Indian coastguard.

The three-month-old ship was heading to Colombo from Gujarat, India. It had previously visited Qatar and Dubai and was due to go to Malaysia and Singapore after calling at Colombo. — AFP



إعلان مناقصة Tender Announcement

Oman National Transport Company SAOC "Mwasalat" is a government owned company founded in 1972. "Mwasalat" is the leading public transport company in the Sultanate. Currently "Mwasalat" has a total strength of more than 1,600 employees, more than 500 vehicles and is going through a rapid period of growth.

"Mwasalat" announce the following tender, to specialized companies in the related services.

Tender Number T-11-2021	
Tender Name	اتفاقية توفير شاحنات منخفضة الارتفاع لنقل الحافلات Call-Off Agreement for Low Bed Trailers Services
Project Summary	Within the framework of this tender, ONTC would like to have a qualified contractor to provide all services required to transport, loading and unloading of ONTC low floor city Buses from Muscat to Salalah and vis versa.
Tender Fee	NII
Grade & Speciality	Qualified & Specialized Companies in the Field
Start date for tender document distribution	Monday 31st May 2021
Last date for tender document distribution	Monday 14th June 2021
Last date for submission	Sunday 4th July 2021
Interested specialized companies may obtain the Tender Documents from the E-Tendering website https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents. Tenders should be submitted online on the given website; no documents can be accepted as manual submission except original Tender Bond. The Tenderer shall register in E-tendering portal to enable purchase and collection of the Tender Documents. Preference is given to local and SME companies that meet the qualification criteria in the tender documents. All correspondences pertaining to the Tender inquiry must be online at the e-tendering system. Any clarification pertaining to the E-tendering system technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email ID etenderhd@ita.gov.om and phone number: +968 24166670, 24166409.	
Oman National Transport Company S.A.O.C. Head Quarter, Ghala P.O.Box: 620, PC: 100, Muscat, Oman	

UK PM in a bind over lockdown

LONDON: Boris Johnson faces a difficult decision about whether to end England's lockdown on June 21 with hospitals already under "worrying" pressure, a health chief has warned.

The continued spread of the Indian coronavirus variant has cast doubt on the ability to scrap restrictions, with ministers considering plans to keep some measures — such as the continued use of face masks and guidance on working from home — in place.

NHS Providers chief executive Chris Hopson said hospital bosses were concerned about the transmissibility of the B1617.2 variant and the large number of people who have still to receive doses of the vaccine.

He warned that although hospitals were not expecting to be overwhelmed by a surge of Covid-19 cases, they were already stretched by going "full pelt" on dealing with the backlog of cases built up during the pandemic and urgent care needs.

Hospitals are operating under reduced capacity due to Covid-19 restrictions and increased numbers of coronavirus patients will add to difficulties by requiring wards to be reconfigured, he added. But he said it was "very significant and important" that the evidence suggests the success of the vaccination campaign means much lower levels of hospital admissions, serious illness and death than previously experienced.

"Significant numbers of Covid-19 hospital inpatients will



People enjoy the sunny weather at a park in London on Sunday. – Reuters

adversely impact care backlog recovery," he said.

"(The) current degree of pressure on hospitals is worrying especially since we saw clear summer demand surges in the two years before Covid-19.

"But if, as evidence above suggests, success of (the) vaccination campaign means much lower levels of hospitalisation, serious illness and mortality, even with (the) new variant, that is very significant and important. This means there is a difficult decision to make for June 21."

He also suggested the Government needs to consider

the increased burden on hospitals in UK holiday hotspots in coming months with people not travelling abroad, saying one trust chief on the south coast had warned they will "struggle" to meet the "significant extra demand."

Dr Mike Tildesley, a member of the Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling (Spi-M) Government advisory panel, said there was still "quite a lot of uncertainty" around the June 21 date.

He told LBC: "We are starting to see signs of course that cases are going up, but at the moment we're still obviously reporting hospital admissions and deaths at

very low levels."

He highlighted there can be a delay of a week or two between case increases and hospital admissions possibly rising, but said the country was in "a very different place" to where it was in January.

He said scientists had "an awful lot of work to do" to analyse data on the link between cases and hospital admissions, while bearing in mind the situation with the Indian variant, to give evidence to the government.

And he warned that if a big wave of cases was allowed to build, that could give rise to new, more dangerous, mutations. — dpa

Johnson weds fiancée in 'secret' weekend ceremony

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his fiancée Carrie Symonds married over the weekend, his office confirmed on Sunday, in what media reports have described as a "secret ceremony".

He is only the second British prime minister to marry while in power, and the first in nearly two centuries. The last was Robert Jenkinson in 1822.

"The Prime Minister and Ms Symonds were married yesterday afternoon in a small ceremony at Westminster Cathedral," a Downing Street spokesman said.

"The couple will celebrate their wedding with family and friends next summer."

Known for his colourful love life, 56-year-old Johnson wed Symonds, 33, in front of close friends and family, the *Mail on Sunday* and *The Sun* newspapers first reported.

The weekend nuptials were a surprise development, after reports earlier this week said the couple had sent out "save the date" cards for a wedding on July 30 next year.

The pair got engaged in December, 2019, and have a one-year-old baby son, Wilfred. Their original plans to marry last year were delayed by the pandemic.

Political colleagues sent congratulations to the couple as the news became official on Sunday.

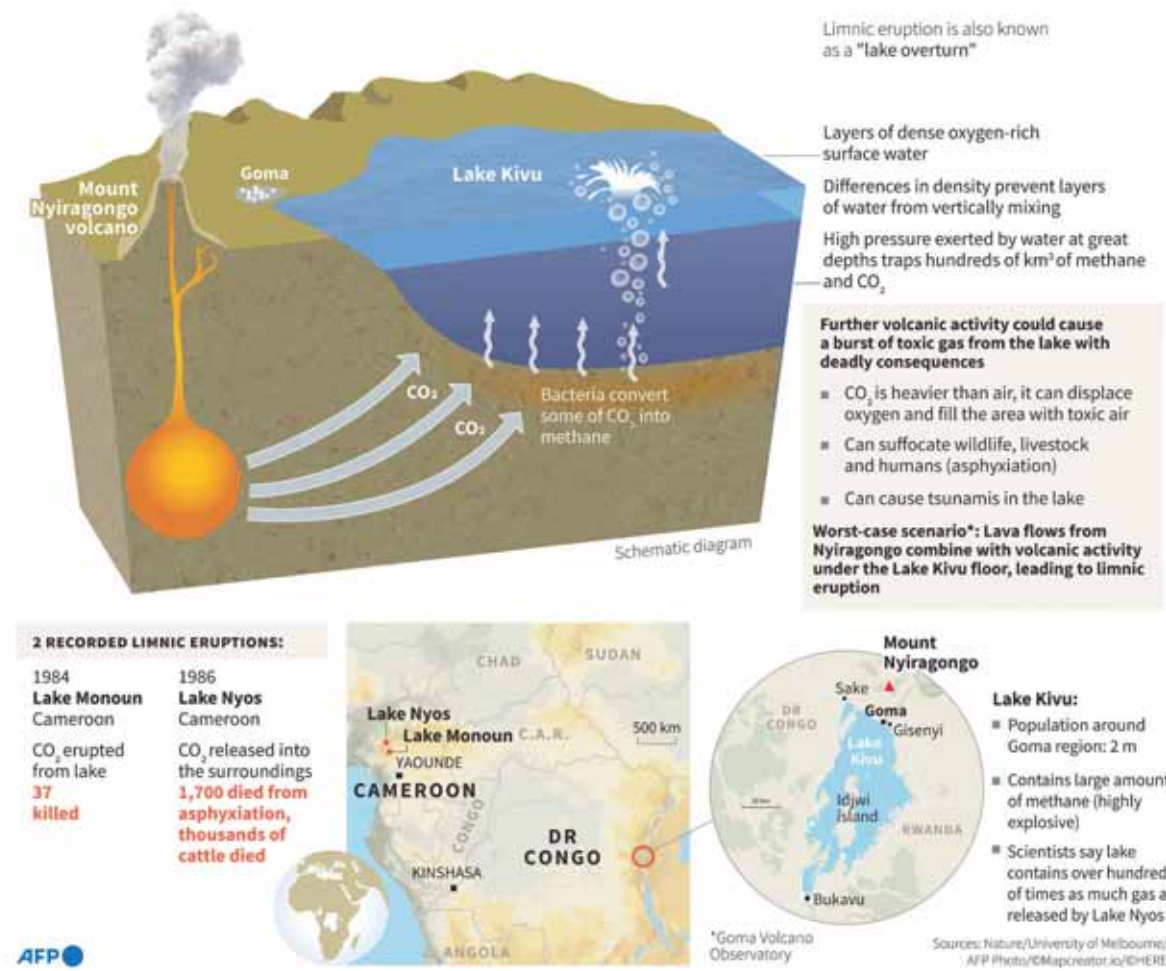
"I think it's a wonderful thing for both of them that they have made their marriage vows to one another," senior minister Nadhim Zahawi told Sky News. — AFP



Boris and Carrie Johnson are seen in the garden of 10 Downing Street, after their wedding, in London on Saturday. – Reuters

Limnic eruption: exploding lakes

A rare type of natural disaster in which carbon dioxide from deep waters of a lake suddenly erupt, leading to violent bursts of toxic gas



Mountaineer on a high after fastest Everest climb by a woman

KATHMANDU: Former Hong Kong schoolteacher Tsang Yin-hung said on Sunday she always believed in aiming high after setting a new record for the fastest ascent of Everest by a woman.

Tsang scaled the 8,848.86-metre (29,031 feet) mountain in 25 hours and 50 minutes, a Nepal government officer who recorded her time said on Thursday.

The 44-year-old reached the summit of the world's highest peak on May 23 and arrived back in Kathmandu on Sunday.

"I am... relaxed and happy because I set this target around four years before," she said

"I have always shared with my students and my friends that if you aim high and expect high,



Arthur Muir



Tsang Yin-hung

lived with "no resources" and sport — which was free to participate in at her school — became her source of joy.

"When I was young I used to run on the mountains, play basketball and do other sports," she said.

She started to train as a mountaineer 11 years ago and summited Everest in 2017 — the first woman from Hong Kong to achieve such a feat.

Other records broken this season include the most ascents of Everest, by Nepali climber Kami Rita Sherpa, who broke his own record with his 25th summit.

Arthur Muir, 75, became the oldest American to climb the world's highest peak when he broke Bill Burke's record set in 2009 at age 67. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

CHRISTCHURCH

New Zealand floods threaten thousands of homes

New Zealand authorities declared a state of emergency in the province of Canterbury on Sunday, as the region was pounded by heavy rain that could force thousands of people to abandon their homes.

Acting Emergency Management Minister Kris Faafoi, who visited the hardest-hit southern parts of the area, said about 3,000 homes were at risk and the army had been mobilised to assist with evacuations if necessary.

"The rain is going to stick around until at least tomorrow. It



will be heavy and the authorities will be watching those river levels tonight," Faafoi said.

The New Zealand Meteorological Service has issued a rare "red" warning, with up to 300 millimetres of rain expected to fall in inland areas.

ACCRA

West African leaders meet to discuss Mali coup

West African leaders were due to meet in Ghana on Sunday to discuss a response to Mali's second coup in nine months, which has sparked warnings of fresh sanctions and deep concerns over stability in the volatile Sahel region.

Mali's new president Colonel Assimi Goita arrived in Accra on Saturday for preliminary talks ahead of the extraordinary summit of regional bloc ECOWAS, which was due to start at 1400 GMT.

Presidents Muhammadu



Buhari of Nigeria, Alassane Ouattara of Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso's Marc Christian Kabore were among those attending the summit, which came as another deadly attack underscored Mali's chronic instability.

MOSCOW

Hollywood actor joins pro-Kremlin party

Hollywood actor Steven Seagal, a long-time admirer of Russian President Vladimir Putin, has joined a pro-Kremlin party, the party said on Sunday.

Seagal received a party membership card of an alliance named Just Russia — Patriots — For Truth on Saturday, a video released by the party showed. It was formed earlier this year, when three leftist parties, all of which support Putin, merged into one.

Seagal, a Russian citizen since 2016, proposed a crackdown on



businesses which damage the environment.

The party controls a faction in the lower house of the Russian parliament and plans to take part in a parliamentary election in September.



Chelsea players celebrate with the trophy after winning the Champions League final against Manchester City at Estadio do Dragao, Porto, Portugal. – Reuters

Chelsea revel in Champions League glory

HAVERTZ GOAL TAMES CITY AS BLUES CLAIM SECOND TITLE

PORTO, Portugal: Chelsea won their second Champions League title and denied Pep Guardiola’s Manchester City their first after Kai Havertz grabbed a first-half goal to secure a 1-0 win in Saturday’s all-English final at the Estadio Do Dragao.

The German youngster, Chelsea’s record signing, kept his composure as he raced through and evaded goalkeeper Ederson before rolling the ball into an empty net in the 42nd minute to decide a tight encounter played in front of a 16,500 crowd.

Premier League champions City were favourites ahead of the final but suffered a desperately disappointing night in their first Champions League showpiece match. Despite winning three of the last four Premier League titles for City, Spaniard Guardiola failed to deliver the coveted European trophy he last won with Barcelona in 2011.

For Chelsea’s German manager Thomas Tuchel the triumph comes after his Paris St Germain side suffered defeat in last season’s final against Bayern Munich and just four months after he took over from Frank Lampard at the west London club.

“To share it with everybody

“To share it with everybody is incredible. We made it. Wow. I don’t know what to feel what to feel

THOMAS TUCHEL
Chelsea manager

is incredible. We made it. Wow. I don’t know what to feel,” said Tuchel. “I was so grateful to arrive a second time (in the final). I felt different.

“The (players) were determined to win this. We wanted to be a stone in their (City’s) shoe. We encouraged everybody to step up and step out, to be more brave,” he said.

CITY EXPOSED

While Tuchel got his approach spot on, Guardiola’s team selection was surprising with Raheem Sterling brought in on the left, neither regular holding midfielder, Fernandinho or Rodri, picked and Ilkay Gundogan left to protect the backline.

It quickly became apparent the move had left City’s defence



CHELSEA, winner of Champions League

2nd title for the London club, 1st for its coach

FOUNDED IN 1905

OWNER
Roman Abramovich (RUS) since 2003

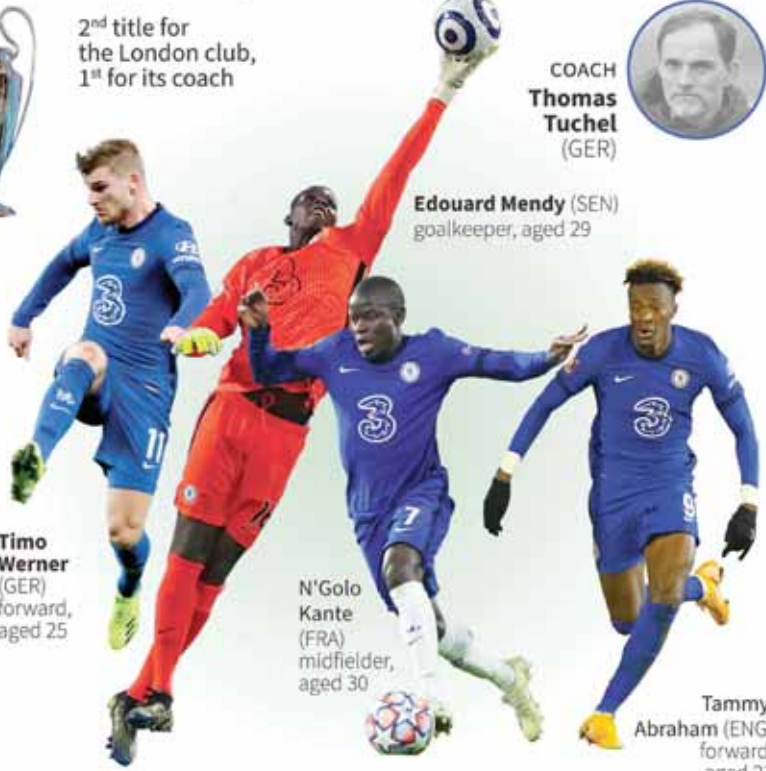
PATH TO FINAL 2020-2021

Final	Manchester City (ENG)
SF	Real Madrid (ESP)
QF	Porto (POR)
Last 16	Atletico Madrid (ESP)

TITLES

- 2 Champions League
- 2 Cup Winners' Cup
- 2 Europa League/UEFA Cup

Source: UEFA AFP Photos



COACH
Thomas Tuchel (GER)

Edouard Mendy (SEN) goalkeeper, aged 29

Timo Werner (GER) forward, aged 25

N'Golo Kante (FRA) midfielder, aged 30

Tammy Abraham (ENG) forward, aged 23

AFP

exposed with Chelsea creating early chances, three of which fell to German Timo Werner who failed to capitalise - miskicking one, shooting softly at Ederson and then finding the side-netting.

Gundogan’s already difficult task got harder when he was booked for a foul on Mason

Mount in the 34th minute.

Chelsea also suffered a setback when their experienced Brazilian centre-back Thiago Silva went down awkwardly after a header and had to limp off six minutes before the break, being replaced by Andreas Christensen.

However, three minutes

later Chelsea struck. Midfielder Mount split the City defence with a superb through ball and Ederson rushed out of his goal but was unable to stop Havertz from skipping past him and slotting into the unguarded net.

City’s night got worse when key midfielder Kevin De Bruyne

had to go off with a concussion injury after an accidental clash with Antonio Rudiger left him on the ground, with Guardiola throwing on Brazilian striker Gabriel Jesus in his place.

Christian Pulisic came on for Chelsea to become the first American to play in a Champions League final and almost the first to score when he was slipped in by Havertz but then drifted his shot just wide of the post.

HOPEFUL EFFORT

City gradually began to get the upper hand but their usual composure was lacking and it was not until deep into stoppage time that they went close with a hopeful effort from Riyad Mahrez that clipped the bar.

The final whistle set off wild celebrations for the Chelsea fans who had flown in for the game, while dejected City supporters headed off for the flights back to Manchester. “Decisions are always to try to win the game,” said Guardiola, when asked to reflect on his team selection. “They’re a really good team, but we competed perfectly against them. In the second half, we deserved to score one goal but we couldn’t do it.” — **Reuters**

OMAN CONCLUDE DUBAI CAMP ON BRIGHT NOTE

RED WARRIORS NOTCH 3-1 VICTORY AGAINST INDONESIA IN FRIENDLY

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 30

The Oman national football team concluded the third overseas camp in Dubai on Sunday on a bright note after two victories in the friendlies that were part of the warm-up camp.

The second victory for 'Red Warriors' was recorded against Indonesia 3-1 on Saturday while Oman beat Thailand 1-0 in the initial preparatory match last Tuesday.

The opening goal of the Sultanate team against Indonesia match was scored by Mohsin al Ghassani in the 40th minute while Khalid al Hajri helped seal a 3-1 victory with a brace in the 77th and 88th minutes.

In the first match, Abdulaziz al Maqbali hit the lone goal for Oman.

In both fixtures, Oman head coach Branko Ivankovic preferred to stick with the same tactical system and players remained the same as in the first friendly match against Thailand.

This hints at Oman's possible starting list for the qualifier matches.

Fayez al Rushaidi was the goalkeeper while Juma al Habsi, Fahmi Rajab, Ali al Busaidy and Abdulaziz al Ghilani were in the defence. Abdullah Fawaz and Harib al Saadi controlled the mid-field. The youngsters Salah al Yahyai and Zahir al Aghbari were assisting the attackers which were represented by Mohsin al Ghassani and Abdulaziz al Maqbali besides Khalid al Hajri. Al Mundher al Alaawi did not take part in both warm-up fixtures as he joined the squad after an injury.

Both friendlies have provided much-needed match practice and confidence to the Omani side ahead of the joint



qualifiers of the 2022 Fifa World Cup and 2023 AFC Asian Cup Championship which will begin on Monday in Doha.

The external camp in Dubai will be followed by a short external camp in Doha prior to the start of the qualifier matches. Coach Ivankovic will target the third appearance of the national team in the final qualifier matches stage after making the mark in 2002 and 2014 qualifying tournaments.

Oman will resume joint qualifier with a top clash against Qatar on June 7 at Al Sadd club's Jassim bin Hamed Stadium in Doha. They will take on Afghanistan on June 11 and will face Bangladesh in the concluding match on June 15 at the same venue in Doha.

The Sultanate are currently positioned second in Group E with 12 points while Asian champions Qatar are topping the group with 13 points from five games. Afghanistan are placed third with four points. India (3 points) and Bangladesh (1 point) are in the third and fourth positions respectively.



Gym owners seek permission to open centres

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, MAY 30

SPORTS FITNESS CENTRES READY TO IMPLEMENT STRICT MEDICAL PROTOCOLS

The fitness guru called on the authorities to grant permission to only those centres which can strictly adhere to the Covid-19 related precautionary measures

The owners of gymnasiums, health and fitness centres find they are going tough in the Covid-19 pandemic period over the suspension of such activities in the Sultanate.

In Oman, several people are occupied with such jobs as fitness instructors and trainers while many others miss their valuable workout sessions.

The Supreme Committee, in charge of dealing with the Covid-19 related measures, had suspended all sports and related activities due to the spread of Covid-19 cases in the country from April 1 till further notice.

With the suspension completing two months, the owners and staff along with the trainees have appealed to the Supreme Committee to grant permission for these health and fitness centres under strict medical protocol.

"The closing of our centres have put us in deep trouble. Now,

since it has reached 60 days after the ban, we appeal to the Supreme Committee to grant permission for us to follow medical protocols. Otherwise, our lives face serious difficulties," Hilal al Abdalli, Oman's international karate referee and an instructor at the Shoto-kar Karate Centre, said.

Many instructors feel these fitness centres keep people healthy and happy.

"The gymnasiums and sports fitness centres promote a healthy lifestyle and it is important these



centres open with medical protocols. It will in fact help people stay fit and healthy in this time of the pandemic," Sensei Farid al Suheibi told *Oman Daily Observer*. "The sports activities help to lower anxiety and improve the mood of the people and increase immune sys-

tem of the body," Farid said.

The fitness guru called on the authorities to grant permission to only those centres which can strictly adhere to the Covid-19 related precautionary measures.

"Now children are spending long hours of online studies. It is

important to provide them with some leisure and fitness activities too. Parents should take care of this aspect as well," the health instructor added.

FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES

Some other instructors like Iqbal al Balushi, who runs a kick-

boxing centre, are facing financial backlogs after closing their centres and generating no incomes.

"We have big amounts of bank cheques to pay along with the monthly rents couples with the electricity, water bills. We cannot also pay our staff employees as there is no revenue from the centre," Iqbal said.

"We are at a crossroads with the pressure from sponsors and other financial commitments to fulfil"

"We appeal to the Supreme Committee to urgently consider our plea and grant permission to those centres ready to implement precautionary measures stipulated by the authorities."

Several other health instructors also promise to carry out the sessions with well-ventilated facilities or open-air classes if required.

The hard-pressed owners of these sports fitness centres however expressed hope for a favourable decision from the Supreme Committee soon after considering their plight.

WINNING START FOR OSAKA

KVITOVA SURVIVES
SCARE, KERBER FALLS
IN FIRST HURDLE



FRENCH OPEN RESULTS

MEN (FIRST ROUND)
Henri Laaksonen (SUI) bt
Yannick Hanfmann (GER)
6-1, 6-3, 4-6, 6-2; Roberto
Bautista Agut (ESP x11) bt
Mario Vilella Martinez (ESP)
6-4, 6-4, 6-2; Fabio Fognini
(ITA x27) bt Gregoire Barrere
(FRA) 6-4, 6-1, 6-4; Enzo
Couacaud (FRA) bt Egor
Gerasimov (BLR) 7-6 (7/3),
6-4, 6-3; Pablo Carreno
Busta (ESP x12) bt Norbert
Gombos (SVK) 6-3, 6-4, 6-3

WOMEN (FIRST ROUND)
Danielle Collins (USA) bt
Wang Xiyu (CHN) 6-2, 4-6,
6-4; Anhelina Kalinina (UKR)
bt Angelique Kerber (GER
x26) 6-2, 6-4; Elena Rybakina
(KAZ x21) bt Elsa Jacquemot
(FRA) 6-4, 6-1; Anastasia
Pavlyuchenkova (RUS x31) bt
Christina McHale (USA) 6-4,
6-0; Ajla Tomljanovic (AUS)
bt Kateryna Kozlova (UKR)
6-2, 6-4; Paula Badosa (ESP
x33) bt Lauren Davis (USA)
6-2, 7-6 (7/3); Danka Kovinic
(MNE) bt Clara Burel
(FRA) 6-3, 7-6 (10/8); Ana
Bogdan (ROM) bt Elisabetta
Cocciaretto (ITA) 6-1, 6-3;
Naomi Osaka (JPN x2) bt
Patricia Maria Tig (ROM)
6-4, 7-6 (7/4)

PARIS: World number two Naomi Osaka let her racquet do the talking at the French Open on Sunday, resolutely maintaining her media boycott but briefly telling a TV interviewer that her clay court game is “a work in progress”.

Osaka opened the first day of action at Roland Garros with a 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) victory over Romanian world number 63 Patricia Maria Tig.

The 23-year-old Japanese star, a four-time Grand Slam title winner, has refused to carry out media obligations at the tournament, claiming news conferences are detrimental to her mental health.

She believes traditional post-match inquests are akin to “kicking people when they’re down”.

On Sunday, Osaka only agreed to take part in a cursory on-court television interview but still faces a fine of up to \$20,000 for skipping mandatory news conferences.

“For me, playing on clay is a work in progress,” said the reigning US and Australian Open champion on a sun-kissed Court Philippe Chatrier.

“Hopefully the more I play, the better I will become. It’s a beautiful court. I’ve only played two matches here, one before the roof and one now so hopefully I’ll keep it going.”

And that was that from a player who has now strung

together 15 successive Grand Slam match wins.

Osaka, who has never got past the third round in Paris, fired 39 winners but committed 35 unforced errors against Tig to set up a second round duel against another Romanian player, Ana Bogdan.

Petra Kvitova, a semifinalist in 2012 and 2020, saved a match point before seeing off Belgian



qualifier Greet Minnen, 6-7 (3/7), 7-6 (7-5), 6-1.

The 11th seeded Czech, a two-time Wimbledon champion, blitzed 43 winners but served up 11 double faults against her 125th-ranked opponent.

Three-time major winner Angelique Kerber, the German 26th seed and twice a quarter-finalist in Paris, fell at the first hurdle, losing to Ukrainian qualifier Anhelina Kalinina 6-2, 6-4.

The win was a 14th successive win for the world number 139 Kalinina across all tournaments.

“I’m looking forward to Wimbledon, it sounds much better for me, so I’m happy that the next Grand Slam is on grass,” said Kerber.

While Osaka refuses to speak, Greek men’s world number five Stefanos Tsitsipas had plenty to offer at his pre-tournament

“**Hopefully the more I play, the better I will become. It’s a beautiful court. I’ve only played two matches here, one before the roof and one now so hopefully I’ll keep it going**

NAOMI OSAKA
Japanese World No 2

media conference, even quoting Britain’s World War II leader Winston Churchill at one stage.

Tsitsipas, who faces home player Jeremy Chardy on Sunday, is widely tipped as a potential champion should 13-time winner Rafael Nadal or world number one Novak Djokovic falter.

The 22-year-old took Djokovic to five sets in the 2020 semi-finals.

He has already captured the Monte Carlo Masters and Lyon titles on clay this season.

He also had a match point to defeat Nadal in the Barcelona final before the Spaniard recovered.

Tsitsipas has the advantage of being in the opposite half of the draw to Nadal, Djokovic and Roger Federer and their combined 58 Slams. Also in action on Sunday is fourth seed Dominic Thiem. — AFP

Osaka fined for media boycott, could face expulsion

PARIS: Japan’s Naomi Osaka could be thrown out of the French Open if she continues to boycott post-match news conferences at the tournament, the board of Grand Slam tennis tournaments said on Sunday.

Osaka, who was fined \$15,000 for skipping the news conference after her first-round victory at Roland Garros, could also face suspension from other Grand Slam tournaments, the board added.

The four-times Grand Slam champion said earlier this week she would not face the media during the French Open, citing mental health reasons.

“We have advised Naomi Osaka that should she continue to ignore her media obligations during the tournament, she would be exposing herself to possible further Code of Conduct infringement consequences,” the board of Grand Slam said in a statement.

“As might be expected, repeat violations attract



tougher sanctions including default from the tournament... and the trigger of a major offence investigation that could lead to more substantial fines and future Grand Slam suspensions.”

The board reminded Osaka that “a core element of the Grand Slam regulations is the responsibility of the players to engage with the media, whatever the result of their match”.

It added that “the mental health of players competing in our tournaments and on the Tours is of the utmost importance to the Grand Slams”. — Reuters

features



Student company launches product that enhances desert agriculture

Using ingredients locally found in Oman, student-led company, Fateel Oman, has produced a product that enhances the quality of agricultural soil by improving its water retention ability and creating a protection barrier against pests. Here's why 'Up Growth' shows promises as an important add-ons to agriculture... **P16**

INSIDE STORIES

HUMAN INTEREST



CICADAS MAKE THEIR OLYMPIC DEBUT IN MINIATURE ART SCENES

Cicadas competing in the Olympics or jamming in a band? How about a line of cicadas waiting in line for vaccinations at CVS?... **Story on Page 15**

ART



USING MODERN TECHNOLOGY AT 3D DRAWING

The art of 3D drawing is a type that differs from regular drawing in terms of size or area used and it appears in three dimensions, not two... **Story on Page 15**

READ



KLARA AND THE SUN
BY KAZUO ISHIGURO

It aspires to enchantment, or to put it another way, re-enchantment, the restoration of magic to a disenchanted world. Ishiguro drapes realism like a thin cloth over a primordial cosmos.

ENTERTAINMENT



'FRIENDS' REUNION REVEALS ROSS AND RACHEL STARS' CRUSH

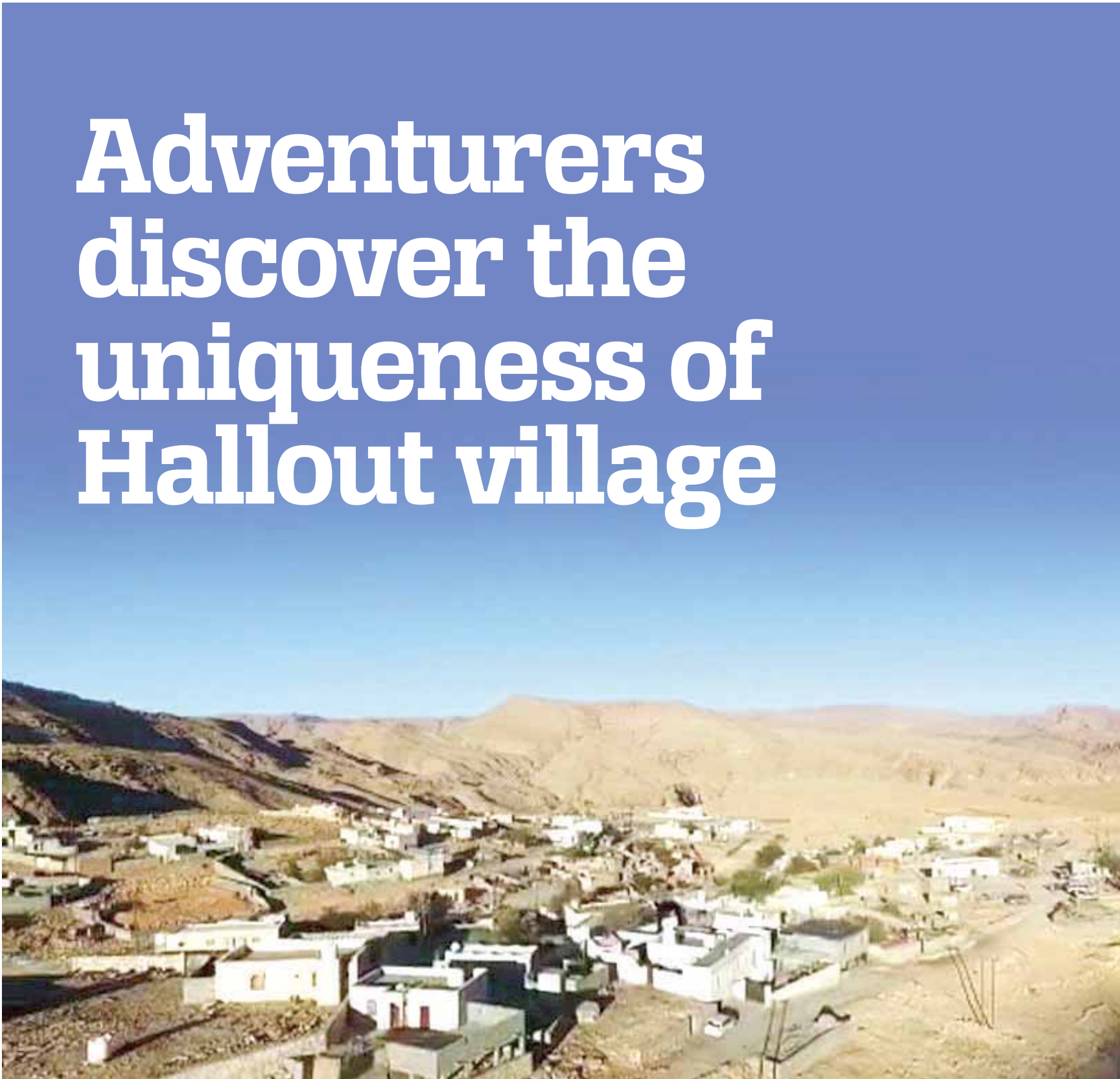
Jennifer Aniston and David Schwimmer almost hooked up on the set of "Friends" – but their characters Rachel and Ross nearly didn't... **Story on Page 15**

CELEBRATE



RARE ANTELOPE POPULATION MORE THAN DOUBLES SINCE 2019: KAZAKHSTAN

The population of the critically endangered Saiga antelope has more than doubled since 2019, Kazakhstan said on Friday, citing the first aerial survey of the animals in two years... **Story on Page 14**



LOCAL TRAVEL

Hasinah Reserve: Picturesque haven to tourists



NATURE RESERVES are a haven for a healthy life where fresh air and spectacular scenery meet and create harmony and give comfort to the eye and heart of the viewer.

The nature reserve of Hasinah in the Wilayat of Al Kamil W'al Wafi is about five kilometres from the centre of the wilayat.



Sand dunes form soft golden arches that embrace the Ghaf trees scattered in the place. This creates a scenery frequently visited by tourists and sand lovers from inside and outside the wilayat.

CONSERVATION

Rare antelope population more than doubles since 2019: Kazakhstan



THE POPULATION of the critically endangered Saiga antelope has more than doubled since 2019, Kazakhstan said on Friday, citing the first aerial survey of the animals in two years.

News that the Central Asian country's Saiga population has risen from 334,000 to 842,000 will hearten conservationists, who warned that the species was on the brink of extinction following a massive die-off in 2015.

In a statement, Kazakhstan's ecology ministry called the population boom "an indicator of the effectiveness of measures to conserve saiga populations and counteract poaching".

Kazakhstan's vast steppe is home to the majority of the global Saiga antelope population with Russia's Kalmykia region and Mongolia hosting much smaller numbers.

In 2015, around 200,000 of the antelopes – well over half the total global population at the time – were wiped out by what scientists later determined was a nasal bacterium that spread in unusually warm and humid conditions.

The 2019 aerial survey confirmed that the Saiga was continuing to rebound from the cataclysm but there was no survey in 2020 as Kazakhstan wrestled with the outbreak of the coronavirus.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), whose "Red List" is the scientific reference for threatened wildlife, lists the Saiga as among five critically endangered antelope species.

Poaching is a persistent threat to the Saiga, known for its distinctive bulbous nose, fuelled by demand for horn in traditional Chinese medicine.

Kazakhstan's leaders pledged to crack down on poaching after two state rangers were killed by poachers in 2019. Earlier this month the ecological ministry said that around 350 female saiga antelopes had been killed by lightning. The discovery came during the Saiga calving season. — **AFP**

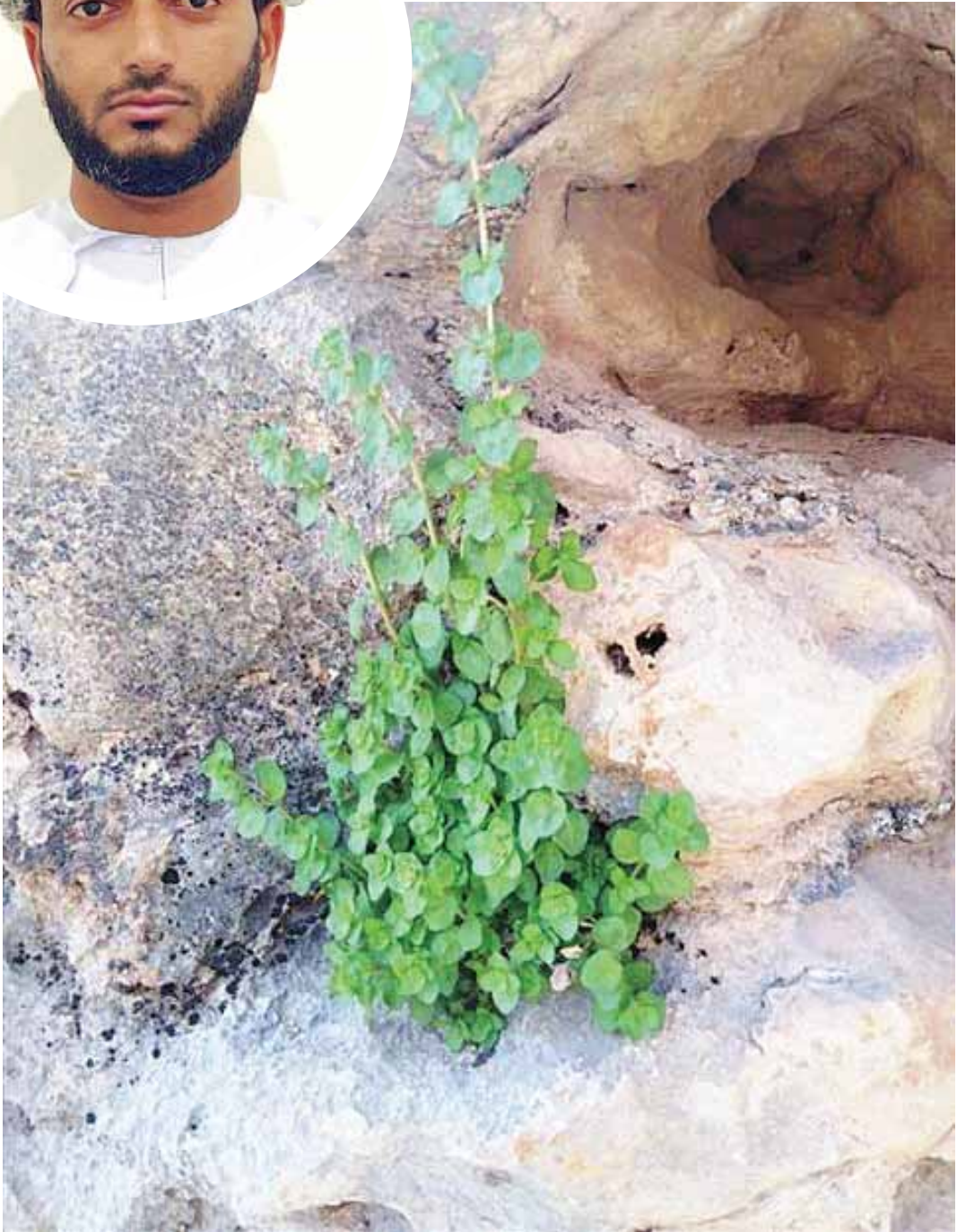


THE WILAYAT of Sur holds many natural wonders, various tourist sites and a stunning mountain range around many residential villages. Each village is distinguished from the others by its location and natural components. Among these villages is the village of Hallout, which is located between the historical city of Qalhat and Tiwi. It is the highest mountainous village in Eastern Al Hajar mountains and the third highest peak in the Sultanate, as it is located at an altitude of more than 2000 metres above sea level, and it is about 50 km from the city of Sur.

Khamis al Muqaimi — a resident of the village said: It is possible to reach the village of Hallout from the city of Qalhat and it is the most accesible road now. The 35 km road requires using four-wheel drive cars as the road is not paved, rocky and passes through rugged mountain heights. The village is characterised by cold weather on summer days and, in winter, the temperature goes below zero. This distinction makes adventurers and tourists seek to discover the village and its tourist attractions.

Al Muqaimi explained that the inhabitants of the village of Hallout depend on raising and grazing cattle and sheep. It is their main source of livelihood. Many people choose to buy sheep and cattle from this area due to their quality. They also use sheepskins for many purposes as the main material of many industries.

Al Muqaimi added that there are also many trees in the village, including the thyme tree for which the village is famous, and it is one of the best types of thyme and is a source of livelihood for some people, in addition to a fig tree and the Sideroxylon tree.





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HUMAN INTEREST



Cicadas make their Olympic debut in miniature art scenes

CICADAS COMPETING in the Olympics or jamming in a band? How about a line of cicadas waiting in line for vaccinations at CVS?

The appearance of the insects known as Brood X, or Brood 10, along the eastern United States after a 17-year hiatus has inspired Virginia professional portrait photographer Oxana Ware to create small-scale art installations, placing the ubiquitous bugs in novel and unexpected settings.



"I always teach my kids to just be playful and respectful of nature, so that's how the idea was born," said the 39-year-old, who has three young children. "We started with my son's fire truck and that was just a huge hit."

Ware collects the cicadas in her yard and places them in doll house-sized settings she has made to showcase them. Predictably, the bugs are far from cooperative and it usually takes some time before she can photograph an insect in a simulated barbell press.

What started as a light-hearted way to memorialise the cicadas has helped children become unafraid of the cicadas, Ware says.

"I've got a lot of thanks," she said. "A lot of kids that were very weary of these things are now not scared of them anymore, and the 'clothing line' cicada putting on a dress is the reason for that. Kids really enjoyed that."

Ware excels at spinning stories about the cicadas in her pictures.

"I've been missing live music so much so I decided to do a cicada rock band," she said, setting up the scene with miniature musical instruments. "This guy is trying to play the guitar ... The bass has been a hard position to fill."

Having emigrated to the States from Tula, Russia, 20 years ago, Ware even brings her home country into her cicada portrait art with a picture of one crawling up the facade of a St. Basil's Cathedral.

"I always see the best in people. I see the best in cicadas," she said. "I try to show people the best in any situation and I like people to be less stressed in life and have more fun." — **Reuters**

ART

Using modern technology at 3D drawing



THE ART OF 3D drawing is a type that differs from regular drawing in terms of size or area used and it appears in three dimensions, not two.

Ameera al Badi, a student at Oman College of Health Sciences, says that she focused on that kind of drawing when she was in grade 11. Supported by her father, teacher and the school, this helped her in

"I prefer drawing in the early morning or late night," Ameera said.

She believes that artists express their emotions through their work. She worked hard during the quarantine period to sharpen her skills and was using the opportunity to experiment with different types and methods of painting, including painting landscapes.

She explained that she uses differ-



highlighting and developing her talent further.

She added that she is currently drawing many paintings in different styles and shapes daily to develop her skill and talent, explaining that the art of three-dimensional drawing relies heavily on modern three-dimensional techniques and programmes. She explained that one can do more allowing the work to come to life.



ent types, methods and tools from time to time. For example, in water-colour or acrylic painting, different types of brushes, canvas, water-colour or acrylic are used, in addition to the varnish material that is placed on the board to protect it from dust or any external factors. Al Badi participated in painting a portrait for the Late Sultan Qaboos in the 50th National Day and she held a course for students in Buraimi Governorate.

ENTERTAINMENT

'Friends' reunion reveals Ross and Rachel stars' crush



LOS ANGELES: Jennifer Aniston and David Schwimmer almost hooked up on the set of "Friends" — but their characters Rachel and Ross nearly didn't.

Those were among the revelations die-hard "Friends" fans were treated to Thursday as a one-off reunion special of the beloved 1990s sitcom streamed on the HBO Max platform.

Asked by host James Corden if any of the six stars had real-life chemistry, both Aniston and Schwimmer confessed to "crushing hard on each other" early in the smash hit show's run.

"I remember saying, one time, to David, 'It's going to be such a bummer if the first time you and I actually kiss is going to be on national television,'" recalled Aniston.

"Sure enough, first time we kissed was in that coffee shop," she said, referring to the New York-based show's famous "Central Perk" set.

"So we just channelled all of our adoration and love for each other into Ross and Rachel."

The two characters' on-off relationship was a cornerstone of "Friends" throughout its 10-year, 236-episode run — which ended with a romantic reconciliation.

Co-creator David Crane said in an interview that the writers had asked themselves if the pair really should end up together.

"We discussed perhaps sort of ambivalent endings," he said.

"And we went 'No, this is 'Friends,' people have been waiting 10 years to see this couple get together, we've got to give them what they want.'"

Elsewhere in the reunion episode, Matthew Perry surprised his co-stars by admitting to having suffered severe anxiety "every night" during filming.

The creators said Monica and Chandler's romance was intended to be a one-night stand before positive audience reactions changed their minds, and that Matt LeBlanc nearly lost out on the role of Joey to the actor who would play his fake twin in a later episode.

And a parade of celebrity fans showed up.

Cara Delevingne, Cindy Crawford and Justin Bieber modelled famous comedy outfits from the show on a catwalk, while Lady Gaga sang a duet of "Smelly Cat" with Lisa Kudrow.

Reviews were lukewarm, with Deadline calling the special "more filler than killer, to put it kindly," but Variety praised "a glossy, poignant, careful trip down memory lane."

Still, it was all too much for some die-hard fans.

"I am not crying... You are crying!" tweeted one, with a clip from the reunion of Aniston drying her eyes. — **AFP**



Student company launches product that enhances desert agriculture

Student companies that are a product of higher education institutions all over the country had successfully transitioned into full-pledged entrepreneurs creating products that are not only socially relevant but also of great quality that can compete not only locally but in international markets as well.

Fateel Oman, a student company that was hatched at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Suhar has pioneered tapping into locally made raw materials that can help make soil healthy so it can be successfully utilised in agricultural production.

Naming the product 'Up growth, Imad al Rujaibi, CEO of "Fateel Oman", said that they

already patented the product and they are looking forward to mass marketing it in Oman.

"Our company mission is to exploit natural resources to produce environmentally friendly products and help improve soil quality," Al Rujaibi said.

Zubaida al Raisi, human resources manager at Fateel Oman, describes the product as speeding up the growth process of plants compared to normal speed.

"The product allows retention of water by 20 to 40 per cent. It helps soften the air temperature around plants," she added.

Zubaida said that the product went through in-depth experimentation and that they've worked in the laboratories of the Ministry of

Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

She added that the product goes through many stages until the desired form is achieved. Using palm kernels at the beginning of the process, she explained that these kernels go through a cleaning process before it is roasted then grounded. Once the desired consistency is achieved, it is then mixed with the rest of the materials before it is packed in special bags.

Al Rujaibi said that the company focuses on improving the quality of the product to meet the specifications and standards, achieve the market need, and introduce new products according to the requirements of consumers.

"Up growth" is only the first product by Fateel Oman. Al Rujaibi said he is proud that it is a locally made agricultural medium with raw materials sourced from the Omani environment.

He also said that as per their research, the product also prevents insects and pests from attacking plants and protects the soil from harmful fungi as well as increasing water retention in soil. This is

evidence of the product's benefit as it proves water rationalisation by not having to water the plant daily.

Al Rujaibi said they are planning to expand the product offerings. As of now, they are busy working with different companies and had even dealt with flower shops providing them with ready-made seedlings that contain the product.

"We've reached out to different plant nurseries and provided them with an educational box so children will also be encouraged to try agriculture. The box contains agricultural tools with an easy-to-implement instruction booklet," he said.

Fateel Oman also seeks to bring flowers, which are difficult to cultivate in Oman, from other countries. They hope

that through further experimentation, they will be able to encourage the growth of these imported plants by using the product.

Zubaida said that as a young company, they have a long way to go to push their product to the general public. Part of their strategy is to focus on marketing and they've already planned on producing short films to share it with the media and in full, educate many people about the benefits of their products.

Fateel Oman was established at the beginning of 2002 and was an entry to 'Injaz Oman,' a competition that pits innovative products and student company against each other and with an overall goal of creating entrepreneurs from participating students.



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Al Anwar weighs move to acquire Al Hael Ceramics



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 30

Al Anwar Investments SAOG has announced that it has signed a non-bind Memorandum of Understanding with Al Maha Ceramics SAOG and the shareholders of Al Hael Ceramics Co LLC to explore the possibility of acquiring the majority of the existing shares of Al Hael.

Oman-based Al Hael operates a state-of-the-art ceramics plant equipped with world-class Italian production lines and technologies. The company has a capacity to produce 15 million sq metres of world-class, premium quality porcelain and ceramic tiles in large sizes.

“The transaction contemplated by the MoU is conditional, inter alia, on the completion of Al Anwar and Al Maha of a satisfactory financial and legal due diligence investigation and evaluation of Al Hael, the negotiation and executive of definitive transaction documents with Al Hael’s shareholders (including a share purchase agreement and shareholders agreement) and receipt of all necessary corporate approvals, regulatory approvals and third party consents,” said Khalid Ansari, CEO of Al Anwar Investments, in a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA).

Unprecedented 1.9% decline in Oman’s power demand last year

KEY TREND: Government subsidy fell to RO 614.98m in 2020, down from RO 624.69m in 2019

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Electricity consumption dipped a modest, but unprecedented, 1.9 per cent to 33,156 gigawatt-hours (GWh) in 2020, reversing for the first time since the sector was restructured in 2005 a year-on-year trend in power demand growth averaging around 4-6 per cent annually.

The slump, as with most other aspects of national economic and social life over the past year, was attributed to widespread disruption unleashed by the economic downturn compounded by the coronavirus pandemic.

According to figures released by Nama Group, the holding company of government-owned power assets and related service providers, subsidy disbursed by the government to the sector also declined slightly to RO 614.98 million in 2020, down from RO 624.69 million a year earlier.

Subsidy typically accounts for roughly half of the economic cost of power generation, distribution and supply to Oman’s estimated 1.3 million customers.

Less than one per cent of this total — comprising large government, industrial and commercial customers with a consumption of over 150 megawatt-hours per annum — pay



The slump, as with most other aspects of national economic and social life over the past year, was attributed to widespread disruption unleashed by the economic downturn compounded by the coronavirus pandemic.

subsidy-free cost reflective tariffs. Besides electricity generation, transmission, distribution and supply costs, the overall economic cost of supplying power also includes depreciation cost, operation and maintenance costs, interest on borrowings, general and administrative expenses, and tax.

Significantly, the subsidy per unit of electricity supplied by Nama Group subsidiaries last year also grew moderately to RO 18.550 per unit last year, up from

RO 18.480 in 2019.

However, starting from 2021, the overall subsidy component is expected to gradually decline in line with a phased strategy by the government to eliminate subsidy altogether over the next five years.

Economically vulnerable residential customers however will be eligible for some assistance in lieu when the subsidy is fully withdrawn.

In another highlight of 2020, Nama Group reported a 2.82

per cent improvement in the utilisation of natural gas towards electricity generation.

The improved efficiency in fuel utilisation was attributed to the operationalisation of two newly developed Independent Power Projects Sohar-3 and Ibri-1 during the previous year.

However, electricity losses recorded a slight spike to 9.80 per cent in 2020, up from 9.67 per cent in 2019.

Nama Group, comprising as many as 12 subsidiaries, posted a 4.77 per cent increase in Group revenue, which climbed to RO 1.31 billion in 2020. Profit After Tax rose 12.29 per cent to RO 67.82 million in 2020. The Group’s total assets reached RO 6.75 billion at the end of last year.

Britain to build new flagship to promote trade

LONDON: Britain is to build a new flagship to promote its business and trade interests around the world, the government said, in a move it said would also boost the ailing shipbuilding industry.

Britain said the ship, once built, would host high level trade negotiations and trade shows, and the cost of the project would be confirmed once manufacturing contracts were tendered.

“This new national flagship will be the first vessel of its kind in the world, reflecting the UK’s burgeoning status as a great, independent maritime trading nation,” Prime Minister Boris Johnson said.

The government said it would be the first national flagship since HMY (Her Majesty’s Yacht) Britannia was decommissioned in 1997.

A flagship to promote global trade has long been advocated by proponents of Brexit, who highlight the possibilities for new free trade agreements now Britain has left the EU. The government said the name of the ship would be announced in due course. The *Sunday Telegraph* reported this month it would be named after Queen Elizabeth’s late husband Prince Philip. — Reuters

Roadmap to support digital transformation of Oman

ICT SHOWCASE: Six-day Comex 2021 forum opens

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 30

Comex 2021, the Sultanate’s annual ‘Communications and Informational Technology Exhibition’, was formally launched on Sunday by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

The virtual forum, focusing on the theme, “Digital Transformation and Accelerated Adoption of the Future of Artificial Intelligence”, has more than 10 government institutions, in addition to around 80 private sector companies in attendance. It showcases the latest trends and developments in the ICT arena, as well as highlights initiatives

by government entities to drive Oman’s digital transformation.

In addition to the annual exhibition, the six-day long forum will also recognise leading players in the field of ICT. Furthermore, as many as 16 panel discussions will focus on the most important digital development in health, tourism, banking, finance, mining and education. Several agreements are due to be signed on the sidelines as well.

In opening remarks, the Chief Guest said Comex 2021 will showcase an array of government services and demonstrate how they are revolutionising the delivery of government services. He stressed the importance of digitalisation to the Vision 2040 strategy. This year’s forum will also highlight the growing role of Artificial Intelligence and related technologies in digital transformation.

The ministry, said Al Maawali,



has been keen to play a pivotal role in Oman’s Vision 2040 by building a thriving digital economy, through the implementation of a number of national projects and initiatives, including: digital transformation initiatives in government and economic sectors, artificial intelligence initiatives, stimulating startups, small, medium and large, and creating income-generating opportunities as well as supporting technical

innovation and attracting technical investments from within and outside Oman.

The coronavirus pandemic, he noted, has spurred governments and private sector organisations to turn to digital technology to overcome the challenges posed by the virus. The transformation is now evident in various fields of education, commercial, health, industrial and other fields, he said.

He stressed that the ministry

was ready to provide all forms of technical and technological support to government and private institutions with the aim of developing their electronic systems to be able to provide a higher quality of services to students and other sections of the community.

On the sidelines of the opening, participants celebrated World Telecommunications and Information Society Day, where a speech was presented by the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union.

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology in cooperation with all government institutions has prepared a framework and an integrated national roadmap for the digital transformation of the government.

The blueprint takes into account the trends and future

ambitions of Oman to complete the digitisation of government services and benefit from the use of emerging technologies in the empowerment and development of the working environment in the public sector, as well as working with various entities to determine the strategic direction of a thriving digital economy in keeping with Oman’s Vision 2040 strategies.

In the 2020 UN E-Government Survey, Oman was ranked 24th internationally and second in the Gulf and Arab in the electronic services development index, and salary.

The 50th international e-government development index, and in the Network Readiness Report, Oman ranked 44th out of 134 countries in 2020, and in the International Cybersecurity Readiness Index, Oman ranked 16th in the world out of 175 countries in 2020.

(With inputs from ONA)

New stage of maturity for Decentralised Finance

When Bitcoin's white paper was released by the pseudonymous Satoshi Nakamoto more than 12 years ago (yes, it has been that long ago!) an important cornerstone brick was laid. That was something that is now known as DeFi: Decentralised Finance.

In the mind of Bitcoin's founder, the idea was to provide everyone in the world with access to a currency independent from centralised authorities such as banks and other financial institutions.

Through a complex cryptographic system based on SHA 256, each crypto holder would have been able to hold one or more digital wallets, where

the cryptocurrencies held were "truly owned" by the holder, with no third party custody or intermediation.

Obviously that came with pros and cons. One being that if the cryptography key needed to access the wallet is lost, all funds are lost. Something that would never happen with a bank.

Then, roughly 5 years later, Vitalik Buterin launched Ethereum, a step up in the game, as it did not only come with a cryptocurrency, but an entire ecosystem — based on smart contracts — where anyone could have created a new cryptocurrency, but also additional programs known as Dapps (short for decentralised apps).

Many other cryptocurrencies were launched in the years to



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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MANY OTHER CRYPTO-CURRENCIES WERE LAUNCHED IN THE YEARS TO COME. IT BECAME SO EASY TO LAUNCH A CRYPTOCURRENCY, THAT THERE WERE LITERALLY TENS OF THOUSANDS IN EXISTENCE

come. It became so easy to launch a cryptocurrency, that there were literally tens of thousands in existence.

Many became worthless in a short period of time. With so much diversification in the offering, the demand of investors was distributed oddly on a handful of currency growing exponentially, while others dropped to near-zero value.

The excitement about blockchain seems to follow a 2 to 3 years cycles, but every time it seems to grow significantly, both in value as well as in number of milestone projects launched to pave the road for the next wave.

In the most recent wave, besides the mere face value of a cryptocurrency, what happened in the background represented a true financial revolution:

The inception of DeFi, the decentralised finance.

While previously large players stepped in as centralised crypto exchange — thus mimicking the traditional financial ecosystem — in the past couple of year there has been a solid move towards truly decentralised exchanges: DEX. Such exchanges offer "swap" systems where cryptocurrencies can be paired and used as collateral for other stable coins which, being pegged to real word assets or fiat currency, maintain a constant value.

Cryptocurrencies are known for being really unstable. This is system has drastically reduced the risk of extreme fluctuation in value and opened potential for more services offered on blockchain.

2020 was the year during

which those who believed in a parallel financial ecosystem, entirely based on blockchain, rejoiced the most. In fact, crypto-lending and crypto-insurance became a reality.

It was a major step towards a vision of a new DeFi ecosystem, where the exchange of value does not need to go through centralised financial institutions. But do banks need to fear such progress towards DeFi? Not for now, in my humble opinion. Technology is still hard to use and there are not enough players in the market.

I could imagine DeFi being much more prominent in 5 years from now, but for the time being it is just an interesting technology with a large potential. *[The columnist is a member of the International Press Association]*

Oman's first N95 mask achieves global recognition

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MAY 30

The first locally produced surgical masks has achieved a rare recognition.

The Trusta Surgical Mask has achieved now Virus Filtration Efficiency (VFE) rating of 97 per cent. This is in addition to the Particles Filtration Efficiency (PFE) 98 per cent and Bacteria Filtration Efficiency (BFE) 99 per cent.

The coveted recognition was awarded by Intertek Testing Services and Quality Assurance, UK, the total Quality Assurance provider to industries worldwide after a labyrinth process of examinations. The tests were done at its Guangzhou office.

Bacterial Filtration Efficiency (BFE) test determines the



filtration efficiency by comparing the bacterial control counts to test article effluent counts whereas although the Viral Filtration Efficiency (VFE) test follows the same procedure as BFE, the challenge organism used is different and the bacteriophage phiX174.

Al Farsi National Enterprises LLC, the leading Omani manufacturer and supplier of medical equipment to government and private hospitals based in Al Misfah Industrial Area has been approved to produce masks and launched Oman's first tie-type mask and N95 respirator masks in 2020 when the world needed it the most.

"We are an Omani company supplying infection prevention and control supplies for hospitals for over 10 years. The initial scarcity of PPE items was the driving force behind such a 100 per cent Omani manufacturing facility to make surgical masks and healthcare respirators and more than 25 Omanis can look forward to work with us once we are fully operational", Issam al Farsi, Chairman of Al Farsi

National Enterprises told the *Observer*.

Made in Oman by Omanis for Omanis and others, Trusta surgical masks meet high standards of filtration BFE (99 per cent Bacterial Filtration Efficiency) meltblown filter media for best filtration rating and breathability.

"We are happy to have been recognised as this is an ambitious Omani project that aimed to transform the country from an importer to an exporter of surgical masks and N95 respirators", Saju George, Managing Director.

This mask manufacturing unit, a first in the country, plans to employ more than 100 Omani staff members as the production and export increase depending upon the demand, according to Al Farsi.

Bank Nizwa supports online education in Nizwa and Manah

MUSCAT: As part of its social responsibilities and support towards the education sector, Oman's leading and most trusted Islamic bank, Bank Nizwa has pledged to present laptops to students in the wilayats of Nizwa and Manah. Joining hands with the Nizwa and Manah charitable organisations, the bank endeavours to provide students from low-income families, who are facing the challenge of access to online education due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Being a standalone Islamic bank, Bank Nizwa is known for its ethical, Sharia compliant banking practices. The bank aspires to play a significant role in driving socio-economic development, not just through



responsible banking practices, but also by giving back to the society that it operates in. Accordingly, Bank Nizwa undertakes several initiatives that create long-lasting benefits for the national economy and society.

Khalid al Kayed, CEO, Bank Nizwa, said "It is a well-known fact that the quality of education plays an instrumental role in shaping a brighter future for any nation."

Wipro appoints BPG Dubai for brand campaigns



MUSCAT: Wipro Yardley FZE, the Middle East arm of the consumer products business, a significant player in personal care and home care consumer product segments in the region, has appointed BPG Dubai to lead media planning and buying for its Middle East brand campaigns. Wipro products have a large consumer base across Arab and Asian communities in the region, and navigating this complex space has always been a challenge and an opportunity for growth. The company also has ambitious expansion plans that required an agile, innovative and disruptive partner such as BPG.

Arun Giridhar, Vice-President — MENA Wipro Yardley FZE, said: "We have a very steep growth agenda in the region with our uniquely positioned brands in categories across body care, home and hygiene segments. With rapidly changing consumer trends in a prolonged disruptive phase, we felt the strong need to bring in a fresh and disruptive perspective."

GAC Motor GS4: A 4WD exclusively built for Oman

MUSCAT: G A C Motor's G S 4 Intelligent — 4WD (i-4WD) is powerful, sturdy and exciting in every way.

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gift of RO 2065, comprehensive 1 year insurance (Oman Coverage) and '3M' Window Tint (For 21 YM Models). (Conditions apply. For more details, please visit any GAC Motor showroom).

Bank Muscat customers celebrate Al Mazyona Salary Transfer draws for April

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat recently held its Al Mazyona salary transfer draws for the month of April. The 20 lucky winners will receive RO 500 per month for a whole year.

As the largest financial institution in the country, the bank plays an important role in promoting the concept of savings amongst the bank's customers and the general public, in line with the national goals of promoting financial sustainability, financial awareness and sound personal finance management. It is this pioneering role that has led to



Bank Muscat debuting new categories and features in its long running Al Mazyona savings scheme on a continuous basis.

Salary transfer draws are an important category within the Al Mazyona scheme. All customers who transfer their salaries to Al Mazyona accounts

are automatically entered into the salary transfer draws. Al Mazyona rewards 10 winners every month from among customers having salaries ranging between RO 500 and RO 999. These winners are paid a monthly salary prize of RO 500 each for a whole year as a reward for choosing Al Mazyona salary accounts.

Similarly, 10 winners with salaries of RO 1,000 or more are chosen from amongst the bank's Al Jawhar Privilege banking customers. These winners will also receive RO 500 every month for a whole year.

MEC announces admissions for Fall 2021 semester

MUSCAT: Middle East College (MEC) announces the opening of admissions for the Fall 2021 semester to its academic programmes in Engineering, Science, Technology, Management and Business, Logistics Management, Archives and Records Management.

The admission process can be completed fully online for the Fall semester which will commence at the beginning of October this year. The college is accredited by the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance for Education



and has achieved high accreditation ratings in Teaching Quality and Research

Performance. The undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are offered in academic partnership with Coventry University in the United Kingdom and Breda University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands.

The college is well-known for its vibrant campus life, offering over 350 extracurricular and co-curricular programmes throughout the year.

The college organises research conferences, symposiums and many other academic events to support student learning

and offers students the best support services to enhance their educational journey.

Faculty members and students are encouraged to use a wide range of innovative and technology-supported teaching and learning practices.

MEC has been keen to provide students with an enriching and exciting learning environment during the Covid-19 pandemic with its e-learning mode, whereby teaching and learning are effectively undertaken remotely through interactive digital platforms.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcement of Capital Reduction
In accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **RIAM SHINE TRADING**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No **1050346**, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from Omani Rials **100,000.000** to **20,000.000**. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

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Carmakers in India’s automobile hub allowed to operate



Workers assemble cars at a plant of Ford India in Chengalpattu near Chennai. – Reuters

NEW DELHI: Carmakers in the Indian automobile hub of Chennai will be allowed to keep operating, the state government said on Saturday, amid protests by workers who fear catching Covid-19 in one of the country’s hardest-hit states.

Tamil Nadu’s government extended a near-total lockdown as coronavirus infections and deaths rise in the southern state, where average cases are running at more than 30,000 a day, official figures

show.

But a government order issued on Saturday said so-called continuous process industries, which include auto factories, would be allowed to function in accordance with measures such as social distancing to stem the virus’s spread.

It also urged vehicle manufacturers to initiate immediate action to vaccinate all their employees within a month.

Tamil Nadu authorities have ramped up

vaccination in recent days, and companies including carmakers have organised vaccination drives.

Hundreds of workers in and around Chennai — often dubbed India’s Detroit — have fallen ill with Covid-19 and dozens have died, labour unions say.

Manufacturing plants run by Ford Motor Co and Hyundai Motor Co near Chennai were shut this week after workers protested over unsafe working conditions. — Reuters

Court delays hearing in Suez container ship compensation case

CAIRO: An Egyptian court on Saturday postponed a hearing in a compensation case filed by the Suez Canal authority against the owners of a container ship that blocked the canal for six days in March, giving the sides more time to negotiate, legal sources said.

The Ever Given, one of the world’s largest container ships, became jammed across the canal in high winds on March 23, halting traffic in both directions and disrupting global trade.

The Suez Canal Authority (SCA) initially demanded \$916 million in compensation from the Ever Given’s Japanese owner Shoei Kisen for disruption caused by the blockage.

But earlier this week, the SCA said it would be willing to accept \$550 million, including a \$200 million deposit paid to secure the ship’s release and the remaining amount payable through letters of credit.

SCA Chairman Osama Rabie has said Shoei Kisen offered to pay \$150 million.

A lawyer representing the ship’s owner said the two sides had asked for Saturday’s hearing to be postponed to allow for further negotiations.

— Reuters

Money is cheap, let’s spend it — White House \$6tn budget message

WASHINGTON: The White House sent Congress a \$6 trillion budget plan that would ramp up spending on infrastructure, education and combating climate change, arguing it makes good fiscal sense to invest now, when the cost of borrowing is cheap, and reduce deficits later.

The first comprehensive budget offered by Democratic President Joe Biden faces strong opposition from Republican lawmakers, who want to tamp down US government spending and reject his plans to hike taxes on the rich and big corporations.

Biden’s plan for fiscal year 2022 calls for \$6.01 trillion in spending and \$4.17 trillion in revenues, a 36.6 per cent increase from 2019 outlays, before the coronavirus pandemic bumped up spending. It projects a \$1.84 trillion deficit, a sharp decrease from the past two years because of the Covid-19 pandemic, but up from 2019’s \$984 billion.

The blueprint builds on a partial “skinny budget” the White House released last month that mapped out \$1.5 trillion in discretionary spending, read more

The plan drew praise from Democrats and criticism from Republicans and some



US President Joe Biden delivers remarks at the White House in Washington, in this file photo. – Reuters

progressive groups, who said it should have scaled back military spending.

Senate Budget Committee Chairman Bernie Sanders called Biden’s budget “the most significant agenda for working families in the modern history of our country,” and said it would create millions of good-paying

jobs, while reducing poverty.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell heaped scorn on the plan, and warned Democrats to “move beyond the socialist daydream and the go-it-alone partisanship.”

“President Biden’s proposal would drown American families in debt, deficits, and inflation,”

McConnell said in a tweet.

White House officials said Biden’s \$4 trillion plans to address historic US inequality, climate change and provide four more years of free public education would be completely paid for in 15 years, with tax increases starting to chip away at deficits after 2030. — Reuters

Eleven US airlines refunded \$12.8 billion to travelers in 2020



Aeroplanes are seen at LAX airport in Los Angeles, California. – AFP

WASHINGTON: Eleven US airlines issued \$12.84 billion in cash refunds to customers in 2020 as the coronavirus pandemic upended the travel industry, the head of industry trade group Airlines for America (A4A) said in a letter to lawmakers.

Airlines have faced a backlash from passengers and some lawmakers over their handling of redemptions for flights cancelled during the pandemic.

Earlier this month, Senators Edward Markey and Richard Blumenthal called on carriers to issue cash refunds whether flights were cancelled by the airline or traveller.

Nicholas Calio, A4A chief executive, acknowledged that many carriers encouraged customers to accept vouchers for future travel instead of cash, but said it was not done with “ill intent” but rather to prevent potential bankruptcy declarations.

“The facts clearly show that US airlines have maintained a steadfast commitment to the travelling public over the course of the pandemic and routinely issued refunds in accordance with all federal laws and regulations,” Calio said.

Calio said the cash refunds, which accounted for about 20 per cent of airline revenues last year, came on top of billions of dollars of travel credits that are now being used “at a rapid clip” to book fresh flights.

— Reuters

Italy approves reform decree to unlock EU Recovery funds



People are seen in Duomo square in Milan, Italy. – Reuters

ROME: The Italian government approved a decree setting out how it will oversee investments funded by the European Union and accelerating procedures for public works, a key step in unlocking the EU funds.

The reforms were promised to the European Commission to get a green light for Rome’s Recovery Plan and obtain the first tranche by August of the 205 billion euros (\$250 billion) in grants and cheap loans it is due to receive from Brussels.

The decree, which was the subject of tense negotiations

with trade unions, will now be sent to the Commission for approval.

Italy, which presented its Recovery Plan last month, is the biggest beneficiary of the 750 billion euro kitty set up to help the bloc’s 27 countries recover from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Governance of the plan will be run by Prime Minister Mario Draghi, key ministers and cabinet undersecretaries, while the Treasury is responsible for drawing attention to any hitches in the progress of investments.

— Reuters

UK’s Sunak says deal to be done on tax at G7, but tech must pay fair share

LONDON: British finance minister Rishi Sunak (pictured) said there was a deal to be done with the United States on tax but big tech firms would have to pay their fair share in return for British backing for Washington’s corporation tax proposals.

The United States has proposed a global minimum corporation tax rate of 15 per cent, well below G7 levels, but above those in some countries such as Ireland. But Britain remains concerned the plans do not go far enough on taxation of tech giants such as Amazon, Google and Facebook.

“We need them to understand why fair taxation of tech companies is important to us. There’s a deal to be had, so I’m urging the US — and all of the G7 — to come to the table next week and get it done,” Sunak told the Mail on Sunday newspaper ahead of a meeting of G7 finance ministers on June 4-5.

“Negotiations are going well ...



But it has to be the right deal for Britain and that’s what this week’s negotiations will be about.”

Sunak said that firms like Facebook themselves also wanted resolution on the issue that would give them certainty and stability.

He also said that he wanted to “level the playing field for British high streets”, with Britain looking at a separate online sales tax.

“Fundamentally, the global tax system isn’t working ... Large multinational companies, particularly digital companies, are able by the nature of their businesses not to pay the right tax in the right places. And that’s not fair” he said. — Reuters

British retail faces ‘tsunami of closures’ without rent help

LONDON: Britain’s retail sector will endure a “tsunami of closures” if the government does not extend a moratorium on aggressive debt enforcement, industry lobby group the British Retail Consortium (BRC), said on Sunday.

Citing survey data it said two-thirds of British retailers have been told by landlords they will be subject to legal measures to recover unpaid rent from July 1 when the moratorium ends.

Many UK retailers deemed “non-essential” had to close their stores during multiple Covid-19 lockdowns over the last 15 months, accruing total rent debt of 2.9 billion pounds

(\$4.1 billion), the BRC said.

The pandemic has hammered the sector and industry data shows one in seven shops already lie empty.

The BRC’s survey found 80 per cent of tenants said some landlords have given them less than a year to pay back rent arrears.

Without action, the end of the moratorium could see thousands of shops close, said BRC chief executive Helen Dickinson.

She called on the UK government to allow the rent arrears built up during the pandemic to be ringfenced and the moratorium on repayment of these debts to be extended to the end of the year. — Reuters