



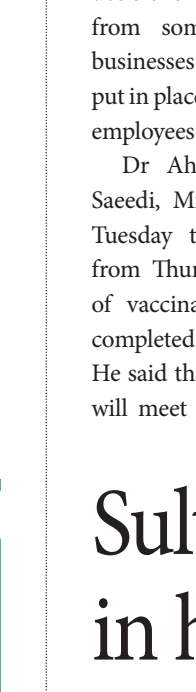
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'TERMINATOR' TITMUS, GYMNAST 'KING'



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BILLIONS OF LOCKDOWN SAVINGS FUNNELLED TO FUNDS



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THE RISE OF THE PLANTITA



MUSCAT

INITIATIVE TO EMPOWER MUSEUMS IN OMAN

The National Museum, launched a series of six lectures on museum management in the 21st century for Omani museum professionals and students. The lectures, starting from Tuesday will continue till the end of this year, are delivered in cooperation with the Smithsonian Institution - the largest museum and research complex in the world and the most prominent cultural centre in the USA. The lectures will be supervised by Dr Paul Michael Taylor, anthropologist, Curator of Asian, European and Middle Eastern Cultures and Director of the Asian Cultural History Programme at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. **DETAILS ON P2**

CRUDE PRICE AT \$72.71 A BARREL

Oman oil price for September delivery on Wednesday reached \$72.71, comprising a decrease by 30 cents from the price of Tuesday, which was \$73.01. The average price of Oman oil for July delivery has stabilised at \$66.40, thus \$3.30 per barrel higher than June delivery. Meanwhile, world oil prices rose as industry data showed US crude and product inventories fell more sharply than expected last week, outweighing worries that surging Covid-19 cases would curb fuel demand. US crude rose 0.52 per cent to \$72.02 a barrel and Brent crude rose 0.31 per cent to \$74.71 per barrel.

READ IN

OPINION

Journaling as a therapy
Sonia Ambrosio

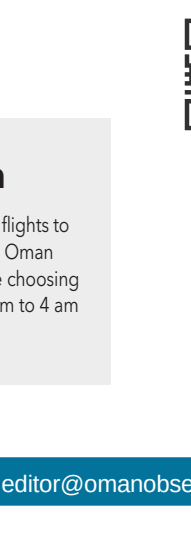
The cost of climate change in the world
Haider al Lawati

INSIDE



US RETURNS TO IRAQ TREASURE TROVE OF ANTIQUITIES

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US, RUSSIA HOLD NUCLEAR TALKS IN GENEVA

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NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR SECOND DOSE FROM AUG 1

SUPREME COMMITTEE MEETS TODAY TO TAKE STOCK OF COVID-19 SITUATION

VINOD NAIR @vinot_nair

All eyes are now on the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, which will make a decision on restrictions. Today's meeting comes amid a fall in the number of coronavirus cases and the beginning of the national campaign for the second dose of vaccine from August 1. One of the eagerly awaited decisions will be lifting a travel ban from some countries after some businesses sought mechanisms to be put in place for the return of expatriate employees stranded since April. Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, said on Tuesday the registration will start from Thursday for the second dose of vaccination to those who have completed 10 weeks of the first dose. He said that the Supreme Committee will meet today to take future steps



regarding the ban, provided that the precautionary measures are put in place. He said that in the Governorate

for vaccination as per the system. He warned that some people are still listening to rumours and are refusing to take the vaccines. "Most deaths are reported at the local and international levels are of people who are not vaccinated." The minister said that there are many reasons that led to the decline in the number of infections, which include adherence to precautionary measures and a large number of people taking the jabs as vaccines are the only tool to confront this disease.

LOCKDOWN Stressing that the results of the closure usually appear after 10 to 14 days, the minister said that the current results are promising due to partial lockdowns which have been in place. He said the emergence of the 'Delta' variant had led to an alarming rise in the number of new infections, which had decreased between October 2020 and January 2021. **TURN TO P5**

Omanis now constitute 62% of population



SAMUEL KUTTY @samkuttvyp
Omanis constitute 62.10 per cent out of a total population of 4.459 million in the Sultanate, according to figures available on National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) website. While the number of Omanis rose to 2,770,900 as of July 27, 2021, expatriates fell to 1,688,900 making 37.90 per cent of the total population. Muscat Governorate continues to be the home for the largest number of people with 1,309,197 Omanis and 582,025 expatriates till the end of May. **TURN TO P2**

Sultanate sees 55% fall in hepatitis patients

ZAINAB AL NASSRI @zainabalnasseri

Patients with viral hepatitis decreased by 55 per cent to 133 in 2020 compared to 260 in 2019, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Coinciding with the World Hepatitis Day themed 'Hepatitis Can't Wait', which falls on July 28 every year, the Ministry of Health said that globally viral hepatitis kills 1.45 million people annually but yet, it is preventable and can be treated. Hepatitis B and C can be transmitted by unsafe injection, sharing tattooing equipment or sharp objects like razors. This disease can only be prevented by vaccination.

On this occasion, Dr Ahmed al Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, said in 2020 there were 30 million people chronically infected with viral hepatitis in the Eastern Mediterranean Region; 65,000 people died of hepatitis and 570,000 were infected. "Covid-19 made it even more difficult to deliver essential health services, including vaccination, diagnosis and care. But despite the challenges, and in line with the Sustainable Development Goals, WHO's Thirteenth Programme of Work (GPW-13) and our vision for the region, Vision 2023, we must not lose sight of our goal of universal health coverage." **TURN TO P2**



HUGE TOURISM POTENTIAL OF MUSANDAM

The Governorate of Musandam boasts a lot of tourism, archaeological and historic potentials due to its unique nature and geological make-up. Musandam is distinguished by its bays and well-known strait which, alongside other landmarks, represent promising opportunities for investment in the tourism industry. Musandam is distinguished by its geographical location and varied terrain. **DETAILS ON P5**

Oman set to host 2022 Race Walking Team Championships

TOKYO: World Athletics announced at its annual congress in Tokyo that the Sultanate of Oman is the new host of the 2022 World Race Walking Team Championships. The event will take place during March 1-6, 2022, at Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC), and will be organised in partnership between

Oman Sail, the Oman Athletics Association and OCEC. The event will be held in Oman for the first time in the Middle East and is expected to attract 1,700 athletes. The bid for the event came as an initiative by Oman Sail based on its expertise in hosting international events with world-class standards as well as its



network with international federations of various sporting disciplines. Dr Khamis al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, said: "We are delighted to be able to lend our expertise in managing large international events in order to make sure the World Athletics Race Walking Team Championships are a huge success. As hosts, this is a prime

opportunity to develop the Sultanate of Oman as an attractive venue for international athletics and inspire our own people to pursue their sporting ambitions. "The country prides itself on its authenticity and will offer a warm welcome to athletes from around the world in 2022." **DETAILS ON P12**



NDC holds graduation ceremony

MUSCAT: The National Defence College (NDC) on Wednesday held a graduation ceremony for the 8th national defence course under the auspices of Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister.

Senior officers from the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO), the Royal Oman Police (ROP), military and security departments, as well as senior officials from the ministries, government civil authorities and institutions took part in the course. The course was organised amid full adherence to precautionary and preventive measures against Covid-19.

The chief guest and attendees

watched a documentary about the 8th course and its three-semester programme covering theoretical studies, practical applications and local visits relevant to the study programme.

Then, the chief guest handed over certificates to the participants in the course, and winners of individual prizes on scientific and research papers at the level of the course. Colonel Abdul-Kazim bin Ibrahim al Ajmi from the Royal Army of Oman was awarded for the best graduation research while Dr Rashid Obaid al Kaabi from the Public Prosecution Department was honoured for the best national security policy paper. — ONA



Sultanate sees 55% fall in hepatitis patients

FROM PAGE 1

Dr Al Mandhari believes that successful elimination requires scaling up of five key recommended interventions; vaccinate infants against hepatitis B; prevent mother-to-child transmission of Hepatitis B virus; ensure blood and injection safety; ensure safety practices among people who use drugs; and implement testing with a view to treatment.

“Our region has led the way in Hepatitis C testing and treatment over the last five years, thanks to strong political commitment from our member states, especially Egypt. Twenty states have now achieved Hepatitis B control targets, reaching less than 1 per cent Hepatitis B prevalence among children under five years of age. These successes prove that we can make a difference” he explained.

People in the region are still getting infected with hepatitis viruses in healthcare settings – precisely where they should expect to be safe. Unsafe injection continues to be a driving source of Hepatitis B

and C virus infections and other blood-borne diseases such as HIV.

Coverage of Hepatitis B birth dose vaccination – a key intervention to prevent mother-to-child transmission of Hepatitis B virus – remains far too low. Such coverage hinders the target to achieve a hepatitis-free future for coming generations.

Dr Al Mandhari also hoped that World Hepatitis Day to be the start of a steady journey towards the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HBV in our region.

“Children who were just born cannot wait more than 24 hours to receive their first dose of Hepatitis B vaccine. I take this opportunity to urge all to work hand in hand and make sure that every mother is tested for Hepatitis B, that every newborn is fully vaccinated. Develop a people-centered approach to the continuity of care so that every mother diagnosed with Hepatitis B can be assured of having their child protected from Hepatitis B virus. This will bring us one step closer to eliminating viral hepatitis.”

62% of population Omanis

FROM PAGE 1

As far as private sector jobs are concerned, there have been 255,012 nationals employed in different sectors with the highest number in the construction sector with 53,731 followed by manufacturing with 32,296 Omanis.

Nearly 6,000 nationals are employed in the health and social welfare sector, while 7,250 work in education.

At the same time, the NCSI statistics show that there has been a fall of 23.7 per cent in the number of expatriate employees in the government sector at 40,273 during the period from May 2020 to May 2021.

In the private sector, they dropped by 11.5 per cent to reach 1,139,988 against 1,148,207 during the same period. The expatriate dependents fell down to 249,570 from 252,681 a year ago.

Sadiq Jawad Suleiman, veteran Omani writer, diplomat passes away

MUSCAT: The Omani writer and diplomat, Sadiq Jawad Suleiman, passed away in India at the age of 90.

One of the founders of the Omani Society for Writers and Literates in 2006, he also chaired the board of directors of the association between 2010 and 2012.

Irrespective of the lectures that he gave on various cultural occasions inside and outside the Sultanate, no book has been published that includes his research works.

Sadiq Jawad Suleiman studied in one of Muttrah schools at the end of the



1930s and early 1940s. At the end of the 1950s, he worked in the Kuwaiti press before returning to the Sultanate in the early 1970s to join the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Before his retirement in the late 1980s, he served as Oman's ambassador to Iran and the United States.

After retirement, Sadiq Jawad Suleiman joined Johns

Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies in the United States, where he obtained a master's degree in international public policy.

The former diplomat used to have many discussions with the local press, including interviews with writer Badr al Abri who had interactions with him on several occasions. Some of these interactions will be published as a book soon.

Sadiq Jawad Suleiman was known to highlight topics of intellectual, political, and religious issues.

Initiative to empower museums

MUSCAT: The National Museum, launched a series of six lectures on museum management in the 21st century for Omani museum professionals and students.

The lectures, from July 27 until the end of 2021, are delivered in cooperation with the Smithsonian Institution; the largest museum and research complex in the world and the most prominent cultural centre in the USA.

The lectures will be supervised by Dr Paul Michael Taylor, anthropologist, Curator of Asian, European and Middle Eastern Cultures and Director of the Asian Cultural History Programme at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. Dr Taylor will lead and familiarise a team of experts



with new techniques in museum research and insights to advance cultural studies at museums and historical sites.

This initiative, by the US Embassy in Oman, focuses on visitor management,

exhibition development, preserving cultural heritage and virtual exhibitions.

The US Embassy has provided similar training opportunities by dispatching specialists from the National Museum, the National

Masterclass for museum professionals, scholars and students to boosts Oman's cultural institutions

Records and Archives Authority (NRAA), and the Ministry of Heritage and Culture (formerly) to the USA for the International Visitor Leadership Programme (IVLP) for several weeks. — ONA



SOHAR Port and Freezone invites Tenderers in the following Tender

NO	Tender Ref	Tender Title	Tender Fee OMR
1	SIPC 2021/0152	Network Access Control System	RO 26.250
2	SIPC 2021/0179	Groundwater Monitoring Integration between SOHAR Port and OQ	RO 26.250
3	SIPC 2021/0168	Re-Tender: SWR Concrete enhancement & Rip-Rap Protection of Flood Protection Channel.	RO 262.500
4	SPSP 2021/002	Bulk Jetty Condition Assessment	RO 105/-

The above-mentioned tender fees including the VAT 5%. Tenderers can request to receive the electronic tender documents from 9:00 am on Thursday , 29 July 2021 until 4:00 pm on Wednesday , 11 August 2021.
Tenderers to follow the below procedures and steps to obtain the electronic tender documents:

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

Account Name	Sohar Industrial Port Co
Account Number	3101-007970-500
Bank Name	Oman Arab bank SAOC – Main Br
SWIT	OMABOMRXXX

Note: Bank transfers is the only mode of payment accepted

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

Step 3: Tenderers will receive the electronic Tender Document by email.
The Technical and Commercial Proposals must be in separate, marked " Technical and Commercial" addressed to:
SOHAR Port and Freezone.
Bid Opining Committee
Tender Reference No: 2021/
Tender Title

- SOHAR reserves the right to accept or reject any tender without assigning any reasons
- All SMES are requested to provide their Green Card along with the required documents
- For any clarification regarding the tenders please send an e-mail to:
sipc.procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

It all starts here

soharportandfreezone.com +968 2685 2700 | soharportandfreezone.com

KEEP IN MIND LOCKDOWN TIMINGS WHILE DRIVING TO SALALAH

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

@lakshmioman

Timing is important this time while taking a road trip to Salalah to enjoy Khareef.

There are flights to Salalah but nothing like the 1,000 km drive in the mist and fog of the monsoon.

The Royal Oman Police has requested citizens and residents to plan their trip with care if the vacationers are choosing to drive across to Dhofar. This is keeping in mind the lockdown hours which is as of now from 5 pm to 4 am until July 31.

When you are travelling to Dhofar Governorate at the present time, you must measure the time period for the distance of the road from the starting point to your destination specified in the governorate in order to ensure that you do not violate the movement ban period.

“Drivers have to bear in mind the distance they have to cover safely in order to avoid the lockdown period,” advised Major Mohammed al Hashami, Royal Oman Police.

Now this means there are 13 hours to drive. Buses usually take about 10 hours typically to drive between Muscat and Salalah and vice versa.

Some of the driving enthusiasts feel there might be no time for meal breaks.

“It is advisable to have two drivers take turns to drive the vehicle,” said one regular driver who travels between Muscat and Salalah.

Ahmed al Mahrouqi, an adventurer and an expert on safety, said it is very simple. Start your journey immediately after 4 am and you have time till 4 pm to reach comfortably.

So what should be on our safety checklist while embarking on a 1,000 km journey?



“First of all we should check your car, tires, tire pressure and make sure the tires are good and can handle the long-distance journey,” said Al Mahrouqi.

“Take ample quantities of water. Now you are ready to start your journey to Salalah. But remember you have 10 hours of drive and at present we have a lockdown at 5 pm. What we have to keep in mind is that from Adham to Thumrait it is desert so one will come across many sand dunes. There could be sand on the road. Here we have to be careful while driving. Do not cross 120 km while driving in this area and this is

Drivers have to bear in mind the distance they have to cover safely in order to avoid the lockdown period

MAJOR MOHAMMED
AL HASHAMI
Royal Oman Police

very important,” he said.

Invariably most people would be in the area by afternoon and then this is what one has to keep

in mind - the temperature.

“It is very easy for the temperature in this region to touch 49 to 50 degrees Celsius. Do not try to drive at one stretch. Take a break by starting from Muscat to Adham, take a break and then the next break can be at Haima to let the car cool down. Get out of the car and spend about ten minutes walking around the car. This is for the blood circulation and to relax the muscles,” explained Ahmed.

So here is his tip on taking breaks - Muscat to Nizwa, Nizwa to Adam, Adam to Haima, from Haima to Maqshan, Maqshan

to Qatbait and from there to Thamrait and to Salalah.

Once in Salalah one has to bear in mind to be careful and maintain distance between vehicles while driving through fog, mist or drizzle.

What drivers must remember is the daily traffic Salalah experiences that has been defined as heavy due to tourists in town trying to wrap up the day tips before the lockdown time at the stroke of five in the evening.

This also means it is important to arrange accommodation before starting the journey.

Safety checklist for 1,000 km journey

CHECK YOUR CAR AND MAKE SURE THE TIRES ARE GOOD



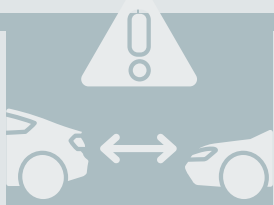
STOCK AMPLE QUANTITIES OF WATER



BETTER TO HAVE TWO DRIVERS TAKE TURNS TO DRIVE THE VEHICLE

120 km/h

IN ADAM-THUMRAIT STRETCH, KEEP THE SPEED LIMIT AT 120 KM



MAINTAIN DISTANCE BETWEEN VEHICLES WHILE DRIVING THROUGH FOG, MIST OR DRIZZLE

NEVER DRIVE AT ONE STRETCH. TAKE A BREAK AND STRETCH MUSCLES. HERE IS A LIST OF STOPOVERS: MUSCAT TO NIZWA, NIZWA TO ADAM, ADAM TO HAIMA, HAIMA TO MAQSHAN, MAQSHAN TO QATBAIT AND FROM THERE TO THAMRAIT AND TO SALALAH

Season to unwind and rejuvenate in the lap of nature

DR NISMA HARIS

It's time to witness the aura unfolded by the onset of Khareef, the magical monsoon of Dhofar which has the tremendous might to transform the entire landscape green. The lush green panorama is soothing to the eyes, is refreshing and replenishing, it symbolises healing and growth and the list is long when it comes to green. According to research published by the Health Council of Netherlands, people tend to seek out nature when they feel stressed or tired because they presume nature to have a restorative effect.

In the Covid era, when mental health is being grossly impacted let us talk about the green. Green is the nature insignia and hence is the emblem of healing and reviving the power of nature. Natural green landscapes have immense benefits on human psychology.

Pandemic has made us more



confined in our dwellings away from nature and somewhere this has been deteriorating our mental well-being.

However, nature is always ready to embrace us with open arms. All you need is to surrender to the splendour of green and let it take off all your uneasiness. Walking and spending some time in the greener surroundings is always rejuvenating for human

behavioural health.

Our ancestors resided closer to the greener habitats which bestowed immense health benefits and well being. It has been majorly incorporated in modern-day buildings and designs to bring positive effects on health and eventually improving productivity.

The largest epidemiological study published in the

Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences documents a positive connection between green space and mental health. It can encourage exercise, provide spaces for socialising, decrease noise and air pollution, and improve immune function by providing exposure to beneficial microbiota. It also can help with psychological restoration; that is, green space provides a respite for

BE IT A LONG DRIVE WITH YOUR SPOUSE OR SPENDING TIME IN THE LUSH GREEN VALLEYS ALL BY YOURSELF OR WITH A DEAR ONE, LET THE MAGNIFICENCE OF KHAREEF REFORM YOU, TAKE OFF ALL YOUR WEARINESS, AND GRANT YOU RESPIRE FROM THE ROUTINE GRIND OF LIFE

over-stimulated minds.

For the kids as well, green assists magnificently with their wellbeing boosting their cognitive performance and improved physical activity.

Children gain attention and working memory benefits when they are exposed to greenery, says a study led by Payam Dadvand of the Centre for Research in Environmental Epidemiology in

Barcelona. In addition, exposure to natural settings may be widely effective in reducing attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder symptoms in children.

The crux of the matter is when green has so much to give why abstain from not deriving the health benefits? Be it a long drive with your spouse or spending time in the lush green valleys all by yourself or with a dear one, let the magnificence of khareef reform you, take off all your weariness, and grant you respite from the reckless overactivity of work. Because that is what the power of green is; transforming life for the better through peace and tranquillity.

But you should venture into the greenkeeping in mind all the guidelines of the Supreme Committee. (The author is a general physician, content creator, health and wellness adviser. Email: dr.nisma.healthyvows@gmail.com)

KEEP MOVING TO STAY HEALTHY



ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

Physical activity is a great way to keep you fit as well as improve mental well being. Research shows that doing exercise releases feel-good chemicals called endorphins in the brain. Even 10 minutes of brisk walk can improve your mental alertness, energy and mood.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) has designated October 2 to promote exercises as part of a healthy lifestyle.

It stated that there are 10 things you may get if you keep sitting all day, like gaining weight, insomnia, back pain, weakness in legs and in hips' muscles, cancer, deep vein clots, shoulder and neck stiffness, diabetes, heart

diseases and varicose veins.

Dr Huda bint Khalfan al Siyabiyah, Director of Health Community Initiatives in the ministry, mentioned that there are many physical, psychological, environmental and social benefits that physical activity brings, as it can be a valuable tool for controlling infection and maintaining overall health.

"Practicing physical activity can reduce the severity of infection of Covid-19 due to muscle activity that results in compounds that improve the performance of the immune system and reduce inflammation. It reduces the chances of patients being admitted to hospitals, and the need to use respirators, which would reduce severe burden on healthcare systems during the pandemic" she said during

IF YOU DO NOT EXERCISE, YOU
RISK WEIGHT GAIN, BACK PAIN,
WEAKNESS IN LEGS AND IN
HIPS' MUSCLES, CANCER, DEEP
VEIN CLOTS, SHOULDER AND
NECK STIFFNESS, DIABETES,
HEART DISEASES AND
VARICOSE VEINS

celebration of the Omani Day of Physical Activity last year.

The World Health Organization recommends that all age groups must engage in physical activities. For adults aged between 18

and 64 years, it recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity per week, or 75 minutes of vigorous physical activity per week, or an equivalent combination of moderate and vigorous

activity.

"For additional health benefits, adults should increase their moderate physical activity to 300 minutes per week, or equivalent. Muscle-strengthening activities should be done on two or more days of the week."

Engaging in regular moderate physical activity such as walking, cycling or exercising, has significant health benefits. At all ages, the benefits of physical activity outweigh the potential harms such as those caused by accidents. And doing some physical activity is better than not doing it at all.

By getting more active throughout the day in relatively simple ways, people can easily reach the recommended activity levels. Regular and adequate physical

activity helps to improve muscular fitness, cardio-respiratory fitness, improves bone health and functional health, reduces the risk of hypertension, coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes, various types of cancer (including breast and colon cancer), as well as depression.

It also minimises the risk of falls and fractures of the hip and vertebrae and it is necessary for energy balance and weight control, according to WHO.

In 2013, the World Health Assembly, the decision-making body of WHO, agreed on a set of voluntary global targets that included a 25 per cent reduction in premature mortality from non-communicable diseases and a 10 per cent reduction in physical inactivity by 2025.



MUSANDAM BOASTS HUGE TOURISM POTENTIALS

KHASAB: The Governorate of Musandam boasts lots of tourism, archaeological and historic potentials due to its unique nature and geological make-up. Musandam is distinguished by its bays and its well-known strait which, alongside the other landmarks, represent promising opportunities for investment in the tourism industry.

Amna bint Ali al Shuhayh, Director of Heritage Department in Musandam Governorate, said that the coastline in Musandam is one of the most thrilling scenes in the Sultanate. She added that Musandam is distinguished by its geographical location and varied terrain.

The governorate, overlooking the Sea of Oman on the east and the Arabian Gulf on the west, lies between the sea and the mountains forming quasi isthmuses in scenery that enthrall viewers with zigzag roads cutting through rock formations lead to stunning natural scenes beauty either in the depth of the sea or

on mountain peaks, she said.

Al Shuhayh said that due to the abundance of tourism potentials in Musandam, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has placed it among its priorities for tourism development and sustainability in accordance with the Oman Tourism Strategy and the Comprehensive Strategy for Economic Development and the comprehensive plan for Musandam Governorate, in direct coordination and cooperation with the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

Musandam Governorate is not only in need of the tourism industry but it also requires us to set up a daring tourism experience that is able to pull tourists. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the governorate attracted 200,000 tourists annually. The number of visitors to Musandam's forts and castles reached 50,000 per year while cruise passenger arrivals reached 129,453, the official said.

A total of 31 land plots have

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the governorate attracted 200,000 tourists annually. The number of visitors to Musandam's forts and castles reached 50,000 per year while cruise passenger arrivals reached 129,453

been allocated and prepared for investment in Musandam following the issuance of the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, for the implementation of the decisions aimed at developing Musandam Governorate, including establishing economic and tourist zones for investment, she added.

Al Shuhayh added that Musandam Governorate has 10 hotels with a total capacity of 512 rooms. The ministry targets to increase the number of hotels and resorts within the tourism projects and has distributed land plots for tourism projects. Besides, the ministry signed usufruct agreements to set up three 3-star hotels in the wilayats of Bukha and Mad'ha.

She said that there are some projects that will be established on the land plots situated in the tourist triangle of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and will be announced soon as they become ready in addition to tourism projects serving tourists and residents that will be announced at the opportune time.

Also among the tourism projects coming up in Musandam Governorate is the Adventure Center project, developed by Omran which recently completed the implementation of the first phase of the project.

— ONA



NCTC Discusses Media Plan on Awareness of Tobacco

NCTC plans to raise anti-tobacco awareness

MUSCAT: The National Committee for Tobacco Control (NCTC) convened its eleventh meeting via video conference under the chairmanship of Dr Mohammed Said al Hosani, Under-Secretary of Ministry of Health for Health Affairs.

The meeting reviewed the composition of the committee members, as new members were added from Sultan Qaboos University and other departments concerned.

The meeting touched upon the results of an economic cost survey of smoking and second-hand smoke exposure in the Sultanate and GCC States (a survey carried out under the supervision of the Health Council and published in 2021). The survey showed a clear increase in the economic

cost of tobacco consumption on the economics of the GCC countries in general and the Sultanate in particular, for which the economic cost of the consumption of tobacco products and exposure to tobacco smoke is equivalent to the GDP of the Sultanate.

Furthermore, the national committee stressed the importance of the media plans on promoting awareness of the hazards of tobacco products. During the meeting, it has been agreed to form joint teamwork for devising a media plan, comprising representatives from ministries of health, information, education, higher education and scientific research, social development, and civil cancer association. — ONA

Campaign for second dose from August 1

FROM PAGE 1

Dr Al Saeedi said that most of the infected cases in the Sultanate are due to the Delta variant which affects people of all ages, and added that the number of patients who have been admitted to intensive care units directly from their homes have also gone up.

The minister said the first dose vaccination for the age group 12-18 years will start before the end of next week. "Vaccination of 320,000 students aged 12 to 18 years will help them to return to classrooms for the next

semester."

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health on Wednesday reported 548 cases and 14 deaths over 24 hours.

The total number of cases registered in the Sultanate has now reached 295,535, including 3,802 deaths.

A total of 63 patients were admitted to hospitals across the country in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients to 641 including 272 in intensive care units.

The total recoveries are 277,632 while the recovery rate is 93.9 per cent.

■ GCC NAVAL COMMANDERS MEET



MUSCAT: Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), participated in the 19th meeting of GCC Navy Commanders on Wednesday. The virtual meeting touched on several topics that would contribute in promoting the joint naval action between member states. — ONA

National Real Estate Development and Investments Co. (SAOG)

P.O. Box 84, Muscat-100, Sultanate of Oman - Phone: 24702133/24701454, Fax: 24703826, C.R. No. 1/02478/7

DIRECTOR'S REPORT FOR THE SIX MONTH ENDED 30th JUNE 2021

Respected shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I present herewith the result of National Real Estate Development and Investments Co. (SAOG) for the first Six-month period ended 30th June 2021.

Operational Result

The Company recorded an un-audited net loss of RO. 11,330 up to the 2nd quarter ended June 2021 versus (2020: RO. 9,670 loss). There was no revenue and no volume up to 30th June 2021.

Finally, on behalf of the shareholders and the Board I wish to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq Bin Taimour for his wise leadership and guidance.

For the Board of Directors
Chairman

NOTE: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder on request either in Arabic or English within 7 days of receipt of the request.

UNAUDITED & PROVISIONAL BALANCE SHEET AS AT 30th JUNE 2021

	2021 RO	2020 RO
EMPLOYMENT OF FUNDS:		
Non Current Asset	7,200,000	9,383,053
Current Assets	189,342	215,364
Current Liabilities	883	485
Net Current Assets	188,459	214,879
	<u>7,388,459</u>	<u>9,597,932</u>

FUNDS EMPLOYED:

Share Capital	1,762,500	1,762,500
Legal reserve	507,275	507,275
Revaluation reserve	5,937,254	7,637,254
Retained earnings	(1,898,005)	(1,688,532)
	<u>6,309,024</u>	<u>8,218,497</u>
Non-current liabilities	<u>1,079,435</u>	<u>1,379,435</u>
	<u>7,388,459</u>	<u>9,597,932</u>

UNAUDITED & PROVISIONAL PROFIT & LOSS ACCOUNT FOR THE PERIOD 1st JANUARY TO 30th JUNE 2021

	2021 RO	2020 RO
Sales	-	-
Cost of Sales	-	-
Gross Profit	-	-
Other Operating Income	2,052	2,586
Expenses before Depreciation	(13,383)	(12,256)
Profit before Depreciation	<u>(11,330)</u>	<u>(9,670)</u>
Depreciation	-	-
Net profit / (loss) after Depreciation	<u>(11,330)</u>	<u>(9,670)</u>

Tunisia in political turmoil as president dismisses more officials

TUNIS: Tunisia lurched further into political uncertainty on Wednesday, as President Kais Saied sacked more officials, days after he suspended parliament and assumed executive powers in what opponents labelled a “coup”.

Key civil society groups warned against any “illegitimate” extension of Saied’s 30-day suspension of parliament, and demanded in a joint statement a timeline for political action.

After suspending parliament and sacking Hichem Mechichi as prime minister on Sunday, dismissing the defence and justice ministers on Monday, Saied then issued orders dismissing a series of top officials.

Late on Tuesday, 63-year-old Saied, a former law lecturer who was a political newcomer when he won a landslide 2019 election victory, issued decrees sacking a long list of senior government officials, including the army’s chief prosecutor.

He has also lifted the parliamentary immunity of lawmakers, and assumed judicial powers.

Saied say his actions are justified under the constitution, which allows the head of state to take unspecified exceptional measures in the event of an “imminent threat”.

CRISES

The moderate Ennahdha party, which was the largest faction in the coalition government, has



Police officers patrol a street in Tunis on Wednesday. — Reuters

labelled the power grab a “coup d’etat”, while the US, EU and other powers have voiced strong concern.

On top of the political turmoil, the North African nation is struggling with a crippling economic crisis including soaring inflation and high unemployment, as well as surging Covid-19 infections.

Tunisians are waiting anxiously for clarity on the next political steps.

Saied, an austere legal academic who has said he is determined to revolutionise the political system through the law, said he would

Key civil society groups warned against any “illegitimate” extension of Saied’s 30-day suspension of parliament, and demanded in a joint statement a timeline for political action

assume executive power “with the help” of a government whose new chief he would appoint himself.

Names of possible candidates circulated on Wednesday after Saied met with representatives

of national organisations late on Monday.

“President Saied will be very careful in choosing the future head of government, because he wants a trustworthy and loyal person who would adopt the same policies as him,” said political scientist Slaheddine Jouchi.

The young democracy had often been cited as the sole success story of the Arab Spring, the tumult sparked across the region after Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian university graduate who could only find work as a fruit vendor, set himself on fire in December 2010. — AFP

Khamenei warns to not trust West as new govt expected

TEHRAN: Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Wednesday that experience has shown “trusting the West does not work”, as the Islamic republic prepares for a new administration to take power.

Khamenei also blasted the US, which is indirectly involved in Iran’s talks with world powers to revive a nuclear deal, of tying its return to the accord to “future” negotiations on Iran’s missile programme and regional issues.

The 2015 deal, the signature achievement of outgoing moderate President Hassan Rouhani, gave Iran some relief from international sanctions in exchange for limits on its nuclear programme.

But it was torpedoed in 2018 by then US president Donald Trump, who unilaterally withdrew from the agreement and imposed punishing sanctions.

“Future generations should use this experience,” Khamenei told Rouhani and members of his cabinet. “It was made clear during this government that trusting the West does not work.”

Rouhani’s government has been holding talks with major powers in Vienna since April on bringing Washington back into the agreement, but a deal now seems unlikely until after he hands over to President-elect Ebrahim Raisi early next month.



Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei attends a meeting with President Hassan Rouhani and his cabinet members in Tehran on Wednesday. — Reuters

Khamenei blasted the US of tying its return to the accord to “future” negotiations on Iran’s missile programme and regional issues

Raisi is an ultraconservative but has expressed support for the nuclear talks, arguing Iran needs an end to US sanctions.

Iran’s ultraconservative camp, which deeply distrusts the United States, has repeatedly criticised Rouhani over the 2015 deal.

Raisi has said his government will support talks that “guarantee national interests”, but will not allow negotiations for the sake of negotiations. — AFP

US returning to Iraq treasure trove of antiquities: Baghdad

BAGHDAD: The United States will return to Iraq some 17,000 archaeological treasures dating back 4,000 years and looted in recent decades, an “unprecedented” restitution, the culture minister in Baghdad said on Wednesday.

Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi was set to take back the artefacts from ancient Mesopotamia on his aircraft, when he returns on Thursday from Washington where he met US President Joe Biden.

“This is the largest return of antiquities to Iraq,” said Iraqi Culture Minister Hassan Nazim, hailing it as “the result of months of efforts by the Iraqi authorities in conjunction with their embassy in Washington”.

Most of the ancient pieces document “the commercial exchanges during the Sumerian

period”, his ministry said in a statement.

Iraq’s antiquities have been extensively looted during decades of war and insurgency, often by organised crime groups, since the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein.

“It is impossible to quantify the number of pieces that have been stolen from archaeological sites,” Qahtan al Obaid, director of antiquities and heritage at the Basra Museum, said.

Archaeological sites across the country have been severely damaged and neglected, and museums looted, with some 15,000 pieces stolen from Iraq’s only national museum in Baghdad.

“I hope that in the near future we will be able to recover the rest of our goods, especially in Europe,”



An Assyrian artefact of the head of a winged bull made out of limestone is displayed at the Iraqi National Museum in Baghdad in 2015.

said Nazim in his statement.

‘LOOTED ARTEFACTS’

Among the pieces to be returned to Iraq is a 3,500-year-old clay tablet with a sequence from

the epic of Gilgamesh, which once sat in Washington’s Museum of the Bible, the US Department of Justice said separately in Washington.

It was not immediately clear whether the “Gilgamesh Dream

Tablet” would be among the 17,000 pieces to be returned this week.

The rare fragment, which recounts a dream sequence from the epic in Akkadian cuneiform script, is one of many ancient artefacts from the Middle East collected by David Green, the billionaire owner of the Hobby Lobby chain of arts and crafts stores.

It was seized by the US Justice Department in 2019, two years after Green opened the museum dedicated to ancient Christian history in downtown Washington.

The tablet was just one of thousands of Iraqi-origin artefacts, mostly 3,000- to 4,000-year-old cuneiform tablets and seals, that have been seized from Hobby Lobby and the Bible Museum for repatriation to Iraq.

The Justice Department said they were plundered in Iraq, and

traded illegally by dealers in Israel and the United Arab Emirates.

According to the Justice Department, Hobby Lobby bought the six-by-five-inch tablet from a prominent auction house in 2014 for \$1.67 million.

It had originally been brought illegally to the United States in 2003 by a dealer, who purchased it in London from a well-known Jordanian trader of ancient Middle Eastern antiquities.

It was then traded several times with false letters of provenance to assure buyers that it was legally obtained, rather than a product of the underground antiquities trade.

In 2014, Hobby Lobby arranged to buy the tablet in New York, but carried out the transaction in Oklahoma to avoid sales taxes, according to the Justice Department. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BEIRUT

Lebanon’s Mikati hopes to form govt soon

Lebanese Prime Minister-designate Najib Mikati said on Wednesday that he hoped to form a government shortly after securing the approval of President Michel Aoun for most of his nominees.

Mikati, a businessman, is the third potential prime minister to be nominated since Hassan Diab’s government resigned after an explosion in Beirut’s port area on August 4 last year that killed more than 200 people and flattened large areas of the



city. He spoke to reporters after meeting Aoun.

Diab’s government has stayed on in a caretaker capacity, but Lebanon’s currency has collapsed, jobs have vanished and banks have frozen accounts in the country’s worst crisis since the 1975-90 civil war.

TEL AVIV

16,000 more work permits for Palestinians

Israel announced on Wednesday it is to issue 16,000 more permits for Palestinians from the occupied West Bank to work in its construction and hotel industries, taking the total to over 100,000.

“Israel intends to increase by 15,000 workers the quota of Palestinian residents of Judea and Samaria (the southern and northern West Bank) working in the field of construction,” the Israeli military body responsible for civil affairs in the occupied Palestinian territories, COGAT,



said. The new permits will bring the number of Palestinians allowed to work in Israel to 106,000, with another 30,000 Palestinians authorised to work in Jewish settlements in the West Bank, a security official who spoke on condition of anonymity said.

BERLIN

Doctor charged with crimes against humanity

A Syrian doctor living in Germany has been charged with crimes against humanity including torture and one case of murder, prosecutors said on Wednesday, in Germany’s latest move against alleged abuses committed in Syria.

The suspect, identified as Alaa M, was arrested on June 19, 2020 and initially charged with two instances of torturing detainees at a prison in the city of Homs in 2011.

But he has now been charged



with a slew of additional crimes, including killing one person and another 18 counts of torture.

Alaa M worked as a doctor at military hospitals in Homs and Damascus in 2011 and 2012, when he allegedly carried out horrific abuses including setting fire to the genitals of a teenager.

In brief

■ LUCKNOW



18 WORKERS KILLED IN INDIA AS TRUCK RAMS INTO BUS

Eighteen migrant labourers sleeping on a highway in northern India after their bus broke down died when a truck rammed into the vehicle, police said on Wednesday. At least 19 others were injured in the accident in Uttar Pradesh state, a senior police officer told reporters.

Most of the passengers were returning home to the eastern state of Bihar after working in the states of Punjab or Haryana.

The passengers got off the bus after its axle shaft broke and were sleeping next to it when a truck crashed into it from behind.

Rescue workers retrieved some of the bodies from under the mangled double-decker bus.

■ KARACHI



CHINESE NATIONAL SHOT AND WOUNDED IN KARACHI

A Chinese national was shot and wounded in an attack in Pakistan's largest city Karachi on Wednesday, police said, two weeks after nine Chinese workers were killed when an explosion sent their bus over a ravine in the north of the country.

Wednesday's victim and another Chinese national were being driven to Karachi's industrial area when they were attacked, police deputy inspector general Javed Akbar Riaz said.

"Two men wearing face masks riding a motorcycle carried out the shooting," Riaz said, adding that the men were travelling without a police escort.

■ MEDAN



INDONESIA'S MOUNT SINABUNG VOLCANO ERUPTS

Indonesia's Mount Sinabung erupted on Wednesday, spewing a massive column of smoke and ash into the sky.

The eruption of the volcano in North Sumatra province lasted about 12 minutes, a local geological agency said.

"The volcanic material reached 4,500 metres into the air and lasted for quite a long time," the head of the agency's Sinabung monitoring post, Armen Putra, said.

An image shared by the agency showed a column of thick, dark smoke coming from the crater.

Afghanistan will become 'pariah state' if Taliban seize power: US

NEW DELHI: Afghanistan would become a "pariah state" if the Taliban take control by force, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday, as a top-level delegation from the insurgent group visited China to assure officials of their international obligations.

"An Afghanistan that does not respect the rights of its people, an Afghanistan that commits atrocities against its own people would become a pariah state," Blinken told reporters in India, where he is on his first official visit.

In China, the Taliban's leadership assured Beijing the group will not allow Afghanistan to be used as a base for plotting against another country.

A delegation including co-founder Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar is in China for talks as the insurgents continue a sweeping offensive across Afghanistan — including areas along their shared border.

Their frontier is just 76 kilometres long — and at a rugged high altitude without a road crossing — but Beijing fears Afghanistan could be used as a staging ground for Uyghur separatists in Xinjiang.

Taliban spokesman Mohammad Naeem said those concerns were unfounded.

"The Islamic Emirate assured



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and India's Minister of External Affairs S Jaishankar hold a joint news conference in New Delhi, on Wednesday. — Reuters

China that Afghanistan's soil would not be used against any country's security."

"They (China) promised not to interfere in Afghanistan's affairs, but instead help to solve problems and bring peace."

Beijing confirmed the thrust of the talks, which were led on the Chinese side by Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

But in Kabul Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani urged the international community "to review the narrative of the

An Afghanistan that does not respect the rights of its people, an Afghanistan that commits atrocities against its own people would become a pariah state

ANTHONY BLINKEN
US Secretary of State

willingness of the Taliban and their supporters on embracing a political solution."

"In terms of scale, scope and timing, we are facing an invasion that is unprecedented in the last 30 years," he warned in a speech on Wednesday.

"These are not the Taliban of the 20th century... but the manifestation of the nexus between transnational terrorist networks and transnational criminal organisations."

In New Delhi, Blinken warned

the Taliban they would have to change if they wanted global acceptance.

"The Taliban says that it seeks international recognition, that it wants international support for Afghanistan. Presumably it wants its leaders to be able to travel freely in the world, sanctions lifted, etc," he said.

"The taking over of the country by force and abusing the rights of its people is not the path to achieve those objectives."

Analysts say China, whose stated foreign policy position is non-interference in other countries' issues, is queasy about the religiosity of the Taliban given their proximity to Muslim majority Xinjiang province.

But the meeting gifts legitimacy to an insurgent group craving international recognition — and a potential diplomatic shield at the UN — to match their military march across the nation.

"Wang Yi pointed out, the Afghan Taliban is a crucial military and political force in Afghanistan," foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told reporters in Beijing.

"China has throughout adhered to non-interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs... Afghanistan belongs to the Afghan people," he said, in stark contrast to the "failure of US policy towards Afghanistan". — AFP

■ MONSOON RAIN INUNDATES ISLAMABAD



Residents cross a flooded street on the backdrop of a damaged car submerged in the flood waters after heavy monsoon rains in Islamabad on Wednesday. — AFP

Sydney adds four weeks to lockdown as Australia Covid cases rise

SYDNEY: Australia's biggest city, Sydney, extended a lockdown by four weeks on Wednesday after an already protracted stay-at-home order failed to douse a Covid-19 outbreak, with authorities warning of tougher policing to stamp out non-compliance.

Far from a planned exit from lockdown in three days, the city of 5 million people and neighbouring regional centres spanning 200 km of coastline were told to stay home until August 28 following persistently high case numbers since a flare-up of the virulent Delta variant began last month.

The state of New South Wales, of which Sydney is the capital, reported 177 new cases for Tuesday, from 172 on Monday. That is the biggest increase since an unmasked, unvaccinated airport driver was said to have sparked the current outbreak. The state also reported the death

of a woman in her 90s, the 11th death of the outbreak.

Of particular concern, at least 46 of the new cases were people active in the community before being diagnosed, raising the likelihood of transmission, said authorities. They have cautioned that active community transmission must be near zero before rules are relaxed.

"I am as upset and frustrated as all of you that we were not able to get the case numbers we would have liked at this point in time but that is the reality," state Premier Gladys Berejiklian told a televised news conference.

Berejiklian added police would boost enforcement of wide-ranging social distancing rules and urged people to report suspected wrongdoing, saying "we cannot put up with people continuing to do the wrong thing because it is setting us all back".

— Reuters

Record virus cases in Tokyo as more regions weigh emergency

TOKYO: Daily virus cases in Tokyo topped 3,000 for the first time on Wednesday, as several neighbouring regions weighed emergency restrictions to tackle a surge in infections.

Tokyo, which is already under a virus state of emergency as it hosts the Olympics, reported 3,117 cases, and Governor Yuriko Koike called on people to avoid "unnecessary, non-urgent outings."

Japan's vaccination programme started slowly, and only just over 25 per cent of the population has had two jabs.

"I want young people to get vaccinated. Young people's behaviour is the key. I'm asking them please for their cooperation,"



Tokyo, which is already under a virus state of emergency as it hosts the Olympics, reported 3,117 cases. — AFP

Koike said.

Japan has seen a comparatively small coronavirus outbreak, with around 15,000 deaths despite avoiding harsh lockdowns.

The state of emergency in place

in Tokyo mostly limits bar and restaurant opening hours and bans them from selling alcohol, though experts have warned compliance is dropping and cases are surging among young people.

Cases are also rising elsewhere, and three regions surrounding Tokyo — Chiba, Saitama and Kanagawa — are now considering seeking a virus emergency from the national government.

The spike in cases is likely to increase scrutiny of the Olympic Games, with persistent concerns over whether the event could drive infections.

Olympic participants face various restrictions, including regular testing and limits on their movement. — AFP



Health workers take swab samples from residents at a Covid-19 drive-through testing clinic in Sydney on Wednesday. — AFP

US, Russia hold nuclear talks in Geneva after summit push



US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman (L) and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov pose in front of their national flags before a meeting at the US diplomatic mission in Geneva, Switzerland on Wednesday. – Reuters

GENEVA: Senior US and Russian officials began talks on Wednesday on strategic nuclear stability, with a fresh mandate from their presidents who held a summit in Geneva last month.

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov headed their respective delegations at the meeting at the US diplomatic mission in Geneva.

US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin, whose countries hold 90 per cent of the world's nuclear weapons, agreed to launch a bilateral dialogue on strategic stability to "lay the groundwork for future arms control and risk reduction measures".

The exact scope of the one-day talks was not made public but

analysts expected it to be the start of a process.

"The talks must lead to real and substantial nuclear reductions. Anything less would be an irresponsible failure," Daniel Hogsta of the Nobel-prize winning International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, said.

Andrey Baklitskiy, senior research fellow at the Center for Advanced American Studies at Moscow State Institute of International Relations, said: "It will be almost a year since the last meeting in this format. We are starting with a new US administration, starting pretty much from scratch.

"It's just meet and greet and try to establish some basic understandings," he told reporters in Geneva.

— Reuters

England scraps quarantine for fully-vaccinated EU, US visitors

LONDON: England will allow fully vaccinated visitors from the European Union and United States to arrive without quarantine from next week, the transport minister said on Wednesday, in a huge and long-awaited boost for airlines and travel companies.

Britain's travel industry has heavily criticised the government for being too slow to open up, saying it has squandered its lead in the global vaccine rollout and given the EU a headstart in attracting tourists.

The government said in a statement that from August 2 travellers with US and EU-approved vaccines would not have to quarantine. That will cover Britain's top nine biggest markets by visitor volumes pre-pandemic.

The opening up of England would likely be followed by the rest of the United Kingdom.

Travellers will, however, still have to take a Covid-19 test before departure and soon after arrival in England, transport minister Grant Shapps wrote on Twitter.

The move will help airlines and travel companies drum up more business after 16 months of restrictions left many of them under severe financial strain.

Shares in British Airways were up 3 per cent while easyJet rose



Passengers stand in a queue to the British Airways check-in desks in the departures area of Terminal 5 at Heathrow Airport in London. – Reuters File Photo

4 per cent and Wizz Air jumped 5 per cent. Quarantine for fully vaccinated Britons returning to the UK from medium risk countries was scrapped on July 19, helping to kickstart a travel recovery, but frequent rule changes over the last two months mean travel is still

plagued by uncertainty.

Moreover, the US remains shut to British visitors so for the transatlantic carriers like British Airways and Virgin Atlantic, planes will primarily be carrying US citizens to England.

British Prime Minister Boris

Johnson said on LBC Radio earlier on Wednesday that he wants US citizens to come to England "freely" and is discussing a travel corridor with the United States, which would mean the restart of two-way traffic with the US.

— Reuters

US tells vaccinated people to wear masks indoors in many places

WASHINGTON: Americans fully vaccinated against Covid-19 should go back to wearing masks in indoor public places in regions where the coronavirus is spreading rapidly, US health authorities said on Tuesday.

In a toughening of guidance issued earlier this month, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also recommended all students, teachers and staff at schools for kindergarten through 12th grade wear masks regardless of whether they were vaccinated.

US coronavirus cases have been rising due to the highly contagious Delta variant, which emerged in India but has quickly spread and now accounts for more than 80 per cent of US coronavirus cases.

US President Joe Biden said that increased vaccination and mask wearing would help the United States avoid the pandemic lockdowns, shutdowns and school closures that the country faced in 2020. "We are not going back to



People wear masks against Covid-19, following the CDC recommendation that fully vaccinated Americans wear masks as they enter the Disney Store in Times Square in New York City, on Tuesday. – Reuters

that," Biden said.

The CDC said that 63.4 per cent of US counties had transmission rates high enough to warrant indoor masking and should immediately

resume the policy. Manhattan, Los Angeles and San Francisco meet the transmission criteria, as does the entire state of Florida, but Chicago and Detroit do not.

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten praised the new CDC mask guidance in a statement, calling it "a necessary precaution

until children under 12 can receive a Covid vaccine and more Americans over 12 get vaccinated."

The CDC's previous guidance for schools only called for unvaccinated students to wear masks.

However, the new CDC recommendations are not binding and many Americans, especially in Republican-leaning states, may choose not to follow them. At least eight states bar schools from requiring masks.

Arizona Governor Doug Ducey, a Republican, rejected the CDC guidance. "Arizona does not allow mask mandates ...," he said in a statement. "We've passed all of this into law, and it will not change."

The United States leads the world in the daily average number of new infections, accounting for one in every nine cases reported worldwide each day. The seven-day average for new cases has been rising sharply and stands at 57,126, still about a quarter of the

pandemic peak.

Two months ago, when the CDC announced that fully vaccinated people could shed their face coverings, Covid-19 was on the decline. Vaccinations have since slowed dramatically and only 58 per cent of people eligible are fully vaccinated.

New studies show that fully vaccinated people who become infected carry as much virus as unvaccinated people do, suggesting they may be able to transmit the infection to others, CDC Director Dr Rochelle Walensky told reporters on a telephone briefing.

"We felt it was important for people to understand that they could pass the disease onto someone else," she said.

On Monday, the Biden administration confirmed it will not lift any existing international travel restrictions, citing the rising number of Covid-19 cases and the expectation that they will continue to rise in the weeks ahead.

— Reuters

SHORT TAKES

FRANKFURT

'No hope' for five missing after chemical blast

Five people still missing a day after a huge explosion at a German chemical park are unlikely to be found alive, the site operator said on Wednesday, urging residents not to touch possibly toxic soot from the blast. Two people were already confirmed dead in the incident on Tuesday, which also injured 31 others.

"We have no hope of finding the missing alive," said Frank Hyldmar, CEO of Chempark operator Currenta. "Our



thoughts are with the families," he added.

The cause of the Tuesday morning blast at Chempark's waste incineration site in the western city of Leverkusen remains unknown, he told a press conference.

LIMA

Peru's Castillo assumes presidency amid crisis

Peru's Pedro Castillo was to assume the presidency on Wednesday with little time to catch his breath as he battles the world's deadliest Covid-19 outbreak, tensions in his socialist party and weak congressional support in a starkly divided nation. Castillo, the son of peasant farmers, will be sworn into office at around midday local time (15:00 GMT) in Congress and will then address the nation, which was split almost in half by a polarised June 6 ballot won by a margin of just 44,000 votes.



The abrupt rise of Castillo, a former teacher, has shaken Peru's traditional political elite and stung copper producers fearful of his plans to hike taxes on mining to fund health and education reforms, and revamp the Andean nation's constitution.

ROME

Moderna vaccine for those aged 12-17 in Italy

The Moderna coronavirus vaccine has been approved for use in those aged 12-17 in Italy, the country's drug regulator, Aifa, said on Wednesday.

The decision means Italian regulators have accepted a European Medicines Agency (EMA) decision from last week, clearing that medicine for that age group. Aifa said the data shared by EMA showed that the vaccine was safe and effective for juveniles.



The EMA opinion does not mean all European countries automatically start following its advice.

Some have remained hesitant to approve the drug for younger people. Others have only allowed its use for at-risk patients.

Establishing peace in region

The relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are rapidly improving in all areas. The bilateral relations between these two neighbouring and brotherly nations will have a positive impact on the entire region.

Those who are closely monitoring the developments, after His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik met King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, have clearly noticed the positive signs of opening of wider horizons of movements on many issues. These highest-level talks have raised hopes that many political issues lingered in the region since long will be resolved. Among the vexed issues which were faced by the region include the crisis in Yemen which has implications on the entire region particularly in the Gulf Cooperation Council. It is heartening to see that Oman and Saudi have taken a stride to impart their historic duty to bring stability in the region. There are clear indications that the two countries together will accomplish their noble objective of bringing peace and stability in the region.

Once all political and military conflicts in the region are over, it is the people of the entire region who will reap the fruits of this approach. We are confident about this approach because after finding solution to the problems, the focus of all the efforts will be on economic development. The resources which are used for continuing the conflicts will be directed only towards development and in bringing increased prosperity for the people.

Today we should thank Almighty Allah that the region has become fully prepared more than ever before to bring peace and achieve stability. The Gulf region has seen enough wars, conflicts and political tensions during the past 40 years. The countries, governments and the people have paid prices for all this. Now, it is the time for introspection, setting right priorities and making concerted efforts to focus on peace, stability and development. The region needs wisdom and more realistic approach for solving problems. The steps which are now being taken by Oman and Saudi will certainly change the path of the region and will take it towards real peace and prosperity. This is what Oman has been urging all its partners in the region to do. Time has proved the efficacy and sincerity of the approach of Oman.

Oman, now, will make more efforts to solve the regional crisis. It will take a radical approach to solve contentious issues. It will require more tolerance among the countries of the region, GCC, as well as in Yemen. We need to understand the ground realities and deal with them logically.

Perhaps one of the most important realities is geographic, neighbourly relations and their ethics as well as principles of not interfering in the internal issues of other countries.



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INNOVATIVE PLAYGROUND

Nine-year-old Anielka plays in an AirBubble, an innovative playground providing clean air thanks to algae that absorb pollutants and carbon dioxide and in return produce oxygen, in Warsaw, Poland. At the new playground in central Warsaw, algae feast on pollutants and carbon dioxide to provide a bubble of clean oxygen in a city ranked as one of the most polluted capitals in the EU. The Polish capital was selected for the inaugural edition of the AirBubble as the city is in particular need of clean air. – AFP

Journaling as a therapy



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As a detox of the increased levels of stress due to the pandemic, I decided to take notes of some daily events. Oh boy! Perhaps I should not have done so.

I had penciled down observations such as lovely smiles from unknown people to inconsequent attitudes. Studies say that journaling is great for mental health. By the end of this brief exercise, I am not sure.

The apex of observed events happened during a 40 plus Celsius degree day. I stopped at a filling station for petrol. There was a car in front of mine and a few other cars parked in front of the grocery store. The car ahead of mine had the petrol hose inserted, and the engine on — a lack of responsibility. By this time, my car was being filled as well. Then, one of those vehicles parked in front of the store started manoeuvring back and forth to gain space to leave the place. The driver of the car being filled in front of mine just reversed — with the petrol hose still injected into the tank! No escape would be possible in case of an explosion. I had complained to the people at the filling station to only hear that, despite the prohibition, people do keep the engines on while filling with petrol. Manoeuvring with the gas hose inserted is asking for serious penalties. I was scared to death

and scared of a horrible death.

Journaling can tell more than one asks for. Sending birthday cards via postal service was another weird experience. A personalised, handwriting birthday card feels like reaching out to connect with people you care about — even though, it is becoming uncommon with the Internet. I went to send the birthday cards to my grandchildren that I haven't seen for two years. One birthday card postal service cost at least RO 10, nearly \$27, and no tracking number was provided. Here comes the tipoff: three times the employee used the banking payment device, and had to cancel each time because of errors in the system. Whatever the reasons, I realised that if there were three payments and cancelled each time, the balance would have to be the same as from before it all started — maybe.

Another episode: a person in charge of dispatching an important document for signature had not forwarded it after 20 days since the submission. Lack of responsibility, the least to say. And it did not stop there. In another incident, despite the submission of personal information update with required in-person presence and hard copy paperwork filled, the information was not entered into the

system; but then, it is all computerised, right? Not really! Still another odd situation: a PhD holder with more than a decade of teaching at the most prestigious universities in the country, and I find out that I am registered into the system as a Bachelor, and even weirder, that I had not one but two identification numbers. Computers have logical structures whereas people can be highly distracted. The human and automation relationship can provide food for thoughts.

Not finished yet. Like going for an orthopedic examination and ending up with an appointment with a heart specialist! During a routine medical checkup after a hiatus of more than one year, the required clinical tests were attributed to a different doctor's specialty. Ouch! Should I be worried?

Writing down the observations was supposed to be a form of stress relief therapy. But it revealed that these episodes raised more concerns than comfort. People feed machines; therefore, information, verification and validation have to be thoroughly performed. More, switching off the engine at petrol stations should not be negotiable. It is a serious offense.

Stressed? Mental health is the next big issue.

The cost of climate change in the world



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TODAY MANY EXPERTS ARE CALLING FOR THE NEED TO REDUCE THE RATES OF CARBON EMISSIONS WHICH CAUSE CLIMATE CHANGE

Despite the presence of a strong infrastructure in many European countries to help them complete their daily work, whether in the field of railways, roads, tunnels and other economic sectors, nature has recently been able to destroy these projects in a large industrial country such as Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, not to mention it left hundreds of people dead as a result of the devastating floods, the worst since the end of World War II.

These floods are exposed to many countries from time to time. We have a great experience in Oman when the Sultanate was hit by the biggest hurricane in June 2007, 'Gonu', whose

effects still remain on some of the projects that were destroyed, while some Omani cities were exposed to heavy rains few days ago which have affected and caused damage to many buildings and facilities. It is expected that the Sultanate will witness rains and other cyclones during the next stage, which requires taking the necessary precautions to confront these natural disasters.

In Europe, rains have caused floods and resulted in lot of destruction in buildings, streets and infrastructure, in addition to deaths, at a time when experts in those countries called for confronting the phenomenon of climate change and global

warming, which makes more heavy rains likely. Such conditions lead to the occurrence of floods and heavy rains. The phenomenon of raising global temperatures happens due to the huge industries that lead to an increase in emissions rates, which requires governments to take steps to reduce the rate of these emissions.

Today, many politicians and experts are calling for the need to reduce the rates of carbon emissions which cause climate change, stressing that these events are expected to occur during the coming period in various countries around the world. The losses resulting from these are very large for the economies,

in addition to deaths, missing, and the diseases that result from that. Our world today is more at risk of overshooting the earth's temperature than climate scientists put it. In the past years many events and conferences were held which have been exposed to the negative effects of climate change and its effects on humanity and life.

The recent rains in European countries have left behind many tragedies which require a period of time to be addressed, at a time when officials pledged to support efforts to save people and rebuild what was destroyed.

The good thing in such disasters is that Western governments take decisions

quickly in addressing the prevailing conditions in the affected areas, and providing financial and other assistance to their citizens, at a time when everyone joins hands to help each other in such cases to remove the effects of destruction and work to restore electricity, gas, communications and roads.

The cost of floods and hurricanes causes great economic losses to countries, amounting to billions, but most of these projects are insured by insurance companies that have always fulfilled their promises to compensate people for those damages in order to restore the economic life cycle to work again.

Shooter Hamed set for second Olympics

Coach Sultan and Al Khatri in intense preparation * Abdulmoneim named chief referee

ADIL AL BALUSHI
TOKYO, JULY 28

Oman's experienced shooter Hamed al Khatri is gearing up for the second consecutive Olympics in the 50 m rifle 3 positions competitions which are scheduled on Monday at Asaka Shooting Range of Tokyo Games.

The 36-year-old Omani did the Sultanate proud last year when he became the champion of the Arab Shooting Championship in Egypt in January 2020. He will compete with 38 top shooters from different parts of the world. The competition qualification will start at 6:30 am (Oman time) and eight shooters will advance to the finals which will begin at 11:50 am (Oman time).

All the shooters will get 120 shots and be distributed into 40 shots each for kneeling, prone and standing within a duration of one hour and 45 minutes. The existing record of al Khatri is 1,176 points and he is holding the Arab record.

TRAINING PROGRAMME

Sultan al Rushaidi, head coach of Oman shooting team, said the preparatory programme for Hamed began since a few weeks ago. "After obtaining the Olympic invitation card for the Sultanate's shooter, we had started a continuous daily training at International Shooting Range in Ghala. We focused on different mental and physical training areas," he added.

The experienced coach affirmed that Olympic Games differ from any other regional and international events and championships. "The competition in any discipline in Olympics is tough as many of the world ranking champions will take part. However, Hamed al Khatri is classified as one of the top domestic, GCC and Arab shooters. He has accumulated technical experience from the previous



national, GCC, Arab, Asian and Olympics participation. Also, we hope the weather condition will be suitable for the shooters to perform well in the competitions. Wind, clouds and fog will not ease the assignment for the shooters to focus on the target goal. Our target is to break a new record and show top performance that reflects the development of Oman's shooting," the Oman coach ended.

LESSONS TO LEARN

Oman's talented swimmer, Issa al Adawi, ended his debut in the 32nd Summer Olympic Games – 2020 Tokyo with sixth place clocking 51.81s in the preliminary heat action of Men's 100m freestyle on Tuesday at the

Tokyo Aquatics Centre.

The national swimmer was assigned in heat three. After completion of the nine heats, Adawi was placed 53rd among the 70 competitors. The fastest qualifier among 16 swimmers who advanced to the semifinals was Italy's Thomas Ceccon who registered a time of 47.71s. The cutoff of the final qualifier was 48.44s clocked by Great Britain's Jacob Whittle.

Commenting after his event, Issa al Adawi said: "My target was to register my personal best and focus was to finish within mid of the 50s. However, small technical details during the swimming competition may change a lot in the final timing. I have learned

many lessons from this debut in the Olympics and working hard to address the weak areas is the main focus now. I can break my best personal (51.69s) in the forthcoming championships and events including the Open swimming championship for Universities in October," he added.

Oman head coach Aiman al Kulaibi said Issa has good technical skills and needs more experience besides taking part in major championships and attending top events.

"This Olympic participation is a good start for Issa. Strengthening some technical aspects and overcoming negative areas are two top points to consider in the



Coach Sultan al Rushaidi



Aiman al Kulaibi



Fina referee Abdulmoneim al Alawi

coming period. Continuity of Issa's preparatory programme in Chukyou University will assist him to develop more and we hope to accomplish the desired outcomes from the long preparatory camp in Japan," he said.

OMANI SWIM REFEREE

Abdulmoneim al Alawi, Fina open water referee, was assigned to officiate the open water swimming competitions (swimming marathon) at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. He is the first Arab and Asian chief referee to manage the competition at Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

Commenting on his selection for the second successive time after his debut in 2016 Rio

Olympics, Al Alawi said: "I had officiated in Rio Olympics as assistant a chief referee. For Tokyo 2020 Olympics, I have been selected as chief referee for the open water swimming competitions which will start on August 4 and 5."

"I am very proud of this Olympic participation. Assigning an Omani referee to run these competitions is a significant indicator and evidence of the success of the Omani referees. I have started officiating swimming events since 1986 and was selected as an umpire for more than 150 international, regional, Gulf and Arab championships and events. I obtained the international referee badge in 1995," he concluded.

Richarlison puts Brazil in quarters, Germany out

TOKYO: Richarlison continued his fine form at the Olympics with a double as Brazil eased into the quarterfinals after a 3-1 win over Saudi Arabia on Wednesday, as Germany exited the men's tournament and hosts Japan progressed with a thrashing of France.

Reigning champions Brazil, who won gold for the first time on home soil in Rio de Janeiro five years ago, finished top of Group D and will face Egypt in the last eight on Saturday.

Matheus Cunha put them ahead in Saitama on Wednesday, but Abdulrahman Al-Amri's goal brought the Saudis level before the half-hour mark. A draw would have been enough for Brazil to go through as group winners, but Richarlison netted in the 76th minute and again in injury time.

The Everton forward is now the leading scorer in the tournament with five goals after his hat-trick against Germany. The Germans, runners-up to Brazil in 2016,



Brazil's Richarlison watches the ball after scoring his second goal while Saudi Arabia's goalkeeper Amin Bukhari (L) looks on. — AFP

bowed out after a 1-1 draw with the Ivory Coast.

Germany had to win to progress, but Benjamin Henrichs' own goal midway through the second half proved costly.

Eduard Lowen's equaliser shortly afterwards set up a tense finale, but the Ivorians held on to seal the second spot in the group and a quarter-final against Spain.

The Spaniards are one of the gold medal favourites after naming a strong squad featuring six members of the team that reached the Euro 2020 semi-finals. But they scored only twice in the group stage, with a 1-1 draw against Argentina enough to edge them through. Real Sociedad midfielder Mikel Merino put Spain in front in the 66th minute. Tomas Belmonte netted a

MEN'S FOOTBALL RESULTS

GROUP A

In Yokohama
France 0 Japan 4 (Kubo 27, Sakai 34, Miyoshi 70, Maeda 90+1)
In Sapporo
South Africa 0 Mexico 3 (Vega 18, Romo 45, Martin 60)

GROUP B

In Sapporo
Romania 0 New Zealand 0
In Yokohama
South Korea 6 (Hwang 12, 45+5, 52-pen, Won 19-pen, Kim Jin-ya 64, Lee Kang-in 82) Honduras 0

GROUP C

In Miyagi
Australia 0 Egypt 2 (Rayan 44, Hamdy 85)
In Saitama
Spain 1 (Merino 66) Argentina 1 (Blemonte 87)

GROUP D

In Miyagi
Germany 1 (Lowen 73) Ivory Coast 1 (Henrichs 67-og)
In Saitama
Saudi Arabia 1 (Al-Amri 27) Brazil 3 (Cunha 14, Richarlison 76, 90+3)

late equaliser for Argentina but the point sealed 1992 champions Spain first place in Group C.

Egypt set up a dream clash with Brazil by seeing off Australia 2-0 with goals from Ahmed Yasser Rayan and Ammar Hamdy.

FRANCE HUMBLLED BY JAPAN

France had given themselves hope of progressing from Group

A when Andre-Pierre Gignac scored a hat-trick in a 4-3 win over South Africa.

But they crashed out as their defence proved fragile again in a 4-0 loss to Japan.

The home side, who reached the semifinals in London in 2012, made it three wins from three and booked a match against New Zealand.

Real Madrid youngster Takefusa Kubo netted for the third straight match before former Marseille defender Hiroki Sakai's tap-in doubled the lead.

Substitutes Koji Miyoshi and Daizen Maeda added to France's blushes as youngster Randal Kolo Muani was sent off on a miserable evening for Les Bleus.

South Africa's slim hopes of reaching the quarters were ended by a 3-0 loss to Mexico in a game that ended with both teams a man down.

The Mexicans will take on South Korea on Saturday, in the same half of the draw as Brazil and Egypt.

South Korea finished top of Group B after a 6-0 thrashing of 10-man Honduras and were joined in the knock-out stage by the Kiwis, who played out a goalless draw with Romania to finish above their opponents on goal difference.

— AFP

In brief

■ LONDON



FORMER ENGLAND
CRICKETER HENDRICK
DEAD AT 72

Former England bowler Mike Hendrick has died aged 72, his old county Derbyshire announced on Tuesday.

“Derbyshire County Cricket Club is deeply saddened by the news of the death of Mike Hendrick, one of the county’s finest post-war cricketers,” said a statement on the club’s website.

A renowned seamer, Hendrick had been suffering from bowel and liver cancer for some time.

Hendrick only played two Tests in that series but he was more heavily involved in England’s 1977 and 1978/9 Ashes successes against arch-rivals Australia.

■ DHAKA



BANGLADESH LOSE KEY
PLAYERS TO COVID
PROTOCOL

Bangladesh have ruled out batsmen Mushfiqur Rahim and Liton Das for a Twenty20 series against Australia next month after they left the team’s coronavirus bubble, a top official said on Tuesday.

Mushfiqur and Liton left a recent tour of Zimbabwe early because of family emergencies and must isolate before rejoining the squad, said Bangladesh Cricket Board chief executive Nizam Uddin Chowdhury.

“Our agreed protocol with Australia is that a player has to be in a bio-secure zone at least 10 days before the series,” Chowdhury said.

Australia are expected to arrive in Bangladesh on Wednesday for the five-match series, which starts August 3.

■ COLOMBO



SRI LANKA-INDIA T20
POSTPONED OVER
COVID-19 CASE

Sri Lanka on Tuesday postponed the second Twenty20 international against India just hours before its start, after an Indian player tested positive for coronavirus.

All-rounder Krunal Pandya was found positive during a routine check, Sri Lanka Cricket said.

“The medical teams have identified eight members as close contacts,” the board said.

“The entire contingent is undergoing RT-PCR tests today to ascertain any further outbreak in the squad.”

No details were given on how Pandya, 30, could have contracted the virus.



IAAF World Race Walking Team Championships 2016 in Rome, Italy.

1,700 ATHLETES TO COMPETE IN MUSCAT

Oman to host World Race Walking

MUSCAT: World Athletics announced at its annual congress in Tokyo that Oman is the new host of the 2022 World Race Walking Team Championships.

The event will take place from March 1 to 6, 2022 at Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC) and will be organised in partnership between Oman Sail, the Oman Athletics Association and OCEC. The event will be held in Oman for the first time in the Middle East and is expected to attract 1,700 athletes.

The bid for the event came as an initiative by Oman Sail based on its expertise in hosting international events with world-class standards as well as its network with international federations of various sporting disciplines.

Dr Khamis al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, said, “We are delighted to be able to lend our expertise in managing large international

events in order to make sure the World Athletics Race Walking Team Championships are a huge success. As hosts, this is a prime opportunity to develop the Sultanate of Oman as an attractive venue for international athletics and inspire our own people to pursue their sporting ambitions. The country prides itself on its authenticity and will offer a warm welcome to athletes from around the world in 2022.”

Mohammed al Asmi, board member at the Oman Athletics Association, said, “This is a great opportunity to enhance athletics in Oman. We have seen in the past how enthusiastic the Omani people have been for home grown and international events and to be able to bring a major championship to the country has the potential position athletics as one of the leading sports in Oman. We are excited to provide the stage for the world’s best race

The event will take place from March 1 to 6, 2022 at Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre

walkers to perform and anticipate an amazing debut for Oman as hosts of the event.”

Each national athletics federation will select a squad to represent their country in Oman. The championships will feature a male and female 20km race, U20 male and female 10km races and Masters categories, scheduled for March 4, 2022. The following day there will also be a 35km combined race. The week of racing in Muscat will be a celebration of athletics with a 1km and 2 km Kids’ Run and Park Run Festival event either side of the main competition with a health and fitness exhibition

on site to inspire budding local athletes to become more active.

Eng Said al Shanfari, CEO of Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre, said, “We are immensely proud to have been chosen to host the championships. The Sultanate has enjoyed a period of rapid sporting growth and earned a strong reputation as excellent hosts as a result. We look forward to delivering another inspiring competition which will have a profound effect on the nation’s youth and further raise the country’s profile internationally.”

Muscat will provide a spectacular backdrop to the event, offering world class accommodation and hospitality for athletes and race officials while also lending a rugged and rich cultural experience to the championships. Racing will centre around the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre in the heart of Muscat.

The route will take competitors through pristine landscaped gardens features a variety of elevations to challenge the racers and provide a perfect viewing platform for a live audience within the Spectators Village. Training camps will be set up at Barcelo Mussanah Resort, dusitD2 Naseem Resort and Golden Tulip in Nizwa to allow the competitors to acclimatise before embarking on the race.

This will be the first time the World Athletics Race Walking Team Championships has been held in the Middle East and the first time outside of China that an Asian nation has hosted the event. The championships were originally due to be held in Minsk, Belarus, but the ongoing travel restrictions caused by Covid-19 forced the event to be rescheduled. Oman now has the opportunity to make history and usher in a new era for athletics in the Sultanate.

Pollard slams pitch as Australia cruise to series win

BRIDGETOWN: Australia handed the West Indies a six-wicket defeat on Monday to clinch a 2-1 one-day international series win and leave home captain Kieron Pollard criticising the quality of the pitch in Bridgetown.

The Australians cruised past their modest target of 153 runs with just over 19 overs remaining as Matthew Wade top scored for the tourists with 51 runs, ensuring stand-in captain Alex Carey led the team to a series victory.

“I think both teams struggled on the pitch and I think that’s unacceptable for international cricket,” said Pollard, whose team were bowled out with more than four overs remaining.

“We’re not going to make excuses. We accept that we batted badly but I don’t think the scores that we have gotten in this three-match series, with two top international teams, I think that’s



Australia players celebrate after winning the third and final ODI against the West Indies at Kensington Oval, Bridgetown, Barbados. — AFP

very embarrassing for us as a people.”

All five Australian bowlers claimed wickets with Mitchell Starc taking three for 43 while his new-ball partner Josh Hazlewood took two for 18 from eight overs.

There was joy, too, for spinner Ashton Agar, who relished the conditions as he claimed two

wickets for 31 runs in his allotted 10 overs. The West Indies struggled with the bat, with only opener Evin Lewis making a significant contribution against the tourists with a knock of 55 runs.

Lewis’ innings came after he had been temporarily forced from the field having played a ball from Hazlewood onto his own helmet

with the West Indies at 14 without loss.

By the time he returned following Keiron Pollard’s dismissal, the hosts were 71 for five and although Lewis continued to offer resistance, he was soon left unaccompanied at the crease with the West Indies all out for 152.

— Reuters

SCOREBOARD

WEST INDIES	
E Lewis not out	55
S Hope c Marsh b Agar	14
S Hetmyer b Hazlewood	6
D Bravo c Philippe b Agar	18
N Pooran b Turner	3
K Pollard c Turner b Starc	11
J Holder b Zampa	5
A Joseph c wkpr Carey b Hazlewood	15
H Walsh c Henriques b Starc	7
A Hosein stpd wkpr Carey b Zampa	3
S Cottrell b Starc	0
Extras (b-4, lb-4, w-7)	15
Total (45.1 overs, all out)	152
Fall of wickets: 1-24, 2-41, 3-46, 4-59, 5-71, 6-75, 7-119, 8-132, 9-137	
Bowling: M Starc 9.1-0-43-3, J Hazlewood 8-1-18-2, A Agar 10-1-31-2, A Turner 8-1-23-1, A Zampa 10-2-29-2	
AUSTRALIA	
J Philippe c Hope b Joseph	10
M Henriques lbw Hosein	1
A Carey lbw Walsh	35
M Marsh c Hope b Cottrell	29
M Wade not out	51
A Agar not out	19
Extras (w-7, nb-1)	8
Total (30.3 overs, 4 wkts)	153
Fall of wickets: 1-10, 2-27, 3-65, 4-99	
Bowling: S Cottrell 3-0-34-1, J Holder 5-0-17-0, A Hosein 10-1-29-1, A Joseph 3-0-14-1, H Walsh 7-0-41-1, K Pollard 2-0-12-0, N Pooran 0.3-0-6-0	



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GERMAN FIRM WEIGHS POTENTIAL FOR GREEN HYDROGEN STARTER VENTURES IN OMAN

ONEIC
الشركة الوطنية للهندسة والاستثمار (ش.م.ع.)
Oman National Engineering & Investment Co. (S.A.O.G)

Materials Events
2nd Quarter of 2021 ended on 30/06/2021.

The company has posted consolidated Profit after Tax of RO 657 k for the six months period ended 30 June 2021 versus RO 612 k for Q2 2020.

Although profit during current period has improved as compared to previous period, but the factors on cost front continues to remain a challenge, some of the factors which are impacting the profit margins are:

- Travel ban has drastically impacted the operations, and many contractually required resources could not travel, impacting revenue of the company.
- Covid impact is continuing, this is impacting progress of work of many jobs, resulting in idling cost, delayed revenue recognition, delay in work execution and noncompliance of contractual terms.
- VAT implementation has seen slight increase on cost front in addition to requirement of additional working capital.
- ONEIC is expecting during the coming quarter that CBO shall issue initial approval to create electronic wallet. This shall open new gateway for electronic payment and collection.
- Visa cost has been drastically increased for expat staff, including staff which are under labor category.
- The interest rates in the market continues to be an area of concern.
- Release of invoices by Ministries and major clients also remain matter of concern as issue of payments gets delayed. Management is taking the delayed payment issue legally and claiming interest for such delays.
- Management in touch with all its customers and keeping them updated with respect to force majeure challenges.

The above issues are temporary in nature, your company is taking strong measures to overcome these issues, we are confident of overcoming these challenges.

The company is in process of diversifying, in line to this:

- ONEIC is in process of establishing integration with other major government and private customers across multiple business segments, substantial volumes are expected from the integration.
- ONEIC collection services are live in Sanad offices, the number of active Sanad offices will increase in coming periods.
- The company has launched mobile POS machines, which are provided to key locations across the region, which can do collection on ONEIC behalf through these devices.
- ONEIC branches are now providing post offices services to its customers.
- ONEIC has entered into agreement with Omantel to provide Omantel services from ONEIC branches.
- The company is focusing on collections, and accordingly combination of initiatives are going on to overcome the issue.
- The company has participated in multiple BOO & other new tenders and favorable results are expected in coming periods. During the period, ONEIC was successfully able to operate Khasab Desalination Plant, which is BOO investment project that expected to contribute to O&M department profits in the coming years.

Your company is taking major steps in order to safeguard interest of all our shareholders and improve to sustain positive growth, which shall play a remarkable role in ONEIC's future profits.

Chairman

Note:
1. Details of Accounts are available with MSM
2. The complete Accounts will be sent by mail to any Shareholder who requests them, in either Arabic or English, as requested, within 7 days of receipt of the request."

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SUSTAINABLE FUTURE: Short-term realisable projects in the 20 – 60 MW range will help pave the way to larger-scale, export-driven schemes, says Hydrogen Rise AG

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](https://twitter.com/conradprabhu)

Hydrogen Rise AG, a well-known German firm specialising in hydrogen fuel technologies, says it is keenly exploring opportunities for the development of module-scale green hydrogen schemes in the Sultanate as a springboard for their eventual upscaling into export-driven mega projects in the future.

The Munich-headquartered firm, which has been among the earliest international proponents of a hydrogen economy in Oman as an alternative to fossil fuels, has been working with a number of Oman-based stakeholders to help advance its stated goal of positioning the Sultanate as a major production hub for green hydrogen in the region.

“Hydrogen Rise is currently planning projects in Oman that can benefit from significant co-funding from the German government. The company focus is on short-term realisable projects in the 20–60 MW range, operating in 2023 and opening the path to larger scale plants,” said Dr Bernd Wiemann, Founder and CEO Hydrogen Rise AG.

“It is expected that green hydrogen achieves commercial viability, much faster as in previous similar waves of new technologies such as solar and wind energy, predominantly due to economies of scale. This is the basis for the worldwide fast-growing interest in this clean energy carrier,” Dr Wiemann stated in a guest article



Dr Bernd Wiemann



Olav Carlsen

published in the latest edition of ‘Energy Oman’.

According to Olav Carlsen, Co-Founder and CFO, module-size 20 MW projects “make sense in size, cost, timing and application” for green hydrogen. “20MW is the most reasonable industrial starter size because of limitations in global and timely availability of electrolyser capacity and in terms of speed of its planning and building,” he said.

Such module-size schemes can “take advantage of future expected significant and fast reduction of capital cost by starting with a reasonable size now and scale as capital cost is coming down”, he noted.

Hydrogen Rise is advocating the use of 20MW starter green hydrogen projects to support a range of industrial applications, including methanol, ammonia, fertiliser, steel, and injection into gas grids.

Such ventures, said Carlsen, will “pave the way for reducing significantly the consumption of natural gas for all of these energy-intensive industries and to be able to continue to attract energy intensive industries to Oman in the future to secure jobs and non-oil revenues while saving natural gas resources when gas is not used for these applications, but renewable energy and green hydrogen instead.”

Starter ventures of about 20

MW capacity can be realised within as little as two years, helping also yield important learning and research opportunities as well as international positioning for Oman. “All industrial countries are looking for international strategic supply partners for green hydrogen now, not in a few years. Supply countries that want to ‘play’, need to act fast in their industry and political positioning,” the CFO stressed.

Last year, the German firm set up Hydrogen Rise LLC in Oman with the goal of creating joint ventures with Omani private investors to plan, develop, build and operate green hydrogen production plants in the Sultanate. Earlier, in partnership with the German University of Technology in Oman (GUTech), Hydrogen Rise set up the Oman Hydrogen Center to support learning and R&D.

Hydrogen Rise says it is in the process of building long lasting consortia with the largest German and international technology and engineering providers to prepare for execution of several hydrogen projects in Oman.

“These partners will continue to work on projects as a team; simultaneously setting up research teams for the proposed application projects for technology transfer and technology adaption to local conditions,” Carlsen added.

High percentage of social media users targeted online in 2020

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 28

Eight-six per cent of respondents in a survey in Oman said either they themselves or family members were targets were targeted by cyber criminals via social networks last year. In most cases fraudsters pretended to be a familiar of potential victims: the manipulation scheme presented a request for help from a friend, global cybersecurity firm Kaspersky said in a report.

Users may not recognise immediately who the person on the other side of the screen is. Though nearly a majority of respondents mentioned that they or their loved ones identified the scammers immediately (56 per cent), 43 per cent still needed to start a dialogue for doing this, the report noted.



“Social media are highly integrated in our daily life and scammers just cannot miss the opportunity to reach users directly through all the popular platforms. The fraudsters may find your personal data in your social media account and use it, for example with social engineering methods. In this case, we shouldn’t forget about basic security rules. For example, it’s better to hide private data and double-check your interlocutor if he urgently asks to transfer

money or open a suspicious link”, comments Maher Yamout, Senior Security Researcher at Kaspersky.

People also try to stay safe from scammers through special apps and programmes. According to the survey, at least 12 per cent respondents use special security solutions (antivirus) to protect themselves against online scams, 12 per cent installed Caller ID and 33 per cent apply built-in phone functions (blacklist and etc.) against phone fraud.

- Some basic security rules:
- Do not click on suspicious links in emails and messages in chats;
 - If you have found out about a particular promotion and want to participate, check the official website or official social media accounts to reassure that this company or brand is holding it
 - Install a reliable security solution with up-to-date databases of phishing sites, scam and spam.
 - Never share confidential information with third parties, including a one-time code from an SMS or push notification;
 - Install a solution that detects phone numbers of spammers and fraudsters;
 - Remember: if an offer on the Internet sounds too tempting to be true, then most likely it is fake.

Khazaen signs lease pacts with two investors



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 28

Lease agreements were signed with two investors who wish to set up operations at Khazaen Economic City near Barka.

The agreements were inked with International Business Development Company and AFT

Group for a total lease area of 15,000 sq metres. Investments are planned in a plastics materials production facility and a general store, Khazaen in a post.

They represent the latest in a flurry of leases signed by local and regional businesses eager to benefit from the financial and geographical advantages offered by Khazaen.

Join Kia’s exclusive referral club & get a chance to win up to RO 50 vouchers



MUSCAT: Kia customers now have a fantastic opportunity to join Kia’s exclusive Referral club and get a chance to win Lulu vouchers up to RO 50 (Conditions apply). For details on how to join Kia’s exclusive referral club, visit the Referral Club section on Kia Oman website and register your details.

According to a representative from Reliable International Automotive, the dealers for Kia in Oman, “The exclusive referral club encourages its customers to share their love for Kia by referring the names of their near and dear ones who would be interested in buying a Kia.

And also get rewarded with Lulu vouchers up to RO 50 for every successful referral. Moreover customers can take advantage of choosing from the vast range of feature-rich vehicles from Kia.

The models include Picanto, Rio, Pegas & Cerato, Sonet, Seltos, K5, Cadenza, K8 (New Cadenza), Stinger, K900, Niro, Soul, Carnival, Sportage, Sorento, Telluride & K4000G.”

“Kia Referral programme is our way exhibiting our relationship with our customers. This programme is a small token of appreciation for our customers for their enthusiasm and loyalty towards the Kia brand. So, hurry and register your referral with us and start earning with every successful referral,” he added.

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

Suhar industrial ‘incident’ causes no disruption: Official

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 28

An ‘incident’ occurring at the Direct Reduction (DR) unit of Jindal Shadede’s steel mill at Sohar Port did not result in any operational disruption or injuries to workers, the company said in a statement.

“There was no disruption of normal operations of the unit as it was under annual shutdown,” Saif bin Ali al Busaidy, Deputy General Manager, Jindal Shadede Iron & Steel, said. “The situation was immediately controlled and there were no injuries recorded. Our team of experts



and engineers have assessed the situation and have ensured that all necessary controls are in place

The situation was immediately controlled and there were no injuries recorded

to mitigate any risks.”

He further added: “The safety and security of our employees and all stakeholders have always been of paramount importance for us and the same was ensured during the incident. There are no long-term implications for the daily operations of the company and the related annual shutdown activities of the company will resume at the earliest.”

Bank Muscat wins prestigious Private Banking award from EMEA Finance

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat Private, the Sultanate’s premier banking service targeted at exclusive High Net-worth Individuals (HNI), has won the prestigious Best Private Bank in Oman award from EMEA Finance.

The award is an excellent recognition of the bank’s unique Private Banking offerings, which provide an exceptional breadth and depth of wealth management solutions.

The investment offerings cover global markets and all asset classes, through a robust execution platform administered by experienced and dedicated Relationship Managers. The Bank has been a multiple winner of EMEA Finance as well as similar awards from Global Finance, Professional Wealth Management and The Banker.

Abdulnasser al Raisi, Deputy General Manager — Premier Banking, Bank Muscat, said: “We are delighted to be continuously recognised by EMEA Finance over the past many years as the Best Private Bank in Oman. This reflects the consistency of performance and the innovative strategies pursued by the bank. The high-end lifestyle benefits and



banking facilities available to our Private Banking clients are the best in the Sultanate. We are very happy that the high standards of professionalism, achieved by Bank Muscat Private as well as the exceptional breadth of our wealth-management and investment solutions are recognised at by leading publications across the globe.”

Bank Muscat offers Private Banking clients a complete suite of investment options in global asset classes through its wealth-management platform and tie-up with international counter parties.

The range of solutions offered to clients includes stocks, bonds, ETFs and mutual funds; across global markets. Bank Muscat

Bank Muscat offers Private Banking clients a complete suite of investment options in global asset classes through its wealth-management platform and tie-up with international counter parties

Private Banking also offer selective exposure to private equity funds, real estate funds and commodity ETFs; offshore banking and portfolio management through reputed global counterparties.

Bank Muscat Private Banking also sends regular research reports to its customers as part of new initiatives to improve customer experience. These reports cover investment ideas, global macroeconomic outlook and updates on key economic and geographic events impacting performance of various asset classes.

The Private banking services also include conventional accounts, term deposits, currency exchange, domestic

and international transfers, online banking and regular asset monitoring. Exclusive Private banking VISA Infinite credit card, VISA Platinum debit card, luxury car finance and yacht finance are available for Private banking clients along with competitive rates for deposits, loans and foreign exchange.

Private banking clients enjoy 1 per cent cashback rewards on all transactions made through Private Visa Infinite credit card. The card also facilitates exclusive Hilton Honors Gold Membership, unlimited access to 1,000+ airport lounges globally, complimentary chauffeur service to and from Muscat International Airport, special offers at over 900 luxury hotels around the world, multi-trip travel insurance and Global Concierge Service.

The additional rewards and benefits for Private clients include high value Al Mazyona prizes. Private customers are eligible to participate in all the prize draws offering a total of RO 11 million in prize money in 2021. Bank Muscat remains committed to expand innovative services to Premier banking clients and provide an exclusive banking experience.

MEC Virtual Fest 2021 a huge success



MUSCAT: Middle East College (MEC) organised the MEC Virtual Festival 2021 recently to provide students from various universities and colleges in Oman to showcase their talents and skillsets. The event saw competitions, workshops and a virtual exhibitions on various topics such as: art and crafts, health and safety, photography, sports and literature and debating. Students from various institutions showcased their talents in the Fest which was attended by notable figures, students, staff and Alumni members.

Thuraya al Yarubi, Head of the Activities Office, said: “All thanks and appreciation to the participating students and the presenters and congratulations to those who won the competitions. MEC always seeks to provide opportunities for students to showcase their talents, and emphasises the philosophies of intercultural engagement and community service in all of its events and activities”.



Oil rises towards \$75 as US inventory drops



Crude oil storage tanks are seen in an aerial photograph at the Cushing oil hub in Cushing, Oklahoma. — Reuters

LONDON: Oil rose towards \$75 a barrel on Wednesday ahead of an industry report expected to show US crude inventories dropped more than expected, bringing the focus back to a tight supply and demand balance rather than rising coronavirus infections.

US crude stocks fell 4.7 million barrels, two market sources citing American Petroleum Institute figures said, more than analysts forecast.

“This price catalyst may inject some much-needed momentum into proceedings, especially after the API set a bullish tone,” said Stephen Brennock of broker PVM, referring to the EIA report.

Brent crude rose 34 cents, or 0.5 per cent, to \$74.82 a barrel at 0820 GMT, after posting on Tuesday its first decline in six

days. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude advanced 40 cents, or 0.6 per cent, to \$72.05.

Oil has risen 44 per cent this year, helped by demand recovery and supply curbs by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies, known as Opec+.

Opec+ agreed to increase supply by 400,000 barrels per day from August, unwinding more of last year's record supply cut, but this is seen as too low by some analysts given the rebound in demand expected this year.

“Oil supply is likely to remain tight even with the production hikes set by Opec+,” said Naeem Aslam of online broker Avatrade.

A rising number of coronavirus cases worldwide, despite vaccination programmes, has limited the upside for oil and remains a concern. — Reuters

BoE set to keep full-speed stimulus despite split over inflation risk

LONDON: The Bank of England looks set to keep its stimulus running at full speed next week despite two policymakers breaking ranks to suggest that its nearly 900 £billion (\$1.2 trillion) bond-buying scheme might have to end early as inflation speeds up.

Britain's economy is rebounding quickly from its almost 10 per cent crash of 2020, when the country suffered a higher Covid-19 death toll and longer lockdowns than most other nations.

With consumers back in shops, bars and restaurants and fuel prices leaping as the global economy fires up, inflation has sped past the BoE's 2 per cent target and is on course to surpass 3 per cent.

Many investors are betting the BoE will raise interest rates before the US Federal Reserve, even though the US economy has already recovered its pre-pandemic size, unlike Britain's.

Two BoE rate-setters — Deputy Governor Dave Ramsden and Michael Saunders — have said the time for tighter policy might be nearing, raising the prospect of the BoE curtailing its bond-buying programme sooner than planned.

But colleagues have signalled they think the bigger risk would be to stop the bond-buying programme before its scheduled



A person walks past the Bank of England in the City of London financial district, in London, Britain. — Reuters

end in late 2021. That could hurt the still incomplete recovery in the world's fifth-biggest economy.

Finance Minister Rishi Sunak is phasing out furlough payments along with other parts of his pandemic safety net, and a recent slowing of Covid-19 cases could prove fleeting.

“I think it will remain appropriate to keep the current monetary stimulus in place for several quarters at least, and probably longer,” Monetary Policy

Committee member Gertjan Vlieghe said on Monday.

Key to the BoE leaving the stimulus programme unchanged is its view that the jump in inflation will prove short-lived.

In May, the BoE said it expected consumer price inflation would peak at about 2.5 per cent in late 2021 although it was then forced to raise that to above 3 per cent in an interim forecast in June.

The new quarterly projections due on August 5 are likely to see

a new peak of 3.5 per cent, which would nudge up the BoE's closely watched forecasts for inflation in two and three years' time to its 2.0 per cent target, according to economists at HSBC.

That would be taken by investors as an implicit backing of market pricing for a May 2022 hike of 15 basis points taking Bank Rate to 0.25 per cent, up from its all-time low of 0.1 per cent now, and a further 25 basis point hike a year later, they said. — Reuters

Deutsche Bank lifts 2022 target after profits jump



FRANKFURT:

Germany's largest lender Deutsche Bank raised its 2022 revenue target after posting a better-than-expected net profit for the second quarter, even as it took a hit from an unfavourable court ruling on banking fees.

Net profit for the April-June period reached €692 million (\$817 million), compared with a €77-million loss a year earlier.

Analysts surveyed by Factset had forecast a smaller net profit of just under 430 million euros.

Group revenues fell one per cent to €6.2 billion, weighed down by an 11-per cent drop in revenues at Deutsche's investment banking division.

Deutsche pointed out however that after an exceptionally strong performance in the first quarter, the investment unit's revenues over the six months of 2021 were still up nine per cent on the year. — AFP

Shares sit at 2021 lows ahead of Fed verdict

HONG KONG: Asian shares stayed stuck at seven-month lows on Wednesday, as markets continued to digest a storm in Chinese equity markets, while the dollar rested with traders reluctant to place large bets ahead of the outcome of the Federal Reserve meeting.

MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan dropped 0.35 per cent in early trading, having fallen in each of the three previous sessions as regulatory crackdowns in China roiled stocks in the technology, property and education sectors, leaving investors bruised.

Japan's Nikkei slid 1.01 per

cent, Chinese bluechips dropped 1.51 per cent, and Australian shares fell 0.43 per cent. Hong Kong bucked the trend, rising 0.63 per cent, after closing at its lowest level since November the day before.

“China and the Fed are the two key things for today,” said Tai Hui, chief market strategist for Asia Pacific, at JPMorgan Asset Management.

Major questions were whether markets would stabilise as they processed the news out of China and whether the spread of the Delta variant posed a risk to growth in the US and Europe, he added. — Reuters

China's regulatory crackdown a drag on HK's IPO pipeline

HONG KONG: Hong Kong's buzzing initial public offering (IPO) pipeline is likely to taper off in the second half of 2021, as Chinese firms temper their expectations for valuations amid a drastic regulatory crackdown in the mainland, dealmakers said.

Investors, on tenterhooks as China's assault on fast-growing private firms has led to an uncertain environment, are also expected to be selective of which deals to buy into, they added.

China's months-long



Floor traders work during afternoon trading at the Hong Kong Stock Exchange, in Hong Kong. — Reuters

regulatory crackdown has involved firms in the \$120 billion private tutoring sector

and behemoths like Alibaba, Ant Group and ride-hailing giant Didi. — Reuters

Billions of lockdown savings funnelled to funds

LONDON: Asset managers St James's Place, Rathbone and Man Group saw billions of pounds in inflows during the first half of the year, as household savings jumped during Covid-19 lockdowns, their results showed on Wednesday.

Wealth managers have seen their fortunes turn around drastically as stimulus cheques and vaccinations reassured investors about the economic outlook following the first few months of last year when clients pulled out money.

St James's Place (SJP) expects gross inflows to grow 20 per cent in the second half of 2021, the money manager said, after attracting £5.5 billion (\$7.64 billion) in net inflows in the first half.

Improving confidence and an increase in household savings rates have helped attract £9.2



British Pound notes and coins are seen inside a cash register in a bar in Manchester, Britain. — Reuters

billion of gross inflows, SJP's Chief Executive Andrew Croft said in a statement.

Funds under management

at SJP, which provides advice on investment and retirement planning, swelled to £143.8 billion at end-June from £129.3 billion in

Wealth managers have seen their fortunes turn around drastically as stimulus cheques and vaccinations reassured investors about the economic outlook following the first few months of last year when clients pulled out money

December.

Rathbone Brothers increased its interim dividend by 8 per cent to 27 pence, following an 8.2-per cent jump in total funds under management and administration to £59.2 billion.

“Investment markets improved in the first half of 2021 as

sentiment began to look beyond the pandemic,” Rathbone Brothers Chief Executive Paul Stockton said in a separate statement.

Shares in St James's Place jumped 5.4 per cent to the top of the FTSE 100, while hedge fund Man Group and Rathbone were up 2 per cent and 1 per cent, respectively.

SJP reinstated its interim dividend and set an 11.55 pence a share payout.

Man Group raised its interim dividend by 14 per cent to 5.6 cents per share and announced a \$100-million share buyback plan as its funds under management rose to a record of \$135.3 billion from \$123.6 billion.

The company added that clients were interested in particular in alternative strategies, which typically aims to provide diversification. — Reuters

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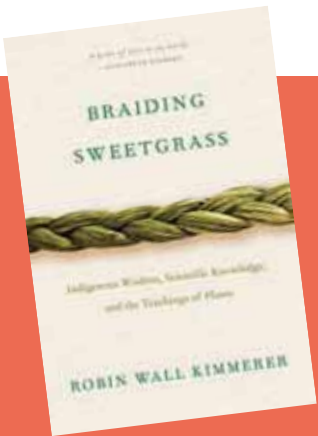
The rise of the #plantita

Urban gardening in the time of Covid19

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DIGITAL TRENDS

READ



BRAIDING SWEETGRASS
BY ROBIN WALL KIMMERER

A botanist and member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation espouses having an understanding and appreciation of plants and animals.

Slice of Charles and Diana's wedding cake to be auctioned

A SLICE OF THE Prince and Princess of Wales' wedding cake is up for sale — 40 years after Charles and Diana tied the knot.

The anniversary of their fairy-tale royal nuptials, when the heir to the British throne married shy 20-year-old Lady Diana Spencer in the grand St Paul's Cathedral on July 29, 1981, falls on Thursday.

But their relationship was not to last: They split 11 years later in 1992 and divorced in 1996.

The large slice of cake icing and marzipan base from one of the 23 official wedding cakes features a sugared only of the Royal coat-of-arms coloured in gold, red, blue and silver.

It was given to Moyra Smith, a member of the Queen Mother's

household Clarence House, who preserved the topping with cling film. She kept it in an old floral cake tin and taped a handmade label to the lid, reading: "Handle with care — Prince Charles & Princess Diane's(sic) wedding cake," which she signed and dated.

Smith's family sold the cake in 2008 to a collector, but it has come up for auction once again, coinciding with the 40th wedding anniversary.

Chris Albury, auctioneer and senior valuer at Dominic Winter Auctioneers in Cirencester, Gloucestershire, said: "It appears to be in exactly the same good condition as when originally sold, but we advise against eating it."

— PA Media/dpa





Iceland, home to world's most expensive feather treasure

On a remote island in Breidafjörður Bay off the west coast of Iceland, a thousand-year-old harvest takes place — the hunt for elusive eiderdown, used to make some of the world's best duvets and quilts.

The handpicked down sells for thousands of euros (dollars) a kilo, catering to those looking for exclusive products.

Every summer, nearly 400 Icelandic farmers comb through hollow surfaces in the rock, on the sand or in the tall grass to unearth a few handfuls of the grey feathers of this polar duck.

From May onwards, the eider comes to nest in sparsely populated marine landscapes around much of Iceland's coast where there is seaweed to feed its ducklings.

"When there are eggs, we only take a part of the down. And when the eider has already left the nest, we take everything," Erla Fridriksdóttir, head of King Eider, one of the country's main exporters, said.

The eider, a sea duck from the subarctic oceans, leaves a trail behind consisting of a natural treasure: one of the warmest natural fibres on the planet, both light and highly insulating.

The female, with her dark brown plumage with black stripes — similar to that of a mallard but slightly larger — releases the down from her breast and lines her nest with it to insulate it during incubation.

METICULOUS CLEANING

About 60 nests are needed to produce one kilo of down — a quilt needs between 600 and 1,600 grammes, depending on the quality chosen.

Worldwide, the annual harvest of eiderdown is no more than four tonnes, three quarters of which comes from Iceland, by far the world's largest producer, ahead of Canada and other countries bordering the Arctic.

There are five Icelandic companies exporting eiderdown, accord-



ing to the Eider Farming Association, but around 15 companies in total involved in some capacity in its production.

On the island of Bjarneyjar, the tradition of searching for abandoned nests has been passed down for generations.

The local practice is said to have started in Iceland as Vikings from Norway settled on the island at the end of the 9th century.

Since 1847, the eider has been fully protected in Iceland, as hunting and picking its eggs are prohibited.

But it still faces dangers, as predators such as seagulls, crows, eagles, minks and foxes eat the sea ducks or their eggs.

"We feel that the ducks like to have their nests close to us, where we are staying," Jon Fridriksson, Erla's brother, said, adding that it could be a strategy to keep predators at bay.

Once harvested, the down is dried in the open air so it doesn't mould.

Then Fridriksdóttir's employees begin the first stage of sterilising and cleaning the down in a huge oven at a temperature of 120 degrees Celsius for eight hours.

"When the down comes in here, it's mostly going to be full of grass, eggshells and all kinds of things from the ocean... and we put it in the oven to kill off any organism and it (the high temperature) also makes

the grass brittle," Pall Jonsson, in charge of the machines at the workshop in the nearby town of Stykkisholmur, said.

In a second step, rotating machines remove other dirt from the down by pressing it against a thin wire mesh.

As a last touch, expert hands — which no technology has been able to replace for this process so far — do another thorough cleaning.

Even for the most experienced, it takes four to five hours to clean out a kilo of down by hand.

Finally, the down feathers are washed with water and disinfected, again by hand, before being wrung out and dried.

4,000-EURO BLANKETS

While world famous, eiderdown production is a drop in the bucket of the world's total down production, estimated at 175,000 tonnes per year, according to the International Down and Feather Bureau.

According to Icelandic law, eiderdown must pass strict quality controls before being sold, ensuring cleanliness, smell, colour and consistency.

"You have to be able to pick up a 40-50 grammes package between two fingers and if it remains intact and does not fall out, then the down is of good quality," Asgeir Jonsson, one of the inspectors, explains.

In addition to its rarity, the production of eiderdown — from its manual collection to its rigorous cleaning — helps explain its high price.

A simple duvet containing 800 grammes of feathers is sold for about 640,000 Icelandic kronur (4,350 euros, \$5,116).

The customers "are often nature lovers and people who care about the environment," Fridriksdóttir said.

"It is the only one that is harvested, the other down is often a by-product of the food industry" added Fridriksdóttir, whose small business mostly ships to Germany and Japan. — AFP

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

From dresses and skorts to hijabs, badminton's women wear what they like



FEMALE ATHLETES have fought long and hard for the right to choose what they wear when they compete at the Olympics, and at the Tokyo Games more and more athletes and fans are speaking out and taking action.

Of the more than 30 women who played badminton on Wednesday, including India's PV Sindhu and Taiwan's Tai Tzu Ying, about two-thirds wore shorts, while others were clad in skorts, dresses and skirts, and one wore a hijab.

"I'm lucky that we can wear whatever we want," said Sindhu, the Rio Olympics women's singles silver medalist who wore one of her blue dresses when she defeated Hong

ing to the European Handball Federation and the International Handball Federation.

Rules state that the bikini bottoms must be a maximum width of 10 centimetres and have a "close fit and cut on an upward angle."

About a decade ago, ahead of the 2012 London Olympics, some officials at the Badminton World Federation (BWF) drew fire because of similar rule saying women had to wear skirts to make the sport more "feminine" and "attractive" to fans and sponsors. That rule was scrapped prior to the Games, however.

"In hindsight, we went around the wrong way, but we've learned from that



Kong's Cheung Ngan Yi 21-9, 21-16.

Iran's Soraya Aghaei Hajiagha, along with her coach, wore a dress, leggings and a hijab in her match with China's He Bing Jiao. Skirts and skorts — loose-fitting shorts that look like skirts from the front — were also a popular choice among players including Belgium's Lianne Tan and Japan's Nozomi Okuhara.

On Sunday, the German women's gymnastics team wore full-body suits in qualifications, hoping to promote freedom of choice and encourage women to wear what makes them feel comfortable.

But the Norwegian women's beach handball team were fined 1,500 euros last week for wearing shorts rather than bikini bottoms and jeopardising "the ideal presentation of the sport", accord-

and so have our manufacturers," said Nora Perry, two-time world champion and a council member of the BWF, whose suppliers include Adidas and Yonex. "Yonex have embraced it because there are a lot of Koreans and Chinese girls who don't want to wear skirts."

Perry, who has over 75 international titles in individual competition, said that when she played in the 80s, the fashion was to wear skirts and dresses with "frilly things underneath".

"It was nice that the women's voices were heard on that," British player Kirsty Gilmour said, "I personally don't feel comfortable in a skirt so I like the choice of short shorts, long shorts; Tai Tzu Ying likes her tops sleeveless."

"We're lucky we don't feel pressure on how we should look." — Reuters



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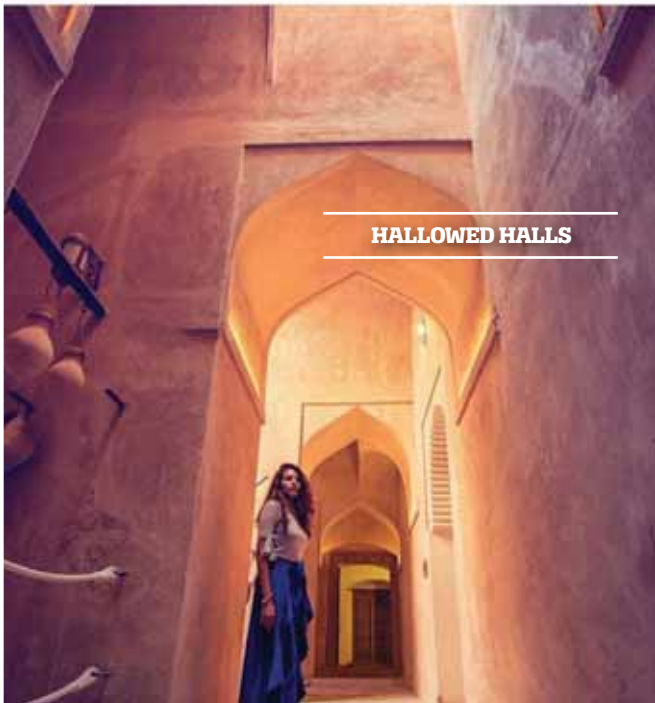
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ENTERTAINMENT



New York's Met Opera mandates vaccines for new season

NEW YORK'S METROPOLITAN Opera will require audiences and performers to be fully vaccinated for its upcoming season, the house announced on Tuesday amid debate in the United States about mandatory vaccinations.

The Met said all customers, staff and members of its orchestra and chorus will need to show proof of vaccination against Covid-19 for performances in the 2021-22 season.

"The Met will be a fully vaccinated house," the prestigious institution said in an e-mail sent to patrons.



Children under the age of 12, a group currently ineligible for vaccines, will not be allowed to enter the Met even if the adults accompanying them are vaccinated.

The announcement comes as parts of the United States move towards vaccine mandates due to fears over rising cases caused by the Delta variant.

California and New York City announced on Monday that public sector workers would need to get vaccinated or take weekly tests.

The US Department of Veterans Affairs became the first federal agency to impose a mandate when it announced this week it would require more than 100,000 healthcare personnel to get Covid-19 vaccines.

New York officials said on Tuesday that proof of vaccination would also be required for a concert on August 21 in Central Park to celebrate the city's post-Covid reopening, with Bruce Springsteen, Andrea Bocelli and Paul Simon slated to be among the performers.

Broadway — due to fully return in September — has not issued a general vaccine mandate, but two shows, "Springsteen on Broadway" and "Pass Over," have announced that audiences must be vaccinated.

The Met employs more than 3,000 staffers, the largest performing arts organisation in the United States.

It has been closed since the coronavirus broke out in New York in March 2020 and is hoping to open at the end of September.

During the shutdown, the institution was rocked by labour tensions over proposed wage cuts.

Tentative agreements with unions representing its chorus and stagehands have been reached in recent weeks. — **AFP**

ANIMAL PLANET

Frog that became extinct in England reintroduced to its former home



A TYPE OF FROG extinct in England since the mid 1990s has been reintroduced to its former home, after animals were flown in from Sweden and first established at a secret site in Norfolk.

The northern pool frog was last found at Norfolk Wildlife Trust's Thompson Common, with its ancient pingo ponds, rare ponds created at the end of the last ice age, as its habitat.

Jim Foster, conservation director of Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC), said the frog became extinct in England as declining water levels made their breeding ponds unsuitable.

He said the landscape at NWT Thompson Common has been improved, with ponds holding water for longer and trees removed from some areas as "pool frogs are real sun lovers."

"That means we can reverse extinction, and it's not often you can say that for an animal," he said.

He went on: "After the species went extinct in England in the 1990s, a load of research was done into why they'd disappeared and what we could do to get them back."

"Basically that resulted in a plan to get permission from the Swedish government to take animals from Sweden, fly them over to England and release them at that first site, Site X."

Site X, a location in Norfolk that has been kept confidential to prevent disturbance, was set up in 2005.

Around 30 adult northern pool frogs per year were flown over from Sweden between 2005 and 2008, Foster said.

Spawn from the growing population at Site X has in turn been used to establish a population at NWT Thompson Common, the second population of the frogs in England and a return to the site where they were last known to occur before their extinction in the country.

Foster said more than 1,000 tad-

poles, reared in captivity from spawn, have been released at Thompson Common during the past four years and the project was completed this month.

"They should be sustainable on their own, that's our aim," he said, adding that further releases will be considered if the population "needs a helping hand."

He said the frogs have moved "under their own steam" from their private release site "out into areas where the public can freely come and go, and now you can see pool frogs in public parts of Thompson Common."

The northern pool frog is "very different from the common frog, which is the other native species of frog that we have in Britain," said Foster.

"They superficially look quite similar but if you look a bit closer, pool frogs always have this bright green or yellow stripe down the back."

"The males have a very loud mating call."

"Adult pool frogs are quite acrobatic."

"They leap out of the water on a sunny day and take dragonflies and damselflies on the wing, and it's really impressive to see."

"Pool frogs are quite different from common frogs also in terms of their ecology."

"They lay fewer eggs, so they're much more vulnerable."

"A common frog would lay around 2,000 eggs, each female, whereas a pool frog would only lay up to about 500 eggs."

He said the animals, which live for between three and five years, have "several hundred ponds... to choose from" at NWT Thompson Common.

Norfolk Wildlife Trust said tadpoles are exposed to high rates of predation in the wild and rearing northern pool frog tadpoles within a protected environment results in many more young frogs than would occur naturally. — **PA Media/dpa**

CONSERVATION

Chile's ancient mummies added to UN heritage list



CHILE'S CHINCHORRO mummies, the oldest in the world to have been purposefully preserved by humans, were added to UNESCO's World Heritage List on Tuesday.

The mummies, which were found in the north of Chile at the start of the 20th century, are more than 7,000 years old, meaning they pre-date the Egyptian mummies by two millennia.

The United Nations' cultural organisation announced on Twitter that it had added the "settlement and artificial mummification of the Chinchorro culture" to its prestigious list during a virtual meeting chaired by China.

"UNESCO is validating on an international level, through different experts, that the settlements and artificial mummification of the Chinchorro culture has exceptional value, that it has a global importance," Chilean anthropologist Bernardo Arriaza said.

The Chinchorro were fishers and hunter gatherers more than 7,000 years ago in an area where the desert and Pacific Ocean meet in what is today the south of Peru and north of Chile.

So far, more than 300 mummies have been found, including red, black and bandaged ones.

The mummification process consisted of removing the organs, intestines and tissue.

The skin was then ripped off the corpse and the body rebuilt using sticks and animal hair, while a thick head of black hair was sewn onto the scalp.

Finally the mummies were painted red or black using earth, pigments, manganese and iron oxide.

"These bodies are very finely made by specialists. There's a subtlety, a creativity by these first populations," added Arriaza, who is the director of the Chinchorro Center at the Tarapaca University in the city of Arica.

Why the Chinchorro culture mummified their dead remains a mystery.

In 2005, Arriaza developed a theory that it could have been linked to high levels of arsenic poisoning in the water that could have produced premature births, miscarriages, underweight children and high infant mortality.

He suggested the mummification was "an emotional response from parents faced with these painful losses, so they painted them, dressed them up and every day this technique became more elaborate." — **AFP**



The rise of the plantita

Urban gardening in the time of Covid-19

By Yeru Ebu
Follow on Instagram: @yru_here

It's a portmanteau of the words plant and tita which is the Filipino word for auntie. Together, it is a concept of someone whose hobby is raising indoor and outdoor plants. If you haven't heard of the word plantita or plantito (plant uncle), you might be familiar with its concept.

Do you know anyone who drools over indoor and outdoor plants? Do you know of someone gushing over their plants growing a new leaf or getting depressed that their plants are also not getting proper sunlight? Technically, the concept is like having a pet but instead of animals, you have plants. The extreme version of the plantita is literally naming each plant and treat them like children collecting as many rare breeds as possible inside their homes and turning their rooms into a mini-jungle. Sound like someone you know? Then that person is definitely a certified plantita.

The concept of gardening actually has been floating around for quite a while. In the time of pandemic, indoor plants became in demand with the very basic ones involving succulents or cactuses. But nobody named the concept. With the original concept growing wild in Western countries, it spread to the Philippines and had bloomed into a full movement. Wherever there is a Filipino, you will find a certified plantita. In Oman, the trend has also spilt over to both nationals and residents but they may simply refer to it as a hobby.

Yusuf al Kindi runs an Instagram account called @plants.oman where he encourages everyone to "make our world green."

"The account belongs to me. We do not have a shop.

I work from home and has decided to do a side home project," he shared.

Yusuf has some of the most amazing collections which are sold with cost depending on the plant size and the way that it was packaged.

He also has plants available for beginners as well as for the extreme collectors with plants ranging from RO 6 and can sometimes cost up to more than RO 100. More established shops sell their plants at higher prices with some reaching more than RO 200 or RO 300.

For Yusuf's case, he has many plants that are easy to care for that will suit well with beginners. Pothos, for example, is one of the most popular breeds usually found in homes and offices. Because it is easy to care for and doesn't need a lot of sunlight or regular water, they are usually preferred as they are great as hanging plants are easy to care for. Once they reach a certain size, they are also fast to propagate by simply cutting it from the stem and then repotting it.

Other varieties that are easier to care for include Monstera deliciosa or also known as Swiss cheese plant, the low-light snake plants, succulents which are a favourite by those who prefer something nice for display, the leafy and vine-like Philodendrons and the easy-to-manage spider plant.

Yusuf does not only recommend what plants to pick, but he also gives insights into how to keep them healthy and alive. Other than making recommendations of where to place the plants, when to water or fertilise them, he also provides information as to what pots comes great with each plant.

Khezia Jane Resma

refers to herself as an amateur plantita and can only raise plants that would fit in her rented apartment.

But unlike other indoor plant owners, she also sticks to plants that can work well with her space and instead of crowding her space, actually compliments it.

"It's like having a little bit of nature inside a concrete space. It makes me smile whenever I see my plants thriving. Especially during the pandemic, that little bit of greenery inside the home does help a lot in your mental health," she said.

One of the front liners working in the medical field, Khezia has about a dozen varieties of plants in her home mostly made up of succulents and Pothos or the likes of it that doesn't require sunlight.

"As a plantita, you also need a good understanding of how to keep the plant alive. You have to know which ones need direct sunlight and which ones need regular watering. Most of my plants do not need a lot of care. Working in the medical field, I have to choose those that will suit well with my lifestyle," she said.

"As a plantita, I celebrate whenever my plants grow a new leaf. I have a Swiss cheese plant that I'd been caring for a lot. Whenever it grows a new leaf, it makes me feel happy like a parent," she shared.

"I don't really know what the Arabic translation is for plantita. I don't think anyone in this part of the world even bothered to name the concept. But for those like me who thrive to be in nature and having that lush greenery inside their homes and you care for your plants like a pet or parent, then welcome to the world of a plantita," she shared.



CHECKLIST THAT YOU'RE A CERTIFIED PLANTITA

YOU FOLLOW PLANT-RELATED TOPICS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

You follow around 10 plant-related accounts on Instagram or gardening websites wherein just watching the different plants inspire you to either horde for more or give tips on how to raise them.

YOU HAVE PLANTS IN NEARLY EVERY CORNER

Instead of a home, you now

have what you can call a mini-jungle. You have plants climbing down your bookshelf, succulents in the bathroom and potted plants in your bedroom.

YOU GO WHERE IT'S GREEN

Whether it's a garden or a park, your attention is drawn to what's planted there. You try to name most of the plants and whenever you see a plant you like, you research it.

YOU DREAM ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE GETTING NEXT

It's not only okay that you have plant photos everywhere (we mean everywhere — from your social media to printed photos on your walls), you also make a stop at every shop that sells potted plants, inquire about what's available and plot on how you can get your hands on it.

YOUR PLANTS HAVE THEIR OWN BUDGET

From fertilisers to pots, from gardening tools to decorative stickers, you always set aside something for your plants.