

AI Cloud Service launched

As one of the vital enablers contributing to the improvement of productivity in economic sectors and a key pillar driving the national economy for technological transformation, Oman Data Park launched Nebula AI service by joining the NVIDIA Partner Network Cloud Service Provider Partner Programme. **DETAILS ON P13**



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OMAN FACE SRI LANKA AS WORLD CUP NEARS



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GOOGLE TO INVEST \$1 BN IN AFRICA OVER FIVE YEARS



P18

TWO CONGOS SEEK UNESCO LISTING TO RECLAIM RUMBA'S RHYTHMS



MUSCAT

HM THANKED BY ALGERIA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from President Abdelmadjid Tebboune of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria in reply to His Majesty's cable of condolences to him on the death of the former Algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika. In his cable, President Tebboune expressed his appreciation for His Majesty's heartfelt sympathies and prayers, praying to the Almighty Allah to protect His Majesty against all harm. — ONA

OMAN, IRAN REVIEW BILATERAL RELATIONS

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Wednesday received Dr Ali Bagheri, Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs of Iran. The two sides reviewed relations of cooperation in various spheres as the leaderships of the two countries attach a joint attention to promote these relations to achieve mutual benefit. The two sides also touched on regional and international issues, as well as their developments. They underscored the importance of dealing with these issues through constructive dialogue and peaceful means. **DETAILS ON P2**

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CIVIL DEFENCE AUTHORITY HANDLES MORE THAN 410 REPORTS DURING CLIMATIC CONDITION

HM receives phone call from King of Bahrain

HIS MAJESTY Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a phone call from King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain to reassure himself about conditions in Oman after the tropical cyclone Shaheen that hit the Sultanate.

During the call, King Hamad stressed his country's solidarity with the Sultanate while it addresses impacts of the climatic conditions.

He expressed his heartfelt condolences and sympathies to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people on victims of the cyclone, praying to the Almighty Allah to rest their souls in peace in paradise and grant their families fortitude to bear the loss, and protect the Sultanate against all harms.

On his turn, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere thanks and appreciation for King Hamad's kind gesture and sincere sympathies, praying to the Almighty Allah to protect him and the Bahraini people against all harms. — ONA

FOCUS SHIFTS TO RESTORATION, PUBLIC HEALTH

MUSCAT: Representatives of the Medical Response and Health Sector held a coordination meeting on Wednesday to rally efforts to secure public health in the aftermath of the tropical cyclone Shaheen.

The National Committee for Emergency Management (NCEM) gave directives to mobilise the public health sector, being part of the Medical Response and Health Sector, by securing the safety of potable water and food supplies. The process also includes ensuring a healthy discharge of wastewater, making speedy disposal of

corpses of dead animals, enhancing epidemiological surveillance activities and combating disease vectors.

Sub-committees tasked with medical response and public health in the governorates of the Sultanate are coordinating efforts to check drinking water and the safety of foodstuff, besides combating disease vectors.

The Medical Response and Health Sector advises citizens and residents to exercise caution when consuming foodstuff as some places were hit power outages for a long time and to get rid of stagnant water within their premises.

Meanwhile, the teams of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) tasked with search, rescue, firefighting and ambulance, handled 410 mayday reports during the tropical cyclone Shaheen in the governorates of North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Dhahirah and North Al Sharqiyah.



Chemistry Nobel for duo for work on catalysts



A sign mentions German scientist Benjamin List, after winning the 2021 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for the development of asymmetric organocatalysis together with David MacMillan, in Muelheim an der Ruhr, Germany, on Wednesday. — Reuters

STOCKHOLM: The 2021 Nobel Prize in Chemistry was awarded on Wednesday to Benjamin List and David MacMillan for developing a new method for building molecules.

The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in Stockholm said their work had advanced pharmaceutical research and "made chemistry greener."

List and MacMillan, working independently of each other, had developed in 2000 "a third type of catalysis."

This method uses organic catalysts such as such as oxygen, nitrogen and sulphur - making it more environmentally friendly than other techniques, as well as cheaper, the academy said. Catalysts are essential in molecular construction because they speedup reactions.

The academy said that before List and MacMillan's breakthrough there had only been two known types of catalysts: metals and enzymes. "This concept for catalysis is as simple as it is ingenious, and the fact is that many people have wondered why we didn't think of it earlier," says Johan Aqvist, who is chair of the Nobel Committee for Chemistry.

"Using these reactions, researchers can now more efficiently construct anything from new pharmaceuticals to molecules that can capture light in solar cells," the academy's citation said.

List is a German chemist with the Max-Planck-Institut. — Agencies

Sultanate marks 50 years of joining the United Nations

MUSCAT: In affirmation to the values and principles that the Omani modern renaissance is based on, the Sultanate today marks (October 7), the 50th anniversary of its joining the United Nations, one of the greatest and prestigious organisations in the world.

The Sultanate joined the UN on October 7, 1971, and became the 128th official member.

Presided by late His Highness Sayyid Tarik bin Taimour, the Omani delegation participated in flag-raising ceremony which took place in the front parade of UN's

premises in New York, declaring the Sultanate's noticeable role in bridging communication with international society politically, culturally and economically, and in spreading the culture of peace.

Recently, delivering the Sultanate's speech before the 76th session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, said Oman, under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, has affirmed its continuous commitment to the main fundamentals and principles of its foreign policy.



Oman's foreign policy advocates good neighbourliness, non-interference in the internal affairs of others, respect for international laws and charters, support for cooperation among countries and the enhancement of opportunities for internal dialogue.

The Sultanate also stressed its conviction on the need to resolve differences in a spirit of harmony and tolerance that has always been the mainstay of the country's civilisation.

Sayyid Badr reiterated the Sultanate's continued cooperation with the UN Secretary-General

and all member states with the prime aim of achieving the UN's noble goals, notably establishing and consolidating international peace and security.

In his speech, Sayyid Badr also highlighted the efforts exerted by the Sultanate while dealing with coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. He said that "Crises and challenges are also opportunities for nations to test their readiness and enhance their capabilities. Despite the great challenges and hurdles, the pandemic did not discourage us, neither did weaken our resolve to confront it."

Royal Office Minister receives French, Indian ambassadors



MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office on Wednesday Veronique Aulagnon, appointed-ambassador of the French Republic to Oman.

Gen Al Numani wished the ambassador success in her tour of duty in the Sultanate.

On her turn, the French ambassador expressed her appreciation to the Sultanate



in enhancing means of joint cooperation to realize the joint interests of both countries.

The meeting exchanged cordial talks and discussed a number of matters of mutual interest.

Gen Al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, also received Shri Munu Mahawar, Ambassador of the Republic of India to Oman, to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty as his country's ambassador to the Sultanate.

The ambassador expressed his gratitude and appreciation for the cooperation extended to him during his tour of duty from all officials in the Sultanate. He also praised the strong, historic relations binding the two friendly countries.

On his turn, Gen Al Numani thanked the ambassador for the efforts he exerted to promote the relations between the two countries. — ONA



Oman, Iran review cooperation ties

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received on Wednesday Dr Ali Bagheri, Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The two sides reviewed relations of cooperation in various spheres as the leaderships of the two countries attach a joint attention to promote these relations to achieve mutual benefit.

The two sides also touched on regional and international issues, as well as their developments. They underscored the importance of dealing with these issues through constructive dialogue and peaceful means.

The meeting was attended by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, Khalid bin Hashel al Muselhi, Head of the Minister's Office



Department, Ali Najafi, Iranian Ambassador to the Sultanate.

OFFICIAL TALKS

An official session of talks was held here on Wednesday between the Sultanate and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Sultanate's side was headed by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Foreign Ministry's Under Secretary for Diplomatic

Affairs. The Iranian side was headed by Dr Ali Bagheri, Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs of Iran.

The two sides explored fields of cooperation between the two countries in a manner that enhances the bilateral relations. The two sides also exchanged views on a range of regional and international matters of common interest. — ONA

SC to promote prompt action in courts

MUSCAT: The general assembly of the Supreme Court (SC) held its first meeting of Judicial Year 2021-2022 under the chairmanship of Sayyid Khalifa bin Said al Busaidy, Chairman of the Supreme Court, Chairman of the Council for Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary.

Sayyid Khalifa commended the achievements made over the past judicial year and expressed gratitude for His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's patronage and support for the judicial



system.

Sayyid Khalifa also thanked the judges and members of the Public Prosecution Department for the efforts they exerted during the past judicial

year. He hoped that the new judicial year would see more accomplishments and enhance the goals of Oman Vision 2040 towards the realisation of fair justice that promotes the process of development in the Sultanate.

The general assembly discussed the formation of judicial chambers for the year 2021-2022 and related statistics. Sayyid Khalifa exhorted judges to espouse active measures to ensure quick and standardised settlement of claims. — ONA

Coordinated efforts to restore essential health services



The Royal Air Force of Oman, supported by the Royal Army of Oman and Oman Charitable Organisation, carries on with the transportation of foodstuff to people affected by the tropical cyclone Shaheen in North Al Batinah Governorate.

MUSCAT: Representatives of the Medical Response and Health Sector held a coordination meeting on Wednesday to rally efforts to secure public health in the aftermath of the tropical cyclone Shaheen.

The National Committee for Emergency Management (NCEM) gave directives to mobilise the public health sector, being part of the Medical Response and Health Sector, by securing the safety of potable water and food supplies. The process also includes ensuring a healthy discharge of wastewater, making speedy disposal of corpses of dead animals,

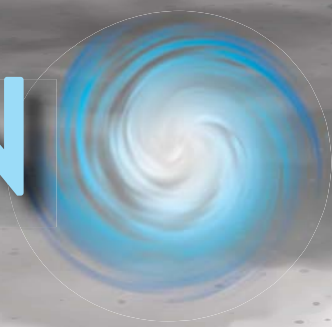
enhancing epidemiological surveillance activities and combating disease vectors.

Sub-committees tasked with medical response and public health in the governorates are coordinating efforts to check drinking water and the safety of foodstuff, besides combating disease vectors.

The Medical Response and Health Sector advises citizens and residents to exercise caution when dealing with foodstuff from which electrical power was disconnected for a long time and to get rid of stagnant water within their home compounds. — ONA



The Royal Oman Police (ROP), supported by the National Committee for Emergency Management (NCEM), is harnessing all its human capabilities and logistic potentials to provide backup and support to Shaheen's impacted families. The ROP's various units are carrying out their humanitarian roles to mitigate the aftermath of the tropical condition across the affected areas.



EFFORTS ON TO RESTORE NORMALCY



Picture by Faisal al Balushi

Over 410 emergency calls handled during cyclone

MUSCAT: Teams of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) tasked with search, rescue, firefighting and ambulance, handled 410 Mayday reports during the tropical cyclone Shaheen in the governorates of North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Dhahirah and North Al Sharqiyah.

As part of the mission, CDAA teams responded to a variety of reports and

humanitarian cases, including 221 reports of stranded people, submerged homes and cars caught unawares in the course of wadis.

Medical emergency response teams handled 73 reports while firefighting squads tackled 89 fire incidents. Other teams dealt with a different set of reports, among them 6 about landslides, 3 about fallen trees, 1 about hazardous leaks and

another 17 different reports.

Some 607 people received the services of CDAA, supported by other sectors of the National Committee for Emergency Management.

The CDAA urges all members of the public to exercise caution and keep away from dams and avoid swimming in wadis and ponds. Children should never be left unattended, said the CDAA.

— ONA



The Sultan's Special Force is undertaking efforts to provide and transport essential foodstuff to the residents of the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq in North Al Batinah Governorate.



LINDAU
NOBEL LAUREATE
MEETINGS



71st Lindau Nobel Laureates Meeting; dedicated to Chemistry Announcement

In order to strengthen research capacity in Oman and exchange knowledge; and as an academic partner of the Lindau Nobel Laureate Meetings, The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation is pleased to invite you to participate in the '71st Lindau Nobel Laureate Meeting; dedicated to Chemistry', from 26th June to 1st July, 2022 in Lindau, Germany. By attending various lectures and actively participating in small-size discussion sessions, this meeting is a marvelous opportunity for three young scientists from Oman to interact with about 40 Nobel Laureates. In addition, the event will attract about 600 young scientists from over 80 countries. This unique annual gathering is exclusive for outstanding undergraduate, master and PhD students, as well as post-doc researchers in the field chemistry or strongly related disciplines.

Evaluation criteria include the following:

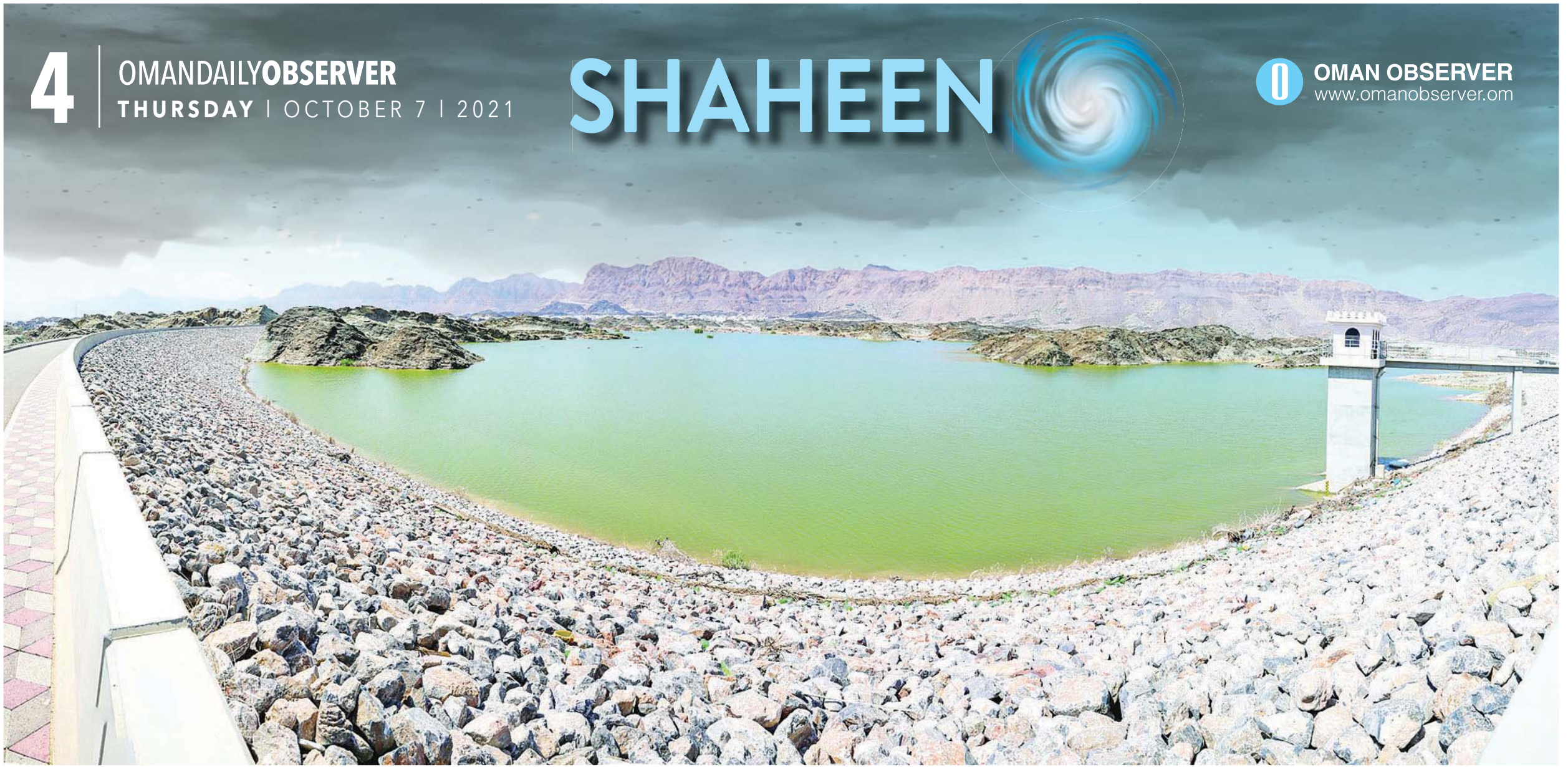
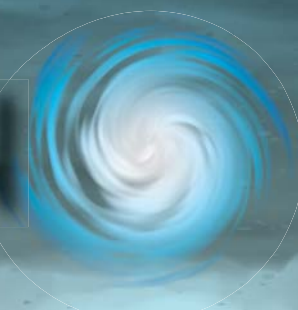
1. Genuine interest and engagement in science and research
2. Excellence in the principal field of studies i.e. in the chemical sciences and/ or related disciplines (being among the top 5 percent of their class)
3. A letter of recommendation from an academic advisor and/ or an internationally renowned scientist, who knows the applicant very well
4. A comprehensive CV together with their application
5. Fluency in English and willingness to actively participate in discussions with Laureates and young scientists
6. Not being older than 35 years at the time of the meeting; with exceptions for special cases (e.g. maternity leave)
7. No history of participation in a Lindau Meeting in the past
8. Submission of a fully completed application (incomplete applications will not be considered)
9. Commitment to participate in the full duration of the meeting

To participate, please submit your application at:
<https://www.trc.gov.om/trcweb/topics/research/programs/6696>
No later than 2:00 p.m. on 17 October 2021

Please note that late or incomplete applications will not be considered and nomination does not necessarily lead to an invitation to participate in the meeting.

For further inquiries, please email lindauM@trc.gov.om, or call 22305371





SHAHEEN'S IMPACT ON GROUNDWATER LEVELS

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

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Groundwater is the primary source of water in Oman. Other sources are desalinated and treated water.

Water experts in Oman see Shaheen as a source that can improve the availability of water in Oman.

According to experts, groundwater represents about 94 per cent of the available conventional water resources in the country.

"Shaheen is a major event since we have been going through a long drought. For many years we have not had heavy rain like this. This amount of rainfall we have received will improve the storage of the aquifer for the groundwater. We have already seen the aflaj flowing much more than before, and this is directly after the rain. This also indicates the level of groundwater is increasing", said Zahir al Sulaimani, Chairman of Oman Water Society.

Groundwater is the primary source for agriculture and domestic water supply and is mainly provided by wells and aflaj.

According to him, the increase of the groundwater level will improve the situation in the areas where saline water intrusion has been experienced. Al Batinah coast has been dealing with this problem for years now.

"This rain and floodwater in Batinah will push back the salty water to the sea. So we expect good impact on the groundwater and most of the dams on the coast does store water, and this will help in the recharging of the aquifer", explained the Oman Water Society Chairman.

Al Batinah has always been known for farms and agricultural practice, however, the over-abstraction from wells had resulted in the decline of groundwater level.

It also further increased seawater intrusion, especially in the coastal area of Batinah. So the rainfall and floodwater



could prove to be a solution to the problem. The wadis by nature rush to the sea, so was water lost?

According to Zahir, the water would have been retained, "We would have managed to retain because there are three operating dams in Al Amerat and they have captured good quantities of water. This will increase the storage of water in Al Amerat area.

Al Khoudh had an overflow, so there is plenty of water there, too, as well as Al Seeb.

All the other areas like Al Rustaq, Barka, Al Khabourah, Al Suwaiq and Suhar have many dams and have received plenty of water. Of course, we would have lost water to the sea too, but it is natural because we cannot capture every drop, but the dams have retained a lot of water", pointed out Zahir.

He quickly points out that although we have water, one should not forget to conserve water and use it wisely.

"Don't be in a hurry to go for picnics because some wadis



This rain and floodwater in Al Batinah will push back the salty water to the sea. So we expect good impact on the groundwater and most of the dams on the coast does store water, and this will help in the recharging of the aquifer

ZAHIR AL SULAIMANI

Chairman of Oman Water Society

are still wet and some are still flowing with big amount of water, so they should take care of children when they are in these areas ensuring safety of people's lives", noted Zahir.

There are five dams in Muscat, South Al Batinah has 10, North Al Batinah has four and Al Dhahirah, North and South Al Sharqiyah have one each. Among them, Wadi Dayqah in Muscat retained the highest amount of water from Shaheen with 82 million cubic metres, in Al Dakhiliyah Wadi Thameed in Bidbid retained

0.100 million cubic metres, in South Al Batinah the highest amount was recorded in the Al Fulaj in Barka with 3.7 million cubic metres, in North Al Batinah — Wadi al Hawasina and Wadi Bani Omar recorded 3.7 million cubic metres, Al Dhahirah — Wadi al Kabeer in Ibri recorded .50 million cubic metres, South Al Sharqiyah — Wadi Wariya in Mudhaibi recorded 0.46 million cubic metres and in North Al Sharqiyah — Al Himaya in Sur 9.8 million cubic metres were recorded.

Drone licencees urged to help in search and rescue

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Omani citizens who have a license to fly drones have been asked not to fly drones for fun or just to capture flash floods images. Instead, they have been requested to take part

in the rescue and surveillance missions of the National Committee for Emergency Management (NCEM).

Oman issues a licence to fly drones only to the citizens, and anyone without a licence cannot fly a drone.

“We ask the drone owners

not to use them now for picture purposes to give priority to the search and rescue teams to accomplish their tasks,” a spokesperson at the NCEM said.

Due to the hovering UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles), helicopters of search, rescue

and evacuation are not able to implement their tasks.

“We urge all licensees to stop using these drones and give more space to the search and rescue teams.”

Meanwhile, the NCEM has urged people to continue to take precautions and not to

cross wadis or low-lying areas as flash floods continue.

“In view of the flash floods and overflowing wadis, people are advised not to cross low-lying areas or wadis and take precautions while driving or crossing these areas,” NCEM statement said.

The roads that were closed near the Ministries District, Bausher-Al Amerat mountain road and where traffic was stopped in Al Suwaiq, Saham and Al Musannah, are partly opened while efforts are on to reinstate vehicle movement in other areas.

29 new Covid cases, 1 death reported

MUSCAT: Twenty-nine new cases of coronavirus (Covid-19) were registered in Oman during the past 24 hours, in addition to one new Covid-19-related death. This brings the total number of

positive Covid-19 cases to 303,895 in the Sultanate. The total number of Covid-19-related death cases reached 4,101, the Ministry of Health said.

The ministry added that

29 new cases have recovered, bringing the total number to 299,148 recoveries.

The ministry also pointed out that 3 cases were hospitalised over the past 24 hours. — ONA

Rise in Internet subscriptions

MUSCAT: The total fixed Internet subscriptions in the Sultanate reached 510,151 by the end of August 2021 while the number of fixed Internet subscriptions via Internet protocol increased by 4.7%, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Of this, total fixed telephone line subscriptions reached 577,450 by the end of August 2021, comprising a decline by 0.4% compared to the same period of 2020. Further, prepaid and postpaid analogue fixed telephone lines fell by 4.9% to 284,927 subscribers compared to the same period of 2020. — ONA



Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Center

Tender Advertisement for the Supply of Plastic Storage Trays

The operational committee of Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Centre announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Bid Submission Closing	Tender Specification Fees
CCCRC/T/372/2021	Supply of Plastic Storage Trays	21/10/2021	-

Qualified companies interested in participating in this tender shall send a request by email mentioned below to get the tender specifications from the date of this advertisement.

Biddings that meet the above requirement should be submitted by email addressed with the Tender Number.

Please note:

- Bids received after the deadline indicated above, for whatever reason, will not be considered.
- Queries/ clarifications should be submitted immediately, but not later than one week before the date of tender submission.
- For Queries you may Contact on Tel: 22774365 or via e-mail: purchase@ccrc.gov.om
- The committee is not obliged to accept the lowest price of the bid or any other bid.



سلطنة عُمان
وزارة النقل والاتصالات وتقنية المعلومات
Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

إعلان Announcement

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and IT will establish a public e-auction for government items auctioned in Safqa website.

Interested auction bidders must examine the following items as per stated below: -

Auctioned Items	Examining Location	Examining Date/Time
Vehicles	Ministry's Main Building in Al-Khuwair	10/10/2021 8:00AM - 1:00PM
Furniture + Electronics	Knowledge Oasis (Muscat)	
Spare Parts and Electronic Devices	Port Sultan Qaboos	
Iron Poles, Barriers and Signboards Scraps	Musandam Governorate (Deba)	
Iron Poles, Barriers and Signboards Scraps + Furniture and Electronics	N. Al Batinah Governorate (Al Ghalil Workshop))	
Iron Poles, Barriers and Signboards Scraps	S. Al Sharqyah Governorate (Sur)	
Iron Poles, Barriers and Signboards Scraps + Furniture and Electronics	N. Al Sharqyah Governorate (Ibra)	

The auction will start on Monday 11/10/2021 from 8:00AM and ends in 12/10/2021 at 12:00pm in accordance to the following conditions:

1. Bidders must register at (www.safqa.om) website.
2. Pay 1000 OMR as insurance electronically through auction website.
3. Bidders who acquired the actioned item successfully must pay auctioning fee which is 3% of the auctioned item value.
4. The Ministry of Transport, Communications and IT and Safqa E-auctioning shall not be liable for any mismatch between auctioned items images and descriptions in the platform and its actual state thus bidders must examine the items onsite in the allocated times for items examining.
5. Bidders who acquired the actioned item successfully must process items full payment through e-auction website within 48 work/office hours.
6. Bidders who acquired the auctioned items should dismantle and move the items within a week starting from the date of winning the auctioned item. In case of failing to move the items within the specified time a 5% ground fine will be imposed for each day of delay and the Ministry shall not be liable if anything is lost or damaged.
7. Acquired auctioned items cannot be returned or get a discount and any related request will not be accepted.
8. Pay customs fees if ROP asked for it (Directorate General of Customs) for the auctioned items located in Port Sultan Qaboos. The Ministry shall not be liable of this procedure.
9. Insurance payment will be confiscated if the following occurred:
 - if the bidder did not process full payment for the acquired item within the specified time.
 - If the bidder did not move or dismantle the acquired items within the specified time.
10. For more information visit www.safqa.om or call (71096969).



MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDDING

The Ministry of Information invites for the following biddings:

Bidding No.	Name of Bidding	Document Fees	Last Date for Collection of Documents	Last Date for Bid Submission
1/2021	Sale of Printer's Paper Waste and Discards & Remnants of Used and Invalid Paper Rolls for the years 2022/2023.	RO 25/= Twenty Five Omani Rials	14/10/2021	21/10/2021
2/2021	Sale of Aluminum Sheets resulted from Printer's Remnants for the years 2022/2023	RO 25/= Twenty Five Omani Rials	14/10/2021	21/10/2021

- Companies and establishments specialized in the aforesaid works may obtain bidding-related documents at the premise of the Information Ministry, Al Qurm city (Oman Daily Newspaper's premise), from the Financial Affairs Directorate's Revenues Department during official working hours against the aforesaid fee (non-refundable) starting from Sunday 12/9/2021.

- All companies and establishments shall enclose along with their bid a temporary insurance in the form of a banking bond or a cheque certified by a bank equivalent to (RO =/200) (Two Hundred Omani Rial), addressed to the Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee, and valid for 90 days from the date of bid submission. The bid which does not honour the required temporary insurance shall not be considered.

- The bid shall be submitted in red-waxed-sealed envelopes , written from outside the name and number of the bidding without naming or making reference to the bidder.

- The bid shall be deposited into the Tender Box (Reception Desk) at the Information Ministry, Al Qurm city (Oman Daily Newspaper's premise), before 10:00 am on the last day for the bid submission. Any post-date bids shall not be accepted whatsoever the reasons were and opening the envelopes starts at 11:00 am.

The Chairman of Internal Tender Committee

Iran expects nuclear talks in Vienna to restart ‘soon’

US still committed to Iran diplomacy but has other options

MOSCOW: Iran’s Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said in Moscow on Wednesday that he expects negotiations on the Iran nuclear deal to restart in Austria soon.

“We are now finalising consultations on this matter and will soon restore our negotiations in Vienna”, he told reporters after talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

The 2015 nuclear deal gave Iran sanctions relief in return for tight controls on its nuclear programme.

In 2018, then-US president Donald Trump withdrew from the multilateral accord and began reimposing sanctions.

Tehran has gradually rolled back its nuclear commitments since 2019.

US President Joe Biden reversed Trump’s decision to pull the United States from international negotiations on curbing Iran’s nuclear ambitions.

But talks in Vienna to revive the deal have been at an impasse since June, when Iran’s ultraconservative new President Ebrahim Raisi was elected. Lavrov said Wednesday that the negotiations “should be resumed as soon as possible”, and called on the United States to return to its obligation under the accord.

Russian’s foreign minister said that the international community was waiting for the United States to “return to legal obligations of the nuclear deal” and end “illegal



Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian hold a joint news conference following their meeting, in Moscow, on Wednesday. — Reuters

restrictions on Iran and all of its trading partners.”

OTHER OPTIONS

President Joe Biden’s national security adviser said on Tuesday that diplomacy is the best way to rein in Iran’s nuclear programme even as he reaffirmed Biden’s warning to Tehran that Washington could turn to other options if negotiations fail.

Biden senior aide Jake Sullivan hosted Israeli national security adviser Eyal Hulata for talks which, according to a US official, gave the two allies a chance to share intelligence and develop a “baseline assessment” of how far Tehran’s nuclear programme has

advanced.

US experts believe the time it would take Iran to achieve nuclear “breakout” — enough enriched uranium to build a nuclear bomb — has “gone from about 12 months down to a period of about a few months” since Trump pulled out of the pact, the US official said earlier, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Iran has consistently denied it is developing a nuclear bomb.

Sullivan in Tuesday’s talks “emphasised President Biden’s fundamental commitment to Israel’s security and to ensuring that Iran never gets a nuclear weapon”, the White House said

in a statement.

“Mr Sullivan explained that this administration believes diplomacy is the best path to achieve that goal, while also noting that the president has made clear that if diplomacy fails, the United States is prepared to turn to other options”, it added.

Sullivan’s words echoed the message that Biden gave Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett during a White House meeting in August. Tuesday’s meeting of the US-Israel Strategic Consultative Group included military, intelligence and diplomatic officials and came amid stalled international diplomacy with Iran. — Agencies

Egypt close to finalising deal for gas supplies to Lebanon

CAIRO: Egypt is finalising arrangements to start supplying gas to Lebanon soon under a plan to help ease Lebanon’s power crisis, the two countries’ energy ministers said after meeting.

Under an agreement announced last month, Egypt will supply natural gas to Lebanon via a pipeline that passes through Jordan and Syria to help to boost Lebanon’s electricity output. The deal, agreed by all four countries, is part of a US-backed plan to address Lebanon’s power shortages.

Lebanese Energy Minister Walid Fayad said on Tuesday that Egypt could provide more gas than originally anticipated if necessary but gave no details.

“Egypt offered... helping in the energy sector through the possibility of offering extra quantities of gas”, Fayad said at a joint press briefing with Egyptian Petroleum Minister Tarek El Molla in Cairo after their meeting.

“We will have another discussion on this”, Fayad said, without elaborating.

Molla said that the two countries agreed on a roadmap for the gas supplies.

“God willing, we can finish the measures related to the deal within the few coming weeks”, Molla said, but did not say when supplies would begin.

Life in Lebanon has been paralysed by the crisis, which has deepened as supplies of imported fuel have dried up. It is part of a wider financial crisis that has sunk the Lebanese currency by 90 per cent since 2019.

The energy plan, however, is complicated by US sanctions on the Syrian government. Lebanese officials have called on Washington to grant an exemption.

Damascus has said it is ready to cooperate.

Meanwhile, a third tanker carrying Iranian fuel for distribution in Lebanon has reached the Syrian port city of Baniyas, TankerTrackers.com reported on Twitter on Wednesday.

The Hizbullah says the shipments it is importing should ease a crippling energy crisis in Lebanon.

Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati said last month the Iranian fuel shipments constitute a breach of Lebanon’s sovereignty.

— Agencies

Severe droughts dry up dreams of Turkish farmers

AKKUZULU, Turkey: Turkish farmer Hava Keles stares inconsolably at withered vines of rotting tomatoes in a field that has been devastated by a series of droughts blamed on climate change.

“My tomatoes, my beans, my peppers are ruined. My watermelons didn’t even grow. The cucumbers I planted have shrivelled up on the branches”, lamented Keles, 58, standing in an arid Anatolian plot in Akkuzulu, north of Ankara.

Keles is among thousands of farmers across Turkey whose livelihoods have been ravaged as little rain has fallen to nourish their crops for the past two years.

Some experts accuse President Recep Tayyip Erdogan — whose popularity has relied on prosperity driven by fast urban development — of failing to do enough to address pressing environmental issues in the country.

But Erdogan has promised Turkey would ratify the 2015 Paris Agreement in October before a pivotal UN climate summit next month in Glasgow. Turkey signed the deal in 2016.

Environmental issues had never topped the political agenda in Turkey, but everything changed after a summer of extreme weather events, including forest fires on the Mediterranean coast and devastating floods in the north.



A farmer waits for his tank to be filled with water in Cubuk district, northern Ankara. — AFP

Action cannot come soon enough for indebted farmers like Keles in a country where droughts have spread to more than of the territory.

“My husband says leave the garden. But I can’t. I’ve worked too hard for this. What can I do with it now?” she asks, despite having debts worth thousands of dollars.

This summer, farmers in her neighbourhood were unable to dig deep enough to find groundwater, so they had to fetch it in large tanks pulled by tractors.

Agriculture is a major sector of the Turkish economy, accounting for around six per cent of GDP and employing 18 per cent of the workforce. Turkey is self-sufficient in food production and is the world’s seventh largest agricultural producer, exporting everything from hazelnuts to tea, olives to figs.

But the country’s import of wheat has already risen exponentially in nearly two decades from \$150 million to \$2.3 billion in 2019, according to the

agriculture ministry.

Such figures add to fears Turkey will move from producer to becoming a country reliant on the outside to meet its food needs.

“Turkey has a lot to adapt to, especially in terms of agriculture because serious drought events are coming. What we have seen is nothing”, warned Levent Kurnaz, director of Bogazici University’s centre for climate change and policy studies in Istanbul.

Drought is forcing some farmers to quit while others opt to grow different crops that demand less water, leaving the consumer out of pocket as food prices rise alongside a weakening Turkish lira. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

GAZA CITY

Thousands of Gazans apply for Israeli work permits

Thousands of Gazans applied on Wednesday for work permits for Israel, which has been reopening its gates to workers from the Palestinian enclave following the latest war in May.

In Jabalia, a refugee camp in northern Gaza, a crowd of men holding their identity papers lined up hoping to obtain a permit to work in Israel, AFP journalists said.

“There is no work in the Gaza Strip”, said Fathi Abu Nur, a 40-year-old unemployed man.



“Yesterday I heard that workers are registering to get permits (for Israel)”, he said.

“I hope things will get better because the current situation is really difficult”, the father of five said.

BEIRUT

Lebanon PM denies link to ‘Pandora Papers’

Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati’s family wealth comes from a communications business that has been audited in the past and is legal, a statement by his office said in response to a giant leak of financial documents.

A Lebanese news organisation, Daraj, was one of a number of international media outlets that reported the “Pandora Papers”, a set of leaked documents purported to reveal offshore transactions involving global



political and business figures.

Daraj had said Mikati owned an offshore firm in Panama called Hessville through which he purchased a property in Monaco worth 7 million euros.

TUNIS

Tunisia closes unlicensed TV station

Tunisia’s independent media regulator said on Wednesday it had closed an unlicensed television station that has been strongly critical of President Kais Saied since he seized most powers in July in a move his foes call a coup.

“It is broadcast without a licence... the law will apply to all television stations outside the law”, Nouri Lajmi, the head of the regulator, said.

Zaytouna is one of several broadcasters that have oper-



ated for years without a licence, angering media watchdogs that saw them as illicit tools for political influence. The station said police had raided its headquarters and seized equipment.

In brief

■ ISLAMABAD



AS COVID-19 SUBSIDES, PAKISTAN FACES DENGUE SCARE

An outbreak of dengue fever has hit major Pakistani cities, overwhelming hospitals and further exhausting health workers already fatigued by the coronavirus pandemic, officials said on Wednesday.

Hospitals in the capital Islamabad and eastern city of Lahore were running out of beds in the isolation wards as patients with the symptoms of the deadly fever continued to stream in.

Dozens of new cases of the mosquito-borne fever were being admitted to hospitals in Islamabad and the nearby city of Rawalpindi, the capital's health chief, Zaeem Zia, said.

■ HANOI



VIETNAM TO WELCOME MORE VACCINATED TRAVELLERS

Vietnam is planning from December to reopen key tourist destinations to vaccinated visitors from countries deemed a low Covid-19 risk, the government said on Wednesday, ahead of a full resumption targeted for June next year.

Vietnam imposed tight border controls at the start of the pandemic in an effort to keep out Covid-19, with some initial success, but that harmed its burgeoning tourism sector, which typically accounts for about 10 per cent of gross domestic product.

Vietnam last month announced it would reopen the resort island Phu Quoc for vaccinated travellers from November.

■ TOKYO



QUAKE HITS NORTHERN JAPAN, NO TSUNAMI

A magnitude 5.9 earthquake hit Aomori and Iwate prefecture in northern Japan early on Wednesday morning but did not cause a tsunami, Japan's Meteorological Agency said.

The quake struck at around 2:46 am local time (17:46 GMT). No damage was reported at a nuclear fuel preprocessing plant in the area, public broadcaster NHK said.

Two people were injured and taken to hospital, while train operators in the area suspended some train services for safety checks, the broadcaster said.

The quake registered 5 plus in the Japanese scale of earthquake intensity, a level that could cause damage to some buildings.

INTERNATIONAL CONCERN GROWS WITH A SERIES OF MISSILE TESTS

North Korea pursues weapons despite Covid blockade

SEOUL: North Korea has continued to pursue its weapons development programmes despite facing a worsening economic situation due to its self-imposed coronavirus blockade, a new UN report has said.

Pyongyang is under multiple sets of international sanctions over its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, which have seen rapid progress under current leader Kim Jong Un.

The report's publication comes after Pyongyang sparked international concern with a series of missile tests in the span of a few weeks, prompting the UN Security Council to hold an emergency meeting.

The report — which was published online on Tuesday Seoul time, and covers the period from February 6 to August 3 — said the North continued to polish its weapons programmes.

“Despite the country's focus on its worsening economic travails, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continued to maintain and develop its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes,” said the report, compiled by a panel of experts monitoring sanctions on the isolated country.

The Democratic People's



European Union Ambassador to South Korea Maria Castillo Fernandez (C) and other delegates visit an observation deck at Aegibong Peace Ecopark in Gimpo, Gyeonggi Province on Tuesday. — AFP

Republic of Korea is the official name of the North, which like the South last month saw the 30th anniversary of their simultaneous admission to the United Nations.

Pyongyang has not carried out an intercontinental ballistic missile launch or nuclear test since 2017 but the report said tests

“combining ballistic and guidance technologies” were conducted while activity continued at key sites related to the nuclear programme.

In early 2020 the country closed its borders to try to protect itself against the coronavirus pandemic, which first emerged in neighbouring China, but

has nonetheless “continued its illicit efforts to procure specific components from overseas and to seek opportunities to transfer its own products to its partners”, the report added.

It said the North's coronavirus blockade had continued “fundamentally to impact the

movement of people and goods, both licit and illicit, within, into and out of the country”.

The import of consumer products, including luxury goods banned under UN sanctions, had “virtually stopped”, the report said, but said it was investigating illicit transfers of luxury vehicles.

Leader Kim has been seen using Lexus SUVs in recent months and the report highlighted an attempted shipment of more than \$1 million-worth of luxury vehicles, including such models, allegedly from the United Arab Emirates to Ningbo, China, for onward delivery to the North.

Pyongyang has stayed away from nuclear talks since the collapse of a second summit between Kim and then US president Donald Trump in Hanoi and has rebuffed South Korean efforts to revive dialogue.

Under President Joe Biden, the United States has repeatedly declared its willingness to meet North Korean representatives, while saying it will seek denuclearisation. Last week, Kim decried Washington's repeated offers of talks without preconditions as a “petty trick”, accusing the Biden administration of continuing the “hostile policy” of its predecessors. — AFP

New Japan PM Kishida off to rocky start in polling



Fumio Kishida

TOKYO: Japan's new Prime Minister, Fumio Kishida, is struggling to find his footing with voters just two days after he took the top job and launched his new government, multiple polls by local media showed.

On the lower end, the daily Asahi put Kishida's approval rating at 45 per cent while Mainichi put it at 49 per cent. The more conservative-leaning Yomiuri said 56 per cent supported his government, while the Nikkei had 59 per cent.

In all the polls, support for Kishida's new government was lower than that of his predecessor Yoshihide Suga's administration when it came into power last year, with the Asahi reporting a 20 percentage-point difference.

“I'm aware of the polling results, but also believe that there is quite a gap depending on the company that conducted the survey,” said Kishida to reporters on Wednesday morning.

“Regardless, I will reflect on

my actions based on these results — including the low approval ratings — and continue to work hard toward the upcoming election,” he said.

Political consultant Takuma Oohamazaki said the results were not surprising, given that Kishida is popular within the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) but has struggled to win the support of swing voters.

“The selection of cabinet members, which included people with a history of scandal, as well as reports of a strong influence from former premiers Shinzo Abe and Taro Aso, appears to have dampened the mood among swing voters,” he added.

Although Kishida's ratings are low for a fresh administration, they are still higher than the most immediate ratings for Suga, who became deeply unpopular during his tenure as he struggled to contain a fifth wave of coronavirus infections exacerbated by the Delta variant. — Reuters

From insurgency to city beat... Taliban police learn the ropes

KABUL: After spending 13 years as a Taliban fighter waging an insurgency, Rahimullah is now slowly adjusting to the relatively ordinary role of a policeman in Afghanistan's capital.

Like the rest of the Taliban, he is grappling with an awkward transition from rebel fighter to civilian patrolman, as the hardliners vow security and build a new police force.

Kabul residents say street crime has dropped, with widespread fear rooted in memories of the Taliban's regime in the 1990s, infamous for harsh punishments such as public stoning, lashing and amputations.

“This is not risky work,” says Rahimullah, who joined the Taliban as a teenager.

The 28-year-old from neighbouring Wardak province, along with his team of eight men, has the task of managing security in a central Kabul district. His work involves “catching thieves, murderers and those who drink wine”, he says, which was allowed to accompany a patrol overseen by a more senior Taliban official.

Some of his colleagues appear unsure of how to navigate their new role in a city far from their previous lives in the much more conservative countryside. “It's not our favourite job, but it's our responsibility,” admits the Taliban commander overseeing the patrol. Instead of the jackets and trousers formerly worn by officers, many Taliban forces don traditional Afghan dress, called shalwar kameez.



A Taliban fighter working as part of a police force stands guard at the entrance gate of a police district in Kabul. — AFP

Some have had new versions made from the blue-and-black camouflage material used in old Afghan uniforms.

At one station, in Kabul's 10th district, the emblem of the previous police force can still be seen, near the Taliban's white and black banner. Taliban punishments have already been on display in some parts of Afghanistan — last week, the bodies of four suspected kidnappers were hung from a crane in the city of Herat.

The old police force, created by the international powers that

drove out the Taliban in 2001, no longer exists.

It collapsed when the Taliban swept back into power on August 15, as former police and civil servants fearful of revenge and abuse scurried into hiding or fled the country.

The Taliban authorities are eager to keep their promise of strict law and order in the new Afghanistan, where the justice system under the US-backed government was plagued by corruption and inefficiency.

— AFP

EU ‘family’ looks to reassure frustrated Balkans

BRDO CASTLE, Slovenia: EU leaders told frustrated Balkan counterparts at a summit on Wednesday the bloc remains committed to letting them join, but offered no concrete progress on their stalled membership bids.

The 27-nation club talked up economic support worth billions of euros for its eastern neighbours at a rain-drenched gathering at Brdo castle in Slovenia, which currently holds the EU’s rotating presidency.

Brussels is keen to show it remains the region’s best hope. But there set to be no breakthroughs at the meeting with the leaders of Albania, Bosnia, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Kosovo on the tortuous path towards membership.

And concern is growing that frustration with years of waiting could push some candidate countries closer to Russia and China.

“We want to send a very clear message and that message is that Western Balkans belong to the European Union, we want them



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Estonia's Prime Minister Kaja Kallas and Netherlands' Prime Minister Mark Rutte speak at the EU-Western Balkans summit near Ljubljana. — AFP

in the European Union”, said European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen as she

arrived for the talks. “We are one European family... and I’m deeply convinced we share

the same destiny”, she said. The EU’s push for enlargement — once a key policy for the bloc



Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel delivers a speech during a press conference at the EU-Western Balkans summit near Ljubljana. — AFP

— has ground to a halt in recent years. Some richer members fear sparking a new wave of migration and some applicants are struggling with the required reforms, especially on democratic norms.

“In Latvia, the process of joining the European Union was the game changer in terms of enabling reform, and of course in the Western Balkans, they still have some ways to go”, said Latvian

Prime Minister Arturs Krisjanis Karins.

However, he cautioned, “either Europe extends the hand, and pulls these countries towards us or someone else will extend the hand and pull the countries in a different direction”.

This reflected the EU’s increasing concern over inroads being made by Moscow and Beijing, which have sent millions of coronavirus vaccines to the region. Moscow has deep cultural ties with fellow Orthodox nations while Beijing has extended major loans in the region, including a controversial \$1 billion for a road, which Montenegro is struggling to pay off.

The EU in response is touting an “unprecedented” €30 billion (\$35 billion) economic investment package for the region.

Officials also promise “tangible” improvements for people in the Balkans, such as bolstering vaccine rates to match EU levels this year and ending phone roaming charges. — AFP

PM Johnson vows to reshape Britain

MANCHESTER: Prime Minister Boris Johnson vowed to radically re-shape Britain on Wednesday, exhorting his Conservative Party faithful to help the government press on with tackling regional inequality by ending “long-term structural weaknesses” in the economy.

In a speech to end his party’s annual conference, Johnson, renowned for his overarching optimism in all things, concentrated on what he called the Conservatives’ successes hoping to draw a line under a series of crises buffeting Britain.

After a week when Johnson has been forced to defend his government against complaints over fuel shortages, fears for Christmas food supplies and farmers having to destroy their produce, the prime minister wants to reset his agenda.

Firing up his party by invoking former prime minister Margaret Thatcher, trumpeting the government’s vaccine roll out and taking aim at the main opposition Labour Party, Johnson presented Britain’s future after Covid-19 and Brexit as a time for change.

“The answer to the present stresses and strains, which are mainly a function of growth and economic revival, is not to reach for that same old lever of uncontrolled immigration to keep wages low”, he told an appreciative crowd.

“The answer is to control immigration to allow people of talent to come to this country,



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson delivers keynote speech on the final day of the annual Conservative Party Conference in Manchester, northwest England. — AFP

Johnson doubles down on vision for high wage economy

but not to use immigration as an excuse for failure to invest in people in skills, and in the equipment, the facilities and machinery... they need to do their jobs.”

“To deliver that change we will get on with our job of uniting and levelling up across the UK — the greatest project that any government can embark on.”

Answering critics who have called for more measures to bring in foreign workers to plug gaps in the haulage and agriculture industries, Johnson again called on businesses to do more to lift wages and attract more workers.

Many businesses were less than

impressed. One Conservative member of the upper house of parliament, Simon Wolfson, a Brexit supporter and head of retailer Next, said the war of words was unhelpful.

“Rather than trying to solve this problem with throwing brick bats at each other, we sit down together, work through and design a system that delivers the best of both worlds”, he told BBC radio, saying there was “real panic and despondency” in the hospitality and care homes sectors.

The chief executive of one company in the top 150 of Britain’s FTSE listed companies said Britain was going through a “painful readjustment” post-Brexit which had been delayed by the Covid pandemic: “The government’s relationship or lack of relationship with business is a symptom of this.” — Reuters

Whistleblower urges regulation to tackle Facebook ‘crisis’

WASHINGTON: A Facebook whistleblower told US lawmakers on Tuesday that the social media giant fuels division, harms children and urgently needs to be regulated, drawing pledges Congress would take up long-delayed action.

The testimony by ex-employee Frances Haugen has fuelled one of Facebook’s most serious crises yet, and prompted a denial from CEO Mark Zuckerberg, who said in a post on his account that her claim the company prioritises profit over safety was “just not true.”

Haugen testified on Capitol Hill after she leaked reams of internal research to authorities and *The Wall Street Journal*.

“I believe that Facebook’s products harm children, stoke division and weaken our democracy”, Haugen told a Senate panel. “Congressional action is needed. They won’t solve this crisis without your help”, she added.

In her testimony, she emphasised the power held by a service that is tightly woven into the daily lives of billions of users.

She also noted the risks that the social media giant’s platforms are fueling a contagion of eating disorders, body-shaming and self-dissatisfaction that is particularly dangerous for young people.

“There are going to be women



Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen testifies during a Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington. — Reuters

Haugen testified on Capitol Hill after she leaked reams of internal research to authorities and The Wall Street Journal

walking around this planet in 60 years with brittle bones because of the choices that Facebook made around emphasising profit today”, she said, referring to the impact of eating disorders.

Zuckerberg denied all the claims in a note to Facebook employees that he posted on his account, calling the argument that the company pushes content

that makes people angry for profit “deeply illogical.”

“We make money from ads, and advertisers consistently tell us they don’t want their ads next to harmful or angry content. And I don’t know any tech company that sets out to build products that make people angry or depressed. The moral, business and product incentives all point in the opposite direction”, he said.

Of all the claims, he said he was “particularly focused” on the ones about Facebook and children, adding that he was “proud” of the work the company has done to help young people in distress. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BERLIN

Health minister calls on people to get flu shot

German Health Minister Jens Spahn has called on Germans to get vaccinated against influenza in particularly large numbers this autumn. As a result of the partial lockdown and other public health measures taken against the coronavirus, there was virtually no flu in Germany last year, Spahn said on Wednesday, and as a result the risk of a flu wave this year was all the higher. “Please get vaccinated against flu”, Spahn said, “enough flu vaccine is available, more than



enough”, he added, referring to some 27 million doses of the flu vaccine available this autumn in Germany. — dpa

VIENNA

Austria prosecutors raid offices of ruling party

Austria’s ruling People’s Party (OeVP) said it had been targeted by raids from prosecutors with local media reporting that offices in the chancellery were among those searched. Deputy OeVP General Secretary Gaby Schwarz confirmed the prosecutors’ actions but did not confirm who was being investigated, saying only that raids were “for show” and that “accusations were constructed over events that date back as far as five years”.

According to Die Presse, raids



also took place in the chancellery and targeted several employees of OeVP Chancellor Sebastian Kurz. — AFP

PRAGUE

Parliamentary poll begins for people in quarantine

Parliamentary elections in the Czech Republic have started two days early for people who are in quarantine due to the coronavirus. These were already able to cast their vote on Wednesday at 82 so-called drive-in polling stations without leaving their car. There were signs of low interest.

According to the authorities, the number of people currently suffering from Covid-19 is just under 8,000.

For the remaining more than



8 million eligible voters, the polling stations will not open until Friday and citizens can cast their ballot until Saturday. — dpa

Air Info, the outlet breaking news in Niger’s Sahara

AMAURY HAUCHARD

From the outside, it doesn’t look like much: a two-storey building with a logo in the dusty streets of Agadez in northern Niger.

But there has been plenty happening inside the building at Air Info — an ambitious media outlet that has been breaking exclusives in the Sahara Desert.

A vast, sparsely-populated region, northern Niger is plagued by drugs and weapons trafficking, migration and violence by armed groups. In 2002, Ibrahim Manzo Diallo, a young school teacher posted to the troubled region, was struck by the lack of media coverage. There was no outlet providing “news of the far north,” he said.

Using a newly-installed printing press in Agadez, Diallo launched a monthly publication, funding it from his meagre teaching salary. Today, Air Info has 13 full-time employees and in addition to the newspaper — whose rate of publication varies — boasts a popular website and Sahara FM, one of Agadez’s main radio stations bought in 2013.

For those needing news on northern Niger, a crossroads between North and sub-Saharan Africa, Air Info is now the go-to source. “We no longer go looking for scoops, they come to us,” Diallo said with a smile.

One of Air Info’s exclusives was video footage it published last year of two Italians being held hostage by Al Qaeda, the first proof they were alive after several years in detention. An Italian television station offered to buy the footage, but Diallo refused. As always, everyone wanted to know his sources.

“The only thing that protects us is honesty and seriousness,” he said. “Our sources know that we will never reveal who is talking to us.”

An early scoop came during the abduction of several French citizens in 2010. Air Info was “one of the very first” to get witnesses to talk, Diallo says, adding that the story “helped establish our credibility”.

But behind the man with a broad smile, wearing a boubou robe and eating braised mutton on the windy terrace of his organisation’s headquarters, there is a journalist caught between the forces of national security and militant expansion. — AFP

There was no outlet providing news of the far north. We no longer go looking for scoops, they come to us IBRAHIM MANZO DIALLO

A young school teacher



UP IN THE AIR!

A man practices yoga along a footpath in Amritsar, India, on Wednesday. — AFP

Sultanate’s participation in world expos



Ali Al Matani alimatanil2@gmail.com

OMAN IS SHOWCASING ALL ITS POTENTIALS, VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE, AND HUMAN CAPABILITIES AT THE DUBAI EXPO 2020

The participation of countries in international forums reflects their cultural value and greatness of their history. This also gives a valuable opportunity to these countries to showcase civilisation, traditions, practices, and culture of their people to other participants. This is the reason why Oman is present at the Dubai Expo 2020 showcasing all its potentials, visions for the future, and human capabilities efficient enough for achieving progress and prosperity. It is there with each element which makes Oman a country liked by the people everywhere in the world.

There is no doubt that Oman’s participation in the global expo is significant. This is because it is visited by millions of people from almost all countries around the world. It is an opportunity to learn from their potential and start learning by interacting. It is equally important that Oman with all its potentials is making others also learn from it. It makes peace with all and focusses its potentials on development to achieve better future. This is evident from everything which it is showcasing at Dubai Expo. It clearly realises the future and gears up for the lifestyle which the coming generation would have.

Since the first trade and industry fair which was held in London in 1851 and in

the expo which were organised around the world later, countries compete with each other in showcasing their potential. This is how they learn about them in depth, as a requirement for sustainable relations beyond boundaries. Innovations and achievements showcased in such events also makes opportunities for regional and international cooperation.

The participation of a country with the size of Oman in history, civilisation, geography, and an international standing in the ongoing exhibition is justified. Therefore, the pavilion is a must match with its stature and size. This is because of its geopolitical position and its local and regional dimensions. It should be there and noticed prominently.

The participation in such international events should be a matter of pride for the people of the country. It should showcase its achievements in the areas of education and what it can offer to the world outside. The capabilities of its people should be displayed, and message should be delivered to the world that its people are well skilled to meet the challenges of future. If you participate in such events, you honour your own people and represent them.

Presence in such events is not a formality which is done by just being there. It is more than that. It should be in a way that it leaves its impression in

the minds of other participants and visitors. It should tell them, along with all other things, that it has all vital tourism elements on which dust never settles. Focus on tourism is part of Oman’s Vision 2040 as a major source for diversification of the economy. The country is making all efforts to develop its non-oil sector. The natural and cultural elements and heritage makes it rich and distinct in the world.

If we talk about participation in all major international events to tell the world about the potential of our country, we should decide how we would convey the message, which language we would speak. This requires strategy formulation and utilisations of available skills and services.

If we talk grand about our country, we do not exaggerate about it. We showcase the world as it is. Therefore, Oman is appreciated by the world. All its historic elements and heritage should get representation in international forums. This is a duty which should be carried by all in the country. Every entity, commercial or others, wherever they go and participate they represent the country and all its cultural elements.

We are confident that the participation of the Sultanate of Oman would be successful and would bring desired results.

Region sees significant fall in economic activity



Haider al Lawati haiderdawood@hotmail.com

REGION SEES SIGNIFICANT FALL IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

The economic and health situation the world experienced during the last period led to a significant decline in the economic activity in general. This condition has resulted in a significant fall in public shareholding institutions and companies in local stock exchanges, including the Gulf stock exchanges.

The same has happened in several other countries in the Middle East and North Africa. According to the data of the Ernst & Young report for the first half of the current year 2021, four deals were registered for listed companies with a total value of \$425.8 million, a fall of 48 per cent compared to the same period last year.

This indicates that the Middle East region needs a longer period of time for the movement and activity of establishing and listing companies on stock exchanges to return to its previous era.

Today many companies operating in various sectors suffer due to the losses due to the outbreak of the pandemic, as well as from oil prices, which ranges from \$60 to 70. The oil prices depend on the industrial activity in the world, and the weather and environmental conditions.

The first quarter of 2021 witnessed slow activity in the number of underwriting deals, with only three deals registered in the Middle East and North Africa, while the second quarter

witnessed the registration and listing of only one deal worth \$131 million for an Egyptian company.

Globally, IPOs witnessed a distinguished activity in the first half of this year, as 597 IPOs were registered in the second quarter, with total amount of \$111.6 billion, an increase of 206 per cent in terms of number of deals and 166 per cent in terms of value compared to the second quarter of 2020. This indicates that the world has begun to erase the negative effects of the pandemic, and is also attributed to the economic and commercial stimulus policies provided by global governments to maintain the movement of economic activity and support

business owners to continue their business.

The second quarter of this year was also more active in terms of number of deals and their returns over the past twenty years, breaking the previous record set in the second quarter of 2007, through 522 subscriptions worth \$87.6 billion.

Head of deals and strategy advisory services in the Middle East and North Africa at Ernst & Young believes that a number of Gulf countries are on a date to offer their shares for public subscription during the coming period, which represents a glimmer of optimism in the region in light of the continuous improvement and economic

stability of the post-pandemic conditions, in addition to the improvement in international oil prices since the beginning of this year, which helps companies to discover new paths in manufacturing and production processes, and then go towards listing.

The observer of the financial markets in the region believe that the area suffers from a lack of liquidity, and therefore those who wish to activate their activities in the money market cannot activate despite the fact that the level of listings is attractive to purchase and to enter into stock and bond deals, some of which are sold at prices lower than their nominal value.

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SPECIAL FOCUS ON OMANI WOMEN FOR TOURNAMENT OPENING

OMAN FACE SRI LANKA AS WORLD CUP NEARS

**ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH**
MUSCAT, OCT 6

Carrying high hopes for a second-round qualification in the T20 World Cup, Oman are facing a real test against Sri Lanka in a friendly match on Thursday, days before the global showdown.

At Al Amerat Grounds, it will be a perfect test event for Oman Cricket as well as it is getting ready for the big occasion of hosting a World Cup for the first time in the Sultanate.

Sri Lanka, former T20 World Cup champions, are set to play two warm-up matches against Oman on October 7 and 9. The first match will begin at 2.30 pm and the second game will start under floodlights at 6.30 pm.

"Oman players are ready to showcase their talent and as hosts we are fully prepared for the smooth conduct of the global tournament. Facing Sri Lanka will be a proper curtain-raiser for the World Cup, Oman Cricket Chairman Pankaj Khimji told *Observer*. "The match against Asian giants Sri Lanka will give us a latest take on our cricketing ability after some top-class

performances recently", Pankaj said.

Oman claimed the T20 tour series against 41-time Ranji Trophy champions Mumbai and topped the World Cricket League 2 tri-series involving USA and Nepal. After the WCL 2 series against Scotland and PNG, the Sultanate are sitting strong on top of the table with 27 points from 18 games followed by Scotland at 16 from 12.

Bangladesh, who are in the same group of Oman in the World Cup first round, will also play a friendly against Oman A team on October 8. The match will begin at 6.30 pm.

England, ODI World Cup defending champions, are also in town for a preparatory camp. They will only hold practice sessions at the Al Amerat Stadium between October 10 and 15.

The recent cyclone 'Shaheen' that caused widespread damages across the country spared the cricket spectacle venue from major damages.

"Apart from some dislocations of some sheet structures, the temporary arrangements at the Al Amerat Grounds was not affected at all", the OC chairman said.

"Fortunately other



PANKAJ KHIJMI

temporary stands were well built and held ground during the heavy rains and winds due to the cyclone. One approach road to the ground was washed out with water and hope the authorities will soon clear the paths to the Al Amerat Grounds."

OMANI TOUCH TO OPENING

The Oman Cricket is also planning to add an Omani touch to the opening of the cricket showpiece in Al Amerat on October 17.

"We are planning a brief show to focus on Omani Women's Day, which falls on the same day of first match (October 17). The Royal Cavalry's all-women mounted band will perform to Omani classical, western and Bollywood numbers and conclude with ICC T20 World Cup

anthem", the Asian Cricket Council vice-president said.

Oman take on PNG in the opening match at 2.30 pm.

"We plan to showcase the traditional equestrian sport of Oman also by arranging some 20 caparisoned horses will line-up at the boundary line with some 16 women riders holding the national flags of all the participating teams."

"A woman rider will bring the ICC T20 World Cup trophy on to the pitch to mark the opening of the event."

The Oman Cricket had hosted a tour of ODI World Cup trophy in August 2018 in a similar way.

SPECTATORS ALLOWED

There will be some 2,500-3,000 spectators allowed during the World Cup following the regulations of Ministry of Health.

"Seats will be left vacant in between to ensure there is no close mingling of the fans. Strict Covid-19 protocols will be followed at the venue as speculated by the Ministry of Health", Pankaj said.

For the practice matches against Sri Lanka

and Bangladesh, fans are allowed in the same pattern. Tickets, priced at RO 2, are being sold by Oman's delivery app TM Done online.

CRICKET FRATERNITY THRILLED

The cricketing fraternity is also thrilled to welcome the spectacle in Oman.

Pranav Mehta, co-owner of Premier Division's Team ARTT, said cricket has a very bright future in the country.

"As a co-owner of a Premier Division team of the Oman Cricket League, I can assure that the Oman Cricket has a strong league structure. The facilities will further improve to international standards with the hosting of the World Cup. We congratulate and appreciate the Oman Cricket for their hard work for making this possible."

Premier Division 'Yalla Shabab' Manager Vinu Mathew said this is exciting period for the game in Oman. "The World Cup will stamp Oman's place in the global cricket map. We hope the national team makes to the next round to join the big shots of the game to make a permanent presence among the top-ranking teams", Vinu said.





MUMBAI THRASH ROYALS TO STAY AFLOAT IN IPL

DUBAI: Nathan Coulter-Nile led an inspired pace attack to help holders Mumbai Indians hammer Rajasthan Royals by eight wickets on Tuesday and keep their playoff hopes alive in the Indian Premier League.

Coulter-Nile (4-14), James Neesham (3-12) and Jasprit Bumrah (2-14) claimed nine wickets between them to limit Royals, who are all but out of the IPL title race, to 90-9 in Sharjah.

Opener Ishan Kishan hit an unbeaten 50 as Mumbai romped home in 8.2 overs to jump from seventh to fifth spot behind Kolkata Knight Riders as they

fight for the final play-off place.

“We had to come here and do what we had to do. The two points were very crucial for us,” said Mumbai skipper Rohit Sharma.

“Once we had them bowled out for 90, we had a chance to finish it early and improve our run rate.”

Delhi Capitals, M S Dhoni’s Chennai Super Kings and the Virat Kohli-led Royal Challengers Bangalore have already booked their place in the last four.

With their backs to the wall, Mumbai came all guns blazing after electing to field first as

“We had to come here and do what we had to do. The two points were very crucial for us. Once we had them bowled out for 90, we had a chance to finish it early and improve our run rate

ROHIT SHARMA
Mumbai Indians skipper

Coulter-Nile, Neesham and Bumrah removed Royals’ top three batters.

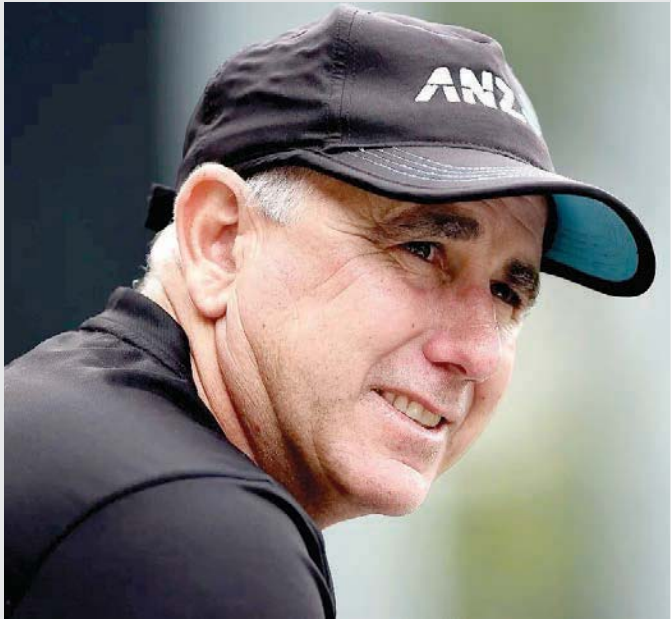
“There are world class bowlers in our side and hope they can pick a few more and I have my job easier,” man of the match Coulter-Nile said of his team’s pace pack.

Opener Evin Lewis top-scored with 24 but the rest of the batting fell flat on a tough pitch.

Sharma made 22 and then left-handed Kishan smashed five fours and three sixes in his 25-ball knock to make short work of the target.

— AFP

NZ coach Stead says no tension around T20 opener vs Pakistan



WELLINGTON: New Zealand coach Gary Stead played down suggestions of any tension around their Twenty20 World Cup opener against Pakistan after the Black Caps recently abandoned their limited-overs tour of the south Asian country citing a security alert.

New Zealand’s withdrawal dealt a massive blow to Pakistan’s hopes of staging regular international cricket, with England subsequently calling off their men’s and women’s tours.

New Zealand face former champions Pakistan in their opening Group 2 match on October 26 in Sharjah and Stead said his side were focused only on that.

“I’m not sure if there’s any more tension on it from our perspective,” he told reporters on Tuesday.

“Obviously, what happened in Pakistan was sad for Pakistan cricket, their players and also our players, who missed out on that opportunity as well.

“We can’t change what has happened there. All we

I GUESS OUR FIRST ONE IS FOCUSING ON ONE GAME AT A TIME, BUT THE MAIN GOAL IS TO GET TO THAT SEMIFINALS STAGE AND IF YOU’RE THERE, YOU’LL KNOW THAT YOU’RE ONLY TWO WINS AWAY FROM A TITLE

can do is prepare for the tournament and we face Pakistan first up.”

New Zealand are bidding to win a second world title this year after claiming the inaugural World Test Championship in June by beating India in the final.

Stead said they would not set too many goals.

“I guess our first one is focusing on one game at a time, but the main goal is to get to that semifinals stage and if you’re there, you’ll know that you’re only two wins away from a title,” Stead added. “We’re in a tough pool, I genuinely think there are six to seven teams that could win this tournament and I guess that’s good for world cricket as well.” — Reuters

Indians emotions vs overseas practicality in do-or-die stage



It’s the second last day of the league stage and with just four games to go, all eight teams have a reason to fight for and the thrill can’t be any better. The four teams are still fighting it out to fill the last open spot of qualification to the play-offs.

Although, ideally one of Kolkata Knight Riders or Mumbai Indians should qualify realistically, but Rajasthan Royals and Punjab Kings have an outside mathematical chance. What would be the most interesting part is to see, how do the youngsters react to an emotional situation of their team. Would the rush of blood take over or would practicality prevail?

Chennai Super Kings might have already qualified, but their defeat against Delhi Capitals has

increased the interest levels of Royal Challengers Bangalore to finish the league stage in the top two slots.

Chennai have lost back-to-back matches against Rajasthan Royals to start with and now against Delhi Capitals. From requiring one win out of three, it’s one out of one and can Dhoni absorb the pressure and finish on top?

Punjab Kings comes into this game with LWLWL record in UAE, and if the record is to be believed then this is their game. But a win is not going to be enough, Punjab needs to absolutely thrash Chennai out by a massive margin to boost their net run rate, and then hope that KKR is overwhelmed by a big margin by Rajasthan Royals and also Mumbai Indians are beaten by a big margin by Sunrisers Hyderabad. Isn’t it a lot being asked for? But then, cricket is a funny game and everything is possible.



CHENNAI FAVOURITES
The last couple of matches at this venue have been low scoring and if Punjab bowl first, they could make Chennai sweat with the pressure of finishing in the top two spots.

Ravi Bishnoi should be the pick of the bowler for this game.

With the experience, Chennai should start the game as favourites.

KOLKATA NEED TO WIN
Knight riders — Kolkata just needs to win this game and on most days they would be through.

But doubt that’s the word being talked about. Surely they would be considering the fact that Mumbai Indians has a match against the weakest Sunrisers Hyderabad and we need to win convincingly to secure the fourth spot.



Practically they are out, but the young Rajasthani team would be looking to finish the tournament by stamping a note of authority against Shahrulk Khan’s team and at the same time giving them an outside chance/opportunity to qualify for the play-offs. But for this to happen, Rajasthan would need more than a magic wand.

KKR HAVE EDGE
Sharjah is a very small ground

and the pitch is not conducive for batting.

But if the players play some good quality fearless cricket, a lot is possible. Even a mishit can carry all the way, and with both teams having some quality power hitters, some courageous batting could take the pitch out of the equation.

Expect KKR to benefit from an emotional Rajasthan Royals team.

Oman eye another stunner against perfect Australia

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 6

Oman will take on Australia in their third match of the Asian Qualifiers — Road to Qatar 2022 in Group B in Doha on Thursday. The match will kick off at the Khalifa International Stadium in Doha at 10:30 pm (Oman time).

Red Warriors will chase three points in the fixture after their historic win over Japan earlier in the previous month. Then, the team suffered a shock 1-0 loss against Saudi Arabia.

Coach Branko Ivankovic's men arrived in Doha since more than two weeks for a short camp ahead of the crucial match. The 15 days warm-up gathering beside the friendly matches against Nepal and Qatar military team assisted the team and coaching staff to review on the team readiness and identify the starting line up for the upcoming match against Australia.

The first preparatory match for the Sultanate team against Nepal ended 7-2 for the former while Red Warriors ended the second match on a winning note as they beat Qatar Military team 2-1.

In both matches, the Croatian coach allowed all the squad to take part in the matches and evaluate their technical performances.

The Oman team were in full strength in Tuesday's training session after the attendance of Fayez al Rushaidi and Zaher al Aghbari from Iran's Mes Rafsangan club. Mohsin al Ghassani and Amjad al Harthi have injuries and may not take part in Australia game.

Oman have met Australia many times in the Asian Qualifiers. In 2014 Fifa World Cup qualifiers, Oman had managed to win once and the same for Australia while the other two encounters ended in draw.

The Bahraini referee Nawaf Shakar Allah will officiate the fixture. The assisting umpiring team is featured from Mohammed Jaafar and Abdullah Saleh (Bahrain). The fourth referee is Muhannad Qasim from Iraq and the VAR umpire is Mohammed Taqi and assisted by Sivakroon (Singapore).



Leylah Fernandez (CAN) works out on the practice courts at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden. — USA Today Sports

Fernandez eager to return to action after Sharapova pep talk

TORONTO: Canada's Leylah Fernandez, who lost in the final of the US Open, said on Tuesday she has since received advice from five-times Grand Slam champion Maria Sharapova and cannot wait to get back on court.

A day after falling to British teenager Emma Raducanu in last month's final, Fernandez attended New York's annual Met Gala where she had a chance to speak with Sharapova.

"She gave me some pretty good advice", Fernandez, 19, told reporters ahead of her return to competition this week at Indian Wells for the BNP Paribas Open. "I don't want to disclose any of it because it's very personal for me."

"She's an amazing person. She told me her own experience and the way that she was able to bounce back and she's just a great person, great inspiration to kind of look up to."

Fernandez won the Monterrey Open in March but upped her game considerably in New York where she beat defending champion Naomi Osaka, three-times Grand Slam winner

Angelique Kerber and world number two Aryna Sabalenka en route to the final.

Against Raducanu, an 18-year-old qualifier making only her second Grand Slam appearance, Fernandez struggled with her serve during a straight sets loss but still showed enough to suggest she could be a lasting force.

Fernandez has since faced a surge in demand for her time since the US Open but credits her team for allowing her to stay focused on tennis.

"I'm very lucky to have a great team around me to just let me focus on my craft, on my tennis, and not be overwhelmed with everything that's going right now", said Fernandez. "Honestly I just can't wait to be back on the tennis court competing again."

The Canadian has shot up to 28th in the rankings and is the 23rd seed at Indian Wells, where she will get a first-round bye at an event widely considered the unofficial fifth Grand Slam.

— Reuters

Oman to host ITTF high-performance camp, WTT event

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 6

Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) will kick off the training sessions of 2021 ITTF high-performance camp for girls on Thursday at the main indoor hall at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

The four days of world-class camp event will feature participation of the top girls players from different parts of the world. The national team participants will be represented by Al Hoor al Jasasi, Noor al Farsi and Retaj al Abri.

The camp will be monitored by specialised and certified coaches and trainers from ITTF. The sessions will be delivered to the participants by them. The camp will act as opportunity for the national players to gear up ahead of the 2021 WTT Youth Contender Muscat which will start from Sunday.

OTTA previously hosted the ITTF challenge and hopes week in Salalah in 2019 while the first



The four days of world-class camp event will feature participation of the top girls players from different parts of the world. The national team participants will be represented by Al Hoor al Jasasi, Noor al Farsi and Retaj al Abri

camp for West Asia was hosted in Muscat in 2017.

On the other hand, OTTA completed all the technical and



logistics preparations to organise 2021 WTT Youth Contender Muscat from October 10 to 15. The event will witness participation of

many players from different parts of the world. The five days event will feature different competition categories including U-11, U-13,

U-15, U-17, and U-19. The technical meeting and the official draw will take place on Saturday. Sajad Mohammed Baqir, Event

Director, said that hosting of the ITTF High performance camp and WTT Youth Contender in Muscat are parts of the OTTA keen to host top international events.

"We are looking forward that our national players will get the required and desired technical experience from the top ranking players. Hosting of the international events will generate different technical, economical and promotional outcomes for the Sultanate's economy. The Sultanate are ready to host the players from different part of the world in Muscat", he ended.

Oman national team squad featured the following players: Laith al Balushi, Eyad al Jassasi, Turki al Abri, Badar al Farsi, Omar al Awadi, Mohammed al Jassasi, Ali al Ghafri, Moyad al Mutawa, Loqman al Farsi, Ayman al Shehi, Mohammed al Moutawa, Badar al Jassasi, Abdulrahman al Zaabi, Mashal al Shehi, Al Hoor al Jassasi, Noor al Farsi and Retaj al Abri.



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ODP launches AI cloud service in Oman

CLOUD SERVICES: New AI service enables Sultanate to store its data internally

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 6

As one of the vital enablers contributing to the improvement of the productivity in economic sectors and a key pillar driving the national economy for technological transformation, Oman Data Park (ODP), the Sultanate's first IT-managed and cloud services provider, has launched Nebula AI service by joining the NVIDIA partner Network (NPN) Cloud Service Provider Partner Programme.

The launching ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Ali bin Amer al Shidani, Under-Secretary for Communications and Information Technology at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, in presence of high-level VIP delegations, business, and media representatives.

The launching of the Nebula AI platform, the first of its kind in Oman, comes in line with Oman's vision for 2040 and within the Sultanate's exerted efforts to keep pace with the latest technological developments in the field of computing, compatible with the requirements of the fourth industrial revolution.



The Sultanate had advanced 11 positions in the government's readiness index for implementing in 2020, while it ranked 48th globally and sixth in the Middle East, according to the Oxford Insight Index.

Highlighting the importance of AI for Oman's economy, Eng Maqbool al Wahaibi, CEO, Oman Data Park stated: "AI is transforming every industry, whether it is by improving customer relationships in financial services, streamlining manufacturer supply chains, or helping doctors deliver better outcomes for patients. It gives us great pleasure to be at the forefront to provide this platform, which will enhance the technological transformation processes in the Sultanate in order to accelerate the utilisation of AI in various economic fields in Oman."

"As the launching of Nebula AI service will contribute to sealing



Oman's entry into the world of AI, Oman Data Park has practically proven its success of bringing innovative services to Oman to fuel further economic growth. Coupled with our impeccable track record of over nine years of service in the cloud services industry, we now look forward to helping businesses leap ahead on innovation and profitability through the use of AI both locally and beyond," Maqbool al Wahaibi added.

Joining virtually for the event, Jaap Zuiderveld, vice-president, EMEA at NVIDIA, stated, "AI is transforming every industry, helping nations and business to solve their biggest challenges in agriculture, healthcare, climate

and more. As an NVIDIA NPN partner, Oman Data Park is helping to grow the nation's AI expertise to create new opportunities with the world leading AI system."

Al Wahaibi also said that the utilisation of AI services is considered an important factor for improving the productivity of many economic sectors, such as banking and finance, energy, healthcare logistics, and retail. It saves time and money and enhances operational efficiencies, as well as leads to an increase in revenue. AI also enhances the performance of sophisticated intellectual tasks such as decision-making and problem solving, as well as increases customer services

proactively.

The Nebula AI service platform is powered by the NVIDIA DGX A100 system, which is suitable for all AI workloads, offering unprecedented compute density, performance, and flexibility in the world's first 5 peta FLOPS AI system. This will enable both government and private sector entities to explore the various benefits of AI with the guarantee of data sovereignty, security, and reliability.

A teaming agreement was also signed at the launch, between ODP's CEO Eng Al Wahaibi and Bikal UK's CEO Raj Sandhu, which was attended by James Goldman, Deputy Head of Mission, British

Embassy Muscat.

A statement from Bill Murray, UK Ambassador, stated, "Technology is an area of strength for the UK in particular, with London recognised as the AI capital of Europe. The potential for collaboration between the UK and Oman in the technology sector is vast, and I am excited by this partnership between Oman Data Park and Bikal. It will create job opportunities and support the development of Oman's tech ecosystem and local talent in alignment with Vision 2040. Congratulations to ODP and Bikal!"

"Our collaboration with Oman Data Park is key to the creation of new AI and 5G technologies in Oman and the GCC. Having a forward-looking partner in the region will enable Bikal to bring UK university researched innovations with the ability to develop the tech locally. This partnership will open joint opportunities in Oman and the UK over the coming years," said Raj Sandhu, CEO, BIKAL UK.

According to a PWC research, AI is estimated to contribute around \$15.7 trillion globally by 2030, while the Middle East is estimated to accrue 2 per cent of the total global benefits of AI in 2030, which is equivalent to \$320 billion. The forecast reports also show that an annual growth is expected to range between 20-34 per cent per year across the region.

Oman's energy ministry appoints focal point for hydrogen, new energies

SUSTAINABLE FUTURE: New department for Energy and Minerals Industries Development established in Ministry of Energy and Minerals

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Reflecting the Omani government's increasingly strong pivot towards green energy, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals has for the first time nominated a Focal Point to liaise with investors, developers, technology providers and research institutions, among other stakeholders, eager to support the growth of a green hydrogen economy in the Sultanate.

Nasser al Rizeiqi (pictured), who assumed charge as the Ministry's Focal Point for Hydrogen and New Energies on August 1, will help strengthen engagement with an ever expanding matrix of individuals

and organisations — local and international — who have a stake in Oman's green energy future.

"My role as New Energies Specialist is to lead and coordinate the different efforts related to hydrogen and new energies in Oman in collaboration with private sector national and international bodies," said Al Rizeiqi.

"While I work closely with the team tasked with developing the National Hydrogen Strategy for Oman, I also follow up on the green hydrogen projects proposed for implementation in the Sultanate."

To help drive value creation across the green hydrogen value chain, a new department has been established at the Ministry, according to the new focal point. The 'Energy and Minerals Industries Development Department' functions under the auspices of the Director General of Planning and Studies at the Ministry.

Nasser's appointment comes against a backdrop of pivotal developments in Oman's renewable and new energies space.



Nasser al Rizeiqi

In recent days, key stakeholders in a world-scale green hydrogen and ammonia project, proposed to be set up in the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Duqm have been firming up plans to advance the landmark venture. Just last month, 13 well-known local energy companies and other stakeholder institutions met under the auspices of the Ministry to establish the National Hydrogen Alliance — also known as Hy-Fly — as a platform to help accelerate Oman's transition to green energy.

Nasser, who holds a Master's Degree in Energy Systems and Thermal Process from the UK's

Cranfield University, wrote his thesis on potential sites for underground hydrogen storage. Prior to his appointment as the Ministry's New Energies' Focal Point, he was part of a team at EJAAD, a hub for research and collaboration between industry and academia, that was tasked with formulating Oman's National Hydrogen Strategy.

"My role at EJAAD was to identify the most optimum hydrogen storage options in the Sultanate, as well as propose the best available carbon capture technology that suits Oman's energy profile," said Nasser.

"In March 2021, I was accepted by the Malaysia-Japan International Technology Institute (MJIT) to do my PhD degree in Chemical and Environmental Engineering. As part of my thesis work, I'm working now on building a mathematical model for optimising hydrogen production and storage systems. My PhD study focuses on balancing energy demand with the minimal environmental and economic impact."

Oman crude soars to \$80.46 per barrel

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 6

The marker price of Oman Crude Oil Futures Contract (OQD) soared above the \$80 per barrel mark for the first time in nearly three years to settle at \$80.46 per barrel in trading on the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME) on Wednesday.

Oman's benchmark crude gained \$0.98 from the previous day's closing price of \$79.48 per barrel in trend with sharp increases recorded by other international crude benchmarks following a decision by OPEC+ to stick with an existing plan to raise output gradually.

Wednesday's high matches levels last seen on October 17, 2018 when the Oman Crude Oil Futures Contract hit \$80.89 per barrel midway through a rally that lifted prices to as high as \$88.96 per barrel on September 26, 2018, after surging an unprecedented 8 per cent overnight.

Meanwhile, Reuters reported that oil hit a multi-year high on Wednesday above \$83 a barrel, supported by OPEC+'s refusal to ramp up production more



rapidly against a backdrop of concern about tight energy supply globally.

The market later unwound those gains due to an American Petroleum Institute (API) report showing rising crude inventories in the United States and, analysts said, technical indicators suggesting oil has rallied too fast.

On Monday, the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies, known as OPEC+, chose to stay with a plan to increase output gradually and not boost it further as the US and other consumer nations have been urging.

Brent crude rose as high as \$83.47, the highest since October 2018, and at 11:15 GMT was down 40 cents, or 0.5 per cent, at \$82.16.

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Sohar International allocates RO 5m to support customers affected by cyclone

MUSCAT: Reflecting its ongoing commitment to the people and community it serves, Sohar International allocated RO 5,000,000 to support its customers and build back the societies in severely affected areas by cyclone Shaheen.

The bank has pledged the amount which will be effectively utilised through interest free financing, as well as deferring personal and housing loans for a period of three months for the cyclone-impacted customers in the wilayats of Saham, Al Khabourah, Al Suwaiq and Al Musannah.

Commenting on the initiative, Ahmed al Musalami, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, said, “We appreciate

the government’s and individuals’ efforts to mitigate the effects of cyclone Shaheen that the Sultanate has witnessed. As a responsible corporate citizen, it is our national duty to always support the community, and stand by its people especially in such times of need. This initiative comes in line with the bank’s Purpose to Help People Win, and hence lending them support during exceptional times, to reduce the financial burden on those who have been severely impacted. The cyclone caused great damages on a number of the governorates of the Sultanate. We would like to commend the tireless efforts made by government and various institutions in the public and private sectors to rebuild the



affected areas. It’s our privilege and duty to support these national efforts made by government, citizens, residents and institutions.”

Sohar International is offering an interest free personal loan of up to RO 2,500 for a period of 10 years, to customers who are

residents of the same locations. This can be availed till December 31, as per terms and conditions cited by the bank.

In addition, the 3-month (October-December 2021) instalment waivers for Personal Loan and Housing Loans are applicable for the bank’s Omani customers, who are residents of Saham, Al Khabourah, Al Suwaiq and Al Musannah.

They can simply avail the waiver by providing a letter at their nearest branch before October 15, 2021, with a mandatory proof of residence location, such as, electricity or water bill. The customer will be liable to pay the insurance premium for the extended tenure of the loan.

Businessman appointed to WTF’s Advisory Board



Adeeb Ahamed

LUCERNE: The World Tourism Forum Lucerne has appointed Adeeb Ahamed, Managing Director of Abu Dhabi based Twenty14 Holdings, to its Global Advisory Board. For over ten years, World Tourism Forum Lucerne (WTF) has been bringing together industry experts, CEOs, investors and start-ups, establishing itself as a prestigious global platform for exchange. By fostering cross-generational collaboration, new ideas and solutions emerge to benefit tourism today and in the future.

Ahamed, who owns a slew of iconic properties across the world including the Great Scotland Yard in London, Waldorf Astoria — the Caledonian in Edinburgh, Pullman Downtown Dubai and Port Muziris in Kochi among others, joins a select group of the industry’s top stakeholders and decision makers who will collaborate on solving for future challenges in the travel and tourism industry.

OMINVEST donates RO 100,000 for cyclone relief

MUSCAT: As part of its social responsibility initiatives, Oman International Development and Investment Company SAOG (OMINVEST) announced a donation of RO 100,000 in support of those affected by cyclone Shaheen that hit several parts of the Sultanate.

In alignment with the company’s purpose and corporate citizenship, the donation has been approved by OMINVEST’s board of directors to help address adverse

conditions confronting our communities.

Abdulaziz al Balushi, Group CEO, OMINVEST said, “Our hearts go out to the families who have lost loved ones and homes because of cyclone Shaheen. These are challenging circumstances that have affected many across different governorates of the Sultanate.

At such times it is our duty at OMINVEST to stand by the society and extend our sincere empathy and support”.

Chevrolet and Cadillac models bolster Budget’s car rental fleet

MUSAT: Leading car rental company Budget Rent a Car has beefed up its rental fleet in Oman with a sizeable number of new vehicles from Chevrolet and Cadillac. The new inductions, coinciding with an uptick in business and leisure travel as the post-pandemic economic recovery picks up steam, attest to the enduring appeal of two of America’s greatest automotive brands.

An OHI Group company, Budget Car Rental Oman is the first international car rental firm to launch its operations in the Sultanate. It is well-known for its extensive fleet of cars comprising of world renowned automobile



brands that cater to the car rental needs of its truly diverse clientele.

“Chevrolet and Cadillac are both renowned brands well known for their durability, quality, high performance, comfort and luxury — features that are well appreciated by our customers who place emphasis on value for money. We are confident that these new vehicles

will add tremendous value to our on-demand mobility clientele”, added Benty Jose, General Manager of Budget Rent a Car.

“We are delighted to play an important role in building Budget’s fleet of rental cars as it gears up for a keenly anticipated revival in business and tourist travel in Oman and the wider region. Budget’s continued preference for Chevrolet and Cadillac is not only testimony of solid performance and safety reputations associated with our automotive brands, but also a recognition of the unmatched standards of our after-sales service,” said Sudhir M, CEO, OTE Group.

Captivated by Nissan Sentra’s efficiency and style

MUSCAT: Nissan Sentra with its upscale look, layers of refinement and great fuel economy is highly appreciated by loyal customers. Its attractive look, luxurious interiors and Nissan Intelligent Mobility technologies further adds to its attractiveness. Nissan Sentra is available with 1.8L engine generating a maximum power of 130 HP. It also offers best in class fuel efficient 16.3 km/l.

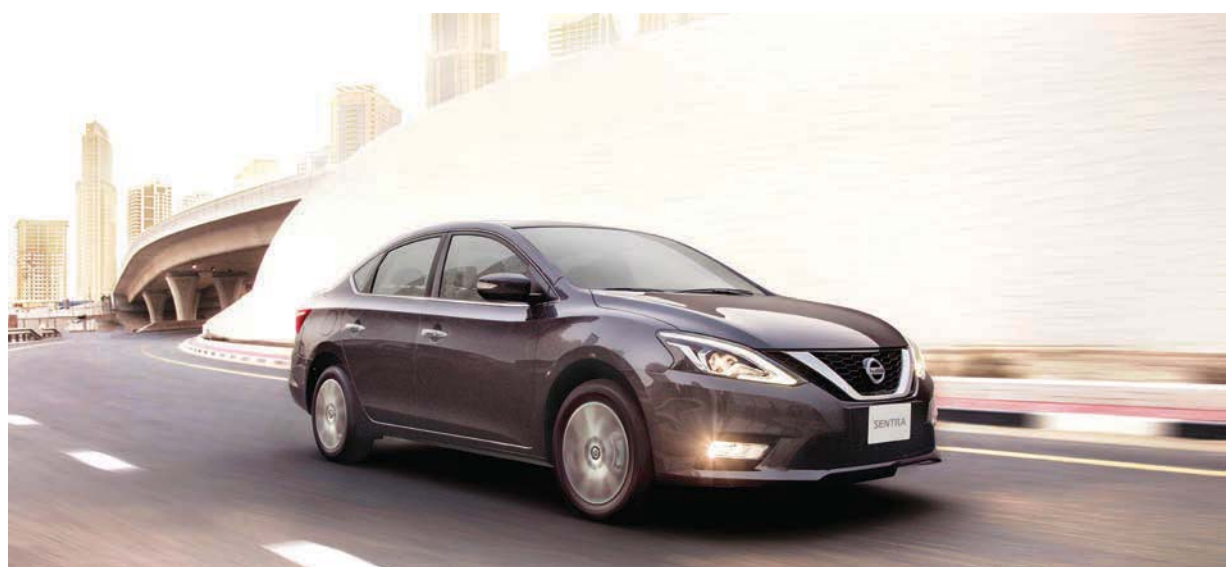
It offers drivers the spaciousness and comfort of cars usually found in the larger segment, as well as technology usually associated with much more expensive cars. Its features stand out attributes such as Xtronic CVT transmission, 16-inch alloy wheel, rear spoiler, power adjustable outside rear mirror, rear LED combination lamps, anti-lock braking system (ABS), power window, cruise control, rear parking sensor,

eco indicator and class leading roominess.

Stressing that Nissan Sentra is a best-in-class family sedan Taamir al Wahaibi says, “It is a rear car since it offers best-in-class fuel economy which is what everyone looks when buying a car. It has great visual appeal and fantastic interiors which delivers a luxurious and urbane appearance. I truly enjoy driving this car which offers so many additional features.”

Sentra’s 4-cylinder engine offers advanced valve timing to its next-generation Xtronic CVT transmission. Sentra is a technical tour de force aimed at providing the best of both worlds — efficiency and performance. The result is that it offers the best-in-class fuel economy that sets the standard.

Othman al Haddabi said, “The Nissan Sentra’s design has been



perfected to create a shape that is as fuel-efficient as it is refined.”

Mazoun al Kamal says Nissan Sentra completely redefines what an affordable car can be. “I also appreciate Sentra’s exterior which combines a sense of classiness with its refined style and proportions.”

Shaima al Zedjali likes Nissan Sentra due to its class-leading looks, safety and spaciousness on the inside.

An official from Nissan Oman said, “Customers are captivated by Nissan Sentra’s new standard of design, driving enjoyment and technology making it one of

the brand’s top sellers and most recognised nameplates.”

Nissan Sentra

Nissan’s next-generation Xtronic CVT transmission guarantees Sentra is always running in the right gear. That means better fuel efficiency, smooth acceleration and seamless

shifting. Proudly wearing the Nissan Pure Drive badge, Sentra is a living proof of Nissan’s commitment to providing more environmentally friendly and fuel-efficient cars.

The Sentra 1.8L engine is designed to excel. With its longer stroke and Twin CVTC (Continuously Variable Valve Timing Control) System on intake and exhaust valves, it offers greater combustion efficiency and maximum fuel economy. Sentra’s engine is very durable but lightweight, giving great performance and power without being a burden to the car.

It’s important to be surrounded by things you love. Soft-touch materials throughout the cabin, along with unexpected available luxuries like wood-tone trim and perforated leather-appointed seats, come together to create a very personal space.

In brief

■ LAGOS



GOOGLE TO INVEST \$1 BN IN AFRICA OVER FIVE YEARS

Google plans to invest \$1 billion in Africa over the next five years to ensure access to fast and cheaper internet and will back start-ups to support the continent's digital transformation. The unit of US tech company Alphabet Inc made the announcement at a virtual event where it launched an Africa Investment Fund, through which it will invest \$50 million in start-ups, providing them with access to its employees, network and technologies.

In collaboration with not-for-profit organisation Kiva, Google will also provide \$10 million in low interest loans to help small businesses and entrepreneurs in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa get through the economic hardship created by Covid-19. — **Reuters**

■ DUBAI



UAE STARTS SELLING DEBUT DOLLAR BONDS

The United Arab Emirates started marketing a triple-tranche US dollar-denominated bond, the first issued by the federal government rather than individual emirates, in a sale to be concluded the same day, a document showed. The bonds have tranches of 10, 20, and 40 years. The 10-year notes were offered with an initial price guidance of about 105 basis points (bps) over US Treasuries, the 20-year at about 135 bps over the same benchmark, and the 40-year at about 3.6 per cent.

The 40-year portion will be Formosa bonds, which are debt securities sold in Taiwan by foreign borrowers and denominated in currencies other than the Taiwanese dollar. — **Reuters**

■ WELLINGTON



NZ CENTRAL BANK LIFTS INTERESTS RATE FROM RECORD LOW

New Zealand became one of the first developed economies to hike interest rates since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, as the central bank bids to rein in rising inflation. In a widely tipped move, the Reserve Bank of New Zealand lifted its base interest rate 0.25 points to 0.5 per cent Wednesday, ending an 18-month freeze aimed at keeping the economy ticking over during the Covid-19 crisis. — **AFP**

Utico to set up hydrogen project in UAE

CLEAN ENERGY: Utility, partly owned by Oman Investment Authority, announces switch from clean coal carbon capture project to green energy portfolio

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 6

Utico, the Middle East's leading full service utility and the only private water and power company in the UAE announced on Wednesday its entry into hydrogen production by 2024. Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the Sultanate's integrated sovereign wealth fund, has an indirect equity interest in Utico.

In a statement at the ongoing WETEX and Dubai Solar Show, Utico also said that it was exiting the Clean Coal Carbon capture project it had signed with Shanghai Electric in 2014, for which it had obtained the Middle East's first Federal Environmental Permit in 2016 done by TUV Nord.

Utico had also planned and announced the same scale 350MW super critical project at the Duqm Special Economic Zone in Oman in 2016 with a bio-fertiliser plant using carbon to produce agro and pharma grade algae with a 200MW solar facility that would offset carbon emissions by greater than 70 per cent, making it cleaner than natural gas.

Both projects would have captured greater than 1 million tonnes of CO2 per year.

The new company will start



with a 12,000 tonnes per annum hydrogen expandable to 100,000 tonnes per annum and will include a portfolio of green and renewable power production totalling 200MW, Utico said, adding that the first phase of production is slated for 2024.

The focus will be to produce the Hydrogen splitting water with green energy rather than natural gas. This will be Green-Blue Hydrogen, generating Green Water as well, making it the cleanest and cheapest hydrogen available in the market.

"The new Hydrogen project is a continuation of our market leading innovation in the energy sector for over the past 16 years. Further, it is a testament to Utico's focus on environment and food security it has adopted for over the past one-and-a-half decades, positioning us ahead of the curve", Ali al Darwish, Chief Executive Officer of Utico in the UAE said, adding that the new project is another step in that direction.

"The new venture makes perfect sense for Utico at this point in time since Hydrogen

is an energy mix of the future, and will be a key mover in the coming decade. Developing this energy resource correctly and positioning it properly is important as Utico has done consistently over the past 16 years, and we feel that the risk reward and cost benefit metrics Utico has set will be market leading going well into the future as well", said Hussain al Lawati, CEO of the MENA region and Head of Global Investments.

Key investors and partners are discussing with Utico for collaborations which includes majors like Blackstone, Actis, Masdar, ADQ, International Holdings Group and IDB Infrastructure Fund, that are aligned with the new world order that Covid has pushed early, viz, food security and cleaner newer world.

Utico is already raising new capital through its Sustainability rated bonds, as well as planning an IPO sooner than later that will support the growth trajectory that it has already set as part of its master plan.

Bank loan repayments eased for laid-off workers, pensioners

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 6

The Central Bank of Oman has issued a number of directives to all banks and finance leasing companies (FLCs), including the announcement of a stimulus package of procedures and incentives aimed at containing the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the lives of individuals and institutional borrowers.

Taking into account, the current economic scenario and in continuation of previously issued instructions, the Central Bank of Oman has issued further directives, to banks and Finance & Leasing Companies to extend the grace period for the repayment of loans for the following categories of borrowers:

i) Omani Citizens laid-off from work: The deferment of instalment/interest/profit is to be extended until December 31, 2022 or until the borrower concerned obtains another job, whichever is earlier, with the suspension of charging any interests during the deferment period.

ii) Omani employees with reduced wages: The instalments, interests, and profits of all affected borrowers of this category are to be postponed until December 31, 2021, with the suspension of charging any interests during the deferment period and along with permission to exceed the debt burden ratio.

iii) Pensioners from the public and private sector: Banks



shall continue to modify the terms of repayment of existing personal loans/finance, so that the maximum debt service ratio does not exceed 30 per cent of the monthly pension if it is equal to or less than RO 1,500, and 35 per cent if the monthly pension is more than RO 1,500.

iv) Riyadh card holders: Banks and Finance & Leasing Companies shall continue to postpone the instalments, interests and profits due from them until the end of December 31, 2021. The lending institutions and the borrower should mutually work out before the end of this period to restore the normal repayment schedule or to reschedule the loans according to the expected cash flows of the borrowers concerned.

"The CBO emphasises that it is necessary for the borrowers, especially the companies which previously benefited from these procedures, to take into account the importance of reassessment of their financial conditions, before the expiry of the grace period on December 31, 2021. Accordingly, it is advised that the entities falling under this category shall work with their lenders to plan and reschedule their loan payments", the apex bank added in a statement.

Zero net emissions by 2050: Huge challenge for airline industry

BOSTON: How can passengers take 10 billion flights a year without contributing to global warming? The question of "greening" the international aviation sector by 2050 constitutes a colossal task whose stakes — and sheer numbers — can make the head spin, according to the airlines themselves.

At its general assembly in Boston, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) said it is now aiming for "net zero carbon emissions" by the middle of the century, a bold but necessary goal in the face of global warming, according to its CEO Willie Walsh.

But by signing up to the goals of the Paris climate accord, and those of the European Union, IATA, which represents the airlines, does not envisage that a massive reduction in emissions will also involve a massive reduction in its operations. Quite the opposite.

"For us the main target is to continue growing, because it's not the traffic that is the enemy, it's the emissions", said Sebastian Mikosz, IATA Vice President in-charge of Environmental Affairs and Sustainable Development.

Even though air transport has suffered a huge downturn due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with a drop from 4.5 billion travellers in



KLM CEO Pieter Elbers



Julie Kitcher, Executive VP, Airbus



Christian Scherer, Airbus CCO



Guillaume Faury, Airbus CEO

2019 to 1.8 billion in 2020, IATA estimates that by 2050 more than 10 billion trips per year will be made by plane.

As it stands, the aviation sector produces 900 million tonnes of CO2 per year, according to IATA. By 2050, if nothing is done to reduce the industry's carbon footprint, that will rise to 1.8 billion tonnes.

That would mean that over 30 years, 21.2 billion tonnes of CO2 would be released into the atmosphere. Reducing this level to gradually achieve net zero emissions in 2050 poses an enormous technological challenge that the IATA estimates will cost

companies around \$1.55 trillion between 2020 and 2050.

IATA says that the main solution lies in the use of sustainable aviation fuels (SAF), which would allow the industry to get 65 per cent of the way towards its goal.

These fuels — made from biomass, waste oils and could even be made from carbon capture in the future — have the advantage that they can be used directly in existing aircraft, which are designed to run on 50 per cent blends of kerosene. And such fuel sources can reduce CO2 emissions by 80 per cent compared to kerosene over their entire life cycle, according to IATA. — **AFP**

Oil hits multi-year high on Opec+ restraint

LONDON: Oil hit a multi-year high on Wednesday above \$83 a barrel, supported by Opec+'s refusal to ramp up production more rapidly against a backdrop of concern about tight energy supply globally.

The market later unwound those gains due to an American Petroleum Institute (API) report showing rising crude inventories in the United States and, analysts said, technical indicators suggesting oil has rallied too fast.

On Monday, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies, known as Opec+, chose to stay with a plan to increase output gradually and not boost it further as the US and other consumer nations have been urging. read more

Brent crude rose as high as \$83.47, the highest since October 2018, and at 1115 GMT was down 40 cents, or 0.5 per cent, at \$82.16. US crude climbed to \$79.78, the highest since November 2014, and was later down 35 cents at \$78.58.

"An energy crisis is



unfolding with winter in the northern hemisphere still to begin, and sets the stage for even higher oil prices", said Stephen Brennock of oil broker PVM.

The price of Brent has surged more than 50% this year, adding to inflationary pressure that could slow recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. Natural gas has surged to a record peak in Europe and coal prices from major exporters have also hit all-time highs. read more

Jeffrey Halley, analyst at brokerage OANDA, said both crude contracts looked overbought based on a widely followed technical indicator, the relative strength index.

"That may signal some daily pullbacks this week but does not change the underlying bullish case for oil", he said. — **Reuters**

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features



The surprising hidden cave of Fins

Barely a 45-minute drive from the capital, Fins has been a favourite destination for campers and leisure fishing enthusiasts because of its rugged shores, scenic cliffs and white sandy coves. While all its nooks and crannies seemingly had already been visited by everyone, Fins still has a few secrets up its sleeve... **P20**

ENTERTAINMENT

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The *Washington Post* journalists detail the dangers and challenges during the transition to the Biden presidency.

Adele announces comeback with new single

BRITISH SINGER ADELE has announced that her comeback single "Easy On Me" will be released next week. The pop superstar shared a short video on Twitter containing the opening bars of the piano-led track and confirmed it will arrive on October 15. In the black-and-white clip, the 33-year-old is seen inserting a cassette into a car stereo and driving down a country lane while pieces of paper fly out of the win-

dows of her car. The snippet points towards the emotive kind of piano ballad the south London singer is best known for, but stops before any vocals are heard. It comes after Adele sparked speculation that new music was on the way by updating her social media accounts and website on Monday. Her Twitter and Instagram pages showed a blue and turquoise pattern with her biography containing a link to her

website, which urged fans to sign up for more information. After fans spotted the change in Adele's online presence, the hashtag #Adele30 began trending. It comes after the number 30 appeared on billboards and was projected on to famous landmarks around the world – including in Dubai, Ireland, France, Italy and the US. The singer hinted her fourth album would be titled 30 in a 2019 poston Instagram, jokingly telling fans: "30" will be a drum and bass record to spite you all." Adele has not released an album since 2015's "25", but she has confirmed she is working on a new record. All three of her studio albums so far have been named after the milestone ages she hit during the creative process. Adele, who headlined Glastonbury festival in 2016, announced her split from charity boss Simon Konecki in April 2019. Their divorce was finalised in March, and they share custody of 8-year-old son Angelo.



She has also made headlines for her weight loss, sharing pictures on social media of her slimmer figure while living in the US. Adele is reportedly dating American sports agent Rich Paul, founder of management company Klutch Sports Group, which represents high-profile basketball stars including LeBron James, Anthony Davis and John Wall. — **PA Media/dpa**



Two Congos seek Unesco listing to reclaim rumba's rhythms

Perched on a corner of the stage at La Septante, an open-air club in Democratic Republic of Congo's capital Kinshasa, Manda Chante sings the lilting opening to "Independence Cha Cha", an old anthem for African anti-colonial movements.

The song debuted one evening in Brussels in February 1960, during negotiations for Congo's liberation from Belgium, electrifying delegates. Within four months, Congo was free.

Sixty-one years later, rumba remains at the core of African music, and a movement has emerged to cement its reputation and secure its protection.

Authorities in Kinshasa and Brazzaville, the capital of neighbouring Congo Republic, have submitted a bid to add Congolese rumba to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural (Unesco) list of intangible cultural heritage. Unesco will announce its decision in November.

The list helps demonstrate the diversity of heritage and raises awareness about its importance. If Congolese rumba were to be added, it would join the hawker food of Singapore, sauna culture of Finland and traditional irrigation systems in the United Arab Emirates, among countless other customs on the list.

"If you look at modern rumba, we have elevated and developed it, but kept references to the icons like Le Grande Kallé", said Manda, referring to the stage name of Joseph Kabasele, who wrote "Independence Cha Cha" to persuade politicians to shelve their



differences to secure self-rule.

Born in the melting pot of 19th-century Cuba, rumba combined the drumming of enslaved Africans with the melodies of Spanish colonisers.

Re-exported to Africa in the early 20th century on vinyl, it found a ready audience in the two Congos, who recognised the rhythms as their own.

"They took our ancestors to the Americas in the 15th or 16th century. Congolese rumba was created and embedded with the same dynamics as the story that forged this country", said Andre Yoka, Director of the National Institute for the Arts in Kinshasa, who is leading Congo's candidacy for UNESCO status.

R u m b a derives from "Nkumba", meaning belly button in the local language, a dance that originates "in the ancient kingdom of Kongo", according to Congo's submission to Unesco.

"When our ancestors who were taken abroad wanted to remember their history, their origin, their memory, they danced the navel dance", said Catherine Kathungu Furaha, Congo's minister of art and culture.

"We want rumba to be recognised as ours. It is our identity."

— Reuters

FASHION

The next fashion trend is clothes that don't exist



THE ONLINE METAVERSE is coming and if we're going to be spending more time in virtual worlds, there's one crucial question: What are you going to wear?

"When I first started talking about this, my friends were like, 'What are you talking about?'" said 27-year-old Daniella Loftus.

"But my 14-year-old cousins understood it immediately." For many, the idea of buying clothes that don't exist is a conceptual leap too far.

But emerging digital fashion stores are tapping into a growing market — not actual clothes but digitally generated outfits that stores simply photoshop onto a customer's photos or videos to be posted onto Instagram and elsewhere.

Soon they are likely to become a way to dress your avatar when interacting in online games and meeting places, all potentially while reclining in sweat pants in your own home.

British influencer Loftus sees so much potential that last month she gave up her job with a fashion consultancy to devote herself full-time to her website, This Outfit Does Not Exist.

Her Instagram shows the potential of virtual clothing that doesn't need to obey the laws of physics — from a shimmering silver liquid pant suit with tentacles, to a wobbling pink creation with lasers firing out of her bustier.

"Digital is coming to overtake physical. Kids are asking each other: 'What skin did you have in this game yesterday?'" said Loftus.

EYE-CATCHING

Isabelle Boemeke, a Brazilian model and influencer, is already an avid buyer of digital outfits.

Online, she is known as Isodope and merges high fashion with a serious commitment to clean energy and environmental activism.

Her other-worldly style fits neatly with her message. "I wanted to do something very eye-catching and bold. If my videos featured me wearing a T-shirt and jeans, they wouldn't have the same appeal", Boemeke told AFP.

"Models nowadays have the freedom to share more about their personal lives and personalities. I'm a big nerd and I love expressing myself in different ways through fashion or make-up."

That's the demand, so the supply is coming fast.

Outfits on digital fashion store DressX range from \$25 hats to strange jellyfish-like dresses for hundreds of dollars.

"Every brand in the future will be on board with digital fashion", said DressX co-founder Daria Shapovalova.

Its own research says 15 percent of customers are doing so for Instagram posts, and almost a quarter found it satisfied their need for a new item of clothing.

"You don't necessarily need physicality to experience the thrill of wearing an extraordinary garment", said Michaela Larosse, of The Fabricant, which sold the first ever digital-only dress in May 2019 for \$9,500.

"We will all have a digital self, we'll have an avatar and you'll be able to communicate something about yourself, who you are, what you're interested in, through the iteration of your avatar."

REDUCING WASTE

Environmental concerns are also key to their appeal.

The traditional fashion industry is one of the biggest pollutants and waste generators on the planet — a point made by Extinction Rebellion protesters who stormed the Louis Vuitton catwalk in Paris on Tuesday.

"I know many women who buy an outfit, wear it once for a single photo and never again", said Boemeke.

"They could reduce consumption and waste by using digital fashion for a few of those posts."

The pandemic was an obvious accelerator for these businesses.

"People were stuck at home with nothing to do. They had nowhere to wear those beautiful clothes", said Loftus.

She is clear that digital fashion is not yet for everyone — and may never be.

"I don't know if a lot of the people who do this stuff online actually want to meet people in person. I think that a lot of their needs and desires can be satisfied online", said Loftus.

It may also prove a great leveller — a way for anti-social people to (almost literally) shed their skin and adopt another.

"You might be an accountant with a wife, kids and you're happy being quite mundane in real life, but then the way you want to express yourself in these virtual worlds is totally different", she said. — AFP



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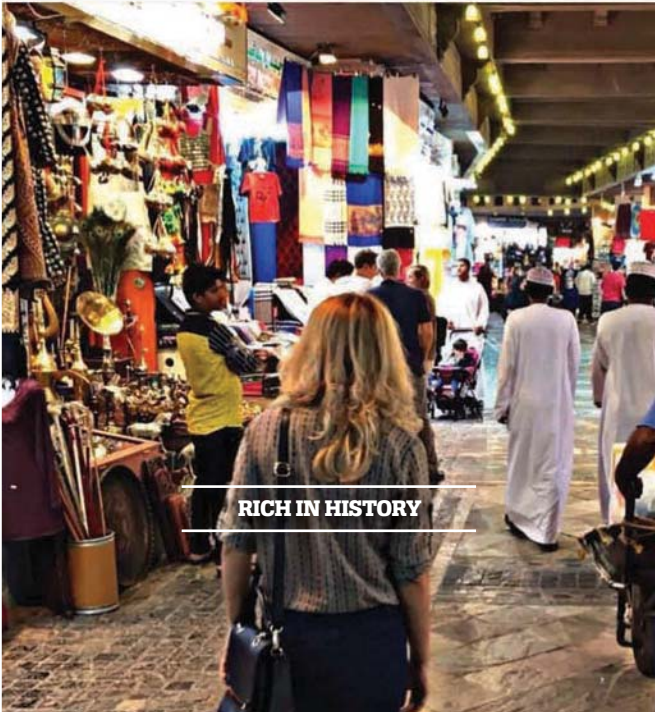
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TV

Netflix to edit 'Squid Game' phone number after woman inundated with calls



A SOUTH KOREAN woman who was deluged with thousands of prank calls and text messages after her phone number was highlighted as a key plot point in Netflix's hit show *Squid Game* may soon get some relief.

Netflix and local production company Siren Pictures said on Wednesday they would edit scenes to remove the phone number, which appears on a mysterious invitation card given to potential players of a series of deadly children's games.

The nine-part thriller depicting cash-strapped contestants playing to the death in a bid to win 45.6 billion won (R577.9m) became an international hit when it premiered on the streaming service last month.

Local broadcaster SBS aired an interview last month with the owner of the phone number, who they identified as Kim Gil-Young, a woman who runs a business in the southeastern county of Seongju. The woman showed some of the messages she had received, including requests for invitations to join the *Squid Game* and go "from rags to riches".

Reuters' calls to the phone number were not answered on Wednesday.

"Together with the production company, we are working to resolve this matter, including editing scenes with phone numbers where necessary", Netflix said on Wednesday, asking fans to refrain from prank calls or messages.

The woman told SBS last month that it was impossible for her to change her number due to client contacts and she had declined an offer of 1 million won (about R13,000) in compensation. SBS has reported that she has since been offered compensation of up to 5 million won.

Netflix and Siren Pictures declined to comment on any compensation offers on Wednesday.

Presidential candidate Huh Kyung-Young made headlines last week when he offered 100 million won on Facebook to buy the leaked number on the show.

Telephone numbers are considered limited national resources and sales or purchase of numbers is illegal under the country's telecommunications business law.

The culture ministry's Korean Film Council offers film-makers screen numbers that are not used in real life, but TV shows streamed on over-the-top (OTT) services like Netflix do not have access to that service.

Netflix and Siren had said earlier they deliberately only showed the final eight digits of the mobile phone number, and were unaware that, when dialled, the prefix would automatically be added to complete the number. — **Reuters**

ART

Gaza sculptor exhibits disembodied limbs, inspired by amputees' loss



PALESTINIAN ARTIST

Khaled Hussein's sculptures of human limbs are on display in a Gaza exhibition he calls "I Miss You Very Much", inspired by the loss felt by amputees, including victims of the conflict with Israel.

"There's a great number of amputees everywhere. It has become a phenomenon, so I wanted to work on this issue and reflect it artistically", Hussein, 46, told Reuters.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said in 2019 there were at least 1,600 amputees among Gaza's population of two million people. Assalam a Charitable Society, which cares for wounded and disabled people, said 532 Gazans had lost limbs in the conflict.

Seven of Hussein's sculptures of limbs went on display this month in a Gaza art gallery. The life-

sized sculptures are made from clay and then cast in other materials such as bronze or concrete, and create a haunting image in the small gallery space.

One shows two legs standing side by side, the big toe of one curled gently over the other foot. Another shows a naked foot poking out from under a rug lain over a calf.

A leg depicted beside a mirror is a reference to a therapy technique that uses vision to treat pain amputees can feel in their missing limbs.

Hussein's work is intended in part to draw attention to the suffering of those injured in protests in 2018 and 2019 at Gaza's border with Israel, which imposes tight restrictions on the territory run by the Hamas militant group.

Palestinian health offi-

cials said at least 200 people were killed and thousands wounded by Israeli forces in the demonstrations. UN investigators said more than 120 people had a limb amputated. Israel said its troops opened fire to protect the border from incursions and attacks by armed militants.

But the work explores the loss of a limb regardless of the cause. One of his sculptures depicts the left leg that Ahmed Abu Dagen, 21, lost in a car accident as a child.

"I didn't expect that someone would take what I had lost as an inspiration and turn it into an artwork that documents it to the world", said Abu Dagen, who plays on an amputees' soccer team. "I showed the community that I have ambitions and dreams and I can make them happen." — **Reuters**

SCIENCE

Explainer: Scientists come closer to solving Caribbean seaweed mystery



SCIENTISTS WERE BAFLED when a band of seaweed longer than the entire Brazilian coastline sprouted in 2011 in the tropical Atlantic — an area typically lacking nutrients that would feed such growth.

A group of US researchers has fingered a prime suspect: human sewage and agricultural runoff carried by rivers to the ocean.

The science is not yet definitive. This nutrient-charged outflow is just one of several likely culprits fueling an explosion of seaweed in warm waters of the Americas. Six scientists told Reuters they suspect a complex mix of climate change, Amazon rainforest destruction and dust blowing west from Africa's Sahara Desert may be fueling mega-blooms of the dark-brown seaweed known as sargassum.

In June 2018, scientists recorded 20 million metric tonnes of seaweed, a 1,000% increase compared with the 2011 bloom for that month.

"There are probably multiple factors" driving the growth, said oceanographer Ajit Subramaniam at Columbia University. "I would be surprised if there is one clear villain."

Still, a recent study examining the chemistry of seaweed from the 1980s up to 2019 offers the strongest evidence yet that water coming from city and farm runoff has been a major contributor to expansion of the so-called Great Atlantic Sargassum Belt, which now stretches for nearly 9,000 kilometres.

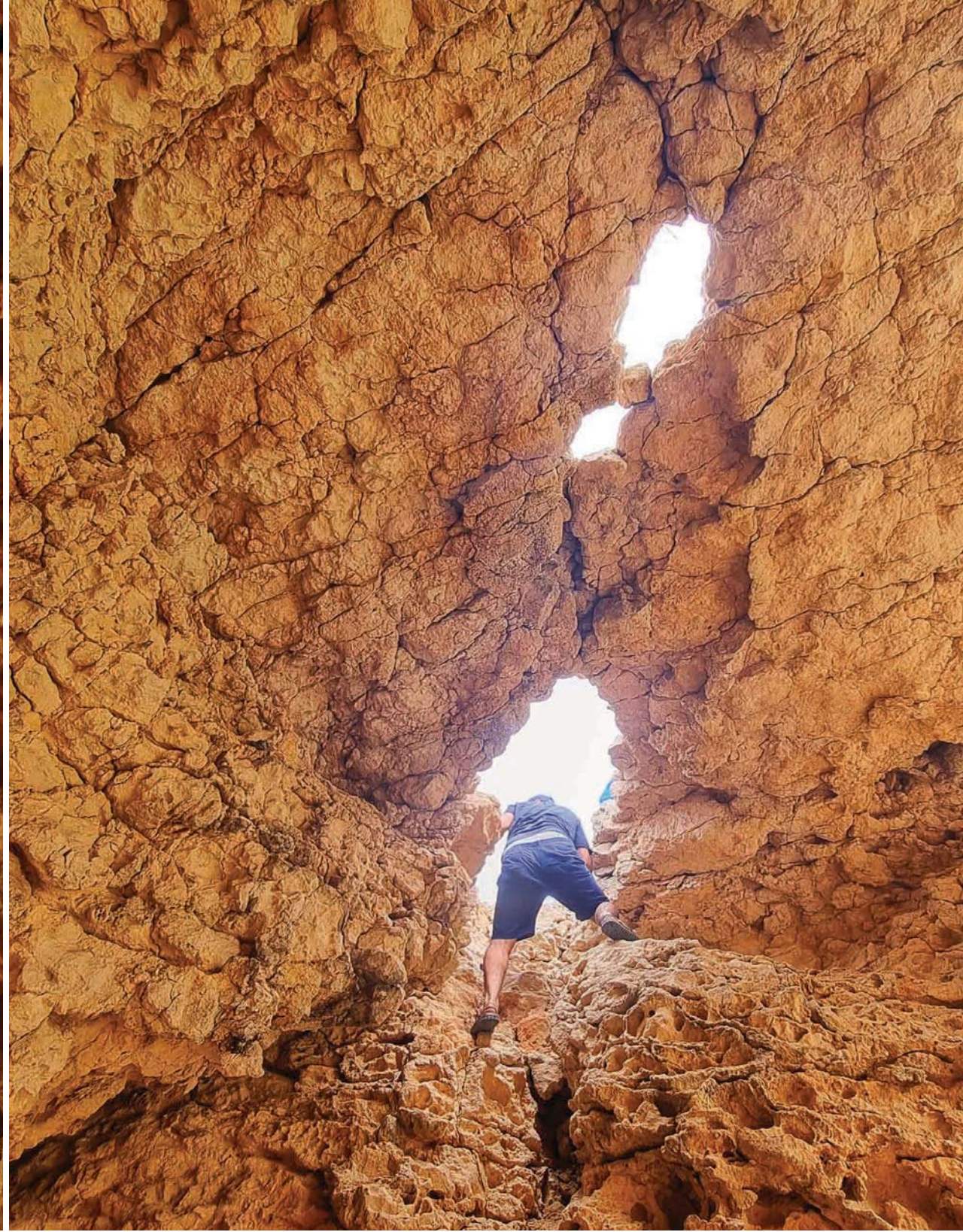
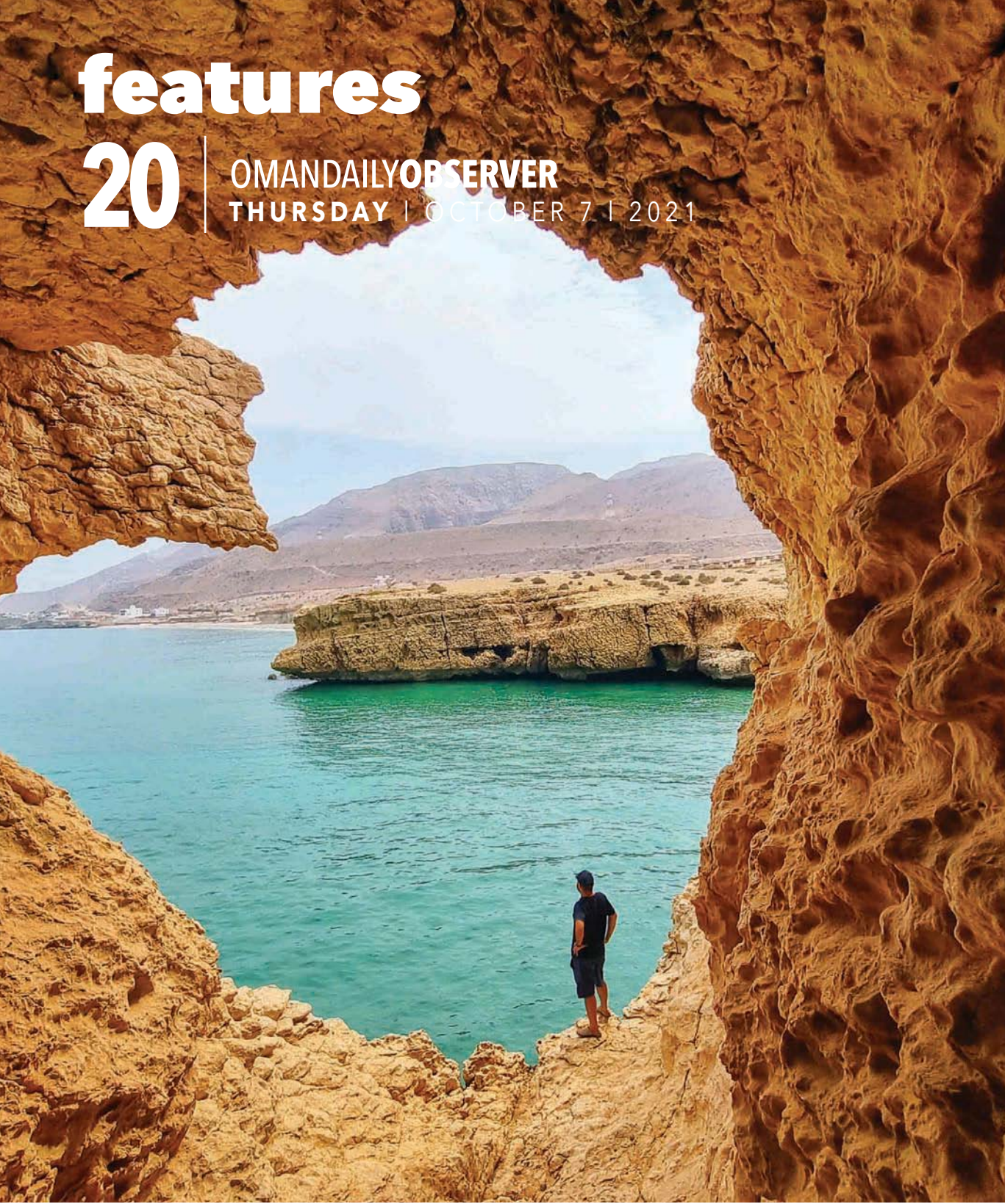
That study, co-authored by biologist Brian Lapointe at Florida Atlantic University, found that sargassum collected recently in coastal waters from Brazil to the southern United States and including several Caribbean nations, contained levels of nitrogen that were 35% higher on average than in samples taken more than three decades earlier. The findings were published in May in the journal *Nature Communications*.

Nitrogen is found in human and animal waste and in fertilisers. The results suggest that sewage and farm runoff that's flowing into rivers throughout the Americas and then on to the ocean is feeding offshore sargassum growth. Currents carry much of this seaweed to the Caribbean Sea, where it's bedeviling the region's tourism-dependent coastal economies.

The samples also showed, for example, a 111% rise in the ratio of nitrogen to phosphorus during the same time frame. That ratio has been nearly constant across the world's oceans going back decades. The change suggests the water chemistry has been radically altered.

The researchers singled out the Amazon River for particular scrutiny.

As global temperatures rise, scientists believe that rainstorms are intensifying in certain areas of the globe, including over the Amazon. Those storms are increasing the frequency of extreme flooding, which likely is pushing more nitrogen-rich runoff out to sea, Lapointe told Reuters, in a sequence he calls "a double whammy." — **Reuters**



The surprising hidden cave of Fins

BY YERU EBUEN

I was just right behind him. I only took a few seconds to take a photo and when I moved in his direction, he was gone.

"Do you want to see something magical?" He teased when we were parked right behind the gloomy, now seemingly abandoned Wadi Shab Resort in Fins.

I've known Ahmed al Jaabri for 6 years now and when he asks the said question, he usually has an amazing surprise up his sleeve. We were on an impromptu trip so he can create content for his Instagram @oman_outdoor_adventure.

We drove past the pebble beach, into this narrow unpaved road that would have been impossible to pass had we not brought along a four-wheel drive. We also passed by a beautiful cove with a white sand beach Ahmed said is perfect for a picnic in the winter.

"This place", he said, "You would have a hard time finding a spot for camping in the winter. There's a reason why this is a lot of outdoor lovers' favourite", he said.

Fins is the long stretch of property between Bimmah Sinkhole up to the rugged shores of Qalhat, the famed Unesco Heritage Site where the storied Mausoleum of Bibi Maryam can be found. Barely 45 minutes from the capital, its coastal cliffs, pebbly or sandy beaches and bushy landscape had been host to numerous campers in the last decade and being very accessible to the capital, is a great alternative for beach lovers hoping to find a private beach

to while the afternoon away.

I called out his name and heard a faint response coming from underground. As I got nearer to this hole in the ground, I found him carefully climbing his way done.

"You need to come down slowly and carefully", he said.

When he got to the lowest point, I followed where he was headed with my gaze. From where I was perched on top, a large opening opens up to a beautiful view of a cove and the infinite view of the nearby cliff and the bluest of skies.

"I'd been here many times but I've never known about this place", I said in between my breath.

Climbing down can be a bit challenging. Some of the rocks and stones are loose and they easily get dislodged. Without any ropes, it's just you sticking your fingers on nooks and crannies of the cave and whatever will stabilise you as you climb down, you hold on tight.

It's understandable why a lot of people who had been to Fins never found out about the cave. It was well hidden underground and the opening is so small that it looks like just another blowhole.

I slowly climbed down with every bit of caution reminding our two other companions to find the route which was easiest to them. If you slip going down, you'd definitely end up with lacerations as most of the stones are sharp.

The barely three-minute descent yielded a quite beautiful view. To my estimate, the cave is barely 40 metres by 40 metres in size. It's about 15

feet high and opens out to the sea which is about a 20 metres drop.

Some call the cave the Romantic Cave. It was what was written on Google map too. We call it the Lovers' Cave because of the odd heart shape that the mouth of the cave forms facing the ocean.

There's nothing much inside except perhaps hundreds of years of erosion. In one specific corner, blowhole blasts cold air from the sea below and along with it, the song of the waves as it ebbs and flows and throwing itself to the rocky cliff below.

We spent barely an hour inside. While the cooler temperature in the cave was a welcome respite from the hot temperature on the ground, we find bringing our picnic baskets down the hole too tedious and laborious we decided to eat late lunch in the nearby pebble beach.

As we climbed out the hole, we knew that we discovered an Instagram worthy location — one that will put the cave on the map. With the photos we took, it didn't take long for it to go viral with dozens of people asking for the location.

If ever you're going for a visit, just a very strong reminder to be vigilant and be very careful in your descent or ascent. We also urge you to park your cars as far as possible as it might result in the top covering falling into the cave.

For more details or a guided trip, reach out to Ahmed al Jaabri on Instagram @ahmed_aljaabri or through @oman_outdoor_adventure.

