

Booster shots can help vulnerable

A Covid-19 booster shot is a way to keep the most vulnerable safe and not a luxury robbing people who have yet to have even a single jab, a senior World Health Organization official said on Monday. The comments from WHO Europe head Hans Kluge appeared to be more positive than the UN health body's past assessments of the third vaccinations being administered by a growing number of countries. — AFP



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OMAN OBSERVER

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WANTS SOY SAUCE
TO BE THE 'KETCHUP
OF INDIA'



MUSCAT

HIS MAJESTY SENDS
CABLES OF GREETINGS

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Sultan Abdullah Ahmad Shah, King of Malaysia, on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to the King of Malaysia. His Majesty also wished the friendly people of Malaysia further progress and prosperity. His Majesty has also sent a cable of greetings to President Paula Mae of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on her country's Independence Anniversary. His Majesty has sent a cable of greetings to President Sadyr Japarov of the Kyrgyz Republic on his country's Independence Anniversary. — ONA

'MIRAN' TO BOOST
STAFF PRODUCTIVITY

The Ministry of Labour on Monday launched its online platform (Miran). The blended learning booster 'Miran' is expected to raise the level of individuals' productivity and fulfil the needs of the labour market. The Miran platform for blended education will provide people with training material online along with traditional education. DETAILS ON P3

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HM GREETINGS TO BAHRAIN KING



King Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa, King of Bahrain, received Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Minister of Foreign Affairs, at Sakhir Palace in Manama on Sunday evening. During the meeting, Sayyid Badr conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to King Hamad. On his part, the Bahrain King asked Sayyid Badr to convey his greetings and good wishes to His Majesty the Sultan, and further growth and prosperity for Omani people. — ONA

Vaccination must
for airport entry

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 30

As many as 2,504,214 people have been vaccinated against Covid-19 in the Sultanate since the launch of the National Immunisation Campaign till Sunday, reaching 71 per cent of the target population. The number of those who took the first dose of the vaccine stood at 1,256,008 comprising 36 per cent, while the number of those who are fully vaccinated (two doses) stood at 1,248,206 comprising 35 per cent.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health continues vaccinating target segments against Covid-19 in all governorates of the Sultanate as vaccination centres witness a good daily turnout.

AIRPORT ENTRY

Entry to all airports in the Sultanate will be restricted to vaccinated people only starting from September 1, Oman

Airports said on Monday.

The decision comes after the Supreme Committee imposed mandatory vaccination for both citizens and residents to enter public places including government offices, shops, malls and restaurants. It is part of the measures to tamp down the spread of coronavirus and encourage people to take vaccination.

“Further to the instructions provided by the Supreme Committee in charge of dealing with the developments of Covid-19 and our emphasis on providing a safe environment for all, we would like to report that the access to Omani Airports will be restricted only to the vaccinated personnel. This decision shall be effective from September 1, and will include all Oman Airport users and strategic stakeholders”, Oman Airports said.

SEE ALSO P3

OMAN VISION 2040 TARGETS RAISING CONTRIBUTION
OF NON-OIL SECTORS TO GDP BY 90 PER CENT

OMAN, SAUDI EXPLORE
TIES IN ECONOMIC FIELDS

MUSCAT: Oman and Saudi Arabia explored the available economic and investment opportunities during the Omani-Saudi Investment Forum on Monday.

The forum, organised by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in collaboration with Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), held at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, was aimed to reach agreements and partnerships between Omani and Saudi firms.

During the forum, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said that the existing investment

The existing investment structures provide an attractive environment for promising projects. These factors affirm the presence of suitable opportunities

QAIS BIN
MOHAMMED
AL YOUSUF

Minister of Commerce, Industry
and Investment Promotion

structures provide an attractive environment for promising projects. These factors affirm the existence of suitable opportunities for entrepreneurs and investors from Saudi Arabia to enter into

partnerships with their Omani counterparts.

Al Yousuf said that Saudi investors get the same treatment as Omani investors and that the ministry will provide technical support and other services to help accelerate steps towards the conclusion of deals for each individual investor.

The minister said that Oman and Saudi seek to achieve prosperity for their citizens and that this partnership, based on solid grounds of integrated action, constitutes an opportunity for the two countries' peoples.

Speaking on the occasion, Khalid Abdulaziz al Falih, Saudi Minister of Investment, said that the forum benefits from the developmental approaches of both countries and respond to the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030 and Oman Vision 2040. TURN TO P2



Oman-Saudi Investment Forum in progress in Muscat on Monday. — ONA

Watch out before sharing personal information online

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Cyberattacks aimed at gathering information and collecting money are growing as adults and children around the world spend more time online for work, education, gaming and connecting with one another during the pandemic.

One should be careful while playing online games and never share personal details with strangers. “More than 5.8 million attacks by malware and unwanted software disguised as popular PC games were detected and prevented by Kaspersky in Q3 2020 to Q2 2021”, the Russian



Internet security firm said.

“One should not share personal information online to a virtual acquaintance, especially the contact details and social media

accounts”, warns IT experts in Oman. “The information that you share will lead them to your private life which can lead to online bullying and other crimes”

Dr Haitham al Hajri, cyber security expert, said the apps can always be modified and resent via private links or downloaded via non-official sites. “Usually, the apps have extra functions that are desirable by some users, the critical factor is those applications are modified by malicious entities aiming to steal information.”

Dr Al Hajri said one should download applications only from legitimate sources. Avoid rooting/jailbreaking the device to install unauthorised versions of the app. Never activate links forwarded through social media and email. Parents should install apps that

will allow them to control and protect the child's device from unauthorised installation of apps, Dr Al Hajri said.

Tariq al Barwani, IT expert, said, “When you receive messages from your friends or relatives asking for money because of some unforeseen issues, the best way to tackle the issue is to call them directly and check with them and ask if they really need money.

“This is because SMS messages or WhatsApp messages can be deceiving and never ever share information to strangers and all banks say they never ask you for vital information online.”

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 33°C Min 29°C SALALAH: Max 28°C Min 25°C NIZWA: Max 41°C Min 26°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 05:48 FAJR: 04:31 DHUHR: 12:12 ASR: 15:40 MAGHRIB: 18:31 ISHA: 19:43

Oman, Saudi ministers discuss industry, agriculture ties



MUSCAT: Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Khalid bin Abdulaziz al Falih, Minister of Investment of the Kingdom of Saudi Ara-

bia (KSA) met at Oman Convention and Exhibition Center on Monday.

The ministers explored prospects for trade cooperation and promising investment opportunities in various

economic fields. They also discussed joint efforts to meet the priorities of the Sultanate and the KSA.

They also reviewed fields of cooperation in the trade and industry

sectors between the two countries, in addition to matters of common interest and ways to boost them.

Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and

Water Resources, also met Al Falih separately.

They discussed cooperation and investment in food security and agriculture. — ONA

Madayn seeks Saudi investment, partnership in Ibri Industrial City

MUSCAT: Khalid bin Abdulaziz al Falih, Investment Minister of Saudi Arabia, accompanied by a delegation, visited the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) at its headquarters in the Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM) on Monday.

Welcoming the delegation, Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, and Chairman of Madayn's Board of Directors, emphasised the robust bilateral ties between the Sultanate and Saudi Arabia and the significance of economic integration and trade relations between the two countries.

Masan encouraged Saudi investors and businessmen to set up businesses in Ibri Industrial City, which is strategically located on the road leading to the new border between Oman and Saudi Arabia. "Ibri Industrial City will offer significant opportunities for Saudi industries targeting the Omani market and vice versa, and shall feature a variety of industries, most notably the logistics industry," he pointed out.

He informed that the total area of Madayn's existing industrial cities and those that are under development has touched around 140 million sqm with 2,200 projects operating in these industrial cities, and the number of the workforces has surpassed 62,000. "The total investment volume has reached RO 6.8 billion in the various industrial cities where the manufacturing industries represent the majority of the total investments, as they constitute approximately 83 per cent of the total investments," Masan added.

According to last year's industrial survey on the existing industries within the industrial cities, the value of raw materials used in production has exceeded RO 1 billion and the imported



raw materials constitute more than 71 per cent. This shall act as an incentive for the Saudi cluster industries to expand in the Sultanate's industrial cities. Moreover, the value of products by factories and projects based in the industrial cities has exceeded RO 3.7 billion during 2020, with exports from these amounting to more than 73 per cent.

The high-profile Saudi delegation also got acquainted with Oman's first tech park and Madayn's technology arm – the Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM). KOM is home to over 190 local, regional and global companies, institutions and organisations ranging from flourishing home-grown SMEs and leading higher education providers to thriving businesses capitalising on KOM's well-established reputation as a centre of excellence and opportunity.

On her part, Ibtisam bint Ahmed al Faroojiyah, Director General of Investor Services at Madayn, elaborated on Madayn Vision 2040, incentives offered



to investors, and available investment opportunities.

Al Farooji explained that Madayn's vision revolves around building world-class business cities based on partnership while maintaining the Omani identity. "Madayn aims to achieve an

enhanced government role for comprehensive and sustainable economic and social development.

This enhanced role shall be achieved through firming up a partnership with the private sector to develop and operate business cities with integrated services

and rapid response to variations while adopting best solutions and technologies that meet the needs of investors," she pointed out.

Highlighting Madayn's current and new projects, al Farooji stated that Madayn Vehicle Complex (Motkar) in Sohar Industrial City aims at presenting a centre for the re-export of used cars to Asian, African and Middle Eastern markets on a total area of 954,096 sqm. The master plan of the project comprises car and spare parts showrooms, vehicle service facilities, truck parking lots, Traffic and Customs of the Royal Oman Police (ROP), and more integrated services are expected to be incorporated in the project to serve the tenants and investors in the automotive industry.

Al Farooji also highlighted the commercial port project in Sur, which aims at establishing value-added infrastructure for global maritime trade in the Sultanate. Designed to meet various requirements for shipping and importing, this project comes to encourage economic development in Sur Industrial City and in support of social development in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

The delegation was also briefed on the infrastructure development project of Marmul Industrial City, which is located in the Wilayat of Shaleem that is 372 km away from Duqm, 341 km away from Salalah and 819 km away from Muscat.

Marmul Industrial City embodies the result of cooperation between Madayn and Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), and shall offer an ideal investment environment for oil and gas, and mining industries.

The Saudi Minister of Investment and his accompanying delegation, then visited Areej Vegetable Oils and Derivatives, Oman Fiber Optic, and Oman Cables Industry which are based at Al Rusayl Industrial City, Muscat. — ONA

Oman and Saudi Arabia explore several joint ventures

FROM PAGE 1

Both visions, he observed, roll out a broad range of investments and strategic partnerships.

Al Falih pointed out that the volume of target investments in Saudi Vision 2030 stands at 12 trillion Saudi rials, while Oman Vision 2040 targets raising the percentage of foreign investments in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 10 per cent and raising the contribution of non-oil sectors to the GDP by 90 per cent.

The investment forum, he said, seeks to float more joint ventures in different services and industries in the fields of oil, gas, renewable energy, infrastructure, transport, logistics, information technology, mining, tourism, health and other sectors.

Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of OCCI, affirmed that the forum aims at establishing commercial and economic partnerships in target sectors stated in Oman Vision 2040 and Saudi Vision 2030, and he pledged the support of the OCCI to the joint endeavours.

Later, bilateral sessions were held by counterparts from both countries and working papers were reviewed.

The first working paper dealt with the Omani and Saudi visions.

The second working paper, titled "Invest in Oman", reviewed the investment opportunities in the Sultanate and the supporting infrastructure in terms of airports, seaports, free zones, industrial estates and the business hubs' vicinity to international trade routes.

— ONA

AMBASSADOR GETS BAHRAIN HONOUR



In the presence of Oman's Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bahrain, Abdullatif bin Rashid al Zayani, honoured Abdullah bin Rashid al Mudailawi, the Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Kingdom and Dean of the Diplomatic Corps at the end of his diplomatic term. Al Zayani expressed his utmost thanks to the ambassador for the efforts exerted in serving the relations between the two countries, wishing his success in his upcoming diplomatic tasks. The ambassador expressed his appreciation and thanks to the foreign minister for the support extended to him during his tour of duty, praising all the support he received from the wise leadership, the government of the Kingdom, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and civil and official establishments, which had enabled him to carry out his duty.

Over 2.5 million vaccinated against Covid-19

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 30

Over 1.2 million people in the target population have received both the doses of Covid-19 vaccine in the country, Ministry of Health said on Monday as vaccination centres continue to report good daily turnout.

MoH said 71 per cent of the total target population received either first or second dose of the vaccine. "The total number of people vaccinated with Covid-19 vaccines in the Sultanate since the beginning of the National Campaign for Immunisation until Sunday reached 2,504,214 people, representing 71 per cent of the total targets," MoH said.

"The total of those vaccinated with the first dose reached 1,256,086 people (36 per cent) while the total of those vaccinated with two doses reached 1,248,206 people (35 per cent)," MoH said.

The Sultanate continued to report fall in cases with 107 new infections within 24 hours, as the country's Covid tally reached 302,239 cases.

Seven deaths in the last 24 hours pushed the total toll to 4,063.

Eleven patients have been admitted to hospitals in the last 24 hours while the total ICU cases touched 57 and 122 total hospitalised cases.

The Covid-19 recovery rate stood at 96.5 per cent.

Plans to clear backlog in surgeries

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The Ministry of Health is planning to clear the backlog of surgeries which have been pending due to the pandemic in Oman.

"I know there is a backlog of operations for two years, which will be a big challenge, but with everyone's cooperation, we will find solutions," said Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health.

The ministry will cooperate with all government and private health institutions in the Sultanate to find a solution to deal with those who have delayed operations, appointments or others, the minister said at a media briefing last week.

Through a circular issued in April last, the ministry urged "to postpone all dates of surgical and non-surgical operations in view of the increasing number of Covid patients in the country and rise in the admissions to government and private hospitals.

It further said surgery should be limited to emergency cases only, "with the exception of caesarean sections and scheduled fertilisation operations".

Yet the minister said there were some programmes that have not been affected despite the pandemic, including the expanded programme for immunising children.

According to a Ministry of



Health's Annual Report 2020, there were 117,890 surgical procedures in 2019, of which 61,736 were performed on men and 56,154 for women.

About 42 per cent of these procedures were considered as major procedures representing 10.7 major surgical procedures for every 1,000 of the population.

About 256,600 patients were discharged during 2020 from

MoH will cooperate with all government and private health institutions in the Sultanate to find a solution to deal with those who have delayed operations, appointments or others

MoH hospitals, with an average 2,516 inpatients per day.

"These patients had a mean length of 3.7 days of stay in the hospital and the bed occupancy rate was about 47.8 per cent.

Last year, the bed turnover rate showed that one bed had served an average of 48 patients and the bed turnover interval shows that a bed was vacant for 3.9 days between two successive patients," the report said.

Labour ministry launches online training platform



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour (MoL) on Monday launched its online platform Miran. The inaugural ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, in the presence of Under-Secretaries and officials.

The blended learning booster Miran is expected to raise the level of individuals' productivity, and fulfil the needs of the labour market. The Miran platform for blended education will provide people with training material online along with traditional education, which will bring together best international practices, objectives of Oman Vision 2040, skills of the fourth industrial revolution and high-quality ap-

proved training programmes.

The Under-Secretary for Human Resources Development stressed that the Miran platform comes as a wonderful response to address the growing demands of society and ensure that the Omani citizens acquire the knowledge and skills required to perform their jobs.

The platform, at the same time, will enable them to adapt with rapid changes experienced in the labour market.

The newly launched platform offers safe learning environment with easy access to all learning sources anywhere. It offers the training institutions to present their classes and workshops online.

Yanqul, Bahla to get new fish markets



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources signed a contract on Monday to establish two fish markets in the wilayats of Yanqul and Bahla with Omani firms.

The project is funded by Petroleum Development Oman as part of its Social Investment Programme.

The 1,300 m2 facilities will contain 24 sales counters and 6 cutting counters as well as other amenities such as admin offices, a cafeteria, and a number of shops for rent.

They will also include parking areas for customers, sellers, transportation trucks, and admin staff.

DON'T LIVE LIFE IN A BUBBLE

SOCIAL DISTANCING MAY TAKE A TOLL ON THE SOCIAL SKILLS OF YOUNGSTERS.
TEACHERS AND PARENTS MUST ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO ENGAGE IN
FRIENDSHIPS OFFLINE WITHIN THE LIMITS IMPOSED BY THE PANDEMIC



LIJU CHERIAN

@lijucherianoman

SOcial distancing limits the spread of Covid-19. But it is a double-edged sword. It also confined us to online learning, work from home and virtual meetings.

For adults as well as youths and young children, shaking hands and hugging, playing and eating together, watching movies with friends now belong to the past. The *Observer* spoke to students, teachers and experts to find out the impact of social distancing on the social skills of youngsters in a bubble of apps and social media.

Lubna Fatima Imran, an elementary school educator at Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir (ISWK), says children have accustomed themselves to a world of computer-generated gaming so much so that it has changed their idea of the 'real world'.

She says children as young as 10 years, now have online friends and play games with people whom they haven't met or come across leaving them secluded in a 'socially distanced bubble'

of their own. With 'work from home' the critical line that distinguishes the real from simulated is lost.

She explains that the "constant anxiety, fear and trauma of losing loved ones and financial instability in families during the pandemic has pushed a generation of adolescents into a world of 'pretend.' This means that the netizens may have numerous social media profiles whereby they may maintain a large circle of friends but they may not be close enough to understand each other's thoughts, tastes, likes and dislikes. They may be pretending to portray a personality which could help them get acceptance among their peer group.

"Youngsters have not developed the real-world skills of face-to-face communication, a social skill that has been lost due to the digital world. Comparatively, this has been very easy to come by for the previous generations. Even though they are friends on Facebook they haven't spoken nor met each other. They may be hesitant to approach or talk in person but are much more comfortable virtually."

Mohammad Khuroo, a topper

from Indian School Ghubra (ISG), suggests that though social distancing and online education might be the only solutions to tackle the pandemic, the situation can be made better by keeping separate classes for socialising and discussing topics with children. This, he says, increases interaction and the teachers can make the class livelier by using different strategies to engage children into schoolwork.

He further adds that though online has its advantages, it carries a plethora of problems which few generally address.

"Unless a child actively takes part in the class, social interactions with the teacher and his peers are shunned down to a minimum. The virtual platform is set up in such a way that the user can choose to interact in class. While some children might excel in this field, a majority of them end up deprived of social interaction and loose communication abilities."

He also mentions that though governments and administrations have taken the tough step to switch to online instruction, with a strong will-power to succeed and a proper support

system for children, online education can be made more fun and engaging than physical classes.

Deepa Harekad Krishna, an academic coordinator in English, at ISWK Primary Section, says that due to the pandemic, the children are forced to live in cocoons. "During childhood one needs to interact with their peers to acquire and enhance socialising skills. Though schools play an important role by conducting online classes, nothing can match in-person interaction. We need to remember that children are resilient, and with a little support they will bounce back", she says.

However, Deepa mentions that the pandemic has brought a paradigm shift in the lives of people, especially children. "The children are cooped up with their parents and their siblings in their houses. Their day starts and ends in one of the house rooms with a device and they see their classmates through tiny windows", she regrets.

Another ISG topper, **Mohamed Zeeshan Shoukat Mukhari** who passed with 98.4 per cent, feels that although apps like Zoom, Teams have been able to provide education

virtually, they are unable to deliver it like in a physical classroom.

"No technology in the world can replace that feeling of being able to high-five your friends or eating together in the canteen."

Social skills are very important to shape a student's personality, he says but instead the students are indulging in online games and watching TV all day, hindering their personality growth.

"A school is every student's second home and an integral part of a child's life, a place where they have fun, meet amazing people who become friends for life and cultivate leadership and communication skills."

However, Lubna sums up saying the very essence of introducing oneself, building a friendship or acquaintance and communicating has been replaced by a 'block' or an 'unfriend' option readily available on the social media interface.

Social distancing and the new normal associated with it, she says, is "sculpting a generation that will have a very different version of social skills in the ages to come."

Expat fans group praised for pandemic charity



KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

A group of expatriates from the south Indian state of Andhra Pradesh joined their heartthrob from the tinsel town, Chiranjeevi, when he volunteered to support fellow people during the pandemic.

Fans of the superstar in Oman, under the umbrella of Chiru Mega Youth Force (CMYF), an NGO known for charity and blood donation, responded to the cause for humanity, which in return, attracted a 'letter of appreciation' from the star.

"We donated generously to the Chiranjeevi Garu Trust Account which has been overseeing oxygen banks and the supply of the same to every nook and corner of the states, reciprocating the yeoman services by the actor to his own people," said Ramdas Chandaka, President of the Group.

The NGO has received many accolades from Oman's Ministry of

Health (MoH) in recognition of its constant support for blood donation in the country.

As much as Rs 35 crores were spent by the celebrity for both Telugu states to begin oxygen banks with each district housing one or two banks to cater to the needs of people from even remote places during the second wave of the pandemic.

The actor himself made sure that oxygen cylinders with oxygen supply are provided across the states as well as to Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

As a token of solidarity, expats in Oman from this South Indian state joined him by donating nearly Rs 5 Lakh (RO 3,000), besides actively taking part in the local charity initiatives in Oman.

The recent blood donation drive by CMYF on August 20 at the Bausher Blood Bank has evoked overwhelming response from the people of Oman.

Power output tops 19k GW/hour

MUSCAT: The Sultanate's total electricity production by the end of June 2021 increased by 9.6 per cent to reach 19,497.7 GW per hour compared to the end of the same month in 2020, when the total production was 17,793.5 GW per hour.

Water production by the end of May 2021 went up by 195,225,600 cubic meters, comprising a rise by 3.8 per cent compared to the same period in the previous year, according to statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The total electricity production in the Governorates of North and South Al Batinah and Al Dhahirah reached 12,134.9 GW per hour by the end of June 2021 compared to the same period of 2020, when the production was 10,896.9 GW per hour, comprising a rise by 11.4 per cent.

The total electricity production in the Governorates of North and South Al Sharqiyah reached 4,473.0 GW per hour by the end of June 2021 compared to an output of 3,915.5 GW last year, recording an increase of 14.2 per cent.

Meanwhile, total electricity production in the Governorate of Dhofar grew by 1.2 per cent, reaching 1,934.7 GW per hour by the end of June 2021 compared to the same period in 2020 when it amounted to 1,911.0 GW per hour. Al Wusta recorded a surge in total electricity production by 41.6 per cent to reach 376.6 GW per hour by the end of June 2021 compared to 266.0 GW in the same period in 2020.

The total electricity pro-



duction in the Governorate of Musandam reached 193.0 GW per hour by the end of June 2021 compared to 188.6 GW per hour during the same period in 2020, comprising a rise by 2.3 per cent. The total electricity production in the Governorate of Muscat went down by 34.8 per cent in June 2021 to reach 385.5 GW per hour compared to 591.0 GW per hour in June 2020.

The net figures are inclusive of purchases by Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) and the Rural Areas Electricity Company (RAEC). The Sultanate's net electricity production by the end of June 2021 increased by 10 per cent to touch 18,858.7 GW per hour compared to 17,144.4 GW per hour achieved during the same period in 2020. Al Wusta Governorate scored the highest increase rate by 46.2 per cent with a net electricity production of 370.2 GW per hour compared to 253.2

GW per hour in June 2020.

North and South Al Sharqiyah saw a rise by 14.5 per cent as net electricity production reached 4,372.1 GW per hour as at the end of June 2021 compared to 3,816.9 GW per hour during the same period in 2020.

The Governorates of North and South Al Batinah and Al Dhahirah also saw an increase in net electricity production by 11.7 per cent as it reached 11,709.2 GW per hour as the end of June 2021 compared to 10,481.1 GW per hour in the same period of the previous year.

The net electricity production in Dhofar went up by 2.1 per cent to reach 1,836.9 GW per hour as at the end of June 2021 compared to 1,799.9 GW per hour in June 2020.

In Musandam, the net electricity production reached 187.5 GW per hour as the end of June 2021 compared to 183.2 GW per hour during the

same period in 2020, comprising a rise by 2.3 per cent. The net electricity production in the Governorate of Muscat saw a fall by 34.7 per cent and reached 382.9 GW per hour compared to 586.6 GW per hour in June 2020.

Moreover, in Al Dakhiliyah the net electricity production stabilised at 23.5 GW per hour. On the other hand, the water production of the Sultanate reached 195,225,600 cubic meters by the end of May 2021, with an increase of 3.8 per cent from the end of May 2020. In Muscat, the water production rose by 0.9 per cent to reach 82,987,800 cubic meters by the end of May 2021.

Meanwhile, water production dropped in Dhofar by 0.8 per cent to reach 25,862,300 cubic meters. The total water production of other governorates by the end of May 2021 was 86,375,500 cubic meters, comprising a rise of 8.3 per cent from the end of May 2020.

In brief

ITALIAN CHIEF OF DEFENCE ARRIVES

MUSCAT: General Enzo Vecciarelli, Chief of Defence of the Italian Republic and his accompanying delegation arrived in Oman on Monday on an official several-day visit to the Sultanate. The guest was received at Al Seeb Air Base by Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Ra'eesi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), Brigadier Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Manthari, SAF Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations and Planning, several senior SAF officers, the Ambassador of the Italian Republic to the Sultanate and the Military Attaché of the Italian Embassy in Muscat.

HONORARY CONSUL OF GREECE TO OMAN

MUSCAT: Dr Elias Nikolakopoulos today received the consular license and appointed as Honorary Consul of the Republic of Greece to the Sultanate. The license was handed over by Dr Khalid bin Said al Jaradi, Head of the Protocols Department at the Foreign Ministry. He wished the consular success in enhancing the bilateral relations for the benefit of the two countries' friendly peoples.

Electronic Tender

Majan Electricity Co. (SAOC) Announces the Following E-Tender:

Tender No.	Description	Grade	Last date for buying	Submission date	Tender price R.O.
99/2021	EXTENSIONS OF POWER SUPPLY TO SEVERAL HOUSES POLT'S AT SAHAM & AL-KHABURAH (NORTH AL-BATINAH GOVERNORATE)	C	9/9/2021	28/9/2021	25 /=

Interested Firm having relevant experience in the similar nature of services and registered with Tender Board and Distribution Code Review Panel (DCRP) for electrical work, may register and obtain the tender documents from E-Tendering Site <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against online payment of non-refundable fees mentioned above for each tender.

The Tenderers should enclose a copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any registered bank in the Sultanate of Oman for a value of (1%) of the submitted bid value valid for a period of (90) days from the date of Submission, and addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee. The original Bid Bond to be delivered in sealed envelope, and the tender number and title of project only are to be mentioned on the envelopes. The place of submission the original bond would be at MJEC Contracts & tenders office at MJEC building in AL Sawari Center in Sohar or at MJEC Contracts & Tenders Office at Muscat in Al Mubailah - opposite to the Industrial Area beside to Bank Suhar, before 10 A.M. according to the assigned date of submission of the tender. Any Submission of original tender bond after the time and date mentioned in the advertisement will not be accepted and tenderer offer will be rejected.

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Advertisement No. 37/2021

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PRE/21/036	2021/MM/QS-7	Treatment of water leaks in the roof of the building of the General Directorate of Muscat Municipality in the Greater Muttrah (E-Tender)	Rial 25	27/09/2021	11/10/2021	Second
PRE/21/053	2021/MM/QS-8	Construction of Water Storage at Wilayat Bousher (E-Tender)	Rial 25	27/09/2021	11/10/2021	First

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Tight security, shops shut as South Sudan warns against protests

JUBA: Security forces patrolled South Sudan’s capital Juba on Monday and many shops were shut as the authorities warned of a tough crackdown against anyone joining a planned anti-government protest.

The world’s newest nation has suffered from chronic instability since independence in 2011, with deepening discontent prompting a coalition of civil society groups to urge South Sudan’s leadership to step down, saying they have “had enough”.

The demonstration was set to take place the same day as President Salva Kiir inaugurated a newly created national parliament, a key condition of a 2018 peace deal that ended South Sudan’s brutal civil war that killed nearly 400,000 people.

The government has taken a hard line against the People’s Coalition for Civil Action (PCCA) and its calls for a peaceful public uprising, arresting at least eight activists and detaining three journalists this month in connection with the demonstrations, according to rights groups.

Although the protest organisers had urged the public to come out in force, no demonstrations were reported in Juba, with residents telling AFP they were afraid even to leave home.

“We are hearing that there is



South Sudan's President Salva Kiir is seen at the opening session of parliament in Juba, South Sudan on Monday. – Reuters

no work today, and besides we are fearing (what the day will bring),” food hawker Emelda Susu said.

“I will go to the market when I see things are normal, but for now one’s life (comes) first, my friend. Yes I am fearing so I have to be careful,” Jimmy Bandu, a small-scale trader, said.

National security officers with militarised mounted vehicles patrolled usually busy neighbourhoods in Juba, which also saw a ramped-up police

presence and low levels of traffic.

The authorities have branded the protest “illegal” and warned of strict measures against anyone who defies the ban. “The government is in full control and... so everybody should resume his or (her) normal duties and... not fear anything,” Information Minister Michael Makuei said.

He dismissed reports of an Internet shutdown after users reported difficulty accessing two of the country’s main networks,

Zain and MTN, blaming any problems on technical troubles. The US Embassy in Juba has asked its citizens to avoid the areas where protesters may assemble, urging them to “exercise caution”.

With the mood in the usually bustling capital decidedly subdued, Kiir told members of the new parliament to put citizens’ “needs above partisan consideration... (and) place the people of South Sudan above any narrow party interest”.

“We should always remember that our final mandate in this (peace) process is to hold free, fair and credible democratic elections at the end of the transitional period,” he added.

South Sudan’s peace process has suffered from years of drift and bickering following the 2018 ceasefire and power-sharing deal between Kiir and his former foe Vice-President Riek Machar.

The PCCA — a broad-based coalition of activists, academics, lawyers and former government officials — has described the current regime as “a bankrupt political system that has become so dangerous and has subjected our people to immense suffering”.

The truce between Kiir and Machar still largely holds but it is being sorely tested, as politicians bicker over power and promises for peace go unmet. — AFP

Saudi students return to school with masks and checks

RIYADH: Waleed Saleh grinned behind his face mask in the corridor of Riyadh’s Ibn al-Hajeb elementary school, enjoying his first chance to see all of his classmates in more than a year.

“It has been a while,” the 13-year-old said as his friends headed to lessons around him, wearing white robes and leather sandals and carrying black backpacks. A sign in the courtyard outside wished them all a “warm welcome back”.

Around 6 million students returned to classes in the kingdom this week for the first time since the start of the pandemic after data suggested infections were stabilising and fatalities falling. But authorities are keeping cautious.

Children older than 12 have to show they have been vaccinated before they can return.

At Ibn al-Hajeb, a security guard checked all the children’s temperature after their parents dropped them off at the gate. The pupils then lined up, standing on marked spots in the courtyard before processing in.

“School breaks and activities involving physical proximity have been cancelled,” school manager Hassan al-Fefe said.



A student wearing a face mask sits in the classroom at a school in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on Sunday. – Reuters

Pupils have to keep their distance during the day — the children sit far apart on blue tables. But the return was still something to celebrate, Waleed and his friends said.

“At least now we can understand what our teacher is saying. We could barely follow our lessons remotely,” said Fahd al-Fares, 13.

New coronavirus infections in Saudi Arabia have stabilised at a few hundred daily over the last months from a peak of more than 4,000 new cases in June 2020. The average daily number of deaths fell below 10 during August.

— Reuters

Fuel dispute triggers sectarian clash in Lebanon’s south

BEIRUT: A dispute over scarce fuel supplies ignited sectarian tensions between neighbouring villages in southern Lebanon over the weekend, forcing the army to intervene, a security source said.

Clashes mostly centred on the crippling gasoline and diesel shortages have become a daily occurrence in Lebanon, prompting growing concern about a descent into chaos after two years of financial meltdown. Around six people were wounded in a dispute involving a village of Maghdouche and Ankoun, the source said.

The incident spiralled when a Maghdouche resident filed a complaint to police after being injured during a dispute over fuel on Friday and police visited Ankoun to investigate. Villagers blocked roads and burnt trees and troops were deployed, the source said. The situation was calm on Monday.

The Amal movement, headed by Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri,

condemned the violence, saying it had, “no relation in any way shape or form to what happened in Maghdouche”, denying accusations on social media of involvement.

The financial meltdown, which has seen the currency sink by more than 90 per cent in two years and forced more than half of the population into poverty, entered a new phase this month as the fuel shortages brought much of Lebanon to a standstill.

The state’s most senior cleric, Grand Mufti Shaikh Abdul Latif Derian, said on Friday Lebanon was heading towards complete collapse unless action was taken to remedy the crisis.

The financial meltdown has been compounded by political paralysis, the country being without a government since the last one resigned in the aftermath of last year’s Beirut port blast.

Prime Minister-designate Najib Mikati, the third to attempt to form a cabinet since the last one



People wait in cars to get fuel at a gas station in Zalka, Lebanon. – Reuters file photo

resigned, said on Friday there were grave hurdles complicating the process.

Earlier, the leader of Hizbullah group, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, said a third vessel of Iranian

fuel was agreed to ease crippling shortages in the country.

“We have agreed to start loading

a third vessel,” Nasrallah said in a televised speech.

“The coming days will prove those doubtful about the shipments arriving with fuel wrong ... and our words will be clear when the first vessel reaches Lebanon.”

On Sunday Nasrallah had said the first vessel carrying Iranian fuel for Lebanon had already departed.

Hizbullah’s foes in Lebanon have warned of dire consequences from the purchase, saying it risked sanctions being imposed on a country whose economy has been in meltdown for nearly two years.

Nasrallah blamed the country’s economic crisis on what he called an economic siege by the United States adding that the sanctions imposed by Washington on Syria had harmed Lebanon. Lebanon’s worsening fuel shortages reached a crunch point this month threatening to bring daily life to a halt. — Reuters

RAMALLAH

Abbas meets Israeli Defence Minister Gantz

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas met with Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz late on Sunday, his first meeting with a high-ranking Israeli government representative in years.

Gantz met with Abbas in Ramallah and discussed security policy and civilian and economic issues, Gantz’s office confirmed.

Gantz told Abbas that Israel is seeking to take measures to strengthen the Palestinian economy. Both agreed to further



communications, he tweeted.

The leader of Israel’s Cogat agency, Ghasan Alyan, and Palestinian intelligence chief Majid Faraj also took part in the meeting.

TUNIS

Tunisian ex-presidential contender held

Liberal party leader Nabil Karoui, runner-up in Tunisia’s 2019 presidential election that saw Kais Saied elected, has been arrested in Algeria along with his MP brother, media reports said on Monday.

The privately owned Radio Mosaïque FM said border police arrested the Qalb Tounes party chief and his brother Ghazi Karoui in the Tebessa region of northeast Algeria. Senior party official Oussama Khelifi told reporters “official information”



was still being awaited. The arrest of the brothers has not yet been confirmed by the authorities in either country.

“We have not heard from Karoui for a week,” Khelifi said.

ISTANBUL

Turkey says cannot take new refugee burden

Turkey cannot take the burden of a new migrant wave from Afghanistan, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said after talks with his German counterpart, as concerns about a new migrant wave remain after the Taliban’s taking of power.

The events in Afghanistan have fuelled worries in the European Union of a repeat of the 2015 refugee crisis, when nearly a million people fleeing war and poverty in the Middle East and beyond crossed to Greece from



Turkey before travelling north to wealthier states. To stem the flow of refugees, the EU reached an agreement with Turkey in 2016 for it to host Syrians fleeing the war in their country.

In brief

■ MANILA



PHILIPPINES REPORTS NEW DAILY HIGH OF COVID CASES

The Philippines on Monday reported more than 22,000 coronavirus infections, its highest daily count since the pandemic began last year. The death toll from Covid-19 also rose to 33,330, up by 222, the Department of Health said. The 22,366 new cases on Monday pushed the country's total caseload to more than 1.97 million, the department added. Health officials have warned that the number of Covid-19 cases would hit new peaks as the country battles with the spread of the more contagious Delta variant of the coronavirus. The surge in cases has left many hospitals struggling with high occupancy rates, forcing some to close their emergency rooms or to stop accepting Covid patients.

■ MANILA



DUTERTE'S TOP AIDE DECLINES PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's long-time aide has rejected the endorsement of the ruling party to run as its candidate in the 2022 elections, a development that some analysts said may open the way for Duterte's daughter to stand. Senator Christopher "Bong" Go, in a letter to the PDP-Laban party, said he wanted to devote his attention to helping fight the pandemic, asking his allies to support candidates who will continue Duterte's policies and programmes. "As much as I wish to respond to the clamour of many of our party mates, I most respectfully decline the said endorsement," he wrote in the letter, which was made public on Monday.

■ TOKYO



JAPAN PM SUGA'S RATINGS HIT RECORD LOWS

Public support for Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga hit record lows, polls for two major newspapers showed on Monday, turning up the heat on the unpopular premier less than a month before he faces a challenge as leader of the ruling party. Suga failed to capitalise on delivering the Olympics for the nation stricken by Covid-19, as a fresh wave of infections has forced the government to declare a fourth state of emergency in most of the country amid a sluggish vaccination rollout.

Rockets target US troops as withdrawal enters final stage

ANTI-MISSILE SYSTEMS INTERCEPT UP TO FIVE ROCKETS



A US Air Force aircraft takes off from the airport in Kabul on Monday. — AFP

KABUL: US anti-missile defences intercepted as many as five rockets fired at Kabul's airport early on Monday, a US official said, as the United States rushed to complete its withdrawal from Afghanistan to end its longest war. Afghan media said the attack was launched from the back of a vehicle. The Pajhwok news agency said several rockets struck different parts of the Afghan capital. Initial reports did not indicate any US casualties, the US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said. The attack followed a huge IS suicide bombing outside the airport gates on Thursday that killed scores of Afghans and 13 US troops and another reported attempted bombing on Sunday.

The US and allied forces have evacuated about 114,400 people, including foreign nationals and Afghans deemed "at risk", in an effort that began a day before Kabul fell to the Taliban on August 15. The forces themselves are due to pull out by a Tuesday deadline agreed with the militants. President Joe Biden reconfirmed his order for commanders to do "whatever is necessary to protect our forces on the ground" after he was briefed on Monday's rocket fire, the White House said. He was told airport operations continued uninterrupted, it added. On Sunday, Pentagon officials said a US drone strike killed a suicide car bomber who had been preparing to attack the airport on behalf of IS-K, a local affiliate of IS that is

an enemy of both the West and the Taliban. US Central Command said it was investigating reports of civilian casualties. "We know there were substantial and powerful subsequent explosions resulting from the destruction of the vehicle, indicating a large amount of explosive material inside that may have caused additional casualties," it said. The drone attack killed seven people, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told China's state television CGTN on Monday, criticising the US action on foreign soil as unlawful. It was the second such condemnation after a US drone strike on Saturday killed two IS

militants in the eastern province of Nangarhar, in an attack the spokesman said had wounded two women and a child. Afghans fearful of reprisals under Taliban rule continued to crowd the airport, appealing to foreign powers for a way out. "We are in danger," said one woman outside the airport. "They must show us a way to be saved. We must leave Afghanistan or they must provide a safe place for us." Two US officials said evacuations would continue on Monday, prioritising people deemed at extreme risk. Other countries have also put in last-minute requests to bring out people in that category, the officials said.

— Agencies

North Korea N-report shows urgent need for dialogue: US

WASHINGTON: A UN watchdog report that North Korea appears to have restarted a nuclear reactor reflects an urgent need for dialogue and the United States is seeking to address the issue with Pyongyang, a senior administration official said on Monday.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said in its report dated last Friday that the signs of operation at the 5-megawatt (MW) reactor, which is seen as capable of producing weapons-grade plutonium, were the first to be spotted since late 2018.

"This report underscores the urgent need for dialogue and diplomacy so we can achieve the complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula," the senior administration official said on customary condition of anonymity.

"We continue to seek dialogue with the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) so we can address this reported activity and the full range of issues related to denuclearization."

The IAEA report came on the heels of a four-day visit to South Korea by President Joe Biden's special envoy for North Korea, Sung Kim.

That visit came as a brief thaw in inter-Korean relations in July.

— Agencies

Indonesia schools start cautious reopening after devastating Covid virus wave

JAKARTA: Indonesia's capital Jakarta reopened 600 of its schools on Monday as coronavirus restrictions eased, though a teacher federation urged caution and warned of clusters in classrooms caused by the highly transmissible Delta variant. Jakarta's infection rate has dropped, authorities said, from a peak last month that saw Indonesia become Asia's coronavirus epicentre, with more than 4 million cases and 131,000 fatalities overall. Jakarta Governor Anies Baswedan said 610 of 10,000 schools deemed safe had opened at 50 per cent capacity in a resumption of a trial that started in April. "The conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic are much more under control," he said on Instagram. Vaccinations are not mandatory for at-school learning, Anies has said, adding that 91 per cent of children aged 12-18 and 85 per cent of educators have been fully inoculated. Nearly 70 per cent of Jakarta's 10 million population



A school student wearing a face mask and face shield is checked with a thermal scanner before entering a class in Jakarta, Indonesia, on Monday. — Reuters

have been vaccinated. Zhaifira Tsamara Ufaira Azza, 6, was excited to be back at school, where students will rotate with one day per week in class and the rest online at home. "I got to meet my

friends and teachers," she said. Mother Endang Sugiarti, 35, said she was still worried about the Delta variant. "But for my daughter's progress and education, I dared to try it

first," she said. Education Minister Nadiem Makarim last week called for school reopening to be accelerated to try to recover lost ground. "There's a decrease in study

targets, lots of children quit school, especially girls in some regions," he said. "There's a learning loss with permanent impacts." But Heru Purnomo, of The Federation of Indonesian Teachers Associations, said broadening the reopening could be risky. According to official data, about 1 per cent of Indonesian coronavirus deaths and 13 per cent of its cases have been minors. "It could create new clusters...it could add to the death of children," he said. Meanwhile, President Joko Widodo said on Monday the government would adjust Covid-19 restrictions from August 31 to September 6 due to improvements in the infection rate in more areas. More parts of densely populated Java island have been lowered from the most severe "Level 4" category. Details of the adjustments would be announced by cabinet ministers, said Jokowi, as the president is known.

— Reuters

Little relief for Germany’s Laschet after first TV debate

BERLIN: The centre-right candidate to be German chancellor, Armin Laschet, was praised by his peers on Monday after the first live televised debate between the three candidates — but few commentators saw him gain ground on his main rival, Olaf Scholz from the Social Democrats (SPD).

Two of Laschet’s fellow Christian Democrat (CDU) politicians and state premiers, Volker Bouffier in Hesse and Tobias Hans in Saarland, gave Laschet their support despite a snap poll which showed Laschet had not impressed a selection of viewers.

He had made a “very good appearance,” Bouffier said. Despite the Forsa instant poll, Laschet would show that he had “staying power,” Hans said.

The heated, but courteous, two-hour debate was watched by more than 5 million people, broadcaster RTL said.

Laschet, whose poll numbers have slipped below Scholz’s in the past week, went on the offensive at points, but Scholz’s calm appearance left many convinced he could be the best bet to be Angela Merkel’s successor in September’s elections.

Germany’s biggest-circulation daily, the *Bild* tabloid, announced on its front page on Monday that the debate was a “clear victory” for Scholz and a “debacle” for Laschet.

The paper cited the same poll by the Forsa institute, which found Scholz was regarded to have “won” the debate by 36 per



North Rhine-Westphalia’s State Premier, CDU leader and candidate for chancellor Armin Laschet during a news conference in Berlin. — Reuters

cent of those surveyed. The Green candidate, Annalena Baerbock, was seen as the winner by 30 per cent, while only 25 per cent put Laschet in front.

Commentators in several other dailies were more balanced on who came out on top, but agreed Laschet had not landed any particular blows.

If anything, said some commentators, it was most notable for being Germany’s first ever three-way televised debate. In the past, only two candidates have had a realistic chance of becoming chancellor.

This year, with three parties all hovering around the 20 per cent mark, the outcome is more uncertain. Many observers expect Germany to have a three-party coalition including, for instance, two of the parties represented in the debate and a third smaller party. — dpa

Hurricane Ida downgraded; 1m homes without power

WASHINGTON: Hurricane Ida was downgraded to a tropical storm early on Monday, but was still sparking dangerous tidal surges, winds and flash flooding as it moved into the US state of Mississippi. The storm hit the neighbouring state of Louisiana as a Category 4 hurricane on Sunday, with winds of up to 240 kilometres per hour (km/h). In its wake, it has left at least one person dead, millions without power and widespread damage.

Fears were high as Ida approached, coming as it did on the 16th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, which savaged New Orleans and left hundreds dead.

This storm struck to the west of New Orleans, but still lashed the city with strong winds and rain.

It had already been downgraded to a Category 1 hurricane overnight. But meteorologists warned that it was still packing winds of 95 km/h. It is also moving very slowly, meaning communities in its path will be subjected to extreme winds for longer periods of time.

The state of Louisiana has been hit hardest, according to the website poweroutage.us.

At least one person died and power outages hit more than 1 million customers in the United States as Ida hit the country’s south.

Around 996,000 households lost electricity in the state, while some 36,000 customers were affected in neighbouring Mississippi. All of New Orleans lost power, the city’s emergency preparedness campaign (NOLA Ready) said, citing utility firm Entergy. “The only power in the city is coming from generators,”



The Karofsky shop suffers severe damage after Hurricane Ida pummelled New Orleans with strong winds in Louisiana. — Reuters



A truck is seen in heavy winds and rain from hurricane Ida in Bourg, Louisiana. — AFP

NOLA Ready tweeted. Nearly 400,000 people live in New Orleans.

Entergy said the hurricane damaged all eight lines that supply the city. Repair work is ongoing but power is not expected to be restored quickly, the supplier said.

The first storm-related fatality was reported in Prairieville, south of the city of Baton Rouge, Louisiana’s state capital. The local sheriff’s office announced the death on Facebook, saying the victim was killed late on Sunday by a falling tree. — dpa/Reuters

UK govt blasted over Afghan exit as hundreds left behind

LONDON: The UK government on Sunday faced a torrent of criticism after its hurried withdrawal from Afghanistan ended, leaving hundreds eligible for relocation behind.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson hailed a mission “unlike anything we have seen in our lifetimes” after the UK airlifted over 15,000 people in the last two weeks. Troops landed back at Brize Norton airbase in southern England on Sunday after Britain was forced to withdraw following the decision of its ally the United States to end its 20-year presence.

Johnson praised the evacuation efforts in “harrowing conditions”

Public opinion has been sharply divided in Britain over a high-profile campaign by an ex-serviceman who runs a British animal charity to evacuate his animals and staff from a shelter in Kabul

and assured the military that decades of deployment “were not in vain” after the Taliban retook control.

But current and former officials slammed government failings, suggesting many more Afghans



British Armed Forces personnel disembark a British Royal Air Force Boeing C-17A Globemaster III aircraft after landing at Brize Norton station after returning from deployment as part of Operation Pitting to evacuate British nationals and eligible personnel from Afghanistan. — AFP

could have been rescued.

The Observer left-wing broadsheet cited a whistleblower as saying thousands of e-mails from MPs and charities to the foreign ministry highlighting specific Afghans at risk from the Taliban takeover went unopened.

Foreign Minister Dominic Raab has already been strongly criticised for not immediately leaving a beach holiday when the Taliban took control.

The Observer said it saw evidence that an official e-mail account set up by the Foreign Office to receive such pleas regularly had 5,000 unopened e-mails last week.

It said these included messages

from ministers’ offices and the leader of the opposition Labour party, Keir Starmer.

“They cannot possibly know (how many people have been left behind) because they haven’t even read the e-mails,” the whistleblower was quoted as saying.

The Foreign Office responded that its crisis team worked 24/7 “to triage incoming e-mails and calls”.

Officials have given varying estimates of how many eligible Afghans did not board evacuation flights, the last of which left on Saturday, with the head of the UK armed forces General Sir Nick Carter putting this “in the high hundreds”. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

PARIS

France sending 10m vaccine doses to Africa

France will be providing 10 million doses of AstraZeneca and Pfizer vaccines for Africa over the next three months, President Emmanuel Macron’s office announced. The jabs “will be allocated and distributed in the framework of the (African Union’s) African Vaccine Acquisition Trust (AVAT) and Covax,” the partnership for equitable vaccine rollout, it said.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa — who with



Macron has strongly attacked unequal access to vaccines — hailed the announcement as a “strong and welcome gesture of human solidarity and political cooperation at a time when the world most needs it.” — AFP

RIGA

Estonian lawmakers vote for new president

Estonia’s parliamentarians convened to elect a new president on Monday, with only one candidate standing for the largely ceremonial post. Alar Karis (pictured), was the only nominee for highest public office in the EU and Nato country.

Karis, the director of the Estonian National Museum, is the candidate for the governing coalition, which consists of the economically liberal Reform Party and the left-wing Centre Party. The parties are the two



leading political forces in Estonia: Together they possess 59 of the 101 seats in the Riigikogu parliament. It was unclear whether Karis would gain the two-thirds majority needed: 68 of the assembly’s lawmakers. — dpa

MILAN

Italian firefighters battling flames in Milan

The upper storeys are still burning in a high-rise building on the outskirts of Milan that went up in flames a day earlier, according to the fire brigade on Twitter. Firefighters are still on the scene after struggling to contain the flames throughout the night. A video showed the building’s charred facade.

The head of the fire brigade said he had never seen anything like this blaze, in comments to the Ansa news agency. He said it was possible that the facade



was made of highly flammable material. The fire broke out late on Sunday and, at times, the building was shrouded in thick black smoke. “We smelled smoke and fled immediately,” one resident told Ansa. — dpa

India’s vaccine supply jumps, raising hopes for exports

KRISHNA N DAS

India’s rising output of Covid-19 vaccines and the inoculation of more than half its adult population with at least one dose are raising hopes the country will return as an exporter within months, ramping up from early next year.

After donating or selling 66 million doses to nearly 100 countries, India barred exports in the middle of April to focus on domestic immunisation as infections exploded, upsetting the inoculation plans of many African and South Asian countries.

India’s daily vaccinations surpassed 10 million doses last Friday, with national vaccine production more than doubling since April and set to rise again in the coming weeks. New production lines have been set up, a vaccine developed by Cadila Healthcare won recent approval, and commercial production of Russia’s Sputnik V is starting in India.

The Serum Institute of India (SII), the world’s biggest vaccine maker, is now producing about 150 million doses a month of its version of the AstraZeneca shot, more than twice its April output of about 65 million, a source with knowledge of the matter said.

“No fixed timeline on exports but the company hopes to restart in a few months”, said the source, who declined to be named without approval to talk on the matter.

SII, which has previously indicated exports could resume by year-end, did not respond to a request for comment.

Global vaccine sharing platform COVAX hopes India will restart foreign sales sooner than later.

“With successful national vaccination and the arrival of more products, we are hoping that Indian supply to COVAX will resume as quickly as possible”, a spokesperson for the platform’s co-lead GAVI said in an email.

India, a major international producer of many other vaccines, could play a “similarly transformative role in the global response to Covid-19”, the spokesperson said.

— Reuters

“
With successful national vaccination and the arrival of more products, we are hoping that Indian supply to COVAX will resume as quickly as possible

A SPOKESPERSON
Co-lead GAVI



UP IN THE FLAMES

Flames surround a chair lift at Sierra-at-Tahoe Resort, a skiing area, during the Caldor fire in Twin Bridges, California, US, on Sunday. – AFP

‘Work is work’ as Afghan ex-minister now delivers food in Germany

HUI MIN NEO

He was once a minister in Afghanistan but quit, fed up with the corruption. Now in Germany, Sayed Sadaat is making a living delivering meals as a bicycle courier.

For six hours on weekdays and from noon to 10 pm on Saturdays and Sundays, Sadaat dons his distinctive orange coat and big square backpack, shuttling pizzas or other orders to customers. “There is no shame in the job at all. Work is work”, he said. “If there is a job, it means there is public demand... someone has to do it”, he said.

Sadaat is one of thousands of Afghans who have found a home in Germany over the last years. Since 2015, when Europe saw a huge influx of people fleeing wars mostly from Syria and Iraq, around 210,000 Afghans have sought asylum in Germany.

This makes them the second biggest group of people seeking protection in Europe’s most populous country after Syrians. With the Taliban’s return to power earlier this month, Germany has also evacuated around 4,000 Afghans,

including those who worked with Nato forces and others who need protection.

Sadaat’s journey to Germany was far less harrowing. He was minister of communications in Afghanistan from 2016 to 2018. But the 50-year-old said he quit his post because he was fed up with corruption in the government.

“When doing the job as a minister there was a difference between the president’s close circle and myself”, he explained. “Their demands were for private benefit, I wanted the money for government projects to be implemented properly. “So I could not fulfil their demands and then they tried to push me, put pressure on me from the president’s side.”

He took on a consultancy job in the telecommunications sector in Afghanistan. But by 2020, the security situation had deteriorated, he said.

“So I decided to leave”, he said.

As a dual Afghan-British citizen, he decided to move to Germany at the end of 2020 before Brexit made it no longer possible for Britons to obtain residency in the EU without conditions such as

an offer of employment. He could have secured a post in Britain, but said he saw more opportunities for his sector in Germany. But without German, Sadaat, who came alone and refuses to talk about his family, said he has struggled to get employed.

The coronavirus pandemic delayed his plans to learn to speak German.

But he is now taking language classes four hours a day, before getting on the bicycle for food delivery company Lieferando.

The job pays up to 15 euros (\$18) an hour, enough for his living expenses, including rent of 420 euros a month.

Sadaat said he does not regret his decision to move to Germany.

“I know this challenge is for a short time, it is until I can get another job”, he said, touting the physical benefits of cycling 1,200 km every month.

With the return to power of the Taliban and the withdrawal of Nato forces from his native country, he sees another possible opening for him in Germany.

— AFP

The adventures of a blonde and a very old car



Rachael MacIver
Instagram: @rachael_maciver

ON HIS WAY, YOUNG HAMDOON HAD COME ACROSS SOME FRIENDLY YEMENIS WHO HAD INVITED HIM TO VISIT

“Well, that didn’t quite go as planned”, Mrs J remarked as Ol’ Martha, our Pajero stuck in 3rd gear, came to an abrupt halt.

Mrs J, who believed in pristine white linen shirts, was after several days on the road, beginning to look distinctly grubby. Her curly copper red hair had taken on an afro look, which at times reminded me of the 80s pop band ‘Boney M’; Google it, and you’ll know what I mean. But neither hairdo nor grubby white shirt seemed to have dampened her spirits. The road sign in front of us did, however.

“Yemen???” she glared at me “the border to Yemen? Are you kidding me?”

We sat silently for a while, just staring at the signboard which without a doubt told us that Yemen lay straight ahead.

“If you squint really hard and look at the horizon, you can actually see the border post, I agreed. It was true that we had left Thamrait in a bit of a hurry in the morning, and its true that I might actually have missed the exit to Salalah. It is also true that in our 35 years of friendship Mrs J and I had never argued. That day broke our record. I argued that I couldn’t be expected to be responsible for both driving and map reading, fire making, tent erecting and tea making. Mrs J argued that I was an idiot.

As we sat there, both sulking, a small dot on the horizon got bigger and bigger. With the heat haze hovering just above the road, the dot shimmered and stayed distorted while slowly, slowly getting closer. Our sulking was replaced by awe

when a strapping young lad in spandex cycling shorts rode past us on his mountain bike, tightly packed with what looked like tent and sleeping bag.

“Did he just come out of Yemen? I wondered aloud “or did we experience a mirage?”

“Maybe he just missed the exit in ‘Thamrait’, Mrs J mumbled through her pursed lips, happy to have gotten in one last dig.

With a last glimpse of the Yemeni border post in the distance, we made a u-turn, in 3rd gear, and caught up with the Omani bike rider. With his music firmly plugged into his ears, it took a while before he noticed us, but when he did, his face lit up in a huge smile. Over coffee we heard his story. Yes, Hamdon had indeed came from Yemen on his bike. He had one

day decided, as you do, to cycle from Muscat to Salalah, got on his bike and set off, carrying with him only what he absolutely needed. Mrs J and I looked at each other and shuddered. It certainly made our road trip look like a luxury holiday, even if stuck in 3rd gear.

On his way, young Hamdoon had come across some friendly Yemenis who had invited him to visit. “So I thought, why not cycle to Yemen”, he grinned.

Our surprise to come across this cycling, spandex clad youngster, was nothing compared to that of the border guards. This wasn’t something they saw every day and they shook their heads in disbelief when he pedalled off. True to their words his new Yemeni friends had been perfect hosts while he explored their

neighbourhood on his bike. “But don’t stray too far”, they had warned.

Hamdoon waved goodbye as he started his long journey back to Muscat. Mrs J watched him disappearing in the distance. “I’m sorry we argued”, she said “I see now that there really is no shame in missing the exit and taking a different path. When one door closes another opens”. I knew I had to stop her before she turned to more clichés and inspirational quotes from Facebook, but I needed not have worried. “At least we didn’t wear spandex”, she concluded “I bet he has blisters”.

And so we continued our blister-free journey towards Salalah. It had been a long journey, but at least we didn’t have to wear spandex.

sport



Red Bull's Max Verstappen in action at Belgian GP.
— Reuters

VERSTAPPEN WINS F1'S SHORTEST RACE

TOP 10 FINISHERS GET HALF POINTS

VERSTAPPEN CUTS HAMILTON'S LEAD TO THREE POINTS

NO OVERTAKES AND EVERY LAP BEHIND SAFETY CAR

HAMILTON SAYS FANS DESERVE THEIR MONEY BACK



SPA - FRANCORCHAMPS, Belgium: Red Bull's Max Verstappen won Formula One's shortest race on Sunday, a wet Belgian Grand Prix with no overtaking that was called off as soon as enough safety car-led laps had been completed to award half-points.

With no actual racing allowed, the Dutchman secured his sixth win of the season ahead of Britain's George Russell, who had put Williams on the front row with a stunning display in a wet qualifying on Saturday.

Championship leader Lewis Hamilton, who again missed out on the chance to secure a record-extending 100th win, was third for Mercedes. It was only the sixth time since the first championship in 1950 that half points had been awarded, and Hamilton's lead over Verstappen in the overall standings dwindled to just three points.

Red Bull also cut their deficit to Mercedes in the constructors' standings to seven.

"It's a big shame to not do proper laps but the conditions were very tricky out there," said Verstappen after

sealing what will count as his 16th career win and first at Spa.

"Of course it's a win but it's not how you want to win."

Hamilton said the fans, who sat huddled for three hours in the torrential rain and cold, should be given their money back.

Russell, in his 50th race with Williams, secured his first Formula One podium and handed the former champions their first top-three result since Canadian Lance Stroll's third-placed finish in Baku in 2017. "We don't often get rewarded for great qualifying and we absolutely did today," said the 23-year-old, widely tipped to land the Mercedes seat alongside Hamilton next year. "The whole team deserve it because there's so much hard work going into this over the last few years and there's not really been anything to show for it."

POOR CONDITIONS

Conditions at Spa-Francorchamps had begun deteriorating before the start of the race. The formation lap was initially delayed by 25 minutes but, with visibility poor, Formula One race director Michael Masi suspended

the race start. After nearly three hours, race control found a window to send the cars out for two laps behind the safety car, ensuring they completed the minimum distance required for a race result to be declared.

The governing FIA's final race classification, however, gave the positions after lap one, explaining that this was in accordance with the sporting regulations.

The race was ultimately called off three hours and 44 minutes after its scheduled start time and will also go down in the sport's statistics as only the 11th without a single retirement.

Mexican Sergio Perez crashed his Red Bull on his sighting lap before even forming up on the grid but stewards allowed him to start the race from the pitlane, with Red Bull mechanics taking advantage of the delay to complete repairs. It proved to be in vain as the 31-year-old was classified last. Hamilton's Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas, who started 13th after a five-position grid drop, moved up a place after Perez's crash.

He finished outside the points in the 12th. — Reuters

Belgian Grand Prix

Spa-Francorchamps Circuit

Aug 29



1	Max Verstappen (NED)	3:27.071
		12.5*
	Red Bull	
2	George Russell (GBR)	at 1.995
		9
	Williams	
3	Lewis Hamilton (GBR)	at 2.601
		7.5
	Mercedes	
4	Daniel Ricciardo (AUS)	at 4.496
		6
	McLaren	
5	Sebastian Vettel (GER)	at 7.479
		5
	Aston Martin	

*Only two laps completed due to rain so the points are divided into two
Source: Formula1.com

Driver standings

Lewis Hamilton (GBR)	202.5
Verstappen (NED)	199.5
Norris (GBR)	113
Bottas (FIN)	108
Perez (MEX)	104

Teams

Mercedes	310.5
Red Bull	303.5
McLaren	169
Ferrari	165.5

In brief

■ MUMBAI



SUNDAR RULED OUT OF IPL WITH FINGER INJURY

All-rounder Washington Sundar was ruled out of the remainder of this year's Indian Premier League on Monday due to a finger injury, raising doubts over his availability for the Twenty20 World Cup later this year.

The 21-year-old Sundar, who bowls off-spin and is a handy batsman lower down the order, suffered the injury in England before being forced out of India's ongoing five-match test series against Joe Root's men.

His franchise, Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB), said he would not recover for the IPL, which will resume on September 19 in the United Arab Emirates.

■ LONDON



BUTTLER OUT FOR ENGLAND, WOAKES BACK

All-rounder Chris Woakes has been added to England's squad for the fourth Test against India, with wicketkeeper Jos Buttler set to miss the match to attend the birth of his second child, the country's cricket board (ECB) said on Sunday.

Woakes, who has recovered from a heel injury, will be joined by Kent wicketkeeper Sam Billings, who has been brought in as cover for Buttler.

Seamer Mark Wood, who injured his right shoulder during the second test at Lord's has also been included in the 15-man squad, and will continue to be assessed by England's medical team.

■ DUBLIN



O'BRIEN STARS AS IRELAND LEVEL SERIES

Kevin O'Brien's rapid 60 helped see Ireland to a seven-wicket win over Zimbabwe in the second Twenty20 international in Dublin on Sunday as the hosts levelled the five-match series at 1-1.

O'Brien, best known for hitting the fastest hundred in the history of the 50-over World Cup — off just 50 balls against England at Bangalore in 2011 — was in fine form as Ireland returned to winning ways in a series that is part of their preparations for the upcoming T20 World Cup in the United Arab Emirates and Oman.

The 37-year-old opener hit seven fours and a six during a 60-ball innings on Sunday, and together with Paul Stirling shared a stand of 59 for the first wicket as Ireland chased down a target of 153 with nine balls to spare.

Streng unseats Peacock in thriller

JIANG KNOCKS OFF OWN WORLD RECORD IN S6 50M BUTTERFLY

TOKYO: German sprinter Felix Streng stormed his way to Paralympic gold in the T64 100m in Tokyo on Monday, dethroning British rival Jonnie Peacock who ended up sharing the bronze after a photo finish.

The track thriller saw Streng finish in 10.76 seconds, short of the Paralympic record he set just a day earlier in heats, but ahead of Costa Rica's Sherman Isidro Guity Guity, who took silver.

After several tense minutes, the decision came back: a shared bronze, with both Peacock and Germany's Johannes Flores coming in at precisely 10.78 seconds.

The pair beamed as they received their flags to join the other medallists.

"It felt amazing," Streng said afterwards of his win.

"I'm so happy that I could execute a race and win in such a competitive field."

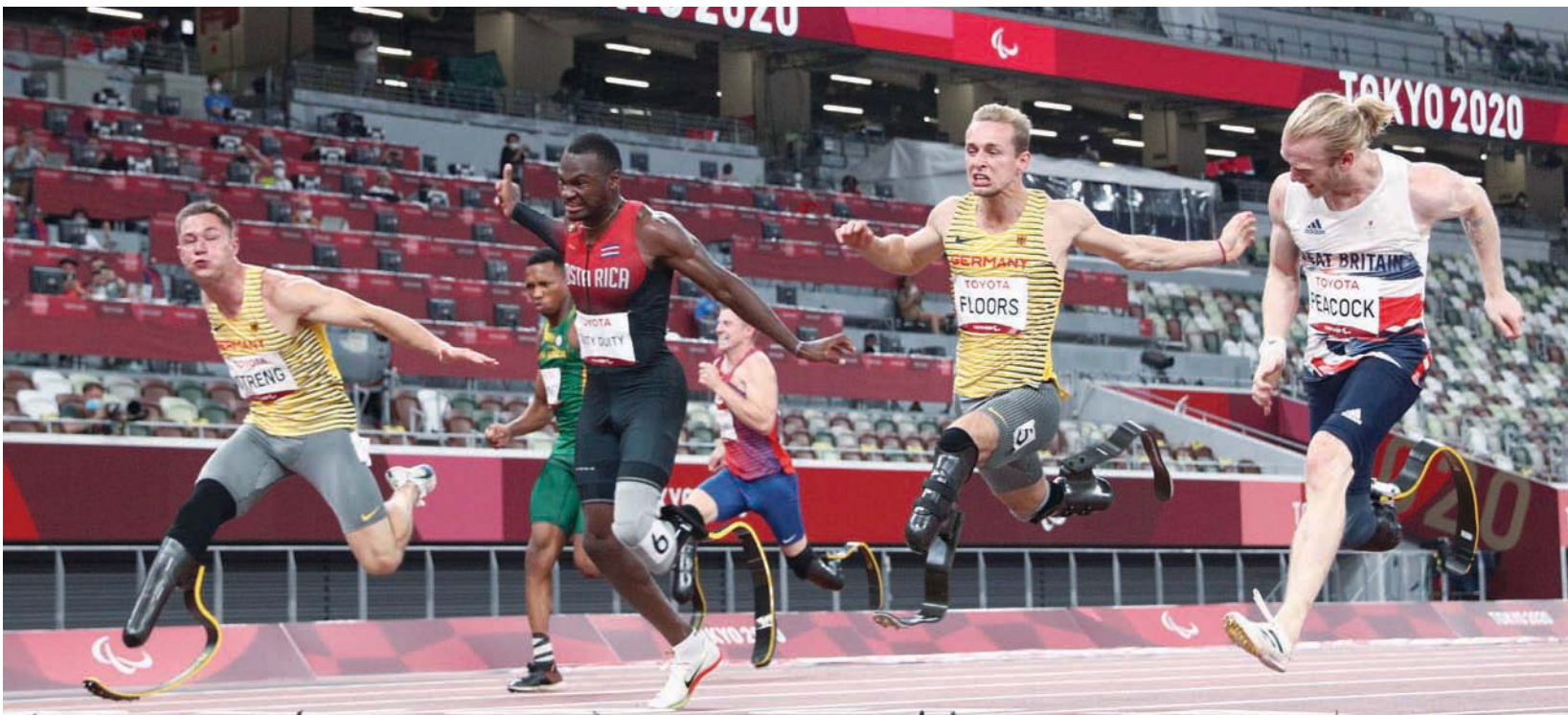
The race was one of the last on the sixth day of competition in Tokyo, with records again tumbling from the track to the pool.

At Tokyo's Aquatics Centre, 16-year-old Jiang Yuyan won her first Paralympic gold in the S6 50m butterfly final, after smashing her own world record in the heats.

"This is my first Paralympic experience and in terms of my personal goals, it's a self-confidence boost," the teenager said straight after her winning swim. "Of course, it's very exciting. But most of all, I think it's the beginning of the next chapter of my life."

Jiang was nearly killed when she was run over by a truck as a three-year-old, but by 14 she was breaking world records and had earned the nickname 'Flying Fish'.

She is the youngest member of China's Paralympic team, which continues to top the medal table — as it has at every Games since Athens 2004.



Felix Streng of Germany, Sherman Isidro Guity of Costa Rica, Johannes Flores of Germany and Jonnie Peacock of Britain in action in men's 100m T64 final. — Reuters



Gold medallist Sumit Sumit of India celebrates after setting a new world record in men's javelin. — Reuters



China's Jiang Yuyan competes in the women's 50m butterfly S6 swimming final. — AFP



Gold medallist Avani Lekhara of India celebrates after winning the women's 10m Air Rifle shooting. — Reuters

'AN INSPIRATION FOR OTHER GIRLS'

Earlier on Monday, International Paralympic Committee chief Andrew Parsons paid tribute to two Afghan athletes who escaped from Kabul after the country's fall to the Taliban this month.

Zakia Khudadadi and Hossain Rasouli arrived in Tokyo over the weekend after a complex international effort that saw them evacuated to France where they rested and trained before flying to Japan.

Parsons said that receiving the pair in Tokyo was "a moment I will remember for the rest of my

life. It was just incredible to feel that we had contributed in some way," he added.

Sprinter Rasouli will take part in the men's T47 long jump on Tuesday having arrived too late for his favoured T47 100m.

Khudadadi will compete in the women's — 49kg K44 taekwondo on Thursday.

Parsons said he hoped the pair would be able to "really focus on sport and forget for a few days at least what they left behind and the horror that they have been through in their home nation."

Monday also saw the medal

ceremony for the winners of the women's swimming 4x100m — 34 points, which was delayed from Sunday after the US team lodged a protest over their disqualification.

The team thought they had come away with the silver, but the second spot was instead handed to Australia after judges disqualified the US side for an illegal changeover.

Their protest was denied by a referee and an appeal to a jury was also rejected.

Also stepping onto the podium on Monday was Francisca Mardones Sepulveda, who

became the first Chilean woman ever to win a Paralympic medal in any sport.

The 43-year-old shot putter won the F54 category and broke her own world record with a throw of 8.33 metres.

The Chilean competed at the London and Rio Games in wheelchair tennis, but later switched to athletics, and is competing in shot put, discus and javelin in Tokyo. "I want to be an inspiration for other girls that will start approaching the sport to become enthusiastic for it," she said after her win. — AFP

Oman in intense preparation for Japan encounter

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 30

The Oman national football team is in intense preparation ahead of the tough opening encounter against Japan on Thursday for group B matches of the deciding round of 2022 Fifa World Cup qualifiers. After arrival in Japan on Saturday, the Sultanate's team players began the training sessions under watchful eyes of Croatian coach Branko Ivankovic on Sunday at Yanmar Stadium in Nagai.

During the previous warm-up session, the technical staff focused on the players readiness in different technical and physical aspects for the crucial fixture. In the initial sessions, the head coach preferred to have some recovery trainings after long journey from Serbia to Muscat and then from Muscat to Tokyo.

The Red Warriors will meet Saudi Arabia in the following match and only six days is the total duration after Japan's fixture. The team will leave Tokyo on Friday to gear up for Saudi Arabia match which is scheduled on September 7 at Sultan Qaboos Sports



Complex. The Sultanate's football lovers are awaiting the decision of allowing the spectators to attend the match in the complex.

It is expected that OFA will unveil soon the mechanism of audience's registration to attend the forthcoming match of Oman against Saudi Arabia at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Tuesday (September 7).

The Red Warriors are all set for commencement of the campaign of final stage for the joint qualifier

of 2022 Fifa World Cup and 2023 AFC Asian Cup. The Sultanate team had concluded recently the overseas camp in Serbia. The team had played four preparatory matches and all of them ended on victory notes.

Oman outclassed FK Kolubara 4-0 in the opening preparatory encounter while in the second fixture, the Sultanate team edged Qatar club 1-0. The third victory came as Mohsin al Ghassani and his team-mates managed to record

an easy 3-0 win against Spartak Subotica club. The concluding friendly fixture ended with a 2-0 victory over Serbia's FK Vozdovac club. Amjad al Harthy (38) and Abdulaziz al Ghilani (81) netted the winning goals.

The last warm-up destination in Serbia, which lasted for a month, ended on a bright note. The technical and administration staff expressed their satisfaction on the outcomes of the overseas camp.

OMAN SQUAD FOR JAPAN MATCH: Mohsin al Ghassani, Jameel al Yahmadi, Zaher al Aghbari, Amjad al Harthy, Abdulaziz al Ghilani, Mohammed al Musalami, Fayeze al Rushaidi, Omar al Fazari, Abdulaziz al Maqbali, Salah al Yahyaie, Abdullah Fawaz, Ali al Busaidy, Juma al Habsi, Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Al Mundher al Alawi, Mohammed al Ghafri, Harib al Saadi, Arshadal Alawi, Fahmi Dorbeen, Khalid al Buraiki, Essam al Subhi, Khalid al Hajri, Mohsin Jawher, Yazeed al Maashani, Ahmed al Kaabi, Saud al Habsi and Ahmed al Khamisi.

MESSI

MAKES PSG DEBUT AS MBAPPE STEALS THE SHOW



Paris Saint-Germain's forward Lionel Messi runs with the ball during the French L1 match against Stade de Reims. — AFP

PARIS: Lionel Messi came on as a substitute to make his Paris Saint-Germain debut on Sunday but Kylian Mbappe stole the show by scoring both goals in a 2-0 win against Reims in Ligue 1.

Messi, wearing the number 30 jersey, came off the bench in the 66th minute to replace Neymar at the Stade Auguste-Delaune, where fans in the sell-out 21,000 crowd had earlier chanted his name as he emerged to warm up.

The Argentine had not played since arriving in Paris from Barcelona almost three weeks ago, his last appearance in any game dating back to the Copa America final on July 11, when he led his country to victory against Brazil.

The six-time Ballon d'Or winner will have to wait for his first goal with his new club, and his first start, which could come when PSG host Clermont in their next match on September 11.

"I'm very happy that he made his debut. It was very important for him," PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino told broadcaster Amazon Prime after Messi's low-key first appearance in a PSG shirt.

"He is still far away from his best form but he has been training well and he will be fit in the next two weeks, after the international break and, yes, we are waiting for the best from him."

The week leading up to this game had been dominated not by Messi but by talk of Mbappe's future, with Real Madrid reportedly having two offers for the France World Cup-winning striker rejected. The latest of these offers was understood to be worth

“He is still far away from his best form but he has been training well and he will be fit in the next two weeks, after the international break and, yes, we are waiting for the best from him

MAURICIO POCHETTINO
PSG coach

180 million euros (\$212m), an astronomical amount for a player whose contract expires at the end of the season and who will be free to negotiate a deal with a new club in January without PSG being able to get a transfer fee.

'KYLIAN IS OUR PLAYER'

With the transfer deadline looming on Tuesday, the 22-year-old did not appear remotely distracted by the talk of a move as he headed in a glorious Angel Di Maria cross in the 15th minute to put the away side in front.

Mbappe then scored his second of the night, and third of the season, just after the hour mark, finishing off an inviting low cross to the back post by Achraf Hakimi.

"Kylian is our player and you know that in football and in business there is always gossip and rumours," Pochettino said. "I think our president and our sporting director were very clear and he is still here. I am really happy to have Kylian. — AFP

Giroud, Abraham open accounts as Milan, Roma cruise



AC Milan's Olivier Giroud (R) celebrates with teammates after he scored the fourth goal for his team. — AFP

MILAN: Olivier Giroud and Tammy Abraham both got off the mark in Serie A on Sunday as the former Chelsea men helped their new teams AC Milan and Roma to comfortable victories which gave them two wins from the season's opening two fixtures.

France forward Giroud, who has not been picked for Les Bleus' upcoming World Cup qualifiers, bagged a brace in a 4-1 win over Cagliari at the San Siro while Abraham scored in a 4-0 rout at promoted Salernitana.

Both strikers left European champions Chelsea this summer in the search of more regular football and have got off to quick starts in Italy.

Giroud has been given the number nine jersey at Milan and scored the third and fourth in an easy victory at the San Siro.

His name was sung by a large portion of the 31,000 Milan fans present, who watched their team run riot in a highly entertaining first half which won the match for Stefano Pioli's team.

"I am very proud to play for Milan and to play in the San Siro stadium. It is a great emotion," Giroud said.

"I believe in myself and in my abilities. As a child I used to watch Van Basten, Papin and Inzaghi and wearing this shirt makes me happy."

Sandro Tonali gave Milan a

12th minute lead with a stunning free-kick which was also his first Milan goal, and Rafael Leao claimed the second after Alessandro Deiola's surprise header levelled the scores.

Giroud then artfully guided home his first Milan goal following a superb run and pass from Brahim Diaz, and when Kevin Strootman's handball was judged to have taken place in the penalty area by VAR, the 34-year-old stepped up and stroked the spot-kick home.

ABRAHAM ON TARGET

Abraham meanwhile crashed home the third in the 69th minute at Salernitana as a flurry of second half goals gave Jose Mourinho's team a comprehensive win in the Italian south.

Roma struggled to break down the hosts in the opening period but a double from Lorenzo Pellegrini and a third goal in two games from Jordan Veretout gave the capital club a deserved win.

"I was perfectly calm right from the start. The team played really well... Again tonight, we dominated the match," said Mourinho.

Both teams sit in a pack of five on a perfect six points, which also includes leaders Lazio, Inter Milan and Napoli, who earlier got a hard-fought 2-1 win at Genoa thanks to Andrea Petagna's late header. — AFP

Chelsea defence holds firm against Liverpool

ANDY JALIL

LIVERPOOL: Chelsea showed why they are champions of Europe after playing an entire half of their match against a top Liverpool side with just 10 men and snatching a point from their 1-1 draw away from home. While it was a superb display of defence by the London side after Reece James was shown the red card for handball in preventing a goal, they were just as determined to attack at every opportunity.

A 'delighted' Chelsea manager, Thomas Tuchel said: "I saw a very strong Liverpool side. We scored the first goal and had a chance for a second with Mason Mount. We lacked a bit of precision and could have had better chances but the pressure and energy was high from Liverpool. At some point you need to suffer and we conceded a penalty."

He added: "We also lost N'Golo Kante at half-time with an injury

so I cannot praise the team enough for their resilience and team work was fantastic."

On the penalty, he commented: "I'd have liked a longer VAR check. The referee just looked at the image. I can remember referees who explained if it's a deflection and it's not a very unnatural arm position, maybe he stays with the decision. How he made the decision was too quick."

Liverpool had an early chance to score when right-back Alexander Arnold sent an excellent crossfield pass, but Jordan Henderson's volley went wide. Chelsea took the lead in the 22nd minute from Kai Havertz following an in-swinging corner from James. Havertz ran clear of Fabinho into a gap and steered a looping header which dropped just under the crossbar.

It was an action-packed end to the first half with Liverpool equalising and Chelsea being given two yellow cards and a red in the following scuffle. Goalkeeper



Chelsea's Thiago Silva and Andreas Christensen in action with Liverpool's Sadio Mane. — Reuters

Eduardo Mendy kicked the ball away at Henderson in frustration and got the first yellow and then

Rudigar, for dissent.

During stoppage time at the end of the first half, Matip, in the six-

yard box, headed against the bar and following that Sadio Mane's attempt was blocked on the goal-

line by James' thigh, the ball then deflected to his right arm which he used instinctively to stop the ball. The referee checked VAR and pointed to the spot.

Liverpool's equalising penalty was taken by Mohamed Salah who sent Mendy the wrong way with his 14th converted Premier League penalty in a row.

Liverpool applied pressure during the second half against the depleted side but Chelsea's determined and disciplined defence stood solid, giving little hope to Liverpool of stealing a home win against such a strong team.

Liverpool manager, Jurgen Klopp, said: "I really feel for Reece. He did not want to do that it was not intentional but it was a handball. If it was 11 v 11, I don't know the result but 1-1 is OK. We drew against the best team of last year in Europe so that is a good start. It was such an incredible, intense game."

business

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Dhofar wind project achieves peak output



CLEAN POWER: New generation peak of over 30 GWh in July was the highest since the wind farm commenced commercial operation in Nov 2019

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 30

The Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer), member of Nama Group, has announced that electricity output from the Dhofar Wind project achieved a new generation peak of over 30 gigawatt-hours (GWh) in July — the highest since the wind farm commenced commercial operation in November 2019.

The plant, Oman's first wind-based power project and one of the most prominent renewable energy projects, managed to reach this level of power generation at an average wind speed of 12.6 metres

per second (m/s).

On this occasion, Ahmed bin Said al Harthy, Tanweer Acting CEO, said, "Tanweer seeks to develop and implement studies to support economic diversification plans, promote sustainable energy, and achieve optimal energy use by focusing on renewable energy projects in the company's concession areas.

"The Dhofar Wind Power Plant is part of the electricity transmission grid in the province and supplies customers with more than 190 GWh of clean electricity", he added.

The wind farm has a generation capacity of 50 MW with 13 wind turbines, each turbine with a production capacity of 3.8 MW.

The generated electricity is transmitted via high voltage lines (132 kV) connected to the main grid in the Governorate of Dhofar to supply the costumers connected to it.

Al Harthy said Tanweer also concentrates on strengthening the

electricity system in its concession area in the governorates, in line with its relentless efforts to develop and safely operate its grid.

The new output record comes as an important milestone in achieving the company's vision, which aims to produce at least 20 per cent of electricity from renewable energy sources by 2025, thus supporting the Sultanate's efforts to reach 30 per cent of clean electricity production by 2030.

In 2015, Tanweer launched a solar power plant in the Wilayat of Al Mazyona in the Dhofar Governorate on 8,000 square metres and an annual production capacity of 550 MWh.

Al Mazyona Solar Power Plant is the first commercial project to produce electricity using renewable energy in Oman. In addition, it promotes the use of clean, renewable energy through its contribution to reducing 433 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions annually.

Tanweer is also implementing

and overlooking several renewable energy projects in the Sultanate, especially schools located in the company's concession areas.

Including four solar-powered schools. The company's efforts did not go unnoticed.

Dhofar Wind won the "Wind Power Project of the Year" award at the Asian Power Awards in 2019.

Oman's first wind farm is a successful result of the joint development agreement signed in 2014 between the Sultanate's government represented by Tanweer and the Abu Dhabi government represented by the Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company (Masdar), with investments amounting to \$100 million.

The farm, spread over 19 square kilometres, is located in the Fetkhit area in Wilayat of Shaleem and Al Halaniyat islands. It is the largest wind-powered electricity generation plant in the Arabian Gulf region.

Oman-Saudi bilateral trade soars to RO 960m in 2020



Saudi Arabia's ACWA Power is a key investor in Oman's Ibri-II solar project.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 30

Bilateral trade between Oman and Saudi Arabia nearly doubled over the past decade to reach RO 960 million at the end of 2020, up from RO 506 million in 2010.

Of the total for 2020, Oman's exported RO 548 million worth of commodities and goods to Saudi Arabia against RO 411 million worth of imports from the latter.

According to Oman's Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, as many as 1,235 Saudi firms are currently operating in the Sultanate, up from 467 in 2010. Saudi investment in the Sultanate mainly focuses on trade, construction and services.

Significantly, Saudi Arabia is also a strategic partner in a number of economic projects established in the Sultanate. The list includes Khazaen Economic City, Salalah-2 Independent Power Project, Salalah Independent Water Project, United Power Company (Manah IPP), Ibri-II solar-powered IPP and Saudi Fund for Development.

On Sunday, a high-level delegation led by Saudi Arabia's Investment Minister, Khalid al Falih, arrived on a three-day visit aimed at strengthening economic ties and mutual investments between the two nations.

Yesterday, a number of agreements were signed by Saudi and Omani companies on the sidelines of an investment forum organised on the occasion.

PDO eyes commissioning of new wind farm by 2023

NEW MOMENTUM: Met masts installed at six locations in the south of Block 6

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

Building on its already sizable presence in the renewable energy space in the Sultanate, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) — the nation's biggest producer of hydrocarbons — says it aims to commission its first wind power development by 2023.

The majority state-owned energy firm says it has already initiated preliminary work to support the development of an estimated 100 MW capacity wind farm within its Block 6 concession.

"(PDO) conducted a feasibility study with a view to commissioning a wind farm by 2023 as part of the transition to renewable energy", the company stated in the 2020 Annual Report of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals issued last week.

"(Meteorological) masts were erected at six potential sites in the south of Block 6 to gather wind speed, temperature and humidity data over at least a 12-month period", it further noted.

Last year, PDO marked the commissioning of the Amin 100-megawatt (MW) solar plant in the south of its concession "three months ahead of target".

"The Independent Power Producer renewable project provides power for the Interior operations and is one of the world's first utility scale solar projects to



have an oil and gas company as the sole buyer of electricity."

"The installation was built and commissioned in record time, just under 12 months after the signing of the engineering, procurement and construction contract", the company said.

PDO's flagship renewable energy project is however the Miraah solar development in the south of the country.

The giant scheme harnesses the sun's heat to produce steam, which is then injected into the Amal oilfield to get its heavy oil contents to the surface.

At full capacity, Miraah can produce the equivalent of 1,021 MW of thermal energy and is the first Enhanced Oil Recovery project of its kind in the world.

Also slated for commissioning during 2023, according to

officials of PDO and its parent holding company Energy Development Oman (EDO), is a new Independent Power Project centering on a 100 MW capacity solar-based generation component.

The project, also planned in the Block 6 concession, will feature — for the first time in Oman — a large-scale battery storage component designed to ensure consistent and sustained power supply overcoming intermittency challenges typically associated with solar or wind based generation.

Other smaller-scale renewable energy schemes in its portfolio include roof and ground-mounted solar PV systems that support the company's energy requirements at the Mina Al Fahal headquarters and Ras Al Hamra residential complex.

Bank Nizwa announces Rights Issue at 95 baisas per share

AS PART OF ITS STRATEGIC ROADMAP AND TO BOOST ITS GROWTH

MUSCAT: Revered as the leading and most trusted Islamic bank in the Sultanate, Bank Nizwa announced the opening of its Rights Issue with subscription period from September 7-16, 2021.

The Rights Issue consists of new 789,473,685 ordinary shares at an issue price of 95 baisas per share aiming to increase the bank's capital by RO 75 million.

The rights share shall be payable in full on submission of the application form with the issuer bearing all issue-related expenses. All shares shall be listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange after allotment.

By increasing the paid-up capital, Bank Nizwa will be geared up for the next phase of growth and increase returns for shareholders.

As the leading and fastest-growing Islamic bank in the country, Bank Nizwa has outlined broad strategies for the next phase



of growth. Firstly, by strengthening capital while simultaneously continue playing its part in contributing to the development of the economy and leading the way as the most prominent Islamic bank in the Sultanate.

Observing and learning from the challenges during the pandemic, Bank Nizwa takes benefit in drawing Sharia-compliant banking further and ensure that it registers growth even in exceptional situations.

The growth of Islamic Banking in the Sultanate is most encouraging and has become significant in a short space of time through various support and policy measures adopted by the Central Bank of Oman.

In less than eight years, Oman has become the world's 15th largest Islamic banking industry and commands 15.1 per cent share of the Sultanate's total banking assets as at end-June 2021.

In upholding values of transparency, ethics and fairness in all its endeavours, Bank Nizwa conducts its operations in accordance with the Banking Law, the Islamic Banking Regulatory Framework (IBRF), and the bank's well-defined policies and procedures.

Bank Nizwa has established its position as a bank built on strong corporate principles and has therefore earned the support of its customers and shareholders alike.

ahlibank vaccinates over 3,000 employees and family members



MUSCAT: In line with its core values of supporting national initiatives, ahlibank has successfully vaccinated over 3,000 individuals, including the bank's employees and their respective family members.

The initiative, held in collaboration with the respected Ministry of Health, is a testament to the bank's keen interest to protect its team members and their dear ones, thereby creating a motivated environment, ensuring seamless operations and business continuity.

Speaking on this national initiative, Mohammed al Mufargi, AGM Head of Human Resources at ahlibank said, "ahlibank gives the highest priority to the safety of its employees and the community at large. This has been reflected in a series of initiatives undertaken within the bank that aimed mainly at preparing and responding quickly to combat the spread of this global pandemic. The launch of this vaccination campaign is an integral part of our efforts to address the spread of this virus, which has greatly affected our lifestyle, generated other dimensions and exceptional circumstances that we have never experienced before."

"Our participation in providing vaccines as soon as possible to our employees and their families is part of our responsibility to create a safe working place and environment for all. We believe this is also essential to encourage our people to continue performing undeterred and contribute effectively to Oman's social and economic development in the

long-run."

ahlibank, represented by its exceptional leadership and a strong team, has been a front-runner in taking preventive measures in accordance with the directives announced by the government and the Supreme Committee dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. The bank continues to provide guidance and directives to its staff, not only to immunise themselves, but also to stay committed to social distancing across ahlibank's branch network, protecting themselves and hence, protecting those around them.

"We have also implemented the strategy of security, health and safety by preparing the premises in the Head Office and our branches distributed in all governorates, using a full proof mechanism that safeguards our customers and stakeholders as well. We also have a Business Continuity Management framework that's aligned to the operating model and is in compliance with regulatory requirements," added Ghada al Balushi, GM — Head of Risk Management at ahlibank.

Furthermore, ahlibank has enhanced the level of its banking services and products through its mobile app and Internet, believing that technological transformation and digitalisation of its banking transactions contribute to enhancing the comfort, health and safety of its customers and stakeholders, to encourage them to complete their banking requirements from the comfort of their own homes.

Khedmah expands branch network bringing services closer to customers

MUSCAT: Committed to expand the reach of its services, Oman Investment & Finance Company (Khedmah), has recently opened three new branches in the wilayats of Ibri Alaraqi, Liwa and Al Buraimi.

The company has launched a new self-service kiosk in Al Muzn mall in the Wilayat of Al Seeb. With the addition of the new branches and the kiosk, Khedmah network now boasts 68 branches and 54 kiosks across the Sultanate along with electronic channels such as the popular Khedmah phone app and the website that allow clients to leverage the company's innovative services.

The new branches were designed as per the best practices in the industry and equipped with latest technologies known in the market. This resonates with the integrated services the company provides to its clients in order to meet



Mohammed bin Obaid al Guthi, Regional Manager of Khedmah Branches in Majan Region

their expectations and fulfil their needs. Through these branches, kiosks and other platforms, beneficiaries can pay electricity, water, telecommunications bills, and the Public Authority for Social Insurance dues, in addition to recharging their phone, prepaid electricity and entertainment subscription.

Speaking on the network expansion, Mohammed bin

Obaid al Guthi (pictured), Regional Manager of Khedmah Branches in Majan Region, said: "We are delighted to announce the opening of the new branches and the launch of the self-service kiosk. This milestone comes in line with our strategy for this year which focuses on renovating and relocating a number of Khedmah branches to more strategic and accessible locations. Furthermore, we are focused on launching many self-service kiosks in highly populated areas to keep pace with market developments, competition factors and modern development."

"At OIFC, we constantly strive to target various segments of society around the Sultanate and provide them with high end and easily accessible services. The company will continue its sterling efforts to give more to the people of Oman," he added.

Additionally, the new branches have qualified workforce trained to fulfil customers' needs with the highest service standards. Over the past period, Khedmah's branches and digital channels saw a strategic development in terms of expansion and new innovative services. These achievements came as a result of extensive studies conducted by the company on the locations of branches, market developments, and the level of customer satisfaction with the services delivered.

This allowed OIFC to acquire insights and determine what is desired by consumers, and thus provide tailor-made services to them that meet their aspirations.

OIFC is one of the leading Investment and Services Company and specialises in billing, collection and debt factoring for electricity, water and telecom services in the Sultanate.

Cost-competitive production key to creating \$700 bn H2 economy

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 30

Green hydrogen (H2) has become a key agenda topic for policymakers and industrial players, driven by global decarbonisation efforts and the commercial opportunities that could follow.

Although ambitious targets are now being pursued through related projects, the possibilities that accompany the green H2 economy depend on several conditions across policy, supply, infrastructure, and demand.

Arthur D Little (ADL), the leading management consultancy firm, has expounded on this viewpoint in their latest report entitled 'Paving the way for green hydrogen: Key considerations for green H2 deployment'.

The document examines the

role green H2 will have in the future, elaborating on promising use cases and the next steps needed for successful deployment.

"Decarbonisation has been raised again on top of world's agenda and countries are actively seeking to lower emissions and transition to clean energy sources," explained Carlo Stella, Partner at Arthur D Little Middle East.

"The 2015 Paris Agreement has instigated widespread action, with leaderships encouraging technology-backed decarbonisation in the years since. Green Hydrogen has been identified as a key technology to bridge decarbonisation ambitions, if the basic conditions and some pressing requirements are met in the short term."

The Middle East is witnessing green hydrogen projects being



pursued in an industry projected to reach \$700 billion by 2050.

Many governments in the Middle East are currently exploring opportunities that can be exploited in this field, as green hydrogen helps reduce economic

dependence on hydrocarbons and contributes to economic development and diversification of energy supply. Furthermore, foreign policy and bilateral agreements are also reinforcing the green H2 economy's importance.

"Strategic alliances are certain to be impactful as countries and industry players work together to realise their shared and mutual green H2 objectives," revealed Eddy Ghanem, Principal at Arthur D Little Middle East.

"That being said, the complex nature of green H2 production cannot be overlooked, and having dual sources of renewable energy is another necessity for sustained decarbonisation success."

The outputs of 'Paving the way for green hydrogen: Key considerations for green H2 deployment' indicate three conditions are necessary for the success of green hydrogen generation projects: cost-competitive production, reliability of production and supply, and hedging of risks to attract investors. Potential hydrogen

demands are also examined, while decision-makers are provided with valuable opportunities analysis, risk limitation, and other risks and conditions related to policies and infrastructure.

"Although green H2 projects are being pursued and more investments finalised, this momentum can only continue if thriving conditions are secured in the areas of policy, supply, infrastructure, and demand," concluded Carlo Stella.

"Through a collective effort based on transparency, collaboration, and innovation, interested parties can deliver on companies and countries decarbonisation commitments, successfully deploying green H2 to usher in a new chapter of renewable energy transformation."

Oman-Saudi pact to boost shrimp farming sector

PROMISING INDUSTRY:

Saudi's Naqua Seafood to explore cooperation with Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) in latter's \$137 million shrimp farming project at Al Jazer on Al Wusta coast

CONRAD PRABHU

@conradprabhu

In a major boost for Oman's ambitious shrimp farming industry, Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) – the fisheries sector investment and development arm of the government – has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the National Aquaculture Group (Naqua) of Saudi Arabia centreing on cooperation in the development of the former's shrimp farming project at Al Jazer on the Sultanate's Al Wusta coast.

The agreement was signed on the sidelines of an investment



forum under way in Muscat as part of the three-day visit of a high-profile Saudi business delegation to the Sultanate.

Announcing the signing of the pact, FDO said in a tweet:

"Within the activities of the Saudi-Omani Investment Forum, we were pleased today to sign a memorandum of understanding with the Saudi National Aquaculture Group (@

NaquaSeafood) to discuss aspects of cooperation and investment opportunities in the Al Jazer project for shrimp farming."

Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the parent holding

company of FDO, added in a post: "The agreement embodies the principle of economic cooperation and integration between the Sultanate and Saudi Arabia in key sectors that support both countries' visions."

Naqua Seafood is a major player in the thriving fisheries and seafood sector of Saudi Arabia.

The company owns and operates, among other ventures, one of the world's largest fish processing plants on the Red Sea.

Its expertise in aquaculture development – a key growth sector in the Sultanate – will prove useful for wholly government-owned FDO as the company embarks on an ambitious programme of investments across multiple facets of the fisheries value chain.

Al Jazer Shrimping Farming Project is one of the largest fisheries initiatives envisaged in the Sultanate as part of the country's drive to establish a thriving aquaculture industry.

Total investment in the venture, covering an area of 1,650 hectares,

is estimated at \$137 million across multiple phases. At full capacity, shrimp production is projected at 18,000 tonnes per annum.

According to details shared by OIA, Al Jazer Shrimp Farming project will feature four breeding sites, a hatching unit, two post-larval production units, a shrimp processing plant and a genetic improvement unit.

Just north of Al Jazer, FDO has plans to set up one of the world's largest shrimp farming projects at Mahout, also on Oman's Al Wusta coast.

The Bar Al Hikman Shrimp Farming project will be developed with an investment of around \$325 million (RO 125 million) in the first phase. Output is projected at 43,000 tonnes of Indian White Shrimps per annum.

Various subsidiaries of FDO, a joint-stock company and a subsidiary of OIA, are also investing in finfish, shellfish and seaweed ventures, as well as commercial pelagic fishing and processing.

Sohar Intl extends vaccination drive to welfare bodies, strategic partners

MUSCAT: Sohar International has extended vaccination drive to include local welfare associations such as the Association for the Disabled in Sohar and Oman Cancer Association, as well as other strategic partners.

"The pandemic affected the lives of countless people, but with the prudent initiatives taken by the government and the aggressive vaccination drive, we see a significant decline in the Covid-19 cases in the country. As a socially responsible financial institution, it becomes our duty to ensure that we complement the government's efforts in this direction by extending the vaccines to others in the community. Supporting associations dedicated to the welfare of the people helps us to meaningfully contribute to the nation's broad objectives of ensuring the health and better living for all.

"In addition, we cannot undermine the efforts of those who are on the field and have been dedicated to making sure that business carries on as usual. We have therefore also extended our vaccine drive to cover key strategic partners and honour them for their efforts.

Through well-planned and thoughtfully designed initiatives like these, we have been able to establish a closer bond with the



overall society we operate in," says Ahmed Al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer, Sohar International.

"Sohar International will continue to remain committed to putting the well-being of its employees first, while simultaneously supporting the untiring efforts of the Oman government in its drive to safeguard its people and stop the spread of the virus. We believe that a healthy workforce is the key to the progress of a nation."

The completion of the vaccination drive extended to the local welfare associations marks yet another milestone in Sohar International's CSR initiatives while attesting to the unfaltering commitment the bank has demonstrated in caring for the people of the nation reflecting its 'Human' personality.

In recognition of these significant efforts by the bank, Sohar International was recently be-

stowed with 'Managing Health at Work' award at the World HRD Congress - Oman Best Employer Brand Awards 2021 - a global body based out of India that has been recognising and highlighting exemplary branding, human resources, and leadership regionally.

In addition, the organisers also honoured the bank with 'Best Employer Brand Award' for its continuous focus on the holistic wellbeing of its employees and overall work environment.

A premium bank that is revered for going the extra mile for its customers, Sohar International has also taken the lead in terms of community welfare by actively supporting national and socially impactful issues.

With the vaccination drive in full swing, Sohar International will continue to do its part to keep the momentum going.

Ukraine pins hopes on Gulf visitors for pandemic-hit tourism

LVIV, Ukraine: Saudi tourists ride horse-drawn carriages, pose for portraits by street artists and play chess on benches with locals in Lviv, a city in Ukraine more accustomed to hosting European guests.

But with strict Covid-19 travel restrictions still in place across Europe, travellers from the Middle East – especially Saudi Arabia – now rank among the top visitors to the ex-Soviet state.

The trend has given hope to the country's pandemic-hit tourism industry.

"We need to seize the moment," says Bogdan Gets, a tour guide on a sightseeing train that ferries tourists along cobbled streets in central Lviv, a city in western Ukraine known for its Renaissance architecture.

For Gets and his colleagues at "Chudo Tour" (Wonder Tour), the unexpected influx of tourists from the Middle East is a chance to recover after a string of lockdowns that put pressure on Ukraine's struggling economy.

In the first half of 2021, the number of Saudi tourists alone visiting Ukraine skyrocketed to 14,000 compared to just 350 in the same period last year, according to the country's state tourism agency.



Middle Eastern tourists play with soap bubbles in Lviv, some 540 km west of Kiev. — AFP

This new cohort is attracted by a visa-free regime enacted in August last year and cheap direct flights.

In previous years, the city was mostly visited by Poles, Belarusians, Turks, Germans and Britons.

"Last year put the tourism industry in extreme conditions", the agency said, and "radically changed" how tourists decide which countries to visit.

Before the pandemic 32-year-old Asma, a tourist from Saudi Arabia, travelled with her

husband and two sons to various European destinations every year, but never considered Ukraine. After exploring Lviv and the capital Kiev this summer, the family was pleasantly surprised.

"The bars, the food and the coffee – all things here in Ukraine are amazing," Asma said outside the iconic Lviv Opera.

Anna Nayda, the head of the Kredens Cafe chain, admitted that the local tourism industry experienced some initial difficulties when catering for their new customers. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

ABUJA

Nigeria's naira hits record low on black market

Nigerian naira hit a new record low of 527 against the dollar on the black market on Monday, days after the central bank banned micro-lenders from foreign exchange dealing, traders said.

The currency closed at 524 naira at its previous session on Friday. It had hit a low of 525 naira a month ago after a central bank dollar clamped down on dollar sales to exchange bureaus, sending the currency tumbling on the unofficial market.



The central bank banned micro-lenders from foreign exchange dealings seven days ago due to their level of capital, the latest in a strings of curbs on the currency market.

— Reuters

TOKYO

Toyota to restart self-driving Olympic vehicles

Toyota Motor said it would resume operations of its self-driving e-Palette pods at the Tokyo Paralympic Games village with greater operator control and more safety staff to ensure they did not hit any more people.

The e-Palettes were halted after one of the vehicles collided with and injured a visually impaired Japanese athlete at a junction last week, prompting a YouTube video apology from Toyota Chief Executive Akio Toyoda.

"The vehicle's sensor detected



the pedestrian crossing and activated the automatic brake, and the operator also activated the emergency brake. The vehicle and pedestrians, however, came into contact before it came to a complete halt," Toyota said in a statement. — Reuters

NEW YORK

McDonald's consider closing indoor seating

Some US fast-food restaurants are closing indoor seating areas or limiting hours of operation because of the spread of the Delta variant of Covid-19, according to franchisees. McDonald's Corp had temporarily closed indoor dining at nearly all US locations in early 2020, but it reopened 70 per cent by last month.

The global burger chain said on July 28 that it was on track to open nearly 100% by Labor Day — barring any Covid-19 resurgence.



But last week, McDonald's instructed its franchisees on steps they should take to re-close their dining rooms in areas where the Delta variant is rapidly spreading, according to internal company materials. — Reuters

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features



Bringing global technology to Oman to enhance production

To find a global footing in technology especially in building and construction may seem hard in the past but with young minds like engineer Saleh Issa al Abri, what used to be impossible is now possible. Check out how his innovative ideas are creating dynamic changes in the industry... **P20**

LOCAL SCENE

READ



BLOODLESS
BY DOUGLAS PRESTON
AND LINCOLN CHILD

The 20th book in the Pendergast series. Bodies found without blood in their veins might be connected to an unsolved skyjacking.

Villagers from Dhank find joy in raising bees

While a lot of people may be scared of bees because of their painful sting, the people of Dhank have not only gotten accustomed to living with bees they've nurtured a relationship that has become mutually beneficial for both species.

Beekeeping is one of the activities that many people are practising in the Wilayat of Dhank in Al Dhahirah Governorate, due to the wilayat's topographical and

physical structures making its environment ideal for Omani honey production. Characterised by fertile valleys with numerous plants and trees growing, bees are attracted to this part of Oman because of the thriving sumr trees which flowers locally called Al Baram are a favourite.

While humans raised them for the honey they create, bees are helping back through pollination which is an important

factor in fruits and crops production.

In addition to beekeeping in farms and homes, some harvest honey from the mountains, where the mountains of Dhank are famous for the presence of local beehives or the so-called Abu Tuwaig, and the process of searching for beehives in the mountains requires skill and experience in terms of tracking bees to reach the location of the hive.

Some villages of the wilayat are famous for their abundance of production, such as the village of "Belt", which is 60 km from the centre of the wilayat. It is a mountainous isolated nature far from city centres and the mild weather and the spread of trees in the valleys and mountains helped the people to pay attention to beekeeping and honey production.





A meander into the streets of Zhongguo

THE HISTORY OF CHINESE cuisine is peppered with variety and change. This art has been cultivated and refined over hundreds of years. Legend has it that the culture of Chinese cuisine originated in the 15th century BC during the Shang dynasty. Centuries

on, the Chinese have discovered the health-giving properties of all sorts of roots, herbs, fungus and plants. They have taught the world that the nutritional value of vegetables is destroyed by over-cooking and in addition, have found that things with a

great flavour can also have medicinal value. Chinese cuisine as we now know it evolved gradually over time as new food sources and techniques were introduced, discovered, or invented. Today, the world over has its own versions of the cui-

sine that has been adapted to suit local palates. We decided to sample this global favourite at one of Oman's oldest institutions - The Chinese Palace. As is on course with our meals, we ordered two appetisers, two mains and a dessert.

HE SAID: For our appetisers, we picked the chicken dumplings and vegetable spring rolls. The dumplings were served in a bamboo basket with rice vinegar. The dough around the filling was very thin and the chicken filling was juicy. On the other hand, the roll filling was overcooked which affected the overall texture of the roll.

SHE SAID: The chicken dumplings were what dreams are made of. I've never had dumplings served with vinegar. It definitely elevated the taste of the lush filling. The spring rolls were crisp but the filling had turned to mush. Disappointing.

HE SAID: For our main course we picked beef with kangkong and cabbage and mushrooms. The beef with kangkong had thin strips of beef and kangkong leaves (some people call it morning glory) cooked to perfection in soy sauce. No wonder it was the first main that disappeared from our table. The cabbage and mushrooms were not less, crispy and nicely done, it was enhanced by natural flavours including the salty minced garlic. As a side, we ordered the Singapore fried rice as a change. To be honest, I did not like it as it was overpowered by the turmeric taste.

SHE SAID: Our mains were excellent. The beef was melt in the mouth soft and the bite of the kangkong (water spinach) enhanced the flavour of the dish. Our second main was a simple dish of cabbage and mushrooms tossed in soy and garlic



with Mirin. A light appetising dish. We asked for a portion of Singapore fried rice on the side that turned out to be a let-down. The extremely strong flavours of turmeric marred the lightness that fried rice generally has.

HE SAID: For dessert, we had fried ice cream, a ball of ice cream covered by a thin layer of dough and coconut powder. It was a remarkable experience as the dough was hot and fluffy and the ice cream was cold and creamy.

SHE SAID: Coconut covered ice cream. What's not to like? This dish may not look great but it really was a sweet treat that was not cloying or overpowering.

WE SAID: Good food doesn't have an address, sometimes small restaurants can be on point with an A-game. We've had the chance to visit fine dining restaurants however this place had the higher hand for food quality, taste and value for money. Will we go back? That's a yes from us!

OVERALL RATING:
Ambience: 3/5
Taste of food: 4/5
Presentation: 2/5
Service: 3/5
Value for money: 5/5

DISCLAIMER: The ORR team reviews anonymously and pays for their own meals.

FILMS

The Sultanate represented at Hope Film Fest



BY KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

SEVEN FULL FEATURE films and 24 short films coming from 24 countries had been short-listed to compete in the first edition of the Hope International Film Festival (HIFF) to be held from September 10 to 13 in Stockholm, Sweden.

The theme of the festival covers children with special needs, women, childhood, wars and other subjects close to humanity.

Dr Khalid al Zadjali, acclaimed Omani film director and cinema persona is the Artistic Director of the international convergence of films and film personalities from countries like Belgium, Germany, France, Ghana, Bulgaria, Britain, Egypt, Macedonia, Morocco, Palestine, Iran, Turkey, India, Jordan, Kazakhstan, America, Colombia, Lebanon, the Emirates, Algeria, Syria, Mauritania, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, besides Oman.

In the feature film category, the film "Save Sandra", starring Sven de Reder and Daria Gantora and directed by Jean Verhein and Lianne Willard, that has participated in a large number of international festivals, was chosen to be the opening film of the first session.

France has sent "Under the stars of Paris" starring Catherine Frut and the child Muhammadu Yaffa, directed by Claus Drexel in his first long fiction experience, who boldly embodied the underworld of the French capital.

Bulgaria's entry is "February" directed by Kamen Kalev and starring Lakichizar Dimitrov, who participated in many major festivals, including Tallinn Black Night Film Festival. Egypt sent the movie "Fragile" directed by Ahmed Rashwan, whose heroine Hanan Mutawa won second place in the referendum for the best actress from the African continent, and from Morocco the film "Hala Madrid Visca Barsa" directed by Abdel Elah El Gohary and starring Abdelhak Belmojahid, Abdellilah Rashid, Latifa Ahrar and Hoda Sedky.

"Cinema in Oman is coming a long way and we are proud to see both citizens and expatriates supporting the film industry in the country," said Dr Khalid al Zadjali, the Festival Director of HIFF.

From Oman/ India, the film by Sudha Radhika, an acclaimed Indian filmmaker who has been in Oman for over a decade and being part of the earlier edition of Muscat International Film Fest (MIFF) is making a grand premiere at the Fest. The film "What the Birds Want to Say", written and directed by Sudha, starring Neelanjana Shah Sudha and Amar Ramachandran sheds light on the intricacies that our adolescent youth go through in the modern world.

"I feel extremely happy for my film having been selected to the HIFF and it adds more professional commitment through films," Sudha said.

The protagonist Neelanjana Shah Sudha in the "What the Birds Want to Say" was awarded Best Actress Lead award at the WFPN (Women's International Film Festival) in Delaware in the US besides winning the 'Best Feature Film Finalist at SoCal Film Festival.

"We hope this festival will succeed in its aims and reach across the world. We have been able to generate an overwhelming response by various filmmakers by reserving their films' participation under the difficult circumstances of the pandemic and lockdowns that the world is going through. I'm thanking the Festival president Padi El Lawand and the artistic teams from the Sultanate of Oman and Egypt," added Dr Al Zadjali.

Films that are showcasing this year include: From France "How to Be a Good Wife" directed by Martin Provost, starring Juliette Binoche and Yolande Mario, from Iran "Sami" directed by Habib Bawi Sajid, starring Saeed Najrafi, Syed Muhammad al Imadi and Rosanuri, and from Kazakhstan "The Yellow Cat" directed by Adel Khan Yerzanova and written by Adel Khan Yerzanova and Ina Smailova, starring Azmat, Sanjar and Camila (International competition), Nika Awards (Best Film of the CIS and Baltic States), San Sebastian International Film Festival, Tokyo Filmex (Best Film), La Biennale di Venezia (International Competition), from America "Angie — Lost Girls" directed by Julia Verdin and written by Janet and Julia Verdin, the film has won several international awards as best feature film such as Hot Spring International Women's Festival, Moving Parts Festival and Social Relief Festival in New York.

As for the short films: "Chakero" from Colombia, "Meet the Soul" from Morocco, "What is Your Name" from Lebanon, "Under Pressure" from the UAE, "The Last Chance" from Egypt, "Gone" and "Room of a Dying Bird" From Egypt, "One of us left the picture" Syria and France, "Sons of the Impossible" Syria, "Kafiya" Mauritania, "moon hares" Kazakhstan, and from Egypt "I am a homeland within the homeland", and from France "The right words", "The last day of patriarchal Czechs, Slovenia and France, "Cell 364" Germany and France, "Day Yi" Ghana and Belgium, "pops" Britain and France, "sticker" Macedonia and from Palestine, Lebanon, France and Belgium "trumpets in the sky", and from America "Mugging - The Art of Social Distancing ", from Turkey "Allegoria", from Egypt "Potato", from Belgium "Radio Flex", and from Jordan "Ya Jaar".

"We hope this festival will set the ball rolling and show the Omani skills and efficiency in organising and managing international film festivals outside the Sultanate of Oman after calling off the Muscat International Film Festival and other festivals across the region," Dr Khalid al Zadjali said.



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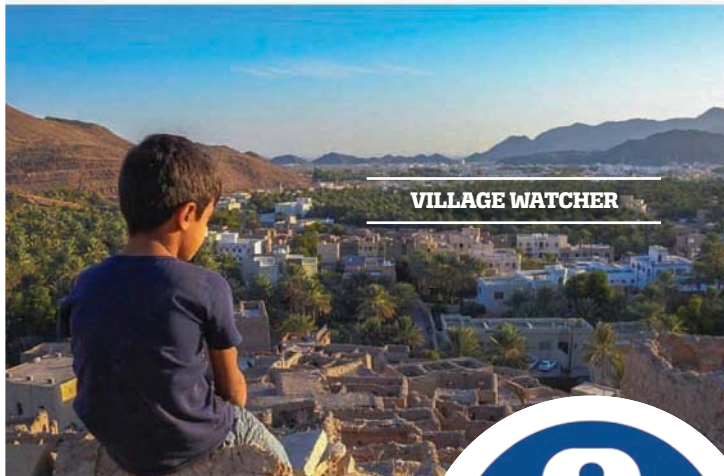
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AROUND THE WORLD

CHANGING WORLD

Thousands rally to 'hug' Spain's dying Mar Menor lagoon



TENS OF THOUSANDS of people formed a human chain around Spain's crisis-hit Mar Menor lagoon on Saturday in a show of mourning after tonnes of dead fish washed ashore, organisers and officials said.

One of Europe's largest saltwater lagoons, the Mar Menor has long been a draw for tourists but is slowly dying as a result of agricultural pollution, with millions of fish and crustaceans dying over the past fortnight.

Images of dead fish have traumatised this south-eastern coastal region, with locals and tourists turning out to join the mass mourning.

Footage from the scene showed huge lines of people, many in beachwear, holding hands along the waterfront on Alcazares beach, which stretches six kilometres and other part of the lagoon's 73-kilometre (45-mile) shoreline.

"It was an act of mourning for the death of the animals... we wanted people to somehow ask their forgiveness for the barbarity we've inflicted on them", Jesus Cutillas, one of the organisers told AFP.

"For days, we've witnessed the death of millions and millions of fish and seeing all that unnecessary death hurts.

"The aim was to express our regret for what has happened and show our determination that it never happens again."

Many people wore black, others held up banners reading: SOS Mar Menor.

Organisers estimated up to 70,000 people joined the protest.

15 tonnes of fish, algae

Experts say the fish suffocated due to a lack of oxygen caused by hundreds of tonnes of nitrates from fertilisers leaking into the waters, causing a phenomenon known as eutrophication which collapses aquatic ecosystems.

On Monday, regional officials said they had removed 4.5-5.0 tonnes of fish, but by Saturday that had risen three-fold to 15 tonnes of fish and algae.

"The 15 tonnes of dead fish and biomass (removed from the shore) show that this is indeed an environmental catastrophe and emergency. We need immediate help for the ecosystem", tweeted Noelia Arroyo, mayor of the nearby town of Cartagena.

Pedro Garcia, Director of Regional Conservation Organisation ANSE, said this week that environmental groups feared the marine death toll was more than twice the figure given on Monday by the authorities.

"Within that 15-tonne figure, there will certainly be at least two or three tonnes of dead vegetation, but we have no way of knowing for sure", he told AFP on Saturday.

At the lagoon on Wednesday, Environment Minister Teresa Ribera accused the regional government of turning a blind eye to farming irregularities in the Campo de Cartagena, a vast area of intensive agriculture that has grown ten-fold over the past 40 years.

But agricultural groups insist they comply scrupulously with environmental legislation. — **AFP**

GASTRONOMY

Japanese giant wants soy sauce to be the 'ketchup of India'



EVERY DISH TASTES better with a dash of soy sauce, even dessert: That's the ambitious pitch of Japanese food giant Kikkoman, hoping to persuade Indians to use it in curries, sweets and everything in between.

Convincing 1.3 billion people to add a staple of East Asian cuisine to their butter chicken and samosas is no cakewalk but it will likely be easier than the brand's 1960s push into the United States.

"When we entered the US, people thought we were selling bug juice because of its dark colour", Harry Hakuei Kosato, Kikkoman's India representative, told AFP.

Today the brand's funnel-shaped dispenser is a ubiquitous presence in US households, accounting for half of the firm's \$4.4 billion revenues, and Kikkoman now hopes to replicate that success in India.

Sales were boosted by the West's growing craze for Japanese cuisine since the 1980s, but the company is taking a different approach to India, which is home to a significant vegetarian population.

"It is not about getting everyone to eat sushi. We want our soy sauce to become the ketchup of India", said Kosato.

He hopes that the move to market the sauce as an endlessly adaptable condiment will strike a chord in a country where culinary innovation is part of street food culture.

For instance, Mumbai's grilled Bombay Sandwich — a hawker staple — is a



buttered British-style toastie, but with a filling that includes boiled potato, onion, tomato, beetroot, and coriander chutney, topped with a sprinkling of "sev", a crunchy deep-fried Indian snack.

So it is perhaps unsurprising that some Indian chefs began using soy sauce in their dishes long before Kikkoman launched in the country earlier this year.

'CHEF'S SECRET'

Restaurateur Prashant Issar first deployed it in a biryani six years ago, while running Mirchi and Mime, a Mumbai restaurant showcasing modern Indian cuisine.

Since then he has added a dash of soy sauce to a range of local dishes, from samosas to lamb keema.

"When I tried it with keema pao, it was just like 'oh my god'. It was an explosion of flavours", Issar told AFP.

"It has this indefinable umami flavour, this tart, sharp quality you can't find anywhere else", he explained, describing it as "a bit of a chef's secret".

Kikkoman is now trying to get the word out to ordinary Indians and counting on social media influencers like Shalini Kapoor to drum up an appetite for its product.

For Kapoor, a home chef who never liked the "synthetic" taste of locally-available soy sauces and couldn't imagine using the condiment in Indian food, the results have been revelatory.

She has even used it to make jalebis — a deep-fried pretzel soaked in sugar syrup.

"I think it's amazing in Indian desserts", she told AFP. But it might take the rest of India more time to catch up to the idea, she acknowledged.

"They just need to get a taste of it" — **AFP**

ENTERTAINMENT

Actress hit with \$46m tax fine as China targets celebrity culture



TOP CHINESE ACTRESS Zheng Shuang was hit with a \$46 million tax evasion fine on Friday while references to film star Zhao Wei were wiped from video streaming sites as Beijing steps up its campaign against celebrity culture.

Beijing is on a mission to rein in what it calls "chaotic fan culture" and celebrity excess, after a spate of scandals in recent months that have taken down China's biggest entertainers including singer Kris Wu, who was arrested on suspicion of rape earlier this month.

Shanghai tax authorities on Friday fined Zheng 299 million yuan (\$46.1 million) for tax evasion and undeclared income between 2019 and 2020 while filming a TV series, according to an online statement.

Zheng, 30, became a household name in China after starring in the hit 2009 remake of Taiwanese drama "Meteor Shower", a string of successful series and movies afterwards.

China's state broadcasting regulator also pulled Zheng's offending TV drama and ordered producers not to hire her for future shows.

The State Administration of Radio, Film and Television added it had "zero tolerance" for tax evasion, "sky-high pay" and "yin-yang contracts", referring to the shady contracts commonly used in Chinese showbiz to obscure actors' real pay.

State media has gone into overdrive urging changes to China's entertainment culture.

"For some time now, artists' moral failures and legal violations, the cultivation of younger idols, and 'chaotic' fandoms have attracted widespread attention in society", state broadcaster CCTV said on Tuesday.

"We must restore a clean and upright literary and artistic environment to the public."

On Thursday evening, search results for Zhao, an enormously popular actress also known as Vicky Zhao, were censored from major Chinese video streaming sites.

Her name was suddenly removed from the credits of major TV series, while a forum dedicated to the actress on social media platform Weibo was also mysteriously shut down, as the hashtag "Zhao Wei super-topic closed" gained 850 million views.

No official reason was given.

But Zhao and her husband were banned from trading on the Shanghai Stock Exchange earlier this year, owing to a failed 2016 takeover bid that authorities ruled had "disrupted market order".

China's cyber regulator released new regulations on Friday that ban celebrity ranking lists and tighten control over "chaotic" celebrity fan clubs and management agencies.

Video streaming site iQiyi said it halted all idol talent programmes on Thursday, while a Chinese boy band made up of primary schoolchildren disbanded earlier this week after performers' ages sparked a public backlash. — **AFP**

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Bringing global technology to Oman to enhance production

BY MAI AL ABRI

"If [business is] not listening to the youth, they are not listening to their future competitors, employees, or customers," said Wadia Ait Hamza, one of the business icons in the world.

When Oman started to also focus on the voices of the youth, it became a remarkable force that helped drive economic revolution. By empowering the youth, a dynamic workforce was activated helping in coming up with innovative solutions and out of the box ideas that diversify Oman we know today.

To find a global footing in technology especially in building and construction may seem hard in the fast but with young minds given a portion of the responsibility, the impossible became possible.

"We carry an exciting energy, enthusiasm, and creativity as a youth in what we do, thus it is a waste of human capital when these gifts are not tapped in improving businesses, letting potentials lie idle, and putting the current and future world of work in jeopardy," said engineer Saleh bin Issa al Abri, who entered the world of technology and industry knowing that hardship in all steps would be inevitable.

Al Abri, who hails from the Wilayat of Bahla in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, who had always been interested in progress in development particularly in the area of technology has succeeded in creating something worthwhile for the industry.

Specialised in the field of "electromechanics", Al Abri used to worry that Oman is not growing fast enough when it comes to technology. He made it his goal to be able to help foster the field he has come to love by developing new things that benefit the technology surrounding his field.

His tours around the world visiting several factories gave him a crystal clear vision of the latest technologies used globally in production. He has gained important knowledge about automated industries and sustainable production lines including noteworthy processes that has less dependence on the human workforce.

Saleh, the owner of the "Tasnee" trademark, said, "Tasnee's group of factories is an Omani brand with a specific vision, mission and goals. Its mission is to provide Omani products of international quality and competitive prices. The vision is to localise global technology to become a purely Omani industrial style."

"We have so far been

able to establish several local production lines for products that were not produced in Oman, such as manufacturing "Silo", which specialises in the manufacture of chemical and cement tanks, with a capacity of more than 10,000 tons, and "Rebar", which specialises in the preparation of building columns. Every single automated line in the construction sector executes the work done by over 100 workers per day," he shared.

He added, "Therefore, after generalising the product, the construction sector can work at a faster pace and at a lower cost. A few months back, we launched the "Roller" line that specialised in the manufacture of conveyor belts used in ports, cement factories, mines, quarries, crushers and other factories, with a production capacity of more than 1500 rolls daily. We were able in a short period to acquire a large part of the Omani market share, and actually began to acquire more than 25% of the Gulf market."

Al Abri stressed that "Roller" is currently executing a government tender for the fish conveyor line in the fishing port of Qurayat, which is the first conveyor line to be completely designed and manufactured in the Sultanate with high quality, international standard specifications, and a competitive price.

Al Abri pointed out that among the principles of "Tasnee" is spreading the culture of local manufacturing with stable quality and low cost through the use of technology.

"Tasnee" has opened its doors to colleges, universities and individuals to benefit from the training programs available to contribute to creating a generation capable of establishing real independent industries.

"Tasnee" provides technical support for young people wishing to establish local technical industries with international specifications.

"We aspire to support our partners in ports, factories, mines, quarries and crushers by providing high-quality products at competitive prices and available local service, which means reducing production costs and supporting the trade balance by reducing revenues and supporting exports of these products. our goal during the ten coming years is to open more factories that contain production lines for innovative products that do not exist in the local market and are capable of global export," the executive engineer said.

