

Mercury likely to touch above 50 in next two days

Met Office on Tuesday warned that temperatures across the Sultanate may go up, touching 50 degrees Celsius in the next two days. Temperatures are expected to continue to rise during the next two days, reaching the end of the forties and the beginning of the fifties on the coasts and plains of the North and South Al Batinah and Muscat governorates during the noon, coinciding with the blowing of the active western winds, the weather agency said.



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AL WAHAIBI TO TEAM UP WITH AL RAWAHI IN JORDAN RALLY



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HUQQA SEAFOOD SPAGHETTI



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RENAULT-NISSAN AND HYUNDAI FACE SHUTDOWNS IN INDIA



MUSCAT

HM CONDOLENCES TO SAUDI KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of Saudi Arabia, on the death of Princess Al Jawhara bint Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al Saud. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the departed's soul in peace in paradise and grant her family patience. — ONA

HM GREETINGS TO GEORGIA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Salome Zourabichvili of Georgia on her country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Zourabichvili. His Majesty the Sultan also wished the friendly people of Georgia further progress and growth. — ONA

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32,000 JOBS FOR OMANIS THIS YEAR

HM ATTACHES SPECIAL IMPORTANCE TO EMPLOYMENT OF NATIONALS

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik attaches a special importance to the issue of employment of Omani youth. His Majesty has often reaffirmed that youth are the inexhaustible wealth of nations and that youth employment tops national priorities.

In pursuance of the efforts exerted by the departments concerned to provide jobs in public and private establishments and to promote self-employment, it has been decided to create more than 32,000 jobs for Omanis during 2021, among them 12,000 jobs in the government's civil and military establishments in accordance with the actual needs of different departments.

Also, within the context of the Royal directives of His Majesty the Sultan and as part of efforts made by government departments to find all means to support employment, various employment initiatives have been launched, reflecting the government's keenness to employ job-seekers and workers who were laid off in the backdrop of the current global economic circumstances that resulted in the shrinkage of the labour market worldwide, compounded by the negative impacts of coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

DETAILS ON P2



- 2,000** Jobs in government sector to work on temporary contracts
- RO 202.5** A cut-off monthly assistance from the Job Security Fund
- 1 MILLION** HOURS of part-time work in government establishments
- RO 200** As subsidy for the wages of fresh staff in private sector
- RO 202.5** A similar cut-off monthly assistance of for six months

Surge in Covid-19 inpatients

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The Sultanate saw a major surge in new hospital admissions of over 100 new inpatients in 24 hours.

Hundred and nine people were admitted to hospitals across the country, taking the total number of inpatients to 709, including 243 in intensive care units as there was no respite from new cases that were in line with the daily trends, with the Ministry of Health reporting 810 new infections of Covid-19 and 10 deaths. The recovery rate also dropped to 92.3 from around 93 per cent on Monday.

The total number of cases registered in the Sultanate has reached 212,038, including 2,284 deaths.

Most of the cases reported on Tuesday were from Muscat (405) and North Al Batinah (130). The capital also accounted for four deaths.

It may be noted that the number of hospital inpatients had dropped by 20 per cent from 833 at the start of this month to 664 as of May 20, and so is the number of ICU patients.

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ADMITTED TO HOSPITALS IN 24 HOURS

CONTRIBUTION

Meanwhile, Oman India Fertiliser Company (Omifco) has a made financial contribution to the procurement of vaccines.

"Within the framework of partnership and in recognition of social responsibility, Omifco presented a financial support of \$1 million to support the efforts of the Ministry of Health in purchasing and providing vaccines against Covid-19," a statement said.

VACCINATION

Officials from the Ministry of Education and head of the vaccination campaign visited several

a few centres in the Governorate of Muscat to oversee the readiness as the campaign to vaccinate Grade 12 students begins on Wednesday, ahead of their scheduled final examinations.

In cooperation with the Ministry of Health on Wednesday morning, the Ministry of Education will begin vaccination of Grade 12 students applying for the General Education Diploma examinations, including students of public and private schools, students at Islamic science institutes, special education schools, and other public education institutions.

Immunisation also includes teaching staff supervising the General Education Diploma, members of examination committees, observers and correctors, workers in examination centres, and test-takers. General Education Diploma and its level, and the employees of the Centre for Educational Measurement and Evaluation and Correction Centres, while taking all precautionary measures at all vaccination centres in the governorates.

BIDS FOR MANAGEMENT OF MUTTRAH FORT



The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has invited private companies and institutions who have technical and financial capabilities can apply for a competition for the lease, operation and management of Muttrah Fort and Al Bait Al Kabir in Muttrah, Governorate of Muscat. This is part of the ministry's efforts to build an integrated system for the management of monuments. Located on top of a rocky, narrow hill, Muttrah Fort stands tall facing the sea and inhaling the winds that waft the fragrant memory of ships gone by, ships that once sailed these azure waters. **DETAILS ON P3**

OVER 32,000 NEW JOBS FOR OMANIS THIS YEAR

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Also, within the context of the Royal directives of His Majesty the Sultan and as part of efforts made by government departments to find all means to support employment, various employment initiatives have been launched, reflecting the government's keenness to employ job-seekers and workers who were laid off in the backdrop of the current global economic circumstances that resulted in the shrinkage of the labour market worldwide, compounded by the negative impacts of coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

THE INITIATIVES PROVIDE

- FOR THE FOLLOWING
1. Generating a total of 2,000 employment opportunities in the government sector on the basis of temporary contracts, in accordance with the actual needs of government establishments

in different governorates in the Sultanate.

2. Providing a total of one million hours of part-time work in government establishments in different governorates. The Ministry of Labour will announce formalities and mechanisms for the same.
3. Subsidising the wages of fresh employees in private sector establishments by providing RO 200 towards the monthly wages of as many as 15,000 fresh employees (with the rest to be borne by the employers) for a period of two years. The Ministry of Labour will unveil the formalities and mechanisms of the same in June 2021.
4. Expending a cut-off monthly assistance from the Job Security Fund (JSF), to the tune of RO 202.5 for a period of six months, in favour of self-employed Omanis insured at the Public Authority for Social Insurance whose businesses were negatively impacted by the economic situation and those of similar standing. This cut-off monthly assistance benefits a total of 15,000 people.
5. Expending a similar cut-off monthly assistance of RO 202.5 for a period of six months, from the JSF in favour of laid-off Omani workers whose services were terminated in GCC states.

His Majesty the Sultan gave his Royal directives to the departments concerned to speed up the execution of these employment initiatives. — ONA



■ SAF JOBS FOR OMANI YOUTH



The Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) has stepped up efforts to provide a number of jobs for young Omanis in its divisions. As part of this, the Sultan Qaboos Naval Academy this week employed Omani youths, who joined the Academy to receive training and join the ranks of defence of their country. The step comes as part of the plans and programmes to accommodate job-seekers.

12,000 more jobs in the pipeline for nationals

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The Ministry of Labour is making unremitting efforts to provide job opportunities for citizens.

Stating this, a top official from the Ministry of Labour, said: "At the beginning of this year, we announced the intention to provide 32,000 job opportunities in the public and private sectors. By the end of the first quarter, the ministry was able to provide 10,000 jobs, of which 4,051 jobs were in the units of the state's administrative apparatus by replacing and creating new financial degrees."

The ministry has succeeded in providing 1,330 jobs in the Ministry of Health; 2,469 in the Ministry of Education; 115 in the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, and 92 at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, and other government institutions.

In addition, 51 job opportunities were generated in companies and institutions which fall under the supervision of the Public Services Authority, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, and others.

The ministry also set its sights on providing 12,000 jobs through replacement and employment in the private sector, 8 per cent of which are managerial positions, specialists and technicians. Its efforts have resulted in the appointment of 3,010 citizens in the sector for the first time at the end of last March, including 677 citizens with a qualification below a General Education Diploma, 909 citizens holding a GED and its equivalent, 390 citizens with university diplomas 1,011 with university degrees, and 23 with Master's and Doctoral degrees, the report said.

EXPAT NUMBERS

Meanwhile, the expatriate workforce in the country has

declined by 12.2 per cent to 1.4 million by the end of April, according to data published by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

It further says that as many as 40,500 workers were in the government sector, a fall of 23 per cent compared to the same period last year, while 1.1 million workers work in the private sector and 252,000 workers in the family sector.

The report suggests a decline in the number of job-seekers until April this year. The electronic census data for 2020 showed that the number of job-seekers at the end of last December

stood at 65,400 of whom 24,559 were males and 40,879 were females.

At the educational level, about 108 job-seekers are illiterate, 276 can read and write, 8,000 qualify for the general diploma, 22,000 have a higher education diploma, and 24,000 hold a Bachelor's diploma or higher.



Symposium on learning loss concludes



MUSCAT: The virtual symposium titled 'Learning Loss in the Coronavirus Pandemic: Effects and Solutions' concluded on Tuesday. The two-day symposium was organised by the Ministry of Education. It targeted as many as 700 participants representing teachers, administrators, supervisors, social and psychological specialists, students and parents from different governorates of the Sultanate.

The second day of the symposium began with six simultaneous sessions covering critical skills and analytical exams in tackling learning loss, roles of educational institutions and parents in addressing learning loss, tackling learning loss of special education students, training and vocational development in tackling learning loss, student needs for upcoming stage in psychological and social aspects and partnership in tackling learning loss.

At the closing session, heads of the six sessions reviewed briefings on the major proposals and recommendations made by the participants during the sessions. This symposium covered three main topics namely, "The causes and magnitude of learning



loss, and its effects due to the Covid-19 pandemic," "Local and international experiences and initiatives in assessing and following up on learning loss", and "Appropriate solutions and plans to address learning loss in the Sultanate."

The symposium sought to limit the learning loss, identify educational, psychological, and social priorities and needs, treatment methods, and the course of policies related in the next phase. It also aimed to find innovative and effective solutions, and to limit its short-term and long-term effects, as well as to highlight the roles of stakeholders from the educational field and the partners from the public and private sectors in addressing it.

In addition, the symposium sought to make use of the best local and international experiences and practices in evaluating and addressing Learning Loss, and identifying national priorities for the learning process in the next academic year 2021/2022. The closing day of the symposium was attended by members of the State Council and Majlis Ash-Shura, Education Under-Secretary and directors general of the ministry and educational directorates in the governorates. — ONA



Top priority to be given for rationalisation of spending

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Finance, represented by the Directorate General of Budget and Contracts, held this year's first meeting to review the financial performance indicators to measure the monthly performance of government departments.

The meeting also discussed preparations to draft the 2022 State Budget. The meeting saw the participation of directors general and directors of departments tasked with implementing the state budget at government units. The aim was to control government spending.

The meeting looked into quarterly financial reports, the expected monthly liquidity sheet due to be presented to the Ministry of Finance by government units with a view to enabling the monitoring of financial performance, rationalising spending and adjusting deficits by consulting Financial Circular No 1 on drafting the 2021 budget

estimate reports.

Discussions also covered the target reports and data, which were delivered electronically in accordance with the financial circular on preparation of 2022 state budget estimates to be discussed with the ministry before endorsing budgets (allocations), given the significance of financial planning and cash flows required for the 2022 budget.

The meeting laid emphasis on the drafting of broadsheets for the preparation of state budget estimates on par with the performance model set for units covered in the actual implementation stage, with effect from 2022.

Ahmed bin Mohammed al Hooti, Director of the State Budget Preparation and Follow-up at the Ministry of Finance, stressed the importance of government units' commitment to presenting financial sheets and their details electronically and on

Education Ministry begins evaluation of reading skills

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education will begin on Wednesday the implementation of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS 2021) in all governorates of the Sultanate.

PIRLS is an international evaluation study organised by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) to measure reading skills among fourth-grade students. This year is the third participation round for the Sultanate, respectively, after the 2011 and 2016 rounds.

A sample of schools was chosen to represent the Sultanate internationally in this study, with a total of 222 schools, of which 189 government schools, 17 private schools and 16 international schools from all educational directorates in the governorates.

The number of students participating in the actual application as a random sample in this study reached 6,381 fourth-grade students where 372 students participate from 15 schools in the Governorate of Dhofar and 232 students from 8 schools in the Governorate of Musandam. From the Governorate of Muscat, the number of participating students is 825 from 28 schools, 505 students participating from the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah. The Governorate of South Al Batinah participates with 653 students from 22 schools and the Governorate of Al Buraimi participates with a selected division from 10 different government schools where the number of students taking the test is 272 students. From the Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah, a total number of 340 students from 14 schools are participating in PIRLS 2021, alongside with 298 students from 10 schools from the Governorate of Al Dhahirah, 174 from 8 schools from the Governorate of Al Wusta, and 717 students from 24 schools from the



PIRLS is an international evaluation study organised by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement to measure reading skills among fourth-grade students

Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah.

It may be noted that the PIRLS 2021 aims to achieve several goals including providing countries with comparative international data, data on their national trends in reading literacy and writing among fourth-grade students, studying and analysing school systems to stand on its pros and cons, and collecting data and information about the home and school environment, and reading activities in the school by distributing and analysing the four questionnaires to identify the factors that are associated with high levels of literacy.



The study also seeks to identify the competencies of students in achieving goals set according to the reading standards, as well as to identify the percentage of differences between the performance of females and males, and between the different types of schools, and also to identify the factors associated with the acquisition of knowledge, and related to teaching methods, as well as school resources.

It also aims at highlighting

strengths and weaknesses in relation to students' literacy level which will provide decision-makers with adequate information on where the resources should be directed to improve early literacy, and how reading is taught, and the extent to which its time, methods, and materials are organised in schools. The study also seeks to compare the educational practices of the teachers of the participating countries with those of other countries. — ONA

Bids invited from companies for management of Muttrah Fort

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 25

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) has invited private companies and institutions that have the technical and financial capabilities to apply for a competition for the lease, operation, and employment of Muttrah Fort and Al Bait Al Kabir in Muttrah, Governorate of Muscat.

An application to purchase the brochure containing the terms and conditions and the specifications can be had from the Financial Affairs Department of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (Second Floor) during official business hours, starting May 30 until June 3.

Documents can be purchased for RO 25 and the last date for submitting bids will be 1 pm on June 26.

The ministry has intensified efforts to build an integrated system for the management of monuments.



Located on top of a rocky, narrow hill, Muttrah Fort stands tall facing the sea and inhaling the winds that waft the fragrant memory of ships gone by, ships that once sailed these azure waters.

The fort seems as if it were the only passage connecting Muttrah and Muscat. Currently, it consists of three circular towers: A huge one sitting on the summit and the remaining smaller two are located

one at the first point in the West, and the other, which still houses one of the old cannons, to the north of the fort near the large tower.

The historic Muttrah Fort overlooks the Port Sultan Qaboos, Muttrah Souq, and neighbouring tourist spots. Visitors to the fort of Muttrah can reach the area by car via Muttrah Souq towards the office of Wali of Muttrah and then turning right towards the fort.



DESIGNING FOR THE FUTURE

KABEER YOUSUF

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It is essential to stay positive amid negativity and emit optimism around to prompt others to dream for a better tomorrow.

'Life after Covid-19 series' is one of the few innovative events recorded during the pandemic that radiated positivity. The furniture manufacturers have come out with the idea to make the 'new normal' life easy yet dynamic.

The furniture manufacturers have almost finalised as to how life will look and feel in the post-Covid era. These pieces of art in wood and plastic are testimony to their perception of sitting and working in the coming days.

They carried many studies to draw strategists. Pre-pandemic, the organisations were craving holistic solutions. The furniture manufacturers took up the challenges of designing meaningful workspaces for the present while offering settings in an uncertain

and fast-changing future way of life.

The thousands of hours spent working with companies of every size trying to help them navigate the pandemic and prepare for post-pandemic work environments have proved fruitful, and the results are forming part of the 'new normal' life.

A collection of essential pieces that span height-adjustable workstations, mobile tables, movable walls, counters and checkout points with sufficient distancing technology, storage trolleys, and more, these designs directly respond to how and where people want to work in the future. These aesthetic designs encourage a re-examination of traditional workplace design while allowing employees to build, test and recreate their spaces in accordance with the post-Covid lifestyle.

It is assumed that by enabling people to experiment with space, employees will gain confidence as they can discover solutions needed for today and adjust themselves

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rapidly if needed. These designs are also expected to mitigate the risks of an uncertain future for organisations yet empowers employees to create optimal spaces to suit their work.

"With people forced to work outside of offices, traditional means of workplace planning have been challenged by the unpredictability of how people will work now and in the future", says Ryan Anderson, Vice-President of Global Research and Insights at Herman Miller, which is in the forefront of such a revolution.

"We are planning to design such ergonomic furniture including those required for office as well as home and keeping in touch with the present pandemic world and apost-Covid lifestyle", says Manohar Guruvar, a furniture designer in Muscat.

"Such artistic pieces would be in demand in the days to come as there is a huge lifestyle change, and we are accustomed to the little changes to furniture that

we see in every office around us", adds Ajitha Malayalappuzha, Leons International Furniture that imports from a cross section of countries like Netherlands, Thailand, India and China.

"Future offices will be a place where the receptionist and the visitors will be seeing each other but across a permanent transparent divider and deals will be struck maintaining a safe social distance from each other. As far as homes are concerned, future furniture that allows sufficient light and air pass through and this furniture are under consideration", she added.

They admitted that these designs result from a global understanding of the physical and cultural changes that had started to shape the future of work. The strategic teams have made visits around the world to understand the entire industry ecosystem. The suite of products available in the workspace collection is created after identifying the signals of the future.

Treasury Bills worth RO 35 million issued



MUSCAT: A tender of Government Treasury Bills, issue number 538, worth RO 35 million was announced this week. Treasury Bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds.

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) acts as the Issue Manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (Repo).

The results of the said issue are as follow, the total value of the allotted Treasury bills amounted to RO 35 million, for a maturity period of 91 days, from 26th May 2021 until 25th August 2021. The

average accepted price reached 99.806 for every RO 100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at 99.805 per RO 100.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 0.77641 per cent and 0.77792 per cent, respectively. It may be noted that the interest rate on the Repo operations with CBO is 0.5 per cent while the discount rate on the Treasury Bills Discounting Facility with CBO is 0.75 per cent. Furthermore, Treasury Bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates.

Additionally, the Government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures. — ONA

Call to hold blood donation camps

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The Central Blood Bank in Bausher has called for conducting blood donation camps by public and private organisations and reach out to the maximum number of donors to help the bank secure enough blood units.

“Any NGO or governmental organisation registered with the Ministry of Social Development or any company that has legal entity can conduct a blood donation drive in coordination with the Central Blood Bank,” said Dr Zainab bint Salim al Araimiyah, Director of Blood Banks Services at the Ministry of Health.

The Central Blood Bank, located in Bausher, caters to various hospitals across the country. The demand for the same has been high. Patients who need a blood transfusion, people needing blood owing to multiple diseases have to depend upon the blood supply from time to time.

However, blood supply compared to the demand is very low, especially during the pandemic as fewer donors turn up to donate blood due to apprehensions.

“Any adult who hasn’t travelled out of Oman in the last four months can donate blood at the Central Blood Bank in Bausher,



and all he or she has to do is just making a booking so that Covid-19 protocols can be followed,” added Dr Zainab.

There is a need for 600 to 700 blood units at the blood bank per week while the supply is very less. The supply has come down by 40 per cent and is likely to continue owing to the pandemic. Many donors cannot donate blood for some reason or the other during the pandemic. The reasons include individuals who tested positive for Covid-19 or are afraid of contracting the virus if they are exposed to medical instruments, which is, in fact, an unfounded fear.

Any NGO or governmental organisation registered with the Ministry of Social Development or any company that has legal entity can conduct a blood donation drive in coordination with the Central Blood Bank

DR ZAINAB AL ARAIMI
Director of Blood Banks Services

“We urge all associations and NGOs to spread awareness among the members to donate and take part in the national life-saving mission in the wake of shortage in the supply,” she added.

She further said that anyone who is not suffering from any communicable disease or who is not chronically ill could donate blood at the blood bank in Bausher from 8 am to 8 pm during working days and on Fridays from 3pm to 8pm.

Those who wish to donate blood can WhatsApp on 94555648 or call 24591255 to fix up a time slot for blood donation.



Role of oil prices in future of GCC economies discussed

MUSCAT: An international conference about the role of oil prices in the future of economies of GCC states kicked off here on Tuesday. A select group of local, regional and international academics took part in the two-day conference, organised by Mazoon College.

Sayyid Sulaiman bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Deputy Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers, who chaired the opening session, underlined the significance of the conference in studying the causes behind the slump in global oil prices and alternatives to come out of the ensuing economic crisis.

Sayyid Sulaiman said that the government has exerted tremendous efforts and undertook measures to curb the impacts of the crisis, including the rationalisation of government spending.

Dr Juma bin Saleh al Ghailani, Board Chairman of Mazoon College, who chairs the conference, said that waves of high oil prices lured oil producing countries into increasing government expenditure and augmenting spending in volumes. This, he observed, led to the emergence of major economic crises that left those countries



incapable of addressing the steep decline in oil prices in the global market. Their negative impacts crippled the overall economic mobility. Accordingly, oil producing countries, GCC states in particular, have to reconsider their financial policies and endorse more rational procedures that could curb the impacts of fluctuating oil prices on development plans and minimise dependence on oil and gas revenues.

To this effect, Sayyid Sulaiman exhorted countries to enhance commercial and economic exchange during a foreseeable stage of fluctuating oil prices in the international markets.

He referred to the great technological progress in the world which, he said,



encourages a policy of self-sufficiency through successful investment in alternative energy fields. Scientific progress in the field of alternative energy offers the best option, away from the policy of oil pricing under the leadership of Opec, Sayyid Sulaiman said.

Then, the first session of the conference began, with wide-ranging participation of academics from Sultan Qaboos University, the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Aarhus University of Denmark, and University of Technology, Sydney, Australia. A number of research papers themed around the relationship between energy and development were presented.

— ONA

2,500 authorised ticket resellers for Dubai Expo



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More than 2,500 online travel agents, tour operators, hotel groups, and airlines have signed as Authorised Ticket Resellers (ATRs) for Expo 2020 Dubai.

Expo 2020 announced at Arabian Travel Market 2021 that it had doubled the number of ATRs since before the onset of the pandemic, offering visitors once-in-a-lifetime experiences across a wide range of budgets and preferences.

The ATRs represent more than 100 countries, covering all key markets, which will ensure that visitors of all ages, nationalities and interests can make the most of their visit to Expo 2020 Dubai with value-added travel packages.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism will be working with various government agencies and travel companies to encourage visitors to Dubai Expo 2020 to spend a few days in the Sultanate.

“We are working on a strategy so that visitors to Dubai for the expo would have a three-day stay in Oman. There have been meetings with the representatives of Oman Tourism overseas. ROP will also be playing its role,” sources at the Ministry of Heritage

and Tourism.

In normal circumstances, to encourage tourism between two countries, a traveller with a tourist visa of Dubai can enter Oman on the same visa for three weeks, provided his Dubai visa is also valid for three weeks. No fee will be charged in Oman as fees are only to be paid to the relevant authorities in Dubai.

The most diverse World Expo in history will have something for every visitor, including exceptional entertainment and culinary experiences, technology, architecture and culture, as well as presenting the world’s most impactful global incubator for new ideas and a powerful launchpad for business.

With less than five months to go until Expo 2020 opens its doors, Expo’s tourism, hospitality, travel, and meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) partners across the globe will support all visitors as they join the making of the world, from October 1 to March 31.

Visitors to the Oman pavilion will pass through five zones, illuminating how frankincense contributed to Omani advancements in transportation, knowledge, manufacturing, sustainability and exploration.

WhatsApp
blocks some
Palestinian
journos

GAZA CITY: Messaging app WhatsApp has blocked the accounts of dozens of Palestinian journalists following this month's fighting between Israel and Gaza rulers Hamas, reporters said.

Shortly after a ceasefire went into effect on Friday ending 11 days of deadly conflict, two journalists in AFP's Gaza City bureau received notices from WhatsApp in Arabic informing them their accounts had been blocked.

Other journalists, in Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank as well as Gaza, said their accounts had also been blocked.

A crew from Qatar-based satellite news channel Al Jazeera said their accounts had later been restored after they lodged complaints with WhatsApp owner Facebook.

The vice president of the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, Tahseen al-Astall, said "around 100 journalists" in Gaza had seen their accounts blocked. — AFP

US pledges aid to rebuild Gaza

TEL AVIV: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken pledged his country's help in rebuilding the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, though he stressed that the aid must not benefit Hamas, which rules the area.

The announcement is part of Blinken's goal during his trip to the Middle East — set to last through Thursday — to help support a ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinian Territories that has been in place since Friday.

He announced the US' "significant contribution" to Gaza after a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Blinken also stressed that tensions in the West Bank and East Jerusalem also needed to be dialled down and advocated renewing relations with the Palestinian Authority (PA). He is scheduled to meet with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah later on Tuesday.

He also plans to meet with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Jordanian King Abdullah II this week.

The US State Department said before Blinken set off that the goal of the trip was to help cement the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, the de facto rulers of the



Palestinian volunteers and municipal workers clear the rubble of the Hanadi compound, recently destroyed by Israeli strikes, in Gaza City's Rimal district, on Tuesday. — AFP

Gaza Strip.

Israel is concerned that any aid deliveries to the blockaded coastal territory could be misused to arm Hamas, as happened after the last Gaza war in 2014. According to media reports, a plan now calls for reconstruction efforts to be

conducted more through the PA and to leave Hamas out of the loop. This would reduce the risk of abuse and strengthen the PA vis-a-vis Hamas.

Israel and militants in Gaza have so far been keeping to an agreed ceasefire that went into

effect early Friday and came about after more than a week of military escalation. In the wake of the recent conflict, there have been significantly more violent incidents in the West Bank.

A young Palestinian man was shot and killed during a raid

by Israeli security forces in the West Bank in the early hours of Tuesday.

A knife attack in Jerusalem, near the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood, on Monday left two Israelis injured, while the attacker was shot dead. — dpa

Young Syrians come of age
in a decade of conflict

DAMASCUS: Trainee flight attendant Ghenwa, engineering student Ali and electronic music DJ Jawad are among a generation of young Syrians to have come of age during the war.

They live in the capital Damascus, which was spared the intense bombing raids that destroyed opposition bastions such as Aleppo but life for the twenty-somethings is far from normal.

A decade of conflict, Western sanctions, a financial collapse in next-door Lebanon, and now, the global pandemic, have battered Syria's economy and a currency crash has sparked shortages of essential goods like wheat and fuel in government territory.

Economic hardships aside, their access to the rest of the world has also been severely curtailed, leaving them little chance of leaving the country for work or leisure. The freedom to travel was the main reason Ghenwa decided to train as an air hostess, having dropped out of university where



Ghenwa, 20, a trainee flight attendant, poses for a photograph in her room in Damascus. — Reuters

she was studying architecture.

"I'm Syrian and I can't travel at the moment except through this opportunity," said Ghenwa, who like the others who spoke to Reuters for this story used only her first name for security reasons.

"It's the only opportunity that makes me feel I can move faster ... to feel the freedom of borders."

Away from her hometown, Sweida in southern Syria, Ghenwa

has had to work multiple jobs to support herself, doing everything from working with children with cancer to modelling.

She finds a sense of release with her friends who share a passion for electronic music.

"We are hungry for happiness," said 24-year-old Jawad, an electronic music DJ who returned in 2019 to a Syria he barely recognised, after spending the war years in Dubai for safety.

Iran approves top judge for polls,
bars several hopefuls

DUBAI: Iran's election watchdog has approved the candidacy of judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi in next month's presidential election, state television reported on Tuesday, while disqualifying some of his main rivals including former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The move is likely to boost the prospects of Raisi, a close ally of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. But it may further dent the clerical rulers' hopes of a high turnout in the June 18 vote, amid rising discontent over an economy crippled by US sanctions.

As well as Ahmadinejad, the hardline-led Guardian Council barred former parliament speaker Ali Larijani, a moderate conservative, and pragmatist First Vice-President Eshaq Jahangiri, an ally of outgoing president Hassan Rouhani.

Rouhani and his moderate allies have blamed most of Iran's economic woes on US sanctions and given top priority to talks aimed at reviving Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers,



Ebrahim Raisi, Chief Justice of Iran, shows his identification document as he registers as a candidate for the presidential election at the Interior Ministry, in Tehran. — Reuters file photo

which former US President Donald Trump quit.

But allies of Khamenei have placed the responsibility squarely on the government, and insisted that Washington cannot be trusted to fulfil any accord.

The Council approved just seven candidates out of 40 who met its basic criteria — in turn a small fraction of the 600 who had registered.

They included former chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili, a conservative; former Revolutionary Guards chief Mohsen Rezaei, a frequent

The Council approved just seven candidates out of 40 who met its basic criteria — in turn a small fraction of the 600 who had registered

presidential candidate; and current Central Bank governor Abdolnaser Hemmati, a low-profile moderate.

Even Raisi appeared to object to the large number of disqualifications.

"Since yesterday evening, when I was informed of the results, ... I have made contacts and I am holding consultations to make the election scene more competitive and participatory," Raisi said on Twitter.

Larijani, who had voiced support for the nuclear deal and talks to revive it, said he accepted the Council's ruling.

"Now that the election process has been conducted in this way, I have done my duty before God and my dear nation," he tweeted.

— Reuters

SHORT TAKES

ANKARA

Poland to buy Turkish drones

Poland will purchase Turkish armed drones, becoming the first NATO and EU member state to buy the hardware from Ankara, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced on Monday.

The deal will be a boost for the Turkish defence sector, which Erdogan has said should meet the country's own military hardware requirements and export to allies abroad.

The sale was announced during a state visit to Ankara by Poland's President Andrzej Duda,



who will visit Istanbul on Tuesday.

Erdogan hailed the drones, saying "we are one of the best three, four countries in the world" for the hardware.

AMSTERDAM

Call for more charges against Darfur suspect

Human rights lawyer Amal Clooney on Tuesday argued that prosecutors should consider additional charges of sexual violence for a man accused of atrocities including rape, torture and murder during the 2003-2004 conflict in Darfur.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) is holding hearings on whether to confirm 31 charges against Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-Al-Rahman, who prosecutors say was responsible for atrocities as senior leader of



thousands of pro-government "Janjaweed" fighters in Sudan.

Prosecutor said Rahman was implicated in over 300 murders and forced 40,000 civilians from their homes.

ROME

Trial sought for Egyptian officers over Regeni murder

Italian prosecutors asked a judge on Tuesday to have four senior members of Egypt's security services sent for trial over their suspected role in the disappearance and murder of student Giulio Regeni in Cairo in 2016.

Regeni, a postgraduate student at Britain's Cambridge University, disappeared in the Egyptian capital in January 2016. His body was found almost a week later and a post mortem examination showed he had been tortured before his death. Egyptian police and offi-



cials have denied any involvement in Regeni's killing. Italian and Egyptian prosecutors investigated the case together, but the two sides later fell out and came to very different conclusions.

In brief

■ COLOMBO



SRI LANKA EVACUATES CREW FROM BURNING CONTAINER SHIP

Rescuers have evacuated all crew from a container ship off the coast of Sri Lanka as a fire on board intensified and two people were injured, a spokesman for the Sri Lankan Navy said on Tuesday.

An explosion was reported from within the vessel, Navy spokesman Indika De Silva said, adding that an air force helicopter was using dry chemical powder to douse the fire.

The *MV X-Press Pearl*, a container ship sailing with a Singaporean flag and carrying cosmetics and chemicals including 25 tonnes of nitric acid, was anchored off Colombo when a container caught fire on Friday, officials said.

■ MEDAN



INDONESIA ARRESTS FOUR FOR STEALING VACCINES

Four people have been arrested in Indonesia for allegedly stealing Covid-19 vaccines marked for prisoners and selling them to the public, authorities said on Tuesday.

The suspects took more than 1,000 doses made by China's Sinovac from the prisoners' quota, offering them to buyers in the capital Jakarta and in North Sumatra's Medan city for around 250,000 rupiah (\$17) each.

The four arrested included a doctor at a prison in Medan and a local health official, police said. They could face a life sentence if convicted under Indonesia's anti-corruption law.

■ MANILA



COVID DEATH TOLL TOPS 20,000 IN PHILIPPINES AS GOVT URGES JABS

The Philippines' Covid-19 death toll topped 20,000 on Tuesday, as authorities stepped up calls for Filipinos to put aside their vaccine worries and get the jab. The Department of Health reported 36 new deaths from Covid-19, pushing the national death toll to 20,019.

With new daily cases still in the thousands, authorities reiterated calls for eligible members of the population to get inoculated now — regardless of the brand of the vaccine.

The government is so far giving shots to priority groups of healthcare workers, the elderly and those with pre-existing conditions.

India logs lowest Covid cases in six weeks

NEW DELHI: India's official tally of daily infections of coronavirus fell to the lowest in nearly six weeks in the past 24 hours, offering hope that a devastating second wave is ebbing, but government leaders said shortages of vaccines were a big concern.

Barely 3 per cent of the country's 1.3 billion people have been vaccinated, the lowest rate among the 10 countries with the most Covid-19 cases, leaving India and its ill-equipped healthcare system vulnerable to a potential third wave, experts say.

The Serum Institute of India, which is supplying the AstraZeneca vaccine, and local firm Bharat Biotech which is providing Covaxin, have both said they are ramping up production but the supply remains way short of the millions of doses India needs.

On Tuesday, the country posted 196,427 new coronavirus cases over the last 24 hours, its lowest daily rise in infections since April 14, and less than half the 414,188 peak reported on May 7. The country's overall officially recorded case load since the start of the pandemic now stands at 26.95 million.



A doctor checks a patient for mucormycosis symptoms using a slit lamp at a hospital in Mumbai on Tuesday. — Reuters

There are serious concerns that many new infections are not being reported, due to a dearth of testing in the countryside, where the virus has spread to from the cities.

Deaths due to Covid-19 amounted to 3,511 in the last 24 hours, bringing the total since the pandemic first stuck over a year ago to 307,231, according to health ministry data.

Experts believe that grossly underestimates the actual toll as only people who have tested positive are counted, whereas

many victims were never tested.

The *Economist* magazine's excess-deaths model estimates that around a million people have died of Covid-19 in India so far, way above the 590,240 in the United States, which is the worst hit country based on official counts.

In desperation, several Indian state governments and even cities such as Mumbai have launched global tenders or sought expressions of interest from firms such as Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson and Johnson for urgent

Barely 3 per cent of the country's 1.3 billion people have been vaccinated, the lowest rate among the 10 countries with the most Covid-19 cases

supplies.

But Delhi's deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia said the three firms told them they were in touch with the federal Indian government and that they will not be dealing with state level authorities.

Sisodia blamed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government for mishandling vaccine procurement and not moving fast enough to secure supplies for the country.

"It is a global blunder," said Sisodia, whose Aam Aadmi Party is bitterly opposed to Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The northern state of Punjab also said over the weekend its efforts to directly source supplies had been rebuffed by the foreign vaccine manufacturers. — Reuters

Two million rushed to shelters as India braces for Yas

KOLKATA: A powerful cyclone headed for eastern India on Tuesday, forcing the evacuation of nearly two million people just a week after another huge storm claimed at least 155 lives on the west coast.

Cyclone Yaas in the Bay of Bengal is expected to slam into West Bengal and Odisha states around midday on Wednesday, the India Meteorological Department said, and could bring winds of up to 165 kilometres (100 miles) per hour.

Experts say the warming of ocean waters due to climate change has led to an increase in the frequency and intensity of such storms.

Nearly two million people



A boy drinks water at a shelter in Digha near Kolkata on Tuesday. — AFP

living along India's east coast are being moved to shelters, officials said on Tuesday, and the storm has also disrupted efforts to

combat the country's devastating Covid-19 outbreak.

Some vaccination centres in districts under threat as well

as the capital Kolkata would suspend operations, officials said, and efforts were under way to ensure the supply of oxygen and medicines to hospitals during the storm.

Some 1.4 million people were moved away from coastal districts in neighbouring Odisha, with thousands of disaster and relief personnel deployed, local media reported.

Officials in Bangladesh, which lies to the east of West Bengal, said they did not expect the storm to hit the delta nation.

The Bay of Bengal has conditions favourable to the development of cyclones, including high sea surface temperatures. — AFP

Australia to close embassy in Afghanistan

KABUL: Australia on Tuesday abruptly announced it will shutter its embassy in Afghanistan this week, expressing fears over the "increasingly uncertain security environment" in Kabul as foreign troops withdraw.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the facility would close as an "interim measure" on May 28 — in just three days — "in light of the imminent international military withdrawal from Afghanistan".

The United States and allied forces are in the final stages of withdrawing their remaining troops from Afghanistan, ending America's longest-ever war, but heralding an uncertain future for a nation in the tightening grip of Taliban militants.

Around 80 Australian troops are also leaving, and without that small contingent and the larger US force as back-up, Morrison said there was an "increasingly uncertain security environment".

"The government has been advised that security arrangements could not be provided to support our ongoing diplomatic presence," he said in a statement.

The elected government in Kabul and Afghan security services remain fragile despite two decades of foreign capacity building, and their success is far from clear without continued US military support.

Western diplomats and military officials have been scrambling to work out how to provide security for their future civilian presence in Afghanistan with fears growing of a Taliban comeback.

"The only incentive for foreign embassies to remain is the humanitarian work that they are involved in, but if their personnel are endangered then there is no point in remaining here," a foreign defence official based in Kabul said.

— AFP

Hong Kong warns it may throw away vaccine doses

HONG KONG: Hong Kong warned on Tuesday it may soon have to throw away coronavirus vaccine doses because they are approaching their expiry date and not enough people have signed up for the jabs.

Hong Kong is one of the few places in the world fortunate enough to have secured more than enough doses to inoculate its entire population of 7.5 million people.

But swirling distrust of the government as it stamps out dissent — combined with online misinformation and a lack of urgency in the comparatively virus-free city — has led to entrenched vaccine hesitancy and a dismal inoculation drive.

On Tuesday, a member of the government's vaccine task force warned that Hong Kongers "only have a three-month window" before the city's first batch of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines go out



A trolley carrying Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 coronavirus vaccines being transported to a warehouse after being unloaded from a Cathay Pacific cargo plane at Hong Kong International Airport in Hong Kong. — AFP file photo

of date.

"The vaccines all have expiry dates," Thomas Tsang, a former controller of the Centre for

Health Protection, told RTHK radio.

"They cannot be used after the expiry date and the community

vaccination centres for BioNTech will, according to present plans, cease operating after September,"

Tsang said it was "just not

right" that Hong Kong was sitting on an unused pile of doses while the rest of the world "is scrambling for vaccines".

And he warned new doses were unlikely to be delivered.

"What we have is probably all we have for the rest of the year," he said.

Hong Kong bought 7.5 million doses each of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and China's Sinovac.

The latter has yet to be approved by the World Health Organization but was fast-tracked for use by city health regulators.

It also pre-ordered 7.5 million doses of AstraZeneca jabs but scrapped that deal earlier in the year, with authorities saying they planned to use the money for second-generation vaccines next year.

So far just 19 per cent of the population has received one dose of either vaccine, while 14 per cent has received two doses. — Reuters

Airlines shun Belarus, opposition leader says journalist tortured

KYIV/VILNIUS: Airlines shunned Belarus's air space on Tuesday and Belarusian planes could soon be banned from Europe, potentially isolating the land-locked country apart from its border with Russia after it forced down a jetliner and arrested a dissident journalist.

A video released overnight showed 26-year-old Roman Protasevich confessing to having organised anti-government demonstrations. On Sunday he was pulled off the passenger plane that was forced to land in the Belarusian capital Minsk.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the video made for distressing viewing and exiled opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya said that the video left no doubt that Protasevich had been tortured.

"He said that he was treated lawfully, but he's clearly beaten and under pressure. There is no doubt that he was tortured. He was taken hostage", she told a news conference in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius.

Belarus has not commented on the torture allegation but has consistently denied abusing detainees.

Protasevich and a 23-year-old

NATO CHIEF CALLS INCIDENT 'STATE HIJACKING'; EU DRAWING UP NEW SANCTIONS ON BELARUS

student travelling with him were arrested after their Ryanair flight was escorted by a Belarusian warplane while flying from Greece to Lithuania.

Western powers have widely condemned the incident, which Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg described on Tuesday as a "state hijacking".

Belarusian state media have reported that President Alexander Lukashenko personally ordered the flight to be intercepted. Belarus says it was responding to a bomb scare that later proved to be a false alarm. The UN agency ICAO has said the incident may have violated the foundational treaty governing international civil aviation, the 1944 Chicago Convention.

At least three other people disembarked the flight in Minsk,



Belarus opposition figure Pavel Severinets smiles from the defendant's cage at a courthouse in the town of Mogilev, some 200 km east of Minsk, on May 25, 2021, as he and six fellow co-defendants activists were sentenced to jail terms of four to seven years in a trial held behind closed doors, after being found guilty of taking part in "mass unrest", referring to the historic protests that erupted after a disputed presidential election last August. — AFP

assumed by Western countries to have been spies who had helped coordinate an operation to capture Protasevich.

One Lithuanian official told Reuters that the three passengers who disembarked included two Belarusian citizens and one Greek citizen. Belarusian state TV on Monday broadcast interviews with the trio.

European Union leaders at a summit on Monday called for airlines based in the 27-member bloc to halt flights over Belarusian

air space, which is along a major corridor connecting Europe and Asia and earns hard currency from overflight rights.

Lufthansa, KLM, SAS, Air France, LOT and Singapore Airlines were among carriers that announced they would stop flying over Belarus.

The EU leaders also directed officials to draw up unspecified new sanctions against Belarus, and to work out a way to ban Belarusian airlines from the bloc's skies.

If all such measures are fully implemented, flights may soon be able to reach Belarus only by passing over its eastern border with its close ally Russia.

"If we let this go, tomorrow Alexander Lukashenko will go further and do something even more arrogant, more cruel", Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said in a statement. **VIDEO TAPED 'CONFESSION'**

Lukashenko, whose security services crushed months of pro-democracy demonstrations last year after an election opponents said was rigged, has so far shrugged off Western sanctions, which mostly consist of blacklists barring various officials from travelling or doing business in the United States and EU.

Politicians in the West have called for tougher measures that might isolate the country from the international financial system or bar its exports. But they have failed to influence the behaviour of Lukashenko, who enjoys unwavering financial and security support from Russia, which considers the Belarusian frontier with Nato its first line of defence.

Russia has said it is still too early to comment on the Ryanair incident, while accusing Western

countries of hypocrisy and noting that a Bolivian presidential plane was diverted to Austria in 2013 after reports it was carrying US intelligence leaker Edward Snowden.

Moscow has also denied suggestions by Western politicians that it may have assisted its ally Belarus in the operation.

During Lukashenko's crackdown on dissent since last August's presidential election, nearly all opposition figures have been driven into exile or jailed, many on charges of organising demonstrations, which the government describes as terrorism. Lukashenko has denied electoral fraud.

In the video released overnight, Protasevich can be seen seated at a desk in a dark hooded sweatshirt.

"I can state that I don't have any health issues, including diseases of the heart or any other organs. Police officers are treating me properly and according to the law", he says. "Also, I now continue to cooperate with the investigation and have confessed to organising mass protests in Minsk"

A number of his allies swiftly wrote on social media that the video was evidence that he was under coercion. — Reuters

Countries urge deeper probe of Covid origins

GENEVA: The United States and other countries called on Tuesday for a more in-depth investigation of the pandemic origins, after an international mission to China earlier this year proved inconclusive.

Addressing the World Health Organization's main annual meeting of member states, representatives from several countries stressed the continued need to solve the mystery of how Covid-19 first began spreading among humans.

"We underscore the importance of a robust comprehensive and expert-led inquiry into the origins of Covid-19", US representative Jeremy Konyndyk told the World Health Assembly (WHA).

Australia, Japan and Portugal

The report said the virus jumping from bats to humans via an intermediate animal was the most probable scenario, while it said a theory involving the virus leaking from a laboratory was 'extremely unlikely'

were among other countries to call for more progress on the investigation, while the British representative urged for any probe to be "timely, expert-driven and grounded in robust science".

Determining how the virus that causes Covid-19 began

spreading is seen as vital to preventing future outbreaks.

But a long-delayed report by the team of international experts sent to Wuhan and their Chinese counterparts drew no firm conclusions on the origins of the pandemic.

Instead, they ranked a number of hypotheses according to how likely they believed they were.

The report said the virus jumping from bats to humans via an intermediate animal was the most probable scenario, while it said a theory involving the virus leaking from a laboratory was "extremely unlikely".

After the report was released, however, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus insisted all theories remained on the table. — AFP

■ MAN DIES TRAPPED INSIDE DINOSAUR STATUE



MADRID: A 40-year-old man died after becoming trapped inside a large statue of a dinosaur in a Barcelona suburb, Spanish police said on Tuesday. It is not clear why the man went inside the decorative stegosaurus located outside a disused cinema in Santa Coloma de Gramenet, but there is no suspicion of foul play, said a spokeswoman for the regional police force, the Mossos d'Esquadra. Spanish media reported that a father and his son out playing in the area noticed a strange smell coming from the papier-mache figure and alerted the authorities. Firefighters removed the man's body, which was inside one of the legs of the dinosaur. According to local media, police suspect the man – who had been reported missing by his family – had entered the statue to sleep there or to try to retrieve something, such as his mobile phone, and became stuck. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BAMAKO

Mali vice-president seizes power

Mali's interim vice-president, Colonel Assimi Goita, said on Tuesday that he had seized power after the transitional president and prime minister failed to consult him about the formation of a new government.

He said elections would be held next year as planned.

President Bah Ndaw and Prime Minister Moctar Ouane were arrested and taken to a military base outside the capital on Monday evening, prompt-



ing swift condemnation from international powers, some of which called it an "attempted coup".

He said elections would be held next year as planned.

WASHINGTON

US closes in on 50% vaccination rate

More than half of all American adults have been vaccinated against Covid-19, the White House said, roughly six weeks before US President Biden's July 4 goal of a 70 per cent inoculation rate.

The halfway mark comes as federal, state and local leaders press ahead with delivering Covid-19 shots to people who have not yet received them, while also battling vaccination hesitancy, fears and misinformation.



"Now, with another week left in May, half of all US adults are fully vaccinated", White House senior Covid-19 adviser Andy Slavitt tweeted overnight.

ROME

Mount Etna erupts, sending ash, smoke 4,000 metres over Sicily

The Etna volcano on the Italian island of Sicily has erupted again, sending plumes of ash and thick smoke up to 4,000 metres into the sky on Tuesday, the National Institute of Geophysics and Volcanology (INGV) said.

The summit of the 3,300-metre-high mountain was already lit up in the early hours of Tuesday as lava shot metres high into the night sky during an eruption.

The INGV recently recorded additional activity at the volcano.



Stromboli, on the volcanic island of the same name in north-eastern Sicily, also recently erupted at the weekend.

The lava flows there at times reached the coast.



AL WAHAIBI TO TEAM UP WITH AL RAWAHI IN JORDAN RALLY

HAMED AL WAHAIBI MAKES DRAMATIC RETURN AFTER NINE YEARS

AMMAN (JORDAN): Hamed al Wahaibi makes a dramatic return to international motorsport competition when he joins forces with young Abdullah al Rawahi to form a two-car Oman Rally Team at this weekend's Jordan Rally.

The second round of the 2021 FIA Middle East Rally Championship has attracted 13 teams and competitors from eight nations. They will tackle two days of demanding gravel special stages in the Dead Sea and Mount Nebo areas of Jordan on Friday and Saturday.

Al Wahaibi was one of the fastest drivers in the Middle East during his heyday in the late 1990s and early noughties and won numerous special stages during ambitious rallying programmes that also stretched to the FIA World Rally Championship.

But the Omani has not competed in the regional rally series since finishing fourth in the 2011 Dubai International Rally in a Mitsubishi Lancer

Evolution X, although he did tackle two events in the Sultanate of Oman the following year in a WMS-built Toyota Yaris as part of a youth development programme with Ulster navigator Allan Harryman and ran a Mitsubishi on three national rallies in Oman, winning all three.

Al Wahaibi has been testing on gravel stages in Oman to regain the pace and rhythm he showed for many years and has recruited the services of Austrian female navigator Ilka Minor to sit alongside him in Jordan.

The 46-year-old is one of the most experienced female navigators in the world and has guided an impressive list of drivers, including Henning Solberg, Manfred Stohl and Evgeny Novikov. This year she has already finished 26th and 21st overall in the Monte-Carlo and Croatian rallies with Johannes Keferböck.

Al Wahaibi, 53, will drive a Motortune-run Škoda Fabia 1.6 with logistical support

from Asyad Express, an Omani delivery and logistics company, WMS, Sandan (a new industrial area near Muscat) and Pirelli.

"At this stage, I am not here to win against Nasser (Saleh al Attiyah)," admitted Al Wahaibi. "He's in a car every week and has been there for so long. He knows the stages so well. I am here aiming to gain as much experience as possible. My year is next year. That's the plan."

"I've come out of retirement with a different mindset. Now I am really enjoying the time in the car. It feels great to be back behind the wheel. I realise I have been out of touch for the last nine years and it will take some time for me to get back in the groove. I am proud to be representing Oman for my return."

Al Wahaibi first tackled a WRC event in the United Kingdom back in 1997 and finished as the runner-up in the 1999 Production WRC behind Gustavo Trelles of Uruguay. He last competed in the WRC in



Abdullah al Rawahi discusses tactics for Jordan

Japan in 2005.

He has yet to win a round of the MERC, but came within a few hundred metres of winning the Jordan Rally in 2004, before a cruel engine failure handed the win to local driver Amjad Farrah on the final super special stage.

Al Wahaibi's best finishes to date in the MERC were as runner-up in Oman in 1998 and third overall in Abu Dhabi, Jordan and Dubai in 1997.

Team-mate Al Rawahi, 24, is one of the most improved

drivers in regional rallying and can call upon the experience of local navigator Ata al Hmoud in Jordan, himself a winner of the inaugural Jordan Baja on a motorcycle.

Al Rawahi graduated from a Subaru Impreza in the MERC2 category to driving an M-Sport-built Ford Fiesta R5 prepared by Motortune. Last season he finished second and 10th on rounds of the regional series in Oman and Cyprus and reverted to the Subaru to win the opening

round of the Jordan National Championship.

A broken steering arm and exhaust sensor issues halted his challenge for honours at the opening round of the 2021 series in Qatar at the end of January. But Al Rawahi carried out over 150km of testing in Oman before his home event was postponed until December because of the ongoing Covid-19 crisis.

"I want to continue learning and getting ready for 2022," said Al Rawahi. "I also want to compete in some European rallies to further my experience. I am optimistic for a good Jordan Rally and have increased my physical training in preparation for the longer stages. Having Hamed around me is a plus point and I feel more confident. His support has definitely helped."

Additional support for Al Rawahi's programme comes from Sohar International, Khimji Ramdas Group, WMS and Motul.

Teenager Gauff sets sights on Paris after success on Italian clay



PARIS: American Coco Gauff is brimming with confidence ahead of the French Open, buoyed by strong results in Italy on clay in the past two weeks that have helped the 17-year-old climb 10 places to a career-best 25th in the rankings.

Gauff has already made the fourth rounds of the Australian Open and the Wimbledon in her nascent career and this week she will be seeded at a Grand Slam for the first time in her career when the clay court major starts on Sunday.

This month the American reached her first WTA 1000 semifinal in Rome and followed it up with her maiden title on clay the week after in Parma.

"I feel really good about going into the French," Gauff told reporters after her second career WTA title. "I hope I can continue to build and keep getting better."

"I feel like I'm hitting good, moving good, my body feels good, my mentality and emotionally I feel good. So I think it will be a good tournament for me."

At the French Open, Gauff will be the youngest seed at a major in 15 years since Nicole Pietrangeli was seeded at the Wimbledon Championships in 2006.

The American also won the doubles title with Caty McNally on Parma's clay courts to become the youngest player to complete the sweep in nearly 17 years since Maria Sharapova won both titles in Birmingham in 2004.

"It's not a surface that people associate me with, so it feels good," added Gauff, the 2018 junior Roland Garros winner. "I like the dirt now. I always talk about how I don't like it, but I like it now."

"Clay shows you a little extra love than the other surfaces do. It's just going home, taking a shower, and I have clay coming out of me from all different places, or clay still in my clothes from weeks later." — Reuters

NADAL, DJOKOVIC EYE HISTORY

PARIS: Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic will set their sights on more Grand Slam history at Roland Garros as the French Open embraces a new and eerily empty era of night time tennis.

A 14th title in Paris for Nadal would take him to a record-setting 21st major, surpassing the mark he shares with Roger Federer who has already written off his hopes of adding to his lone success in the French capital back in 2009.

Djokovic, the champion in 2016, can move to 19 Grand Slam titles with victory.

That would make the world number one the first man in over half a century to win all four majors on multiple occasions.

Nadal arrives in Paris buoyed by having defeated Djokovic in the Rome Masters final in what was the pair's 57th meeting.

It was Nadal's 10th title in the Italian capital.

Not that he was reading too much into the statistics as far as Roland Garros is concerned.

"I think I can work on a couple of things that I can do a little bit better," he insisted.

— 'Work right way' — "I just need to keep going. I know what I need to work on and I'm going to do it. Work, relax mentally, and work the right way."

At last year's delayed Roland Garros, Nadal swept past Djokovic in straight sets in the final.

It was Nadal's 100th win at the tournament against just two losses since his 2005 title-winning debut.

Giving Djokovic hope, however, is the knowledge that he was responsible for one of those losses, in the 2015 quarterfinals.

He is also a four-time runner-up although three of those defeats in the championship match came against the Spaniard.

Only two men have previously managed to win all four of the Slams on more than one occasion — Roy Emerson and Rod Laver of Australia.

Laver's achievement came back in 1969.

"I think I have a good chance to go all the way in Paris, but of course it's a long shot," said Djokovic who captured the season's first Grand Slam title in Australia for a ninth time in February.

Federer, with his 40th birthday fast



ROLAND GARROS EMBRACES NIGHT-TIME TENNIS

approaching, remains the sentimental favourite but his priority will be an assault on Wimbledon where he has been champion eight times.

— Chasing pack — "I'm not so sure in the last 50 years of the French Open, somebody just rocks up at nearly 40 years old, being out for a year and a half, and wins everything straight," said Federer after losing his only clay court match this year in Geneva last week.

Of the chasing pack, two-time runner-up Dominic Thiem is low on form and confidence.

A run to the Madrid semifinals was followed by a straight sets defeat to

Cameron Norrie in his Lyon opener.

World number two Daniil Medvedev has yet to win a match at Roland Garros in four attempts.

In Rome, he fell at the first hurdle and half-jokingly pleaded with the referee to disqualify him such is his dislike for clay.

World number five Stefanos Tsitsipas is the most likely man to upset the odds of Nadal and Djokovic again making the final.

The 22-year-old Greek won the prestigious Monte Carlo clay court title in April, had match point before losing the Barcelona final to Nadal and then lifted the Lyon trophy.

He has beaten Nadal on clay in Madrid in 2019 and stretched Djokovic to five sets at the 2020 French Open semifinals.

This year's Roland Garros will be the second taking place under the shadow of the coronavirus.

Just over 5,000 fans a day will be allowed on site until June 9 when that figure rises to 13,000.

For the first time this year, there will be nine evening sessions at the tournament.

However, a Covid-19 curfew from 9 pm means that eight of those sessions will be played out inside an empty Court Philippe Chatrier. — AFP

Oman women cricketers learn from Indian star Punam

SHAHZAD RAZA
MUSCAT, MAY 25

Aiming to learn new skills and raise their games, Oman women's cricket team had an online session with renowned Indian cricketer Punam Raut on Monday and came out more encouraged and inspired to do well at international level.

The Oman Cricket organised the online interaction with the Indian star batswoman who had featured in a world record opening partnership of 320 runs with Deepti Sharma in an ODI, contributing 109 and thus beating the women's record of 229 (by Sarah Taylor and Caroline Atkins of England) and the standing men's record in ODIs of 286 (by Upul Tharanga and Sanath Jayasuriya of Sri Lanka).

The session was moderated by Vaishali Jesrani, Lady Coordinator



Punam Raut

Our girls had so much to learn from her and it was heartening to see that Punam motivated them to take their cricket more seriously to succeed at international level

VAISHALI JESRANI
Oman women's team captain

of Oman Cricket, and captain of Oman women's cricket team.

As many as 20 Oman players interacted with Punam who shared her experiences and what all helped her grow as an international cricket player. They discussed with her ways to succeed

at highest level, setting targets for self-development, how to handle pressure in critical situations, self-evaluation and technical details about batting.

Talking about the online session with Punam, Duleep Mendis, Chief Development Officer, Oman



Cricket, said it was important for Oman's women cricketers to understand the mindset of elite players so they can learn from them.

"Oman Cricket is continuously taking initiatives to develop cricket at all levels and it is committed to

promoting women's cricket in the country too," he added.

Commenting on the importance of players' interaction with the Indian star, Vaishali said: "This was a huge opportunity for our players. Punam focused on important topics like setting individual goals

and handling pressure. Our girls had so much to learn from her and it was heartening to see that Punam motivated them to take their cricket more seriously to succeed at international level."

Punam has played 2 Tests, 71 ODIs and 35 T20I for India so far.

Former FIA president Max Mosley dies aged 81



Former F1 chief Max Mosley

LONDON: Max Mosley, the former president of motorsport's world governing body the FIA, has died aged 81, ex-Formula One supremo Bernie Ecclestone announced on Monday.

Mosley became FIA president in 1993 after serving in previous administrative roles in the sport, including within Formula One.

The former racing driver, who had been suffering from cancer, served three terms as president before standing down in 2009.

Ecclestone told the PA news agency: "Max was like family to me. We were like brothers. I am pleased in a way because he suffered for too long."

Mosley was the son of 1930s British fascist leader Oswald Mosley.

In 2008 he won a privacy case against the now-defunct News of the World newspaper after it printed photographs and published video of his involvement in a sadomasochistic sex session.

It was reported by the newspaper as a "sick Nazi orgy" but the judge found no evidence of Nazi themes in his judgement.

He also said there was no public interest defence in the clandestine recording of the session.

Mosley experienced a family tragedy in 2009 when his son Alexander died aged 39. The coroner ruled Alexander's death

was due to non-dependent drug abuse.

Mosley senior studied at Oxford University, where he read physics, but later trained as a lawyer and became a barrister whose specialism was patent and trademark law.

His love of motor racing began in his youth and he was involved in Formula 2 for Brabham and Lotus before retiring in 1969.

He founded a car manufacturing company, March Engineering, and oversaw its legal and commercial affairs from 1969 to 1977.

He became president of FISA, FI's governing body at the time, in 1991 and two years later took over unopposed at the FIA.

He oversaw the safety reforms in the sport that followed the death of Ayrton Senna at the San Marino Grand Prix in 1994.

Jean Todt replaced Mosley as FIA president in 2009. Since then, Mosley had campaigned for tougher regulation of the press.

The Williams Racing team were one of the first to pay tribute, tweeting from their official account: "We are saddened to learn of the passing of former FIA president, Max Mosley."

"Our condolences go out to his family and friends at this difficult time."

— AFP



France's rider Nicolas Touzaint competes with his horse 'Absolut Gold HDC', during a preparatory event for the Tokyo Olympic Games, near Angers, western France. — AFP

No change on Olympics: Japan

TOKYO: A new US travel warning for Japan over virus risks will not affect this summer's pandemic-postponed Olympic Games, the Japanese government and Tokyo 2020 organisers said on Tuesday.

The US State Department advisory released on Monday urges citizens to avoid travel to Japan, where the borders are already closed to almost all foreigners.

It cites government health advice, as well as "secondary factors such as commercial flight availability, restrictions on US citizen entry, and impediments to obtaining Covid test results within three calendar days".

The advisory comes with less than two months until the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Olympics, which were postponed last year as the pandemic took hold.

Japan's government said the measure would not affect the Games.

"It is our understanding that there is no change to the US position to support Japan's effort to hold the Olympic and Paralympic Games", government spokesman Katsunobu Kato told



Seiko Hashimoto, President of the Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee, listens as Masayuki Kanda, Tokyo 2020 Elective Director of Transport speaks, during her visit to Tsukiji Depot, Tokyo. — AFP

a regular briefing.

He added that Japan had been told the decision was "not related" to the plans of the US Olympic delegation.

Tokyo 2020 chief Seiko Hashimoto said she "didn't think it would impact the Games", adding the organisers would "do their best to prepare for the Olympics whose priority is safety and security".

The US Olympic and Paralympic Committee also said it remained confident that safety measures and frequent testing for athletes and staff "will allow for safe participation of Team

USA athletes this summer".

A State Department spokesman said Washington understood "the careful considerations that the Japanese government and the International Olympic Committee are weighing as they prepare for the Tokyo Olympics this summer".

"President Biden proudly supports the US athletes who have trained for these Games and will be competing in the best traditions of the Olympic spirit", he said.

Japan has seen a relatively small coronavirus outbreak, with

around 12,000 deaths overall.

But the country has been battling a fourth wave of infections that prompted the government to impose states of emergency in several places including Tokyo.

The measures largely involve closing restaurants early and banning the sale of alcohol at eateries and bars.

Infection numbers are now declining in Tokyo and hard-hit Osaka, but reports suggest the emergency restrictions may still be extended for several weeks past their current May 31 expiry.

Japan's inoculation programme has rolled out slowly, with just two per cent of its population fully vaccinated so far.

The government aims to finish inoculating the over-65s by late July, when the Olympics begin, but ministers say the Games do not figure in their roll-out schedule, and no date has been announced for other age groups.

Public opinion in the country is still largely opposed to holding the Olympics this summer but organisers say the event can be held safely. — AFP

Oman Olympic team gearing up for Bahrain matches

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 25

The head coach of the Olympic (U-23) football team, Dario Basic, will lead the team in its first international match against Bahrain on June 5 and 8 since his appointment earlier last year.

The U-23 players are undergoing a camp in Bahrain. The training sessions started on Friday under supervision of the Croatian coach in Manama city.

The camp is focusing on improving the fitness and physical sides of the team members after the long break since last appearance in March. The team players are having two training sessions daily including gymnasium training in morning

sessions while implementing some tactical practices during evening sessions.

The 19-day external camp is part of the team's preparation for the Asian Olympic Qualifiers that will take place in October. The finals of the AFC Asian (U-23) will be held in September 2022 in Uzbekistan during September 6 to 25.

Coach Basic's boys are gearing up for the friendly games against Bahrain team on June 5 and 8. Both matches will give Basic and his assistant Mohammed Khamis better idea on the Omani players' technical readiness.

The current squad is promoted from the U-19 team as the Olympic league did not occur in 2019-20 and 2020-21 seasons



Dario Basic (R) with OFA technical director Slobodan Pavkovic.

due to the pandemic situation.

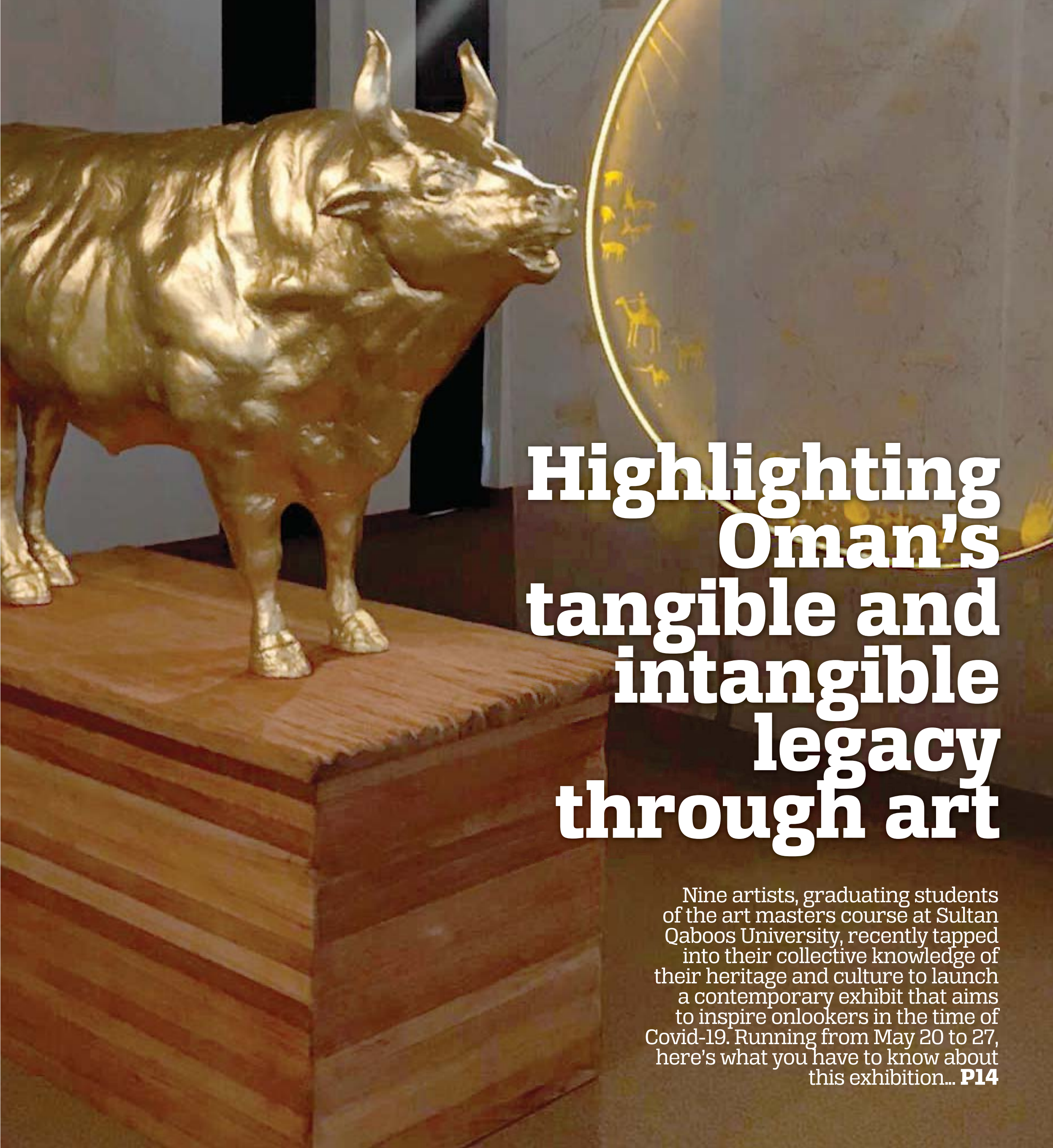
The Croatian coach, who took in charge for Olympic team since early 2020, had led the team in four training camps. The first two warm-up camps were in the first quarter of 2020 and the team had stopped training due to the pandemic. The squad restarted training in last November with an internal camp while the fourth internal camp was held in last March. The team had depended on the local friendly matches during that domestic camp and could not have any international preparatory matches due to the Covid-19 situation.

The Oman Olympic team will take part in many upcoming events including

the Islamic Solidarity Games in Turkey for which the dates will be confirmed soon by the organising committee. The GCC Games in Kuwait is another event set to be finalised later.

Oman U-23 squad: Essam al Makhzoomi, Faisal al Harthy, Arshad al Alawi, Yahya al Hudaifi, Awadh al Shari, Hussain al Shari, Najeeb al Shujaibi, Jasim al Noubi, Fahad Bait Obaidan, Essa al Naabi, Saud al Habsi, Al Baraa al Maawali, Islam al Hinai, Fahad al Hajri, Ibrahim al Rajhi, Yusuf al Malki, Abdullah al Balushi, Hani al Nuaimi, Musab al Maamari, Yusuf al Shiyadi, Mohammed al Buraiki, Marwan al Abdulsalam, Hani al Qartoubi and Qasim Mubarak.

features



Highlighting Oman's tangible and intangible legacy through art

Nine artists, graduating students of the art masters course at Sultan Qaboos University, recently tapped into their collective knowledge of their heritage and culture to launch a contemporary exhibit that aims to inspire onlookers in the time of Covid-19. Running from May 20 to 27, here's what you have to know about this exhibition... **P14**

INSIDE STORIES

TRAVEL TALES



THE MOUNTAINOUS TAWI ATEER RECEIVES VISITORS ALL YEAR LONG

Tawi Ateer is a mountainous village that has multiple beautiful tourist spots in the Wilayat of Dhofar, located 26 kilometres to the northwest of the city centre of Mirbat... **Story on P16**

COOK LIKE A CHEF



HUQQA SEAFOOD SPAGHETTI

Some people stay away from preparing Italian food at home because they are intimidated that it may take a long time and may become too complex for a family on the go. But not all pasta and recipes are created equal. In today's Cook Like a Chef, we are proposing this HuQqa special – an easy to follow the recipe that will surely delight your family... **Story on P15**

READ



THE LAST THING HE TOLD ME

BY LAURA DAVE

Hannah Hall discovers truths about her missing husband and bonds with his daughter from a previous relationship.

FASHION



ARMANI RETURNS TO LIVE FASHION SHOW AUDIENCES

More than a year after switching to virtual shows, Italian fashion house Armani announced Thursday the return of live audiences, starting with its Spring/Summer Men's collection next month... **Story on P15**

HUMAN INTEREST



CHINESE ARTIST CREATES ANIMALS AND MUSHROOM-HEADED FIGURES OUT OF WOOL FELT

Using a long needle, Chinese artist Yin Yue diligently pokes a piece of wool onto a pink-purple elephant made out of wool felt in her studio in Beijing... **Story on P15**



Highlighting Oman's tangible and intangible legacies through art

Story by Mazoun al Ghailani
Photos by Asma al Fahdi

Even a pandemic that cripples the economies of different countries cannot stop artists from showcasing their creativity. In fact, for the case of artists in Oman, they drew strength and inspiration from the hopelessness creating work of art that will help rekindle the fire and give new courage to desperate people who are near the end of their ropes.

Disrupting the campus of Sultan Qaboos University, the first batch of Art students who finished their Masters produced contemporary work covering different genre and using diverse medium delighting onlookers, students, faculty and staff of SQU.

"The students were able to produce contemporary works of art that are no less important than any international artist experienced in the field of arts. The works

Another highlight of the exhibit was inspired by the Jernan tale that was very popular in the Wilayat of Izki in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. The Jernan tale describes a golden calf that was said to be hidden in a cave by the foot of the Al Nizar village in Izki.

"As an artist, when I created this piece, it was not actually about believing in the tale but documenting what people believe," Said al Nahwi said.

He added, "My role as an artist is to document this Omani tale, create a representation of it so it may flourish across generations and countries," Said shared.

"For this golden calf, it is said that this was an idol worshipped by people before Islam came to Oman. According to legends, the calf was hidden in Jernan Cave but studies and surveys were made and no evidence of the



varied between drawing, photography, stereoscopic, installation in space, design and video art," shared Dr Fakhriya al Yahyai, Professor of Arts and the supervisor of the exhibition.

She added, "I was able to touch the students' technical abilities and push them to create artworks the way professionals would. They were also ready to search and work diligently despite the challenges put before them by the pandemic."

Conceptual artist Safa al Fahdi was inspired by an old Omani tale called "The Vow Baby" that tells about an Omani woman who was deprived of motherhood.

Safa explained, "In the past, women were blamed for their inability to procreate, and this woman desperately wanted a child. One day, she went to the wilderness to collect wood from the Sidr and Acacia trees."

She wantonly said that if Allah blessed her with a baby girl, she will make her marry the falcon who had sheltered in one of the Acacia trees."

She continued, "It was said that this falcon is a wizard. After some time, that's what happened. Allah blessed that woman a beautiful girl. But the falcon did not forget what the mother vowed. He came asking to marry that beautiful girl. So the daughter became a victim of that ominous vow."

The artwork is accompanied by a visual art video representing Safa.

"In the video, I demonstrated the importance of the people's actions and concern for others, children's issues, and women's issues," she said.

"I am extremely happy to be one of the first batches of art students earning their masters. To be able to work within the context of this Omani tale was a very interesting experience," Safa said.

bull was ever discovered. The fascinating part of this tale is that supposedly, the calf was a symbol of strength, fertility and rain. People go to the calf and conduct religious rituals to gain the gifts it supposedly bestows," he said.

Said made the artwork using digital art, digital sculpture and 3D printing technology to create the sculpture. The three-dimensional hologram was manufactured in approximately 288 hours of continuous work to print all the art pieces.

Artist Adhari al Shidhani on the other hand took the route of music. Adhari recorded childhood songs and Omani folk games, created artistic visuals that work with the music and created pieces that would work well with the audio-visual needs of today's generation.

"Documenting these songs and folk games are important as they are beginning to disappear from our culture. Some of today's children do not even know what these songs and games are. With the free flow of songs and information, these folk songs and games are now being replaced by Western songs," Adhari said.

"Doing this, creating an audio-visual artefact would allow the children of tomorrow to have something to look back to and learn from. These recordings will allow the preservation of these materials allowing Omani children to still have a connection to their past. I think this initiative is important and will have a significant cultural, social and economic impact," Adhari said.

The exhibition runs from May 20 to 27, 2021. There are nine 9 artists in total showcasing their works including Ali al Jahwari, Majida al Rahbi, Khalid al Sabhani, Nada al Ruwaishdi and Siham al Darmaki, who all highlighted the Omani folklore and tangible and intangible legacies in their artworks.



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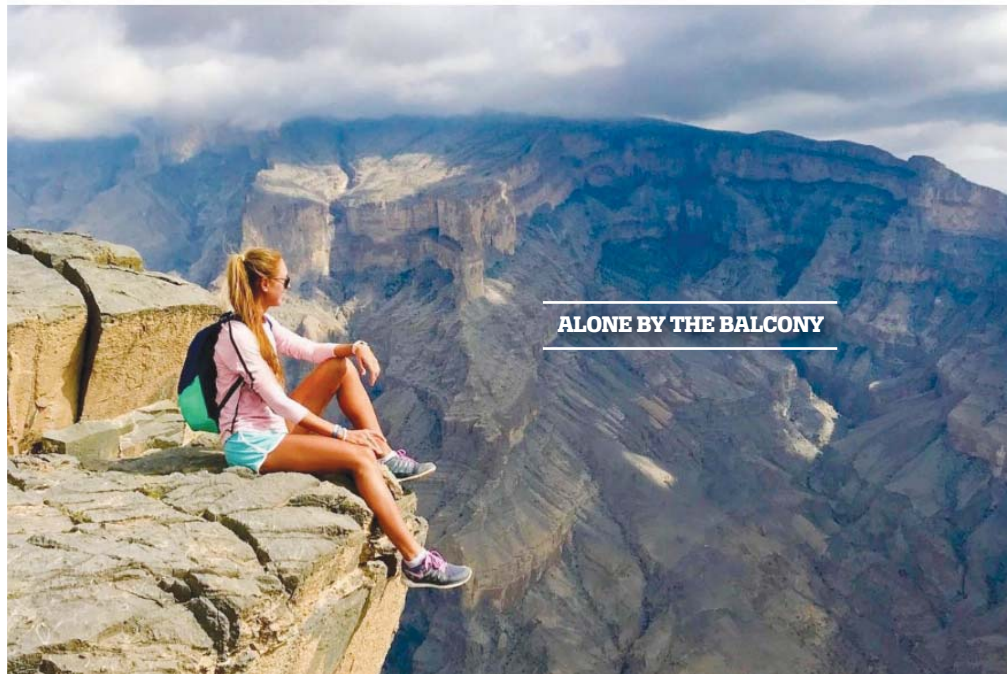
15

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



flyteti • Follow

Jabal shams, grand Canyon, oman



ALONE BY THE BALCONY



astmandance • Follow

Sultanate Of Oman



ALONE BY THE BEACH



ferasbaloch • Follow



WANDERING ALONE

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE



HUMAN INTEREST



Chinese artist creates animals and mushroom-headed figures out of wool felt

USING A LONG needle, Chinese artist Yin Yue diligently pokes a piece of wool onto a pink-purple elephant made out of wool felt in her studio in Beijing.

She stumbled onto wool felt art about a decade ago, and has turned it into a career. Her current exhibition at an art centre in Beijing features mushroom-headed figures sitting on chairs, as if posing for a family portrait.

"I came across pictures about wool felt art online by chance. I was very interested in this kind of material so I did some research and started to try to make something," said the 31-year-old Yin.



"At first it was just a little hobby. I wouldn't have thought that I would do it as a profession."

The elephant, which is the size of a small child and depicted in a fetal position, has a special meaning for her. She began working on it while pregnant with her son, who is now five months old.

"When I was making this piece, every time I held it, I would imagine what my baby in my belly would look like," she said. "It felt like the piece was growing together with the baby. In my imagination, they have some connections."

That sense of family came through her artwork at the Beijing exhibition, visitors said. One featured a small mushroom-headed family and another a life-sized mushroom-headed adult and child. The exhibition opened in April and runs until September.

"When I saw them, a sense of warmth came over me. This set of figures looks like a mother and her daughter," said college student Shi Wenjie, as she visited the exhibition.

"They are all in comfortable clothing with gentle gestures, giving people a feeling of being at home."

Yin first gained recognition by posting her works online and has been part of nine exhibitions in China and Japan since 2012, including three solo shows.

Some of her works are sold in galleries and others to individual buyers, she said. — **Reuters**

COOK LIKE A CHEF

HUQQA SEAFOOD SPAGHETTI



SOME PEOPLE stay away from preparing Italian food at home because they are intimidated that it may take a long time and may become too complex for a family on the go. But not all pastas and recipes are created equal. In today's Cook Like a Chef, we are proposing this HuQqa special — an easy to follow the recipe that will surely delight your family.

INGREDIENTS

350g Spaghetti
20g Butter
40g Shrimp, peeled and deveined
30g Salmon
30g Squid
40g Black mussel
5g Salt
3g freshly ground black pepper
60ml Italian tomato pasta sauce
8g Cloves garlic, minced
6g Fresh basil
25g Dried mushroom
20g Cherry tomatoes

PREPARATION

In a large pot of salted boiling water, cook spaghetti until 'al-dente' and drain.

Meanwhile, in a large skillet over medium heat, melt butter. Add shrimp, mussels, salmon and squid and season with salt and pepper. Cook 2 minutes per side.

Then add garlic and cook until soft and fragrant for 3 minutes. Add cherry tomatoes, mushrooms and simmer for a further 3 minutes, add Italian tomato sauce and mix until combined.

Add cooked spaghetti and toss until fully coated.

Transfer it to a serving plate and garnish with basil and serve.



ABOUT THE CHEF

CHEF GÖKHAN ÇÖKELEZ
HEAD CHEF
HUQQA

Head Chef GÖKHAN ÇÖKELEZ leads the culinary team of HuQqa and The Market across Muscat and the region. Having started his career in Istanbul, GÖKHAN boasts over 12 years of experience within the premium food and beverage landscape. His work has carried him from Turkey to the Middle East and Canada. Some of his former roles include Grosvenor House, Qbara, JW Marriott Marquis, Emerald Palace Kempinski Dubai and Shook Kitchen. Today, Chef GÖKHAN holds an integral role within the Q Food and Beverage Group, developing both pleasurable and instagrammable dishes for HuQqa and The Market.

FASHION

Armani returns to live fashion show audiences



MORE THAN A year after switching to virtual shows, Italian fashion house Armani announced Thursday the return of live audiences, starting with its Spring/Summer Men's collection next month.

The June 21 Giorgio Armani show will take place in Milan, while on July 6, the Giorgio Armani Prive fashion show will be held at the Italian embassy during the Paris Fashion Show for Haute Couture.



"The return to live attendance has been decided following the current general improvement in public health with relation to the pandemic," the group announced.

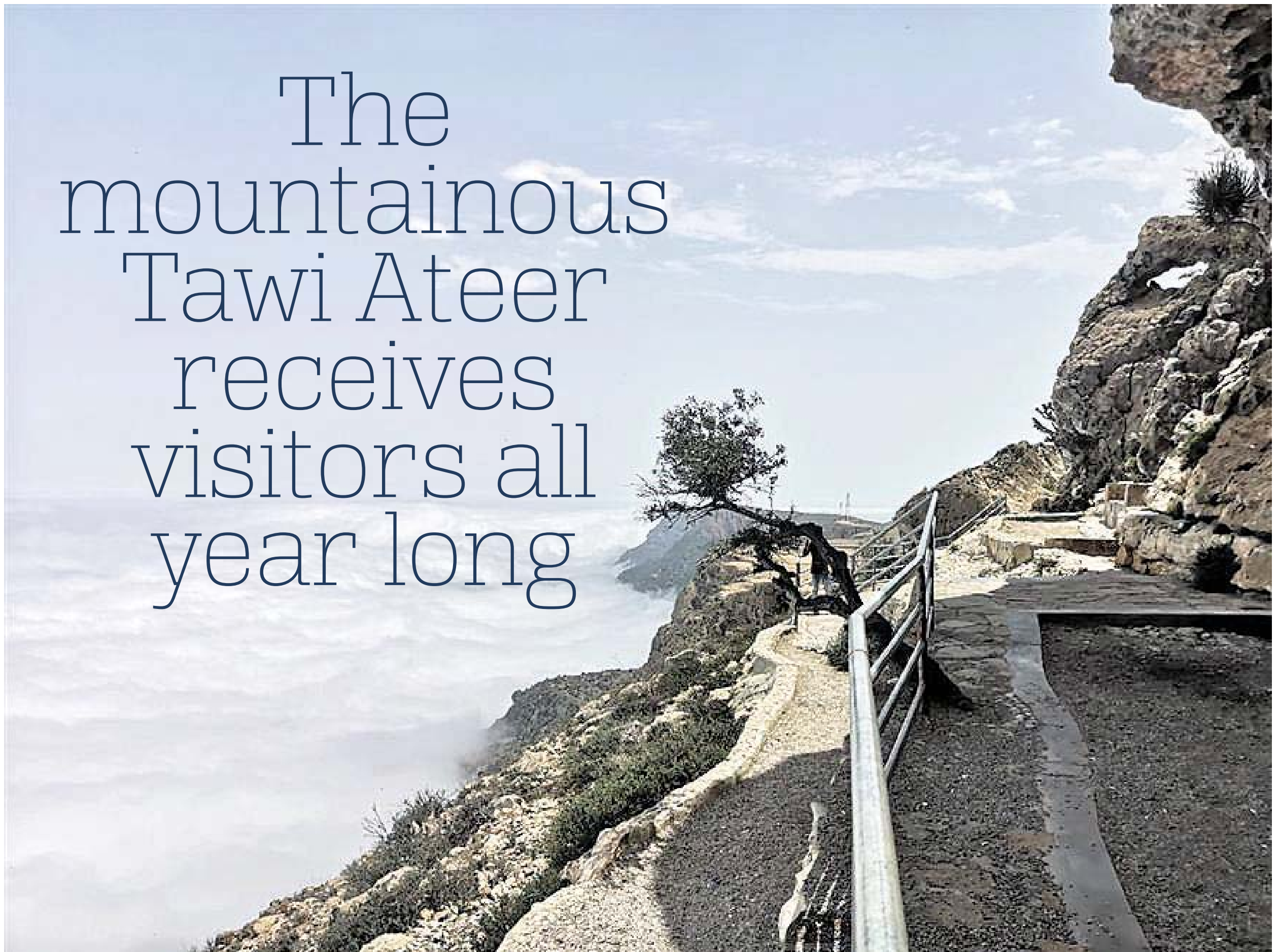
It warned its plans could still change, however, depending on the rate of coronavirus infections going forward.

"The organisation of the shows will comply with the distance and safety rules required by law and the actual holding of the events, in any case, will be conditional to the evolution of the pandemic," it added.

Armani is the first big Italian brand to announce the resumption of live audiences, just as it was also the first to give them up in February 2020 as coronavirus first swept Italy. —**AFP**



The mountainous Tawi Ateer receives visitors all year long



Tawi Ateer is a mountainous village that has multiple beautiful tourist spots in the Wilayat of Mirbat in the Governorate of Dhofar, located 26 kilometres to the north-west of the city centre of Mirbat.

Tawi Ateer is located to the north of Thamrait, and to the east of Jabal Samhan, and can be reached through Aqbat Ghadiya road and Aqbat Hasheer road.

The areas of Tawi Ateer are affected by the khareef season, as are other areas of the Dhofar mountains, and the wide grassy areas are the most prominent thing that can be seen here. Tawi Ateer is one of the most important areas because it is where most clays used in pottery industries are sourced from.

One of the famous places of tourism in the mountain is Ateer Well (the bird Well) which has gained international fame since its discovery in 1997 by the Slovenian adventurers' team in cooperation with Sultan Qaboos University as one of the largest dissolving sinkholes in the world, which increases the rich balance of environmental, geographical, historical, archaeological monuments and cultural components in the Dhofar Governorate.

14 km from the Tawi Ateer, the visitors meet with Teeq which contains the Teeq sinkhole. Teeq Sinkhole is about 975 thousand cubic metres. Its diameter is between 130 to 150 metres and its depth is 211 metres. The flow of water along the wadi that flows into the sinkhole has dissolved the rocks, and thus helped the formation of the magnificent waterfalls located along the intersection with the Teeq sinkhole. There is also Teeq cave near the top of the sinkhole with a volume of approximately 170 thousand cubic metres.



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Global experts lay stress on energy transition

KEY TOPICS: Leading figures urge switch to renewables, diversification of economy

MUSCAT: An international conference on the role of oil in shaping the future of GCC economies began in Muscat on Tuesday with the participation of local, regional and international experts.

The two-day forum, organised by Mazoon College, opened under the auspices of Sayyid Sulaiman bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Deputy Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers.

In opening remarks, the Chief Guest stressed the importance of the conference in identifying the results and reasons that led to the decline in oil prices and alternatives to get out of this global economic crisis, explaining that the government is making great efforts to reduce the impact of this crisis, such as rationalising government spending and other measures.

Dr Juma bin Saleh al Ghailani, Chairman of the Board of



Directors of Mazoon College, explained that buoyant oil prices that prevailing prior to the current downturn had fuelled robust growth in the region amid strong fiscal spending by governments. However, following the oil price crash, GCC states can no longer depend on oil revenues alone to fund their economies and must thus reduce their dependence on hydrocarbons.

In this regard, he urged oil-producing states in the region to work together to promote trade and commerce, given continued volatility in international oil markets.

Nations should harness science and technology to turn to alternative sources of energy and move away from policies influencing oil markets and prices.

A panel discussion featured

experts and academics from Sultan Qaboos University, the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, the Danish University of Aarhus and the Australian University of Technology.

A number of research papers were presented focusing on: The relationship between energy and development; A comprehensive observation of causality,

The Chief Guest stressed the importance of the conference in identifying the results and reasons that led to the decline in oil prices and alternatives to get out of this global economic crisis, explaining that the government is making great efforts to reduce the impact of this crisis, such as rationalising government spending and other measures

correlation and convergence in the different dimensions of the links between energy; Economy and the environment; and Exploring the future scope of renewable energy development as an engine of economic growth in Oman.

The second session of the conference, which opens today, will be attended by a group of local and international academics from the

American International College of Science, Missouri University of Science and Technology and North Carolina State University for Agriculture and Technology, as well as a number of specialists from international companies, and will discuss several topics, most notably global oil prices, the Middle East economy, the next generation of nuclear energy in the Middle East, corporate social responsibility, oil, environment, green energy and developments in energy hybridization for a flexible supply and the impact of renewable and non-renewable energy in the environment.

The third session will include a number of local and international academics and representatives of local and international companies, who will present a number of research papers on the impact of oil prices on Oman's overall economic performance, energy economics in the GCC countries, the impact of green fuel as alternatives to oil prices on Oman's economy and the importance of decarbonisation of hydrocarbons in the oil industry, and diversification and the oil economy. — ONA

Oman's fiscal funding strategies, EDO to figure in IMF talks



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 25

The role of Energy Development Oman (EDO), the newly established wholly government-owned energy outfit, as well as the government's fiscal funding strategies, are part of a slate of topics on the agenda during fortnight-long deliberations with experts of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that began on Monday.

According to a statement by the Ministry of Finance, the talks are taking place via videoconferencing within the context of Article IV consultations with member states. During an Article IV consultation, an IMF team of economists visits a country to assess economic and financial developments and discuss the country's economic and financial policies with government and central bank officials.

The team reports its findings to IMF management and then

presents them for discussion to the Executive Board, which represents all of the IMF's member countries. A summary of the Board's views is subsequently transmitted to the country's government.

Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi, Secretary-General of the Finance Ministry, chaired the opening session of the virtual meeting.

The two-week meetings will cover developments of macro-economy, its future scopes, response to Covid-19 and preparations for the recovery period. They will also discuss the priorities of the financial policies and measures listed under the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan (2021-2025), including financial regulation procedures.

The agenda includes a review of Oman's medium term strategy for funding fiscal needs and the management of sovereign assets. This covers the expected financial obligations of state-owned firms and Energy Development Oman.

(With inputs from ONA)

Spanish firm wins contract to design new Barka water project

SUPERIOR FEATURES: Barka V Independent Water Project to feature high-tech desalination capabilities

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Spanish based international engineering consultant Savener has announced that it has been awarded a contract to undertake the engineering design of a new desalination plant due to come up at Barka in South Al Batinah Governorate.

Savener, a global grouping of consultants with expertise ranging from aeronautics and water desalination to energy efficiency and civil architecture, says the contract was awarded by the partnership of GS Inima of Spain and Italian Fisia Italimpianti of Italy.

The latter partnership is the Engineering Procurement Construction (EPC) contractor for the so-called Barka-V seawater reverse osmosis (RO) desalination plant with a capacity of around 100,000 cubic metres per day (equivalent to 22 million imperial gallons per day MIGD).



The contract was awarded by the partnership of GS Inima of Spain and Italian Fisia Italimpianti of Italy

GS Inima is a wholly-owned subsidiary of South Korean based global construction heavyweight GS Engineering & Construction (GS E&C), which was last year named as the winner of two Independent Water Projects (IWPs) tendered out by Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP), the sole procurer of new capacity under the Sector

Law.

In addition to Barka V IWP, GS Inima is developing a 300,000 m3/day (66 MIGD) capacity desalination plant at Al Ghubrah in Muscat Governorate. Investments in both Barka V and Al Ghubrah III IWPs total around \$400 million.

In a statement, Savener said its remit covers the engineering design of five reverse osmosis (RO) trains equipped with spiral wound members, dissolved air flotation (DAF) pretreatment systems, and other filtration equipment.

"This alliance will allow the Savener team and specialists

and the GS Inima and Fisia Italimpianti technicians to work in a coordinated manner in all disciplines associated with the project, such as Civil Engineering, Electricity, Piping, Process, I&C, Mechanics or 3D Modeling, guaranteeing the usual levels of demand and quality of Savener projects," the Spanish consultancy firm said..

"With this project, Savener consolidates its knowledge and experience in the water sector, specifically in desalination systems, and reinforces its presence as a strategic and technological partner of large engineering projects in the international arena," it stated.

London firms switched to Dublin for post-Brexit business

Dublin has been chosen as the most desirable place for jobs from London's financial district, as 135 firms have relocated business to the Irish capital because of Brexit, according to new research.

Think-tank New Financial has found firms to favour Dublin over its city-competitors Paris, Luxembourg, Frankfurt and Amsterdam. With Ireland being an English-speaking country, language was obviously a big advantage over many other places.

As firms moved to the Irish capital as a result of Brexit, for convenience of business in the European Union, 102 firms chose Paris, 95 selected Luxembourg, 63 Frankfurt and 48 Amsterdam.

Banks have moved or plan

to move more than £900 bn in assets to the continent, worth around 10 per cent of the entire UK banking system.

Insurance firms and asset managers alone, have transferred more than £100 bn, with a third of all asset management firms transferring to Dublin post-Brexit. Sixty per cent of banks favoured Frankfurt and nearly two-thirds of the firms making the move to Amsterdam are trading platforms, exchanges or brokerage firms.

"The real impact of Brexit is unlikely to fully emerge until the dust finally settles in a few years' time", Managing Director of New Financial and a co-author of the report, William Wright, said.

Wright added that Frankfurt would eventually emerge as the "winner" in terms of assets in the longer-term, while Paris could still take Dublin's position in



ANDY JALIL
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DUBLIN'S POSITION IN
TERMS OF JOBS

terms of jobs.

The think-tank found 7,400 staff moves or local hires following the referendum but expects the numbers to increase in the next few years.

Meanwhile, according to new figures, UK tech companies are now more optimistic about their short-term growth prospects than at any time over the last seven years.

Firms in the rapidly-growing British tech sector reported strong confidence that business activity will bounce back strongly after the latest national lockdown and as Brexit-related uncertainty among clients begins to ease.

As a result, companies expanded employee numbers in the first quarter with the pace of staff hiring the quickest for almost two years, according to KPMG's quarterly tech monitor.

However, it was not all plain

sailing for tech firms. Business activity dropped modestly in the first quarter, mainly because of the latest pandemic restrictions.

There was also a slight drop in new orders due to Brexit disruption, while rising costs for staff, transportation and electronic components led to the sharpest increase in input prices for the sector for nearly four years.

But as tech companies looked towards future growth, employment rose by its fastest rate since the second quarter of 2019, while output growth projections were at their strongest since the second quarter of 2014.

Optimism was higher than in all other parts of the UK private sector apart from hotels and restaurants, many of which have not been trading at all for the last nine months.

"With the UK now in phase three of the government's roadmap to recovery and businesses starting to adjust to regulatory changes and supply chain issues after Brexit, the tech sector is fast-tracking plans to get back to growth", said Bina Mehta, chair of KPMG in the UK.

"An acceleration in jobs growth to its fastest for almost two years provides a clear signal that tech companies are confident about future workloads and expect to receive a boost from improving UK economic prospects."

Mehta added: "The successful vaccine rollout and optimism around corporate technology investment were key factors helping to drive up business confidence to a seven-year high in the first quarter of the year." *(The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK)*

Fuel-efficient Nissan Altima available on special zero per cent interest

MUSCAT: Offering customers an unmatched buying experience, Nissan Oman from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA), is extending a wide range of deals for the patrons of Nissan Altima, which is known for its classy design, fuel economy, driving performance, technology and comfortability.

Customers of Nissan Altima will have a choice of benefits including zero per cent interest



for three years on specific models, cash gift, free service, insurance and more. The offer, which is available on all models purchased

for personal use, will go on till June 3, 2021.

A senior official of Nissan Oman said, "As testament of the brand's pledge to its customer to offer them the best, we have worked out deals that customers of Nissan Altima are sure to find attractive. Nissan is popular because it offers an outstanding drive, enhanced handling, fuel efficiency and thoughtful technology solutions."

Own a K5: Kia pays your VAT, you enjoy rewards



MUSCAT: Customers looking forward to own the K5 can benefit with Kia Oman paying your VAT (5 per cent VAT on net selling price will be borne by Kia Oman) and you save from RO 10 to RO 14 on monthly EMIs for a loan tenure of 4 years.

Customers can choose from two options Flexible option: Cash gift of up to RO 2400 & service of 3 years/30,000 kms or Bundle option: Cash gift of RO 2100, registration, insurance and service up to 8 years / 80,000 kms. Also get assured cash for fuel Scratch N Win coupon up to RO 1000 with every purchase. (Conditions apply. Please visit showroom for details).

The Kia K5 is designed to get all attention along with its dynamic and powerful performance that gives the lead when required the most. The K5's powerful and angular design language represents another chapter of boldness and passion for the brand.

Hyundai Motor to donate 10,000 3D masks to its showrooms in Oman

MUSCAT: Hyundai Motor Company is continuing to put the safety of its customers at the forefront of their operation by providing 3D face mask gear to its distributors across the Middle East and Africa markets.

Following an increase in the number of cases across several countries in the Middle East and Africa market in recent weeks, Hyundai Motor has purchased 300,000 3D masks and 60,000 mask straps designed for children to help tackle the threat.

Oman is one of the 10 countries that will benefit with Hyundai contributing 10,000 3D face masks and 2,000 mask straps which will handed out to customers' children visiting its Hyundai showrooms over the next three months.

The contributions are part of Hyundai Motor's on-going commitment to helping people keep safe during these unprecedented times. In June 2020, at a time when all countries were affected by the pandemic, Hyundai Motor donated more than 603,000 safety items including face masks, hand sanitizers, protective suits and ambulances to 37 nations across the Middle East and Africa market.

Webinar series spotlights procurement and investment opportunities in Oman

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 25

Businessgateways recently launched an exciting webinar series, titled 'Connecting the international community to Oman's Procurement & Investment Opportunities', intended to help Omani MSMEs and Large businesses connect with a global audience of investors. The webinar series is hosted on an online knowledge-sharing platform, The Stage, an initiative of businessgateways.

Through these webinar-based presentations, stakeholders, suppliers, operators and embassies engage, discuss and share information on business prospects, with emphasis on showcasing procurement and investment opportunities in Oman to select international markets.

Since its launch, the webinar series has garnered praise for its tangible success in shedding light on Oman's immense portfolio of procurement and investment opportunities to the world.

China, given its unrivalled status as the global economic powerhouse, was the first international market to be featured in the series.

Supported by the Embassy of the People's Republic of China (Oman), the webinar



introduced China to Oman's market, upcoming projects and prospective B2B Partnership ventures. Next in the series was the United Kingdom which, as the biggest contributor of foreign direct investment into the Sultanate, made for an impactful presence.

Conducted under the auspices of Oman's Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), the webinar titled 'Connecting UK to Oman's Procurement & Investment Opportunities' was a resounding success from all standpoints, with the backing from the Department for International Trade (UK), which is Britain's top policymaking body for trade and investment, in addition to the British Embassy in Muscat.

Opening remarks by Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Under-Secretary of Oman's Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion, set the stage for roughly two hours of engaging presentations and discussions centring on a key message: 'Oman is open for business'.

An overview of Britain's longstanding trade and economic partnership with Oman was presented by Gareth Stevens, Director of International Trade & First Secretary Defence & Security, British Embassy — Muscat.

Additionally, sector-wise opportunities, spanning Oil & Gas, Renewable Energy, Free Zone Developments, as well as regulatory aspects governing

these opportunities and more, were outlined by representatives from Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), Daleel Petroleum, Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), Addleshaw Goddard, and businessgateways.

Buoyed by the immense success of the first two editions of its webinar series, businessgateways is now targeting an array of promising new international markets. Taking centre stage in June will be Canada, with its thriving hydrocarbon sector.

And over the course of this year, the webinar series will also feature Italy, Switzerland, Singapore, Malaysia, Germany and the United States, among other markets.

"The strength of participation in our webinar series — in terms of online attendance and outreach — has been overwhelmingly positive", said Hemant Murkoth, CEO — businessgateways.

"The outstanding success of the webinars on China and UK gives us confidence that The Stage is an effective and powerful platform that helps the JSRS Buyers and Suppliers Community connect and engage with investors and customers in target markets around the world."

NBO wins two awards at World Business Outlook Awards



MUSCAT: A testament to its role as a digital leader in the banking industry, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has won twice at the World Business Outlook Awards, for "Best Digital Bank Oman 2021" and "Best Mobile Banking App Oman 2021". The awards, which are held annually by the global publication, highlight the bank's innovative use of technology and it's constantly-enhanced digital portfolio.

With its mobile app at the centre, NBO's range of cutting-edge digital solutions continue to cater to the evolving demands of its customers and cement its position as a bank fit for the future.

Abdul Karim al Hinai, Chief Transformation Officer at NBO, said, "Our digital transformation is central to our journey as a market-leading bank, and as such we have pioneered a number of first-of-their-kind projects, from our mobile app, to cashless and contactless banking, to our mobile wallet."

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Renault-Nissan and Hyundai face shutdowns in India

CHENNAI: Automakers Renault, its alliance partner Nissan Motor Co and Hyundai Motor Co face temporary factory closures in India due to growing unrest among workers concerned about rising Covid-19 infections.

Workers at Renault-Nissan's car plant in the southern state of Tamil Nadu will go on strike on Wednesday because their Covid-related safety demands have not been met, a union representing the workers told the company.

Hyundai said it would suspend operations at its plant, also in Tamil Nadu, for five days starting

Tuesday, after several workers staged a brief, sit-in protest amid rising cases in the state.

"The management agreed to close the plant after workers expressed concerns over safety after two employees succumbed to Covid," E. Muthukumar, president of the Hyundai Motor India Employees Union, said.

The unrest highlights the challenges companies face in India amid a huge wave of Covid-19 infections, an overwhelmed health system and a shortage of vaccines which is making employees more fearful.



Workers assemble cars inside the Hyundai Motor India Ltd plant at Kancheepuram district in Tamil Nadu. — Reuters

The management agreed to close the plant after workers expressed concerns over safety after two employees succumbed to Covid

E. MUTHUKUMAR
President, Hyundai Motor India Employees Union

Tamil Nadu is one of the worst-hit states with more than 30,000

cases a day last week. The state, an auto hub known as India's Detroit, has imposed a lockdown until May 31 but allowed some factories, including auto plants, to continue operating.

The strike threat at the Renault-Nissan plant came ahead of a court hearing on Monday over allegations from workers that social distancing norms were being flouted and factory health policies did not sufficiently address the risk to lives.

Renault-Nissan has said it is following Covid-19 safety protocols. — Reuters



Attendees take part in G7 foreign ministers meeting in London, Britain. — Reuters

US Treasury sees G7 backing for 15 per cent global minimum tax

WASHINGTON: The US Treasury expects strong backing from G7 peers for Washington's proposed 15 per cent-plus global minimum corporate tax, which should help solidify support in the US Congress for domestic corporate tax legislation.

"My sense is that you're going to see a lot of unified support amongst the G7 moving forward," US Treasury Deputy Secretary Wally Adeyemo said on Monday after France, Germany, Italy and Japan made positive comments about the Treasury's proposal.

That support may be voiced at an in-person meeting of G7 finance ministers in London on June 4-5, Adeyemo said.

Optimism about a long-sought

While the talks are taking place among nearly 140 countries through the OECD, G7 countries have a strong influence over multilateral decisions

comprehensive deal for how to tax the largest multinationals and digital services companies has increased since the Treasury last week said it would accept a global minimum tax rate of 15 per cent or higher.

The rate is well below the Biden administration's proposed 21 per cent minimum rate for US companies' overseas income and its 28 per cent proposed domestic corporate tax rate.

While the talks are taking place among nearly 140 countries through the Organization for

Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), G7 countries — the United States, Japan, Germany, Britain, France, Italy and Canada — have a strong influence over multilateral decisions.

The reaction from G7 chair Britain, which currently has a 19 per cent corporate tax rate, has been more guarded.

Asked if Britain would support Washington's 15 per cent minimum proposal, Prime Minister Boris Johnson shifted the focus to taxation of large tech

companies such as Alphabet Inc and Facebook Inc.

"Reaching an international agreement on how large digital companies are taxed is a priority, and we welcome the US's renewed commitment to reaching a solution," Johnson said.

The US global minimum tax proposal is expected to be a key topic of discussion at a preliminary virtual G7 finance leaders meeting on Friday.

Adeyemo, who is involved in the OECD tax talks, said he expects a broad international commitment of 15 per cent or more to build support in Congress for a US corporate tax increase by narrowing the gap between US and overseas rates. — Reuters

Global property markets ready to soar this year

WASHINGTON: Residential property markets in major economies will soar this year on huge monetary and fiscal support and amid a recovery from the pandemic, according to Reuters polls, which showed risks for prices skewed to the upside.

Average home selling prices have hit eye-watering levels in 2021 in some countries. That trend is expected to continue, driven by low mortgage rates, swift vaccine rollouts and the easing of restrictions after deep pandemic-induced recessions last year.

The global boom in property prices comes alongside soaring stock markets, which quickly bounced back from a slump on pandemic-driven economic damage and devastating job losses, to focus on unprecedented stimulus and the recovery at hand.

Reuters polls of more than 100 property market experts taken May 11-24 showed big upgrades to house price forecasts for the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia and Dubai compared with just three months back, outpacing expected GDP growth

and consumer price inflation.

"Consumer confidence has risen strongly due to the success of vaccination programmes and survey evidence suggests the pandemic has led to more people looking to move home. Supply shortages point to upward pressure on prices in the short term," said Andrew Harvey, senior economist at Nationwide.

Almost 60 per cent of analysts, or 55 of 92, who responded to a separate question on property markets across the globe, said risks to the outlook were skewed to the upside over the coming year. The remaining 37 said more to the downside.

The trend showed expectations for strong gains this year followed by slower appreciation in the next few years, moderated by increased supply, lower immigration and as affordability becomes a bigger constraint.

While there has been a higher demand for both single- and multi-family homes in cities and towns, when asked how demand for office space would change more broadly over the next few years, respondents were split.

— Reuters



Construction workers build single homes in San Diego, California. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

SHANGHAI

Huawei to unveil new OS next week

Chinese tech giant Huawei on Tuesday said it would launch a long-awaited new operating system for smartphones next week, part of an all-out push into the software industry aimed at weathering US sanctions and taking on Google's Android.

Huawei tipped the June 2 launch of its HarmonyOS platform in a short teaser on social media, just as an internal memo came to light in which company founder and CEO Ren Zhengfei outlined plans to go big



in software.

The 76-year-old assured staff that "in the software domain, the US will have very little control over our future development, and we have much autonomy."

— AFP

TOKYO

Oil prices steady near one week high

Oil prices were steady on Tuesday, holding around one-week highs after jumping more than 3 per cent the previous session as investors tempered expectations of an early return of oil exporter Iran to international crude markets.

Brent crude futures were down 1 cent at \$68.45 a barrel. US West Texas Intermediate futures were off 8 cents at \$65.97 a barrel, after gaining 3.9 per cent the previous session.

Indirect negotiations between



the US and Iran are due to resume in Vienna this week. Talks were given another life after Tehran and the UN nuclear agency extended a monitoring agreement on the country's atomic programme. — Reuters

BERLIN

German economy shrank 1.3 per cent in Q1

The German economy was hit harder in the first quarter by the coronavirus crisis than previously estimated after a new round of anti-pandemic lockdown measures led to a sharp drop in private consumption.

Europe's biggest economy shrank by 1.8 per cent in the first three months of the year, the Federal Statistical Office (Destatis) said on Tuesday, dragged down by a 5.4 per cent drop in household spending. In April, Destatis saw the Q1



contraction at 1.7 per cent following a 0.5 per cent expansion in the final quarter of 2020. "The coronavirus crisis caused another decline in economic performance at the beginning of 2021," Destatis said. — dpa