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DEFENDER SHOWS MOURINHO WHO'S BOSS IN ROME



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PANDEMIC DRIVES SEA FREIGHT PRICES TO RECORD HIGH



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GRAFFITI ART SHAPES THE TALENT OF ARTIST MUSAB



MUSCAT

HM GREET'S ALGERIA, VENEZUELA, CABO VERDE

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Abdelmadjid Tebboune of Algeria, on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health, well-being and a long life to President Tebboune. His Majesty has also sent a cable of greetings to President Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela, on his country's Independence Anniversary. His Majesty has sent a cable of greetings to President Jorge Carlos Fonseca of the Republic of Cabo Verde, on the occasion of his country's National Day. — ONA

TEMPERATURES TO COME DOWN

South-Eastern coast is on a cool mode due to the monsoon winds, but Al Hajar Mountain range has been in the spotlight on Sunday with clouds forming over parts of the governorates of Al Dakhiliyah, South Al Batinah and North Al Sharqiyah, which brought about the rain with thunder, accompanied by active winds and hail. The next three days will continue to have this weather pattern. DETAILS ON P3

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Culture brands who you are...
ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHAMI

Progress on Covid, but disunion haunts US on 245th birthday

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HUGE TURNOUT FOR VACCINATION

IMMUNISATION FOR 18 YEARS AND ABOVE BEGINS

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Within the National Strategy for Immunisation against Coronavirus (Covid-19), the Ministry of Health on Sunday began administering vaccines to a new target segment, which includes people aged 18 and above in all governorates of the Sultanate.

A steady stream of citizens comprising a majority of youngsters was seen from 7 am queueing up for the vaccination drive at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Apart from Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in Muscat, Sahil Health Centre in the Wilayat of Qurayat has started

receiving targeted people with full adherence to health measures.

As many as 8,000 people, predominantly women, took their first dose of the vaccine while many waited for their turn outside the hall. There are nearly 60 booths which can accommodate between 4,000 to 8,000 people a day.

TURN TO P2

Active cases drop, no respite from deaths

The Sultanate got some reprieve on Sunday as the number of cases reported for three days was relatively less compared to June 27 figures.

The number of sick

patients or active cases has dropped by 1,367 to 29,009 from 30,376 on Thursday.

At the same time, there is no respite from the number of deaths,

which is a record for a Sunday at 143. It may be noted that the Ministry of Health has reported 50 daily deaths for the first time on Friday.

DETAILS ON P2



Sultanate's agriculture sector sees 9.8 per cent growth

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

On the back of enhanced adoption of advanced farming technologies and conducive government policies, agriculture production in Oman has seen substantial growth in the last two years.

“Despite Covid-19 pandemic, the agriculture and fisheries sector saw a growth of 9.8 per cent in 2019-2020.

Hence, Oman's agriculture market witnessed impressive growth during the pandemic”, according to a report quoting the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

In its forecast for the period between 2021 and 2026, Reportlinker.com projects the Agriculture in Oman to register a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 2.4 per cent.

“The increase in the

adoption of advanced farming technologies and conducive government policies supporting domestic crop production are some of the factors driving the market growth in the country”, the report points out.

Oman majorly meets its domestic fruits, vegetables, and cereals demand through imports. Therefore, to reduce import dependency, the country is aiming for self-sufficiency



in agricultural products by encouraging its farmers to adopt advanced farming techniques.

Agricultural production of Oman constitutes mainly dates, vegetables, fruits and other crops in a minor quantity. According to FAO, the total amount of agricultural land present in Oman was about 1.4 million hectares in 2019, 1.5 per cent of the total land area.

TURN TO P3

STUDENTS AT SCIENTIFIC COMPETITION



A number of students from North Al Sharqiyah Governorate participated in the Shaikha Fadia Al Saad al Sabah Scientific Competition 2021, held in the State of Kuwait. The competition is designed for the General Education Diploma (GED) students in the field of discovering the multiple effective roles of bacterial isolates extracted from the environment in the biological treatment of oil pollutants, combating agricultural pests and boosting plant growth.

Tax Authority begins to receive VAT returns

MUSCAT: With effect from July 1, the Tax Authority began to receive the first set of VAT returns via the Authority's electronic website for a period of 30 days.

The quarterly tax returns for VAT registrants covers the added value of imports, accruals, deductibles, due tax and refundable tax credits.

The Tax Authority pointed out that, over the past period, it published an advisory guide through which it explained the mechanism of presenting tax returns for VAT registrants, as well as terms for tax refund, rectification of submitted tax returns and ways of maintaining tax registers and bills.

The Authority underscored the significance of taxpayers' presenting their disclosures in time to avoid penalties stated in the VAT Law's Article (101), which penalises any person who fails to submit the tax return or presents false data or commits any other violations stated in the law. The penalty includes

Over the past period an advisory guide explaining the mechanism of presenting tax returns for VAT, as well as terms for tax refund, was published

TAX AUTHORITY

imprisonment ranging between one year and three months of imprisonment and a fine ranging between RO 5,000 and RO 20,000 or either of the two penalties (imprisonment, fines).

With effect from July 1, the authority started receiving registrations of merchants and service providers from among those whose baseline annual imports or expected imports range between RO 250,000 and RO 499,999. — ONA

Active cases drop, but no respite from deaths

DAILY TOLL TOUCHES 50 FOR FIRST TIME ON JULY 2

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Sultanate got some reprieve on Sunday on the Covid front, as the number of cases reported for three days was relatively less compared to June 27 figures.

The number of sick patients or active cases has dropped by 1,367 to 29,009 from 30,376 on Thursday. In addition, the total recovery rate has improved to 88.3 per cent from 87.6 during this period.

At the same time, there is no respite from the number of deaths, which is a record for a Sunday at 143. It may be noted that the Ministry of Health (MoH) has reported for 50 daily deaths for the first time on Friday.

The MoH on Sunday reported 4,662 new cases and 143 deaths. As per June 27 figures, there were 5,517 cases and 119 deaths.

Of these, 1,862 and 50 deaths were reported on Thursday, 1,569 and 48 deaths on Friday and 1,272 and 45 deaths on Saturday.

The total number of cases registered in the Sultanate has now reached 275,166, including 3,283 deaths.

One hundred seventy-one patients were admitted to hospitals across the country in the last 24 hours, bringing the total number of inpatients to 1,589, including 532 in intensive care units.

Meanwhile, with the Eid al Adha and holidays approaching, the WHO has stressed the importance of maintaining effective personal protective measures as we observe religious practices and festivities.

"This Eid al Adha let us make sure that no one is harmed because of their own complacency or the complacency of others, and let us



With the Eid al Adha and holidays approaching, the WHO has stressed the importance of maintaining effective personal protective measures as we observe religious practices and festivities

celebrate Eid al Adha safely this year."

It added, "We can remain socially connected but we must adhere to physical distancing measures by avoiding physical greetings, social feasts, and other social gatherings as much as possible.

Some of the simplest measures can have huge consequences for our joint efforts in fighting and containing the pandemic."

DINNING FOR HOTEL GUESTS

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has issued a new decision, allowing the four- and five-star hotel establishments to operate dining halls in restaurants and cafes during the ban on movement between 8 pm and 4 am, which will be limited to in-house guests.

The decision is effective from July 11 until further notice.

All hotel and tourist establishments must abide by the decisions issued by the Supreme Committee to avoid legal accountability.

Huge turnout for vaccination as 18 plus join target group

FROM PAGE 1

"The procedures for getting vaccinated are very easy to follow and we have incorporated single window system for smooth registration and vaccination processes," said Dr Anbren bin Said al Balushi, Centre Incharge at the OCEC.

There are dedicated volunteers apart from personnel from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Royal Oman Police (ROP), National Scouts and Guides, Oman Air, Omran, and other public and private organisations. An exclusive waiting area, proper signage, barcoded registration procedures, and ample parking are provided while clear guidance and awareness programmes are being carried out by the volunteers here.

"Everyone should be part of this national campaign, and everyone should initiate to register on Tarassud Plus to slot vaccination. Nonetheless, all procedures will be taken care of once a person walks in to the OCEC," added Dr Anbren, who is also the family physician and head of Health Centre in Al Hail.

Adding the new target group is part of the national vaccination strategy, this will help achieve the goal of vaccinating 70 per cent of the population by the year-end, according to the ministry officials.

In association with various bodies, the Ministry of Health has been organising vaccination campaigns for various target groups and ministries well as public and private groups, and the majority of people are seen taking their vaccine from the vaccination centres and private hospitals.

Oman began to vaccinate the first target group of people some six months ago, and the groups included people above 65 years, people suffering from chronic diseases, frontline workers including medical staff and the like at various schools, grounds etc.

A mass vaccination camp for people above 45 years of age began at the OCEC on June 20 and continued for many weeks. The ministry has kept on adding more target groups and more governmental departments, ministries and Public Authorities



in the past few weeks, and the latest among the target group is the youngsters above 18.

"We encourage the public to get vaccinated according to the dates and times allotted to each sector and to be a part of the nation building march and to ignore the negative news as no scientific proof

has been identified to support the fake claim that vaccine has side effects," she further said.

A number of targeted people for vaccination expressed their satisfaction with the drive and the easiness of procedures in vaccination centres. They also valued the efforts of the

government in ensuring the health of citizens and residents alike.

The Directorate-General of Health Services in Muscat Governorate also continues providing the drive-thru vaccination service at Oman Automobile Association.

In a statement, Thamra bint

Said al Ghafriyah, acting Director General of Health Services in the Governorate of Muscat, said that the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre saw a good turnout of people and a smooth vaccination process.

Al Ghafriyah added that the drive-thru vaccination service in the Oman Automobile Association is offered from 2 to 7 pm. Further updates will be given weekly on this service.

Moreover, the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah on Sunday started vaccinating people aged 18 and above with the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine. The complex also continues vaccinating other targeted age groups.

The Ministry of Health has emphasised the importance of booking an appointment through the website <https://covid19.moh.gov.om> or through Tarassud Plus application before heading to government vaccination centres in various governorates of the Sultanate to ensure a safe and smooth vaccination process.

(With ONA inputs)

Temperature likely to cool down, drizzle expected



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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The South-Eastern coast is in a cool mode due to the monsoon winds, but the Al Hajar Mountain range has been in the spotlight with clouds forming over parts of the governorates of Al Dakhiliyah, South Al Batinah, and North Al Sharqiyah, which brought about the rain with thunder, accompanied by active winds and hail.

“The next three days will continue to have this weather pattern,” said the weather forecaster at Oman Met Office, Civil Aviation Authority.

“The rain around Al Hajar Mountains will continue for three days. However, it will not extend up to the capital area,” he pointed out.

According to the weather expert, the coastal area is expected to experience clouds in the morning.

“However, the clouds will disappear as the sun rises by 10 am and reappear over the mountains as convective clouds,” he said.

There have also been thick Khareef (monsoon) clouds on the coasts of Dhofar Governorate and the adjacent mountains, with the possibility of more drizzle.

“The next few days, Khareef is expected to be better than the last couple of days as more drizzle is



expected,” explained the weather forecaster.

The coastal areas are also expected to experience cooler temperatures as the Southeastern part is under the influence of monsoon wind, and Oman

Sea Coast will also see better conditions compared to the last three days, according to the weather forecaster.

The highest temperatures were recorded in Al Sinaina, Al Hamra, Al Rustaq, Al Amerat and Wadi Al

Maawil at 47 degrees Celsius, while the lowest recorded in Dhalkout at 21.6 degrees Celsius, Qairoon Hiriti 22.1 degree Celsius, Shalim 23.8 degree Celsius, Marmul 23.9 degree Celsius and Haima 24 degree Celsius.

Registration for General Education Diploma ends

MUSCAT: The Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC) at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation completed the two-month registration phase (May-July 2021)

Dr Hamad bin Khalfan al Numani, HEAC Director General, said that the number of General Education Diploma (GED) students and its equivalent registered for the academic year 2020/2021 reached 44,779 of them 23,040 males and 21,739 females. As many as 39,865 students made their initial study programme choices.

Al Numani added in a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA) that the centre is preparing for the upcoming registration and admission stages, which are as important as the

initial registration. He explained that their dates coincide with the announcement of GED students' final results for the academic year 2020/2021.

He further said that it is expected that the study programmes update will be announced in the first week of next August, coinciding with the start of the stage of finalising study programme choices.

The registration in this phase confirms the students' choices to compete in the first sorting. Students are advised to carefully follow the updates. During this stage, students can add new programmes either from the student's guide or from the new study programmes that will be announced on the HEAC website and social media accounts when the registration starts. — ONA

Agriculture sector sees 9.8 per cent growth

FROM PAGE 1

Due to the rising disposable incomes, people in Oman are presently more focused on healthier diets, with more fruits and vegetable inclusion. Additionally, with the increasing expat population in Oman, there is a shift in the traditional dietary habits towards organic food.

“This is anticipated to influence vegetable production in the country. Moreover, the interest in wellness and immunity has spiked as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, leading to a higher demand for fruits and vegetables in the domestic market and in partner countries. This factor is likely to have a significant impact on market growth”, points out the report.

According to the report named Agriculture in Oman — Growth, Trends, Covid-19 Impact and Forecast, dairy consumption is likely to witness the fastest growth, followed by cereals consumption.

While the consumption of cereals is set to rise due to its prominence in the daily meal, Furthermore, the demand for dairy and cereals is likely to be

supported by tourist arrivals anticipated to increase on the back of the government's plan to strengthen the tourism sector through the development of tourist spots and by encouraging private investments.

The reliance on imports has further increased with the growing demand for high-quality produce.

“Thus, with the rising demand for animal-sourced protein, fruits, and vegetables, the government's support to ensure a sufficient supply of commodities influences the agriculture market in Oman. Thus, the market is projected to record a healthy growth rate during the forecast period”, says the report.

On the other hand, the distribution network and retail chains, with respect to agriculture, are expanding consistently in Oman.

“The Omani retail industry is characterised by strong consumer demand, robust economic growth, distinct demographic factors, and a high-end technology system that ensure better customer service and efficient customer checks”, adds the report.

■ DRUG SMUGGLING ATTEMPT FOILED



The Police Command of North Al Batinah Governorate in cooperation with the Coast Guard Police, foiled an attempt to smuggle a large quantity of drugs comprising hashish, crystal meth, tramadol and methadone which was carried out by two infiltrators via the sea using speed boats. The Royal Oman Police (ROP) said that the legal procedures have been initiated against the defendants.

Oman and Sri Lanka to bolster trade

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

As part of its constant efforts to enhance bilateral trade ties with the countries around the region and beyond, the Sultanate of Oman represented by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in association with the National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka (NCCSL) is organising a three-phase Business Forum on Wednesday, July 7, on a virtual platform.

“The first ever Business Forum of its kind to be held between the national chambers of the two friendly countries is part of our ongoing drive to enhance mutual trade relations between countries in the region and beyond,” said Redha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of the OCCI board.

The first-ever ‘three-in-one’ business meeting aimed primarily

at boosting export-import relations and explore B2B opportunities will see representatives of leading business houses specialised in health, agriculture, food, farming, tourism, boat building, fisheries, garments and ICT in both Oman and Sri Lanka meeting online and exploring Avenues for mutual cooperation.

“Representatives of business communities from both countries including exporters, importers as well as investors, could make use of this opportunity to ascertain market information and to establish potential business links with their counterparts,” Ameer Ajwad,

Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman told the *Observer*.

Besides, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Chambers of Commerce of Oman and Sri Lanka will

be virtually signed to promote business cooperation between the private sectors of both countries followed by a virtual business forum and a B2B matchmaking session.

The Chairperson of the NCCSL will ceremonially sign the MoU in the presence of the Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Sri Lanka at the NCCSL premises in Colombo and by the Chairperson of the OCCI in the presence of Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman at the OCCI premises in Muscat.

The business forum will be addressed by the representatives/resource persons of the NCCSL, Board of Investment (BoI), Export Development Board (EDB) and Sri Lanka Association for Software and Services Companies (SLASSCOM). Representatives/resource persons from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries

and Water Resources, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones will address the Business Forum representing the Omani side. The Forum is open to all who are interested in exploring business opportunities in both countries.

The third segment will be the B2B matchmaking between Omani companies and their Sri Lankan counterparts who make prior registration with the NCCSL and the OCCI. The focused sectors for the B2B matchmaking include health, agriculture, food, farming, tourism, boat building, fisheries, garments and ICT. Both Omani and Sri Lankan companies who wish to participate in this virtual B2B matchmaking can register themselves by accessing the barcodes provided by the NCCSL and the OCCI on their websites.



STUDY ABROAD

STILL HAS WIDESPREAD INTEREST AMONG STUDENTS

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
[@patkaushal](#)

There has been impact of Covid-19 pandemic on every sector, including education. From suspension of classes to cancellation of exams and student-teacher interaction on virtual modes, the Covid has taught many 'new normal' lessons to the sector.

Despite talks on quality of education during the pandemic and restricted mobility, people in general were thinking that not many parents would allow their children to go away from them to study abroad.

The trend of students, however, opting to study in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Ireland and United States is noticeable. Some education consultants

admitted only marginal drop in this trend and said enquiries were still there for vacant seats.

In an interview with the *Observer*, Renu Bitling, Team Lead of the Oman chapter of IDP Education, said, "This year there has been an increasing interest for Canada. Though we are still receiving enquiries for Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Ireland and United States."

Commenting on demand for education in European and US institutions, Renu Bitling said, "There is widespread interest amongst students to study abroad as they like to study on campuses."

She, however, admitted that there is impact on foreign university options mainly due to the pandemic restrictions and border closures.

"Due to this impact student are keen to pursue education with the universities abroad. However this would mean a student might have to opt for a fully online-mode or the hybrid model which is blend of online and face to face learning."

Among the popular courses in demand are engineering, computer science and business programmes, but there is an increase in humanities also.

Asked, are students opting for admissions in foreign universities/colleges even though they know they would be able to see the campuses very soon?

"Yes students who are keen to study abroad, they are opting for admissions and are fine to commence their studies online", said Bitling.

Though there are no exact numbers

available, the IDP Education, Oman Team Lead said there is a slight drop in admission percentage, "but we are currently receiving enquires from both Omani and expatriate students."

Pan GCC there is a gradual increase in interest from students for studying in off-site campuses like Dubai and Malaysia.

Commenting on the challenges of handling applications and papers etc, Bitling agreed with the situation and said, "Due to the pandemic situation, we are providing our services and counselling sessions for the students via online platforms. We are also conducting several topic-specific information sessions ranging from careers to admission process and student visa information, which students can attend virtually", she said.



Expatriates desperately await lifting of travel ban



SAMUEL KUTTY

@samkuttyvp

Thousands of expatriates are in a bind following the travel ban and suspension of flights between the Sultanate and different South Asian countries as a result of the catastrophic spread of Covid-19 pandemic.

All of them are facing the same ordeal with the main concern being about losing their jobs or businesses. They are now desperately looking forward to the lifting of the entry ban to Oman.

"I am facing multiple challenges after my arrival in India. Not only that I may lose out on my job, but my wife and children are alone back in Oman. My wife was already hit with the pandemic", said Abdul Samad, who hails from the southern Indian state of Kerala.

The entry ban has come as a major blow to tens of thousands of expatriates who have been hoping to return to their places of work at the earliest.

Sreekumar, who accompanied a sick person to assist him to reach India for further treatment, is now stranded in India. "The travel ban came into force a day earlier when I was supposed to travel back. Hope my company will bear with me in this unprecedented situation", he said, adding, "I am clueless on when to rebook the return ticket".

Irfan Ahmed, a Pakistani national in a WhatsApp message to the *Observer*, expressed his optimism saying: "I came to Islamabad in March last. Now I too am in the same impasse as many other Pakistanis are facing. I

hope at least residents of Oman will be allowed to travel back. There are many like me who are waiting to get back to the country as we are on the verge of losing out to our jobs", Irfan, a tax expert, said.

With their families split and jobs and businesses at stake, expats are taking to different social media platforms to highlight their plight as a result of the ban on flights to the Sultanate and other countries.

"Please at least announce flights from India to Oman that will resume on any one date... only a few days left for the expiry of visa... When will the flights be restored? I am desperately waiting to reach Oman as my husband is sick there...", thus go some of the concerns and requests.

The Philippines has also barred entry of travellers from

With their families split and jobs and businesses at stake, expats are taking to different social media platforms to highlight their plight as a result of the ban on flights to the Sultanate and other countries

Oman and other Gulf countries as part of measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

"My parents are seriously sick back in Manila. It's been over two years that I have not visited them. Flights are cancelled to the Philippines due to the coronavirus spread," said Emmanuel Joseph, a pharmacist.

Currently, there is entry ban on over 15 countries including the UK, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Nigeria, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Sudan, Brazil, and Vietnam are banned from entering Oman following a surge in cases in the second wave of Covid-19.

Omani nationals, healthcare workers, diplomats, and their families are exempted from the ban.

WOMAN AIRLIFTED TO HOSPITAL



The Police Aviation airlifted a woman suffering from a medical condition from the Al Jabal Al Akhdhar to the Sultan Qaboos University Hospital to receive medical treatment.

RNO COMMANDER LEAVES FOR UK

MUSCAT: Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), and the military delegation accompanying him left to the United Kingdom on an official several-day visit. – ONA



Termination of Employment Relationship with an Employee

Mohsin Haider Darwish LLC., Muscat, Ruwi, Al Nour Street, Way No. 3116, Building No. 951, hereby announces that **Mr. Abdullah Sulaiman Salim Al Ajmi**, Omani nationality, worked as Senior General Manager in the Estate & Maintenance Department, has submitted his resignation from work on December 1, 2020, and there is no current employment relationship between him and the company. We request all customers of the company not to deal with the above-mentioned in any transactions as an employee of the company.

Initiative to promote writing skills of school students

LIJU CHERIAN

@ljucherianoman

A literary consultancy named 'Pachyderm Tales' has come forward to help promote the young writing talents of Omanis and expatriates in the Sultanate.

The Chennai-based enterprise was launched in 2020. With a short span of a year, they have published over 100 books with writers from across the globe covering various projects.

To spread its success story, Pachyderm Tales now works towards spreading their roots in other countries and are scouting for new collaborations.

The Sultanate will be their first venture in the Arabian Gulf and plans are on to involve Omani students as much as possible and create a writing culture among them.

ELF professional Divya Hariharan, will act as its ambassador planning their programmes in the Sultanate. "We are planning to help Omani school going students to develop and foster their creativity in writing by conducting workshops and conferences and thereby helping them to bring out their works. We will also focus on the expatriate communities settled in Oman to develop and bring out their hidden writing talents."

Explaining their plans for the



Dr R Lakshmi Priya, CEO & Founder

Sultanate, Divya, who is a poet and blogger, says Pachyderm Tales has plans to launch their '1,000K Challenge', which provides publishing opportunities to students under the age of 18 free of cost, to schools and colleges in the Sultanate.

Divya further explains saying that "We will do everything from editing, typesetting and book cover free of cost for the 1,000 children project and I will be in charge of workshops and signing deals.

"We would also help the writing community to get a wider reading audience. Initially, we started out by bringing out regional books on Spotify and also through Amazon. Our main intention is to make the world a creative place, to nourish and beautify nature and cherish their culture and foster love towards other cultures from writing."

CEO and Founder, Dr Lakshmi

Priya, says Pachyderm Tales means elephant stories. "We initially launched this for children, but now we are publishing books for the audience. We are working on a book based on Europe and another completely for students in the US," she says.

Pachyderm Tales initially focused their roots in India. Now after a year, they are slowly spreading roots to develop creativity on a wider scale.

Pachyderm Tales have already held poetry reading sessions among students in Bhutan, workshops in Darjeeling, India, and at Jenderal Soedirman University, a public university located in Central Java, Indonesia, and Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Bangkok, Thailand. Similar workshops have already been held in Asia, Africa and The Netherlands.

They plan to conduct international creative writing symposiums with renowned speakers around the world to foster and nurture hidden talent. Pachyderm Tales helps writers discover the joys of writing, without letting the burden of the publishing world drain them of their passion.

Director and COO, V Uma, says the consultancy aims to foster growth among students and others by spreading out to open the hidden talents.



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. 29/2021

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following tenders:

Serial	Tender No.	Tender Description	Document Fee	Deadline for Inquires Submission	Deadline for obtaining Tender Docs.	Deadline for Submission
1	74/2020/MM/PA-22-Recall-1	Supply of Pumps & Electrical Materials	25/- OMR	25/07/2021	08/08/2021	15/08/2021
2	34/2021/MM/PA-5	Hiring of Non-potable Water Tankers (5000 GLN) for Irrigation at Al-Seeb	25/- OMR	25/07/2021	08/08/2021	15/08/2021
3	35/2021/MM/PA-6	Hiring of Drinking Water and Sewage tankers for Labour Camp at Al-Mistah - Bouwsher	25/- OMR	25/07/2021	08/08/2021	15/08/2021
4	36/2021/MM/PA-7	Supply of Tools and Pesticides for Insect Control	25/- OMR	25/07/2021	08/08/2021	15/08/2021

Specialized Companies with a valid registration certificate from Tender Board can obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>. Starting from the date of this announcement until the end of deadline mentioned above.

Bidders shall submit their offers electronically through the link shown above accompanied with an electronic copy of a bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat Municipality. The details of bond (amount & validity) must be as per tender's terms and conditions in the etendering Website starting from the date of bids submission. The original copy of the bond shall be submitted **as the table below**:

Tender at The Serial	The box's location for Tender Bonds
1, 2	First floor at The Directorate General of Quantity Surveying & Contracts in Muscat Municipality, Head Office, Darsait
3, 4	Third floor at The Directorate General of Quantity Surveying & Contracts in Muscat Municipality, Head Office, Darsait

Tender not accompanied by a tender bond will be rejected.

NOTES:

- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please contact us through e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
- For technical support of e-tendering system, please send an email to (etenderhd@mtc.gov.om) or call (+968 24166670).

Website: www.mm.gov.om



شركة مطاحن صحار
SOHAR FLOUR MILLS

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Sohar Flour Mill LLC, Sohar hereby announces the following tender:-

Tender No	Description of Works	Eligibility to Participate	Fee	Date of Submission	Location for Tender Submission
SFM/2021/R0/5	Provision of manpower and equipment for installation of machinery for Sohar Flour Mills silo project at Sohar Industrial port area.	Locally registered company with proven experience in skilled & semi-skilled manpower supply	RO 25/each. (Non-Refundable)	26 th July 2021	Sohar Flour Mills LLC office Sohar Industrial Port, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman Contact: +968 26646818 or +968 91369927

- The electronic copy of tender documents will be available from Tuesday, 6th July 2021.
- Qualified contractors are requested to contact "Sohar Flour Mills LLC, Tel: +968 26646818, Fax: +968 26850401, GSM: +968 91369927 E-Mail: Mazin.almezeini@soharflourmills.com" to request the tender documents or for any further information.



Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al Sisi and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan are seen during the inauguration of the new 'July 3' naval base, in Marsa Matruh Egypt. – Reuters



SISI OPENS NAVAL BASE CLOSE TO BORDER WITH LIBYA

RAS GARGOUB, Egypt: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al Sisi inaugurated a large naval base on Saturday 135 km from the border with Libya, flanked by close ally Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan and Libya’s unity president.

Egypt says the July 3 base will help it protect strategic and economic interests as well as helping guard against irregular migration as it boosts its naval presence on the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.

At the inauguration, two Mistral helicopter carriers acquired from France were on display alongside a German-made submarine and two recently delivered FREMM-class Italian frigates.

Naval forces performed exercises that included the firing of missiles, parachute jumps and

an amphibious landing.

Later, Sisi briefed guests at a private event about the giant hydropower dam being built by Ethiopia, which Egypt sees as a threat to its water supplies. The United Nations Security Council is likely to meet over the issue this week after talks repeatedly stalled.

Egypt appreciates Ethiopia’s development needs but negotiations should not “continue indefinitely” Sisi said, according to a statement from the presidency.

The July 3 base, whose name marks the day in 2013 when Sisi led the overthrow of Brotherhood president Mohamed Mursi in 2013, is spread over more than 10 sq km and has a 1,000-metre naval quay with a water depth of 14 metres. It also has quays for commercial shipping. The eastern border became a key security

concern for Egypt after Libya slid into turmoil after 2011, though it has beefed up its presence in the area.

Egypt and the UAE, backed the eastern-based commander Khalifa Haftar as conflict escalated in Libya after 2014, but Cairo has increasingly thrown support behind a United Nations-led effort to reunify the country.

That process created a new three-man presidential council headed by Mohamed al Menfi, who attended Saturday’s inauguration.

Egypt has also experienced tensions with Turkey — which backed Haftar’s rivals in Libya — over maritime rights in the gas-rich eastern Mediterranean. However, Cairo and Ankara have taken cautious steps this year to mend relations.

In April, Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouli travelled to Libya, where he had talks with interim prime minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah, in a new sign of warming ties between Cairo and Tripoli.

Dbeibah visited Egypt in February on his first official trip abroad after his election. In April, Dbeibah also paid a visit to Abu Dhabi, where he was warmly greeted by Shaikh Mohammed, who expressed support for the new Libyan administration.

Sisi and his guests witnessed military manoeuvres involving several vessels, attack helicopters and fighter jets.

State-run newspaper *Akhbar Al Youm* reported that the new Egyptian base includes an airstrip and a 1,000-metre long pier.

— AFP/Reuters

43 migrants missing in boat sinking off Tunisia

TUNIS: Forty-three migrants were missing off the Tunisian coast and 84 others were rescued after their boat sank while heading to Europe, a Tunisian Red Crescent official said on Saturday.

A rescue operation started on Friday after the boat capsized near the coastal town of Zarzis in Tunisia’s Medenine province, Munji Salim, the head of the Red Crescent in the southern province, said.

The boat had set off from the Libyan city of Zuwara with 127 migrants on board, Salim said.

Those rescued included 46 Sudanese nationals, 16 Eritreans, 12 Bangladeshis and five from Egypt.

They were taken to the Zarzis port, according to Salim. “The sheltering centres in southern Tunisia are crowded with migrants,”

he added.

Last month, the Tunisian coastguard rescued 267 migrants from drowning after their boat also sailing from Libya broke down while heading to Europe.

This was the highest number of migrants rescued off the Tunisian coast in a single operation.

Every year, thousands of migrants risk their lives crossing from Tunisia and Libya in search of a better life in Europe.

In April, at least 41 migrants died after their boat sank off the Tunisian coast

According to the UN’s International Organization for Migration (IOM), more than 550 people have died in the Mediterranean Sea this year. They often use unseaworthy wooden boats or rubber dinghies. — dpa



Tunisian naval forces last week rescued Europe-bound migrants from the Mediterranean Sea. – AFP File Photo

Rebel-held Syria’s northwest shifts power towards solar panels

KILLI, Syria: Huge solar panels poke out of pumpkin and tomato fields in Syria’s rebel-held northwest, where after infrastructure was destroyed during a decade of war, many have switched to renewable energy.

“We used to rely on diesel-powered generators, but it was a struggle with fuel shortages and price hikes,” said Khaled Mustafa, one of dozens of farmers who set up panels in the Idlib region. “So we opted for solar power instead,” he said. More than three million people live in the Idlib region in Syria’s northwest, much of which is controlled by fighter forces and other rebels.

Across Syria, at least 90 per cent lack a stable power supply, according to the United Nations’

‘Since armed clashes have decreased, and the country is in a more stable situation, solar energy production has spiked as a valid alternative,’ says UNDP

Development Programme (UNDP).

In rebel areas, there is little hope of state-provided electricity.

Instead, the dark blue silicon panels have become common — installed on roofs, in hospitals or between tents in massive displacement camps. Once small and smoky diesel generators used to power many homes.



Solar panels are installed in agricultural fields, in the village of Killi, near Bab al Hawa by the border with Turkey, in Syria’s northwestern Idlib province. – AFP

But with regular fuel shortages sending prices soaring, solar panels are now viewed as a cheaper, more efficient and

reliable alternative.

In Mustafa’s plot, solar panels hooked to rotating metal plates turn to follow the movement of

the sun. They are among 200 solar panels purchased two years ago by an agricultural cooperative of nearly 20 farmers, costing some \$4,000.

The panels power water pumps from a well, irrigating three hectares (seven acres) of cooperative farmland, as well as neighbouring fields. “Even if (state) electricity is restored, solar energy will remain cheaper,” said Mustafa.

Syria’s electricity production was slashed by at least half during the conflict, but as fighting has calmed, renewable energy sources have increased, the UN says. “Since armed clashes have decreased, and most of the country is in a more stable situation, solar energy production has spiked as a valid

alternative,” UNDP said.

In regime-controlled areas, solar panels provide power for both homes and public institutions like universities.

As for those under rebel control, one survey found eight per cent used solar as the main source of power in their homes, according to a report in the *Education and Conflict Review*, published by Britain’s University College London.

It also found a tenth of people used solar for heating water, and a third of people used solar as a secondary source of power, for lighting and charging batteries.

In the rebel-held town of Dana, shimmering solar power installations cover rooftops.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

KHARTOUM

Sudan urges ceasefire in war-hit Tigray

Sudan called for a ceasefire and dialogue in neighbouring Ethiopia, warning of regional instability, as fighting intensified in war-hit Tigray region across the border. “The Sudanese government is deeply concerned about the developments in Ethiopia, which may have a negative impact on regional stability,” it said in a statement.

It urged “all the parties in neighbouring Ethiopia to stop the fighting and come to the negotiating table”. Ethiopia’s



northern Tigray region has been rocked by fighting since last November 4, when the federal government unleashed a military operation against dissidents in the region. — AFP

BATABO

Chain protest to keep Syria aid crossing open

Hundreds of humanitarian workers formed a human chain in northwest Syria, urging the international community to keep open the only border crossing for aid into the rebel-held region. ‘Humanitarian aid is a right, not a privilege,’ one sign held up by aid workers read, while others stood in a pattern on the road, so that the words “Save lifeline” was visible from the air.

A UN authorisation for aid to transit through the Bab al Hawa border crossing from Turkey



into Syria expires on July 10. Aid organisations fear that Russia, a staunch ally of the Damascus regime, might block a United Nations Security Council vote to renew it for a year. — AFP

BEIRUT

Animals starve in Lebanon’s zoos

Thin and frail, the two big cats scarcely moved as they lay on the concrete floor of their cage while, nearby, an emaciated Syrian brown bear anxiously paced his enclosure. The three starving animals are among the last, neglected residents of a zoo in Hazmieh outside Beirut, their upkeep rendered too expensive by Lebanon’s economic crisis.

“At this point they are not really lions,” said Jason Mier, director of Animals Lebanon, a rescue charity seeking homes for



them and other zoo animals in sanctuaries abroad.

“DNA-wise those are lions but those are just two animals which have given up on life and are lying here.” — Reuters

In brief

■ NAYPYIDAW



MYANMAR FORCES KILL 25 IN RAID ON TOWN

Myanmar security forces killed at least 25 people last week in a confrontation with opponents of the military junta at a town in the centre of the Southeast Asian nation, a resident and Myanmar-language media said on Sunday.

A spokesman for the military did not respond to calls requesting comment on the violence at Depayin in the Sagaing region, about 300 km north of Naypyidaw. The state-run *Global New Light of Myanmar* said 'armed terrorists' had ambushed security forces patrolling there, killing one of them and wounding six. It said the attackers retreated after retaliation by the security forces.

— Reuters

■ WASHINGTON



ONE MILLION US VACCINE DOSES DUE IN MALAYSIA

One million donated doses of the Covid-19 vaccine developed by Pfizer Inc's and BioNTech will arrive in Malaysia on Monday, White House officials said, with plans for more shipments to Southeast Asia soon. The doses are from an initial batch of 80 million US-made vaccines the Biden administration pledged last month to share globally amid concern about the disparity in vaccination rates between advanced and developing countries.

Washington has been competing with China to deepen geopolitical clout through so-called 'vaccine diplomacy', although it says it is not sharing vaccines to secure favors or extract concessions, but to save lives and end the pandemic. — Reuters

■ KARACHI



TIKTOK BACK IN PAKISTAN AFTER COURT REVOKES BAN

TikTok was running again in Pakistan after a provincial court lifted suspension of the popular social media service but ordered it to address complaints that it hosted objectionable content. The Pakistan Telecoms Authority (PTA) blocked access last week for a third time after a ruling by a Sindh court hearing a private citizen's petition against the Chinese-owned app.

Freedom of speech advocates have long criticised creeping government censorship and control of Pakistan's internet and media. — AFP

29 killed in Philippines troop plane crash

MANILA: At least 29 people were killed on Sunday when a Philippines Air Force plane carrying troops crashed on landing and broke up in flames, the country's worst military air disaster in nearly 30 years.

Pictures from the scene showed flames and smoke pouring from wreckage strewn among trees as men in combat uniform milled around, while a column of thick black smoke rose from the coconut palms into the sky.

The Lockheed C-130 transport aircraft carrying troops bound for counter-insurgency operations crashed with 96 aboard at Patikul in the far southern province of Sulu.

The army in the sprawling Philippine archipelago has been fighting a long war against militants from Abu Sayyaf and other factions.

Twenty-nine bodies were retrieved and 50 people had been taken to hospital, leaving 17 unaccounted for, the military said in a statement, adding there was still hope for survivors.

"A number of soldiers were seen jumping out of the aircraft before it hit the ground, sparing them from the explosion caused by the crash", the unit, the Joint Task Force Sulu, said in the statement.

Military chief Cirilito Sobejana said the plane had "missed the runway trying to regain power".

A military spokesman, Colonel Edgard Arevalo, said there was no sign of any attack on the plane,



First responders work at the site after a Philippines Air Force Lockheed C-130 plane carrying troops crashed on landing in Patikul, Sulu province. — Reuters

but a crash investigation had yet to begin and efforts were focused on rescue and treatment.

The military command said the soldiers aboard had the rank of private, and were being deployed to their battalions. They were flying to the provincial airport of Jolo from Laguindingan, about 460 km to the northeast.

"They were supposed to join us in our fight against terrorism", said Commander William N Gonzales of Joint Task Force Sulu.

Jolo island is about 950 km

A military spokesman says there was no sign of any attack on the plane, but a crash investigation had yet to begin and efforts were focused on rescue and treatment

south of the capital, Manila.

The Lockheed C-130H Hercules aircraft, with registration 5125, had only recently arrived in the Philippines.

It was one of two aircraft provided by the US government through the Defence Security Cooperation Agency, a government website said in January. It quoted an air force spokesman as saying the aircraft would boost capability for heavy airlift missions.

The website C-130.net said the plane that crashed had first flown

in 1988. The model is a workhorse for armed forces around the world.

The Philippines armed forces have had a patchy air safety record. Last month a Black Hawk helicopter crashed during a training mission, killing six people.

A Philippines Air Force C-130 crash in 1993 killed 30 people. A 2008 crash of the civilian variant of the Lockheed plane flown by the Philippines Air Force killed 11 people, the Aviation Safety Network says. — AFP

Japan rescue work continues after deadly landslides



Police officers wearing muddy protective face masks conduct rescue and search operation at the site of a mudslide caused by heavy rain at Izusan district, Atami. — Reuters

ATAMI: Rescuers in a Japanese holiday town hit by a deadly landslide were forced to suspend their search for survivors several times on Sunday as more rain lashed the devastated area.

Two women were confirmed dead after torrents of mud crashed through part of the hot-spring resort of Atami in central Japan on Saturday morning, following days of heavy downpours.

Nineteen people have been rescued and around 20 others are still missing, the town's disaster-management spokesman Yuta Hara said.

"We are doing our best to rescue survivors while carefully checking the weather and other conditions", he said.

Hara said around 130 homes and other buildings had been destroyed as the landslide swept through

the residential area, leaving behind a quagmire that stretched down to the nearby coast.

Vehicles were buried and buildings tipped from their foundations, with an air-conditioning unit seen dangling from one devastated home towards the slurry below.

Hara said the landslide was one kilometre long and 120 metres wide at some points.

Hundreds of rescue workers and military personnel were combing through the mud and debris with diggers and on foot, climbing across cracked roofs and sticking poles into the ground to check for bodies.

TV footage showed coast guard divers searching in murky seas, while police officers scoured damaged houses with sniffer dogs.

— AFP

First spacewalk at China's new Tiangong station

BEIJING: Two astronauts conducted China's first tandem spacewalk on Sunday, working on the outside of their nation's new Tiangong station in orbit around Earth. Three Chinese astronauts blasted off in June, docking at the space station where they are to remain for three months in China's longest crewed mission to date.

On Sunday morning, two of them exited the core module, said the China Manned Space Agency. The first, Liu Boming, was transported with help from a mechanical arm to a work site and the other, Tang Hongbo, moved by climbing outside the hatch.

In a video clip of Liu leaving the cabin, he exclaimed: "Wow, it's too beautiful out here."

Their mission involves elevating a panoramic camera outside the Tianhe core module, as well as testing the robotic arm which will be used to transfer future modules around the station, state media said.

Television footage showed the astronauts preparing for the spacewalk by donning gear and conducting health checks while exercising.

The crew members were later shown opening the hatch and exiting the module separately, wearing newly developed suits said to weigh some 130 kilograms.

This is the first of two spacewalks planned for the mission, both expected to last six or seven hours.

It is also the first time since



In this photo released by China's Xinhua News Agency, Chinese astronauts, from left Tang Hongbo, Nie Haisheng, and Liu Boming salute from aboard China's space station core module Tianhe during a video conversation with Chinese President Xi Jinping on June 23.

It is the first time since 2008 that Chinese astronauts have come out of their craft in space

2008 that Chinese astronauts have come out of their craft in space. Back then, commander Zhai Zhigang made China the third country to complete a spacewalk — after the Soviet Union and the United States.

As with the 2008 mission, the launch of China's first crewed mission in nearly five years is a matter of huge prestige for the country, as Beijing marks the 100th anniversary of the ruling

Communist Party this month with a massive propaganda campaign.

To prepare, the crew underwent more than 6,000 hours of training.

The Chinese space agency is planning a total of 11 launches through to the end of next year, including three more crewed missions that will deliver two lab modules to expand the station, along with supplies and crew members.

In addition to Liu and Tang, the mission's commander is Nie Haisheng, a decorated air force pilot who has already participated in two space missions. He supported the latest spacewalk from within the cabin. — AFP



A firefighter battles the flame in a forest on the slopes of the Throodos mountain chain, as a giant fire rages on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, on Saturday. — AFP

Four dead in Cyprus’ worst forest fire in decades

VAVATSINIA: A huge forest blaze in Cyprus has killed four people, destroyed homes and forced evacuations of villages as Greece, Israel and other countries deployed fire-fighting planes to the Mediterranean island.

The fire began on Saturday afternoon and has swept through districts in the southern foothills of the Troodos mountains as the country grapples with a blistering heatwave.

“It is a tragedy,” President Nicos Anastasiades said on Twitter, describing it as “the largest fire since 1974” when the island was divided after Turkey occupied its northern third.

The blaze had caused “loss of life” and destroyed property and forest lands, Anastasiades said, adding that “the government will provide immediate assistance to the victims and the families of the victims.”

“We will not leave anyone abandoned in the destruction of the fire.”

Firefighters were successful in bringing the main fire under control on Sunday morning, authorities said, while warning that strengthening winds could

yet propel a resurgence.

Interior Minister Nicos Nouris said that four charred bodies were found outside the village of Odos in Larnaca district in what was the “most catastrophic fire since the founding of the Republic of Cyprus” in terms of material damage.

“Forensic examiners are going to the scene for identification,” he told reporters on Sunday.

“All the indications support the fact that these are the four missing persons we have been searching for since yesterday,” he said, adding that all four are thought to be Egyptian nationals.

The daily *Phileleftheros* newspaper said their bodies were found about 400 metres (yards) from their burnt-out vehicle.

In areas where the fire had been tamed, charred tree trunks were visible on hillsides, while grey ash had replaced yellowed scrub as far as the eye could see in non-forested areas.

Thick gnarled trunks of ancient olive trees, long emblematic of the holiday island, were reduced to smouldering skeletons. — AFP

Biden White House serves up burgers, nostalgia for July Fourth

WILMINGTON: US President Joe Biden will mark the nation’s 245th birthday on Sunday with a traditional celebration looking forward to a rebound from the coronavirus pandemic.

After a holiday spent buying cherry pies in Michigan before spending a quiet night at his family home in Delaware, Biden is returning to the White House to host around 1,000 people for burgers and fireworks.

It’s a sweet dose of nostalgia for a country weary of coronavirus pandemic restrictions and hardship, burdens that have eased but not disappeared with widespread availability of vaccines.

The pandemic forced cancellation of nearly all celebrations last year and led to a toned-down January inauguration for the Democratic president, who had to do without traditional black-tie galas and bipartisan comity as Republican former President Donald Trump disputed his election loss.

Signs of normalcy have returned in the United States, where people travelled and gathered without masks even though Biden has fallen somewhat short of his goal to get 70 per cent of US adults at least one vaccine shot by Sunday.



Fireworks explode at the ‘Monster Freedom Fest’ during Independence Day weekend celebrations at the Lincoln Speedway in Abbottstown, Pennsylvania on Saturday. — AFP

The government calculated the number as about 67 per cent, as some people have resisted getting shots.

“On Sunday, we’ll celebrate our independence as a nation, as well as our progress against the virus,” Biden told a group of teachers on Friday. “In the days ahead, we have a chance to make another beginning.”

At the White House on Saturday, smoke from ground-beef patties rose off of charcoal grills as workers prepared dishes for Sunday’s event.

In a sharp shift from recent months, the doors of the White House will be open to hundreds of invited guests, marking the largest event there of Biden’s presidency.

The White House lawn event is expected to include essential workers who helped in the COVID response and military families.

Biden will make remarks and there will be a 17-minute fireworks display set off from both sides of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool.

— Reuters

Masks personal choice in England soon

LONDON: The wearing of face coverings in England will become a personal choice and the data that will determine if lockdown restrictions can be lifted this month was looking “very positive”, Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick said on Sunday.

“It will be a different period where we as private citizens make these judgments rather than the government telling you what to do,” Jenrick told Sky News.

Legal lockdown restrictions are due to be removed on July 19 under the government’s roadmap and Prime Minister Boris Johnson will set out details about the final stage of easing in England in the coming days, Jenrick said.

Asked if he would stop wearing a face mask if permitted, he said: “I will. I don’t particularly want to wear a mask, I don’t think a lot of people enjoy doing it, we will be moving into a phase though where these will be matters of



personal choice.”

Johnson had hoped to remove final restrictions in June but his plan was scuppered by rising coronavirus cases, driven largely by the more transmissible Delta variant.

He said last week that although Britain’s vaccination programme had broken the link between infection and deaths, some

precautions might have to remain beyond July 19.

Jenrick on Sunday said the data was looking “very positive”.

“It does seem as if we can now move forward and move to a much more permissive regime where we move away from many of those restrictions that have been so difficult for us,” he said.

“We’re going to have to ensure

that every adult gets double vaccinated, because that is the key to keeping the virus under control as we move into the autumn and the winter.” Meanwhile, Downing Street on Saturday confirmed proposals to scrap quarantine requirements for those who have received two doses of a coronavirus vaccine are under “consideration.” A No 10 source said it was looking at whether to drop all legal self-isolation measures for fully vaccinated people who come into contact with someone who is infected as a possibility for life after Stage 4 of the road map. The hospitality industry, however, said such a move would not lift pressures it is currently under as a result of the NHS Test and Trace app, which bosses said was “casting the net quite wide” in terms of who it pings as a close contact of a positive case, leading to mass shutdowns of venues. — AFP

Channel migrants face arrest on arrival

LONDON: Britain has announced it will seek harsher sentences for migrants caught entering the country without permission amid a record-breaking surge in arrivals over the English Channel.

The stricter prison sentences for both migrants and people smugglers come as part of Home Secretary Priti Patel’s plans to overhaul asylum rules in a bid to prevent what her department has characterised as “asylum shopping”.

The legislation announced on Saturday makes it a criminal offence to arrive in the UK without permission, with a maximum sentence for those entering the country unlawfully increasing from six months to four years.

Under the law set for its first reading in parliament on Tuesday, people smugglers will face life sentences, up from the current maximum of 14 years.

Criminal offence to arrive in the UK without permission, with a maximum sentence for those entering the country unlawfully increasing from six months to four years

Patel said the plans were “fair but firm”, adding that the UK would “welcome people through safe and legal routes whilst preventing abuse of the system, cracking down on illegal entry and the criminality associated with it”.

The bill’s unveiling comes as the Britain’s asylum system strains under the pressure of a record number of arrivals over the Channel. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

MOSCOW

Russia virus cases soar again

Russia on Sunday counted more than 25,000 new daily infections after a week of record deaths tolls as the highly contagious Delta variant propels a global resurgence of the pandemic.

The coronavirus has killed nearly four million people worldwide, forcing numerous nations to reimpose restrictions well over a year after the outbreak of the pandemic.

Moscow has so far ruled out a new lockdown, but Sunday’s 25,142 infections were the



biggest figure since January 2.

Record virus deaths were registered five days in a row rising to 697 on Saturday, before dropping to 663 for Sunday.

SANTIAGO

Chile to work on new constitution

Chile officially starts writing a new constitution on Sunday to replace the one it inherited from the era of dictator Augusto Pinochet and is widely blamed for deep social inequalities that gave rise to deadly protests in 2019.

The country’s biggest protests in 30 years of democracy won Chileans a referendum last October in which a majority voted for a new constitution to be drawn up by a body of elected members.



This 155-member body, elected in May and called a “constitutional convention,” will on Sunday officially start its work of crafting a new Magna Carta for a new Chile.

BRASÍLIA

Impeachment demand against Bolsonaro

Protesters took to the streets in Brazil on Saturday demanding the impeachment of President Jair Bolsonaro and more vaccines to fight the coronavirus pandemic, as the country faces the world’s second deadliest outbreak after the United States.

On Friday, Supreme Court Justice Rosa Weber authorised the opening of an investigation into Bolsonaro over alleged irregularities in procurement of vaccine developed in India.

The protests were originally



scheduled for July 24, but were brought forward after evidence of irregularities related to that vaccine deal were presented before a Senate committee investigating the federal government’s handling of the pandemic.

Last picture show looms for Shahi Theatre

BHUVAN BAGGA

With its ancient humming projector and elegant balcony, the Shahi Theatre is the last surviving single-screen cinema in Shimla, the Himalayan hill station that was once the summer retreat of British India.

But like many other once-teeming movie houses across the country that were already struggling to stay afloat, the pandemic may be the final death knell for the century-old picture house.

It was originally built as a theatre in British times, when the entire colonial administration would decamp from the blistering summer heat of the plains for the cool mountain climate further north.

Current owner Sahil Sharma said his grandfather bought the building and turned it into a cinema after the British left in 1947, at a time when the town's other three theatres were too expensive for ordinary people.

"In those days we still had the British legacy that people couldn't go around in the evenings without good formal clothes", Sharma said.

"So ordinary and poor people didn't have a cinema they could call their own."

Shimla was a popular destination in the golden decades after independence and its cinemas would host prime ministers and celebrities as people flocked to see the latest Bollywood flicks.

"I was here in 1972 when the Pakistani president's daughter watched a movie", recalls Ashok Kapoor, 69, who started working at the now-closed Ritz Cinema as a teenager and rose to be manager.

She was there, Kapoor says, because elsewhere in Shimla the leaders of India and Pakistan were meeting to defuse tensions after a brief conflict between both countries the year before, during the Bangladesh war of independence.

Satish Kumar, another old hand who has worked at the Shahi for 50 years, says a brisk black market for tickets used to cater for queues that stretched around the block.

But, he adds, business has been "really bad over the last few years."

Shimla has lost some of its old-world charm as the local population has grown and the town has sprawled over the hills, although the main street — The Mall — retains its colonial-era shopfronts.

— AFP

In those days we still had the British legacy that people couldn't go around in the evenings without good formal clothes. So ordinary and poor people didn't have a cinema they could call their own

SAHIL SHARMA

Theatre owner



RANG DE KARACHI

An artist paints the wall outside the National Cricket Stadium during the 'Rang De Karachi' beautification project organised by the local municipal corporation in Karachi, Pakistan, on Sunday. — AFP

Culture brands who you are...



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
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GENERALLY, WHERE PEOPLE COME FROM HAS A LOT OF IMPACT ON IDENTIFYING THEIR SOURCE OF ORIGIN AND THEIR IDENTITY AS HUMAN BEINGS TOO

Culture is defined as the shared patterns of behaviours, values, ways of thinking, interactions and understandings that have been learned through a process of socialisation among certain groups of people.

In return, all these and some other principles play a key role in shaping the identity and personality of people. These shared patterns are what make individuals living in one society differ from others of a different cultural background. Sometimes, it also makes individuals living in the same community have different personal identities. Probably personal beliefs contribute to forming one's character!

However, culture stands as the main driving force in shaping individuals' identity. Generally, where people come from has a lot of impact on identifying their source of origin and their identity as human beings too. In fact, there are many other influences that serve shaping individuals, but it all starts with the culture. It is from this point that humans build their identity in the lives that they have. In order to start this journey of self-discovering, people need a place to begin with; a home where they start as children analysing everyone they meet and judging every event that they comes across and takes place in life.

As people grow up, the attachment to their culture and homeland increases too.

Social interactions and communications with others play a significant role in enabling humans to make sense of their beliefs. Such beliefs are actually an outcome of what they learn from the religions that clearly set the path for them to follow and embrace. However, culture is biggest motivation behind people's actions, from the very beginning, that controls their behaviours and set the rules by which they organise their life and socialise.

On the other hand, language plays a significant role in the shaping of identity sometimes. Other than helping people communicate and interact with one another, it also builds in them a feeling of belonging as individuals to their respective groups.

A case in a point, when you are travelling or maybe living abroad and accidentally you come across someone who speaks your language, you immediately get the feeling that this person belongs to you and as if he/she is a member of your family. Here comes the role of a language in relating to one's identity. As the saying goes, "Birds of the same feather flock together".

Yet, personal identity is also affected by other factors that in return make individuals in the same culture differ from their fellow citizens. Two factors can be considered as important in shaping personal identity: Social environment

and life experience. Social environment can be seen in the difference of life styles of rich and poor people in the same society. The rich will have a more relaxed life and personality, whereas the poor struggle for their living. Accordingly, the behaviour and expectations of a wealthy person will mostly differ from those of a poor one.

This trend builds up in generations of rich and poor families and impact personal identity in the long run. The rich young for instance, supported by soundly founded families and secured future, feel more confident in life, while the other suffers the opposite feeling. Life experience also contributes to the identity structure. As an example, people who live in war zones develop an aggressive personality, unlike others of the same culture who have never been in such places or situations. For sure, each one will have a different personality and differently built identity.

It is true that individuals in the same society absorb culture differently; something that is attributed to reasons like social environment, life experience and family background to which one belongs to, but still culture pauses as the major reference to all.

Culture is rooted in one's identity and the foundation of who s/he is. It is something that cannot be changed or ignored!

Progress on Covid, but disunion haunts US on 245th birthday

JEFF MASON

Most US adults are vaccinated but Covid-19 cases are rising. The economy is accelerating but inflation looms. Bipartisan cooperation has improved but political rancor is high.

More than five months into Joe Biden's presidency, the United States has changed in multiple ways, with a healthier business outlook and a pandemic — at least in many parts of the country — increasingly under control.

But as the world's largest economy celebrates its 245th birthday on July 4, the Independence Day holiday will not be the full celebration that Biden had hoped, or promised.

A White House goal of

vaccinating 70 per cent of adults against Covid-19 with at least one shot will not be met, and legislation to repair the nation's infrastructure is still far from arriving on Biden's desk.

Biden will celebrate with a 1,000-person party on the White House lawn and fireworks over the National Mall. Historians said he, and the country, have a reason to do so.

"Compare where we are versus a year ago economically, in terms of public health, in terms of national psyche, it is almost like living in a different country", said Presidential Historian Michael Beschloss.

He said Biden had to walk a careful line between celebrating

the progress made on the pandemic and declaring: Mission Accomplished.

"If Biden had been too hasty in declaring the pandemic over, which he has not, it would be difficult to ask Americans for future sacrifices and it would also make Democrats politically vulnerable next year if the pandemic in some way recurs", Beschloss said. Trouble may loom ahead, though. The US government said on Thursday that daily coronavirus cases rose in the past week, driven by increases in the Midwest and Southeast where vaccination rates are low and the highly contagious Delta variant, first found in India, is spreading.

"We are celebrating, as a

country, at the same time as we recognize the fact that we're in a serious situation for those who have not been vaccinated", said infectious disease expert Dr Anthony Fauci.

In a sign of economic progress, the Labour Department said on Friday that US companies hired the most workers in 10 months in June. But the economy is far from back to normal, with 7 million fewer jobs than it had in February 2020, before the pandemic. Meanwhile some businesses are having trouble hiring the employees they need, as workers struggling with childcare or worried about illness choose to stay home.

Vanderbilt University historian

Thomas Alan Schwartz noted the country's challenges had changed since the tumultuous tenure of former president Donald Trump.

"Our problems are really different now", he said.

Demonstrations over racial disparities have fallen after massive unrest in 2020 over the death of George Floyd, a Black man, and the white police officer charged with murdering him was sentenced to 22-and-a-half years in prison. Biden commemorated the 1921 massacre of Black Americans in Tulsa, Oklahoma, last month and signed a bill into law making June 19 a federal holiday commemorating the emancipation of the enslaved.

— Reuters

AS THE WORLD'S LARGEST ECONOMY CELEBRATES ITS 245TH BIRTHDAY, IT WILL NOT BE THE FULL CELEBRATION THAT BIDEN HAD HOPED



‘SHAW-STOPPER’

DEFENDER SHOWS MOURINHO WHO'S BOSS IN ROME

LONDON: At Jose Mourinho's new home, the Stadio Olimpico, Luke Shaw chose the perfect setting for his latest riposte to his former boss with two assists in England's 4-0 thrashing of Ukraine to reach the Euro 2020 semifinals.

Shaw suffered at the hands of Mourinho for three seasons at Manchester United, a string of public criticism not a patch on what was said behind closed doors, the 25-year-old admitted this week.

Mourinho's arrival at Old Trafford came hot on the heels of a horrible double leg fracture Shaw suffered in September

2015. The former Southampton defender revealed in 2018 there had even been fears his right leg would have to be amputated because of blood clots that required emergency surgery.

His career never got back on track during Mourinho's tempestuous time at United, where he was far from the only player the Portuguese did not take kindly to.

At one point Mourinho even remarked he was the "brain" controlling Shaw's body by having to coach him through games. "I don't think any of you realise the two or three years I had with him and how bad it was

then, what it was like then," Shaw told reporters this week. "What he says now is nothing compared to how it used to be. I am being totally honest. I am so past it now. I have grown up a lot."

Newly installed as Roma boss, but working as a pundit at the Euro, Mourinho's latest barb was to criticise Shaw's set-piece delivery after England's 0-0 draw with Scotland.

"Clearly I am in his head a lot and he clearly thinks about me a lot," added Shaw in a withering critique of his former boss.

There was no problem with Shaw's delivery in Rome on Saturday as two pinpoint crosses

picked out Harry Maguire and Harry Kane early in the second half as England romped to their biggest ever win at a European Championship.

SHAW THE CREATOR

Shaw was also the creator for the vital opening goal, scored by Raheem Sterling, in a 2-0 win over Germany in the last 16 which ended a 55-year wait for a knockout victory over the four-time world champions in a major tournament.

Another 55-year milestone is now England's target as they return to Wembley with 60,000 in attendance for a semifinal

QUARTER-FINALS		EURO 2020	
all times in GMT			
Friday, July 2		Friday, July 2	
 Switzerland	1	1	Spain
Spain won 3-1 on penalties St-Petersburg Stadium			
Friday, July 2		Friday, July 2	
 Belgium	1	2	Italy
Allianz Arena, Munich			
Saturday, July 3		Saturday, July 3	
 Czech Rep.	1	2	Denmark
Olympic Stadium, Baku			
Saturday, July 3		Saturday, July 3	
 Ukraine	0	4	England
Olympic Stadium, Rome			
Source: UEFA		AFP	

against Denmark on Wednesday.

The Three Lions have never even reached the final of a major tournament since winning the 1966 World Cup, but will scarcely get a better chance with momentum and home advantage on their side.

"We won't win the game because we're at home. We've got to play well and we've got a fabulous opportunity," said England boss Gareth Southgate.

"It's a chance to make history. We've never been to a European Championship final, it's not so much pressure but it's another challenge for these players to take on," Southgate said. — AFP

Denmark overpower Czech Republic to enter semis

BAKU: Denmark's rousing Euro 2020 campaign continued as they beat the Czech Republic 2-1 on Saturday to reach the semi-finals thanks to first-half strikes from Thomas Delaney and Kasper Dolberg.

Patrik Schick responded for the Czechs early in the second half to score his fifth goal of the tournament and become the joint-top scorer with Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo.

However, Denmark stood firm to book their place in Wednesday's semi-final, where they will face either England or Ukraine.

The result avenged Denmark's 3-0 defeat by the Czechs in the last eight of Euro 2004 and meant they reached the semi-finals for the third time, taking them closer

yet to adding to their unlikely triumph at Euro '92.

Denmark got off to a flying start when Delaney took advantage of slack marking from a corner to head home in the fifth minute, although replays showed the corner should never have been given as the ball had come off a Danish player when it went out.

The Czechs struggled to respond and Denmark missed several chances to double their lead, with Mikkel Damsgaard, Delaney and Martin Braithwaite all spurning decent opportunities.

They eventually scored again at the end of the first half when left-back Joakim Maehle delivered an inviting cross with the outside of his right foot which Dolberg side-footed in on the volley, adding



Denmark players celebrate after the match. – Reuters

to his double in the 4-0 win over Wales.

Denmark had ridden the wave of a raucous home crowd in their three group games in

Copenhagen and also enjoyed strong support against Wales in the last 16 in Amsterdam, capturing the hearts of many neutrals after Christian Eriksen

suffered a cardiac arrest in their opening game with Finland.

Even though there was a sizeable and noisy Danish contingent in Baku there was less of a festive mood than in previous games as the players were separated by an atmosphere-sapping running track and sparse crowd in Azerbaijan, where locals have been largely less than enthusiastic about the tournament.

After a poor first half, the Czechs made a double change which instantly gave them more purpose in attack and one of their substitutes Michael Krmencik forced Kasper Schmeichel into a save immediately while moments later Antonin Barak made the keeper make a full-stretch save.

The goal soon followed, Schick

meeting a Vladimir Coufal cross first time to beat Schmeichel and match Milan Baros' five goals for the Czech Republic at Euro 2004.

But they failed to build on the momentum and Denmark woke up and defended well for the remainder of the half, ending the Czech Republic's hopes of reaching a first Euros semi-final since 2004 and a first final since 1996.

They should have put the game to bed as substitute Yussuf Poulsen failed to beat Tomas Vaclik and Maehle was also denied by the keeper at point-blank range but their first-half goals proved just enough to see them through, the Czechs coming closest to levelling when a Barak strike flew just wide.

— Reuters



In brief

■ LOS ANGELES



BUCKS OUST HAWKS TO FACE PHOENIX IN NBA FINALS

Khris Middleton poured in 32 points to power the Milwaukee Bucks into their first NBA Finals in over 45 years on Saturday with a series-clinching 118-107 win over the Atlanta Hawks.

The third-seeded Bucks beat the host Hawks in the best-of-seven series 4-2 to book their first appearance in the league championship since 1974.

"As a little kid, everybody wanted to be part of this chance to go to the finals. This is amazing," said Bucks guard Jrue Holiday.

Milwaukee will face the Western Conference champion Phoenix Suns in the finals which begin on Tuesday.

■ LONDON



PALACE APPOINT HODGSON AS VIERA'S SUCCESSOR

Crystal Palace have appointed former Nice boss Patrick Vieira as their new manager on a three-year deal to replace Roy Hodgson, the Premier League club said on Sunday.

Hodgson left boyhood club Palace at the end of last season after four seasons in charge, guiding them to a 14th-placed finish in his final season.

Vieira, who captained Arsenal to three league titles and four FA Cups as a player, was sacked by French Ligue 1 side Nice in December after a stint that lasted 2-1/2 years.

The 45-year-old also led Arsenal's 'Invincibles' side who went a full Premier League season unbeaten in 2003-04, and won the 1998 World Cup and the European Championship in 2000 with France.

■ MILAN



SPINAZZOLA OUT FOR A FEW MONTHS, SAYS MOURINHO

Italy defender Leonardo Spinazzola will be out of action "for a few months" after suffering a serious injury in their Euro 2020 quarter-final win over Belgium on Friday, his club AS Roma's new manager Jose Mourinho has said.

Italian media reports said full back Spinazzola, who has been fundamental to Italy's impressive charge to the last four, sustained a suspected ruptured Achilles tendon injury in their 2-1 win in Munich and would miss the remainder of the Euros.

Spinazzola, 28, was pictured in tears on a stretcher as he left the field to be replaced by Emerson Palmieri, who is set to take his spot for Tuesday's semi-final against Spain at Wembley.

Verstappen takes full control of F1 title race

DUTCHMAN MAKES IT THREE WINS IN 15 DAYS AT AUSTRIA GP

SPIELBERG, Austria: Max Verstappen of Red Bull made it three wins in 15 days at Sunday's Formula One Austrian Grand Prix to leave thoughts of an epic title fight with champion Lewis Hamilton starting to become a distant memory.

Verstappen started from pole and cruised to his 15th career win and fifth of the season with four of them coming in the last five races.

That has transformed a deficit in the title standings to Hamilton to a now 32-point lead — more than a full race win worth 25 — with Mercedes simply unable to match the pace of their rivals.

Valtteri Bottas of Mercedes took second but was some 17 seconds behind and Lando Norris of McLaren completed the podium.

Hamilton limped in to fourth — where he started — after suffering damage to the rear of his car.

And after winning in France late last month and the Styrian Grand Prix at the same Spielberg venue last week, Verstappen and Red Bull will carry tremendous momentum into Hamilton's home British Grand Prix on July 18.

That race will take place in front of a full house at Silverstone as the United Kingdom eases coronavirus restrictions — as Austria did in Spielberg.

For the first time in the pandemic a huge crowd, including several thousand orange-clad fans from the Netherlands, were able to attend the Red Bull Ring.

They were treated to a victory from Dutch driver Verstappen that was never in doubt from the moment he closed off Norris in the dash to the first corner.

"Today was incredible to be honest, the car was on rails," Verstappen said in television interviews. "It was really enjoyable to drive."

"You go into the weekend as the



Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen celebrates with his trophy on the podium after winning the Austrian GP at the Red Bull Ring race track in Spielberg. — AFP

favourite, but it's never easy to do.

"It was insane to see all the fans and so much orange."

The sole drama in the race came shortly after when the safety car caused by Esteban Ocon crashing his Alpine came in four laps later as Bottas briefly got the better of Hamilton.

But with Sergio Perez challenging Norris round the outside, his Red Bull ended up in the gravel as the Briton refused to concede space.

That allowed both Mercedes drivers to move up behind Norris, who bravely held off Hamilton for 15 laps before easing up when told of a 5-second penalty for the earlier incident.

Bottas took third when he followed Norris into the pit on lap 31, a move for fresh rubber followed immediately by Hamilton and Verstappen.

Red Bull delivered a precise change to ensure there was no

slip for Verstappen who emerged with a massive lead over Hamilton which he easily defended for the rest of a 71-lap stroll.

He even had time to pit again on lap 61 in successful pursuit of the fastest lap bonus point.

Mercedes switched Bottas and Hamilton on lap 52 and Norris soon followed past the defenceless champion, who did at least hold his next position after a further pit. "It was a good race — it was exciting but I'm disappointed because we should've been P2, I thought Lap 1 was just racing," said Norris, while Bottas said it was "nice to be on the podium again," while acknowledging "McLaren were really quick today, they were putting on the pressure."

Perez fought back but also picked up two 5-second penalties for separate contacts with the Ferrari of Charles Leclerc to finish sixth behind Carlos Sainz in the other Ferrari. — dpa

Three candidates to vie for OFA chairman post

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 4

The preliminary list of candidates who will compete for Oman Football Association (OFA) board member positions in 2021-2024 term was completed on Sunday. Three candidates will vie for chairman post including existing chief of OFA, Shaikh Salim al Wahaibi, Dr Jassim al Shukaili, Vice-Chairman of OFA for the current term and Dr Abdulhakeem al Ghilani from Al Wahda Club.

The vice-chairman position will be contested by the current first vice-chairman Mohsin al Masrori while the other nominee is Dr Khalid bin Hamed al Ghilani from Sur Club.

The final approved list of the candidates for all the positions will be announced on July 14 after revision by the election panel headed by Dr Hamed al Hadhrami. The committee members will filter all the submitted applications and inspect whether they are in adherence to the set criteria and regulations. The committee began receiving the nomination forms from candidates since June 20.

As many as 23 candidates delivered their applications to compete for board membership. Former football players, previous international referees and board members in national clubs are competing for six seats at board members position.

The list featured the following: Ibrahim al Hosni, Hamood al Atabi, Abdulaziz al Kharousi, Majid al Salhi, Ibrahim al Balushi, Ahmed al Sulaimani, Ali al Ajmi, Daood al Juma, Ibrahim al Alawi, Nasser al Hadabi, Mohammed al Shukairi, Qutaiba al Ghilani, Ahmed al Hadad, Khalid al Mudhafar, Khalid al Mudelwi,



Salim al Wahaibi



Dr Jassim



Dr Abdulhakeem (R)

Khamis al Qateti, Abdullah al Jabri, Dr Saud al Marhoobi, Abdullah al Kamzari, Ahmed al Khonji and Abdulaziz al Oraini.

For the women mandatory membership positions, two nominees are vying including Omani business women Lujaina Mohsin and Fatma al Fazari.

The initial agreed date for the general assembly meeting which will feature the election for the new term of the board is scheduled on August 28. The general assembly of OFA will select nine members for the term including: chairman, vice-chairman, one women mandatory position for board member and six other board members.

SA take T20 series as Pollard blasts team 'insanity'

ST GEORGE'S, Grenada: South Africa capitalised on the misfiring power-hitters of the West Indies to claim a series-clinching 25-run victory in the final T20 International of their five-match contest at the National Cricket Stadium in Grenada on Saturday.

Defending a total of 168 for four, thanks to half-centuries from Aiden Markram and Quinton de Kock, all the Proteas' main bowlers made significant strikes to limit the defending World T20 champions to 143 for nine despite a typically flamboyant 52 from opening batsman Evin Lewis.

Fast bowler Lungi Ngidi, who endured a hammering through the first four matches, bounced back with three wickets.

Fellow pacer Kagiso Rabada, and seam bowling all-rounder Wiaan Mulder, playing in place of injured speedster Anrich Nortje, took two wickets each.

However, the outstanding bowling effort was again produced by Tabraiz Shamsi, the left-arm wrist-spinner improving on his previous record economical figures in the last two matches by



conceding just 11 runs through his four overs in claiming the wicket of Chris Gayle.

He was the inevitable choice as 'Man of the Series' taking seven wickets across the five matches at the outstanding economy rate of four runs per over.

West Indian hopes of coping with an increasingly challenging run-rate eventually rested on the shoulders of their captain Kieron Pollard. However he was

hampered by a leg injury sustained when scampering a quick single and when Mulder removed Pollard and Andre Russell off successive deliveries in the 15th over, the match tilted heavily in favour of the visitors.

For South Africa, it was a first T20 International series triumph for almost two years.

It was also the first under the captaincy of Temba Bavuma and coaching stewardship of

Mark Boucher. "This is really a tremendous effort for our side, and especially for me in just my first T20 International, it is something to build on going forward," said Mulder.

Pollard was bitterly disappointed with his team's failure yet again to chase down a moderate total.

"It looks as is we haven't learnt much from these matches because we keep making the same mistakes, and that is the definition

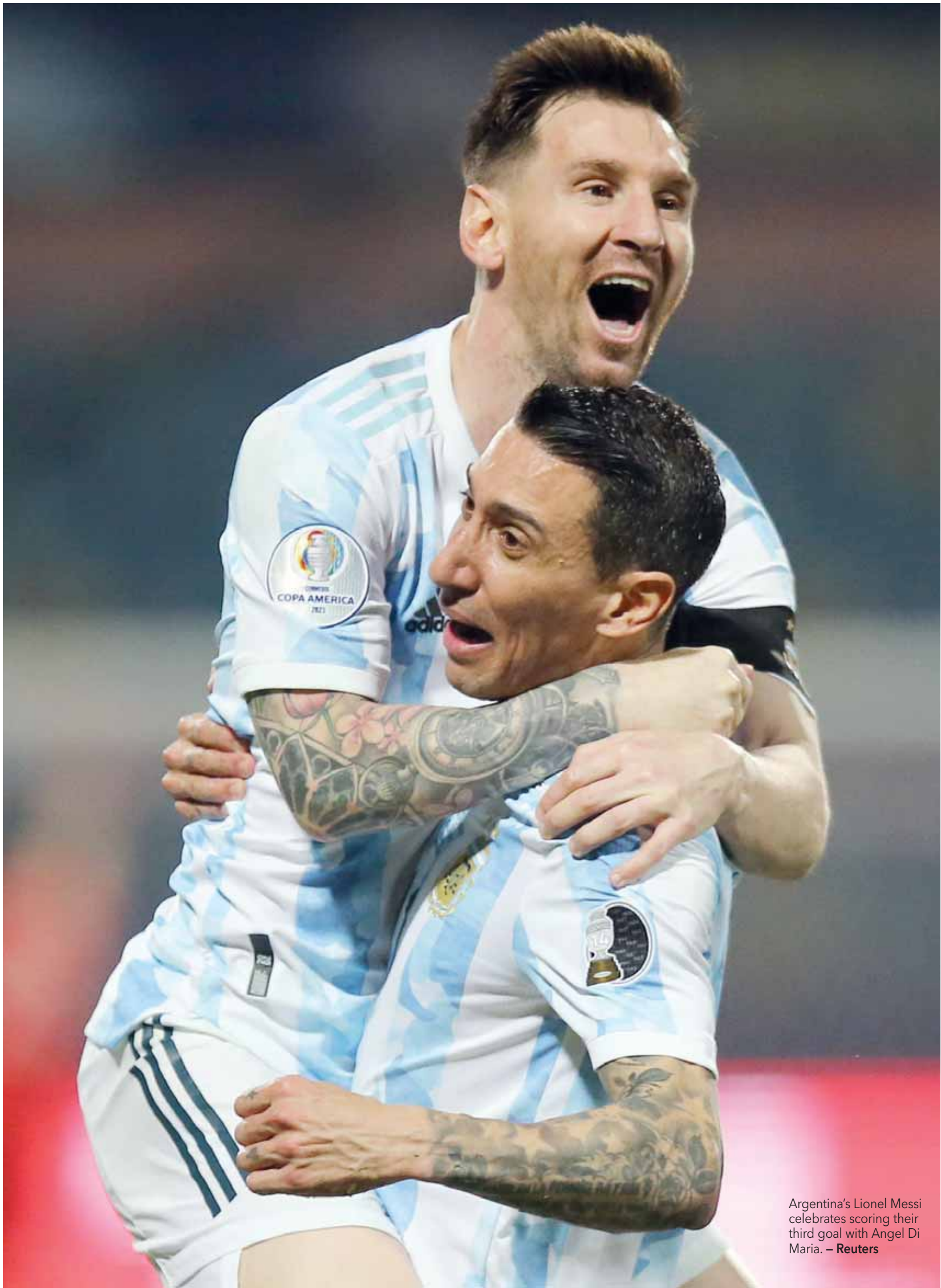
SCOREBOARD	
SOUTH AFRICA	
Q de Kock c Russell b Edwards	60
T Bavuma c Gayle b Edwards	0
A Markram c Simmons b McCoy	70
D Miller not out	18
R van der Dussen c and b Bravo	1
W Mulder not out	9
Extras (b1, lb1, w8)	10
Total (20 overs, 4 wkts)	168
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-128, 3-144, 4-149	
Bowling: Edwards 3-0-19-2, Gayle 2-0-15-0, Bravo 4-0-28-1, McCoy 4-0-31-1, Russell 3-0-32-0, Hosein 2-0-24-0, Pollard 2-0-17-0	
WEST INDIES	
L Simmons lbw Linde	3
E Lewis c Markram b Ngidi	52
C Gayle c de Kock b Shamsi	11
S Hetmyer c Miller b Ngidi	33
K Pollard c Markram b Mulder	13
A Russell c Ngidi b Mulder	0
N Pooran c de Kock b Rabada	20
D Bravo c Bavuma b Rabada	1
A Hosein not out	2
O McCoy c Mulder b Ngidi	1
F Edwards not out	0
Extras (lb1, w5, nb1)	7
Total (20 overs, 9 wkts)	143
Fall of wickets: 1-20, 2-65, 3-75, 4-110, 5-110, 6-125, 7-140, 8-140, 9-142	
Bowling: Fortuin 1-0-11-0, Rabada 4-0-24-2, Linde 3-0-33-1, Ngidi 4-0-32-3, Shamsi 4-0-11-1, Mulder 4-0-31-2	

of insanity," said the captain.

Next up for the home side is a five-match series against Australia, starting next Friday in St Lucia.

— AFP

Messi stars as Argentina set up Colombia Copa semifinal



Argentina's Lionel Messi celebrates scoring their third goal with Angel Di Maria. – Reuters

GOIANIA, Brazil: Lionel Messi scored one goal and created two others as Argentina beat Ecuador 3-0 in Goiania on Saturday to reach the Copa America semi-finals.

In Tuesday's last four match, the 14-time winners will play Colombia, who beat Uruguay on penalties earlier in the day.

Messi teed up goals for Rodrigo De Paul and Lautaro Martinez before firing home an injury time free-kick to cap a stunning individual performance.

The scoreline was harsh on Ecuador, who ended the game with 10 men after Pedro Hicapie's dismissal but had been competitive throughout.

"The truth is it was a very tough match. We knew the difficulty of playing Ecuador, who work hard with players who are fast, physically strong, young," said Messi.

"It was a battle until we managed the (second) goal."

Argentina made a bright start and Martinez almost opened the scoring with a moment of brilliance. He chipped the ball over goalkeeper Hernan Galindez and then volleyed goalwards, only for Robert Arboldea to block the ball on the line. Moments later Martinez had a shot deflected wide and from the resulting corner, German Pezzella volleyed into the side netting.

Carlos Gruezo almost gifted Argentina a goal when his attempted back pass sent Messi clean through with only Galindez to beat, but the six-time Ballon d'Or winner saw his shot cannon back off the post.

Up the other end, goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez had to be alert to parry a stunning 20-yard volley by Sebastian Mendez.

Argentina had their own let off seven minutes from half-time when Pervis Estupinan crossed from the left and Enner Valencia's flicked header narrowly evaded the sliding Alan Franco at the back post.

MESSI TAKES CONTROL

Two minutes later Argentina were in front, with Messi the architect.

First he played in Nicolas Gonzalez on goal but when he

“The truth is it was a very tough match. We knew the difficulty of playing Ecuador, who work hard with players who are fast, physically strong, young,”

LIONEL MESSI
Argentina striker

was tackled by Galindez, Messi reacted quickest and teed up De Paul to score.

There was still time before the break for Galindez to make an incredible double save from Gonzalez, before Valencia somehow headed wide from six yards out.

After the break, Valencia remained Ecuador's most likely route back into the match and the livewire forward's near post shot hit Martinez's leg before going behind.

A wicked Estupinan cross was then almost turned into his own net by Gonzalez.

Messi came close to killing off the tie but his curled effort sailed just past the post, while Aston Villa goalkeeper Martinez denied substitute Gonzalo Plata an equaliser with a near-post block.

Inter Milan forward Martinez finally ended Ecuador's resistance six minutes from time from Messi's pass after Hincapie was caught in possession by Angel Di Maria.

And Hincapie completed a miserable few minutes as he was dismissed in injury time after dragging back substitute Di Maria when clean through, with Messi despatching the free-kick.

RECORD-BREAKER OSPINA

Goalkeeper David Ospina was the hero as Colombia beat Uruguay on penalties in Brasilia.

Ospina saved two spot-kicks in the shoot-out on the day he earned his 112th Colombian cap, moving clear of the previous national record he shared with the iconic Carlos Valderrama.

— AFP

Serbian team member tests positive for Covid-19 on arrival in Japan

TOKYO: A member of Serbia's Olympic rowing team tested positive for the new coronavirus on arrival in Japan, an official said on Sunday, the third Covid-19 infection confirmed among Olympic team members visiting for the Tokyo Games starting this month.

A member of Uganda's Olympic squad tested positive for the virus on arrival in June and a second member was confirmed as having the virus a few days later.

One of Serbia's five-member rowing team tested positive

during a screening at Haneda airport on Saturday night, said Takashi Ikeda, an official at the sports section of the central Japan city of Nanto, which had been scheduled to host the Serbians' training camp.

The man in his 30s was sent to a medical facility, while the other four were isolated in a separate facility in Tokyo, Ikeda said by phone.

"Since they are expected to be isolated for two weeks, the Serbian rowing team is unlikely to come to Nanto for training before the Games," he said.



Puerto Rico's Gary Browne in action with Serbia's Ognjen Dobric. – Reuters

The group was to have travelled to Nanto in Toyama prefecture on Sunday to hold their training camp through July 18, ahead of the June 23 start of the Games.

Rowing teams from Greece, South Africa and Russia arrived in Nanto earlier this month for training camp, he said.

The Tokyo Games, delayed by a year because of the pandemic, are proceeding amid concern that the influx of thousands of people from around the world could unleash another wave of Covid-19 infections in the

country. Foreign spectators are banned, and the government is considering what limits to place on domestic spectators.

Tokyo reported 716 new Covid-19 infections on Saturday, its highest in more than five weeks, as the nation considers extending pandemic restrictions in the capital.

Cases totalled 518 on Sunday, up 132 from last Sunday, marking the 15th consecutive days of increases from week-earlier levels, said public broadcaster NHK.

— Reuters



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New unit to drive value addition in Oman’s mining sector

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

A new unit has been set up under the auspices of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals to help optimise value creation from Oman’s mineral resources, according to a senior ministry official.

Dr Ali al Rajhi, Director of Planning, said the new department, called ‘Industry Development of Energy and Minerals’, will support downstream processing and value addition of the Sultanate’s mineral wealth as an alternative to the current practice of exporting unprocessed raw materials.

Speaking during an online workshop on the theme, ‘Capitalising on Oman’s Natural Resources’, organised last week by the Industrial Innovation Centre (IIC) — the Sultanate’s preeminent hub for industrial R&D — Dr Al Rajhi said the new department would work to “localise industries” around mineral resources extracted in Oman.

“We think there are a lot of opportunities that can be achieved for each type of minerals in the midstream and downstream sectors. Many industries are looking to add value (to these resources) here

VALUE CREATION: ‘INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT OF ENERGY AND MINERALS’ TO SUPPORT DOWNSTREAM PROCESSING AND LOCALISATION OF SULTANATE’S MINERAL WEALTH’

in Oman, rather than send them abroad as raw material. This is also in line with Oman’s economic diversification strategy and Oman Vision 2040 objectives”, he said.

With the exception of some quantities of chromite, marble and gypsum, most of the metallic and non-metallic mineral resources currently being produced in the Sultanate are being exported in raw, unprocessed form, lamented Dr Al Rajhi.

“It is very important for us as the Ministry to have value added to these minerals instead of them being exported as raw materials”, said the official. “It is also important to study the value chain of each mineral because it’s only then we can (evaluate) the midstream and downstream opportunities of each mineral for their utilisation in industries and the sustainable growth of this sector.”



RO 22.6 million power network upgrades to benefit Duqm projects



NETWORK REINFORCEMENT: TANWEER BEGINS UNDERTAKING KEY INITIATIVES TO STRENGTHEN ELECTRICITY SUPPLY INFRASTRUCTURE AROUND DUQM SEZ

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 4

The Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer), member of Nama Group, is investing RO 22.6 million in the expansion of electricity infrastructure in the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) of Duqm — an initiative that will directly benefit a number of strategic industrial projects coming up in the hub.

In all, five key network developments are being undertaken by Tanweer during 2021, including the expansion

of the existing Duqm North Switching Station and Duqm South primary substation, which is due to be completed shortly. These projects will help meet the power requirements of the industrial, commercial, tourism and residential sectors of the SEZ.

In addition, Tanweer is laying 33kV cables to connect the two sub-stations in the north and south of Duqm. The interconnection, due to be completed before the year-end, will benefit the Karwa bus assembly plant, among other ventures. Besides, three key primary substations are being constructed in the Fisheries Industries Area, Industries Zone and the Showroom Area, and the Heavy Industries Zone.

Meanwhile, work is well under way on the ‘Rabt’ project — a strategic initiative to link the Main Interconnection System (MIS) of North Oman with Dhofar electricity



transmission network. The project will bring Duqm into the national grid as a priority goal.

To support this initiative, Tanweer has floated a tender to interconnect its 33kV distribution system with the 400kV line from the Main Interconnection System (MIS) that connects the north of the Sultanate.

Additionally, Tanweer is

installing 11kV distribution transformers to serve the Duqm Industrial Land area and Duqm cement located at Port of Duqm.

“Tanweer aims to develop and enhance the electrical infrastructure in the Special Economic Zone of Duqm to serve the aspirations and needs of current and future investors, especially in light of the extensive investment facilities provided by the Sultanate for investments located in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm and other free zones and Special Economic Zones”, the company said in a statement.

Ahmed bin Said al Harthy, Acting CEO, said the projects are being implemented in close collaboration with all stakeholders including the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR).

Mala’a credit bureau services to be offered online shortly

NATIONAL DATABANK: OMAN CREDIT AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION CENTRE TO ASSIST IN CREDIT RISK MANAGEMENT

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 4

Oman Credit and Financial Information Centre (Mala’a) offers credit bureau services to enhance the creditworthiness of individuals and corporates in the Sultanate in line with Oman Vision 2040, said Mala’a’s Managing Director Aadil al Saadi (pictured). This supports

financial inclusion by ensuring responsible financing in addition to improved credit risk management.

Al Saadi stated that Mala’a Centre aims to fulfil its objectives by being Oman’s National Databank & Reference to All Credit & Financial Information, offering credit reports, and credit score for individuals and corporates, instant credit decisioning engines and a range of data analytics Solutions. The availability of credit scores for Individuals and corporates enables lenders to make informed credit decisions.

He added that Mala’a credit score is dynamic indicator that is generated according to a world-

class scoring engine to reflect the analysis of historical credit information of individuals and corporates based on Oman actual credit data from the Banking Sector. Mala’a Credit Score is the quantitative measure which ranges from 300 to 900 where the higher number reflects lower risk.

The credit score is a proven World Class System in Advanced & Emerging Markets and supports credit providers in assessing credit risk. The credit score information is based on Oman’s actual Credit Data for the Last 10 Years, and compliant with the World Bank Credit Information Reporting Standards.

“Mala’a contributes through its innovative products to enable



access to credit through reliable and accessible credit information”, he said.

Elaborating on risk mitigation, he said the Mala’a Credit Score is an indicator of the creditworthiness of individuals and corporates; it is a valuable

credit risk management tool. “The Mala’a Score is dynamic and changes according to credit and financial history. The Credit score is calculated based on the information derived from credit providers taking into consideration over-indebtedness, positive history, and payment behaviour”, he stated, adding that positive financial and credit behaviours lead to higher credit score.

In addition, work is currently underway to establish online channels for self-service, such as a portal and a smartphone application, which will help individuals and corporates to utilise the centre’s services in the future. It also aims to raise

awareness about the financial and credit principles in the Sultanate.

Mala’a’s comprehensive data covers over ten years of corporate and consumer credit history offering credit providers an accurate data source enabling them effective credit risk assessment.

Presently, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states are in discussions to sharing credit information across-border to enable cross-states and cohesive Business Environment, Al Saadi noted.

The Mala’a initiative is the deliverable of an ambitious 3-year strategy for an Oman Credit Bureau (OCB), spearheaded by the Central Bank of Oman.

Facility management sector to grow significantly

In its Vision 2040, Oman has drafted a plan to boost and develop the Sultanate society into a knowledge-based economy, able to compete on a global scale. Oman's finance and economy were both impacted by the pandemic, but to a certain extent less than other countries that are currently still suffering from both a health crisis and a wealth downturn.

However, for Oman the future might be brighter than expected. By building new smart and sustainable cities and technologically-powered infrastructure facilities, the Sultanate aims to be a pioneer in the GCC and throughout the Middle East.

In a recent trend forecast published by Research and

Markets, Oman's Facility Management Sector was projected to grow significantly by 2025. Facility Management is a relatively new field that gravitates around logistics as a whole and industrial production. It encompasses a wide range of services and solution designed to boost efficiency and standardisation of productivity.

In a world that has become progressively more stringent and demanding around import and export regulation, conforming with strict guidelines has become key to achieve international success. We have seen Facility Management at work with disinfection and sanitisation services around production facilities, a niche market that has already seen a 95



STEFANO VIRGILLI
stefano@virgilli.com

BY BUILDING NEW SMART AND SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND TECHNOLOGICALLY-POWERED INFRASTRUCTURE FACILITIES, THE SULTANATE AIMS TO BE A PIONEER IN THE GCC AND THROUGHOUT THE MIDDLE EAST

per cent increase over the past 18 months.

As a global growing trend, Facility Management can shape the near future for the Sultanate's industrial production and logistics. In 2019, the sector was valued at US\$400 million, but according to the recent projection it is likely to reach \$750 million by 2025, nearly doubling in its value. The Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) is estimated to average 13.5 per cent for the next 4 to 5 years. This growth will in turn increase the competitiveness of Oman's economy with the rest of the region.

In 2020, the public establishment for industrial sectors, Madayn started working on implementing projects at Nizwa Industrial

City including the expansion of Phases III and IV, on an area of approximately 1 million square metres, and providing a second entrance to the industrial city.

During the first quarter of 2020, the total investment volume of Nizwa Industrial City was at \$956 million.

In the second quarter of 2020 — in the middle of the pandemic — Madayn managed to sign a memorandum of cooperation with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) to build an industrial city within the Marmul industrial and logistics complex. With such an agreement in place, Madayn has further financed, developed, and attracted investments to the proposed industrial city, which sits some 800 km from Muscat.

In November 2020, Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company secured a 15-year-long contract from PDO to build retail filling stations, with an option to extend it for five more years until August, 2040.

With so many projects upcoming, the Facility Management sector in Oman is therefore expected to provide a solid economy boost as well as a new employment opportunity for Omani citizens. As a consequence, with the standardisation of all facilities, the chances and likelihood of more foreign investment coming to the Sultanate remain high.

[The columnist is a member of the International Press Association]

Foton Auman medium duty truck now available



MUSCAT: Foton Auman medium-duty truck, which is known for its legendary performance, reliability and durability, is now available on a low EMI rate of RO 425 for six years. The offer is inclusive of the five per cent value-added tax (VAT).

A spokesperson for GGS said, "We are pleased to offer low EMI on Auman EST-M which is powered by the latest generation Cummins ISDe 245 30 engine, which provides 245 hp@ 2500 rpm and 950Nm of torque. Turbocharged and intercooled, this engine provides the Auman with a premium powertrain that is not normally found on medium-duty trucks. It has eight-speed manual transmission."

Foton Auman medium-duty truck boasts a 6.7-litre engine with 245 horsepower. Its Cummins engine features

high burst pressure and strong power, with the maximum power output at 210ps and the power per litre in excess of 34kW/L. This 1,000,000 km overhaul-free engine is manufactured strictly in accordance with the Cummins global quality system and manufacturing standard and passed the 2,000,000 km stringent road reliability and durability test. The vehicle took the lead to pass the stringent German DEKRA test, with the accumulative test mileage.

A medium-duty truck that looks and feels like a heavy-duty truck, the Auman EST-M has a road presence that other trucks aspire to. The Auman EST-M is much more than the good looking truck with a Cummins engine; it incorporates the latest design and technology, providing a distinct and refined driving experience.

Renault Master L4H3 a favourite among customers

MUSCAT: Class-leading safety technology and a feature-packed cabin has made Renault Master L4H3 a favourite among customers.

The Renault Master L4H3 MY2021 is a mix of practical space, adaptable interior, handy features and low running costs. L4H3 MY2021 sets the benchmark with its efficient engine to help business users and trades to do their work more effortlessly and efficiently.

Serving the Oman market perfectly, it combines great value for money with high levels of driver and passenger comfort.

Adil al Abri is impressed with its safety features such as driver and passenger airbags, emergency brake assistance, tyre pressure monitoring system. He



also says, "The Master Van is fitted with a rear-view camera so you can reverse with confidence whether you're loading, parking or manoeuvring tight spaces."

Zaid al Zedjali likes Renault Master's comfort qualities such as electric front window (driver & passenger), electric mirrors, C-shaped DRL, rear glazed doors with 270° opening and heated rear window, floor anchorage points and side anchorage points

in the load area.

He says, "Master Van delivers on space and ability and suits your delivery needs perfectly."

Khalil Abdul says it is a great looking van that can get a great deal done.

"The Master Van sets a new standard for practicality with style. Its exterior features include new front grille, new bumpers, and front wings which is very impressive."

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MUSCAT: Get the latest smartphone without worrying about the price tag! Ooredoo customers can enjoy amazing instalment rates when subscribed to any Shahry plan. With zero down-payment, the offer combines affordable access to state-of-the-art technology with all the benefits of Ooredoo's flexible postpaid plans.

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With a wide range of options that fit all payment methods, Ooredoo's Shahry plans offer the perfect mix of flexibility, great value, simplicity and most of all, convenience.

Infiniti Courtesy Vehicles create convenience for service customers

MUSCAT: Conceived to provide seamless mobility during car service, Infiniti Courtesy Vehicle (ICV) from Infiniti Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles has been offering customers convenience while adhering to all the safety protocols related to Ccvid-19.

The objective of the exclusive concept titled Infiniti Courtesy Vehicle (ICV) is to offer convenience for service customers and provide existing customers with the opportunity to experience other/ new models with the latest technology.

A senior spokesperson at Infiniti Oman said, "The courtesy vehicles offered as part of



the programme will be free of charge to our customers. ICVs are dedicated units kept only for offering them as replacement vehicles to

service customers. All customers/ jobs are eligible for ICV except for internal, B&P and waiting customers for quick services. We are happy to offer customers with easy mobility during car service and provide a chance to try our newer Infiniti models."

He added, "Our protocol and guidelines guarantee the utmost hygiene, sanitisation, and safety for all. Besides, our staff is trained to make the processes very secure, with the highest focus on hygiene and safety." This service is based on the availability of the ICV cars during the time of car service. Terms and conditions apply.

Enhance every moment with the Toyota Fortuner

MUSCAT: The legendary powerhouse is the perfect four-wheel drive SUV to take you places both on-road and off-road too. The Fortuner makes its bold presence felt with its stylish appearance. On the inside, its detailed and thoughtful appointments make every drive in it comfortable and exciting too.

The Fortuner is available with petrol engines that include a 2.7 litre four-cylinder engine producing 164 HP & 25.0 Kg-m of Torque. The 4.0 Litre V6 engine churns out 235 HP along with 38.3 Kg-m of torque. The 6-speed automatic transmission, available as a standard option, provides

thrilling acceleration.

The Fortuner is equipped with comprehensive safety systems to protect its occupants. These include anti-lock braking system (ABS) that prevents the tyres from locking during braking. The Fortuner is equipped with SRS driver airbag, SRS front passenger airbag, side airbag, curtain airbag and SRS knee airbag (driver only). In terms of seatbelts, a three-point emergency locking retractor (ELR) seatbelts are equipped. When impact is experienced during a collision, the Seatbelt Locks to restrain the passenger. Other reassuring safety features include the Vehicle Stability Control (VSC)



and the Tyre Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS).

Rugged and adroit, the Fortuner also is known for its high standards on the inside. Premium leather seats, leather and wood finished steering wheel with paddle shifts, cool glove box, cruise control and a whole bunch of other goodies augment its interior ambience.

Toyota Fortuner has a powerful air conditioner. Other innovative touches include a navigation system. The rearview camera ensures peace of mind when reverse parking. The 6-speaker audio system enhances its harmonious ambience. And to add to the convenience, there is

a power back door system which adds to the sheer convenience.

In Oman, the nationwide parts and service network of Saud Bahwan Automotive supports Toyota's outstanding product quality. No wonder that today, Toyota is one of the most trusted and well-known brands.

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Pandemic drives sea freight prices to record high

LONDON: Container shipping prices have reached record highs some 18 months after the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic which disrupted maritime logistics chains and drove demand sky-high.

"We are basically running out of vessels and of empty containers," Alan Murphy, head of the consultancy Sea Intelligence, said.

"There's been a massive shortage of empty containers, they are in the wrong place, they are stuck in ports and not in Asia ready to be loaded." The Freightos Baltic Index, a benchmark for major shipping routes, has more than tripled in a year to nearly \$7,000 (5,900 euros) for a trip from China to the west coast of the United States.

A trip to Europe has exceeded \$10,000, compared with just \$1,600 at the same time last year.

Murphy said the unprecedented situation compounded the troubles of the last 10 years, which he said had been "really bad for the shipping lines".

Blighted by overcapacity in the sector, he said the firms "were

Disruptions to loading and unloading operations, from dockers falling ill and Covid restrictions to unforeseen events like the shipping backlog caused the blockage of the Suez Canal in March, have only exacerbated the trend

losing money every time they were moving a container".

The Covid-19 pandemic, which initially brought global shipping to a virtual standstill, did not bode well for the industry and led to "an unprecedented drop in demand", said Didier Rabattu, of Lombard Odier Investment Managers.

But this did not account for the trends among US and European consumers who during lockdown stopped spending in restaurants and theatres or going on holiday and instead used their money to purchase material goods — many of them imported from Asia.

"Imagine how many televisions



A container ship arrives at a loading terminal of the Hamburg harbour in Hamburg, Germany. — Reuters

you can buy if you don't go skiing for a week with four people?" said Paul Tourret, director of France's Higher Institute of Maritime Economics (ISEMAR).

Disruptions to loading and unloading operations, from dockers falling ill and Covid restrictions to unforeseen events

like the shipping backlog caused the blockage of the Suez Canal in March, have only exacerbated the trend.

As a result, shipowners have never been in better shape.

The Marseille-based CMA CGM container and shipping company for example posted a net

profit of more than \$2 billion for the first quarter of 2021 alone, 40 times more than the previous year.

Its Danish competitor AP Moller-Maersk announced an even higher net profit of \$2.7 billion for the first three months of the year — 13 times what it saw last year.

"It is true that ship owners are making a lot of money at the moment," Tourret said.

"But it is also a way for them to renew their fleets and accelerate their liquefied natural gas (LNG) programmes," he added.

CMA CGM placed an order in April for 22 container ships, more than half of which are LNG-powered.

Maritime transport is "one of the main emitters of sulphur dioxide", the French expert said, adding that although figures were favourable for each tonne transported, the sector nevertheless emitted levels of CO₂ "comparable to Germany".

The price of container transport depends on the level of demand, but also on the supply-side capacity to meet it.

"Whether or not shipowners decide to wage a trade war is a major factor," Tourret said.

"None of them has any interest in driving prices down. Their collective discipline today must be not to sell out," he added.

The situation could last, Tourret said, driven in part by the need to transport perishable goods.

— AFP

Sri Lanka tightens foreign currency outflows



A man cleans the signage of Central Bank of Sri Lanka in Colombo. — Reuters

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's central bank on Sunday further tightened controls on the outflow of foreign currency to combat a growing cash crunch triggered by the coronavirus pandemic.

Foreign exchange reserves have almost halved since late 2019 to \$4 billion after the rupee sank to a record low last year.

The economy has been badly hit by the spread of the virus and lockdowns in its worst downturn since independence from Britain in 1948.

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka said overseas investments by local firms would be suspended for six months.

The amount of capital that companies and citizens can take out of the island nation would also be restricted, it added.

Sri Lanka has already banned imports of luxury goods and cars since last year to combat the foreign currency outflows.

The government is planning to extend the import ban to mobile phones, computers and electronic consumer goods, local media reported recently. — AFP

Governments can no longer delay automation of citizen services

In every nation, while delivering citizen services, governments face, more or less, similar challenges. Whether it is the borders and immigration, whether it is law and order, legislation, essential services, documentation, or other areas.

They must compete for the same talent as the private sector in terms of salary, job satisfaction, and career sustenance. They must also be able to maintain huge volumes of data for long timelines and make those silos interoperable. Furthermore, they must be able to adjust to the changing nature of citizen demands and transformation within their countries.

With such high expectations and significantly different competitive organisational cultures internally, it is not surprising that services from the government and public sector in each nation tends to lag as compared to leading private sector industries. In a recent survey across a range of countries, McKinsey found users of public services rated them on an average at 5.5-6.0 out of 10.0 points, implying scope for improvement.

With many of the nation's industries, taking a lead in digital transformation and coping with the challenges of the pandemic, governments and public sector institutions have realised they cannot be left behind. By lagging in service quality, on a day-to-day basis, governments risk losing the trust and confidence of their citizens. And in most cases, this erosion of confidence has already been set in motion.

Moreover, this expectation from the government to perform is enhanced when the nation and its population are in crises, as we continue to face the post-pandemic phase of things.

On the flip side, efficient government services that deliver



National governments can no longer delay boosting efficiency of their services by automation, creating confidence and trust in citizens

ANAS A ABDUL-HAIY
Director and Deputy CEO,
Proven Consult

outstanding customer experience create satisfied citizens, who are nine times more likely to trust their governments. They are also less likely to keep making follow up visits and subsequently overwhelm administrative services. In addition, the probability of satisfied citizens to seek consumer forum redressals, seek visibility in social media, and resort to litigation, is much lesser. All these can be advantageous when there are national and global upheavals.

Automation can be

implemented by introducing robotic process automation (RPA). With RPA, routine tasks including data extraction and data cleaning are executed by computer devices. Automated and smart workflows integrate tasks performed by humans and machines, for example, optical character recognition converts handwritten, typed, or printed characters into machine-encoded text.

Automation can also use machine learning and algorithms that are trained to learn from results, without an overriding set of programming rules. Latest trends include natural language processing for automated analysis of text and speech-generating specific outcomes. Such intelligent agents are added to the virtual workforce creating versatility and adaptability.

Once the decision to automate citizen services is underway, government departments can anticipate the following benefits:

Reduction of errors

Automation of tasks can vastly increase the speed of operations while ensuring that human-related errors are virtually eliminated. Errors stemming from worker fatigue and distractions are eliminated.

Empathic and caring services

Since humans are freed from monotonous and laborious tasks, they can focus on more caring and engaged services with citizens. These could be for the benefit

of senior citizens, complex task management, and support cases, without adding on more workers.

Bringing in AI

Once automation has been established and is operational, it is a good time to start considering personalised automation driven by artificial intelligence. By training the data, automation can start recognising human-related decision-making and can execute them over time.

Decisionmakers in government and public sector organisations also need to realise that automation of the workforce is hugely disruptive for the workers.

The project champion needs to have a range of skills to drive the automation initiative and being able to drive a change management exercise is fundamental.

A specialised and experienced consulting partner, brought in at this stage, can help to avoid the typical obstacles that arise and not reinvent the wheel.

A typical point of failure that first-time organisations make is to underestimate the complexity of implementing the changes.

While working with a specialised partner is key, project champions need to be able to continuously communicate to decision-makers and workforce, leverage those workers with digital skills, and focus on the journey rather than specifics.

They also monitor the impacted workers and processes and ensure workers are reskilled and adapted for their new roles.

Additionally, they focus on the most important objectives of automation which are simplicity, reliability, and consistency.

Finally, success is a blend of the technology solution, the readiness of the organisation to change guided by the champion, and guidance from a specialised partner.

Oman Air named official airline partner of ICCA



**BUSINESS
REPORTER**
MUSCAT, JULY 4

Oman Air, the national carrier of the Sultanate of Oman, announced its collaboration with the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), becoming an official airline partner for the Middle East as part of ICCA's Regional Travel Partnership Programme. As the newest member of the programme, Oman Air brings 5-Star Covid-19 safety and network connectivity across the Middle East to association meetings professionals so they can re-connect with colleagues and work towards reviving face-to-face, in-person meetings in the post-pandemic landscape.

"In securing this partnership, we are pleased to connect our ICCA members in the Middle East with an airline that will serve them under exceptional standards of health and safety. Meeting face-to-face is vital to our industry and we at ICCA World believe we can begin to do so once again as we continue to adhere to best practices in pandemic safety," said Senthil Gopinath, ICCA CEO.

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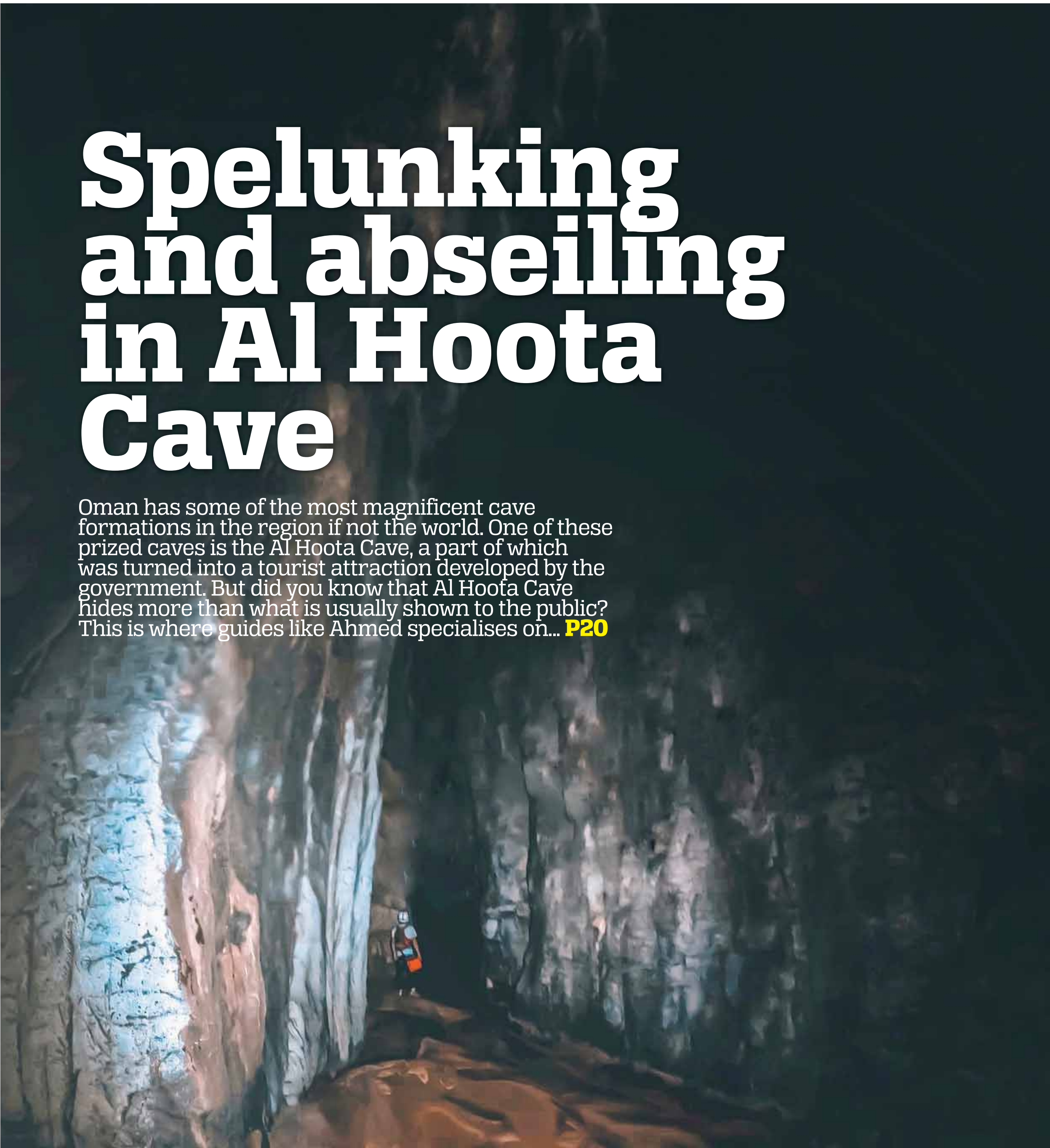
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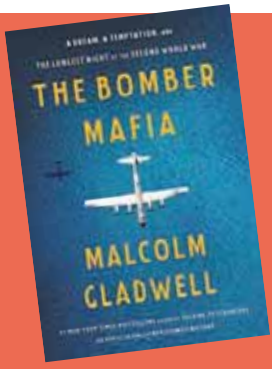


Spelunking and abseiling in Al Hoota Cave

Oman has some of the most magnificent cave formations in the region if not the world. One of these prized caves is the Al Hoota Cave, a part of which was turned into a tourist attraction developed by the government. But did you know that Al Hoota Cave hides more than what is usually shown to the public? This is where guides like Ahmed specialises on... **P20**

ART

READ



THE BOMBER MAFIA
BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

A look at the key players and outcomes of precision bombing during World War II.

SEE HOW VAN GOGH SAW HIMSELF IN LONDON EXHIBITION

VINCENT VAN GOGH'S self-portraits will go on show in London next year, in what organisers say is the first exhibition dedicated to the Dutch post-Impressionist artist's depictions of himself. From February, The Courtauld Gallery will stage the display – from “Self-Portrait with a Dark Felt Hat” painted in 1886 in Paris to “Self-Portrait with a Palette” which van Gogh painted in an asylum in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, southern France, in September 1889. He died the following year. Part of The Courtauld collection, the well-known “Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear”, which van Gogh painted in 1889 after cutting off most of his ear, will also be on show alongside loaned

works. “This will be the first time that the full span of Van Gogh's self-portraiture has been explored in an exhibition,” the gallery, which will re-open in November after a refurbishment, said in a statement on Thursday. “An outstanding selection of more than 15 self-portraits will be brought together to trace the evolution of Van Gogh's self-representation ... Several works in the exhibition were last together in Van Gogh's studio and have never been reunited, until now.” “Van Gogh Self-Portraits” will run at The Courtauld, which is located in central London's Somerset House, from February 3 to May 8, 2022. — **Reuters**





Graffiti art shapes the talent of artist Musab

The Sultanate is full of talented people who possess many skills in various fields. There is no doubt that the people of this country spare no effort in serving the country by presenting their capabilities, creativity and talents to raise the profile of Oman in various forums. Youth are the focus of the Oman 2040 vision, believing that youth are the only power of the country.

Among these talented young people is the artist, Musab bin Abdulrahman al Shahri, who seeks to highlight the aesthetics of the Sultanate through his brushes that are always creative in any site he paints. Musab al Shahri began his free drawing journey five years ago. this kind of art requires mastery, focus and patience while painting the details of each work, whether through graffiti, canvas or sand.

Musab stressed that the concerned authorities, especially the Omani Society for



Fine Arts, are doing their part in providing what can be done to help artists and sharpen their skills through exhibitions and training courses. He pointed out that the work he is proud of painting the most is the picture of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said and His

Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and the picture of the Honorable Lady, spouse of His Majesty.

Al Shahri added, "From my drawing skills, graffiti is the best for me where I can be more creative and have more space to highlight all the details I want to"



It is worth noting that Musab finished an artwork in cooperation with the Dhofar Municipality in Ateen roundabout. He painted two images of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said and His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in a remarkably beautiful panoramic manner.

CHANGING WORLD

White gold gamble: Togo turns to private sector for cotton revival



IN A BOLD BUT contested strategy, the West African state of Togo has bet heavily on the private sector to revive its struggling cotton industry.

"White gold," as cotton is sometimes called, accounts for only between one and 4.3 per cent of the country's GDP, bringing 500,000 jobs for a population of 8.8 million.

Yet cotton also has huge potential in terms of job creation, especially for the poorest and smallest producers in the marginalised north.

Eyeing the success of privatisation in neighbouring Benin, Togo last December sold a majority stake in its largest cotton producer, the New Cotton Company of Togo (NSCT), to a Singaporean giant.

NSCT says it aims to produce 135,000 tonnes next year and 225,000 by 2025 – a target that many say is a big ask.

Production in the 2020-21 season was a meagre 67,000 tonnes, amounting to a dramatic 43 per cent decrease over 2019-20.

Many farmers switched to corn and soy as the NSCT lowered the price for a kilogram of raw cotton from 265 CFA francs (\$0.48) in the 2019-2020 season to 225 CFA francs (\$0.43 to \$0.40) the following year.

"At least 40,000 cotton producers out of 153,000 abandoned their fields this last season," said Koussouwe Kouroufei, president of the National Federation of Cotton Farmers' Associations (FNGPC).

The 2020-21 harvest suffered from "poor seed quality and bad weather in the north of the country," NSCT chairman Simfeitcheu Pre said.

Togo has cast envious eyes at its neighbour Benin, where privatisation has helped cotton output to rise from 324,000 tonnes in 2015-2016 to 700,000 tonnes last year.

The transformation has been engineered by Benin's President Patrice Talon, a tycoon known as the "Cotton King" before he was elected in 2016.

Benin is now the biggest cotton producer in the region, with the sector making up 12 per cent of GDP.



PRICE SUPPORT

Togo last December sold 51 per cent of its shares in NSCT to Singapore-based agricultural conglomerate Olam International.

Owned by Japan's Mitsubishi and Singapore's sovereign fund Temasek, Olam International is present in 60 countries, with a hefty focus on agri-business in Africa.

The state of Togo has retained 24 per cent of NSCT shares and the farmers' association 25 percent.

Under its new terms of operation, NSCT will be responsible for all cotton activities in the country, including supporting producers with fertilisers, ginning and sale.

The company says it will raise the floor price of raw cotton to 254 CFA francs (\$0.46) per kilo to encourage production. International cotton prices have rebounded this year, peaking at 93 cents per pound (0.45 kilo) in February – almost double from its lowest point in 2020.

A processing factory is also being built in a new industrial zone, Adetikope, about 20 kilometres (12 miles) south of the capital Lome, with a capacity to transform 5,000 tonnes of fibre by 2022 and 25,000 tonnes over the new three years.

"We are hopeful that the new season will offer brighter perspectives for the entire industry," Martin Drevon, deputy director general in charge of operations at NSCT, said.

But some fret about the long-term impact from opening the door to multinational giants. They fear a loss of sovereignty.

"If we don't step up, in five years all of Togo's cotton will be in the hands of this group," said Emmanuel Sogadji, president of Togo's consumer association (LCT).

"And it's not just cotton. It's the same for soy and other agricultural products. Even in a liberal economy, we should promote domestic investors." — AFP



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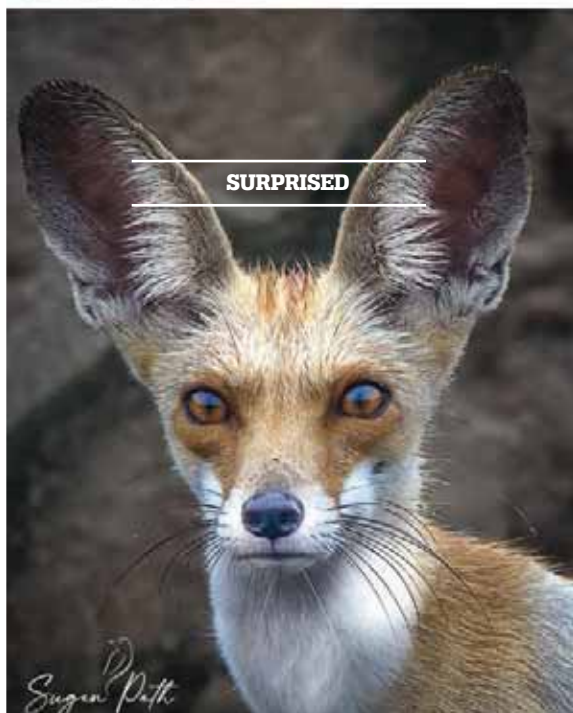
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7 Reasons to Fall in Love with Chao Phraya River — The River of King in Bangkok

THE CHAO PHRAYA River renaissance is highlighting all things to see along the waterway; historic attractions, art, local life and food. Here, the concierge team at The Peninsula Bangkok offers ten reasons to fall in love with this charming Chao Phraya River, the river of King.

1. AN EPIC HERITAGE; HISTORIC GRAND PALACE AND TEMPLE OF DAWN

The Grand Palace and Temple of the Emerald Buddha is the cultural, historical, and religious heart of Bangkok. Temple of the Emerald Buddha is home to the holiest and most important object in the nation. The Emerald Buddha is the country's palladium. Wat

Arung (Temple of Dawn), visiting this remarkable and highly recognisable site at sunset or sunrise is a truly awe-inspiring experience. The Temple is a classic Prang structure of Ayutthaya style, built as a representation of Mount Meru, home of the Khmer gods. It is a favourite amongst Bangkok's many temples. The one hour cruise experience will take our guest up the river to see the Grand Palace and Wat Arung along with delicious canape and cocktails.

2. ART AND CULTURE

Over the past years, art scene around the Chao Phraya and Charoenkrung neighbourhood has seen a rise of art galleries opening. Each unique and differ-

ent, the galleries are a response to growing interest in art by both local and international artists. Our guests can enjoy special privilege to access The River City, Asia's premier art and antiques centre hosting national and international exhibitions and also a digital art museum, and also participating in a monthly gallery hopping by our hotel's partner The Bangkok River Partners. A complimentary shuttle boat from hotel to the River City is provided for our guests.

At The Peninsula Bangkok, guests are also invited to explore Artist in Residence programme which is designed to support emerging artists, while also providing guests with access to culturally representative art pieces. Our current artist is Ms Onnalini Lojanagasin. The artist brings her painting out of the art studio and do a live painting on the hidden spot of the hotel as well as capturing soul of Chao Phraya River. Guests are invited to interact at the painting spots.

3. CREATIVE DISTRICT AND STREET ART

Creative District. Bangkok's blooming Creative District is set to be the centre of creative Bangkokians' universe. The creative district has seen a rise in the number of artists and innovative entities moving in through street arts. Our guests are recommended to start the walk to explore the Creative district by taking hotel's shuttle boat to River City.

Street Art — Ong Ang Canal. Some of Thailand's best-known street artists participated in the Ong Ang Canal project that joins Rattanakosin and Chinatown. The canal refurbishment programme includes new canal walls, paved canal sidewalk and even solar powered ferries for public transport. The murals capture the essence of old town Bangkok, portraying characters associated with the neighbourhood on walls both sides of the canal.

Talat Noi. This is a classic Bangkok neighbourhood — small

alleys, old shophouses, and aging residents that remain true to themselves. Along the river, in an area sandwiched between Chinatown and Bang Rak, stands a charismatic neighbourhood that is living through its golden years.

4. RIVER CRUISE

The dine on board river cruise scene has evolved. Guests can enjoy more variety of dining cruise from upscale Thai set menu to sumptuous buffets serving Thai and International cuisine are guaranteed for guest to enjoy an evening by the river.

5. FOOTPRINT FROM THE PAST — A CANAL TOUR BY LONG TAIL BOAT

Exclusively designed to offer our guests' unique and unprecedented access to historical, cultural and local lifestyle experiences in each of our destinations, The Peninsula Academy offers a collection of bespoke programmes for both adults and children. Explore Bangkok, as never before with the style, elegance and sophistication that only The Peninsula can provide.

6. BICYCLE TOUR

Undiscovered places rich in stories lie where cars cannot go near the hotel's neighbourhood. Urban planning has lead to Bangkok having many megablocks, with much of unseen culture and history tucked away in the middle of them. Many older local communities have been built with troks or alleys that fit only pedestrians, bicycles, and motorcycles, resulting in amazing structures and stories hidden away from eyes on main roads.

7. BANGKOK WAY OF RIVER LIFE

Bangkok's Chao Phraya River is the heart of the capital. Steeped in history, the 'river of kings' has been the meeting point of east and west for centuries. Today, it ranks amongst the world's best waterfront destinations. Surprising to even the ardent traveller, there is a treasure trove of things to do along Bangkok River.

Amato Couture opens Arab Fashion Week with full black and white fashion film



"BLACK IS COMING to light" said Furne Amato. "This film is about a new beginning, changing the norms and challenging the future," he added. "I believe that designers are born not just to adapt but to create. Amato's GENESIS is a canvass of hope, waiting for the sun to shine and the colours of nature to touch life.

shot in Black and White by Dubai Film-maker Monte, and also the first at Arab Fashion Week-Men's. Speaking about creating a full black and white film, Furne Amato said: "The fashion film GENESIS is the first ever black and white film in the history of Arab Fashion Week featuring rising Bollywood star Asim



It is not just about the dresses but the intense feelings that heralds with it — because the collection changes but the emotion lingers."

Critically-acclaimed Dubai-based fashion house AMATO Couture to unveil new collection tomorrow at Arab Fashion Week-Men's Spring/Summer 2022 presentation shot in a full black and white film, produced by trending celebrity agency YUGEN Group, which also produced Arab Fashion Week's historical and most viewed film of all time — Inner Sanctum — with Miss Universe Pia Wurtzbach directed by Dubai Director Alex Suhorucov.

This is Furne Amato's first full length fashion film

Riaz as the first ever male star from Bollywood to open Arab Fashion Week. It also co-star upcoming Polish model Daniel Dejne and was produced by Dubai-based celebrity agency YUGEN PR."

Asim Riaz flew to Dubai early this year to shoot the fashion film which is an embodiment of our new generation's quest for art and hope and the commencement of the never ending revolution for fashion by designers and creators.

"I am extremely happy and blessed to be working with fashion legend Furne Amato and celebrity producer Josh Yugen for this monumental project in my career," said Asim Riyaz



Spelunking and abseiling in Al Hoota Cave

By Erin Coyle

The darkness broken by the light from head torches and the silence interrupted by the murmuring of the water are just two of the things one will experience inside the Al Hoota Cave.

The caving experience has recently opened in Hoota, thanks to Ahmed bin Mohammed al Abri and Sights Tours. They have gone inside to prepare the route to get it ready for visitors.

Ahmed is from Nizwa and is a guide who will take you anywhere. He always brings a great team with him too. When he and his friend talked about the chance to go hike inside Al Hoota Cave, this was an opportunity to experience a new challenge.

When meeting the group at the starting location, the team will assist with assembling harnesses and helmets and will make sure a head torch is strapped onto the helmet. The journey begins with about a ten-minute walk along some small and medium-sized rocks until the first abseil, which is less than a 10-metre drop. When looking across the mountain, a small crater-like hole appears, which is the entrance to the cave. After this abseil, the access is less than fifteen minutes away. Upon reaching, it is now time to turn on

the head torches to get ready to climb down inside the cave. This first one requires stepping down five metal pegs placed on the rocks with the help of the leaders if needed.

The caving continues, which requires walking or jumping around boulders, abseiling, jumping into the water, and short swims. Some parts of the hike require placing your legs on both sides of narrowing boulder rocks to get down. Of course, when help is needed, ask someone, and they will gladly assist. They will even let you place your feet on their shoulders to get you down. The team is always eager and willing to support in any way they can.

Most importantly, make sure to keep stopping now and again to look at the beauty inside the cave. The shapes and formations are unique, with small and large-shaped rock circles with holes inside and oddly shaped tall triangles. At one point, there is a slate-coloured rock resembling a turtle. The crevasses along the way in slate and light brown colours have shapes reminding me of large, sharp incisor teeth. The stones will appear to have golden yellow and faded purple streaks running alongside them with the right camera.

After the last abseil, there

is a short walk until reaching the trip's final leg, which is an 800 metre swim to the end. There are times where walking is possible; however, the mud at the bottom of the water causes your shoes to get stuck, so personally, swimming is more manageable! The water sounds like the beating of a drum against the rocks. Make sure to keep looking up at these crater-like circles to admire the formations. The end brings you to the tourist part of Al Hoota at the stairs, where one can view those small fish. The hardest part is now over. The last part is a breeze, simply walking up the stairs and walking through the tunnel, taking around ten minutes until reaching the car park.

If there is ever a time to face your fears, this is a good one to try. I was so grateful to Ahmed and his team for keeping us safe while making sure we had a great time. The key is always to trust the guides.

Details: This cave is considered a challenging hike and not recommended for those who are claustrophobic. The length is 4.5 km, including four abseil drops of ten to fifteen metres, with the longest pool being 800 metres. The water is about 20 degrees, but it is tolerable. For more details, check out Instagram @sightstour or @ahmed_nizwa.

