

Oman wins membership to ILO's governing body

The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Labour, has won membership to the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s governing body for the period (2021-2024). This was the result of elections held via videoconferencing on the sidelines of ILO's 109th international session elections, in which the Sultanate bagged the second largest number of ballots involving the post of permanent member for Asia and the Pacific. – ONA



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KIM KARDASHIAN HAS NO REGRETS AS 'KEEPING UP' REALITY SERIES ENDS



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PACT SIGNED TO ENHANCE SATELLITE-BASED SERVICES



MUSCAT

JOBS FOR CITIZENS IN PUBLIC SECTOR

The Ministry of Labour announced the availability of 1,003 job opportunities for male and female job-seekers in the public sector and that the registration for these jobs will last for 8 days. The ministry said that the job opportunities target various specialisations including finance, administration, economy, media, English language, humanities, law, designing and engineering. The ministry stated that a number of job vacancies are allocated to the disabled including 19 jobs for Bachelor's holders and 3 jobs for holders of certificates above the General Education Diploma.

CANCER CENTRE TO OPEN IN MID-JULY

The Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre will be opened for soft launch and will receive patients in the middle of July. Built on a 54,000 sq metre area, the centre comprises 300 rooms and three inpatient wards. Dr Mansour bin Saif al Mantheri, head of the operating committee of the Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre, said: "We seek to position it as a leading and internationally recognised medical centre." SEE P3



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JUNTA TRIAL OF MYANMAR'S SUU KYI GETS UNDER WAY

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GERMANY'S SCHOLZ BETS ON EXPERIENCE IN POLL BATTLE

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HM GETS MESSAGE FROM SAUDI KING



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a verbal message from King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of Saudi Arabia. The message deals with the fraternal relations and cooperation between the two brotherly countries, in addition to means of promoting them. The message was conveyed by Prince Faisal Farhan al Saud, Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, when Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received him at his office in Muscat on Monday.

DETAILS ON P2

HM CONFERS ORDER OF FELICITATION



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday conferred Order of Felicitation on Dr Ali Abdul Khaliq al Qarni, former Director General of Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States (ABEGS), reflecting His Majesty the Sultan's appreciation for the efforts and contributions of Dr Al Qarni in serving the GCC Educational work. The order was handed over by HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, when he received Dr Al Qarni at his office in Muscat. – ONA

Sultanate eyes to attract 11.7m tourists by 2040

ZAINAB AL NASSRI @zainabalnasseri

Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) — the operational arm of the Sultanate for the development of the tourism sector — celebrated the launch of commercial identity for the national travel operator 'Visitoman.om' in cooperation with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

Visitoman.om is the first integrated digital platform for serving and trading customers in the travel and tourism sector in the Sultanate in line with the National Tourism Strategy 2040 and the tourism distribution strategy.

Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, graced the occasion organised by the ministry.

In his speech he said, "The 'Visitoman.om' is an ambitious promotion initiative aiming to make Oman one of the competitive destinations by virtue of its competitive advantages. The platform will digitise the tourism chain and link travel and tourism institutions in the Sultanate and consumers."

Al Mahrouqi added that the platform is expected to play role in enhancing the Sultanate's vision of raising the domestic and international investment rate in the tourism sector, down to attracting 11.7 million tourists by 2040, of whom 5 million would be international tourists.

Mohammed bin Salem al Busaidy, Chairman of Omran Group, said: "The launch of the Visitoman.om platform is



“Visitoman.om’ is an ambitious promotion initiative aimed to make Oman one of the competitive destinations

SALIM AL MAHROUQI
Minister of Heritage and Tourism

an important step for Omran to achieve its vision through investment in the value-added series of the tourism sector through the implementation and activation of the distribution strategy aiming at increasing inbound tourism numbers from various regional and international markets."

He stressed that the platform came in line with the group's efforts to develop the sector by establishing sustainable projects contributing to economic diversification.

TURN TO P2

MASS VACCINATION TO COVER MAJORITY OF POPULATION

51% READY TO TAKE COVID-19 VACCINE

KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

The majority of Oman's population, including expatriates, will be covered under the mass vaccination campaign, as overwhelming response continued for the second dose, according to a study conducted by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The Ministry of Health has included new groups, more government departments, ministries and public authorities in the target group. A study conducted among 3,000 randomly selected people, of which 67 per cent were Omanis, and 33 per cent expatriates, indicated that more than half of the Omani society is willing to take Covid-19 vaccines while campaigns are under way across the sectors.

Speaking to the Observer, Mohammed bin Ali al Qassabi, Acting Chief of Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI), said the



vaccination campaign is giving good results. Time is not far when the nation could conquer the pandemic.

"We are taking part in the campaign for vaccination. Long queues at the vaccination centres are obvious results of collective efforts."

He refuted rumours about the side effects and negative impacts of the vaccine and said the awareness level

among the society was very high.

"We encourage the public to get vaccinated as per schedule given to each sector and be a part of the nation-building march and ignore the negative news as no scientific proof has been identified to support the fake claims that the vaccine has side effects", said Al Qassabi.

TURN TO P2

EU's digital vaccine pass becomes law

BRUSSELS: The presidents of the three main EU institutions signed a plan for a digital Covid-19 vaccine certificate into law on Monday, setting it up to go live on July 1 across the bloc.

The signatures were the European

Union's final approval for a pass that indicates whether someone has tested negative or recovered from the coronavirus, or has been vaccinated against it. All 27 EU member states are to recognise certificates issued in other countries, making travel easier

across the region as the summer holiday season kicks off.

It is ultimately up to the capitals to decide what perks come with the certificate, but many governments have indicated they will drop quarantine. — dpa

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 42°C Min 31°C SALALAH: Max 33°C Min 26°C NIZWA: Max 50°C Min 32°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 05:20 FAJR: 03:52 DHUHR: 12:12 ASR: 15:30 MAGHRIB: 19:00 ISHA: 20:22

HIS MAJESTY RECEIVES MESSAGE FROM SAUDI KING

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a verbal message from the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The message deals with the fraternal relations and cooperation between the two



brotherly countries, in addition to means of promoting them.

The message was conveyed by Prince Faisal bin Farhan al Saud, Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, when Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister received him here on Monday.

The meeting reviewed the distinguished relations between the two countries. It also touched on several issues of joint interest.

The meeting was attended by Abdullah bin Saud al Anzi, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, appointed to the Sultanate and a number of officials from both sides. — ONA

Sultanate targets over 11 million tourists by 2040



FROM PAGE 1

The National Travel and Tourism Platform ‘Visitoman.om’ aims to strengthen the Sultanate’s position in international travel and tourism markets by linking Omani travel and tourism providers actively with trading customers in targeted markets. This is done through influencing the sales-oriented to the Sultanate via alignment of business partners’ incentives which contributes to raising the quality of tourist spending for tourists in the Sultanate.

The platform will be enabled via digital solutions and advanced technology in the Sultanate dynamically and attractively. It will be linked

to the value-added series of travel and local tourism that includes: aviation, accommodation facilities (hotels), transportation, tourist destinations, tourist experiences of various kinds, restaurants and other tourist products.

At this stage, registration will be available to partners in the travel and tourism sector in international markets, as well as Omani organisations operating in tourism, including Omani tourist service providers, destination management companies, as well as new tourism providers in the market and who haven’t had the opportunity to compete in international markets to expand their business.



124 admitted to Covid-19 field hospital, bed occupancy hits 90%



MUSCAT: As many as 124 Covid-19 patients have been admitted to the field hospital where occupancy stood at more than 90%.

Dr Nabil bin Mohammed al Lawatia, Director of the Covid-19 Field Hospital, said in a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA) that the hospital’s capacity has been raised to 150 beds, with 50 beds added since May 25.

Al Lawatia pointed out that the hospital received 31 patients yesterday and that the facility received 24 or more patients on a daily average recently. “The

longer the patients stay at the hospital, the more pressure is exerted on the facility’s ability to receive new cases. The hospital is undergoing a huge pressure as the number of new cases keeps rising,” said Dr Nabil.

He explained that the cases to which the hospital is attending currently are more extreme, compared to similar instances during the past wave of infections. “The cases that reach us are ones suffering sharp shortage in oxygen or obvious damage to the respiratory system, which show right from the first week of symptoms,”

The longer the patients stay at the hospital, the more pressure is exerted on the facility’s ability to receive new cases. The hospital is undergoing huge pressure as the number of new cases keeps rising

DR NABIL AL LAWATIA
Director, Covid-19 Field Hospital

said Dr Nabil, noting that such symptoms used to appear in the second week after infection, which proves that this variant of the virus is more ferocious.

Dr Nabil said that most of the cases received at the Field Hospital are those of patients aged less than 60 years. Only a small proportion of the patients received two doses, said Dr Nabil, who explained that those who received at least one dose had less acute symptoms, compared to those who receive none. He urged all to take Covid-19 vaccination and to keep adhering to precautionary measures. — ONA

Mass vaccination to cover majority of population

FROM PAGE 1

The NCSI study shows that 51 per cent of Omanis are willing to take the Covid-19 vaccine (57 per cent men and 38 per cent women). As for residents, it is 68 per cent (69 per cent men and 59 per cent women). Also, 84 per cent of people willing to take the vaccine will take the 2 doses, and 42 per cent of them have no worries and will recommend their families and friends to do the same.

This was revealed by the survey conducted by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) in accordance with the Ministry of Health on Covid-19 vaccination campaign (December 15-31, 2020).

The study sample was 3,000 people, 67 per cent of which were Omanis and 33 per cent were residents.

The study indicates that more than half of the Omani society is willing to take Covid-19 vaccines.



It also shows that 88 per cent of the society are aware of Covid-19 vaccines (93 per cent Omanis, 79 per cent residents).

It also points out that the society’s level of awareness ranges between average and high (awareness of the symptoms and prevention methods 96 per cent,

infection ways 95 per cent, what to do when symptoms appear 95 per cent and 93 per cent of the society are aware of the most infected segments with the disease.

Furthermore, 67 per cent rely on social media as a source of information and 56 per cent rely on television.

More than half of the society believe that the vaccine can prevent infection, whereas 44 per cent think that it should be administered to people who have history with the virus, and 42 per cent suggest prioritizing the currently infected people. (With ONA inputs)

Cancer centre to open in mid-July



MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Center will be opened for soft launch and will receive patients in the middle of July.

Built on a 54,000 sq metre area, the centre comprises 300 rooms and three inpatient wards.

Dr Mansour bin Saif al Mantheri, head of the operating committee of the Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Center said we seek to position the centre as a leading and internationally recognised medical centre in the academic and



research fields and the provision of integrated medical services to realise the vision of the His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to set up a comprehensive centre with integrated medical staff and equipped with the most advanced medical technology with the aim of providing psychological relief for the patients and the most advanced methods of medical treatment.

Dr Al Mantheri said the centre is receiving continued support and attention from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. — ONA



Pact signed to manage, operate Jabreen Castle

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism signed an agreement with Al Theqa Investment company to manage, operate and utilise Jabreen Castle in the Wilayat of Bahla, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The agreement was signed by Eng Ibrahim bin Said al Kharousi, the Ministry's Under-Secretary for Heritage, and Abdullah Hamad al Alawai, representative of the company.

The agreement comes within the framework of the ministry's efforts to enable the SMEs to enrich the cultural tourism and revive the cultural sites.

This comes as part of the ministry's endeavours in maximising the in-country value by creating a sustainable tourism sector which aligns perfectly with Oman's rich heritage and Oman Vision 2040. — ONA

DOORS

OPEN TO RICH LEGACY OF ARCHITECTURE



TEXT & PHOTOS
BY YAHYA AL SALMANI

The ancient buildings of Oman narrate political, social and architectural history of the Sultanate. What distinguishes these old residential neighbourhoods is their architectural style, which is built with mud, stones and stucco. Wooden doors and windows play a major role in adding an exceptional aesthetic to these clusters or Harat. The vintage doors and windows that decorate homes, forts, castles, mosques and traditional markets attract tourists and lovers of architectural heritage from across the world.

Those who visit these premises find crumbling columns, arches, walls and ceilings and worn-out doors and windows with residents long migrated to buildings in towns and cities with modern amenities. But we cannot leave this cultural legacy fall prey to the elements and rodents.

Some of the doors that stood the test of time are rich in decorations and carvings. The doors of the main entrances to these districts and their forts, castles and mosques are based on the social conditions prevailed during the historical periods that span hundreds of years.

Across the centuries, the Sultanate has witnessed many political conflicts and social changes. The main gates and doors that decorate the façades of these old towns are distinguished by the presence of a smaller door that measures approximately half of a person's height. These smaller gates and doors allowed entry and exit for individuals, as permitted by the guardian of the lane, home, or fortress. This type of door is also one of the methods that were used during that era to tighten the guard and defend the forts and castles from surprise attacks.



Some of the doors have two knockers; small one for women and big for men. If a woman raps the door with the smaller ring, the lady of the house opens the door for her. If it is big knock the man of the house opens the door for the guest. This method is prevalent in some old neighbourhoods of some Islamic countries, including Turkey.

According to the historical sources, the wood of these doors and windows was imported mainly from India and East Africa. This is proof of Oman's trade ties with these countries.

Abdulrahman al Salimi and Heinz Gaube Lorenz Korn in their book "Islamic Art in Oman" mention that "many of vegetal decorations of doors and frames give the impression of eastern origin. It is not farfetched to assume that many of these doors were ready

made and imported from India or countries east of India. Their decoration had an impact on the style of Omani woodcarvers, as can be seen in the workshop of Sur, where doors with rich vegetal ornamentation, which cannot be found in other parts of the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, Iran, Egypt or Syria originate.

These vegetal decorations, which we also find on Zanzibari doors, witness the close link of costal Oman to India and the countries east of it."

Teak is the most popular type of wood used for these doors and windows. Teak is strong wood that can withstand heat, humidity and various climatic changes for long time. It is also resistant to termites, which destroy other types of woods. Omanis often used fish oils to coat imported wood to ensure durability of wood.

Most of the wooden doors in these districts are distinguished by inscriptions that are rarely found elsewhere. Each door has its own identity. The doors of the homes of educated families are engraved with Holy Quran verses, literary, poetic phrases, and greetings. It also mentions the dates of construction of these homes.

They also feature drawings of palm trees, flowers and leaves. It also includes some doors studded with interlocking bronze nails.

There are more than 1,000 old districts and 500 castles and fortresses in the Sultanate. Some of them date back to the pre-Islamic era. Some of them are listed in the World Heritage List of UNESCO.

Although most of these Harats have long suffered from neglect after their residents left them, it is heartening to note that in recent years a number of Omanis took the initiative to restore some of the houses in the old quarters for the future generations and to attract tourists.

MoE unveils more job opportunities

MUSCAT: The job vacancies announced by the Ministry of Labour on Sunday include 400 jobs for national job-seekers willing to join the educational sector.

Majid bin Said al Bahri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Administrative and Financial Affairs, said that the ministry has opened competition for graduates of various specialisations.

The official added that the dates and mechanisms of the tests and the subsequent stages that precede the appointment in the ministry, will be announced later in coordination with the Ministry of Labour.

On Sunday, the Ministry of Labour announced the availability of 1,003 job opportunities for male and female job-seekers in the public sector and that the registration for these jobs will last for 8 days.

The ministry explained that the job opportunities target various specialisations including finance, administration, economy, media, English language, humanities, law, designing and engineering.

The ministry stated that a number of job vacancies are allocated to the disabled including 19 jobs for bachelor's holders and 3 jobs for holders of certificates above the general education diploma. — ONA

Etimad conducts training sessions



MUSCAT: The National Leadership Programme for Middle/Senior Management (Etimad), in accordance with Takatuf Oman, on Monday started collective learning introductory sessions for the second group of the first batch.

The 4-day sessions are being conducted in Oman Institute for Oil and Gas (instOG).

Etimad is a programme that qualifies private sector employees by sharpening their leadership and supervision skills through a special programme designed by international and local centers and institutes specialised in enhancing management skills

and training leaders.

This opportunity enriches the personal and professional aspects for individuals and institutions alike.

The individuals will be qualified as leaders, while the institutions reap the benefits of their qualified national cadres who are qualified for middle and Senior management positions.

It is worth noting that nearly 250 participants qualified within the first group from different private sector institutes.

They went through a focused programme on upgrading leadership skills led by international experts. — ONA

WEAR SUNGLASSES



TO PROTECT YOUR EYES

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@PATKAUSHAL

Summer has arrived, and it has come in a big way. Even though there is some relief now in some parts of the country, other areas witnessed temperatures around 50 degrees.

Senior ophthalmologist Dr Mukund R Nayak came out with suggestions to protect eyes from the scorching summer heat. “If proper care is not taken, there are possibilities of damaging eyes. During the peak summer, the temperature might even reach 50 degrees. To protect our eyes from UV rays of sunlight, wearing sunglasses is very important. The damage caused by UV rays has a cumulative effect on the eyes. Hence, wearing sunglasses throughout the summer is important,” said the ophthalmologist.

According to him, everyone, regardless of age, needs sunglasses. Even children are at risk of eye damage due to UV radiation. Eyes are vulnerable to UV rays during cloudy days also, as UV rays penetrate through clouds.

HOW TO SELECT A SUNGLASS
“While selecting a pair of sunglasses, one should read the label properly. Look for UV light absorption

percentage. Not all sunglasses are 100 per cent UV protective. But, anything which has more than 70-85 per cent UV absorption will serve the purpose. Larger lenses offer greater eye protection than small lenses. For maximum protection, use wrap-around lenses,” says Dr Nayak

Do we need to wear sunglasses only during summer? No, it should be worn in all seasons. In summer, the intensity of the rays is high.

“Winter or summer, cloudy or sunny-you are susceptible to UV rays. Excess UV exposure can cause cataract, macular degeneration, pterygium (fleshy growth) and dryness of the eyes.

Sunglasses are not just another stylish accessory. The colour of sunglasses is purely cosmetic. The percentage of UV absorption is more important than the colour of sunglasses. Polarised sunglasses reduce glare, and they are more comfortable.”

Sunglasses also protect the skin of our eyelids, as the skin of the eyelids are the thinnest in the entire body. If you have a prescription, those can be incorporated with sunglasses also.

Sunglass is especially important for people who have undergone cataract surgery, light coloured eyes, and under photosensitive

“While selecting a pair of sunglasses, one should read the label properly. Look for UV light absorption percentage. Not all sunglasses are 100 per cent UV protective. But, anything which has more than 70-85 per cent UV absorption will serve the purpose

DR MUKUND
R NAYAK
Senior ophthalmologist

medication. The most significant danger of poor sunglasses is if they are tinted but do not block the UV rays. Blue rays of the light spectrum are said to be more dangerous to the retina. They might damage the retina causing macular degeneration.

Important to note that “Just sunglasses without UV protection may damage your eye, as pupils will

be dilated which increases harmful solar rays to enter the eyes causing more retinal damage.

People working outdoors continuously should wear glass lenses. Plastic or fibre lenses are likely to get distorted due to very high temperatures. Use sunglasses only when you are outdoors.” Wearing them indoors and at the workplace look indecent and may not be acceptable by others, suggests Dr Nayak.

LENS ARE PREFERENCE
For any age group, large lenses are preferred, as, on the other hand, small lenses still allow sunlight to pass from its sides. The upper edges should at least touch the eyebrows, and the lower edges should rest on the upper side of the face on either side of the nose.

Whatever the age of the occupation, using sunglasses when you are outdoors will help you maintain good eyesight for a long time. Polaroid sunglasses offer glare-free vision, 100 per cent UV protection, hard coating for maximum scratch resistance.

Dr Nayak suggests, wearing sunglasses while driving is all the more critical, as they reduce the amount of light entering into the

eyes, which reduces the glare effect in the eyes. “This will provide more comfort during driving which might again reduce the chances of road accidents.”

People wearing powered glasses may feel disadvantaged, but things are not usually against them. Manufacturers of sunglasses have devised eyewear to meet their demands by producing special glasses. People who wear short-sighted (myopia) glasses can protect their eyes from sunlight by using photo-chromatic glasses (generally called “day and night” glasses). These glasses become dark when they are exposed to the sunlight, says Dr Nayak.

Some other power glasses are available with antiglare coating, which will reduce glare into the eyes. Good quality sunglasses do not become hot when exposed to sunlight.

Recommending strongly sunglasses for everyone, Dr Nayak said, “It is essential to wear sunglasses for protecting your eyes, especially in countries like Oman, where temperature rises almost every day during summer. It may be worth thinking about how good they are for your eyes, rather than concentrating on style.”



Sultanate, Norway hold political consultations



MUSCAT: The second round of the political consultations between the Sultanate and the Kingdom of Norway was held on Monday via video conferencing.

The session was chaired from the Omani side by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, while

Veibjorn Dysvik, Director General of Department for Regional Affairs chaired the Norwegian side.

The two sides reviewed the bilateral relations between the two countries as they stressed their keenness to continue promoting them in various spheres. They also exchanged views on a number of

regional and international issues of common interest.

The session was attended by Yousef bin Said al Amri, the Sultanate's non-resident ambassador to Norway, Oyvind Stokke, Norwegian non-resident ambassador to Oman, and officials at the foreign ministries of the two countries. — **ONA**

Finance Ministry issues circular on national register of govt assets

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Finance on Monday issued Circular No 4/2021 on the National Register of Government Assets.

The circular mandates a consultant to devise the "Register Plan" with the purpose of drafting a "Government Assets Investment Strategy" (GAIS) aimed to supply the State Budget with additional financial resources.

The Ministry also asked upon specialists in different government units concerned to provide all data pertaining to the state-owned Assets Register.

The Ministry also asked government units to (each) nominate one of their specialists to serve as a point of reference and liaison with the team tasked with undertaking the GAIS project. The team is required to provide all relevant data and information in time to the Ministry. — **ONA**

MoH, Nizwa University sign agreement



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 14

The Ministry of Health (MoH), represented by the Directorate General of Human Development (DGHD) signed an agreement with the University of Nizwa to train the students of Pharmacy and Nursing College at the University headquarters on Monday.

The agreement was signed by Dr Ahmed al Abri, DGHD Director General on behalf of the Ministry and Dr Salim bin Said al Toobi, Dean of Pharmacy and

Nursing College, on behalf of the University.

The agreement stipulated using the health facilities of the Ministry of Health to train the students of Pharmacy and Nursing College of the University of Nizwa.

As part of the facilitations provided by the MoH for the private higher education institutions, this agreement is the second and the fourth one within similar agreements aiming to acquire the students the scientific and applied knowledge in their specialisations.

Oman participates in UNCAC session

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 14

The Sultanate's State Audit Institution (SAI) is taking part in the 12th session of the group responsible for reviewing the implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC).

The five-day (June 14-18) session is being convened virtually from the United Nations headquarters in Vienna.

The meeting agenda includes a number of topics that are open for discussion, mainly; assessing the performance of the review mechanism of the UNCAC implementation as well as providing implementation review group with analysis relevant to timeframes

of conclusive stages of the review process including statistics of countries missing deadlines in order to ensure the effectiveness of the process.

The participants will also touch upon financial matters especially those relevant to budgets, how to utilise available resources in a manner that is sustainable, efficient and neutral, in addition to exploring financing solutions to fund the review process.

During the session, aspects of the UNCAC will also be highlighted such as those relevant to information and practices exchange on executing the convention and recommendations of the country review reports taking into account the efficiency in the deliberations and decision-making processes.

Further, the session will be providing more information on successful stories, good practices, existent challenges, technical needs as well as actions taken after finalising the country reviews.

It is worth noting that a review of the Sultanate execution of the chapters three and four from the UNCAC (criminalisation and law enforcement, and international cooperation respectively) was conducted in 2015.

In 2018, the Sultanate was reviewed against chapters two and five (preventative actions and assets recovery respectively). The two reviews concluded that there are a number of different successful experiences and praised the efforts exerted by the Sultanate in the field.

Programmes to enhance performance of state-owned firms



MUSCAT: Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has conducted a number of programmes and procedures aimed to lay out a clear-cut form of governance that serves as a springboard for operational and financial performance of state-owned firms in line with provisions of Royal Decree No 61/2020.

Specifically, the OIA has drafted regulatory frameworks and policies meant to establish an integrated environment for the governance of state-owned firms. It also restructured some firms under its supervision, formed new boards of directors and appointed Omani nationals known for expertise in their fields of specialty, both from the public and private sectors.

Towards this end, the OIA meetings and workshops led

to the creation of performance indicators to secure the preset goals and ensure the efficiency of tasks.

The meetings pinpointed the challenges and ways to circumvent them and meet the objectives, the most important of which is the formulation of a general framework for the governance of OIA firms to upgrade their performance and regulate the relationship between them the OIA at all levels.

Other outcomes include empowering boards of the directors, drafting specific performance indicators for them and to find principles for supporting the greatest proportion of contribution of the private sector and to enable it to achieve in-country value.

At the centre of this process is the development of a comprehensive plan for investment and partnership, including listing the firms in stock markets.

This is in addition to enhancing the diversification of sources of income, bolstering economic diversification, augmenting the volume of non-oil investments in the Gross Domestic Product and attracting direct foreign investment to the Sultanate.

The OIA is currently working side by side with state-owned firms to issue a "Governance Charter" in line with the best local and international practices and with "Principles of governance of companies in which the government holds stake", issued by the Capital Market Authority. — **ONA**

MOORE STEPHENS LLC

NOTICE ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF LIQUIDATION OF STRATEGY & SERVICES (MIDDLE EAST) LLC (AS APPEARED IN OFFICIAL GAZETTE NO 1395)

Moore Stephens LLC, announces the liquidation process of Strategy & Services (Middle East) LLC, bearing commercial registration number 1121622, in accordance with the decision taken by the Company's Members on 31 May 2021. The liquidators alone have the right to represent the Company under liquidation before third parties, and all parties are to conform with the liquidator for all matters concerning the company's business at the following address:

Office No.41, 4th Floor, Building No.1022, Way No.1013; Al Walaj Street, Al Qurum P O Box 933, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman Tel: 24061000, Fax: 24061099

By this announcement, the liquidator calls the company's creditors to submit their claims against the company, together with the supporting documents, to the above address within six months from the date of publishing this announcement for the first time, and any debtors should settle the company's rights with the liquidator on the address above.

Moore Stephens LLC
Official Liquidators of Strategy & Services (Middle East) LLC
(Under voluntary liquidation)



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

إعلان مناقصة Tender Notice

The Internal Tender Committee at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology
In AL Khuwair invites for the Following Tenders:

TENDER NO	TENDER NAME	DATE OF PUBLISHING	LAST DATE TO PURCHASE TENDER DOCUMENT	SUBMISSION DATE	COMPANIES WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THIS TENDER	DOCUMENT PRICE
MOTs/HQ-11/20/2021	MAINTENANCE OF TRACK ROADS PROJECTS (SOUTH AL SHARQIYYA GOVERNORATE) (FOR 5 YEARS)	15-06-2021	29-06-2021	27-07-2021	EXPERIENCED COMPANIES IN THE SIMILAR WORKS (FIRST CLASS)	(290/-) TWO HUNDRED AND NINETY OMANI RIAL NON-REFUNDABLE
MOTs/HQ-12/21/2021	MAINTENANCE OF TRACK ROADS PROJECTS AT (MUSANDAM GOVERNORATE) (FOR 5 YEARS)	15-06-2021	29-06-2021	27-07-2021	EXPERIENCED COMPANIES IN THE SIMILAR WORKS (FIRST CLASS)	(300/-) THREE HUNDRED OMANI RIAL NON-REFUNDABLE

Interested Companies registered with General Secretariat of the Tender Board may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted online on given website. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by local bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of (1%) of the Tender value validity for (90) days, and addressed to (Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee). And hard copy of the same should be submitted manually to the Tenders Section, Tenders and Contracts Department (1st Floor), Ministry of Transport Building at Al Khuwair before 11:00 am on submission date.

CORRESPONDANCE:

- Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at e-Tendering System. (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
- E-Tendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the e-Tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number:
Tel: +968 24166670, e-mail : etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE

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Erdogan praises revival of dialogue

ANKARA: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on Monday the revival of dialogue channels with Greece helped solve some bilateral problems between the Nato members, over which tensions flared last year.

Ankara and Athens have been at odds over several issues for years, from conflicting Mediterranean maritime claims to air space and migration. The allies came close to a confrontation last year, hurting ties between the European Union and Ankara.

“We believe that the revival of dialogue channels with our neighbour Greece contributes to solving problems and to regional stability,” Erdogan told an event organised by the German Marshall Fund on the sidelines of a Nato summit in Brussels.

Erdogan is expected to meet Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis later on Monday at the summit.

Meanwhile, US President Joe Biden and Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan discussed problematic bilateral ties including Ankara’s purchase of Russian S-400 missiles, but there is little hope they will resolve any of several disputes that divide Nato.

The two leaders will hold their first face-to-face talks since Biden took office in January on the sidelines of a Nato summit in Brussels. — AFP



Outgoing Israeli President Reuvin Rivlin (C) is flanked by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and alternate Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Yair Lapid during a photo with the new coalition government in Jerusalem. — AFP

Israel’s new govt begins, Netanyahu era ends

JERUSALEM: The first Israeli government in 12 years not led by Benjamin Netanyahu got down to business on Monday, with the former prime minister shying away from a handover ceremony with successor Naftali Bennett.

The right-wing leader’s record run in office ended on Sunday with parliament approving, by a razor-thin majority of 60-59, a new administration led by Bennett, a nationalist whose views mirror Netanyahu’s on many issues.

In Tel Aviv, thousands turned out to welcome the result, after four inconclusive elections in two years.

“I am here celebrating the end of an era in Israel,” said Erez Biezuner in Rabin Square.

“We want them to succeed and to unite us again,” he added, as flag-waving supporters of the new government sang and danced around him. A combative

Under coalition deal, Yair Lapid to become PM in 2023 as Naftali Bennett is the new premier

Netanyahu, 71, said he would be back sooner than expected.

“If we are destined to go into the opposition, we will do so with our heads held high until we can topple it,” he told parliament before Bennett was sworn in.

The traditional handover ceremony was not scheduled at the prime minister’s office, where Netanyahu was expected to meet Bennett later on Monday to brief him on state matters.

The last time Netanyahu was unseated as Israel’s leader, in 1999, he ended his first term in office with a glass of wine in his hand and affable words of welcome to

then-Labour party leader Ehud Barak, who defeated him at the polls.

“Sour, grumpy, not stately — Trump-like until the final moment,” Yossi Verter, a political affairs commentator, wrote in the left-leaning Haaretz newspaper.

Asked why there would be no such scene now, Topaz Luk, a senior aide to Netanyahu, told Army Radio: “That’s just what happens.”

Netanyahu, he said, was “filled with motivation to topple this dangerous government as quickly as possible”. Luk declined to disclose Netanyahu’s comeback strategy, pointing only to the new administration’s slim margin of support in parliament.

Luk said the incoming government was receiving briefings from Netanyahu’s diplomatic and security advisers to ensure an orderly handover. — AFP

Iran presidential vote on June 18

DUBAI: Like many young Iranians yearning for democracy, Shirin doesn’t believe elected officials want to deliver greater political and social freedoms. How many shares her frustration may become apparent in a June 18 vote, when Iran holds a presidential election seen as a referendum on the Islamic Republic’s handling of an array of political and economic crises.

Official polls suggest record low participation, a prospect ascribed to economic hardship and to a lack of choice at the ballot box for an overwhelmingly young population chafing at political restrictions.

Religiously devout, less well-off communities are expected to go to the polls and vote for the front-runner, the strongly Ebrahim Raisi, but young educated voters in

towns and cities and some villages may well stay home. After an election body barred candidates from standing in the race, young urban Iranians appear united only in their weariness with a cheerless status quo.

“I want freedom, I want democracy. Iranian presidents have no authority and desire to change our lives... So why should I vote?” said French literature student Shirin, 22, from Tehran.

Like most other young people interviewed for this story, Shirin declined to be identified by her full name due to the sensitivity of the election contest. Under Iran’s clerical system, the powers of the elected president are circumscribed by those of the hardline supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in office since 1989. — AFP

THE PRIZED CATCH



A worker carries a carp freshwater fish at a breeding site in Iraq’s central city of Najaf. — AFP

Trauma helpline taking calls from Gaza during conflict, beyond

RAMALLAH: The distressed caller was on the line from Gaza when an explosion drowned out his voice and the line suddenly went dead. For counsellors at the Sawa 121 (One-to-One) Palestinian helpline in Ramallah, it is a grimly familiar end to calls in times of conflict, most recently during the 11-day hostilities between Israel and Hamas in May.

“You don’t know if they’re still alive or not,” Sawa co-founder Ohaila Shomar said at her call centre office in Ramallah, in the occupied West Bank.

“This is the most difficult thing. We keep thinking about them and what happened to them.”

Relying on funding from humanitarian organisations, Sawa will continue to provide emergency post-war support for another six months

Sawa — “Together” in Arabic — fielded around 37,000 calls during the May violence, twice its usual workload, with concerns such as safety, missing children and unexploded bombs added to the helpline’s usual pleas for help with domestic abuse, child protection and mental health problems.



A psychologist plays with Palestinian girl Suzy Eshkuntana, who was pulled out from the rubble of her house, as part of a mental health support session in Gaza City. — Reuters File Photo

Some callers were seeking shelter during Israeli airstrikes or used Sawa’s free line to pass messages to their family because they had no phone credit, counsellors said.

An Egyptian-brokered truce on May 21 ended the fighting which saw 253 Palestinians killed by Israeli airstrikes and 13 people in Israel killed by Palestinian rockets and missiles, medical officials said.

Jalal Khader, director of Sawa in Ramallah, said that although the fighting has stopped, the real support work is only just beginning after four wars between Israel and Gaza activists since 2008.

“It’s as if the trauma and crises

that they went through during the previous wars came back again because they’re living the same crisis that they’ve lived through before,” said Khader.

Relying on funding from humanitarian organisations including Médecins du Monde Switzerland and the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), Sawa will continue to provide emergency post-war support for another six months. Staff are limited to answering the phones for a maximum of 20 hours a week to prevent counsellor burnout, but Sawa official Noor Nazzal said the gratitude of callers made a difficult job worthwhile. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

CAIRO

France to invest €3.8 bn in Egypt projects

French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire signed agreements with Egypt to invest €3.8 billion in the most populous Arab country’s public transport and renewable energy sectors. France will finance Egyptian projects with French companies to the tune of €1.8 billion.



The first tranche will be for transport giant Alstom to supply 55 underground trains for Cairo Metro’s Line 1, for a total of €800 million financed by a loan from the Treasury.

The line used by over a million commuters daily has dilapidated carriages that are over 3 decades old. Nine other projects are included in the intergovernmental agreement.— AFP

BEIRUT

Lebanon currency hits new low against dollar

Lebanon’s currency hit a new low against the dollar on the black market Monday, continuing its freefall in a country gripped by political deadlock, an economic crisis and increasing shortages. The pound, officially pegged at 1,507 to the US dollar since 1997, was selling for 15,400 to 15,500 to the greenback on the black market, several money changers said.

After hovering around 15,000 to the dollar in mid-March, the unofficial exchange rate dropped



to between 12,000 and 13,000 later that month before soaring back up in recent days. The latest plunge means the pound has lost more than 90 per cent of its value on the informal market. — AFP

BAGHDAD

Iraq opens mass grave to identify IS victims

Iraqi authorities said the remains of 123 people killed by IS group had been removed from a mass grave in a bid to identify them. The Badush prison massacre was one of the worst crimes IS carried out after it seized control of a third of Iraq in a lightning offensive in 2014.

In June that year, IS fighters attacked the northwestern prison, freeing inmates and forcing 583 mainly prisoners into a truck, before driving them to a ravine and shooting them.



In recent weeks, dozens of family members of the victims have given blood samples, which will be compared to the DNA of the remains, which were found in the mass graves in 2017. — AFP

In brief

■ NEW DELHI



INDIA EASES CORONAVIRUS RULES AS NEW CASES DIP

Many Indian states eased coronavirus restrictions on Monday including the capital Delhi, where authorities allowed all shops and malls to open, as the number of new infections dropped to the lowest in more than two months. Experts have cautioned against a full re-opening as India has vaccinated only about 5 per cent of its estimated 950 million adults with the necessary two doses, leaving millions vulnerable.

Infections peaked in India in May with about 400,000 new cases a day but that dropped to 70,421 new infections reported on Monday, the lowest daily increase since March 31, health ministry data showed. — AFP

■ MANILA



PHILIPPINE POLICE CHIEF WARNS VOTE BUYING MAY GO DIGITAL

Philippine police chief Guillermo Eleazar warned that political candidates may try to take advantage of the growth in the use of digital platforms and e-wallets in the country to buy votes in national elections next year. Filipino voters will choose a president and vice-president, alongside more than 300 lawmakers and thousands of local government officials, in polls due to be held on May 9.

In the Philippines, elections are frequently marred by vote buying, as many politicians woo people with offers of cash, food and other giveaways in exchange for votes. — AFP

■ JAKARTA



RARE JAVAN RHINO CALVES SPOTTED IN INDONESIA

Two Javan rhinoceros calves have been spotted at an Indonesian national park, offering a rare sighting of one of the world's most endangered mammals. The pair — ranging in age from three months to one year — were caught on footage snapped by camera traps in March at Ujung Kulon national park, the environment ministry said.

On the westernmost tip of Java island, Ujung Kulon is the last remaining wild habitat for Javan rhinos. After years of population decline, there are believed to be just 73 of the rare mammals at the sanctuary, which comprises some 5,100 hectares of lush rainforest and freshwater streams. — AFP

Trial of Myanmar's Suu Kyi gets under way

NAYPYIDAW: The trial of deposed Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi got under way on Monday, more than four months after a military coup, with junta witnesses testifying the Nobel laureate flouted coronavirus restrictions and illegally imported walkie-talkies.

Near daily protests have rocked Myanmar since the generals' February 1 putsch.

A mass uprising has been met with a brutal military crackdown that has killed more than 850 civilians, according to a local monitoring group. The junta has brought an eclectic raft of charges against the Nobel laureate, including claims she accepted illegal payments of gold and violated a colonial-era secrecy law.

On Monday the court heard a police force major testify that Suu Kyi broke coronavirus restrictions during last year's elections that her National League for Democracy (NLD) party won in a landslide, her lawyer Min Min Soe said.

Another police major testified



Protesters make the three-finger salute as they take part in a flash mob demonstration in Yangon. — AFP

on separate charges accusing her of illegally importing and possessing walkie-talkies, she added.

Suu Kyi "paid keen attention" throughout the hearing, another member of her legal team, Khin Maung Zaw said in a statement.

Journalists were barred from proceedings in the special court in the capital Naypyidaw, but a

reporter said there was a heavy police presence outside.

Suu Kyi's lawyers — who have struggled to gain access to their client — have said they expect the trial to wrap up by July 26.

"We are hoping for the best but prepared for the worst," Khin Maung Zaw said ahead of the hearing.

A separate trial is scheduled to start on Tuesday over sedition charges she faces alongside ousted president Win Myint and another senior member of the NLD.

If convicted of all charges, Suu Kyi, 75, faces more than a decade in jail. "It is a show trial motivated only by political reasons," Debbie Stothard, Coordinator of the



Aung San Suu Kyi

Suu Kyi's lawyers who have struggled to gain access to their client have said they expect the trial to wrap up by July 26

Alternative Asean Network on Burma, said. "Min Aung Hlaing is determined to lock up Aung San Suu Kyi for the rest of her life. If he could, he would probably charge her under every law available."

Suu Kyi spent more than 15 years under house arrest during the previous junta's rule before her 2010 release. — AFP

■ S KOREAN PRESIDENT ON AUSTRIA VISIT



Austria's Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and South Korea's President Moon Jae-in bump fists to greet each other for a meeting in Vienna. — AFP

French N-firm seeks to fix 'performance issue at China plant

BEIJING: A French nuclear firm said on Monday it was working to resolve a "performance issue" linked to a gas build-up at a plant it part-owns in southern China following a US media report of a potential leak there.

CNN reported earlier that the US government is assessing a report of a leak at the Taishan Nuclear Power Plant in populous Guangdong province after the French company, Framatome, warned of an "imminent radiological threat".

EDF, the majority owner of Framatome, said in a statement that it had requested an extraordinary meeting of the power plant's board "for management to present all the data and the necessary decisions".

Framatome said in a statement that it is "supporting resolution of

a performance issue" at the plant.

"According to the data available, the plant is operating within the safety parameters," the company said. EDF later said that there was an "increase in the concentration of certain noble gases in the primary circuit of reactor No. 1" at Taishan, referring to a part of the reactor's cooling system.

Noble gases are elements like argon, helium and neon which have low chemical reactivity.

Their presence in the system "is a known phenomenon, studied and provided for in the reactor operating procedures," EDF said.

David Fishman, manager at energy-focused consulting group The Lantau Group, said that the presence of noble gases could suggest the problem was caused by a cracked fuel rod. — AFP

Bangkok slum gets Michelin-starred meals

BANGKOK: Surrounded by children in a Bangkok slum, Miss Universe Thailand handed out lunch boxes prepared by Michelin-starred chefs on Monday — a project to help some of the capital's worst Covid-hit communities.

The kingdom is currently battling a third wave of coronavirus — an outbreak that authorities traced in April to a nightlife district frequented by Bangkok's uber-rich and politically connected.

The government slapped restrictions on businesses and public spaces — much to the chagrin of restaurants already battered by a year of on-off pandemic shutdowns.

Even Michelin-starred ventures are feeling the brunt, and concierge company The Silver Voyage Club is working to bring their ultra-luxe meals to some of Bangkok's hardest-hit communities, said founder Jakkapun Rattanapet.

Part of the "Food for Fighters" project, Bangkok's world-class chefs are paid up to 100 baht (\$3.20) per lunch box — which are then donated to communities where high rates of clusters have emerged.

Khlong Toei — Bangkok's



Miss Universe Thailand 2020, Amanda Obdam hands food boxes made by Michelin-starred chefs to residents of the Khlong Toei slum area in Bangkok. — AFP

largest slum — has emerged in this third wave as a hotspot, because most of its working-class residents are not able to social distance or work from home.

On Monday, families stood in long queues waiting to receive 500 meals made by top Bangkok chefs from Miss Universe Thailand Amanda Obdam.

"We need to get rid of that (inequality) gap because there are so many people still struggling while the rest are living an elite life," she said, in between taking

Families stood in long queues waiting to receive 500 meals made by top Bangkok chefs from Ms Universe Thailand Amanda Obdam

selfies with fans.

"I'm very grateful to be here," she said. "I hope they enjoy what they receive today."

Among the offerings was pasta with a spicy tom yum chicken flavour, said chef Thaninthorn "Noom" Chantawan — who heads the Michelin-starred restaurant Chim by Siam Wisdom.

It is "a mixture of comfort food and a mixture of a food that you don't get to eat too often".

Despite his restaurant having to temporarily close because of Covid, he said he was luckier than most because he could still keep his staff.

"The restaurant industry is very affected and we try to fight, but the chance is thin," he said. "The government needs to do better."

— Reuters

Ahead of summit, Putin denies Russia cyberattacks on US

WASHINGTON: President Vladimir Putin dismissed accusations that Russia was behind cyberattacks against the United States as “farcical” in an interview with NBC broadcast on Monday ahead of his summit with President Joe Biden.

The Russian leader also said he was open to a prison swap with the United States — the fate of prisoners is set to be on the agenda when the two meet in Geneva on Wednesday — and said that jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny would “not be treated any worse than anybody else.”

Biden will attend the summit after a week of meeting allies from the G7, European Union and NATO, with tensions between Moscow and Washington at their highest in years over a long list of disputes.

Asked if Russia was waging a “cyberwar” against the United States, Putin said: “Where is the proof? It’s becoming farcical.”

“We have been accused of all kinds of things, election interference, cyberattacks and so on and so forth, and not once, not one time, did they bother to produce any kind of evidence or proof, just unfounded accusations.”

US companies, including a major fuel pipeline network, have been hit by cyberattacks in recent months, often forcing temporary shutdowns until ransoms are paid.

Any negotiations over prisoners



Combination pictures show Russia's President Vladimir Putin and US President Joe Biden. — AFP

would focus on individuals including former US marine Paul Whelan who was jailed for 16 years by Russia for espionage. Whelan has urged Biden to arrange a prisoner exchange and said in a recent interview he was a victim of hostage diplomacy.

Another US citizen, Trevor Reed, was sentenced to nine years in prison in 2020 on charges of assaulting Russian police officers while drunk.

Moscow could be eyeing the return of the notorious Russian arms dealer imprisoned by the United States, Viktor Bout, and

a contract pilot and alleged drug trafficker, Konstantin Yaroshenko.

But the White House moved to quickly tamp down talk of an exchange of “cybercriminals” after Biden appeared open to the idea when speaking at a press conference after the G7 meeting in Britain.

“He’s not saying he’s going to be exchanging cybercriminals with Russia,” National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said.

“What he was talking about was accountability and the idea that responsible countries should be held accountable... not harboring

cyber criminals, and to bringing cyber criminals to justice.”

When asked about Navalny and accusations of brutal crushing of dissent in Russia, Putin said “you are presenting it as dissent and intolerance towards dissent in Russia... we view it completely differently.”

Putin called for “predictability and stability” in Russian-US relations, saying it was “something we haven’t seen in recent years” — while also describing former President Donald Trump as “colourful” and a “talented individual.” — AFP



People ride in a pedalo in the sunshine in Hyde Park in London. — AFP

Britain set to delay full lifting of virus restrictions

LONDON: Britain was on Monday widely expected to delay the full lifting of coronavirus restrictions due to a surge of infections caused by the Delta variant.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson is due to announce the government’s next step of its roadmap out of stay-at-home measures, after easing began in March. He is expected to announce a delay at a news conference on Monday evening, as media reported that senior ministers had agreed to postpone the lifting.

The BBC reported that most current rules will stay in place until July 19. Last week Johnson gave his strongest hint yet that the final stage — lifting all social distancing requirements on June 21 — could be put on hold.

The more transmissible Delta variant, first identified in India, is now responsible for over 90 per

cent of cases, and positive tests have jumped 50 per cent in the last week.

The postponement comes as reported cases are at their highest since February. Public Health England said the Delta variant is 60 per cent more transmissible than the Alpha variant first identified in southeast England.

That forced the country to go into the last lockdown in January.

Nevertheless, hospital admissions and deaths remain low as more than 40 per cent of adults in the UK have had two vaccine jabs.

In comments to Sky News on Saturday, Johnson acknowledged that the spread of the virus was a matter of “serious, serious concern”.

The Times reported Monday that Johnson and senior ministers agreed on a four-week delay after a briefing by scientific and health advisers. — AFP

Anti-N-campaigner urges Biden, Putin to back fresh arms talks

GENEVA: Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin have an opportunity this week to push for deep cuts in their nuclear arsenals, a step which could help persuade China to back away from an arms race, the head of a Nobel Peace Prize-winning campaign group said on Monday.

Despite well-publicised friction between the US and Russian leaders meeting on Wednesday in Geneva, Beatrice Fihn, head of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), said she believed it was possible that it could mark a “turning point” and yield a pledge for new nuclear arms talks.

In February, the United States and Russia extended the New START arms control treaty for five years, preserving the last treaty limiting deployments of

the world’s two largest strategic nuclear arsenals.

“There is not a huge sense of expectations of something radical, a strong commitment. But I really do think that it is a possibility to lay out the beginning of a process to negotiate new reductions,” Fihn said in an interview at ICAN offices, where a framed copy of its 2017 Nobel award is displayed.

“I think that this meeting could hopefully, for the safety of the world, be a turning point and the start of a process to really pull us back from this very dangerous position we are in right now.”

The 2010 New START treaty limits the two countries to deploying no more than 1,550 strategic nuclear warheads each and imposes restrictions on the land- and submarine-based



Beatrice Fihn, director of the Nobel peace prize-winning ICAN, during an interview in Geneva. — Reuters

missiles and bombers to deliver them.

“These two countries, they hold

over 90 per cent of the world’s (nuclear) arsenals. These two individuals basically have the

Nobel Peace Prize laureate hopes for nuclear pledge at summit as cuts in US and Russian arsenals could encourage others

ability to end the world as we know it,” Fihn said. “What is important is that there is an ambition expressed to reach zero and start chipping away at the nuclear arsenals.”

The last decade has seen huge modernisation and upgrades of US and Russian nuclear programmes, with new types of nuclear weapons, which play an increased role in the two powers’ security policies, she said.

Fihn noted that Britain announced in March that it will

grow its nuclear warhead stockpile by more than 40%.

“China has also increased its nuclear arsenals. Now they are still very small in comparison to the US and Russia,” she said.

“So I think an agreement between the US and Russia to start negotiating nuclear disarmament reductions would really put a lot of pressure on China, on the UK, on France to also come to the table and provide some evidence or progress towards their commitment to disarmament.”

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, nuclear-armed states spent \$72.6 billion on such weapons in 2020, little changed from 2019, according to an ICAN report issued last week. The United States accounted for more than half of that spending, with China second. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

PARIS

Notre-Dame cathedral seeks more money for repairs

The Catholic Diocese of Paris said it was seeking up to €6 million to restore and modernise the interior of Notre-Dame cathedral, nearly destroyed by a massive fire two years ago. The diocese launched a fundraising drive looking for €5 to 6 million to complete the work.



President Emmanuel Macron has vowed to complete the monument’s restoration for 2024, and more than €800 million has already been received or pledged from private and corporate

donors. While the spire collapsed and much of the roof was destroyed on the evening of April 15, 2019, the efforts of firefighters ensured that the medieval edifice survived the night. — AFP

MOSCOW

Jailed Belarus scribe makes another public appearance

Jailed Belarusian journalist Roman Protasevich appeared at a news conference in Minsk, saying he felt fine and had not been beaten, in what the opposition said was another public appearance made under duress. Protasevich sat alongside four officials saying he had not been made to cooperate with the authorities and that he was in good health after being arrested last month when his Ryanair flight was forced to land in Minsk.

“Everything is fine with me.



Nobody beat me, nobody touched me,” he said. “I understand the damage I have caused not only to the state, but also to the country. Now I want to do everything in my power to rectify this situation.”

OSLO

Norway eyes delay to Covid-19 vaccinations

Norway now expects to receive 900,000 fewer Pfizer/BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine doses in the July-September quarter compared to what authorities had earlier anticipated, Health Minister Bent Høie said. The country of 5.4 million people will at the same time get a higher number of vaccine doses from Moderna but will still see a delay in its vaccination campaign, Høie told a news conference.

While Norway forecasts future deliveries based on input from



vaccine makers, the volume it ultimately receives is subject to uncertainty and is only confirmed close to the time of delivery, according to the Institute of Public Health (FHI). — Reuters

What’s in a sting?

I was all enthusiastic about the ‘World Bee Day’ — making videos, interviewing beekeepers and writing about it.

The star of our video was a little bee enjoying the nectar of little white flowers of a basil plant at home. Was under the impression it must have come km away looking for flowers of its choice. Our guest on the Bee Day, Mohammed al Badi, a beekeeper, had explained how bees would even travel 8 km even looking for food.

And then on a sunny day, running through the garden to avoid the blazing sun resulted in a little brownish thing which was flying around getting attached to my index finger. As I shook the finger frantically to detach myself from the flying insect there was a shooting pain. And at last I was free from the one with the wings only to see the stinger that was left behind was still wiggling. The sight would make anyone faint, but the stinger was actually doing its part by squeezing in more of the venom into the bloodstream.

In other words the pain continued and in panic turmeric powder was splashed, and after a second thought washed it off with water until finally instinct suggested the stinger had to be pulled out — all this amidst excruciating pain and tears and yelling. That makes one wonder why crying out loud makes one feel better?

Now at these moments of struggle asking Google what to do, did not pop in the mind. So I decided to pull the stinger out with tweezers and the burning pain



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THE LITTLE BEE
IN THE VIDEO IS A
RESIDENT OF THE
GARDEN AND
BLAZING SUN
HAD DRIED UP A
LEAF EXPOSING
THE HIVE

continued until my friend suggested applying calamine lotion and that was it — the coolness took away the stinging pain and the tears dried up. The lotion soothed and the bump turned itching and soon it was all getting to be normal until we discovered the hive. “Your own beehive!” said the beekeeper friend.

The little bee in the video is a resident of the garden and blazing sun had dried up a leaf exposing the hive. It was the running that had made the bee panic and clashed with the runner all in defence of saving her dive. Yes, it is a ‘she’ because the original use of the stinger is to lay eggs.

Now when I told my beekeeper interviewee about the incident, the first thing they said was, “Oh good for you!” And to the question, ‘Why?’ he replied, “Bee venom is good for people because it has health benefits as it has shown to have anti-inflammatory properties and is considered good for rheumatoid arthritis and even chronic pain. They also say it is good for skin”, Mohammed al Badi, a professional beekeeper explained.

With curiosity triggered off it was time to delve into bee venom reading. According to experts bee venom contains several active molecules such as peptides and enzymes, “That have advantageous potential in treating inflammation and central nervous system disease, Alzheimer’s and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis.” (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov).

In fact this therapy is called Apitherapy, classified as an alternate therapy, it uses honey bee products but

its most important treatment is with the bee venom itself.

And don’t you want to know how it is done?

The bee venom is given through an injection or even better — letting the bee sting the person. But this is not new knowledge as experts say the bee venom therapy (BVT) has been used in alternative medicine for more than 5,000 years. Apparently it is believed that beekeepers tend to suffer from rheumatism and joint pain.

For a while the impression was that it could have been a wasp that had stung but the discovery of the hive proved it was a honey bee. Now the hive is much appreciated by the interviewees and they identified them as the wild bees of Oman. The wild bees are hard to maintain in a farm because they like to fly away and move on to different locations.

For now as long as they stay on the spot, there is not going to be any running around. Shall tip toe around and follow the advice from my friend, “They can sense when you are nervous. When you are calm the bees are at ease.”

That is a bit of wisdom for life too. When we are agitated there are so many things in and around us that go out of balance. As for the bees of the world that need all the care now as the ecosystem is being damaged, they are an amazing creation with goodness from the honey they make to the venom they produce.

The only sad part is when they leave the stinger behind they die thereafter.

FRAGILE ALLIANCE

Risks aplenty for Israel’s new government

GUILLAUME LAVALLEE

Israel’s new government, a fragile alliance spanning the political spectrum, is meant to endure until 2025 but it could be brought down quickly by divisive issues such as the Palestinian conflict, analysts said on Monday.

And that excludes any moves by Benjamin Netanyahu, a shrewd politician who is ready to pounce on any missteps by the coalition and return through new elections after his ouster following 12 straight years as prime minister.

Even though thousands of Israelis celebrated his departure on Sunday, many doubt the longevity of a government made up of eight parties representing the left, far-right and centre, as well as Arab conservatives.

An opinion poll by Channel 12 television said 43 per cent of Israelis expect it to dissolve “quickly”, 30 per cent think it will last “a long time” and only 11 per cent expect it to survive its four-year mandate.

In order to survive, the government led by Naftali Bennett — who has the weakest parliamentary base for a prime minister in Israel’s history with only six of 120 seats — should focus on the post-pandemic economic recovery and avoid divisive issues, analysts said.

Bennett, a tech millionaire, played up his economic credentials in a speech to parliament on Sunday, saying he would aim to get 15 per cent of Israel’s workforce employed in the hi-tech sector within four years, up from the current 10 per cent.

“The first issue of course is (passing) the budget”, said analyst Dahlia Scheindlin, adding it was “something Israel has not been able to do... for the last two years.”

But “there is not that much disagreement over issues like how to revive the economy and health and (the) environment”, she said.

The Bennett government was likely to focus on such issues and “try to put aside more controversial issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict”.

The government could quickly become caught up in sensitive issues such as the development of settlements in the occupied West Bank or the situation in the Gaza Strip, said Guy Ben-Porat, professor of political science at Ben-Gurion University.

It may also have to decide on the fate of a wildcat settlement to be evacuated in the West Bank, which could anger settlers once represented by Bennett.

And that doesn’t take into account the fate of a ceasefire agreed last month with Hamas after a deadly 11-day conflict between Hamas and Israel.

“The Palestinian question is definitely going to bother this government”, said Ben-Porat.

“They will do the best they can to put that question away... I don’t think that works for the long run and this actually can come in the face of this government very soon.”

Any attempt to deal with such issues might cause the government’s “collapse”, he warned.

“For Bennett, pragmatism is a method of survival.” — AFP

“The first issue of course is (passing) the budget. Something Israel has not been able to do... for the last two years. But there is not that much disagreement over issues like how to revive the economy and health and (the) environment

DAHLIA SCHEINDLIN
An Analyst

FINAL SPRINT

Germany’s Olaf Scholz bets on experience in uphill poll battle

MICHAEL NIENABER

German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz is hoping to overcome his party’s poor ratings to win this summer’s election by attacking Chancellor Angela Merkel’s conservatives as a club for lobbyists while presenting himself as an experienced crisis manager.

With Merkel not running in the September 26 vote and centre-right candidate Armin Laschet struggling to unite the CDU/CSU alliance, Scholz sees a chance of ending 16 years of conservative rule.

But public demand for change, personified by 40-year-old Annalena Baerbock from the Greens, and doubts about his credibility following two business scandals could prevent Scholz, 63, from becoming the next leader of Europe’s biggest economy.

His main challenge will be to translate good personal ratings into support for his centre-left Social Democrats (SPD), polling third behind the conservatives and Greens. Scholz said that opinion polls suggested the SPD was “within striking distance” of its rivals. “That’s why we’re confident that in the coming weeks and months, we’ll reach the strength needed to get the mandate and lead the next coalition government”, he said.

Polls put the SPD on 14-16 per cent, behind the conservatives on 27-28 per cent and the Greens on 20-22 per cent. However, 48 per cent of Germans view Scholz as the best candidate to become chancellor, clearly ahead of Laschet’s



German Social Democratic Party candidate for chancellor Olaf Scholz cheers on stage during a party meeting in Berlin, Germany. – Reuters

BY CASTING
HIMSELF AS A
LEVEL-HEADED MAN
OF ACTION, SCHOLZ
HOPES TO ATTRACT
VOTERS

43 per cent and Baerbock’s 28 per cent.

So far, Scholz has avoided personal attacks on his rivals, though other SPD politicians have questioned Laschet’s ability to make tough decisions and Baerbock’s experience.

As Finance Minister, Scholz’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic was described as excellent by the International Monetary Fund. During his three-and-a-half years in the post, Scholz ditched balanced budgets at home and helped create the European Union’s pandemic recovery fund,

overcoming Merkel’s resistance to the bloc’s unprecedented debt plans.

With France, Scholz drove efforts to introduce a global corporate minimum tax and new tax rules for tech giants.

Scholz has denounced the CDU/CSU alliance, his current coalition partner, as being too close to business groups such as the real estate industry.

He said the coalition had agreed that landlords and tenants should share additional heating costs caused by an increase in a levy on carbon dioxide (CO2) this year. — Reuters

sport



England's Raheem Sterling (R) celebrates scoring his team's first goal with Mason Mount during the Uefa Euro 2020 Group D match against Croatia at Wembley Stadium in London. – AFP

STERLING STRIKES

AS ENGLAND EDGE CROATIA

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, JUNE 14

Winning their opening match for the first time in a Euro tournament might be looked at as an omen for England and the result was also a payback after Croatia beat England in the semifinal of the last World Cup.

After England had much the better of the match in a 1-0 win, in the presence of 18,500 fans allowed into the stadium for social distancing, their manager, Gareth Southgate said: "I didn't realise this was the first win in an opening game, so that's something we've managed to achieve that no other (England) team has done. We just focused on 'What is this team about, where do we want to go, how do we work as a group', build on the performance and build on the training they've all put in the last two weeks."

He added: "The key was to get pressure on Croatia's midfield players and we managed to do that. That limited some of the supply and the defenders dealt with the longer balls well and read the game well. It was a day when everybody who got on to the pitch performed well and that was set up by the whole group. They were composed and carried out what we wanted to do brilliantly."

England began well with high tempo, putting pressure on the opponents who found them difficult to handle and after just six minutes, Phil Foden, on receiving a pass from Raheem Sterling, sent in a wonderful, low curling shot that beat the goalkeeper Dominik Livakovic and struck the inside of the far post.

Two more chances were missed in the first half, first by



England's forward Raheem Sterling (C) scores the opening goal against Croatia at the Wembley Stadium in London. – AFP

Kalvin Phillips whose volley was well saved and then a dipping, curling free kick from Mason Mount went just over the bar. But 12 minutes into the second half came the all-important

goal. On receiving the ball from right-back Walker, Phillips went past two defenders before sending an inch-perfect pass to Sterling who sped behind the Croatia defence and just as he

was about to be tackled by Sime Vrsaljko, he put the ball into the net beating the advancing goalkeeper.

Thereafter, in the 61st minute England could have doubled the

lead but Harry Kane was unable to convert a cross by Mason Mount.

Earlier the Croats, who looked far from their best, had begun to enjoy a bit more possession, missed a fine chance when Ivan Perisic beat Kieran Trippier but made a hash of a shooting chance.

Southgate praised Sterling: "I'm so pleased for Raheem. He was dangerous all game. He's been a reliable performer for us for a long period of time. His goal-scoring record suggests we should have faith in him and I think he was motivated to show that."

England's match winner, who grew up as a child in the shadows of Wembley stadium, commented: "It's good to get on the scoresheet. I'm a person that's hungry for goals, but at the same time I know the true value of a team".



In brief

MUSCAT



NAQVI'S ELDER DAUGHTER PASSES AWAY

Former Oman and Indian hockey coach SAS Naqvi has lost his elder daughter Wajida Jafri, who passed away in Indian city of Bangalore on Monday. Wajida was suffering from Covid-19 and was in ICU for two months. She is survived by her husband Dr Shahid Jafri, two daughters Dr Shazi and Dr Sarah and two grandchildren. Naqvi expressed his deep sorrow and shock in the demise of his 60-year-old daughter.

LOS ANGELES



SUNS COMPLETE SWEEP OF NUGGETS, BUCKS HOLD NETS

Chris Paul and Devin Booker combined for 71 points as the Phoenix Suns completed a four-game sweep of the Denver Nuggets on Sunday to reach the NBA semifinals for the first time in 11 years.

Paul scored 37 points and Booker finished with 34 points and 11 rebounds as the Suns beat the Nuggets 125-118 to capture the Western Conference second round series 4-0. "I have been waiting for this for a very long time," said Booker.

Elsewhere, Giannis Antetokounmpo poured in 34 points and grabbed 12 rebounds as the Milwaukee Bucks evened their Eastern Conference second round series with a 107-96 rout of the Brooklyn Nets, who lost Kyrie Irving to an injury.

Antetokounmpo delivered his best performance of the postseason, shooting 14-of-26 from the field and scoring 12 points in the third quarter for the Bucks.

ABU DHABI



DU PLESSIS SUFFERS MEMORY LOSS AFTER CONCUSSION

South Africa batsman Faf du Plessis said he suffered some memory loss after sustaining a concussion during a Pakistan Super League (PSL) T20 match in Abu Dhabi on Saturday but is confident of making a quick return to action.

Du Plessis collided with Quetta Gladiators team-mate Mohammad Hasnain while trying to save a boundary in their 61-run defeat to Peshawar Zalmi.

The 36-year-old lay prone on the ground while the Gladiators physio attended him before he got up and was taken to hospital.

"Thank you everyone for all the messages of support," Du Plessis tweeted on Sunday.



Netherlands' defender Denzel Dumfries celebrates after scoring the third goal. — AFP

DUMFRIES

GIVES DUTCH DRAMATIC WIN OVER UKRAINE

AMSTERDAM: Denzel Dumfries scored a dramatic late winner as the Netherlands marked their long-awaited return to a major tournament with a 3-2 victory over Ukraine in a remarkable Euro 2020 game in Amsterdam on Sunday.

Dumfries, the PSV Eindhoven full-back, headed in a cross from substitute Nathan Ake to complete a madcap second half after the home side eased into a two-goal lead and then threw it away.

Captain Georginio Wijnaldum and Wout Weghorst both scored before the hour mark at the Johan Cruyff Arena, only for Andriy Yarmolenko and Roman Yaremchuk to briefly restore parity for Ukraine.

Frank de Boer's side got there in the end and the victory provides a major lift to the Netherlands after their first game at a major competition in seven years.

"I thought we were very balanced and dominated the game so we would like to see the same again going forward. We can be proud," insisted De Boer.

They will now hope to build on it on Thursday against Austria, who beat North Macedonia earlier in the same Group C.

It was a brilliant game, and a crowd of around 16,000 created an atmosphere fit for the occasion at the home of Ajax, where supporters held up banners with messages of support for Christian Eriksen

I thought we were very balanced and dominated the game so we would like to see the same again going forward. We can be proud

FRANK DE BOER
Netherlands coach

following the Denmark star's cardiac arrest on Saturday. Eriksen played for Ajax before

moving to Tottenham Hotspur in 2013 and several Dutch players remain close to the midfielder.

Defender Daley Blind played with him in Amsterdam and needed heart surgery himself in 2019 after being diagnosed with myocarditis. He was in tears as he was substituted in the second half.

"Daley was quite emotional because he had some problems with his own heart," De Boer said.

"Even now Christian is one of his best friends and it is normal that there were lots of emotions."

After failing to qualify for Euro 2016 or the 2018 World Cup, the Netherlands were playing their first game at a major competition since coming third at the 2014 World

Cup. They had not won a game at a Euro in 13 years, since a 2-0 win over Romania at Euro 2008.

The emergence of the likes of Frenkie de Jong and Matthijs de Ligt has given supporters of the Oranje hope for the future.

Those supporters were in fine spirits ahead of the game, bedecked in orange as they filled the bars around the ground in the blazing sunshine, thoughts of the pandemic appearing far away.

Yet Dutch optimism has been tempered by selection problems facing De Boer. Juventus defender Matthijs De Ligt missed this game as he recovers from a groin injury, while Virgil van Dijk is not at the tournament at all. — AFP

Scotland stunned by Czechs' Schick on Euro return

GLASGOW: Scotland's long-awaited return to a major international tournament was ruined by Patrik Schick's slick finishing as the Czech Republic won 2-0 at Hampden on Monday to move top of Euro 2020 Group D.

Schick's header just before half-time opened the scoring, but it was his stunning strike from just inside the Scotland half after the break that will live in the memory as one of the all-time great European Championship goals.

After a 23-year wait to qualify for a major tournament, Scotland's hopes of making more history by getting out of the group for the first

time now look slim.

Steve Clarke's men face England next on Friday at Wembley before hosting World Cup finalists Croatia at Hampden on June 22.

Playing in front of fans at Hampden for the first time since November 2019 with 12,000 in attendance, Scotland made a nervous start.

David Marshall was the hero of penalty shootout wins over Israel and Serbia to qualify and was needed early on to turn Schick's powerful effort at the near post behind. The hosts were desperately missing the driving runs and poise on the ball normally provided by Kieran Tierney on the left side of



Czech Republic's forward Patrik Schick (L) celebrates scoring his team's first goal. — AFP

a back three.

Clarke has settled on a 3-5-2 to make way for two of the Premier

League's best left-backs in the same team.

Without the Arsenal defender,

Liverpool's Andy Robertson was his side's biggest threat with a series of rampaging runs.

His cross was turned narrowly wide by Lyndon Dykes at the near post before the Scotland captain was denied a moment to remember by Tomas Vaclik.

Robertson burst onto Ryan Christie's pass but his shot that was headed for the top corner was tipped over by the Sevilla goalkeeper. The home side was stunned by a moment of brilliance from Schick on 52 minutes as he spotted Marshall off his line from halfway and bent in an incredible shot from just inside the Scotland half. — AFP

NEYMAR TURNS CREATOR

BRAZIL CRUISE TO COPA WIN OVER VENEZUELA



“It’s not just being without key players, we didn’t have time to prepare better for this team.”

JOSE PESEIRO

Venezuela coach

BRASÍLIA: Star forward Neymar netted a penalty and created a second as hosts Brazil eased to a 3-0 victory over a coronavirus-depleted Venezuela on Sunday in the opening match of the 2021 Copa America. Centre-back Marquinhos opened the scored midway through the first half and Gabriel Barbosa sealed the Group B win a minute from time. In a tournament already delayed a year and moved from its original hosts Argentina and Colombia due to the pandemic, it was fitting that the coronavirus should take centre-stage right up to the tournament kick-off. Played in front of an empty Mane Garrincha stadium in Brasilia due to Covid-19 restrictions, Brazil made light of the continent’s minnows, who arrived with a makeshift side missing eight players ruled out after

testing positive for coronavirus the day before.

EMERGENCY REPLACEMENTS Venezuela called up 15 emergency replacements but could still only name seven out of a possible 12 substitutes due to a lack of available players. “It’s not just being without key players, we didn’t have time to prepare better for this team,” complained Venezuela’s Portuguese coach Jose Peseiro. The game went ahead and, predictably, reigning champions Brazil were well on top. “The three points are important. We had to start well regardless of our rivals having players out,” said Brazil captain Casemiro. Following a minute’s silence to remember Covid victims, Richarlison

was denied from close range by Venezuela’s goalkeeper Joel Graterol early on before the forward flicked a header wide from a corner. Centre-back Eder Militao was also off target with a header while Graterol did well to hold a Danilo volley from distance. Venezuela produced little going forward but Jose Martinez did have the Brazil defence back-peddalling with a dangerous burst before winning a corner that came to nothing. Brazil took the lead on 23 minutes when Richarlison flicked on a Neymar corner that deflected into Marquinhos’s path inside the six-yard box, allowing the centre-back to bundle home. Richarlison had a goal ruled out for offside while Neymar incredibly fired wide from 12 yards out as Brazil threatened to put the game to bed

before half-time.

NEYMAR TAKES CENTRE STAGE It was more of the same after the break as substitute Alex Sandro from distance and Richarlison with a header both shot over the bar. Neymar somehow failed to turn home a cross-cum-shot from Gabriel Jesus from three yards out but on 64 minutes he doubled the lead from the penalty spot. Yohan Cumana clumsily brought down Danilo in the box and Neymar sent Graterol the wrong way from 12 yards. Neymar then created the third, rounding Graterol before crossing for Gabriel Barbosa to chest home from barely a yard out. “He’s developed the ability to create. Right foot, left foot, he’s become an unpredictable player,” Brazil coach Tite enthused about Neymar. — AFP



Colombia's Edwin Cardona in action. — Reuters

Intricate free-kick move helps Colombia beat Ecuador

CUIABA, Brazil: Colombia got their Copa America campaign off to a winning start with a scrappy 1-0 victory over Ecuador on Sunday, with the goal coming from a beautifully choreographed free-kick straight off the training ground. Edwin Cardona scored three minutes from halftime when he started and finished a move that involved deft touches from two other players. The goal was initially ruled out for offside but that decision was reversed after a review by the Video Assistant Referee. “The move for the goal was something the players have been working on since the World Cup qualifiers,” said Colombia coach Reinaldo Rueda. Ecuador had by far the better of the second half but they could not get the goal that their pressure deserved and fall to the bottom of Group B alongside Venezuela, who lost 3-0 to hosts Brazil in the tournament’s opener earlier on Sunday. Rueda acknowledged his side had not been at their best but praised their commitment and said they managed the game “intelligently”. “Ecuador didn’t let us play the game Colombia could have played,” he said, “The commitment the team showed was invaluable.” Ecuador had beaten Colombia 6-1 in a World Cup qualifier in November but it was clear from early on there was little chance of a similar goal tally as clear-cut opportunities were few and far between. Neither side were able to build up much of a rhythm on a pitch that cut up quickly and with the game repeatedly stopped by the referee’s whistle for 33 fouls. The result marked a third straight defeat for Ecuador while Colombia have gone three games unbeaten since Rueda took over as coach. Both sides face Venezuela next, with Colombia playing them on June 17 in Goiania and Ecuador on June 20 in Rio de Janeiro. — Reuters

Oman look to advance with victory against Bangladesh

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 14

Oman will aim for a victory against Bangladesh on Tuesday to ensure their spot in the last round of the 2022 Fifa World Cup. The concluding match of the national team in Group E of the joint qualifier of Fifa World Cup Qatar 2022 and AFC Asian Cup China 2023 will kick off at the Jassim bin Hamed Stadium in Doha at 9:10 pm (Oman time). The first leg match ended for Oman by 4-1 in Muscat. Oman is inching closer to seal a slot for the final round of the World Cup qualifier and all the heroes of Red Warriors are eager to earn this

direct ticket to the next stage. The Sultanate team possesses high hopes in moving to the final round of qualifier among the other five competitors as best second-placed finishers. A victory or a draw against Bangladesh will mean the ‘Red Warriors’ progress to the final round of the World Cup qualifier. The triumph will raise the Sultanate team’s tally to 18 points behind Qatar who ended the qualification as a group topper by 22 points. Oman’s players are aiming for securing a spot in the final stage of the World Cup qualifier for the third time as they had qualified in 2002 and 2014. In case of a defeat

from the opponent, the national team will qualify if Afghanistan registers a victory against India with a big margin of scoring. Coach Branko Ivankovic’s men showed solid performance during the previous game against Afghanistan which ended at 2-1. Abdullah Fawaz, the star of the match, after his perfect show during the encounter and he scored both the winning goals. The Croatian coach may continue in a similar line-up list as the team heroes are familiarised with the existing playing system. The top three middle youngsters including Abdullah Fawaz, Zaher al Aghbari and



Salah al Yahyai will be the vital players to assist the attacking side which comprises Abdulaziz al Maqbali and Mohsin al Ghassani. The entry of Khalid al Hajri is possible as well at anytime during the game as a substitution. The national team players are set for the concluding match of the qualifier after having three training sessions in the past few days. The coaching staff focused on the weakness areas and enhancing the strong points. Having the right concentration from all the players during the whole match will assist to deliver the desired technical performance and register the triumph.

business

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Pact signed to enhance satellite-based services

DIGITALISATION DRIVE: Space Communications Technologies (SCT) and Omantel enter into an agreement for satellite services

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 14

Space Communication Technologies Company (SCT) and Oman Telecommunication Company (Omantel) have signed an agreement to provide Satellite Communication to the different verticals in the Omani market. Omantel will utilise the satellite services using the state-of-the-art technologies on Ka-Band from the SCT's satellite Earth Station located in Omantel's Al Amerat Teleport on the Omani Satellite payload on Arabsat6A @ 30.5 E.

Omantel will use this service to expand and enhance its reach for mobile network backhauling, in addition to providing connectivity services to their end-customers in different regions across the Sultanate.

As the leading integrated telecom services provider of Oman, Omantel sees this agreement as a push towards digitisation that is modernising traditional ways of governance, education, business, services and administration by offering more

Omantel sees this agreement as a push towards digitisation that is modernising traditional ways of governance, education, business, services and administration by offering more efficient technologies and advanced solutions

ENG SALIM AL MAZRUI
General Manager
Wholesale Operations, Omantel

efficient technologies and advanced solutions. The agreement will further

consolidate Omantel's position as the market leader as the Company will expand and enhance its reach

for mobile network backhauling, in addition to providing connectivity services to its end-customers in

different regions across the Sultanate.

Omantel will gain satellite bandwidth to complement its terrestrial range coverage, thus expanding the user base, and bringing them access to the latest innovations through improved connectivity.

This agreement is another collaboration between Omantel and SCT. In 2020, Omantel was selected as SCT's telecom infrastructure service provider and accordingly SCT co-located its main satellite hub in Omantel's Teleport in Al Amerat.

Eng Salim al Alawi, Executive Director of SCT, stated, "Signing the agreement with Omantel is an extension of collaboration between the two companies in the field of space telecommunication. Omantel is considered as one of the biggest strategic partners to SCT. As the agreement states, Omantel will be provided with satellite bandwidth for its commercial users to complement their services provided by terrestrial coverage.

This will provide Omantel with satellite connectivity to increase the bandwidth available to the mobile

stations in the rural areas. I would like to express my thanks to Omantel's Wholesale Business Unit for their collaboration that led to signing this agreement and a special thanks goes to SCT's team for their recognizable effort to seal the signing."

Eng Salim al Mazrui, General Manager Wholesale Operations at Omantel said, "Omantel is always keen to utilise the latest available technological solutions to provide the most advanced services to its customers.

Through this partnership with SCT, we will be able to increase the backhauling capacity for various mobile stations located in remote areas. By doing so, we will be able to upgrade the mobile technologies offered in these areas, which in turn, will allow our clients to enjoy enhanced services and better customer experience, which is one of our key priorities. We thank our counterparts in SCT for their efforts in facilitating this agreement and we look forward to achieving more mutual benefits under this highly valued partnership."

Tender floated for Oman's first industrial city in Musandam

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has initiated the development of a new industrial city in Musandam Governorate — the first of its kind in the Sultanate's strategically important enclave overlooking the Strait of Hormuz.

The industrial city — the latest addition to an expanding network of industrial parks proliferating around the country — will be established at Mahas in the Wilayat of Khasab.

A sprawling site, covering an area of around 1.444 million sq metres, has been earmarked for the development of Khasab Industrial City dedicated primarily to light and medium industrial and manufacturing activities.

On Monday, Madayn invited qualified contractors to bid for its contract to construct roads, infrastructure and utilities to support the development of the proposed industrial city.

The tender came on the heels of last week's Royal Directives by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the implementation of a slate of key projects aimed at fuelling the governorate's socioeconomic development. It includes a proposal for the upgrade of Port Khasab into a maritime hub for shipping, logistics and cruise tourism.



Khasab Industrial City to come up on 1.444 million square metre area at Mahas

Mahas, an area well-known for quarrying activities, is proposed to be redeveloped into dedicated tourism and economic zones incorporating Khasab Industrial City. Also envisaged is a new university and strategic reserves for essential foodstuff and medicines.

As the governorate's first industrial city, the project will add a manufacturing component to Musandam's economic base, which is currently limited to primarily fishing, livestock farming, tourism and hospitality, local handicrafts and quarrying.

But with Port Khasab targeted for development into a commercial gateway, the governorate's strategic location can be leveraged to attract investment in, among other areas, warehousing and logistics, mining and quarrying, fisheries and food processing, and aquaculture, say experts.

Vision 2040 to boost Oman's ICT market to RO 2.2 billion by 2024

TRANSFORMATION: Omani government is ideally-positioned to push the envelope in using technology to optimise citizen services

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 14

Oman Vision 2040's digital transformation will boost the Sultanate's ICT market to RO 2.2 billion (\$5.6 billion) by 2024, and drive new levels of citizen engagement, global technology company SAP announced launching a new whitepaper 'Navigating Oman's Vision 2040 Through SAP's Lens'.

Thanks to nationwide digital transformation, Oman's ICT market will nearly double to RO 2.2 billion by 2024, up from RO 1.2 billion (\$3.2 billion) in 2019, according to a recent report by market research firm GlobalData.

The whitepaper highlights the digital transformation opportunity for the Sultanate across five areas: A society of creative individuals, a competitive economy, a sustainable environment, responsible state agencies and building Smart Cities.

"Oman's government agencies can achieve Oman Vision 2040 goals by digitally transforming into Intelligent Enterprises that can integrate back-end operations and center the citizen experience", said Waheed al Hamaid, Managing Director, SAP Oman.

"Citizen engagement platforms can enhance happiness and trust, reduce



costs and security risks, and rapidly deploy and future-proof e-services." Supporting creative individuals, real-time technology can help education and healthcare institutions to operate more efficiently and personalise tracks and patient treatment.

In the competitive economy, an integrated job matching platform could connect citizens to job postings and talent development, support entrepreneurs and SMEs, enhance tourist experiences, and optimise Value Added Tax compliance.

In fostering environmental sustainability, Oman could attract more tourists, secure higher levels of supply chains resilience and food security, and maintain its rich cultural heritage. For responsible state agencies, a digital government is key — with an Open Data Strategy, government resource planning and shared services for real-time decision-making, and citizen-centric services that are vital for Smart Cities.

Aligned with Oman Vision 2040's economic growth and job creation goals, OQ, the globally integrated energy company with roots in Oman, is seeing strong success on its long-term growth plan.

OQ offers a wide range of end-to-end products, services, and solutions in the upstream and downstream. Central to OQ's growth plan is the digital transformation of its operations in 17 countries around the world under the "One ERP" roadmap.

Currently, OQ is running on the SAP Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) solution, the SAP SuccessFactors human experience management suite, and the SAP Cloud for Customer (C4C) and Commerce Cloud solutions for e-commerce. "As global energy demand rises, OQ needs full visibility on our operations and employee experiences", said Ghalib al Maamari, Leader, Information & Digital Solutions, OQ. "Thanks to our digital

transformation with SAP, we have real-time insights to grow our upstream and downstream markets, elevate talent, and drive innovation. OQ's change management strategy and SAP's industry expertise are ensuring that our digital roadmap has strong time to value."

Aligned with Omanisation goals, 60 per cent of SAP Oman employees are Omani nationals. Enabling the Omani workforce of the future, the SAP Training and Development Institute's Young Professionals Programme has trained 125 recent university graduates to become certified SAP associate consultants.

SAP's Dual Study programme is integrating technology into the curricula programme at the Modern College of Business and Science, and the German University of Technology. And SAP's Sales Academy is helping Omani university graduates to gain hands-on skills and knowledge on digital business solutions.

CbCR in GCC: Are multinational entities shifting sands?



AASTHA RANGAN

Globalisation coupled with e-commerce has led to enormous growth of multinational entities around the world which has given rise to bilateral dealings between related entities belonging to such multinational groups located in difference jurisdictions. In context to the growing number of transactions happening among the multinational group entities, it came to limelight that

most of these entities are shifting their profits to those tax heaven jurisdictions or where there are low tax rates. To combat the phenomenon of tax losses due to profit shifting, Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) project by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the G20 was developed under which there are 15 action plans to address the issues concerned with tax avoidance to ensure that the profits are taxed where the economic activities generating the profits are performed and where the value is created. One of the cornerstones of the OECD's action plan is a Country by Country Reporting (CbCR) requirement that is detailed in Action Plan 13. As per the CbCR the large multinational entities who meet



the revenue threshold will have to provide an annual return that breaks down key elements of the financial statements by jurisdiction. A CbCR provides local tax authorities visibility to revenue, income tax paid and accrued, employment, capital, retained earnings, tangible assets and activities of the multinational group for each jurisdiction. The CbCR aims to provide tax authorities information to assess the transfer pricing risks among the associated enterprises. The aim is to develop new transfer pricing documentation to enhance transparency for tax administration. CbCR has gained world's attention towards the GCC countries which are considered as low tax region or tax havens – the

UAE being the one of the world's fastest-growing tax havens, with over \$200bn flowing into the country, according to the Tax Justice Network. There being no corporate taxation in UAE, many multinational entities having significant operation in high tax jurisdiction like US have operation in UAE as well, are shifting/reporting profits in UAE to gain the benefit of the tax free jurisdiction; wherein the main country where the economic activity is carried out is losing heavily on the tax revenue. Recently in 2019, UAE has made CbCR filing mandatory for multinational entities with consolidated revenue of more than AED 3.15 bn. Similarly, KSA, Qatar and Egypt also have joined the CbCR mandate of the OECD.

On September 27, 2020, Oman also introduced CbCR requirements vide Ministerial Decision 79/ 2020. The CbCR requirements apply to entities that are tax resident in Oman and are part of a Multinational Entity Group with consolidated revenues equal to or exceeding RO 300 million (approx 670 million euros / \$780 million) in the financial year preceding the reporting year. The CbCR requirements are applicable for reporting years beginning on or after January 1, 2020. Accordingly, for the reporting year starting on January 1, 2020, the CbCR must be submitted latest by December 31, 2021. [Aastha Rangan is Director - VAT & Transfer Pricing at Crowe Oman. She can be contacted at: aastha.rangan@crowe.om]

Kia offers ending soon



MUSCAT: Don't miss the best chance to own your dream Kia and enjoy exclusive rewards across the range. You can also benefit with the advantage of Kia paying your VAT. (Since 5% VAT on net selling price will be borne by Kia Oman). Customers owning a Kia can choose from these two options: 1) Flexible Option: With service 3 years/30,000 kms and cash gift RO 700 up to RO 4000. 2) Bundle Option: With service 8 years/80,000 kms, 1 year comprehensive insurance, registration and cash gift RO 1150 up to RO 3300. Also get assured Scratch N Win, cash for fuel from RO 20 to RO 1000 & 0 per cent interest on Sportage 1.6L & Niro. Conditions apply. Please visit Kia showroom for details. Offer ends on June 17, 2021. Kia's range in Oman has remained popular owing to its stylish designs, advanced technology, impressive safety features and more.

Efforts on to boost Oman - Greece trade relations

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](https://twitter.com/kabeeryousef)

Oman is keen to enhance bilateral trade relations with Greece, with talks underway to explore mutually beneficial avenues for trade and business between the two countries, according to the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI). Industrialists and investors from both sides will take part in a regional conference due to be held virtually on

Tuesday. Named 'Greek-Gulf Business Forum', the two-day virtual seminar is organised by the Greek-Arab Chamber under the slogan "Shared Visions" on June 15 and 16. Representatives of all the six Gulf states, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates are in attendance aiming at regional development of trade and commerce with Greece. "We are expecting to explore

more areas of common interest for business and investments and hopefully, the Greek-Gulf Business Forum will pave ways for enhanced mutual relations in various areas," Eng Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of the OCCI told the Observer. The forum attended by high-level delegates from the Gulf and Greek sides will present visions and ideas that will raise the economic, commercial and investment reality between the

two sides in various sectors. Oman and Greece have been bolstering bilateral relations, particularly on the political level. There have been high level visits from both sides and in 2019, the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs, George Katrougalos, visited Oman and discussed bilateral relations. It followed the earlier visit of the Secretary General of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dimitrios Paraskevopoulos.

Ahlibank launches Al Nukhba Banking



MUSCAT: Ahlibank launched on Monday Al Nukhba Banking, a rebrand of its Premium Banking segment, in a bid to deliver more value-added services to its premium customers and clients. The exclusive brand brings with it enhanced, more personalised services and customised products for the premium segment. "At ahlibank, we recognise that premium customers need special solutions to manage their accounts. In this context, we work as partners for our customers by offering distinctive

and innovative offers that live up to their expectations. We are also aware of the growing need for smart solutions that keep pace with today's premium lifestyles and evolved choices, so we are constantly adopting the latest technologies and strategies to help meet these requirements. This helps us to constantly understand customers' feedback and work towards addressing it, which cements our position as one of the most preferred bank in Oman," Suhaila al Busaidy, Head of Premium Banking, ahlibank, said.

Bank Nizwa launches buyout campaign

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa has launched the buyout campaign that allows customers to transfer their current finance or loan from any other Bank or financial institution to Bank Nizwa, at reduced interest rates, hence lowering their EMI amount. The bank will take over the current loan or finance by covering the dues and refinance it to the customer as per the principles of Islamic Sharia. With this campaign, customers can enjoy a competitive 5 per cent profit rate and reduced monthly instalments along with a plethora of great benefits offered by the bank, making it an ideal choice for beneficiaries. The introduction of such promotions reflects the bank's strategic approach of providing solutions that cater to community needs, particularly



since the cost of living and daily life requirements are spiking up. Arif Maqbool al Zaabi, Assistant General Manager Retail Banking, Bank Nizwa, said: "At Bank Nizwa, we direct our efforts toward realising the needs of our clients. The increase of financial strain and daily requirements are usually mentally preoccupying concerns to many people. As such, we are delighted to announce the launch of buyout campaign."

BankDhofar holds first Double Your Salary Scheme draw



MUSCAT: BankDhofar had recently conducted the first draw of Double Your Salary Scheme. The draw included all customers who had transferred their salary into their savings account or current account from March 1, 2021, where 20 lucky customers got the chance to double their salaries to up to RO 2,000. Commenting on the draw, Dr Tariq Taha (pictured), Chief Retail Banking Officer at BankDhofar said: "We are pleased to conduct the first draw of our "Double Your Salary" scheme. Launched earlier this year, the scheme aimed to provide our salary transfer customers with chances to double their salaries to up to RO 2,000. I would like to congratulate the winners, and we are looking forward to see more winners within this scheme."

As part of "Double Your Salary" Scheme, BankDhofar will conduct monthly draws where 20 salary-transfer customers will get the chance to double their salaries. For instance, if a customer transfers a salary of RO 500 and he wins the draw, he will get back an additional RO 500 from the Bank. Another customer who has transferred salary of RO 1,000, will win back an additional RO 1,000 from the Bank and so on.

OTE Group named Middle East's top dealer by Isuzu Motors

MUSCAT: OTE Group, exclusive distributors of Isuzu's award-winning trucks in the Sultanate of Oman, was conferred with the prestigious title of 'No. 1 Dealer in the Middle East' by Isuzu Motors in recognition of its stellar record in automotive sales for the year 2020. The coveted accolade was presented by Shigeji Sugimoto, President – Isuzu Motors International FZE, at the Isuzu Regional Middle East Conference held recently. It attests to the laudable efforts of OTE Group in effectively marketing the Isuzu brand in the Sultanate, notwithstanding the immense constraints posed by the coronavirus pandemic.

The citation on the commendatory plaque proudly reads: "This certification is awarded to Oman Trading Establishment (OTE) LLC, the No. 1 Dealer in the Middle East, for its excellent sales attainment for the year 2020. Isuzu Motors International hereby honours your achievement and expresses our sincere gratitude for your great contribution." While superior sales clinched the award in OTE Group's favour, there was also warm appreciation for the local distributor's well-established efforts to position the Isuzu Motors brand for strong and consistent growth in the Omani market over the long time.



Thus, in addition to performing superbly on the sales front, OTE Group also recognised for its performance in customer service, spare parts availability,

inventory management, training support, skills development, and overall quality standards. "We are truly honoured to have been recognised with this hugely coveted award, given the fact that we were up against some formidable players in the wider Middle East region," said Malay Saha, Vice-President – OTE Group. "Indeed, this year's award is especially creditable as we delivered in the face of the extraordinary challenges. Our heartfelt appreciation to Isuzu Motors for its continued confidence in us, and our profound thanks to Team OTE for this splendid achievement," he added.

IMF explores new trust to provide aid to more countries



LONDON: The International Monetary Fund is exploring creation of a new trust that could allow its members to lend their IMF reserves to more countries, including middle-income countries vulnerable to climate change, IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva (pictured) said.

Leaders of the Group of Seven rich economies had given the IMF a 'green light' to keep working on the plan, and China had also expressed interest, along with middle-income countries that

stand to benefit from such a fund.

She said the IMF would continue working on the "Resilience and Sustainability Trust" — which could help countries combat climate change or improve their healthcare systems — ahead of the July meeting of finance officials from the Group of 20 major economies.

"Now we have the indication that we have a green light to go ahead, and we will reach out to others," Georgieva said during the G7 leaders summit in England.

"China has expressed interest to participate, and I would expect there could be other emerging market economies with sound fundamentals and strong reserve positions that may also do the same," she said.

G7 leaders welcomed an expansion of the global lender's emergency reserves, or Special Drawing Rights, by \$650 billion, and backed a global target of providing \$100 billion to the most vulnerable countries, but said other countries should join. — **Reuters**

In brief

■ WASHINGTON



SHELL CONSIDERING POSSIBLE SALE OF US PERMIAN ASSETS

Oil giant Royal Dutch Shell is reviewing its holdings in the largest oil field in the United States for a possible sale as the company looks to focus on its most profitable oil-and-gas assets and grow its low-carbon investments, according to sources familiar with the matter.

The sale could be for part or all of Shell's position in the US Permian Basin, located mostly in Texas. The holdings could be worth as much as \$10 billion, the sources said, on condition of anonymity because the talks are private.

Shell declined to comment. — **Reuters**

■ TOKYO



JAPAN INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION RISES MORE THAN ESTIMATED

Japan's industrial production increased more than estimated in April, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry said on Monday.

Industrial production rose a seasonally adjusted 2.9 per cent month-on-month in April. In the initial estimate, output increased 2.5 per cent. Shipments grew 3.1 per cent monthly in April. According to the initial estimate, shipments rose 2.6 per cent.

On a yearly basis, industrial production accelerated 15.8 per cent in April. In the initial estimate, output rose 15.4 per cent. — **dpa**

■ JAKARTA



INDONESIA CENTRAL BANK SAYS KEY RATE 'ALREADY LOW'

Indonesia's benchmark interest rate of 3.50 per cent was already low, central bank governor Perry Warjiyo said on Monday, while also underlining the central bank's efforts to accelerate bank lending ahead of a policy review.

"We're continuing to push for interest rate transparency (among banks) because BI's benchmark has gone down sharply since last year. We've cut six times" the Bank Indonesia (BI) governor told a hearing with parliament's finance commission, referring to a total of 150 basis point reduction since the coronavirus pandemic began.

"At 3.50 per cent, we view the rate as already low and this is to back up the rupiah," he said, adding that BI was focusing on trying to push down lending rates for new loans. — **Reuters**

Bitcoin jumps after Elon Musk says Tesla could use it again



SINGAPORE: Bitcoin hit a two-week peak just shy of \$40,000 on Monday, after another weekend reacting to tweets from Tesla boss Elon Musk, who fended off criticism over his market influence and said Tesla sold bitcoin but may resume transactions using it.

Bitcoin has gyrated to Musk's views for months since Tesla announced a \$1.5 billion bitcoin purchase in February and said it would take the cryptocurrency in payment. He later said the electric car maker would not accept bitcoin due to concerns over how mining the currency requires high energy use and contributes to climate change.

"When there's confirmation of reasonable (~50 per cent) clean energy usage by miners with positive future trend, Tesla will resume allowing Bitcoin transactions," Musk said on Twitter on Sunday.

Bitcoin rallied more than 9 per cent after that message, breaking above its 20-day moving average, and it climbed a tiny bit further in Asia to hit \$39,838.92.

"The market had been going through another round of correction over the weekend ... until Elon Musk's tweet of accepting BTC again for Tesla purchases changed sentiment," said Bobby Ong, co-founder of crypto analytics website CoinGecko.

He said the market was also supported by software company and major bitcoin-backer MicroStrategy raising half a billion dollars to buy bitcoin.

Bitcoin is up about 33 per cent this year but has collapsed from a record peak above \$60,000 amid a regulatory crackdown in China and Musk's apparently wavering enthusiasm for it. Tesla stock is down about 30 per cent since the company's bitcoin purchase.

Musk's tweet was made in response to an article based on remarks from Magda Wierzycka, head of cybersecurity firm Syngia, who, in a radio interview accused him of "price manipulation" and selling a "big part" of his exposure. — **Reuters**

Virus outbreaks at Thai factories threaten export sector, recovery

BANGKOK: A series of coronavirus outbreaks in Thai factories is raising concerns that the export sector could be hit hard, threatening to further undermine an economy as it struggles to recover from the pandemic's crippling blow to the crucial tourism industry.

The virus has swept through over 130 factories, including those supplying international brands, with more than 7,100 cases across 11 provinces, making manufacturing one of the top sources of infections along with prisons and construction camps.

The affected plants are just a fraction of about 63,000 factories in Thailand that employ 3.4 million, government data shows, but officials worry about the impact on exports that have kept the struggling economy moving as income from tourism has collapsed.

In 2020, exports accounted for 45 per cent of gross domestic product. The tourism-reliant economy, a global trade hub, suffered a steep 6.1 per cent contraction last year, and last month the government trimmed GDP growth forecast for this year to 1.5 per cent to 2.5 per cent from 2.5 per cent to 3.5 per cent previously.

Electronics, rubber gloves, and food are among the export sectors hit by infections, Federation of Thai Industries vice chairman Kriengkrai Thiennukul said, but he said it was too early to assess the overall impact.

"If it continues the damage will increase, so factories have to be fully vaccinated," he said. Already, some of the manufacturers affected by the outbreak have had to curtail production.



Workers are seen inside a textile factory in Pathum Thani province in Thailand. — **AFP**

The virus has swept through over 130 factories, including those supplying international brands, with more than 7,100 cases across 11 provinces, making manufacturing one of the top sources of infections along with prisons and construction camps.

Charoen Pokphand foods Pcl, which exports to 40 countries from Thailand, said a factory that was closed due to infections accounted for 10 per cent broiler chicken production.

Instant noodle maker, Thai President Foods Pcl closed a factory that produces rice vermicelli and rice noodle. Overseas sales accounted for about a third of the company's semi-finished food sales.

Some factories continued partial operations while others have temporarily closed and quarantined their workers. The outbreak has sent industry

sentiment tumbling to an 11-month low.

Thailand has recorded a total of 199,264 Covid-19 infections and 1,466 deaths so far, with over 80 per cent of the new cases and 90 per cent of the fatalities reported after April. As of now, only 1.6 million people out of a population of over 66 million have been fully vaccinated.

The government has been trying to contain the outbreak with a "bubble and seal" policy, which takes effect when 10 per cent of factory workers are infected.

The confirmed cases

are then sent for treatment while the remainder are kept at the factory for 28 days. Workers at factories and in construction camps who live on site — many of them low-wage migrant workers — have been unable to leave their workplace, even if they are not infected.

The policy differs from other workplaces affected by the coronavirus. "It's not appropriate," said Suthasinee Kaewlekklai, Migrant Workers Rights Network (MWRN) coordinator in Thailand, adding that authorities should be doing more tests. Suthasinee said that companies should improve conditions, give more space for social distancing and increase training for workers so those who were healthy could avoid infection and move freely.

— **Reuters**

Oil prices hold near multi-year highs

TOKYO: Oil prices held near multi-year highs on Monday, underpinned by an improved outlook for demand as increased Covid-19 vaccinations help lift travel curbs. Brent crude was up 14 cents, or 0.2 per cent, at \$72.83 by 0123 GMT.

It rose 1.1 per cent last week and hit the highest since May 2019 of \$73.09 on Friday. US West Texas Intermediate was also up 14 cents, or 0.2 per cent, at \$71.05 a barrel, after reaching the highest since October 2018 at \$71.24 on Friday and rising 1.9 per cent on the week.



A 3D printed oil pump jack is placed on dollar banknotes. — **Reuters**

Vehicle traffic is returning to pre-pandemic levels in North America

and much of Europe and more planes are in the air as lockdowns

and other restrictions are being eased, driving three weeks of gains for the oil benchmarks.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and allies, known as Opec+, need to increase output to meet recovering demand, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said in its monthly report.

The Opec+ group has been restraining production to support prices after the pandemic wiped out demand in 2020. "Opec+ needs to open the taps to keep the world oil markets adequately supplied," the IEA said. — **Reuters**

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcement of Capital Reduction

In accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **AL HILAL GENERAL GLOBAL (LLC)**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No 1219180, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from Omani Rials **250,000,000 to 100,000,000**. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

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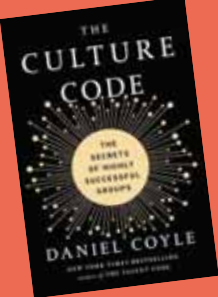
Hail Al Ashkhariyeen: A witness to the changing landscape and Omani architecture

Located in Wadi Ahen in the Wilayat of Suhar in North Al Batinah Governorate, Hail Al Ashkhariyeen village remains to be a testament to Oman's unique traditional architecture. Surrounded by tall mountains, it is the perfect place where past and present meet... **P16**



DISCOVERY

READ



THE CULTURE CODE
BY DANIEL COYLE

The Culture Code is a thorough analysis of how humans work together and how they might keep each other from doing so. From his research, he sees 3 skills at the heart of great teamwork.

Two Viking relatives reunited in Denmark after 1,000 years

COPENHAGEN: Separated for 1,000 years, two Viking warriors from the same family were reunited on Wednesday at Denmark's National Museum, as DNA analysis helps shed light on the Vikings' movements across Europe.

One of the Vikings died in England in his 20s in the 11th century, from injuries to the head. He was buried in a mass grave in Oxford.

The other died in Denmark in his 50s, his skeleton bearing traces of blows that suggest he

took part in battles.

DNA mapping of skeletons from the Viking era – from the eighth to the 12th century – enabled archaeologists to determine by chance that the two were related.

"This is a big discovery because now you can trace movements across space and time through a family," museum archaeologist Jeanette Varberg said.

Two of her colleagues spent more than two hours on Wednesday piecing together

the skeleton of the man in his 20s, from the remains freshly arrived from Oxford.

The 150 bones have been lent to the Danish museum by the Oxfordshire Museum in Britain for three years.

The historical consensus is that Danish Vikings invaded Scotland and England from the late eighth century.

The younger of the two men "may have been cut down in a Viking raid, but there is also a theory that they (the skeletons in the mass grave) were victims of a royal decree by English King Ethelred the Second, who commanded in 1002 that all Danes in England should be killed," Varberg said.

It is very rare to find skeletons that are related, though it is easier to determine the relationships for royals, according to Varberg.



While the two were confirmed to be relatives, it is impossible to determine their exact link.

They may have been half-brothers, or a grandfather and grandson, or an uncle and nephew.

"It's very difficult to tell if they lived in the same age or they differ maybe by a generation, because you have no material in the grave that can give a precise dating. So you have a margin of 50 years plus or minus," Varberg said. — **AFP**



Finding success in the production of perfumes and aromatics

Rashid al Nuaimi, an entrepreneur in the Wilayat of Dhank in Al D h a h i r a h Governorate, is among the area's success stories. He was interested in the field of trade and from being a street vendor to owning a factory for the production of perfumes, soap products and detergents, he has found the road to make his passion a profitable business.

Al Nuaimi said that delving into the field of soap and aromatics, he started working with olive oil as the foundation of his business. He was only learning to manufacture this product for personal use before thinking in 2016 to establish a factory for the production of soap and aromatics. He not only equipped it with all the required production equipment, but he also obtained the licence from the concerned authorities.

He added that he started working in the factory to produce soap from natural materials including "murr", "sabr" and "Luban", and he distributed his products in various governorates of the Sultanate. He enhanced his capabilities and expertise in the field of soap, oils and aromatics by joining educational and training courses in several universities, colleges and specialised institutes.

Al Nuaimi pointed out that



he likes working in the factory because he has learned and discovered the proportions and standards for soap making, such as the proportions of oil, hardness and materials. He produces five types of shampoo in addition to other types of soap using

different ingredients such as frankincense, coffee, aloe, murr and turmeric, in addition to introducing new types such as frankincense soap with sulphur and soap, charcoal and rice.

Al Nuaimi explained that before the Corona pandemic,

ic, profits were between RO 3,000 to 4,500 per month, while during the pandemic, profits decreased to between RO 800 to 2,500 per month, which covers operational and production aspects only.

Al Nuaimi stressed the importance of the natural properties of Luban and its availability in the Sultanate. It is considered a rare Omani gold. He also turned to the production of frankincense oil, which is one of the best and finest types in the world through the purchase of raw frankincense to introduce it in several industries, including essential oils and soap, as well as the manufacture of rose water with frankincense, various cosmetic products for hair and skin, and sterilisation using frankincense.

He said that he manufactures various other products such as coffee, turmeric, as well as manufacturing oil products, including Yas oil, Yas shampoo, Sidr and eucalyptus wheat shampoo and Omani frankincense, stressing that tests and experiments on the products are carried out before distributing them in local markets.

ENVIRONMENT

ESO, European Union to launch webinar series on ending plastic pollution



THE ENVIRONMENT SOCIETY of Oman (ESO) has partnered with the European Union (EU) Delegation to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Sultanate of Oman and the European Environmental Bureau to deliver a series of virtual workshops throughout June 2021 on the issue of plastic pollution in Oman and the region. The webinars will share European experiences of addressing environmental issues, specifically plastic pollution, with different groups and organisations across the country.

Plastic is one of the fastest-growing pollutants in Oman and measures are already being taken to address this issue, such as the ban on single-use plastic bags, which came into force on January 1, 2021. The webinar series aims to increase public awareness of the issue and help to promote change by encouraging people to avoid plastic waste in their lives. The workshops will also explore concrete measures in sustainable production and consumption, retail and waste management.

"We launched our 'It's Time' campaign at the beginning of the year, aiming to draw attention to the issues surrounding litter, single-use plastics and recycling. As part of a line-up of events, we are happy to collaborate on this informative series to promote the adoption of environmentally conscious community behaviours", said Suaad al Harthi, Executive Director at ESO.

He added, "Oman is blessed with abundant wildlife and a diverse natural environment, and it's important that we act now to prevent it from degradation. Accepting alternatives to single-use plastics is a small step that we can take to safeguard our health and our environment for future generations to enjoy."

ESO are pleased to be partnering with the European Union and the European Environmental Bureau to deliver a series of virtual events that aim to share the EU experience on environmental issues, specifically the issue of plastic pollution.

Webinar 1

"Let's end the plastic pollution crisis - current state and paths towards solutions"

Tuesday 22 June 2021

06:00 pm to 08:20 pm (Oman Time)

English

Webinar 2

"Policy approaches and instruments to address plastic pollution at source"

Tuesday 29 June 2021

10:00 am to 12:20 pm (Oman Time)

English

In collaboration with:

Follow us on social media to learn more and to register for these events:

The first webinar, entitled "Let's end the plastic pollution crisis — current state and paths towards solutions" will take place on June 22, 2021 at 6:00 pm Muscat time. Aiming to promote sustainable consumption within society, it will be open to the general public. Details of the programme and the registration link can be found at <https://bit.ly/3gm2Lc3>.

The second webinar, entitled "Policy approaches and instruments to address plastic pollution at source" is a technical event focused mainly on corporates aiming to raise awareness about sustainable production. It will take place on June 29 at 10:00 am Muscat time and will bring together European and Omani experts. Details of the programme and registration link can be found at <https://bit.ly/2ThPiud>.

A third webinar aimed at Omani government representatives will take place on June 30, 2021.



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ENTERTAINMENT



Kim Kardashian has no regrets as 'Keeping Up' reality series ends

AFTER 14 YEARS of drama, fashion and family, "Keeping Up with the Kardashians," the television series that made Kim Kardashian and her siblings household names, took its final bow on Thursday with hugs, tears and gratitude.

"I have no regrets. This was, like, the best decade and a half of my life," Kim Kardashian says in the finale.

"I feel like the luckiest girl in the entire world that I get to work with my family every single day," she added. "This is who I am. This show made who we are, and I'll never take that for granted."

The series ended with hugs for the TV crew that has followed the wealthy family in its most intimate moments, and the burial of a time capsule.

Matriarch Kris Jenner buried the certificate she got when she trademarked the word "momager" in 2017 for managing the family's interests, while her daughter Kylie Jenner, 23, contributed the lip gloss kits that made her a billionaire.

However, the extended family from California has no plans to step back. They will return for a two-part reunion on June 17 and 20, and have a deal for a new series on streaming platform Hulu that is expected to launch later in 2021.

Details are scarce but Kris Jenner has described it as "the next chapter" for the family.

Over the years, the show chronicled the personal and professional lives of the Kardashian-Jenner clan, including Kim Kardashian's marriage to rapper Kanye West, sister Khloe Kardashian's split with basketball player Lamar Odom, and the gender transition of patriarch Bruce Jenner to Caitlyn Jenner.

It also launched the beauty and fashion empires of Kim Kardashian and her half sister Kylie, Kendall Jenner's modelling career, spin-off shows for Khloe and Kourtney Kardashian and a social media presence in which Kim now counts some 227 million Instagram followers.

West and Caitlyn Jenner did not appear in the final episode, which was filmed last winter, before Kim Kardashian filed for divorce and Jenner announced she was running for election as California governor.

"Keeping Up with the Kardashians" made its debut on NBC Universal's E! Network in 2007, airs in some 90 nations in 20 languages, and spawned multiple spin-off shows.

Audiences in the United States have declined in the past year to under 1 million from about 4 million at the height of the show's fame.

The family announced last September that they would end the show but gave no reasons for the decision. — **Reuters**

GASTRONOMY



Renew tradition everyday: Bottura's recipe for Ferrari's new restaurant

FOOD BY TRIPLE Michelin starred chef Massimo Bottura will be served next to Ferrari engines when the car company relaunches the restaurant in Maranello where founder Enzo Ferrari once dined with friends and Formula 1 stars.

Il Cavallino will open again on Tuesday, across from Ferrari's headquarters at the heart of a region known around the world for fast cars and slow food.

The restaurant, closed in 2019 by previous owners, is now a cornerstone of Ferrari's new brand enhancement strategy, aimed at offering affluent customers and new clients more than just supercars.

A new women's and men's clothing collection, designed by Ferrari's creative director and former Armani designer Rocco Iannone and launched on Sunday, is also part of this new strategy.

"It looks good, it looks beautiful," Bottura said of the restaurant.

"I am looking at the past in a critical way, not in a nostalgic one, to bring the best of the past into the future, to renew tradition, exactly as Ferrari does everyday," he said.

The Cavallino, designed by Iranian-French architect India Mahdavi, features Formula One memorabilia, Ferrari engines and racing car components displayed as art pieces. The firm's Prancing Horse, or Cavallino Rampante, badge is prominent.

The Cavallino is not the first restaurant Bottura has launched in collaboration with a luxury brand. In 2018 he opened the Osteria in Florence with Gucci. The duo repeated the venture last year in Beverly Hills.

He wants to offer a mixture of the past and the future, the traditional and the out-of-this-world.

"I am thinking about my grandmother, brought from the moon after

two years, and then let into the kitchen of the Cavallino," Bottura said.

Known to cherish tradition with a modern twist, he will offer gourmet dishes featuring local ingredients.

"You cannot touch the tortellini," Bottura said. "You can touch the way you present them."

Bottura aims to give the restaurant "a lot of signature dishes" such as a creme caramel of Parmigiano



Reggiano cheese and very old balsamic vinegar, another Modena ingredient.

"So very traditional in the flavour, very contemporary in the presentation," he said.

With more affordable prices than haute-cuisine restaurants, the Cavallino aims to welcome not just super-rich Ferrari owners but also Ferrari fans and food lovers.

"It's the essence of a restaurant, we have to take care of people, of travellers, people who want to spend some time in a restaurant and enjoy," Bottura said.

"I think Enzo Ferrari would come, sit here and would eat tortellini as a historic compromise, not with chicken broth, not with cream, but with Parmigiano Reggiano sauce," he said.

Meanwhile, preparing for Tuesday's launch, a waiter armed with a tape measure is making sure the tablecloths drop down exactly the right number of centimetres. — **Reuters**

TRAVEL

Taj Mahal to reopen as India eases Covid-19 restrictions



INDIA'S TOP TOURIST attraction the Taj Mahal will reopen on Wednesday, the government said, two months after it was shut as a deadly surge in coronavirus infections swept the country.

Cases and deaths in the vast nation of 1.3 billion people soared to record levels in April and May, with state and national authorities imposing lockdowns and other restrictions to stem the spread of the virus.

Infections have declined in recent weeks, with major cities including the capital New Delhi and the financial capital Mumbai lifting some curbs on movement and activities.

One of the New Seven Wonders of the World, the Taj Mahal was shut down in March last year as India imposed one of the world's strictest lockdowns at the start of the pandemic.

The monument of love built by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan as a tomb for his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal reopened in September with restrictions on the number of visitors before shutting again in mid-April.

The Taj Mahal is in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, which was badly hit during the massive wave of infections and deaths. Covid-19 precautions mean visitors would not be allowed to touch the shining marble mausoleum, an Archaeological Survey of India official said on Monday.

"All Covid-appropriate precautions are being taken," the official said.

"Visitors will have to step on a sponge-like platform which will act as a sanitiser for shoes." — **AFP**





Hail Al Ashkhariyeen: A witness to the changing landscape and Omani architecture

Have you heard of Hail Al Ashkhariyeen village in Suhar? Once you visit it, you'd surely keep coming back. Why?

Located in Wadi Ahen in the Wilayat of Suhar in North Al Batinah Governorate, this village remains to be a testament to Oman's unique traditional architecture.

The village is surrounded by tall mountains making them the high walls that protect the village. Being at the foothills of these mountains, it makes the village a jewel that contains ancient structures, palm plantations and circuitous paths created by the aflaj located in the middle of the village and spread towards the farms.

"Coming into the village, you would notice right away what is new and what is old. While the roads are made of concrete and well-paved, the ancient dwellings of our ancestors are still standing at the centre of the village. We have preserved these old dwellings," shared Salem al Ashkhari, a resident of the village.

Al Ashkhari said that his grandparents and their parents before them have lived in Hail al Ashkhariyeen for as long as he can remember.

For the traditional houses," Al Ashkhari explained that "They are made of small rocks and mud, and the roofs are made of palm trunks and leaves. This is a unique style found all over the villages of Oman. The village is also structured to include houses, mosque, sabla and other facilities that make life comfortable.

"When visitors come to visit and they see the farms and the old houses which are witness to how our ancestors lived in the

past, they are looking how the past and present merge. While some other houses were demolished, there are still several that visitors can go through revealing their fascinating details both inside and outside. All the components, including the roads and alleys, these are all very traditional on how we make our house and village," he said.

He added, "The old village houses are characterised by their low ceilings and few windows with ventilation holes, which makes them cool even in summer. In addition, you can also see the "arish", which is an external area for relaxation built of palm tree fronds and leaves mainly."

While the tribe's shaikh house is the biggest house in the village, there are also other structures that were added like the sheep pens in some houses that protect their livestock during the hot season too.

Al Ashkhari said that the widespread growth of date palms in different gardens automatically give people an idea of how important date farming is for the residents. Located on the slope of the surrounding mountains, they are able to successfully work with the land and make the date palm thrive. The village is famous for the "Al Nagal" palm and other seasonal crops.



The village is surrounded by tall mountains making them the high walls that protect the village. Being at the foothills of these mountains, it makes the village a jewel that contains ancient structures, palm plantations and circuitous paths created by the aflaj located in the middle of the village and spread towards the farms.

