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P10

SOLID START
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LEAGUE



P13

ATM USAGE
SHRINKS AS OMAN
GOES CASHLESS



P20

MISFAT AL ABRIVEEN
EMBRACES
COFFEE TREND



MUSCAT

ROP CAUTIONS ON HONEY TRAPS

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has sounded caution on 'honey traps' that tend to target both youngsters and elders, as some cases have already been reported. "This (honey trap) is a new style of crime adopted by criminals who target innocuous social media users and blackmail them asking for money and mostly, women are found to be committing this crime", a senior official from the ROP said. The perpetrators of the crime try to establish relationship with the potential target, chat with them regularly before committing the actual crime. **DETAILS ON P2**

NEW DELHI

INDIAN STATES BRACE FOR CYCLONIC STORM

A deep depression over India's Bay of Bengal is likely to intensify into a cyclonic storm that is expected to make landfall on Sunday, the state-run India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Saturday. By Sunday evening, the cyclone is expected to cross the southern coastal parts of Odisha state in India's east and northern areas of Andhra Pradesh state in the country's south, with wind gusts of up to 95 kph, the IMD said. Rescue teams will evacuate people from low-lying areas of Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, said a senior government official. Separately, five National Disaster Response Force teams will be deployed in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, he said.

READ IN

OPINION P9

Change is won or lost, out of spotlight
Ray Petersen

A historical mystery with a difference...
Rasha al Raisi

INSIDE



SOUTH KOREA'S DAILY COVID-19 CASES TOP 3,000 | P7



MERKEL ENDORSES CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE | P8

NET OIL REVENUES IN THE FIRST 7 MONTHS OF 2021 HIT RO 2.639 BILLION



Budget to see surplus as crude nears \$75

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

Along with the global trend, Oman crude continued its surge nearing \$75 a barrel, paving the way for fiscal consolidation with a narrowing deficit and expected surplus in 2022.

The price of Oman oil for delivery next November reached \$74.89 per barrel on Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME) on the last day of trading on Friday.

With this, the monthly average price of Omani crude oil for delivery in September amounted to \$72.73 a barrel, an increase of one dollar and 7 cents compared to the price for delivery in August.

On the international markets, oil prices rose for a third week in a row to a near three-year high on Friday as global output disruptions have forced energy companies to pull large amounts of crude out of inventories.

Brent futures rose 84 cents, or 1.1 per cent, to settle at \$78.09 a barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate crude rose 68 cents, or 0.9 per cent, to settle at \$73.98.

FISCAL BALANCE

According to experts, from a fiscal balance perspective, oil price above \$75 per barrel is a huge relief to the Government of Oman as the Budget 2021 was prepared with an average oil price of \$45 barrel per day.

"The higher oil prices will allow the government to rely lesser on borrowings from the international market to fund the anticipated fiscal deficit", said Alkesh Joshi, Tax Partner and MENA leader for Earnest & Young.

Since average daily oil production during 2021 has been maintained more or less in line with the budget, he said the total income has significantly increased.

The budget for 2021 was prepared with an average daily oil production of 960,000 barrels. The average price stood at \$67.9 per barrel during the January-August period, which is 47.6 per cent higher against the average price of \$46 recorded in 2020.

TURN TO P3

North Korea says hope is alive for peace

SEOUL: North Korea is willing to consider another inter-Korean summit if mutual respect between the rivals can be assured, state news agency KCNA reported on Saturday, citing Kim Yo Jong, the sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

The comment comes just a day after North Korea urged the United States and South Korea to abandon what it called their hostile policy and double standards towards it before formal talks can be held on ending the 1950-53 Korean War.

The 1950-53 Korean War ended with an armistice not a peace treaty, leaving US-led UN forces technically still at war with North Korea. The question of formally ending the war has been complicated by North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons.



I think that only when impartiality and the attitude of respecting each other are maintained, can there be smooth understanding between the north and the south

KIM YO JONG

"I think that only when impartiality and the attitude of respecting each other are maintained, can there be smooth understanding between the north and the south", Kim Yo Jong said.

SEE ALSO P7



SPRING TIME IN DHOFAR

Spring season has arrived in Dhofar Governorate after the end of khareef and across the governorate one can experience pleasant weather, sunshine, low humidity, calm seas as well as clear and spectacular landscapes of mountains, plains and desert, and see colourful flower beds.

PHOTO BY DR SACHIN SINGH

All wedding events must be notified to municipality

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

Only vaccinated visitors and workers can enter a wedding hall as the Supreme Committee on Covid-19 in the Sultanate has allowed meetings and group activities with certain conditions.

"Entry is regulated in accordance with the health protocols issued by the authorities as part of the preventive measures against coronavirus", said a statement from the committee

while issuing the guidelines.

In addition to notifying the municipality concerned of the event 72 hours in advance, both the owner of the hall and the wedding party should sign an undertaking that they would follow the health protocols issued by the Supreme Committee regarding gatherings.

According to the guidelines, the number of people attending the party should not exceed 50 per cent of the hall's total

IN THE EVENT OF ANY OF THE ATTENDEES FALLS SICK DUE TO NON-COMPLIANCE OF THE GUIDELINES, THE OWNER OF THE HALL WILL BE HELD RESPONSIBLE

capacity and a board displaying the possibilities of risks involved in gatherings and the need to maintain physical distance.

"In the event of any of the attendees falls sick due to non-compliance of the guidelines, the owner of the hall will be held responsible", said the statement.

The guidelines insist chairs with posters should be placed so as to keep physical distance as stipulated by the Ministry of Health. All should wear masks.

There should be a separate register to keep the details of the workers, including vaccination, their entry and exit from the place of the wedding party. If a new worker arrives from outside the Sultanate, "it is necessary to work according to the protocol in force at the Ministry of Health".

With regard to cleaning and disinfection operations, which should be done more frequently, the materials used for this should be entered in the register.

Never share personal information online, you may fall into honey trap

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Royal Oman Police urged people to be cautious when dealing with strangers after a rising number of honey trap cases where con artists use women to extort money from victims.

“This (honey trap) is a new style of crime adopted by criminals who target people and blackmail them for money and mostly, women are found to be committing this crime,” a senior ROP official said.

The trap begins with a woman sending enticing messages and videos luring the victim into a relationship on social media that usually leads to exchange of personal messages and videos.

Now another person claiming to be the father, brother or relative of the woman, messages the victim claiming that the woman is being tortured or killed by her relatives who had discovered her secret relationship with this person.

In the final act, another member of the gang poses as an embassy staff approaches the victim with fake documents



ROP asked the victims to dial toll-free number 80077444 or mail to ecocrime@rop.gov.om for any assistance. The ROP said the gangs milked victims’ fear of loss of face, which prevented them taking legal recourse

including a copy of the complaint from investigating authorities. The victim now desperately wants to get out of the case. A huge sum of money is demanded at this stage for dropping off the case, which the victim might agree to pay. The best way to get out of such a situation is to alert the ROP which will deal with all complaints confidentially and professionally to preserve the victim’s privacy, the official said

ROP asked the victims to dial

toll-free number 80077444 or mail to ecocrime@rop.gov.om for any assistance. The ROP said the gangs milked victims’ fear of loss of face, which prevented them taking legal recourse.

“Never accept friendship requests from strangers. If you receive a chat request from a friend’s friend, verify the identity before starting communication. One should not share personal photos or information online,” said the official.

OJA to host IFJ congress

MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by Oman Journalists Association (OJA), is scheduled to host 31st congress of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), a global union federation of journalists’ trade unions, in May 2022.

This was announced during video conferencing meetings held recently by the IFJ’s Executive Office, where a team from OJA chaired by Dr Mohammed bin Mubarak al Araiimi, Chairman of the OJA’s Board of Directors, submitted the Sultanate’s hosting portfolio.

The Sultanate secured 18 votes out of 21, which makes it the second Arab country to host the congress after Tunis.

The five-day meeting will be convened in May with the presence of 300 participants representing 178 journalistic unions, federations,



Mohammed al Araiimi Chairman of the Oman Journalists Association

associations and authorities.

The International Federation had earlier assigned the Association to organise the meetings of the Executive Office between March 13 and 17, 2020, but due to the prevailing situation of the pandemic, they were postponed four times.

Meanwhile, the IFJ’s next meetings will witness the election of a new executive office for the next three-year round.

RO 3,000 fine for tourism activities without licences

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkutttyp

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has started issuing notices for using villas, apartments and guests houses for tourism purposes without licences. Such activities are violations of law.

The Heritage and Tourism Department in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, during the weekend, issued a violation notice against one of the property owners who was found to be carrying out tourism activities without a licence.

In a circular, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism had said earlier that it was not permissible to operate tourism-related activities without obtaining the necessary licence from the relevant authorities.

“The ministry has noticed that some companies and individuals without tourism licences are advertising and promoting such services on various social media channels,” the ministry said in the circular.

Quoting Article 12 of the Tourism Law promulgated by Royal Decree 2002/33, the ministry said, “it is not allowed to occupy any site or tourist area or part of it, or benefit from, exploit or dispose of it, without a licence from the ministry”.

The ministry added that it is also not permissible to establish any hotel establishment or tourism, exploitation or management.

A fine not exceeding RO 3,000 will be slapped on anyone who violates the provisions of Articles 12, 15, 18 or 19 of this law or carries out one of the activities stipulated in these articles. If the violation is repeated, the fine shall be doubled with a ruling to close the facility.

The fine, according to the law, is also applicable to those individuals or companies who obtained a licence using forged document or engage in activities that violate the public morals or commit an act that harms the country’s reputation or security.

■ AL HAZM FACE LIFT NEARING COMPLETION

The maintenance work of the Al Hazm Castle in the Wilayat of Rustaq is almost completed. “The completion rate of the Al Hazm Castle maintenance work in the Wilayat of Rustaq in the South Al Batinah Governorate, which was implemented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, has reached 95 per cent,” an official said. Amjad bin Ahmed al Mukhaldi, Director of the Department of Restoration and Maintenance at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said that the project is part of the ministry’s efforts to preserve archaeological and historical monuments including castles, forts and heritage homes. “The project included filling the deep cracks in the external facades and ceilings of the fort, restoring other damaged structural parts, maintaining floors and external fences, fixing electrical works, restoring the mosque and addition of washrooms,” Al Mukhaldi said. – ONA



Falaj project enables smooth and efficient education

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

The pandemic pushed schools into crossing the digital barrier and educators to rethink how technology is used in teaching and used by learners.

Oman embraced digital innovation in line with the goals of 2040. In 2020, the Ministry of Education nationally adopted Google Workspace from Grade 5 onwards, giving many teachers access to a shared online space, collaboration tools and an ecosystem of innovative apps. Teachers also have digital versions of Cambridge textbooks in PDF format. The World Bank praised the Ministry of Education for its efforts in edtech.

One example of this digital innovation is the Falaj Project, a collaboration between the

Ministry of Education of Oman, Cambridge Partnership for Education, and Google for Education to respond to teaching challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Focused on hybrid and online learning best practices, the project is named after the traditional ‘falaj’ irrigation system. Just like the falaj enables smooth and efficient irrigation across the country, it is hoped that an effective digital teaching approach enables smooth and efficient education when Oman’s schools are closed.

The Falaj Project considers ways in which teachers can teach effectively in remote and hybrid contexts.

The insights gained from the 14-week project show how innovative combinations of digital tools such as Google Workspace and existing embedded resources



used by millions of students, such as Cambridge textbooks, can help teachers manage their time more effectively and enhance the student-centred aspect of their teaching.

As part of The Falaj Project, a group of 10 teacher innovators was appointed by the ministry to take part in workshops, respond

to surveys and to evaluate digital prototypes demonstrated by Cambridge and Google. This group reflected on one of the key challenges of successful technology adoption: designing digital solutions that will work for a diverse community of teachers. Oman’s teachers and supervisors have varying and diverse digital

skills, approaches to using digital technologies and access to infrastructure.

Another challenge is keeping students engaged during remote learning. The group discussion suggested attention spans are shorter, with limited opportunities for student-teacher interaction — especially in inquiry-based activities like practical science experiments.

Currently available digital content has its own limitations. Textbooks continue to be used by teachers every day to understand curriculum objectives, success criteria and get ideas for activities and questions, but the way this content is currently formatted can limit teachers’ options for adaptation and interactivity. For instance, some subjects like Maths reported specific issues such as functionality for presenting

graphs and equation symbols.

THE WAY FORWARD

A UK study has shown that access to high quality digital lesson content could help streamline some parts of the planning process. Digitising existing content in a more interactive format, such as in high-quality, textbook-aligned topic videos, could help teachers focus their time on activities that allow them to successfully manage digital education solutions and provide high quality lessons to their learners.

Lastly, digital tools can only be as effective as their implementation. Research, including in the Omani context, emphasises the importance of high-quality, continuous edtech training in schools while implementing new digital initiatives.

Sultanate supports sustainable development



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

The Sultanate participated in the first-ever UN Food Systems Summit in an effort to spur national and regional action to deliver the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through transforming food systems.

Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, represented Oman at the summit. "The Sultanate of Oman affirms its continued commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and will take active measures in supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and continue to raise awareness and the level of public debate on the transformation of our food systems," the minister said.

The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated fragility of global food supply chains and the necessity to enhance food and water security to avoid disruptions.

The Sultanate has emphasised the importance of working together to transform the way the world produces, consumes and thinks about food by developing a technical roadmap which outlined its approach to food systems transformation and contained an action plan for sustainable food systems until the year 2030.

Furthermore, the Sultanate stated its commitment to bold new actions, solutions and strategies to deliver progress on all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), each of which relies on healthier, more sustainable and more equitable food systems.

Dr Nora Ourabah Haddad, FAO Representative of Oman, said, "The UN Food Systems Summit served as a historic opportunity to highlight the importance of food systems in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and build a resilient world where no one is hungry, no one is poor, and no one is left behind. Through this summit, we reaffirm our commitment in working with our partners to enhance our food systems and free the world from hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition."

For food systems to be sustainable, the involvement of all stakeholders is needed and critical. There is a need to develop a common understanding of a food system framework as a foundation for collective action and joint solutions for enriching and sustaining our food system for us all!

Too many of the world's food systems are fragile, unexamined and vulnerable, as millions of people around the globe have experienced first-hand during the Covid-19 crisis. When our food systems fail, the resulting disorder threatens our education, health



and economy, as well as human rights, peace and security. As in so many cases, those who are already poor or marginalised are the most vulnerable.

The good news is that we know what we need to do to get back on track. Scientists agree that transforming our food systems is among the most powerful ways to change course and make progress towards all 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Rebuilding the food systems of the world will also enable us to answer the UN Secretary-General's call to "build back better" from Covid-19. We are all part of the food system, and so we all must come together to bring

about the transformation that the world needs.

As part of the United Nations' "decade of action" to meet the SDGs and tackle the interconnected crises of poverty, inequality and climate change, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres convened a World Food Systems Summit, under the auspices of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The summit delivered progress on all 17 of the SDGs through a food systems approach, leveraging the interconnectedness of food systems to global challenges such as hunger, climate change, poverty and inequality.

Guided by five Action Tracks,

the Summit brought together key players from the worlds of science, business, policy, healthcare and academia, as well as farmers, indigenous people, youth organisations, consumer groups, environmental activists, and other key stakeholders. Before, during and after the Summit, these actors came together to bring about tangible, positive changes to the world's food systems.

A pre-summit event took place at the end of July hosted by the FAO headquarters to pave the way to the Summit deliberations. This event examined the progress achieved through the wide-ranging process of diverse public engagement, consultations and data gathering that began in 2020, setting the stage for an ambitious and productive Summit that was held from the 23rd to 25th of September. FAO has collaborated with MAFWR in the development of the national dialogues and provided full support to the preparatory process of the UN Food Systems Summit. As the UN Anchor Organization for Action Track 1 on "Ensuring access to safe and nutritious food" and with focal points for the other Action Tracks of the Summit, as well as representation on the Scientific Committee, FAO supports the engagement of external entities and UN agencies, ensuring that the Summit working groups benefited from existing knowledge and experience.

Spring spreads cheer, colours over Dhofar



Spring season has arrived in Dhofar after the end of Khareef, and across the governorate one can experience pleasant weather, sunshine, low humidity, calm seas as well as clear and spectacular landscapes of mountains, plains and desert, and to watch colourful flower beds.

Also known as Al Sarb season locally, spring starts from the end September and lasts for about 4 weeks every year.

Al Sarb is also a harvest and business season during which farmers, fishermen, livestock breeders and honey traders are busy.

Temperatures will be around 20 degrees Celsius in the mountains and 26-28 degrees in the low lying areas during the day.

The season also rolls out green carpet for the camels and herders who descend to the plains for the annual journey or Al Khatlah. The roads, beaches and slopes of Salalah and adjoining areas will be flooded with camels from Wadi Nahiz, Wadi Darbat, Wadi Ghaydat, and other areas.

The camels are accompanied on their journey by herdsmen on four wheel vehicles or pick-ups. The journey lasts for about a month, during which these herds move from one place to another in search of fodder. The plains and mountains of the governorate provide pastures for approximately 74 per cent of the cows and 71 per cent of the camels in the Sultanate.

Photos by Dr Sachin Singh



Budget to see surplus as crude nears \$75

FROM PAGE 1

According to International Monetary Fund (IMF), Oman's economy is set to recover in 2021, with non-hydrocarbon GDP growth of 1.5 per cent as vaccine rollout gradually restores domestic activity along with the recovery of external demand.

The fiscal deficit and government debt rose sharply in 2020 but are projected to improve considerably over the medium term with the implementation of the authorities' Medium-Term Fiscal Balance Plan.

The fiscal deficit widened to 19.3 per cent of GDP in 2020, partly reflecting non-policy factors (notably the contraction in nominal GDP). It is projected to decline to -2.4 per cent in 2021 and a surplus in 2022.

Net oil revenue — which accounted for around 51 per cent of the government's total revenues — inched up 0.2 per cent in the first seven months of 2021 at RO 2.639 billion compared with RO 2.634 billion in the corresponding period of 2020. The government's total revenues in the first seven months of 2021 increased by 0.5 per cent to RO 5.214 billion compared with RO 5.188 billion recorded during the same period last year.



LEARNING LANGUAGES NOT A TOUGH NUT TO CRACK

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Languages are very close to the heart of Gaith al Ghafri of Ibri. His passion for languages came about when he was a third grader and English language was introduced in the syllabus. He was intrigued and he continued to get top scores throughout the schooling and soon it was time to join the College of Higher Technology specialising in mechanical engineering. But something bothered him, he could still not converse in English.

“I got the basics and I got good grades but I could not communicate in English. So the real journey and interest in languages began in September 2010 — the foundation year. The main focus was to learn the language and I dedicated myself to learn it the best I can. But I also have a greedy personality as I have ambitions over ambitions. Whenever I achieve something I aspire to achieve something higher. When I got comfortable in reading, writing and speaking English I was then intrigued by the idea of being able to communicate in a foreign language. So I started to look for a third language in life. I did not have a monitor or a guide so I decided to do it on my own. In addition to English, there are two other languages people learn in Oman and they are French and German. I tried to learn the basics on my own but it did not work because of the pronunciation”, Gaith explained.

Soon the young linguist discovered Spanish but soon lost motivation. But



coming to Muscat made the difference when he came to pursue a Bachelor’s Degree.

“I could learn many new things and in the Higher College of Technology I took up French again. It was a new beginning. I quickly moved to higher levels in French at Franco Oman Center. Soon I continued with Spanish. Summer of 2017 I began to learn Swahili and then took a few lessons in German but have not been able to pursue it now. In 2019 I challenged myself to learn Italian as fast as possible because the similarities between languages was my major motivation”, he explained.

Gaith achieved it by finding a video and soon found a teacher through instagram and in the first interview which was ten minutes long he could

manage to speak in Italian as a result of his self study.

“I am continuing to learn Italian but I feel self-study is an important technique in learning languages. And this is by understanding the similarities”, he noted.

The language, however, he chose to train others was Arabic to non-native speakers but this is where his foreign languages helped.

“Arabic was not what I had been focusing on but destiny had that I come back to Arabic and teach at Berlitz Language Centre. The knowledge of other languages helped in translating Arabic to their mother language when I was teaching them”, he said.

The pandemic did not stop him, he conducted sessions online, especially on learning languages at a fast pace,

especially self-study method.

According to Gaith, he prefers to be known as a coach rather than a teacher, “I like to share my experience. So when I graduated in mechanical engineering I chose to teach Arabic. There are many challenges in teaching languages, the main one would be the mindset of the learner. If they do not like the language, I can tell they are not going to learn it and would not be able to reach a high level. The second one is the methodology of learning. What works for me may not work for others. Some students, depending on their mother tongue, may be faster in learning the structure of the language.”

And how is it to learn Arabic for others?

“It depends — if it is the classic Arabic it might take time but if it is conversational Arabic, I have had students learn it in two to three months and sometimes six months. They are able to communicate in informal Arabic with Arabs from other Arab countries. I say informal because there are numerous grammar rules in formal Arabic”, notes Gaith.

“Conjugations in Arabic are easy. It all depends on which part of the language. So I would say it is challenging, not difficult. My way is to learn with verbs in present tense when it comes to learning any language then learn the past, future and order of words. But it all starts with the subject, verb and form sentences. We begin with daily conversations and the topics that touch our lives”, advised Gaith, enthusiastic to teach more students.



There are many challenges in learning languages, the main one would be the mindset of the learner. If they do not like the language, I can tell they are not going to learn it and would not be able to reach a high level. The second one is the methodology of learning. What works for me may not work for others. Some students, depending on their mother tongue, may be faster in learning the structure of the language

GAITH AL GHAFRI
Teacher



Meeting discusses Nizwa parking



AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, SEPT 25

A meeting was held in the office of the Director-General of the Al Dakhiliyah Municipality to discuss the operation of the first phase of the Nizwa Central Market parking lot. The meeting

was hosted by the official of the company that won the bid for the operation of the parking lot.

During the meeting, the investor's work plan was reviewed. Clarity was sought on operational processes.

The bid to operate and invest in the market came after repeated

requests from shoppers and merchants.

Nizwa market is one of the important centres for shopping on the occasions of Eid al Fitr and Eid al Adha. The new parking lot will help to ease movement of peoples and vehicles during rush hours.



NUST holds white coat ceremony for 140 students

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

National University of Science and Technology organised a White Coat Ceremony for (MD) Doctor of Medicine students of the College of Medicine.

Dr P Mohamed Ali, Chairman, University Executive Board, National University of Science and Technology, was the chief Guest.

Dr Ali bin Soud al Bimani, Vice-Chancellor; Dr Salim bin Khamis al Araiimi, Deputy Vice-Chancellor; MP Nair, Chief Financial officer; Nizam Adin Ahmed, Assistant Vice-Chancellor; Dr Mohammed al Zadjali, Member of Majlis Ash'shura in Suhar; deans of faculties at the university, and officials of the Ministry of Health were present in the ceremony.

Dr Al Bimani welcomed the dignitaries after the arrival

of the procession. He also emphasised the role of doctors and the importance in the healthcare profession.

A total of 140 students received white coats marking their entry into practical training in medicine. This was followed by the presentation of Certificate awards by Dr Al Araiimi.

The College of Medicine and Health Sciences at the National University of Science and Technology is the first private medical school licensed by the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Health of the Sultanate of Oman. It is affiliated with the West Virginia University, USA, and in addition to the Omani students, many students from the GCC and other foreign countries are studying in the College.

The university operates across four campuses in Oman. The College of Engineering is

located at Al Hail; the College of Medicine at Suhar; The School of Foundation Studies at Airport Heights; and the College of Pharmacy together with the university offices at Bausher.

The promoters of National University of Science and Technology envision the university to become internationally recognised and renowned for its excellence in education and research, driven by social values. The university will endeavour to carry its mission of transforming students into global citizens with quest for knowledge and its application for the betterment of society. The promoters firmly believe that the National University is destined to reach new vistas of excellence in science and technology and that it will remain to be seen as an icon of higher education and research in the Sultanate of Oman.

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDDING

The Ministry of Information invites for the following biddings:

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

- Companies and establishments specialized in the aforesaid works may obtain bidding-related documents at the premise of the Information Ministry, Al Qurum city (Oman Daily Newspaper's premise), from the Financial Affairs Directorate's Revenues Department during official working hours against the aforesaid fee (non-refundable) starting from Sunday 12/9/2021.
- All companies and establishments shall enclose along with their bid a temporary insurance in the form of a banking bond or a cheque certified by a bank equivalent to (RO =/200) (Two Hundred Omani Rial), addressed to the Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee, and valid for 90 days from the date of bid submission. The bid which does not honour the required temporary insurance shall not be considered.
- The bid shall be submitted in red-waxed-sealed envelopes , written from outside the name and number of the bidding without naming or making reference to the bidder.
- The bid shall be deposited into the Tender Box (Reception Desk) at the Information Ministry, Al Qurum city (Oman Daily Newspaper's premise), before 10:00 am on the last day for the bid submission. Any post-date bids shall not be accepted whatsoever the reasons were and opening the envelopes starts at 11:00 am.

The Chairman of Internal Tender Committee



2014-2017 Model Year F-150 Vehicles Equipped with 3.5L EcoBoost Engines Brake Master Cylinder Replacement.



Date of Campaign : 26/09/2021
Recall Type : Safety
Product Description : Brake Master Cylinder

Year	Division	Vehicle Model	Affected vehicle VIN / Chassis Range	Nos. of Affected Vehicles
2014 - 2017	FORD	F-150	1FTEW1EGOFFC24861 1FTEW1EGXGKD12387	21

Description of defect:

In some of the affected vehicles, a seal in the rear of the brake master cylinder may become compromised, allowing brake fluid to leak into the brake booster. If the brake fluid reservoir is depleted below a predetermined level, the driver will be alerted in multiple ways that brake system service is required. If the brake fluid reservoir continues to be depleted, the driver may experience a change in brake pedal travel and feel, and reduced brake function in the front wheels without affecting brake function in the rear wheels. Reduced brake function in the front wheels can extend stopping distance, increasing the risk of a crash.

Procedure:
Brake Master Cylinder Replacement

For More Information:

Customers of affected vehicles may please contact M/s. Arabian Car Marketing Co. LLC for further details/booking appointment etc. from 26/09/2021 onwards.

Contact Details:

Toll free No.80073111 on all working days (Sunday to Thursday) between 08:00 to 17:00 hrs.

C.R. 1052055



SULTANATE OF OMAN MINISTRY OF INTERIOR

ADVERTISEMENT FOR TENDERS

The Internal Tender Committee at the Ministry of Interior invites for the following tenders:

No.	Tender No.	Name of Tender	Last Date for Obtaining Tender Documents	Last Date for Bid Submission	Document Fees OMR
1	TM/1	Project of Supplying and Installing Attendance Devices at the Ministry's Diwan General, the Offices of Governors and Walis, and Buildings of Niyabats and Municipalities	7/10/2021	28/10/2021	(25) Twenty Five Omani Rials
2	TM/2	Project of Maintaining Devices of Information Data Centres.	7/10/2021	28/10/2021	(25) Twenty Five Omani Rials
3	TM/3	Project of Supplying Security Devices at the Municipality's Premises and Municipality's Directorates	7/10/2021	28/10/2021	(25) Twenty Five Omani Rials

- Specialized companies and establishments registered with the Board of Tender and interested in subscribing to the said tender may collect tender-related requirements and specifications documents at the Services and Procurements Department; Building of the Ministry's Diwan General in Al Khuwair during office hours against the aforesaid document fee as of Sunday 26/9/2021.
- Each bid is submitted along with a temporary bond in the form of a banking guarantee or a cheque certified by a bank operating in the country at a sum equivalent to 1% of the bid's amount, addressed to the Ministry of Interior and valid for 90 days from the date of submission. The bid which does not honour the required bond shall not be considered.
- Bids are submitted in red-wax-sealed and closed envelopes, addressed to the Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee and bearing the tender number and name without referring or making mention to the bidder.
- The envelopes are deposited into the Tender Box at the Ministry's Undersecretary Office in the Diwan General in Al Khuwair at 10:00 am on the last date for bid submission mentioned above. The representatives of companies and establishments submitting their bids should witness the session of opening the envelopes at 11:00 am on the same day.
- The Ministry is not obligated to accept the lowest or any other bid.

The Internal Tender Committee of the Ministry

www.moi.gov.om

Libya PM draws crowd for mass wedding and protest against parliament



Libyans gather to express support to the country's unity government in Tripoli's Martyrs' Square. — AFP

TRIPOLI: Several thousand Libyans packed a Tripoli square late on Friday for a state-funded mass wedding celebration that also drew supporters of transitional Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah and protesters against the eastern-based parliament.

Dbeibah was installed in March through a UN-backed process to head a unity government after years of division between rival administrations in the civil war, and to prepare for an election.

The election is planned for December 24 but there is controversy over parliament's handling of a law for the vote to take place and analysts fear the jockeying among rival factions could unravel the peace process.

Dbeibah has courted popular opinion with measures such as financial support for newlyweds but has faced problems with the parliament, which was elected nationally in 2014 but moved east as the country split between warring factions.

The parliament has not passed his budget and this week its speaker, Aguila Saleh, passed a vote to withdraw confidence from the government though some members of the chamber said he had falsified the vote count.

Saleh had earlier passed a law for a presidential election that his critics said was tailored to allow him to run without risking his existing role by stepping aside for three months before the vote.

Parliament has not passed a law for a parliamentary election.

Many of the people who attended the Tripoli wedding celebration on Friday were there to protest against the parliament and back Dbeibah.

"We are fed up with the parliament. We elected them and we now ask them to get out. They have become a real headache," said Ali al Hamdi, 41, a shopkeeper. — **Reuters**

113 Ennahdha members resign amid Tunisia political crisis



A picture shows the Habib Bourguiba avenue in Tunis. Tunisia's largest political party, Ennahdha, has called President Kais Saied's moves 'a flagrant coup against democratic legitimacy' and called for people to unite and defend democracy in 'a tireless peaceful struggle'. — AFP

TUNIS: More than 100 members of Tunisia's Ennahdha party announced on Saturday their resignation from the party over "bad choices" by their chief that had deepened the country's political crisis.

Members of parliament, former cabinet ministers and party leaders are among the 113 Ennahdha members who left, they said in a statement.

"The current party leadership is responsible for (Ennahdha's) isolation and largely for the deteriorating situation in the country," it said.

It pointedly blamed party leader Rached Ghannouchi for making "bad political choices" and striking "inappropriate alliances" with other movements that "undermined Ennahdha's credibility".

Ghannouchi had "failed" and "refused all the advice" that was given to him, the statement added.

In July, President Kais Saied sacked the government, suspended parliament, removed the immunity of lawmakers and put himself in charge of prosecutions.

On Wednesday, Saied announced decrees that strengthen the powers of his office at the expense of the government and parliament, saying he will rule by decree.

Ennahdha, Saied's archfoe with the largest bloc in parliament, had

already condemned the president's July power grab as a "coup d'état".

It said this week that Saied's measures risked setting in motion the dismantling of the state.

And on Thursday, Ghannouchi called for a "peaceful struggle" against a return to "absolute one-man rule" in Tunisia.

Ghannouchi admitted

however that his party was in part responsible for Saied's power grab.

"Ennahdha is not in power but it backed the government, despite some criticism we had," he said.

Tunisia has seen years of political deadlock since its 2011 revolution that ousted autocratic president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

Fractious coalitions and short-

lived governments since the uprising have failed to resolve mounting social and economic crises.

Ghannouchi founded Ennahdha four decades ago and has remained at the helm ever since despite years of exile under the rule of Ben Ali.

— AFP

More than 350,000 dead in a decade of war in Syria

DAMASCUS: More than 350,000 people have been killed in the conflict in Syria, which has been ongoing for 10 years, the United Nations said.

"We assess this figure of 350,209 as statistically sound, based as it is on rigorous work," said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet in Geneva.

"But it is not — and should not be seen as — a complete number of conflict-related killings in Syria... It indicates a minimum verifiable number, and is certainly an undercount of the actual number of killings," she said.

The UN statistical analysis indicated that the actual number of people killed between March 2011, when the uprising started in Syria, and March 2021 was actually higher.



Syrian students walk to school past damaged buildings in the northern city of Raqqa. — AFP

It added that in many cases, however, there was a lack of information or documentation of the deaths at all.

"Our numbers include only those people identifiable by their full name, with an established date of death, and who died in an

identified governorate," the report said.

According to the UN, more than 27,000 children have died in the conflict so far.

"Tragically, there are also many other victims who left behind no witnesses or documentation as to their deaths, and whose stories we have not yet been able to uncover," said Bachelet.

Six months ago, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a watchdog documenting the violence in Syria, counted 388,000 fatalities, including 117,000 civilians.

Forces loyal to President Bashar al Assad currently control about 70 per cent of Syria's territory, an area home to about 40 per cent of the population, the UN has said.

— dpa

Lebanon president says big challenges await

BEIRUT: Lebanon's President Michel Aoun told the United Nations General Assembly on Friday that big challenges awaited his country's new government and asked the international community for funding to revive its crisis-stricken economy.

"We are relying on the international community to fund vital projects, whether in the public or private sector, in order to revive the economic cycle and create new job opportunities," Aoun told the gathering via a recorded video message.

Lebanon is in the throes of a financial crisis that the World Bank has called one of the deepest depressions of modern history.

After a year of political deadlock which has compounded the economic meltdown, a new government was formed this month headed by Prime Minister



Lebanon's President Michel Aoun addresses the United Nations General Assembly via a recorded video message. — Reuters

Najib Mikati.

"With the formation of the new government... Lebanon has entered a new phase that we seek to turn into a promising step on the road to resurgence," Aoun said.

Mikati has promised to resume talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and to pursue the reforms seen as a necessary pre-requisite for foreign aid to flow in. — **Reuters**

SHORT TAKES

DUBAI

Shaikh Mohammed unveils new cabinet

United Arab Emirates Prime Minister and Dubai ruler Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum announced ministerial changes on Saturday, including new finance and environment ministers.

Shaikh Maktoum bin Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum — Shaikh Mohammed's son and the current deputy ruler of Dubai — has been appointed deputy prime minister and finance minister. Mohammed bin Hadi al



Husseini replaces long-serving Obaid Humaid al Tayer as the Emirates' minister of state for finance, while Maryam al Muhairi becomes the minister of climate change and environment.

ARBIL

Iraq-Kurd forum pushes Israel normalisation

More than 300 Iraqis, including tribal leaders, called for a normalisation of ties with Israel at a conference in autonomous Kurdistan organised by a US think-tank, drawing a chorus of condemnation on Saturday from Baghdad.

The first initiative of its kind in Iraq, a historic foe of Israel and where its sworn enemy Iran has a strong influence, the conference was held on Friday.

The organisers, the New York-based Center for Peace



Communications (CPC), advocates for normalising relations between Israel and Arab countries, alongside working to establish ties between civil society organisations.

SANAA

140 killed as clashes for Marib intensify

More than 140 rebels and pro-government troops have been killed this week as fighting intensifies for Yemen's strategic northern city of Marib, military and medical sources said.

At least 51 loyalists were killed in the past four days, most of them in clashes in the province of Shabwa and the neighbouring governorate of Marib, multiple military sources said.

They added that at least 93 rebels also died in the fighting



The Ansar Allah in February escalated their efforts to seize Marib, the government's last northern stronghold, and the fighting has killed hundreds on both sides.

In brief

■ KABUL



TALIBAN HANG BODIES OF FOUR MEN IN HERAT

The Taliban hung the bodies of four kidnappers from cranes after killing them during a shootout in Afghanistan's western city of Herat on Saturday, a senior official said. Herat province's deputy governor Mawlawi Shir Ahmad Muhajir said the men's corpses were displayed in various public areas on the same day as the killings to teach a "lesson" that kidnapping will not be tolerated. Graphic images posted to social media showed bloody bodies on the back of a pick-up truck while a crane hoisted one man up. A crowd of people looked on as armed Taliban fighters gathered around the vehicle.

■ MANILA



COUNTRY TO LOSE OVER \$789 BN IN 40 YEARS

The Philippines' economic losses due to the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns are estimated to be more than 40 trillion pesos (\$789 billion) in the next 40 years, the country's chief economist said on Saturday. In the first year of the pandemic alone, the Philippines lost 4.3 trillion pesos due to lost revenues, productivity and investments, Socio-Economic Planning Secretary Karl Kendrick Chua said. "The present and future costs are estimated at 41.4 trillion pesos in net present value terms", Chua said in a statement, citing an assessment by the National Economic and Development Authority with the assistance of development partners.

■ COLOMBO



GOVT TO ACHIEVE NET-ZERO CARBON EMISSIONS BY 2050

Sri Lanka will cease building new coal-fired power plants and achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa said in an address to the United Nations International Energy Forum. Sri Lanka has set a target of achieving 70% of all its energy requirements from renewable sources by 2030. "Sri Lanka is happy to be a co-lead of the Energy Compact for No New Coal Power", Rajapaksa said. Governments including Sri Lanka, Chile, Denmark, France, Germany, Montenegro, and the UK have announced a No New Coal Power Compact to halt the construction of coal-fired power plants, according to climate advocacy group Sustainable Energy for All.

Quad leaders press for free Indo-Pacific

FOUR COUNTRIES AGREE TO COOPERATE ON VACCINES, CLEAN ENERGY AND SPACE, AND TO HOLD SUMMIT EVERY YEAR



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks during a 'Quad nations' meeting at the Leaders' Summit of the Quadrilateral Framework hosted by US President Joe Biden with Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga in the East Room at the White House in Washington. — Reuters

WASHINGTON: Leaders of the United States, Japan, India and Australia vowed to pursue a free and open Indo-Pacific region "undaunted by coercion" at their first in-person summit, which presented a united front amid shared concerns about China. The two-hour meeting at the White House of the Quad, as the grouping of four major democracies is called, will be watched closely in Beijing, which criticised the group as "doomed to fail". "We stand for the rule of law, freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful resolution of disputes, democratic values and territorial integrity of states", US President Joe Biden, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a joint statement after the talks. While China was not mentioned in the public remarks by the four leaders or in the lengthy joint statement and a factsheet issued afterwards, Beijing was clearly top of mind. "Together, we recommit

to promoting the free, open, rules-based order, rooted in international law and undaunted by coercion, to bolster security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and beyond", they said. The Quad leaders also voiced support for small island states, especially those in the Pacific, in order to enhance their economic and environmental resilience. Additionally, they urged North Korea to engage in diplomacy over its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes, which Pyongyang has refused to do unless international sanctions are dropped. The leaders took steps to expand vaccines worldwide, welcoming India's plan to resume exports in October. After the meeting, Suga told reporters the countries agreed to cooperate on vaccines, clean energy and space, and to hold a summit meeting every year. Modi told his fellow Quad leaders India would permit export of 8 million Covid-19 vaccine doses by the end of October under a deal the grouping reached in

March to supply a billion doses to the Indo-Pacific, India's foreign secretary said. The plan to supply a billion doses across Asia by the end of 2022 stalled after India, the world's largest vaccine producer, banned exports in April amid a massive Covid outbreak at home. India has said when it restarts vaccine exports it will prioritise the COVAX international vaccine initiative and neighbouring countries. The Quad announced several new pacts, including one to bolster supply chain security for semiconductors and to combat illegal fishing and boost maritime domain awareness. It also rolled out a 5G partnership and plans to track climate change. "Acknowledging the role of governments in fostering an enabling environment for 5G diversification, we will work together to facilitate public-private cooperation and demonstrate in 2022 the scalability and cyber security of open, standards-based technology", the leaders said. — Reuters

N Korea could consider inter-Korean summit

SEOUL: North Korea is willing to consider another inter-Korean summit if mutual respect between the rivals can be assured, state news agency KCNA reported on Saturday, citing Kim Yo Jong, the sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. The comment comes just a day after North Korea urged the United States and South Korea to abandon what it called their hostile policy and double standards towards it before formal talks can be held on ending the 1950-53 Korean War. The 1950-53 Korean War ended with an armistice not a peace treaty, leaving US-led UN forces technically still at war with North Korea. The question of formally ending the war has been complicated by North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons. "I believe only when fairness and mutual respect can be maintained smooth communication between the North and the South can take place", Kim Yo Jong said. "Issues such as meaningful and timely declaration of an end to the war, reopening the joint liaison office and a summit meeting between the North and South can be resolved in the near future through constructive discussion." Addressing the UN General Assembly on Tuesday, South Korean President Moon Jae-In repeated a call for a formal end

to the war but later said time is running out to achieve such progress before his term ends in May. North Korea for decades has sought an end to the war but the United States has been reluctant to agree unless North Korea gives up its nuclear weapons. Kim, who is a powerful confidant of her brother the leader, said she noted with interest the intense discussion in the South over the renewed prospect of a formal declaration of the end of the Korean War. "I felt that the atmosphere of hope to restore strained inter-Korean relations and achieve peaceful stability seems irrepressibly intense in South Korea", she said. "We are no different in wishing for the same." Expectations were raised that a declaration on ending the war, even if not an actual treaty, would be made during a historic summit between then US president Donald Trump and North Korea's Kim Jung Un in Singapore in 2018. But that possibility, and the momentum that the two leaders generated over three meetings came to nothing. Talks have been stalled since 2019. US President Joe Biden said in his own UN address that he wanted "sustained diplomacy" to resolve the crisis surrounding North Korea's nuclear and missile programmes. — Reuters

■ PICTURESQUE POINT

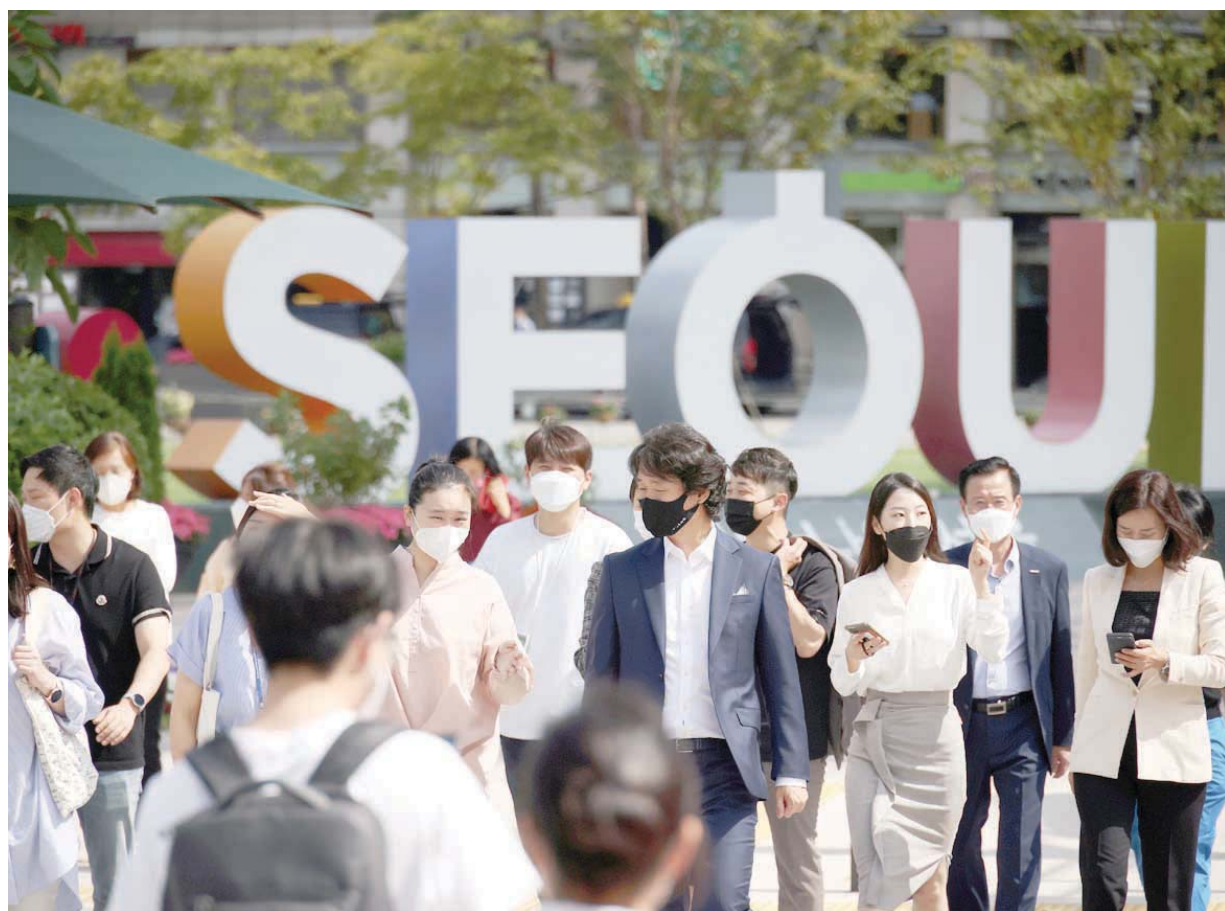


An aerial view shows visitors at the south-eastern tip of Pamban Island in Dhanushkodi. Pamban Island in Tamil Nadu offers picturesque views of the Bay of Bengal and neighbouring Sri Lanka. — AFP

South Korea's daily Covid-19 cases top 3,000

SEOUL: South Korea's daily Covid-19 infections topped 3,000 for the first time as an outbreak fuelled by this week's three-day holiday spreads, authorities said on Saturday. Friday's 3,273 coronavirus cases surpassed the previous high a day earlier, the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) said, taking the nation's tally to 298,402 infections and 2,441 deaths. Domestically transmitted cases accounted for 3,245 of the new infections, while 28 were imported. More than 77% of the former were in Seoul and areas neighbouring the capital, which is home to about half the population of 52 million. "We estimate that the surge in travel during the Thanksgiving holiday, as well as the increase in person-to-person contact, could be major reasons for the sharp increase", said the agency's director, Jeong Eun-kyeong. The current outbreak of the

highly infectious Delta variant has contributed to the jump in infections, she told a briefing. Daily infections may continue to surge over the next one or two weeks, she added, urging people to delay or cancel private gatherings over the period. The mortality rate and the number of severe cases remain relatively low and steady at 0.82% and 339, respectively, helped by vaccinations that focused on older people at high risk of severe infection, the KDCA said. The number of coronavirus tests jumped more than 50% to 227,874 from a week earlier, it added. Authorities have urged those returning from the holiday to get tested even for the mildest symptoms similar to Covid-19, especially before going back to work. By Friday, 73.5% of the population had received at least one dose of vaccine, with nearly 45% fully inoculated. — Reuters



Commuters wearing masks walk on a zebra crossing in Seoul. — Reuters

Merkel backs Laschet hours before election

BERLIN: Outgoing German Chancellor Angela Merkel has endorsed her conservatives' candidate to replace her a day before the country's electorate paves the way for a new government.

"Tomorrow is about Germany remaining stable," Merkel said on Saturday at a rally for Armin Laschet in his hometown of Aachen.

She said Laschet's tenure as premier of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia had been characterised by "building bridges" and that he had shown in his entire political life that he stood for solidarity, not only theoretically, "but with passion and heart."

Merkel is leaving office after 16 years in power. The conservative CDU/CSU bloc is trailing the centre-left SPD in the most recent polls by only a few percentage points.

Also speaking at the event in Aachen, Laschet said: "If you

want stability in Germany, the CDU/CSU must be in first place tomorrow."

He added that a leftist coalition is a realistic possibility if the SPD, the Greens and the far-left Die Linke manage to garner enough votes in Sunday's election.

Olaf Scholz, the SPD's candidate, is also due to appear at his final campaign event later on Saturday in the state of Brandenburg.

The third candidate for chancellor, the Greens' Annalena Baerbock, officially wrapped up her campaign on Saturday. Now sitting at a distant third in the polls, she is seen as unlikely to have a shot at the chancellorship.

But her party is expected to vastly improve its electoral share compared to the last elections in 2017, and even be part of a future coalition government.

In light of the large numbers of undecided voters in Germany, the outcome of the poll is considered to be impossible to predict.



German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Armin Laschet attend a rally in Aachen. – Reuters

Polling has often been inaccurate in the past.

Most observers expect the result of the vote to be a three-way coalition, but it's not clear

who will be in it.

If Laschet's bloc of Christian Democrats and the Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) manages to take the lead, then

it is likely to be a centre-right coalition.

If the SPD triumph, then Germany could swing slightly or strongly to the left, depending

on who Scholz chooses as his coalition partners.

Another option is that Germany continues its current "grand coalition" of SPD and CDU/CSU.

In a continuation of a campaign tactic employed by the conservatives, CDU General Secretary Paul Ziemiak warned against a left-wing coalition on Saturday.

He told the *Stuttgarter Zeitung* newspaper that a victory by the SPD would mean that about 50 members of the party's youth wing, considered to be markedly more left-wing than the party itself, would enter parliament.

This would mean a "massive shift to the left," Ziemiak said.

Meanwhile, SPD Secretary-General Lars Klingbeil claimed that the CDU/CSU conservative bloc was "broken and devoid of ideas after 16 years of Merkel" and that it was necessary for them to go into opposition.

— dpa

Britain expected to ease visa rules as truck driver shortage bites

LONDON: Britain is expected to announce plans to issue temporary work visas to truck drivers to ease an acute labour shortage that has led to fuel rationing at hundreds of gas stations and long queues to fill up — with pumps running dry in some places.

As retailers warned of significant disruption in the run-up to Christmas, Prime Minister Boris Johnson's office said it was looking at temporary measures to address the shortage of heavy goods vehicle (HGV) drivers.

Newspapers reported that the government would allow up to 5,000 foreign drivers into Britain on short-term visas, a measure that logistics companies and retailers have demanded for months but which the government had previously ruled out.

The UK's Road Haulage Association (RHA) says Britain needs 100,000 more drivers if it is to meet demand.

Shortages of truckers have been caused partly by Brexit and Covid-19, which put a stop to driver training and testing for about a year.

"We're looking at temporary measures to avoid any immediate



An aerial view shows customers queuing in their cars to access an Asda petrol station in east London. – AFP

problems, but any measures we introduce will be very strictly time limited," a spokeswoman for Johnson's Downing Street office said in a statement.

Downing Street declined to give further details.

Ministers have cautioned against panic buying, and oil companies say there is no shortage of supplies, merely problems delivering the fuel to gas stations.

However, there were long lines of vehicles at filling stations as motorists rushed out to fill up, and some forecourts closed as

their supplies ran out.

The issue came to the fore after BP said it had to close some of its outlets due to the driver shortages, with Shell and ExxonMobil's Esso also reporting problems with supplies.

EG Group, which runs 341 forecourts across Britain, said on Friday it would impose a purchase limit of £30 (\$41) per customer for fuel due to the "unprecedented customer demand".

"I regret what we're seeing at the forecourt," Huw Merriman, chairman of parliament's transport committee, told BBC

TV.

"I was out on my bike... and came past my BP garage and it was chaos. As soon as the message gets out there might be a fuel shortage, people understandably react."

One police force said long queues were a potential hazard, blocking roads for emergency vehicles.

Downing Street said the country had "ample fuel stocks".

"The public should be reassured there are no shortages," the spokeswoman said. "But like countries around the world we are suffering from a temporary Covid-related shortage of drivers needed to move supplies around the country."

The fuel issue comes as Britain, the world's fifth-largest economy, also grapples with a spike in European natural gas costs causing soaring energy prices and a potential food supply crunch.

Other countries across Europe as well as the United States are also dealing with truck driver shortages, and industry figures have warned there was no guarantee that a change to the visa process would see foreign drivers coming to Britain.

— Reuters

Hundreds protest against Russian election results



People attend a Russian Communist Party rally against the results of the parliamentary election at Moscow's Pushkinskaya Square on Saturday. – AFP

MOSCOW: More than 1,000 people gathered in central Moscow on Saturday to protest against the results of last week's parliamentary election, which was overshadowed by massive accusations of fraud.

The rally was called by the Communist Party, which had come in second behind the pro-Kremlin United Russia in the race for the State Duma.

Among the parliamentarians' demands were a recount of votes cast online, which the opposition claims were systematically falsified.

The protest at Pushkin Square attracted a heavy police presence, with barriers erected and prisoner transport vehicles standing ready.

Officers played music over loudspeakers, presumably to drown out the speeches made by Communists at the protest.

Russian authorities had earlier issued a warning about taking part in unauthorised protests.

United Russia won the vote last weekend with 49.8 per cent. The Communists came in second with 18.9 per cent; like all other parties represented in the Duma, they are considered close to the Kremlin.

Opposition and independent election observers complained of numerous violations and systematic fraud.

Hundreds of Moscow residents had responded to a similar call for protests by the Communists last Monday. In the days that followed, several participants were arrested. According to the OVD-Info protest monitoring group, there were more than 50 cases of people being put under pressure by authorities over their connection to the protest. — dpa

SHORT TAKES

MADRID

Flights to La Palma disrupted due to volcano

Commercial flights to the Spanish island of La Palma were disrupted on Saturday due to large amounts of volcanic ash, amid an ongoing volcanic eruption that began last week.

Flights to the neighbouring islands of Tenerife and La Gomera resumed, however, Binter airline said on Twitter. Ferries from La Palma to Tenerife were not affected. The crossing takes about four hours.

The volcano in the Cumbre Vieja nature park has been



spewing ash, rock fragments and lava at a temperature of around 1,000 degrees Celsius since Sunday.

The level of activity at the volcano increased on Friday.

REYKJAVIK

Election predicts hung parliament

Icelanders began voting on Saturday in an election that could see its unprecedented left-right coalition lose its majority, despite bringing four years of stability after a decade of crises.

With the political landscape more splintered than ever, the process of forming a new coalition could be more complicated than in the past.

Prime Minister Katrin Jakobsdottir, whose Left-Green Movement had never led a government before, is seeking a second



mandate but the large number of parties could stand in her way.

Opinion polls suggest a record nine parties out of 10 are expected to win seats in the Althing, Iceland's parliament.

TEXAS

Last migrants removed from camp under bridge

The last, mostly Haitian migrants who camped illegally under a Texas bridge, sparking a major border crisis for President Joe Biden's administration, have left or been removed, a top official said.

"There are no longer any migrants at the camp underneath the Del Rio bridge," Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas told reporters at the White House.

Around 2,000 were flown to Haiti on 17 expulsion flights,



Mayorkas said, while "others have been moved to processing facilities along the border."

"Many of them will be returned to Haiti from there," he said.

A trailblazing wage law narrows gender pay gap

JEREMIE RICHARD

Iceland is home to a pioneering equal pay law that has narrowed the gender wage gap — and the man and woman running for prime minister on Saturday have both had a role in its success. A fierce advocate of women's rights, Prime Minister Katrin Jakobsdottir was in office when the law came into force in January 2018.

Her predecessor and conservative rival in the weekend election, Bjarni Benediktsson, headed the government when the legislation was adopted. Iceland has long been one of the world's most egalitarian countries, leading the World Economic Forum's ranking for the past 12 years.

Its wage gap has now dropped to its lowest ever level, to 12.6 per cent in 2020 from 15 per cent in 2017. Adjusted for factors such as occupation, qualifications and education, it has narrowed to 4.1 per cent from five per cent four years ago.

Jakobsdottir, who heads the Left-Green Movement, said the law "definitely has had an effect".

Prior to the new law, employees had to prove they were being discriminated against.

Now, companies with more than 25 employees must provide documentation proving men and women are being paid equally.

They have to develop a gender equality plan, detailing how they calculate the value of an employee's work using objective criteria, such as seniority, education, experience or strenuousness.

If approved by an independent auditor, the company receives a certificate valid for three years.

If not, it risks a fine of up to 50,000 kronur (330 euros, \$385) per day, though no fines have been issued yet. "Those (companies) that have actually finished the work say it increases transparency and the quality of how salaries are decided," Jakobsdottir said. "The experience of those who have gone through the process is positive and that helps," she added. — AFP

Those companies that have actually finished the work say it increases transparency and the quality of how salaries are decided. The experience of those who have gone through the process is positive and that helps

JAKOBSDOTTIR

Left-Green Movement, Iceland



A 'PLAY' TOOL

An Iranian boy plays atop an anti-aircraft gun at a street exhibition by Iran's army and paramilitary Revolutionary Guard force to celebrate "Defence Week", marking the 41th anniversary of the start of 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, at the Baharestan Square in Tehran, on Saturday.

— AFP

Change is won or lost, out of spotlight



Ray Petersen
r.j.petersen52@gmail.com

Democracy, although it is philosophically and legally debated at length, and is a complex and debatable topic of discussion in those circles, can be quite clearly defined away from its conceptual definitions as being 'the majority rules.' It is defined within its Greek origins as 'demos,' meaning people, and 'kratos,' meaning strength; so, it refers to 'the power of the people.'

It cannot be a single set of definitive rules because every society treats democracy differently, whether as part of a parliamentary, senate, or hierarchical society and government, each of which has developed systems of representation that facilitate management of their society, in a way that has, for them, meaning and practical application within their history, culture, traditions, social, economic and political imperatives.

Richard van Weizsnecker makes the assertion that democracy "thrives on argument and discussion as the way forward," while noting that within argument and discussion there is an implied respect for others that is the foundation of democracy. This makes it clear that there are manners, conduct, and if you like, rules that apply to the related concept of change, as change can only be implemented through a 'democratic' process. And so many people want change today... but they want change to what they want, they think, and they believe, and they want it

now!

There is a name for that too, and it's called anarchy. Anarchists want everything their way irrespective of the power of the people, irrespective of the majority's right to rule, and just now we are seeing way too much of this, in the guise of 'freedom of expression,' for us to be comfortable with the survivability of democracy. Ironically, those who have the most to lose under anarchy, you would think are the politicians, the people's representatives, yet they procrastinate, dither, dilly, and dally in the face of a few hundred activist protesters, scared of the new 'woke,' libertarians.

In Melbourne, Australia, an anti-vax mob attacked police furiously protesting against federal vaccination requirements. In London, 'Insulate' eco-warriors, seeking climate change consultation, have several times glued themselves to the M25 circular, disrupting tens of thousands of ordinary folks going about their daily work. The 'Extinction Rebellion,' who want us to rewrite history, have dismantled statues of those 'they say,' were not worthy of celebration. And the 'Admaster' inspired occupation of the White House, a year ago, seeking a 'new world order,' definitely strikes an anarchist chord.

Then of course, most famously, the 'Black Lives Matter' movement 'championed' that paragon of virtue George Floyd and accorded him iconic

status following his death at the hands of overzealous police last year. Yes, I am rudely disappointed by the needless fatality, but also that the movement saw fit to utilise a felon, during the commission of a crime, as their 'poster boy,' their 'martyr'.

The common theme for these civil disturbances, or disorders, is that none of them had a mandate from the population, and apart from the BLM fiasco, none of them had a numerical significance to impact upon any election or governance, yet, as I said earlier... they want change now, and they want their beliefs prioritised over those of the quieter majority.

I have always felt that there is never any justification for civil, or social, disorder, on the basis that if your respectful discussion, debate, and argument are insufficient to sway others towards your opinion, why should you then impose your actions upon those others? I have my views on vaccines, climate change, the environment, history, roots, cultural awareness and respect, and if someone can convince me otherwise, great... but if their first interaction with me is to endanger or inconvenience me, they have a massive job ahead of them to ever get my support.

"The fight," said Muhammad Ali, "is won or lost, long before my dance in the spotlight," and these are words, of wisdom, that would not be lost on those foolish, misguided, penny-ante anarchists.

A historical mystery with a difference...



Rasha Al Raisi
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THE MORE THE TRANSLATOR ADVANCES IN THE MYSTERY THE MORE INTENSE HIS OBSESSION BECOMES

One of the things I like about historical mysteries is the limitation of the methods: murders were always executed by strangling, stabbing, drowning or poisoning.

Detectives didn't have much to work with especially with sparse evidence and witnesses, which gave rise to intrigue. *The Athenian Murder Mysteries* by Spanish writer José Carlos Somoza is a historical mystery with a difference: from the first page you're met with footnotes written by the translator interpreting the text from Greek to English (or Spanish in the original version).

The text being translated is the book you're reading: *The Athenian Murders* and so far, you don't know who composed it. It opens with the mutilated body of an adolescent called Tramachus

found, presumably attacked by wolves.

Tramachus was a student in Plato's Academy and his tutor Diagoras hires Heracles Pontor "the decipherer" to investigate the suspicious death. During the investigation, other academy students either disappear or turn up dead, which makes Pontor deduce that these incidents were premeditated and for a reason.

While reading the murders, you're also reading the translator's notes that highlight different aspects of the text. The translator's thoughts soon turn into another story where he narrates what's happening to him at the time of the text translation. He believes that there is a hidden message within the narrative and tries to decipher it; just like Pontor who's trying to solve the murder

mystery in the original story.

The more the translator advances in the mystery the more intense his obsession becomes that at times he feels as if the author is addressing him personally.

Readers will feel intrigued wanting to know how would both plots end: the past one where the original murder mystery is occurring and the present one where current action is taking place in the translator's life.

Every chapter is linked to Heracles' 12 labours in a smart way using eideses: certain words embedded in the text that indicate one of the labours. Somoza's fascination with ancient Greece is evident and contagious. He sheds light on the ancient patriarch society where women were shunned from intellectual activities like education as such

pursuit was not seen fit for their feeble minds.

Instead, they were married off at a young age, expected to have a few children and to spend their time arranging dinner parties (if rich) or working hard to provide for their families (if poor).

However, women of both classes were presumed religious and had to practice by either participating in rituals or by visiting temples more often. There are not many female characters in the books and even the ones that exist have no real impact on the storyline, unlike the male characters who creates all the action that propels the narrative forward.

Perhaps it's done on purpose to emphasise how little effect women had in ancient societies. Moreover, Plato and his Academy

appear in many chapters, even his famous Theory of Forms — Ideas are real and timeless unlike the physical world — is argued within both plots.

As well as his Allegory of the Caves — the effect of education and the lack of it in our nature — is another theme that is discussed and linked cleverly to the main plot.

Overall, the book is genuine in all aspects and is a real page-turner. It's Somoza's first book to be translated to English in 2002 and win the Gold Dagger Awards; a British award given to best crime novel of the year. Whether you're a fan of ancient mysteries or not, you should give this book a shot. It's something you'll remember reading for a long time.

The writer is a certified skills trainer and an author



SOLID START TO OCA LEAGUE

C Y C L E K O M C L A I M O P E N I N G R O U N D H O N O U R S

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

The Oman Cycling Association (OCA) League Championship 2021-22 kicked off with the 47 km first round happening from Al Sawadi to Blue City (Al Madina Al Zarqa) in Muscat on Friday.

Cycle KOM – NRO, captained by Paul Willcox, clinched opening honours after they completed the distance in 1 hour, 4 minutes and 5 seconds.

Royal Army Oman team finished a close second (1:04:41) and Capital Team ended third (1:04:45).

Oman Club (1:05:43) and Elite Team (1:06:38) completed the fourth and fifth rankings respectively in the first round competed by 25 teams.

Cycle KOM skipper Willcox, last season's overall runner-up and 40 plus category winner, said his team survived some anxious moments to finally prevail.

“Our team comprising of Abdullah, Dan, David, Greg and myself set off on our allotted time. A smooth start got us up to race pace, then within 7 minutes disaster struck when we lost David (feeling unwell). The remaining four continued, and we made the turn with the half circuit run back with the wind,” Willcox told the *Observer*.

“At 26 km (just over halfway) is where we lost Greg to fatigue. The three of us now knew that one more out and our race is over with the requirement of the time of the third man across the line counting. Knowing our time was still good, and being the strongest left and also a strong time trialist, I told Dan and Abdullah to just sit on my wheel and conserve energy for the remainder. I kept us on track and relief ensued when we crossed the line, not only three intact but with a solid time too, 1h:04m:04s,” the rider from United Kingdom said.

“It was enough to edge out the



OCA League Races			
Race 1			
Friday 24/9/2021	Team Time Trial	47 km	Sawadi
Race 2			
Friday 22/10/2021	Road Race	98 km - 10 Laps	The Wave - Airport
Race 3			
Friday 12/11/2021	Road Race	110 km - 4 Laps	Sawadi
Race 4			
Friday 3/12/2021	Road Race	123 km - 3 Laps	Nizwa
Race 5			
Friday 10/12/2021	Individual Time Trial	18 km	Al Batinah Coastal Road
Race 6			
Friday 7/1/2022	Road Race	116 km	Quriyat - Jahloot Daghmar - Quriyat
Race 7			
Friday 4/2/2022	Road Race	96 km	Wakan - Wadi Mistal
Race 8			
Friday 11/3/2022	Road Race	84 km - 15 Laps	PACA
Note: The schedule (date / place) is subject to change			

2

Royal Army (2nd) and Capital team (3rd) who finished on the same minute as us, but fortunately seconds back. It was a perfect start

to the OCA season and the team look forward to the second round and first road race in October,” Willcox added.

OCA Leauge TTT Race1 RESULT

Rank	Team	Time	Gap
1	Cycle KOM - NRO	01:04:05	
2	Oman Royal Army	01:04:41	+36
3	Capital Team	01:04:45	+40
4	Oman Club	01:05:43	+1:38
5	Elite Team	01:06:38	+2:33
6	Gulf Cycles	01:10:30	+6:25
7	Wave Riders	01:10:54	+6:49
8	Bahla Club	01:11:44	+7:39
9	IRN Bro's	01:12:00	+7:55
10	Al Shabab Club	01:13:17	+9:12
11	Izki	01:13:57	+9:52
12	Sur	01:14:52	+10:47
13	Quriyat Club	01:15:01	+10:56
14	F4S Cycling Team	01:16:00	+11:55
15	Brothers Team	01:16:45	+12:40
16	Al-Musanna Club	01:17:37	+13:32
17	Cyclone Cycling Team	01:17:58	+13:53
18	A'Salam Club	01:19:52	+15:47
19	Saham Club	01:20:55	+16:50
20	Rustaq Club	01:23:43	+19:38
21	Nizwa	01:23:45	+19:40
22	Ibri	01:23:46	+19:41
23	Al-Mouj Team	01:24:09	+20:04
24	Muscat Oasis Riders	01:28:10	+24:05
25	Muscat Bikers Group	01:35:34	+31:29

EIGHT-RACE LEAGUE

The second race of the eight-race League will be an individual road race for 98 km from The Wave to the Civil Aviation Club in Muscat on October 22.

The OCA League races is being held for under-23 category, 40 and above and elite or Open (23 and above).

Open category leader will get red jersey, while leader for 40 years

I told Dan and Abdullah to just sit on my wheel and conserve energy for the remainder. I kept us on track and relief ensued when we crossed the line, not only three intact but with a solid time too, 1h: 04m:04s

PAUL WILLCOX
Cycle KOM captain

and above claim green jersey and under-23 leader takes white jersey.

Races are planned for women as well if there are a minimum of five contestants.

The races are as follows: second race (5 laps), third race (2 laps), fourth race (1 lap), fifth race, eighth race (10 laps).

Same races are also planned for junior riders.

The female race is only held with the participation of 5 or more contestants.

The female and junior events will be individual races without championship points.



RED-HOT KNIGHT RIDERS TAKE ON CHENNAI IN SUPER SUNDAY CLASH

It's a Super Sunday and obviously the teams with the highest fan followings in IPL are going to lock horns for the bragging rights.

In the afternoon, Kolkata Knight Riders locks horns with the Chennai Super Kings in match # 38 of the IPL 2021. While, in the evening, the perennial underachievers Royal Challengers Bangalore will be looking to make a comeback in match # 39 of the second leg of IPL 2021 against the champion Mumbai Indians.

CHENNAI SUPER KINGS VS KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS

Head to Head — Out of the 26 matches between them, Chennai Super Kings have dominated by winning 16 encounters, while Kolkata Knight Riders has won nine of them and one match didn't produce a result. The match is in Sheikh Zayed Stadium, Abu Dhabi where the pitch has been a tricky one for batting in the tournament, especially for the teams, batting first. The spinners have gotten quite a significant amount of turn from the surface. Chasing has been easier on the track. The average first inning score has been 159 (last 24 IPL matches on this venue)

Kolkata Knight Riders — The Men in Gold and Purple defeated the Royal Challengers Bangalore and the Mumbai Indians in Abu Dhabi to enter the top four. Going into the next game, KKR can take heart from the fact that they beat the MS Dhoni-led Super Kings last year when they faced each other at the same venue.

Chennai Super Kings — CSK, on the other hand, must be high on confidence as well. They have beaten the Challengers and Mumbai to climb the top of the points table. Another win will almost take them into the playoffs. In their previous meeting, CSK defeated the Knights by 18 runs



after posting 220 for three on the board.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE MATCH?

In the second leg, KKR batting has impressed, especially the top order with Vankatesh Iyer, Shubman Gill and Rahul Tripathi. While with the ball, Varun Chakravarthy and Sunil Narine have been outstanding. On the other hand, for Chennai Super Kings, Ruturaj Gaikwad has been in the form of his life with the bat. With a very long batting line up, all the others have been pitching in. With the ball, Dwayne Bravo has been shining bright in the middle and death overs. Although

other bowlers haven't done that great, but a couple of magical spells from Dwayne Bravo in the last two games has been the difference.

ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE VS MUMBAI INDIANS

RCB and Mumbai Indians will have a point to prove as the match will take place at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium Dubai on Sunday (September). Both teams were pretty impressive in the first half of the tournament and their spot in the playoffs seemed quite certain. However, both RCB and MI have made a dismal start to the UAE,

In the afternoon, Kolkata Knight Riders locks horns with the Chennai Super Kings in match # 38 of the IPL 2021. While, in the evening, the perennial underachievers Royal Challengers Bangalore will be looking to make a comeback in match # 39 of the second leg of IPL 2021 against the champion Mumbai Indians.

suffering defeats in the first two games. Hence, getting back to the winning ways is of extreme importance. Notably, the Virat Kohli-led side walked away with a thrilling two-wicket triumph when these two sides met in the first half of the competition.

Royal Challengers Bangalore — The team that has been unable to get their hands on the IPL silverware since its inception, yet they have one of the biggest and most loyal fan bases in the IPL. Skipper Virat Kohli has been able to find form in the last game against Chennai Super Kings, but the middle order wasn't able to capitalise. In fact, the middle order and the bowling has always been a

problem for Royal Challengers Bangalore. They have to win three games out of the remaining five and if they don't qualify this time, then this year will be the most disappointing seasons of all times, considering the position they have been.

Mumbai Indians — One wouldn't be wrong, if Mumbai Indians would be called the most balanced team of the Indian Premier League of all times. The results speak volumes about this statement. The team management has really believed in focusing on the core and this core has done extremely well for Mumbai Indians, year-after-year. But currently, the likes of Hardik Pandya, are being missed and the lack of form amongst the core is costing Mumbai big time.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE MATCH?

The match is at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium in Dubai. It's a good sporting wicket where quick bowlers will get maximum assistance from the surface in the powerplay. It's all about keeping the wickets in the hand, as batting will become easier as the game progresses. Expect a special one from AB de Villiers and Glenn Maxwell. Tim David might have one more game, to prove his mantle. Rajat Patidar might come in for Srikanth Bharat, Shahbaz Ahmed might come in for Navdeep Saini and George Garton might come in for Wanindu Hasaranga. Mumbai Indians will be looking for the fitness for Hardik Pandya to replace Saurabh Tiwary. Anukul Roy could get a match in the place of Krunal Pandya as well. Royal Challengers might come out on top in this one, with the injuries affecting Mumbai Indians in a big way, while Royal Challengers Bangalore might play some cricket with freedom, which might really make them lethal.

McLaren's Norris secures maiden pole at Russian GP

BERLIN: Lando Norris of McLaren secured a first ever career F1 pole position in wet conditions on Saturday for the Russian FormulaOne Grand Prix.

Seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton of Mercedes was only fourth, while championship leader Max Verstappen of Red Bull will start Sunday's race from the back of the grid due to a power unit change.

Briton Norris set the best time of 1 minute 41.993 seconds around the 5.848-kilometre Sochi Autodrom.

He was followed by Carlos Sainz of Ferrari, 0.517 second behind, and Williams' George Russell in third.

The trio benefited from early tyre changes in Q3, when the

track was already fit for slick tyres, therefore giving drivers a better grip.

Norris, who was second in Monza two weeks ago, was speechless after his maiden pole position.

"You never think you're going to get a pole until you actually do it, but here we are. I have to thank the team so much," he said.

Sainz will be Ferrari's major hope for points as Charles Leclerc will also start from the back of the grid as he like Verstappen is serving a penalty due to too many engine changes.

"I put in a pretty strong lap," Sainz said. "This weekend we've been looking a bit stronger. We will put on a fight [in the race] and try to have some fun."



McLaren's Lando Norris celebrates pole position after qualifying. — Reuters

Russell, meanwhile, has been enjoying the best period of his career so far. After securing his maiden points for Williams in Hungary in August and a podium at the Belgium Grand

Prix —despite no real race due to weather conditions — he was the first to gamble with the soft rubber in Q3.

"It's crazy [getting P3]. The team have done a great job,

You never think you're going to get a pole until you actually do it, but here we are. I have to thank the team so much

LANDO NORRIS

McLaren driver

getting the strategy right and putting the right tyres on at the right time," said Russell, who will join Mercedes next year.

His future team-mate Hamilton hit the wall coming into

the pits for a tyre change and then spun during his last lap, missing the chance to improve his time.

Earlier on Saturday, the third and final practice session was cancelled due to heavy rain in Sochi.

Verstappen and Leclerc didn't finish the qualifying session. Verstappen abandoned it in Q1 and Leclerc in Q2, therefore avoiding any possible car damage due to the wet and slippery track conditions. Even though he didn't set a time, the Dutchman will be allowed to race as the 107 per cent rule doesn't apply in wet conditions. The rule states that a driver is not allowed to race if he fails to qualify within 107 per cent of the fastest time of the session.

— dpa

UNITED STATES OVERWHELM EUROPE TO GRAB CONTROL OF RYDER CUP

KOHLER: A red wave washed over the Ryder Cup on Friday as the United States dominated both foursome and fourball sessions to grab a commanding 6-2 lead over holders Europe for their largest opening-day advantage in the biennial event in a nearly half-century.

With US results highlighted in red and Europe in blue on the Whistling Straits's scoreboards, chants of "USA, USA" rang out across the striking links-style layout from dawn to dusk as 40,000 mostly American fans basked in a dominating performance by the United States not seen since 1975.

By winning both sessions 3-1, US captain Steve Stricker's men are nearly halfway to the 14-1/2 points needed to reclaim the small gold cup that will be hoisted by the winners on Sunday.

History is surely on the Americans' side as they have never lost a Ryder Cup at home when winning the first session 3-1 or better. In fact, they are 11-0 under that scenario, but European captain Padraig Harrington remained defiant.

Play resumes on Saturday at 7:05 am CT (1205 GMT) with foursomes again followed by afternoon fourballs.

"No doubt it was a tough day," said Harrington. "There's obviously still 20 points to play for."

"You can't just turn around and try to eat into a lead straightaway in one session."

"It would be lovely if it happened, but you can't think like that. You've got to do it slowly, one step at a time."

The Americans, who boast an average world ranking of nine compared to 30 for Europe, were the heavy favourites, but few expected the largely inexperienced side to deliver such a poised performance.

Olympic champion Xander Schauffele produced another gold medal-worthy effort in his Ryder Cup debut, winning both his matches.

For the morning foursomes, Schauffele teamed up with Patrick

By winning both sessions 3-1, US captain Steve Stricker's men are nearly halfway to the 14-1/2 points needed to reclaim the small gold cup that will be hoisted by the winners on Sunday

Ryder Cup		
Winning teams		Host countries
2018 	Europe	FRA
2016 	US	USA
2014 	Europe	SCO
2012 	Europe	USA
2010 	Europe	WAL
2008 	US	USA
2006 	Europe	IRL
2004 	Europe	USA
2002 	Europe	ENG
1999 	US	USA

Source: rydercup.com

Cantlay for a 5&3 win over Rory McIlroy and Ian Poulter, then in the afternoon was matched up with Dustin Johnson for a 2&1 win over Paul Casey and Bernd Wiesberger.

Sergio Garcia, who went out in the day's first group with fellow Spaniard Jon Rahm, equalled Nick Faldo's record for Ryder Cup match wins with 23, but that was the only highlight on what proved to be a rough day for the European side.

Rahm and Tyrrell Hatton birdied their final hole to halve their fourball match with Bryson DeChambeau and Scottie Scheffler, another of six rookies on the 12-man US squad.

Tommy Fleetwood and Viktor Hovland held on to tie Justin Thomas and Cantlay to earn Europe's only other half-point.

Ryder Cup rookie Harris English and Tony Finau beat McIlroy and Shane Lowry 4&3 to give the United States their other full point in fourball.

— Reuters



Team USA's Xander Schauffele hits his tee shot on the 2nd hole during the Foursomes. — Reuters



Team USA's Dustin Johnson hits his tee shot on the 6th hole during the Foursomes. — Reuters



Team Europe's Tyrrell Hatton hits his tee shot on the 6th hole during the Foursomes. — Reuters

Isner, Shapovalov win doubles as Team Europe lead Laver Cup

BOSTON: The doubles pairing of American John Isner and Denis Shapovalov of Canada notched up the first win for Team World in the Laver Cup in Boston on Friday with Team Europe heading into the weekend with a 3-1 lead after the opening day.

Isner and Shapovalov defeated German Alexander Zverev and Italian Matteo Berrettini 4-6 7-6(2) 10-1 in the final match, bringing the TD Garden crowd to their feet with the clock minutes away from striking midnight.

Named after Australian great Rod Laver, the three-day team event pits six of Europe's top players against six of their counterparts from the rest of the world with four matches played each day (three singles and a doubles).

Each match win is awarded one point on Friday, two points on Saturday, and three points on Sunday with the first team to reach 13 points declared winner of the event, which was cancelled last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.



Team Europe have won all three editions of the Laver Cup so far and they did not seem perturbed by the absence of Roger Federer, Rafael

Nadal and Novak Djokovic in their ranks for this year's tournament when they jumped to a 3-0 lead in the singles.

The crowd at the indoor arena, used by the NBA's Celtics and NHL's Bruins, were fully behind Team World but their vociferous

Team Europe have won all three editions of the Laver Cup so far and they did not seem perturbed by the absence of Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic in their ranks for this year's tournament when they jumped to a 3-0 lead in the singles

support was not enough to derail Norway's world number 10 Casper Ruud against big-serving American Reilly Opelka.

With Federer watching from the stands, Ruud neutralised his opponent's booming serves on the hardcourt to win 6-3 7-6(4) as the six feet 11 inches tall Opelka described it as the "slowest condition I have ever played in".

Swiss Federer, who is a co-

creator of the exhibition event, is recuperating from a knee surgery he underwent last month but thrilled the Boston crowd by making a surprise trip.

"I got a text from Stefanos (Tsitsipas) saying where I am, he's missing me and he needs me on the team," Federer, who received a warm applause from the spectators at TD Garden, said ahead of the start of the tournament.

"I didn't tell him yet I am coming, so that'd be a surprise."

With the deciding third set a 10-point match tiebreaker at the Laver Cup, Wimbledon finalist Berrettini saved 12 of the 13 breakpoints he faced against Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime to rally to a 6-7(3) 7-5 (10-8) win after a two-hour and 52-minute battle against his close friend.

Russian world number five Andrey Rublev also had to come back from a set down to beat Diego Schwartzman of Argentina 4-6 6-3 (11-9) as his team swept the singles for a 3-0 lead. — Reuters

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ATM usage shrinks as Oman goes cashless

DIGITAL PAYMENTS: 45,000 Point of Sale deployments recorded in private and government establishments across the Sultanate

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Transactions based on digital payment modes are expected to double by 2022 as all segments of the stakeholder community — including merchants, consumers, banks, private companies and government institutions — increasingly switch to cashless payment channels, according to a key official of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

Ali bin Hamid al Jabri (pictured), Manager — Payment Systems, said that ATM usage, which accounted for 58 per cent of total transactions in the country in 2017, shrank to 38 per cent in 2019.

On the other hand, Point of Sale (PoS) based transactions, which typically involve the use of devices and terminals to effect payment via credit or debit cards, soared to 58 per cent in 2019, up from 42 per cent two years earlier.

The uptake of PoS and other digital payment modes, which has already skyrocketed during the pandemic, is projected to double by 2022 as recent mandates by the Omani government in support of cashless payment channels begin



to kick in, he said.

The official made the observations during a presentation on the CBO's ongoing efforts to broaden and upgrade the country's national payment systems infrastructure. The presentation came during the New Age Banking Summit 2021, organised by UMS Events at the Al Bustan Palace — A Ritz Carlton Hotel, on Wednesday.

Attesting to the growing popularity of digital payment channels in the Sultanate, more than 13,000 private sector entities have deployed a total of around 39,000 PoS devices across the country as of May 2021, according to the official.

In the government sector, as many as 100 ministries and public

entities have deployed 6,000 PoS systems to support digital payments based on PoS, QR Code and e-commerce modes, he said.

"We believe that with the government's mandate to the private sector to utilise digital payments for their transactions, the (uptake) of PoS and other modes should double by 2022, and we are working to this end as well," Al Jabri stated.

Significantly, e-commerce — accounting for an 8-per cent share of total transactions in 2019 — almost doubled by Q1 2021, aided in part by the pandemic, the official said. Mobile payments, on the other hand, while having strongly picked up since 2019, have not achieved the desired



response, Al Jabri said, attributing this limited uptake to poor customer awareness.

But boding well for the robust growth of digital-based transactions, over cash and ATM-based alternatives, are mandates issued by the Omani government to the public and private sectors to digitise their payment modes.

Salary processing, once done entirely manually at considerable risk and concern to the financial system, is now conducted almost entirely digitally, said Al Jabri.

"In the first quarter of 2021, almost all government and private sector organisations began processing salaries digitally through the digital channels provided by the banks," he noted, crediting this success to the joint efforts of the Central Bank, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Labour.

In July, following a mandate issued by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), microbusinesses operating in 12 different economic sectors are obligated to transact their business digitally, he said.

Mega pharma project making headway in Salalah Free Zone

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

The Board of Directors of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) held a meeting with a number of CEOs of factories at Salalah Free Zone and visited a number of establishments operating in the fields of food, chemicals and pharmaceutical production in the Zone.

OPAZ Board of Directors, headed by Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman, also held its third meeting of the year in Salalah.

The meeting covered investments at Salalah Free Zone and the direction to localise the production of medicines and medical supplies in the Zone, where special locations have been already allocated for such projects. Soon the Zone will be home for one of the largest pharmaceutical factories in the Sultanate, which is currently under construction.

Already, the free zone is home to an array of investments focused

on pharmaceuticals, nutritional products and other healthcare related commodities.

Philex Pharmaceutical Industries, the biggest of these ventures, has already brought into operation part of its estimated \$300 million-worth integrated pharmaceutical complex.

While a secondary packaging unit was launched in May 2020, the centrepiece of the massive venture — a pharmaceutical plant set on 110,000 sq metres — is currently under construction and will commence the first phase of operations next year. In addition to medicines, the company's product line-up will include hard tablets and capsules, and the country's first injectable solutions.

The Board of Directors was briefed on the plan developed by Asyad Group to enhance the integration of Salalah Free Zone with the logistics system in the Sultanate. Likewise, the meeting also focused on ways to maximise the benefits between the special economic zones, free zones and the ports.



Municipal waste services now cover 100% of Oman's population: be'ah

SEAMLESS SERVICES: End-to-end services provided by 3,340-strong workforce distributed among six specialist contractors

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

Municipal solid waste (MSW) management services provided by Oman Environmental Holding Services Co (be'ah), via a number of specialist service providers, now cover 100 per cent of Oman's population, according to the state-owned entity.

As many as six leading local and international waste management firms have been licensed by be'ah as contractual service providers to handle the complete spectrum of services in their respective licensed areas in the Sultanate.

These services range from bin and fleet supply, waste collection, transfer and final disposal, to allocation, maintenance and regular sterilisation of bins. Between them, they operate a 3,340-strong workforce that forms the manpower handling waste collection across the country.

"be'ah efficiently manages three waste types: municipal, healthcare and hazardous. Before the decommissioning of traditional dumpsites, these waste types were dumped together and buried in pits, burnt and left exposed to the environment. This waste attracted scavengers, created an unhealthy environment, and contributed to soil, water and air contamination in the area," said be'ah in its latest report.

"These traditional dumping grounds, which were over 300 in number, were also a breeding ground for pests besides being a



source of various infections as they received all waste types and had no provision for their safe disposal. The continued and varied risks to public health, the local ecosystem, the environment, and the economy from such legacy practices called for prioritising damage control using innovative, far-sighted and sustainable measures," it stated.

As a first step in the sustainable

management of solid waste, be'ah began closing all traditional dumpsites. Making gradual and focused progress, it systematically began decommissioning such sites as soon as the nearest engineered landfill or transfer station became operational.

The company also began identifying the various waste streams and devised strategies

to extract value before they were disposed.

By the end of 2020, ten new engineered landfills were in operation at key locations around the Sultanate. An 11th engineered landfill is also under construction.

Complementing this network are 15 waste transfer stations, which are already operational, with a further five under construction.

Eng Tariq al Amri, CEO — be'ah, commented: "be'ah has been aligning each of its strategies, initiatives and projects concerning waste management and the environment in accordance with domestic and international best practices. With the need for an international standard waste management infrastructural set-up largely addressed, the emphasis is now on gradually shifting the current linear economy model to a circular economy model by

leveraging the Fourth Industrial Revolution to create sustainable communities. These communities will, in turn, support Oman's economy and further improve the quality of life. For this, the company will continue to collaborate with stakeholders at every level."

Eng Ahmed bin Hamed al Subhi, Chairman of the Board of Directors, added: "The waste management infrastructure that we see today starting from engineered landfills, transfer stations, treatment facilities, coupled with high-level of professionalism, ethics, operational capability and environmental awareness are just a few examples of the achievements be'ah has accomplished. We at be'ah see a promising road ahead and our focus will be on preserving company successes and scaling up to provide world class services across the Sultanate."

MoSD and Meethaq sign MoU for Social Takaful account

MUSCAT: In line with its pioneering role in providing Islamic financial services and products in the Sultanate, Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to open a Social Takaful account for the Ministry of Social Development.

Under the terms of the agreement, Meethaq will provide the necessary facilities for collecting contributions, donations and aid to the ministry through various channels, which include its large network of branches, ATMs, CDMs as well as through Meethaq's Internet and Mobile Banking platforms.

The MoU was signed by Hilal al Hosni, Assistant Director General for Administrative and Financial Affairs at the Ministry of Social Development and Hamed Lal Bakhshi al Balushi, Head of Meethaq Corporate Banking Services.

The signing of this memorandum will also serve to enhance the bank's role in



Public-Private Partnership in various fields and sectors.

Hamed Lal Bakhshi al Balushi, Head of Meethaq Corporate Banking Services, said: "Meethaq is delighted to sign this Memorandum of Understanding to provide all the necessary facilities that can help the Ministry of Social Development in achieving its different goals. Meethaq Islamic Banking is keen to strengthen

its partnership with institutions and corporates in the Sultanate to provide the best banking services and facilities which are compliant and in accordance with the principles of Islamic Sharia."

He stated that Meethaq has always been a pioneer in providing cutting-edge banking solutions to both individuals and organisations, and would in turn help them support the National

Economy.

Meethaq extends support to all key economic sectors with innovative Sharia based products. It is well positioned to provide Islamic financial expertise to all segments and thereby promote the good of society as a whole.

With 24 branches and over 40 ATMs and CDMs spread across different governorates, Meethaq is the leading Islamic financial services provider in the Sultanate, catering to the varying needs of individuals, corporates and SMEs.

Every Meethaq product goes through the process of Sharia-compliance certification by its Sharia Supervisory Board and is created in line with the guidelines of the Central Bank of Oman. Meethaq plans to continue expanding its services and products in response to customer needs and continuous feedback.

Please visit <https://www.meethaq.om/en/Pages/default.aspx> or call 24656666 to know more about Meethaq.

Bank Nizwa completes Rights Issue

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

Oman's leading Islamic bank, Bank Nizwa, has announced the successful completion of its Rights Issue which was open for subscription during September 7-16, 2021. Subsequent to the subject matter disclosures, Bank Nizwa announced new 736.953 million ordinary shares at an issue price of baisas 95 per share, increasing the bank's capital by over RO 70 million.

Allotments of all subscriptions were approved by the Capital Market Authority. The new share capital is listed on Muscat Stock Exchange on September 26, 2021. The bank's new issued share capital post-Rights Issue shall be RO 220,010,538.040 of 2,236,953,032 shares.

NBO partners with Alfardan Hotels and Resorts

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) has signed a strategic partnership with Alfardan Hotels and Resorts to provide finance facilities for buyers interested in purchasing a property within The Residences at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat.

Buying a dream home at one of Muscat's most luxurious destinations is now easier than ever thanks to NBO's unique housing loan offerings, with up to 90 per cent funding of the property value including registration fee, mortgage charges and insurance premium starting at as low as 4.99 per cent p.a. reducing balance rate. With quick approvals and doorstep service, it's easier than ever to turn dreams into reality.

Tariq Atiq, Chief Retail and Digital Banking Officer at NBO, said, "We're delighted to be



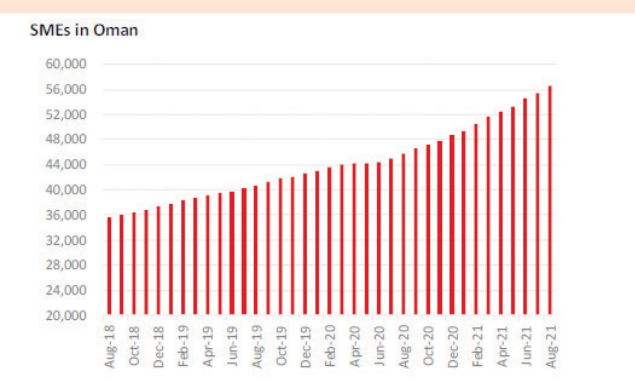
joining hands with Alfardan Hotels and Resorts, adding to our growing portfolio of international partnerships. Nowadays people are looking for homes in prime locations, and these highly sought-after properties offer plenty of options for buyers. Whether young newlywed couples or growing families, we're here to support them every step of the way, while adding value to

their overall banking experience."

A beachfront address running along an incredible 360-metre-long coastline, The Residences at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat features an array of luxury apartments, duplexes and townhouses. An ideal real estate investment opportunity in Oman, the project will entitle its residents to a freehold title deed upon purchase.



MSX ends week marginally lower



Source: NCSI

MUSCAT: The MSX30 Index ended the week down by 0.20 per cent. All sub-indices ended lower. Services, Industrial and financial Index closed lower by 0.86 per cent, 0.63 per cent and 0.33 per cent, respectively. MSX Shariah Index closed lower by 0.66 per cent.

Dhofar Generating Company has advised the Capital Market Authority, the Muscat Stock Exchange and the investors' community that its financing arrangements provide for a cash sweep obligation to take effect from or after July 31. (Cash Sweep Start Date).

The cash sweep mechanism requires that 95 per cent of the free cash flows, after accounting for the operating costs and debt service payments, shall be paid to the lenders towards prepayment of the balloon repayment. The Company has requested its lenders for an amendment to the loan agreement to extend the Cash Sweep Start Date from July 31 to October 28, 2021.

Lenders unanimously approved to extend the Cash Sweep Start Date to October 28, 2021 with the condition that no dividend shall be distributed to the shareholders until the Extended Cash Sweep Start Date (i.e. October 28, 2021) as well as, if the Backstop DSRA LC is arranged, the LC provider shall meet the required credit ratings as specified under the financing arrangements.

Expatriates who buy flats under Oman's usufruct scheme will continue to own their properties, even after they leave the country, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) has said.

"Non-Omani owners who buy real estate in multi-storey residential and commercial buildings can keep the property even when they return to their home countries on expiry of their work contracts at a company or an organisation in Oman," said a ministry official.

The expatriates will also be able to rent the properties through a mediation office, a law firm, a realtor to manage, rent, or oversee their assets whether they are within or outside Oman. As of now, expatriates can buy properties in buildings in Al Amerat, these include Al Amerat Al Hashiyah 1, Al Nahda City phases 2, 3, 4 and 5, Al Amerat Al Muhaj phases 1 and 2. In Bausher, expatriates can buy properties in the phases 1, 2 and 3, Misfah phase 2, Ghala Heights phases 1 and 2, Bausher Al Watiyah phase 2, and Al Khuwair phase 2.

The number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) at the end of August 2021 totalled 56,687, representing an increase by 24 per cent compared to the same period of 2020. Among the governorates, Musandam topped the list with 44.9 per cent SMEs registered in June 2021, followed by Al Wusta with 37.5 per cent. (Courtesy: U-Capital)

Oman Arab Bank launches new direct remittance service

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) recently announced the launch of the 'iSend' feature for money remittance, further enhancing the portfolio of innovative digital banking facilities and products that it provides.

The new service is a secure, fast, and easy way of sending money internationally, anywhere and at any time, through the OAB Online App and is underpinned by Mastercard's proprietary remittance solution — Mastercard Send.

Commenting on the new feature, Rashad al Shaikh, Head of the Retail Banking Division at OAB said, "iSend is an exclusive remittance solution that enables our customers to carry out money transfers within seconds, effortlessly and conveniently.

As compared to the traditional swift, this new service offers more convenience, value addition and is also aligned with our key strategy of enhancing digital financial inclusion. Through iSend, we can help citizens and customers abroad send money through our secure and real-time payment infrastructure. To encourage more customers to utilise this feature, we are offering it as a complimentary facility to all our customers for a limited time. As we look forward to our phase one roll-out, we continue to enrich our offerings to improve overall customer experience."

Through Mastercard Send, financial service providers can seamlessly process digital payments leveraging its global network through a single connection. Furthermore, these



cross-border payments can reach almost anywhere in the world with certainty and predictability, and without back-end charges.

Mastercard's platform plays a key role in improving world-wide connectivity, by providing new and enhanced innovation across

the global digital ecosystem.

Nadia Ghissassi, Country Manager, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait & Iraq, Mastercard, said, "As Oman

Vision 2040 is under way, the ability to make fast, frictionless cross-border transfers is crucial in driving the country's digital transformation efforts. Oman Arab Bank customers will now be able to send money to their family and friends across the world with increased convenience and peace of mind. As a trusted technology partner, Mastercard is committed to empowering consumers to connect to the digital economy in simpler and more secure ways."

With the new feature, customers with an Oman Arab Bank account can send money to friends and family abroad with just a few taps, from the comfort of their home or office. During phase one, the bank has launched the service as an account-to-account solution and will add more options in subsequent phases.



In brief

■ CALIFORNIA

**CRUISE BOOKINGS FOR 2022 2ND HALF ABOVE PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS**

Carnival Corp, said cruise bookings for the second half of 2022 were ahead of pre-pandemic levels, in a sign the cruise operator expects a rebound in business as it restarts voyages globally. The company's US-listed shares rose 3.1 per cent to \$25.48 as the Cunard cruise line owner said its core earnings will break even early next year and be above pre-pandemic levels in 2023.

The cruise sector was among those most affected by the pandemic in 2020 as many ships docked at ports and anchored offshore for months, forcing operators to raise billions of dollars in debt to stay afloat.

■ WASHINGTON

**IMF CHIEF ACCUSES WB PRESIDENT'S OFFICE OF MANIPULATION**

IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva criticised as 'false and spurious' the findings of an independent probe into allegations that as World Bank head she pressured staff to manipulate data to make China's business climate appear more favorable.

In a statement she plans to present to the executive board of the International Monetary Fund, Georgieva also accused the office of the World Bank's past president, Jim Kong Kim, of manipulation.

She said she intervened to block a proposal from a member of Kim's staff to include Hong Kong data in China's ranking in the World Bank's Doing Business 2018 report, which would have significantly improved its standing.

■ CALIFORNIA

**GOOGLE CEO SOUGHT TO KEEP ISSUES OUT OF SPOTLIGHT**

Google Chief Executive Sundar Pichai in 2019 was warned that describing the company's Incognito browsing mode as 'private' was problematic, yet it stayed the course because he did not want the feature 'under the spotlight,' according to a new court filing. Google spokesman José Castañeda said that the filing "mischaracterises emails referencing unrelated second and third-hand accounts."

The Alphabet Inc unit's privacy disclosures have generated regulatory and legal scrutiny in recent years amid growing public concerns about online surveillance.

Users last June alleged in a lawsuit that Google unlawfully tracked their internet use when they were browsing Incognito in its Chrome browser.

Faulty start for car makers in India

We all love our cars. Big in the Middle East. Tiny in Europe. Fancy looking in Asia. Environmentally friendly in the US. And what about India?

In India, 95 per cent of cars are priced below \$20,000. An important factor that many international players failed to acknowledge when targeting to penetrate the market.

Simply put, the largest majority of Indians prefer to have a small, cheap, fuel-efficient cars that could bump over uneven roads without needing expensive repairs.

When mid-1990s US car maker Ford Motor Co entered the Indian market by building its first factory, a growth similar to the one of China was expected to happen.

That was short-lived. With a growing middle class having progressively more disposable income, economy observer were predicting a boom in the automotive

industry that could have cut for Ford a 10 per cent market share in no time. That proved to be a severe misjudgement.

Fast forward to 2021 and Ford decided to pull the plug to the chances of success in the Indian market.

The cost of the failed investment?

It is estimated in \$2 billion. This did not come as a surprise, as other US motor makers such as General Motors and Harley-Davidson had already deserted India not long ago.

So, the Indian auto market, once seen as the world's third potential market after US and China, is now left with a handful of international players. Japanese Nissan still retains a foothold in the country as well as German maker Volkswagen. The latter, despite being the manufacturer with the world's largest volume of sales, can only count a mere 1 per



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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FOREIGNERS TEND TO BADLY MISJUDGE INDIA'S POTENTIAL AND FAIL TO UNDERESTIMATE THE COMPLEXITIES OF OPERATING IN A VAST COUNTRY THAT REWARDS DOMESTIC PROCUREMENT

cent of their sales in India.

Car sales in India slowed down to a low 3.6 per cent compared to a high 12 per cent in the previous decade.

Ford's troubled international ventures do not stop in India.

In January the car maker announced the exit from Brazil too. It is becoming apparent that the electric vehicles agenda is not a good fit for emerging markets, but still seen as a novelty for a small amount of early adopter.

"Companies invested on the fallacy that India would have great potential and the purchasing power of buyers would go up" but such an expectation for that kind of environment and infrastructure is short lived, according Ravi Bhatia, President for India at JATO Dynamics, a provider of market data for the auto industry.

"The struggle for many global brands has always been meeting India's price point because they

brought global products that were developed for mature markets at a high-cost structure", said analyst Ammar Master at LMC.

After losing \$2.5 billion in India — since entry — and burning another \$2 billion in the past decade alone, Ford made the hard decision not to invest more.

"To continue investing... we needed to show a path for a reasonable return on investment", Ford President & Managing Director, Ford India Anurag Mehrotra shared with reporters in a recent interview. "Unfortunately, we are not able to do that."

India is growing steadily across many sectors, but the foreigners tend to badly misjudged India's potential and fail to underestimated the complexities of operating in a vast country that rewards domestic procurement.

(The columnist is a member of the International Press Association)

Australian Business Group Oman holds briefing



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

The Australian Business Group Oman (ABGO) members, and Omani alumni met at ABGO's Back-to-Business briefing session and networking event at the Grand Hyatt Muscat last week.

The focus of the event was ABGO's programme called 'ABGO Connect,' an initiative developed and overseen by ABGO.

The main goal of ABGO Connect is to facilitate business and commercial opportunities between Australia and the Sultanate of Oman, while strengthening bilateral relations.

Mustafa Salman, Australian

Honorary Consul, opened the event and noted that "Omani students are the future of relationships between Australia and Oman, and ABGO Connect is extremely important for that."

Mac Thomson, Chair of ABGO, in his address gave an introduction about ABGO Connect and encouraged the alumni to get involved as "they already have the common ground and relatability with Australia, which will help them form business synergies faster and more effectively which will benefit the employment of Omanis across a variety of sectors". There were also many positive comments from the alumni who attended.

Banking and Fintech leaders discuss digital transformation

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

The sixth edition of New Age Banking Summit Oman, supported by Oman Banks Association, drew a good response from the banking and fintech sectors. Tahir bin Salim al Amri, Executive President, Central Bank of Oman was the chief guest at the event held on September 22, at Al Bustan Palace — A Ritz Carlton Hotel.

In his keynote address, Al Amri shared updates on the CBO's digital journey, steps to promote digital payments, management of related risks, concessions granted during the pandemic and efforts to study areas including open banking, cloud banking, co-operation between fintech and banks, and crypto eco-system.

In another presentation, Ali Hassan Moosa, CEO, Oman Banks Association highlighted the importance of financial inclusion and the collaboration among government, regulators, civil society organisations, banks, service providers and technology enablers to achieve this.

The Summit hosted a panel



discussion titled 'Driving Innovation and Transformation in Financial Services'.

The panel comprising the well-known industry leaders from banking, fintech and technology solution providers, deliberated on the new trends in digital banking and payments and the future of the financial services sector with evolving customer needs.

The panelists included Khalid al Kayed, CEO, Bank Nizwa; Said Ahmed Safrar, CEO, Oman Investment & Finance Co (OIFC), Ali Hassan Moosa; Ewan John MacLeod, Chief Transformation Officer, Sohar International; Eng

Maqbool al Wahaibi, CEO, Oman Data Park; and Eddy Abboud, CEO, GBM Oman. The panel was moderated by Akshay Bhatnagar, Executive Vice President & Group Managing Editor, UMS.

The Summit was a unique platform for the banking and finance professionals to discuss the new developments in global banking and debate on the focus areas for Omani banks.

Oman Banking & Finance Awards 2021 were co-located with the New Age Banking Summit. Bank Muscat won the overall Best Bank award in the large banks category.

Huawei executive freed after deal with US

BEIJING: Huawei Executive Meng Wanzhou was headed home from Vancouver on Saturday as two Canadians were released from prison in China, ending a bitter diplomatic row that has poisoned ties for three years.

Meng and the two Canadians — former diplomat Michael Kovrig and businessman Michael Spavor — are all on their way back to their home countries after years of being detained in what critics have called "hostage diplomacy".

Meng, the 49-year-old daughter of Ren Zhengfei, the billionaire founder of Chinese telecoms giant Huawei, was granted release in a Vancouver court hearing after three years of house arrest in Canada while fighting extradition to the United States.

This came hours after US prosecutors announced an agreement under which fraud

US prosecutors announced an agreement under which fraud charges against the Huawei executive are to be suspended and eventually dropped

charges against her are to be suspended and eventually dropped. She then quickly boarded a flight to the city of Shenzhen, returning to China for the first time since her arrest at Vancouver's international airport at the behest of US authorities on December 1, 2018.

Meanwhile, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced that the two detained Canadians had left Chinese airspace, and were on their way



Huawei Chief Financial Officer Meng Wanzhou talks to media at British Columbia Supreme Court after her extradition hearing ended in her favour, in Vancouver British Columbia, Canada. — AFP

home.

Their plane was expected to land on Saturday in Canada, Trudeau told a news conference in Ottawa, adding they had gone through "an unbelievably difficult ordeal."

The "Two Michaels" were detained just days after Meng on what Ottawa has contended were "trumped up" espionage charges. In turn, Beijing called Meng's case "a purely political incident."

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said "the US Government stands with the international community in welcoming the decision" to release the men.

Speaking to reporters before heading to China, Meng said: "Over the past three years, my life has been turned upside down. It was a disruptive time for me as a mother, wife and a company executive." She later posted a message on Chinese social media from her plane saying "thank you to the party and government."

"It is that shade of brilliant Chinese red that... leads me on the long journey home", she wrote.

The resolution of the case removes a deep thorn in the relationship between Beijing, Washington and Ottawa, with China accusing the US of a political attack on one of its technology titans. — AFP

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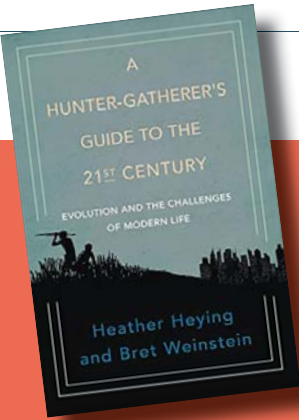
features



Misfat Al Abriyeen embraces coffee trend

The Al Misfat Heritage Castle other than being one of the oldest ancient stone houses in Misfat Al Abriyeen in Al Hamra is also considered the highest point in the village. One of the latest changes sweeping the village is the transformation of the roof deck of this castle into a coffee shop, something that will help drive more visits to the area... **P20**

READ



A HUNTER-GATHERER'S GUIDE TO THE 21ST CENTURY
BY HEATHER HEYING
AND BRET WEINSTEIN

The evolutionary biologists posit that the modern world is out of sync with our ancient brains and bodies.

ANIMAL PLANET

Researchers delighted by discovery of endangered Siamese crocodiles

RESEARCHERS HAVE discovered eight hatchlings of the endangered Siamese crocodile (*Crocodylus siamensis*) in the wilds. The hatchlings were tracked down during the reptiles' breeding season in the Srepok Wildlife Sanctuary by a team of staff from the Environment Ministry and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), a joint statement said.

The rare hatchlings are now

under round the clock guard in the sanctuary, which is in the east of the country.

This was the first evidence in ten years of a Siamese crocodile breeding population in the region, the statement said. The researchers said it had been a "very exciting discovery."

The team had been conducting normal field research during the breeding season, the

release said. "Then came the exciting moment when someone from our team first spotted the glint in the eyes of crocodile cubs," said a delighted Sothea Bun, one of the researchers involved.

Milou Groenenberg, biodiversity expert at the WWF, spoke of a breakthrough. "We were previously unsure whether there were still breeding pairs in the local population, whether nests were present and whether animals had hatched successfully," she explained.

The discovery in Srepok raises prospects for the Siamese crocodile's survival in the wild. The discovery was "a significant find for the species in Cambodia and worldwide," according to the park statement. The rare Siamese crocodiles grow to a maxi-



mum of four metres and live exclusively in freshwater rivers, lakes and swamps. They used to be widespread in

large parts of South-East Asia, but their population has been declining sharply since the early 1990s. — **dpa**



Genetic study reveals how ancient seafarers settled vast Polynesia

BEGINNING MORE than a millennium ago, intrepid seafarers traversed vast Pacific Ocean expanses in double-hulled sailing canoes to reach the far-flung islands of Polynesia, the planet's last habitable region to be settled by people.

A genetic study published on Wednesday has deciphered the timing and sequence of this settlement of an area spanning about a third of Earth's surface, with Samoa as the starting point while Rapa Nui, also called Easter Island, and other locales known for megalithic statues were among the last to be reached.

"Many of the distances were immense", said Stanford University computational geneticist Alexander Ioannidis, lead author of the research appearing in the journal *Nature*.

For example, the study found that Rapa Nui was settled in about 1210 AD after an open-sea voyage covering roughly 1,600 miles (2,575 km). Historians believe that family groups of perhaps 30 to 200 people sailed at a time aboard double-hulled canoes that operated similarly to modern catamarans and used a lateen or triangular sail

to have been from Samoa to Fiji and Tonga and then to Rarotonga in the Cook Islands in the 9th century AD. In the 11th century, the islands of Totaiete ma (Society Islands) were next, followed in the 12th century by Tuha'a Pae (Austral Islands) and the Tuamotu Archipelago.

Eventually in the 12th and 13th centuries seafarers from Mangareva in the Gambier Islands reached Te Henua 'Enana (Marquesas Islands), Rapa Nui and Raivavae — places where megaliths like Rapa Nui's monumental head-and-torso stone statues, known as moai, were created.

"It is one of the most impressive and fascinating chapters of human expansion and long-distance exploration", Moreno-

genomic network where connections, splitting patterns and dates can be inferred", said geneticist and study co-author Andres Moreno-Estrada of Mexico's CINVESTAV network of research centers.

The first voyages were found

Estrada said.

There has been an ongoing debate based on archaeological remains as to when the Polynesian islands were settled.

"Unravelling these histories is not only a fascinating chal-

sophisticated artistic and cultural traditions in carving, boat ornamentation, religious and social rules, the practice of tattooing and, in Rapa Nui, North Marquesas, South Marquesas and Raivavae, megalithic statues.

The people of the megalith islands were found to be genetically connected, settled from a common Tuamotu origin.

"The discovery of a common genetic source for people on the eastern islands where megalithic sites have been found is not an intuitive connection given how distant and widely dispersed these group of islands are", Moreno-Estrada said.

The researchers dated those lengthy voyages close to the time when, as detailed in their genetic study published last year, there was contact by Polynesians with native people in South America.

"This suggests that when the maritime culture of the widely spread Tuamotu Archipelago was embarking on its longest voyages of discovery, which gave rise to widely dispersed monumental sculpture-building populations, it also made contact with the Americas", Ioannidis said.

While Samoa was the springboard for remote Polynesia's settlement, the researchers called it merely an intermediate stop in a larger Pacific regional human expansion beginning in Taiwan around 4,000 to 5,000 years ago. It is believed Samoa was settled by around 800 BC. — Reuters

FASHION

Prada strips dresses back, foulard inspires Versace in Milan



PRADA DECONSTRUCTED dresses at Milan Fashion Week on Friday, using elements including trains and corsets in a spring collection that explored seduction through clothes.

Co-creative directors Miuccia Prada and Raf Simons, who joined the Milan-based, Hong Kong-listed luxury group last year, added silk trains on miniskirts, put corset lacing on the front of jackets and mimicked brassiere cups on knitwear.

The spring/summer 2022 collection, called "Seduction, stripped down", also featured long back-baring dresses in pink, lime and tangerine that were cinched at the waist.

Short dresses were also slit behind and had trains while biker jackets were given a worn look

following virtual editions in February due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"I strongly disagree with the idea of a return to 'normal' — we must draw lessons from this moment. We have learned that we, in fashion, engage with a much wider world", Prada said. Prada held simultaneous shows in Milan and Shanghai, livestreaming both.

"Doing these shows simultaneously demonstrates a new possibility: that a Prada show can happen anywhere," Simons said. "It's about sharing — not just sharing imagery, not just sharing through technology but sharing a physical event."

Singer Dua Lipa opened and closed the Versace show, which built on the fashion's house's printed silk scarf, or foulard.



and paired with the brightly coloured miniskirts.

"We thought of words like elegant — but this feels so old-fashioned. Really, it's about a language of seduction that always leads back to the body", Prada said in a statement.

"Using these ideas, these references to historical pieces, this collection is an investigation of what they mean today, what seduction means."

For accessories, there were belted arm bands and pointy slingback shoes in bright colours.

Like New York and London, Milan Fashion Week is hosting both in-person shows and digital presentations this season

Designer Donatella Versace transformed the scarf into lining for dress slits and asymmetric hems, jacket sleeves, shirts, trouser flares and knotted headscarves.

The line featured latex dresses and shiny miniskirts in neon colours. Some designs bore large safety pins.

For men, there was casual wear, loose suits and relaxed printed shirts.

"The foulard is a fundamental component of Versace's heritage and character", Versace said in show notes. "...This season (it) turns everything on its head, it is no longer fluid or dreamy, the scarf is provocative, sexy, wound tight." — Reuters

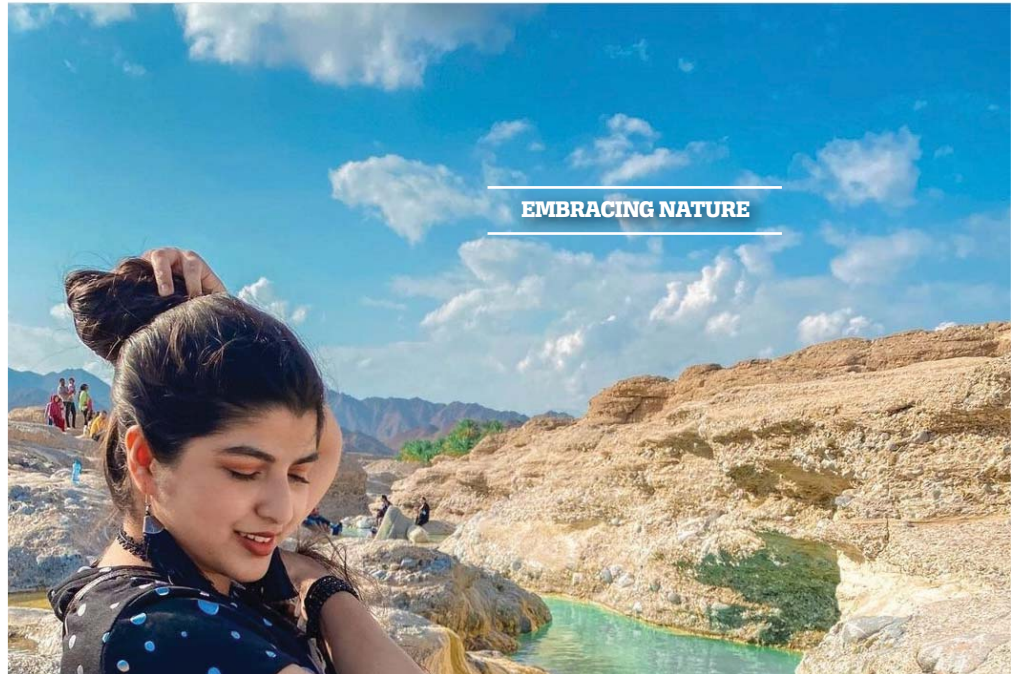


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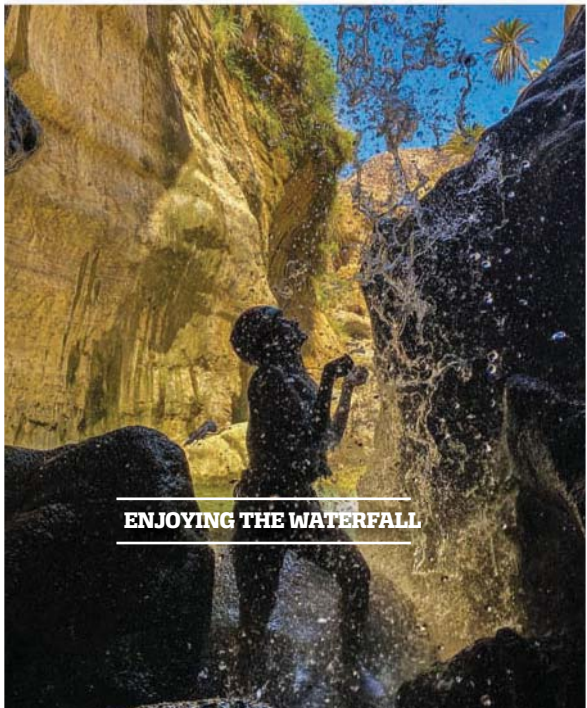
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Seeking knowledge in war: Yemeni woman turns home into school

YEMENI TEACHER Amina Mahdi gives a science lesson to children sprawled across the ground at her home in a remote village in the southern province of Hodeida.

For these boys and girls, learning at Mahdi's sun-scorched compound is their only opportunity for an education in the small rural area of Muhib in the Al-Tuhayta district.

She had already been teaching children to read and write before the outbreak of the impoverished country's devastating war in 2014.

"What pushed me towards teaching was the high rate of ignorance in the village and that children were deprived of an education," Mahdi told AFP.

With dozens of children to tend to, Mahdi has divided them into three groups based on age, teaching each class for two hours a day.

Other than learning how to read and write, the children also get lessons in maths and science.

But Mahdi said her house, with hundreds of books piled on a single shelf, is not really equipped for teaching.

"There is lots of damage from the sun and heat," she said, wearing an all-black niqab.

Yemen's war pits the government — backed by a Saudi-led military coalition — against the Iran-allied Ansar Allah rebels, who control the capital Sanaa and much of the northern and western parts of the country.

Tens of thousands of people, mostly civilians, have been killed and millions displaced in what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

'PUBLIC PLACE'

More than 2,500 schools in the country are unfit for use, with some destroyed and others turned into refugee camps or military facilities, according to the UN's children's agency.

UNICEF has estimated that two million children were without school even before the coronavirus pandemic, a further systemic shock which it warns has likely propelled the number even higher.

"We wouldn't have been able to read, write or learn if it

weren't for Miss Amina," one of the pupils, Ibrahim Mohib, told AFP.

His father, Mohammed, said he had no regrets sending his three children to learn at Mahdi's home.

"They were taught there from the first until the fourth grades, and thank God for (Mahdi) striving to teach them," he said.

Mahdi said she hopes to get some form of help to teach the children.

"I ask all those who are charitable to bring joy to these children... and offer aid to establish a real school," she said.

"My small home is not good enough, and it has become a public place where I am no longer comfortable." — **AFP**

TRAVEL TALES

Green-thumbbed Thai cabbies turn taxis into gardens amid Covid-19 crunch



WITH DEMAND for taxis drying up in Thailand and thousands of drivers leaving town, one Bangkok cab company has turned its vehicles into mini vegetable gardens, hoping to take the edge off the coronavirus crunch.

The Ratchapruet Taxi Cooperative has taken hundreds of cars off the road in the past year amid a slowing economy worsened by months of lockdown to prevent the spread of Covid-19, which has

Asawalertkul, a business consultant for the company.

"They have become just metal as they've been parking for over a year now."

Thailand has recorded more than 15 million coronavirus cases and 15,600 deaths, 99 per cent of those since April this year. Just 21 per cent of the population has been vaccinated.

On hundreds of pink and orange taxis, chilis, eggplants, cucumbers and basil leaves



left many drivers with insufficient income to pay the lease on their vehicles.

The cooperative grows vegetables on the roofs and bonnets of 300 of the disused cabs, providing its drivers and members with food to share while sending a message to the government to do more to help with the hardship.

"We discussed among each other and decided to grow vegetables to eat because there is no use for these taxis," said Thapakorn

sprout from soil contained in black plastic sheeting reinforced with bamboo or wooden poles.

Kamolporn Boonnitayong, an administrator with the company, said though the gardens keep people occupied, they are only a temporary fix.

"To a certain extent, it has helped with lessening our stress but it isn't really the answer," Kamolporn said. "The government should also step in to help us too." — **Reuters**



Misfat Al Abriyeen embraces coffee trend

New halwa coffee shop rises above the old village

By Abdulaziz al Amri

The Al Misfah Heritage Castle is one of the oldest ancient stone houses in Misfat Al Abriyeen in Al Hamra about 250 km away from the Governorate of Muscat. To preserve the heritage and culture, it was turned into an inn receiving tourists all year round. As testament to its historical significance, one of the rooms in the castle, the first to be ever built dates back to 400 years ago and is currently referred to as the Dark Room.

The castle also has great geographical importance built near the Rogan Castle said to have been constructed before Islam came to the country. Strategic in its location, it is considered the highest point in the village overlooking the charming panoramic view of its gardens and nearby mountains.

While massive changes have been taking place in Misfat Al Abriyeen, the inhabitants are very keen on preserving the aesthetics and authenticity of the village working with authorities to provide the needed upgrade but staying true to the sustainability and historical importance of the place.

One of the latest ventures in the village is the transformation of the roof deck of the Al Misfah Castle into a coffee shop.

"This cafe was established through a partnership between the owners of Misfah Castle and Hussain al Sawaei, the owner of the Halwa Coffee cafe", shared Zahran al Abri, the owner of the Inn.

"We chose this brand specifically as it is 100% Omani, presenting Omani identity and authenticity in a modern and contemporary form which suits the nature and the heritage of Misfat Al Abriyeen", he added.

The rise of coffee shops has become a trend across the wilayat and in Misfat Al Abriyeen alone, this is perhaps the second most notable coffee shop rising in recent date.

As the trend continues, many of the business owners are becoming more creative with their ideas and products and the game has become all about the unique experiences they provide to their guests.

For the Halwa Coffee Cafe at the castle, the location was the primary selling point where one can enjoy a good coffee while watching the view from the top but also spend a delightful moment while watching the sunset.

According to Hussain, the Misfat

Al Abriyeen branch is the fourth in their portfolio having established the brand already in locations like Al Khoudh and Al Manouma.

He affirmed that the Misfat Al Abriyeen location provides a different aesthetic but one that plays well with their brand as Halwa Coffee is their way of promoting a local brand and bring it to the consciousness of international guests.

"Halwa Coffee was born out of this curiosity of why coffee brands were always imported to the country. For us, what we wanted to do is create a local brand which has the potential of growing global", he said.

Hussain added, "The Omani hospitality has always been tied to coffee. Kahwa and dates are a big part of our welcoming tradition and it is this very tradition that we want to shine through", he said.

"Our vision is to grow the brand to become global. That comes with the mission of delivering beverages and snacks with Arabic taste perfectly tied with the hospitality and beauty of Omani culture", Hussain added.

"The secret behind the brand is that we make coffee drinks mixed with halwa to attain a certain unique flavour. When we introduced our halwa coffee, it has become a best seller and we've proved this as the Misfat Al Abriyeen branch is our fourth one", he shared.

Halwa Coffee offers a wide variety of food and drink options to dine in or take away, including sweets, coffees, cold drinks, ice cream and daily specials. The visitor can enjoy having his selected type of drinks and food on the upper floor of the café which is an open area, overlooking the historic old houses of Al Misfah and also can view the whole village of Al Hamra.

"We expect the number of visitors will grow in the coming days of winter when the atmosphere becomes cooler. Omani people, in particular, love the cold weather, and the Omani coffee is the forever companion of all times", Zahran shared.

The town of Misfat Al Abriyeen is one of the beautiful archaeological villages in the Wilayat of Al Hamra. It is located in the midst of the central mountain of the Wilayat of Al Hamra, which is part of the extension of the Al Hajar Mountains. It is about five kilometres away from the centre of the wilayat through a paved road that cuts through a mountain range. The lightest vehicles can reach the village via a paved and easy road.

